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**Presentation of the Catechism of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church**  
*Christ – Our Pascha*

**Introduction of Section One of the Catechism of the UGCC –  
 “The Faith of the Church” by Rev. Dr. Myron Bendyk<sup>1</sup>**

The title of the Catechism, *Christ – Our Pascha*, has its own specific rationale. And that is the miraculous rebirth of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church (UGCC) in Ukraine in the aftermath of merciless persecution. This rebirth is permeated with a paschal theology: our Church, like Christ Himself, experienced the Pascha – the passion, death on Golgotha and resurrection – and we, like the apostles and disciples, became the witnesses of the Pascha of Christ in the UGCC, His Body.

The concept of the thousand year-old Kyivan Christian tradition, starting with the baptism of St. Volodymyr and uninterruptedly continued throughout the history of the Church and people to this day, underlies the foundation of the UGCC’s Catechism. That is because the Particular<sup>2</sup> UGCC in Ukraine and its diaspora is the direct descendent of the Kyivan Metropolia and confesses its faith in Christ according to the Kyivan tradition. Our Catechism mirrors this faith. In it are generously distributed the treasures of a tradition that is over a thousand years old: liturgical books, icons, writings of theologians, and the liturgical tradition of the Ukrainian people of God. In the words of Patriarch Josef Slipyj, these are “treasures of universal significance,” worthy of the greatest attention, and should be utilized as a resource by the widest strata of human society.

The structure of the Catechism, as well as this, its first section, is infused with the universal principle of the Fathers of the Christian East, that is, the rule of prayer determines the rule of faith. This means that the Catechism is first and foremost an act of prayerful worship, expressed in the words and concepts of the Church's faith. That is why, under the general heading of the first section “Faith of the Church,” one finds both the anaphora, or prayer of offering, of St. Basil the Great (rule of prayer) and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (rule of faith). These texts, like epigraphs<sup>3</sup>, permeate the first section. Reading them, we notice how organically they correspond with one another. The order of the truths of the faith, expressed in the anaphora and in the Creed, ordered the progression of the themes discussed in the first section.

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<sup>1</sup> The original presentation and article appeared in Ukrainian. This translation has been approved by the author. It was translated from the Ukrainian by O. Hanushevska Galadza and edited and annotated by Rev. S. Wojcichowsky.

<sup>2</sup> “Particular” is a technical term, used consistently in the documents of Vatican II, designating the reality of a Church with a distinct identity, and to refer to the Churches of the Catholic Communion; as such, the word is capitalized when it refers to a specific Church. In the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* the Latin term *sui iuris* is used to designate legal identity. It translates the Greek word *autónomos* (“of one’s own laws” or “autonomous”). Depending upon the hierarchical structure of a given Eastern Catholic Church, there are varying degrees of autonomy.

<sup>3</sup> An epigraph is a short quotation set at the beginning of a literary work or one of its chapters to suggest its theme.

Having stated that the faith of the Church is the response of the faithful to God's Revelation, heard in the words of a sermon or seen in the form of an icon, the Catechism focuses on God's Revelation itself. First of all, it underscores the importance of God's Person, and more precisely, that God's Revelation is not a "something" (a selection of truths of faith), but a "Someone" (the living Person of God the Father, who reveals Himself to people through the Son in the Holy Spirit). God's Revelation is always personal. Taking its lead from the Cappadocian Fathers, the Catechism states that God the Father, unseen in his essence, graciously allowed himself to be revealed. He, in accordance with Revelation, is a Person – the Source of all being – and, at the same time, a Trinity of Persons. The Son of God received God's Revelation from the Father, and having been incarnated, passed it on to the apostles through the concepts and images of human speech. The Holy Spirit, descending at Pentecost upon the apostles, "taught them all truths," that is, revealed the true meaning of the teachings of Jesus Christ, as revealed by God Himself.

In the words of Christ, the Holy Spirit "will take from me and proclaim to you." In the Catechism, we move from explaining God's Revelation to defining the concept of Holy Tradition, the Author of which is the Holy Spirit. Holy Tradition is present in the Church's liturgical life (rule of prayer); it is recorded in Holy Scripture and in the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church (rule of faith). Further, the canon<sup>4</sup> of the Bible is presented, with a listing of the books of the Old and New Testaments and the Tradition of the Holy Fathers – a dogmatic consensus of the Fathers as the foundational Teaching Authority of the Church.

In accordance with Eastern Christian thinking, the Catechism examines the Tradition of the Church Fathers, which has been unchangingly present in the life of the Church. This means that the era of the Church Fathers did not end in the 8th century. It continues in the conciliar teachings of the bishops, the Roman Universal Pontiff, the Fathers of the UGCC. They are all part of the "symphony of faith" with the Tradition of the Holy Fathers, actualizing it and applying it to the concrete historical circumstances of the life of the Church.

Having explained the one Tradition (with a capital "T") of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the Catechism notes that evangelization, that is, proclaiming the Word of God to the people, means the "incarnating" (embodying) of this Word into the culture of the nations that hear this Word and receive it. This "incarnation" (embodiment) is the enculturation of the Word of God, the result of which is the existence of the one Holy Tradition in diverse local and particular traditions. Recognizing this, we begin to understand how our Catechism brings us the salvific Holy Tradition via the Kyivan tradition.

Having analyzed the Church's sources of faith, the Catechism then moves on to teach this faith. The first God-revealed truth is that of the One God, the Father. In accordance with the Cappadocian Fathers, who differentiated between the Holy Trinity in its interior-godly life and the Revelation of the Father's plan for creation, the Catechism focuses on the view, or theology, of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father becomes the Beginning and Source of God's life; from the being of the Father, the Son of God is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds.

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<sup>4</sup> The canon of the Bible refers to the list of sacred books which the Church acknowledges as being inspired by God and as having a rule (this is the meaning of the word "canon") for faith and morals.

The Catechism bases its view of the Holy Trinity on Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church Fathers, apophatically<sup>5</sup> expressed in the texts of the anaphora and the Creed.

When the Catechism describes the Holy Trinity in the grace-filled realization of the Father's plan through the Son in the Holy Spirit, then, in keeping with the Byzantine Fathers, it speaks not about the "descent" of the Holy Spirit from the Father, but rather about Its "proceeding" from the Father through the Son, or even from the Father and the Son. Two words with different semantic nuances (i.e., descent and proceeding) are the Ukrainian cognates (equivalents) of two Greek words (*ekporeustai* and *proienai*) and allow for the removal of layers of polemicism<sup>6</sup> around the "Filioque" (literally, "and the Son") which was added to the Creed. Besides the teaching of the Church Fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Catechism utilizes the triadological<sup>7</sup> texts of Metropolitan Ilarion, an 11th Century Father of the Kyivan Church.

According to God's Revelation, the intention, or plan of God the Father is the glorification of the Beloved Son of God through the co-action of the Holy Spirit. The Father's love "overflows beyond the measure" of the Holy Trinity and signifies the beginning of creation. Beholding His Son, "in His Image," the Father calls all from non-being into being. In describing the creation of the world, the Catechism relies on the theology of Maximos the Confessor, who taught us to see in all that is created, seen and unseen, the "Body and Blood" of the human nature of the Son of God. Describing the unseen angelic world, the Catechism relies on the angelology (teaching on angels) of Dionysios the Areopagite and his view of the "heavenly hierarchy," that is, the nine choirs of angels.

God's Revelation reveals the human person as the summit of creation. The theological view of the person, or the anthropology of the Catechism, is built on the heritage of Irenaeus of Lyon and the Cappadocian Fathers. To their texts are added writings about the dignity of the person by St. Cyril of Turiv, a 12th Century Father of the Kyivan Church. In accordance with the Tradition of the aforementioned Fathers, the person is created "in the Image of God," who is Christ; the person is the "image of the Image" and came forth from the hands of God in a state of innocence. From that point on, as a theocentric (God-centred) being, the person is called to develop from spiritual naiveté to mature adoption by God, and to stewardship of creation, in order to fulfill a state of paradise in creation. In other words, the person created in God's image is called to grow and develop into God's likeness, so that, through her or his God-likeness, he or she can be divinized in glory.

When the person, called to *theosis*<sup>8</sup> (divinization), fell into the temptation of the evil one and defiled the image of God in himself, he/she came to be in need of salvation. God responds to human sin with the Promise of salvation, through which the history of humanity becomes the history of salvation.

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<sup>5</sup> Apophatic theology acknowledges that the essence, or inner life, of God is unknowable and beyond the capability of human language to express. Its ultimate purpose is union with God. This can be achieved through the grace of God and by genuine contemplation and inward purification.

<sup>6</sup> Polemicism or polemics is a form of argument which seeks to attack or refute the opinions or principles of another, usually in an aggressive manner.

<sup>7</sup> Triadological is the adjectival form of the word "Triadology" which expresses the Church's doctrine of the Trinity.

<sup>8</sup> *Theosis* derives from two Greek terms *Theos* ("God") and *-osis* ("process" or "condition"). In English this word is rendered "deification" (being made like God) or "divinization" (becoming divine). As such, it is a transformative process whose goal is *likeness to* or *union with* God, or simply put, to become holy.

Citing the Old Testament, the Catechism examines God's Promise in the stages of its historical concretization, through the stages of receiving the Promise of salvation by forefathers, patriarchs, the people of God led by Moses, and the prophets.

Historically, the will or Testament of God unfolded with the people, according to the measure of their readiness. By these stages, God the Father prepared “the fullness of time,” in which He sent into the world the Only-Begotten Son of God. The Catechism describes humanity's period of waiting for the Saviour in the liturgical concepts of the church year, that is, in the pre-Nativity fast. The catechetical goal of this fast is for every Christian to experience as fervent a desire for the Saviour and salvation as that of the children of God's people of the Old Testament through the course of millennia.

The Christological section of the Catechism first presents to the viewer the icon of the Incarnation. Following the Church Fathers, the Catechism states that the reason for the Incarnation is the Father's love for humankind. Having fulfilled the Promise of salvation which was given as a gift to humanity, God antinomically<sup>9</sup> reduces himself to a small child, the One Who Cannot be Encompassed encompasses himself in a fragile infant's body, the Eternal One enters into temporality. In light of the Church Fathers' teaching about the self-diminishing (*kenosis*<sup>10</sup>) of God's Son, the Catechism reviews the earthly life of Jesus Christ – from birth to the baptism in the Jordan, passion, death, to the descent into Hades.

Regardless of this self-diminishing, Christ – unchanging, without commixion<sup>11</sup>, undivided, inseparable – is God, incarnate in a human body. The Catechism formulates a view of the God-Human in the events of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth based on liturgical stichera (stanzas of liturgical poetry), icons of the Kyivan and Galician traditions, and particularly on the writings of Metropolitan Ilarion of Kyiv. The Catechism also describes how the main events in The Saviour's life come to be celebrated in the Ukrainian Christian tradition: the Nativity, Feast of the Jordan, Pascha, Ascension, and Transfiguration.

The Catechism does not limit itself to teaching about the reasons for the Incarnation and the main events in the life of the God-Human on earth. According to the Church Fathers, the point is the goal of the Incarnation, which lies in the *theosis* of the person: “God became human, so that humans could become God.” This is the favourite theme of St. Athanasius and of all the Alexandrian Fathers. From this point there is one more view of the earthly life of Christ, including the Resurrection and the Ascension – not just as a self-diminishing of God, but also as the *theosis* of the person by means of purifying God's image in him through the forgiveness of sins, triumph over death, and, ultimately, the Promise of the fullness of *theosis* in Jesus Christ's Ascension and His glorious Second Coming.

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<sup>9</sup> Antinomically is the adverbial form of antinomy. Antinomies seem like conflicts between two principles, laws or truths, both of which are equally valid. For example, we say that God is one and three; Mary is Mother and Virgin; Jesus is human and divine. They appear to be impossibilities, yet there exists a wider perception which includes them and goes beyond both of them.

<sup>10</sup> *Kenosis* is the self-emptying of oneself/one's ego in order to be attentive to God. It also refers to Christ, and is best exemplified in the Philippian hymn (2:6-11) by which Paul understands the Incarnation (namely the Word's descent from eternity into finite time). Traditionally it is used to describe the goal of *ascesis*: self-emptying oneself in order to discover the indwelling Trinity.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, “commixion” refers to the erroneous thinking that the two natures of Christ can be blended into one nature. The Church teaches us that in the one person of Christ there are two natures: human and divine.

On this backdrop of the culmination of salvation history, the figure of Mary of Nazareth is examined, the New Eve, “immaculately conceived” (Matins of the Nativity of the Theotokos, canon 2, 6th ode), the Theotokos, or Mother of God, according to the consensus of the Fathers of the 3rd Council of Ephesus, and Ever-Virgin on the basis of the Fathers of the 5th Council of Constantinople. Her ever-virginity exists in an integration of “mind, soul, and body” (Maximos the Confessor). The Theotokos is seen in numerous icons found in the Catechism.

After having contemplated the Son of God, the Catechism focuses on the third Person of the All-Holy Trinity – the Holy Spirit, who descended on the apostles on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Christ's Resurrection. The pneumatology (theology re: the Holy Spirit) of the Catechism is based on the works of the Holy Fathers, particularly Basil the Great, and also on the writings of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, Father of the 20th Century Church. Through the Holy Spirit, the Son of God dwells among Christians “for all time until the end of the ages,” to accomplish the Promise of the Father regarding the salvation of the world. The mission of the Holy Spirit is specifically to gather those divided by sin into “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” – a mission which, as an icon of communion, reflects the community of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The ecclesiology<sup>12</sup> of the Catechism will be dealt with in more detail in a separate talk. Instead, we will deal with a few concepts here. For one: just as in triadology (see footnote 6) the Cappadocian Fathers always began with the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then continued with the contemplation of God's single nature, – so we, in the ecclesiology of the Catechism, go from particular Churches, and among them, our own Particular Church, to the contemplation of the nature of Christ's Church, which enjoys unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Every particular Church is an icon of the incarnate Son of God, and that is why historically it develops through the organic evangelization of the local culture.

The faith of the young Church gathers people around the local Eucharist, in love, presided over by the bishop. That is how a local Church, or eparchy, is formed. Its communion with other local Churches forms a Particular Church. The communion of particular Churches is seen in the ministry of the apostle Peter, as the bishop of Rome, thanks to which the Catholic Church exists. Churches of the Catholic communion are sister-Churches with each other. The development of a Catholic communion, according to the will of the Saviour “that all be one,” will lead to the unity of Churches, which will appear in glory as one Church of Christ in the Day of the Lord's Second Coming. The Catechism bases its ecclesiology on the teachings of Patriarch Josyf Slipyj, a Father of the 20th Century Church.

Features of a new eschatological<sup>13</sup> creation gradually emerge in Christ's Church, revealed in the Holy Mother of God and all the saints. Through them, the Risen Christ acts in history and His Pascha continues, to which all creation is called to take part through the Liturgy of the Church. And with this, the first section of the Catechism flows into the next, which begins with a lesson about the Divine Liturgy, the remembrance of the Mystical Supper and the anticipation of Christ's Pascha.

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<sup>12</sup> “Ecclesiology” pertains to the understanding, doctrine, or concept of the Church.

<sup>13</sup> Broadly speaking, “eschatology” is the theology of the end times, or the completion of time which inaugurates the coming of the Kingdom of God in fullness. Literally, the term derives from the study of the “last things” (*ta eschata*). It includes teaching on death, judgment, the end of the world, the Second Coming of Christ, the afterlife (heaven and hell), resurrection and the nature of the resurrected body, and eternal life in light of the merciful love of God.