

ST ANDREW'S GREEK ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Four of the Best Years of My Life

Prior to getting married and having children, the best years of my life were spent in Sydney, while I was a student at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College¹ (the College). I am certain that many other graduates of the College would share the same feelings. The College is a special place for many reasons and I wish to provide readers and in particular prospective students with a personal insight as to what College life was like.



When we look back at our favourite memories through life, there will certainly be a number of summer days that we won't be able to forget. Summer always brings forth warm recollections of fun days at the beach, numerous water sports and other events that have a distinctive summer taste. My most memorable summer day however, was the day I left Melbourne to go and study at the College. I distinctly remember leaning against my suitcase on the interstate platform of Spencer Street station while waiting for the 6:45pm train for Sydney. It was such a memorable day because it earmarked the beginning of some of the best years of my life. Four years that provided me not only with my undergraduate degree, but more importantly with the Orthodox education that

currently and forever will shape my life. On that platform I also met three of my co-students that I would be studying and living with. Three co-students who along with the five other students in my graduation year would go on to become lifelong friends.

Location

When we arrived in Sydney on that hot February morning we learnt our new address: St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College (aka the College), 242 Cleveland Street, Redfern, New South Wales. An address which I, along with many graduates will always refer to as 'home' because not only was it so for four years of our lives, but also because it was at that address that our 'stoho' (the main intention of our lives) was clarified.

Based at the same location as the headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, the College's location in my opinion is the perfect position for such an institution. It sits immediately next door to the Royal Prince Alfred Park, south of the Sydney CBD (a one stop train ride) and a healthy walk from Sydney's Darling Harbour, with the University of Sydney only a short walk away.

The College itself, while it is an older building (built early last century), has had large amounts of money spent to maintain and renovate it, making it a beautiful, cosy place to live and study. While it is a small college compared to some of the bigger theological colleges, its size is more than ample for its purpose and numbers.

Prayer

Our College Chapel of Saint John the Evangelist and Theologian was the central place of prayer and worship for us as students during our studies at the College. It was also an essential and fundamental part of

¹ I will refer to Saint Andrew's Theological College as 'the College' throughout this article and for the rest of my life (not just for the purpose of this article). It is common practice for current students and graduates to refer to it as thus. I am not exactly sure why. I guess it is easier to actually say 'the College' rather than saying 'Saint Andrew's Theological College'. However I also think that anyone who has a strong affiliation with Saint Andrew's Theological College would agree that it becomes so endear to one's existence that it is forever perceived as 'the *par excellence* College of one's life. For this reason we refer to Saint Andrew's Theological College as 'the College.'

College life. During weekdays we attended and actively participated in Matins services in the mornings before lectures from 8:30am-9:00am and Vespers in the evenings after lectures from 4:00pm-4:30pm. This way, every day of lectures began and ended with prayer. This allowed us to live our studies from day to day as something more than just an academic experience. It became a way of life. Hence this meant that we were all expected to participate and share in the liturgical life of the College under the guidance of a Spiritual Father. We were also expected to do our best to lead a sacramental life. Consequently prayer and veneration played a vital and imperative role that was directly linked to our studies. In the words of Evagrios the Solitary 'If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.'

Living Within

Living and studying at the College was a fantastic experience. While I didn't feel this way exactly at the time, I now look back and appreciate every second. With the dormitory upstairs and the lecture rooms downstairs, one's mind and body were always within the walls of the College. This meant that while you would study in class and absorb as much as you could from your lecturers, you could talk and discuss with your fellow students what you've learnt, what you are learning and just about anything else outside of lectures. This in turn assisted greatly in the education process.

Furthermore, as students living within the College we learnt a new lifestyle to the one we were so accustomed to at our homes with our parents. We learnt to live in our new home with our new family and to take care of ourselves as our parents were not there to look after us anymore. We cooked and cleaned together. In turn, we learnt to study, pray and live together. We became more than just friends, mates, comrades and brothers. We became all of these combined. We became 'syntrophi'.²

Each of us had our own bedroom/dorm which we used for private study and of course for sleep. We also spent recreational time in our common room after dinner where we had many memorable experiences. Other times we went out together for dinner, to play sport, shop and attend the vespers of a parish. Looking back, it didn't really matter what we did or where we went. Our common connection to the Church and the College meant that as long as we were together, we were certain to have a great time.

Study

The College is a fully accredited through the Sydney College of Divinity. It holds strong academic standards and requirements as an institution of higher learning. As students we needed to be dedicated to our studies. While I found my studies at the College challenging at times, I would do it all over again without any doubt or second thought. I now wish I had the time that I had then to study. A time when my greatest concerns were studying sufficiently for exams, reading the correct texts and writing comprehensive essays.

The highlight of the studies at the College were without doubt, the lectures of His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos. A lover of learning and an academic scholar himself, his lectures were always the best part of our week of studies. Furthermore, the team of lecturers we had lecturing us were gifted scholars themselves who also inspired and encouraged us. We are in great debt to all of them for all that they taught us.

The College also holds a large collection of books in the College Library. According to the current College handbook there are over 13,000 monographs and 200 periodicals available in English and Greek. The library also has a full time librarian present to assist students with their educational research. It was very easy to lose track of time and get lost within the contents of a book while in the library. Its neat and well presented design and serene atmosphere made it a pleasant place to read and study.

Prospective Students

² I never recognised the importance of this word until Archbishop Stylianos analysed it in one of our lectures. He explained that originally it came from two words: 'sun' meaning 'with' or 'in company with' and 'trofh' meaning 'food'. Originally used as a term for people one ate with, it later took on its modern day meaning. Because we formed such strong friendships in the College and ate together every day, I like to use this word 'suntrofov' to refer to fellow students of the College.

The decision to study at the College is not one which should be taken lightly. To those who wish to study at the College my advice would be to firstly think carefully, long and hard about your decision as it is a decision which requires a lot of contemplation and deliberation. Prospective students should also consult their Spiritual Father and meet and discuss possible entry to the College with their local bishop. Additionally prospective students should prepare themselves for some long and hard study and contact the College Registrar (see below).

Conclusion

The College has a mini tradition which it has practiced, I believe, since its first graduates graduated in 1990. While quite simple in theory, its purpose is quite profound. Graduates, on the day of their graduation receive a small gift from the current students studying at the College. The gift itself is a simple pen (stainless steel) and it is not so much the pen that is significant. What is most important is that engraved upon the pen is the Greek word 'omogalakte' literally meaning 'of the same milk.' This pen is a symbolic reminder to all students who are graduates of the College. A reminder that they were fed 'the same milk from the same mother'. In other words, received the same theological and spiritual Orthodox education from the same College, the College, Saint Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College and are hence spiritual brothers in Christ.

Having said this, it is with great pride for the College that I complete this article using the pen given to me by my 'syntrophous' on the day of my graduation. Looking back on the greatest summer day and four of my best years of my life (aside from getting married and starting a family), I thank God for the opportunity to study at the College that has played such a pivotal role in my living.

God Bless

Dionysios (Dennis) Krinas

Graduate of Saint Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College

Recently the College has changed the structure of the course making the Bachelor of Theology available over three years instead of four and a Masters programme is also available. In addition the College also offers one-week intensive school held during school holidays (summer/winter) which are open and available to both males and females. For information regarding applications or for general enquiries contact the College Registrar, Mr Anastasios Kalogerakis:

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