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SACRED SPACES IN MYKONOS: A Resilient Faith Decimated by Time in a Corner of Greece?

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Famous for its refreshing winds, picturesque architecture and magical beauty, Mykonos is a small island on the southeastern part of the Aegean Sea, a piece of land that was once part of the archipelago of islands whose center was the neighboring island of Delos (i.e., "the Cyclades" or *Κυκλάδες*), cradle of Apollos and his twin sister Artemis according to Greek mythology. Today this area encompasses the islands of Andros, Ceos-Citnos, Milos, Mykonos, Naxos, Paros, Syros, Santorini (Thila) and Tinos.

This Greek paradise, originally populated by the Carians, Ionians, and other migrants of the Mediterranean Basin, and whose name derives from the son or grandson of Apollos, has been for years a destination for tourists from all over the world for its great attractions. One of them, characteristic of other islands of the Cyclades and which it is often looked at superficially, is the presence of numerous chapels, altars or temples, almost exclusively of the Christian Greek-Orthodox tradition. And when one has the privilege of visiting and touring this island, it is impossible not to agree with those who affirm that there is practically one church for every family.

Mainly from the Byzantine period, these precincts grab the visitors' attention but not as much as "the Church of Our Lady" (i.e., "Panagia") (ca. 1475) or "(the church) standing by the door" does (i.e., "Paraportiani"), precisely because it is located at the entrance of the Medieval

castle of Castro, in the bay of the town that bears the same name as the island (and that some call "Chora" to differentiate them).



Church Panagia Paraportiani

Among the many explanations given regarding this distinctive religious trait, it is said that the Mikonians, at some point, were required to build a church on their land before their own houses. To this we may add the desire of the islanders to honor the Virgin Mary or proclaim their faith visually. Others claim that these shrines were also built to guide boats dock at the pier safely. And there have also been those who have erected these structures to celebrate the realization of some miracle or to honor the death of a loved one.



Church Agios Nikolakis, built in honor of Saint Nicholas, protector of fishermen and sailors.

This trait worthy of a postcard invites a reflection beyond touristic interest or summer leisure plans. On the one hand, it reaffirms the principle that the presence of religion in every corner of the world is a constant of the history and culture of all peoples, even in the midst of the overwhelming influence of secularization and its many faces. Villas, settlements, ports and villas, in the past as in the present, continue to set apart physical

spaces to mediate their mystical faith, their ethereal projections to the afterlife, their sense of community, and that mysterious need to give and receive which seeks to connect with Something or Someone Superior, going beyond the confines of our modern cynicism and the rationality that accompanies it.



Iglesia Agia Kiriaki

On the other hand, when it is said that the majority of the population of this island are "Greek Orthodox" but, at the same time, the doors of these sacred enclosures remain locked and some of them are opened to the public only at the time of the Mass and for the benefit of a handful of elderly people, it is inevitable not to ask ourselves

- If the version of Christianity concretized in Mykonos, as in the neighboring islands and other parts of the world, is not simply a romantic relic with little or no relevance, starring by a faithful remnant that only grows during the holidays thanks to the participation of "nominal Christians" and curious tourists...
- If it is only a matter of time until the death of this branch of Christianity occurs as it happened with the pre-historical and polytheistic ancestors who dwelt in this charming little piece of land...
- If it is possible or even desirable to update to the twenty-first century the Greek-Orthodox beliefs (or any other religion in decline while others, inexplicably, grow exponentially) to prolong their lives a little and prepare them for other challenges around the corner to which relevant answers must be given...
- If the crosses, the bell towers and the pinnacles, surrounded by beautiful white houses with blue and red embroidery lying on the canvas of the coastal hills, are nothing more than markers of cultural identity which must be left alone...
- If those of us who embrace the remnants of religion or secularization are, after all, victims and beneficiaries of the law of supply and demand, in a society in which needs and desires at the service of entertainment, manipulated by an omnipotent system now digitized, are confused as if they meant the same thing...

In short, all to preserve human life while the sun rises and sets every day always waiting for better days, with its possibilities, surprises, and enigmas to be deciphered.



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