Foreword

"For the human being is of God, possessing a sacred mind, a soul that loves Christ, God-oriented knowledge, and a thoughtful intellect."

Theodorus the Studite, *Epistle* 399

In Greece, the Psychology of Religion remains little known for many reasons, including fanaticism, prejudice, half-knowledge, spiritual parochialism and the lack of funded research. Abroad, by contrast, it has made remarkable advances and has begun to develop as a distinct scientific field.

The Cognitive Psychology of Religion (CPR), also known as the Cognitive Science of Religion, is the cognitive study of religious thought and behaviour from the perspective of the cognitive sciences. It is a relatively young branch of the Psychology of Religion, which emerged during the 1990s (Gibson, 2005, p. 15; Eisen & Laderman, p. 593) and quickly attracted public interest. For example, the 7 May 2001 issue of *Newsweek* featured the cover story "God and the Brain." Knowing, or "thinking about," religion requires us to draw upon all the cognitive dimensions of religion: the acquisition of knowledge, theory, the exercise of logical functions and the use of symbols (Pruyser, 1968, p. 6).

Beyond the fact that the scientific study of the Psychology of Religion has developed in Greece through theological schools, it has also emerged as a fertile, interdisciplinary and holistic field of inquiry, offering an approach to an increasingly specialised object of knowledge and to an already highly fragmented reality. Within this framework, the various anthropological, sociological, philosophical, theological and psychological theories concerning the origins of religion have proved one-sided and insufficient.

The CPR is neither a panacea nor a deviation from the "conscious" Orthodox Faith and its revealed teaching. It must be pursued within scholarly, serious, dispassionate and, as far as possible, objective frameworks—not in the service of any ideology—with a view to familiarising students of Greek Theology with all contemporary international trends in the Psychology of Religion, and to enabling them to assess and critically examine them. Thus, *a priori*, the CPR neither opposes nor uncritically advocates any religion or confession; nor does it take an absolute evaluative position in favour of one scientific theory over another. Rather, it seeks to present the evidence currently available from all relevant research.

Accordingly, students of the CPR, as cautious scholars, need not fear the new insights offered by the neurosciences in the study of religion. Neuroscience and biotheology, like every empirical science, can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God (Flournoy, 1903; Persinger, 1987, p. 17), nor validate or invalidate His revealed Word (Newberg & D'Aquili, 2001). Neither can they identify a cerebral or neuroanatomical centre for the supernatural (Seybold, p. 80). To do so would,

among other things, call into question the university, panentheism, pantheism and Gnosticism (as well as the complex nature of the human being); it would also undermine the moral and spiritual value of a person's religious faith, which is grounded in the human being's "likeness" to God and in the freedom of the will. On the contrary, the experienced researcher may—always with discernment—make appropriate use of the findings of both the neurosciences and theology.

The present work does not constitute an exhaustive textbook. Instead, it offers an introductory overview of the subject.

With the hope that those who worship God "in spirit and in truth" will continue, with "burning hearts," to await with eager longing—through unceasing, Spirit-inspired self-knowledge and knowledge of God—their psychosomatic transformation, together with all creation, into true children of God, we offer this work. We do so in the hope that other, more capable researchers and more worthy initiates may receive a richer divine illumination, enabling them to pursue continually, synthesise and "discover" the infinite majesty of the Godhead and the unfathomable depths of the human soul:

"And now, O Lord, examine them with humility, and you will understand nothing for ever; for you will not discover the depth of the human heart, nor comprehend the thoughts of his mind." (Jude 8:13–14)

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