

The Modality and Virtue of Trust

On behalf of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) community, I extend warm greetings to all participants and guests of our conference and inauguration of the International Institute for Ethics and Contemporary Issues. This is a great day for the Ukrainian Catholic University. Let me explain why.

Both in theory and in practice, here in Lviv, UCU has been conceiving, forming, and reforming itself over the last twenty-one years. The process of establishing UCU in Ukraine entailed moving to this city an idea and prototype generated by Patriarch Josyf Slipyj in Rome in the 1960s and 1970s. How that reality was to be incarnated in a post-communist, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, postmodern country profoundly scarred by the toxic trauma of totalitarianism was indeed a complex question. After substantial spiritual discernment and broad international consultation, it became clear that in a country where there already exist many – today some 180 – universities, there is no need for one more that merely mimics others.

With a sense of mission transcending Ukrainian political, cultural, and ecclesiastical borders, UCU charted a course to contribute to “the university” as a phenomenon in the global context.

The explicit goal was to develop or even in some aspects rethink “the university” – one of the most successful and enduring institutions of Western civilization generated nearly a millennium ago by the Catholic Church. This ambitious, some might say audacious, vision led to a search for alternatives in curricula, pedagogical approaches, research methodologies, management style, corporate culture, and most importantly spiritual identity.

One quality that constitutes a compelling alternative in Ukraine is a strong commitment to integrity and transparency in the face of Soviet and post-Soviet deceit, corruption, and secretive decision-making. Another has been the emphasis on general institutional openness, and internationalism, while explicitly fostering Eastern Christian tradition and strong roots in local and national culture. Ukraine had been isolated behind the Iron Curtain for most of the twentieth century. Youth, society, the Church, and political life all need a critical and creative experience of the universal dimension of human life and catholicity of authentic spiritual solidarity. It is in this solidarity that the dignity of Ukrainians, so often violated, can be reestablished.

The planning of academic faculties and programs of study, research projects, pastoral and social outreach, the school’s architecture, fiscal policies and administrative practices was guided by a series of questions: Can this be done in a manner that best serves the UCU mission to address the spiritual and ethical concerns of the contemporary world? Can the university be open to approaches that provide post-secular, humanly more holistic alternatives to the Enlightenment engendered academy, both East and West, while maintaining its indisputable qualities? How can this university contribute to healing the wounds inflicted by history and help bring Ukrainian society into a more life-giving future?

The search for alternatives was neither an exercise in corporate individualism nor a quest for novelty or uniqueness for their own sake. Rather, compelled by an analysis of certain evident inadequacies and failures of contemporary higher education in and outside Ukraine, the nascent academic community sought with both confidence and humility to engender creativity and cooperation in an atomized society characterized by fear and a deficit of trust.

Trust is a basic quality of all social interaction: personal, familial, local, national and international, private and public, civic, economic, and political. The fostering and practice of the modality and virtue of trust is necessary everywhere. It is especially necessary for a society deeply scarred by wonton and systematic violence whereby in one century some 15 million people perished. The consequences of Ukraine's historic trauma can be experienced in a routine manner in the city of Lviv where a widespread venal worldview and mundane corruption in education, health and social services, and political and economic life cloud and corrode people's everyday experience.

The recent history of the city and the telling statistical toll help explain the systemic skepticism, corruption, and much more. In 1939, Lviv had some 300,000 inhabitants, of which only 50,000-60,000 were left at the end of the war. Some 100,000 Jews were exterminated by the Nazis; an analogous number of Poles were deported beyond the new Polish border by the Soviet liberators; Armenians left with the Poles and the Ukrainian population was decimated by purges and the flight of many of the educated to the West. If that were not enough, some 10% of all western Ukrainians, over 400,000, were deported to Siberia in the immediate post-war years. In the following decades, Soviet programs of industrial and military development led to a repopulation of Lviv with almost 100,000 Russians, many eastern Ukrainians, representatives

of other nationalities of the USSR, and most importantly, by a rapid urbanization of western Ukrainian villagers. By the mid-1980s, Lviv, which by 1945 had lost 80% of its pre-war inhabitants, became a city with a daytime population of one million. In the span of two generations, Lviv was violently emptied of its human population and refilled, tripling the number of its residents.

The continuity of Lviv's charming architectural legacy belies the fact that the human fabric of city was furiously shredded. The human community of Lviv – shaped over 700 years – was abruptly destroyed by force, and through force it was refabricated. This engendered a city that in many ways is an artifact of modern ideologies: an urban population characterized by an intangible but nevertheless prevalent anxiety and undermined interpersonal trust. To make matters worse, in the post-war decades, of all Soviet cities, Lviv probably had the highest concentration of KGB agents and informers.

The aftereffects continue to endure. Like the radiation of Chernobyl, they are invisible, inaudible, with no evident odor or taste. Yet, they deeply mark the moral and psychological DNA of Lviv's residents. People have learned the hard way to be wary of systems and remain so even though commitment to such "systems" as the law, the family, and the community are prerequisites for rebuilding civic society. The latent apprehension and subcutaneous distrust continues to impair social intercourse. It is no surprise that the city of Lviv and the country as a whole have many problems of a spiritual and ethical nature.

In light of this history, the UCU project seeks to respond to what is a broad range of local and global societal and academic challenges. UCU's paradoxical, at first glance, emphasis on the martyrs and marginalized, especially the mentally handicapped, speaks to the contemporary person in search of principles and re-

lationship in a postmodern world characterized by relativism, virtuality, and alienation. Confessors and martyrs overcame arguably the greatest challenge of the twentieth century: totalitarian ideology. They did so by witnessing in difficult, sometimes impossible, circumstances to truth and ethical precepts. Their witness serves as a school of life for those bewildered by the challenges of the twenty-first century, infusing confidence: “If they could, maybe we can.”

There were reservations about the inclusion of people with special needs into the academic environment, especially since UCU embraces its friends with special gifts not as objects of charity or social responsibility, but as real partners in university life. Our friends with special needs and gifts, who do not put up facades and walls to mask their vulnerability, summon those whom they meet to more authentic interpersonal interaction – to trust. To put it simply, with their presence and charisma, with their very person they ask the most important pedagogical question: “Can you love me? Do you want to learn how?” By becoming tutors in human relations, the marginalized are radically present in the very heart of the university addressing one of society’s core dilemmas.

The exploration of alternative approaches addressed the nuts and bolts of scholarly life. Rethinking various aspects of academic activity led, for example, to a reconsideration of the dynamics of academic conferences, their communicative capacity, and their link and relevance to the “real world.” In 1994-96, the Institute of Church History conducted the “Brest Readings” – a two-year series of 18 encounters of Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and secular scholars. The subject at hand, one of the most controversial in Slavic history and one provoking furious debate in the 1990s in Ukraine, was the Union of Brest (1596) through which the Kyivan Metropolitanate reestablished communion with Rome... or did not.

The series took on a lively interactive form engaging not only specialists but also the public at large. The conferences traveled from city to city, and the discussions on contentious topics animated by the world's best specialists were open to people of different walks of life. The continuity of the program, its geographical and thematic trajectory, and the rather unique encounter of gown and town brought the work of the ivory tower down to the public square in a way that not only changed historical perspectives but also mollified discourse on a socially divisive topic. Although some at first saw the conference program as a "wandering circus" rather than a properly academic venue, in the end the scholarly results were indisputable and were internationally received.

The search for a more fruitful academic lifestyle eventually led to architectural articulations. Thus upon critical reflection UCU abandoned the Soviet model of the "dormitory." Student living was transformed from a phenomenon peripheral (and often deleterious) to university education to one that is at the center of the formational endeavor. The concept of a collegium, wherein university faculty and staff, visiting professors, and distinguished fellows representing the arts, politics, diplomacy, and sports, members of religious orders, and the mentally handicapped live with students, was incarnated in an innovative building that pulsates with rich spiritual and intellectual life. Other buildings with imaginative programs are following suit.

Today is a significant day for the university because rather quietly, in a traditional academic manner, the inauguration of a new UCU institute is taking place. The International Institute for Ethics and Contemporary Issues (IIECI) will be an important locus for reflection upon the above-outlined challenges – and many others – that Ukraine and the world face in the twenty-first

century. As our conference program illustrates, the IIECI brings alternative perspectives to our city and country. The modality and quality of its discourse will undoubtedly set standards, something that will become evident only with time. In a culture in which philosophical thought was marginalized or even discredited as “ideology,” the invigoration of intelligent discussion on ethical topics will be of broad import. Ideas matter. Thinking responsibly needs special cultivation.

Of all UCU departments, the IIECI has had the most methodical and solid trajectory of preparation before inauguration, something that reflects the talents and character of its founder and first director, Volodymyr Turchynovskyy. It has been taking shape over the last five years, holding wonderful conferences, seminars, and summer schools, bringing to the university a wide range of students and, most importantly, leading global exponents of contemporary sociological, philosophical, and ecclesial thought. The Institute has also been able to discover new sources of financing, previously not tapped by the university, creating new possibilities for many students and promising scholars. Thus it is opening doors for many, something that can be heartily commended to all UCU institutes and projects and to the community-at-large. Opening doors in a country and culture of enclosures and cul-de-sacs is much more than effective administration – it gives hope and life.

The Ukrainian Catholic University and its new International Institute for Ethics and Contemporary Issues is particularly well situated to foster reflection on the fundamental issues of our day. A corporate culture of mutual respect and love, a prime generator of our scholarly endeavors, creates an atmosphere that helps people see problems from a new perspective and, hopefully, provide insight and even solutions.

BISHOP BORYS (GUDZIAK)

I thank all those who have contributed to the development of the IIECI and greet all participants, the Director of the Institute, members of the Advisory Council, wishing you all a wonderful day and fruitful deliberations. I kindly ask you to support this Institute with blessings, constructive criticism, but most importantly, through your generous intellectual and spiritual participation.

+ BORYS (GUDZIAK)
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