

On the Occasion of the
Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the
Repose of the Ever-Memorable Elder
Philotheos (Zervakos) (†1980)



Text III

An Interesting Letter on the
*Calendar Question**

Paros, 16 September 1979

*Beloved in the Lord, Father Theokletos:*¹

(1) *I received your letter two months ago. As many times as I took up my pen to write to you, whole groups of Christ-loving Greek Orthodox from the ends of the earth would come for Confession; and because they were in a hurry to return to their homes, I was not able to write to you. Today, I have found a little time and I am answering you.*

[Archbishop Chrysostomos] Papadopoulos,² whose book Ἡμερολογιακῶν Κατηγοριῶν Ἐλεγχος [A Refutation of Accusations by the Calendarists]³ you write to me that you are reprinting, [maintains therein] that the correction of the [Old] Calendar was not his own work, since it [allegedly] came about by the unanimous consent of the Hierarchy. He also endeavors to prove that Old Calendarism is an outright error.

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(2) *The unvarnished truth is that [Archbishop Chrysostomos] Papadopoulos, in a certain committee⁴ that met, in 1923, for the correction of the Old Calendar—in which he took part, being a professor of the National*

University and Director of the Rizareios Theological School—expressed his opinion that on no account should the correction of the Old Calendar and the introduction of the New Calendar into the Church of Greece be permitted, because [the Church of Greece] would be proclaimed schismatic by other Orthodox Churches.

His judicious, logical, and sound opinion was accepted by all of the members of the committee, and it was decreed by the Holy Synod that the State should follow the New Calendar in business and trade with European and other nations, whereas the Church should follow the Old Calendar for Feast Days. And, in this way, peace prevailed for some time, both in the country and in the Church.⁵

But when some months had passed,⁶ by the vote, not of God and the people, but by the vote of the then revolutionary government under Plasteras and Gonatas, [Chrysostomos Papadopoulos] ascended to the Archiepiscopal Throne of Athens and introduced the Papal Calendar by order of the government and on the advice of the then Œcumenical Patriarch Meletios Metaxakes⁷—that arch-Mason, innovator, and modernist, who bore the highest (thirty-third) degree of Masonry⁸ and who held fast to the mentality: “Bend thy bow, prosper, reign, and divide.”

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(3) At first, when the uncanonical, unlawful, and reckless New Calendar was being introduced into the Church, not all of the Hierarchs were in agreement with it, as [Archbishop Chrysostomos] Papadopoulos states. Eight Hierarchs opposed it,⁹ but, fearing lest they lose their thrones, they backed down, while others yielded on account of the extremism, fanaticism, and undiscerning zeal on the part of certain Old Calendarist monks of the Holy Mountain, who strayed from the straight path, falling into heresies, re-Baptisms, and re-Chrismations, preaching and believing that the Mysteries without the Old Calendar are invalid and that salvation does not exist outside of the Old Calendar.

Consequently, when [Archbishop Chrysostomos] Papadopoulos says that the introduction of the New Calendar was not his own work and that it came about by the unanimous consent of the Hierarchy, he is not telling the unvarnished truth, given that he himself introduced it, following a government mandate.

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(4) After the demission of the revolutionary government, and when elections were being held for the appointment of a new government, P. Tsaldares,¹⁰ leader of the “People’s Party,” sought the vote from the Old Calendarists, and in return for their vote, he [promised that he] would restore the Old Calendar to the Church.

Once P. Tsaldares had taken power, certain of the fanatic Old Calendarists were emboldened and, believing his promises to restore the Old Calendar, wrote menacing letters to [Archbishop] Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, [threatening] to assassinate him if he did not immediately restore the Old Calendar.

He pointed out those letters to me one morning when I visited him. And, shaken and terrified, he said to me, as soon as he saw me: “Save me! Will you save me!” “What’s wrong, Your Beatitude?” I asked him. “Here!” he showed me, holding some letters, “the Old Calendarists write me that they will kill me.”

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(5) Then I remembered that I had written him two letters: One before he introduced the New, Papal Calendar into the Orthodox Church of Greece, [telling him] not to venture its introduction and the division of the Church into two warring factions; to take care—together with the other Hierarchs, as good Shepherds—to bring peace and unity to a nation divided into two parties: the Royalists and the Venizelists; and to hold firm to his first opinion, which all of the members of the committee for the correction of the Old Calendar—which the Orthodox Church has been following for nearly 1600 years without suffering any harm—had acclaimed and embraced.

I wrote him the second letter after the introduction of the New Calendar, beseeching him to restore the Old Festal Calendar, which the 318 God-Bearing Holy Fathers who constituted the First Great and Holy Ecumenical Synod ordered to remain eternal and unaltered,¹¹ and which all of the seven Ecumenical and local Synods sanctioned and preserved.

“Be sure, Your Beatitude,” I wrote him, “that you restore it, because it was unlawfully, uncanonically, and recklessly introduced, and that is why its fruits are beginning to show. ‘For the fruit of the Holy Spirit,’ says the Apostle Paul, the mouth of Christ, “is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance’;¹² and the fruit of the Papal Calendar is envy, sorrow, wrath, abasement, etc. Hasten, Your Beatitude, to restore it, for the time will come when you will beat your head.”

“Recall, Your Beatitude, that when I wrote you that letter, I told you that you would beat your own head!”

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(6) And then he began to beat his head forcefully with both hands and to say: “Perish the moment, perish the moment.”¹³

I pitied him, at that moment, to the very heart, and said to him: “Do not be distressed, Your Beatitude. The situation will be rectified. What do you want from me, the least of all men? How can I be of help to you?” “Go,” he said, “to the President of the Old Calendarists and say to him that I beseech him to go to the Prime Minister to tell him to give me the order to introduce the Old Calendar into the Church, be it even tomorrow.” “Your Beatitude,” I said, “the Church should give orders to the political leaders, not take orders, because many of them are Freemasons, atheists, or unbelievers.” He answered: “Since the then revolutionary government gave me the order, again it should be the government to order me.” “Remain calm, Your Beatitude,” I told him, “and I will bring you the reply.”

I flew as if on wings, for I thought that the right time had come for longed-for peace to return to the Church.

Making haste, I found the President of the Old Calendarists, Mr. Dimitrakopoulos, and the Vice-President, Mr. Evstratiades,¹⁴ editor-in-chief of the journal Σχολή, together with the Speaker of the House, Mr. Petrakakos.¹⁵ Greeting them, I said: “I come on behalf of Archbishop Chrysostomos Papadopoulos of Athens, bearing good tidings. He told me that he beseeches you to request of the Prime Minister that he order him to introduce the Old Calendar into the Church, and he will gladly introduce it, beginning tomorrow. Behold the welcome time; behold the time of calm, peace, concord, and unity in the divided Church.”

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(7) Before the government presided over by P. Tsaldares—who had promised the Old Calendarists to restore the Old Calendar if they voted for him—was formed, Mr. Petrakakos had been a great champion of the Old Calendar. He wrote articles and published in the papers that the Œcumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of Greece should be proclaimed schismatic because they recognized that our Lord Jesus Christ was born, Circumcised, Baptized, and Transfigured with the New Calendar, but was crucified, laid in the tomb, Resurrected, and Ascended with the Old.¹⁶ He wrote that the condemnation of the Bulgarian Church as being schismatic on account of its creation of its own Patriarchate without the leave of the Œcumenical Patriarchate must be revoked, because other Orthodox Churches—of Russia, Romania, and Serbia—elected Patriarchs and were not condemned as schismatics; and that none of the Orthodox Churches accepted the Papal, heretical calendar except for the Œcumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Greece.

These scathing articles by Petrakakos troubled and alarmed the Holy Synod of Greece, and they asked Petrakakos to stop writing; for the Church of Greece was in danger of being cut off from communion by the other Orthodox Churches and of being condemned as heretical and schismatic. And to persuade him to stop writing, they appointed him Royal Commissioner, advocate of the Holy Synod, and advocate of the Holy Monasteries of Pentele and Petrake, with a high monthly salary that exceeded the monthly salary of even the Minister himself. So he stopped writing and ceased to be an opponent of the New Calendar and, for money's sake, became a supporter of the Papal Calendar and an opponent of the Old.

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(8) Being unaware of all of that, I told him that the time had come for the Church to be restored to peace and to be unified. And that is why, when I informed him that His Beatitude, Chrysostomos had told me that when the government would order him to restore the Old Calendar, immediately the next day he would restore it, [Petrakakos] became flustered and told me that the government did not intend to give any such order.

Then the Vice-President of the Old Calendarists, Evstratiades, rose and, approaching him, said to him angrily: "Metropolitan Papadopoulos is not to blame. You are. You are liars, dishonest, impious hypocrites, traitors. And repeat what I am telling you to Prime Minister Tsaldares. Because even though you promised us that you would restore the Old Calendar, now you are breaking your promises; therefore you are deceitful, liars, and imposters!"

Seeing that anger and contention were gaining and that if it had not been for the President of the Old Calendarists, who advised them to cease their shouting and insults and to discuss the matter with discretion and gentleness, they would have come to blows, I returned and told the Archbishop: "Your Beatitude, the Prime Minister told me that the government does not give leave.... 'Hide thyself for a little until the wrath of God shall pass away.'"

Not many days went by and Prime Minister Tsaldares—who had promised the Old Calendarists that if they voted for him, he would restore the Old Calendar—exiled the Old Calendarist Bishops.¹⁷

Then [Archbishop Chrysostomos] Papadopoulos was emboldened and wrote that it was not he who had introduced the [New] Calendar, but that it had come about by the unanimous consent of the Hierarchy.

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(9) He was not [however] telling the truth.

The truth is that he introduced it following a government mandate and the advice of the then Œcumenical Patriarch [Meletios] Metaxakes.

He ought, as Archbishop, to have kept to his original opinion—which was correct, judicious, logical, and sound—that it was not possible for the Church of Greece to accept the correction of the Old Calendar without the unanimous consent of all of the Orthodox Churches, because it would be declared schismatic, and which opinion all of the members of the committee, the then Church of Greece, and the government had accepted.

That he endeavors to prove, as you [Father Theokletos] write, that Old Calendarism is an outright error, is proof of his unstable character and delusion of mind and intellect.

If he had said that certain of the fanatic and over-zealous Old Calendarists had strayed from the straight path, fallen into error, misinterpreted

the Holy 318 God-Bearing Fathers—who instituted and handed down to us the Old Calendar¹⁸ for the common celebration of the Feast of Pascha on the same day and so that divisions might not break out among Christians—he would have been justified, [because the] Holy Fathers did not instruct us that the Old Calendar would save us or that we should celebrate the Mysteries by it.

But for him to say that Old Calendarism is an outright error means that he considers and condemns as being in error the 318 God-Bearing Fathers who had instituted it,¹⁹ all of the Œcumenical and local Synods that followed and sanctioned it, and all of the Orthodox Churches that followed it until 1924; but he also condemns his own self, for in 1923 he supported it and in 1924 he demolished it.

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(10) This befell him because he followed—deplorably enough—the modernist, innovationist, and Freemason, [Patriarch Meletios] Metaxakes, because of whom the day would come when he would beat his head (when I reminded him that he would do so should he not revoke the unlawful introduction of the new, Papal Calendar). When the day came and he beat his head, he said with groans and tears: “Perish the moment, perish the moment²⁰ I accepted the New Calendar! It was he, that perverse Metaxakes, who led me down the garden path!”

[Patriarch Meletios] Metaxakes also led him into other errors, which I shall pass over. And I declare and believe, with a clear conscience, that if he had not followed him and gone along with him, he would have distinguished himself as one of the new teachers and writers of the Nation and our Orthodox Church, such as Evgenios Boulgaris, Nikephoros Theotokes, Makarios Notaras, Nikodemos the Hagiorite, Athanasios of Paros, and Nektarios of Pentapolis.

But instead of following them and remaining firmly and steadfastly within the Apostolic and Patristic Tradition, he followed [Patriarch Meletios] Metaxakes, along with whom he opened the doors of the rational sheepfold to [Patriarch] Athenagoras,²¹ Meliton of Chalcedon,²² and Iakovos of America,²³ who entered the rational sheepfold and tore to pieces the rational sheep and the Œcumenical Patriarchate.

(II) *I am not casting the complete burden, responsibility, and blame entirely on the Patriarchs and Hierarchs; also to blame are the laity that engendered them, according to whose heart [God] gives them leaders. We are all to blame, and I first of all. If we say that we do not sin, we lie.*

One remedy for the evils is genuine and sincere repentance and return to the All-Good, true God and Heavenly Father. If we repent, we will be saved. If we do not repent, we will be damned.

Let us prefer the path of repentance.

*With brotherly and fatherly love,
†Archimandrite Philotheos Zervakos*

***Source:** *Ὁ Ὁσῖος Φιλόθεος τῆς Πάρου* [Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis “Orthodoxos Kypselē”] (January-April 2001), pp. 50-57. Editorial presentation ours.

Notes

1. The recipient is the well-known scholar and Athonite Monk, **Elder Theokletos of Dionysiou**.

■ **The remarkable** significance of the present epistle by the venerable Elder Philotheos (Zervakos) to Father Theokletos was underscored in our work: “[Ἡμερολογιακὸ Ζήτημα ἢ Αἵρεσις τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ: Κριτικὴ ἀναφορὰ σὲ τρεῖς ἄρθρα τοῦ γέροντος Θεοκλήτου Διονυσιάτου](#)” [[“The Calendar Question or the Heresy of Ecumenism? A Critical Review of Three Articles by Elder Theokletos of Dionysiou”](#)], Part V, §§10-12, *Ἅγιος Κυπριανός*, No. 321 (July-August 2004), pp. 68-71, 75.

2. Chrysostomos Papadopoulos (1868-1938). A professor at the University of Athens (1912-1923), he was formerly Director of the Holy Cross School in Jerusalem, and also of the Rizareios School in Athens. As a friend and fellow worker of Meletios Metaxakes, he was an active participant in the ecumenical movement from its outset. He served as Metropolitan and then Archbishop of Athens, beginning in March 1923 (elected 8 March and Consecrated 10 March). Not only was he a primary agent in the reform of 1924, but he was also a pioneering ecumenist and one of the founders of the pan-confessional Geneva-based organization (WCC).

■ **See our work:** [“The Immoderate and Self-Absorbed Anti-Old Calendarist Zeal of the Innovative New Calendarists”](#) (June 2005). See, in particular, chapter

4, §2: “The Reformer of 1924: A Pioneering Ecumenist” [soon to appear in English from the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies].

3. See **Archbishop Chrysostomos of Athens**, *Ἡμερολογιακῶν Κατηγοριῶν Ἐλέγχος* [*A Refutation of Accusations by the Calendarists*] [*sic*] (1st edition; Athens: 1937).

■ **2nd edition**; Thessaloniki: 1979, pp. 1-6 (introduction), pp. 7-28 (refutation), pp. 29-32 (conclusion); editorial presentation by **Monk Theokletos of Dionysiou**.

■ **The ever-memorable** Confessor-Hierarch Chrysostomos, former Metropolitan of Florina, refuted this work by Chrysostomos Papadopoulos. See *Ἀναίρεσις τοῦ “Ἐλέγχου” τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀθηνῶν Χρυσοστόμου* [*Confutation of the “Refutation” by Archbishop Chrysostomos of Athens*] (Cairo: 1937).

4. In 1922, the Greek State, through the government under S. Gonatas, formed a special *committee* for the consideration of the question of the *calendar reform*. President of the *committee* was the Minister of Economy, G. Kophinas, and members were the lawyer P. Tsitsekes, the university professor, Archimandrite Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, Hamilkas Alivizatos, and D. Aeginites.

On 16 January 1923, the *committee* submitted a *report* on the matter to the government, on the basis of which the Greek State unilaterally adopted this reform by the Royal mandate entitled “Concerning the New ‘Civil Calendar’” (dated 18 January 1923). It was determined that the Royal mandate be implemented on 16 February 1923, which was called 1 March 1923.

(See *Ἐφημερίς τῆς Κυβερνήσεως τοῦ Βασιλείου τῆς Ἑλλάδος* [*Government Journal of the Kingdom of Greece*], Vol. I, No. 24 [Athens: 25 January 1923]).

5. “For some time,” that is, from 1 March 1923 until 1 March 1924, at which time the “correction of the Julian Calendar” was resolved upon under Archbishop Chrysostomos Papadopoulos ecclesiastically, and 10 March 1924 (the Sunday of Orthodoxy) was called 23 March 1924.

(See the “*Encyclical of 1 March 1924*” and “*Telegraphic Order of 3 March 1924*,” in **Archimandrite Theokletos** (Strangas), *Ἐκκλησίας Ἑλλάδος Ἱστορία ἐκ πηγῶν ἀψευδῶν (1817-1967)* [*History of the Church of Greece From Reliable Sources (1817-1967)*] (Athens: 1970), Vol. II, pp. 1246-1249.)

6. The civil reform of the calendar was implemented on 16 February/1 March 1923, and the Consecration of Chrysostomos Papadopoulos was performed on 10 March 1923. Chrysostomos Papadopoulos played a decisive role in the *Fourth Hierarchical Meeting* (16–21 April 1923) and also in the *Fifth Hierarchical Meeting* (24 December 1923–2 January 1924), during which it was resolved upon to reform the *Church Calendar* as well. On 10/23 March 1924, the “rash calendar change” was implemented under him and, in this way, “he assumed the burden of responsibility for the calendar modification.”

(**Strangas**, *Ἐκκλησίας Ἑλλάδος Ἱστορία*, Vol. II, p. 1250, n. 1).

7. **Meletios Metaxakes** (1871-1935). He was meddlesome, a troublemaker, a great innovator, and beyond doubt a Freemason. He served as Metropolitan of Kition, in Cyprus (1910-1918), Metropolitan of Athens (1918-1920), Patriarch of Constantinople (1921-1923), and Patriarch of Alexandria (1926-1935). He was one of the pioneers and founders of ecumenism.

8. See our article: “**C**ecumenical Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis (1871-1935): Freemason, Innovator, and Ecumenist,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVII, Nos. 2-3 (2000), pp. 2-11.

9. After the reading of the Synodal Minutes at the eleventh session of the *Tenth Hierarchy*, on 27 June 1929, Metropolitan Gregory of Halke characteristically stressed that:

“According to the reading of the minutes concerning the introduction of the New Calendar, it appears that no objection had been made to it”; on the contrary, “there was vigorous objection to it on the part of many, but this was not noted in the minutes, while other opinions were assiduously marked down.”

(Strangas, *Ἐκκλησίας Ἑλλάδος Ἱστορία* [Athens: 1971], Vol. III, p. 1646.

10. **Panagiotes Tsaldares** (1867-1936). A politician and eminent lawyer, he was the leader, from 1924 on, of the anti-Venizelist “People’s Party,” which was founded in 1915 by Demetres Gounares. He served twice as Prime Minister: 1932-1933 and 1933-1935.

11. The words “**prescribed**,” “**sanctioned**,” “**preserved**,” and, further on, “**handed down**,” are used in the sense that “**the First Holy C**ecumenical Synod, on the basis of the Old Calendar—the so-called Julian Calendar—prescribed that the Feast of Pascha remain unaltered and eternal.”

(See the venerable Elder Philotheos’ epistle of 16 May 1973 to the Priest, Demetres Gangastathes [†16/29 January 1975] in *Πάπα-Δημιήτρης Γκαγκασάθης—Ὁ Ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ 1902-1975, Βίος—Θαύματα—Νοσητεῖαι καὶ Ἐπιστολαί* [*Papa-Demetres Gangastathes: The Man of God, 1902-1975, Life, Miracles, Counsels, and Letters*] [Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis “Orthodoxos Kypsele,” 1975], pp. 274-278.)

12. Cf. Galatians 5:22-23.

13. “Perish the moment...” (“**Νὰ μὴ τό ’σωνα!...**”) an expression of intense regret: “Would that I had not done that!...”

14. **Evstratiades, Gregorios** (1862-1950). Lawyer, journalist, and politician under the banner of the “Popular Front” (1915). Initially a contributor to the political journal **Σκρίπ**, he took it over in 1903. His work, entitled *Ἡ Πραγματικὴ Ἀλήθεια περὶ τοῦ Ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ Ἡμερολογίου* [*The Real Truth About the Church Calendar*] (Athens: 1929), which was published in a series of articles, in March 1928, in **Σκρίπ**, remains an invaluable reference book for the historical anatomy of the reform of 1924.

15. **Petrakakos, Demetrios** (1877-1946). An advocate and politician, he specialized in ecclesiastical law and the political science, authoring a great many works in these fields.

16. As is well known, from 1924 onwards, the *innovationists* implemented, in practice, both the *New Calendar* (for the fixed Feast Days in the *Menaion*) and also the *Old Calendar* (for the moveable Feast Days of the *Triodion* and *Pentecostarion*).

17. After their ecclesiastical *walling-off*, the three Hierarchs, Metropolitan Germanos of Demetrias, Chrysostomos (formerly) of Florina, and Chrysostomos of Zakynthos, established a three-member Synod of Bishops and sent the Synod of the *Innovationist* New Calendar Church the document: “Protestation and Declaration,” dated 26 May 1935. Following that, they proceeded to the Consecration of four Hier-

archs: Christophoros of Megara, Germanos of the Cyclades, Matthaïos of Vresthene, and Polykarpos of Diavleia.

All of the seven Hierarchs were summoned to be judged by the *Innovationist* Synod's court of first instance for Bishops. They, however, refused, sending a document of "disavowal" (31 May 1935).

The *Innovationist* Synod's court of first instance condemned the four newly-Consecrated Hierarchs on 13 June 1935 and, on 14 June 1935, condemned the three Hierarchs who had performed the Consecrations.

The sentences were depositions and five-year confinements in monasteries, "having first managed to persuade Prime Minister P. Tsaldares, with the cooperation of Bishop Damaskenos of Corinth, to amend Law 5383 (1932) through a mandate that was signed in one night, so that the condemned Hierarchs would not be able to suspend the sentence imposed upon them through the entry of a caveat or appeal..."

(See **Strangas**, *Ἑλλησίους Ἑλλάδος Ἱστορία*, Vol. III, pp. 2035-2045).

18. See note **ii**.

19. See note **ii**.

20. See note **13**.

21. **Athenagoras I**, Patriarch of Constantinople (1948-1972, †1972).

■ For a comprehensive survey of the declarations, messages, and activities of Patriarch Athenagoras—about whom the ever-memorable Elder Justin Popović (†1979) used to say that "lately, he [Athenagoras] has become a source of anarchism and nihilism in the Orthodox world. The Athonite monks justifiably call him a heretic and apostate"—see our detailed publication: "*Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople (1886-1972): His Statements, Messages, and Activities.*"

(*Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (2001), pp. 2-23. Reprinted from the journal *Ἑλλησίουστικὸς Ἀγών*, introduction and presentation ours).

22. **Meliton (Hatzes)** (†27 December 1989), Metropolitan of Chalcedon, of Imbros and Tenedos, and later of Heliopolis and Theira, of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. A veteran ecumenist and the elder, guide, and inspirer of his successor to the throne of Chalcedon, Bartholomew (Archontones), Metropolitan of Philadelphia (1973), the future Patriarch (1991).

23. **Iakovos (Koukouzes)**, Archbishop of North and South America (1959-1996, †2005), of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, a veteran ecumenist.