

of the homonymous mountain inspired by Hellenic ideals and traditions; and revive the pagan rituals of marriage and baptism, to be performed at various Greek sites. These developments struck Kantiotis as signs of a de-Christianization of Greece that the church should confront through radical means, such as excommunication. He argued that the Greek Postal Service should have chosen a more neutral symbol, like a white pigeon, instead of Hermes—a god known in antiquity as the protector of thieves and impostors, as well as the one who would cover up Zeus's moral transgressions. This is why Kantiotis called the Hermes stamp "a satanic stamp, the stamp of the Antichrist."<sup>121</sup> The long-standing antipathy between Hellenism and Christianity, whose roots can be located in earlier centuries of Christian condemnation of Hellenism, is still alive and seething today.

Another extreme case can be found in Orthodox rigorists who opposed the official lighting of the Olympic flame in the ancient location of Olympia on the occasion of the Atlanta Olympic Games of 1996. The rigorists decreed that the ceremony was totally inappropriate for Christian Greece. Why? Because a priestess during a related ceremony would symbolically invoke the god Apollo to send his sacred flame down to earth, clearly a ploy to fan the fires of paganism. The rigorists found the presence of the local metropolitan Germanos at this "pagan fiesta" particularly annoying, in effect accusing the Orthodox bishop of an act of treason against his own faith. Further, they protested, he ought to have been defrocked, according to the holy canons of the church. They sent a related complaint to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, demanding further investigation and contending that the lighting of the Olympic flame could have taken place without these supposedly sacred rituals and the ludicrous prayers to Apollo.<sup>122</sup>

Theirs was not the first instance of angry Orthodox Greek reaction to the pagan elements of the modern Olympic Games. The popular and zealous preacher, Apostolos Makrakis, had also protested the Athens Olympic Games of 1896 and the Olympic Anthem as "an introduction of the ancient pagan spirit of error and wickedness."<sup>123</sup> The Holy Synod denied permission to a priest seeking to participate in the Marathon race of 1896.<sup>124</sup> The ceremonial lighting of the flame for the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 in Nazi Germany and the introduction of the Olympic Torch Relay for the first time brought similar complaints in the official bulletin of the Church of Greece, calling these pagan-like rituals unworthy of the Greek people.<sup>125</sup> Orthodox voices also charged that the spectacular opening ceremonies of the Athens Olympic Games of 2004, organized by the renowned choreographer Dimitris Papaioannou, focused more on Greece's Hellenic and pagan past and

less on its Christian history.<sup>126</sup> Generally, some Orthodox circles associated the Athens Olympic Games of 2004 with a clear revival of paganism.<sup>127</sup>

To place these divergent aspects of Orthodox Christian and anti-Romeic Hellenocentric/Neopagan orientations in the modern Greek context, we would do well to relate them to two basic identity models: Romeic and Hellenic. The topic gained special prominence following Patrick Leigh Fermor's Helleno-Romeic "dilemma" thesis and his analytic typology of sixty-four points to distinguish these two models of identity.<sup>128</sup> Social anthropologist Michael Herzfeld also talked about the fundamental "disemie" of modern Greek culture as a whole, namely the bipolarity resulting from these two different models of identity.<sup>129</sup> The repercussions of this bipolarity do not pertain to religion alone but also involve other areas. Predictably, the Byzantine Orthodox Christian past and its relation to Greek Antiquity continue to be assessed in Greece today from divergent angles, both positive and negative.<sup>130</sup> In a recent novel dealing with the Holy Mountain Athos and its monastic community, the Greek-French writer Vassilis Alexakis (b. 1943) has also critically discussed the differences between and repercussions of the open ancient Greek and the closed Byzantine Christian worldviews.<sup>131</sup>

Yet, although conflict is the predominant *modus operandi* for viewing the above cultural and religious models in Greece, it is only part of the story. As will become evident in the remaining chapters, the fallout from Hellenism and Christianity is but one aspect of a much richer tapestry. The modes of interaction between these two religious cultures are indeed multifaceted, with nuanced trajectories, and portend further evolution. We cannot infer that modern Greeks generally suffer an unresolved and insoluble identity crisis because of divergent models of identity. This is not to deny, though, existing problems in Greek identifications, both in history and at present. Nevertheless, identities are usually constructs, managed and adapted to specific conditions, not set in an exclusive direction. People can live quite well with multiple identities and their resulting contradictions. The same is valid for Greece to a considerable extent. It is generally the outside observer who nitpicks these differences and sees in them intractable problems.

“known religions” in the country, thus bestowing legitimate status on Neopagan followers. This decision gave Neopagans a strong impetus to demand greater “rights” from the Greek state, such as permission to use ancient sacred places for their rituals and worship once more. On January 21, 2007, the Neopagan group *Ἑλλήνων Ἀρχαιοθρησκῶν Ἱερὸν Σωματεῖον* (Sacred Association of Hellenic Followers of Ancestral Religion) set out to celebrate the feast of Gamelia or Theogamia (the Marriage of Zeus and Hera) in the ruins of the temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens but were soon hindered by police. They appealed to court and international forums to reignite their cause to combat what they perceive as blatant violations of basic human rights.<sup>115</sup> It is obvious that the Neopagan revival in modern Greece, disparate though it may be, will endure and make headlines in the years to come.

This broad Hellenic revival, particularly that of the Neopagans—although relatively marginal and lacking in mass appeal—did not fail to alarm the Orthodox Church, which was intent on silencing the upsurge at its rebirth. The metropolitan of Kitros and Katerini, whose diocese is situated near Mount Olympus, where Neopagan festivities usually take place, issued an encyclical (no. 192) on June 6, 1996, condemning such actions and warning the Orthodox public of the dangers arising from them.<sup>116</sup> The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece formed a special committee to deal with this revival, resulting in a long, polemical leaflet entitled *Ἡ προσπάθεια ἀναβιώσεως τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας* (*The Attempt to Revive Paganism*), distributed free of charge to the Orthodox flock in 2004.<sup>117</sup> The committee took the view that resurgent paganism demonstrated the spiritual crisis that had been building in modern Greece, and as a countermeasure it pleaded for renewed faith in Orthodox Christianity, the epitome of all religious truth. Its leaflet characterized Neopagan criticisms of Helleno-Christianity as part of an orchestrated plan to destroy the Orthodox Christian foundations of the modern Greek nation. The church defended its selective use of Hellenic tradition as appropriate to its followers, typifying pagan treatment of Christianity as false and, indeed, as the destroyer of *true* Hellenism. The leaflet went on to decry the low moral standards, crude anthropomorphism, and sick mysticism of the Hellenic religion. The only way to salvage the Hellenic tradition, the pamphleteers insisted, was to synthesize it with Christianity.

Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Christodoulos (1998–2008) expressed similar ideas in a 2004 book entitled *Ἑλληνοπαιδὺς προσηλύτης*

(*Proselyte Hellenism*).<sup>118</sup> Exploring reasons for the passage from paganism to Christianity, he concluded that ancient Greeks suffered deep existential dilemmas and were unsatisfied with their own religious tradition, as indicated by the sharp internal critiques already at play since antiquity. Just before Christianity's appearance, ancient society and religion were in a state of internal decay and on the verge of collapse. Christodoulos goes on to say that, although many contemporary scholars speak highly of the unique ancient Greek heritage, they tend to overlook the latent decadence of the ancient era. The widespread sense of imminent collapse was what compelled the rulers and the masses to abandon Hellenic religion and embrace Christianity. The archbishop argues that the synthesis of “Christian Hellenism,” as accomplished by the Greek Church Fathers, is both the perennial and ideal model of orientation for subsequent generations of Greeks. His is one of many Orthodox responses to the broader Hellenic revival.<sup>119</sup> Additional works offer justifications for positioning the Old Testament in the Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical culture and education.<sup>120</sup>

Our historical survey would not be complete without mention of the Orthodox rigorists who see Neopagan culprits under every stone. One such rigorist is the metropolitan of Florina, Eordaia, and Prespes (1967–2000), Augustinos Kaniotis, a person renowned for his militancy and fervor in defending Orthodoxy in Greece and abroad. He denounced Hellenic religion and culture from a staunch moral perspective, regarding Hellenic deities as the perpetrators of abominable and disrespectful transgressions. He was contemptuous of the scourge of the “new Julians” working both explicitly and insidiously to paganize modern Greece. He recited an exhaustive list of Neopagan “plots” (some of which had already been carried out) to, among other things: teach Greek mythology in the schools; name streets and public places after Hellenic deities; emblazon the emblem of owl on the central building of the University of Athens (according to Basil of Caesarea, this nocturnal bird symbolizes a person who chooses to live in darkness and error rather than respond to Jesus's light); employ the image of Pallas Athena as a logo on the seal and banner of the University of Athens; erect statues of Apollo and Athena in the Academy of Athens; organize Delphic Feasts and create an international cultural center in Delphi for promoting the Delphic ideal and spirit of universal cooperation; circulate books explicitly promoting paganism (e.g., Joseph Papadopoulos's 1960 work, *Ἑλληνοικήσιπὰ ἱστορία*) in the school curricula; make Hermes's head the symbol of the Greek national Postal Service and print a Hermes postage stamp; assist the Olympus Association, which intends to create a city in the foothills

It calls into question internationally accepted theories about the ancient Greeks, such as their Indo-European origins or the Phoenician provenance of the Greek alphabet, dismissing such theories as anti-Hellenic bias or, worse, Jewish propaganda. These authors perceive an abysmal chasm separating Hellenism and Judaism and promulgate the existence of a Jewish conspiracy against Hellenic civilization throughout history (e.g., the fierce critique of Martin Bernal's book *Black Athena* in numerous issues of their review). They routinely discredit the Old Testament as anti-Hellenic, immoral, pernicious, racist, and fascist; they also take the view that Christianity is a *product* of Judaism and therefore an enemy of Hellenic culture for the past two thousand years. They also see Christian monotheism as the antithesis of Hellenic polytheism and regard their struggle as one of freedom and plurality versus dogmatism and violence. They blame totalitarian, cruel, theocratic, and inhuman Byzantium for the current dismal state of affairs. Further, they regard Ρωμαιοσύνη (Greek Romeicity), the attempt to unite Hellenism and Christianity, as a grotesque hybrid, and the Ρωμαίοι (Romeic Greeks) as bastard Hellenes who fell under the Jewish-Christian spell.

In contrast, the Neopagans are less concerned with scalding diatribe and more concerned with reviving Hellenic religion as a way of reactivating the entire Hellenic culture. Estimates of the number of believing or practicing Neopagans in Greece range today from two thousand up to ten thousand, and the inclusion of sympathizers would probably significantly add to those figures. Greek Neopaganism, unlike many of its counterparts abroad, does not represent an eclectic mix of ideas, activities, and syncretic phenomena; rather, it claims a predominantly ethnic character, grounded in the ancestral, indigenous Hellenic tradition that existed long before the imported, foreign Christian religion arrived on the scene. Its basic characteristics are polytheism, worship of nature as a divine element, lack of recognized founders or divine revelation, a clear ethnic character and a Hellenic pantheon, and finally recognition of the importance of sacrifice as a gift to the deities.

In fact, such groups usually reject the term "Neopagan" as a self-designation. They claim that Christians especially brandish terms like "Neopagans," "heathens," and "idolaters" as derogatory labels. They actually prefer to designate themselves as "Gentile/Ethnic Hellenes" (Εθνικοί Έλληνες), as "followers of the ancestral Hellenic religion and way of life" (Αρχαϊκόθησκοι, Αρχαϊκότροποι, Έλληνότροποι), or as "Dodekathelists" (Δωδεκαθεϊστές), i.e., worshippers of the pantheon of the twelve Olympian deities.

An important Neopagan group publishes the review *Διπτερές (Fallen from Zeus, i.e., from heaven)* with the subtitle, *In Defense of the Ancient Psyche*. Its primary aim is to defend and uphold the pre-Christian Greek psyche and to create real (not nominal) Hellenes. The group berates the pseudo-worshippers of antiquity—Hellenized Christians, New Agers, and Hellenocentric nationalists and fascists—for disregarding the importance of Hellenic religion and using antiquity for selfish purposes and other objectives. It considers Hellenic religion a comprehensive cosmogonist, psychological, and eschatological system aimed at supplying humans with serious religious and philosophical meaning. To understand the Hellenic way of life, followers must envision the ancient psyche of their Hellenic ancestors as an internal fire that burns in and guides every person. The psyche signifies the possibility of human deification, which in turn is seen as a consubstantial element of the nature of the universe in which all humans live. Human beings, with their divine origin and potential for deification, can thus gain an optimistic, enthusiastic understanding of life and properly value each person's dignity and freedom. These Neopagans find any correlation between Hellenism and Christianity unthinkable. Their attempt to de-Christianize modern Greece is evident in their use of the ancient Hellenic calendar of months and feast days, as well their replacement of overtly Christian holidays with pagan festivities. They organize rites and festivals outdoors (on sites like Mount Olympus) on such dates as full moon or summer solstice—offering prayers, libations, hymns, name-giving ceremonies, talks, artistic events, and pilgrimages to ancient sacred places—usually attired in various chlamydes of Ionian or Doric design.

A reaction to the hostile Christian treatment of the Hellenic religion and its systematic persecution in history, however, lies at the heart of both anti-Romeic Hellenocentric and Neopagan endeavors. Adherents and detractors often raise their common voices in renewed discussion. There was even a meeting of the World Congress of Ethnic Religions in Athens in June 2004, scheduled to coincide roughly with the Olympic Games held in Athens in August 2004. The range of Neopagan interest groups and individuals became so diverse that an umbrella organization, the Supreme Council of the Gentile Hellenes, formed in 1997 to disseminate information and serve as an official organ and unified voice, better enabling the panoply of different groups to collectively express their concerns in Greece and before representative bodies abroad.<sup>114</sup> As a result, Greek courts recognized the Hellenic religion in 2006 as one of the

the Decalogue—written from a negative perspective—were, he said, unsuitable for children, who did not yet know what their duties to society were; their innocent souls could be polluted upon hearing the vile deeds mentioned in the Decalogue (especially the eighth and tenth precepts). Children were forced to read and hear of the achievements of Jewish heroes (such as Gideon) and their occasionally monstrous deeds instead of learning about the extraordinary labors of Hercules and Theseus, which were marvelously described in ancient Greek poetry and fine art. On the contrary, they learned about Samson and his hair as if these were historical facts. Politis regarded the Old Testament as abounding in vile deeds, such as the lie of Adam and Eve to God and Cain's fratricide. Even the most innocent-sounding stories in this Jewish book might teach one deceit and wickedness.<sup>112</sup> Underlying Politis's criticism was the friction between Hellenic and Jewish traditions and modes of thought. A development in such thinking occurred as Judaism came to be regarded by several modern Greeks as a precursor to and allied with Christianity, and thus at odds with Hellenism. These Greeks therefore either demanded the stronger Hellenization of Christianity and its purification from Jewish elements,<sup>113</sup> or Christianity's outright rejection as a Jewish construct having nothing to do with the authentic Hellenic tradition.

Such critical views are characteristic of a whole array of anti-Romeic Hellenocentric and Neopagan currents in Greece, which have conspicuously arisen especially in the last few decades. Related groups strive to distinguish Hellenism from Christianity. For them, there is no middle road and to argue continuity among ancient Greece, Byzantium, and modern Greece would be a gross error. Hellenism, they contend, has been held captive for the past sixteen centuries and totally distorted under the thumb of Christianity. They hold not only Byzantium but also the modern Greek state and political leadership responsible for that captivity by clinging to the futile goal of Helleno-Christian synthesis. In fact, it could be said that Hellenic polytheism is the legitimate original religion of Greece. This attitude sometimes leads the modern-day Hellenic "ancestral activists" to demand the return of ancient sacred places for performing rituals and the expulsion of tourists from "confiscated" archaeological sites.

It is helpful to distinguish between two broad yet overlapping categories of such currents, the anti-Romeic Hellenocentrists and the Neopagans. The first are more generally interested in a full-blown Hellenic revival, with emphasis on Greece's ancient heritage, usually at the expense of the Orthodox



Fig. 4-3. Cover page of an issue of the review *Δαυλός* (*Torch*), which is generally very critical of the Orthodox Church and its treatment of the Hellenic tradition. This specific issue deals with the strongly anti-Hellenic writings of John Chrysostom, since the church had declared 2007 the "Year of Saint John Chrysostom."

Christian tradition. Connections with right-wing nationalist, esoteric, or other idiosyncratic pro-Hellenic movements are not unusual. Such a group has been publishing *Δαυλός* (*Torch*) since 1982 (see fig. 4-3), a monthly review devoted to all aspects of Hellenic civilization, regarded as the "light of the world" and a paragon of unparalleled achievement. It touts the unquestionable superiority of the Hellenic race, spirit, and culture worldwide.

# Hellenic Temples and Christian Churches

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