

"I AM THE VINE,...

...YE ARE THE BRANCHES"

# THE GRAPEVINE

*Vignettes of Seminary Life*



The oldest book in the Seminary Library—printed in 1721.

**The Fourth Cappadocian.** In the Patristics course that is part of the M.T.S. program, we focussed on the three Church Fathers known as the “Cappadocian Fathers,” namely, St. Basil the Great, his brother St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory the Theologian. These three figures are significant for their elucidation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity. Prior to these Fathers, there was much confusion, since different Church figures used different terminology when expressing dogma. This was because the language of philosophy, while useful, did not correspond precisely to Christian teaching; for example, as Father Georges Florovsky states, neither ancient Greek nor Latin had a word for an individual person. These Fathers were instrumental in developing what became standard terminology:

*“If we acquire divine grace, all things are easy, joyful, and a blessing from God.”*

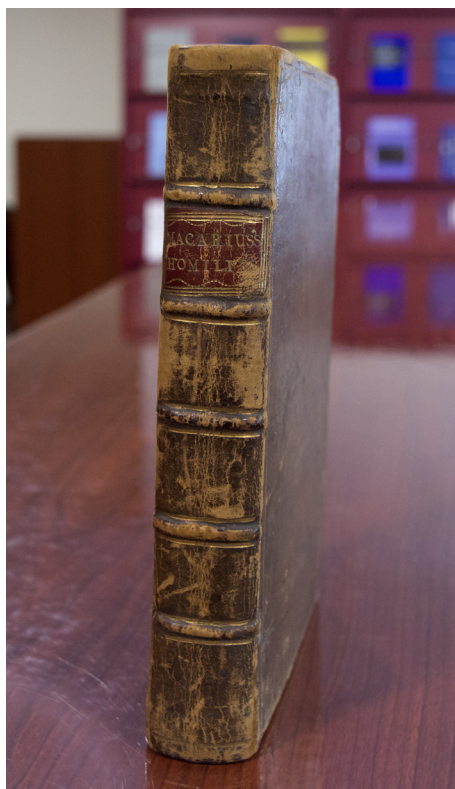
—Elder Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia

One Essence (or Substance) in Three Hypostases (or Persons).

During the course, each student was required to give a class presentation. My presentation concerned a fourth figure who is less well known, St. Cæsarius, the brother of St. Gregory the Theologian. In subsequent issues of this newsletter I will discuss his life and teachings, sharing the content of my presentation.

*Father Chrysostomos*, M.T.S. Student

**Library discovery.** I have been granted the privilege of assisting in the Seminary Library to catalog and organize the



books. The complexity of the process is amazing and exciting. The extensive and eclectic collection of books not only contains theological works but a variety of other topics, some of which are pertinent for today. I have also worked with books in a number of different languages, such as Greek, Russian, Romanian, French, Latin, and even some in Arabic and Georgian. My favorite are the rare books. These have yielded, to my surprise and great delight, a book printed in 1721 containing homilies by St. Macarios translated into English. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn something new and to be of service to the Seminary. I hope my meager contribution will greatly benefit those who use this library.

*Mother Helen, Assistant Librarian*

**True beauty.** In the Pascha Term we were fortunate to attend a series of lectures by Mateusz Ferens on aspects of iconography. Mr. Ferens brought up the ethereal subject that is beauty and gave us students the task of proposing a definition. This tied in very well with his subject of iconography, for beauty has both aesthetical and intrinsic qualities, and iconography captures both.



Detail of the Icon of the Annunciation, Stavronikita Monastery, Mount Athos.

We learned that true beauty should lead us towards God. The outward beauty of icons captures our attention, and their intrinsic beauty, their sacredness and tie to the noetic, draws us closer to the Divine.

This is further emphasized in all other aspects of Church worship. For example, in hymnography we hear the words of the Archangel to the Theotokos, "Awed by the beauty of thy virginity." By these words we realize

that the virtues themselves are forms of beauty that demonstrate our truer and more divine nature. Not only do the virtues, as paradigms of true beauty, lead us to God, but they are also guiding lights to others.

*Mother Synkletike, B.Th. Student*

**Eastward, upward, Godward.** Orthodox ecclesiastical architecture is dynamic, not static—it is a vehicle for propelling our souls onward. This is one of many invaluable insights I gained by attending Dr. Augustin Ioan’s fascinating seminar on sacred space for the course “Religion and Society.” The Church is the Ark of Salvation conveying us from this earthly existence to our final port, the Harbor of Heaven. Our liturgical journey occurs simultaneously along two axes, one horizontal and the other vertical—the two components of the Universal Archetype of the Cross—, each of which is itself, paradoxically, the *axis mundi*, the bridge connecting the terrestrial to the celestial. The ecclesiastical edifice simultaneously orients and raises our attention, physically and mentally, eastward and upward: eastward, toward the sanctuary, toward Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, present in the Eucharist, and upward, toward the dome, again toward Christ, the Most High God, present as the Pantocrator. The lighting in the church should be subdued and focus our gaze in these two directions, which are really one and the same direction, for in moving spiritually eastward and upward, we are, in fact, moving Godward, advancing “from glory to glory,” sailing the well-travelled route of deification navigated by all of the Saints before us.

*Father Gregory, M.T.S. Student*



Dr. Ioan regaling students in one of his classes.

**An Orthodox lens on history.** One of our visiting professors, Dr. Ernest Latham, an historian and veteran “cold warrior,” presented to us a series of lectures with the collective title “The Twentieth Century’s Search for Salvation.” Truth be told, we did not, as this title may suggest, review the many religious movements of the twentieth century, but rather the major historical events and the men and ideas that produced them—wars, revolutions, emerging philosophies, scientific discoveries, and all the other elements of which “secular” history is composed. In isolation, such a course may seem out of place for a professed theological seminary, but taken within the context of all that we are learning, I found that this ostensibly non-religious topic became a profound and eminently practical extension of the strictly Orthodox teachings on theology, anthropology, and so on. If, for instance, we





Dr. Latham lecturing in the Seminary Auditorium.

your members?” (St. James 4:1) History, the acts of men, furnishes us with not just trivial information, but concrete illustrations of the inner workings of man’s heart. Dr. Latham’s condensed exposition of the rather chaotic twentieth century was built upon this framework and proved to be not just informative, but, with Orthodoxy as a foundation and interpretive principle, enlightening for all.

*Brother Gregory, B.Th. Student*

learn of the passions of man, what they are, how they emerge, and how they act, what better example of this could be found than the many and varied wars, revolutions, and upheavals of the past century? As St. James the Apostle says: “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in

**Paradigms of harmony.** The philosophers of ancient Greece valued the order, harmony, symmetry, and beauty in the universe, seeing in these “God’s hand,” and often coming to incredible insights of the Divine through all that elevates us in our world—especially beauty and order, both outward and inner. It is in this light that, centuries



Hierarchical Liturgy on the Patronal Feast of the Convent of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess of Russia, Etna, California.

later, in the Roman (Byzantine) Empire, where the ancient philosophers were studied and admired, ambassadors and emissaries from foreign countries who visited Constantinople would, first and foremost, be brought to the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, whose splendor was indescribable and whose services exemplified the ideals of order, harmony, and beauty as the pinnacle of human achievement. As one of our professors said, "It was as though the Byzantines were saying, 'If you have dealings with us, you have to deal with our God.'" Keeping these historical paradigms in mind, we Orthodox, both clergy and laymen, must understand and fulfill our obligation to keep our churches in a pristine condition of proper adornment and cleanliness, meticulously caring for every detail. It is then that, upon entering an Orthodox church, which is always imbued with spiritual beauty, anyone, be he Orthodox or not, will realize that, in a fallen world full of chaos, corruption, and disorder, this is where one finds order, harmony, beauty, and peace; this is where one finds and encounters God.

*Father Photii, B.Th. Student*

### **Reflections on Divine Philanthropy.**

In studying Patristic theology over the past two years, we—both faculty and students—have learned much together and have been profoundly edified by the sublime teachings of the Holy Fathers. Time and time again, we were reminded that one of the most prevalent themes in Orthodox theology and liturgy is that of God's love for mankind (φιλανθρωπία, *philanthropía*). Every dismissal at the Divine Services ends with the resounding and reassuring

phrase, "for He is good and loveth mankind." Our hymnography is likewise suffused with references to both of these Divine attributes, which, while by no means absent from Western conceptions of God, especially in the era before the Great Schism, are certainly given far more emphasis in the Orthodox understanding of God in terms of His interaction with mankind.

"It is love," St. John Chrysostomos tells us, "that brought the Son of God down from the Heavens to us. It is through love that He Who was fleshless took on flesh, that the Unoriginate received a beginning, and that the Son of God became the Son of man." Love and goodness are Divine Energies which, as St. Basil the Great affirms, "come down to us," and make God known to us, whereas His ineffable Divine Essence "remains beyond our reach."

In a magnificent summation of the Incarnate Economy of the Logos, the Son and Word of the Father, St. Maximus the Confessor explains that "the Cause of all things, through the beauty, goodness, and profusion of His intense love for everything, goes out of Himself in His providential care for the whole of creation [that is, in His Energies]. By means of the supraessential power of ecstasy, and spell-bound as it were by goodness, love, and longing, He relinquishes His utter transcendence in order to dwell in all things while yet remaining within Himself."

At the same time, we should not forget the beautiful image by which Christ revealed Himself to St. John the Theologian: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and



he with me” (Revelation 3:20). The author of the anonymous *Epistle to Diognetos* expresses the common mind of the Fathers with consummate clarity: “In gentleness [and] meekness has [the Father] sent [the Son], as a king might send his son who is a king. He sent Him, as sending God; He sent Him, as [a man] unto men; He sent Him, as Savior, as using persuasion, not force: for force is no attribute of God. He sent Him, as summoning, not as persecuting; He sent Him, as loving, not as judging,” for “He was always, and is, and will be, kindly and good and without anger and true, and He alone is good.” God loves us—indeed, as St. Maximos puts it, He is “a zealous and exemplary lover, because of the intensity of His blessed longing for all things”—but He respects our free will and waits for us to open the door of our heart to Him.

*Father Patapios, Dean*

**Studying New Testament Greek.** To some, the study of New Testament Greek might sound like a musty, tedious pursuit, but such has not been my experience—quite the contrary. Despite

the difficulties and frustrations inherent in the learning curve, this subject has been one of my favorites, especially since it provides a measurable sense of accomplishment more than some other subjects. It was a revelatory experience to find myself suddenly understanding Greek Psalm verses we had been singing in Church services for years, and it was particularly rewarding to be able to read passages from the Gospels in the actual language in which they were written.

A less obvious side of learning this language, however, is the humorous one. As a class, we worked on translating passages from Patristic works which to our knowledge had not yet appeared in English, which was excellent practice. However, some of the Fathers having been literary geniuses and sometimes gifted orators or poets, their Greek could be far from basic and rather embellished at times. Unfortunately, our attempts at translating these great works were often less than inspiring. Nevertheless, this exercise allowed us to encounter various delightful peculiarities and ambiguities in the language, which sometimes produced some real head-



scratchers in our translations.

In particular, one of my contributions to academia was the translation of a passage from one of St. John Chrysostomos' homilies which should have been rendered "and makes enemies friends." I translated it as "and makes detestable friends." In a passage by St. Cæsarius, in which he waxes eloquent upon the subject of the wondrous creation, our attempts at translation made the sea teeming with all manner of fishes and birds caring for their young into something akin to a pot of boiled fish with eggs on the side. Ah, well! One has to begin somewhere, and perhaps just such amusing trials along the way may help to make what is learned more memorable.

*Mother Eupraxia, B.Th. Student*

**SPOTS IT system awarded.** On a more practical note and in contrast to some rather lofty words, the Seminary

[<http://man.spots.school/>](http://man.spots.school/)

computer system is running a state-of-the-art cloud system that is powered by OpenStack, an open-source project that is used by many major data centres around the world, including CERN, NASA, and over 600 companies. It is a large open-source software project with a member base of over 92,000.

A story about the Seminary's computer system was featured on Superuser,

[<http://spots.school/x/d>](http://spots.school/x/d)

a website covering OpenStack, and the Seminary was recognised with an award from the OpenStack community.

[<http://spots.school/x/db>](http://spots.school/x/db)

Open-source software is a system where the computer code is available to anyone free of charge. This system enables community collaboration on a

massive scale and is capable of producing software that is better than a single company could produce on its own. It also has the benefit of peerless peer review, which enhances security and stability. Open-source really is the future of computer software and the Seminary IT staff is happy to be able to run an all open-source system.

*Father Vlasie, IT Director*



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Under the sacred patronage of its namesake, please help us impart light, for "without schools, we walk in darkness."

(Saint Kosmas of Aetolia)



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