

Alexandrian Legacy

A Critical Appraisal

Edited by

Doru Costache, Philip Kariatlis
and Mario Baghos

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To His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos of Australia
Εἰς πολλὰ ἔτη, Δέσποτα

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INTRODUCTION

Most chapters included in this volume were originally offered as contributions for two successive St Andrew's Patristic Symposia, held in 2012 and 2013, convened by two of the three editors and hosted by St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College, a member institution of the Sydney College of Divinity (Sydney, Australia). These symposia primarily focused on the personalities and writings of two Alexandrine theologians, St Athanasius and St Cyril. It is for this reason, naturally, that more space is allocated to these illustrious Church fathers rather than on other representatives of that tradition. Of the thirty-seven contributions to the 2012 and 2013 symposia, from both Australian and international scholars, a selection of ten essays are included herein together with four more (namely the first, the second, the third and the eighth) from both geographically closer and more distant friends of the College. These latter contributions fill gaps in the 'narrative' of this volume. Except for the first one, a brand new essay, all the chapters included in this volume have been initially published, after peer review, in *Phronema*, the scholarly journal of St Andrew's, and are now offered in revised form. Indeed, it must be mentioned that *Phronema* has been the main publishing outlet for the proceedings of the symposia since its 2010 edition to this day. For each contribution, we have indicated where it was originally published and the extent to which it has been revised for the present collection—ranging from slight stylistic adjustments to additions of bibliography and thorough rewritings. In relation to the first contribution included in this volume, it is published here after undergoing independent peer review. Our wholehearted gratitude goes to all the excellent scholars who, at various stages, have offered their 'blind' feedback.

The volume is structured in four parts. The first part gathers contributions on two earlier Alexandrines, Clement and Origen, who broke new grounds in their immediate context and set the parameters for theological, hermeneutical and spiritual developments in later centuries. The second and the third parts address matters pertaining to the major Alexandrian fathers whose contributions constituted the focus of the patristic symposia, namely saints Athanasius and Cyril, who flourished in the fourth and fifth century, respectively. Well known for their tremendous input to the theological debates of their time, the chapters dedicated to these saints

address their contributions to both theology—specifically, triadology, christology, pneumatology, and soteriology—and other areas of the early Christian experience, such as spirituality, pastoral work, philosophy, exegesis, and the apologetic discourse. The last part of the volume explores the place of various representatives of the Alexandrian tradition within the history of Christian thought, from the reliance of Clement and St Athanasius on several early Christian antecedents, in terms of the apologetic discourse, to some later, Byzantine and modern influences of St Athanasius and St Cyril in terms of the spiritual anthropology. So structured, the present volume focuses on the legacy of Christian Alexandria—more specifically some of its representatives from the second half of the second century to the first half of the fifth century—and aspects of its significance for the broader ecclesial tradition. Now, let us look more closely at the contributions included in this volume.

The first part, *Early Alexandrians*, presents two chapters: one on Clement, the first great Alexandrian theologian whose writings have been preserved, and a second on Origen, the first great Christian interpreter of Scripture. Bogdan G. Bucur's contribution, "Hierarchy, Eldership, Isangelia: Clement of Alexandria and the Ascetic Tradition" points out that Clement was the first Christian author to depict early Christian urban dwelling in a desert-like manner. The relevant phrase, "as in a desert", is taken to signify (much like Paul Evdokimov's notion of "internalised monasticism") the inherent 'monastic' character of the Christian experience. Consequently, the chapter discusses the fact that Clement's writings anticipate later developments in monastic spirituality, referred to, and appreciated, by eminent theorists of the ascetic life, such as Evagrius, Palladius and St John Climacus. In this chapter, Bucur examines Clement's ascetic theory by taking into account the *Prophetic Eclogues*, *Adumbrations*, and *Excerpts from Theodotus*, indeed seeing them equally significant as the *Paedagogue* and the *Stromata*. In the light of the former oft-neglected texts—possibly surviving fragments of the now lost *Hypotyposes*—Clement's proto-monastic views of the mystical experience gain concreteness and contour, and their appeal for later monastics becomes readily understandable. According to the author, it is in these former works that the mystagogical framework within which Clement operated becomes more obvious. This framework, both sacramental and spiritual, allowed the Alexandrian teacher to sketch the trajectory of a whole process of ascetic transformation—an experience which he presented by way of a wide range of scriptural and ecclesial metaphors related to the "angelic life" and the ministry of the holy teacher, able to guide others in their journey of transformation and sanctification.

The second chapter, “Origen and Logocentrism: A Few Observations on a Recent Debate” by Vlad M. Niculescu addresses the implications of Daniel Boyarin’s challenging study of allegoresis in the Pauline corpus for the current, post-structuralist notion of ‘Logocentrism’ when applied to the views of a paradigmatic Logos-committed theologian and allegorical exegete such as Origen. Contrary to the established opinion which perceives Origen’s Logos as a metaphysical construct associated with a spiritualist hermeneutic, the author proposes a non-metaphysical reading of the Origenian Logos which requires an alternative, non-reductionist hermeneutic. In his reappraisal, Niculescu takes Origen’s construal of the historical and textual incarnation of the Logos as messianic events rather than metaphysical ones. These events, he argues, are foundational for the understanding of Scripture as a divine message adjusted to human readership—an understanding that conditions an interpretive approach which transcends the narrative in search of the divinely revealed meaning without this involving the removal of the text. More specifically, this understanding entails a spiritually-formative and transformative interpretation which does not demand the abandonment of the scriptural ‘letter’, the way Origenian spirituality does not require the discarding of the body. Without the author stressing this out, his reading of Origen’s views of the Logos and the Scriptures suggests ways in which the controversial legacy of the Alexandrian can be salvaged for the mainstream Christian tradition.

The second part, *The Maturation of a Tradition: St Athanasius*, deals with various aspects of St Athanasius’ personality and thought. Whilst different aspects of this saint’s life and theology are examined, a common thread running through the contributions included here is their attempt—by and large—to bring to the fore the existential and salvific significance of the Alexandrian’s writings. This part opens with a series of theological reflections which highlight St Athanasius’ understanding of salvation through Christ and the Spirit. More specifically, the third chapter, “Athanasius’ *Letters to Serapion*: Resource for a Twenty-First Century Theology of God the Trinity” by Denis Edwards examines the importance of the Athanasian teaching on God as Trinity in creation and salvation for modern understandings of trinitarian theology—more often than not focused on God in God’s self. In highlighting the Athanasian vision, the chapter offers various examples of the way the Trinity is revealed in the divine economy. Far from dealing with speculative abstractions of God in God’s self, St Athanasius’ vision of God is presented as a narrative theology of the Trinity acting in and through the world. In illustration of this lively theology, Edwards analyses a wide range of scriptural metaphors that have been—successfully—employed by the great Alexandrian

teacher. The fourth chapter “The Gift of Receptivity: St Athanasius on the Security of Salvation” by Adam Cooper endeavours to bring into dialogue Athanasian soteriological insights from the perspective of modern debates regarding the relationship between the world’s salvation universally wrought by Christ and its personal appropriation. In this regard, Cooper argues that St Athanasius’ important contribution to these debates lies in the fact that salvation in the end is not contingent upon the will of the individual, but rather the realisation that the incarnation of the Son of God paved the way for humanity’s incorporation and participation in Christ’s human nature, whereby Christ’s body becomes ours as well. Among other virtues, the chapter offers a systematic presentation of the intricate Athanasian soteriology of *Against the Arians*. The next chapter follows a similar train of thought. Based on the understanding of salvation as depicted in an early Athanasian work, the fifth chapter “Soteriological Insights in St Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation*” by Philip Kariatlis brings to light the inner coherency of the entire salvific economy of Christ. In so doing, it makes an important contribution to contemporary studies in soteriology which have tended to isolate different moments of Christ’s earthly ministry for their understanding of salvation. The chapter discerns an unending soteriological narrative in highlighting certain texts in *On the Incarnation* which could in fact be seen to suggest that Christ’s work of salvation does not end with his earthly ministry but continues to this day within the Church, which is his body.

The sixth chapter “The *Chora* Within: Unveiling Asceticism in St Athanasius’ *Life of St Antony*” by Andrew Mellas brings the Athanasian biography of the revered Egyptian hermit into dialogue with both ancient and contemporary philosophy in order to show points of similarity and distinction concerning the notion of ‘space’ (*chora*) in the various writings. Whilst tracing the emergence of this concept in Plato and contrasting it to the postmodern considerations of Derrida, the chapter displays an interdisciplinary approach towards the concept of *chora*, thereby making it available to contemporary scholarly audiences. One of the highlights of the chapter is that it underscores the positive understanding of the term *chora* as delineated in the *Life of St Antony* as the interior place within which an unmediated experience of the divine becomes possible. Those looking for a fresh approach to the Athanasian rendition of St Antony’s life and thought—which brings to bear the resources of this saint’s wisdom upon modern issues—will find this chapter an engaging and enjoyable read.

In the light of recent historical scholarship which has tended to portray the character of the saint in a less than favourable light, the seventh and

final chapter in this part, titled “The Traditional Portrayal of St Athanasius according to Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret” by Mario Baghos reconstructs the ecclesial vision of the saint as depicted, in the footsteps of Rufinus, by the early Byzantine historians, namely Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret. Upon highlighting that modern historiographical approaches in fact constitute a resurgence of the Eusebian paradigm, with its negatively biased corollary in Philostorgius’ history, this chapter reconstructs the traditional portrait of the saint focusing especially on his role as providential agent, prophet and martyr. The chapter contributes to the existing scholarship on the saint’s profile by demonstrating that the traditional representation of Athanasius precisely as a saint of the Christian Church is just as legitimate as any other.

The third part, *Furthering the Legacy: St Cyril*, focuses on the person and theology of St Cyril of Alexandria, a contested figure in scholarship who has recently been approached in a more positive light. The eighth chapter, “The Festal Letters of the Patriarchs of Alexandria: Evidence for Social History in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries” by Pauline Allen testifies to the recent turn in scholarship by engaging the character and thought of St Cyril within the context of Late Antiquity as reflected in the festal letters of several Alexandrian hierarchs. The principal aim of the festal letter was to introduce the beginning of the Lenten fast, whilst at the same time addressing other topics relevant to the everyday life of the churches and monasteries of Egypt. The chapter explores some of these topics, such as heresy, schism and fasting, as reflected in the letters of two predecessors, St Athanasius and Theophilus of Alexandria, but focuses mainly on St Cyril’s multilayered engagement of polytheism, paganism, astrology, oracles, Christian-Jewish relations, athletics, violence, and brigandage. By honing in on these themes, the chapter brings to the fore the complex ministry of the patriarchs of Alexandria, who had to engage with many topics in addressing their faithful by means of letters.

Chapter nine, “The Philosophical Theology of St Cyril’s *Against Julian*” by David Bradshaw delves into a little explored Cyrilline treatise that merits more attention in scholarship. The author engages with the topics of philosophical concern within this apologetic treatise, including questions of whether or not the divine attributes are consistent with one another; can God, who is eternal and immutable, act differently at different times; is a real reciprocity possible between God and his creatures; and, in answering such questions, what is the role played by faith, reason, and divine revelation? Bradshaw of course focuses on St Cyril’s answers to these questions that are manifested in the “education in riddles” offered up by the Scriptures themselves. This ‘education’ is reflected in the seemingly

inconsistent affirmations in Scripture, that if God is immutable, self-sufficient, and perfectly good, then how could he possibly experience emotion or suffer in any way? This ostensible inconsistency was brought up by Julian as a way of ridiculing Christianity, and Bradshaw deftly demonstrates Cyril's response in highlighting—again with examples drawn from the Scriptures—that God does not experience suffering in God's self, but economically. The chapter concludes by affirming that St Cyril's philosophical theology could act as a springboard for further reflection on the distinction between essence and energies.

In turn, Jonathan Douglas Hicks' chapter, "St Cyril on the Priesthood of Christ and the Old Testament", emphasises Cyril's role as a skilled exegete. Specifically, Hicks is interested in reconciling Cyril's post-Ephesus christology, which, he asserts, limits Christ's priesthood to the incarnation, with his earlier reflections on Christ's priesthood that are found in his Old Testament commentaries. The result is a portrait of the Son of God as a perennial high priest, made clear by the Alexandrian's exegetical depiction of Christ as a deliverer and healer, the restorer of true worship, and the One through whom we know God the Father and the Father in turn knows us; all of which is of immediate existential relevance for Christians that share in the humanity of Jesus. The chapter concludes by illuminating the broadness of the Son of God's work of mediation and priestly service, which is manifested throughout both the Old and New Testaments, and which continues "in the heavenly places".

The eleventh and twelfth chapters both focus on the character of St Cyril. The chapter "St Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, and Pastoral Care", again by Pauline Allen, is interested in his role as a pastor, which the author admits is difficult to assess, given that there is no contemporary biography of the Alexandrine shepherd, and the remainder of the primary sources, whether by him or others, yield themselves to a construal of the Alexandrine mainly (but not exclusively) as an exegete, doctrinal polemicist and politician. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in his role as patriarch of Alexandria, St Cyril would have had a large pastoral horizon, and the author applies the following criteria to the extant sources in order to elicit his role as such: the administration of justice, charity, and social welfare; teaching and preaching; conversion; the maintenance of orthodoxy; the ransom of captives; the provision of spiritual direction or guidance; and ritualised care in the form of liturgical rites. This chapter demonstrates quite clearly that Cyril excelled in relation to conversion and maintenance of orthodoxy, but that evidence is lacking for his role as a pastor.

The final chapter of this part, “Ecclesial Memory and Secular History in the Conflicting Representations of St Cyril of Alexandria” by Mario Baghos has recourse to the Orthodox ecclesial memory in order to prove that, in contrast to secular historiographical accounts that render him as a tyrant, St Cyril can indeed be construed as a holy person. Compelled by the fact that the secular portrayal of the Alexandrian theologian has adversely impacted his image in popular culture, specifically in the film *Agora* and the novel *Azazel*, this chapter demonstrates that the representation of ‘Cyril the tyrant’ is a construct rooted in the Enlightenment period. In contrast to this, the Church has—since Cyril’s lifetime—remembered him as a holy person motivated by his commitment to Christ and pastoral concern for his flock. It is concluded that this positive representation of St Cyril, transmitted throughout the generations via the ecclesial memory, is just as legitimate as any ideologically conditioned negative portrayal, and that the former is existentially relevant for the people of God.

The fourth part of the volume, *Alexandria within Tradition*, addresses, as its title suggests, the Alexandrian legacy within the broader context of the ecclesial tradition. The chapters contained in this part, which also conclude the volume, authored by Doru Costache, consider aspects pertaining to apologetics and the spiritual teaching. Chapter thirteen, “Worldview and Melodic Imagery in the Alexandrian Tradition and Certain Patristic Antecedents”, discusses aspects of the melodic imagery utilised within two Alexandrine apologies, *Exhortation to the Gentiles*, by Clement, and *Against the Gentiles*, by St Athanasius, together with their significance for the early Christian interactions with broader cultural milieus, as well as for the articulation of the ecclesial worldview. This chapter analyses the musical metaphors and analogies employed by these two Alexandrian fathers for the active rapports between the Logos and the universe, and for the theological meaningfulness of the cosmos. Beginning with a review of the Christian antecedents of this approach (mainly in St Ignatius of Antioch and St Irenaeus of Lyon together with glimpses of other early Christian writers, such as St Clement the Roman and St Athenagoras the Athenian) the chapter highlights the continuity of the ecclesial tradition in representing the cosmos by way of melodic imagery, and also the relevance of this topic to current research on the articulation of the cosmos as “another Scripture”. In turn, the fourteenth chapter, “Adam’s Holiness in the Alexandrine and Athonite Traditions”, considers a particular interpretive strand within patristic tradition, for which the paradise narrative in Genesis constituted a metaphor of the spiritual life with Adam as a hesychast saint—a virtuous person, directly connected

with God and transformed by this experience. The authors and the texts discussed herein include, St Athanasius' *Against the Gentiles*, the *Letter to the Monks* of St Sarapion, the *Sayings of the Fathers*, St Cyril of Alexandria's *Against the Anthropomorphites*, a Palamite chapter from *On the Divine and Deifying Participation* together with St Silouan the Athonite's diary. It is argued that these sources represented the adamic experience both contextually and in various terms, such as image and likeness, vision, union and the breath of life, all converging toward the notion of the paradise narrative as signifying the experience of holiness in general. The author points out that this contextual interpretation of Genesis, from the vantage point of holiness, reveals uncommon aspects of the traditional construal of Adam and likewise says something about the personal character of the interpreters.

In an attempt to summarise this volume's 'narrative' and contribution, it can be said that the chapters offered here explore a variety of aspects pertaining to the Alexandrian legacy, whilst focusing on the crucial personalities and works of St Athanasius and St Cyril. Indeed, the two giants of early Christian theology left an indelible mark not only on their immediate context but also, and more so, the history of Christianity as a whole. The two biographical reconstructions presented herein, in chapters seven and twelve, alert the reader to the dire circumstances in which the two Alexandrines lived and worked, as well as the adversities which their memory faced in history. Their convoluted reception within the ecclesial or traditional milieus and in modern scholarship is abundant proof for the significance of their presence in history. In relation to their manifold contributions, the essays gathered in the second and third parts consider different aspects of their life, times and writings: chapters three, four, five, nine, and ten highlight their theological visions; the sixth and the fourteenth chapters, their spiritual teaching; the eighth and the eleventh chapters, their pastoral activity; the sixth and ninth chapters, their philosophical undertakings; the ninth and thirteenth chapters, their apologetic discourses, whilst chapters three, ten, and fourteen reflect on the exegetical output of the two holy fathers.

Of course, it is neither the claim of the authors nor that of the editors that the matters discussed in this volume exhaust the contributions of the two Alexandrines. Far from it. That being said, the present collection addresses aspects of their creativity which are currently neglected in scholarship. For instance, and without undertaking to show the strength of each of the fourteen chapters included here, the appraisal of the two saintly theologians as shepherds is still a grey area in contemporary research, mainly due to the scarcity of the relevant information but also because of

the modern scholarly tenor which refers to them as politicians rather than bishops with pastoral inclinations. Therefore, the two chapters concerned with this dimension of their ministry, the eighth and the eleventh, are of great significance for the furthering of our knowledge. Likewise, even though attempts at establishing the nature of St Cyril's philosophical contributions are not entirely absent from the scholarly landscape, such assessments are neither frequent nor interested in exploring the theological, exegetical, and spiritual background of these contributions. In addressing Cyrilline philosophy against this complex background, the ninth chapter fills an immense gap in the literature. Furthermore, whilst recent Athanasian scholarship still grapples with the inheritance of earlier decades during which researchers busied themselves with the (re)assessment of the Arian controversy and the role played by St Athanasius within it, chapter three analyses the trinitarian valences of a lesser researched text, namely the *Letters to Serapion*, herein presented as a much needed paradigm for trinitarian theology in the current setting. In so doing, the chapter 'brings back the Trinity', so to speak—a topic of great theological complexity which does not appeal yet which constitutes the very backbone of Christianity as recipient of God's self-disclosure. The same is true with reference to the fourth chapter, which undertakes a challenging exploration of St Athanasius' *Against the Arians* in search for antecedents of, and traditional solutions for, the ongoing debates concerning the so-called objective and subjective aspects of salvation. Whereas Western theologians are usually polarised around the two aspects (some upholding the view that salvation is objectively accomplished by Christ 'on our behalf' and there is nothing, therefore, which believers can do, whilst others point out the need for a personal or subjective appropriation of salvation) chapter four proposes an intermediary solution. More specifically, this chapter understands St Athanasius' vision of salvation wrought by Christ in the midst of the earth in terms of a divinely initiated action, one that nonetheless has to be appropriated by each member of the faithful. Indeed, the very process of appropriation or interiorisation, the author argues, refers to Christ's content of objective salvation, which unfolds within the sacramental framework—a framework where the achievements of Christ become those of Christ's body, the Church.

Nevertheless, the evaluation of the Alexandrian legacy is not limited to the tremendous input of the two fathers mentioned above, St Athanasius and St Cyril. We have already seen that the volume opens in fact with a couple of unique analyses of contributions from two earlier representatives of the Alexandrine tradition, Clement and Origen. Never acknowledged as

saints by the mainstream Church, the two fathers, appraised as such by their disciples and theological heirs, have nonetheless contributed groundbreaking ideas and methods which shaped Alexandrian theology, philosophy, hermeneutics and spirituality, together with conditioning later developments in the Christian tradition. In both cases, the available literature is already immense and still growing. Against this backdrop, the two chapters dedicated to Clement and Origen in this volume bring about fresh insights into the legacies of these fascinating thinkers. For instance, chapter one discusses the already researched Clementine metaphors of transformative experience, such as angelification and theosis, yet from the vantage point of the Alexandrian and Byzantine monastic tradition, which has appropriated these metaphors and which, in turn, has confirmed the validity of Clement's approach. In other words, the chapter points out that the authenticated experiences of holy transformation in later authors have proven Clement correct. It should not come as a surprise therefore that the chapter ends by affirming the requirement of an 'existential' or 'personal' proof for the validity of Clement's tenets—a proof which complements the equally useful scholarly and objective approach. Likewise, chapter two questions the customary views of the Origenian Logocentrism, whose metaphysical character it contests on the grounds that the scriptural centre of Origen's hermeneutics entails the interpretation of the Logos as revelatory Word and not as metaphysical principle. The implications of this incarnational angle are immense for the understanding of the Alexandrian's theological discourse as well as his approach to Scripture. In the first case, the chapter suggests that a revision of the current literal appraisal of the Origenian theory of preexistence is urgent; in the second, it points out the complexity of Scripture as 'in-textuation' of the Logos, which requires a reassessment of the letter/spirit theme in terms of a 'pneumatophoric' letter and a 'grammatophile' spirit. The reader will discover similar significant contributions throughout this volume.

Drawing to a close, the contributions gathered here explore a range of aspects pertaining to the Alexandrian tradition, whose complex and significant legacy is at times misunderstood and in some quarters wholly neglected. Indeed, throughout modernity and, in some cases, to this day scholars have waged total war against Alexandria, both in terms of its theological tradition and its hermeneutical method. Despite the many voices that currently demand a reassessment of the matters, assertions such as 'Christian' Antioch and 'Greek' Alexandria are still commonplace, doing injustice to both centres of Christian Hellenistic learning. Theologically, the milieus which maintain these assertions favour, for instance, the artificial, metaphysically polarised christology of certain

radical Antiochenes over and against the personalist, unified and experiential approach of the Alexandrines to the mystery of Christ as preached by the apostles. Hermeneutically, the same milieus exhibit utter distaste for the complexly rich Alexandrian notion of Scripture together with the inherently spiritual and formative approach of its representatives to Scripture, revelling in the historical and critical exploration of the heavy mud of biblical prose. Whilst they do not polemically engage such views, the chapters collected here cast clarifying lights upon the Alexandrian tradition. More precisely, they point out that behind the unattractive complexity of the Alexandrian tradition one finds a vibrant Christian spirit—granted, one that has successfully put on the flesh of Hellenistic culture—and a consistent strive for the reformation and transformation of the human being according to the gospel of the incarnate and glorified Logos, Christ. In so doing, the chapters offered in this volume contribute a nuanced voice to the gathering scholarly choir which already hums a new song about the Alexandrian tradition and its representatives. To this new trend, our volume adds the outcomes of an interdisciplinary approach which combines methods pertaining to the fields of historiography, theology and philosophy, pastoral care, hermeneutics, hagiography, and spirituality. By way of this complex approach, the present volume brings together areas which currently evolve in parallel scholarly universes—a manner of dealing which is wholly befitting to the complexities entailed by the rich and ever-challenging Alexandrian legacy.

We began this introduction by pointing out the framework in which most of the contributions gathered in this volume originate, namely the patristic symposia held in 2012 and 2013 at St Andrew’s Greek Orthodox Theological College. It would be remiss of us not to mention that in 2016 the College celebrates its thirtieth anniversary as well as the fact that in 2015 the scholarly journal which has initially hosted the majority of the contributions published here in revised form, *Phronema*, issues its thirtieth edition. Last but not least, it would be impossible for us not to acknowledge that in 2015 the College’s Founder and Dean, His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos Harkianakis—to whom this collection is gratefully dedicated—celebrates the fortieth anniversary of his enthronement as shepherd of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia. Without his vision and efforts, neither St Andrew’s nor *Phronema* would be here. Implicitly, neither would this volume.

Sunday of All Saints
June 2015

Doru Costache
Philip Kariatlis
Mario Baghos