

## **Adult Catechism January 9, 2017**

### *Introduction to Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: Christ Our Pascha*

“When I buy a new car, I always buy one with a compass because 30 years ago when I was appointed to a rural area as the visiting priest,” said Bishop David Motiuk of the Eparchy of Edmonton in his opening remarks at the launch of the Ukrainian Catholic catechism *Christ – Our Pascha*, “I would always look for a particular landmark that I was to turn off at to get to the church. When they took the little shed away one day, I was driving back and forth and back and forth for some time before I found the right road. “Similarly, the catechism is a compass for Ukrainian Catholics to be able to understand what the Church teaches.”

Based on an interview with Fr. Peter Galazda, the Catechism has three parts:

Part I – The Faith of the Church (what we believe)

“This book is not a page turner,” “Part I is best read in small snippets.”

Part II – The Prayer of the Church (how we pray);

is informational, providing a wealth of facts, as “a kind of dictionary for worship in our Church.”

Part III – The Life of the Church (how we live our lives as Christians).

“The third part of the Catechism, on Christian morality, is worth the price of the book,” “It is the jewel in the crown. The style is much more engaging and it tends to include explanations far more often than the two previous parts.”

*Christ – Our Pascha* presents “an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine,” for faith and morals. It spells out our own authentic tradition within the Universal Church for all Christian faithful.

“A distinctive theology is not a different set of beliefs,” “but rather a unique way of interpreting and explaining those beliefs. It is a particular way of presenting the dogmas and doctrines common to the whole Catholic Church.

“First, this Catechism symbolizes the fact that our Church worldwide – and paradoxically starting in Ukraine – knows that its mission is not simply to serve the religious needs of an ethnic community,” “but to bring the truth of Christ to entire societies.”

This is an exciting time, indeed, for the Ukrainian Catholic Church, and all Eastern Churches. A process that for centuries was impossible due to persecution (“the Church in Ukraine has seen the devil up close”) and other barriers (“elimination, flight, or assimilation of its elites”) has now

opened a myriad of possibilities for the Particular Churches of the East, first with the creation of the Ukrainian version of the catechism and now the English translation.

In a post-Soviet country, where theology had been abolished and theologians imprisoned “our Church in Ukraine understands that its task is to transform all of society – not just its own members.

“This outstanding resource will also enrich other Catholic Churches and the Church Universal,” For example, the catechism has drawn the interest of other Particular Eastern Churches who appear to be considering developing their own.

We need to cater to the understanding of those outside the church, because there are as many approaches to education and understanding as there are people. We need to explain that the catechism is like the Creed we recite, but with more images and explanations. The Creed is a skeleton of our beliefs, the catechism gives it depth.

“This is a project that required members of our Church to wrestle for years with ideas and concepts of universal significance in order to be able to say something significant today about life-changing realities,” “Ideas have consequences. Even the market forces that drive so many of our contemporary choices and values, even these market forces have a grounding in ideas. So who is forming the ideas in our communities; what are those ideas; and what are the consequences?

“The contemporary phenomenon of globalization is primarily characterized by the creation of a global culture,” “which leads to the formation of a global civil society. It can be positive if it succeeds in combining the diversity of existing cultures in such a way that one culture enriches other cultures while preserving its own identity. At the same time, the creation of a global culture carries the risk of reducing all cultures to one mass culture geared toward a consumer society.”

***Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: A witness to our "specific experience and liturgical tradition in the one faith in Christ" - By Fr Jeffrey D. Stephaniuk***

"Relativism does not first affect morality and then eventually destroy culture. Relativism first destroys the liturgy, and then it attacks morality and then the culture."

"Being the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, O Christ our God, you fully achieved the whole of the Father's plan of salvation. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness, always, now and forever and ever." Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

I have been translating the title of the Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church as Christ, Our Resurrection. The Ukrainian title, Christ, Our Pascha, offers such a tremendous amount of spiritual food for thought that it is worth an in-depth meditation.

Christ is our resurrection, as mentioned in the Gospel of St. John 6:54 "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Dr. Brant

Pitre, author of *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* ([www.brantpitre.com](http://www.brantpitre.com)) clearly explains the theology of fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. The Catechism describes this theme in a section on the unity of the two testaments: "God's actions during Old Testament times pre-figure what God accomplished in the fullness of time in the Person of his incarnate Son." Although he is not quoted in the new catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Dr. Pitre's widely accessible scholarship is beneficial to the work of introducing the new catechism. He shows how the Resurrection of Christ is part of the promise of a new Exodus and how the heavenly Jerusalem is the new Promised Land. Christ is the new Passover lamb, while the Last Supper is the new Passover.

Dr. Pitre also explains how Christ is the new manna and the new Bread of the Presence, so called, as Juliana Casey writes in her commentary, *Hebrews*, "because it was near to the inner sanctuary where the presence of God was believed to be." Christ is the Lamb of God, following the appellation of St. John the Baptist (John 1:29) and such other biblical references as St. Paul: "For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7) A prayer from Vespers for Saturday of the week of Tone 5 of the 8 tone cycle, a resource often quoted in *Christ, Our Pascha*, explains the connection this way: "He who gives resurrection to the human race is led to be sacrificed, as is a lamb to the slaughter."

From the Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, in #348, "Preparation for Divine Liturgy", this description of the paschal lamb is given: "Christ is the paschal Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. On the lamb, cut from the bread, the words "Jesus Christ conquers" are stamped, foreshadowing the fullness of the age to come." In #351, the reference continues: "The priest places the lamb in the centre of the paten as a sign that the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ is the centre of the universe and history."

The Resurrection Matins for Easter Sunday expresses this theology about Christ and the Passover in the poetry of prayer:

"Today a sacred Pascha is revealed to us. A new and holy Pascha. A mystical Pascha. A Pascha worthy of veneration. A Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer, a blameless Pascha. A great Pascha. A Pascha of the faithful. A Pascha which has opened for us the gates of Paradise. A Pascha which sanctifies the faithful."

The theme continues, after the inclusion of prayers from the psalms and reference to the empty tomb:

"Pascha of beauty! The Pascha of the Lord! Pascha! A Pascha worthy of all honour has dawned on us. Pascha! Let us embrace each other joyously! Pascha, ransom from affliction! For today as from a bridal chamber Christ has shown forth from the Tomb, and filled the women with joy saying: "Proclaim the glad tidings to the Apostles."

The metaphor of bridegroom and the bride is the most commonly used metaphor in scripture to describe "a great mystery", as St. Paul teaches, referring to the relationship between Christ

and the Church. In recent decades, as author Dawn Eden writes in her book, *My Peace I Give You: Healing Sexual Wounds with the help of the Saints*, both Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen and Blessed Pope John Paul II showed "how the Triune God inscribes the vocation of love in man and woman." Roman Catholic catechists such as Christopher West have introduced this "Catechesis on Human Love", also known as the theology of the body, to a popular audience. Within the Ukrainian Catholic Church, a predecessor to Patriarch Sviatoslav, Cardinal Lubachevsky, used his book on the Ten Commandments in a similar fashion of catechesis, especially to defend traditional Christian teaching on marriage.

Eden is able to explain the love of Christ and the liberation of the new Passover from personal experience:

"... on the third evening of Passover, 2006 I would experience an absolute beginning of my own. It was Easter Vigil, the night I received the Sacrament of Confirmation. In my mind, I am back there now... In the light of Christ – represented by the Paschal Candle – the Jewish people's dark period of slavery in Egypt is revealed as a necessary chapter in the world's most beautiful story. God's liberation of the Jews presages his ultimate liberation, freeing all humanity from sin and death. Past pain becomes prologue to future joy."

The liberation of humanity from sin and death is directly connected to the catechesis of Christ as the new Passover. As Dr. Brant Pitre explains, with quotes from the books of Leviticus and Hebrews, in Judaism, the manna from heaven was placed in the Most Holy Place,

"having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. (Hebrews 9:4)

According to the Jerome Biblical Commentary, the effect of the manna in the holy of holies was to "remind subsequent generations of God's provident care for his people." Together with Aaron's staff, the symbol of his priesthood, it was here, as Juliana Casey I.H.M writes in Hebrews, "before the mercy seat that one came into direct contact with God, that one stood before the presence of the Divine."

This temple is where the tablets of the Ten Commandments were venerated and protected. In other words, those who would consume the manna are none other than those whose lives were lived in conformity with the commandments of God. Consequently, until we are reconciled with God, the Church, and with the people in our lives through the Mystery of Penance, also known as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we refrain from presenting ourselves to receive Holy Communion. A serious matter, Catholics who promote or practice such morally objectionable ideologies as abortion and homosexuality are also, in this context, asked to refrain from the Sacrament of Holy Communion in order to examine their lives, stop these practices, and be reconciled with the Church. Christ, Our Pascha has this explanation:

"Christians receive the Holy Eucharist 'for the forgiveness of sins and for life everlasting': 'Approach with an intense love to receive Communion, so that the fire of love may consume our sins and enlighten our hearts; and so that through our union with the heavenly fire we too may be ignited and made divine.' (St. John Damascene) The pure conscience of the communicant is a worthy preparation for Holy Communion, repentance before God for sins, and reconciliation with one's neighbour."

After detailing the life of the Ukrainian Catholic in faith and prayer, the implications of this faith and prayer are precisely where Christ, Our Pascha transitions in the section entitled, "Life of the Church." The sections on faith and prayer set the context within which to explain, understand, and accept the section on Christian living, in which the moral life is defined as "a witness to the faith" and the "application of the spiritual life to specific and concrete actions." (#726) By the time the reader considers the explanation of the authors on abortion, contraception, and artificial reproductive technologies, terms are clearly defined about the dignity of the human person and the responsibility of each person before God, conscious of the line delineating the jurisdiction that belongs to God alone, namely decisions over life and death. For example, by the time the reader is presented with the section, "The Christian Family as a New Creation," the context has already been set by a meditation on God as the author of all creation, and Christ renewing creation through his conception, birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and return to his Father and our Father, his God and our God.

The Ten Commandments, introduced in the catechism in a section entitled "Human Freedom and Moral Responsibility" are described by Cardinal Lubachevsky as "the external expression of the internal natural law" that were given "not only to the Jewish people, but as the Creator of the Universe... to all human beings, to the whole human race." (Collection of Sermons on the Ten Commandments), The first three "rule our relationship with God" while the next seven "govern our relationship and behavior toward other human beings, or as the Holy Scripture calls them – neighbors." Christ, Our Pascha, has this explanation of human freedom and moral decision-making:

"As a rational being, humans have the capacity to understand the purpose and consequences of one's actions. With the spiritual growth and deeper self-understanding that comes from a relationship with one's Creator, a person begins to see that actions chosen either bring him or her closer to God, or push one further away from Him. The foundation of Christian consciousness is life lived in a constant relationship and association with God, the famous "walk before the face of God."

One implication of such a "walk" is presented in the above-mentioned section, "The Christian Family as a New Creation". A defense of both pre-natal life and traditional marriage is made in the context of treating human beings, our "neighbours," as persons, not reducing him or her to a brute object:

"All forms of self-absorbed aggression against another human being, submitting another person to the demands of one's own crass sexual pleasure, are offenses against God's gift of love. They are a corruption of the meaning of human sexuality, and result in both the breaking of the sixth and ninth commandments, and profound injury to the one abused. A person is reduced to an undignified object by all sexual activity outside the Sacrament of Marriage, and this is why adultery is a serious sin, along with the destruction of the fertility of the marital act through abortion and contraceptive technologies, polyandry and polygamy, and homosexual acts..." (#863)

The most recognizable authority for the section on human sexual morality in *Christ, Our Pascha* is the Encyclical by Pope Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, *Of Human Life*. From within the history of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, the authorities repeatedly cited are Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church from 1901 until his death in 1944, and Patriarch Joseph Slipyi, his successor. One source, Sheptytsky's pastoral letter from 1942, "Thou Shalt Not Kill", for example, refers to a society based on abortion and contraception as "a nation in decline." This pastoral letter was written three years after the brutal Soviet invasion of Western Ukraine, and four months after the ignoble counter invasion by Nazi Germany. As a lesson in attitude for our generation and culture, there is a complete lack of nihilism in "Thou Shalt Not Kill"; it is void of the pervasive dejection of modern day Canada that is quick to conclude that "we have no right to bring another child into this kind of a world." This Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was writing during the Second World War, from a country decimated and desecrated by its pornography of death. Even still, he wrote of the dignity of the human person, the natural beauty of marriage, and "the worthiness of parents to cooperate with the Creator in the acceptance and nurturance of new life," in his paraphrase of *Humanae vitae*.

"Thou Shalt Not Kill," quoted at length in the new catechism under the section entitled "The Sin of Abortion" and "The Sin of Contraception" has the following description, warning against the "deepening horrors" of abortion, "instances when parents kill their own children, achieved by the most loathsome, terrible and unnatural methods":

"The very fact that this crime has been committed by one's own father or mother, and that the unborn child is in no position to defend herself, places (abortion) in a singular category of crime.... A nation in which women do not want to embrace the responsibilities of motherhood, and in which men search for sexual satisfaction with no concern either for the obligations and difficulties of family life or for the goals of marriage, such a civilization is on a collision course with oblivion."

In the entire catechism, which presents solid explanations and insights on the vision of Christianity and the mind of the Church about the meaning of human life, it is only in a reference to contraception in #890, that the teaching of the Church could be misunderstood. In a book from 1974 by Fr Alphonse de Valk, *Morality and Law in Canadian Politics: The Abortion Controversy*, he writes that the thinking that has also found its way into *Christ, Our Pascha*, is based on a statement from Pope Pius XII: "the use of the pill was 'licit' when employed as

medicine, that is, when a temporary sterilization was caused indirectly as a result of regulating some uterine or organic disorder. He declared its use illicit when employed to bring on temporary sterilization directly in order to prevent conception." However, Catholic doctors such as Dr. Mary Martin in the United States, and websites such as <http://www.thepillkills.com> make it perfectly clear that there is no medical use for the contraceptive pill; people have died of blood clots, for example, when the pill has been prescribed for the ostensibly morally unobjectionable use of the treatment of acne. This current understanding of the complete renunciation of any value whatsoever of the artificial contraceptive pill, which its own manufacturers clearly state works as an abortive action on the early human in one's pre-implantation time of development, would be written into a revised paragraph #890 of the Christ, Our Pascha.

The title of these reflections is taken from an article promoting the upcoming Year of Faith 2012, 2013, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In the Ukrainian Catholic Church we can also add the promotion of 2012 as the Year of the Holy Sacraments, insightfully explained in the catechism as the "mystery of Christ among us," and following the guidance of St Paul:

"... making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Ephesians 1:9-10)

The faith of the Church, the prayer of the Church, and the life of the Church are a coherent unity without internal contradiction or hypocrisy, a defense against modern relativism, and a witness to our "specific experience and liturgical tradition in the one faith in Christ." In the words of the catechism,

"Every Christian possesses the grace of being called, the opportunity to live a blessed life, filled with such great meaning as is only possible in union with God. This vocation is lived as a spiritual life, an essential aspect of the growth in maturity and development of an individual. Just as physical activity is non-negotiable for one's physical development, or study and education for one's intellectual development, similarly for spiritual growth, what's required are good works, prayer, and the reception of the Blessed Sacraments." (#711, Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church)

In other words, Christ, Our Pascha is a catechism that will help practicing Christians become stronger practicing Christians, and will be an exhortation to those who have become inactive Christians to return "as a new person in Christ," to the Church of Christ, "which through its unity, holiness, universality, and apostolic service is present and active in the modern world, enlightening with the light of Christ every person who comes into the world." (#708)