
Greek Studies, Hellenism, and Hellenic College/Holy Cross

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THE HONOR I AM BEING PRESENTED WITH, AS A MINISTER OF Education and Religious Affairs of Greece, is at the same time an honor to our country, Greece, and to its government. This is a great honor for me both personally and also as the official representative of education in Greece, since it is being presented by an institution of higher learning which is the seat of Hellenism, scholarship, and Orthodoxy in the great and hospitable country of the United States.

"Good fortune" has brought it about that the speaker has associated his name with the decision of the Greek Government, legally expressed by the law, which recognizes Hellenic College as equivalent and corresponding to the institutions of higher education in Greece in the areas of Greek Studies, Elementary Education, and Human Development. This bold decision to recognize Hellenic College is, I believe, the best thing Greece could do to support Hellenic Studies actively in the United States, through an institution of higher learning directly connected with the Omogeneia in America and with Orthodoxy.

Indeed, Greek Studies are promoted within the framework of Classics in certain universities in the United States and in the whole world because of the the universal, intellectual, and cultural prestige of Hellenism. There is, however, a big gap, which we hope that Hellenic College will in the long run bridge in its new form. The gap that Hellenic College will bridge is:

a) The promotion of Greek Studies in their entirety by an institution of higher learning within the United States, since Hellenism—ancient, Byzantine, and modern—constitutes a unified historical con-

tinuity and an unbroken cultural unity.

b) The cultivation of Greek Studies through an academic institution of Hellenic lineage integrally connected with Hellenism throughout the ages and with Orthodoxy.

c) The preparation at the university level of an appropriately trained scholarly personnel for the educational needs of the Omogeneia and to staff the Church of America.

We expect that under its new institutional status, with the support of the Church and its internationally acclaimed primate, Archbishop Iakovos, and with the moral, intellectual, and educational support of Greece, Hellenic College will gradually evolve into a center of Hellenism and of Orthodox Theology. We also expect it to develop together with Holy Cross School of Theology into a seat of Hellenic Studies and Orthodox Theology, with such intellectual and spiritual range that it will attract both Greek-American and American citizens and—why not?—future Hellenists and theologians from the European countries, and of course, from Greece.

Hellenic College in its new form and Holy Cross School of Theology, also in collaboration with the Greek universities which possess strong scholarly resources in this area, can evolve into a seedbed of new scholars from within the ranks of the Greek-American community. More specifically, these schools can develop into a seedbed of new theologians, Hellenists and teachers who will pump new blood into the Greek-American community, the schools where Greek is being taught, as well as into the Orthodox clergy of America. It is also possible that Hellenic College and Holy Cross School of Theology will attract undergraduates and graduate students from Greece as well, some of whom, by attending the College, will strengthen both the Hellenic spirit of the College and also the ranks of the theologian-clergyman.

The close collaboration with Greece, both on the level of the university professors who would be able to teach at Hellenic College, as well as on the level of student exchange, can constitute a spiritual bridge and a continuous two-way channel between Greece and the United States.

The possibility that Hellenists, Orthodox theologians, or elementary school teachers will be able to study for one or two semesters in corresponding institutions in Greece, will not only greatly assist them in their scholarly preparation, it will also give Hellenic College an advantage, not easily found in most colleges and universities of the United States.

A strong center of Hellenism in the United States has a lot to offer today; first of all to the Omogeneia. Indeed, we are very proud in Greece, because the Greek Omogeneia is one of the most vibrant com-

munities of the United States, the greatest power on earth. The Greek-American community also constitutes the most successful part of the Greeks of the Diaspora, who have always assisted Greece in her difficult times, as happened recently with her struggle on national issues.

The Greek language and Orthodoxy constitute the identity of the Greeks wherever they might live, and they bond together the great family of Hellenism that is spread throughout the whole world, in America, Canada, Australia, Europe, and Africa.

At Hellenic College, language, history, culture, and Hellenism in all its facets, along with Orthodoxy, will be cultivated meticulously and will then be transferred to the Omogeneia for their best possible utilization. It is quite obvious that in order to support the Omogeneia, especially the younger generations, we have to strengthen those components i.e., language, religion and the Hellenic spirit, that will help maintain the ties with their roots, safeguard their special identity, and make them feel proud of their heritage, something that I am sure that they want, since it meets the deeper psychological needs of the human being.

Today in Europe, in America, and in the entire world, we live in an era where all the ideological walls that separated peoples in the past are crumbling, one after another. These worldwide changes and the technological revolution, along with the vast new capabilities of communication, offer us the perspective of a new global community. New ideological, social, and political realities are formed among nations and peoples. Systems, theories, ideas, values, and ideologies are revised, modified, or rejected. New values and new ideals are sought. At the same time, a general confusion, insecurity, and uncertainty plague modern man, who searches for answers.

The progress in science and technology, of course, has solved many problems and has greatly benefited humanity. No one disputes that one of the goals of civilization is to secure the material well-being of people. Real prosperity, however, is not based only on material things. It also relies on values. Thus, we need "homo sapiens," as much as we need "homo faber."

Man cannot live at peace with himself while witnessing the misery of the third world children, the increasing problems of the people in the Balkans and the former countries of Communist Europe and, even more, while witnessing the death of thousands of people in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, in Afghanistan, or the Kurdish areas. In these times, the responsibilities of all major nations and people around the world increase, along with the responsibilities of the citizens who are prospering. Moreover, the responsibilities of the Church take new dimensions, and the responsibilities of the intellectuals and of each one of us increase. They increase toward ourselves, toward our children, our

neighbors, and the future generations.

It is precisely here that Hellenism and the great Greek thinkers, who laid the foundations of our Western Civilization, played an important role. It was through their writings that they left their indelible mark on human civilization during its greatest moments, in its artistic flights, in its philosophical quests, in its theatrical inventions, in the achievements of scientific thought, in the fostering of values, in the awareness of the thinking citizen regarding his responsibilities, in the fruits of freedom, democracy, and peace. This is the area where Hellenism can again play an important role.

Moreover, in combination with the principles of Christianity and of Orthodoxy, Hellenism can become a new source of inquiry for contemporary man for the real values of life, for the deeper meaning of human existence, and a search for his chief identity, i.e., humanity and humanism. It may also activate or redefine values that have been forgotten, weakened, turned into slogans or even commercialized, only to lose their own value in the end. Humanism must be the main characteristic for this new universal community of nations.

We can and must discover anew the diachronic and timeless values that Homer, Aischylos, Sophokles, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Thukydides, Plotinos, and so many other thinkers have taught us through their unsurpassed and always timely texts that transformed forever world thought, and then adjust these values to contemporary reality. Just as man changes constantly while remaining the same, so also the universal values which first found expression in a most stirring way in the classical texts, retain their strength throughout time. The redefinition of their content and function need adjustment. Nevertheless, the texts of these great thinkers have exactly this characteristic: they constantly converse with every reader across time; they communicate to the readers the perennial problems. It is their ability to maintain a timeless communication with the men of each era that makes these texts classic and universal. Equally classic and universal, though invested with a different power, authority, and aim, is the unique text of all times, the God-inspired text of the New Testament, as well as more recently the important and inspired texts of the great Fathers of the Church.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this hospitable land, the greatest country of the world today, in these United States of America, I feel that I am in a spiritually familiar space. I also feel that certain basic principles of democracy and government, the respect of the State for its citizens, and of the citizens for the State, the freedom of thought, the responsibility of the citizen, the respect for political and human rights, the exercise of citizen's rights,

the participation of the citizen in matters of public interest, the respect for law and tradition, the existence of rules and regulations in public life, the democratic clarity, in other words, all the principles and foundations of Athenian democracy have found expression in this country.

According to Isokrates: "We may find no other form of government more popular or advantageous to the State than democracy." Even the two strongest characteristics of American government, that is, the emphasis on the purist of economic vigor, and the emphasis on action and practical application, are based on the political maxims of Athenian democracy which we find in Aristotle's *Politics*.

Is it a happy coincidence for the course of world affairs that the United States, the power that confronted the storm of totalitarian ideology of the former Eastern Block, and made an enormous universal contribution, by becoming the "opposing force" to a sociopolitical model whose outcome in the international community is unknown, is inspired by the principles of democracy, freedom, human rights, and peace. These principles sprang from the influence that the Greek spirit and culture and, above all, the political discourse and Greek thought in general had on Europe.

This political thought is expressed in Plato's words: "It is just for all to have equal rights, and not some to have more than others" (*Gorgias* 489A).

It is also expressed in the political writings of Aristotle: "It is a principle of democracy that no office is for life," and "Equality means that the rich have no more rights to seek office than the poor. . . . Only this way does the government guarantee equality and freedom" (*Politics* 6, 1, 1, 317 A 40).

Such principles inspire and permeate the United States which guarantees the preservation of peace and the protection of human rights around the world. This deeply democratic country remains the leading world power that can play a decisive role in the preservation of world peace. This makes all people cast their glance at American policy in the face of the great issues that endanger peace. The great honor that destiny had in store for the United States by giving it an important role in world affairs, also implies a great responsibility for the appropriate handling of issues of such paramount importance.

Greece has reasons to value deeply the stand of the United States during crucial times, regardless of some bitter moments during the long common course of the two countries.

The cooperation and friendship between Greece and the United States are old, with common struggles, and with the possibility and potential of yet greater improvement, since the roots that connect the great country of the United States and the small country of Greece are

deep and essential on an intellectual, cultural, and political level.

Allow me to remark at this point that Greece does not seek special treatment on national issues. What we demand is that our friends in particular respect the "sanctity" and the rights of the land that gave birth to civilization and became the beacon for the western world. I am referring to the historical rights of Cyprus and Macedonia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece may be a small country, but Hellenism was and is great, very great indeed. As an idea, as a value system, as an achievement of humankind, it greatly transcends the geographical boundaries of Greece. I would like to remind you that the Ancients regarded as a Greek everyone who shared in Greek culture regardless of origin. This is precisely what I want to remind you of at this moment and on the occasion of this celebration.

Modern Greece, as a living legacy of the great cultural tradition that starts from the language and reaches the innermost being and thought of humanity, has acquired her own uniqueness through Hellenism, a phenomenon that transcends time and space, as well as through her contemporary presence, and has her own contribution to make. Greece, "this Land, this small land, the great" to quote Elytis, is the voice of the spiritual consciousness of Western civilization, a voice which should never cease reminding people of the need to respect the human being and to honor the values that distinguish a human being as a person and as an essence. The teaching and the promotion of the Greek texts, the intellectual products of three millennia, as sources of inquiry into the deeper essence and true human values, should be a concern of every Greek, of every Hellenist, and of every center of Hellenism such as Hellenic College. They constitute an unprecedented heritage. Without sounding chauvinistic, Greek letters belong not only to Greeks but to all people. They are universal.

Besides, as prophetically stated by Isokrates, the great teacher of antiquity, Greek letters contributed so that "the name of the Greeks does not simply denote heritage, but also the intellect, and not only the citizens of Greek descent deserve to be called Greeks but also those who partake of the Greek *paideia*."

The best argument as to why we should preserve and study the intellectual production of Hellenism, the Greek texts, can be found in the largest computerized collection of Greek texts from Homer to the Byzantine period. This program, known by the name *Ibykus*, was created at the University of California at Irvine, and, to date, includes approximately 57,000,000 word entries that comprise the "Thesaurus of Greek Language."

I will conclude this address with an excerpt from the rationale that

led to the undertaking of this amazing work.

The Thesaurus of the Greek Language represents the effort of twentieth-century man to collect, preserve, and protect the material that constitutes the foundation of western civilization. Ancient Greece is the cradle of western civilization. Contemporary literature, science, technology, philosophy, art as well as many contemporary institutions have their roots in it. In order to face successfully the issues and problems of the twentieth-century contemporary man should rely on the intellectual, practical, and moral heritage that emanates from ancient Greece.

Your Eminence, Ladies, and Gentlemen,
I have nothing to add to the above.

I would only like to wish from my heart to all the graduates every success in their difficult mission.

To the Omogeneia, I wish continuous prosperity and success in the hospitable land of the United States of America.

To Hellenic College, I wish that it evolves as we envision it, into a great center of Hellenism and Orthodoxy in America.

To the Faculty, I wish success in their new objectives.

To you, Your Eminence, who are a rare example of a religious leader, I hope God gives you the strength to continue your great contribution to Hellenism, Orthodoxy, and the Omogeneia.