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Ukrainian Religious Migration as a Challenge to Ecumenism in Poland

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Abstract: This article analyzes how military migration from Ukraine has changed the religious field in Poland. The author examines the impact of a large number of Ukrainian Christians of different denominations on the transformation of interchurch relations in Polish churches and their rethinking of confessional identity and pastoral approaches. The article examines the church environment of the three main denominations: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. The research method used includes eleven semi-structured interviews with clergy and theologians of different denominations, as well as discourse analysis of church documents and media. As a result, new modes of ecumenical interaction have been identified: from institutional dialogue to practical concelebration and humanitarian cooperation. Military migration has become a catalyst for changes in Polish ecumenism from formal diplomacy to solidarity action. This experience demonstrates that in times of war, ecumenism ceases to be only a theological concept and becomes a tool for responding to social challenges.

Keywords: ecumenism, religious migration, Ukrainian churches in Poland, interchurch dialogue, war in Ukraine, religious field in Poland

The Revolution of Dignity in 2013 and the Russian–Ukrainian war caused certain shifts in the religious map of Ukraine. The most important consequence was the emergence of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the weakening of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). This complicated the rules of the game in the Ukrainian market of religious services, affecting most of the market's actors.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 forced many Ukrainian Churches to reconsider their role in society, often leading to more radical and politicized positions. Meanwhile, chaplaincy and the volunteer movement strengthened cooperation between Ukrainian Churches. The war also triggered an unprecedented wave of migration from Ukraine to Poland. Ukrainian migrants encountered a large number of humanitarian and spiritual needs, which almost all Polish Churches met. On the other hand, a number of Ukrainian Churches have expanded their activities on the territory of Poland. Together with the help of their compatriots, they transferred

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to Poland the ideas inherent in internal Ukrainian realities about their role in society, the way Churches are organized, spiritual practices, and lines of tension between the Churches.

Polish–Ukrainian relations have long been the subject of multidisciplinary research by both Ukrainian and Polish researchers. These studies were especially intensified in the context of two waves of migration from Ukraine: in 2014 and 2022. Researchers from the Ukrainian Catholic University, Olha Mikheeva and Viktor Susak (2019; 2023) studied the transformation of values, attitudes, and daily practices of Ukrainian migrants in Poland. In the context of state security issues, Ukrainian migration was studied by Dominika Liszkowska (2023). Separate studies have been conducted on the relations of Ukrainian migrants with religious communities of Wrocław (Lubicz Miszewski 2023), Kraków (Mróz 2023), and Chorzów (Śpiewak et al. 2023). Catholic minorities have also been the subject of ethnographic research. The Mieroszewski Center has researched the mutual perception of neighbors (Wołosewycz and Boklan 2024; Mazurkiewicz and Sygnowski 2025).

Theological research forms a distinct strand within these studies. Several conferences of the Reconciliation in Europe Group have addressed reconciliation in Europe, with a particular focus on Polish–Ukrainian relations. Works by Oleksandr Dobroier (2024), Heorhii Kovalenko (2018), and Mykhailo Cherenkov (2017) discuss theological dialogue in Ukraine from various denominational perspectives. Recently, both Polish and Ukrainian researchers have focused on the issues of Ukrainian autocephaly (Bortnyk 2022; Blaza 2022; Kałużny 2019). Mateusz Jakub Tutak (2023) has dealt with the religiosity of Ukrainian migration as a challenge for the Church in Poland—from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).

This study examines Churches and church communities in Poland, representing three traditions: Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical. The problem considered is how the radical change in the religious landscape brought about by the war changes the Church's openness, the unity of the Church, and the practice of ecumenism in Poland. To examine this issue, the author has set himself these research goals: to find out how changes in the Ukrainian religious field affected the Polish religious environment due to the mass migration of Ukrainians; to analyze how Polish Churches and communities from various traditions have responded to this new situation, both in theological rhetoric and pastoral practice; and to identify new models of ecumenical interaction emerging in Poland as a result of these changes.

In order to achieve these goals, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of various religious communities. A detailed review of information on official websites and social media platforms of Churches and their communities was also conducted. The collected and analyzed data enabled assessing the changes that have occurred in Poland's religious field and describing the main challenges that have arisen for the Churches in Poland as a result of religious migration from Ukraine.

The collected material highlights issues of practical ecumenism in entirely new circumstances for Poland from various perspectives. These forms of cooperation complement common prayer and theological dialogue (Kantyka 2010, 189). However, this novelty should provide a new impetus for further theological research, since "a Catholic theologian should not be closed to understanding the faith of other confessions." (Skierkowski 2007, 316)

Ecumenism today is important not only in the context of religious issues but also as a response to political and social challenges. Facing these challenges—both internal and external—religious dialogue becomes a tool for strengthening social stability. This work is another step toward understanding Polish–Ukrainian relations in a new, previously unexplored aspect.

1. Catholics

1.1. The Roman Catholic Church

The RCC in Poland, like other religious communities, immediately reacted to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This reaction took place on several levels: formal, humanitarian, and pastoral.

On the very first day of the attack on Ukraine, February 24, 2022, the head of the Polish Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, made a statement calling Russia's attack on Ukraine a "shameful act of barbarity." (Gądecki 2022) A week later, he wrote a letter to Patriarch Kirill, in which he called for influencing the Russian leadership to stop the war. He also asked the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to influence the military and dissuade them from participating in war crimes.

In the first three weeks of the war, Roman Catholic parishes, monasteries, and Caritas centers assisted over 8,000 refugees and created over 2,000 places for them (Tasak 2023, 106–7).

> Even we, in the Pallottine house in Lublin, received people from Ukraine for several months. They lived with us, ate breakfast with us at the same table. It was a very good human experience—ordinary closeness, without pathos. And it became important for us not only to help, but also not to insult their faith, their needs. (Pawłowski 2024, pers. comm.)

This practical experience of the Church has been reflected in a number of documents. In particular, it is worth mentioning here *Pro memoria dotyczące posług religijnych udzielanych wiernym z Kościołów i Wspólnot kościelnych niemających pełnej wspólnoty z Kościołem katolickim* [Pro memoria on religious services provided

to the faithful of Churches and ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church], prepared by the Council for Ecumenism together with the Legal Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference already in March 2022 (KEP 2022). The document essentially repeated the main principles of the Catholic Church's attitude toward non-Catholic Christians (Pawłowski 2022). It does not contain any dogmatic formulations. Instead, it is more of a reference book for the Catholic clergy. However, its principal value lies in its practical dimension. For many Polish Christians, including priests, ecumenism was something very theoretical until recently. However, with the influx of a large number of refugees from Ukraine (Orthodox, Protestants), these norms acquired a concrete application and were adapted to the context of the war.[1]

The document has a distinct pastoral direction. Its main principle is to ensure that all Christians have a source of grace during difficult times in their lives. However, the authors of the document clearly state that the Catholic Church must provide assistance to the faithful of other Churches, "respecting their confessional identity and ecclesiastical affiliation." As the document states, "the administration of the Sacrament or other religious services to baptized non-Catholics does not lead to a change in their faith, and such a situation should not be used for actions that would have signs of proselytism." (KEP 2022, no. 3)

A significant part of the document focuses on Orthodox Christians, as they have constituted and continue to constitute a substantial portion of the refugees. Under certain conditions, a Catholic priest is allowed to administer communion to an Orthodox Christian, after making sure that the latter has asked for the sacrament consciously, and not as a result of confusion or ignorance (KEP 2022, no. 4). It is also permitted in some instances to baptize a child of Orthodox Christians (at their request), which does not mean that this child becomes a Catholic (KEP 2022, no. 6).

The document pays special attention to the permission to use temples, chapels, and objects of worship. The Polish Orthodox Church considered such a position to be interference in the internal affairs of Orthodoxy. It was the practice of providing premises for worship by the RCC to priests of the OCU, as well as the misunderstanding of the fact of the ban by the Ukrainian authorities of the UOC, which led to a certain crisis in relations between the RCC in Poland and the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC). In November 2023, the work of the Catholic–Orthodox bilateral group was even suspended (Pawłowski 2022, 161–64). Through the efforts of the co-chairs of the Commission, Catholic Bishop Adam Bab and Orthodox

1 "The war in Ukraine has made the issue of ecumenism relevant, calling for cooperation between the Churches," said Bishop Krzysztof Nitkiewicz, former chairman of the Council for Ecumenism of the Polish Bishops' Conference, in an interview with the Catholic Information Agency. Cf. Bieliński 2023.

Bishop Abel, it was possible to find an understanding quite quickly and resume the work of the group. Bishop Bab explained to the journal *Więź*:

> We treated Orthodox people kindly, without even asking which Church they belonged to—whether autocephalous or affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate. However, the Orthodox side made this distinction and suggested that we should take into account their canonical assessment of the situation. In their view, the autocephalous Church is in fact not a canonical Church; they have reservations about the very procedure of proclaiming autocephaly and even about the validity of ordinations. From the canonical point of view, this is not our concern. We were simply guided by the necessity of helping those in need, without analyzing their church affiliation. Here we were motivated simply by love of neighbor, not by the canons. (*Polscy prawosławni* 2023)

So the Polish Bishops' Conference did not make a generally binding decision on the provision of churches for the service of the OCU, but left it to the discretion of local bishops. Sławomir Pawłowski, believes that providing for such an ambiguity is the only way to show that the RCC does not interfere in the affairs of Orthodoxy:

> We take such a middle position. On the one hand, we must hear what the Orthodox side, which is in Poland, says, because they are our ecumenical partner. On the other hand, we also have a certain freedom of our own, and we do not want to get involved in an internal Orthodox dispute at all. This is the official position. We do not interfere, but this does not mean that we refuse hospitality. (Pawłowski 2024, pers. comm.)

Pro memoria also provides for certain conditions under which Catholic ministers can administer the sacraments to members of Protestant communities. Such conditions include belief in the absolution of sins in confession, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the special grace that is the sacrament of anointing of the sick (Pawłowski 2022, 168). The document pays attention to the correct naming of religious groups. It avoids some theological issues (e.g., the continuity of apostolic ministry, the validity of the sacraments in non-Orthodox communities). This is explained precisely by the pastoral nature of the document (Pawłowski 2022, 171–72). *Pro memoria* reflected a new theological balance. It demonstrated openness to practical ecumenism without the threat of losing Catholic identity on the one hand and the temptation of proselytism on the other.

Since the mid-2010s, the Mass in Ukrainian has been introduced in some churches in Poland (Tokarz 2025). With the beginning of the full-scale invasion and the influx of refugees, such offers appeared in many cities in Poland. These services became regular, although on average, they involved several dozen people.[2]

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2 For example, in Lublin, where there is a large community of Ukrainian students and immigrants, Sunday Mass is in Ukrainian at the Dominican Fathers and in the academic church of the Catholic University of

Thus, it can be assumed that for most Ukrainian Roman Catholics in Poland, language is not the main feature of their religious identity. Recent experience shows that many believers easily integrate into Polish-language liturgical practices without perceiving this as a loss of their Catholic identity. At the same time, the regular holding of services in Ukrainian indicates that for some of the faithful, this factor retains symbolic and pastoral significance, especially in the context of forced migration and war. Thus, the role of language can be described as an additional but not decisive element of religious identity, the importance of which may vary depending on the specific community and personal circumstances of believers.

1.2. The Greek Catholic Church

The Greek Catholic Church has long been a bastion of Ukrainian identity in Poland. The linguistic marker has been important for Greek Catholic communities. Religious services here were and are held only in Ukrainian. The Church has always maintained ties with Ukraine. Since prewar times, part of the Ukrainian labor migration lived "in two countries." Bishops of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland participate in the Synods of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). In Poland, the Greek Catholic Church has systematically carried out various initiatives for many years, contributing to the cohesion of Ukrainian youth and the preservation of their national identity. It is worth mentioning, at the very least, the activities of the youth movement "Sarepta" or the Foundation for Spiritual Culture of the Borderlands.

Therefore, it is quite natural that with the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Greek Catholic communities in Poland became, in a certain sense, landmarks and first points of assistance for many Ukrainians who found themselves in Poland. These were places where Ukrainians could not only pray but also find various forms of assistance, including information, humanitarian aid, and legal support. Greek Catholic communities became centers for people who are ready to integrate into Polish society, respect its culture and social norms, but do not want to assimilate. It is crucial for them to preserve their Ukrainian culture and identity.

The Greek Catholic Church in Poland is taking steps to make itself more accessible to Polish society, as well as to partners in ecumenical dialogue. One of such initiatives was the publication of the Catechism of the UGCC in Polish.

Today, there is still no reliable data on the growth of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland since 2022. However, by observing the lives of these communities and analyzing other data, we can confidently say that this growth has occurred multiple times (Batruch 2024). Some "fading" parishes have been given new life. In many places, new parishes have also emerged (Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva 2025).

Lublin. In total, fewer than 100 people come to these Masses in both churches.

The Greek Catholic Church in Poland occupies a special position. On the one hand, it is neither a competitor nor a partner in the ecumenism of the RCC (because it is too small for that). On the other hand, it is constantly criticized by the Orthodox. Therefore, it occupies a relatively small niche. Nevertheless, it has a close-knit and loyal following. It mediates between the dominant Roman Catholicism and the communities of the Byzantine tradition. It also combines the Catholic identity with the liturgical identity of the Orthodox Churches, which are represented in Poland by the PAOC and the OCU.

2. Orthodoxy

Ukrainian migration has had a significant impact on the Orthodox community in Poland. There are several reasons for this. First, Orthodoxy is the dominant Christian denomination in Ukraine, with 72% of the population identifying themselves as members of this Church (KMIS 2022). In Poland, approximately 1% of the population identifies as Orthodox (GUS 2022). Second, Orthodoxy has never been homogeneous in Ukraine, unlike in Poland. Without delving into the lengthy and complex history of Orthodoxy in modern Ukraine, let us note that at the outset of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, two primary Churches in the country represented this denomination: the UOC and the OCU.

2.1. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was only the UOC that was recognized as canonical by the whole world. Until the events of the Revolution of Dignity and the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine in 2014, it held a dominant position in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. This Church maintained close ties with the ROC and, in fact, had a privileged status. It also maintained close ties with the authorities, especially during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych.

With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the situation of the UOC within the country became very complicated. Communication with Moscow was interrupted, but the declaration of independence in the form of autocephaly was not implemented. It was decided that this situation would not change until the war was over (cf. Blaza 2022, 23–24). However, there was a strong association of the UOC with Moscow in society, reinforced by the media. Finally, on August 20, 2024, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted Law No. 8371 On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine. On August 24, 2024, it was signed by the President of Ukraine. The law imposed restrictions on the activities of religious organizations in Ukraine whose headquarters

are located in a country carrying out aggression against Ukraine. The law was specifically directed against religious organizations affiliated with the ROC. Although no organization was named, the context of the law's adoption indicated that it was aimed at the UOC.

This is especially true of the sharp anti-Ukrainian rhetoric employed by certain UOC public figures between 2018 and 2022. Such a disrespectful attitude toward the state in the current geopolitical situation affects—though indirectly—the reputation of the PAOC precisely because of its long-standing ties with the UOC.

Priests of the UOC are permitted to serve together with priests of the Polish Church. However, the practice of accepting Ukrainian priests into the staff remains extremely limited. They are mostly outside the staff of the PAOC and only join in the service on Sundays and holidays.

2.2. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine

The issue of Ukrainian autocephaly, both in history and in modern times, has never been only canonical but has always been political (Kałużny 2019; Dobroyer 2019). Moscow has always viewed Ukrainian Orthodoxy as its branch. The fear of losing Ukraine had quite measurable indicators. Having lost influence over the UOC, the Russian Church would have lost about 30% of its structure (almost a third of parishes and clergy). At the same time, this would have meant for Moscow the loss of the main support of the "Russian world." It would also have lost the right to speak on behalf of "all Eastern Slavs." Since 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has taken a number of active steps aimed at granting autocephaly to Ukraine. After 2014, they took place against the backdrop of increasing sanctions pressure and the isolation of Russia. A number of prominent American and European politicians have spoken out in support of granting autocephaly to Ukraine.

As a result, on January 5, 2019, Patriarch Bartholomew granted the Tomos to the OCU. Thus, an autocephalous Church was established in Ukraine. However, this process did not lead to the creation of a single Orthodox Church in Ukraine. None of these Churches is recognized today by the entire Orthodox world. Some Orthodox Churches (mainly from the Greek world) recognize only the OCU, while others (including the ROC and the PAOC) recognize only the UOC. Some Churches recognize both Orthodox Churches on the territory of Ukraine as legitimate (Blaza 2022, 27). This ambiguous situation, due to the large number of Ukrainian Orthodox refugees, was "imported" into Poland and significantly affects ecumenical relations in the country.

According to the Tomos, the OCU is not permitted to create parishes outside of Ukraine. However, on October 18, 2022, the Synod of the Church, guided by pastoral intentions, created a Chaplaincy Mission to provide spiritual services and assistance to Ukrainian refugees. The pastoral care and coordination of the mission in Poland

was entrusted to Metropolitan Hilarion of Rivne and Ostroh. Today, such missions operate in many Polish cities, including Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław, and Katowice.

In Poland, the OCU branches do not use state registration. They operate mainly as unregistered communities or as public organizations. In most cases, the places for worship services are provided to the priests of the OCU by the RCC. This is precisely what has become a reason for strained relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Poland. In some cases (such as in Wrocław), the premises are provided by the city authorities.

As the OCU priests explain, they are in Poland to "take care of the faithful who are here, and there are a lot of them here, much more than the faithful of the Polish Orthodox Church." Despite the protests of the PAOC, the missions continue to operate. The main arguments against the OCU from the Polish Church are the non-recognition of the canonical status of the OCU and the creation of parallel structures on the territory of another autocephalous Church. At the same time, the OCU authorities do not see a problem in their Church's canonical status, understanding it as part of the universal Church. In matters of canonicity, they follow the logic emphasized by one of the interlocutors:

> If you recognize [the existence of the OCU—O.D.], there are no questions, yes, of course, then we are ready to act within canonical norms. If you do not recognize…, what non-canonicality are we talking about?… There is no recognition, there is no non-canonicality.… We are forced to take care of our faithful, we cannot abandon them. (Sergienko 2024, pers. comm.)

Such a position of the OCU does not formally deny the importance of canonical structures. However, it emphasizes pastoral needs and puts its own ecclesiological legitimacy first. In the relations between the OCU and the UGCC in Poland, one can observe the parallel presence and even a certain level of competition. In a certain sense, such a situation reflects the relation between these Churches in Ukraine itself. Although the conversations highlight the existence of diplomatic relations between the pastors of these communities, the author's observation suggests that these relations are somewhat distant. As for the laity, the vast majority have their own specific ecclesial identity (Orthodox or Greek Catholic) according to which they attend the respective religious services. However, there is a small number of those who "go to both us and the Greek Catholics.… They say: we want your singing, your tradition." (Revtov 2024, pers. comm.) In this case, parishioners primarily choose between these communities based on the "style of church life," which encompasses the language, nature of the liturgy, and pastoral approach.

2.3. The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church

Orthodoxy is traditionally represented in Poland by the PAOC (Mironowicz 1999). Most of its parishioners have historically come from Belarusian and Ukrainian families. The PAOC has been and remains a recognized yet peripheral actor in the religious field. For decades, it has enjoyed limited but genuine historical and cultural capital in Polish society. It strengthens symbolic legitimacy through institutional cooperation with other religious minorities within the framework of the Polish Ecumenical Council. In the Polish religious life, it plays the role of a "keeper of tradition."

The "Ukrainian question" reappeared for the PAOC in the context of granting autocephaly to Ukrainian Orthodoxy. On May 9, 2018, the Synod of Bishops of the PAOC issued a communiqué, which, in response to a letter from the Primate of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy, noted that "the church-canonical life of the Orthodox Church must be based on principles that are grounded in the dogmatic-canonical teaching of the Orthodox Church. Violation of this principle introduces chaos into the life of the Orthodox Church." (PAKP 2018a) While this message remained formally neutral, in the broader context of the confrontation between Moscow and Constantinople, it indicated that the PAOC leans more toward the pro-Moscow position.

Notably, the same communiqué reported that the Synod had information from Patriarch Kirill of Moscow "on the inclusion in the catalog of holy new martyrs and confessors" and approved the decision "to include their names in the diptych of saints of the PAOC." (PAKP 2018a) Since the accession of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to the ROC in 2007, the Russian Church has included in its diptychs many figures representative of the spiritual revival of the "Russian world." (Dobroyer 2010; cf. Szabaciuk 2022) Although the communiqué does not mention specific saints, the very inclusion of martyrs glorified by Moscow, rather than Constantinople, in the diptychs affirms, in a certain sense, the sacred memory of the "Russian Golgotha" of the 20th century as the core of the common identity of Orthodox Christians in the post-Soviet space. This legitimizes the ecclesial hegemony of the ROC through the "spread of holiness" from Moscow and reinforces the symbolic "church map" of the "Russian world" in Poland.

The issue of Ukrainian autocephaly was then subsequently considered by the Council of Bishops of the PAOC several more times: in November 2018, and in April and October 2019 (PAKP 2018b; 2019a; 2019b). In these discussions, the same points were reiterated: The PAOC does not oppose granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church, but the process must involve all Orthodox Churches, adhere to dogmatic and canonical norms, exclude those deprived of episcopal and priestly ordinations, and prohibit the clergy of the PAOC from entering into liturgical and prayerful contact with the "clergy" of the "Autocephalous Church." These arguments closely mirror those of the Moscow Patriarchate.

With the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Council of Bishops of the PAOC sharply condemned the military actions against Ukraine, appealed to the secular authorities of Russia for a ceasefire, and urged Patriarch Kirill to assist in this effort. Despite the apparent change in tone, the unequivocal condemnation of the war, and the expression of support for Ukraine, some elements in the letter are interpreted differently by various actors in ecclesial life. For instance, calling the war "fratricidal," according to the authors, refers to the Cain and Abel story. However, for Ukrainians, this term echoes post-Soviet rhetoric—which is considered utterly unacceptable in Ukraine today—and recalls the Soviet euphemism of "fraternal peoples." (PAKP 2022)

The condemnation of the "criminal invasion of the Russian Federation into the territory of independent Ukraine" once again appeared in the letter from Metropolitan Sava, when he had to explain his inappropriately courteous greeting to Patriarch Kirill on the 14th anniversary of his enthronement in February 2023. The hierarch explained that he had not taken into account the "difficult geopolitical situation." (PAKP 2023)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that over the past 10 years, the PAOC has gone from cautious concern to outright condemnation of the war. Although this anti-war stance remains without specific geopolitical assessments, it indicates a shift in attitude toward the events in the neighboring country and the Church.

Religious services in the PAOC are held mainly in Old Church Slavonic, sometimes in Polish. In some parishes, elements of the Ukrainian language are introduced (during sermons, singing, and some parts of the liturgy). A significant part of Ukrainian parishioners who attend PAOC churches are assimilated or do not show a strict linguistic or confessional identity. The faithful of all Orthodox jurisdictions of Ukraine can receive the sacraments in the PAOC. At the same time, the position regarding the clergy of the OCU remains unchanged: The Polish Church does not recognize it. The clergy of the OCU can receive the sacraments of the PAOC, as well as all secular Orthodox believers.

Historically, after the collapse of the USSR, the entire Orthodox world accepted the UOC as the only possible Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Therefore, for years, the Orthodox world, including the PAOC, looked at religious life in Ukraine through the prism of the ROC and the UOC affiliated with it. There were no contacts with other Church structures, and they were practically ignored. According to the Polish Orthodox priest Łukasz Leonkiewicz, "We … the last few years, … have not been on this topic, it is a bit foreign to us.… I understand that this is mostly a Ukrainian problem in Ukraine." (Leonkiewicz 2024, pers. comm.) Among the issues that authors and pastors have overlooked is the importance of Ukrainian national identity in Ukrainian church life. Father Leonkiewicz comments on this point, "It is clear that we do not yet understand each other. But in general, I believe that establishing relations, even very cautious ones at first, is the beginning of any dialogue. Therefore, I believe that

it is a plus that we are finally starting to get to know each other." (Leonkiewicz 2024, pers. comm.)

The presence of a large group of Orthodox Ukrainian migrants is a challenge for the PAOC, since their total number is equal to or exceeds the number of faithful in the Polish Church. The cautious and slow opening of the PAOC to the needs of the Ukrainian community is also due to the need to protect the Church's identity. Even if there are fewer truly active parishioners among Ukrainian refugees than those who identify themselves as Orthodox, this is still a reasonably large number of people. Some of them will adapt to the Polish Church. Still, some will likely seek a "Ukrainian" Church, and the OCU in Poland will serve as an alternative.

3. Evangelical Christians

3.1. Baptists

From the very beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Baptists in Poland, like other communities, were involved in helping Ukrainian refugees. For example, 85 out of 110 congregations of the Council of Christian Baptist Churches of the Polish Republic had refugee reception centers. The arrival of people from Ukraine, most of whom were either Orthodox or had not previously encountered religion, required Baptist ministers and volunteers to learn to navigate new realities. According to Marek Głodek, "So this united us as Christians who go to help not only materially but also spiritually.… And at the same time, it showed, from the point of view of Christian theology, the picture of this Kingdom of God as the people of God from different nations, cultures, and languages." (Głodek 2025, pers. comm.) Understanding that they had people from different backgrounds under their care, who were to some extent dependent on the people who hosted them, Polish Baptists did not demand that Ukrainian refugees reevaluate their lives or did not encourage them, for instance, to become Baptists: "We did not do this and did not offer this to our coordinators or the communities we worked with. Rather, these people attended services at Orthodox churches, if there were any, and it did not bother them. We did not exert such pressure, and I think this is ecumenism in practice." (Głodek 2025, pers. comm.)

Speaking about the differences in structure, customs, and liturgical practices between Ukrainian and Polish Baptists, a few notable distinctions are worth mentioning. In Polish churches, congregationalism is well-developed, and decisions are made by the congregation council or the General Assembly (Conference). In the Ukrainian tradition, there is a hierarchical structure in communities. Often, the pastor is the person who makes all decisions. There are very clearly defined roles for deacons. This organizational structure is usually more straightforward. To this day, in Baptist

churches in Ukrainian communities in Poland, leadership is concentrated in one or two individuals, whereas in Polish churches it is typically vested in a church council elected from among the members. This presents a challenge because Ukrainians in Polish churches expect the pastor to have all the information and to make decisions on the spot. In contrast, in the Polish tradition, decision-making rests with the council (Głodek 2025).

Additionally, Polish Baptist meetings typically include wine during the Lord's Supper. However, the consumption of wine by Polish parishioners is often frowned upon by Ukrainian parishioners and sometimes even considered tantamount to being unbelievers. Certain internal rules also distinguish Baptists of both nations. For example, in the Polish tradition, either during the service or after, when getting to know each other, men shake hands with women in greeting. Therefore, women in Polish churches do not feel discriminated against or left out. According to the testimony of the interlocutors, Ukrainian men do not shake hands with women, do not greet women at all, and sometimes do not even pay attention to them. When Polish men greet community members, they shake hands with women first, and Ukrainian women often "read" this as courtship.

In Ukrainian congregations, there is a tradition of married women covering their heads. In Polish congregations, this discussion took place more than 20 years ago, and today it is a matter of personal preference, although it is not often practiced. The practice of bowing during prayers is also relevant in Ukrainian and some Polish conservative congregations, but it is almost nonexistent among Polish churchgoers.

Sometimes disputes arise regarding which language to use during worship services—Russian or Ukrainian. For example, one of the Warsaw churches, which previously used Russian, changed to Ukrainian last year. Sometimes, the service is conducted in a mix of Russian and Ukrainian, with one song in each language. This involves considering the interests of individuals who speak Ukrainian or Russian on a daily basis. Quite often, communities seek to understand and include both groups in their services. It is worth noting that Russian-speaking people are not only Russians or Russian-speaking Ukrainians. These individuals, also from Moldova or Belarus, have migrated to Poland over the past decade in several waves of economic and political migration.

However, at this time, new churches were also emerging, consisting of refugees themselves. An example of such a congregation is the Church "Svitlo Yevangelia" ("Light of the Gospel") in Kraków. It owes its origin to Oleh Shaykevich, the Baptist pastor of the Church "Skynia" in Odessa. However, establishing a Church was not his immediate goal.The start of the full-scale invasion caught him abroad. Having received permission from his Church, he began working on the border with Ukraine, in Chełm. Kraków was chosen as the hub city due to its logistical convenience. There were also several partner Churches that helped in the first days of the evacuation (Shaykevich 2025).

Before the start of the full-scale invasion, Shaykevich was unaware of Polish Churches. However, he quickly got to know them and they offered help (e.g., Pastor Maciej Wilkosz founder of the Voice of the Persecuted Society or the First Baptist Christian Assembly in Kraków). By the way, the subdomain of this Church's website contains a link to the "Light of the Gospel" Church.[3]

According to Głodek, institutional ecumenism has lost its former meaning today. At the same time, the pastor sees great sense in ecumenism at the community level, where the success of ecumenical activities depends on the personality of local leaders and their environment. He calls such ecumenism more personal, based on personal faith in Christ, than the one that has an institutional dimension. In his opinion, it is this kind of ecumenism that will survive in the future, as opposed to the institutional one, which he believes is somewhat politicized.

There is also a noticeable difference between Polish and Ukrainian traditions in their attitudes toward cooperation with other Churches. In Poland, communities are small, so to organize events or initiatives, they often need to unite with other denominations. In contrast, Ukrainian Baptist communities in Ukraine are usually large and accustomed to relying on their own resources. They bring this experience of self-sufficiency with them to Poland.

3.2. Pentecostals

Like Baptists, Pentecostal communities have developed several strategies for involving Ukrainian believers. One such example is the Pentecostal Church "Bethany," which has been in Katowice for many years. Religious services are held in Polish, but Ukrainian believers now have the option of translation into Ukrainian. The second strategy involves establishing a Ukrainian community adjacent to the existing Church. For example, in Olsztyn, the Ukrainian community "God's Love" was established next to the Church "Your Harbor" in 2022. Other communities, such as the Church "New Hope" in Katowice, have services in Ukrainian and Russian, and run their social networks in both Ukrainian and Russian.

It should be noted that the issue of language—which, among other things, distinguishes Pentecostals from the Orthodox OCU or Greek Catholics—is not paramount or equally fundamental. The leaders of such churches try to avoid radicalism in matters of language. Evangelical identity is of decisive importance here, compared to ethnic identity: "We understand that the problem is not in the Russian language, the problem is in ideology. And the problem is that Russians, like Russia, also need Christ. If we are divided on issues of language, then when will we endup?" (Radchenko 2025, pers. comm.)

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3 See https://baptysci-krakow.pl/ua/.

Differences in customs and service forms are minor, but they do exist. For instance, in Polish Pentecostal communities, wine is allowed during the Lord's Supper. Among Ukrainian Pentecostals, there is a strict ban on alcohol. Regarding other differences (such as whether to cover one's head or not), there is tolerance.

> Considering that in our Church there are people from different regions of Ukraine, from different countries, from different confessions, we do not impose prohibitions such as making it mandatory to cover one's head, wear pants or a skirt. We do not set boundaries. We strive to maintain a balance, and our stance is that if you choose to cover your head, do not judge those who do not. If you do not cover your head, do not judge others. If you judge, then repent and live on. (Radchenko 2025, pers. comm.)

The history of the Church "Word of Faith" is an example of another strategy for the development of Pentecostalism in Poland, with the participation of Ukrainian migrants. It was founded about 10 years ago, initially in Warsaw. It was then that Pastor Oleksandr Demyanenko, from Western Ukraine, began to come to Poland at the request of Ukrainian Pentecostal migrant workers. Later, he moved to Poland, where he founded the Church "Word of Faith." Today, there are approximately two dozen Ukrainian Pentecostal "Word of Faith" churches in the country, most of which were founded by Pastor Demyanenko. A significant part of the congregation consisted of Ukrainians, but it is open to Belarusians (in Poznań, the pastor and 70% of its members are Belarusians). There are also Russians and a few Poles. Practical considerations largely drove the desire to have their own pastor.

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, about 700 people attended the central church in Warsaw. Today, about 400 people come to Sunday services at 20 Wyborna Street. In addition, this Church has organized Life Centers. One of these is located near Warsaw, in Ząbki, at Piłsudskiego Street. Together, about 100,000 people have passed through these centers in Warsaw, Lublin, and Łódź.

Ukrainian Pentecostals have enormous missionary potential and a passion for it. New churches emerge with the establishment of home groups, which are attended not only by Pentecostals but also by Baptists and Charismatics. For example, five cities around Warsaw where many Ukrainians live have been identified: Otwock, Pruszków, Ząbki, Legionowo, and Piaseczno. There are plans to open new churches in these cities based on home groups. The preachers also give sermons in city squares, including in Warsaw's Old Town. The sermons are in Ukrainian and Polish. According tochurch leader Vadym Radchenko, Poles also join the Church, although such cases are rare.

The Church has also founded the "Maranatha" mission, opened an organization with the same name, and works in Poland and other European countries (including Germany and Scandinavia). As Radchenko says, Poles see "that there are many Ukrainians, churches are growing, a certain movement is taking place, and God is

doing something through the Ukrainian people." (Radchenko 2025, pers. comm.) Formally, the "Word of Faith" Church is part of the Pentecostal Church in Poland. However, there are already plans to register their own congregation.

What immediately catches the eye of Ukrainian Protestant refugees is the total dominance of the Catholic Church in Poland. For Christians who come from Ukraine, where religious pluralism exists, this is an unusual context. Today, the "Word of Faith" Church has no relations with the Catholic Church, but does not exclude such a possibility in the future. However, it has good contact with Baptists and Charismatics. Pastors visit each other, gather for pastoral meetings, and preach at each other's churches.

4. Polish Ecumenical Council

One of the main projects of the Polish Ecumenical Council (Pawlik 1996), in which Ukraine is involved, is the "Reconciliation in Europe" project and its Inter-Church Working Group (WG). It has been and remains a platform for dialogue between the Churches of Poland, Germany, Ukraine, and Belarus for about 30 years. This platform works on developing contacts between Christian communities of different traditions, organizing conferences, seminars, and joint prayers (Polska Rada Ekumeniczna 2016; Glaeser 2016, 2021). From Ukraine, official representatives from the RCC and UGCC, Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche der Ukraine (DELKU), and UOC participate in the work of the International Reconciliation Group. Despite the formal composition, the conferences it organized, including some in Ukraine, attracted a wider range of participants, particularly representatives of the OCU.

The confrontation between the two Ukrainian Orthodox Churches (UOC and OCU), which has been unfolding in Ukraine, was reflected in internal discussions in the WG even before 2022.[4] Due to the Alexander Lukashenko regime's support for Russian aggression, its Ukrainian members expressed doubts about the possibility of cooperation with Belarusian participants in further projects. Finally, despite all this, the WG decided not to change its composition. The rule was to refrain from interfering in confessional crises until the Churches themselves resolved them. This rule is not formally fixed, but it has a certain tradition. The same logic was followed in the mid-2010s during the crisis in the DELKU.

Until 2022, events in eastern Ukraine and Crimea were not perceived by some of the Group members as decisive in religious or political terms. Ukrainian representatives have repeatedly emphasized the war that has been ongoing since 2014, but in the collective perception of other members, it was perceived more as a "local

4 Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the WG has been represented solely by a delegate of the UOC from the beginning.

conflict" rather than as a fundamental civilizational struggle. This is how the director of the Polish Ecumenical Council (PRE), Pastor Grzegorz Giemza, commented:

> When we met, the Ukrainian side always said that there had been a war since 2014. We somehow didn't fully realize this in the Group. We somehow did not know that this was a war. I don't think we treated the annexation of Crimea as a war. Now that this aggression has taken place and manifested itself, it has also had a very strong impact on the Group. (Giemza 2024, pers. comm.)

At the beginning of 2022, it became clear that traditional approaches to Church reconciliation were insufficient to overcome new challenges. First, it was understood that in wartime conditions, reconciliation is impossible. However, it is possible to maintain relations and prepare the ground for future dialogue. Secondly, a full-scale war does not allow anyone to remain neutral. According to the director of PRE this lack of neutrality has a downside: the ecumenical structures of the West have become too politicized, representing the de facto position of Western foreign policy in the ecumenical space. In this perspective, there is no room for a complex, polyphonic dialogue. As an example, Pastor Giemza cites the "Pathway to Peace" program of the Conference of European Churches. In response, the Group developed its own strategy to distinguish between politics and faith, trying to maintain openness to personal and Church dialogue despite political circumstances. The Group does not question the legitimacy of the need to speak about peace and justice, but advocates for preserving a space for multilateral presence, even if it includes complex or politically undesirable voices. This applies in particular to the UOC, which is not Russian, but whose voice is now marginalized (Giemza 2024, pers. comm.).

Today, the Group focuses on preserving informal connections, institutional memory, informal trust—anything that in the future can become a resource of symbolic capital for the restoration of dialogue. The Group defines itself as "a bridge that has not been destroyed." The International Reconciliation Group does not make official statements or take sides in ecclesiastical disputes, but supports regular meetings—online and in neutral spaces. This "relationship maintenance regime" is seen as a contribution to the possibility of future reconciliation when the political and moral prerequisites appear (Giemza 2025).

Conclusions

As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the wave of migration it caused, Polish Christian communities faced a reality that led to significant movement in the country's religious field. They were confronted with the need not only to respond

to the social and religious problems of a large number of migrants from beyond the eastern border, but also to begin the processes of rethinking the principles of their own ecclesial identity, openness, and the limits of communion. Migrants brought with them the peculiarities of religious life in Ukraine, which is characterized by diversity, with the dominant role of Orthodoxy; a dramatic weakening of the UOC and the growth of the OCU; strengthening of the role of Evangelical Churches; quiet rivalry between two eastern "Ukrainian" Churches: the OCU and the UGCC. All this made the polyphony of Christian Ukraine visible, which had previously not been noticed by many Polish Churches.

For the dominant RCC in Poland, the need to serve "others" (Orthodox, Protestants) has turned from an academic issue into a matter of pastoral responsibility. The document *Pro memoria* highlighted new meanings in the understanding of Catholic identity and hospitality and was an attempt to adapt pastoral practice to a multi-confessional presence. Guided by this, the RCC, in particular, provides its churches for the use of Greek Catholics and the OCU. The latter caused new challenges in the relationship with its long-time partner, the PAOC. This prompts the RCC to balance hospitality and respect for Orthodox identity without proselytism. The encounter with a large number of non-Catholic Christians highlighted the challenge of the deeper ecumenical preparation of the Catholic clergy.

The influx of migrants from Ukraine significantly increased the size of Greek Catholic communities. The close connection with national identity (through language, tradition, and history) has made it a powerful center for the integration of Ukrainian migrants. This will contribute to the growth of the UGCC's influence in the religious field. However, the appearance of the OCU in the same field creates a challenge to build some form of relations with this Church for the benefit of the entire Ukrainian migrant community. The challenge facing the UGCC in Poland is, on the one hand, not to lock itself in the national ghetto, and on the other hand, to be open to the needs of Ukrainian non-Catholics in Poland. This opens a new page of Polish ecumenism—the coexistence of two migrant "Ukrainian" Churches on the same territory. To better understand Polish partners, the UGCC will need to produce more Polish-language content.

The greatest challenges due to Ukrainian migration are for Orthodoxy in Poland in particular, due to the emergence of OCU structures. In Poland, it operates on the basis of its own ecclesial logic, where legitimacy is determined not by pan-Orthodox recognition but by declared responsibility to its people. Other Churches and communities (except PAOC) see it as a legal ecclesial partner. Its emergence in Poland added to the religious life of this country a complexity inherent in the Orthodox reality of Ukraine. In particular, it appeals to pastoral necessity and thus undermines traditional Orthodox ideas about the limits of jurisdiction. However, it appears that in the future this Church will attempt to develop its infrastructure in Poland and seek institutional consolidation of its presence through partnership models.

The internal tension that has arisen through the "canonical line" requires the PAOC to adapt to new realities. The Orthodox Church of Poland faced a gap between its canonical self-awareness and its real pastoral situation. The attitude of the PAOC towards the OCU is an expression of the classic dichotomy between *oikonomia* (pastoral indulgence) and *akribeia* (canonical accuracy), which has yet to find a single theological solution in Orthodox ecclesiology. The specialty of the situation also lies in the fact that the churches of the PAOC are visited by many OCU believers, along with the faithful of the UOC. This situation could become a source of deep theological reflection for Polish Orthodoxy in the future, prompting a reevaluation of its sources, given that the PAOC is historically one of the heirs of the ancient Kyivan Church. The gradual opening of the Church to the needs of Ukrainian migrants (also through the language of the liturgy) could contribute to its greater attractiveness for Ukrainian migrants, as well as the rejection of rhetoric and practices that can be perceived as pro-Russian. There is a minority of Evangelical communities in both Ukraine and Poland. However, they are very active and create many spiritual and humanitarian opportunities for Ukrainian refugees. They embody the model of "network" or horizontal ecumenism. With cautions about institutionalized ecumenism, they practice inter-church ties built on trust, friendship, and common service. This is the ecumenism of action. It poses an alternative and a challenge to the institutional forms of ecumenical activity, which are often perceived as a matter of hierarchies and are limited to common declarations. It is worth noting certain forms of cultural, theological, and organizational differences between the Polish and Ukrainian Evangelical communities. There are also differences in the language, but they are not acute. With the dominant tendency to serve in Ukrainian, bilingualism is also practiced, including Ukrainian and Russian.

Another model of ecumenical activity in response to the challenges of wartime in Ukraine is demonstrated by the Reconciliation in Europe Group, which operates on the basis of the Polish Ecumenical Council. Despite certain crisis moments in the Group caused by the war in Ukraine, it has found its own formula for cooperation. The fact is that the issue of reconciliation is postponed until the postwar period. The Group's main efforts focus on maintaining informal connections and trust among participants. This "relationship maintenance regime" is seen as a contribution to the possibility of future reconciliation when the appropriate conditions for it appear.

Thus, the Polish experience of ecumenism in the conditions of the war in Ukraine demonstrates the possibility of one's own reawareness. We observe a shift from Church diplomacy to solidarity, from interfaith politeness to collective action for peace and justice. The war and the large wave of military migration from Ukraine became a kind of test of the sincerity of ecumenical efforts. Where ecumenism was based only on formal principles or diplomatic courtesy, it is now in crisis. Instead, in places where cooperation is built on a common shared understanding of human

dignity and a common Christian responsibility before God and people, new impulses have emerged for the Polish ecumenical movement.

Translated by Iryna Stepaniak

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