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### A Friend of Greek Evangelicals

It was 1996 and we were living and in Ayrshire, *Rev Andy Anderson*, the then president of the FIEC was our speaker at the Church anniversary of New Cumnock Baptist Church. We spoke of our plans to visit **Greece in 1997** and indeed meet up with Christians from the Free Evangelical Church of Greece. As it happened Andrew had himself visited Greece & spoken in Athens and most helpfully put us in touch with the Church Office there. My personal interest in the FECC stems from to our time with the Irish Presbyterian Church when *Dr. Donald Gillies* back in the mid 1960's presented briefs to the General Assembly on the flagrant injustices suffered by these Greek Christians who were classified as a sect. Worse than that, officials of the Orthodox Church of Greece had obtained permission to chain up the premises of their fellow believers. This injustice made me doubly keen to meet up with these faithful and courageous Greek Christians.

### A Change of plan

My letter to the Athens Office of the Greek Church drew a reply from Thanos Karbonis –the leader of the Church. His disarming invitation to join their annual trip to Patmos that fortuitously fell within our panned dates came as a surprise. There and then Mina my wife recognized the unparalleled opportunity and we willingly added in the £300 to our budget and booked the trip. Who could refuse such a special holiday?

### Thanos Karbonis



In conversation with this accomplished lawyer who played a personal role in the Hague presentation that freed his Church from the shackles of persecution, one found a self-effacing but extremely well informed modern Greek with a solid background of philosophical and historical and biblical reading at his fingertips. His series of 4 homilies on Patmos delivered in the modern Greek medium which I could follow fairly well, were a real treat. His testimony as one brought up communist in commitment was of conversion as he read scripture and talked with his predecessor as leader of the Greek Church whilst a student. Thereafter he would preach

publicly in Sentagma Square and tell of the grace of the Saviour who changed his life.

### **B.A. FLIGHT922 Heathrow to Thessalonica**

After our visit and overnight stay with Mina's brother John and his wife Emma at Tinkers Hill we drove to Heathrow Terminal 1 to board our 8.15am flight bound for Greece-arriving 1.55pm local time. We picked up our car and drove along fairly quiet carriageway for 13 kilometers branching towards the biblical Berea. The diversion of 35 km both ways got us to the modern town of Veria. We were pleased



to see a bronze memorial to the early biblical Christians of the town and enquired at the bakery if the Christian bookstore would be opening only to be told it was a holiday. We had no other way of getting in touch and time was of the essence as we moved toward Lamia where we would overnight- rejoining Highway 75 for a further 111 km to Larissa and onwards 137 km to Thermopulae

### **The Pass of Thermopulae**

Here we stopped for photographs. The tall bronze commemorates the 3 brave Macedonians who delayed the Persian host. It is an impressive testament to the bravery of Greek warriors whose mothers bade their sons as they marched to war "return with your shield or borne upon it". We diverted to the E65 and dropped down to Delphi the nerve centre of the ancient Delphic oracle –a representative of which Paul met at Philippi(Acts16.16-21).



## Delphi-the navel of the world

The landscape below Delphi is luscious and the views are glorious but the altars must have reeked of blood which still darkens their surface with stains after 2000 years though these bulls never atoned for sin

Let me explain that Greek city states sent votive offering: Corfu, Athens, Lacedemonia, Argos, Taras, Rhodes, Daochos & Krateros have treasuries on the site. The Amphictyonic League included 12 city states or tribes which had a senate that organized the Pythian Games and Delphic Festival every 4 years. In a 5000 seater stadium those attending watched the Sacred Drama of the contest between Apollo and Python. Music and Paeans in honour of Python were popular. Worship was led by 2 priests.



To gain an oracle or prophecy a tax was payable affording the right to the altar of Apollo. Pythia-the priestess purified her in the Kastalian fount, then bent over th Navel of the earth(a sacred stone) ate a laurel leaf, inhaled the vapours from the chasm and entered an ecstasy. Her incoherent words were interpreted by the priests put into poetry and given to the suppliants.

The reason Delphi is significant is that Zeus according to legend released two eagles who met there and so Delphi was declared the “centre of the earth” which Zeus confirmed by throwing the sacred stone just there.

The modern festival restores the idea of “supping with the gods” which was the original concept-although Paul and Christians would class it as “supping with the devil”.

Historically the cave of Gaia (mother earth) from whence came prophecies dated from the second millennium BC. As an infant Apollo killed Python purified him and returned to Delphi and was crowned-thus the worship of Apollo began. The League took control of the Oracle in 590BC and after many wars for its treasuries between the Greek states and latterly Athens the Romans took it over in 191BC and its decline began.

To ensure prophecies were relevant a network of slave girls and later ladies over 50 were dispersed over Greece as let us say spies. They communicated the settings of questions and contributed to the prophetic messages. Thus the oracle at Philippi would have already been the best informed individual on the

newly arrived Paul. You could say it was both the secret service of Greece besides being the tax-gathering system for the League.

## Glaxidi and Patras

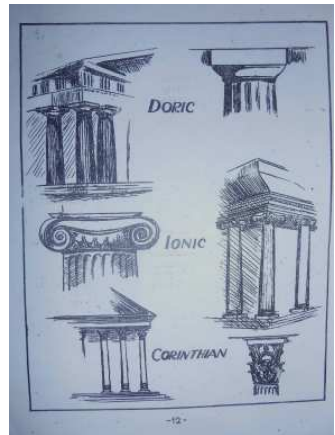
About 30 km and we were back on the E65 on the northern shores of the Gulf of Corinth and enjoyed a stop for refreshments at lovely Glaxidi where there is a fine marina, We followed the E65 for 50 Km enjoying seascapes all the way to the ferry and on to Rio on the south shore, Within 15minutes we were in Rio by car ferry and by another simple detour we arrived at Patras. How could we miss this town. Here it was St Andrew was martyred on an “X”

cross such as is emblazoned on the Scots ensign. I once asked a group of Scottish Profs at St.Andrews Uni as we shared coffee how St.Andrews got its name. After a pause one piped up that he thought St.Andrew’s head had been interred in the old castle church by the shore. Maybe! What we know is that he who first introduced the Greeks to Jesus kept in touch with them and went to reach them at home-and for that adventurous ministry he gave his all.

## Corinth

The journey to Corinth along the E65 dual carriageway was fast because we were now having to keep our eyes on the clock. Full 50 towns and villages lay along the route-a highly populated and desirable environment. We avoided the modern city but visited the ancient archaeological site and I scaled the 1,857 ft high Acropolis where 900 prostitutes had once lived in the first century. The historical site is excellently set out though not quite so interesting as Philippi. You can walk the streets just like Paul and visit the various areas of town-the meat market(1Cor10.25)-the legal quarter with its Bema and the temples and elite domicile of the patricians.

Xenophon whose Anabasis I had to study for Matriculation brought 10,000 Greek mercenaries safely home from the defeat of Cyrus by Artaxerxes his brother. He lived in Corinth 365-355BC. He believed great leadership required thorough education-this Cyrus had. Alexander the Great who gathered the city



states in Corinth a little later in 335BC also was well educated and he reversed the losses in Asia and swept through to India. But we would know little or nothing about ancient Greece without Pausanius who circa 160AD wrote 10 books about the country and was the most widely travelled Greek up until then. The apostle Paul had been to every land he visited but one-Egypt-and the apostle wrote two letters to Corinth where Aquila and Priscilla housed the first Church in the city.



An old inscription from Delphi tells us Gallio arrived in Corinth AD51-2 and I have stood beside his Bema or judgment seat in Corinth(Acts18.12) .

Whilst in location we stopped to take some photos of the Corinth canal, It was dug by Jewish slaves who worked indefatigably but under terrible duress(cf Zech9.13) here as

in a mine **we visited in 2005**. The result of their labours is a channel between the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf and their Herculean labours meant no longer did boats need to be hauled overland between these seas.



Modern ships can navigate the canal with precious little clearance on either side.

By this time in the afternoon we were beginning to run late and we had a 77km journey to the heart of Athens to complete before the office there closed and with it the church car park where we had arranged to leave our little vehicle because we would board a vessel bound for the far western margins of Greek Aegean territory. The secretary had been delayed by our tardy arrival but said something very inspiring. She said “We knew you would come-the English keep their word”.

### **Sentagma and a Preacher’s Suite**

Apart from packing too much into the day we had got totally lost at the huge merry-go-round that is Sentagma Square. I asked a policeman on duty for directions –he uttered an expletive and we shunted on. Then an angel lady in a





small car appeared and said “Follow me”. I don’t know where she came from, how she appeared before us or anything else about her-but she got us to Amalias Avenue. We parked the little yellow car and set off with the keys to the lovely upstairs flat with fridge well stocked and everything made ready for us. It was let me say “commodious” beyond our imagining. We were in the home of a leading Athenian surgeon in the Harley Street of Athens. It was coincidentally another surgeon theologian, Dr. Michael Kalopothakis who founded the church in 1871. We rested well and were accompanied by Thanos and Katie to the Boat at the port of Athens.

### **The ‘Rhodos’**



What a thrill to join the ‘Rhodos’ which plies between Athens and the far-flung Greek Dodecanese islands one of the twelve being Patmos to which the apostle John was banished in 95AD during the persecution under Domitian which claimed the life of Flavius Clemens a cousin of the Emperor and in which Domitian’s own wife Domitilla also was banished.

**We boarded at 12.30midday Thursday 1st April 1997** at the windswept port of Peirias and were shown to our cabin where after seeing the ship cast off we caught up on sleep albeit fitful and had a meal aboard before going on deck as darkness fell and the moon ruled the skies. Coming toward the end of our 275 miles cruise we drew near Patmos and looking east across the 10 miles or so still between we saw something hard to interpret. We could clearly see lights poised above the horizon –after a time we understood it was Skala- sitting like a “city come down from heaven”-an unforgettable impression.



### **Man with cart**

It was after 11pm when we arrived to the east of Patmos. To our surprise there were no cars (There was one mini electric float which operated from the single food store). We were utterly surprised to see a sturdy middle-aged man between the shafts of a donkey cart. Those who could not carry luggage piled their cases on the cart and while the man pulled we took turns to push. Thus we got to Hotel Effie (named after its genial lady

proprietor. This is a gorgeous spot with fine fare, comfy beds and beautiful surroundings. One could scarcely believe that the ship we travelled on brings much of the island's water supply with it. There is no spring summer autumn rainfall and little in winter either. In the 90's rainwater was harvested in large containers built on the flat rooftops. No doubt there is now much desalinization. One's first thought on walking further uphill next day when the Greeks took Siesta was-how different for John serving in the salt mines and living in a cave. We had late refreshments and eats and got to bed

### **Breakfast at 8.30am**



The Greeks whom we were now getting to know were most egregious and many spoke English readily. At breakfast we exchanged details of our family life and of the church in Britain and Greece. We had sampled the air strolling down to the water's edge as the milk float I mentioned crept quietly along the very narrow single street. After breakfast it was time

for the first homily on the Apocalypse which was revealed to John within a mile of our Hotel.

### **Homily No 1. Island History and the Ephesus of St.John**

What a privilege to hear a Greek speaker and lifelong avid student of scripture begin with the context the first 3 chapters of Revelation and bring lessons from Church No.1 Ephesus. This volcanic island abounds in igneous rock but because of its water impoverishment was never widely peopled. Today small white cells –one room houses-are sprinkled through the island which is dedicated to St.John the “Theologos” who during his time was drafted into salt recovery-but from his contacts history tells us he baptized several fellow workers.



The Church in Ephesus in AD96 received John back from solid confines to a city of 300,000

where Diana was the peoples' goddess. The Nicolaitans followed Nicholas of Antioch who taught that one must indulge in sin to understand it-a source of antinomian views in the early church. We learn the church may exhibit good works energetic labours and patience and be orthodox but depart from its first love. He who directs church leaders and walks by the menorah of the second greatest centre of the church of the time as the high-priest of our confession, counsels repentance lest Ephesus the lamp of Asia Minor be extinguished.

## Friday(Parskege-preparation) Episkephe (sightseeing)

There are three grades of road on Patmos-major, minor and dirt roads. We travelled uphill to the high point of Chora to the Orthodox monastery where we were shown an ancient illuminated New Testament codice. From there we went on to visit the cave where according to tradition the apostle received his messages from our Lord. It was a very unspoilt cavern with just a simple icon to mark it as special. Lunch was in the lovely open air “Estiatorio Mepalkoni”. Fish courses were always available. There are no beef cattle on the island. Breakfast would consist of a



boiled egg, grapefruit & orange drink, black coffee with sachets of milk, chocolate yoghurt and cheese, a sesame roll, savoury biscuit packs, a bunch of grapes, olives tomatoes and chocolate cake. Chocolate for breakfast is something we really need to introduce in England! I used to get chocolate haystacks at a friend’s house on my way to school!

While Greece slept through siesta we visited the old rock hewn and semi natural baptistery where John baptized the first Patmos Christians. This tradition is firmly rooted and this disciple of John the Baptist and Jesus perhaps most lustered his witness by leading fellow slaves of persecution to freedom in Christ and public confession of faith notwithstanding the peril of life on that island at that time.



Our first full day on the island was spent as we walked and talked along the beautiful coast where John stood on the sand by the shore (Rev.13.1) and saw the beast of Rome Redivivus arise out of the waters. We saw the sun lowering in the West much as you would at Galway Bay but we thought on the high times in which we live –of the Rapture of the church and the rise of that latter day power which will replace the thralldom of ancient Rome when the bride meets the bridegroom in the air.

## Saturday(Sabbato) –Homily No.2

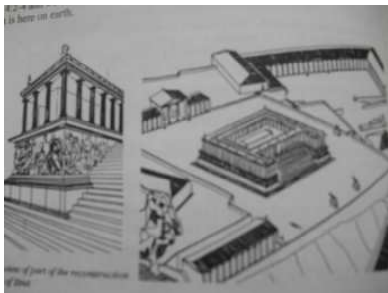
An early start-breakfast (Proino Geuma) at 8am. Then our daily homily-this time we would think about the 1<sup>st</sup> cent.church in Smyrna and Pergamum. Let’s summarise for brevity



**(i) Homily 2** Smyrna-50miles north of Ephesus and 30m.inland-Homer's city-it came under Roman control in 27BC. Paul evangelized it from Ephesus (Acts19.10).It had rich temples to Cybele, Zeus, Apollo, Aesclepius & Aphrodite. Cybele mythical goddess descended to death and rose again in legend-to this Church our Lord says "I am He who died & rose again" Smyrna itself was wiped from the roll of cities for 300years when destroyed by Lydia but it lived again as a great Greek city. Our Lord said "I know your afflictions-fear not I will give you the crown of Life" Smyrna is type of the suffering church especially over 10days (persecuted under Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Aurelius, Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian & Diocletian AD64-313). Its good bishop Polycarp at 86 confessed "Eighty and six years have I served him and he ahs not failed me My Lord and my God-how can I deny him now" Thus he went to the stake and was burned. I once wrote a paper as a young theolog on this great leader and have esteemed him ever since.

Thinking of crowns consider as you serve our Lord the crown of the steadfast(Rev.4.4), of the persevering(1Cor925ff) of the righteous(2Tim.4 8-10),of the pastor(1Pet5.1-4) and of the soul-winner(!Thess2.19 &Phil4.1

**(ii) Homily2** Pergamum(Bergama). Situated 65 miles north once more-by the



river Caicus-its old ruins are 1000ft above the plain. By 560BC it was ruled by the Lydian king Croesus, then by Persia and in 334BC by Alexander whose empire was divided in four(Daniel8.8)being the present Greece Turkey Syria and Egypt from one of which the Antichrist will emerge. General Lysimachus deposited 9,000talents of gold there, later a library of 200,000 books was housed there and AttalusIII on

his deathbed in 133BC bequeathed his realm of 66,750square miles including all cities where the seven churches were later planted-to Rome. Famed for its paper, its healing symbolized by the serpent on the pole (Aesculapius seems to have adopted Moses') and its throne of Zeus (described by Jesus as "Satan's throne". In 1871 a German engineer gathered the altar fragments and later the altar was reconstructed in Berlin. After WW2 the Russians moved this altar to the Kremlin but returned to Berlin under communism and the Communist Hoeneker regime attached a plaque of thanks to Moscow to it for rescuing it and them. Turkey now wants it back from Germany. Spiritually our Lord refers to the habit of Balaam(Numbers25.1-9) because Pergamum by marriage to idolaters corrupted faith. Nicolas who merged Christianity and paganism had followers in Pergamum. The Lord called for repentance and promised the "hidden manna" "white stone" and a "new name". We are to 'feed on Christ',

experience ‘acquittal’ and “fellowship” with the “new character” that comes with faith in Jesus.

### **The Sea is rough**

When the Aegean(Eastern Med) turns angry it poses a threat to small craft. Our midday trip was to be to Samos. We were looking forward to that a lot. In the end we settled for Lipsi -8miles not 16 and just a small jetty and some shops to browse and fresh and beautifully palatable fish. I remember Lipsi for the sampling the octopus –a strong gristly meat even though it was thumped repeatedly on the quayside to tenderize it.



But it’s the debate as to whether we would set sail in our small open boat with an outboard motor or not that took 3/4of an hour to decide. The debate went like this:

*Chair:* ‘Who would like to go to Samos as planned?’ 30%

‘Who would like to stay on Patmos and have a walk?’ 30%

‘Who would like to go to Lipsius-a shorter trip?’ 30%

*Chair:*-I will open it up for discussion

Why should we not go to Samos?

Answer of *demos*(the people): ‘It is too far! The sea is very rough! The wind is too strong!’

*Chair:* ‘Very well –shall we abandon our sea-trip?’

Many voices-*demos* responds ‘No, no!’

*Chair:* ‘Why should we go?’

*Demos:* ‘Because it’s what we planned! And the weather may improve!’

*Chair:* ‘But weather may worsen!’

*Chair:* ‘I have another problem-Georgios tells me the boatman will not go to Samos-he will not hazard our lives.’

*Demos:* ‘Would the boatman go to Lipsi?’ Georgios ‘Yes’



*Chair:* ‘I am concerned-you all must decide. Let’s have a show of hands’. There were a sufficient number of hands went up to make a party. So off we went and Greeks-from ***the oldest democracy in the world had come to a verdict.*** My wife and two others were violently sick over the side and the boatman just managed landfall on Lipsi despite the wind and current. and by the grace of God we got back –the wind

blew the waves roared but the sun shone-and all's well that ends well!

### **Kuriake (Lord's Day) May 4**

We enjoyed our eggs and chocolate cake yoghurt and fruit and cheese with black coffee and toast-and so fortified got notepaper ready for the a.m. homily by Thanos on the churches of Thyatira and Sardis.

(i) *Thyatira background:* Sixty miles from Pergamum (modern Akhisar) lies on the borders of Mysia and Lydia. Seleucus I took it from Lysimachus in 301BC and then controlled from India through Phrygia. It was called Pelopia until Seleucus named it Thyatira to honour Apollo-Tyrimnos the sun-god.-an equestrian warrior with a battle axe. It produced wool, linen, leather, pottery **copper brass** and was famous for dyeing cloth. From the latter industry came Lydia Acts 16.14. Lydia was compelled to membership of a trade guild as a trader and membership involved attending meetings where pagan rituals and astrology featured.



*Thyatira & Jesus message:* Our Lord speaks of Himself as angry with idolatry-his eyes are blazing and His feet are burnished bronze. He commends deeds of love faith and service and perseverance and increase of work but condemns participation in the sexual immorality of society and the led of Jezebel in this.

The rebuke is linked with encouragement that in the time of our Lord's rule with an iron sceptre faithful ones will have authority and be given the 'morning star'(Rev.22.16) We will have the presence of Jesus like them when we pass to glory and continued in the golden era yet to come.

(ii) *Sardis Background:* Located 40miles south of Thyatira and 50 east of Smyrna on the spur of Mt.Tmolus –a fortress from 1300BC (when Joshua entered Canaan)-the most ancient of the 7 cities. It minted its own gold coins as capital of Lydia and seat of Croesus who is credited as the inventor of money. It was when a Lydian soldier dropped his helmet and walked down to retrieve it that Cyrus forces thus found the way in.

*Sardis & Jesus' message:* The Lord said "I know your works-you are reputed to be alive but are dead". Amid spiritual activity they were bankrupt and broken –with **no spiritual gold** of which to boast. Second, they were asleep spiritually and told to "**wake up**", remember your past love and joy and repent. "Watch or I will come as a thief". Besides they were encouraged as the Lord recognized a few who walked with Him. Then overcomers were promised their names would not be blotted out of His book and they would be acknowledged before the angels of God.

## Taking the sun at Lampe beach

Off we went to enjoy a “hallowed” Sunday along the lovely shoreline of Patmos itself. Georgios Papadopoulos was in his most pleasing and humorous mood regaling the party with Greek humour and observing with every turn of the coach as it navigated the narrow roads alone “magnifique”. The sea lying below was “magnifique”-the ladies he teased on the coach were “magnifique”



and the landscape dotted with holy cells of monks was “magnifique” and the beach we soon reached lying below us was “magnifique”. Even though sun-bathing was banned as we could all see though at considerable distance along the shoreline a young lady had not taken much notice of the everywhere abundant signage- as she read her book whilst our party took the sun and

not a little “ousa”. Mina and I observed that the Greek evangelical stiff upper lip was quickly converted to a lugubrious chatty and over hilarious enjoyment of the occasion. There was nothing out of place-and of course the fish and chips that represented our midday fayre had, after all to be washed down.

A few of us did venture into the water-but the shelf was steep and there were enough stones to make it less pleasant to enter and leave the crystalline shimmering sea. One has to consent with Giorgios (a hotelier from Crete and the Church’s travel agent) that all around us the loveliness of the island was captivating.

## Fragrant memories of a true leader



Brother Thanos was as his Greek name *Karmpon* means “Cream of the army” -he was a trophy of Grace from the Greek Communist era and he turned his gifts to the legal defense of his church and to the evangelization of the

city of Athens. With others he established the ‘Charis’(Grace) centre at Sunion(70km from Athens) for the young people of the Greek Church and it served from the 1950’s till the close of the twentieth century. Mina and I enjoyed the holiday facility there



with a party in 2005 and on that occasion heard the life story of Thanos who with Katie his wife (they met at Sounion) joined us for tea and an evening of fellowship. Sounion often played host to children in need from Ukraine and Romania. Thanos was of the view that the Apostle Paul stayed in the vicinity of Sounion because the shipmaster would not hazard the point of the peninsula where pirates operated late and early.

One of my happiest memories of Thanos was listening to him in the company of a party from Bexleyheath and Welling-it was Easter in Greece (we had two celebrations that year) and Thanos spoke for a solid hour on the Resurrection. His message was interpreted to us by earphones. That morning Barbara Hawkins told me “I understand it now”. She had been on an Alpha Course back home in England-but it was under the ministry of Thanos that the Lord saw fit to bring her to Him.



The last letter Thanos wrote to me was dated December, 2008. He spoke of his illness as preventing him sending me the usual long annual report typed by his secretary. He spoke of the devastating fires of summer 2007 and of the Christians of the Peloponnes distributing help to victims. He told with sadness of youth terrorist demonstrations that year in many towns. To mark the especial interest of Thanos in the return of our Lord I quote from his last letter *‘The signs all over the world show that our Lord’s second coming is near. Together with Apostel John in the Revelation*

*we say*

*‘Amen, Even so, come Lord Jesus’.* With our warm greetings in the Lord’

### **Final Sunday Evening Homily**

If Philadelphia represents the reformation and revival of the Church Laodicea represents its cold formal want of the Holy Spirit and power. Thanos took us to Rev.3 7-22 exploring these NT churches.

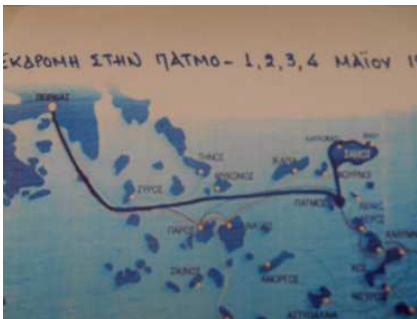
*(i)Philadelphia background and message.* 45Km south-east of Sardis the city was built to link the ancient centres of Laodicea Hierapolis and Colossae. It was named by Eumenes II in affection for his brother Attalus. It lies on an earthquake belt and was ruined in AD 17 & 23. From its early days it promoted Greek culture. With the advent of Christianity it witnessed to the Lord using its strategic position-i.e.its ‘open door’

The glorious promise to Philadelphia is ‘I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the world.’ This trial is expounded by our Lord in Revelation 6-18 and better known as ‘The Great Tribulation’. Readers of the



last book of the bible have to ask ‘Why is the church mentioned 19 times in chapters 1-3 and never after Chapter 4? The apparent answer is ‘The rapture’. (ii) *Laodicea Background and message* AT 110 miles east of Ephesus and 60 south east of Philadelphia lies Laodicea in the plains. **When I visited it in 1999** it was a bee-keepers paradise and local boys played amongst the ruins. It was named after Laodice wife of its rebuilder Antiochus II in 250BC. Destroyed in 60AD by earthquake it spurned help from Rome and proudly refurbished itself. It was a wealthy city of banks and obtained fame for its medical school and eyesalve yet our Lord describes it as abysmally poor blind and naked. Worst of all it was ‘luke-warm’ We once stayed in Pammukale some miles above the plain where it is situated. In front of our caravaniserai hot water streamed down and behind frigid water tumbled noisily keeping us awake. Both streams lost character as they ran-the sun warmed the frigid to tepid water and that from the hot underground spring cooled. When the water reached Laodicea it was tepid and bitter. What was wanting spiritually was the golden riches of Christ, the clear vision for souls and the vesture of our Lord’s righteousness. That great invitation of Revelation 3.20 was held out to this worldly church. In the early days when 500 or more churches surrounded the seven John mentions many were following Jesus closely-but the world sold its rags to many others, and Christ was left without in the manner Holman Hunt portrayed so affectingly in his art piece ‘The Light of the World’.

One of the sadnesses of our lives is that through late house moves we lost the copious and irreplaceable scripts-one in shorthand-the other in English and Greek that added so very much more to the above edges of these homilies.



### **Good-bye to Patmos**

To find the Greeks who were first introduced to Christ by Philip and Andrew so well taught and desirous of living in victory as they await with us the coming of the Lord –as they anticipate the Rapture was to say the least inspiring. Thanos would quote the ancients and bring his audience constantly back to John ‘the Theologos’ of Greece from whose writings he took his thoroughly

convincing teaching concerning our Lord’s coming kingdom.

Our arrival at Peiraeas on Monday morning we encountered a Taxi issue. Cabdrivers would not countenance taking aboard tourists because they could do two journeys for Greeks in the same time slot as one for people like us. Katie in desperation bribed a driver and Thanos being a lawyer chided her for giving in to the guy’s extortion. We were safely landed at Alkiviadou Street

and began our long 400 mile journey north and east to Philippi where we would arrive after 10 hours of solid driving-so, so weary. But I had arrived at the place which from my student days meant so much because my earliest motto was “For me, to live is Christ”, to die is gain”.

### **The Longest journey**

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> May 1997 we were to undertake a very long journey-from Athens to Philippi-450 miles. The little yellow Renault just failed once and that was on account of an unfamiliar safety feature. We followed the E75 to Thessalonica-a 300 mile stretch-passing the Euboian gulf by the Evia peninsula where not a few locations bear the name of St.Luke. Did he hail from that beautiful area? The motorway in places was built like an overpass-a true highway (constructed by European funding) and from it there were glorious views. We by-passed Lamia, Larissa & Volos, stopping only for fuel and refreshments. At Volos the route winds inland for 60 miles until one overpasses the first of the great northern rivers-the Pinios. You will recall Paul writing in 2Corinthians 11.26 ‘I have been in danger from rivers, from bandits etc’-when one witnesses the sheer breadth of these rivers and imagines them in spate during seasons of heavy rain and snow the threat is very real. Leaving Olympus and Katerini to our left and Pydna to seaward we were within 40 miles of Thessalonica where after 300 miles we made an hour long stop. *It was at Pydna in 168 BC that the Roman Legion & Tortoise proved its superiority to the Phalanx battle order of Philip of Macedon. Philip discarded the idea of ideal seasons for battle because he had the perfect flexible machine which could fight on four fronts defensively or in attack. It could be as small as 16 men spaced properly in a square or it could be as large as 4096 soldiers fifty deep or even the quadruple “syntagmata of 16,384 men. It was with this formidable stratagem that Alexander the great won **all** his pitched battles.* Closer to Thessalonica we overpassed the huge rivers Loudios, Axios and Galikos. The sheer volume of water in the Axios immediately triggered 2Cor.11 and one realized the sheer courage of Paul in hazarding his life to reach Macedonia and Greece.

### **Thessalonica –Oldest continually inhabited Greek City**



Since the days of Paul half way through the first century there has been a church in Thessalonica. Archaeological ruins of the AD 320-40 church of Demetrius (patron saint of the city) and of Leontios 463 remain. The Rotunda of Galerius actually became a Christian Church. Today the Greek Evangelical church flourishes and

maintains strong links with the American Presbyterian tradition. There is a fine Christian hospital in the city and ships from Thessalonica serve Chios Lesbos and Samos. The via Egnatia runs through the city passing under the *arch of Galerius*-the emperor had a palace to the east of the city.

During our walkabout we were impressed by famous ‘white tower’ (16<sup>th</sup> c Ottoman fort-then a prison-now a museum), the mile long seafront-cum-harbour, the high-end shopping quarter and by the Roman Arch which was clad with scaffolding in 1996.

## Apollonia, Amphipolis Kavalla

It was early afternoon when we set off on the 100 mile



journey that took us toward Philippi in exactly the opposite direction to the Apostle Paul in full flight from Philippi to Thessalonica. Paul had no E90 but he would have passed by Lake Volvi and



Koronia . Sixty miles on we circled a roundabout twice

looking for **the marble lion of Amphipolis** on its pillar. It was disguised amid the firs of the roundabout. I got a photo of this monument that linked us with the First Century and we diverted to look at the pure filigree gold in the Gallery just off the route. Philip of Macedon paid his soldiers with gold mined from the chain of hills from there to Philippi. As you can see the gold in those parts was good.



This short break was useful before we set off to Kavala-the Neapolis of Acts 16.11. That city is very beautiful and four sea shipping lanes operate from the port. We turned off along Road 12 in a north, north westerly direction. Dusk had fallen and we were climbing from the coastal strip among hills fringing the bowl of **the plain of**

**Philippi** where the battles of Philippi in Rome’s civil war took place. (*You will remember the Ghost’s words ‘We meet at Philippi’ in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar*). *Brutus extended his battle line too far and Octavian broke through the centre and attacked both flanks from the rear. With the suicide of Republicans Cassius & Brutus the triumvirate of Anthony Octavian & Lepidus got to control Rome*).



We in this last long leg of travel were, for our part, by now so weary that we were looking along the road for signs of Filipi or Lydia(the modern village) but found none. Just then we happened upon a tractor and a couple of farmers in conversation. They

realized we were strangers and looking lost. This farmer most kindly suggested he would start up his vehicle and proceed before us to Hotel Lydia which he knew very well. Thus it was that in the dark we drew to the doorway of the exquisitely located Hotel that served visitors to Philippi. We clocked in and closed the shutters and dropped into bed absolutely exhausted.

### **Morning has broken**

When I opened the shutters the light streamed in-it was another beautiful day-day 9 of our holiday-the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1997. The first thing I saw was the man next door to the hotel with a big piece of marble on his shoulder-he was clearing ground to plant vegetables and had to dump those ancient Greek Marbles probably from the days of Octavian who extensively built up the city as a colony for veterans. *Octavian named it a third time **Colonia Iulia Augusta Philipensis** adding the forum and agora and much more. In 31BC its original name ‘Crenides’[springs] was given by Thracians who fortified it in 360BC and mined its gold. It was shortly afterward in 356BC that Philip II of Macedon conquered it, named it Philippi and issued his own gold coinage.* Mina and I were delighted during a pre-breakfast walk that we were literally outside the gate of Philippi facing the Lycus river- where Lydia’s prayer place or *PROSEUCHE* once stood. There stands a little chapel today.

Breakfast that morning was really the first true Greek breakfast we had-with a plentiful supply of cheese, eggs and chocolate-just the thing. The Greeks have a lot to teach us –in cuisine not just philosophy!

### **A dream realized**

I have already alluded to my student motto from Philippians. I love the epistle. It is full of joy and the church to which it was written never forgot Paul-and sent once and again to encourage him in Rome. Paul writes “Rejoice and again



I say ‘rejoice’ and those words were from the Mamertine prison in Rome. I have stood there on the cold block paving-seen the chain-noted the stool and realized what it must have meant to have believers be in touch during the darkest hours of life-believers who shared the highest joys of the Macedonian calling with Paul.

There we stood at the Lycus-hard by the modern baptistery fed from the

very same stream. This place to many pilgrims is second only to the Baptismal site by Jordan in Israel. From my student days I dreamed of coming to this place. Before the morning was out we would wander round the well preserved

archaeological sites and even stand by the old prison where Paul shouted to the gaoler 'Do thyself no harm-we are all here' and replied to his heart rending request 'What must I do to be saved?' 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and your house!'



### **The Administrator and his secretary**

If there's one other thing I should have loved to have been able to do it was to meet the office secretary who worked under the Administrator who just then was actively reviewing the antiquarian listings and producing a new plan of the site. We had a letter of introduction to the secretary from Thanos who knew her through church fellowship connections. It was her day off. But since the office was closed we should not have been able to see the sight-except for that letter. When the Administrator read it he left his duties closed his office and conducted us around the site.



There was the Bema, the agora, the forum, the city toilets, the ancient temples-the heart shaped pillars-everything ordered in the mind of our guide. The site was substantial in size – about the square measure of 6 football pitches. I was fascinated that Egyptian slaves had been employed in construction and went off up toward

the acropolis to look at the hieroglyphics that these slave builders left on the rocks which were as open air temples to their gods. Meantime, the Administrator who turned out to be somewhat of a hopefully harmless playboy, replied to my wife's 'I like this site' with his own affectionate 'I like you'. I have to say that in her mid fifties Mina was and still is a most attractive lady-but have no fear-I was soon by her side. The persistent gentleman followed us to the car hoping we might return on an alibi he had contrived-but declined and pursued our way back to Kavala and onward to Chakidiki.

### **The Airport by two stops**

Yesterday's journey had been the best part of 450miles. On this final day our road travel would be one third of that but the road was rather more convoluted –which was compensated by the beauty all around. Chalkidiki has three long peninsulae like fingers extending out into the Gulf of Thrace. At Stavros on the





Strimone Gulf where Route 16 runs by the sea we stopped for a break. It was such a beach as you would find on a desert island. There between the sea and the road was a lovely beach chair –just the thing. We sat there and took in the loveliness for a while-but having regard for the miles between us and the airport we couldn't make the most of this haven of delight. After 25 miles at Stagira we considered it necessary to have a break

and get some eats. There at a little trinket shop we were pleased to purchase some Greek figurines with the spare drachmas-some as mementoes and some to have as gifts. We had something short of 100miles still to travel and under 2 hours to do it. Our little yellow car had proved itself to be a 'Spartan' and now we began to imagine it was 'Bucephelus' and indeed it didn't disappoint. The airport was on our side of the city and soon we had delivered it to the hiring agency with the correct fuel load and not a scratch by God's good mercy-after over 2000 road miles. We boarded BA 923 bound for Heathrow. It had been the trip of a lifetime.

Our knowledge of Greece was considerably improved and our experience of the modern evangelical church was both enriching and encouraging-and we would be back with others in 2005(April 25-May5 of that year) to share a much more leisurely holiday based at Sounion. I will add a few paragraphs to paint in the outstanding events and experiences of the later trip and some additional photographs as well.



Birthday girl during time at Patmos



Mural of Paul at Berea



Glass Olympian(Harley St of Athens)



Holiday group at Lipsi



Philippi-Administrator & Mina



Mina at Patmos Monastery



At Monastery on Patmos



Hotel 'Effie' at night



Mina & friend sailing to Lipsi



Window display at Berea

## **SOUNION APRIL25-MAY5 2005**

### **Welling/Bexleyheath Party**

We flew out of Heathrow 08.15 hrs and arrived in Athens 13.55hrs. proceeding 34 km by coach on Route 91 to our holiday apartments at Sounion in the mid-afternoon. When one arrives at the tennis Court and concrete car park one is not highly impressed. But when you realize that the Greek Church has put voluntary staff at your disposal-a delightful legal secretary gave her week to chaperon our party and the secretary of the Athens churches and his wife spent lots of time with us-we were privileged. The beach was five minutes easy walk away but you passed a pleasant little shop serving tea and ices near the beach. Everybody enjoyed the morning beach party-and a dip in the warm clean water.

### **Introductions**

We were in the main a party from Welling but we had a few Liverpudlians with us. When I asked that each give their name and something about them most people chose to highlight their significant roles in life.-be that in civil service working with a minister of being the firm's treasurer or whatever. The backgrounds I hasten to add were all accurate. But one friend from Maghull who shall be nameless piped up "We have been married just under a year-no family yet but we are reading all the right books!" The factuality again was unquestionable-but the humour drew howls of laughter and broke the ice that first evening.

### **Daily Outings**

Where did we go? We went to the mine where Jewish slaves were deployed to mine ore and lead. Few of us knew that the Greeks enslaved Jews. The scripture in Zech9.13 attests this practice.

We went on a shopping expedition to Athens-and were fascinated by the models of philosophers and keen to purchase cards to send home-and many who had never been to Greece were glad to buy a meal out just to sample the cuisine.

We travelled to a beach called 'Pisses' (Resin from pine) but because of the unfortunate name we called it a 'mystery' trip! We went to see the ancient archways and massive rock carvings of the primitive Minoan race that once controlled Greece. Then there was the thrill of a power boat ride round Sounion Point-not a little dangerous at the turning speed of the craft-some people bounced in the air as our over zealous friend-son of the Church secretary bounced on the waves at full throttle. The Greek coastguard craft watching the strait issued a warning and all was well.

We enjoyed watching our roast-lamb on a spit cook on Easter Sunday after an outing to the main Evangelical Church where the Easter address was interpreted to our party by microphones. On a Second Sunday at the second Evangelical Church I gave a short address in Greek-more classic than modern-and we enjoyed a time of fellowship and singing in the afternoon.

We went to a local town to enjoy the open-air market there and obtain some very useful gifts and reasonable jewellery.

The Olympic rowing took place just a few miles away so we were treated to a boat trip which landed us on a small nearby island.

A very special outing was our visit to Mars Hill and to the acropolis, the agora and the famous water-clock.

On our last evening we went to overlook the sea just as the sun shone through the pillars of the Poseidon Temple as it went down over tip of the Sounion Peninsula.

### **Afternoon tea on the verandah and evening ousa**

We did not succumb to the Greek siesta habit but we were really enjoyed those happy hours spent with tea and coffee and easy chairs chatting about our experiences. Our hosts provided all sorts of delicious cakes and biscuits to accompany liquid refreshments.

After each evening meal we were offered a little glass of ousa. Mina and I do not indulge but it was a splendid treat for our party and was very much enjoyed.

### **Spiritual offices**

We always had morning prayer and an evening singsong with a short epilogue. Because it was the Greek Easter-following our

own which we celebrated before coming the passion theme predominated

Saviour keep me near the cross  
There my glory ever  
Till my ransomed soul shall find  
Peace beyond the river.

On Easter Sunday one of our party came to the Lord. This made the visit hugely worthwhile-the masterly presentation of Thanos on the resurrection had brought home the reality of the love of Jesus to suffer in our place and Barbara found in Greece the Lord of her life-finishing off the work begun in an Alpha-course at home.

During the week we hosted Thanos and Katie. Thanos gave us the story of his fascinating life from early Communist days to student years as a follower of Nietzsche and then after a thrilling conversion becoming a fervent open air preacher and later a well established lawyer presenting a brief at the Hague in defense of the Greek Evangelical Church's rights as a Christian denomination-and then for very many years the leading theological voice of the church in Athens.

## SOME SOUNION 2005 PICTURES



Boat trip pictured with Malcolm Drake





Parthenon close up



Easter lamb cooking



Easter lamb on spit-well done



Corinth canal



Wild flowers & "Rose of Tralee"



Native tortoise hides from us



Powerboat loads at Sounion



At 2<sup>nd</sup> Evangelical Church Athens



Mina by Patmos Baptistery



PaRthenon stack on dull day



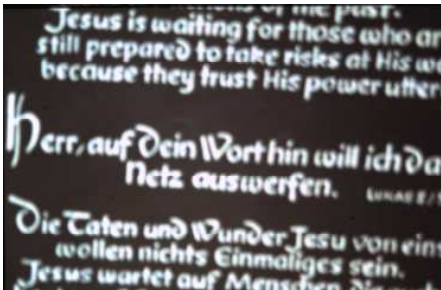
Below Poseidon at Sounion



Parthenon & Athens on sunny day



Mars Hill with inscription



Basilea Schlink's verse at Mars hill

We hope you will enjoy & profit by reading this short illustrated memoir of our visit(s) to Greece and Patmos

Bob and Mina Coffey  
Easter 2020