

## The Sheptytsky Institute at Thirty-Three and Eastern Catholic Theology in the West

A modest yet poignant book recently appeared that bears directly on the Sheptytsky Institute's work and mission. Christopher Guly's *Strangers in a Strange Church? New Faces of Ukrainian Catholicism in Canada* tells the story of nine religious "seekers" who consciously chose to join an Eastern Catholic Church for the vision and lifestyle it offers.<sup>1</sup> They did so despite not having any background that would connect them ethnically with the frequently insular Church they entered. These nine individuals form an impressive group: a former ambassador, two physicians, and a major-grant-winning scholar are among the young committed Christians who have become stalwarts in their new communities while remaining vital contributors to society at large. More to the point of this editorial, all of them have had a direct connection to the Sheptytsky Institute and the theology it promotes.

Barely a month after Guly's book appeared, the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church notified the Sheptytsky Institute that it would be honoring it with its highest award, the Order of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky.<sup>2</sup> Both the book and the medal provide welcome encouragement. More than 50 years after Vatican II, which lists a distinctive *theology* as one of the four constitutive elements of a Church *sui iuris* (see *Lumen gentium* 23 and *Unitatis redintegratio* 17) some Eastern Catholic authorities – as well as Roman Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Guly, *Strangers in a Strange Church? New Faces of Ukrainian Catholicism in Canada* (Toronto: Novalis, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The medal was officially presented on December 8, 2019 by his Beatitude Sviatoslav (Shevchuk) during the concluding Divine Liturgy of the Assembly (*Sobor*) of the Philadelphia Archeparchy. The latter was hosted by Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak.

theologians allegedly committed to the Council's vision – continue to impede the flourishing of this distinctiveness.

Eventually it will be possible to tell the whole story of the obstacles placed in the way of such a flourishing. In the meantime, allow me to offer the following “silhouette” of how Eastern Catholic theology has been “done” at the Sheptytsky Institute during the last thirty-three years. Hopefully, it will provide not only a useful *apologia* for the Sheptytsky Institute's vision and work to date, but also afford some guidance to the next generation of Eastern Catholic theologians, lay and ordained, who hope to improve on it – a hope I sincerely share. As the Institute marks thirty-three years, a symbolic number associated with crucifixion and resurrection, now seems an appropriate time to offer this précis of our work.

To begin with, let me respond to a criticism that, while not exactly central to this “silhouette,” has certainly been the most curious as regards our vision: the charge that our approach to theology at the basic degree level is suitable primarily for “specialists.” The argument goes something like this: regular, pastorally-oriented theology is what is needed by the Eastern Catholic Churches today, especially in North America, and such theology can be found only in mainline Western programs.

Several remarks are apropos. First, the Sheptytsky Institute has always been part of a “mainline Western” faculty of theology precisely so that the kinds of questions – and answers – percolating in contemporary North American societies (and thus in North American theology) are never avoided. They dare not be elided by a myopically Eastern approach fixated, for example, on “identity.” Consequently, an entire third of the courses taken in MDiv or MTS programs sponsored by the Sheptytsky Institute, whether at Saint Paul University in Ottawa or, more recently, at St. Michael's College in Toronto, have always been taught by Western Christian professors, sourced from courses offered by Western faculties. These include almost all of the courses in pastoral theology, and most of those in biblical studies. The most immediate reason for this close cooperation is that Eastern Christian studies continue to be derivative in these two areas – heavily reliant on Roman