

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
HOLY METROPOLITANATE OF SERRAI AND NIGRITA

Serrai, January 5, 2021

PASTORAL ENCYCLICAL no. 259

To the blessed Christians of our Holy Metropolitanate.

“The Greek Revolution is the most markedly spiritual revolution that ever took place in the world. It is hallowed. The freedom for which the Greeks sacrificed themselves was not some vague deity, it was Christ Himself”.

(Photis Kontoglou, *Hellenism tormented*)

My dear brethren,

In its historical course, the glorious Greek people has known many conquerors and has become conscious of what slavery means and has spilled a great amount of blood on every occasion for its much-desired freedom. It is therefore aware of the great significance and the value of a peaceful and free life. The National Uprising of 1821 was inextricably connected with the struggle for the recovery of freedom, to the point of sacrifice. A feature all those brave creators of the epic of 1821 had in common was the certainty of the sacred purpose of the National Uprising, the common decision for freedom or death and the shared faith in the divine alliance and Providence. To this sublime struggle the fighters of freedom offered up their very lives with admirable bravery and decided to fight the good fight for the sake of all against a barbaric oppressor of a different religion.

During the Turkish Rule, the enslaved Hellenism, the Hellenism tormented, as the Greek man-of-letters and icon-painter Photis Kontoglou calls it, resisted by means of the Orthodox faith, Greek learning, the rifle, and its love of honour. In the armed revolt, highwaymen turned self-appointed anti-Ottoman insurgents, warlike mountain-folk, and Christian Greek irregular soldiers led the way, but the part played by Bishops, simple priests and monks was also remarkable. In the second form of resistance, the spiritual and moral one, the Church was the undisputed leader and guide. The involvement of the Church in the resistance against the Turkish oppressor and its contribution to the preservation of the unity and the continuity of the Nation were magnificent. In his book *The Great Church in Captivity*, the authoritative British Byzantinist Stephen Runciman pointed out that “*it was Orthodoxy that preserved Hellenism through the dark centuries [...]*”. Having been harshly tested, the Greek Nation finally triumphed because it had faith in God, justice, and truth.

This spiritual resistance of the Nation and the leading part played by our Church during that period are mainly evident in the areas of the preservation of the faith and national consciousness. The notions of “Orthodox” and “Roman” were almost identical. Throughout the servitude under the Ottoman Turks the Orthodox Church was a great and constant school of faith, Greek learning, hope, endurance, spiritual resistance, moral freedom, and national awakening. This was how the “*palingenesia*” (regeneration) of the fatherland was achieved. It is the only explanation for the profound faith of the heroic protagonists of 1821. “*Fight for Faith and Fatherland*”, Alexander Ypsilantis wrote in the Declaration of February 24, 1821.

With that coordinated preparation by the Great Church of Christ, the Teachers of the Nation, the headmen and the other community groups, and mainly thanks to the indomitable spirit of the Greeks, which is perennially a legacy of our nation, expectations long forgotten were awakened, hopes fading away under unspeakable suffering were rekindled, forces oppressed by a horrific tyranny were revived. This is how the enslaved Greeks rose from humiliation, the fighters were reborn from the tombs and stood bravely before the barbaric oppressor and proudly raised their mottos over every corner of the Greek land: “*Freedom or death*”, “*For the holy faith of Christ and the freedom of the Fatherland*”. In that titanic struggle, the Holy Orthodox Church was a source of inspiration and a cohesive force, regarding which the late woman of letters Ioanna Tsatsou so aptly remarked: “*Orthodoxy was a fatherland for every slavery. Our fatherland was our Orthodoxy!*” Every hero, whether he became known or remained anonymous on the stage of the great struggle innerly embodied the entire Nation, just like the very Nation became identified with every known or anonymous fighter of the epic of freedom.

The Greek Revolution is like no other revolution of that time. It may have drawn upon ideas from other European revolutionary movements of those years but is not a copy of any one of them. It was a revolution of a national and religious nature, motivated by the desire of the Greeks to free themselves of the Ottomans of a different religion. It was a revolution of a noble people, which longed for its national independence, after a period of slavery of over 400 years under the Turkish oppressor. The Greek General and pre-eminent leader of the Greek War of Independence Theodoros Kolokotronis succinctly summarized the nature of that great struggle in the most authentic manner as follows: “*Our revolution is like no one of those taking place in Europe today. The revolutions in Europe against their administration are civil wars; our war was the most just, it was that of a nation against another nation*”. The national *palingenesia* was marked by the unanimity of the clergy and the people, an unshakeable faith, pure patriotism, and this was why it succeeded. A multitude of hierarchs of the Orthodox Church, such as Theophilos of Athens, Chryssanthos of Monemvassia and Sparta, Ghermanos of Christianoupolis, Gregorios of Nafplion and Argos, Philotheos of Dimitsana, Philaretos of Oleni, Iosseph of Thessaloniki, Gregorios of Koroni, Meletios of Kitros, Ignatios of Ierissos, Theodoretos of Vresthena, Porphyrios of Arta, Anthimos of Elos, Isaiah of Salona, Polykarpos of Larissa, Plato of Chios, Gregorios of Methoni, Navarino and Neokastron, Iosseph of Rogai, Alexandros of Sissanion and Siatista, clergymen and monks, hieromartyrs and national martyrs such as Athanassios Diakos in Alamana, Gregorios Dikaios in Maniaki, Samuel the monk in Kughi and fighters, all actively participated in the Revolution, gave up their lives fighting against the Ottoman conqueror and their blood watered the tree of the Greek freedom.

One of the superb trail blazers of this epic, to whom we modern Serreans owe particular honour and gratitude for what he did in favour of the faith and the fatherland, is also Emmanuel Pappas, General-in-Chief, our fellow countryman, who offered up his entire family and his life to the Struggle and sealed this invaluable offer with his death. Sparing no effort nor funds, he worked prudently, ingeniously, with a fighting spirit, in favour of the national awakening and protection of the wronged Greeks and the greatest good of freedom. The eminent and emblematic personality of the Serrean leader played an important part in the outcome of the struggle for freedom at a local and national levels. His contribution to the struggle, which rose higher than circumstances in terms of his love of the fatherland, purity of intentions and motivation, courage, valor, and spirit of sacrifice, was magnificent and unique in determination, since he went beyond the limits of what was possible and reached for the miracle. May the memory of this ‘immortal’ hero be eternal and his venerable relics rest in the glorious Serrean soil and be gently perfumed with the fragrant incense of its flowers.

The task of ecumenical Hellenism and the imposed duty of us all, who today enjoy the great good of freedom, is to put to good use this spiritual legacy and historical experience constituted by the struggles and sacrifices of the heroic fighters of the National *Palingenesia*. This brilliant anniversary gives us the opportunity to gain an insight into the events in a constructive manner, to learn from them by correcting our errors and amplifying our virtues, to “*commune with the immortal wine of '21*” and remember the hardships and sufferings experienced by our glorious forefathers. At the same time, however, this anniversary should also work as a powerful bulwark against the levelling oblivion in our times, which causes the weakening of the cohesive and existential elements of this Nation. The study and knowledge of our history freed of prejudice, bigotry, and distortions is a sacred obligation and a crucial concern of any sensible people, advancing through the constantly changing modern historical process.

My dear brethren,

Wishing to contribute to the celebration of what essentially is a triple anniversary, i.e. the completion of 200 years since (a) the National “Palingenesia” (March 25, 1821), (b) the miraculous rescue of the great martyr town of Serrai on May 8, 1821, from slaughter by the Ottoman Turks, thanks to the intercession of Saint John, Apostle and Theologian, and (c) the passing of the pioneer of the Revolution in Macedonia, Serrean General-in-Chief Emmanuel Pappas, on December 5, 1821, our local Church for the current year 2021 has planned a series of events of an anniversary and instructive nature, which, God willing, will be carried out with the collaboration of institutional bodies of the area and of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece and will constitute a good opportunity for all of us jointly so that we may put this spiritual legacy of our forefathers and the historical experience of our martyr people to good use and keep the flame of freedom alive. The study and profound knowledge of history, vigilance and the abandonment of complacency, our national unity and concord, constitute the most effective weapons today, too, if we wish to address the various national, social, and spiritual challenges of modern times.

The study and, mainly, the knowledge of our national history, freed of prejudice, ideological rigidity, and hollow exaggeration, will lead us to comprehend the diachronic value and admirable relevance of the following words of the Greek man-of-letters Stratis Myrivilis: “*Nonetheless, a human being, a people, a nation does not vanish only*

by fire and sword. It does not only vanish by the loss of its life. It vanishes more surely, more conclusively by the loss of its soul, its individual or collective soul. I lose my soul means I lose my essential existence. If today we exist as Greek nation, it is because we have clung to the vestment of our religion all these years”.

I pray that the grace and the far-shining light of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has appeared may always cover you all in a sanctifying and protective manner.

Fervently praying to the Lord for you,

THE METROPOLITAN

MOST REV. †THEOLOGOS OF SERRAI AND NIGRITA