

# New religions as the postsecular epiphenomenon of globalisation in the contemporary Ukrainian society

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**Dates:**

Received: 07 Aug. 2019

Accepted: 18 Dec. 2019

Published: 24 Feb. 2020

**How to cite this article:**

Grabovska, I., Talko, T. & Vlasova, T., 2020, 'New religions as the postsecular epiphenomenon of globalisation in the contemporary Ukrainian society', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(1), a5711. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.5711>

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The tendencies of postsecularism in the social life of today's Ukraine are especially significant in their influence on the quasi-religious context of religious worships practiced in the country. These factors erode the modernity basis of the society, and Ukraine appears in the contradictory situation of its intention to complete the modernisation process and oppose the antiglobalistic isolationism. The neo-Protestant teachings and practices are obviously connected with the principles of liberalism and consumerism. Neo-Oriental and new syncretic religions show that they produce significant influence on spreading globalistic views in the Ukrainian society. The marginality characteristics of new religions prove the idea that their values are a challenge to the essentialistic dichotomies of the Ukrainian traditional churches. The sociocultural and political context of globalisation and postmodernism includes religious transformations axiomatically, and the impact of both on the late capitalism stage is evident in different contexts. The culture of postmodernism makes this process complicated in the countries which are still between modernity and postmodernity. The processes of 'label change' are important with the stress on the substitution of the rationalistic foundation by quasi-scientific teachings. The conclusions demonstrate that the very incompleteness of the modernity has led to the expansion of the quasi-religious techniques in the social and cultural life of Ukraine. The erosion of the modernity values results in spreading new religions, which became vivid at the end of the last century. As globalisation promotes syncretic and neo-Oriental religions, antiglobalistic movements are supported by neo-pagan techniques and practices.

**Keywords:** new religions; neo-Oriental cults; syncretic worships; neo-pagan techniques.

## Introduction

The topicality of the article's problem is stipulated by the fact that the development of the postsecular tendencies in the Ukrainian society and the attempts to complete its modernisation against the opposition of the nationalistic isolationism and globalistic intentions comprise the present context of the development of new religions in Ukraine. The latter testifies to the assumption that the research of the peculiarities of the inter-relation of the main tendencies in the development of the Ukrainian society and new religions, which have recently come into existence, is important and urgent. The inter-relation of postsecularity and globalisation tendencies produces a significant influence on the quasi-religious environment transforming the former nationally established worships. At present, the religious situation in Ukraine is determined by two main components of the religious process – traditional worships and new religions.

The impact of social transformations on new religions is supposed to promote the development of new research fields in science, on the whole, and religious studies, in particular.

## Experiments

At present, the topic of new religions is of constant interest not only in scientific discussions but also in students' discussions. To this point, the course of lectures devoted to non-traditional religions and worships has been delivered to the students of philosophy in Oles Honchar National University of Dnipro since 2011. Recently, most students' course papers and diploma works have been concentrated on the analysis of neo-Orientalistic worships such as the Vaishnavism, the Krishnaism, the Rajneeshism and the Falum Gong Dafa. The Bahaim is considered the most popular among the syncretic cults. Of some interest are different neo-Protestant trends, for example, the Charismatic Movements. The Ukrainian neo-pagan religion in the form of runwism is also popular among young people. The movement of the Bahai, which is presented now in

approximately 70 towns, and the academic discipline of the Bahai studies at universities are developing extensively nowadays. The important factor which exerts students' active debates and emotions is an issue of the inter-relation of neo-religions and the ethics of consumerism.

All the facts mentioned above are derived from the practical activities of the authors and point to the conclusion about the necessity of the deeper theoretical analysis of the given phenomenon.

## Discussion

The research of the traditional religions covers a significant corpus of literature in the Ukrainian science. As the analysis of the traditional worships in Ukraine is not the subject matter of the given article, it is considered appropriate to touch mainly on the ideas of the leading Ukrainian scientists in the field of religious studies – A.M. Kolodny and P.L. Yarotzky. In their books, they pay attention to the pre-Christian pagan worships and the history of Christianity in our country in the periods of the Middle Ages, the colonial dependence in the Russian empire, the religious processes in the Soviet Ukraine, religions of the ethnic minorities and the religious life in the contemporary independent Ukraine. As the ethnic life of the Ukrainians is mostly connected with Christianity, many researchers consider it necessary to correlate the periods of the religious processes in Ukraine with Christianity, defining pre-Christian, the Orthodox Christian, polyconfessional Christian and ecumenism tendencies for the organic unity of different Christian denominations (Kolodny & Yarotzky 1999:22–27). The protestant churches came to Ukraine in the 18th century; the Adventism and the Pentecostalism sects were spreading their influence in Ukraine during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

The Soviet period is characterised by the atheistic propaganda, destruction of churches and persecution of the priests. With the state independency acquired in 1991, the religious spheres in Ukraine have become revived and renovated (Kolodny & Yarotzky 1999:22–27).

We are well aware of the fact that at present there are many problematic issues in this domain, and in our research we have faced more than a few of them. It has become evident that in this analysis we must take into consideration the debates over secularism and postsecularism, which are traditionally oriented towards determining the definitions of those notions and development of those phenomena which point out the postsecular character of the contemporary Western world. In this context, many researchers apply J. Habermas' theory of postsecularism. Considering the problems that the West faced after 09 November 2001, J. Habermas came to the conclusion that there was no direct dependency between the modernisation of the society and the secularism of the population. Thus, J. Habermas claimed that the compromise would be reached between the postsecular tendencies and religious traditions (Habermas 2011).

J. Habermas maintained that the religious communities would demonstrate a capability for the reflexive and rationalistic self-consciousness. They would stop denying the authority of science and create a new religious language, which would be easily understood by popular masses. The secular majority, in its turn, would agree to see in religion the most important resource of *making sense* (Habermas 2002).

In their attempts to comprehend the essence of the modernity transformations in Ukraine, the scientists have begun to discuss the postsecular state of the contemporary Ukrainian society. In particular, K. Pashkov tries to dispute J. Habermas' thesis that only developed Western democratic societies can be called postsecular. The scientist stresses that (Pashkov 2013):

[T]he post-Soviet society has passed the secularization processes similar to those of the Western societies and formally it can be considered ready to become postsecular. (p. 186)

In our opinion, it is significant that the modernisation project has not been completed in Ukraine. The fact is that the traditional religions, which have lost their impact to a great extent currently in the world, have begun to revive actively after the disruption of the Soviet Union. It is worth mentioning that the desecularisation processes, which were characteristic of the Soviet period, began to accelerate in Ukraine in the past years.

All mentioned above hardly makes it possible to speak about the Ukrainian society as a postsecular one. It is rather more valid to analyse the tendencies, which testify to its postsecular future and completion of the modernity project. In this context, the liberal democracy as the most successful political project of modernity is considered the most adequate means of reacting to the contemporary challenges (Harary 2018).

It is necessary to stress that nowadays scientific literature on the different aspects of the origin, operation and content of new religions, their teachings and worships is multisided and vast (The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology 2003; Ward 2004). However, the analysis of the new religions in the aspects of their reflection in the secular and postsecular, globalistic and isolationistic tendencies is not present in the scientific books or articles of Ukrainian authors. In the context of the discussion of this theme, it is interesting to consider the analytical papers concerning the articles of the post-Soviet states.

For example, Rogatin V.N. points to the positive and negative features of the neo-Christian churches participation in the Ukrainian political life (Rogatin 2016). The new religions are under research in the monographic book of the Belorussian scientist V.A. Martinovitch. Of special interest is V. Martinovitch's attempt to classify neo-religious movements and analyse the peculiarities of their migrations (Martinovitch 2015).

The problem of the influence of new religions on the formation of students' identities is also in the focus of the Ukrainian scientists' research (Talko & Bunakova 2016).

Of special interest are papers in which scientists analyse essentialistic approaches to the concept of marriage and family (Grabovska T., Talko T.), paying special attention to the cultural aspects of the secularisation and the family (Vlasova T., Makeshina Ju., Vlasova O., etc.). The problems of the desecularisation of culture are under research in the works of O. Kiselyov (2019).

The neo-religious criticism is vivid in the research of foreign scientists such as Y. Barry, A. Dworkin, Y. MacDowell, D. Markem, D. Stuart, A. Egorsten, N. Krivelsky, A. Kuraev, S. Semin and others. Most of the, particularly Ukrainian, scientific investigations are dedicated to the historiography of various neo-religious movements and practices mainly in the Ukrainian context.

Among the Ukrainian scientists who are involved in the research of religions, authors such as N. Dubar, V. Elensky, M. Zakovitch, S. Kachurova, A. Kolodny and V. Titarenko should be mentioned. It must be stressed that nowadays neo-religious churches are considering those new confessions, churches, religions and groups which reflect the processes of modernisation of the religious sphere. In this context, we want to draw attention to M. Novichenko's articles (2003). The paper of V. Elensky (1995) is considered useful in the analysis of the Ukrainian new religions.

It should be noted that there have been recently published some papers in which researchers analyse systematically various aspects of the interaction of new religions and ethnopolitical processes in Ukraine. In this context, S.I. Zdiruck's monograph *Public and religious relations: Challenges of Ukraine in the XXIst century* (Zdiruck 2005) is of importance alongside the research by V. Voinalovitch and N. Kochan (2014:200–275).

We should stress that most of the Ukrainian authors study the transformation processes of the Ukrainian society in the aspects of traditional religions (Kiselyov 2019).

Ukrainian scientists point out that one of the main problematic issues is an attempt to determine the role of the religion in the future, and answering this question means taking into account two religious types – internal and external ones. As A. Kolodny mentions, the methodological mistake of many researchers is the fact that a number of manifestations of the external religious behaviour are used as the indicators of the internal religious feelings (Kolodny & Yarosky 1999:700). In our opinion, it is important from the methodological point of view that religious ideas have ceased to be a font of knowledge in our age of hypermodernism.

For the prognosis of the future of new religions in our country, we agree with M. Novichenko's (2003) opinion who claims that:

[T]he tendency of spreading new religions on the confessions map of Ukraine represents objectively irreversible character. The innovative religious process will continue with different intensive force in different Ukrainian regions depending on the differences of mentality and the religion culture of the population. (p. 114)

We support the opinion that the quantity and variability of new religions do not have a historical precedent (Kolodny & Yarosky 1999:718). The focus of the analysis of all the debates mentioned above is on the fact that the attempt to classify new religions present in Ukraine now is connected with the future of the solution of many problems represented in this article.

The objective of the research is to consider the essentialistic peculiarities of the contradictions between modernism and postsecular and globalistic tendencies complicated by the isolationising trends in the Ukrainian society. The scientific tasks in such a problematic field have not been under research in the Ukrainian science yet.

### Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Results

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium were characterised with flourishing religious ideas and practices (Taylor 1987). The revival of the traditional churches took place together with spreading neo-religious movements (Westphal 2009). The latter shows that the project of European modernity based on the values of the secular society is still incomplete in Ukraine.

The values of the secularism comprise the system of values which are not new (the recognition of scientific truth, the division of science and faith life). Many of those values are present in different religious beliefs, both traditional and non-traditional ones. But the scientists stress that the secularism peculiarities point out that they do not claim to be exclusive and monopolic owners of those values (Harary 2018). Besides a great number of new religions, which is a quantitative factor, there is a more important factor that indicates the intention to establish communication with the representatives of all confessions and worships.

New religious organisations, which operate in Ukraine now, can be divided into several main groups. The first one covers new Christianity teachings. In Ukraine, they are represented by neo-Protestant communities, first of all, by Evangelistic and Charismatic ones, the latter is dominant in this country. The Charismatic movement began to develop in the 1990s, and now the main Charismatic communities functioning in Ukraine are The Spiritual Movement of the Churches of the Evangelic Christians; Ukrainian Christian Evangelic Church; The Spiritual Centre *New Generation* of the Christian Churches of Ukraine (Complete Testament); The United Christian Evangelic Church of the Living God; and The Union of the Evangelic Churches of Ukraine. Nowadays in Dnipro region, the following Charismatic communities are functioning:

- Alfa and Omega Christian youth community, which organises charity dinners, holiday programmes and concerts at Christmas and Easter.
- Paradise.

- Great Errand.
- Bethesda.
- The Free Evangelical Church of Ukraine.
- The Jews for Christ.
- New Generation.
- The Flame of Awakening.
- Open Heaven.
- The Father's Home.
- Awakening.
- Freedom.
- Zion – the affiliation of New Generation.
- Fulcrum.
- God's Kingdom.
- Jesus Christ's Church.

It is significant to stress that an active charitable operation is a characteristic of the Charismatic Church in general. Volunteers provide help in charitable events which are correspondingly shown in 33 periodicals. The congregation movement named Christ Church is actively developing at the moment too.

According to researchers' mind, the determining feature of our country's neo-Protestant movement is the necessity to overcome sectist features acquired in the past because of the hostile environment along with the searches for the optional organisation model, orientation towards interchurch discipline and consolidation of the community's members. It is supposed that high social activity should be connected with impenetrability against secular tendencies and expressive religious dominating features. The neo-Protestant representatives speak about the necessity of the growth of the protestant values presence in the secular life.

As for the neo-Christian communities, the group of Antonin Gognal (Pidgirtsi, Vasilian monastery) consists of the former monks-Vasilians who left the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. They proclaimed themselves bishops, sources of the Truth, and began to determine precisely who belonged to the church and who did not. Sometimes it is absurd, for example, the fact that the Pope was abdicated too. In practice, the main ideas of that movement are protection of the family values and struggle with homosexuality.

The next group is represented by neo-Orientalistic communities. Among many of them, the most famous are Society of Krishna Consciousness and the International Society *World's Pure Religion* (Sahaja yoga). The Chinese tradition is represented by Falun Gong. The scandalously known Transcendental meditation, Brahma Kumaris, is also operating in Ukraine; here, Buddhist movements should be mentioned too. New religions actively assimilate New Age ideas. This concerns primarily the faith into impersonated god and the possibility of men and women to acquire divine properties. Among their practices, meditative, occult, channelling and holistic ones should be mentioned, as for the main features they include mysticism, healing properties and orientation towards the healthy way of life, vegetarianism and so on.

Generally speaking, new religions' supporters focus their hopes on the alternative medicine.

Neo-religious movements of this kind are characterised by ecologism, self-perfection as an instrument to perceive the paranormal world. In the syncretic cults, the Oriental mysticism is often connected with the Western scientism. The following exotic cults are characterised by their special interest in mysticism: Voodoo, Crowleyism, Satanism, Luciferism and so on. The next group of the Ukrainian new religions is represented by the neo-pagan communities oriented either towards the Western neo-pagan concepts or the Ukrainian neo-pagan organisations, for example, the Native Ukrainian National Faith, The Glory of the Orthodox Church, RUN-faith (L. Silenko's followers) and so on.

Among the Ukrainian new religions, there are those that represent a *temptation* of totalitarianism with the intention of *clear* answers without the necessity of choice or individual spiritual work; they always stress need for subordination (Kolodny & Yarosky 1999:718). As a rule, these are destructive cults, for example, the White Brotherhood. The neo-Protestant fundamentalism has been evident recently too.

The vivid example is provided by the activities of the church *The God's Embassy* with its charismatic pastor Sunday Sineui Adelaja. To oppose those movements, some ecological religions are quickly developing now together with the so-called Galaxy Religion. The latter contributes to the development of the globalistic orientations, contributes to the completion of the formation of the modern national community and helps to solve the problems of the inner integration in Ukraine (de-Sovietism, decolonisation). Thus, it will contribute to the completion of the process of modernisation and European integration in Ukraine; the latter will help to ruin the concept of the *Russian world* and suchlike ideas (Grabovsky 2018).

In our opinion, the Utopian character of the *postsecular society* lies in its conception maintaining that all the main social decisions will be provided after the secular majority have listened to the opponents' agreements as for their religions or beliefs (Habermas Y.). However, those Utopian ideas do not decrease the interest in the interpretation of the future of neo-religious movements in Ukraine in the context of postsecularity. The globalistic tendencies are, for example, represented in the teaching of the Bahaim followers, in whose texts it is stated that the mankind is developing towards the world's unity. Describing the order of such a community, they stress that it can be formed only on the spiritual basis with the elimination of the wealth and poverty both inside and outside the nations. They focus on the formation of the world's federal government which is to ensure the fulfilment of any decision providing protection of all peoples and resistance to any aggression (Hatcher & Markin 2002).

Undoubtedly, the liberal and globalistic processes are reflected in the teaching of most syncretic neo-religious

movements; on the contrary, the opposite tendency, the nationalistic isolationism, is also represented in some trends of the Ukrainian neo-pagan conceptions. While analysing neo-pagan ideas, we should remember that it would be a dangerous mistake to think that, as J.N. Harari puts it, without nationalism we must have lived in the liberal paradise (Harary 2018). It is obvious that nationalism is closely connected with patriotism. In our country's context, under the conditions of the hybrid war nationalistic oriented Ukrainians have shown their love of Ukraine and readiness to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of the Ukrainian people, and the majority of the Ukrainian neo-pagan followers have proved the force of their religious values. However, we should not forget that the ambivalence of researchers' evaluations of the Ukrainian neo-pagan cults is not accidental. Some adepts of the Ukrainian neo-pagan cults have shown that the problems with nationalism, along with patriotism, began when *good patriotism* turns into chauvinism and ultra-nationalism. As J.N. Harary writes, if we believe that our nation is unique and believe in the unique character of any other nation, we do not break the laws of justice, in the opposite case it becomes the fertile soil for conflicts and wars (Harari 2018). The facts from our country's recent past prove the validity of the above-mentioned statements.

The leader of the civil paramilitaristic organisation *The Patriot of Ukraine* lieutenant colonel of the battalion *Azov A. Biletsky* is famous for his xenophobic ideas which he has announced in many public speeches. The battalion under his leadership took an active part in the battles in Donbass, and he himself was elected into Verhovna Rada in 2014. The researchers of the ethnic and political processes in Donbass note that the organisation *The Patriot of Ukraine* under his leadership has positioned itself as a social-nationalistic one, which defends the principles of the race theory. The scientists stress that in the programme documents of that organisation, the notion of nation is interpreted as *exclusive genetic population* which has a right to get rid of other ethnic or racial population by means of their deportation to their historical motherland. It is claimed that the Ukrainian nation has a right to improve its own health by means of racial eugenic and ecological laws. The scientists state that racial views in the ideology of *patriots* are linked to the stylised Slavonic Paganism, which preaches radical nationalism and open-minded racism. It is represented in the images of the Swastika as an Arian solar symbol, which is stylised in a Gothic print. All the above mentioned have risen associations with the German national socialism (Voinalovitch & Kochan 2014:269).

A. Biletsky's xenophobic ideas concerning the ethnic and political development of Ukraine are a vehicle of spreading the ideology of the nationalistic isolationism in Ukraine. In the context of the tendencies of the nationalistic isolationism, we should mention one more Ukrainian neo-pagan phenomenon called *The Vedic Orthodox Church*. The teaching of Sva I.M. as its founder is based on the segregation interpreting the racial genesis and proclaims antisemitic ideas. Slavonic people are stated to be *light* and *pure*; Jews are

called to be the people of the darkness who forced the Christianity on the Slavs and have been trying to eliminate the people of Light for centuries. The founder proposes to re-evaluate Christ's role in history. He writes that Christ brought the Vedic religion and that Christ did not find the Christian religion. Christ came to the perished fallen Jews to save them, to protect them from the sinful way of life like a doctor who came to the sick to cure them. Jesus was crucified in his own land where there was its own religion, initially born simultaneously with the Jews coming into existence – Judaism (Sva 2010:6). As it is obvious, the nationalistic orthodox fascism is vividly present in this teaching. The interaction of the xenophobic mood and the nationalistic isolationism in the problematic concepts and practices of the Ukrainian neo-pagan cults proves R. Doking's statement that the religion puts conflicts among people on purpose, motivating their natural intentions to prefer their own ethnic group and avoid the *Other*.

In the patriarchal conceptions of the adepts of the Ukrainian neo-pagan cults, the essentialistic ideas prevail by all means. Those ideas claim that all and everything exist according to its nature, and the world is rigidly divided into the binary oppositions I (Self) – the Other, *the God – the evil, masculine – feminine* and so on. Of great significance is the fact that the society must provide protective mechanisms against anti-human religious ideas and worships. First of all, it concerns the protection of the citizens, the defence against the destructive pseudo-religious doctrines and practices which lead to the threats to the physical and psychic health of the nation, provoking social passivity and disorientation.

## Conclusion

In the conclusion, it is necessary to stress that the main tendencies of the society development in Ukraine influence greatly the formation of the new religions in this country. Neo-religious ideas, teachings and practices are actively engaged in the process of finishing the *Modernity Project*. Nowadays, it is obvious that the new religions not only contribute to the processes of establishing Western neoliberal values in the Ukrainian culture. Those values together with consumerism contribute into finishing the neoliberal project of the Ukrainian society and development of the globalistic tendencies in this context. The problem is that they clash with the necessity of acquiring the national and religious identity. The marginality kept by most new religions proves the fact that spiritual values proposed by them are a serious challenge to the essentialistic dichotomies which divide the world into the *Self* and the *Other*. Many stereotypes of the patriarchal cultural tradition, canonic churches and traditional public consciousness are exposed to the scientific revision. Thus, the development of the new religions is a witness of the liberalisation of the Ukrainian society, on the one hand, while on the other, it testifies to the conflict mechanism stipulated by certain destructive ideas of the totalitarian, fundamentalistic, xenophobic and nationalistic kind.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or non-profit sectors.

### Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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