
Liudmyla Fylypovych and Yuriy Babinov

1 Pre-Formative Phase of the Discipline’s Development

Religious Studies is a relatively young scientific discipline for Ukraine. Its recent history dates from 1991, when Ukraine got its independence. However, Religious Studies can also be considered as one of the oldest branches of human knowledge. Information about religion was recorded on the territory of modern Ukraine during the ancient civilizations, and using archaeological, linguistic, and other monuments we can partially reconstruct archaic world-views of proto-Ukrainians. The understanding of artifacts of popular spiritual life, however, appeared much later.

The earliest roots of Ukrainian Religious Studies are to be traced in Kievan Rus. This medieval state flourished during the 9th to 13th centuries CE, and was notable for a highly developed literate culture. The historians of Ukrainian Religious Studies approach Old Rus chronicles, early Christian, and epic works as sources containing information about religions during specific periods, crucial events in the spiritual life of the people, and the rise of Christianity in Rus in particular. The Story of Years Bygone, the Teachings of Volodymyr Monomakh,

1 Because the original language of this chapter does not use Latin alphabet, we provide both the transcription as well as English translations of the publications mentioned.

2 To clarify the terminology used here, under “Religious Studies” we have in mind the scientific study of religion or knowledge about religion in various forms of abstraction. Neither of the terms “Religious Studies” and “Study of Religion” completely corresponds to the Ukrainian term “religiieznavstvo”, which translates literally as “religio-knowledge” or “knowledge about religion”. In the Western tradition, “Religious Studies” is used to refer 1) to religious study of a specific religion by its believers or those who pretend to be religious; and 2) to scientific research and analysis of religion by scholars. To overcome the dual semantics of this term, some western scholars use the term Religionswissenschaft, “science of religion”, but it should be noted that znавство, ‘knowledge’ in Ukrainian terminology, does not correspond to ‘science’ in the English terminology.

and the *Sermon on Law and Grace* by Hilarion of Kyiv, Kyiv-Pechersk Paterikon, and other written records\(^4\) give an account of the conversion of the Kyivan Prince Volodymyr the Great to Christianity, the formation of the Christian worldview of the people of Rus, and the influence of Christianity on the development of the Old-Rus culture.

The tradition of reflecting over the national spiritual history has never been interrupted in Ukraine: at times it has been more intense, and at others diminished, but the interest in religion (speculative or practical) has always persisted.

Until the 19th century, Religious Studies in Ukraine developed largely in a theological frame of reference.\(^5\) The major contributors of cumulative and analytical data on religion were the scholars of the Kiev-Mohyla Academy I. Gizel, I. Kononovych-Gorbatskyi, S. Yavorskyi, and F. Prokopovych.\(^6\) This academy was the first Orthodox institution of higher education in Eastern Europe; its task was to teach Christian apologetics and the strengthening of the Orthodox confession, but also ideas of humanism and enlightenment. The scholars sought to clearly distinguish philosophy from theology; the famous theologian, philosopher, and Rector of the Academy, Theophan Prokopovych, believed that philosophy and theology each have their own distinct principles and methods. Whereas the object of theology is the Divine Revelation, the object of rational philosophy concerns logical operations: natural philosophy deals with natural bodies, and moral philosophy concerns the moral and social life of the people.\(^7\)

The Ukrainian educator and philosopher G. Skovoroda (1722–1794) was critical of medieval scholasticism and religious dogmas; he believed in human reason and the limitless possibilities of cognitive perception of the world.\(^8\) Skovoroda tried to implement these ideas through adoption of the principles of Christian life, and through understanding each person’s “affinity” in one’s union with faith.

---

\(^4\) *Povist’ vrem’yanikh lit: Litopys* [The story of years bygone: chronicle] (Kyiv: Rad. Pis’m., 1990).

\(^5\) Anatoliy Kolodnyy, “Religieznavcha dumka v Ukraini: ii istoriya i s’ogodenni zdobutky,” [Religious studies thinking in Ukraine: its history and modern achievements]; *Religieznavcha nauka rokiv nezalezhnosti* [Religious studies in the independence years] (Kyiv: UARR, 2010), 9.


\(^7\) Feofan Prokopovich, *Dukhovnyy Reglament* [Spiritual Regulations] (Kyiv, 1823).