
Foreword

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This book is being published on the occasion of an important celebration, the one hundredth anniversary of the arrival in Canada, in December 1912, of the first Ukrainian Catholic bishop, Nykyta Budka (1877–1949). To properly commemorate that event, the Ukrainian bishops of Canada commissioned a long overdue and thorough examination of the life of Budka, a pivotal figure in Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Canadian history. The bishops' choice of Canadian Reverend Dr. Athanasius D. McVay to write this work was most fortuitous. In his earlier academic works he has shown a learned historical perspective on difficult issues confronting the Ukrainian people. In this work he demonstrates an unrivalled depth of knowledge of the primary sources on the subject, particularly those in the Vatican Archives, in which he has been immersed for over ten years of his academic life. This, along with his dedication to finding the facts about Bishop Budka, has resulted in this remarkable account of a life lived in obedience, work, and love.

Until now, a complete biography of Nykyta Budka, who held a position of enormous significance in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in both Canada and Ukraine, had never been attempted. Budka's mission in Canada has been largely neglected or ignored by both church and secular historians. There were a small number of popular works on him, mostly written in Ukrainian. As a consequence, many unanswered questions remained. The few works about his efforts on behalf of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada were written by people largely hostile to his person and almost all his endeavours to preserve the faith of his flock. Thus Budka was popularly viewed to be a negative force in Canadian history. In Canadian Catholic historical accounts he appeared to be a figure of little importance. Yet, without his dedication, enormous physical and mental exertions, the very existence of the Church he headed would have clearly been in jeopardy. His placement in Canada, his relentless hard work, and the resolving of continuous conflicts, all cost him his physical and emotional health.

In his conclusion Dr. McVay rightly points out that "Bishop Budka needs to be judged by history on his whole life, and not merely on isolated incidents, and based on a wider consultation of primary sources than in the past." My own research on Bishop Budka as a graduate student in the late 1970s centred around a particular short period of time, from the beginning of the First World War to Budka's departure from Canada in 1927 when he was obligated to resign his post. My interest was sparked by the discovery of the judicial vindication of Bishop Budka, by a 1919 Winnipeg courtroom, of charges of disloyalty to Canada. At the time, my thinking was—what could have happened to a person of obvious prominence, as the head of a church in Canada, to have led to him being treated in this manner? In the 1980s I produced two articles which explored Budka's experience in Canada in some detail, in particular the episode surrounding the controversial pastoral letter that he issued in July 1914.

It was the availability of relevant archives which made my work possible. However, consulting primary sources in Rome was impossible as the Vatican Archives materials from the period I was studying had not yet been opened to

scholars. Nevertheless, using what was accessible to me in Winnipeg and Canada, I was able to be a small voice amid the silence which had been maintained so long about Bishop Budka's life and work. But there is larger story here, which is finally being told by Dr. McVay.

As Pope Leo XIII stated, when he opened the Vatican Archives to scholars, "The Church has nothing to fear from the truth." The truth about Bishop Budka as revealed in Dr. McVay's clear, straightforward prose is complicated and multi-faceted, as was the entire life of the bishop. In Budka's life there were periods of great joy and celebration, but more frequently for long periods, he lived through great distress, painful uncertainty, and physical and mental hardships. The portrayal of Budka in this book is a portrait of endurance. The genesis of many of his problems, especially while working in Canada, was a lack of fundamental understanding by his superiors of the gravity of the issues confronting him daily, throughout the years of his episcopate. One wonders how different that mission might have been if Budka had been permitted to make use of the ministry of married secular clergy to serve his faithful. We can also reflect on how both his Canadian mission and also the work he did in interwar western Ukraine were circumscribed by wider, global events like the First and Second World Wars. It is intriguing to speculate on how the roadblocks and hardships he faced during his Canadian sojourn might have been relieved by a sound financial base.

Even the account of the final five years of his life spent in a Soviet Gulag adds little to our knowledge of his severe incarceration between 1945 and his death. But what we do know is that this servant of God continued to minister to the weak and dying, serving to the end of his life as the Christian priest he was. Maintaining his dignity, his faith, and forgiveness in the cruelest of circumstances, as he had done throughout the years of service to the Ukrainian Catholic Church, he gained a favourable judgement from that Church, as a beatified martyr and confessor of the Faith, which is so well deserved.

With this publication, the name and life of Blessed Bishop Nykyta Budka will find their proper place in the history of Ukrainians in Canada, in Canadian Catholic history, and in the history of Ukraine.

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Figure 3. Commemorative stamp issued by Canada Post to mark the centenary of the arrival of Mykyta [Nykyta] Budka, the first Bishop for the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada.