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# ROAD TO EMMAUS

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# LIFE ON THE GOLDEN HORN

## Memories of Greek Constantinople 1948 to 1963

In 2005, Nicholas Karellos, our *Road to Emmaus* Greek correspondent, arranged a meeting with Kyria Elpida Papadapolous of Nea Smyrni, Athens, whose remarkable stories of life in 20th-century Constantinople (Turkish Istanbul) are a legacy for Orthodox everywhere. We met with Kyria Elpida many times over the following weeks and attended one of her *kerygmas*, an Orthodox neighborhood prayer and lecture gathering, which she has held in the basement-chapel of her home for over 35 years. This interview is dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the destruction of the Greek community of Constantinople, and to all those who suffered through those dark days.

**KYRIA ELPIDA:** I was born on the Greek island of Lesbos in 1929, not far from the Turkish coast. I married my husband, Praxiteles, in 1948, and moved to his home in Constantinople, where I lived until 1963, when we came to Athens.

The Greeks of Asia Minor called themselves “Romios,” because they were the last remnants of the Roman Empire. Most Constantinople Greeks were educated upper-middle class people. There were only a very few rich, and a small number who were rather poor. Greek Constantinopolitans were of a different quality than mainland Greeks, very serious and sincere. They didn’t even have contracts. A verbal agreement had the power of written law, and they trusted one another implicitly. On the mainland, though, we Greeks did not have such a good reputation. Throughout the 20th-century waves of emigration from Constantinople there was a saying that if you managed to save your property from the Turks, you would lose it to the Greeks, who often fooled and cheated the Constantinople Greek immigrants. Many lost everything.

Of course, we were the same blood, the same nation... the difference was that the educated Constantinople Greeks had never faced real poverty, while

*Opposite: Old Greek Quarter, Istanbul. 2005.*

the poorer and more oppressed mainland Greeks – many of whom were under Turkish occupation until 1912 – had had to develop ways to survive, cheating the Turks and stealing from the state. During World War II, first came the Italians, and then the Germans, and from the time they were 8 or 9, Greek children had to invent ways to stay alive – how to steal bread from a truck, and so on. The Constantinople Greeks didn't have to do this.

RTE: What was the relationship of the Greek community in Constantinople to the Turks?

KYRIA ELPIDA: I remember that when I came newly-married to Constantinople, the Turks we knew called me, “our bride.” They would greet me on the street, “Our bride has come.” My husband had a wide circle of noble upper-class Turks as close friends for many years, but after we married they drifted apart when the political climate became increasingly difficult and it was dangerous for them to have Greek friends. Finally, most of the Greeks were either deported or left penniless after the pogrom of 1955.

### The Destruction of Greek Constantinople: 1955

RTE: Most Orthodox have never heard of the 1955 destruction of Greek Constantinople. Will you tell us about it?

KYRIA ELPIDA: The night of destruction in Constantinople was the third major incident after the forced emigration of the Turks in the Exchange of Populations in 1922.<sup>1</sup> The first was in 1932, when a law was passed prohibiting Greek citizens living in Turkey from practicing over thirty trades and professions, including tailoring, carpentry, medicine, law, and real estate. As a dentist, my husband was forced to take Turkish citizenship to continue practicing. I also had Turkish citizenship by marriage. My brother-in-law, however, didn't have Turkish citizenship, and later his property was seized. My husband and his brother jointly owned a small villa; after the seizure, half of the villa belonged to the Turkish state, and half to us.



*Wonder-working Icon of Hodigitria, Defaced in Riots of 1955. Blachernae Monastery.*

The second incident was in 1942, when the Turkish parliament put unbearable property taxes on the

Greek, Armenian and Jewish communities. My husband had opened his dental office only six months before the taxation. He had hardly any patients yet, and he was taxed 7,000 “banknotes,” which was an enormous sum. They had only thirty days to pay. His father paid the tax for him, and only because of this was he able to keep his office open. The taxes were so high that many couldn't pay. Either their property was confiscated, or they were put to work in labor camps deep in Anatolia where middle-class professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and even the ill and elderly were forced to work breaking stones and building roads. Many died of the harsh conditions, which was what the authorities wanted. They wanted to kill them off so that they could take their property. When those who survived had “paid off their debt” and returned to Constantinople, they were helped by their fellow Greeks. The community's economy slowly improved, until, a decade later, we were flourishing again, and Menderes<sup>2</sup>, the Turkish prime minister, realized that you couldn't easily get rid of the Greeks. We'd been reborn from the ashes. This was why he did something more drastic with the 1955 riots.

The pogrom was the third major incident. In 1955, there was political upheaval in Cyprus, which was still under the British. A conference was called in London to which the Greeks and Turks were invited, but no agreement was reached.<sup>3</sup> To intimidate the Greeks, the Turks secretly planned an “action” to force them back to the bargaining table. The British may have even known about the plans because on September 4, when Evangelos Averof, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, visited London for a meeting between the British, the Turks and the Greeks to try to stabilize the unrest, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs said to Averof, in front of Fatin Zorlu, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, “You Greeks aren't behaving, you are to be blamed as well.” “Why, what has happened?” “Haven't you heard? They've just bombed Kemal Ataturk's<sup>4</sup> birthplace in Thessalonica.” The Greek Minister said, “How could I not know if such a thing had happened?” He immediately called Greece, but nothing had happened. The bomb was only placed the *following day*, on September 5th, by a Turkish agent, as was well-documented later, so the British diplomat, or perhaps the Turkish Minister who had told him, had made a mistake and revealed the plans a day early.

The Turks then roused the population against the Constantinople Greek community by saying that not only had we bombed Ataturk's house, but were also planning to massacre the Turks in Cyprus. The rioters, however, were not Constantinople Turks. It is now well-documented that the government



*Kyria Elpida with  
Road to Emmaus  
corespondent,  
Nicholas Karellos.*

paid Turkish laborers from other cities to come in and destroy the Greek community. They were brought in on trains, and it was all orchestrated by the *Demokrat Parti*, the majority nationalist Turkish party of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes.

On September 6-7, 1955, the night of the destruction in Constantinople, we didn't even realize what was happening. We were on the island of Chalki<sup>5</sup> for the summer – one of the Prince's Islands in the Sea of Marmara near Constantinople. In those days we were isolated; only one family in fifty had a telephone, so we had no news. That afternoon, my baby finally fell asleep after a bad ear infection. We were exhausted from having been up with her day and night, and in the early evening, we also fell asleep. This was the night of the riots. The next morning, my husband and father-in-law went down to the port to take the ferry to the city to work. After fifteen minutes they came back, terribly upset, and said, "Down at the port, St. Nicholas Church is in ruins, they have destroyed everything." Of course, we began to ask the neighbors, and found that the other three families who had flats in our house, had locked themselves into the garden shed in the backyard. But because we had gone to sleep early and the lights were out, they thought we had gone or were already in hiding, and we never woke up. We were so exhausted, we never heard the crowd of Turks in the garden, although they threw a huge stone at the window. The stone lodged on the windowsill just a centimeter in front of the glass, where the baby was sleeping. It was a heavy window, and if it had broken, she would have been showered with broken glass. The neighbors were astonished, "You didn't hear the rocks they were throwing? And the mob in the garden?"

I knew then that we had been protected by a kind of spiritual umbrella – we hadn't even felt the fear and horror of that night. We only realized what had happened the following morning. For two days there was no public transport. We stayed in our houses, and only after three or four days did we dare take the boat to the city. It was a terrible sight.

In the Greek neighborhood, everything, everything was destroyed, all the shops and offices pillaged and the merchandise flung into the streets. I remember seeing piles of silks and other expensive fabrics thrown into the street, trampled and ruined. On every street was merchandise piled a meter high. There wasn't a single shop left untouched. Medical offices, schools,



churches, cemeteries, all were destroyed. Even the graves of the Ecumenical Patriarchs at Zoodochos Pigi had been opened and their relics scattered. Seventy-two churches were desecrated, looted, and burned. We couldn't even find canned milk for the baby. The Greeks had no contact with the outside world, and when we turned to the BBC radio station, we heard the British saying, "You Greeks

and Turks, watch out! You behave yourselves!" Our lives had been destroyed, and the British were blaming us.

But we have full records of all this. On the night of the riots, at great risk of his own life, a Greek photo-journalist named Dimitrios Kaloumenos dressed as a veiled Moslem woman and ran about with the Turkish mobs, photographing the catastrophe and the ruined churches.<sup>6</sup>

I must add here that this tragedy was not the fault of our Turkish neighbors. The average Turks were so ignorant of foreign affairs that when a Greek friend of ours, who had a Turkish servant, asked her what she thought about Cyprus, she said, "Cyprus... is that a girl's or a boy's name?" She didn't know that Cyprus was a country. It is clear that the incidents that happened between Greece and Turkey were set up for political reasons, and that the average Turk is not to be blamed for it. Most of them knew nothing, and they are rather peaceful people.<sup>7</sup>

But now I have to finish telling you what happened to us. Before we married, my husband had a well-known Turkish general as a close friend. Although he was a general, even upper-class Turkish civil servants and military people were paid very low wages, so when this general married, he couldn't support his wife in the social circle to which they belonged, so his Greek friends secretly paid many of his bills – one even paid for her hairdresser. If we went somewhere for the weekend together, my husband and the other Greeks would say, "Don't worry. We will pay for the hotel, and your wife won't know." After our marriage the general and my husband drifted apart. They hadn't see each other for many years, but on the night of the 1955 riots, when the Turks destroyed the entire Greek community, the general sent a soldier to secretly write on my husband's office door, "Cyprus is Turkish," so that the crowds of Turks who were looting the businesses and houses bypassed my husband's office. This was an act of gratitude by the general to my husband, but we never saw him again. It was too dangerous for him to know us.



*Desecrated tombs of the Ecumenical Patriarchs of Constantinople, Monastery of Zoodochos Pigis.*

Photos by Dimitrios Kaloumeris, 1985.



*One of 73 vandalized Orthodox churches in Constantinople (Istanbul).*

But everything leads us to God. Neither words nor deeds are lost. When my husband supported his Turkish friend out of solidarity, how could he ever imagine that there would come a day that this man would, in turn, save his property? Of all the offices and shops, my husband's was the only one left untouched, because of what the Turkish general had written on his door.

### Little Anthoula and the Greek Communists of Lesvos

I have a similar story about the Greek communists. During the destruction of Asia Minor in 1920, General Plastiras was leading the Greek troops. He was a very big, tall man, and he was wounded one day on the battlefield. My father was very short, but he saved the general's life by carrying him off the field on his back. In gratitude, the general gave him a medal.

After World War II, my home, the island of Lesvos, was the most communist area of Greece. It was called "The Red Island," and my village, "Little Moscow." To the other villagers, my father's medal was a sign that he was a "fascist," so my family was black-listed by the Greek communists, and in 1944, when the German occupation ended, but before the British came, the communists took hold of the area. Out of revenge and hatred, they had a list of the names of young girls from the "fascist" families who were to be raped. I was fifteen years old, and my name was third down on the list. They even had it arranged, who would rape whom.

A year earlier, a young village girl had come to live with us as a helper because her family was too poor to take care of her. She had a problem with her eyes, and my mother took her to Mitilene, the capital of Lesvos, to have surgery. Because of the four years of German occupation and lack of food, no one was in very good health, and the girl was very weak. The doctor said, "She needs to rest, to gain weight, and then you can bring her back for the operation." So, whenever we had meat (which was only once a week after the war), mother would take the biggest portion, the best part, and give it to little Anthoula. As a girl, I was even a bit jealous – why did my mother love Anthoula more than my father and me? Finally, Anthoula had her surgery and her eyes improved.

Some months later, these plans were laid to rape the girls of the non-communist families, which would have left us all unmarriageable. But Anthoula's brother, who was a leader of the Young Communists, came secretly at the risk of his own life, and warned my father, "Hide Elpida away, because they are going to rape the girls of the village." They hid me in a boat full of cotton, and I was taken to a relative's villa in Mitilene town where I stayed in hiding until the British came.

So, it was because of the love and charity of my mother, the love that she showed to a weak and unimportant girl, that my honor and reputation were saved. Here we had a Turkish Moslem and a communist atheist who were the chief benefactors of our family, which means that nothing falls from



*1955 destruction in the Church of SS Constantine and Helen at Stavrodromion.*



*His Grace Bishop Gerasimos of Pamphilos, abbot of Monastery of Zoodochos Pigis, at Baliki Hospital after mob assault. He died of his wounds two days later. 1955.*

God's hands. It is not people whom we should blame for war and corruption. It is the hidden interests of those in power who are doing these things, then and now.

RTE: What happened to the rest of the girls of the village?

KYRIA ELPIDA: The communists beat many of the villagers, but three days before they were to put their plan for the girls into action, the British arrived and destroyed the communist army on the island. Not that the British saved us and left, they came as conquerors. My brother was drafted, and as a Greek soldier during the British occupation, he was made to fight the communist Greeks, who were his own fellow-countrymen and villagers. They were arrested and executed. He still feels this deeply, that he fought against fellow Greeks, and from that time until now he has never received Holy Communion.

The British, of course, were giving boots, clothing, and military equipment to the Greek army, but during the fighting my brother also saw Greek communists with the same British boots, clothing and equipment, and he concluded that the British were artificially supporting both groups so that they could stand in the middle as the peace-maker. This made him very bitter.

RTE: Unless the communists had stolen the British supplies for their future "revolution", which we know happened quite frequently.

KYRIA ELPIDA: Of course, some supplies could have been stolen, but not on the scale that my brother saw. Certainly, it's a fact that the Allies had handed Bulgaria to the communist Russians and kept Greece for themselves. The Greek civil war, following the German occupation, was the perfect excuse for western troops to come in and control the country; "divide and conquer."

### Marriage, Children, and Spiritual Rebirth

RTE: What else do you remember from your girlhood on Lesbos? How did you meet your husband?

KYRIA ELPIDA: When I was seven years old I had such a strong call from the Lord that I wanted to become a nun, but that didn't happen. I was nineteen when my family married me. My uncle did the matchmaking; he knew my future husband's family from Constantinople, and when Praxiteles escorted his mother to Mitilene to look after some property she owned, he was suggested as my future husband. There was a meeting, he was accepted by my parents, and all the arrangements were made. Only then did I have the right to say, "yes" or "no." In the end, the decision was mine, but the families had already agreed. For him it was love at first sight, but not for me. I liked him as a person, but I didn't really want to be married yet. I wanted to go to Athens to study foreign languages. Also, there was an eighteen-year

difference between us. He was almost twice my age, but he was so young-looking that you couldn't tell.

But, at that time, I would have done anything to get away from Lesvos. After the Germans came the communists, then the British. I was tired and disillusioned and my village was a very small world. I understood that marriage would be a quick escape. Of course, I liked Praxiteles because he was educated, he spoke two or three languages, he had a good sense of humor and a noble character, but I wasn't in love with him. My mother was shocked when I said this and replied, "Don't tell me that you can't love a man like this!" I said, "Well, he's nice, but I don't think that I will ever love him more than my brother Gregory." Mother said, "Your brother is a different thing. You will end up loving your husband more than any other man." And she was right. As St. Paul says, "This is a great mystery..."



*Kyria Elpida and Kyrios Praxiteles on their wedding day.*

We were married in Lesvos, spent twenty days on the island, and then left for Constantinople. The very day that I was married, just after receiving the sacrament, I fell in love with him, inexplicably, and we were in love for 54 years until he passed away. Although he wasn't really religious when we married, he was a person of high morals, and I always felt that the Lord preserved his purity and integrity so that later, when he became interested in spiritual life, he was ready.

So, in 1948, I moved from a tiny island village, with all of those bad memories, into the high Greek social circles of Constantinople. Most of the people we knew were thirty or thirty-five, so I immediately tried to look grown-up and sophisticated. I wanted to live a big city life, and I gradually left that spiritual call I'd felt as a young girl. Of course, we were Orthodox, we kept the outward cultural traditions, but we weren't really devout; I was young and loved Constantinople and our social life. My husband didn't want children, but I insisted, and after some years I gave birth to my daughter, Xanthippi. After that I couldn't conceive again.

My spiritual life really began years later. I was already 32 when, on Proti,<sup>8</sup> one of the Prince's Islands near Constantinople, I met a clairvoyant nun named Christodouli. As soon as she saw me, she began telling me about my

whole life, as if she'd lived it with me. It shook me, and then I remembered my first love for God. I said to myself, "Elpida, what are you doing? This woman knows everything about you. There is a God." During Great Lent in my family we'd only fasted during Holy Week, but she so influenced me that, that year, for the first time in my life, I fasted for all of Great Lent.

Not long after meeting her, we heard that the Ecumenical Patriarch had brought a holy monk, Fr. Amphilochios Makris,<sup>9</sup> from the island of Patmos to confess the Greeks in Constantinople. So, I thought, "Why don't I take my mother-in-law to him for confession?" Although she was Orthodox she had never confessed before. So, we went. Fr. Amphilochios had a long white beard and my first impression of him was that he was like the Prophet Abraham. When Fr. Amphilochios saw me he said, "It's a very good thing you've done, bringing your mother-in-law for confession, but don't you have anything to confess?" I said, "Father, bless me, but I don't know what is a sin and what is not." He asked, "How many children do you have?" "I have one child." "Why do you only have one child?" "Because my husband doesn't want to have children. It's a great responsibility to raise children, and he doesn't feel he is up to it. We have a daughter only because I told him I would divorce him if we didn't have a child."



*Fr. Amphilochios Makris*

I was only 32 then, but in those times, a woman was considered to be very mature at 32. I said to him, "How can I have another child at this age? How do we know that I, and especially my husband, will live to raise this child?" Fr. Amphilochios replied, "How does he know that God will not grant him many years? And this was true, my husband only died in 2003, when he was 91.

Fr. Amphilochios told me, "You are not to have Holy Communion until you have a second child, but the next time I come, I will find you with a grace-filled boy, and then you will be able to receive." He didn't realize this was a prophecy, it just came out of him that I would have a son and that my husband would live for a very long time. So, he was my first confessor in Constantinople. Later, I had Elder Porphyrios in Athens.

When we returned home, my husband was waiting for us, and said, "Well, well, what do I see? Did our sinful women come back from confession? Did you have much to confess?" I said, "Yes, we did, but I'm not allowed to



receive Holy Communion.” “Why? You haven’t eaten anything all Lent and now he says that you can’t have Communion?!” “He says that I am not to receive until I have a second child.” My husband became furious, “Oh those priests! They just want more children born who will have to be baptized and married, so that they will get more money!” I said, “No, this priest is like Abraham, he’s not like that...”

My husband was furious. “The first time you blackmailed me that if we didn’t have a child, you’d go back to your father and mother. This time I’m telling you – go to your father and mother! I’m not having a second child!” He was over fifty years old then, and I cried all night because he refused to have another child. The next morning, although Constantinople was covered with snow, I took little Xanthippi by boat to see Sister Christodouli. I complained to her, “Sister, I’ve been told that Christ unites people, but since I’ve met Christ, I’m on the verge of divorcing my husband.” When I told her what had happened, she said, “Ah, leave that cold-blooded guy...” then she thought for a moment and said, “...but do you know how to turn wolves into sheep?” “How,” I asked? “Buy forty candles of pure beeswax, and every night when your mother-in-law and husband go to sleep, say a *paraklesis* to the Mother of God in front of the icon.” So I began.

On the sixth day of the *paraklesis*, I decided to take my mother-in-law and go to church in a rather wild Turkish neighborhood of Constantinople, where the *Gorgoepikous* (Quick to Hear) Icon was kept. This icon was so wonder-working that even Turks said that they had seen it miraculously flying over the trees when someone was about to be healed. It had been kept for centuries in a little cave-chapel next to a church, but when I went, only the cave chapel was left, as the Turks had already pulled the church down in 1952.<sup>10</sup> My husband said, “You two women going alone to that neighborhood? Forget it, I’m going with you.” When we arrived, there was Sister Christodouli, whom I’d seen the week before. There was a liturgy going on in the cave and the only people present beside the priest and deacon, were the nun, myself, my husband, my mother-in-law, and one other woman.

Afterwards, Sister Christodouli said, “At liturgy I had a vision of a swaddled baby by the name of Christos. This will be your son.” My husband surprisingly replied, “I believe in visions, sister, but how can I be sure that this vision was for me? She said, “Because your wife was praying to have



another child, and not the other woman.” So, my husband turned to the other woman and said, “Excuse me, madam, but were you praying to have another child?” The woman looked at him and said, “Sir, I have seven already! I was praying that God not give me any more!” Although I’d only read six *parakleses* out of the forty, that same night I conceived, despite the fact that it was physically impossible – my woman’s time hadn’t occurred for many years.

I began knitting pink clothes for the baby, and when my husband saw this, he said, “Why are you knitting pink clothes? It’s going to be a boy.” But I was not sure the prophecy would be fulfilled, and I was afraid that if we put too much faith in it and then had a girl, that my husband, who was slowly approaching the Church, would be disappointed and drop away. Even Sister Christodouli had cautioned me earlier, “Of course we believe in clairvoyance and these gifts of the Holy Spirit, but even holy people can fall in small ways, such as having bad relations with someone. The Holy Spirit may leave and what you say then might not be from God, it might not be clear.” But, my husband was convinced, and said to me, “No, what she said is from God, and two miracles have happened already. Just a few weeks ago I told you to go home to your mother, while now I agree to have another child with you. And now you’ve conceived when it wasn’t physically possible.”

And so I gave birth – I had a Cesarean – and when I woke up, I asked, “Is the baby alright? Is it a boy?” My husband said, “Do you still doubt it?” Here is the birth certificate and I’ve written the name myself to be sure that it is Christos.” Fr. Amphilochos had also given a true prophecy, because the next time he visited, we had Christos. My son is a very good man and has his own child now, a little Praxiteles.

RTE: That would be hard to live up to, having your birth predicted by a saint.

KYRIA ELPIDA: He is not so spiritual now, he is a young man in love with life. But as a child, he had a gift of prayer, as some children do. I remember once in 1974, when he was six, he knocked on the door of our room in the middle of the night and said, “Mama, get up and start doing the midnight prayers.” “Why,” I asked, and he said, “I saw a huge bat flying over Cyprus.” I was half-asleep and said, “What Cyprus?” He said, “I don’t know what Cyprus, but that’s what I saw.” (He was only six years old and could have known nothing about Cyprus.) A few days later, the Turks invaded Cyprus.





Former Greek homes on Principio (Buyukada), largest of the Prince's Islands, 2005.



Weeks later, he saw the same bat flying over Greece, and the next day it was announced that the Greek army was being mobilized. We were one step away from a Greek-Turkish war that thankfully never happened.

Over the years, we understood that he had some kind of gift. We sometimes discretely asked him to pray about things, and tell us what he heard. When he was twelve, my husband and I were concerned about the situation of Greek youth (which was nothing compared to now) and told him, "Pray to the Three Holy Hierarchs and ask them what we should do to help save these Greek young people from corruption." He said, "They won't tell me, because I asked Christ to let me be like an ordinary child."



Kyria Elpida's Icon of Christ Emmanuel

As he grew older, teenage doubts crept in, but still, God did not leave. For example [*she points to an icon on the wall*], do you see this icon of the Lord Emmanuel, the Lord as a youth? My husband's grandfather was named Emmanuel, this was his icon. When Christos was in high school, an atheist teacher once told him, "The Byzantine iconoclasts were right for banning all icons and images." So, he came home from school and told me: "The teacher said this and this – you must take the icons down from the wall, you are an iconodule.' I thought to

myself, "What am I going to do with this boy? As a child he was sent by God, enlightened, and now he's practically possessed." For a week he insisted on our taking the icons down until, one day, his grandfather's icon, which was on the wall in the hall, began swinging like a pendulum. At first we thought it was an earthquake, but it wasn't, and Xanthippi said, "Mother, this is happening because of what Christos said." When Christos saw it, he understood that he was wrong, humbled himself, and made the sign of the Cross...

### Daily Life in Constantinople

RTE: The children must have been a great consolation for you and your husband. Can you tell us now what you remember of the daily life of the Greeks of Constantinople?

KYRIA ELPIDA: One thing I know about Greek tradition in Turkey is the cuisine. I was raised on Lesbos and could cook all of our native dishes before I was married, so when I went to Constantinople, people said, "How quickly you've learned to cook our Turkish food." This wasn't true, it was the Greek food I'd grown up with on the island. The only thing they didn't have in Constantinople was roasted lamb on Pascha.

Also, when the Greek Orthodox went out exquisitely dressed on New Year's Eve to restaurants, theatres, and night-clubs, no matter how late they



*Principio (Buyukada), Prince's Islands, 2005.*



returned home they would first go to St. Basil's Church in Constantinople, which was open all night for the vigil for St. Basil's feast, to take holy water to bless their homes for the New Year. I didn't see that as much in Athens, although when I went to St. Catherine's in the Plaka for the all-night vigil on New Year's Eve, society women also came in to light a candle before returning home.

The Constantinople Greeks were more sophisticated than mainland Greeks, and they did more western dancing, both socially and at weddings and baptisms, not the village country dances I'd grown up with. There were also Greek theatre and dance troupes that sometimes came to Constantinople. There was a very popular *bouzouki* singer, Stelios Kazantzidis, who was so popular among both Greeks and Turks, no matter their social level, that whenever he came to Constantinople to perform for the Greeks, half of the theatre was filled with Turks.

Of course, there wasn't any television yet, but I remember one of our rare Greek films brought in by the Turkish cinemas. It had a famous actress and was called, "Alice in the Navy," about a young girl who fell in love with a Greek sailor and stowed away on his ship. The movie was filmed mostly on this Greek ship, and the Greek flag was often seen. The Greeks in Constantinople were not allowed to have a Greek flag, even in their homes, so when the film was shown in the Turkish movie theatres, the whole Greek community lined up night after night, not for the actress, but just to see the Greek flag.

As for reading, we usually read the local newspapers. In 1959, my husband, Praxiteles, who had slowly come closer to the Church, was the first person to write the lives of the newly-revealed saints, Raphael, Nicholas and Irene of Lesvos, for Constantinople's Greek newspaper. Because we were from Lesvos, we had the story first-hand. Theirs were the first lives he wrote and afterwards when some of the Orthodox in Constantinople began holding Christian gatherings in different houses, his role was to read one saint's life at every meeting. After many years of this, he said one day, "I think I've read them all." But I said, "There must be some more. Look again, maybe you've missed some."

When Praxiteles wrote to the newspaper about Sts. Raphael, Nicholas, and Irene, a very respected, funny old priest, Fr. Antonis, whose son was a bishop in Constantinople, called us at home to say, "Eh, Praxiteles, old friend, why don't we gather all those donkeys (meaning his son and his colleagues) to find out what they know about these saints." So, the presbytera of Papa Antonis, the mother of the bishop, and his sisters arranged a nice meeting, and all the bishops of the Holy Synod of Constantinople came to their home. They asked Praxiteles, "So, we came to hear from you about the newly-revealed saints." Praxiteles responded, "And we were hoping to hear from you if you are going to canonize them." One of the bishops said, "Well, we got some kind of envelope from Mitilene, but we didn't really have time to read it." So, Fr. Antonis said, "OK, Praxiteles, so tell these guys about the

saints.” As soon as he started telling their lives, Fr. Antonis called his wife and said, “Presbytera, girls, leave the tea and come here and listen to how the scriptures are being fulfilled. The sheep is teaching the shepherds.” Praxiteles wanted to drop through the floor, and I was so embarrassed I didn’t know where to look. Fr. Antonis’ son was not only a bishop, he was the director of the Theological School of Chalki. The current Patriarch Bartholomew was his student.

RTE: I can imagine you were embarrassed, but it must have been a real joy to have Kyrios Praxiteles active in church life.

KYRIA ELPIDA: Yes. He was a very good man, and just needed time to come to real faith. Do you remember when I said that nothing falls from God’s hands? It is strange how God works sometimes, even when things seem outwardly unjust. Only once did I see my husband Praxiteles with tears in his eyes. That was when his brother managed to take most of their father’s property through a trick. My father-in-law was very ill and one morning he called Praxiteles and asked him to get the key to his safe and take what was inside, “because I can’t trust your brother and his wife to divide things fairly.” Praxiteles replied, “Father, I cannot do that to my brother. Even if you don’t trust him, I do.”

However, this ended badly. His brother went to the hospital during their father’s last days escorted by two family friends, and convinced the frail and confused old man to sign a new will, by which all of the property, apartments, houses, shops, land, and most of the funds were given to himself, leaving Praxiteles only a little money which he could only withdraw in small monthly installments. Praxiteles cried, not because he had lost his share of his father’s property, but because “my brother tricked our father and stole his heart.” I replied, “No he didn’t steal his heart. He only cheated him. Your father’s heart belonged to you. Remember that he called you to open the safe and not your brother.” But my husband could hardly be consoled over his brother’s betrayal.

With a sense of bitterness, I went to confess to Fr. Amphilochios Makris who was again in Constantinople. I told him what had happened and Fr. Amphilochios replied, “Your husband must be an honest man, and that is why God loves him. Your father-in-law was a merchant and money that comes from commerce is not always clean money. Often it is made by sharp

‘deals’ that are little more than stealing, by using employees hardly, and so on. God has taken a sieve, shaken it well, and what is left inside is the true fruit of your father-in-law’s work. This clean money will bring more fruit. The rest was given to your bother-in-law as he desired, and it will vanish like smoke.”

I replied, “No, Father Amphilochios, I do not want to curse my brother-in-law. Let him enjoy what he obtained, even if he did so in a dishonest way.” Fr Amphilochios replied, “Well spoken, Kyria Elpida, but what I am telling you is not a curse, it is from heaven.”

A few years later, my husband, whom you remember had become a Turkish citizen in order to practice dentistry, was able to protect and claim our assets when we finally had to leave Turkey. In Athens, we took a loan in order to buy a house and were able to pay the loan off with the small monthly installments of the inheritance. But my brother-in-law, who had remained a Greek citizen, had all of his property seized by the Turks. He lost everything that he had taken by injustice: apartments, shops, real estate, everything. He and his family were so poor when they moved to Greece that they hardly had enough to eat. My nephew had to work as a taxi-driver.

## 20th-Century Church Life in Constantinople

RTE: Did you and Kyrios Praxiteles know many monastics in Constantinople?

KYRIA ELPIDA: No, but we both knew, and I still have as a friend, Kyrios Petros, who knew two ascetic lay-women. They were true ascetics, and they had a wonder-working icon of the Mother of God which they later gave him. After Ataturk took power, there were no active monasteries in Constantinople. They were not allowed. If people wanted to live as monastics, they could only do so as lay-ascetics. The only exception to this was Sister Christodouli, who had been brought from Jerusalem by the Ecumenical Patriarch. She had come to take care of the Monastery of the Transfiguration on the island of Plati (*Yassiada* in Turkish), a tiny remote island that only had a prison and the monastery. The prison was used for high-security criminals and political prisoners. When the authorities imprisoned Adnan Menderes, the former prime minister, they wanted to increase security by turning Transfiguration Monastery into a watchtower. In order not to lose it, the Patriarch brought Sister Christodouli in and put



her there by herself. She was the only nun in Constantinople. Although the Turks did not allow priests and bishops to wear clerical garb in public – only the Patriarch could do so – Sister Christodouli always wore her monastic clothes. When she was stopped by the police, she claimed that she wasn't a local, that she was visiting from Jerusalem.

The Greeks of Constantinople were religious, they kept the traditions, but they didn't have a deep spiritual life and, as I said, they knew nothing about confession. Of course, in Greece, only experienced priests who are already spiritual fathers are allowed to hear confessions, and we were not exposed to this. For example, our friend Kyrios Petros' five sisters hadn't been to confession for decades. This was why Fr. Amphilochios was brought from Patmos to teach us how to confess.

About confession, I remember that we had a Turkish laundress who helped me once a week when the children were small. At noon and at five o'clock, she would ask for a small carpet, which she put in the corner to do her *namazi*, her Moslem prayers and prostrations. I was impressed when I learned that she did this no matter what, even when she was exhausted, at every house she worked in. So, once, when I was in Pera, at the Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos, I went to a well-known and very noble priest there, who had lost a leg, and I asked him, "Father, we are Christian and we are supposed to pray, but we are so tired that sometimes we can't even make the sign of the Cross before we fall asleep, while this Muslim woman, who is even more hard-working, does all of her prayers five times a day. Can you explain this?" He said, "Listen, my child. You are praying to the real God, so the evil one will bring you fatigue. When it is time to pray you will feel sleepy, you will feel lazy, you will feel *accidie*, but because this woman is praying in the name of the false prophet, why should he bother her?" There is always a spiritual fight to be Orthodox.

In the Gospel, when Philip and Andrew went to Christ and said, "Rabbi, the Greeks have come to see you, the Lord replied, "*The hour is come that the Son of Man be glorified,*" meaning through the Orthodox faith. He also said that the seed would fall into the ground and die before it bore fruit. I feel that now is the time of decline in faith and morals, the rotting of the seed, and only after this will Orthodoxy come back in her true power. Now we Greeks are rotten, we're egotistic, we need to humble ourselves. It is only



when we humble ourselves that the seed can spring up again. This applies to individuals, and to myself first. If I elevate myself, I fall ill or something bad happens because God abhors selfishness. When we are proud, we get smacked.

The Greeks from Constantinople also had to pay their dues for being egotistical and proud. When I came to Constantinople from Mitilene, the affluent Greeks would say, "You Greeks in Greece, you buy chicken by the half-kilo, we can buy two or three whole chickens." Or when I asked them, "Have you ever been to mainland Greece?" they would say, "It is so backwards, what would we do there? We'd rather go to Paris, to London, to Brussels...." But within a few years they were humbled by God – they had to come to Greece seeking food and refuge.

RTE: Wasn't Mother Gavrilia, the ascetic who reposed a few years ago, also from Constantinople?

KYRIA ELPIDA: Yes, and I am so mad at myself that I never met her. I just wasn't worthy. After she died, I prayed, asking, "Why was it that you lived in Constantinople and then in Athens for so many years and I never met you?" I received an inner answer that, "If you had met me then you would have been scandalized by my attitude towards the non-Orthodox." And this was true. When I was younger I was fanatically Orthodox and thought that anyone who even said good-morning to a Roman Catholic was polluted. But now I have changed, I've matured. I understand that I cannot blame others for being what they are. Converts, including those who were born Orthodox and only become devout later, can be very fanatical. But the book about Mother Gavrilia, written by her spiritual daughter, Sister Gavrilia, is her legacy to us.<sup>11</sup>

RTE: What do you remember about the Ecumenical Patriarchate? Was it a center for the Greek community?

KYRIA ELPIDA: We didn't go to the patriarchate often. We had about eighty-five churches and chapels in Constantinople, and I tried to visit different parishes. The whole Greek community, of course, would go to the patriarchate on the Feast of the Three Hierarchs (St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian were both archbishops here) and on St. George's



*St. Saviour in Chora. 2005.*



*Ecumenical Patriarchate, Church of St. George. 2005.*

feast, because the patriarchal church is dedicated to St. George. Also on St. Euphemia's feast day – her relics are there. I once met Patriarch Athenagoras. He was very tall and imposing, with a deep voice. His successor, Patriarch Demetrios, was very humble and simple.

I have a wonderful story about Patriarch Demetrios. Kyrios Petros, the man I mentioned earlier with the five sisters, knew a lay woman ascetic named Kyria Vasiliki. She was very poor and he supported her. In the neighborhood of Tatavla, in the Church of the Holy Apostles, the Greeks decided to make the church look simpler by removing some of the old smoke-darkened icons from the walls. They stored them in the basement. One day, Kyria Vasiliki told Kyrios Petros, "Tell the priests of the church that the Mother of God is crying because a certain icon of hers has been moved to the basement." She described the icon. Kyrios Petros said, "Kyria Vasiliki, how am I going to tell the priests a thing like that? They'll think I'm crazy. There are hundreds of icons in the basement. Even if they believe me, why that particular icon?" But she insisted, so he went to the priests after a service and told them. Just as he expected, they laughed at him, all except his friend, young Fr. Dimitri, who went down to the basement, found the icon, and put it back on the wall.

When Kyria Vasiliki heard this she prophesied, "The priest who did this will have the greatest honor a man can have on earth," meaning that he would become the Ecumenical Patriarch. Kyrios Petros laughed aloud and

said, "Kyria Vasiliki, do you know who you are talking about? Do you know what Dimitri is good for in the parish? 'Dimitri, pull the table over here.' 'Dimitri, shut the lights off.' 'Dimitri, take the box to the car'... he's a nobody." Vasiliki said, "Kyrios Petros, you will see." Kyrios Petros told Fr. Dimitri, who laughed and said, "Poor old thing, out of joy that I put the icon back, she's talking nonsense."

Years later, when Fr. Dimitri did become patriarch and came to Athens on an official visit, Kyrios Petros went to see him. He was waiting with many others in a downstairs room, but when the patriarch saw Kyrios Petros' name on the list of people waiting he was so happy that he left the room and went in search of him.

### Turkish Muslims and Christian Faith

RTE: Do you know any instances of Turkish Muslims who had spiritual experiences with Christian saints?

KYRIA ELPIDA: I remember an incident in a Turkish military hospital in the neighborhood of Cikli. Among the other buildings in the hospital compound was a storehouse in the yard that had previously been a church. One day a high-ranking Turkish army doctor visited Patriarch Athenagoras and told him, "You know, I can't sleep at night, because I see a white horse with a



*Orient Express Train Station Constantinople Istanbul.*



*Ruins of the city walls of Emperor Theodosius, Constantinople.*

rider on it, going around and around this building...” He didn’t know it had been a church but he sensed that this was something supernatural and Christian. Perhaps he’d heard of St. George, or he had had ancestors who were Christian, we just don’t know. But we do know that he went to the patriarch and asked him to go with him. So, they went to the hospital and when they entered the storehouse, they found it full of old clothes, boots, military supplies. In the back there were three wooden boxes that had been pushed into the corner. They opened the first one and there was an *epitachelion* and some church supplies. The others contained old church records, and they learned from these that the storehouse had been a church.

With the blessing of Patriarch Athenagoras and the permission of the authorities, it was made into a church again. The miracle is that this took place in 1955, the year that the Turks demolished eighty-two Orthodox churches in Constantinople. After the miraculous intervention of St. George, this new church was opened with the permission of the Turkish government. There were huge crowds, thousands of people came. The sad thing about the story is that soon after, the Turkish doctor disappeared.

There is another well-known story, and we were acquainted with people this had happened to. When Greeks wanted to go fishing, they often hired a certain Turkish man with a boat to take them to the Bosphorus early in the morning. On Principio (Prince’s Island)<sup>12</sup> is the Monastery of St. George *Kodounas*, meaning St. George the Bell-Keeper. In earlier times, they hung bells on peo-

ple who were mentally ill and violent, so that others were warned they were coming. This monastery was a great place of healing and when these people were healed, they offered the bells hanging from their clothes to St. George, leaving them at the monastery. Several times, Greeks who were fishing near the monastery heard hoofbeats right on the shore, but they couldn’t see anything. However, the Muslim pilot would say, “*Efendi* [“Master” or “Sir”] look, look, it’s St. George!” It was the Muslim who saw him.

RTE: Why do you think the Muslim saw him and not the Christians?

KYRIA ELPIDA: I don’t know. Perhaps these Muslims’ ancestors had been converted by force, or they had been secretly baptized as children without knowing. There are many good people among the Muslims, and St. George is venerated by Christians and Muslims throughout the Arab world.

Another funny story is about St. Therapon, one of the unmercenary physicians. We had a holy spring dedicated to him that was only open once a week in a completely Turkish neighborhood. If someone was ill, he would go there, cross himself with holy water, and if there was a priest there, he would ask him to say a prayer over him. One day a wealthy Muslim woman named Aisa came to ask for the healing of her headaches. The priest wasn’t terribly tolerant of Moslems, and when he prayed, he didn’t give the usual church prayer for illness, but said, “O Lord, look down from heaven and dry up the head of Aisa the way you dried up the gourd of Ninevah...”<sup>13</sup> Of course, she

didn't understand church Greek, so she didn't know that his prayer was tongue-in-cheek. The following Monday, when St. Therapon's Church was open again, Aisa came rushing in, her arms full of gifts. "Where is the holy father, where is the holy father? For years, my son has taken me to the best doctors in Europe and no one could help me with those headaches, but this wonderful priest healed me with his prayer!" The clergy took turns serving there, so the priest who had prayed over her wasn't there to get the gifts. Kyrios Petros says, "It might sound funny, that the priest was comparing the head of this poor Moslem woman to a gourd, but the prayer was strong, and God healed her."

RTE: Did any Constantinople Turks convert to Christianity in your time?

KYRIA ELPIDA: Not so many in Constantinople, but in Anatolia, yes, I've heard there were many. I do know one incident in Constantinople that closely affected us. There was a medical clinic that served the poorer Greeks, and the Greek doctors of Constantinople took turns working there for free. Of course, the patients were not exclusively Greek, there were also poor Turks who would come for treatment. Once, when it was my husband Praxiteles' turn to serve as the clinic dentist, a Turk came in with a bad tooth that he wanted filled. My husband saw that it was beyond repair, and without saying anything, quickly pulled it. When he saw the tooth in his hand, the Turk stood up and said, "Oh, Efendi, we have both just committed a great sin." "What was that?" "I have just come from Holy Communion, and you have removed my tooth and now it's bleeding. After receiving Holy Communion, you are not supposed to bleed, and now my mouth is bleeding." My husband shook with fear because he could have been accused of converting that Turk. He said, "Shhh! Don't say anything more, someone will overhear!" The Turk said, "Then, I will come to your office to talk to you." And a few days later he did.

He was a crypto-Christian, from a village far from Anatolia. He prayed five times a day, as all devout Moslems do, and went to the mosque daily, but while he was in the mosque he said his own Christian prayers, which he knew by heart. He had a secret Christian calendar, and he told my husband that at night, after the village was asleep, he pulled the curtains and found the saints and scripture readings for the next day. He had an icon hidden in the cellar beneath the floor that had been given to him by his grandmother, and at night he would go down secretly and pray before the icon without anyone

knowing. Because it is a huge city, and no one knew him, when he came to Constantinople he would quietly go to receive Holy Communion. But in the village he pretended to be a pious Muslim because he couldn't do otherwise.

RTE: Was his family Muslim, or were they always secret Christians?

KYRIA ELPIDA: In his case, certainly, his grandmother was a Christian, or at least she remembered the family history as she had given him the icon. Perhaps it went back even farther. The first Turks were part of the Mongol horde, warriors who conquered Asia Minor, and of course, married local Christian Byzantine women. From these mothers and the Christian families who were forced to become Muslim, there were many who kept their Christian memories, and some who secretly continued to practice their Christianity. Once the family had converted, or appeared to convert to Islam, it would have been apostasy punishable by death for any of their descendants to openly return to Christianity. From their appearance and customs, many "Turks," especially those who live close to the sea, are obviously of Greek descent, people whose families converted and who now speak Turkish, as opposed to real Turks of Mongolian descent.

Another case involved our friend, Kyrios Petros. In Constantinople there was a good Turk who had prayed for many years to come close to God. Finally he had a dream, "You must go to this man, to this address... his name is Kyrios Petros. Ask him what you have to do to come close to God. He will tell you." This Turk didn't know Kyrios Petros, he didn't even know that he existed. When he came to his door, Kyrios Petros was very frightened because he thought this was one of the traps set by the Turks to snare Greeks, and that if he told him about Christ, the Church, and baptism that, at the least, he would be arrested and deported. But the man insisted, and finally Kyrios Petros believed his story. He arranged for him to be baptized and stood as his godfather.

This new Christian was very careful with his fasting, and after a few weeks came one day to his godfather. Kyrios Petros asked him how he was doing and he replied, "I'm trying to be a very good Christian. I follow all of the fasting instructions you gave me. You told me not to eat oil on Wednesday and Friday. Well, yesterday was Wednesday. My wife had made artichokes with oil, so when I saw the oil, I knew I couldn't eat it, but since I couldn't tell her why, I waited until she left the room, and then threw it away. Then I went to the scullery and secretly boiled two eggs, and ate them instead."<sup>14</sup> (*laughter*)



But the funniest thing happened one day after Kyrios Petros told him, “My child, the Christian life is full of trials. It is not an easy life and the more you grow in faith, the more you become a good Christian, the more you will face difficulties, trials and temptations.” Sometime after the Christian Turk came to Kyrios Petros and told him with great joy, “Godfather, Godfather, I have become a good Christian! My car has been stolen!”

Who knows where this man is now, perhaps there are hundreds of people like this. We don’t know why he in particular had the dream – obviously he was a pious man, but maybe it was due to the prayers of a Christian ancestor in Paradise, or maybe God just answered his prayer because He knew that he would obey the dream.

There are well-known prophecies of future freedom for Constantinople, in which the Russians will play a large part. Both St. Tarasios and St. Nilus of Malevi and the Holy Mountain speak of this. They say that Constantinople will be captured by a blond nation and given to the Greeks, and that one-third of the Turks will freely convert to Christianity and be baptized. Out of 60 million Turks, maybe 20 million will be baptized.

## Kyrios Petros

RTE: What happened to Kyrios Petros afterwards?

KYRIA ELPIDA: One day in 1964,<sup>15</sup> he was notified by the Turkish police that he was to report to the police within twenty-four hours. He could only bring a few personal effects and no money. This and the pogrom of 1955 were among the worst moments in the 20th century for the Greek community in Turkey. Thousands of Greeks with Greek citizenship living legally in Turkey were rounded up and deported overnight. Their property was seized. Kyrios Petros and his family were terrified. They didn’t know what was going to happen, whether he was being deported, sent to an internment camp, or even executed.

That very morning Kyrios Petros had arranged and attended a secret baptism for a Turkish couple of whom he was the godfather. After the police arrived, his wife, daughter and two other friends of the family packed four suitcases for him, one large and three small. They were weeping as they



packed. Because there was a rumor that soon even Greeks with Turkish citizenship were going to be rounded up and sent to Anatolia (his wife, Kyria Penelope, had Turkish citizenship), with Kyrios’ Petros consent, the terrified women hid most of the small family heirlooms of silverware and jewelry among the clothes in the four suitcases.

Kyrios Petros also had an old family icon from Russia, which he wrapped in paper, and carried in his arms. Before leaving home he said to his wife and children, “I am taking Her with me. If I manage to take Her to Greece, this means that we will meet again one day. If not, we won’t.”

Kyrios Petros left home with four suitcases and the icon in hand. At the border, Turkish police and customs control officers terrified the Greeks, who were told to undress, and left completely naked in the customs shed. The Turkish soldiers told Kyrios Petros then that he could only take one suitcase, so he chose the larger one and the other three were taken away. (Thank God, they were returned to his home in Constantinople.) When his turn came, a belligerent and aggressive officer demanded to see what was in the paper parcel. When he saw the icon he said, “This is an antique, it cannot leave the country. I am taking it.”

Kyrios Petros not only felt terribly sorry about losing the icon, but he remembered his own sudden words, “If I manage to take the icon through customs we will meet again. If not, then we won’t.” He was close to collapse, when he suddenly had a heavenly inspiration and said to the officer in fluent Turkish (although his Turkish wasn’t nearly as good), “And you, Efendi, you have an ill child at home. If you let me take Her with me, She will heal your child.”

The officer was amazed and stepped back. Then he came close to him and said quietly in Greek, “Take the icon, hide it, and go.” It was only then that Kyrios Petros understood that he was being deported. Was the officer a crypto-Christian? Was he a Greek convert to Islam? It is a mystery why he spoke Greek, but he obviously did indeed have an ill child at home. Kyrios Petros lifted the edge of the suitcase, slid in the icon, and left. He was taken to the border and he went straight to Athens.

But the story does not end here. When he arrived in Athens he went to stay with relatives. After he called his wife to tell her he was safe, he opened the large suitcase to take out a change of clothes. To his amazement, the suitcase did not contain even a change of underwear, but was completely filled with their valu-





*Kyria Elpidas home chapel.*



*Old Greek House on Principio.*

ables. Kyrios Petros was shocked and furious that his wife had repacked all of the valuables into one suitcase. He trembled when he thought, “How easy it would have been for the Turks to inspect the suitcase, or for the officer to have seen this when I slipped the icon in. With this idiocy of putting all the valuables into one suitcase, my foolish wife and her friends could have had me shot.

A few days later when Kyria Penelope opened the three smaller suitcases that had been returned to her Constantinople and found no valuables among the clothes, she understood that the Turks must have opened the suitcases, taken everything of value, and sent back only the clothing.



*Kyrios Petros and Kyria Penelope.*

In the nine months before Kyria Penelope arrived in Athens, whenever they spoke on the telephone, she would ask, “Petros what happened with the suitcase? Did you have enough clothes to change into?” Kyrios Petros was still so angry that when she asked this he couldn’t say a word, but just hung up the phone. The misunderstanding was only resolved when his wife arrived in Greece and they realized that a great miracle had taken place. Somehow, all of the valuables had been transferred to the only suitcase that Kyrios Petros managed to take with him through customs.

This is amazing, isn’t it? Four women witnessed

the packing of the valuables in the four suitcases, and had seen him to the police station. This is like when the Hebrews fled from Egypt. God told them to take their flocks and herds, all their belongings and valuables, and leave with Moses.<sup>16</sup> Here, the same thing happened in a miraculous way.

RTE: Amazing. Has his whole life been like this?

KYRIA ELPIDA: Yes, there have been many miracles, and I know a few. He was born the last child of a large family. His father was arrested by the Turks in 1913, accused of collaborating with the British, and imprisoned in Constantinople. When his wife went to see him in prison, she found him buried in the earth up to his neck. Only his head was above ground. He told her, “Despina, take care of yourself and the children. Don’t worry about me.” Then they moved him deep into Anatolia, and the family lost all trace of him.

So, you had a very large family living in extreme poverty. There were six boys and seven girls, with Petros the youngest and weakest child, and a mother who was the sole support of the family. She sold all of her jewelry and small family valuables piece by piece to survive; work at that time was impossible to find, especially for a woman. When they had no food, she would take holy water and drop a bit on each child’s tongue, saying, “Alright, now you’ve eaten. Go to bed.” They often did night vigils, but they didn’t know if they should commemorate their father as living or dead. They thought he was dead, until one night four-year-old Petros stood up in the



Zoodochos Pigis, Patriarchal Graveyard. 2005

center of the family circle and said, “My father is alive. He will come back and bring a lot of money with him.” And later he did come back, with a good sum of money. Petros never knew from where.

As a child, Kyrios Petros was very sickly and no one expected him to live. In those days we didn’t have central heating or antibiotics, and a draught could bring on a cold that would quickly develop into pneumonia. Many children died this way. When he was very little, more than once he woke up, feeling an invisible hand removing the covers in his sleep. But each time one of his sisters would wake up, sense that something was wrong, and cover him up again. He was a very fragile child, but he outlived them all and is now 94.

When Petros grew up, the Constantinople Jews helped him. In his early twenties, he worked as an assistant in a small grocery for a Greek who had a passion for gambling. The owner was steadily losing money, and despite the fact that the store was doing well, he went bankrupt. He decided to sell, and although Kyrios Petros had saved as much as he could, he was far from having the sum to buy it. One day, one of the store’s customers from the Jewish lobby asked him, “What is going to happen to this shop?” “Kyrios Petros said, “I would like to buy it, but I don’t have the money. “The Jew said, “How much do you have?” Kyrios Petros said, “I have been saving for three years, I have this sum.” The Jew said, “I see that you’ve been working hard and that you are financially sound because you’ve already collected this much money. If you wish, you can take a loan from us, and pay it back



Former Greek homes on Principio (Buyukada). 2005.

when you can, little by little.” He borrowed the money, and paid back the loan. Kyrios Petros was well-liked by everyone and had Jewish friends, even in the synagogue.

When Kyrios Petros’ son Elias was a newborn, he fell ill one night, and in a few hours his little body was burning with fever. The neighbors weren’t home, and Kyrios Petros wanted to go for the doctor, but his wife was so weak and fragile after the birth that he was afraid if the baby died while he was gone his wife would also die of grief. So, he went to the icon of the Mother of God, and demanded her help. “Panagia, don’t you see? My child is dying. I can’t go for the doctor, my wife will die of sorrow, you must do what you can.”

In a little while he heard one of the *bakti*, neighborhood watchmen who patrolled the area, blowing their whistles periodically to discourage burglars. Kyrios Petros opened the window and shouted, “*Efendi, Efendi*, come here, I need to tell you something important. My child is very ill, please go to the doctor and ask him to come urgently.” In a short while, the doctor arrived, obviously irritated: “I came even though I’m angry with you. Wasn’t it enough that you sent that nice woman out alone at night to ask me to come look after your baby? But then you sent the police to force me...” It turned out that a “very nice woman” had come with Kyrios Petros’ address a few moments before the police, and begged him to go quickly to the baby. When Kyrios Petros heard this, he was so shocked that he dropped what he was

holding. “Me, such a sinner, and the Mother of God listened not to a humble prayer, but to my demand.”

Do you remember the story I told you about the seemingly unjust inheritance of my husband and his brother? Kyrios Petros had a similar story of injustice: a Greek friend in Constantinople asked him to sign as surety on a bank loan so that he could borrow money for his business. The business didn't go so well, however, and that “friend” proved to be dishonest. He didn't want to pay back the loan and simply disappeared with the assets. Kyrios Petros was so afraid that the bank would seize his property, since he had guaranteed the loan, that he signed all of his property over to his wife, Kyria Penelope, who was Greek but had Turkish citizenship. (Kyrios Petros had Greek citizenship.)

When Kyrios Petros understood that this acquaintance had defaulted on the loan, he complained to God that he had only tried to be a good Christian and a brother, but in exchange he almost lost his property. Why, he asked, did he have to go through all this trouble?

A few years later, when Kyrios Petros was suddenly deported as a Greek citizen, all of his property should have been seized, but thanks to that very unjust incident, it had already passed to his wife, who was able to keep it as a Turkish citizen. Everything was saved.

Another interesting story happened later in Athens, when the son of Kyrios Petros' best friend went to study medicine in Switzerland. He had been taking spiritual advice from Kyrios Petros, and when he returned from school he said, “Kyrios Petros, you talk about chastity, but all of my classmates at the university have girl friends, and soon they will misjudge me and say that I'm not even a man.” So they decided to engage him to Kyrios Petros' sixteen-year-old daughter, so that he would have an excuse not to have a girlfriend.

During the holidays, the young man visited often so the young people could get to know each other. She fell in love and they were engaged. After some time he said to Kyrios Petros, “I live too far to get to the university easily. I need a car. Can you lend me the money? After I'm a doctor, I will pay you back.” Kyrios Petros sent the money and the young man bought an Alfa-Romeo. When he struggled to pass his exams, Kyrios Petros would sense it and pray for him, and then he would pass. Whenever he came back to Greece, he would ask Kyrios Petros, “Did you pray for me at such and such a time?” He always had.

But after the young man returned to school, he began writing letters to his fiancée, saying, “Maybe we should think about this, maybe we should reconsider...” As it turned out, he was having an affair with a Swiss girl. In spite of all that Kyrios Petros' family had done for him, he wanted to break off the engagement. Kyrios Petros' daughter was beside herself and said, “If he leaves me, I'll throw myself off Lycabettos,” the highest cliff in Athens.

But the young man broke the engagement anyway, and married the Swiss woman. He even brought her to Athens for the wedding. Kyrios Petros' wife was furious, his daughter was very sad, and he thought, “Even if this is my best friend's son, we can't go to that wedding.” But as he was praying he heard, “Not only will you go to the wedding, but you will buy a gold bracelet and give it to the Swiss woman, because, due to his injustice, this marriage will not last unless you forgive him.” So, out of obedience, and secretly from his wife and daughter, Kyrios Petros bought the bracelet and went to the wedding. He offered the bracelet to the bride and left. The couple moved back to Switzerland and sometime later thieves broke into their apartment. They stole everything, all the jewelry and valuables they could find, but for some reason they left that bracelet on the table. It was a holy bracelet of absolute forgiveness.

Later, Kyrios Petros had stomach cancer and was healed. He was in terrible pain, praying of course, all the time, and one day he heard in prayer, “Go for three Saturdays to receive Holy Communion.” Although he had a burning pain that often made him double over, he went the first Saturday, the second, and when he received the third time, it was as if someone had poured water on lit charcoal. He went immediately to the doctor, and the doctor said, “Petros, I don't understand. What happened to the tumor?” He replied, “It's gone. I knew it, but I wanted you to confirm it.”

Kyrios Petros prays very much and has seen demons in the street appearing as all black. When he sees this he goes out and incenses the street. He is also often aware when there are dangerous political situations. One night he asked me to pray for American President Jimmy Carter because he had a difficult decision to make in regard to the Soviet Union. This was when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, but it wasn't news until the following morning.

In March 1987, he saw Ismet Inonu<sup>17</sup> in a dream, the same Turkish Minister who was a general during the catastrophe of Asia Minor and the destruction of Smyrna in 1922, who had arranged the deportation of thousands of Greeks in 1964, including Kyrios Petros himself. As bad as he was

to the Greeks, Kyrios Petros saw him in his dream, saying, “Petros, I came to ask you to pray, they are going to involve us in a war.” Kyrios Petros asked him, “How were you allowed to come and warn me and not Kemal Ataturk, who liked the Greeks more than you do?” But he got no answer. It was later revealed to him in prayer that although Inonu was an enemy of the Greeks, he was a pious Muslim, faithful to his wife, who thought he was helping his own country, while Ataturk had been the complete opposite: an atheist, sexually rotten and thoroughly corrupt. The meaning was that the one was personally clean, while the other was morally filthy. Kyrios Petros has had many such instances in his life.<sup>18</sup>

But there were many people like this in Constantinople and Athens, just a decade or two ago: Fr. Amphilochios, Elder Porphyrios, Mother Gavrilia, and many secret lay-ascetics whom we will never hear of. It is the prayers of people like this that turn God's wrath from our sins and, in this time of weakened faith, keep us believing until Orthodoxy is reborn again in power. ✦

1 Exchange of Populations: After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, which had aligned itself with Germany during World War I, the new Turkish Republic under Kemal Ataturk, although sizably reduced in territory, was granted official recognition. By the terms of the settlement, 4000 year-old Greek-inhabited areas in western Anatolia were put under Greek control. Greek troops landed at Smyrna, ostensibly to secure the territorial gains, but at the encouragement of western allies, began marching north to take Ankara and Istanbul (Constantinople). When the bid failed, retreating Greek soldiers set fire to some Moslem villages. The Turkish army retaliated, destroying numerous Greek Christian villages and the entire Greek city of Smyrna. All Greek males between 15 and 60 were arrested and condemned to forced labor. Finally, by the terms of the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, the entire Moslem population of 400,000 was expatriated from Greece to Turkey, and over 1.2 million Greek Orthodox, many of whom spoke only Turkish and whose forebears had lived in Asia Minor since before the time of Christ, were moved *en masse* to Greece, increasing the Greek population by 20 percent overnight. Although the Patriarch and the local Orthodox community of 100,000 people were allowed to stay in Constantinople and on two small islands at the mouth of the Dardanelles, this exchange of populations wiped out the remnants of the 3000 year-old Greek culture in Asia Minor.

2 Adnan Menderes (1899-1961): Founded the *Demokrat Parti* in 1946, which came to power four years later. Menderes served as the premier (prime minister) and sometime foreign minister from 1950-60, when the government was toppled by an army coup. Menderes was arrested, charged with violating the constitution, and executed.

3 The Tripartite Conference of 1955 was convened in London in August at British invitation; representatives of the Greek and Turkish governments met with British authorities to discuss Cyprus – a radical departure from traditional British policy, which had considered domestic colonial matters to be solely a British affair. Greece accepted the invitation with hesitation as no Cypriots had been invited. The Turks also accepted. The meeting broke up in September with no results. The Greeks were dissatisfied because Cypriot self-determination was not offered; the Turks because it was not forbidden.

The day before the meeting ended, a bomb was set off at the Turkish consulate (Ataturk's birthplace) in Thessalonica, which led to the riots of September 5, which devastated the Greek community. Premier Menderes claimed to know nothing of the source of the riots, declared martial law, and “sent in” the army, too late to protect the Greek community. Later, at the Yassia Trial, it was proven that the bombing and riots had been prearranged by the Turkish government and Menderes' own *Demokrat Parti* to bring pressure on the Greeks over Cyprus. Most of the Greek churches, property and businesses in Constantinople (Istanbul) and Smyrna (Izmir) were destroyed. Greece reacted by withdrawing its representatives from NATO headquarters in Turkey and relations between the two countries were severely strained.

4 Kemal Ataturk: (1881-1938) Turkish army officer, extreme nationalist revolutionary against the Ottoman Sultanate, and first President of the Republic of Turkey.

5 Chalki: Pronounced “Halki.” One of the Prince's Islands. In Turkish, “Heybeliada.”

6 Kaloumenos, Dimitrios. *The Crucifixion of Christianity: The Historic Truth of the Incidents of September 6-7, 1955 in Constantinople (Istanbul)*. Dimitrios Kaloumenos. 2nd. ed., rev. Athens : [s.n.], 1991.

7 The 1961 Yassia Trial against Menderes and his hardline foreign minister, Fatin Zorlu, exposed the detailed planning that went into organizing the pogrom.... In the run-up to the pogrom, Menderes and Zorlu mobilized the formidable machinery of the ruling *Demokrat Parti* (DP) and party-controlled trade unions of Istanbul. Interior minister Namik Gedik was also involved. According to Zorlu's lawyer at the Yassia trial, a mob of 300,000 was marshalled in a radius of 40 miles around the city for the pogrom....

Most of the rioters came from western Asia Minor.... carted by train with third class-tickets to Istanbul. These recruits were promised the equivalent of \$6 USD, which was never paid. They were accompanied by ...police, who were charged with coordinating the destruction and looting once the contingent was broken up into sub-groups of 40–50 men, and the leaders of the party branches.

In addition to commercial targets, the mob clearly targeted property owned or administered by the Greek Orthodox Church. Seventy-three churches and 23 schools were vandalized, burned or destroyed, as were 8 asperes and 3 monasteries. This represented about 90 percent of the church property portfolio in the city. The ancient Byzantine church of Panagia in Veligradiou was vandalized and burned down. The church at Yedikule was badly vandalized, as was the church of St. Constantine of Psammathos. At Zoodochos Pege church in Balikli, the tombs of a number of Ecumenical Patriarchs were smashed open and desecrated. The abbot of the monastery, Bishop Gerasimos of Pamphilos, was severely beaten during the pogrom and died from his wounds some days later in Balikli hospital. In one church arson attack, Father Chrysanthos Mandas was burned alive. The Metropolitan of Liloupolis, Gennadios, was badly beaten and went mad. Elsewhere in the city, Greek cemeteries came under attack and were desecrated. Some reports also testified that relics of saints were burned or thrown to dogs.

While the pogromists were not instructed to kill their targets, sections of the mob went much further than scaring or intimidating local Greeks. Between 13 and 16 Greeks and one Armenian (including two clerics) died as a result of the pogrom. Thirty-two Greeks were severely wounded. Men and women were raped, and according to the account of the Turkish writer Aziz Nesin, men, mainly priests, were subjected to forced circumcision by frenzied members of the mob and an Armenian priest died after the procedure. Nesin wrote: “That night, many men shouting and screaming were Islamized forcefully by the cruel knife. Among those circumcised, there was also a priest.”

The physical and material damage was considerable and over 4,348 Greek-owned businesses, 110 hotels, 27 pharmacies, 23 schools, 21 factories, and over 1,000 Greek-owned homes were badly attacked or destroyed.

An eyewitness account was provided by journalist Noel Barber of the London Daily Mail on 14 September 1955:

“The church of Yedikule was utterly smashed, and one priest was dragged from bed, the hair torn from his head and the beard literally torn from his chin. Another old Greek priest [Fr. Mandas] in a house belonging to the church and who was too ill to be moved was left in bed, and the house was set on fire and he was burned alive. At the church of Yenikoy, a lovely spot on the edge of the Bosphorus, a priest of 75 was taken out into the street, stripped of every stitch of clothing, tied behind a car and dragged through the streets. They tried to tear the hair of another priest, but failing that, they scalped him, as they did many others.”

Although the British Ambassador to Ankara, [Sir James] Bowker advised British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that the United Kingdom should “court a sharp rebuff by admonishing Turkey,” only a note of distinctly mild disapproval was dispatched to Menderes. The context of the Cold War led Britain and the US to absolve the Menderes government of the direct political blame that it was due. The efforts of Greece to internationalize the human rights violations through international organizations such as the UN and NATO found little sympathy. British NATO representative Cheetham deemed it “undesirable” to probe the pogrom. US representative Edwin Martin thought the effect on the alliance was exaggerated, and the French, Belgians and Norwegians urged the Greeks to “let bygones be bygones”. Indeed, the North Atlantic Council issued a statement that the Turkish government had done everything that could be expected. More outspoken was the World Council of Churches, given the damage wrought on 90 percent of Istanbul's Greek Orthodox churches, and a delegation was sent to Istanbul to inspect the havoc. (Retrieved and adapted from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul\\_Pogrom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul_Pogrom))

8 Proti Island: The closest of the Prince's Islands to Constantinople [Istanbul]. In Turkish, "Kinali."

9 Fr. Amphilochios Makris: (1888-1970) Well-known Greek monastic spiritual father from the holy island of Patmos. One time abbot of St. John the Theologian Monastery and founder of the Women's Convent of the Annunciation, besides being a renowned spiritual father, Fr. Amphilochios was also known for his missionary, ecological and charitable endeavors.

10 Three years after this, on September 20, 1964, the Greek cemetery of Kouskoutzouki (Kuskuncuk) was desecrated and the following day the Cave-Chapel of Panaghia in Exi Marmara was destroyed.

11 Nun Gavriilia, *The Ascetic of Love*, Series Talanto, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2000. See also, *Road to Emmaus*, Issue 7, Fall 2001, "The Obedience of Love: An Interview with Sister Gavriilia."

12 Principio, one of the Prince's Islands. In Turkish, Buyucada.

13 Jonah 4:6-11.

14 For nonOrthodox readers: Orthodox Christians fast not only from oil, but more importantly, from meat, eggs and wine on Wednesdays, Fridays and during major fast periods, but for some reason this new Christian had only heard, "oil."

15 In 1964, the Ankara government reneged on the 1930 Greco-Turkish Ankara convention, which established the right of Greek *etablis* (Greeks who were born and lived in Istanbul but held Greek citizenship) to live and work in Turkey. Deported with two-day's notice, the Greek Orthodox community of Istanbul was devastated. The population, 80 – 100,000 persons in 1955, shrank to only 48,000 in 1965. Today they number around 1,500, and continue to be persecuted. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has been bombed four times over the past few years, and the remaining Greeks are increasingly forced to emigrate by Turkish laws designed to obstruct inheritance and business. The Greek Theological School of Halki, the theological seminary of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was forcibly closed by the Turkish government in 1971, and remains so until now.

16 Exodus 13:32-36

17 Ismet Inonu (1884-1973) First Prime Minister of Turkey, President of Turkey after Ataturk's death (1938-50) and afterwards repeatedly reelected as Prime Minister until his retirement.

18 Note from *Road to Emmaus* correspondent, Nicholas Karellos: "I can vouch for this. In the early spring of 1987 I was doing my compulsory military service in the Greek navy. One night, I was called back from leave and we were put on red alert for several weeks. We were ready to go to war from moment to moment, but did not know the details ourselves, and there is no way that Kyrios Petros could have known this. Only in 2004 was it revealed in the Greek press that a Greek-Turkish war had been narrowly prevented by a secret agreement between the Prime Minister of Greece, Papandreou, and President Todor Zhivkov of communist Bulgaria. The Bulgarians quietly sent their troops to the Turkish borders and the Turks, afraid of a double war, withdrew."