

University's celebrations in occasion of the Vatican's accreditation of UCU's Theology Program

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On May 20th at the festivities dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Philosophy Theology Department at UCU, the Grand Chancellor of the University, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, announced Vatican's accreditation of UCU's Theology Program.

In his welcoming remarks, His Beatitude Sviatoslav underscored that it was Metropolitan Sheptytsky himself who wanted to have the highest level and the best quality of teaching of theology at the university. Unfortunately, due to world wars and a government that was not loyal to Ukrainians, this was not achieved. "Metropolitan Andrey saw an urgent need for a university because it is only the university that has the possibility to assist the Church to withstand various ideologies, cultural waves, and other challenges of the present time. He perceived that without the nucleus of a high level of Theology Scholarship, our Church will not be able to survive. UCU is needed by the Church to preserve Ukrainian Christian identity," emphasized the Patriarch.



The idea of establishing the University was continually borne by Patriarch Josyf Slipyj, who nurtured it in the Stalin concentration camps, and who, as soon as he saw an opportunity to realize it " immediately made it happen. According to His Beatitude Sviatoslav, Patriarch Josyf saw that the Ukrainian Church which is alive in all the continents, cannot survive without a

theological nucleus. For, it is without a Theology Department, that the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church would continue to remain a silent church?

“I often said and I will repeat: I cannot imagine UGCC without UCU. One can feel this especially in Kyiv, the capital of our country,” stated the Patriarch. In my Epistle which I recently published, I wanted to stress that the responsibility for the development of Ukrainian Theology lies not only on UCU students or doctoral candidates, but on the whole Church.”

His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk reminded all that the particularity of UCU lies in the ability to view the current issues (political and social processes, the Church’s transformation) with the eyes of faith. It is this characteristic which forms the identity of the Ukrainian Catholic University. Without the Christian element, our University can be transformed into “a blown away salt”: one more, or one less. Institute of higher education? This may go unnoticed by all, but if we want to realize the highest attainments of Ukrainian intellectual life, according to Metropolitan Andrey, then we cannot achieve this without a Christian, Catholic University.

The Patriarch wished that the new slogan of the Department be the words of Apostle John: “I came, I saw, I believed”. Everyone who enters this University should leave it as a different person, transformed and illuminated by God’s grace. The Grand Chancellor noted that the receiving of the Vatican accreditation is not a special recognition; rather “it is a credit of faith, it poses new challenges for UCU lecturers and administration.

Bishop Borys Gudziak, UCU President, first of all thanked all the witnesses and martyrs who fearlessly carried their faith through the impenetrable darkness of Stalinist repressions. The first ideas of creating a Theological Academy he discussed exactly with them – the persecuted priests and laity from the Underground Church.

The Bishop also thanked all the lecturers who came from throughout the world: South Africa, USA, Canada, Australia. “There are tens and tens of names of those who as volunteers assisted us to create that which seemed totally impossible: a Catholic university in Ukraine,” said Bishop Borys. He also thanked the first students who enrolled in studying at the Academy, often in contradiction to the will of their own parents, and believed that it is truly possible: “This kind of courage by the students demanded great sacrifices from the lecturers. I think that in the history of Ukrainian Higher Education, there was no one who had such chances and possibilities as UCU students, from which they successfully benefitted.



Rev. Bohdan Prach said that it is particularly important for the University and the Philosophy-Theology Department, to understand at what stage of development we find ourselves today: “If the Bishop did not possess a deep and convincing faith in what he is doing, and the fact that this is to change society, if it were not for the ecstatic faith of His Beatitude Lubomyr Husar, much would not have been done. Many people would not be here – including myself. For the sake of this University I also had to change my life and my country.”

Rev. Rector describes that a big encouragement for the development of the University was the Pilgrimage of Saint John Paul II to Ukraine. “This truly was the breath of the Holy Spirit, who freed an enormous energy to come down upon our Church and our people,” related the rector,

God expected from us the kind of faith that overcomes all impediments. A faith, which would help us understand our future.

Today's task of the University is to raise the whole Church to the high level of Theology Education. This is needed by His Beatitude, all the bishops, all the faithful. We cannot be lazy, irresponsible. We have to be responsible for every word. It is Our Church. It is our responsibility. Together we are building this House of God on earth," emphasized Rev. Bohdan Prach.



In his concluding remarks, the Dean of the Department of Philosophy-Theology, Rev. Deacon Taras Zaviyskyi remembered 1999, the year in which the first meeting of the alumni of the renewed Theological Academy with the alumni of the pre-war Theologica Academy took place. The youngest person of that generation was in his 90's. This meeting clearly illustrates the interrupted tradition from which we come, circumstances and simultaneously challenges which we face: to catch up with the gaps in Theology, to partially correct history, which unjustly forced Our Church into silence," stated Rev. Roman. He stressed that we are facing many gaps. For example, there exists no Ukrainian commentary not even to the Old Testament, but also not even to the New Testament.

The Church awaits our rethinking of the Eastern Catholic Theology. We have to raise from the depths our ancient Kyivan Theology tradition, show its beauty, understand it ourselves, and share it with the Universal Church," said the deacon. He related that the Vatican accreditation for the Theology Academy was sought already by Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky; he did not receive it but the lecturers of this Academy were well known in the international theological circles. They were renowned, noteworthy figures, levels of which the current lecturers of the Theology Department have not yet reached. Therefore, he hopes, that the Vatican accreditation will enhance the Department to fulfill its vocation to enter the vast family of Theology Departments in Europe and to share the accomplishments of our Kyievan Theology tradition with the Universal Church.



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