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**Religious Activity and Religious Outlook of Ukrainians  
in the Conditions of the Introduction of the new Soviet Ritual:  
the in Years of Khrushchev's «Thaw» and the Deployment of Brezhnev's «Stagnation»**

**Abstract.** *The focus of this article is the study of the desire of Ukrainians to preserve their own national and spiritual identity in the process of the implementation of the CPSU – CPU of the new Soviet ritualism during the 60's – 70's of the twentieth century. **Research methodology.** During the research, such scientific methods as analytical-logical, historical-systemic, explanation, search, synthesis, comparison and complex selection were applied. The work also used the method of analysis is to find out the level of growth of national consciousness of Ukrainians. **Scientific novelty.** The article proves that despite the anti-religious policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the planting of the «new Soviet ritualism», the ancient church and religious traditions and customs of the Ukrainian people continued to be a part of the everyday culture of Ukrainians. **Conclusions.** So, the new rites became another «brick» laid by the communists in the stronghold of denationalization and sovietization of the Ukrainian ethnic group. New Soviet holidays were officially opposed to religious holidays. However, the percentage of supporters of church rites of weddings, baptisms and burials among the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR remained quite high. The religious activity of representatives of the Ukrainian ethnic group was especially observed during the celebration of Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and other church holidays. And although the number of adherents of religious rites in the republic was different – from less in the East to more in the West, Christian values, despite atheism, continued to be the basis of the spiritual life of the absolute majority of Ukrainians.*

**Key words:** Ukrainians, church, national consciousness, atheism, Soviet power, «new Soviet ritualism».

**The Problem Statement.** Ukrainian rituals have always had a great social, cognitive, educational and patriotic significance, shaped the national outlook of Ukrainians. However, during the era of Soviet atheism, it suffered a devastating destruction. In this context, it is necessary to focus the attention on the 1960's and 1970's, which were characterized by the development of the violent displacement of ancient religious customs and traditions from the mass consciousness of the Ukrainian ethnic environment. Instead, the Soviet dogmas of the then political regime, which ignored Ukrainian national issues, were comprehensively planted.

With the independence of Ukraine, democratization of socio-political life, opening access to many archival sources, favorable conditions were created for free, unbiased, methodologically balanced study of the Soviet past of the Ukrainian nation and expanding the field of national memory and historical consciousness of citizens. Therefore, a comprehensive study of the confrontation between the Soviet and Ukrainian national identity during the introduction by the CPSU – CPU of new rituals during the 60's – 70's of the twentieth century is extremely relevant and requires a special approach to study.

**The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches.** The issue of atheism and anti-religious policy of the CPSU – CPU in the USSR during second half of the XX century was highlighted in the works of such authors as: O. Novytska (2003), O. Penkova (2006), V. Vovk (2007), O. Mikhalechuk (2008; 2010), Yu. Kaganov & V. Chura (2022) and others. However, in the scientific literature the topic remains understudied. This enables us to continue working in this promising area.

**The Purpose of the Article.** Thus, the focus of this article is the study of the desire of Ukrainians to preserve their own national and spiritual identity in the process of the implementation of the CPSU – CPU of the new Soviet ritualism during the 60's – 70's of the twentieth century.

**The Results of the Research.** At the end of 1964, with the aim of popularizing Soviet ritual innovations in most regional centers of the Ukrainian SSR, the communists created special ritual commissions, and on December 24, 1969, in accordance with the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Republican Commission for the Study and introduction of new civil holidays and ceremonies into everyday life began to work under the presidium of the Verkhovna

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Rada of the Ukrainian SSR (Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR, 1970, p. 3). Studying archival documents, we see that such commissions also operated in district centers and at the executive committees of village and settlement councils (DAIO, f. R-1918, d. 2, c. 79, 183 s.). Under the influence of the Soviet ideological policy, a complete complex of calendar, professional, labor and official state holidays and rituals was formed, the content of which reflected the material and worldview values inherent in the mentality of the Soviet person.

A new custom of the time when a marriage was concluded was its registration in the «Palace of Culture» or «Palace of Happiness», where representatives of the RAGS, in the presence of relatives and members of the public, solemnly handed the young people a marriage certificate (Kindrachuk, 2016, p. 159). The attitude of the authorities was not favorable to people who followed the Christian principles of family formation, because the rite of marriage at church was considered a «shameful» phenomenon and one that was subject to public condemnation. However, many of those Ukrainians who stepped on the towel got married at church.

A different situation was observed in the East of Ukraine, which was multi-ethnic. The solemn registration of marriage developed and implemented by the Soviet state among the residents of the Eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR was popular to such an extent that it practically supplanted the conduct of the church ritual. Thus, on average throughout Donetsk region, as of 1963, weddings with the participation of a priest accounted for only 0,5 % (Penkova, 2006, p. 98), and in 1964 this indicator decreased to 0,3 % (TsDAHO Ukrainy, f. 1, d. 31, c. 2401, p. 40).

The same disappointing situation with church marriage has developed in Luhansk region. According to archival sources, 20,155 couples were solemnly married here in 1970, but only 76 couples were married at church in the same year (TsDAHO Ukrainy, f. 1, d. 20, c. 827, s. 23). The ratio of these data was almost the same in Kharkiv region. As of 1970, 30,878 couples were registered here who became adherents of Soviet rituals, and only 170 couples who got married at church (TsDAHO Ukrainy, f. 1, d. 20, c. 827, s. 4 – 5). In general, the rate of weddings in the east of Ukraine was significantly lower compared to other regions of the Ukrainian SSR. This is explained primarily by the presence of fewer churches there compared to the west of the republic and the low level of religiosity among the population.

A significant reason for the decrease in the number of supporters of church marriage in the Ukrainian SSR was that during the period of total atheism, participation in church rites caused a certain risk. The facts of the application of religious rituals by Ukrainians never remained unnoticed by the Soviet state authorities. The religious behavior of Ukrainians was constantly discussed and condemned at party, trade union meetings, and meetings of labor groups. However, according to archival documents, at the end of the 70's of the 20th century on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR, almost a third of newlyweds performed a church marriage after official registration (TsDAHO Ukrainy, f. 2, d. 14, c. 2649, s. 7).

In the conditions of the construction of an atheistic society, the sacrament of baptism also turned out to be ideologically «harmful». However, despite the desire of the Soviet authorities to eradicate religiosity, Ukrainians continued to baptize their children secretly, often at night, sometimes in other districts and even regions (Kindrachuk, 2016, p. 159), the number of which in the early 1960's in Ukraine was about 40 % of all newborns (Vovk, 2007, p. 180). It is worth emphasizing that in the East of the Ukrainian SSR, the implementation of the church baptism ceremony was based on folk tradition, and only then on the awareness of religious ideas. With the onset of the 1970's, which were characterized by the rise of totalitarian tendencies in society, the level of baptisms among Ukrainians decreased somewhat.

In view of the above data, we can see that despite the state's efforts to impose a new Soviet ritual on society, Ukrainians still remained supporters of the church rite of baptism. A large part of the representatives of the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR considered this rite as an act of further protection of their children from life's troubles and various kinds of diseases. This conviction in their minds was so strong that even that part of people who declared themselves atheists still considered it necessary to perform the sacrament of baptism.

It should also be noted that funerals according to Soviet rites had to be held without the participation of the clergy, and the scenarios of the civil burial ritual had to oppose religious dogmas. However, among Ukrainians, the percentage of supporters of church burials still remained quite high, especially in rural areas, where Christian traditions have become the norm of life. In general, in the late 60's – early 70's of the 20th century. in the Ukrainian SSR, 69 – 72 % of people were buried according to church rites (Mikhalchuk, 2010, p. 159).

Stating such figures, Soviet ideologues were forced to admit that in most cases the burial of the dead was carried out by Ukrainians according to church rites (DAIO. f. R-1-P, d. 1, c. 4140, s. 85). This indicator remained consistently high in the west of Ukraine. The fact that at the end of the 1970's there were about two thousand cemeteries in the Ukrainian SSR, while there were only two hundred and nineteen Soviet mourning grounds, also testifies to the large number of followers of the religious rite

(Vovk, 2007, p. 183). In order to remain faithful to religion and the church and at the same time to avoid punishment for «disobedience», among Ukrainians, cases were becoming more frequent when a person was buried according to the Soviet burial custom, and then the earth was taken from the grave and carried to the church, where the priest conducted a service over it, as over the deceased.

Analyzing the above, it can be confidently asserted that the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR nevertheless gave preference to religious rites – baptism of children, weddings at church, funerals of the dead with the participation of a priest. The most complete picture of the level of religiosity in the Ukrainian ethnic environment is provided by archival data. So, for example, in the city of Chernivtsi as of 1962, 9,204 people were baptized according to the church rite, 1,443 people were married, and 3,890 people were buried (Materials on the state of atheistic work and the fight against sectarianism..., s. 66). In Kremenets district of the Ternopil region, as of 1965, 66 % of newborns were baptized in the church, 25 % of marriages took place at church, 82 % of the dead were buried with the participation of the priest (DATO, f. R-1, d. 1, c. 3844, s. 102).

Over time, the tendency to perform religious rites among the Ukrainian ethnic environment, especially in western region of the Ukrainian SSR, continued to remain stably high. Archival sources indicate that as of 1968, there were 23,378 church baptisms, 577 weddings, and 12,774 church burials in Lviv region (DALO, f. P-1332, d. 2, c. 42, s. 13).

The Soviet authorities recognized their shortcomings in the organization of conducting scientific and atheistic propaganda and saw the futility of implementing new civic holidays and rituals into the lives of Ukrainians. The outlined state of affairs led the communists to the conclusion that the section of ideological work on the eradication of religious rituals in the Ukrainian ethnic environment was in a neglected state.

According to archival sources, the most convincing example of a conciliatory attitude towards religion was that religious rites were performed by party activists, Komsomol members and communists themselves. Thus, the Bureau of the Ternopil Oblast Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine noted that «in Ternopil region, in the village of Lydykhiv the children of I. Batyukh – foreman of the construction crew, Mamchur – head of the village council, G. Romanyuk – inspector of the Kremenets Central Security Service, agent of state insurance Yarmoschuk, driving school instructor P. Dykun were baptized at church. It is characteristic that public opinion of condemnation has not been created around these people, although they denounce the titles of communists, Komsomol members, and activists» (DATO, f. R-1, d. 1, c. 3844, s. 104). Archive documents indicate that in 1969 O. Podolsky, the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs in Chernivtsi region, also recognized numerous facts of the communists' performance of religious rites, in particular in Vyzhnytskyi, Kitsmanskyi, Zastavnytskyi, and Hlybotskyi districts of this region (DACHO, f. 1, d. 22, c. 260, s. 67).

It should be emphasized that the party bodies closely monitored that «religious superstitions» did not occur in the Ukrainian ethnic environment. To prevent this, in October 1960, the country's leadership made changes to the Criminal Code of the USSR and Ukrainian SSR, the articles of which provided for administrative and criminal liability for violations of Soviet legislation on cults.

Archival documents show that, based on the decree of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR dated March 26, 1966 «On administrative responsibility for violations of the legislation on religious cults», as a result of organizational and practical measures carried out by police officers of Chernivtsi region with KGB employees in 1969 in the region a number of illegal religious gatherings were discovered, the participants of which were immediately brought to administrative and judicial responsibility (DACHO, f. 1, d. 22, c. 260, s. 75).

In addition to oppression and intimidation, Soviet ideologues continued to use lecture-based atheistic propaganda on the way to opposing and eradicating Christian rites during the 1960's and 1970's. Every year, on the eve of religious holidays, a plan for lectures on atheistic topics and a schedule for the departure of communist activists to read them in the field were approved. However, with such fruitful and systematic anti-religious work of the communists, the level of religiosity among Ukrainians remained quite high. Ukrainians still dared to actively visit churches throughout the territory of the Ukrainian SSR, even where they were closed and deregistered. The activity of Ukrainians was especially observed during the celebration of one of the biggest Christian holidays – Easter.

Thus, according to M. Prykhodka, head of the department of propaganda and agitation of the Ternopil Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, 316,000 people (about 140,000 families) visited church on Easter in 1976, and a large number of Ukrainians, according to him, did not show up for work at Easter (DATO, f. R-1, d. 15, c. 47, s. 13).

The head of the propaganda and agitation department of the Chernivtsi regional committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine V. Lopatyuk also claimed that in 1975 in the city of Chernivtsi, a rather large number of the city's population, including children of school and preschool age, participated in the celebration of religious holidays (DACHO, f. 1, d. 35, c. 46, s. 18).

Seeing the devotion of Ukrainians to religion and church, the Soviet authorities, enlisting the

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support of police officers, closely monitored those who visited churches during holiday services. Communists who were influenced by religion were especially under the «watchful eye» of party structures. For example, a historian O. Penkova claims that during a raid by representatives of the Kremin district party organization of the Luhansk region on the Easter holiday in 1972, 86 Komsomol members and 38 communists were found in the church, who intended to consecrate Easter eggs and Easter bread (Penkova, 2006, p. 63). A similar situation was observed in the mining village of Trudivske, Donetsk region, where in 1976, during a church service on Palm Sunday, a raid by representatives of the Ukrainian Communist Party took place, who also recorded Komsomol members present at church (Penkova, 2006, p. 63).

It is worth emphasizing that eastern Ukrainians, in addition to Easter, also celebrated Christmas. Thus, studying archival documents, we see that S. Ganzhenko, the representative of the Council for Religious Affairs in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, having reported to the secretary of the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine Comrade O. Chernov and the head of the executive committee of the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Council of Workers' Deputies Comrade P. Kaikan about the religious situation in the region during Christmas in 1973, noted that in some villages of the region due to the disorganization and irresponsibility of the leadership of village councils and school directors, local youth participated in religious rites of caroling and often attended church services (DAIO, f. R-1-P, d. 1, c. 3825, s. 18, 19).

**Conclusions.** Thus, during the 60's and 70's of the 20th century, the party ideologues of the Soviet totalitarian state artificially developed and actively introduced into the life of the Ukrainian ethnic environment a new Soviet ritual, which was supposed to raise a true atheist from every Ukrainian, a Russified citizen of the Soviet type without a national identity. New Soviet holidays were officially opposed to religious holidays.

The religious behavior of Ukrainians was constantly discussed and condemned at party, trade union meetings, and meetings of labor groups. The ideologues of communism spread the new ritualism to the masses with the help of radio, television, printed publications, and various lectures. In order to prevent religiosity, the leadership of the USSR and Ukrainian SSR in October 1960 amended the Criminal Code, the articles of which provided for administrative and criminal liability for violations of Soviet legislation on cults. The new rites became another «brick» laid by the communists in the stronghold of denationalization and sovietization of the Ukrainian ethnic group.

However, the well-organized anti-religious campaign «failed». Ancient church and religious traditions and customs of the Ukrainian people continued to be a part of their everyday culture. The percentage of supporters of church rites of weddings, baptisms and burials among the titular nation of the Ukrainian SSR remained quite high. The religious activity of the Ukrainian ethnic group was especially observed during the celebration of Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and other church holidays.

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#### Надія Кіндрачук

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#### Релігійна активність і релігійний світогляд українців в умовах запровадження нової радянської обрядовості: роки хрущовської «відлиги» та розгортання брежнєвського «застою»

**Анотація.** Метою статті є вивчення прагнення українців зберегти свою власну національно-духовну ідентичність у процесі впровадження КПРС – КПУ нової радянської обрядовості в роки хрущовської «відлиги» та розгортання брежнєвського «застою».

**Методологія дослідження.** Під час здійснення дослідження застосовано конкретні наукові методи, зокрема аналітико-логічний, історико-системний, пояснення, пошуку, синтезу, співставлення та комплексного добору. У роботі також використано метод аналізу – для з'ясування рівня зростання національної свідомості українців. **Наукова новизна.** У статті аргументовано доведено, що незважаючи на антирелігійну політику КПРС – КПУ, насадження «нової радянської обрядовості», споконвічні церковно-релігійні традиції та звичаї українського народу і надалі залишалися складовою повсякденної культури українців. **Висновки.** Так, «нові обряди» стали черговою «цеглиною», закладеною комуністами у твердиню денационалізації та радянзації українського етносу. Релігійним святкам офіційно протиставлялися нові радянські свята. Однак відсоток прихильників церковних обрядів вінчання, хрещення та поховання в середовищі титульної нації УРСР залишався досить високим. Релігійна активність представників українського етносу особливо прослідковувалася під час святкування Різдва, Водохреща, Великодня й інших церковних свят. І хоча кількість прибічників релігійних обрядів у республіці була різною – від меншої на Сході до більшої на Заході, проте християнські цінності всупереч атеїзації продовжували залишатися основою духовного життя абсолютної більшості українців.

**Ключові слова:** українці, церква, національна свідомість, атеїзація, радянська влада, «нова радянська обрядовість».

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