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**THE TRUE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE
OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th – THE FIRST QUARTER
OF THE 21st CENTURY**

Abstract. *The phenomenon of the True Orthodox Church (TOC), also known as the “catacomb church”, belongs to the complex and controversial plots of the history of Orthodoxy in the 20th century, as it arose in the context of the radical transformation of state-church relations after the 1917 revolution and the formation of opposition among some of the clergy and laity to the policy of loyalty of Moscow Patriarchate towards the Soviet government. The long-term illegal existence of underground Orthodox communities, the limited nature of the source base, and the ideological bias of early research led to the uneven development of scientific understanding of this phenomenon. The purpose of the article is to critically analyze the main stages and directions of studying the True Orthodox Church, to compare*

key research approaches, and to identify prospects for further studies. **The methodological basis of the study** is a complex of principles of historicism, problematics, and interdisciplinarity using special historical methods – historical comparative, problematic chronological, and historiographic analysis. **The scientific novelty** of the article consists in the systematization of the main directions of studying the TOC in the Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian historiography, a critical comparison of their methodological approaches and source capabilities, as well as in determining the specifics of the Ukrainian research tradition formation in this area. **Conclusions.** The analysis of historiography shows that the study of the True Orthodox Church was formed gradually and unevenly. The Soviet historiography considered underground Orthodox groups mainly through the prism of the state's anti-religious policy and did not form a coherent scientific concept of the TOC, although it accumulated a significant empirical material. A new stage began after the opening of archives in the 1990s, when the Russian researchers introduced a significant array of documents of repressive bodies into scientific circulation and initiated a systematic study of the catacomb movement. Since the 1990s the Ukrainian historiography has gradually formed its own research tradition, based mainly on archival and investigative materials and regional studies. At the same time, the issue under study remains insufficiently generalized: a significant part of the sources has not yet been introduced into scientific circulation, and regional studies require synthetic understanding. Further studies should be aimed at expanding the source base, clarifying the conceptual and terminological apparatus, and creating generalizing studies that will enable scholars to make a holistic reconstruction of the history of the TOC in the context of church life in the Soviet era.

Key words: True Orthodox Church, Catacomb Church, Church Underground, Orthodoxy in the USSR, historiography, state-church relations.

ІСТИННО-ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦЕРКВА У НАУКОВОМУ ДИСКУРСІ ДРУГОЇ ПОЛОВИНИ ХХ – ПЕРШОЇ ЧВЕРТІ ХХІ ст.

Анотація. Феномен Істинно-православної церкви (ІПЦ), відомої також як «катакомбна церква», належить до складних і дискусійних сюжетів історії православ'я ХХ ст., оскільки виник у контексті радикальної трансформації державно-церковних відносин після революції 1917 р. та формування опозиції частини духовенства і мирян до політики лояльності Московської патріархії щодо радянської влади. Тривале нелегальне існування підпільних православних громад, обмежений характер джерельної бази й ідеологічна заангажованість ранніх досліджень зумовили нерівномірний розвиток наукового осмислення цього явища. **Мета статті** полягає у критичному аналізі основних етапів і напрямів вивчення Істинно-православної церкви, зіставленні ключових дослідницьких підходів і визначенні перспектив подальших студій. **Методологічне підґрунтя дослідження** становить комплекс принципів історизму, проблемності та міждисциплінарності з використанням спеціально-історичних методів – історико-порівняльного, проблемно-хронологічного та історіографічного аналізу. **Наукова новизна статті** полягає у систематизації основних напрямів вивчення ІПЦ у радянській, російській та українській історіографії, критичному зіставленні їхніх методологічних підходів і джерельних можливостей, а також у визначенні специфіки формування української дослідницької традиції у цій сфері.

Висновки. Аналіз історіографії засвідчує, що дослідження Істинно-православної церкви формувалося поступово та нерівномірно. Радянська історіографія розглядала підпільні православні групи переважно через призму антирелігійної політики держави та не сформувала цілісної наукової концепції ІПЦ, хоча накопичила значний емпіричний матеріал. Новий етап розпочався після відкриття архівів у 1990-х рр., коли російські дослідники ввели до наукового обігу значний масив документів репресивних органів і започаткували системне вивчення катакомбного руху. Українська історіографія з 1990-х рр. поступово сформувала власну дослідницьку традицію, що ґрунтується переважно на архівно-слідчих матеріалах і регіональних студіях. Водночас проблема залишається недостатньо узасявленою: значна частина джерел ще не введена до наукового обігу, а регіональні дослідження потребують синтетичного осмислення. Подальші студії мають бути спрямовані на розширення джерельної бази, уточнення понятійно-термінологічного апарату та створення узагальновальних праць, що уможливлять цілісне відтворення історії ІПЦ у контексті церковного життя радянської доби.

Ключові слова: Істинно-православна церква, катакомбна церква, церковне підпілля, православ'я в СРСР, історіографія, державно-церковні відносини.

Problem Statement. The phenomenon of the True Orthodox Church (TOC), also known as the “catacomb church” (although the identity of these two definitions is questionable), is one of the most complex and controversial subjects in the history of Orthodoxy in the 20th century. Its emergence was associated with a radical change in state-church relations after the 1917 revolution, when the Bolshevik government launched a systematic policy of secularization, administrative pressure, and repression against religious institutions. Under these conditions, the traditional model of functioning of the Russian Orthodox Church underwent a profound transformation, which caused internal differentiation of the church environment. The crisis was especially acute after the Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) in 1927, which declared the loyalty of the church hierarchy to the Soviet state and provoked opposition from part of the episcopate, clergy, and laity, which took shape in the movement of true Orthodox.

It was in this context that a spectrum of underground Orthodox groups gradually emerged, refusing to recognize the new model of church-state relations and developing their own forms of religious life under conditions of conspiracy. In the 1927 – 1930s, these cells evolved from scattered groups of “unintelligible” to more structured networks, which in historiography received the generalized name of the True Orthodox Church (the author’s vision of the essence of various definitions for the phenomenon of “true Orthodox” is set out in a number of studies (Trygub, 2009, pp. 145–146; Trygub, & Bazhan, 2026), and as an alternative (Beglov, 2018, pp. 9–16; Kyrydon, 2012a; 2012b; Protsenko, 1998; Shumylo, 2011, pp. 52–53)). The post-war period was marked by both further marginalization of the catacomb movement under state pressure and the preservation of certain underground traditions in various regions of the USSR, in particular in Ukraine.

The long illegal existence of the TOC, the limited nature of the source base, and the ideological bias of a significant part of the early publications led to the uneven and contradictory development of its scientific understanding. Only after the opening of the archives at the end of the 20th century did the prerequisites for a more differentiated analysis of this phenomenon appear, which, however, did not eliminate a number of fundamental discussions in modern science.

In the development of the TOC historiography, it is appropriate to distinguish four stages: Soviet (the 1960s – 1980s), émigré (the 1940s – 1980s), the post-Soviet archival (the 1990s – early 2000s), characterized by the accumulation of archival materials on the activities of the TOC, and modern interdisciplinary (since the 2010s), when, along with the continued accumulation of archival documents, there is a desire for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Such periodization enables us to trace the evolution of research approaches and the degree of source coverage of the issue.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. The historiographical review of the object of our research was usually carried out as an introductory part of the monograph, or as a corresponding paragraph in dissertations. The only special publication that clearly focuses on the history of the study of the phenomenon of the TOC phenomenon is the extensive and thorough article by Alla Kyrydon (Kyrydon, 2012b) (which will be discussed further).

One of the first, in our opinion, modern analyses of the historiographical heritage regarding the true Orthodox movement, in particular Josephlian one, was made in the studies by the Russian researcher Mikhail Shkarovskii (Shkarovskii, 2000, pp. 41–46; Shkarovskii, 1999, pp. 4–6). Focusing his historiographical analysis on Soviet, émigré, and Russian historiography of the 20th century, the researcher’s conclusion remained unchanged for two

decades – “there are no special works dedicated to the Josephian movement in the Soviet and foreign historiography” (Shkarovskii, 1999, p. 4) (i. e., the author did not fully identify Josephians with the True Orthodox Church or True Orthodox Christianity, and calls it a separate “movement” within the Russian Orthodox Church environment).

Another Russian researcher, Aleksey Beglov, also provides a thorough historiographical analysis of the church underground issue in the USSR. The author consistently traces the evolution of approaches – from early Soviet anti-religious journalism to émigré and post-Soviet scholarship – and convincingly shows their methodological and ideological conditioning. The author reasonably emphasizes that for a long time the church underground was viewed not as an independent phenomenon of illegal religiosity, but through the prism of political or church-political opposition (Beglov, 2018, pp. 19–30). Since both object of research and its chronological framework (the 1920s – 80s) are broader in A. Beglov, the analysis of the available literature is somewhat deeper than in M. Shkarovskii. Although it should be noted that the main focus of the researcher is still on the events of the Stalin era, which increases the interest in his study by researchers of the history of the TOC, because the 1920–50s are the time of the greatest activity of the true Orthodox movement.

Overall, the text gives the impression of a highly professional historiographical reflection, which significantly expands the research field of the study of the church underground and offers a productive reorientation of the issue – from a narrowly institutional to a broader socio-cultural analysis. Despite some debatable points, the work has significant scientific value and is an important contribution to the modern understanding of the history of illegal church activity in the Soviet period. As a result, the author came to the conclusion that “throughout the entire time, starting from the 1920s, the topic of the church underground was mentioned in historiography in its pure form” (Beglov, 2018, p. 28). On the other hand, it should be mentioned that both Russian authors completely ignore the achievements of the Ukrainian historiography. And if for M. Shkarovskii this is excusable, because his key studies on the topic were published in the late 1990s, when the Ukrainian historians and religious scholars were only at the beginning of the path of studying the phenomenon of the TOC, then A. Beglov published his latest study, which is marked as the second and supplemented edition, in 2018, and the Ukrainian historians had already accumulated a fairly extensive factual, theoretical and methodological baggage in the field of studying the true Orthodox movement (V. Pashchenko, O. Trygub, O. Ihnatusha, S. Shumylo, D. Vedeneev, V. Shumylo and the others). In addition, the world saw the historiographical analysis by A. Kyrydon, which was published in both Ukrainian and Russian (see: Kyrydon, 2012a).

In the aforementioned article, A. Kyrydon reasonably emphasizes the fragmentary nature of the research on the study of the history of the TOC and suggests the attempt to systematize it, focusing on the Ukrainian historiography mainly. The positive aspects of the study the following ones: a wide source and historiographical base, the involvement of studies by the Ukrainian and foreign researchers, as well as the focus on the methodological and source-based aspects of the study of the TOC. At the same time, the historiographical analysis is sometimes descriptive and not always accompanied by a sufficient level of critical comparison of the positions of researchers. It would require a clearer formulation and the author’s vision of the conceptual and terminological issues (in particular, regarding the relationship between the True Orthodox Church and the True Orthodox Christianity), as well as a wider involvement of Western historiography. Some fragments of the text are overloaded with lengthy constructions, which somewhat complicates the reception of the material.

Finally, I would like to mention the historiographical review of the essence of the only dissertation to date dedicated to the history of the TOC, authored by Vitaliy Shumylo (Shumylo, 2021b, pp. 18–39). The author demonstrated profound knowledge of the source and scientific base, consistently traced the evolution of the study of the issue – from emigration church historiography of the mid-20th century to the post-Soviet and modern research. The strong point of the study is the careful introduction into the scientific context of key Ukrainian researchers' studies, as well as the emphasis on the importance of archival and investigative materials and diaspora heritage. Important is, first of all, the attempt to show the historiography of the regional specificity of the true Orthodox movement using the example of Chernihiv region. At the same time, in some items the review is of a compilative descriptive nature and is not always accompanied by a sufficient level of critical comparison of the positions of different historians. At the same time, the author convincingly substantiates the scientific niche of future historians – the lack of a holistic history of the TOC at the level of individual eparchies, and in particular in Chernihiv region.

Since we have a certain baggage of historiographic analysis, we will try to fill in some gaps, add our own vision of the author's positions, and trace the genesis of research into the history of the true Orthodox movement, primarily in the Ukrainian historiography. At the same time, the authors will consciously appeal and refer to the aforementioned predecessors to avoid repetitions and unnecessary tautologies (it is from this position that we will omit the consideration of foreign historiography, only mentioning the studies of recent decades briefly).

The purpose of the article is critical analysis of the main stages and directions of studying the True Orthodox Church, comparison of key research approaches and determination of prospects for further studies. Methodologically, the research is based on the principles of historicism, problematics, interdisciplinarity and source correlation.

Research Results. Soviet historiography. Within the Soviet historical and philosophical tradition, the issues of the emergence, development, and content of underground (catacomb) movements of Orthodoxy have almost never been considered. Moreover, in the Soviet historiography, the True Orthodox Church was not actually recognized as a separate church phenomenon. Underground Orthodox groups were described not in a confessional or church-historical sense, but through the prism of the state's anti-religious policy and were often identified with a sectarian movement. This led to a specific lens of research, within which the TOC appeared primarily as a politically unreliable environment. Thus, in one of the first studies (Klibanov, 1969), in which a cursory description of the true Orthodox environment was made, the famous Soviet religious scholar Aleksandr Klibanov noted that “the trends of “true Orthodox Christianity” and the “true Orthodox Church” do not differ in any essential way from Orthodox Orthodoxy in their dogma”, considering them “extra-church Orthodox trends” (Klibanov, 1969, p. 5). Despite the fact that the author focused on highlighting problematic issues of history and the contemporary situation of the Baptist, Evangelical Christian Baptist (ECB) and Adventist believers, on the pages of the study he repeatedly extrapolated his focus on the issues of the True Orthodox Church (TOC) and True Orthodox Christianity, showing their genesis during the 1930s – 60s (Klibanov, 1969, pp. 55–56, 172–176) (factual material for the study was collected during the expeditions in 1959–1961 by a research group of the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences under the leadership of A. Klibanov).

In 1973, an edited monograph by A. Klibanov was published, which was based on the same materials from the “field expeditions”. In the monograph, the author focused on the essence of the religious doctrine of the “true Orthodox” in a separate paragraph, also

revealing the prehistory of the emergence of the TOC and true Orthodox Christianity groups in Tambov region. Like his student L. Mitrokhin (see below), the author used the name of one of the currents of the TOC, led by Bishop Alexiy (Bui) – “buievshchyna”, or “buievtsi”. Based on the rhetoric and terminology, as well as some digital data from the 1930s, it can be concluded that A. Klibanov had limited materials from the KGB archives (possibly from the funds of the regional party committee) at his disposal. In his brief essay, the author concluded that “during the second half of the [19]50s, there was a collapse of true Orthodox Christianity, manifested in the departure of the majority of its members and its disintegration as an organized movement” (Klibanov, 1973, pp. 187–193). The author also provided a brief description of the TOC and true Orthodox Christianity groups in the context of the study of Lipetsk region, coming to the same conclusions that the true Orthodoxy “suffered bankruptcy” (Klibanov, 1973, pp. 198–201, 232–236).

One of the first special research on the history of the True Orthodox Church was the article written by the member of A. Klibanov’s research group – L. Mitrokhin (Mitrokhin, 1961). The author consistently interprets the TOC as a socially reactionary and politically unreliable phenomenon, comparing it to “sectarianism” and almost not considering the intra-church logic of the opposition formation after 1927. A characteristic feature of the study is also the typological generalization of diverse underground groups under a single conceptual label, which reflects the methodological attitudes of the Soviet religious studies of the 1960s. Like A. Klibanov later, L. Mitrokhin uses specific terms of the Soviet secret services of the late 1920s, such as: branches of the TOC, centralized anti-Soviet movement, anti-Soviet organization, religious fanatics, nuns, anti-Soviet group, etc. On the other hand, the author uses interesting facts, quantitative indicators, and materials from field sociological research, which can be useful in studying not only the historiographical aspect of the issue, but also various aspects of the history of the TOC – true Orthodox Christianity, because the author communicated with living witnesses of the emergence of true Orthodoxy and followers of the Bui’s branch, the so-called “first generation”. Of course, for a modern researcher, the study requires liberation from atheistic Soviet ideology, and the factual series needs to be verified by other sources, but our knowledge of the relevant archival files (SSA SSU, Fund 13. List 1. File 390). The Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine indicates that this study has not lost its source value. The article of another participant of A. Klibanov expedition, Z. Nikolskaia, is of a similar nature (Nikolskaia, 1961), who focused on the development of communities of true Orthodox Christians in Tambov region. Among the interesting conclusions of the author, it can be noted that the True Orthodox Christian communities transformed into TOC groups, including the so-called “silent” movement, at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s.

Perhaps, in the Soviet historiography the only monograph directly devoted to the true Orthodox movement was the study by Aleksandr Demianov (Demianov, 1977). As a former activist of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in his study he presented unique information obtained “from the inside”, through sociological field research and the study of archival documents. The researcher focused on the history of the emergence and formation of truly Orthodox Christianity, its social and ideological prerequisites, and the situation at that time. The author provides a description of the features of religious consciousness, beliefs and cult of the followers of the true Orthodox Christianity. The researcher first characterized the various directions of this movement. For us, these works are interesting because they relate to the historical conditions of the emergence of the true Orthodox Christianity – True Orthodox

Church, i. e., they reveal the general events of the 1920s – 30s. In addition, A. Demianov covers the events of the Central black soil district, which was headed by the Exarch of Ukraine for the TOC, Bishop Alexiy (Bui), and accordingly, the region was closely connected with the Eastern Ukrainian communities of “true Orthodox”.

At the same time, A. Demianov’s study is not devoid of source information: it is based on materials from state bodies and contains a number of empirical observations on the geography and social composition of underground communities. Given this, in modern historiography it is appropriate to consider it not as an analytical reconstruction of the TOC phenomenon, but as representative evidence of the official Soviet vision of the catacomb movement, which requires mandatory critical deconstruction, as a source of the author’s “field research”.

The True Orthodox Christianity is defined by the author as an independent religious movement that began to take shape in the first years after the October Revolution and emerged both as a product of a split in the Russian Orthodox Church and as a reflection of social tensions in the Soviet countryside. The author associates the social core of the movement primarily with the peasant environment, which he characterizes as the most traditionalist and religiously conservative. Within the framework of his interpretation, A. Demianov emphasizes the spread of eschatological and fanatical sentiments among the followers of the True Orthodox Christianity, and also emphasizes the role of the opposition-minded clergy. At the same time, the author does not offer a clear internal confessional typology of the movement, which reflects the sociologizing and ideologically normative optics of late Soviet religious studies.

It is necessary to dwell on the study that represents the church historiography of the Soviet era – the master’s thesis of Ioann (Snychev), which was defended in 1966 and published as a separate book in 1993 (Ioann (Snychev), 1993). The master’s thesis of Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev) is dedicated to the so-called right-wing schisms and represents one of the few studies that attempt to reveal the nature of the emergence of the right-wing opposition and the TOC. It was carried out within the strict framework of the Moscow Patriarchate, and therefore a significant part of the analysis presented by the author, as well as the cause-and-effect relationships and conclusions, are not always justified and are not confirmed by modern research and newly introduced sources.

The author unconditionally approved the decisions and actions of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), unconditionally and apologetically justified them, and, if possible, kept quiet about the negative consequences for the Russian Orthodox Church of the “forced” agreement of 1927 with the God-fighting state; he characterized the actions of church leaders who took an irreconcilable position regarding the policy of the deputy patriarchal locum tenens as schismatic. For a modern researcher, the thesis is interesting because it gives a one-sided, but professional canonical analysis of the schisms that arose as a reaction to the Sergius Declaration of 1927.

In general, the Soviet historiography did not create a coherent scientific concept of the TOC, but it formed a specific discursive background and accumulated significant, albeit problematic, documentary material. It is clear that the following features are characteristic of the Soviet historiography of the TOC issue: fragmentation, ideological bias, limited source base, methodological stereotypes and attitudes. However, these studies can (and must!) be used in modern research, provided that they are treated critically, taking into account the conditions in which they were created, and the factual material presented is used in a balanced and verified manner. That is why, a critical rethinking of this heritage has become one of the key tasks of post-Soviet research.

Russian historiography. The first thorough studies on the issue of the TOC belong to the Russian researchers Mikhail Shkarovskii and Irina Osipova. Unlike the Ukrainian KGB archives, in the then Russian Federation, against the background of the development of Yeltsin's democratization, access to the archives of the special services was opened earlier, albeit to a limited extent. However, the Russian archives very rarely refused representatives of the ruling church and employees of the Memorial Society. As a result, an archivist M. Shkarovskii, who closely cooperated with the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and was an employee of the Memorial Scientific and Information Centre in 1994 – 1998, was one of the first to receive unique investigative files on the leaders of the true Orthodox movement in the first half of the 1990s. The specified materials were included in his doctoral dissertation (Shkarovskii, 1996), which was later published as an adapted and supplemented monograph, where a separate section focuses on the so-called “Josephlianstvo” (Shkarovskii, 2000, pp. 41–46), which is one of the key currents of the TOC. At the same time, quite successfully A. Kyrydon mentions the remarks of the editorial staff of the online journal “Church Bulletins” that M. Shkarovskii inappropriately and without evidence contrasts the Josephlians with the TOC and the catacombists, considering them not related to each other as church organizations (Kyrydon, 2012b, p. 40). At the same time, a qualitative start has been made to the TOC research.

Having accumulated significant material on the history of the Josephlians movement, by 1999 the researcher prepared one of the most thorough research in this area, which territorially covers not only the RSFSR, but also Ukrainian lands, which is especially valuable for domestic researchers. By involving a mass of new documents, mostly criminal cases, he managed to form a fairly reliable (if possible, given the use of documents from repressive bodies as almost the only source) and differentiated idea of the two branches of the Russian Orthodoxy in the 1920s – 1940s: “Josephlians” (TOC) – a variant of the semi-legal opposition to Sergius, which did not claim to create a parallel church centre, but was oriented towards conquering the highest church authority in the Patriarchal Church, and “True Orthodox Christianity” – a “catacomb”, illegal church that operated in the deep underground, anti-Soviet and anti-Sergius. Pointing out the clear differences between the True Orthodox Church and the True Orthodox Christianity, as two forms of development of the Russian Orthodox Church under the conditions of the establishment of a totalitarian regime, the author determined the approximate number, social composition, areas of greatest activity, and chronological framework of the existence of the aforementioned religious trends (movements) (Shkarovskii, 1999).

The author's erroneous statement, mentioned by A. Kyrydon, was his belief that the Josephlian movement chronologically ended in the 1940s, and its remnants merged with the catacombs (Shkarovskii, 1999, pp. 191–201). This is precisely the point of view held by some followers of the modern TOC, stating their position in the comments to the published section of M. Shkarovskii's monograph, which is dedicated to the history of the TOC in Ukraine (Shkarovskii, 2010)¹ (we believe that a well-known researcher and follower of the TOC, Candidate of Historical Sciences Vitalii Shumylo, spoke on behalf of the editorial board). Instead, our opinion boils down to the fact that from the point of view of Josephlian movement, as a separate trend of the TOC, M. Shkarovskii's position is quite justified, because the fundamental definition of the essence of the movement for the researcher is

¹ Nowadays, the official website of the online publication “Church Bulletin” has ceased to exist and is available exclusively in the web archive.

“an attempt by a part of the clergy and believers to find an independent (alternative to the Sergian and Catacomb) path of development in the form of legal or semi-legal opposition to the Soviet state” (Shkarovskii, 1999, p. 6). From this position, the author is absolutely right, because the post-war Josephlians no longer adhered to these provisions and completely belonged to the catacomb-type of the TOC.

As for the Ukrainian oppositionists, most of the material covers the period 1927 – 1931 and is based on a multi-volume criminal case stored in the Central Archive of Public Associations and Ukrainian Studies, which was processed by the author in sufficient detail, which enabled him to recreate the general picture of the emergence and development of the TOC in Ukraine (Shkarovskii, 1999, pp. 90–125). Later, the researcher supplemented individual details of the development of the TOC in the Ukrainian SSR/Ukrainian SSR with a number of articles on the development of true Orthodox parishes in Kyiv region, led by dean Dimitriy Shpakovskiy and Bishop Damaskin (Tsedryk) (Shkarovskii, 2011), and the post-war fate of the Ukrainian communities of the true Orthodox movement (co-authored with the Ukrainian historian Dmytro Vedeneev) (Vedeneev, & Shkarovskii, 2016a; 2016b; Shkarovskii, & Vedeneev, 2017). In addition to analytical-positivist studies, the researcher prepared quite deep biographical reconstructivist research papers, which restored the biographies of figures of the Josephlian movement (Shkarovskii, 2006; Shkarovskii, & Anashkin, 2013). These studies can serve as reference books for researchers of the history of the Russian Orthodox Church and its opposition movements.

Another pioneer in the study of the history of the true Orthodox movement is Irina Osipova, who joined the staff of “Memorial” in 1990 and began working in the archives, raising and studying the investigative and camp cases of the repressed. It was at Memorial that she found herself as a publicist, historian, researcher of archival documents and the fates of thousands of believers who suffered during the repressions (Bochkov, 2023, p. 85).

Her first substantial study was the monograph “Through the Fire of Torment and the Water of Tears... ” (Osipova, 1998), which is almost entirely based on just one criminal case, “Losiev-Novosiolov”, in which incriminating findings from various investigative cases, including the criminal case of the Ukrainian group of true Orthodox, were collected as evidence about the scale of the “counter-revolutionary” movement of the TOC. Having allocated the material from the Ukrainian SSR into a separate section, the author interpreted the history of the TOC from the standpoint of the Chekist accusation, which left an imprint on both specified fragment and the entire work as a whole. Another significant miscalculation of the monograph, which significantly affected the authority of the researcher, was the use of materials provided by the famous mythologizer of the history of the Catacomb Church, Ambrose Sievers. The latter provided I. Osipova with the use of the so-called “Novosiolov Archive”, which collected materials from the “nomadic” Councils of the Catacomb Church, which made up a significant part of the published monograph. The vast majority of modern researchers consider the works of A. Sievers and the “Novosiolov Archive” to be falsified.

Later, I. Osipova founded a book series called “New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia in the Face of God-Fighting Power”, within the framework of which 19 books were published. The authors of the books were I. Osipova and her like-minded people – Liliana Sikorskaia and Ihor Ilyich. And although the researcher did not always act as an author, she was invariably the editor of works authored by her colleagues. The vast majority of books in this series are publications of documents, excerpts, narratives of the clergy, and memoirs of believers who belonged to the TOC-True Orthodox Christianity and were subjected to repression. By 2006,

when the first restrictions were imposed on the work in Russian archives with documents of the repressed, I. Osipova studied and copied thousands of archival references, materials from camp and investigative cases, protocols, descriptions, denunciations, letters, indictments and execution lists (Bochkov, 2023, p. 87). It was these documents that formed the basis of the publications in this series.

For the Ukrainian researcher, the books that, in one way or another, provide an opportunity to reconstruct local pages of the formation and further development of the movement of the true Orthodox (and we count only two of these) are of greatest interest (Osipova, 2008; Sikorskaia & Osipova, 2022). The first collection is the memoirs of believers, which provide an idea of the internal processes in the TOC and its reception by the average adherent, and the second is the publication of materials from the 20-volume investigative case of the TOC on Ukraine in 1931, which had already been processed by both Russian and Ukrainian researchers. At the same time, the compilers focused on publishing documents of the key, in their opinion, figures in the case – bishops Pavel (Kratirov) and Iosaf (Popov), the priests Nikolai Zahorovskiy and Dimitriy Ivanov. Thus, these publications do not carry any factual novelty, but are a fairly extensive publication of primary sources, which makes the documentary heritage of the history of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church accessible and popular. The “bonus” in the publication is the republishing of materials from the book by Vinnytsia researcher Oleksandr Loginov about Bishop Vasiliy (Doktorov) (Loginov, 2012). Overall, Osipova’s works played a huge role in opening up the topic of the Catacomb Church and the TOC in the 1990s, but in modern historiography they are more often seen as the first stage of research, which was then reinterpreted by more analytical studies.

Both Russian pioneers in the study of the history of the TOC are characterized by a focus on the figures and events of the Russian eparchies, while the Ukrainian page acts exclusively as a component of the all-Russian (all-Union) movement. Their study of Ukrainian “true Orthodox” is marked by the uniformity of the source base and its limitation to Kyiv archives, which requires further researchers not only to more deeply involve materials from regional archives, but also to search for documents from the period of 1932 – 1950s, since this period has been poorly researched.

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the given issue did not lose its relevance for the Russian historical school, where the leading positions began to be occupied by the young generation of researchers, among whom Aleksey Beglov stands out (the history of the church underground of the Soviet era in all its diversity) (Beglov, 2004; 2018) and the priest Aleksandr Mazyrin (the problem of the essence of internal conflicts in the Russian Orthodox Church of the Stalin era, the reception of the 1927 Declaration and the emergence of the anti-Sergius opposition, the legality of the higher administration of the Moscow Patriarchate) (Mazyrin, 2005; 2006; Mazyrin, & Kosik, 2011). Their work makes it possible to clarify the processes that took place at the all-Union level, their driving force, the causes of conflicts in the centre, and project them onto an all-Ukrainian background.

It is interesting that these researchers represent two different historiographic schools of study of the anti-Sergius opposition and the movement of the true Orthodox. A. Beglov is a representative of the secular academic school, and A. Mazyrin is a representative of the church-Orthodox school. They are distinguished by three key points: the initial position of the researcher, the types of sources that form the basis of the study, and the research objectives. Thus, A. Beglov sets as his objective the socio-historical reconstruction of church life, based mainly on materials from state and administrative bodies, while A. Mazyrin seeks

to convey a canonical analysis of church events of the 1920s – 1930s, relying on an intra-confessional source base – letters and epistles of bishops, polemical works, decisions of church authorities, etc. (of course, most of his conclusions are drawn in the light of the official position of the Moscow Patriarchate). As a result, the evaluations, interpretations, and conclusions of these researchers differ.

In general, the Russian historiography of the issue under study has gone through, in our opinion, two key stages: the 1990s–mid-2000s – the opening of archives and the introduction into scientific circulation of materials from repressive bodies, church documents, and memoirs, which led to the accumulation of a significant amount of material and the emergence of the first academic studies; the mid-2000s – 2021 – expansion of the source base and deepening of the issues, which was accompanied by a gradual restriction of access to primary sources of repressive bodies (the Russian researchers began to increasingly use the Ukrainian source base, taking advantage of the reverse process in issues of access to the documentary heritage of the repressive bodies of the USSR). At the same time, different interpretative approaches to the scale, structure, and canonical status of true Orthodox communities and the nature of the Catacomb movement emerged in the scientific community. Nowadays, the Russian historiographic schools have entered a new stage, the watershed of which can be considered the final ban on the international society “Memorial” (2022), who provided enormous methodological and practical assistance to researchers in accessing the sources of the Soviet repressive machine. The current stage will be characterized by the limitation of Russian historians to the source base, which will lead to a certain “trampling on the spot” with a simultaneous deepening of the theoretical, methodological and source-based understanding of the problem, which we can observe nowadays (see, for example, the source-based study of O. Nuikina) (Nuikina, 2024), or the already mentioned collection of documents by I. Osipova and L. Sikorskaia (Sikorskaia, & Osipova, 2022), as an example of “trampling on the spot”).

Ukrainian historiography. In the 1990s – 2020s, the Ukrainian historiography in the study of the True Orthodox movement undoubtedly took a significant step forward. Without any exaggeration the “father” of the Ukrainian historiographical school of research on the TOC should be called Poltava researcher Volodymyr Pashchenko, who was perhaps the first to analyze the indictment in the case of the Ukrainian “branch” of the TOC in 1931 and introduced its materials into scientific circulation (Pashchenko, 1994). The researcher’s works are written in broad strokes in a positivist spirit, and a separate fragment from the history of the TOC is only a small part of the overall picture of state-church relations of the Leninist-Stalinist era, which the author created in his study.

Despite the fact that the discovery of the mentioned case belongs to a Ukrainian researcher, its detailed study was carried out by the already mentioned M. Shkarovskii and I. Osipova, who for many years was repelled by secular researchers of church history of the interwar period. To date, the aforementioned case, which has already been supplemented with additional volumes and consists of 23 storage units, has not yet been fully introduced into scientific circulation. Researchers use its materials sparingly when examining individual episodes of the history of the TOC-True Orthodox Christianity in a biographical or regional context (see, e.g., the article by Trygub, & Bazhan (2026)). This is the nature of the studies of the first decade of the 21st century, which are dedicated either to individual figures of the TOC (Lavrentiy (Proskura), Pavel (Kratirov), Varsonofiy (Yurchenko), Petr (Ladygin), etc.), or to the state-church issues of individual regions of Ukraine (Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv,

etc.). Therefore, we will consider individual studies of the Ukrainian researchers as they are published.

One of the first systematic researchers of the TOC history were Chernihiv followers of this creed, Vitaliy and Serhiy Shumylo. In 2001, V. Shumylo published a popular science brochure with a hagiographic essay about the schiarchimandrite Lavrentiy (Proskura) (Shumylo, 2001), which was based on archival documents and eyewitness memories. As the author wrote in the preface to his scientific publication about Fr. Lawrence later: “The disadvantage of it [the study of 2001] is that it was written in a popular science style and was more of a popularizing than a scientific nature” (Shumylo, 2019). At the same time, a persistent study on finding primary sources enabled V. Shumylo to do a thorough and maximally complete hagiographic research on Father Lawrence.

In 2011, S. Shumylo published a synthetic study (Shumylo, 2011), in which there is expressed the author’s vision of the history of the TOC and, to some extent, occupies an intermediate position in historiography between scientific research and confessional journalistic exposition, as evidenced by the term “notes” used by the author in the title. According to the author’s intention, the study is a generalizing synopsis of the history of the catacomb movement, which sequentially examines the stages of the underground church existence – from the persecutions after 1917, the catacomb communities formation and their development in the 1930s – 1950s to the situation in the 1980s – early 1990s. The author seeks to explain the reasons for the transition of part of the Orthodox clergy and laity into the underground and to trace the formation history of the so-called True Orthodox (Catacomb) Church in the USSR. In essence, this study can be described as a generalizing confession-oriented attempt to present the history of the Catacomb movement, which popularizes a certain interpretation of the True Orthodox Church history and, at the same time, reflects the view of the environment associated with the Catacomb tradition. We completely agree to the conclusion of A. Kyrydon regarding this study, which concluded that “the author’s considerations only actualize the need for further study of the causes of the emergence, nature and character of the TOC and the relationship between the concepts of the TOC and the True Orthodox Christianity” (Kyrydon, 2012b, p. 44).

Later, V. Shumylo published a number of articles that were linked in one way or another to the development of the TOC in Chernihiv region and, first of all, revealed little-known biographical pages of its leading figures – Bishop Damaskin (Tsedrik) (Shumylo, 2015; 2016), Abbot Alippii (Yakovenko) (Shumylo, 2020a), Archbishop Pakhomiy (Kedrov) (Shumylo, 2020b), a layman and ideologist of the TOC Sergiy Nilus (Shumylo, 2021a), etc.

The result of the researcher’s study was a PhD dissertation that reveals the history of the true Orthodox movement in Chernihiv region during the interwar period (Shumylo, 2021b). Despite the undeniable positive aspects of the study (an insider’s view, a rich source base, an understanding of the internal nature of the catacomb movement), it is not without its own shortcomings. For example, the author mostly operates with materials from Chernihiv communities of the TOC, and the territories of other districts and regions are deprived of the researcher’s focus. Important aspects of social history were left out of researcher’s focus – a general portrait of a true Orthodox believer, the number of communities, its gender, educational, property, etc. cross-section.

Speaking about the regional aspect of studying the TOC, it is necessary to recall the works of O. Loginov (Loginov, 2007; 2012) (Vinnytsia region), S. Bilokin (Kyiv) (Bilokin, 2008), M. Mykhailutsa (Odesa region) (Mykhailutsa, 2002; 2012a; 2012b; Mykhailutsa, &

Trygub, 2020), O. Trygub (Mykolaiv and Kherson regions) (Trygub, 2009c; 2013; 2019) and O. Forostiuk (Donbas) (Forostiuk, 2000; 2001). All authors base their research on archival and investigative materials on supporters and ascetics of the TOC. In the historiographical context, these studies can be characterized as local studies of individual movements and groups of the religious underground, which complement general studies on the True Orthodox Church, but do not claim to create a general concept of the history of the Catacomb movement. They are important primarily because they introduce new archival materials into scientific circulation and demonstrate regional features of the existence of the religious underground. For example, the studies of Oleksandr Loginov, based on materials from the archives of special services and local archives of Vinnytsia region, reconstruct the activities of one of the groups of the religious underground of Podillia – the “Ioannites”, tracing their formation, social composition, ideological features and mechanisms of repressive persecution by the Soviet authorities. A special merit of the researcher is the discovery of the criminal case of Bishop Vasiliiy (Doktorov), the last years of whose life remained a blank spot in historical science.

We should dwell on the studies of Oleksandr Trygub, which are of a pan-Ukrainian nature (Trygub, 2009a; 2009b; 2009d). In particular, A. Kyrydon, characterizing the scholar’s scientific achievements in the field of studying the history of the TOC, noted: “In the Ukrainian historiography of church history, the position of the TOC was outlined by O. Trygub the most thoroughly. Summarizing the existing approaches to the characterization of the TOC, the researcher emphasized the conventionality of the term TOC and suggested using another one – “anti-Sergius opposition””, insisting on the conventionality of the term “True Orthodox Church”. “...O. Trygub’s merit is an attempt to characterize the activities of regional religious groups of the TOC movement in the 1920s and 1930s” (Kyrydon, 2012b, p. 42). In turn, V. Shumylo noted: “Oleksandr Trygub’s thorough research is valuable due to the published archival documents and the clear chronology formed by the author. The studies of this researcher are characterized by objectivity, non-involvement in certain church politics and confessionalism” (Shumylo, 2021b, pp. 31).

The last decade was marked by the publication of a number of studies by Dmytro Vedenev (including the already mentioned studies co-authored with M. Shkarovskii), which are based on declassified materials from the Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (Vedenev, 2017). In the monograph “Atheists in Uniforms...” (Vedenev, 2016, pp. 310–366), the author analyzed the history of the TOC in Ukraine through the prism of the activities of the Soviet special services, describing the operations of the OGPU-NKVD-MGB-KGB bodies against the religious underground, including the “church-monarchical underground” and communities of the True Orthodox Church, which were the object of agent development and repression. The merit, and at the same time the drawback, of the researcher is his complete reliance on archival documents of an operational nature, which create a false reception of the true Orthodox movement through the prism of the Chekist view. The author’s focus is not on a comprehensive reflection of the development of the denomination, but, first of all, on the forms of underground activity of communities, methods of their detection and liquidation, as well as on the mechanisms of operational work of state security bodies. After the monograph was published, the author posted most of its materials on the website www.pravlife.org, which significantly increased the readership of his materials. It is interesting that in his studies D. Vedenev is distinguished by his sharp and sometimes contemptuous rejection of opposition Orthodox movements, positioning himself as a supporter of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Ukrainian historiography is not limited to the above-mentioned researchers, as certain aspects of the TOC issues have been (and are being) studied by Liudmyla Shuhaieva, Oleksandr Ihnatushya, Petro Bondarchuk, Tetiana Vahramenko, and the others. Of course, the development of Ukrainian historiography in the field of studying the history of the True Orthodox Church, the Catacomb Church, the movement of True Orthodox Christians, and in general, church resistance and the Orthodox underground requires separate research, deeper study, and broader coverage.

Conclusions. The analysis of the True Orthodox Church historiography shows that the study of this complex phenomenon was formed gradually and unevenly, depending on political conditions, the availability of source material, and the methodological guidelines of historical science. The Soviet historiography did not actually recognize the TOC as a separate church phenomenon and viewed underground Orthodox groups mainly through the prism of the state's anti-religious policy. It was characterized by ideological bias, a limited source base, and an interpretation of the movement as a socially reactionary or sectarian phenomenon. At the same time, the studies of Soviet authors have accumulated significant empirical material – the results of field research, statistical data, and some archival information, which, after critical rethinking, remain an important source for modern research.

A new stage in the study of the TOC began after the opening of the archives in the 1990s. The Russian researchers M. Shkarovskii and I. Osipova introduced into scientific circulation a significant array of documents of the repressive bodies and initiated a systematic study of the Catacomb/Josephlian movement. Their studies made it possible to outline the structure, geography and social composition of true Orthodox communities, although they focused mainly on the Russian regions. Further research, in particular the studies of A. Beglov and A. Mazyrin, demonstrated the formation of different methodological approaches – secular academic and church-confessional, which led to the emergence of different interpretations of the nature and scale of the movement.

The Ukrainian historiography has been active since the 1990s and has gradually formed its own research tradition. A significant contribution to the development of this issue was made by V. Pashchenko, the Shumylo brothers, S. Bilokin, O. Trygub, D. Vedenev and other researchers. Their works are based mainly on archival and investigative materials and are partly regional in nature, which enables us to reconstruct the local features of the existence of underground Orthodox communities in Ukraine. At the same time, to this day, historiography lacks thorough works of a pan-Ukrainian nature.

In general, the modern historiography of the TOC demonstrates a transition from ideologized and fragmentary interpretations to a more comprehensive analysis that takes into account the socio-cultural context and the diversity of forms of the religious underground. At the same time, the problem remains insufficiently researched: a significant part of the sources has not yet been introduced into scientific circulation, and regional studies need to be generalized. Further research should be aimed at expanding the source base, clarifying the conceptual and terminological apparatus, and creating synthetic works that will focus on a holistic reconstruction of the history of the True Orthodox Church in the context of church life in the Soviet era.

We can say that the Ukrainian historical science is currently at the final stage of accumulating an empirical archival mass and soon, owing to the Ukrainian archival revolution of the last decade (comprehensive access to documents of special services with the simultaneous development of the digitalization of documentary heritage), we can expect the appearance of qualitatively new studies on the stated issues.

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SSA SSU – Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine. Fund 13. List 1. File 390 “Obvinitelnoe zakliuchenie po delu kontrevoliutsionnoi, tserkovno-monarkhicheskoi organizatsii ‘Buevtsev’. g. Voronezh. 1930 g.” [Indictment in the Case of the Counter-Revolutionary, Church-Monarchist Organization ‘Buevtsev’. Voronezh, 1930]. [in Russian].

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