

## Aphrodite: a Talk with Author Monica Cyrino

By Vasilis Papoutsis

IRVINE, CA – Dr. Monica Cyrino is a Professor of Classics at the University of New Mexico and her academic research centers on the erotic in Ancient Greek poetry.

While visiting the University of California Irvine to give a lecture, she spoke with The National Herald.

Prof. Cyrino said she fell in love with Ancient Greek poetry in her first year in college and decided to focus her academic studies on the Greek Classics. A prolific writer and a consultant on numerous film and television productions, Cyrino's first book was *In Pandora's Jar: Lovesickness in Early Greek Po-*



Classics Professor and author, Dr. Monica Cyrino

etry(1995). In Greek mythology Pandora, just like Eve, was the first woman on Earth. Zeus had ordered her creation as a punishment to the human race, after Prometheus stole fire from the gods.

"Pandora is the tool of the gods," she said, about the story's premise. Women bring beauty, love and most importantly life on Earth. But they also brought mortality, and the unleashing of the evils from Pandora's jar. "Mortality is the price to pay for all the beauty and love we experience." We have "highs and lows, no one gets a flatline anymore."

And yet Elpis, Hope, remained in the jar, "and we don't know why but, hope gives life a meaning."

Her book *Aphrodite* (2010) examines the importance of the Greek goddess of love for the Ancient Greeks as well as her enduring influence as a symbol

of beauty and sexuality in contemporary culture. She said "love comes from the outside, it attacks and takes you over," it is a "physical imposition from the outside and while it is very pleasurable it is also very painful. "When you are in love you are compromised, you are invaded. You are always aware of the presence of someone else." The book offers new insights into the ancient texts. She also is the author of a popular text book, *A Journey through Greek Mythology*(2008). Explaining the origin of the book she said, "I did not agree with some of the interpretations on the textbooks offered and I decided to write one with my own interpretations. I did not include any pictures on it to keep the cost down. Textbooks have gotten so expensive." She has been awarded the American Philological Association's Excellence in Teaching Classics award (1999).

Her book *Big Screen Rome*(2005) surveys several films on ancient Rome. She followed that with two volumes on the HBO series *Rome*, Season One and Two. The reception for her film books was enthusiastic and the demand for her services has increased since they were published. She is asked to coach, translate, and consult on a regular basis now.

At her lecture at UC Irvine titled "The Bible Epic as Action Movie: 'Maximal Projections' in Noah (2014) & Exodus (2014)." In her presentation, she explained that both these movies were produced and marketed as epic style action movies rather than movies with religious overtones. She also compared two movies, *Gladiator* and *Exodus*. The storylines and characters are almost identical, a successful commercial cinematic formula.

Over the years, Cyrino has led student tours to Greece both in Peloponnese and Northern Greece. About the current Greek crisis, she says "The European Union should act more like the United States of America. When states are in financial trouble in the United States the federal government would support those states. Germany's financial policies were not fair to the Greek government."

As she continues to lecture around the country, Dr. Cyrino is currently working on a new book about the Spartacus series, due out soon.

## Ithaca Church Celebrates its 50th Anniversary

By Evan C. Lambrou

ITHACA, N.Y. – Saint Catherine Greek Orthodox Church in Ithaca celebrated the 50th anniversary of its official church charter recently with a special event, to which the Saint Catherine's parish community had also invited the wider public. Local ministers and Orthodox Christian priests from the area, as well as professors from Cornell University and Ithaca College, attended.

Rev. Dr. George D. Dragas, professor of Patristics and Church History at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston, was the event's featured speaker. Father Dragas has represented the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem in scores of interfaith dialogues at the ecumenical level for more than 35 years.

"Christ, who is both human and divine, mediates between created man and the Uncreated God. What, then, is the Church? The Church is the Body of Christ, which implies that the Church also mediates between man and God, in order to help man enter into communion with the Creator. That means the world was built for the Church because the world is called to be part of the Body of Christ," Father Dragas told more than 100 people who had gathered to hear him speak this past November 21st about the life of the saints and ecclesiology of the Church.

"We are familiar with the fact that each of us has a physical and genetic composition. When we are physically conceived, we receive our biological DNA. But what about our spiritual DNA? What does that mean? During our physical conception and development in the womb, God stamps our souls with the Breath of Life. That is our spiritual DNA. And that is what makes human beings not only physical creatures, but spiritual beings, as well," he added.

**SACRED HISTORY**  
To mark the occasion, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America also sent his archiepiscopal greetings to Rev. Dr. Athanasios Parthenakis, pastor, and the Saint Catherine's parish community for the event:

"For the last 50 years, you have gathered humbly and joyfully before God in prayer. You have proclaimed the Gospel with power and conviction. You have taught the precepts of the



Alderman Seph Murtagh recently presented an official proclamation to St. Catherine Greek Orthodox Church in Ithaca for the 50th anniversary of the church's official charter. L-R: Fr. Tom Parthenakis (church pastor), Alderman Murtagh, Ann Bantuvanias (church president) and Rev. Dr. George Dragas, the event's featured speaker.

Orthodox Christian faith, through your words and deeds, to each generation... As a parish of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit under the omophorion of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit – and within the canonical jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, which is an eparchy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – you share in a sacred history as an ecclesial community of the Great Church of Christ. On this day, when the Rev. Dr. George D. Dragas will be addressing your community, I pray that you will be enriched by his knowledge and strengthened in the understanding of the direct and unbroken link the Greek Orthodox Church shares with the Holy Apostles themselves. I offer you my heartfelt best wishes for a festive 50th anniversary celebration," His Eminence wrote.

Alderman Joseph Murtagh of Ithaca's 2nd Ward (where the church is situated) presented the St. Catherine's community with an official proclamation from the City of Ithaca:

"Whereas the Apostle Andrew founded the Holy Mother Church of Constantinople almost 2,000 years ago; whereas the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is an eparchy of the Holy Mother Church; whereas Saint Catherine's Church in Ithaca, incorporated under the Archdiocese, is this year celebrating the 50th anniversary of her official church charter; and whereas, Saint Catherine's Church commemorates the memory of her patron saint each year on November 25th... now therefore, I, Svante L. Myrick (mayor of Ithaca), do hereby proclaim November 25th, 2015 as 'Saint Catherine Greek Orthodox Church Day' in the City of

Ithaca, New York," the proclamation states.

Local Greek-Americans had started settling in the Ithaca area in the mid-to-late 1890's. By the early 1950s, they decided they needed a church of their own. After drawing straws, the late Peter Poulos – owner/operator of the former Pop's Place, a popular eating establishment in Collegetown – named the new parish in honor of his mother.

**Saint Catherine Church started holding services at its present location in 1967, and has been faithfully serving Orthodox Christians ever since...**

Initially a mission of the Annunciation Church in Endicott (now located in Vestal), Saint Catherine Church became a fully incorporated parish of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in 1964, receiving its official church charter from the Archdiocese in September of 1965. The charter was signed by then Archbishop Iakovos of North & South America.

Located on the northeast corner of Seneca and Geneva Streets in downtown Ithaca, the building that is now Saint Catherine's was designed in the late 19th Century by William Henry Miller, who studied under renowned Cornell University Professor of Architecture Charles Babcock. Originally built in 1884 for Ithaca's First Congregational Society, which relocated to Cayuga Heights in 1960, the historic edifice was also where Ithaca College held its music and performing arts programs from 1960 to 1966.

By that time, the local Greek-American community, which had once held services in the Saint John's Episcopal Church rectory at Cayuga Street on Saturdays, was holding services at their first church in Collegetown (the former Cosmopolitan Club on Bryant Avenue). They purchased the historic downtown property from IC and reconverted it to a house of worship. The building's original organ and stained glass windows, one of which was donated by the Treman family to the Congregational Church back in the early 20th Century, are still in their original place.

Saint Catherine Church started holding services at its present location in 1967, and has been faithfully serving Orthodox Christians at the Cornell University and Ithaca College communities, as well as the local Greek American community, ever since. The church today also has several non-Greek members. Dr. John Bezergian is treasurer of the parish council, for example, and Dr. Steve Hoskins is the choir director.

Four sons of the parish graduated from Holy Cross, three of whom went onto become clergymen: the late Metropolitan Epiphanius (Gus) Perialas; Poulos' son, the Very Rev. Seraphim (John) Poulos, pastor of Saints Nicholas, Constantine & Helen Church in Roseland, New Jersey; and Rev. Steve Dalber, pastor of Saint Nektarios Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Evan Lambrou was Managing Editor of *The National Herald* in 2004. A lifelong member of Saint Catherine Church and graduate of Holy Cross, he was the chief organizer of the Church's 50th anniversary event.

## Greek-Am. Gymnasts Sign w/ Div. 1 Univs

Men's gymnastics is a sport struggling to survive in the wake of Title IX. With fewer than 16 colleges fielding men's teams, the odds of receiving a scholarship or even a spot on a team is slim. Yet this year, however, two Greek-American young men defied those odds and signed with NCAA Division I Teams. Socrates Gavallas and Sebastian Sembos Quiana are excited about their recent offers, and are looking forward to joining their college teams this fall.

Socrates, a senior at Brick Township High School in New Jersey, trains at Monmouth Gymnastics under Coach Yuriy Amino. He accepted a scholarship to The University of Michigan. Sebastian, a senior at River Dell High School, also in New Jersey, trains at US Gymnastics Development Center II under Coach Genadi Shub. He accepted a scholarship to The University of Illinois.

These are not easy feats. Their hard work and dedication were rewarded but not without years of training. Each started gymnastics at a young age and passed on participating in more popular boy's sports. Gymnastics is not a seasonal sport, and it is not for the indifferent. They train 6 days a week, 4 hours a day, 51 weeks a year. Despite all their time in the gym, both boys

are recognized as Academic All American Athletes.

Socrates and Sebastian have known each other for years, having met at meets their teams attended. After some time, the boys began to know their competitors. Sebastian remembers his mother pointing out Socrates when they were younger and stating, "There is another Greek boy doing gymnastics."

After some time, they started talking and quickly became friends. This summer they attended gymnastic training camps together at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was a fun time and a chance to introduce themselves to college coaches while experiencing college campus life.

This fall, Socrates and Sebastian were recruited by several universities. Socrates received offers from Michigan and Iowa; Sebastian received offers from Michigan, Penn State and Illinois.

The recruiting process is very competitive and strictly regulated by NCAA rules.

In addition to being gymnasts, both young men have strong ties to the Greek community. Sebastian is a member of GOYA at St. Nicholas in Wyckoff, NJ having graduated from their

Greek School and playing on their church basketball and soccer teams, unbeknownst to his gymnastic coach.

Socrates is a member of St. Barbara's parish in Toms River, NJ where he participates in GOYA, Greek dancing and is a graduate of their Greek School.

Socrates and Sebastian credit their supportive parents and their Greek family values for helping them achieve their dreams. Hard work, dedication and self-discipline are traits they found all around them and ready to emulate.

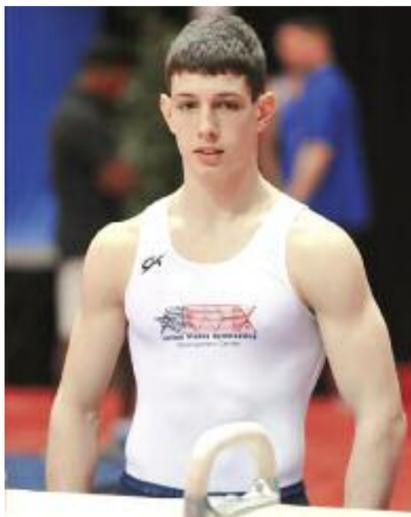
Coincidentally, both hope to attend medical school and are pursuing majors headed in that direction. Socrates plans to major in BioChemistry, and Sebastian in BioEngineering.

This year's competition season is about to begin. Socrates and Sebastian will see each other at a couple of meets and if all goes well at the US Junior Olympic National Championships in Battle Creek, Michigan this May. They have qualified for this prestigious competition several years in a row.

Once in college, the two will be competing in The Big Ten conference against each other. Despite their competition at meets, the boys know they will remain friends.



Elite Greek-American scholar-athlete Socrates Gavallas (L) who will attend U. of Michigan,



and Sebastian Sembos Quiana, who will go to U. of Illinois, are excited about college.

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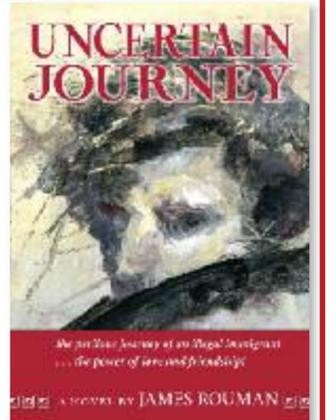
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