



Welcome  
to Athens

*by George Athanassiadis*

*President of the Hellenic Olympic Committee*

On behalf of the Hellenic Olympic Committee and all Greeks, I cordially greet and welcome the representatives of the participating countries at the 80th Session of the International Olympic Committee to this land, cradle of the Olympic spirit. The Greek people bids you welcome in its country with the same feelings as its ancestors, back in ancient times, received the sacred messengers from Elis announcing the armistice, joyous message of the Olympic Games.

▲ *Above, Herod Atticus Theatre where the opening ceremony of the 80th IOC Session will take place.*

We think of you as the apostles, agents and crusaders of the moral principles and ideal of modern Olympism, and we greet you as the artisans of the work of the International Olympic Committee which aims to encourage noble sports rivalry and to spread the Olympic spirit so that it may act as a catalyst in this tired world and so that peace, love and friendship may reign between peoples.

The first centenary has almost been reached since the enlightened French nobleman, Pierre de Coubertin, a visionary and admirer of the immortal Hellenic spirit, renovated the institution of the Olympic Games.

*(Continued on page 271)*

*(Continued from page 249)*

Coubertin's achievement constitutes a truly historical fact, as well as a landmark in the course of man's evolution. For in this way, the opportunity arose of passing on the sacred flame of the Olympic Games that the ancient Greeks preserved for 1200 years with an untiring strength and religious devotion, attracted by the supreme sports exploits and the institution's noble capacity for educating young people.

The Olympic idea flowered and grew in the green, wooded valley of Olympia. This is the Olympic ground—that is to say where a unique centre of civilisation was born in ancient times and where for twelve centuries the human spirit developed in strength and dignity with sacred respect.

The modern Olympic idea has managed to survive two world wars. This is not purely by chance since Olympism is a "living and virile" philosophy due to the fact that it retains its incorruptible principles—simple, understandable and acceptable by everyone. Olympism represents a noble struggle as the inspiration and motivation for a life based on supreme and good ideals.

All of us who are in the service of the Olympic idea believe that through devotion to our task we shall help peoples to realise that we form a community within the free world, closely linked by the five Olympic rings, and that our objectives consist in contributing to mutual respect and understanding, and to real friendship among all men so that peace, happiness and optimism may reign on earth.

If the ancient Greeks succeeded in uniting Greeks who were spread around the Mediterranean basin, why should we not also fight with the Olympic idea, adapted to present-day concepts, so that the world may turn into a peaceful community ?

Greece is delighted since it is always ready to offer the simple olive branch as a universal symbol of peace, love and friendship. I welcome the members of the 80th Session of the International Olympic Committee with the Hellenic conviction that Olympia, with its immortal spirit, is with us always as a brilliant guide which contributes to our work.

G.A.

