**73rd MEETING OF THE SNTS - OPENING SPEECH**

**Prometheus and Paul**

*Μr. President of the SNTS, Honorable Committee members and Officers, Esteemed colleagues,* On behalf of the Dean of the School of Theology of University of Athens, **Professor Apostolos Nikolaidis**, I am delighted to welcome you all to Athens! Welcome indeed to the cr**a**dle of democracy and of tragedy**!** ***Willkommen*** in the City where the church Fathers excelled in Rh**e**toric and Philosophy! Καλώς ήλθατε in the UNESCO **Book Capital** of the World for the year 2018, and indeed the **“Bible Capital”** of the World for this year!

The idea of holding this Meeting in Athens emerged on Patmos, the **i**sland of the Revelation, during the First Colloquium Ioanneum 2013. It was there when we, Christos Karakolis and I, decided to work hard towards bringing, with God’s blessing, the present SNTS Meeting to Athens, despite the **economic crisis tsunami** already hitting **hard** our country. Professor Galitis, our common mentor, recommended to us **Mr. George Dimopoulos**, Mrs Bessy Musulea and the rest of the Himalaya Travel. To this hard-working team the local organizing committee extends **their heartfelt thanks and gratitude**. Our colleague Lecturer Dr. Athanasios Antonopoulos and Mr Dimitrios Alexopoulos also contributed valuably. **Coming now to you, Michael Wolter,** President of our Society, I dare say that Athens has truly become like a **second Home** to you. Two years ago, the University of Athens and the Department of Social Theology conferred to you the title of **Honorary Doctor of the New Testament and Greek Letters**. Building a special relationship with Athens and the University of Athens, is something we truly wish for you all, dear Collea**g**ues!

Our Beloved Sisters and Brothers, Paul never wrote an **Epistle to Athens**. He never mentioned his experience from the *Kleinon Asti*, meaning the *Beautiful City,* although Athens as domicilium studiorum (Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.43) and a place of initiation in Eleusinian Mysteries, was the favorite destination of the grand tour of Roman elite (possibly also of κράτιστος Theophilos, the recipient of Luke - Acts). Neither did the Apostle of the Nations kiss Athens - based Christians, like Damaris or D**i**onysius the Areop**a**gite. Rather, it is the Corinthian household (**oikos)** of Stephanas which *the apostle proclaims to be the firstfruits of* ***A****chaia* (1 Cor. 16:15).Athens after all, will be the last city in Hellas to finally accept Christianity. Keep in mind the contrast between the City of Wisdom (Athena) and the City of Eros (Aphrodite): 3 Visits in Corinth, 5 Epistles, 50 - 100 Recipients. Paul’s visit in Athens is only known to us through L**u**ke. In Acts 17 the Antiochian doctor portrays the Tarsian evangelist as a **new Socrates[[1]](#footnote-2)** or, as I suggest, a **new Zeno[[2]](#footnote-3)**, the founder of the Stoicism who came **a**lso from East.

However, the spirit of “peregrinus” Paul is all over this city. We may find the ***Pauline Effect*** well within the **Titania** Hotel, our kind host, as well as further beyond.As such an example, as well as an avenue for inspiration, we will bring to your attention two Details on the fresco of the historic Main Building of the University of Athens (= <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeaFZQTcdA8>). To begin with, the capital figure on the fresco is **Otto I,** the Bavarian Prince who became the first modern king of Greece (1832-1862) in the age of only 17. Enthroned in an Olympian, **Zeu**s-like fashion[[3]](#footnote-4), Otto is depicted accompanied by the first Faculties of the University of Athens, personified as the classical Muses. With his right hand, Otto firmly **holds the hand of Justice (ΝΟΜΟΘΕΣΙΑ,** who in contrast to Themis, isn’t blind),while with his left one he ***calls note for Religion but for*** Philosophy (I suspect that especially **Ethic** is most likely to be implied[[4]](#footnote-5)). The fresco, designed (but not painted) by the Austrian Carl Rahl (1812 – 9 July 1865)[[5]](#footnote-6), extends over the entire forefront of the main University Building. The parallel sessions and dialogues it depicts, involve not only people from the Humanistic Studies, but people (men ***and*** women) who represent the bright spectrum of Reality. Myth and History, Arts and Sciences, Mind and S**o**ul are interacting in the search of the **ultimate Beauty, Happiness and Truth.** And this is the essence of the mission of ***Panepistimion*** especially in our own postmodern time[[6]](#footnote-7).

The architecture and the decoration of the University of Athens is indeed **a Synthesis of the opposites**. The ceremony hall (under the glances of the 9 Muses on its roof < University = *Museum*) combines elements of the Ionian temple and the Christian Basilica; the two banners are those of the armoured Athena[[7]](#footnote-8) and the heralds of the *crucified* Sofia (whose “Parthenon” was the “omphalos” of Constantinople): the three holy Hierarchs, the patrons of Greek - Christian Paideia (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus also known the Theologian, John Chrysostom)[[8]](#footnote-9), who carry the Evangelion (New Testament). The Persons, who are commemorated with statues outside of the Building, also represented different Ideologies - contrary Visions regarding the independent Greek states (comp. Rigas Feraios [< Rex from [Pherae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pherae)[[9]](#footnote-10)] or Patriarch Gregor V with Adamantios Korais[[10]](#footnote-11)), although almost everyone (except Korais) suffered a violent death[[11]](#footnote-12).

Coming now to the “great little” Details. The fresco begins with a painting of **Prometheus bringing the gift** of fire to an early humanity struggling for survival[[12]](#footnote-13). The minimality of clothing underlines the primeval state of the recipient (mankind), as well as the empathy of the benefactor (Prometheus), who is turning to the right. Now **on the far-right side of the *fresco***, exactly opposite to the Promethean painting, we find **the only Christian reference in the entire Composition**. We find Paul preaching near a burning altar before an audience of only four people, two men ***and* two women**. In contrast to the Promethean theme, the state of humanity is now different, m**i**lder, a clue outlined once again by the dressing and the stance of the figures. The burning altar seems to allude to the Athenian altar with the inscription *To an Unknown God* **and** the fire of Prometheus. Paul’s gift is addressed not only to the mind but **a**lso to the **heart** of his audience, who however encounter him with **mixed feelings.** We all know that the Promethean gift came at a great cost: The T**i**tan eventually became a Martyr on Mount Caucasus, in need for a saviour for himself[[13]](#footnote-14). Athenians of the Roman time proved to be quite reluctant to recognize in Paul a new Prometheus. Paul’s f**ie**ry Gift on Mars Hill, a God Judge of all Humanity through a Person who was crucified and resurrected from the dead, **didn’t find many followers**. And so, Paul simply quietly left the ever-vibrant city of Pallas-Athena. **Yet** this message of the new Prometheus and his fire has gathered us all together in this place two thousand years later.

To conclude: the final Paradoxon with this fresco is the following: The whole artistic synthesis, also widely known as “Laudatio Otto”, was completed **after the deposition, exile and death of king Otto I.** After Otto, no longer did the University call itself Ottonian; **National and Kapodistrian** became its new brand name. But the fresco with the **gi**gantic figure of the deposed monarch paradoxically remained safe and sound. The whole narrative of the University’s fresco **is about the following message**; Through openness and dialogue, **anyone,** irrespective of nationality, gender, social origins and personal convictions, can be a bearer of the **Hellenic and Pauline spirit of wisdom and civilization**; The study of the New Testament, not only these summer days in Athens, can serve as a beacon of hope especially in our postmodern Kosmos.

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. (2 Cor. 13:13 NTG 28: May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Ch**r**ist and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all!)

1. See my monograph *The Apostle Paul in Athens. Synchronic Interpretation of Acts 17,* Athens: Athos 2009, passim. Torsten Jantsch*. „*Sokratische*“* Themen in der Areopagrede*.* Apg 17*,*22*–*31 im Kontext der antiken Philosophiegeschichte*.* *Early Christianity* 8 (2017), 481–503. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [SDESPOTIS PAUL AND ZENO (Unpublished)](https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/SOCTHEOL144/%CE%A0%CE%91%CE%9D%CE%A4%CE%91%20%CE%A4%CE%91%20%CE%95%CE%98%CE%9D%CE%97Revised.doc) <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/?course=SOCTHEOL144> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. # Comp. the Greek Imation of [William Edward Gladstone – William Ewart Gladstone http://www.athenssculptures.com/2014/06/william-edward-glaston.html](http://www.athenssculptures.com/2014/06/william-edward-glaston.html) His statue is in front of University. At the Russian Church of Athens (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Trinity,_Athens>) the face of Paul (on Areopag) is this of Otto I !

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. During the Revolution the motto was “Liberty or Death”. During the first years of the Freedom, as the assassination of Kapodistrias proves, the motto was “Privileges or Death”. This remark comes from **Michalis Giochalas** and **Pavlos Gkoygiannos (**Art historians of the Department of History and Archaeology),

   <https://en.uoa.gr/announcements_and_events/view_event/guided_tours_of_the_national_and_kapodistrian_university_of_athens/>. See also <https://onedrive.live.com/?cid=055B263D99899BDF&id=55B263D99899BDF%215757&parId=root&o=OneUp> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Rahl> Note that Theology is *third* in the row *after* Medicine! See <http://www.perceptum.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Comp. *Christoph Stückelberger,* THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING A GLOBAL ETHICAL CULTURE, Ethics in Higher Education: Values-driven Leaders for the Future (Globethics.net Education Ethics Series) (Volume 1) [Divya Singh, Christoph Stückelberger], 31 – 57, 47: The triple A has to be replaced by a triple E (EEE): ethical excellence, environmental excellence, economic excellence (telling the economic truth of costs, including external costs). <https://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/20368389/GE_Education_Ethics_1_isbn9782889311644.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://www.uoa.gr/to_panepistimio/istoria_kai_prooptikes/to_labaro_toy_panmioy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Holy_Hierarchs> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigas_Feraios> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adamantios_Korais> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. The “highlight” are the monuments of students sacrificed in the wars of Greece (the “unfortunate” Greek - Turkish war 1897 and the I World War). See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vjIWwu3Wfc>

    <https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%95%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%81%CE%BA%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%CF%82_%CF%80%CF%8C%CE%BB%CE%B5%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%82_%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85_1897> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The same Theme dominates also in the Academy of Athens: <http://www.academyofathens.gr/el/building/interior> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. «Τοιούδαι μόχθου τέρμα μη τί προσδόκα πριν αν θεός τις διάδοχος των σων πόνων φανή, θελήση τ’ είς αναύγητον μολείν ‘Άιδην, κνέφαια τ’ άμφί Ταρτάρου βάθη» (Vers. 1041-1043 - Transl. «μην περιμένεις να λυτρωθείς από τους πόνους προτού θεός πάρει τα πάθια τα δικά σου πάνω του και με τη θέλησή του κατέβει στον ‘Άδη τον ανήλιαγο, στους άφεγγους του Ταρτάρου βυθούς»). Comp. Verses 772, 834, 848. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)