

LIFE AND SOCIAL WELFARE ACTIVITY
OF PATRIARCH ATHANASIOS I (1289-
1293, 1303-1309) OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

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The list of intellectual theologians in the Byzantine Church is long and impressive. But there were other Churchmen in the Byzantine Church who distinguished themselves more as shepherds and pastors, as clergymen concerned with the practical application of their Master's teachings, than as theoretical theologians.

Like the Patriarchs, St. John Chrysostom of Constantinople and St. John the Eleemon of Alexandria, the late Byzantine monk and Patriarch of Constantinople, Athanasios I, belonged to the category of Church Fathers who were more involved in reform and social welfare activity than in theological disputation or abstract theology. As pastor and reformer, Athanasios deserves to become one of the better known Fathers of Greek Orthodox Christianity.

Our knowledge of Athanasios derives first of all from his writings, primarily from his letters. Of course, we can reconstruct an adequate picture of Athanasios the man and his work, from the 14th century historians, George Pachymeres and Nicephoros Gregoras. However, much more important than these works are two biographies of Athanasios written by his contemporaries, Theoktistos the Studite and Joseph Kalothetos, who wrote in Constantinople shortly after 1334 and before 1360.

There is today no published systematic and thorough monograph about Athanasios. But one finds a great deal of information in special studies by M. Gedeon, Gennadios Arambatzoglou, N. Banescu, R. Guil-

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land, H. Delahaye, Angeliki Laiou and Alice-Mary Talbot. The present paper has considered all these writings but most of it relies on Athanasios' own epistolography. A critical edition of 115 epistles has been prepared by Prof. Talbot and is soon to be released in the Dumbarton Oaks Texts. I am grateful to the editors of the Dumbarton Oaks Texts for permission to read Dr. Talbot's edition in page proofs.

A

We know neither the exact year of Athanasios' birth nor the definite date of his death. Athanasios Pantocratorinos, the editor of Joseph Kalothetos' biography of Athanasios, suggests the year 1215 as the year of the Patriarch's birth and the year 1315 as the year of his decease. Prof. Talbot inclines to accept the year 1230 or 1235 as the year of his birth. Two cities claim to have been his birthplace — Androussa in the Peloponnesos and Adrianople in Thrace. Modern scholarship favors the opinion of the late Byzantine historian, George Pachymeres, who writes that Athanasios was born in Adrianople¹, against the Byzantine chronicler, George Phrantzis, who accepts Androussa as the Patriarch's birthplace.

He was the son of Georgios and Euphrosyne, who baptized him Alexios. Very little is known of his early years. He received his elementary education in his native city in which he lived until his early teens. From his early youth he was «struck by a divine eros.» It was his eros for the monastic life that prompted him to leave parents, relatives, friends and his native city and move to Thessalonike, close to an uncle, his father's brother, the abbot of a monastery in the district of Thessalonike. St. Alypios, the seventh century Stylite, was Athanasios' prototype of a monk and a saint.

From Thessalonike Athanasios, still under the name Alexios, moved to Mount Athos where he joined the monastery of Esfigmenou as a cook. There he assumed the name Akakios. His biographer writes that Athanasios lived on vegetables, vinegar and salt, and for three years he had used neither wine nor oil. Defying climate and weather, he went about barefoot and very simply dressed.

1. *George Pachymeres*, De Andronico Palaeologo, Bk. 2, ch. 13, ed. I. Bekker vol. 2 (Bonn, 1835), 179; *P. Athanasios Pantokratorinos*, «Βίος και Πολιτεία τοῦ Ἀθανασίου Α,» *Thrakika*, vol. 13 (Athens, 1940), p. 61. See also *H. Delehay*, Editor, «La vie D'Athanase Patriarche de Constantinople (1289-1293, 1304-1310),» «Melanges D'Archéologie et D'Histoire», vol XVII (Paris - Rome, 1897).

From Mount Athos he decided to travel to Jerusalem as a pilgrim and in order to see and converse with the holy men of monasteries and Lavras along the Jordan River and the deserts there. Satisfied with his pilgrimage to the Holy land, his itinerary brought him to Asia Minor where he joined a monastery on Mount Latros. However, he was anxious to meet three renowned holy men, Elias, Neilos and Lepentinos; thus Athanasios - Akakios moved to a monastery on the Auxentiou mountain. But he was not destined to stay there forever. A turning point in his life was his stay at the monastery of St. Lazaros on the Galision mountain, not far from Ephesos, which he joined after his departure from the Mount Auxentiou monastery. He spent ten years there where he was «forced» to accept ordination first as deacon and then as priest. Upon ordination he changed his name for the third time assuming now the name of Athanasios. At the St. Lazaros monastery he read extensively and became self-educated. But Athanasios, restless and adventurous, sometime during the last quarter of the 13th century fled to Thrace by the mountain Ganos² where he established his own monastery, the *Nea Mone*, and attracted several disciples of his own such as Euthymios, Job, Iakovos, Theodosios, Leontios, Theophanes and Theodoretos.

The fame of Athanasios for holiness, austerity and orthodoxy reached Constantinople itself. In the controversies between the Orthodox and Latin Churches there, Athanasios became a champion of Orthodoxy. When Ioannes Bekkos, the Latinophile Patriarch, ordained a Latinophron bishop for the district of Ganos, Athanasios refused to accept him. In a dialogue between Athanasios and the bishop, the latter became so angry that he used physical violence against Athanasios who was pushed down and kicked.

His devotion to Orthodoxy, his simplicity, austerity and concern for the Church elevated him to the throne of Constantinople approximately at the age of 60. Reluctantly he accepted ordination to the rank of Bishop and became Patriarch of Constantinople in 1289 succeeding the able George Kyprios³.

B

When Athanasios assumed his Patriarchal duties, the people of Constantinople, the clergy in particular, were divided into followers

2. *Pachymeres*, op. cit., vol 2, p. 139.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

of earlier Patriarchs, such as Arsenios, Joseph, Gregory and even the Latinophile Ioannes Bekkos, all of whom had occupied the Patriarchal throne between 1255-1289. Athanasios desired to heal the schisms and divisions, to impose discipline and order, to strengthen Orthodoxy against the Latin influences, and to reform the Church as well as the society. To him the Church was not a peripheral agency but the instrument *par excellence* for the reformation of society, clergymen, and laymen, alike. Though a monk, he saw the Church as a living organism within this world and not out of this world.

Thus, as patriarch, Athanasios distinguished himself as a philanthropist, advisor to the Emperor, active in society and a reformer. Furthermore, he wrote many letters, encyclicals and two catechisms but continued to live a very simple life. He spent a great deal of time visiting the people, refusing to go on horse but always walking. Even in his capacity as patriarch, he preferred to live the prayer life of the monk, conducting regularly his prayers and services. A man of principles, Athanasios could not tolerate seeing monks living a secular life and bishops abandoning their flock in the provinces to seek a comfortable life in the capital. He believed that a bishop should not stay away from his flock for long. Thus, he castigated those who had taken up residence in the capital living a luxurious life. He sought to take the monks out of the streets and shops by urging them to live a life becoming to their vocation — a life of solitude rather than of secular concerns. In his effort to purify the Church and send idle bishops back to their provinces, he abolished the permanent or endymousa synod, which gave bishops the excuse to remain in the capital, and revived the tradition of the annual gathering of all bishops. He writes that many of the bishops and monks in the capital engaged in idle talk and gossip, participating in intrigues and festivities, disturbing the peace of Church and State⁴.

While the Patriarch asked for the Emperor's assistance on sev-

4. *Gennadios Arabantzoglou*, Editor, «Τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου Ἀθανασίου Α' Ἐπιστολιμαῖαι Διδασκαλαὶ πρὸς τόν... Ἀνδρόνικον Β'» *Orthodoxia*, vol. 27 (1952), p. 115: «ὡς ἀδύνατον πλέον τὴν τῶν ἀρχιερέων ἐνταῦθα διατριβὴν ὑποφέρειν με· οὔτε γὰρ ἔννομον οὔτε εἰρήνην τῇ βασιλείᾳ, οὔτε τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ... Πῶς σήμερον οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον... εὐρίσκονται ᾗδε, εἰ μὴ εἰς συμπόσια καὶ εἰς... ταραχάς».

cf. *Nicephoros Gregoras*, *Historiae Byzantinae*, ed. L. Schopeni, vol. I, (Bonn, 1829), pp. 182-183. For the religious policy of Athanasios see now Alice-Mary Mafry Talbot, «The Patriarch Athanasios (1289-1293, 1303-1309) and the Church», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 27 (Washington, D. C. 1974).

eral occasions, he did not encourage the Emperor to interfere in the internal affairs of the Church as some Emperors had done in previous centuries. In fact, he advised the Emperor to become obedient to, and not master of, the Church⁵.

The welfare of the common people was Athanasios' major preoccupation. No aspect of his flock's life was foreign to him. The establishment of social justice, the protection of the poor from the powerful and the wealthy, the prosperity of widows and orphans, the release of prisoners, the improvement in the social order preoccupied him daily⁶. The state faced two powerful enemies, the Turkish pressure and advance, from without and the mounting greediness and social injustice from within. Athanasios, who had totally devoted his life to the commonwealth of the people, became a moral standard, the critic of both Church and State evils.

Tax collectors were especially unscrupulous. Athanasios advised the Emperor to bring them under control. Many peasants preferred to become subjects to the invading enemy rather than to the tax collectors who are described as blood thirsty⁷.

In the view of Athanasios, Church and State are two aspects of the same organism and the same body. In the light of this, he participated actively in social, political and civil affairs, supporting social justice, speaking against the corruption of officials and condemning black marketeers and high prices. The emperor is viewed as the representative of God on earth, not for personal reasons and private gains but for the benefaction of God's people. Thus, he must be the prototype of justice, punishing injustice and social evil. Church and State must cooperate for a holy-like (ἀγιοπρεπῆ) life of the people.

Even the well being of the army was one of Athanasios' concerns. In a letter to the Emperor, the Patriarch urged him to look after the physical and the spiritual strength of the army. In order to arrest the decline of the state, the Emperor needs a powerful army, well kept,

5. *Gennadios Arabantzoglou*, op. cit., p. 115: «διὰ τοῦτο, ἀντιβολῶ, νήψωμεν, μάθωμεν ὑποκύπτειν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ, μὴ αὐτὴν ὑποτάσσειν, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ ὑποτάσσεσθαι καὶ τοῖς ταῦτοις θεσμοῖς».

6. *Athanasios Pantokratorinos*, Editor, «Βίος καὶ Πολιτεία...» op. cit., p. 90: «ὄλαις ἡμέραις νουθετῶν, παραινῶν, συμβουλευῶν, ...ἀμύνων ἀδικουμένους, ρυόμενος πτωχοῦς ἐκ χειρὸς στερεωτέρων, προστατεύων πενήτων, ἐπαρκῶν χήραις καὶ ὀρφανοῖς, ...πάντας προτρέπων πρὸς αἵρεσιν καὶ ἐργασίαν τῶν βελτιόντων πρὸς ἰσότητα τοῦ δικαίου».

7. *Gennadios Arabantzoglou*, op. cit., p. 115: «ὡς ἄλλη τις βδέλλα, ὁμοίως Ἄδῃ καὶ γῆ καὶ ὕδατι καὶ πυρὶ χρηματίζοντες κατὰ τὸ ἀκόρεστον».

physically strong and morally courageous. The state must compensate the soldiers well in order to prevent mutinies. The Emperor should instruct his soldiers to abstain from robbery and immorality and to respect the common people⁸.

A man who had taken very seriously his office, ascetic and direct in his ways, frugal and content with little, Athanasios spared no one from his reproofs—nobles, bishops, members of the imperial court and any one who compromised with justice, love and virtue⁹. It was because of his austere character that the Emperor asked him to resign in 1293. Several bishops who had been reproved by Athanasios became so disaffected that they threatened a schism¹⁰. Furthermore, other clergymen and laymen who had been dissatisfied with Athanasios' firm moral reforms had turned against him. He writes that a furious storm of monks, nuns and other people became hostile to him. They ridiculed not only his convictions but attacked with stones his very person trying to inflict every physical injury on him. He resigned because he believed in the principle that men must rule willingly over willing people¹¹.

Two and a half months later, the Abbot of the Pamakaristos Monastery was elected as John XII. He was a pious married man, the father of two children, who upon the death of his wife took monastic vows and was later ordained. John XII served as Patriarch for 10 years.

Athanasios never ceased to have an active interest in the Church. From the monastery in which he had sought a life of prayer and contemplation, he wrote several letters to the Emperor on a variety of subjects. But the theme that recurs again and again in his correspondence is social equity, righteousness and support for the poor. He fought against high interest rates, usury, treachery in social dealings and lawlessness because he was aware of the critical point at which the Empire had arrived. He saw in social injustice one of the major internal factors that contributed to the Empire's decline¹².

In a dramatic appeal to the Emperor, Athanasios writes: «Let

8. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

9. *Athanasios Pantokratorinos*, op. cit., p. 93, n. 2.

10. *Pachymeres*, op. cit., vol. 2 p. 140: «ἀρχιερείς τῆ φατριᾶ συναπήχθησαν ταύτῃ καὶ συσκευῆ καὶ τὸν κρατοῦντα διανοχλεῖν οὐκ ἐπαύοντο».

11. *Athanasios*, Letters, No. 111, ed. by Alice-Mary Talbot, *The Correspondence of Athanasius I, Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters to the Emperor Andronicus II, Members of the Imperial Family, and Officials*, Dumbarton Oaks Texts, vol. II (Washington, D. C. 1974), p. 124; cf. 1 Peter 5:2.

12. *Athanasios*, Letters, No. 3, 12, 15, ed. Talbot, pp. 138ff.

righteousness shine forth in your days; let righteous judgment be established, let moderation be the rule, let mercy and truth pour forth, lest any of the characteristics of the unhappy city, such as treachery and usury and lawlessness be found in your city. First of all teach your household and the children whom God had granted you to take pride in piety and righteousness rather than in imperial glory... Teach the officials not to be «companions of thieves» nor to succumb to bribes and gifts»¹³.

C

When John XII resigned from the Patriarchate in 1303, Athanasios was recalled to the throne. He was the choice of both the Synod and the Emperor. According to George Pachymeres and to one of his biographers, Athanasios was reinstated because of his prophecy that an earthquake and a famine would bring much misery to the Empire, a prophecy that was realized¹⁴. His adamant character and unbending morality had apparently prevailed and had inspired admiration and respect for the man.

It was during his second term in office, that Athanasios became a truly great hierarch. He proved a courageous defender of Orthodoxy; he dedicated himself to the improvement of the social order, castigating injustice, vice and social evil, promoting justice, peace and cooperation between Church and State, the poor and the wealthy, striving for a social equilibrium.

As we know, many Byzantines pursued their religious beliefs and theological teachings in their daily lives, since the image of Christ, who had given His life for others, exerted a telling influence upon their minds. The concept of love which seeks nothing in return, a concept which binds people together in a community of fraternal love, was viewed as a spontaneous creative act of the redeemed or repentant man. Thus the wealthy man who repents and seeks his spiritual redemption and freedom expressed his freedom by renouncing his material possessions, distributing them among his less wealthy brethren.

Athanasios called the wealthy to this type of repentance and renunciation. The poor brethren were a daily preoccupation of this worthy man. As the incarnate God was concerned with the restoration

13. Ibid., Letters No. 3, Talbot, p. 138.

14. *George Pachymeres*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 360-362; H. Deleyahe, Editor, «La Vie D'Athanasie...», op. cit., pp. 66-68.

of both body and soul of the human person, likewise Athanasios attempted to assist his people spiritually and physically.

Poverty was not an uncommon phenomenon in the Byzantine Empire. But now, in the reign of Andronikos II, it had assumed large dimensions. The Turkish ravages on the one hand and the Catalan attacks on the other had increased greatly the refugees who sought their security and survival within the walls of the capital. This resulted in a shortage of grain as well as in a famine which hit Constantinople in 1305. An earthquake had left many homeless and had added to the misfortunes. Thus the hungry and the needy ran now in the thousands. In a letter to the Emperor, Athanasios described the situation as follows:

«Formerly when I walked through the streets, one poor person would ask me for one thing, another for another, but now all cry out with one voice for grain... I myself share their sorrow and sufferings, and am persuaded of the plight of these people and I (am able) to estimate the distress which will befall my brethren and fellow poor, on account of the scarcity of food»¹⁵.

He appealed to the Emperor not to yield to bribes and not to distribute the available grain to profiteers who would drive the grain out of the city. The Emperor, like a father, must rebuke the merciless merchants and assign the distribution of the grain to the poor to conscientious and pious men. In another letter, Athanasios pleaded with the Emperor, asking him to select men of irreproachable reputation to supervise public bakers. They would find out first the identity and number of the bakers; how they bought their grain and how they sold their bread. The same committee would furthermore supervise the ships transporting the grain. Athanasios was anxious lest public buyers of grain and grain dealers buy all the cargo because he preferred to see the needy individuals themselves procuring their grain and their bread directly from the first source and not through intermediary agents and black marketeers. In addition, Athanasios alerted the Emperor against the merchants' use of possible «double weights and measures», and became instrumental in the organization of a state commission to regulate and control grain supplies and prices¹⁶.

The Emperor should make social justice a daily preoccupation because the function of imperial power is to exercise and to pursue justice and order. God Himself bestows His mercy upon the people

15. *Athanasios*, Letters, No. 72, ed. Talbot, pp. 221-222.

16. *Ibid.*, No. 100, Talbot, p. 257.

when there is moral rectitude and prudence. Imperial justice must do everything possible to restrain the profit-seeking and unscrupulous merchants and traders whose obsession is how to enrich themselves with no consideration for the weak and the poor. In another letter, the Patriarch demanded from the Emperor that the honest purchase of grain and bread be carefully controlled and discharged¹⁷.

The determined Patriarch never tired of writing to the Emperor on behalf of the poor. Even in times of a great crisis for the whole state, the rich continued to exploit the poor, grabbing their property either because the poor could not pay their taxes or because they could not repay debts to the wealthy. Some of the powerful bribed the authorities for personal gains, disregarding lawfulness and righteousness. They were described as men who «devoured the people of the Lord like bread.» With the cooperation of the Emperor, Athanasios organized a court of mediation charged with the task to support the poor when they were exploited by unscrupulous officials or magnates¹⁸.

Tax collectors were to the toiling people like pests and locusts. The Patriarch was concerned with them as well. «The collection of taxes,» he wrote to the Emperor, «should not be entrusted to heartless people... who are little or no better than 'cornrust and locusts' whose actions... have brought nothing but unbearable misfortunes upon the common people.»¹⁹

The Emperor Andronikos II Paleologos did not have the vision or the ability to arrest the decline of the Empire. In fact, Patriarch Athanasios held him responsible for the moral and social crisis that prevailed in the first quarter of the 14th century. He accused Andronikos as a man who possessed the ability to act constructively in both public and private affairs but who preferred to do nothing. This is what Athanasios wrote with firmness and fearlessness: «The fact is that you do not instruct your sons in ways pleasing to God, and that do you not look after your subjects as a father should his children; that the Church has been profaned and attacked so that not only through ignorance are unworthy men brought into the clergy, but also men who are known to be unworthy... that fiscal agents are not investigated, but persist in their depravity and injustice... that never has such li-

17. *Ibid.*, No. 93, Talbot, pp. 250-251.

18. *Ibid.*, No 65, Talbot, p. 208; *Pachymeres*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 369-370, 583.

19. *Ibid.*, No. 68, Talbot, p. 213.

cense for corruption been granted to nuns and monks; ...that when an army is dispatched there is no one to admonish the men... but they indulge in adultery and looting and thievery...»²⁰.

Admittedly the austere and critical Patriarch exaggerated in his letters and tried unjustly to hold the Emperor solely responsible for all the sins of the people and of the imperial court. Nevertheless, we cannot help but admire his outspokenness and his devotion to duty and to virtue as he understood it. He was a selfless man who suffered with the suffering and rejoiced with the happy. From his correspondence, Athanasios emerges as an individual who indeed partook of the afflictions, the tears, the sorrows and the despondency of the toiling masses.

In a dramatic letter to the Emperor he describes social conditions and the plight of the poor as follows: «As I sit here in the midst of a crowd of unhappy people who are quarreling with each other, I see one man in tears, another who has been struck by someone, another bemoaning his bloody clothing, another still the loss of his property, yet another suffering from oppression especially at the hands of those who collect the public taxes (who have an obligation to treat justly those who are in any way suffering) not to mention those who escape half-dead from the Ishmaelites (Turks) and the very Italians — and then are mercilessly stripped by their own countrymen... Pay close attention to these matters, holy Emperor, and do not disregard for long the terrible misfortunes which befall us...» He concludes with a passionate plea on behalf of the poor and the destitute²¹.

But Athanasios advanced beyond letter writing, admonitions and exhortations. He had set an excellent example of an active man devoted to the amelioration of social conditions and the economic improvement of the poor. Perhaps the very best illustration of the Patriarch's philanthropies is his involvement for the help of the common people during his second term in office.

Between 1306 and 1307, Constantinople and vicinity suffered from a great famine which took a heavy toll on the population²². It may have been the result of the elimination of grain by the Geonese, because of the Catalan-Bulgarian alliance which made the Bulgarians withhold

20. Ibid., No. 36, Talbot, pp. 170-171.

21. Ibid., No. 46, Talbot, pp. 180-182.

22. *Athanasios Pantokratorinos*, op. cit., p. 101.

their wheat supplies from Constantinople²³. All suffered, but the poor and destitute suffered most. The situation was partly relieved by the stern and philanthropic measures of Athanasios.

Athanasios introduced operations to stop the exploitation of the poor. He advocated the re-institution of governmental control over the sale of wheat and supported control over the baking and the price of bread;²⁴ he persuaded wealthy people to open their warehouses to the poor and even persuaded black marketeers to contribute to the necessities of the poor²⁵. A stern moralist, the just Patriarch reproved alike the imperial officials who devoured the common people and the prelates who manifested selfishness and greediness. As we have observed, he wrote several letters to the Emperor Andronikos II pleading for reforms in social morals, castigating profiteering, asking for measures to ensure the availability of bread, begging for the translation of charity into deeds²⁶.

In the famine of 1305 Athanasios set up in several places of the Capital large kettles to feed the poor, orphans, widows and others in want. Boiled wheat, vegetables, oil, fish, wine, cheese, beans and other foodstuffs were provided to the extent that all poor could get a full dish or even a saucepan of food. In addition he distributed shoes and clothing to the needy. He used Church funds and money from the high clergy in order to carry out his philanthropy²⁷, believing that the improvement of social conditions is the responsibility of all and that poverty and want are just as evil and destructive to soul and body as moral evil.

When in the same year (1305) a destructive fire broke out in Constantinople, there were not only homeless and other misfortunes but also looting and thievery. Athanasios not only castigated thieves

23. *Angeliki Laiou*, «The Provisioning of Constantinople during the Winter of 1306-1307», «Byzantion», vol. 37 (1967), pp. 97-103.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 105; cf also *N. Banescu*, «Le Patriarche Athanase 1er et Andronic II Paleologue...» Academie Roumaine, Bulletin de la section historique, vol. 23 (1942), pp. 46-54; *R. Guiland*, «La correspondance inédite d'Athanase», Patriarche de Constantinople (1289-1293; 1304-1310), «Melanges Charles Diehl», I (Paris, 1930), pp. 138-139.

25. *Athanasios Pantokratorinos*, *Blöz*, op. cit., p. 101; *Laiou*, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

26. These valuable letters were first edited by *Angeliki Laiou*, Constantinople and the Latins (Cambridge, Mass. 1972), pp. 335-336, 338-340.

27. *Athanasios Pantokratorinos*, *Blöz*, op. cit., p. 101.

but under canonical threat, «he forced looters to return stolen goods to rightful owners»²⁸.

For the sake of the hungry, the sick and the needy, Athanasios was prepared to risk even his life rather than to keep silent or to remain idle. In one of his many letters to the Emperor, the Patriarch again and again, denounced dealers and heartless profiteers. He asked the Emperor to intervene and to punish them. He adds: «Those who are enriched by Mammon have not hesitated to hoard the grain and the wine which God has furnished for the support of the people... and this to the ruin of the poor. For it is by the oppression of these (i.e. poor people) that they wish to acquire their accursed wealth, accursed because he who raises the price of grain is cursed by the people.» The Patriarch threatened that if the Emperor failed to take action, he intended to gather together the common people and from the pulpit to declare excommunication and anathema on every grain dealer and then go home, saying nothing further no matter what happened. «For is it better for me to be killed than to keep silent, when I see in a Christian state injustices which are not to be found even among pagan nations»²⁹.

But the Emperor and the Imperial Court, the merchants and the grain dealers were not the only targets of Athanasios. Unfortunately, there were many clergymen, especially bishops, who fell short of their spiritual vocation. Many bishops had abandoned their sees in the provinces either because of the Turkish invasions or because they were attracted by the easy life and the security of the capital. When his direct appeals and admonitions had failed to move the prelates, the Patriarch wrote several letters to the Emperor urging him to order the bishops to return to their flocks. In one of them he emphasized: «Your divine majesty is aware how the bishops as well as certain monks, have been and are staying (in the capital) these days for no better reason than for drinking bouts and dissension and disturbances...»³⁰ «For the sake of God, for the good of righteousness... fight injustice everywhere, especially in the Church,» he wrote elsewhere³¹. Other bishops in the capital proved gluttonous and selfish. They made their carefree resi-

28. *Ibid.*; *Pachymeres*, op. cit., vol. 2. p. 582; *Alice Talbot*, in *DOP*, op. cit., p. 14.

29. *Athanasios*, Letters, No. 106, ed. *Talbot*, p. 263.

30. *Athanasios*, Letters, Nos. 16,25, *Talbot*, pp. 153, 162.

31. *Ibid.*, No 18, *Talbot*, p. 157.

dence in the capital begging slavishly the Emperor for favors and honors, leaving their flock prey to the wolves. Athanasios pleaded with the Emperor: «I beg of you, do not allow the bishops to reside far from the diocese allotted to them by law»³². No bishop should «spend more than six months» away from his own flock³³.

Several bishops were accused by name. For example the Metropolitan of Chalcedon was denounced because he had exhausted the treasury of the Kosmidion monastery for private benefit. The Patriarch lashed out at the Metropolitan of Bitzyne because the latter drew an annual income of 800 *hyperpyra* while so many others, clergymen and laymen alike, were poor and deprived. Athanasios condemned the Metropolitan of Sardis because he was the owner of real estate, such as a vineyard, a yoke of oxen, a garden, and several workshops³⁴.

In the light of Athanasios' letters it is not surprising to learn that for the second time he was forced to resign from his office after eight years of dedicated ministry (1303-1309 or 10). Nicephoros Gregoras relates that Athanasios was forced to resign the first time because of the noise and the disturbances of bishops and monks and laymen who could not stand any longer Athanasios' melancholic temperament (*πνευματικὴ σκυθρωπότης*). He had been ridiculed in secret as well as in the open and had found no support from the Emperor³⁵. But he was brought back to the throne because of his acknowledged love for Christ, his dedication to the people, his compassion for the poor and his readiness even to suffer for his principles³⁶.

Gregoras, who had accused the Patriarch as ignorant and unwashed, admits that Athanasios succeeded in bringing about order and discipline in the Church. In later years, there was a nostalgia for his measures and standards. The same historian adds that, «it would have been indeed most beneficial if regulations and standards such as he (Athanasios) imposed throughout the whole of his time as Patriarch could have remained in force also in the reigns of his successors³⁷».

32. *Ibid.*, No. 48, *Talbot*, p. 184.

33. *Ibid.*, No. 62.

34. See Letters 69 and 25. Also *Alice Talbot*, in *DOP*, *op. cit.*, p. 24; *D. M. Nicol*, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261-1453*, (London, 1972), pp. 106-107.

35. *Nicephoros Gregoras*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 191.

36. *George Pachymeres*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 140.

37. *Nicephoros Gregoras*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 184; cf *Joseph Gill*, «Emperor Andronicus II and Patriarch Athanasius I», *Byzantina*, vol. 2 (Thessalonike, 1970), pp. 18-19.

Athanasios' tireless efforts to reform the Church during his second term in office won him few friends. In fact his enemies multiplied. A novel that he issued in 1304 reveals once more that Athanasios was an uncompromising hierarch in matters of faith and morals³⁸. And while this novel was issued in cooperation with a synod of 21 bishops, it seems that six years later Athanasios had very little support from either the synod or the Emperor. His enemies now resorted to a very vicious trick in order to remove him from the throne. They made a picture of the Emperor Andronikos with a bridle in his mouth led by the Patriarch as if the Emperor were a donkey. They took this picture to both the Patriarch and the Emperor. Athanasios decided to resign and spend the rest of his life in the quietude and prayer life of a monastery. It is interesting to note that even though the Emperor had found in Athanasios a fierce and constant critic, Andronikos either in secret or in the open admired the Patriarch and had likened him to John Chrysostom on account of Athanasios' stern morality, philanthropy and virtue³⁹.

CONCLUSION

The life and the writings of Patriarch Athanasios of Constantinople reflect not only problems and conditions in the late medieval Greek Church, but also reveal social, political, economic and ideological issues and trends that the Byzantine state and society faced in the 13th and early 14th centuries. Athanasios' letters in particular are an excellent source for the social thought and religious history of the period.

In his person, we have a strong willed, determined, austere and yet compassionate, devoted, albeit uncompromising churchman who was totally committed to the welfare of the Church and his people. Admittedly, his monastic background led him to excesses. Frequently, he appears as a humorless and gloomy individual. It was with some justification that his contemporary historian Pachymeres described Athanasios as tougher than «beans which do not soften even in boiling water.»⁴⁰

38. *G. A. Rhallis and M. Pollis, Σύνταγμα τῶν Θείων καὶ Ἱ. Κανόνων*, vol. 5, (Athens, 1855), pp. 124-126.

39. *Nicephoros Gregoras*, op. cit., vol I, p. 216: «ἴσον τῷ θειοτάτῳ τὴν ἀρετὴν Χρυσοστόμῳ προθέσειν ἔλαις τῆς γνώμης τοῦτον ἀποφαινόμενον».

40. *Pachymeres* op. cit., vol. 2, p. 519: «ἔλωσ δὲ ἀθώπευτος ἦν καὶ ἀτεγκτος... κατὰ τοὺς κερασβόλους κύμους ἀμάλακτος...».

Because of his devotion to reform and to the ideals of poverty and philanthropy, Athanasios was distrusted by many bishops and monks more worldly inclined: because of his lack of education and refined manners he was not popular among the intellectuals. But Athanasios was above party politics either of the Church or of the State and a high-minded individual whose favorite segment of society were the poor brethren. He has been accused by a modern historian of trying to make Byzantium one vast monastery⁴¹. To some degree this is true, but Athanasios was more than a monk dedicated to the ideals of purity and poverty; he was a pastor with a passion for practical Christianity, public and personal ethics; he was concerned with the elimination of private and public evil and the reformation of the sinner rather than with theorizing on theological issues of his time, such as the procession of the Holy Spirit, the use of unleavened or leavened bread in the Eucharist, and other theological issues. He viewed Christianity as a way of life and was devoted to it as if it were an evangelical enterprise.

Admittedly, his intellectual training was limited and perhaps he was unable to comprehend the high points of theological abstractions. Nevertheless, his contributions to the Church and to the society of his day were many and very valuable. He had proven to be the pillar and the guardian of the common people.

From his letters, Athanasios emerges as an independent and stringent man, with rough and uncourtly ways which did not commend him to the highly sophisticated Byzantine society. But his major concern was how to improve the lot of the laboring folk. Wealth and social positions should be used in order to alleviate poverty, hunger and disease. The hunger, sickness and the miseries of the toiling population was a very painful spectacle to the sensitive Patriarch who became the advocate of social justice and brotherly love among all classes of people.

His passion for reform and social equilibrium led him to attack the Emperor as well as the imperial court, parasitic monks as well as avaricious bishops. He spared neither power nor wealth and attacked evil wherever it was found, whether in the Church or in the State. No wonder the people of God recognized Athanasios as a worthy saint. His name is commemorated to the present day on October 28.

41. R. Guiland, «Correspondence inédite d'Athanase...», op. cit., p. 75.