

# MACEDONIAN AGENDA



**16 essays on the development of Macedonian culture in Australia. Includes cultural values, language, religion, arts, identity, women's issues, the elderly, immigration, politics, the "child refugees", human rights and more**

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Victor Bivell**

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*Front cover: February 2, 1960, Bitola Railway Station, Macedonia:  
Mr Aleksandar Kolupacev is farewelled by his village, Gjavato, as he  
sets out for a new life in Port Kembla, Australia.*

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# **The Macedonian Orthodox Church: Its Role In The Moulding And Maintenance Of Ethnic Identity In Australia**

**Dr Christopher Popov and Michael Radin**

*This paper was first published in Religion and Ethnic Identity: An Australian Study, Volume 3, 1989*

## **Historical Retrospective**

The struggle for recognition and independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church has closely paralleled the struggle for national self-determination of the Macedonian people. It is perhaps one of history's great ironies that the Church, having made a considerable impact and contribution to every aspect of Macedonian life prior to 1767, only achieved its appropriate legitimacy in modern times with the creation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia as an autonomous and self-determining national unit within the federation of Yugoslavia.

However, it is equally important to note that an independent Macedonian church, with its seat at Ohrid, now a large town in the Macedonian Republic, had existed for a millennium until 1767, and that through its stature, Macedonians had at various times established some de facto national independence.

The Macedonian Orthodox Church, particularly in medieval and late feudal times, as the most learned and conscious element of the developing Macedonian national psyche, had inspired a cultural and artistic renaissance amongst the Macedonian people which dated right back to the legacy of the Macedonian educators of the ninth century, the brothers Cyril and Methodius of Solun (now known as Thessaloniki in Greek), the former capital of Macedonia. This cultural renaissance was always closely linked with religious identification. For example, the Macedonian church was responsible for the tradition of medieval painting, as well as the famous icons and frescoes which decorated the churches and monasteries themselves.

The nexus between national and religious struggle was further made paramount during the era of the "national re-awakening" in the eighteenth century, when the Church protected and promulgated the

embryonic ideas of an independent Macedonia free from Ottoman Turkish rule.

After the Turks abolished the Ohrid Archbishopric in 1767, concerted efforts were made by the Macedonian people over the course of the next century to seek its reinstatement. These attempts proved long, arduous and fruitless, yet they were determined nonetheless. This struggle however, significantly honed the spiritual fabric of the independence movements which produced, over generations, patriotic ideals which manifested themselves in times of crisis as a resistance ethic.

It was with great alacrity therefore that the Macedonian Orthodox Church pronounced itself autocephalous in 1967, having formally re-established itself in 1958 in the Macedonian Republic, exactly two hundred years after its abolition.<sup>1</sup>

However, problems have remained, the most fundamental of which has been the failure of the other Eastern Orthodox Churches to recognize the autocephalous status of the Church.

Yet the beginnings for the Macedonian Orthodox Church were far less auspicious. The settlement of Macedonia by Slavonic tribes in the late fifth and the sixth centuries A.D. reached its zenith by the early part of the seventh century, when the entire area of Macedonia had been covered by the tribes. These tribes however, were polytheistic, and initially this brought them into conflict with the local population, who were governed under the Archbishopric of Justinian the First. Over the course of the next century and a half, however, the tribes began to develop Christian characteristics, mostly due to the influences of the Byzantine state and its ecclesiastical organs. During the eighth century, an eparchate was established in Macedonia, which was presided over by the Metropolitan of Salonica.

There were principally two reasons why the Macedonian population was initially resistant to Christianity. The first was their long held pagan beliefs, and the second was the Macedonians' inability to understand the Greek language, in which the Balkan Christian culture was taught and disseminated at that time.

The development of the first Macedonian alphabet therefore by Cyril, based upon the orthography of the local Macedonian population of Solun, proved to be an historical watershed for the Macedonians and for all of the Slavonic peoples of Europe. Liturgical works were then subsequently translated into Old Church Slavonic, which achieved the status of a "civilized" language (along with Greek, Latin and Hebrew) over the following century. It is important to note that the first religious books to be written in Old Church Slavonic were in the language of the

Macedonians, as this was the language used by Cyril and Methodius and a significant element of the population of their birthplace, Solun.<sup>2</sup>

The Macedonian brothers, accompanied by their disciples, then embarked upon their "civilizing mission" amongst the Slavonic peoples in Europe, being noted most for their teaching in Moravia (now in the Czech Republic).

In the year 885 A.D., the Cyrillic disciple Clement returned to Macedonia and continued his teaching in Ohrid, in the Macedonian language. Thereafter, in the following decades, hundreds of pupils graduated from his "University", being taught not only in theology, but also in other subjects such as history, science, art, medicine, languages and philosophy. This body of knowledge disseminated from Clement's Ohrid school, when embodied in literature, constituted an entirely new literary culture which gradually spread to all of the Slavonic peoples.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to his teaching, Clement studiously undertook the organization of the Macedonian Church in Ohrid. Appointing and teaching priests and deacons, and organizing and establishing parishes, he laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid as a specifically Macedonian church (This ultimately saw the light of day during the reign of the Macedonian King, Tsar Samuel). This great work was, in succeeding years, completed by Naum, who also based himself in Ohrid after having taught for many years in Bulgaria.

In the tenth century A.D., what became known as the "Bogomil" movement saw its origins in Macedonia. The founder of this movement, the priest Father Bogomil, designed it as a rebellion against the official orthodoxy of the Church, which he saw as being subservient to the Bulgarian State and oligarchy, which at that time politically dominated Macedonia. The philosophies of Bogomil ultimately penetrated Western Europe, and held a modicum of influence there for almost five hundred years.

Following the defeat of Tsar Samuel in 1018 A.D., and the incorporation of Macedonia into Bulgaria's medieval Empire, the Patriarchate of Ohrid was co-opted into the service of the Bulgarian Court. In fact, the Patriarchate was once again demoted to an archbishopric, although it retained the status of an independent church.

The independence of the Church was maintained even through the twelfth century disintegration of the Byzantine Empire, which witnessed numerous wars, many of them taking place on Macedonian territory.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, most of Macedonia's territory was incorporated into the Serbian State, and indeed during the reign of Tsar Dushan (1331-1335), all of Macedonia was part of the

Serbian realm. Yet even during this period, the independence of the Macedonian Church was preserved, and the Serbian state maintained two archbishoprics, that of Serbia and that of Ohrid. This period witnessed a flourishing of medieval religious art, with the establishment of many new churches and monasteries of considerable architectural character, adorned by impressive frescoes.

In 1392 A.D., the modern Macedonian capital, Skopje, was captured by the Ottoman Turkish armies. Subsequently, Ohrid was overrun in 1408 A.D. This was the start of five centuries of Turkish domination, the longest and most significant period of foreign rule in Macedonia's history. However, the fate of the Macedonian Church under this rule varied. Initially, with the consolidation of Turkish power across the Balkans, the Archbishopric of Ohrid retained and indeed increased its influence as one of four autocephalous Churches in European Turkey, the others being at Constantinople, Trnovo and Pech.

However, as the feudal system was consolidated in Macedonia, heavy financial burdens were placed upon the Church and the Christian population in general. This produced a series of sporadic upheavals against the Empire, which responded with an active campaign of Islamization of the Christian population. The Macedonian Church, already heavily in debt, was unable to resist the tide of compulsory conversion and consequently lost considerable influence. As a result, many thousands of Macedonians, particularly in the western districts of the country, converted to Islam.

Unfortunately, the Turks also demolished many Macedonian churches, whilst others were converted into mosques. The legacies of this campaign are still readily visible in Macedonia today.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Macedonian Church found itself coming under increasing pressure from the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople. This era had witnessed in general a marked increase in the Patriarch's drive to hellenize the southern Balkan lands, and the Macedonian Church at Ohrid had proved a constant irritant in this mission. The Patriarch initiated a campaign aimed at the Sultanate which responded by abolishing the Ohrid archbishopric in 1767 A.D.<sup>4</sup>

The ecclesiastical organs of the Macedonian Church were subsequently taken over by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and bishops and priests of Greek origin were despatched to Macedonia, with the express instruction to take over control of education within the parishes. Schools were established in an attempt to hellenize the Macedonian population.

In 1870, the Ottoman Court agreed to the re-establishment of the Bulgarian Church, which itself embarked upon a campaign of

proselytization of the Macedonian people. This ushered in a most destructive era of religious warfare between the two dominant foreign churches on the territory of Macedonia. In this battle, the Macedonian population most often chose to align itself with the Bulgarian church, as it was a case of this church being "the lesser of two evils".

The absence of an independent Macedonian Church during this period was a critical factor in determining the impact of the independence movement. The Macedonian Church could theoretically have provided the national focus within a religious guise for the intelligentsia to rally and integrate the subjective revolutionary forces towards national emancipation.

Its absence in any cogent and coherent form during this era meant that the external forces which destabilized the Macedonian population, principally through their churches and schools, were unable to be effectively challenged, and this of course impacted negatively upon the consciousness and preparedness of the independence movement in the 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s.

The demoralization suffered by all sections of the Macedonian people after the heavy defeat by Turkey at "Ilinden" (1903) was compounded by further successive national disasters in 1912-13 (Balkan Wars), the division of Macedonia between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria in August 1913, the First World War (Versailles Peace Treaty) and two decades of harsh denationalization, fascism and the Second World War. In this, the Macedonian Church suffered in much the same way as the Macedonian people. Religious identification with the Macedonian Church, and Christian worship as a form of subjective national and ethno-cultural expression, was outlawed in Greece (Aegean Macedonia), Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia) and Yugoslavia (Vardar Macedonia). This has remained the situation in both Greece and Bulgaria to the present day. Albania, which has a small Macedonian minority, allows the entry of Macedonian Orthodox priests from the Republic of Macedonia.

During the fascist occupation of Yugoslavia, a guiding committee to organize church affairs in Macedonia was established in October 1944, and following the liberation of Skopje, this guiding committee held the First Macedonian Popular Church Assembly in that city in March 1945. The Assembly passed a unanimous resolution calling for the re-establishment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid as an autocephalous Macedonian Church.

In October 1958, the guiding committee held its Second National Church Assembly at Ohrid. Here, the Congress voted historically to restore the Ohrid Archbishopric. Though resolving to maintain canonical

links with the intransigent Serbian Patriarchate, the guiding committee had bravely decided to "go it alone". On the 5th of October, Archbishop Dositej was formally enthroned as the head of the restored Church, although nominally he remained subservient to the Serbian patriarch.

And, on the 17th of July 1967, the Third National Church Assembly was held at Ohrid, and on the following day, a resolution was passed unanimously proclaiming the Macedonian Orthodox Church autocephalous.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia: An Overview**

Although the first Macedonian settlers in Australia are widely believed to have migrated to these shores in the 1890s and very early part of this century, it was not until the period immediately following the Second World War that this immigration took on a mass character. Charles Price has estimated that there were no more than 2,000 Macedonians in Australia in 1947. Certainly, even allowing for the rudimentary nature of these statistics, there were no more than 5,000. The great preponderance of these early settlers were either from the Lerin and Kostur districts of Aegean Macedonia (Greece), or from the region of Bitola in the Republic of Macedonia.<sup>6</sup>

As the numbers began to increase dramatically in the 1940s and early 1950s, with the itinerant male workers deciding to stay permanently and bring out their families, and joined subsequently by the political and economic refugees from Macedonia, community organizations were formed across all States. Initially, their orientation was towards the provision of settlement assistance and support services, although once the organizational infrastructures had been consolidated, their activities diversified considerably to include cultural and linguistic maintenance, social functions and celebrations, sport, politics, and of course, the establishment of churches to meet the spiritual needs of their members.<sup>7</sup>

Currently, there are 18 Macedonian churches around Australia.

Perth	St Nikola (2 separate churches)
	St Nikola
Melbourne	St George
	St Ilija
	St Nikola
	St Dimitrija
Geelong	St John
Sydney	Sts Cyril & Methodius
	St Nikola
	St Petka

Newcastle	St Mary
Wollongong	St Dimitrija
Port Kembla	St Clement of Ohrid
Queanbeyan	St Ilija
Canberra	St Clement of Ohrid
Brisbane	St Mary
Gold Coast	St Nedela
Adelaide	St Naum

In addition, there are two Macedonian Orthodox monasteries near Melbourne, St Clement and St Naum. Another church is planned for the St Albans region of Melbourne in 1996. Perhaps the crowning achievement was the erection and opening in December 1988 of the Macedonian Orthodox Cathedral, St Clement of Ohrid, in Red Hill, Canberra. The land was donated by the Commonwealth Government, and the foundation stone was blessed in 1983.

It is also of interest to note that many Macedonians in Australia, of the Muslim faith, regularly worship in Islamic mosques. Further, a small Macedonian Baptist Community exists in Melbourne, having been established in 1973, together with a Macedonian Uniting Church parish in Preston, Melbourne, which has canonical relations with the Methodist Church in Macedonia.<sup>8</sup>

The Orthodox churches together form the Australian Diocese of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, with the seat of the eparchate based in Melbourne where its activities are governed by a ruling Executive Committee, elected every two years by the Diocesan Conference, comprising delegates and parish priests from all the Churches and headed by the Deputy to the Bishop. The Bishop incidentally, wearing the jurisdictional title of Metropolitan (of Australia) resides in Ohrid, in the Republic of Macedonia, although moves are afoot to have him permanently based in Melbourne. Interestingly enough, the Diocese is not registered pursuant to Australian law, although the individual churches have disparate registration within each state. The older churches, established either prior to or contemporaneously with the modern Macedonian Orthodox Church, have independent constitutions, whilst the newer ones have all adopted the uniform constitution of the Diocese.

### **The Macedonian Orthodox Church in Victoria and South Australia: A Descriptive Analysis**

The modern historical period has witnessed the development of a

rather pragmatic attitude amongst Macedonians towards Orthodoxy and its institutions. This attitude was in large measure transferred to Australia where it was significantly strengthened by each succeeding wave of Macedonian immigration, which was forced to make the socio-psychological transition from a predominantly agrarian to a modern industrial society, and thus increasingly came to imbibe the more secular, materialistic values of contemporary Australian society. Consequently, the 200,000 strong Macedonian community in Australia does not display the same fervency of religious beliefs as would some other Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian communities.

Religious worship and the institution of the Church, as we have indicated above, have historically been seen as serving the purpose of affirming the cause of national self-determination and recognition. The reason for this lack of religious fervour can in large part be traced to that period from 1767 to 1958 (especially up until 1944 when the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was constituted within Federal Yugoslavia), during which an independent Macedonian Church did not exist.

During this period the Orthodox Macedonian population (only a small number of Macedonians having been islamized during Turkish rule) was forced to express its religious devotion within the confines of the aggressively nationalistic Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches which worked hand in hand with their respective national states to dismember Macedonia (1912-1913) and denationalize the Macedonian people.

The defeat in 1949 of the Democratic Army of Greece, in which many Macedonians had fought in the hope of winning at the very least national rights within a Communist Greece, was deeply felt by Australia's Macedonian community. With their hopes for the national liberation of the homeland dashed and the denial of Macedonian ethno-specificity by the Greek and Bulgarian states, Macedonians expected the campaign to deny their identity to be transferred and stepped up in Australia as well.

The worst fears of the progressive Macedonians were quickly realized in 1950 with the arrival in Melbourne from New York of the Metropolitan of the then "Free" Bulgarian Church, Andreja Velichky. The Metropolitan had been invited by a group of Macedonians (mainly from Aegean Macedonia) to constitute a local church and appoint a parish priest.<sup>9</sup> These Macedonians were characterized by their longer residence in Australia and a sympathy for the Bulgarian Church which dovetailed with their conviction that the Church in Bulgaria in the immediate post-war years was repressed and subservient to the Communist regime. However, they were by no means fervent anti-communists.

By skilfully manipulating the fears, religious convictions and misplaced national identification of these Macedonians, Velichky in 1950 managed to set up a Bulgarian-Macedonian Orthodox Church in Young St, Fitzroy, Saints Cyril & Methodius. However, due to the efforts of the Macedonian Australian People's League (MANS), Velichky failed to set up similar "Bulgarian" churches in other major cities in Australia, save in Queanbeyan, NSW (this church was subsequently to come under the aegis of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, soon after its establishment in Australia).<sup>10</sup>

In the mid 1980s the congregation of Saints Cyril & Methodius (which was now located in a former Anglican Cathedral in Northcote, Melbourne, and which had in the early 1960s passed under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of Sofia) resolved to defect to the Australian Diocese of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and their application was accepted by the Metropolitan in Skopje. A dispute subsequently ensued over title to the Northcote church, with the Victorian Supreme Court ruling in 1986 that the property remained vested in the Bulgarian Archdiocese, despite the judge's considerable sympathy for the feelings of the Macedonian parishioners.

### **The Macedonian Orthodox Church St George, Melbourne, Victoria**

It was precisely the desire for national self-affirmation through the medium of the Church that informed the decision to set up the first Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia and in fact in the Western world, St George, in Young St, Fitzroy, Melbourne.

After long consultations within the ranks of MANS, in May 1956 the Macedonian Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria was formed. A constitution was drafted in English and steps taken to register the Community as a legal Australian institution.<sup>11</sup> The prime movers in the establishment of the Community were the well known activists, Stojan Sarbinov, Vane Nedelkovksi, Dane Trpkov, Risto Altin, Atanas and Done Filipov.

A campaign was soon launched to collect funds for the building of a church. In 1956 the site of the intended Church was bought, 52-54 Young Street, Fitzroy where the MANS club was then located and where MANS' newspaper Makedonska Iskra (Macedonian Spark) was produced until its discontinuation in January 1957.<sup>12</sup>

On the 3rd of August 1958, on the occasion of Macedonian National Day, Ilinden, a dinner dance was held at which 6000 pounds - a large sum in those days - was collected for the building of the church. This astound-

ing success immediately provoked the ire of the Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian church authorities and the age-old argument was once again employed: "Permission cannot be given for such a church to be built as a Macedonian people and nation does not exist, therefore it would be ludicrous to have a "Macedonian Church".<sup>13</sup>

Such "argumentation" succeeded in convincing the municipal authorities to withdraw the building permit, which in reality left the Community (which was determined to assert its national and religious identity) with no choice but to challenge that decision in the Victorian Supreme Court. This case was decided in favour of the Macedonian Orthodox Community and people, who were deemed to be a distinct ethnic group with the same rights to their own national church and religious freedom as other Australian citizens.<sup>14</sup>

After this historic Supreme Court case the construction of the Church was begun with renewed enthusiasm and passion. In February 1959 the Community's constitution was given official approval.<sup>15</sup>

The Church was finally consecrated and officially opened on the 7th of August 1960 by the Archbishop of the Zletovo-Strumica region of Macedonia, the Right Reverend Naum, accompanied by the secretary to the Metropolitan, Archpriest Nestor Popovski, and Father Georgi Angelovski who was to become St George's first priest. The special edition of Makedonski Tsrkoven Bulletin (Macedonian Church Bulletin) was to proudly proclaim in its July 1960 edition:

"MACEDONIANS: THE CHURCH "ST GEORGE" WILL BE INAUGURATED ON ILINDEN! THE CONSECRATION WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY A MACEDONIAN ARCHBISHOP. The priest and the Archbishop are arriving from Skopje by plane ... The day has finally come when we can quite positively inform you that the Church St George has been completed and that we have selected the day of the glorious Ilinden Uprising as the day on which the first Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia - let us allow ourselves to state - the first such church in the whole world for the Macedonian people, since this church was begun and completed on a purely religious-national basis, is to be consecrated".<sup>16</sup>

There was a massive Macedonian presence at the consecration of the church and at the dinner held that same evening at Fitzroy Town Hall. Melbourne television news had widely covered the arrival of the delegation at Essendon Airport.<sup>17</sup> From this period onwards Macedonians in Melbourne began to develop a cohesive socio-religious life which affirmed their presence and visibility in Australia. On the other hand, activities in the social political spheres aimed to consolidate the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia in order to preserve its role in promoting

national unity and identity.

The role of the fourth priest to serve at St George, Archpriest and Bishop's Deputy Metodija Gogov (now Archbishop Mihail, newly elected head of the Church in Macedonia), in furthering the social and religious life of the Macedonian community deserves special mention. For he did not only serve his flock conscientiously and compassionately in Melbourne, but contributed to the socio-religious life of Macedonians in all Australia. He played a significant role in helping to develop churches and an active community life in Perth, Adelaide, Queanbeyan, Newcastle, Port Kembla and Sydney. He ensured that the organ of the Macedonian Orthodox Church Diocese of Australia, "Makedonski Vesnik" (Macedonian Newspaper) was published more frequently and he enriched its contents significantly.

He was instrumental in improving the cultural and intellectual life of Macedonian youth through the creation of ethnic schools which taught in both English and Macedonian. In addition, his excellent knowledge of English enabled him to represent the Macedonian Orthodox Church throughout Australia in a worthy and dignified manner, as well as to advance his life-long goal of achieving a true ecumenical unity amongst all Christian Churches.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Macedonian Orthodox Church St Naum, Adelaide, South Australia**

The strength and vitality of Macedonian church life as embodied in the socio-religious, cultural and political activity of the Macedonian Church Community "St George" provided a basis for the establishment of Macedonian Orthodox Church communities in other parts of Australia. Such a development was given added impetus in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the immigration to Australia of ever increasing numbers of Macedonians from the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.

These two factors contributed to the upsurge of religious activity amongst the Macedonian community in Adelaide, South Australia. The Macedonian Orthodox Community of Adelaide and South Australia Inc (the Association was then known as "Alexander the Great") was established in 1947, its first president being Vasil Apostol. The organization grew rapidly with the influence of young refugees and their families, predominantly from Aegean Macedonia (Greece), during the 1950s. In late 1967, a Community Hall was erected, and in the following year a decision was made to conduct religious service in the Macedonian language at the rear of the Community quarters. Leading roles in developing

these initiatives were played by Kosta Radin, Risto Yankov, Kosta Papas, Kosta Kiossev and Pandil Phillipov. The first major initiative of the Community's management was to invite the parish priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church St George in Melbourne, Father Metodija Gogov, to conduct the first service, to which hundreds of Macedonians flocked. The second significant decision involved an application to the Church in the Republic for a parish priest. In 1969, Father George Kacarski arrived from Skopje to commence duties with the parish, and he remained until 1975 when he was promoted and moved to Melbourne. He was replaced briefly by Father Temelko Velkovski.

In the interim, the Community had resolved to prepare plans for the erection of a new Orthodox Church on a block adjacent to the Community Hall. These plans were initially drawn in 1974, with a further four years elapsing before the Community resolved to adopt St Naum as its patron saint.

On the 1st of May 1981, a foundation stone was laid and blessed by the then Metropolitan of Australia, Bishop Kiril. Work commenced soon after. Almost three years of voluntary labour was expended by Community members, and an associated cost (labour free) of \$120,000 before the new edifice was completed.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to its opening, the new parish priest, Father Jordan Tasev, arrived from the Republic to take up his duties in December 1983. Subsequently, on the 29th of April 1984, the new Church was consecrated by the Metropolitan of Australia, Bishop Timotej, in the presence of the President of the Macedonian Emigrants Council of the Republic of Macedonia and distinguished South Australian guests.

The design concept of the new church, praised as one of the most impressive Macedonian churches in this country, was commissioned from a leading Australian-Macedonian architect, Jim Petre, of Adelaide. Today the church has a regular parish of over six hundred.

## **Religious Leaders, Cultural Maintenance and Sectarian Affiliation**

As we have stated above, the struggle for the recognition and independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, both in its Balkan homeland and in Australia, has been intimately intertwined with the overall struggle of the Macedonian people for national liberation and self-determination. This ineluctable fact has consequently informed the approach and philosophical outlook of not only the boards of management of the respective church communities throughout Australia, but also to a large extent of those priests who serve the spiritual needs of their

parishioners. To that extent, the strength and cohesion of the various church communities has tended to coincide with progress being made on the socio-cultural and political front for Macedonians in Australia. Likewise, the disunity and internecine fighting which has frequently erupted between church communities and their secular and religious leaderships has been mirrored in a general disarray and lack of orientation within the wider Macedonian community.

This is not to say that the Macedonian Orthodox Church is the only force in the community which is capable of giving general political, cultural and social direction, nor that it is the most significant.

In fact, in recent years bodies such as FOMAV (Federation of Macedonian Associations of Victoria), the Australian Macedonian Human Rights Committee, its various state committees for Macedonian Human Rights, the Australian Macedonian Progressive Society (AMPS), the Australian Macedonian Society and the Ilinden Foundation, the Association of Former Refugee Children, the Aegean Macedonian Association of Australia, the Macedonian Teachers' Society of Victoria, Welfare Councils, literary societies, professional and artistic groups, educational and studies foundations, school and student bodies, the Macedonian Communities of Western Australia and South Australia, the Australian-Macedonian Weekly and other media, and of late the Macedonian Councils, among others, have made the running on vital political, social and cultural issues confronting the community.

The activities of such organizations have had the goal of complementing the general community actions of the church boards of management, by focusing on areas and issues where specialist skills and expertise (traditionally lacking on the church boards) are needed for progress to be made. The fact that most of these organizations are led or significantly influenced by the younger, better-educated generation of Macedonians of both sexes has been wrongly perceived as a threat by some patriarchal secular church leaders (especially in Victoria and NSW), who feel that activity in the community is extending beyond the boundaries that they had traditionally determined and into areas which they feel ill-prepared to tackle in modern Australian society.

However, having said that, it must be stated that the activities of such progressive organizations are significantly advanced, or hindered, in proportion to the degree of support, or opposition, emanating from the ranks of separate church communities and in particular from the Diocese's Executive Committee. Such a statement is eloquent testimony to the influence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and its religious and secular bodies in moulding Macedonian public opinion.

The religious and socio-cultural activity of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia has undoubtedly fostered a sense of Macedonian ethno-specificity and uniqueness, as evidenced by the tenacity with which it fought to establish the first Macedonian church in the Western world, St George, in Melbourne in 1960, and by its contribution to the fund-raising for the trip to Europe in May 1989 by the international Macedonian Human Rights delegation. Its role in resisting the chauvinist denials of the Macedonian people's ethno-specificity in recent years in Australia is also noteworthy (the contributions of St George, St Dimitrija and St Nikola of Melbourne, St John of Geelong, St Naum of Adelaide and St Nikola of Perth being of particular significance).

Its emphasis on cultural maintenance is evidenced by the widespread network of Macedonian language schools that it has established within its confines and apparent from even a cursory examination of church bulletins, newspaper etc. (viz Makedonski Vesnik, Makedonski Trskoven Bulletin of St George's, Melbourne).

Yet, paradoxically, the emphasis placed by the Macedonian Orthodox Church on maintaining Macedonian ethno-specificity has led to an appreciable lessening of the significant role which it could be expected to have in such maintenance. Such a development is a result of the means by which "Macedonian identity" is promoted within the Church by the majority of church committees and boards of management in this country. For the promotion of Macedonian culture borrows heavily from traditional agrarian society with its attendant conservative and patriarchal values and, as such, the cultural model presented has come to be perceived as ossified and irrelevant to the needs of younger Macedonian-Australians seeking their place in modern society. The relative lack of representation of younger members of the community - and especially of young women - on church boards of management has tended to compound this problem.

At the same time such an approach has tended to militate against successful integration into the social, cultural and political mainstream by postulating a Macedonian identity rooted in pre-migration Balkan homeland conditions rather than one which attempts to marry the Balkan experience with the positive values of modern Australia. It must be stated unequivocally that the Church, to its credit, has always stressed the need for first generation Macedonian migrants to learn English adequately (a perusal of the pages of Makedonski Vesnik in the 1960s and 70s would bear this out) as a means of empowerment and progress within Australia.

However, those members of that same first generation who, due to

their deeper religiosity, imbibed the model of cultural identity promoted until recently by the Church, have experienced significant problems in adapting to the demands of life in their second homeland even after 40-50 years in this country. Consequently, their role as conveyors of a socially relevant Macedonian culture to their children (apart from obvious barriers such as age and radically different conditioning in formative years) has not been as effective as it could have been. The upshot is that Australian-born Macedonian youth has until recently been reluctant to promote Macedonian culture as an integral part of this country's multi-cultural fabric, although the emergence of a tight nucleus of young intellectuals during the last few years has worked to redress the situation.

The question of creating a Macedonian cultural model more relevant to the needs of the community in general has perhaps been most successfully tackled by those Macedonian Orthodox Churches which form part of an umbrella community structure rather than exist as parishes in their own right. In Perth, Western Australia, the Church St Nikola exists as a constituent organization of the umbrella body, Macedonian Community of Western Australia Incorporated. Whilst the church has its own board of management and is entitled to three members on the 40 member Community Executive Committee, decisions regarding its operation are taken by the Community Executive Committee, which in 1989 was led by young progressive Macedonians, namely Chris Angelkov (President) and Trajan Andonovski (Secretary), who managed to shift the focus of community life to issues more relevant to the lives of "Macedonian-Australians" rather than to "Macedonians in Australia".

Likewise, the Macedonian Orthodox Church of Adelaide, St Naum, forms part of the wider community body, The Macedonian Orthodox Community of Adelaide and South Australia Incorporated (MOCASA). This organization has managed to raise the profile of Macedonians in South Australia by working hard at developing links with both governmental and broader ethnic organizations, such that it has managed to obtain significant state funding for its multifarious activities. The image of St Naum has thereby been improved amongst second generation Macedonian-Australians through its membership of the wider community body.

Interestingly, the long-serving president of MOCASA, Kosta Radin, stood down from his post in 1984 in order to make way for "younger blood" so as to ensure the vitality and continuity of Macedonian community life in South Australia.

It was envisaged that the Macedonian Orthodox Community of Mel-

bourne and Victoria (MOCMV) would grow into a wider umbrella body, with the other four churches in Victoria together with St George eventually forming part of the same structure. However, these four remaining churches have constituted themselves as separate parishes and as such community cohesion in general has been weakened. In 1989 the only other organization affiliated with MOCMV is "Svetlost", the youth folkloric dance troupe, which throughout the 1960s and 1970s was ably led by Ana Vasileva. The inescapable fact remains however that an infusion of new blood into existing church structures would give them broader community appeal and strengthen their role and profile amongst Macedonians in Australia.

In keeping with trends which would cut across most ethnic communities in Australia, the children of the first generation Macedonian migrants hold significantly less fervent religious beliefs than those of their parents. As indicated earlier, the religious values of the first generation of adult Macedonians in Australia were rather more pragmatic than those of their Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters, due to a host of historical and political factors. These beliefs have been further diluted in Australian-born Macedonians who have grown up in relative affluence in a modern industrial society with its attendant secular and materialistic values. Yet, this is not to say that their sense of being Macedonian has decreased in corresponding degree. If anything, their identification as Macedonian-Australians has been heightened by the activities over the last five years of younger Macedonian intellectual circles who have been instrumental in creating an identity more suited to local conditions, and in raising the question of the denial of basic human rights for their country folk in those parts of the homeland which now form part of the Balkan states of Greece, Bulgaria and Albania.

## **Conclusion**

The Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia has by no means lost its relevance in inspiring a sense of ethnic identity in the broader community. The huge attendance of young and old at especially the Easter and Christmas services is testimony to its continuing attraction. What is certain is that the determination with which Macedonians in the late 1950s in Melbourne fought in order to establish their national Church in this country - in the form of St George - was of enormous significance in building the impetus which led to the mother Church in Macedonia taking the decisive step and proclaiming its autocephalous

and independent status in 1967. The challenge lying ahead for the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Australia is for it to cement its rightful role in the maintenance of Macedonian culture by linking up with progressive circles in the community and the social, political, cultural, welfare and structural initiatives that they are taking.

#### *Notes*

1. D Ilievski, *The Macedonian Orthodox Church*, Macedonian Review, Skopje, 1973, pp7-9.
2. Op cit p16.
3. Op cit p17.
4. Op cit pp30-31.
5. Op cit pp92-95.
6. V Andonov, *Makedoncite vo Australija*, Kultura, Skopje, 1973, pp17-18.
7. P Hill, "Macedonians" in *Encyclopedia of the Australian People*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1988, p689.
8. Ibid
9. S Sarbinov, *Kako i Zosto Se Dojde Do Izgradbata na Makedonskite Pravoslavni Crkvi vo Australia*, Paper prepared in December 1988, Melbourne, p14.
10. S Sarbinov, *Makedoncite vo Australia: 1940-1988*, Paper presented by author at the Australian Macedonian National Conference, April 1989, Melbourne University, pp5-6.
11. S Sarbinov "Kako i Zosto ...", p15.
12. Ibid
13. Ibid
14. S Sarbinov, *Kako i Zosto ...*, pp15-16.
15. S Sarbinov, *Makedoncite vo Australija ...*, p6.
16. *Makedonski Tsrkoven Bulletin*, A Melbourne Orthodox Community Publication, Vol 3, No 4, Melbourne, July 1960, p1.
17. S. Sarbinov, *Kako i Zosto ...*, p17.
18. *Makedonski Vesnik*, Publication of the Macedonian Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria, July 1970, p3, p10.
19. Iskra, Macedonian Cultural Society, Adelaide, No 4, 1986.