

Address at the Launch of the English
Translation of the Catechism of the
Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church,
Christ Our Pascha,¹
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Introduction

It is a joy and privilege to be able to speak here in Edmonton at the launch of the English translation of our Catechism.

Bishop David [Motiuk] and several of his collaborators – in particular Fr. Stephen Wojcichowsky here in Edmonton and Fr. Michael Winn in Ottawa – have been key in shepherding the translation of the Catechism to completion. I will leave it to history to disclose the many boulders and pits that they have had to navigate to bring the project to this joyous day.

My remarks this evening will be divided into two sections. The first will be a reflection on the ways in which our new Catechism symbolizes a host of wonderful things in the life of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church. At least four such symbolic aspects come to mind. Then, in the second part, I want to briefly share with you some of the magnificent insights that you will find in this new publication. Naturally, these will have to be brief: we want you to buy the book – so I'm not going to read it to you.

¹ *Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: Christ Our Pascha* (Kyiv and Edmonton: Synod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Commission for the Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, 2016).

I.

Let me begin with the question of symbolism. Books can be important not only for what they say, but for what they signify. The Catechism of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church and its English translation symbolize several significant facts.

First, this Catechism symbolizes that our Church worldwide – and paradoxically starting in Ukraine – knows that its mission is not simply to “serve the religious needs of an ethnic community.” Rather, that mission is to bring the truth of Christ to entire societies. Why do I say this? Because a Church with a narrow “identity” focus would never embark on a project of this kind. This project required members of our Church to wrestle for years with ideas and concepts of *universal* significance in order to be able to say something significant *today* about *life-changing realities*. A Church that conceives of herself primarily as a repository of ancestral customs and community cohesion will never produce such a book. And this is where the connection with our Church in Ukraine is so vital – and symbolic. Has it occurred to anyone that the production of this Catechism – that is, the original text – was realized not in any Western country, where our Church has access to scores of libraries and specialists who could have helped produce a catechism, but rather in a post-Soviet country, where theology had been abolished and theologians imprisoned? How can one explain this? Undoubtedly this is because our Church in Ukraine understands that its task is to transform all of society – not just its own members and not just superficially. And it understands that it, the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church, has to do it. Unlike parts of the “diaspora,” our Church in Ukraine does not presume that other Christians will undertake this charge, that other Churches will bring the light of Christ to society as a whole. Moreover, because our Church in Ukraine has seen the devil up close, it understands that dancing with him is not an option. Our Patriarch, along with all those who know what it means to confess Christ at the cost of one’s comfort, have seen what happens to a society that loses its mooring in Christ. It is their sense of mission that compelled Patriarch Sviatoslav and his associates to embark on the production of the original

Ukrainian version, and how blessed we in the West are to have been led by such a Patriarch and the confessors of the faith that have surrounded him.

Second, this Catechism symbolizes a commitment to theologizing. For those of you who might think that theology is a rather irrelevant discipline (let's face it, theology faculties are hardly growing in most universities today), it remains a fact that ideas have consequences. Even the market forces that drive so many of our contemporary choices and values – even these market forces have a grounding in ideas. So who is forming the ideas in our communities; what are those ideas; and what are their consequences and effects?

The ability to gather people to thrash out nuanced ideas is no mean task for the Ukrainian Church. Since the thirteenth century – the time of the Mongol invasions – our people have experienced repeated, numerous brain drains. The brain drains have generally not been our fault, but we have been the victims. In other words, during recurring periods for almost 800 years, Ukraine has suffered the elimination, flight, or assimilation of its elites – including its intellectual elites – and the consequences are evident to all. Of course, when a people – and Church – have to worry about basic survival, “metaphysical” questions of necessity get sidelined. And yet, without intellectual reflection, any group will usually become the victim of those who *are* doing the thinking.

This Catechism treats questions such as the nature of labour, the meaning of suffering, the contours of freedom... And the fact that the Catechism exhibits real intellection is at least partially demonstrated by the fact that while I have a PhD in theology – along with three other degrees in the area of religion – there are sections of the Catechism where even I learned refreshingly new and insightful concepts. (I am not suggesting that people with doctorates in theology have nothing to learn – quite the contrary – but one does not usually think of a catechism as a source for such learning.)

The commitment to theologizing signified by the Catechism brings us to a third symbolic dimension of its appearance. This relates to the very identity of an Eastern Catholic Church. If someone were to ask why there is an entity