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Light from the East

The Catholic Eastern Churches Sixty Years After
Vatican II

Edited by
Ines Angeli Murzaku and Ana Victoria Sima

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**Light from the East: The Catholic
Eastern Churches Sixty Years After
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Guest Editors

Ines Angeli Murzaku

Ana Victoria Sima



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Guest Editors

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About the Editors

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Preface

This edited volume, *Light from the East: The Catholic Eastern Churches Sixty Years After Vatican II*, focuses on renewal, resilience, and identity in Eastern Catholic communities across Europe and the diaspora. The chapters trace critical moments such as the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church during the Prague Spring, the Romanian Church's movement from clandestine existence to full governance, and the Ruthenian Church's reaffirmation of the married presbyterate in North America. They also engage questions of theological identity, ecumenical mission, and liturgical life, addressing tensions between tradition and modernity while preserving Eastern Catholic distinctiveness without folding it into a Latin framework. Taken together, these contributions offer historical depth and theological perspective on how Eastern Catholic Churches witness to unity in diversity within the Catholic communion.

Ines Angeli Murzaku and Ana Victoria Sima

Guest Editors

Editorial

Epilogue: After Sixty Years—An Eastern Catholic “Pope Leo Moment”

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When Dr. Ana-Victoria Sima and I began this project, our question was simple: how should we mark sixty years since the promulgation of Vatican II’s *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (21 November 1964), a pivotal moment for the Catholic East? We were grateful for the enthusiasm with which colleagues received the call to contribute to the Special Issue and for the strong submissions representing major Eastern Catholic Churches, including the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, and other churches. The result is a volume of high-quality research on the Eastern Catholic tradition. But an epilogue must also look ahead: what is happening now, and what comes next for the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches?

1. Guarding Eastern Identity in the Diaspora

On 22 November 2024, Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, issued a practical guide on indults of biritualism amid concerns that Western countries with clergy shortages are becoming over-reliant on Eastern Catholic priests. That is not only policy, it is ecclesiology—unity with Rome while preserving diversity in practice. The near future will likely see particular canon law and seminary formation adapted to safeguard Eastern identity ensuring that pastoral generosity does not become quiet Latinization.

2. Liturgy After the Syro-Malabar Crisis

When we conceived this Special Issue, the Syro-Malabar liturgical controversy was still unfolding. In July 2025, the Holy See concluded the mandate of the Pontifical Delegate, Archbishop Cyril Vasil’, S.J., for the Archeparchy of Ernakulam–Angamaly, and local norms now balance *ad orientem* and *versus populum* practices. The next chapter will be catechesis and pastoral implementation: forming clergy and faithful in the “why” behind the “how,” so that unity in worship is received as communion, not as mere compliance.

3. Primacy, Synodality, and Ecumenism

Two recent reference points are reshaping Catholic–Orthodox theology and ecumenism:

- The Alexandria Document (June 2023) of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church on *Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today*.
- The Vatican study “The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in Ecumenical Dialogues and the Responses to *Ut unum sint*” (June 2024), which gathers convergences toward a primacy at the service of communion.

Together, these documents sketch what a Roman primacy receivable by the East might look like, which is crucial for Eastern Catholic ecclesiology and for dialogues where Eastern

Catholics are often key interlocutors. The Coptic Orthodox suspension of official theological dialogue with Rome in 2024 (amid tensions over *Fiducia supplicans*) shows how fragile progress can be. The road ahead requires careful clarifications and patient bridge-mending, with Eastern Catholics frequently mediating at the local level.

4. Research Infrastructure, Rebuilt

Rome has been reorganizing study centres: the Pontifical Oriental Institute (*Orienteale*) is now structurally integrated with the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Pontifical Biblical Institute, tightening collaboration in Eastern studies, canon law, and scriptural research. One can expect joint programmes, easier archival access, and a new wave of critical editions, liturgical history, and musicology grounded in sources newly available to scholars.

5. The Near Future (3–5 Years)

These priorities include: From permissions to particular law—concrete eparchial statutes to implement the 2024 biritualism guidance and protect Eastern praxis in mixed-rite settings; Eucharistic and liturgical ressourcement—deepening catechesis on the mysteries rather than managing rubrics alone; synodality as ordinary governance—regular consultation, accountability, and co-responsibility woven into eparchial life; conflict-aware moral theology—just peace, displacement, trauma, and minority jurisprudence as core subfields for Eastern Churches under pressure; diaspora identity and mission—formation that sustains language, chant, and domestic church practices while evangelizing in plural societies.

6. A “Pope Leo Moment” for the Eastern Catholic Churches

The modern defence of Eastern rites begins with Leo XIII’s *Orientalium Dignitas* (1894), which explicitly protected Eastern traditions and forbade proselytism into the Latin Rite. John Paul II’s *Oriente Lumen* (1995) carried that vision into a new century: “the light from the East” is not ornamental but essential. Today we stand at what may be a new “Pope Leo Moment,” a retrieval and fresh application of those principles—not uniformity, but unity-in-diversity.

This volume aims to contribute to that Pope Leo moment. Across its chapters one will find restoration and ressourcement; theological identity and ecumenical mission; diaspora and belonging; synodality in theory and practice; liturgy and mystagogy; resilience under pressure; renewed ecclesiological models; and pastoral reforms that address post-conciliar sensitivities without surrendering Eastern distinctiveness.

In sum, if Vatican II gave the Eastern Catholic Churches the juridical and theological space to breathe, the present asks them to sing, to let their liturgies, canons, and spiritualities sound clearly in parish life, in academia, and in ecumenical dialogue. The measure of success will not be the borrowing of Latin solutions, but the credibility of Eastern holiness—Eucharistic, ascetical, communal, and missionary.

From council text to parish praxis, from Rome to the peripheries, the “Pope Leo Moment” will belong to those churches that protect their tradition while generously offering their services. We hope that the research explored here helps the Eastern Catholic Churches do both, keeping the ancient faith with a new courage for the tasks at hand.

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Article

Restoration of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia During the Prague Spring

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Abstract: The Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia found itself outlawed after its violent liquidation by the brachial communist power in 1950, and the members of this church were forced to convert to the Orthodox faith. This study explains the difficult process of renewal of the Greek Catholic Church and its structures in the context of the *Ostpolitik* of the Holy See, represented by the Vatican diplomat and later secretary of state Agostino Casaroli, and in the context of the political relaxation in Czechoslovakia in 1968, during the so-called Prague Spring. In addition to the scientific literature, this study is based on historical research carried out in the historical archive of the Secretariat of State in the Vatican within the Agostino Casaroli fund, which has so far been processed little. In the study, the author describes the most significant steps which lead to the official legalization of the Greek Catholic Church on June 13, 1968, as well as the difficult process of negotiating the terms of the restored church with the state-enforced Orthodox Church.

Keywords: Greek Catholic Church; Eparchy of Prešov; legalization; Council of Prešov; Vasil' Hopko; 1950–1968

1. Introduction

The new breath of the Holy Spirit and the desire for the renewal of the Church, represented by the Second Vatican Council, intensely affected the local churches in Czechoslovakia, despite the interference of state censorship authorities, which restricted and manipulated numerous reports from the meetings of the council fathers. Such techniques were abused by communist propagandists in an effort to create the impression of religious freedom in the country and to improve the reputation of communist Czechoslovakia abroad and in Vatican circles, where thanks to Slovak and Czech exiles, there was no lack of information about the persecution of the Catholic Church in the country. Enthusiasm for the council was manifested both from a political point of view by the attempts of the government and the Holy See, through *Ostpolitik*¹, to renew negotiations between the Vatican and Czechoslovakia, as well as by the opening of important ecclesiastical problems, among which were, primarily, the question of vacant bishops' chairs, the implementation of the Work of the Council's renewal, especially in the liturgy, and also the question of resuming the activities of the Greek Catholic Church.

From the point of view of historical research, this topic—the renewal of the legalization of the activity of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia—is currently under-researched. On the one hand, this is because historical research regarding the minority Greek Catholic Church, which, according to the latest statistics from the population census in 2021, represents only 4% of the population of the Slovak Republic, is dealt with only by a narrow circle of historians working at the only Greek Catholic Faculty of the University

of Prešov in Prešov, and, on the other hand, because historical research is focused primarily on more dominant topics such as the liquidation of this church and its persecution during the period of the communist regime. Despite the faculty's efforts to conduct systematic historical research through the regular publication of the scientific collection, *Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia in light of the anniversaries published annually from 2011* (Coranič 2011), to date, neither a special conference nor a special scientific collection (in book form) has been dedicated to the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church, apart from the issue of liquidation, and a spectacular conference which was held in 2010, and an extensive publication on this issue which was published under the title *Church in the shackles of a totalitarian regime* (Coranič et al. 2010). From the point of view of religious studies, no solid research has been carried out at all. The restoration of the Greek Catholic Church in 1968 and the subsequent—and sometimes violent—takeover of churches from the hands of the Orthodox Church after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 is still a reason for tense relations between the two churches, as many things have not been consulted on to this day. To date, there has not even been solid sociological research that would clarify the consequences of the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia on the composition of religious populations. From an ethnic point of view, the Greek Catholic Church was presented as Ruthenian; however, this does not correspond to reality. The Slovakian people themselves are also an important ethnic component of Greek Catholics in Slovakia. A very interesting phenomenon observed during re-Catholicization was the transfer of the Slovak Protestant population to the Greek Catholic Church (Haraksim 1992, p. 158). This study is a historiographic study which applies the historical method and analysis of published contributions with sociological overlap as a basis for further research in the field of religious studies.

2. The Situation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia in the Years 1950–1968

The Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia adhered to the Soviet model, similar to the so-called model of the Eastern Bloc, and was forcibly liquidated shortly after the representative of the Vatican at the apostolic internunciature in Prague, Mons. Ottavio de Liva was expelled from the country by the Note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 19 March 1950, and official diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Vatican were subsequently severed (De Marchi 2006, p. 84); this was followed by the violent liquidation of men's orders on the night of 13–14 April 1950 (Dubovský 1998). Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, the orthodoxization of Greek Catholics under the slogan of “the return of the church to the fathers” had already been implemented in October 1943 and, according to this model, was implemented on 10 March 1946 in the Ukrainian region of Halych in Lviv (Horňák 1990, pp. 3–4), in Romania on 1 December 1948, and in Subcarpathian Rus in Ukraine on 28 August 1950 (Seman 1997, p. 12); in Czechoslovakia, it was liquidated in the Black Eagle building in Prešov, which was the only seat of Greek Catholics in Czechoslovakia, on 28 April 1950. While only 35,000 members of the Greek Catholic Church lived in Czechoslovakia at that time, the Greek Catholic Church had, prior to its liquidation, 305,000 members, with two bishops and 331 priests (Rusnak 1986, pp. 18–21). Bishop Pavol Gojdič was immediately taken into isolation in the monastery in Nižná Šebastová, but soon after, on 9 June 1950, he was taken into custody in Valdice and in a staged political trial, together with two Roman Catholic bishops, Ján Vojtaššák and Michal Buzalka, he was sentenced to life imprisonment on 15 January 1951, in which he died on 17 July 1960, in the prison in Leopoldov. His body was moved to Prešov only at the time of political relaxation after the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church in 1968 (Šturák 2013, p. 89; Potaš 1999). The auxiliary Greek Catholic bishop in Prešov, Vasil'

Hopko, who was ordained as a bishop in a tense political situation on 11 May 1947, was isolated at the episcopal residence in Prešov immediately after the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church, taken into custody on 18 September 1950, and sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment on 24 October 1951 (Michalík 1996, pp. 6–7; Borza 2001, pp. 61–72), under the pressure of the Holy See, as part of the incipient Ostpolitik of the Holy See under the leadership of the diplomat Agostino Casaroli, who was appointed to this role by Pope John XXIII in March 1961 (Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato—Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 1, fasc. 1, ff. 3–4, 47–48)². He was then released on parole for three years until 12 May 1964. After completing the necessary treatment, he was interned in the convent of religious sisters in Osek near Duchcov. After the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church at the beginning of July, the Supreme Court annulled the judgment of the former State Court in Bratislava on 31 July 1968, which sentenced Bishop Hopko to prison. Subsequently, the Regional Prosecutor’s Office in Košice stopped the criminal prosecution of this man, who was the only Greek Catholic bishop in the whole of Czechoslovakia, so that he could participate in the restoration of this church (Michalík 1996, pp. 6–7; Borza 2001, pp. 61–72). Both of these bishops were elevated to the altar as blessed martyrs by Pope John Paul II; for bishop Gojdič, this took place on 4th November 2001, then the process was repeated for bishop Hopko on 14th September 2003.

As for Greek Catholic priests, out of 328 priests, only 45 agreed to join the Orthodox Church. Among them were several church dignitaries (Seman 1997, p. 41). Under pressure, another 132 priests eventually joined the Orthodox Church in the same year (Vopatrný 1998, p. 87). The church historian Peter Šturák provides other data reporting that out of 256 clergymen in the public administration, 169 clergymen signed the transfer to the Orthodox Church (Šturák 1999, p. 126). Of these, 105 Greek Catholic priests were deported with their families to southern Bohemia in November 1951, where they worked in local factories. In 1953, another 98 priests and their families were deported to southern Bohemia (Konečný 1996, p. 121).

Only a small part of those who followed the Greek Catholic faith converted to the Orthodox Church. Most attended Roman Catholic services. For a better understanding of this, we can cite the example of the East Slovak region, which was home to the most Greek Catholics in Czechoslovakia; according to the report of the Regional National Committee in Košice from 1955, out of 52,000 Greek Catholics, only 15,000 believers accepted Orthodox ceremonies, 25,000 Greek Catholics regularly attended Roman Catholic ceremonies, and 12,000 Greek Catholics prayed the Byzantine liturgy of St. John Chryzostom (Coranič 2014, p. 351).

3. Circumstances and First Attempts to Restore the Activities of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia

Apart from the sporadic independent attempts to restore the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, especially by priests who returned to Slovakia from southern Bohemia at the end of the 1950s, an important impulse for its legalization was the resumption of diplomatic negotiations between the Vatican and Czechoslovakia and the change in the papal policy towards the so-called Eastern Bloc through the Ostpolitik. The publication of the encyclical of Pope John XXIII incited a very positive response. *Pacem and Terris*, published on 11 April 1963, was dominated by the idea of building peace in the world. The rapprochement between the Holy See and Czechoslovakia also took place within the negotiations of the Second Vatican Council, which was also attended by a Czechoslovak delegation, but was used by the communist authorities to spy on the greatest critics of the regime, who were priests and bishops in exile, especially in Rome, as well as

to create a positive image of communist Czechoslovakia around the world, which was informed by them about the violation of religious freedom and the persecution of Christians. (Roccucci 2013, pp. 636–7; Dikarev 2017, pp. 543–6; Chenaux 2017, p. 33). Thus, in 1962, within the theology of the dialog of John XXIII, the first negotiations on the restoration of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Czechoslovakia began, in which the Holy See demanded, above all, from the government, the opening of negotiations on the release of bishops from prison or internment, among them the only Greek Catholic bishop in Czechoslovakia, Vasil' Hopko, religious freedom for Catholics, the filling of vacant episcopal sees, and also the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia (Barberini 2007, p. 103; Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato—Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali (d'alej ASRS), Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 65, ff. 150–151).³ A great success resulting from papal diplomacy was the visit of the so-called traveling nuncio Agostino Casaroli on 13–14 May 1963 in Prague, where he met with all the oppressed bishops and flew to Rome on 15 May (ASRS, Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 65, f. 259; ASRS, Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 7, fasc. Agende: anno 1963, ff. 1261–1262).⁴ A huge result of this journey was that on 2 October 1963, the Archbishop of Prague, Josef Beran, and the Bishop of Brno, Karel Skoupý, were released from forced isolation, and then on 4 October 1963, the Bishop of Spiš, Ján Vojtaššák, and two Czech auxiliary bishops, Stanislav Zela and Ladislav Hlad, were released from prison (Rebichini 1977, p. 68). However, after a few days, Bishop Vojtaššák was forced to spend the rest of his life in isolation in the Charity Home in Senohraby. However, the fact that the only Greek Catholic bishop, Vasil Hopko, was released from prison only a year later, on 12 May 1964, proves how serious a problem the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church was for the Czechoslovak government (Michalík 1996, pp. 6–7). The possibility of legalizing the Greek Catholic Church was out of the question at that time.

A significant change in political and ecclesiastical issues in Czechoslovakia occurred after the Slovak politician Alexander Dubček became the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on 5 January 1968, and, together with his collaborators, started the political reform of communism with the so-called human face, known as the Prague Spring⁵ (Judák 2003, p. 257).

This situation was used by some Greek Catholic priests in exile, among them Michal Lacko, a professor of church history at the Eastern Pontifical Institute in Rome, who had already published various articles in the exile magazine *Mária* since the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in 1950, in which he pointed out the course of the abolition and the severe persecution of Greek Catholics in Czechoslovakia. He was among the first (Babjak 1997, pp. 84–91; Chalupický 2006, p. 412) to write a letter to Alexander Dubček in January 1968 to request the rehabilitation of the Greek Catholic Church, clergy and believers and the restoration of the Eparchy of Prešov (Lacko 1968, p. 21). Despite the difficult situation, the auxiliary bishop of Prešov, Vasil' Hopko, from exile, addressed a letter dated March 19, 1968, to the leadership of the Communist Party in Prague, Alexander Dubček, and to Bratislava, Vasil' Biľak, in which he demanded the legalization of the Greek Catholic Church (Šturák 1999, pp. 180–3; Chalupický 2006, p. 412). This letter was published in full by the *Catholic Newspaper* (Anonymous 1968, p. 3), which caused a great response not only among Greek Catholics, but also among Roman Catholic priests, who at their priestly meetings supported this demand as key to resolving the religious situation in the country, and even Evangelical priests joined this initiative. On 9 March 1968, the Ukrainian radio broadcast in Prešov also raised the issue of the rehabilitation of the Greek Catholic Church and listed the injustices caused by the Orthodoxy of Greek Catholics, as was the case in the Ukrainian periodicals *Nove žyt'a* and *Družno vpered*, which, from mid-March 1968, published several

articles demanding the same goal (Coranič 2014, p. 359). On 11 March 1968, the presidency of the Cultural Association of Ukrainian Workers pointed out the unjust solution of the religious question through orthodoxization in an appeal to the Ruthenians, whom the state considered to be Ukrainians under the influence of Soviet policy (Barnovský 1999, p. 448). Of particular importance was the appeal of the Prague Apostolic Administrator František Tomášek of 25 March 1968, addressed to the Czechoslovak government, in which he presented the demands of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, in which in the fifth point he demanded the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church and all its rights, which had been abolished by the unjust intervention of the communist regime. These activities were also joined by Greek Catholic priests, who published in the *East Slovak Newspaper* on 29 March 1968, common demands for the legalization of the Greek Catholic Church and the repair of damage caused by the regime, summarized in five points. In the first point, they demanded acknowledgement of the state's intervention in the Orthodoxy of Greek Catholics in 1950 and a description of the measures that led to the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. The second demand was to occupy the episcopal see in Prešov and to verify the legality of the political trials with the Greek Catholic bishops Pavol Gojdič and Vasil' Hopko. The third demand was to leave freedom to Greek Catholics to choose their religious beliefs and to eliminate all coercive practices of State Security. The fourth demand was the rehabilitation of Greek Catholic priests and their families deported to Bohemia and their moral and material compensation (Coranič 2014, p. 359). In addition to this initiative, the Greek Catholic priest Dr. Ján Murín sought out Ladislav Holdoš, who at the time of the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in 1950 was the chairman of the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs and directly participated in the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church, in order to explain the true historical background of the liquidation of the church after he was paradoxically expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1951. In his letter, he described the unconstitutionality of the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church on the basis of Moscow's political order (Sirochman 2003, p. 69). He expressed the need to correct the injustices he caused to the Greek Catholic Church by his actions and published several articles on this matter (Holdoš 1968b, p. 1, 3; Holdoš 1968a, p. 2; Kapitoly z najnovších cirkevných dejín 1968, p. 3).

Through these activities, two centers were created around the two most prominent personalities of the Greek Catholic Church, Bishop Vasil' Hopko and his closest collaborator in Prague, the Greek Catholic priest Ivan Ljavinec and Dr. Ján Murín in Bratislava, naturally and independently of each other, two centers striving for the legalization of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. The link between the two groups was the Greek Catholic Redemptorist Štefan Lazor. They considered the approaching Easter holidays to be a suitable opportunity for the resumption of the activities of the Greek Catholic Church, when Štefan Lazor, together with another Greek Catholic priest, Ivan Ljavinec, asked to be received by the head of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs under the Prime Minister's Presidency, Dr. Erika Kadlecová, and officially asked for permission to hold Greek Catholic services during Easter, which, in 1968, fell on 14 April. This initiative was supported by a petition of believers, organized in eastern Slovakia under the leadership of Ivan Ljavinec (Coranič 2014, p. 362), which was signed by 40,000 people (Chalupecký 2006, p. 412). Despite the opposition from the Orthodox Bishop of Prešov, Nikolaj, this petition played an important role in putting pressure on the government to seriously deal with the issue of legalization of the Greek Catholic Church. Indeed, on 5 April 1968, a meeting of representatives of the Orthodox Church led by the Orthodox Bishop of Prešov, Nikolaj, and the Greek Catholic Church, led by the Greek Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Prešov, Vasil' Hopko, was held at the Ministry of Culture and Information in Prague, at which a representative of the Czechoslovak government proposed the creation of a

mixed commission that was to offer a solution to the arrangement of relations between the two churches in the country. Both delegations agreed with the proposal. However, the Orthodox, state-supported Church made it a condition of negotiation to maintain the status quo of 1 January 1968, a proposal with which the Greek Catholic group did not agree (Vnuk 2001, p. 184). Therefore, after the meeting of the delegations, the representatives of the Greek Catholic Church agreed to create their own representative committee to present the demands of the Greek Catholic Church to the government. Eighteen years after the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church, the Committee convened the first meeting of Greek Catholic priests, which took place on 10 April 1968 in the premises of the Roman Catholic Bishop's Office in Košice. The conference was attended by as many as 134 Greek Catholic priests out of a total of 172, and 68 laymen also attended (Lacko 1971, p. 162). The so-called *Preparatory Action Committee* was headed by Bishop Vasil Hopko, together with 16 other priests and 2 laypeople. Dr. Ján Murín, Štefan Ujhely and Andrej Zima became the executive representative of the Greek Catholic priests. Among the members of the committee was Ján Hirka, who later became an ordinary of the Greek Catholic Church. This committee became the official representative of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia in negotiations with the Czechoslovak government on the resumption of the activities of the Greek Catholic Church and the proclamation of the so-called Declaration of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of the Prešov Council of 28 April 1950 as an invalid and state-imposed act (Šturák 1999, p. 146). At the same time, the Action Committee decided not to continue talks with representatives of the Orthodox Church, to which the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia responded by appointing a member of the party's Central Committee, Dr. Štefan Brenčič, whose task was to restore dialog between the two sides. He convened a meeting on 18 April in Košice; however, this did not lead to any significant concessions, which the Orthodox delegation was striving for (Letz 2001, p. 276). For this reason, on the same day, Brenčič met with the Action Committee of the Greek Catholic Church; the meeting took place in Košice, and was the first ever official meeting of the state with representatives of the Greek Catholic Church. At the meeting, the Greek Catholics' unyielding demands for the resumption of the church's activities were again voiced, not according to the status quo of 1 January 1968, as demanded by the Orthodox side, but according to the status quo from before 28 April 1950, i.e., to the state before the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. Negotiations between the Greek Catholic Church and the state continued on 22 April 1968, and on that date, an agreement was reached to accelerate the rehabilitation of Bishop Vasil Hopko due to the restoration of the Greek Catholic bishopric in Prešov, and the Action Committee was tasked with developing a project for the renewal of the Greek Catholic Church, which it did very promptly a week later, 29 April 1968, in the form of the so-called *Constitution Memorandum*, which was presented to the state authorities. In it, the demand for the preservation of the status quo from before 28 April 1950, was presented (Coranič 2014, p. 365).

4. Legalization of the Greek Catholic Church by the State

The initial symptom of successful negotiations in the changed ecclesiastical and political conditions in Czechoslovakia was the granting of state approval for public pastoral activity to the auxiliary bishop of Prešov, Vasil Hopko, on 11 May 1968. This allowed him to participate in the meeting of the Ordinaries of Czechoslovakia, who, on 14–15 May 1968, held a constituent congress of the Work of Catholic Renewal in Velehrad in the spirit of the instructions of the Second Vatican Council. In the final statement of the Ordinaries, there was a demand that all the rights of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia be restored (Vnuk 2001, p. 194). Meanwhile, several Greek Catholic activists founded local and district committees that organized a petition for the restoration of the Greek

Catholic Church and took over a total of more than sixty churches from the hands of the Orthodox without an official decision of the state authorities, which created unrest between Greek Catholics and Orthodox in eastern Slovakia, where most of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox believers were concentrated. Therefore, on 29 May 1968, the Eparchial Council of the Orthodox Church wrote a protest to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, in which it demanded that the activities of these Greek Catholic priests be banned. However, they were already serving the Greek Catholic liturgy in the churches without state approval, and the state began to pay salaries to many priests even before the official legalization of the Greek Catholic Church (Pešek and Barnovský 1999, pp. 196–7; Coranič 2014, p. 367).

Those factors clearly showed the irreversibility of the process of the official restoration of the Greek Catholic Church, which took place shortly afterwards by Government Decision No 205/1968 of 13 June 1968 and Government Decision No 70/1968 of the same day on the economic security of the Greek Catholic Church (Chalupecký 2006, p. 412; Coranič 2014, pp. 367–8). The representative of the state, Dr. Štefan Brenčič, issued directives determining the takeover of individual parishes and churches under the administration of the Greek Catholic Church. At the same time, the Czechoslovak government allocated funds intended for the activities of the Greek Catholic Church, while still requiring the necessary state approval from priests to carry out pastoral activities. He published these guidelines on 19 June 1968 (Lacko 1973, p. 48). After difficult negotiations, the cathedral was restored on 5 July 1968, although the bishop's residence and seminary remained in the hands of the Orthodox Church. On 7 July, Bishop Hopko celebrated the first divine liturgy in the cathedral since the legalization of the church, and the Prešov dean Leontij Lizák transferred to the Greek Catholic Church, which was considered a great success. Gradually, by the end of July 1968, 111 priests signed up for pastoral care within the Greek Catholic Church. As of 30 November 1968, there were 180 Greek Catholic priests in the Greek Catholic Bishopric in Prešov (Coranič 2014, pp. 369–70). The clergy of the diocese consisted of four groups. The strongest group were priests who had not signed the entry into the Orthodox Church in 1950 and could not work pastorally until the restoration of the church. The second group were theologians who, due to the events of 1950, could not complete their theological studies. Eight such seminarians were ordained priests by Bishop Hopko on 11 May 1969. The third group consisted of 36 Greek Catholic priests who converted to the Orthodox Church in 1950 and returned to the Greek Catholic Church in 1968. The fourth group consisted of 42 theologians from Greek Catholic families who continued their studies after 1950 and were ordained by Orthodox bishops (Lacko 1971, pp. 174–5; Pešek and Barnovský 1999, pp. 204–5).

From the administrative point of view, the Greek Catholic Bishop's Office in Košice was established on 17 July 1968, as the seat of the Orthodox Church remained in Prešov. Andrej Zima, a member of the committee, is the director of the office, and Dr. Ján Murín is the secretary. The question of filling the episcopal vacant see and appointing a coadjutor bishop was raised. The candidate for the position of bishop was Vasil Hopko, who had to be rehabilitated by the courts, and Ján Hirka, Ivan Ljavinec and Juraj Bumbera were proposed as the coadjutor bishops (Babjak 1997, p. 92). For this purpose, Bishop Hopko traveled to Rome at the beginning of December and, together with two Greek Catholic American bishops of Slovak origin—Stephen John Kocisko from Pittsburgh and Michael Joseph Dudick from Passaic—participated in an audience with Pope Paul VI, at which the question of occupying the episcopal see in Prešov was raised. There was a change in personnel policy on the part of the Holy See and Hopko's candidacy became more and more problematic. The reason given was the poor health of the bishop as well as the national question (Coranič 2014, p. 372), within which efforts were made to demythologize

the centuries-old ideas that the Greek Catholic Church is exclusively a question of the Rusyn ethnicity, which of course did not correspond to the real situation, because there was a relatively strong representation of Slovakian people among Greek Catholics in Slovakia.⁶ However, it is not impossible that such an attitude occurred on the basis of the intervention of the communist government in connection with the onset of normalization⁷ in the country and the associated reduction in freedom for churches. The path of Vasil' Hopko to the episcopal see in Prešov proved to be less and less likely, and the possibility of appointing a new apostolic administrator of the Eparchy of Prešov instead of appointing a coadjutor bishop was considered. During Hopko's stay in Rome in December 1968, a decision was made to appoint Ján Hirka, a member of the Action Committee, as the Ordinary of the Greek Catholic Bishopric in Prešov, i.e., the only Ordinary of Greek Catholics in the whole of Czechoslovakia. The decree of appointment as Apostolic Administrator with the rights of Bishop Resident was issued on 20 December 1968, and signed by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, Cardinal Maximilian Fuerstenberger. At the same time, Bishop Vasil Hopko was confirmed as an auxiliary bishop of the eparchy. However, the circumstances of his appointment are interesting, creating assumptions as to whether this act was a matter of diplomacy of the Holy See or an act of the Congregation itself, since, as the historian Michal Barnovský pointed out, at the beginning of January 1969, the main protagonist of the Ostpolitik of the Holy See, the secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs, assured the representatives of Czechoslovakia that Ján Hirka had not been appointed as Ordinary. By doing so, he created doubts as to whether the appointment of Ján Hirka could have taken place without the knowledge of the Vatican Secretariat of State (Barnovský 2004, p. 43). This assumption is unlikely; even impossible. Rather, the leadership of the communist state wanted to have a guarantee that Ján Hirka was not appointed bishop. It is not possible for a prefect to appoint an apostolic administrator without the knowledge of the Secretariat of State. Barnovský probably considered the words "Ordinary" and "bishop" to be synonymous. Indeed, in the decree of appointment of Ján Hirku, it is stated that the Pope considered it right to select and send him as an ordinary "ad interim" without an episcopal character with a seat in Prešov (Hirka 2013, p. 43).

The appointment of Ján Hirka as apostolic administrator in Prešov met with resistance from the Czechoslovak government, which made the assumption of office conditional on the granting of state approval, which the Holy See did not ask for before his appointment. In order to meet the government's needs, the Holy See commissioned the Trnava Apostolic Administrator Ambroz Lazík to lead negotiations with the government on this matter. In a letter dated 27 February 1969, he addressed the Minister of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic, Miroslav Válek, in which he asked for state approval for the appointment of Ján Hirka as the Ordinary of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia with the seat in Prešov with the rights of a resident bishop (Barnovský 1999, p. 458; Štefanský 1992, pp. 457–60). On 1 April 1969, Minister Válek convened a meeting of representatives of the Greek Catholic Church Vasil' Hopko, Ján Hirka and Trnava administrator Lazík at the Ministry in Bratislava, at which he gave *nulla* to obtain state approval for Ján Hirka. On the very next day, 2 April, Ján Hirka obtained the necessary state approval, and this was also granted for Vasil' Hopko as an auxiliary bishop of Prešov. The apostolic administrator Hirka took up his office on 23 April 1969, in Prešov, where the seat was also moved from Košice. It was not moved to the original premises of the bishop's office, as the Orthodox bishop Nikolaj refused to leave the residence, but in the premises of the Greek Catholic parish office in Prešov. Subsequently, with the appointment of a board of consultors, the process of legalization and consolidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia was completed (Šturák 1999, p. 158).

5. Conclusions

When the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia was abolished on 28 April 1950, it seemed that the end had come. None of the leading state representatives would have thought that in 18 years, there would be a renewal of its activity; moreover, no one, not even the leading representatives of the Greek Catholic Church, would have thought that a few years later, not only would the church be legalized, but also that the episcopal seat in Prešov would be elevated to the metropolitan seat. The sacrifice and suffering of the now blessed bishops Peter Pavol Gojdič and Vasil' Hopko, as well as many priests with their families, as well as the Greek Catholic faithful, resulted in a rich harvest and flourishing of the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia, which has not been seen in its entire history. The Ordinary of the Greek Catholic Church, Ján Hirka, appointed in the context of the political thaw of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, took over the epochal role of the rebirth of Greek Catholics in the country from the underground to its public activities, and after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, he became the first free Greek Catholic bishop, which was the time of a new spring of this minority church in Slovakia, which is still experiencing growth despite the growing liberalism and atheism in the area. From the administrative and legal point of view, it has achieved its independent position of *the Church sui iuris* and a developed structure, associated with an active and creative approach of Greek Catholic bishops, priests and believers. While in 1968, he was the only Greek Catholic bishop in the whole of Czechoslovakia in the country, at present, in addition to the previously mentioned position of the metropolitan character of the bishopric in Prešov, he has three archbishops (one of whom is emeritus) and four bishops. Even more valuable are the three blessed martyrs of the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia: Bishops Gojdič and Hopko, as well as the Redemptorist Metod Trčka.

From the point of view of religious research, it would be interesting to analyze and evaluate the consequences of the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia in 1950 and its subsequent legalization in 1968. The abolition of this church by the communist state resulted in the outflow of some Greek Catholics to the Orthodox Church, in which, due to the fact that they continued to attend the same church that fell to the Orthodox Church after 1950, they remained part of the Orthodox Church even after the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church in 1968. Orthodoxy, supported by the communist state power on the model of Moscow, had permanent consequences for the relations between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches in Slovakia. Likewise, the original Greek Catholics, who converted to the Orthodox Church after 1950, after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, when most of the churches were returned to the Greek Catholics, paradoxically stood in the fight to preserve these churches in the hands of the Orthodox Church. Another part of the Greek Catholics, who, in terms of loyalty to the Pope, chose the Roman Catholic Church instead of the Orthodox Church, gradually integrated into the structures of the Roman Catholic Church, and after the restoration of the Greek Catholic Church, they did not return to the original Church and raised their offspring within the tradition of the Western Roman Catholic Church. The Greek Catholic Church's emphasis on and legal arguments for those who identify themselves as Roman Catholics and who should follow the Byzantine rite according to the rite often encounter resistance due to the fact that this practice has become alien to them over the decades.

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Notes

- ¹ The term Ostpolitik is a term denoting the policy of normalizing the relations of the Federal Republic of Germany with the countries of the so-called the Eastern Bloc, especially from East Germany, which German Chancellor Willy Brandt (1969–1974) began to promote. This term later took on the character of the overall more conciliatory policy of the countries of the West towards the countries of the Eastern bloc. In the context of Ostpolitik of the Holy See, it is a policy seeking to establish diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the countries of the Eastern Bloc in an effort to ensure a better position of Catholics in communist countries where the persecution of the Church continued and many bishoprics were vacant.
- ² Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato—Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali (ASRS), Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 1, fasc. 1, ff. 3–4, 47–48.
- ³ Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato—Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali (hereafter ASRS), Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 65, ff. 150–151.
- ⁴ ASRS, Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 65, f. 259; ASRS, Fondo Spoglio del cardinale Agostino Casaroli, pos. 7, fasc. Agende: anno 1963, ff. 1261–1262.
- ⁵ We understand the term Prague Spring as referring to the political loosening of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia after internal conflicts in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia at the end of September 1967 and the subsequent election of a new pro-reform secretary of the party, Alexander Dubček. It lasted until the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the invasion of the troops of the Warsaw Pact countries on 21 August 1968, which started the normalization process in the country.
- ⁶ In this effort, the Jesuit professor at the Pontifical Eastern Institute in Rome, Michal Lacko, a Greek Catholic of Slovak origin, played an important role; as a result of his actions, for the first time in history, Slovak Greek Catholics were listed under their name in the official statistics of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches for the year 1962. *Oriente Cattolico. Cenni storici e statistiche*. Città del Vaticano: Congregazione per la Chiesa orientale, 1962, pp. 313–21. In this context, the appointment of Bishop Hopko, who supported the Ruthenian national consciousness, ran into opposition from Slovak Greek Catholics.
- ⁷ We understand the term normalization as originating from the Moscow Protocol, signed on 27 August 1968, by which the Czechoslovak government, after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops under the dictates of Moscow, carried out a series of measures to suppress the democratization process in the country in order to consolidate the communist dictatorship in the country.

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Article

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Its Communion with the Bishop of Rome: Nurturing Its Ecumenical Engagement

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Abstract: The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is an Eastern Catholic Church that lives according to the Ukrainian–Byzantine Christian theological, liturgical, canonical and spiritual tradition and is in full and visible communion with the successor of Peter. Unity with the Roman Apostolic See has become one of the most important foundations of the UGCC’s identity, enriching its church life and strengthening its ecumenical ministry. As a *sui iuris* Church in the “family” of Catholic communion, the UGCC actively develops its ecumenical commitments with the Orthodox Churches and Protestant ecclesial communities. In this article, we will briefly examine how the UGCC developed its communion with the Bishop of Rome and how communion with the Apostolic See was a blessing for this Church, but at the same time sometimes became a threat to its existence in times of persecution by totalitarian regimes. We will also present the current religious context in which the UGCC operates, analyze some of its most important ecumenical initiatives and examine its participation in the development of interfaith dialogue in Ukraine. We will consider the challenges that the Russian invasion has brought to the UGCC and other religions in Ukraine, and how the UGCC, by developing communion with Rome, manages to witness the Gospel of life in the difficult circumstances of war and death.

Keywords: interconfessional relations in Ukraine; Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; communion with the Bishop of Rome; ecumenism

1. Historical Aspects of Ecclesiological Maturity

Officially, the UGCC draw its origins from St. Volodymyr’s Baptismal Font in 988; when the Kyivan Metropolia was founded by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it was historically developed in the Byzantine tradition. Generously drawing from the theological, liturgical, canonical and spiritual sources of the Eastern tradition, organically united with the legacy of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and fostering its own indigenous culture, the Kyivan Church abided in communion with the Christian Church of the West and the Pope (Колесо 2022, p. 5). It was able to grow into a self-governed Eastern Slavic Church, enjoying considerable autonomy, which allowed it to develop a truly independent life within the Byzantine heritage (Suttner 1993).

From the very beginning, the Kyivan Church was open to both the Christian East and the Christian West and supported the restoration of the unity of the Churches, which was lost as a result of the excommunications of 1054 and the later divergence between the Churches of Old and New Rome.¹ Despite the fact that the Kyivan Metropolia was under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople, from time to time metropolitans and Rus’ princes contacted the Church of Rome, recognizing its primacy and trying to establish relations with it, despite the Latin–Greek alienation (Gudziak 1998).² An example of this is the participation of its representatives in the councils of Lyons I (1245), Constance

(1417), and particularly through the participation of Isidore, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Rus', in the Council of Florence (1439). The Kyivan Church rarely entered directly into a dispute between Rome and Constantinople, from time to time trying to initiate or actively support efforts aimed at restoring Christian unity, subsequently adhering to the union traditions that had been relevant to it for a long time (Колесо 2022, n. 1, p. 7). In the latter half of the fifteenth century, the metropolitans of Kyiv appeared not to recognize strict confessional divisions, even though both Rome and Constantinople viewed the ecclesiastical rapprochement achieved at the Union of Florence as having lapsed. Through the beginning of the sixteenth century, without ever breaking ties with Constantinople, Kyivan metropolitans sought to maintain or reestablish relations with the papacy (Gudziak 1998, n. 4, p. 248).

In the context of the internal crisis, with the weakening of the Patriarchal Centre of Constantinople and the challenges of the Protestant Reformation and post-Tridentine Catholicism, the hierarchy of the Kyivan Church, seeking, in the spirit of the Council of Florence, to fulfil Christ's commandment "that all may be one" (John 17:11), decided to restore Eucharistic communion with the Bishop of Rome, while ensuring the preservation of its Eastern ritual traditions, as well as its own church and ethno-cultural identity.³ Unfortunately, as a result of this, the Kyivan Church was divided into the United and Orthodox Churches, and subsequent attempts to unite both parts of the Kyivan Church into a single patriarchate in the seventeenth century failed for a number of subjective and objective reasons.⁴ The wounds of division in the body of the Kyivan Church remain unhealed to this day (Колесо 2022, n. 1, p. 9).

Summing up the consequences of the Union of Brest, 1596, the UGCC in its Ecumenical Position from 2021 recognizes that, on the one hand, thanks to the Union, it managed to preserve and even strengthen unity between eparchies, raise its educational standards and adopt some of the best examples of European Christian culture. On the other hand, and partly of its own free will, the UGCC suffered tremendously from Latinization and soteriological exclusivism, which led to serious distortions in the understanding of its identity and vocation as an Eastern Church (Колесо 2022, n. 1, p. 11).

2. Identity of the UGCC as a Church in Communion

Christianity in the time of St. Volodymyr was accepted and adopted by the Kyivan Rus, according to Pope John Paul II, "when the whole Church of Christ lived in complete ecclesial unity. It was Christianity, Orthodox in faith and at the same time Catholic in love, because it was in full communion with the Apostolic See and with the whole Church" (Благовісник Блаженнішого Мирослава-Івана Кардинала Любачівського 1986–1987). The identity of the UGCC is traditionally characterized by two aspects. On the one hand, having a historical connection with its Mother Church, the Church of Constantinople, and being one of the legitimate heirs of the historic Kyivan Metropolia, the UGCC belongs to the Christian East, preserving and developing Eastern spirituality, theology, canonical order and liturgy. On the other hand, it is in full communion with the Roman Church and all sui iuris Catholic Churches (Колесо 2022, n. 1, p. 34). Therefore, the desire for Christian unity, which the UGCC boldly embraces, helps to develop its identity as a local (*помічна, pomisna*) church and to introduce new ideas and proposals to the global ecumenical dialogue.

For the UGCC, communion with the Church of Rome has served as a great historical support, enriched its ecclesiological experience and filled it with the spiritual gifts that have led its faithful to great sacrifices and heroic feats of faith in times of persecution.⁵ The UGCC continues to enrich its ecclesial thinking through ongoing dialogue and communion with the Roman Catholic Church and with other local churches and communities, which,

together with the UGCC, are an integral part of the Universal Church in communion with the Bishop of Rome (Колесо 2022, n. 1, p. 55).

The identity of the UGCC in different periods was threatened, on the one hand, by the process of Latinization: in a certain period of its existence, the Church could not always fully draw from its natural roots in the Eastern tradition.⁶ Popes sometimes had to defend the Eastern Rite and affirmed its equality within the Catholic Church. They issued encyclicals and other documents supporting the preservation of Byzantine and other Eastern traditions in liturgy, discipline and spiritual life, for example “*Orientalium Dignitas*” (1894)—Pope Leo XIII defended the rights of the Eastern Catholic Churches and called for the preservation of their traditions; “*Rerum Orientalium*” (1928)—Pope Pius XI encouraged the development of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the study of Eastern theology; and “*Oriente Lumen*” (1995)—Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of Eastern spirituality and traditions in the life of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, based on the soteriological exclusivism inherent in the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council, sometimes the UGCC was perceived as a tool that could be used to “convert Russia”. Also, on the other hand, the UGCC was perceived by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as an obstacle to the establishment of dialogue, and thus the issue of Uniatism as an unacceptable method on the path to the Christian unity was raised in 1993 during the official meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church at the Balamand Monastery in Lebanon. While rejecting Uniatism as a model for unity, the Declaration acknowledged the existence and legitimacy of the Eastern Catholic Churches, affirming their right to exist and minister to their faithful.⁷

Identity, which is expressed in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, has repeatedly caused serious challenges and even threats to the very existence of the UGCC. First, at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this took place through the gradual incorporation of its individual parts into the Russian Orthodox Church through violent “reunification” initiatives. This is especially true of the twentieth century, which also became a time of martyrdom for this Church. In Soviet times, the UGCC was the largest underground religious community in the world (Bociurkiw 1996).⁸ It was also one of the most active structures of resistance to the Soviet system, defending human dignity and the right to religious freedom in the face of totalitarianism (DeVillie and Galadza 2023).

3. The Ukrainian Religious Context and Ecumenical Initiatives of the UGCC

Religious life in Ukraine began to flourish after the collapse of the USSR and Ukraine’s independence in 1991. Ecumenical life since that time has been full of various challenges and achievements. Ukrainian Christianity (in contrast to Russia, where the ROC had a dominant position in the state) was characterized by the absence of one monopolistic denomination that could dictate terms to other denominations or have special privileges from the State. Such diversity created a certain tension and competition between denominations, but, at the same time, it created the basis for *dialogicity* and openness in Ukrainian Christianity.

In Ukraine, during the early 1990s, several Orthodox Churches were formed at once, namely the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), but they did not have communion with each other. The Catholic Church was represented by Eastern Catholics, i.e., the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) and the Mukachevo Greek Catholic Eparchy (MGCE), and Roman Catholics, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine (RCCU), as well as Protestant communities, usually

of the Baptist or Evangelical persuasion. According to the non-governmental think tank and research institution Razumkov Center, Ukrainian society demonstrates a fairly high level of religiosity (about 70%): “after 2014, there has been a downward trend in the number of those who identify themselves as Orthodox (their share decreased from 70% in 2014 to 55% in 2024). Meanwhile, the share of Greek Catholics has somewhat increased from 8% to 12%. 10% called themselves «just Christians», and 18% said they did not identify themselves with any religious faith. . . Other denominations and religions (Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, etc.) have notably fewer followers” (Yakymenko et al. 2024, p. 5).

This diversity became a source of interdenominational conflict and tension during the first three to five years of independence.⁹ However, after a phase of distrust and sometimes hostility caused by conflicts over the distribution of churches and church property, interchurch relations moved into a period of peaceful coexistence. Initiatives of reconciliation, some origins of dialogue and cooperation emerged, interfaith prayers started to be held, and various scholarly theological meetings were organized between representatives of Ukrainian churches. The churches of Ukraine have put forward joint legislative and educational proposals within the framework of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, which was established in 1996. This institution represents 95% of religious communities present in the country. Meetings between leaders of Ukrainian churches have become commonplace (Аналітична записка 2020, p. 16).

4. Challenges to Ecumenism in Ukraine

However, ecumenism in the Ukrainian state remained a hostage to some factors, namely that Orthodox Christians in Ukraine have been cut off from global ecumenical processes. The UOC, as part of the ROC, has never been a separate member of ecumenical bodies, dialogues or meetings, as it has always been part of the ROC. Within the ROC itself, the attitude toward the ecumenical movement has often been and remains ambivalent: outwardly, the ROC is a full member of the World Council of Churches, its hierarchy participates in international ecumenical meetings (in fact, Patriarch Kirill began his career as the official representative of the ROC in the WCC in 1971–1974) and joint statements are issued with other denominations, but in its internal environment the attitude towards ecumenism is quite different: most clergy, and believers in general, are brought up in the spirit of isolationism and prejudice against all who are non-Orthodox. The UOC’s relations with other Ukrainian Orthodox denominations are burdened with negativity: the UOC-KP and UAOC have been accused of schism, and their sacraments—including Baptism—were not recognized—and in many cases are not recognized to this day. The rather neutral attitude of the UOC to Russia’s military movements against Ukraine in 2014 only increased the rejection of this religious community by a large part of Ukrainian society (Аналітична записка 2020, n. 21, p. 17); the number of those who associate themselves with the UOC has dropped significantly from 13% in 2021 to 5.5% in 2024 (Yakymenko et al. 2024, p. 6).

Lacking recognition from other Orthodox Churches, the UOC-KP and UAOC were unable to participate in international ecumenical dialogue. The granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly and the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 2019 brought hope for healing the divisions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy.¹⁰ However, this expectation remained unfulfilled due to long-standing internal conflicts, deep-seated prejudices and strong external pressures, and thus most UOC parishes did not join the OCU.¹¹

Most of the Protestant communities of Ukraine belong to the “second wave” of Protestantism. These are Baptists, Pentecostals and Adventists, who are characterized by low ecumenical activity, a sort of isolation, in contrast to the “first wave” of Protestants—

Lutherans and Reformed. The atmosphere of persecution during the Soviet Union pushed them to confessional isolationism, and only in the 2000s did they begin to form inter-Protestant representative structures and reach the all-Ukrainian level. Although most Protestant communities still remain largely self-centred, the development of theological education, initiation of relations with other denominations and participation in joint projects have enabled the gradual penetration of ecumenical consciousness into their environment (Аналітична записка 2020, п. 21, р. 18).

5. Ecumenical Initiatives of the UGCC

The UGCC, in comparison with other denominations in Ukraine, has certain ecumenical achievements and advantages. However, in its midst, the attitude to ecumenism is heterogeneous, sometimes with certain reservations. The negative experience of church property conflicts during the period of coming out of the underground has not yet been forgotten: among the older generation of priests, the memory of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, when in the 1960s the Vatican did not mention the persecution of Ukrainian Catholics in the USSR in order to maintain a dialogue with the ROC, is still alive.¹²

Nevertheless, the UGCC has played the leading role among other Ukrainian denominations, being engaged in different ecumenical initiatives. This pioneering role in ecumenical processes has its own objective causes. Back in the days of the Soviet Union, when Ukrainian denominations tried to survive under the brutal conditions of atheistic Soviet propaganda and persecution, a part of the UGCC in exile was comforted by freedom and could freely benefit from the achievements of the modern ecumenical movement. Thus, after the 1990s, Ukrainian Greek Catholics were able to continue their activities in new circumstances in Ukraine as well. With the rapid development of religious life, as well as the establishment of seminaries and other church educational institutions, Ukrainian Eastern Catholics could participate in international ecumenical congresses and meetings; many graduates of seminaries studied abroad, and many teachers from outside Ukraine taught in Ukrainian seminaries. All this made it possible to make serious ecumenical progress, even at a time when the Orthodox brothers were not yet ready for this (Fihás 2021).

We can only briefly summarize some of the ecumenical initiatives of the UGCC as of the late 1980s. The main documents of the heads of this Church bear significant ecumenical importance. In the period of persecution and catacomb existence, the UGCC in 1987 confirmed its openness to reconciliation through the voice of His Beatitude Myroslav-Ivan (Lubachivsky), in particular with the Russian Orthodox Church (Колесо 2022, п. 1, р. 18), when he extended his hand of forgiveness, reconciliation and love to the Russian nation and the Moscow Patriarchate. Nevertheless, this gesture remained unanswered (Ковчег 2 Львів 2000; Shevchuk 2011). Later, in 1994, at a time of severe inter-confessional confrontations, Cardinal Myroslav-Ivan published the Pastoral Letter *On the Unity of the Holy Churches* with an appeal for unity among Christians in Ukraine. His successor, His Beatitude Lubomyr (Husar), continued ecumenical work, which was summarized in his Pastoral Letter *One People of God in the Land on the Hills of Kyiv* in 2004. His Beatitude Lubomyr raised important issues for inter-confessional dialogue with Orthodox brothers, in particular the issue of the common Kyivan tradition, the need of forgiveness and reconciliation and a call to move from erasing exclusivism to contemporary complementarity, from the Churches' position of subordination to public service, from the "ecumenism of ultimatums" to partnership dialogue and from confessional rivalry to the primacy of love. All these could be the main principles on which the future vision of the Kyivan Church could be built. The Letter of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (Shevchuk) on the occasion of the centenary of the renewal of unity of the Ukrainian Nation and State, *Our Saint Sophia*, from 2019, talks about the "Sophianic" foundation of the civilization of Kyivan Christianity.¹³

In 1994, the UGCC created the Lviv Theological Academy, which later became the Ukrainian Catholic University, a leading educational and research institution in Ukraine and known throughout the world. The University successfully develops and operates theological programmes, including the Institute of Ecumenical Studies, which since 2004 deals with, inter alia, issues of Christian unity. UCU has become a place for constant meetings of representatives of various denominations, and also for their creative reflection on today's challenges. The fact that this Institute's president Fr. Iwan Dacko became a member of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, as well as this Commission's Coordinating Committee, has considerably increased the authority of this institution.

The development of research on the common Kyivan tradition is embodied in the publishing project *Kyivan Christianity*, which was launched in 2013 in cooperation with the Humanities, Philosophy and Theology Faculties of the Ukrainian Catholic University. It aims to research the theological, canonical and socio-cultural sources of transmission of the Kyivan Metropolia in the broader comparative context of the universal Christian traditions of Byzantium, the Latin West and Eastern Orthodox communities. During ten years of work, Ukrainian scholars collected material for more than 30 volumes, which covered the period from the Middle Ages to the early modern era.

The UGCC, with the help of its international partners, developed the largest social aid organization in the country, Caritas Ukraine, which operates throughout the non-occupied territory of the state. The coordinated work of Caritas has become a huge help for the war-torn Ukrainian society, and thousands of people receive professional help and comfort every day. Social engagement extends beyond the denominational boundaries of religious communities, inspiring each denomination to serve the needy even more.

The UGCC is the only Church in Ukraine that has developed its *Ecumenical Position*, and regularly updates it every five years.¹⁴ Cardinal Kurt Koch in 2019 said that such a document is a sign of the ecumenical maturity of the Church and a testimony that it cannot be considered as an obstacle. Even more, it is a catalyst for ecumenism (Acistampa 2019). At the same time, asserting through its superiors that the issue of the Christian unity is one of the priorities of their Church, representatives of the UGCC constantly participate in ecumenical events, academic conferences, meetings and joint prayers.¹⁵

However, intra-Orthodox confrontation, antagonism and a tendency to gain a kind of exclusivity, especially in relations with the state on the one hand, and political and ideological influence from outside Ukraine on religious consciousness (for example, the *Russkiy Mir* ideology; see below) on the other, became serious obstacles that did not allow the launch of the process of mutual recognition of Baptism between Ukrainian Churches or for a serious theological dialogue to be started.

6. War as a Threat for Religious Life

6.1. Physical Threats and Destructions

The full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which violated international law and agreements, has become the largest military conflict since World War II. Now lasting more than three years, the war has claimed the lives of thousands of soldiers and civilians, and has caused countless injuries and maimings. It has led to the destruction of entire Ukrainian cities, civilian infrastructure, and hundreds of schools and hospitals. Since 2022, vast territories have been mined, the soil polluted due to ongoing military operations, and numerous crimes against the environment—including acts of ecocide—have been committed.

This war has brought a grave physical threat to the Ukrainian people. Due to the high number of brutal and senseless killings of civilians by Russian forces, many experts

describe the war as having a genocidal character (Snyder n.d.). Russian political leaders have openly denied Ukrainians the right to be a distinct nation, to have their own national state, government, political and historical position, and their cultural and religious life is under attack.

The war has triggered both internal and external migration, forcing people to flee from frontline areas. The profound humanitarian impact of the conflict is reflected in the fact that approximately 10 million Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes, making it one of the largest displacement crises in recent history. Continuous military actions have severely impacted Ukraine's religious landscape, with the destruction of sacred sites presenting a challenge for faith communities across the country. According to the "Religion in Fire: Documenting Russia's War Crimes Against Religious Communities in Ukraine" project, as of 2 February 2025, at least 643 religious sites had been damaged or destroyed. These include churches, mosques, synagogues, chapels, prayer houses, Kingdom Halls, cemeteries, memorials, and religious educational institutions.¹⁶

6.2. Religious Persecutions and Threats to Religious Diversity

The war has severely undermined religious freedom, leaving a trail of devastation. On the occupied territories of Ukraine, systematic violations of religious rights have been carried out by the new Russian authorities. Clergy have been pressured to collaborate with the occupying regime, and in cases of refusal, they have faced violent retribution, including physical elimination.¹⁷ Many churches and prayer houses have been closed, while threats, persecution, and imprisonment of religious leaders are ongoing, the killing of some clergy and preachers has also become a reality. From the onset of the aggression in Donbas in 2014, Protestant leaders were among the first victims. Since then, 67 ministers from various Ukrainian Churches and religious organizations have been killed by the occupying forces.¹⁸ The once rich confessional diversity of Ukraine has been systematically eroded in these territories, reduced to a monopoly of Russian Orthodoxy under the Moscow Patriarchate, with all other forms of religious expression strictly reduced or banned.

In particular, the UGCC and its affiliated faith-based organizations have faced severe repression. The Russian authorities have officially banned UGCC activities in areas such as Zaporizhzhia region, extending this prohibition to humanitarian organizations like Caritas and the Knights of Columbus. These bans have resulted in the expulsion of all Greek and Roman Catholic clergy from occupied territories, effectively eliminating Catholic presence and disrupting both religious life and community support systems.¹⁹ Notably, two Greek-Catholic priests, Ivan Levytsky and Bohdan Heleta CSsR, were released from Russian captivity in 2024 after more than a year and a half of unjust imprisonment. Additionally, the occupation authorities have confiscated church properties, including buildings and land, further impeding religious activities and halting the provision of vital social and humanitarian services previously delivered by these religious organizations.²⁰

Therefore, religious persecution by Russian authorities—marked by the pressure, imprisonment and killing of religious leaders, the monopolization of religious life, and the exclusive privileging of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)—has emerged as the foremost threat to religious freedom and religious diversity in Ukraine's occupied territories.

6.3. The Weaponization of Religion

The tragedy of this military aggression lies in the fact that the elimination of Ukraine as a sovereign state was a premeditated plan, gradually implemented by the Putin regime and these actions were clearly supported by the largest Christian Church in Russia.²¹ The ROC has become a key ideological partner of the Kremlin,²² notably contributing to the elaboration of the broad concept of "Holy Rus"²³ and, in particularly, to the development of

the teaching/ideology of the so-called Russkiy Mir (“русский мир”, “the Russian World”), the last one was fully articulated and solemnly presented at the XXV World Russian People’s Council, chaired by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow on 27 March 2024.²⁴ The concept of the “Russian World” was crafted by Patriarch Kirill and his close collaborators as a replacement for the waning communist ideology of the late 1980s. Its goal was to become a state-building doctrine for modern Russia, grounded in religious and cultural supremacy. The idea of the brotherhood of three nations—Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians—was cloaked in imperialist and expansionist rhetoric, serving as a theoretical justification for war and the suppression of Ukrainian sovereignty and identity.

While anti-Christian in nature, the ideology of Russkiy Mir fosters xenophobia and violence under the guise of a messianic mission (Shumylo 2024). This framework proclaims a special role for the Russian state, people, and the “Russian World”, describing Russia as the “katechon”—the force restraining evil—tasked with preserving a “special civilization” in contrast to the “West that has fallen into Satanism” (Hovorun 2023, p. 544). Such rhetoric cloaks aggressive geopolitical ambitions in religious language, promoting the idea of a divine mission for Russia and legitimizing violence as a sacred duty.

This ideological shift signals a departure from traditional Christian doctrine, replacing the theology of peace and life with a theology of war and death. The ROC has glorified violence, offered spiritual justification for war crimes through the promise of forgiveness, and supported political goals such as the occupation of Ukraine and the defeat of Western civilization. Believers are subjected to apocalyptic narratives and nuclear blackmail is framed as a legitimate means to achieve an imagined victory. The Kremlin’s state power has been sacralized through political myths, turning the Church into a tool of imperial propaganda rather than a witness to Christ’s message of peace and justice (Shumylo 2024).

Ultimately, religious rhetoric has been fused with political ambition, creating a dangerous ideological construct that sanctifies violence, justifies conquest, and glorifies war as a sacred mission. This weaponization of religion threatens not only Ukraine but also the integrity of Christian witness and the foundations of global peace.

6.4. What Can Churches Do?

Since the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022, Ukrainian Churches have delivered a clear and unified assessment of the events, unequivocally condemning the Russian military invasion of an independent state. Through numerous joint statements issued within the framework of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCIRO), Ukraine’s diverse confessions have denounced the unprovoked violence, called for the establishment of a just peace, and urged the protection of the oppressed.²⁵ Ukrainian Christians, with their prayers, military and hospital chaplain services, and charitable activities in society, stood on the defense of their country, actively engaged in a variety of work, in order to be close to those who suffer and to help those in need. Churches and church-related organizations played a significant role in humanitarian work and with their pastoral work continue to heal the wounds of the war. And in these struggles Ukrainian Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants are working together.

The war did not begin with bullets—it began with ideas, with religious narratives that had been preached for decades. These narratives laid the ideological groundwork for further aggression. Therefore, the deconstruction of the ideologies of “Holy Rus” and the “Russian World” is essential to understanding how the Christian message was distorted and instrumentalized. Only through critically analyzing and dismantling these constructions could be laid the foundations for lasting peace, built upon human dignity, religious freedom, justice, and truth. This process would also allow Churches to reassess

and correct their own narratives, ensuring they do not unintentionally reinforce imperialist ideologies, but instead faithfully advocate for truth, justice, and the Gospel of life.

An example of efforts to deconstruct the teaching of the “Russian World” was a roundtable discussion held on 25 April 2024, at the Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy, titled “Theological Aspects of the Doctrine/Ideology of the ‘Russian World’”. The event brought together scholars from various Ukrainian Christian traditions who critically examined the origins of this ideology, its significance and destructive impact in justifying war. Participants also called on the global community to engage in further study of the issue and to draw clear conclusions regarding the dangers of such ideologies.²⁶

On 13 March 2022, more than 300 Orthodox theologians worldwide condemned the “Russian World” ideology as non-Orthodox, issuing the “Declaration of the Orthodox Theologians on the ‘Russian World’ Teaching”.²⁷ They asserted that this teaching contradicts the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Tradition of Orthodox Christianity. In light of this, there is a pressing ecumenical initiative—to hold ROC leaders accountable for spreading an ideology of war and to protect international ecumenical platforms from Russian propaganda and manipulation.²⁸

The ecumenical task of both Ukrainian Churches and the global Christian community is to stand together in defending religious freedom, supporting those persecuted for their faith, and proclaiming the Gospel of life. The solidarity of the international community, grounded in a clear understanding of the true causes of the war—rather than in appeasing the aggressor or pursuing premature and simplistic pacification—can strengthen its commitment to truth and justice. This solidarity is essential for laying a durable foundation for genuine peace, where religion serves as a force for reconciliation, justice, and love, rather than a tool of violence and division.

6.5. UGCC Initiatives to Promote Just Peace and Defend the Oppressed

As an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with the Apostolic See, the UGCC adheres to the core Catholic principles of religious freedom and respect for human dignity, as articulated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Additionally, the Catholic Church’s teachings on just war and peace have been integrated into the UGCC’s theological reflection and pastoral mission. However, in the face of the tragedy of war and through deep reflection on its causes and consequences, the UGCC has adopted a critical stance toward certain statements made by Pope Francis regarding the ongoing military conflict. This critique stems from the Church’s direct experience of aggression and its commitment to truth, justice, and the defense of those who suffer.

Some statements and expressions by Pope Francis regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war have caused confusion and concern in Ukrainian society. Although the Pope has acknowledged that Ukraine bears the greatest suffering in the conflict, he has not explicitly named the aggressor responsible for launching the war, thereby blurring the line of responsibility between the aggressor and the victim. This diplomatic approach by the Vatican has been perceived by many as a lack of moral clarity, particularly in light of the violence and suffering endured by the Ukrainian people. A sociological survey, conducted in May 2023, shows that about 34% of Ukrainian society has a negative assessment of the Pope’s position regarding the war, while 23.8% are outraged that Pope Francis compares Russians and Ukrainians, considering them equally “victims of the war”. Pope Francis gained only 3.1% of support among Ukrainians in the rating of trust among church leaders, while his desire to end the war at any cost is supported by only 9.1% of the population.²⁹

Ukrainian Greek Catholics face many challenges when the Roman Apostolic See considers the affairs of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian Churches together with the affairs and opinion of the Russian state and Church. But doing so, *it puts the files of Ukraine*

and Russia into one and the same folder. This policy has been expressed in different ways at different times. For example, the Vatican's Ostpolitik of the 1960s and 1970s tended to silence religious persecution in the Soviet Union, especially the persecution of the UGCC, for the sake of dialogue with the ROC. Further examples include the failure to grant the UGCC patriarchal status due to the intransigent position of the ROC on this issue (Plokhly 2003, p. 851); the recent consecration of Russia together with Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, although the Fatima message request concerned only Russia; the incident with the presence of representatives of Ukraine and Russia at the stations of the Way of the Cross in Rome three years in a row; and Pope Francis' repeatedly expressed desire to visit Ukraine, but only after a visit to Russia, to name just a few. The Vatican should address Ukrainian matters—both those of the State and as well as those of the Church—more clearly as an independent unit, a subject, and not exclusively in the relation to Russia or its stance toward Ukrainians. This post-colonial approach to Ukraine and its Churches should be reconsidered and ultimately abandoned.

Having endured persecution during Soviet times, the UGCC bears witness to the importance of defending religious freedom, both in Ukraine and in the occupied territories, where it is facing persecution now. Religious oppression and the restriction of the activities of religious organizations are unacceptable and must be stopped by the international community. Together with other Ukrainian Churches and religious organizations UGCC actively advocate for the protection of human dignity and the fundamental right to freedom of religion and belief across various international platforms.³⁰

During a recent visit to Washington, His Beatitude Sviatoslav (Shevchuk), Head of the UGCC, met with Paula White-Cain, head of the Faith Office, at the White House. In the course of their conversation, he spoke about the restrictions on religious organizations in the Russian-occupied territories, the destruction of churches, and the persecution of priests and pastors. He noted, "Thanks to the mediation of the Holy See, we secured the release of our Fathers Ivan Levytsky and Bohdan Heleta. However, Protestant pastors have no one to advocate for them at the highest level. That is why I spoke up for them before the head of the office, urging their release".³¹ Such mutual solidarity and joint care for persecuted Christian communities make advocacy for religious freedom more effective and contribute to the strengthening of interchurch relations.

In view of the above challenges, the UGCC considers its important task in serving the Ukrainian society, to nurture its resilience in the struggle for freedom, together with other Churches to support the oppressed and to be their voice among the powerful of this world. In its official statement, "Rescue the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor" (Jer. 22:3): The Message of the of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC in Ukraine on War and Just Peace in the Context of New Ideologies, the UGCC Synod calls for a clear and distinct proclamation of the Gospel Truth:

If modern humanity—the humanity of the "post-truth era"—does not recognize objective truth, it will gradually turn into a "post-justice world". If it does not develop and establish social justice based on the main principles of human dignity, the sanctity and inviolability of human life, common good, and solidarity, it will end up as societies where the concept of law is replaced by the concept of interests of certain individuals or criminal groups, the right of the strong prevails over the rule of law, the law is not the same for everyone, and the foundations of international law and the inviolability of state sovereignty fall victim to the geopolitical and economic interests of the world powers of today.³²

The active defense by the UGCC of those persecuted for religious reasons, both in Ukraine and globally, along with its shared witness with other Churches to the fundamental principles necessary for building a just peace—such as justice, respect for international

law, and care for human dignity—is a way to prevent the misuse of religion by totalitarian regimes. This commitment aims to enable religion to become a true instrument of peace and reconciliation, bringing hope to those enduring hardship and suffering.

7. Concluding Remarks

The identity of the UGCC has developed dynamically over the centuries. Originating from the Kyivan Metropolia and rooted in the Eastern theological, canonical, spiritual, and liturgical heritage, this Church lives in full communion with the Church of the West. Since historically the Kyivan Church had been open to relations with the world centers of Christianity, the UGCC seeks further promotion of this openness. It brings into the spiritual treasury of unity its unique experience of communion with the Christian West and openness to Christian Europe.³³ The UGCC carries out its mission worldwide,³⁴ developing its patriarchal structures in accordance with the call of the Second Vatican Council's Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (n. 11) and actively participating in the ecumenical movement. The experience of communion with the Pope of Rome is a fundamental part of the UGCC's identity, enriching its ecclesial life as a Catholic Church. At the same time, embodied in one of the Eastern Christian traditions, the UGCC shares its Byzantine heritage both with its Eastern Catholic Sister Churches in other countries and with the Orthodox Churches (Babynskyi 2022), enabling it to act locally.

The identity of the UGCC as an Eastern Catholic Church in communion with the Roman Apostolic See has been repeatedly threatened—most notably during Soviet persecution, and now once again as its structures are being persecuted and banned in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. Yet, despite these trials, the UGCC has remained a vibrant community that has challenged entrenched confessional stereotypes and traditional “confessional spheres of influence” (Avvakumov 2021, 2022). Although Eastern Catholics in Ukrainian society make up only 10% of all believers, they can fulfill their task when they are an active and creative minority that can produce new ideas and models of unity, to form trustworthy leaders, in particular in the field of peacebuilding and reconciliation, and creatively approach the issue of dialogue.

The UGCC tries to build its patriarchal structure³⁵ as an Eastern Catholic Church, as a local Church in a specific time and place, developing its communion with the families of the Catholic Churches, and actively implementing its ecumenical commitment. The patriarchate, as the natural form of existence and activity of *sui iuris* Churches, expresses and ensures the fullness of the means necessary for the Church's service in all areas. According to Bishop Borys Gudziak, the patriarchate is not a privilege or a pedestal; rather, it signifies ecclesial maturity, linked to moral authority and responsibility, as well as an essential instrument for unified, solidaristic service in communion (Gudziak 2024).

Today, the attention of the world community is focused on the Ukrainian context, on the tough experience of facing war, pain, and suffering, and at the same time tireless resilience, struggle for freedom and dignity. This experience, being local, already has a global impact and forces world leaders—both religious and political—to rethink the foundations of a new and more just world order, to create new approaches in fostering peace, and to look for such methods of communication and dialogue, which will be based on the principles of truth and human dignity.

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Notes

- 1 “Crisis and Reform” is a fundamental study that examines the historical developments leading to the Union of Brest, when the majority of Ruthenian eparchies recognized the primacy of the Pope while preserving their Slavonic–Byzantine rite. Gudziak focuses on the pivotal role of the Kyivan metropolia in its struggle against both the Moscow metropolia and the growing influence of Polish Roman Catholicism and Protestantism on Ruthenian spiritual life. He also highlights how these tensions, along with the impact of Patriarch Jeremiah of Constantinople’s visit to Muscovy (1588–1589), ultimately prompted the Ruthenian hierarchy to seek union with Rome.
- 2 More studies on the motives for the conclusion of the Union of Brest and the intentions of the Rus’ bishops (Moncak 1987; Gudziak 1998, n. 4; Hryniewicz 1995; Suttner 1990).
- 3 The proposals of the Orthodox Kyivan Metropolitan Petro Mohyla to conclude a new union with Rome without breaking with Constantinople can be found in Hryniewicz (1995).
- 4 About the preservation and development of the identity of the UGCC as a daughter of the Kyivan Metropolia, as an Eastern Church in union with the Church of Rome (Chirovsky 1994).
- 5 More about the problem of Latinization as a consequence of Uniatism can be found here (Korolevskij 1927; Galadza 1994; Pott 2010).
- 6 More about the question of Uniatism can be found here (Skira et al. 2022; Latinovic and Wooden 2021a, 2021b).
- 7 Bohdan Rostyslav Bociurkiw’s book is a fundamental study of the Stalinist suppression of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. It is being published on the 50th anniversary of the so-called L’viv Sobor of 1946, at which the Church was abolished. Dr. Bociurkiw judiciously places together the information he collected to describe the planning, realization and immediate consequences of the Soviet liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. He carefully analyzes Soviet policy towards the Church from the first occupation of Galicia by the Red Army in 1939 through to the Church’s “reunion” with the Russian Orthodox Church and the repression of the leading Greek Catholic clergy after World War II. In the process, he identifies the main executors of the Kremlin’s directives and separates fact from fiction and deliberate Soviet disinformation.
- 8 The genesis, difficulties and challenges of interconfessional conflicts in the early 1990s in Ukraine can be read about here (Elensky 1999; Marynovych 1999, 2003).
- 9 More studies on the granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly (Drabynko n.d.; Аналітична записка 2020, n. 21, p. 24; National Institute for Strategic Studies 2019).
- 10 According to the State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, since 2018, two religious communities of the UOC have changed their subordination in canonical and organizational matters to the religious centres (administrations) of the OCU in 2018; 319 communities in 2019; 30 in 2020; 25 in 2021; 496 in 2022; 471 in 2023; and 232 in 2024: <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/1036509.html> (accessed on 25 January 2025).
- 11 More studies on the Vatican Ostpolitik (Floridi 1986; Stehle 1981).
- 12 The most significant official UGCC texts on the ecumenical issue can be found here (Інститут екуменічних студій УКУ 2022).
- 13 Comparison and analysis of the two texts of the Ecumenical Position of the UGCC of 2016 and 2022 can be found in Schon (2023), Andriyovsky (2021) and Drabynko (2021).
- 14 The main ecumenical achievements and the role of the UGCC leaders can be found here (IEC УКУ 2021; Dacko 2001).
- 15 Many papers that put the ongoing military conflict in the context of the religious past and present in both Ukraine and Russia, thus contributing to a theologically informed understanding of the current situation and its global effect, can be found here (Avvakumov and Turi 2024). The volume includes the papers presented at the “Church Diplomacy and the Religious Dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian War” conference held in Lviv, Ukraine, on 29–30 June 2023.
- 16 The “Religion in Fire” project was launched in March 2022 by the Academic Religious Studies Workshop NGO, with support from government institutions and civil society organizations. Its goal is to record and document cases of religious site destruction caused by Russian military aggression, as well as to analyze changes within Ukraine’s religious communities following the full-scale invasion.
- 17 An extensive commentary on religious persecution in the occupied territories can be found here: Brytsyn and Vasin (2025).
- 18 “Comment of the MFA of Ukraine regarding the situation with religious freedom in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine” (10 January 2025): <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/komentar-mzs-ukrayini-shchodo-situaciyi-z-religijnoyu-svobodoyu-na-timchasovo-okupovanih-teritoriyah-ukrayini> (accessed on: 13 January 2025).

- 19 “‘Not a single Catholic priest’ left in Russian-occupied Ukraine, reveals major archbishop” in National Catholic Reporter, 10 July 2024, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/not-single-catholic-priest-left-russian-occupied-ukraine-reveals-major-archbishop> (accessed on: 25 January 2025).
- 20 “Russian occupation authorities ban UGCC activities in the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia region” in UGCC website, 7 December 2023, <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/russian-occupation-authorities-ban-ugcc-activities-in-the-occupied-part-of-zaporizhzhia-region-793/> (accessed on 2 February 2025).
- 21 Many papers that put the ongoing military conflict in the context of the religious past and present in both Ukraine and Russia, thus contributing to a theologically informed understanding of the current situation and its global effect could be found here: Avvakumov and Turi (2024). The volume includes the papers presented at the “Church Diplomacy and the Religious Dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian War” conference held in Lviv, Ukraine on 29–30 June 2023.
- 22 Hovorun (2023) and other articles of this author on the issue.
- 23 Anatolii Babynskiy analyzes the historical development of the idea of “Holy Rus”, which formed the basis of the ideology of the “Russian world”. After the collapse of the USSR, the mythology of “Holy Rus” was proposed by the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church as a substitute for the bankrupt Marxist-Leninist philosophy. This idea had a deep history and emphasized Russia’s special mission in the world and was supposed to become the ideological foundation for the reintegration of the post-Soviet space, where the Russian Orthodox Church retained a dominant role. The author examines how the idea of “Holy Rus” was formed and its characteristics in previous periods of Russian history, as well as its part in shaping the ideology of the “Russkiy mir” and justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine (Babynskiy 2024).
- 24 “Order of the XXV World Russian People’s Council ‘The Present and Future of the Russian World’” «Наказ XXV Всемирного русского народного собора “Настоящее и будущее Русского мира”» in Patriarchia.Ru, 27 March 2024, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6116189.html> (accessed on 2 February 2025).
- 25 <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/documents/> (accessed on 3 February 2025).
- 26 Resolution of the Round Table “Theological Aspects of the Doctrine/Ideology of the ‘Russian World’”, 1 May 2024, <https://kpba.edu.ua/en/academy/resolution-of-the-round-table-theological-aspects-of-the-doctrine-ideology-of-the-russian-world-2/> (accessed on 2 February 2025).
- 27 “Declaration of the Orthodox Theologians on the ‘Russian World’ (Russkii mir) Teaching”, 13 March 2022, <https://ucu.edu.ua/news/a-declaration-of-orthodox-theologians-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/> (accessed on 11 December 2024).
- 28 Cyril Hovorun has criticized the World Council of Churches’ policies since 2014 for allowing itself to be instrumentalized by Russian propaganda through the ROC: Hovorun (2022).
- 29 Razumkov Center’s statistics in ZN.UA, Online: <https://zn.ua/ukr/war/prahnennja-papi-rimskoho-terminovo-privniti-vijnuzabud-jaku-tsinu-pidtrimuje-9-ukrajintiv-opituvannja.html> (accessed on 2 December 2024).
- 30 “His Beatitude Sviatoslav presented the religious dimension of the war against Ukraine and the ideology of the ‘Russian world’ at the Hudson Institute” Ukr. «Блаженніший Святослав представив релігійний вимір війни проти України і ідеологію «русского міра» в Інституті Гудзона» in UGCC website, 21 February 2025, <https://ugcc.ua/data/blazhennishyuy-svyatoslav-predstaviv-religijnnyy-vymir-viyny-proty-ukrayny-i-ideologiyu-ruskogo-mira-v-instytutu-gudzona-6426/> (accessed on 22 February 2025).
- 31 “Head of UGCC Meets with Head of Trump Administration’s Faith Office on Persecution of Christians in Occupied Territories”, 22 February 2025, <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/head-of-ugcc-meets-with-head-of-trump-administrations-faith-office-on-persecution-of-christians-in-occupied-territories-1457/> (accessed on 23 February 2025).
- 32 *The Message of the of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC* (see n. 39), 64.
- 33 *The Ecumenical Position of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church* (see n. 1), 35.
- 34 <https://ugcc.ua/church/structure/> (accessed on 2 December 2024).
- 35 Read more about the significance of the patriarchate for the UGCC and history of the Ukrainian Patriarchal Movement here: Husar (2005), Shevchuk (2018), Ploky (2003, pp. 849–67), Sorokowski (2013).

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Article

The Quest for Unity and Autonomy: The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the Diaspora

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Abstract: This article examines the complex process of establishing a unified structure for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) within the post-World War II diaspora, focusing on the formation of the Bishops' Conference and the concurrent pursuit of the recognition of patriarchal status. Building on earlier inter-diocesan meetings, efforts to create a coordinating body for the dispersed UGCC episcopate gained momentum in the 1950s, culminating in the establishment of the Episcopal Conference. However, these conferences progressively revealed significant internal disagreements, particularly concerning the scope of the Conference's authority and its relationship with the Roman Curia. The release of Josyf Slipyj from Soviet imprisonment and his subsequent exile in Rome, coupled with the proclamation of the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, dramatically altered this dynamic. Slipyj's advocacy for ritual jurisdiction clashed with the Roman Curia's desire for centralized control and the divergent views of individual bishops. Significantly, the growing activity of the laity, characterized by persistent demands for autonomy and patriarchal status, and fueled by disillusionment with Vatican policies, played a crucial role in shaping the UGCC's trajectory. This analysis underscores the intricate interplay of canonical, political, and personal factors that influenced the UGCC's attempts to forge a coherent identity and assert its rights in the post-war diaspora.

Keywords: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; Synod of bishops of the UGCC; Ukrainian diaspora; patriarchate; Josyf Slipyj

1. Introduction

In a pivotal letter dated 5 February 1980, Pope John Paul II articulated to Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), his intention to convene a synod comprising all Ukrainian bishops dispersed throughout the diaspora. This meeting, to be presided over by the Pope or his delegate, was tasked with nominating candidates for the coadjutor *cum iure successionis* to the Lviv major archbishopric. Additionally, the letter addressed the prospective conferral of extraordinary powers upon the Major Archbishop, enabling the convocation of UGCC synods *ad nutum Summi Pontificis* (Marksteiner-Mishchenko 2020, p. 123).

This papal intervention resolved a protracted dispute concerning the procedural legitimacy of UGCC synods. Subsequently, on 1 March 1980, the Pope formally announced the convocation of an extraordinary synod of bishops of the UGCC. This synod convened on 24 March 1980, under his direct auspices in the Vatican. Later that year, from 25 November to 2 December, an ordinary synod of the Ukrainian episcopate was held in Rome. During the initial sessions of the latter synod, a debate arose regarding its classification as either extraordinary or the "first ordinary" synod. Bishops Augustine Hornyak, Apostolic Exarch in Great Britain, and Jeronim Chimy, Bishop of New Westminster in Canada, sought papal

clarification on this matter. Cardinal Władysław Rubin, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, resolved the dispute on behalf of the Pope, affirming that “on the basis of the letter of the Holy Father to His Beatitude the Major Archbishop dated 5 November 1980, this synod was convened by His Beatitude the Major Archbishop, and it is the first ordinary synod” (Minutes of the first ordinary synod, 25 November–2 December 1980//Historical Archive of the UGCC in Rome (HA UGCC), 2, IVa, 74, p. 204).

This seemingly procedural detail held profound significance for the synod’s participants, given the longstanding divergence of opinions within the episcopate regarding the status and authority of the UGCC’s collegial body in the diaspora. Bishops who opposed the very idea of a UGCC synod as a permanent collegial body, to which they would hypothetically have to delegate some of their autonomy, understood that if this synod were no longer an extraordinary ad hoc gathering like the previous one, it would fundamentally affect the format of their relationships with the head of the UGCC and other bishops, as well as the functioning of the Church as a whole. The designation of the synod as the ‘first ordinary’ effectively meant its institutionalization and the potential limitation of the individual power of diocesan bishops in favor of conciliar decision-making.

For those bishops who had long advocated for greater synodal governance within the UGCC, rooted in their interpretation of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (OE), the term ‘ordinary synod’ implied a degree of permanence and regularity. It suggested the establishment of a standing collegial body with inherent authority to address the ongoing needs and challenges of the Church in the diaspora and, potentially, in the homeland.

The synod’s designation held profound significance for the dispersed faithful, for whom the Church served not only as a religious institution but also as a crucial unifying force in their stateless existence. However, the label “first” sparked immediate controversy, particularly from the editor of the influential lay movement’s magazine, “Патріархат” (The Patriarchate). He argued that this naming convention effectively invalidated previous ecclesiastical gatherings, which many bishops, clergy, and faithful had considered synods and whose decisions had shaped the Church’s direction (Haliv 1981, pp. 15–16).

To understand the root of this debate, it is necessary to examine the differing interpretations of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* within the UGCC. Equally important is the specific lens through which this decree was perceived by Ukrainian laity and priests who were forced to leave their homeland just before the council, while their fellow Ukrainians who remained on the other side of the Iron Curtain endured martyrdom and confession. This specific lens, shaped by their unique experiences, significantly influenced their interpretation of the decree’s provisions. The debate centered on a broad spectrum of historical, political, and theological-canonical issues. Specifically, the decree defined the authority of patriarchs and major archbishops, outlining their jurisdiction over bishops, clergy, and faithful within their respective territories or rites (OE, 7). Based on this, Ukrainian Catholics asserted that their head of the Church possessed the right to convene synods of bishops belonging to their rite and to address the Church’s challenges in the diaspora, with indirect implications for the Church in their homeland.

Furthermore, they interpreted the decree’s call for the re-establishment of Eastern Churches’ rights and privileges in accordance with ancient traditions and ecumenical council decrees (OE, 9) as a mandate for the UGCC to restore the autonomy it enjoyed prior to the Union of Brest in 1596. This included the Metropolitan of Kyiv-Halych’s historical authority to convene synods and appoint bishops. Conversely, both Rome and certain Ukrainian bishops prioritized the decree’s stipulation that these rights and privileges be adapted to contemporary conditions. At that juncture, the UGCC’s legal existence was confined to diaspora communities in the “Free World”, and its head was effectively in exile in Rome.

The UGCC patriarchate idea, and its associated events and projects, has been extensively researched (Baran 1961; Krajcar 1964; Luznycky 1971; Madey 1971; Lencyk 1988). Augustyn Babiak's *Legitimacy of the Ukrainian Patriarchate* (Babiak 2005) provides a valuable analysis of the 20th century period. By drawing on correspondence between Josyf Slipyj and Roman Curia officials from the Historical Archives of the UGCC in Rome, Babiak elucidates the principal topics and arguments within this discourse.

The evolution of synodality within the UGCC is also well-documented in scholarly literature (Monchak 1983; Shafran 2008). Babiak (Babiak 2005) and Mishchenko (Mishchenko 2017) both utilize archival sources, with Mishchenko's doctoral dissertation on canon law, based on previously inaccessible materials from the Historical Archives in Rome, offering a particularly significant contribution.

The reaction of the wider community to this issue remains comparatively understudied. While several authors have addressed the topic (Bilaniuk 1976; Markus 1979, 1989), their direct involvement in the events introduces a degree of polemic into their research, as they often defend particular viewpoints. Andriy Sorokowski's "Outline of the History of the Ukrainian Patriarchal Movement" offers a more objective perspective; however, he acknowledged that insufficient time had elapsed at the time of writing to allow for a comprehensive historical evaluation (Sorokowski 2009).

Previous research has largely concentrated on the canonical dimensions of the issue, as well as the analysis of discussions between the Apostolic See of Rome and Josyf Slipyj, the head of the UGCC. Consequently, internal UGCC dynamics, specifically the bishops' attitudes towards synods and their involvement or opposition to the concept, have received less attention. This study, employing the historical method, aims to address this imbalance. Furthermore, the processes among active laity, who played a significant role in public discourse surrounding this issue, warrant greater scholarly scrutiny. Given the unique context of this exiled community, this study will also draw upon insights from diaspora studies.

This study contends that the tension surrounding the UGCC's synodal autonomy arose from divergent interpretations of the Second Vatican Council's decrees, primarily within the Ukrainian episcopate itself, rather than solely between Rome and the UGCC leadership. Moreover, the laity's attempts to influence these processes were significantly shaped by the conditions of their forced exile, extending beyond purely ecclesiastical concerns. Consequently, this article reveals the UGCC's post-Vatican II struggle for synodal autonomy as a complex interplay of historical, political, canonical, and geopolitical factors.

2. The UGCC in Diaspora: Post-War Displacement

Following World War II, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church faced an exceptionally precarious situation. In 1946, its structures were outlawed in Ukraine after a pseudo-synod, orchestrated in Lviv under the auspices of the NKGB, the Soviet secret police. Parts of the Church were forcibly integrated into the Russian Orthodox Church, which also appropriated Greek Catholic property. The remainder continued to operate clandestinely. In 1949, the Soviet authorities also liquidated the Greek Catholic eparchy of Mukachevo (Bociurkiw 1996, pp. 102–228). Greek Catholics in Czechoslovakia and Romania experienced a similar fate. All UGCC bishops within Soviet reach were arrested, with the majority perishing in imprisonment. However, the Church persisted in diaspora communities, primarily in North and South America, where emigration had begun in the late nineteenth century and where ecclesiastical structures had gradually developed.

World War II precipitated a further wave of emigration, primarily from Western Ukrainian territories, encompassing those who had fled before the Soviet army's advance and those who declined repatriation to the USSR following their release from forced labor in Nazi Germany. The majority of these individuals found themselves in Displaced Persons

(DP) camps in Germany and Austria, where they had resided for approximately five to eight years. These DP camps, beyond fostering active political, social, and cultural life, also served as a catalyst for the revitalization of religious practices. For individuals from rural areas, religious observances had long functioned as a model for organized community life and a visible symbol of group identity (Bohachevsky-Chomiak 2018, p. 21). Furthermore, the Church, particularly for those from Galicia, held the status of a semi-political or national institution, acting as a focal point for national identity and resistance (Baran 1992, p. 153). According to Alexander Baran, the religious revival within DP camps stemmed from religion's capacity to "recreate a spiritual presence of the lost fatherland in the psyches of the émigrés" (Baran 1992, p. 154). Consequently, it became a pivotal element in the lives of intellectuals and politicians, some of whom had previously exhibited limited engagement with religious life or even held oppositional stances. Thus, during their sojourn in DP camps, post-war Ukrainian refugees not only cultivated a well-functioning community but also established nearly 120 Greek Catholic and 80 Orthodox parishes, reflecting the fact that approximately two-thirds of the post-war wave of Ukrainian emigration were Greek-Catholics.

Following several years spent in post-war Europe, between 1948 and 1955, approximately 220,000 to 250,000 Ukrainians emigrated to North and South America, Australia, and various Western European countries, such as Great Britain, France, and Germany. Upon resettlement, they encountered established communities from previous waves of Ukrainian emigration. The well-developed religious life of these earlier emigrants facilitated the integration of the newly arrived post-war immigrants into existing parish and community networks. This influx of new emigrants significantly strengthened Greek Catholic structures in the diaspora. While pre-war exarchates existed only in the United States and Canada, the immediate post-war decades witnessed the transformation of the Canadian exarchate into a Metropolitanate of four dioceses (1957) and the United States exarchate into a Metropolitanate of three dioceses (1958). Additionally, exarchates were established in Great Britain (1957), Germany (1958), Australia (1958), France (1960), and Brazil (1962). Ukrainian Greek Catholics also received their own bishops in Argentina in 1961. As a result, the number of UGCC bishops outside Ukraine increased from three in 1939 to sixteen by the time of the Second Vatican Council.

The majority of new immigrants settled in the United States and Canada. For the most part, this expansion was successful, though localized conflicts arose, primarily concerning the use of English in parish schools and liturgical services. These conflicts stemmed from the fact that earlier waves of Ukrainian emigration were largely composed of second- or third-generation immigrants, well into the process of assimilation. This posed a significant challenge for the newcomers, who viewed their primary objective as the preservation of Ukrainian cultural heritage, which the Soviets were attempting to eradicate in the homeland.

Having been denied the natural development of their national culture, the post-war wave of Ukrainian immigrants turned to the Church, which, as mentioned above, had already played the role of a national institution before the Second World War. On the other hand, during the 1950s, this newly arrived wave of emigrants underwent an acculturation process. For the first generation of immigrants, such a process is always accompanied by rapid and profound changes, such as learning a new language and adjusting to a new social environment. In this new context, the Church became a significant stabilizing force in their lives, providing continuity amid uncertain realities.

It also served as a vital link between the immigrant community and their homeland, where due to soviet suppression, it existed only underground. It also fostered connections among Ukrainian émigrés in different countries. As a result, these factors contributed to

the emergence of what Thomas Tweed termed “diasporic religion”, (Tweed 1997, pp. 94–97) which, in this case, manifested primarily in efforts to connect immigrants with their homeland and preserve the distinct features of the Ukrainian Christian tradition in contrast to the Western Christianity. Elements such as the Julian calendar, the broader religious tradition and rite, the liturgical language, and sacred architecture were considered integral and were to be maintained in their full authenticity, without modification. For the newcomers, these aspects played a translocative and transtemporal role, ensuring continuity with their homeland’s religious history, the present, and even future generations.

For example, in 1962, during the consecration of St. John the Baptist Church in Hunter, NY—built in the traditional Western Ukrainian style—a priest emphasized its symbolic significance: “as a precious memorial icon, which we, wanderers, took with us into emigration, to remind us of the native architecture and the native mountains with which it and we are connected” (Horniatkevych 1964, p. 40).

Certain leaders within this community asserted that the Church, far exceeding its religious functions, embodied the remnants of their lost statehood (Butrynskyi 1980, p. 8). In a parallel manner, the development of theological thought within the framework of diasporic religion aimed to clearly define the identity and self-sufficiency of the Ukrainian theological and spiritual tradition. This reflected the inherent diasporic theological desire to preserve the “authenticity” of tradition and prevent its dilution through “spiritual assimilation”. This desire manifested in the articulation of the distinct features of the Eastern theological tradition, often highlighting their differences from the Latin Christianity, sometimes even setting them in opposition to one another.

Certain authors advocated for the establishment of a diasporic “capital”, even a “spiritual state”, imbued with comprehensive political and cultural attributes, despite its territorial absence. As one author stated, Ukrainian society in exile, “... having forfeited its native land, transforms into a primarily spiritual community, becoming part of a spiritual Ukraine, unconquered by the enemy” (Vitkovskyi 1965, p. 6). Consequently, the newly arrived émigrés catalyzed the formation of four pivotal communal goals and ideals: paramount among them Ukrainian independence; followed by the intermediate objectives of effective international advocacy for the Ukrainian cause, the preservation and proliferation of cultural heritage under conditions precluding such development within Ukraine, and, most importantly, internal communal unity.¹

Reflecting both the concepts of a diasporic spiritual state and the broader lay revival within the Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Christian Movement was established in 1955. Conceived as a movement of devout intellectuals, its primary objectives were to develop an ideological framework based on the principles of Christian democracy, widespread at the time, for further implementation in a free Ukraine; to reconcile the often divided political groups of the Ukrainian emigration; to advocate for the “Ukrainian question”, at international forums; and, crucially, to counter national and religious assimilation, and preserve community unity through various mobilization practices, including gatherings, demonstrations, and celebrations (Yaniv 1957).

3. Forging Unity: The Formation of the Ukrainian Bishops’ Conference

In parallel with these developments, the idea of a coordinating body for the Ukrainian episcopate was maturing among the hierarchy, reflecting a growing desire for unified leadership and action within the UGCC diaspora. The idea was rooted in the inter-diocesan meetings initiated by Metropolitan Sheptytsky in the 1920s and further demonstrated by the episcopal conferences held in Lviv (1927) and Rome (1929). These earlier conferences, convened with papal blessing, brought together bishops or their representatives from

the Ruthenian rite eparchies of Lviv, Przemyśl, Stanislaviv, Mukachevo, Prešov, Križevci, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Winnipeg.

The concept of episcopal collegiality gained renewed momentum in the mid-1950s when bishop Maksym Hermaniuk of Winnipeg advocated for a joint Canadian–U.S. conference of Greek Catholic bishops, a proposal supported by Exarch Constantine Bohachevsky of Philadelphia in a 1954 consultation. Although the initial meeting in Washington (1954) focused on harmonizing liturgical practices, the bishops recognized the inherent necessity of such gatherings, indicating a growing desire for structured episcopal collaboration within the UGCC diaspora (Motiuk 2005, pp. 80–83).

Substantive discussions regarding the establishment of an episcopal conference of Ukrainian bishops in the diaspora commenced immediately following the enthronement of Maksym Hermaniuk as the first metropolitan in Canada, on 12 February 1957, and intensified thereafter, with the participation of bishops from the US, Gabriel Bukatko of Križevci, and Ivan Buchko, the Apostolic exarch in Western Europe.² On 21 April, three Ukrainian bishops in the United States, Constantine Bohachevsky of Philadelphia, his auxiliary Joseph Shmondiuk, and Abbrose Senyshyn of Stamford convened in Philadelphia with Bishop Gabriel Bukatko, where they affirmed the necessity for annual meetings and resolved to request metropolitan Hermaniuk to preside over such a conference and to designate a meeting location (Ambrose Senyshyn to Constantine Bohachevsky, 6 April 1957 // Archive of the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia (AUAP) Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1957, n.p. Note: n.p. means that the original document does not contain page numbers). In a letter to metropolitan Hermaniuk, Gabriel Bukatko emphasized that “our Church in our native lands and historical events” demanded “mutual connection, contacts, and joint coordinated action of our episcopate”. Speaking on behalf of the other bishops, Bukatko suggested that the initiative should originate from Hermaniuk, as “the metropolitan and the first among us”. He also recommended inviting Bishops Nicholas Elko and Stefan Kocisko of the Pittsburgh Exarchate,³ with whom he had previously met in the United States (Gabriel Bukatko to Maxim Hermaniuk 30 April 1957 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1957, n.p.).

Despite initial enthusiasm, Bohachevsky declined to participate following the proclamation of the *motu proprio Cleri sanctitati* on 11 June 1957, referring to the fact that this case should be clarified by Rome. However, he subsequently attended the conference in Toronto after Hermaniuk informed him that the Congregation for the Oriental Churches had authorized the conference of the Canadian Metropolitanate with the participation of U.S. bishops (Maxim Hermaniuk to Constantine Bohachevsky, 3 August 1957 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1957, n.p.). The meeting, attended by Canadian and American bishops, took place on 12 November 1957, in Toronto. At this meeting, it was established that the decisions “for individual hierarchs in their territories would not have the binding force of law, but would rather be of an orientation and directive nature” (Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops of the Free World, 12 November 1957 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1957, n.p.).

The subsequent conference convened in Philadelphia, United States, on 2–3 November 1958. The meeting commemorated two events: the establishment of the Philadelphia Metropolitanate and the enthronement of its first metropolitan, Constantine Bohachevsky, who presided over the conference. This gathering was notable for its expanded participation, including bishops from the United States and Canada, as well as Ivan Prashko from Australia and Josyf Martynets from Brazil. Despite the absence of Isidore Borecky from Toronto, Ivan Buchko, the Apostolic Exarch of Western Europe, and Gabriel Bukatko, who were unable to attend, eight of the eleven bishops were present. (Minutes of the Con-

ference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops, 2–3 November 1958 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1958, n.p.).

The following conference was held in Rome from 12 to 14 October 1959. Attendance was further expanded, with eleven of the twelve bishops present. In addition to bishops from the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and Ivan Buchko who resided in Rome, Platon Kornyliak, the newly appointed exarch in Germany, was also in attendance. Gabriel Bukatko of Križevci, though absent, submitted numerous proposals for discussion. Among the significant decisions, which demonstrated a growing desire to establish permanent supra-eparchial structures were the proposal of the creation of an inter-diocesan press bureau and a Liturgical Center in Rome. Another notable decision was the adoption of “Ukrainian Catholic Church”⁴ instead of “Ruthenian” as the official name of the Church. The bishops also issued a joint message to the faithful following the Rome meeting, proposing, among other things, that Ukrainian Orthodox bishops join them in addressing the Ecumenical Council, announced by Pope John XXIII, with a request to establish a common Kyivan Patriarchate, which will be in union with Rome (Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops, 12–14 October 1959 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1959, n.p.; *Пастирське послання українських владик до українського народу* 1959, pp. 9–10).

The next bishops’ conference was held in Munich, Germany, from 5 to 9 August 1960. This meeting was less well attended than its predecessors, with five of the twelve bishops absent, including metropolitan Constantine Bohachevsky of Philadelphia. A key decision of the Munich meeting was the approval of the Statute of the Ukrainian Catholic Conference, intended to establish a legal institution to replace the annual conferences. The statute was submitted to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches for review. Subsequently, it was adopted, with modifications based on the Congregation’s recommendations, at the conference held in Winnipeg, Canada, on 2–3 July 1962, where metropolitan Maksym Hermaniuk of Canada was elected its head (Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops, 5–9 August 1960 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1960, n.p.; Motiuk 2005, pp. 84–87).

The Winnipeg meeting was the largest to date, with thirteen of the fifteen bishops in attendance. The increase in attendees reflected the appointments of Volodymyr Malanchuk in France, Andriy Sapeliak in Argentina, Augustine Hornyak in Great Britain, and Yaroslav Gabro as bishop of the newly established eparchy of Chicago in the United States. Following the death of Metropolitan Constantine Bohachevsky of Philadelphia, Ambrose Senyshyn became the new metropolitan. Despite the Conference’s newly established legal institutional status, the Winnipeg meeting revealed the existing disagreements within the episcopate regarding the Conference’s significance. Notably, the newly appointed metropolitan Ambrose Senyshyn departed Winnipeg early, attributing his departure to the importance of his own metropolitan duties, in Philadelphia, over general Church matters (Historical Archive of the UGCC in Rome (HA UGCC), Ivan Prashko to Andriy Sapelak and Yosyf Martynets, 10 July 1971, os. 2, fasc. IVa, ff. 46, pp. 349–54).⁵

While the bishops’ correspondence suggests general agreement on the need for ongoing conferences, the meeting minutes indicate a tendency to prioritize practical matters, such as liturgical details or clerical attire, rather than strategic issues. Furthermore, in instances of divergent opinions, matters were typically deferred to the discretion of local hierarchs or the Apostolic See. Additionally, the minutes reveal that certain issues were revisited across multiple conferences, indicating a lack of effective mechanisms for implementing decisions. This initial emphasis on practical, often localized concerns, was arguably logical given the nascent stage of these gatherings. As bishops from diverse contexts, with varying experiences and pastoral ministries, convened for the first time, it

would have been unrealistic to expect immediate, mature collegial decision-making. Moreover, the UGCC's development in the diaspora as a collection of exarchates and eparchies directly under Rome,⁶ without internal connection, further hindered the establishment of a cohesive, unified body capable of addressing broader strategic questions. Finally, the discord evident at the Winnipeg conference underscores that not all bishops shared an equal enthusiasm for the concept of a supra-eparchial body. In the case of Metropolitan Senyshyn, this was particularly significant, as the Church in the United States possessed the greatest financial capacity to support other exarchates and eparchies, and to facilitate collaborative projects.

The challenges faced by the Ukrainian bishops were further compounded by the absence of relevant canonical norms. In establishing a novel form of global interaction between eparchies of the same tradition, they lacked established precedents. Latin episcopal conferences, organized along territorial lines, provided no suitable model for the UGCC's unique situation, which necessitated transcending geographical boundaries. This issue, however, was not entirely new. In the early twentieth century, as eparchial structures in immigrant settlement regions were emerging, proposals arose for the establishment of a Greek Catholic patriarchate with jurisdiction extending beyond territorial borders, based on personal rite affiliation (Відвідини Апост. Нунція і його "слово" 1938). These proposals were often rooted in a fear of disintegration, as the dispersed nature of the diaspora raised concerns about the preservation of its distinct identity and unity. However, these aspirations remained unrealized.

Concurrent with the episcopal efforts to establish collegial coordination, the laity articulated their own aspirations. While the old emigration's interest in the bishops' initiatives is difficult to ascertain, it is probable they had acclimated to prevailing conditions, becoming used to their current situation, confining their ecclesiastical perspectives to their respective eparchies, metropolitanates, or parishes. However, the newly arrived immigrants, as previously discussed, held a significantly different outlook. Amidst this period of heightened activity, voices emerged asserting that only the establishment of a UGCC patriarchate or a permanent collegial body for the Ukrainian episcopate in exile could safeguard the Church from disintegration and the erosion of its religious and national identity. Such a structure, it was argued, would facilitate the development and pastoral care of the faithful, while accumulating resources to prepare for the revival of the Church in the homeland (Nahayewsky 1962, p. 3).

These ideas garnered support among broader masses of laity and clergy. This sentiment was reflected when, at bishop Isydore Borecky's request, Fr. Meletii Soloviy submitted considerations and proposals regarding potential topics for Ukrainian bishops to raise during the Second Vatican Council sessions. Fr. Soloviy's primary concern, as articulated in his text, was the absence of a leading Church center. He posited that only the creation of a patriarchate, titled of Kyiv and All Ukraine-Rus, could rectify this deficiency. According to Fr. Soloviy, this would elevate the Greek Catholic Church's prestige both in the homeland and in emigration, enable it to show greater initiative and activity in all areas of church life, contribute to its "de-Latinization" in the "legal and canonical sense", and strengthen the Church's unity within the diaspora (Meletii Soloviy. *The Shortcomings of Our Church Life, 1960*//HA UGCC, Fond of Bohdan Lonchyna, Letters, Other, n.p.).

4. The Struggle for Autonomy: The UGCC in the Post-Vatican II Era

The situation underwent a dramatic shift following the release and subsequent arrival in Rome in February 1963 of Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, the head of the Church, after 18 years of imprisonment in the Soviet Gulag. Slipyj promptly engaged in the ongoing work of the Second Vatican Council. On 19 August, amidst the developing discussions concerning

the schema of the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches he submitted a comprehensive appeal to Pope Paul VI, raising the issue of the Ukrainian patriarchate (Josyf Slipyj to Paul VI, 19 August 1963//HA UGCC,2, IVa, 29, pp. 108–14).

From 1963 to 1965, the Ukrainian bishops had the opportunity to convene annually in Rome for the sessions of the Ukrainian Bishops' Conference, coinciding with the Second Vatican Council.⁷ The Conference's activities resumed in autumn 1963, when the bishops were gathered in Rome for the Council sessions. Maksym Hermaniuk yielded his presidency to Josyf Slipyj, and the inaugural September meeting saw the attendance of 17 bishops, including Joachim Segedi, the newly appointed auxiliary bishop of Križevci. Bishops Nicholas Elko and Stefan Kocisko of the Pittsburgh Exarchate attended as observers. A significant decision emerged from this meeting: the establishment of a two-thirds majority vote for binding resolutions, meaning decisions that would be considered mandatory for the bishops, a measure opposed by 2 of the 17 bishops present. It was also agreed by the bishops that Josyf Slipyj, representing the entire Ukrainian episcopate, would petition the fathers of the Second Vatican Council to elevate the UGCC to patriarchal status, which he subsequently did on 11 October 1963 (Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1963//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 73, pp. 33–38).

Metropolitan Maksym Hermaniuk characterized the 1963 meeting of the Conference of Ukrainian Bishops as calm and orderly, with the sole point of contention being Josyf Slipyj's proposal for a Ukrainian Catholic University in Rome (Hermaniuk 2012, pp. 130, 135). This institution, envisioned as the central research and educational center for the UGCC, would have received support from all dioceses in the diaspora. However, the proposal failed to secure the necessary votes.

Meanwhile, in December 1963, the Apostolic See, after examining historical documents in response to an *ad dubium* request from the UGCC head's office, confirmed that the Archbishop-Metropolitan of Lviv was indeed major archbishop, a status inherently conferring rights equivalent to those of patriarchs.

The meetings of the Conference of Bishops during the 1964 session of the Vatican Council further highlighted the divisions within the episcopate. Bishops Ambrose Senyshyn, Augustyn Horniak, and Josyf Martynets were absent from nine of the eleven meetings, and their signatures, along with that of bishop Joseph Shmondiuk of Stamford, USA, were notably absent from the written request of the Ukrainian episcopate regarding the proclamation of the Ukrainian patriarchate, which was submitted to Pope Paul VI on 12 November 1964 (Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1964//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 73, pp. 39–46; Bishops of the UGCC to Paul VI, 12 November 1964//HA UGCC 2, IVa, 31, pp. 460–64).

Ambrose Senyshyn, the leader of this faction, maintained that the competence of the Conference of Ukrainian Bishops was limited to matters of rite and did not extend to administrative affairs or the pastoral strategies of individual bishops. He argued that other matters could be discussed within the Conference solely on a voluntary basis. Senyshyn emphasized that the Apostolic See held supreme authority over eparchies and metropolitanates in the diaspora,⁸ and, according to canon law, even patriarchs lacked jurisdiction beyond their canonical territories (Ambrose Senyshyn to Maksym Hermaniuk, September 1963//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 354, pp. 25–27). Bishop Josyf Martynets adopted a similarly detached stance, stating during the Conference meetings at the final session of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 that he considered himself a member of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference, and attended meetings of the Ukrainian bishops solely out of goodwill (Hermaniuk 2012, p. 277).

As his conflict with Josyf Slipyj intensified, Senyshyn accused Slipyj of seeking to subjugate the entire diaspora and return to the USSR, thereby placing all power over the

UGCC in the hands of Soviet intelligence services (Ambrose Senyshyn to Josyf Slipyj, 9 November 1966//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 354, pp. 91–94). This accusation resonated with prior allegations leveled by radical nationalist circles. Slipyj expressed a desire to return to the USSR to be with his persecuted flock, and while retaining his Soviet citizenship, did not openly criticize Soviet authorities and refused to meet with nationalist leaders, likely to avoid angering Soviet authorities. When this became widely known, suspicions regarding his intentions were disseminated, and some nationalist groups within the diaspora attacked him. It remains difficult to ascertain the extent to which Senyshyn genuinely believed these claims, or if they were merely a tactical maneuver. However, according to Hermaniuk, Senyshyn and Horniak, during a meeting, expressed clearly their suspicions that Josyf Slipyj might be collaborating with the Soviets. This assertion was met with indignation and rejected by all other bishops present (Hermaniuk 2012, p. 187).

Fueled by outrage at the bishops' opposition, lay organizations advocating for UGCC patriarchal status and autonomy emerged in the US and Canada. Most of its members belonged to the post-war wave of emigration, and some of their leaders had previously belonged to the Ukrainian Christian Movement. Furthermore, the 1964 promulgation of the *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* decree, particularly its assertion that Eastern Catholics "can and should always preserve their lawful liturgical rites and their rule of law, . . . and, if in their regard they have fallen short owing to contingencies of times and persons, they should take steps to return to their ancestral traditions" (OE, 6), held profound significance for the post-war wave of emigrants. This decree aligned with the core tenets of their *diasporic religion*, with its emphasis on the authenticity of tradition, and provided a crucial theological foundation for the newly established Committees for the Defense of Rite and Tradition. Despite disagreements on certain aspects, both lay movements coalesced around a common aspiration: to persuade the bishops and the Apostolic See to grant the UGCC greater internal autonomy. This vision entailed the creation of a UGCC synod of bishops, structured to operate in a coordinated manner under the authority of the patriarch.

The Roman Curia reacted negatively to the processes in the Ukrainian diaspora and on 22 April 1965, sent letters to all bishops stating that Pope Paul VI wished to end discussions about the patriarchate of the UGCC (Amleto Cicognani to Josyf Slipyj, 22 April 1965//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 33, p. 55).⁹ This intervention, however, had the unintended consequence of galvanizing the lay movement, which expanded across all countries of emigration and evolved from ad hoc committees into established lay organizations, as their initial advocacy for a patriarchate later expanded into a broader agenda.

Beyond personal, financial, or power issues, which should not be discounted in the context of the conflict between Ambrose Senyshyn and Josyf Slipyj, there was undoubtedly a fundamental difference in their views on ecclesiology and the interpretation of the *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* decree. Senyshyn's emphasis on his direct dependence on Rome as a metropolitan in the US, effectively limiting the UGCC's unity to a mere spiritual and symbolic expression, contrasted sharply with Slipyj's vision. Josyf Slipyj interpreted the *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* decree as fundamentally altering the understanding of patriarchal or major archbishop's jurisdiction, moving from a strictly territorial model to one that embraced personal jurisdiction based on rite. He saw this shift reflected in the Council Fathers' use of the Latin conjunction 'vel' instead of 'seu' in defining patriarchal authority, arguing that 'vel' allowed for jurisdiction over both territory and rite, unlike 'seu', which equated rite with territory (Marksteiner-Mishchenko 2020, pp. 139–40). Catholic intellectuals within the patriarchal movement supported this opinion, arguing that the promulgation of the *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* decree rendered all prior laws, especially those inconsistent with the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, invalid (Chubaty 1969, p. 54).

The interpretation of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* by Slipyj and his lay supporters was, to some degree, directly shaped by their practical goals. For them, the establishment of the patriarchate and synod served a predominantly pragmatic purpose, centered on the restoration of the Church in Ukraine, extending beyond a mere restoration of traditional Eastern Church governance. Given his inability to return to the USSR, Slipyj maintained a firm hope and belief that the Church in Ukraine would eventually emerge from its underground existence. However, he also recognized that its prolonged suppression would leave it significantly weakened, necessitating a concerted restoration effort by the diaspora. Therefore, he desired a cohesive and unified Church, structured to function as a singular, well-coordinated entity.

The very next year after the end of the Second Vatican Council, Slipyj, intending to implement his vision, planned to convene a synod of Ukrainian bishops in 1967. However, this plan was abandoned following interventions from the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and Pope Paul VI, coupled with a lack of consensus among the Ukrainian bishops. Rome's position favored a Conference, to be convened by metropolitan Hermaniuk, its ex officio chairman (Yosyf Slipyj to Ivan Buchko, 2 April 1968//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 44, p. 269). Slipyj, however, argued that Hermaniuk's chairmanship was no longer relevant after his release (Yosyf Slipyj to Maksym Hermaniuk, 19 October 1970//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 49, pp. 193–95).¹⁰ Hermaniuk himself supported Slipyj's plan to convene a Synod in 1967, even encouraging him to proceed. He also rejected the proposal from the American bishops for a separate regional conference of Ukrainian bishops from the United States and Canada, advocating instead for the resolution of all matters with the participation of the entire episcopate (Yosyf Slipyj to Maksym Hermaniuk, 19 October 1970//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 49, pp. 159–60).

Despite initial enthusiasm, following the Apostolic See's negative reaction, most bishops became wary of convening a synod. However, the situation shifted in the spring of 1968, when Josyf Slipyj embarked on his first extensive tour of Ukrainian diaspora communities. The tour commenced in Canada and concluded with visits to Australia and New Zealand in October of that year. Initially, his arrival in the USA was uncertain. However, the numerous events and enthusiastic reception accorded to the UGCC head in Canada, with many attendees traveling from neighboring US regions, prompted American bishops to extend an invitation. Slipyj's visits to Ukrainian diaspora centers were marked by large gatherings and a powerful emotional resonance among the laity. These events visibly confirmed his undisputed recognition as the leader of the Greek Catholic segment of the Ukrainian diaspora. For many, his figure was suitable for the role of leader of a "spiritual state".

The arrival of the Church's head also revitalized the lay community, which had been significantly disappointed by the Vatican's refusals regarding both the patriarchate and the convening of a UGCC synod. In the early months of 1969, patriarchal societies initiated a petition campaign in support of synod. According to Eva Piddubcheshen, approximately 65,000 to 67,000 Ukrainians in the USA joined this 1969 petition campaign, thanks to the involvement of numerous cultural and professional organizations (Piddubcheshen 1970, p. 30).

It can be reasonably inferred that the widespread actions of the faithful prompted the bishops and the UGCC head to adopt a more decisive stance and proceed with convening a Synod. The Synod of Bishops was held in Rome from 29 September to 4 October 1969, preceded by celebrations (27–28 September) marking the consecration of the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Rome, which were attended by numerous lay groups from around the world, with Pope Paul VI participating in the consecration. On 1 October, during the third session of the synod, lay representatives were granted the opportunity to address the bishops. In

addition to the UGCC head, 16 bishops participated in the synod, including Vasyl Hopko, former bishop of Prešov eparchy. Metropolitan Ambrose Senyshyn, however, departed Rome prior to the meeting and, thus, did not participate in the episcopal sessions, nor did he sign the resolutions or the collective letter to the Pope regarding the patriarchate, which was signed by all other bishops (Minutes of the Synod of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1969//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 73, pp. 63–75; Bishops of the UGCC to Paul VI, 4 October 1969//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 38, pp. 441–45).

The decisions of this meeting encompassed a broad spectrum of 24 topics, addressing diverse aspects of Church life, ranging from married clergy and dialog with the Orthodox Church to the issue of mixed marriages and the future mission in Eastern Ukraine upon its potential independence. The laity responded to the Synod with considerable enthusiasm, perceiving it as a de facto affirmation of UGCC autonomy.

However, the Roman Curia contested the synod's legitimacy. It reiterated that the Conference of Bishops remained the sole officially recognized collegial body of the UGCC. Despite this, the head of the UGCC continued to convene synods in Rome in 1971, 1973, and 1975. Disagreements persisted among the bishops regarding their status; while some considered them full-fledged synods, others, given Rome's reaction, viewed them as synodal or pre-synodal meetings, or used the more general term "meetings" (Minutes of the Synod of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1971//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 73, pp. 146–53). Nevertheless, the minutes of these gatherings consistently referred to them as synods. All three meetings were well-attended, including participation from bishops in the USA.

However, due to persistent Vatican objections, the following gatherings in 1976, 1978, and 1979 were designated as episcopal "consultations". As stated in the minutes of the 1976 meeting at the request of the bishops, the head of the UGCC agreed to alter the designation of the meetings, acknowledging that, due to the Vatican's response, some bishops would decline participation under those circumstances. (Minutes of the Consultation of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1976//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 73, n.p.).

The 1970s marked a period of significant change within the laity, characterized by both profound disappointment and increasing radicalization. This shift was significantly influenced by external factors, including Pope Paul VI's negative response to the patriarchate issue in 1971 and the direct prohibition against the UGCC head convening synods. Further exacerbating this dissatisfaction were the Vatican's contacts with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. Pope Paul VI's pontificate witnessed an intensification of Ostpolitik, the Vatican's policy of seeking improved relations with Eastern Bloc countries, featuring numerous mutual visits of official delegations and bilateral negotiations. These developments, in turn, shaped the Roman Apostolic See's approach to the "Ukrainian topic" in general and the UGCC patriarchate issue in particular (Dunn 1979, pp. 61–75; Floridi 1972).

The most prominent protest action of this period was the opposition to the Roman Curia's nomination of John Stock and Basil Losten as auxiliary bishops of the Philadelphia. The ordination, held on 25 May 1971, in Philadelphia, was met with widespread and emotionally charged protests, including a hunger strike by representatives of the group of Ukrainian students. Similar, albeit less extensive, protests from the patriarchal movement accompanied the nominations of Bishops Ephrem Kryvyi (1972), Jeronim Chimy, Dmytro Hreshchuk, and Myroslav Marusyn (1974) (Sorokowski 2009, pp. 39–44). The laity did not oppose the persons themselves, but the procedure for their appointment bypassing the UGCC bishops and its head, and which, in their view, violated the rights of the UGCC granted it by the Union of Brest.

The lay patriarchal movement became a subject of discussion during the episcopal synods of 1971 and 1973. During these meetings, Josyf Slipyj noted a growing distrust

of the hierarchy among the laity, citing recent diaspora events. He also emphasized the laity's awareness and defense of their rights, advocating for guidance and leadership rather than condemnation. However, hierarchs such as bishops Augustine Gornyak, Isidore Borecky, Basil Losten, Ivan Prashko, and Maksym Hermaniuk expressed critical views of the patriarchal movement's activities and methods, such as public demonstrations and petitions (Minutes of the Consultation of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1973//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 73, pp. 230–36). Though they generally adopted a cautious public stance.

The Vatican's Ostpolitik, its policy of seeking improved relations with Eastern Bloc countries, contributed to strong anti-Roman sentiments among Ukrainian Greek Catholics in the diaspora, raising concerns about potential defections to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Consequently, some bishops refrained from publicly disseminating Pope Paul VI's negative response to the patriarchate, fearing further discouragement and requesting Slipyj to pacify the faithful (Isidore Borecky to Josyf Slipyj, 23 August 1971//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 45, p. 19).

Ultimately, the laity's and a segment of the clergy's disillusionment with the Vatican fueled the increased public and liturgical commemoration of Josyf Slipyj with the patriarch title from 1973 onward. The publication of the Easter Message of the Ukrainian hierarchy in the semi-official edition "Вісті з Риму" (News from Rome), signed by Josyf Slipyj as "Patriarch and Cardinal", (Соборне Великодне послання ієрархії помісної Української Католицької Церкви 1975) generated considerable enthusiasm within the lay community. Josyf Slipyj personally justified his consent to the use of the patriarch title as an effort to prevent further disillusionment among the UGCC laity and potential schism, a concern that had even been reported in the non-Ukrainian press (Josyf Slipyj to Ivan Prashko, 24 July 1974//HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 46, p. 562).

Despite subsequent admonitions from the Roman Curia regarding the canonical irregularity of his use of the title (Babiak 2005, pp. 136–37), no sanctions were imposed upon Slipyj. This was likely due to his considerable moral authority, stemming from his eighteen-year imprisonment as a confessor of the faith under Soviet rule. He continued to employ the title until his death in 1984. However, his successors did not maintain the practice of self-designation as patriarchs, despite the establishment within the UGCC of the custom of commemorating its head as patriarch liturgically and referring to him as such in everyday discourse.

The struggle for the right to convene synods, however, proved more successful, culminating in a resolution facilitated by Pope John Paul II. His pontificate, marked by a deeper understanding of the realities under communist rule in Eastern Europe and the specific pastoral needs of the UGCC both within Ukraine and throughout the diaspora, represented a significant shift in Vatican policy.

Although Josyf Slipyj's declining health precluded his active participation in synods, beginning with the aforementioned synod in November 1980, Archbishop-Coadjutor Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky assumed the presidency, subsequently becoming head of the UGCC in 1984. The synods of 1983, 1985, 1987, and 1989, while addressing contemporary diaspora issues, such as the election of candidates for vacant episcopal sees—a matter previously under the purview of the Roman Curia—increasingly focused on providing aid to the Church behind the Iron Curtain. The regularity of these synods and the comprehensive participation of the UGCC diaspora episcopate significantly ameliorated tensions with the active laity, fostering the emergence of a moderate faction committed to collaboration with the hierarchy rather than confrontation.

The significance of this development was underscored when, amidst dynamic changes in the USSR, ten bishops from Ukraine, emerging from clandestinity, traveled to Rome in 1990 to participate in the Extraordinary Synod alongside eighteen diaspora bishops.

Despite lingering misunderstandings among diaspora hierarchs, which persisted, albeit to a lesser extent than in the 1960s and 1970s, and unavoidable friction between “diaspora” and “Ukrainian” hierarchs, stemming from their divergent experiences (Plokhly 1995), the bishops from Ukraine encountered a relatively cohesive diaspora Church. This Church promptly provided substantial support for the revival of ecclesiastical structures in Ukraine, which had been decimated by the Soviet totalitarian regime. Conversely, the new wave of emigration following the collapse of the USSR strengthened UGCC diaspora communities, while the Church in Ukraine largely addressed the shortage of priestly personnel in diaspora dioceses.¹¹

Following the return of the head of the UGCC, Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky, to Ukraine, synodal activities continued with regularity. Notably, in 2001, the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, a landmark event in UGCC history, elected Lubomyr Husar—a close associate of Josyf Slipyj—as head of the Church, with the participation of both Ukrainian and diaspora bishops. Despite initial disagreements during the election, Husar successfully fostered reconciliation among the episcopate (Спогади про Любомира Гузара. Він був Людиною Свободи 2017). This contributed to a more unified trajectory for the Church and enabled it to effectively address the challenges it faced in subsequent years, particularly following Russia’s hybrid aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022. Once again, the diaspora Church emerged as a vital source of support for the Church in Ukraine, mirroring its role in the early 1990s.

5. Conclusions

The post-World War II trajectory of the UGCC diaspora reveals a profound struggle for synodal autonomy, driven by more than mere canonical considerations. Forced emigration and the imperative to preserve religious, national, and cultural identity fostered a unique diasporic religious experience, wherein ecclesiastical aspirations became inextricably linked to the preservation of collective identity. This situation arose, in part, from the unpreparedness of Catholic ecclesiology to address the emergence of Eastern Catholic diasporas. The Roman Curia’s and local Roman Catholic hierarchs’ emphasis on the territorial principle in church organization contributed to the gradual alienation of Greek Catholic communities, often forcibly dispersed across different nations. Furthermore, the establishment of hierarchies for Ukrainian Greek Catholics in various regions, while intended to ensure local bishop’s autonomy under centralized Roman administration, risked severing vital connections between eparchies sharing a common ecclesial tradition. This threatened the perceived unity of the Church, particularly in the eyes of many post-war Ukrainian emigrants, who viewed it as detrimental to the Church’s survival and its potential role in supporting the persecuted Church in Ukraine. The establishment of the Conference of Ukrainian Bishops, though a step towards unity, failed to fully bridge the deep disagreements within the episcopate.

The arrival of Josyf Slipyj ignited a critical conflict, as his vision for the UGCC, shaped by his interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, clashed with the centrifugal forces within the episcopate. This conflict, rooted in divergent ecclesiological views, was further exacerbated by the geopolitical realities of the Cold War and the Vatican’s *Ostpolitik*.

The radicalization of the laity, manifested in their assertive advocacy for synodal autonomy and patriarchal status, posed a significant challenge to the Church’s traditional authority structures. This movement, driven by a sense of displacement and a fervent desire to preserve their cultural and religious identity amidst perceived Roman indifference, profoundly disrupted the established hierarchical order. Slipyj’s controversial use of the patriarchal title, within this context, transcended mere symbolic gesture; it represented a strategic maneuver. It highlighted the enduring tension between canonical norms and

the pragmatic imperatives of pastoral care, particularly in response to the extraordinary circumstances faced by the Church under Soviet rule, a tension further amplified by the unique exigencies of the diaspora.

Ultimately, the UGCC's struggle for synodal autonomy was a product of historical, political, and theological tensions. It highlights the inherent difficulty of reconciling universal Church structures with the unique needs of diasporic communities, where religious and national identities are intertwined. The conflicting interpretations of Vatican II, coupled with Cold War constraints, shaped the UGCC's development and its enduring relationship with the Holy See, establishing a particular precedent for continued discussion regarding the balance between universal governance and particular Church autonomy.

Josyf Slipyj never challenged the universal jurisdiction of the Pope. Rather, the tension stemmed from differing interpretations of the Bishop of Rome's role as both universal pontiff and patriarch of the West. Contemporary polemics frequently questioned the unrestricted freedom of the Latin Church to develop in all regions, even where it constituted a minority, and Eastern traditions predominated. This, in turn, raised legitimate concerns regarding the restrictions imposed on Eastern patriarchs or major archbishops, particularly concerning the survival of their exiled flocks. Slipyj's proposed solution was to grant Eastern Church heads personal jurisdiction over all faithful belonging to their respective ecclesial traditions.

In the view of the lay movement, many priests, and bishops, this situation contradicted the spirit and letter of the Second Vatican Council, which envisioned the Church as *unitas in varietate*, affirming the equal dignity of all traditions and rites and the imperative to preach the Gospel globally, transcending territorial boundaries (OE, 2–3). The synodal discourse within the UGCC during the 1970s and 1980s holds direct relevance for contemporary ecumenical dialog, particularly with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, where the self-governance of autocephalous Churches is a fundamental ecclesiological principle. Therefore, despite the prevalent negative sentiment in many Orthodox circles towards the very existence of Greek Catholics, often rooted in political considerations, the dynamics of relations between Rome and the *sui iuris* Eastern Catholic Churches serve as a crucial litmus test by which the Eastern Orthodox Churches may assess the feasibility of hypothetical unity.

Undoubtedly, the issue of the diaspora in this context remains complex. As it is not resolved even in the Orthodox world and is a subject of heated debate. On the one hand, the multiplication of parallel jurisdictions associated with ethnic groups undermines the universality of the Church and requires resolution. On the other hand, it is impossible not to consider the peculiarities of the diaspora mentality, for which connection with the Church of their native land, at least in the first generations, is crucial and must be considered in pastoral practice. Even in the case of subsequent generations, who may no longer consider themselves "diaspora" and associate themselves with the local nation, the memory of their origin can remain an important part of identity, where the Church plays a significant role. The UGCC case is unique in this regard, as these events took place when the Church in the homeland lived on the verge of destruction. Nevertheless, certain arguments and solutions may be relevant to contemporary Catholic ecclesiology.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

| | |
|---------|--|
| UGCC | Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church |
| OE | Orientalium Ecclesiarum |
| HA UGCC | Historical Archive of the UGCC in Rome |
| AUAP | Archive of the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia |

Notes

¹ These objectives were not unique, as comparable goals were pursued by Polish and Lithuanian post-war emigrations (Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann 2004; Van Reenan 1990). However, the Ukrainian case was distinct in that its religious tradition, differentiated from Western Christianity, provided an additional instrument for self-preservation.

² While the bishops subsequently labeled this gathering as the first conference, contemporaneous sources contradict this claim.

³ Despite the fact that the invitation was sent to them several times bishops Elko and Kocisko of the Pittsburgh Exarchate declined invitations to these joint conferences, mirroring the stance of their predecessor, Danylo Ivancho. This refusal stemmed from the historical division of Galician and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenians, who, despite sharing a common self-identification, were separated into the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Exarchates in 1924, in part due to differing views on nation-building. Sub-Carpathians favored the traditional “Ruthenian” designation, while Galicians increasingly adopted the broader “Ukrainian” identity. By the 1940s, descendants of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenians experienced greater assimilation into American life, and the Pittsburgh Exarchate, which primarily served Ruthenians but also included Slovak and Hungarian minorities, gradually embraced the broader self-identification of “Byzantine Catholics”, thereby avoiding specific ethnic designations. Consequently, when Elko and Kocisko were again invited to participate in 1958, they asserted in a letter to Bohachevsky that their congregations belonged to distinct “nations”, and thus, refused to attend a conference of “Ukrainian Catholic Bishops” (Motiuk 2005, pp. 83–84).

⁴ Although the name “Ukrainian Catholic Church” is commonly used in the diaspora, particularly in North America, this article uses the name generally accepted within the framework of the entire Church: Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC).

⁵ Metropolitan Maksym Hermaniuk also mentions the existence of opposition to the Conference at this time in his Diaries, but does not name specific names (Hermaniuk 2012, p. 57).

⁶ Furthermore, in some regions, they operated under the authority of the local Latin bishop. This dependence was exemplified when, despite Vatican sanction for the meeting in 1959, Bishop Martynets was required to secure consent from the local Latin Ordinary, Cardinal Jaime de Camara (Josyf Martynets to Constantine Bohachevsky, 12 February 1959 // AUAP, Box Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1959, n.p.).

⁷ In 1962, during the Council’s first session, Ukrainian bishops met for consultations; however, these gatherings were not formally constituted as sessions of the Bishops’ Conference.

⁸ This emphasis on individual episcopal autonomy was not unprecedented in the history of the UGCC. It stemmed, predominantly, from the gradual assimilation of practices and mentalities characteristic of the Latin Church over centuries. Notably, during the interwar period in Galicia, the bishops of Stanislaviv and Przemyśl, though suffragans of the Lviv Metropolitan, frequently acted independently, even on matters concerning the entire church province, such as the calendar and priestly celibacy. In the diaspora, where episcopal contact was even less frequent, these tendencies were further exacerbated. Metropolitan Sheptytsky’s initiative to convene episcopal conferences represented an attempt to establish a collegial body for resolving important issues affecting all dioceses. It was also an effort to return to the governance system inherent in the Eastern Church, given that the Union of Brest itself was a product of the Kyiv Metropolis’s synodal activity.

⁹ Several factors contributed to this decision, both internal and external. Internally, the Ukrainian episcopate lacked unanimity. Externally, Cardinal Bea opposed the Ukrainian patriarchate, believing it would jeopardize ecumenical dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate (Yosyf Slipyj to Maksym Hermaniuk, 8 March 1966 // HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 49, pp. 115–17). Furthermore, recently declassified KGB archives in Ukraine reveal that Soviet secret services used hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate to obstruct the proclamation of the Ukrainian patriarchate (Informational message KDB URSR, 24 October 1969 // Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine 1, 16, 989, pp. 105–6).

¹⁰ In 1972 and 1974, Metropolitan Hermaniuk personally appealed to Rome to stop calling him the head of the Conference of Bishops in the *Annuario Pontificio*, arguing that since 1963 the Conference had begun to act as a synod in accordance with the decree on the Eastern Churches and that its head was Josyf Slipyj (Maksym Hermaniuk to Cardinal Jean-Marie Villot, 7 May 1974 // HA UGCC, 2, IVa, 49, p. 398).

¹¹ This exchange extended to episcopal appointments, as seen in the case of His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, who served as a bishop for Ukrainians in Argentina (2009–2011) before being elected head of the UGCC in 2011.

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Article

Synodality of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (1964–2024): Evolution, Institutional Forms, and Identity Significance

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Abstract: The Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek-Catholic, boasts a long and rich synodal tradition, with roots tracing back to the Metropolitanate of the Orthodox Romanians of Alba Iulia, which, at the close of the seventeenth century (1697–1700), re-established communion with the Church of Rome. The aim of the study I put forward is to analyse the evolution of synodality in the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania between the years 1964 and 2024, employing a methodology that will systematically relate historical, ecclesiological, and canonical aspects, thereby highlighting their identity implications. The structure of the article is determined by the principal stages through which the Greek-Catholic Church has traversed during the specified period: 1964–1989; 1989–2005; 2005–2024. These stages have witnessed profound transformations within the Greek-Catholic Church, including modifications to its canonical status that have also impacted its synodal life. In the year 1964, as the Second Vatican Council concluded and the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* was approved, the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania was in the midst of severe communist persecution, having been outlawed since 1948. Its canonical status as a metropolitan province extra Patriarchatus was regulated by the *Motu Proprio Cleri Sanctitati* (2 June 1957), which recognised the institution of the provincial metropolitan synod, yet not that of the diocesan synod. Due to the persecution, the celebration of the metropolitan synod was not possible; however, privy conferences of bishops and diocesan ordinaries were held, which had significant effects on the life of the Church. The fall of communism, in December 1989, and the legalisation of the Greek-Catholic Church were followed by the publication, on 18 October 1990, of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*. According to the new legislation, the Greek-Catholic Church regained the status of a Metropolitan Church *sui iuris*, a status unsuitable to its dignity and tradition since it lacked the institution of the synod. Indeed, the Council of Hierarchs, which under the presidency of the metropolitan archbishop governed the Church, did not constitute a synod but merely a form of exercising episcopal collegiality. Nevertheless, with the approval of the Holy See, the Fourth Provincial Council was held in Blaj (1997–2000). On 14 December 2005, Pope Benedict XVI elevated the Greek-Catholic Church of Romania to the dignity of a Major Archbishopric. Thus, the full attainment of synodality was achieved, with the supreme governing authority being the Major Archbishop and the Synod of Bishops. The proceedings of the Synod of Bishops of the Greek-Catholic Church have prompted institutional development, to be detailed in the article. This research will also illustrate the limitations of the current *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* concerning the synodality of the Greek-Catholic Church.

Keywords: Romanian Church United with Rome; Greek-Catholic; synodality; provincial synod; council of hierarchs; synod of bishops; metropolitan church; major archiepiscopal church; ecclesiological identity; Second Vatican Council

1. Introduction

Upon the 21 November 1964, when Pope Paul VI did promulgate the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, concerning the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek-Catholic, did find itself subjected to the fierce persecution at the hands of the communist authorities of Romania. Declared unlawful on 1 December 1948, following the Soviet model used to suppress the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine, it continued to exist in secrecy, remaining steadfast in its communion with the Holy Apostolic See of Rome (Bucur 2003, pp. 133–262; Vasile 2023, pp. 55–160, 205–52; Cosmovici 2020a, 2020b).¹ Of the Greek-Catholic bishops who were in office in 1948 and subsequently arrested—many subjected to severe physical and moral suffering—only one still survived by the 21st of November 1964: Bishop Iuliu Hossu of Cluj-Gherla, who was kept under house arrest at the Orthodox Monastery of Căldărușani. Among those ordained in secret, all but one lived on. Tit Liviu Chinezu had met a martyr's death in the extermination prison of Sighet, but Ioan Ploscaru, Ioan Dragomir, Iuliu Hirțea, Ioan Chertes, and the future Cardinal Alexandru Todea had survived.

News regarding the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council reached the Greek-Catholic bishops and clergy only with the greatest difficulty and in a fragmented manner, being closely monitored by the Securitate (Soica 2016, pp. 343–44, 383–84). Amidst the tensions of the Cold War, the sole Romanian Greek-Catholic bishop to attend the Council was Vasile Cristea, who, on 2 July 1960, had been appointed Titular Bishop of Lebedus and entrusted with the pastoral care of Greek-Catholic Romanians in exile. Iuliu Hossu received an invitation to participate in the final session of the Council (14 September—8 December 1965)²; however, fearing that the communist authorities would deny him re-entry into Romania and thus prevent him from standing by his persecuted Church, he took no action in this regard (Soica 2016, pp. 385, 407). He maintained the same stance in 1969, when the Romanian authorities conditioned Pope Paul VI's intention of elevating him to the cardinalate upon his permanent departure from Romania. For this reason, Roman Pontiff created him a cardinal in pectore during the Consistory of 28 April 1969.³

We do not know to what extent the ecclesiological texts of the Second Vatican Council, and particularly the *Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches*, became known to Cardinal Iuliu Hossu. However, we have strong reasons to believe that the Council, through its rediscovery of the Church's communal dimension, its affirmation of unity in diversity and synodality, its recognition of the equal dignity of all particular Churches and rites, and, lastly, its guarantee of the identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches, would have brought him joy and deep satisfaction. The long and storied history of the Greek-Catholic Church attests to a constant endeavour to defend and affirm its own Eastern identity.⁴ Nevertheless, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* would also have given him cause for concern, as the text contains a general reference to Eastern synods and two specific mentions of Patriarchal and Archiepiscopal synods (Second Vatican Council 1964, nos. 1, 9, 19), yet omits any mention of the synodal institution within Metropolitan Churches.

Among the identity-defining themes for the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek-Catholic, synodality has always held a place of great importance, as it bears ecclesiological, liturgical, disciplinary, and pastoral implications. It embodies a model of communion linked to a canonical configuration and a certain degree of autonomy within the Catholic Church. The Greek-Catholic Church possesses a rich synodal tradition, whose origins may be traced to the synodal life of the Orthodox Metropolis of Alba Iulia. This tradition was notably affirmed through the Great Synods presided over by Metropolitan Theophilus in 1697 and Metropolitan Athanasius between 1698 and 1700, during which communion with the Church of Rome was solemnly declared. With regard to the typology of synodal institutions within the Greek-Catholic Church from 1700 to 1948, the following

have been identified: the Great Synod or *Great Sobor*; the Elective Synod; the Synod convened for the oath of fidelity to the new emperor; the Eparchial and Archeparchial Synod; the Provincial Synod or Council; the Vicarial Synod; and the Protopresbyterial Synod (Barta 2014, pp. 68–78, 83–88; Stanciu 2017, pp. 92–94).

Recent research has revealed that the synods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constituted privileged instruments of the post-Tridentine strategy promoted by Rome and by the Catholic Archbishop of Esztergom, the Primate of Hungary, regarding the strengthening of Catholic confessional identity within the Greek-Catholic Church of Transylvania. This strategy, which had positive and modernising effects on both the Church and society, included theological education and the formation of priests, the consolidation of confessional schools, the improvement of the financial situation and morality of the clergy, and the regulation of the organisation and functioning of ecclesiastical institutions. For Romanian Greek-Catholics, the synods represented the essential means for consolidating the religious union with the Church of Rome and for preserving their Eastern individuality and identity. Moreover, in the second half of the nineteenth century, through the synods, they defended the autonomy of the Metropolitan Province of Făgăraş and Alba Iulia in relation to the Catholic Church of Hungary (Stanciu 2021, pp. 103–14).⁵

In the year 1948, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church held the dignity of a metropolitan province under the title of Făgăraş and Alba Iulia, comprising the Archieparchy of Făgăraş and Alba Iulia, the Eparchy of Oradea Mare, the Eparchy of Cluj-Gherla, the Eparchy of Lugoj, and the Eparchy of Maramureş.

The present article aims to examine the evolution of synodality within the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek-Catholic, between the years 1964 and 2024, tracing perspectives on its principal ecclesiological and canonical aspects. This study will highlight the manner in which the ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council was received within the Romanian Church United with Rome, as well as its impact on the Church's institutional development and its ecclesiological identity. The structure of the article delineates three distinct phases in the life of the Greek-Catholic Church during this period: 1964–1989, a timeframe marked by the promulgation of the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and the fall of the communist regime in Romania, when the Greek-Catholic Church regained its legal status; 1989–2005, culminating in Pope Benedict XVI's elevation of the Greek-Catholic Church to the dignity of a Major Archiepiscopal Church in 2005; 2005–2024, a period characterised by the reorganisation and flourishing of synodal life.

2. Metropolitan Province Outside the Patriarchate (1964–1989)

In the year 1964, the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania, suppressed by the communist authorities through a series of violent, immoral actions and legislative measures, culminating in Decree 358 of 1 December 1948, continued to exist illegally but canonically. The *Annuario Pontificio* would include, year after year, the Romanian Greek-Catholic eparchies, attesting that, in the eyes of the Holy See, they continued to exist despite the persecution.

The canonical status of the Greek-Catholic Church was determined in accordance with the first codification of Eastern legislation, initiated in 1929 by the will of Pope Pius XI and partially completed with the promulgation of four documents: *Crebrae allatae sunt* (22 February 1949), *Sollicitudinem nostram* (6 January 1950), *Postquam apostolicis litteris* (9 February 1952), and *Cleri sanctitati* (2 June 1957). The latter, dealing with issues concerning Eastern rites and persons, holds canonical and ecclesiological significance, as in Canons 316–320 it regulates the situation of metropolitan provinces extra Patriarchatus, a category into which the Romanian Church United with Rome fell.

It is worth noting that the Romanian Church United with Rome had received Metropolitan dignity as early as the mid-19th century, when, by the decision of Emperor

Francis Joseph I on 12 December 1850, and by the *Bulla Ecclesiam Christi* of Pope Pius IX, promulgated on 26 November 1853, the Metropolis of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș was established, directly subordinate to the Roman Pontiff. Its canonical legislation was to be essentially clarified in the documents of the Provincial Councils held in Blaj in the years 1872, 1882, and 1900, which played a crucial role in the organisation of ecclesiastical life.

By comparing the acts of the First Provincial Council with the provisions of *Cleri sanctitati*, we observe a continuity regarding the metropolitan dignity and synodality. The legal concept used by *Cleri sanctitati*, namely metropolitan province extra Patriarchatus, served the purpose of distinguishing Eastern Catholic metropolises directly subordinate to the Roman Pontiff from those belonging to an Eastern Catholic patriarchate. In this regard, the situation of the Romanian Church United with Rome remained unchanged. Furthermore, *Cleri sanctitati* mentioned the institution of the provincial synod for metropolises extra Patriarchatus (Pius PP. XII 1957, 340 §2), specifying that the members with deliberative votes in the synod, which was convened and presided over by the metropolitan, were the residential bishops, who could delegate their coadjutor or auxiliary bishop, titular bishops, apostolic administrators of eparchy, exarchs, and administrators of vacant sees. Other clergy members invited to the synod only had consultative votes, except in cases where the Holy See or the synodal Fathers, by secret vote, explicitly granted deliberative votes to the presidents of monastic congregations or confederations (Pius PP. XII 1957, 341 §1–2). We note the fundamental correspondence between *Cleri sanctitati* and the First Provincial Council in this regard (*Concilium Provinciale Primum* 1882, Tit. III, Cap. III).

Nevertheless, we note two significant differences concerning the rights of the metropolitan and the synod, through which *Cleri sanctitati* diminished the autonomy of Eastern Catholic metropolises that did not belong to a patriarchate.

1. The first concerns the election of bishops, which was a constitutive element of the autonomy of the Romanian Church United with Rome. Inherited from the Orthodox Church in Transylvania, to which the Diet of Turda, in 1579, had granted the right for the clergy synod to elect the new bishop, who would then be confirmed by the prince (Alzati 2003, p. 225) and ordained by the Metropolitan of Ungrovlahia, this right would be reaffirmed even in the acts of the Union Synod with the Church of Rome, convened in Alba Iulia on 7 October 1698:

“And no one shall have the power to disturb our Reverend Vladik (Bishop) Athanasius in his seat until his death; and if it happens that he dies, the Synod shall elect, as before, a Vladik, whom, having been elected, His Holiness the Pope and His Majesty the Emperor shall confirm, and the Patriarch from His Majesty’s domain shall consecrate”.⁶

This request of the Synod, which, together with the full preservation of the rite, constituted a condition for union with the Church of Rome, reflected a manner of restoring communion in the spirit of the Ecumenical Council of Florence and within the new political situation characterised by the fact that Transylvania had come under the authority of the Habsburg Empire. Similarly, however, it expressed the identity consciousness of the Romanian Church, which declared its unity with the Catholic Church but wished to remain itself, an Eastern Church with its own Byzantine-Roman rite and specific autonomy. The second Leopoldine Diploma, dated the 19th of March in the year 1701, in Article XII, maintained the involvement of the clergy in the selection of the hierarchy but diminished it in the sense that the priests’ right was reduced to proposing three candidates to the emperor, from whom the emperor would choose and appoint the new bishop. In practice, the clergy’s involvement took place in the form of an electing synod, which proposed the first three candidates in the order of votes received. This procedure would be applied in the Eparchy of Făgăraș. Later, it was also used in the Archieparchy of Făgăraș and Alba

Iulia, where the electing synod included not only priests of the Archieparchy but also representatives of the clergy from the suffragan eparchies. However, this procedure was not applied in the Eparchy of Oradea Mare or in the other suffragan eparchies, where the emperor, based on a *jus patronatum*, directly appointed the new bishops, and the Pope canonically instituted them (Andrei 2004, pp. 131–38).

The First Provincial Council, whose acts were approved by the Holy See only in 1882, after almost ten years of deliberations, carefully included the right to elect the metropolitan:

“When the episcopal metropolitan seat becomes vacant, the senior bishops of the suffragan eparchies, after consulting with the metropolitan ordinary and other provincial bishops, are obliged to take care that the metropolitan see be filled, moderating the act of election or designation, examining the suitability of the candidates, and submitting a proposal to fill the metropolitan vacant seat”.⁷

Following the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, the Concordat (10 May 1927) decreed that episcopal appointments would fall under the jurisdiction of the Holy See. However, the Holy See was also required to inform the Romanian government regarding the identity of the future bishop in order to ascertain whether any political impediments existed.⁸ Notably, the text of the Concordat made no mention of the involvement of an electing synod in the event that the metropolitan see became vacant. The efforts of the Romanian Greco-Catholic episcopate to secure a concession from the Holy See began immediately upon the signing of the Concordat between Romania and the Holy See, for Metropolitan Vasile Suciú and his suffragan bishops were profoundly dissatisfied with the prospect of the Greco-Catholic Church losing its long-held right to elect, or at the very least participate in the election of, the future metropolitan. They did not dispute the Holy See’s competence over episcopal appointments. After much deliberation, the Greco-Catholic bishops succeeded in convincing the Holy See to approve the convening of electing synods, which would propose, in order of votes, three candidates in 1935 (Turcu 2017, p. 583) and again in 1946 (Bucur 2003, pp. 155–63). It is, however, worth noting that the Holy See approved these synods with reservations, granting them provisional approval.

Cleri sanctitati, on the other hand, specifies that the Roman Pontiff freely appoints bishops or confirms those chosen legitimately (Pius PP. XII 1957, can. 392 §2). The procedure for election is established for patriarchs, archbishops, metropolitans, and bishops within the framework of Patriarchal or Archiepiscopal synods (Pius PP. XII 1957, can. 221, 251–253, 325), but this does not apply to the metropolitans of the provinces extra Patriarchatus, who, consequently, are not merely confirmed by the Pope but are appointed. Through *Cleri sanctitati*, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church retained the institution of the provincial synod, yet its autonomy was diminished due to the loss of the synod’s right to be involved in the election of a new metropolitan.

Upon a cursory examination, one might contend that this limitation was more theoretical than practical, for the Greek-Catholic Church, being both clandestine and persecuted, was scarcely in a position to convene provincial synods or elective synods. Moreover, the decree issued by Pope Pius XII, *De nominatione substitutorum*, dated 29 June 1948, and subsequently reconfirmed and supplemented with *Facultates specialissime* on 29 July 1948 (Birtz 2007, pp. 15–16, 88–94; Birtz and Kierein 2010, pp. 282–90), conferred special prerogatives upon bishops operating in a state of necessity induced by persecution, thereby regulating the means of ensuring the leadership of eparchies through the appointment of substitute ordinaries. However, it did not address the matter of appointing a metropolitan. In fact, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church had been without a metropolitan since 5 June 1941. Owing to the Second World War and the Hungarian occupation of Northern Transylvania, it proved impossible to initiate the canonical procedures until 16 March 1946, when the

elective synod in Blaj proposed Bishop Alexandru Russu with the highest number of votes. Although the Holy See acquiesced to the proposal, the pro-Soviet Romanian government withheld approval for the confirmation of Alexandru Russu.

Following the suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church, the preeminence within the episcopal body was granted to the hierarch with the longest years of episcopal service. Each of them, in accordance with the decree *De nominatione substitutorum*, appointed two substitute ordinaries, who, in the event that the bishop was prevented from exercising his authority, would assume the leadership of the eparchy in the order established by the bishop.

In a state of necessity, the elective principle, whether in the case of appointing a new bishop or when the episcopal seat became vacant or the episcopal leadership was hindered, posed a vulnerability from the perspective of the Holy See, as it could potentially be influenced by political powers. Therefore, when episcopal ordinations took place in secrecy, they were performed with the consent of the Holy See, albeit in a clandestine manner.⁹

Nevertheless, on 30 April 1985, during the funeral of Bishop Ioan Dragomir, the bishops and ordinaries of the Greek-Catholic eparchies present decided that Alexandru Todea would lead the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church until further canonical provisions. Later, on 14 March 1986, in Cluj-Napoca, a conference of bishops and ordinaries of the Greek-Catholic eparchies took place, during which Bishop Alexandru Todea was elected metropolitan, “with all the rights and duties prescribed by our Provincial Councils and the universal canons in force”. This election, subsequently communicated to the Holy See, was in accordance with the provisions of the First Provincial Council but not with those of *Cleri Sanctitati*, which were probably unknown at the time. In the ensuing period, Alexandru Todea acted as metropolitan, appointing Father Lucian Mureşan as ordinarius of the Eparchy of Maramureş, assuming jurisdiction over the Eparchy of Cluj-Gherla following the retirement of Father Prunduş, and appointing Father Tertulian Langa as episcopal vicar general for the same eparchy (Prunduş and Plaianu 1992, pp. 37–38).

This act, justified by the necessity for central leadership in an exceedingly difficult period for the Church, was not immediately followed by confirmation from the Holy See. In fact, it was only after the fall of communism that Pope John Paul II appointed Alexandru Todea to the office of Archbishop and Metropolitan of Făgăraş and Alba Iulia. The text of the papal bull (Prunduş and Plaianu 1992, pp. 49–50) refers to the appointment rather than to confirmation, though it was interpreted within the Greek-Catholic community as a confirmation of the election made on 14 March 1986 (Prunduş and Plaianu 1994, p. 139). Nonetheless, there exist opposing perspectives (Birtz 2019, pp. 404, 411–14).

2. The second distinction between *Concilium Provinciale Primum* and *Cleri Sanctitati* pertains to the right of the metropolitan to ordain and enthrone new bishops. This right is acknowledged by *Concilium Provinciale Primum* (Conc. Prov. I, Tit. III, Cap. III, 3) but is not recognised in *Cleri Sanctitati*, which acknowledges this right for metropolitans under the authority of a patriarch (Pius PP. XII 1957, can. 319 §1) but not for metropolitans in provinces extra Patriarchatus (Pius PP. XII 1957, can. 320).

The significance of this right extends beyond the legal relationships of superior/subordinate, such as the metropolitan/suffragan bishop dynamic, as episcopal ordination, where alongside the metropolitan, two other bishops participate as co-consecrators, and the enthronement of the newly ordained bishop represent a way of manifesting and even constituting the *communio Ecclesiarum* (Szabó 2005, p. 154).

3. The Metropolitan Church *Sui Iuris* (1990–2005)

Upon the promulgation of canonical legislation for the Eastern Catholic Churches, *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990), on 18 October 1990, the Romanian Church United with Rome was recognised as a Metropolitan Church *sui iuris*.

Regarded in its full breadth, this codex constituted a laudable progression, being imbued with the lofty ecclesiological principles espoused by the Second Vatican Council and animated by a steadfast resolve to uphold the canons of the Eastern tradition. The juridical construct of *Ecclesia sui iuris* (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 27), wherein was enshrined the singular status of the Eastern Catholic Churches within the embrace of the Catholic Church, vouchsafed unto them an autonomy, permitting them to govern themselves in accordance with their own discipline, ever within the bounds of that law which hath been ratified by the Supreme Authority. This provision afforded them the means whereby they might preserve and cultivate, untrammelled, the unique identity. It is most fitting to note that, throughout the storied annals of the Romanian Church United with Rome, its hierarchy and theologians have upheld the incontestable verity that their Church is possessed of an Eastern discipline most proper to itself. Indeed, invocations of the *Pravila*¹⁰, or *Directorium legis*—a compendium of canonical jurisprudence wherein were contained the disciplinary precepts of the East, long employed in Transylvania by Greek-Catholic and Orthodox Romanians alike—are found as late as the latter portion of the nineteenth century. The recognition of *sui iuris* status, therefore, did not introduce a new reality but rather confirmed a long-standing conviction regarding the Church's identity. Furthermore, the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, by acknowledging not only the common legislation applicable to all Eastern Catholic Churches but also the role of *particular law*, furnished the requisite foundation upon which each Church might further elaborate its own specific regulations in accordance with its tradition.

For the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania, the canonical recognition as a Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* introduced a matter of considerable complexity, one that stood at variance with its established synodal tradition. According to the newly promulgated code, a Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* is presided over by the Metropolitan of a designated see, appointed by the Roman Pontiff, and is assisted, in accordance with canonical norms, by a Council of Hierarchs (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 155§1). This Council of Hierarchs comprises all consecrated bishops of the Metropolitan Church, save for those rendered incapable or subjected to canonical censure. However, deliberative voting rights are accorded solely to eparchial bishops and their coadjutors, while all other bishops may exercise such a right only if expressly stipulated by particular law (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 164§1–2). In the case of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, the Council of Hierarchs likewise included the bishop of the Eparchy of Saint George in Canton, Ohio, an ecclesiastical jurisdiction established by Pope John Paul II on 26 March 1987, for the pastoral care of Romanian Greek-Catholics residing in the United States.

The institution of the Council of Hierarchs, despite its resemblance to the synodal assembly, does not possess a truly synodal nature. From a canonical perspective, the Council represents a significant innovation. This gathering of bishops within a *sui iuris* Metropolitan Church undeniably reflects the episcopal collegiality of the Church; however, it does not embody a fully synodal nature. Federico Marti, in his analysis of the Council of Hierarchs, particularly considering the specific criteria for its composition and the relationship between the metropolitan and the Council of Hierarchs, has described it as a theological and juridical hybrid. In his view, it is not an expression of the *collegialitas effectiva* that is characteristic of true synodality. Rather, the Council of Hierarchs is indicative of the emotional collegiality of the bishops within the *sui iuris* Metropolitan Church, a symbol of their communion and unity, but it does not manifest the effective collegiality that is a hallmark of synodal governance (Marti 2011, pp. 162–66).

Dimitrios Salachas has highlighted the similarities between the Council of Hierarchs and the Episcopal Conferences found in the *Codex Iuris Canonici*, but he also pointed out the

key differences, particularly stemming from the fact that the Council of Hierarchs, having the role of assisting the Metropolitan in the governance of the entire *sui iuris* Church, is entrusted with a deliberative power according to the norms. Nevertheless, the possession of deliberative power, as opposed to merely consultative power, does not transform the Council of Hierarchs into the juridical figure of a Synod as seen in the Patriarchal or Major Archiepiscopal Churches (Salachas 2003, p. 198).

The absence of a synodal institution has a limiting and problematic consequence for the autonomy of a metropolitan institution: the Council of Hierarchs does not have the competence to elect the metropolitan in the event of a vacant see, nor the authority to elect new bishops. It is only responsible for compiling a list of three candidates deemed most suitable, which will be sent to the Apostolic See (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 168). The appointment of the metropolitan and bishops belongs solely to the Roman Pontiff (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 155§1; 181§2).

The Romanian Church United with Rome, by virtue of recognising its status as a *sui iuris* Metropolitan Church, was afforded a clear guarantee of the preservation of its ecclesial identity and its right to govern in accordance with its own discipline. The office of the metropolitan was canonically accompanied by rights and prerogatives far more extensive than those prescribed by the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* concerning the rights of a metropolitan within a metropolitan see that falls under a Patriarchal or Major Archiepiscopal Church (Marti 2011, pp. 166–67). Fortuitously, the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* acknowledged the metropolitan of a *sui iuris* Church's competence in the ordination and enthronement of bishops (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 159§1). Nevertheless, the inherent autonomy of the *sui iuris* metropolitan figure did not align with the historical and ecclesiological reality of the Romanian Church United with Rome, for it was devoid of two fundamental elements from its tradition: synodality and the right to elect the metropolitan. The continuity of these intertwined elements, historically attested in various institutional forms within the tradition of the Romanian Church United with Rome, was now interrupted, a fact not lost upon the Greek-Catholic clerical and lay elite.

Evidence of this situation is provided by the fact that the Romanian Church United with Rome convened the Fourth Provincial Council between 1997 and 2000. However, how could a Provincial Council have been celebrated under circumstances wherein the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* made no provision for such a synodal institution? In the absence of access to the ecclesiastical archives of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania and the pontifical archives from this period, our reflection shall rely upon the communiqués issued by the Council Secretariat, information gleaned from pastoral letters, and both ecclesiastical and secular press reports.

After a year and a half of preparations, the Fourth Provincial Council was inaugurated in Blaj on 17 March 1997, with a solemn celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, officiated by Metropolitan Lucian Mureșan. The event was attended by the Greek-Catholic bishops, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bucharest, His Grace Ioan Robu, who was also the President of the Romanian Catholic Episcopal Conference; Mr Gheorghe Anghelescu, the Secretary of State for Religious Affairs; as well as various local dignitaries, numerous members of the clergy, and faithful adherents. Representing the Holy See, the following participated: His Excellency Archbishop Janusz Bolonek, the Apostolic Nuncio to Romania; Monsignor Marco Brogi O.F.M., Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches; and Monsignor Krzysztof Nitkiewicz, an official of the same Congregation. Alongside the bishops, the composition of the Council included general vicars, superiors of religious orders and institutes of consecrated life, rectors and professors from the Theological Institutes, proto-presbyters, and laypeople from all the eparchies.

The event was conceived by the Greek-Catholic hierarchy within a framework imbued with profound symbolic significance, reflecting both the communion with the Church of Rome and its synodal tradition (Zubaşcu 1997a, p. 20). The commencement of the council took place in the context of the 300th anniversary of the declaration made on 21 March 1697, when Metropolitan Teophilus and the 12 proto-presbyters in Alba Iulia expressed their decision to unite the Orthodox Church of Transylvania with the Church of Rome. Furthermore, in 1997, it also marked the 125th anniversary of the celebration of the First Provincial Council of the Greek-Catholic Church. The final session of the Fourth Provincial Council was scheduled for the autumn of the year 2000, when it was to commemorate 300 years since the Union Synod with the Church of Rome, presided over by Metropolitan Athanasius in Alba Iulia on 4 September 1700, as well as the centenary of the Third Provincial Council. Finally, the year 1997 also marked the 32nd anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.

Though the official designation was that of a Provincial Council, a title also adopted by representatives of the Holy See, from a canonical standpoint, the event was structured upon the canons which govern the Assembly of a *sui iuris* Metropolitan Church (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 140–145, 172). Thus, whilst in the perception and intentions of the local Church, the event sought to be a continuation of the previous Provincial Councils or, at the very least, a symbolic and practical restoration of the synodal tradition, in the view of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, the gathering at Blaj was, in structural terms, akin to the Assembly of a Metropolitan Church (S.I.C.O. 1997, p. 196). This structural correspondence, however, did not remove the peculiarities associated with such an assembly, which was to unfold over several sessions during a span of four years, its deliberations being conducted in accordance with its own *Vademecum Synodi*¹¹. Nevertheless, within the Greek-Catholic theological sphere, it was credibly argued that the Fourth Provincial Council was, in truth, the inaugural meeting of the Metropolitan Assembly of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania (Muntean 2000, p. 59; Bleiziffer 2016, p. 257; Cristescu 2011, p. 302).

In his message to the participants, which was read by the Apostolic Nuncio, Janusz Bolonek, His Holiness Pope John Paul II exhorted the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania to engage particularly in the formation of theology professors and future priests, as well as in the apostolate with the youth (S.I.C.O. 1997, p. 197). The pastoral horizon was likewise underscored in the message of Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, who expressed his desire that the participants contemplate together the objectives and pastoral methods in pursuit of an authentic evangelical witness, favouring the human person and society. Simultaneously, Cardinal Silvestrini brought to their attention the necessity for the proceedings of the Fourth Provincial Council to draw inspiration from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, and the post-conciliar ecumenical vision (S.I.C.O. 1997, p. 198).

The first session of the Fourth Provincial Council, held between 17 and 21 March 1997, addressed matters concerning the identity and legal configuration of the Greek-Catholic Church (S.I.C.O. 1997, p. 199). Metropolitan Lucian Mureşan, in the pastoral letter written on the occasion of the Easter celebrations of April 1997, highlighted the following objectives and accomplishments of the first session: the affirmation of full communion with the Catholic Church and the preservation of the Eastern identity; the initiation of an evaluation concerning the past, to better comprehend the present and to delineate the path forward in the third millennium, within the Universal Church and amidst the Romanian people (Mureşan 1997, pp. 5–6). From the communiqué issued by the Press Office of the Council (Biroul de Presă 1997, p. 1) on 21 March 1997, as well as from other journalistic accounts (Zubaşcu 1997b, p. 6), it is understood that the first session was devoted to discussions

concerning the martyrs of the Communist era, the rediscovery and redefinition of the identity of the Greek-Catholic Church, the draughting of particular law in continuity with the first three Provincial Councils, and, lastly, the implementation of the documents of Vatican II and other magisterial texts pertaining to the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The second session was held at Blaj, between 28 September and 9 October 1998, taking place under the sign of the fiftieth anniversary of the suppression of the Greek-Catholic Church by the Communist regime. Five themes were addressed: the Holy Scriptures, the Liturgy, the ongoing formation of the clergy, the spiritual formation of the laity, and consecrated life (Zubaşcu 1998, p. 10).

At the third session, held once more in Blaj from 15 to 19 March 1999, the principal subjects of deliberation encompassed Greek-Catholic education at all levels and catechesis (Mureşan 1999); the internal organisation of the Church at every hierarchical tier; an examination of its status as a Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* and the prospects of attaining the dignity of a Major Archiepiscopal Church; as well as its relations with the Roman Catholic Church (Bleiziffer 2016, p. 258).

The fourth session took place between 27 September and 1 October 1999, again at Blaj. According to the press release issued by the Secretariat of the Council, signed by Archbishop George Guţiu *ad personam*, the proceedings were focused on the situation and role of the Greek-Catholic Church in contemporary society:

“Through this reflection, we sought to broaden our gaze of faith from the perspective of the Second Vatican Council on matters of the utmost importance: ecumenical relations, the promotion of the family, the defence of life, as well as the healing of the morality of contemporary society” (Guţiu 1999, p. 8).

The final, fifth session was hosted at the Franciscan Monastery in Oradea, from 19 to 22 September 2000, and concluded with a solemn celebration of the Divine Liturgy, officiated by Metropolitan Lucian Mureşan and the Greek-Catholic bishops, accompanied by thirty-five priests. The press release from the General Secretariat of the Council stated the following:

“The themes addressed in the five conciliar sessions encompassed a broad horizon: the fundamental doctrine of the Church, the formation of the clergy and the laity, theological education, the internal organisation of the Church, and ecumenism. In this final session, the conciliar documents were finalised, and reflection was given to the events of the past year: the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Romania, the national pilgrimage of Romanians to Rome, and the Apostolic Letter of the Sovereign Pontiff on the occasion of the third centenary anniversary of the Union with the Church of Rome” (Secretariatul General al Sinodului 2000, p. 5).

Although the Fourth Provincial Council did indeed produce a series of important documents, it was not followed by their formal approval either by the Council of Hierarchs or the Holy See. Yet, this should not be understood as rendering the event devoid of ecclesiastical significance in the annals of the Greek-Catholic Church. Quite the contrary, the Fourth Provincial Council remains an occasion of considerable importance, for it marked a pivotal moment in the life of the Church, as it arose from the cessation of persecution and the restoration of public life within a society still much influenced by the mentality of the communist era and struggling with the monumental task of rebuilding its structures and communities. In this context, the Council provided a crucial platform for reflection and analysis on the identity and multifaceted mission of the Greek-Catholic Church and its pastoral, educational, cultural, and social responsibilities. This reflective process was enriched by the dialogue between generations, for present at the Council were clergy who had served prior to 1948, priests, monks, and laity who had suffered imprisonment for

the sake of their Catholic faith under the communist regime, clergy formed and ordained in secrecy, as well as young priests and laypersons educated in the post-1989 era. The diversity of life experiences, sensitivities, and spiritual-cultural perspectives brought to the proceedings proved an invaluable resource. Moreover, the participation of not only the clergy—bishops and priests—but also consecrated persons and laity created an atmosphere conducive to meaningful debates for the entire Church, fostering the crystallisation of thoughtful and significant directions for the future.

It is no mere coincidence that the discussions of the first session, concerning the martyrs and confessors of the Catholic faith during the communist persecution, would be followed, on 16 January 1999, by the commencement of the beatification process for the seven Greek-Catholic martyr bishops: Valeriu Traian Frențiu, Vasile Aftenie, Ioan Suciu, Tit Liviu Chinezu, Ioan Bălan, Alexandru Rusu, and Iuliu Hossu¹².

While one cannot, with certainty, establish a direct causal link between the Fourth Provincial Council and the actions undertaken after the year 2000 by Metropolitan Lucian, in concert with the Council of Hierarchs, aimed at obtaining from the Holy See the elevation of the Greek-Catholic Church to the dignity of a Major Archiepiscopal Church, it is indubitable that the conciliar debates regarding the canonical configuration of the Church did indeed (Bleiziffer 2016, p. 258) crystallise the awareness of the necessity of such an initiative. For these deliberations clearly illuminated the fact that the canonical status of a *sui iuris* Metropolitan Church was wholly unsuitable for the ecclesiological identity, synodal tradition, and disciplinary heritage of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church.

4. The Major Archiepiscopal Church (2005)

Although the specific deliberations that transpired within the pontifical fora regarding the request made by metropolitan Lucian Mureșan and the Council of Hierarchs remain obscure, it is evident, from the testimony of Mons. Cyril Vasil' S.J., that the distinguished canonist Ivan Žužek S.J., consultant to the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, and Secretary-General of the Pontifical Commission for the Codification of the Eastern Code, advocated as early as 1994 for the canonical establishment of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church as a Major Archiepiscopate. He underscored that during the initial codification of the Eastern canon law, the canons within the *Motu Proprio Cleri Sanctitati* regarding major archbishops were specifically devised with the Romanian Greek Catholic Church in mind, thereby positioning it ahead of other analogous Churches, including the Ukrainian Church. The seven prerogatives of the metropolitan, delineated by the First Provincial Council of Blaj in 1872, contributed significantly to the definition of the archbishop with near-patriarchal jurisdiction, as articulated in *Cleri sanctitati*, and subsequently, the major archbishop in the *Codex Canonum Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. Accordingly, Ivan Žužek contended that the Romanian Greek Catholic Church should have been recognised as a Major Archiepiscopate as early as 23 December 1963, the precise moment when the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was granted such a status. In this manner, the debates surrounding the clergy's participation in the election of the metropolitan, though historically attested but incongruent with ancient canons, could have been canonically resolved through the Synod of Bishops (Vasil' 2016, pp. 270–73). Undoubtedly, these cogent arguments, reiterated by Ivan Žužek in late 2003, shortly before his passing, must have held substantial influence in the decision-making process of the Holy See.

On 14 December 2005, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI responded favourably to the petition submitted by metropolitan Lucian Mureșan on behalf of the Council of Hierarchs and, through the Papal Bull *Ad totius Dominici gregis*, elevated the Romanian Church United with Rome to the dignity of a Major Archiepiscopal Church, bearing the title of Făgăraș and Alba Iulia of the Romanians, with its seat established at Blaj¹³.

The *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* defines a Major Archiepiscopal Church as an “Eastern Church *sui iuris* which is not vested with the patriarchal title” (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 151). Consequently, the common law applicable to Patriarchal Churches extends likewise to the Romanian Major Archiepiscopal Church, save for instances wherein the law expressly dictates otherwise or where such distinctions arise from the nature of the matter at hand (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 152). The principal distinction between a Patriarchal Church and a Major Archiepiscopal Church lies in the procedure governing the election of the patriarch and, respectively, the major archbishop. A duly elected patriarch, following his proclamation and enthronement (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 76 §2), is required to seek ecclesiastical communion with the Roman Pontiff (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 76 §2). In contrast, a canonically elected major archbishop must petition the Roman Pontiff for confirmation of his election, and only upon receiving such confirmation may he be proclaimed and enthroned (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 153 §2–3).

This new canonical legislation faithfully embodies the vision articulated in the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, according to which patriarchs and major archbishops, together with the Synod of Bishops, constitute the supreme authority within their respective particular Churches (Second Vatican Council 1964, 9–10).

From an ecclesiological and canonical perspective, the Papal Bull of His Holiness Benedict XVI bore consequences of profound significance for the Romanian Church United with Rome, as it endowed the Church with two distinguishing marks of autonomy: the institution of the Synod of Bishops (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 102–113) and the right to elect bishops within the canonical territory of the Major Archiepiscopal Church (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 181 §1; can. 182–89), including the election of the major archbishop himself (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 63–75). The Synod’s prerogative to elect both the major archbishop and the bishops constitutes a fundamental attribute of autonomy, at once a living expression and a safeguard of the Church’s self-governance.

The elevation to the status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church provided an impetus for the institutional development of the Romanian Church United with Rome. His Beatitude Lucian Mureșan, enthroned as major archbishop at Blaj on 30 April 2006, formally established the Synod of Bishops by Decree 1025/06 on 20 June 2006. Furthermore, he instituted the Curia of the Major Archiepiscopate, equipping it with the structures and functions delineated by canonical law (*Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* 1990, can. 114–25), while tailoring them to the particular circumstances of the Greek-Catholic Church. Among these, one may enumerate: the Permanent Synod, the Bishop of the Curia, the Ordinary Tribunal, the Economic Council, and the following Synodal Commissions: the Commission for the Codification of Particular Law; the Commission for Patrimony; the Commission for Catholic Education; the Liturgical Commission; the Theological-Historical Commission; the Pastoral Commission; the Missionary-Ecumenical Commission; and the Social Commission (Bleiziffer 2016, pp. 214–24).

The Synod of Bishops, adhering scrupulously to canonical procedures, proceeded with the election of new auxiliary bishops¹⁴ and bishops for the Curia of the Major Archiepiscopate¹⁵. Furthermore, His Beatitude Cardinal Lucian Mureșan, with the consent of the Synod, effected the transfer of bishops as deemed necessary for the governance and pastoral needs of the Church¹⁶.

Of singular importance in the institutional evolution of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania was the establishment of the Eparchy of Saint Basil the Great of Bucharest on 29 May 2014. This momentous step was undertaken by His Beatitude Lucian Mureșan, following the unanimous assent of the Synod of Bishops and in consultation with the

Apostolic See, marking a significant milestone in the ecclesiastical organisation and mission of the Church.

5. Conclusions

The commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council stands as an event that ought not to be merely reduced to festive remembrances but is rather an occasion for a critical reflection upon the reception of the conciliar documents within the Catholic Church and their impact upon the local Churches. For the Romanian Greco-Catholic Church, the conciliar documents have, in essence, served as a confirmation of its ecclesiological vision, which had been crystallised throughout history. According to this ecclesiological conception, its reality as an Eastern Catholic Church was a mode of existing within the communion of the Catholic Church, with an identity marked by a dual belonging: Catholic, determined by faith and by hierarchical communion with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, and Eastern, by virtue of the spiritual, liturgical, theological, and disciplinary patrimony specific to the Byzantine-Romanian Rite.

Owing to its strong sense of identity, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church has consistently asserted its ecclesiological individuality within the Catholic Church. The debates held with the pontifical authorities concerning its canonical configuration, its synodal institutions, and the right to elect the metropolitan cannot be separated from the way in which it has understood its own ecclesial reality. The Church is more than its status. In fact, the canonical configuration and synodal structures should accurately reflect the concrete reality of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church and enable an appropriate and efficient organisation to fulfil its pastoral mission.

The Second Vatican Council, through its ecclesiology of communion in *Lumen Gentium*, by valuing local Churches and affirming the dignity and identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*), created the appropriate ecclesiological framework for the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania. However, the canonical framework, transposed in the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* through the category of Metropolitan Church *sui iuris*, did not align with its history and synodal tradition. It would have been more fitting for the canonical configuration to have been that of a Major Archiepiscopal Church immediately after the enactment of *Cleri sanctitati*, similar to the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, or shortly after the publication of the new *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*.

Synodality and the right to elect or participate in the election of the metropolitan can be irrefutably substantiated within the tradition of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church. One may engage in discourse regarding the concordance or lack thereof between certain synodal institutions and the Eastern venerable canonical laws, or the fact that within the Eastern Churches, certain prerogatives of the metropolitan and the Metropolitan Synod have been subsumed under the auspices of the patriarch and the Patriarchal Synod. This ecclesiastical evolution has engendered reservations within the Holy See concerning the recognition of the right to elect the metropolitan within the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church. Nonetheless, both historically and institutionally, these two ecclesiological and juridical elements have distinctively set it apart from other Greek-Catholic Churches in Central and Eastern Europe, thereby manifesting a well-defined and unwavering ecclesial identity. Hence, the decision of Pope Benedict XVI to elevate the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church to the status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church was, from an ecclesiological standpoint, a perfectly natural and theologically appropriate act, and from a canonical perspective, an entirely sound and just decision.

From the synodal experience of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, one may extract at least two elements of notable significance, which shall prove invaluable in the ongoing

synodal discussions encouraged by His Holiness Pope Francis within the Synod of Bishops. These reflections also hold particular relevance as we look towards the potential revision of the canonical legislation governing the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The first element pertains to the reconsideration of the institution of the Council of Hierarchs within the Metropolitan Churches *sui iuris*. This canonical structure serves, among other purposes, to distinguish the degree of autonomy of a Metropolitan Church in comparison with that of a Major Archiepiscopal Church, whilst also acting as a demarcation criterion between a *sui iuris* metropolis and a metropolis within a Patriarchal or Major Archiepiscopal Church. Notwithstanding, its nature is hybrid, and it does not wholly conform to the ancient Eastern canons. Scholarly investigations into the rapport between the metropolitan and the Council of Hierarchs have illuminated the fact that the metropolitan enjoys competences and authority hitherto unparalleled in the Eastern ecclesial-canonical tradition, deviating from the model of the protos, the *primus inter pares*, in the precise sense of Canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons (Marti 2011, pp. 166–67). In light of this, it would be most propitious, in the quest for absolute coherence with the ancient Eastern canons and with the dignity and autonomy of the Eastern Churches, which is particularly articulated through their synodal form, to dispense with the structure of the Council of Hierarchs and supplant it with the institution of the Synod of the Metropolitan Church *sui iuris*.

The second element pertains to the election of the major archbishop and bishops within the Major Archiepiscopal Churches. At this juncture, we observe a complete harmony between the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* and the Eastern tradition, according to which bishops are elected within the Synod of Bishops. This situation is also in full accordance with the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, which affirms that synodality is both an expression and an instrument of strengthening the communion of the Church, one that is not amorphous but is rather structured on the basis of the apostolic and episcopal hierarchy.

The very composition of the Synod of the Patriarchal and Major Archiepiscopal Churches underscores this principle: an individual is constituted as a member of the episcopal body by virtue of their episcopal consecration. However, the right to partake in the synodal governance of the Church emanates not from an abstract or purely theoretical concept but from the reality of being, through ordination, established as the pastoral leader of a particular Church. Furthermore, the inclusion of both eparchial bishops and those titular or emeritus in the Synod serves to express both the unity of the Major Archiepiscopal Church and the collegial nature of the episcopate (Salachas 2001, p. 107). Within the synodal framework, each bishop represents the interests and the pastoral mission of their respective eparchy, and all bishops, in concert with the major archbishop and in complete unity with the Bishop of Rome, collectively embody the representation of the local Church within the universal communion of the Church.

Nonetheless, should the ongoing synodal path, fervently advocated and propelled by Pope Francis, deem it prudent to involve additional categories of Christians—priests, consecrated individuals, and laity—in the process of episcopal elections, the historical institution of the elective synod within the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, which historically encompassed the participation of priests, could undoubtedly serve as a significant reference. The incorporation of such diverse members, alongside the bishops, is a practice presently observed within the Orthodox Churches¹⁷. When designed in a manner that preserves the preeminent role of the episcopacy within the Synod, perhaps in an advisory and institutional capacity, it would still stand as a profound expression of ecclesial communion and co-responsibility at the level of the local Church.

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Notes

- 1 The persecution of the Greek-Catholic Church began immediately after the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, with the suppression plan fully implemented in 1948. Following the Soviet model used for the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, the Romanian communist authorities issued abusive legal measures and organised a pseudo-synod in Cluj-Napoca on 1 October 1948, at which 38 Greek-Catholic priests—under pressure and threat—signed the so-called “return” of Greek-Catholics to the Orthodox Church. Although no Greek-Catholic bishop was present at that meeting—on the contrary, they all condemned the event—and although the attending priests lacked any canonical authority to represent the Church, the decision of this pseudo-synod was ratified by the Romanian Orthodox Church. This culminated in the issuance of Decree 358 on 1 December 1948, which legally dissolved the Greek-Catholic Church, transferring all its properties to the State and to the Romanian Orthodox Church. Subsequently, Law 1710 of 29 December 1948 regulated the division of these properties. This simulated legality was accompanied by systematic and violent repressive measures against bishops, priests, religious, and lay faithful, all aimed at compelling them to abandon communion with the Apostolic See of Rome and to join the Orthodox Church. The heroic fidelity to the Catholic faith demonstrated by all the bishops—who ultimately died as martyrs—as well as by many clergy and laity, ensured the clandestine survival of the Greek-Catholic Church. Six bishops were consecrated in secret, and new priests were trained and ordained, which, despite the inherent limitations and difficulties, allowed for the continued coordination of the Church’s spiritual and sacramental life. Religious orders and congregations also displayed admirable fidelity. Despite numerous petitions submitted by the bishops to the authorities demanding justice and religious freedom for the Greek-Catholic Church, the situation remained unchanged until the fall of the communist regime in December 1989. Throughout this period, the Church continued its mission in the diaspora through missions and parishes established in Western Europe, Latin America, and the United States. The most significant recognition of the sacrifices endured by the Greek-Catholic Church during the communist persecution came on 2 June 2019, when Pope Francis beatified seven martyr bishops at Blaj: Valeriu Traian Frențiu, Iuliu Hossu, Alexandru Rusu, Ioan Bălan, Ioan Suci, Vasile Aftenie, and Tit Liviu Chinezu.
- 2 The (Osservatore della domenica 1966, p. 217), published a list of prelates invited to participate in the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council. From Romania, the list mentioned the Greek Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu and the Roman Catholic Bishop Marton Aron.
- 3 Pope Paul VI would publicly announce this appointment only on 5 March 1973, after the death of Bishop Iuliu Hossu. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1973/march/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19730305_concistoro-segreto.html (accessed on 15 February 2025).
- 4 From the extensive bibliography dedicated to the subject, we selectively refer to: (Sima 2003, 2013; Buzalic 2022, pp. 64–124, 283–300; Barta 2023, pp. 12–133, 160–195).
- 5 A comprehensive and systematic analysis of the importance and meaning of the synods of the Romanian Greek-Catholics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be found in: (Stanciu 2017, pp. 83–116).
- 6 Original Latin text: “*Et Reverendum Vladicam nostrum Athanasium usque ad eius mortem in sua sede turbandi potestatem habeat nemo; et quod si ei mori contingerit, Synodus eligat, ut ante, Vladicam, quem ita electum Sua Sanctitas Papa Suaque Majestas imperator confirmat, et Patriarcha ex ditione Suae Majestatis consecret*”. (Nilles 1885, p. 204).
- 7 Original Latin text: “*Sedi Episcopali metropolitana in vacantiam deveniente, senior Episcoporum suffraganeorum, collatis cum Ordinariatu metropolitano caeterisque comprovincialibus Episcopis consiliis, sollicitudinem impendere tenetur, ut sedes Metropolitana compleatur, ipse actum electionis seu designationis moderando, examinat candidatorum habilitatem, propositionemque pro sede vacante metropolitana complenda substernit*” (Concilium Provinciale Primum 1882, Tit. II, Cap. III).
- 8 (Inter Sanctam Sedem et Romaniae Regnum 1929). art. V §2.
- 9 We refer to the following bishops: Ioan Ploscaru, consecrated as Bishop of Trapezopolis and auxiliary for the Eparchy of Lugoj by Apostolic Nuncio Gerald Patrick O’Hara, on 30 November 1948; Tit Liviu Chinezu, consecrated as Bishop of Regiana and auxiliary of the Archeparchy of Făgăraș and Alba Iulia by Bishop Valeriu Traian Frențiu, on 25 April 1949, at Căldărușani; Ioan Dragomir, consecrated as Bishop of Paleopolis and auxiliary of the Eparchy of Maramureș by Apostolic Nuncio Gerald Patrick O’Hara, on 6 March 1949; Iuliu Hirtea, consecrated as Bishop of Nebbi and auxiliary of the Eparchy of Oradea by Apostolic Nuncio Gerald Patrick O’Hara, on 28 July 1949; Ioan Chertes, consecrated as Bishop of Cantano and auxiliary of the Eparchy of Cluj-Gherla by Bishop Valeriu Traian Frențiu, on 25 December 1949; Alexandru Todea, consecrated as Bishop of Caesaropolis and auxiliary of the Archeparchy of Făgăraș and Alba Iulia by Bishop Joseph Schubert, Apostolic Administrator of the Roman

Catholic Archeparchy of Bucharest, on 19 November 1950. For the biographies of these bishops and their heroic fidelity to the Catholic Church during the period of communist persecution, see (Prunduș and Plaianu 1998).

- 10 Under the designation of *Pravila* (from Slavonic, *Правила*, translated as “Rule” or “Canon” in English), a number of collections of legal and normative texts circulated within the Romanian realm, encompassing the canons of local, provincial, and ecumenical councils from the first Christian millennium, along with fragments of patristic writings and the legislative texts of the Byzantine emperors (Floca 1990, pp. 132–46; Mărtincă 1998, pp. 38–62). Of the various collections, the most notable was the *Pravila cea Mare* (*The Great Rule*, or *The Great Canon*), published in Târgoviște in the year 1652, which earned widespread recognition for its juridical significance. This compilation was duly employed by the Romanian Greek Catholic Church in the regulation of all ecclesiastical matters. With the passage of time, it became evident that certain provisions within the *Pravila*, such as the allowance of divorce in cases of adultery, were in direct contradiction with the doctrines and disciplinary norms of the Roman Church. In light of this, the Synod of Blaj, convened in 1739, established by means of Canon 6 the principle to be applied in the use of the *Pravila* within the United Church: the Romanian canon law, known as the *Pravila*, was to remain in force, save for those matters which were shown to be in contradiction with the Holy Union. Thus, contentious issues were to be examined on a case-by-case basis, yet those found to be at odds with the Union in faith did not render the *Pravila* as a whole invalid. This principle, though not without its tensions in the relations between the Romanian hierarchs and the Roman authorities, held sway, and the *Pravila* persisted in effect even until the latter part of the nineteenth century, until 1882, when the pontifical authorities formally requested the removal of all references to the *Pravila* from the documents of the First Provincial Council of Blaj (Barta 2023, pp. 82–85).
- 11 In the introduction, there are delineated the models and sources which were judiciously adapted to the specific context of the Fourth Provincial Council: the *Vademecum Synodi*, published by the Synod of Bishops for the Synods pertaining to America (1997) and Asia (1998); the *Codex Iuris Canonici*; and the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum celebrandae recognitus et auctus*. (Conciliul Provincial al IV-lea 1998, p. 1).
- 12 The process of beatification was conducted within the Archeparchy of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș from 16 January 1999 to 10 March 2009, while the Roman stage took place at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, from 7 November 2009 to 19 March 2019, when Pope Francis authorised the publication of the decree recognising the martyrdom of the Servants of God. The beatification was solemnly celebrated by Pope Francis in Romania, at Blaj, on the Field of Liberty, on 2 June 2019 (Man 2022, pp. 133–45).
- 13 The text of the Papal Bull *Ad totius Dominici gregis* is duly published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, (Benedictus XVI 2005, vol. II, p. 107).
- 14 Three auxiliary bishops were selected in due course: Mihai Frățilă, who was appointed as auxiliary bishop of the Archeparchy of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș on 20 June 2007 and was solemnly proclaimed on 27 October 2007; Cristian Dumitru Crișan, who was chosen as auxiliary bishop of the same Archeparchy on 16 January 2020 and was duly proclaimed on 22 January 2020; and Călin Ioan Bot, who, on 16 January 2020, was elected auxiliary bishop of the Eparchy of Lugoj, with his proclamation following on 22 January 2020.
- 15 Vasile Bizău was elected on 20 June 2007 and was proclaimed on 27 October 2007. Likewise, Claudiu Lucian Pop was chosen on 8–10 June 2011 and was officially proclaimed on 21 November 2011.
- 16 His Beatitude Lucian Mureșan did indeed facilitate the transfer of three bishops, following the elections held within the Synod for the purpose of appointing new hierarchs to the vacant episcopal seats and to the newly established Eparchy of Bucharest. In this manner, Vasile Bizău was transferred from his position as Bishop of the Curia of the Major Archiepiscopal See to that of Bishop of the Eparchy of Maramureș, following the consent of the Synod of Bishops, convened at Blaj on 8–10 June 2011; Mihai Frățilă was transferred from his role as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș to that of Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Basil the Great of Bucharest, with the consent of the Synod of Bishops, convened at Blaj on 8 May 2014; Claudiu Lucian Pop was transferred from his position as Bishop of the Curia of the Major Archiepiscopal See to that of Bishop of the Eparchy of Cluj-Gherla, with the consent of the Synod of Bishops, convened at Blaj on 12 April 2021; and Călin Ioan Bot was transferred from his role as Auxiliary Bishop of the Eparchy of Lugoj to that of Bishop of the Eparchy of Lugoj, following the consent of the Synod of Bishops, convened at Blaj on 7–8 June 2023.
- 17 Such a procedure is currently in effect within the Romanian Orthodox Church. For reference, see the *Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, Articles 126–32.

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Article

The Activities of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Under the Soviet Totalitarian Regime and the Second Vatican Council

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Abstract: The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was officially liquidated by the Soviet authorities at the L'viv Pseudo-Council of 1946. However, the clergy and faithful who remained loyal to their Church formed an underground church structure. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the underground Greek Catholics had special hopes for the revival of the UGCC. This was due to the easing of repression in the USSR after Stalin's death and the preparation and convening of the Second Vatican Council. It was at this time that Pope John XXIII managed to secure the release of the head of the UGCC, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, who had spent 18 years in the Soviet labor camps and exile. At that time, many suspicions and accusations arose among the clergy and faithful of the underground UGCC due to insufficient information about the actions and decisions of the Council. In those years, a movement emerged that later grew into an apocalyptic sect ("Pokutnyky"). Ecumenical talks between the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church, the issue of patriarchal status for the UGCC, ritual disputes, and so on also caused a lot of discussion among the Greek Catholics in Ukraine. This paper is an attempt to provide a better understanding of the perception of the Vatican II decisions by underground Greek Catholics within their struggle for the existence and revival of their Church.

Keywords: Second Vatican Council; Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; Josyf Slipyj; "Pokutnyky"

1. Introduction

The Second Vatican Council became one of the most important events in the history of the Catholic Church in the 20th century. Many of its decisions are still being implemented in the life of church communities. No doubt, its influence on the development and activity of the Eastern Catholic Churches was decisive. A peculiarity was that during the preparation, conduct, and implementation of the Council's decisions, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine was under persecution and prohibition. The communist regime established in Western Ukraine at the end of World War II did not want to tolerate the Greek Catholics' rights to free religious recognition. According to the Ukrainian historian from Canada, Bohdan Bociurkiw, there was a "fundamental incompatibility" between the Soviet authorities and the UGCC, since this Church was Ukrainian, contributing significantly to the formation of the modern national identity of Ukrainians; it was Catholic, that is, it emphasized its connection with the Apostolic See and Western civilization; and it also became an important spiritual guide for several generations of Ukrainians, opposing itself to the atheistic Soviet system (Bociurkiw 1996, p. ix).

This paper aims to present and analyze the conditions in which Greek Catholics in Ukraine found themselves during the Second Vatican Council. The main source for

this study was the interviews with the participants of the UGCC underground from the archives of the Institute of Church History of the Ukrainian Catholic University in L'viv. The interviewing of the witnesses began in 1992 in the context of the oral history project "Profiles of Fortitude: A Living History of the UGCC's Underground Life, 1946–1989", initiated by Borys Gudziak, the eventual Metropolitan of Philadelphia (UGCC). The interviewers very often asked about the respondents' attitude to the Second Vatican Council, its impact on the underground life of the UGCC, the implementation of the Council's decisions, etc. This paper also applies thematic materials from several state archives, such as the Sectoral State Archive of Security Service of Ukraine, the collection of the Plenipotentiary under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR (fond 4648) of the Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine, and holdings of regional plenipotentiaries of the state archives of Western Ukraine. The academic works by Petro Galadza (Galadza 2001), Roman Skakun (Skakun 2015), Yaroslav Stotskyi (Stotskyi 2009), Mykyta Sorokin (Sorokin 2021), Anatolii Babynskyi (Babynskyi 2018), Maria Ivaniv (Ivaniv 2021), and Natalia Shlikhta (Shlikhta 2023), which cover various topics of relations between the Vatican, Greek Catholics, and the USSR, the impact of conciliar decisions on UGCC activities, and the Greek Catholic underground peculiarities were important for this study.

2. UGCC Before Vatican II

As a result of the Soviet authorities' repressive pressure, the UGCC officially "ceased its existence" at the non-canonical L'viv Council on 8–10 March 1946, by the proclaimed "reunification" with the Russian Orthodox Church. At that time, the whole Greek Catholic hierarchy, headed by Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, had been arrested for eleven months. The Greek Catholic clergy faced a choice between signing the conversion to Orthodoxy with the opportunity to continue their pastoral work or not signing and facing inevitable repression. Due to their resistance to the forced "Orthodoxisation", many Greek Catholic priests were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms. The process of 'reunification' covered the whole of Western Ukraine, whose territory became a part of the USSR. Thus, besides the L'viv, Stanislaviv, and a part of the Peremyshl eparchies (the other part was in Poland), Greek Catholics of the Mukachevo eparchy were also subjected to forced "Orthodoxisation". The Mukachevo Greek Catholic diocese was historically independent of the UGCC and had a direct connection with the Apostolic See. The liquidation of the union in the Transcarpathian region had certain peculiarities. In particular, the Soviet state security authorities first assassinated Bishop Theodore Romzha (1 November 1947). Then, on 28 August 1949, they announced the liquidation of the ecclesiastical Unia of Uzhhorod without holding a Council (Pahirya 2015, pp. 446, 460).

Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons for the liquidation of the UGCC was its canonical connection with the Pope of Rome. Soviet state security, the main directors of this liquidation process, emphasized precisely the rejection of uniting the Apostolic See and the transition to ROC jurisdiction. The Moscow Patriarch Aliexii Simanskyi, shortly after the arrest of the Greek Catholic hierarchy, in his appeal to the clergy, the Greek Catholic believers, and the people of Western Ukraine, accused the Pope of collaborating with the Nazis and added that the UGCC should escape from such a church connection as soon as possible: "Break, destroy the ties with the Vatican. The Vatican is leading you into darkness, into spiritual destruction, thanks to its religious errors, and now it wants to arm you against all freedom-loving humanity, wants to turn your back on the whole world. Hurry up and return to the arms of your dear mother, the Russian Orthodox Church!" (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 65, case C-9113, vol. 21, p. 442a)¹.

Father Gavryil Kostel'nyk, one of the leaders of the Initiative Group for the Reunification of the UGCC with the ROC, persuaded priests to renounce Catholicism and convert to Orthodoxy. In one of his reports, he said: "That is why we are conducting our action in such a way that . . . we are undermining the papacy and will continue to do so". He constantly emphasized that his goal was "to defeat faith in the papacy" among the Greek Catholic clergy (Serhiichuk 2006, vol. 2, p. 136). The priests constantly rebuked Kostel'nyk for betraying the Catholic Church. For example, Father Illia Blavatskyi, an opponent of "reunification with ROC", indignantly addressed the leader of the Initiative Group: "You are trying to refute Roman dogmas and convince us that they are false, but it is very difficult for us to convince ourselves. And how dare you to desecrate the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth—the Pope!" (Serhiichuk 2006, vol. 2, p. 183).

After the death of Josyf Stalin in 1953, because of the political revision of the Soviet regime, most of the repressed Greek Catholic priests received amnesty and, in 1954–1958, began to return to Western Ukraine. The weakening of state pressure allowed the clergy to continue their priestly ministry in an underground existence. For example, at a meeting of the Council for ROC Affairs on 25–26 October 1957, in Moscow, concern was expressed about the intensification of activities in the Western Ukrainian regions of Greek Catholic priests, most of whom had returned from the forced labor camps and began their underground pastoral work. Soviet officials were also dissatisfied with the attempts of underground Greek Catholics to influence "formally reunited" ROC priests who remained loyal to the Vatican and return them to the bosom of the Catholic Church (SALR, State Archives of L'viv Region (ДАЛО, Державний архів Львівської області), fond R-1332, description 2, case 25, pp. 299–302).

It should be noted that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the GCC in Ukraine managed to organize its underground structures, namely, Greek Catholic secret communities functioned, underground monasteries operated, and priest ordinations were held. Despite the death of most bishops and the continuous imprisonment of Metropolitan Slipyj, it was possible at least to establish the partial functioning of the hierarchical structure. Thus, during 1956–1959, Assistant Bishop Mykola Charnetskyi, released from the camps, worked in L'viv, Bishops Ivan Sleziuk, Symeon Lukach, and Ivan Liatyshevskyi worked in Stanislaviv, and Oleksandr Khira worked in Uzhhorod (Hurkina 2009, p. 57).

At that time, the anti-religious campaign proclaimed by the first secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Mykyta Khrushchov, hit the official ROC, both in quantity and quality, as it not only lost churches, seminaries, and monasteries, but also had many restrictions imposed on its pastoral work (Stotskyi 2008, pp. 273–74). The underground priests, although closely monitored by the authorities, tried to take advantage of this turn in communist policy by creating new underground cells and using closed churches for their services (Bociurkiw 1993, pp. 133–34). However, despite the persecution from the Soviet state, the ROC only increased its presence in the external forum. Obviously, one of the important areas of the Moscow Patriarchate representatives' activity was the development of relations with the Holy See.

With the beginning of the pontificate of Pope John XXIII, the Vatican's policy towards the Soviet Union changed somewhat. The new Pope sought to establish diplomatic relations with the communist authorities, emphasizing in his official documents the importance of peace and the responsibility of politicians to history. Khrushchov responded quite positively to such calls, believing that "Western imperialists" should listen to the Pontiff (Sorokin 2021, p. 119). The convening of the Second Vatican Council was also perceived in the world as a good opportunity to begin the process of unifying Christians. Therefore, it was logical for the organizers of the Council to invite representatives of other Christian denominations, including the Russian Orthodox Church, with which the Vatican also had

complicated historical relations. During the pontificate of Pope John XXIII and his successor Pope Paul VI, relations between the two Churches improved. For example, the chairman of the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Alexei Puzin, in one of his reports in 1964, spoke positively about the policy of Pope John XXIII towards communist countries, and the proof of this was the absence of anti-communist appeals at the Council or the announcement of “crusades” against the communists. However, he criticized the Holy See for supporting Greek Catholics and, according to him, the position of the Soviet authorities on this issue was “unchangeable” (SALR, State Archives of L’viv Region (ДАЛЮ, Державний архів Львівської області), fond R-1332, description 2, case 36, p. 126).

In fact, against the backdrop of all these political, diplomatic, and inter-church conversations, the issue of the Head of the UGCC, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, who could not attend the Council because he was serving his second sentence in Soviet camps, arose. According to the plan of Pope John XXIII and Vatican diplomats, the “case of Slipyj” was to become an unofficial part of peaceful diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

3. “The Case of Slipyj”

Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj was arrested on 11 April 1945, by the People’s Commissariat of State Security, in the L’viv region and later taken to prison in Kyiv. He and another four Greek Catholic bishops were accused of “implementing the anti-Soviet policy of the Vatican and the instructions of the German-fascist leadership circles they were associated with. For a number of years, they actively carried out subversive work against the USSR, and during the period of temporary occupation of Ukraine by the German-fascist invaders, they actively supported their activities in their favor” (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 6, case 68069, vol. 7, pp. 181–92). On 3 June 1946, the military court tribunal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Ukrainian District in Kyiv sentenced him under Article 54-1 “a” of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR to 8 years in labor camps and 3 years of restriction of rights with confiscation of property (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 6, case 68069, vol. 7, p. 256). While serving his sentence, he was repeatedly transferred from one labor camp to another. After the end of his term, he was taken to Moscow to persuade him to cooperate with the Soviet authorities and involve him in establishing relations with the Vatican. Metropolitan Slipyj was allowed to visit libraries and museums and engage in academic activities. He began writing an outline of the history of the UGCC and an essay on relations between the USSR and the Vatican and possible ways of reconciliation. However, after the arrest of the Minister of Internal Affairs Lavrenty Beria, who had initiated the invitation of Slipyj, the Metropolitan was sent back into exile to a nursing home in the village of Maklakovo, Yenisei District, Krasnoyarsk Territory, in Russia. There, the Metropolitan continued his historical research. He also managed to establish an underground pastoral ministry and secretly wrote several letters to the clergy and faithful of his Church. Such an activity of the Metropolitan did not go unnoticed by the state security. He was under constant surveillance by the Krasnoyarsk KGB department. On 19 June 1958, Metropolitan Slipyj was arrested for the second time. He was once again accused of anti-Soviet activities, which consisted of attempts to revive the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine. The Metropolitan was sentenced to 7 years of correctional labor camps a year later. Subsequently, due to the fact that Slipyj “did not embark on the path of correction” (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 6, case 68069, vol. 10, p. 506), the Judicial Board in Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court

of the Ukrainian SSR recognized him, by decision, as a particularly dangerous criminal “recidivist”. Such a cruel decision was taken due to the Metropolitan’s refusal to cooperate with the Soviet regime and his constant attempts to defend the rights of Greek Catholics as well as demands to legalize the GCC in Ukraine.

Against the background of all Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj’s wanderings, the movement for his release was intensified in the free West. Obviously, the Ukrainian diaspora constantly reminded the world community about Metropolitan Slipyj’s sufferings from repression and persecution. Undoubtedly, during the preparation of the Second Vatican Council, the Ukrainian episcopate emphasized that their Head of the Church would not be able to take part in the Council sessions. Archbishop Ivan Buchko, the most senior among the Ukrainian bishops, appealed to the Apostolic See with a request to assist in the release of the “Great Absent One”, as the press began to call Slipyj according to the Ukrainians’ suggestion (Horyacha 2015, p. 344). During the Second Vatican Council’s opening, the Pope mentioned the bishops absent because they were “imprisoned for their fidelity to Christ and exiled” (Hermaniuk 2012, p. 23). The Ukrainian bishops counted on the Vatican’s assistance in the matter of Metropolitan Slipyj’s release.

For the representatives of the UGCC, along with that unpleasant fact, there was the presence of two observers from the Russian Orthodox Church, who arrived at the Council as guests of the Secretariat for Christian Unity. At the same time, the Vatican tried to establish good relations with the USSR and the Russian Orthodox Church. Against the backdrop of the Caribbean crisis, Pope John XXIII offered his help in de-escalating the confrontation between the West and the Soviet Union. The first unofficial negotiator was the American journalist Norman Cousins, an editor of the newspaper “Saturday Review” and a close friend of US President John F. Kennedy. On 13 December 1962, Cousins met Mykyta Khrushchov in Moscow, where, besides other issues, he raised the issue of the release of Metropolitan Slipyj. Although the communist leader reacted rather negatively to such a proposal, he promised to consider the issue (Horyacha 2015, p. 351).

The Pope’s request for the release of Metropolitan Slipyj was also transmitted through the Russian Orthodox observers at the Council: the report of Archpriest Vitalii Borovoy reached the top party leadership. It should be said that the Holy See emphasized that the release of Slipyj was a humanitarian act, a step towards reconciliation which would not have any anti-Soviet manifestations (Horyacha 2015, pp. 354–55). All these measures influenced the Soviet authorities and, in the end, on 12 January 1963, Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj was liberated by a decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Late in January, he was taken to Moscow, while he was forbidden from going to L’viv. In his memoirs, Slipyj recalled that his main question for his oppressors was “does his release mean the return of freedom to the Greek Catholic Church?” (Slipyj 2014, p. 227)

After arriving in Rome and several months of recuperation, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj participated in the Second Vatican Council sessions during 1963–1965; he was appointed a member of the Council Commission for the Affairs of the Eastern Churches. His appeal to the Council Fathers to elevate the UGCC to the status of a patriarchate was significant. It should be said that it was not realized. However, the Holy See still recognized the Ukrainian Greek Catholics: on 23 December 1963, the UGCC was proclaimed a Major Archbishopric, and on 22 February 1965, Josyf Slipyj received the title of Cardinal.

In the West, however, Josyf Slipyj encountered numerous problems with regard to the leadership of the UGCC, as he could not fully perform the duties of the Major Archbishop. In particular, he constantly insisted on his right to hold synods of bishops whose decisions would be mandatory. The Apostolic See refused his requests because, according to the canon law of the time, he had authority only within his ecclesiastical province, which was under Soviet occupation, and the Church was in the catacombs (Marksteiner-Mishchenko

2018, p. 269). On the other hand, despite the great respect for his personality, Josyf Slipyj failed to unite all the bishops and clergy in the Ukrainian diaspora around him. As Metropolitan Maksym Hermaniuk of Winnipeg wrote in his diary, Josyf Slipyj was very worried about the steps of some bishops who tried to pursue their own policy towards the Vatican, ignoring the proposals of the Major Archbishop of the UGCC. Metropolitan Maksym recalled that Slipyj instructed him to write a letter to the Pope about the “chaotic state of our Church” (Skira 2012, pp. 117–20). It should be noted that despite the Vatican’s non-recognition of the patriarchal status of the UGCC, Josyf Slipyj proclaimed himself Patriarch in 1975. However, this step by the Head of the Church was not welcomed by some of the Greek Catholic bishops and clergy (Babynskyi 2018, pp. 337–38).

Despite all of the difficulties and failures, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj’s arrival in the West was an impetus for Ukrainians in the diaspora. Father Ivan Datsko, Slipyj’s close collaborator, analyzed that his stay in the West motivated Ukrainians to a church–religious awakening and restrained their national assimilation. The figure of the confessor of faith, the voice of the “Silent church” in the free world, and its spokesman before authoritative international institutions became a uniting factor (Teodorovych 2007, p. 14). It is important that, for the West, Patriarch Josyf Slipyj became a symbol of the martyred Church whose faithful were suffering for their faithfulness to the Holy See (Pashchenko 2002, p. 258). Until Slipyj’s death on 7 September 1984, in Rome, he made a huge contribution to the development of the UGCC in the diaspora, and he also constantly cared about the fate of Greek Catholics in Ukraine, emphasizing the need for the legalization of the Church (Bublyk 2013, pp. 152–57).

4. Hierarchical Structure in L’viv

The prohibition for Metropolitan Josyf to visit L’viv and the need to leave for the West immediately after his release from the camps left the issue of the Greek Catholic hierarchy unresolved in the L’viv Archdiocese. However, Slipyj managed to solve this problem. While staying in Moscow for several days, he summoned the Redemptorist hieromonk Vasyl Velychkovskyi by telegram and ordained him a bishop as his deputy locum tenens on 4 February 1963 at the Moscow Hotel.

It should be said that at that time, L’viv had a lack of bishops. The Stanislaviv (now Ivano-Frankivsk) eparchy was led by Bishop Ivan Slezyuk, who had served two terms in Soviet camps (1946–1954, 1962–1968). He was secretly ordained by Bishop Hryhoriy Khomyshyn before his arrest on 11 April 1945. In fact, after serving the sentence, Bishop Mykola Charnetskyi, Apostolic Exarch of Volyn, Polissia, and Pidliashiya, returned to the city of L’viv in 1956. He managed to activate the underground activities of the Greek Catholic clergy, religious, and faithful, but did not ordain any new bishop. After his death in 1959, the L’viv archeparchy was led by administrators Frs. Adrian Zafiiovskyi, Volodymyr Hrytsai, and Ivan Chorniak, and hieromonk Vasyl Velychkovskyi. For example, according to the reports of local KGB officers, Fr. Zafiiovskyi, as a leader, grouped Greek Catholic priests who had returned from imprisonment around himself, gave them advice in the field of underground pastoral care, emphasized the importance of working individually with believers, especially children, and explained to people the need to write requests to Moscow regarding the legalization of the UGCC (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 2, case 2832, pp. 3–4). KGB operatives tried to limit the activities of Fr. Zafiiovskyi by pressure on his son, a Professor at the Polytechnic Institute in L’viv (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Yurii Zafiiovskyi, 16.04.1995, L’viv. P-1-1-527, p. 20).

A newly ordained bishop, Vasyl Velychkovskiy, was an influential figure in the Catcomb Church. He served a 10-year term in the Vorkuta camps, and after his release in 1955 he actively pastored in Western Ukraine. The state security agencies characterized him as “a kind of fanatic, obsessed with the idea of reviving the Uniate Church in Ukraine and not susceptible to influence. When in a difficult situation, he uses provocative actions” (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 65, case С-9113, vol. 21, p. 21). Bishop Velychkovskiy especially intensified his underground activities during the preparation and convening of the Second Vatican Council. He convinced like-minded people that it was the best time to achieve the legalization of the UGCC in the Soviet Union. The KGB knew about his ordination as a bishop in Moscow and therefore closely monitored his actions. Already in 1964, a series of arrests and searches were carried out in the houses of active Greek Catholics, including Velychkovskiy. However, state security was unable to stop the underground activities and liquidate the Greek Catholic hierarchical structure. Bishop Velychkovskiy also made sure that there were several bishops in L’viv who were his assistants and could substitute for him at the time of his arrest or death. For example, on 2 July 1964, Bishop Velychkovskiy ordained his fellow Redemptorist Volodymyr Sterniuk as a coadjutor bishop, and the KGB officers quickly learned about this (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 65, case С-9113, vol. 33, p. 20). Bishop Velychkovskiy also initiated the “seizure” of churches closed by the Soviet authorities for underground Greek Catholic services. He was accused of influencing the “reunited” priests to return to the UGCC (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 65, case С-9113, vol. 33, p. 20). Bishop Velychkovskiy was arrested for the second time on 29 January 1969. He was later sentenced to three years of imprisonment. After serving his sentence, Bishop Velychkovskiy left for the West, where he died on 20 June 1972. Thus, Archbishop Volodymyr Sterniuk performed the duties of the locum tenens of the Head of the UGCC in Ukraine until 1991 (Dmytrukh 2007, p. 31).

5. Peculiarities of Underground Existence

According to the observations of the local communist party authorities, the release of Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj and the Second Vatican Council undoubtedly influenced the activities of the Greek Catholic underground. For example, the Plenipotentiary of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC, Atamanyuk, reported that in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, Greek Catholics, in connection with the Second Vatican Council, began to spread rumors about the imminent revival of the UGCC. Such information was of great importance to the population, especially against the background of Khrushchov’s anti-religious policy with the closure of Orthodox churches and numerous restrictions for the official Orthodox clergy. For example, in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, 110 ROC communities were deregistered in 1963 alone (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 287, p. 29). Such measures of the Soviet authorities encountered resistance in Western Ukraine from the Orthodox clergy, the majority of whom were former Greek Catholics (163 priests out of 208) (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 287, p. 17, 22). A similar situation was observed in other Western Ukrainian regions. For example, in the L’viv region, 142 communities were deregistered in 1963 (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО,

Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 287, p. 122).

Restrictions against the official ROC added opportunities for the underground UGCC. In general, in the early 1960s, more than 270 underground priests and about 700 monks and nuns lived in the L'viv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil regions (Stotskyi 2009, p. 6). It should be noted that it was in the late 1950s and early 1960s that Greek Catholic monasteries resumed accepting candidates for the novitiate (Stotskyi 2009, pp. 16–17).

The beginning of the 1960s in Ukraine was also marked by the intensification of Soviet atheistic propaganda. Atheist education was spread through educational, social, scientific, and cultural institutions. “Soviet rites” were introduced, which were supposed to replace the religious traditions popular among the local population. For example, the Plenipotentiary of the Council for Religious Cults in the L'viv region reported on 7 July 1964 that the region needed to introduce new traditions, holidays, and rituals in order to distract the population, especially the youth, from the Church and religion. He argued that despite the great religiosity of the region, more and more people were turning to “Soviet rites” (SALR, State Archives of L'viv Region (ДАЛО, Державний архів Львівської області), fond R-1332, description 2, case 36, pp. 75–79). The influence of such steps was felt, with priests discussing this in private conversations; Fr. Yurii Vanchytskyi, an Orthodox dean and rector of one of the churches in L'viv, claimed in a private conversation that “it feels like the propaganda of atheism is working. We see fewer and fewer worshipers in churches” (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 287, p. 122). Also, the repressive pressure on the underground clergy did not stop at this time. Arrests, criminal prosecutions, searches, and confiscation of property occurred. Thus, in the late 1950s, priests Anton Kaznovskyi and Pavlo Vasylyk (the future bishop) were arrested, and in the early 1960s, bishops Ivan Slezniuk, Symeon Lukach, and others were arrested too (Stotskyi 2009, pp. 11–12).

The constant pressure of the authorities on the ROC in the region and the changes that took place in the Catholic Church in the preparation and holding of the Second Vatican Council had interesting consequences for the Greek Catholics in the underground. In particular, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there were cases of returning some “reunited” priests to the jurisdiction of the UGCC. For example, Fr. Ivan Shulym, who joined the ROC after the L'viv Pseudo-Council, served in parishes until 1950; later he was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in camps, and after being released he refused to serve again as an Orthodox priest and went into the Greek Catholic underground, working as an accountant in one of the L'viv museums (SALR, State Archives of L'viv Region (ДАЛО, Державний архів Львівської області), fond R-1332, description 2, case 35, p. 15). Fr. Ivan Ratych also converted to Orthodoxy, but that did not save him from repression—he spent nine years in special settlements in remote areas of Russia, and after returning to Halychyna, under the influence of his brothers—priests, who were not “reunited”, he repented and became an underground pastor (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Iryna Kraykivska, 07.04.1993, L'viv. P-1-1-183, p. 8). Fr. Ivan Nahurskyi, who served in the L'viv churches, continued serving according to the “Uniate rite” and eventually refused to “reunify” and returned to the UGCC for underground service (SALR, State Archives of L'viv Region (ДАЛО, Державний архів Львівської області), fond R-1332, description 2, case 35, p. 13). The story of another priest is interesting—Fr. Julian Rudkevych was a long-time parish priest in the village of Leshniv, in the Brody District. According to state security records, he said to Fr. Gavryil Kostelnyk at a deanery meeting of priests on 4 August 1945 that “religion is not a glove that can be taken off and put on again. We must re-study your books and convince ourselves that we

have been wrong for 40 years of our conscious life” (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 65, case C-9113, vol. 23, pp. 145–46). However, he was later “reunited”, although there was a belief among the priest’s relatives that Fr. Rudkevych did not sign the transfer to the ROC, but that his parishioners did it for him in order not to lose a good priest. He was arrested and served about five years in Stalin’s camps. After his return, he continued his priestly ministry. In 1963, he retired and then publicly in the church of the village of Leshniv renounced Orthodoxy, telling the parishioners, “That’s it . . . I want to die as a Greek Catholic priest. . . I thank God that I’m done with Orthodoxy” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with fr. Mykola Markevich, 17.03.1993. Mykolaiv. P-1-1-337, p. 59; AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Hanna Dmytruk, 20.09.2004, L’viv. P-1-1-1618, pp. 9, 13). At the same time, he met the underground bishop Volodymyr Sterniuk, who accepted him back into the UGCC.

At that time, there were cases when priests, while remaining in Orthodox parishes, secretly revoked their “reunification” and actually acted as Greek Catholics. Obviously, such facts were not reflected in the documents, but the testimonies of people close to such pastors can be found. Thus, Fr. Ivan Kinash, a priest in the village of Ushkovychi, Peremyshliany District, although serving as an Orthodox until his death in 1981, nevertheless, according to the testimony of a parishioner, revoked the “reunification” and was considered a Greek Catholic among his relatives (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Hanna Klapchuk, 25.07.2006, Peremyshlyany. P-1-1-1851, pp. 7–8). Fr. Julian-Myron Prystash, a long-time parish priest in the village of Moloshkovychi in the Yavoriv District, who, although he protested the activities of Fr. Kostelnyk, later “reunited”. In 1948–1955, he served his sentence in the camps of Mordovia, and after his release he continued his pastoral work. According to witnesses, he commemorated the Pope during the service and did not introduce Orthodox rites; therefore, he was considered a secret Greek Catholic (Prach 2015, vol. 1, p. 326). Father Vasyl Koliasa, a priest from the Lemko region (now the territory of Poland), who in 1945 was resettled to the village of Sokolya in the L’viv region, was registered there as an Orthodox abbot. Later, he renounced Orthodoxy and collaborated with the underground clergy. In his home chapel, hieromonks of the OSBM were performing services (Prach 2015, vol. 1, p. 562). It should be said that the method of returning to the UGCC imposed certain restrictions on priests, since they had to commemorate the Pope and the Catholic hierarchy, as well as avoid joint services with the Orthodox bishop and priests. Obviously, such cases testified to the “formality” of transferring Greek Catholic priests to the ROC and showed the gap between the desire of the Moscow Patriarchate leadership and the reality of church life in the western regions of Ukraine. For example, the Ukrainian researcher Natalia Shlikhta says that ‘reunification’ can be considered a form of adaptation, allowing local communities to preserve a certain identity (Shlikhta 2023, p. 132).

From the point of view of canon law, it was easier to return to the UGCC for those priests who retired and left the parish. For example, Fr. Mykola Kulytskyi, “reunited” in 1947, in the late 1950s completed his official ministry in the village of Poltva in the L’viv region, and as an emeritus returned to the UGCC. For more than 10 years, until his death in 1970, he worked as an underground priest, living in his parish (Gudziak and Turii 2022, p. 166). Father Hilarion Ortynskyi, who until 1957 served in the parish in the village of Voiutychi in the Sambir district, retired and transferred to the underground UGCC. He began working actively in underground communities, and for that reason he was deprived of receiving a pension from the ROC. He also experienced repression and persecution; in particular, he was robbed and beaten several times (Prach 2015, vol. 1, p. 592). It should be

said that such “returns” were not hugely common, but it was possible to speak of a certain unique phenomenon in the adaptation of Greek Catholic priests who formally accepted the jurisdiction of the ROC but remained faithful to Catholicism.

6. Perception of the Council

The Second Vatican Council was generally positively perceived in the underground UGCC environment, as evidenced by party functionaries. For example, the Plenipotentiary of the Council for the Affairs of the ROC in the Ivano-Frankivsk region claimed that Greek Catholics had great hopes for the Council and rumors about the imminent revival of the UGCC were actively spreading among them (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 291, pp. 32–33). Such information was also contained in the documents of KGB officers, who believed that the Vatican supported the desire to revive the UGCC in Ukraine and actively helped the representatives of the Greek Catholic diaspora in establishing underground structures in the Soviet Union (SSASSU, Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, Галузевий державний архів Служби Безпеки України), fond 16, description 1, case 965, p. 95). However, such excessive hopes for the Council had a somewhat negative effect of disappointment. In his interview, the underground hieromonk Damian Bohun OSBM recalled that “people thought that if bishops came from all over the world, they would say that the Soviet Union should not exist, because it was not a prison of nations, but a torture chamber of nations. But nothing of the kind was said there. And people were disappointed with that Council, because they, of course, did not understand what the Council was supposed to talk about and what laws were to be established” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with fr. Damian Bohun OSBM, 06.06.1993, L’viv. P-1-1-150, p. 48). It should be said that although there was some disappointment, in general a rather sober perception of the situation prevailed. Thus, the underground bishop of Ivano-Frankivsk, Sofron Dmyterko OSBM, recalled that the Greek Catholics hoped for at least some relief: “People listened with great joy and hope that the Council would achieve something, especially the contacts with the Orthodox bishops from Russia, who were with the delegation there, that they would agree on something, that it would be easier for us after that Vatican Council” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Bishop Sofron Dmyterko, 06.11.1997, L’viv. P-1-1-419, pp. 15–16). Apparently, he also expressed his disappointment with the Council, but he argued that the majority still understood that the Holy See was looking for ways to alleviate the fate of the Greek Catholics, even in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church. The bishop recalled that against the backdrop of the Vatican’s negotiations with representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Greek Catholics often heard the “reunited” ones saying, “it’s good that we signed. . ., we have something, and you have nothing. The Vatican doesn’t care about you. The Vatican has sold you out”. (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Bishop Sofron Dmyterko, 06.11.1997, L’viv. P-1-1-419, p. 16).

On the other hand, there were certain changes in the attitude towards local communities of the ROC, which even the Orthodox priests spoke about. They reported to the regional plenipotentiaries that some Greek Catholics had begun to attend churches, although they had not done that before. They linked this fact to the decisions of the Vatican Council. Rumors spread among Greek Catholics that, since then, it was possible to go to Orthodox churches, but only to those in which former Greek Catholic priests served, bypassing the clergy from other regions of Ukraine (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher

Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 291, p. 32). Although it should be stated that the Greek Catholic priests did not recommend attending Orthodox churches, they clearly recognized that the Holy Mysteries in the ROC would be valid and administering them anew would be a violation of the Council's decisions (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Josyf Shtelikha, 26.12.1993, Uzhhorod. P-1-1-205, p. 17).

The underground environment developed a negative perception of the Orthodox clergy. Bishop Sofron emphasized in his interview that people perceived the clergy of the ROC as loyal employees of the Soviet government, who in many cases were characterized by negative moral traits (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Bishop Sofron Dmyterko, 06.11.1997, L'viv. P-1-1-419, pp. 18–19). Hieromonk Damian Bohun OSBM spoke sharply even about those former Greek Catholic priests who, for various reasons, “reunited” with the ROC: “They are traitors to God and that’s it. If they renounced what they had sworn to, when they were ordained, they made a confession of faith, the Catholic faith, not the Orthodox one, then they can only be called bread-eaters, because they just wanted to have bread, and they will do whatever they are told to do”. (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with fr. Damian Bohun OSBM, 06.11.2004, L'viv. T-1-1-31, p. 1). In fact, during the underground era, there was a discussion about the conditions for accepting again the “reunited” clergy, and since the mid-1950s, a secret revocation of the “signing Othodoxy” was introduced, although the part of the Greek Catholic underground which Fr. Bohun belonged to did not support this (Bociurkiw 1993, pp. 143–44).

The convergence with the Orthodox at the Second Vatican Council and the ecumenical dialog did not significantly impact the underground Greek Catholics. For example, Fr. Ivan Kolodii, an underground seminarian ordained in 1983, recalled that he was brought up in a spirit of rejection of Orthodox priests and Orthodoxy in general, perceiving them as ‘schismatics’. However, when the UGCC emerged from the underground, everything changed in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in its attitude towards the Orthodox: “I am on fairly good terms and convinced in the teaching of the Church according to the Second Vatican Council, and I do not regard them less as I did before, but I understand that they are not in unity with the Apostolic See. I am very well aware of this, but I consider them as brothers and defend them as priests and protect them” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with fr. Ivan Kolodiy, 14.12.1993, Ternopil region. P-1-1-256, p. 34). Hieromonk Yaroslav Spodar CSsR testified similarly, acknowledging that the ROC was completely under the control of the KGB, but as was noted at the Council, ‘the Holy Spirit liked to save people through the Orthodox Church’ and the signatories should also be treated with understanding: ‘It was a difficult time for them. . . And we should understand their situation” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with fr. Yaroslav Spodar CSsR, 15.09.2004, L'viv. P-1-1-1640, p. 20).

Discussion of the document *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* attracted great attention from the Greek Catholic bishops. Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj stressed in his speech at the sessions of the Commission for the Eastern Churches that without the Eastern Churches with their rich theological and liturgical heritage, the Catholic Church would have lost much and become poorer (Ivaniv 2021, p. 181). In the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, the council fathers stressed the importance of preserving “their liturgical rites and their legal order”, and if under certain circumstances they deviated from them, they should “try to return to their ancestral traditions” (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, p. 6).

Obviously, the most important decisions of the Second Vatican Council among underground Greek Catholics were those associated with such issues as changes in the rite, namely the elimination of Latin borrowings or the use of the word “Orthodox”, the easing of fasting, the use of the Ukrainian language in worship, and the status of the patriarchate for the UGCC (Galadza 2001, pp. 378–80). Undoubtedly, the ritual issue was the most dramatic, with numerous discussions and conflicts. Disputes between Easterners (vos-tochnyky) and Westerners (zapadnyky) were not new to the UGCC in the 20th century, and, unfortunately, the underground did not become a time for understanding. For many Greek Catholics in the underground, it was the Latinized rite of the UGCC that became an element of resistance to the Soviet system and its satellite, the Russian Orthodox Church. It is symptomatic that it was the Moscow Patriarchate, through the local episcopate, with the help of authorized representatives, that tried to “clean” the rite and traditions in the former Greek Catholic parishes. First of all, they were concerned about the rejection of Latin customs, such as supplication, the cult of the Sacred Heart of Christ and the Body of God, or the prohibition of kneelingly receiving Communion. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the authorities paid great attention to the commemoration of the Orthodox hierarchy by former Greek Catholics during services and the use of the word “Orthodox” (Oksiiuk 1950, pp. 38–39). In light of such processes, it is obvious that the majority of Greek Catholics did not perceive changes in the liturgical and ritual life of the UGCC. Bishop Sofron Dmyterko categorically expressed his disagreement. According to Fr. Kostiuk, Greek Catholics, unable to attend the underground liturgy, attended Roman Catholic churches, and there they were further steeped in Latin traditions, met with the use of the word “Orthodox”, since people immediately associated it with the “Russian Orthodoxy” that was forcibly imposed by the Soviet authorities (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Bishop Sofron Dmyterko, 06.11.1997, L’viv. P-1-1-419, p. 19). Hieromonk Damian Bohun categorically stated that these differences in rites became decisive for the time of the underground, since people, seeing the difference, remained faithful to the Catholic Church and thereby saved Catholicism in the region (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with fr. Damian Bohun OSBM, 06.06.1993, L’viv. P-1-1-150, p. 50).

The consistent defenders of those ritual changes were the L’viv bishops—Vasyl Velychkovskyi and Volodymyr Sterniuk. The priests in support were mainly from the L’viv archdiocese, and the Redemptorist or Studite hieromonks carried out the decisions regarding the Eastern traditions in the UGCC. Thus, the underground priest Metodii Kostiuk, who was forming under the influence of the famous Redemptorist Fr. Mykhailo Vynnytskyi, recalled that he always mentioned “Orthodox” and did not pay any attention to reproaches from the faithful (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Metodii Kostiuk, 14.03.2002, Pidkamin, L’viv region. P-1-1-645, p. 16). According to Fr. Kostiuk, Greek Catholics, unable to attend the underground liturgy, attended Roman Catholic churches, and there they were further steeped in Latin traditions (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Metodii Kostiuk, 14.03.2002, Pidkamin L’viv region. P-1-1-645, p. 15). This approach was observed in matters of the Latinized services: Greek Catholics perceived them as theirs and, therefore, did not want to refuse them. In an interview, the Basilian priest Sofron Popadiuk said that he did not fully understand those priests who oppose “prayer services, rosaries, Stations of the Cross” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Sofron Popadyuk, 05.09.2003, Ivasivka, Donetsk region. P-1-1-1497, p. 6). These Latinized traditions were indeed deeply rooted in the rite of the UGCC, and even those who worked on “getting eastern” did not

completely abandon certain services. For example, Fr. Liubomyr Surmakevych, who was close to Bishop Sterniuk, recalled that the archbishop himself, consistently defending the “eastern face of the UGCC”, always liked to pray the rosary for the unity of the Churches in the evening before going to bed (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Lubomyr Surmakevych, L’viv. P-1-1-635, p. 4). Many priests tried to maintain a certain balance, based on the realities in which the Church found itself. Thus, the underground priest Fr. Petro Geryliuk-Kupchynskyi, who served a long term in the camps, tried to reconcile the two camps, but according to him it failed (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Petro Geryliuk-Kupchinsky, 16.11.1993, Stebnyk, L’viv region. P-1-1-31, p. 17). Fr. Yaroslav Spodar CSsR agreed it was necessary to adhere to the Eastern traditions, but at the same time he emphasized that, on the other hand, people widely perceived “supplications, exposition of the Holy Mysteries . . . So, people loved it very much” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Yaroslav Spodar CSsR, 15.09.2004, L’viv. P-1-1-1640, p. 17).

No doubt, the most serious disputes were held around ritual issues or using the word “Orthodox”. All the other changes were accepted without any particular complaints. Thus, hieromonk Metodii Kostiuk, commenting on the easing of the discipline of fasting, emphasized that fasting should be performed according to the old rules, but for those who could not stand it, the Council gave them relief (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Metodii Kostiuk, 21.02.1993, L’viv. P-1-1-358, p. 58). The priests understood the needs of the time, that people in such circumstances of life could not always adhere to the old rules, and therefore the Church could reduce the requirements for the faithful (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Volodymyr Bagniuk CSsR, 14.02.1995, Kolomyia. P-1-1-491, p. 26). The matter of applying the native Ukrainian language in divine services received many favorable reviews. One of the laywomen of the Catacomb Church, who attended underground divine services at the Redemptorists’, recalled with great enthusiasm the moment when they began to use the Ukrainian language. According to her recollections, it was not easy, since all the books for divine services were in Church Slavonic and people were taught in the old way: “I actually knew the prayers in Church Slavonic. . . I just started learning Ukrainian again. Even when my grandmother taught me, she taught me exclusively in Church Slavonic. . . I think that there was a lot of good, because a lot of people simply did not understand some words and spoke that way, because they spoke, and distorted them, and so on. . .” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Maria Kobyletska, 23.08.2000, L’viv. P-1-1-1238, p. 6). There were certain reproaches here too, as one of the underground priests testified, that people were partly used to and knew the texts in the so-called sacred language (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Volodymyr Bagniuk CSsR, 14.02.1995, Kolomyia. P-1-1-491, p. 26). The underground Greek Catholics were quite calm about the issue of patriarchal status for the UGCC, which was actively discussed in the diaspora. Here, to some extent, a division into Easterners (vostochnyky) and Westerners (zapadnyky) was also observed: the former followed Slipyj’s opinion, the latter appealed to the lack of relevant decisions by the Vatican, and some expressed skepticism, since in their opinion the question of the UGCC’s existence in Ukraine was unclear (Galadza 2001, pp. 389–90).

Additionally, many underground pastors were not concerned with the implementation of the Second Vatican Council’s decisions, since they believed that the UGCC was facing a completely different challenge—to survive in the face of prohibitions and repressions. Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, one of the most active figures among underground clergy, in an

interview stated that “the Council’s decisions were not felt by the Greek Catholics here, because we were all united to fight against Bolshevik atheism, that enslavement. And our task was to fight for the rights of our Church. And that did not move us, it did not hinder us, we did not even enter the discussions” (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, 18.02.1994, Kolomyia. P-1-1-455, p. 26).

Another aspect of the Council’s influence on the underground UGCC was the inaccessibility of information. Thus, Fr. Ivan Repela, who studied in an underground seminary, expressed the opinion that Greek Catholics did not have the opportunity to develop along with the entire Catholic Church: “that new spirit, that great impetus that the Second Vatican Council gave the whole world, . . . it passed by us. Because we did not know those materials, we did not know the science of the entire Universal Church, of which we are also a part. . . . actually, in the scientific sense, where we could not develop, work, it is negative for us. These 40 years we remained at the level of the 1940s or 1950s post-war years in the development of church science, in the development of the Church, in the development. . . It is, definitely, a negative influence for us”. (AICH, Archive of the Institute of Church History (Архів Інституту історії Церкви), interview with Fr. Ivan Repela, 14.02.1993, Ivano-Frankivsk. P-1-1-275, p. 37).

7. Negative Response to the Council

It should be said that despite all the positive feedback and expectations, negative opinions about the Second Vatican Council and the papacy were also spreading among Greek Catholics in Ukraine. Thus, the Plenipotentiary of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Ivano-Frankivsk region claimed that among some underground Greek Catholics there was a certain distrust of Pope John XXIII and his successor Paul VI, since they did not publicly defend the persecuted Church and established relations with the Russian Orthodox Church (CSAHAAU, Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (ЦДАВО, Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України), fond 4648, description 3, case 291, pp. 32–33).

However, if we are to talk about the biggest opponents of the course of renewal within the Catholic Church during the underground period of the UGCC, then we should first of all mention the “Pokutnyky” or “penitents”. It was during the preparation and holding of the Second Vatican Council that the so-called “penitent” movement began forming in the Greek Catholic underground, which in the 1960s turned into a full-fledged sect. The ideologist and organizer of this movement was the Greek Catholic priest Ignatii Soltys, who originated from the village of Seredne, in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, and received ordination from the hands of the Stanislaviv auxiliary bishop Ivan Liatyshevskiy in 1948, when he was in exile in Kazakhstan. In fact, during the 1950s, Fr. Soltys conducted active pastoral activities in the L’viv and Ivano-Frankivsk regions. He was noted for his uncompromising attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox priests and insisted on the repentance of those who had “reunited”. Under his influence, Fr. Sophronii Ivantyshyn repented and returned to the UGCC, serving in the native village of Fr. Soltys (Skakun 2015, p. 472).

The founder of the “penitents” was an influential underground priest, collaborating with many priests and nuns. However, he later increasingly began to emphasize his uniqueness: at first, according to his statement, he was allegedly appointed by the Vatican as an underground bishop, but Bishop Ivan Liatyshevskiy categorically refused to perform his ordination (Skakun 2015, pp. 479–80). The next step in separating Fr. Soltys from the UGCC was the “visions” of his sister Anna Kuzminska, which initially concerned a spring

in a mountain in the vicinity of the village of Serednie. According to her prophecy, the Mother of God indicated the uniqueness of this place, which should become an important element of the salvation of all mankind. She claimed that the Virgin Mary appeared on Serednie Mountain and called the people to go on a pilgrimage there for penance and the consumption of holy water: “Whoever comes, repents of their sins and receives that water with faith, I will heal their soul and body and he will not perish when destruction comes” (Skakun 2015, p. 482). In the following years, Soltys’s sister continued to claim new apparitions of the Virgin Mary and prophesized the rapid decline of the Holy See. Father Ignatii also became a radical critic of the Soviet government, calling it “the government of the Antichrist”, demanding that his entourage break ties with public, social, and political life as much as possible, such as leaving the Komsomol, refusing Soviet documents, not working in state places, not going to school, etc. (Skakun 2015, p. 510). The actual break with the underground UGCC occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when, after the death of Pope Pius XII (October 1958), a new pope was elected—John XXIII. The visionary Kuzminska began to say that the current pope was an illegitimate one, the real Roman pope was Ignatius Soltys, and that the center of the Catholic Church was now in the village of Serednie. Later, her prophecies reached the point of proclaiming Soltys as “Christ in the second coming”, and herself as “the Blessed Virgin Mary”.

A split finally occurred between the Greek Catholics and the “Pokytnyky” during the years of the Second Vatican Council, which expressed in its documents the goal of establishing good relations with other Churches. At the same time, the Holy See took diplomatic steps towards socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union. Both these measures were unacceptable to Soltys and his followers. It should be noted that the majority of the Greek Catholic clergy and monastics rejected the “visions” of Fr. Ignatius’s sister. The only ones who supported him and became penitents were Fr. Anton Potochniak, a priest of the L’viv Archdiocese, and Fr. Stefan Gregorovych from the Transcarpathian region (Skakun 2015, pp. 492, 517). In fact, this penitential movement from the mid-1960s was perceived as something different from the Greek Catholic underground. Even in the statistical reports of the Soviet authorities, officials distinguished between Greek Catholics (Uniates) and “Pokutnyky”.

8. Conclusions

Greek Catholics, who were striving to keep their faith in underground conditions, did not have the opportunity to receive reliable information on the preparation and course of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, the second half of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1960s became a period where church structure was formed in the catacombs. It is symbolic that, at the time of the Council, in Ukraine there was a process of returning those priests who, under the coercion of the authorities, “reunited” with the ROC to the bosom of the UGCC. It was not massive, but it caused concern among Soviet officials. For many Greek Catholics, the news of convening the Ecumenical Council became a hope for the possible revival of the Church or at least the facilitation of its existence in the USSR. At that time, the question of the release of Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj from the Soviet camps was raised, and the active participation of Pope John XXIII made it possible to implement this plan. The release of the Head of the UGCC, his participation in the Second Vatican Council sessions, and the constant reminder of the fate of Greek Catholics in Ukraine became important elements of the struggle for the revival of the UGCC. Josyf Slipyj, who was proclaimed Major Archbishop and later received the title of Cardinal, demanded that the Vatican recognize the UGCC as the patriarchal Church, emphasizing its loyalty to the Apostolic See. At that time, the Greek Catholics in Ukraine accepted the Council’s decisions everywhere through the prism of ritual discussions that were inherent in the UGCC in previous decades.

The demands to depart from Latin customs rooted in the Eastern rite of the UGCC were very often encountered with misunderstanding and rejection. It can be said that for the underground UGCC, the Latinized forms of the rite became a certain element of resistance against the Soviet authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church. Obviously, not all the changes in traditions were accepted negatively. In particular, the reform of performing divine services in the native Ukrainian language received a lot of positive feedback. In general, it can be stated that the majority of Greek Catholics perceived the Second Vatican Council as a fact that had taken place but had not yet been implemented in the life of the UGCC. Nevertheless, it was the change in the Vatican's policy towards socialist countries and its response to the challenges of the world of that time that enabled the Apostolic See to more effectively assist the UGCC in its struggle for revival and legalization.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

| | |
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| AICH | Archive of the Institute of Church History |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| CSsR | Congregatio Sanctissimi Redemptoris |
| OSBM | Ordo Sancti Basilii Magni |
| ROC | Russian Orthodox Church |
| SALR | State Archives of L'viv Region |
| SSASSU | Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine |
| UGCC | Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |

Note

- ¹ Quote in Ukrainian: «Порвіть, розторгніть узи з Ватиканом. Який веде вас у темряву, в духовну загибель, завдяки своїм релігійним помилкам, а тепер хоче озброїти вас проти всієї вольнолюбної людськості, хоче поставити вас спиною до всього світу. Поспішайте повернутися в обійми вашої рідної неньки—Руської Православної Церкви!».

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- SALR, State Archives of L'viv Region (ДАЛО, Державний архів Львівської області), fond R-1332, description 2, case 25.
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Article

The Synodality of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church After Vatican II: A Need of the Faithful and Challenge for the Roman Curia

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Abstract: The Second Vatican Council and its Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* played a significant role in the life of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Vatican II became a moment of unity as all the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops, including the newly released from exile Josyf Slipyj, gathered in Rome. The bishops had the unique opportunity to form a synod of bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. This synod would help to unite the UGCC faithful scattered around the world into one ecclesial structure and preserve their Eastern Catholic identity in the diaspora. The laity, theologians, and most bishops were in favor of convening the UGCC synod of bishops. However, many challenges arose after the council, as the Vatican Curia did not allow the Ukrainian bishops to form a synod. The decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* brought a new perspective to the understanding of the Eastern Catholic Churches and their ecclesiology. The decree was actively used in UGCC discussions to support the convocation of a UGCC synod. Unfortunately, the Vatican did not confirm the legal character of the document, and its canonical power with respect to the UGCC synod was questioned. This paper will analyze the discussions and argumentation of the Ukrainian patriarchal lay movement, theologian Victor Pospishil, bishops, the Roman Curia, and their role in the convocation of the UGCC synod in 1980.

Keywords: UGCC synod; Josyf Slipyj; Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in diaspora; *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*; Vatican II; Victor Pospishil; Ukrainian patriarchal lay movement

1. Introduction

The last week of March of 1980 brought to the world the dramatic news about the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador on 24 March. Simultaneously, on a rainy Monday morning of 24 March, fifteen Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops gather together for a Divine Liturgy in the Sistine Chapel. Pope John Paul II was the main celebrant and the one who called these Ukrainian bishops from around the world to Rome for an official UGCC Synod. After the Gospel, he preached in Ukrainian and spoke about the See of Peter and unity. His sermon also referred to some of the documents promulgated at the Second Vatican Council. The choice of theme was not random, as it summarized the 15-year-long struggle of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to convene its bishops in a synod legally. That was not the first time these bishops gathered together for a common meeting, but this was the first time that the Vatican recognized it as a legal synod.

This event, which occurred 45 years ago in Rome, marks the culmination of discussions, negotiations, and sometimes conflicting ideas between the Vatican and the UGCC's bishops in diaspora, theologians, and laity that had been ongoing since Vatican II. This article aims to illustrate the path taken by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops from an episcopal

conference they organized before the Council to the official UGCC Synod convoked by the Pope in 1980. First, it will present a history of bishops' gatherings before and during the Second Vatican Council. We will examine the structure of these gatherings and their legal status. Next, the ideas on the synod of bishops in the Eastern Catholic Churches, as outlined in the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, will be briefly discussed. The following section of the article will focus on the post-council discussions on the synod of the UGCC bishops that took place within the UGCC in the diaspora and involved bishops, theologians, and the laity. First, it will present the ideas and activities of Josyf Slipyj regarding the Synod of Bishops, along with supporting and opposing views from other UGCC bishops. Then, theological reflections on the UGCC Synod and its legal status will be discussed based on the writings of canonist Victor Pospishil. The perspective of the laity on the Synod of Bishops will be represented by the ideas of the patriarchal lay movement that developed after Vatican II and actively promoted the patriarchate for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The description of the Vatican's and Pope Paul VI's position on this issue, as well as the role of Pope John Paul II in convoking the synod in 1980, will be woven into these three perspectives.

2. Episcopal Meetings Before Vatican II¹

Since the time of the Early Church (Acts 15), gatherings of leaders from diverse communities to discuss the challenges of the present and plan for the future have been an integral part of the Church's life. Metropolitan of Lviv Andrey Sheptytsky also recognized this need, as he organized two gatherings of Byzantine Greek Catholic bishops in Lviv in 1927 and Rome in 1929. These meetings gathered bishops not only from Galicia eparchies but also from Canada, the USA, Bulgaria, Uzhhorod, Prešov (now Slovakia), and Križevci (now Croatia). These conferences played an essential part in the formation of the gathering of bishops to unify the rite, liturgical practices, and church discipline of the Greek Catholic eparchies scattered around the world (The Development of Synodality in the Ukrainian Catholic Church 1985, pp. 9–13).

The Second World War tremendously influenced the life of the Eastern Catholics in Ukraine as the Soviet government persecuted the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and drove it underground after the so-called "Lviv Sobor" in 1946, and all the bishops were arrested (Bociurkiw 1996, pp. 167–78). The Church structures in Canada and the USA (established at the beginning of the century), as well as in South America and Europe, became the only places where the Church and its traditions could be preserved after the war. Therefore, when Ukrainian Catholic migrants from the displaced people's camps in Germany relocated to various parts of the world at the end of the 1940s, ecclesiastical entities were also established in Brazil, Australia, Argentina, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. These structures were founded by Rome, directly subordinate to the Roman Curia, and were not interconnected.

Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk from Winnipeg took the first step in uniting Ukrainian bishops and invited all Ukrainian Canadian bishops to a conference. It took place on 11–12 October 1951 in Ottawa (Motiuk 2005, p. 82). Bishops discussed various inter-exarchial ways of cooperation, including synod, seminary, and press. Therefore, this meeting might be seen as the beginning of the formation of the Ukrainian Bishops' Conference. The next gathering was of the Canadian and US bishops for the Ukrainians on 25 October 1954 in Washington, DC. It was decided that this first common meeting would not discuss some significant problems but would be limited to discussions on the uniformity of the regulations of Lenten and forbidden times. Not all bishops accepted the invitation. Bishop Ambrose Senyshyn from Stamford, CT, decided not to attend this meeting. I emphasize this moment because later, bishop Senyshyn would also, for some

time, refuse to participate in the meetings of the Ukrainian bishops during the Second Vatican Council.

The next stage in the development of the Ukrainian Bishops' gatherings was the establishment of a Conference of the Ukrainian Episcopate of the Free World, which was founded on 12 February 1957 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In general, this conference was convened five times before Vatican II, scilicet every year. In 1960, the Ukrainian Bishops approved the "Statutes of the Ukrainian Catholic Conference," which had been prepared by Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk and described the purpose and aims of the conference. Articles two and four of those statutes specifically emphasized that the conference exists to protect the tradition, rite, and unity of the UGCC bishops in the diaspora, and it is not equivalent to a synod; therefore, it does not have the canonical force of law (Motiuk 2005, pp. 83–87). As we can see, the conference did not possess juridical power.

Typically, the conference convocations lasted only a short time, around three days, and were connected to other Church events or celebrations. Such a short duration evidently makes it difficult for a conference to engage in fruitful work. Bishop Andrej Sapelak (from Argentina) noted that the work of the Ukrainian Bishops' Conference was not particularly active; however, it provided them with the opportunity to represent the Ukrainian Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council rather than merely being a ritual addition to its locally dispersed episcopate (Sapelak 1967, p. 57).

3. Episcopal Meetings During the Council

The Second Vatican Council provided a valuable opportunity for the Ukrainian bishops to gather together for more than three days and to foster closer cooperation. During each session of the Council, the Ukrainian Bishops' Conference met every Thursday (Hermaniuk Diaries 2012). Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk was the one who most actively promoted the idea of bishops' collegiality among the Ukrainian bishops. In the first year, only the Ukrainian bishops of the Diaspora were present at these meetings. Sometimes, they were joined by the Melkite Catholic Bishops.

In 1963, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj joined the meetings after his liberation from exile in Siberia. The return of Metropolitan brought new life to the development of the Ukrainian Bishops' Conference. Following this, during the second, third, and fourth sessions of the Second Vatican Council, three convocations of the Archiepiscopal Synods, as they were named by Slipyj, took place in Rome. (Motiuk 2005, p. 88) However, there were some canonical difficulties in convening those synods. Before the council, Metropolitan Hermaniuk had been the head of the conference. In 1963, he handed over this governing power to Metropolitan Slipyj, whose title of Major Archbishop was confirmed. The latter, being a strong-willed person who sought to unite his church and its bishops, decided to alter the conference's purpose and develop it into a Synod of the bishops. (Hermaniuk Diaries 2012, p. 123) In Slipyj's opinion, the Synod of Bishops is an integral part of the Eastern Church's existence. Thus, the change in name from conference to synod was not a formal action but a step towards the creation of a Ukrainian patriarchate and the establishment of the Ukrainian Church as an Eastern Church *sui iuris*. Yet, at the same time, it was not canonically justified in the Vatican's view. (Tataryn 2013, pp. 85–86)

During the Council, the work of the Bishops' Conference was a necessary but complicated process. Not all bishops were adherents to its development. Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk wrote in his diary of the Council's first session that the Basilian bishops (they belonged to the Order of St. Basil the Great), Ambrose Senyshyn (USA), and Jose Martenetz (Brazil) were opposed to certain questions regarding a common pastoral letter to the Ukrainian faithful (Hermaniuk Diaries 2012, pp. 78, 85). This counterposition of the Basilian bishops was not a unique case. One year later, Metropolitan Hermaniuk mentioned in

his diary a conversation with Metropolitan Slipyj about “The politics of the Basilian Fathers against our Bishops Conference” (Hermaniuk Diaries 2012, p. 143).

In 1964, during the Second Archiepiscopal Synod, Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk presented a project for the creation of the Lviv-Halych Patriarchate to the Ukrainian bishops. At that time, the Basilian bishops did not attend the meetings and continued to oppose the establishment of a Ukrainian Catholic Church patriarchate. Moreover, they critiqued the person of Metropolitan Slipyj. According to Metropolitan Hermaniuk, Metropolitan Ambrose Senyshyn from Philadelphia was “the main instigator of this division” (Hermaniuk Diaries 2012, p. 184).

It is essential to identify the reasons behind these divisions. The Basilian monastic Order had a different perspective on the Ukrainian Church’s structures and hierarchy. At the same time, Metropolitan Hermaniuk attempted to determine the reason behind Senyshyn’s actions. He suggested that the Metropolitan from the United States became “a victim of some sort of political, pro-Russian agitation” (Hermaniuk Diaries 2012, p. 220). Jaroslav Skira, a researcher and translator of Metropolitan Hermaniuk’s diary, considers that these conflicts and instabilities may have three inner reasons. These are “a lack of a clear system of governance, differing visions of ecclesiology and personal conflict” (Skira 2011, pp. 322–40, 338–39).

Therefore, we can see that the Ukrainian bishops were not united, and some of them accepted only the authority of Rome rather than uniting with others and accepting the authority and power of the Major Archbishop. That is why the work of the Ukrainian Bishops’ conference faced internal obstacles caused by misunderstandings among the bishops, which were also influenced by external factors.

4. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* on the Synod of Bishops

The decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches was promulgated on 21 November 1964. This document was prepared and written by the Commission for the Oriental Churches. It consists of 30 paragraphs, organized into eight parts. Unfortunately, this document does not have a separate part dedicated to the Synod of Bishops in the Eastern Catholic Churches. However, some of the paragraphs can provide insight into how it views synods in the lives of Eastern Churches.

Orientalium Ecclesiarum 9 talks about the synods in connection to the patriarchs: “The patriarchs with their synods are the highest authority for all business of the patriarchate, including the right of establishing new eparchies and of nominating bishops of their rite within the territorial bounds of the patriarchate, without prejudice to the inalienable right of the Roman Pontiff to intervene in individual cases.” The same connection synods have to Major Archbishops—according to *OE* 10. Therefore, we can see that the synod holds the highest authority in the Church and assists the head of the Church in caring for and developing the Church in all its needs.

The decree does not mention anything about the establishment of a synod in Churches that do not have one. It only mentions the possibility of establishing new patriarchates in *OE* 11: “Seeing that the patriarchal office in the Eastern Church is a traditional form of government, the Sacred Ecumenical Council ardently desires that new patriarchates should be erected where there is need, to be established either by an ecumenical council or by the Roman Pontiff.” We may presume that this statement can be applied to the synods.

Already in the 1960s, when *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* was promulgated, many of the Eastern Catholic Churches had their exarchates, eparchies, or even metropolias established outside their territorial boundaries. According to the decree *OE* 7, bishops who were appointed to those ecclesiastical entities still belonged to the hierarchy of the Mother Church: “Wherever a hierarch of any rite is appointed outside the territorial bounds of

the patriarchate, he remains attached to the hierarchy of the patriarchate of that rite, in accordance with canon law.” The challenge was that the canon law for the Eastern Churches was promulgated by the Vatican only in the 1990s, and the decree itself did not have legal power.

If we combine the ideas of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 7, 9, 10, and 11, then we can presume that the Ukrainian Catholic Major Archbishop, who has the same rights as Eastern Catholic patriarchs, can convoke a synod of bishops who belong to his hierarchy (even if they are appointed outside *territorium proprium*) and this synod has authority and juridical power to help Major Archbishop in governing the Church. This interpretation of the decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches will be further explored in the subsequent sections of the article.

5. The Positions and Activities of the Ukrainian Bishops in Diaspora on the Question of UGCC Synod

The activities and theological ideas of Cardinal and Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj play an essential role in the question of the synod of the Ukrainian bishops. In Slipyj’s opinion, the Ukrainian Bishops’ Conference and its powers were insufficient for the Ukrainian Church to develop and grow. Therefore, he sought permission to convoke a Synod of the Ukrainian Church after Vatican II, as performed by the other Eastern Catholic Churches.² The Ukrainian bishops had a pre-synodal meeting in December 1966 and decided to have a synod in 1967. After that, Cardinal Slipyj communicated this decision to Pope Paul VI and the Prefect of the Eastern Congregation, Cardinal Testa, with a request to allow the convocation of the synod. (Mykola Marksteiner-Mishchenko 2018, p. 266) This request for the transition from the conference to a synod was based on articles nine and ten of the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. Cardinal Testa responded that it is impossible to convoke a synod and that the conference of the Catholic Bishops of the Ukrainian Rite is the only legitimate gathering. Some changes could be made to its statutes, but only by the Holy See.³ Slipyj attempted to persuade Pope Paul VI that the Ukrainian bishops required a synod to unify their Church and preserve it, and the right to, based on OE nine and ten. He received a response from the Secretary of State Cardinal Cicognani that “a detailed examination of the issue showed that the convening of such a synod creates considerable difficulties of a legal nature, [. . .] connected primarily with the interpretation of Art. 10 of the Council Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches.”⁴ (Mykola Marksteiner-Mishchenko 2018, p. 270) Therefore, the unity and synodality of the Ukrainian bishops here depended on the interpretation of the decree by the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Decrees of the Second Vatican Council.

However, Slipyj did not wait for the interpretation (Mykola Marksteiner-Mishchenko 2018, p. 271). In July 1969, he sent a letter to all the Ukrainian bishops with a tentative plan for a possible synod in September. The Ukrainian bishops in Canada responded actively to this call and held a pre-synodal conference at the beginning of September 1969. Bishop Isidore Borecky from Toronto asked Metropolitan Hermaniuk to organize a commission to develop a constitution for the Ukrainian Church, similar to the constitutions of other Eastern Churches, which should then be discussed by all eparchies.⁵ The Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops took place in Rome from 29 September to 4 October 1969. Slipyj sent its decisions (which included 21 articles) to the Prefect of the Eastern Congregation, Cardinal de Furstenberg.⁶ The Prefect responded to Cardinal Slipyj that he had no right to convoke a synod, which would have legislative powers because he was not on his canonical territory of Ukraine, and there were no bishops who would be under his jurisdiction. The cardinal also stated that the mentioned gathering was a free meeting of bishops. He underlined that such a synod could be called only with a special mandate issued by the Holy Father. However, de Furstenberg mentioned that the new canon law for

the Eastern Catholic Churches would introduce some changes that would make synodal gatherings possible.⁷

Following this reaction from Cardinal de Furstenberg, Slipyj sent a response, arguing, based on *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 7, 9, and 10, that he had the right to convoke a synod. He underlined that “the decree is binding not on the basis of the future Eastern Code, but on the basis of the Code of the Decree.”⁸ This position of Slipyj indicates that he viewed the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* as the law for the Eastern Catholic Churches. In another letter to de Furstenberg, he stressed that “The basis of the future development of our Church can be only the conciliar decree *De Ecclesiis orientalibus catholicis*, and the Union of Brest, as the rules of law. [...] If Your Eminence wants to deny it, you may do it, but you will have to take on the responsibility regarding the possibility of a schism or at least of great confusion”⁹ (Babiak 2005, p. 112). His response demonstrates his willingness to accept OE’s imperative to establish patriarchates where necessary (OE 11) and that his jurisdiction extended to the rite rather than being limited to a specific territory (cf. OE 7).

In the following years, the Ukrainian Bishops from Canada and South America were in favor of convening a synod or conference of Ukrainian bishops. The Canadians invited Slipyj to Canada and planned the synod for the Summer of 1971 in Winnipeg.¹⁰ But Slipyj was not allowed by Rome to attend. Bishops Sapelak and Martenetz (from Argentina and Brazil, respectively) hoped for a meeting but rather as a reorganized conference of the Ukrainian bishops. They proposed to conduct it in Rome in the second half of September 1971. Both groups of bishops saw the need to meet and discuss the urgent needs: the future synod of bishops in Rome, the permanent synod of the Ukrainian bishops, the election of a successor for Slipyj, and the liturgical and pastoral activities of the Ukrainian bishops in the places of their service, which should be discussed collegially. The difference was that the Canadians supported Slipyj and viewed the gatherings as a synod, whereas South American bishops regarded the meetings as a conference and adhered to the Vatican’s position.¹¹

Bishop Ivan Prashko from Australia also stressed that it should be a synod. He emphasized that there was no need for conferences when the bishops could hold a synod, which, under the leadership of the major archbishop, is a traditional type of episcopal gathering for the Eastern Churches. Prashko stressed that Vatican II, in the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 5, “solemnly declares that the Churches of the East, as much as those of the West, have a full right and are in duty bound to rule themselves, each in accordance with its own established disciplines, since all these are praiseworthy by reason of their venerable antiquity, more harmonious with the character of their faithful and more suited to the promotion of the good of souls.”¹² Therefore, by imposing conferences on the Ukrainian bishops, the Eastern Congregation was not following the OE’s decisions regarding the Eastern Catholic Churches.

Bishop Avhustyn Horniak, OSBM, from Great Britain, did not support Slipyj’s idea of unifying the Ukrainian Catholic eparchies and exarchates in the patriarchate. In his letter to Metropolitan Senyshyn, with whom he was a friend, he mentioned that “The life of our individual Churches on all continents of the world, although they undeniably form one ritual and more or less ethnic unity, known as the Ukrainian Catholic Church, is so diverse that it would be difficult to formalize them into one jurisdictional unit.”¹³ He also did not see the reason for the convocation of the synod of Ukrainian bishops, as the existing legal order, organized and headed by the pope, was the right one for the coexistence of all Ukrainian Catholic bishops with one another and with the Vatican. “If the Holy See changes the existing legal order to some other—a new one, then we will have to adhere to that new legal order, and for now, we must follow the existing legal order (See Note 13)”

As you can see, Bishop Horniak favored Roman ecclesiology concerning the UGCC's status as a conference of bishops.

Metropolitan Senyshyn from Philadelphia did not participate in the episcopal gathering that wanted to be recognized as a synod in Rome in 1969. In his letters to Vatican officials, he opposed Slipyj's jurisdiction over all Ukrainian Bishops and did not support the synod. In Bishop Ivan Prashko's opinion, Senyshyn was the primary reason for the separations and disagreements in the conferences before the council and after the return of Slipyj. Also, Senyshyn gave duplicitous reasons for not attending the synod in 1969. He was convinced that if Senyshyn cooperated with the other Ukrainian bishops, there would be fewer difficulties and challenges in the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church.¹⁴ In 1975, Slipyj wrote a critical letter to Senyshyn regarding his ignoring the synod's decision to issue joint Christmas and Easter pastoral messages by publishing his own. He also mentioned that three other bishops did not obey or recognize the synod.¹⁵

Even though Senyshyn participated in the 1971 meeting of the Ukrainian bishops, he continued to be opposed to the idea that they were synods. In 1973, he complained to the Secretary of the Eastern Congregation, Archbishop Mario Brini, that

...for ten years already the Ukrainian Catholic Episcopal Conference is lacking a president. Cardinal Slipyj has assumed control of everything. At the proposal of His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Slipyj refused to be the permanent president of an Episcopal Conference but rather took matters into his own hands to convene so-called "synods" and prepared a Constitution for the Ukrainian Catholic Church without the agreement and approval of the Apostolic See. Because of this state of affairs chaos has reigned as well as the unfounded criticism aimed at the Apostolic See from the part of some of the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops.¹⁶

This letter reiterates Senyshyn's position regarding the Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops. He, unlike Slipyj, Hermaniuk, and the majority of other Ukrainian bishops, did not view the synod as an essential component of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's existence and did not consider the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* to be its basis.

Slipyj and those bishops who supported him in the struggle for the Ukrainian Synod gathered together for the meetings despite prohibitions from the Vatican. Until 1975, they continued to refer to their gatherings, which took place in 1971, 1973, and 1975, as Archiepiscopal Synods. They also attempted to establish a permanent synod, which consisted of a few bishops who represented the Synod and served as an advisory group to the head of the Church. This permanent synod met twice, in June 1972 and February 1973. Further opposition from the Vatican compelled Ukrainians to rename their gatherings from the synod to meetings of the Episcopate of the UGCC. They gathered in this format three times in 1976, 1978, and 1979 (The Development of Synodality in the Ukrainian Catholic Church 1985, pp. 21–25).

However, Rome's position changed significantly in 1980, when Polish cardinal Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II. After years of prohibitions, in response to the Ukrainian bishops' request, he wrote a letter to Cardinal and Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj, announcing his support for a synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops and allowing Slipyj to convoke synods in the future. The Pope wrote the following:

The major archbishop, 'at the will of the supreme pontiff', will be able to convoke other synods, either to handle business or to propose candidates for the episcopate. He will proceed as follows:

- For each individual synod, a request to be able to hold it will be submitted to the pope, together with a disclosure of the questions to be considered.

- Having obtained authorization, the major archbishop will call a synod of all the Ukrainian bishops.
- The declaration of 25 March 1970, regarding *aggregatus* will be applied to such synods.¹⁷ (Ukrainian Vatican Synod 1980)

This move of Pope John Paul II was a recognition of the rights of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and its bishops to be united under the leadership of the major archbishop in a synod. It also confirmed the lawfulness of the synodal assemblies of the Ukrainian bishops. Nevertheless, restrictions were placed on the major archbishop and synod, as the convocation of a synod and its agenda required the approval of Rome.

6. Victor Pospishil and His Perspective on the UGCC Synod of Bishops

The question of the synod of the Ukrainian Catholic bishops was related to the question of the jurisdiction of Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj. The letters of Cardinal de Furstenberg in 1969–1970, mentioned in the previous part, stressed that Slipyj had no right to gather bishops into a synod, as he was in Rome and did not have jurisdiction outside his archeparchy in Ukraine. This prohibition became a reason to search for arguments in favor of the rights of a major archbishop of Lviv to convoke a synod and his jurisdiction over other Ukrainian bishops and faithful worldwide.

Prominent theologian and canon lawyer Victor Pospishil,¹⁸ who served as a priest in the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia since the 1950s and advised UGCC bishops on canonical questions not only in the US but also in other eparchies, wrote extensively about the question of the UGCC's synodality. He saw the achievement of the jurisdiction of the major archbishop over all the Ukrainian Catholics worldwide as the first step in the process of achieving the patriarchate. He saw it as the only way, according to the existing law.

The Pope and the S. Congregation may be wrong in their position, but they certainly possess—in the Catholic system of church government—the legal power to do so, and their declarations possess the character of law. However, if we are able to demonstrate that the law itself as it was established by the same Holy See desires that the Ukrainian Catholic Church enjoy autonomy as do other Eastern Churches, than we can expect that the reluctance of Rome to grant it will appear in its proper characteristic. (Pospishil 1971, p. 8)

Pospishil's attitude was very rational and canonical.

To better understand the argument, I will briefly present the canonical situation surrounding the Major Archbishop of Lviv. According to the declaration issued by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches on 23 December 1963, the Metropolitan of Lviv, Josyf Slipyj, was regarded as a major archbishop (as of canons 324–339 of *Cleri Sanctitatis*) (Acta Apostolica Sedis 1964, p. 214). This move was not an elevation but a recognition of the previously existing character of the metropolitan and its ecclesial structures. (Pospishil 1971, pp. 9–10) When *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 10 equalized in rights patriarchs and major archbishops,¹⁹ it gave a reason to think that the jurisdiction of the major archbishops was the same as the Eastern Patriarchs. But *OE* 7 and its footnote 9 led to *Cleri Sanctitatis* 216, which stated that the Eastern Patriarchs did not have jurisdiction over the faithful of their rite outside of their canonical territory (Pospishil 1971, pp. 10–11; Pospishil 1965, pp. 26–28). Pospishil criticized these limitations and presented examples of giving jurisdiction to a bishop outside his territory or on the territory of another bishop in the Orthodox Churches in the past. He stressed that the rule of territoriality had been abandoned by some autocephalous Orthodox Churches, but the Roman Catholic Church continued to prohibit Eastern Patriarchs from exercising their jurisdiction over their faithful.

Simultaneously, the Latin Church continued to expand its activity in the historically Eastern territories²⁰ (Pospishil 1971, pp. 11–12).

Pospishil wrote that even the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 10 did not qualify as enacted law but rather suggested future legislation where Ukrainian bishops might be able to have a synod (according to OE 7, 9, 10), (Pospishil 2021, p. 276), which would include all the bishops.²¹ However, that synod would not be able to appoint bishops outside the canonical territory, as the pope appointed them. Therefore, Pospishil did not understand the position of Cardinal de Furstenberg and the Roman Curia, who did not recognize the gatherings of the Ukrainian bishops as synods in 1969²² (Pospishil 1971, pp. 13–14, 18).

Here, it is important to mention another document issued by the Vatican—the Declaration *Apostolica Sedes*, which was issued on 25 March 1970. It stated that the Eastern bishops outside of the territory of their patriarchates could participate in the patriarchal synods, and candidates for the episcopacy could be selected by the pope out of three candidates proposed by a patriarch and the synod (Pospishil 1971, p. 15). Unfortunately, those norms were not confirmed for the Ukrainian bishops, as Cardinal de Furstenberg wrote in his letter from 10 April 1970,²³ that the Ukrainian bishops could not have synods but only conferences (Pospishil 1971, p. 16).

In search of a solution, Pospishil provided another example that supported the convocation of the synod and the major archbishop's jurisdiction. When the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* was promulgated, Josyf Slipyj issued a declaration stating that the decree would officially take effect on 7 April 1965. In the Roman Catholic Church, the date on which the OE officially took effect was 22 January 1965. The question of the date was significant as, according to it, article 18 of OE and the new marriage form had to take effect, as was mentioned in the third chapter. Due to the difference in dates, the Congregation clarified that for the Ruthenians in the USA, the date is based on the one given by Rome, and for Ukrainians—according to Slipyj's declaration. Pospishil underlined that this decision declared that Ruthenian eparchies were not under the jurisdiction of the major archbishop of the Ukrainians, but the Ukrainians—were (Pospishil 1971, p. 17). This, in his opinion, set a precedent for the Vatican's recognition of the jurisdiction of the major archbishop over the Ukrainian eparchies worldwide. Unfortunately, the Roman Curia did not consider this example in its subsequent decisions regarding the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian major archbishop and his synod. Pospishil wrote:

There is hardly any recorded instance known in the history of the Eastern Catholic Churches that an assembly of bishops was treated in this manner in front of a startled faithful as these Ukrainian bishops. What they had so solemnly legislated went down the drain together with their resolution to request the Holy Father graciously to erect an Ukrainian patriarchate. They were simply informed that the Ukrainian Catholic Archiepiscopate had not been established in the manner of the Oriental patriarchal churches as Art. 10 of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* had envisioned. (Pospishil 1971, p. 19)

Pospishil expressed his disappointment with the Vatican's decision to prohibit the gathering of Ukrainian bishops in a synod. He stressed that some decisions of the synod could be rejected, but the Roman Curia could approve the Ukrainian bishops' ability to hold a synod (Pospishil 1971, pp. 20–21).

He mentioned five reasons that could be behind the Vatican's prohibition to convoke the synod: (1) *The Eastern Congregation opposed it*. It was actively used by the Ukrainian media, but the theologian did not think that it was the main reason. (2) *The rapprochement between the Vatican and communist Moscow*. Pospishil presumed that the Soviets would see any rights or privileges given to the Ukrainian Church as an act of enmity. (3) *The new Ecumenism*. In his opinion, the Vatican saw the Eastern Catholic Churches as obstacles

to the ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and it would be better if they would disappear.²⁴ (4) *Opposition of some Ukrainian Bishops*. Pospishil mentioned that none of the Ukrainian bishops made public or official statements against the synod or the patriarchate. Only Metropolitan Senyshyn was absent and did not sign the petition alongside the other bishops.²⁵ Additionally, Slipyj's strong character may have been one of the reasons why some bishops were reluctant to follow his lead as patriarch. (5) *Absence of the right motivation*. The theologian stressed that the political motifs were stronger than ecclesiastical ones among the laity. For those immigrants who were more politically oriented, the patriarchate would serve as a surrogate for the independent Ukrainian state. However, he mentioned that the strong bond between the church and state was one of the characteristics of the Eastern Churches. The request to establish an autonomous Church can also be justified by the previous unjust activities of the Roman Curia and Latin bishops concerning Ukrainian Catholics in the USA (Pospishil 1971, pp. 26–29). All these reasons had ecclesiological, social, and political character.

Pospishil's analysis of the possibility of convoking a synod of Ukrainian bishops provides a deeper canonical and theological perspective on the situation. This theologian supported the idea of a synod of Ukrainian bishops but also recognized the numerous canonical stumbling blocks. Interpretation of the articles in the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* was another, as the Vatican authorities did not view it as law but rather as advisory to the existing law of *Cleri Sanctitati*. Pospishil's interpretation agreed with the canonical impossibility of receiving a patriarchate, but according to him, the decree confirmed the right of the Ukrainian bishops to gather as a synod in accordance with the ancient traditions of the Eastern Churches.

7. Patriarchal Lay Movement and Its Perspective on the UGCC Synod

This movement began its development at the end of Vatican II. The dispersion of Ukrainian Catholic emigrants around the world after World War II, the persecution of the Church in the Soviet Union, and the need to preserve their identity were among the main factors that influenced the creation of this lay movement. Therefore, the Ukrainian Greek Catholics in the diaspora, especially in the United States, began to develop and engage in various theological and social discussions, activities, and occasionally conflicts, in which they sought to argue in favor of the establishment of a Ukrainian Patriarchate (Babynskyy 2020). After the council, they established a broad network, which later evolved into a world organization. The laity, who belonged to the movement, felt empowered by the council's call to be active and began to develop their own strategy for preserving a distinct Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

The question of the synod of the Ukrainian bishops was one of the aspects that the patriarchal laity viewed as integral to the governance of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. After the Second Vatican Council ended, they expected their bishops to gather together and resolve the challenges their Church was facing at that time.²⁶ The Ukrainian laity, who participated in the patriarchal movement, did not view the Ukrainian eparchies as separate entities but rather as a unity within one particular Ukrainian Church. The national factor played its role in this, as Ukrainian ethnicity was one of the unifying factors.

The laity of the patriarchal movement also saw the meetings of the Ukrainian bishops during the sessions of the Second Vatican Council as synods (Kuzyk 1990). Their decisions, for example, on the liturgical changes proclaimed in the pastoral letters during the Council, were considered the law and obligatory for all Ukrainian eparchies in the free world. However, these gatherings officially had the status of the bishops' conference in the eyes of the Roman Curia. Therefore, when the Vatican began to prohibit gatherings of the

Ukrainian bishops after the council, as their synodal status had not been approved, the laity actively protested these actions.

As mentioned above, the Ukrainian bishops gathered in Rome in September 1969 for a meeting, which they referred to as a synod, and the Prefect of the Eastern Congregation responded that the synod was invalid, and it could not be a valid conference either, as it was convoked not in accordance with the statutes.²⁷ This position of the Vatican received a very negative reaction from the patriarchal movement. They emphasized that the Ukrainian Church could not afford to wait for several decades and required immediate changes.²⁸ The patriarchal laity took umbrage with Cardinal de Furstenberg's letter to Josyf Slipyj and picketed in Philadelphia during a major celebration at the Ukrainian cathedral in December 1969.

It was the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Ukrainian Metropolia in Philadelphia, PA. The laity protested Metropolitan Senyshyn's behavior, including his failure to attend the synod in September 1969, his decisions not to support their struggle for the patriarchate, his refusal to recognize Slipyj's jurisdiction, and his allegiance to the Roman Curia and the Eastern Congregation²⁹ (Sorokowsky 2009, p. 37). Protesters carried slogans against Senyshyn and de Furstenberg. The last one received a hostile reception from the laity because of his letter to Cardinal Slipyj, in which he emphasized that Slipyj had no authority to convene a synod of the UGCC and make decisions for his church outside his canonical territory in Ukraine.³⁰

A similar reaction among the laity occurred in 1976 when Cardinal Phillippe, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, sent a letter to all the Ukrainian bishops in which he reminded the bishops about the prohibition on gathering as a synod without the pope's permission (Babiak 2005, pp. 136–37). The activists of the patriarchal movement in the USA criticized the Ukrainian bishops for their silence and saw them as obedient to the Vatican administrators.³¹

The further meetings of the Ukrainian bishops were called synodal consultations to avoid conflicts (Monchak 2016). In 1976, the Vatican also did not permit Slipyj to attend the Eucharistic Congress in the USA. The laity of the patriarchal movement presumed that it was performed to avoid the possibility of all the Ukrainian bishops meeting as a synod. The reaction of the patriarchal activists was immediate and, in some moments, radical.³² For example, the following headline of a leaflet called Ukrainian Catholics to give their blood to the Red Cross as a symbolical way to protest the prohibition for Slipyj to attend the Eucharistic congress in Philadelphia: "Our Homeland is lost! We are losing our Church! Now we are ready to give our blood!"³³

Another moment connected with the UGCC's synod and the question of primacy was the appointment of new bishops for the Ukrainian eparchies in the diaspora. The first event was the consecration of two auxiliary bishops, John Stock and Basil Losten, for the Metropolia of Philadelphia in May 1971 (Fedorowich 1971). The second event was the appointment of three new bishops (two for Canada and one for Europe) that happened in 1974. These appointments were much needed by the Church, but the patriarchal movement protested the way in which they were performed. In their opinion, the Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, with Slipyj as its head, had the right to choose new bishops, and this right was confirmed by the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* nine and ten as well as by the documents of the Union of Brest.³⁴ Here, again, we can see that the patriarchal movement interpreted the decree in a way that conflicted with Rome.

According to the motu proprio *Cleri Sanctitati* 392 (2), "Bishops are freely appointed by the Roman Pontiff, or if lawfully elected, confirmed by him." The Vatican did not view the gathering of Ukrainian bishops as a synod, so it continued to appoint bishops for the Ukrainian eparchies without confirmation from the Ukrainian bishops, instead appointing

them solely according to the pope's discretion. For the laity, the gatherings of the Ukrainian bishops had Eastern synodal legitimacy, and they expected that they would gather and appoint new bishops. Therefore, patriarchal activists wrote to the Ukrainian bishops and Vatican authorities requesting that they either recall the nominations or confirm them with Josyf Slipyj.³⁵

The patriarchal movement viewed the unity of all Ukrainian bishops gathered together as a synod, functioning according to Eastern Christian norms and the decisions of the Second Vatican Council. They perceived the actions of Vatican officials as hostile when they prevented formal episcopal gatherings or refused to recognize them as synods. In their opinion, the Vatican did not follow the decisions or the spirit of the council (Rezoliutsii 1967). Further complicating the situation was that these laypeople were not always guided by religious or theological considerations in their activities. Often, people who were voices of the movement were driven by political reasons and the need for national unity in the diaspora. However, some of them saw themselves as missionaries who had to share the news about the particularity of the Ukrainian Church, its synod, and its patriarchate.³⁶

8. Conclusions

When you know your rights and stand up for the truth, even if it takes years, you achieve justice. With these words, I wanted to summarize the 15 years of struggle by Ukrainian bishops and laity for the Vatican to allow the convening of the Synod of the UGCC. Obstacles to achieving this goal included misunderstandings among the Ukrainian bishops themselves, differing approaches to interpreting the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches by the Vatican and the UGCC, as well as outdated canon law.

The path taken by the bishops, some theologians, and laity in their attempt to prove the right of Josyf Slipyj to convene the Synod was difficult, and each group pursued this goal in its own way. The Major Archbishop and Cardinal Josyf Slipyj, together with the Ukrainian bishops (with the exception of a few), defended their rights in the Vatican Curia, wrote numerous appeals and letters, and made a concerted effort to maintain unity among themselves, despite the distance and dispersion around the world. Theologian and canonist Victor Pospishil developed theological and canonical justifications for the right of Ukrainian bishops to meet as a synod. The laity, in turn, through their *sensus fidelium*, reminded the Roman Curia in various ways, sometimes radical, of the rights of the UGCC.

The position of the Vatican and Pope Paul VI regarding the right of Josyf Slipyj to convene the Synod of the UGCC was based on the Roman Catholic vision of the relationship between the Pope and his bishops, as well as the canonical norms established before the Second Vatican Council. All Ukrainian eparchies and metropolias in the diaspora were created by the Vatican. Each of them was considered a separate unit not connected to the other. Similarly, the Pope maintained contact with the Roman Catholic dioceses worldwide. Even the name "Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy" indicated that it was viewed as an ethnic diocese rather than part of a distinct Eastern Catholic Church. Josyf Slipyj, as Archbishop of Lviv, was outside his canonical territory, not by his own will, but due to the Soviet Union's occupation of Ukraine. However, this fact was one of the main arguments used to prohibit convening the Synod.

Therefore, the efforts of Ukrainian Greek Catholics in the diaspora to achieve recognition of their bishops' meetings as legal synods posed a challenge for the Vatican on both a canonical and ecclesiological level. However, time, the persistence of Josyf Slipyj, and changes in the Vatican contributed to the fact that Pope John Paul II convened the Synod of the UGCC bishops in March 1980, recognized the previous meetings of the bishops, and allowed future meetings of the Synod of the UGCC. These meetings still had many limitations, but this synod marked a major breakthrough in uniting the scattered eparchies

of the UGCC around the world and in having the Vatican perceive them as a single Church *sui iuris* rather than separate, independent eparchies.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

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| AMSMG | Archive of the Missionary Sisters of the Mother of God |
| AUAP | Archive of the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia |
| AUET | Archive of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Toronto and Eastern Canada |
| OE | <i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i> |
| UGCC | Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church |

Notes

- 1 Some parts of this article are based on my Ph.D. Thesis, “The Reception of the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* by the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia 1965–1980,” University of St. Michael’s College, 2024.
- 2 At that time, Armenian Catholic Church, Chaldean Catholic Church, and Melkite Greek Catholic Church had their synods of bishops, and all of them were patriarchates.
- 3 This response of Cardinal Testa represented canon law of that time.
- 4 Letter from Cardinal Cicognani to Cardinal Slipyj from 8 February 1969.
- 5 Letter from Borecky to Hermaniuk on 29 July 1969, folder Metr. Hermaniuk, AUET.
- 6 Letter from Cardinal Slipyj to Cardinal de Furstenberg from 25 October 1969, AMSMG.
- 7 Letter (388/69) of Cardinal de Furstenberg to Cardinal Slipyj on 1 December 1969, AUAP.
- 8 Letter (sub secreto) from Cardinal Slipyj to Cardinal de Furstenberg from 15 December 1969, AMSMG.
- 9 Letter from Cardinal Slipyj to Cardinal de Furstenberg from 21 September 1970.
- 10 In January 1971, the Ukrainian Canadian bishops had a meeting and decided to invite Slipyj to visit Canada in June of that year. Metropolitan Hermaniuk sent him the official invitation, where he mentioned that the goal of the visit would be to strengthen the unity of all the faithful and the Church under one patriarchal and synodal leadership. He also suggested visiting the USA in May so there would be no conflicts and separations there, which would influence the whole Church. Letter of Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk to Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj on 15 January 1971, folder Cardinal Joseph Slipyj, AUET.
- 11 Letter of Bishop Borecky to Cardinal Slipyj on 31 May 1971, folder Slipyj Joseph Patriarch, AUET; Letter of Bishops Martenetz and Sapeliak to Cardinal Slipyj on 9 June 1971 (a copy sent to Borecky) folder Slipyj Joseph Patriarch, AUET.
- 12 Letter (marked as confidential) from Bishop Prashko to Bishops Martenetz and Sapeliak from 10 July 1971, AUAP.
- 13 Letter (AE/67/B_{II}_AC) from Bishop Horniak to Metropolitan Senyshyn from 23 September 1967, AUAP.
- 14 Letter of Bishop Prashko to Bishops Martenecz and Sapeliak from 10 July 1971, AUAP.
- 15 Letter of Cardinal Slipyj to Metropolitan Senyshyn from 10 January 1975, AUAP.
- 16 Letter of Metropolitan Senyshyn to Archbishop Mario Brini, Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches from 3 August 1973, AUAP.
- 17 Letter from Pope John Paul II to Cardinal Slipyj from 5 February 1980.
- 18 Victor Pospishil taught at Manhattan College in New York. He was not of Ukrainian descent and was born in 1915 in Vienna. He received his doctorate at Gregoriana University in Rome and was devoted to the Byzantine rite and the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Fr. Victor also published a commentary on the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*: Pospishil (1965). For more about the life of Fr. Victor, see Pospishil (2001) and (Chirovsky 2006).
- 19 Footnote 12 gave *motu proprio Cleri Sanctitati* can. 324–27 as the basis of the paragraph.
- 20 Here is an example of the Syro-Malabar Church’s experience when its priests were forbidden to conduct missionary work in their own rite. For more, see Koodapuzha (2007, pp. 57–59).

- 21 Pospishil gave an example of the Armenian Patriarch, who was allowed by the pope to have a synod outside of his canonical territory (at that time the center of the Armenian Patriarchate was in Lebanon) in Rome in 1911. Therefore, Cardinal Slipyj, who was in Rome and could not go to Ukraine could be allowed by the pope to gather a synod outside his canonical territory as well.
- 22 The synod in 1969 was the first one that had some legal decisions, dissimilar from the previous ones (just liturgical questions). Pospishil mentioned that the Ukrainian press, as well as the bishops, used the term *synod*, as it was the usual term that described a gathering of the bishops.
- 23 This was the first answer to the petition of the Ukrainian bishops to erect a Ukrainian Patriarchate of Kyiv and Halych. The Cardinal communicated that the patriarchate, as well as the synod of the Ukrainian bishops, are not possible. He proposed to reorganize the conference of the Ukrainian bishops instead. For the full text of the letter, see (De Fuerstenberg 1971, pp. 299–300).
- 24 Here it is important to mention that there were some tensions between Vatican II texts: *OE* affirmed Eastern Catholic Churches and *UR* affirmed Eastern Orthodox Churches who objected to the existence of Eastern Catholic “Uniates.”
- 25 “The American Ukrainian bishops also feared that by majority resolutions they could be burdened with financial contributions to which the bishops constituting the majority would add nothing because of their circumstances” (Pospishil 1971, p. 26).
- 26 “The resolutions of the meeting of laity and priests in Philadelphia on 13 September 1969,” folder 1969 Synod Rome, AUET.
- 27 Letter from Cardinal de Fuerstenberg to Cardinal Slipyj from 1 December 1969, AMSMG.
- 28 The leaflet of the Committee for the Rite Traditions and Language of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the USA and Canada, AUAP. The leaflet also called for the laity to send letters of protest to Pope Paul VI.
- 29 Letter of the Society for the Promotion of the Patriarchal System in the Ukrainian Catholic Church to Metropolitan Senyshyn with the request to cancel celebrations and become part of the synod from 4 December 1969, folder Ukrainian Cath. Church Patriarch Committee, AUET.
- 30 Letter (388/69) in Italian and its English translation from Cardinal de Fuerstenberg to Cardinal Slipyj on 1 December 1969, AUAP.
- 31 Society for the Patriarchal System in the Ukrainian Catholic Church (New York, Philadelphia branches) *Information letter* no. 2 (14 July 1976), AUAP.
- 32 On 26 June 1976, Ukrainians protested that decision of the pope in front of the house of the apostolic delegate in Washington DC. Eva Piddubcheshen prepared pamphlets in the name of patriarchal society to protest the decision and named Slipyj as the Vatican’s Prisoner. Fr. Meletius Wojnar in his letter about that event mentioned that there were nearly 50 people and some of them were throwing eggs at the house. Later Bishop Losten, who was apostolic administrator at that time, sent his apologies to the apostolic delegate on 28 June 1976 (Letter 768/76 O), AUAP.
- 33 Leaflets of the Patriarchal Movement from July 1976, folder Patriarchate Organization of Ukr. Cath Church, AUET.
- 34 Letter of the Regional Council of Societies for the Patriarchal Structure of the Ukrainian Catholic Church to Metropolitan Senyshyn from 15 June 1971, AUAP.
- 35 Letter of the Society for the promotion of the patriarchal system in the Ukrainian Catholic Church to Bishop Borecky from 10 June 1971, AUET; letter of the World Association for the Erection of the Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Catholic Church to Bishop Isidore Borecky from 10 July 1974, AUET; letter of the Council of the Ukrainian organizations in the USA for the patriarchate of Ukrainian Catholic Church to Cardinal Jean Villot Secretary of State, 3 August 1974, AUET.
- 36 Leonid Rudnytzky mentioned this in a private conversation with the author on 16 January 2024.

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Article

The Eastern Catholic Churches and the Restoration of Unity Theology

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Abstract: The Church of Christ is unity in diversity. Around the great centers of diffusion, the rites have been gradually defined as “the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of the history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested” (*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* can. 28 § 1). At the same time, the necessity of the existence of the sacred ministry for the celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacraments is the basis for the establishment of the hierarchy of bishoprics that are formed ontogenetically and diachronically around the primary diffusion center, recognized as the Mother Church or, starting from the IVth–Vth centuries, as the Patriarchates. The tensions between dissident factions culminated in the Ecclesiastical Schism of 1054, which separated Eastern Christianity from the Roman Church. The restoration of the unity of the Constantinopolitan Churches of Central and Eastern Europe began with the Union of Brest–Litovsk (1595–1596), which generated a process of gradual entry of the territories of the Eastern Churches into unity, in 1700 reaching Transylvania. The Greek Catholic Churches fought a pioneering struggle in asserting their own traditions in order to restore the unity of the Church. The Eastern churches that re-entered the unity of the Catholic Church faced a change of ecclesiological paradigm, being in a permanent struggle to preserve their own specificity and to affirm the unity. The signatories of the Union Acts rejected “the Uniatism” from the beginning, a fact accepted today within the theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, the canonical evolution and the treatises of Greek–Catholic theology being the result of a process of experimentation “from within” of unity and catholicity in the context of the modern and contemporary era. The United Churches have paved the way for the restoration of unity between East and West, being obligated to grasp different forms of canonical manifestation of unity in the absence of a Patriarchate in communion with the Church of Rome, during which they offer a reflection that fully grows through a theology of restoring the unity of the Church, benefiting today from the ecclesiological paradigm shift of Vatican II and by the conceptual tools provided by the traditions and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

Keywords: Church unity; Code of Canons of Oriental Churches; ecumenical theology; Eastern Catholic Church; theological reconciliation; unity; Vatican II

1. Introduction

In a few centuries of manifestation as ecclesial entities in the communion of the Church of Christ as unity in diversity, the Greek Catholic Churches affirmed the confession of apostolic faith, which they expressed in the apostolicity of their own tradition and of their own rite (doctrinal, liturgical, disciplinary heritage, etc.), as a plenary unity that

materialized historically in the context of the confessionalization of culture and society of the European Modern Age (Barta 2003, p. 32).

Within the Catholic Church there are several schools of thought differentiated by their specific ways of dealing with issues, a single magisterial position, and more currents of thought that develop certain specificity or have a series of their own authors who translate the message of faith in historical-cultural and national language into the doctrinal orthodoxy specific to the Catholic Church in its universality as unity in diversity. The same thing happens in the heart of the Orthodox Churches, gradually distinguishing the nuances that define and delimit Greek theology from Russian/Slavic or Romanian theology, each with separate authors and distinct elements that develop the common core of doctrinal orthodoxy through nuances specific to their own rite and the sensibilities of the local national Churches they represent.

We distinguish two sources that feed Greek Catholic theology: the United Romanian Church is ontogenetically the Romanian Church, which confers unity in the Romanian Greek-Byzantine rite and common history until the year 1700, and the United Romanian Church affirms this historical identity in the theological dialogue proper to a unity in diversity of a One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, promoting Romanian specificity in the opening of universal theology, “translating” and “updating” at the same time theological thinking in the historical and cultural language specific to Romanian Christianity.

In the case of the same cultural and spiritual environment, there is no simple taking over as a grafting of another tradition onto its own common branch. In the case of the United Churches it is about a real return to the origins and the valorization of the elements that express unity in diversity, especially since the institutional appearance of the United Churches is not an arbitrary act of establishing an artificial ecclesial entity, but is the recognition—obviously with good and bad aspects at times—of an internal process specific to the living Church of Christ that tends towards its eschatological mission (Himcinschi 2020, pp. 17–18).

Ecumenical theology is a necessity of our days and one can find the convergences and reconciliation of the positions of each individual Church or Confession as the basis of a theological dialogue, which can become the foundation of reconciliation where there are misunderstandings or historical traumas in which Christian communities have been involved, critically recognizing the limits of the transposition in life of unity and the “unity in diversity” of the Church of Christ in its catholicity.

In order to situate Romanian Greek Catholic theology among the other schools of thought, we need to start from the definition of the rite according to the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*. We follow the delimitation of Romanian theology within the development of the Romanian rite in order to reach the specific difference which consists mainly in the reconciliation of points of dogmatic divergence according to the Florentine Council and some original positions.

2. Romanian Greek Catholic Theological School

Developed in the Romanian cultural-spiritual environment, ontogenetically, Romanian Greek Catholic theology has its origins in the Romanian Church as a common branch of the two ecclesial entities that were delimited after the year 1700 and that evolved in the last three centuries according to their own specificity and the conditions imposed by institutional-administrative hierarchical evolution. The Slavic Greek-Byzantine rite becomes “Romanian” through the introduction of the Romanian language into the liturgy, then through the theological, ascetic and mystical productions written in Romanian for the faithful of the Romanian Church.

The starting point for the delimitation of a theological school consists in defining the rite of a Church as patrimony.¹ Thus, the Churches of the Greek–Byzantine or Constantinopolitan rite are nuanced differently depending on the culture, local history and sensitivities of the peoples. Especially, the spoken language leads to the delimitation of the Greek–Byzantine, Greek, Slavic, Romanian, etc. rites. Apart from nuanced peculiarities in the celebration of the Romanian liturgical rite compared to the Greeks, the South Slavs, from Central Europe or the Russians, the most important distinctive element for the Romanian Church, which is the basis of the construction of the theology of the Romanian Church, is the use of vernacular language in religious worship. Romanians had already translated the main liturgical texts at the end of the 17th century (Vanca 2018).

Starting in the 18th century with the Romanian liturgies that took over the translation of the orthodox Bishop Antim Ivireanul, the united Romanians promoted the Romanian liturgical language. The united Romanians could celebrate freely in the Romanian language, unlike its sister Church on which the Phanariots imposed the Greek or Church Slavonic language, despite the fact that the “sacred languages” were completely removed from the vernacular; if Slavic speakers understood the meaning of the words spoken in the Church Slavonic language, the vast majority of Romanians, the clergy and the people alike, did not always know the liturgical orders and expressed themselves intuitively, having little knowledge of the doctrine content. However, the educated elite were aware of these aspects, the printing of liturgies and prayer books that circulated throughout the Romanian Church, united or not, demonstrating the need to ensure worship in the Romanian language especially through the Holy Liturgy, the sacraments, and sacramentals, which are at the center of parish life (Goția 2006, p. 102).

For the sister Romanian Church, this process starts “from the bottom up, outside of the ecclesiastical authority, starting with the texts of first necessity: readings, sermons, prayers out of personal piety”, which “was claimed, assumed and, subsequently, controlled by the church hierarchy”, while the United Romanian Church assumed this desire from the top down, programmatically, becoming the letter of the law starting with the decisions of the Union Council under Theophilus (1697), taken over by Athanasius (1698), recorded in the Book of Testimony, clearly stipulating the desire to celebrate officially in the Romanian language, a unique request made by the Romanian unions in contrast to the Russian (Ukrainian–Belarusian) clergy (Buzalic 2021).

The Romanian language penetrated education and is institutionalized, especially in Transylvania, against the backdrop of the German Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), which was not anti-clerical but, on the contrary, relied on the Church for the emancipation of the people, wanting the removal of feudal practices and the modernization of society. Despite the difficulties at the beginning of the Union in 1700, in a memorandum from 1732, Bishop Inocențiu Micu-Klein (1692–1768) defended the rights of Romanians and asked Emperor Carol VI to establish Romanian schools. The Romanian language is institutionalized and modernized through Bishop Petru Pavel Aron (1709–1764), the founder of the first systematic Romanian schools inaugurated on 11 October 1754, through the schools in Blaj (Public School—elementary school, Latin School—middle school, which became secondary school and high school, and School of Priesthood—higher theological seminary), true “fountains of gifts” which left their mark on the development of Romanian culture and theology. Even now, the foundations of the library are laid, a monastic seminary is established, the Blaj printing house appears, which, from now on, edits the texts necessary for the conduct of worship in the United Romanian Church, and the main theological productions of its own appear.

This qualitative leap that occurred in the 18th century is the consequence of the emancipation of the Romanians according to modern education, taken as a model after the

European education of the time, but it is also the result of the training of the clergy and teachers in university centers from Buda, Vienna or Rome, and especially of the ability of the elites to develop and affirm the Romanian language among the philological studies of Romanistics, gradually laying the foundations of linguistic studies and “grammars” of the Romanian language. Gradually, the spiritual, political and social emancipation movement of Transylvanian Romanians will be achieved through the Transylvanian School, the most important contribution in the 19th century being the introduction of Latin script instead of the Cyrillic alphabet used in medieval writings.

These can be seen in the evolution of the liturgical language that best expresses the level of understanding of the theological content it expresses, as we have seen through the editions of the liturgies, the liturgy of the hours (*horologion's*) and the prayer books (*euchologions*) in the Romanian language printed by the two Romanian Churches. If we compare the theological language of the 16th–17th century writings or the Books of Testimony—Acts of the Union, signed by the fathers of the union councils with the editions printed starting from the 18th century, we notice that the Romanian language is gradually becoming a mature language, capable of expressing the philosophical-theological, exegetical, spiritual literature subtleties, etc., which characterize the Romanian Greek–Byzantine rite differentiated by the culture and historical circumstances of the development of the Romanian people among other European nations (Goția 2006, pp. 5–11).

The Romanian Greek Catholic school of thought generates a theology of the Church of the Romanian Greek-Byzantine rite, expressed in the Romanian language, intended for the pastoral care and emancipation of the people (*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* can. 28 § 1). This development of theology affects the entire Romanian Church. We will continue to dwell on the specific differences in Romanian Greek Catholic thinking.

3. The Theology of Restoring the Unity of the Church of Christ

Romanian historiography focuses generally on the Romanian geocultural environment and on the 17th–18th centuries, when the United Romanian Church was formed as a distinct ecclesial entity from the non-united Romanian Church, which would later be defined confessionally as the Romanian Orthodox Church. Also, restrictively, in historical studies only the demand for social rights for the Romanian people and the geopolitical and military context of the time are mentioned as motivational, minimizing the doctrinal motivations and the events related to the movements to restore the unity in Europe of the Transylvanian space, the most important event being the Union of Brest–Litovsk (1595/1596) (Ghitta 2000, p. 109).

The situation of the Alba–Iulia Union in 1700 in the ecclesiastical context must be seen through an integral analysis that follows the main phenomenological and chronological milestones on the scale of the universal and local Church. The United Churches appear territorially in concentric circles that propagate starting with the Union of Brest–Litovsk, passing through the Union of Uzhhorod (1656), and reaching the Union of Alba–Iulia (Ghitta 2000, p. 110).

The Christian Church is a unity in diversity, there are several diffusion centers in Antiquity (the future Patriarchates of the Pentarchy) that generate the rites in which a whole liturgical, spiritual, disciplinary, and theological heritage of its own can be found. In the first Christian Millennium, the foundations of the main directions of the development of theological thought are laid, several schools are outlined circumscribed by methodologically ordered solutions that will shade eastern and western patristic thinking, from which the traditions of the medieval and modern schools of thought will later emerge. In the face of heresies, the magisterium of the Church began to institutionalize itself through the consensus of the Ecumenical Councils and the promulgation of dogmas

that delimited doctrinal orthodoxy from erroneous interpretations. The orthodoxy of the doctrine is manifested in the catholicity of the Church of Christ, in the pluralism of the theological schools.

Ontogenetically, the polemic between the Latins and the Greeks begins with Patriarch Photius of Constantinople (†897), who raises the issue of the unilateral introduction by the Latins of the expression “from the Father and from the Son” (filioque) in the pneumatological article of the procession of the Holy Spirit. The question of the filioque, without a doubt, remains the thorniest of all the issues to be discussed and examined in the future by the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church (Alexopoulos 2021, p. 203).

Gradually will be added discussions regarding the term purgatory introduced by Latin scholasticism, the traditional differences regarding the matter of the Holy Eucharist in different local Churches, and especially the traditional use of unleavened bread in the Latin Church and the canonical issue of papal primacy. Pneumatology would not have become a conflicting issue between the Churches had it not been for the struggle for power and influence between Constantinople and Rome.

Apart from the philosophical nuances that led to the development of Western theology along the lines of defining the person as a subsisting relationship, the filioque is introduced as a theologoumenon (discussions, proposals, and speculative solutions in a concrete problem by a current of thought, without having the plenary authority of the Church), which was necessary for the environment of the Church in Spain against the background of the presence of migrants who received Christianity in an Arian form, hence the need for a clear catechetical explanation of equality in the deification of the three persons.

For the Latin Church, the expression filioque was introduced into the liturgical Creed only under Pope Benedict VIII in 1014, a gesture that aroused the protest of Mihail Keroularios (†1059), Patriarch of Constantinople, against the background of already existing tensions and controversies.

The schism of 1054 led to the separation of the Church of the Latin rite from the Constantinopolitan Church, with the Eastern Patriarchates and all the local Churches that were formed later, in the medieval period, being drawn into the schism and receiving the spiritual patronage of Constantinople. This is the situation of the Romanian Church (1359—Wallachia, 1391—Monastery from Peri/Maramureş, 1401—Moldova) (Prunduş and Plăianu 1994, p. 45).

The restoration of unity has remained a constant concern of the Church, but, concretely, Greek Catholic theology is the result of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Constantinople regarding reconciliation around points of dogmatic divergence. The Ecumenical Council of Ferrara–Florence (1438–1439) succeeded for the first time in clarifying the “points of dogmatic divergence” based on theological, patristic, and scriptural arguments.

The adoption of a specific tradition or the prevalence of one over the other was not imposed, but there was a mutual recognition of the theological traditions that generated the Latin or Greek interpretive line in dogmatic matters (filioque, purgatory, and the matter of the Eucharist), the fourth point relating to the common ecclesiology of the Church of the first millennium, and the tradition of the order of precedence and the specific position of the successor of Saint Peter in relation to the main historical patriarchal centers. In this context, Greek and Latin theologians are the exponents of a few theological schools that throughout history develop complementary aspects in the speculative deepening of the mystery of a transcendent God who created and maintains creation in existence and governs through divine Providence. There are differing views whether the council of Ferrara–Florence succeeded in clarifying “points of dogmatic divergence”. Even though

the Counter Council convened by Mark Evgenikos rejected and de facto annulled the Union of Florence, the solution of reconciling theological positions between Western and Eastern schools of thought was the only path of reconciliation accepted by the future United Churches. Unions of Eastern Churches with Rome were established repeatedly and in different ecclesiastical and cultural contexts, both on the level of national/local communities and on the personal level (Avvakumov 2021, p. 26).

Basically, God remains unchanged, the cultural language of historical man and the horizon of his knowledge evolves, imposing a permanent process of “translation” of the divine message into a language that is accessible and acceptable to the concrete man living in history. Added to all this are the cultural models and the evolution of European civilization, with Christian roots, in the direction of the secularization of society and the desacralization of life, which raise new barriers between God—the Author of the message of salvation—and man—the beneficiary and audience of this message. This desire to restore the unity of the Church of Christ is a constant of the Greek Catholic school of thought as the theology of restoring unity.

4. The Evolution of Greek Catholic Theological Thought

With the Union of Brest–Litovsk (1595/1596), Greek Catholic theologians, together with Roman Catholic missionaries, published the first works of catechetical nature, then, controversially, reached true theological treatises of an ecumenical character, promoting the specificity of the patristic and liturgical traditions of the East against Western theology, and critically popularizing Western theology in its own cultural environment. In general terms, the Union of Brest of 1595–1596 denotes a decision of the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Kyiv to switch its jurisdiction from the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Bishop of Rome under the condition of preservation of its ecclesial autonomy and Byzantine liturgical practices (Wooden 2021, p. 44).

The first stage is the period of catechisms and apologetic literature. The first theological productions from the Greek Catholic environment of the Polish–Lithuanian European space are of a polemical nature, being generated by the discussions on the four points of dogmatic divergence that led to the schism of 1054. The beginning of the revival of Russian spirituality in the unity of the Catholic Church benefited from the contribution of the theological writings of Piotr Skarga (+1612), Ipatie Potie (+1613), and Iosafat Kunțevici (+1623). The spirituality of Eastern Christianity, in crisis due to the incisive growth of Calvinism and oppressed by civil laws that favored only citizens of the Roman Catholic denomination and the nobility that had adopted Protestantism, could be saved, in their view, by restoring the Christian unity around Rome, destroyed by the schism of 1054, and by guaranteeing to remain in doctrinal orthodoxy to what is common to the spirituality of universal Christianity (Minea 1990, p. 68).

We meet the same ideas in the spiritual environment of Transylvanian Romanians, with Greek Catholic theologians offering a rich native production, in accordance with magisterial positions and faithful to their own spirituality, qualitatively at the level of the development of theology in the universal Church, starting in the 18th century and lasting until 1948.

The period around the moments of the “Union” is dedicated to catechisms intended to make up for the lack of university theological training of the clergy of the Greek Byzantine rite and especially to expose the concordance of the statements of the Greek or Latin theological schools in relation to the “points of dogmatic divergence”. The Catechisms, the Instruction of Faith, the Confessions of Faith, etc., go through special development after the invention of printing. They have a didactic role, being primarily intended for the initiation of children in the doctrinal content of the faith.

The publication of the Catechisms in the vernacular languages in Transylvania was made during the rule of the Calvinist Princes. The conversion of Orthodox Christians and Catholics to the ideas of the Reformation was desired, but in the Romanian Orthodox environment only the idea of liturgical celebration and Romanian education was inoculated. From a historical perspective, the first modern catechisms are printed by Martin Luther in the language of the people (*Der Kleine Katechismus*—“Small Catechism” and *Deutscher Katechismus*, also called *Der Große Katechismus*—“Big Catechism”, both published in 1529), the most important reformed catechism being printed under the name of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). The ideas of Lutheranism, Calvinism, or Zwinglianism are promoted by preachers and by means of translations of “catechisms” into the vernacular languages. To counteract the ideas of the Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) decides to publish in the spoken languages the instructions of faith that become the Roman Catechism, a work addressed to parish priests: *Catechismus, ex decreto Concilii Tridentini, ad parochos, Pii Quinti Pont. Max. iussu editus, Romae, 1566*. Unlike the catechetical literature of the patristic period, Reformed or post-Tridentine Catholic catechisms reflect confessional theological aspects (Bonda and Ghișa 2009, p. 36).

The modernization of theology and the Catholic Reformation triggered in the Western Catholic environment produced a change of vision on Roman centralism and on canonically expressed unity and, looking from within the Roman Catholic Church to extrapolate to the level of the entire Catholic Church, a change of ecclesiological vision was produced that differed from the model of restoring the unity of the Church expressed in Ferrara–Florence, the latter much closer to the ecclesiological model of the first Christian Millennium. However, in the dialogue between East and West, the starting point of a process of restoring unity remained the reconciliation regarding the four points of dogmatic divergence exposed at the Schism of 1054.

In the Greek Catholic theological environment of the Union of Brest–Litovsk, in the 17th century, the Catechisms of Archbishop Iosafat Kunčevici and Metropolitan Iosif Veliamin Rutski were printed and they addressed most of the clergy in matters of dogmatic moral theology and sacraments in the absence of a modern philosophical–theological and spiritual training program. After the Synod of Union in Brest, we are gradually moving towards the emancipation of the Eastern clergy through the elites trained in Western universities and scholars who know and live the spirituality of Greek Byzantine Slavic or Romanian Christianity.

Influences from the politics of the Catholic Reformation are inevitable; in the Polish–Lithuanian space, the Jesuit Piotr Skarga (1536–1612) stands out as a preacher, apologist and polemist, the first rector of the Vilnius Academy founded in 1579 by Stepan Báthori (*Alma Academia et Universitas Vilnensis Societatis Iesu*), where the united clergy was initially formed. The Vilnius theologians studied patrology in a particular way in a spiritual environment where the Oriental and Eastern worlds naturally intertwine, a pressing necessity being the defense of the orthodoxy of the faith in the face of the spread of Calvinist theology.

The same effort to counterattack Calvinist proselytism is made in the non-united Church by the Metropolitan of Kiev, Petru Movilă (1596–1646). In the polemical spirit of the Catholic Reformation, but also with the anti-Catholic accents generated by the tensions within the Polish-Lithuanian State and the Ukrainian territories where the Cossack Hetmanates were manifested, Petru Movilă is concerned with the emancipation of the clergy and the people, leaving to posterity a *Small Russian Catechism* (intended for the “Ruthenian” population, actually Ukrainian–Belarusian, later translated into Russian) and especially the work *The confession of the Orthodox faith of the Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church of the East*, in which he eruditely addresses the theological controversies of the time (Ghibu 1975, p. 213).

This Catechism of Petru Movilă will also be translated into Romanian; after that, the text was discussed, “corrected”, and accepted by the Orthodox world at the Synod of Iași (15 September–27 October 1642). The struggle for the preservation of doctrinal orthodoxy is a constant of the time, the elites of the Greek, Russian, or Romanian non-united Churches being aware of the danger of distorting theology through the penetration of false modernization trends promoted by the Calvinist catechisms, as also observed in the 22 points of the “Instructions” given by Patriarch Dositej of Jerusalem to Athanasius Anghel in 1698 (Săsăujan 2010, pp. 196–98).

Polish, Ukrainian, or Romanian specialized literature mentions the fact that one of the motivations for restoring unity according to the Florentine model was the desire to reject the heterodox practices brought by Calvinist proselytism through the policy of principles favorable to the Reformation. In the first stage, the unity took the model of the Catholic Reformation and the Catechisms, through which the main landmarks of the *Confession of Faith* and its own liturgical and spiritual specificity are expressed, in apostolic continuity.

The first “Greek Catholic” theological production intended for Romanians is the translation from Latin into Ukrainian and into Romanian of the Catechism of Joseph de Camillis (Mârza 2002, p. 8). It outlines the methodology of the subsequent theological works from the Greek Catholic environment, starting from the reconciliation of the points of dogmatic divergence in Florentine expression. The arguments and the general structure adopted by the Catechisms and edited in the spirit of the Catholic Reformation are taken up in order to reach the problem of the unity in diversity of the Catholic Church or the definition of the “law” that would only be promulgated three centuries later through the Code of Canons of the Eastern Church’s definition given to the “rite”. De Camillis asserts the legitimacy and dignity of the Eastern Rite, speaks of “Our Church of the East” or “Our Greek Church”, but also of the complementarity of the evolution of Latin or Greek thought, appealing to the arguments of the Florentine Council (Mârza 2002, p. 183).

We will find this starting point of what we can call the “theology of the Confessions of Faith” in the documents of the Union, from Brest–Litovsk to Alba–Iulia, and it best expresses the essence and specificity of Greek Catholic theology. Theophilus (+1697), in the document of union, expresses simply, without theological arguments, the Florentine resolution in a form that has primary legal value (Cipariu 1885, p. 183).

The Declaration of Union or the *Book of Testimony* made by the Great Council under the pastorate of Athanasius (+1713) reflects a series of concerns related to the concordance of the Eastern synodal tradition with the evolution of post-Tridentine Roman centralism and the civil legislative evolution specific to modern states, best expressing the anchoring in the tradition of the Romanian Church through the heritage of the Romanian Greek Byzantine rite (Bârlea 2000, p. 27).

At the present time, we can adopt an objective position on the events that followed in understanding the complexity of the historical–ecclesiastical context. In the first stage, the “united ones” face the contradictions between the Florentine expression, specific to a medieval ecclesiological vision, and the reality of a modern society in the full process of modernizing the relationship between political power and society, including through the “confessionalization” of civil society. For Greek Catholics today, in a historical–theological analysis, the term filioque is recognized in the spirit of the Florentine Council, in recognition of the meaning of the Latin theologoumenon in the sense of the origin of the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Symbol (Buzalic 2021, p. 287).

Octavian Bârlea (1913–2005) introduced into theology the theory of “the two unions”: the “first Union”, the one signed and accepted by the Romanians in the spirit of the ecclesiology of the Florentine Council, and the “Second Union”, called “uniatism”, imposed

by the Viennese court with the ratification of the Union (1701), which applied the canonical adaptations provided for by the Council of Trent (Bârlea 1983, pp. 29–30).

We must view in the same way, objectively, the personal errors and excess on the part of Kollonitz and the conditional re-ordination of Atanasie Anghel, a gesture that generated polemical discussions related to the “change of the ancestral law” and about “uniatism”, as well as the context of the practical transposition of an ecclesial unity in the unilateral evolution of the canonical legislative body in the wake of Roman centralism in the absence of a united Patriarch who could exercise administrative levers in the leadership (Bârlea 2000, p. 22).

Also, in the absence of Eastern theological educational institutions at the level of modern education, except for a few scholarship holders in the main European university centers, the clergy was initially formed according to ancestral customs, the brief training in matters of faith and liturgy and letters of recommendation from the deacons being sufficient for the ordination of priests. Like the Union Church of Brest, the bishops receive an adviser on doctrine and canon law through what goes down in history as the “Jesuit theologian” (Bărbat 2022, pp. 15–20).

Contrary to preconceived ideas, in fact the Jesuit missionaries were obliged to comply with the provisions of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* which referred to the observance of four dogmatic points. In addition to this requirement, they added: the union to be accomplished in faith; to respect the rite and discipline of the Eastern Churches in all their integrity and purity; and, with respect to fasting, feasts, customs, ceremonies, and private prayers, not to urge believers to switch to the Latin rite. These transitions, exceptional and argued for regarding certain concrete needs for the good of believers (primarily for political reasons), being authorized only by the Holy See.² These are explicitly provided in the *Monita ad misionaries in partibus orientalibus* from 1669 (Nilles 1885, p. 113).

Generally the Jesuits supported the interests of the united Romanian clergy. They sought to reconcile the positions of the authorities in the case of tense situations that required recourse to the canonical provisions of the time, in establishing the institution of “directors” they ensured de facto interim leadership during the vacation period of the episcopal seat, and they supported the schooling and training of candidates for the priesthood, but above all they ensured the publication of the *Catechisms*, which I mentioned previously, which ensured the first stage of the transmission of key theological knowledge in matters of faith and morals and the emancipation of the clergy and the people.

After the death of Atanasie Anghel, on 9 November 1713, the electoral synod initially proposed the Jesuit Francisc Szúnyog to take over the episcopal chair, but he refused due to the provisions of the rules of the Society of Jesus. Without idealizing the entire period of operation of the “Jesuit theologian” institution (1701–1773), this fact proves the sympathy and trust that the united Romanian clergy have towards their activity during the period of the modernization of the Romanian Church (Pâclișanu 1923, pp. 149–50).

There follows the period of polemical writings intended to generate real Disputations for the purpose of the critical development of autochthonous theology, the argumentation being anchored in Eastern theology and Romanian spirituality by Grigore Maior, Silvestru Caliani, Atanasie Rednic, and Gherontie Cotore (Buzalic 2005, pp. 75–76).

In the 19th century, in the development of Romanian Greek Catholic dogmatic theology, Simion Micu’s works of compilation of Western theology (*Fundamental or General Dogmatic Theology*—1876 and *Special Dogmatic Theology*—1881, both processed after Joanne Schwetz), as well as the work of Bishop Iosif Papp Szilagyí (*Enchiridion Juris Ecclesiae Orientalis Catholicae*—1862), which popularized Eastern ecclesiology in order to facilitate adaptation, are noteworthy in the development of Romanian Greek Catholic dogmatic theological, canonical, normative provisions, with the traditions and Churches of other rites.

The beginning of the 20th century brings with it the expressions of conceptual maturity, both the methodological lines and especially the nuance of Greek Catholic theology, being quantified in reference volumes for any researcher in the field of dogmatic history. One of the most representative works is the theological compendium of Metropolitan Vasile Suci (*Fundamental Dogmatic Theology*—1907 and *Special Dogmatic Theology*—1908, vol. II in 1927). Vasile Suci's treatises are unique as an approach to the environment of Romanian theology, for systematizing and using the complementarity of meanings in the East and the West, with related explanations, for their originality for Catholic theology in representing the application of the starting point specific to the Council of Ferrara–Florence and adopted by all the Greek Catholic theological schools (the concordance of the statements regarding the “points of divergence”), but especially for the introduction of some arguments taken from the Byzantine liturgical texts and from the spirituality of Eastern Christianity (Buzalic 2008, pp. 90–103).

In all these works, as well as in the publications of theology teachers from the first half of the 20th century, the content of the arguments is taken from the tradition of the Eastern Church. There are examples that cite the works of Greek Patrology and liturgical texts specific to the Greek–Byzantine rite, in methodological continuity with the works of predecessors. In the interwar period, the Romanian Church clearly expressed the main landmarks of a theology specific to the Romanian Greek Catholic school of thought, which was the fruit of the critical reception of the authors who published the first works of a catechetical, apologetic character, or specific to Romanian theology, starting from the 18th century.

At the same time, the foundations of a modern pastoral care are laid by training the clergy, as demonstrated by the works of Nicolae Fluieraş (*Moral-pastoral treatise on the use of the sacraments*—1932) or the many publications of Nicolae Brânzeu.

The outlawing of the Romanian Church United with Rome in 1948 and, implicitly, the abolition of educational institutions, interrupted the continuity of specialized books, the Church in Romania being called “to practice” a true “theology of martyrdom” and to organize itself in the catacombs. The clandestine training of future priests and their ordination, in addition to the aspect of resistance, also ensured the “red thread” of preserving and passing on their own tradition. This situation led to the absence of debates generated by the works of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council or the appearance of a critical reflection that could enter the public sphere. However, the contact with developments in the Catholic Church continued through the specialized literature of Roman Catholic theologians and through the personal study of Greek Catholic priests and theologians from the catacomb period.

The most important achievements concerning the Romanian Greek Catholic Church are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the fruit of the work of the commission chaired by Cardinal Josef Ratzinger since 1986, in which the Episcopal Conferences and the theological and catechesis institutes expressed themselves in the way of work projecting in the collegial nature of the Episcopate manifested in the full catholicity of the Church.³

The Catechism of the Catholic Church became a working tool for all in 1992, and in 1993 the Romanian translation published by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest appeared. This work preserves the traditional structure of catechisms but goes beyond the framework of a catechism for didactic use, representing a complete and complex theological synthesis of the truths of faith with doctrinal value. Very many have expressed the desire that a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed, that it might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in various regions. The presentation of doctrine must

be biblical and liturgical. It must be sound doctrine suited to the present life of Christians. After the Synod ended, I made this desire my own, considering it as “fully responding to a real need both of the universal Church and of the particular Churches”. For this reason, we thank the Lord wholeheartedly on this day, when we can offer the entire Church this reference text entitled the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for a catechesis renewed at the living sources of the faith! Following the renewal of the Liturgy and the new codification of the canon law of the Latin Church and that of the Oriental Catholic Churches, this catechism will make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church, as desired and begun by the Second Vatican Council.

The second document that directly concerns the Romanian Church United with Rome, but also the Romanian Orthodox Church to the extent that it wants to launch into a sincere ecumenical dialogue to understand the new ecclesiological bases, promoted by Vatican II, the current Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches was issued by Pope John Paul II in 1991. The current Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches affirms, in the spirit of post-Vatican II, the thinking that the Romanian Church United with Rome is a *sui iuris* Church. (*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 28 § 1)

Within the Catholic Church, leadership is collegial, headed by the Roman Pontiff who has the spiritual primacy granted to Saint Peter, following the model of Christ and his Apostles. The College of Bishops, the entire episcopate in communion with the Roman Pontiff, regardless of rite and membership to one Church *sui iuris* or another, is the subject of supreme and full power over the Universal Church.⁴

5. Conclusions

To be in the unity of the Church means to manifest oneself with full rights through what is proper in a Church of Christ in which all nations are called to salvation and to praise God: unity in diversity, equality in dignity, sister Churches that each individually guide through pastoral care the Church redeemed by the blood of our Savior.

The theological vision was common to the entire Central and Eastern European geocultural environment. The metropolitans and bishops who signed the Unions with the Church of Rome accepted the complementarity of the statements of the Latin and Greek schools of thought, wishing to remain anchored in the Eastern traditions. Philosophical-theological training in the great university centers of the West and the spiritual formation in the Romanian Church generated a synthesis that is reflected in the publications edited in the 18th–20th centuries (Barta 2003, p. 153).

First, the so-called Catechisms through which were presented the first arguments were presented in support of the position of the Council of Trent, then followed a period of apologetic and polemical literature. Starting in the second half of the 18th century, emerged a theological literature in which Greek Catholics constructed their own arguments, incorporating both Florentine positions and patristic traditions and the analysis of liturgical texts from published religious books, common to the Eastern Orthodox Church and Catholics (Buzalic 2005, p. 77).

After the re-establishment of Greek Catholic education in the 1990s, the Romanian Greek Catholic theological school is placed in the situation of taking over the tradition of its predecessors and, at the same time, is obliged to outline its own theology in the light of the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the specialized research of the post-conciliar period.

In the spirit of the Act of Union of 1700, according to the works of Greek Catholic theologians throughout the centuries, what constituted the four points of dogmatic divergence are recognized as complementary visions of Western and Eastern theology. What is required is not the unilateral taking of a position or statement, but the mutual recognition

of the validity of the evolution of theology in the apostolic continuity of the legitimate local traditions of each Church *sui iuris*.

Thus, papal primacy is unanimously accepted as “*primus inter pares*”, the Latin Church’s openness to synodality allowing for new approaches that concern canon law rather than ecclesiology. Full communion means not only a primacy of honor, but also a juridical one, but adapted to the traditions of the first Christian millennium. (Blanco 2014, pp. 371–72).

The validity of the matter of the Holy Eucharist (its host being leavened bread) is mutually recognized, the differences not touching the essence, the differences being specific to the evolution of local, legitimate traditions, in apostolic continuity. The term “purgatory”, introduced in the scholastic theology of an Aristotelian–Thomist argumentative system, is found in the vision of the eschatology of Eastern theologies that is expressed in traditional biblical–patristic language; therefore we can have a constructive and not divergent critical reception, especially since both traditions are anchored in doctrinal orthodoxy. The unilateral introduction of *Filioque* into the Latin tradition must be understood as a *theologoumenon* necessary for Latin theology, especially since in sealing the Unions, Popes Eugene IV in Florence, Gregory XIII for the Greeks, Urban VIII for the Orientals (*Bullarium Romanum*, tom. 3, § 6), and Pope Benedict XIV in *Etsi Pastoralis* (*Bullarium Romanum*, tom. 1, Pars I) do not impose a change in the liturgical creed specific to their own traditions. For example, the liturgical books of the Romanian Church published from the 18th century until today have never introduced the term *Filioque* into the text.

More than 30 years after the “exit from the catacombs” of the Romanian Church United with Rome, a specific direction of the Romanian Greek Catholic theological school was already taking place, which was reflected in the context of contemporary discourse. It is necessary to continue the research and especially the critical perception of the results, thereby consolidating the school of thought specific to Greek Catholic theology, both internally, by knowing the connection between the past and present, and especially externally, by popularizing the real contributions that Romanian Greek Catholic theology has brought during three centuries of existence in communion with the Romanian Church.

This is what the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council essentially expresses in the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*: “The Eastern Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have a special duty of promoting the unity of all Christians, especially Eastern Christians, in accordance with the principles of the decree, “About Ecumenism,” of this Sacred Council, by prayer in the first place, and by the example of their lives, by religious fidelity to the ancient Eastern traditions, by a greater knowledge of each other, by collaboration and a brotherly regard for objects and feelings” (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum Decree* 1964, n. 24).

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Notes

- ¹ Can. 28—§ 1. A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church *sui iuris*. § 2. The rites treated in this code, unless otherwise stated, are those which arise from the Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Chaldean and Constantinopolitan traditions. *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, abbreviated CCEO, see https://www.iuscangreg.it/cceo_multilingue2.php (accessed on 10 February 2025).

- ² Can. 31—No one can presume in any way to induce the Christian faithful to transfer to another Church *sui iuris*; Can. 32—§ 1. No one can validly transfer to another Church *sui iuris* without the consent of the Apostolic See.; Can. 35—Baptized non-Catholics coming into full communion with the Catholic Church should retain and practice their own rite everywhere in the world and should observe it as much as humanly possible. Thus, they are to be enrolled in the Church *sui iuris* of the same rite with due regard for the right of approaching the Apostolic See in special cases of persons, communities or regions, see https://www.iuscangreg.it/cceo_multilingue2.php (accessed on 10 February 2025).
- ³ John Paul II, Apostolic constitution *FIDEI DEPOSITUM* on the publication of the catechism of the catholic church prepared following the second vatican ecumenical council, 11 October 1992.
- ⁴ When Christ instituted the Twelve, “he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them.”³⁹⁸ Just as “by the Lord’s institution, St. Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a single apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another.” Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 880, see https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2A.HTM (accessed on 24 January 2025).

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Article

The near Elimination and Subsequent Restoration of the Married Presbyterate in the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church in America

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Abstract: This paper chronicles the evolution of the presbyterate of the Ruthenian Byzantine Metropolitan Catholic Church in the United States of America from the time of the first wave of immigrants to the United States to the present day. It looks at critical junctures in the history of this *sui iuris* Church regarding (1) the importation of married priests from Europe serving in the Metropolia during the first wave of immigration; (2) the restriction of consideration for priestly formation and ordination to celibate men; (3) the more recent importation of married priests from Europe in response to the critical shortage of clergy; and (4) most recently, the admission of American-born married men to priestly formation and ordination. This paper will examine in more detail the changing face of the presbyterate across the Metropolia, beyond the boundaries of the Passaic Eparchy. This paper also discusses how the Metropolia has adapted to forming married men alongside single men for the presbyterate as well as developed a policy for the formation of married deacons for the married presbyterate. The Byzantine Catholic Seminary adapted from having a student body of celibate men to one that includes celibate men, men who are dating, and others who are married. This paper also discusses the reception of married priests and their families by the lay faithful as well as the reception and acceptance of married priests and their families by celibate clergy. Finally, this paper discusses how the restoration of the married presbyterate to the Metropolia has been a positive development for the Church.

Keywords: Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church; celibacy; married presbyterate

1. The Roman Catholic Church in America Meets the Byzantine (Greek) Catholic Church

The arrival of the Greek Ruthenian Catholic Church in the United States has been well documented (Zugger 2023a, pp. 230–315)—it was an uneasy meeting of the faithful of Byzantine and Roman Churches. The Roman Church, though somewhat more established, was still working to acculturate, be accepted, and not be feared by the Protestant majority. In fact, one of the seminal opponents of the presence of married Byzantine Catholic priests in the United States was Archbishop John Ireland of Saint Paul, Minnesota. He was a strong proponent of the “Americanization” of the American Roman Catholic Church and had already found himself “leading the opposition of the English-speaking bishops against the German demands to have their own parishes, preserve their language in their schools, and receive a greater voice in the American Church” (Fogarty 1974, p. 17). The Byzantine faithful found themselves misunderstood by their Roman brethren, not least of all by the Roman clergy, as will be seen in the next section. As for laypersons, it was not uncommon for Byzantine Catholics to need to convince their peers that they were indeed Catholics in

union with Rome. To this day, when Roman Catholics attend a Divine Liturgy, the priest or deacon typically explains to those “not accustomed to attending the Byzantine Divine Liturgy” that all Roman Catholics, properly disposed, are welcome to receive the Eucharist and then proceeds to explain how Holy Communion is distributed to the faithful.

1.1. Married Priests Serving in the Metropolia from Europe from the First Wave of Immigration

As can be inferred from the prior section, the faithful Greek–Ruthenian Catholic immigrants to the United States wrote to their bishops back home requesting they send priests to minister to them. That they did, and the priests they sent were, in large part, married since the long-held practice of ordaining married men in the Christian East continued in those Eastern Churches that had reunited with Rome. The response of the American Roman Catholic hierarchy was generally icy at best and, practically speaking, hostile and rejecting. In 1890, the American hierarchy—led by Archbishop John Ireland and Bishop Tobias of Erie—petitioned the Vatican to give American hierarchs jurisdiction over Eastern Catholic laity and clergy coming to the United States, and further that the clergy must be celibate (Fogarty 1974, p. 18). Whilst no formal decree was forthcoming, instead, the Vatican Propaganda office responded by issuing a letter in October 1890 to John Ireland and Bishop Tobias Mullen “supporting them in their actions toward oriental rite Catholics and decreeing that ‘priests of the Greco-Ruthenian rite, who desire to go to and remain in the United States of North America, ought to be celibate’” (Fogarty 1974, p. 18). This response coincided with an unfortunate, ugly interaction between Archbishop Ireland and Father Alexis Toth of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Eperjes. As Fogarty (1974, p. 17) reported, Ireland “refused to recognize Toth as a validly ordained priest because the latter had been married even though then a widower.” With this, the unity of the Greco-Ruthenian Church was dealt a blow.

On 25 March 1891, Father Toth—together with his congregation of about 365 immigrants—was received into the Orthodox Church by Bishop Vladimir Sokolovsky of San Francisco. During the next few years, Toth became a zealous missionary for the Orthodox Church among the Uniate Catholics, especially in Wilkes-Barre. The work of Toth and men like him, aided by the intolerant stance of the American hierarchy, was eminently successful, for over the next few decades, more than 225,000 Carpatho-Russian and Galician Uniates entered the Orthodox Church (Fogarty 1974, p. 18).

Magosci (2004, p. 31) reported that

the Russian Orthodox Church was only too willing to accept Toth and his flock, for at the time, Russia’s tsarist government was supporting liberally the spread of Orthodoxy both in Europe and the New World. The talented Toth was before long sent on missionary work to Pennsylvania, where he succeeded in converting many more Carpatho-Rusyns to the Orthodox faith. It has been estimated that by the time of his death in 1909, this energetic priest “brought back” more than 25,000 Carpatho-Rusyns (three-quarters of whom were from the Lemko Region in Galicia) into the fold of Orthodoxy. These converts and their descendants have since then formed the largest portion of the membership in the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in America (later the “Metropolia” and now the Orthodox Church in America). For his services, Toth has been hailed by the church as the “father of Orthodoxy” in the United States and in 1994 was proclaimed a saint.

As for those who remained in union with Rome, this and other directives from the Holy See were, in part, ignored. To gain more control over the situation in America, archbishops—at a meeting in Baltimore in September 1893—composed a letter that was sent to the Holy See that stated the following:

“[T]he presence of married priest of Greek [Eastern] rite in our midst is a constant menace to the chastity of our unmarried clergy, a source of scandal to our laity, and, therefore, the sooner this point of discipline is abolished before these evils obtain large proportions, the better for religion, because the possible loss of a few souls of the Greek rite bears no proportion to the blessings resulting from the uniformity of discipline”.

(Fogarty 1974, p. 18)

The Holy See issued in 1908 the *Ea Semper* decree in response to the American bishops' concerns regarding the Eastern Churches. In specific regard to the issue of clerical celibacy, it contains the following:

Article 10. Since there are not yet any Ruthenian priests who were either born or even educated in the United States, the bishop of the Ruthenian rite, in consultation with the Apostolic Delegate and the local [Latin-rite] bishop, will make every effort to establish seminaries to educate Ruthenian priests in the United States as soon as possible. In the meantime, Ruthenian clergymen will be admitted to the Latin seminaries in the area where they were born or in which they are domiciled. But only those who are celibate at present and who shall remain so may be promoted to the sacred orders.

This latest decree, if anything, added fuel to defections to the Russian Orthodox Church. Even after Toth's death in 1909, at least seventy-two “parishes or communities were received into Orthodoxy, most of them containing ‘Carpatho-Russian’ Greek Catholics who were being urged to seek their ‘true home’ in the Russian Orthodox Church during the tenure of Archbishop Platon Rozhdestvensky, head of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America from 1907 to 1914” (Magosci 2004, p. 31).

The Holy See was not anticipating the strong negative reaction to the imposition of clerical celibacy in the Greco-Ruthenian Church as other Eastern Churches had already been moving toward conformity with the Roman practice (Zugger 2023a, pp. 383–84). Thomas J. Loya (2021), himself a celibate Byzantine priest and the grandson of a married Byzantine priest, explains the strong reaction against the imposition of clerical celibacy:

When confronted with such an almost hysterical prospect, it is important to consider the recent history related to this issue. When the Latin hierarchy, in concert with Rome, stopped the practice and presence of married priests in the Eastern Catholic churches in the “New World”, the grave injustice was not simply that one church encroached on a tradition of another. It was not that a bunch of men had their wives taken away from them. **What was missed by the Latins and not even fully recognized by the Eastern Catholic churches themselves to this day was that a married priesthood was part of the very structure and character of the Eastern Catholic churches.** Removing the custom of having married priests was like kicking one of the four legs of a table out from under it and still expecting that table to stand normally. The table at best will wobble, and indeed the Eastern Catholic churches have been wobbling ever since the *Cum Data Fuerit* debacle. But the worst part of the grave injustice was that after kicking the leg out from under the Eastern Catholic churches, the Latin Church offered nothing to replace that leg. The Eastern Catholic churches to this day have never really been given—nor have they themselves established and articulated—a suitable replacement for the missing leg. (pp. 202–203).

So, though pronouncements were made, enforcement was lax until years later when the Vatican document *Cum Data Fuerit* (1929) was promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Pius XI on 1 March 1929.

The promulgation of *Cum Data Fuerit* occurred four and a half years after the Greek–Ruthenian Church in the United States was given the status of exarchate on 1 September 1924. With the establishment of the exarchate, the Most Reverend Basil Takach was sent to the United States to serve as its first bishop. At the time of the exarchate’s establishment, there were an estimated 300,000 Greek–Ruthenian Catholics in one hundred fifty-five parishes served by one hundred twenty-nine priests. Zegger (2023a, p. 373) documents that Bishop Takach had one hundred twenty-nine priests, mostly married, to serve the one hundred fifty-five parishes of the exarchate. These parishes were mostly near the coal mines, steel mills, and factories in the northeast. The seat of the exarchate was moved from New York City to Munhall, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, to be in proximity to the largest major population center of Greek–Ruthenian faithful.

Cum Data Fuerit was, on the surface, a largely positive document affirming the right of Greek–Ruthenian Catholics to exist and flourish alongside their Roman Catholic brethren in the United States. The document states that the Greek–Ruthenian Rite bishops appointed to serve in the United States “have the right and power to rule and govern their flock and to enact laws and statutes in matters which are not contrary to common law. Their chief duty will be to see that doctrine and good morals, as well as **the rites and discipline peculiar to this Church, be observed faithfully and in their entirety**” (*Cum Data Fuerit*, Chapter I, Article 3, p. 14). (**Emphasis added.**) Further, the document instructs that “ordinaries see to it that, when the opportunity presents itself, at least a major and minor seminary be erected...for the education of the clergy of the Greek-Ruthenian Rite” (*Cum Data Fuerit*, Chapter II, Article 11, p. 16). The document also prohibited Latin clergy from inducing any Greek–Ruthenian Rite to transfer to the Latin Rite contrary to, or aside from, the canonical provisions that govern the change of Rite (*Cum Data Fuerit*, Chapter III, Article 30). However, one statement overshadowed all others because, once and for all—or so it seemed—it prohibited married priests from serving in the diaspora: “...as has already several times been decreed, priests of the Greek-Ruthenian Rite who wish to go to the United States of North America and stay there, **must be celibates**” (Chapter II, Article 12, p. 17). (**Emphasis added.**)

The years immediately following the promulgation of *Cum Data Fuerit* were difficult as documented in detail by J. A. Loya (1995). According to J. A. Loya (1995), the primary reason for arguing against the imposition of mandatory celibacy for Greek–Ruthenian Catholic clergy in the United States was that [the married presbyterate]

was not so much a granted right as it was an age-old tradition that was recognized, affirmed, guaranteed, and protected by the popes who forged the establishment of the Eastern Catholic churches with former Orthodox bishops and clergy in the Unions of Brest-Litovsk (the Ukrainian union of 1596) and Uzhorod (the Ruthenian union of 1646). **Never had it been explicitly stipulated that this protected privilege could be subject to geographical restriction** (p. 150). (**Emphasis added.**)

Division and acrimony over *Cum Data Fuerit* in the Greek–Ruthenian Catholic Church soon led to yet another schism when, in July 1935,

thirty-seven parishes that were in opposition to Latinization attempts by the Roman Catholic Church petitioned that a Church Congress be called to decide the future of Carpatho-Russian Churches in the United States. The first Diocesan Council-Sobor was called in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 23 November 1937 by Father Orestes P. Chornock who was appointed administrator of the Diocese being formed. The Sobor abrogated the 300-year-old “Unia” and returned the Carpatho-Russian people to the ancestral Orthodox Faith. The clergy at this

Sobor elected the Rt. Rev. Orestes P. Chornock as the Bishop-Nominee of the new Diocese (www.acrod.org/about/history, accessed on 12 May 2025).

The story of one priest, told to this author by his son Mr. Adrian Zapotocky (A. Zapotocky, personal communication, 8 April 2025), is very indicative of how the schism caused by *Cum Data Fuerit* impacted individuals and families at a deeply personal level. Reverend Andrew Zapotocky was the last of a long line of married Greek Catholic priests in his paternal lineage dating back to *at least* 1623. Father Andrew's paternal grandfather, Father Ivan Zapotocky, was one of the first priests to come to America, most likely in the early 1870s. The young Andrew was twenty-two when CDF was promulgated. Intent on responding to his call to the married priesthood, he left the Greek Catholic Church for Orthodoxy in 1937, married Klotild Magyar, and was later ordained an Orthodox priest. Father Andrew was a founding father of Christ the Savior Cathedral, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and cathedral of the newly formed American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese History (n.d.). Klotild was the daughter of the cantor-choir director-religious education teacher Professor John Magyar at the Greek Catholic Parish in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He was warned that if he attended his daughter's wedding in the Orthodox Church, he would lose his job. For fear of losing his livelihood, Professor Magyar did not attend his daughter's wedding. Father Andrew went on to serve as a priest for ACROD until 1965 when he was received into the Byzantine Catholic Church (BCC) and served in the Eparchy of Passaic. Son Adrian became a Byzantine Catholic prior to his father, as "I saw the direction in which my father was heading." Adrian married his wife Barbara in the Byzantine Catholic Church, albeit before his father's reception into the BCC. Of note, Father Andrew's return to the BCC was facilitated by Father Alan Borsuk, a priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, and Cardinal Krol, then Archbishop of Philadelphia. What would have been unthinkable for an American Roman Catholic bishop in 1937 was deemed the right thing to do in 1965.

Father Andrew Zapotocky's defection to the Orthodox Church was not an isolated event. Upwards of 200,000 Ruthenian Catholics became Orthodox due to the *Cum Data Fuerit* Decree of 1929 (Zugger 2023a, p. 397). In some cases, the schism took place in families where some members left for the Orthodox Church. Scandalously, as reported by Zugger (2023b, 26:00-26:56), the Roman hierarchy in the United States acknowledged the likelihood of the Byzantine Church losing faithful secondary to the imposition of a ban on a married presbyterate. However, this was seen as an unavoidable consequence of the quest for uniformity of discipline. These ancillary losses of 200,000 souls from the Catholic communion were deemed acceptable by the American Roman Catholic hierarchy. That is an astonishing and tragic sixty-seven-percent loss of people from the American Greek-Ruthenian Church.

These losses notwithstanding, the Byzantine Catholic Church continues in America, and married priests have been serving it to this day. Despite opposition to the married presbyterate among the American Roman Catholic hierarchy, the tradition was never completely discontinued. Those who had come to the United States in the 1920s continued to serve until their retirements or deaths as late as the 1970s, albeit in much smaller numbers than previously. This author grew up in a parish (SS. Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Elizabeth, New Jersey) that had been served by a married priest, Reverend Orestes Koman, who retired in 1973. Father Koman was one of the last married priests to retire. By that time, the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh had been forming celibate men for the presbyterate ever since it inaugurated its program of theological studies in 1950. At its peak, the seminary enrolled one hundred eleven men in its program of priestly formation in September 1960. From its beginning, only single men were considered for priestly formation and accepted into the seminary.

The practice of admitting only unmarried, celibate men to the seminary for priestly formation was a strictly held policy that continued with the elevation of the Most Reverend Nicholas T. Elko as the first American-born Byzantine Catholic hierarch on 6 March 1955. Although a charismatic figure whose leadership facilitated the expansion of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America, he was also a controversial figure for his role in “Latinizing” the Church to create a more “American” Byzantine Catholic Church (Zugger 2023a, p. 573). In 1963, with the establishment of the Passaic Eparchy led by Bishop Stephen Kocisko, the “conventional wisdom” (J. G. Basarab, personal communication, 30 April 2025) is that Archbishop Elko transferred the few married priests remaining within his archeparchy to the newly formed eparchy.

1.2. *Seeds of the Restoration of the Married Presbyterate in the Twenty-First Century*

Orientalium Ecclesiarum, promulgated by Pope Saint Paul VI on 21 November 1964, marked a turning point for the Eastern Churches in union with Rome as the legitimacy of the Eastern Rite was affirmed, and they were instructed to return to their ancestral practices. More specifically, it instructed the following:

6. All members of the Eastern Rite should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their legitimate liturgical rite and their established way of life, and that these may not be altered except to obtain for themselves an organic improvement. All these, then, must be observed by the members of the Eastern rites themselves. Besides, they should attain an ever-greater knowledge and a more exact use of them, and, if in their regard they have fallen short owing to contingencies of times and persons, they should take steps to return to their ancestral traditions.

The restoration of the “ancestral practices” began, especially regarding the removal of “Latinizations” such as statues and certain prayer services. Several examples offer a feel for the changes that most immediately, albeit not uniformly, took place. In fact, restoration has been slow in more than a few parishes.

- Parish churches removed statues and altar rails. In their place, iconostases and icons were installed in many, though not all, churches.
- The Roman Catholic service of the Stations of the Cross had been the norm during the Great Fast (Lent) in Byzantine Catholic churches. The Second Vatican Council led to the restoration of the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts in place of the Stations.
- English translations of the Divine Liturgy replaced the Church Slavonic. At present, most parishes celebrate Divine services primarily, if not exclusively, in English.

One can presume that the re-assignment of Elko to a curial position in the Vatican in 1967 facilitated these restorations.

While these changes were taking place, the policy of admitting only unmarried men to the seminary for priestly formation continued, and the few remaining married priests were reaching retirement from active ministry or dying. There were a handful of cases of individual married priests who came into the Metropolia by way of Orthodoxy or immigration after the deaths or retirements of the few remaining married priests who had originally arrived on these shores in the early twentieth century. There was the case of a married priest of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese who was received in the Byzantine Catholic Church in 1969 with the facilitation of Cardinal John Krol, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Philadelphia, and Rev. Alan Borsuk of the Passaic Eparchy (G. Noga, personal communication, 30 April 2025). The priest continued to serve until 2000 when, for unspecified reasons, he returned to the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church. While this priest was still serving in the Passaic Eparchy, another priest arrived

in the United States with his wife and their children in the mid-1980s. He served several parishes in the Eparchy of Passaic for twenty-one years until his death. This priest was ordained in Mariapocs, Hungary, and then served in the Slovak Greek Catholic Eparchy of Toronto for eight years before coming to the United States. A married Slovak priest came to the United States in 2005 to serve in the Eparchy of Parma, as did another married Slovak priest, who similarly served in the Eparchy of Toronto (for five years) before coming to the United States to serve in the Eparchy of Passaic in 2011. Due to the great need for priests and the shortage of home-grown vocations, the American hierarchs of the Byzantine Catholic Church increasingly relied on priests brought in from Transcarpathia in far western Ukraine and eastern Slovakia—most of these priests are married. However, this could not be a long-term solution to the shortage of priests.

In a move that partially opened the door to the ordination of married men to the presbyterate in the United States, Pittsburgh's Metropolitan Archbishop Judson Procyk promulgated new Norms of Particular Law of the Byzantine Metropolitan Church *Sui Iuris* of Pittsburgh, USA (1999, on 29 June). These Norms state, *Concerning the admission of married men to the order of the presbyterate, the special norms issued by the Apostolic See are to be observed, unless dispensations are granted by the same See in individual cases; this is consistent with Canon 758 art. 3. of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, which states, "The particular law of each Church sui iuris or special norms established by the Apostolic See are to be followed in admitting married men to sacred orders."* Essentially, though the ban on the ordination of married men to the presbyterate held, the American Byzantine Eparchs could petition the Apostolic See for dispensations to the ban on a case-by-case basis, effectively opening the door to the ordination of married men to the presbyterate in the United States. It is worth noting here that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirmed the existence of the married priesthood in the Eastern Churches in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965), which states

[. . .][Though] celibacy is held by the Church to be of great value in a special manner for the priestly life...it is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood, as is apparent from the practice of the early Church and from the traditions of the Eastern Churches, where besides those who with all the bishops, by a gift of grace, choose to observe celibacy, there are also married priests of the highest merit. **This holy synod, while it commends ecclesiastical celibacy, in no way intends to alter that different discipline which legitimately flourishes in the Eastern Churches. (Emphasis added.)**

From that time through 2014, very few married men were ordained to the presbyterate in the United States.

It was not until the fall of 2011 that the Byzantine Catholic Seminary inaugurated a program for the priestly formation of married men with two married deacons from the Eparchy of Phoenix and one layman from the Eparchy of Parma. Interestingly, when this author (together with his wife) interviewed for the deacon formation program in the Eparchy of Passaic in 2010, he was told by one of the interviewers that any deacon might one day be called to the presbyterate, so, as such, "there is no 'permanent' diaconate." The door had been opened, if only partially.

1.3. Full Restoration of the Married Presbyterate in the Byzantine Catholic Church of America

Over the past twenty or so years there has been a steady flow of priests, the vast majority of whom are married, coming into the United States, primarily from the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, and to a lesser degree, Slovakia. The flow of priests has slowed to a trickle since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The role of these married priests from the ancestral homeland in paving the way for the admission of married American men to the

presbyterate cannot be underestimated. As will be detailed in the following section, these married priests have been serving the Metropolia in various capacities in addition to their parochial ministry.

The current make-up of the presbyterate in the Metropolia is documented in Tables 1 and 2. As per the data on eparchial websites or directories, Table 1 shows that 43% of the priests serving in the Metropolia are celibate. The Eparchy of Phoenix has the lowest proportion of married priests at 37%, while the Eparchy of Passaic has the highest proportion of married priests at 54%.

Table 1. Breakdown of celibate and married priests by ecclesial jurisdiction.

| | All Married | All Celibate | Totals |
|------------|-------------|--------------|--------|
| Pittsburgh | 20 (38%) | 33 (61%) | 53 |
| Passaic | 24 (50%) | 24 (50%) | 48 |
| Parma | 11 (46%) | 13 (54%) | 24 |
| Phoenix | 7 (37%) | 12 (63%) | 19 |
| Totals | 62 (43%) | 82 (57%) | 144 |

Table 2. Breakdown of celibate and married priests by country or continent of ordination and by ecclesial jurisdiction.

| | US Married | US Celibate | Euro Married | Euro Celibate | Totals |
|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|--------|
| Pittsburgh | 12 (23%) | 32 (60%) | 8 (15%) | 1 (2%) | 53 |
| Passaic | 5 (10%) | 22 (46%) | 19 (40%) | 2 (4%) | 48 |
| Parma | 5 (21%) | 12 (50%) | 6 (25%) | 1 (4%) | 24 |
| Phoenix | 6 (32%) | 12 (63%) | 1 (5%) | 0 (0%) | 19 |
| Totals | 28 (19%) | 78 (54%) | 34 (24%) | 4 (3%) | 144 |

It is worth keeping in mind that the numbers are fluid—owing to immigration, ordinations, deaths, and, more rarely, priests leaving the active ministry—but the numbers are generally stable, especially when the numbers are looked at for the Metropolia. That said, the celibate cohort is older than the married cohort. For example, in the Eparchy of Passaic, of the twenty-four active married priests, one is in his mid-seventies and three are in their sixties, or seventeen percent of the married presbyterate. Eighty-three percent of the married presbyterate range in age from their late twenties to mid-fifties. In contrast, only about twenty percent of the celibate presbyterate of the eparchy of Passaic range in age from their late thirties to mid-fifties, while eighty percent of the celibate presbyterate range in age from the sixties through eighties. Given these demographics, within the next ten years, there is likely to be a shift for a larger married presbyterate. All these priests serve as parochial administrators. Does this suggest the inevitable disappearance of the celibate presbyterate? Not necessarily. As seen in Table 2, the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh and the Eparchy of Phoenix have the largest proportion of American-born celibate priests at sixty percent and sixty-three percent, respectively. Of significance, these two jurisdictions collectively had several ordinations to major orders (diaconate and priesthood) recently. Together with the Eparchy of Passaic, these jurisdictions have ordained nine presbyters and one deacon in priestly formation since the spring of 2024. Of these ten men, three are celibate and seven are married. The three celibates are young adults, as are four of the married men; thus, 43% of the young-adult ordinands are celibate. Additionally, there are

two Byzantine men's monastic communities in the United States: the Holy Resurrection Monastery in Wisconsin, formerly linked to the Eparchy of Phoenix but now under the Byzantine Romanian Eparchy of Canton; and Duchovny Dom in Oregon, linked to the Eparchy of Phoenix.

In the span of a generation, the married presbyterate has been restored in the Byzantine Metropolia; initially, through the importation of married priests from Europe, and more recently, through the ordination of American-born men. The flow of priests from Ukraine has been dramatically slowed since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Presently, of the sixty-two married priests serving in the Metropolia, twenty-eight—or forty-five percent—are American-born. Since becoming Eparch of Passaic in December 2013, Bishop Kurt Burnette has ordained eight men to the presbyterate, of whom three are celibate and five married.

The Council of Hierarchs of the Metropolia established a policy whereby the normal route for deacons who had completed their diaconal training at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary (BCS), if called to the presbyterate, is to return to the BCS to complete two years of full-time formation in residency. To date, several married deacons from Pittsburgh and Passaic have taken this route of priestly formation to ordination to the presbyterate. The number of men entering the Byzantine Catholic Seminary has increased over the past several years and now seems to have plateaued but, in numbers, have doubled what they were fifteen years ago.

Over a relatively short span of time, the Metropolia has transitioned from forming single men for the celibate priesthood to forming men who are either married or, if single, are more likely to be discerning marriage as well as discerning the priesthood. This has been no small task. The Byzantine Catholic Seminary has put in place a policy on married couples (<https://bcs.edu/policy-married-couples/>, accessed on 7 May 2025) that has no doubt evolved and will continue to evolve. The policy in its current form welcomes wives and children to attend all liturgical services and community meals (weekday lunch and dinner after Saturday evening Vespers). Wives may also audit classes at a reduced rate. One notable way in which the BCS differs from its Orthodox counterparts and their long history of forming married men for the presbyterate is its lack of on-campus housing for married seminarians, as is the case at Saint Vladimir Orthodox Seminary (<https://www.svots.edu/>, accessed on 7 May 2025). One vocation director opined to this author that “better housing options should be available to married seminarians.”

A policy for the priestly formation of married deacons who are called to the presbyterate was established by the Council of Hierarchs of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia. It requires that married deacons who completed the diaconal formation program at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary, Pittsburgh, return to Pittsburgh for two years to complete a Master of Divinity degree as well as receive additional pastoral, human, and spiritual formation.

1.4. The Acceptance of Married Priests and Their Families by Celibate Priests and the Laity

It is one thing to bring people into an organization; it is quite another thing to have the new people accepted. It has been the experience of this author and other married priests that they and their families have been accepted by celibate priests—both brother Byzantine Catholic priests and Roman Catholic priests—and laity alike.

For laity in their mid-sixties and older, having a married parish priest harkens back to a time when they either had a married priest or at least knew of one serving or having served in their parish or a neighboring parish. There is a sense of gratitude expressed by some that “we can finally be ourselves.” Roman Catholic visitors seem accepting when attending a Divine Liturgy celebrated by a married priest. One woman, a lapsed Roman Catholic, expressed appreciation that her adolescent daughter was being initiated into

a Church that has married priests. Although it is too soon to tell, it may well be that a healthy married priesthood may serve to facilitate more conversions from Protestant denominations as happened with the earliest waves of immigrants to America (Zugger 2023b, 18:36–21:30). The laity may also have a greater appreciation for the sacrifices made by their celibate clergy, knowing that they freely chose to forego marriage. As the married presbyterate becomes more established, these are questions that will be worth examining.

What can be said at this juncture is that married priests throughout the Metropolia serve as parochial administrators, pastors, or parochial vicars. In addition to their parochial ministries, married priests may be found throughout the Metropolia serving in various capacities at the eparchial level such as on the College of Consultors, the Eparchial Tribunal, the Presbyteral Council, Cathedral Rector, and formators and adjunct professors at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary. Some have taken positions as hospital, military, and police chaplains and, as such, have received bi-ritual faculties that require the blessing of both the priest's Byzantine bishop and the Roman bishop in whose (arch)diocese the priest intends to serve in a special ministry. Additionally, a few of these priests are adjunct professors at local Catholic colleges and universities. This author has continued his ministry in service to a Roman Catholic seminary.

This rich tapestry of married priests serving in the American Byzantine Catholic Metropolia, in the predominantly Roman Catholic United States, is testimony to the growing understanding and acceptance of the rightful place of these priests in the Eastern Churches. The married presbyterate is, once again, an integral part of the American Byzantine Catholic experience. In the end, it was the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Pope Saint John Paul II in *Orientalium Lumen*, and Pope Francis who, collectively, over a span of one-half century gradually facilitated the restoration of the health of the Eastern "lung" of the Catholic Church. The married presbyterate has been an essential element to that restoration of health, having led to a more robust, authentic expression of Byzantine Catholicism in America in the spirit of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and has, at times, unwittingly infused vitality into some otherwise floundering parishes. For example, there are small parish communities in the Metropolia with few, if any, children that suddenly find themselves with a new parish priest and his wife and young children in tow.

A married American born of the Metropolia remarked in a personal communication (27 March 2025) on how his parish has responded to his wife:

"... I have found that my wife, who is very much a behind-the-scenes person, has added to the experience of the community as people have found that she takes an interest in them just as much as I their priest do. Although she is not the priest and does not have any authority, nor is she in charge of anything, the faithful have found that she is very much an extension of my presence, and thus they feel they have been seen and heard, even if I was not able to visit with them in a social setting. So, in a sense, I can touch twice as many people with her help. Not to mention the obvious comments I get that families have a priest that understands their challenges."

Parish communities must adapt whenever one priest leaves and a new one arrives to serve the community. When that new priest is married with a family, the parish community adapts to the priest and his family. It has been the observation of this author that, in general, parishioners love their parish priests as well as the families of the married priests. In the Byzantine Church, priests' wives are commonly given the title Pani, meaning "Lady," a title of respect, perhaps because—as the priest said in the preceding quote—the priest's wife may be seen as an extension of her husband. Father Thomas J. Loya's (2021, p. 203) experience growing up with his priestly paternal grandfather echoes this sentiment, as outlined below:

The wife and family of an Eastern Catholic pastor served as a built-in sense of community and support for the pastor and most of the time contributed significantly to the life and community of the parish. There was a great fraternity among the married priests' families, as their children could play together, grow up together, form lasting bonds, and even, as in the case of my own patrimony, meet their future spouses.

The married presbyterate in the Byzantine Catholic Church in America is no mere band-aid to the shortage of priestly vocations. If anything, it restores to the Church a form of priestly ministry that has a spirituality distinct from that of the celibate priest. Father Lawrence Cross, a married Russian Catholic priest in Australia, observes, "Those who are called to the married priesthood are, in reality, called to a spiritual path that in the first place, is characterized by a conjugal, family form of life." He further states that priestly ordination builds upon the marriage, and the priest is called "to love more, to widen his capacity to love, and [as] the boundaries of his family are widened, his paternity is widened as he acquires more sons and daughters; the community becomes his family" (Dumko 2013). Thomas J. Loya (2021, p. 201) argues that the restoration of the married presbyterate should take place concomitantly with the "renewal of monasticism and a positive articulation of celibacy, [other] wise our approach will be only superficially 'Eastern' and not true to the real Eastern genius for integration." More specifically, Thomas J. Loya (2021, p. 206) notes, "monasticism takes the question of a married priesthood out of the constraints of the either/or. Monasticism, and with it a positive and adequate articulation of celibacy, raises the choice of being a celibate priest to the level of being perhaps as attractive as being a married priest." To be sure the spirituality of the married presbyterate in the Byzantine Catholic Church is in the process of re-developing, a recent volume edited by DeVille (2021) provides an important collection of articles, some of which discuss the distinct spirituality of the married presbyterate.

For example, drawing from Pope St. John Paul II's 1994 Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, Petra (2021, pp. 242–43) stated the following:

The theological meaning of a married clergy is that it seeks to become, by its conjugal and priestly existence, the living image of the deep unity of the "great mystery," both as domestic church and as community church. "There is no 'great mystery,' which is the Church and the humanity of Christ, without the 'great mystery' expressed in the 'one flesh' (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31–32), that exists in the reality of marriage and the family." Such are the words of the pope.

Petra (2021, p. 243) states that the married priest performs a priestly mission, which "exhorts him to continue that priestly mission in joy by 'making of [his] life a constant gift to God, to [his] family and to the community entrusted to [his] cares.'" Cross and Petra (2021, p. 222) explain, "The husband, by becoming a priest, unites two sacraments, and in sharing both with his wife, is called to love more, not less, and in particular to widen his capacity to love. The boundaries of his family are widened: He acquires sons and daughters; his paternity is widened; his family becomes the community; and the community becomes his family."

The restoration of the married presbyterate in the Byzantine Catholic Church of America, more than righting a wrong that tore families and congregations apart, has allowed for the return to an authentic and complete expression of the Byzantine Catholic Church's lived experience in which married presbyters, with the full consent and cooperation of their wives, are able to "widen their paternity" in service to not only their biological families but to their spiritual families as well. It is in this light that the restored married presbyterate in the Byzantine Catholic Church of America can be seen as a gift to the American Roman Catholic Church rather than as a threat or source of scandal little more than a century ago.

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Article

Preservation of Tradition vs. Fidelity and Organic Progress: A Necessary Updating of Certain Elements in the Liturgy of a Greek-Catholic Church

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Abstract: With good reason, Vatican II encourages the Eastern ecclesial realities to preserve and, if necessary, to rediscover their own traditions (also, even if not only, for ecumenical reasons). There are, however, certain aspects of the heritage of the Eastern Churches that require urgent revision in a spirit of consistency with the teachings of the Council. This is undoubtedly the case with regard to the anti-Jewish elements so specific to the entire Christian tradition (more or less generalised insults and judgments; substitutionary and appropriative perspectives; a purely instrumental use of the Jewish scriptures) and, in the absence of full reception of the Council, still reflected in the public prayers of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, to the detriment of that spirit of respect, fraternity, and dialogue theoretically embraced throughout the Catholic world today. In the light of *Nostra aetate* §4 and the subsequent developments that flowed from it, I shall try in this contribution to outline some possible criteria for reforming the offices of Holy Week, aiming to show that—at least in this particular case—it is not enough merely to refer to the OE, let alone to use it to justify a comfortable tendency towards inertia. Apart from the fact that it is this very Decree that speaks of a possible and necessary organic progress, we cannot ignore the more general spirit of renewal of the Council and its other documents (the NA, the SC, the DV, the GS). The challenge would be to engender a creative fidelity, which—while preserving the best of tradition—surpasses certain of its contingent elements.

Keywords: anti-Judaism; Shoah; liturgy; Eastern Churches; Vatican II; *Nostra aetate*; reform; dialogue; fraternity

1. Introduction

Well before OE, it was an Apostolic Letter of 1894 by Leo XIII that affirmed the dignity of the Eastern Churches and their respective liturgies (OD); in its wake, the rediscovery of Eastern traditions determined one of the specific directions taken by the liturgical movement of the early twentieth century in the Greek-Catholic milieu (Mojzes 2005, pp. 210–12, 217–18), although this was not the only direction taken, as is clear from the Romanian Greek-Catholic press articles at the time (Albinus 1926, p. 1; Luran 1926, p. 3; Pteancu 1926, pp. 2–3; Gael 1926, pp. 2–3). And it is this idea of the rediscovery, valorisation, and preservation of its own rites that is still predominant in the Romanian Greek-Catholic sphere, based on certain stances adopted by Vatican II itself (OE §§1–3, 5–6), which, however, are not the only ones to be retained from the conciliar documents, the latter also hinting at the legitimacy and necessity of organic progress (SC §§3–4; OE §§2, 6). This tension between the idea of the preservation of traditions and the legitimacy and the possibility of development is also to be found in the Instruction for applying the liturgical prescriptions

of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (§§9–12, 16–20 and the OL §§1; 4–5, 8, 10; in the same sense, see: Gugerotti 2004, p. 269; 2005, pp. 77, 80, 83–85).

In this article, I shall attempt to show that, at least in the case of the anti-Jewish elements still present in the liturgies of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (especially, but not only, in the liturgies of Holy Week)¹, the principle of their preservation simply cannot be justified. Their reform is required for consistency both with the novelty of NA §4, and with the most authentic Byzantine tradition (generally characterised by the spirit of humility and repentance for one's sins and not by the judgment of others) and the spirit of Christianity itself (a religion of love, fraternity, and forgiveness, and not of hatred, condemnation, and revenge which are often the hallmarks of the current liturgical texts). Rather than absolutising certain paragraphs of the Council's writings (or even reading them selectively), we should strive to grasp their general spirit of renewal, which is also reflected in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The latter makes it clear that, while there may be certain norms and principles of reform that apply only to the Roman rite, there are others that apply to the other rites as well (SC §3).

Rather than doubting the possibility of reforming the liturgies of Holy Week, we should perhaps ask ourselves what their current form would have been if the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church had had the possibility to participate in the Council (and then to apply it in full freedom) or, even prior to that, to have had the opportunity, together with other ecclesial realities, to travel the path towards awareness of the Christian responsibility in the Shoah and of the need for a change in traditional teaching (Stefani 1998, pp. 45–50; 2004, pp. 223–26, 246–49; Schäfer 2022, pp. 223–27; Neudecker 2012, pp. 17–22; Remaud 2008, pp. 17–26; 2015, pp. 94–99). But the fact is that the forty years of communist persecution (1948–1989) have greatly delayed the reception of the pre- and post-conciliar innovations in this field². Perhaps, however, the 60th anniversary of NA and the Jubilee are the appropriate time for such change, and Vatican II—like the further developments of NA §4 and its other documents—could provide us with various keys to reform.

2. Preservation of Tradition vs. Organic Progress

2.1. Anti-Judaism, a Point of Contrast with Vatican II

Sixty years after the Council, the liturgy of the 'Great and Holy Week' in the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church still retains a number of anti-Jewish elements³, starting with offensive terminology. Even a cursory analysis of the liturgical texts prompts the immediate observation of the preference for the term *iudeu,-i*. And while it may be true that it replaces the even more pejorative *jidov* in the previous edition of our liturgical texts (*Strastnic* 8–9, 11, 32, 35, 37, 40–41, 68, 79, 86–88, 90, 101, 103, 105–108, 112, 123–124, 127–128, 155–157, 159), we might wonder what feelings its sound, so similar to the name of Judas (Iuda in Romanian), is likely to arouse in the participants in liturgical celebrations⁴. Moreover, since it is used as a generic term, it is likely to be understood as relating to all adherents of Judaism or even all members of the Jewish people. In addition, in the offices examined, the various references to more or less well-defined 'Jews' are often accompanied by epithets designed to make their image even more negative and detestable. Thus, the people and leaders are called 'ungodly', 'unbelieving', 'iniquitous', 'lawbreakers', 'lawless' (*Rânduiala* 79, 105, 107, 148, 158).

Moreover, it does not even seem necessary to identify such terms in the Holy Week texts, since they are often used as a simple substitute for 'Jews', referring mainly, but not exclusively, to the leaders (*Rânduiala* 82, 84–87, 106, 122, 138, 140, 143, 148, 152, 158, 166–167, 174, 185). Such expressions are similarly applied to the Sanhedrin (*Rânduiala* 96, 137, 153, 175) or to the scribes (*Rânduiala* 135), as well as to Judas (*Rânduiala* 106–107, 112, 135, 138), but also to the 'crowd' (*Rânduiala* 63–64) or to the people (*Rânduiala* 142). The

'Jews' (directly named or only implied) are also linked, though less frequently, to other outrageous epithets such as 'heathens' (*Rânduiala* 154, 158), 'dogs' (*Rânduiala* 154), 'sinners' (*Rânduiala* 28), 'killers' (*Rânduiala* 140, 145), and finally, 'deicides' (*Rânduiala* 148; 154), a term that has made much headway both in the East and in the Christian West, fuelling their centuries-old anti-Judaism⁵.

And it is in this, perhaps, that lies at the heart of the anti-Judaism of our liturgical texts: the accusations surrounding Jesus's passion and death, which are addressed both to the leaders and to a less defined Jewish entity. Thus, the leaders are accused of having plotted against him or of having induced Judas to betray him, of having planned (and determined) his death, and of having handed him over to Pilate/to the 'gentils' (*Rânduiala* 63–64, 82, 105, 107, 153–154), of having tortured and crucified him (*Rânduiala* 143, 145). Sometimes, however, these (and other) acts—the corruption of Judas (*Rânduiala* 135, 138, 148), the plan to kill Jesus (*Rânduiala* 135, 154), the fact that he was slandered with false testimony (*Rânduiala* 154), handed over to Pilate (*Rânduiala* 140, 148), condemned (*Rânduiala* 143, 145, 148), tortured (*Rânduiala* 138, 142–143, 154, 166–167, 174–175), mocked (*Rânduiala* 28, 174) and, finally, killed (*Rânduiala* 28, 138, 142–143, 145, 148, 166–167, 174–175), pierced (*Rânduiala* 138, 174), defamed even after his death/resurrection (*Rânduiala* 185, 201)—are attributed to the more generic collective term, 'Jews' (to the 'Jewish people' /to the assembly of the Jews/to the deicide mob, to the 'iniquitous' /'ungodly' /'lawless' /'those who neglect the law', etc.).

The explicit accusations listed above—which might perhaps still seem justified insofar as they claim, after all, to constitute a simple description of the facts, starting from the way they are reported in the Gospels (not without certain subjective touches, however)—are, in addition, accompanied in our liturgies by harsh assessments of the character of the persons and groups under discussion (which, in my opinion at least, is contrary to the most authentic spirit of Christianity, despite the fact that it may be rooted in certain passages of Scripture, indeed even in certain pronouncements put in the mouth of Jesus). To the leaders of Israel are attributed, for example, attitudes of wickedness (*Rânduiala* 82, 154), envy (*Rânduiala* 63–64), or even *perfidy* (*Rânduiala* 63–64, 107, 135), which cannot fail to remind us of the very first reforms of the Good Friday rites in the Roman Catholic Church (Paiano 2000, pp. 685–710; Stefani 1998, pp. 48–50). The entire people is treated, more or less explicitly, as ungrateful and/or unfaithful (*Rânduiala* 140, 143, 148, 166–167, 175, 197), even across the generations (*Rânduiala* 112, 138, 140). This is also a very prevalent theme in the *improperia*-type texts, sometimes formulated in the name of Jesus (*Rânduiala* 143, 166–167, 175), sometimes in the name of the apostles (*Rânduiala* 143), or of the praying community (*Rânduiala* 140). In some of these texts, the idea of substitution—perhaps the cornerstone of secular anti-Judaism (Stefani 2004, p. 54)—is also clearly expressed (*Rânduiala* 143, 166–167).

A final characteristic of our liturgical texts that I would like to mention here is the tendency to overlook the responsibility of the Romans in the death of Jesus (a strand much explored by researchers today) and to exempt them from further moral evaluation (*Rânduiala* 21, 145, 148, 154, 157, 174). Thus, it should be said that various hymnographic passages where their involvement cannot be entirely overlooked are formulated in a rather neutral and deliberately ambiguous way so that the Jews can also be included (*Rânduiala* 146–148, 156, 174). Indeed, in the only passage where their involvement in the killing of Jesus is explicitly mentioned, it is in fact rather 'the Jews' who are judged (*Rânduiala* 154). Moreover, as we have already seen, our offices charge them with actions that the Gospels explicitly attribute to the Romans: the condemnation, the crucifixion, the torture, the piercing of the side (*Rânduiala* 138, 142–143, 145, 166–167, 175), which goes to show that the 'historicity' of the facts (or at least the faithful rendering of the Gospel text) is not necessarily the primary concern of the compilers of our offices.

All these elements (and many others) are undoubtedly in concordance with the Church's teachings on the Jews over the centuries (held responsible for the death of Jesus, they were considered an accursed people⁶, rejected by God and felicitously replaced with the 'new and true Israel', which was obviously considered to be more in keeping with that vocation), but not with the perspective found in *Nostra aetate*, which posits (1) the rejection of any form of anti-Semitism/anti-Judaism⁷; (2) the renunciation of any generalising accusation with respect to the Jews in relation to the death of Jesus; (3) the recognition of universal responsibility with regard to that death (and, on a historical level, also Roman responsibility)⁸; (4) the abandonment of the idea that the Jewish people were rejected and cursed by God; (5) the affirmation of an intrinsic bond between Israel and the Church; (6) the promotion of respect towards the Jews; (7) the idea of a universal brotherhood and a general spirit of dialogue.

So, here we are at a crossroads: even though our liturgical texts are entirely 'traditional' (not only have we always prayed this way, but their contents are based on ancient Christian literature) and the *Orientalium ecclesiarum* requires us to preserve our liturgies, certain elements of the services of Holy Week (and others) are evidently discordant with the contents of other conciliar documents (in this specific case, *Nostra aetate*). Should we therefore conserve the liturgy or rather renew it? Would there be a way to remain faithful to tradition, yet not be held captive by it? What should be maintained and what should be transformed? According to what criteria should the pre-Easter services be updated?

2.2. Various Facets of the Conciliar Perspective on Tradition

For a proper discernment, it might be useful to gain a better understanding of the perspective on tradition that Vatican II offers us in the Constitution on Divine Revelation, going beyond the static vision that would treat it as an immutable patrimony or as a treasure to be preserved unchanged, and presenting it as a living organism, which progresses over time, also in proportion to the deepening of our understanding of spiritual matters, and not only through the efforts of 'those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth', but also through 'the contemplation and *study* made by believers', which is an implicit affirmation of the value of theological studies (DV §8; di Pilato 2017, pp. 172–77; Imperatori 2019, p. 112). Developing these insights gained from DV, Pope Francis in turn likened tradition to 'a tree that lives and grows', also saying, in words perhaps even more suited to our theme, that tradition is not a 'museum' nor the 'urn of the ashes of the past' (Francis 2019, 2021a, 2021b; 2025, p. 105)⁹; regarding the process of growth in the understanding of our faith, he also liked to quote a principle already expressed by Vincent of Lérins in the fifth century: *annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate* (consolidated by years, expanded by time, refined by age), which again is well suited to the subject studied here.

No matter how immutable the contents of our liturgies might seem to us, first of all because they are biblical¹⁰ and then because they are apparently legitimised by patristic authority, our understanding of Scripture and the context in which it is read by the Fathers is growing. Today, for example, we are much more aware of the extent to which certain of their perspectives—the typological view of the Passover of Melito of Sardis (with the associated idea of the death of the Jews and the disappearance of Judaism) or the invectives of Tertullian, Chrysostom, Ephrem, the use of the Hebrew Scriptures against their first recipients, and the development of any potentially anti-Jewish elements in the New Testament, etc.—are circumstantial and not infrequently competitive and polemical. The patristic texts on which our liturgies are based (and here we are already dealing with a selection of approaches and emphases to which we could find alternatives in the same tradition) should therefore be properly contextualised before being absolutised. This will

remain a challenge even after a reform of the liturgical offices, since there are patristic writings in circulation in the Romanian Greek-Catholic milieu that are not always provided with suitable introductions and explanations, and a simplistic reading of them will continue to nourish homiletics, the spiritual life of the faithful, and theological studies. It is also necessary to understand that true fidelity to the tradition of the Fathers does not lie so much in uncritically replicating their words, but rather in carrying forward, with all the means at our disposal today (readier access to biblical texts, a better understanding of the redaction process, the proliferation of interpretative methods, the contextualisation of certain themes and emphases, an awareness of the consequences of the approaches favoured so far, etc.), their efforts at reading the Scriptures in their own times, with results that we might not entirely agree with today, but with an undeniable pastoral passion, which would be an important approach to cultivate in a new interpretation of the texts on which Holy Week is built (or would be built in the future). The good of believers, their spiritual benefit, is one of the principles on which the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy bases the very idea of reform (SC §§1, 23, 36, 50).

Then, as regards the relationship between the Council and tradition, it should be remembered that NA §4 actually marks a turning point, a rupture, a discontinuity. Relevant in this regard is the fact that, despite the fundamental choice that the Council makes in favour of *ressourcement*, this paragraph does not cite any patristic or magisterial text in support of its pronouncements (Remaud 2018, p. 31; 2008, p. 27; Stefani 1998, p. 18; 2004, pp. 227–28); indeed, certain of its assertions overturn the classical teaching of the Church and constitute a ‘real new beginning in the way of conceptualising the relationships that bind the Church to the Jewish people’, the starting point ‘of a new path with regard to the overall way in which the Catholic Church looks at ‘Abraham’s stock’’ (Stefani 1998, pp. 18–20, 178; Remaud 2008, p. 27, 110, 124–25; 2015, pp. 92–98). This is why, at least in the present case, rather than justifying the maintenance of the current approach adopted in our offices by reference to the statements in *Orientalium ecclesiarum* about the necessity of preserving the Eastern traditions, we should perhaps endeavour to find a suitable way to put into practice the idea, equally present in this declaration, of a legitimate and necessary updating of our liturgy (OE §§2, 6). The fundamental question is probably to what extent, although present in the secular tradition of the Church, the teaching of hate and contempt with regard to Jews and Judaism can be considered an inalienable part of Tradition or merely one of its circumstantial elements. Its disastrous effects throughout history should make us no longer hesitate to change something 60 years after the Council and 80 years after the Shoah. And this is not an external requirement, but a purely internal one. Our liturgy will not be an authentically Christian (and Byzantine) prayer for as long as it continues to convey messages of judgement, accusation, vengeance towards others, and self-justification and self-idealisation.

Last but not least, the Council’s assertions on the necessity of the Eastern churches preserving their own traditions—so easily absolutised in our ecclesial milieu, often merely out of convenience (it is certainly easier to cling to the logic of ‘it has always been done this way’, and a certain inertia is perhaps also normal in a long persecuted community such as ours) and sometimes out of a traditionalist spirit rather more Western than Eastern (the current integrationist trends of the West, which idealise the pre-conciliar liturgy and consider Vatican II to be the cause of the decline of the Church, do not remain without echoes in the Romanian Greek-Catholic sphere, also because they are promoted by a section of the media and a certain type of catechetical programme)—should perhaps be contextualised. Like the Council’s more general affirmations on the dignity of the Eastern churches (LG §§13, 23; OE §§3, 5; UR §§14–15.17; SC §4) and on the value of their respective patrimony (OE §§1, 3, 5–6; LG §23; SC §§4; 23; UR §§14–18)—these assertions should be

positioned first of all within the dynamic of its fundamental choice of a return to the sources already mentioned above (O'Malley 2013, pp. 43–45; Faggioli 2013, pp. 24, 28–38, 51–62), and also in the context of the abandonment of the earlier assumption of the superiority of the Latin rite (Farrugia 2000a, p. 547; 2005, p. 20; Instruction §24). Moreover, the idealisation of the Eastern rites by the promoters of the Western liturgical movement reflected a rather romantic view, instrumentalised for their own reformist purposes (Taft 1999a, pp. 100–103, 107, 113, 119–120; 2004, pp. 18–20, 23–28). Our rites are valuable, undoubtedly, but certainly not unreformable where a new understanding of the other or of certain elements of our faith would require it. The issue here is not so much whether to remain stationary but rather, to discern between what should be preserved and what should be renewed. In my opinion, what we should preserve are the rich biblical inspiration of our offices and the beauty of the poetry and the singing, and what we should avoid at all costs is the subjective selection of the scriptural text and any interpretation thereof that is hostile towards others. In the Apostolic Letter *Orientalis lumen* John Paul II affirmed the following: 'When the uses and customs belonging to each Church are considered as absolutely unchangeable, there is a sure risk of Tradition losing that feature of a living reality which grows and develops, and which the Spirit guarantees precisely because it has something to say to the people of every age. As Scripture is increasingly understood by those who read it. . . every other element of the Church's living heritage is increasingly understood by believers and is enriched by new contributions, in fidelity and in continuity. . . Tradition is never pure nostalgia for things or forms past, nor regret for lost privileges, but the living memory of the Bride, kept eternally youthful by the Love that dwells within her' (OL §8).

Nor should the fact that the idea of preserving the Eastern rites is linked in the document on ecumenism to the ideal of Church unity in itself condemn the Eastern Catholic churches to immobility. On the one hand, what the Council affirmed about the preservation of the 'very rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches. . . for the faithful preservation of the fullness of Christian tradition. . . for bringing about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians' (UR §15; cf. OE §24) cannot in itself nullify its general spirit of renewal and the possibility of organic development. After all, this and other problems of our common liturgical heritage could become topics of dialogue with our Orthodox brethren, and the undertaking of reform—a common endeavour and (why not?) a workshop for unity (Instruction §21). And then, in anticipation of such cooperation (and in support of it), for the Greek-Catholic Church, the effort to find a way to accommodate in its liturgy the conciliar and post-conciliar theological perspectives on this and other issues could perhaps already be a way of fulfilling its mission of being a bridge between East and West.

2.3. *Paths of Renewal for the Liturgies of Holy Week*

But the revision of the anti-Jewish content of our worship is first and foremost an internal requirement for our ecclesial reality. A merely theoretical reception of NA §4 (and of Vatican II in general) would be terribly sterile in this ecclesial sphere, possibly even creating serious cognitive dissonance in the absence of the reinforcement of the new messages through the liturgy, in itself a formative place (SC §§2; 7; 10; 21; 33; 84; 88; 105; Instruction §14)¹¹, and for many, even the only one. Warmly recommended (SC §§14, 19, 35.3; Instruction §30), liturgical catechesis is in fact very rare and, when offered, not necessarily attended. Moreover, in the situation under discussion here, it seems an unsatisfactory solution, since it risks either reinforcing the current content of Holy Week or creating a schizophrenic perspective on the subject: we pray one way, but we believe another. And if the reception of NA §4 was not possible for the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church at the time of its promulgation, perhaps this delay also brings its own opportunities,

since, in the meantime, the insights of Vatican II in the field of the relationship with Jews and Judaism and in so many areas of theology have matured and the liturgical reform in general, and that of Holy Week in particular, have shown both their fruits and their limitations. As far as our topic is concerned, I think that one of the things we can learn is that the suppression of a term such as *perfidis judaeis* (with endless repetitions in the Byzantine offices) is far from solving the problem of anti-Judaism. That *improperia* do not necessarily lose their original meaning through the simple suppression of certain terms that address them more explicitly to Jews. That the path of reform is gradual, as gradual as the awareness of this problem. Moreover, the contents of NA §4 were carried forward.

If a first step towards the reform of the liturgical offices discussed here could consist in reformulating certain texts (those containing insults towards Jews or generalised judgements for Jesus's death, perhaps better circumscribing where responsibility lies for this event) or suppressing those more explicitly substitutive, vindictive, or disrespectful of Judaism (such as those that refer without further explanation to the 'curse of the law'), following precisely the line taken by NA §4¹², I personally believe that—sixty years on—we could go much further. In my opinion, something would need to be changed in the spirit of the Holy Week offices themselves. In the first place, their fundamental perspective, which is currently, paradoxically (1) more Judeocentric than Christocentric; (2) accusatory and judgmental towards our Jewish brethren rather than the bearer of the good news of salvation and divine mercy for everyone; (3) excessively critical towards others and overly justificatory (and idealising) in respect of the Christian community. And here perhaps is the really significant step required to bring about a true reception of *Nostra aetate* 4: the reformulation of our offices to make them more engaging for the participants. This does not mean that to update the hymnography of the Great Week it would suffice to simply extend the current accusations to Christians as well, renouncing the current detachment (they did such and such, but we glorify you), although a good criterion for reform would certainly be to ask ourselves whether we could maintain the same severity of language if, instead of the Jews, or alongside them, we were also to be talking about ourselves. The purpose of the liturgy is not to apportion blame (not to ourselves, let alone to others), and the 'holy' week should change its name if, instead of love and blessing, it conveys hostility and curses. Perhaps the challenge of receiving NA §4 would be to stop once and for all blaming the Jews (more or less collectively) for the rejection and killing of Jesus, acknowledging that—had we been in their place (and this would be a useful 'substitution' exercise, probably the only legitimate one)—we would not have done any better. And then find a new way of expressing the mystery of Easter and the cross which, rather than being a court passing judgment on the acts of others or an occasion for self-congratulation, might be for worshippers an opportunity for awareness and authentic conversion.

For this reason, perhaps more than a chronicle of what happened or an exact account of Jesus's sufferings, our offices should be a place that speaks of his infinite love (as the ending of NA §4 itself states), as well as one where we proclaim his forgiveness (with him and on his behalf), acknowledging our own need for such forgiveness. Whenever we blame the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus in our liturgies or elsewhere, we should perhaps ask ourselves how many times we have crucified him in our brothers. And we would perhaps be reminded of the way the Church acknowledged the faults of the past during the 2000 Jubilee (Neudecker 2012, pp. 121–22). If, up to this point, a 'historical', literal (indeed, literalist) interpretation of the Easter events has prevailed in the Easter offices, it is certainly not the only one possible; the alternative, in my opinion, would consist precisely of a more 'spiritual' interpretation of the Easter events, which is already present in a certain type of exegesis and homiletics on many biblical passages, including those central to the Easter celebrations. After all, the purpose of Scripture is not to instruct

us on the evil of others, but rather to highlight our own, in order to then light our path (Ps 119:105), healing and transforming our lives. What form would the offices of Holy Week take if—instead of judging the acts of Judas and the ‘Jews’, comfortably detaching ourselves from them—we found ourselves involved in them through the darkest corners of our own existence? So many other figures from sacred history serve as mirrors for us; why would these be an exception? What if, instead of identifying ourselves with Christ or with the Cyrenian¹³, or with the ‘faithful’ disciples—at most with the ‘good thief’ and the repentant sinner—we identified ourselves with those who plotted against Jesus, betrayed him, condemned him, mistreated him, crucified him, mocked him, offered him vinegar and gall, etc.? A spiritual reading of the most varied biblical texts is extremely common to an entire Christian tradition; why stop at the mere historical level in this case, forgetting that it is not the letter, but the spirit that gives life? And even if, by moving to a theological level, our liturgy were perhaps to lose something of the historical truth of the facts, it would gain something in truthfulness: coming face to face with our most real self (not the ideal one, supposedly converted once and for all through baptism) and placing it in all nakedness before God in prayer could not but benefit every member of the praying community. Similarly, starting from the readings of Holy Monday, could we also see ourselves in the murderous vineyard workers, in the brother who refused to work in the vineyard, in the barren fig tree (all themes explored in an anti-Jewish sense by patristics). And, as already mentioned, in the case of fig tree motif, the liturgy already offers us some models for a rewriting of the texts when it applies this image to the praying community (*Rânduiala* 32, 67). But such an insight should perhaps be extended to what has so far been neglected (or even discarded) in our offices: the behaviour of a Peter in Gethsemane, the flight of all the apostles (till now rather idealised), and perhaps, and above all, the acts of Judas and the ‘Jews’, the figures of Pilate, Herod or Barabbas¹⁴. Seeing ourselves in all of these, and perhaps above all in that ‘son of the father’ in whose place Jesus went to the cross, accepting his mission and carrying it through to its ultimate consequences, could cure us of any desire to accuse others. Reforming our liturgical texts in this way would be consonant not only with the essence of Christianity, but also with the most authentic Byzantine spirit concentrated throughout Lent in the prayer of Ephraim the Syrian: ‘O Lord, give . . . the spirit of . . . humility . . . and love to Thy servant . . ., the charity that never fails . . .; grant me to see my own faults and not to judge my brother’¹⁵.

Well, I think that by now—after John Paul II’s historic visit to the synagogue in Rome and Pope Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, which after all develops certain affirmations on fraternity already present in the Council (NA §§1, 4–5, GS §§35, 38, 61, 88, 92), as well as a key idea of Christianity—it is unimaginable that this designation does not also apply to Jews. It is true, however, that this theme—for centuries explored in the Christian tradition to designate the relationship between Jews and Christians in rather negative senses—would require reinterpretation and healing. If our ancestors concentrated above all on their conflictual aspects, it might be time to explore new meanings. Illustrative of the current approach is the way in which, commenting on the story of Jacob and Esau, the Fathers neglect the episode of their reconciliation (*La Bibbia commentata dai padri. Antico Testamento 1/2, Genesi 12–50* 2004, p. 330), but also the themes that our liturgy chooses from the story of Joseph: the father’s lament for the loss of his son (*Rânduiala* 25)¹⁶ and the resistance in the face of the temptation by the Egyptian woman (*Rânduiala* 25, 32). How would the whole setting of our offices change if they also incorporated that part of his story that speaks of the brothers finding each other and of his forgiveness? Given that the whole Christian tradition (and the liturgy itself) sees Joseph as a Christ-like figure, this would bring down the whole anti-Jewish edifice we have built up. But is forgiveness not the path

that Jesus has shown us? A theme to explore in our liturgies? The essence of the Jubilee (SNC §23; Pastoral Guide §§1–2; 14, 18)?

3. Moving Forward

The Pastoral Guide for the Jubilee of the Oriental Churches invites the various ecclesial realities to ‘a profound exterior and interior renewal’ through ‘courageous steps’ that make ‘Christians more conscious of the treasure of their faith and more credible in their witness to the gift of love they have received’, which requires ‘new approaches’ (Pastoral Guide §29), as well as a ‘liturgical and spiritual renewal of the Lenten celebrations’ (Pastoral Guide §32), also speaking of the need for churches to transmit concrete gestures ‘of forgiveness given and received’, which could be ‘all the more prophetic’ in the times of anguish and conflict we are currently experiencing. What if the Jubilee of Hope would be an appropriate time for the start of the reform of Holy Week? When Jules Isaac visited John XXIII before the Council and presented him with Seelisberg’s ten points, he asked him at the end of the meeting if he could hold out hope for a change in the Church’s traditional teaching and prayers with regard to the Jews and Judaism, and the Pope replied that he could have more than hope (Stefani 1998, p. 54; Remaud 2008, p. 18). This promise was not fully realised at the time, however, since a part of the Eastern Catholic Churches could not follow the pre- and post-conciliar innovative trends because of the conditions imposed on them by the Communist regimes. But, if such renewal has been substantially delayed, it is not irretrievable (and, in any event, should not be put off any longer). Eighty years after the end of the Second World War and the tragic experience of the Shoah, and sixty years after *Nostra aetate*, it is time for the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church to become aware of the weight of traditional anti-Judaism still present in its liturgies and to begin to reform them (along with catechetical, homiletic and theological mindsets and discourses).

This would be required first of all by the coherence of the life of this ecclesial reality with the spirit of current Catholicism, which has taken so many steps in the area of relations with ‘our elder brothers’ (John Paul II 1986) and ‘fathers in faith’ (Benedict XVI, cf. The gifts and the calling 14) in recent decades. The reception of Vatican II on this and other issues is not an optional extra, but a journey that has to be undertaken, as authoritative voices have repeatedly reiterated (John Paul II 1985; 1986, p. 5; 2000, p. 10; TMA §36; Francis 2013, 2016; Sandri 2014) and will, at some stage, inevitably also impact on worship, a precious source of vitality that should remain so. However, in their current form, the offices of Holy Week risk being quite the opposite when they cultivate attitudes of hostility towards others, which is already at odds with the most authentic spirit of Christianity, which should cultivate love rather than judgement. It would also require consistency with the Eastern spirit, which, especially during Lent, should cultivate penance and weeping for one’s own sins and those of others (Makarios Simonopetritul 2008, pp. 62–80), as Pope Leo XIV reminded us in his recent meeting with the Eastern Catholic Churches (Leo XIV 2025). Personally, I hope that the fact that he reaffirmed the idea of the preciousness of the Eastern rites and the importance of preservation of our traditions will not be interpreted as a rejection of any organic progress. On the other hand, he also spoke of the perennial novelty of Eastern spiritualities. The idea of not diluting them does not necessarily mean immobilising them, paralysing them, allowing them to atrophy.

At the above-mentioned Jubilee of the Eastern Churches, seeing the various Catholic Churches of the Byzantine rite praying together, it occurred to me that reflection on how to update the anti-Jewish elements of our liturgies could be the subject of a networking exercise (and also, as already mentioned, a subject of dialogue and cooperation with our Orthodox brethren). In a context in which knowledge is ultra-specialised and the problem of anti-Judaism much more complex than would appear at first sight, it would be essential

to bring together a variety of skills and experiences, as well as a variety of creative resources to try to re-tell the Paschal mystery in new ways, proclaiming the cross of Christ ‘as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows’ (NA §4). In a world where the harm caused by words of scorn and hatred is readily apparent, and in a time when we are well aware of the tragic consequences of the traditional teaching on Jews and Judaism, and when, rediscovering the values of fraternity, dialogue, concord, we bear testimony to them with such conviction, we should stop disseminating expressions of hostility (to whomever they may be addressed) in our own worship. And since the Pope reminded us that our spiritualities are ‘medicinal’, perhaps we should ask ourselves how they could become more so, even and especially in their liturgical expression. Probably the way to do this would be to replace the insults, accusations, judgments, condemnations and curses that characterise our worship at present with an acknowledgment of our own limitations and sins, repentance, intercessions, and blessings.

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Abbreviations

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| Antologhion | <i>Antologhion. Slujbele săvârșite în colegiu pe perioada Triodului</i> vol. II, Roma: Colegiul Pio romeno 2016 |
| CCCO | Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. Available online: https://archive.org/details/codeofcanonsofea0000cath/mode/2up (accessed on 5 May 2025) |
| Communicate | Communicate of the Synod of Bishops (spring 2022): https://bisericaromanaunita.ro/comunicat-sesiunea-ordinara-de-primavara-a-sinodului-episcopilor-bisericii-romane-unite-cu-roma-greco-catolice-3/ (accessed on 5 May 2025) |
| DV | Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on divine Revelation <i>Dei verbum</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (accessed on 10 May 2025) |
| GS | Vatican II, Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world <i>Gaudium et spes</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed on 7 May 2025) |
| Holy Week | Eparhia greco-catolică de Cluj-Gherla, liturgic, Triod 2023, Săptămâna mare 2023. Available online: https://www.eparhiaclujgherla.ro/liturgic/ (accessed 20 on May 2025) |
| Instruction | Istruzione per l’applicazione delle prescrizioni liturgiche del CCCO, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/orientchurch/Istruzione/pdf/istruzionecongchieseorientali.pdf (accessed on 5 May 2025) |
| LG | Vatican II, Dogmatic constitution on the Church <i>Lumen gentium</i> . Available online: www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed on 3 May 2025) |
| NA | Vatican II, Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-christian Religions <i>Nostra aetate</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed on 7 May 2025) |
| OE | Vatican II, Decree on the catholic churches of the eastern rite <i>Orientalium ecclesiarum</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html (accessed on 5 May 2025) |
| OD | Leo XIII, Orientalium dignitas. On the Churches of the East. Available online: https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/113orient.htm (accessed on 14 May 2025) |

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| OL | John Paul II, Apostolic letter <i>Orientalium lumen</i> to mark the centenary of <i>Orientalium dignitas</i> of pope Leo XIII. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19950502_orientale-lumen.html (accessed on 3 May 2025) |
| Pastoral Guide | The Jubilee Year 2025 and the Eastern Catholic Churches, chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcapcgjclefindmkaj/https://www.orientchurch.va/images/2025.02.26_DCO_GIUBILEO_ENGLISH_-_ESTRATTO.pdf (accessed on 3 May 2025) |
| Rânduiala | <i>Rânduiala sfintelor și dumnezeieștilor slujbe din săptămâna mare, duminica învierii și săptămâna luminată</i> . Blaj: Buna vestire 2004 |
| SC | Vatican II, Constitution on the sacred liturgy <i>Sacrosanctum concilium</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed on 13 May 2025) |
| SNC | Francisc, <i>Spes non confundit</i> . Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit-bolla-giubileo2025.html (accessed on 12 May 2025) |
| Strastnic | <i>Strastnic care cuprinde Rânduiala sfintelor și dumnezeieștilor slujbe din săptămâna patimilor</i> , Blaj: Tipografia seminarului 1929 |
| 'The gifts and the calling' | 'The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:29). Available online: https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/_perche-i-doni-e-la-chiamata-di-dio-sono-irrevocabili--rm-11%E2%80%9329-/en.html (accessed on 15 May 2025) |
| TMA | John Paul II, Apostolic letter <i>Tertio millennio adveniente</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html (accessed on 7 May 2025) |
| Triod | <i>Triodul care cuprinde slujbele bisericesti de la duminica vameșului și a fariseului până la sfânta înviere</i> , București: IBMBOR 2000 |
| UR | Vatican II, Decree on ecumenism <i>Unitatis redintegratio</i> . Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (accessed on 8 May 2025) |

Notes

- ¹ The present article is part of a larger research project on the necessity of the reception of the NA in the Romanian Greek-Catholic sphere that is in the process of publication, which it would be impossible to summarise here, but which presupposes the analysis of the anti-Jewish elements of our worship and their respective patristic roots, highlighting their contextual and subjective character and, therefore, their reformability. The liturgical material studied is the most recent version of the offices of Holy Week published so far in the Greek-Catholic sphere (*Rânduiala*), a collection less heavy on anti-Judaism than the earlier Greek-Catholic edition (*Strastnic*) or the Romanian Orthodox editions of the *Triodion* (similarly used in our communities), due to the fact that the number of texts has been reduced in an effort to shorten the offices. Even if such intervention in the pre-Easter offices did not have the direct aim of moving away from anti-Jewish passages, it does show that the modification of our liturgies is possible. And I hope that my commitment as a scholar of the Council (and that of other researchers with other competences) may impel a revisiting of our liturgies also from the point of view of my subject of study, offering the decision-makers reasons and criteria for renewal. My study is at the level of the theological investigation, which should precede any potential revision of the liturgy as referred to by the Council and subsequent documents (SC 23; Instruction 19). The reform proper would be the responsibility of the competent ecclesiastical authority (SC 22; Instruction 22–24); it should be the fruit of the work of a team (SC 44) and should preferably be carried out in cooperation with the other Churches of the same rite, including the Orthodox rite (see below). It is to be welcomed that recently the idea of reforming liturgical texts with an anti-Jewish character is beginning to be considered in our Church (Communicate), something that was unimaginable in 2012, when I began my research on the subject of the (non)reception of the Council in our ecclesial sphere, when the problem of anti-Semitism was relativised, ignored, or automatically considered outdated after Vatican II.
- ² By 'reception', I mean not merely the theoretical knowledge of NA §4 (or of the Council more generally), but also the translation of this knowledge into new terminology, mindsets, attitudes, theological approaches, openness to dialogue, and also into a reappraisal of the various expressions of our faith, including the liturgy (however traditional, co-natural, and immutable they might seem to us). In this regard, I follow the approach of Routhier 2007, pp. 44–49, 62–65 and Noceti 2007, p. 104. On the subject of reception, see also Congar 1972, pp. 369–403; Capretti 2010, pp. 21–26 or Theobald 2011, pp. 390–404; in the wake of Alois Grillmeier, Farrugia (2005, p. 22) in turn distinguishes between the reception of the vocabulary of a Council and that of its contents.
- ³ For a more complete analysis, see the research mentioned above and another of my contributions: The Jews, our 'lawless'... 'elder brothers'. Perspectives on the reception of the Second Vatican Council among an Oriental Catholic Church, in *Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism*, Edition Israelogic, (Zetea 2024, pp. 289–310). I also draw attention to the complementary studies of: Eliane Poirot, Alexandru Ioniță, and Basilius Groen.
- ⁴ A dictionary published in the first half of the last century illustrates that Romanians were already aware of the preference of Jews to be called 'evrei' ['Jews/Hebrews'] and 'israeliți' ['Israelites'] rather than 'iudei' and 'jidovi'/'jidani' (Scriban 1939, p. 714). Some twenty years earlier, the Greek-Catholic press objected to the choice of the editors of an Orthodox translation of the Bible to replace the term 'jidov' with 'evreu' (Macaveiu 1921, p. 7).

- 5 According to Isaac, this is the central argument of Christian anti-Semitism and the most harmful and enduring thesis of the so-called ‘teaching of contempt’, the most effective weapon against Judaism and the permanent source of Christian anti-Semitism (Isaac 1948, pp. 349–414; 2014, pp. 186, 382).
- 6 Holy Monday remains consecrated to the memory of the patriarch Joseph and of the *barren fig tree* (*Rânduiala* 25), in which the Christian world has traditionally seen a symbol of the unfruitful ‘synagogue of the Jews’, cursed by Christ. This is explicitly attested to in a verse from the *Triodion* (547), fortunately suppressed in the *Rânduiala*, along with other passages on the same theme, during the course of abbreviating the offices as mentioned above, but reappearing in an online version of liturgical texts, the editor of which seems intent on offering worshippers the most comprehensive form possible of the offices (Liturgic). By contrast, other passages on the barren fig tree preserved in the *Rânduiala* could serve as a model for the reformulation of current anti-Jewish passages, given their more spiritual approach to the theme (see below).
- 7 Despite the fact that in its final form *Nostra aetate* speaks only of anti-Semitism, the original intent of taking up the subject of Jews and Judaism was precisely to heal the traditional anti-Jewish hostility manifested within the church (Hussar 2022, pp. 98–99; Stefani 2014, pp. 329–30; O’Malley 2013, pp. 222–25, 281–82). Its insights are carried forward by other official documents, by various speeches and gestures of recent popes and by rich theological reflection (Neudecker 2012, pp. 31–144; Stefani 1998, pp. 179, 192–224; 2004, pp. 230, 235–46, 251–77; 2014, pp. 331–43; Remaud 2008, pp. 114–26; 2015, pp. 98–103; Capretti 2010, pp. 46–53, 172–73, 180–81, 202; Imperatori 2019, pp. 77–97, 157–58).
- 8 It could be said, of course, that NA §4 also mentions Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. Nevertheless, the history of the document shows us that the intention here is not to reiterate imputations, but precisely to circumscribe responsibility by countering the classical collective accusations, as well that of deicide (Bea 1966, pp. 61–103, 147–50, 159–62; O’Malley 2013, pp. 225–26, 256–57; Gronchi and Paolo 2018, p. 492, 553–58; Paolo 2016, pp. 195–96; Remaud 2008, pp. 119–25). However, the real novelty of the document (which is not so new, since it is an affirmation already present in the Tridentine Catechism (Stefani 2004, p. 245; Ratzinger 1999, pp. 36–37; Garrigues 2013, p. 141)—who needs to be incorporated into our liturgies seems to me to be the idea of universal responsibility (= *our* responsibility) in the death of Jesus, till now practically forgotten in the offices of Holy Week. In the current formulation, the idea of the death of Jesus ‘for us’, although present, risks being understood in the sense of a reward rather than a responsibility, while all the blame for what happened in that Passover is laid on the ‘Jews’, at least according to the most accessible and immediate interpretation.
- 9 The idea of a living tradition is not foreign to Eastern theology either (Taft 1999b, pp. 12, 30, 115, 318 ss.; Farrugia 2000b, p. 769; Andrew Louth cited in Ioniță 2024, p. 11; Alfeyev 2009, pp. 277–80; Getcha 2010, pp. 80–81).
- 10 A careful analysis of the current form of the liturgical offices of Holy Week could illustrate how the biblical text is far from being used in its pure form. Even when cited as such, it is subject to various selections (with a preference—as far as the Gospels are concerned—for texts with the strongest anti-Jewish potential and—as far as the Old Testament readings are concerned—for passages that can be interpreted in a prophetic or prefigurative key). In the hymnographic context, various biblical texts are subjected to a variety of combinations, interpretations and sometimes corrections, as we have already seen and as I will detail in the study above. And while it is certainly inconceivable that the offices of Holy Week could ignore the Passion narratives (in themselves an interpretation of what happened in that Passover, not without a certain anti-Jewish animosity, something now sufficiently demonstrated by the specialist literature), their repetition could be less insistent and arbitrary. The hymnography, in turn, could serve not to increase the anti-Jewish potential of the basic biblical texts, but possibly to diminish, explain, and contextualise it. Hymnody—a very specific and probably irreplaceable component of the Byzantine tradition—could be better utilised, with all its potential for beauty and creativity, in the offices of Holy Week. Placing it at the service of good or of evil, of hatred or of the healing of wounds, is a matter of choice. The use of certain passages from the Old Testament could, in turn, be less instrumental; in its current form, the reference to the Hebrew Scriptures seems strictly subservient to the Christian message, without much respect for their intrinsic and/or universal value. As possible avenues of reform, I would tentatively suggest the following: (1) the reading of the Hebrew Easter texts not so much in a prefigurative, appropriative, substitutive key, but rather in that of gratitude for God’s gift to his people (= Israel); (2) the substitution of those Old Testament passages that currently reinforce various elements of the Passion in a prophetic-prefigurative logic (not infrequently with accusatory and vindictive overtones) with those that speak of God’s love and his forgiveness beyond human infidelities (which, moreover, are not only Jewish, but also ours); (3) the re-interpretation of passages such as the songs of the suffering servant or certain psalms traditionally read in an exclusively Christological key (as well as certain figures such as Jonah or Job) in a more universal key. The idea would be to show not so much that everything has been prefigured and fulfilled in Christ, but rather, how he takes on the human condition to the point of suffering and death.
- 11 In the same vein, see also Girardi 2014, pp. 85, 105, 148–50, 247–48; Faggioli 2013, pp. 72–73; Mojzes 2022, pp. 419–20; John Paul II 1994, p. 4; Gugerotti 2005, pp. 73–74, 81–82, 89, 91.
- 12 These are the options endorsed in their proposal for the rewriting of the Byzantine liturgical texts by Mother Eliane Poirot et Sandrine Canéri (Poirot and Canéri 2008). I discuss this initiative in greater detail elsewhere.

- ¹³ This is the fundamental approach for the second part of Lent (see, for example, *Antologhion* II, 460; *Rânduiala* 27–28, 71; *Triod* 543; 555, but also the explanations given by the experts: Makarios Simonopetritul 2008, pp. 371, 373; Schmemmann 2013, pp. 129–34, 143–44; Andronikof 1986, pp. 205–6).
- ¹⁴ And it is not as though the patristic tradition has not already travelled this path of identifying with certain characters of the Easter events; see, in this regard, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 45, 23–24 (PG 36, 654–655), a reading moreover proposed by the Roman Catholic rite during the Easter season (for example, 1 April 2023): ‘If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross and follow Christ. If you are crucified beside him like one of the thieves, now, like the good thief, acknowledge your God. For your sake, and because of your sin, Christ himself was regarded as a sinner; for his sake, therefore, you must cease to sin. Worship him who was hung on the cross because of you, even if you are hanging there yourself. Derive some benefit from the very shame. . . . If you are a Joseph of Arimathea, go to the one who ordered his crucifixion, and ask for Christ’s body. Make your own the expiation for the sins of the whole world. If you are a Nicodemus, like the man who worshiped God by night, bring spices and prepare Christ’s body for burial. If you are one of the Marys, or Salome, or Joanna, weep in the early morning’. Perhaps all that is required is to take this insight further: ‘Since you are among those who have betrayed him, accused him, condemned him, tortured him, crucified him, pierced him, ask forgiveness for yourself and for others, and look to his infinite love for all. Learn forgiveness and self-giving from him, and live and die like him, giving yourself up to your last breath’. Identification with Christ should not be taken for granted, but proposed as a path to follow. Or again, ‘Like Peter I betrayed you. . . . Like him I did not understand you. . . . Like the other apostles I fled. . . . Like Barabbas I received deliverance and life. . . . Give me tears of repentance and the grace to return to you. . . . So many things about me oppose your teachings. . . . Help me to accept them in the concreteness of my existence! Some part of me sometimes rejects you, to the point of crying out “he deserves to die on the cross”! . . . Teach me to welcome you, to know you and to love you wherever you present yourself to me, starting with my brothers!’
- ¹⁵ The prayer can be found on the website <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/lenten-prayer-of-st-ephrem> (accessed on 5 May 2025); on the same theme, see also Makarios Simonopetritul 2008, pp. 129–40; Schmemmann 1987, pp. 62–70. Other words by the same author (whose works are not without anti-Jewish elements) that could serve to revisit the pre-Easter offices were quoted in Pope Leo XIV’s address at the audience organised for the pilgrims at the Jubilee of the Eastern Churches on 14 May 2025 (Leo XIV 2025). This shows that the current anti-Jewish approach evident in our liturgies is not due to patristic inspiration *per se*, but rather to a given selection of texts and emphases; as already mentioned, it is the very same patristic tradition that can offer us alternative perspectives, something I will return to at length elsewhere.
- ¹⁶ Two comments made by Cyril of Alexandria on the events surrounding Joseph, interpreting his figure Christologically and correlating that of Jacob to the Father (whom he says is saddened by the folly and the homicidal, unpardonable act of the Jews), may reveal something more about the meaning of these passages: Glaphyra Genesis, VI, Joseph 4–5. The continuation of the Cyrillian commentary is also interesting, where Jacob’s joy at finding his son and grandchildren is interpreted as the Father’s joy at welcoming the Son’s people: VI, Joseph and his sons 3.

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