

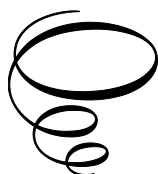
The Reception of
Roman Catholic
Doctrine in Serbian
Orthodox Theology
From 1958 to the
Present

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By

Nenad Mijalković

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 978-1-0364-7188-0

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-7189-7

IMPRIMI POTEST

Doctoral thesis examined and approved in accordance with the Statutes of the Pontifical Lateran University:

Prof. **Riccardo Ferri**, Professor of Trinitarian Theology

Prof. **Giovanni Tangorra**, Professor of Ecclesiology

Prof. **Natale Loda**, Professor of Canon Law

Printing authorized

Prof. **Vincenzo Buonomo**, Rector Magnificus

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INTRODUCTION

This book is based on a doctoral dissertation completed at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. It employs a theological-historical methodology to examine the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Initially conceived under the title *The Reception of Roman Catholic Doctrine in Serbian Orthodox Theology from 1958 to the Present*, the dissertation ultimately acquired its final title: *Roman Catholic Themes in Serbian Orthodox Theology: Interpretation and Reception from 1958 to the Present*. The work was evaluated as original in both content and methodology and examines the reception of Roman Catholic doctrine within Serbian theology. Its primary aim is to present the responses of Serbian theologians to selected doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church—issues that are central to theological dialogue.

The topic of this dissertation has not previously been the subject of detailed scholarly research. Only two academic works bear some relation to it, primarily through their presentation of historical events, without engaging in in-depth theological analysis or offering a theological perspective. The first is Marko Nikolic's *Ecumenical Relations Between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church from 1962 to 2000* (published by the Public Enterprise Sluzbeni Glasnik, Belgrade, 2011). The second is a doctoral dissertation by Zoran Nedeljkovic titled *Official Relations Between the Holy See and the Serbian Orthodox Church from 1965 to 2010*, presented and defended at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome.

The originality of the present research lies primarily in its subject matter, offering a thorough theological analysis of the reception of Roman Catholic doctrine by the Serbian Orthodox Church and its theologians. The study focuses on theological developments from the second half of the twentieth century, providing an overview of Serbian Orthodox theological thought regarding the most significant issues raised in the ecumenical dialogue. Research conducted at the library of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, as well as in several Serbian archives, confirmed that no Orthodox or Catholic theologian had previously addressed this topic in such depth.

A further novelty of this work is its use of archival documents that have never been published before. These include theological reflections and commentaries prepared by prominent professors of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade for the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The documents comment on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. These and other archival sources offer unique insights into the views of Serbian Orthodox representatives on official Roman Catholic documents—beginning with documents of the Second Vatican Council and extending to those of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. A key objective of the dissertation is to examine how these documents were received by Serbian theologians and the Serbian Orthodox Church as a whole.

This work investigates the ways in which Roman Catholic teachings have been received in Serbian Orthodox theology, beginning in 1958 with the enthronement of Patriarch German. Archival sources consulted include those from the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Archives of Yugoslavia, and the archives of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade. In addition, numerous scholarly works, articles, essays, and books authored by Serbian Orthodox theologians were collected and analysed, with particular attention to those dealing with dogmatic or systematic theology. The central topics examined include ecumenism, papal primacy, Uniatism and proselytism, the *Filioque*, and the doctrine of the Most Holy Theotokos.

The first chapter presents the positions of Serbian Orthodox theology concerning *ecumenical dialogue*. While Serbian theologians have not produced extensive monographs on this topic, many have written journal articles. These theologians can broadly be divided into two groups: those critical of ecumenism and those who support its efforts and aims.

The second chapter addresses *authority in the Church*—one of the core issues in Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue—especially the question of papal primacy. This topic is approached from both historical and theological perspectives and is structured into five parts: 1) the understanding of the Church as unity in diversity; 2) the concept of papal infallibility; 3) the episcopate as a ministry with both local and universal dimensions; 4) the conciliar system and ecclesial unity; and 5) the notions of primacy and synodality in the Church.

The third chapter analyses the issues of *Uniatism and proselytism*, both of which relate to the Church's ecclesiology and mission. Serbian Orthodox theologians condemn Uniatism as a means of achieving Church

unity and proselytism as a method of mission. Nonetheless, some offer constructive proposals for overcoming these problematic practices.

Chapter four explores the question of the *Filioque*. Although today this issue may seem of lesser importance, historically it caused significant theological disputes between East and West, including among Serbian Orthodox theologians. This chapter argues that Roman Catholic theology depends on its interpretation of the *Filioque*, as understood by Serbian theologians. The analysis addresses: 1) the Trinity and the experience of the Church; 2) the relationship between Christology and pneumatology; 3) the implications of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit for Trinitarian doctrine; and 4) the implications of the Spirit's temporal mission.

The fifth and final chapter is dedicated to the *Most Holy Theotokos*. Recognizing her special place in both Eastern and Western traditions, the chapter examines how Serbian Orthodox theologians interpret two Roman Catholic dogmas: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. Through critical reflection on the writings of selected Serbian theologians, the work seeks theological models that may contribute to overcoming differences within the context of official dialogue.

This particular order of presentation reflects the overarching importance of ecumenism in the dissertation. The first chapter introduces key Serbian theologians and their contributions to ecumenical theology. The second chapter follows naturally by addressing papal primacy, a central theme of the Joint International Commission's work.

The third chapter discusses Uniatism and proselytism. While historically this topic was addressed before papal primacy in the International Commission's dialogue, it has been controversial in the East and led to interruptions in official discussions.

The final chapters address the *Filioque* and the doctrine of the Theotokos—both ongoing areas of concern in Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. Despite the historical depth of the *Filioque* controversy, dating to the sixth century, these topics were placed last due to their current significance in theological discourse. Although the primary lens is ecclesiological, the dissertation does not neglect the Trinitarian, pneumatological, and Christological dimensions of the issues discussed.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, the dissertation has practical significance. It seeks to foster dialogue between dogmatic teaching and canonical tradition. The study offers several benefits: historically, it clarifies the relationship between the two Churches; theologically, it provides a comparative doctrinal analysis; ecumenically, it contributes to mutual rapprochement; and culturally, it promotes understanding between societies rooted in a shared Christian heritage.

ABBREVIATIONS

B.C. / A.D.	<i>Before Christ / Anno Domini</i>
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> —Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church
can. / cann.	<i>canon / canons</i>
ch. / chs.	<i>chapter / chapters</i>
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> —Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
cf.	<i>confer / compare</i>
DH	<i>Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum</i> , [H. Denzinger–P. Hünermann], EDB, Bologna 2003
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> —Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
FPRY	Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> —Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
MPC=MOC	Macedonian Orthodox Church
RMC=RCC	Roman Catholic Church
NDH	Independent State of Croatia
no. / nos.	<i>number / numbers</i>
OE	<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i> —Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches
para. / paras.	<i>paragraph / paragraphs</i>
p. / pp.	<i>page / pages</i>
reg.	<i>record / registry entry</i>
REY	Republic Executive Council (Yugoslavia)
n.a. / n.d.	<i>no author / no date</i>
n.p. / n.publ.	<i>no place / no publisher</i>
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
FEC	Federal Executive Council
SPC=SOC	Serbian Orthodox Church
WCC	World Council of Churches
FR	Federal Republic
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> —Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> —Decree on Ecumenism
vol. / vols.	<i>volume / volumes</i>

CHAPTER ONE

THE DIFFERENT OPINIONS OF SERBIAN ORTHODOX THEOLOGIAN ON ECUMENISM

The reception of Roman Catholic doctrine within Serbian Orthodox theology is a historical reality that can be examined through various approaches. First and foremost, the analyses of Serbian Orthodox theologians provide not only the methodological framework for studying this reception but also offer a broad perspective on the phenomenon itself. These analyses highlight the diversity of ideas that have been either accepted or rejected and present a critical interpretation of these theological interactions. Secondly, it is essential to consider the exegetical perspective, from which certain key elements emerge that shape the theoretical framework of reception. In a technical sense, the concept of reception allows for the observation and reassessment of doctrinal issues within teaching, theological thought, and ecclesial attitudes. The impact of reception takes on different forms, influencing ideas, concepts, and methodological structures.

The concept of reception or influence can be categorized as follows:

Theoretical Influence (Ideas):

- a) Direct Influence
- b) Indirect Influence

Impact on Textual Material:

- a) Texts and Doctrinal Teachings
- b) Reflective Influence (criticism of certain Ideas)

Written and Oral Tradition of this Influence

Formative Influence, which includes:

- a) **Internal Actions**—the essential assimilation of adopted ideas
- b) **External or Informative Impact**—knowledge and underlying theological thought

Certain forms of reception can be clearly identified within the body of work produced by Serbian theologians. It is crucial to approach reception as both a spiritual and hermeneutical principle. The acceptance of specific doctrinal questions and their application to theological thought and ecclesial life can be understood collectively as a form of *neopatristic synthesis*, integrating elements of both Orthodox and Catholic traditions in a nuanced and critical manner.

A fruitful dialogue occurs when both parties approach it with honesty, mutual respect, and a genuine willingness to listen. For the exchange to be productive, it must remain focused on the central issue under discussion, avoiding the risk of becoming a battleground for irreconcilable positions that preclude any possibility of shared understanding. Equality in dialogue, reciprocal goodwill, and freedom of expression are essential elements for overcoming conflicts. Acknowledging otherness and recognizing the value of diversity require abandoning accusatory or dismissive attitudes. Nevertheless, the question remains: is it possible to transcend historical constraints and the weight of past divisions in order to overcome the limitations imposed by the spirit of the times? The answer is complex—yes, in some respects, and no, in others. A genuine ecclesial dialogue cannot exist if one party imposes its theological perspective as the sole and indisputable truth. The logic of exclusion and outright condemnation is detrimental to dialogue, for dialogue itself is an intrinsic dimension of the Church. To abandon dialogue would be tantamount to renouncing ecclesial communion. Those incapable of engaging in dialogue cannot grow or advance. Ultimately, knowledge of the other not only fosters mutual understanding but also deepens self-awareness. In a certain sense, the way in which we engage in dialogue with others defines who we are.

Various models have been proposed throughout history to overcome the divisions between Churches, including Uniatism, conversion, reconciliation, and doctrinal harmonization of faith. In the fifteenth century, the idea and desire to convene a new ecumenical council emerged, gaining traction in both the East and the West. Throughout history, and even in the present, ecumenism has had both supporters and opponents. For some, ecumenism represents a confirmation of the Church's true nature—an essential dimension of its identity; for others, however, it constitutes a betrayal of the Church.

For a long time, Churches suffered from their own exclusivism, unable to move beyond intolerance and defensive isolation. Over time, however, various Churches and confessions gradually opened themselves to dialogue, developing a willingness to listen and engage with one another. Some approached this new openness with enthusiasm, while others

remained hesitant and skeptical. Within the Orthodox Church, attitudes toward ecumenism have been similarly varied: some have actively supported it, others have rejected it outright, while still others have remained entirely indifferent. In the Book of Revelation, we read: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Likewise, Christ’s High Priestly Prayer calls all believers to unity: “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:18–21).

Let us now briefly examine the preparations for the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. A pivotal moment in this process was the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in the Holy Land on 5 January 1964.¹ The promulgation of the conciliar document on ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio–UR*, 21 November 1964) and the mutual lifting of excommunications and anathemas on 7 December 1965, were undoubtedly favorable events for initiating dialogue between the East and the West.² The dialogue between the

¹ Cf. “Susret Vaseljenskog patrijarha Atinagore s poglavarom Rimokatolicke Crkve papom Pavlom VI” [*The Meeting of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras with the Head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Paul VI*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 1 (1964): 38–39.

² Cf. Radovan Bigovic, *Pravoslavna teologija ekumenizma* [*The Orthodox Theology of Ecumenism*] (Beograd: EKOPRES–Zrenjanin, 2010), 109–111; Professor D. Kasic authored a report for the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church entitled: “The Anathema between the Roman Church and Constantinople.” During the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council, a special joint commission was formed by Rome and Constantinople with the task of identifying a scholar in dogmatics, a historian, and a canon law expert to study the historical event and assess the possibility of lifting the mutual anathemas. “On the basis of all that has been stated, the opinion of the Rome–Constantinople Commission can be accepted, namely that the anathema was limited to the leaders of the papal delegation and to the closest associates of Patriarch Michael Cerularius. Such an interpretation substantially narrows the scope of the conflict and serves the advancement of the contemporary Church. If the conflict is understood more broadly, as encompassing all Western and Eastern Christians across time, as is sometimes suggested, then, on the Eastern side, a decision would have to be made through a pan-Orthodox council, though that is not necessary in this context. The bilateral act [of lifting the anathema] does not, in itself, have practical consequences. The schism remains between the Eastern and Western

Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, as a dialogue in love, progressed beyond the preparatory stages. For instance, in April 1974, an unofficial conference of theologians from both Churches was held in Vienna on the theme: *The Community of the People of God and the Eucharist in the Early Church*. This meeting marked a significant step in strengthening mutual understanding between the two Christian traditions. Participants engaged in discussions on fundamental issues concerning the nature of the Church, the role of the Eucharist, and ecclesial communion, striving to identify points of convergence while respecting theological and historical differences.³ Analysts and interpreters of the meeting observed that the Roman Catholic Church adopted a “tactical” approach, demonstrating a willingness to make certain “concessions” to the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox, for their part, emphasized that the dialogue should be conducted on an equal footing, upholding the ecclesiological principle that the highest authority in the universal Church resides in the Ecumenical Council.⁴ Orthodox theologians reject the possibility that a single bishop could hold jurisdiction over the universal Church and emphasize that the dialogue should begin from the shared tradition of the undivided Church.⁵

On the tenth anniversary of the lifting of the anathema, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Demetrios of Constantinople established two preparatory commissions—one Catholic and one inter-Orthodox—which led to a meeting of the coordination group in March 1978. The representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the commission were Metropolitan Danilo Krstic and Hieromonk Atanasije Jevtic.⁶

Churches, as the many doctrinal and ecclesiological differences that necessitate further discussion still persist [...] Nevertheless, the lifting of the anathema has its implications: it aims to create a new atmosphere, a new climate in the relations between the two Churches, which aspire to ever more fruitful and constructive mutual engagement.” Dusan Kasic, *Skidanje anateme izmedju Rimske i Carigradske crkve br. 1716/66 [Lifting of the Anathema between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople No. 1716/66]*, (Beograd: Arhiv Svetog Sinoda Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve [*Archives of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church*], 1966), 1-3.

³ Cf. “Inostrani pregled” [*Foreign Review*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 5 (1974): 130.

⁴ Cf. “Inostrani pregled,” *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 7 (1974): 170.

⁵ Bigovic, *Pravoslavna teologija ekumenizma*, 112.

⁶ Cf. “Kroz hriscanski svet” [*Through the Christian World*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 2 (1988): 35; The monks of the Holy Mountain (Athos) expressed their displeasure over the participation of Patriarch Dimitrios in the papal Mass of 6 December 1987, during which the Orthodox deacon read the Gospel in Greek, followed by a Roman Catholic priest reading it in Latin. The monks criticized

During the meeting in Chambésy in 1978, Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians addressed the issue of hierarchy as a service within the Church.⁷ In Istanbul in 1979, during Pope John Paul II's visit to Patriarch Demetrios, the official beginning of the theological dialogue was announced, along with the establishment of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.⁸ In Patmos and Rhodes in 1980, a framework was established to initiate the dialogue. The goal of the negotiations was Eucharistic unity—the very unity that had existed in the early centuries of Christianity. The method to achieve this goal was defined as follows: the dialogue would begin from the elements that unite the two Churches. This did not imply that the existing differences between Orthodox and Catholics would be ignored, but rather that they would be addressed at a later stage of the dialogue.⁹

the joint declaration signed by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Dimitrios I. They stated that the Holy Mountain does not reject dialogue and good relations, but cannot accept concelebration with the Roman Catholic Church, whose sacraments it does not recognize as valid. In his response, Patriarch Dimitrios praised their zeal and fidelity to Orthodoxy, but added that his responsibility was not only to listen to “the voice in the wilderness” (the monks), but also, as *primus inter pares* in the episcopate of the Orthodox Church, to work toward the further advancement of unity among all Christians. “Patriarch Dimitrios assured the monks of Mount Athos that ‘the Mother Church stands firm as a rock in faith and apostolic tradition,’ and that ‘truth, like light, is not hidden under a bushel,’ for her only concern is ‘the glory of God and the salvation of humankind.’” “Kroz hriscanski svet, Odgovor patrijarha Dimitrija Svetogorcima” [*Through the Christian World: The Response of Patriarch Dimitrios to the Monks of Mount Athos*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No 9 (1988): 168.

⁷ Cf. “O svestenickom sluzenju i jerarhiji” [*On the Priestly Ministry and the Hierarchy*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 5 (1978): 106-108.

⁸ Cf. “Kroz hriscanski svet” [*Through the Christian World*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 11 (1979): 266; In the initial phase of the Commission's work, discussions focused on the sacred nature of the Church, the relationship of faith, the role of the Holy Sacraments, and the Mystery of the Church, aiming to establish a natural connection between Eucharistic experience and theological teaching. In a sense, the goal was to demonstrate the link between theory and practice. Cf. Zlatko Matic, ed., *Da istinujemo u ljubavi, Zvanicni bogoslovski dijalog Pravoslavne i Rimokatolicke Crkve* [*That We May Abide in Love: Official Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches*] (Pozarevac: Odbor za prosvetu i kulturu Eparhije pozarevacko-branicevske, 2013), 15-17. The representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church were Bishop Sava Vukovic and Professor Stojan Gosevic.

⁹ Cf. “Inostrani pregled” [*Foreign Review*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 7 (1980): 175.

Radovan Bigovic offered the following assessment of the International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church:

“It should be noted that this document of the Commission, like all the most recent ones, does not have a dogmatic or binding character for the Churches participating in the dialogue, as it was agreed that the Commission does not possess theological authority nor the authority of a Council. However, the very presence of the highest representatives undoubtedly testifies to a significant theological influence, primarily in terms of the guidelines and positions that the Churches should present in future dialogue.”¹⁰

Professor S. Gosevic from the Faculty of Theology of the Serbian Orthodox Church was invited by Don Emmanuel Lanne to attend a meeting of the Sub-Commission for Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics, held in Chevotogne.¹¹ The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church responded positively and entrusted Professor Gosevic with the task of participating in the work of the Sub-Commission.¹² The Coordinating Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches held its subsequent session in Venice in 1981, and the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity invited Professor Gosevic to take part in the proceedings.¹³

“The Commission was tasked with reviewing and studying the texts received from the three Sub-Commissions on the same subject: *The Mystery of the Church and the Mystery of the Eucharist in Light of the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity*, in accordance with the decision made by the Joint Commission during the meeting in Rhodes. Furthermore, the Commission prepared its own text as a synthesis of the three Sub-

¹⁰ Bigovic, *Pravoslavna teologija ekumenizma*, 117.

¹¹ *Pismo Emanuela Lanea profesoru Stojanu Gosevicu br. 2073 od 3 septembra 1980* [Letter from Emmanuel Lanne to Professor Stojan Gosevic, No. 2073, 3 September 1980], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1980).

¹² Cf. *Akt Svetog arhijerejskog sinoda SPC br. 2073/zap. 634 od 30 septembra 1980* [Act of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, No. 2073/Reg. 634, 30 September 1980], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, Beograd 1980). The sub-committee’s theme was: “The Mystery of the Church in Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.”

¹³ Cf. *Torelja Ramon Sekretarijat za unapredjenje hriescanskog jedinstva* [Torelja Ramon Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity], No. 303/81, (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1981); cf. Stojan Gosevic, *Pismo Svetom arhijerejskom sinodu* [Letter to the Holy Synod of Bishops], No. 933, 4 May 1981, (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1981).

Commission texts, which were then submitted to the Joint Commission. Subsequently, the Commission approved the proposal of the Archbishop of Munich, Cardinal Ratzinger, to hold the next meeting of the Joint Commission in Munich from 21 June to 6 July 1982.”¹⁴

1.1 The Official Position of the Serbian Orthodox Church

1.1.1 The Serbian Orthodox Church During the Time of Patriarch German

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) adopted the stance that it could not engage in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church until the latter demonstrated a clear departure from its previous attitudes and methods of working against the Orthodox Church, particularly its Uniate policies. The contemporary ecumenical path is no longer one of conversion and proselytism, but rather of genuine cooperation, mutual understanding, and respect. Brotherly love has always formed the foundation of any sincere approach to resolving theological questions.¹⁵

To obtain a realistic understanding of the Serbian Orthodox Church’s attitude towards ecumenism, it is essential to consider various internal and external factors. In general, the SPC was open to dialogue, yet it also faced internal resistance from those who opposed any agreements or engagements with other Churches. External influences were strong, and the SPC remained attentive to the voice of all Orthodox Churches in an effort to maintain a spirit of conciliation. While one might conclude that this stance involved compromise, strategic calculation, or diplomatic tactics, the reality is that numerous historical, theological, political, and social factors played a significant role in shaping the SPC’s position on ecumenism. From an external perspective, key developments in the Christian world—such as the ecumenical movement’s call for unity and the innovations introduced by the Second Vatican Council—undoubtedly exerted a considerable influence on the SPC’s stance.

The process of forming a definitive position within the SPC followed a structured and methodical path. The Serbian Church arrived at its decisions within the framework of its Council, through Slavic conferences, within the broader canonical context, and in consultation with other

¹⁴ Stojan Gosevic, *Izvestaj za Sveti arhijerejski sinod SPC br. 1269/zap. 568. od 15 maja 1981* [Report to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church No. 1269/Reg. 568, 15 May 1981], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1981).

¹⁵ Cedomir Draskovic, “O ekumenizmu” [*On Ecumenism*], *Pravoslavna misao*, No. 30 (1983): 27.

Orthodox Churches. Given the complexity of the issue and the extensive history of inter-Orthodox meetings, conferences, and theological exchanges, it is not feasible to recount every detail. Nevertheless, this study will examine the key elements that illuminate the SPC's concrete position on ecumenism.

In order to reach a common position, it was necessary to hold preparatory Orthodox Conferences for dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. These were convened in Rhodes between 1961 and 1964. Participants were invited to present their perspectives on the relationships between the Orthodox Churches and other Christian denominations with which they maintained contact. At the opening of the first conference in Rhodes, Metropolitan Damaskin of the Serbian Orthodox Church delivered a speech in which he stated:

“Our Serbian Orthodox Church has lived the same life as the entire Orthodox Church. Its joys and sorrows are our joys and sorrows. The Serbian Church is deeply imbued with the awareness of the unity of the whole Orthodox Church and continues to safeguard this unity as a great treasure: the unity of faith, the unity of Church organization and order, and equality in prayer and worship. [...] It believes and expects that this conference, in preparation for the future convocation of the Pre-Synod, will further strengthen the unity and mutual love of all Orthodox Churches and constitute a glorious page in the history of the Orthodox Church.”¹⁶

The second Pan-Orthodox Conference was held in 1963 in Rhodes. At this gathering, all Orthodox Churches unanimously requested Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople to initiate dialogue with the Roman

¹⁶ “Svepravoslavna konferencija na ostrvu Rodosu u Grčkoj” [*The Pan-Orthodox Conference on the Island of Rhodes, Greece*], 104; It was affirmed that representatives of the Russian and Romanian Churches retain the right to assume the role of presiding officers over other delegations, provided that the head of the delegation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople is absent or unable to preside, while still honoring the Patriarch of Constantinople. Representatives from Jerusalem, Alexandria, Greece, and Antioch, as well as delegates from the Serbian Orthodox Church, did not participate in this discussion. This raises ecclesiological concerns, as the concept of rotational presidency was previously unknown in Orthodox tradition. Key topics of the conference included: 1) Faith and Dogma; 2) Sacred Worship; 3) Church Administration; 4) Mutual Relations Among Orthodox Churches. Prof. L. Milin addressed these topics and submitted his perspective on Orthodox-Catholic relations to the Holy Synod of Bishops for further deliberation. Cf. Lazar Milin, *Teoloske teme za buduci Posinod* [*Theological Themes for the Future Post-Synod*], (Beograd: Ahriv Sinoda SPC, 1964).

Catholic Church on the basis of mutual equality.¹⁷ At the third Rhodes Conference in 1964, Serbian Patriarch German was present. During the discussions, a unified Orthodox position concerning other Christians was established, grounded in the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology.¹⁸

As historical evidence demonstrates, the Serbian Orthodox Church has consistently looked to the Patriarchate of Constantinople when addressing significant matters in ecclesial life, with the aim of preserving the spirit of catholicity. Following a period of awaiting a consolidated Orthodox position on participation in the World Council of Churches, Orthodox

¹⁷ Cf. *Pismo patrijarha carigratskog Atinagore patrijarhu srpskom Germanu o sazivanju Treće Rodoske konferencije br. 429, i 1638 od 21 maja 1965* [Letter from Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople to Serbian Patriarch German regarding the convening of the Third Rhodes Conference, Nos. 429 and 1638, 21 May 1965], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1965); Cf. Meliton Mitropolit, "Ponovni susret crkve Istoka i Zapada" [*The Re-Encounter of the Eastern and Western Churches*], *Glasnik-službeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 3 (1966): 97-98. At the Vienna conference, Metropolitan Meliton participated in a meeting of a lay group organized by Cardinal König. The conference proceedings were published in English in the World Council of Churches' journal *The Ecumenical Review*.

¹⁸ Marko Nikolic, *Ekumenski odnosi Srpske pravoslavne i Rimokatolicke crkve 1962-2000* [*Ecumenical Relations between the Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, 1962-2000*] (Beograd: Sluzbeni glasnik, 2011), 72-73. 139-140; The work of this conference continued the efforts of the two preceding conferences, expanding the scope of Orthodox-Catholic relations. The entire Orthodox Church expressed a desire to initiate dialogue with Rome. Pope Paul VI sent a document to this conference, conveying heartfelt gratitude and assurances of his prayers for the participants. The conference coincided with the Second Vatican Council, underscoring the alignment of both parties' goals. Following the Third Rhodes Conference, the Patriarchate of Constantinople was invited to send a delegation to Rome on 14 February 1965. After meeting with His Holiness Pope Paul VI and engaging with Cardinal Augustin Bea and members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, this Orthodox delegation presented the agenda of the latest Pan-Orthodox Rhodes Conference. For the first time in centuries of separation, a delegation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople delivered a message of great significance to the head of the Roman Catholic Church on behalf of all Orthodoxy—a truly historic moment. The meeting was marked by sincerity and warmth, followed by a second encounter on 2 April 1965, when the delegation sent by Pope Paul VI arrived in Phanar. Led by Cardinal Augustin Bea, alongside Bishop J. Willebrands and Father Pierre Duprey, the delegation presented a letter from the Pope to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Cf. Meliton Mitropolit, "Ponovni susret crkve Istoka i Zapada" [*The Re-Encounter of the Eastern and Western Churches*], *Glasnik-službeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 3 (1966): 98.

observers were invited to the Second Vatican Council, and a clear stance on dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church was formulated.¹⁹

In the spirit of the Rhodes Conferences—following a reconstruction of events and transformations, and in line with the evolving ecclesial mindset—many professors from the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade encouraged reflection on reconciliation and reunification.²⁰ The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was one of the most innovative assemblies ever convened in the Western Church.²¹ Its reforms encompassed nearly every aspect of theology, religious freedom, and openness to the world and other Christian Churches.²²

His Holiness Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople sent two letters to Patriarch German in 1962, informing him about a visit to Constantinople attended by Vatican representatives. During this visit, the Vatican envoys conveyed to Patriarch Athenagoras the formal convocation of the Second Vatican Council.²³ Following his return from Moscow,

¹⁹ “The Serbian Orthodox Church holds a special and historic role. It has preserved, in its structure, life, and ethos, the principle of catholicity (sobornost). This is recognized by all who engage with these issues. It is not for the Serbian Church to question why other Orthodox Churches have experienced internal schisms, historical isolation, or independent decisions, such as joining the World Council of Churches or sending observers to Vatican II, abandoning shared ideals. The Serbian Orthodox Church’s stance, as noted by the Catholic newspaper *Le Monde* and various press agencies, is clear. It was observed that the Serbian Church’s response to the Patriarch of Constantinople’s proposal regarding relations with the Vatican (and membership in the World Council of Churches) was: ‘Let us gather together and act collectively.’” Vasilij Rodzjanko, “Izvestaj o Ekumenskom pokretu” [*Report on the Ecumenical Movement*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 6 (1964): 220. Cf. Branko Cisarz, “Pravoslavna crkva i mir u svetu” [*The Orthodox Church and World Peace*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 6 (1964): 228–232.

²⁰ Cedomir Draskovic, “Put Crkve u 21 vek” [*The Church’s Path in the 21st Century*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, Nos. 3–4 (1965): 124–126.

²¹ Cf. “Novi smjer Petrovoj ladji” [*A New Course for Peter’s Ship*], *Vjesnik u srijedu*, 17 October 1962, 8–9.

²² Cf. Dusan Kasic, “Drugi Vatikanski sabor (1962–1965)” [*The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)*], *Glasnik–sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 6 (1966): 214–217.

²³ Cf. Letters from the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church to all autocephalous Churches, following discussions between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, based on correspondence from the Patriarch of Constantinople (Synodal Letters Nos. 152 and 394/63, and 1745/62), Arhiv Sinoda SPC [Archives of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church], Beograd 1962. These letters clarify the Serbian Orthodox Church’s stance toward Vatican II. The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity acknowledged these

Cardinal Augustin Bea, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, together with Secretary Johannes Willebrands, sent a letter to Patriarch German encouraging the Serbian Orthodox Church to send observers to the Council. Alongside these letters, Patriarch Athenagoras also provided a set of guidelines for the delegates who would serve as observers at the Second Vatican Council.²⁴

The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church adopted the following position:

“Taking into account the responses received from the sister Orthodox Churches, which did not send observers to the Second Vatican Council, and in agreement and unity with the Most Holy Orthodox Church, we inform Your beloved Beatitude and the Holy Church that it is not possible to send Orthodox observers to this Assembly [the Council].”²⁵

One may grasp the seriousness and attentiveness with which the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) followed the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council by considering the decision taken by the Holy Council of the SPC during its regular session in May 1963:

developments but could not afford delays. Consequently, Secretary J. Willebrands traveled to Moscow in September. The outcome of his visit to Patriarch Alexy was the Russian Church’s decision to send delegates to Vatican II.

²⁴ Cf. *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 2944 od 11 oktobra 1962* [*Synodal Document of the Serbian Orthodox Church, No. 2944, 11 October 1962*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1962). Key provisions included: 1) To help Christians separated from the Holy See understand Vatican II’s work, the Holy See invited them to send delegates. 2) Observers were permitted to attend public solemn sessions and closed general assemblies but excluded from commission meetings unless specifically invited. 3) Observers had no speaking or voting rights during Council discussions. 4) The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity mediated between Council bodies and observers, ensuring information flow and organizing special sessions for dialogue.

²⁵ *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 2913/62* [*Synodal Document of the Serbian Orthodox Church, No. 2913/62*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1962); On 10 November 1962, the Secretary of the Holy Synod, Priest Mladen Mladenovic, received a letter from Archimandrite Simeon of the Constantinople Patriarchate’s General Secretariat reaffirming that no observers would be sent to Vatican II. Cf. *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 3226/599 od 13 novembra 1962* [*Synodal Document of the Serbian Orthodox Church, No. 3226/599, 13 November 1962*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, Beograd 1962). Shortly thereafter, Patriarch German of Serbia relayed a letter from Russian Patriarch Alexy, confirming J. Willebrands’ visit to Moscow and the Russian Synod’s decision to send two representatives: Prof. Vitaly Borov (liaison to the World Council of Churches) and Archimandrite Vladimir Kotlyarov (deputy head of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem). Cf. *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 3009/62* [*Synodal Document of the Serbian Orthodox Church, No. 3009/62*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1962).

“Having consulted with all sister Churches and presented our position, considering the specific circumstances of our people and our Church, we are interested in sending two delegates as observers to the Second Vatican Council. This decision is made in response to the invitation of the Secretariat for Christian Unity and in preparation for the Second Vatican Council, dated 6 October 1962, No. 200/60.”²⁶

The Serbian Orthodox Church responded by accepting the visit of Secretary Johannes Willebrands, suggesting that it take place between 4 and 8 September 1963. For the first time in the history of the SPC, the papal envoy, Monsignor Willebrands, was received on an official visit.²⁷ Prior to the dispatch of observers, such a visit would have been impossible, as the Patriarchate of Constantinople had suggested convening a Pan-Orthodox Conference to resolve the issue of sending observers to the Second Session of the Second Vatican Council. Consequently, the Second Conference of Rhodes began on 25 September 1963.²⁸

In September 1964, the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council was convened. Regrettably, even at that stage, the Serbian Orthodox Church did not send its observers. During this period, the Third Orthodox

²⁶ *Sveti arhijerejski sabor SPC br. 22/zap. 65 od 10 maja 1963* [*The Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church No. 22/reg. 65 of 10 May 1963*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1963).

²⁷ Cf. *Sluzbena beleska, Prvi i drugi boravak Preuzvisenog biskupa Jana Willebrandsa br. 2842/zap. 428 od 13 oktobra 1963* [*Official Note, The First and Second Visit of His Excellency Bishop Jan Willebrands No. 2842/reg. 428 of 13 October 1963*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1963); cf. *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 2477/63* [*Document of the Synod of the SPC No. 2477/63*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1963).

²⁸ Cf. *Prva i Druga Rodoska konferencije br. 316/63* [*First and Second Rhodes Conference No. 316/63*], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1963). The Greek Church refused to participate, having openly declared its opposition to the sending of observers to the Council. During the vote, the delegations were divided into two groups. The first group, in favor of sending observers, included the Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Czechoslovak Churches. The second group, which opposed sending observers, consisted of the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Serbia. One may wonder why the SPC delegation voted against sending observers, given that the previous decision of the Holy Assembly of the SPC had been to send observers to the Second Vatican Council. With prior authorization, they voted against this decision at the Assembly itself (the Council). At the second session of the conference, on 28 September 1963, following the proposal of the delegates of the Church of Antioch, a unanimous decision was adopted, leaving the question of sending observers open for each Church to decide autonomously according to its internal circumstances.

Conference was held in Rhodes from 1 to 14 November 1964. Following the conference, the Serbian Orthodox Church authorised the establishment of a Commission to prepare for dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. The Commission included Bishop Sava Vukovic, D. Kasic (Rector of the St. Sava Seminary in Belgrade), and S. Gosevic, a professor at the Faculty of Theology of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.

In the letter dated 17 May 1965, Bishop Johannes Willebrands, Secretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, informed Serbian Patriarch German of the desire to undertake a new visit to the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC). The official visit would include Father Pierre Duprey, Undersecretary of the Secretariat, alongside Bishop Willebrands. The meeting was scheduled to take place from 26 to 30 June 1965.²⁹ His Holiness Serbian Patriarch German accepted this visit and sent a letter to Bishop Willebrands via Fr. Duprey.³⁰ Patriarch German had a deep interest in the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council. When asked what the Council had accomplished thus far and what remained to be done, Willebrands responded that the Council had approved documents on the Liturgy, the Church, Ecumenism, and the canonical status of the Eastern Catholic Churches.³¹

Patriarch German wrote:

“We must commit ourselves to unity, even as we acknowledge it is a long path, yet we will do all that lies within our capacity. Let us allow time to

²⁹ The following were present: His Holiness Serbian Patriarch German; Bishop Jovan of Nis; Bishop Emilijan of Slavonia; Bishop Andrej of Banja Luka; Bishop Jovan of Sava and Valjevo; the Secretary of the Holy Synod, Fr. Mladen; His Excellency Bishop J. Willebrands; Rev. Father Pierre Duprey; and the translator D. Pavlovic, clerk of the Patriarchal Library. Mladen Mladenovic, *Sluzbena beleska o razgovorima sa Preuzvisenim biskupom G. Janom Willebrandsom br. 2142 od 30 juna 1965* [Official Note on the Conversations with His Excellency Bishop Jan Willebrands No. 2142 of 30 June 1965], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1965), 1-8.

³⁰ Cf. *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 1852/65* [Document of the Synod of the SPC No. 1852/65], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1965).

³¹ J. Willebrands stated: “The Constitution on the Liturgy is the most significant, because the faithful participate equally in the Holy Eucharist through both the narrative language and Communion. [...] The second Constitution concerns the nature of the Church. The Holy Eucharist is the spirit of the structure of the Church in its unity.” Mladenovic, *Sluzbena beleska o razgovorima sa Preuzvisenim biskupom G. Janom Willebrandsom br. 2142 od 30 juna 1965*, 3.

work in tandem with our goodwill: as His Eminence Willebrands stated, let us permit the Holy Spirit to guide us toward this goal."³²

The Second Vatican Council comprised four sessions, which addressed nearly every aspect of Church doctrine, life, and organisation. These doctrinal deliberations culminated in documents that expressed the conciliar spirit that had guided the Council. As representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Professors D. Kasic³³ and L. Milin,³⁴ were appointed by the Holy Synod to attend the Council's fourth session on 14 September 1965.³⁵ This exemplifies the influence of Roman Catholic

³² Mladen Mladenovic, *Sluzbena beleska o razgovorima sa Preuzvisenim biskupom G. Janom Willebrandsom br. 2142/zap. 444 od 2 jula 1965* [Official Note on the Conversations with His Excellency Bishop Jan Willebrands No. 2142/reg. 444 of 2 July 1965], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1965), 7.

³³ Professor Dusan Lj. Kasic (1914–1990), rector of the St. Sava Seminary and professor at the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade, dedicated his entire life to the study of the history of the Serbian Church, especially the Serbian Church in Croatia and Slavonia. Many of his works remain unpublished, although of particular interest are the reports he submitted to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Other notable publications include: *Serbian Settlements and Churches in Northern Croatia and Slavonia*, Zagreb 1988; *Serbian Archbishops and Patriarchs, The Serbian Orthodox Church from 1219 to 1969, A Monument to the 750th Anniversary of Autocephaly*, Belgrade 1969; *The Contribution of Patriarch German to the Cooperation for Unity among the Orthodox, Serbian Patriarch German, Memorandum on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of His Patriarchal Service 1958–1978*, Belgrade 1978. Cf. Predrag Puzovic, "Protjerej-stavrofor dr D. Lj. Kasic" [*Archpriest Stavrophor Dr. Dusan Lj. Kasic*], *Glasnik-sluzbeni list Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*, No. 5 (1990): 115-117; cf. Predrag Puzovic, *Prilozi za istoriju Srpske pravoslavne crkve* [Contributions to the History of the Serbian Orthodox Church], vol. 4, (Beograd: Institut za teloska istrazivanje, 2014), 389-391.

³⁴ With letter No. 834 of 4 July 1965, Cardinal Bea once again invited the Serbian Orthodox Church to send its representatives to the fourth session of the Council. The Holy Synod of the Serbian Church, at its assembly on 1 October 1965, decided: "[...] to accept the invitation and to send, as observers for the Serbian Orthodox Church to the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council in Rome, Archpriest Dr. D. Kasic, Rector of the St. Sava Seminary in Belgrade, and Archpriest Dr. L. Milin, professor at the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade." *Dokument Sinoda SPC br. 2064/zap. 560 iz 1965* [Document of the Synod of the SPC No. 2064/reg. 560 of 1965], (Beograd: Arhiv Sinoda SPC, 1965).

³⁵ Cf. Kasic, "Drugi Vatikanski sabor (1962-1965)," 177; cf. *Zabeleska-Savezno izvrsno vece kabinet Svetislava Stefanovica 10 septembar 1965* [Note-Federal Executive Council, Office of Svetislav Stefanovic, 10 September 1965, in *Archives of Yugoslavia-Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, fund 144, file 91, 1965*],