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STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN POLAND AND UKRAINE

Стаття аналізує структуру релігійних організацій у Польщі та Україні. У роботі було розглянуто особливості ієрархії релігійних організацій, їх правовий статус та вплив на суспільство. Досліджено основні релігійні конфесії, що домінують у кожній країні, зокрема Римо-Католицьку та Православну церкви, а також діяльність протестантських і греко-католицьких громад. Висвітлено відмінності в централізації управління, взаємодію держави з релігійними установами та їхню соціальну роль. Особливу увагу приділено відмінностям між двома країнами, зокрема впливу історичних і культурних факторів на формування релігійного середовища.

Ключові слова: структура релігійних організацій, релігійні громади, духовенство, релігійні центри, адміністративні органи, правовий статус, Католицька церква, Православна церква, соціальна роль релігії, взаємодія церкви і держави.

Introduction. Religious organizations play an important role in the social life of Poland and Ukraine, influencing cultural, political and social processes. However, their structure, interaction with the state and society, as well as the level of centralization differ significantly. In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church dominates, with a clear hierarchical structure and significant influence on public policy. In contrast, the religious landscape of Ukraine is more diverse, and the issue of church autonomy, particularly within the Orthodox tradition, remains a subject of public and political debate.

Another crucial issue concerns the legal regulation of the activities of religious organizations, which directly affects their autonomy and cooperation with the state. The differences between Polish and Ukrainian legislation create both opportunities and challenges for religious communities. The study of the structure of religious organizations in Poland and Ukraine is essential for analyzing their societal role, operational mechanisms, and interaction with state institutions, thereby providing a deeper insight into the distinctive characteristics of religious life in both countries.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Denomination and religiosity constitute important components of the lives of many individuals and communities, as they are closely related to accepted worldviews, values, and specific patterns of behavior. Religion as a social phenomenon represents a complex object of study not only because it belongs to the

sensitive personal sphere of human and social life, but also due to the fact that many of its aspects go beyond the quantitative categories typically employed in statistical and empirical research. This applies not only to surveys that explore individual perceptions of religion, but also to the institutional dimension of religious life. Various churches and religious associations are characterized by significant diversity in terms of their size, distribution, and geographical location.

In Poland, the study related to the Church, beliefs, and religious institutions has been conducted by such scholars as A. Pitkiewicz, S. Gendzia, A. Staszuk, Z. Legutko, J. Pekala, T. Gabrel and others. These researchers have made a substantial contribution to the examination of the Polish Church, its role in social life and cultural context, analyzing not only its historical development but also the contemporary challenges and transformations occurring within the church structure of Poland. Their works provide a deeper understanding of the crucial role of religious organizations in Polish society, particularly in the context of modern processes of secularization and integration with other religious traditions.

In Ukraine, the study of the Church and religion has been addressed by numerous domestic scholars, including Yu. Bohutskyi, N. Bohutskyi, N. Sahan, and S. Zdioruk. A significant contribution to this area of study has also been made by P. Yarotskyi, who explores the development of religious organizations in post-socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, paying particular attention to this subject.

The religious network in Ukraine is among the largest in Europe, which significantly contributes to the emergence of deep-rooted religiosity among the population. An important aspect is that religious organizations have reached a qualitatively new stage of development. The administrative structures of churches are almost completely formed, and their activities are coordinated by more than 350 spiritual centers and administrations. Furthermore, the training of clergy and religious personnel is carried out in around 200 specialized education institutions (Kolodnyi & Fylypovych, 2010).

Changes in the quantitative composition of religious denominations over the past twenty years reflect profound transformations in the religious life of Ukraine. These changes involve the re-evaluation by denominations of their role in society, the definition of their relationship with the state and the broader social environment, as well as the reassessment of key universal values, such as political, social, national, legal, and spiritual. Religion can be fully free only under the existence of appropriate conditions.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the structure of religious organisations in Poland and Ukraine, to identify their peculiarities, mechanisms of functioning and interaction with state institutions. The study is aimed at identifying the main differences in the religious life of the two countries, the impact of historical, legal and socio-cultural factors on the development of religious organisations, and their role in shaping social processes.

Research Methods. In order to achieve the stated goal and implement the set tasks, several general scientific research methods were used: analysis, synthesis, comparison and generalisation of the views of Ukrainian and foreign scholars on various aspects of the problem.

Research results. Understanding the structure of religious organizations is of great importance both in social and scientific contexts. It also plays a crucial role in ensuring social stability, political balance, academic research, and effective public administration. Several key aspects should be considered:

- *Social role and influence.* Religious organizations play an essential role in shaping moral values, cultural traditions, and civic consciousness. They often engage in charitable activities, education, and social support for the population.

- *Legal and regulatory aspects.* Understanding the structure of religious organizations helps effectively regulate their activities at the state level, particularly regarding registration, taxation, and interaction with government bodies.

- *Political context.* In many countries, religious organizations influence socio-political processes. They can serve both as instruments of social consolidation and as factors contributing to social conflicts.

- *Interdenominational relations.* Analyzing the structure of religious communities helps to understand their mechanisms of interaction, which is crucial for maintaining interfaith dialogue and preventing religious conflicts.

- *Educational and research interest.* The study of religious organizations is an integral part of sociology, religious studies, and history. It helps scholars better understand social transformations and religious trends in different countries (Kolodnyi & Fylypovych, 2010).

Religious organizations may have various types of structures that define their hierarchy, governance, and interaction with society. In general, there are three main models: hierarchical, congregational, and synagogue (network-based).

The hierarchical model is typical of religious communities such as the Catholic Church or Orthodoxy, where a strict vertical power structure is headed by a spiritual leader (for example, the Pope or the Patriarch).

The congregational model is typical of Protestant communities, which function autonomously and make decisions independently.

The synagogue (network) model is typical of Jewish and some modern spiritual movements, where communities are connected through horizontal ties without centralized leadership or governance. The structure of religious organizations is shaped by the denomination, historical traditions, and legal regulations of a particular country (Yarotskyi, 2010).

In Poland, the structure of religious organizations is multi-level and reflects both historical and modern religious realities of the country. The dominant religion is Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church, which has the greatest influence in the country, is organized according to a strict vertical model, with bishops, archbishops and the Pope playing key roles. However, there are also other religious communities in the country with unique types of organizational structure:

- Autonomous Protestant communities (Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals) often follow the congregational model of governance, in which each congregation independently makes its own decisions.
- The Orthodox Church in Poland has a hierarchical structure similar to the Catholic one but operates within the framework of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church.
- Jewish communities are organized according to the synagogue (network) principle, which provides for each state community, although there are general coordinating bodies (ibid.).

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, Poland experienced a significant increase in the number of religious organizations and a broad expansion of its religious network. Overall, their number more than tripled in the early 1990s. The period of spiritual and religious revival was closely tied to the country's break from its communist past. The Catholic Church, which enjoyed a high level of public trust, played a crucial role in the processes of political transformation. According to sociological studies, around 80% of Poles believed that the Church was fulfilling its social mission with dignity (Kolodnyi & Fylypovych, 2010).

The religious renaissance, detailed in the second chapter of this study, was largely driven by the adoption of new democratic legislation on religious organizations. This legislation created favorable conditions for

their registration on general legal grounds. According to data from the State Statistical Office, between 1990 and 1999, 163 religious organizations were officially registered in Poland.

Analyzing the dynamics of religious organization registration in Poland during the period of democratic transition, it is important to note that at the beginning of the 21st century, the growth rate of religious associations slowed considerably. The largest decline was observed in 2002 and 2005, when no new denominations were registered. According to general statistical data, as of early 2014, there were 176 officially registered churches and religious organizations operating in Poland (excluding interfaith organizations) (Palinchak, 2023).

Catholicism in Poland is represented by four main churches: 1) The Roman Catholic Church; 2) The Greek Catholic Church (Byzantine-Ukrainian Rite); 3) The Armenian Catholic Church; 4) The Byzantine-Slavonic Catholic Church. All these denominations recognize the supremacy of the Pope. The Law on Guarantees of Freedom of Conscience and Religion (1989), which defines the legal basis for interaction between the state and the Catholic Church, applies to all four rites (Ciecieląg & Haponiuk, 2013).

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest both among Catholic denominations and among all religious organizations operating in Poland. It is represented in all regions of the country, particularly in the north-east, central, and south-west. According to statistical data, in 2011 there were 10,177 Roman Catholic religious' communities in Poland. Between 2001 and 2011, their number decreased by only 0.9%, indicating a high level of institutional support for this religious organization, as well as reflecting competition mainly from Protestant and Orientalist religious movements.

As of 2011, there were 30,481 Roman Catholic clergy in Poland, and the clergy coverage rate was 290%. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of priests in this denomination increased by 2,548 (Palinchak, 2012).

Despite the complex political transformations of the 20th century, the role of the Catholic Church as the guardian of Polish national identity and protector of the people only strengthened. After a brief period of state independence in 1918–1939, and later under Soviet rule following World War II, the Church remained a symbol of national unity and a pillar of resistance up until the fall of the communist regime.

This unique synthesis of Catholicism and national identity can be viewed through the lens of civil religion, which is tied to patriotism and the perception of religious and national holidays as a unified whole. This

manifested itself in symbolism, particularly in the comparison of Poland with Christ, who was depicted on the cross, as well as in the concept of compensatory messianism, which emphasized the special historical mission of the Polish nation in Europe and the world (Palinczak, 2023).

Thus, under the influence of historical and political conditions, the Catholic Church in Poland developed a distinct national theology, leading to the sacralization of this concept and the values associated with it. Even today, many Poles perceive their country as a “Catholic state of the Polish people”.

In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church remains the largest and most influential religious institution. Over 85–90% of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholics. The Church possesses a powerful hierarchical structure, exerts strong influence on public life and state policy, and maintains numerous churches and religious communities throughout the country.

In contrast, the Greek Catholic Church (Byzantine-Ukrainian rite) is a much smaller and less widespread religious body. Its believers represent a small percentage of the population, primarily members of the Ukrainian minority. Greek Catholic communities are mainly concentrated in the southeastern regions of Poland (particularly the Subcarpathian Voivodeship) and in major cities inhabited by Ukrainians (Ciecieląg & Haponiuk, 2013).

The Greek Catholic Church in Poland (officially the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Poland, UGCC) is part of the Universal Catholic Church, which follows the Byzantine rite and is subordinate to the Pope. Its believers are mainly Ukrainians living in Poland, especially in the southeastern regions of the country and in major cities.

In the 20th century, the Greek Catholic Church suffered repressions, particularly after Operation “Vistula” (1947), when many Ukrainians were forcibly resettled to the western and northern regions of Poland.

The revival of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland began after 1989, and today it has over 50,000 believers. The main spiritual centre is Przemysl, where the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is located. Thanks to its hierarchical structure and active religious work, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church plays an important role as both a spiritual and cultural center of the Ukrainian community in Poland, influencing significantly to the preservation of its traditions and religious identity (Palinchak, 2023).

The Greek Catholic Church in Poland thus serves as a local religious and cultural hub for Ukrainians, maintaining its own clear hierarchical structure and exercising considerable influence on the spiritual life of its faithful.

The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, also known as the Orthodox Church of Poland, is an autocephalous local Orthodox Church, ranking 12th place in the diptych of autocephalous churches. It follows the Byzantine rite and uses Polish and Church Slavonic languages in its liturgy (church services), as well as the Julian and New Julian calendars.

The Church was originally established in 1924, when Poland regained independence after World War I, to meet the spiritual needs of Orthodox Christians in the country. After World War II, at the insistence of the Soviet authorities, it was re-established in 1948. Its jurisdiction also includes Orthodox communities in Brazil that are canonically subordinate to the Polish Orthodox Church (Palinchak, Galda, & Leshanich, 2015).

The modern Orthodox Church plays an important role in the political and cultural life of Poland. It is actively involved in charitable activities, providing support to low-income people. Furthermore, there are cultural centers in the country that are funded by the Orthodox Church, contributing to the preservation of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Orthodox community.

At the same time, the Church has faced certain criticism, particularly concerning its attitude toward women and minorities. For instance, in 2018, several cases were reported involving violations of women's rights in some Orthodox monasteries in Poland, where women were subjected to restrictions of freedom and forced unpaid labor. In contemporary Polish society, some political forces are trying to restrict the rights of religious minorities, but despite this, the Orthodox community preserves its traditions and continues to practice its faith freely.

The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) has a well-defined hierarchical structure, ensuring efficient management and spiritual guidance of the faithful. At its head stands Metropolitan Sawa (Hrycuniak), Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland. The Church is divided into several dioceses, each headed by an archbishop or bishop. The PAOC includes the following archdioceses:

- Warsaw-Bielsk Archdiocese, headed by Metropolitan Sawa (Hrycuniak).
- Bialystok-Gdansk Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Jakub (Kostiuczuk).
- Lodz-Poznan Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Atanazy (Nos).
- Wroclaw-Szczecin Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Jerzy (Pankowski).

- Lublin-Chelm Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Abel (Poplawski).

- Przemysl-Gorlice Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Paisjusz (Martyniuk).

- Rio de Janeiro-Olinda-Recife Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Chrysostom (Freire) (Polish Orthodox Church, n.d.).

- Recife Diocese, headed by Bishop Ambrozy (Kubas).

In addition to archdioceses, the PAOC includes titular dioceses headed by vicar bishops:

- Titular Suprasl Diocese, headed by Bishop Andrzej (Borkowski), vicar in Bialystok and Gdansk.

- Titular Bielsk Diocese, headed by Bishop Grzegorz (Charkiewicz), vicar in Warsaw and Bielsk.

- Titular Hajnowka Diocese, headed by Bishop Pawel (Tokajuk), vicar in Warsaw and Bielsk.

- Titular Siemiatycze Diocese, headed by Bishop Warfolomiej (Doroszkiewicz), vicar in Warsaw and Bielsk (*Polski Autokefaliczny Kościół Prawosławny*, n.d.).

The structure of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) also includes the Polish Orthodox Military Ordinariate, headed by Archbishop Georgy Pankowski. This institution ensures effective governance and spiritual guidance within the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, allowing it to fulfill its mission both in Poland and beyond its borders.

In Poland, religious freedom is guaranteed, allowing representatives of any denomination to freely perform their religious practices. However, certain political forces attempt to limit the rights of religious minorities, especially those not belonging to the dominant Catholic Church.

One example of such restrictions is the law prohibiting the use of live animals in religious rituals, which has significantly complicated the practice of Islam and Judaism, as ritual animal slaughter constitutes an integral part of these religious traditions. The law was adopted following public concern over the inappropriate conditions of animal keeping in special camps (facilities), nevertheless, it triggered tensions between the state and representatives of Muslim and Jewish communities.

Another challenge to religious freedom has been the initiatives of some political groups aimed at restricting the rights of religious minorities to hold gatherings and conduct rituals, which could provoke conflicts between larger denominations and undermine the principle of religious tolerance.

Despite these challenges, Poland remains a country with a high level of religious freedom. Government institutions have gradually taken measures to protect the rights of religious minorities and ensure their security. Civil society organizations and human rights advocates also play an important role in this process, actively defending the rights of all religious communities and opposing any manifestations of discrimination on religious grounds (*Religious Information Service of Ukraine, 2020*).

The multiethnic composition of Ukraine's population has contributed to the formation of a diverse religious environment, in which numerous denominations, religious movements, and churches have historically coexisted. Some of them have survived to this day, while others have undergone transformations or integrated into new religious associations. It is important to note that in the history of Ukraine, there have been no large-scale interreligious wars or violent conflicts, although certain tensions did arise among Orthodox Christians, Uniates, and Protestants. Nevertheless, throughout most historical periods, religious tolerance prevailed on Ukrainian territory, allowing persecuted denominations to find refuge and fight for independence from dominant religious institutions.

An official indicator of the religious situation in Ukraine, recorded by state authorities, is the number of active religious organizations. According to state statistics, these include administrative structures of denominations, churches and religious movements, communities (parishes), monasteries, missions, brotherhoods, and theological education institutions. It is essential to distinguish between the terms "religious organizations" and "religious communities".

Religious organizations are associations of believers created for the collective profession and dissemination of faith, as well as for conducting religious activities, services or worships, and rituals. They operate within specific denomination or religious movements and may have different forms of organization and governance. The main types of religious organizations include:

1. Churches and religious centers – large associations of believers with a centralized structure and management (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church).
2. Religious communities (parishes) – local associations of believers that organize religious services and activities within a particular settlement.
3. Monasteries – spiritual centers where monks or nuns live according to the rules of their respective faiths and religion.

4. Missions – organizations engaged in spreading religious teachings and charitable work.

5. Brotherhoods and religious education institutions – communities of believers whose purpose is to support spiritual development and religious education (*Religion in Ukraine*, n.d.).

In many countries, religious organizations have a special legal status, allowing them to be officially registered and to benefit from certain rights and privileges, such as tax exemptions.

Religious communities, on the other hand, are local associations of believers whose members profess a particular religion, conduct worship services and religious rites, and engage in spiritual activities. They constitute the basic structural unit of religious organizations. It is at the community level that active religious life takes place. The main characteristics of religious communities include:

- Local nature – the community operates within a specific settlement or territory;
- Union (association) of believers – composed of individuals who share a common faith and are united around a temple, church, mosque, synagogue, etc.
- Organizational structure – governed by administrative bodies (e.g., parish councils) and rector or a spiritual leader;
- Liturgical (worship) activity – conducting religious services (rites), sermons, educational programs, and charitable events (*ibid.*).

In many countries, religious communities can be officially registered, obtain legal status, own property, engage in charitable activities, and establish education institutions. Religious communities constitute part of religious organizations, yet they are not identical to them. A religious organization is a broader concept that encompasses communities, monasteries, missions, theological educational institutions, and other related entities. Religious communities play a key role in the religious life of society by providing believers with the opportunity to meet their spiritual needs at the local level (*Religion in Ukraine*, n.d.).

The most widespread church in Ukraine is the Orthodox Church, represented by several jurisdictions, the largest of which are the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). The OCU is autocephalous, meaning it is an independent church recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2019.

In addition to Orthodoxy, other religious communities are also widespread in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is one of the largest and most influential churches, particularly in the western regions of the country. It combines Catholic doctrine and faith with the Byzantine rite. The Roman Catholic Church is also active in Ukraine, being represented mainly among the Polish community and other Catholics. Protestant communities, including Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, and other denominations, are also actively developing and have a wide presence (Palinchak, Halda & Leshanych, 2015).

The total number of parishes in the OCU and UOC remains approximately the same. In recent years, however, there has been a trend toward growing support for the OCU and a decline in the influence of the UOC, which is associated with the country's political and social transformations.

Religious freedom in Ukraine is guaranteed by the Constitution and national legislation. Article 35 ensures the right to freedom of worldview, conscience and religion. This right includes the freedom to profess any religion or not to profess any, to freely practice religious cults and ritual rites, and to conduct religious activities without interference. The Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" specifies the rights and obligations of religious organizations and guarantees the right to freedom of conscience and belief. However, certain restrictions may apply, particularly under martial law.

- Martial law. Under martial law, restrictions may be imposed on mass religious gatherings and events to ensure public safety. The activities of religious organizations cooperating with the aggressor state may also be limited or restricted.

- National security. The activities of religious organizations may be restricted if they threaten national security, public order, health, or public morality.

- Legislative restrictions. There are legislative restrictions on the activities of religious organisations that promote violence, hatred or discrimination (Religion in Ukraine, n.d.).

Moreover, following the onset of the full-scale invasion, several legislative initiatives were introduced aimed at limiting the activities of churches with ties to Russia. The war has intensified interdenominational relations in Ukraine, particularly among Orthodox churches. Overall, religious freedom in Ukraine remains guaranteed; however, certain

restrictions may be introduced under martial law or for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

Conclusions and further research prospects. The findings suggest that the Roman Catholic Church holds a dominant position in Poland, possessing a strong hierarchical structure and exerting significant influence on social life. In Ukraine, the religious landscape is more diverse, featuring competing Orthodox jurisdictions, the Greek Catholic Church, and various Protestant communities.

The Roman Catholic Church in Poland has a clear vertical hierarchy, which ensures centralized governance, whereas the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine exhibit different degrees of centralization, reflecting historical and political factors. In Poland, the Catholic Church maintains a considerable impact on state policy, reflecting its long-standing role in national identity and public life. In Ukraine, the relationship between the state and religious organizations is more complex, particularly in the context of political transformation and Russian aggression.

In both countries, religious organizations play an essential role in shaping moral values, cultural traditions, and civic consciousness. They also participate actively in charitable initiatives, education, and social support. Historical and cultural factors have significantly influenced the formation of the religious environment in both nations: in Poland, the Catholic Church has become a symbol of national identity, whereas in Ukraine, religious diversity reflects the multiethnic composition of its population. The legal regulation of religious organizations affects their autonomy and cooperation with the state. Differences in the legislation of Poland and Ukraine create both opportunities and challenges for religious communities. In both countries, religious organizations face common challenges connected with secularization, interfaith relations, and political transformations.

Given the above the **prospects for further research** are seen in conducting comparative study on educational activity of these organisations in both countries.

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SUMMARY

Shulha Yuliia. Structure of religious organisations in Poland and Ukraine.

The article analyses the structure of religious organisations in Poland and Ukraine. The paper examines the peculiarities of the hierarchy of religious organisations, their legal status and impact on society. The main religious denominations that dominate in each country, including the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as well as the activities of Protestant and Greek Catholic communities, are studied. Differences in the centralisation of governance, the interaction of the state with religious institutions and their social role are highlighted. Special attention is paid to the differences between the two countries, in particular the influence of historical and cultural factors on the formation of the religious environment.

Religious organisations play an important role in public life in Poland and Ukraine, influencing cultural, political and social processes. However, their structure, interaction with the state and society, as well as the level of centralisation differ significantly. In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church dominates, with a clear hierarchical structure and significant influence on public policy. In Ukraine, however, the religious landscape is more diverse, and the issue of church autonomy, especially in the Orthodox environment, remains a subject of public and political debate.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the structure of religious organisations in Poland and Ukraine, to identify their peculiarities, mechanisms of functioning and interaction with state institutions. The study is aimed at identifying the main differences in the religious life of the two countries, the impact of historical, legal and socio-cultural factors on the development of religious organisations, and their role in shaping social processes.

Key words: *structure of religious organizations, religious communities, clergy, religious centers, administrative bodies, legal status, Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, social role of religion, interaction between church and state.*