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UKRAINIAN PROTESTANTS' COMMUNICATIVE RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract. The article considers the reaction of Ukrainian Protestants to the Covid-19 pandemic. Most important for Protestant theologians was a discussion of the impact and consequences of the pandemic on church life. Most Protestants agreed to a hybrid model of church worship: online-offline as a manifestation of an open reaction to the changes that resulted from the introduction of state quarantine restrictions. During the pandemic, Ukrainian Protestants managed to move away from the established model that the church is a building and to accept the paradigm of the Church as the Body of Christ. Under limited conditions, digital Protestant theology began to gain momentum in the form of sermons, discussions, online broadcasts, and so on. There is still a search for a "golden mean" between traditional forms of church activity and the church online, as the Orthodox context of Ukrainian culture leads to the belief that "real" worship can take place only in special rooms. During the pandemic, a number of eschatological theories were born among Protestants, reinforced by fear for their lives, which led to a decrease in the number of believers in the churches. However, along with the negative aspects of the pandemic, there were a number of positive ones, such as believers rethinking their relationship with God and the church community, and self-organization as a reaction to state and church restrictions. There was a digital awakening, which allowed churches to represent themselves online under unusual conditions. Moreover, there was a new emphasis on the New Testament thesis that the church is not a building, but a social community of believers who can serve God outside of a particular building.

Keywords: COVID-19, quarantine, Protestantism, reactions of Protestant leaders.

Introduction

The unusual situation of quarantine provoked a wide reaction among Protestant intellectuals. The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that the pandemic continues to change the religious world, forcing believers of various denominations, including Protestants, to adapt to new methods of interpersonal and ecclesiastical communication. Unusual forms of existence in quarantine conditions provoke discussions among Protestant scholars, intellectuals, and public figures in response to the question: Why did God allow a pandemic? Is it an eschatological sign spoken of by Christ? What to do next? In search of answers to these and other questions, Ukrainian Protestants created a diverse multiplicity of views (polylogue). For example, Mikhail Cherenkov argues that "a pandemic can be seen as an external stimulus to the Reformation,"¹ while Roman Lunkin introduces the term "coronavirus Reformation."² Roman Soloviy claims that "the Christian community was completely unprepared for the challenges of a pandemic, social isolation, and restrictions on the normal course of church life."³ This is a polemical exaggeration, because there have been a whole range of reactions by churches to the new reality, such as helping doctors, victims, charity, and information support.⁴ In fact, Protestants, according to a number of researchers, have adapted to the pandemic easier and faster than traditional/historical churches.⁵ Among Protestants in Ukraine, the largest number of communities are Baptists (28% of Protestant communities), Pentecostals (27%), Charismatics (15%) and Adventists (11%)⁶. We have not

¹ М. Черенков "Церковь и ее миссия во времена перемен." Славянская Богословская Коллегия, May 12, 2020. <https://www.slavictheology.com/single-post/church-and-her-mission-in-time-for-change>. [M. Cherenkov. "The Church and Its Mission in Times of Change." Slavic Theological College.]

² Р. Лункин, "Коронавирусная Реформация." InVictory, April 16, 2020. <http://www.invictory.com/columns/4384/>. [R. Lunkin. "Coronavirus Reformation."]

³ Р. Соловій "Парадоксальні висновки суперечливого року." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, December 29, 2020. https://risu.ua/paradoksalni-visnovki-superechlivogo-roku_n114727. [R. Soloviy. "Paradoxical visnovki of super-fluent rock." Religiyno-Information Service of Ukraine.]

⁴ В. Токман "Релігійні організації в умовах пандемії COVID-19. Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень." Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень, April 29, 2020. <https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2020-04/relegiyni-organizatsii-covid.pdf>. [V. Tokman. "Religious organizations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. National Institute for Strategic Studies." National Institute for Strategic Studies]; В. Токман "Соціально значуща діяльність релігійних організацій України під час карантину. Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень.", July 7, 2020. <https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2020-07/relegiyni-organizatsii-covid.pdf>. [Tokman, V. "Socially significant activity of religious organizations of Ukraine during quarantine. National Institute for Strategic Studies."]

⁵ Petro Kraliuk, Igor Bogdanovskiy, and Kateryna Yakunina, "Religious Organizations under Quarantine: Ukrainian Realities," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40, no. 7 (2020): 53–68, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss7/5>; Vita Tytarenko and Iryna Bogachevska, "Religious 'COVID Fundamentalism' in Eastern and Central Europe: Challenges and Lessons," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 41, no. 1 (2021): 31–45, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/4/>.

⁶ Number of communities: Baptists 2816, Christians of the Evangelical faith (Pentecostals) 2693, Charismatics 1496, "other Protestants" together 1373, Adventists 1070, Evangelical Christians 371, Reformed 129, Lutherans 83. Total Protestants 10031. Source: "Релігійні організації в Україні (станом на 1 січня 2019 р.)." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, 2019. <https://risu.ua/religiyni-organizacii-v-ukrajini-standom-na-1-sichnya>

been able to find a theological analysis of Ukrainian Charismatics. Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists have regularly presented their views on the pandemic online and covered a number of related issues.

The purpose of the article is to investigate how Ukrainian Protestants reacted to the coronavirus pandemic from a theological point of view.

The Main Materials of the Study

The theological discourse of Ukrainian Protestants about the COVID-19 pandemic is best represented in the pages of the scholarly journal "*Bogomyсли*," published by the Baptist Odesa Theological Seminary. In 2020, the editorial board dedicated three issues to this topic, №26 "Church in the Pandemic Era," № 27 "Theology in the Pandemic Era," and de facto №28 on the topic of anti-utopia. Pentecostals dedicated the issue №2 for 2020 to the popular magazine "*Blagovesnyk*" on this topic.

The Baptists, together with the Pentecostals, held a series of online discussions on the problems of adapting churches to quarantine. In particular, the online talk show of the Pastor Development Committee on "Advantages and disadvantages of quarantined church life," "New forced forms of church assembly and evangelism," "Digital Hygiene," "Easter in quarantine," and "Will the Church change after quarantine?" The pastoral online conference "Ministry in Crisis" was dedicated to this topic, where, in addition to the usual aspects of church life such as leadership, committee work, and ministry, topics like "Experience of preaching on camera," "How the church can use social networks wisely?" and "Church offline" provided tips for resuming worship after quarantine.

Adventists in Eurasia conducted an online training course on digital evangelism, where the majority of teachers (and probably visitors) were Ukrainians. Classes covered evangelism issues on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Viber, Telegram, Zoom, WhatsApp, rules of use OBS Studio, StreamYard, Adobe Photoshop, online public speaking, development of a content strategy for church projects, basics of copyrighting, promotion, advertising campaigns, copyright on social networks.

The pandemic also sparked a series of official statements by Protestant churches. These issues concerned loyalty to state norms during this period,⁷ observance of security

2019-г_п97463. ["Religious organizations in Ukraine (as of January 1, 2019)." Religious Information Service of Ukraine.]

⁷ "Заклик ВРЦіРО щодо профілактики поширення коронавірусу." Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій (ВРЦіРО), March 16, 2020. <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/627-uccro-statement->

measures,⁸ and methods of performing the main regular rite of the Lord's Supper,⁹ as well as attempts to ease state restrictions on the work of churches.¹⁰

Protestants did not openly declare disobedience to state demands, but such events did take place. In eastern Ukraine, violations of quarantine restrictions were motivated by distrust of the central government. "This is what happened in the public mood: the eastern regions, as a rule, are in moral and political opposition to Kyiv, and everything that comes out of the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, is 'from the evil one,' 'we will not accept it,'" the pastors said. Respondents also mentioned financial motives: "if parishioners do not gather, he (the pastor - Maxim Balaklitsky's note) will not have any income, his activity ends there, so for churches, it is unprofitable to take quarantine measures, like for many businesses."¹¹ Also important were considerations of freedom of conscience: why does the state determine how the church acts. Another group of violations had psychological causes, which we will analyze below with the case of conspiracy theories. The most active, socially transparent churches declared their support for the government's decisions: "in case of non-compliance with the conditions of quarantine, church ministers bear personal responsibility to the state, their church and all [denominational - Balaklitsky] fraternity."¹² This became the starting point for further discussion. That is, the most numerous church unions took the position of "Christian

on-coronavirus-prevention. ["VRCiRO's call to prevent the spread of coronavirus." All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (VRCiRO).]

⁸ "Звернення Ради євангельських протестантських церков до помісних громад." Рада Євангельських Протестантських Церков України, March 10, 2020. <http://repcu.org/2020/03/10/%d0%b7%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%bd%d0%b5%d0%bd%d1%8f-%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%b8-%d1%94%d0%b2%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b3%d0%b5%d0%bb%d1%8c%d1%81%d1%8c%d0%ba%d0%b8%d1%85-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b5%d1%81-4/>. ["Address of the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches to local communities." Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine.]

⁹ "Рекомендації щодо проведення Вечері Господньої в умовах карантину." Рада Євангельських Протестантських Церков України, September 1, 2020. <http://repcu.org/2020/09/01/%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%ba%d0%be%d0%bc%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b0%d1%86%d1%96%d1%97-%d1%89%d0%be%d0%b4%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%bd%d1%8f-%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%87%d0%b5%d1%80%d1%96/>. ["Recommendations for holding the Lord's Supper in quarantine." Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine.]

¹⁰ "Рада Церков закликає Уряд збалансувати обмеження богослужінь." Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій (ВРЦіРО), November 13, 2020. <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/uccro-calls-on-ukrainian-government-to-balance-covid-19-restrictions-on-worship>. ["The Council of Churches calls on the Government to balance restrictions on worship." All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (VRCiRO).]

¹¹ , Т. Купрієць "Церква онлайн: прощавай олдскульний світ." Інформаційне Агентство "Світогляд," February 6, 2021. <https://svitogliad.com/articles/czerkva-onlajn-proshhavaj-oldskulnyj-svit/>. [Т. Kupriets. "Church Online: Farewell to the Old School World." Worldview News Agency.]

¹² "Пасторам і відповідальним служителям щодо дотримання норм карантину." Всеукраїнський союз церков євангельських християн-баптистів (ВСЦ ЄХБ), February 17, 2021. <https://www.baptyst.com/pastoram-i-vidpovidalnym-sluzhytelyam-shhodo-dotrymannya-norm-karantynu/>. ["Pastors and responsible ministers for compliance with quarantine regulations." All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches (WCC ECB).]

humanism," that life and health are more valuable than religious dogmas and rituals. As a result, there were "contradictions between supporters of Christian humanism, who insisted on compliance with all norms of quarantine for the safety of parishioners, and their conservative antagonists, for whom the highest priority is to preserve the inviolability of the canonical and liturgical order of the church."¹³

On the agenda of church administrators and activists was the adaptation of denominations to new, unusual conditions. Unwanted trajectories of the mood were both the denial of the "theology" of the pandemic and the need for vaccination¹⁴ and fear on the verge of panic. Some wondered that since the pandemic is still a fact, then what is its cause: earthly factors (natural), or good (God), or evil (devil) supernatural forces. Vladimir Vorozhtsov points out that the idea of the coronavirus as a biological weapon of earthly forces, as a conspiracy of the world government in spite of everything, as well as an uncontrollable natural evil contradicts the concept of God's omnipotence in the universe. The author complains that during the pandemic for a number of believers, "the Bible has become less authoritative than social networks,"¹⁵ and he calls for confronting the "fear pandemic" as a manifestation of false faith, an inversion of the biblical worldview.

There was an "eschatological adrenaline rush"¹⁶ of stress, an emphasis on biblical prophecy. "Modern global upheavals are the initial links in the chain of world cataclysms described in the book of Revelation," says Vyacheslav Bachinin.¹⁷ Alexei Efetov tries to determine if not the year, then the probable time period of the Second Coming of Christ, based on the theory of "technological singularity," the realization of which Ray Kurzweil and Elon Musk predict in 2048-2050.¹⁸ Vyacheslav Komlev sees a crisis of faith in the coronavirus pandemic. Both society and the churches were forced to re-evaluate their views

¹³ Р. Соловій "Парадоксальні висновки суперчливого року." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, December 29, 2020. https://risu.ua/paradoksalni-visnovki-superechlivogo-roku_n114727. [R. Soloviy. "Paradoxical visnovki of super-fluent rock." Religiyno-Information Service of Ukraine.]

¹⁴ В. Данелюк "Пандемия или всемирный обман?" Славянская Богословская Коллегия, August 13, 2020. <https://www.slavictheology.com/single-post/pandemic-or-worldwide-deception>. [V. Danelyuk. "Pandemic or Worldwide Deception?" Slavic Theological College.]

¹⁵ В. Ворожцов "Эпидемия страха." *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 131–41. <http://almanah.bogomyслие.com/article/download/202950/202752>. [V. Vorozhtsov. "Epidemic of Fear." Theology.]

¹⁶ Б. Куриляк "Коронавирус и библейское пророчество в Откровении?" *YouTube*, March 23, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4haayJPpqs&feature=emb_title. [B. Kurilyak. "Coronavirus and Bible Prophecy in Revelation?"]

¹⁷ В. Бачинин, "Жизнь, похожая на бред, или дивный новый мир пандемии." *Богомыслие*, no. 28 (2020): 69, <http://almanah.bogomyслие.com/article/view/223157/223551>. [V. Bachinin. "A life that looks like delirium, or a brave new world of a pandemic." Divine contemplation.]

¹⁸ А. Ефетов, "Будущее глазами кино." *Богомыслие*, no. 28 (2020): 250–56, <http://almanah.bogomyслие.com/article/view/223157/223551>. [A. Efetov. "The future through the eyes of cinema." Divine contemplation.]

and priorities, to rethink the essence of their beliefs and actions. The pandemic was a test for the church and its members, including men in their families, who had to take leadership positions, direct the energy and hopes of fellow believers during this period.¹⁹

Many authors are concerned about the information overload of believers. Protestant analysts offer "information fasting,"²⁰ self-restraint, and spiritual (self) censorship²¹ of media consumption. According to them, believers need to develop critical thinking and install protective filters against toxic information.²² Maksym Balaklitsky claims that when evaluating information, one should pay attention to the source of the message, the person, and the status of the author, as well as how the perceived information affects the addressee.²³

Protestant analysts also paid attention to overcoming conspiracy theories. The authors offered religious and psychological explanations for the popularity of conspiracy theories in the church environment. They paid attention to the concept of post-truth--the emotional appeal of the message, which overcomes its rational content. Understanding the popularity of conspiracy theories, Roman Kalashnikov²⁴ identifies psychological, political, and rational reasons for this phenomenon: the opposition "we are against them," the secrecy of elites, a simplified worldview, the search for simple answers to complex questions. According to these authors, conspiracy theories portray evil as omnipotent and all-encompassing, which does not correspond to the biblical perspective of history. Church analysts seek to convince that "God controls both the coronavirus and the Internet."²⁵

Nostalgia for offline²⁶ is understandable and legitimate, but bringing quarantine to an end makes sense and should be used with maximum efficiency.²⁷ Technology will now be an

¹⁹ В. Комлев, "COVID-19 и кризис веры," *Богомыслие*, no. 27 (2020): 168–85, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/208216/208499>. [V. Komlev. "COVID-19 and the crisis of faith." Divine contemplation.]

²⁰ Д. Довбуш, "Духовний імунітет," *Благовісник*, no. 2 (2020): 19, https://blag.org.ua/arhiv/arhiv_2020_2.html.

²¹ О. Опарін "Другий прихід ковіду." *YouTube*, November 16, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ya9np29nR2k>. [Oparin, O. "The second arrival of the covid."]

²² "Цифрова гігієна. Пасха в умовах карантину," April 9, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdQ7nS0hYcY&feature=emb_logo. ["Digital hygiene. Easter in quarantine".]

²³ М. Балаклицкий, "Критическое мышление во время коронавируса," *Обзор мировых вопросов*, no. 3–4 (2020): 14–16. [M. Balaklitsky. "Critical thinking during the coronavirus." Review of world issues.]

²⁴ Р. Калашников, "Извлечение камня глупости или в чем опасность конспирологических теорий," *Богомыслие*, no. 28 (2020): 131–47, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.29357/аб.v0i28.222990>. [R. Kalashnikov. "Removing the stone of stupidity or what is the danger of conspiracy theories." Divine contemplation.]

²⁵ М. Балаклицкий "Бог и коронавирус." Українська уніонна конференція Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, February 14, 2021. <https://info.adventist.ua/bog-y-koronavirus/>. [M. Balaklitsky. "God and the coronavirus." Ukrainian Unionna Conference of the Church of Today's Adventists.]

²⁶ "Як коронавірус змінить це Різдво? Радіовечір з Олександром Погрібним," December 21, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Tq5v-wdXd0>. ["How will the coronavirus change this Christmas? Radio evening with Oleksandr Pohribny."]

integral part of religious life. In the texts of Ukrainian Protestants, we find an ambivalent vision of the Internet: criticism of its negative aspects and the search for opportunities to "conquer" social networks for the church mission. Therefore, according to these authors, it is necessary to care for the destroyed church life, effective Christian communion, and ministry, using the available opportunities. Church members need to be focused on maintaining friendships and preaching the gospel.

Ukrainian Protestants see the meaning of ending the quarantine in the need to rethink their lives, believe, repent, and correct their lives according to biblical standards.²⁸ Quarantine "vacation" is interpreted as an external pause for spiritual transformation,²⁹ in essence as a stimulus to the search,³⁰ the inner journey. The above analyzed authors call for concrete steps in the visible world. Personal loneliness during a pandemic can be a threat, a separate pandemic, and sometimes new opportunities. In conditions of forced social isolation, many people have come to rethink their social ties, to understand how little they have constructive, high-quality, and positive communication outside their family, and the workplace with other people, with friends and acquaintances.

On the other hand, during the quarantine, many faced the necessity of being alone with one's thoughts, fears, and the need to know oneself,³¹ say Valeria Chornobay and Victoria Gritsenko. The authors also recommend the following forms of activity during quarantine: reflection and spiritual development ("no other people are needed for personal prayer and building a relationship with God")³² hobbies, acquiring new knowledge and skills, reading books, online courses, starting a big project: "participation by a believer in the service of God in accordance with his (or her) spiritual gifts and vocation,"³³ and helping

²⁷ М. Балаклицкий "Вирусное Евангелие: Бог привел Церковь в интернет." Українська уніонна конференція Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, January 26, 2021. <https://info.adventist.ua/vyrusnoe-evangelye-bog-pryvel-tserkov-v-ynternet/>. [M. Balaklitsky. "The Viral Gospel: God Brought the Church to the Internet." Ukrainian Unionna Conference of the Church of Today's Adventists.]

²⁸ А. Опарин, "Пандемии: медицина, история, философия," *Обзор мировых вопросов*, no. 3–4 (2020): 8–13. [A. Oparin. "Pandemics: Medicine, History, Philosophy." Review of world issues.]

²⁹ Корещук, І. "Зупинка карантину: 14 зупинених Господом... і 15-й (III частина, остання)." *YouTube*, April 11, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0aFrMOplFE>. [I. Koreshchuk. "Quarantine Stop: 14 Stopped by the Lord... and the 15th (Part III, Last)."]

³⁰ І. Корещук "Десять біблійних карантинів." *YouTube*, April 18, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk726MuH8Tc>. [I. Koreshchuk. "Ten Biblical Quarantines."]

³¹ В. Чорнобай and В. Гриценко, "Одиночество как пандемия в условиях глобальной социальной изоляции," *Богословские размышления: Восточноевропейский журнал богословия*, no. 2 (2020): 60, <http://reflections.e-aaa.info/article/view/217137>. [V. Chornobay and V. Gritsenko. "Loneliness is like a pandemic in the context of global social isolation." Theological Reflections: An Eastern European Journal of Theology.]

³² *Ibid.*, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*

others. Social isolation can be an occasion to establish contact with old friends, to establish online friendships and communication, in particular through communication services.

Preserving the family during quarantine is another task for Protestant media people. At the beginning of the quarantine restrictions, some of them expressed surprise that the long periods of a Christian family being together were interpreted, not as desirable, but as a severe ordeal for the family.³⁴ But later it became clear that idealistic expectations did not correspond to reality. Church analysts advise assessing the relationship between family members and in the case of serious threats, such as chemical addictions, violence, mental disorders, to seek qualified help.³⁵

Preachers have published a number of recommendations for ways to organize family worship.³⁶ Some authors see in quarantine God's call to Christians to "return to the family," "God speaks to the Church through the coronavirus. He locked us in our houses so that we could take responsibility for our families."³⁷ Proponents of this view equated true faith with manifestations of faith in one's home, that is, the organization of regular "true" worship services by believing families. It seems that not everyone was able to do it. Even more, other authors opposed the identification of the house church in the New Testament with the average Ukrainian family, because such a family in some cases consists of two or three people.³⁸ According to their estimates, the New Testament term "*oikos*" meant the ancient family of a wealthy man, which included his many children, relatives, servants and slaves, and in other cases friends and clients. This word did not describe the home groups of believers who gather on weekdays for socialization and spiritual exercises in addition to the main "general"

³⁴ Д. Гордан "Коронавирус как пророчество и лакмус." Українська уніонна конференція Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, March 25, 2020. <https://info.adventist.ua/koronavirus-kak-prorochestvo-y-lakmus/>. [D. Gordon. "The Coronavirus as Prophecy and Litmus." Ukrainian Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.]

³⁵ М. Балаклицкий "Как сохранить семью на карантине." *YouTube*, April 19, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9mQORn4RNY>. [M. Balaklitsky. "How to keep a family in quarantine."]

³⁶ М. Король, "Изучение Библии во время семейного поклонения," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 202–9, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/download/203213/202981> [M. Korol "Studying the Bible during Family Worship." *Theology*]; Калашников, Р. "10 заповедей подготовки к 'онлайн богослужению.'" Центр Благовестия и Ученичества. Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://blagovestie.today/10-zapovedey-online-church/>. [R. Kalashnikov. "10 Commandments to Prepare for 'Online Worship.'" *Evangelism and Discipleship Center*]; К. Сюко "Пасхальное богослужение онлайн: что и как делать и не делать." Центр Благовестия и Ученичества. Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://blagovestie.today/pashalnoe-bogosluzhenie-online/>. [K. Syuko. "Easter Worship Online: What and How to Do and Not to Do." *Center for Evangelism and Discipleship*.]

³⁷ Б. Галюк "Offline vs Online." *Благовісник*, no. 2 (2020). https://blag.org.ua/arhiv/arhiv_2020_2.html. [B. Galyuk. "Offline vs Online." *The evangelist*.]

³⁸ А. Гейченко, "Домашняя церковь в отечественной баптистской экклесиологии и современной библеистике.," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 161–81, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202860/202682>. [A. Geychenko. "House Church in Russian Baptist Ecclesiology and Contemporary Biblical Studies." *Divine thinking*.]

meeting, but the church communities of that time as those who conducted services in the homes of their wealthy patrons. According to these researchers, there is usually no reason to equate an individual Christian family with a church community. An individual family does not have the resources, authority, or means to organize worship at the appropriate level and maintain church discipline.

Serhiy Sannikov goes further, seeing the danger in "family individualism" as opposed to the church community, which must unite believers beyond blood ties, gender, nationality, race, and other factors. He predicts the onset of the "new Middle Ages," the spread of localization.³⁹ This means that there will be more non-church Christianity, and church communities must resist this tendency.

"The Crisis of the Institutional Church" is another observation by Roman Soloviy about the quarantine year.⁴⁰ Researchers have noted an excessive, in their estimation, attachment of believers to traditional forms of church life. This was most evident in discussions of church holidays (Easter) and rites (Lord's Supper). Protestant authors acknowledge that the pandemic prompted the church to thoroughly understand the essence of faith, traditions, and forms of its work, and to separate the main from the secondary.

For Adventists, the annual holidays are not as sacred as the weekly Sabbath. As for the Lord's Supper, which Adventists celebrate quarterly, the Eurasian Adventists were given one recommendation: since the regularity of the Supper is of a historical nature, that is, it is a church decree, they should postpone this event to the post-quarantine period or the period of state easing of restrictions on churches.⁴¹ Baptists and Pentecostals described with nostalgia the sublime celebration of Easter, which was unavailable in 2020.⁴² Keileb Syuko gives advice on how to recreate the Easter holiday atmosphere as much as possible, remotely (with or without broadcast) participating in a solemn service on this occasion.⁴³

³⁹ "Світ після пандемії," *Благовісник*, no. 2 (2020): 16–18, https://blag.org.ua/arhiv/arhiv_2020_2.html. ["The world after the pandemic." The evangelist]; Санніков, С. "Церква 'офлайн': поради до відновлення служінь після карантину." *YouTube*, August 13, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_4j4IqVF4s. [S. Sannikov. "Church 'Offline': Tips for Resuming Services after Quarantine."]

⁴⁰ Р. Соловій "Парадоксальні висновки суперчливого року." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, December 29, 2020. https://risu.ua/paradoksalni-visnovki-superechlivogo-roku_n114727. [R. Soloviy. "Paradoxical visnovki of super-fluent rock." Religiyно-Information Service of Ukraine.]

⁴¹ Е. Зайцев "К вопросу о проведении Вечери Господней." Українська уніонна конференція Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, June 21, 2020. <https://info.adventist.ua/k-voprosu-o-provedenyuy-vechery-gospodnej/>. [E. Zaitsev. "On the question of holding the Lord's Supper." Ukrainian Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.]

⁴² Ю. Вавринюк "Чи буде цьогоріч Пасха?" На перехресті думок. Блог Юрія Вавринюка, November 4, 2020. https://vavryniuk.blogspot.com/2020/04/blog-post_11.html. [Yu. Vavryniuk. "Will there be Easter this year?" At the crossroads of thoughts. Yuriy Vavryniuk's blog.]

⁴³ К. Сюко "Пасхальное богослужение онлайн: что и как делать и не делать." Центр Благовестия и Ученичества. Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://blagovestie.today/pashalnoe-bogosluzhenie-online/>. [K.

The seriousness of these issues for the Baptist community was that a group of teachers at the Odessa Theological Seminary developed detailed recommendations on possible options for the participation or non-participation of both individual believers and Christian groups in the rites of Easter⁴⁴ and the Lord's Supper.⁴⁵ The essence of the Passover counsel was the well-known thesis of late Protestantism about the logocentrism of worship. That is, the main thing is not physical participation in the rite or presence in a "sacred" place, but a careful perception of biblical truth in the sermon (hearing the word of God) and a meaningful response (faith) to it. With the Lord's Supper, things are more complicated. For Christians, this is the second most important (after baptism) rite in the Christian life. The above-mentioned group of theologians suggested four options: 1) to postpone the Supper for the post-quarantine period, 2) to celebrate it with family (individually), 3) in church and at home at the same time, when remote believers observe church action through digital devices and synchronously repeat necessary actions, 4) hold the Supper online. A group of researchers presented all of these options as equally possible and relevant to biblical teaching, giving local communities the right to choose the best option.

The general assessment of the pandemic as an important episode in the history of Ukrainian Protestantism among church activists is not identical. Mostly these authors agree that the pandemic will cause damage to the churches. And that it is a crisis, negative in nature, regardless of the number of deaths from the disease itself among the faithful or in society as a whole. Recalling historical examples of pandemics,⁴⁶ Protestant analysts see them as evidence of human vulnerability at all stages of the history of civilization. Roman Solovyi writes that "the lightning spread of the virus across the planet is largely due to the

Syuko. "Easter Worship Online: What and How to Do and Not to Do." Center for Evangelism and Discipleship.]

⁴⁴ И. Бандура, "COVID-19 и Пасха онлайн в условиях карантина," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 20–34, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202840/202660>. [I. Bandura. "COVID-19 and Easter Online in Quarantine." Divine contemplation.]

⁴⁵ И. Бандура, "Проведение Вечери Господней в условиях карантина," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 8–13, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202837/202659>. [I. Bandura. "Carrying out the Lord's Supper in a quarantine." Divine contemplation]; С. Санников, "Вечеря Господня в контексте COVID-19. Расширение, рефлексия и обоснование документа 'Проведение Вечери Господней в условиях карантина'." *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 49–78, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202836/202657>. [S. Sannikov. "The Lord's Supper in the Context of COVID-19. Expansion, reflection and substantiation of the document 'Carrying out the Lord's Supper in quarantine'." Divine contemplation]; Р. Калашников, "Причастие во время карантина: проводить нельзя отменить: где поставить запятую?," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 107–22, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202841/202661>. [R. Kalashnikov. "Communion during quarantine: it cannot be canceled: where to put a comma?" Divine contemplation.]

⁴⁶ А. Опарин "Пандемии: медицина, история, философия," *Обзор мировых вопросов*, no. 3–4 (2020): 8–13. [A. Oparin. "Pandemics: Medicine, History, Philosophy." Review of world issues]; "Пандемії та християнство: уроки історії," *Благовісник*, no. 2 (2020): 22–24, https://blag.org.ua/arhiv/arhiv_2020_2.htm. ["Pandemics and Christianity: Lessons from History." The evangelist].

high level of globalization and openness of the world (...) However, the achievements of civilizational development do not eliminate the radical vulnerability of man. As Reinhold Niebuhr noted, "the irony of history is that the supposed virtues and advantages of civilization eventually turn out to be its flaws and imperfections."⁴⁷

Yuriy Vavryniuk also thinks about the reverse side of the technological armament of the world and the church of the 21st century: "You have to pay for everything. And for scientific and technological progress, too."⁴⁸ The journalist draws a parallel with the weakness of "high-tech" Christianity, which does not think of its existence outside the expected level of prosperity, peace, stability, and resources. The world in the Christian era, of which Jesus Christ prophesied, offers none of these guarantees except the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit with the community of believers. The church cannot rule out a pandemic. The role of the church in these events is always reactive. However, history preserves examples of steadfastness and devotional service to victims by prominent figures of Christian civilization. Protestant journalists⁴⁹ are urged to follow their example, not to despair, to "sit through" the crisis, or even to try to hide some deals behind these events.⁵⁰ It seems to be the main conclusion of the pandemic experience, rather than the religious debate over whether to get vaccinated.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Р. Соловій "Парадоксальні висновки суперчливого року." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, December 29, 2020. https://risu.ua/paradoksalni-visnovki-superechlivogo-roku_n114727. [R. Soloviy. "Paradoxical visnovki of super-fluent rock." Religiyno-Information Service of Ukraine.]

⁴⁸ Ю. Вавринюк "Християнство на карантині." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, March 17, 2020. https://risu.ua/hristiyanstvo-na-karantini_n108651. [Yu. Vavryniuk. "Christianity in Quarantine." Religious Information Service of Ukraine.]

⁴⁹ В. Герасимчук, "Когда 'толпами гибнет отчаянный народ'. Три примера веры в эпоху повальных болезней," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 142–60, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202859/202680>. [V. Gerasimchuk. "When 'desperate people are dying in droves'. Three examples of faith in an era of widespread disease." Divine contemplation.]

⁵⁰ А. Абрамов, "Карантинные размышления о христианах во времена пандемий, последнем времени и романе-притче А. Камю 'Чума'," *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 210–26, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/202941>. [A. Abramov. "Quarantine reflections on Christians during pandemics, the end times and the novel-parable of A. Camus 'The Plague'." Divine contemplation.]

⁵¹ "Радіовечір з Олександром Погрибним." *YouTube*, March 23, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrh5JUVH0v4>. ["Radio evening with Alexander Pogribny."]; Р. Савочка "Коронавірус: 5 розпространєних міфів. Вакцина, Білл Гейтс, 5G, Всесвітній заговор," April 30, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppKIhuI2oUA>. [Sannikov, S. "Church 'offline': please, before the renewal of the quarantine service."]; В. Антонюк "Вакцина від COVID-19." *YouTube*, January 22, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIV1XlgKx00>. [V. Antonyuk. "Vaccine from COVID-19."]; Ю. Вавринюк "Вакцинація від Covid: наступаючи на ті ж самі граблі." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, February 8, 2021. https://risu.ua/vakcinaciya-vid-covid-nastupayuchi-na-ti-zh-sami-grabli_n115749. [Yu. Vavryniuk. "Vaccination against Covid: stepping on the same rake." Religious Information Service of Ukraine]; "Опасно ли вакцинирование от коронавируса и каковы риски?" Українська уніонна конференція Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, February 15, 2021. <https://adventist.ua/ru/news/interview/chi-e-nebezpechnoyu-vakcinaciya-vid-koronavirusa-ta-yaki-riziki-isnyuyt>. ["Is coronavirus vaccination dangerous and what are the risks?" Ukrainian Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.]

Church journalists note that the pandemic has helped churches realize the priority of sociality over the details of the liturgy. The church is not a building, as Protestants often reminded themselves during the lockdown, but a community of believers. Thus, participation in a common cause (so translated from the Greek word "liturgy"), the collective implementation of this event allows individual Christians to become a church. These authors contrast this participation with the consumer, contemplative position of the user of online worship.

Wider development of online space by churches is the most noticeable trend of the quarantine year. Roman Soloviy writes about this as follows: "Quarantine restrictions have literally forced many Christian communities to go out into the open virtual space, to master the latest social technologies. At the same time, there is reason to talk about the spread of naive belief in the power of the technological approach, that the use of the right tools guarantees if not a success, then at least survival."⁵² Again, this assessment seems an exaggeration. The analyzed authors show a cautious attitude to technology.

Protestant analysts are inclined to a mixed form, where online is an integral part of the offline church. In Ukrainian Protestantism, the idea of online rites has not spread, at least not yet. I am not aware of the online celebrations of the Lord's Supper (although the above-mentioned joint document of Baptist seminary teachers⁵³ allows it), baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The very idea of online worship, even "ordinary" one's for many Ukrainian Protestants is too revolutionary. More often we find calls for the slightest easing of restrictions to return to offline meetings,⁵⁴ to protect the community under quarantine,⁵⁵ to value community communication, even limited by digital technology: "Zoom communication" can also be the spiritual divine reality where our character and faith must be formed, and where we can hone each other's personalities. Such communication can be seen as the grace of God, with the only difference that we are not accustomed to this type of

⁵² Р. Соловій "Парадоксальні висновки суперечливого року." Релігійно-Інформаційна Служба України, December 29, 2020. https://risu.ua/paradoksalni-visnovki-superechlivogo-roku_n114727. [R. Soloviy. "Paradoxical visnovki of super-fluent rock." *Religiyno-Information Service of Ukraine*].

⁵³ И. Бандура "Проведение Вечери Господней в условиях карантина." *Богомыслие*, no. 26 (2020): 8–13. <http://almanah.bogomyслиe.com/article/view/202837/202659>. [I. Bandura. "Carrying out the Lord's Supper in a quarantine." *Divine contemplation*].

⁵⁴ Р. Волкославский "Какую позицию христианину занимать во время коронавируса?" *YouTube*, November 6, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfYQB4_Z4ok. [R. Volkoslavsky. "What position should a Christian take during the coronavirus?"]

⁵⁵ "Чи зміниться церква після карантину," April 24, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoe5BAOxs-o>. ["Will the church change after quarantine."]

communication.⁵⁶ Bohdan Halyuk claims that "it is the physical, real church that teaches us to get along with different people, even those we don't like."⁵⁷ He believes that remote communication makes it too easy to quantify the participation of unwanted people in the Christian life. Instead, physical presence has greater educational potential for a member of a religious community.

Roman Kalashnikov recommends⁵⁸ organizing participation in online worship according to the same rules as in an offline church meeting, especially if it's an online Easter service. He invites viewers of the online broadcast to prepare special clothes at home, tidy up the house, prepare holiday food, turn on the festive music, greet each other with the words "Christ is risen!" In the same style, Caleb Syuko⁵⁹ advises sleeping the day before and not overloading yourself with screen time (including watching movies late), gathering with the family in one room and watch the broadcast on one device, turning off mobile phones while watching, not making derogatory comments about what you see, preparing the Bible and read all the texts quoted in the sermon, informing others about the possibility of watching the service, using interactive opportunities to submit prayer requests, and participating in the collection of donations. After the broadcast, the family should discuss what they saw, call their fellow believers, and convey words of encouragement to the pastor.

Roman Kalashnikov's view of online "home churches" is similar.⁶⁰ He sees the benefits of such meetings, such as convenience, mobility, flexibility, the possibility of spiritual support at a distance. The disadvantages, in his understanding, are the lack of emotional contact, dependence on the Internet, the unavailability of shared meals, the technical complexity of the joint singing of the faithful. The researcher considers the correspondence of the apostles to be the biblical precedent of remote communication of

⁵⁶ А. Абрамов, "«Жить вместе». Размышления о книге Дитриха Бонхёффера во время пандемии коронавируса," *Богомыслие*, no. 28 (2020): 272–78, <http://almanah.bogomysliye.com/article/view/223160/223449>. [A. Abramov. "Living together". Reflections on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book during the coronavirus pandemic." Divine contemplation.]

⁵⁷ Б. Галюк "Offline vs Online." *Благовісник*, no. 2 (2020). https://blag.org.ua/arhiv/arhiv_2020_2.html. [B. Galyuk. "Offline vs Online." The evangelist.]

⁵⁸ Р. Калашников "10 заповедей подготовки к 'онлайн богослужению.'" Центр Благовестия и Ученичества. Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://blagovestie.today/10-zapovedey-online-church/>. [R. Kalashnikov. "10 Commandments to Prepare for 'Online Worship.'" Evangelism and Discipleship Center.]

⁵⁹ К. Сюко "Пасхальное богослужение онлайн: что и как делать и не делать." Центр Благовестия и Ученичества. Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://blagovestie.today/pashalnoe-bogoslujenie-online/>. [K. Syuko. "Easter Worship Online: What and How to Do and Not to Do." Center for Evangelism and Discipleship.]

⁶⁰ Р. Калашников "Онлайн группы общения. Плюсы. Минусы." Центр Благовестия и Ученичества, March 31, 2020. <https://blagovestie.today/online-gruppa/>. [R. Kalashnikov. "Online communication groups. Pros. Minuses." Center for Evangelism and Discipleship.]

Christians. That is, the Internet church is not something perfect, but it is quite useful in crisis conditions (pandemic) or other obstacles (geographical distance).

An example of the most complete acceptance of technological innovations is the position of Pavel Stefanovich. He starts from the thesis that the future has come, the online church is a fact, and it remains to adapt to these changes. Otherwise, conservatives lose the competition for a socially promising audience.

The Church should learn and use new communication technologies to stay up to date and demanded as well as to stay attractive and understandable for young people. I help my Christian readers realize the times we are living in and motivate all of us to use Internet technology in carrying out church missions. The online church meets the needs of our society and the next generation. The online format doesn't exclude the traditional one, they coexist and complement each other, presenting itself as a hybrid model.⁶¹

Stefanovich says there is tension between traditional and new church models. Recent decades have shown the decline of the traditional church, but interest in the religious sphere has not waned. That is, there is a demand for religion, but not in its traditional church "performance." The role of technology in all spheres of life is growing. For Generation Z the Internet has been available from an early age. These trends are generating demand for the online church, which, according to the author, is both a form of the church meetings over physical distances and a promising means of Christian mission. Thanks to the Internet, "the world and the gospel have come closer to each other."⁶² He urges building online communication in such a way that the social connections that arise through remote contacts encourage you to meet offline. Valentin Zagreba⁶³ bases his research on the prospects of mission in the digital age on the theory of generations. He ranks age groups by adaptability to Internet technology, emphasizing the ability to translate online those parts of church work that are provided before. However, the most important purpose of these contacts is to form personal friendships--whether online or offline.

A result of the "pandemic" reflection by Ukrainian Protestants on the prospects of the church online is Rostislav Tkachenko's article "Cyber Theology and the Church on the World Wide Web." In it, the author reviews the book "Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet" (2012, English translation 2014) by Catholic theologian Antonio Spadaro

⁶¹ П. Стефанович, "Добро пожаловать в онлайн-церковь," *Богомыслие*, no. 27 (2020): 151. <http://almanah.bogomyслиe.com/article/view/208213/208497>. [P. Stefanovich. "Welcome to the online church." Divine contemplation].

⁶² Ibid., 165.

⁶³ В. Загреба "Церковь и поиск новых путей коммуникации." *Альфа и Омега*, no. 58 (2020): 7–12. <https://esd.adventist.org/2020/07/30/alfa-i-omega-1-2020/>. [V. Zagreba. "The Church and the Search for New Ways of Communication." Alpha and Omega].

and discusses it with the author. Tkachenko states/acknowledges that "modern digital culture needs Christian theological understanding."⁶⁴ Importantly, contrary to the assertion of a "naive belief in technology," Tkachenko, following Spadaro, emphasizes that Christians need not pause at the "wonders" of technology, but can go to its root to understand how the world is changing and how this change is having an impact on the life of faith.⁶⁵ Tkachenko explains how Spadaro also denies the possibility of reducing the multidimensionality of church life to online information exchange. For the Catholic author, the essence of church life--the sacraments and fraternal communion--is possible only in the "real community in a particular place with certain ministers and with the real sacraments."⁶⁶

Tkachenko agrees with the thesis about the influence of digital culture on the Christian faith, but the nature and extent of this influence is still the subject of discussion, not a *fait accompli*. The relationship between the Internet and the church raises new questions rather than answers. The Protestant author believes that digital Christian culture is just beginning to take shape. The integral or mature "language of the church of the Internet age" has not yet emerged. And the development of such a language of thought and theology is a matter of the present and the future. The age of the Internet offers its "grammar," and we as a church may or may not be obliged to Christianize it and fill it with the correct "lexical" meaning--the truth and love of Christ. This is a necessary and achievable mission."⁶⁷ Therefore, on the one hand, the coronavirus pandemic became a serious challenge for Ukrainian Protestants who were not technically and morally ready for online forms of communication, and on the other hand, it was an impetus for the development of "digital immunity" of churches, readiness for further mediatization of their activities.

Conclusions

The theological reflection of Ukrainian Protestants on the pandemic proved to be lively. In general, it has been a cautious view, but open to change. Protestants have expressed a desire to create a hybrid model where online complements offline as the main dimension of church work. In this context, Christian Internet projects function as a technological extension (Marshall McLuhan) of the Church as the Body of Christ. Church thinkers also face pragmatic tasks: not to discredit their reputation before the state and society, to adapt to

⁶⁴ Р. Ткаченко, "Кибербогословие и церковь во всемирной сети," *Богомыслие*, no. 27 (2020): 218, <http://almanah.bogomyслиye.com/article/view/208443/208703>. [R. Tkachenko. "Cyber theology and the Church in the World Wide Web." Divine contemplation].

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

changed circumstances, to repel panic and conspiracy theories, to form critical thinking, to live with the "new normality:" to be a church and quarantined. Protestants are aware of the need to continue to believe, to build inner peace, to preserve family unions, to develop mediatized forms of church life, including rites, to search for the "golden mean" between traditional forms of church activity and the requirements of the time, namely, the church online.

The Protestant religious community was not ready for completely remote forms of worship. The Orthodox context of Ukrainian culture determines the belief that "real" worship services must take place in special rooms. Church events outside of places of worship are perceived as something defective, amateurish type of home meetings, in short, as a diminutive semblance of worship. When the pandemic dragged on and the state imposed restrictions on the number of believers in churches, a number of eschatological theories were born among Protestants reinforced by fear for their lives. As a result, some senior believers have weakened their ties with local communities. The existing meetings have blurred their boundaries, as believers have become more likely to watch broadcasts from other communities and denominations.

The positive aspects of the pandemic are the personal self-analysis of believers in the form of rethinking their relationship with God and the church community, and the manifestation of self-organization as a reaction to state and church restrictions. There was a digital awakening, which allowed churches to represent themselves online under unusual conditions. The pandemic transformed the social position of the churches. Old-timer churches on the Internet have become more popular and strengthened their authority in the religious community, and non-mediated denominations have reduced their publicity during this time due to the unavailability of offline events. There was a new emphasis of the New Testament thesis that the church is not a building, but a social community of believers who can survive without "sacred" walls of brick and concrete, cultivating their community.

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