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# **RELIGIOUS EPIDEMICS ON THE TERRITORY OF UKRAINE: HISTORICAL PARALLELS AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

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**Abstract.** The article deals with two religious epidemics that unfolded in Ukraine in a span of one hundred years. The study analyzes the factors influencing the emergence and development of religious epidemics. On this basis, their peculiar algorithm has been singled out, the components of which are, on the one hand, the worldview and crisis of values caused by the rapid turns of history, and—on the other—choosiness by God, charisma of the leader of a particular organization, which is “fed” by an eschatological idea, syncretic teachings, which are cultivated as an alternative religious model to established traditions. The definition of a religious epidemic is given, which, arising on the wave of a crisis of social changes and acquiring a mass character, causes a change in human identity, in which imitation, self-suggestion and mutual suggestion play a significant role.

**Keywords:** “Malovanshchyna,” White Brotherhood, religious epidemic, charisma of the leader, mutual suggestion.

## **Introduction**

To date, the concept of a religious epidemic is not fully defined. In general, it is understood as a mass phenomenon of intensive spread of religious ideas, doctrines, which unfolds at the individual level as the process of human self-identification loss, which is caused by increased emotional and sensory sphere and is based on faith, imitation, suggestion, self- and mutual suggestion. But as in modern medical psychology, it is underused and applies mostly to materialist-oriented psychiatry. This once again proves the

inadmissibility of a simplified approach to such a complex multifaceted phenomenon as religious faith.

The history of humankind shows that the factors that sometimes destabilize the functioning of its social systems or even destroys them are mass movements captured by religious ideas. However, religion influences greatly the inner life of humans, at the level of their experiences. It is here, in the human soul, that it acts as a factor that mitigates the borderline (boundary) situations of human existence (serious illnesses, death of loved ones, physical and moral sufferings, etc.). In this context, religion, having significant heuristic potential, acts as a psychotherapeutic and meaningful life factor, enriching the personal and existential resources of humans. Hence “religion is associated with positive health outcomes.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, socio-economical shifts that are rapidly changing history, affect the fate of many people. Alexander Chizhevsky, giving a classification of “collective madness,” which periodically stun society, distinguishing “religious” and “religious-hysterical” epidemics, notes: “The more public life is in full swing, the more often and deeply it is covered by collective madness.”<sup>2</sup> It may seem that in this situation, there were different variants of developments, but it is far from true. After all, on the one hand, we should take into account the establishment of the principles of freedom of religion in today’s globalized society and on the other hand—a reverse side of today’s worldview freedom—the spread of many religious teachings that quickly fill the spiritual and existential vacuum created during the crisis, eclectically combining fragments of various religious and philosophical doctrines. In addition, “faith (and not merely belief), however, it entails certainty and confidence, grounded in intellectual insight that invites one to believe, without the pressure of sensible perceptions or of analytic truths.”<sup>3</sup> Religious faith is based on the belief in the existence of a transcendental first principle, which has created everything, governs everything and is the Alpha and Omega of human existence.

An epidemic is usually associated with the spread of an infectious disease of a person that significantly exceeds the incidence rate in the area. Religious epidemics impact on the masses, their worldview and behavior often affecting a large number of people. During the

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<sup>1</sup> N. C. Hvidt, D. Hvidtjørn, K. Christensen, J. B. Nielsen, & J. Søndergaard. “Faith moves mountains—mountains move faith: two opposite epidemiological forces in research on religion and health.” *Journal of religion and health*, 56(1), (2017): 294.

<sup>2</sup> Л. Чижевский. Космический пульс жизни: Земля в объятиях Солнца; Гелиотараксия. [A. L. Chizhevsky. *Cosmic Pulse of Life: Earth in the Arms of the Sun; Heliotaraxia.*] (Москва: Мысль, 1995), p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Sanguinetti. “Religious Faith, Natural Science, and Metaphysics.” *Science Between Truth and Ethical Responsibility*. (Springer, 2015), p. 327.

epidemic the frequency of infection transmission is monitored, which contributes to its spread and large-scale impact. What are the factors that cause the flow of religious teachings, which quickly reach the mass consciousness, influencing a large number of people? Why do they appear in history from time to time and cause a kind of outbreak of an epidemic in the religious sphere?

### **Is *Malovanshchyna* Neuropsychiatric or Religious Epidemic or Religious Mystic Movement?**

Let us turn to the cases of interaction between religion and psychiatry on the territory of Ukraine. At the end of 1891 and the beginning of 1892, in several villages of Vasylkiv, the district of Kyiv province, a religious movement appeared among the peasants, which was called “*Malovanshchyna*” after the founder Kindrat Malovanyi. The impetus for the emergence of this movement in Kyiv region was “stundism” (from German *Stunde*-hour)—a Christian religious movement, a historical and popular name of the Protestant movement in southern tsarist Russia, in modern Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, founded among German colonists (Lutherans, Reformers, Mennonites). *Malovanshchyna* began to spread rapidly which caused a reaction of the authorities. By order of the head of the South-Western region, Count Alexei Ignatiev, a special commission was established to study that religious movement directly in the region of its spread, which included the expert psychologist, psychiatrist, and the public figure, Ivan Sikorsky (1842-1919), the first head of the Department of Systematic and Clinical Doctrine of Nervous and Mental Diseases at St. Vladimir University. Here are his scientific observations:

“The spiritual leader of the religious movement was 48-year-old Kindrat Malovanyi, a person of choleric temperament, who abused alcohol until the age of 40 (in fact, the alcoholism of the “prophet” was transmitted to him by his parents). Eventually, the alcohol drinking habit began to be supplanted by a state of religious arousal—“religious practice, preaching and ecstasy.”<sup>4</sup> The next step in the process of changing his identity was the hallucinations of the sense of smell—during his prayers Malovanyi began to feel some extremely pleasant smell (he called it the smell of the Holy Spirit). At the same time, he seemed to be floating in the air, in a mystical and joyful mood, which led to the delusion of a religious content: “He is

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<sup>4</sup> И. А. Сикорский. (1893). Психопатическая эпидемия 1892 года в Киевской губернии. [I. A. Sikorsky. Psychopathic Epidemic of 1892 in the Kiev Province.]. (Тип.-лит. Университета Св. Владимира). p. 3.

convinced that in him is the Holy Spirit and that everything he does and says comes from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

Manifestations of the cult, methods of conversion to a certain faith and means of control are usually determined by specific characteristics of the personality of the cult leader. Particularly unsurpassed is the feeling of one’s own “I,” the feeling of one’s own charisma. In addition, Malovanyi combined this feeling with a fanatical fascination with the Bible and it manifested itself in the fact that he proclaimed himself Jesus Christ. “...Malovanyi considers himself Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, but the Evangelical Christ, in his opinion, was not a historical figure, and all the stories about the Evangelical Christ are only prophecies about him—Malovanyi.”<sup>6</sup> Sikorsky draws attention to the incoherence and stereotypes of Kindrat Malovanyi’s language, diagnosing him with paranoia.<sup>7</sup>

This diagnosis was later confirmed by the famous Russian psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev, who called one of the chapters of his book “Paranoid Malovanyi as the Person Responsible for a Kind of Psychopathic Epidemic.”<sup>8</sup> The most characteristic somatic feature of his condition were tremors and convulsions, which gradually spread from the hands to the whole body. The tremor itself became a factor that allowed Sikorsky to label the epidemic nature of the whole movement. “The trembling and shaking of Malovannyi, which was often rhythmic, had a great influence on the innocent people around him—his admirers. During the common prayers, at the time when Malovanyi began to tremble (“shake” in the local expression), some of those present, especially women, began to tremble and convulse. From that time on, shudders became an almost invariable part of prayer meetings that took place in the presence of Malovanyi, partly without him.”<sup>9</sup> Malovanyi explained such tremors by the entry of the Holy Spirit into him, which was beyond the control of his will. During the prayers, he entered a state where he began to smell an incredible scent—the scent of the Holy Spirit, extraordinary joy and exaltation above the earth. During the general prayers, his condition was passed on to others. Gradually, his followers began to worship him as God, to believe in his superhuman qualities. “Hence was the belief of the *Malovans* in the appearance of Christ in the person of the commoner Kondratiy Malovanyi.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> В. М. Бехтерев. “Внушение и его роль в общественной жизни.” *Гипноз*. [V. M. Bekhterev. "Suggestion and its role in public life."]. (Донецк: Сталкер, 2000). pp. 248-275.

<sup>9</sup> И. А. Сикорский. *Психопатическая эпидемия 1892 года в Киевской губернии*. [I. A. Sikorsky. Psychopathic Epidemic of 1892 in the Kiev Province.]. (Тип.-лит. Университета Св. Владимира, 1893). p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 21

Immersed in a state of hallucinations and delusions, the *Malovans* were in good health. They considered the presence of convulsions as evidence of the entry of the Holy Spirit. Observing the *Malovans*, Sikorsky came to the conclusion that their condition and its manifestations resemble hysteria. However, they had a “peculiar state of mind, which could be called a deep search for peace, which comes as if after fatigue, when a person abandons all decisions and seeks peace, rest, and tranquility.”<sup>11</sup> This fact brings them closer to the representatives of quietism, which is characterized by the rejection of any desires; his followers direct their will to suppress aspirations, feelings, and passions. Thus, for the *Malovans* olfactory hallucinations were inherent (they called them divine—“smells of the Holy Spirit);”<sup>12</sup> hallucinations of the general perception—a feeling of lightness, disembodiment, etc.; “the phenomena of obvious mental fatigue, passivity or delay of the predominance of feeling over will;”<sup>13</sup> predisposition to convulsions manifested in them during the general prayer meeting (the *Malovans* themselves explained them by the “undoubted action of the Divine principle in man”).<sup>14</sup>

It seemed that during the cultic practices, the followers of Kindrat Malovanyi completely changed their spiritual identity, turning into a “vessel guided by the spirit;” in other words, they completely lost control of themselves and performed automatic actions. Sometimes they could not stop or, conversely, they froze for many hours in place, and then began to bark or perform other strange acts. Their uncontrollable actions were especially evident during prayer. “In the midst of general noise, shouting and disorder, some fall like lightning, others enthusiastically or plaintively shout, cry, jump, clap their hands, beat themselves in the face, pull their hair, knock their chests, stomp their feet, dance, make all sorts of sounds and exclamations...”<sup>15</sup> To repeat, according to the *Malovans*, that condition was caused by the action of the Holy Spirit descending on them.

Ivan Sikorsky was forced to state the fact that the *Malovans* lived in a constant anticipation of the coming of the end of the world, which in their view would be better completion of human external existence.<sup>16</sup> Usually, the eschatological worldview is an integral attribute of profound historical change. After all, the human history moves through a

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 23

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>15</sup> И. А. Сикорский. *Психопатическая эпидемия 1892 года в Киевской губернии*. [I. A. Sikorsky. *Psychopathic Epidemic of 1892 in the Kiev Province*.] (Тип.-лит. Университета Св. Владимира, 1893). pp. 12-13

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 7

state of change and instability; it is also subject to large-scale natural disasters and social cataclysms, which contributes to the construction in the human mind of various mythologies of the “end of the world.” The stability of such an eschatological algorithm testifies to its non-accidental presence in religious epidemics. Therefore, it is clear why all the activities of the *Malovans* were constantly focused only on waiting for the end of the world. They did not care about the present. That is why any work became meaningless for them; they spent all their wealth on precious clothes and accessories. In most cases, “they are imbued with a spirit of extreme blasphemy and hostility to their former (Orthodox) religion, which they would be willing to trample on and destroy if external conditions did not interfere.”<sup>17</sup>

Coercive criminal and psychiatric measures were applied to the *Malovans*, which, from the point of view of freedom of conscience and religion, they clearly did not deserve. As Ivan Sikorsky testified, to prevent the *Malovanshchina*, the head of the South-Western Territory (krai) adopted a number of protective measures. First of all, on the basis of the law on enhanced security, the meetings of the *Malovans* were disbanded. And subsequently, Count Ignatiev approved the following measures: 1) the placement of the *Malovans*, suffering from insanity, in hospitals; 2) the placement in hospitals and monasteries of those who suffer from convulsive and nervous diseases...; 3) the arrest and administrative expulsion of sectarian fanatics.”<sup>18</sup> Kindrat Malovanyi was first admitted to the department for mental patients at the Kirillov Hospital in Kyiv. When asked why he was in the hospital, he said that he had to experience all the torments, persecutions, because it was said so about him in the prophecies. Malovanyi was later transferred from Kyiv to Kazan, where he spent many more years in psychiatric prison.

Thus, the description of the religious epidemic proposed by Ivan Sikorsky includes three main points: first, at the individual level (the example of Malovanyi) is a kind of replacement of alcohol dependence by a religious arousal, which was due to heredity and the related features of his nervous and circulatory systems, and also his psyche; secondly, the activation of the mechanism of both emotional contagion and self-suggestion and mutual suggestion, which enhances religiosity; thirdly, the socio-economic conditions proved to be a fertile ground for the emergence and spread of *Malovanshchyna*. Ivan Sikorsky identified *Malovanshchyna* largely as a “neuropsychiatric epidemic, only in appearance similar to the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>18</sup> И. А. Сикорский. *Психопатическая эпидемия 1892 года в Киевской губернии*. [И. А. Sikorsky. Psychopathic Epidemic of 1892 in the Kiev Province.]. (Тип.-лит. Университета Св. Владимира. 1893). p. 45

religious movement.”<sup>19</sup> The author gave a fairly detailed psychological description of the movement, looking for its “general state of mind,” offering a description of feelings, ideas, and the lifestyle of the *Malovans*. At the same time, he drew attention to both the irrationality as well as exaltation of their behavior, and their strange elevated mental states (constant complacency and cheerfulness, exaggerated sentimentality, etc.). “Rejoicing and joy were the main features of their general meetings.”<sup>20</sup>

Ivan Sikorsky’s approach to *Malovanshchyna* was that of the reductionists, which allows us to characterize it as “psychiatric.” The modern researcher of this movement Konstantin Mikhailov notes the following: “Ivan Sikorsky sees his main task in making a “diagnosis” not for an individual, but for the religious movement as a whole. Based on the a priori idea of his “marginal” character, he seeks to clarify the nature of his pathology, to show the importance of pathological personalities, elements and connections in their formation. It should be noted, however, that, apparently, both the personality of the founder of the movement and the activities of his members provided a good reason for such an approach.”<sup>21</sup> In our opinion, such a thought is biased, and making such a diagnosis is discriminatory.

Thus, Sikorsky, in the same way as Bekhterev, and the vast majority of prominent psychiatrists of the time, when explaining certain religious phenomena, identified them as pathology. Consequently, the psychiatrists tended to look for its causes within the framework of “medical materialism,” which appealed, first of all, to physiological explanations of religious phenomena. However, even William James recognized the reality of ecstatic religious experiences and saw in them the potential for the development of tolerance. He remarked: Medical materialism is the best refuge for a simplified system of thought. ...Medical materialism believes that it did away with St. Paul, explaining its vision on the way to Damascus as an epileptic seizure. He contemptuously puts the stigma of hysteria on Saint Teresa, and in Saint Francis of Assisi he sees only a degenerate. ...Modern psychology, recognizing the existence of certain psychophysical relationships, accepts, as a convenient hypothesis, the complete dependence of states of consciousness on organic conditions. If we accept this position, the claims of medical materialism will be true in many ways, but not in all. Saint Paul was probably susceptible to epileptoid, if not epileptic seizures; George Fox

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>21</sup> К. М. Антонов. “ ‘Русские могилы’: И. А. Сикорский и В. В. Розанов О психологии сектантства.” [К Antonov. M. ““Russian graves””: I. A. Sikorsky and V. V. Rozanov about psychology of sectarianism.”]. Вестник ПСТГУ. Серия I: Богословие. Философия. Религиоведение. 2017. Вып. 72, 107.



was without doubt a hereditary degenerate; Carlyle suffered from self-poisoning of the body caused by a digestive illness, and so it was with many others. But does this really resolve the question of the value of the known spiritual manifestations of these people?<sup>22</sup>

We think that we have no reason to consider *Malovanshchyna* and its founders in categories that go beyond religious studies, in particular, beyond its disciplinary formation—psychology of religion. In this context, we are impressed by the position of the famous Ukrainian philosopher Vadim Menzhulin, who carried out a titanic study of contemporary historical realities and comprehensively considered the activities of Sikorsky, assessed *Malovanshchyna* as a religious movement as follows: “If we distract from the terrible consequences that took place for Malovanyi and his closest associates, the diagnostic conclusion of Prof. Sikorsky, then the question of whether the person who calls himself Jesus Christ is mentally healthy or not remains open.”<sup>23</sup>

### **The White Brotherhood as a “New” Religion of Salvation**

Paradoxically, a hundred years later, in the 1990s, a religious epidemic broke out again in Ukraine (geographically almost within the same region as *Malovanshchyna*). The collapse of the Soviet Union provoked a socio-economic, spiritual, value, and ideological crisis in Ukraine. In the religious sphere, one of the possible paths was proposed—the path of religious revival—as an uncompromising condemnation of its antipode—the state atheism as a symbol of the past. Such a sharp change in the worldview paradigm, which occurred as a result of the crisis of the Soviet ideology, led to a change in priorities, to the formation of a spiritual vacuum, confusion, disorder, and chaos.

This new religious epidemic in Ukraine, the Great White Brotherhood (better known in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries as the White Brotherhood), began to spread in the late 1980s as the Soviet “atheism” weakened and Krishnaists, theosophists, and Rajneesh followers began to assert themselves, etc. The followers of these religious communities were in truth those who created a kind of aura around them that attracted various people who could not realize themselves—their feverish search for the answers to existential questions served as the light to which “flocked” various intellectuals who for one reason or another were not recognized in society. One of those seekers was the candidate of technical sciences Yuri

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<sup>22</sup> В. Джемс. *Многообразие религиозного опыта*. [W. James. *The Diversity of Religious Experience*.]. (Санкт-Петербург: Андреев и сыновья, 1993), pp. 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> В. Менжулин. *Другой Сикорский: неудобные страницы истории психиатрии*. [V. Menzhulin. *Another Sikorsky, Awkward Pages of the History of Psychiatry*.]. (Киев: Сфера, 2004), p. 182

Krивоногов, who was fascinated by bioenergy, social psychology, and the secrets of the human soul. Later, Krивоногов began to realize his ambitions to some extent in the Institute of the Human Soul, which he established in 1990 based in the Kyiv branch of the Charity and Health Foundation. Young people who tried to find their place in life reached out to this institution. As the circle of stakeholders expanded, Krивоногов's influence and charisma grew. The newspaper "Atma" and other informative sources appeared. "Quite quickly, the Soul Institute evolved into a religious community with a rigid hierarchy and impeccable discipline, aimed at an active, even aggressive, mission in the world doomed to perish by the end of the millennium."<sup>24</sup>

Krивоногов began to construct a new religion from elements of ancient Egyptian cults, the Vedic religion, Krishnaism, Judaism, and Christianity. He proclaimed this syncretic bouquet of ideas of different religions as a "supra-religion," "universal," "epoch-making" religion and called it YUSMALOS (UYS in this abbreviation means—Yuoan Swami, Krивоногов himself; MA—Maria Devi, Marina Tsvigun; LOS—planetary Logos). Adherents of the White Brotherhood were constantly "intensified," fueled by various ideas, being in an atmosphere of constant emotional tension, inflamed by the leader, his prophecies, various precepts, exalted behavior and boundless devotion. However, such emotional, sensory and intellectual charging could not last indefinitely—gradually the resources began to diffuse. What was needed was a new idea of a religious character, which would not shake the absolute authority, would not erode the absolute filter of faith in Krивоногов, but would also nourish him. It is clear why the leaders of this religious movement decided to introduce the idea of a "living god."

Undoubtedly, "the image of God for the believer is not only the bearer of some deep secret meaning; it correlates with his actual life situation, with the reality of the sensory experience that he experiences daily, the experience that is most significant for his life."<sup>25</sup> This is how Maria Devi (Marina Tsvigun) appeared, who soon began to call herself Maria Devi Christos Marina Tsvigun (formerly a journalist who worked for a youth newspaper) quickly grew into a new role. In April 1990, she changed her identity, declaring that Christ had entered her body. Krивоногов's "status was also changed—he called himself the prophet of Mary Devi Maria Christos and the undisputed controlling leader of the organization. These

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<sup>24</sup> В. Єленський. "Нові релігійні рухи: напрямки еволюції, зони занепокоєння." [V. Yelensky. "New Religious Movements: Directions of Evolution, Areas of Concern."]. *Нові релігії в сучасній Україні. Матеріали круглого столу та науково-практичної конференції* (Київ: VIP, 2000). p. 42

<sup>25</sup> Д. Є. Предко. *Релігійні почуття: сутність та особливості прояву: монографія*. [D. E. Predko. *Religious Feelings: Essence and Features of Manifestation: Monograph.*] (Київ: VADEX, 2018), p. 87

events were accompanied by violent reactions from their supporters, when “at the appearance of the 'living god' and her prophet, the initiates wept, and many became hysterical.”<sup>26</sup>

Later, Yuri Krivonogov and Marina Tsvigun married and developed a doctrine according to which the heavenly God combined the masculine and feminine principles and could descend to earth in one person. There were information sources (YUSMALOS newspaper) in which the works of the leaders—Krivonogov and Tsvigun—were published. The publication of “*christivochkas*” (proclamations, appeals and calls of the cult leaders) was especially popular. Also, the activities of the White Brotherhood were reported in the small-format magazine called *It's interesting!*

However, in order to spread the doctrine, significant financial costs were required. A considerable part of the proceeds were voluntary donations—the new members of the White Brotherhood gave all their personal property to the denomination. This idea was supported by Krivonogov. He stated that in the future “micro-golden age” there would be no need for money as such. “In order to be saved, you need to give up all material possessions, break with family and old friends, and spread information about the White Brotherhood.”<sup>27</sup> For this, Mary Davi Tsvigun promised the greatest reward imaginable—salvation at the Last Judgment and the transition to a new life for the elect.” Their followers believed every word of their leaders, which was perceived as a guide to action.

Thus, in this case, blind faith focused only on the charismatic mission of its pastor, the cultivation of guruism—when the entire religious arsenal of a religious community was associated only with its spiritual leaders. Blind faith was formed gradually, entrenched in the consciousness and actions of the adherents, acquiring the status of a stable dominant that is, being fixed on a certain type of behavior. Moreover, its cultivation was intensified by a number of factors. First, the White Brotherhood as a religious community was based on a rigid internal hierarchy, professing the election of only its adherents, constantly updating the idea of their salvation in the future. Second, community leaders, claiming the status of God, demanded unquestioning obedience and devotion. Third, if certain “brothers” had doubts about the actions of Yuri Krivonogov or Marina Tsvigun—they were instantly overcome by

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<sup>26</sup> В. Єленський. “Нові релігійні рухи: напрямки еволюції, зони занепокоєння.” [V. Yelensky. “New Religious Movements: Directions of Evolution, Areas of Concern.”]. *Нові релігії в сучасній Україні. Матеріали круглого столу та науково-практичної конференції.* (Київ: VIP, 2000). p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> А. Попова, Е. Щербина. *Когда спецназ срывает конец света: история культа “Белое братство.”* [A. Popova, & E. Shcherbina. *When Special Forces Disrupts the End of the World: A Cult History. The “White Brotherhood.”*]. <https://batenka.ru/unity/sect/white-brotherhood/>. Accessed 11.18.2020.

filtering mechanisms—cultivated only those ideas that were absolutely necessary, beneficial to the leaders.

There was a rigid hierarchy in the communities of the White Brotherhood. The community was divided into certain groups, led by senior leaders. Their functional specification was the total control of each member of the group. Moreover, they reported daily on the mental state of the group members, which was later carefully analyzed by the organization's top management. Hence, humility as certain devotion was unquestionable; any deviations in behavior were controlled and subjected to the necessary correction.

In two years, branches of the White Brotherhood were opened in Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. Marina Tsvigun called the date of the end of the world—November 24, 1993. From that time the propaganda of the idea of mass self-immolation began. According to Krivonogov and Tsvigun, it would culminate in a resurrection, after which the two would begin to judge the Last Judgment, as a result of which only members of the White Brotherhood would be saved. After the “transformation,” they would be in a paradise that would rein on earth. And all the rest—“infidels,” “children of Satan” —would go to hell.

Tens of thousands of their followers were flocking to Kyiv, which the White Brothers had called the “New Jerusalem,” trying to break into Sofia Square to set themselves on fire. Using tricks, disguised Maria Devi Christos, Yuri Krivonogov and about 25 other believers bought tickets to the museum of St. Sophia Cathedral. A few minutes later, two companies of Special Forces burst into the cathedral, used tear gas, and tied up the adherents of the White Brotherhood. The case ended with a lawsuit.

During the trial, the couple tried to shift the blame onto each other: Yuri claimed to have followed Maria's instructions; and she in her turn, having cursed her ex-husband, blamed him for everything. The White Brotherhood investigation lasted for fifteen months and the trial lasted for eleven months. Krivonogov was sentenced to seven years in prison, and Maria Tsvigun was sentenced to four years in prison. The defendants were charged with crimes under Articles 77, 187, and 209 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (mass riots, seizure of state and public buildings (meaning the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kyiv), and encroachment on the health of citizens under the pretext of performing religious rites.

Thus, in this religious epidemic there was a “contamination” with a religious idea, which, falling on the appropriate ground, led to a destabilization or destruction of the social community. First, in the latent and preparatory stage (crisis in society, unrealized ambitions, Krivonogov's spiritual search, etc.), a number of motives and incitements accumulated, which prepared the ground for a religious epidemic. At the next stage, an explosive flash was

traced, which generated a mental and religious wave. The source of the outbreak was a passionate personality, the appearances of a “living” God (Tsvigun), around whom an activating set of religious factors was formed, which strengthened and initiated the creation of a sacred space: receiving revelation, divine healing, ascension of the Holy Spirit, etc. In the third stage, we could trace the process of institutionalization—the transformation into a religious community, which was accompanied by the rapid spread of teachings, influencing thoughts and feelings, behavior and lifestyle.

### **Conclusions**

Thus, on the basis of the analysis of the two above-mentioned religious movements it is possible to build a certain algorithm of origin, and functioning of religious epidemics. They usually arise, on the one hand, as an opposition to a traditional religion, which plays a dominant role in a particular region and on the other—their main motivating factor is a search for new values. The bifurcation topos of religious epidemics is a charismatic personality (Kindrat Maliovanyi, Marina Tsvigun), who not only constantly “nourishes” his/her divinity and originality, but also his/her followers. Thus, a century later the originators of religious epidemics and their followers, without agreement, seem to imitate and reflect each other’s thoughts. Their voices sometimes sound original and unique, but in the vast majority as echoes of other ideas, as overtones of the melody of a syncretic religious narrative. Therefore, the religious-mental virus of the epidemic, arising at the height of socio-spiritual crises, changes not only the religious space, but also the worldview and values of their followers through imitation, self-suggestion and mutual suggestion.

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