

РЕЛІГІЄЗНАВСТВО

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FEATURES OF EXPLICATION OF INTER-ORTHODOX RELATIONS
IN UKRAINIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Background. This article explores the formation and evolution of Ukrainian religious studies in the context of examining inter-Orthodox relations, which have gained particular relevance due to the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), shifts in the religious landscape of Ukraine, and global decolonization processes. The author highlights how Ukrainian scholars interpret complex confessional interactions, jurisdictional conflicts, and the impact of Orthodoxy on national identity, societal stability, and geopolitical agency.

Methods. The study employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates tools from religious studies, sociology, philosophy, political science, and cultural studies. The methodological framework is based on narrative analysis, postcolonial critique, and principles of hermeneutics. A comparative-historical method is applied to reconstruct the stages of development in Ukrainian religious studies, alongside content analysis of scholarly works that address issues of autocephaly, jurisdictional disputes, and globalization-related challenges.

Results. The study finds that the tradition of religious studies in Ukraine has undergone significant transformation – from an ideologically constrained Soviet model to a modern analytical discourse that actively reflects on global processes. Key scholars (V. Yelenskyi, O. Sahan, Yu. Chornomorets) are identified as having laid the intellectual groundwork for the study of inter-Orthodox relations in the context of war, digitalization, globalization, and secularization. The article outlines major themes in contemporary Ukrainian religious scholarship, such as autocephaly, canonical territory, Orthodox nationalism, the role of the diaspora, and digital technologies in church life. It is demonstrated that Ukrainian Orthodoxy is increasingly integrated into global religious processes, while also transforming the concept of ecclesial unity.

Conclusions. Ukrainian religious studies has emerged as an independent analytical instrument for understanding ecclesiastical dynamics both within Ukraine and across the broader Orthodox world. The research argues that inter-Orthodox relations should not be viewed merely as internal ecclesial matters – they also entail critical cultural, political, and security dimensions. Thanks to the intellectual achievements of Ukrainian scholars, a productive analytical field has been formed, capable not only of describing but also of interpreting and forecasting developments within the Orthodox environment amid global transformations.

Keywords: inter-Orthodox relations, Ukrainian religious studies, autocephaly, globalization, ecclesial identity, Orthodoxy, Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), confessional conflict.

Background

In today's world, inter-Orthodox relations are gaining increasing significance in the context of global sociocultural processes, confessional competition, and geopolitical influences. Positioned at the intersection of religious, cultural, and civilizational vectors, Ukraine has become one of the key arenas where dialogue and conflict unfold among various Orthodox jurisdictions. In this context, Ukrainian religious studies plays an essential role in the systematic analysis of inter-Orthodox relations and the development of academic discourse on autocephaly, canonicity, ecclesiastical diplomacy, and religious identity.

The establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the response from other Orthodox churches – particularly the Moscow Patriarchate – and the global dynamics of contemporary Orthodoxy require scholarly interpretation. For this reason, the work of Ukrainian scholars in the field of religious studies has become not only theoretically significant but also practically relevant to the preservation of religious peace, the advancement of interconfessional dialogue, and the protection of national security.

It should be noted that the contributions of such Ukrainian scholars as V. Butynskyy (Butynsky, 2014), K. Hovorun (Hovorun, 2018), H. Khrystokin (Khrystokin, 2021), and T. Vysotska (Vysotska, 2020) have been of particular importance to this study. However, it must also be acknowledged that their works lack a comprehensive analysis of the development of Orthodox studies within the framework of Ukrainian religious scholarship.

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to explore the contribution of Ukrainian religious studies to the examination of inter-Orthodox relations in the context of global sociocultural and political developments.

This aim involves addressing the following objectives:

1. to outline the main stages, directions, and key figures in Ukrainian religious studies who have engaged with the subject of inter-Orthodox relations;

2. to determine how Ukrainian scholarship reflects the influence of globalization processes on conflicts, alliances, and transformations within the Orthodox world.

Methods

The methodological foundation of the article lies in an interdisciplinary approach that integrates tools from religious studies, the sociology of religion, philosophy, political science, and cultural studies. The research is conducted through content analysis of scholarly works by Ukrainian researchers, as well as critical reflection on trends in the development of the Orthodox world under the influence of globalization and geopolitical dynamics. Particular attention is given to the use of postcolonial critique, narrative analysis, and the concept of "open Orthodoxy" as analytical instruments for identifying the causes of conflicts and the potential for dialogue between Orthodox jurisdictions. The author relies on comparative analysis of historical, theological, and sociocultural dimensions of inter-Orthodox relations, which allows them to be viewed as a dynamic system responsive to contemporary challenges.

Results

Main stages, figures, and key directions in Ukrainian religious studies within the context of interpretation. The study of inter-Orthodox relations in Ukrainian religious scholarship has deep historical roots and is developed along several key lines reflecting the evolution of academic thought in Ukraine from the Soviet period to the present. These studies focus both on the internal dynamics of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine and on its place within the broader global Orthodox community.

During the Soviet era, religious studies developed predominantly within the framework of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which significantly limited objective analysis of inter-Orthodox relations. Nevertheless, research approaches to analyzing confessional structures, religious policy, and the role of Orthodoxy in society gradually emerged. These studies were mostly conducted within the fields of the history of religion and the sociology of religiosity. A significant contribution was made by historians of religion who, despite the officially atheist discourse, compiled valuable empirical data on the transformations of Orthodox institutions.

Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, a new stage began in the development of religious studies, marked by increased opportunities for objective and comprehensive analysis of religious processes. During this period, scholarly focus shifted to relations between different Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine – particularly between the UOC, UOC-KP, UAOC, and later the OCU. Scholars increasingly addressed issues of autocephaly, canonicity, conflict, and dialogue within Orthodoxy.

Prominent scholars in the field of inter-Orthodox relations include:

- Yuri Chornomorets – philosopher, theologian, and publicist, who seeks to integrate academic religious studies with the practical dimensions of church policy. His writings explore the philosophical foundations of autocephaly, the notion of sobornist (conciliarity), and theological dimensions of unity and schism (Chornomorets, 2012, p. 505).

- Oleksandr Sahan – Doctor of Science in Religious Studies, who has conducted extensive analytical studies of Ukraine's confessional landscape, the process of recognizing autocephaly, and the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His works are fundamental for understanding intra-church dynamics and the impact of global religious structures on Ukrainian Orthodoxy (Sahan, 2004).

- Viktor Bondarenko – religious scholar. He examines interconfessional relations, placing emphasis on questions of identity, religious freedom, and the influence of religion on political processes. His research elucidates how Orthodoxy functions in contexts of democracy and war. For example, that researcher writes "In accordance with the existing administrative and legal mechanisms of the state regarding religious organizations and based on the Law of Ukraine No. 8371 "On the Prohibition of Religious Organizations in Ukraine Associated with the Aggressor Country", a model of legitimization of the UOC has been proposed, which should contribute to the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from Moscow and the unification of the Orthodox. According to this model, the informational and ideological threat from Moscow, which uses the UOC to spread Kremlin narratives in the form of the so-called Russian world, will be reduced" (Bondarenko et al., 2023, p. 3).

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, a Ukrainian school of religious studies has emerged that interprets inter-Orthodox relations within broader frameworks of globalization, identity, modernization, and secularization. Leading institutions in this research include the H.

Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the Ukrainian Catholic University.

Scholars have increasingly focused on issues such as:

- relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate;
- participation of Ukrainian Orthodox churches in Pan-Orthodox councils;
- the role of Orthodox churches in public life and civic identity;
- the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the transformation of church identity and unity.

The past decade has marked a period of intensive development in analytical religious studies in Ukraine, characterized by an increasing reliance on interdisciplinary approaches that combine theology, philosophy, sociology, political science, and cultural studies. Since 2018, in particular – when the Tomos of autocephaly was granted to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine – the topic of inter-Orthodox relations has become central to academic, media, and public discourse.

Ukrainian scholars have increasingly addressed such issues as:

- the loss of canonical authority by the Moscow Patriarchate;
- the transformation of the OCU into a self-sufficient religious institution;
- the typology of Orthodox nationalism within postcolonial discourse;
- the need to rethink the concept of Orthodox unity in a multipolar world.

As V. Lozovytsky rightly emphasizes, "Contemporary Ukrainian Orthodox theology, as a theoretical expression of 'open Orthodoxy,' enables the formation of ideological foundations for intra-Orthodox dialogue in pursuit of national unity. A critical analysis of ten major obstacles to Orthodox unification in Ukraine becomes possible through the comprehensive application of modern hermeneutic methods –especially narrative analysis. At the core of inter-jurisdictional confrontation in Ukraine lies a complex conflict of narratives, the resolution of which requires dialogue, cooperative practices, and a renewed identity increasingly oriented toward theoretical and practical acceptance of the values and principles of 'open Orthodoxy.'" (Lozovytsky, 2025, pp. 10–11)

In conclusion, it may be emphasized that Ukrainian religious studies, having evolved from a system under ideological constraint to one grounded in pluralistic analysis, has established a robust scholarly foundation for the study of inter-Orthodox relations. Its contribution lies in the systematic investigation of processes such as autocephaly, jurisdictional conflict, theological divergence, and the geopolitical influence on Orthodoxy. Thanks to the work of Ukrainian scholars, inter-Orthodox relations are now viewed not merely as an internal ecclesiastical issue, but as a multidimensional phenomenon with direct implications for social stability, national security, and Ukraine's international image.

Peculiarities of How Ukrainian Scholars Address the Impact of Globalization on Transformations within the Orthodox World. The contemporary Orthodox world is increasingly immersed in globalization processes that are transforming traditional models of ecclesiastical hierarchy, communication, and inter-jurisdictional interaction. Ukrainian religious studies actively reflect on these shifts by offering a multifaceted analysis of the relationship between global sociocultural transformations and the current state of the Orthodox community.

In academic religious discourse, globalization is understood not merely as an economic or political phenomenon, but as a comprehensive process that affects identity, values, modes of religious expression, and the structure of interaction among churches. In the Ukrainian context, scholars emphasize that the globalization of Orthodoxy is unfolding through several key mechanisms: the intensification of inter-church communication, the international diplomacy of patriarchates, the influence of diasporas, and the active use of digital technologies in ecclesiastical life.

As V. Yelensky rightly notes, "Despite the significant decline of religion's role in everyday life among the citizens of nearly all European countries over the past century, it plays a greater role in politics and international relations today than it did one hundred years ago. Regardless of the divergent policies pursued by Ukraine's presidents over the last thirty years, it is unimaginable for any of them – unlike Volodymyr Vynnychenko – to proclaim a principled rejection of the Church, or like Mykhailo Hrushevsky, to declare, 'We'll manage without priests!' These transformations are linked to globalization, which, by compressing the world, provokes resistance to unification and fosters the emergence of new identities, as well as the collapse of the 'grand ideologies' of the twentieth century that themselves aspired to become religions. The post-communist history of Orthodoxy entails its active integration into domestic political processes and geopolitics, a struggle to regain status and influence, and the pursuit of adequate responses to the challenges of secularization, globalization, and the 'human rights revolution.' A new generation – millennials – has entered the Orthodox churches, and for many of them, Orthodoxy is internalized as a way of life rather than a compensation for a lost or ambiguous identity. However, the national-territorial principle that underpins the organization of Orthodox Plenitude, along with the dense and sometimes inextricable link between 'faith, land, and blood,' makes Orthodoxy a significant factor in ethno-political mobilization and national consolidation. Orthodox churches defend their respective states on the international stage – even when major disagreements persist over domestic political issues. Some churches even regard nationalism, or at times imperialism, not as external to the Church but as fundamentally ecclesiological. In such a context, expectations regarding the privatization of Orthodoxy, its relegation to the domain of personal significance, and its gradual depoliticization remain unfulfilled" (Yelensky, 2021, pp. 136–137).

In general, several key analytical emphases can be distinguished in contemporary Ukrainian religious studies:

1. Globalization as a challenge to national ecclesial identity.
2. The Orthodox diaspora as a factor of global influence.
3. The digitalization of Orthodoxy.
4. Religion and war as factors prompting the rethinking of inter-Orthodox relations.

Let us briefly examine each of these points in greater detail.

First and foremost, Ukrainian scholars interpret the conflict between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate as a manifestation of deeper global trends – particularly decolonization, the shift toward a multipolar ecclesiastical order, and the transformation of the concept of "canonical territory". Studies highlight that the recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) by the Ecumenical Patriarchate carries not only ecclesiological, but also geopolitical significance. Scholars such as Sahan,

Yelensky, and Chornomorets emphasize the paradigm shift from centralized to network-based models of Orthodox unity.

A recurring theme in Ukrainian scholarship is the dilemma of how to preserve national identity within a globalizing Orthodox framework. Globalization compels local churches to choose between openness to the world and the preservation of their authenticity. Issues such as liturgical translation, intercultural dialogue, engagement with the diaspora, and integration into the pan-Orthodox space are analyzed through the lens of balancing the local and the global. Considerable attention is devoted to the role of the Ukrainian diaspora, especially in North America and Western Europe. The diaspora not only promotes Ukrainian church life abroad but also actively participates in global discussions – through involvement in ecumenical structures, relations with Constantinople, and the development of digital resources. These processes are shaping new models of spiritual leadership and enhancing the international legitimacy of the OCU.

Despite the conflict-prone nature of the Orthodox domain, research also identifies efforts to build horizontal forms of inter-church cooperation. These are expressed through joint social initiatives, international theological dialogues, and humanitarian aid. The OCU is increasingly integrated into global initiatives, thereby forming not only a local but also an international ecclesiastical agency.

It should also be noted that in the context of globalization, digital communications have emerged as a new dimension of Orthodox public engagement. Ukrainian studies point to a profound transformation in the nature of ecclesial communication, the dissemination of information to the faithful, and theological discourse. Online platforms have become channels for church diplomacy, image-making, and influence projection. At the same time, Ukrainian scholars warn of the risks of digital polarization, the spread of disinformation, and manipulation by hostile ecclesial and media actors.

Finally, it is crucial to emphasize that since 2014 – and especially after the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 – Ukrainian religious studies has begun to reassess the nature of ecclesiastical participation in conflicts. The war has illuminated the connection between religious identity and political loyalty, revealing hidden forms of religious influence on national security. Scholars are analyzing how global reactions to the war (such as statements by patriarchs, calls for peace, and the isolation of the Russian Orthodox Church) are reshaping the architecture of the Orthodox world.

Ukrainian scholars of religion apply contemporary approaches drawn from the sociology of religion, global studies, postcolonial critique, and the philosophy of religion. Models of global Christianity, the dynamics of transnational institutions, and theories of social communication provide analytical tools for interpreting globalization not as the destruction of tradition but as its transformation under new conditions.

Ukrainian researchers of Orthodoxy do not merely document ongoing changes – they interpret them within a complex, multidimensional framework. This perspective enables a view of inter-Orthodox relations as a dynamic system that is highly responsive to global challenges. As a result, a robust analytical foundation is being formed for church policy, interconfessional dialogue, and strategic forecasting of religious developments in both Ukraine and the wider world.

In this context, V. Voynalovych rightly emphasizes: "The Ukrainian Orthodox community, burdened with longstanding and unresolved wounds, stands on the threshold of new and

equally serious challenges. The Tomos of autocephaly for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine does not in itself resolve the pressing issues currently facing Ukrainian Orthodoxy – it merely opens a window of opportunity to address the mandate to achieve something genuinely significant for both the Church and the country as a whole. Ukrainians have long needed a qualitatively 'different Orthodoxy' – one made possible by a decisive departure from the Moscow-centered model of church-building, by the genuine restoration of conciliarity (sobornist), and, most importantly, by a reimagined concept of unity. This unity entails readiness for civilized and peaceful coexistence between parallel Orthodox jurisdictions, the reestablishment of normal human and ecclesial communication, and a reexamination of dialogical capacities in relation to other confessions and religions – both nationally and globally. The Ukrainian ecclesiastical project may take one of two directions: it will either find the courage to become universal and open to the world and to society, or it will eventually devolve into a purely state-bound institution" (Voynalovych, 2018, pp. 187–188).

Discussion and conclusions

The conducted research makes it possible to summarize key findings concerning the role of Ukrainian religious studies in the examination of inter-Orthodox relations under the conditions of global transformations. The analysis takes into account both the historical stages of the field's development and the contemporary context marked by the challenges of war, globalization, secularization, and the digitalization of the religious sphere. Special attention is devoted to how Ukrainian scholarship conceptualizes the processes of autocephaly, confessional identity, relations among Orthodox jurisdictions, and the geopolitical significance of ecclesiastical subjectivity. Based on the objectives pursued, the following general conclusions can be drawn:

1. Ukrainian religious studies has developed a unique tradition of researching inter-Orthodox relations, evolving from ideologically constrained Soviet-era approaches to a modern, pluralistic, and analytically sophisticated discourse. As a result of this historical progression—spanning both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods – Ukrainian scholars have not only maintained interest in interconfessional issues but have significantly expanded the analytical scope of inquiry to include philosophical, theological, and sociological dimensions. Leading figures such as V. Yelensky, O. Sahan, and Yu. Chornomorets have established a foundational scholarly framework for the study of autocephaly, canonical territory, and the identity of Orthodox churches operating in Ukraine. Their work has contributed to the emergence of a critical mass of research capable of interpreting intra-church transformations not only in religious terms but also from geopolitical and security perspectives. A distinct school of analysis on inter-Orthodox relations has thus taken shape within the Ukrainian academic community, capable of independently modeling the confessional landscape amid war, postcolonial emancipation, and global religious resurgence.

2. Ukrainian scholars consistently demonstrate the ability to integrate inter-Orthodox issues into the broader context of global processes, identifying new mechanisms through which global trends influence the development of Orthodoxy both in Ukraine and worldwide. By employing approaches from postcolonial critique, global studies, and the sociology of religion, Ukrainian religious studies offers a deep interpretation of such phenomena as digitalization, religious diaspora, confessional identity, and political mobilization. Particular attention is paid to critical aspects

such as the conflict between the Moscow and Ecumenical Patriarchates, the typology of Orthodox nationalism, the transformation of the concept of canonical territory, and there thinking of unity in a multipolar world. These dynamics impact not only Ukraine's confessional landscape but also position Ukrainian Orthodoxy as an active agent in the global religious arena. Thus, Ukrainian religious studies is not limited to documenting events – it provides an analytical framework for understanding the future of the Orthodox world in an age of global change.

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ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ЕКСПЛІКАЦІЇ МІЖПРАВОСЛАВНИХ ВІДНОСИН У ВІТЧИЗНЯНОМУ РЕЛІГІЄЗНАВСТВІ

Вступ. Присвячено аналізу формування і еволюції вітчизняного релігієзнавства в контексті вивчення міжправославних відносин, що набули особливої актуальності у зв'язку з утворенням ПЦУ, змінами в церковному ландшафті України та глобальними процесами деколонізації. Висвітлено, як українські науковці інтерпретують складні конфесійні взаємини, конфлікти між юрисдикціями, а також вплив православ'я на національну ідентичність, суспільну стабільність і геополітичну суб'єктність.

Методи. Застосовано міждисциплінарний підхід, що інтегрує інструменти релігієзнавства, соціології, філософії, політології та культурології. Методологічну основу становлять наративний аналіз, постколоніальна критика та принципи герменевтики. Використано порівняльно-історичний метод для реконструкції етапів розвитку вітчизняного релігієзнавства та контент-аналіз наукових праць українських авторів, що висвітлюють питання автокефалії, юрисдикційних конфліктів та глобалізаційних викликів.

Результати. Установлено, що релігієзнавча традиція в Україні зазнала істотної трансформації – від ідеологічно обмеженої радянської моделі до сучасного аналітичного дискурсу з активною рефлексією на глобальні процеси. Виокремлено провідних науковців (В. Єленський, О. Саган, Ю. Чорноморець), які сформували інтелектуальну основу для дослідження міжправославних відносин у контексті війни, цифровізації, глобалізації і секуляризації. Визначено ключові теми сучасного українського релігієзнавства – автокефалія, канонічна територія, православний націоналізм, роль діаспори та цифрових технологій у церковному житті. Показано, що українське православ'я дедалі активніше інтегрується у глобальні релігійні процеси, водночас трансформуючи концепт єдності.

Висновки. Наголошено, що вітчизняне релігієзнавство стало самостійним аналітичним інструментом осмислення церковної динаміки в Україні та православному світі загалом. Доведено, що міжправославні відносини не можна розглядати як суто внутрішньо-церковне явище – вони мають важливі культурні, політичні й безпекові виміри. Завдяки інтелектуальним здобуткам українських науковців сформовано продуктивне аналітичне поле, здатне не лише описувати, а й інтерпретувати та прогнозувати зміни в православному середовищі на тлі глобальних трансформацій.

Ключові слова: міжправославні відносини, українське релігієзнавство, автокефалія, глобалізація, церковна ідентичність, православ'я, ПЦУ, конфесійний конфлікт.

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