

ECUMENICAL ASPIRATIONS AND ORTHODOX RESISTANCE: UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC EFFORTS TOWARD DIALOGUE AT VATICAN II, 1959–1965

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Abstract. This article examines the efforts of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) to foster ecumenical dialogue and secure Orthodox participation at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), focusing on the years 1959–1965. Despite sustained episcopal diplomacy, the UGCC's aspirations for unity with Ukrainian Orthodoxy proved structurally impossible due to deep-seated historical and institutional resistance from Orthodox hierarchs. Key challenges included the Orthodox suspicions of the Council, the controversy over Moscow Patriarchate observers, and the eventual rejection of an invitation to send observers, even after the unauthorized visit of one hierarch, Archbishop Mstyslav Skrypnyk, underscored the internal divisions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The study reveals a profound asymmetry in ecclesial memory that prevented Greek Catholic calls for unity from taking root in Orthodox consciousness.

Keywords: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), Ukrainian Orthodoxy, Ecumenism, Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk, Archbishop Mstyslav Skrypnyk.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was an epoch-making event in the history of the Catholic Church, inaugurating profound theological, liturgical, and ecclesiological reforms. For the Eastern Catholic Churches, it was no less significant. In particular, the conciliar decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* summarized more than half a century of ecclesial reflection on the place and role of the Eastern Catholic Churches within the universal communion – a process catalyzed by Leo XIII's

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1894 breve *Orientalium dignitas*. Equally important was the Council's decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which devoted particular attention to the Catholic Church's ecumenical engagement with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Since nearly all Eastern Catholic Churches (with the exception of the Maronite Church) have their own "Orthodox counterparts" with whom they share a common history, territorial space, traumatic experiences, and a long tradition of polemics and dialogue, the ecumenical spirit of the Council demanded a fundamental rethinking of their place in light of the updated paradigm of inter-Christian relations.

Ukrainian Greek Catholics and Orthodox had sought opportunities for reconciliation and the restoration of unity already in the decades following the Union of Brest in 1596. Dialogue continued, with varying intensity, until around 1680,² when external circumstances beyond the control of either party brought these efforts to a halt until the twentieth century. Pope John XXIII's announcement of the Council, emphasizing that it was to serve not only as a means of renewing the Catholic Church but also as a vehicle for healing divisions among Christian communities,³ prompted laypeople, theologians, and bishops alike – both from the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and from the various Ukrainian Orthodox jurisdictions – to formulate their own positions in response to this call. This process of reflection, debate, and position-forming continued throughout all sessions of the Council, shaping responses to the unfolding conciliar proceedings.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that existing scholarship on the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC)⁴ and the Second Vatican Council

2 See Jan KRAJCAR, "The Ruthenian Patriarchate. Some Remarks on the Project for its Establishment in the 17th Century", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964) 65–84; Wasyl LENCYK, "The Origins of the Ukrainian Patriarchate", in Nicholas L. CHIROVSKY (ed.), *The Millennium of Ukrainian Christianity*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1988, 371–392; Demetrius TANCZUK, "Quaestio Patriarchatus Kioviensis tempore conaminum Unionis Ruthenorum (1582–1632)", *Analecta OSBM* 2.1.1 (1949) 128–144.

3 William HENN, "The Reception of Vatican II's Teaching on Ecumenism into the Life of the Catholic Church", *Jubilee 2000 Magazine* 2 (1997), https://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01051997_p-45_en.html [accessed 23 November 2025]

4 Prior to 1959, "Ruthenian Church" served as the formal ecclesiastical designation in official usage, even as "Ukrainian" had gained widespread acceptance in vernacular discourse, particularly within the diaspora. In 1959, the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops in the diaspora adopted the decision to change the designation to "Ukrainian Catholic Church." In the diaspora, particularly in North America, the name "Ukrainian Catholic

has focused predominantly on two areas: debates surrounding the patriarchate,⁵ which intensified from 1963 onward and dominated post-conciliar discourse, and discussions of the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, particularly concerning liturgical practice and religious-cultural identity.⁶

By contrast, the ecumenical dimension – specifically, the question of unity with the Ukrainian Orthodoxy – has received comparatively less scholarly attention,⁷ despite its centrality to both the episcopal hierarchy and the broader Ukrainian Catholic community during the Council's preparatory and early phases. This article addresses that lacuna. Drawing upon Ukrainian Catholic periodicals, episcopal correspondence, minutes of episcopal conferences, personal diaries (particularly those of Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk), and archival materials,

Church" continues to be used today. This article employs the official name generally accepted within the framework of the Church: the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). Beginning in 1961, the *Annuario Pontificio* began using the designation *degli Ucraini* (of the Ukrainians) for eparchies and metropolises historically connected to the Kyivan Metropolitanate, replacing the earlier formulation *per i fedeli ruteni di rito bizantino* (for the Ruthenian faithful of the Byzantine rite).

- 5 See for example Augustyn BABIAK, *Legitimacy of the Ukrainian Patriarchate*, Lyon-Lviv: Missioner, 2005; Vasyl MARKUS, "The Role of the Patriarchal Movement in the Ukrainian Catholic Church", in David GOA (ed.), *The Ukrainian Religious Experience: Tradition and the Canadian Cultural Context*, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989, 157–170.
- 6 See for example Mariia IVANIV, *The Reception of the Decree Orientalium Ecclesiarum by the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia 1965–1980*, Doctoral Thesis, University of St. Michael's College and the Graduate Centre for Theological Studies, Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto, 2024.
- 7 Certain aspects of this topic have been addressed in Myrosław TATARYN, "The Eastern Catholic Churches and the Paradox of Vatican II", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 13/2 (2013) 83–95; Peter DE MEY, "Metropolitan Hermaniuk and the Conciliar Work on Unitatis Redintegratio and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*: A Comparative Study", in Jaroslav Z. SKIRA, Peter DE MEY (eds.), *Met. Maxim Hermaniuk, Vatican II and the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church* (Eastern Christian Studies Series 31), Leuven: Peeters, 2020, 99–142; Mariia IVANIV, "The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Bishops at the Second Vatican Council: The Participation in the Council and Contribution to the Discussions of Conciliar Documents", in Vladimir LATINOVIC, Anastacia K. WOODEN (eds.), *Stolen Churches or Bridges to Orthodoxy? (Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue)*, Springer International Publishing, 2021, 161–184.

as well as Orthodox Ukrainian statements and correspondence, this article examines Ukrainian Greek Catholic efforts to secure Orthodox participation at the Council and the broader question of Catholic-Orthodox reconciliation during the years 1959–1965. The analysis illuminates the divergence between the Council's ecumenical promises and the realities of Ukrainian Catholic-Orthodox relations, revealing why rapprochement mattered so profoundly to Greek Catholic identity yet proved structurally impossible despite sustained episcopal diplomacy, genuine personal relationships, and shared national aspirations.

Post-war ecumenism

At the time when Pope John XXIII announced, on 25 January 1959, his decision to convene the Council, the UGCC found itself in an exceptionally difficult situation – one that significantly shaped both its expectations of the Council and its subsequent evaluation of its decisions. Although the Ukrainian episcopal delegation was among the most numerous of the Eastern Catholic groups – 15 out of approximately 120 bishops⁸ – its voice was less visible than that of the 16 Melkite bishops headed by Patriarch Maximos IV. The main reason for this lay beyond the UGCC itself: in its homeland, where the Church's historical and theological center was located, it existed only underground. All of its bishops had been arrested by the Soviet authorities in 1945, and by 1962 only its head, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, remained alive among those arrested – by then having spent seventeen years in the GULAG camps. Moreover, the vast majority of the Church's faithful, along with significant portions of its property, had been forcibly incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church.⁹

This violent suppression inevitably colored attitudes toward ecumenism within the Greek Catholic diaspora, particularly given Rome's desire to establish dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate – a Church that, in the eyes of many Ukrainian Catholics, bore direct responsibility for their persecution.

By contrast, during the preceding decade the Church in the diaspora underwent dynamic development, expanding from two exarchates in 1945 to six exarchates,

8 Андрій Сапеляк, *Українська Церква на II Ватиканському Соборі*, Рим–Буенос-Айрес: Салезіанське видавництво, 1967, 69.

9 See Bohdan Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Soviet State 1939–1950*, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996.

one apostolic visitation, and two metropolitanates comprising seven eparchies. Yet despite this considerable institutional growth, the episcopate lacked unified leadership: hierarchs were primarily focused on the internal needs of their respective local communities.¹⁰

At the same time, the Church's internal environment itself presented a significant challenge. The expansion of its institutional network was driven in no small part by the sharp increase in the number of faithful: after the Second World War, roughly 250,000 Ukrainians arrived in the West, the majority of whom were Greek Catholics. This new wave of emigration – with its own experiences and its own understanding of the Church's nature, mission, and future – often differed in its views from those of the older emigration and their descendants.¹¹ This created a new configuration of internal expectations and needs, which in turn influenced the formation of diverse and sometimes markedly different hopes and assessments regarding the Council's forthcoming decisions.

The experience of this postwar cohort was decisive in shaping expectations regarding the Council, particularly on questions of ecumenism. Before resettling permanently in North and South America, Western Europe, and Australia, these Ukrainian refugees spent several years in displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany and Austria. A distinctive feature of religious life in these camps was the parallel existence of sizable Greek Catholic and Orthodox communities. For the first time in over 150 years – a period during which these two religious groups had been separated by the political borders of the Austrian and Russian empires – direct and sustained contact became possible. According to available statistics, approximately 65–67% of Ukrainian refugees belonged to the UGCC, organized into 120 communities, while 30–33% were Orthodox, belonging to 80 parishes of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC).¹² This proximity generally unfolded without significant

10 Anatolii BABYNSKYI, "The Quest for Unity and Autonomy: The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the Diaspora", *Religions*, 16.4 (2025) 518.

11 See Анатолій Бабинський, *Патріархальний рух в середовищі українських греко-католиків у діаспорі (1964–1989 рр.)*, Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеня доктора філософії, Львів: Український католицький університет, 2020.

12 Essentially, this Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was an outgrowth of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC), which received the Tomos of autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1924. A significant portion of the PAOC faithful consisted of ethnic Ukrainians who consistently advocated for the Ukrainianization of church life and subsequently received their own bishops. During

conflict. On occasion, representatives of different confessions formed a single parish community, participated in joint paraliturgical celebrations marking national holidays, or collaborated in commemorative events honoring national heroes.¹³ Life in the DP camps thus fostered what might be termed a “grassroots ecumenism” – one that was not institutional in character but rather emerged organically at the level of the laity. This development, however, raised concerns in Catholic circles. In 1947, it became the subject of a conversation between Cardinal Eugène Tisserant and Bishop Constantine Bohachevsky, Exarch of Philadelphia for the Ukrainian catholics in the United States, during which the Vatican official expressed anxiety about the possibility of Greek Catholics converting to Orthodoxy out of patriotic motives.¹⁴

One striking manifestation of this postwar Ukrainian ecumenism was an unprecedented attempt to produce a shared Church history that would account for both Greek Catholic and Orthodox perspectives. This effort was realized within the framework of the *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* project in 1949.¹⁵ In Greek

World War II, on the Ukrainian lands occupied by the Nazis, these Ukrainian hierarchs of the PAOC consecrated several new bishops. Fearing repression, they emigrated, along with many of their faithful, ahead of the advancing Red Army. After being resettled from the camps, they merged with Ukrainian Orthodox structures in the United States and Canada, which had been formed in the first half of the 20th century, or created new ones in Western Europe and Australia. These structures were not recognized by other Orthodox churches for a significant period, and only in 1990 (Canada) and 1995 (USA) did they enter the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople with the status of autonomy. For further details, see: Nicholas E. DENYSENKO, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine: A Century of Separation*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2018, 59-134.

13 BARAN, “The Ukrainian Catholic Church”, in Wsevolod W. ISAJIW (ed.), *The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II*, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1992, 150; Bohdan R. BOCIURKIW, “The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in West Germany, 1945–50”, in Wsevolod W. Isajiw (ed.), *The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II*, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1992, 166.

14 Martha BOHACHEVSKY-CHOMIAK, *Ukrainian Bishop, American Church: Constantine Bohachevsky and the Ukrainian Catholic Church*, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 417.

15 Микола Чубатий, Наталія Пілонська-Василенко, “Історія Церкви”, in Володимир Кубійович, Зенон Кузеля (eds.), *Енциклопедія українознавства. Загальна частина, т. 2*, Мюнхен-Нью-Йорк: Наукове Товариство ім. Шевченка, 1949, 601–622.

Catholic discourse, such rapprochement was primarily framed as the realization of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky's (1865–1944) ecclesial vision, which had placed the reunification of the Christian East and West – specifically, the restoration of unity within the confessionally divided Kyivan Metropolitanate – at the center of his life's work.¹⁶

On the eve of the Council

Yet as lay-driven initiatives waned – primarily because the faithful were dispersed across different localities and returned to their respective parishes, losing the direct daily contact that had characterized the DP camps, which lowered the intensity of grassroots ecumenical activity though did not entirely eliminate it – a new phase emerged in which Greek Catholic bishops themselves began to assume leadership in ecumenical outreach. A pivotal moment came in 1957, on the occasion of the establishment of the UGCC Metropolitanate in Canada, when the “Ukrainian Catholic hierarchy in the free world” – comprising nine bishops, primarily from the United States and Canada, along with Ivan Buchko, Apostolic Visitor for Ukrainians in Western Europe, and Gabriel Bukatko, Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of Križevci in Yugoslavia – issued a pastoral letter in which a substantial portion was devoted specifically to the restoration of unity between Ukrainian Greek Catholics and Orthodox.¹⁷

In this address, the bishops emphasized that for nearly 170 years, Orthodox and Greek Catholics had been deprived of opportunities for dialogue, primarily due to political circumstances: Greek Catholic communities had been forcibly incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church by the tsarist regime, whereas Orthodox communities were gradually assimilated into Russian Orthodox culture. Given that both Churches now existed in the diaspora under conditions of freedom, the bishops argued, they not only could but should initiate dialogue on unity. The

16 See Lubomyr Husar, “Sheptytsky and Ecumenism”, in Paul Robert MAGOCSI (ed.), *Morality and Reality. The Life and Times of Andrei Sheptytsky*, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1989, 185–200.

17 *Спільне пасторське послання Української католицької єпархії вільного світу з нагоди оснування української Католицької митрополії всієї Канади у Вінніпезі / Collective Pastoral Letter of the Ukrainian Catholic Hierarchy in the Free World on the Occasion of the Erection of the Ukrainian Catholic Metropolitan See in Winnipeg*, Yorkton, Sask.: Redeemer's Voice Press, 1957.

hierarchs noted that Ukrainian Orthodox could pursue this dialogue not only with them but also directly with Rome. They further suggested that a potential framework for unity might be the establishment of a Kyivan Patriarchate – an idea that had been discussed as early as the seventeenth century. The overall rhetoric of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops remained, understandably, within the prevailing Catholic framework of the era: they spoke of “uniting our separated brethren in Christ’s Church”¹⁸ and invoked the Council of Florence. This language reflected the pre-conciliar understanding of Christian unity, though it avoided the more triumphalist rhetoric of “return” that characterized much Catholic discourse of the previous periods.

If the 1957 pastoral letter represented primarily a continuation of the UGCC’s longstanding self-understanding as promoter of unity between Christian East and West, the 1959 appeal introduced a qualitatively new dimension. Within two years, both the tone and substance had shifted considerably. Ukrainian bishops appear to have taken seriously Pope John XXIII’s declaration that one of the primary aims of the announced Council would be the advancement of Christian unity. This question was formally addressed at the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops in Rome in October 1959, where the hierarchs resolved: “In connection with the convening of the announced Ecumenical Council, [we] approve the cultivation of an appropriate atmosphere and desire for union at the grassroots level.”¹⁹ The accompanying pastoral letter “To the Ukrainian People,” issued on the same occasion, again devoted significant attention to dialogue with the Orthodox. Significantly, in 1959 the Greek Catholic bishops addressed themselves directly to their Orthodox counterparts rather than confining themselves to general pronouncements. The rhetoric had become markedly different, emphasizing the shared responsibility of both Churches for the historical division and the common obligation of both hierarchies to work toward reunification. The Greek Catholic bishops invited their Orthodox counterparts to join them in addressing a petition to the Council, announced by Pope John XXIII, requesting the establishment of a common Kyivan Patriarchate in union with Rome.²⁰

18 Ibid., 10

19 Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops, 12–14 October 1959, *Archive of the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia (AUAP)*, Box “Greek Catholic Ordinariate in Philadelphia 1959”, n.p..

20 *Пастирське послання українських владик до українського народу*, Рим, 1959, 9.

Parallel to these episcopal initiatives, public discourse on the ecumenical dimension of the forthcoming Council began to emerge within Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Orthodox circles in North America. The episcopal appeals of 1957 and 1959 found an enthusiastic reception among Greek Catholic laity and intellectuals, who actively engaged questions of Orthodox-Catholic reconciliation in periodicals, public lectures, and community forums. This engagement reflected the grassroots ecumenical spirit that had animated DP camp life in the late 1940s – a spirit that, though diminished by geographic dispersion, had not been extinguished.

These discussions ranged widely: from the practical question of Ukrainian Orthodox participation as observers at the Council, to theological and ecclesiological differences between the two Churches, to identifying factors that hindered unity, and to addressing internal problems within both communities that complicated rapprochement. Yet as these discussions unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that skepticism and even hostility toward the Council predominated within Orthodox communities.²¹ While individual voices within the Ukrainian Orthodox diaspora in the United States did advocate for greater engagement with the ecumenical movement and specifically called for sending observers to the Second Vatican Council, these remained minority positions that failed to gain traction within the broader Orthodox ecclesiastical establishment.

The institutional Orthodox response crystallized at a meeting of seven Ukrainian Orthodox bishops held on 28–30 April 1960 in the city of Winnipeg, Canada. Although these hierarchs did not constitute a jurisdictionally unified body – structures in the United States and Canada existed independently of one another and had consistently failed to reach agreement on uniting among themselves – they proved capable of issuing a joint statement on the question of the Council. The resulting declaration was both emotionally charged and uncompromisingly negative in tone. It emphasized that “the Ukrainian Orthodox Church considers it impossible to take any part whatsoever in this Council of the Roman Catholic Church.”²² The bishops attributed this refusal to the Catholic Church’s responsibility

21 See for example Мелетій Соловій, “Ізоляція чи співпраця?”, *Америка*, 15, 16, 19 червня 1962, 2; Мелетій Соловій, “Три кроки у церковному об’єднанні (З приводу думок православного священика)”, *Америка*, 22 вересня 1962, 2; Ілля Сапіга, “Нема перешкод до поєднання. Думки православного українця про Вселенський собор”, *Америка*, 6, 7 лютого 1962, 2.

22 “Українська православна церква не бере участі на II Ватиканському соборі”, *Віра і культура*, 3. 123 (1964) 19.

for the division of the Ukrainian people and accused it of “treachery” and “violence” against the Ukrainian Orthodox community. In response to the Greek Catholic episcopal appeals, they declared: “We call with heartfelt love all Greek Catholic bishops, all Greek Catholic clergy, and the entire Greek Catholic people to abandon Rome, which is foreign and hostile to us, and to return home – to your own Mother, the Orthodox Church! And when you all return to us, this will be the greatest and brightest celebration of Ukraine, afflicted by this division. And then there will truly be a One Unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and it will lead us all to a truly Unified and Free Ukraine!”²³

The sharp divergence between Greek Catholic aspirations and Orthodox resistance on the eve of the Council reflected not only political calculations or recent historical experiences, but also a deeper asymmetry in ecclesial memory and imagination. For Greek Catholics, the restoration of Kyivan ecclesiastical unity through a patriarchal structure had been a consistent aspiration since the seventeenth century. This vision – repeatedly articulated as the recognition of the historical dignity of the Kyivan Church – remained a vital foundation for constructing the identity and mission of their Church. It was not an improvised response to the Second Vatican Council, but rather the application of an old ecclesiological ideal to new circumstances. In the Orthodox tradition, however, this concept never achieved comparable resonance. With the exception of certain seventeenth-century figures, such as Metropolitans Job Boretsky and Petro Mohyla – whose openness to various forms of engagement with Catholics nonetheless provoked criticism from more conservative clergy, laity, and bishops – the idea of a Kyivan patriarchate in communion with the papacy failed to take root in Orthodox consciousness.

The repeated appeals of Greek Catholic bishops thus presupposed a shared historical imagination that, in fact, did not exist. This fundamental difference in how the two communities perceived unity – Greek Catholics viewing it as a continuation of an earlier dialogue, the Orthodox regarding it as capitulation to historical oppression – significantly shaped their respective reactions to the ecumenical orientation of the forthcoming Council. What Greek Catholics understood as an invitation to recover a common heritage was interpreted by Orthodox hierarchs as yet another expression of Roman Catholic expansionism – one that, in their historical experience, invariably bore a Polish face – albeit now presented in ecumenical terms.

23 Ibid., 20.

At the Council: Moscow observers controversy

The opening of the First Session of the Second Vatican Council became a trial for Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops – one directly connected to the ecumenical character of the Council itself. They were heavily affected by the conjunction of two events: the presence of official observers from the Moscow Patriarchate and the simultaneous absence of the head of the UGCC, Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, who remained in Soviet imprisonment. Moreover, according to the testimony of Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk of Canada, the official Vatican press avoided “the martyrdom of Ukraine” and the issue of the persecuted Church in the USSR.²⁴

As early as 17 October, the hierarchs discussed issuing a joint statement to the Council fathers concerning the presence of Moscow Patriarchate observers, but within the episcopate itself there was no unity on this issue.²⁵ On 27 October, they received a signals from the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and the Papal Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity that the Pope expected them to refrain from any public statements.²⁶ Evidently, the idea of such a statement had reached the Vatican through dissenting bishops who were familiar with its preparation.

Despite this intervention, a draft statement was prepared. It was not released directly by the Ukrainian bishops but was leaked to the press through informal channels: on 21 November, *Il Giornale d’Italia* published the article by journalist Filippo Pucci who presented a detailed account of the document’s contents. The

24 Jaroslav Z. SKIRA, Karim SCHELKENS (eds.), *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk C.Ss.R. (1960–1965)* (Eastern Christian Studies 15), Leuven: Peeters, 2012, 90.

25 *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 74. Among the most vocal opponents of such an appeal was Metropolitan Ambrose Senyshyn of the United States, who consistently sought to demonstrate loyalty to Rome. His reasoning, as recorded in his correspondence and Council notes, revealed internal contradictions. On the one hand, he argued against the statement on the grounds that it would only provide publicity to “Moscow agents”; on the other, he expressed concern that such a declaration would provoke the communist press to attack the Catholic Church. Senyshyn to Missionary Sisters of Mother of God, 7 November 1962, AUAP, Senyshyn’s Collection, n.p., Senyshyn to Missionary Sisters of Mother of God, 12 November 1962, AUAP, Senyshyn’s Collection, n.p.. For more on the problems of unity among the episcopate of the UGCC, see BABYNSKYI, “The Quest for Unity and Autonomy.”

26 *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 75-76.

Ukrainian bishops emphasized that the joy surrounding the opening of the Council was overshadowed by grief over the absence of the unlawfully imprisoned Metropolitan and by the presence of representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate. They asserted that the participation of Russian observers could not be understood in religious or ecclesial terms, but rather constituted part of a political strategy by the Soviet regime aimed at “sowing confusion”. The bishops underscored the dramatic situation of their Church: the violent liquidation of its institutional structure, the imprisonment of its episcopate, the violent subordination of millions of Greek Catholics to Moscow’s jurisdiction, and the complicity of the Moscow Patriarchate in Soviet anti-religious policy. They formulated five demands, the fulfillment of which could lend the presence of Moscow observers “a character of sincerity”: the release of bishops, the return of churches and property, the cessation of forced propaganda, and recognition of the legal status of the Eastern Catholic Church.²⁷

The publication immediately drew Vatican attention. During the general session of the Council, Monsignor Johannes Willebrands of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity approached the Ukrainian bishops, inquiring about the article and suggesting that they issue a retraction. At a conference of Ukrainian bishops held that same day at the Collegium of St. Josaphat, the hierarchs resolved “not to associate ourselves with any statements.”²⁸ They maintained this position of public silence thereafter, neither commenting on the appearance of the statement nor acknowledging their role in its dissemination.²⁹

The impact became evident within a week. On 28 November, the General Secretary announced that the Council would dedicate a novena to prayers for all bishops, “those present and those absent,” which Italian newspapers immediately connected to the Ukrainian statement. This recognition was reinforced during Christmas, when *L’Osservatore della Domenica* published an article explicitly naming Metropolitan Slipyj among imprisoned hierarchs.³⁰ The fact that such acknowledgment appeared in official Vatican media suggests that the leaked

27 Сапеляк, *Українська Церква на II Ватиканському Соборі*, 95-97.

28 *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 95.

29 Metropolitan Hermaniuk later acknowledged that the Ukrainian bishops had deliberately leaked the document. Jaroslav Z. SKIRA, “Fostering Dialogue and Promoting the Reception of Vatican II Among Ukrainian Canadians”, in Jaroslav Z. SKIRA, Peter DE MEY (eds.), *Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk, Vatican II and the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church* (Eastern Christian Studies Series 31), Leuven: Peeters, 2020, 200.

30 Сапеляк, *Українська Церква на II Ватиканському Соборі*, 98-100.

document had fundamentally altered the terms of discourse surrounding the persecuted Eastern Catholic Churches at the Council.

This episode revealed the structural constraints facing the Ukrainian episcopate within the Council's ecumenical framework. While the Ukrainian bishops actively sought dialogue with Ukrainian Orthodox, they regarded the observers of the Moscow Patriarchate at the Council as representatives of an institution complicit in the persecution of Ukrainian Catholics. Their circumvention of Vatican directives reflected not mere tactics but a fundamental disagreement over the terms of ecumenical engagement. From their perspective, Rome's pursuit of dialogue with Moscow – what would later be termed *Ostpolitik* – prioritized diplomatic compromise over authentic ecumenism. The leak strategy allowed them to challenge this approach without directly defying papal authority, while the Vatican's subsequent public acknowledgment of the persecuted Church suggested that their intervention had shifted institutional discourse, even as it failed to alter the underlying policy of engagement with the Moscow Patriarchate – a policy that would generate sustained resentment within the Ukrainian diaspora throughout the conciliar period and beyond.

Ukrainian Orthodox observers

Following the First Session, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops issued a joint pastoral letter that returned to the question of Orthodox participation. The letter expressed regret that “among the observer-representatives of non-united Christian confessions at the Council, there are unfortunately no representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches.” The bishops reported that during the Council they had received news about the favorable attitude of some Orthodox Ukrainian circles toward the matter of participation of Ukrainian Orthodox observers at the Council, as well as written greetings and requests from respected representatives of Ukrainian Orthodox intelligentsia asking them to persuade Orthodox hierarchs to send representatives. Invoking Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky’s legacy as “our great champion of church unity,” the bishops appealed once more: “We, Ukrainian Catholic bishops, want to hope that our Orthodox Ukrainian bishops, in the name of Christ and for the good of our Church and people, will overcome all earthly obstacles and decide to send their representatives to participate in the Council’s deliberations, in the role of observers.” The letter framed Orthodox participation not as capitulation but as an expression of shared longing for unity, arguing that

“their presence would benefit not only the Church but the temporal good of the entire Ukrainian people.”³¹

This renewed episcopal appeal prompted Metropolitan Hermaniuk to undertake direct diplomatic engagement. Between February and August 1963, he conducted a sustained campaign to persuade Metropolitan Ilarion Ohienko, arguably the most authoritative and intellectually distinguished Ukrainian Orthodox hierarch in the diaspora, to send observers from the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church in Canada to the Second Session. Hermaniuk’s dialogue, conducted in his capacity as president of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops in the diaspora, proceeded in coordination with Johannes Willebrands, Secretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. In March 1963, Hermaniuk had discussed the matter with Willebrands in Rome; by April, Willebrands asked Hermaniuk to ascertain whether the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada would be prepared to accept an official invitation. Should such willingness be expressed, Willebrands indicated, a formal invitation would be issued.³²

The negotiations proceeded through multiple formal visits between February and August, with each meeting exposing deeper layers of Orthodox resistance. Ilarion’s objections were manifold. He criticized the Greek Catholic bishops for procedural missteps – specifically, for having issued public appeals through the press rather than first cultivating private dialogue. He cited institutional constraints, explaining that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was “not yet prepared” and that any decision would require consultation with his Consistory. And he invoked political concerns, pointing to the presence of Moscow Patriarchate observers as evidence that the Council had already been compromised.³³ Yet beneath these tactical deferrals lay a more fundamental obstacle. As Hermaniuk recorded after their April meeting, Ilarion “could not hide his instinctive intolerance of Rome.”³⁴

By August 1963, after six months of engagement, Ilarion’s final answer remained negative. Though he acknowledged personal sympathy – he would personally favor his Church sending an observer – he faced “too much opposition among his own.” Hermaniuk pressed for a formal written response, but Ilarion declined to provide

31 Спільне Пастирське Послання Українських Католицьких Владик, приявних на Вселенському Соборі Ватиканському Другому в Римі, Америка, 12 грудня 1962, 2.

32 Лист митрополита Максима Германюка до митрополита Іларіона Огієнка, *Vipa i культуру*, 3.123 (1964) 20-21.

33 See *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 110-119.

34 Ibid., 116.

one. Instead, he preferred to deliver his refusal orally, maintaining a posture of personal regret while affirming the institutional impossibility of action: he was “very interested in the Council, prays for its success, but at this time he can not yet ignore history.”³⁵

35 Ibid., 120. The Ukrainian bishops’ engagement with the Council’s ecumenical agenda was not limited to behind-the-scenes diplomacy. They also participated actively in conciliar debates on *Unitatis Redintegratio*, articulating perspectives shaped by their concrete experience of failed dialogue with Ukrainian Orthodoxy. On 28 November 1963, Bishop Volodymyr Malanczuk addressed the assembly regarding paragraph 18 of the decree’s third chapter, devoted to the development of cooperation with Orthodox Eastern Churches. Malanczuk identified three obstacles to such cooperation. Two of these – religious particularism, whereby particular Churches identified themselves so completely with their nations that they viewed other churches as national enemies, and self-sufficiency, manifested in the conviction that one’s own language, tradition, and customs were superior to those of other churches – addressed the general Catholic-Orthodox context. In the context of this study, however, Malanczuk’s first point proved most revealing, as it directly reflected the experience of Ukrainian Catholic engagement with Ukrainian Orthodox: political motives that conflated religious identity with national independence, making any rapprochement with Rome appear as betrayal of patriotic duty. As Malanczuk elaborated, these political motives “abuse the influence of the Christian religion for the implementation of national ambitions. These motives are in favor of rejection of any religious dialogue, allegedly harmful to the political independence, and which they [the Orthodox] call ‘dependent on external influence, such as the influence of the Roman See.’ They consider religious independence as the high level of patriotism. All the attempts to restore relations with the Holy See they consider as dangerous for the Church and the nation.” This formulation captured precisely the logic underlying the 1960 Winnipeg declaration of Ukrainian Orthodox bishops: ecumenical engagement with Rome risked appearing, within the Ukrainian Orthodox community, as capitulation to foreign ecclesiastical authority – an especially sensitive issue given the historical association of Catholicism with Polish political dominance. The declaration made this equation explicit: “We, together, the entire Ukrainian Episcopate, call with heartfelt love all Greek Catholic bishops, all Greek Catholic clergy, and the entire Greek Catholic people to abandon Rome, which is foreign and hostile to us, and to return home – to your own native Mother, the Orthodox Church! And when you all return to us, this will be the greatest and brightest celebration of Ukraine, afflicted by this division. And then there will truly be a One Unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and it will lead us all to a truly Unified and Free Ukraine!” For futher details about Ukrainian Bishops’ intervention during the debates concerning *Unitatis redintegratio* see

As the minutes of the meeting of the Conference of Ukrainian Bishops from the Second Session of the Council reveal, similar conversations were conducted not only with Metropolitan Ilarion Ohienko in Canada. By this time, the Conference was presided over by Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj, who had been released from Soviet imprisonment earlier that year.³⁶ At the session held on 10 October 1963, the question of Ukrainian Orthodox observers at the Council was the subject of dedicated discussion. Reports were heard from Bishops Maxim Hermaniuk, Volodymyr Malanchuk, Platon Korniyliak, and Ivan Prashko. It emerged that the most promising prospect was the potential attendance of Archbishop Mstyslav Skrypnyk, then deputy to Metropolitan Ivan Theodorovych of the Ukrainian (Autocephalous) Orthodox Church in the USA and head of its Consistory. Consequently, “the Conference resolved, for its part, to make every effort so that, should Archbishop Mstyslav come to the Council, he too, following the example of other observers, might be present there.”³⁷

Mstyslav’s arrival at the Second Session in autumn 1963 materialized under circumstances that remain somewhat unclear. The minutes of the conference suggest that Greek Catholic bishops had conducted soundings with multiple Ukrainian Orthodox hierarchs. Metropolitan Ivan Theodorovych, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA, was notably absent from the list of potential visitors, indicating that he had expressed no willingness to attend – likely unwilling to deviate from the collective Orthodox position articulated in the 1960 Winnipeg declaration. By contrast, his deputy, Archbishop Mstyslav Skrypnyk, had signaled openness to such a visit. This created a procedural impasse: any formal invitation from the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity could only be addressed to the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA, not to his subordinate. A direct invitation to Mstyslav, bypassing Theodorovych’s authority, would have violated Orthodox ecclesiastical protocol.

Mariia IVANIV, “The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Bishops at the Second Vatican Council: The Participation in the Council and Contribution to the Discussions of Conciliar Documents”, in Vladimir LATINOVIC, Anastacia K. WOODEN (eds.), *Stolen Churches or Bridges to Orthodoxy? (Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue)* Springer International Publishing, 2021, 174-179.

36 See Karim SCHELKENS, “Vatican Diplomacy after the Cuban Missile Crisis: New Light on the Release of Josyf Slipyj”, *The Catholic Historical Review* 97.4 (2011) 679–712.

37 Minutes of the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops 1963, *Historical Archive of the UGCC in Rome (HA UGCC)*, 2, IVa, 73, 35;

The solution emerged through an indirect approach. The invitation came first from the Conference of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops rather than from the Vatican Secretariat. This allowed Mstyslav to frame his journey as a personal initiative undertaken without official ecclesiastical mandate, softening – though not entirely avoiding – the breach of subordination to his superior, Metropolitan Theodorovych.

By 21 October, the Ukrainian Catholic bishops had received a positive response from Mstyslav, prompting Metropolitan Slipyj to contact Msgr. Willebrands that same day. The Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity subsequently decided that Cardinal Augustin Bea would write a personal invitation to Skrypnyk. On 23 October, Hermaniuk discussed the matter further with Willebrands, coordinating the practical arrangements for Mstyslav's participation.³⁸

Mstyslav's decision was supported by those circles within Ukrainian Orthodoxy that advocated greater international engagement – both with other Orthodox Churches, particularly in the context of the pan-Orthodox preparatory meetings then underway in Rhodes, and with the Catholic Church. The broader context of Mstyslav's journey suggests a strategic vision extending beyond the Council itself: before arriving in Rome, from 14–19 November he traveled to Istanbul for a meeting with Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras. On 20 November he continued to Athens, where he had hoped to meet Orthodox Archbishop Chrysostomos, but the latter was absent.³⁹ This itinerary indicates that his Roman visit formed part of a larger effort to extricate Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the diaspora from its isolation. An energetic and ambitious hierarch – who would eventually assume leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA in 1971 – Mstyslav evidently saw the Council as an opportunity to establish Ukrainian Orthodox presence on the international ecclesial stage, even if he could not secure the unified support of all Ukrainian Orthodox jurisdictions.

Yet Mstyslav's initiative provoked immediate resistance from Orthodox hierarchs who viewed it as a breach of collective discipline. On 29 October 1963 – even before Mstyslav had departed for Rome – Metropolitan Ilarion sent him a letter of strong warning: “Dear Brother, I strongly and forcefully advise you and ask you not to do this!... There are a hundred reasons, and I cannot write them

38 *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 139.

39 Богдан Желехівський. “З подорожі владики Мстислава до Європи”, *Українське православне слово*, 1 (1964) 12-13. Михайло Коржан, “Передсоборові міркування”, *Український самостійник*, 9 (479) (1964) 2-7.

all here. I presented some of them to you during our personal meeting... My deep conviction and belief: there is nothing to go to Rome for!”⁴⁰ This intervention failed to dissuade Mstyslav, but it demonstrated the depth of Orthodox institutional resistance to any form of engagement with the Council, even at the personal level.

Mstyslav arrived in Rome on 21 November 1963. Following the Second Session, Hermaniuk noted in his diary: “I talked to Msgr. Willebrands about the issue of the arrival of Archbishop Mstyslav for the Second Period of the Council. Msgr. Willebrands said to me, that Archbishop Mstyslav has not yet applied to the Secretariat for Christian Unity, but he should hurry with this matter since the end of the session is nearing. In the event that he applies to the Secretariat, he would be allowed to be present at the Council.”⁴¹

On 22 November, Mstyslav met with Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj. Two days later, on 24 November, he visited the Ukrainian bishops at the Collegium of Saint Josafat, where, following Divine Liturgy in the college chapel, he had a conversation with Ukrainian Bishops, explaining that “he has come with the knowledge of Metropolitans Ivan and Ilarion, though he is not representing them at the Council.”⁴² On 24 November, he met with Msgr. Willebrands in the company of Bishop Prashko, where he received formal permission to attend. He was assigned a seat in the first row of the observers’ tribune.

On 26 November, Mstyslav attended the Council for the first time. Two days later, on 28 November, he attended the Ukrainian episcopal conference dinner at the Collegium, where after the meal he addressed the bishops, explaining “his attitude (full respect and interest) to the Council.”⁴³

On 30 November, Hermaniuk accompanied Mstyslav to a meeting with Cardinal Augustin Bea. Through Hermaniuk as interpreter, Mstyslav conveyed that he was “very happy to be able to attend this Council,” grateful to meet Ukrainian Catholic and other bishops personally, pleased to witness the ecumenical movement in action, and hoped to return for the third session while in the meantime spreading interest in the Council’s work among Ukrainian Orthodox in the United States.⁴⁴

40 “Лист митрополита Іларіона Огієнка до архієпископа Мстислава Скрипника”, *Віра і культура*, 3(123) (1964) 22.

41 *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 153.

42 *Ibid.*, 155.

43 *Ibid.*, 158.

44 *Ibid.*, 159.

Mstyslav's presence at the Council provoked sharp condemnation both from his own hierarchical superior and from other Ukrainian Orthodox structures in the diaspora, particularly in Canada. The situation created an acute internal conflict within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the USA. At a joint meeting of the Metropolitan Council and Consistory of the UOC in the USA on 19 March 1964, Archbishop Mstyslav was compelled to issue a public declaration in which he acknowledged that during his journey to Europe he had acted without authorization from Metropolitan Ivan or the governing bodies of the UOC in the USA, and expressed regret that he had "harmed the authority of Metropolitan Ivan as primate of our Church."⁴⁵

The situation remained tense for some time. Metropolitan Ivan, who had even been prepared to resign over the matter held negative views of Mstyslav's actions.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the Fifth Council of the UOC in the USA, held in October 1964, did not formally condemn Mstyslav's actions, though criticism was voiced during its proceedings.⁴⁷ This outcome reflected Mstyslav's institutional position as head of the Consistory – the administrative body that wielded considerable influence over church governance – which allowed him to shield himself from formal ecclesiastical sanctions despite hierarchical displeasure. In May 1965, the XIII Council of the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church in Canada, along with Metropolitan Ilarion personally, sharply condemned his unauthorized journey to the Council,⁴⁸ as did the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Australia in December 1965.⁴⁹

Defense of Mstyslav's actions came not from the hierarchs who had warned against his journey but primarily from forces within the Consistory of the UOC in the United States, which Mstyslav himself headed, and from the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church Metropolitanate in Europe. On 2 June 1964, the Supreme Council issued a statement affirming that "nowhere during his journey in Europe did he do anything that could give grounds for

45 "Спільні засідання ради митрополії і консисторії УПЦ в США", *Українське православне слово* 4 (1964) 6.

46 "З української преси", *Церква й життя* 3(42) (1964) 18; "З української православної преси", *Церква й життя* 3(48) (1965) 19.

47 "П'ятий собор УПЦ в ЗДА в Честері закінчився великою перемогою єдності для добра Церкви і народу", *Свобода*, 27 жовтня 1964, 1-3

48 "Святым духом керований собор", *Церква й життя* 4.49 (1965) 21-22.

49 Василь Каменецький. "Сучасні церковні події і тіні минулого", *Церква й життя* 2.59 (1967) 17.

accusing him of any intentions to betray the Orthodox faith or the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.”⁵⁰

These denunciations, particularly intense in Canada, reflected the specific historical circumstances of Orthodox institutional formation in this country. The Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church in Canada had emerged in the early twentieth century, precisely in opposition to Catholicism and was composed primarily of former Greek Catholics who had converted to Orthodoxy.⁵¹ The Church had crystallized its institutional identity through sustained polemics against Catholic influence, and among its faithful, anti-Catholic sentiment remained especially acute, rooted in local conflicts over church property, parish affiliation, and competing claims to represent authentic Ukrainian religious identity. In this context, any engagement with Rome – however informal – risked appearing to the Orthodox faithful as betrayal of the community’s founding mission. Mstyslav’s unauthorized participation thus violated not merely ecclesiastical protocol but the very logic of Orthodox self-definition in the Canadian diaspora.

Yet Mstyslav’s presence at the second session remained the sole instance of Ukrainian Orthodox participation throughout the entire conciliar period, and rather than opening possibilities for broader engagement, it foreclosed them. When Hermaniuk attempted to revive the question of official observers in April 1965 – delivering a joint Easter greeting from all Ukrainian Catholic bishops headed by Major Archbishop Josyf Slipyj and again inquiring whether the Ukrainian Orthodox Church would accept an official invitation from the Secretariat for Christian Unity to send observers to the Fourth Session – Ilarion cited Mstyslav’s unauthorized participation as having “complicated this matter very much.” His response remained unchanged: “As it is now, I have to say that we remain at our previous position to date – not to go to Rome.”⁵² Given that Ilarion had from the very beginning been inclined to seek reasons not to send observers to the Council, his appeal to the incident with Mstislav appears less an expression of genuine regret over the impossibility of doing so than a convenient pretext to reaffirm his earlier position.

50 Коржан, “Передсоборові міркування”, 6.

51 See Orest MARTYNOWYCH, *Ukrainians in Canada. The Formative Period, 1891-1924*, Edmonton; Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1991, 155-400.

52 *The Second Vatican Council Diaries of Met. Maxim Hermaniuk*, 234.

Mstyslav's unauthorized visit thus had the opposite effect of what Ukrainian Catholic bishops had hoped: instead of opening a path for broader Orthodox engagement, it became grounds for rejecting future participation. What had been intended as a gesture of ecumenical goodwill became, in Orthodox institutional politics, evidence of the dangers of engagement with Rome.

Ukrainian Greek Catholic's sustained efforts between 1963 and 1965 had revealed the limits of episcopal diplomacy when confronted with structural obstacles rooted in historical memory, institutional competition, and prejudices. Ukrainian Orthodox participation at Vatican II remained confined to one unauthorized visit by one hierarch – a symbolic gesture that, rather than bridging the Catholic-Orthodox divide, underscored its persistence.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church approached the Second Vatican Council already prepared for ecumenical engagement. The idea of Church unity had been integral to its identity for centuries, but Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky (1865–1944) elevated it to the very center of ecclesial discourse and practice. Under his leadership, all aspects of church life – education, monasticism, pastoral formation, theological reflection – were oriented, in one way or another, toward the goal of restoring unity between Christian East and West. This comprehensive integration of ecumenical vision into institutional life earned Sheptytsky recognition as a “precursor of ecumenism,” and the depth to which this vision had taken root in Greek Catholic consciousness was already evident in the 1957 pastoral letter issued on the occasion of the establishment of the UGCC Metropolitanate in Canada. While this was not yet ecumenism in the modern sense – nor in the sense that would emerge from Vatican II – it provided a foundation from which the Ukrainian hierarchy could readily adjust its course once the Council’s ecumenical framework became clear.

In the Council and its ecumenical debates, Ukrainian bishops saw an opportunity to renew contact with Ukrainian Orthodox on fundamentally new terms. This outlook reflected a certain spirit of the age – optimistic, perhaps excessively so, in its expectation that the question of unity could be resolved with relative swiftness and intensity. The announcement of the Council, Pope John XXIII’s rhetoric of reconciliation, and the participation observers from other Christian Churches and

communities all seemed to suggest that centuries-old divisions might be overcome within a generation. When this did not materialize – when the sharp Orthodox rejection articulated in the 1960 Winnipeg declaration made clear that Ukrainian Orthodox hierarchs viewed unity with Rome not as opportunity but as capitulation – Greek Catholic bishops shifted to a more incremental approach. They sought, at minimum, to draw Ukrainian Orthodox into the broader ecumenical process: not immediate reunion, but participation as observers, bilateral dialogue, gradual rapprochement. However, this too proved unattainable.

Yet already at the Council's opening, Ukrainian bishops encountered the submerged obstacles of ecumenical dialogue. The presence of Moscow Patriarchate observers confronted them with a fundamental dilemma: how to participate in an ecumenical process when one's hypothetical dialogue partner continued to participate in one's persecution? The Moscow Patriarchate's complicity in the violent liquidation of the UGCC in Soviet territories – the imprisonment of its episcopate, the forced incorporation of its faithful, the confiscation of its property – made the Vatican's invitation to Moscow observers appear, from the Ukrainian Catholic perspective, as a prioritization of diplomatic accommodation over authentic ecumenism. The Ukrainian bishops' leaked statement of November 1962, with its five demands for lending Moscow's presence "a character of sincerity," articulated this tension. Though the Vatican subsequently acknowledged the persecuted Church through prayer and symbolic gestures, it did not alter the underlying policy of engagement with Moscow – what would later be termed Ostpolitik. This experience revealed the limits of the Council's ecumenical promise for Eastern Catholic Churches whose very existence was contested by the Orthodox partners Rome sought to engage.

The repeated refusals of Metropolitan Ilarion Ohienko between 1963 and 1965, despite six months of sustained diplomatic engagement by Metropolitan Hermaniuk, revealed obstacles that goodwill and persistence could not overcome. Ilarion's objections were multiple: procedural, institutional, and political. Yet beneath these tactical deferrals lay something more fundamental. As Ilarion stated in August 1963, he could not "ignore history" – the accumulated weight of Catholic-Orthodox conflict, the association of Catholicism with foreign political dominance (particularly Polish), the influence of Russian Anti-Catholic discourse absorbed during the imperial period, and the conviction that religious independence constituted the highest form of patriotism. The 1960 Winnipeg declaration had

made this explicit. Orthodox unity equaled Ukrainian national liberation; Catholic affiliation represented foreign subjugation. No amount of episcopal diplomacy could bridge this chasm in historical imagination.

Ukrainian Orthodox hierarchs saw neither advantage nor opportunity in dialogue with the Catholic Church. Even from a purely pragmatic perspective, which was likely behind Archbishop Mstyslav Skrypnyk's actions – making Ukrainian Orthodoxy more recognizable internationally, demonstrating its distinctiveness from Russian Orthodoxy, securing a voice at a major ecclesial gathering – the potential benefits of Council participation did not outweigh the perceived risks. For Orthodox leaders shaped by decades of competition with Greek Catholics in the diaspora, engagement with Rome meant association with the very force against which their institutional identity had been constructed. The logic of self-preservation thus trumped ecumenical opportunity.

The sole instance of Ukrainian Orthodox presence at the Council – Archbishop Skrypnyk's unauthorized attendance at the second Session in November 1963 – only confirmed the depth of institutional resistance. Mstyslav came on his own initiative, without mandate from his Church. His presence provoked condemnation from his fellows. When Hermaniuk attempted in April 1965 to revive the question of official observers for the Fourth Session, Ilarion cited Mstyslav's unauthorized participation as having “greatly complicated this matter” and reiterated: “we remain at our previous position – not to go to Rome.” Mstyslav's visit, intended to demonstrate Orthodox openness to dialogue, instead reinforced institutional barriers and marked both the high point and the endpoint of Ukrainian Orthodox participation at Vatican II.

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