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## **The Truth Regarding the Property, the Taxation of the Church and the Payroll of Its Clergy**

### **The Empress and the Widow's Vineyard**

The tactics applied by the modern Greek state vis-à-vis the Church over the 180 years of free life of the former brings to mind the practice of Eudoxia, Empress of Byzantium, when Saint John Chrysostom was Archbishop of Constantinople (early 5<sup>th</sup> century) : Whereas she herself was in possession of incalculable wealth and estates, following the death of Patrician Theognostos, whom she herself had sent into exile, she also took hold of his fortune, thus plunging his widow and orphans into poverty. It was the Holy Chrysostom who protected them by giving them shelter in a charitable foundation of the Church, yet in one of his Epistles did not fail to castigate the callous and unlawful behaviour of the Empress, an act which later cost him an exile. But in what sense can a parallel be legitimately drawn between those tactics and that of the modern Greek state? Let us explain.

Greece has a total expanse of 131,957.4 km<sup>2</sup>. Of these, the following are lands of farming interest :

- 29,500 km<sup>2</sup> (22%) being forests,
- 52,500 km<sup>2</sup> (40%) pasturelands, and
- 39,500 km<sup>2</sup> (30%) agricultural lands.

Of the expanses above, 61,441.9 km<sup>2</sup> belong, in the sense of ownership, to the following entities :

- the State (43,598 km<sup>2</sup>),
- Local Government (15,553.2 km<sup>2</sup>)
- Cooperative Associations (1,098.4 km<sup>2</sup>)
- the Church (1,292.3).

In other terms, 1.4% of forests, 2.3 of pasturelands, and 2.19% of farming lands belong to the Church (whereas the State owns 45.6% and Local Government 30.8% thereof)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures have been drawn upon the valid study/survey under the title "*Property Status and Use of Agricultural Lands in Greece*" [in Greek] by Th. Tsoumas and D. Tassioulas, a publication of the Agricultural Bank, Athens 1986, including many tables and statistics.

The reality being as outlined above, each time the State wishes to divert popular attention away from its problems, it 'reheats' the issue of "Church property", while, with the help of some media or other agencies, whether hostile to the Church or insufficiently informed, it cultivates the climate and paves the ground for what they hope will be the final onslaught, aiming to grab what's been left of this property, in order supposedly to distribute it to the landless; in other terms, in order to distribute what amounts to a total of 1.96%, which belongs to the Church, while leaving the 60,443.5 km<sup>2</sup> of the State, Local Government, and Cooperatives intact ! This is the situation which legitimates the parallel with the Empress Eudoxia, who grabs even the little vineyard of the widow, whereas she herself is not aware of her own vast fortune, placements or returns ...

Still, let us present all aspects of the issue of "Church property", even if only in brief, so that the lies connected with it may become apparent, the truth may shine and the elaborately cultivated myth regarding the 'legendary' fortune supposedly possessed and owned by the Church may be debunked.

### **Necessary clarifications**

To start with, let us answer the reasonable questions of citizens of good will, such as the following :

#### **1. Does the Church have the right to own property or is it suitable for It to do so ?**

The answer here must be affirmative with no hesitation. Just as each human being *qua* psychosomatic entity shall not live on each word coming out of God's mouth alone, but also on bread (cf. Luke 4:4), in other terms it also needs material goods, so does the Church of Christ *qua* theanthropic organization have not only a spiritual but also a social work to carry out as part of its mission. For this work dedicated persons and material means are required, after the example and teaching of the Lord. Namely, He was not content with selecting and preparing the Apostles for His design but also stipulated that there be a fund within the group of the Apostles (*glossokomon*). The money thereof was used for their daily needs and for the relief of the poor (John 12:5-7), and of course not in the sense of some kind of condemnable avarice. The Lord fed the five thousand in the desert by blessing the five loaves and the two fish but also ordained that the fragments that remained be taken up (Matth. 14:15-21, Luke 9:12-17). It was from that fund that the Passover supper was prepared (Luke 22, 7-14). When the Church was

founded, after the Pentecost, the Saint Apostles collected and responsibly managed the offerings of the faithful for the needs of the community of Christians (*Acts 4:3ff.*). By means of the “*logia*” Apostle Paul supported those unduly suffering and established the material reward of priests “*that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel*” (*1 Cor. 9:7-14*).

The example and preaching of Christ and the Apostles was followed by Apostolic and later Fathers, who, as Christians and shepherds, had not only obligations but rights. They organized the charitable work. They saw to it that spiritual and material needs be met. They constructed not only churches but buildings to house social activities. By means of donations by members of the Church and thanks to personal labour on the part of Christians, movable and immovable property was gradually acquired, so that the charitable work of the Church was facilitated. Despite the occasionally inimical dispositions of state power (at first Roman, later Byzantine and Ottoman) towards the Church, the latter preserved or even increased its property (as will be developed below), while both through sacred canons (Apostolic Orders B24, Apostolic Canons 38 and 78, Synodical Canons 15 of Ankara, 24-25 of Antioch, 26 and 33 of Carthage, 24 of Chalcedon etc.) and through state laws and provisions the property in question was declared “*inalienable*” and indeed acknowledged “*in perpetuity*”.

## **2. Who does this property belong to and how is it managed?**

It is wrong of some to think that this property belongs to the Holy Synod or to the Archbishop or to Metropolitans or to Hegumens of Monasteries. This is because, when we use “*Church property*” as a generic expression, we mean the whole of the property of ecclesiastical legal entities, namely of the 96 Metropolitanates of Greece, of five to six hundred Monasteries, 9,024 parish churches, several pilgrimage sites and the central organizations of the Church. In accordance with the provisions of Law 590/1977 “*On the Statutory Charter of the Church of Greece*” and “*in terms of their legal relations*” all these bodies constitute legal entities of public law. *Qua* legal entities they are governed by Boards constituted as the laws of the state stipulate. Indeed, except for Monastic Councils, in all others lay members participate also, being even the majority.

Of course, when Church property is spoken of, what is meant is mainly (movable and especially immovable) monastic property. This may be distinguished into property “*to be preserved*” and property “*to be divested*” or “*to be liquidated*”, as stipulated in pieces of legislation of 1930-31, when the administration and the management of the property “*to be divested*” was assigned to an Organization for the Management of Church Property (ODEP,

in Greek). The property “*to be preserved*” remains in the ownership, possession with *animus domini* or simple possession of Monasteries.

### 3. How was it acquired?

As the anthropic organization the Church has been around for 20 centuries. No state or other institution in the world has had such a long lifespan. At this point let us formulate an entirely simple question, which as such entails the answer: in every period, even in our days —before the financial crisis broke out— if both spouses worked over 30 or 35 years and wisely managed the money they were paid, would they not be likely to have acquired their house (even a flat), to own two or three cars, a country house, a deposit in a bank and, at the same time, have ensured a good education and satisfactory course of life for their children? Consequently, if two working spouses can acquire considerable property over 3 or 4 decades, why should it be any wonder that the Church acquired its own property over 20 centuries and why should people supposedly ‘of goodwill’ can ask how this was possible? Therefore, let us inform them.

In the beginnings of Christian faith, all those who believed had one heart and one soul ... They shared everything. Those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money they got from the sale to put it at the disposal of the Apostles (*Acts* 4:32, 34-35). Later, monks in the wilderness or in faraway places where there was no man, cultivated the adjacent lands or used them for the grazing of domesticated livestock so that they may secure a living, and the rights they acquired in these areas were established during the Byzantine period, maintained by the Ottomans and legally recognized by the modern Greek state. Particularly in Greek Byzantium, of course, where monasticism flourished, also because of the synergy achieved in the Church-State relationship, the acquisition of considerable immovable property by Monasteries was favoured and the property in question would mainly come from donations by emperors, courtiers, generals, etc., some of whom were also founders, benefactors or even hegumens of big monasteries, after they first resigned from their high-ranking posts in the state.

The said property —typically comprising uninhabited expanses, since in those times population was scarce— was preserved or even expanded during the Ottoman rule (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries), because of the privileges granted to Patriarchs by Mehmed the Conqueror. As Gheorghios Sphrantzes states in his *Major Chronicle* (3,11), the Patriarch was “*unappealable and untaxed and unoppressed by any adversary, and free of all fees and contributions, [...] with all the Patriarchs after him and all the bishops under him*”. Moreover, even Sultans and other Ottoman officials would cede large expanses to different Monasteries,

while, in some cases, childless Christians would also bequeath their estate to churches or monasteries under the sole condition that their name be commemorated for ever.

It was thanks to this property that Monasteries were able to use of (and did use) the ability to establish schools staffed with great teachers of the nation, in times of loosening of the grip of the Sultan's power, to preserve the Greek language and letters, to prepare and support the National Uprising of 1821. It was therefore anything but accidental that the Church, and mainly the many monasteries existing in Greek territory, should legally possess ca. 25% of the land after the liberation and the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1828 (see Proceedings of the Plenary of the Hellenic Parliament, Session of April 2, 1987, p. 5076). Below we shall see how this property, truly vast at that time, which in terms of its ownership, possession with *animus domini* and simple possession belonged to the Church and its Monasteries, was gradually removed by means of different kinds of pressure on the part of the state, threats, machinations, expropriations and grabbing.

#### **4. How Church property was pillaged**

**a. Dissolution of 416 Monasteries and pillaging of their property.** Espousing the view that Church property was a treasure bequeathed to the Greek nation by its ancestors (!) and writing off the invaluable contribution of Monasteries to struggles past and recent, the foreign and Protestant Regency of Otto dissolved 416 Monasteries by means of royal decrees in 1833 and 1834 and used their movable and immovable property to establish the "Church Fund". However, that Fund, once established, operated in such a non-transparent and superficial manner that eventually it led to a pillaging of Church property, while the crooks of those times would sell sacred liturgical objects, heirlooms and relics of saints in fairs for personal profit<sup>2</sup>. In 1843 (i.e. ten years after it was established) that sinful Fund came to the administration and management of the State Secretariat for Finance and its monies were used to meet its own needs ... Even "*all expenditure of the University (of Athens)*" was covered by that Fund, that is with money acquired from the sale of monastic lands.

**b. Expropriation of 1836.** By a Royal Decree dated May 20 / June 1, 1836, "*On Church lands*" there was an expropriation (i.e. without payment of the compensation due) of further, vast lands and Monasteries in running order, supposedly "*for the sake of God-pleasing works and the construction of churches*

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<sup>2</sup> See D. Vayakakos, *Contribution to the Ecclesiastical History of Mani*, 1956 [in Greek], pp. 4ff.

*and charitable foundations*"<sup>3</sup>. On the property that remained heaviest indirect taxation was imposed. Inability to pay would lead to public auctions!

**c. The 'agricultural' and other laws of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.** The imposition of expropriations by the modern Greek state at the expense of Church property was continued in a callous manner even in contemporary times, particularly after the Balkan wars of 1912-13. Thus, by means of laws nos. 1072/1917 and 2050/1920 (which came to be known as "agricultural laws") and other pieces of legislation which followed (such as law no. 2189) expropriations of monastic lands were imposed, sometimes to settle refugees or landless persons and at other times – vaguely – for reasons of "*evident need and public benefit*". Given that numbers are typically more eloquent, may we note what is revealingly stated in document no. 976/780/18.4.1947 of the aforementioned Organization for the Management of Church Property (ODEP) addressed to the Directorate General of Public Accounting of the Ministry of Finance regarding the size of the expropriations imposed by the state: from 1917 to 1930 the Church expanses expropriated were worth over 1 billion in pre-war drachmas. It was the state which determined that price, but paid only 40 million to the General Church Fund and still owes 960 million pre-war drachmas ! If today's Ministry of Finance dares, let it calculate this unpaid debt on its part, indeed by converting it into today's currency values and including the respective interest accrued etc.

**d. "Liquidation" by virtue of Law no. 4684/1931 and ruination.** By means of that law the state essentially imposed the expropriation ("*liquidation*") of yet another large part of Church property, despite the objections of the Church. What was collected was placed in "*national securities and negotiable instruments*" (any resemblance to modern-day bonds?) but their value evaporated almost in its entirety, when our national economy was ruined during World War II, the foreign Occupation and the Civil War which ensued.

**e. New blows and the 1952 Convention.** The Fourth Revisionary Parliament (1946-50) and the Special Committee on elaborating a Draft Constitution in Article 143 stipulated the full expropriation of all Church property with nothing in return! What was the pretext that landless cultivators and farmers should be settled there. The Hierarchy reacted, the attempt was thwarted, but by means of Legislative Decree 327/1947 and that of October 29, 1949, the state delivered new blows. Whereas even the Constitution of 1952 stipulated that

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<sup>3</sup> See C. M. Rallis, *The inexpropriability of Church property*, 1903 [in Greek], pp. 28-30, 51-52.

the “prevailing<sup>4</sup> religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ”, the Plastiras Government raised the claim that Church property be ceded to the state, indeed under the threat of suspending payment of the salaries of priests (about which see below).

The unbearable pressures on the part of the state inevitably led to the signing of the “Contract regarding the purchase of lands of the Orthodox Church of Greece by the State to settle landless cultivators and farmers” effective from 18.09.1952, ratified through the Royal Decree of September 26 / October 8, 1952 (Government Gazette issue no. 299A). That contract was onerous for the Church, since the latter was thereby forced to cede four fifths (80%) of its cultivated or cultivable property and two thirds of its pastures to the state. What for, in return? Just one third of their real value and some pieces of urban land and real estate.

The important element in that Contract which is deliberately passed over in silence by detractors for obvious reasons is that it includes a declaration by the state that the expropriation in question will be the last one and there will be none other in the future, while the state also commits to providing every necessary (material and technical) assistance so that the Church may put its meagre remaining property to use.

Unfortunately, however, the state proved itself unreliable in that commitment too, because, by means of subsequent administrative measures, not only did it not support but it did not allow the Church to utilize what was left to it. Sometimes by challenging ownership, requesting titles of ownership going back to times when our state did not even exist, and at other times by not accepting the validity or the legal effect of imperial documents or patriarchal *sigillia* or sultanic firmans, or by qualifying monastic expanses as forested or “held”, in practice state services prevented and still prevent the Church from utilizing its scant property. The problem is intensified by the systematic cultivation of the impression that the Church owns fabulous property, which it supposedly does not put at the disposal (or does not utilize for the good) of the people! Not only did it prove itself unreliable but continued its attempts at plundering even what had been left of the property.

**f. During the last 35 years.** From 1975 onwards pressures have been intensifying for the so-called “*separation between Church and State*”, while in

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<sup>4</sup> That Constitution, just as subsequent ones, recognized the Orthodox Church as the “prevailing” religion not in a quantitative “*but also in a qualitative sense, referring to its care that it should remain the prevailing one*” (C. Ramiotis, *The Church within the Greek State*, Athens 1997 [in Greek]).

1976 the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs at that time (Gheorghios Rallis) drafted a bill of law according to which three quarters (75%) of the property would be ceded to the State and the Church would keep the remaining one quarter (25%). His endeavour failed. His successor in the ministerial chair (Ioannis Varvitsiotis) proposed a tougher plan: the State would take four fifths (80%), while one fifth (20%) would remain with the Church. That did not materialize, either. In 1985 the Minister of Education (Apostolos Kaklamanis) drafted a bill of law on the "*Regulation of matters of monastic property*" and in the following year the new Minister (Antonios Tritsis) presented a Draft Agreement on the development of Church property and its utilization by agricultural cooperatives, which would yield 10% to the Church and 5% to the State and its validity would last for 100 years. This plan did not materialize, either, and luckily so, if one takes into account the 'wonders' of almost all overindebted cooperatives (with few exceptions).

However, at that time Minister Tritsis insisted. He drafted and tabled a bill of law to the Parliament, which was approved as Law 1700/1987 and constituted the culmination of state enforcement at the expense of the remaining Church property. Despite reactions, the majority in Parliament voted in favour of the law, through the provisions of which the rules of administration, management and representation of the monastic property would be modified, the State would appoint the Board of Directors of the aforementioned ODEP so that this latter may manage Church property, while an intervention was also effected in the manner of administration and management of parish churches etc.

The luck of that law is familiar: The Supreme Administrative Court abrogated the Constitutive Act of the Board of ODEP (ruling no. 5057/1987), the State did not dare implement Laws 1700/1987 and 1811/1988, some Monasteries appealed to the European Court of Human Rights for violation, by the aforesaid laws, of Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights and the First Protocol thereof, and were vindicated because, by its Judgment no. 10/1993/405/483/484/9.12.1994, the Court :

- found that Law no. 1700 violated fundamental rights of Holy Monasteries to their property rights;
- reversed the case-law of Greek Courts to that day in favour of the Greek state and imposed on them the obligation to comply fully with the Rome Convention;
- declared that the Monasteries —and therefore the Church of Greece, too— were not state institutions, even though they are legal entities of public law;
- clarified that Monasteries might invoke any manner of acquisition of the ownership of their property (including by adverse possession), as there was no Land Register in Greece and, as a result, it was impossible to have title

deeds registered before 1856 and legacies and inheritances registered before 1946, and

- resolved in favour of the Holy Monasteries the dispute regarding the issue of illegally occupied lands (i.e. without legal deeds) possessed by the Church, on the basis of the evidence for their ordinary or extraordinary adverse possession.

Despite the 'freezing' of those two laws (i.e. 1700 και 1811), in 1998 the General Secretariat of Forests attempted to activate the Convention as stipulated by the latter of the laws, though to no effect. Even so, raking up the issue of Church property did not cease, as happened in the year 2000, when the whole of Greece was concerned and in turmoil because of the issue of citizens' religion no longer being stated on their new identity cards or again later on, in 2009, when the financial crisis broke out, IMF, EU and ECB (the so-called troika) came to Greece and the first MOU was signed ... Then it came as no surprise that the 'leftover soup' of Church property should be 'reheated' and constantly served up to the media, since whether people ignoring truth or people of ill will have been ruminating the same story over and over again, raising, however, two new issues as well, namely why the clergy should have their salaries paid by the State and why the Church should not pay taxes. Answers are provided below to both these questions.

## **5. Why should the clergy have their salaries paid by the State ?**

In times of crisis, it is expected that voices should be raised as to *"why should the State pay the salaries of the servants of God"* or claiming that *"nowhere in the world are clergymen Public Servants"* and that the State should stop paying them from the public purse and the cost should instead be covered by the Church.

If we go back to the past regarding this issue, we may recall that until 1945 clergymen were paid from the so-called contributions of parishioners. It was at that time, then, that Emergency law no. 536/1945 was issued *"On the regulation of emoluments of the Orthodox Parish Clergy of Greece, of their mode of payment and of covering the relevant cost"*. As of 01.10.1945 not only was the payment of salaries but also *"the contribution of 25% on the gross revenues of parish and collegial churches as well as those governed by special laws"* inaugurated (Art. 2.2.A). The 25% contribution was raised to 35% by a provision of Emergency law no. 469/1968, but was abolished as of 01.01.2004 (Art. 15 of Law 3220/2004). It is worth noting that for 60 years the 25% or 35% contribution was paid by churches to public funds *"every quarter"*.

The argument in favour of the position that the State should pay the salaries of parish priests and bishops of the Orthodox Church, apart from everything else, is founded upon the following two facts :

a. Since the Greek State expropriated the largest part of Church property, essentially with nothing in return, it has the obligation to honour its commitment (see the aforementioned 1952 Convention) that it will provide its necessary support to the Church, as is also stipulated in the (current and previous) Constitution. Besides, once the Church was stripped of its property in the manners referred to above, it was objectively impossible to shoulder the burden of paying the clergy.

b. The overwhelming majority of Greek citizens are members of the Church, no matter how actively and consciously so or not. At the same time, they are also tax-paying citizens. From the taxes it collects the state has the obligation to meet the needs of its citizens in terms of healthcare, education, security, culture, sports etc. This is why it constructs and operates hospitals, schools, cultural and sports centres etc. However, we as its tax-paying citizens are also Orthodox Christians, in our majority. And just as we expect and demand that the state should ensure the teacher, the doctor, the judge, the policeman, the defendant of our motherland for us from our taxes, so do we have the claim that it should pay the salaries of our priests and bishops, so that these latter may see to our mental, spiritual and metaphysical needs. To argue the opposite is to deny the mental and spiritual aspects of man. It is unacceptable for the state, on the one hand, to allocate large funds for subsidies to essentially insignificant (supposedly cultural, athletic, artistic etc.) actions and, on the other hand, to seek ways of depriving the overwhelming majority of its citizens of their spiritual and religious guidance.

## **6. Why should the Church not pay taxes ?**

Misinformation in all its glory ... It will suffice to surf different websites of the Internet to establish how many lies, inaccuracies and how much venom permeates many of the texts uploaded. It is often written that *"the Church is the largest landowner in Greece, shareholder in businesses and depositor"*, however without any evidence ever being produced in corroboration of such claims. Elsewhere we read that the Church enjoys *"a status of permanent tax immunity"*. Nonetheless, is it so ? Certainly not, because the ecclesiastical legal entities of public law, too, pay the public purse exactly what is stipulated by the legislation adopted by the Greek Parliament. Thus at the time this text was being written, the following status applied regarding the taxation of the Church :

**i.** *“The revenue from renting buildings and lands collected by holy churches, Holy Metropolitanates, Holy Monasteries of Mount Athos, the Holy Monastery of Patmos, the Holy Monastery at Sinai, Apostolic Diakonia, the All-Holy Sepulchre, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Alexandria, the Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus and the Holy Stavropegic Monasteries of Cyprus, our own legal entities which have been legally constituted or are constituted in the pursuit of demonstrably charitable purposes, as well as our own charitable foundations are subject to a taxable coefficient on income of 20 per cent (20%)”* (Art. 12 § 4 of Law 3842/23.4.2010, Government Gazette issue no. 58A’).

**ii.** Extraordinary Special Fee upon Constructed Surfaces Provided with Electric Power, *“for imperative purposes of national interest consisting in the immediate reduction of the budget deficit imposed on constructed surfaces provided with electric power for residential or commercial use”*, depending on the area of the constructed surface, the rate of the respective zone price etc. (Art. 53 § 1-2 of Law 4021/3.10.2011, Government Gazette issue no. 218A’). Immovable property used by the Church *“to carry out its work for purposes of worship, or educational, religious and charitable purposes”* are of course not subject to the aforementioned special fee Art. 53 § 5 β’ and γ’ of the said Law, and Art. 29 § 1 ια’ and ιγ’ of Law 3842/2010), an exemption which also applies to Public Services, other legal entities of public law, local government, and municipal utilities. However, it goes without saying that the Church normally pays the special fee for the rest of its immovable property.

**iii.** A tax with a 3‰ coefficient on the basis of the objective value of the immovable property (other than the exceptions above).

**iv.** A tax with a 0.5% coefficient on the value of inheritance and donations.

**v.** Stamp duty and Agricultural Insurance Organization rights (2.4%) on pecuniary contributions of Christians to churches for sacred services.

**vi.** The Church also withholds and pays the tax offices the following :

- a. a payroll tax from church employees;
- b. VAT on the basis of the coefficients stipulated for services and goods;
- c. 8% income tax on all service delivery invoices;
- d. 4% income tax on all dispatch notes regarding goods and 1% on liquid fuel.

Moreover, it is worth noting that, as of 01.08.2011, many Holy Metropolitanates, churches and Monasteries pay very substantial amounts for the postage of their publications to many Christians –typically free of charge

for them– within the framework of their pastoral work, following the issuance of Law 3986/01.07.2011 (Government Gazette issue no. A'152) on “*Urgent measures implementing the 2012-2015 medium-term fiscal strategy*”, by virtue of the provisions of which the Special Charging Rates on postal fees paid by publishers of printed editions were abolished.

Finally, in reply to those who distort the truth, may we quote the untimate paragraph of a Press Bulletin issued by the Holy Synod (15.09.2011, English version of 22.02.2012) on “*Information Regarding the Taxation of the Church*”, and stating: “*The Church of Greece wishes to emphasise, on the one hand, the fact that **the exemption** from the tax on real estate for buildings used for worship, religious and public benefit purposes **has been in effect** since 2008 **for all religions and denominations** owning real estate in Greece and, on the other hand, the fact that, although Its revenues so far come mainly from however meagre pecuniary contributions offered to It by the faithful and are used for the maintenance of Its religious and public benefit foundations<sup>5</sup>, It **has never requested any kind of preferential tax treatment** in relation to the other tax-paying non-profit organisations of the country”.*

Even so, despite the expropriation and the plundering of the largest part of its property, the Orthodox Church of Greece did not cease to stand by local societies, persons in need, ailing, imprisoned, the youth, senior citizens. Here is a very recent example: on July 19, 2011, there took place a funeral service for an elderly Metropolitan of an insular Metropolitanate. The Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod at the time, who delivered the funeral oration, noted, among others :

*“Schools, kindergartens, sports facilities, social housing, foundations, cultural centres and others have been constructed or operating within areas of ecclesiastical or monastic property, which, at the exhortation of our Bishop, were ceded free of charge for this purpose. Even the opening up of roads and the creation of squares have taken place within church territory at the exhortation of our late Metropolitan to the benefit of the poor and of society more broadly. This is how the Church utilizes its property!”*

This is why all inaccuracies and lies regarding the issues of Church property, taxation of the Church and the payroll of the Orthodox clergy should at last cease once and for all.

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<sup>5</sup> The number of which exceeds 400 across Greece.

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In the early 5<sup>th</sup> century Empress Eudoxia, although owning large property, following the death of Patrician Theognostos, whom she herself had sent into exile, also took hold of his fortune, thus plunging his widow and orphans into poverty and misery. It was the Holy Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople at that time, who protected them, yet did not fail to castigate the callous Queen, an act which later cost him an exile.

Though owning vast immovable property, as, jointly with the Local Government agencies and Cooperatives, it possesses 60,443,500 acres, the modern Greek state pretends that it wishes to reinstate landless persons by means of the 1,292,300 acres still belonging to churches, monasteries, foundations and organizations of the Church !

You should read this brief study, if you wish to know the truth. On the basis of evidence, it debunks the well-cultivated myths regarding the supposedly legendary Church property, the payroll of Its clergy, and the alleged non-taxation of the Church.

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