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Religious movements of Chernivtsi oblast: peace in diversity

An attempt is made to analyze the current religious situation in the Chernivtsi oblast of Ukraine, which consists of four ethnic regions: Northern Bukovyna, Northern Bessarabia, Hutsulshchyna (Hutsul region) and Hertsa. The study is based on a comparison of interviews of leaders or responsible representatives of different denominations with the analysis of official data of the relevant state authority, i. e. the Department of Religions and Nationalities of the Chernivtsi Regional State Administration.

Keywords: religious diversity, religious movements, Chernivtsi oblast, Bukovyna, Tomos

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Релігійні рухи Чернівецької області: мир в розмаїтті

Здійснена спроба аналізу сучасної релігійної ситуації в Чернівецькій області України, яка складається з чотирьох етнічних регіонів: Північної Буковини, Північної Бессарабії, Гуцульщини та Герци. Дослідження ґрунтується на зіставленні інтерв'ю керівників чи уповноважених представників різних конфесій з аналізом офіційних даних відповідного державного органу, тобто Відділу з питань релігій та національностей Чернівецької обласної державної адміністрації.

Ключові слова: релігійне різноманіття, релігійні рухи, Чернівецька область, Буковина, Томос

Chernivtsi oblast, a small region in the western part of Ukraine, has always served as an example of religious and cultural diversity. Different Christian denominations, Jews, and followers of other religions have been living there without significant conflicts. It led to the current religious variety, which has influenced local traditions and mentality.

This paper aims to analyze the current religious situation in the region from the view of the state and the communities themselves. The object of this research is all the religious communities of Chernivtsi oblast, whilst the subject is its current position and perspectives. This paper examines the religious situation in the Chernivtsi oblast of Ukraine, which incorporates four ethnic regions: Northern Bukovyna, Northern Bessarabia, Hutsulshchyna, and Hertsa. We will sometimes refer to Bukovyna, an ethnic region in modern-day Ukraine and Romania, where an autonomous Orthodox metropolitanate was established. Under the term *peace*, we understand public order and concord between different religious communities [12].

The proposed research uses a slightly new method compared with the previous. Namely, it is based on interviews with leaders or responsible representatives of various denominations combined with analyzing the official data from the corresponding state authority, i. e. Department for Religions and Ethnicities of the Chernivtsi Regional State

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Administration. It allows obtaining the data from inside and thus provides more facts rather than sole numbers. All information is updated by January 1, 2020.

The number of scholars, who conducted research related to the religious situation in Chernivtsi oblast includes V. Balukh, V. Dokash, V. Leshan, I. Lutsan, M. Lahodych, N. Myzak, A. Yaremchuk, I. Chekhovskiy, M. Shkribliak, et al. The actuality of this paper is provided by a lack of research on religious diversity in Chernivtsi oblast together with a strong need to study the religious issues after the Tomos of Autocephaly in 2018.

Chernivtsi oblast was inhabited since the earliest time, and thus it can be presumed that some primitive cults were practiced at those times. Some early sources, such as Moldavian prince Dumitru Cantemir, claimed that Bukovynians could be baptized already in the 4th century, but only sporadic missionaries acted then [16, p. 48–49]. Most probably, Christianity appeared there at the beginning of the 11th century, after the Baptism of Rus'. During the early period, the region belonged to the Metropolitanate of Kyiv and later of Halych. In 1371 an attempt to establish a Roman-Catholic diocese in Siret (modern-day Romania) was made but it was not successful [16, p. 38–39]. In the same period, the first Armenian Orthodox believers arrived. It can also be proven by a document signed by Moldavian Prince Alexander the Good in 1408. In the 13th–14th centuries, the first known Jewish community was established and soon started to control the merchandise [16, p. 330–331]. In 1472, an Orthodox eparchy of Radivtsi (modern-day *Rădăuți, Romania*) was established with Ioanikius as its first bishop. Some parts, however, belonged to the Metropolitanate of Moldavia. In 1781, all the Bukovynian parishes were unified under the control of bishop Dositheus (Herescul), who was the first to move from Radivtsi to Chernivtsi. Around this period, the first Protestant, Roman, and Greek Catholic believers arrived and built their temples. Russian Old Believers have appeared here already before the Austrian occupation [16, p. 310]. In 1844, they established a bishopric, thus making Bukovyna the main centre of Old Believers before the Second World War. In 1873, the Bukovynian Orthodox eparchy was reformed into an autonomous Metropolitanate of Bukovyna and Dalmatia under the pastorship of Eugene Hakman, who, however, died later that year. Insignificant communities of Adventists, Baptists, and Pentacostalians also acted predominately among Romanian-speaking inhabitants [16, p. 331–343].

After the Tomos of Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was issued, Orthodox believers belong to two large jurisdictions: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (afterwards in the text – UOC), a self-ruling part of the Patriarchate of Moscow, and the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (afterwards in the text – OCU). According to the statistics, UOC has 440 parishes and 12 monasteries, whereas OCU has 213 parishes (44 in the Chernivtsi-Kitsman eparchy, 20 in the Chernivtsi-Hotyn eparchy, and the rest in the eparchy of Chernivtsi and Bukovyna) and four monasteries [17]. As the OCU consists of three former denominations, three bishops represent it, whereas a ruling bishop and three vicars manage the UOC eparchy. Both Orthodox denominations are socially active, organizing services and help for the poor and in hospitals, etc. Both churches also assign their humanitarian help and priests to the east of Ukraine. In terms of education, in both denominations, Sunday schools are organized, predominately in Chernivtsi and district centres. Moreover, higher education establishments of both denominations are the

Theological department of the Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University belonging to the OCU and Chernivtsi Theological Institute of the UOC. In recent years, Orthodox communities have also launched their Internet mission, creating pages in social media and websites. Both denominations claim to attract the majority of laymen, although no official statistics can prove it. The UOC has also a significant Romanian-speaking community, which preserves typically Romanian liturgical tradition and, in many parishes, the Gregorian calendar.

However, since 2018 the Orthodox in Northern Bukovyna have had several conflicts due to the willingness of some UOC parishes and particular parishioners to join the newly formed OCU and the unwillingness of the other UOC activists and clerics. Some major conflicts have happened in the villages of Tovtry, Rynhach, Zadubrivka, Vaslovivtsi, Zavoloka and Mykhalcha due to provocations from both sides [18]. In some of these villages, UOC parishioners organized constant guarding in the churches. According to the journalists, parishes in 21 villages have decided to join the OCU [19], but most of these parishes were divided, only two UOC priests joined the OCU.

Patriarch Filaret, former head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate, which formed the OCU, refused to obey its primate and reestablished its patriarchate. However, his organization is not registered by the state and is in minority. In Chernivtsi, Kyiv Patriarchate has a bishop and an insignificant community. Some other minor “True Orthodox” communities also act in Chernivtsi oblast.

The aforementioned Old Believers still exist in Northern Bukovyna and have their religious centre and monasteries in Bila Krynytsia. Eleven religious organizations and six priests act in eight villages and towns of Chernivtsi oblast, according to the official statistics. According to our interviewee, there are around 6000 faithful with the most significant communities being Hrubno (~5000), Chernivtsi (~250), and Bilousivka (~100). All the other communities consist of not more than 50 laymen [17; 4]. All of them belong to the Kyiv Archbishopric of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church. As for the Chernivtsi parish, it used to belong to the same jurisdiction. Later, its priest Leontiy Sergeev was banned from the church service and thus created an autonomous Old Believers community [1]. Nowadays, Old Believers form an isolated religious minority with several conflicts and divisions.

As for the Catholic faithful in the region, both Greek and Roman Catholic Churches have 28 parishes each. Roman Catholic community consists of around 1500 people and 13 priests lead by a Dean, whereas Greek Catholics have a bishop, 15 priests, and, presumably, more laity. Both communities are socially active, organizing recollections, humanitarian help, missionary work, etc. Greek Catholics also hold a yearly festival Obnova, which has become one of the most remarkable events in Chernivtsi. We can state, that the Roman Catholic community is more self-centered and is sometimes perceived as “Polish”, whereas the Greek Catholics act more actively so that their community has been more widespread, especially since the Maidan in 2014 and the establishment of the first-ever Catholic bishopric in Chernivtsi oblast in 2017 [17; 3].

Since the 14th century, Chernivtsi has been a shelter for an Armenian religious community. In 1845, Armenians built their church in the centre of the city. Nowadays,

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around 50 families consist the Armenian religious community forming one parish with one priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church [9].

Traditional Protestant denominations used to be widespread during the period of Austrian rule but nowadays only two minor Lutheran communities exist, which attract only a small number of people [17]. Protestants are mostly centered in Chernivtsi and the Romanian-speaking part of the region. The most common Protestant denomination is Baptists having 150 communities, around 140 pastors, and more than 8500 registered faithful. Baptists maintain some missions and educational establishments but are predominately self-centered [20].

Pentecostals belong to 104 communities with an equal number of pastors and approximately 7000 believers. One can be taught in the Ukrainian-speaking Chernivtsi Bible Seminary and Romanian-speaking Bukovynian Bible College. They also have a charity mission [6].

Adventists have 101 communities and around 7000 faithful. They own a Biblical Institute and an educational complex (joined kindergarten and school). They have the most active media mission, represented by a broadcasting company. Adventists also have a children's recreational camp in the Vyzhnytsia district [8].

Council of Protestant Churches is an umbrella organization for seven Chernivtsi Baptist and Charismatic communities and two Messianic Jewish ones, which are to be mentioned later. It unites around a thousand of Protestant believers. The largest community is the Blahodat (Grace) church consisting of approximately 200 faithful. The Council is the most active in social terms, as it has a children's centre and educational clubs, several biblical groups, an English school, which is one of the most popular in Chernivtsi. Churches of the Council also organize summer camps, psychological and humanitarian help, cooperate with different charity organizations, and organize missionary events [7].

Some other independent Protestant communities of various traditions exist all around the Chernivtsi oblast, consisting of only a limited number of faithful [17].

Jews have also formed a significant religious and ethnic minority. Before the Second World War Bukovyna was a centre of two rabbinic and one tzadik dynasties. Almost every town or big village had a synagogue and a community. Nowadays, however, only 800 Jews live in the region, mostly in Chernivtsi. Village communities consist of not more than 17 registered faithful. Three synagogues perform their service in Chernivtsi together with another synagogue, which is considered schismatic by the mainstream community. Chernivtsi Jews have close cooperation with the state educational authorities, having a state school and a kindergarten with Jewish ethnical and cultural component. Several religious courses and projects aimed at age groups also exist. The Jewish community also organizes various social projects for their ethnic community, possess a cemetery memorial house and a pilgrimage centre in Sadhora, currently a part of Chernivtsi, which used to be a major Jewish place [5].

Two communities of Messianic Jews unite around 200 faithful (150/50) but do not communicate with traditional Jews. Both communities belong to the aforementioned Council of Protestant Churches and participate in its projects [7]. The progressive Jewish community was unreachable to both state authorities and the author.

Traces of Islam in Chernivtsi oblast can be seen in Khotyn, where ruins of a Turkish mosque are still visible. Several other mosques existed in Khotyn as well but were then converted into Christian churches. The same happened in the village of Nelypivtsi [21, p. 73–75]. Presumably, several mosques existed in the region before 1775. Nowadays in Chernivtsi are four independent Muslim communities of around 3000 faithful, one in the Bukovynian State Medical University campus, which unites people of different ethnical backgrounds, who study there, one Turkish community, one Uzbek, and one belonging to the Religious Administration of Muslims of Ukraine “Umma”. Currently, Muslims have no mosque in the region but an Islamic cultural centre in Chernivtsi, which maintains religious education and cultural development. Muslims of the region belong to various religious groups and are divided predominately by their ethnic origins [2].

Although not many authentic pagan traditions and traces survived, in recent years, many people declare themselves as pagans and true offspring of the Slavic ancestors. We have found three neo-pagan communities: Native Ukrainian Faith (RUN-Vira), Native Believers (Ridnoviry), and Perun’s Will (Perunova Volia). They unite around 50 practicing believers. The first two communities consider themselves to be persecuted by the Christians and refuse to maintain any contact with other religions and the state. They also claim to be real followers of Christ. The third group is centered around the Academy of Knowledge of Faith and Rights and has partners all around Ukraine [15; 11].

Other religious movements are only minorly represented in Chernivtsi oblast. Jehovah’s Witnesses have around 20 communities with an unknown number of followers [16]. Mormons have one community with approximately 120 believers and a president [10]. The Bahá’í Faith have around 30 faithful and nine clerics [13]. International Society for Krishna Consciousness has around 60–65 followers, 50 of whom live in Chernivtsi [14].

Several denominations have no or only slight contact with both the public and the state. To those belong the Buddhists, different Hinduism or quasi-Hinduism movements, New Apostolic Church, Pastafarians, Nasoreans, Rerich Movement, True Orthodox, and others. All the aforementioned, except from Nasoreans, who have eight communities in the Hlyboka district, attract only a few decades of people and do not influence the religious picture of the region.

In conclusion, one can see that Chernivtsi oblast has a wide variety of denominations. Predominate communities are Christian, mostly Orthodox. Non-Christian religions are slightly represented and have a minor influence. After the Tomos of Autocephaly, several conflicts occurred but generally, the region remains peaceful in all its religious diversity.

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4. Interview with Fr. Leontiy Sergieev, taken in Chernivtsi on 20.01.2020. *Personal archive of the author*.

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