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Institutional revival of the Catholic church in Ukraine (1991–2026): historical retrospective and contemporary challenges

The study is a thorough and comprehensive analytical analysis of the thirty-five-year path of development, formation and transformation of Catholic structures in modern Ukraine. The author aims not simply to record the chronology of administrative decisions or religious events, but to deeply understand this process in the context of pan-European socio-cultural changes, decolonization, the collapse of the Soviet totalitarian empire and the restoration of Ukraine's state independence. This thirty-five-year anniversary, which falls in 2026, becomes an important analytical milestone for reflection on a unique historical phenomenon, when religious communities, which for decades were under the brutal pressure of a totalitarian state, driven deep underground and doomed to complete destruction, were able to transform into powerful, extensive, self-sufficient institutions in a short historical period of time and become integral factors in the development of modern Ukrainian civil society.

To deeply understand the scale and phenomenality of this revival, the author makes a detailed excursion into the historical prerequisites of the Soviet period, analyzing the tragic experience of the functioning of religious communities in conditions of militant atheism. The communist regime throughout its existence pursued a consistent and ruthless policy aimed at the complete eradication of religious consciousness and

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the physical liquidation of church structures. The consequences of this policy were devastating for both branches of Catholicism in Ukraine, although they had their own specific features for each of them. The Roman Catholic Church of the Latin rite suffered a total destruction of its institutional network. Almost all religious buildings, including magnificent temples and ancient monasteries, were either closed or turned into commercial buildings, warehouses, cinemas, or simply physically destroyed. Monastic orders and congregations were completely banned, and their activities were paralyzed. Mass repressions, exiles to Siberia, deportations, and physical attacks on the clergy led to a catastrophic personnel shortage. In the early 1980s, only a few dozen elderly Roman Catholic priests remained throughout Soviet Ukraine, working under strict KGB supervision and constant restrictions, which made any full-fledged pastoral care, catechizing of youth, or systematic transmission of religious tradition to subsequent generations impossible.

Even more tragic was the fate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite, which suffered a brutal blow at the national level. The Soviet authorities completely liquidated the UGCC as an integral institution during the so-called Lviv Pseudo-Council of 1946. The authors rightly characterize this event as an act of brutal state violence, which was completely devoid of any canonical, ecclesiastical or legal grounds, since it took place in the complete absence of the Greek Catholic episcopate, which had been arrested the day before, and under the direct control and pressure of the Soviet special services. All property of the Church, including cathedrals, parish houses and monasteries, was either confiscated in favor of the state or forcibly transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church, which occupied a privileged and monopolistic position due to its loyalty to the communist regime. The UGCC found itself outside the law and was forced to transfer to the status of an illegal religious community, becoming the largest banned Church in the world.

However, despite the totalitarian machine's attempts to completely erase Catholic identity, religious life did not disappear, but was transformed into the phenomenon of the Church in the catacombs. It was in the conditions of the deep underground, thanks to the incredible resilience, courage and sacrifice of believers and clergy, that informal religious communities survived. People secretly gathered in apartments, private houses or in remote forest areas to hold divine services. Underground bishops performed secret ordinations of new priests, ensuring the con-

tinuity of apostolic succession and the canonical legitimacy of the structure. This unique experience of catacomb existence not only preserved the confessional identity of millions of people, but also tempered the inner spiritual strength of the Church, which became the solid foundation on which a rapid public revival later began in the late 1980s.

The process of the Catholic Church's emergence from the underground and its official legalization began in the context of profound internal and external political transformations in the Soviet Union, associated with the policy of perestroika, glasnost, and democratization initiated by the Soviet leadership. Society gradually began to get rid of the paralyzing fear of repression, and believers and clergy increasingly resolutely refused to put up with the discriminatory religious policy of the state. The authors reconstruct the chronology of this process in detail, emphasizing that the movement for the legalization of the UGCC had the character of broad civil resistance and mass mobilization. An important turning point was the open statement of a group of Greek Catholic clergy and laity led by Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, who on August 4, 1987 signed and published an official statement on the emergence from the underground, declaring their intention to act openly and demand official recognition from Soviet state bodies. This bold act translated religious resistance into the realm of public policy and forced the authorities to reckon with the real existence of a multimillion-strong community of believers. The movement for legalization quickly acquired an avalanche-like and nationwide character, covering wide segments of the population, especially in the regions of Western Ukraine. The specially created Committee for the Protection of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church organized a large-scale campaign to collect signatures for official recognition, which was signed by more than one hundred and twenty thousand citizens. Mass open-air services began in the towns and villages of Galicia and Transcarpathia, which quickly evolved from small prayer meetings to religious demonstrations of many thousands. The celebrations of the millennium of the Baptism of Rus-Ukraine in the summer of 1988 in Zarvanytsia and Hrushev had a huge public resonance, demonstrating to the whole world the invincibility of Ukrainian Greek Catholicism. In the spring and summer of 1989, in Lviv, Sunday liturgies held in the open air near the former monastery of the Discalced Carmelites gathered tens of thousands of people, turning into powerful actions of national and spiritual revival. The culmination of this mass popular pressure was a grandiose peaceful march

through the streets of Lviv on September 17, 1989, in which about two hundred thousand people took part, which clearly demonstrated to the Soviet nomenclature the futility and impossibility of further maintaining the Church in an illegal status.

In parallel with the powerful grassroots pressure, complex processes were unfolding at the legal and international levels. The Soviet government, under the influence of the internal crisis and international pressure from the Western democracies and the Vatican, was forced to make concessions. On November 20, 1989, the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR issued a statement that, although it was a purely administrative order and not a full-fledged law, officially opened the possibility of registering Greek Catholic communities under the general procedure, which meant *de facto* recognition of the Church by the state and the elimination of many years of legal discrimination. The final international legal consolidation of this process was the historic visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to the Vatican on December 1, 1989 and his meeting with Pope John Paul II, during which the right of Ukrainian Greek Catholics to officially register parishes, return selected religious buildings, and establish religious educational institutions was recorded. The key legal instrument that provided a lasting regulatory basis for the process of institutional revival of both Catholic structures was the USSR Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, adopted on October 1, 1990. This progressive legislative act for that time radically changed the legal field, eliminating the former confessional inequality and the privileged monopoly position of the Russian Orthodox Church, which it held with the support of the totalitarian state. The law for the first time introduced clear, transparent legal procedures for registering religious organizations as legal entities, enshrined the principle of state non-interference in the internal life and canonical activities of church communities, and created the legal prerequisites for the gradual resolution of complex property disputes and the return of church property expropriated by the Soviet authorities. This allowed hundreds of Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic parishes throughout Ukraine to emerge from the legal vacuum, obtain official legal status, and begin the systematic expansion of their activities.

In this context, the author draws special attention to the important initiative shown by Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk during a meeting with the Chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of

Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, Mykola Kolesnikov. Pavlo Vasylyk proposed creating a special joint committee or commission to resolve property and inter-confessional disputes that inevitably arose in the process of mass return of churches to their historical owners, especially in regions where conflicts between Greek Catholics and Orthodox believers had intensified. This proposal demonstrated the foresight of the church leadership, which sought to translate the process of restitution and revival into a civilized, legal and peaceful direction, avoiding unnecessary social tension and violence, which was extremely important in the fragile socio-political situation of the late eighties.

At the same time, the process of restoring the legal rights of Catholic institutions caused serious opposition from the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, which tried by all available means to prevent the revival of the RCC and the UGCC in Ukraine, seeking to preserve its monopoly religious influence and control over the property complex. The author analyzes in detail the attempt of the leadership of the ROC to resolve the Greek-Catholic problem during the official meeting of its delegation with Pope John Paul II in August 1989 in the Vatican. The Moscow Patriarchate offered the Vatican a kind of compromise plan, which in fact aimed at the veiled liquidation of the UGCC: they proposed that those believers in Ukraine who necessarily seek to be in union with the Roman See should switch exclusively to the Latin rite, that is, become Roman Catholics, and those who adhere to the traditional Eastern, Byzantine rite should remain within the bosom of the ROC. Thus, it was planned to completely destroy the Greek Catholic identity as such, dissolving it between Latin Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy. However, Holy Pope John Paul II resolutely rejected this discriminatory proposal, emphasizing the inalienable, sovereign right of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to its own unique identity, public status, full canonical existence and comprehensive institutional development in its historical homeland.

An important milestone in the fixation of the internal canonical legal personality and self-awareness of the Church was the Resolution of the Extraordinary Council of the UGCC, adopted on January 23, 1990 in the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Lviv. This historical document had enormous political, legal and ecclesiological significance for the further fate of the Greek Catholic community. The Council officially declared all decisions of the Lviv Pseudo-Council of 1946 legally null and void, invalid and completely devoid of any canonical or ecclesiasti-

cal grounds, thus recording the continuity and continuity of the existence of the UGCC from a canonical point of view throughout the entire period of underground activity. In contrast to the permits of state bodies for the registration of individual disparate religious communities, the Council's resolution clearly recorded the restoration of a coherent church structure with dioceses, a hierarchy of bishops and centralized administration, which allowed the Church to act as a single, consolidated entity in relations with the state and the international community.

The complete organizational completion, systematicity and international legitimacy of the process of revival of both Catholic structures in Ukraine were ensured by the decisive and far-sighted steps of the Holy See and personally of Pope John Paul II in early 1991. Administrative formalization took place through the restoration of the episcopal hierarchy, which returned the Churches to a canonically ordered model of existence and ensured the continuity of the apostolic succession. On January 16, 1991, the Pope made the first official episcopal appointments for the restored Roman Catholic dioceses, whose history dates back to the Middle Ages and which were brutally liquidated by the Soviet authorities. The Lviv Roman Catholic Archdiocese was headed by Archbishop Ordinary Marian Yavorsky, the Kamianets-Podilskyi diocese was taken under his leadership by Bishop Jan Olshanskyi, and the Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese was headed by Bishop Jan Purvinskyi. This step allowed laying a solid foundation for the creation of a collegial governing body of the Conference of Bishops of the RCC in Ukraine, which took on the mission of coordinating pastoral ministry, rebuilding destroyed churches, and establishing religious education. In the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the restoration of the full functioning of central institutions was marked by the long-awaited return from forced emigration of its Head, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivskyi, who arrived in Lviv on March 30, 1991. Up until this point, during the most difficult phase of the emergence from the underground, the duties of the apostolic administrator of the Church were courageously and effectively performed by Bishop Volodymyr Sterniuk. The return of the Supreme Archbishop Cardinal Lyubachivsky became the true culmination of the process of legalization of the UGCC, a visual symbol of the unity of the long-suffering mother Church in Ukraine with its powerful foreign structures in the countries of settlement of the Ukrainian diaspora, as well as an extremely important psychological and political factor in the consolidation of the entire Ukrainian society on the

eve of the fateful August proclamation of state independence. At the same time, all bishops who were ordained in strict underground conditions received official recognition and approval from the Vatican, which finally regulated their international and canonical status.

Starting from these historic decisions of 1991, over the next thirty-five years both Catholic Churches demonstrated an impressive dynamic of institutional development, turning into extensive, self-sufficient and influential religious institutions. An important step on the path of organizational formation of the RCC was the holding of the First Official Meeting of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops of Ukraine in Lviv on February 28, 1992. This historic meeting was attended by Archbishop Marian Yavorsky, Bishops Rafail Kernytsky, Markiyan Trofymyak, Jan Purvinsky, Jan Olshansky, as well as Father Marian Buczek, who became the Secretary of the Conference. The creation of specialized commissions within the Conference ensured high systematicity and efficiency of management in the field of catechization, liturgy, support of youth movements, protection of the institution of the family, development of monastic vocations and deployment of large-scale charitable activities. As of today, the Roman Catholic Church has a clear and balanced structure, which includes seven dioceses, united into a single Lviv Metropolis, where pastoral service is provided by hundreds of diocesan priests and monks, and future personnel are trained in three higher theological seminaries in Lviv-Bryukhovychy, Vorzel and Sharovechka.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has also made a colossal qualitative and quantitative leap over these decades. The author emphasizes the unique global and transnational nature of the UGCC as a Supreme-Archiepiscopal Church in its own right, which combines clear centralization of management with flexible regional autonomy. The modern multi-level structure of the UGCC includes numerous metropolia, archieparchy, eparchies and exarchates not only within Ukraine, but also throughout the world. The main body of collegial governance is the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC, which includes more than forty bishops who exercise spiritual leadership over structures in Europe, North and South America, and Australia. Pastoral ministry is provided by more than three and a half thousand priests, and monastic life is supported by thousands of monks and nuns who work in the fields of education, culture and social service.

In the 2020s, the Catholic Church in Ukraine faced new unprecedented, tragic and existential challenges caused by a full-scale

aggressive war against the Ukrainian state. In these extreme social conditions, religious institutions were forced to radically transform their daily activities, going far beyond the boundaries of purely liturgical, cult life. They have become the most important centers of socio-humanitarian protection, psychological stabilization and national consolidation. The author identifies several strategic directions of the modern service of the Church in the conditions of martial law. First of all, this is the deployment of large-scale humanitarian assistance through a network of charitable organizations, such as Caritas, which provide hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced persons who lost their homes as a result of hostilities. The premises of parishes, monasteries and seminaries were quickly converted into shelters for refugees.

The second most important direction was the deployment of systematic pastoral and psychological care. The Institute of Military Chaplaincy has acquired special importance, providing spiritual support to defenders on the front lines, helping them to maintain humanity and moral guidelines in the hell of war. In parallel, the Church is actively developing psychological rehabilitation programs for veterans, families of fallen soldiers and civilians who have suffered deep war traumas, integrating professional psychological methods with spiritual care and prayer practice. The author calls the mass exodus of millions of Ukrainian citizens abroad in search of safety a separate long-term and complex challenge. This forces the Catholic Church, especially the UGCC with its unique global experience of working in the diaspora, to promptly expand the worldwide network of support for Ukrainian migrants in the countries of Europe and the world. The main objective of this activity is twofold: on the one hand, to help people adapt and integrate into new foreign socio-cultural contexts, to protect their rights, and on the other, to preserve their national, spiritual and religious identity, preventing assimilation and separation from their native roots, ensuring lasting ties with Ukraine.

Based on a deep retrospective analysis of the thirty-five-year period, the author formulates fundamental generalizing conclusions regarding the historical and social significance of the revival of the Catholic Church in Ukraine. First, this process marked the final and irreversible overcoming of the Soviet totalitarian legacy in the religious sphere. The decisive steps of Holy Pope John Paul II to restore the episcopal hierarchy of the RCC and the triumphant return of Cardinal Lyubachivsky to Lviv in 1991 recorded the complete historical and ideological defeat of the

Soviet inhuman policy of militant atheism, and the official cancellation of the consequences of the violent Lviv pseudo-council returned canonical and historical justice to the Greek Catholics. Secondly, the Churches have demonstrated a unique scale of institutional growth, having gone from catacomb communities to powerful internationally recognized religious structures with a developed management system and collegial bodies, such as the Conference of Bishops of the RCC and the Synod of the UGCC, which allows them to function effectively in the modern globalized world.

Thirdly, the Catholic Church has successfully overcome the limits of a purely temple-like, isolated existence, becoming an organic and influential element of Ukrainian civil society. Thanks to the development of a network of educational institutions, catechetical schools, monastic congregations and powerful charitable foundations, the Church actively influences the formation of moral guidelines, the protection of family values, the education of youth and the support of socially vulnerable segments of the population, where the laity play a conscious and proactive role. Finally, fourthly, in times of modern existential trials brought by a full-scale war, the Catholic Church has proven its irreplaceability as an effective factor of national solidarity, consolidation of society and practical embodiment of the Gospel commandments through daily sacrificial service to one's neighbor. Thus, the 35-year historical path convincingly proves that the institutional revival of the Catholic Church in Ukraine was not just a local religious process, but a deep, organic and historically conditioned return of Ukraine to a common European spiritual, cultural and geopolitical space, where the Church continues to confidently implement its mission, successfully integrating centuries-old tradition into the complex socio-political context of the XXI century.

Presentation of the material

Scientific understanding of the historical retrospective and the current state of religious institutions in Ukraine is one of the most urgent tasks of modern humanities, since the religious factor traditionally plays a fundamental role in the processes of nation-building, preservation of cultural identity and consolidation of civil society. The study covers the 35-year period of the institutional revival of the Catholic Church

in Ukraine from 1991 to the present and offers a comprehensive analytical view of the phenomenal process of transformation of religious communities. This time period is an entire historical era that included the collapse of one of the most brutal totalitarian systems in the world, the restoration of Ukrainian state independence, the painful process of building democratic institutions and, ultimately, the existential test of a full-scale war that continues today. The author of the study approaches the analysis of church life not as an isolated sacred phenomenon, but as an integral component of broader geopolitical, legal and socio-cultural processes that determined the vector of development of Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The anniversary milestone of the 35th anniversary of the restoration of official church structures becomes a unique analytical platform for tracing how religious institutions, which the Soviet regime doomed to complete oblivion and physical extermination, were able not only to be revived, but to become powerful subjects of public life, capable of taking responsibility for the fate of millions of people in times of global crises. In order to fully comprehend the depth and scale of this revival, it is necessary to reconstruct in detail the historical and ideological context in which the Catholic Church of both rites was forced to function during Soviet rule.

Communist doctrine viewed religion as a hostile element that must be permanently and permanently eradicated from the Soviet mentality. For decades, the state implemented a systematic policy of militant atheism, which combined brutal administrative violence, criminal prosecution of the clergy, confiscation of property, and a powerful propaganda campaign. The consequences of this pressure were catastrophic for the institutional potential of both the Roman Catholic Church of the Latin Rite and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The network of Roman Catholic parishes was practically paralyzed due to the successive closure and destruction of churches, the liquidation of monastic orders, and the deportation of priests, as a result of which only a few active pastors remained in the vast territory of Soviet Ukraine, deprived of the opportunity to carry out full-fledged ministry.

At the same time, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church suffered an even more total blow, since after the Soviet occupation of Western Ukraine it was officially liquidated by the communist regime with the help of a pseudo-council in 1946. The temples of the UGCC were forcibly transferred to the state church or converted into economic facilities, and

the Church itself became the largest banned religious community in the world, forced to go deep underground. It was this unique experience of catacomb existence that became the first and most important factor that determined the future nature of the institutional revival. Despite all the efforts of the Soviet special services, religious practice and confessional identity were not destroyed; they were preserved within underground communities, where liturgies were secretly celebrated, new priests and bishops were ordained, and the faith was transmitted from generation to generation. The Catacomb Church developed specific mechanisms of internal self-organization, solidarity, and resistance to the totalitarian system, which combined religious devotion with the desire for national freedom. When the political landscape of the Soviet Union began to change in the late 1980s under the influence of crisis phenomena and the policy of perestroika announced by Mikhail Gorbachev, this latent potential of the underground exploded into a powerful public movement.

The emergence of the Catholic Church from the underground was not just a religious event, but a significant factor in social transformation and democratization, since the demands for religious freedom turned out to be inextricably linked with the political demands for the sovereignty of Ukraine and the protection of human rights. Mass religious demonstrations, the collection of thousands of signatures for legalization, public open-air services, and bold statements by the underground clergy demonstrated the complete inability of the communist regime to maintain control over the spiritual life of society. The process of legalizing church structures required not only massive popular pressure, but also serious regulatory and legal support that would bring religious communities out of the legal vacuum. The adoption of the Soviet law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations in the fall of 1990 laid the first legitimate foundations for the elimination of confessional inequality and the termination of the state monopoly on the regulation of religious life. This allowed the official registration of parishes to begin and opened the way to a civilized resolution of property conflicts regarding the return of churches to their historical owners.

However, the final institutionalization took place thanks to the historic decisions of the Vatican and personally of Saint Pope John Paul II at the beginning of 1991, when the episcopal hierarchy for Roman Catholic dioceses was officially restored and the canonical status of the Greek Catholic episcopate was confirmed after the return to Lviv of the Head of the UGCC, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivsky. The appointment of

legitimate bishops and the creation of the Conference of Bishops of the RCC returned canonical completeness, legitimacy and systematic management to religious life, laying a solid foundation for the thirty-five-year development of the church infrastructure. Over these decades, both branches of Catholicism in Ukraine have gone through a colossal path of development, building an extensive network of parishes, seminaries, monasteries, and charitable institutions, which allowed them to become an organic part of modern civil society, integrated into the broader European context.

The current stage of the Catholic Church's activity in Ukraine in the 20s of the 21st century is marked by new, dramatic challenges that require a rethinking of traditional forms of pastoral ministry. Full-scale military aggression against Ukraine destroyed the usual social order and put society in the face of a huge humanitarian and humanistic catastrophe. Under these circumstances, the Catholic Church has shown high institutional flexibility and mobility, transforming its structures into centers of practical assistance, social protection and psychological rehabilitation for millions of affected citizens. The organization of assistance to internally displaced persons, the development of military chaplaincy, support for the families of fallen soldiers and the coordination of international solidarity through global church networks have become a practical manifestation of evangelical values in critical historical conditions. An analysis of 35 years of institutional development allows us to see how the experience of overcoming the Soviet totalitarian past and the internal resilience tempered in the catacombs help the Church effectively respond to the challenges of the present, confirming its strategic role as an important factor in national consolidation and solidarity.

In 2026, the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine celebrates the 35th anniversary of the restoration of church structures in Ukraine by Saint John Paul II. This event is of exceptional importance both in religious and socio-historical dimensions. It became a symbol of the Catholic Church's emergence from a long period of persecution and underground existence, initiated a process of institutional renewal, and contributed to the formation of a new spiritual identity for Ukrainian society.

The act of restoring church structures in 1991 was not only an administrative decision, but also a profound gesture of solidarity and support from the Universal Church. It opened up opportunities for the development of dioceses, seminaries, monastic communities, and parishes, which became important centers of spiritual life and social service. At

the same time, this step was of strategic importance for the processes of democratization and cultural renewal of Ukraine, which was just gaining independence at that time.

The 35th anniversary of the restoration of church structures is an opportunity for a comprehensive understanding of the path taken, which runs from the underground preservation of faith to open service and from local initiatives to broad integration into public life. It also encourages reflection on the modern mission of the Church, which serves to support education, culture, charity and spiritual support in times of war and social crises. The tragic consequences of communism, which found their manifestation in the religious life of the Church and its believers, affected almost every aspect of human life and took millions of lives. Most churches, as places of worship, were deliberately destroyed or closed. In the 1980s, only about 30 Roman Catholic priests worked throughout Ukraine. Such enormous destruction, especially in the spiritual sphere, became a challenge for the Church, and it required external assistance for the potential revival of spiritual and religious life.³

The restoration of Catholic church structures in Ukraine in 1991, initiated by John Paul II, was the result of long-term historical processes and changes in the socio-political environment⁴ during the period of independence. This act contributed to the formation of a new spiritual paradigm, the integration of Catholic institutions into the social and cultural sphere, and also defined the long-term mission of the Church as a source of spiritual support and social solidarity in times of crisis and war.

During the Soviet period, the activities of the Catholic Church were significantly limited, which was primarily manifested in the consistent closure of churches, the liquidation of monastic orders and monastic communities, and the long-term persecution of the clergy led to the destruction of its institutional network. At the same time, religious practice did not disappear completely, but was preserved within underground communities that maintained confessional identity and ensured the transmission of religious tradition⁵.

In the late 1980s, political transformations in the USSR opened up opportunities for changing the status of religious organizations.

³ R. Stolarczyk, *Początki karmelitańskiej misji w Kijowie* (Biały Dunajec–Ostróg, 2015), 19.

⁴ V. Bureha, *Istoriia ta bohoslavia Katolytskoi Tserkvy* (Kyiv, 2021), 418–421.

⁵ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS), 1991, № 83, 405–406.

The emergence of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church from the underground in 1989 marked the beginning of a public revival of church life⁶. Further regulatory consolidation of these processes occurred after the adoption of the USSR Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" on October 1, 1990⁷, which allowed the official activities of religious institutions.

In this context, the decision of John Paul II⁸ with the support of the Universal Church, to restore Catholic structures in Ukraine gave the process organizational completeness and international legitimacy. It was not only about administrative formalization, but also about the restoration of full-fledged church life in connection with the Universal Church⁹.

A decisive stage on the path of institutional restoration of church structures was the restoration of the episcopal hierarchy. In particular, on January 16, 1991, the first appointments were made, which confirmed the revival of the Roman Catholic Church of the Latin rite in Ukraine. As a result of the new changes, the Lviv Archdiocese was headed by Marian Yavorsky as Archbishop and Ordinary¹⁰. He was assisted by auxiliary bishops¹¹ afal Kernytskyi and Markiyan Trofymyak¹². he Kamianets-Podilskyi diocese was headed by Jan Olshanskyi, and the Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese was headed by Jan Purvinskyi¹³.

The appointment of bishops meant the actual restoration of historical dioceses,¹⁴ ormed in the 14th century and liquidated during the Soviet period. The restored hierarchical structure created the condi-

⁶ V. Bureha, *Istoriia ta bohoslovnia...*, 418–421.

⁷ Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS), 1991, № 83, 408–410.

⁸ Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS), 1991, № 83.

⁹ O. Bakovetska, *Derzhavno-tserkovni vidnosyny v Ukraini: relihiieznavchyi aspekt : navch. Posib* (Rivne, 2011), 158–161.

¹⁰ B. Modzelewska, W. Osadczy, *Lwowska archidiecezja katolicka, EK, t. 11* (Lublin, 2006), 272–273.

¹¹ Arkhiv Lvivskoi Arkhidiietsezii RKTs. Spr. 1/1991 (Dekrety pro pryznachennia yepyskopiv). Ark. 1–3.

¹² W. J. Kowalów, *Odrodzenie struktur archidiecezji lwowskiej pod koniec XX w*, nr 5, (Biały Dunajec–Ostróg 2012), 30–31.

¹³ DAZhO (Zhytomyr), Fond R-4993 (Upovnovazhenyi u spravakh relihii po Zhytomyrskii obl.); Jan Ślepowroński, Waldemar Witold Żurek ed, *Restaurare omnia in Christo «25-lecie reaktywowania administracji Kościoła Rzymskokatolickiego na Ukrainie Diecezja kijowsko-żytomierska* (Kijów–Żytomierz 2017), 16–17.

¹⁴ TsDAVO Ukrainy. F. R-4648. Op. 5. Spr. 312 (Materiały pro reiestratsiiu rymo-katolytskykh hromad). Ark. 45–48.

tions for the establishment of systemic church governance, in particular for the formation of the Conference of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine. This became the basis for the Church's return to open activity and its inclusion in general church processes. The restoration of church structures was the result of a combination of the internal stability of religious communities, external political transformations and regulatory and legal decisions that ensured the institutional restoration of the Catholic Church in Ukraine¹⁵.

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

In the context of the democratization policy initiated in the USSR by Mikhail Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) intensified its efforts to emerge from the underground. The faithful and clergy increasingly refused to put up with the state's discriminatory policy towards the Church.

An important stage in the process of legalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was the public statement by a group of priests and laity about emerging from the underground. On August 4, 1987, 23 representatives of the clergy and faithful, led by Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk, officially declared their intention to act openly and seek recognition of the Church by state authorities. This act had a double meaning, because on the one hand, it testified to the readiness of the Greek Catholics to abandon the status of an "illegal" religious community, and at the same time became a symbol of social awakening in the conditions of the policy of "perestroika" and democratization initiated in the USSR. The 1987 statement is seen by researchers as the beginning of an organized movement for the legalization of the UGCC, which later led to a transition from religious resistance to political subjectivity and large-scale public actions in the late 1980s. Such actions, in turn, led to the loss of the monopoly on control over religious life in Halychyna¹⁶. Thus, the event of August 4, 1987 became the starting point for the process of institutional renewal of the UGCC, which combined the internal mobilization of religious communities with external political transformations. It is also worth

¹⁵ O. Bakovetska, *Derzhavno-tserkovni vidnosyny v Ukraini: relihiieznavchyi aspekt : navch. Posib* (Rivne, 2011), 162.

¹⁶ V. Yelenskyi, *Relihiia i suspilstvo v Ukraini* (Kyiv, 2007), 182–185.

mentioning other key documents and events that contributed to the revival of the Roman Catholic Church in Halychyna. In this context, we are talking about the statement of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR (November 20, 1989).¹⁷ The said document did not have the status of a law and was an administrative order in nature. At the same time, the decision of the Council for Religious Affairs provided for the possibility of registering Greek Catholic communities in accordance with the general procedures applied to other confessions. As a result, the legal inequality caused by the previous ban on the institutional activity of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was eliminated. Granting communities the right to register and use religious buildings meant their de facto recognition by the state. This step ended a long period of underground existence of the Church, which lasted for more than four decades.

The Resolution of the Extraordinary Council of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of January 23, 1990,¹⁸ adopted in the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Lviv, recorded the public resumption of church activity and confirmed the invalidity of the decisions made during the so-called Lviv “pseudo-council” of 1946¹⁹. In the said document, the previous decisions were declared null and void, which meant the denial of the legitimacy of the liquidation of the Church carried out in the post-war period. This position was formulated in the conditions of preservation of the Soviet state system, which gave it a distinct political meaning.

The key content of the resolution was the assertion of the continuity of the existence of the Church from a canonical point of view. The liquidation of 1946 was qualified as a violent action, devoid of church-legal grounds²⁰. In this context, the declaration of the invalidity of the “pseudo-council” meant, in addition to the analysis of previous historically adopted decisions, also the restoration of the legitimacy of one’s own institutional tradition²¹.

¹⁷ TsDAVO Ukrainy (Kyiv), fond R-4648 (Rada u spravakh relihii pry Radi Ministriv URSR), opys 5.

¹⁸ Arkhiv Instytutu Istorii Tserkvy UKU (AIITs UKU) F. 1. Op. 1. Spr. 12 (Materialy Soboru 1990 r.). Ark. 1–5; TsDAVO Ukrainy, F. R-4648. Op. 5. Spr. 418. Ark. 22–24.

¹⁹ The council had no canonical force, as it contradicted church law and the will of the faithful. B. Botsiurkiv, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva i radianska derzhava (1944–1950)* (Lviv, 2005), 180–210.

²⁰ M. Serhiichuk ed, *Likvidatsiia UHKTs (1939–1946): dokumenty radianskykh orhaniv derzhavnoi bezpeky*, T. 1. (Kyiv, 2006), 100–101.

²¹ AIITs UKU. F. 1. Op. 1. Spr. 12. Ark. 2.

Unlike previous decisions of state bodies, which allowed the registration of individual groups of believers, the Council's resolution recorded the restoration of a holistic church structure. The existence of dioceses and a hierarchy represented by bishops who had come out of the underground was declared²², which testified to the transition from informal existence to the open functioning of the church organism.

Among the laws that were crucial in the process of institutional restoration of the structure of the UGCC, the Law of the USSR "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" of October 1, 1990, which created legal conditions²³ for the full-fledged activity of religious communities on the territory of the Union, is of particular importance. Its adoption meant a transition from the practice of administrative regulation based on permits from the authorities to the normative consolidation of the right to freedom of religion.

Within the Ukrainian context, this law acquired additional significance, as it contributed to the intensification of the processes of religious and national revival. For the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, it became an effective legal instrument in resolving conflicts regarding religious buildings: from now on, the argumentation was based on the current legislation, and not on informal agreements with representatives of local authorities.²⁴ Thus, the Law established the principle of non-interference of the state in the internal affairs of religious organizations, which limited the powers of the controlling bodies, in particular the Council for Religious Affairs, which previously regulated personnel and parish issues.

A separate consequence was the elimination of confessional inequality that existed in the previous period, in particular the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church. As a result, Greek Catholic communities received equal legal opportunities with other denominations, which contributed to the expansion of a network of parishes, primarily in Halychyna and Transcarpathia, and facilitated their official registration. The Law effectively abolished the privileged position of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). This equalized the rights of the "underground"

²² O. Bakovetska, *Derzhavno-tserkovni vidnosyny v Ukraini: relihiieznavchyi aspekt : navch. posib* (Rivne, 2011), 158; V. Bureha, (2021) *Istoriia ta bohoslovnia Katolytskoi Tserkvy* (Kyiv, 2021), 411–412.

²³ Zakon SRSR «Pro svobodu sovisti ta relihiini orhanizatsii» vid 1 zhovtnia 1990 r., st. 10, 18, 23.

²⁴ M. Babii, *Svoboda sovisti v Ukraini* (Kyiv, 2004), 120–122.

UGCC with other churches, which significantly simplified the process of registering new parishes in Halychyna and Transcarpathia.²⁵

In the context of the analysis of the regulatory and legal acts that had a decisive influence on the consistent restoration of the religious life of the above-mentioned church structures in Ukraine, it remains important to study the reaction of other religious forces that had a significant impact on church life in Ukraine during the specified period. Thus, it should be noted that there were attempts on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church to harm the processes that, in their legal force, provided an opportunity for the restoration of the activities of the RCC and the UGCC in Ukraine. That is why the restoration of the legal status of Greek Catholics in the late 1980s and early 1990s caused particular tension in the relations between the two traditions, which reflected deep historical and canonical contradictions.²⁶

During the meeting of Pope John Paul II with a delegation from Patriarch Pimen, which took place on August 25, 1989 in the Vatican, a specific solution to the problem of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was proposed.²⁷ According to the position of the Russian Orthodox Church, the faithful who sought to preserve unity with the Apostolic See should join the Roman Catholic Church, while those for whom the Eastern rite remained decisive should remain part of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, Pope John Paul II rejected this solution, emphasizing the need for the legal and public status of the UGCC as a separate church community, entitled to its own identity and canonical existence.²⁸

The official meeting of Pope John Paul II with Mikhail Gorbachev on December 1, 1989 in the Vatican went down in the history of the Church as a significant event. The Declaration published on the day of the visit, consolidated the official registration of Greek Catholic religious communities. And all this invariably contributed to the further opening and return of religious buildings, and also opened up opportunities for the formation

²⁵ Закон СРСР «Про свободу совісті та релігійні організації» від 1 жовтня 1990 р., ст. 10, 18.

²⁶ R. Boiko, *Problemy vzaiemodii UHKTs iz pravoslaviam u kintsy 1980 kh – 1990 kh rr. Istoriiia relihii v Ukraini: naukovyi shchorichnyk. Knyha I: Istoriiia* (Lviv, 2013), 590 (588–599).

²⁷ A. Polishchuk, *Ukrainska hreko-katolytska Tserkva: vid pidpillia do lehalizatsii. Kulturolohichnyi almanakh. Vyp. 3*, (Kyiv, 2022), 18 (14–20).

²⁸ B. Bociurkiw, *Ukrainski Kościół katolicki w ZSSR za Gorbaczowa*, No11-12. (Więź, 1991), 163. (150–171).

of new theological seminaries. The achievements of “perestroika” should first of all include freedom of conscience, speech, worldview, the precursor for which was the urgent need for modernization and change.²⁹

An important stage in the process of restoring the institutional life of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was the return to Ukraine of its Head, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivskyi, which took place on March 30, 1991. This event confirmed the legal recognition of the Church and marked the end of a long period of underground existence, opening the opportunity for full-fledged public activity. The return of the Supreme Archbishop to Lviv meant the restoration of the full-fledged functioning of the central church institutions, and also became a sign of unity between the Church in Ukraine and its foreign structures, which for decades had supported the spiritual life in exile.³⁰ In the scientific literature, this event is considered as the culmination of the process of legalization of the UGCC, which combined the internal mobilization of the faithful, political transformations in the USSR and the support of the Holy See. Thus, the return of Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivskyi became a symbol of the complete restoration of church structures, as well as an important factor in the consolidation of Ukrainian society during the period of gaining independence.³¹

In 1988–1989, the Committee³² organized a large-scale campaign to collect signatures for the official recognition of the UGCC, as a result of which about 120 thousand signatures were collected.³³ At the same time, open-air services began to be held in the cities and villages of Western Ukraine.³⁴ At first, they gathered a small number of participants, but

²⁹ A. Polishchuk, *Ukrainska hreko-katolytska Tserkva...*, 19.

³⁰ Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady ta upravlinnia Ukrainy (TsDAVO Ukrainy). F. R-4648. Op. 5. Spr. 214. Ark. 12–15.

³¹ TsDAVO Ukrainy, F. R-4648. Op. 5. Spr. 214. Ark. 12–15.

³² In order to come out of the underground and legalize the Church, the “Committee for the Protection of the Ukrainian Catholic Church” was created, which was headed by I. Gel in November 1987. The Committee’s magazine “Christian Voice” played a significant role in activating the movement for the legalization of the UGCC, which covered the pages of the Church’s struggle for the right to recognition. A. Polishchuk, *Ukrainska hreko-katolytska Tserkva...*, 18.

³³ S. Hurkina, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva: vykhid iz pidpillia (1987–1989)* (Lviv, 2014), 184–187; I. Hel, *Vyklyk systemi: Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva v borotbi za samozberezhennia i lehalizatsiiu* (Lviv, 1996), 156.

³⁴ S. Hurkina, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva...*, 212–215.

gradually grew into demonstrations of many thousands.³⁵ Particularly publicized were the celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus in July 1988 in Hrushev and Zarvanytsia, organized by Bishop Pavlo Vasylyk and a group of priests, as well as the celebrations on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the birth of Taras Shevchenko in Lviv in 1989, where Orthodox and Greek Catholic priests served together.³⁶

In May 1989, Greek Catholic priests began regular Sunday liturgies in the center of Lviv near the former monastery of the Discalced Carmelites. In the largest cities of the region, large-scale memorial services were held in city cemeteries dedicated to the memory of the fighters for Ukraine's independence. The culmination of these actions was a mass march through the streets of Lviv to St. George's Cathedral on September 17, 1989, which testified to the public demand for freedom of religion and the legalization of the UGCC.³⁷

In the process of legalizing the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church³⁸ in 1989–1991, the issue of church hierarchy was regulated through the appointment and confirmation of the episcopate. Volodymyr Sterniuk served as apostolic administrator during the period when the Church emerged from underground.³⁹ After returning from emigration in 1991, the Lviv Archdiocese was headed by Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivskyi⁴⁰ as the Supreme Archbishop. Bishops ordained in underground conditions, in particular Ivan Margitych⁴¹, received official recognition from the Holy See⁴², which consolidated their canonical status.

³⁵ *Derzhava i tserkva v Ukraini. 1917–1990: Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kyiv, 1993), 242–245.

³⁶ N. Shlikhta, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva: vid «samolikvidatsii» do vidrodzhennia. Istoriia relihii v Ukraini. T. 4.* (Kyiv, 2001), 348–352; O. Bakovetska, *Derzhavno-tserkovni vidnosyny v Ukraini: relihiieznavchyi aspekt* (Rivne, 2011), 157.

³⁷ N. Shlikhta, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva...*, 350–352.

³⁸ Derzhavnyi arkhiv Lvivskoi oblasti (DALO). F. R-1339. Op. 2. Spr. 156. Ark. 5.

³⁹ S. Hurkina ed, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva: vykhid iz pidpillia (1987–1991). Dokumenty i materialy* (Lviv, 2014), 322–325; Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrainy. F. 16. Op. 7. Spr. 48. Ark. 102.

⁴⁰ S. Hurkina ed, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva...*, 394–397.

⁴¹ M. Vehesh, N. Kontsur-Karabinovych, V. Marchuk, M. Palinchak, *Narysy istorii Ukrainskoi hreko-katolytskoi Tserkvy. Tom 2* (Uzhhorod, 2022), 138–172.

⁴² B. Botsiurkiv, *Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva iadianska derzhava (1944–1950)* (Львів, 2005), 254; S. Hurkina, *UHKTs: vykhid iz pidpillia (1987–1991): dokumenty i materialy Dokument № 142 (Lyst Derzhsekretariatu Vatykanu pro pryznachennia)* (Lviv, 2014), 358–362.

The restoration of the hierarchical structure in both branches of the Catholic Church, both Latin and Greek Catholic, created the organizational prerequisites for the development of the parish network, the functioning of theological seminaries, the activities of monastic communities, and the deployment of social initiatives⁴³.

The appointment of bishops of the Roman Catholic and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Churches in Ukraine in 1991 determined the further dynamics of the restoration of church life and can be analyzed in several interconnected planes.

In the institutional aspect, the restoration of the episcopate meant a return to a canonically ordered model of existence. The bishops acted as bearers of apostolic succession and ensured the legitimacy of church structures. Their appointments created the prerequisites for the formation of the Conference of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine and contributed to the restoration of the hierarchical unity of the Greek Catholic community.⁴⁴

In the socio-cultural dimension, the bishops took on the coordination of educational, cultural and charitable initiatives. Their activities included the restoration of theological seminaries, the development of monastic communities, and the implementation of catechetical programs, which influenced the religious life of society after a long period of restrictions.⁴⁵

The appointment of bishops took place in the context of political transformation associated with the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of an independent Ukraine. John Paul II's decision demonstrated support from the Universal Church and contributed to the inclusion of the Ukrainian Catholic community in the broader European context. It also consolidated the possibility of an open presence of Catholic communities in the public space.⁴⁶

Thus, the appointment of bishops in 1991 was not only an administrative act, but also a symbol of the spiritual revival and international recognition of Ukrainian Catholicism. It laid the foundation for the development of a parish network, educational institutions, and social service, which remain important components of the Church's mission today.⁴⁷

⁴³ S. Hurkina, *UHKTs: vykhid iz pidpillia (1987–1991)...*, 412–415.

⁴⁴ V. Bureha, *Istoriia ta bohoslovia Katolytskoi Tserkvy* (Kyiv, 2021), 418–420.

⁴⁵ V. Yelenskyi, *Relihiia i suspilstvo v Ukraini* (Kyiv, 2007), 195–198.

⁴⁶ V. Yelenskyi, *Relihiia i suspilstvo...*, 202–204.

⁴⁷ *Istoriia relihii v Ukraini: u 10 t. T. 4: Katolytyzmyz* (Kyiv, 2001), 580–582.

The hierarchical structure formed in 1991 required further organizational development at the level of coordination between individual dioceses and the episcopate. The solution to this problem involved the creation of a permanent body capable of ensuring the consistency of management decisions, developing a common pastoral strategy and representing the Church in interaction with state institutions and society. Thus, on February 28, 1992, the First Session of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops of Ukraine⁴⁸, was held in Lviv, which consisted of Archbishop M. Yavorsky, R. Kernetsky, M. Trofymyak, J. Purvinsky, J. Olshnasky and Fr. Marian Buchek – Secretary of the Conference.⁴⁹

Over the course of three decades, the Church has restored its hierarchy, created new parishes and monastic orders. Today, the RCC in Ukraine has 7 dioceses that are part of the Lviv Metropolis,⁵⁰ 2 active bishops and 4 bishops emeritus. As of 2019, 707 diocesan priests served in Ukraine, and as of 2021, 684 monks and nuns serve in Ukraine. Today, the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine has three higher theological seminaries in Lviv-Bryukhovychy, Vorzel and Sharovechka.

Within the structure of the Bishops' Conference of Ukraine, there are specialized commissions designed to coordinate the Church's activities in key areas of theology, pastoral care, and public service. Their activities ensure consistency in decision-making and the integration of church initiatives into the broader social context.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS), 1992, Vol. 84; Arkhiv Lvivskoi Arkhidiieziezii RKTs (ALA RKTs). Spr. 5/1992. Ark. 1–4.

⁴⁹ W. Żurek, Jan Ślepowroński, *Diecezja żytomierska, geneza, historia, przetrwanie w czasach totalitarnych i jej reaktywowanie. Restaurare omnia in Christo "25-lecie reaktywowania administracji Kościoła Rzymskokatolickiego na Ukrainie Diecezja kijowsko-żytomierska"* (Kijów–Żytomierz, 2017), 46.

⁵⁰ W. Osadczy, Kościoła łacińskiego na Ukrainie dole i niedole. Doświadczenia, dzień dzisiejszy, problemy i perspektywy. Kościół katolicki na Wschodzie w warunkach totalitaryzmu i posttotalitaryzmu (Siedlce–Lublin, 2017), 91–93.

⁵¹ Komisiiia u spravakh virovchennia – ocholiuie yepyskop Mykola Luchok OR (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Katekhytychna komisiiia – yepyskop Eduard Kava OFMConv (z 29 lystopada 2025 r.); Komisiiia u spravakh kliru – yepyskop Pavlo Honcharuk (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Komisiiia u spravakh liturhii ta sakralnoho mystetstva – yepyskopy Yatsek Pył OMI ta Stanislav Shyrokoradiuk OFM (z 15 lystopada 2013 r.); Komisiiia dushpastyrstva rodyn – yepyskop Radoslav Zmitrovych OMI (z 15 lystopada 2013 r.; z 1 hrudnia 2018 r. takozh asystent rukhu «Svitlo Zhyttia»); Komisiiia zahalnoho dushpastyrstva – arkhiepyskop Mechyslav Mokshytskyi (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Komisiiia u spravakh cholovichykh ta zhinochykh ordeniv i zghromadzen – yepyskop Radoslav Zmitrovych OMI (z 29 lystopada 2025 r.); Komisiiia dushpastyrstva molodi ta poklykan – yepyskop Yan Sobilo

The functioning of these commissions testifies to the institutional maturity of the Catholic Church in Ukraine and its ability to integrate theological, pastoral and social tasks into a single management system. Each commission performs a specific role in ensuring the unity of church practice, the development of catechesis, support for families, youth and vocations, as well as in the field of interreligious dialogue, social communication and charity. An important role was played by the laity, who actively participated in the restoration of churches, catechesis and social initiatives. Catholic structures actively develop educational and charitable projects, support displaced persons and defenders of Ukraine. In the current conditions of war, the Church has become a source of spiritual support, prayer and practical assistance.⁵²

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) as the Supreme Archbishopric Church of the Byzantine Rite has a broad structure that includes metropolia, archieparchy, eparchies and exarchates both in Ukraine and abroad.⁵³ This organizational model ensures unity of management and at the same time takes into account regional peculiarities of pastoral care.

(z 1 hrudnia 2018 r.); Komisiia zovnishnikh zviazkiv – yepyskop Vitalii Kryvytskyi SDB (z 1 hrudnia 2017 r.); Relihiina misiia «Karitas Spes» – yepyskop Oleksandr Yazlovetskyi (z 16 hrudnia 2022 r.); Komisiia u spravakh ekumenizmu ta mizhrelihiinoho dialohu – yepyskop Vitalii Kryvytskyi SDB (z 1 hrudnia 2018 r.); Komisiia u spravakh intehrlnoho rozvytku liudyny – yepyskop Leon Maliy (z 1 hrudnia 2018 r.); Komisiia u spravakh zasobiv suspilnoi komunikatsii – yepyskop Mykola Luchok OR (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Komisiia viskovoho dushpastyrstva – yepyskop Pavlo Honcharuk (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Komisiia ekolohii ta turyzmu – yepyskop Stanislav Shyrokoradiuk OFM (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Komisiia tserkovnoho prava – yepyskop Oleksandr Yazlovetskyi (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.); Komisiia tserkovnykh rukhiv ta spilnot – yepyskop Radoslav Zmitrovych OMI (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.). Rechnyk Konferentsii Yepyskopiv Ukrainy – yepyskop Eduard Kava OFMConv (z 17 bereznia 2023 r.). <https://rk.org.ua/konferentsiya-yepyskopiv/komisiyi/> Date accessed: 21.03.2026

⁵² H. Coleman, C. Wanner, *War and religion in Ukraine: editors' introduction*, VOL. 67 (Canadian Slavonic Papers, 2025), 1–2, 1–12.

⁵³ Kyiv Galician Metropolis: the metropolis includes: Kyiv Archdiocese (headed by Supreme Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk); Kharkiv Exarchate (Bishop Vasyl Tuchapets); Donetsk Exarchate (Bishop Maksym Ryabukha); Odessa Exarchate (Bishop Mykhailo Bubnii); Lutsk Exarchate (Bishop Josaphat Hovora); Crimean Exarchate (administrator Bishop Mykhailo Bubnii). Lviv Metropolis: includes: Lviv Archeparchy (Metropolitan Ihor Vozniak); Sokalsko-Zhovkiv Eparchy (Bishop Petro Loza); Sambirsko-Drohobych Eparchy (Bishop Yaroslav Pryriz); Stryi Eparchy (Bishop Taras Senkiv).

Ivano Frankivsk Metropolis: Ivano Frankivsk Archeparchy (Metropolitan Volodymyr Viityshyn); Kolomyia Eparchy (Bishop Vasyl Ivasiuk); Chernivtsi Eparchy (Bishop Josaphat Moshchych). Ternopil-Zboriv Metropolis: Ternopil-Zboriv Archeparchy (Metropolitan Teodor Martyniuk); Buchach Eparchy (Bishop Dmytro Hryhorak); Kamianets-Podilskyi Eparchy (Bishop Ivan Kulyk).

The multi-level structure of the UGCC testifies to its global nature and ability to integrate Ukrainian communities in different cultural and political contexts. It ensures unity of management while preserving regional autonomy, which is a characteristic feature of the Supreme Archbishopric Church.

According to the latest available reports of the Synod of Bishops and official statistics, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is characterized by a branched hierarchical structure and significant personnel potential. As of the reporting period, 43 bishops serving in the UGCC Synod of Bishops, who head dioceses and exarchates both in Ukraine and abroad, serve. Pastoral ministry is carried out by over 3,500 priests, and monastic life is supported by about 1,000 monks and 1,500 nuns.⁵⁴ These indicators testify to the scale and institutional maturity of the UGCC, which maintains a balance between episcopal governance, parish ministry, and monastic communities. They also demonstrate the Church's ability to integrate spiritual life in different cultural and social contexts, ensuring the unity of tradition and openness to global challenges.

The Catholic Church in Ukraine in the 2020s faced an unprecedented challenge due to the trials of war and its consequences. It has become one of the main centers of assistance to displaced persons, military and civilians, combining spiritual care with a practical mission. Charitable structures, parishes and monastic communities organize humanitarian headquarters, provide psychological support and promote international

Structure outside Ukraine: Poland: Przemyśl Warsaw Metropolis: Przemyśl Warsaw Archeparchy (Metropolitan Yevhen Popowych); Wrocław-Koszalin Eparchy (Bishop Volodymyr Yuszczak); Olsztyn-Gdańsk Eparchy (Bishop Arkady Trokhanowski). Western Europe: France: Paris Eparchy of Saint Volodymyr the Great (Administrator Hlib Lonchyna); Great Britain: London Eparchy of the Holy Family (Bishop Kenneth Nowakivsky); Germany and Scandinavia: Apostolic Exarchate (Bishop Bohdan Dzyurakh); Italy: Apostolic Exarchate (Bishop Hryhoriy Komar). North America: USA: Philadelphia Metropolis (Metropolitan Borys Gudziak) with dioceses in Stamford, Parma and Chicago; Canada: Winnipeg Metropolis (Metropolitan Lavrenty Hutsulyak) with dioceses in Edmonton, New Westminster, Saskatoon and Toronto.

Latin America and Australia: Brazil: Curitiba Metropolis (Metropolitan Volodymyr Kovbych) and Prudentopol Eparchy (Bishop Myron Mazur); Argentina: Buenos Aires Eparchy (Bishop Daniil Kozlynsky); Australia: Melbourne Eparchy (Bishop Mykola Bychok). Other communities: vicariate in Romania and communities in the Baltic countries, Moldova, Austria, Paraguay, Venezuela, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium, Kazakhstan, United Arab Emirates, South Africa and Russia. <https://ugcc.ua/church/structure/> Date accessed: 21.03.2026

⁵⁴ <https://ugcc.ua/church/structure/> Date accessed: 21.03.2026

solidarity. This emphasizes the new role of the Church as a stabilizing factor in a crisis society. The mass exodus of Ukrainians abroad creates new communities that need pastoral care and integration into local societies. The Church must develop a global support network to preserve the spiritual identity of Ukrainians in the diaspora and at the same time facilitate their integration into new cultural contexts.

Thus, the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the revival of Catholic structures in Ukraine in 2026 allows not only to honor historical memory, but also to comprehend the phenomenal path of institutional and spiritual renewal. An analysis of the stage passed provides grounds for the following key conclusions. Overcoming the legacy of totalitarianism: the act of restoring the hierarchy by Saint John Paul II in 1991 and the return of Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivsky to Lviv became the final victory over the Soviet policy of “militant atheism”. The official recognition of the invalidity of the decisions of the Lviv pseudo-council of 1946 returned the UGCC and the RCC to the legal field, restoring historical and canonical justice. Over three and a half decades, both branches of the Catholic Church in Ukraine transformed from the “Church in the catacombs” into powerful, branched structures. The creation of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops and the development of the UGCC system ensured the effective management of thousands of parishes, dozens of eparchies and dioceses not only within the country, but also on a global scale.

The modern Catholic Church in Ukraine has gone far beyond the boundaries of purely liturgical life. The development of a network of educational institutions (from catechetical schools to universities), monastic communities and charitable institutions (in particular, Caritas) has transformed the Church into an integral part of civil society. The laity have become active subjects of this revival, demonstrating the viability of the religious community. In the conditions of a full-scale war, the Church has confirmed its strategic role as a source of national consolidation and solidarity. The organization of aid to displaced persons, support for the defenders of Ukraine and pastoral care for the victims have become a practical embodiment of evangelical values in critical social conditions.

Thus, the 35-year path of revival has shown that the restoration of Catholic structures was not only an administrative step of the Vatican, but an organic process of Ukraine’s return to the common European spiritual space. Today, the Church continues its mission, integrating theological

traditions into the modern social context and strengthening international cooperation for the sustainable development of Ukrainian society.

An analytical analysis of the 35-year retrospective period of the institutional revival and functioning of the Catholic Church in Ukraine (1991–2026) allows us to formulate a number of generalizing conclusions that are essential for understanding religious, social, and sociopolitical processes in Eastern Europe. First of all, the results of the study convincingly demonstrate that the restoration of the official episcopal hierarchies of the Roman Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in early 1991 marked not just a local administrative and canonical reformation, but a fundamental break with the Soviet paradigm of state regulation of the religious sphere. The triumphant return of the Head of the UGCC, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lyubachivskyi, to his historic see in Lviv, along with the Vatican's appointment of legitimate Roman Catholic ordinaries for the restored dioceses, became a clear confirmation of the final and irreversible capitulation of the Soviet totalitarian doctrine of militant atheism. The official disavowal and recognition as legally null and void of the decisions of the Lviv pseudo-council of 1946 at the Extraordinary Council of the UGCC in 1990 ensured the restoration of violated historical and canonical justice, returning the multimillion-strong community of believers to the legitimate legal field. This step demonstrated to the world that even the harshest forms of state violence, repression, and expropriation of property were unable to destroy the deep-seated confessional identity that had been successfully preserved and reproduced within the unique socio-cultural phenomenon of the Church in the Catacombs for four decades.

Summarizing the experience of institutional building, it is necessary to emphasize the impressive dynamics and scale of the evolution of Catholic structures, which in a historically short period of time transformed from disorganized, persecuted and driven deep underground communities into highly structured, self-sufficient and staffed religious institutions. The creation of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops of Ukraine in 1992 and the consistent deployment of the global system of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC allowed both branches of Catholicism to build effective, multi-level and centralized management models capable of promptly responding to internal and external demands of society. As of 2026, the presence of an extensive network of dioceses, archdioceses and exarchates both within the state and on a global scale, the

functioning of higher theological seminaries, as well as a solid personnel potential, measured in thousands of priests and monks, testify to the full institutional maturity of Ukrainian Catholicism. The Church has successfully overcome the crisis consequences of the Soviet totalitarian destruction, having formed a new generation of educated clergy and laity, capable of carrying out the mission in the conditions of the modern secularized and globalized world.

An important theoretical conclusion of the study is the rethinking of the socio-cultural role of the Catholic Church, which over the years of Ukraine's independence has completely gone beyond the limits of purely liturgical, sacred isolation and integrated into the structure of modern civil society as its integral, proactive element. Through the development of a broad-based infrastructure, including research institutes, universities, catechetical schools, monastic communities and powerful charitable organizations, such as the Caritas World Network, the Church has become an influential subject of social modernization, humanitarian policy and human rights protection. The activities of specialized synodal and episcopal commissions have proven the ability of religious institutions to conduct an effective and equal dialogue with state institutions, other confessions and secular intellectual circles, contributing to the harmonization of interreligious relations and the establishment of the principles of religious pluralism in Ukraine.

A special place in the system of scientific results is occupied by the analysis of the Church's activities in wartime and full-scale aggression of the 2020s, which became the most difficult existential test for the Ukrainian nation and its institutions. The research materials clearly demonstrate that in extreme conditions of social catastrophe, the Catholic Church of both rites showed high adaptability, mobility and solidarity, transforming its parish, monastic and administrative centers into nodes of humanitarian resistance, refugee shelters and hubs of psychosocial rehabilitation. The effective deployment of the institution of military chaplaincy, continuous pastoral care for defenders on the front line, assistance to internally displaced persons and families of fallen heroes became a practical, effective embodiment of evangelical values in critical historical conditions, confirming the strategic role of the Church as an important factor in national consolidation, stability and stabilization of the crisis society.

The scientific analysis also actualizes the long-term and complex challenge associated with the recent mass migration of millions of Ukrainian

citizens abroad, which requires church structures (primarily the UGCC) to promptly reformat and expand their global pastoral network. In this context, the hierarchy faces a dual strategic task: to ensure the effective integration of newly arrived refugees into local foreign societies and at the same time to develop effective mechanisms for preserving their religious, national and cultural identity, preventing assimilation processes and maintaining a strong mental and spiritual connection with the mother state. This translates the mission of Ukrainian Catholicism into the plane of transnational diplomacy and global humanitarian management.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the 35-year path of institutional revival of the Catholic Church in Ukraine (1991–2026) is a vivid testimony to deep civilizational processes. The restoration and strengthening of Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic structures was not simply a consequence of intra-church decisions or diplomatic efforts of the Vatican, but a natural, organic manifestation of the general process of decolonization and the return of Ukraine to its historical origins in the common European spiritual, cultural and legal space. The experience accumulated over these decades of resisting totalitarian pressure, the inner resilience tempered in the catacombs, and the developed ability for sacrificial social service in times of war crises provide the Church with a solid foundation for the continuation of its mission, the successful integration of theological traditions into modern social discourse, and active participation in ensuring the sustainable, value-oriented development of the future Ukrainian state.

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the 35-year process of revival and institutional development of the Catholic Church in Ukraine (1991–2026). The historical prerequisites for the emergence of the RCC and the UGCC from underground are considered. The legal factors of legalization are separately highlighted, in particular the 1990 USSR law on freedom of conscience and the decision of the Extraordinary Synod of the UGCC. The social, educational, charitable and humanitarian mission of the Church during the war as a spiritual and social institution of Ukrainian society of the present period is shown.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church, UGCC, legalization, Soviet era, clergy.