
METHODOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION A CASE OF UKRAINE

Zoya Shwed*

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Volodymyrska Str. 60, 01033, Kyiv, Ukraine

(Received 1 June 2020, revised 1 December 2020)

Abstract

This article deals with the application of the model of the ‘conceptual matrix of the religious situation’ for the study of Ukrainian religious life in the context of local religious communities. The proposed model includes three levels: mega-level, macro-level and micro-level. The structure of the religious situation (micro- and macro-levels) depends on and correlates with the external mega-level controlling parameters. The use of this model based on specific examples suggests that the dynamics of global social trends and local social, political and economic conditions can lead to the fundamentalization of religion, as well as contribute to the individualization of religiosity and the rethinking of religious doctrines. On the other hand, the most reliable forecasting results can be achieved by including the most specific manifestations of a complex religious system in the model of the conceptual matrix of the religious situation, taking into account the local features of one or another religious community.

Keywords: religious, communities, fundamentalism, state-church, relations

1. Introduction

Practical religious studies hold an important place among modern approaches to understanding religion. Their main purpose is to consider religion as a functioning reality, the changes in which have both local and global nature. In Ukrainian science, this topic was covered in a number of works, including the collective monograph *Functionality of Religion: The Ukrainian Context* [1], *Forecasts of Religious Processes in Ukraine* [2] and others. Leading domestic researchers in collaboration with their foreign colleagues do not just record changes in the religious environment. They carry out effective work in terms of understanding religious phenomena and determining the relationship between the functionality of religion and the objective reality, as well as outline mechanisms and ways to manage the religious situation. J. Casanova, M. Emerson, W. Mirola, S. Monahan, A. Kolodny, L. Fylypovych, V. Yelensky, and V. Tytarenko are among leading researchers in this field [3-8]. The state of

*E-mail: shwedzoya@yahoo.com

scientific research in religion is now at a certain ‘methodological crossroads’, when classical and non-classical analysis models no longer work. In our opinion, valuable results can be achieved by taking into account the synergetic method, which allows us to consider the religious situation as a functional, complex, self-organized system. In this regard, the synergetic method is understood as a tool of scientific knowledge that covers different areas of reality (material and social worlds), including such self-organized systems, which are characterized by a nonlinear way of development. Given this, the ‘complex’ nature of the religious situation is expressed in the fact that its elements (components) can be regarded as independent systems (e.g. institutional forms of religion or religious practices) and be included in a more complex system (e.g. social or political life) [9]. It is a matter of creating a model that reflects its object, limiting the elements of this model to the level required for research. The model does not exhaust information about the phenomenon; it includes only those characteristics of the phenomenon that are necessary for achieving the research objectives.

In addition, religious studies aimed at examining the dynamics of change in the religious situation will have practical application if they use modern approaches and methods, including methods of post-non-classical science in general that are becoming widespread. The latest approaches involve those that are focused on the functional aspect of socio-spiritual phenomena, including religion. Understanding religion as a functional system allows us to theoretically record those features of the influence of religion on people that are manifested at the level of satisfaction of their religious needs as well as in terms of influencing reality in its various manifestations (social life, education, economics, law, etc.). Many practical religious studies develop methodologies for the forecasting research of religions. One of them is the model called the “conceptual matrix of the religious situation” [5, p. 303], in which the religious situation is presented as an element of social reality. According to V. Tytarenko, the model of the conceptual matrix of the religious situation is “the reproduction of knowledge about the object of study, taking into account only the most essential elements and relations related to the understanding of social reality” [5, p. 305]. This refers to the functions of religion and the dynamics of change in the religious complex at the doctrinal, institutional and praxiological levels. We consider it expedient to analyse the possibility of applying this model to examine specific manifestations of the religious situation in Ukraine and, in particular, to identify the possibility of linking the interaction of different structural levels of the religious situation, which constitutes the objective of this article.

2. The organizational structure of the religious system in Ukraine - a three-level model

Based on the proposed model of analysis of the religious situation in terms of specific features, the structure of the religious system has a complex organization. With reference to the principles of synergetics (self-organization, self-reproduction, instability of systems, their ‘openness’ to changes,

multivariation of changes, etc.), religion can be considered as including three levels: micro-level, macro-level and mega-level.

At the micro-level (everyday religiosity, religious practice), changes are dynamic and very fast. An example here may be the situation we are currently witnessing. Due to restrictions associated with the spread of the coronavirus, access to places of worship is limited. This is why religious people had to turn their activity to online actions (e.g. teaching). At the same time, there is a certain danger because religious everyday life, being at the level of 'here and now', does not correlate the model of the behaviour of a religious person with some transcendent, by nature, ethical norms. Therefore, people, who are faced with the choice to do or give up something, to follow quarantine instructions or violate them, sometimes use selfish sentiments. Here, the value system is 'dehierarchicalized' and actions are justified by their own, individual, selfish principle 'I do so because I think it's right'. In such a situation, based on the individual's personal beliefs, the right thing is what corresponds to religious canons (religious faith, own interpreted views), i.e. to that which already belongs to the macro-level in our model. In other words, at the level of everyday perception, the macro-level elements are not perceived as requiring additional authoritative justification. The principle 'Who are you, sir, to tell me what to do?' is fully revealed. Everyone believes that their understanding of religious canons is true, because of which the system connection is broken and the situation tends to chaos. Chaos is understood here as the "disruption of interaction and interconnection in the system itself" [5, p. 210]. In the structure of the religious situation, the micro-level is most susceptible to changes also because individuals (actors of this level) are under the influence of modernization and secularization processes, and the global news market affects their consciousness. Thus, these same people 'create' the factors of change. Guided by the models of behaviour available to them in everyday life, they build a model of religious perception, which may not coincide with established religious traditions, religious beliefs, ways to meet religious needs, and so on. Sometimes such spiritual pursuits can contribute to the fundamentalization of religious views and movements or, by levelling the 'conservatism' of religious teachings, lead to radical changes in teaching, resulting in the emergence of new religious movements, a significant weakening or a complete rejection of religion [10].

The macro-level does not change so quickly because the religious consciousness included in it is a "parameter of long-existing collective variables" [5, p. 211]. In the model of the 'conceptual matrix of the religious situation', the macro-level determines the dynamics of the micro-level (actions of individuals) and this connection is two-way. Not only conceptual religious consciousness affects the lower level, but also collective behaviour (the lower level) can create 'parameters of the order' at the macro-level. This process is not so fast, and therefore the relationship between these elements can be observed and recorded. In other words, the interaction of these levels shows that not only the macro-level contributes to micro-level changes in religious situations, but the micro-level itself, questioning the content of religious doctrine, can also change

the normative elements of the religious system, adjusting them to the current religious situation.

It should be noted that conservative religious people, on the wave of negative attitudes towards change, tend to accept fundamentalist views and show a willingness to use appropriate methods to preserve their own identity. An example may be the events observed in the Ukrainian religious space. We are talking about some of the consequences of the proclamation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in 2018. As known, after the unification council, the Church included the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), some episcopates of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC, commonly referred to as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. After these events, starting in 2019, the head of the OCU announced the need to reform the Church (macro-level) and these changes were to affect the ritual part and the Church calendar (micro-level). Ritual reform was to be aimed at changing the rules of participation in religious worship. This was especially true for young people, for whom the rules of etiquette prevalent in the traditional Orthodox Church were considered to distance the Church from the present, making it not only conservative but also one with widespread fundamentalist ideas and therefore incapable of meeting the needs of young religious people.

However, the main topic of discussion in the modern Orthodox world of Ukraine was the so-called 'calendar reform', which from the point of view of the Church should bring Ukrainian Orthodoxy closer to world Christianity [11]. There are arguments both for and against such changes among Christians' spiritual mentors. In our opinion, the arguments for the reform indicate the Church's attraction to the ideas of Christian ecumenism, the desire to find ways to understand Christian religions. However, the arguments against it reveal fundamentalist trends in the sense that they refer to the need to reproduce the rules and principles established by 'authentic doctrine' and must protect not only the Church calendar but also relevant worldviews, family and political values. At the same time, according to a survey conducted by the sociological group 'Rating', only 25% of religious people support the initiative to change the Church calendar (64% spoke out against, 7% had an indifferent attitude and 4% found it difficult to answer) [*Attitude of Ukrainians to rescheduling Christmas celebration*, Sociological group 'Rating', 2019]. After the publication of the results, the Primate of the OCU noted that the change of the calendar can take place only with broad public support. It is interesting to note that there is a widespread opinion among the clergy of this Church that reckless steps in the reform will lead to internal splits and the fundamentalization of views among members of some religious communities, as well as cause the 'conservation' of thousands of communities with millions of religious people in the Moscow Patriarchate [*Attitude of Ukrainians to rescheduling Christmas celebration*, Sociological group 'Rating', 2019]. In such a covert form, the hope is expressed that most UOC communities will eventually join the newly created local Church.

As can be seen, in contrast to the widespread views on the causes of fundamentalization as a response to desacralization and globalization processes, such anti-modernist tendencies in the Ukrainian environment originate from the desire for intra-Church change. At the same time, those who advocate these changes believe that they can help reconcile with the global Christian world, modern morality and stabilize the situation of religious insecurity arising against the background of civilizational change. Those who criticize the changes emphasize that innovations can lead to the loss of national identity and make the National Church dependent on external factors.

The third element of the model of the 'matrix of the religious situation' is the mega-level. The mega-level of the religious situation includes the so-called 'controlling parameters', which are external to the religious situation (as a system) and cause changes in this system. As a component of public life, religion is influenced by economic, political and legal factors. Therefore, the use of the proposed approach provides an opportunity to see how the mega-level of a complex religious system affects its development. For example, the above-mentioned epidemiological situation has led to a narrowing of the personal rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens, affecting in turn religion, as the rights and freedoms of citizens also influence the freedom of conscience and religion. An additional manifestation of the mega-level is the current political situation in Ukraine associated with events since 2014. Here, the 'controlling parameters' at the public level are of particular importance. When analysing the role of political and economic factors in the fundamentalization of religion and the impact of these phenomena on modern politics, one should pay attention to the role of the media. After all, it is through the activities of the media that an idea is formed of the justice or sanity of those actions that can be perceived either as a manifestation of national liberation movements using the means of insurgent-guerrilla wars or as manifestations of the criminogenic factors of globalization taken as a basis by fundamentalist or extremist religious organizations. The modern world has a place for various manifestations of religious beliefs, social needs and ideological interests. The ability of the media not only to broadcast but also to popularize them leads to the fact that the media themselves will be at the centre of de-religiousization or de-secularization processes. At the same time it is undeniable that the ethics of public discussion, which is often initiated and conducted by the media, should be based on the observance of specific principles that should contribute to tolerance in the religious sphere. There is a need not only to organize a platform for dialogue but also to spread the principles of respect for all its participants, as well as to overcome stereotyping and those obstacles that impede the dialogical nature of communication. The second condition may be the observance of principles long known to academic religious studies: objectivity, non-concession and pluralism. This position of the media will help to involve participants in the dialogue and create conditions for adequate coverage of events taking place in the religious environment, with the dissemination of positive results that contribute to overcoming social tensions and conflicts. This means that the direct connection between the mega-level and

the macro-level can not only create conditions for the emergence of crisis situations in religion at the macro-level (fundamentalization, extremization) but also contribute to the formation of new qualities ('privatization' of religion, its individualization).

On the one hand, religious people, being citizens, are objects (subjects) of politics, economic or legal relations, participants in the educational process, etc. On the other hand, they are members of religious communities, bearers of the so-called collective religious consciousness (macro-level), participants in religious practices (micro-level), and, to varying degrees, Church subjects. In the context of the above-mentioned external factors, the practice of meeting religious needs has changed, and their consequences are already manifesting themselves in the dynamics of the religious situation. Its changes can be manifested at all levels of public life: the lives of religious people, economic relations, political and legal practices [8, p. 171]. It has been shown that imaginary short-term changes in the micro-level elements affect the long-term change in the religious situation and can lead to confrontation within one religious denomination, represented by the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, such as the OCU and the UOC.

It should be noted that the Internet has become a means of communication for many people and its role has grown significantly against the background of the coronavirus pandemic. We have witnessed how mega-level instruments are involved in the micro-level of the religious situation and the future role of pastoral ministry is yet unknown. In this situation, conservative views are already difficult to identify, as people who consider themselves traditionalists or conservatives can support views that run counter to established religious canons and religious traditions. This is observed in the public speeches of religious hierarchs, in their attitude to the use of modern technology in the process of religious worship. We are talking not just about the growing role of the Internet in the lives of religious people, but about the virtual space replacing sacred symbols and the historically prevailing conditions that were considered traditional for meeting religious needs (attending religious events, participating in rituals, pilgrimage). At the same time, we realize that there are spiritual demands inherent in human nature, and how the Church responds to them may indicate a change in the functional manifestation of religion associated with objective reality.

The history of religion in Ukraine has many examples of how the activities of religious communities have affected the non-religious sphere. For example, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) took an active part in the practice of nation-building (mega-level). Having the experience of oppression and persecution, the UGCC turned to the solution of social, economic and political issues that, at first glance, were supposed to remain outside the scope of its attention. At various times in its history, the Church participated in the creation of cooperative movements, helped preserve the national idea and national identity, maintained diplomatic relations, provided direct support for the educational process, and 'wrote' the history of repression not only in the religious sphere. Having become spiritually close to many Ukrainians, the

UGCC also affected the macro-level of the religious situation. The spiritual authority of the Church is confirmed by the course of elections in Ukraine taking place only on Sundays. An analysis of the reports of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Ukraine shows that voter turnout in the country's regions is directly dependent on the denomination dominated in the electoral district. For example, in the early elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, voter turnout (percentage of the total number of those who took part in the elections) at 12 p.m. was about 40% for the Kharkiv region and less than 25% for the Lviv region [*Extraordinary elections of NDU*, Central Election Commission data, 2019]. Most analysts attribute this to the fact that residents of the western regions of Ukraine show a higher percentage of churching, participate more actively in the religious life of the community, and attend Sunday services more widely. According to Oleksandr Razumkov Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, against the background of a decrease in the number of religious people, there is a regional difference in the ratio of their participation in religious life (8% in eastern Ukraine and 40% in western Ukraine) [*Church, society, state in confrontation challenges and threats of today (information materials)*, Round table 'Religion and power in Ukraine: problems of relations', Oleksandr Razumkov Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, May 24, 2017, 27, https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2017_Religiya.pdf].

Another noteworthy example is the participation of representatives of religious communities in the events unfolding in eastern Ukraine [B. Tsyupa, *Russian church to stop blessing nukes proposal*, Voice of America, 2020]. Having supported the national struggle of the Ukrainians, the UGCC has been actively involved in charitable activities aimed at supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine since 2014. At the same time, representatives of this Church took an active part in the creation and institutionalization of the chaplain service, which contributed to the adoption of the law on military chaplaincy in the first reading, the regulation 'On the Military Clergy Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine'. Such an active civic stance contributed to the process of 'popularizing the Church', which in 2016 numbered 4.5 million believers. The given examples show that the mega-level not only subordinates religion to itself but is itself under the influence of a religious factor. This is not just a factor that determines the trends of the religious situation - the parameters of the mega-level themselves change in response to the requirements of the religious situation.

It should be noted that the freedoms that Churches receive from the state are ambiguously perceived by society, especially when assessing the consequences of exercising their rights, as indicated in the report of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the US Department of State in 2018 [*Ukraine International Religious Freedom Report*, 2018]. At the same time, these assessments, based on facts, influenced the formation of such a state policy that helped to mitigate the transition period of institutionalization, as exemplified by the OCU. This situation was reflected in the results of a survey conducted from February 15 to February 27, 2020 by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. Its purpose was to reveal public opinion regarding the largest

churches of Ukraine and their leaders. According to the survey, the OCU enjoys the highest level of trust. A positive attitude toward this Church was expressed by 60.6% of respondents and a negative attitude by 5.4%. The OCU is followed by the UGCC (35.2% are positive and 6.5% are negative) and the UOC (25.7% and 28%, respectively) [11]. As can be seen, there is a 'negative balance' in the attitude toward the UOC, which may be due to the position of this Church on the events in eastern Ukraine.

3. Conclusions

Based on the proposed model, we can point out some factors that cause religion to gravitate towards fundamentalization. One of them is the 'liberalization' of some elements at the macro-level and at the micro-level. An important aspect of this topic is also to take into account the factors of social and political influence and the dynamics of change in the perception of cultural and historical heritage at the mega-level (among the controlling parameters). That is, the religious component of national-cultural identity can be the cause of the fundamentalization and radicalization of political movements since it is often the centre of the preservation of national culture. One of the reasons for the emergence and manifestation of fundamentalism can be religious conflicts caused by several circumstances: interdenominational doctrinal contradictions (macro-level conflict), intradenominational dogmatic and practical contradictions (micro-level - direct practice), the desire for domination and the levelling of interests with other denominations, including paternalism mechanisms on the part of the state (mega-level). Unfortunately, a compromise that could help to overcome a religious conflict is not an effective factor, as it suggests giving up one's own certain beliefs in order to reach an agreement. At the same time, there are other opportunities that open up in the process of interdenominational dialogue related to common social problems, the solution of which is possible only with close cooperation (overcoming the consequences of military conflicts, solving poverty problems, social service, etc.).

An analysis of the specifics of cultural and historical experience suggests that the deliberate levelling of cultural and religious differences that determine various types of identities in the system of social interaction and social relations can have extremely negative consequences. Focusing on the values of preserving rights and freedoms in the religious sphere requires constant support from the state. Society cannot reproduce itself without regard to state and legal norms and laws. In this regard, the state becomes the leading regulator of public life, and the legislator ensures the plurality of interreligious dialogue. Thus, not only the freedoms of citizens are ensured, but also, by reducing the tension in the process of the institutional definition of religious communities, conditions are created in society for developing religions and projecting changes in the religious situation. The positive dynamics in this situation is indicated in particular in the reports of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom [*Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act*, 2019].

Therefore, by applying the model of the conceptual matrix of the religious situation to the analysis of the religious situation in Ukraine, we can describe the interaction of all three levels as follows. The instability of the political situation in the country leads to changes in religious life at the public level and in the sphere of individual religious life. Such a situation may result in the spread of radical sentiments, the fundamentalization of religion, changes in the vectors of cooperation between the Orthodox Churches, as well as the emergence of new 'non-institutional' forms of religiosity.

References

- [1] A. Kolodny and L. Fylypovych, *Functionality of religion: The Ukrainian context. Monograph*, UAR, Kyiv, 2017.
- [2] A. Kolodny, *Religious Ukraine. Collective monograph*, Vol. II: *Forecasts of Religious Processes in Ukraine*, Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies, Kyiv, 2008.
- [3] V. Voynalovych, V. Yelensky, M. Kryryushko, N. Kochan and N. Rublyova, *Religious factors in the nation- and state-building process: The experience of modern Ukraine. Monograph*, I.F. Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, 2012.
- [4] P. Kosukha, V. Yelensky and A. Kolodny, *The current religious situation in Ukraine: State, trends, forecasts*, Part 1, The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, 1994.
- [5] V. Tytarenko, *From prophecy in religion to projections in religious studies: History, theory, prospects. Monograph*, Tsentr Yevropy, Kyiv, 2017.
- [6] Z.V. Shwed, *Studia Universitatis Moldaviae. Seria Stiinte Umanistice*, **4(94)** (2016) 205-210.
- [7] J. Casanova, *Curr. Sociol.*, **59(2)** (2011) 252-267.
- [8] M. Emerson, W. Mirola and S. Monahan, *Religion Matters: What Sociology Teaches Us About Religion in Our World*, Routledge, London, 2016.
- [9] V.G. Budanov, *Filosofiya osvity (Philosophy of Education)*, **1(3)** (2006) 160.
- [10] Z.V. Shwed, *Gilea: Scientific bulletin, Philosophical sciences*, **138(11)** (2018) 27-31.
- [11] ***, *Results of a survey on public opinion regarding the largest churches of Ukraine and their leaders*, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, Kyiv, 2020, online at https://risu.ua/stavlennya-do-okremih-cerkov-ukrajini-i-ochikuvannya-vid-diyalnosti-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi-ukrajini-lyutiy-2020-roku_n103056.