

BOLSHEVIK ANTI-RELIGIOUS POLICY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE ON THE YOUTH OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE VOLHYNIA-ZHYTOMYR REGION (1925–1936)

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Abstract

The relevance of the research problem lies in the need to expand scholarly knowledge about the role and place of national minorities (Poles, Germans, and Jews) in the processes of Sovietization of the Ukrainian countryside and in the establishment of the totalitarian regime in general during the first decades of Soviet rule in Ukraine. Drawing on extensive source material, the article examines the policy of the Bolshevik authorities toward the youth of the Polish, German, and Jewish national minorities in the Volyn–Zhytomyr region against the background of the Sovietization of the countryside in the mid-1920s to the early 1930s. It is noted that Soviet youth policy was implemented through an extensive network of party-state and public institutions, primarily the Leninist Communist Youth League of Ukraine, and was aimed at the unification of young people's value orientations (political, national, and civic). Within this system, atheistic education was regarded as one of the authorities' priority tasks, since the religious consciousness of national communities constituted one of the most important factors of their identity. The imposition of atheistic consciousness among the youth of national minorities proved to be an extremely difficult task for the authorities, as the abandonment of national religious traditions in the context of total Sovietization and repression was perceived by people as an existential threat. As a result, the everyday religious practices of national communities assumed more concealed forms, while their gradual displacement from people's lives extended over many years.

Keywords: Volyn–Zhytomyr region, Soviet authorities, rural youth, national minorities.

Formulation of the Problem

The younger generation has traditionally served as a key driver of social dynamics and innovative development, which has made it an important target for deliberate influence by state and political institutions. It is therefore unsurprising that the Bolsheviks, in the course of implementing the Sovietization of the Ukrainian countryside, concentrated their efforts

primarily on the youth segment of the rural population. Seeking to enlist the support of young people during the implementation of large-scale campaigns—including the anti-church campaign, *korenizatsiia* (indigenization), the elimination of illiteracy, collectivization, among others—all aimed at consolidating the totalitarian regime, the Soviet authorities actively sought forms and methods of drawing young people into the circle of their allies. Within the framework of the *korenizatsiia* policy, the youth of national minorities—particularly Poles, Germans, Jews, and others—also became targets of Bolshevik influence. However, whereas in the first decade of their rule the Bolsheviks declared support for the linguistic and cultural identity of national communities, by the early 1930s this policy gave way to a course of unification that entailed the dismantling of national institutions and the application of repressions against representatives of national minorities, who were increasingly treated as a potentially disloyal element of Soviet society. Atheistic education of youth occupied a priority position within this system, since the religious consciousness of national communities constituted one of the most important factors of their identity.

Analysis of Recent Publications

The problem of anti-religious education of youth in the Ukrainian SSR is well represented in contemporary Ukrainian historiography. Virtually every scholar who has studied the atheistic orientation of Soviet policy in the first half of the twentieth century has addressed this topic (O. Rublov,¹ A. Kyrydon,² I. Pohonets,³ O. Chuchalin,⁴ O. Ihnatusha,⁵ and others).

¹О. Рубльов. Державно-церковні відносини в УСРР у 1920-х роках: історіографія проблеми. [Rublev O. State-Church Relations in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s: Problems of Historiography]. Український історичний журнал. 2001, (4), 98–112.

²А. Киридон. Держава – церква – суспільство: інверсна трансформація в Україні: [монографія]. [Kyrydon A. State – Church – Society: Inverse Transformation in Ukraine: [monograph].] Рівне: РІС КСУ, 2011. 216 с.; А. Киридон. Час випробувань: держава, церква, суспільство в радянській Україні 1917–1930-х років. [Time of Trials: State, Church, Society in Soviet Ukraine, 1917–1930s]. Тернопіль: Підручники і посібники, 2005. 384 с.; А. Киридон. Утвердження комуністичного побуту в суспільстві Радянської України 1920-их років: онтологічний і аксіологічний аспекти. [The establishment of communist life in the society of Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s: ontological and axiological aspects]. Актуальні проблеми вітчизняної та всесвітньої історії. Наукові записки Рівненського державного гуманітарного університету: Збірник наукових праць. Випуск 19. Рівне: РДГУ, 2010. С. 59-67.

³І. Погонєць. Організаційне оформлення антирелігійної політики в СРСР у 1920-х рр. [Pohonets I. Organizational design of anti-religious policy in the USSR in the 1920s]. Збірник матеріалів V Міжнародної наукової конференції студентів і молодих вчених. Донецький національний університет імені Василя Стуса, 2023. С. 271-273.

⁴О. П. Чучалин. Вплив атеїстичної пропаганди радянської преси на релігійну ситуацію в УСРР у 1920-1930-ті рр. (Chuchalin O. P., The influence of atheistic propaganda of the Soviet Press on the religious situation in URKSSR in the 1920s and 1930s). Гілея: науковий вісник. 2019. Вип. 142(1). С. 182-188.

⁵О. Игнатуша. Антирелігійні кампанії 1920-1930-х рр. Історія релігії в Україні. Праці XI Міжнародної наукової конференції (Львів, 16-19 травня, 2001 р.). Кн. 1. [O. Ignatusha. Anti-religious campaigns of the 1920s-1930s. History of religion in Ukraine. Proceedings of the XI International Scientific Conference (Lviv, May 16-19, 2001). Book 1]. Львів: Логос, 2001. С. 211–216.

Of particular significance is the work of Vinnytsia-based scholars I.V. Mazur-Stukalska, and A.V. Voinarovsky, who provide a detailed analysis of the forms and methods of implementing Bolshevik anti-religious policy in the 1920s, emphasizing the important role of Komsomol cells—described as “direct conduits of Bolshevik policy on the ground”—within the system of atheistic education of youth.⁶ The theme of atheistic education of Ukrainian youth in the 1920s-1930s is also addressed indirectly in the works of M. Palinchak and S. Bokoch,⁷ A. Fesenko,⁸ and V. Prylutsky,⁹ who highlight the high degree of religiosity among youth as a factor that long impeded the implementation of Bolshevik policies on the ground. A contrasting view is offered by A. Kyrydon, who argues that “the society of Soviet Ukraine in 1917-1930s “permitted” the elimination of traditional Orthodox ideology, the destruction of religious organizations, and the demolition of churches,” as it was subconsciously prepared for the acceptance of Soviet ideological orientations as a result of the destructive socio-political and spiritual processes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries —associated with the emergence of socialist ideas, the First World War, and the erosion of the very foundations of the Church, which had failed to “serve as the conscience of the social organism.”¹⁰

However, the issue of exploiting the youth of national minorities in the anti-religious policy of the Soviet authorities is addressed only tangentially by researchers. In this regard, studies by scholars who have examined the situation of national minorities in the Ukrainian SSR in general, or their youth organizations and movements, may prove useful (L. Babenko,¹¹

⁶I.V. Мазур-Стукальська, А.В. Войнаровський. Антирелігійна політика радянської влади початку 20-х років ХХ століття: форми та методи (на прикладі губернських міст України). [Mazur-Stukalska I.V., Voinarovsky A.V. Anti-religious policy of the Soviet government in the early 1920s: forms and methods (on the example of provincial cities of Ukraine)]. Наукові записки [Вінницького державного педагогічного університету імені Михайла Коцюбинського]. Серія: Історія. 2014. Вип. 22. С. 59-64. С. 59-63.

⁷М. Палінчак, С. Бокоч. Радянська релігійна політика та її наслідки в незалежній Україні [Palinchak, M., Bokoch, S. Soviet religious policy and its consequences in independent Ukraine]. Східноєвропейський історичний бюлетень. Дрогобич, 2021. № 20. С. 184-194.

⁸А. Фесенко. Антирелігійна політика радянської влади у другій половині 1920-х рр. на Донеччині: на прикладі діяльності істинно-православної церкви [Fesenko, A. Anti-religious policy of the Soviet government in the second half of the 1920s in the Donetsk region: on the example of the activities of the true Orthodox Church.]. Збірник наукових праць за матеріалами Всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції з міжнародною участю „Тоталітаризм як система знищення національної пам’яті“, 11-12 червня 2020 року. Львів: Друкарня Львівського національного медичного університету імені Данила Галицького, 2020. С. 488–490.

⁹В. І. Прилуцький. Молодь у суспільно-політичному житті УСРР (1928–1933 рр.). [Prylutsky V. I. Youth in the socio-political life of the Ukrainian SSR (1928–1933)]. Український історичний журнал. 2002. № 4. С. 60–68.

¹⁰А. Киридон. Держава – церква – суспільство: інверсна трансформація в Україні: [монографія]. [Kyrydon A. State – Church – Society: Inverse Transformation in Ukraine: [monograph].] Рівне: ПІС КСУ, 2011. С.128-129.

¹¹Л. 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 decade of Soviet rule]. Україна Модерна. 2017. <http://uamoderna.com/md/babenko-atheism/>

L. Yakubova,¹² L. Dudka,¹³ R. Motrychuk,¹⁴ M. Zhurba and M. Zholob,¹⁵ B. Chirko¹⁶ and others).

Thus, a historiographical analysis of the problem under investigation leads to the conclusion that, despite a substantial body of scholarship on the anti-religious and anti-church policy of the Bolshevik-Soviet authorities in the 1920s-1930s, the specific focus of this policy on the younger generation of national minorities in the Ukrainian SSR has yet to become the subject of a dedicated study. The relevance of the topic under investigation is further reinforced by the virtual absence of scholarly works that examine it from a regional perspective. The authors therefore aim to investigate the impact of Soviet anti-religious policy on the youth of the Polish, German, and Jewish national minorities in the Volhynia-Zhytomyr region against the backdrop of Sovietization processes from 1925 to the early 1930s. Drawing upon an extensive body of primary sources, we consider it necessary to examine the content, methods, and forms of the anti-church and atheistic propaganda conducted by the Soviet authorities within the youth milieu of national minorities in Volhynia and the Zhytomyr region, as well as the means of involving representatives of the younger generation in anti-religious activities.

Within the framework of this study, the term ‘Volhynia-Zhytomyr region’ (Volhynia-Zhytomyr, the Volhynian region) refers to the Zhytomyr, Novohrad-Volynskiyi, and Shepetivka *okruhy* (districts) of the Ukrainian SSR, which were established on the territory of the former Volyn Governorate following its reorganization in 1925 and shared common socio-demographic characteristics.

¹²Л. Якубова. Повсякденне життя етнічних меншин радянської України у міжвоєнну добу. [Yakubova L. Everyday life of ethnic minorities in Soviet Ukraine in the interwar period]. Інститут історії України НАН України. Київ, 2011. 339с.

¹³Л. Дудка. Журнал «Безвірник» у системі антирелігійної пропаганди в Україні в 1920–1930-х роках [Dudka, L. The magazine "Bezvirnyk" in the system of anti-religious propaganda in Ukraine in the 1920s–1930s.]. Науковий щорічник «Історія релігій в Україні». Інститут релігієзнавства – філія Львівського музею історії, 2010, № 20, 336–341; Його ж: Спілка безвірників у контексті антирелігійної пропаганди в Україні: питання хронології та періодизації [Dudka, L. The Union of Infidels in the Context of Anti-Religious Propaganda in Ukraine: Issues of Chronology and Periodization], Емінак. 2016. Вип.1(2). С. 48–55.

¹⁴Р. Мотричук. Атеїстична діяльність більшовиків серед національних меншин України в 1920 ті роки [Motrychuk R., 2014, Atheistic activity of the Bolsheviks among national minorities of Ukraine in the 1920s.]. Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького національного університету. 2014. Вип.40 С.101-104.

¹⁵М. Журба, М. Жолоб. Піднесене і земне: релігійні громади етнічних меншин в умовах комуністичного режиму в Україні (20–30-і рр. XX ст.). [Zhurba, M., Zholob, M., 2019, The Sublime and the Earthly: Religious Communities of Ethnic Minorities under the Communist Regime in Ukraine (1920s–1930s)]. Вінниця: ТОВ «Твори», 2019. 308с.

¹⁶В. Чирко. Репресивна політика радянської влади щодо німецької етнічної групи України в умовах сталінського тоталітарного режиму (1920–ті – 1930–ті роки) [Chirko V. Repressive policy of the Soviet authorities towards the German ethnic group of Ukraine under the Stalinist totalitarian regime (1920s – 1930s)]. Гілея: науковий вісник. Київ, 2016. Вип. 112. С. 42–47.

Presentation of the Main Material

In the period from 1925 to the 1930s, the youth policy of the Soviet Union acquired a systematic and purposeful character, becoming an important instrument for consolidating Bolshevik power and shaping the ‘new person’ under the conditions of an emerging totalitarian regime. Youth was viewed by the Soviet leadership not merely as a socio-demographic group, but primarily as a strategic resource for political stability and ideological reproduction of the system. It was precisely during this period that the institutionalization of state control over the processes of upbringing, socialization, and worldview formation of the younger generation took place. Soviet youth policy was implemented through an extensive network of party-state and public structures—above all the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (*Vsesoyuznyy leninskiy kommunisticheskiy soyuz molodyozhi*, VLKSM), the Pioneer Organization, and the education system. Their activities were directed toward the unification of the value orientations of young people, the cultivation of unconditional loyalty to communist ideology, and the cult of the Party and its leaders, as well as the displacement of alternative forms of identity—religious, national, and civic. The dominant role within this system was indisputably played by the VLKSM, which rapidly transformed ‘from a public organization into a state-controlled mass structure for the education of youth and control over it’¹⁷ (p. 126), and simultaneously became an instrument for the unification of the worldview and behavioral models of the younger generation within the totalitarian system.

One of the key areas of Bolshevik work with youth was atheistic education, which was regarded as an essential component of the formation of the ‘new Soviet person’ and an important instrument for the destruction of traditional worldviews and value systems. Through the education system, the activities of Komsomol and Pioneer organizations, mass campaigns, and anti-religious propaganda, the Soviet state sought to expel religion from the everyday life of the younger generation, replacing it with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Atheistic education was not merely ideological but also political in nature, as it was directed at undermining the influence of the Church as an alternative center of spiritual authority and at integrating youth into the system of totalitarian control, in which loyalty to the Party and the state supplanted traditional forms of religious and moral self-identification.

¹⁷М. Фролов. Комсомол у політичній системі Радянської України 1920–1930 рр. [Frolov, M., 2010, Komsomol in the political system of Soviet Ukraine 1920–1930]. Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького університету. 2010. Вип. 29. С.122-130.

The direction and content of anti-religious propaganda were determined by the highest party organs. In Soviet Ukraine, the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CP(b)U (*agitprop*) and the Main Political Education Committee under the People's Commissariat of Education (*holovpolitovsita*) were established for this purpose. Anti-religious activities were coordinated by the All-Ukrainian Anti-Religious Commission (VAK)—an unofficial clandestine body under the Central Committee of the CP(b)U, which existed until 1929. On the ground, its policy was implemented by the agitation and propaganda departments of the CP(b)U's district committees.¹⁸ The spearhead of Bolshevik anti-religious propaganda was directed not only at Orthodox believers but also at adherents of other churches active in Ukraine—Catholic, Protestant, Judaic, and others.

Direct oversight of youth policy in the region under study was exercised by the Volhynian District Committee of the KSMU (Communist Union of Youth of Ukraine), to which local district and municipal committees were subordinated. Within the framework of implementing the Leninist nationality policy, national departments (bureaus)—Polish, Jewish, and German—began operating under the district committee from 1926 onward, tasked specifically with work among the youth of national minorities, including the implementation of anti-religious policy within their milieu. In promoting an atheistic worldview, bureau staff had to exercise an exceptionally cautious approach, as the experience of previous years had demonstrated that aggressive government actions in this sphere had failed to produce the desired results owing to the deep religiosity of the population. The level of religious consciousness among youth was determined by the strength of the influence exerted upon it by the traditions of the rural community and by self-perception as part of a distinct ethnic group. It also had to be taken into account that attacks on national churches were perceived by representatives of national minorities as an insult to their national sentiments, which could provoke protests undesirable for the authorities. Therefore, in the early 1920s, the authorities focused primarily on agitation and propaganda work, which was conducted among the youth primarily through VLKSM cells and various cultural and civic organizations: “For a long time, anti-religious work on the ground was carried out by circles and cells that were not organized according to a uniform model—circles of atheists, godless, or even natural science and regional studies circles.”¹⁹ This work was conducted in two directions: internally, through the re-education of organization members, and externally, through the organization of various public

¹⁸Л. Бабенко. Як українців робили атеїстами...

¹⁹І. Погонєць. Організаційне оформлення антирелігійної політики в СРСР... р. 272.

events of an anti-religious orientation. Bolshevik activists typically employed traditional methods: the introduction of new revolutionary/Komsomol holidays into everyday life, the delivery of lectures, the distribution of leaflets and slogans of a corresponding nature, and the involvement of representatives of the rural intelligentsia, such teachers, heads of reading rooms, and clubs, in this work.

From mid-March onward, the anti-Easter propaganda campaign would unfold. As a rule, it included a set of measures such as the delivery of public lectures on atheistic topics, the organization of entertainment evenings for youth at the local club, theatrical performances on anti-religious themes, and the establishment of ‘godless corners’ stocked with appropriate literature in clubs, *chervoni kutky* (red corners), and reading rooms. Local committees of the CP(b)U developed the topics and methodological guidelines for the corresponding lectures and discussions. For example, the following topics were proposed for rural youth: “The Change of Seasons,” “The Witch-Whisperer,” “Is the Resurrection of a Human Being Possible? / The Myth of Jesus Christ,” “Soviet Government and Religion,” and so forth.²⁰

However, in the agrarian Volhynian region, even such Bolshevik initiatives encountered direct or indirect resistance from both the deeply religious population at large and the younger generation in particular. The atheistic worldview took root with especial difficulty in the milieu of Polish national communities, where the authority of the Catholic Church was extraordinarily high and unassailable. Government representatives noted that the influence of Catholic priests on local communities was “extraordinarily strong, in contrast to the feeble [influence] of the LKSMU.”²¹ In order to divert Polish youth from the Komsomol, priests delivered sermons in churches, conducted conversations with parents, disseminated religious publications, and supervised *Ruzhanets* (Rosary) circles that united women and girls in prayer. They categorically refused to register these circles with the village council, and in response to official demands to disband them, concealed their activities: “Formally, they disband the circle,

²⁰Державний архів Житомирської області [State Archives of Zhytomyr Region]. (ДАЖО), ф. П-94 (Житомирский (Волынский) губернский комитет ЛКСМУ) [Zhytomyr (Volyn) Provincial Committee of the LKSMU], оп 1, спр.144 (Директивы и переписка по вопросам политико-просветительной работы среди молодежи и политическою учебы комсомольцев (2.01.- 25.06.1925) [Directives and correspondence on issues of political education work among youth and political training of Komsomol members (02.01.- 25.06.1925)], арк. 40.

²¹ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр.710 (Протоколы заседаний бюро нацмен коллегии ЦК и окружного комитета ЛКСМУ, директивы и переписка по нацменработе. (5.05.-5.12.1928)) [Minutes of the meetings of the Bureau of National Minorities of the Central Committee and the District Committee of the LKSMU, directives and correspondence on national minorities work. (5.05.-5.12.1928)], арк.7.

but in practice they operate clandestinely—if not in this village, then at the church.”²² Accordingly, when reporting on the situation in the Marchlewsk district, the Komsomol official from the Volhynian District Committee of the LKSMU was repeatedly compelled to acknowledge that “in all villages there are Rosary circles, in the work of which adult women and partly girls are involved,” while “anti-religious work is not being conducted in any of the villages.”²³

The authorities attributed this state of affairs primarily to the absence of strong and influential Komsomol cells. In the period under discussion, Soviet youth organizations were typically joined by uneducated youth from among the poorest peasants, who commanded no authority within Polish communities. Moreover, even those young Poles who had joined the Komsomol frequently continued attending church, prompting the secretary of the Volhynian District Committee of the LKSMU, Krymsky, to repeatedly draw attention to instances of “expulsion from the Komsomol on account of religious observances.”²⁴ In order to strengthen anti-religious propaganda, it was recommended that teachers and the rural intelligentsia in general be actively recruited for this work, that they be supplied with specialized methodological literature, that socialist competitions be organized among Komsomol cells and individual Komsomol members with the participation of godless cells, and that anti-religious shock brigades be formed, among other measures.²⁵ To invigorate anti-church propaganda among young people, it was traditionally proposed that religious holidays, particularly Christmas and Easter, be utilized. By way of example, local Polish activists were advised to recruit “the existing Polish *aktiv*, both Komsomol and cultural-educational, to deliver lectures in Polish on ‘The Immaculate Conception’ and ‘How Gods and Goddesses Are Born, Live, and Die’ in all Polish settlements during the holidays” and “in villages where there are Polish schools and village clubs, to arrange with the heads of drama circles for performances following the lectures.”²⁶

In support of Polish-speaking propagandists, supervisors from the CP(b)U had prepared theses entitled *Do świąt Wielkanocnych* (‘For the Easter Holidays’), in which, ostensibly

²²ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр.594 (Материалы по обследованию работы среди польской молодежи, планы и календари польской секции. (1.11.-30.12.1927)) [Materials for surveying work among Polish youth, plans and calendars of the Polish section. (1.11.-30.12.1927)], арк.26.

²³ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 594. арк.14-14зв.

²⁴ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 594. арк.24.

²⁵ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр.754 (Протоколы и выписки из протоколов заседаний бюро ВЛКСМ по вопросам нацмен. работы. (14.04.1929- 12.03.1930)) [Minutes and excerpts from the minutes of the meetings of the Komsomol Bureau on issues of work with national minorities. (April 14, 1929 – March 12, 1930)], арк.69.

²⁶ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 594. арк.10.

drawing on historical grounds, the mythical character of the figure of Jesus Christ was explained. The document concluded with the thesis: “Only by ceasing to celebrate Easter shall we free ourselves from the legacy of wild primitive peoples.”²⁷ In this manner, Bolshevik propagandists sought not only to instill a communist worldview in the younger generation but also to foster the conviction that Marxist-Leninist ideology was superior and ‘modern’ compared to ‘primitive’ religious belief.

Despite a range of measures, the authorities failed to achieve any visible results in the field of atheistic propaganda within the Polish communities during the period from 1925 to 1930. Demonstrating utter helplessness, Soviet officials wrote that “anti-religious work among the Polish population remains in an embryonic state and is hindered primarily by the absence of well-trained Polish cadres of anti-religious workers,” although this was far from the most fundamental problem.

In the 1920s-1930s, the Jewish national minority also became one of the targets of deliberate Soviet anti-religious policy, which in practice meant a systematic campaign against Judaism, the liquidation of traditional communal structures (*kahals*), the closure of synagogues, the persecution of rabbis, and the curtailment of religious education. Given the traditional economic structures of Jewish communities, in which various forms of small-scale entrepreneurial activity occupied a prominent place, Jewish communities found themselves in the crosshairs of the new authorities not only in the context of the anti-religious campaign but also of the policy of liquidating the private sector and the struggle against the ‘petty bourgeoisie.’ Local party and Komsomol officialdom treated Jewish communal organizations as ‘national-chauvinist’ entities that exerted religious influence through “*kheders* and petty-bourgeois elements of the ‘*Voltuyiveniki*’ who recruit children by material means, forming among them a positive attitude toward the use of material assistance, and gradually influencing the children, shaping an ideology undesirable to us.”²⁸ Consequently, the restriction and prohibition of their activities was viewed in the context of the struggle for influence over the consciousness of Jewish youth.

Within the framework of the anti-religious campaign in connection with the approach of religious holidays, the Jewish municipal department of the LKSMU in Zhytomyr approved in April 1929 a list of anti-religious measures. Under this campaign, Jewish youth were

²⁷ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп 1, спр.160 (Протоколы заседаний коллегии по работе трудящейся молодежи национальных меньшинств при ЦК ЛКСМУ. (30.12 1924-1.06.1925)) [Minutes of the meeting of the collegium on the work of the working youth of national minorities at the Central Committee of the LKSU. (30.12.1924-1.06.1925)], 37 арк., арк. 22.

²⁸ДАЖО, ф. П-94, оп.1, спр. 710, арк.2.

encouraged to counterpose the most important religious holidays (Hanukkah, Yom Kippur, Purim, etc.) with “such revolutionary holidays as the transition of Jews to agriculture, the transition of Jewish colonies to civilized farming, and so forth.”²⁹ At the same time, each anti-religious cell was tasked with conducting a series of discussions among both Komsomol members and non-party youth on Passover, religion, culture, and other subjects. For the purposes of visual agitation, the authorities planned “the conduct of an anti-religious march, to which students were to be recruited, using it for the organization of anti-religious events in the cells” (SAZhR, f. p-94, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 1).

Such local initiative on the part of Komsomol activists was in keeping with the ‘general line’ of the LKSMU. Thus, the Jewish section of the Central Committee of the Komsomol of Ukraine resolved on August 30, 1930, “to launch a broad anti-religious campaign during the autumn Jewish holidays under the slogan: ‘Not a single Jewish worker shall participate in the celebration of religious holidays.’”³⁰ Furthermore, within the system of anti-religious measures, the organization of *subotnyky* (Saturday voluntary work days) and *nedilnyky* (Sunday voluntary work days) during religious holidays continued to be recommended.

The youth of the German national minority was also the object of close scrutiny by the Bolshevik authorities, who characterized them as “very religious and raised in respect for parents and elders.”³¹ German communities were distinguished, among other things, by their cohesion, the preservation of a conservative way of life, and a deeply rooted religiosity that was an integral part of it. External manifestations of this included regular church attendance, participation in various religious rites and ceremonies (baptisms, weddings, funerals), and other observances. Among Germans, there was a widespread custom of hanging pictures and inscriptions of religious content in their living quarters. Some of these inscriptions were quite expressive in characterizing the worldview of the householders: ‘Be joyful in hope,’ ‘Patient in affliction—persevere in prayer,’ ‘All things are possible for him who firmly believes,’ ‘Your yoke is easy and my burden is light,’ ‘Learn to endure without complaint.’³²

By way of example, one of the reports from the national minorities department of the Volhynian District Committee of the LKSMU indicated that “the German youth is more withdrawn and does not participate in public life. In the village of Stara Buda in the

²⁹ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 710, арк.7

³⁰ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 754, арк.9

³¹ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр.165 (Планы, директивы и переписка по вопросам работы среди трудящейся молодежи национальных меньшинств за 23.02.- 16.06.1925 г.) [Plans, directives, and correspondence on issues related to work among working youth from national minorities for February 23–June 16, 1925], арк.7.

³²Л.Якубова Повсякденне життя етнічних меншин радянської України у міжвоєнну добу... С.69.

Cherniakhiv district, there is a German Bible study circle in which active work is well organized: singing, which greatly attracts young people. The circle is led by a pastor. There is influence from parents and a prohibition on joining the Komsomol.”³³ It should be emphasized that the Bolsheviks interpreted the religiosity of German communities as a manifestation of anti-Soviet hostile activity. “Particularly harmful work,” in the assessment of government representatives, “is conducted by Baptist organizations,”³⁴ as well as “Lutherans and *Fusswäscher* [foot-washers], who have recently focused their primary attention on winning over the youth.”³⁵ It was noted that they responded instantly to government initiatives by organizing mirror-image actions. For instance, an organized campaign to increase subscriptions to the German-language Komsomol newspaper *Die Saat* resulted in a parallel increase in subscriptions to a Baptist newspaper.³⁶

Local Komsomol activists enjoyed no authority among their peers and were unable to propose alternative ideas that would be accepted by young people. The weak effectiveness of atheistic work was explained by the small size of local Komsomol cells, the absence of “well-trained cadres of anti-religious workers,”³⁷ the lack of “popular literature, both scholarly and belletristic,”³⁸ and the “insufficiency of the network of Komsomol political schools and political circles.”³⁹ For the conduct of atheistic propaganda among German youth, a separate brochure was prepared in German, entitled *Antireligiöse Propaganda und die Satzung des Gottlosenkreises im deutschen Dorf* (‘Anti-Religious Propaganda and the Charter of the Godless Circle in the German Village’),⁴⁰ which, in addition to methodological guidance on organizing this dimension of propaganda work, contained a brief characterization of church activities in German colonies.

As in Ukraine generally, so too in the Volhynian region in particular, this problem was addressed through the centralized production of a torrent of recommendations, circulars,

³³ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 710, арк.5.

³⁴ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр.713 (Переписка ЦК ЛКСМУ з окружним комитетом и ячейками по вопросам нацменработы. (5.01.21.02.1928)) [Correspondence of the Central Committee of the LKSMMU with the district committee and cells on issues of national employment. (5.01.21.02.1928)], арк.5зв.

³⁵ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 591 (Протоколы заседаний центрального бюро еврейской секции и переписка с организациями по работе среди еврейской молодежи) [Minutes of meetings of the central bureau of the Jewish section and correspondence with organizations for work among Jewish youth], арк.84.

³⁶ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр.713, арк.5зв.

³⁷М.Журба, М.Жолоб. Піднесене і земне: релігійні громади етнічних меншин в умовах комуністичного режиму в Україні... С.180.

³⁸ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 594, арк.14-14 зв.

³⁹ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 754, арк.60.

⁴⁰ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 590 (Директивы и обращения ЦК ЛКСМУ. Выводы по обследованию немецкой секции. (24.03.1927-20.12.1928)) [Directives and appeals of the Central Committee of the LKSMMU. Conclusions on the examination of the German section. (24.03.1927-20.12.1928)], арк.80.

directives, and the like, the execution of which was entrusted to the lowest rungs of the Bolshevik-Soviet bureaucratic hierarchy. “The essence of the struggle against religious organizations in the German village,” stated one of the resolutions of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the LKSMU, “comes down to the struggle for the rising generation, for the organization of the broad masses of working youth around socialist construction. All work of the Komsomol cells in this direction should be conducted on the basis of the decisions of [...] the Second Congress of the Godless.”⁴¹ The Union of the Godless was formally established in May 1928.⁴² However, as L. Dudka argues, the process of mass creation of local godless cells had been initiated under the pressure of central party organs two years earlier,⁴³ In the Volhynian district, the work of establishing cells of the Union of the Godless remained in an ‘embryonic’ state until the spring of 1929, when the Polish national godless section was created, with its founding conference held in Marchlewsk.⁴⁴ During the same period, in the Pulyn German district, “a godless circle was established (12 persons). Work was carried out to organize a Young Pioneer detachment, and an initiative group of 9 persons was organized.”⁴⁵ In order to intensify anti-religious work among youth, the Bolshevik authorities tasked the Komsomol with “involving Komsomol members and non-party youth in the cells of the *Bezvirnyk* [Godless], [and] organizing circles for the study of natural science.”⁴⁶

A separate target of manipulative propagandistic pressure were the so-called religious ‘sects’ and their members. On the list of ‘sectarian organizations’ of the Volhynia-Zhytomyr region that exerted influence on youth, the Bolshevik authorities included: “Baptists and Evangelicals, Molokans, *Myronostsi* [Myrrh-bearers], *Khlysty-Korniyivtsi*, and others.”⁴⁷

⁴¹ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 754, арк.61.

⁴²М.Журба, М.Жолоб. Піднесене і земне: релігійні громади етнічних меншин в умовах комуністичного режиму в Україні ... С.22.

⁴³Л.Дудка. Журнал «Безвірник» у системі антирелігійної пропаганди в Україні... С.51.

⁴⁴Л.Дудка. Спілка войовничих безвірників в антирелігійній пропаганді в Україні (20-ті - 40-ві роки ХХ ст.) [The Union of Militant Infidels in Anti-Religious Propaganda in Ukraine (1920s - 1940s)]. Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеня кандидата історичних наук. Київ, 2005. <https://uacademic.info/ua/document/0405U004890>

⁴⁵ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 710. арк.5.

⁴⁶ДАЖО, ф.П-94, оп.1, спр. 743 (Выводы и постановления окружного комитета ЛКСМУ по обследованию работы районных комитетов и ячеек ЛКСМУ. 28.08.1929 – 4.91.1930) [Conclusions and resolutions of the district committee of the LKSMU on inspection of the work of district committees and cells of the LKSMU. 28.08.1929 – 4.91.1930], арк.34.

⁴⁷ДАЖО, ф.П-4 (Житомирский (Волынский) комитет ЛКСМУ) [Zhytomyr (Volyn) Committee of the LKSMU], оп.1, спр. 146 (Директивы по вопросам политико-просветительной работы, доклад об антикоммунистическом движении молодежи на Волыни) [Directives on issues of political and educational work, a report on the anti-communist youth movement in Volhynia], арк.7.

Table 1.

Register of ‘Sectarian Organizations’ and Their Members in the Zhytomyr Region as of 1925⁴⁸

District	Evangelicals		Baptists		Seventh-day Adventists	
	No. of communities	No. of members	No. of communities	No. of members	No. of communities	No. of members
Korosten	3	287	11	1,564	–	–
Zhytomyr	6	278	16	1,352	1	20
Total	9	565	27	2,916	1	20

As can be seen from Table 1, the total number of such organizations across the region was relatively small; nevertheless, they exercised a considerable influence on the local population, especially the youth. In certain localities, for example, “in Myropil, the sect was 98% composed of youth; in the village of Fedorivka of the Cherniakhiv district, a Molokan sect drew 40 young people.”⁴⁹ This situation caused some concern on the part of the local Soviet party and Komsomol apparatus. It is noteworthy, however, that in the mid-1920s the content of Bolshevik propaganda narratives regarding the activities of ‘sects’ was considerably milder than, for example, in relation to the Orthodox, Catholics, or Jews. Thus, local Komsomol cells were advised to ‘carefully study and observe the sects.’ Emphasis was placed on the need to “exercise extreme caution in one’s work, not permitting the assessment of a sect as counter-revolutionary or anti-Soviet.”⁵⁰ The reason for such caution, in the opinion of researchers, lay in the fact that during this period “the Soviet state was not only rethinking the concept of “sectarianism” but also its attitude toward “sects.”⁵¹ Precisely for this reason, instructions regarding the organization of anti-religious propaganda for the grassroots levels of the LKSM of Ukraine emphasized the need to coordinate the content of public events of an

⁴⁸ДАЖО, ф.П-4, оп.1, спр. 146, арк. 14-15.

⁴⁹ДАЖО, ф.П-4, оп.1, спр. 146, арк.7.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹М.Кучеренко «Сектантство» у радянських антирелігійних журналах 1920-х – початку 1940-х років [М.Кучеренко "Sectantism" in Soviet anti-religious magazines of the 1920s – early 1940s.]. 2019. <https://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/doslidzhennya/2652-margarita-kucherenko-sektantstvo-u-radyanskikh-antireligijnikh-zhurnalakh-1920-kh-pochatku-1940-kh-rokiv>

anti-sectarian orientation with the relevant committees of the Bolshevik Party on the ground—and under no circumstances to display initiative in this matter.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide grounds for the conclusion that, during the period under examination, the rural youth of national minorities in the Volhynia-Zhytomyr region served as a target of close political interest on the part of the Bolshevik-Soviet authorities. The fundamental principles of youth policy were developed by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CP(b)U, which also oversaw the process of their implementation. The key organization charged with the task of educating the younger generation of Soviet citizens in the spirit of loyalty to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, and later to ‘the great Stalin,’ was the LKSMU. From the mid-1920s, the recruitment of local youth—representatives of the Polish, German, and Jewish national minorities—into the ranks of the Komsomol was regarded as one of the most important tasks against the backdrop of the Sovietization of the Volhynian countryside.

An important component of youth policy in the milieu of national minorities in the Volhynia-Zhytomyr region was anti-religious propaganda. The analysis of a substantial body of archival documents provides grounds for the conclusion that, during the period under study, anti-church and anti-religious propaganda among representatives of national minorities did not achieve significant success. On the one hand, this was attributable to the patriarchal insularity of national communities, which fiercely defended their traditions and beliefs. On the other hand, it was due to the absence of educated, ideologically competent Komsomol and party cadres capable of opposing clergymen at an adequate level. Despite the authorities' efforts to instill an atheistic consciousness in the Ukrainian SSR in the early 1930s, which led to significant restrictions on public religious practices in national communities, especially among young people, the level of its religiosity remained quite high, since renouncing one's national religion in conditions of total Sovietization and repression was perceived by people as an existential threat. Despite the relentless pressure exerted by the Bolshevik-Soviet authorities, the process of displacing from the everyday lives of Poles, Germans, and Jews the traditional practices associated with the performance of certain religious rituals within their communities extended over the course of several decades.

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