

THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF UKRAINIANS DURING THE SOVIET ANTI-RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN IN THE KHRUSHCHEV THAW PERIOD

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Abstract

This article examines the changes in religious consciousness and daily religious practices of Soviet Ukrainians during the so-called Khrushchev Thaw, based on sociological interviews. It is emphasized that despite the intensified atheistic propaganda and the closure of churches, religion remained a significant factor in people's lives. Religious beliefs were deeply embedded in the Ukrainian worldview, shaping their way of thinking and everyday life, which, in turn, influenced the norms and patterns of religious behavior. Risking harassment from their superiors or even losing their jobs, people continued to attend services, baptize their children, and celebrate religious holidays. Family upbringing traditions played a crucial role in restraining the state's atheistic influence on people's consciousness, particularly among the youth. Thus, the anti-religious campaign of the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, which resulted in a sharp decline in the number of religious communities and sacred sites, did not result in a substantial decline in public religiosity, as the population continued to openly or semi-covertly profess the Orthodox faith.

Keywords: Ukrainian SSR, anti-religious campaigns, Khrushchev Thaw period

Formulation of the Problem

Following Ukraine's declaration of independence, the religious factor acquired a special significance within the system of social, historical, and psychological determinants of the national and spiritual revival of Ukrainian society. These dynamics continue to intensify amid the realities of modern warfare, as war invariably heightens religious sentiments.

During the war, the number of believers in Ukraine increased by 26%, while 11% began attending church more frequently. Religiosity has evolved from beyond a mere confessional

attribute to becoming a marker of national identity, a powerful force in shaping the Ukrainian political nation, civil society, and a functional and democratic, state.

Therefore, examining the socio-political and spiritual transformations in the consciousness of the Ukrainian people under the influence of religious ideas and beliefs, including from a historical perspective, remains of utmost relevance.

The empirical foundation of this study is based on oral surveys conducted among the population of Zhytomyr and Vinnytsia regions. Throughout the study, 36 respondents aged 73 (born in 1952) to 96 (born in 1929) were interviewed between 2023 and 2025. Of these, 6 (17%) were men, while the remaining 30 (83%) were women. In terms of social background, most respondents came from peasant families. According to their religious beliefs, they identified as either Orthodox Christians or atheists (2 individuals) from families that traditionally adhered to the Orthodox faith.

During the period under study, they were either children or adolescents, which ensures the reliability of their responses, albeit with age-related interpretations. This study focuses on the religious life and church practices of Orthodox Christians residing in the central regions of the Ukrainian SSR. The research examines the religious aspect of everyday life during the Khrushchev Thaw, a period when the Ukrainian SSR experienced another wave of state-led anti-religious and anti-church campaigns.

Analysis of Recent Publications

The historiography of church-state relations in the Ukrainian SSR, as well as the religious life of the population, is well-represented in academic discourse. Among the key academic works in this field, particular attention should be given to the monograph by V. Pashchenko¹ and a series of studies by P. Bondarchuk,² where the researchers highlight, “the authorities unprecedented use of harsh administrative measures to suppress religious life in the country, which had experienced a noticeable revival in the mid-1950s and demonstrated a

¹ В.Пашченко. Православна церква в тоталітарній державі: Україна 1940 - початку 1990-х років. [Pashchenko, V. *The Orthodox Church in a Totalitarian State: Ukraine from 1940 to the Early 1990s.*] Полтава, 2005. 631 с.

² П. Бондарчук. Релігійність населення України у 40-х - 80-х роках XX ст.: соціокультурні впливи, особливості, тенденції змін. [Bondarchuk, P. *Religiosity of the Population of Ukraine in the 1940s–1980s: Socio-Cultural Influences, Characteristics, and Trends of Change*]. Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2009, 381; Його ж: Релігійна свідомість віруючих УРСР (1940–1980-і роки): повсякденні прояви, трансформації. [Bondarchuk, P. *Religious Consciousness of Believers in the Ukrainian SSR (1940s–1980s): Everyday Expressions and Transformations*]. Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2012, 322.

positive developmental trend.”³ As a result, religious denominations and clergy became the target of “intense pressure from the state and its officials.”⁴ Several valuable insights into the functioning of the church within a totalitarian state can be found in the works of O. Lysenko and O. Marushchenko.⁵ Kyiv-based scholar N. Shlichhta⁶ conducted a comprehensive analysis of the Bolshevik policy of atheism and identified various forms of collaboration between the state and the church at different times, as the Soviet government skillfully exploited religious issues to address numerous domestic and geopolitical challenges.

The author emphasizes that the Communists fully understood that physically and legally dismantling the church would not eradicate the religiosity of the population, so they sought to control it instead. Examining believers’ responses to the Communist anti-church policies, the scholar argues that they actively participated in religious practices: “they continued to attend functioning churches, gathered clandestinely for services in closed churches, and celebrated religious holidays. The church remained, in essence, the only institution overseeing the most significant events in a person's life.”⁷ Certain aspects of the religious everyday life of Soviet Ukrainians are examined by scholars from the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, P. Bondarchuk and V. Danylenko, in the sixth chapter (*Church and Religion in the Daily Life of Citizens*) of a collective monograph.⁸ A. Kyrydon⁹ devoted significant attention to studying this issue, emphasizing the necessity of examining church-state relations in Ukraine in the 20th and 21st centuries within the state-church-society framework and considering them comprehensively in the context of

³ В. Байдиш. Антирелігійна кампанія радянської влади у 1958-1964 рр. і Римо-католицька церква в Україні. [Baidych, V. *The Anti-Religious Campaign of the Soviet Authorities in 1958–1964 and the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine*]. Наукові записки Інституту політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України. No.2 (2011): 296.

⁴ Релігійна політика в Україні у 1960-х - 1980-х роках і сучасна практика міжконфесійних відносин [Bondarchuk, P. M., Danylenko, V. M., Крупина, V. O., Kubalskyi, O. N. *Religious Policy in Ukraine in the 1960s–1980s and Contemporary Interfaith Relations*. Ed. by V. M. Danylenko. Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2010, 37.

⁵ О.Лисенко, О. Марушченко. Православна церква як інструмент гібридної війни Російської Федерації проти України. [Lysenko, O., Marushchenko, O. *The Orthodox Church as an Instrument of the Hybrid War of the Russian Federation against Ukraine*.]. Сторінки воєнної історії України. No.27 (2023): 167-188.

⁶ Н.Шліхта. Церква тих, хто вижив. Радянська Україна, середина 1940-х – початок 1970-х рр. [Shlichhta, N. *The Church of the Survivors: Soviet Ukraine, Mid-1940s – Early 1970s*]. Харків: Акта, 2011. 465 с.

⁷ Н. Шліхта. Церква за умов хрущовської антирелігійної кампанії: ситуація в Україні та її польська паралель. [Shlichhta, N. *The Church in the Conditions of Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Campaign: The Situation in Ukraine and Its Polish Parallel*]. Україна модерна. No. 4-5 (2000): 260.

⁸ Соціальні трансформації в Україні: пізній сталінізм і хрущовська доба: Колективна монографія. [Social Transformations in Ukraine: Late Stalinism and the Khrushchev Era: A Collective Monograph. Ed. by V.M. Danylenko; comp. and ed. by N.O. Laas]. Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2015, 698.

⁹ А. Киридон. Держава—церква—суспільство: інверсна трансформація в Україні. Монографія. [Kiridon, A. *State–Church–Society: Inverse Transformation in Ukraine*. Monograph]. Рівне: PIC КСУ, 2011, 216.

social, economic, political, and spiritual issues. Among foreign scholars, Jane Ellis,¹⁰ William Fletcher,¹¹ John Anderson,¹² and others have examined the existence of Christianity in the USSR. Notably, Christel Lane's¹³ monograph analyzes changes in the liturgical practices and social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church, implemented by the church authorities to adapt to new socio-political realities. In general, the issue of church relations in the Ukrainian SSR is well-represented in historiography. However, scholarly attention has primarily been directed towards analyzing the official policy of the Soviet authorities on church-state relations, whereas the study of religious daily life and individual religious practices remains underexplored and requires further in-depth analysis.

Presentation of the Main Material

This study aims to outline the factors that shaped religious consciousness and practices among the population of Soviet Ukraine during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaigns. Given that this study is grounded in the methodological principles of everyday life history, it is logical to examine some contemporary approaches to defining its essence. First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that there is no universally accepted definition of everyday life. The vast majority of researchers consider the following as key conceptual dimensions of everyday life within scholarly analysis: interpersonal communication, housing, material objects, everyday knowledge, language, habits, traditions, daily behavior, and lifestyle, among others. A person's immediate living environment constitutes everyday life, which operates according to certain rules and serves as "the foundation of the structural organization of daily existence."¹⁴ Everyday life is dynamic and ever evolving. Its "most fundamental characteristic is its continuous unfolding, its constant progression, and its resistance to interruption. Even extraordinary events rarely disrupt it entirely; rather, they are merely integrated into its routine framework."¹⁵ Everyday life functions as a social environment that facilitates an individual's religious socialization and contributes to shaping behavioral patterns. Accordingly, agents of

¹⁰ Ellis J. *The Russian Orthodox Church: a contemporary history*. London: Routledge, 1988.

¹¹ Fletcher V. *Soviet believers: the religious sector of the population*, - Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981.

¹² Anderson J. *Religion, state and politics in the Soviet Union and the successor states, 1953-1993*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹³ Lane C. *Christian religion in the Soviet Union: a sociological study*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978.

¹⁴ В. Докаш. Релігія як чинник формування етнонаціональної свідомості. [Dokash, V. *Religion as a Factor in the Formation of Ethno-National Consciousness*]. *Українське релігієзнавство*. No.50 (2009): 153-159.

¹⁵ М. Окрут. Повсякденна реальність: пошуки визначення. [Okрут, M. *Everyday Reality: Search for Definition*]. *Український соціум*. No. 5 (2006): 40.

socialization—primarily the family, church, religious community, and the state—play a crucial role in this process.

In any society, the public sphere exerts influence on the transformation of private life. The extent of this influence depends on the nature of the prevailing political system, whether democratic or totalitarian. The Soviet government's church policy was overtly discriminatory and anti-religious, rooted in the “central ideological commitment to constructing a secularized society.”¹⁶ Since coming to power, the efforts of the CPSU and the Bolshevik government have been directed at suppressing all forms of religious expression in the state. The church and clergy were labeled as ‘class enemies’ and subjected to systematic repression, ranging from bans on religious services and confiscation of church property to the physical elimination of clergy and religious institutions.

Throughout the existence of the USSR, the religious policy of the Bolshevik-Soviet government underwent a series of transformations, shaped by both external and internal factors. Notably, “the period of the 1920s and 1930s marked critical stages in the formation of a power-based model of church-state relations, evolving from an initial simplistic vision of the rapid creation of a fully secular society to a more structured atheistic framework.”¹⁷ During the Second World War, the aggressive anti-religious rhetoric of the Stalinist regime was “replaced by a more measured and less aggressive critique of religion, alongside a more conciliatory stance toward the existence of church institutions and clergy.”¹⁸ This shift was driven by Stalin's need to exploit religion as a tool for political, military, and national mobilization in the fight against the German occupiers. The period of Khrushchev's Thaw, according to the vast majority of researchers, is characterized by the launch of a massive anti-religious campaign in the wake of de-Stalinization—a “total attack on religion”¹⁹ which shattered all public expectations for the continuation of the more liberal church policy that had emerged during the war.

¹⁶ Н. Шліхта. Церква за умов хрущовської антирелігійної кампанії: ситуація в Україні та її польська паралель. [Shlichta, N. *The Church in the Conditions of Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Campaign: The Situation in Ukraine and Its Polish Parallel*]: 247.

¹⁷ Л. Бабенко. Як українців робили атеїстами: державна політика проти релігії у перші десятиліття радянської влади. [Babenko, L. *How Ukrainians Were Made Atheists: State Policy Against Religion in the First Decades of Soviet Power*]. *Україна модерна*. (2017). <https://uamoderna.com/md/babenko-atheism/>

¹⁸ П. Бондарчук. Особливості релігійної ситуації в Україні у середині 1940-х - на початку 1950-х рр. [Bondarchuk, P. M. *Features of the Religious Situation in Ukraine in the Mid-1940s – Early 1950s*]. *Український історичний журнал*. No. 2 (2010): 137.

¹⁹ І. Андрухів, Р. Калюжний, А. Шевченко. Політика радянської влади у сфері релігії у західній Україні у першій половині 60-х рр. XX ст. [Andruxiv, I., Kalyuzhnyi, R., Shevchenko, A. *Policy of the Soviet Authorities in the Sphere of Religion in Western Ukraine in the First Half of the 1960s*]. *Юридичний вісник. Повітряне і космічне право*. No. 3 (2011): 23.

On June 7, 1954, the Central Committee of the CPSU issued a resolution “On the Significant Shortcomings of Scientific-Atheist Propaganda and Measures for Its Improvement,” marking the beginning of “a large-scale government offensive against religion aimed at reducing, and if possible, eliminating religious influence within socialist society.”²⁰ The document explicitly outlined the primary target of the atheist campaign: the youth, who were to be systematically distanced from religious influence. A powerful propaganda machine explained party resolutions through the mouths of its speakers—party officials, lecturers, and agitators — by means of direct meetings with various audiences. Other channels of mass anti-religious propaganda in the hands of the state were the press, television and radio, educational institutions, museums, libraries, clubs, etc. In particular, the newspaper “Soviet Zhytomyr Region” of December 14, 1959, wrote: “The Party and the Soviet government have been and are working hard to eradicate from the minds of the population religious vestiges that prevent them from taking an active part in building a new life.”²¹ Atheistic education of the future generation became an important component of the Soviet educational system.

The overwhelming majority of our respondents, who were of school age during the period we studied, associate their memories of their own religious experiences and practices with their family and school.²² Usually, they see the root cause of their religious beliefs in their family upbringing, mainly under the influence of their mother. When asked who in the family shaped their religious feelings, the respondents answered without hesitation: “Of course, my mother.”²³ In particular, Nila Zadorozhniuk, a native of the village of Mohylne, Korosten district, Zhytomyr region, recalls: “Our mother was very religious. My mother's father read in church, he was a *starosta*, and my mother went to church from childhood, and they sang in church until her death. My mother and father were very religious, they celebrated all the holidays, prayed to God, went to church to sing and observed religion at home. My mother went to church until her death and died a singer.”²⁴ Kateryna Andriivna Osadcha from the village of Bystryk, Ruzhyn district, also points to the formation of her religious ideas under the

²⁰ В. Сергієнко. Лекційна пропаганда у системі антирелігійної політики радянської держави у 1950-их роках. [Sergienko, V. Lecture Propaganda in the System of Anti-Religious Policy of the Soviet State in the 1950s.]. *Історична пам'ять: наук. зб.* No. 37 (2017): 55.

²¹ Радянська Житомирщина. [Soviet Zhytomyr region]. 1959. 14 грудня. №242 (8977).

²² Тексти інтерв'ю зберігають особливості мовлення респондентів. [The texts of the interviews retain the peculiarities of the respondents' speech].

²³ Інтерв'ю з Валентиною Акуліч [Interview with Valentyna Akulich]. 1947 р.н., записане у м. Житомир 10 жовтня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

²⁴ Інтерв'ю з Нілою Задорожнюк [Interview with Nila Zadorozhniuk]. 1938 р.н., записане у с. Зозулинцях Хмельницького району Вінницької області 15 жовтня 2021 р. *Архів автора*.

influence of her mother: “When I was maybe in the third grade, my mother took me to celebrate Easter. I was so happy and happy that it was in a church. My mother loved going to church. She used to go to Ruzhyn when we didn't have a church.”²⁵ Vira Humeniuk from the village of Lypno expressed similar thoughts: “My mother taught us all to pray from childhood.”²⁶ Thus, it was in the family that traditional religious models of human behavior were laid down and inherited, with the mother acting as their guardian.

Despite a massive atheistic intrusion into the spiritual realm of the younger generation, the communist authorities failed to eradicate the religious sentiments and beliefs of Ukrainian children and youth. However, it should be emphasized that most of the respondents we interviewed did not identify themselves as devout believers, considering regular church attendance a key indicator of religiosity. “Well, I wouldn’t say I was truly religious,” says Nila Zadorozhniuk, “because I didn’t go to church, but I prayed to God. We all celebrated religious holidays—on Easter, we would gather at our parents’ house, celebrate, sing carols, and come together as a family for Christmas and Easter. With children, with everyone, we would go to our mother’s house and celebrate Christmas or Easter all day long.” The woman clarifies: “We carried God in our hearts, but we couldn’t pray as it was forbidden.”²⁷ Another respondent reflects: “What do you mean by religious? I used to go to church, not very often, but I was a believer. And I still am. My parents and grandparents were believers, and so am I.”²⁸ For some respondents, the question of their religiosity raises doubts: “Well... I do believe, I do believe,” says Maria Pastukh, a native of Velykyi Mytnyk village, Khmilnyk District, Vinnytsia Region, somewhat uncertainly, explaining her belief in God by stating, “Everyone believed back then, and so did we. Our parents believed, so we did too.”²⁹ An interesting response comes from Mykola Liutyk from Liubar, Zhytomyr Region, who could not identify himself as a believer. However, when the interviewer asked for clarification—“Who forced your parents to baptize their children if they were not certain about their faith in God?” — he confidently replied: “No one forced them. I only know one thing—there was a saying: “Without God, you won’t make it past the doorstep.” My grandmother Nadiia was a believer, all my uncles were believers.

²⁵Інтерв’ю з Катериною Осадчою [Interview with Kateryna Andriivna Osadcha]/ 1949 р.н., записане у с. Бистрик Ружинського району Житомирська обл. 14 жовтня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

²⁶ Інтерв’ю з Вірою Гуменюк [Interview with Vira Humeniuk]. 1948 р.н., записане у с. Липно Любарського району Житомирської області, 29 жовтня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

²⁷ Інтерв’ю з Нілою Задорожнюк [Interview with Nila Zadorozhniuk]...

²⁸ Інтерв’ю з Валентиною Акуліч [Interview with Valentyna Akulich]...

²⁹ Інтерв’ю з Марією Пастух [Interview with Maria Pastukh]. 1941 р.н., записане у с. Великий Митник Хмельницького р-ну Вінницької обл. 10 жовтня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

They didn't always go to church. Not because they didn't want to, but because they were busy working to provide for their children—to clothe and feed them.³⁰ As we can see, the respondents we interviewed associate the depth of their religious feelings not so much with a conscious understanding of faith as with following family traditions and engaging in customary religious practices. Our findings align with the argument of Ukrainian religious scholar P. Bondarchuk: “The traditional maintenance of religiosity was the most widespread among the religious movements that existed in Ukraine for a long period and became an integral part of Ukrainian society—Orthodoxy, Greek Catholicism, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism.”³¹

The late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s marked the peak of Soviet anti-religious policy, aimed at definitively settling the 'religious question' in the process of building a communist society. The primary methods of this campaign involved rigorous oversight and regulation of church and religious institutions within the framework of existing religious legislation.

However, as N. Shlichta observes, “No union or republican leader issued an official statement advocating a decisive struggle against religion or a full-scale offensive against the Church, nor did any official document of the highest party leadership specify concrete objectives for this anti-religious campaign. The Party ostensibly fought not against religious beliefs themselves, but against corruption within the Church and clergymen who violated Soviet legislation on religious cults.”³² Clergymen were subject to administrative penalties for violating state-imposed regulations on the organization and conduct of religious rites, such as weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies.

This policy led to the mass closure of religious buildings and their repurposing as warehouses, atheist museums, and cultural centers. Nina Serhiivna Zadorozhniuk recalls that after their church was closed, “there was a club there for a long time, then a grain warehouse. They brought grains all over the district. But the church was wooden, very tall from bottom to top, so the district authorities feared it could be set on fire, which would leave the district without seed reserves. So they locked the church. It stood until 1969, and in 1969, it was burned down.”³³

³⁰ Інтерв'ю з Миколою Лютиком [Interview with Mykola Liutyk]. 1952 р.н., записане у м. Любар Житомирської обл. 29 вересня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

³¹ П. Бондарчук. Особливості мотивації релігійності та здійснення релігійних дій віруючими в УРСР (середина 1940-х – середина 1980-х рр.). [Bondarchuk P. *Peculiarities of the Motivation of Religiosity and the Implementation of Religious Actions by Believers in the Ukrainian SSR (mid-1940s – mid-1980s)*]. *Україна XX ст.: культура, ідеологія, політика*: Зб. ст. Київ, No.12 (2007): 389.

³² Н. Шліхта. Церква за умов хрущовської антирелігійної кампанії: ситуація в Україні та її польська паралель. [Schlichta N. *The Church in the Conditions of Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Campaign...*]: 253.

³³ Інтерв'ю зі Нілою Задорожнюк [Interview with Nila Zadorozhniuk]....

Recalling those times, another narrator describes a similar situation: “In the village of Lipno (Liubar District, Zhytomyr Region), the church was also closed and converted into a grain warehouse. The villagers fiercely defended their church, engaging in physical confrontations. And in the neighboring village of Kutyshcha, the church was dismantled. However, no one wanted to take the building materials because it was considered a sin.”³⁴ In general, local residents rarely participated in state-organized church demolitions, the destruction of icons, or the disposal of religious artifacts, as they perceived such actions as sacrilege. Fear of divine retribution served as a strong deterrent against anti-religious actions. N. Kobilinska recalls that the church in her village had survived German occupation but was dismantled by the Communists in 1958: “Oh, it was terrifying. People said that those who dismantled the church later died of illness. No one wanted the church to be torn down.”³⁵

The closure of churches altered the religious practices of believers. Many were forced to attend churches located at significant distances from their homes, leading to infrequent visits. Nadiia Antonivna Kobilinska notes: “People attended church on major religious holidays. But since it was far away, they rarely went. However, on major religious holidays, they made sure to attend church.”³⁶ For many, attending church became a challenge due to the long distances, prompting them to pray at home instead. For example, Petro Fedorovych Kaidaniuk from the village of Tsvitanka, Chervonoarmiyskyi District, Zhytomyr Region, recalls that “by the late 1950s, people continued to pray, but no longer in churches—only in their homes.”³⁷ This is confirmed by Vira Oleksandrivna Humeniuk: “Men of my father’s generation would gather at our home every Sunday and read the Bible with him. I remember it from my childhood. They read aloud, while I hid behind the pillows and listened.”³⁸ It is evident that the restriction of laypeople’s access to churches through mass closures and demolitions, coupled with aggressive atheistic propaganda, “caused profound (and negative) shifts in the national mentality.”³⁹ disrupting the traditional religious way of life for laypeople.⁴⁰ However, the religious attitudes

³⁴ Інтерв’ю з Вірою Гуменюк [Interview with Vira Humeniuk]...

³⁵ Інтерв’ю з Надією Кобилінською [Interview with Nadiya Kobylynska]. 1941 р.н., записане у с.Дівошин Житомирської обл. 24 жовтня 2023 р. Архів автора.

³⁶ Інтерв’ю з Надією Боровик [Interview with Nadiya Borovuk]. 1950 р.н., записане у с. Березники Смільчинського району Житомирської області 18 жовтня 2023 р. *Архів автора*.

³⁷ Інтерв’ю з Петром Кайдаником [Interview with Petro Kaidaniuk]. 1947 р.н., записане у с.Цвітінка Червоноармійського району Житомирської обл. 22 листопада 2023 р. *Архів автора*.

³⁸ Інтерв’ю з Вірою Гуменюк [Interview with Vira Humeniuk]...

³⁹ Соціальні трансформації в Україні: пізній сталінізм і хрущовська доба: Колективна монографія. [Social transformations in Ukraine: Late Stalinism and the Khrushchev Era: a collective monograph...]: 373.

⁴⁰ Г. Кулагіна-Стадніченко. Спосіб життя вірянина як складова релігійного комплексу. [Kulagina-Stadnichenko H. *The Lifestyle of a Believer as a Component of a Religious Complex. Religion in the Problems of*

ingrained at the subconscious level and sustained by the traditional religiosity of multiple generations of Ukrainian families endured the trials of a difficult period for the Church.

In addition to attending church services and daily prayers, an essential aspect of a believer's daily life is the fulfillment of other religious needs, "which shape their interests, aspirations, and life purpose."⁴¹ This includes religious rites such as baptisms, funerals, weddings, and attendance at festive services for Christmas, Pentecost, Easter, and other holidays. The majority of respondents stated that both they and their children had been baptized. However, when asked, "Could you openly baptize your children in a church?" – responses varied. Some answered: "All my children were baptized in church. Openly,"⁴² or, "Yes, they were baptized. Openly. They were baptized, in church openly,"⁴³ and others: "No-no-no, I was not baptized, and at that time, when we were, our parents did not baptize us and we were not in church,"⁴⁴ or: "You could not be baptized openly, the authorities forbade it, if they caught you, they would punish you."⁴⁵

These differences stem from the Soviet authorities' policy at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, which "primarily involved threats and punishment of individuals for engaging in religious life or raising children in a religious spirit."⁴⁶ Repressions were mainly directed at citizens involved in public life (ideology, politics, education, administration), whereas ordinary peasants were largely ignored. This is exactly what Nadiya Ivanovna Borovyk meant when answering a question about the baptism ceremony: "Well, it was... both open and not open. It was closed to communists. It was closed to Komsomol members, communists. But ordinary people were baptized and went to church."⁴⁷

The persecution of clergy and laypeople for performing religious rites compelled them to find ways to fulfill their religious needs while avoiding conflict with the authorities. The clandestine practice of baptism—often conducted without the presence of parents or relatives

Its Structure and Functionality. Scientific Collection. Edited by Prof. A. Kolodnyi]. *Українське релігієзнавство*. No.78 (2016): 55.

⁴¹ О. Бучма. Емоційно-почуттєва релігійного феномену. [Buchma O. *Emotional and Sensory Aspects of the Religious Phenomenon*]. *Українське релігієзнавство*. No.78 (2016): 25.

⁴² Інтерв'ю з Надією Гиндич [Interview with Nadiya Hindych]. 1946 р.н., записане у с. Кам'янка Романівського району Житомирської обл. 18 вересня 2023 р. *Архів автора*.

⁴³ Інтерв'ю з Ніною Данилюк [Interview with Nina Danyliuk]. 1946 р.н., записане у м. Житомир 18 жовтня 2023. *Архів автора*.

⁴⁴ Інтерв'ю з Юлією Богатко [Interview with Yulia Bohatko]. 1949 р.н., записане у с. Вигнанка Любарського району Житомирської обл. 17 жовтня 2023 р. *Архів автора*.

⁴⁵ Інтерв'ю з Петром Кайданюк [Interview with Petro Kaidaniuk]...

⁴⁶ В. Байдич. *op. cit.*, P. 301.

⁴⁷ Інтерв'ю з Надією Боровик [Interview with Nadiya Borovyk]. 1950 р.н., записане у с. Березники Ємільчинського району Житомирської обл. 18 жовтня 2023 р. *Архів автора*.

who held party membership cards and without official church records—became widespread. Nila Zadorozhnyuk recalls that “when we baptized our son, we brought the priest home, he baptized him and did not write in the book. When we baptized our second son, I went to a neighboring village, and my mother took the child without me, so that I would not know. We baptized in the church.”⁴⁸ V. Akulich had a similar experience: “When we baptized our daughter, we secretly went to the priest in the neighboring village. And in the house, there, not in the church, but in the house.” The woman clarifies that “even when there was a funeral and the priest was at the funeral, Baba Lena hid in the bushes so that no one would see. She was not in the house during the memorial service. It was a funeral, you understand. And she was afraid.”⁴⁹

The primary deterrent was the threat of punishment, including dismissal from work. However, as we can see, many people still chose to take this risk. Even some representatives of the authorities, a number of whom were believers themselves, sometimes limited their actions to verbal reprimands and warnings. For example, Nila Serhiivna Zadorozhniuk, who worked as a village librarian at the time, recalls: “I had a lot of trouble because of my son’s baptism. I was summoned to the district committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine numerous times, reprimanded, but I kept my job.”⁵⁰

In the early 1960s, the authorities launched a new wave of anti-religious campaigns. In accordance with the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine of October 9, 1962, “On the State and Measures to Improve the Scientific and Atheistic Education of Workers in the Ukrainian SSR,” public associations aimed at conducting mass atheistic propaganda among the local population were established under party committees. The activities of these so-called “assistance commissions,” which actively involved workforce collectives, cultural, and educational institutions, became a defining feature of the anti-religious campaign.⁵¹ To limit the influence of the Church on the younger generation, commission members monitored churches on major religious holidays, primarily Easter and Christmas, or organized alternative activities such as “Saturday clean-ups,” sports competitions, and other mass events scheduled to coincide with religious holidays.

⁴⁸ Інтерв’ю з Нілою Задорожнюк... [Interview with Nila Zadorozhniuk]...

⁴⁹ Інтерв’ю з Валентиною Акуліч [Interview with Valentyna Akulich]...

⁵⁰ Інтерв’ю з Нілою Задорожнюк... [Interview with Nila Zadorozhniuk]...

⁵¹ Н. Шліхта. Основні форми і методи атеїстичної пропаганди в Українській РСР наприкінці 50-х - на початку 60-х років. [Schlichta N. *The Main Forms and Methods of Atheistic Propaganda in the Ukrainian SSR in the Late 1950s - Early 1960s.*] *Наукові записки НАУКМА: Історія*. No. 14. (1999): 80-87.

The vast majority of our respondents, who were between the ages of 10 and 15 at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, recall their experiences through the lens of school life. Nearly all of them emphasize that school authorities forbade them from attending church, particularly from participating in Easter and Christmas services: “Teachers forbade us from going. They told us not to, saying religion is the opium of the people, a deception. We were told not to go, not to pray, not to sing carols, not to participate in New Year’s traditions.”⁵²

Students who defied the ban by attending church faced punishment: “Teachers at school took disciplinary measures. They held meetings where students were publicly shamed at Pioneer assemblies. Those who participated in caroling or other holiday customs were called to stand in front of the entire school at morning assembly and reprimanded.”⁵³ “At school, they were summoned to the principal’s office.”⁵⁴ “In class, they were singled out in front of their peers.”⁵⁵ “At school assemblies, they were humiliated.”⁵⁶ “Teachers patrolled outside churches to prevent students from attending Easter and Christmas services.”⁵⁷ “Both the principal and teachers were stationed outside the church during Easter. They chased us away, but we kept going—we hid, but we were still there.”⁵⁸

Conclusions

Thus “the anti-religious campaign of the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, which resulted in a sharp decline in the number of religious communities and sacred sites, did not lead to a significant decrease in the religiosity of the population or its support for religious institutions.”⁵⁹ Family religious traditions served as a strong counterbalance, mitigating the effects of atheist propaganda among young people.

Daily religious practices—such as reading morning and evening prayers, venerating icons in private homes, refraining from household chores on religious holidays, attending

⁵²Інтерв’ю з Марією Пастух [Interview with Maria Pastukh]....

⁵³ Інтерв’ю із Нілою Задорожнюк [Interview with Nila Zadorozhniuk]....

⁵⁴ Інтерв’ю з Антоніною Вакуленко [Interview with Antonina Vakulenko]. 1939р.н., записане у с. Івановичі Черняхівського району Житомирської обл. 29 вересня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

⁵⁵ Інтерв’ю з Євою Грибинською [Interview with Eva Hrybyska]. 1943 р.н., записане у с.Сахни Ружинського району Житомирської області 20 вересня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

⁵⁶ Інтерв’ю з Вірою Гуменюк [Interview with Vira Humeniuk]....

⁵⁷ Інтерв’ю з Юлією Богатко [Interview with Yulia Bohatko].

⁵⁸ Інтерв’ю з Марією З-нюк [Interview with Maria Z-nyuk]. 1951 р.н., записане у с. Степки Овруцького району Житомирської області 29 жовтня 2023 року. *Архів автора*.

⁵⁹ Релігійний чинник у процесах нації- та державотворення: досвід сучасної України [Монографія.]. [*The Religious Factor in the Processes of Nation- and State-Building: The Experience of Modern Ukraine* [Monograph]. Київ: Інститут політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І.Ф. Кураса НАН України, 2012, 224.

church services, celebrating a village's patron saint day, and singing carols within the family—directly and indirectly contributed to the religious socialization of children and youth.

As adults, they would go on to baptize their own children, even if doing so meant risking their jobs or losing their Party or Komsomol membership. On the one hand, this can be seen as a tribute to tradition; on the other, it demonstrates that religion maintained a central place in their system of values and beliefs.

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