

**The Religious Policy of the Soviet Authorities:
A Case Study of the Donetsk Region of the Ukrainian SSR, 1965–1991**

This doctoral dissertation explores the history of the religious policy of the Soviet Union authorities, using the Donetsk region as a case study during the late Soviet period (1965–1991). The research focuses on the activities of party and state institutions in the religious sphere, specifically the functioning of the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (from 1974 – the Ukrainian SSR) in the Donetsk region.

An analysis of the available historiography revealed a lack of specialized research on the specific reception of Soviet religious policy between 1965 and 1991 in individual regions of the Ukrainian SSR, particularly in the Donetsk region. Three main research groups were identified based on territorial criteria: Ukrainian, Russian, and Western. These include works produced by academic schools at higher education institutions, studies on general issues of state-church relations, and monographs or articles focusing on specific historical eras or regional aspects of religious policy.

The study is based on a broad source base covering various spheres of life: spiritual, political, social, cultural, and legal. A key role was played by normative acts, official documents, and archival materials, which enabled a detailed analysis of the legal framework of Soviet religious policy and the definition of the competencies of state institutions, including the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs.

To illustrate the religious situation in the region, statistical and descriptive sources were utilized, detailing the number of registered and unregistered religious communities as well as their economic activities. Narrative interviews were also conducted with former employees of the central and local offices of the Council for Religious Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR.

The application of general scientific and historical methods allowed for an in-depth analysis of religious policy from 1965 to 1991 based on materials from the Donetsk region. It was established that the implementation of this policy followed two main directions: atheist propaganda and the control of religious communities. The first direction was carried out by the "Znanie" (Knowledge) Society, which had operated since the 1940s and was responsible for organizing the system of atheist education through lectures on scientific atheism. The second direction was managed by the apparatus of the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs, which from 1965 served as the sole state body responsible for religious life at both the national and regional levels. Its scope of activity included Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist, Jewish, Molokan, and Old Believer communities.

The Commissioner collaborated closely with local authorities, councils of deputies, security agencies, and educational institutions.

The dissertation provides new findings regarding religiosity in the region and the activities of the Commissioner during a period of escalating systemic crisis, the liberalization of socio-political life, and the dissolution of the USSR (1965–1991). For the first time, an analysis of the activities of the Commissioner's office in the Donetsk region was conducted based on documents from central and regional archives. The policy of the authorities toward various religious communities was compared, and the transformations in state-church relations during the 1980s were examined.

The scientific novelty of the dissertation lies in the formulation and development of the issues surrounding religious life in general, and the activities of the Council's Commissioner in particular, within the Donetsk region in the context of the Soviet collapse. Special attention was paid to the structure and functioning of the local office of the Council, its relations with

authorities and religious communities, and the internal hierarchy of the Soviet administrative and legal system in this field.

The thesis is an independent study presenting the author's analysis of the religious policy of the USSR from 1965 to 1991, using the Donetsk region as a case study. The primary findings of the research have been presented at 18 international and all-Ukrainian scientific conferences.