



# THE FUTURE OF THE GREEK LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

## SURVIVAL IN THE DIASPORA



### A REPORT FROM THE ARCHBISHOP'S COMMISSION ON GREEK LANGUAGE AND HELLENIC CULTURE

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## On the Report of the Commission on Greek Language and Hellenic Culture

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I am very happy and proud to present the members of the Commission and their report, "The Future of the Greek Language and Culture in the United States: Survival in the Diaspora" to all of you this morning, for it stands as a landmark achievement in the life of our Holy Archdiocese. When I assumed my responsibilities for the welfare of this Archdiocese from the hands of our Holy Mother Church, I became immediately aware that the issues of Greek language and culture were in dire need of immediate attention.

The eminent Russian Orthodox theologian Father George Florovsky pointed out throughout his long and distinguished career, that Greek language and culture cannot be divorced from Orthodox Christianity. In fact, the loss of the Greek language in Western Europe was a direct cause of the misunderstandings and eventual break between the Western and Eastern Churches. The value of keeping faith and continuity with the language of the New Testament, and for that matter of the Old Testament in the Septuagint, as well as the language of the Church Fathers, cannot be underestimated. If I may quote him:

"The Orthodox Church of East has been speaking for centuries the same old idiom of the Fathers, has kept and cherished it as her true mother tongue, and for that reason is perhaps better equipped for its adequate interpretation than anyone who would merely learn a foreign tongue in order to interpret ancient texts with some respectable dictionary in his hands."

So it is not merely a matter of culture, but also a matter of Faith that the vitality of the Greek language be preserved and cultivated.

Our Church has arrived at a point in its history where the knowledge of the modern Greek language among the majority of our flock is at an all-time low. This cannot reasonably be attributed to the pastoral decision of thirty years ago to employ English in the liturgical services of the Church, because, as is well known, the language of the Liturgy is not spoken Greek. In fact, one could make the argument that the use of English in the Liturgy and the subsequent accessibility of the Liturgy for converts has increased the knowledge of Modern Greek among those very converts who choose to learn Greek as part of their experience of the richness of our Church.

However, the fact remains that the knowledge of Greek is waning in our Archdiocese and with that, the knowledge and appreciation of Hellenic Culture. This does mean to imply that to appreciate Greek Paideia and the Hellenic Ideals one must speak Greek. This is clearly not the case and is demonstrated in the wider society by the Philhellenic spirit of America. But it does mean that in our Greek-American subculture, where the Greek language is allowed to disappear, it is inevitable that the appreciation of Hellenic Culture will also fade.

Is this to say that the primary purpose of the Church is to teach Greek language and culture? By no means. The primary mission of the Church is to preach and teach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we are also the inheritors of a great legacy, and in a country and time when the appreciation of cultural diversity and ethnic origins are a hallmark of our educational systems, what a shame it would be for our own community to lose the very thing that other faith and ethnic communities are striving to maintain.

For all these reasons and more, and I mean the valiant and noble efforts that are made around our beloved Archdiocese every day by hard-working men and women to make the Greek language and culture alive for our children, I asked Professor John A. Rassias of Dartmouth University to head up a commission to study comprehensively the situation as it stands now, and to propose a means by which we can move forward.

I am very pleased to welcome Professor Rassias and members of the Commission to the Archdiocese today, so that they might present the results of their year-long labor of love for the sake of our Church



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Your Eminence:

Your Commission on Greek Language and Hellenic Culture has completed its assignment. Although we witnessed much that is commendable, we also encountered areas of disturbing weakness in the system. Our report therefore includes carefully considered analysis as well as recommendations for action that we present to you with a sense of great urgency.

On March 12, 1998, at our first meeting, you charged us to conduct such public hearings, inquiries, and studies as might be necessary to make recommendations to you. We were charged to consider: (a) the importance of the study of Greek language and culture, (b) the need for professional development, (c) the quality of materials and realia used in instruction, (d) the effectiveness of curricula, (e) the optimal age to begin studying the Greek language and culture, (f) the quality of teacher preparation and re-training, (g) the availability of testing mechanisms, (h) financing Hellenic education, (i) the role played by parents, and (j) other areas of importance.

Since March 1998, we have held public hearings in Boston, Manhattan, Flushing, Chicago, Baltimore, and Los Angeles. We have visited Greek schools and have had the opportunity to interview teachers and students. We have also mailed questionnaires in both Greek and English, along with letters in both languages, to Greek teachers and principals of day and afternoon schools in the 500 communities in the United States. To assure greater independence of view, we indicated that the questionnaires need not be signed. We have given many interviews in newspapers and on the radio, have been contacted personally by interested parties, and have issued five interim reports to Commission members.

We gleaned a wide cross section of opinions in extensive personal notes and letters, along with questionnaires from throughout the United States. The questionnaires were evaluated and analyzed by professional statisticians. The results, which may be seen in appendices to this report, underscore many existing problems and substantiate the need for action. The public hearings gave large numbers of people the opportunity to air their feelings.

The makeup of the Commission assured us of the most qualified people to undertake a task of this magnitude. We also had the advantage of a propitious mix of Commissioners born in Greece, members who are Greek-American, and those who are not of Greek heritage. This assembly of people with different backgrounds was essential to arrive at an unbiased consensus on major issues. The expertise of various members was brought to bear in the report, with objectivity being the hallmark. I believe that a Commission made up of a completely Greek constituency would not have had the same degree of impartiality. People sometimes view their problems in too narrow a context, whereas the proper context is frequently much broader. Basically, the problems of second-language instruction are not peculiar to the Greek community. Other groups face similar problems, and the Commission considered some of their solutions.

You will find our report to be a well-balanced document that is concerned wholly with what is fitting and proper for the reformation of Greek studies in the Greek Orthodox communities of this nation. We commend you on your initiative, desire for objectivity, and unstinting moral support throughout our investigation.

Measured by the impassioned participation in our hearings and by responses to our questionnaires, I can assure you that the Commission's activities have stimulated, - at the very least, an increased interest in improving the instruction of the Greek language and of Hellenic culture. We trust that our report will generate wide public discussion. We believe that the Greek community's school system is ready to receive the Commission's recommendations and, under your leadership, to act on them.

On behalf of the Commission,

Sincerely yours,

John A. Rassias  
Chair of the Commission



## **PREAMBLE**

The basic question is how Greek-Americans can thrive as Hellenes in the diaspora. We used to take for granted that students in the Greek schools were Greek and spoke Greek at home. These students now tend to be second, third, or fourth generation, and many come from mixed marriages. They do not speak Greek at home. Or, if one parent does speak Greek to them, they answer in English. Nevertheless, most of the students in Greek school are proud to be Greek. So the schools' task becomes how to preserve and enhance this Hellenic consciousness. How can parents be induced to speak some Greek at home when the children are tired, when they want to watch television or go out to play instead of studying or hearing Greek? How can children overcome their conviction that Greek is useless for them?

One second-generation mother spoke movingly about her own situation. "Why," she asked, "should my third-generation child learn Greek?" There must be a real answer. It can no longer be assumed that learning Greek is the right way to go.

Here is what we learned in our hearings from parents and children when we asked the question "Why should children learn Greek?"

- Because we are proud to be Greek.
- Because I like the history, people, and culture of Greece.
- Because Greek culture is basic to understanding Western civilization.
- Because I want to communicate with relatives and friends when I go to Greece.
- Because learning another language will help me to become a complete person.
- Because knowledge of another language enhances self-esteem.
- Because knowledge of Greek helps one with English, since so many English words are derived from Greek.
- Because knowledge of a second language generally enhances performance in school in other subjects and leads to higher scores on the SATs.
- Because the New Testament is written in Greek and I would like my children to be able read it in the original.
- Because I would like to write letters to my friends and relatives in Greece.
- Because knowledge of foreign languages helps a person secure a job in today's global culture.
- Because learning Greek or any other foreign language enables a person to relate to the world in more than one way.

An important question that we heard again and again is whether a heritage can be maintained if its language is lost. Some people argue that if language is forced on children, or taught badly (or both), then the net result is hatred of both the language and the heritage. It might be better to teach the heritage (e.g., ancient Greek mythology, Byzantine civilization, modern Greek culture) via English at first, so that students become interested enough to want to learn the language. Other people maintain

that the language must be taught early and in a sustained manner. The Commission agrees. However, the Commission also believes that greater use should be made of English at early stages to teach the Greek heritage.

Achieving competency in the Greek language and acquiring a meaningful awareness of Hellenic culture will require a major, sustained effort. The Commission concludes that these goals cannot be achieved without substantial improvements in the entire system. As the Commission interacted with people throughout the nation, it realized that there are many administrators and teachers who are making laudable contributions to language study. We have reason to rejoice, for the Greek schools do have teachers who are competent, enthusiastic about teaching, and able to respect their students as whole persons - who help their students overcome their fear of learning, fear of making mistakes, who banish boredom and, in sum, make learning an enjoyable experience. To say that problems exist in the system as a whole does not diminish these achievements. However, the Commission has identified persistent structural and systemic problems. These include:

- Inadequate preparation of teachers at all levels.
- lack of appropriate, pedagogically sound teaching materials.
- lack of imaginative curricula that touch, excite, and motivate students.
- lack of uniform standards and criteria for evaluation and testing of language proficiency.
- Poor articulation from level to level.
- Insufficient administrative and financial support in many parishes.
- Lack of recognition of good teachers.
- Grossly inadequate compensation and fringe benefits for teachers.
- Inadequate use of technological resources - e.g., computers, audiovisual materials, and distance learning.
- Lack of lending libraries with relevant books in Greek and English for all ages.

Before we present our findings and recommendations, let us take a moment to dream. How beneficial it would be if Greeks were able to retain their Hellenic ethnicity in the American diaspora while constituting a "Platonic village" in which diversity is strength - i.e., a community in which all people know that they have a task and willingly pursue their own task while at the same time accepting the activities of others as proper within the overall structure. And also, how beneficial it would be if Greeks, like other religious and cultural groups in the United States, could establish excellent schools that serve the population at large. We have every reason to believe that, with effort and determination rooted in the fundamentals of the rich Greek heritage, the Greek community could do this. Indeed, we believe that the Hellenic-American community could create a distinguished institution of higher learning that would stand proudly beside a Catholic Georgetown, a Jewish Brandeis, and a Quaker Haverford!

## SUMMARY

The basic questions are how Greek-Americans can thrive as Hellenes in the diaspora and whether their Greek heritage can be maintained if its language is lost. The Commission believes that it cannot. The Greek language is essential; it must be taught early and in a sustained manner. However, English can be used effectively at early stages to teach the Greek heritage to younger students and to instill in them a desire to learn the Greek language.

Although sporadically successful, the present system of language instruction in Greek Orthodox community schools suffers from persistent problems. The Commission's report divides these problems into nine categories:

1. **Morale.** In all three groups that the Commission investigated - teacher students, and parents (not to mention priests in some cases) - skeptical attitudes exist that undermine the vibrant, joyful instruction of Greek
2. **Parents.** A disappointingly small percentage of Greek-American parents send their children to Greek school and maintain the Greek language at home.
3. **Organization.** The schools suffer from lack of coordination among themselves and with the public

school system.

4. **Curriculum.** There is a paucity of articulated curricula that would enable a better progression from lower to higher grades and allow students to sit for a common examination. There is also a significant underutilization of literature in the curriculum.
5. **Educational materials.** Greek schools need more and better educational materials; their books and ancillary materials do not always match what is available in French, Spanish, Japanese, etc. Materials that may have been appropriate in the past are now outdated. Children's needs and circumstances have changed. Some of the books now employed fail to relate to American ways and are particularly inappropriate for students from mixed marriages.
6. **Pedagogy.** Greek parochial schools need to match the public schools and other parochial schools in their awareness of diverse and effective methodologies. Especially needed are strategies to de-emphasize grammar and to teach Greek as a foreign language.
7. **Teacher Preparation.** Teachers need training and re-training. Speaking Greek as a mother tongue does not alone qualify one to teach. Teachers from Greece need to become aware of American ways. All teachers need to be trained in how to overcome boredom, how to integrate language with culture, and how to make full use of technological aids, among other strategies.
8. **Compensation.** If schools are to maintain quality education, they must pay their teachers a viable salary along with appropriate benefits. At present, teachers' salaries are grossly inadequate. Of those who responded to our teachers' questionnaire, only 3% indicated satisfaction with their remuneration while 75% indicated that they were not at all satisfied.
9. **Finances.** The burden of financing should rest primarily on the individual parish, not on the Archdiocese or the Greek government. Local fund-raising energizes the individual community and deepens its commitment to language study.

The Commission's report provides seventy-three recommendations, to be implemented on the national or local level, for improvement in the above categories. The Commission is convinced that, unless action be taken immediately, Hellenism's survival in the American diaspora will be at risk.



## Chapter 1.

### **MORALE: Successes and Shortcomings**

The Commission found many reasons for optimism. The speakers in our hearings were all sincere in their determination to maintain the Greek heritage. There was frequent applause for the many testimonies about pride in teaching for "the glory of Hellenism."

We were heartened as well by many stories about success in language instruction and about supportive parents who believed in the quality of their schools. We were impressed by the warm, caring environment created by the faculty and administration in some of the schools we visited, by the excellent rapport between students and teachers, by the exceptionally good behavior of the children, and by the intelligent answers given to our questions in most cases.

Good morale is achieved when all elements in a given parish — the priest, the teachers, and the parents — work in harmony. In such cases, the effect on students is predictably positive. For example, when a parish holds an open house, students are given the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned and to bask in the approval of their parents and other community members. There can be few recruiting devices more effective than seeing excited children demonstrating their learning and their pride in their accomplishment. As one principal reported to the Commission, "These students have a positive ethnic self-image — they know who they are."

On the other hand, the Commission found many reasons for concern. We encountered a pervasive feeling that, historically, the Archdiocese has not always given high enough priority to its educational mission. Furthermore, we were told that some priests do not believe in Greek language education, and sometimes do not even speak Greek very well themselves. Whenever the local priest is genuinely interested in Hellenic culture and is competent in the Greek language, he can generate the resources and create the needed programs to promote their instruction.

Conversely, priests who cannot effectively use Greek in worship, sermons, and general conversation, and who are adversely predisposed to Hellenic culture, produce the opposite effect: they can divide the community along linguistic lines, with the result that the importance of the Greek language and culture in the parish rapidly declines.

Teachers ardently desire more moral support from the Church and more recognition for their services. In many instances, they feel discouraged by the mix of Greek-speaking and non-Greek-speaking children in the classroom. In all instances, they feel scandalously underpaid. They are equally distressed by the paucity of hours of instruction allowed, by the lack of adequate materials, and by what they perceive as parental indifference.

The Commission, too, is discouraged to hear teachers and priests decry the indifference of the great majority of Greek-American parents, who do not send their children to Greek school and who apparently do not believe in the value of Greek language education. It was even reported in one hearing that converts are often more devoted to Greek than are Greek-Americans.

A further cause for concern is the general lack of self-esteem on the part of Greek-American students unable to compete with Greek-speaking students newly arrived from Greece. In an attempt to assess why student motivation was low, we examined the reactions of high school students to issues related to their education and the Greek language. In one school, the students remained silent, having no answers to any of our questions. We fear that this demonstrates a lack of true motivation in the students themselves, which in turn indicates this school's failure to communicate to its students convincing reasons for the study of Greek.

Taken together, the above problems add up to skepticism, and even to demoralization.

## **Recommendations:**

### ***National***

- 1.1 The Archdiocese should consider how best to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to the teaching of the Greek language and Hellenic culture.
- 1.2 Seminarians should be required to take intensive courses in the Greek language during the early part of their studies, and if possible to assist in some parish in Greece during or immediately after their education.
- 1.3 The Archdiocese should establish a central location where those who teach Greek can be prepared and where other relevant training for specific purposes can take place.
- 1.4 In order to enhance students' self-esteem and the credibility of the teaching program, the Archdiocese should award a diploma to children who finish the eighth grade and pass a proficiency examination
- 1.5 The Orthodox Observer should run a page devoted to education as frequently as possible on which it prints examples of writing and/or art work by students from different grades.

### ***Local***

- 1.6 At the start of the school year, each school should hold an open house, inviting parents to meet with teachers and some past students in order to learn about the school's program. At this time, past students should demonstrate their competence through recitations, shorts plays, skits, or

- other means.
- 1.7 Schools should involve parents in recruiting along the lines of "Each-one-reach-one."
  - 1.8 Throughout the school year, each school should hold programs in which role models from various professions and vocations speak about how the knowledge of Greek has enriched their lives. Such talks could also be broadcast on Greek radio stations and TV programs.
  - 1.9 Use radio announcements and advertisements in local newspapers as ways of bringing the schools to the public's attention.

### ***Why Do We Teach?***

We teach in order to bring to life, through language, the gifts God gave us by which to communicate, to share, to help - in sum, to live fully. We teach in order to activate not only the mind but also the senses and emotions. Children need to be taught how to look and really see, how to listen and really hear, how to smell and be pleased or shocked, how to taste and react, and - most important - how to touch, that they may be spiritually touched. When all of this is accomplished, language instruction becomes truly humanistic.



## **Chapter 2.**

### **PARENTS: A Crucial Role**

Language is best mastered at school if the home environment is supportive either through parents who speak Greek or non-Greek-speaking parents who encourage their children's efforts.

Unfortunately, the Commission heard consistent testimony that the schools' problems are caused in large measure by uncooperative or indifferent parents who do nothing at home to encourage their children to speak or understand Greek.

An extremely small percentage of Greek-American children are sent to Greek school. There are several reasons. We were told that in some mixed marriages Greek schooling is opposed out of deference to the non-Greek spouse, if not out of apathy or antagonism. Some parents object to driving considerable distances to deliver their children to school; others say that they cannot afford the tuition, especially when more than one child is involved. Also, in cases where children are sent, all too often the Greek school is used primarily as a babysitting facility.

Even when parents are cooperative, they find it difficult to maintain the Greek language at home. Children have so many competing interests: television, sports, clubs, and all sorts of other distractions that youngsters conjure up to avoid studying.

Furthermore, parents all too often permit their children to be absent from class for inadequate reasons.

This detracts from the seriousness of the enterprise, discouraging both teachers and assiduous students.

Given such difficulties, one must be thoughtful and considerate when reaching out to parents who do not send their children to Greek school. In cases where the marriage is mixed (a very common situation, indeed true of 80% of the marriages performed in one of the populous parishes we visited), advocates of Hellenic education must be particularly alert not to offend the non-Greek spouse. The wrong approach would be the super-nationalistic one. Parents who do not speak Greek need to be sensitized so that they will become partners in the teaching endeavor. They need to recognize the advantages (and also the problems) of bilingualism

## **Recommendations:**

### ***National***

- 2.1 Prepare a handbook for parents on how they can help their children at home; include information about resources on the internet.
- 2.2 Design courses in Greek culture for non-Greek-speaking parents, taught in English.

### ***Local***

- 2.3 Offer effective language courses to non-Greek-speaking parents as well as to their children.
- 2.4 Encourage Greek-Orthodox parents to become involved in Church affairs in order to acquire a more complete experience of Greek culture.
- 2.5 Encourage all parents, especially those of younger children, to remain in the classroom whenever possible.
- 2.6 Encourage Greek-speaking parents to serve as teaching aides in the classroom.
- 2.7 Reward cooperative parents with reduced tuition fees — for instance, those who participate actively in the "Each- one-reach-one" program. (Judicious means will be needed to do this fairly.)
- 2.8 Vigorously discourage absenteeism.
- 2.9 In each parish, form a cadre of satisfied parents eager to contact families that do not send their children to Greek school, to serve as a welcoming committee for newcomers to the parish, and to contact parents of younger children early on in order to help establish a positive attitude.

### ***Parental Involvement***

If parents do not value the study of the Greek language or Hellenic culture, their feelings will be passed along to their children and there will be little reason for the children to embark on a difficult path. Schools cannot operate successfully in a vacuum; without parental support they are guaranteed to fail. The problems are threefold: how to involve children in Greek education in the first place, how to teach them effectively once they are there, and how to celebrate their accomplishments so that the cycle will continue.



## **Chapter 3.**

### **ORGANIZATION: Centralization and Coordination**

Teachers from many different European nations testified at a recent symposium in Crete that problems besetting Greek-language education are more dire in the United States than anywhere else, the alleged cause being lack in the United States of the centralization enjoyed by Greek schools in other countries.

The Commission was told repeatedly that centralization would help provide a network of support for the schools since in some areas each Greek school operates independently and often in competition with other parish schools. The Commission heard many calls for team-oriented, non-autocratic coordination through the Archdiocesan Office of Education. At the same time, it heard many reminders that every form of organization must be responsive to local conditions, needs, and resources. A balanced approach would facilitate coordination between the Office of Education, diocesan directors of education, parish communities, and the relevant departments in the Greek Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education. A centralized office would be able to keep all the schools informed about relevant laws, opportunities, outside funding, etc.

Coordination was a repeated topic in the Commission's hearings. Parishes should not compete but should work together. Churches should "pull down their walls," allowing children from their parish to attend the school of another parish if necessary. The varying level of competence among Greek schools creates a problem for the children's preparation for high school and college. Owing to a laissez-faire attitude, many schools now are proceeding independently. Perhaps the number of schools should be reduced, and fewer schools maintained, so that the quality of instruction might improve.

Several teachers felt that their schools have lost great numbers of students because of demographic changes in the makeup of neighborhoods. Greek-American parents have left traditional Greek centers and have moved to the suburbs; this forces them to travel considerable distances to deliver and then pick up their children, since the schools cannot afford vans or buses. The principal of one school located in center-city felt that if his school were transferred to the suburbs its enrollment would triple.

Parishioners felt that coordination is also needed between the Greek parochial schools and public high schools, as well as colleges, to ensure that students receive appropriate credit for their level of proficiency in Greek. For example, the Chicago Board of Education now requires that all high school students complete two years of language study in order to graduate. Students who leave the parochial system after the eighth grade and enter a public high school might be eligible for credit, thus speeding their graduation and providing an incentive to study in the earlier grades. By law, the Chicago Board of Education is required to supply a teacher if twenty or more students wish to study a particular language. And, if an individual public school does not have the twenty students required for an additional teacher to be supplied, the Board of Education can arrange for independent study. It would be useful for the Greek schools to know more about possibilities in the public sector. To this end, they will need to be informed about applicable state and federal legislation.

The Commission was saddened by the evident lack of cooperation among various parishes in close proximity. Along with the lack of coordination regarding curricula and examinations, Greek schools often fail to coordinate their extra-curricular activities that enhance Greek identity — for example, music, dance, drama, etc.

### **Recommendations:**

#### ***National***

- 3.1 Empower the Archdiocesan Office of Education with greater financial resources, additional personnel, and more extensive outreach in matters of curricula, teacher training, materials, and finances, provided that local concerns are also honored.
- 3.2 Evaluate the various types of Greek schools periodically, using independent referees.
- 3.3 Create magnet schools at the high school level as centers of excellence capable of attracting non-Greek as well as Greek students

### ***Local***

- 3.4 Discourage competition among schools within close proximity since this severely restricts the most profitable use of facilities.
- 3.5 Take advantage of educational opportunities in Greek language and culture available through the local public schools in regions where a substantial number of students are studying Greek.
- 3.6 Coordinate extra-curricular activities in communities with many parishes so that each year one of the parishes becomes the locus for activities — such as music, dance, drama, etc. — that lead to a greater sense of Greekness.
- 3.7 Develop after-school Greek clubs.

### ***Sharing***

Through friendly, healthy sharing, schools will bolster their identity and create an atmosphere of mutual respect. One way to share is through the spelling bee at the elementary level; another is through quiz bowls at more advanced levels on topics such as the Odyssey, the New Testament, mythology, or modern Greek poetry. Sharing in these extra-curricular ways will tighten the bonds among parishes and allow for greater cooperation in academic matters.



## **Chapter 4.**

### **CURRICULUM: Professionalism and Focus**

The Commission heard that a strong academic program in language and culture - a full curriculum able to compete with other schools - is a sine qua non of a viable educational program. Parents must feel that they are doing the best for their children; children must be able to compete when they reach high school. The parochial schools need to match the public schools in results. They need to be more professional.

Most Greek schools end at the eighth grade; many graduates continue in Catholic high schools. Clearly, most students stop studying Greek too early. On the bright side, one school in New York, ending in eighth grade, graduated students who averaged 90.1% in the Greek Regents four years later. All these children were second generation, and half of them were from mixed marriages.

Many urged that instruction begin as early as possible - i.e., at the pre-kindergarten level. The establishment of more pre-school, nursery, and kindergarten grades is likely to produce significant returns.

There is a dearth of articulated curricula that would enable a better progression from lower to higher grades, would provide clear guidelines for materials appropriate for each level, and would allow students from all schools to sit for a common examination. The Commission recognizes, of course, that different schools may require customized curricula to some degree. However, the curricula currently in use are not sufficiently standardized.

The Commission witnessed courses that utilized literature not only to inform but also to elicit full participation by students. One such class dealt with Book One of the Iliad. The relevant vocabulary, background information on Homer, the poem's overall action, as well as primary metaphors were all covered. Although the instructor lectured, she also encouraged the students to contribute answers to her apt questions. The students' participation was remarkable and their interest was kept alive to the end of the session. The classroom walls were lined with the students' essays on different literary topics and poems. These papers were impressive for their mastery of language, analytical grasp, and creative approach.

It is important to raise philhellenic as well as Hellenic consciousness in order to show how knowledge of the Greek heritage can be useful in appreciating the art and literature of other countries, particularly that of America. This can be accomplished through content-based instruction - i.e., by teaching Greek mythology, drama, Aesop, Homer, modern history and literature, etc., in English. There is little doubt that Greek heritage taught in English has the ability to entice young students, opening the door to further study, including the study of Greek itself.

The Commission was pleased to see two schools with well-equipped computer rooms, one of which was state of the art, with computers at which children aged six to ten were working under the supervision of the teacher. These children were very involved, happy, and creative. Another school had twenty new computers, five of which were already logged onto the internet. Plans for a second such room are being considered. We lament the lack of similar equipment in most Greek schools. On the other hand, we are wary about overemphasizing technology. The internet increases the flow of information and heightens communication among people, bringing the entire world into the classroom - these developments cannot be ignored. But ways must be found to make them meaningful and productive without losing sight of the human factor. Technology will be of little value in educating our children if teachers fail in their indispensable function of inculcating and embodying humanistic values. No matter how awesome technology may be, nothing can match the effect of an underpaid, flawed human being who shares knowledge instead of merely dispensing it, and who connects with his or her students.

## **Recommendations:**

### ***National***

- 4.1 Employ articulated curricula addressing the specialized needs of schools teaching Greek as a foreign language primarily, as opposed to schools whose students are mostly native speakers of Greek.
- 4.2 Set goals for each grade - what children are expected to know and be able to do after first grade, second grade, etc. - comparable to standards set in other languages.
- 4.3 Develop common examinations similar to standardized examinations in other languages, based on a nation-wide curriculum and perhaps on the guidelines established in Pistopoiisi eparkeias tis ellinomatheias, published by the Kentro Ellinikis Glossas (Thessaloniki 1997).

### ***Local***

- 4.4 Concentrate instruction, especially in the early grades, on speaking and understanding, before

other linguistic skills are developed.

- 4.5 Introduce the accomplishments of Hellenic culture across the ages, in Greece and in the diaspora, taught at first in English and then in Greek. In this way, raise philhellenic as well as Hellenic consciousness through content-based instruction. Introduce students to ideals in the arts and sciences inspired by Hellenic civilization.
- 4.6 Start instruction in language and culture earlier, ideally in prekindergarten; continue instruction beyond the eighth grade.
- 4.7 Increase the number of hours devoted to Greek per week, especially in the higher levels.
- 4.8 Make sensible use of the computer, in particular the internet, which already provides many resources for the study of Greek culture, geography, art, and so forth.

### ***Drama in the Classroom***

The role of drama in the classroom cannot be overemphasized. Play-acting fills a great need in the child's world. It becomes a vehicle through which people live out dreams, becoming anyone they choose and doing anything they want. It is the ideal medium through which students of all ages can divest themselves of their inhibitions by assuming different personae. It is particularly important in the early stages, for it is through drama that students realize that they can express themselves without fear of error, since another is speaking through them.

Drama enables students to unlock their potential for language and to experience what language can accomplish. Their confidence is boosted; the satisfaction of participation leads to further involvement. Everything is alive and active. The student is always center stage.



## **Chapter 5.**

### **EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS: More and Better**

There is a consensus that Greek schools have a great need for more and better educational materials; their books and ancillary materials do not match what is available in French, Spanish, Japanese, etc.

Children's needs have changed; there are fewer immigrants from Greece. Materials that may have been appropriate twenty years ago are now outdated. The problem is that many of the books now employed have very little to do with our own children - they do not relate to American ways and are particularly inappropriate for students from mixed marriages.

The problem does not apply only to children. Adult students tend to drop out in the few Greek language courses that exist for non-Greeks in mixed marriages because the teaching materials and methods are unappealing.

Especially lacking in Greek are history books and books about Greek culture in general. Some now in use come from Greece; although the cultural material they present is rich and may serve as ready resource material, their vocabulary tends to be much too advanced for second-language learners.

However, there are wonderful materials written in English about Greek history, literature, culture, and especially mythology. The Commission visited a remarkable elementary school where such materials are used, primarily in an oral manner. Students from this school, having completed a study of Homer, have signed up in record numbers for a Greek mythology course in the local high school, forcing the teacher of that course to revise it consistent with the students' prior learning.

## **Recommendations:**

### ***National***

- 5.1 Develop and utilize materials that fulfill the standards established for each level of Greek instruction: pre-school, primary school, middle school, high school.
- 5.2 Develop and utilize materials that fulfill the standards established for each type of Greek instruction (i.e., for non-Greek-speaking children, for Greek-speaking children, for adults).
- 5.3 Develop and utilize materials that respond to the interests and needs of American children in the Greek diaspora.
- 5.4 Take advantage of materials currently being developed in Greece by the Ministry of Education, the Kentro Ellinikis Glossas, the University of Crete, etc.
- 5.5 In developing new materials, seek the help of independent scholars, Greek studies programs, and professional associations in the United States.
- 5.6 Publish a monthly magazine, distributed nationally, that appeals specifically to Greek-American children. This might include simple Greek comic strips, crossword puzzles, and articles, drawings, and/or poems submitted by the children themselves. *Aerostato* might serve as a model.
- 5.7 Commission bilingual editions of children's books published in Greece.
- 5.8 Establish a biennial, named award in recognition of the best set of materials developed by local teachers.
- 5.9 Maintain open lines of communication between local schools and the Archdiocesan Office of Education regarding teaching materials.
- 5.10 Establish a web site through which teachers may display effective materials, download them, and exchange ideas.

### ***Local***

- 5.11 Encourage individual teachers to develop their own materials, consistent with established criteria for curricula, in a way that enables the local environment to be reflected in texts.
- 5.12 Provide study-leave opportunities and compensation to facilitate the development of materials by individual teachers.
- 5.13 Encourage schools to utilize appropriate materials available in English for the instruction of mythology, literature, and culture to younger children. It is likely that older children will want to continue their study of these subjects in Greek.

### ***What Textual Materials Do We Use and to What End?***

To make the class meaningful, the teacher needs to learn to make instruction vibrant. Texts either help or hinder this process. Language books are most often inhabited by unreal, cut-along-the-edges personages

who come unglued the minute you try, to stand them up. Above all, students want to relate to real people and situations - to the truth. After all, they have been raised on instant truth: television brings natural and man-made disasters directly into the living room. Students have seen the world in living color; inadequate language texts often portray it in black, white, or depressing gray. It is important that students know as much about themselves and what touches them as possible. They should have the opportunity not only to fill their minds with knowledge, but also to express their prejudices, sentiments, and other emotions. They should be at ease with themselves and be encouraged to articulate their innermost thoughts - to read and understand their own book within. In this sense, language study is a route to maturity and completeness. Language, if excellently taught, is a kicking, fleeting, growing, protean power whose dynamism will enhance the students' inherent dynamism and creativity.



## Chapter 6.

### **PEDAGOGY: Programs to Excite and Challenge**

How and to whom Greek is taught must be reviewed. When immigrants arrived en masse to the United States, the language was an extension of what they had learned in Greece. Greek, then, was taught as the first language for many first-generation children. For the second generation it was often taught in the same way, but the results were not the same. It is true that in some instances it was taught as a second language. The theory was good, but the classroom hours and the pedagogy were inadequate. Now, in most instances, we need to consider Greek a foreign language and teach it accordingly.

Too often in the Greek schools an excessive amount of time is devoted to grammar; that is a mistake. Although the study of grammar is an important part of language pedagogy, it must be placed within a meaningful context. Language can be taught in many ways, but the most efficacious way is through the oral-aural method when that method is properly used by well-prepared, linguistically aware teachers. Interdisciplinary elements from culture, mythology, drama, song, and dance should be tightly woven into the lesson, defining the Greek heritage in the process. Full participation by the children needs to be elicited in every classroom hour. Children need to be instructed in ways that are imaginative, joyful, and challenging.

The unsuccessful classes that we observed were conducted mostly in the form of an old fashioned lecture with a few simple questions suggesting obvious answers that only three or four students and the instructor herself kept providing. The successful classes that we observed stressed active participation on the part of students and the sheer joy of learning. The children had their hands constantly raised to answer questions and participated vividly in the discussion. They evidently liked what they were doing.

Separate tracks are needed academically (but not extra-curricularly) in order to cope with the diversity of students — namely (a) Greek-speaking children, (b) non-Greek speaking children. This is imperative for more than academic reasons, since non-Greek-speaking children feel embarrassed, even humiliated, when put in competition with Greek-speaking children.

All relevant studies indicate that class size makes a difference. We were pleased that we heard no complaints about class size. We urge Greek schools to keep classes small

## **Recommendations:**

### ***National***

- 6.1 Assure that all teachers receive preparation in modern pedagogies that address a variety of educational situations and problems, as well as in strategies to cope with such problems.
- 6.2 Assure that all teachers receive training in the pedagogy of second-language acquisition.
- 6.3 Enhance the teaching program by trips to Greece — for example, through the Archdiocesan summer camp (Ionian Village) and travel program.
- 6.4 Enhance the teaching program through summer camps in the United States where Greek is used exclusively.
- 6.5 Enhance the teaching program by linking cities having Greek schools to sister cities in Greece or Cyprus. (Among other benefits, this will help to involve parents.)
- 6.6 Enhance the teaching program by pen-pal communication between American students and students in Greece.
- 6.7 Enhance the teaching program by exploring the internet to discover resources.
- 6.8 Enhance the teaching program by utilizing distance learning to reach remote and/or isolated areas.

### ***What Priorities Should Be Followed in Class***

Oral communication is the key: at all costs our students must speak! Speaking is an integral part of our nature; it is through speaking that we learn a language. Active use is the key to mastering vocabulary; a word atrophies quickly not only when it is not used but also when its fullest meaning has not been incorporated into the student's experience and needs. There is nothing radical in this view — it has been known for centuries. As Saint Augustine pointed out in A.D. 389, "Hearing words does not result in learning; . . . we cannot hope to learn words we do not know unless we have grasped their meaning. This is not achieved by listening to the words, but by getting to know the things signified." Reflecting on strategies of language teaching, the Moravian educator John Amos Comenius wrote in 1648: "All things are taught and learned through examples, precepts, and exercises.... The exemplar should always come first, the precept should always follow, and imitation should always be insisted on." Further insistence on hands-on application in learning a language was voiced by Pierre Alexandre Lemare, a French grammarian, in 1819: "When for the first time a child hears the command 'Shut the door!' if he does not see a gesture accompanying the order, if he does not see it carried out immediately, he will not know what it means. . . . But if a voice from somewhere shouts 'Shut the door!' and someone rushes up to close it, . . . he perceives the sense of the expression he has heard."



## Chapter 7.

### TEACHER PREPARATION: Renewal and Revitalization

There is broad consensus that teachers need training and re-training. They need to be prepared in language instruction for different levels, for different age groups, and for students whose first language is not Greek. Teachers need to be trained in immersion techniques and in how to integrate language instruction with culture. They need to learn strategies to overcome boredom. Teachers need to be aware of the implications of multiculturalism. They need to get rid of nationalistic, narrow-minded biases that are outdated and that cannot help young Greek-Americans growing up today.

The Commission was distressed to learn that teachers in Greek schools rarely learn new methods. Although some training sessions exist, they are largely ineffective because they tend to expose the teachers to a lecture, whereas the teachers should be experimenting in techniques - hands-on practice - and participating in the exchange of ideas: showing each other what works and what does not work.

The Greek schools must reject the notion that people who want to teach and whose mother tongue is Greek are automatically capable of teaching well. For example, teachers from Greece do not necessarily know how to teach non-Greek-speaking Greek-Americans. In the future, such teachers need to be carefully screened not just for their professional knowledge but also for their motivation and flexibility. And once they get here, they will certainly need further training if they are to begin to understand the quite different culture in which they will be operating. It would be advantageous for teachers to come from American colleges, where a certain number of students are always being trained in the Greek language and culture. Regarding those from abroad, it was suggested that our schools should play host to young Greek interns - not teachers - so that younger people from Greece might experience our ways, and at the same time help in the classroom and develop lasting friendships.

It would be beneficial to hold teaching programs that bring together all teachers in a given city or district, since this would enhance networking among teachers as well as training them in pedagogy. This can best be accomplished through the creation of an American Association of the Teachers of Greek (AATGR), similar to the American Association of the Teachers of French (AATF), etc., which would hold annual meetings, sponsor colloquia on pedagogical strategies, evaluate materials, sponsor book fairs, and perhaps publish a journal.

### Recommendations:

#### *National*

- 7.1 Through regional seminars and workshops, all teachers should receive periodic training and re-training in both language instruction and methods of teaching literature and culture.
- 7.2 The Archdiocese should subsidize travel and accommodation for those who attend teacher-training workshops.
- 7.3 Teachers who come from Greece should undergo a training program in the specific characteristics of the American educational environment.
- 7.4 Teachers should be evaluated periodically. This evaluation should be done in a spirit of cooperation and camaraderie by competent internal and external evaluators.
- 7.5 Teachers should be given opportunities and incentives to re-train. If they do not accept, and/or do not improve after re-training, they should be dismissed.
- 7.6 Teachers should receive a salary increment based on the number of hours of training they undergo each year.
- 7.7 An American Association of Teachers of Greek (AATGR) should be established.

- 7.8 Schools must give priority to the hiring and preparation of a new generation of teachers.
- 7.9 Together with recruiting experienced teachers from Greece, schools should attract young Greeks to come to the United States as interns for a year, and/or should hire Greek graduate and undergraduate students currently enrolled in American universities to assist in the classroom.
- 7.10 Whenever possible, teachers should be drawn from among graduates of American colleges who possess fluency in Greek.
- 7.11 Diocesan-based placement services should be established in order to facilitate the selection of teachers by school principals.

### ***What Do We Seek in a Good Teacher?***

Tens of thousands of students trained throughout the world by the Peace Corps, when asked about the qualities that best define a good teacher, responded: "A good teacher should be competent, skillful, and zealous." A teacher who is competent knows the material well; a teacher who is skillful relies on an effective methodology; a teacher who is zealous shares his or her passion for the subject and teaches it with God's inspiration and help — i.e., with enthusiasm.



## **Chapter 8.**

### **COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS: Time for Serious Reconsideration**

The Commission established that present teachers, looking to the future, do not see where enough new teachers will be found. Teaching is a mission for many, it is true, but that is not sufficient. It is doubtful that people will continue to be attracted, given the meager salaries offered. The crucial factor is the teachers' enthusiasm, but they also need to have adequate financial support, health insurance, retirement benefits, etc.

Teachers' salaries are grossly inadequate. Mean salary seems to be about \$25 per hour, but is paid only for class time, not for preparation. To obtain a pension from Greece, teachers must work at least eighteen hours per week and have this as their chief employment — requirements that are rarely met.

Because of the unattractive income and lack of benefits that the profession offers, there is a serious shortage of Greek teachers now. In ten years, very few of those who are currently teaching will be active. Therefore, vigorous recruitment should begin immediately.

In the most successful schools we visited, clearly the school's excellence was derived in large part from the high level of salaries paid, which in turn enabled the school to hire — and retain — well-trained teachers.

In sum, teachers need to be rewarded with adequate salaries and benefits, not to mention moral support and recognition.

## **Recommendations:**

### ***National and local***

- 8.1 Since it is likely that the pool of teachers will be drastically depleted in the very near future, it is imperative that steps be taken immediately to improve the condition of current teachers in the areas of salary, benefits, periodic training, and recognition. This will make the schools more attractive to those whom they attempt to recruit in the future. Unless this be done, Greek education will proceed at great peril.
- 8.2 Benefits should include financial support for attending professional meetings in the United States and/or Greece, and other forms of professional development.
- 8.3 Professional development should be rewarded by increases in salary.



## **Chapter 9.**

### **FINANCES: Serious Support and Awards**

It is abundantly clear to the Commission that a great amount of money will be needed to support the recommendations made by the Commission. There are sharply varying opinions in regard to the proper sources of this money - namely, the proportion of funds that should be solicited from the Archdiocese, individual parishes, businesses, individuals, and/or the Greek government.

There are those who believe that the burden of financing should rest primarily on the individual parish, not on the Archdiocese or the Greek government. Local fund-raising energizes the individual community and deepens its commitment to language study. On the other hand, we must recognize that although many Greek-Americans are quite affluent, others do not send their children to Greek school because they cannot afford to do so, especially when they have more than one child.

A community that takes primary responsibility for its own financial viability will no longer need to fantasize about financial support from the Greek government. There are other ways in which the Greek government might play a role - for example, in sponsoring interns.

Although it is probably not feasible or even advisable for the Archdiocese to assume the full burden of financing every school, the Archdiocese should and could match funds raised by individual parishes. Since a community is a collection of diverse people who share important elements in common - such as heritage, language, religion - it is fitting and proper that there be a synergistic relationship among all parties. For example, since a Greek-owned business benefits from Greek customers, it should give back to the community a commensurate amount in the form of contributions.

## **Recommendations:**

### ***Local***

- 9.1 The individual parishes should bear the primary responsibility for funding their schools.
- 9.2 In each parish, a sufficient percentage of total dues from all contributors - not just those parents

whose children are in Greek school - should be allocated to education. A percentage sufficient to meet school needs might be suggested by the Archdiocese.

- 9.3 Families with more than one child in Greek school should receive reduced tuition for the second, third, or additional children according to a scale such as: first child full tuition, second child 3/4 tuition, third child 1/2 tuition, subsequent children zero tuition.
- 9.4 Parishes should aggressively seek contributions from local businesses.

### ***National***

- 9.5 In recognition of the parishes' efforts to fund their schools, the Archdiocese should respond with a program of proportional matching funds.



## **CODA:**

### **A Call for Immediate and Decisive Action**

The time is ripe for a concerted, strenuous long-term effort to revitalize Hellenic culture and language in the United States: to constitute the "Platonic village" in which diversity is strength. The Greek language - the indispensable manifestation of Hellenic identity - is rapidly eroding. Unless significant remedial action be taken immediately, Hellenism's survival in the American diaspora will be at risk. The Commission's most dire prediction, based on the evidence it has accumulated, is that Greek identity may well be lost in less than a generation.

[The Rassias Report - Appendix A \(Ερωτηματολόγιον\) ►](#)

[The Rassias Report - Appendix B \(Questionnaire\) ►](#)

[The Rassias Report - Appendix C \(Statistics\) ►](#)

[The Rassias Report - Appendix D \(Teacher Frequency Report\) ►](#)

[The Rassias Report - Appendix E \(Student Frequency Report\) ►](#)