

The Greek Orthodox Church in South Africa: The Beginnings

Evangelos A. Mantzaris

ABSTRACT

This article traces the first steps of the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church in South Africa by the pioneering efforts of the first immigrants. These immigrants were from all social groups throughout the country, and their efforts bore fruit in establishing the church in that country. The article begins with an historical account of the initiatives of the first small groups of pioneers that laid the foundations, and ends with the building of the churches in Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg in the early years of the twentieth century. The article is mainly, if not exclusively, based on primary sources, such as interviews with pioneers and community archival material.

Introduction

Throughout time and in varied countries, Greeks of the Diaspora have attempted to combine and unite a number of human and social struggles; those of social and economic survival and progress, culture, tradition and historical memory, with a combination of nationalism, patriotism and ethnic pride. All these interrelated characteristics have held common denominators throughout the centuries, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and continue today with the establishment of Greek communities and the Greek Orthodox Church. The organic communities were established in South African cities where Greek pioneers first arrived and were the main founders of Churches. However, it was a Greek priest who convinced the then leaders of a nationalist organisation called ‘*Ellinismos*’ (‘Hellenism’), that the establishment of a real Greek functional community would be the main unifying body that would bring all Greeks together to build the first Greek Orthodox Church in Cape Town, South Africa.

The First Greek Communities

Nicolaides, the first historian of Greek pioneers in Africa, based his book, written in 1923, on oral evidence and wrote that the first Greeks in South Africa arrived in

Evangelos A. Mantzaris is a retired professor in the Faculty of Management Sciences at Mangosuthu University of Technology. <Mantzaris.Evangelos@mut.ac.za; mantzar@sociologist.com> .