

MASI Inaugural Study Days a Marked Success

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From July 2–5, 2008, the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (MASI) offered its first ever Study Days. The almost 200 academic and non-academic participants came from as far away as Lviv, Ukraine and San Diego, California to Saint Paul University in Ottawa for four days of lectures and workshops by renowned Orthodox and Catholic speakers. This feast of heart and mind provided an opportunity for participants to pray and study together, to look at our faith within the world, to embrace the need to engage the world, and to be able to be witnesses of Christ's light to the world. Along with a full daily cycle of liturgical services, the schedule also included a program for youth and many opportunities for fellowship. Plenary sessions on the topics of doctrine, liturgy, morality and evangelization were held in the mornings followed every afternoon with workshops in other areas of Eastern Christian thought and life.

On Wednesday morning, Fr. Thomas Hopko, dean emeritus of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in Crestwood, New York, presented the first plenary address entitled "Christian Doctrine in an Age of Relativism." Hopko prefaced his presentation with a caution to those who wish to delve into theological questions by means of a twelve-point list which emphasized things such as the necessary desire and willingness to endure struggle in coming to know Jesus Christ, the importance and necessity of reading Scripture daily, personal and corporate prayer, silence and proper spiritual direction, the following of the commandments, and of living each moment in

that moment and for the glory of God. Once we have accomplished these, then we are ready to begin learning Christian doctrine. In the past, the common approach to the teaching of Christian doctrine was to begin with a preparation in metaphysics and move to the issues of the one God and Trinity, Christology, redemption, ecclesiology and eschatology. Hopko offered a new approach, stressing that our King is victorious over His enemies, including the last enemy, death. This is the good news that must be announced and lived in our homes, our catechism classes, our seminaries – everywhere we are teaching the Christian faith. We cannot begin with metaphysical ideas about God; we must begin with Jesus of Nazareth and the empty tomb.

Hopko offered a three-stage approach to the teaching of Christian doctrine in the modern world that moves away from the older purely academic model. Stage One begins with the human encounter with Jesus as given to us in the pages of the New Testament, which must be read over and over again and an attempt must be made to live it. This first stage also allows one to embrace a period of purgation, of cleansing, for only the pure in heart will see God.

Stage Two is the level of *physike theoria*, of contemplative theology. After careful study of the Scriptures and other Christian texts, through the action of the Holy Spirit, one begins to make a synthesis of all that is learned. There is a movement from the initial preaching and announcement of the victory of Christ to a deepened doctrinal understanding of aspects of this victory. It is at this point that one begins full participation in the Church's Divine Liturgy.

Stage Three is the level of *theologia*, the level of perfection, discernment, love and *theosis*. Few of us ever attain this stage but it remains a goal for all of us. In concluding his address, Hopko stated that there is no deification without humiliation, no theosis without kenosis. Christian Doctrine in the modern world is a life-long process. "To the measure that we are keeping the commandments by faith and grace, that we trust and pray to Christ, we are illumined and in communion with God and are deified. These three aspects remain with each person all their life."

On Thursday morning, Fr. Peter Galadza, the Kule Family Professor of Eastern Christian Liturgy at MASI, made a presentation entitled “Eastern Liturgy in a Western World.” Inasmuch as authentic worship is counter-cultural (against the world for the sake of the world) – and not contra-cultural (an apathy toward or disdain for the culture) – there are some qualities of the modern Western culture that can help to facilitate the goals of “rational” Byzantine Christian worship and assist the Church in her liturgy to still be *in the world* without being *of the world*. The modern interests in beauty and beneficent materialism, interests in the interpersonal and authenticity, an appreciation for a direct expression of emotion (and resultant rejection of sentimentalism), of fragmentary forms of communication, and the receptivity to prosperity that leads to a stance of rejoicing are some of the qualities that facilitate a traditional and classical approach to Eastern Christian worship.

The problem, however, is that many of these qualities are often accepted in the context where idolatry, and especially idolatry of self, is dominant – where consumerism is the main religion and entertainment is the rite. Galadza examined the mechanics of the manipulation of modern Western culture so as to understand how it has an impact on our worship and Christian life in general; he then offered an Eastern Christian response to these problems. A unique problem is the acceptance of the transcendent as real. Secularism, the inability and refusal to recognize God’s presence in the world, gives us the sense that transcendence emanates from us. By contrast, authentic Eastern Christian worship, especially in the physical orientation of clergy and laity toward the transcendent, helps to generate a God-centeredness in worship that leads to a way of life that is God-centered. The hymnody and prayers of our worship turn our worldly focus to what God has done and is doing in our midst. Worship of God as a matter of personal taste and time is met with the *ordo* of worship. Beauty without the Cross is met with the Byzantine rite’s ritualization of everything imaginable. Galadza concluded with practical suggestions for our worship that will assist in allowing our authentic worship to truly become “revelation in action:” congregational singing, the approach to standing and sitting in

liturgy, alternating male and female singing, the kiss of peace, the reading of the psalms – all of which was put into practice in the liturgical services of the MASI Study Days.

On Friday morning, Frederica Mathewes-Green, a well-known author and commentator of modern culture from an Orthodox perspective who has written eight books and hundreds of essays, considered how our modern culture arrived at a point that is considered by many Christians as immoral. She also mentioned a few of the ways that Christians try to confront and change the culture. Specifically, she examined the roots of the Sexual Revolution through the lens of Hollywood movies. “We often think that old fashioned movies reflect old fashioned morality. They do, but we just don’t know what old fashioned morality actually was.” The sexual revolution began earlier than we think. At the turn of the twentieth century, the sunny disposition of the culture at that time came crashing down. While the silent movies were often comedies there were, even at that time, some silent movies that showed a darker side of life. An example of this is the 1916 movie, *Where Are My Children*, a story where a man learns that his wife has secretly been aborting their children. Cecile B. DeMille, known for his epic, *The Ten Commandments*, also made earlier movies about sexual temptation in marriage where the characters caught in adultery were often presented in a sympathetic light, as victims of love. By the 1930s, adultery was treated as something understandable, as something that can be forgiven, even permitted. Later, there came about an increasing awareness of the impact of adultery on children which changed Hollywood’s approach to adultery in films. *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Crimes and Misdemeanours* (1989) testify to the destructive nature of adultery. Recent films such as *Magnolia* (1999) and *The Good Girl* (2002) actually show repenting adulterers.

Mathewes-Green argued that it is possible for a culture to get better if some behaviour has become unanimously condemned throughout human history. Perhaps the consequences of that behaviour are blurred for a while, but it also troubles the conscience that is formed and placed in each of us by God. This does not mean that the culture recognizes the change or

the reason for that change. The change in terms of adultery came about not as a result of pressure from religious groups, but as recognition that the consequences of adultery and the harm that it causes could no longer be ignored. While adultery fell out of fashion, in its place came acceptance of sex before marriage. *Splendour in the Grass* (1961) is a sympathetic presentation of how unfair and unbearable pre-marital chastity can be. And the list continues with drunkenness, pre-marital pregnancy, contraception, pornography, and homosexuality.

In the end, cultural change is an organic process, one that is not specifically Christian. While we observe that our culture might be getting worse, in some aspects, our culture has gotten better. We cannot expect a utopian achievement either. Just when we observe an improvement in one area, there is something else unobserved that is falling. Culture fluctuates – it is a human creation. We must remember, however, that God is always at the centre. Do not let our hearts be troubled either by the lack of cultural affirmation of Christianity or the lack of persecution. God has put us at the point in the cycle when we can best endure. And as God has placed us in this here and now, Mathewes-Green furthered suggested that Christians can work effectively to change sensibilities in other areas of morality by way of addressing the gatekeepers of culture such as the media, entertainment, and museums.

On Saturday morning, Fr. Andriy Chirovsky, the founding director and Peter and Doris Kule Chair of Eastern Christian Theology and Spirituality at MASI, gave a lively presentation on evangelization in North America entitled “Good News in Tough Times.” While the Lord has given a mandate to the entire Church to continue His work of evangelizing, there are challenges in our modern society which tempt us to perhaps look at the Church with a “doom and gloom” attitude. Specific barriers that need to be overcome include the personal and corporate embarrassments that are focussed on what or what not to say in evangelistic efforts and the belief that things are always better in other parishes than one’s own. Another barrier is the fear of the consequences in our parishes if evangelistic efforts are successful. We need to realize that evangelization is not focussed on us and our experiences; rather, evangelization

is focussed on the person of Jesus Christ. Smallness of mind distracts from this focus. Sometimes we do not know how to handle good news because we have set ourselves up to receive bad news in this world.

Chirovsky identified some aspects of our ecclesial life that can allow us to assist others in the world in their search for meaning and truth and to find that meaning and truth in the Church. The smallness and uniqueness of our Church in North America is attractive to some people and provides a more personal and human scale in a culture that tends to operate on a vast and impersonal scale. It is in this smallness that one has the opportunity to experience a community of persons. There is an intimacy, warmth, and familiarity of small parishes that reveal the familial nature of our churches in North America. The antinomic approach in our theology allows for a clear and well-grounded expression of doctrine that is never simplistic. We have a wholistic liturgical and sacramental life whereby the whole self is engaged and we are making it known to the Western world bit by bit. We have a realistic morality that can be known by whoever seeks to touch the edge of the garment of truth. Finally, all members of our churches need to practice continual repentance and asceticism – the life-long struggle to become receptive to God's love and mercy that allows us to recognize that while we are sinners, we can know the enormity of God's love for us. We need to be taking up our cross day after day even in these tough times in North America. The results may not be flashy, may not make national news, but will make a difference in our churches and our lives. The truth will never be overcome by the darkness. This is the good news in tough times.

The afternoon workshops featured specialists in Eastern Christianity and included some of the teaching personnel of MASI. Fr. John Jillions, an assistant professor at MASI and dean of Annunciation Orthodox Cathedral in Ottawa (OCA), examined how conflicts arise in church communities and what can be done to foster reconciliation. Fr. Andrew Onuferko, a biblical scholar, has been with MASI since 1996 and addressed the Byzantine system of Scripture readings for the Divine Liturgy and their interpretation. Fr. Stephen Wojcichowsky,

Director of MASI, focussed on how the social teachings of the Church enable members of the Church to be leaven within the world without compromising the demands of the gospel. Fr. Maxym Lysack, pastor of Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church in Ottawa and chaplain at the University of Ottawa, examined modern society's search for spirituality and offered a response that is both patristic and contemporary based on the resources of the Eastern Christian spiritual life. Lesya Sabada Nahachewsky, from the Department of Religious Studies and Anthropology at the University of Saskatchewan, presented her newly published book on Melkite Archbishop Joseph Raya and his efforts to foster fruitful encounters and reconciliation among the Middle Eastern churches. Presvitera Irene Galadza of St. Elias Parish in Brampton, Ontario spoke on catechesis that takes place through the liturgical worship of the Church, highlighting a popular creative approach entitled "Generations of Faith" that takes catechism out of the classroom and presents it as an adaptable whole-parish and multi-generational opportunity to growth in faith and as a community. She has worked extensively for many years with Sr. Ann Lazok OSBM, Director of Religious Education for the Eparchy of St. Josaphat in Parma, in developing the Generations of Faith program for Byzantine parishes. Each evening, Sr. Ann offered a guided viewing of newly released media resources on the Holy Mysteries.

Special beginner and advanced training sessions were offered for cantors. Fr. Roman Galadza, pastor of St. Elias Parish in Brampton, Ontario taught common chants for the Divine Liturgy and Presvitera Melita Mudri-Zubacz, Director of Religious Education for the Archeparchy of Winnipeg, trained cantors in the eight resurrectional tones with extensive use of *The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship* published by MASI. Participants had the opportunity to use what they had learned at these sessions in the daily liturgical services held throughout the Study Days.

Daily liturgical services of Vespers, Matins, and Divine Liturgy were served in the main chapel of Saint Paul University. It was an opportunity to put into practice what had been acquired through the plenary sessions and workshops and per-

haps was the pinnacle of experiences for most participants. Fr. Peter Galadza was able practically to show the suggestions he made in his plenary session address.

One family-friendly feature of the MASI Study Days was the youth program coordinated by Lisa Hladio of Pennsylvania and followed by more than 30 youth aged 5 to 15. Their mornings and afternoons were spent learning the Word of God through prayer, Bible readings, skits, games, songs, and crafts.

On Friday night, the participants gathered for a community meal as they shared with one another their experiences of the previous days.

The 2008 MASI Study Days were a success in the eyes of the participants. The challenging and spiritually enlightening presentations were inspiring and most expressed their desire to return next year for the second set of MASI Study Days tentatively scheduled for July 2–4, 2009.

