

## Vatican II's Call to Renewal: Re-visiting Sheptytsky's 1942 Initiative for Re-union<sup>1</sup>

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In his 2012 reflection on interpreting the Second Vatican council, Ormond Rush argued that an “appropriate hermeneutics for interpreting the council and its texts”<sup>2</sup> must avoid focussing on one element of the council to the detriment of others. In other words, to interpret the council and its documents one needs to appreciate the interplay of the various elements and documents. Gerald O’Collins notes that the very first document promulgated by the council establishes the council as one that combines two seemingly paradoxical directions: both continuity and discontinuity. He notes how within this document the authors frame their presentation around the notions of “fostering and renewing.”<sup>3</sup> Although the language of the council moves to the words “renewal” or “reform” as well as “retrieval,” O’Collins convincingly argues that the agenda represented by all these words was the same: preserving “an unbroken continuity with the past” and yet “widespread external adaptations and inner changes.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first delivered at the “*Orientalium ecclesiarum – Fifty Years Later*” conference at the University of Toronto in October 2014, organized by the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Ormond Rush, “Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and its Documents.” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 547.

<sup>3</sup> Gerard O’Collins, “Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 771.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 775.

Similarly, as the emeritus bishop of Rome Benedict XVI stated in his Christmas address to the Curia<sup>5</sup> in 2005: “It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists.” In other words, to truly understand the council, its declarations, and its results, we cannot isolate one factor or utilize a simplistic hermeneutic. Rather we need to contextualize single documents within the frame of the whole and recognize that again, in Pope Benedict’s words, neither a solitary hermeneutic of continuity or discontinuity is adequate.

Clearly, much work has been done over the past fifty years on implementing the document that is the focus of this conference, *The Decree on the Eastern Churches*.<sup>6</sup> Its effects are very evident in the life and liturgy of the Eastern Churches. Although not simply resulting in a preservation of “legitimate liturgical rites” and their “established way of life,” these are the areas where reflection has focussed. The implementation of these areas of the document has resulted in significant changes in the practice and life of the Eastern Churches, showing continuity with an earlier period which is relatively discontinuous with more recent Latinizing tendencies. The document reminds everyone that the norms and practices laid out are only relevant until “such time as the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern Churches come together into complete unity” (30).

The focus of this paper will be on this latter part of *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, offering a suggestion that in order for this vision of Catholic-Orthodox unity to come to fruition we need to integrate within the life of our Eastern Catholic churches the larger visions of *Orientalium ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis redintegratio*. Specifically, the unifying mission of the Eastern Churches does not simply lie in being liturgically or structurally indistinguishable from the Orthodox Sister Church, but rather in living a humble (I would call it ascetic-kenotic) ecclesiology. The very ethos of our Eastern Churches needs to be rooted in the appeal made in *Unitatis redintegratio*: “There can be no

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_orientalium-ecclesiarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html)

ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from renewal of the inner life of our minds, from self-denial and unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way" (7). I will pursue this vision in relation to my own Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church (UGCC).

I would suggest that an important characteristic of God's work in the historical experience of the UGCC is the manifestation of *kenosis*. The centrality of this practice of self-denial in our ecclesial tradition is evident in the canonization of the first saints of Kyivan-Rus': the *strastoterptsy*/passion-bearers Borys and Hlib (canonized ca. 1068). According to custom they calmly accepted death in the name of unity and in so doing established a model of sainthood unique to the Slavic world. It is a model that would be emulated many times over and presents an important challenge in our search for fulfilling the agenda of the council in the life of the UGCC and of the Church *in toto*.

The council's call for a change of heart, for self-denial and the strong tradition of *kenosis*, draws our attention to the person of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky who in the midst of the years of the Second World War initiated an unexpected campaign aimed at building unity between Ukrainian Catholics and Ukrainian Orthodox.<sup>7</sup> He wrote to members of the Orthodox intelligentsia in May, 1942: "We, Greco-Catholics not only do not wish to claim seniority or lord over our brothers, but rather we are willing (to our own detriment) to submit to them. Thus a complete union of our two confessions would, one would have to say, represent the complete submission of Greco-Catholics to the authority of the Kyivan patriarch."<sup>8</sup> This willingness to "submit" or engage in self-denial is not a gambit, a tactical maneuver, but rather an expression of Christ-likeness. In 1941, he wrote to Orthodox bishops in Ukraine:

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<sup>7</sup> Sheptytsky insisted that the Orthodox accept the "Universal Faith, that is the orthodoxy of the first seven Ecumenical councils completed by the decisions of the Ecumenical councils from the 10<sup>th</sup> c to the present times." (*Письма-послання Митрополита Андрія Шептицького, ЧСВВ з часів німецької окупації. Друга частина* [Йорктон: Логос, 1969], 350.)

<sup>8</sup> *Церква і церковна єдність. Документи і Матеріали 1899–1944. Том 1* (Львів: Свічадо, 1995), 420.