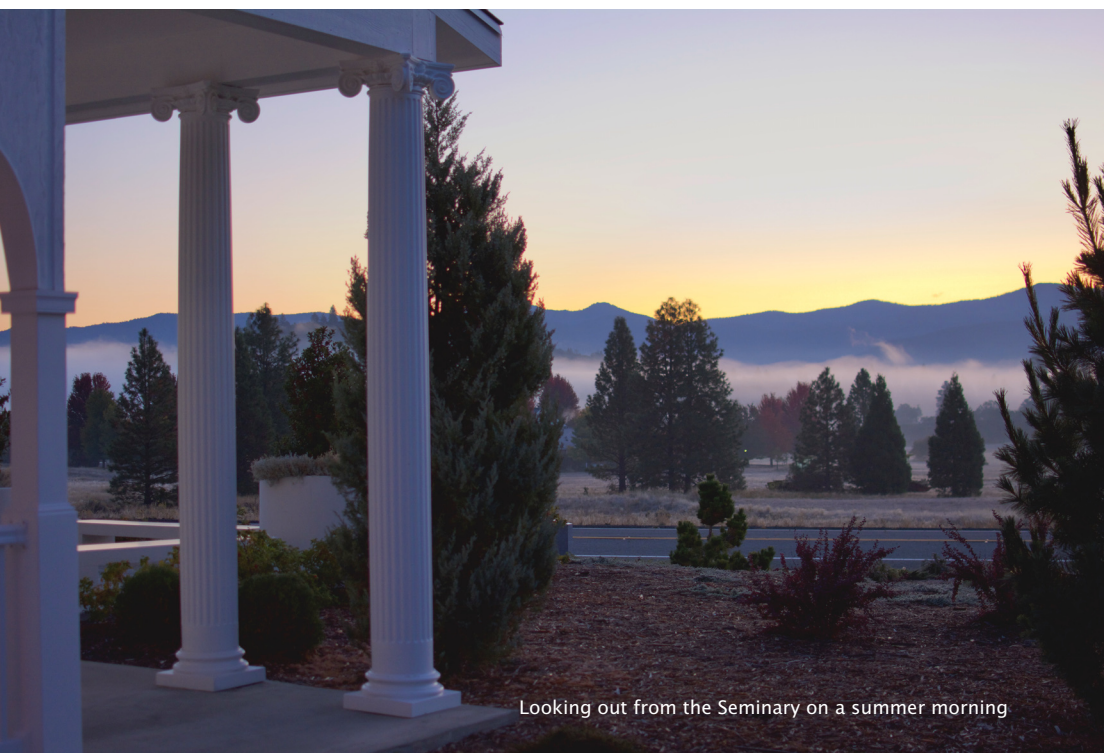


"I AM THE VINE,...

...YE ARE THE BRANCHES"

# THE GRAPEVINE

*Vignettes of Seminary Life*



Looking out from the Seminary on a summer morning

**“God Does Not Exist.”** In late June, during the Summer Recess, Father Jiří Ján offered a week-long developmental seminar to the faculty of the Seminary, which served as a training course for their advanced instruction in Orthodox theology. The topic of the seminar was the oft-misunderstood writings of Saint Dionysios the Areopagite, who is a pivotal theologian of the Orthodox Church.

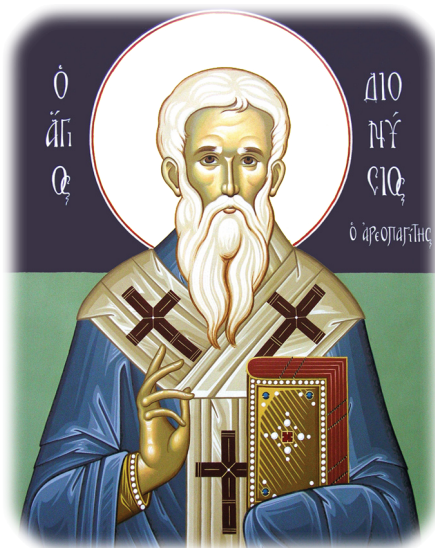
By refuting various misunderstandings about the writings and person of Saint Dionysios, Father Jiří brought into focus what this great Father truly teaches, namely, the genuine experience of the Church. The first misunderstanding to

be rejected is the often assumed but erroneous notion that Saint Dionysios was simply a Neo-Platonist who mixed philosophy with Christianity in his writings. With tremendous insight into the development of history, philosophy, and the spread of Christianity, Father Jiří showed that Saint Dionysios felt free to use philosophical language precisely because what he was writing about had nothing to do with philosophy as a purely intellectual endeavor. As a true theologian, the Saint first experienced God and then wrote about his experience. Thus, Father Jiří emphasized another point of paramount importance: In the

Orthodox Church, we do not conjecture or speculate about God; rather, the genuine theology of the Church is always experiential. In fact, the Saints of the Church are scientists *par excellence*, and the science of sciences which they master is quite empirical.

At the heart of Saint Dionysios’s theology, which is simply the expression of the Church’s theology, lies the apophatic approach. This is a point that Western Christendom, having separated itself from its true Eastern roots, cannot understand. Thomas Aquinas quotes Saint Dionysios extensively, and yet Aquinas completely misses the mark with regard to what Saint Dionysios is saying. Aquinas claims that God is the Supreme Being, but that nonetheless He is still a being analogous in some way to other beings, while the primary point of Saint Dionysios’s works is that God is beyond being, beyond existence, completely and radically different from anything created. Orthodox theology can boldly say what the Scholastic theology of the West cannot: If creation exists, then God does not exist; if God exists, then creation does not exist. In other words, there is no “analogy of being” between the Uncreated and the created.

In God’s complete unknowability and radical otherness, there is, however, a wonderful paradox. Though God’s Essence is completely unknowable, His Uncreated Energies, without which nothing can exist, are communicable, and man is capable of union with God through them. This vital teaching of the Church, which Saint Gregory Palamas championed, is directly linked with the writings of Saint Dionysios, whom Saint Gregory cites very often. But Scholastic theology, in its conjectures about God, rejects the true teaching that God is both completely unknowable in His Essence and yet immanent in His creation, sustaining every last



Saint Dionysios the Areopagite

part of it by His Uncreated Energies. And so, sadly enough, Western Christians show that they have lost the knowledge and experience of man’s true goal of union with God, which begins even in this life. These and many other points Father Jiří explained with penetrating insight and remarkable precision.

Father Jiří’s seminar emphasized the fact that the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church do not engage in mere semantics; their theology is meant to defend the genuine experience of the Church, through which mankind can achieve its goal of deification. The works of Saint Dionysios are, for Orthodox Christians, a theological foundation expressing the uninterrupted, living experience of the Church, but for those who are not partakers of this experience, they are a cause of much perplexity. Father Jiří elucidated the works of a Church Father who is widely misunderstood, misrepresented, and misinterpreted; for this, the Seminary faculty owes him an immense debt of gratitude, and we hope that Father Jiří will conduct many similar seminars in the future.

*Father Photii, Instructor*

### **Illuminating the Divine Services.**

When I was a new convert to the Orthodox Church, I was told countless times that if I was present and attentive during each of the Divine Services, I would learn that which is essential to living an Orthodox life. It was impressed upon me that the Services are vital for developing as a Christian. However, as a new convert, the teachings held within the Divine Services seemed, at times, inaccessible to me. The many readings in Greek, the Byzantine chanting, and the unfamiliar liturgical traditions left me in need of guidance in order to decipher my experiences.

Over time, this sense of impenetrability was slowly replaced with a functional, though fragmented, understanding of the Services. This limited understanding was better than total ignorance, but I knew that my understanding would remain deficient without an organized framework. With this in mind, I decided to attend the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary, in the hope of building a strong Orthodox foundation on which to base my life in Christ.

During my first year at the Seminary, I was immersed in courses such as New Testament Greek, Byzantine chant, and Patristics. As a result of this comprehensive coursework, I found the lessons held within the Divine Services opening to me in a way that had at first appeared out of reach. Prior to my time at the Seminary, my understanding was scattered, making it difficult to apply that which I learned through the Divine Services. Now, I am beginning to acquire an organized framework within which I can understand and retain the once-veiled instructions held within the Services of the Church.

Upon my return home for the summer break, with one year under my belt, I have begun to understand the depth of meaning held within each of the Divine Services. The framework I have received from my Seminary education has been instrumental in deepening my appreciation for and understanding of what is being offered, as I now stand, attentive and fully present, in Church. What once appeared impenetrable to me is now so much clearer.

*Uriah Lantzer, B.Th. Student*

Father Jiří Ján teaching one of his classes





**Master Your Thoughts.** My first year at the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary was a time of constant discovery. One of the most constructive lessons learned in the early days was that I have to make a conscious effort to control and direct my thoughts. More than one teacher and many books played their role in teaching me this lesson, and the learning process took some time. In the end, it served to make my first year a productive one, at least in one respect.

Before I began my studies at the Seminary, I only rarely read worthwhile books. Even less frequently did I read poetry, and it was uncommon on these occasions (here we approach the percentages that begin with a zero and a decimal point) that this poetry was really beneficial. However, one of these worthwhile poems contained a particularly important message. In his famous poem *If*—, Rudyard Kipling writes:

If you can dream—and not make  
dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make  
thoughts your aim....

According to the conclusion of the poem, he who achieves these two aims, along with others described in other stanzas, achieves not only true manhood (that is, manly virtue), but *mastery of the world itself*.

I remember reading these words and thinking they were excellent advice, never observing the conflict between this advice and my personal pursuits. As anyone who knew me during the first twenty years of my life could attest, my feet were rarely on the ground. I spent my time in daydreams and in rambling internal dialogues serving as nothing more than theaters for the spectacle of my thoughts. I was, as Dickens said of Mr. Dorrit, building castles in the air.

It was not until my attendance at the Seminary that I began to recognize how

unproductive this behavior is. How much I have retreated from it, as a result of this new understanding, I cannot say, but the recognition is a beginning. This beginning occurred as a result of more than one book and more than one instructor, as I have said, but I can easily single out a particular instance as an example.

It was an excerpt from the *Conferences* of St. John Cassian, which we read during an Old Testament class. In this passage, St. John condemns not only wicked thoughts, but goes so far as to say that even an *idle* thought can be harmful to one's spiritual progress. None but those thoughts which concern and further one's life in Christ have a place in the heart. This was a difficult passage for me to swallow, but it was profoundly instructive.

Perhaps unsurprising to those who knew Metropolitan Chrysostomos, of blessed memory, His Eminence was the teacher who most effectively instructed me to control my thoughts. Although we first-year students had only a few chances to listen to him speak due to his indifferent health, our rare conversations with him, for which we will always be grateful, were illuminating. He would regularly say such things as, "Keep developing these ideas," which for him meant, not adding a few more turrets to the aforementioned sky-castles, but, rather, examining our thinking so as to cut away the worthless parts in order to reveal the worth hidden beneath. His Eminence always aimed to challenge our thinking and to steer us away from daydreams and unproductive, idle thinking. I do not think I have ever met another individual capable of reducing a castle to rubble with so few words.

Rudyard Kipling advised those pursuing the virtuous life to master their thoughts. Although I have always in theory considered this a sound strategy, I never really attempted to put it into



Saint Catherine's Student House, an off-campus women's dormitory completed this summer, ready for the arrival of new students



practice before my time at the Saint Photios Seminary. This practice has only just begun for me, but even a start in the right direction is better than continued motion in the wrong direction and makes a very real difference.

*Timothy Granger, B.Th. Student*

***The Ark of Salvation.*** Over this past summer, I read a book published by the Saint Edward Brotherhood, in Brookwood, England, called *The Ark of Salvation: A Young Adult's Guide to the Orthodox Church*. For anyone who is curious to find out more about Orthodoxy, there are many topics covered in this work. Some of the topics discussed are Icons, Saints, the Mysteries, the soul, the Church Calendar and Services, fasting, prayer, music, television, the Internet, and the non-Orthodox.

A couple of points especially caught my eye while I was reading *The Ark*. There is a section dedicated to music, which presents an Orthodox view of the different genres of popular music. Among these are heavy metal and its subgenres, such as black metal (which features shrieking) and death metal (which features growling); from their very names and characteristics, we can guess who inspires these styles of music. In addition, so-called “Christian rock” is discussed as a genre that mixes religious lyrics (that are not Orthodox) with worldly and titillating melodies.

This book also contains many interesting insights into proper Orthodox practice. For example, in answer to the question of whether it is alright to drink water before Holy Communion, the answer given is negative. The explanation for this is that we are required to fast from midnight until the time we commune in the morning. This applies even if we are not going to commune, because the *antidoron* given out at the end

of the Divine Liturgy should be consumed on an empty stomach.

I enjoyed reading this book, which answered several questions I had and which opened doors to me to explore others in greater depth.

*Kira Rapp, B.Th. Student*

***The Fourth Cappadocian, Part 4.*** *This is a continuation of a series on St. Caesarius of Nazianzos, a serialization of a presentation that I made during the Patristics course of the M.T.S. program.*

As explained in the first installment of this series, the Patristics course that was part of the M.T.S. program, from which I have since graduated, 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. In a presentation I gave while still a student, I dubbed St. Caesarius, a less known figure, “the Fourth Cappadocian.”

There is a work traditionally ascribed to St. Caesarius known as the “Four Dialogues” (Διάλογοι Τέσσαρες) or “Questions and Answers” (Ερωταποκρίσεις), found in *Patrologia Graeca* (Vol. xxxviii, cols. 851–1189), with the following subtitle:

Questions put to Caesarius the secretary, brother of St. Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzos, by Constantius, Theocharistos, Andrew, Gregory, Domnos, Isidore, and Leontios, when he remained in Constantinople and taught for twenty years.

Consisting of about two hundred questions and answers, mostly on theological matters, the work begins by presenting teachings on the Holy Trinity which have much in common with the teachings of the other three Cappadocians. For example, St. Caesarius stresses the





equality of the Three Hypostases of the Holy Trinity. Writing against the heresy of Eunomios, who claimed that the Son was unlike the Father, St. Cæsarius beautifully uses the metaphor of light to elucidate this equality:

The Father is primarily and *par excellence* the true light, as St. John the Theologian says.... The Son also is light, as the same author attests.... And I say that the Divine Spirit also is light, concurring with the divinely-inspired David, who said, “In Thy light shall we see Light” (Psalm 35:10). ...And so, in light (the Father) we see light (His Child and Word); and in light (the Son) we see light (the Spirit). Therefore it may naturally be supposed that there are three lights in one another, unconfusedly and inseparably united. But God over all, the Father Almighty, is neither begotten nor caused, but is the Begetter and Cause of His Son, as a spring is of a river, as the sun is of a ray of light, as fire is of a flame—a cause, yet not an anteriority. Likewise also those from Him are caused and not subsequent. And thus is the Son: eternally begotten from the Father, the Cause and Begetter, in manner ineffable, not subsequent in time, no lesser in power, and not unlike in glory; being ever in the Father, and from the Father, and with the Father,

unconfusedly, inseparably, and unchangeably coëxisting with the Begetter. (*Response to Question II*, cols. 857–860.)

However, most scholars claim that this work was not actually written by St. Cæsarius. I will therefore discuss its authorship in the next installment.

*Father Chrysostomos, Lecturer*

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(Saint Kosmas of Aetolia)



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