THE BIBLE - A TIMELESS TEXT FOR TODAY?

The Sheptytsky Institute Organizes a Conference on

How Christians Can Read the Bible Faithfully

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada – July 4, 2012

This is how some participants answered the question "What did you like most about Study Days?"

The combination of prayer, presentations and workshops – another wonderful. Spirit filled experience. – Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic

Some of the laity have gotten an amazing spiritual boost from having attended these Study Days for the past years. This is a very important vehicle for their growth. – Ukrainian Catholic

A truly Christian and ecumenical atmosphere! – Greek Orthodox

The wonderful sense of God's presence and love in the spiritual ambience of Study Days, and the fellowship of God's community. – member of the Presbyterian Church of Canada

Study Days expanded my need to pray the psalms and not to fear reading the Book of Revelations. I can read the Old Testament with more understanding. – Eastern Orthodox

I especially enjoyed the plenary sessions and liturgical services. – Roman Catholic

Father's workshop was excellent. I hope to see him at next year's MASI Days. – Romanian Orthodox

Our children look forward to the youth program and really enjoyed it! They always have positive memories! – Eastern Catholic

For the fifth consecutive year, the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (MASI) hosted its annual Study Days, held from Friday, June 30 to Monday, July 2. As a family event, with approximately 125 adult participants and 25 young people (aged 5 to 12) in the youth program, MASI reached out to Eastern and Western Christians in offering an academic and spiritual event to enlighten and deepen their faith. The participants of various Christian communities (Anglican, Eastern Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic) came from many parts of the United States (Arizona, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York) and Canada (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Northern and Southern Ontario, and Quebec).

This year's theme was **The Bible - A Timeless Text for Today? Celebrating … Understanding … Living … the Word of God**.

The conference began with a plenary address by the Very Rev. Dr. Andrew Onuferko (Wynnyckyj Teaching and Research Fellow, Sheptytsky Institute) who discussed the topic **The Timeless Truth of**

the Written Word of God. his session examined questions such as: how do we discern between what is timeless and true and what may be the product of dated and limited human knowledge; what can contemporary literary theory teach us about Scripture and what are the limits of academic study in a Christian's search for the meaning of Scripture; what can we learn from our own experience as Eastern Christians, as we celebrate, study and are transformed by the living Word of God? In all, it was an excellent "setting of the scene" for the rest of the conference.

The Very Rev. Dr. Andrea Spatafora (Dean, Faculty of Theology at Saint Paul University) focused on the **Good News According to the Apocalypse**. Father Andrea acknowledged that for most readers, the Apocalypse, also known as the Book of Revelation, is filled with fearsome images that speak of judgment and punishment. Although there are some disconcerting images in the book, he assured us that the Apocalypse is in fact a proclamation of the Good News that God has triumphed over evil and has accomplished his plan of salvation for his people – a message of hope and affirmation.

On the closing day, Dr. Edith Humphrey (Professor, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) tackled the Old Testament with the caution, **Dare We Ignore the Scriptures of the Apostolic Church?** While Eastern and Orthodox Christians honour the Old Testament, she said, it is also the case that the collection is not well known among many, especially in our day when weekly services, Orthros (Matins), and Vespers are not as well attended as the Divine Liturgy, where there is no Old Testament reading. No doubt many Christians feel that there is much that is "distorted" about the canon of the Old Testament, which is much longer than the New Testament, composed of very different kinds of literature, and covers a vast period of time. While highlighting the unique value of the Old Testament, Dr. Humphrey took on some of its most difficult passages, and showed that even in these places (indeed, perhaps especially here) we are drawn into the mystery of the Triune God.

The plenary sessions we re augmented by workshops offered by a variety of Eastern Catholic, Roman Catholic and Orthodox presenters. These were of a practical nature integrating theological insight with opportunities to apply this knowledge to one's family circle, community and particular circumstances. We covered the following areas: Healing Memories Among the Churches (SbDcn. Dr. Adam DeVille); Dealing with the Times when We Feel the Absence of God (Rev. Dr. Roman Rytsar); Christian Parenting – Raising "C" rated Kids in an "S" rated World (Rev LCol Terry Cherwick and Presvitera Lada Tesla Cherwick); the Byzantine Liturgical Year (SbDcn. Dr. Brian A. Butcher); Theosis: Eastern Christian Teaching on the Nature of the Human Person (Rt. Rev. Dr. Andriy Chirovsky); Seeing Scripture in Icons (Presvitera Olenka Hanushevska Galadza); Praying the Psalms (Very Rev. Dr. John Jillions); Saint Gregory Palamas on the Feast of Transfiguration (Very Rev. Maxym Lysack); Counselling from a Christian Anthropology: How Do We Heal the Human Heart? (Dr. Mary Marrocco). Advanced and beginner cantor training were also taught by Melita Mudri-Zubacz and Yuriy Derkach respectively.

Study Days included Vespers, Matins and Divine Liturgy, a youth program (led by Justine Kruz), a community supper and the chance for participants to interact in a truly and positive Christian environment.

Following Study Days, two summer courses are offered at the Sheptytsky Institute for those who wish to continue their academic and spiritual growth. This year's summer courses are taught by Rt. Rev. Dr. Andriy Chirovsky (Selected Topics in Eastern Christian Thought II: Theosis [Deification]) and Rev. Dr.

Roman Rytsar (Selected Topics in Eastern Christian Thought I: Metropolitan Anthony Bloom and Kenotic Theology).

The Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies is encouraged by the positive feedback received this year at Study Days and is planning future conference(s). The last word goes to one of our Ukrainian Catholic participants:

Excellent week-end! It's like a reunion each year with some of my favourite people and also a retreat … Real food for the soul!

Please consider joining us next time. Our doors (and our hearts) are open!