

## War as a new reality for religious minorities of Ukraine (on the example of Jehovah's Witnesses)

Vita Tytarenko (ORCID 0000-0003-1073-9792)

H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy

The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Ukraine)

Liudmyla Fylypovych (ORCID 0000-0002-0886-3965)

H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy

The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Ukraine)

### ABSTRACT

Using the example of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) religious organization, the authors analyze the situation for representatives of religious minorities in Ukraine in connection with the Russia-Ukraine's war. Being institutions that, even in peacetime, occupying a non-dominant position in the structure of the religious life of Ukraine, religious minorities suffer the most from the war and its consequences compared to the majority religions.

The purpose of the article is to clarify the scale of resource losses (human, material, moral), the nature of the religious minorities representatives' activities (in this case, the JW) and the possibilities of preserving and revitalizing the activities of their communities.

As a result of the study, the authors came to conclusions that can be considered a certain novelty: the war accelerated the processes of civil and national identification, strengthened people in their faith, and intensified socially useful and humanitarian assistance to the needy from religious minorities. The vast majority of communities took a distinctly patriotic position, contributing in various ways to the victory of Ukraine in the war and the establishment of a stable and just peace.

At the same time, the authors predict that Ukraine after the war may be threatened with a decrease in religious pluralism due to the impossibility of reviving the activities of some small religious groups, which will not be able to return to their pre-war usual life, even if the conditions of latitude and state guarantees of human rights are preserved in the religious sphere and their communities.

### KEYWORDS

war,  
religious minorities,  
Jehovah's Witnesses,  
religious identification.

### Introduction

For various reasons, the subject of religious minorities has never been a dominant research problem for domestic historical, religious or theological science. In Soviet times, religious issues were generally viewed with negative connotations, and Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) were labeled as a destructive anti-Soviet sect that should be banned, which was systematically done.

Since 1991, there have been attempts to perform an unbiased study of this religious movement. In the early days, these studies were dominated by the desire to restore the rights of the JW not as representatives of Christianity, i.e. confessors of faith in Jesus Christ, but as a politically damaged institution as a result of the Soviet authorities' anti-religious campaign. Despite the official state registration, this religious organization was perceived by the society, and especially by other Christian churches, as a non-Christian sect, and accordingly, the scientific study

of JW was objectively and subjectively limited. To this day, in the Christian environment, JW are considered sectarians, deceivers, non-Christians (Trachuk, 2016). World statistics still do not include JW in the list of Christian currents, highlighting them in a separate line (Jehovah's Witness 2006). The apotheosis of anti-sectarian slander on JW are the books by the Russian sectarian A. Dworkin (2002). Russian science is known for its narrowly religious (pro-Orthodox) orientations, although more or less objective studies began to occur there as well (Gordienko, 2002; Kanterov, 2006).

Ukrainian historians and scholars of religion, when studying JW started from fundamentally different positions. Already in the first reference and textbook editions, JW appeared as a historically regular phenomenon, as a participant in religious processes in Ukraine. Employees of the Department of Religious Studies at H.S. Skovoroda Insti-



tute of Philosophy always defended the principles of historicism, objectivity, non-confessionalism (Kolodnyi, Lyubovyk 1996; Kolodnyi (ed.), Yarotskyi (ed.) 1999; 2008). Such an unbiased approach to the study of JW was supported by other researchers in Ukraine (*Lyudyna i svit, 2000; Nikolaev, Marynychenko, 2015; Palchevska, 2016; Yarotskyi, 2012*).

In the development of scientific approaches to the study of JW, interesting studies by the domestic historian K. Berezhko (2005; 2011; 2020) appeared.

Despite this, the religious information space of Ukraine is still filled with sufficiently critical materials about JW<sup>1</sup>, apologetically aimed at protecting religious interests. Such narrow evaluations of this organization have the right to exist, but for the balance of existing opinions, as an alternative view, there is a need to voice neutral approaches. In part, it is already presented in well-known works of Ukrainian scientists (*Nikolaev, Marynychenko, 2015; Fylypovych, 2021a, b*).

This research aims to offer a scientific analysis of the activities of the JW religious organization, which is a religious minority in Ukraine, the interest in which is gradually increasing, as evidenced by publications (*Kolodnyi, Filipovych, Aristova, 2021; Filipovych, Tytarenko, Pyvovarova, 2022; Fylypovych, Kolodnyi, 2022; Fylypovych, Tytarenko, 2022*), and therefore interest in JW is also growing. Academic scholars continue to deeply study the religious sources of JW, their history and activities (*Yarotskyi, 2013*).

Especially attractive for real scholars of religion are the issues of the religion's evolution, the change of worldview paradigms in the minds of its believers, in particular, this religious trend. The first attempts to understand the new trends that have appeared recently in the activities of the JW in connection with the Russia-Ukraine's war fall on the year of the 70th anniversary of the sad event – the deportation of the JW from Ukraine to Siberia. Before this date, an international conference was held, as a result of which an interesting collection of materials appeared: "Operation "North": 70 years later." Important lessons of repression for faith" (2021).

These trends require further analysis, which is proposed by the authors of this material, who not only meticulously studied historical sources, religious and liturgical literature of the JW, in particular their journals, annual reports, but also actively used such a **research method** as included observation, repeatedly visiting JW communities in different cities, in the Ukrainian Bethel, communicating with members of this religious organization. This permitted to collect interesting material and draw extraordinary conclusions.

### Results and Discussion of the research

Religious minorities in the conditions of the monopoly of the ruling/dominant churches and the protectionist policy of the state towards the latter have always been disadvantaged, discriminated against, unequal, even prohibited. This applied to both Western and Eastern European countries at all times. Foreign believers and foreign Slavs are common names for religious minorities in the Russian empire (*Religious minorities..., 2021: 30*). In Soviet times, the non-Orthodox were called sectarian, totalitarian and destructive. This also applies to Jehovah's Witnesses (JW),

whose pre-independence history, until 1991, is a history of persecution, mistrust, and suspicion on the part of the authorities and society, other religious organizations.

During the political repressions of the Soviet era, the apogee of which was Operation "North", as a result of which 10,000 Ukrainian JW were forcibly deported en masse to Siberia, state anti-religious propaganda, as well as the negative attitude formed in society towards Jehovah's Witnesses (*Fylypovych, 2021b*), the followers of this religious organization closed themselves within small Bible study groups. Even after the accusations were withdrawn in 1965, they were forbidden to return to Ukraine. Being actually underground, the witnesses were forced to confirm the secrecy and illegitimacy of their structure.

### Since 1991, radical changes in the status and structure of the organization began.

State registration of a religious organization was an important step here. Thanks to the JW leadership, who quickly navigated the changed circumstances, it was possible to achieve an official status for the JW. The Ukrainian authorities, which after a 50-year ban on this denomination, registered the JW precisely as a religious organization, thus proving that it considers them one of the subjects of state-church relations.

In the conditions of many churches' rehabilitation, which were recognized as victims of political repression, the JW managed to prove that they are also the injured party. On February 28, 1991, the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization was officially registered in Ukraine. This was the first registration of Witnesses on the territory of the USSR and one of the first registrations of religion on the territory of Ukraine.

Therefore, in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine, thanks to the registered status of a religious organization, received freedom for their religious activities. They immediately took advantage of these opportunities and held their first congress in Lviv, which then gathered a large number of their followers. And 1993 became a turning point for Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine. At that time, the first international congress was held in Kyiv, which was attended by thousands of people from abroad. During the days of the congress, 7,000 people were baptized, that is, accepted faith in Jehovah. Since then, the number of Witnesses in Ukraine has been constantly growing, and before the war (as of 2020), there were 128,614 of them (*Service Report... 2020*). For the year 2023, the JW website gives a figure of 127,378 ministers who teach the Bible, united in 1,429 congregations. The slight decrease in the number of JW is explained by the forced migration of the organization's members in connection with the Russia-Ukraine's war.

JW, as well as other religious organizations (RO) in Ukraine, during the 30 years of its state independence, went through several stages in its development, and they are directly correlated with the political waves experienced by Ukraine. If a representative of a conservative political force focused on Russia with its autocracy, neo-imperialism, and totalitarianism was in power, then in the religious environment permitted and impermissible religions are marked, those that receive approval and support, even patronage from the state.

<sup>1</sup>(Religious society of Jehovah's Witnesses, 2001; RISU, 2014; Who are "Jehovah's Witnesses"? URL: <https://kpba.edu.ua/statti/662-svidkuegovu.html>)

In such periods, signs and sometimes direct manifestations of the so-called anti-sectarian policy appear. All religious minorities feel uneasy, fearful, even dangerous in the religious field of Ukraine. The return to power of democratic forces guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, equality before the law, peace, to tell the truth, not without problems, in religious life.

JW, like other religious minorities, experienced several waves in the sphere of state-church relations:

1) 1991-1993 – uncertainty in the relations between religious organizations and the state (the old models of total state control over the activities of the RO no longer work, and the new ones have not yet developed), which the JW took advantage of by holding an international congress in Kyiv;

2) 1994-1996 – acquaintance with the world experience and the search for a democratic model of state-church relations (SCC); active visits of the JW abroad;

3) 1996-1999 – formation of a new attitude of the state to the church and the church to the state, creation of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO), active establishment and development of a confessional network; surge in the number of communities;

4) 2000-2009 – relative stability of the state-church relations (SCR), development of specific mutual relations forms; active construction of Kingdom Halls;

5) 2010-2013 – a period of stagnation of SCR in Ukraine and a return to Soviet methods of managing the religious sphere;

6) 2013-2014 – Maidan trials, reactions of various denominations to events, awareness and implementation of the new role of religion in society, interreligious solidarity on the Maidan, formation of the civil Church; The JW took a neutral position;

7) 2014 - until 24.02.2022 – the situation with JW developed in 2 different directions:

- Development of a mutually beneficial partnership in the unoccupied territories based on: a) state policy of maximum non-interference in the religious life of the JW and b) acceptance and respect for state laws, taking into account the historical traditions of the Ukrainian people;

- Implementation of the repressive laws of the aggressor country into the religious reality of the annexed Crimea and the temporarily occupied territories of a part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, changing the equal status of JW to sectarian and undesirable, for which JW are subjected to persecution and bans; an attempt by a religious organization to adapt to new conditions.

In general, real, not paper, religious freedom prevails in the major territory of the state of Ukraine, when millions of people can freely practice their religion as they wish. They should not fear unjustified punishment for reading the Bible or Bible literature, for attending church services, or for discussing the Bible with family, friends, acquaintances, or those willing.

The legislation of Ukraine in the religious sphere testifies to the existence of rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and the law, which are protected by the state. Thanks to the democratic transformations in Ukraine, the JW from a closed sect, which was an alternative reality of the Soviet reality, is gradually turning into a denomination open to Ukrainian society (with the exception of the occupied territories).

What indicates such changes?

The attitude of the state towards the religious organization "Jehovah's Witnesses".

Has changed Society's attitude towards JW and their organization is changing.

The attitude of the JW to the state and society is changing.

As a result of such changes, it can be stated that JW are turning into a full-fledged element of the religious life of Ukraine. Characterizing the latter, we note that by 2022, 37,000 religious organizations were registered in Ukraine, and 97 percent are, in fact, Christian organizations. Among the Christians, the Orthodox dominated, they numbered more than 50 percent, which are concentrated in two main churches: The Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

According to the data of state bodies, there are currently 7,097 religious organizations in Ukraine that belong to the structure of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. 12410 are structures of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In addition, there are Catholics, Greek-Catholics (more than 3,500 parishes), Protestants (who count 25 percent of the total network of religious organizations in Ukraine), Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, etc. in Ukraine (*Zvit pro merezhu, 2021*).

Among all religious organizations, almost 130,000 Witnesses are united in almost 1,500 (according to the JW) or almost 1,000 (according to the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience) communities, which is a small percentage of the total number of religious organizations registered in Ukraine - 4% only. If you count the number of Witnesses among believers, and there are 28 million of them out of the approximately 40 million population of Ukraine (70% of Ukrainians declare their faith in God), then only 0.46% of them are counted (data until 02/24/2022).

Like any religious organization, the JW before the war had 2,819 so-called clergymen. There were 157 Sunday schools (according to the Report of the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience).

The question arises: is such a percentage of JW organizations and believers too much or too little. In our opinion, statistics do not always correspond to the real presence of religious organizations in the religious field of the country, which depends on the activity of one or another organization, on the efficiency of their faithful.

If we compare the number of JW and Orthodox, then Orthodox believers are much more – about 15 million, but they are not as visible and not as audible as Jehovah's Witnesses or representatives of other small, not so large, organizations, which are Orthodox. In the history of the JW in already independent Ukraine, there were years that testify that the Witnesses grew by 20 percent every year, and even more. But since a certain time, the growth rate has stabilized, the annual mass influx of new members has stopped, but still it is stable somewhere around 5% every year. We can say that the Witnesses have not conserved their statistical growth, but, on the contrary, thanks to the status of a registered religious organization, i.e. recognized by the Ukrainian state, the number of Witnesses is not decreasing, they have not exhausted all their resources, therefore we can expect a further increase in the number of Witnesses and activation of their activities.

By the way, it is the JW in the Protestant environment that demonstrates the highest dynamics of community growth. Thus, the increase for 2021 was 31 communities – from 897 (2020) to 928 communities (2021). It can be assumed that one of the factors that influenced the increase

in the number of this religious direction was the wide coverage in the infospace of the events of the 70-year history, which were related to the deportation of JW to Siberia under the code name "Operation "North". As part of the anniversary celebrations, a number of events were held in April 2021, including the scientific and practical conference "Operation "North" – 70 years later. Forgotten lessons of repression for faith", with the involvement of a wide range of both Ukrainian and foreign scientists, as well as civil servants, deputies, and eyewitnesses to the events (Fylypovych, 2021a).

In addition, attention is drawn to Jehovah's Witnesses in connection with the gross violation of their rights and freedoms in the Russian Federation, due to the ban and liquidation of their activities there. The campaign to persecute this organization has been condemned by a number of international organizations — the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union and certain states, including Germany, the United States of America, and others. Constant monitoring of the situation in the Russian Federation is carried out by analytical and human rights centers, for example, RISU – Religious Information Service of Ukraine.

The dynamics of the organization members' growth and the number of communities were seriously affected by the events of recent years. Among them are COVID and war.

Under the conditions of quarantine due to COVID-19, the religious situation in Ukraine has changed. It worsened, prohibitive measures negatively affected the activity of members and the life of communities. And this applies to all religious organizations, not only Witnesses. But the Witnesses quickly got their bearings and found the latest forms for studying the Bible, for meetings of their faithful, everything has been moved mostly online, even people of the older generation have mastered modern gadgets in order not to suspend their activities. In a word, in such force majeure circumstances, the Witnesses demonstrated that they are a living religious organization that continues its existence in the religious field of Ukraine and is becoming more and more visible in this general sky.

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which in its active phase began on February 24, 2022, led to serious changes in the number of organizations and their structure (Fylypovych, Kolodnyi, 2022). Due to military actions and the capture of certain cities and villages, due to the occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine, JW began to leave their places of permanent residence, as they were threatened not only with persecution in these territories in accordance with Russian laws (JW have been banned in Russia since 2017), but also with physical threats to their lives and health of Ukrainian citizens. The JW experienced active migration, resettlement of the faithful to Russia, western Ukraine, and abroad.

Characterizing the status of the JW in the structure of the religious life of Ukraine, it is necessary to note such a feature as the regionalization of religious organizations of the Witnesses. The general trends are that the vast majority of Witnesses (and this has happened historically) is concentrated in the western regions, regional centers and large cities more than in villages and towns. According to the reports of the Witnesses themselves, in some villages of Transcarpathia, the ratio of JW to other local residents is 1 to 5. That is, Transcarpathia is a kind of incubator, one might say, for Jehovah's Witnesses, although there are certain exceptions to this general trend.

After the mass exodus of the JW from the eastern regions to the West, there were even more of them here. For example, in the Zaporizhzhia region, until recently, a large number of meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses were observed, because it was there that Witnesses deported to Siberia, who eventually settled there, were allowed to return. But in the conditions of life dangers associated with Russian aggression, their number has significantly decreased. Existing communities of the JW in Mariupol suffered serious destruction – and not only the buildings of the Kingdom Halls. In general, we can say that the activities of the JW in the cities occupied by Russian troops have stopped, because the JW actively left those territories due to bans and persecution. And in other front-line or liberated areas, it decreased to a minimum, and in some places it never recovered.

Many JW went abroad. Their return is quite problematic, because firstly, there is nowhere to go, the halls are destroyed, the communities are scattered; secondly, they were well received abroad or in the western regions of Ukraine.

All-Ukrainian JW "Betel" center in Ukraine helped refugees and temporarily displaced persons a lot. On May 20, 2001, the All-Ukrainian JW Center in Ukraine, located in Bryukhovychy, began its work. It has a religious service that not only coordinates the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, but also makes a significant contribution to the development of Ukrainian society, which has historical significance. In addition to traditional activities, which did not stop either during the pandemic or during the war, the center was actively involved in helping refugees, not only in its relief organization.

Translation work, thanks to which materials are created in the Ukrainian language, has a positive effect on the language situation in Ukraine. This is not only about printed publications, but also Ukrainian songs, audio, video, cartoons in the Ukrainian language, etc. Thus, in 2014, the world saw the "Translation of the New World" in modern Ukrainian. Witnesses state that he included the latest discoveries in the field of biblical studies, and the decisions made regarding changes in the translation were based on older manuscripts that appeared after the translation by P. Kulish, I. Nechuy-Levytskyi, I. Pulyuy (1903) and I. Ohienko (1962). The expediency of new philological and translation innovations should be investigated by scientists in the relevant fields, but we admit that the appearance of this translation contributed to the growth in the number of Ukrainian-speaking JW communities in the central, southern and eastern parts of Ukraine. The updated version of the Bible is available in 187 languages, including Ukrainian.

JW are extremely efficient during natural disasters and emergencies. And this was shown by the challenges of the war, and especially the military events. Thus, in 2014-15, Jehovah's Witnesses welcomed 7,600 co-religionists and their family members, including non-Witnesses, from Donetsk and Luhansk regions into their homes. Their humanitarian aid amounted to 149 tons of products and 21 tons of clothes. Psychological rehabilitation of the victims was organized. Witnesses used their resources to restore damaged housing in Sloviansk (Svidky Yehovy, 2015). Thanks to this, dozens of people changed their lives and became useful members of society. That is, it is a kind of spiritual help, spiritual therapy that helps people quickly rehabilitate after imprisonment. In the conditions of war, it is extremely difficult to carry out this work, that is why such forms of work are partially curtailed.

Being successful preachers and missionaries, JW actively preach. They found and used various forms of this activity. For example, they were present in places of liberty deprivation, constantly communicating with prisoners, providing literature in prisons or colonies, distributing Bibles, corresponding with people held there, and preaching. A large number of people then accept the faith.

The "Betel" Center coordinates the Bible education program in about 40 places of execution in Ukraine.

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Witnesses also actively work with national minorities, distribute Bible literature in various languages. Separate gatherings are created, which are held in Korean, even in Uzbek. That is, any person who lives in the territory of Ukraine and is not an ethnic Ukrainian can find understanding, spiritual support from Jehovah's Witnesses and, most importantly, can develop spiritually together with this organization. This religious organization works with socially vulnerable groups, groups at social risk, for example, with AIDS patients or drug addicts. That is, they do not despise these social strata of our population, but are very active and, in fact, instead of the state, solve a huge number of social problems that Ukrainian society faces. They pay special attention to those who have lost sight and hearing. Focusing on these defectological groups, the JW initiated in 2018 the first translation of the New Testament into the sign language used by deaf people in Ukraine and the former CIS countries.

On this occasion, in October 2018, the Central Board of the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf noted this important event for people with hearing impairments and wrote: "now deaf people can perceive part of the Holy Scriptures in a sign language they understand... We sincerely thank you for your cooperation for the benefit of deaf citizens of Ukraine". Useful translation activity was also noted by RISU: "the 33rd of the 66 parts of the Bible in sign language was published in Ukraine. This means that exactly half of the Holy Scriptures have already been translated" (*Svidky Yehovy vydaly povnu Bibliyu...*, 2020).

It is quite possible that Ukraine will become the second country in the world after the USA, where the entire Bible will be translated into sign language. In this way, JW perform an important social function by socializing, including people, forgotten members of our society, through Bible study in their congregations to the real life.

JW worthily represent the national community of believers among foreign brothers in faith. Thus, in July 2018, an international mass service was held in Lviv at the Arena-Lviv stadium. In addition to Ukrainians, it was visited by 3,500 co-religionists from the USA, Canada and seven European countries. The center organized numerous events to best present Ukrainian culture and the country's landmarks to foreign guests: a concert program at the Solomiya Krushelnyska Opera Theater and at the Maria Zankovetska Drama Theater, ancient castles, costume tours of the city, in combination with Ukrainian folk songs, dances, national dishes, and the playing of folk musical instruments made quite an impression on the guests. One of Ukraine's leading information sources – the online publication "Ukrainian Pravda" noted that "according to the most modest estimates of the event's organizers, foreign Jehovah's

Witnesses left about \$2 million in Lviv during their one-week stay" (*Salyvonchuk, 2018*).

A factor such as the construction of Kingdom Halls played a major role in the establishment of the JW as a religious organization in Ukraine. When religious buildings are built, this indicates the financial, material, personnel capabilities of a religious organization and its good management. Some religious organizations in Ukraine still do not have their religious buildings. And the Witnesses have built many new ones over the past 30 years. At the same time, they use the latest construction methods, modern building materials and tools, work as a team to build not only their religious buildings, but also help others. The halls are ecologically clean, comfortable, they can be quickly assembled and placed in any place. When people see that such religious structures are being built, they gain more trust: it means that there is a permit for the construction of these structures, it means that it is a legitimate organization, they are not temporary in tents here, but take root for a long time.

Unfortunately, it was the JW buildings that suffered the most from destruction during the war. According to monitoring data carried out by MAR (Workshop of Academic Religious Studies) as part of the "Religion in Fire" project, about 70 halls of kingdoms were completely destroyed, 10 more were severely destroyed (data as of May 15, 2023). The most damaged buildings were in the regions where hostilities were and battles are being held: Kharkiv, Kyiv, Kherson, Donetsk, Sumy, and Luhansk regions. (*Katehoria: Svidky Yehovy, 2022*). Not only the halls of kingdoms, but also Orthodox churches were destroyed there. But if for the Orthodox their losses make 1.2% (152 out of 12,500), then for the JW they are 4% (61 out of 1,500). That is, religious minorities are the most affected by the loss of religious buildings.

The JW is increasingly responding to the complex issues of our reality, including: the attitude to different nationalities, to the authorities, to the Russia-Ukraine war, to the annexation of the Crimea, to covid and the related quarantine. Today, the neutrality in secular affairs and certain isolationist policies announced by the Witnesses are no longer working. Being citizens of a single country, one cannot be neutral in matters of global and national survival, which are war and its consequences.

JW monitors their losses. Thus, according to one of the latest (fifteenth) press releases from the JW, 47 heralds were killed, 97 heralds were injured, 22,568 heralds were forced to leave their homes. It is known that 590 residences in JW were destroyed, 645 residences were severely damaged, and 1,722 residences suffered minor damage (*Press Release No. 15, 2022*).

Realizing the new realities of the war, the JW organized 27 Committees for Emergency Situations, which are concerned with meeting the needs of fellow believers, helping with moving to safer areas of the country, helping to find housing, and adapting to a new place (*Press Release No. 15, 2022*). The Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses (religious buildings) were converted to provide shelter and reception for displaced persons. JW were involved in the removal of persons from the zone of military operations (*Vidvazhni Braty...*, 2022).

On March 7, 2022, 10 days after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine (CSYe) appealed to the head of the Lviv Regional Administration, Mr. M.Z. Kozytsky, in which

he noted that the CSYe "makes all possible efforts providing assistance to injured persons and refugees... evacuation of refugees was organized at our own expense... their temporary resettlement, food, provision of basic needs... delivery of humanitarian aid from co-religionists of other countries."

In addition to mentioning of the religious buildings' use to accommodate thousands of believers who became TPOs (temporarily moved persons), the letter also mentioned: "we are ready to hand over a DAF truck to the Lviv Regional State Administration free of charge for use in humanitarian purposes." As of May 27, more than 190 tons of humanitarian aid (cereals, legumes, canned fish and meat, as well as hygiene products) were brought to Ukraine from Poland (*Dostavka dopomohy...*, 2022).

The war affected the JW, which became increasingly regional and nationally oriented. Manifestation of religious identity, according to Prof. A. Aristova, "a significant component for the individual of his community, patriotic position, ethnic and national identity, cultural and moral preferences" (*Religious identities...*, 2021, 51-52). Just as earlier Witnesses avoided conversations on this subject, now they openly criticize Russia, while clearly supporting Ukraine.

Being an integral part of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR for many years, JW were generally "Soviet people" in the political and national sense. Even in Western Ukraine, in a situation of specific Ukrainian identification, the JW was subjected to successful Russification. All literature and magazines were published in Russian, which was used by the JW in their ministry. But gradually, starting in 1991, the Witnesses of Ukraine began to realize themselves as **Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses**. We understand that this is connected with the general movement of the national and spiritual people's revival, with the historical and geographical origin of the Witnesses – the territory and culture of Western Ukraine, with the formation and strengthening of the state of Ukraine, with the Witnesses' awareness of their national roots, with the comparison of Ukrainians and Russians, who kill Ukrainians.

Even in the same Siberia, Irkutsk or Tomsk regions, the memory of the national – Ukrainian – roots of believers is preserved. And although family, mental and religious ties with Russia are still very strong even now, during the war, at the same time, a kind of autonomization of various parts of the once unified Soviet religious organization is taking shape. The current central governing body of the JW in Ukraine, which was created with the support of Polish and German Jehovah's Witnesses, contributes to the fact that Ukrainian Witnesses perceive themselves as part of the world, and not Russian, structure.

### Conclusions

As a result of the study performed, the authors reached certain conclusions that may seem too innovative not only for the scientific environment, but also for the JW itself. The JW always faced historical and existential, social and religious, personal and community, global and local challenges. They always accepted these challenges with dignity, patience, gratitude, did not grumble, and strengthened their faith in God. The JW, each maintaining its neutrality towards the state and its policies, never cooperated with various regimes, neither fascist nor communist, which created additional problems for them. JW, despite Soviet propaganda, persecution, bans, branding, earned respect from people for its honesty, principledness, truthfulness, non-conflict, correspondence of words and deeds.

Having come out of the underground, from the first years of Ukraine's independence, JW became part of the general revivalist religious movement, which was manifested in the increase of followers and the quantitative dynamics of JW communities. In addition, their believers in Ukraine gradually began to realize themselves as **Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses**. Having been an integral part of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization in the USSR for a long time, with the formation of independent Ukraine, the ties formed between Witnesses throughout the union weakened, and with the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014, they were actually interrupted. Since 2017, when their organization in Russia was banned, the JW of Ukraine provided moral and often financial support to their brothers in faith in Russia, condemning the discriminatory policy of the Russian authorities towards the JW. Since February 24, the neutral attitude, which began to turn into a conscious rejection and ignoring of the Russian government, is taking on an anti-Russian tone. The open military aggression of Russia against Ukraine, the destruction of the halls of kingdoms throughout the temporarily occupied territory, the killing of Ukrainian citizens, believers and non-believers, contributed to the fact that

the JW from a catacomb community of people with sectarian consciousness, traumatized by the Soviet policy of persecution and repression, turns into a full-fledged religious institution, which is not easily, but gradually fits into the structure of the religious life of Ukraine. Jehovah's Witnesses from a closed sect, which was actually an alternative reality of the Soviet reality, are turning into a denomination open to Ukrainian society.

Witnesses are slowly becoming a denomination rooted in Ukrainian society, within which several generations of modern believers have grown up. All of them lived in different socio-political conditions (total ban – limited permission to exist – situation of religious freedom), which certainly affected their confessional identity, which is experiencing different states, including the crisis ones. Having passed the painful path from exile to recognition, the JW are perceived by Ukrainian society primarily as victims of the repressive Soviet regime. Their courageous stand in the face of communist persecution, mass deportation to Siberia, and suffering there for their faith are understandable. But the protest against the totalitarian communist regime, which resulted in a policy of neutrality or indifference to society, must now be transformed into new strategies, because the state in which the JW live is no longer alien, not totalitarian, but their own, Ukrainian and democratic, which declared respect to freedom of religion, about guarantees for its citizens to protect their rights in the religious sphere.

Under the conditions of religious freedom, JW can freely convey the history and worldview of the Witnesses to Ukrainians, which opens up wider opportunities for religious activity. The presence of the JW in Ukraine strengthens religious pluralism in society, which strengthens and enriches society. And although there is a danger of a decrease in religious pluralism in Ukraine due to the impossibility of resuming the activities of some small religious groups, which will not be able to return to their pre-war usual existence, even if the conditions of religious freedom and state guarantees of human rights in the religious sphere and their communities are preserved, the JW will always defend the right to one's own religion.

Based on the experience of the JW in new circumstances, which can be extrapolated to the life activities of any religious minority, we note that war accelerated the processes of civil and national identification in Ukraine,

strengthened people in their faith, and intensified socially useful and humanitarian assistance to the needy from not only the majority religious currents, but also minority communities, the vast majority of which took a distinctly patriotic position, contributing in various ways to Ukraine's victory in the war and the establishment of a stable and just peace.

The new reality, the reality of war, in which the JW, like all religious minorities, are now, is a difficult test for everyone. But we see how they, from a community of people who do not trust the world and therefore renounce it, become a collective capable of changing this world. Gradually overcoming the negative attitude towards themselves on the part of some churches, the mistrust of society and regaining their self-respect, JW strive to become included participants in public life, to become more active as members of Ukrainian society, offering it their model of Christian life, in which the image of the ideal world as the Kingdom of God on Earth is established, where love, mutual assistance, support and solidarity reign.

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## Війна як нова реальність для релігійних меншин України (на прикладі Свідків Єгови)

Віта Титаренко (ORCID 0000-0003-1073-9792)

Інститут філософії імені Г.С. Сковороди  
Національної Академії Наук України (Україна)

Людмила Филипович (ORCID 0000-0002-0886-3965)

Інститут філософії імені Г.С. Сковороди  
Національної Академії Наук України (Україна)

На прикладі релігійної організації Свідків Єгови (СЄ) автори аналізують ситуацію, яка складається для представників релігійних меншин в Україні у зв'язку із російсько-українською війною. Будучи і в мирний час інституціями, які в структурі релігійного життя України займають відповідно невідомі позиції, релігійні меншини найбільше в порівнянні із мажоритарними релігіями потерпають від війни та її наслідків.

Метою статті є з'ясування масштабів ресурсних втрат (людських, матеріальних, моральних), характеру активностей представників релігійних меншин (в даному разі СЄ) та можливостей збереження та відродження діяльності їх громад. В результаті дослідження автори прийшли до висновків, які можна вважати певною новизною: війна пришвидшила процеси громадянської і національної ідентифікації, укріпила людей у вірі, активізувала соціально корисну і гуманітарну допомогу нужденним з боку релігійних меншин. Переважна більшість громад зайняла виражено патріотичну позицію, в різний спосіб сприяючи перемозі України у війні і встановленню стабільного справедливого миру. Разом з тим, автори прогнозують, що Україні після війни може загрожувати зменшення релігійної плюральності через неможливість відновлення діяльності деяких малочисельних релігійних груп, які не здатні повернутися до довоєнного звичного буття, навіть якщо збережуться умови релігійної свободи і державних гарантій прав людини в релігійній сфері та їх спільноти.

**Ключові слова:** війна, релігійні меншини, Свідки Єгови, релігійна ідентифікація.

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