

# A Greek Evangelical View of the Greek Economic Crisis

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I'm glad to provide a guest post by Dr. Myrto Theocharous (M.A. Wheaton College. Ph.D Cambridge Uni ), Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at the Greek Bible College in Athens. She provides some reflections from Habakkuk on the Greek economic crisis from the vantage point of a Greek evangelical.

## **A Greek Evangelical View of the Greek Economic Crisis**

The Greek debt crisis, while tragic, affords the opportunity to face hitherto hidden dilemmas for evangelicals. Parallel to the prophet Habakkuk's view, the problem is both national and global. On the one hand there is the national ethical degradation. Greece is a nation which has learned to operate in its daily dealings through unlawful means, a situation which was often purposefully left unnoticed by government officials and the country's leadership as this allowed them to pursue their own corrupt schemes undisturbed. These schemes included feeding off EU grants and loans, but also taxation from those who were not in a position to hide their incomes (usually those at the bottom), while at the same time enjoying political asylum. This cycle of corruption had become the established way of survival in the country and it was very difficult for anyone to do business without participating in one measure or another in this game. Businesses that refused to "bribe" their way in were easily marginalized and lost in bureaucracy.

On the other hand, as Habakkuk also observed in his time, the oppression comes from outside. Greece is one of the few countries that faced occupation for centuries. Upon escaping from Ottoman rule, the Greeks were faced not only with World Wars, but also civil wars, dictatorships and multiple Turkish threats (all in the last century) with each of these leaving irrecoverable wounds and a deep suspicion of government. The euro did bring some development for the country's infrastructure... but much got lost in other pockets—yet no one at that level is ever punished.

In the crisis that we face today, although all have sinned, some have sinned to become wealthy and some have sinned to survive. Lots of Greeks see that not everyone is paying to make things right, thus perpetuating an unjust system where the elite always manage to escape with their funds unscathed. It is the lower strata of society that have to carry the burden for the sins of the powerful: their salaries are slashed,

thousands have lost their jobs, cannot pay for their rent, stores are closing down one after the other – all sheep to the slaughter for saving the banks.

How does the evangelical religious minority react to this? On the one hand, the traditional approach continues: the church remains focused on spiritual issues and individual guilt, while passively submitting to the government (appealing to Romans 13) and trusting the EU's "roadmap" on how to get out of the financial mess. Some tend to emphasize the church's "heavenly" citizenship and the imminent coming of Christ, which render political involvement futile. Evangelistic efforts and charity continue, both of which focus on saving individuals from the clutches of what seems to be an irredeemable society. Without discounting the traditional approach, some are beginning to place greater focus on systemic evil, assessing what should be the level of their political involvement and what direction it should take. For some the evil lies in the productivity-killing corrupted socialist system of Greece, while for others it is to be found in the poverty-generating greed inherent in global capitalism. Theological and political issues are thus discussed with an acute sense of urgency, as previous perspectives are now being put to the test in life-altering ways; there is no doubt that all of us will emerge from this changed. While there is currently no unified viewpoint or course of action among Greek evangelicals, the crisis is demanding a reevaluation of the church's role in the political sphere, something we must all pursue in open and deep scriptural reflection in order for the church to be relevant to our troubled world. As the world learns from the Greek debt crisis, let us hope the lessons learned by Greek evangelicals will be heard and heeded by believers in countries whose turn for crisis has not yet come; for as Habakkuk assures us, it certainly will.

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