

# **The new Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church “Christ – Our Pascha” from an ecumenical perspective: One step forward, two steps backward**

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In the context of Ukrainian church realities, the ecumenical breadth of the new Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (“CUGCC”) can be measured by the attitude of its authors toward Orthodox theology, and specifically to their own Orthodox roots.

At the outset, the very publication of such a document can be said to be an expression of the Eastern theological identity of the UGCC. When the basis of the first section of the 1992 “Catechism of the Catholic Church” is founded upon the so-called “Apostolic” Symbol of Faith, (See Footnote 1) which is accepted only in the Western Church and in the mainstream Protestant Churches, the CUGCC corrects this anti-Orthodox lapse of the Latin Church and makes specific reference to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith, which bears an unquestionable universal authority and is acknowledged as the authentic expression of the faith of the Ancient Church not only by Catholics and Orthodox, but even by the majority of the great Protestant denominations.

However, for some reason the creed is given with the “Filioque” addition, even though in brackets. The particular reasons guiding the authors of the CUGCC in making such an ecumenical faux pas toward their Orthodox brothers is truly incomprehensible. It is well-known that this unfortunate addition was one of the main theological reasons of the Great Schism between East and West. This is even more incomprehensible, if we take into account the fact that the Filioque was dropped even in the declaration of the Vatican Congregation of the Faith’s “Dominus Iesus” (See Footnote 2) (2000 AD). It is obvious that the creators of the CUGCC lacked the courage to clearly articulate the truth of the Eastern theological “Monarchy” or “Single Principle” of the Father.

Although the Father is acknowledged as the “Principle of the Person of the Son and of the Person of the Holy Spirit” (82), but the key word “only” is not included, and as a matter of fact there is no quotation anywhere throughout the CUGCC from the works of St Photios the Great, whose Trinitarian theology constitutes the crown of the teaching of the Eastern Church on the Holy Trinity. However, with

regard to the question of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, the CUGCC copiously attempts to keep to the Eastern tradition (comp. 91), while, at the same time acknowledging the legitimacy of the Western-Alexandrian tradition (comp. 98).

While articulating the Anaphora of Basil the Great, the commemoration of the Roman pope as the “Most Holy Ecumenical Pontiff” (8) strikes a discordant note, as this is actually a corruption of the anaphora, for this title of the Bishop of Rome is absent from its initial text.

It is a translation of the Latin phrase “episcopus universalis” – a term with a very doubtful theological basis, which Bishops of Rome had, for long, rejected (for example, Pope Gregory the Great-Dialogist) and which was slowly introduced into the UGCC after the Synod of Zamostia, of sorry memory, in 1720 with the goal of squeezing out from its (the UGCC’s) memory more than 600 years of communion with the *Ecumenical* Patriarchate of Constantinople. Within the context of the ecumenical dialogue, this term is “past its best before date” and is a reminder of the struggle between Rome and Constantinople, so that it, in no wise, reflects the “Petrine ministry of the Bishops of Rome” (291) and should have been removed, post haste, from the Liturgy of the UGCC.

Affirming that the “Bishop of Rome – the bearer of Peter’s ministry – calls together Ecumenical councils, approves their affirmation, affirms and expresses the infallible teaching of the faith of the Church, deals with the difficulties that develop in the lives of individual particular churches” (293), the CUGCC only parrots the contemporary Western perspective on the primacy, that is based, first and foremost, on the canonical falsifications of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the one, undivided Church of the first millennium, the pope did not call together any Ecumenical council and the Eastern Church never acknowledged the pope’s infallibility, nor his jurisdictional primacy in the sense given by the First Vatican council.

To affirm that “Communion with the Church of Rome is the sign and condition of belongingness to the universal Church (304), the CUGCC unwittingly removes from the Universal Church all non-Catholics - a disturbing statement given its indirect put down of the Orthodox Churches. This is a witness to the fact that, for the time being, the UGCC has not liberated itself from the theological baggage of uniatism, whose basis consists in the view that the Eastern Churches are considered incomplete ecclesiological constructs.

In support of this is the equally false affirmation, that the Florentine and Brest unions were examples of the overcoming of schism in the Church (comp. 306) at a time when it is well-known that the first (that of Florence) ended in a complete fiasco, and the other not only did not renew the union between East and West, but divided the hitherto united Ukrainian Church – the effects of which we experience to this day.

Unfortunately, the authors of the CUGCC missed a wonderful opportunity for an absolutely necessary *reassessment of the Union of Brest as the sin of the primary schism of the Ukrainian Church*, which originated the beginning of the schism of our people into East and West, the effects of which we all continue to experience to this day.

In general, the CUGCC is characterized by a certain thinking in terms of fantasy or else by an effort to canonize myths that exist in the minds of many Greek-Catholics who are incapable of accepting the new reality of ecumenism which was finally solidified by the Balamand document of 1993, which clearly condemned uniatism as a method of renewing unity. Rather than demonstrate the perspective of Balamand and, in this manner, express its own positive attitude toward ecumenism, the CUGCC continues to recite the fables of the epoch of uniatism with all of its negative stances toward ecumenism.

The catechism's authors loudly proclaim that the Kyivan Metropolitans, who were in union with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, were somehow in communion with Rome even after the rupture of communion between Constantinople and Rome, while the union of Brest was but an affirmation of this communion (between Rome and Kyiv – comp. 307). This conclusion is simply illogical for if such communion with Rome existed in an uninterrupted state, then why the need for the union at all and why did the participants of the uniate sobor of Brest anathematize their countrymen, who didn't join them in the union, but who decided to remain in the "communion with Rome" that existed prior to Brest? Is it then the case that the rivers of blood and tears that ran throughout our Ukrainian land as a result of the union occurred as a result of some sort of affirmation of what was already in place?

In fact, it would have been entirely proper for the CUGCC to have acknowledged the error of the schism within the Ukrainian Church on the part of those bishops who created the union of Brest and who disregarded its foreseeable and sad aftermath for the unity of the Ukrainian Church. Instead, the catechism makes a failed attempt to proclaim the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church to be the "direct descendant of the Kyivan Metropolia in communion with the Roman Church" (307), thus affirming the UGCC's pretensions with respect to being the inheritor of the rights of the pre-union Kyivan Church.

However, the fact that the Kyivan Church was Orthodox was somehow lost. This means that, logically, the true inheritors of the pre-union Kyivan Church could only be the Orthodox hierarchs. In addition, from the point of view of church law, it is clear that after the union of Brest the Sees of those bishops who went into the union became vacant, including the Kyivan Metropolitan See, which is why their replacement with new bishops was the legal right of the Orthodox Church.

The glorification of Josaphat of Polotsk who “would rather have given up his life than allow for the shedding of brotherly blood” (323) indicates that the authors of the CUGCC weren’t overly concerned with the fact that this saint is a very controversial personage for the Orthodox and a symbol of uniatism personified – the desire to renew the unity of the Church of Christ by means of dividing the Eastern Church while placing portions of it under the jurisdiction of the pope of Rome.

Unfortunately, the attempt of the authors of the CUGCC to focus on the Catechism of the Catholic Church as their orientation is made manifest in the very foreword (p. 7) and in practice it took shape as a form of uncritical imitation of redoubtable ideologies of Latin ecclesiology.

In contradiction of known facts from the history of the Church when a significant part or even a majority of bishops fell into heresy (e.g. Arianism and Iconoclasm), the CUGCC adopts an idealistic view of the teaching authority of the Church defined as “when the bishops, in one mind, hand down that which they received from the Apostles always and everywhere” (58). The Eastern Church does not know the idea of the “teaching authority of the Church” as this is a typically Latin ecclesiological notion, which makes truth the slave of the leadership of the Church. And generally speaking, the UGCC is not obligated to use the Catechism of the Catholic Church for the UGCC is an Eastern Church, and the creators of the CCC placed it on the foundation of the pseudo-apostolic creed which was never confirmed by the Ecumenical Councils as an expression of the faith of the entire Church – which also makes that creed uncanonical.

In addition, the teaching about papal primacy is not characterized by the spirit of ecumenical openness, but, instead, is expressed within the framework of the First Vatican Council, where the Bishop of Rome is the guarantor of the maintenance of orthodoxy (p. 287) and the “teacher and rule (sic) of the Apostolic faith, to whom the Lord has given the gift of infallibility in matters of faith and morals, in order to safeguard the purity and fullness of the Divine teaching.” (p. 291). And this in spite of the fact that the history of the Church indicates something quite different, for example, the case of pope Honorius I who was posthumously anathematized by the Sixth Constantinopolitan Ecumenical Council in 681 for his support of the Monothelite heresy or when the popes at the beginning of the second millennium illegally added the “Filioque” to the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith.

However, a step toward Orthodox ecclesiology is seen in the presented notion of the Particular Church (ukr. *pomisna Cerkva*) as such and which is created from the Local Churches (comp. 291). This is foreign to the Latin tradition. The catechism also classifies the Roman Church as being a Particular Church. This shows that the Roman Church is truly the sister of the UGCC, and equal in rights with her (comp. 305 and 307), and not her mother. Nonetheless, the CUGCC refuses to call matters by their proper names by avoiding the use of the term

“autocephalous.” To this is added wishful thinking when it is affirmed that the “one and catholic Church exists in the Particular Churches and is of the Particular Churches” (17), because the Second Vatican Council the “ecclesia particularis” is, in fact, identical with the notion of an “eparchy/diocese” (See Footnote 3) and not with a true Particular Church, which does not have any rightful place in the Catholic Church, because the particular unions of bishops, for example, the Episcopal Conferences, possess a status that is entirely dependent on Rome (See Footnote 4).

The CUGCC makes a general attempt to base the idea of particularity on the foundation of inculturation (301), and not in terms of the canonical tradition of the Eastern Church (34<sup>th</sup> Apostolic Canon), as this is done by the Orthodox Churches. But this is extremely illogical, because if the inculturation factor in connection with ecclesial particularity was valid then we would see a movement toward ecclesial particularity in those regions of the Western Church with strongly and widely defined cultures, but this is not the case at all. We should not confuse ecclesiology with cultural issues. The Particularity of the UGCC is not derived from local Ukrainian identity but is rather a logical aftermath of the fact that the Uniate Churches are separated parts of the Orthodox Church and therefore they at least try to orient themselves on the basis of Orthodoxy’s ecclesiological principles.

In the entire CUGCC there is a felt absence of such a foundational (for Eastern theology) term as “the Uncreated Energies”: not to mention the fact that not even once is mention made of the greatest theologian of the Eastern Church in the second millennium, St Gregory Palamas. This is an unacceptable lack in a theological document of such a level. Deification (divinization) is mentioned a few times, however, and is even placed within the context of Eastern theology (comp. 850-855), however this is, in at least one place, understood in accordance with Latin theology, as an “entrance into communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity” (255), which contradicts the Eastern apophatic theology of the Trinity and the Palamite traditions concerning the idea of God. Instead, the Western theology of satisfaction is adopted, which is expressed in the dogma about purgatory (250), but there is no mention about indulgences. Mention is made about the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Theotokos (576).

The acknowledgement, in the catechism, of the role of the Epiclesis in the sanctification of the holy Gifts (260,381) adheres to the tradition of Eastern theology. In general, one great positive characteristic of the CUGCC from the ecumenical point of view is that it contains the entire authentic liturgical tradition of the Eastern Church which binds the UGCC with strong ties to the Orthodox Church. In particular, an explication is given for the practice of standing during the Liturgy (627), the Communion of the faithful “who having piously placed their hands in cross-wise position on their chests, walk to the ambo before the Royal Doors” (389) and the Communion of baptized children (431).

Such a position taken in the Catechism regarding the renewal of the Byzantine liturgical heritage and the removal of the aftermath of Latinization is not only a legitimate obligation of our ecumenical time, but also is in complete agreement with the directives of the Roman curia which desires that “we take upon ourselves, even if this be via a progressive process, the renewal of elements that were lost, replacing them by important practices and regulations . . . even if this will mean going against the decisions accepted by local Synods or a moving away from directives given in various times and for various reasons by the dicasteries of the Apostolic See.” (See Footnote 5).

We may only hope that these principles of this official document of the UGCC, which applies to all its eparchies, won't be ignored by the Latinized eparchies of the UGCC, for example, by that of Buchach where under the leadership of the Basilians the liturgical tradition of the Eastern Church is aggressively violated, including the relevant documents of the Apostolic See in this regard – for example, the Eucharistic supplications are served, the word “Orthodox” is left out during the Divine Liturgy and so on. Sadly, the authors of the CUGCC could not bring themselves to condemn the Synod of Zamostia of 1720 and its directives which sanctioned liturgical and theological Latinization.

A very hopeful sign of the restoration of Eastern spirituality is the presentation of the theme of the great tradition of prayer (pp. 802-809), especially the Jesus Prayer (693-694) together with hesychasm (754).

In conclusion, the Catechism of the UGCC “Christ – Our Pascha” is a reflection of those theological processes which are occurring today in the UGCC itself. On the one hand, it is a witness to a certain theological, even ecclesiological, state of progress where the UGCC affirms itself to be a Particular Church with an Eastern tradition and so it demonstrates that it moves forward with other Ukrainian Churches which are struggling to have their autocephaly recognized. On the other hand, this document likewise demonstrates that the UGCC is still not ready to remove from itself that ecclesiological heritage which is founded on Western ideas about the unity of the Church which is called “uniatism.”

Alongside all its positive aspects, the CUGCC is, above all, a great missed opportunity to have made an ecumenical update by way of modernizing the irrelevant uniate ecclesial self-awareness of the UGCC and move towards the ecumenical achievements of today. The publication of the CUGCC, first and foremost, indicates that the UGCC does not, at present, possess its own vision of the renewal of the unity of the Ukrainian Church that was divided by the union of Brest into two confessions. In other words, notwithstanding all the rhetoric about the “Kyivan Church” the UGCC currently has nothing to propose to the Orthodox in the matter of ecumenism and church unity, for if the main leitmotiv of even a document of such a high level is . . . uniatism, what then can be said of the situation “on the ground” in the various eparchies?

All prior ecumenical initiatives of the UGCC which come down to the baseless desire to immediately renew Eucharistic communion with the Orthodox Churches have turned out to be simply smoke and mirrors from behind which now comes this “manifesto of uniatism” – the new catechism of the UGCC.

This document has become dated even before its publication because it is a determined witness of the anti-ecumenical reaction in the UGCC rather than a step forward toward the creation in Ukraine of one Particular Church. Not having quoted even once from the documents reflecting the consensus of the Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the authors of the CUGCC have placed the UGCC in a bad light as a result of the negative attitude of this Church (as reflected in the CUGCC) toward ecumenism.

However, a hopeful sign is that the CUGCC demonstrated a certain acceptance of the Balamand document – it in fact has adopted the ecclesiology of the “Sister-Churches” as discussed in the Balamand document where “Every Particular Church has a salvific faith, an unbroken Apostolic tradition and valid Holy Mysteries and therefore the name “Sister-Church” means the recognition of these characteristics in the other Church and the equality of the Particular Churches.” (305) (See Footnote 6). Unfortunately, praise of the various unias that follows (306-307) shows that the authors of the CUGCC were incapable of moving the ecclesiology of the Sister-Churches from its internal Catholic confessional level to the universal or ecumenical level which is what the intention of Balamand was, in fact.

In sum, the new catechism requires an immediate ecumenical overview, the sooner the better. As they say, “the catechism is dead, long live the new catechism.” Therefore, we shall have to wait a while longer for a real ecumenical breakthrough to occur in the largest Eastern Catholic Church.

#### Footnotes:

- 1) For the history of this creed, see *Kelly, John N.D.*, *Altchristliche Glaubensbekenntnisse: Geschichte und Theologie*, Gottingen 1993, 362-425 (Engl. *Kelly, John N.D.*, *Early Christian Creeds*, London 1972).
- 2) Compare with the original Latin text of the declaration, point 1: qui ex Patre procedit” – [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-jesus.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-jesus.html)
- 3) Compare with “Lumen gentium” 23 – here the discussion is about eparchies and not Particular Churches “Individual bishops are the visible

source and foundation of unity in their particular Churches (in suis Ecclesiis particularibus), created in the image of the Universal Church (ad imaginem Ecclesiae universalis formatis), in which and from which there comes the one and only Catholic Church (in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica existit).”

- 4) Compare with, for example, the motu proprio of John Paul II “Apostolos suos” from 21.05.1998 p. 12.
- 5) “The Instruction of the application of the liturgical directives of the Codex of the Canons of the Eastern Churches” of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, 6.01.1996, 39.
- 6) Compare with the Balamand document, 13: “On each side it is recognized that what Christ has entrusted to His Church – profession of apostolic faith, participation in the same sacraments, above all the one priesthood celebrating the one sacrifice of Christ, the apostolic succession of bishops – cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our Churches.”