

Vatican Diplomacy and the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church¹

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Abstract

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In view of the radical political changes in East Europe in the last several years, the notion of Vatican *Ostpolitik* may no longer be valid; nevertheless, it has continued to influence Vatican policy toward the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church. Today, the central issue for that Church is the territorial jurisdiction of the major archbishop and his synod. The latter is complicated by ecclesiastical divisions and canonical irregularities among Ukraine's Orthodox. While the conceptions of some Vatican ecumenists would exclude the leading, central UGCC role in the work of Christian unity advocated by some of its leaders, recent Vatican moves may point to a gradual acceptance of the UGCC in the ecumenical process.



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Is the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church (UGCC) an object of Vatican diplomacy? If the UGCC is a part of the Catholic Church, then it is simply part of the *subject* of Vatican diplomacy, perhaps even with a role in formulating this policy. Yet anyone familiar with Vatican *Ostpolitik* knows that such is hardly the case. Instead, the UGCC's history appears to indicate that it has been an *object* of Vatican diplomacy. This perplexing fact points to the troublesome and central issue of the place and role of the UGCC vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church and within the community of Christian Churches. Recent developments in the UGCC and in the ecumenical movement suggest a reformulation of that place and role. In particular, the following factors merit attention in this regard.

First, the UGCC is the largest of some twenty-one Eastern Catholic Churches, though as a major archepiscopal Church – a dignity it shares with the Syro-Malabar Church of India – it is of lower rank than the six patriarchal Eastern Catholic Churches. It follows the Byzantine tradition (one of five Eastern traditions in the Catholic Church), sharing it with several other rites.²

Second, “the Vatican” is a broad concept, encompassing the pope himself as well as various departments of the Roman Curia which have different objectives and which may pursue differing policies. The Vatican's Eastern policy, while conducted generally by Pope John Paul II, is shaped by the Secretariat of State, currently under Angelo Cardinal Sodano. Of some indirect relevance is the activity of the Pontifical Council for the Unity of Christians under Edward Cardinal Cassidy; less influential is the Congregation for the Eastern Churches under Achille Cardinal Silvestrini.³

Third, it must also be borne in mind that Vatican “foreign policy” cannot be understood in terms of ordinary international relations. The Church does not pursue conventional political goals

² See George Nedungatt, S.J., *The Spirit of the Eastern Code* (Rome and Bangalore, 1993), 62, 68; Ronald G. Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1988), 26–37.

³ I am indebted to Professor Thomas Bird of Queens College for pointing out the relative importance of these dicasteries, and for providing extensive comments on this paper.

but rather a set of religious interests. Its Eastern policy has traditionally sought to preserve institutional structures where those are threatened, and to secure maximum freedom for believers.

And fourth, historically, Vatican policy toward Ukrainian Catholics was conditioned by its policy towards Orthodox Russia and Catholic Poland and Austria. At various times, it took into account the attitudes of Russian, Polish, and Austrian governments towards Greco-Catholicism in Ukraine. More recently, it has had to consider the institutional weaknesses of the Ukrainian Church, the strength of Roman Catholicism in neighboring Poland, Russian Orthodox anti-Uniate pressures, and the policy of the Ukrainian government in Kiev. Thus, from the time of the Second Vatican Council up to a few years ago, Vatican policy towards the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church was largely a function of its *Ostpolitik*.

Ostpolitik and Ecumenism

The term *Ostpolitik*, which gained currency in the mid-1960s, originally referred to the West German government's policy of rapprochement with the Soviet bloc.⁴ It was later used by Hans-Jakob Stehle in his study of the Vatican's Eastern policy since 1917.⁵ It came to be associated especially with the Vatican-Soviet rapprochement dating from the early 1960s, whose principal architects were Pope Paul VI, Johannes Cardinal Willebrands and Agostino Cardinal Casaroli. In the 1960s and 1970s, Vatican *Ostpolitik* sought to preserve the Church in the Soviet bloc through

⁴ Roger Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Pan Books, 1983), 338.

⁵ Hans-Jakob Stehle, *Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans: 1917–1975* (Munich: Piper, 1975); *id.*, *The Eastern Politics of the Vatican, 1917–1979* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981). Other studies of the Vatican's Eastern policy are: Dennis J. Dunn, *The Catholic Church and the Soviet Government, 1939–1949* (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) (on the USSR, including Ukraine, see chapter 6); and *id.*, *Detente and Papal-Communist Relations, 1962–1978* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979) (on Ukraine, see chapter 3).