

President's Preface

The papers in this volume derive from the Second Annual Conference of the *Sophia Institute*, a research forum dedicated to issues of concern for the Eastern Orthodox Church. Fellows of the Institute and other invited members have gathered annually in New York, for several years past, to consider a general theme of significance, and consider how a faithful attention to deep Orthodox traditions can be correlated to issues that remain of enduring social import, and often enduring problematic. This gathering of scholars to speak for, and out of, Orthodoxy's old wisdom is one of the chief reasons for the existence and continuance of the *Sophia Institute*. Just as the Journal *Put* became a voice for the Russian Paris Exiles of the Soviet era, and achieved accomplishments beyond its modest resources, so too the small beginnings of a formal gathering of Orthodox intelligentsia in the New World may be expected to produce an impressive harvest in due time; in God's *Kairos*. The *Sophia Institute* exists to put these young (mainly so) Orthodox thinkers together, and to fashion a habit of consensual approach to major issues that address ecclesial traditions in an age of unprecedented change. The results of the first conference, addressing Orthodoxy and the issue of women's ministry in the Church, appeared in 2009 from Theotokos Press, New York (the imprint of the Sophia Institute), edited by J M Lasser, and entitled 'Women in the Orthodox Church: Past Roles, Future Paradigms.' This present volume, ably edited by Matthew Pereira, and with editorial assistance from Amy Barbour, continues the series 'Studies in Orthodox Theology' with select papers from the Sophia Conference of December 2009; one dedicated to the theme of Philanthropy.

The scholars approached the concept from a variety of angles: covering many aspects of historical as well as contemporary interest. The resulting synthesis brings together a deep overview of how Orthodoxy thinks about these things. The Western Churches have, over this past century, developed significant avenues of thought towards divine and human philanthropy; some of which have gained wide currency: to take Liberation Theology as one prominent example. The

West's experience in creating a liberationist perspective on matters of social and religious justice has been helped along by a (generally) favorable attitude to the potential of Marxist analysis for aiding Christian reflection. The experience of the Christian East, in the same period, on the other hand, has left it with a highly jaundiced view of the credibility, intellectual or otherwise, of Marxist systems. Too many of Orthodoxy's own intellectuals had 'too close an encounter' with Marxist principles in the course of the 20th century to allow liberationism anything like a similar intellectual underpinning in Eastern Christian thought. Several commentators have noticed how Orthodoxy, as a result, does not have a discretely packaged 'social theory' (comparable, let us say, to the extensive range of social-theological documents produced by the Roman Catholic tradition in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries). But if it does not have a detailed social dossier, Eastern Orthodoxy certainly has a 'way of thinking' about such central matters; for they are fundamental to the Evangelical *Kerygma*.

In this volume, several strands of that complex 'way of thinking' are brought together. A typical stress, so it seems to me, is that Orthodoxy will insist, time and again, that human philanthropy cannot be separated from the Divine Philanthropy that inspires, underpins, and models it. The order of two parts of the syntax is important: 'Love the Lord God with your whole heart and soul, and love your neighbour as yourself.' The Divine Philanthropy of the Economy of Salvation, is the model for the energy (*energeia*) of compassion among men and women inspired by Christ. For the Orthodox, it is the *Charis*, the grace, of the risen Lord operative in the Church; an energy of the Holy Spirit making up the Body. To that extent, the exercise of love, the existence of a powerful and central dynamic of compassion in the daily (as well as the international) affairs of the Church, so it seems to me, is rightly to be understood as one of the 'essential marks of the Church' (*Notae ecclesiae*). We have in the past given great stress to the 'four marks' of ecclesiality: 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic.' Perhaps we ought to add in a fifth today: that the Church is simply not Church, if it is not shining and radiant with Christ's own mercy and compassion in the otherwise so-cold world of Man's inhumanity to Man.

A common theme of many of the papers is that Philanthropy in Orthodox culture is not merely an ethical or a societal phenomenon: rather that it is part of the great *Mysterion* of Christ's presence in the world. Orthodoxy has, for centuries, resisted Augustine's sharp categories of the distinctions between nature and grace; seeing the 'world' not as merely some 'natural' order parallel with a divine blessing: but more as a sacramental reality that is intrinsically graced, holy, infallibly permeated with divine blessing. Not surprisingly, there is much stress here that Philanthropy is not first and foremost a *desideratum* of social polity, but more in the domain of a deep creation blessing: part of the Kingdom, both here and in the age to come. Philanthropy is thus seen as a highly charged Eschatological reality: an aspect of the matter that, possibly, has not been so far sufficiently addressed in other theologies of social compassion. From these papers there also emerges a strong, and again distinctively Orthodox, insistence that Philanthropy cannot be separated from the Altar. It is a Eucharistic mystery just as the Church itself is.

I have been instructed, moved and inspired by this collection of papers from such a range of Orthodox thinkers and practitioners. Our book is not the last word on the subject: but it is a splendid beginning; and if it inspires someone to make a more profound and extensive monograph dedicated to the theme, offering the Eastern Church at this important time of rebuilding and reconsideration of its social role (in an East that labours to repair so much infra-structural damage, and a West that labours to shine out from the bushel-measure of so much secularism) we will have accomplished more than we set out to do. In the meantime this volume stands as a small witness to the most pressing question: How does Christian Philanthropy articulate itself in Orthodox eyes?

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