



## Technology, Art, Orthodoxy and Hellenism

*Konstantine Buhler*

This past June (2014), I had the honor to be the first Orthodox person in Stanford University's 120-year history to deliver the only student speech during the Stanford University Commencement weekend. This was particularly an honor because the student speech is supposed to be spiritually oriented. Last year a Jewish verse was included and the ceremony always includes various spiritual leaders. The keynote addresses of the weekend were by philanthropists such as Bill and Melinda Gates, a world-renowned Buddhist monk, and a very popular professor. There were about 5,000 people in the Baccalaureate audience, and for eight minutes, I had the opportunity to have a wonderful adventure with them. There were laughs, and many people told me they cried as my speech had a relatively serious tone about loss, memory, and belonging.

Initially, when asked to write this essay, I was a bit hesitant to talk about my modest successes. However, I thought it was pertinent because being Greek and Orthodox are central to whatever success I have achieved. They certainly teach me to work hard. Greeks and especially Greek Americans work hard. I had the joy of being raised in large part by my Greek-born grandparents. I grew up with their and my parents' moral guidance. They gave me the heart of an immigrant and the benefits of a third-generation American.

Both of my parents are American-born, but only my mother is of Greek descent. My *papou* was born in the town of Lidoriki in central Greece. My *yiayia* was born in a small village in the Peloponnesus just outside of Pylos. My father is not positive about his exact ancestry; he is likely half Swiss-German and half Norwegian. This explains my blonde hair and blue green eyes. Although at heart he is very Greek. My mother and father are in the fields of law and business, respectively. My sister Eunice is a law

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student at Northwestern. She is brilliant and I was lucky to share two years at Stanford with her.

I grew up in Chicagoland. My parish is Ascension of the Lord in Lincolnshire, Illinois. I'm very close to that community and have many friends there. The youth leader of that time, Alex Magdalinos, was central in keeping me connected to the community throughout my university years, a relatively hard time, spiritually. My major was Management Science and Engineering and I minored in art history. Although there are vast differences in my major and minor, I absolutely love both of them. Each of them is really about understanding the big picture while being able to identify and interpret key details. They manifest in beautifully different ways. I believe this appreciation of the macro and the micro is a Greek trait, informed by philosophers as far back as Plato, not being limited by the immediate physical world, and maintained by the appreciation that Orthodoxy affords us.

I am very interested very interested in technology (just visited the wonderful Archimedes museum in Greece) and am particularly interested in its impact on government and businesses. I hope to be a problem solver my whole life, more and more by using technology to solve big problems. My first experience with entrepreneurship was Always Ready Kids (ARK), which I started when I was twelve-years-old. It grew to the world's premiere youth disaster preparedness organization. Its mission is to help young people be more prepared for emergencies. I had been inspired by my aunt, a 9/11 survivor. I had the honor of being a keynoter at a commission for President Obama and Congress and at the World Conference on Disaster Management. After this experience of making something out of nothing, I fell in love with entrepreneurship. But it is no surprise, after all, Greece has the highest rate of self-employment in Europe. Moreover, my father was an entrepreneur, as were my grandfathers and great-grandfathers (if you consider goat-herds entrepreneurs, as I do). I prefer to work on a great team than to work alone, but being Greek makes me unafraid to do something different.

I was a Mayfield Fellow in 2013, which involves a nine-month work-study program designed to develop techniques for growing technological companies. There are twelve Fellows chosen at Stanford. I also had the joy of running the Stanford Orthodox Christian Fellowship and Stanford Venture Capital Club (SVCC) this past year. The SVCC is twelve technical students who basically do consulting for some of the best venture capital firms in Silicon Valley. We are paid to do market research, technical analysis, and product testing. Most of the group members are engineers. I believe all of them are brilliant and I am proud that some are my best friends.

In first part of 2014, I worked in Italy with its largest start-up accelerator, H-Farm, which is located in the northeast Veneto region district. I managed a team of fourteen in a small organization of thirty students doing consulting for clients throughout Italy. My clients include Salvatore Ferragamo, Moncler, and Santa Margherita winery. I spent the summer in Greece, visiting friends, revisiting my roots and relaxing. In the fall, I began working on a joint Masters in Computer Science at the Stanford School of Engineering and a Masters in Business Administration at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. When I graduate and return to Chicago, I hope to be able to contribute to a team of high-performing technologists and investors.

I wrote earlier that being Greek and Orthodox have been central to my modest successes. My faith gives me guidance and strength. My culture gave me roots. I have been fortunate for elders with whom I could talk seriously. I am very grateful for this heritage and excited to hear how it has also affected other young Greek Americans. If any young people want to be in touch with me, I am available at [buhler@stanford.edu](mailto:buhler@stanford.edu).

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