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MODERN GREEK STUDIES
(AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND)

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The periodical welcomes papers in both English and Greek on all aspects of Modern Greek Studies (broadly defined). Prospective contributors should preferably submit their papers on disk and hard copy. All published contributions by academics are refereed (standard process of blind peer assessment). This is a DEST recognised publication.

Το περιοδικό φιλοξενεί άρθρα στα Αγγλικά και τα Ελληνικά αναφερόμενα σε όλες τις απόψεις των Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών (στη γενικότητά τους). Υποψήφιοι συνεργάτες θα πρέπει να υποβάλλουν κατά προτίμηση τις μελέτες των σε δισκέτα και σε έντυπη μορφή. Όλες οι συνεργασίες από πανεπιστημιακούς έχουν υποβληθεί στην κριτική των εκδοτών και επιλέκτων πανεπιστημιακών συναδέλφων.

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Alexander Norman
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WHERE THE CHURCH BELL CAN BE HEARD,
THERE THE PARISH LIES:
ISSUES OF SCHISM AND CONTINUITY IN THE GREEK
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

The religious landscape of Australia is both complex and diverse. Such diversity has resulted chiefly from the migration, forced or otherwise, of peoples from all over the world. However, the transition of a religion and its associated community from one social and cultural context to another is by no means an easy one. The history of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia is one example of the difficulties that are typically encountered in this move. As a case study, an examination of this history can give a valuable insight into the problems that migrant religions and religious communities face in new homes. Further, it provides a fascinating study of the divisions that can occur in migrant religious communities regarding areas of authority. The establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia reveals a number of issues characteristic of migrant religious communities: The prominence of lay people in establishing their own churches; the role of the church in retaining faith, culture and language and the influence of the homeland church in governance. The ways in which it dealt with these issues can yield valuable lessons that may shed light on the challenges faced by migrant religious communities presently forming in Australia, and those that are yet to come.

After the Second World War, migration brought many 'unfamiliar' Christian groups to Australia. The number of Greek Orthodox people in Australia has risen from around 10,000 before the Second World War, to over 364,000 in the 2001 National Census (Chryssavgis 1988, p. 56; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). The Greek Orthodox Church is a migrant Church, established for the spiritual and pastoral care of those Greek Orthodox who had made their lives outside the national boundaries of the mother church. Orthodoxy is a loose grouping of national Churches. Each of these is autonomous

and thus the relationship between church and cultural identity is strong. In secular Australia this has been a challenge. The clear Church jurisdictions of the various (national) homelands have resulted, through migration, in overlapping jurisdictions in Australia.

Religion influences the way people conceive of themselves in the world and the way they live in it. For the Orthodox Church, the experience of domination by various foreign powers, especially the Ottomans (1453–1821) meant that it served not only as a maintainer of spiritual identity, but also national and cultural identity. This resulted in the various churches becoming often the sole repositories for language and culture. Consequently, when Greeks and the Greek Orthodox Church moved to Australia this nationalist aspect moved with it (Papageorgopoulos 1981, p. 78). Belonging to a particular Orthodox Church may also determine national, social, or cultural identity. In the Orthodox diaspora the church has once again become a focus for social and cultural identity within multicultural societies. From its beginnings in Australia the Greek Orthodox Church was enmeshed in this. Where Greeks settled in Australia they established organizations to maintain Greek cultural identity.

As with all other Orthodox Churches in Australia, the development of the Greek Orthodox Church closely followed the patterns of Greek immigration. There were individual Greek Orthodox people in Australia from as early as 1810, and by 1860 the community had become a notable group (Gillman 1988, p. 249). However, there was no Orthodox Church present in Australia at that time. There was some concern from the Anglican establishment to care for the Church because of its common link and break with Rome (Carey 1996, p. 161). The journal of St James Church in Sydney records that in 1897 St James was offered to Fr. Bakillaros to conduct services (cited in Chryssavgis, p. 54). Greek Orthodox Communities (*kionotites*) were eventually established in Melbourne and Sydney at the end of the nineteenth century. On the 29th of May 1898 the church of the Holy Trinity opened in Surry Hills in Sydney. This was followed soon thereafter by the Church of the Annunciation in East Melbourne. The Orthodox Church in Australia was at first administered by Jerusalem, however, on the 6th of June 1903, at the insistence of Greek Community leaders from Melbourne, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece placed Australia under its spiritual jurisdiction (Tamis, 1997, p. 33).

The first real conflicts began in 1924. In 1923 the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople revoked the Synodic Patriarchal Tomos of 1908 that gave jurisdiction over the Orthodox people outside the Greek State. In January 1924 Christophoros Knetes was appointed as first Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. Knetes' time as spiritual leader was not a smooth one. The establishment of the Metropolis was met with opposition from the *koinotites*.

There was no consultation with the Communities, who financially supported the Church and the clergy (Tamis, p. 35). The Sydney *koinotita* took a firm 'anti-Knetes' stance which resulted in a fight between the two factions at church that required police attendance. After this, the *koinotita* sieged their church and prohibited the Metropolitan's entry. Supporters of Knetes established a separate parish, and the cathedral of St. Sophia, in Darlinghurst was erected (Doumanis 1992). The reverse was the case in Melbourne where Knetes' supporters controlled the *koinotita*. The Melbourne Community had been isolated to some extent by the establishment of the seat of the Church, the Greek Consulate, and Greek language newspapers in Sydney. This kept the Melbourne Community away from the ecclesiastic schism, but also away from much needed resources (Tamis, pp. 13-15). The anti-Knetes faction then broke away and formed a new church.

Knetes found what many other migrant religious leaders have learned – outside of traditional contexts, authority cannot be taken for granted. The schism became institutionalised when Archimandrate Varaklas seceded from the Australian Metropolis on the 18th of November 1926. He, along with the new Council of the Sydney *koinotita*, joined the Autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church of America and Canada. Knetes successfully requested the defrocking of Varaklas for this act. However, following this the *koinotites* mounted a campaign against Knetes' personality and pastorship through the Greek language media. Trips to Greece were organised, and many letters were written to both the Greek government and the Patriarchate. Sacraments conducted by the defrocked Varaklas were declared void, and children born from these marriages were not recognised by Greek legislation. Re-marriages and re-baptisms were enforced by the Metropolitan. In the ensuing battle, Knetes' character and pastoral qualities were questioned, and he was even accused of being homosexual. His image had been tarnished by the dissension, and the Greek government eventually demanded his removal in 1929 (Tamis, pp. 41-43).

This theme of the Community '*politikon*' rejecting the authority of the Church was to carry on for decades. It has been particularly painful for the greater community as Orthodoxy is, theologically, undivided. It is the Orthodox faith that binds the community. Indeed, it was with this very intention that the document establishing the Diocese in Australia maintained that all Orthodox communities should weld together into one ecclesiastical whole (Gillman, p. 250). However, even today this is yet to be realised. The post-war influx of migrants from many different cultures and languages has probably delayed it even further. Gillman argues that this may indeed never happen, claiming that the Whitlam system of multiculturalism seeks to reaffirm ethnic roots, and move away from 'assimilation' of any kind. However, Gillman's analysis misses the crucial aspect of the theological unity of the Orthodox faith. There may always be 'cultural' Orthodox churches, yet the canonical goal is undoubtedly an ecclesiastical unity.

The *koinotites* of Sydney and Melbourne had provided each community with a church through fundraising. Their hegemony over the community was jealously guarded. In Greece the clergy and Church had exerted much influence over community life. Therefore, the Church and clergy were seen by many to be the greatest threat to the secular *koinotites*. Priests, it was argued, should be restricted to performing ceremonies and religious rituals. It is thus no surprise that the introduction of ecclesiastical structure in Australia was met by some sections with outrage. Some *koinotita* leaders were incensed that they had not been consulted. The community was instantly divided into those with an anti-clerical view, and those who felt that a diocese was needed to regulate the Greek Orthodox religious life. After the removal of Knetes, the Church, under Metropolitan Timotheos (1931–1947), maintained relations that were cordial (Doumanis, p. 66). The Church had been conceded a foothold of spiritual authority. However, the *koinotites* retained control of all other parish activities and administration.

The fifty years to 1947 were a time of change and vacillation by decision makers. However, Tamis (1997, p.13) argues that in general the course of the *koinotites* was conservative and parochial, and this combined with the hardship of the times led to little relative growth. There was always a strong dissention between the laity and the Church. However, there were also always two schools of thought within the community – those advocating unification and collaboration with the Metropolitan, and those not. With the instalment of Metropolitan Theophylactos in April 1947, the leadership and dominance of the *koinotites* was publicly questioned for the first time (Doumanis, pp. 66-67). In the post-war period the role of the *koinotites* changed. 145,000 Greeks had migrated to Australia between 1947 and 1966. However, political infighting and a lack of financial resources resulted in the *koinotites* failing to meet the demands for new churches, let alone the raw needs of the community. In this environment many localities began to establish their own parishes and institutions.

During the 1950s the programme of increased migration had resulted in the Orthodox faith growing to 3% of the total Australian population, with Melbourne becoming the third largest Greek city in the world after Athens and Thessaloniki (Bouma 1995). The Church entrusted itself to offer social and spiritual assistance to migrants. Migrants were faced with the daunting tasks of learning English, finding a home, and finding a job whilst adapting to dramatic cultural differences. The Church undertook the task of helping with this process. Yet it had limited resources to draw upon to do so. To add further complication, the dramatic increase in parish populations meant there were too few priests to cater for the religious needs of the people (Chryssavgis, p. 56).

With the election of Archbishop Ezekiel in 1959 the Church entered a period of increasing pastoral activity. He sought the co-operation of all Communities and parishes

and created new ones in order to involve more people in the wider pastoral programme of the Church. However, when Ezekiel established traditional Greek Orthodox by-laws he met bitter opposition, and court action ensued on all sides (Chryssavgis, p. 60). The profound ecclesiastical reformation of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia that occurred between 1959 and 1974 fostered a further ecclesiastical schism. The Metropolis of Australia and New Zealand was elevated to Archdiocese and Metropolitan Ezekiel to Archbishop on 1st September 1959. The domination of the *koinotites* in religious affairs was being challenged by the Church.

The foundations for schism were laid in the 1890s when the small Greek communities were dominated by the *koinotites*. The *koinotites* were modelled on the Greek form of local government, and catered for community needs such as English language classes, social events and other cultural activities (Doumanis, p. 65). Ezekiel resolved to confront the problem of the *koinotites* power from ownership of church property. He made clear from the outset that the Archdiocese would accommodate all churches, including *koinotitan* churches, within the ecclesiastical structure, yet would remain independent of their control. To this end, Ezekiel's supporters were sent out to the suburbs and rural centres to encourage local communities to form committees, raise funds, and build their own churches. These new parishes, dubbed 'parish-communities', would be owned and maintained by the community, and would recognise the spiritual leadership of the Archbishop (Doumanis, pp. 65-68). The Archdiocese was given full control of the clergy and purely religious matters. This system of decentralisation destroyed the monopoly of the *koinotites*, undercutting their prestige and influence within the community. In doing this, the Archdiocese was responding to and providing for the radical population increase in post-war Greek Orthodox Australia.

Eventually most *koinotites* accepted the new ecclesiastical system. However, a number remained staunchly anti-clerical. Of these Adelaide, Newcastle, and Melbourne conveyed their objections by formally splitting with the Church. In 1964, 10,000 people led by three canonically disputed bishops led a second schism. Relations were established with an American Church and there were breakaways from Ezekiel's jurisdiction (Breward, 1993, p. 157). Ezekiel continued to face difficulties in areas where the *koinotites* had influence. He had still to win the hearts and minds of the average parishner in these areas. His method in this area was to assert that *koinotitan* churches were schismatic. Therefore, weddings, baptisms and other rituals performed in them were invalid. People responded to this by deserting the *koinotitan* churches. The *koinotites*, absorbed in their own fight over rights and authority allowed little for the religious predilections of Greek migrants and suffered the consequences. In the rural village setting from which most Greek migrants had come, the Church and religion played a central role in everyday life. Religion, and

religious legitimacy were considered especially important. Most Greek-Australians were simply not prepared to attend un-canonical churches. This feeling was further enhanced by the Greek government's support for the Archdiocese (Doumanis, p. 69).

In 1975 Archbishop Stylianos was appointed as the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia¹. He immediately ruled that new parishes be registered in the Archdiocese Property Trust to avoid the dissensions that had arisen in the past (Chryssavgis, p. 56). Stylianos expressed great concern that some parishes and communities were not fulfilling their spiritual and financial obligations to the Archdiocese. What Stylianos was concerned with is the registering of churches within the Church authority. This concern carries through to today. In seeking this he is trying to present a unified Church, but, more importantly, he is seeking to foster parish-community churches that will forever be with the people – something that will not die or fade with its founders. Tied into this is the idea that the Church will belong not only to all Greek Orthodox people, but all Orthodox in general (Papageorgopoulos, pp. 90-92). In this can be seen the move to a United Orthodox Church in Australia.

In the light of such conflict and schism, the scholar may seek to find trends and lessons for the future. Despite a vociferous campaign in the Greek language press, the Archdiocese continued its success and continued to grow. Doumanis (1992) claims that *pro-koinotitan* writers have given little attention to this fact, yet it cannot be doubted that the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia is succeeding in its mission. We might ask two questions. Firstly, how does the Church face the potential divide between the lay community and itself? Following from this, how does the Church approach the problem of consolidation? The answers to these questions can shed light on the process of the transferral of a religious community to a new home.

Australia is a country and society where pluralism and multiculturalism are not only abstract ideals, but are, to a certain extent, given realities of everyday life. A distinguishing factor of the phenomena of religious conflict within the Greek Orthodox Church is that it has been intra-ethnic, rather than inter-ethnic². The relationships between priest, community leader, and Archbishop have been difficult. The traditional modes of authority of the 'old-country' were not present at the outset. Breward (1993) argues that in the Orthodox faith tradition is seen as normative, and deeply national. This has certainly complicated clergy-laity relations in the new social setting of Australia. The first Communities in Australia were established as secular companies. In these the position of the priest was not seen as a vocation but rather as an appointment. The priest could then be dismissed without reference to the ruling bishop (Chryssavgis, p. 60). Doumanis posits that the Orthodox Church has a 'tradition' of ecclesiastical conflict and community fragmentation, claiming that this is caused by 'intrinsic characteristics in Orthodox

ecclesiastical traditions and structures' (Doumanis, p. 61). This may be the case, at least in migrant contexts, and to some extent may be the result of the outlook of the Church in terms of geographical expansion.

Orthodox hierarchs were slow to respond to the needs of emerging migrant communities. Being a nationally based and non-proselytising Church, there were no strategies in place to deal with geographic expansion. The laity were usually responsible for buying, maintaining, and, importantly, controlling religious property. This gave the laity power over religious affairs, and later made it extremely difficult to establish Church authority. Further, Church authority and ecclesiastical jurisdiction were ill defined and led to disputes and dissent. The Church-*koinotites* struggle was seen by the Communities as one in which an elected representative body had to be defended against a feudal power structure – a struggle between democratic practices and authoritarianism. Beward (1993) sees this as a common pattern in migrant religious communities. The Clergy-Laiety Congresses, first established by Ezekiel in 1961 have been very important in the process of working out these differences.

Where schism from the Church did occur, a complex problem arose – canonically, and theologically, there can be only one Orthodox Church in one place. Indeed, this is a recurring problem in countries like Australia where migrants from many Orthodox national Churches have immigrated. In 1924, when the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople assumed canonical jurisdiction over Greek Orthodox communities and parishes in the diaspora, its mandate was to establish a Church in which all Orthodox believers would belong to 'one ecclesiastical whole' (Chryssavgis, p. 54). Of all the Orthodox Churches in Australia, the Greek Orthodox is the furthest ahead in this process. Archbishop Stylianos has expressed a desire for Orthodoxy in Australia to move beyond the limited ethnic boundaries or denominations. This is especially important as Orthodoxy is seen as a continuation of the *undivided* Christian Church, and there have been steps towards creating inter-communion between the Eastern Christian and Orthodox Churches, particularly in small migrant communities (Carey, p. 159).

In September 1979 the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Churches in Australia (SCCOCA) was established. This provided formal links between the separate administrations, and meant that there was an official body able to speak with a common Orthodox voice. SCCOCA is also seen by some as the embryonic form of the Orthodox Church in Australia, moving away from national ties and united under one spiritual administration (Godley & Hughes 1996, p. 7). In addition to this, the 1986 opening of St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College in Sydney was seen by many as a herald of coming unity. Stylianos' statement that 'the more genuine Greek and Orthodox we remain, the better Australians we become' (quoted in Papageorgopoulos, p. 22) is indica-

tive of his position – that ‘cultural’ or ‘ideological’ churches are manifestations of the one Orthodox faith. The real challenge for the Greek Orthodox Church has been in creating an Australian rather than Greek identity. However, an autocephalous Australian Orthodox Church seems unlikely at present.

As repositories of cultural values, all migrant churches in Australia struggle to create a sense of Australian spiritual identity. The Greek Orthodox Church exemplifies the struggle and challenges faced by migrant religious communities in becoming a united body, whilst remaining true to its history and identity, and being relevant to contemporary Australia. Many migrants feared or resisted assimilation, and the Church was seen as important in maintaining cultural identity. However, with cultural, symbolic, and religious significance comes political significance. Community leaders or factions sometimes sought a controlling interest in church affairs, and this often plunged the community into conflict. Indeed, one commentator on migrant history has remarked that no institution has been the source of more community division than the migrant religion (Bodnar, 1985, p. 166). Traditions from many parts of the world have become part of the Australian religious landscape and society, and will continue to do so. Australia’s Greek Orthodox community provides a fascinating case study of the types of issues that emerging religious communities may have to face as they struggle to gain acceptance, both external and internal, in their new home.

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NOTES

- 1 Archbishop Stylianos remains in that position to this day.
- 2 It is worth noting that almost every Orthodox community in Australia has suffered divisive religious conflict.