

ADVANCING AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY WITH HELLENIC TRADITIONS



The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis 14 Jun 2012

In this article I make an attempt to discuss how we should maintain our Hellenic identity, whilst remaining Australian. We, as Greek Australians, at one time or another, question our identity, our role in society and our effects upon that society. Many of the second and third generation have been spared the worst of this personal and individual crisis, as well as the emotional and cultural scars that are associated with it.

Yet those of us in the preceding generation have found ourselves looking deep into our lives, wondering what we are doing here, where we are now, what our parents would think of us, whether we have contributed to our Hellenic origins and whether we have done anything to ensure that the youth of today will carry on the traditional cultural and religious values of our forefathers.

If we as a cultural group retain our heritage, then Hellenism will develop and flourish in Australia. Those who have second thoughts may well learn my lesson while serving as a soldier with the Australian Defence Force in Singapore and Malaya. One of my mates asked me: "Pete, on whose side would you be if Australia and Greece were on opposing sides". I looked at him and said quick as a flash, "Cobber, I would be fighting with the Australians".

My mate asked "Why?" I said: "Traditionally Greeks have always fought for their adopted country even back in ancient times. In any case, how the bloody hell is a Hellenic bullet going to identify me as an Australian with a Hellenic background, especially when I am wearing the Australian uniform?"

Australians of Hellenic background at an early age have instilled in them the positive aspects of their heritage. These early teachings and subsequent reinforcement with their communities, church and family assist greatly in their identifying with Hellenism as the basic foundation for their value system.

The youth of today are better equipped technologically, highly educated, and exposed to a greater diversity of influences than their parents. As a result, they are better placed to take on the challenges of life. Post-World War II, there were two types of migrants from Hellenic backgrounds - those who embraced the Australian environment early and those that took a generation to reach the same level of understanding.

In both cases parents would have experienced to some degree the horrors of war, and both were determined to ensure their offspring were prepared to meet their future. One set of parents would prepare their children to develop, contribute and embrace life's opportunities while the other parents would prepare their children to be wary of life's opportunities, restrict their freedom and development and thus carry the baggage of their parents.

In both cases it was not unusual for children to do well and reach the pinnacle of their careers in whatever field they chose. Again, in both cases each individual would have taken a different track on life's journey, but heading in the same direction. It is important that those who have reached the pinnacle of their careers be acknowledged by their respective communities, relatives and/or family circles. If we as Australians of Hellenic heritage fail to do this, then we fail to learn the lessons of the past and will continue to carry its baggage into the future.

Therefore, my question to the Australian youth with Hellenic origins comes in three parts:

One: Do we want our youth of today to question the paradigms of the past, to test our core values, to respect and remember our cultural, religious and Hellenic origins, to seek responsibility and leadership and to question our beliefs whether they are of a religious or materialistic point of view?

Two: Do we encourage, develop and prepare our youth emotionally and academically to face life's challenges without fear or reproach, to contribute and serve and allow them the freedom necessary to grow, make decisions and become a part of Australian society without losing their Hellenic identity?

Three: Do we instil into youth our fears and concerns, stifle their growth, put them down, restrict their movements, put the fear of God into them, never to forget their Hellenic cultural and orthodox roots, and let them carry our inherited cultural and other accumulated baggage of the past?

Which of the above is relevant and would be the best model for Australians of Hellenic heritage? The challenges for the youth of today are to identify what is the best model for them, without the influence of the generations before them, so as to be good citizens of Australia without losing their Hellenic identity. Is it possible to blend all three or maybe two of the above models that personifies the youth Australian Hellenism of the future?

Is there a future for Australian Hellenism? More importantly, what is Australian Hellenism and what does it mean to the youth of today? Do Australians of Hellenic background wish to acknowledge their heritage and will orthodoxy remain relevant? Such questions cannot be answered with some form of debate or forum. Having said all of the above, one wonders what constructive role, if any, the Greek Orthodox Church and Hellenic Governments can play in the future of Hellenism in Australia?

If these two institutions are to be relevant and wish to play a significant role in Australian Hellenism, they must acknowledge once and for all that the current generation of Australians of Hellenic origins are no longer the superstitious, opportunistic backwater peasants. The Greek Orthodox Church and Hellenic Governments in Australia have a wonderful opportunity to contribute and mentor Australian of Hellenic origins to develop in all spheres of academia, industry and at the political spectrum, thus emulating their Anglo/Saxon/Celtic brethren to become the Australians of the future without losing their core identity. Our youth of today are better equipped to handle the future and therefore we must make every effort to assist in their development as citizens of Australia. *Previously published in Neos Kosmos*



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