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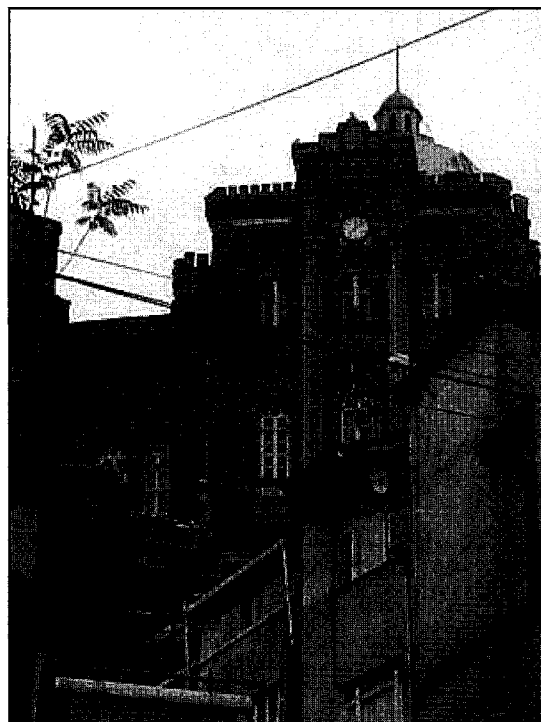
EUROPE/RUSSIA

Whitney Mason is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Constantinople's Last Stand

By Whitney Mason

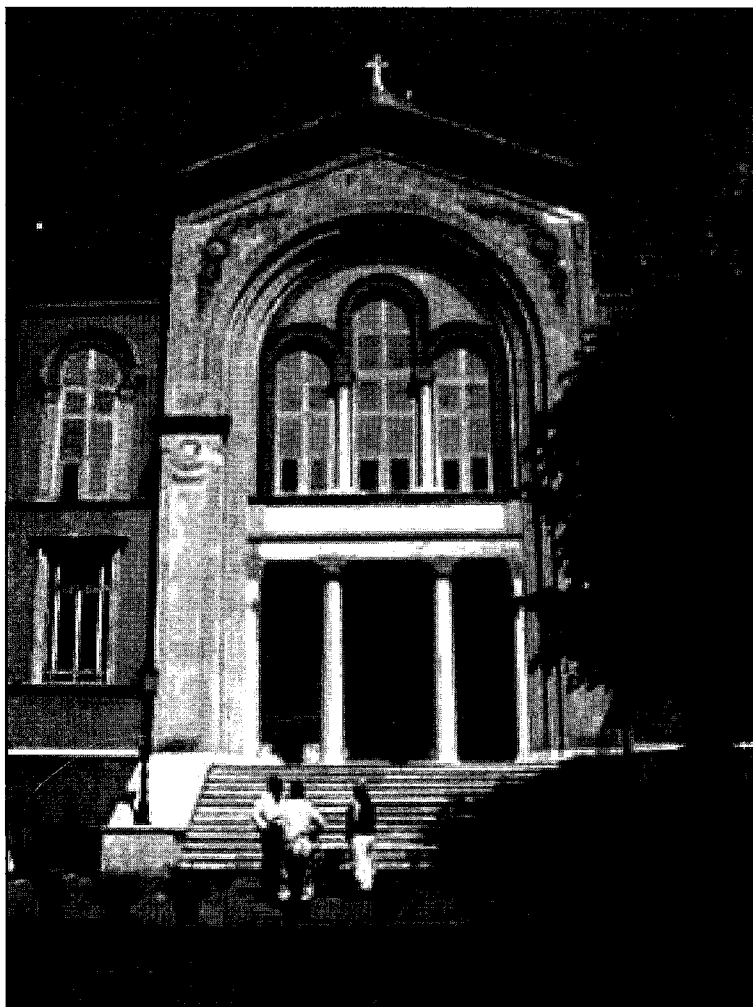
ISTANBUL—The second day of the school year in Istanbul was a good one to be inside. The air was cool without being fresh and the leaden skies threatened rain. And surely no school, I thought, could look more impressive than the one where I had an appointment with the headmaster that morning. The Special "Rum" (the Turkish word for a Greek of Turkish citizenship, literally meaning "Roman") High School was a palatial edifice of red brick drawn up steeply against the hills of Istanbul's Fener district overlooking the Golden Horn. The front gate was painted fire engine red. Inside, the pastels on the molded ceiling and pillars looked as fresh as the cheeks of a turn-of-the-century Levantine bride. The foyer had the proportions of a fancy hotel lobby. In an office big and elegant enough for a government minister, the bright-eyed headmaster looked smart in a sport coat and tie as he chatted with equally bright-eyed teachers. At around 11 I heard a little commotion and poked my head into the main hall. A half-dozen boys and girls in uniforms were talking quietly. There was no sound of excited young voices, no tardy boys tearing around corners. All the students were at their appointed places — all 62 of them.



The Special Rum High School, just up the hill from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, rises grandly above the concrete blocks of Istanbul's Fener district, which has become a slum inhabited exclusively by poor Muslim immigrants from the countryside.

The Great School, of which the current state-governed institution is a direct continuation, was probably founded in the mid-16th Century — some say even as early as 1456. For centuries it was the training ground for the sons of the wealthy and powerful Phanariot Greeks. Originally merchants and ship owners, these families dominated the international trade that made Istanbul one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world until the First World War. The Phanariots also supplied the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia, senior officials at the Ottoman court and the Ecumenical Patriarch, who was entrusted with both the spiritual and worldly guidance of the Ottoman Empire's Orthodox Christian subjects. Even amid the slow collapse of the empire from economic torpor and secessionist violence in the Balkans, the Phanariots were still wealthy enough to fund construction of the current building in 1881. In the 1930s some 400 Greek boys still studied there.

In 1987 the boys' school merged with its equally diminished sister school. The

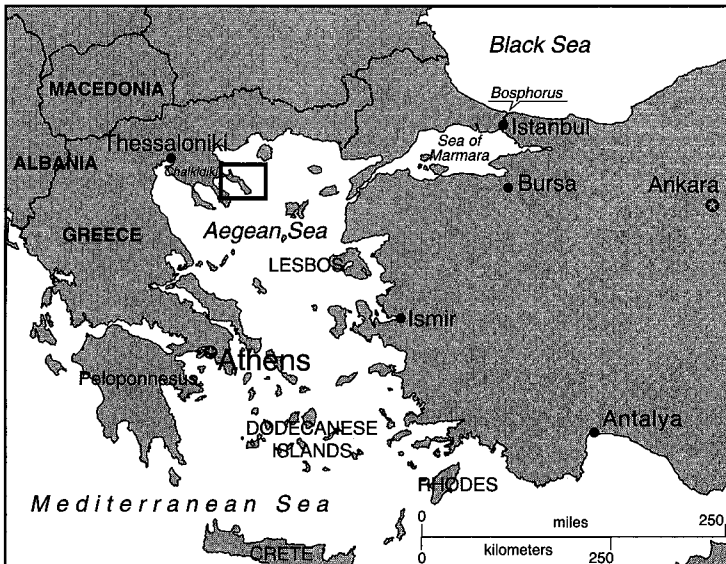
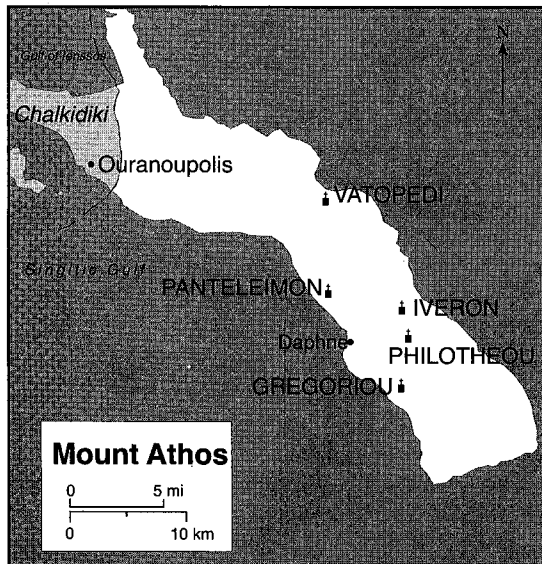


Immaculately maintained by the Patriarchate, since 1971 the school has been shut by order of the Turkish government.

current institution, where children rattle around this relic of a disappeared world, is a sad monument to the pride and stubbornness of both the Greeks and the Turks. Some Greeks have told me that when the school was private

and students paid tuition, it used to be the best in the city, but that under state control it's become mediocre. Yet for unknown reasons it has what surely must be one of the best teacher-student ratios in the world, with 15 teachers for its 62 pupils. Many of the teachers are former graduates. A young teacher of Greek literature who showed me around had graduated in the mid-'80s. The current headmaster had been his biology teacher. Yet as if to kill the school with kindness, the state mandates that students recognize all Turkish holidays and all Greek ones. In one semester this adds up to over 30 days off.

Today the school looks like a citadel whose outer perimeter has already been overrun by the enemy while the defenders have retreated to the innermost keep. The magnificent foyer on the ground floor is dominated by a shrine to Kemal Ataturk, with pictures, quotations and a table covered in books by and about the man who drove the Greeks into the sea and modeled the Turkish Republic on the ethnically homogenous nation states of western Europe. Against another wall is a collection of creations from the school's home-economics class, including a plate painted with a child's vision of a city in paradise — labeled "Athens" in Greek. Upstairs, devoid of students, the floor is covered with a mosaic of two Greek words meaning "Know yourself." On the top floor is an auditorium whose ceiling is graced by darkened oil paintings of saints of the Orthodox Church. Just outside the window, a small cross faces a forest of mosques and minarets bristling like spears. And rising above the top floor is a tower with a telescope and a window in the rounded ceiling through which young Greeks could gaze toward the heavens, where, their leaders told them, lay their reward for pre-





Inside the entrance of the Patriarch's House, a mural depicts Mehmet the Conqueror installing Gennadios as Patriarch and giving him authority over all the empire's Christian subjects.

serving the True Faith amid the indignities of the Turkish Yoke.

Today, the two-to-three thousand Greeks of Istanbul, most of them in their dotage, are headed quickly toward one of two almost equally hard to imagine futures. One possibility is that somehow, despite its terminal appearance, the community will perdure. If there is any chance of this happening, it will require the Turkish government to relax its death grip on the heart and head of the Greek community in Istanbul — and the senior prelate in the Orthodox world — the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

But perhaps because for centuries now Turks have felt themselves under siege by hostile foreign powers, Ankara doesn't seem to recognize that the Patriarchate

could be an invaluable ally in the battle against religious nationalism of the sort that has ravaged the Balkans for the past ten years and as a bridge to Greece and the wider world of Orthodox Christianity. And so at this point the scenario that looks far more likely is that in the next few years, after well over two millennia of unbroken residence along the shores of the Bosphorous, the Greeks will finally disappear from the city they made great. The Turkish nationalists will then have realized their dream of turning this storied conurbation, where for centuries travelers marveled at the kaleidoscope of costumes and languages, into a docile and drab monoculture — even as the old nation states of western Europe cultivate and celebrate their own cultural diversity.

The march toward this bleak end began with the Ottoman conquest of the city on May 29, 1453, but it has been far from slow and steady. Though the streets in those first days ran with blood and the conquering Turks defiled Greek daughters and sons alike, Sultan Mehmet II soon restored the office of Patriarch and gave to its new occupant — a priest named Gennadius who had led opposition against compromise with the Vatican — authority over all his Orthodox subjects. Under the Ottomans, the Greeks of Istanbul not only survived but prospered. Their destruction, the destruction of the human legacy of the eastern Roman Empire and of Istanbul as a haven for people of diverse creeds and tongues, belongs almost entirely to the bloody twentieth century.

Three watershed events drove huge numbers of Greeks to abandon their beloved city. The first of these began in 1919 when Turkey

lay prostrate following defeat in the First World War, and Greece, with the encouragement of the Hellenophile British Prime Minister Lloyd George, invaded Anatolia. In 1922 Turkish armies under the command of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk routed the Greeks, an event known to the Greeks simply as the "Katastroph."¹ The triumphant Turks burned much of the largely Greek city of Smyrna, now renamed Izmir, and unnumbered Greeks died trying to escape the Turks' wrath.

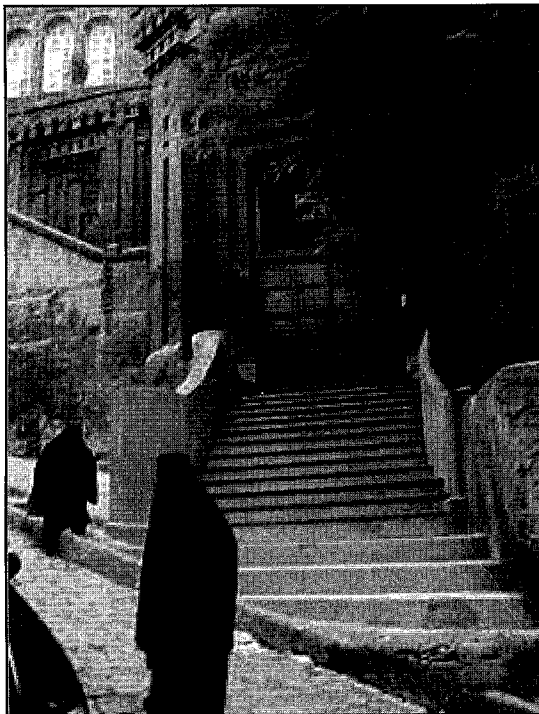
The Treaty of Lausanne, negotiated following this Turkish victory, included an unprecedented, epoch-marking provision: an exchange between Greece and Turkey of all Muslim and Orthodox nationals except the Greeks of Istanbul and Muslims of eastern Thrace. About one million Greeks were expelled from Anatolia and 400,000

¹ Greek lamentation over this devastating defeat seldom acknowledges that it never would have happened if the Greeks themselves hadn't attempted to conquer the Turks. Or, as a U.S. Marine Corps gunnery sergeant rather bluntly wrote in the visitors' book at the peace memorial in Hiroshima: "Don't start a war if you can't take a joke."

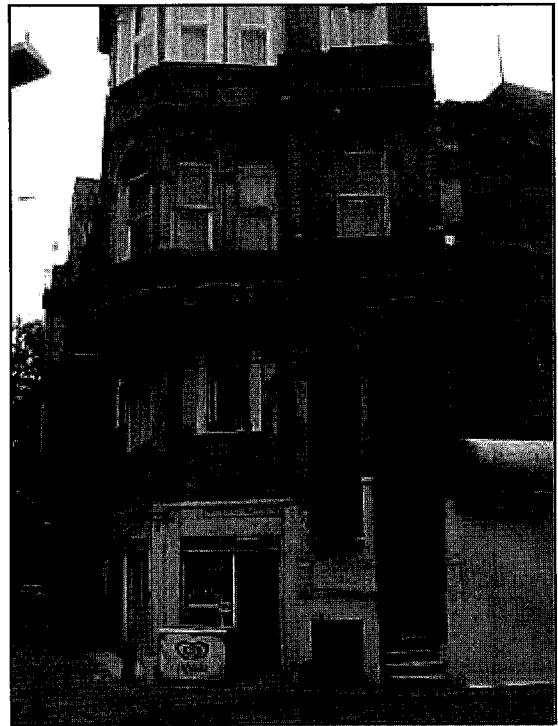
Muslims from Thrace. Though not required to leave by the treaty, immediately after it was signed some 90,000 Greeks, out of a population of 200,000, left Istanbul. This massive ethnic-cleansing operation, reluctantly endorsed by the international community, was designed to remove a fifth column the Turkish nationalists reasonably blamed for bringing down the Ottoman empire. The Greek invasion was itself endorsed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the time as well as a Greek population drunk on dreams of restoring Byzantine greatness.

However understandable in political terms, whether the expulsion served the interests of most Turks is dubious. Kemal Ataturk wanted to turn Turkey into a European country: his first step was to throw out most of the European population. The Greeks were, moreover, even more important than their sheer numbers would suggest. It is a striking fact that in their long history as an important power, the Turks have never been *creators* either of new art, scientific or philosophical breakthroughs or even manufacturers of consumer goods. The Turks were instead peasant farmers and soldiers, replacing the Romans as custodians of the physical infrastructure and social discipline of the empire, while the Greeks played the role of, well, Greeks — supplying, along with the Armenians and Jews and assorted Europeans, the entire class of merchants, manufacturers and professionals.

Besides leaving Turkey with a tiny number of people trained in critical occupations, the forcible deportation to strange lands of the Anatolian Greeks and Thracian Muslims caused enormous suffering. Turkey was assigned most of the blame — even though, according to



Conservative Muslim women in full length charshafs contrast sharply with the Greek school's exuberant red gate.



This dilapidated Greek mansion in Fener is reminiscent of Doctor Zhivago.

Arnold Toynbee, it was the Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos who first conceived the idea of exchanging the Christian population of Anatolia for the Muslims of western Thrace.

Whoever may claim paternity, there is no doubt that Turkish nationalists relished the Greek exodus and looked forward happily to the day when their coreligionists in Istanbul could be persuaded to follow suit. The Turkish general in charge of Istanbul in 1922, Refet Pasha, had said: "The Greeks, if they were not actually expelled, would be well advised to leave, as in future in a new Turkey they would be unable to make a living here."

The state took a brutal step toward realizing this prophecy in 1941. A neutral in World War II, Turkey nevertheless joined in the Axis spirit of persecuting minorities by imposing the ruinous *varlik vergisi*, a capital tax on the property of Armenians (232%), Jews (184%) and Greeks (159%). Besides giving the state a pretext for expropriating most of the country's profitable businesses and redistributing them to Muslims — minus the personnel who had made them successful — the tax led to thousands of bankrupted Christians and Jews being imprisoned.

Despite this persecution, in 1950 Istanbul still contained over 100,000 Greeks. Then, on September 5, 1955, following reports of attacks by Greek nationalists on Turks in Cyprus, Turkish students and laborers went on a well-organized rampage through Greek neighborhoods, smashing and looting businesses and houses and destroying most of the city's 80 or so Greek Orthodox churches.



The abbot of the monastery of Iveron has a soft spot for "holy fools" drunk on the love of God.

Ian Fleming, in town to cover a conference, reported that "hatred ran through the streets like lava."² Several features of the violence revealed the hand of the state. Only one Greek was killed. The Patriarchate, the best-known Greek institution in the city, was untouched. Though government ministers would usually have been in the city at this time of year, none was in Istanbul during the riots. At first the government tried to blame the riots on "communists," but soon acknowledged that they had been organized by the government of President Adnan Menderes who was hanged in 1960, partly for his role in orchestrating the pogrom.

My contact at the Patriarchate had warned me that the Greek community in Istanbul is very shy. "They've all gone through the ugly period from the fifties to the seventies when after talking with a reporter the police would drop by for a chat," he said. But at the age of 80, with his health failing and virtually all his friends gone, Dr. Yorgo Adosoglu may feel he has nothing left to lose. I met Dr. Adosoglu, a medical doctor and publisher of Istanbul's only surviving Greek newspaper, *Evening*, in the overheated and sour-smelling apartment he shares with his older sister in the heart of the European quarter of Beyoglu. Dr. Adosoglu's father was an engineer and sculptor whose specialty was mermaids. Unable to pay the capital tax in 1941, he was interred for a year in a camp near the Georgian border. Dr. Adosoglu was in Phanar during the riots and remembers glass, clothes and furniture all over the streets of what until then had still

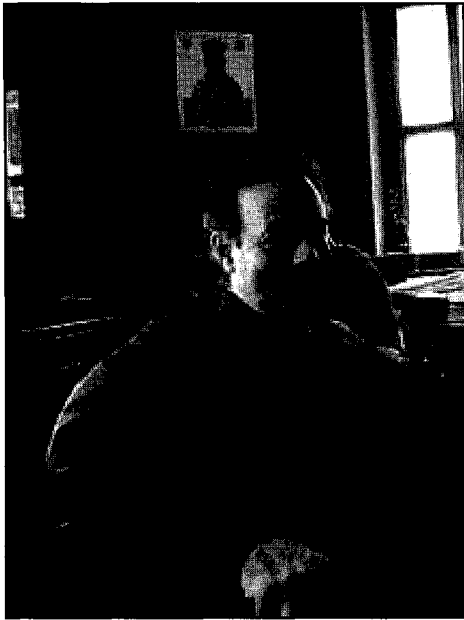
been one of Istanbul's most fashionable quarters. After the riots, most Greeks who could, left quickly. Dr. Adosoglu was at a loss to explain why he and his sister were among the few Greeks who'd chosen to stay. Said he: "We were born here. We grew up here. We love Istanbul."

It's hard to understand why. The old neighborhood of Phanar, which the Turks call Fener ("Lighthouse"), has been cleansed of Greeks and turned into a slum. Traditional Muslim women in headscarves or even black sheets covering their entire body now stare suspiciously at strangers as they walk Fener's streets among the wrecks of once elegant homes. The place reminds me of the scene in *Doctor Zhivago*, when Omar Sharif returns to his Moscow mansion to find that it's been taken over by peasants. Like the Soviets, the poor Turks who moved into the quarters abandoned by Greek Istanbul lacked the sophistication to maintain what they had won.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate

The one institution that continues to make Fener important not only for Greeks but for all Orthodox Christians is the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Orthodox world's closest equivalent to the Vatican. Physically, it is a very modest second-best to the Holy See. The tightly packed walled compound of ten buildings sits on a charming stretch of cobbled street just half a block back from the busy road running along the Golden Horn, which on

² *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire* by Philip Mansel, page 425.



Father
Tarasios, the
grand
archdeacon
and the right
hand man of
His All
Holiness the
Ecumenical
Patriarch
Bartholomew,
began life as
George Anton
in St. Louis.

warm days reeks of sewage. Middle-aged men, who are not overly rigorous about checking guests, man the guard box next to the stone steps leading to a gate in the brick wall. Past a metal detector that doesn't seem to work is the unremarkable 18th-Century Church of St. George. To the right is the Patriarch's residence and main office building, an immaculate new Ottoman-style building of maple-colored wood that was opened in 1989. [The previous headquarters building had burned down in 1941 and for decades the government wouldn't give the Patriarchate permission to rebuild.] The foyer is decorated with a mural improbably depicting Mehmet the Conqueror and Gennadius, the first Patriarch after the Conquest, standing together in an attitude of equals and allies.

I have paid many visits to the Patriarchate to meet with a Greek American now named Father Tarasios. For ten years, Father Tarasios — raised in St. Louis, Mo., as George Anton — has served as Grand Archdeacon, the Patriarch's right-hand man. His boss and bishop, His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, is the 270th occupant of the throne of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the erstwhile Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, whom the Turkish government insists on calling merely the "Patriarch of Fener," is the most senior of all the Orthodox patriarchs. But among the Orthodox he is *primus inter pares*, first among equals: his seniority, unlike the unchallengeable authority of the Pope in the Catholic Church, is honorary. "The authority of the Patriarchate has been questioned because under the Ottomans it had no power," explains Tarasios. "The Moscow Patriarchate and others want to retain the prerogatives they've enjoyed for the past five hundred years, whereas the Ecumenical Patriarch argues that he simply wants to return to the state of relations before the Ottoman conquest." But the individual patriarchs of the other sees — the ancient ones of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem and the "new" ones of the Balkans and Russia — guard their ter-

ritory and independence jealously. A few years ago, Patriarch Alexy of Moscow, whose flock is six times the size of Bartholomew's, was angered by Bartholomew's recognition of independence by Orthodox churches in Estonia. In retaliation Alexy pointedly failed to include Bartholomew's name on a list, known as a *dyptychs*, of patriarchs with whom he was in agreement on theological doctrine. (A bigger showdown looms over the Orthodox in the Ukraine, which is courting Bartholomew's support for *autocephaly*.)

The flock under the Ecumenical Patriarch's direct jurisdiction has been shrinking for centuries. After the Conquest, the greatest blow to his power came in 1833 with a declaration of *autocephaly*, the canonical term for independence, by the bishop of the newly independent Greece. The Ecumenical Patriarch withheld recognition of the independent Greek church until 1852. Today Patriarch Bartholomew presides over a motley congregation of about six million souls including all Orthodox of the diaspora, three million of whom live in North America; the Orthodox Church in Finland; those in Istanbul, Crete and the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean; and what is variously considered the spiritual heart of Orthodoxy or a citadel of dogmatism, the "Monks' Republic" of Mount Athos in Greece.

This geographical diffusion has a positive side that gives the Ecumenical Patriarch the potential to be an enormous force for good. "Ecumenical" means *universal*. Uniquely among Orthodox patriarchs, the Ecumenical Patriarch is governed not by the interests of a single national community, but by the universal aspirations of a Church that the Orthodox regard as the custodian of the one true faith not just for Greeks or for Russians but for all mankind. This perspective predisposes the occupant of the Patriarchal Throne in Istanbul to be an enemy of that heresy that continues to ravage the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East: *phyletism* or religious nationalism. The Ecumenical Patriarch first condemned phyletism as a heresy in his Encyclical of 1872 when it was beginning its terrible career in the Balkans.

Phyletism has emerged as the great curse of Orthodoxy. The explanation isn't that complicated. While the Vatican conducted the liturgy in Latin, Orthodox Christians, from the days when the Byzantine monks Cyril and Methodius began proselytizing among the Slavs, celebrated the liturgy in something close to their own language. In the first centuries of Christianity all bishops were considered equals, and under the peaceful conditions of the Byzantine Empire there was no impetus to change this by concentrating authority, as there was in the west under the pressure of the barbarian invasions. From the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 320, Christianity was a state religion. The egalitarianism of the episcopate set the stage for various national churches hiving off from the Mother Church in Constantinople. After the Ottoman conquest of all the Orthodox lands save Russia, the churches became their

peoples' main repository of tradition and national consciousness. And for the past thousand years the Orthodox have been fighting a losing battle against Muslims to the south and east and Catholics and their Protestant progeny to the west.

I have witnessed this battle, in different forms, first-hand. My first visit to an Orthodox Church was in 1992 in Siberia along with an American friend and our best Russian friend and co-editor of an English-language newspaper we were editing, Sergei. When we arrived it was snowing lightly and a crowd was trying to press into the rather homely, onion-domed church where Russians newly awakened to their religious heritage were going through the unfamiliar motions of lighting candles and genuflecting before icons. The priests arrived, carrying more icons and censoring the crowd, then disappeared behind the iconostasis. Sergei was as lost as we were. But when we came home and started warming ourselves with vodka, Sergei launched into a tirade against a colleague who had just written a fine article on the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birabidjan in the Russian Far East. With an ugly scowl on his face that we'd never seen before, Sergei said he was sick of reading negative things about Russians. To our dismay, Sergei spat out that our colleague would only write such things because he wasn't really a Russian. He was, according to Sergei, a Catholic. After that Easter service, Sergei always retained a trace of that anger and there was always a barrier between us.

A couple of years later, on the morning of Orthodox Christmas, January 5, in the Bosnian Serb capital of Pale, I waylaid the Bosnian Serbs' president and indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic as he made his way into an Orthodox Church. Karadzic was proud of having led the Serbs in a war against their Muslim neighbors that took some 200,000 lives. As a father and his young son let off celebratory machine gun rounds on a nearby balcony, Karadzic shamelessly sent Christmas greetings to fellow Christians around the world and repeated that all he had done was to defend Europe against hordes of fanatical Islamists. In other Serb-held areas I met Orthodox priests in camouflage fatigues who advocated killing Bosnian Muslims, whom nationalist Serbs called "Turks," as an act of piety, and volunteer Greek snipers who'd come to Bosnia to pay their devotions.

Against this picture of bigotry, Patriarch Bartholomew has been a leading proponent of dialogue with other faiths. He was a founding member of the World Council of Churches. He participates in regular "International Theological Dialogues" with Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and Methodists to which each church sends two representatives. He also meets regularly with representatives of the other monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Islam. For years he has been unsuccessfully trying to persuade other Patriarchs to participate in an Ecumenical Council that could address major doctrinal issues, including those dividing Orthodox from Catholics. Bartholomew's ecumenism is a delicate business.

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Once I said something to Tarasios about the Patriarch's "campaign against religious nationalism." Tarasios quickly emphasized that "campaigning against" was a negative way to describe positive efforts to encourage his fellow Orthodox to be open-minded.

Openness to the views of other Christians has not been a hallmark of the Orthodox. Before the Ottoman conquest, the population and most of the church leaders declared that they'd rather be ruled by the turban of the Turks than the mitre of the Pope. "Today," says Tarasios, "monks on Athos say that if the Anglicans are ordaining women bishops, why bother talking to them? The answer, of course, is that the Patriarch hopes he will have a positive influence on the Anglicans' thinking." Make no mistake: Bartholomew, an expert in canonical law, is no radical reformer; his attitude toward women in the Church and toward ecclesiastical authority would be anathema to most Americans. But to me, as a non-believer in either Christianity or nationalism, the Ecumenical Patriarch's supranationalism is reason enough to wish him well.

In addition to his opposition to religious bigotry, Bartholomew has become a vocal proponent on another subject with which Turkey can use all the help it can get: responsible stewardship of the natural environment. "Basil of Caesaria has lots to say about man and the environment," said Tarasios. "Orthodox have always lived



In the shadow of the school, the grave of an alum and former Ecumenical Patriarch with the Byzantine double eagle.

mostly in agricultural countries. In looking back, we found that we had a lot to offer on the subject." The Patriarchate hosted the first of several ecological symposia bringing together theologians and scientists on the Aegean island of Patmos in 1987. In 1989 Patriarch Demetrios made September 1 each year a "Day for Prayer and Protection of the Natural Environment."

Until recently most Turks regarded the prelate's headquarters as a den of enemy spies. Tarasios says that when he arrived in Istanbul ten years ago articles about the Patriarchate in the Turkish press were always negative, often viciously so. In 1994 terrorists calling themselves the "Fighters of Light" planted a huge bomb by the front gate. After it was defused, police found a note from the militants vowing they'd battle "until this place, which for years has contrived Byzantine intrigues against the Muslim peoples of the East, is exterminated." In 1997 another bomb bounced off the Church of St. George before exploding and injuring a monk so seriously that one of his arms remains paralyzed.

The Patriarchate's progressive activities seem to have improved its image. It has also benefited by improved relations between Greece and Turkey, particularly after each country extended generous aid to the other after both of them were struck by catastrophic earthquakes in the summer of 1999. Visiting Greek dignitaries always call at the Patriarchate, as did President Clinton when he came to Istanbul for the summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe last November. About 30 big businessmen are reliable supporters of the Patriarchate. Rahmi Koc, the richest man in Turkey, has attended an Easter service in the Church of St. George and sat in the front pew, holding a candle.

Despite its cachet among some members of Turkey's elite, state policy toward the Orthodox administration still makes life difficult. According to the terms of the Lausanne Treaty, the Patriarch must be a Turkish citizen who has completed his military service. Bartholomew was elected in 1991 and is now only 60, so he could break the longevity record of 27 years. The staff and supporters of the Patriarchate can only hope that by the time he dies, Turkey would have changed its law on citizenship.

Turkey now has 20 Bishops, all Turkish citizens. Only 12, plus the Patriarch as chairman, are needed for a synod. If the Turkish government changed its law, their episcopate could be drawn from all over its jurisdiction, which includes North America, Australia and Asia. Patriarchs needn't even be priests before election: Saints Photias and Tarasios, the Arch Deacon's namesake, were elected as laymen from deacon to priest to Patriarch in three days.

But despite the Turkish government's heavy hints that it would not be sorry to see the Patriarchate leave forever, Father Tarasios remains optimistic that the institution will endure. His first reason for optimism — which must be as obligatory as American presidential candi-

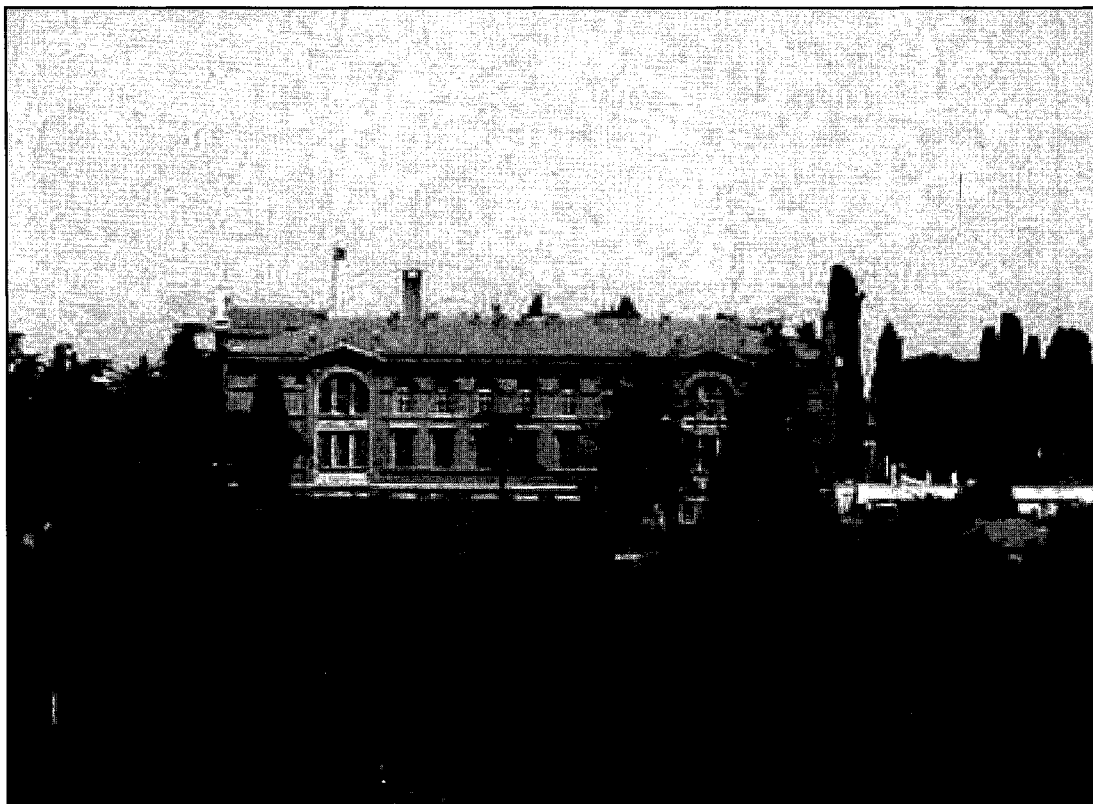
dates maintaining the Bible as their favorite book — is his faith in God. The second reason is that the Patriarchate has weathered much more hostile periods than the present — the 1920s during the expulsion of Greeks from Anatolia, the anti-Greek riots of the 1950s and even the intimidation of the 1980s. Not only the Patriarch but all employees of the Patriarchate must be Turkish citizens, and the Turkish government refuses to facilitate the employment of non-Turks by granting them citizenship. There are ways around this restriction, said Tarasios, when there's good will. In the 1940s, Patriarch Athenagoras flew over on Truman's private plane and the Turkish ambassador gave him his newly issued Turkish passport at the airport in Switzerland, so that by the time he landed in Turkey for the first time he was within the law.

When good will is wanting, the prelates employ more creative survival strategies. Though he has worked in a high-profile position at the Patriarchate for ten years now and is a well-known figure around the city, Tarasios himself, for instance, is a "volunteer." Says Tarasios, alluding to the US military's policy on gays: "It's basically a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy toward the five foreigners working at the Patriarchate."

According to Tarasios, the best thing the Turkish government could do for the Patriarchate would be to allow the reopening of the Orthodox seminary on the island of Heybeliada — Halki in Greek — an hour-and-a-half ferry ride from the Patriarchate in the Sea of Marmara. In 1971 Turkey passed a law prohibiting minorities from operating university-level faculties. In order to use the law to close the seminary, the authorities designated the Theological School at Halki a university. Today it is a ghost school. While the state won't allow the school to operate, it does allow Greeks to keep it in perfect condition.

I visited one sunny afternoon in May, without any prior arrangement. There are no cars on Halki. From the ferry landing you reach the Theological School on top of the pine-covered hill by foot or a horse-drawn carriage called a phaeton. I pushed a buzzer next to the main gate, next to a sign declaring the school to be under the authority of the Turkish Republic. A young man, a Greek from Istanbul, let me in and showed me around along with a couple of Turks.

After the original building was destroyed by earthquake, the current stone edifice was built by a Greek banker at the end of the nineteenth century. Like the Greek high school in Fener, it is both impressive and attractive. And also like the high school, it looks cleaner and better maintained than almost any Turkish building. The tile and linoleum floors are buffed. The spotless toilets smell of disinfectant. In the refectory, the benches are arranged around the table in a neat horseshoe shape. In the cavernous library, not a single leather-bound tome is out of place. The surrounding gardens contain rows of vegetables, planters bursting with flowers, a



The Theological School on Halki, known in Turkish as Heybeliada.

few lambs and a donkey, and the graves of several Greek notables, including a Patriarch. All that's missing is students.

There may be no other facility in the world suspended so evenly between life and death. If the Greeks had been conquered by any people other than the Turks, with their Ottoman heritage of tolerance, the school would almost certainly have been razed. If the Greeks were any people other than the Greeks, they almost certainly would have abandoned the moribund school. And if the Turks were less stubborn, they would by now have succumbed to pressure from President Clinton, among others, to allow the school to reopen.

Most bishops in Europe are graduates of Halki and all recent Patriarchs have been drawn from its alumni. Says Tarasios: "Halki is the bloodline of the Patriarchate. The school would guarantee that the spirit and vision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as protector of the Orthodox would endure. Being ecumenical and being based in a Muslim country gives the Ecumenical Patriarchate a uniquely supranational perspective that Turkey should value and this perspective can only be inculcated in its own seminary. Without this school, the vision of the Patriarchate can't continue. Yet this wider vision is essential to the universal mission of Orthodoxy."

As if his travails in Turkey weren't enough, Patriarch Bartholomew is facing simmering rebellions among the two most influential parts of his flock:

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North Americans who say he is too conservative, and monks on Mount Athos who say he's too worldly.

Recalcitrant Americans

In 1994 Bartholomew caught wind of a move in the American Orthodox Church to discuss autonomy. The Patriarch responded by retiring the legendary Archbishop Iakovos, who had been head of the Orthodox Church in America for 37 years. Said Tarasios. "He knew the power brokers on Capitol Hill. He marched with [Martin Luther] King." But Bartholomew believed he had colluded with Greek ideas intent on pushing for independence for the American church.

In his place Bartholomew appointed a bishop named Spyridon, the first American-born bishop ever to hold the post. In making the appointment Bartholomew was clear about his intentions: "You bear many qualifications, [but] the crowning qualification... is your unlimited fidelity and devotion to this venerable Ecumenical Throne... It was to this last virtue of yours over all others that the Mother Church looked when reaching her decision. For even if one of her hierarchs has every talent, every qualification, and all other virtues, but does not have unlimited devotion and blind loyalty and lifelong gratitude, he is nothing, nothing is gained, he is nothing but a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal."

Unfortunately, loyalty seems to have been Spyridon's only strong suit. During his three-year tenure, his authori-

tarian style and financial scandals angered and alienated Greek Americans and caused an unprecedented crisis in the American church.

Tarasios told me that the Patriarch had had high hopes that Spyridon's American roots would make him a natural for the job. "But after high school Spyridon had gone to Europe and by the time Bartholomew appointed him, he'd come to look down on Americans as inferior. He also had an autocratic style, which went out with hoop skirts. Nowadays you have to be a pastor, a shepherd." Even his English was stuck in a time warp. "He used to say things were 'groovy' and he called his enemies 'goons'." In short, said Tarasios, "he bombed."

Hostility toward Spyridon galvanized a group of articulate and well-heeled Greek Americans who formed a group called the Orthodox Christian Laity to push for the archbishop's removal. Bartholomew removed Spyridon in 1999. By then, though, the Americans' critique had become more radical: that the authoritarian, state-oriented ethos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was alien to Americans. The president of the Orthodox Christian Laity wrote: "Developing the church within the cultural norms of the democratic, pluralistic society in which we live respects fair play, parliamentary procedure, due process, the separation of church and state. It is within this dynamic that Orthodox Christianity in America has developed and flourished."

Father Tarasios gave me the Patriarchate's argument against it. [I'm relating his remarks in detail because, given his evident charm and capability, Tarasios seems to stand a very good chance of one day becoming the Archbishop of North America. As he told me with ill-concealed delight, grand archdeacons, the Patriarch's right-hand men, skip over parish priesthood straight to the episcopate.] Says Tarasios: "The Church in the US is too young and too divided to be autocephalous. Their connection with the Ecumenical Patriarchate gives the Orthodox Church in America authenticity, history and tradition."

The Ecumenical Patriarch helps it keep its bearings in the New World. Its connection to Istanbul is an anchor. Without it, it will become assimilated. Some Orthodox in the US, for instance, have talked about wanting to have a bride walk down an aisle in the church to the sound of organ music."

Tarasios argues that an independent American church would also be ravaged by fractious politics. "The Orthodox Church in America is urging people to feel Orthodox over Greek, but other Orthodox communities in the US who are still animated by old fashioned nationalist agendas will profit by this disunity. For now the Greek-American community has to stay strong under the Ecumenical Patriarch, who has no nationalist or political agenda and can share the

benefit of his experience with the Church in America."

Censorious Monks

While the American Orthodox contemplate an unprecedented insurrection, the Patriarch's other most unruly spiritual children, the monks of Mount Athos, are following a long tradition of holding their bishop to the straight Orthodox line. "Monks are always conservative," said Tarasios. "They see themselves as watchdogs. They play a valuable role in anticipating the long-term consequences of leaders' actions that might be rash or reckless."

This doesn't mean, according to Tarasios, that their concerns about Bartholomew are necessarily justified. "Patriarch Bartholomew has always said fanaticism is wrong and pursued dialogue with other Christians. Monks don't like ecumenicism. They say canon law is clear: you don't pray with heretics. In their minds this seems to leave no room for dialogue. If the Patriarch argues that other faiths have things to offer, the monks say he's weak. The monks seem to be afraid that someone along the line — some patriarch — will be duped."

Despite their seclusion, says Tarasios, the monks are not naifs. "Athos has a degree of independence which they see as being greater than it is. But they have to deal with the world and they have proven themselves good politicians — too good."

I had wanted to see Mount Athos, the mysterious, mystical and uncompromisingly conservative heart of Orthodoxy, for years. I set off in late April — Lent for the Orthodox and the week before my wedding to Amanda Wilson — along with a close Greek-American friend, Yianni Doulis, and my cousin Bill Hinkle, a conservative Republican commissioner of a rural county in the Cascade mountains of Washington state who had recently converted to Orthodoxy from Evangelical Protestantism. Tarasios had given me a letter from the Patriarch himself asking in impressive Greek calligraphy for the three of us — two Orthodox and "a friend of the Church" — to be admitted to the Holy Mountain. From the smile on Tarasios's face when he handed it to me, I gathered that the monks' reaction would be an interesting test of how loyal they were feeling toward their bishop.

Bill, Yianni and I landed at Thessaloniki airport fairly late on Sunday night and caught a taxi into town. Finding the air in the car stuffy, I asked the taxi driver, whom I was sitting behind, to roll down my window. He refused. By way of explanation he clapped his hand on the back of his neck. Like many in the region, his notions about health came not from science but from generations of folklore, according to which there is nothing more dangerous than a draft on the back. Though I was familiar with this belief, his blunt refusal came as a bit of a shock. In dozens of cab rides in Turkey in which I'd asked for a window to be rolled down, the driver not to smoke or the radio to be turned

down, no driver had ever even hesitated to oblige.

The driver asked where we were coming from and we said Turkey. "Acch, Turkey very dirty country," was his response. "The Muslims, they are fanatics," he continued without encouragement. I thought about all the Turks who had told me that Greeks were fine people and culturally very close to themselves. The problems between Athens and Ankara, Turks always say, are a game among politicians and no reflection on their respective peoples. After a few more minutes the driver decided to entertain us with a light anecdote about some recent passengers from Israel. It seems that when they reached their hotel and had paid their fare of some thousands of drachmas, the Israelis had waited for the change, which amounted to pennies. "So you see how the Jews are," the driver pronounced triumphantly, looking at us with the leer of a playground bully who's found a new victim.

Walking around Thessaloniki the next day I saw a couple of magazine covers oriented toward readers like our driver. One showed Greek soldiers looking toward Turkey's Aegean coast through a telescopic rifle sight. Another carried a portrait of a older man labeled as "the Turk," his lecherous, decadent-looking, elaborately made-up face a parody of demonization.

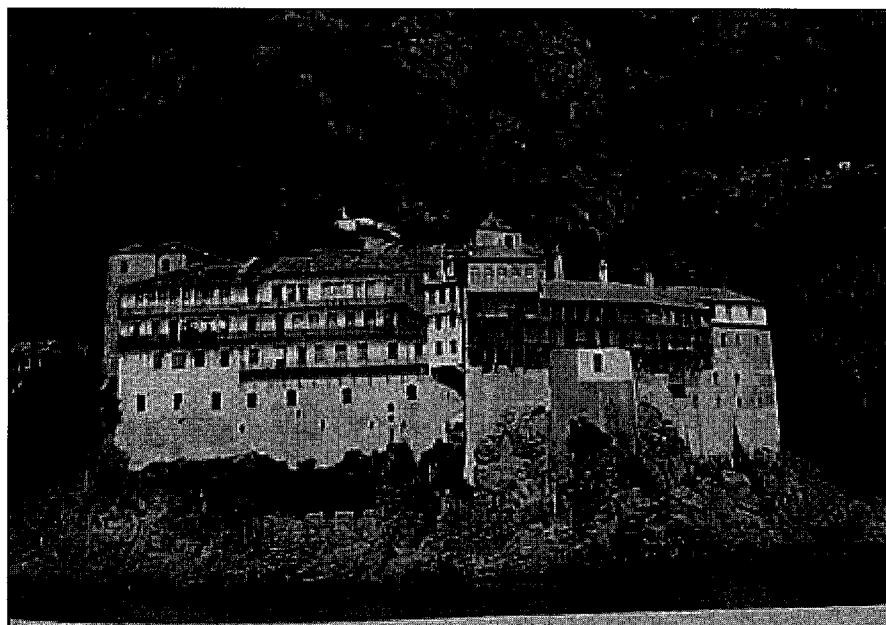
That afternoon we took a three-hour bus ride to the town of Ouranopolis, the jumping off point for the Monks' Republic. Early the next morning we made our way to the pilgrims' office where we hoped the letter from the Patriarch would get us an official permit to enter the strictly regulated peninsula. Because it was Holy Week, the office was overflowing with 850 men looking like Americans heading out for a weekend of drum beating

in the woods, only pushier. Almost all the men were Greek and had made their reservations months ahead through local offices. When Yianni and I finally managed to push our way through to the counter, the reaction to Bartholomew's letter was interesting. Looking flummoxed because we hadn't called ahead, the clerk got up and showed the letter to a colleague. Yianni and I saw their eyebrows raised and heard them utter "Patriarch" in a wondering tone as they regarded the Byzantine *laissez-passer*. Without further hesitation, the official issued us three permits that would allow us to board the ferry that would take us beyond the boundary that women haven't been allowed to cross for 900 years and along the south coast of the peninsula. There were few old-timers on the boat. As Yianni put it, most of the men were middle-aged, "at that stage in life where they're questioning things and they can't buy a Ferrari so they come here." And it was through thousands of pilgrims like these who came to Athos to renew their sense of purpose that the monks would exert their great influence on Greece and, indirectly, Turkey.

There were 20 monasteries on Mount Athos, some of which were especially popular and required reservations. We sailed past the onion domes of the Russian monastery of Panteleimon and, after stopping at the ferry hub of Daphne, caught another boat to a monastery called Gregoriou that had a friendly reputation and a beautiful site on a rock jutting into the sea. Founded only in the 14th century, it ranks seventeenth in the Athonite hierarchy. Some 70 monks call Gregoriou home and, like most monasteries on the mountain since the collapse of the Soviet block and Yugoslavia, it is growing fast.

Our schedule, as at all the monasteries, was dominated by a round of church services, each one following

a centuries-old pattern to commemorate another step toward the apex of the liturgical year, Easter. The most important services were held in the middle of the night. In ancient stone chambers illuminated by hundreds of candles, bearded monks dressed in black robes would come and go according to inscrutable patterns, while their brothers chanted and sometimes performed the mystery of turning bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ behind the richly decorated barrier called the iconostasis. Monks who weren't chanting would generally prop themselves up in one of the wooden stalls along the walls and stare into the middle distance, sometimes swaying back and forth. The faithful laity were most active when they first entered the church, genuflecting,



At St. Gregoriou monastery, one of 20 on Mount Athos, over 70 monks work toward the Orthodox goal of deification in this life while worrying about features of globalized modernity that they read as portents that the Apocalypse may be near.

and venerating the icons of saints by kissing the pictures and lighting candles before them. The faithless — me — just watched and struggled to stay awake.

After a while I noticed that everyone else looked exhausted too. The monks never talked about “going to bed”; they merely “took a little rest.” Sleep deprivation, I realized, is an integral part of the monks’ routine; since their goal is to transcend rational thought and see visions, it made sense. Considering that for Lent they were eating just one small vegetarian meal a day — though washed down with home-made wine — and spending probably 12 hours a day or more chanting by candlelight, the monks were doing everything possible to give themselves a natural high.

At Gregoriou I had interesting conversations with a young monk named Damianos. The son of Greek Cypriots, Damianos had grown up in a rough section of London. For ten years after graduating from high school he’d lived hard and fast. He’d become a monk when experiences of altered states of consciousness convinced him that there was more to reality than what we saw with our sober, worldly eyes.

Damianos believed that even saying something as straightforward as “I believe in the Bible” is a misleading attempt to limit the supralogical reality of the world based on a God beyond human understanding. “The Bible is the word of God, yet it is not,” he said, looking at me rather feverishly. For Damianos and probably most of the other monks, only the *apophatic* approach — in which one underscores God’s illimitability by describing what He is *not* — makes sense.

Damianos was prepared to be assertive about one topic: Turkey. “We Orthodox were enslaved by Turks for five hundred years and stabbed in the back by the Latins,” Damianos said when I asked whether he was optimistic about warming ties between Greece and Turkey. “This history doesn’t bode well for the future. Most monks see Turkey as an American puppet.”

Like every monk we met on Athos, Damianos referred to the 500-year Ottoman period as the “Turkish Yoke.” Use of this term testified to the triumph of myth over history. In fact most construction on Athos seems to date from this period and many priceless decorations had come to the Holy Mountain as gifts from the Ottoman Sultan himself.

What the monks on Athos are most worried about these days is a move to introduce identity cards in Greece that conform to the European Union standard by not referring to the citizen’s religion. In Greece the Orthodox Church has always been a department of state and membership in it a pillar of national identity. The monks, along with the Orthodox Church of Greece, see the introduction of the creedless cards as the first step on a slippery slope leading to separation of Church and State. If they were separated, it would be the first time since the adop-

tion of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 320. But the monks, said Damianos, also had another concern: the fact that all EU cardholders will be assigned a number not as a member of their respective countries but as Europeans. I thought I understood the concern and suggested to Damianos that the Church saw the numeration of people in a huge pool as a landmark on the march toward a crisis of alienation. But that wasn’t quite it. It was like the bar codes on items in grocery stores, said Damianos. “All the bar codes end in ‘666’” said Damianos. “How do you explain that?”

My cousin Bill, with his background in fire-and-brimstone Protestantism, was ready with an answer. “It’s the sign of the beast,” Bill said, referring to the Biblical augurs of the Apocalypse.

“Exactly,” said Damianos.

Despite his rather morbid contemplation of the “End Times,” Damianos was a gentle person. Unlike the Catholics, he said, the Orthodox Church, had never endorsed violence. While this may be true of official Church doctrine, monks from Athos had left the Holy Mountain to fight for Greek independence, and Orthodox prelates had encouraged violent rebellions against the Ottomans and their Muslim descendents in the Balkans ever since.

This encouragement over the centuries has left its mark on the Orthodox faithful. Sergei was a Russian former theology student who had come to Athos with typically Orthodox pragmatism to spend six months mourning the death of his mother. During a break from one midnight service, Sergei recounted his fanciful understanding of how and why a certain Scandinavian adventurer had become the first king of Russia. “There were barbarians from the east who were threatening to conquer the Slavs so Rurik came from Scandinavia to help them,” explained Sergei. When he saw my look of rather pained skepticism he said, “You know, these people from the east, they were dark, bad. Rurik, he came from the west to help.” And then he’d stayed and made himself king. With favors like this, I thought, who needs conquest?

We heard similar echoes of the nationalist edge of Orthodoxy at the Vatopedi, a huge monastery that had been home to some of Orthodoxy’s greatest theologians, where we stayed for our third and final night. Father Matthew, whose rolling gait revealed his Californian roots even after 20 years on the Mountain, gave us a tour including the holy relics that the faithful venerate by kissing, believing that the objects can perform miracles, or at least bring good luck. Vatopedi’s collection was especially rich and included the skull of one of the greatest Orthodox theologians, John Chrysostom. Attached to the side of the skull is a shriveled brown nub that Father Matthew assured us is the saint’s ear — preserved because St. Paul whispered into it. Another of Vatopedi’s treasures was a bit of wood, encased in glass, that was supposed to be a piece of the holy cross. The prized relic had been donated

by Prince Lazarus of Serbia. Parroting the favorite myth of Serb nationalists, Father Matthew told us that Prince Lazarus had "acquiesced to suffer defeat by the Turks rather than betray his faith."

Daniel, a bright, passionate young student from the University of California at Berkeley who had come to Vatopedi to study in preparation for confirmation as an Orthodox, told us that the monks were repeatedly chastising him about America's supposed "anti-Orthodox conspiracy." Said Daniel: "The monks condemn the NATO bombing of Serbia as cruel and immoral and ask why the US didn't bomb Turkey when it invaded Cyprus in 1974."

Amid these psychological wilds, stalked by the specters of mythic nationalism and paranoia, the Patriarchate back in Istanbul came to look like an oasis of moderation. The Patriarch did, moreover, obviously command some degree of respect. When we gave Bartholomew's letter to the young monk who received us at Vatopedi, another Cypriot, he joked: "What are you going to give me next — a letter from Bill Clinton?" [From his friendly expression it was clear that he was *not* implying that the Patriarch and Clinton were co-conspirators.]

But I also saw that the Patriarch himself had to maintain a delicate balancing act.

A couple of years ago he had officiated over the first stages of a Eucharistic service along with the Pope. Though he had stopped short of performing the sacraments over which Orthodox and Catholics have theological disagreements, the monks were scandalized. Damianos told me: "If the Patriarch had gone any further with the Pope, we would have been in schism."

Back in Istanbul, I told Tarasios what the monk had

said. "The monks are letting the world know that there's a system of checks and balances," Tarasios replied serenely.

I also told Tarasios about an explanation one monk had offered for their preoccupation with doctrinal purity. Unlike Catholics and Protestants, who believe in salvation only after death, the Orthodox aspire to "become God" in this world. Those who accomplish this are saints. But of course, the monk explained, the distance between the normal human condition and deification is enormous: if you're on a journey of a thousand miles you want to be very sure of your compass readings before you begin. I found the metaphor interesting, but it didn't work for Tarasios: "To me that means there's only one way to approach God, that those outside Orthodoxy — including those who've never even been exposed to it — are damned," he said. "I can't believe that."

Bordered by Orthodox countries to its north and west, Turkey faces perhaps no greater long-term external threat than phyletism, which often takes the form of hatred of Turks and their historic kin. If an enemy of your enemy is your friend, then Turkey should regard the Ecumenical Patriarch as a good friend indeed. But Turkish policy makers seem not to have recognized the unique value of the gray-bearded, blue-eyed polyglot Istanbulu in Fener. Indeed, even while Turkey supports NATO actions in the Balkans to halt ethnic cleansing, it continues to quietly strangle its age-old rivals, the Greeks. If either enlightened self-interest or international pressure or a sudden burst of magnanimity does not soon prompt Turkey to allow Halki to reopen and the Patriarchate to employ non-Turks up to the office of the Patriarch himself, the slow-motion extinction of the Greeks of Istanbul will soon be complete. That would be as great a tragedy for Turks as for Greeks. □

*"It is extremely daring for someone to talk about deification, without having witnessed it himself. Through the mercy of Almighty God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, we have dared that which is above our power.

We have to do this so as not to hide from our Orthodox Christian brethren the highest and final purpose of our life, the one for which we were created.

We have to do this so as to make clear that the only Orthodox pastoral teaching is that of deification and not of man's moral perfection, without God's Grace, according to Western standards.

We have to do this so as to make us all long for the best things and thereby struggle for the noblest and the only ones capable of totally quenching the soul's thirst for the Absolute, Triune God.

We have to do this so as to be filled to overflowing with gratitude towards our Maker and Creator for His great gift - our deification by Grace.

We have to do this so as to feel the irreplaceable nature of our Holy Church, as the only earthly communion of deification. We have to do this so as to testify to the magnificence and truth of our Orthodox faith, the only faith that teaches and provides deification to its members.

And finally, we have dared to do this so as to console our souls which, no matter how much they have been poisoned and confused by sin, crave after the light of Christ.

Merciful Lord, take pleasure in Thy infinite love, so as to make us worthy to enter the path of deification before we depart from the present ephemeral world. Merciful Lord, in their search for deification guide our Orthodox brethren who do not rejoice because they ignore the magnificence of their vocation, as been called by You to become gods by Grace.

Merciful Lord, guide the steps of the heterodox Christians towards acquaintance with your Truth, so that they are not left out of Your Bridechamber, deprived of the Grace of deification."

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— Fellows and their Activities —

EUROPE/RUSSIA

Gregory Feifer—Russia

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Whitney Mason—Turkey

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the Vladivostok News and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Jean Benoît Nadeau—France

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

SOUTH ASIA

Shelly Renae Browning—Australia

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

THE AMERICAS

Wendy Call—Mexico

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Peter Keller—Chile

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Susan Sterner—Brazil

A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women.

Tyrone Turner—Brazil

A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced photo-essays on youth violence in New Orleans, genocide in Rwanda and mining in Indonesia. As an Institute Fellow he is photographing and writing about Brazilian youth from São Paulo in the industrial South to Recife and Salvador in the Northeast.

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