The Service at the Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, Sydney, was as splendorous as one would have expected such an occasion to be

FIRST AUSTRALIAN-BORN BISHOP OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE

Bishop Iakovos Ordained in Sydney Sunday February 20, 2011

'Historic' was the word that many in attendance used to describe what was happening before their eyes at the Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, Sydney.

A boy who had grown up in Winston Hills before attending St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College was now being ordained (some prefer to say 'consecrated') a Bishop of the Orthodox Church!

Formally, the Service was as splendorous as one would have expected such an occasion to be: celebrated by His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos of Australia, assisted by Bishops Ezekiel of Dervis, Seraphim of Apollonias and Nikandros of Dorylaion, together with Athonite Hieromonk Damaskinos and several Clergy from around Australia, there was nothing unusual about the profound prayers, the magnificent chanting or the sense of joy.

Informally, however, there was a distinctiveness that one could say stemmed from the faithful in attendance. Faithful who had arrived by bus and plane from Melbourne, and especially from the Parish-Community of Oakleigh, where the then Father Iakovos had served for the past nine years. Faithful whose plans to attend were made sufficiently clear in advance that the Cathedral cleverly arranged a tent with chairs and a screen to cater for the expected overflow of that Sunday's congregation. Faithful who had been touched in some way by the 44-year old ordinand's ministry. Faithful who love him.

This love was no more evident than in Archbishop Stylianos who, just a few months earlier, had submitted a formal nomination to the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Iakovos to be made the newest Bishop here, to join the three above-mentioned Assistant Bishops Ezekiel, Seraphim and Nikandros serving in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide respectively with much dedication and discernment. The reply came back positively only several weeks later, on January 11, announcing his unanimous election by the Holy Synod.

February 20, 2011, truly was historic. It saw the elevation of the first Australian-born Greek Orthodox Bishop. This event highlighted to Parishes all over Australia that the Orthodox Church not only has a past, but also a future in this continent. A very bright future, potentially.

And while there is no more inherent virtue in being 'Australian-born' than in being 'Greek-born' or having any other place of birth for that matter, the historic value of the ordination lies in three deeper points:

1) It shows that the Orthodox Faith in Australia has taken a quantum leap in being seen by the broader society as 'belonging' to this country, rather than as a 'migrant church' that might have been dismissed by some in the past as something 'foreign' to it.

The new Bishop Iakovos of Miletoupolis

2) It consolidates the good work that has been taking place for the past 25 years at St Andrew's Theological College (which is not that long for a tertiary institution) in so far as its graduates are now serving in all three offices of Clergy, as well as in every possible pastoral area.

3) It acts as a timely reminder to us all that there is no 'glass ceiling' (to use a corporate analogy) to stop the true Christian calling, no matter where we live or in which historical period. And the faithful were again reminded that, unlike the corporate world, the position of the Bishop is not at 'the top' of some pyramid structure, but in fact at the *bottom*, as the one who serves and bears the spiritual weight of the rest of the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

Bishop Iakovos is the eldest of three sons born to devout and hard-working parents who hail from the region of Sparta. He could never have imagined 30 years ago, as an altar boy in the Parish-Community of St John the Forerunner, Parramatta, that he would be standing amidst the congregation, not as a mere listener of the inspired words of the Apostles, but as a *successor* to the Apostles. Not, as before, holding a candle while the Gospel is read to the people, but as a defender and proclaimer of the Gospel. Not as one who simply knows about the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, but as one who pledges to identify his whole being with those decisions. This he pledged on Sunday before the commencement of the Liturgy.

Whether as His Eminence's Deacon, or as the Priest appointed successively to the Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Theotokos (Redfern), the Parish-Community of the Resurrection of our Lord (Kogarah) or the Parish-Community of Saints Anargyroi (Oakleigh), Bishop Iakovos gained valuable experience in two States and gave of himself freely.

Shortly after conducting the ordination of his former student and Deacon, Archbishop Stylianos emphasized the timeless but unwritten rule of Orthodox Christian discipleship, which is that one becomes a spiritual father to the degree that he becomes a son, and that this principle is exemplified in the duty of an Orthodox Bishop. The spiritual father publicly expressed the wish that his spiritual son may be strengthened, not as an 'administrator' or as a 'leader', but as a true father who labours for the whole family, constantly. And with tears he added the hope that there may be found more imitators of Bishop Iakovos' ethos.

In responding, Bishop Iakovos expressed deepest gratitude to His Eminence, Their Graces and to all present. And when he said that he is looking forward to going back to Melbourne (as the second Assistant Bishop of Melbourne with Bishop Ezekiel), all the visiting Melbournians applauded profusely. The Sydney-siders did not.

That speaks volumes about the high regard and affection of us all for this man of the Church.

Axios! May he always be worthy.

Dimitri Kepreotes