

Summary of the Strategic Planning Colloquium (April 16-17, 2004)

The Administrative Board of the Institute has been meeting regularly since the Spring of 2003. Aided by the appointment of an Associate Director and Board Coordinator, the Board spent considerable time in its start-up of 2003-04 year discussing the goals of the Institute and the concrete means of achieving them. The high point of this planning was a diagnostic working conference in which some dozen and a half mostly local scholars gathered at the School's campus in Brookline, Massachusetts on April 16 and 17, 2004 to dialogue in general about "The Opportunities and Challenges of Patristic Studies Today" and also to offer advice about the particular opportunities and challenges of this Institute at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. The brief reflection papers prepared in advance by these scholars and the discussion that these papers stimulated provide the background for much of the following report. They are also serving as an invaluable ongoing aid to the Administrative Board as it goes about the task of establishing the Institute's priorities and goals.

The overworked "glass-half-empty/glass-half-full" can be helpful here. Our chosen phrase "opportunities and challenges" is a positive way of talking about the problems that beset the field of patristics today. But many of these problems are not specific to patristics; they are shared by all the humanistic disciplines as we enter more and more into the cybernetic and nanotechnological age. We can bewail these problems, and react to them with some kind of rear-guard action. Or, looking at the brighter side, we can attend to the various things that have been developing in the worlds of church, academia, and society. Many of these developments really are problems. But our choice is to look upon them less as problems and more as revelatory of new situations and experiences that can provide the practical insight and inspiration for identifying the work that now needs to be done.

A second well-worn cliché provides another key to what lies before us: "dialogue." Those who met with us on April 16 and 17, 2004 came not only from different academic settings but also from different church situations both within and without the Greek Orthodox communion. Yes, there were differences of opinion. But, committed to listen and to learn from each other, we discovered that the differences could become an enriching blessing. Reflecting on this experience, the Administrative Board realized that dialogic activity must be a major priority of the Institute and a central characteristic of most of its undertakings.

At the outset, the need to clarify what is meant by "patristic studies," both what it means in general and what it can mean for this Institute, came quickly to the surface. It proved to be a complex issue. Viewed diachronically, until about 150 years ago patristics (along with religious studies generally) tended to be dominated by overriding philosophical, religious, or confessional concerns. To these concerns, patristics, if by that we mean serious academic-theological research, was only a maidservant. Later, at the turn into the twentieth century, especially in the West, this dominance was shifting to "scientific" historical approaches. For the most part, however, traditional religious institutions reacted negatively to these new "scientific" approaches. In patristics, these approaches were often associated with the work of Adolf von Harnack or with the history-of-religions school. Later, by the middle of the twentieth century, the scientific-reductionist aspects of these scholarly approaches were on the wane and more nuance was entering into patristic and early Christian studies. At the same time, the borders they had—often jealously defended barriers between academic approaches and religious approaches—were becoming less strict. But much of that gain was neutralized by the rise of sharper lines of division between the disciplines. While biblical studies, for example, were becoming more historically critical, patristic studies, especially in theological or church settings, tended to remain more dogmatic, more doctrinally oriented.

But now, in the opening years of the twenty-first century, we find contemporary hermeneutics successfully exposing as illusory modernity's pretensions to objectivity. In addition, one notices that many of the just-mentioned differences formerly seen as divisive can now be seen as enriching. Nevertheless, the separation between biblical and patristic studies remains a great challenge, to

say nothing of what seems to be the self-ostracizing of patristic studies by its general inability or unwillingness to be in dialogue with contemporary theology. Yet when viewed and discussed dialogically rather than polemically, these differences, these problems can help us to formulate the Institute's programs and priorities.

Viewed synchronically, however, as even the beginning of this Institute's dialogic activity has revealed, what we have been describing and analyzing derives from a distinctly Western way of looking at things. It does not reflect what has been going on in the East. Look, for example, at the relative lack of Greek or Eastern participation in the quadrennial Oxford Patristic Conference and in the annual meetings of the North American Patristic Society. It can also be seen from the very discussion occasioned by the founding of this Institute at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. The "challenges and opportunities" that we have been identifying and from which we look to draw our inspiration have been based on how the discipline is defined in the West. We assumed from the outset that the dialogue between East and West and the overcoming of East-West misunderstandings were central to the agenda of this Institute. But it was only when we got into discussion that we realized the extent to which we, including the Greek Orthodox among us, were construing this agenda in terms of specifically Western definitions and paradigms.

An example of this is the way that the categories "critical" and "uncritical" are applied to patristic writings and research. Even when scholars, Eastern as well as Western, dismiss as superficial the bias that sees everything before the Enlightenment as uncritical, they still point critically, and in terms developed by modern Western historical criticism, to discrepancies precisely where the Fathers of the Church found connections and continuities. It cannot be denied that some of this emphasis on continuity, in the past as well as in the present, and in the East as well as in the West, is uncritical. But some of it is also due to a significantly different world view that is more present in Greek Orthodox theology and spirituality than in the theology found in the West. It is a way of looking at things that emphasizes the continuities rather than the separations between the Bible, patristic biblical exegesis, and its various appropriations in the life of the Church today. This points to one of the obvious opportunities and challenges of this Institute: its ecclesial as well as its academic location. Not only is it located within Boston's university setting and in one of the institutions that constitute the uniquely rich resources of the Boston Theological Institute, it is also located in and shares in the goals and purposes of an academic institution dedicated unequivocally to the study and practice of Greek Orthodox theology, liturgy, and spirituality. Far from seeing this as a problem in the sense of Kipling's "East is East and West is West, and ne'er the twain shall meet," we see this situation, with all its tensions and ambiguities, as constituting the very heart of the potential of this Institute.

"Patristics" as it is commonly understood, especially in its traditional, almost synonymous relationship with "The Fathers of the Church", belongs to the world of theology, especially to the Catholic and Orthodox world of theology. However, the great recent flowering in early Christian studies, while not turning its back on this ecclesial world has extended significantly beyond its traditional boundaries. When, for example, we glance through the recent issues of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, we notice that it contains research that usually does not come from any ecclesial setting, let alone a Catholic or Orthodox ecclesial setting. It comes mainly from scholars located in universities and academic departments that have little or no connection to any church. Significantly, however, the scholars who gathered with us on April 16-17, 2004 to talk about the opportunities and challenges of patristic studies today did not see this development as a danger or a threat. We saw it primarily as a unique opportunity. We heard ourselves encouraging ourselves not to be afraid of secular knowledge, but also, along with that, reminding ourselves not to lose sight of our religious and spiritual roots and goals. For if we lose sight of those, we would also be losing our *raison d'être*. Some expressed this graphically by pointing out that, on the one hand, under the aegis of a strongly traditional ecclesiastical culture, patristics can be in danger of losing its mind; but that, on the other hand, under the aegis of a strongly scientific academic culture, patristics can be in danger of losing its soul.

Actually, an unreserved commitment both to the mind and to the soul was not just the implicit

assumption of the dialogue into which we have entered, it came to explicit expression when we began to speak about the goal of the Institute. This goal was pregnantly and serendipitously expressed early on in our discussion as contemplation. Contemplation/theoria, with all its rich connotations, beginning with Aristotle's scientific canonization of it as the summit of human virtue, and on through its rich development in the life, writings and experiences of Christian Fathers, saints, mystics and people of faith—and not just people of Christian faith—marvelously suggests most of the things this Institute has been founded to serve.

But to come back to our location in Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology within the Boston Theological Institute, we have to deal with the question of the relationship between patristics and Orthodox theology. A strong traditional position is that they are closely interrelated, or even synonymous. On the other hand, many modern progressive Orthodox theologians make only a few bows to their own patristic sources. Is this a regrettable loss of connection to one's roots? Or, looking at the brighter side, is it possibly a liberation from limitations that might otherwise keep an individual scholar from dealing effectively with the contemporary world? It is not our task to try to decide the ins and outs of this, but it is a question to be kept in mind. Complex questions like this bring us back to the need for the dialogic in patristic studies. No one person, or even one "school" of persons can possibly do justice to the vast array of information, hermeneutic approaches and methodologies that are now available to scholars working in the area of patristic studies. Even if the particular task that any one of us undertakes has a narrow focus, we cannot responsibly carry it out in isolation from what is going on, first, in the rest of the world of Early Christian studies, and then, at least implicitly, in the rest of the world of religious studies.

We spoke above of "the self-ostracizing of patristic studies by its general inability or unwillingness to be in dialogue with contemporary theology." This is another instance of the problem-versus-opportunity contrast. There is no question that this is a problem. Patristic scholarship all too often speaks only to itself, or even only to a select part of itself. But when we shift our categories from "problem" to "challenge" and then to "opportunity," the work ethos of our new Institute, in its location within the Boston Theological Institute, begins to take shape. Like charity, dialogue must begin at home, that is, among patristic scholars themselves, before we seek to reach out to the other areas of theology and religious studies. Thus it is that establishing dialogic, collaborative contact with the already flourishing *Patristica Bostoniensia*, The Boston Area Patristics Group, becomes a significant priority. The plans that are already under way to set up a regular meeting of graduate students working on or interested in patristic themes are also an expression of this dialogic commitment. In other words, both by supporting already existing undertakings and by identifying and supporting the development of new activities—conferences, lectures, seminars, fellowships, research grants, publications, web site services, etc.—come to mind, it is the goal of this Institute to become a supportive and attractive center for research and study of patristic themes in the service of both the academy and the Church.

The concept of service to the Church brings us to one of the significant new opportunities now opening up to patristic studies. Traditionally, it has been primarily the Orthodox, the Catholic and Anglican, and then, to a lesser extent, the main line Protestant churches that have had a special interest in patristics or the "Fathers of the Church" as they are commonly referred to in church circles. Recently, however, scholars from the evangelical churches are beginning to appear in greater numbers at patristic gatherings. This parallels an increasing interest in liturgy and liturgical studies among scholars from these churches. The ecumenical significance of these developments can hardly be overestimated. For the greatest ecumenical divides, the greatest ecumenical chasms, are not those between East and West, nor between Protestant and Catholic, but between the sacramental and the so-called non-sacramental churches (churches in which only baptism and the Bible are accorded "sacramental" significance). Among the Orthodox, the Catholic and the main line Protestant churches, there has been, over the past half century, a growing convergence of theology and practice regarding the Eucharist and the other sacraments. This has been accompanied by a growing common familiarity with the Bible due to the use of common or similar lectionaries. There is hope, and signs that indicate that this hope is realistic,

that this convergence will eventually bring us closer to the long-dreamt-of union of our churches. Our new patristics Institute at Holy Cross, having defined itself from the outset as open to the contributions of scholars from all the churches and all serious academic settings, finds itself in a position to contribute mightily to this exciting new ecumenical situation.

This ecumenical context in which we find ourselves also means that we must attend to the way that key terms, for example "tradition" can mean different things to different people. For Protestants, especially for evangelical Christians, the patristic tradition is important because of its proximity to the Bible, whereas for Catholics this literature is part of the building of a "tradition" throughout the history of the Church. It is similar with the "Fathers of the Church." A narrow understanding of the term "Fathers" would exclude a major document like the Didache, or the writings of Origen or Tertullian. It would also tend to exclude or undervalue marginalized figures or those who were "losers" in the various doctrinal struggles that led to the solidification of the orthodox understanding of the creed. But often, careful attention precisely to these neglected or marginalized figures and writings—attention that is now increasingly possible, if not inevitable, with the improved resources and methodologies of the twenty-first century—can provide key insights to what was developing and transpiring in the early history of Christianity.

We are on sensitive ground here. For, as our dialogic discussions at Holy Cross on April 16 and 17, 2004 reminded us, there seems to be no theological or academic position that has already achieved perfection, no position that cannot in some way be purified or brought to a deeper understanding that is more true to its own authentic self. And, as our discussions indicate, patristic scholars seem ready and committed to bring to these discussions the nuanced sensitivity that is needed to respect the difference between, say, the theology that is integrally connected with central creedal affirmations of the Church, and the more contingent theories and positions that lie more at the periphery. With these words we are beginning to touch upon what might be called the exalted vocation of the patristic theologian and the patristic scholar. But we are by no means starting from scratch. Without exception, everyone who gathered with us for discussion on April 16 and 17, 2004 obviously had previous experience with this kind of sensitively nuanced theological and scholarly discussion. That was one of the things that made those two days so enjoyable; we were feeding upon each other's insights and achievements. It is also one of the things that makes us eagerly optimistic about the future of this Institute.

Not immediately present to us as we began our discussions, but more and more to the fore as we went on, especially as we reflected on the ecclesial aspects of our mission, is the place of the laity in the work of the Institute. Education of the laity is obviously not our central mission. But if we are serious about a mission of service to the Church as well as to the academy, we acknowledge our responsibility to be alert to the ways in which we can share with the broader realms of church membership the riches of the Church's patristic traditions. This, of course, is closely connected to our commitment to do what we can to bring patristic scholarship into dialogue with contemporary theology.

Priorities: Short-Term and Long-Term

Dialogue, indeed an ethos of dialogue, will thus be central to our work. However, ever present in our deliberations and planning is the awareness that acquaintance with the primary texts is the unavoidable basis of solid patristic scholarship. Our increasing ability to access the material cultures and the sociological settings from which the texts arose, while adding to the enriching complexity of patristic studies, does not dilute the reality that patristic study centers primarily and foundationally on the texts that have come down to us from early Christianity. However, numerous important texts have not yet been critically edited, and many, many more are still not available in reliable modern translations or supported by helpful commentaries. This situation obviously establishes some of the long-term priorities of the Institute, and, given the decline of the humanistic disciplines alluded to near the beginning of this paper, one of the most serious challenges of this Institute and of contemporary patristic scholarship in general. However, the long and expensive work of editing texts involves the commitment of more resources than are

initially available to us. Thus, until the endowment grows sufficiently to include the support of such vitally important scholarship, we will focus on more immediately attainable goals such as sponsoring conferences, fellowships, and selected research projects and translations, and on the publications that can proceed from these activities. We will also be looking into the ways in which the Institute's web site, in conjunction with other similar resources, can be of service to patristic scholars and to others interested in the Early Church.

IV. Summing Up and Looking Ahead

Thus, as The Stephen and Catherine Pappas Patristic Institute at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology moves towards the end of its first full year of operation in the Academic Year of 2004-2005, we can report that [1] three significant things have already been achieved, and [2] several other events are imminent or are [3] in the planning stages.

[1] Chronologically, the first significant event was the diagnostic working conference on April 16-17, 2004 on which this report is largely based. Second, and almost concomitantly, the Institute's web site went on line. It will be periodically updated and expanded as the work of the Institute progresses.

Third was the event that began to put the Institute on the map of patristic studies: a major conference on October 14-16, 2004 on the campus of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology entitled "Apocalyptic Themes in Early Christianity." The major papers at this conference were presented by Brian E. Daley, S.J. of the University of Notre Dame, Bernard McGinn of the University of Chicago, Alexander Golitzin of Marquette University, Nancy Sevcenko, an independent scholar, John McGuckin of Columbia/Union Theological, Theodore Stylianopoulos of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Matthias Henze of Rice University, and Georgia Frank of Colgate University. There were also "Short Communications" from some dozen other scholars. These papers are now being prepared for publication in a volume that will become the inaugural volume in a series of publications that come from this Institute. These volumes will be published jointly the press of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology and a major commercial publisher.

[2] In addition, two further events are about to take place in the Spring of 2005. On the evening of April 14, 2005 the Institute will sponsor on its Brookline campus an evening of discussion with the members of *Patristica Bostoniensia*, the BTI-sponsored Boston Area Patristics Group. The theme of the discussion will, to a significant extent, be a continuation of the discussions (summarized earlier in this report) that took place in the April 16-17, 2004 diagnostic working conference: "The Situation of Patristic Studies Today: Challenges and Opportunities." Whether or not a meeting of this kind becomes an annual event, it clearly signifies the Institute's commitment to collaborate as much as possible with patristic scholars living and working in the Boston area.

Then, on the two following days, April 15 and 16, 2005, the Institute will sponsor on its Brookline campus a graduate student conference for students who are working in or are interested in patristic studies. Advice will be available from a committee drawn from some of the faculties of the Boston Theological Institute, but the program will be administered primarily by the graduate students themselves. It is hoped that this will become an annual affair that will offer an opportunity for graduate students in patristics both to get to know each other and to have a supportive atmosphere in which to present and get feedback on their papers and research projects. Some two dozen graduate students, some of them local, of course, but also from across the country and with a few even from Europe, are expected to attend and discuss each other's papers.

[3] Finally, planning is under way for future events and activities. First, and most imminently, building on the success of our first conference in the Fall of 2004 on "Apocalyptic Themes in Early Christianity," plans are now almost complete for a second such conference to be held on October 13-15, 2005 on the theme: "Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity." This conference

will feature not only major presentations from such scholars as Rudolf Brändle, Daniel Caner, Francine Cardman, Demetrios Constantelos, Stephen Friesen, Susan Holman, Angeliki Laiou, and Wendy Mayer, but also a panel discussion that will attempt to relate this patristic theme to the current situation in the Church and world. This will be the second in the series of annual conferences to which, along with our projected publisher, we are now committed. The projected titles for the future conferences are: 2006: "Evil and Suffering in Early Christianity"; and 2007: "Sickness and Healing in Early Christianity."

In addition, some form of continued collaboration with the BTI-sponsored Boston Area Patristics Group will be pursued, and the conference of graduate students in patristic studies is projected to become an annual affair.

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This, we project, is just the beginning of the story. The Administrative Board of the Institute is increasingly turning its attention not just to continuing what now seems to be well begun, but more and more to directing its attention and resources to other, more long-term ventures. See the beginning of this discussion above in Section III of this report. To keep abreast of ongoing developments, check in occasionally with our web site:
<http://www.pappaspatristic.hchc.edu>

March 30, 2005
For the Administrative Board,
Robert J. Daly, S.J.