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Valentyna Kuryliak

*Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine*

Volodymyr Dudarets

*Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Kyiv, Ukraine*

Valeriy Bulatov

*Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Kyiv, Ukraine*

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# DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGES IN THE ERGO DESIGN OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN UKRAINE (1991-2021)

By Valentyna Kuryliak, Volodymyr Dudarets and Valeriy Bulatov

**Valentyna Kuryliak**, PhD, is the Vice-Rector for Research of the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences. She is also a doctoral student of the Department of Modern History of Ukraine of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine. Scientific interests: History of Protestantism in Ukraine, Seventh-day Adventist Church, History of religion in Ukraine. E-Mail: [v.kuryliak@ugi.edu.ua](mailto:v.kuryliak@ugi.edu.ua) ORCID: 0000-0001-5245-9700

**Volodymyr Dudarets**, PhD, is the Head of the Department of Design of the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences, and a Doctoral student of the Design Department of the Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Kyiv, Ukraine. Scientific interests: Landscape design, left-bank Ukraine, Architecture. E-Mail: v. [dudarets@ugi.edu.ua](mailto:dudarets@ugi.edu.ua) ORCID: 0000-0002-9619-9637

**Valeriy Bulatov**, is a postgraduate student of the Design Department of the Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design, Kyiv, Ukraine. He is the Senior Lecturer of the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences. Scientific interests: Design, Church history, Design for inclusive people. E-mail: [bulatov@ugi.edu.ua](mailto:bulatov@ugi.edu.ua) ORCID: 0000-0003-0832-2429

## Abstract

The article presents the evolution of ergonomics and design of Protestant churches in Ukraine in the period from 1991-2021. Since Ukraine left the Soviet Union, the Soviet worldview of Ukrainian Protestants has gradually changed, which, in turn, influenced the formation of the subject-spatial environment and, in general, the ergo design of Protestant churches. The concept presented in the article is that ergo design is similar to a living organism, which changes under the influence of external factors, such as the emotional feeling of believers, political and economic changes, etc. This influence was especially evident during the transitional period on the territory of Ukraine, beginning on August 24, 1991, when the *Verkhovna Rada* adopted the “Act of the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine,” which led to the achievement of religious freedom by the churches. The newfound freedom for Protestants in Ukraine opened the way for the implementation of design solutions in their churches, despite a significant lack of funds. The Protestant worldview, freed from the influence of Soviet ideology, was reflected in the pictorial features of the spatial and artistic environment of the sacred structures. The contrast of changes in the ergo design and architecture of Ukrainian Protestant churches is summarized in this study.

**Keywords:** evolution of ergo design, Protestant churches, external factors, interior, Ukraine.

## Introduction

Fundamental changes in Ukraine began in 1991, which led to the emergence of turbulent processes in various spheres of the country's life, including the religious sphere. One

of the most important aspects of freedom in Ukraine was religious freedom, under the influence of which, since 1991, the ergodesign<sup>1</sup> of Protestant churches began to change rapidly, generating new views, new forms in the formation of the subject-spatial environment of the interiors of sacred premises. These changes, first of all, took place in the wake of the realization that religion received real freedom after seventy years of militant atheism over Ukrainian churches. Processes such as the persecution of believers, the ban on reading the Bible, the confiscations of Bibles, the ban on free gathering in prayer houses, and having at least some religious rights were being left behind. This in turn led to significant evolutionary changes in the ergo design of Protestant churches. V.V. Kurilyak wrote that Protestant churches in Ukraine have special features not only because of the desire to express their teachings through architectural elements, but above all, that it is an expression of religious freedom and an attempt to express their religious affiliation to the general Christian community.<sup>2</sup> As the author V.R. Radomsk stated, "The destruction of churches and their equipment, as well as the consignment to the oblivion of the names of the architects who left outstanding works of art of sacred Christian buildings, [this] has caused irreparable damage to the historical memory of the Ukrainian people, which in turn left an imprint on the state of modern ergo design in design activities in Ukraine."<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that in the journal *Protestant Religious Architecture* this author drew attention to the diversity of Protestant architecture, that is, the lack of a single style. To the contrary, one can notice only some of the characteristic features inherent in different buildings at different times.<sup>4</sup> Another scientist, Dóra Danielisz, points to excellent design directions in the formation of the artistic and spatial environment of Protestant sacred buildings, which strictly adhered to the traditions that developed at the dawn of Protestantism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ergodesign is a term formed from two concepts: ergonomics and design. Ergonomics, as part of ergonomic design, studies objects that are in direct contact with people in the course of their life and considers ways of interacting with them in order to maximize their ease of use by a person. Design, on the other hand, helps to give "shape" to the ideas of ergonomics – to create an environment in which it is pleasant and comfortable to work.

<sup>2</sup> Valentyna Kuryliak, Petro Kotliarov, and Mykhailo Fedorenko, "Architectural Features of Protestant Churches from the 16th to the 21st Centuries in Ukraine," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40, no. 9 (November 2020): 55–75, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss9/5/>.

<sup>3</sup> Віолетта Радіонівна Радомська, "Принципи організації інтер'єру в українській сакральній архітектурі першої чверті XX століття (на прикладі творчості Модеста Сосенка)" (Ph.D Thesis, 2021), <https://lpnu.ua/spetsrady/k-3505225/radomska-violetta-radionivna>. [Violetta Radionivna Radomska, "Principles of Interior Organization in Ukrainian Sacred Architecture of the First Quarter of the 20th Century (on the Example of Modest Sosenko's Works)"]

<sup>4</sup> "Protestant Religious Architecture. France," Musée Protestant, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://museeprotestant.org/en/notice/larchitecture-religieuse-protestante/>.

<sup>5</sup> Dóra Danielisz, "Spatial Formation in 16-19th Century Calvinist Church Architecture: The Calvinist Churches of Sepsiszkék," *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture* 48, no. 1 (April 12, 2017): 35–44, <https://doi.org/10.3311/PPAr.10608>.

Exploring the period of formation of Protestant churches in Ukraine, starting from 1991, the author I. Vasilyeva noted a dynamic movement in the development of Protestant confessions.<sup>6</sup>

The change in the ergo design trends of Protestant churches in Ukraine since 1991 is associated with several expressive features of the long-term struggle against the “atheistic monster.” This meant, first of all, the need to define the firm foundations of the faith of Christians which hardened in the struggle during 70 years of Bolshevik control. Questions are raised, such as what were the Protestant church buildings of the time of the persecution of believers? What was the design of the sacred premises? How did the change in worldview affect the Protestants on the ergo design of church premises? This will be presented in the main part of this study.

### **Presentation of the Main Research Materials**

Figure 1 shows a meetinghouse without a building. In the middle of a forest, believers secretly gathered to worship God, because visiting buildings without registration was punishable by imprisonment, and the houses that the believers bought for ministry were confiscated by the authorities using any pretext. All these actions were taken by the authorities in order not to permit the receipt of registration for a prayer house.



**Fig. 1. Meeting House in the Woods - Pentecostal Christian Service**  
**(date taken: May 1980)**

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<sup>6</sup> Irina Vasilyeva and Vita Tytarenko, “Dynamics and Growth Prospects of the Protestant Denominations in Ukraine,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40, no. 3 (April 2020): 73–87, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss3/7/>.

Meetings were usually in nature under a constant threat to life, as the persecution by the atheistic state authorities did not stop. Relentless surveillance of believers, especially during worship services, often led to people being surrounded by police during the service, who arrested the preacher and made lists of all those present. Therefore, the believers secretly, using various means, tried to remain unnoticed and gathered in small groups to worship God in deserted places, in the thick of the forest or on mountains (Fig. 2.), etc.



**Fig. 2. Pentecostal worship service 1960**

To be able to meet, they often bought a house at their own expense on behalf of one of the community members, and then made a lease agreement. However, even then the houses were taken away because the laws were formulated to prevent believers from having prayer meetings in homes, and without them, the state did not register communities of believers. It was a vicious cycle. In fig. 3, an example of such a building is shown. This photo shows the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Seventh-day Adventist community in the village of Novoignatovka, Donetsk region.



**Fig. 3. House of prayer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the village of Novoignatovka, Donetsk region 2013.**



What can you say about the design of this sacred building of the Soviet era, and even more so its ergo design? The design is very compressed, and the exterior of the building does not indicate its purpose. The same type of house, which was massively built for peasants who lived on collective farms. But this was also a great advantage for the believers in that area since they had at least some place to worship God. If the community had a registered building, this automatically allowed them to gather, albeit under the supervision of the authorities. In every city where the house of worship was registered, at every service, there were regulatory authorities from the state, which enumerated everyone who attended the service, who preached, what they preached about, how the interior of the meeting house was decorated, which symbols were applied to the walls, etc. In fig. 4. shows another Protestant church in the 1950s. Unfortunately, almost all the prayer buildings of that time that were open for ministry looked about the same. The exterior of the house could not be attractive, its appearance could not indicate a cult affiliation, because this was prohibited by the atheistic authorities and the violation was punished very severely.



**Fig. 4. Meeting House of the Seventh-day Adventist Church 1950.**

A small number of prayer houses have survived from the time of the Nazi occupation, starting in 1941. During this period, the occupation authorities began throughout the occupied territories of the USSR, including in Ukraine, to permit believers to open churches for service. It was enough for the community to indicate a house suitable for ministry, and they received it. This was done specifically for the purpose to destroy the atheist-Bolshevik mentality of the population. Interestingly, after the liberation of the occupied territories, many of these newly opened churches were not closed because Stalin's policies changed for a while. Thus, on December 1, 1944, the resolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Council of People's Commissars was, "On the procedure for opening churches and houses of worship in

the territory liberated from German occupation.”<sup>7</sup> For some time this reduced the pressure by the totalitarian atheistic regime upon the believers, and then the persecution began again. Art has always reflected historical events, especially the design of that time. What did the design of sacred buildings of that time look like in Ukraine, what and was the interiors of Protestant churches? First of all, it is an expression of the unyielding faith of people, which was defined in different ways in different churches. For example, in the sacred buildings of Seventh-day Adventist Christians, on the central wall above the pulpit, there was always a symbol of the Law of God (Fig. 5), where the 10 commandments were written.



**Fig. 5. Protestant prayer house, Kherson 1978.**

To the left and right of the Decalogue were Bible verses. This element of ministry was treated with special attention (Fig. 6). They specifically looked for a master who would agree to make this work of art, although it was very dangerous because for such things the artist could go to jail.



**Fig. 6. Protestant Church, 1978.**

<sup>7</sup> С.В. Петров, “Молитовні будинки в контексті релігійної політики СРСР щодо євангельських церков у 1940 – 1960-і роки,” *Наука. Релігія. Суспільство*, no. 1 (2013): 36–46. [S.V. Petrov, “Prayer Houses in the Context of the Religious Policy of the USSR towards Evangelical Churches in the 1940s and 1960s,” *Nauka. Religion. Society*]

In the Baptist church, one of the expressive elements was the image of the Lord's cup on top of the wall behind the pulpit. In other Protestant churches, it could be a dove, olive branch, or vine. A very important element of the Protestant churches in Ukraine was the pulpit from which the Word of God was preached. The preacher always stood on the pulpit in the middle of the stage in front of the audience. It was a sturdy, wide enough structure. The pulpit was treated with special respect because the Word of God was preached from it.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, there are almost no photos of the prayer hall with the pulpit at that time, because it was life-threatening to store it.



**Fig. 7. Meeting House of the Seventh-day Adventist Protestant Church 1930<sup>9</sup>**

In another photo (Fig. 8) you can see the interior of a Protestant prayer building in Kherson 1977 during a wedding.

<sup>8</sup> И.А. Гуцул, “Христианская символика в сакральной архитектуре протестантов Украины визуальное выражение духовности верующих,” *Богословские размышления*, no. 17 (2016): 327–45. [I.A. Hutsul, “Christian symbolism in the sacred architecture of Ukrainian Protestants, a visual expression of the spirituality of believers,” Theological reflections]

<sup>9</sup> “Історія Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня,” Сайт Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, accessed November 10, 2021, <https://adventist.ua/history/>. [“History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Seventh-day Adventist Church website]





**Fig. 8. House of prayer at home, Kherson city 1977.**

On the left we see a massive pulpit, wooden panels along the contour of the hall; the walls are usually painted white. This color was especially important for believers at that time, because the concept of holiness and religious purity was associated with the white color at that time. The doors were also paneled, but this is rather an exception from the general circumstances of the time. Tablets with Bible verses on the walls may be seen. In many Protestant churches, these attributes were necessarily used to fill the spatial environment and reveal the content of the teachings of believers. The hall was most often filled with benches, stools, or chairs for joint ministry. The Protestant churches of Ukraine did not use attributes such as a cross, paintings, icons, or sculptures--this was considered a violation of the second commandment of the Law of God.

The minimalism of ergo design has remained in Protestant churches to this day in Ukraine. In the photo, one can see the interior of the prayer house of Evangelical Christians Baptists, which included Pentecostal and Mennonite Christians. Pay attention to the biblical inscriptions on the walls of the room, and the white color of the walls, which at that time had a special meaning for believers, Figures 9 and 10.



**Fig. 9. Prayer house of Evangelical Christians Baptists in Irpin 1960.**



**Fig. 10. Participants of the ACECB meeting in Moscow, 1945.<sup>10</sup>**

Another obligatory attribute of Protestant churches of that time was a stage with two or three steps for the choir. The external image of the cross on churches and inside churches began to appear only after 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. The image of the cross began to be used only as a general symbol of Christianity. An obligatory element of the interior of prayer buildings was also a harmonium or a piano, which were used in the music ministry.

After the proclamation of Ukraine's independence in 1991, the door of real freedom was opened for believers. Communities began to register churches, and those buildings that were once taken away by the authorities began to be returned to churches. After 1991, a personal period of renovation of churches and the construction of new ones began. The new look of freedom formed a new design of the sacred buildings of Protestant churches, which already took into account the principles of ergonomics. In the photo, one can see what forms the new church buildings have acquired, which began to be dominated by the latest ergo design, see drawings from 11 to 14.

<sup>10</sup> Участники совещания ВСЕХБ в Москве, 1945 год, accessed November 14, 2021, <http://baptistru.info/index.php?title=%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:VSEKHB-1945.jpg>. [Participants of the AECB meeting in Moscow, 1945]



**Figure 11. Podolsk spiritual center of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian Church, the city of Kyiv.<sup>11</sup>**



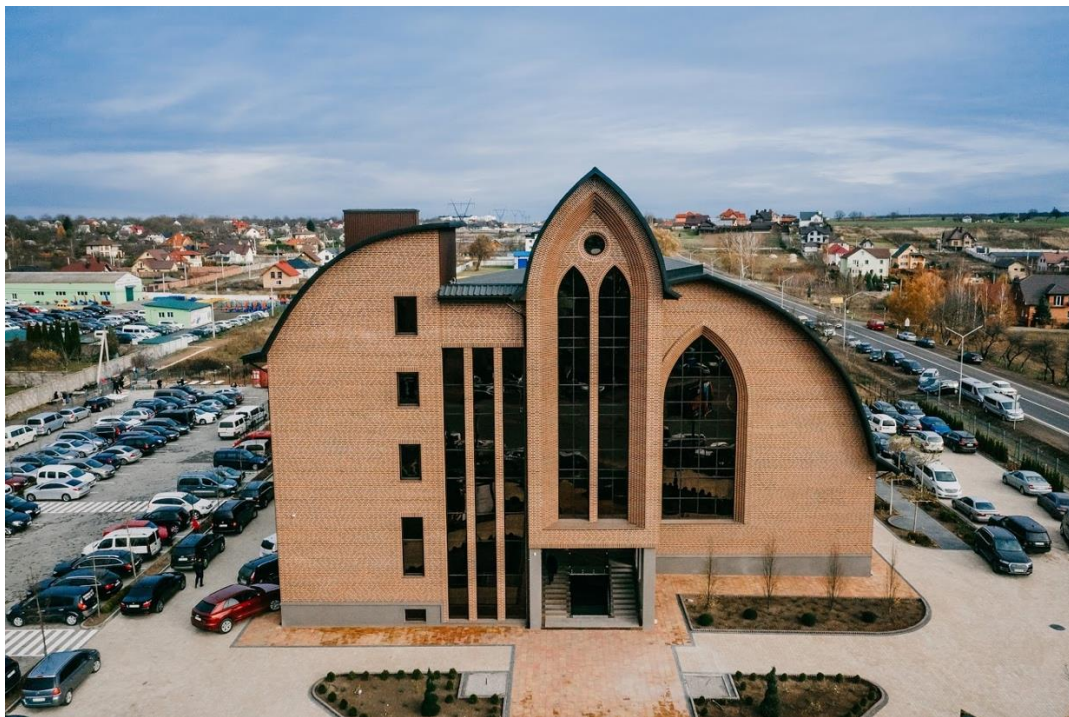
**Fig. 12. Left-bank spiritual center of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kyiv.**

<sup>11</sup> “Церква Адвентистів сьомого дня в Києві - громада 3,” Сайт Церкви адвентистів сьомого дня, accessed November 10, 2021, <https://adventist.ua/churches/kyiv/3/>. [“Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kyiv - Community 3,” Seventh-day Adventist Church website]





**Fig. 13. House of the Gospel - Baptist Temple, Lutsk.<sup>12</sup>**



**Fig. 14. Protestant Church of Christians of the Evangelical Church «Salvation».<sup>13</sup>**

<sup>12</sup> “Луцк. Дом евангелия – баптистский храм,” Фото Украины, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.photoukraine.com/russian/photos/region/3/4609>. [“Lutsk. House of the Gospel - Baptist Church, ”Photo of Ukraine]

<sup>13</sup> “Около Луцка открыли дом молитвы церкви ‘Спасение’. Фоторепортаж,” Світогляд, 2020, <https://svitogliad.com/ru/news/okolo-luczka-otkryly-dom-molytvy-czerkvy-spasenye-fotoreportazh/>. [“A house of prayer of the ‘Salvation’ church was opened near Lutsk. Photo report, ”Svitoglyad]



Under the influence of the Protestant churches of Europe and America, new sacred buildings appeared in Ukraine. Various architectural styles have crossed over to diversify architectural masterpieces. The desire to express and convey Protestant ideas was embodied in the organization of the latest approaches to ergo design, which also used symbols used during the long time of persecution.<sup>14</sup> Along with this, various forms of modern ergo design began to be embodied, which can be seen in the interiors of Protestant churches. Instead of benches and uncomfortable chairs, comfortable ergonomic artistic and aesthetic chairs appeared in churches. Meeting house lighting changed for the better. Lamps, chandeliers, arches, and other lighting fixtures began to be used in harmony with the general concept of the church building premises, emphasizing the identity of its form and content. Many different new artistic expressive elements have appeared in architectural design, in the form of stucco moldings on walls and ceilings, wood carvings, and various forms of decoration of interior items. Many new things have appeared, but some elements have remained unchanged. For example, in some churches of Christian Baptists in the foreground of the temple in the hall, there is an image of the "Chalice of the Lord," as shown in fig. 15.



**Fig. 15. Interior of a Protestant Christian Baptist Church.<sup>15</sup>**

Also, the lectern remained in the center of the stage, as it was during the years of persecution, only it became smaller and sometimes transparent or portable. A cross appeared

<sup>14</sup> Абрахам Кайпер, "Христианское мировоззрение. Лекция 5. Кальвинизм и искусство," Реформатский взгляд, accessed October 20, 2021, <https://www.reformed.org.ua/2/140/7/Kuyper>. [Abraham Kuyper, "The Christian Worldview. Lecture 5. Calvinism and Art, "The Reformed View]

<sup>15</sup> "Церковь ЕХБ г. Зеленограда," "МОЯ ВЕРА". Религиозный путеводитель по Москве, accessed November 12, 2021, <https://xn--80adj0ako6h.xn--p1ai/place/tserkov-ehb-g-zelenograda/>. ["Church of the ECB in Zelenograd," "MY FAITH". Religious guide to Moscow]

on the bowl - this is already a new element for all Protestant churches in Ukraine after 1991, which was adopted not without discussion during this period. Looking, for example, at the sacred buildings of the Seventh-day Adventist Protestant Church, one can also see dramatic changes in the formation and decoration of modern sacred buildings, Fig. 16.



**Fig. 16. Interior of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Prayer**

However, some of the elements in this temple remained unchanged. The Ten Commandments on the central wall above the pulpit is prominent. Works with gilding to decorate the law, and reflect light with a good arrangement of windows and chandeliers, create conditions for optimal visualization of the inscription on the central wall. Wood furnishings form the composition of the scene, in which the pulpit occupies a central place. The use of living plants in the interior of Protestant buildings is used almost everywhere, giving a special atmosphere of peace, harmony, and benevolence.

The content of a Protestant sacred structure is an expression of an unconditional dialogue between the human being and God without intermediaries.<sup>16</sup> Being face to face with God, being in a prayer sanctuary, the design of this environment is very important emotionally. Therefore, the organization of the interior during this period acquires special qualities. Using the ergonomic principles of the color of the walls, which change from cold to warm, they use

<sup>16</sup> И.А. Гуцул, “Христианская символика в сакральной архитектуре протестантов Украины визуальное выражение духовности верующих,” *Богословские размышления*, no. 17 (2016): 327–45. [I.A. Hutsul, “Christian symbolism in the sacred architecture of Ukrainian Protestants, a visual expression of the spirituality of believers,” *Theological reflections*]

the latest technologies for lighting. The lighting becomes softer, the overall ensemble of the interior is combined into one idea, directing the gaze of the soul to the eternal and holy.

Since 1991, another very important element of the interior has appeared in many Protestant sacred buildings--baptisteries for the baptism of people. Until 1991 in Ukraine, baptism in Protestant churches took place secretly, more often at night in unremarkable bodies of water, because the atheistic government punished very severely for this. The acquisition of freedom of religion made it possible to place baptisteries in the middle of some Protestant sacred buildings, where people could now be baptized openly, without fear, thus expressing their faith in God. Baptisteries of prayer houses have become an integral part of the new interior of Protestant churches in Ukraine, fig. 17. In Ukraine, all late Protestant churches baptize adults. Therefore, the pool inside the church under the stage is an important part of the construction of every church after 1991; Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, Charismatics, etc.



**Fig. 17. Baptism in a Protestant church<sup>17</sup>**

The best ergo design principles in various churches have been applied to ensure that this element of the ministry becomes, firstly, safe and convenient to use, and secondly, equipped with the necessary means for safe entry and exit from the water, as well as the use of purification and heating of water, etc. Baptisteries of Protestant churches have become a special artistic means of expression, combining content and form and complementing the overall sacred composition, Fig. 18-19.

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<sup>17</sup> “Крещение в Церкви Адвентистов Седьмого Дня,” Христианский сайт “Иисус любит тебя!,” 2011, <https://jesuslove.ru/6014-kreshhenie-v-cerkvi-adventistov-sedmogo-dnya.html>. [“Baptism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Christian Site “Jesus Loves You !,”]





**Fig. 18. Interior of a Protestant church with a baptistry.**



**Fig. 19. Interior of the hall of a modern Protestant church with a baptistry.**

A general overview of the present Protestant churches in Ukraine determines the special flavor of various expressions of modern ergo design, which, thanks to the use of artistic and expressive elements, has formed the unique image of modern Protestant churches. In other words, the change away from Soviet ideology, which at one time rigidly influenced and controlled the actions of believers, after the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed the Protestants of Ukraine to embody elements in the ergo design of their church premises that testified that the building belongs to sacred works of art. However, as we can see, individual



elements, such as the chalice of the Lord, large pulpit, the Ten Commandments in the center of the wall, etc., remained as a reminder of the difficult times that the churches survived in the atheistic period.

## **Conclusions**

Investigating the evolutionary processes of the ergo design of the Protestant churches in Ukraine from 1991 to 2021, rapid changes that led to the emergence of modern sacred buildings are observable, which became an elective synthesis of the confession of the Protestant world community. However, at the same time, it is necessary to note the uniqueness of the Ukrainian Protestant churches, which preserved their foundations and principles that were formed during the years of persecution for the faith. These foundations were best reflected in the formation of the subject-spatial environment of the interiors of sacred structures due to the preservation of the elements of Soviet decoration and the addition of modern elements of ergo design. Consequently, despite the huge changes in the design of Protestant churches, the latest principles of ergo design are applied almost everywhere, which in turn help to make sacred buildings a special place for a believer to communicate with God.

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