

UDC 272(438)“19/20”
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.34.324607

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Bibliographic Description of the Article: Buravsky, O., & Kozlovets, M. (2025). Roman Catholic Church and Polish society in the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century: cultural religious aspect. *Skhidnoevropeyskyi Istorychnyi Visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 34, 125–134. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.34.324607

**ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND POLISH SOCIETY IN THE SECOND HALF
OF THE 20th TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY:
CULTURAL RELIGIOUS ASPECT**

Abstract. Among the pressing issues of modern Polish society development, cultural and religious problems hold a prominent place. Traditionally, the cultural and religious realm has been the field of activity for the Roman Catholic clergy, which has achieved significant success in this domain. This article focuses on the study of the cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in the Polish society from the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. **The research methodology** is grounded in the principles of historicism, objectivity, systematicity, and scientific rigor, as well as the utilization of general scientific methods such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, comparison, and generalization, on a sociocultural approach. During the processing of the source base, methods of historical cultural and analytical analysis, criticism, and periodization, classification and typologization have been applied. **The scientific novelty** consists in the fact that a new conceptual vision

of the cultural and religious activities of the RCC in the Polish society in the second half of the 20th – to the beginning of the 21st centuries has been proposed, its main directions have been outlined, and its impact on society and on the rise of the national consciousness of the Poles has been characterized. **Conclusions.** Throughout the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century, the RCC served as a bearer of national consciousness, preserving language, cultural traditions, and historical memory. The cultural and religious influence of the church on Polish society was significant in shaping moral values. Its influence on education, art, and public behaviour contributed to the maintenance of traditional values and the establishment of ethical norms. Religious education, the Roman Catholic press, became key factors in the cultural and religious life of the Polish society. The RCC adapted to new social realities. It maintained its position in the spiritual life of society while also seeking answers to new challenges and aiming at becoming a modern centre of spirituality and moral improvement. It is argued that amidst the social changes at the beginning of the 21st century, brought about by the fall of the communist regime, there was also a decline in popular support for the church.

Key words: Roman Catholic Church, Polish society, Republic of Poland, cultural religious activity, religious education.

РИМО-КАТОЛИЦЬКА ЦЕРКВА І ПОЛЬСЬКЕ СУСПІЛЬСТВО В ДРУГІЙ ПОЛОВИНІ ХХ – ПОЧАТКУ ХХІ ст.: КУЛЬТУРНО-РЕЛІГІЙНИЙ АСПЕКТ

Анотація. З-поміж актуальних питань розвитку сучасного польського суспільства чільне місце посідають культурно-релігійні проблеми. Традиційно культурно-релігійна царина була полем діяльності римо-католицького духовенства, яке досягло значних успіхів у цій площині. Стаття присвячена дослідженню культурно-релігійної діяльності Римо-католицької церкви (РКЦ) в польському суспільстві другої половини ХХ – початку ХХІ ст. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на принципах історизму, об'єктивності, системності та науковості, а також на використанні загальнонаукових методів – аналізу і синтезу, індукції й дедукції, порівняння та узагальнення, на соціокультурному підході. Під час опрацювання джерельної бази застосовувались методи історико-культурного і аналітичного аналізу, критики та періодизації, класифікації і типологізації та ін. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що запропоновано нове концептуальне бачення культурно-релігійної діяльності РКЦ в Польщі другої половини ХХ – початку ХХІ ст., окреслено її основні напрями й охарактеризовано вплив на суспільство, на піднесення національної свідомості поляків. **Висновки.** Протягом другої половини ХХ – початку ХХІ ст. РКЦ виступала носієм національної свідомості, зберігаючи мову, культурні традиції та історичну пам'ять. Культурно-релігійний вплив церкви на польське суспільство мав суттєве значення у формуванні моральних цінностей. Й вплив на освіту, мистецтво та громадську поведінку сприяв підтримці традиційних цінностей і встановленню етичних норм. Релігійна освіта, римо-католицька преса стали ключовими чинниками культурно-релігійного життя польського соціуму. РКЦ адаптувалася до нових суспільних реалій. Вона зберігала свою позицію в духовному житті суспільства, а також шукала відповіді на нові виклики, прагнула стати сучасним центром духовності й морального вдосконалення. Обґрунтовано, що в умовах суспільних змін на початку ХХІ ст., викликаних падінням комуністичного режиму, водночас спостерігалось й зниження народної підтримки церкви.

Ключові слова: Римо-католицька церква, польське суспільство, Республіка Польща, культурно-релігійна діяльність, релігійна освіта.

Problem Statement. Among the pressing issues of the development of modern Polish society, cultural and religious problems occupy a prominent place. To analyze them, it is expedient to use the experience of cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland from the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. Traditionally, the cultural and religious realm was the field of activity of the Roman Catholic clergy, which achieved significant success in this area. The outlined problems have a general historical significance. Without considering the peculiarities of the socio-political and cultural religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church, it is difficult to study the history of Poland.

In domestic historical science, comprehensive studies of the cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland from the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century are absent. Therefore, it is relevant to study the peculiarities of cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic priests in Poland during the specified period. The chosen topic is of a significant scientific and humanitarian importance, which determines its social relevance under modern conditions of Poland's development.

Review of Sources and Publications. In modern Ukrainian historiography, there are studies that to some extent addressed the issues of cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland from the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. Among the studies of Ukrainian historians, it is necessary to mention the dissertation research by M. Palinchak, which traces the activities of Roman Catholic monasteries in the field of charity and education: care for preschool institutions, schools, gymnasiums, hospitals, etc. (Palinchak, 2014). In the research by V. Plokhotnichenko, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on educational processes in the Republic of Poland during the specified period is highlighted (Plokhotnichenko, 2022).

The relationship between the church and the state has been the subject of study by foreign, primarily Polish scholars. For example, A. Korbonski analyzed church-state relations in Poland after the fall of the communist regime, focusing on religious education, the spread of Christian values through the media, and negative tendencies within the Roman Catholic Church (Korbonski, 2000).

In the scientific research, I. Borowik studied the religious and cultural activities of Pope John Paul II, which substantially changed not only the Catholic Church but also the world in general (Borowik, 2002). Y. Osewska, G. Stala, and K. Bochenek illuminated the influence of culture and education on Polish society in the 1990s (Osewska, Stala, Bochenek, 2022). The situation of churches and religious communities during times of political, ideological and cultural change in the Czech Republic and Poland, when these countries were undergoing transformation from socialism to liberalism and democratic politics, was analyzed T. Bubík (Bubík, 2014). The activities of the church and the state in the struggle for human rights in Poland are researched by J. Will (Will, 1984). The subject of research by scholars has also become reflection on religiosity as the subjective presence of religion in the lives of individuals and societies, and its transformations (Borowik, & Grygiel, 2023). The diversity of confessions in the Polish lands and their evolution in the 20th century is discussed in the study of B. Johnston (Johnston, 2017).

However, the analysis of historiographical material indicates that the cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland in the last quarter of the 20th and the first years of the 21st century require further historical and scientific interpretation.

The purpose of the article is to study the cultural and religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Polish society from the second half of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century.

Results of the Research. Religion is closely associated with a specific historical, social, and cultural context. According to Pope John Paul II, the Polish culture exhibits distinct Christian characteristics, and Christian inspiration continues to be the primary source of creativity for the Polish artists (Jan Paweł II. *Przemówienie do młodzieży*, 1979).

The role of Pope John Paul II in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 demonstrated that religious beliefs can influence the course of history, societies, and nations transform through education and culture (Osewska, Stala, Bochenek, p. 8).

To implement the directives of the Second Vatican Council regarding culture, John Paul II established the Pontifical Council for Culture (Dinka, 1966). It initiated activities aimed at bringing together evangelization and contemporary culture, demonstrating the pastoral concern of the church to bridge the gap between the Gospel and cultures, collaborating with universities and historical, philosophical, scientific, artistic institutions to foster joint initiatives, supporting initiatives of international organizations on cultural matters, philosophy of science, anthropology, and monitoring the development of policies and actions of individual states in the field of culture (Osewska, Stala, & Bochenek, 2022, p. 11).

After the Second Vatican Council, the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church were directed towards creating conditions for the common good of society, fraternal relations, solidarity among people, and effective international cooperation against global threats. For the Catholic Church of the 20th century, it became a period of cooperation among Christian denominations, understanding in international relations based on the example of church dialogue (Kvik, 2023, p. 110). Pope John Paul II set the goal: “Christians must walk together in the name of the one Christ Jesus...” (Horbachevsky, 2016, p. 201).

An important feature of Roman Catholicism in Poland was the understanding of religion as encompassing spheres beyond the religious realm, as part of political confrontation. This was expressed both in everyday religious practice and in the broader activities of the church. Religious ritual became a central expression and manifestation of civil society: processions, pilgrimages, attending Mass, etc. (Borowik, 2002, p. 241). However, effective church activities were hindered by the communist political regime. For example, the Millennium of Poland’s Baptism in 1966 was a confrontation with the Millennium of Polish statehood organized by the communist authorities to discredit the Roman Catholic Church. During religious ceremonies, which were complicated by administrative and police obstacles, festivals, sports competitions, and recreational events were organized (Mendzhetskyi, & Bratsysevych, 2015, p. 309).

Public life in the Republic of Poland had a pronounced confessional orientation: religious symbols and attributes belonged to all state institutions, schools, and courts; the president of the country was required to take a religious oath. Many public institutions operated under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholic monasteries looked after 952 preschool institutions, 263 schools, 94 gymnasiums, 111 vocational schools, 294 hospitals, etc. Three Roman Catholic higher educational institutions operated in the country, which had the same rights as state ones: the Catholic University of Lublin, the Institute of Catholic Education in Warsaw, and the Higher Catholic School in Poznań (Palinchak, 2014a, p. 125).

However, after the adoption of the Constitution of Poland in 1952, the communists intensified their struggle against the church and religion, and by 1956, religious education was almost eliminated from state schools (Horbachevsky, 2016, pp. 335–336). For instance, on August 2, 1954, the Polish government liquidated theological faculties at Kraków and Warsaw Universities. Religious education was limited to private religious schools and the Catholic University of Lublin (Monticone, 1966, p. 86).

Since the arrival in 1956 of Władysław Gomułka to power, there was a relative normalization of state relations with the Catholic Church, persecution of the Roman Catholic Church ceased, and religious education was reinstated in state schools. However, religious education, as before, was not compulsory and was only introduced in schools where parents demanded it. However, soon the Polish government became concerned about the influence of religious education on youth and began to take measures regarding the restriction of religious

teaching. By 1960, in Poland there were nearly 3,000 schools without religious instruction (Dokumenty Druhoho Vatykanskooho Soboru, 2014, pp. 337–338)].

The Catholic Church was forced to seek new ways to support the Christian spirit of the population and the level of religiosity. At the local level, networks of parish centres began to be organized. After unsuccessful attempts to liquidate them, the authorities realized that it was better to control and supervise such centres. However, tension increased over the years, and strikes spread throughout the country. In response, in 1981, the Ministry of Education instructed school directors to coordinate the school schedule with the church calendar (Ogorzelec, 2022, p. 132).

In the late 1980s, the national Roman Catholic Church promoted the convergence of religious beliefs with the national identity of the Poles based on the historical traditions of the Polish people. Polish Catholicism became a sort of centre for shaping civil society in the new era, as during decades of communist rule, it metaphorically refused to be confined to a “church ghetto”. A symbolic event in this context was the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Krakow as Pope John Paul II on October 16, 1978 (Palinchak, & Andriyiv, 2023, p. 97).

Owing to the Pontificate of John Paul II, the Catholic Church became one of the most important cultural and historical factors in the modern world, strengthening its position in Polish society. As a Pole and a Christian, John Paul II understood well the church-state relations in Poland, as well as the specifics of cultural and religious activities. The Holy Father openly challenged the communist regime regarding the public presence of the Church in society, stating that the Polish government, contrary to the principles of religious freedom, was imposing atheism as a “new state religion”. He became a staunch and tireless advocate of the religious and civil rights of his people. As a result, in the 1990s, the number of dioceses increased in Poland, and the number of seminaries grew. Typically, theological studies in a seminary last six years. After the fifth year of study, seminarians are ordained as deacons. In the sixth year, graduates are required to undergo pastoral practice in parishes (Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1991 – 2011).

Extremely important was the granting of legal status to the Roman Catholic Church and its diocesan structures during the pivotal years of Poland’s independence (1989 – 1990), which opened opportunities for establishing schools by church entities (dioceses, monasteries, parishes), as well as societies and foundations. Thus, already in 1994, there were seventy Catholic schools, and in the academic year 2016/2017, 610 Catholic schools were operational.

In this context, very notable was John Paul II’s speech during his visit to the city of Łowicz on June 14, 1999: “I am pleased that more and more Catholic schools are emerging in Poland. This is a sign that the Church is present in a concrete way in the field of education. These schools need to be supported and create such values so that they can serve the good of society together with all schools in Poland” (Ksendzerski, 2017). John Paul II succeeded in encouraging young people to take a more respectful approach to the Church and its teachings. The Roman Pontiff managed to attract young people to the path of seminary studies and consecrated monastic life. The Pope encouraged young married couples to live a full and deep Catholic life.

The development of Polish democracy and the activation of cultural religious activities were facilitated by the adoption of a new Constitution, which came into force on October 17, 1997. A feature of the Polish Constitution is the guarantee of the rights of parents and guardians to ensure religious education and upbringing of their children according to their beliefs (Palinchak, 2014b, p. 86). Parents have the right to moral and religious education according to their convictions (Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1997).

A renowned scholar M. Palinchak believes that Poland today remains a country with a strong representation of religious tradition, which undoubtedly affects the relations between the state and the church in the educational sphere. According to the Law “On the Education System” (1991), in public schools starting from April 14, 1992, all religious organizations recognized by law have the right to conduct religious education in schools for 2 hours per week if there are at least 7 students in the class who adhere to that religion. Religious organizations and the state jointly control the teaching of religion. In case parents are against the study of religion in school, children choose between three additional humanities subjects, one of which they are certified in. Recently, the content of the religious education course has been reviewed by abandoning the traditional legislative approach and introducing philosophical, individually oriented issues that encourage reflection on various life situations through the prism of faith (Palinchak, 2011, pp. 165–166).

At the beginning of the 21st century in Poland, the basis for teaching religion in schools became the Law on Education of 2002. According to it, two hours per week were allocated for religious education in schools of all types. In exceptional cases, with the consent of the bishop, these hours may be fewer. Thus, religious education is organized in educational institutions at the request of parents, and religion becomes a compulsory subject for students (Plokhhotnichenko, 2022, p. 133).

Table 1

The number of Catholic schools in the 2011 – 2012 academic year

Type of educational institution	Number of schools, k
Total	540
Primary schools	162
Incomplete secondary schools	190
General education schools	137
Vocational educational establishments	20
Schools for children and youth with learning difficulties	21
Special schools for sick and disabled children and youth	10

Source: Ciecieląg, P., Lysoń, P., Sadłoń, W., & Zdaniewicz, W. (Eds.). (2014). *Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1991 – 2011* [Catholic Church in Poland 1991 – 2011]. Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny; Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych. URL: https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5515/12/1/2/rs_kosciol_katolicki_1991-2011.pdf

In the 2016 – 2017 academic year in Poland, there were already 610 Catholic schools operating: 194 primary schools, 209 secondary schools, 134 comprehensive high schools, and 73 schools of other types: artistic, technical, vocational, for students with behavioral and developmental problems, and schools in social assistance centres. Over 10 000 teachers worked in Catholic schools, and 66 365 students were enrolled (Ksendzerski, 2017). Society trusts Catholic schools, considering them leading educational institutions. These schools are part of the church’s educational mission, open to students from neglected, both religiously and morally, families, non-believers, or representatives of other denominations.

The activity of the established Council of Catholic Schools is indicative; it belongs to the entities that are social partners of the Ministry of Education and takes part in evaluating the Ministry’s draft laws and legislative processes in the committees of the Polish Sejm

(Ksendzki, 2017). The National Bureau of the Council assists and actively participates in establishing new Catholic schools, provides them with legal support, model statutes, and other documents, and trains directors. All schools receive effective support from the Council during educational reforms. At the initiative of the Council of Catholic Schools, Poland's Catholic Church holds a Week of Education. The Council of Catholic Schools conducts systematic publishing activities for the needs of Catholic education.

Catholic print media had a significant impact on spreading the cultural identity of Poles. After 1989, there were fundamental changes in the publishing industry and Catholic press. Political changes led to the abolition of censorship, and economic challenges placed all publishers, including Catholics, before the challenges of the free market. The share of Catholic publications in the Polish book market at the beginning of the 21st century was nearly 5% (Kościół katolicki...).

In Poland, there are also Catholic-oriented mass media outlets. Since 1989, there have been Catholic editors at Polish Radio and Polish Television. Educational, advisory, and religious programmes have been broadcast on Telewizja TRWAM since 2003. Church organizations have a nationwide radio programme (Radio Maryja) (Kościół katolicki...).

Roman Catholicism is deeply rooted in the cultural and religious life of the Poles. Ideas and principles of life according to Christian values are expressed through accessible means of contemporary culture. In Poland, numerous cultural events of various levels are organized annually. From religious festivals to Christian art fairs in Poland and around the world. The Church also acts as a guardian of many monuments – churches and sacred buildings, diocesan and parish museums. Christianity in Poland is also noticeable in education. The country has several Catholic universities and universities with papal status (Johnston, 2017; Bublik, 2014).

Sociological surveys indicate that about 90% of modern Poles consider themselves Roman Catholics. Almost all parents of newborns perform the sacrament of baptism. However, contemporary Catholicism is losing its main religious meaning and is turning into a system of rituals and rituals closely linked to mass culture (Ogorzelec, 2022, p. 109).

It is worth noting that at the beginning of the 21st century, disputes over the place of the Roman Catholic Church in social life intensified, and criticism of the church became more aggressive than in the early 1990s. In a modernizing Polish society, the Roman Catholic Church seeks to rethink its position regarding both institutions of social life and individual social groups (Mariański, 2017, p. 144).

The sphere of conflict between the church and the state arose around religious education in public schools. The dispute focused on two issues: sex education and whether grades for religious education should be part of official school certificates. When the Ministry of Education first expressed the idea of introducing sex education in secondary schools, it was immediately attacked by the Catholic Church, which launched a campaign to discredit this idea and condemn the textbooks chosen for the course. Fierce opposition managed to postpone the consideration of the bill in parliament until a change of government after the 1997 elections. The new Minister of Education rejected this idea, instead proposing a softened version of social studies. Religious education was to be voluntary. The Church also insisted that grades for students attending religious classes be part of official school certificates (Korbonski, 2000, pp. 131–132).

An important issue was the legalization of abortions. Until the early 1990s, Poland, like other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, had a fairly liberal abortion law, which Polish women primarily used as a means of birth control. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) took

the lead in advocating for amendments to the law and used all its authority and influence to persuade parliament to pass a new law against abortions. Church pressure was also exerted on Polish doctors, who adopted the “Medical Code of Ethics”, which strongly opposed abortions.

Among other important issues in the 21st century is the legal status of women in Poland. The RCC opposes the women’s rights movement and stands against many proposals regarding women’s rights, being one of the major obstacles to the respect for women’s freedom (Szocik, & Szyja, 2015, pp. 16–17).

It is worth noting that religious institutions were not included in the list of objects of the lustration laws of 1997 and 2006, which aimed to remove secret agents of the communist era from post-communist positions of power and influence. Thus, representatives of the clergy, including new bishops, were exempted in 2007 from formal verification processes (Kunicki, 2021, pp. 36–37). However, as noted by the Polish researcher Mikołaj Kunicki, a prominent Catholic clergymen collaborated with the communist secret police. The pro-Catholic and national conservative party “Law and Justice” startled Polish bishops by exposing communist secret agents among the clergy (Kunicki, 2021, p. 22).

Therefore, under the conditions of social changes at the beginning of the 21st century, prompted by the fall of the communist regime, church-state relations in Poland present a complex picture. On the one hand, the RCC continues to hold a leading position in the country, and on the other hand, the church’s activities were not always approved by the Poles in many aspects of its functioning, including issues of religious education, anti-Semitism, large church finances, and more. As a result, there has been a decline in popular support for the church.

Conclusions. In the second half of the 20th and early 21st century, Poland experienced a period of profound political, ideological and cultural changes directly related to the countries transformation from socialism to liberalism and democratic politics. In Poland, as in many other post-socialist countries (e. g., Romania, Croatia, Ukraine) that experienced communism and the transformation after its collapse, the level of religiosity and the relationship between religion and national identity are stronger than in Europe as a whole. After the fall of the communist regime in Poland, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) adapted to new social realities, returning to its traditional segments of social life, and there is a revival of the religious education system. With the adoption of the new Constitution, religious education and the Roman Catholic press become key factors in the cultural religious life of Polish society. The cultural and religious influence of the church on Polish society was significant in shaping moral values.

Acknowledgements. We express sincere gratitude to all members of the editorial board for consultations provided during the preparation of the article for publishing.

Funding. The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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*The article was received January 22, 2024.
Article recommended for publishing 27/02/2025.*