

# Americanizing Greek Orthodoxy

Bright sunlight shone on the glittering gold and silver robes of eight bishops and the jeweled crown of the archbishop, whose swinging censer sent a jingle of chains and rich sweet smoke toward the 3,000 people gathered in New York's Damrosch Park. The surrounding highrise apartments and city traffic provided an unusual setting for the Greek Orthodox Divine Liturgy, normally celebrated only under the ornate, icon-filled arches of Byzantine-style churches.

It was the beginning of a week of unusual changes, all part of a new commitment to face "the American reality." Long torn by divided loyalties to Greece and America and little understood by the general public, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America moved toward "Americanization" in two major decisions. The Twentieth Biennial Congress, meeting at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, approved a complete translation of the liturgy into English and asked for more autonomy to solve local problems. (The archdiocese is under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and has no direct ties with the church in Greece. Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I is spiritual leader of world Orthodoxy, which includes more than 250 million communicants.)

Changes are in response to pressures such as mixed marriages, decline in the use of the Greek language in the third and fourth generations, and general social and cultural assimilation.

The archdiocese, established in America in 1921, has an ethnic constituency of as many as two million but an actual membership of fewer than 80,000. (Membership requires payment of \$20 per year, usually only by the head of the family.) A generous estimate of participating members including families is 400,000. About 1,000 official delegates gathered for the first "open" congress in church history, in which a matching number of additional women, youth, and guests participated in vigorous floor debate. Excitement ran high over the spirit of the congress and importance of its decisions. It was a "definite departure from the usual"—not just a sterile organizational meeting but a

charting of the future course, according to Archbishop Iakovos, 59, who has been primate of the archdiocese since 1959.

A new and urgent stress on the archdiocese is the formation four months ago by the Moscow patriarchate of an independent Orthodox Church in America, which wants to attract other ethnic Orthodox groups now divided into more than a score of denomina-



tions. Iakovos describes the Russian action as "unprecedented" and "unilateral," though he admits it has created a totally new situation among Orthodox in America and will hasten some sort of readjustment.

"Someday either there will be one Orthodox church in America or none at all—this is very clear," states Archbishop Iakovos. However, his plan for unity differs from that of the Russians. In 1960 Iakovos led eleven Orthodox groups in founding the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, which sent letters two months ago to all the old-world Orthodox patriarchs asking that a date be set for another Pan-Orthodox Conference to consider forming a "provisional synod" in America. If this were to prove itself a "serious organ," says Iakovos, it might become a regular synod, in time having its own head. This is the process through which he would like to see the growth of an autocephalous church among Orthodox in America (totally independent and electing its own bishops and archbishop).

The Greek Orthodox now seek a kind of autonomy that would have the

blessing and spiritual guidance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. With the approval of the congress, Iakovos will petition Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I for authority to take an official stance on such issues as abortion, birth control, mixed marriages, and the setting of the date of Easter. This authority is now held by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but such matters "cannot be met and appreciated from afar," explains Iakovos. "My responsibilities compel me to respond to my people."

By far more emotional and of at least equal importance was the decision for use of the vernacular (in most cases English) for the total liturgy. "This is going to give a new image and a new synthesis to the Orthodox Church. I believe it is a turning point," states Dr. Nicon Patrinos, author of a draft translation which, if approved by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, could be in use by next Easter. Previously "only the most limited use of languages other than Greek" was authorized for church services by the 1964 congress, though in fact their use is now more extensive. The resolution stresses the voluntary use of the vernacular as needed.

However, news reports caused an uproar in Greece, where headlines read "Greek Language Abolished." Even an American Greek newspaper announced: "The Glorious Greek Language . . . Is Driven to Golgotha!" Among American-born Greek Orthodox there is a substantial conservative element that opposes the use of English in the Divine Liturgy. A strong psychological and emotional attachment to the Greek language is the cause, as well as pride over the classical Greek heritage and the New Testament's original Greek, according to Dr. Patrinos. Nevertheless, the measure passed by a solid majority.

Still more controversial is liturgical change. A committee was approved to examine and restructure the liturgy, in which no change has been made since the fall of Constantinople in 1453. If approved, the reform will be one of the most extensive in the history of Orthodoxy. "Of course, this is going to be a painful job. It is painful to me. But we consider it so important we must do it at any cost," affirms Dr. Patrinos.

Reform is aimed at creating more participation in worship by the people, and the greatest importance is to church relations with the youth. Although the serious obstacle of language has now been removed, the young must still face the identity conflict: Greek or American? In his opening address, Iakovos pointed out the divided loyalties as a major problem of the church, saying, "It is common knowledge that this cannot be continued indefinitely." By the end of the congress the direction of the future was set toward "Americanization," but the issue is far from resolved.

At one point in the debate a fiery emotional appeal was made by Demetrius Tsakonas, deputy minister to the prime minister of Greece, who sat on the official dais during some of the banquets and meetings. Tsakonas opposed any kind of autonomy, saying it would weaken the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which relies on the American archdiocese for much of its support. Hearty applause followed. Later Peter Marudas, a young administrative assistant to the mayor of Baltimore, retorted that "a mentality that is obsolete has no business on the floor of this council in this day and age. . . . I take personal exception to being told how I should vote by a foreign emissary." The loud applause that he too received underlined the divergence of opinion on the identity issue.

Many of the older generation want to preserve in the youth the whole Greek heritage—history, culture, language, and folk dance, as well as Orthodox faith. One man who urged this cried out, "He who is not a Hellene is a barbarian." But for most of those who care in the younger group, the goal is a "genuine American Orthodox consciousness," as Marudas expressed it. In the emotional open discussion, Simos Demas, a college student from New York, warned that Orthodox faith must take primacy over cultural heritage: "If we don't do that, we are going to have children that are neither Greek nor Orthodox either." Marietta Katehis said she once had the typical attitude of young college graduates toward their Orthodox background—"either ignore it or rebel against it." She later came into a vital personal faith and gave a moving testimony at the congress, supporting both the movement toward Orthodox unity and the use of English as ways to reach more youth.

In asking that the church adapt to the American scene, one long-haired youth in bell-bottoms threatened, "If it doesn't, the American Orthodox Church [i.e., the newly formed Orthodox Church in America] looks very inviting." A strong educational program was adopted for both youth

and adults, following reports that the Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA) had "almost reached a total state of collapse" with only 1,000 members in fifty chapters. Junior GOYA claims 3,000 members, while Greek Orthodox college groups are growing and now number 100, reaching a small portion of the 20,000 potential students.

A folk litany demonstrated by the Reverend George Paulson, a naval chaplain, created excitement among the GOYAs and a new hope for their future. With guitarists, a simple English text, and a swinging Greek beat, he passed on to the Orthodox the folk-music revolution of Catholics and Protestants. Though he has been the only priest so to experiment, others now intend to take the litany back to their youth, and Paulson has invitations to carry it around the country.

The stir created by the folk litany is an indication of the spirit of the Greek Orthodox Church. It is still "Orthos"—untouched by any liberal theological movement. The labels conservative and liberal are applied only to the issue of ecumenical action, a sphere in which Father Eusebius Stephanou, editor of *Logos*, is the vocal representative of the minority conservative position.

Finances remain a major problem of the church, with its Hellenic College in Brookline, Massachusetts, currently facing a \$237,000 deficit for 1969-70 alone. Having recently attempted to support a full liberal-arts program, the college was directed by the congress to return exclusively to education of the clergy. A commission was appointed to study the church's present plan of membership by payment and alternative financial systems, reporting in 1972.

In the meantime, with a \$2.3 million estimated income for each of the years 1971 and 1972, the Greek Orthodox will endeavor to substantiate Orthodoxy's growing recognition as the fourth major faith in America.

ANNE EGGBROTEN

### NACC: 'Involved'

The theme was a popular one: "Involved." Yet it represented a new step for the North American Christian Convention, which shuns "legislation" on social or political issues, "heated floor debates," and "political maneuvering."

Proving the potential for involvement without pronouncement, the four-day gathering in St. Louis, Missouri, tackled the problems of the black American, sex education, drugs, Christian unity, and family and campus tensions. These held ground with the usually dominant themes of faith in Christ and opposition to theological liberalism.

"We have developed an unbiblical doctrine of separation. To be separated

from our world is not to be isolated from it," declared evening speaker E. Ray Jones, a minister from Indianapolis. "We have feared contamination by our world more than we have had faith in the power of the Gospel to conform our world to the image of Christ."

The more than 22,000 people attending described themselves as "a free and open gathering of interested persons among the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ . . . not a delegate convention, an agency convention, nor . . . a convention of churches." Congregations related to the NACC did not join the recently formed Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), instead preserving their congregational autonomy and conservative, evangelical stance. With more than 6,000 churches concentrated in the central United States and extending overseas, they support more than 600 missionaries and contribute to thirty-seven schools.

Workshops and speakers (including William E. Pannell of Tom Skinner Associates) provided in-depth study of the problems, while application and implementation was left to individuals and local churches. The teachings of Jesus were stressed as having "power to right every wrong and to meet every human situation," with total despair marked as unbelief in the power of the resurrected Lord. □

### GARBC: Debating 'Neo-Evangelicalism'

No dissent was heard as delegates unanimously approved nine resolutions opposing such actions as "dissent that disregards the laws of our country" and the appointment by the President of a Vatican envoy, but on the tenth resolution the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches split over the decision.

"Neo-evangelicalism" was censured by a majority of the 1,700 delegates meeting in Denver, but in terms not strong enough for a minority. Neo-evangelicalism was described as supporting "the tendency to interpret Scriptures in the light of science," the "questioning or denying of the verbal plenary inspiration," "ecumenicity in evangelism," and "dialoguing with the objective of being non-offensive and to win by infiltration." The resolution upheld the GARBC position of separation.

At this thirty-ninth annual conference, forty-nine new churches were added to the GARBC, making a total of 1,400 with a membership of nearly 200,000. Almost a fourth of the total budget of the churches goes to missions: \$7.1 million to five boards with 1,400 active missionaries. Dr. Joseph M. Stowell, national representative (chief executive), called for raising the