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ANTI-CLERICISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN GREECE

I

It is difficult to talk about a cultural *response* to Christianity in Greece, for Greece is a Christian country and Christianity is an essential part of Greek society's historical fabric. 'Responses' as such have been more on the part of outsiders. A British naval chaplain who arrived in Athens shortly after its liberation in 1944 was moved to write: 'It seemed as if, for the first time in our life, we were in a Christian city.'[1] Not that enthusiasms were always so ecumenical: in 1874 *The Rock* informed its Protestant readership that the Ionian Islanders

> like the Roman Catholics...pray to the Virgin and the saints, and though they do not worship statues, they adore relics and pictures, which are surely no less worthy (or unworthy) of Divine honours. They also believe that miracles have not ceased, and moreover, prove their faith by occasionally fabricating them.[2]

In similar vein, the good Doctor Goodisson could comment in 1822 that, with regard to the inhabitants of the Ionian island of Lefkada,

> a considerable portion of the year is devoted to feasting and idleness, which is

1. D. J. Chitty, in *The Christian East*, New Series I (1950), p. 11, cited in Kallistos Ware, 'The Church: A Time of Transition', in R. Clogg (ed.), *Greece in the 1980s*, London: Macmillan 1983, p. 208.

2. *The Rock*, 24 April 1874.

> encouraged and kept up by the preposterous number of saints which they have crowded into their Kalendar.[3]

But whether seen as piety or chicanery, the manifestations of Church and religion in Greece have always struck the foreigner, and now that Greece has become one of the playgrounds of the Western world, hardly a tourist brochure fails to include a photograph of a black-robed bearded priest as the guarantee of local colour. Nor will the tourist be disappointed. The priests are still there,[4] and despite what is generally held to be a growing secularization of Greek society, Christianity still supplies the country's cultural backdrop. And yet, precisely because Christianity is still so much a part of daily life, at the popular level its content is often hard to specify.[5]

II

In the village of Spartohori, on the tiny island of Meganisi, a dependency of Lefkada, where, between 1977 and 1980, I conducted fieldwork,[6] almost everyone would readily declare, *'pistevo'* ('I believe'), the standard formulation for profession of the Christian faith. But what did they believe?

Signs of religiosity, or perhaps better, of a Christian tradition, abounded.

3. W. Goodisson, *The Ionian Greeks: A Historical and Topographical Essay upon the Islands of Corfu, Leucadia, Cephalonia, Ithaca and Zante etc.*, London 1822, p. 57.

4. Between 1920 and 1975 the number of priests and deacons serving in Greece doubled and, in the next five years, increased by a further one thousand to reach a total of 9,334 in 1980 (Ware, 'The Church: A Time of Transition', p. 210).

5. I am comforted by the fact that this observation is not mine alone. The outstanding ethnographies of John K. Campbell (*Honour, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1964) and Juliet du Boulay (*Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1974) demonstrate the degree to which Christianity informs the life of rural Greece. Various aspects of religion have also been treated by John K. Campbell, 'Honour and the Devil', in J. G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1965; Margaret E. Kenna, 'Houses, Fields and Graves: Property and Ritual Obligation on a Greek Island', *Ethnology*, Vol. XV (1976), pp. 21–34; idem, 'Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example', *History of Religions*, Vol. XXIV, no. 4 (1985), pp. 345–68; Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982; idem, 'Power through Submission in the Anastenaria', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. I, no. 2 (1983), pp. 203–23; and Lucy Rushton, 'Doves and Magpies: Village Women in the Greek Orthodox Church', in Pat Holden (ed.), *Women's Religious Experience*, London: Croom Helm 1983. My own experience, however, mirrors that of M. J. Lineton, who found religion to be so much a part of the-world-taken-for-granted as to be virtually intractable ('Mina, Past and Present: Depopulation in a Village in Mani, Southern Greece', University of Kent: Ph.D. Thesis 1971).

6. Fieldwork was undertaken with the generous financial assistance of the Philip Bagby Trust, Oxford, and was subsequently financed by a Project Grant from the SSRC under the direction of Dr J. K. Campbell, St Antony's College, Oxford.

Like every village, Spartohori had its church; like every church, it was dedicated to a saint (Agios Georgios); and, like every such saint, he was the village's patron. His name-day was the village's festival or *paniyiri*; his ikons marked the village's exits and entrances, defining, an anthropologist might say, the inhabited space under his protection (though no one actually made that claim).[7] The more pious—the old and especially the women—would make the sign of the cross whenever they passed these ikons, just as they would cross themselves in a bus or a car whenever they passed any church or shrine. Every house, too, had its ikons, kept in the bedrooms and tended by the women, who also cared for the village's ikons, lighting every evening the small oil-lamps placed before the holy images. And though this was women's work,[8] ikons were not a purely female concern. In the village and along the road men had erected ikon shrines which clearly bore their makers' names and the dates of their construction—labours undertaken in fulfilment of a vow, recompense for favours from the saint whose representation they housed.

Every stage of the life cycle—birth, marriage, death—was marked by Christian ritual; indeed, the life cycle *was* a Christian cycle. No child was ever referred to by name until it had been baptized and had thus received, through the ministry of the Church and from its baptismal sponsor and 'spiritual parent', a name which was precisely a *Christian* name and the sign of its inclusion within the Christian fold.[9] The bonds of godparenthood thus created—of assistance on the one hand and 'respect' on the other—were always honoured. The relationship was, after all, sacrosanct. Marriage, for its part, was inconceivable except in terms of a Christian mystery: all else was mere fornication. Admittedly, at the time of my fieldwork civil marriage (and civil divorce) had not been introduced, and the state itself recognized no union of a Greek Orthodox subject which had not been celebrated by the Orthodox Church (nor, indeed, any marriage of any person which had not been conducted according to the rites of some religion).[10] Rumours of reform were in the air, however, and the old men of Spartohori grumbled in the coffee-shops, with a logic I cannot lay bare but with an indignation I could certainly register, that if the sanctions of religion were removed would not

7. For the role of the saint as a protector of a defined geographical area, see Kenna, 'Icons in Theory and Practice'.

8. For the relegation of religious duties to women, see J. Dubisch, 'Greek Women: Sacred or Profane', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. I, no. 1 (1983), pp. 185–202. Cf. Kenna, 'Icons in Theory and Practice', and Rushton, 'Doves and Magpies'.

9. This is standard practice in Greece. Until a child is baptized and has received its name from its baptismal sponsor, it is normally referred to by everyone, including its parents, simply as *to moro* (the kid) or *o bebis* (the baby).

10. *The Statistical Year Book of Greece 1981* (Athens: National Statistical Service of Greece 1982) provides in English the following definition of marriage: 'Marriage is the legal union of persons of opposite sex. The legality of the union in Greece may be established through celebration according to the dogma or religion of the parties. *Marriage of Greek subjects not celebrated is considered non-existent in Greece* [emphasis added].' In 1983 Greek family law was revised, and both civil marriage and civil divorce are now permitted.

everyone copulate in the streets like dogs? And death, finally, was Christian death, the passage from one world to another with the hope of salvation to come, ritualized by the Church in a ceremony which brought the whole village together,[11] prolonged by religion through the memorial services conducted at regular intervals on behalf of the soul of the deceased.[12]

And beyond the celebration of such rituals (which were manifestly Christian rituals), and beyond the festivals of Easter, Christmas, Epiphany and the name-day of the village saint (all that 'feasting and idleness' which was nevertheless Christian feasting and idleness), and beyond the respect for the ties of godparenthood and marriage (which were Christian ties) and the veneration of the saints and their ikons (which were Christian saints and ikons), Christianity obliquely entered into almost every facet of life, providing both the idioms of daily discourse and the forms of emotional expression. The old man who had lost a second son by drowning (shipwrecked off the coast of Libya) was visited during his period of unshaven mourning by a radiant figure dressed in white with long flowing hair. Perhaps, he told me, it was an angel, or perhaps he was going mad; but in either case his vision was a Christian one. And the old woman, all of whose eight children had emigrated overseas, and who could not speak to her grandchildren when they telephoned (for they knew only English), kissed the ikon of St Nicholas, and the saint came to her at night and told her not to worry. More mundanely, the language of the Spartohoriots was littered with Christian allusions, mere verbal ties perhaps, but Christian ones for all that: 'Praise be to God', 'The All-Holy Virgin help me', 'If God rains'. And impieties were as significantly Christian as pieties, for the Spartohoriots were great swearers, and there are few Greek obscenities which are not also blasphemies. For a virgin, the All-Holy one had a very hard time of it.

Yet for all these *signs* of Christianity, and despite the ready professions of 'belief', quite what was believed still seemed to me problematic—not because the concept of belief is itself difficult to define (though doubtless that is true),[13] but because, though belief might not be the same as knowledge, it would nevertheless seem to require some set of propositions as its object (as any catechism makes clear). The problem was simply that the Spartohoriots were

11. Nowadays most Spartohoriots die in one of the major hospitals in Athens. The body, however, is always brought back by hearse and caique (a ten-hours' journey) to the village for burial. The deaths of the aged pass with little public notice, but any premature death is the occasion of village-wide mourning. The entire population waits at the entrance of the village to pay their respects as the coffin is carried up the steep cliff road; all will kiss the corpse at the funeral ceremony; all will attend the burial; and all will present their formal condolences at the house of the deceased.

12. It is customary in Greece to hold memorial ceremonies three days, six days, nine days, three months, six months, and one year after a person's death. Further memorial services may be held subsequently. In many regions of Greece (Danforth, *Death Rituals*; Kenna, 'Houses, Fields and Graves') the body is exhumed after three years and a final memorial service is held. Exhumation is not, however, practised on Meganisi.

13. See Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1972.

not a people much given to theological discussion. If any question of mine touched on the *content* of their belief, I would be referred to the priest; and since the priest was not an educated man and felt uncertain of many matters, he would suggest I ask a bishop. And no doubt I could have done so and worked my way up through the whole learned hierarchy—only to recreate, at a level far removed from the villagers themselves, the entire elaborate theology of the Orthodox Church, which certainly could not be considered the possession of the average Spartohoriot except perhaps by proxy and in name.

Maybe I do an injustice to some members of the community who might have been able to explain more than they cared to,[14] but I suspect that what most Spartohoriots believed could be reduced to a fairly minimal set of propositions: that God exists and is in His heaven; that Jesus Christ, His son, is their saviour; and that the All-Holy Virgin and the saints are helpers to be appealed to in times of need. But most importantly, what the Spartohoriots believed was that they *were* Christians—adherents of the one true faith, members of the one true Church. It was their *identity* as Christians, as 'believers', which was the real object of '*pistevo*'—'I believe that I believe'. The rest—of which they knew there to be a lot—could safely be left to priests, bishops and theologians: experts whose business it was to be learned in such things.

III

Such an untroubled relegation of spiritual concerns (and of doctrinal detail) to religious professionals is surely not exceptional. It is, I think, almost what one would expect to find in most European communities where Christianity is the unchallenged norm; and it is exactly what one would expect to find in a culture where for more than fifteen hundred years the Church has been established as God's representative on earth. Moreover, it is an attitude which the Church itself (and not only in Greece) has frequently endorsed. A little theology is a dangerous thing. Better simple piety than thoughtful heresy. If there is one true faith, then the Church is its appointed guardian; for this, indeed, it was established.

The Church in Greece, however, is established not only as God's

14. It is difficult to make firm generalizations about the Spartohoriot community, especially when it comes to matters of knowledge and belief, for its members range from illiterate shepherds who have scarcely ever left the island to university graduates who may also have studied overseas. Indeed, their number now includes one woman with a degree in theology who doubtless could have answered all my questions—at least from the point of view of academic theology. This educated class, however, though not severed from the village, lives most of the year in Athens. In reporting the beliefs and attitudes of the Spartohoriots, I am referring for the most part to the older generation of agriculturalists who are the village's permanent population or to the less-educated sailors and their families who have elected to remain in the village.

representative on earth. Orthodoxy is also the official religion of the state. The degree to which Church and state are technically separate is a question perhaps better left to constitutional lawyers to answer. According to official pronouncements, neither is subordinate to the other, and both have their independent spheres of influence over which they preside in a spirit of mutual respect. But the Church enjoys a 'special relationship' with the state, and, for example, all priests receive a government salary.[15]

The Church's special relationship with the state (not always a harmonious one) and the constitutional recognition of Orthodoxy as the official religion of Greece have been in force since the very creation of Greece as a sovereign state.[16] But this incorporation of the Church into the structure of the state merely recognized at an official level the historical centrality of Orthodoxy in the self-definition of the Greek-speaking peoples. Under Ottoman rule, the populations of the Empire had been administered on religious rather than 'ethnic' or linguistic lines, with Orthodox Christians constituting the *millet-i-rum*, the 'Roman' *millet*, and within a few years of the Ottoman conquest the Orthodox Church saw most of its powers and privileges restored. The Patriarch of Constantinople became the Ottoman-appointed leader of all the Empire's Orthodox subjects (and it was precisely the Patriarch's inability to control his Christian flock which led to his execution on the outbreak of the War of Independence). It has been argued that under Ottoman rule the Church, which assumed jurisdiction over many civil as well as religious matters, was in fact more powerful than it had been during the period of the Byzantine theocracy.[17]

15. A summary of this relationship is presented in *Greece, A Portrait* (Athens: Research and Publicity Center, KEDE 1979): 'The relationship of the Greek State with the Church is *sui generis*. It is not a case either of 'union' or of total separation of Church and State. The State provides for and protects the Orthodox Christian Church, which is a public entity, administratively, and financially....

'Certain activities of the Church as a corporate body are supervised by the State while in certain external matters of an administrative nature (unconnected with doctrine and worship) the State acts with the Church (for example, it issues mandates for the recognition of the election by the ecclesiastical authorities and the enthronement of a bishop or for the establishment of a parish. It grants licences for the foundation of churches etc.).'

16. The very first article of the revolutionary constitution produced in 1821 proclaimed the Orthodox Church as the established religion of Greece. The progress of the War of Independence, however, meant that the clergy were cut off from the Patriarchate in Constantinople. When a new constitution was framed under the Bavarian monarchy in 1833, the Church was made subservient to the state and independent of the Patriarchate. Complete loyalty to Orthodox doctrine was professed, but the Greek Church became autocephalous and recognized the King (a Catholic!) as its head (C. Frazee, 'Church and State in Greece', in J. T. A. Koumoulides (ed.), *Greece in Transition*, London: Zeno 1977, pp. 130 ff.; D. Dakin, *The Unification of Greece 1770–1923*, London: Ernest Benn 1972, p. 68). The Greek Church remains independent of the Patriarchate and is governed by a Synod of the Greek Church hierarchy, but now recognizes no other head than 'Our Lord Jesus Christ' (*Greece, A Portrait*).

17. See R. Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979, pp. 18–19; Dakin, *The Unification of Greece*, pp. 10–13.

More importantly, however, after four hundred years of Ottoman rule the real distinction was between Christian and Muslim, not between 'Greek' and 'Turk'. Indeed, up to the end of the eighteenth century and the importation of new forms of nationalism which were both Western-inspired and self-consciously classicizing, the term 'Hellene' (Greek) was scarcely employed by the native inhabitants of what was to become Greece.[18] They called themselves 'Romaioi' (Romans), as had the Byzantine Greeks before them, or else they referred to themselves simply as 'Christians', to distinguish themselves from their hated Muslim masters. Within Greece itself, notions of 'national' identity, or indeed of 'Greek' identity, were largely lacking.[19] What gave the Greek-speaking peoples of the Empire their cohesion (or such cohesion as they had) was their common faith and their membership of the Orthodox Church.[20]

With the creation of the Greek state, 'national' identity was superimposed on and merged with religious identity. To be Greek was (and for the most part still is) to be Christian.[21] During the years of the recent military dictatorship, that equation was loudly proclaimed by the Colonels' slogan 'Greece of the Christian Greeks', and, as Woodhouse has noted, a good deal of religious symbolism was appropriated by their propaganda. The phoenix rising from the ashes may have been classical, but the proclamation which accompanied it, 'Greece is reborn', traded unambiguously on the phrase with which every Orthodox Christian greets the arrival of Easter Sunday: 'Christ is reborn'.[22]

Such crude propaganda certainly did not deceive the majority of the Greek population, but however unconvincing its use, its symbolic basis was sound. For all but the most sophisticated or those most committed to a materialist philosophy, nationalism still incorporates religion. Indeed, the *possession* of the Christian faith is a matter of national pride, and the proposition that to be a Greek is to be a Christian is, in the minds of many, virtually a reversible one: to be Christian necessitates being Greek, since when one is talking about Christianity, one is, after all, talking about the one true holy catholic

18. See, for example, A. Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 'Romioi, Hellenes and Philhellenes' (in Greek), in his *Laographika Meletimata*, Athens: Ekdoseis Olkos 1975.

19. For the Greeks' rediscovery of their classical past, see R. Clogg, 'Sense of the Past in Pre-Independence Greece', in R. Sussex and J. C. Eade (eds.), *Culture and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe*, Columbus, Ohio: Slavica 1985.

20. See John K. Campbell and P. Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, London: Ernest Benn 1968, pp. 193–6. It should also be noted that in the population exchange made between Greece and Turkey in 1923 the sole criterion of 'ethnic' identity was in fact religion. All Muslims in Greece were deemed to be 'Turks' and all Orthodox Christians in Turkey were deemed to be 'Greeks'.

21. Note, for example, President Constantine Karamanlis' words in 1981: 'The nation and Orthodoxy...have become in the Greek conscience virtually synonymous concepts, which together constitute our Helleno-Christian civilization' (cited in Ware, 'The Church: A Time of Transition', p. 208).

22. See C. M. Woodhouse, 'The "Revolution" in its Historical Context', in R. Clogg and G. Yannopoulos (eds.), *Greece under Military Rule*, London: Secker and Warburg 1972, p. 1.

and orthodox religion, Orthodox Christianity, seen as a uniquely Hellenic possession. Other sects have at best a doubtful claim to legitimacy.

This point of view was clear in Spartohori. The existence of Roman Catholicism was well known—after all, the Ionian Islands and Greece as a whole have had contact enough with Catholic Italy.[23] Inasmuch as it was assumed I was Christian, it was assumed I was Catholic, and, in my presence at least, the villagers were pleased to say that (the *filioque* controversy notwithstanding) Orthodoxy and Catholicism were 'all the same'. But genuine uncertainties existed amongst the elderly about the extent of Christianity, and certainly about the variety of its forms.

I was frequently asked what religion was practised in England and in Australia. When (admittedly with some liberty) I replied that the English and the Australians were Christians, this occasioned mild surprise; again it was assumed, however, that they would be Catholic. When I went on to explain that the majority were not Catholics but Protestants, I encountered perplexity. Some knew the term, but it was widely assumed that Orthodoxy and Catholicism exhausted Christianity; if there were such things as Protestants it was doubtful they were Christians.[24]

It is important to stress, however, that this exclusion of Protestantism from the Christian fold was not caused by doctrinal dogmatism; it was, rather, the result of a quite pure form of religious ethnocentrism. How could anything which had no basis in Greece or which had failed to impress itself on the Greek consciousness be Christian? Since Greece was the centre of the Christian world, it could hardly be that there were unknown forms of Christianity flourishing elsewhere. The prejudice was nationalistic rather than theological, and it was, in fact, reinforced rather than dispelled by the overseas emigration to America, Canada, Australia and South Africa which had taken place since the 1950s (and in the case of America, since the turn of the century); for those Spartohoriots who returned were inclined to say that there was 'no religion' to be found outside Greece, just as they were inclined to say that 'family life' was an institution peculiar to the Greeks.

Obviously these are matters about which various members of the Spartohoriot community were better or worse informed and about which some variety of opinion existed. The extreme view, however, was presented by one old man who asked me what religion the English and Australians were and,

23. This results, of course, not only from Venice's historical contest with the Ottoman Empire for control of the Greek peninsula, but also from Italy's occupation of Greece during the Second World War.

24. Most Protestant sects are represented in Greece, but the number of their adherents is small. According to *Greece, A Portrait* (pp. 158–9), 97·4% of Greece's population is Christian, and 96·7% is Orthodox Greek Christian. It thus appears that only 0·7% of the population is non-Orthodox Christian, and of this the majority is Catholic (42,000). Strangely, by far the largest Protestant group (18,000) is the Jehovah's Witnesses, a somewhat notorious sect in Greece since its members refuse to perform military service and are regularly gaoled as a result. In many Greeks' minds Protestantism is equated with Jehovah's Witnesses, who appear not only unpatriotic but potentially subversive.

when I replied that they were Christian, flatly told me this could not be so since Christianity was 'our' religion, the religion of the Greeks. I assured him that this was not the case: Christianity was a world religion. He conceded that other people could become Christians (the Catholics were Christians), but Christianity was nevertheless 'Greek'. How could the English be Christians? They did not have the saints, who were Greek saints, nor did they have the Bible, which was the Greek Bible. I protested that we had both, and (in what I thought would be a telling point) mentioned that St George, the patron saint of Spartohori, was in fact the patron saint of England. This piece of information was greeted with frank incredulity: St George was *Greek*. And if we did have a Bible, then it could not be the same Bible. I admitted that we read the Bible in English, but assured him that it was the same Bible. Well then, if that were so, in what language had the Bible (or rather, the New Testament) been written? In Greek, I admitted, thus losing (as always) the argument.

IV

The relegation of all spiritual concerns to the professional care of the Church and the equation of Christianity with Hellenism go hand in hand. In both cases, religion is not something to be pondered; it is part of a given identity. One is a Christian because one believes; one is a Christian because one is a Greek; what one believes is that one is a Christian Greek. It might also be assumed, then, that the Church and its ministers would command great respect; for if there is only one true faith, Greek Orthodoxy, which is the unique possession of God's chosen race, the Greeks, and if the content of that faith is to be held in trust by the established Greek Church, then the Church is placed in a position not only of moral, but indeed of civic pre-eminence. And yet, paradoxically, quite the opposite seems to be the case. I had thought that the Church would be the centre of village life; by men, at least, it went largely unattended. I had thought that the village priest would be a man of influence; he was openly derided. 'Hey, you with the hat' was a form of address I heard more than once, and for most of the year the priest could scarcely find an altar-boy to help him in his empty House of God.

It might have been that Spartohori's priest had individual failings, but I do not think so. What seemed to be held against him was simply that he was a priest. It might also have been that Spartohori was itself somewhat exceptional; but again I doubt that this was really the case. It must be admitted that Spartohori was a notoriously left-wing village within an area, Lefkada, well known for its left-wing sympathies. The majority of the older Spartohoriots were, or had been, supporters of KKE, Greece's Moscow-oriented Communist Party of the Exterior—though during my stay there was a shift, especially among the young, towards Andreas Papandreou's PASOK socialist party (which triumphed in the 1981 elections). But anti-clericism was

not confined to the left (and there were some staunch right-wingers in the village); more importantly, support for the Communist party by no means implied a rejection of Orthodox Christianity. It is worth pointing out that the old man who claimed the Bible, the saints and Christianity to be exclusively Greek had himself been a well-known communist guerrilla during the years of the occupation and the ensuing civil war, and he had remained loyal ever since to the communist ideal. Being a communist or leftist in Spartohori did not at all preclude being a Christian believer, while being a Christian believer in no way entailed a respect for the clergy or the Church. Religiosity (or rather, the profession of Orthodox Christianity as part of one's self-definition), anti-clericism and polite allegiances were all separate phenomena which did not correlate. Almost everyone 'believed'; the majority were left-wing; and almost no one had a good word to say for the Church or the clergy. Moreover, such anti-clericism appears to be quite widespread in Greece, and the priesthood and higher clergy the traditional objects of mockery, resentment and satire.

The oddity is not, of course, that the people should be both left-wing and believers, nor that people should be both religious and anti-clerical. These two combinations are well known. The peculiarity of the Greek situation (at least as I experienced it in Spartohori) is that people should see in the very institution whose professional servants they deride the sole arbiter and guardian of the faith which they profess. To be a pious Christian and to reject the Church is one thing; but to relegate to the Church all spiritual concerns and to hold that the only faith acceptable is that defined by the Church and *then* to reject the Church seems paradoxical.

In logical terms that paradox cannot, I think, be resolved; and I would claim that in general people are quite capable of inconsistencies, especially when it comes to 'beliefs'. But if the paradox cannot be resolved, the situation can nevertheless be comprehended, even if this means taking the two elements of the paradox separately and not attempting to force them into some sort of 'rational' compatibility. After all, such an exercise was not undertaken by the Spartohoriots.

The 'ethnocentricity' of Greek religious beliefs has already been substantially accounted for. Historically, the vital difference between 'Turk' and 'Greek' was between Muslim and Christian. 'Ethnic' identity devolved on religious identity, and it was the Christian Church which supplied the Greek peoples with their sense of cohesion. To be Christian was to be Greek, and to be Greek was to be Christian. Inevitably, the *form* of Christianity subscribed to was that which had evolved in the Eastern Empire of Constantinople. In simple terms, there was no other choice. Orthodoxy *did* exhaust Christianity within the local setting. Nor was any other choice demanded or desired, for the commitment to Orthodoxy was not based on a search for spiritual truths within Christianity, but on a rejection of the encroachments of Islam from the outside.[25] And if Catholicism was known, both through contacts with Italy

25. Though Islam officially tolerated Christianity, attempts were made (and inducements offered) to convert Christians. See Campbell and Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, pp. 193–4, and Dakin, *The Unification of Greece*, pp. 10–11. For the degree to which Christianity retreated under Islam, see S. Vyronis Jr., 'The Greeks under Turkish Rule', in P. Diamondouros *et al.* (eds.), *Hellenism and the First Greek War of Independence (1821–1830): Continuity and Change*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies 1976, pp. 52 ff.

and through Venetian occupation, it too was the religion of 'others'—of the Westerners, the *Frangoi*—foreigners, invaders and colonizers. Doctrinal differences may have preoccupied the theologians, with East and West declaring each other schismatic, but for the inhabitants of what was to become Greece it was not the niceties of dogma which made the Westerners' claim to Christianity suspect, but the very fact that on every count they were aliens—not Greeks, and therefore, within a Greek setting, not Christians. A rejection of the Orthodox Church, or rather, of the Orthodox faith as defined by the Orthodox Church, would thus be tantamount to cultural and national apostasy.

Within such a framework, then, and within such a tradition, criticism of the Church relates neither to its monopoly of spiritual authority, nor to a questioning of its doctrines. They remain unchallenged. Rather, criticism is directed towards what might be called the 'practical' conduct of its representatives and what, on a purely secular level, is seen as its privileged position.

V

In March 1821, Germanos, Bishop of Old Patras, raised the banner of revolt in the Peloponnese on the day now celebrated as Greek Independence Day.[26] In Constantinople, the Patriarch Gregorios had already anathematized the leaders of the independence movement in the strongest terms, preaching the doctrine of *eleutherodoulia*, 'voluntary submission' to Ottoman rule, and drawing attention to the privileges enjoyed by the Empire's Christian subjects.[27] No doubt Gregorios could have done little else, and even that did not save him (and much of the Christian population of Constantinople) from the Sultan's wrath.[28] Nevertheless, Germanos' and Gregorios' near-simultaneous actions point to one of the major contradictions in the social position of the Greek Church. On the one hand, it functions as a national emblem, as a focal point of

26. Or so the story goes. For a different view of events, see G. Finlay, *History of the Greek Revolution and the Reign of King Otho*, London: Zeno 1971, p. 147.

27. For an easily available translation of the Patriarch's anathema, see R. Clogg (ed. and transl.), *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770–1821: A Collection of Documents*, London: Macmillan 1976, pp. 203–4.

28. Gregorios was hung from the lintel of a gate at the Patriarchate and his body thrown to a Jewish mob. Other members of the high clergy suffered similar fates.

Hellenism; on the other, it has always been integrated into the power structure of society where, with its own vested interests to protect, it has been a conservative political force.

In popular history, it is Gregorios' execution which is remembered rather than his opposition to the revolt, and again, in popular history, it is the Church's leadership of the Christian Greeks throughout their 'four hundred years of slavery' which is celebrated rather than the degree to which, in much of mainland Greece, the Church represented an authority legitimized by Ottoman rule. But if, for the past, the mythologies of national and ethnic unity can overcome the historical inequalities of power and authority, the same is not true of the present, nor even of post-independence Greece. The Church emerged from the War of Independence as the largest single landowner in the country—as, indeed, it had been throughout the Ottoman period. And it remains the largest landowner, despite successive appropriations by various governments.[29] In a country in which, up to the 1950s, the majority of the population were small-scale peasant agriculturalists and where even today the average land-holding does not exceed 3·6 hectares, from a village perspective the Church is seen as belonging to 'the rich', 'the powerful', 'the big people', as being part of that remote and largely mysterious class whom fate has allowed to enjoy all the good things of the world at the expense of the downtrodden worker and peasant for whom daily life is an unending struggle.

This attitude, which is both envious and indignant and which, whether justified or not, is characteristic of the Greek peasant's world-view, is not confined to members of the left. It should be remembered that the extreme right in Greece is a 'populist' right, that whatever the Colonels actually did, their rhetoric was in support of the 'little man' and that they went to some lengths to woo the vote (or backing) of the peasant sector (from which most of them had come). Those still loyal to the Colonels always point to their 'democratic' actions; to the fact that they rode roughshod over the traditional elite—an elite with which, in many people's minds, the Church is merged. On the other hand, the Colonels, of all people, espoused the Christian-nationalist equation, and for the members of the left, the Colonels' support for the Church and, on balance, the Church's support for the Colonels are further proof of its corruption and its alignment with the forces of oppression. In fact, the Church has seldom refrained from playing politics in Greece, and on the whole the politics it has played has been the politics of the right.[30]

In the end, however, it is neither politics, nor the Church's part in politics, which prompts resentment of the Church. Rather, it is the cruder, or at least

29. Nearly three-quarters of the 524 monasteries and most of the nunneries were suppressed by the Bavarian monarchy shortly after 1833 and the income from their properties turned over to the state (Dakin, *The Unification of Greece*, pp. 68–9). Further expropriations were made after 1922 as part of the refugee settlement programme (Clogg, *Modern Greece*, p. 122).

30. For an account (sympathetic to the Church) of its involvement in politics, see Frazee, 'Church and State in Greece'. It must be admitted that governments have tried to manipulate the Church quite as much as the Church has tried to manipulate governments—an inevitable consequence of the Church's incorporation into the structure of the state.

more general, feeling that members of the Church are to be numbered amongst those who do not have to struggle for their living but who are nevertheless granted authority and command respect—a conjunction deeply offensive to the strongly egalitarian (but highly competitive) ethos of village life. And here one strikes a second paradox. For though the Church may be the largest landowner in Greece, and although in popular imagination it is fantastically wealthy, and although with regard to its administration and hierarchy it is highly centralized,[31] it has always been a fundamental principle of the Orthodox Church that village priests be precisely 'men of the people'.

Those ambitious of higher Church office must enter a theological seminary and are sworn to celibacy; but village priests are not learned men. Traditionally they come from the village in which they serve (as did the priest in Spartohori), and they are required to be married. They are priests, but they remain villagers, with their inherited plots of land which they work like any other villager. On the face of it, the Orthodox Church would seem to have institutionalized just what the more radical Catholic clergy are now pursuing with their notion of the 'worker priest'. And yet, though this integration of the priesthood with the village may have served the Church well during the period of Ottoman rule by sustaining the faith at grass-roots level, nowadays, at least, it seems to be one of the weaknesses of the Church's organization. For on the one hand, the Church as a whole is seen as remote, aligned with the rich and the powerful, part of that envied and inaccessible world whose very success is evidence enough of its corruption, while on the other hand, at the local level, the human failings of the priesthood (real or imagined) are only too intimately known and discussed.

It is a situation in which the village priest loses all ways. He is a servant of that Church which is fabulously wealthy, politically conservative, remote from 'the people'; at the same time he is just another villager, somebody's brother, somebody's husband, somebody's father, somebody's son. Instead of bringing the Church to the people, of being the emissary of those who (rightly or wrongly) enjoy power, authority, prestige and all the good things of the earth, he is seen as one of the people who has gone over to the Church, a mere opportunist who knows a good thing when he sees it. In short, the village priest is tainted by his *alliance* with the world of riches and ease which everyone knows to lie outside the village (and to exist on the exploitation of the village), and yet, as a villager himself, any claim he lays to that exterior (and, though despised, still superior) world is known to be false. Who would seek sage counsel from a man they know to be no wiser than themselves? Who would respect the learning of a man who knows his letters no better than the average villager? Who would trust a man who, like everyone else, must seek his advantage where he may? Who would confess his secrets or his problems to a man who also has a daughter he must wed and a field he must water? And yet they must call him 'Pappas' and have him baptize their children, celebrate

31. See Ware, 'The Church: A Time of Transition', pp. 211 ff.

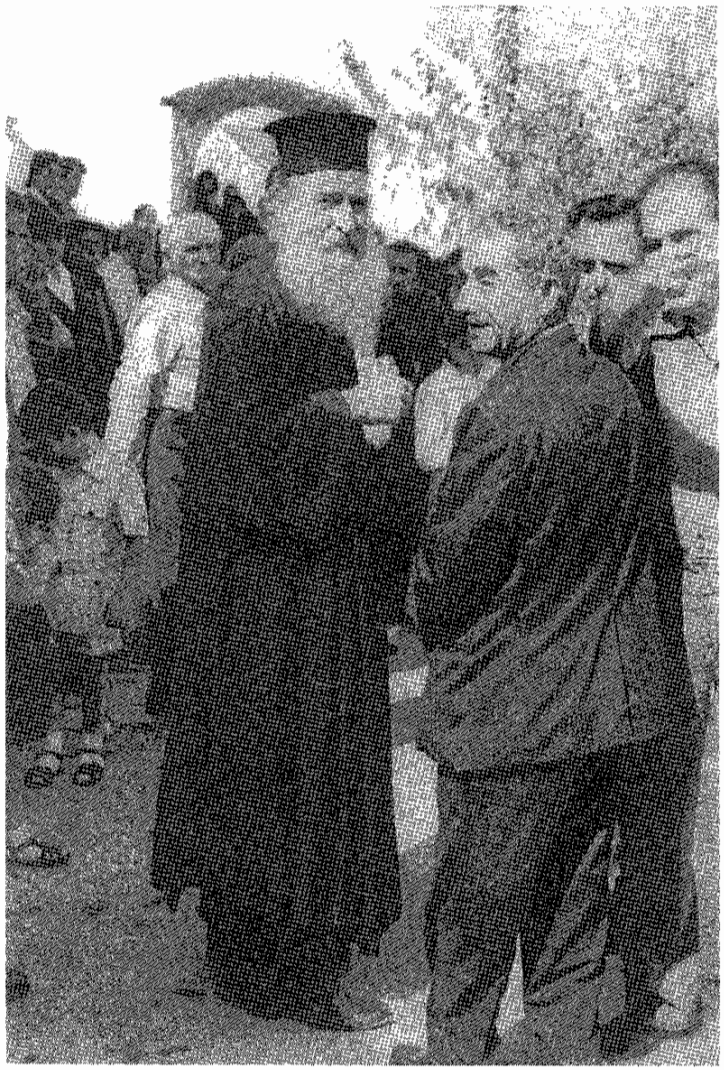
their marriages and bury their dead. And for this not only does he get a government salary—they must pay him!

It is this last feature—payment for the services which the priest alone is competent to perform and which, as Christians and believers, the village must receive—which most rankles and which is most complained of. In fact, payments of this kind to priests are voluntary.[32] It would be possible to refuse. But here self-esteem, *philotimo*, intervenes. No man of honour would wish to appear so mean, or (an equally important consideration) so financially constrained, that on the day of his daughter's wedding or his child's baptism or his father's death he should refuse to hand over to the priest an amount sufficient to demonstrate his contempt for monetary considerations. And so everyone pays individually, and everyone complains collectively. The priests are 'rapacious'—as rapacious as the Church itself, which, with all its fabulous wealth, still has the audacity to ask for alms and accept contributions from the old, the sick and especially the women in order to ensure the blessings which ought to be every Christian's natural right.

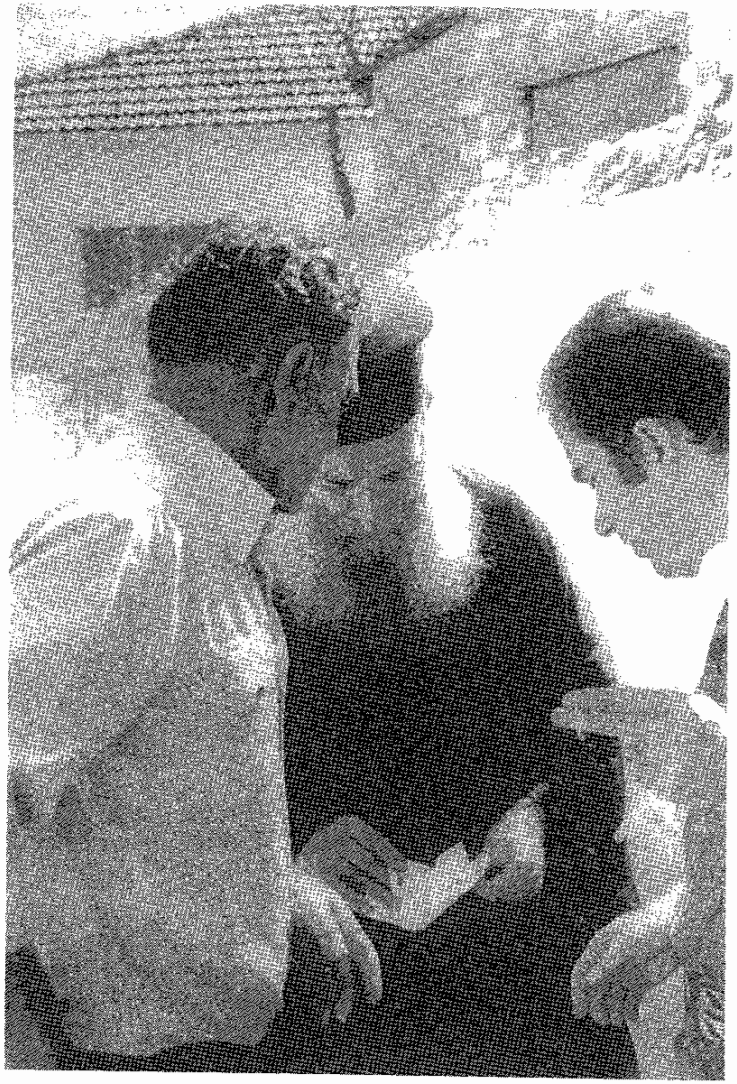
It makes little difference that most village priests (and certainly Spartohori's priest) are not wealthy men. The government salary received during the time of my fieldwork was approximately fifteen thousand drachmas (£75) a month, about one-third of what the lowest paid of Spartohori's sailors were earning and certainly insufficient to live on. The priest had to supplement his income both by engaging in agriculture and by accepting payments. The problem is that the village priests—as mere villagers—are themselves participants in the continuous village struggle for esteem, and thus, like everyone else, continually open to criticism. Only the priest, it would seem, has an unfair advantage. His office, his role of priest is vital to the life of the community. And yet who is he but a man, a villager, like everyone else? His salary is thus construed as something he receives for nothing—or rather, as something which he receives for being unprincipled enough to accept a sinecure. The spirit of egalitarian competitiveness spares no one. Since the priest is a man like everyone else, by definition he must be a hypocrite to have assumed the role of priest.

In this context, the actual accusations levelled against the priest become remarkably petty or simply untrue (as, indeed, are so many of the accusations with which the villagers pursue their continual struggle for moral pre-eminence in a society which will brook no superiority). The priest did not drink in the *kaphenia*. His status forbade him from joining in the more boisterous celebrations of village cameraderie. But every time he passed one of the 'shops', the sailors, with a blatant edge of mockery, would proffer him the conventional invitation, *'E, Pappa, ti tha pieis?'* ('Hey, Priest, what will you [have to] drink?'). And the priest would embarrassedly refuse, caught between the demands of his status and the rule that no man should be insulted by having his hospitality refused. And when the priest had gone by and the

32. Such payments are known as *tykhira*, 'luck money'. In fact, they are merely analogous to the sort of gifts which were generally made supplementary to normal payments for services rendered—even to nurses and doctors on the successful delivery of a child.



The Spartohori village priest



Settling accounts

laughter had died down, it would be commented that the priest did indeed 'drink'—he drank 'at home', a standard accusation which, by some moral alchemy, transformed a public pleasure into a private vice. Or else, in the heat of the summer, my older friends—staunch 'believers' all—would speculate on how much the priest must be sweating under his robes and with all that uncut hair and beard. He must stink. It would do the priest good to be stripped of his robes, barbered like everyone else, and thoroughly washed. And there were standard jokes. If the child did not resemble the father, then better ask the priest why.[33] And then, during fasts—which most people, and certainly most men, broke—the trespassing of the ritual rules would be apologized for on grounds of necessity. 'What can we do?' people would say, always adding that it was all right for *priests* who could afford the luxuries of lobster and shrimp (shellfish being exempt from the dietary prohibitions in force during Lent and at other times). 'Besides,' as one man told me as he sat eating pork *souflaki* during Easter Week, when, of all times, the fast should be observed, 'faith is faith, and food is food.' I know nothing about the dining habits of bishops, but I know that Spartohori's priest could never afford to eat a lobster—not something true of all Spartohoriots.

VI

The modest aim of this paper has been to describe a situation which struck me as odd, or at least which was counter to my expectations: a situation in which adherence to the Christian faith was in no way problematic, since it was part of a given cultural and national identity, but in which respect for the Church, freely granted the monopoly of authority in all spiritual matters, was nevertheless singularly lacking. By way of conclusion, I should like to relate one complex anecdote which, though it involves more than Greece, seems to me to draw together some of the threads of this description.

During my stay in Spartohori, the Iranian revolution broke out. It was fully reported on television, and events were closely followed in the coffee-shops. At the time, the full import of the revolution was not clear. It seemed that it might announce the triumph of democracy in Iran: the battle was against the Shah, the Americans, inevitably the CIA, and all the forces of oppression. It thus had the support of the left and of most of the Spartohoriots. Enthusiasm was slightly dampened, however, by two facts: first, the revolutionaries were Muslims. It thus galled a little to support their cause. But second, and more importantly, it was clear that their leader, Khomeini, was 'a priest'. Suspicions were aroused. Khomeini seemed to represent the common man, the exploited,

33. The priest, of course, has access to women in a degree not shared by other men, and jokes about the sexual exploitation of this advantage are legion, especially concerning the higher clergy, who are *de jure* celibate.

the peasant. 'But', I was asked on several occasions, 'surely it is not a good thing for a ruler to be a priest?'

I spent the following Easter in the neighbouring village of Katomeri. On Saturday evening the church was crowded—the one time of the year when it was. After the joyful midnight announcement that 'Christ has arisen', the congregation dispersed with their lighted candles. Outside the church, however, 'the students' (who had returned for the occasion from Athens with their families), most of whom were strongly left wing, had continued another tradition, for they had constructed a bonfire on which they had placed the conventional figure of Judas the Jew, the betrayer of Christ. As the bonfire blazed, however, I noticed an innovation. Judas wore a sign round his neck on which was printed the name 'Khomeini'. The symbolism was, I think, complex (even if it had been done on the spur of the moment) and multivalent. Judas the Jew and Khomeini the Muslim: both the enemies of Christendom, both triumphed over by the Greeks. But I think the students were also up to something else: the figure that burned was also Khomeini the priest, a sight to greet their own *pappas* as he exited from his church.

Ahmed Al-Shahi

NORTHERN SUDANESE PERCEPTIONS OF THE NUBIAN CHRISTIAN LEGACY

People of the northern Sudan inhabit a semi-desert region.[1] Apart from the riverine Nile, where most of the people live as sedentary agriculturalists, the rest of the region is barren, consisting of deserts with some hilly outcrops and inhabited by nomadic groups. Despite the unfavourable ecological conditions, this region has attracted outsiders who came originally to proselytize and spread their religions. The process of religious conversion and reconversion began with the ancient Egyptians, followed by Christian missionaries from Egypt, themselves succeeded by the arrival of Arab/Muslims from Egypt and Arabia. In addition to those who came for religious reasons, others were drawn to the northern Sudan by its supposedly rich natural resources and for trade and slavery. However, to the present-day population of the north, neither the temples of the ancient Egyptians and indigenous Sudanese dynasties nor the ruins of Christian churches and monasteries have much cultural or ideological relevance. Rather, it is the two major Islamic institutions, the mosque and the Koranic school, which are of fundamental religious and ideological significance to the people. Islam has superseded previous religions; but it is interesting to examine in their historical context the pre-Islamic religions and cultural influences on northern Sudan and, in particular, the legacy of Christianity.

In view of its geographical proximity and vested interests, Egypt has had and continues to have a greater cultural and political influence on the Sudan than the rest of its neighbours. The ancient Egyptian dynasties contributed to the civilizations of the northern Sudan in the fields of religion, arts,

1. I am grateful to my wife Anne for her comments on the content of this paper.