

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN WESTERN UKRAINIAN LANDS FROM 1914 TO 1918: THE SITUATION OF CONFESSIONS UNDER CONDITIONS OF WAR AND OCCUPATION

By Oksana Markevych and Andrii Shevchuk

Oksana Markevych, PhD in History, Associate Professor of the Department of World History, Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine. Scientific interests: World history, history of Ukraine, teaching history, administrative power of the Right-Bank Ukraine during 19th century.

Email: oksanamarkevich@ukr.net

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0457-8697>

Andrii Shevchuk, Doctor of Historical Sciences (Dr. Hab. in History), Professor of the Department of International Relations and Political Management, Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine. Scientific interests: history of Ukraine, international relations, judicial and administrative power of the Right-Bank Ukraine during the «long» 19th century.

Email: shevchuk.istor@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9023-5214>

Abstract

This article examines the religious life in Western Ukrainian lands during the First World War, amidst military operations and changing occupational regimes. It establishes that the Russian occupational authorities applied mechanisms of confessional control, previously tested in other captured Ukrainian and Belarusian territories, aimed at the forced imposition of Orthodoxy and the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. Particular attention is paid to the scale of religious persecution: the deportation of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, the arrests of Greek Catholic priests, pogroms against the Jewish population, and mass deportations of Protestants. The phenomenon of mass displacement (refugee crisis) is explored as a social catastrophe, accompanied by the destruction of established religious community life and the severing of spiritual ties with parishes. The article reveals the key role of religious institutions in providing humanitarian aid to refugees and war victims. It demonstrates the dichotomy between the brutal repressions of the occupational authorities and the remarkable resilience of religious communities, which continued to perform vital social functions even under extreme conditions. The historical memory of the resilience of religious communities, the solidarity of clergy and believers during the hardest of times, can serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary Ukrainian society and the international community.

Keywords: First World War, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Western Ukrainian lands, Russian Empire, religious life, Greek Catholic Church, refugee crisis.

Formulation of the Problem

The events of the First World War are particularly tragic in the history of Ukraine, as Ukrainians found themselves part of two warring empires – the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian. Ukrainian lands became a theater of military operations, and for the first time, the population encountered the phenomenon of mass displacement. Under these conditions, the Church performed not only a spiritual but also a social function, becoming a pillar of support

for the destitute and persecuted. The relevance of this topic grows in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. Just as over a hundred years ago, the Church plays a key role in supporting society, becoming a center for spiritual solace, humanitarian aid, and organizing support for refugees and victims.

In the Ukrainian lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Greek Catholic Church was dominant, while Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and other faiths were also practiced.¹ This religious tolerance stood in sharp contrast to the policy of the Russian Empire, which, upon arriving in these territories as a "liberator" and de facto conqueror, began the forced imposition of Orthodoxy. The Russian occupation authorities initiated mass repressions against representatives of other confessions. Targeted searches for "aliens," "enemies," and "spies" commenced – accusations that were groundlessly leveled against Greek Catholics, who constituted the majority of believers in Galicia and Bukovyna, as well as against Protestants, Jews, and other religious minorities. The Greek Catholic clergy faced especially brutal persecution: priests were arrested, deported deep into Russia, and Greek Catholic churches were forcibly transferred to the Orthodox Church.

The horrors of war gave rise to the unprecedented problem of displacement in Western Ukrainian lands. The mass movement of the population was accompanied by the destruction of established religious community life.² Refugees lost not only their property but also their spiritual anchor – their connection to parishes, priests, and religious shrines. Despite all the hardships of wartime, religious institutions and believers demonstrated remarkable examples of mutual aid and solidarity. Church parishes organized collections of funds, food, and clothing for refugees and war victims. Monasteries were transformed into shelters for the destitute, hospitals for the wounded, and orphanages for children. The Greek Catholic clergy, despite persecution, continued to care for their flock, often risking their own lives.

In this article we comprehensively analyze the religious life in Western Ukrainian lands during the years of the First World War. This includes examining the situation of the Church and believers of various confessions under conditions of war and occupation, the forms of mutual aid provided by church institutions, and shedding light on the problem of displacement through the prism of religious identity and confessional affiliation. Unlike previous studies,

¹ М.Вегеш, Н.Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М.Палінчак, Я. Голонич. *Українська Греко-Католицька церква: минуле і сучасне*. [M. Vegesh, N. Kontsur-Karabinovich, V. Marchuk, M. Palinchak, Ya. Holonych Ukraine Greek Catholic Church: Past and Present]. Fairmont : Academic publishing, 2020: 380. URL: <http://elar.nung.edu.ua/bitstream/123456789/8832/1/7340si.pdf>.

² Л. Жванко. *Біженці Першої світової війни: український вимір (1914 – 1918 рр.)*. [L. Zhvanco. Refugees of the First World War: the Ukrainian Dimension (1914–1918)]. Харків: Віровець А. П. «Апостроф», 2012: 568.

which focused solely on individual denominations, this article offers the first comprehensive interdenominational analysis of religious life in Galicia and Bukovina during World War I, combining Austrian and Russian perspectives on the occupation with an analysis of the church's role in the refugee crisis.

Analysis of Recent Publications

The question of the situation of the Church in Western Ukrainian lands has been considered only fragmentarily, limited to examining one of the confessions – Greek Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant – which did not provide a holistic picture of the region's religious life. In the work of Ukrainian researchers Olga Bilobrovets and Oleg Sokolovskyi, the activities of only the Roman Catholic Church are highlighted. They conclude that the clergy worked actively to provide aid to the Polish population and refugees.³ The religious policy of the Russian occupation authorities in Galicia and Bukovyna concerning Jews and German Protestants was examined by Vasyl Kovbasa, who meticulously approached the analysis of the complex religious situation. He focuses on how the imperial authorities imposed the labels of "other" (meaning non-Orthodox – authors' note) and "enemy." A comparison of the occupational regimes of 1914 and 1916 is also made. In the author's opinion, the occupational regime established in the second half of 1916 in Galicia and Bukovyna was more moderate.⁴ A general overview of Christian confessions in the first half of the 20th century (1900-1939) was provided by Fedir Prodanyuk. In his view, wide-ranging duties were placed on the Church in the society of that time, and during the war, it served as a pillar of support for the population.⁵

Parish life of the Greek Catholic Church was described by Ukrainian researcher Oleh Pavlyshyn, who refuted the assertion that the Russian authorities pursued a limited policy in the church-religious sphere. According to him, the Russians primarily sought to secure the loyalty of the local peasantry and were therefore moderate on religious matters. He suggests

³ O. Bilobrovets, O. Sokolovskyi. Lutsk-Zhytomyr Roman Catholic Diocese During the First World War: Charitable and Socio-Political Activities. *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*. Vol. 45: Iss. 3 (2025): 97-110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2229.2595>

⁴ В. Ковбаса. Релігійна політика російської окупаційної влади в Галичині та Буковині (1914-1917). [V. Kovbasa. Religious Policy of the Russian Occupation Authorities in Galicia and Bukovina (1914–1917)]. *Вчені записки ТНУ імені В.І. Вернадського. Серія: Історичні науки*. No 32 (71) (2021): 65-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32838/2663-5984/2021/3.10>

⁵ F. Prodanyuk. Christian Denominations on the Territory of Ukraine in the First Half of the 20th Century (1900-1939). *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 43: Iss. 7 (2023): 2-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2454>

that conclusions about repression by the authorities are due to scholars focusing on the biographies of individual clergy members who suffered persecution.⁶

Separately, we highlight works concerning prominent religious figures of the time. The role of Andrey Sheptytsky in shaping Ukrainian national identity was examined by Iryna Krasnodemska.⁷ She noted his active role in reforming the Greek Catholic Church and specifically highlighted his idea of a united (*soborna*) Ukraine on the ruins of the Russian Empire. This idea was reflected in his memorandum to the Austrian government, titled "On the Future Military, Legal, and Ecclesiastical Order of Russian Ukraine in Anticipation of its Occupation by Austrian Troops," dated August 15, 1914.⁸ Ultimately, this served as the grounds for the imperial authorities to arrest and deport the Metropolitan to Russia on September 19, 1914.⁹ For his significant contributions to state-building, T. Pshenychnyi and V. Hoiman referred to A. Sheptytsky as a guarantor of public life.¹⁰

Olga Polumysna and Mariia Bobro examined religious issues in the pages of the journal "Ukrainske Zhyttia" ("Ukrainian Life", 1912-1917). The article emphasized the important role of the Church in societal life and how the imperial authorities used this fact to strengthen their presence. Through the mediation of Russian priests, the authorities imposed the use of the Russian language in Ukrainian churches. Religious activity had a political underpinning, which influenced the appointment of priests to various parishes, as well as their work with the local population. The pages of "Ukrainske Zhyttia" also raised issues concerning the oppression of the Uniate Church, to which the majority of the population in Galicia belonged, the arrest of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, and other related matters. A distinctive feature of the journal

⁶ О. Павлишин Парафіяльне життя метрополії греко-католицької церкви у роки Першої світової війни: повсякдення та кризові явища. [O. Pavlyshyn. Parish Life of the Halychyna Metropolitanate of the Greek Catholic Church during the First World War: Everyday Life and Crisis Phenomena]. *З історії західноукраїнських земель*. Вип. 16 (2020): 130-157. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33402/zuz-2020-130-157>

⁷ І. Краснодемська. The Role of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytskyi in the Formation of Ukrainian National Identity. *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 42: Iss. 9 (2022): 52-82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2395>

⁸ М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*. [M. Vegesh, N. Kotsur-Karabinovich, V. Marchuk, M. Palinchak. Essays on the History of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church]. В двох томах. Т. 1. Ужгород, 2022: 392.

⁹ Ю. Черченко. Шептицький Андрей. [Yu. Cherenko. Sheptytskyi Andrei]. *Енциклопедія історії України: Т. 10: Т-Я / Редкол.: В. А. Смолій (голова) та ін. НАН України. Інститут історії України. К.: в-во Наукова думка, 2013: 688. URL: http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Sheptytskyj_A.*

¹⁰ Т. Пшеничний, В. Гойман. Українська греко-католицька церква в житті населення Західної України в першій половині ХХ ст.: історіографія. [T. Pshenychnyi, V. Goiman. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the Life of the Population of Western Ukraine in the First Half of the 20th Century: Historiography]. *Вісник Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка*. Вип. 101 (2010): 34-36.

was that it drew attention to the monuments of wooden church architecture from the 17th–18th centuries,¹¹ describing them as the highest cultural achievement.¹²

Among scholarly works, particular attention is drawn to research dedicated to the policy of the Russian Empire in previously captured territories,¹³ aimed at strengthening the position of the Russian Orthodox Church and transforming it into a key instrument of imperial governance. These include works on the Orthodox clergy,¹⁴ the Uniate Church,¹⁵ and confessional policy in Ukrainian and Belarusian lands.¹⁶ The mechanisms of religious policy tested in these regions¹⁷ were subsequently applied to the newly captured Western Ukrainian lands during the First World War.

The situation of refugees was examined by L. Zhvanko,¹⁸ O. Serdiuk,¹⁹ N. Zahrebelna, and I. Koliada.²⁰ Scholars view the refugee crisis as the greatest social catastrophe of that time,

¹¹ The monuments of wooden church architecture deserve separate study. These sacred structures represent the unique tradition of Carpathian wooden architecture. In 2013, they were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The site "Wooden Churches of the Carpathian Region in Poland and Ukraine" comprises 16 churches – 8 in Poland and 8 in Ukraine. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is crucial to protect this cultural heritage, as the Russian authorities are waging a hybrid war against Ukraine. This includes asserting the inferiority of Ukrainian culture and Russia's defining influence on its development, which is a blatant falsification of history. These unique architectural monuments from the 17th–18th centuries are a manifestation of the deep religiosity of the Ukrainian people, their distinctive traditions of sacred architecture, and the organic fusion of folk spirituality with Christian values.

¹² O. Polumysna, M. Bobro. Religious Issues in the Journal "Ukrainian Life" (1912-1917). *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 43: Iss.7 (2023): 19-30. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2457>

¹³ Йдеться про Правобережні українські землі, захоплені внаслідок поділів Речі Посполитої. Апробовані тут механізми релігійної політики згодом було поширено на новозахоплені західноукраїнські терени.

¹⁴ А. Боярчук. *Православне духовенство Волинської губернії: формування, матеріальне забезпечення, громадська та душпастирська діяльність*. Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеня кандидата історичних наук. [A. Boyarchuk. Orthodox clergy of Volyn province: formation, material support, social and pastoral activities. Dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences.]. Східноєвропейський національний університет імені Лесі Українки. Луцьк, 2019, 240.

¹⁵ В. Білик. Унійна церква в містах та містечках Волинської губернії (перша третина XIX ст.). *Науковий вісник Східноєвропейського національного університету імені Лесі Українки*. [V. Bilyk. The Uniate Church in the Cities and Towns of the Volyn Province (First Third of the XIX Century)]. No.6 (2018): 16–23.

¹⁶ О. Буравський. Конфесійна політика російського самодержавства на Правобережній Україні та Білорусі (кінець XVIII – початок XIX ст.). *Наукові записки Тернопільського національного педагогічного університету ім. Володимира Гнатюка. Серія: Історія*. [O. Buravskiy. Confessional Policy of the Russian Autocracy in the Right Bank Ukraine and Belarus (end of XVIII - beginning of XIX centuries)]. No. 1, P. 2 (2016): 13-18.

¹⁷ А. Shevchuk, O. Markevych. The Religious Policy of the Russian Empire in the Captured Territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (On the Example of the Volyn Province at the End of the 18th-The First Half of the 19th Century). *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*. Vol. 45, Iss. 1(2025): 24-38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2229.2596>

¹⁸ Л. Жванко. *Біженці Першої світової війни: український вимір (1914 – 1918 рр.)*. [L. Zhvanko. Refugees of the First World War: the Ukrainian Dimension (1914–1918)]. Харків: Віровець А. П. «Апостроф», 2012: 568.

¹⁹ О. Сердюк. Біженство в Україні під час Першої світової війни. [O. Serdyuk. Refugees in Ukraine during the First World War]. *Проблеми історії України XIX – початку XX ст.* Вип. 4. 2002: 111–132.

²⁰ Н. Загребельна, І. Коляда. *Велика Війна: українство і благодійність (1914–1917 рр.)*. [N. Zagrebelna, I. Kolyada. The Great War: Ukrainian Identity and Charity (1914–1917)]. Київ: Національний педагогічний університет ім. М.П. Драгоманова. Інститут Історії України НАН України, 2006: 194.

detailing the system of aid provision through state bodies, zemstvo institutions, and charitable organizations. It is worth highlighting separately the role of the church and religious organizations in aiding refugees, considering their significant participation in organizing shelter, food, and spiritual support for the forcibly displaced.

The Situation of Religious Denominations in Western Ukraine During the War and Occupation

The dominant religion in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was Catholicism, which was supported by the authority of the Emperor. However, the ethnic diversity of the population in Western Ukrainian lands influenced the region's religious policy. According to the 1910 census, the ethnic composition of Galicia's population was as follows: 46% were Poles, 42% were Ukrainians, 11% were Jews, and 1% were Germans. In Eastern Galicia, the situation differed: the majority were Ukrainians (62%), Poles—25%, Jews—12%. The Jewish population was increasing due to a high birth rate and flight from pogroms in the western provinces of the Russian Empire. Bukovina was more ethnically diverse than Galicia: 38.1% of the population were Ukrainians; Moldovans and Romanians—34.2%; Jews—12.8%; Germans—9%; and Poles, Hungarians, Armenians, and Czechs—5.9%.²¹

The Emperor of Austria-Hungary shaped internal policy by skillfully exploiting the tensions between Poles and Ukrainians in the region, aiming to strengthen his own position and preserve imperial control. At the same time, beyond Catholicism, other confessions also found support. Thus, the Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky enjoyed significant authority in the eyes of the government. He openly stated that in the event of Austro-Hungarian advancement into Russian-controlled Ukrainian territories, a key task would be to detach the Ukrainian church from Russian ecclesiastical control, from under the authority of the St. Petersburg Synod, to revive the institution of the Hetmanate, to introduce Austrian laws, and so forth.²² An example of successful initiatives implemented with government support and thanks to the Metropolitan's financial backing was the creation of the first vacation colonies (vacation homes) in Galicia. These were establishments for children's holiday recreation, which had become popular in Europe as early as the 19th century. The initiator of the vacation colonies was the Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lviv ("Mariiska Druzhyna Pan" / "Marian

²¹В. Ковбаса. Релігійна політика російської окупаційної влади в Галичині та Буковині (1914-1917), *op. cit.*, 66.

²² М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, *op. cit.*, 135.

Sisterhood"). In 1905, members of the Society opened the first vacation colony for Ukrainian girls aged 7 to 14 in the village of Milovannia, Tovmach county (now Myluvannia, Tysmenytsia Raion, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast).²³ This was a response to an objective societal need to support school-age children from the poorest strata of the urban population. Throughout the day, the children participated in physical and moral recreational activities, starting with morning exercises after a joint prayer at 7 a.m. The schedule included hiking tours, gymnastic games, swimming, singing, and writing letters to family. Furthermore, the girls engaged in various forms of handicraft such as cutting, sewing, and embroidery, read literary works aloud, and organized friendly entertainments. The educational process was led by educated women who were members of the Main Department of Vacation Colonies. Among them were Olha Barvinska-Bachynska, Olena Berezhnytska, and Olha Vakhnianynova. Their initiative was directed towards providing recreation built on religious values and also fostered a love for the native land through the use of the native language, poetry, songs, and games.²⁴

The situation changed drastically with the outbreak of the First World War. Ukrainians were accused of supporting Russophile sentiments, and mass deportations to the concentration camps of Thalerhof, Gmünd, Theresienstadt (Terezín), and Esztergom took place. In Thalerhof alone, 6,000 Ukrainians were deported, of whom 1,767 perished. The Sknyliv Studite Lavra in the city of Lviv was completely destroyed.²⁵

When active hostilities began, the Russian troops of the Southwestern Front, following the defeat of the Imperial [Austro-Hungarian] forces, entered Lviv on September 3, 1914. They subsequently advanced to the San River, blockaded the Przemyśl Fortress, and ultimately occupied a significant part of the Precarpathian region. Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky called on Greek Catholic priests to remain with their faithful and, if possible, to bury church registers in a safe place.²⁶ Some of the clergy heeded the Metropolitan's call and did not leave (or could not leave) the territories seized by Russia. Soon, they, like Metropolitan Sheptytsky himself,

²³ О. Бижук. Роль церкви та громадських інституцій у справі опіки над дітьми в Галичині на початку ХХ століття. [O. Bezjuk. The Role of the Church and Civil Society Institutions in Child Welfare in Galicia in the Early 20th Century]. *Наукові записки Острозької академії. Серія "Психологія і педагогіка"*. Вип. 21 (2012): 14.

²⁴ Г. Васянович. Емпатійність як провідна цінність у духовній спадщині митрополита Андрея Шептицького. [G. Vasyanovich. Empathy as a Leading Value in the Spiritual Heritage of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky]. *Андрей Шептицький : наук.праці*. Упоряд. та наук. ред. Д. Герцюк, П. Сікорський. Львів: "СПОЛОМ", 2016: 46-52.

²⁵ М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, op. cit., 136.

²⁶ О. Павлишин. Парафіяльне життя метрополії греко-католицької церкви у роки Першої світової війни: повсякдення та кризові явища, op. cit., 137.

became hostages of the Russian Empire. Others faced the fate of either being mobilized as chaplains in the Austrian army or becoming refugees.

The Russian occupation authorities applied a policy that had already been tested, which aimed to neutralize (and later could potentially liquidate) the Greek Catholic Church, with its faithful to be transferred to the structures of Russian Orthodoxy. The Uniates were considered the spiritual backbone of Ukrainian separatism. The program of action for the Russian administration in the field of church policy, prepared by the St. Petersburg "Galician-Ruthenian Benevolent Society," laid out specific proposals. These included, for example, transferring Uniate churches in localities where the majority agreed to convert to Orthodoxy to the Orthodox; liquidating the Jesuit and Basilian monastic orders; and altogether removing Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky and Bishop Hryhoriy Khomyshyn from the Church. To implement the plans for converting Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy, 200 Orthodox priests arrived in Lviv with the Russian convoy, led by Volyn Archbishop Evlogii (Georgievsky), a native of the Tula region.²⁷ As noted by Oleh Pavlyshyn, part of the population voluntarily converted to Orthodoxy. Most peasants did not understand the inter-confessional canonical differences, and the Orthodox Church skillfully exploited this fact, particularly by distributing leaflets and appeals featuring images of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, which was revered by the local population. Other reasons for conversion could have included the passivity of the faithful, hopes for various forms of aid during an extremely difficult period, and the absence of Greek Catholic clergy in the localities.²⁸

A difficult fate awaited those who remained. Not long after the deportation of the Metropolitan, Bishops Yosyf Botsian and Dmytro Yaremko (died 1916), the vice-rector of the Stanislaviv Theological Seminary, Yevhen Lomytskyi (died in exile in 1915), and more than fifty parish priests were arrested and deported. During the ten months of the first Russian occupation, out of 1,784 Greek Catholic parishes, only 81 – that is, four percent – converted to Orthodoxy, either fully or partially.²⁹

Not only Greek Catholics but also Protestants and Jews found themselves in a difficult position during the Russian occupation. Immediately after the Russian army entered the territories of Galicia and Bukovyna, the Jewish population suffered significant repression. The

²⁷ М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, op. cit., 136.

²⁸ О. Павлишин. Парафіяльне життя метрополії греко-католицької церкви у роки Першої світової війни: повсякдення та кризові якища, op. cit., 137.

²⁹ М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, op. cit., 138.

Russian authorities accused Jews of espionage on behalf of Austria and profiteering in essential goods, as well as hoarding copper and grain. The arrival of Russian troops was accompanied by numerous pogroms and lootings, murders, and abuse of the civilian Jewish population. Hundreds of synagogues and Jewish prayer houses were desecrated, looted, and destroyed. Tens of thousands of Galician Jews fled from the Russian troops, escaping to the central and western regions of Austria-Hungary.³⁰

In occupied Lviv, the newly appointed mayor (*gradonachalnik*) S. Sheremetev issued an official decree. It stated that he would not create distinctions between Christians and Jews, would uphold justice, and would value their rights. However, he demanded from them: not to harbor Jewish soldiers, to hand over every deserter to the authorities, to prevent damage to telephone equipment in their districts, not to gather on the streets, not to engage in dialogue with soldiers, and not to spread rumors and false information. S. Sheremetev threatened punishment in accordance with wartime laws for non-compliance with these demands, which were announced in the synagogues.³¹

Jewish pogroms and persecutions also occurred in other settlements of Galicia and Bukovyna. After capturing the town of Ustia in the Borshchiv district, Russian troops drove out the entire Jewish population and destroyed their houses down to the foundations. They even demolished basements in search of money and valuables. In Kolomyia, a special type of contribution was imposed on Jews for "false information" about their property. Persecutions took place in Chernivtsi, Stanislaviv, Sambir, and other cities.

On February 13, 1915, the military governor-general, Count H. Bobrynsky, issued a special mandatory decree restricting the movement of Jews within the territories of Galicia and Bukovyna. The preamble stated that, based on the order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Southwestern Front, General of Artillery M. Ivanov, and due to the increased espionage activities by Jews, it was necessary to establish a series of prohibitions and restrictions on movement: to prohibit persons of Jewish nationality from entering Galicia and moving from one district to another. Those guilty of violating this decree were to be subject to a fine of three thousand rubles or imprisonment for up to three months.

The local Protestants were also going through difficult times. They had settled in Galicia since the mid-18th century.³² These were migrants from Prussia and Saxony who worked at

³⁰ В. Ковбаса. Релігійна політика російської окупаційної влади в Галичині та Буковині (1914-1917), *op. cit.*, 66.

³¹ *Ibid.* 67.

³² Ф. Стеблій. З історії взаємин українців і німецьких поселенців у Галичині у середині XIX ст. [F. Stebliy. On the History of Relations Between Ukrainians and German Settlers in Galicia in the Mid-19th Century].

the local cloth factory. Later, urban Lutheran communities appeared in Lviv, Zamość, and Yaroslav. By the mid-19th century, there were 186 colonies in Galicia founded by migrants from Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, Holland, Flanders, as well as Germans from Poland and the Czech lands.

The Lutheran and Calvinist communities were subordinate to one of the regional structures of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions—the Galician-Bukovynian Superintendency (bishopric), which had its center in Lviv (1804-1870), in Gelsendorf (Zahirne, Lviv region) (1886-1896), and in Bielsko-Biała (1871-1885 and 1897-1918). On the eve of and during the First World War, the community was led by the Austrian religious leader and theologian Hermann Georg Fritsche, a pastor in Wiener Neustadt (Lower Austria) and Bielsko-Biała. In 1913, the Lutheran part comprised 29 parishes, 50 church branches, and 16 mission stations, with a total of 52,540 adherents. The Calvinists, in turn, had 4 parishes, 8 branches, 1 station, and 4,679 faithful.³³

Baptist communities existed in many Galician cities, including Lviv, Rava-Ruska, Skole, Zhovkva, Przemyśl, and Dobromyl. During the First World War, the colonists (settlers) dispersed throughout Galicia, settling in locations such as Vyshyntsi, Mykhalyky, Maidani, Yulynivka, Zabiria, Hiiche, Vylok, Kamianka, and Salashi.³⁴

Protestants predominantly displayed either political indifference or supported the Russian authorities. The communities provided material and moral aid to the Russian army. Together with Evangelical Christians, they founded the fund "The Merciful Samaritan," which raised funds for organizing field hospitals and caring for the wounded, as well as distributing religious literature on the front lines. Despite this, Protestants faced systematic arrests, with some being forcibly deported to Russia. A mass closure of communities in the frontline zone took place, accompanied by the confiscation of prayer houses and the exile of their leaders. From the end of 1914, the deportation of local Protestants to Siberia began. Initially, all men aged 18-70 were subject to expulsion; later, their families with children were also included, given three days to prepare for departure, and then only one day. Resistance was met with arrest and confiscation of property.³⁵

Німецькі колонії Галичини: Історія–Архітектура–Культура. Матеріали Міжнародного наукового семінару. Львів, 1996: 125.

³³ В. Ковбаса. Релігійна політика російської окупаційної влади в Галичині та Буковині (1914-1917), *op. cit.*, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

³⁵ В. Ковбаса. Релігійна політика російської окупаційної влади в Галичині та Буковині (1914-1917), *op. cit.*, 66.

As for Roman Catholics, their situation was better. Within the Russian Empire, Catholicism was practiced freely, and monasteries became centers of mutual aid and support for refugees. The supreme authorities did not wish to create an internal enemy for themselves and therefore avoided oppressing Catholics.³⁶ Moreover, within the empire itself, many people were dissatisfied with the religious policy in Galicia. It was openly condemned by prominent Russian state and church figures, including State Duma deputies P. Miliukov and A. Kerensky, as well as Bishop Nikon of Krasnoyarsk.³⁷

Austrian authority in the Western Ukrainian lands was restored as a result of the successful Gorlice offensive operation by Austro-German troops in May-June 1915. The Russian army abandoned the fortress city of Przemyśl, Lviv, and almost all of Galicia. Fearing reprisals from the Austrian authorities, priests who had converted to another confession, as well as some peasants, left for Russia. Some of those who had left and changed their confession while in Russia eventually returned home.³⁸

Within a short period, government institutions, socio-political organizations, publishing houses, cooperatives, and educational-scientific institutions resumed their activities. The most acute problem facing the Greek Catholic Church³⁹ was a severe shortage of priests. During the Russian occupation of Galicia, out of 2,483 Greek Catholic priests: 350 were interned by the Austrian authorities; 350 retreated westward before the Russian advance; 61 left for Russia; 120 converted to Orthodoxy or collaborated with its structures. Thus, only 1,572 active priests remained in the clergy overall. Priests served as chaplains within frontline Ukrainian regiments and the Legion of Ukrainian Sich Rifleman.⁴⁰

In the second half of 1916, a Russian occupational regime—the Military Governor-Generalship of the Austro-Hungarian Regions Occupied by Right of War—was re-established in Galicia and Bukovyna. It differed from the previous one (1914-1915) in being more moderate. Its primary task was to prioritize lobbying for the interests and meeting the needs of the active army, while avoiding any actions that could inflame political and religious conflicts among the population.

³⁶ O. Bilobrovets, O. Sokolovskyi. *Lutsk-Zhytomyr Roman Catholic Diocese...*, op. cit., 100-101.

³⁷ М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, op. cit., 139.

³⁸ О. Павлишин. Парафіяльне життя метрополії греко-католицької церкви у роки Першої світової війни: повсякдення та кризові явища, op. cit., 139.

³⁹ The problems were similar for other confessions as well – authors' note.

⁴⁰ Греко-Католицька церква опікувалась легіоном Українських Січових Стрільців, сприяла формуванню національно-патріотичних почуттів і високого морально-бойового духу стрільців. Детальніше за: М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, op. cit., 143.

According to officially published data, during the First World War in Galicia, as a result of active hostilities by both Russian and Austro-German forces, 182 Greek Catholic churches and monasteries and 72 filial churches and chapels were completely destroyed, and 469 and 174 units were partially destroyed, respectively; 58 Roman Catholic churches and monasteries and 29 filial churches and chapels were completely destroyed, and 387 and 197 units were partially destroyed, respectively; one Evangelical church was completely destroyed, five were partially destroyed; 10 Jewish synagogues were completely destroyed, 16 were partially destroyed; 17 other Jewish places of worship were completely destroyed, 8 were partially destroyed.⁴¹

The Refugee Crisis and Assistance to War Victims during the First World War

The Austrian authorities granted the High Command of the Army the de facto right to evacuate the civilian population to the interior regions "in case of necessity or suspicion."⁴² The scale of the evacuation was determined by Austrian officers on the ground. The first refugees arrived from the areas of present-day Ternopil, Terebovlia, Zboriv, Buchach, Rohatyn, and Nadvirna. Transportation was carried out primarily by rail. The route proceeded via the Northern Railway line, or through the Hungarian City Railway line, or the Žilina Railway line, and could take from 8 to 12 days.

Camps for interned refugees and evacuees were constructed by the Austrian authorities in the autumn of 1914. The construction of the last camp, Braunau am Inn, began in the summer of 1915.⁴³ There were both mono-ethnic and mixed camps. The camps were deployed in various parts of the empire: Wolfsberg, Gmünd, Grödig, Bruck an der Leitha, Enzersdorf, Gaya (Hodonín), Leibnitz, Moravian Ostrava (Ostrava), Obergöllersbrunn. They contained residential and sleeping barracks, an isolation ward, an infirmary (lazaret), a bathhouse barrack, kitchen buildings, food storage, wood and coal depots, workshops, a kindergarden, a school, several shops, a tobacco shop, a post office, and, obligatorily, a wooden church with a bell tower. To avoid losing control over the flow of displaced persons, a Central Representation for the Care of Refugees from Galicia and Bukovyna was established at the Vienna Magistracy as

⁴¹ О. Павлишин Парафіяльне життя метрополії греко-католицької церкви у роки Першої світової війни: посвядження та кризові явища, *op. cit.*, 140

⁴² Kuprian Hermann. *Flüchtlinge, Evakuierte und die staatliche Fürsorge in: Klaus Eisterer, Rolf Steiniger. Tirol und der erste Weltkrieg.* [Kuprian Hermann. Refugees, Evacuees, and State Welfare in: Klaus Eisterer, Rolf Steiniger. Tyrol and the First World War]. Vienna 1995: 73-83.

⁴³ О. Реєнт. Евакуаційні заходи Австрійського та російського урядів на українських землях у роки Першої світової війни. [O. Reient. Evacuation Measures Taken by the Austrian and Russian Governments in Ukrainian Territories during World War]. *Енциклопедія історії України*: Т. 3: Е-Й / Редкол.: В. А. Смолій (голова) та ін. НАН України. Інститут історії України. К.: В-во "Наукова думка", 2005: 672. URL: http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Evakuacijni_zakhody

early as August 10, 1914. An instruction titled "Religious, Socio-Political, Cultural-Humanitarian Content of Care for Refugees from Galicia and Bukovyna" was also prepared. According to it, the primary work of accommodating and mandatorily employing refugees was to be carried out by the governments on whose territory the displaced persons were located.⁴⁴

The Greek Catholic Church also joined in charitable work and support for the troops. In 1915 alone, Greek Catholic chaplains at the front established 226 field chapels. The religious periodical "Missionary" ("Misionar") enjoyed wide popularity among soldiers. It published messages from church hierarchy, articles of spiritual and intellectual content, as well as world and local news, including, for example, about the liberation of all disabled prisoners of war from Russian captivity through the efforts of Pope Benedict XV, and the establishment of the "Ukrainian Orphan's Protection" children's shelter in the city of Lviv.⁴⁵

The number of refugees entering the Russian Empire was comparatively small. Most refugees settled in provinces bordering the war zone, primarily Volyn and Podillia, with the intention of later being resettled to other territories. No special camps or holding facilities were provided—they were housed in private homes. Religious institutions provided significant assistance. Unlike in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which implemented a centralized system for transporting and materially supporting refugees, in the Russian Empire a significant percentage of such aid was provided on a voluntary basis.

The Roman Catholic Church provided active assistance. Masses were held in churches with calls to support the Russian army in the war, and the population was urged to attend to their affairs and pray sincerely to God.⁴⁶ Before the war, the tsarist government strictly regulated church monetary collections, limiting them to Sunday and holiday donations for approved purposes. Unauthorized fundraising could lead to disciplinary sanctions against the clergy, including dismissal from their positions.⁴⁷ However, at the start of the war, these restrictions were eased due to the growing need to collect funds to support the army and aid the affected population. The Lutsk-Zhytomyr Diocese instructed all churches in the diocese to collect donations to help wounded and sick soldiers, and for equipping hospital beds and aiding the wounded. In a short time, the number of beds increased from 119 to 200.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 672.

⁴⁵ М. Вегеш, Н. Концур-Карабінович, В. Марчук, М. Палінчак. *Нариси історії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*, op. cit., 140.

⁴⁶ О. Bilobrovets, О. Sokolovskyi. Lutsk-Zhytomyr Roman Catholic Diocese..., op. cit., 101.

⁴⁷ The pre-revolutionary (pre-1917) restrictions on church collections were not accidental – they reflected the imperial policy aimed at preventing the Roman Catholic Church from achieving financial autonomy. Following the November (1830–1831) and especially the January (1863–1864) Uprisings, in which the Catholic clergy played a significant role in the national liberation movement, the tsarist government systematically limited the Church's ability to accumulate funds, fearing they would be used to support the Polish opposition.

Roman Catholic charitable societies were actively engaged in philanthropy. Already in early October 1914, they allocated 2,000 rubles from their principal capital to refugees from the Kingdom of Poland. The society's board provided financial aid of 100 rubles to the Committee for Rapid Aid to Wounded Soldiers and 50 rubles to the Zhytomyr Committee for Rapid Aid to Poor Families of Reservists. Other charitable services were offered: the society appealed to the city administration with a proposal to purchase firewood from the state forest and also offered furniture-making services at a 10% discount for the surgical department. After the retreat of Russian troops, the number of refugees increased, and Roman Catholic charitable societies intensified their philanthropic activities, especially in support of children.

O. Bilobrovets and O. Sokolovskyi note that children, as victims of war, were under the special care of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁸ This primarily concerned the Polish population. Catholic priests participated in the creation of Polish organizations which operated in Ukrainian lands – the Polish Society for Aid to War Victims (PSAWV) and the Central Civil Committee (CCC). Alongside material aid, they took care to preserve Polish children's national identity, Catholic faith, and to nurture the Polish national spirit among the youth on the eve of the restoration of Polish statehood.⁴⁹

Conclusions

The First World War was a complex period in the religious life of Galicia and Bukovyna, while also offering lessons for the modern generation. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Western Ukrainian lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were characterized by religious tolerance and the coexistence of various confessions (Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Jews). The establishment of Russian occupational authority at the start of the First World War had a profound impact on religious life, initiating a policy of forced imposition of Orthodoxy, accompanied by mass repression against Greek Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.

Greek Catholics found themselves in the most difficult situation, as the Russian authorities did not recognize the Uniate Church and therefore launched an intensive process of their "reunification" with Orthodoxy, a policy already tested in previously captured territories. Under wartime conditions, these measures were particularly brutal – the deportation of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, arrests of Greek Catholic priests, forced transfer of churches to the Orthodox Church. Despite large-scale repression, only 4% (81 out of 1,784) of Greek

⁴⁸ O. Bilobrovets, O. Sokolovskyi. *Lutsk-Zhytomyr Roman Catholic Diocese...*, op. cit., 103-104

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

Catholic parishes fully or partially converted to Orthodoxy during the ten months of the first Russian occupation, a testament to the strength of the population's religious identity.

Jews and Protestants also faced repression. The Russian authorities systematically accused Jews of espionage and profiteering, which was accompanied by numerous pogroms and lootings of synagogues and prayer houses. The official decree of Governor-General H. Bobrynsky on February 13, 1915, effectively introduced a regime of ethnic segregation, prohibiting Jews from entering Galicia and moving between districts. Protestants faced arrests, closure of communities in the frontline zone, and mass deportations to Siberia – the imperial authorities suspected them of sympathies towards Germany due to their ethnic origin and confessional ties.

The refugee crisis reached unprecedented scale for the first time in the history of Ukrainian lands. It was accompanied not only by the physical displacement of the population but also by the destruction of spiritual ties with native parishes, the loss of religious shrines, and the disruption of established ritual practices. Church communities provided significant material support, effectively supplementing state aid to improve the lives of the destitute, especially children. Charitable societies established under the auspices of churches provided aid to the wounded and soldiers, and the Greek Catholic Church cared for the Legion of Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, fostering national-patriotic sentiments and high morale among the riflemen. Monasteries were transformed into shelters for refugees, hospitals for the wounded, and orphanages for children who had lost their parents.

In summary, it can be argued that the First World War was a period of the most severe trials for the religious life of Western Ukrainian lands, yet it simultaneously demonstrated the exceptional resilience of religious institutions and their ability to perform vital social functions under catastrophic conditions. The experience of church aid to refugees and victims of the 1914-1918 war remains relevant today, as Ukraine once again faces the challenges of mass displacement due to Russian aggression. The historical memory of the resilience of religious communities, the solidarity of clergy and believers during the hardest of times, should serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary Ukrainian society and the international community.

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