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The Multiple Faces of Greek American Religious Experience: Helen Papanikolas's *The Apple Falls from the Apple Tree*

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After centuries of organized religious practice, a tendency among individuals to acknowledge themselves as having a strong personal faith, one that does not necessarily align itself with any of the well-delineated religious orders (Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus), has become increasingly evident. Nevertheless, such private religious belief, termed America's "invisible religion,"[1] does not finally destroy the established form of religion or affect the astonishing proliferation of new varieties of religious movements. Rather, while religious faith is regarded as a private matter, religious practice as a public performance is undergoing a phase of revalorization as it potentially provides for community and fosters social bonds among members of the established religious orders or the new religious movements. Instead of being drawn by theological factors, members of religious groups are drawn by social ones that strengthen communal bonds and provide a sense of personal belonging and security.

At the same time, one must acknowledge the "constantly evolving role of religion as a force of global affairs" (Lester 37), which has discredited the assumption that advances in the rational understanding of the world will inevitably diminish the influence of religion. As the editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, David B. Barrett has noted, the impact from the changing role of religious experience is enormous. For Barrett, this change is "massive, it's complex, and it's continual" (qtd. in Lester 38). Thus, a mapping of the religious landscape in the era of globalization would have to take into account a tendency among religious practitioners to join in new movements or to redefine their relationship with their old religious order, in light of their growing need to establish a sense of cultural belonging and strengthen their communal attachments. This tendency owes much to the

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1 The phrase belongs to sociologist Luckmann and his book of the same title.

present intensified phase of globalization that has favored "supranational integration—economic, […] political and cultural," but also "a strengthening of 'local' allegiances and identities within nation-states" (Hall 354). "Everywhere in the world today, men and women are reaffirming their local particularities, their national, ethnic or religious identity, [...]" writes Michael Walzer (164) in an essay devoted to the 'new tribalism'. Paradoxically, both phenomena—the nationalistic much more than the supranational—rely upon quasi-religious, mythical notions that attempt to restore a discourse of "essential cultural continuity" where "essence" has resurged after having been subdued. We might then have to agree with Nathan Glazer who, in comprising a list of differences among Americans, includes religion along with race and ethnicity as three of the most pertinent American diversities. In his own words, "religious differences in American Society not only remain salient but have increased in significance in some respects in the past two decades" (126).

The issue of religious identification has become even more important among the different racial and ethnic groups in the US because of the way religion and ethnic culture affect each other. Numerous studies have documented the role of ethnic religion in the construction, support and reinforcement of ethnic identity while they emphasize its continuing vitality in America, especially for ethnic groups.[2] As one of such ethnic groups, Greek Americans follow the above-mentioned paradigm but with differences that have to do with the historical formation of their nationhood. Historically, Greeks have aligned themselves with Orthodox Christianity. One can hardly conceive of Greek national identity without having to account for the Christian Orthodox tradition.[3] In fact, any attack on nationhood historically has been translated into a threat to the established authority of the Orthodox Church and vice versa. There have been many cases from the late eighteenth century onward in which the Church responded to such underminings of its authority, not only textually, but with "outright violence, as any administrative power would: with harassment,

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[2] See among others, Mol 1976; Miller 1977; Smith 1978; Rutledge 1985. On the role of Greek Orhtodox religion and the Greek American community, see Kunkelman.

[3] Even contemporary popular films such as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* make the connection between ethnicity and religion. In this cross-cultural romance between an ethnic Greek woman and a non-Greek, the wedding cannot be performed until the groom is baptized in the Greek Orthodox church.

unemployment, prison, forced confession, or excommunication."[4] The significance of the Orthodox Church was solidified during the Byzantine era not only because religion operated as the instituting force of Byzantium's national imaginary, but because Byzantium with its religious nature of national consciousness was interpreted as "the missing middle," the direct link between antiquity and the present, which "assured Greece of the coveted mark of a continuous culture" (Gourgouris 145), the apparently seamless and unbroken continuity toward a pure, mythic past. Byzantium was thus interpreted by prominent Greek historians as "medieval Hellenism," "a pseudonym for something generically proper to European national histories: the Middle Ages, the necessary historical key to modernity and to the formation of Europe's nationalities."[5] Undoubtedly, most specialists agree, "there has been a long-term tendency to cement the links between Greek national identity and the Orthodox Church" (Partos 121). As a consequence, for Greece the entanglement of national-historical-religious discourses is striking and marked by complexity.[6]

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[4] Consider the case of Nikos Kazantzakis but also other historical instances as cited by Gourgouris in *Dream Nation* (79). For a discussion of early ethnoreligious nationalism, see Kitromilides whose close examination of autobiographical sources leads him to conclude that, "prior to the enforcement of mutually exclusive national identities, a common Orthodox, or Balkan, 'mentality' was discernible" (qtd. in Calotychos 39).

[5] The phrase "medieval Hellenism" belongs to historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, quoted in Gourgouris's *Dream Nation* (259-60). Also, in his study of Greek folklore and its contribution to the definition of national culture and identity, Michael Herzfeld notes that historians and folklorists alike did much to "reinstate the Byzantine period as the essential link between high antiquity and the present" (123).

[6] In recent years, there have been many instances where the fusion between religious faith, national identity and territorial claims has become obvious. For example, Greek support for Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs has been repeatedly demonstrated during the Yugoslavian War. Greece's longstanding friendship with the Serbs has been reinforced by its fears about Turkey's increasing influence in countries with large Muslim population, mainly Albania and Bosnia. Albania's Orthodox minority belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church, an institution many Albanians regard as carrying out a Hellenizing mission in their ranks and link that mission to Greek territorial claims to southern Albania, home to most of the country's ethnic Greeks. Despite its Orthodox affiliation, until recently Greece has refused to recognize FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) because it had appropriated for itself the historic name of Macedonia, fearing that it harbored a claim to the northern province of the same name. (For an illuminating discussion, see Partos. For a more recent examination of the Macedonian issue and the cooperative climate established between Greece and FYROM after 1995, see Calotychos.)

Despite their overcharged historical past, or perhaps because of it, for the first Greek immigrants who arrived in the US, Orthodoxy served as the defining core of their cultural identity and proved to be a powerful instrument of legitimating their ethnic interests. Like many other immigrant groups whose ethnic religion played a significant role in their adjustment process as well as in providing a sense of ethnic identity and exclusivity, Greek immigrants used their religious creed as a vehicle for the maintenance and support of ethnic identity and cohesion. For the first generation immigrants it was virtually impossible to separate ethnicity from religion. In addition, the church (as well as its basement where social gatherings often took place) became the spatial and temporal center of the community around which all social life evolved. Not only did the Greek ethnic church help support and reinforce ethnic identity but it provided a religious basis for the legitimation of some of the traditional ethnic values (family-centeredness, respect for parents, work ethic) which serve as decisive ethnic markers of Greek ethnic identity. It, thus, accomplished at the same time a double role: that of a religious and social institution.

However, as the children of Greek immigrants gradually inscribed themselves into an American context they voluntarily contested the hegemony of patriarchal Greek Orthodoxy within an evolving American cultural identity. The combined impact of modernization, secularization, and Americanization had affected the formal traditions of Orthodox religious practice divesting it of the sacred and transforming it, for the most part, into cultural ritual. At the same time, Orthodox religious faith, which formally held Greek immigrant communities together, offering structures of participation and a context for collective identity, seemed less and less capable of sustaining the authority implicit in redemptive, ritual repetitions of religious practice. This apparent ineffectiveness of Christian Orthodoxy in maintaining group cohesion can be seen as a result of intergenerational and gender conflict, expressive of ideological challenges by second-generation Greek Americans.[7] Rather than second-generation rejection of religion, however, this ostensible loosening of religious ties seems to mark the need for a modification of traditional religious forms as well as a pluralization of responses toward religion among second-generation ethnic Greeks.

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[7] I include as second generation all those who have been born in the US. For the sake of brevity, I sometimes refer to the second-generation group as "Greek Americans" or simply "ethnic Greeks."

In this paper, I will argue that, even though it has been ostensibly weakened, displaced or neglected by second-generation Greek Americans, Christian Orthodox religion is still a vibrant and indispensable component of their understanding of ethnic identity and boundary. In fact, Greek American identity is shaped by its religious belief, which is simultaneously operative in two ways: it gives a sense of grounding in a Greek Orthodox communal past and shared or inherited culture, connecting Greek Americans to the ideal topos of origin and situating them within "the nation's dream-work," that is, Greece's understanding of itself "as a social-imaginary signification."[8] At the same time, Orthodoxy has made it possible for ethnic Greeks to resist the impact of the dominant regimes of representation while it has also recomposed a "Greek-Americanness" in ways that differ from the stereotypical (American) representation of Greece almost exclusively constructed in relation to the nation's glorious ancient past. Indeed, one of the most significant ways in which second-generation Greek Americans within the church articulate their ethnic identity is through the appropriation of traditional Greek values, which foreground their ethnicity within the dominant American cultural system. Religion, therefore, puts contemporary Greek American identity into dialogic relationship with the Greek past and the American present, as well as within the American discourse of the historic moment at issue. Through religion, Greek Americans position themselves within the narratives of both past and present, historical time and cultural geography.

This profound cultural awareness cannot exist without mediation. It is present in all cultural manifestations of Greek Americans as a distinct ethnic group, but above all in their writings, where religious signifieds assume a diversity of symbolic representations. This paper will examine the multiple faces of Orthodox religious experience, and its cultural impact on Greek American cultural identity, through an analysis of Helen Papanikolas's collection of stories, *The Apple Falls from the Apple Tree.*[9] In my choice of Papanikolas's work, I make no claims about it as "representative" of Greek American ethnic writing (although this is to a large extent true). However, a

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[8] Gourgouris (x). In his book-length study, Gourgouris examines, first, the national formation of Greece as a particular moment of social history and, second, certain instances of Greece's national-cultural idiom (Neohellenism) that re-enact this formative scene in order to revisit the realm of the dream-nation.

[9] The American equivalent of this proverb is "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Like its American counterpart, the proverb emphasizes generational continuity.

close reading of the stories that comprise the book will show that *The Apple Falls* insistently points to the cardinal role of religion in the maintenance of ethnic cohesion while at the same time it challenges the institution's authoritarianism and monolithic attitudes through a repeated interrogation and thematization of the acts of contestation.

Born in 1917 in the US, Helen Papanikolas lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. Author of two collections of short stories, a novel and a memoir of her parents, she is also an accomplished anthropologist with numerous publications on oral histories by Greek immigrant men and women. As mentioned above, Papanikolas's *The Apple Falls* best exemplifies religion's effectively decisive role in accentuating the deep horizontal comradeship that defines ethnic identity, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson.[10] Or, to quote from another source, "religion has been one of the driving forces in building up" (and preserving, we might add) "a sense of ethnic identity" (Partos 91). In addition to shared history and myths, collective memory, language and (oral) literature, lifestyle, division of roles between men and women, family structures and moral inhibitions, Papanikolas's Greek Americans are united by their religion and its various practices (rituals of birth, marriage and death, religious holidays, church attendance and liturgy).

This is not to say that, like most ethnic groups, Papanikolas's Greek Americans are not committed to assimilation or that, despite their reservations or resistances, they have not exhibited great energy, ambition, toughness, and adaptability to external forces. Though eager for assimilation and acceptance, they did not overthrow the legacies of their ethnic identity and religion. But they have often adopted intricate and ambivalent ways to relate to their ancestral heritage. For example, while one of the means to authenticate their ethnic identity is to establish ties both to Greece's contemporary history and to its glorious past, some of Papanikolas's ethnic Greeks, as we shall see, tend to deny its historical specificity by perceiving Greece ahistorically, outside a linear chronology, revealing their own ambiguity and "disempowering sense of belatedness" (Kalogeras 705) toward their pre-American motherland. On the other hand, their response to contemporary historical events, such as World War II or the Vietnam War, is informed by the authorial discourse of the dominant culture, which casts the US in the role of the world's savior from communism and preserver of

[10] Anderson speaks of nation and not ethnicity but an ethnic community too is held together horizontally by its shared character, 7.

freedom and democracy. Indicative of the Greek Americans' impulse to dehistoricize is the tendency to merge historical events with legendary ones or attribute mythic dimensions to historical sites. In the story entitled "Neither Nose Nor Ass," Papanikolas attempts to expose the underlying ideological assumptions of such attitudes.

American-born Manny and Greg were brought up together, sat by each other in Greek language school, chanted the Sunday liturgies together and eventually became brothers-in-law by marrying sisters. But while Manny, having internalized the American spirit of progress, fulfills the American dream of material success, his brother-in-law contemptuously rejects it. Instead, he claims legitimization of his identity as a true descendent of the Hellenes and a direct heir of Pericles through his knowledge of ancient history and his cultivation of classical heritage, which consists of his urge to visit classical war sites and his obsessive reconstruction of a scale model of the Acropolis and the agora. On showing his father-in-law a book of ancient sculptures, he exclaims proudly "Look at them. Beautiful people. Not like the Greeks of today. Look at those faces, those bodies" (109). Predictably, he attempts to disseminate his ideological position by infiltrating organizations affiliated with the church. Greg seems particularly aware of the ethnic church's contribution in legitimizing and defending a set of core traditional values that seem to constitute Greek American identity. Thus, though he "had always criticized anything connected with the church" (112), he now takes advantage of the church's structural unity and devoted membership and does not hesitate to appropriate religious holidays for the promotion of the ancient Greek ideal. On the occasion of 25 March, the double celebration of the Virgin Mary's Annunciation and the anniversary of the Greek revolution of 1821 that freed most of Greece from Ottoman occupation, he appoints an American professor to speak to the congregation about their noble Hellenic heritage. The whole celebration outrages the community and most of all his brother-in-law who considers it a disgraceful travesty. Greg's static and reified understanding of ethnic history allows him to disregard the signifiers and diacritical features of Greek American identity around him (i.e. clothing, food, religious icons and crosses, but also Greek flags, Greek folk dance) and pretend that the Hellenic past has intellectually bypassed Christianity. Not without irony Papanikolas castigates Greg's inauthentic posture toward his ethnic descent not only for being naïve and ahistorical but also for being ideologically suspect as it complies with the stereotypical American representation of Greece almost exclusively constructed in relation to the nation's glorified ancient past. For Papanikolas, the ethnic

Greeks' claim of "Greekness" is not predicated on ancient Greece ("beacon of civilization, the basis of Western culture, and so on" [115]) but on their adherence to their cultural heritage that translates into an unremitting respect and preservation of communal and family values transmitted best through the ethnic church. This is not supposed to happen at the expense of their allegiance to their new homeland. In fact, time and again, the author has her characters affirm their American identity by situating her text within contemporary American history, which serves as the narrative's chronological framework. Not only do her characters comment on the socio-economic situation of the US or debate over American politics but they have taken active participation in the making of this history. Note one character's adamant response during an argument with his daughter on drafting for the Vietnam War: "It [is] every young man's patriotic duty to fight for his country" (178). He adds that he too was sent to Southeast Asia to serve his new patridha (homeland), thus, revealing his indisputable qualification as an American. Thus, although second-generation Greek Americans can be seen, by and large, as integrated within the American society, this is not done at the expense of the self-defined markers for signaling ethnicity, namely ancestry, language and traditional values, all of which find their "ideal" topos of articulation within the boundaries of the ethnic church.

All six stories that comprise *The Apple Falls* center around women belonging to first- and second-generation Greek Americans and related, in various degrees, to their ancestral heritages. By focusing on more than one generation of women, Papanikolas presents us with a panoramic view of the dynamic and multifaceted character of Greek American life during a time span of one hundred years. Predictably, such a view entails intergenerational and gender conflicts and tensions expressive of ideological challenges of the second generation. This is particularly true of the most energetic and vocal part of the population, upwardly mobile middle-class women of immigrant descent. "County Hospital" narrates Kallie's confusion caused by conflicting loyalties toward her parents' culture and the claims of the new world.[11] Her bilingual/bicultural education which she acquired by attending Greek school after public school made it possible for her to be hired as a nurse at the

[11] The date "1939," indicated in the story's title, is significant because it marks the end of Greek American marginality. World War II with the victory of the Greek Army against the Axis Powers, as well as the end of the Depression, transforms the role of Greek American ethnicity within US.

county hospital while maintaining the Greek language and Greek customs at a relatively low level in the home.

One incident that best illustrates the intergenerational conflicts and discontinuities is when Kallie becomes aware of one of her patient's wish—who is in the last stage of syphilis—to take communion with her. According to Greek Orthodox religious practice, communion is offered to the congregation by a common spoon dipped into a chalice full of consecrated wine and placed into the believer's mouth.

> She did not want to use the common spoon, Kallie thinks. Priests said the wine was holy and could not carry bacteria. She had thought it would be interesting to put a little consecrated wine under the microscope, but of course she would never be able to get any. There was holy water, though, that priests gave out on St. John the Baptist's feast day. Her mother kept a small bottle next to the icon. Whenever they were sick, her parents drank a teaspoonful of it. She would place a drop of holy water under the microscope to see if there were any bacteria in it. She never did. (57)

Kallie's questioning of the sacredness and validity of the sacramental rituals is not an uncommon experience among the faithful. For those who have moved to critical and skeptical adulthood, it is considered almost natural to dismiss religious faith as belonging to an earlier stage of their development. However, in Kallie's case, divesting religion of its transcendence, de-ritualizing and de-mythologizing religious beliefs might lead to severing her communal ties but also to jeopardizing her own and her community's ethnic distinctiveness. Interestingly enough, though Papanikolas has her character question religious practices she never lets it amount to a religious crisis or any wholehearted dismissal of faith. As if Kallie is aware of the potential danger of cutting herself off from community life, she never pursues this subversive line of thought.

If the relationship of the individual to God is ultimately personal, in the case of Greek Americans, it is mediated by the whole pattern of community life. As the title denotes, "Getting Ready for the Festival" is about the religious community's empathetic sharing and engagement with issues at once ethnic and moral. At the center of the community's activities lies the

church, which serves as the main structural force that maintains ethnic group solidarity and cohesiveness. As the descendants of the original Greek immigrants leave the ethnically homogeneous ghettos of urban areas and the ties to their ethnic culture are reduced, the ethnic church plays a crucial role in maintaining a meaningful attachment to their ethnic collectivity while it contributes to the support and reinforcement of ethnic identity and consciousness among second-generation community members. The men and women who once inhabited Greek Town and have left it—usually as a result of upward social mobility—return to it to participate in the religious feasts and gatherings which they also regard as an occasion for reassembling, on a regular basis, family members and friends who are rarely seen. "In spite of the yearly complaints of hard work, aching feet, and arthritic bones, a camaraderie seized the congregation each year the festival time neared" (74). The meticulous preparation and ritualistic sharing of ethnic food combined with long discussions not only on personal and ethnic news but also on social, political and economic issues keep this communal memory together and provide its members with comfort and a sense of cultural belonging. The parish is also active both in assisting newcomers from the motherland and in feeding, clothing and caring for the poor and the homeless. Though such activities are considered important, it is the life of worship that steers the emotional involvement of the community. Despite variations in their degrees of religious commitment, the congregation takes seriously the liturgical year with the Lenten and Easter seasons having a particular salience. Predictably, in Papanikolas's narrative, the sermon with interpretations of the biblical readings and their applications to contemporary personal or social problems is characteristically missing. This marked absence is enhanced by the priest's marginal role in communal matters. It becomes obvious that partly due to its transatlantic journey and partly because of intergenerational conflicts the church has lost some of its authoritative voice and paternalistic attitude. Yet, its enduring significance seems to be derived from the sense of companionship and solidarity it provides to its members.

Moreover, church participation seems to be motivated not only by a simple need for ethnic fellowship but also by a powerful desire among second-generation Greek Americans to preserve their ethnicity, for themselves and for posterity. It is the church's senior citizens' luncheon that Anna, the heroine of "If I Don't Praise My House," decides to attend now that she has become a widow. After a long period of estrangement it is among the women of her own ethnic origin, the old acquaintances from her pre-American past through whom she strives to quench her deep feeling of

insignificance and loneliness and sustain her self-identity. Besides, the presence of such a community makes it easier for Greek Americans to transmit to their children a sense of moral integrity and ethnic identity, though these ethnic values may be embraced or accepted to varying degrees by the second generation. The following exchange between two sisters articulates best the ethnic subject's need for integration into a religious system of meaning and belonging:

> I certainly don't believe everything the Church says.
>
> What are you talkin' about? […] If the Church says somethin', then you've got to believe it.
>
> […]
>
> I used to think about those things all the time. Years ago. Then I realized my problem wasn't that at all. My problem was I didn't know if there was a God.
>
> My God! […] Then why did you kill yourself takin' your kids and then your grandkids to church every Sunday and Holy Week and stuff? Hmm?
>
> Because I thought they should have the memory of churchgoing. To give them some order to their lives. […] Besides, it's our culture. (209)

The story that most eloquently expresses the crucial role of religion in the Greek American's struggle to articulate self and communal identity within a pluralist, multicultural American society is that of the book's title: "The Apple Falls from the Apple Tree." The story addresses the issue of intermarriage, one of the very few ethnic and/or religious transgressions met with outright intolerance since it is regarded as a direct threat to the very existence of community. Concomitantly, sociologists, anthropologists and specialists on religious matters have repeatedly pointed out the continued high inter-religious marriage rates that, along with other parameters, tend to reduce the salience of ethnicity. Historian Adrian Hastings argues, "the fact remains that intermarriage […] threatens ethnic nationhood and is anathema to ethnic nationalists." He then goes on to cite the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Irish Republic in 1974 who spoke against inter-church marriage as breaking down "social and political barriers" while recommending "religious segregation" because it reinforces nationalism (206).

Reared and educated in multicultural America, Papanikolas's second-generation Greek Americans at first believe they can surpass religious differences and contribute to the bonding of contiguous religious communities by committing themselves to marriages based on love and genuine reciprocity. However, as the narrative unfolds and they let their connection to their faith wane, they find out—to their surprise—that they have also lost claim to their own self-definition. More specifically, Athena's marriage to a Mormon and the pressure that her own Mormon children put on her lead her to a total estrangement from her family and complete alienation from herself and her people. While she seems to be able to withstand the rift between herself and her family she is not capable of handling her own sense of "othering." Ultimately, as we shall see, she turns to Orthodoxy to legitimize her search for self-identity. Orthodox religion in this short story is not treated as epiphenomenal, one more component to maintain ethnic distinctiveness; rather it plays a crucial role in defining ethnicity. In fact, Greek ethnic identity becomes fused with Orthodox religious identity. "They're Greeks. They wear crosses," says one character (163). Later, when her children insist on her conversion to the Mormon faith Athena realizes how little they know about her own religious background which she equates with her "Greekness." "She had hidden too much Greekness from Paul, the oldest child, and from Marilynn as well," she is thinking.

To rule out the possibility of class distinctions as a factor contributing to the separateness between the Greek and Mormon families, Papanikolas inscribes her main characters into a similar lifestyle. Not only do they know each other from childhood but their fathers also used to be friends as they shared a deep affection for mountain life, had the same occupation (they both owned herds of sheep and lambs) and belonged to the same socio-economic class. However, the discrepancies in faith and religious rites between the two churches are foregrounded throughout the narrative. Since most of the story is told from Athena's point of view, it is the Christian Orthodox religion that is characterized for its resiliency, benevolent spirit and liberal thinking. On the other hand, Mormonism is stigmatized in the narrative by its practice of polygamy, its feverish proselytizing, its organizational commitment and adherence to the authority of scripture.

"Religion is like a fish. Eat the flesh and leave the bones" is a proverb Athena's liberal father used to tell her, and toward the end of the story it is repeated by her husband who wishes to remind her that she shouldn't let religious differences destroy their married life and family unity. Athena

though, named after the Goddess Athena who sprang from Zeus's head, has already once overestimated her rational capacities to establish control over her emotive self. The resentment and frustration she feels toward her husband who psychologically abuses her by seeking to impose his own religion upon her, will eventually lead her to spiritual revolt. Tired eyes, lack of sleep, moodiness, weeping, and hopelessness, negligence of her household and maternal duties and ultimately silence are the symptoms of her spiritual ailment. Until she admits to herself, as the story's title indicates, that she cannot keep running away from her ethnic upbringing and Greek Orthodox faith, Athena can find no peace. Or, as her sister succinctly puts it, "You was [sic] born Greek Orthodox and as far as I am concerned that's what you'll always be" (210). Her healing will be achieved when she is able to return to the religion of the immigrant generation and re-embrace the unambiguous authority of its laws and other dictates.

As a woman, however, Athena is not only defined by her ethnic/religious heritage, but also by her gender. Self-definition and empowerment become possible through the painful confrontation with patriarchal inscriptions ("the rules made by men" [240]) as well as with her husband's authoritarian attitude. She has then to assuage the guilt at having given up her ancestral religious practices for so long and at having neglected to pass them on to her children ("She has let her children be steeped in Mormon family history and lore and had said little to them about her own parents and their life" [215]). Whether Athena's return to the vestiges of the Greek religious faith has been motivated by feminist rebellion or by guilt, the narrative emphasis is put on the personal aspect of her "conversion." She is driven back by her need to articulate meaningfully the religious impulse that she has previously suppressed. And this she must experience alone:

> As she drove toward the three-domed burnished brick church and into the asphalted parking lot, she willed thoughts of her family away [...]. She entered the narthex. Her heart beat wildly with ecstatic relief. Once before she had felt such emotion; in her childhood, she had skipped at the side of railroad tracks, not hearing the train whistle, and then steam rushed past her bare legs. (238)

She follows the ritual step by step, passively and obediently at first, but feeling "a rush of joy, of freedom," then with a sense of belonging, and finally participating wholeheartedly. "Athena's lips began moving. A fine

hurt brought tears: no, she had not forgotten [...] . She was right to have wanted to come alone, in peace" (238-40).

The last section of the story is removed chronologically ten years from the period of Athena's spiritual crisis and subsequent revelation. The process of reclaiming her religious identity has left her victorious and at peace with herself. She had defied the behavioral expectations of her Mormon relatives and had refused to abide by the roles prescribed out for her. Instead, her renewed commitment to religion and "rediscovery" of her religious identity has taken on an expressive function involving a deeply emotional and spiritual participation in the services of the Holy Week. Every year, and in her own private quiescent style, Athena celebrates Christ's Holy Passion and Resurrection and with Him she re-experiences her own departure and repentant return to the bosom of her ethnic church.

It has been my claim in this essay that in the case of Greek American ethnicity ethnic and religious, secular and sacred elements are so strongly intertwined that there is no possibility of separating them. Deeply rooted in the exercise of collective memory and the usage of religion, second-generation Greek American ethnicity has managed to maintain certain forms of "tangible" ethnicity, namely key traditional values and moral standards derived from its pre-American motherland. This has been accomplished mainly within the Greek ethnic church by providing a powerful religious basis for the legitimation of some of these traditional ethnic values. Though not without challenges, such "primordial" values (Geertz; Isaacson) have become central to the articulation of the second generation's sense of group identity. In her efforts to represent a voluntary but intense identification with practices and loyalties taken from this older immigrant culture, Papanikolas reveals the defiant power of religious identity grounded in ethnicity. Whether it is called "symbolic" (Gans) or "voluntary" (Novak), regarded as constructed and invented (Sollors), whether it currently undergoes a revival or a decline, Greek American ethnicity seems to partake of both strands of its cultural background. Conversely, if the "straight-line theory" (Sandberg) of ethnicity ever materializes and ethnic distinctions become eroded by acculturation and assimilation, then Greek American ethnicity will follow its course of its eventual absorption by a single host society. But, as long as the notion of ethnicity persists in the American society, Greek American ethnicity will survive in both its forms of representation, the secular and the sacred, its Greek and its Christian Orthodox component.

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