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# RESPONSES OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN UKRAINE AND OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

The article examines the reaction of Christian Churches to the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. Attention is paid to the Churches in Ukraine and countries of similar political and cultural heritage (Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, etc.). The guidelines and practical activities of the Churches are analyzed, reflecting their response to various problems related to the pandemic. The corresponding differences occur not so much between different countries and peoples, but rather between different denominations. In general, more conservative, and sometimes fundamentalist, reactions are shown by the Orthodox Church, especially in parts of the Russian Orthodox Church in the countries under study (for example, Moldova), or those Orthodox Churches that are traditionally under its great influence (for example, in Serbia). But in Ukraine, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which recently received a *Tomos* from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is more flexible and sensitive to the Covid-19 problem and the protective actions of the government, cooperating with it in anti-pandemic measures. It is determined that the position of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine is similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and many Protestant Churches. What the reactions of most Christian Churches have found to be more or less common is the transfer of worship practices online and the strengthening of social work to help a variety of people suffering from coronavirus or fighting a pandemic: from spiritual practices, in communities and individual circumstances, to hospital care—the work of hospital chaplains, lay volunteers, the purchase of medicines and medical equipment, etc. Not all Churches and not all their members appeared ready to optimally combine their religious activities and life in civil society in new conditions, and that Churches—both their leadership and ordinary members—need to innovatively develop their religious activities in accordance with the challenges of the time.

**Keywords:** Christian Churches, Eastern and Central European countries, Covid-19 pandemic, challenge, response.

## Introduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that citizens of each country and all segments of society show maximum understanding of how to resist this disaster and exercise responsibility for both their actions and inaction. Believers of various churches make up a significant part of the world's population, whose secularization does not mean complete alienation from either faith or religious practices—especially in Ukraine and other Central and Eastern European countries. Thus, much depends on these citizens in how these countries will survive the coronavirus invasion. Therefore, it is very important for religious scholars to study the reaction of the churches, especially Christian churches that are present in the region, and their response to all events directly and indirectly related to the pandemic, quarantine, and compliance with its norms. Scientists, in particular V. Bondarenko,<sup>1</sup> V. Tytarenko, I. Bogachevska,<sup>2</sup> A. Máté-Tóth,<sup>3</sup> G. Gjorgjevski, and I. Blazhevski<sup>4</sup> have already carried out such research, but many aspects of this topic still require special attention.

In this article, we aim to identify the specifics of responses to the Covid-19 challenge of different Christian churches operating in Ukraine and countries of similar cultural and political heritage (Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Montenegro, etc.). We focused on finding out the attitude of these Churches toward the development of pandemics, quarantine restrictions, and various problems which arise in society.

## Main Part

The Christian churches came to the present day with certain developed guidelines on health problems, which are being actively rethought in the age of today's advances in medicine and ideological pluralism. Some Christian churches, having their own detailed social doctrines, have written instructions for various cases more or less thoroughly; and others speak on occasion, assessing the current situation. Today, virtually all churches must respond to Covid-

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<sup>1</sup> Віктор Бондаренко, „Коронавірус, церква, держава і суспільство: деякі акценти та висновки.” *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. [https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/blog/~viktor\\_bondarenko/80029/](https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/blog/~viktor_bondarenko/80029/) [Victor Bondarenko, „Coronavirus, church, state and society: some accents and conclusions.” *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [www.risu.org.ua/ua/index/blog/~viktor\\_bondarenko/80029/](http://www.risu.org.ua/ua/index/blog/~viktor_bondarenko/80029/). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>2</sup> Vita Tytarenko, and Iryna Bogachevska, „Religious “Covid Fundamentalism” in Eastern and Central Europe: Challenges and Lessons,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 4. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/4>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>3</sup> András Máté-Tóth, „Pray and Vaccinate: Worship and Pastoral Care in Times of Pandemic in Hungary.” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 12. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/12>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>4</sup> Gjoko Gjorgjevski, and Ivan Blazhevski, „The Religious Aspect of the Macedonian Society in the Condition of the Crisis Caused by Covid 19.” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 11. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/11>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

19, the latest pandemic. In the perception and response to this challenge, they show their potential, different approaches, apply their traditional experience, and resort to innovation. Different churches assessed the threat differently, and there were different opinions among the clergy of different churches (not to mention the laity). Actions also differed.

Let's review how inhabitants of European countries got acquainted with Covid-19. In the winter of 2020, the media began to communicate the shocking information from China and the first infected cruise liner. After that, against the background of the beginning of the epidemic around the world, travelers from the epicenter of the disease began to return to their countries. In Ukraine, this was first experienced in the New Sanzhar village, when its residents protested the placement of a quarantine center near their homes, while passengers who were returning broke through the sanitary barricades set up by police at airports. It is likely that among these citizens were also some believers. Priests of the Novy Sanzhar area, where the Ukrainian quarantine center was eventually set up, should be praised: at first, they expressed concern, but when people were brought there, they took part in collecting and delivering humanitarian aid for them. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) called on their believers to show mercy to those who returned from epidemic centers, emphasizing that the unworthy attitude to others caused more damage in society than the infection itself.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the Metropolitan of the PCU Dmytro (Rudyuk) noted that communion in churches should remain unchanged (it was about attempts of hygienically justified variations or restrictions).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>“У ПЦУ закликали українців проявити милосердя до евакуйованих з Уханю.” *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. [“In the OCU called on Ukrainians to show mercy to those evacuated from Wuhan.” *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all\\_news/orthodox/ocu/78969/](https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/orthodox/ocu/78969/). Accessed 03.12.2021; “Глава УГКЦ про ситуацію довкола евакуації українців з Китаю: “Не таким небезпечним є коронавірус, як вірус зневаги ближнього.” [“The head of the UGCC on the situation surrounding the evacuation of Ukrainians from China: “The coronavirus is not as dangerous as the virus of contempt for others.” Information resource of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church]. *Інформаційний ресурс Української Греко-Католицької Церкви*.

[http://news.ugcc.ua/news/blazhenn%D1%96shiy\\_svyatoslav\\_pro\\_situats%D1%96yu\\_dovkola\\_evakuats%D1%96i\\_ukraints%D1%96v\\_z\\_kitayu\\_ne\\_tak\\_nebezpechnim\\_ie\\_koronav%D1%96rus\\_yak\\_v%D1%96rus\\_nenavist%D1%96\\_%D1%96\\_znevagi\\_do\\_blizhnogo\\_88752.html?fbclid=IwAR1-SMIAeDNWbnFo-JYiEVwyYC5JmW3zIoVWCpOf3cZY1NBAEKDuCzrJ1F4](http://news.ugcc.ua/news/blazhenn%D1%96shiy_svyatoslav_pro_situats%D1%96yu_dovkola_evakuats%D1%96i_ukraints%D1%96v_z_kitayu_ne_tak_nebezpechnim_ie_koronav%D1%96rus_yak_v%D1%96rus_nenavist%D1%96_%D1%96_znevagi_do_blizhnogo_88752.html?fbclid=IwAR1-SMIAeDNWbnFo-JYiEVwyYC5JmW3zIoVWCpOf3cZY1NBAEKDuCzrJ1F4). Accessed 03.12.2021; “Керуючий справами УПЦ митрополит Антоній: Розділення набагато страшніше від коронавірусу.” *Українська Православна Церква. Синодальний інформаційно-просвітницький відділ УПЦ*. [“Metropolitan Anthony, the head of the UOC: Separation is much worse than the coronavirus.” *Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Synodal Information and Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church*]. <https://news.church.ua/2020/02/20/keruyuchij-spravami-upc-mitropolit-antonij-rozdilennya-nabagato-strashnishe-vid-koronavirusu/>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>6</sup>“В ПЦУ закликають вірян не боятися причащатися через коронавірус.” *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. [“The PCU urges believers not to be afraid to take communion because of the coronavirus.” *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all\\_news/orthodox/ocu/79179/](https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/orthodox/ocu/79179/). Accessed 03.12.2021.

Covid-19 spread in Europe, including Ukraine, as Lent, which preceded the Easter holidays, was just approaching. The competent authorities of various countries introduced a quarantine, and the Christian churches, although with reservations, largely recognized the expediency of restrictive quarantine measures. Some churches (Orthodox and Catholic) called on believers to join Liturgies online, through radio, television, and the Internet. A similar decision was soon made by Protestant churches. At the same time, some Church representatives, despite the attitude of their leaders, were critical towards "the intimidating" information about the pandemic. However, "differences" with the official position of the leadership varied in different Churches. Thus, the separate opinion of Bishop Edward Kava of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)<sup>7</sup> was not reflected in the fact that, generally, this Church, in Ukraine in particular, followed the rules of quarantine, accepting the instructions and example of Pope Francis. Though the UOC-MP, contrarily, did not seem to object to quarantine, still invited the faithful to come to churches despite the epidemic, and to partake in confession and communion. It practically provoked mass violations of quarantine restrictions and soon resulted in the emergence of new local Covid-19 outbreaks.

As the Easter holidays approached, the number of coronavirus patients and deaths in Europe increased. In this situation, the mass measures really seemed inappropriate, and the authorities tightened the quarantine requirements. Churches reacted in different ways. The RCC announced a dispensation (i.e., an exemption) for believers from attending masses in person in churches, and at the same time proposed to attend them online—including in the pre-Easter and Easter periods. They advised them to carry out individual and family prayers at home.<sup>8</sup> Similar decisions were made by the UGCC<sup>9</sup> and the OCU,<sup>10</sup> as well as by the Protestant churches (although the latter did not inform widely about this at the national level). The UOC-

<sup>7</sup> "Єпископ Едвард Кава: вірю в Христа, а не в коронавірус." *CREDO*. ["Bishop Edward Cava: I believe in Christ, not the coronavirus." *CREDO*]. <https://credo.pro/2020/03/258403>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>8</sup> "Римо-католики в Україні звільнені від участі у недільній Месі." *CREDO*. ["Roman Catholics in Ukraine are exempt from participating in Sunday Mass." *CREDO*]. [https://credo.pro/2020/03/259015?fbclid=IwAR0r\\_vHm\\_72L9DoDgpYzH9y625SKnME0gwmPRAyCXnawwy63eVepnMMsB9g](https://credo.pro/2020/03/259015?fbclid=IwAR0r_vHm_72L9DoDgpYzH9y625SKnME0gwmPRAyCXnawwy63eVepnMMsB9g). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>9</sup> "Лист Блаженнішого Святослава з рекомендаціями про те, як у час пандемії Covid-19 служити страсній пасхальній богослужіння." *Українська Греко-Католицька Церква*. ["Letter of His Beatitude Sviatoslav with recommendations on how to hold Pre-Easter and Easter services during the Covid-19 pandemic." *Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*]. [http://ugcc.ua/documents/list\\_blazhenn%D1%96shogo\\_svyatoslava\\_z\\_rekomendats%D1%96yami\\_pro\\_te\\_yak\\_u\\_chas\\_pandem%D1%96i\\_covid19\\_sluzhiti\\_strasn%D1%96\\_y\\_pashaln%D1%96\\_bogosluzh%D1%96nnya\\_89092.html](http://ugcc.ua/documents/list_blazhenn%D1%96shogo_svyatoslava_z_rekomendats%D1%96yami_pro_te_yak_u_chas_pandem%D1%96i_covid19_sluzhiti_strasn%D1%96_y_pashaln%D1%96_bogosluzh%D1%96nnya_89092.html). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>10</sup> "Рішення Священного Синоду від 24 березня 2020 р." *Православна Церква України*. ["Decision of the Holy Synod of March 24, 2020". *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*]. [www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/povidomlennya-pro-rishennya-svyashhennogo-synodu/?fbclid=IwAR0D\\_CPUHMy-5BumA78I7BSR\\_IhCVqIOiwlwuJHFDDOEQDdxKBTOaRUuLNU](http://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/povidomlennya-pro-rishennya-svyashhennogo-synodu/?fbclid=IwAR0D_CPUHMy-5BumA78I7BSR_IhCVqIOiwlwuJHFDDOEQDdxKBTOaRUuLNU). Accessed 03.12.2021.

MP, on the other hand, encouraged people to attend Easter and pre-Easter services: relevant announcements were available on its websites, including parish ones, and on churches' bulletin boards.

At Easter (according to the Gregorian calendar), all Catholics of the world could participate online in the ceremonial service performed by Pope Francis in the uncommonly deserted St. Peter's Basilica. To attend the Easter service in the churches in person, the believers had to register in advance to not violate the current norm of 20 people. Instead, on the same day (Palm Sunday according to the old style) and the week after, during the celebration of Easter according to the Julian calendar, one could observe different scenes in and around temples of other denominations: from conscientious observance of quarantine hygiene requirements, distance, and number of believers, to completely ignoring of these requirements. This was true in both Ukraine and other Central and Eastern European countries. Again, in Ukraine, systemic violations were committed by the UOC-MP, although there were some violations in other churches, too. For particularly egregious cases of mass services in the churches of the UOC-MP with non-compliance with the quarantine rules, five criminal proceedings were initiated by police.<sup>11</sup> In Montenegro, police detained a Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church,<sup>12</sup> as well as a bishop and seven priests of the Serbian Patriarchate<sup>13</sup> for violating their quarantine.

With the onset of the warm season, when hopes of a smaller spread of the coronavirus did not materialize, even in southern countries with strong economies, the Churches had to adjust to lockdowns or prolonged restrictions. However, the neglect of quarantine norms continued to occur periodically, both in Ukraine and in neighboring countries. In Ukraine, the UOC-MP again attracted public attention: its Primate Onufriy celebrated his birthday in violation of the quarantine norms. At the liturgy in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, both clergy and laity prayed without masks, and believers kissed icons.<sup>14</sup> The Prime Minister of Bulgaria and

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<sup>11</sup> “Великдень у храмах УПЦ МП: поліція порушила 5 кримінальних справ.” *Українська правда*. [Easter in the churches of the UOC-MP: the police opened 5 criminal cases. Ukrainian Pravda]. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2020/04/20/7248638/> Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>12</sup> “Поліція затримала Митрополита Сербської Православної Церкви за порушення карантину.” *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. [“Police detained the Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church for violating quarantine.” *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.ua/policiya-zatrimala-mitropolita-serbskoji-pravoslavnoi-cerkvi-za-porushennya-karantinu\\_n103829](https://risu.ua/policiya-zatrimala-mitropolita-serbskoji-pravoslavnoi-cerkvi-za-porushennya-karantinu_n103829). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>13</sup> “У Чорногорії поліція затримала єпископа і сімох священників Сербського Патріархату.” *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. [“In Montenegro, police detained a bishop and seven priests of the Serbian Patriarchate.” *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.ua/u-chornogoriji-policiya-zatrimala-ypiskopa-i-simoh-svyashchennikov-serbskogo-patriarhatu\\_n104484](https://risu.ua/u-chornogoriji-policiya-zatrimala-ypiskopa-i-simoh-svyashchennikov-serbskogo-patriarhatu_n104484). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>14</sup> “Предстоятель УПЦ МП відсвяткував іменини: віряни цілували ікони, молились без масок.” *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. [“The head of the UOC-MP celebrated his birthday: the faithful kissed the icons

other high-ranking officials and journalists were also fined for being present in the church without masks.<sup>15</sup> However, in general, the Churches reduced their offline activities and introduced some forms of online activities: from flash mobs of remote prayers with the intention of ending the pandemic (in the RCC of Poland<sup>16</sup>) to online coaching for doctors on the treatment of Covid-19 (in Caritas of Czech Republic<sup>17</sup>).

With the beginning of the seasonal cold, when the wave of Covid-19 rose again in many countries, the Christian churches continued to act as before: blatant cases of disregard for quarantine norms were again recorded in a particular denominational environment. Thus, during the farewell to Metropolitan Amphilochius, who died of coronavirus, in the cathedral of the Serbian Patriarchate in Podgorica on October 3, 2020, several thousand people kissed the hands and head of the deceased.<sup>18</sup> Amphilochius himself was a "covid dissident" and served without a mask. Shortly after, Serbian Patriarch Irinej, who was infected at the funeral, died in Belgrade. At the same time, the monitoring of the various Christian churches in the countries of interest generally shows "neutral" news around "covid" issues, mostly in regard with certain social work activities. Some Churches, such as the RCC in the Czech Republic, have considered it necessary to devote a separate place<sup>19</sup> to this problem in their Internet resources, which made possible the monitoring of the pandemic response in greater detail.

In general, examples of social service during Covid-19 focus on helping health workers and the most vulnerable people. It can be the provision of facilities for medical needs, assistance with medicines, medical equipment, and work in hospitals and social care

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and prayed without masks." *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.ua/predstoyatel-upc-mp-vidsvyatkuvav-imeneni-viryani-cilovali-ikoni-molilis-bez-masok\\_n109438](https://risu.ua/predstoyatel-upc-mp-vidsvyatkuvav-imeneni-viryani-cilovali-ikoni-molilis-bez-masok_n109438). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>15</sup> "Прем'єр-міністра Болгарії оштрафують за вхід до церкви без маски." *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. ["The Prime Minister of Bulgaria is fined for entering the church without a mask." *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*] [https://risu.ua/premyer-ministra-bolgariyi-oshtrafuyut-za-vhid-do-cerkvi-bez-maski\\_n109410](https://risu.ua/premyer-ministra-bolgariyi-oshtrafuyut-za-vhid-do-cerkvi-bez-maski_n109410). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>16</sup> "Abp Gądecki dziękuje za wspólnotę modlitwy o ustanie pandemii." *Conferencja Episkopatu Polski*. ["Archbishop Gądecki thanks for the community prayers for the end of the pandemic." *Polish Bishops' Conference*]. <https://episkopat.pl/abp-gadecki-dziekuje-za-wspolnote-modlitwy-o-ustanie-pandemii/>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>17</sup> "Charita ČR zaučila téměř jednu tisícovku lékařů na léčbu COVID-19 na dálku." *Církev.cz*. ["Caritas CR has trained almost one thousand doctors to treat COVID-19 remotely." *Církev.cz*]. <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/200609charita-cr-zaucila-temer-jednu-tisicovku-lekaru-na-lecbu-covid-19-na-dalku>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>18</sup> "Кілька тисяч вірян поцілювали тіло митрополита Амфілохія, який помер від коронавірусу." *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. ["Several thousand believers kissed the body of Metropolitan Amphilochius, who died of coronavirus." *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*] [https://risu.ua/kilka-tisyach-viryana-pociluvali-tilo-mitropolita-amfilohiya-yakij-pomer-vid-koronavirusu\\_n113209](https://risu.ua/kilka-tisyach-viryana-pociluvali-tilo-mitropolita-amfilohiya-yakij-pomer-vid-koronavirusu_n113209). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>19</sup> "Církev a koronavirus." *Církev.cz*. ["Church and coronavirus." *Církev.cz*]. <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/koronavirus?p.Page=1>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

agencies— such as Caritas in Poland,<sup>20</sup> RCC structures in the Czech Republic,<sup>21</sup> and others. In Ukraine, the UGCC should be mentioned, which approaches the problems of social work comprehensively developing practical social initiatives that can be implemented at various levels, and which include assistance to those in spiritual, psychological, and material difficulties.<sup>22</sup> In this Church, since the beginning of the pandemic, retreat and rehabilitation centers, pastoral centers, and educational institutions opened for the needs of medical services.<sup>23</sup> Their medical chaplains also work in hospitals.<sup>24</sup>

Since the second half of 2020, the topic of vaccination against Covid-19 has intensified, and the attitude of the Churches to it has also been different: from approving and stimulating the search for effective vaccines and their fair distribution (such as Pope Francis, leaders of the UGCC and OCU, and some Protestant churches) to denial and condemnation. The most odious example of the latter is the metropolitanate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Moldova, which was rightly pointed out by our colleagues V. Tytarenko and I. Bogachevska. We agree with their assessment that "the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church initiated and

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<sup>20</sup> "Caritas Polska przekazuje respiratory dla szpitali." *Conferencja Episkopatu Polski*. ["Caritas Polska donates respirators to hospitals." *Polish Bishops' Conference*]. <https://episkopat.pl/caritas-polska-przekazuje-respiratory-dla-szpitali/>. Accessed 03.12.2021.; "Caritas Polska i Nestlé pomagają medykom oraz seniorom." *Conferencja Episkopatu Polski*. ["Polish Caritas and Nestlé help medics and seniors." *Polish Bishops' Conference*]. <https://episkopat.pl/caritas-polska-i-nestle-pomagaja-medykom-oraz-seniorom/>. Accessed 03.12.2021.; "Caritas Polska i Polskie Sieci Elektroenergetyczne pomagają medykom w całej Polsce." *Conferencja Episkopatu Polski*. ["Polish Caritas and Polish power grid help medics all over Poland." *Polish Bishops' Conference*]. <https://episkopat.pl/caritas-polska-i-polskie-sieci-elektroenergetyczne-pomagaja-medykom-w-calej-polsce/>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>21</sup> "Nová strategie v boji proti covid-19: Charitní domovy vybaveny testovacími přístroji." *Církev.cz*. ["New strategy in the fight against covid-19: Charity homes equipped with test equipment." *Církev.cz*]. <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201027nova-strategie-v-boji-proti-covid-19-charitni-domovy-vybaveny-testovacimi-pristroji>. Accessed 03.12.2021.; "Duchovní centrum ve Vranově u Brna nabízí pomoc v karanténě." *Církev.cz*. ["The spiritual center in Vranov u Brna offers help in quarantine." *Církev.cz*]. <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201112duchovni-centrum-ve-vranove-u-brna-nabizi-pomoc-v-karantene>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>22</sup> "Через пандемію коронавірусу УГКЦ знайшла нові форми душпастирства та зробила соціальне служіння пріоритетним." *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. ["The UGCC found new forms of pastoral care and made social service a priority through the coronavirus pandemic." *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.ua/cherез-pandemiyu-koronavirusu-ugkc-znajshla-novi-formi-dushpastirstva-ta-zrobila-socialne-sluzhinnya-prioritetnim\\_n109332](https://risu.ua/cherез-pandemiyu-koronavirusu-ugkc-znajshla-novi-formi-dushpastirstva-ta-zrobila-socialne-sluzhinnya-prioritetnim_n109332). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>23</sup> "Глава УГКЦ розповів прем'єр-міністру про діяльність Антикризисного центру УГКЦ з протидії пандемії." *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. ["The head of the UGCC told to the Prime Minister about the activities of the UGCC Anti-Crisis Center to counter the pandemic." *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.ua/glava-ugkc-rozpoviv-premyer-ministru-pro-diyalnist-antikrizovogo-centru-ugkc-z-protidiyi-pandemiyi\\_n111291](https://risu.ua/glava-ugkc-rozpoviv-premyer-ministru-pro-diyalnist-antikrizovogo-centru-ugkc-z-protidiyi-pandemiyi_n111291). Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>24</sup> "УГКЦ готує приміщення для лікарів і хворих на Covid-19." *Релігійно-інформаційна служба України*. ["The UGCC is preparing a room for doctors and patients with Covid-19." *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*]. [https://risu.ua/ugkc-gotuye-primishchennya-dlya-likariv-i-hvorih-na-covid-19\\_n113409](https://risu.ua/ugkc-gotuye-primishchennya-dlya-likariv-i-hvorih-na-covid-19_n113409). Accessed 03.12.2021.



maintained fundamentalist sentiments among its believers.”<sup>25</sup> However, the course of the pandemic and the vicissitudes of the churches’ reactions to it led us to the conclusion that the churches will have to improve their guidelines, and not only on vaccination and quarantine. As we noted in another of our articles, Covid-19 “is likely to encourage the Church to update its social doctrines, complementing them with specifics about those health problems and related complex issues of conscience that pose fundamentally new challenges to human and society.”<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Thus, in the attitude of the Churches to the Covid-19 epidemic and related problems, as was expected, at least for religious scholars, the differences are not territorial (such as in Ukraine and other Central and Eastern European countries), but rather confessional ones. The common feature is the conduct of one or another relevant social service. In general, Christian churches have already demonstrated their potential to respond to problems of the modern pandemic and of the quarantine’s organizational and restrictive changes in society. These answers for their believers and the wider community depend on relevancy and utility for the future of the Churches as institutions. At present, it seems that all those experiencing Covid-19, from government officials and clergy to ordinary citizens, which are accustomed by and large to life in relative comfort with various benefits of the modern materialist era, find themselves overwhelmed by an unprecedented problem. Various Christian churches, despite their centuries-long experience in responding to epidemics, have shown mixed reactions to all the vicissitudes of the Covid pandemic and its current consequences: from caution, temperance, and cooperation with government actors and strengthening their social work to ignoring, denying, and violating quarantine regulations.

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<sup>25</sup> Vita Tytarenko, and Iryna Bogachevska, “Religious “Covid Fundamentalism” in Eastern and Central Europe: Challenges and Lessons,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, Article 4. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss1/4>. Accessed 03.12.2021.

<sup>26</sup> Ольга Недавня, “Церкви в Україні під час епідемії ковіда-19: здатність до змін та співпраці у її реалізації й потенціях.” *Авраамічні релігії в Україні в процесі стабілізації міжконфесійних і міжнаціональних відносин*. Матеріали наукової конференції: Україна – Ватикан контекст міжконфесійних ідентичностей і релігійних трансформацій у світі та Україні. (Галич: Інформаційно-видавничий сектор Національного заповідника “Давній Галич”. 2020). сс. 143-150. [Olga Nedavnya, “Churches in Ukraine during the covid-19 epidemic: the ability to change and cooperate in its implementation and potentials.” *Abrahamic religions in Ukraine in the process of stabilizing interfaith and interethnic relations*. Proceedings of the scientific conference: Ukraine — Vatican: context of interfaith identities and religious transformations in the world and Ukraine].

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