

Faith, Language and Culture

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An assessment of the Church's contemporary situation in the United States must be anchored to the eternal truths of the Church. These truths stand independent and apart from the social currents of particular historical eras. Our purpose here is to advance the universal faith and tradition of Orthodoxy by examining certain sociological realities of the Church in America.

First and foremost, we must seek to disentangle wishful thinking from social reality. We must look at ourselves honestly and realistically. It is commonly accepted that the American environment has had a powerful socializing influence on the members of our Church. As an institution as well, the Church clearly reflects some adaptation to major aspects of the cultural, political, and economic contours of American society. None of this need imply any contradiction between Holy Tradition and the advancement of Orthodoxy in an American milieu. Our mission, rather, is to build upon the foundation of our immigrant forebears who laid the basis for an Orthodox Church in the new world.

The Church in America is not a national Church, in which Orthodox correligionists make up the large majority of the population. Nor is it a diaspora Church, which means that its members hark back to some kind of emotional, if not physical, return to an ancestral homeland. Neither is it any longer an immigrant Church, whose members were born in the old country. Rather, the Church is evolving into an indigenous and American faith whose promise is limited only by the vision of its congregants.

As the Church in America approaches the end of the twentieth century, one way to convey recent developments is to contrast the older generation of Greek immigrant church builders with the later generations of church inheritors. The 1980s marked the end of three decades of widespread church construction in the United States. Most of the builders of the post-World War II generation were motivated by the desire to establish a Greek Orthodox presence in what was then mostly an alien environment. By the time the churches were standing, however, American society had changed. Greek Orthodoxy was no longer so alien, a reassuring sign of the success of the builders' intentions.

Yet the inheritors did not accept the bricks-and-mortar mentality that equates the success of Greek Orthodoxy with the construction of more churches and community halls. They had less of an emotional stake in the outward presentation of their religion and were inclined more toward an inward Orthodoxy. In the 1950s the Greek Orthodox were struggling with the question of what it means to be an American; in the 1990s, comfortably American, they struggled with a more fundamental question: what it means to be Greek Orthodox.

The plan of this paper is straightforward. First, we discuss certain demographic realities. Second, we look at the issue of language and liturgy. Third, we turn to the question of Greek ethnic identity in this country and the relationship of such identity to the Church in America. We conclude with a look toward the future.

DEMOGRAPHICS

To understand social changes within the Greek Orthodox Church in this country is ultimately to grasp

trends in Greek-American demography. To a large degree Greek Orthodoxy reflects changes in the numbers of new arrivals, the proportion born in the old country versus the proportion born in the United States, reproduction rates, the frequency of intermarriage, the age and generational distribution, converts from and losses to other denominations, and so on.

Immigration

First readings on the Greek-American population come from immigration statistics. We can divide Greek immigration conveniently into seven distinct periods.

Early Migration: 1873-1899. A trickle of Greek immigrants began to arrive in the 1870's, but by the end of the nineteenth century only some 15,000 Greeks had entered the United States. The approximate annual average was 500.

Great Wave: 1900-1917. The great wave of immigration, when 450,000 Greeks came to these shores, started at the turn of the century and ended in 1917 when the U.S. entered World War I. The approximate annual average was 25,000.

Last Exodus: 1918-1924. The final phase of the earlier immigration of 70,000 Greeks lasted from the years following World War I until the doors of immigration closed in 1924. The approximate annual average was 10,000.

Closed Door: 1925-1946. The two-decade "closed door" period lasted through the end of World War II. Only some 30,000 Greeks came to this country. Many of these were brides of immigrants already settled in America. The approximate annual average was 1,300.

Postwar Migration: 1947-1965. After World War II the doors opened somewhat, especially under provisions for displaced persons. Some 75,000 Greeks arrived here. The approximate annual average was 4,000.

New Wave: 1966-1979. Starting in 1966, when the immigrating laws were changed to allow easier entrance for the relatives of persons already here, a new wave of 160,000 Greeks came to the U.S. The approximate annual average was 11,000.

Declining Migration: 1980-present. For over a decade, immigration from Greece has tapered off considerably. Only 25,000 Greeks came to these shores during the 1980s. The approximate annual average is 2,500. But with returnees, the net growth rate is probably, under 1,000 annually.

The end of immigration from Greece is the first demographic reality for a contemporary understanding of the Church in America.

Fertility Rates

One other important remark must be made about the Greek-American population. For at least two decades, the American-born generations have not been replacing themselves. In terms of economic and educational status, Greek-Americans have done well, but certainly they are fewer in number than if they were not so well educated and so well off. With no renewal of immigration in sight and with little

likelihood of a rise in the birthrate, the Greek-American population will shrink somewhat in the years to come.

The Greek-American and Greek-Orthodox Populations

Our numbers in the United States are much lower than inflated public relations statements. The U.S. census remains the best source of data on the Greek-American population. In the 1980 census, persons were asked to identify their ancestry in terms of national origin or descent. An identical item was included in the 1990 census, but the tabulations from that census are not yet available. Most likely, the numbers of Greek-Americans to be reported in 1990 will be smaller than those of 1980.

The 1980 census reported that 615,000 Americans identified themselves as being of purely Greek ancestry and that another 345,000 identified themselves as having some Greek ancestry. Thus, under one million persons can be considered Greek-Americans on the basis of national origin. Of course, all of those who acknowledge Greek origins do not necessarily identify themselves with the Greek community or even have personal feelings of Greek ethnicity.

By using available census and immigration figures and by making some assumptions about the ratio of births to deaths since 1980, we can calculate the generational distribution of Greek-Americans in the early 1990s. An informed estimate would be as follows:

First generation

(Immigrants)	200000
Second generation	350000
Third generation	250000
Fourth generation	100000
Total	900000

In other words, about a quarter, or slightly less, of all Greek-Americans have Greek as a mother tongue. The Greek language competency of the later generations is unknown, but realism dictates that English is the preferred language for virtually all of the American born. A large number of the second generation (children of the immigrants), to be sure, have some fluency with the Greek language. For the vast majority of the third and later generations (the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the immigrants), if truth be told, Greek language competency is meager to nonexistent. We examine ways of improving Greek language capabilities later in this paper.

Religious affiliation is not tabulated by the census. A 1975 Gallup poll of American religious preference found .031 who identified as Greek Orthodox (Reinken). If the Gallup figures are extrapolated to the total U.S. population, there were approximately 670,000 self-identified Greek Orthodox in this country in 1975. A 1990 survey, however, reported only about 550,000 self-identified Greek Orthodox (Kosmin). Let us, for the sake of argument, then, say there are some 600,000 identifying Greek Orthodox in this country. The Archdiocese has approximately 130,000 dues-paying family units, which would come to approximately 400,000 individuals.

In broad terms, then, about two out of three persons with Greek ethnicity identifies as Greek Orthodox, and about the same proportion of these self-identified Greek Orthodox are formally affiliated with the Greek Archdiocese.

The Archdiocesan figures are not designators of active membership in Church life, of course. A tendency exists among even bona fide Orthodox Church members to limit their religious participation to occasional Church attendance. Such casual Church membership often leads to a movement away from the Church, not so much in a sense of renunciation or joining another denominational body, but in the sense that Orthodox Christianity is no longer a prime definer of one's religious identity. The danger is not that the Greek Orthodox suffer discrimination, much less persecution, in the United States, but that in the tolerance of American society, no Orthodox identity is maintained. The "drifting away" phenomenon is often accentuated by the growing likelihood of marriage with a non-Greek Orthodox.

Intermarriage

By the early 1990s, over two out of three marriages occurring in the Greek Orthodox Church involved a partner who was not Greek Orthodox. Furthermore, some number of the marriages in which both partners are reported as Orthodox include converts, thereby reducing the proportion of intra-Greek marriages even more.

The Greek-American community has had to change its position on intermarriage in the face of its frequency. The initial edict of the immigrant parents was to tell their children that all Greek potential marriage partners were better than all non-Greek. The next line of defense, typical of the second generation, was to acknowledge that there are equal measures of good and bad in all nationalities, but the sharing of a common Greek background makes for a better marriage. (Interestingly enough, the available Archdiocesan data, though not conclusive, show a somewhat lower divorce rate among couples in which one of the partners was not Greek Orthodox.) The final argument, a common recourse for the third generation, is that if one does marry a non-Greek, one must be sure that the spouse is able to adapt to the family kinship system and be willing to become Greek Orthodox.

At present, the non-Greek spouse usually plays a minor role in Church functions, but there is a discernible trend for some such converts to become more actively involved in Church organizations. Non-Greeks, in fact, have been elected to Church Boards. Converts (a very, very few who learn to speak Greek) have become a new element in the impetus toward a permanent Greek Orthodox presence in this country. Now that intermarriage has become the rule rather than the exception, its meaning has also been transformed. Outmarriage no longer carries a stigma of deviance in the community; thus it is much easier for exogamous Greek-Americans and their spouses who marry in the Church to continue an active membership in the Greek community.

Without frontal recognition of the increasing likelihood of intermarriage, there can be no long-term answer to the viability of the Greek Orthodox Church in this country. The battle against intermarriage is over. The focus now must be on how to retain the non-Greek spouse and the children of the intermarried.

The Children of Mixed Marriages

What happens to the children of intermarried couples? There is no firm answer to this question. But

there is good reason to think that a substantial proportion of children of mixed-marriages will have less identity as Greeks than those who are the offspring of two Greek-American parents. More salient, for our purposes here, intermarriage will reduce the number who identify themselves as Greek Orthodox in future generations unless measures are taken to incorporate non-Greek spouses into the Greek Orthodox community. (We do have data for Jewish-Gentile marriages. Among such marriages, only one-quarter are raised as Jews) (Jewish Federation).

It is revealing to examine the religious patterns of our five most prominent Greek-American political figures: Spiro Agnew, John Brademas, Michael Dukakis, Paul Sarbanes, and Paul Tsongas. Agnew and Brademas were children of mixed marriage and not raised in the Greek Orthodox faith. Michael Dukakis, although raised as Greek Orthodox and a member of the Church, did not marry in the Church and did not raise his children as Greek Orthodox. Indeed, a leading American commentator described Dukakis as "the first truly secular candidate we had ever had for the presidency" (Wills, 60). Paul Tsongas and Paul Sarbanes married non-Greek women in the Church and baptized their children as Greek Orthodox. Tsongas, who has addressed OCL gatherings, states his wife and children found themselves uncomfortable with the Greek ethnic overtones of the Church and found themselves attending the Episcopalian Church (Tsongas, 40). Only Sarbanes's children have a Greek Orthodox identity.

With such experience among our most prominent Greeks, it behooves the Church to consider ways to maintain or, perhaps more accurately, even create a Greek Orthodox identity among its children. Consideration must be given to instituting some kind of focused instruction in Church doctrine and history beyond the Sunday School level. Such instruction should be directed toward adolescence, a time when young people are most likely to drift away from the Church and a time when young people are forming an adult religious identity. At present, the knowledge of Orthodox traditions and beliefs even among our observant youth is often deficient. Simply ask our young people, for example, what is the significance of such major Orthodox holydays as January 6 and August 15.

LANGUAGE AND LITURGY

Once upon a time, a generation ago, to be Greek-American usually meant to know something about the Greek language. Even today, there is little doubt that if we could have instant Greek, if we could by some Brave New World method learn Greek in our sleep with little effort, nearly all Greek-Americans would be glad to do so. But learning and using Greek requires conscious effort, and the effort by and large was not being made by American-born parents for their children, much less for the children of mixed marriages. Increasingly Greek Orthodox affiliation rather than Greek language has become the defining trait of Greek ethnic identity in America.

The issue of the language and liturgy in the Greek Orthodox Church in this country is a vexing one. Orthodox Christianity clearly adheres to a tradition of coterminous liturgical and indigenous languages. But we must recognize that many native Greek speakers (though not all by any means) and some American born have a strong and understandable desire to perpetuate the mother tongue in this country. This stance in turn disaffects many of those for whom Greek is an alien language.

What aggravates the language question is that the liturgy has unique importance in Eastern Orthodoxy. The laity's presence and participation is indispensable in the liturgy. An Orthodox priest cannot celebrate the Eucharist without lay participation. The Churchgoer wants to find his or her faith

adequately, indeed inspiringly, embodied in the words and acts of the liturgy, that part of the religious experience which makes the most pervasive and persistent public manifestation and moves most hearts. It is through the liturgy that Orthodox Christians, more so than Occidental Christians, are formed in their Christian allegiance.

As early as 1927, a Boston bishop held that the Greek Orthodox could be considered faithful even if they did not know Greek (Papaioannous, 151). But this was a cry in the wilderness at the time. Archbishop Athenagoras was a conservative on the language issue, probably to avoid conflict with community lay leaders (Papaioannous, 142-43). Even Sunday schools were required to use Greek as the language of instruction up through the 1940s. Proposals for an English liturgy were seriously advanced in the 1950s, but Archbishop Michael authorized English only in sermons. During the 1950s, a major transmission of Greek Orthodox commitment to the American born occurred through the lay-directed Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA). Significantly, Michael allowed English to be GOYA's official language. GOYA served as the incubator for a generation of lay leaders in the Greek Orthodox community.

In 1964, the clergy-laity congress allowed certain readings and prayers in the liturgy to be repeated in English. In the important clergy-laity congress of 1970, following the personal appeal of Archbishop Iakovos, an English liturgy was permitted, depending upon the judgment of the parish priest in consultation with the bishop. The progression to English would have been inevitable and relatively smooth had it not been for the large influx of new immigrants from Greece in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With the arrival of the new immigrants, older traditionalists could join forces with a younger constituency committed to the Greek language. The Greek Orthodox Church was more ready, in effect, for English in 1965 than it was in 1980. During the 1980s, however, the long-term movement toward English was clearly reascendant. In fact, even some of the newly ordained priests had only a shaky mastery of the Greek vernacular.

The tide of Americanization that began to lap at the feet of the Church in the post-World War II era has continued to rise in each succeeding decade. Despite resistance, the Church has begun to adapt to linguistic change. By the early 1970s, most liturgies were predominantly, but not exclusively in Greek. By the early 1990s, language use varied widely. Churches in the immigrant neighborhoods of the larger cities offered their services entirely in Greek. Churches in the metropolitan suburbs and in the West and South, those most likely to be attended by the American born, had services increasingly in English. By the early 1990s, in a manner of speaking, a kind of local option system had evolved.

The language issue to some degree solves itself outside of the liturgy. Language use in Church meetings, formal affairs, and informal conversation comes close to reflecting prevailing usage among those present. With a little give and take, no one is seriously at a language disadvantage. But the liturgy remains a source of linguistic contention. None of the various accommodations (singing parts of liturgies in both languages, a service partly in Greek and partly in English, alternating language use on various Sundays) is entirely satisfactory. The Church's policy of "flexible bilingualism," a mixture of Greek and English, dependent on the parish's linguistic makeup can only be regarded as temporary expediency. Indeed, it is inherently contradictory for the sermon and announcements in most of our churches to be in English while the bulk of the liturgy is in Greek.

The adaptation of an English liturgy in the Greek Orthodox Church in this country is handicapped by the fact that no authorized translation of the liturgy exists. Equally pressing, there has been no

concerted effort to synchronize an English-language liturgy with liturgical music. The time is overdue for a commission consisting of those well versed in theology, liturgical history, the intricacies of both the English and Greek languages, and Church music.

However, the lack of an authorized liturgy in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese should not serve as an excuse for inaction. The Antiochan Orthodox Archdiocese (1938) and the Orthodox Church in America (1971) have successfully used English as the primary liturgical language for decades, and there is no reason to believe that the Greek Archdiocese could not do the same.

Fostering a Greek Identity

To argue that the Church must come to recognize and nourish its new roots in America does not mean to forsake Greek ethnic identity. Celebration of Greek national holidays, classes in the Greek language, Greek cooking, Greek dancing and music, all have a place in the Church community -- if this suits a community's needs and desires. But it is to say that preservation and encouragement of Greek ethnic identity need no longer be an overriding responsibility of the Church. We might even argue that to some extent the Church has been distracted from its fundamental mission by seeking to become the prime, if not sole, conservator of Greek ethnic identity.

The time is ripe for serious consideration of long-range programs to foster ethnic identity by a multiplicity of groups. With the advent of inexpensive mass air transit, travel to Greece becomes an increasingly available option. Also certain programs could fit in rather nicely with the growing emphasis on education abroad for young people and continuing education for adults. The possibilities merely listed here await further discussion and modification:

1. A high school year in Greece for Greek-American youth. Such a policy could be modeled after the exchange program of the American Field Service. Each year thousands of overseas students come to the United States and an equal number of Americans go abroad.
2. A college year in Greece or a "fifth year" in Greece following a bachelor's degree.
3. A summer language and culture course for high school or college students. The pilot program of the University of Aegean is one model to emulate.
4. A continuing education program in Greece for Greek-American adults and their spouses. Such a program would foster both language and culture learning. The ulpan schools in Israel, where Hebrew is taught as a second language, is one such model.
5. A lecture series and seminar program geared to weekend attendance. Such a program could involve traveling lecturers and seminar organizers visiting local communities.
6. Some kind of fund to subsidize a journal of commentary and literature on Greek-Americana.

The above is only a first-draft listing. Readers can think of other concepts. Some of these programs could be self-sustaining by tuition or fees paid for by participants. Others might need supplementary financial support from foundations, Greek-American donors, Greek-American associations, and, in some cases, the Greek government. Everything appropriate to Greece applies equally to Cyprus.

Such courses and programs must be tailored to the capabilities and needs of the participants. What works for someone immersed in a Greek background will not work for someone coming to his or her Greek ethnicity afresh. We stress especially that such programs could also contain material on Greek Orthodoxy, thereby bringing some secularists closer to the faith.

TOWARD THE FUTURE

Serious questions, not all with definitive answers, can be raised against the argument that the Church should gradually release itself of primary responsibility for maintaining the Greek ethnic heritage in America. Here are three of the most serious, in ascending order of difficulty.

If not the Church, who will represent the interests of Greece and Cyprus in the American policy? The simple answer is that the Church in America cannot be the political arm of Hellenic interests. Indeed, for the Church to try to play such a role in American politics is counterproductive. On non-religious issues, the Church should stay clear of political involvements. The causes of Greece and Cyprus are best represented by secular leaders and groups in the Greek-American community and, as much as possible, by non-Greek ethnics in the American political system. The proper conception of political activism should be in accord with the strong American tradition of separation of church and state.

If the Church sheds its ethnicity, will not Greek identity disappear in this country? In point of fact, Greek ethnic identity is already disappearing. As we have sought to demonstrate in this paper, present trends augur the possibility of a virtual extinction of an identifiable Greek-American community in another generation. A variety of groups and multifaceted programs drawing upon varying constituencies promises to be the best way for Greek identity to flower in this country.

Will not a de-emphasis of our Greek ethnic heritage lead ultimately to the creation of an American Orthodox Church? Such a question must be addressed on its own terms and in due time, if and when it arises. Some view an autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church in America with alarm, others with joy. For the present, we can state that there is nothing that either forecloses or inevitably moves toward an autocephalous Church. At the minimum, pan-Orthodoxy must be high on the agenda of the Church in America. In any event, the Church must keep clear a sense of priorities. In these straitened times, resources should be directed toward those institutions that are the seed corn of our future. Of these, the Holy Cross School of Theology stands out as most worthy.

Looking at Greek Orthodoxy in the United States, we can offer the following generalizations. For the immigrant generation, Orthodoxy was Hellenism -- the two were virtually synonymous. For the second generation, Orthodoxy was found in Hellenism. To be a Greek in America meant to be a Greek Orthodox. For the third and later generations, Hellenism is to be found in Orthodoxy. This is to say that rather than viewing the increasing Americanization of the Church as antithetical to Greek identity, it will be only with an indigenous Greek Orthodox Church that we can expect any kind of Greek identity to carry on into the generations to come. Paradoxically enough, the more the Church reaches out and accepts non-Greeks, always without compromise of its doctrinal tenets, the more it will insure its own flowering and, therefore, guarantee some form of Greek-American ethnic survival into the indefinite future.

To conclude, it may be useful to distinguish between secular ethnicity and sacred ethnicity. Secular

ethnicity will slowly erode, despite rearguard actions by the diasporists. Sacred ethnicity, on the other hand, can strike roots in the new world -- a Church adaptable to changing social conditions and changing generations, while not deviating from its traditions and transcendental truths. If the Greek Orthodox Church in America were to emphasize secular ethnicity over sacred ethnicity, it might well end in a situation in which the descendants of the immigrants are neither Greek nor Orthodox.