

## Theology in the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church: The Past, Present and Future in the “Diaspora” Context<sup>1</sup>

Peter Galadza

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### *The Mandate of Vatican II and the Burdens of History*

The Second Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium* 23, *Unitatis redintegratio* 17, and – less explicitly – *Orientalium ecclesiarum* 5) declared that Particular Churches are to be distinguished by distinctive theologies (in addition to liturgies, spiritualities and canonical traditions). This, then, is not an optional aspect of Church life. The supreme teaching authority of the Catholic Church has mandated that a “*Pomisna Tserkva*” have its own theologians and theological institutions – both within and without its ancestral territory. The Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church (UGCC) outside Ukraine (as also in Ukraine) has begun to see the fruits of its commitment to theological distinctiveness. Our new Catechism is a good example of this. However, much remains to be done. Certainly as long as many of our faithful in the West continue to imagine that our Church’s distinctive identity lies in ethnicity and Rite alone, interest in developing theological programs will remain low.

Some envision that “Ukraine will take care of these needs.” One might ask, though, whether this is not an attitude reflecting greater commitment to the Church of one’s grandparents than the Church of one’s grandchildren. (This may

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<sup>1</sup> The following is a memorandum prepared for the Synod of Hierarchs of the UGCC in August, 2013.

sound harsh, but it does seem to explain certain phenomena. Besides, all of us are prone to seek surrogates when reality is so difficult. The work of re-evangelizing our own third and fourth generation faithful *in the West* can be much more demanding than helping others engaged in evangelization work in Ukraine. It also enables one to retain the notion that the UGCC is primarily an ethnic institution.)

The lack of attention to theology within the UGCC, however, should not be surprising. It reflects the burdens of a tortuous past. The long periods when the Ukrainian people were bereft of the kinds of social elites that create intellectual institutions have left their mark. (Even the famed Kyiv-Mohyla Academy was not allowed to offer accredited theology, and the struggles faced by Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky when he tried to create a university remained insurmountable.) When one couples this with the fact that until Vatican II Eastern Catholics were frequently censured for venturing beyond Tridentine Latin manualism or Thomistic scholasticism, it is not surprising that only limited progress has been made in implementing Vatican II's insistence that Churches *sui iuris* have their own theology.

These, of course, are the burdens of history. And one must always acknowledge them. But there is a difference between recounting history in order to evoke appropriate compassion, and recounting it to excuse inaction today. The Lord has given us the most unique opportunity in the long history of our Church. We now have the chance to bring Christ's light worldwide and to do so by brilliantly combining the best of Roman Catholicism with the best of Eastern Orthodoxy. (It is true that the UGCC already combines the two, but it is not always the *best* of the two that it combines.) Among the tasks of our own theology is to forge this synthesis in the most constructive way.

### ***Where and How in the Diaspora is Vatican II's Mandate Being Implemented?***

It would be much easier to answer the question about the state of theology in the UGCC if information could be ga-

thered in a systematic way. Almost three years ago, two UGCC academic institutions in North America planned a conference on the topic: “The State of Theology in the UGCC Worldwide.” The conference would have heard papers on theology in the UGCC as it exists everywhere – from Brazil to Edmonton, and in between. However, our North American Church leadership informed the organizers that the time was not opportune for such a conference. Unfortunately, there has been no subsequent communication from the North American hierarchy regarding a possible date. It did not propose an alternate. Of course, academic institutions dealing with non-controversial topics like this are not required to seek episcopal approval to organize such conferences. But it is indicative of the organizers’ desire to *sentire cum ecclesia* that they deferred to episcopal authority.

The following, very unsystematic, list of institutions in the West indicates where

- a) Ukrainian Greco-Catholics offer theological programs – of any kind, even non-accredited enrichment programs; and/or
  - b) Ukrainian Greco-Catholics of any appreciable number (more than two or three) follow programs of study.
- 1) Most of the Roman academic institutions, and the Pontifical Oriental Institute (PIO) in particular;
  - 2) The University of Leuven, Belgium;
  - 3) The International Theological Institute (ITI) in Trumau, Austria (and its Centre of Eastern Christian Studies);
  - 4) The Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (MASI), Saint Paul University, Ottawa (presently involved in negotiations to relocate to the University of St. Michael’s College in the University of Toronto);
  - 5) St. Josaphat’s Ukrainian Catholic Seminary, Washington DC – and the theological institutions located on the campus of the Catholic University of America;
  - 6) St. Basil’s College, Stamford, Connecticut;
  - 7) The Basilian House of Studies, Edmonton, Alberta;