

Divisions in the 2x2 Church

Divisions in the Two by Two Church

Greece – Nicolas Athanassios

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Division in Greece

John Micheletos migrated from Greece to Canada as a young man. He professed in 1910-11 in Alberta and went in the work in 1912. From the start, he wanted to return to Greece to preach. Because of the total control of the Greek Orthodox Church, it seemed impossible to go with a non-Greek male companion, and there were no other Greeks in the work at that time. So he married Annie McBride, one of the sister workers he had first heard who was quite a bit older than he. They went to preach in Greece in 1920. Annie died in Chania, Crete in January, 1948, and John died in Athens in December, 1966.

John was the Overseer of Greece until his death. He was succeeded by Anton Koutsourelis until his sudden death in June, 1981 while touring conventions in the USA. He is buried in the Mt. Vernon Cemetery near the Milltown, Washington convention.

From the time of Anton Koutsourelis' death, it seemed clear that Nicolas Papadakis would be the next Overseer. He had been Anton's right-hand man for years. He appeared to be the spokesperson for the Greek workers. It was he who wrote the letter from Greece about the Workers' Meeting held after Anton's death.

Nicolas Papadakis was the Overseer of Greece until around 1984-85. The 1981 Greek Workers' List, which came out a few weeks after Anton's death in June, 1981 has Nicolas at the top with George Manetas as his companion. George's older brother Michael is the senior companion of the next pair. The 1983 list is the same in that respect: Nicolas listed at the top, George as his companion, and Michael as the senior of the second pair. The 1984 list has Nicolas at the top with Athanassios as his companion, a young brother worker who had been in the work for about 7-8 years.

In 1984, for the first time, the Greece workers' list had Catherine Stavroulakis' name listed at the top of sister workers. Until that year Catherine had been a junior companion. Her junior companion on the 1984 workers list was sister worker Theodossia Politakis, who for a number of years previously had always been at the top of the list.

Some Greek workers became concerned about things *"going wrong"* with Nicolas which involved the handling or mishandling of funds. Some of the Greek workers appealed to Overseers in other European countries to replace Nicolas. One account is that two Greek sister workers saw wrongdoing on Nicolas's part and reported it. The result was that Pierre (Peter) Bill from Switzerland came to Greece for their special meetings in the latter half of the year 1984 and also to investigate the claims and work things out.

Trouble arose quickly in Greece while Pierre was there for special meetings. Things came to a head and the situation deteriorated rapidly. Reportedly, when it became apparent that a Division was going to occur, representatives from both "sides" rushed to collect the key to the public hall where the Athens special meeting was going to be held that Sunday. The side representing the majority of the workers arrived there first and received the key, and in that manner the control was taken away from Nicolas.

In any case, Nicolas left or was dismissed from the work and a Division occurred. Nicolas, along with sister worker, Catherine Stavroulakis (whom he married shortly thereafter) and a young brother worker, Athanassios Kalogeropoulos all left the main group along with a few other Friends and formed a separate group. As far as is known, these three were the only workers to leave at that time. On the 1985 workers' list, the names of Nicolas, Catherine, and Athanassios are absent, and Pierre (Peter) Bill's name is at the top.

They continued to preside over the band of followers who left with them. Their departure seemed to be due to their close ties with Nicolas and their personal admiration for and appreciation of him. It appears that there was little or no disagreement regarding doctrine or practice—just a question of whose leadership they were going to follow. At some point after the Division, Nicolas and Catherine married. Reportedly, Nicolas absconded with a large sum of money and bought a lavish villa in Athens.

After the Division, the sister usurped by Catherine on the 1984 list, Theodossia Politakis, resumed her position at the top of the list. There were six Greek sisters on the list that year, and all the others remained in the work. Catherine was the only one who allied herself with Nicolas. By the time the 1985 list came out, another young Greek sister had started out, so there remained six sisters. It was a few years before any more Greek brothers started, and then in the late 1980s a number of brothers began to go out, and a number have started since.

Pierre (Peter) Bill was the Overseer of Greece until his death in an accident in November, 2003. Up until that time, there hadn't been any non-Greek workers working in Greece, since for many years the government was closely tied to the Greek Orthodox church, and foreigners were denied permission to enter the country. George Manetas was one of the speakers at Pierre's funeral in 2003. He said, *"We are so thankful that this man was our lifeline, our helper in a difficult time for Greece."*

Nicolas died somewhere between 2003-2005. Not long after his death, some of his band of followers returned to the fellowship, including Catherine, Nicolas's widow. It now appears that the Division in Greece has been mended and the friends and workers are reunited, and that most if not all have returned to the main body. Whether or not this includes Athanassios is not known at this time.

After Pierre died, Graham Snow replaced him for a short time. Then Eric Culbert, from England, who had been laboring in Armenia, assumed the oversight around 2005. As of 2017, there is a fair-sized group of young Greek workers compared with other European countries, and Greek workers have gone to help in other European/Middle Eastern countries. The workers in Greece also cover fields in Albania, Cyprus, Armenia, Georgia, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and the republics that were formerly Yugoslavia, with some occasional visits to Turkey. Greek workers also worked in Egypt for years, and some of the Greek workers first came in touch with fellowship in Egypt.

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