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Valentyna Kuryliak
Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences

Maksym Balaklytskyi
V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine

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ARMED CONFLICT AND PROTESTANT VOLUNTEERING IN EASTERN UKRAINE

By **Valentyna Kuryliak** and **Maksym Balaklytskyi**

Valentyna Kuryliak, PhD, is a postdoctoral student in the Philosophy and Cultural Studies Department of National University “Ostroh Academy,” in Ostroh, Ukraine. She is the Head of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences. Scientific interests: History of Protestantism in Ukraine, Seventh-day Adventist Church. E-Mail: valentina.kuryliak@gmail.com.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5245-9700>

Maksym Balaklytskyi, Doctor of Sciences in Social Communications is Professor of the Department of Journalism at the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine. His scholarly interests are religious media. E-Mail: m.balaklytskyi@karazin.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7977-5594>

Abstract

The process of development and activity of Ukrainian Protestantism due to the influence of the recently destroyed Soviet ideology is somewhat complex and unstable. Protestants became noticeable to Ukrainian society after the events of Euromaidan and the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 in the center of the capital of Ukraine. The Protestant community, however, did make real, material contributions in the territory of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, which began in April 2014. The aim of this article is to evaluate the volunteer work of Ukrainian Protestants and to understand the difference between secular and religious volunteering. The disadvantages and advantages of volunteer work are identified. There is a key difference between secular and Protestant volunteering, which is that religious volunteering, in addition to material assistance in earthly life, tries to draw the attention of its recipients to the heavenly realities. The numbers describe the activities of Protestants and show that the contribution of Protestant volunteers in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine is insignificant compared to secular humanitarian organizations. Their motives for helping and rebuilding the destroyed areas, however, are based on religious principles, rather than in determining the enemy. In other words, Protestant volunteers are a priori not focused on what is desired, but on what is available.

Keywords: armed conflict, Protestant volunteering, eastern territory of Ukraine.

Introduction

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has become a serious challenge for Ukrainian Protestants.¹ It was preceded by Euromaidan and the escape of the President of Ukraine

¹ The largest percentage of Protestant churches in Ukraine are Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists and Charismatics, the rest of the Protestant churches are located only in historical regions (Transcarpathia, Volyn, Bukovina) or in small numbers.

(November 21, 2013–February 22, 2014) and the annexation of Crimea (from February 20, 2014) by Russia. It is estimated that the military conflict in the Donbass (since April 6, 2014) caused damage worth \$100 billion,² resulting in 13,000 casualties, a quarter of whom were civilians, and more than 30,000 wounded.³ The number of internally displaced persons from the occupied territories of Donbass and Crimea is 1,404,926.⁴ In the period from 2014 to 2015, six waves of open mobilization were carried out, and martial law was in effect from November 26 to December 26, 2018.

This is the first military conflict on the territory of Ukraine since the Second World War. It ended the series of significant events mentioned above, affecting in some radical way the state-church relations, the social role, and status of Protestantism in Ukraine. The political beliefs of Ukrainian Protestants mainly reflect peculiar regional affinities (western Ukraine being “for Europe,” east being “for Russia”). The personal views of Protestants, however, are overall somewhat pro-Western, probably due to the religious commonality of this Christian movement with the European Reformation.

Of course, Protestantism in Ukraine has a history, the peculiarity of which is that the territories of the Ukrainian state were often called the “Bible belt” of the Soviet Union. The period of Soviet rule for Ukrainian Protestantism in general is characterized by constant or rarely interrupted persecution, during which Protestantism tried to recover from the damage caused. However, such “golden decades” (1919-1939) passed quickly, and the faithful of this denomination, as a rule, found themselves in an even worse position than they were previously.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, evangelical churches grew rapidly in Ukraine. Until 2000, a quarter of all registered places of worship in Ukraine belonged to Protestants, and, in southeastern Ukraine, their number was almost equal to that of Orthodox churches. The territory of Ukraine has become a missionary destination for some of the most active and strongest evangelical communities from all over Europe. As a result, a number of evangelical publications, seminaries, and recruitment missionary centers emerged to serve

² “Збитки України Від Російської Агресії оцінили в 100 Мільярдів Доларів.” Українська Правда, 2018, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/06/9/7182864/>. Accessed 12.08.2020. [“Ukraine's losses from Russian aggression were estimated at 100 billion dollars.” Ukrainian Pravda].

³ “13 Тисяч: Офіційні Дані ООН Щодо Загиблих у Війні На Донбас.” Радіо Свобода, 2019, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29792144.html>. Accessed 12.16.2020. [“13 Thousand: Official UN Data on Victims of the Donbas War.” Radio Liberty].

⁴ “Динаміка міграції в Україні: де зареєстровано найбільше переселенців.” Слово і діло, 2019, www.slovovidilo.ua/2019/10/31/infografika/suspilstvo/dynamika-mihracziyi-ukrayini-zareyestrovano-najbilshe-pereselencziv. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020. [“Dynamics of migration in Ukraine: where most migrants are registered.” Word and deed].

throughout Eurasia.⁵ In addition, Ukraine is the only post-Soviet country that “did not revise the 1990 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,”⁶ according to which Protestant churches are free of any legal restrictions. For the last twenty-five years, they have had the best conditions for development in their history.⁷

Under the conditions of freedom of conscience, Ukrainian Protestantism went through two stages during the period of Ukraine's independence (1991-2021), which can be characterized as follows. The first stage is the search for oneself, one's own identification in the context of spiritual and material formation. Replenishment of church members through the work of foreign evangelicals and volunteers took place, who perceived the territories of the former Soviet countries as springboards for the rapid conversion of people hungry for spiritual food. Newly converted church members, with the support of brothers and sisters from abroad, built and purchased buildings, turning them into church premises. When interest in evangelical programs and the number of converts declined significantly after the 2000s, Protestants conditionally moved on to the second stage of their own development: building links with the so-called outside world, which had its own problems, experiences, and challenges. One such challenge to which the Ukrainian Protestant community responded was the armed conflict between eastern Ukraine and Russia. Protestants did not support one side or the other; they focused on the victims of the conflict and their needs, and volunteered for defenses instead of attack, creation instead of destruction, and mercy instead of condemnation.

Characteristics of Protestant Volunteering

The principle “from student to professional” is, for minority churches, inverted. Communities of such denominations are modeled on the “big family”⁸ and consist of volunteers. If, in Catholic and Orthodox churches, the liturgy is performed exclusively by denominational professionals, i. e. priests in paid positions, then, in late Protestantism, the local community may be guided by assistant pastors who work on a voluntary basis and may

⁵ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted. Ukrainians and Global Evangelism.*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 1.

⁶ Вікторія Любашенко, *Протестантизм в Україні. 500 років Реформації. Рух, що змінив світ.* (Київ: Джерело життя, 2017), 15. [Victoria Lyubashchenko. *Protestantism in Ukraine. 500 years of the Reformation. A movement that changed the world.*]

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Вікторія Любашенко. “Протестанти в Україні: 30 років релігійної свободи.” Українська уніонна конференція., 2019. <https://info.adventist.ua/tyzhdenpodyaky-protestanty-v-ukrayini-30-rokiv-religijnoyi-svobody/>. Accessed 11.02.2020. [Victoria Lyubashchenko. "Protestants in Ukraine: 30 Years of Religious Freedom." Ukrainian Union Conference.]

not have paid positions at all. Members of Protestant churches can be elected to different levels of responsibility (“service”), which gives church members a sense of greater freedom and rights, without the economic leverage to control them.

The phrase “Christian church volunteering” is rather a tautology for such a church environment; the essence of Christian thoughts is understood by minority church activists primarily as selfless help, actions in the interests of others. The church's synonym for “volunteering” is “service,” in the sense of “serving, helping, being for someone” a source of moral, psychological, and material support. Researchers have repeatedly stated the following:

[Ukrainian] evangelical communities ... reaffirm socialist moral attitudes towards equality, solidarity, and prosperity, offering assurances of imitation. ... Promoting disciplinary practices and conversations about salvation that include a sense of liberation and superiority over what the world has to offer.⁹

This order of their ecclesiasticism is integral; it creates narrow professional centers for tasks of increased complexity. And there is not always an opportunity to do with confessional stocks. Under conditions of great strife, when there are many affected, any help is needed. This principle is illustrated by the initial, and often most acute, stage of the crisis.

Armed Conflict and Protestant Volunteering in Eastern Ukraine.

In the first months of the conflict in Donbass, the state security system in the front zone was destroyed, making the civilian population, first and foremost, victims and hostages of the new circumstances. The transportation network was blocked or interrupted, and the supplies of food, medicine, gas, water, and electricity were stopped or hindered. A number of state institutions were in a semi-frozen state, unable to provide appropriate services to the population. To this were added injuries, new illnesses, and large numbers of people seeking to leave the conflict zone.

Under such conditions, the Protestant churches of Donbass, which the Orthodox majority had previously ignored at best, attempted to temporarily replace the structures of state social security. Pastors and church activists evacuated people in their own vehicles, and bought medicine, medical treatments, and food. Church premises, at least temporarily, became social centers, where toilets, showers, and washing machines were installed, clothes, folding beds or wheelchairs were stored, and a safe haven was provided to shelter those

⁹ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted. Ukrainians and Global Evangelism.*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 9.

displaced. During the day there were biblical meetings, psychological counseling, music concerts, classes for children, and charity meals.

Communities could not exist for long in this mode. The “grassroots” and “people’s” volunteering were replaced by the systematic work of professionals. Special charitable organizations were established, some of which were founded by the churches themselves, and the rest by secular communities or state bodies.

At the beginning of the crisis in the Donbass, Protestants came to the rescue, guided by the universal motive of Christian action. They did not have the resources or desire to replace the capabilities of state structures but responded to the humanitarian crisis in the hope of meeting at least some of the needs of the population affected by hostilities. Protestants claim that they always go beyond the local needs of their beneficiaries in their ministry, arguing that everyone needs not only medicine, water, and transportation to depart the area of hostilities, but also faith in God’s grace for them and in the congregation of the church. In the church, they find a community of like-minded people who, by constantly exchanging care, attention, and other forms of social capital, continue to help each other. The Bible criticizes the imperfection of the earthly state and social structures, an alternative to which is the church as a laboratory of other kind of relationships, building a Christian atmosphere and compelling its adherents to find eternal life with God in God’s kingdom, which again begins on earth with the call “to repent and to believe in the gospel.”

Protestants resolve the tension between general and special (professional) help as follows: volunteering as an inner belief; an attitude of readiness is cultivated in the church environment as a daily norm for the believer. Volunteering as an expression of effective Christian love is a common reaction of every “true” believer. Professional help is a supplement based on the same motivational basis. Its efficacy depends on the available material resources, while the former should be a natural manifestation of the essence of the church.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Donbas, many Ukrainian Protestants have “professionalized” their assistance to the victims, becoming chaplains and activists of public organizations that helped the army, veterans, and civilians in the warzone. This “professionalization” was influenced by the vast practice of such skills as they acquired in the process of their volunteering, deriving from self-education, communication with colleagues at specialized events, and formal education, which was provided at secular and religious universities. For example, “Psychological Counseling and Chaplaincy” and “Psychological Counseling in Crisis” comprise a two-year program of “Master of Religious Studies” at the

Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University in Kyiv.

Contrary to the claims of the Ukrainian media, which hastened to proclaim the Protestant volunteers of Donbass in 2013-2015 as “Ukrainian patriots,” there is evidence that casts doubt on this. Protestant activists claim that they were driven by religious and moral motives to help the needy, rather than by a desire to support either side of the armed conflict; in doing so, they “depoliticize” the conflict. They avoid assessments of the political situation in Donbass, shifting the beneficiaries' attention to Christian ideology: the moral example of Jesus, their vocation to serve all people, and the opportunity for beneficiaries to do the same by incorporating these principles into their lives, caring for family and health, forgiving insults and forming a desire to live and build life prospects. Gnat Merenkov¹⁰ successfully complements this opinion, arguing that Protestant charity is systematic and dynamic, as most Protestants see their worldview as a way to fulfill the principle of “love your neighbor as yourself.”

It is shown that Christian charity goes beyond the simple desire to increase the size of one's church and demonstrate one's kindness to others through an excess of material resources. It was found that, among Protestant leaders, there was a need to go beyond purely humanitarian work. In connection with the events in eastern Ukraine, Ukrainian Protestantism has shown charitability at the level of world charities, occupying a niche at the state level, as a result of which the directions of assistance to Ukrainian society were expanded from local to national interests. According to Ukrainian law, “charitable activity is voluntary personal and/or property assistance ... that does not involve the philanthropist making a profit, as well as paying any remuneration or compensation to the philanthropist on behalf of or on behalf of the beneficiary.”¹¹

As of 2017, the scale of Protestant charity is as follows. The article “Protestants—the property of Ukraine” on the website of the Association “Call”¹² states that 100,000 children were homeless in the 1990s until the problem began to be solved by 50 Christian orphanages.

¹⁰ Г. Меренков, “Харитативна діяльність пізньо-протестантських церков в Україні: тенденції розвитку.” *Вчені записки Таврійського національного університету імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія Історичні науки*. 30, no. 3 (2019): 22–28. [G. Merenkov. “Charitable Activity of Late Protestant Churches in Ukraine: Development Trends.” *Scientific notes of Tavriya National University named after VI Vernadsky. Historical Sciences Series*].

¹¹ “Закон України ‘Про благодійну діяльність та благодійні організації’.” Верховна Рада України. Офіційний вебпортал парламенту України, 2013. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5073-17#Text>. [“Law of Ukraine ‘ On Charitable Activities and Charitable Organizations ’.” Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Official web portal of the Parliament of Ukraine].

¹² “Протестанти – надбання України.” Поклик. <https://poklik.org/projects/protostanty-nadbannya-ukrayiny/>. Accessed 11.11.2020. [“Protestants are the property of Ukraine.” Call.]

Today in Ukraine there are “23 socio-psychological centers for children, for mother and child. Today, 20,000 orphans are under the care of evangelical believers.” The authors of the article note that, thanks to the charity of evangelical Christians, “in 2011 there were 30,000 orphans in need of adoption, and in 2017 there were only 6,000 left.” In addition, 300 Christian social rehabilitation centers for alcohol and drug addicts have successfully rehabilitated 50,000 people. Homeless, disabled, and low-income people regularly receive help from evangelical churches, missions, foundations, and organizations. There are charitable medical clinics, at which, over the past 10 years, more than 150,000 people have received free treatment, as “evangelical Christians provide hospitals with medical equipment and patients with drugs, prostheses, wheelchairs and care.”¹³

In the first months of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Christian volunteers evacuated 55,000 migrants.¹⁴ More than 60 charity canteens have been opened.

430 houses were repaired and 400 houses were provided with firewood. More than 4,000 tons of food and 800 tons of humanitarian aid were collected». Subsequently, one bishop of Zhytomyr region sent 120 trucks of food and humanitarian aid.¹⁵ Believers of Rivne region collected about 200 trucks, which is about 5,000 tons. The Zaporizhia Assistance Center provided 300 tons, and one of the international missions provided 2,500 tons of aid. As for social work for persons serving prison sentences, 90% of those who have undergone spiritual rehabilitation thanks to Protestants do not return to prison.¹⁶ Chaplaincy developed 110 evangelical ministers in 22 military units. Also, on the website of the charity ADRA Ukraine—the Ukrainian office of the Adventist Relief and Development Agency—it is stated that since the beginning of Euromaidan and the armed conflict in Donbass in 2014, ADRA Ukraine has provided assistance to more than 950,000 people in 15 regions of Ukraine (as of 2016). Today this figure reaches more than a million people.”¹⁷

Therefore, Christian, and, in particular, Protestant charity, in accordance with the instructions of Jesus Christ, is not based on the distribution of excess, but on the willingness to serve someone, to sacrifice oneself for others, for God and neighbor. As Mykhailo Cherenkov (Doctor of Philosophy), noted about the humanitarian projects of evangelical Christians, “service to society is no longer based so much on individual initiatives as on a

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Протестанти – надбання України.” Поклик. <https://poklik.org/projects/protestanty-nadbannya-ukrayiny/>. Accessed 11.11.2020. [“Protestants are the property of Ukraine.” Call.] All the quotations in the above paragraph are from this source.

¹⁵ This is Volodymyr Brychka, the senior presbyter of the Zhitomersk regional community, the church of Christians of the Evangelical faith of Ukraine [Pentecostal]. He is also rector of the church in the village of Karpilovka, Rokotonsky district.

¹⁶ See <https://poklik.org/projects/protestanty-nadbannya-ukrayiny/>.

¹⁷ “Наша історія.” Адвентистське агентство допомоги та розвитку. <http://www.adra.ua/nasha-istoriya/>. Accessed 11.09.2020. [“Our story.” Adventist Relief and Development Agency].

socio-theological position.”¹⁸ The hope of a successful outcome of such a mission for Protestant philanthropists is not the decisive motive for doing a good deed. Protestant volunteers showed love for people in some of the most dangerous places in the anti-terrorist operation zone. After all, human dignity is an invariable category that should not depend on excess or on how the recipient responds to the call to repentance. Churches have increasingly adopted the attitude that people, in addition to spiritual hunger, have many other needs worth addressing, without which biblical teaching cannot be taken seriously.¹⁹

Without a willingness to do charity in modern society, persuasive preaching is impossible. After all, in most cases, it is important for the listener not so much to hear what the preacher is saying, but to see who the preacher is and whether he or she can be trusted. After gaining freedom of religion, especially during the era of mass evangelization, society is more apt to respond to the church only if social activity aimed at something more than the number of baptisms. A true evangelical mission is only possible if the purpose of charitable activity goes beyond the desire to quantify one's church, rendering the conversion of people open to the invitation to God a side effect of service.

Protestants are guided in social activity by the principle of human dignity, which is relevant anytime and anywhere and which makes charitable activity meaningful even for incomplete solutions to social problems.²⁰ Furthermore, there is a guarantee of a total solution to all painful issues in the Kingdom of God, because, according to Adventists, believers must form their character for Eternity here on sinful earth.

As Ivan Chernushka (Doctor of Philosophy), argues, “in some traditional and Protestant churches, social and missionary activity is an outward manifestation of their church life, centered around ritual actions or personal salvation. In the case of Adventism,

¹⁸ М. Черенков, *Європейська реформація та український євангельський протестантизм. . Генетико-типологічна спорідненість і національно-ідентифікаційні виміри сучасності*. (Одеса: Інститут філософії імені Григорія Сковороди, 2008), 403. [M. Cherenkov. *European Reformation and Ukrainian Evangelical Protestantism. Genetic-typological kinship and national-identification dimensions of modernity*.]

¹⁹ Г. Мєренков, “Харитативна діяльність пізньо-протестантських церков в Україні: тенденції розвитку.” *Вчені записки Таврійського національного університету імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія Історичні науки*. 30, no. 3 (2019): 24. [G. Merenkov. “Charitable Activity of Late Protestant Churches in Ukraine: Development Trends.” *Scientific notes of Tavriya National University named after VI Vernadsky. Historical Sciences Series*].

²⁰ Г. Мєренков, “Харитативна діяльність пізньо-протестантських церков в Україні: тенденції розвитку.” *Вчені записки Таврійського національного університету імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія Історичні науки*. 30, no. 3 (2019): 22–28. [G. Merenkov. “Charitable Activity of Late Protestant Churches in Ukraine: Development Trends.” *Scientific notes of Tavriya National University named after VI Vernadsky. Historical Sciences Series*].

missionary and social activity belongs to the very core of church life.”²¹ It is during a serious crisis situation, when the state shows its inability to solve a wide range of social problems of the population that the charitable activity of the churches is especially noticeable, as it greatly helps the state to cope with the crisis. On the other hand, the humanitarian aid provided by churches to vulnerable people should not be seen as a forced reaction to the weakness of public social services. After all, according to chaplain pastors, “a volunteer may not be a Christian, but a Christian is always a volunteer.”²² This means that, even in a prosperous state, where people enjoy a high level of social protection, there is a place for Christian charity.

But, in Protestantism, charity is not so much a feeling as it is a major principle deeply rooted in worldview and theology. The intra-church dimension of charitable and humanitarian Protestant activity demonstrates the improvement of the character of Christians and their unity in the Church as in the family, which serves as an example for the world. At the same time, helping people who are not affiliated with the church should not merely meet their material needs, but their spiritual as well, in opening them to God. There is also a need for Christian leaders and activists to go beyond purely humanitarian work, to bring Christian values into the administrative and political spheres. Charity as a compensation for a socially inefficient state must grow in the desire to improve the ethics of the state.

In the conflict zone are also secular charitable organizations, such as “People in Need,” the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Caritas,” “Right to Protection,” “Acted,” the International Committee of the Red Cross, “Doctors Without Borders,” “Doctors of the World,” “Crimea-SOS,” “Vostok-SOS,” UN: “UNICEF,” “UNHCR,” “International Organization for Migration,” and “Polish Humanitarian Mission.”²³ The prospect of creating permanent charitable structures can be traced to the example of the Salvation Army (SA), a charity church founded in 1865 by the Methodist Church in England. This is probably the oldest of the current structures of this type, founded

²¹ І. Чернушка, “Сучасний стан та основні тенденції розвитку адвентизму в Україні.” (Дисертація кандидата філософських наук, 2016), 113. [Chernushka, I. "The current state and main trends in the development of Adventism in Ukraine." The dissertation of the candidate of philosophical sciences].

²² Г. Меренков, “Харитативна діяльність пізньо-протестантських церков в Україні: тенденції розвитку.” *Вчені записки Таврійського національного університету імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія Історичні науки*. 30, no. 3 (2019): 26. [Merenkov, G. “Charitable Activity of Late Protestant Churches in Ukraine: Development Trends.” *Scientific notes of Tavriya National University named after VI Vernadsky. Historical Sciences Series*].

²³ “Ukraine: 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).” Humanitarian Response, 2020. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/ukraine>.

by Protestants. It operates in 130 countries, while ADRA International has 118.²⁴ The total budget of the AU in 2018 amounted to 65 million pounds,²⁵ i.e., 84.33 million US dollars, and the budget of ADRA International 270 million US dollars. The SA covered 800,000 victims of natural disasters in 2018,²⁶ while ADRA helped 16.3 million people.

Commenting on the cooperation of Protestants with secular society, Gnat Merenkov²⁷ notes that Protestantism aims to implement joint projects, which in recent years are less involved in evangelization, the primary component of all Protestant actions. In a situation where the state cannot cope with the responses to threatening challenges, effective responses to them, even from the religious minority, become particularly noticeable, including for the media. Most importantly, in society there is a demand for such answers.

Armed Conflict and Protestant Volunteering in Eastern Ukraine

As Christopher Garbowski, a researcher of religion in Poland, points out, being part of a minority requires more effort than belonging to a majority.²⁸ The fact that Protestants in Ukraine, with a turbulent religious history in these lands, are generally and relatively prominent (Ukraine has the largest national Baptist union outside the United States) suggests that Protestant passion has not abated. We propose to analyze the contribution of the Protestant community and their assistance in the east, where the armed conflict continues and statistics of the number of killed soldiers appear in the media almost every day.

a) What is Ukrainian Protestantism?

Almost a third (29%) of church communities in Ukraine are Protestant.²⁹ During the period of independence (1991-2021), the number of Christian churches in Ukraine increased by 160%, from 12,850 to 33,389; Protestants by 258%, from 2721 to 9742; Orthodox by

²⁴ ADRA 2018 Annual Report.” ADRA, 2020. <https://adra.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Annual-Report-2018.pdf>.

²⁵ “Annual Report.” The Salvation Army International, 2020. <https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/annualreport>.

²⁶ “As the Most Vulnerable Faced More Challenges, Love’s Army Helped Them Fight Back.” 2020 Annual report. 2020. <https://salvationarmyannualreport.org/>.

²⁷ Г. Меренков, “Синергія церкви й світу в пізньому протестантизмі: сучасний український контекст.” Гілея: науковий вісник. Філософські науки., no. 143 (2019): 110–14. [Merenkov, G. “Synergy of Church and World in Late Protestantism: Contemporary Ukrainian Context.” Gilea: scientific bulletin. Philosophical sciences]

²⁸ C. Garbowski, *Religious Life in Poland: History, Diversity and Modern Issues.*, vol. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Incorporated Pub, 2014), 308.

²⁹ “В Україні зросла кількість незареєстрованих релігійних громад – статистика Мінкультури.” Інститут релігійної свободи., 2020. <https://www.irs.in.ua/en/statistics-of-religious-organizations-in-ukraine-2020>. [“The number of unregistered religious communities in Ukraine has increased - statistics from the Ministry of Culture.” Institute of Religious Freedom.]

168%, from 7034 to 18879; Catholics by 54%, from 3095 to 4768.³⁰ Of course, this number does not translate to a large number of followers, as the average Protestant community consists of dozens of members, while the Orthodox average several thousand. Each community requires, first, the organization of worship (which means that there should be a circle of people whose ministry is recognized by the community), and, second, a network of social ties—family, friends, interests, joint service, system of home churches, mutual aid (benefit) and common time (communication, friendship, leisure). The existence of such a community requires a constant investment of time, talents, ideas, money, and efforts. On part of the Orthodox majority (of whom many members may be nominal), especially in the secular east and south of Ukraine, such efforts are often perceived as “fanaticism.”

Ukraine is home to most of the Protestants in the post-Soviet space, despite the fact that Russia's population is twice as large. Bible translator Yuriy Popchenko, who is a Baptist, says that the number of Ukrainian Baptists has tripled³¹ during the post-Soviet era. Valery Antonyuk, the leader of the largest Baptist union in Ukraine, has confirmed this figure. In terms of church infrastructure, Ukrainian Protestantism is also a leader in the post-Soviet space. Most Protestant seminaries, publishing houses, media, and public (charitable) organizations are located in Ukraine.

b) Protestant Education

In the city of Rivne is the office of the Eurasian Accreditation Association (EAAA), an inter-Protestant association of higher education institutions, mostly in the post-Soviet space. As of April 2020, there were 53 of EAAA member institutions.³² Of these, Ukraine is home to 25 institutions (47%), the Russian Federation to 10 (19%), Moldova to 3, the United States to 3, Lithuania to 2, Central Asia to 2, and 1 each in the Netherlands, Austria, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tatarstan (although it is a republic within the Russian Federation), Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

³⁰ “Протестанти – надбання України.” Поклик. <https://poklik.org/projects/protestanty-nadbannya-ukrayiny/>. Accessed 11.11.2020. [“Protestants are the property of Ukraine.” Call.]

³¹ Source: an e-mail to the authors.

³² “Список школ, входящих в ЕААА 2020.” Евро-азиатская аккредитационная ассоциация., 2020. <http://e-aaa.org/index.php/eaaa-home/kakie-shkoly-v-eaaa>. [“List of schools included in EAAA 2020.” Euro-Asian Accreditation Association.]

c) Book Publishing

Since 2012, the authors have interviewed representatives of 35 Protestant publishers in Ukraine.³³ Since 1987, the total circulation of their literature has comprised 16,637,000 books. It is doubtful that all these publishing houses have survived since then. In general, book publishing in Ukraine is in a depressed state; in 2019, 57% of Ukrainians had not read a single book.³⁴ But the digital media content of Protestant churches in Ukraine has greater potential to reach a wide audience. Here is the report for 2020 of the Nadiya TV channel, affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.³⁵ During this time, special programs covered 2.6 million people. Advertising campaigns for special projects “Ukraine for the Family” and “Pray Together” reached 3.4 million and 2.8 million, respectively. The demand for the channel's content on social networks is noticeable. The 30 YouTube projects cover 100,000 main channel subscribers, 200,000 subscribers on all projects, 31.5 million views, or + 243%. 23 projects on Facebook cover 100,000 subscribers, 3.9 million views, i.e., + 148%. 18 projects on Instagram cover 100,000 subscribers, i.e., + 83%.

d) Social Work

There are 23 social and psychological centers for mothers and children in Ukraine. Today, 20,000 orphans are under the care of evangelical believers. Back in 2011, there were 30,000 orphans in need of adoption, and in 2017 there were only 6,000 left. The full life of 50,000 successfully rehabilitated is the result of serving 300 Christian social rehabilitation centers for alcohol and drug addicts. Evangelical churches, missions, foundations, and organizations provide ongoing assistance to the homeless, people with disabilities, and the poor.

e) Medical Work and Health Care

More than 150,000 people have received free treatment through 550 charitable medical clinics over the past 10 years. Evangelical Christians provide hospitals with medical equipment, and patients with medicines, prostheses, wheelchairs, and care.

³³ Максим Балаклицький, “Сучасний стан протестантського книговидавництва в Україні,” *Вісник Харківського Національного Університету Ім. В.Н. Каразіна*, no. 4 (2012): 103–7. [Balaklitsky, Maxim. "The current state of Protestant book publishing in Ukraine." *Bulletin of Kharkiv National University*. V.N. Karazina..]

³⁴ “Більшість українців не прочитали за рік жодної книги: дослідження.” 24 канал, 2020. https://24tv.ua/bilshe_polovini_ukrayintsiv_ne_prochitali_za_rik_zhodnoyi_knigi_doslidzhennya_n1257784. ["Most Ukrainians haven't read a single book in a year: research." Channel 24.]

³⁵ Source: Hope Channel UA press service.

f) Socio-Political Activity

Ukrainian Protestants cooperate in a number of parachurch structures: public organizations, educational institutions, and publishing houses. At the national level, such projects are the Ukrainian Bible Society, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, and the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine. They demonstrated their ability to self-organize at the national level by gathering about 400,000 people at the Thanksgiving in the center of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. The secular publication called this meeting “Protestant Maidan.”³⁶ Beginning in 2018, Protestants formed the All-Ukrainian Council, which sought to create an all-Protestant public position. In 2020, about 1,000 Protestants ran in local elections in Ukraine.³⁷ Ukrainian Protestantism is not “asleep.”

The main resource for the activities of Ukrainian Protestants is now the unprecedented religious freedom in these lands. The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the armed conflict in Donbas have contradictory consequences for the Protestant community in Ukraine. Commenting on this, Maksym Balaklytskyi noted: “Multifaceted geopolitical and social transformations in and around Ukraine after EuroMaidan urge scholars to come to the opposite conclusions—from the glorification of the religious aspect in these events to deep pessimism.”³⁸ Euromaidan protesters from religious circles describe the then change of power as a victory for democracy and civil society in Ukraine.³⁹

But a number of foreign analysts⁴⁰ and Euromaidan supporters acknowledge⁴¹ that the loss or reduction of Ukrainian state control over these territories (Crimea, Donetsk and

³⁶ “На виступ Ніка Вуйчича в центрі Києва зібрався ‘протестантський Майдан’.” Інститут релігійної свободи., 2017. <https://novynarnia.com/2017/09/18/na-vistup-nika-vuychicha-v-tsentri-kiyeva-zibravsvya-protestantskiy-maydan-foto/>. [“A ‘Protestant Maidan’ gathered in the center of Kyiv for Nick Vuychych’s speech.” Institute of Religious Freedom.]

³⁷ “Вперше в історії України близько 1 тис євангельських християн балотується на місцевих виборах: Форум ‘Україна напередодні виборів’.” Всеукраїнський собор., 2020. https://sobor.com.ua/news/forum-ukrayina-naperedodni-vivoriv_ [“For the first time in the history of Ukraine, about 1,000 evangelical Christians are running in local elections: the ‘Ukraine on the Eve of Elections’ Forum.” All-Ukrainian Cathedral]

³⁸ M. Balaklytskyi, “Religious Issues in the Ukrainian Media after Euromaidan.,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*. 35, no. 1 (2015): 1–10.

³⁹ Л. Филипович and О. Горкуша, *Майдан і церква. Хроніка подій та експертна оцінка*. (Київ: Самміт-Книга, 2014). [Filipovich, L., and O. Gorkusha. *Maidan and church. Chronicle of events and expert assessment*]

⁴⁰ Mark Elliott, “A Theme Issue on the Impact of the Ukrainian Crisis on the Church and Christian Ministry.,” *In: East-West Church Ministry Report*. 22, no. 3 (2014): 1.

⁴¹ “When God Becomes the Weapon. Persecution Based on Religious Beliefs in the Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine.” Solidarity Platform, 2020.

Lugansk regions) has reduced the level of freedom for religious minorities, including Protestants. This narrowed the possibilities for preaching and other public manifestations of religious life, in particular by subjecting these territories to Russian power with Yarova's anti-terrorism laws,⁴² depriving a number of communities of registration and church property, and causing a wave of violence against Protestants, including the killing of four Pentecostals Slavic soldiers of the “Russian Orthodox Army.” Due to these factors, there was migration, in particular of Protestants, from territories not under the control of the Ukrainian authorities; the presence and activity of these churches there has decreased significantly. The adopted legislation of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics follows the restrictive approach to the activities of religious minorities, which is contained in the legislation of the Russian Federation, and requires the urgent re-registration of all religious communities. Evasion of re-registration outlaws communities and blocks their activities.

Thus, it is doubtful that the current post-Euromaidan crisis will encourage Ukrainian Protestants to volunteer. On the contrary, it has created the greatest obstacles to this work, at least in the territories not under Kyiv's control. The events of Euromaidan itself lasted four months, were local in nature, and attracted a limited number of participants. Yet, the military conflict in Donbass at the time of writing has already outlasted the actions of World War II on Ukrainian soil.

Ukrainian Protestants are mostly guided by religious rather than civic ethics. For them, the heroism of Euromaidan is debatable. At the time of writing the euphoria of victory in Ukraine has long subsided, and society is experiencing the consequences of this crisis: loss of territory, economic downturn, declining confidence in state institutions. In the theological context of the late Protestant churches, Euromaidan protests are much easier to interpret as a sinful rebellion against state power as God's institution (Romans 13) than as a battle of “warriors of light” (a passionate stratum of the actual or potential “middle class” of Ukrainians) against the corrupt family of President Viktor Yanukovich, whose rule prevented this potential bourgeoisie from creating and defending its wealth.

In the context of the above, a logical question can be asked. Does it make sense for philanthropists to take a stand on the victims of the conflict, outlining who is to blame and bringing the perpetrators to justice, instead of continuing to invest in rebuilding destroyed

https://irs.in.ua/storage/files/publications/2015.04_Report_Religious_persecution_in_occupied_Donbas_eng.pdf.

⁴² Eckel Mike, “Russia’s ‘Yarovaya Law’ Imposes Harsh New Restrictions on Religious Groups.” Radio Liberty, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-yarovaya-law-religious-freedom-restrictions/27852531.html>.

infrastructure and repairing broken lives? The approximate answer may be as follows. Ukrainian late Protestantism in its social strategy resembles a liquid: it occupies all the volume available to it. They try to keep the biblical commandments based on the resources available to them at the moment, including legal ones that are historically the most deficient in the Ukrainian lands. Sociologically, the community consists of middle peasants, bearers of the typical features of Ukrainian citizens, who, experiencing a life crisis, decided to seek a cure for them in alternative Christianity.

A firm and unequivocal position on the complex geopolitical confrontation that resulted in the post-Euromaidan crisis is not an achievable goal for either Ukrainian society or Protestants as part of it. Like any conflict, Euromaidan polarizes and radicalizes society. According to the request of Ukrainian authorities, most Ukrainian Protestants officially and organizationally distanced themselves from their Russian fellow believers. But at the local level, churches have a wide range of positions and views on this painful and complex topic. The believers are united by the conviction that they are called to this world not to judge its sins, but to carry hope and serve the real needs of the people. Such a reaction is generally recognized in the churches and is most acceptable to Ukrainian society.

Ukrainian Protestants see their mission as “saving” people rather than state and political entities. From the end of the 19th century, they lived under a tsar with a state church, then Bolshevism with state atheism, and now live in a secular nation-state. Realizing the variability and contradictions of political ideologies and their disintegration potential, they themselves do not want intra-church divisions on this basis and do not want to push away those whom they seek to serve.

From the point of view of the beliefs of these churches, the culprits of Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, and violence in Donbas are the works of Satan and his evil angels rather than the Russian Federation, NATO, the European Union, Ukrainian nationalists, oligarchs, ethnic Russians, or other earthly forces. In such a discourse, “specific culprits” have long been “named” by Protestants. Sinners will be punished by Jesus, and not by people as a result of their arbitrary decisions and with the help of earthly tools.

Millions of Ukrainians consistently support this or that version of the interpretation of the causes of this conflict, but this did not reduce the slaughter of manpower in 2020. So, Ukrainian Protestants are a priori focused not on desire, but on available means. Of course, this does not reduce some of the contradictions of the social position they occupy.

What Are the Real Results of the Effectiveness of the Efforts of the Protestant Minority in Eastern Ukraine?

The usual measures of Protestant effort are the amount of assistance provided: the weight of food, fuel, drinking water, kits of medicines, evacuees, beneficiaries of medical examinations, financial assistance, restored housing, and general infrastructural provisions. Some of these figures are given above.

The service of volunteers in eastern Ukraine is associated with a risk to health and even life. In 2017, employees of the ADRA Ukraine Charitable Foundation negotiated the restoration of a damaged house of one of the families in the village of Troitsky, Luhansk region, on the contact line. The next day, officers learned that a shell had hit the house that night. The father and eldest son of the family had died, and the mother and youngest son had been taken to the intensive care unit in critical condition. Naturally, mild forms of post-traumatic stress disorder from work during the war and devastation will certainly be observed in the volunteers themselves.

What are the motives that compel Protestant volunteers in Ukraine, who are not always specialists in many types of volunteer work, to help the affected population? It would be true to say that almost all Protestant volunteers are to some extent idealists. They believe in their vocation to change the world for the better. In this dedication, they are similar to secular volunteers.

However, the key motives of Protestant volunteers are religious. Their altruism is usually derived from Christian principles and the belief in the need for the human being to overcome the tendency to live for himself/herself. They believe that selfishness is a manifestation of the sinful human nature; volunteering therefore becomes not only a form of helping others, but also a kind of pious exercise.

This approach, on the one hand, makes church volunteering truly amateurish, or, at least, the charge of a less specialized population, as compared to secular volunteering. In Protestant circles, a large majority of church activists have at least had an experience of participating in charitable projects, while, in the general population, the conflict in Donbas

has increased these figures slightly (by 18% in 2018),⁴³ but it remained lower than in the leading countries such as world ratings (46-38%).⁴⁴

On the other hand, the perception of volunteering not as an “action,” “season,” or “period in life” but as a necessary norm blurs the line between volunteer work and “rest from it” in the minds and practices of Protestants. This makes religiously motivated volunteering not only more widespread but also ongoing. Only a small percentage of Ukrainian Protestants went to Donbas, but most church activists at least repeatedly visited elderly believers, local hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, and boarding schools. The huge involvement of Protestants in the work of their religious communities and the practice of mutual assistance of believers allows us to consider volunteering as a leading form of social manifestations of the religious life of Ukrainian Protestants.

Conclusion

Summing up, we note that the participation of Ukrainian Protestant volunteers in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine is noticeable; their efforts were acknowledged by the media of Ukraine. These efforts, however, are not decisive, as secular humanitarian organizations have invested much more in the destroyed area according to the statistics of material assistance provided. At the same time, the comparatively insignificant material assistance of Protestants in comparison with non-religious organizations is accompanied by their spiritual support of the population. In other words, by not emphasizing material things, the Protestant churches try to show that the material passes, and that constant hope in God will best help people to survive the worst circumstances that accompany human life in the conditions of hostilities. Volunteering is, while somewhat amateurish and idealistic based on the mood of a volunteer, nevertheless accompanied by the belief that even a small effort of one person can change the world for the better. Also, religious volunteering, including Protestant, in addition to helping in this life, tries to instill the dream of heavenly realities, which will inevitably await a person who lives according to the norms of biblical morality on earth.

⁴³ “Кількість волонтерів в Україні за минулий рік збільшилась – опитування.” Радіо Свобода, February 19, 2019. radiosvoboda.org/a/news-volontery-opytuvannia/29778750.html. Accessed 11.11.2020. [“The number of volunteers in Ukraine has increased over the past year - survey.” Radio Liberty].

⁴⁴ “Top 10 Countries for Volunteering Time for Charity between 2009 and 2018, by Share of Population.” Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/283354/top-10-countries-volunteering-time-for-charities>. Accessed 11.04.2020.

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Source: an e-mail to the authors.

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