Religiosity of Ukrainian believers
in the realities of Russian military aggression

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Abstract.
The author analyzes the religiosity of Ukrainian believers during the military invasion of the Russian Federation. The features and main trends in the religious behavior of Ukrainian believers in wartime are identified. The factors of active change in the religious orientation of Ukrainians to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (Metropolitan Epifaniy) are shown.

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The latest data from sociological studies allow us to state that the stage of civil (political) self-identification of Ukraine has been passed. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, significantly accelerated the process of forming a political nation and significantly offset the identity crisis, forcing citizens to fundamentally reassess the role of Russia as a foreign policy benchmark.

A huge proportion of Russian-speaking Ukrainians, out of a sense of unwillingness to have anything to do with Russia, have deliberately switched to the Ukrainian language. Thus, in 2021, the rate of citizens using Ukrainian in everyday life was 64%, but in 2022 it rose to 71%, which significantly weakened the confrontation around language and religious issues [Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2023].

We observe the same situation in the mass consciousness of Ukrainians, in particular, regarding the perception of the national, Ukrainian, Orthodox Church, which has not compromised itself by collaboration, ties with the enemy and aggressor from the "Russian world."

The unwillingness to have anything to do with Russia also prompted the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine to change their religious calendars, which is primarily based on the choice of their faithful. Thus, at the end of 2022, 44% of respondents expressed their readiness to celebrate Christmas on December 25, 23% said they did not care about this issue, 31% were against this idea (in 2021 – 58%), and the remaining 2% were not able to answer. In other words, 69% of believers are in favor of celebrating religious holidays together with the European Community [Sociological Group "Rating", 2022].

Despite the fact that Ukrainians do not support the idea of a state church, it continues to hold one of the first positions in terms of trust among social and political institutions (along with the Armed Forces and volunteer organizations). At the same time, the moral authority of the Church is recognized as lower than the level of trust in it; the attitude of citizens to the morality of clergy is quite critical. With the beginning of the Russian aggression, the traditionally high level of religiosity among Ukrainians increased to 74%. After Russia's full-scale aggression, more
than half of the respondents (59%) noted the positive role of the Church in Ukrainian society. At the same time, the majority of citizens expressed the belief that religious faith does not imply mandatory religious certainty [Razumkov Center, 2022].

At the beginning of 2023, according to the Kyiv-based Info Sapience Research Agency, 41% identified themselves as belonging to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 4% to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate), and 24% did not identify themselves with any patriarchate. It is noteworthy that while before the full-scale war, the largest number of parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate) was in the east, now, on the contrary, we have the smallest number of them there - 1% [Info Sapience Research Agency, 2023].

Until now, a manifestation of religious competition and a significant problem between Orthodox denominations in Ukraine has been the use of different national narratives in communicating with believers. As a result, separate national and political identities are being formed within the same state, which greatly hinders the formation of a national identity. In particular, we are talking about the influence of the aggressive "Russian world" through the use of purely religious means of influencing the minds of believers.

With the outbreak of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the pro-Russian orientation of the foreign policy identity of the Ukrainian state has obviously been marginalized. There was a clear "victory" of the orientation towards European and transatlantic structures. Today, more than 75% of respondents support the decision, after Ukraine's victory and de-occupation of its territory, to completely sever all relations with the Russian Federation, up to a complete ban on Russians entering Ukraine [Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2022].

This could not but affect the priority of Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Thus, the attitude towards breaking with the Moscow Patriarchate, up to and including its prohibition, prevails among the majority of Ukrainian respondents today. The results of a sociological study conducted by the Active Group company using the SunFlower Sociology online panel on November 18-21, 2022,
show that 62% of Ukrainians support the ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) [Active Group, 2022].

Currently, the traditional content of the identity crisis that characterized Ukraine before the Russian invasion is no longer present. However, there is a high probability that new socio-political splits will emerge, in particular, due to further claims to dominance by the Moscow Patriarchate. Today, it is crucial to prepare the necessary safeguards in advance in order to avoid being caught in the field of identity conflicts that will likely arise along the new demarcation lines.

During Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, cannot ignore the loss of its faithful, church property, and the destruction of its churches by the Russian military invader. Thus, the Synod's documents state that 14 of the 53 dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate are affected by the fighting. On the territory of these dioceses, there are more than 3,000 parishes and 62 monasteries, where 3,500 clergy and almost 2,000 monks and nuns continue to perform their ministry even at the risk of their lives [Results of the Holy Synod, 2022].

However, pointing to the direct actions of the Russian aggressor in the destruction of Orthodox churches and the human potential of the faithful, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate is hierarchically dependent and too loyal to Russian Orthodoxy, the Russian Orthodox Church; its neglect of the national component of Ukraine's state development is so powerful that it does not allow the leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine to assess the actions of the Russian occupiers as genocide of the Ukrainian people. Moreover, by calling the actions of representatives of the Ukrainian authorities illegal, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, seeks to place itself above Ukrainian legislation and attempts to influence it [Results of the Holy Synod, 2022]. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate still has influence on public opinion, controls and manipulates the consciousness of Ukrainian citizens. It commemorates Patriarch Kirill during the liturgy,
excommunicates priests who disagree with it, prohibits those who support the national policy of the state from serving, and prefers another religious organization, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, headed by Metropolitan Epifaniy.

It seems that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, feels too comfortable in the realm of "double standards," issuing contradictory statements. One of them was proclaimed by Metropolitan Onufriy in the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where he strongly condemned the war against Ukraine launched by Russia. The second was made two months later, when at its Synod on May 12, 2022. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate, accused the Ukrainian authorities of aiding the aggressor, echoing the rhetoric of the terrorist state of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church: "The victim is to blame for the aggressor's attack."

Today, we have a situation where the "sin of pride" applies not only to the individual Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also to the entire church organization, of which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in unity with the Moscow Patriarchate remains a structural component, which
- does not promote inter-Orthodox unity at the level of theological communications and liturgical practice;
- makes decisions on its own;
- does not accept the decisions of Pan-Orthodox Councils;
- refuses to engage in inter-Orthodox dialogue;
- produces hate speech in assessing the activities of other autocephalous Orthodox churches (in particular, calling the transition of priests and local communities to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, headed by Metropolitan Epifaniy, a transition "into schism", fake information, etc);
- claims the superiority of its own patriarchate to others with a constant desire to level, diminish, and distort their activities;
- has categorical statements when responding to important socio-political issues according to the scheme "there is only one correct point of view - and it is mine;"
- labels political issues, makes constant attempts to distort historical events in the development of Orthodoxy in its own favor;
This work is extremely dependent on the political situation, and therefore serves the interests of the Russian authorities;
- insists on the need to establish the world hegemony of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Orthodox environment.

Such a lack of freedom within the religious system should not restrict the rights of a believer to act in accordance with Ukrainian law, nor can it contradict the natural human right to freedom of expression and the practice of religion.

At the same time, freedom of religion within the framework of Ukrainian legislation is not synonymous with religious arbitrariness, and therefore should be based on the principle of the impossibility of violating the territorial integrity of the state with irresponsible anti-Ukrainian messages, including the opening of an internal "religious front" [Oleksiy Milyutin, 2022], which stir up society and split its unity during the difficult trials of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

References:


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