

## Editor's Preface

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The essays in this volume were delivered at the Third Annual Conference of the Sophia Institute in December 2010 at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The theme of that conference, "Power and Authority in Eastern Christian Experience," brought forth a diverse group of scholars who contributed their perspectives on the ways the Eastern Orthodox Church, in its broadest sense, has negotiated the notions of power, authority, (dis)obedience, and resistance over time and space. These insightful essays promise to draw the Orthodox world into a dynamic and productive discourse.

This volume then can be seen as evidence of the conference's scholarly merits and of the creative energy exerted by Orthodox thinkers in generating the momentum to educate, debate, and further an understanding of our faith on important issues. Some of the authors hold positions in academia, while others are graduate students or independent scholars. All are exceptionally qualified to contribute their intellectual understanding of the Eastern Orthodox experience.

The essays are grouped together under three broadly conceived themes. The first group deals in whole or in part with power and authority in ancient texts and tradition. In his essay, John A. McGuckin, president of the Sophia Institute, offers a sophisticated and nuanced analysis of the New Testament sense of the Kingdom. He elaborates upon the covenant relationship of divine *Exousía* as authority as it is intricately connected to the nature of the Kingdom or *Basileia tou Theou*. Drawing upon the works of Plato, Socrates, and Jacques Derrida in her analysis of the development of emerging literary genres in late antiquity, Stamenka Antonova demonstrates the ways in which the 'sub-culture' of the Egyptian-Christian desert movement negotiated religious power and authority. Alexis Torrance addresses issues of power and authority by providing scriptural examples of how the Eastern Christian tradition has promoted and protected the concept of spiritual direction from spiritual abuse of power throughout its history. In his essay, he analyzes the spiritual director's practice of "self-abasement, humility, and love" as the foundation for safeguarding spiritual direction. The next three essays in this group offer a critical assessment of ethics and canon law. Seraphim Danckaert examines the canons promulgated at the Council in Trullo to

illustrate the growth of Christian theologians' dependence on patristic texts and Scripture as a source of authority. Like Danckaert, Alexander Rentel grounds his research in the *corpus canonum* as an authoritative source to examine the question of primacy in the Church. Rentel discusses the nature of the relationship between bishops, synods, and their metropolitans and how that relationship is defined within the intertextual "dialogue" that exists in canon law as well as with direct engagement within the life of the Church. In a similar fashion, Theodor Damian examines the life of St. Cyprian of Carthage and his treatise, *De unitate ecclesiae*, which grounds its authority in foundational biblical texts. In his essay, he expounds on Cyprian's approach to the problem of the unity of the Church and how it is intricately related to the role and position of the bishop within a historical context. Georgia Williams' exploration of hierarchy as fractal in the theology of Dionysios the Areopagite rounds out this first group of essays. The author attends to our "natural suspicion of hierarchy" and develops a compelling argument for understanding Dionysian fractal hierarchy as "radically dynamic and therefore...constitutive of personal freedom and personal empowerment." Like the other authors in this group, Williams turns the rigid, oppressive assumptions of hierarchy, power, and authority, on their head to position them within the Orthodox experience immanent in God's love and creative energy.

The second group of essays considers the relationship between church and state. In his careful analysis of St. Gregory the Great's correspondence with the Byzantine emperor Maurice, George Demacopoulos, Co-Founding Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Program at Fordham University, compellingly demonstrates how Gregory appropriated the language of empire to subvert imperial authority in order to claim and assert the Church's authority in late antiquity. Likewise, A. Edward Siecienski, professor of Byzantine studies, traces examples of 'holy disobedience' to secular and ecclesiastical authorities throughout Orthodox Christian history. He concludes by offering that resistance in our present time to secular and/or religious authorities is not only legitimate but even necessary if either or both violate the teachings of the Church. Kim McCann establishes the far-reaching influence of the teachings of the Desert Fathers on the Insular Isles, an area that today comprises Ireland, England, Wales, and Scotland. McCann shows how the Irish legal framework of *sóerad*, the 'right-ordering' in the relationship between the Church and State, was manifested in the Columban tradition. Nikolas Gvosdev, a leading expert in national security affairs at the US Naval War College, brings us into twenty-first century Russia and Ukraine, where political leaders draw

from “usable pasts,” including an embracing of Orthodox traditions and symbols, to forge support for a new political culture.

The third group of essays explores power and authority through the interaction between church, society, and culture over time. V.K. McCarty reveals the ministry of the Deacon Phoebe as representative of authority exercised in the early history of the Church. McCarty rightly concludes that in our time “restoring the female diaconate would reflect a truer understanding of the charism of the New Testament era Deacon.” In his essay, David J. Dunn draws upon Sergei Bulgakov’s work to offer a new framework for understanding the concept of *symphonia* in a secular context. Dunn demonstrates that *symphonia* must function as an ecclesiology in which the Church is bound to engage and embrace modern secular culture. Fevronia K. Soumakis offers an historical analysis of the role of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in shaping the trajectory of the teacher training institute at St. Basil’s Academy, in Garrison, NY during the period 1959-1973. She demonstrates how the church hierarchy defined the physical and ideological space for Greek American women within the limits of the community parish. Frank Dobbs boldly articulates the contemporary challenges facing the Orthodox Church, and like McCarty, argues, among other things, for the full inclusion of women in the life of the Church. Advocating for the inclusion of women in the female diaconate, Eftychios Phil Eftychiadis constructs his argument around the principles of Orthodox contextual theoethical thought, and an understanding of new contexts or *praxes* that have the potential to re-energize the Church’s ministry according to the needs of modern society.

The final section is composed of analyses of ‘received books’ by our Sophia reviewers: William Ephrem Gall, Paul Knitter, Vicki Petrakis, and Sergey Trostyanskiy. I am most grateful to the authors of this volume and especially to the Very Reverend Professor John A. McGuckin for entrusting me with the task of organizing the essays in this collection. My own understanding of the many complex layers of the Eastern Orthodox experience and its relation to the concepts of power and authority has been greatly enlarged and deepened. I do not believe this volume necessarily constitutes the final word on the subject addressed. The emergence of a reflective scholarship through the Sophia Institute’s *Studies in Orthodox Theology* continues to show great promise. The work presented here is significant because it is a serious reflection of the Orthodox Christian experience by a dynamic group of Orthodox scholars, leading experts in their fields as well as practitioners. Orthodox experience finds its essence in the power and authority immanent in the Holiness of God. This work is one example of what is

demanded of us in consequence , the creative expression of that restless divine energy.

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