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THE SPECIFICS OF AUTOCEPHALOUS MOVEMENTS IN UKRAINE AND POLAND IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE 20TH CENTURY: A COMPARATIVE-RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS

Background. *The article examines the specifics of autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland during the first quarter of the 20th century through a comparative-religious analysis, with particular focus on the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the processes of recognizing church independence. The relevance of the topic is driven by the need to comprehend the historical experience of religious transformations in the post-imperial period, which is crucial for understanding contemporary trends in the development of religious autonomy amidst political instability.*

Methods. *The authors employ a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, combining historical analysis, sociological research, and religious studies discourse. The results of the study highlight the significance of autocephalous movements as tools for consolidating national identity, overcoming imperial legacies, and shaping new political and religious realities. The conclusions drawn from the research provide valuable insights for modern religious studies, particularly in the context of challenges related to church autonomy.*

Results. *The authors emphasize the interconnection between religious autocephaly and national liberation movements. The article analyzes the influence of political, social, and religious factors on the formation of autocephalous churches in the context of struggles for independence. Specifically, the research demonstrates that in Ukraine, the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church was associated with national revival and efforts to overcome the imperial influence of the Russian Orthodox Church. In contrast, in Poland, this process was driven by the state's aim to integrate Orthodox communities into the national system through support for the autocephaly of the Polish Orthodox Autocephalous Church.*

Conclusions. *Special attention is given to the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in recognizing the autocephaly of the Polish Orthodox Church in 1924, underscoring its significance as a key arbiter in matters of church independence. The article also notes that the lack of support from Constantinople for the first formation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church created obstacles to its international recognition and complicated its establishment.*

Keywords: *autocephaly, Ecumenical Patriarchate, religious autonomy, national identity, church history, Orthodoxy, comparative analysis.*

Background

In the first quarter of the 20th century, Ukraine and Poland experienced a complex period of political, social, and cultural transformations that directly influenced religious life. In this context, autocephalous movements gained particular significance as they not only served as a form of religious self-determination but also became instruments of political and cultural self-awareness for nations. In Ukraine, the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church was intertwined with processes of national revival, the struggle for independence, and the aspiration to overcome the imperial influence of the Russian Orthodox Church. In Poland, however, autocephalous initiatives assumed a different character, shaped by the specificity of interethnic and interdenominational relations, particularly considering the role of Catholicism as the dominant religion. Studying these processes is crucial for understanding contemporary trends in the development of ecclesiastical autonomy and the interaction between religion and national movements.

A comparative-religious approach to analyzing the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland allows us to identify both shared features and unique characteristics of these processes, offering valuable insights for interdisciplinary research on religious autonomy. As I. Prelovska aptly notes, that the contemporary state of historical-ecclesiastical research, particularly in the field of Orthodox Church history, necessitates the formulation of new historiographical frameworks, the revision of previous paradigms, and the establishment of new chronological models. These models

should be grounded in the following principles: rejection of aggressive atheism as the primary criterion for evaluating events in church history, ensuring a more objective and balanced approach; addressing informational gaps that emerged in earlier periods, thereby filling lacunae that have hindered a comprehensive understanding of the historical narrative; development of a unified conceptual framework and determination of the place of church history within the broader historical narrative of a particular nation (Prelovska, 2002, p. 101).

Aim of the Article. The aim of this study is to investigate the specifics of autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland in the first quarter of the 20th century through a comparative-religious analysis, to identify their commonalities and differences, and to explore their impact on national, religious, and political processes in both countries.

Based on this aim, *the following objectives* are outlined:

- to analyze the socio-political and religious factors that influenced the formation of autocephalous initiatives;
- to determine the common and distinctive features of the autocephalous movements in the mentioned countries;
- to assess the significance of these processes in the context of contemporary religious and socio-political challenges.

Methods

The methodology of this study is grounded in a comparative-religious approach, integrating historical, sociological, and political analyses to explore the specifics of autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland during the first quarter of the 20th century. The research draws on primary and secondary sources, including archival

materials, church documents, and contemporary accounts, to reconstruct the historical and cultural contexts of these movements. By employing a comparative framework, the study identifies commonalities and distinctions in the socio-political and religious dimensions of autocephalous initiatives in both countries. This approach is further enriched through an interdisciplinary lens, combining insights from religious studies, political science, and cultural anthropology to examine the interplay between national identity, religious autonomy, and state-building processes. The analysis is thematically structured, focusing on the role of national revival, the influence of state policies, the challenges of international recognition, and the broader implications of these movements for church-state relations. This methodological framework ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject, situating the historical dynamics of ecclesiastical autonomy within the broader processes of social and cultural transformation.

Results

Socio-Political and Religious Factors Behind the Emergence of Autocephalous Movements. The First World War significantly altered the political map of Europe, triggering national shifts and intensifying struggles for self-determination. For Orthodox communities in Poland and Ukraine, the war served as a catalyst for recognizing the need for ecclesiastical independence, as it exposed the challenges of cultural and religious assimilation. On the one hand, this heightened the aspiration for autocephaly; on the other, it introduced new challenges to its realization amid the instability of the period.

During this time, national liberation movements gained significant momentum in both countries, profoundly influencing church life. In Ukraine, for instance, the events of the Ukrainian Revolution (1917–1921), accompanied by the struggle for political independence, played a crucial role. Within the context of national revival, a key task was the establishment of an independent Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), free from the control of the Russian Orthodox Church. Before 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church had functioned as a state institution under the control of the Tsarist government. The February Revolution and the fall of the monarchy created opportunities for initiatives by nationally oriented Orthodox leaders who sought to establish independent churches.

The Ukrainian liberation movement aimed to overcome imperial dependence symbolized by the Russian Orthodox Church, which had served as an ideological tool of Russification. Autocephaly was seen not only as religious autonomy but also as an element of state-building that strengthened national identity. This process was especially supported by key figures of the Central Rada and the Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic, who advocated for an independent church.

In Poland, the socio-political situation had its own distinct features. Following the restoration of independence in 1918, the Polish government faced the challenge of integrating territories that had been under the influence of different empires (Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and German). In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, political support for the Greek Catholic Church, particularly in Galicia, had created a distinct religious environment where Orthodoxy was less prevalent but had acquired certain political dimensions. This legacy played a role in interfaith interactions within the newly established Polish state.

The religious factor played a critical role in this context, as Orthodoxy was associated with Russian dominance, while Catholicism remained a cornerstone of Polish

national identity. The establishment of an autocephalous Orthodox Church in Poland aimed to weaken the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and create conditions for peaceful coexistence among religious communities. As such, "The position of the Orthodox Church in interwar Poland can be summarized in several key aspects: the Orthodox hierarchy consistently sought to negotiate with state authorities to regulate the legal status of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC), yet, for various reasons, it demonstrated insufficient assertiveness and determination in resolving this issue. Despite its desire to maintain unity with the ROC, the Church leadership had to adapt to new political realities and reluctantly supported the cause of PAOC autocephaly. At the same time, the hierarchy and part of the clergy tried to preserve the Russian character of the Church, slowing down its Ukrainization processes. Furthermore, the hierarchy ignored demands to restore conciliar traditions in Orthodoxy and sought to prevent the Ukrainian Orthodox community from participating in Church governance. Such a stance by Orthodox hierarchs hindered the strengthening of Orthodoxy in Poland, obstructed the rapprochement between Orthodox laity and Church leadership, and impeded their consolidation as a unified Orthodox community capable of advocating more effectively for the Church's interests" (Neroda, 2024, pp. 208–209).

It is worth noting that the collapse of both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires created new political realities that made autonomous churches possible. Importantly, the First World War significantly reshaped the political map of Europe and the world, triggering national shifts and intensifying struggles for self-determination. For Orthodox communities, the war acted as a catalyst for recognizing the necessity of ecclesiastical independence, as it revealed the challenges of cultural and religious assimilation. On the one hand, this heightened the desire for autocephaly; on the other, it posed new challenges for its realization amid the instability of the time.

As Church historian S. Bashynsky aptly observes, "The 1920s marked a period of widespread declarations of autocephaly, driven by various factors: national, political, personal, and ecclesiastical-doctrinal. The unifying factor in most of these declarations was the desire to gain independence from the Moscow center and implement conciliar governance in the life of the Church, abolishing the entrenched system of episcopal absolutism at the local level. At the same time, a key issue emerged: almost every one of these declared Churches considered itself the sole canonical entity, calling on others not for unification but for integration—essentially advocating for the absorption of one Church into another rather than seeking compromise solutions through negotiations to establish a unified Church" (Bashynsky, 2015, pp. 85–86).

Globally, the Ecumenical Patriarchate played a significant role in matters of autocephaly. In the case of Poland, it granted official recognition to the autocephaly of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC). However, this decision carried political undertones, as it aimed to sever the Orthodox community from the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). In Ukraine, by contrast, the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not support autocephaly, complicating the process of its establishment and gaining international recognition.

The socio-political and religious factors driving the formation of autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland during the first quarter of the 20th century highlight the close connection between national liberation

aspirations, political struggles, and ecclesiastical transformations. These processes were fraught with challenges and contradictions, yet they were critical for the development of national churches and the formation of national identity. Analyzing these factors offers valuable insights into contemporary trends in church life, particularly in the face of global challenges.

Commonalities and Differences in the Autocephalous Movements of Ukraine and Poland in the Early 20th Century. First and foremost, analyzing the commonalities and differences of the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland during the early 20th century is essential not only for understanding the historical processes of that era but also for uncovering the deeper socio-cultural mechanisms that influenced the formation of church autonomy in the context of post-imperial disintegration. These movements emerged under different socio-historical circumstances, shaped by the specific political and religious traditions of the two countries, yet they share several similarities that allow for their comparative study.

A notable commonality between the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland was the desire to overcome ecclesiastical dependence on the Russian Orthodox Church, which for centuries had served as an ideological tool of imperial policy. In both cases, church independence was perceived as part of the broader process of national self-determination. The Ukrainian and Polish national movements, which gained new momentum after World War I and the collapse of empires, regarded autocephaly as a key element of establishing national identity and overcoming the colonial legacy. In this sense, autocephaly was not only a religious category but also a political one.

However, the nature and dynamics of the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland differed significantly due to the distinct social and religious contexts of the two countries. In Ukraine, the autocephalous movement was closely tied to the struggle for political independence and enjoyed broad support among both clergy and laity. The proclamation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) in 1921 was the culmination of a prolonged struggle for church autonomy that began in the 19th century. The UAOC emphasized its national identity through the use of the Ukrainian language in liturgy, support for cultural initiatives, and active participation in the national revival.

This contrasted with the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC), which arose under the strong influence of the Polish state and had limited support among the Orthodox population. The PAOC's establishment was driven more by state interests than by grassroots ecclesiastical initiatives, and it faced significant challenges in securing widespread acceptance among believers. These differences highlight the varying trajectories of autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland, reflecting the unique political and religious landscapes in which they operated.

In contrast, the Polish autocephalous movement was largely driven by the Polish government's aspiration to integrate the Orthodox Church into the structure of the national state. As noted, "one of the characteristic features of the national-church movement in the Orthodox Church in Poland at that time was that the efforts directed toward its realization predominantly came from urban areas" (Petrovych et al., 2015, p. 78).

After regaining independence, Poland faced the challenge of managing territories where a significant portion of the population adhered to Orthodoxy, which was associated with Russian imperialism. Therefore, one of the government's primary objectives was to create a Church independent of the Russian Orthodox Church, aligned with the interests of the Polish state. This goal was pursued through the proclamation of the autocephaly of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) in 1924, which received recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. However, this process was accompanied by conflicts between the Polish government and the Orthodox community, which often perceived autocephaly as an initiative imposed "from above."

Another significant distinction lies in the religious environments in which these processes unfolded. In Ukraine, Orthodoxy was the dominant confession, while in Poland, it was a minority religion overshadowed by Catholicism, which played a central role in shaping Polish national identity. This divergence influenced the nature of the autocephalous movements: in Ukraine, they were grounded in the desire to establish Orthodoxy as the foundation of national culture, whereas in Poland, the movements had a predominantly administrative-political character and were aimed at the "Polonization" of the Orthodox Church.

It is important to emphasize that despite the Polish pro-Catholic government's concessions regarding the institutional formalization of the Orthodox Church, the 1930s witnessed a tragic chapter of anti-Orthodox campaigns. As part of a state program aimed at the Polonization of the Ukrainian population, 162 Orthodox sanctuaries were destroyed between June and July 1938. Throughout the interwar period, in the Chełm region alone, 156 churches were demolished or burned, and 175 Orthodox churches were converted into Roman Catholic churches. Of the 378 Orthodox churches functioning in this area in 1914, only 47 remained operational by September 1939.

The autocephaly granted to the Polish Orthodox Church in 1924, achieved by the hands of the government rather than through the efforts of pastors and parishioners, turned the Church into a hostage of state policy. Orthodox Ukrainians, who formed the backbone of the Orthodox Church in Poland, faced persecution and torture for refusing to adhere to the state-imposed course (Hergeliuk, 2014, p. 77).

Despite these differences, both movements faced similar challenges. One of the most significant was the lack of international recognition during the early stages of forming their autocephalous churches. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), for instance, failed to secure official recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which limited its influence and exacerbated internal conflicts. In the case of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC), while the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized its autocephaly, tensions between the Orthodox community and the Polish state persisted.

Another shared challenge was maintaining internal unity amid political and social instability. In Ukraine, the UAOC faced opposition from supporters of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and pressure from Soviet authorities, who saw the national church as a threat to their ideological monopoly. Similarly, in Poland, the PAOC experienced internal conflicts, particularly due to tensions between the various ethnic groups within the Orthodox community.

In conclusion, the commonalities between the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland included the desire to break free from the ROC and establish ecclesiastical autonomy as a crucial component of national self-determination. At the same time, their differences stemmed from the unique political, social, and religious contexts of each country. These differences were reflected in the form, dynamics, and outcomes of the autocephalous initiatives, shaped by both internal and external factors. The analysis of these processes not only provides a deeper understanding of the historical conditions under which autocephalous churches emerged but also offers insights relevant to contemporary studies of religious autonomy and its interaction with national ideologies.

The Role of Autocephaly in Consolidating National Identity and Overcoming External Influence. The autocephalous movements that unfolded in Ukraine and Poland during the first quarter of the 20th century were integral to the struggle for national self-determination and the consolidation of national identity. In both cases, the aspiration to create independent churches was closely tied to overcoming external influence exerted through religious institutions.

For a long time, the Orthodox Church in these countries remained under the control of the Russian Empire, which used it as a tool of imperial assimilationist policy. As a result, the processes of autocephaly acquired not only a religious dimension but also a distinctly political and cultural character.

The Ukrainian and Polish movements toward ecclesiastical independence reflected broader national liberation efforts and symbolized a break from imperial domination. Autocephaly thus became a means of affirming cultural and political sovereignty, helping to solidify national identity while resisting external control.

Ukraine, during the revolutionary changes and struggle for independence from 1917 to 1921, faced the urgent need to develop its own religious infrastructure that aligned with national interests. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was perceived as a legacy of the imperial past, with its dominance in Ukrainian religious life associated with centuries of Russification policies. In this context, autocephaly emerged as a means of not only religious but also cultural separation from Russian influence.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), proclaimed in 1921, became a crucial factor in shaping national consciousness. The use of the Ukrainian language in worship, the integration of church traditions with folk customs, and the support for cultural and educational initiatives contributed to the consolidation of national identity, particularly among the peasantry, which comprised the majority of the population.

At the same time, the process of forming the UAOC encountered significant challenges. One of the most pressing issues was the opposition from the ROC, which refused to recognize the legitimacy of the UAOC and sought to maintain control over Ukrainian parishes. This difficulty was compounded by the lack of international recognition of the UAOC from other Orthodox churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Furthermore, Soviet authorities, initially tolerant of the UAOC, gradually shifted to repressive measures, viewing the independent church as a potential threat to their ideological monopoly.

As A. Kyrydon notes: "The qualitative rupture of historical time and the corresponding political, economic, social, and cultural changes in the state could not leave the UAOC in a state of stagnation. Due to its earthly nature, this organization was objectively involved in the

development of events. The specificity of its position lay in a peculiar dual polarity: on the one hand, the state determined the vector of its development, while on the other, society influenced its course. Fulfilling its high spiritual mission within the Bolshevik model of state-church relations became highly problematic. The principles of these relations, determined by the authorities, placed the church in a state of dependence, humiliation, and uncertainty about the possibilities of its future existence" (Kyrydon, 2015, p. 13).

In Poland, the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church also served as a tool for consolidating national identity, albeit with distinct characteristics. After regaining independence in 1918, the Polish state sought to integrate the Orthodox community into a unified national framework. Orthodoxy in Poland was associated with Russian imperial rule, and the establishment of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) in 1924 was viewed as a way to overcome this historical influence.

However, unlike Ukraine, where the autocephalous movement had strong grassroots support, in Poland, it was primarily initiated "from above" and supported by state structures. The political motivations behind the establishment of the PAOC influenced its functioning, as the church played both a religious and a political role in stabilizing interfaith relations within the country.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate played a pivotal role in recognizing the PAOC by granting it autocephaly in 1924. This recognition was significant as it affirmed the PAOC's independence from the ROC. The Patriarchal and Synodical Canonical Tomos provided a detailed justification for the legitimacy and canonicity of granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Poland. Of particular importance was the Ecumenical Patriarch's statement in the Tomos, noting that the transfer of the Kyiv Metropolis from the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Moscow Church had been an uncanonical act (Patriarchal and Synodical-Canonical Tomos, 2023).

This recognition underscored the broader historical and canonical issues surrounding Orthodoxy in the region, demonstrating the importance of autocephaly not only as a religious phenomenon but also as a political and cultural response to the legacies of imperial domination.

The process of forming national identity among Orthodox believers in Poland was significantly more complex than in Ukraine, as Orthodoxy constituted a minority in a predominantly Catholic society. The Polish state sought to Polonize the Orthodox Church, but these efforts often met resistance, particularly from Ukrainians and Belarusians, who comprised the majority of the Orthodox community.

Despite these differences, in both cases, autocephaly contributed to the cultural and political emancipation of the churches from foreign dominance. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) became one of the central symbols of Ukrainian national revival, even though its activities were constrained by Soviet policies. Conversely, the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) played a vital role in shaping Polish state identity, despite internal conflicts and limited support among believers. These processes demonstrate that while autocephaly helped to overcome external influence, it also introduced new challenges related to the internal consolidation of church communities.

In summary, the role of autocephaly in consolidating national identity and overcoming external influence was pivotal. It functioned not only as a means of religious autonomy but also as an essential instrument for political

and cultural self-determination. For Ukraine, autocephaly represented an effort to restore a church tradition aligned with national interests and the spiritual needs of Ukrainians. In Poland, it was a means of overcoming imperial legacies and creating a church structure aligned with the new state identity. These historical lessons remain relevant today, as religious autonomy continues to play a significant role in processes of nation-building.

Discussion and conclusions

The study of the specifics of the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland in the first quarter of the 20th century has yielded the following conclusions:

1. Autocephalous movements in both countries were closely tied to national liberation aspirations. In Ukraine, the processes of autocephaly developed against the backdrop of national revival and the struggle for state independence, particularly in the effort to overcome the imperial influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). In Poland, however, autocephalous initiatives were predominantly administrative-political, aimed at integrating Orthodox communities into the structure of the newly established national state.

2. Despite differing socio-political conditions, a shared feature of the autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland was the aspiration for church independence as a key element of national identity. The Ukrainian autocephalous movement enjoyed widespread support among clergy and laity, linked to national revival. In Poland, autocephaly was largely state-driven, initiated "from above," and received limited support from the Orthodox population.

3. Autocephalous movements played a crucial role in overcoming imperial legacies and forming national church autonomy. The Ecumenical Patriarchate's recognition of the PAOC's autocephaly was instrumental in integrating it into the global Orthodox community. Conversely, the lack of recognition for the UAOC complicated its establishment and influenced its subsequent development.

4. Autocephalous movements in Ukraine and Poland in the first quarter of the 20th century became vital elements in processes of national self-determination, struggles for independence, and the development of new models of church autonomy. Their experience provides valuable insights for contemporary religious studies, particularly in examining the relationship between religion, national identity, and state policy.

Authors' contributions: Evgeniya Netetska – conceptualization, methodology, analysis of sources, preparation of the literature review or theoretical framework of the study; Victoria Zaporozhets – conceptualization, methodology, analysis of sources, preparation of the literature review or theoretical framework of the study.

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СПЕЦИФІКА АВТОКЕФАЛЬНИХ РУХІВ В УКРАЇНІ ТА ПОЛЬЩІ В ПЕРШІЙ ЧВЕРТІ ХХ СТОЛІТТЯ: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНО-РЕЛІГІЄЗНАВЧИЙ АНАЛІЗ

Вступ. Досліджено специфіку автокефальних рухів в Україні та Польщі у першій чверті ХХ століття через компаративно-релігієзнавчий аналіз, зокрема роль Вселенського патріархату в процесах визнання церковної незалежності. Актуальність теми обумовлена необхідністю осмислення історичного досвіду релігійних трансформацій у постімперський період, що є важливим для розуміння сучасних тенденцій розвитку релігійної автономії в умовах політичної нестабільності.

Методи. Використано компаративний і міждисциплінарний підходи в поєднанні з історичним аналізом, соціологічними дослідженнями та релігієзнавчим дискурсом. Продемонстровано важливість автокефальних рухів як інструментів консолідації національної ідентичності,

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подолання імперської спадщини та формування нових політичних і релігійних реалій. Висновки дослідження є цінними для сучасної релігієзнавчої науки, зокрема в контексті аналізу сучасних викликів, пов'язаних із церковною автономією.

Результати. Акцентовано взаємозв'язок між релігійною автокефалією та національними визвольними рухами. Проаналізовано вплив політичних, соціальних і релігійних факторів на формування автокефальних церков у контексті боротьби за незалежність. Зокрема, показано, що в Україні автокефалія Православної церкви була пов'язана із національним відродженням та прагненням подолати імперський вплив Російської православної церкви, тоді як у Польщі цей процес був зумовлений прагненням держави інтегрувати православні громади в національну систему через підтримку автокефалії Польської православної автокефальної церкви.

Висновки. Окрему увагу приділено ролі Вселенського патріархату у визнанні автокефалії Польської православної церкви в 1924 році, що підкреслює його значення як ключового арбітра в питаннях церковної незалежності. Також зазначено, що відсутність підтримки Константинополя для УАПЦ першої формації створила перешкоди для міжнародного визнання і ускладнила її становлення.

Ключові слова: автокефалія, Вселенський патріархат, релігійна автономія, національна ідентичність, церковна історія, православ'я, порівняльний аналіз.

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