

which they themselves benefit in the western world. Given the situation described in these pages, it is truly ironic to have Orthodox prelates declare that their 'task in North America is not limited to serving the immigrant and ethnic communities, but has as its very heart *the missionary task of making disciples* in the nations of Canada and the United States'.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, the nation's educational curriculum will have to incorporate the simple lesson that although the overwhelming majority of Greeks are Orthodox, one need not be Orthodox to be a good Greek. Such changes are possible, if the political will and leadership exist to bring them about. However, it would be unrealistic to believe that such will and leadership exist in Greece today.

## Notes

- 1 Lt.-Gen. Sir Arthur F. Smith, Chairman, The Evangelical Alliance, London, letter of 18 September 1963, to N. J. A. Cheetham, Southern Department, Foreign Office. Foreign Office Records, 169099, CE1781/6.
- 2 *Ekklisiastiki Alitheia*, VII (No. 168) 1 October 1983.
- 3 Metropolis of Philippi, Neapolis and Thasos, No. 813, 13 July 1984, report of Metropolitan Prokopios to the Public Prosecutor of Kavala.
- 4 Foreign Office Records, 169099, documents CE1781/4, CE1781/6, CE1781/11. In its report the British Embassy in Athens dismissed as 'complete rubbish' the claim that the Katerini pastor had received money from the Consulate and concluded: '. . . almost certainly the crux of the matter is that [the pastor] has been too energetic in attracting support for his flock and that for this (or, of course, possibly some other reason) he has fallen foul of the local Orthodox hierarchy . . .' Murray to Dodson, 28 August 1963, CE1781/6.
- 5 Stephanos Stavros, 'O prosilytismos kai to dikaioma sti thriskeftiki eleftheria', *Poinika Khronika*, October 1993, 964-77; Stephanos Stavros, 'The Legal Status of Minorities in Greece Today: The adequacy of their protection in light of current human rights perceptions', paper presented at the Modern Greek Studies Association symposium, San Francisco, 30 October-1 November 1993.
- 6 Stavros, 'O prosilytismos'. In several cases, following hearings by the European Commission on Human Rights, a 'friendly settlement' was reached between Greek Evangelicals as plaintiffs and the Greek state authorities. See, for example, the cases of Charilaos Polyzos, No. 13271/87, decided by the Commission on 13 May 1988, and of Argyris Iordanoglou, No. 13270/87, decided by the Commission on 18 December 1987.
- 7 M. B. Kyriakakis, *Protoporeia kai protoporoi* (Athens, 1985), 19.
- 8 Kyriakakis, 38.
- 9 *Diati katapiezetai i Elliniki Evangeliki Ekklisia* (Athens, 1954), 61-2. In Greece, cemeteries belong to the local civil authorities and are not the property of the Orthodox Church.
- 10 *Diati katapiezetai*, 13-14, on the Mylotopos case. The official organ of the Orthodox Church which printed the Archbishop's circular mentioned above also expressed profound gratitude to the World Council of Churches for the 'very large sum of money' donated to the Church of Greece. *Ekklisiastiki Alitheia*, VII, No. 169, 16 October 1983.
- 11 Andreas N. Loverdos, 'Prosilytismos: mia elliniki apokleistikotita', *Eleftherotypia*, 20 December 1992. See also his *Prosilytismos. Gia tin antisyntaxmatikotita tes skhetikis me ton prosilytismo poinikis nomothesias* (Athens, 1986).

- 12 Gerasimos Augustinos, "'Enlightened" Christians and the "Oriental" Churches: Protestant missions to the Greeks in Asia Minor, 1820-1860', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, IV (1986) 130.
- 13 Ioannis Agapidis, *Ellinikai evangelikai koinotites tou Pontou* (Thessaloniki, 1948), 9-17.
- 14 Agapidis, 5.
- 15 Kyriakakis, 11-15.
- 16 *Summarized History of the Evangelical Church of Greece* (Athens, n.d.), 2.
- 17 Georgios D. Dragas, *Ionas King* (Athens, 1972), 65, 92.
- 18 Dragas, 90.
- 19 Dragas, 86-101. For an account by an American contemporary highly critical of King, see Charles K. Tuckerman, *The Greeks of Today* (New York, 1878), 211-27.
- 20 Dragas, 92.
- 21 Kyriakakis, 19.
- 22 Kyriakakis, 29.
- 23 Kyriakakis, 31.
- 24 *Eikones*, 16 September 1992, 18.
- 25 *Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini* (Katerini, n.d.).
- 26 *Eleftherotypia*, 20 December 1992.
- 27 Letter of Revd. Stelios Kaloterakis, 13 December 1993, to the author.
- 28 *Kathimerini*, 6 November 1991.
- 29 *Greece: Religious Intolerance and Discrimination*, Human Rights Without Frontiers, VI (1994) 2.
- 30 *Eleftherotypia*, 20 December 1992. On a prominent case of a Jehovah's Witness decided by the European Court of Human Rights see *Case of Kokkinakis v. Greece* (3/1992/348/421), *Judgement*, Strasbourg, 25 May 1993.
- 31 *Eleftherotypia*, 20 December 1992.
- 32 *Summarized History*, 3; see also *Katastatikos Khartis tis Ellinikis Evangelikis Ekklisias* (Thessaloniki, 1971).
- 33 *Katastatikos Khartis*, Art 30, 24.
- 34 *Summarized History*, 3.
- 35 *I pistis ton Ellinon Evangelikon* (Athens, n.d.) 21.
- 36 *I pistis*, 21-2.
- 37 *Summarized History*, 3-4.
- 38 Elliniki Evangeliki Ekklisia Kerkyras, *Ekthesi alvanikou ergou gia to etos 1991*.
- 39 Loverdos, 'Prosilytismos' in *Eleftherotypia*, 20 December 1992.
- 40 *Katholiki*, 16 November 1993.
- 41 Loverdos, 'Prosilytismos'.
- 42 Panhellenic Evangelical Alliance, letter of 24 August 1982 to the Prime Minister and the Ministers of National Education and Religions, Ministry of the Presidency and Justice, signed by Revd. Stelios Kaloterakis and Revd. Apostolos D. Bliatis.
- 43 Republic of Greece, Ministry of National Education and Religions, 070.1A3/110, 11 July 1984.
- 44 Ministry of National Education and Religions, 070.1/A/1637, 9 July 1979, signed by K. Athanasiadis.
- 45 Free Evangelical Church of Thessaloniki, complaint by Dr Demosthenis Katsarkas to the Directorate of Security, Thessaloniki, 10 June 1991.
- 46 *Katholiki*, 16 November 1993.
- 47 *Eleftherotypia*, 20 December 1992.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 The case, from the mid-1950s, is the author's.
- 50 *New York Times*, 9 December 1994; emphasis added.



quently made against Evangelicals was that they had not shown sufficient opposition to 'slavo-communism'. The police authorities in Pieria once reported that when the area had been under ELAS control the 'Evangelical' heretics had been preaching that communism does not persecute the 'Evangelical Church'.<sup>47</sup> Given the Evangelicals' total rejection of communist dogma as an atheist aberration one can only wonder about the motives behind such a report.

Finally, there is persistent speculation that Evangelicals, as well as members of other religious minorities including the Catholics, are systematically excluded from sensitive government positions. In December 1992, an Evangelical spokesman in Athens, while denying that serious problems existed between his church and state authorities, added: 'there is unconfirmed information that there continues to remain in force a directive for the exclusion of Evangelicals from certain sectors of public service: the army, police, education'.<sup>48</sup>

This is the kind of suspicion which is obviously very difficult to prove or disprove. However, there is some evidence that such a directive was in fact issued. In a letter published in the Athens weekly *Oikonomikos Takhydromos* (30 December 1993), a writer revealed that, having completed his military service as the doctor of his battalion (but without an officer's commission, which is standard practice for medical officers in the Greek armed forces), his discharge papers listed his conduct as 'fair'. When he protested, his battalion commander claimed that he had merely complied with a secret order of the Army General Staff that all Evangelicals, regardless of performance, were to receive the conduct designation 'fair'. After appealing the matter to the Council of State, he was summoned to the local police station (which handles reservists' call-up papers) and was told that an order had been received to change his discharge papers, under the heading conduct, from 'fair' to 'excellent'.

It is difficult to imagine that this was in fact an isolated case and there are heretofore undocumented reports of similar treatment. However, an entirely different experience deserves to be mentioned. In 1955, when an Evangelical draftee requested that the designation 'Christian/Orthodox' on his army papers be changed to 'Christian/Evangelical' he was refused in abusive language which, among other matters, questioned his Greekness. Yet months later, after repeating to the examining board his religious affiliation, he was sent to officers' school, as was another Evangelical. Once commissioned, he received the highest security clearance for Greece and NATO, and was assigned to the Hellenic National Defence General Staff where he served as interpreter in highly sensitive conferences with NATO officials. On his discharge, with highest commendation and conduct 'excellent', he was employed by the press office of the Ministry to the Prime Minister, where his assignments included service as court interpreter in the trial of the American airman who had killed General Stefanos Sarafis, the

commander of ELAS, the wartime, communist-controlled resistance army, in a traffic accident (the government had feared that the communists would use the trial for propaganda purposes).<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusions

Greece is today a reasonably stable, democratic society, whose constitution and legal system, in principle, accord the individual citizen protection against religious persecution at the hands of the state authorities. As a 'known' religion, the Greek Evangelicals fare much better than other religious minorities which are not so designated. Yet a fundamental problem persists, symbolizing the gap between theory and practice. Although most Greeks think nothing of it, there is a feature of Greek public life and culture that sets it apart from all western democratic societies. At every state function the place of honour is reserved for the Orthodox clergy who are treated as the sacred symbol of the nation's identity and spirit. At official ceremonies, presidents of the republic, prime ministers, the cabinet, generals and other representatives of the state behave as though supreme authority for all things Greek flows from the institution represented by the person in black robes. The historical explanation for all this is all too well known, as is the service of the Orthodox faith to the preservation of the Greek nation. But the symbolism also perpetuates the notion that Greekness is synonymous with Orthodoxy and that the Church stands above civil authority. And as long as the Orthodox Church continues to regard religious minorities as intruders upon its exclusive preserve, the status of all such minorities, including the Evangelicals, will remain precarious. So long as state organs serve as passive – and at times active – tools of the Orthodox Church, religious minorities in Greece will not receive a full measure of protection of their religious freedoms. So long as the political culture of the country identifies ethnic identity and personal loyalty to the state with a particular Church, religious minorities will continue to be treated as less than genuinely Greek. And when the nation feels insecure or victimized, inflamed nationalism will retard any progress toward genuine religious freedom.

As already suggested, this culture, which subjects ethnic identity to criteria defined by the dominant Church, brings Greece on a collision course with the European Union. If it genuinely supports the content and implications of the Maastricht accords, Greece will have to bring itself into line with its partners on a variety of issues, including freedom of religion. It will have to cultivate a pluralistic society in all respects, including matters of religious faith, and turn the myth of the separation of Church and state into reality. For this to happen, two basic changes are essential. First, the constitutional prohibition of proselytism must be annulled, making it impossible for the courts to serve as the tools of the dominant Church. The time must finally come when Orthodox authorities will tolerate in Greece the full measure of religious freedom from



Gospel and its meaning to the young through Bible school and appropriate recreation. In this connection, they run several summer camps where some 500 children (and sometimes entire families) combine vacation with religious education and worship. Since the 1980s growing attention has been paid to social problems and modest programmes have been started in the large cities for alcoholics and drug addicts.<sup>37</sup> The Church in Kerkyra has recently combined relief work with religious activity in post-communist Albania.<sup>38</sup>

### A religious minority: problems and realities

It is not easy to generalize about the experiences of the Evangelicals as a religious minority in Greece. In part, this is because they do not, as a rule, seek to bring attention to themselves and any problems that they encounter with the authorities often go unreported. Conditions have changed over time and there has been slow but steady improvement in the attitude of secular authorities, at least in principle. It has always been more difficult to be an Evangelical in small towns and villages than in the larger urban centres. Most individual members of the Church, whose social, educational and economic status represents an approximate cross-section of the nation as a whole, are able to lead professional and occupational lives unhindered by their religious affiliation. Their employers and fellow workers, and (in the cities) many of their neighbours as well, are not aware of their religion or are not particularly concerned about it. Parenthetically, the required designation of one's religious affiliation on identity cards has caused much debate in recent years and raises fundamental questions of legal principle. The practice was condemned by the European Parliament as a violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights,<sup>39</sup> and the issue is likely to emerge as a point of friction between the European Union and Greece in the years ahead.<sup>40</sup> Its practical significance for members of the so-called known religions is probably negligible. However, if as ordinary citizens the Greek Evangelicals are largely unaffected in their daily lives, as practitioners of their faith they certainly suffer the consequences.

As already mentioned, the 1975 Constitution (article 13.2) extends protection of freedom of worship to all 'known' religions. But even though the Evangelicals, as Protestants, are accepted as a 'known' religion, their ministers and lay evangelists frequently run afoul of the constitutional banning of 'proselytism'. The original prohibition was intended to defend the dominant Orthodox Church from the loss of its faithful to alien religions. On the other hand, the 1975 Constitution maintains the prohibition of 'proselytism' as protection of the individual right of freedom of religious conscience against attempts at conversion by what the penal code labels 'false means'. This change implies that the banning of proselytism is directed at *all* religions, and thus is fair and impartial. However, since the meaning of 'false means' is not specified by law, it is left to courts to decide what in fact constitutes

proselytization. Some court deliberations on this issue have been reminiscent of theological debates of the Dark Ages. Among the practices which the Greek courts have declared to be 'false means' are the mailing of books, the 'skillful interpretation' of the Gospel, and the disparity in the level of education between the person preaching and the one being preached to.<sup>41</sup> As mentioned above, even the promise of paradise may lead to charges of proselytism. Under these peculiar conditions much of the Evangelicals' religious endeavour can be, and is, challenged as representing attempts at proselytization. More often than not, the instigators of the charges and legal action are the local Orthodox authorities and their lay followers.

Under 'compulsory laws' dating back to the Metaxas dictatorship, but which remain in effect today (especially 1363/38 as amended in 1672/39), the erection and operation of a Church building of any denomination require an official licence issued by the 'appropriate recognized authority' and the Ministry of Education and Religions. The application for such a licence must be accompanied by detailed information concerning the religious group involved. The unspecified 'appropriate authority' is in reality the local police and the local Orthodox Church, which almost routinely seek to block the granting of the licence. As recently as 1982, the Panhellenic Evangelical Alliance appealed to the national government to repeal these laws protesting that 'almost in all cases the Orthodox "ecclesiastical authority" has not allowed the building . . . and any licence granted finally by the State occurred after a recourse of the interested parties [to] the Council of State'.<sup>42</sup> In its reply, issued two years later, the Ministry of Education and Religions rejected the request arguing that the licensing regulations in question did not violate the Constitution and were in fact intended to assist and protect the non-Orthodox.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond the problem of licensing Church buildings the Ministry of Education and Religions regularly requires the Evangelical Churches to submit detailed accounts of their activities. For example, a July 1979 circular demanded the following information 'as soon as possible': exact address of place of worship, telephone 'where we can reach you', full name of current pastor, titles of periodicals or other literature sponsored, names of other organizations, clubs or schools operated by the Church. The circular concluded with the reminder that 'any change in your address or your pastor requires our approval'.<sup>44</sup> On occasion security officials in civilian clothes arrive unannounced to request information about the Church.<sup>45</sup> And in the autumn of 1993 the Athens press reported the existence of a classified survey of non-Orthodox Greeks undertaken by the Greek Intelligence Agency (EYP). This contained the names, addresses, telephone numbers and information on personal finances and bank accounts of their pastors, who were apparently under routine surveillance.<sup>46</sup>

Periodically, religious minorities, including the Evangelicals, have been accused of lacking in patriotism. In the 1940s and 1950s one charge fre-



are regarded by the Orthodox authorities as a heresy (as are the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons) and a serious threat to the nation because their religious activities are viewed as deliberate efforts to undermine national solidarity among Greeks. According to journalistic sources, about twenty Pentecostal Churches are believed to exist in the Athens area alone.<sup>28</sup> Their activities are regarded as essentially outside the law. The authors of *Greece: religious intolerance and discrimination*, published in 1994 by the Brussels-based organization Human Rights Without Frontiers, give the figure of 16,000–18,000 Protestants, making no attempt to distinguish between Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Whatever their origins and beliefs, the Jehovah's Witnesses need to be considered separately from the family of Protestant churches. Their doctrine and preaching tactics, not to mention their claim that all the dominant Christian Churches (especially the Catholic) have been expropriated by Satan, set them apart from the main subject of this article. Nevertheless, they need to be mentioned here because, as already suggested, in the Greek setting, they are often confused with the Evangelicals who suffer from this unwelcome association. Moreover, they serve as the lightning rod for the charge of proselytization, from which the Evangelicals have sought to protect themselves with only moderate success.

No official figures are available on the Jehovah's Witnesses in Greece but they are clearly more numerous than all the Greek Protestants, from whom they are divided by a wall of mutual rejection. The Witnesses' own figure is about 26,000.<sup>29</sup> The status of the Witnesses in Greece is unique because the authorities have not recognized them as a 'known' religion protected under the constitution and penal code. This is despite the fact that in 1975 the Council of State (*Symvoulion Epikrateias*) accepted the Jehovah's Witnesses as followers of a 'known' religion and thus entitled to protection under the constitution. However, in 1983 the Supreme Court (*Areios Pagos*) declared them a heresy, which for all practical purposes they remain in the eyes of church and civil authorities. When questions arise, state authorities defer to the Orthodox Church which consistently regards the Witnesses as a heresy with a hostility that has not mellowed over the years. As a result, state organs serve as instruments of religious intolerance. For example, when in 1989 the Witnesses applied to have their ministers excused from military service (as are ministers of the 'known' religions) the military authorities requested a ruling from the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Religions. The Ministry's response consisted of the decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece which declared that the Witnesses are 'neither a known religion nor in fact a religion but a business with an economic-political purpose'.<sup>30</sup>

In a court case decided in 1991, in Tripolis, Jehovah's Witnesses brought charges against certain individuals whom they accused of publicly and verbally assaulting them on account of their religious activities. After listening

to a parade of 'experts' in matters of theology, the court dismissed the charges ruling that Jehovah's Witnesses 'in no circumstances can be considered an accepted religion and consequently they do not constitute an object of verbal assault'.<sup>31</sup>

### Structure, dogma, activities

The Evangelical Churches of Asia Minor had adopted the 'congregational' system of self-government under which the entire membership, acting as a democratically-ruled unit, controlled the affairs of the church and selected its minister, whose qualifications consisted of personal integrity and faith, and knowledge of the Gospel. The Evangelicals of the Greek state had followed the more structured 'Presbyterian' style, which is based on a hierarchy of authorities; the council of elders (presbyters) and the ministers of the district churches, in turn following guidelines established by a geographically larger general assembly. After the arrival of the refugee churches in Greece a Panhellenic Evangelical Alliance was established (in 1924) which over time developed a governing structure that combines elements of both the Congregational and Presbyterian traditions.<sup>32</sup> In essence, while seeking spiritual unity and mutual support, the Greek Evangelical Churches are independent, self-sustaining and self-governing entities. They are not branches of foreign Protestant Churches, they joined the World Council of Churches at its founding in 1948, and they support the Ecumenical Movement.<sup>33</sup> There are today some eighteen to twenty ordained ministers (many of whom graduated from theological seminaries in the United Kingdom), scores of lay preachers and evangelists, Bible distributors and some 100 elected elders.<sup>34</sup>

The Greek Evangelicals, who espouse the Nicene Creed (325 AD), celebrate two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. They accept as authentic Gospel only the scriptures of the Old Testament (39 Books) and the New Testament (27 Books) and believe that the Bible alone is 'the real and indisputable canon of faith – containing all the material needed by Christians to form a clear and correct faith'.<sup>35</sup> They regard ecclesiastical 'Tradition', including the veneration of rules and ceremonies not traceable to Christ and his Apostles, and of man-made objects such as icons, to be products of the human mind influenced by regional, political and social trends, individual bias and ignorance. In this they differ from both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches which regard 'Tradition' as divinely inspired and having the same authority as the Books of the Bible.<sup>36</sup>

In practice the Evangelicals believe that the mission of their church is to propagate and distribute the Gospel as the only vehicle of salvation through which man discovers and communes with his Creator personally and directly. They aspire to convey this message to others chiefly through their daily conduct, by personal example. Great emphasis is placed on teaching the



from Massachusetts Jonas King (1792–1869), whom Kalopothakis had come to know and admire. As he said later, he entered the court as a pious Orthodox but left it as an Evangelical Protestant.<sup>16</sup> At first welcomed warmly by the Greek authorities in the closing years of the war of independence, a friend of Kapodistrias and other Greek leaders, King became for a time the Greek government's advisor on educational matters. He founded the *Evangelikon Gymnasion* (1831), the first secondary school in Athens, which was attended by the sons of many prominent Greek families. In 1827 he had urged American leaders and philanthropists to create in Mani or Sparta a college of the quality of his beloved Alma Mater, Amherst College in Massachusetts, and later wished to open a private university in Athens. During 1851–58 he was the American consul in the Greek capital.<sup>17</sup> But, for all his work in education and philanthropy, King was primarily interested in spreading the message of the Bible. Before long, his sermons, religious articles and Bible work attracted the wrath of the Orthodox authorities who charged him with insulting the Virgin Mary and other offences. In the press he was accused of presiding over orgies.<sup>18</sup> In 1854 he was convicted of heresy, excommunicated and ordered to be deported, over the strong protests of the American government. Although the deportation order was rescinded by King Otto, he went abroad for several years but returned to Athens where he died two years later.<sup>19</sup>

Despite his energetic religious activities, King had not wished formally to establish a church. However, his sermons and Bible lessons attracted a number of Athenians, including Kalopothakis, who was a defence witness at King's trial.<sup>20</sup> It was Kalopothakis who brought together some of King's followers and formed the First Evangelical Church of Athens. In 1871 the group built its assembly hall in the (then) open fields across from Hadrian's Arch, below Plaka, where its rebuilt version stands today. That is the building from which in November 1895 the word 'Greek' was removed by the police, to be restored some weeks later by court order.<sup>21</sup>

Kalopothakis's son, Dimitrios, himself a pillar of the First Evangelical Church, graduated from Harvard, taught history at the University of Athens and had a distinguished career as *The Times* of London's correspondent in Greece. During the turbulent decade of the 1920s he was the General Director of the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and received many honours and decorations from the Greek and British governments. When he died in July 1946, *To Vima* praised him as a distinguished journalist and government official and an 'outstanding Greek patriot who had served the interests of Greece'.<sup>22</sup> Responding to a newspaper article which had labelled his faith a 'Protestant error', he wrote:

When all the medieval and Turkish walls and structures were removed from it, the Acropolis of Athens emerged in all its beauty and the splendour of its original form. So also with the Orthodox

Church. When all the added-on human decrees and traditions, which centuries of error and ignorance have piled on that brilliant edifice erected upon the solid foundation of the Apostles and Prophets have been removed, it will be revealed in all its original apostolic magnificence before a joyous Christendom. May it not be long until that blessed day when the Church of our fathers returns to the simplicity and purity of the apostolic ages. Then, with pious joy, we the Greek Evangelicals will return to its fold . . .<sup>23</sup>

In short, while benefiting from the work of Western missionaries, the Greek Evangelicals did not descend upon the Hellenic scene riding the coat-tails of powerful foreign churches and religious organizations. They represent a very small but autochthonous movement of genuine Greeks who, through a variety of personal encounters, came to believe that their spiritual well-being and salvation could be assured through direct communication with their Creator, for which the Bible was the only vehicle. However, their reformed faith clashed with the historical and prevailing concept of Greekness, which defines ethnic identity in terms of the Orthodox Church. Reflecting this attitude, Stelios Papatthemelis, subsequently Minister of Public Order, in September 1992 characterized the work of TV evangelists as 'anti-Orthodox and therefore anti-Greek propaganda'.<sup>24</sup>

### The Greek Evangelicals today

Today there are twenty-eight congregations across the country (four are in the Athens-Piraeus metropolitan area) which belong to the General Synod of the Greek Evangelical Church. There are also three churches in the United States and one in Germany. In terms of regular membership, including children, the largest is that of Katerini, with about 1,500 persons. That church grew out of the 120 Evangelical refugee families from Asia Minor to whom the authorities granted 1,650 hectares of land for re-settlement in 1923.<sup>25</sup> Otherwise, the larger churches are in Athens and Thessaloniki. Family-size groups and lone Evangelicals, for whom no reliable numbers are available, can be found all across Greece.

Statistics on this religious minority are virtually non-existent. The 1928 state census listed 9,003 as 'Protestants', while in the 1951 census (the last to specify religious allegiance) the number was down to 6,859, or 0.1 per cent of the population. A December 1992 Athens press account on religious groups reported 12,000–15,000 'Protestants' (named as the third officially recognized Christian dogma), of whom the main group was said to be the Greek Evangelical Church with 5,000, including children.<sup>26</sup> The rest were presumably Protestants of other denominations, including Pentecostals, with the more conservative of whom the Evangelicals maintain polite if distant contact.<sup>27</sup> The Pentecostals, among whom beliefs and practices vary widely,

Such reform and redirection of religiosity required a certain level of literacy and the availability of the Gospel in understandable Greek. Accordingly the missionaries combined traditional philanthropy with education in the three Rs, so that the individual could read and think for himself, and the translation and distribution of the Old and New Testaments. Using the cosmopolitan port city of Smyrna as their main base of operations, where they established some of the best educational institutions of the Near East, they spread out across the Ottoman Empire establishing schools, orphanages, relief stations, training and certifying teachers of Greek, and distributing Greek editions of the Bible. Although they taught the Bible, they saw their mission as one of enlightenment, not of conversion. They believed that they were helping fellow Christians rediscover and return to what they considered to be the true meaning of Christianity as defined by Christ and recorded by his apostles.

Often the graduates of missionary schools would be invited by Greek towns and villages in distant regions of the Ottoman Empire, which had never seen a foreign missionary, to come and operate a Greek school. Most of these young teachers simply taught the three Rs and nothing else; a few also became messengers not of a 'foreign' religion but of a personalized Christian faith based on the Bible and especially the New Testament. They were not aware of any change in their identity as Greeks caused by their particular understanding of the Christian faith. Moreover, their function as 'evangelists' was often unplanned.

Thus, in the late 1870s, the village of Semen near the Black Sea, consisting of some 140 Greek families, hired a teacher (Ioannis Valavanis) for its elementary school. Some time after his arrival the teacher was seen eating eggs and butter on a day of fasting. The matter was reported to the village School Board which appointed two of its members to investigate and recommend appropriate punishment. Asked to explain his conduct, the teacher produced a copy of the New Testament in Greek and read aloud from First Corinthians, VIII/8: 'But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.' And from Matthew XV/11: 'Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.'

The illiterate but reverent villagers admitted that for the first time in their lives they had actually understood a passage from the Bible. They invited the teacher to read and explain to them the scriptures at regular gatherings. By 1887, over the strong objections of the local Orthodox priests and some villagers, an Evangelical meeting hall was built, which served also as the one-classroom elementary school of the children of the congregation. A new teacher, with more serious religious training (Georgios Lemonopoulos) came to serve as teacher and pastor. In 1917, in the tragedies spawned by the First World War, when the Turkish authorities destroyed the village, some fifty to sixty families of Evangelicals moved to the nearby town of Kotyora (Ordu),

where an Evangelical community had been in existence since 1880.<sup>13</sup> Although no accurate numbers exist, at the time of the 'Great Disaster', the defeat in 1922 of the Greek armies in Asia Minor, and the ensuing exchange of populations, there were approximately thirty to forty Greek Evangelical churches and many more family-size groups across Asia Minor.<sup>14</sup>

Needless to say, the Evangelicals of Asia Minor who crossed the Aegean in search of a new home were a numerically insignificant portion of the Greek refugees. Despite their spiritual separation from the Orthodox Church, and the hostility they often encountered as a result, they regarded themselves as purely Greek, sharing the grave misfortunes of their compatriots. They did not think of themselves as followers of an international Protestant movement and did not seek preferential treatment from the largely Protestant relief organizations then operating in Greece. Their one appeal to the Greek authorities was to permit them to be resettled together, as religious communities, but this was done in very few cases. Beyond the suburbs of Athens, where many tried to rebuild their lives, others went to Thessaloniki (where a small Evangelical group had been meeting since 1865), Larissa, Volos, Katerini, Edessa, Veria, Komotini, Ioannina, Alexandroupolis; some made it to the islands of Kerkyra, Crete and Andros where they joined small groups of other Evangelicals. In their new locations they established self-supporting, self-governing churches where they survive to this day.

The experiences of the Evangelicals who originated on the Greek mainland were basically similar, with the notable difference that certain of their leaders were well-educated and prominent Athenians. The oldest and best known of the Greek Evangelical churches was established in Athens in 1858 by Mikhalis Kalopothakis, (1825-1911), founder and long-time editor of *Astir tis Anatólis*, the leading Evangelical journal which continues to be published today and is a valuable chronicle of the history of the Greek Evangelicals.

Born in Mani in the clan of Petrobeis Mavromikhalis, Kalopothakis attended elementary school in Areopolis (founded by the American missionaries G. W. Leyburn and Samuel Houston) and developed a keen interest in the Bible. He graduated from gymnasium in Athens and earned his medical degree in 1853 at the University of Athens. After brief service as an army doctor he went to New York, attended Columbia University and graduated from Union Theological Seminary. Back in Athens he decided to devote himself to Evangelical work. His motto was 'the nation needs spiritual reform and this reform must be based solely on the Bible.'<sup>15</sup> Following the Cretan revolt of 1869, he travelled to the United States once again to plead the cause of Hellenism.

While still a medical student Kalopothakis had been drawn to the ministry by the prosecution in various Greek courts and conviction on charges of heresy of the prominent American missionary and philhellene



politan's instigation, included the charge that the pastor had received 'considerable sums of money' from the British consulate in Thessaloniki, some other purpose not being out of the question . . .'.<sup>4</sup>

The problem created by the attitude of the Orthodox hierarchy and pliant state agencies is more serious than the size of the religious communities affected would suggest. As the only Eastern Orthodox member of the European Union, Greece can no longer disregard with impunity international scrutiny and ignore mounting charges that it does not provide adequate protection to its religious minorities. Genuine integration into the supremely secular and multicultural Western European community requires the abandonment of outmoded chauvinistic practices which serve no useful purpose and alienate Greece's partners. Resolutions of the European Parliament and decisions of the European Court (concerning the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses) have already put Greece on notice that its performance on the issue of religious freedom does not measure up to the community's standards.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, for all its practical significance, adherence to international conventions is not the only issue. Religious intolerance in this instance reveals arbitrary and regressive images of national identity and patriotism and undermines respect for the fundamental rights of all Greek citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. The basic question is this: Who decides what defines Greekness, and by what criteria? Can a non-Orthodox citizen of Greece, who feels and conducts himself as a Greek, expect to be treated as a full-fledged Greek by the authorities of his own country?

This essay deals mostly with the Greek Evangelicals. Other Protestant groups, as well as the Jehovah's Witnesses, are mentioned only in passing, when their experiences in Greece raise questions of broader significance. It should also be stressed that the subject of religious freedom in Greece is something of a moving target. Despite a number of court decisions, the impact of the 1975 constitution's relevant provisions remains unclear. Similarly, the practical effect of European Court rulings on the Greek system is as yet uncertain.<sup>6</sup>

### Origins, pathfinders, adversities

The history of the Greek Evangelicals, whose roots coincide with the nation's liberation from Ottoman rule, is one of sharp contrasts and contradictions, of the occasional acceptance of individuals and wholesale rejection of their religious community. Thus, as a boy in Crete, Eleftherios Venizelos, the charismatic politician who dominated Greek politics during the first third of the twentieth century, was a regular subscriber to the *Ephimeris ton Paidon* (Children's Newspaper) published by the first prominent Greek Evangelical, Mikhalis Kalopothakis, a protégé of Petrobeis Mavromikhalis and editor of the journal *Astir tis Anatolis* (Star of the East). But the church which Kalopothakis built in Athens and where he preached

for forty years (1871–1911) was the regular target of stone-throwing and noisy disruptions, and he was threatened with bodily harm. In 1895, when his congregation placed on the church facade the sign 'Greek Evangelical Church', the Metropolitan of Athens had the police remove the work 'Greek' on the grounds that it constituted proselytization and possible deception of the innocent passers-by.<sup>7</sup>

The commander of the allied forces in the First World War at the decisive battle of Skra, Colonel (later General) Athanasios Kyriakou, was a prominent and devout Evangelical. He was decorated by Greece, Britain and France and was buried with great honours at the prestigious First Cemetery of Athens.<sup>8</sup> But when during the civil war an army private died after taking part in the Grammos campaign against the communist insurgents, the Metropolitan of Alexandroupolis would not allow him to be buried in the public cemetery because he was an Evangelical. After much publicity the young man was laid to rest in a remote corner of the cemetery, away from other graves.<sup>9</sup> And at the very same time when Protestant churches across the United States were raising millions of dollars to rebuild 1,000 Greek Orthodox churches damaged or destroyed in the violence of the 1940s, and to provide priests with cloth for vestments and food for their flock, the Orthodox authorities in Edessa would not allow a tiny Evangelical congregation to occupy the small church it had built.<sup>10</sup> Finally, while the international community, with the formal participation of Greece, struggles to establish norms for the protection of individual human rights everywhere, including religious freedom, there are today Greek judges who rule that to promise a person a place among God's chosen *after death* constitutes an attempt to convert by 'false and deceptive means' and is therefore illegal.<sup>11</sup>

The birth of the Greek Evangelical movement in the early decades of the nineteenth century occurred independently but virtually simultaneously in mainland Greece and in the Greek communities scattered across Asia Minor and Pontos. Especially in Asia Minor it was the very modest by-product of an ambitious if naive design of American and British Protestant missionary societies to bring Christianity to the Moslem masses of the Ottoman Empire. This was to be accomplished through the 'revival' and restoration to its original 'purity and vigour' of the Greek Orthodox faith, the influence of whose followers spanned the Moslem world even as they remained under Ottoman subjugation.<sup>12</sup> Rather than making converts to Protestantism, these Western missionaries hoped to reform, enlighten and invigorate the Eastern Orthodox Church by persuading its members to abandon ritual, mysticism and icon-worship in favour of personalized Christian faith based exclusively on the message of the Gospel. Individual salvation was to be achieved through personal communion with the Creator, through the understanding and acceptance of the Gospel as God's command delivered to man simply and directly through Christ and his Apostles.



## EVANGELICALS

*JOHN O. IATRIDES*

For the overwhelming majority of Greeks, for whom national self-awareness is fully synonymous with the Eastern Orthodox faith, the existence in their midst of religious minorities totalling less than 3 per cent of the population is hardly a cause of serious concern. To be sure, periodically the Moslems of Greek Thrace are viewed as the tool of an aggressive Turkey, while Greek Catholic clergy might be accused of serving the Vatican's global aims. However, in both these instances it is the foreign patron rather than the Greek client group who is perceived as constituting a national threat. With the virtual destruction of the Greek Jews, other religious communities in the country are too small, isolated and inconsequential to trouble the public at large. Indeed, were it not for the determination of the Greek Orthodox Church to root out 'heresy' and 'proselytization', religious freedom would not be an issue in Greece. Yet the prevailing influence of the Orthodox Church (formally the Church of Greece) over state institutions and society often reduces religious minorities to the status of second class citizens or worse. And although the Protestants of Greece are not the primary target of intolerance, they nevertheless feel its effects, at least in part because of wide-spread ignorance and confusion concerning their identity and beliefs. In the words of one foreign Protestant official, 'religious liberty in Greece would seem to be theoretical rather than practical'.<sup>1</sup>

On 23 September 1983 the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece launched a new 'anti-heresy campaign' with a circular addressed to all Orthodox parishes and to the country's armed forces, warning them of 'provocative proselytizing activity by agents of multinational and Protestant organizations, societies and Eastern religions'. Naming first the Jehovah's Witnesses, the circular included among the 'heresies of protestant origin' the following: 'Adventists, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Free Evangelical Churches, Presbyterians, etc.'. Also listed were 'all kinds of "initiation rites"

organizations, especially of Hindu origin, parapsychology, mediums and magic'. Within seven days of the circular's date its recipients were to submit to the Archbishop's office information on all such groups 'as well as on how you are confronting the problem'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the eyes of the highest Orthodox authorities, universally recognized Protestant denominations were lumped together as heresies with the Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna, magic and parapsychology, and local priests and their support groups, as well as the country's military, were urged to take action against them all. As the circular makes clear, one of the most vexing problems faced by mainstream Greek Protestants is the refusal of the Orthodox hierarchy, court rulings notwithstanding, to recognize them as members of long-established, universally known Christian Churches. If the head of the Greek Orthodox Church could invalidate the Protestant Reformation by the stroke of his pen, it is hardly surprising that lower-level clergy and civil servants act accordingly.

Indeed, encouraged by their superiors, but also acting on their own initiative, Church officials frequently bring charges before state courts against non-Orthodox groups whose activities they find offensive. Thus in July 1984 the Metropolitan of Kavala demanded that the police prevent further public meetings of the organization 'Greek Missionary Union' which had staged in the town square a musical performance titled 'Freedom and Joy'. According to the Metropolitan's report to the court authorities, 'the study of the printed materials [distributed] and the [group's] method of operation lead to the conclusion that it is a Protestant offshoot, engaged in intense proselytization against Greek society'.<sup>3</sup>

Often the root cause of the problem appears to be the desire of Orthodox prelates to draw attention to themselves as defenders of the Nation against foreign influence. A case in point is that involving the Evangelicals of Katerini whose difficulties with the authorities in the 1960s attracted the attention of the British government because the pastor under attack was a Greek Cypriot and thus a British subject. According to the British diplomat who investigated the matter, the Katerini Evangelicals were a model community 'so well organized socially, and the esprit de corps existing among them is so strong, that rarely has any one of its members been known to have become a public burden - other than to his own community - due to ill health, destitution or unemployment'. However, the success of the Church in attracting members had aroused the hostility of the local Orthodox prelate who, 'apart from other considerations (the Metropolitan is a grand poseur, a forceful and extremely ambitious personality, ever ready to champion any cause which would help him in the public eye), as a matter of policy M. Barnabas has quite understandably felt called upon to combat the challenge of the Evangelical Church'. Accordingly, after arranging for the civil authorities to expropriate the small garden of the Evangelical community, the Metropolitan accused its pastor of proselytization and had him declared an 'undesirable', thus precipitating his expulsion from the country. The police report, filed at the Metro-