

Impact of the Greek Diaspora Church on Missions:

The Role of the Greek Diaspora Church in Educational Mission

I. Introduction

The main thesis of this paper is that the Greek Diaspora Church in the United States has played a key role in constructing and shaping the Greek American educational system. To affirm this thesis, this paper uses an ethnographic description combined with analysis. The ethnographic description that is employed to analyze the Greek diaspora church includes participant observations, interviews, demographic information, histories, migration narrative and stories, and biblical evidence and information. This evidence and information demonstrates that a relationship exists between the Greek Diaspora Church and the Greek American educational system. Also, this analysis has shown that there is a connection between the Diaspora communities in the NT and the Greek Diaspora communities of today.

II. Demographic Information of Greek Orthodox in the Sending Context

There are 11.2 million people in Greece. Of this total population in Greece, there are 10.2 million Christians. The largest religion in Greece is Christian. In Greece, the largest ethnic groups are 85.9% Greek, 4% Albanian, 1.8% Slavomacedonian, 1.4% Turkish- and Bulgarian-speaking minorities, and 0.8% Gypsy/Romani. Note that these numbers are estimates because of a large migration movement¹.

¹ Mandryk, J. Pray for the World. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

III. History of the Greek Orthodox in the Sending Context

First, to affirm our thesis we present the history of the Greek Orthodox Church in the sending context². In 1922, Vlassis Kantartzis ran from the village of Dikili in Ottoman Turkey to settle in a small commercial town called Perama, located on the island of Lesbos. Like Vlassis, Perama became the final destination and home for many Asia Minor migrant families. But unlike Vlassis, for his brother Euripedes and others, America called them to journey across the Atlantic to California where they would remain and be separated from their family for good. After Vlassis was eventually elected mayor of the small town of Perama, Georgios Papandreou, a government minister, visited Lesbos after World War II. During this visit, Papandreou asked Vlassis what his town needed and Vlassis responded that they needed a new school due to the children being educated in a temporary room in an olive press and soapmaking factory. For this reason, within a few years of the request, a school was fabricated just across from the church of St. Pantelesman. The impact of these efforts was that generations of children were educated in the school that his grandfather was instrumental in fabricating².

Despite these efforts, Greece ruled by a dictatorship (1967-1974) was an inhospitable place and because of this, many from his father's generation departed for America². The history of migration to America was as follows². His father, Vassilis arrived to Astoria, NYC in 1970. In Astoria, NYC he assumed the name William Kantzaris and his wife changed her name to Dina. Similar to the desire of many Greek immigrants to instill a Greek identity in their American born children, his parents wanted to send their children to Greek school. This was accomplished since they found an infrastructure that was able to grow and flourish in a multicultural and multilingual city².

² Soumakis, F.K. *Educating Greek Americans: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Pathways*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

So, what does this personal migration narrative tell us? This personal migration narrative opens a window through which we can reexamine the efforts by Greek immigrants and Americans of Greek Heritage to preserve and maintain a Greek cultural identity through schooling and learning in the United States. The author of “Educating Greek American” mentions gaps that exist in the knowledge about Greek American institutions, organizations, or programs that are directly related to education or that include some component of education in their mission². One important gap exists in higher education with respect to 60 Modern Greek studies programs offered in colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. Secondly, AHEPA (oldest Greek American organization) awaits scholarly attention. Lastly, the largest institution under which formal and informal schooling occurs (GOARCH) has to be critically analyzed with respect to totality of educational effort.

So, how do we close the gap? As suggested by the author, we use religion as an analytical lens to enable scholars to comprehend more fully the role the GOARCH played in shaping the Greek American community overtime². This can also help to shed some light on the ways that Greek Americans have transformed their faith. What is required then is a historical and contextual understanding of how religious institutions in the U.S. developed and innovated around a religiously and ethnically pluralist tradition².

IV. History of Greek Orthodox in the Diaspora Context

In this next section, the thesis is further affirmed by presenting a history of the Greek Orthodox in the Diaspora context². What is the importance of this? The importance of this is that the absence of Greek American educational programs from scholarly publications is explained by the attention and urgency provided to public schools, as well as standards they have yet to fulfill with offering an education to children of all classes, races and beliefs². Religious sects and

groups have advocated for public tax monies for education going back to the 17th and 18th century. Legal challenges in the 19th and 20th century resulted in compromises between taxpayers and religious sects to fund education in parochial schools. The Greek Orthodox pursues 2 avenues-public and private education². First, they rallied public schools to include Greek as a foreign language. Secondly, they secured support for parochial schools. The author comments that both Greek American and Archdiocese provide insight into the works of the Greek Diaspora community².

The Birth of Greek Orthodox Education during Early Immigration Period

The arrival of Greek refugees in the United States happened simultaneously to the period of industrialization and urbanization². This period highlighted the social, political, and economic expansion of the U.S. in the late 19th century and the political and economic instability of Greece. During this early immigration period in the U.S., the Greek Diaspora community formed church communities to attend to their spiritual and cultural needs². The task of the Greek Orthodox Church was to maintain, preserve, and perpetuate language, culture, tradition, and faith. The Greek Diaspora community shaped the initial growth of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States.

With the history of parochial schools, up until World War I, the Greek Orthodox Church expressed an “uncompromising commitment” to preserving national identity in the U.S., brought about by press, fraternal societies, and schools². It was because of partisan politics that neither Church of Greece nor the patriarchate in Constantinople was able to back or support Greek Diaspora communities or national identity in the U.S. On the otherhand, preserving national identity was left to Greek immigrants who established Greek language schools prior to the church calling for them. Between 1908 and 1912, 3 parochial schools were founded²:

(a) Socrates Greek American School in Chicago, (b) Hellenistic-American School of Holy Trinity in Lowell, MA, and (c) Greek American Institute in Bronx, NY.

Another important process that enabled Greek Diaspora educational initiatives was the organization of independent Greek Orthodox parishes². The Greek Orthodox Church in America would be governed by a conference held every 2 years. At this clergy-laity conference, the clergy and select laymen discussed, debated and voted on important issues affecting their parishes. The SEC or Supreme Educational Council was still another significant addition to systematize Greek Diaspora educational efforts in the United States. The SEC made up of 5 Clergyman and 9 Layman had responsibilities including: (1) regulating all schools, (2) overseeing curriculum, (3) establishing teacher qualifications and salaries, (4) promoting Greek language, and (5) publishing books and articles and maintaining school statistics.

Basil T. Zoustis, SEC 1st Secretary, compiled the statistics of schools and wrote about the status of education for Greek Diaspora schools². Based on her accounts, the earliest language schools were held in afternoons from 4 to 6 pm in church basements or other suitable spaces. Sometimes Diaspora church communities would rent classroom space in American Public schools because of available amenities. The priests and more educated among the Greek Diaspora community served as teachers in schools. These efforts resulted in schools doubling from 284 to 456 and the number of students doubled from 12,712 to 24,562². The SEC's actions resulted in additional avenues of education which are assisting education in Greece and introducing Greek language in public schools². With the benefits of the schools also came some challenges. The challenges included teachers/methods, limits of Greek schools/parishes, changing need of immigrant population, and sending school part of debate.

What Was the Impact of Greek Immigration?

In the 1960s, the steady stream of new Greek refugees in NYC happened simultaneously to the tenor of Archbishop Iakovos². His leadership altered the Greek Diaspora Church in America. Some important events to consider are in (1) 1960 the Clergy-Laity congress asserted education was a “subject of primary urgency and must be maintained always with the 1st subject of concern of the Archdiocese²”. Iakovos encouraged parish communities to invest 3/5 of their operating budgets for education and culture., (2) In 1962 Clergy-Laity Congress, he affirmed the importance of parochial schools as “a definite assurance of the future of our church²”, (3) In 1964, he challenged church communities to mortgage their properties and support their day schools.

So, how do we understand the extent to which the Archdiocese’s policies shaped NYC parochial schools? Let us sketch out their development. First, the Greek Diaspora communities prompted the creation of afternoon schools in the growing church communities². This led to the expansion of 13 co-ed parochial schools in NYC. Second, of the 11 Greek Orthodox Churches that were funded during the 1890s-1930s throughout Manhattan, 3 Greek Diaspora communities were successful in building parochial schools. For instance, the oldest parochial school in NYC, the Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity established Cathedral School (1949)². Third, the Borough of Queens observed the establishment of 5 parochial schools and 3 High Schools by Greek Refugees settling in Whitestone, Corona, Astoria, and Flushing. In the mid-late 1920s, 3 Diaspora communities created churches and afternoon schools at same time: (a) Transfiguration of Christ Church (1926) in Corona, (b) St. Demetrios Church (1927) in Astoria, (c) St. Demetrios Church (1927) in Jamaica².

V. Survey of Migrants in the OT and Diaspora Communities in the NT

In Rynkiewicz's book, "Soul, Self and Society", the author discusses and analyzes anthropological elements including migration, diaspora, and transnationalism³. The author's main argument in Chapter 11 of Soul, Self and Society is that the 3 areas of migration, diaspora and transnationalism represent the frontier of mission since it involves populations that are difficult to identify, difficult to settle among, and difficult to minister among. For example, Christians can become missionaries in the context of Diaspora and in this context Non-Christians can come into contact with the Christian narrative and Christian behavior³.

A key theme that we interact with is that in the OT, "Aliens" and "Strangers" are referenced quite frequently and Diaspora communities played a significant role in the early church in the NT. A survey of Ancient Near East biblical history demonstrates the biblical characters that were migrants, aliens or strangers. The story of Joseph is one of the Bible's famous stories regarding human trafficking and how God used Joseph to rescue and deliver his people. Because of the famine during the time of Joseph, Jacob and his sons became refugees in Egypt. A new ruler turned God's people into slaves after Joseph and Pharaoh died and God's people were oppressed and abused as refugees in Egypt (Ex 1:11-14). Much later in history, Uriah the prophet became a refugee in Egypt after his life was threatened by King Jehoakim as a result of prophesying against Jerusalem (Jer 26:21).

Likewise, the NT text makes mention of the Diaspora and how it played a key role in the early church. The NT text makes mention of the "exiles of the Dispersion" and is used to describe Jews who live outside Palestine. The Letter of James refers to Jewish Christians who live outside Palestine (James 1:1). 1 Peter encourages persecuted Christian believers who are in Diaspora in Asia Minor. Based on these accounts and our previous discussions and analysis,

³ Rynkiewicz, M. Soul, Self and Society. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011.

there is a connection between the Diaspora communities of the NT and the Greek Diaspora communities of the present age.

VI. Worship Expressions of Greek Orthodox Church

The worship expressions of the Greek Orthodox Church also affirms our thesis that the Greek Diaspora Church in the United States has played a significant role in creating and shaping the Greek American educational system. It has also shaped the ethnic identity of the Greek Diaspora communities in the United States. The following discussion and analysis are based on 4 site visits to the St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Springfield, MA.

Brief Description of Worship Expression

A. Orthodox Church-The Work of the People

The main Sunday morning worship service of an Orthodox Church is called the Divine Liturgy. The word “Liturgy” means “work of the people”. Everyone participates in the Liturgy. As we have observed, the whole congregation is active in worship, even the children. Therefore, the Liturgy is the common act of prayer, worship, teaching, and communion of all those who make-up the church.

B. Orthodox Church-The Origins of the Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is composed of 2 parts⁴. The first part of the Liturgy is the Liturgy of the Word or the Liturgy of the Catechumens⁴. The second part is the Eucharist, which has also been called the Liturgy of the Faithful. The Liturgy of the Word is a Christ-centered version of the

⁴ Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985.

synagogue service focus on the reading of the biblical passage and the homily. The Eucharist, on the otherhand, comes from the Lord's Supper.

C. Orthodox Church-The Development of the Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is a complex act of movement, sound, and sights characterized by a deep sense of harmony, beauty, dignity, and mystery⁴. It is framed by 2 solemn entrances, the reading and the exposition of Holy Scripture, the great Eucharistic prayer, and the distribution of Holy Communion. Sophisticated opening rites (enarxis) and a series of dismissal rites (apolyxis) embraces the whole action.

The basic outline of the Divine Liturgy goes back to the New Testament⁴. Ritual and text evolved slowly; the several parts of the Liturgy developed unevenly and at different stages. The structure of the Liturgy was expanded, increased in value, and adorned with chants, prayers, readings, and various ceremonials. By the 10th Century, the Eucharistic rites of Constantinople, the Chief See of the Orthodox East, had become more or less written in stone⁴. Because of its achievements, the rites of Constantinople initially influenced and finally replaced all other rites in the Orthodox East. Since the 12th Century, the Liturgy of Constantinople has become the common rite of all Orthodox Churches⁴.

Participant Observations for the Greek Orthodox Worship Expressions

1. Liturgical Flow-Greek Orthodox Worship Expressions

As congregants enter the sanctuary, they light candles and incense prior to the service beginning. The candles added a nice bright glow to the back of the room (close to the entrance). The lights were dimmed at the entrance to the church, so the candles helped to illuminate the back of the

room. The candles gave the room a vanilla smell. The smoke coming off the candles is symbolic of the congregant's prayers going up to heaven⁴.

At the beginning of the service, the choir sang hymns in Greek. This is symbolic of the early NT church where the service was most likely in Greek⁴. The NT text was also translated from the Greek. As the worship service was in a cathedral, the music and singing could be heard throughout the sanctuary. The congregants that were standing in the pews in the sanctuary were blessing themselves while the choir was singing and playing hymns. They were blessing themselves with the sign of the cross. The priest came out at the beginning of the service with incense in a canister and shook the canister back and forth with smoke coming out of the canister. This was symbolic of prayers going up to heaven⁴.

The Divine Liturgy is broken into 2 segments: The Liturgy of the Catechumens and the Liturgy of the Faithful or the Eucharist⁴. The Liturgy of the Word is a Christ-centered version of synagogue service focusing on the reading of a biblical passage and the homily⁴. The Eucharist is derived from the words and actions of the Lord's Supper.

The Liturgy is celebrated by the whole church-clergy and people. Everyone is a participant. There are many ways the people participate. They sing the hymns with the choir or cantor, are attentive to the prayers and readings, and enact various gestures such as bowing, kneeling, making the sign of the cross, and exchanging the "kiss" of peace⁴.

Of no surprise, the ultimate sign of participation is receiving Holy Communion⁴. The Holy Communion is offered only to Orthodox Christians who are in good order with the faith, life, and canonical disciplines of the church⁴. The readings consisted of reading from the Book of Hebrews (Hebrews 4:14-5:4) and the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke

(Luke 10:25-37). The main point of the story is given by the greatest commandment, that we should “Love God and Love People”.

2. Atmosphere/Aesthetics-Greek Orthodox Worship Expressions

One of the first things that we noticed when we enter the Orthodox Church is the icons or pictures-pictures of Christ, the Virgin Mary with her Child, angels, Saint John the Baptist, Christ’s Apostles, and other holy and heroic Christians of the past⁴. An icon, a biblical word meaning “image” is a dramatic and constant reminder that there is infinitely more to reality than what we see every day on the earth⁴. Icons help impart the presence of heaven to us in our worship. The Orthodox Church displays pictures of those who faithfully finished the race, that one might keep them in mind. The functions of the icon are similar to that of the pictures of loved ones you probably have in your wallet-Visual images that represent real people and events. These icons have long been called “windows of heaven⁴”.

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