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## Ethno-Religiosity in Orthodox Christianity: A Source of Solidarity & Multiculturalism in American Society

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**Abstract:** This study will analyze the processes of community organization implemented by Eastern Orthodox Christian ethno-religious groups, and Greek Orthodox Christian communities in particular, to establish themselves in American civil society. It will be argued that the symbiotic relationship formed between ethnicity and religion in this tradition, as well as the democratized grassroots mode of community organization that American civil society fosters, contributes to a strong sense of belonging amongst members of the ethno-religious Orthodox Christian congregations. In turn, this sense of belonging has produced a multi-layered mechanism for solidarity-building in these communities. It will then be suggested that in addition to contributing to America’s religious diversity, the preservation of ethno-linguistic heritage by the various Orthodox Christian churches simultaneously contributes to America’s poly-ethnicity and linguistic diversity as well. Last, it will be argued that the continued survival of ethno-religiosity in American Orthodoxy can either lead to further isolation amongst the separate ethnic congregations, or it can alternatively open avenues for the cultivation of a form of Orthodox Christian multiculturalism that supports neither homogeneity nor isolationism.

**Keywords:** ethno-religious identity; Orthodox Christianity; Multiculturalism; civil society

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### 1. Introduction

With its longstanding history of immigration & religious denominationalism, American civil society has become an arena of unprecedented ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. It was once suggested that “Americanization” and “secularization” would produce a “post-ethnic secular” society in which

religion and ethnicity would cease to play a prominent role in socio-cultural identities. However, as we witness the continued salience of religious and ethnic affiliation in America's social landscape, we realize that this has clearly not been the case. Given the continued immigration of new religious and ethnic groups into American society, it is important to understand the ways in which religion and ethnicity have shaped American immigrant identities over the past century and the integration of immigrant groups into American civil society. Today, religious and ethnic groups that were once migrants from other nations have become well-rooted diasporic communities throughout the United States. Retaining many of their values, beliefs, practices and identity narratives, these religious and ethnic collectives are both transforming, and being transformed by, the social landscapes of the local contexts in which they are now immersed. An examination of the processes by which ethno-religious communities take root in American society speaks not only to the prospects of immigrant ethno-religious integration *today*, but also to the future of America as a multicultural and religiously pluralistic democratic society into the future.

It will be argued that the unique dynamics that exist between ethnicity and religion in the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches, coupled with America's religious denominationalism and congregationalism, enabled these immigrant communities to successfully integrate into American society while simultaneously preserving their ethno-linguistic heritages and Eastern Orthodox Christian faith. Particularly in the Greek Orthodox community, the symbiotic relationship formed between ethnicity and religion fosters a dual sense of solidarity amongst its members as it enabled the community to establish itself in American society as a *religious* denomination without also having to abandon its *ethnic* identity. Additionally, it will be argued that America's unique social circumstances played a role in democratizing the internal structure of Orthodox parish communities, which in turn contributes to their internal solidarity. Last, it will be suggested that the current social situation of Orthodox Christianity in North America potentially proffers a multiculturalism that is neither assimilationist in its outlook nor hostile toward the idea of intercultural cooperation.

## 2. Globalization & the Re-Territorialization of Ethno-Religious Groups

Contrary to the common perception that globalization produces global cultural homogeneity, the new diasporic realities that have arisen as a result of transnational migration also enable groups to reinforce highly particular religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences in novel ways. These religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic particularities are reinforced as a means of preserving their traditions in their newly acquired cosmopolitan milieus. Mark Juergensmeyer has noted that there is a reification of both ethnic and religious identities in multicultural societies,

[I]n multicultural societies it is hard to say how one should define the "people" of a particular nation. This is where religion and ethnicity step in to redefine public communities...In the increasing absence of any other demarcation of national loyalty and commitment, these old staples—religion, ethnicity, and traditional culture—have become resources for national identification. In other cases, the cultural identities are transnational ([1], p. 139).

This phenomenon illustrates that people utilize traditional ethno-religious ties to narrate their identities and be received as members of unique historical communities in order to combat what José Casanova has referred to as the "threat of dissolution" that globalization poses to more traditional

communities ([2], p. 117). With their deep entrenchment in systems of beliefs and values and historically-rooted collective narratives, religion and ethnicity have the ability to empower people and give them a sense of solidarity in a world in which religious and ethno-cultural communities are unhinged from the geographical locations that once shaped their ways of life. The territoriality that traditional communities relied upon as a marker of identity is increasingly becoming more difficult to maintain as communities become scattered across the globe. By providing the resources necessary to maintain a stably situated social identities, ethno-religious traditions provide a secure sense of self and people-hood to those who find themselves living a diasporic existence. Ethno-religious traditions offer de-territorialized communities the possibility of surviving and adapting in ways that provide a sense of continuity through time and place. They seek modes of community organization that offer the possibility of an authentic integration in their new homelands, and which will afford them recognition of their unique identities rather than mere assimilation.

American “civil society” is itself a public space, separate from the state, in which private citizens can engage in the mutual pursuit of common goals, collectively gather, and form private organizations in the public sphere. The nature of this civil society lends itself to numerous possibilities for immigrant groups to create *voluntary associations* in which their ethno-religious identities have survived. As José Casanova has commented, “modernity, as Tocqueville saw clearly a long time ago, offers new possibilities for the construction of communities of all kinds as voluntary associations, and particularly for the construction of new religious communities, as voluntary congregations” ([2], p. 116). Consequently, American civil society has opened new possibilities for diasporic ethno-religious groups to form a host of new associations in America. In order to explore these possibilities in greater depth, I would like to turn our attention toward the ways in which Eastern Orthodox Christian ethno-religious groups, and Greek Orthodox Christian communities in particular, have established themselves as voluntary associations in American civil society.

Arriving en masse in a wave of immigration that took place after the close of World War II and prior to Greece’s entry into the European Union, approximately 200,000 Greek Orthodox Christians settled in the United States between 1946 and 1981. Although both the Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox communities had a presence in America since the 18th and 19th centuries, and although there was a wave of Greek and other Eastern Orthodox Christian immigrants that occurred during the turn of the last century and into the 1920’s, it was the post-WWII wave that brought many of today’s Greek Orthodox communities to America. As of 2010, the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas reported a total of 1,043,300 Orthodox Christians—including both Eastern and Oriental<sup>1</sup> branches—in the United States, with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America making up the largest Orthodox Christian population with approximately 476,900 members [3]. The Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity on the Upper Eastside of New York City was established by a community of Greek Orthodox Christians in 1892 and now serves as the Holy See of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese was incorporated in 1921 and officially recognized by the State of New York in 1922. This Archdiocese is an Eparchy of the

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<sup>1</sup> “Oriental” is used to refer to the collection of Orthodox Churches that did not accept the Christological terms of the council of Chalcedon in the year 451 CE. This collection of churches is comprised of the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Orthodox Church, amongst others, all of whom are “in communion” with one another.

Patriarchate of Constantinople, meaning that the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in the United States falls under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, making all of the individual parishes of which this Eparchy is comprised fall under the aegis of the Autocephalous<sup>2</sup> Eastern Orthodox Christian Patriarchate in Constantinople<sup>3</sup>. As we proceed in our analysis of this ethno-religious group, a curious phenomenon will become evident whereby the ways in which the Greek Orthodox community took root in America adopted a characteristically American form of voluntary associationalism that simultaneously enabled them to integrate into American society, while also avoiding the necessity of having to completely assimilate to the dominant culture.

### 3. Orthodox Ecclesiastic Organization & Differentiations

The modes of ecclesiastical organization that have occurred in the Eastern Orthodox Christian church communities in the United States have fundamentally shaped their ability to preserve their respective traditions and foster a deep sense of solidarity amongst the members of the various Orthodox churches. By combining and preserving customs that lie at the intersection of ethnic, linguistic and religious identities, these churches provide their parishioners with the resources necessary to partake in a “way of life” rather than simply an outlet for spirituality that can be easily segmented from other aspects of their social identity. This section offers a brief description of the historical modes of institutional organization employed by the Eastern Orthodox Church that highlight how the various Eastern Orthodox ethno-religious communities have adapted to life in the American context. Setting aside the theological perspectives and doctrinal positions regarding what constitutes an appropriate relation between ethnic and ecclesiastic identity aside, I would like to explore what might be best described as the “associationalist” qualities of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church. In particular, I would like to examine how this associationalism has facilitated the integration of the Eastern Orthodox Christian communities into American civil society.

Eastern Orthodoxy has historically been a collection of ecclesiastically united associations, whose quasi-decentralized structure has lent itself to this religious group’s integration into the highly denominationalist religious circumstances, and deeply associationalist civil sphere, of American society. The Orthodox theologian John Romanides has noted of Orthodox ecclesiastical structure that: “The self-determination of bishops and congregations grouped into provincial synods was an established fact, and in one form or another has remained so throughout the history of the Orthodox churches” ([4], p. 188). Although in the early Church there was arguably a form of proto-associationalism, the Orthodox Church’s contemporary ecclesiastic structure actually has its roots in 6th century Christendom. During the reign of Emperor Justinian, which lasted from 527 CE to 565 CE, five Patriarchs of Christendom were established in what is known as the Pentarchy. These five Patriarchates included: the *Patriarch of Rome*, later to become the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church during the great schism between the

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<sup>2</sup> I will further address the issue of autocephaly below in an attempt to provide a more in-depth explanation of the ecclesiastical structure and organization of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

<sup>3</sup> This is the same jurisdiction that held the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, and which produced the Nicene Creed defining Christian belief that is still accepted by numerous Christians today—including Orthodox and Roman Catholic as well as Anglican and some Protestant denominations. This gives the Greek Orthodox community a deep sense of connectedness with the roots of Christianity itself; a theme to be further examined in this study.

Greek and Latin Churches of 1054; the *Patriarch of Constantinople*, who is still currently the head of what has come to be known as the Greek Orthodox Church; the *Patriarch of Alexandria*; the *Patriarch of Antioch*; and the *Patriarch of Jerusalem*. Each of these five Patriarchates was granted local authority over their particular regional jurisdictions, including the various bishops and parishes of that region. All of these Patriarchates continue to exist today. The latter four of the five aforementioned Patriarchates, and those that developed from them such as the Patriarchate of Moscow, constitute the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which must be distinguished from what are known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches. In the year 451 CE, a Christological debate occurred during the Council of Chalcedon that produced a schism between the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syriac and Armenian) and the Eastern Orthodox Churches (originally Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem). Consequently, the two groups of churches became separate collectives of administratively sovereign ecclesiastic hierarchies. Today, the Eastern Orthodox, and now Roman Catholics, are considered Chalcedonian churches while the Oriental Orthodox are otherwise known as non-Chalcedonians, in reference to the fact that these Churches did not accept the decisions of this council.

Within the family of today's Eastern Orthodox Churches there are no theological differences that exist among them and hence, they are all "in communion" with one another and mutually recognize the orthodoxy of one another's beliefs and liturgical traditions. Consequently, within the global Orthodox Church today there are two types of ecclesiastic groupings: *autocephalous churches* and *autonomous churches*. Autocephalous churches are ones in which bishops of a diocese are elected by the clergy and laity of the same diocese and ordained by other bishops of the same diocese, such as a Patriarchate. Autonomous churches, on the other hand, elect the bishops of their own diocese yet remain united to an autocephalous church, the Patriarch of which oversees the ordination of the autonomous church's bishops. Each autocephalous and autonomous church corresponds to a particular geographical region, be it a nation or city. To this end, Eastern Orthodoxy includes a variety of autocephalous Patriarchs, such as those of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, Moscow, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, as well as various autonomous Churches. Autonomous Churches still fall under the jurisdiction of an autocephalous Patriarchate, yet retain quasi-independence in ecclesiastic affairs as authorized by the Patriarch who oversees that particular regional jurisdiction. This means that each autocephalous Patriarch in Eastern Orthodoxy has sovereignty over his jurisdiction and its hierarchy. This arrangement allows each Autocephalous Church to determine matters of liturgical language and determine the acceptability of particular ethno-cultural variations on standard and accepted practices within the church community. The Eastern Orthodox churches are distinguished by the regionally-based autocephaly to which they are traditionally linked. Subsequently, it is not *theological* matters but regional *cultural* heritage that is the primary characteristic distinguishing the various Eastern Orthodox Christian communities worldwide.

In the United States, all of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, with the exception of the Orthodox Church in America (an offshoot of Russian Orthodoxy whose autocephaly remains contested by some Orthodox Churches) fall under the jurisdiction of a particular foreign Patriarchate, such as that of Constantinople, Antioch or Moscow. With Eastern Orthodoxy, we are presented with a regionally based territorial mode of organization, and a federated form of association in which local clergy and congregants play an active role in determining their particular ecclesial leaders. Commenting on this tradition of autocephaly, Philip Walters traces it to "the arrangements whereby local communities of

believers in the early church came into association with one another” ([5], p. 357), and describes it as a “sanctioned ecclesiastical regionalism in the framework of a universal unity of faith...” ([5], p. 358). In a sense, these historical arrangements embody the notion that any universalistic idea will always manifest itself through the particular, thereby enabling the emergence of a religio-cultural atmosphere in which ethno-linguistic diversity has historically been incorporated into the very fabric of the tradition itself.

#### 4. Associating to Survive

##### 4.1. Growing Roots in America

Although regional autocephaly has its roots in the ancient church, during the course of modernity numerous inter-ethnic tensions and ethno-national sovereignty movements gave rise to an increased number of autocephalous and autonomous churches, creating a situation in which autocephaly and autonomy began to correspond to particular *ethno-cultural and ethno-national groups* rather than particular *cities*. This explains the emergence of the ethnic/national brands of Orthodoxy we are presented with today. From the perspective of the Church as a socio-political institution vying for regional authority and power, this intra-Orthodox diversity might have become a historically divisive force that weakened this religious community. Yet, in an era of diasporas, diversity, denominations and democratic ideals, an ecclesiastic tradition that is historically seasoned in the ways of pluralism and subgroup self-determination well-suited for survival in a society committed to multiculturalism, multilingualism, democracy and religious diversity. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various ethno-cultural groups migrated to North America from the Orthodox Christian world. As they arrived they began to establish parish churches comprised of members of their own particular ethno-religious communities and which acquired recognition from the autocephalous churches of their respective regions of origin. This served to create a patchwork of different Orthodox churches in America, each affiliated with a distinct autocephalous, or autonomous, church and as a result, different ethno-linguistic cultural groups.

In the case of Eastern Orthodoxy in America, each of these ethno-religious groups survived their pre-existing associationalism to their American social circumstances. On the institutional level, this mode of organization went from one that had been based upon geographical territories of *inhabitation* to one based upon geographical territories of *origin*. As an institution, the Orthodox Church never established a united “American Orthodox”<sup>4</sup> autocephalous Patriarchate or autonomous national Church, as exists in other parts of the Orthodox world. Rather, as will become evident, the grassroots origins of building parish communities meant that particular ethno-linguistic communities in the United States became incorporated under the aegis of whichever foreign Patriarchate corresponded to their country of origin. This produced a situation in which multiple Orthodox Christian Archbishops, Bishops and the like—all representing different ethnic and or national Patriarchates from abroad—are tending to the needs of a particular ethno-linguistic community. Each maintains a separate and disunited ecclesial hierarchy, all of which share the same nature and structure. So, in the end, this re-formulation has allowed for the co-existence of two or more Orthodox Archbishops in a single city

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<sup>4</sup> Although some are currently seeking to do precisely this—create an American Pan-Orthodox Church.

or region, which is unprecedented in most of the Orthodox world outside of the United States, where each region has but one hierarchical structure <sup>5</sup>.

This larger institutional change was arguably the result of adaptations on the parish level. Orthodox Christian organization re-developed from one in which Patriarchal jurisdiction was pre-determined by location to one in which lay communities petitioned a Patriarch for recognition. In the traditional model operative outside the United States, priests were assigned according to jurisdictional location. In the new American model, congregations independently established themselves and then determined which Patriarchal jurisdiction they were to belong to according to their ethno-linguistic cultural orientation. These congregations began by petitioning a Patriarchate for a new priest and retained the ability to request clergy as this new model took root in American society. This gave rise to the larger intra-Orthodox form of institutional ethno-religious quasi-denominationalism that occurred in the United States. To clarify, in the United States today the Greek Orthodox Christian community is an American Archdiocese, under the authority of its own Archbishop, who in turn is lower on the hierarchy and under the jurisdictional authority of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, located in modern day Turkey. This Archdiocese is an Eparchy and hence, includes a number of Metropolises, or bishoprics, under the hierarchical supervision of a Metropolitan, or local bishop that oversees the various parishes in his region. Many of the other Orthodox Christian Churches in the United States similarly fall under the jurisdiction of other international Patriarchates, such as the Patriarchate of Moscow and all Rus' <sup>6</sup> (otherwise known as the Russian Orthodox Church).

While these Eastern Orthodox ethno-religious communities have indeed retained a variety of their historical associationalism, there is at least one novel feature of the form it took in American civil society. Rather than being regionally or territorially based—as has traditionally been the case within the history of Orthodox Christianity—in America we witness a type of organizational de-territorialization of the form of associationalism that emerged. Victor Roudometof observes, “in the United States, more than one bishopric may exist in the same city or region of the country, each serving a specific immigrant or diaspora population...” ([6], p. 382). Regardless of one’s theological or doctrinal position on the current state of ecclesiastical organization within Orthodoxy, it becomes quite evident that this overlapping and de-territorialized network of ecclesiastical jurisdictions is a uniquely North-American phenomenon. Although ethno-national tensions amongst various Orthodox peoples arguably played a role in the de-territorialization of the Orthodox churches in America, such de-territoriality is primarily the result of immigrants seeking something familiar in a new land. The fact that these immigrant communities banded together to re-create spaces in which they could carry on their ways of life and pass down their traditions is a salient aspect of Orthodox church-life in America. From this point of view, de-territorialization within the Orthodox Church in America is the

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<sup>5</sup> I say unprecedented in “most” of the Orthodox world because of the situation in the Ukraine in which multiple Eastern Orthodox Church factions exist, one of which has declared itself Autonomous and another which falls under the aegis of the Moscow Patriarchate. I have neither the time nor space to elaborate on this in any detail but suffice it to say this is unique to the Ukraine and is not the commonplace form of Church organization that one would find in Eastern and South-eastern Europe or the Middle East.

<sup>6</sup> “Rus” is a term used to refer to the ancient Slavic people existing in the lands of what is now Russia, Belarus and parts of the Ukraine.

result of these ethno-religious communities finding new possibilities for survival as voluntary associations within their new social circumstances.

As José Casanova says “denominationalism constitutes the great American religious invention” ([2], p. 113) and it is within this denominational matrix that the Orthodox Christian immigrants found themselves. A foundational feature of religious life in American civil society is “congregationalism”, whereby individuals take grassroots measures to establish religious congregations, which function independently despite often remaining tied to a larger institutional denomination. This phenomenon has been documented by Stephen Warner as a “de facto congregationalism” consisting of: (1) Voluntary membership association; (2) An identity defined primarily by its constituent members rather than current territorial inhabitation; (3) Lay leadership in the parish; (4) Systematic fundraising on the parish level; (5) A tendency for clergy to be hired as employees of the congregation; (6) A tendency for ethnic exclusivity; (7) A tendency for the parish to be multifunctional in terms of social, cultural, educational and religious affairs; and (8) A tendency for member families to congregate in the church building regardless of sacred days ([7], pp. 277–78). As Orthodox Christian immigrants arrived in the New World they found their respective compatriots from their countries of origin, yet did not necessarily have a local or regional Orthodox church to attend. The next step was to establish churches in which they could practice and preserve their ethno-religious traditions, and the result was a religious polity that reflected the de facto congregationalism that characterizes much of American religion.

Unlike their Catholic southern European counterparts, the Orthodox churches adapted to denominationalism and congregationalism with greater ease due to the pre-existing quasi-decentralized<sup>7</sup> nature of their ecclesiastic organization. Rhys Williams claims that, “the fight for acceptance in America meant that Catholicism had to come to terms with church-state separation and the cultural emphasis on individualism. This was the ‘Americanization’ dilemma” ([8], p. 19). Arguably, one of the ways in which the previously territorially-based and ethno-linguistically bound Orthodox Christian communities handled this “Americanization dilemma” was by accepting that their place in American civil society would be as separate ecclesiastic voluntary associations. When faced with this “dilemma”, Orthodox communities demonstrated an ability to accept and adopt America’s “de facto congregationalism” and “denominationalism”.

As a result of the deep-rooted tradition of territorial autocephaly and autonomy within Eastern Orthodox Christianity, this religious tradition has the organizational foundations that were needed in order to assimilate the voluntarism and associationalist North American religio-civil order. For some groups, especially those with a historically more collectivist, or communitarian, outlook and mode of organization, such a move would require major transformations in their religious institutions, modes of social organization, and practices if they were to somehow manage to fit, what was once a driving force behind an entire way of life, into the structure of a civil association. However, the pre-established autocephaly of the Orthodox Christian churches facilitated their integration into the denominational paradigm of American civil society by enabling each ethno-linguistic community to function as a separate denomination.

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<sup>7</sup> Although the Orthodox Church does indeed have a centralized authority structure in terms of maintaining an ecclesial hierarchy, taken as a cluster of territorially sovereign Patriarchates who then grant administrative autonomy to other regional Churches, Orthodoxy has a power-structure that is far more decentralized than institutions such as the Catholic Church.

Once particular collectives of individuals had established clusters of congregations practicing a particular ethno-culturally informed brand of Orthodox Christianity that was recognized by their respective Patriarchs, they began to take on a denominationally styled presence in the American public arena. What differentiates these Orthodox Christian parish communities from many of their Protestant counterparts is that individual congregations do not remain fully independent and that the ethno-religious denominations retain deep ties with the ecclesiastic hierarchies located abroad. Rather than come into existence through top-down decisions, as did many Catholic parishes, the Orthodox congregational form of parish establishment led to the rise of a variety of ethno-religious Orthodox “denominations”, each transnationally tied to a different foreign country of origin. Through a bottom-up, rather than top-down, form of establishment in the United States, each parish congregation petitioned a particular foreign Patriarch for recognition of their authenticity and validity, and ultimately approval. As these clusters of parish congregations multiplied and spread, the American-based hierarchical institutional structures corresponding to foreign Patriarchates grew more elaborate for each ethno-linguistically bound Orthodox community. In essence, in the case of Orthodox Christianity, ethno-linguistic congregationalism gave rise to a form of ethno-religious denominationalism.

Arguably, rather than harm the vitality of the Orthodox ethno-religious communities, this form of congregational associationalism enabled them to prosper by serving as a central point around which members could organize their social lives in their new circumstances. The initial intention behind the establishment of small church communities was to re-create the life they had in their village of origin. While some might have attempted to create a barrier between their community and the larger American society, the fact that they did so by establishing churches and related associations took on a distinctively American quality that resembles the ways many American Protestant congregational denominations function. Having social life revolve around the church enabled Orthodox ethno-religious communities to integrate into American society without having to completely assimilate culturally. By keeping their “village churches” alive these immigrant communities were able to forge a new life in America without having to undergo a complete rupture with their previous lifestyles. As Casanova and others have observed, articulating religious identity from within a congregational framework has long been a way for immigrants to acquire public recognition and acceptance in American civil society. Casanova further observes,

The fact that religion, religious institutions and religious identities played a central role in the process of incorporation of the old European immigrants has been amply documented...that immigrants became more religious as they became American has been restated by most contemporary studies of immigrant religions in America...the thesis implies that collective religious identities have always been one of the primary ways of structuring internal societal pluralism in American history ([2], pp. 113–14).

The Greek Orthodox Church has been an especially vibrant Christian ethno-religious community that has preserved its heritage in the United States, and has become well known for its Greek food and music festivals that people of all races, ethnicities and creeds enjoy attending. Their continued use of the Greek language beyond the first and second-generation, continued consumption of Greek cuisine, and retention of Greek folk music and dance, all speak to the enduring ethno-religiosity of this community. While some other Eastern Orthodox have adopted English as their liturgical language,

including a number of the Antiochian parishes, many of the Greek Orthodox parishes continue to use Greek as their liturgical language, or implement a bi-lingual Greek-English liturgy. Many of the individual parishes also host Greek-language schools that actively teach the Greek language, history and culture. Some of these students even go on to take exams for “ellniomatheia certification”, which is a certificate of attainment in the Greek language that is issued by the *Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religions Centre for the Greek Language*, based out of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece.

Many families in this community continue to give their children Greek first names, and most are baptized with Greek-Christian names according to traditional Byzantine Christian baptismal naming practices that call for a recognized Christian name to be used. A number of Greek-Americans use an Anglicized version of their name in society at large, while using the Greek version of their name within the Hellenic community and in church life. Examples of this include: an individual named “Dionisi”, who goes by the name “Dennis” when in non-Greek speaking social environments; another named “Thanasi”, who goes by “Tommy” when outside of the Greek circle; and another named “Kostas”, whose non-Greek friends often call him “Gus”. Alongside the bilingualism that pervades liturgy, naming, and many conversations within the Greek Orthodox community in America, this ethno-religious group has in many cases continued to uphold practices that are far less commonly practiced in Greece itself, especially in the urban areas. These practices include: participating in Greek folk dancing, attending religious services, and utilizing the church grounds as a hub of social events. All of these activities were commonplace in Greek towns and villages in the past, but have dwindled as a result of European secularization and Greece’s modernization <sup>8</sup>.

#### 4.2. Ethno-Religious Heritage as a Social Cause

The political philosopher Michael Walzer has commented on the unique adaptations of ethno-religious communities as they continue to survive as voluntary associations in America:

Though they are historical communities, they must function as if they were voluntary associations. They must make ethnicity a cause, like prohibition or universal suffrage... The advocates of religious ethnicity...have probably been the most successful in doing this ([10], p. 16).

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<sup>8</sup> Considering this community’s retention of its ethno-cultural practices are concerned, some might wonder about the issue of endogamy within the Greek Orthodox community. While there does not exist an abundance of resources providing data on this issue, Stavros Constantinou’s studies demonstrate that exogamy within the Greek Orthodox community increased from about 30% in the early to mid-1960’s to approximately 60% by the early 1990’s ([9], p. 99). Despite this change, which might be taken as a marker of cultural assimilation, one will witness an interesting phenomenon within many Greek Orthodox parishes, especially those in the American Northeast, whereby non-Greek spouses, regardless of gender, tend to convert to Greek Orthodoxy, or at least attend Greek Orthodox churches, so that even the children of mixed marriages continued to be raised within the Greek Orthodox faith, with many even attending Greek school in the afternoons. This has produced an interesting situation in which new generations who are now of Greek-Italian, Greek-Filipino or Greek-Latino descent, for example, retain an ability to speak some Greek and continue to identify with the Greek Orthodox Christian identity. Furthermore, others who are in endogamous Greek Orthodox marriages will more often than not recognize these ethnically mixed parishioners with one Greek parent as full members of the Greek community.

Walzer's observation that the survival of a particular community itself becomes a cause that unites the members of such a community is telling, not only of the ways in which traditions must adapt to new circumstances, but also the ways in which the traditions themselves are valued as ends worth pursuing and as integral elements in their conception of the good life. Their preservation thus becomes part and parcel of their members' pursuit of the good life and hence, motivates them to act, at times in novel ways, in order to achieve such an end. By acting as associations, the members of these traditions respond to their novel circumstances by undertaking novel modes of situating themselves in the social sphere. They do this precisely in order to both maintain and acquire recognition of their communal identity and to gain acceptance of their way of life.

Furthermore, Walzer's comment highlights the importance of recognizing ethno-religious groups' need to relate to society at large through more limited forms of collectivity and, in a world of deep differences, the necessity of altering their civic patterns of activity in order to do so. While alterations in patterns of individual and communal activity are indeed inevitable as circumstances change, what these communities seek is not a radical *transformation* of their way of life, but rather, novel vectors of *continuity*. In terms of having to function as voluntary associations, which by their very nature makes them *cause-oriented*, so to speak, an ethno-religious tradition's new mode of social activity becomes the struggle to survive through making its own perpetuation the cause that must be pursued. In a peculiar way this pursuit to preserve ethnic identity actually assisted in the democratization, and arguably the Americanization, of these ethno-religious communities.

For instance, when Eastern Orthodox Christian communities entered American civil society they entered a set of circumstances that demanded grassroots modes of organization, which quickly took on a cause-oriented and democratic character. Lay group members formed voluntary associations in the civil sphere to pursue the cause of ethno-religious perpetuation. Commenting on the origins of this phenomenon within the Greek Orthodox community in particular, the historian Theodore Saloutos observes that as these immigrant groups settled in certain areas in sufficient numbers to form communities, they took it upon themselves to form associations, "whose primary responsibility was to build churches and schools that would help ensure the perpetuation of their faith and nationality, their customs and traditions..." ([11], p. 397). They undertook grassroots measures to establish both their lay associations and their churches. Saloutos writes, "Once the decision to form a church was made these same laymen, who organized the lay communities, petitioned the Patriarch of Constantinople or the Holy Synod of Greece to assign a priest to them" ([11], p. 397), and the same may be said for the numerous other ethno-religious Orthodox communities. As the Greek Orthodox Church communities established themselves in America they managed to form a hybrid mode of community membership whereby an inherited ethno-religious identity, together with a denominationally-structured mode of institutional establishment cultivated a sense of solidarity as an American ethno-religious minority.

Despite the aforementioned de-territorialization of the Orthodox community within the North American context, to reiterate, each ethno-religious community corresponds to its own diocese, or jurisdiction. These dioceses often united with their national jurisdiction of origin and hence, manifest themselves in the United States as ethno-linguistic rather than simply regional jurisdictions. Consequently, this phenomenon might be best described as a sort of *re-localized trans-territorialism* that has enabled the preservation and survival of these particular ethno-religious traditions within novel circumstances. This curious phenomenon of the existence of a regional *bricolage* of ecclesiastical

jurisdiction is a very unique trait of Orthodoxy in North American civil society that did not exist in the “Old World”, where, while ethno-linguistic autocephaly occurred, ecclesiastical jurisdiction was traditionally limited to a “one-diocese/archdiocese-per-region” rule. This feature of the Orthodox church in North America, along with its general refrain from participation in the American political order, demonstrate its adaptation to the American civil sphere—albeit in an organizational form distinct from the Aegean, Anatolian, Middle Eastern, Balkan and Eurasian regions.

Differing from both Catholicism, with its Church representing a single centralized global organization, and their counterparts in Europe, which are territorially organized and often ethno-nationally differentiated, the various ethno-religious Orthodox Christian communities in North America not only represent separate voluntary church organizations, but also exemplify a democratic tendency as a result of their de-territorialized nature. As illustrated by the self-motivated mode of lay organization that occurred as Orthodoxy entered American civil society, there was arguably the necessity for a *democratization* of Orthodox communities due to the initial absence of established overarching ecclesiastical structures. The social scientist Daniela Kalkandjeva has described “the phenomenon of autocephaly in Orthodoxy as a major reason for its past and contemporary decentralization”, claiming that “At the international level, the decentralization of the Orthodox Church...allowed for more democratic behavior by individual Orthodox churches” ([12], p. 14). The democratization of the individual ethno-religious Orthodox congregations is directly linked to the ways in which they had to pursue their preservation in voluntary associations. Describing the organization of the Greek Orthodox community in Canada, the social scientist Anastasia Panagakos, writes, “The center of Greek Canadian life is the *kinotis*, or community. The *kinotis*, consists of a general assemble and board of directors (*symvoulion*)...In the early years of migration the main purpose of the *kinotis* was to raise enough money to found and maintain a Greek Orthodox Church. The earliest forms of Greek social organization were voluntary clubs.” ([13], p. 823) <sup>9</sup>. Despite her focus on Canada, the establishment of Greek-American Orthodox churches functioned in the same way.

Although *kinotis* can have a theological interpretation as “spiritual community”, it has come to imply a community of laity, whose responsibilities include managing parish affairs, securing the clergy that will serve the congregation, and establishing Greek schools and other cultural activities such as dance classes and cultural youth groups. Today, the *symvoulion*, or the *kinotis*’ board of directors, retains a high degree of congregational authority, especially when compared to Catholic parishes, for instance. It not only has the ability to request a parish priest from its appropriate Metropolitan or Archbishop once it is established, but some have been known to request new priests when their current clergy are no longer satisfactory <sup>10</sup>. The *kinotis*’ authority within parish life presents a prime example of the existence of a form of *de facto congregationalism* operative in Greek Orthodox communities in that they: are established as voluntary organizations; retain a social identity defined by congregants; maintain strong lay leadership; engage in fundraising to support their parish; in a sense, “hire” their clergy; tend to be ethnically exclusive; are multifunctional arenas of social, cultural and religious services; and become sites of gathering for non-religious reasons. The fact that the *kinotis* represents a

<sup>9</sup> It must be mentioned that there are also theological uses of the terms *kinotis* & *kinonia*, which Panagakos does not discuss. However, these are not relevant for our current purposes.

<sup>10</sup> This dissatisfaction, may, for instance, be the result of a particular priest’s inability to speak Greek when the community is one that wishes to preserve its linguistic traditions.

lay association that is largely responsible for the perpetuation of the Greek Orthodox community itself, and for the establishment of Orthodox churches, speaks to the importance that the ability to establish voluntary associations played in the survival of the Greek Orthodox community in North America. Further, it speaks to the ways in which a robust civil society, which enables a high degree of associative liberty, provides an arena in which an ethno-religious tradition can flourish.

Commenting on grassroots organisations in America, the religious studies scholar Jeff Stout has argued that, by forming voluntary organizations, citizens cultivate a deep sense of solidarity with one another:

By coming together in a public setting of their own choosing and enacting a script of their own devising, citizens make their collective power manifest. They articulate shared values, sum up shared experiences in representative stories, and celebrate their existence as a unified group capable of action. By assembling, they reinvigorate the group and charge up its members. They also make its life force and solidarity evident to others ([14], p. 45).

By establishing themselves as grassroots-initiated voluntary associations, ethno-religious communities are able to achieve both self-perpetuation and are also better equipped to express their need for cultural recognition in the civil arena. Hence, it should be no surprise that the Greek Orthodox sought survival and recognition or that they were willing to re-formulate, or adapt, some aspects of their ecclesiastical modes of organization in order to do so. Namely, the aforementioned strategic adaptation of their parish life to a more congregationalist form and the de-territorialization of the Church's institutional form of organization that gave rise to a more denominationalist type of social presence in America. On the one hand, the fact that the entire hierarchical institutional structure, not simply individual parishes, is itself incorporated as being officially "Greek Orthodox" reinforces the cause of ethno-linguistic cultural survival beyond the congregational parish level. On the other hand, the strong congregationalism that pervades this community as a whole enabled particular parishes to determine the extent to which they would individually and voluntarily pursue ethnicity and language as a social cause with the establishment of Greek-language afterschool programs, thereby creating a degree of difference amongst particular Greek Orthodox parish communities in terms of Greek-language usage and preservation.

Arguably, in light of Walzer's comments, given the deep-seated history of ethnic survival in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe and the struggle to preserve the Eastern Orthodox faith in the face of the dominant Islamic Ottoman presence in the region, the necessity of having to add one's own ethno-cultural community survival to its list of social causes came easily to the Orthodox ethno-religious communities. For instance, during Ottoman times the Greek Orthodox Church took on educational responsibilities, teaching Christianity, the Greek language, and the interwoven history of both. With the Church having historically played a salient role in lingua-cultural as well as religious preservation, it is no surprise that newly established parishes in the U.S readily adopted the social cause of ethno-linguistic survival within a religious institution.

#### *4.3. Ethno-Religiosity as a Source of Solidarity*

Prima facie, the "voluntary" aspect of having to function as a voluntary association seems to contradict the definitive un-chosen-ness of inheriting an ethnic heritage. However, reframing ethno-religiosity as an identity script and cause that must be personally chosen arguably cultivates a

deeper appreciation for the tradition itself. This claim may be asserted insofar as one must personally choose to learn the customs in order to preserve them, which in turn contributes to the personal autonomy of its members by placing the tradition's survival in the hands of individual lay members, as opposed to the purview of either ecclesiastic or socio-political authority. First, if the "associative" dimension may be said to correlate to a tradition's coming to terms with the American-style separation between church and state, then the qualifier "voluntary" arguably correlates to the tradition's response to liberal individualism. Consequently, this means that all members must have freely chosen to associate and create an organization.

Yet, when we are discussing ethno-religious traditions this requirement seems a bit peculiar. How, precisely, can one "choose" to be a member of that which one simply inherits by birth<sup>11</sup>? As a way of making sense of this voluntariness in relation to an "inherited" identity, we might suggest that it is not that one chooses to be a member per se, as is the case with most forms of Protestantism. Rather, what one is capable of choosing is whether or not one will be a "practicing" member of both the religion and the ethnic cultural tradition. Choosing to be a practitioner involves taking pride in the heritage. By taking pride in one's inherited traditions one freely chooses to pursue the preservation of that tradition as a goal. This pursuit can include making a personal choice to be an active member of the community, and exerting a personal effort to maintain its cohesion, uphold its practices, and help ensure its survival for future generations. In Orthodox Christian ethno-religious communities, unlike situations in the "Old World" where there was either no, or very little, choice involved in being a member of the community (*i.e.*, Ottoman rule) or, in which, as a member of the dominant religio-cultural community, one's ethnic and religious commitments are ascribed rather than achieved, in the North American context one must make a personal decision whether or not actively pursue community membership and strive to ensure the continuation of the tradition itself.

Phil Hammond argues that there are:

[T]wo contrasting views of the church in contemporary society. On the one hand, there is what I earlier called the "collective-expressive" view, in which involvement is largely involuntary because it emerges out of overlapping primary group ties not easily avoided. On the other hand, there is the "individual-expressive" view, in which involvement is largely voluntary and independent of other social ties. ([15], p. 5).

Arguably, what we witness in the case of Eastern Orthodoxy in America is a distinctive type of religious association that lies in between a "collective-expressivist" tradition and an "individual-expressivist" Church. The fascinating aspect of this phenomenon is to be found in the ways in which these communities utilized what were originally "individual-expressivist" social apparatuses and modes of civil organization as a means of preserving their social functionality as "collective-expressivist" communities. This case illustrates the possibility for some sort of new middle ground between staunchly individualist and collectivist modes of religious sociality that imbues members with a sense of solidarity as they forge their own authentic way of participating in America's pluralistic civil society.

The American philosopher Josiah Royce argued that devotion of a group of persons to a cause fosters fellowship and imbues each person's sense of self with a meaningfulness it would not otherwise

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<sup>11</sup> This would be especially true in the case of Judaism, but is also applicable to any "ethno-religious" tradition in that ethnicity is inherited.

have had ([16], pp. 16–20). Taking up a cause entails a personal choice to pursue a particular end, which when shared by others becomes a shared aim for a common good. This common goal propels people into mutual action, thereby enabling them to engage in shared practices, deepen their sense of solidarity, and cultivate a shared identity and way of life<sup>12</sup>. The necessity of having to adopt a new form of organizing their communities as de-territorialized cause-oriented ethno-religious associations contributed to both the success of preserving their unique traditions as well as a more robust sense of fellowship amongst community members.

Commenting on signs he saw for a Greek Orthodox Church festival in Santa Barbara, California, Phil Hammond writes,

Carefully and beautifully printed, they announced the sponsor as “The Greek Church of Santa Barbara”. Then inscribed in longhand between the words “Greek” and “Church”, someone had added “Orthodox”. Whoever first prepared the signs, in other words, had failed to mention the part of the label that, in substance, is of greatest importance: What church is sponsoring this booth? The Greek *Orthodox* Church...The signmaker, while acknowledging by his choice of words that there could be Greek sponsorship, which is *not* the church, was also implying that church-going Greeks in Santa Barbara go to *one church* only. How characteristic of a disappearing past, I thought to myself—to have one’s church more or less dictated by one’s primary group allegiances. And not just dictated by, but expressive of, those allegiances. Under these circumstances, the church is surely a vital part of people’s identity ([15], pp. 1–2).

The sociologist Effie Fokas has observed, “in certain diasporic contexts—Orthodox Churches in the United States, for example—we see many churches operating as hubs of national identity for various diasporic communities (be they Greek, Serbian, Russian *etc.*, but most often separate churches for separate national communities)...” ([17], pp. 355–56). Due to the historical interrelation between regional ethno-cultural heritage and religious affiliation, when the Orthodox tradition operates as a voluntary association, it carries a dual structure of community membership, whereby the ethno-linguistic and religio-cultural dimensions of the organization buttress one another in attracting and retaining membership and in perpetuating itself. Religion and ethnicity form a symbiotic relationship that sustains the vitality of the community despite its de-territorialization.

To this end, I would venture to argue that the reasons why Michael Walzer and others have observed the heightened success of ethno-*religious*, as opposed to ethno-*cultural*, traditions at ensuring their survival is that as ecclesiastic organizations they already possess mechanisms required for continuation. Commenting on ethno-religiosity, the sociologist Herbert Gans has suggested that,

[O]ne could also hypothesize that, on organizational ground, ethnicity disappears faster than a group’s religion. Ethnic groups are poorly organized, most of the organizations being informal groups. Conversely, religious groups are usually dominated by formally organized denomination in which informal groups play interstitial roles ([18], p. 581).

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<sup>12</sup> None of this should be taken to imply, however, that religious traditions are now somehow unable to uphold their mission statements, so to speak, and the “old” causes they have historically been committed to. Rather, it is merely to suggest that they must now add, if they haven’t already done so, “self-preservation” to their repertoire of pre-ordained causes, goals, aims, and ends.

Gans' observation that formal organizational structures within religious traditions have helped contribute to ethno-religious perpetuation in North America is indeed supported by the case of Greek Orthodox Christianity. However, this community also illustrates another phenomenon: in a time when many had anticipated the secularization of modernity, the Greek Orthodox Church in America was able to attract new members insofar as it was able to appeal to their desire to participate in the ethno-cultural heritage of their ancestors and preserve their historical linguistic community. The ethnic and religious dimensions of these communities play a mutually reciprocal role in sustaining the vitality of the group's collective identity.

Anthony Smith described an *ethnos*<sup>13</sup> as involving a deep bond of kinship and hence, a quasi-familial mode of interrelationality writing, "When people identify with *ethnies*, they feel a sense of wider kinship with a fictive 'super-family', one that extends outwards in space and down the generations" ([19], p. 438). This sense of ethnic kinship develops insofar as the *ethnos* not only provides its members with a shared ancestral narrative, but also with a wide array of shared customs that actually engage the senses and physicality of those who belong to the community. These include types of food and culinary practices, folk dances, musical styles and types of instruments, gestures and mannerisms, styles of art and architecture, all of which provide the ethnic group with an embodied social relationality, which then becomes the lived actualization of their shared ancestry. This intertwining of history and practice enables common modes of agency and valuing particular behaviour as an expression of community membership that can deepen interpersonal bonds and cultivate a common sense of rootedness in customs and traditions. This imbues the *ethnos* with a dimension of fellowship and solidarity grounded in shared identity narratives and practice that is not necessarily reliant upon a shared corpus of beliefs.

This is where religion steps in to provide a deeper degree of epistemic confluence than if we simply analyze ethnicity on its own merits. The cognitive elements of religious faith offer an ethno-cultural community an additional shared perspective by contributing onto-metaphysical bases and epistemic foundations upon which members of a community can begin to conceptualize their existential location in the social world. Add to this the array of rituals and practices that religion carries with it, and we witness the emergence of a robust array of ways in which members of an ethno-religious tradition can participate in shared agency and embody a common life. Consequently, this produces a deeper sense of kinship that is unparalleled by religion or ethnicity *alone*. Arguably, the Eastern Orthodox communities represent an instance in which ethnic and religious forms of communitarianism have coalesced, thereby producing communities in which ethnic kinship and religious fellowship intertwine in a single sense of solidarity.

Take, for example, the particular case of Greek Orthodox Church communities in North America. The parish church itself, and often its extended hall and community center, is a hub of community-building activities and the nucleus of kinship formation. In addition to the Christian liturgical religious practices that occur within this space, a panoply of other activities take place, some of which are grounded in the Christian tradition, some of which are rooted in Greek custom, and some of which become a hybrid. For instance, after Sunday liturgies there is often a free, shared meal that takes place in the church hall

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<sup>13</sup> I view the terms *ethnie* and *ethnos* as synonymous and will use the term *ethnos* to refer to an ethnic group in the singular while utilizing the term *ethnies* to refer to ethnic groups in the plural.

that is the contemporary evolution of the agape fellowship meal of the early Christian Church. These meals may consist of American cuisine or Greek cuisine or both, and are prepared by members of the Church community themselves. As the chefs are busy in the kitchen, many of the younger children are attending Sunday school, receiving a religious-oriented education in the classrooms of the church hall. However, this space remains an active social sphere beyond sanctioned days of religious observance. Many of the congregants, who are families with children, use the community center's classrooms to establish Greek language and culture schools, as mentioned previously. The Greek school operates as an afterschool program, where children and adolescents attend classes during weekdays in the late afternoon. Often Greek folk dance classes are also offered throughout the week, as are lessons in religious and Greek folk music. All of this reflects how the ethnic and linguistic dimensions of a collective's cultural identity can be preserved in a diasporic context in ways that are conducive to life in a political territory other than that of its region of origin.

### 5. Orthodox Christianity & American Pluralism

This raises an important question concerning the extent to which a group's self-conceptualization as an "ethno-national-religious" community, in contradistinction to a purely "ethno-religious" community, affects its ability to perpetuate its traditions in a pluralistic society. Commenting on the phenomenon of Italian-American hyphenated identities, Walzer argues that, "The consequence, of course, is that 'Italian' is a cultural identity without political claims. That is likely the only form in which Italianness is tolerated, and then it must sustain itself...privately, through the voluntary efforts and contributions of committed Italians. And this is the case, in principle, with every cultural and religious group..." ([10], p. 172). Some might wish to argue that, in order to survive in the American social context, an ethno-religious group must de-nationalize and de-politicize their identity, even if they wish to preserve certain explicitly ethno-cultural and or lingua-cultural elements of their narrative. Unlike "ethno-culturality" or "ethno-religiosity", forms of ethnic and religious nationalism carry with them a *politicized identity* that may be perceived as threatening by the State, or, simply as an unwillingness to embrace the civil arrangements of the new society. Arguably, when Orthodox Christianity's ethno-religiosity meets America's denominationalist brand of religious liberty, the cultural dimensions of linguistic and ethnic heritage become emphasized as the community attempts to cope with their de-territorialization and integrate into America's associationalist civil arena.

For instance, a common narrative in the Greek Orthodox communities of America traces their religio-cultural roots back to the Hellenic Christianity of the Byzantine era through the Ottoman period up until the present day. This narrative is brimming with stories of ethno-religious survival and self-perpetuation in the face of perceived Islamic subjugation, proselytism by other Christians, and the onset of secularization in the modern period. These stories are primarily passed down from grandparents to grandchildren or casually told by parents after meals during family gatherings. Stories such as these may also be heard in Greek schools as the history of the modern Church and birth of the modern nation-state of Greece are taught, or during one the plays that some Greek schools will have the children perform for the community after church on a Sunday afternoon. Many of these narrative threads weave together the personal identity scripts of Greek Orthodox Christians as they recall the Church's role in preserving the Greek language, and as they remember and retell the ways in which Hellenic and Orthodox culture became interwoven in the identity of their ancestors under Ottoman

Muslim rule. This historical narrative enables many community members to view their Greek ethnicity as something that precedes the emergence of the Greek nation-state, and as an ethnos that has a long and intimate history with Orthodox Christianity itself. The historicity of the Greek Orthodox identity dislodges it from any particular political identity in terms of partisanship or socio-political ideology. Furthermore, having had a history of dispersion throughout the Mediterranean and Anatolian civilizations, the Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians have a narrative that inherently recognizes their ethno-religious community's diasporic character, as is witnessed when Greek-speaking congregants from Cyprus, the Pontic region, what are now the Mediterranean coastlands of Turkey, or from Alexandria in Northern Egypt, come together in solidarity with other paisioners whose country of origin is the modern nation-state of Greece.

From this point of view, the community's territorial re-location coupled with the dynamics of American civil society serve to de-politicize the currents of ethno-nationalism in the community and re-orient their narrative toward their longstanding religio-cultural heritage. Such a de-politicization links the preservation of the ethnos with the perpetuation of the religious culture, effectively making the ethnicity's survival unreliant upon the continued existence of a particular nation-state. This in turn makes membership in the ethno-religious community compatible with membership in American political society. As Yiorgos Anagnostou has claimed,

If cultural assimilation posits the forgetting of ethnicity as a necessary condition for national membership, the narrative of civic assimilation privileges political rather than cultural forgetting...The ideology of freedom in America encourages retention of ethnic and religious diversity, as it envisions a polity of "voluntary pluralism", the unity of the nation through commonly shared political principles. This is the civic narrative of assimilation which is legitimized by an astounding diversity of immigrant groups becoming an integral part of the American polity without shedding completely their ethnic affiliations ([20], p. 30).

With their socio-political underpinnings, forms of "religious nationalism" and "ethno-nationalism" are often perceived as incompatible with a socio-political context defined by civic participation and national solidarity. Nationalistic forms of identity-hyphenation carry with them too many explicitly socio-political connotations to be perceived as uncontroversial bases of diasporic identity in explicitly civic and political nations, such as the United States. The de-politicization of ethnic identities that are nationalized in other global regions is an aspect of ethno-religious immigration in America that enables a community to acquire recognition of their ethnic and religious traditions while remaining open to numerous social possibilities. These possibilities include: adopting novel political ideologies; embracing new socio-political arrangements; finding ways to integrate into different civil arenas without having to abandon their claims to difference; and cultivating a *transregionality* as nationalistic currents of politicized identities are transformed into a cosmopolitan rootedness in regional cultures that does not require the preservation of tribalistic animosities in order to achieve cultural survival.

America's denominationalism has reinforced the religious character of many immigrant ethno-religious communities, thereby de-politicizing ethnies as they seek acceptance in their new homeland. Unlike explicitly political forms of ethno-nationalism, ethno-culturalism is more amenable to a community's incorporation in a pluralistic civil society by allowing it to disassociate cultural pride from political ideology and by decoupling ethno-religious elements of one's culture from the political

views of its members. An example of the apolitical ethno-cultural dimensions of the Greek Orthodox community in America is the G.O.Y.A. (Greek Orthodox Youth Association). Unlike bible study groups, the G.O.Y.A. presents a continent-wide organization comprised of parish-based chapters that incorporate folk-based, religious-based and modern forms of dance, music and art in addition to its community-service and fellowship building activities. The G.O.Y.A. hosts local and regional inter-chapter dances as well as annual artistic competitions such as “Sights & Sounds”, in which individuals as well as groups submit artwork, perform music and dance numbers. At an event such as this, one can hear everything from a modern rock song, to Byzantine chant, to traditional Greek folk music being performed, as elements of Orthodoxy, Hellenism, and Americanism blend into a single multicultural bricolage of sociality.

The existence of such biculturalism & bilingualism speaks to the uniquely *multicultural* dimensions of Orthodox Christianity’s contribution to religious pluralism in America. Although these circumstances present the possibility of reifying ethnic identities through cultural enclosure to others experiencing a similar situation, they also possess the potential to become an avenue through which members of such communities can come to recognize one another as fellow carriers of biculturalism and bilingualism. Such recognition would entail identifying with the ways in which another relates to his or her faith through an ethno-religious tradition—even when the ethno-linguistic culture is not shared. Such circumstances are a fertile ground for the cultivation of a *diasporic cosmopolitanism* in which solidarity with one’s own particular community is no longer antithetical to an integrated co-existence with other members of society at large.

The liberal pluralism of America has provided Orthodox Christianity with a socio-political situation in which, as a single tradition, it was able to manifest its multicultural tendencies in civil society. Members of these communities may de-ethnicize themselves as they continue to grow deeper roots on American soil, or they may grow to recognize one another’s ethno-religious affinities even in the face of ethno-cultural and linguistic differences. By adopting a spirit of cooperative intercultural amicability that does not eschew the ethno-cultural dimensions of their faith, but instead recognizes the ways in which Orthodox Christianity helped disperse ethnic and linguistic cultures as the Church itself was globalized, members of this Church can cultivate a pan-Orthodox ethos of *solidarity in diversity* that values its tradition’s contribution to America’s ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. From this perspective, American Orthodox Christian ethno-religiosity can be considered a unique expression of the pluralism that American-style religious liberty enables—one which embodies a pluralistic triad that consists in ethnic, linguistic and religious dimensions.

While some may regard ethno-linguistically oriented ecclesiastic pluralism as a divisive force that serves to splinter and weaken the Orthodox Christian Church in America, this is not necessarily the case. From the point of view of assessing the vitality of multiculturalism, and its relationship to religion in American society, the Orthodox ethno-religious churches may be regarded as a phenomenon that simultaneously contributes to America’s poly-ethnic and linguistically diverse character as well as its religious diversity. While the ecclesiastic autocephaly of Eastern Orthodoxy facilitated survival in the Protestant-style congregational-denominational socio-religious landscape of United States, its uniqueness as a theologically unified community of communities, each sharing a similar ecclesiastic structure, has primed this tradition for continued survival in a multicultural socio-political climate dedicated to the discovery of shared morals despite ethno-cultural differences. Arguably, in an era in

which cultural assimilation and homogenization are being contested, any religious tradition that is able to successfully balance the demands of the universal *and* particular will be more apt to flourish and have a more prosperous future in a rapidly globalized world. The Eastern Orthodox communities are an instance in which ethnic and religious forms of communitarianism have coalesced while simultaneously maintaining a universal faith that is open to multiple ethno-cultural traditions, thereby becoming a potential source of learning how to cultivate unity in diversity. This is where the ability for the ethno-religious Orthodox communities to function as distinct voluntary associations holds the possibility for the production of an internally multicultural form of shared religiosity that is conducive with the liberal pluralism and democracy that have shaped American civil society. Additionally, viewing Orthodox Christianity as an internally multicultural form of shared religiosity can assist in cultivating a cosmopolitan vision of this religious tradition as one that is capable of connecting its members to other regions of the globe as it preserves and celebrates ethno-cultural and lingua-cultural diversity.

## 6. Conclusions

These diasporic ethno-religious Orthodox communities arguably represent a unique form of religious trans-nationalism and may be described as a form of Christian multiculturalism. The multicultural aspects of the Orthodox churches are often underappreciated by their members, who tend to value the preservation of their ethno-religious customs, yet may not perceive the significance such arrangements possess when addressing issues concerning the establishment of a multicultural socio-political order or constructing a form of liberal pluralism in what some commentators are calling a “post-secular” society. Insofar as many of these communities are comprised of bi-cultural families (*i.e.*, Greek-American or Ukrainian-American *etc.*...) they represent a locus of trans-national and intercultural exchange and hybridity, thereby making cultural alterity a far less “frightening” or “foreign” phenomenon and something to which these persons become accustomed to on a very intimate level. This is an arena in which cosmopolitan sentimentalities can be cultivated through the understanding that members of other communities are similar to one’s own in both faith and bi-culturality without any demand for the homogenizing consolidation of the two communities. It is to become betwixt in solidarity and separation, neither one needing to be excluded for the other to have its place. As a locus of multiple ethno-linguistic cultural communities, Orthodox Christianity in America represents a genuinely multicultural religious tradition whose individual church groups have been born of self-initiated, independent voluntary associations. Further studies into these elements of the Eastern Orthodox community-at-large could serve as a fertile ground for new ways of examining the relations amongst religion, ethnicity and social integration in liberal multicultural democracies and answering the question of how cultures can independently survive despite diminishing animosity and the cultivation of ethical and social solidarities.

The case of the Orthodox Christian communities in America demonstrates that de-centralized and associationalist modes of organization are not only amenable to, but might even be said to promote, democratic behaviour among religious communities that are often thought of as being “traditionalist”. Their de-centralized associationalism lends itself to collective decision-making and both individual and collective expressions of autonomy, in the form of taking grassroots initiatives to pursue individually held and commonly shared causes that have been personally and communally chosen, rather than

prescribed by an external authoritative body<sup>14</sup>. Liberal multiculturalism fundamentally promotes the free pursuit of diverse ways of life while sharing in a common society. Further, as has been argued, associational decentralization may be said to promote democratic communities. If both of these statements are true, then a religious tradition that is capable of retaining its cultural pluralism—it's distinctive ethno-diversity and communal autonomy—while simultaneously cultivating solidarity in a common collective is indeed an expression of a multicultural tradition with democratic tendencies regardless of its retention of rootedness in heritage.

Ultimately, we can come to recognize that adopting a form of associationalism in the civil arena enables ethno-religious traditions to perpetuate themselves in a liberal democratic society, while simultaneously enabling them to integrate into the American cultural context and contribute to the country's multicultural character. Although the forms of association that different traditions adopt and the ways in which they will perpetuate themselves will indeed differ, voluntary and associationalist modes of ethno-religious community formation need not necessarily be seen as a threat to either traditional ways of life—insofar as they help enable their survival—or to life in American society—insofar as they promote the democratization and integration of these communities in a multicultural social setting. Conceptualizing religious associationalism in this manner enables a view of ethno-religious traditionalism and preservationism as commensurable with the civil sphere of liberal multicultural societies.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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<sup>14</sup> This observation should not be mistaken for the descriptive claim that all of the internal organizational features of these associations are entirely democratic, nor with the normative assertion that they ought or ought not to be. Rather, this observation is intended to highlight an aspect of their associative activity that is highly reminiscent of, if not akin to, the ways in which grassroots democratic organizations are often established and the ways in which they tend to function in the civil sphere.

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