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ATTITUDES OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN UKRAINE TO ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE

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Abstract

The attitude of the largest religions of Ukraine to reproductive medicine is determined by a variety of practical approaches, which are still in process of change between the rather strict negative official position of major religious organizations of Ukraine, on the one hand, and a rather liberal approach to reproductive medicine in secular legislation of Ukraine. The harsh negative official position of the main religious organizations of Ukraine to surrogacy and abortions is presented in a joint document adopted by the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. While the diversity of practical approaches of these organizations is represented by the speeches of the leaders of these organizations and current decisions within each of the churches are made up according to the context in every case of artificial fertilization or abortion. Most religions in Ukraine take a compromise practical position: Church representatives allow men and women who are married but unable to have children to seek reproductive medicine on medical grounds. Also, while opposing abortion as an undoubted sin, church representatives still allow exceptions in most cases –in the case of rape or a clear threat to the life of the expectant mother. Religious justifications for the status of the human fetus as one that acquires human rights at a certain stage of its development play an important role. Despite different views on the emergence of a new person, most representatives of religious organizations in Ukraine tend to allow in some cases recourse to both reproductive medicine and abortion.

Keywords: health care ethics, assisted reproductive technologies, surrogacy, abortion, reproductive medicine, embryo, religious organizations of Ukraine, Orthodox Churches of Ukraine.

Introduction

Any new technology has the potential for social transformations that guide the future development of society. In the process of their implementation in the practical plane, many

aspects of public life are involved, including economic, political, environmental, legal, and ethical factors. In market economy societies, as a rule, the economic feasibility of scientific discoveries becomes the basis for creating both a legal framework for their regulation and public moral approval. However, the implementation of innovative technologies in the complex world of medicine, at least for the last few decades, is increasingly dependent on the moral evaluation of new treatment practices in the context of individual life. The formation and worldwide dissemination of hospital ethics committees¹ and several international documents and declarations² on medical and biotechnology³ testify the significance of ethical conclusions in health care. Each case raises questions, simultaneously regarding assessment of medical expediency of treatment, and of value to and teleological significance of the life quality of the patient. After all, each individual case is a complex question of choice, which is to make in the socio-cultural and ideological context of the person, reflecting her/his general attitude to life and highlighting moral and spiritual priorities. This choice manifests “personal religion,” as understood by American philosopher William James.⁴

Anglican priest and theologian Robin Gill notes that in the 1960s, religious leaders thought they could increase their influence in society due to area health care ethics.⁵ This conclusion parallels Fred Rosner’s research, where he revealed that one of the first ideas of the formation of “medical-moral committees” in hospitals appeared in Medico-Moral Guide for Canadian bishops in 1971.⁶ That committee was devised to educate the hospital community in health care ethics and provide interdisciplinary dialogue. This further reaching responsibility of the “medical-moral committees” would behave in contrast to the co-called “Seattle God Committee,” formed a few years earlier, but was singularly entrusted with ethical issues of selecting dialysis candidates.⁷ Nowadays health care ethics is a broad space for discussions between physicians, philosophers, lawyers, theologians, and church leaders who provide their arguments for a variety of ethical decision-making. How influential the “religious voice” is in public moral approval depends on many factors, including a level of

¹F. Rosner, “Hospital Medical Ethics Committees: A Review of Their Development”. *JAMA* 253(18) (1985), pp. 2693–2697. doi:10.1001/jama.1985.03350420105027.

²*Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights* (11.11.1997), 14 p.

³*Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine: Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine* (Oviedo Convention), (4.04.1997) (valid after 1 December 1999).

⁴W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature* (Project Gutenberg, 01.08.1996), pp. 31-36. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/621>.

⁵R. Gill, *Health Care and Christian Ethics (New Study in Christian Ethics)* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.3.

⁶Rosner, F. “Hospital...”, p. 2693.

⁷M. P Aulisio, “Why Did Hospital Ethics Committees Emerge in the US?” *AMA Journal of Ethics* 18(5), (2016), p. 547, doi: 10.1001/journalofethics.2016.18.5.mhst1-1605.

true religious commitment, inclusion, and pluralism in society, as well as proper public communications.

Most religions value the achievements of science and medicine as a gift and mercy of God. The way God has given humans minds, talents, and their development of such resources is God's providence. However, new scientific methods and medical operations, which try to affect a future development of human organism, or create a new life outside the body in vitro, evoked an unprecedented burst of ethical debates.⁸ Reproductive medicine and related biotechnologies, which are based on the use of human embryonic cells, donor gametes, and surrogacy motherhood, raised a number of diverse ethical issues that received a most acute reverberating response within the scope of widespread religious worldviews. During their years of independence, Ukrainian churches and religious organizations, which have been actively building their infrastructures and forming levers of influence on public life, have their own positions and are trying to give moral guidance in the field of bioethics. We will try to tease out the peculiarities of the attitude to ethical problems of reproductive medicine among the largest religious organizations and the main Orthodox churches of Ukraine.

Some Sides of Debates around Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Metaphor of Frankenstein

One of the early international trends in ethics debates regarding reproductive technologies assumes to compare the modern medical scientists to Frankenstein (character of Mary Shelly's novel). This allusion is used both in the ironic context of "scientists who attempt to play God"⁹ and in the positive interpretation of Frankenstein's character as the mythological Prometheus, who carries the technological advances to humankind.¹⁰ Some church leaders also employ the Frankenstein metaphor; for example, representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland in their media campaign¹¹ to monsterize the proposed creation of "test tube" babies. This metaphor appeared in the public discourse of Ukraine in the context

⁸S. Harakas, *For the health of body and soul: an Eastern Orthodox introduction to bioethics*. 1980. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/216851>.

⁹J. Harris, "In Vitro Fertilization: The Ethical Issues (I)". *The Philosophical Quarterly* 33(132), (1983), p. 217. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/2219222>

¹⁰C. Stubber, and K. Maggie, "The Persistence of the Frankenstein Myth: Organ Transplantation and Surrogate Motherhood". *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 99(1), (2016), pp. 29–53. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5325/soundings.99.1.0029>.

¹¹M. Radkowska-Walkowicz, "The Creation of 'Monsters': The Discourse of Opposition to in Vitro Fertilization in Poland". *Reproductive Health Matters* 20(40), (2012), pp. 30-37. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(12\)40647-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(12)40647-4).

of the Church's critique of scientific experiments with embryonic stem cells.¹² However, they operate within the narrative that was formed during the public debates of the 1980s, when the real facts about the fate of children born after in vitro fertilization were objectively insufficient.¹³ According to Mulkay, participants in public debates could not rely on the established facts and they turned to fiction for rhetorical purposes.¹⁴ Although the practice and effectiveness of reproductive technologies in Ukrainian clinics corresponds to European indicators¹⁵ and has been actively developing since the first years of independence,¹⁶ moral evaluation, as well as legal regulation, is somewhat lagging behind.

Surrogacy

Due to the development of the market of infertility treatment services in Ukraine as significantly ahead of their legal constraints, Ukraine has become one of the centers of “medical tourism” for people who want to use assisted reproductive technology, but for various reasons could not get them at home.¹⁷ A special law on Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Ukraine is still in draft status, and the basic legal framework is contained in the Order of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine.¹⁸ However, international and national legal norms in the field of reproductive medicine are also in the process of formation.¹⁹ Applying for health services in the field of reproductive medicine outside own country may be due to the difference in the cost of such services and could be a search for more affordable prices. As a result, there is a risk that residents of lower welfare countries will turn the female body

¹²Архієпископ Львівський і Галицький Августин (Маркевич). *Проблеми біоетики: православний погляд* [Archbishop Augustine of Lviv and Halytskyi (Markevich). *Problems of bioethics: Orthodox view*]. <http://orthodox.org.ua/node/1704>.

¹³M. Mulkay, “Frankenstein and the Debate over Embryo Research”. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 21(2), (1996), pp. 157–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/689772>.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁵О. М. Юзько, “Допоміжні репродуктивні технології України – 25 років успіху”. *Збірник наукових праць Асоціації акушерів-гінекологів України* [О. М. Yuzko, Assisted Reproductive Technologies – 25 Years of Success. Collection of scientific works of the Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Ukraine] (Kyiv, 2016), p. 395.

¹⁶В. Грищенко, “Репродуктивність сімейного щастя”. *Вісник НАН України* 12, (2010). [V. Hryshchenko, Reproduction of Family Happiness. *Visnyk of the NAS of Ukraine*], pp. 66-68. <http://www.visnyk-nanu.org.ua/en/node/2314>.

¹⁷Sven Bergmann, “Fertility Tourism: Circumventive Routes That Enable Access to Reproductive Technologies and Substances.” *Signs* 36, no. 2 (2011), p. 283. <https://doi.org/10.1086/655978>.

¹⁸Наказ МОЗ України № 787 від 09.09.2013 «Про затвердження Порядку застосування допоміжних репродуктивних технологій в Україні». [The Order of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine “On Approval of the Procedure for the use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Ukraine”]. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1697-13?lang=en#Text>.

¹⁹О. В. Розгон, “Порівняльне дослідження правового регулювання правовідносин щодо сурогатного материнства у країнах Європи та Азії”. [O. V. Rozgon, Comparative Study of Legal Regulation of Legal Relations on Surrogate Motherhood of Europe and Asia]. *Eurasian Academic Research Journal* 6(12), (2017), pp. 28-40.

into a commercial container for carrying babies. Such a threat is relevant for Ukraine, said scientist and priest Igor Boyko and warned “Ukraine is becoming a ‘Mecca of surrogacy.’”²⁰ Archpriest of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Oleksa Petrov drew attention to this problem in the context of combating trafficking in human beings against the background of financial difficulties.²¹ In Ukraine, law does not prohibit surrogacy. Representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (recently official as Moscow Patriarchate)²² and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church condemn commercial surrogacy overtly, call for removing this rule from the draft Law of Ukraine “On Assisted Reproductive Technologies.” The resolution of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations “Ukraine for the Family” of June 7, 2021, a special paragraph #4 mentions this issue and states that this practice “devalues the dignity of the child to the level of goods.”²³ It should be noted that the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations consists of Ukrainian leaders of thirteen Christian denominations and churches, representing Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, the Supreme Mufti of Ukraine, the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, and the President of the Ukrainian Bible Society.²⁴ All of them are representatives of the so-called Abrahamic religions. In other words, we can state that at the level of officially represented religious organizations in Ukraine, not only Orthodox denominations, the ethical attitude to surrogacy on a commercial basis is unanimously negative.

The document “Social Concept” of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church condemns surrogacy even on altruistic grounds.²⁵ The joint statement of the bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church names any form of surrogacy a “moral evil.”²⁶ In the “Social Concept of Muslims of Ukraine” the practice of surrogacy is

²⁰ «Сьогодні Україна перетворюється на «Мекку сурогатного материнства»», – керівник Школи біоетики УКУ о. Ігор Бойко. [“Today Ukraine is becoming a ‘Mecca of surrogacy’”, said Igor Boyko, head of the UCU School of Bioethics]. (21.03.2012). https://risu.ua/sogodni-ukrajina-peretvoryuyetsya-na-mekku-surogatnogo-materinstva-kerivnik-shkoli-bioetiki-uku-o-igor-boyko_n55446.

²¹ Мінсоцполітики разом із церквами протидіятиме торгівлі людьми. [The Ministry of Social Policy together with the churches will counteract human trafficking]. (Kyiv, 22.07.2021). <https://irs.in.ua/p/30>.

²² Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних Організацій. Рада Церков обговорила з Головою Верховної ради проблемні законопроекти. [Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Council of Churches discussed with the Chairman of the Verhovna Rada problematic bills]. (Kyiv, 04.02.2022). <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/events/uccro-met-with-chairman-of-ukrainian-parliament-february-2022>.

²³ Резолюція учасників телемарафону “Україна за сім’ю”. [Resolution of the participants of the telethon “Ukraine for the Family”]. (Kyiv, 07.06.2020). <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/documents/resolution-of-uccro-telethon-ukraine-for-family>.

²⁴ Members of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/council/members>.

²⁵ Соціальна концепція. [Social concept]. (Kyiv, 04.02.2013), XII.4. <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/sots%D1%96alna-kontsepts%D1%96ya>.

²⁶ Заборонити сурогатне материнство та міжнародну торгівлю дітьми вимагають від влади України єпископи УГКЦ та РКЦ. [Bishops of UGCC and RCC demand that Ukrainian authorities ban surrogate

not so unequivocally condemned, but “questioned,”²⁷ and according to the spiritual leader of Muslims of Ukraine and Islamic scholar Said Ismagilov, “surrogacy violates the principle of human origin from one father and one mother.”²⁸ In Sunni Islam, which prevails among Muslims in Ukraine, surrogacy is prohibited by Islamic law.²⁹ The situation is interesting with the position of the Jewish religious communities, whose leader signed the resolution “Ukraine for the Family.” Israel is one of the countries where surrogacy is legally allowed on a non-commercial basis, but the intended parents pay significant money as the surrogate’s fee.³⁰ To some extent, it is “commercialization” in favor of the state. This issue is the subject of active discussions for Jewish and secular ethics.³¹

However, in the diverse world of Christianity, especially among Protestant denominations around the world, there are different views and ethical assessments of surrogacy, which under certain circumstances could be “a moral good” both commercially and altruistically.³² However, for the Protestant denominations on Ukrainian territory, the authors form an opinion about their attitude to surrogacy on the basis of their activities in the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, that represents officially registered at the state level unions of believers. These are the All-Ukrainian Union of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, Christians of Evangelical Faith (Ukrainian Church), the Ukrainian Union Conference (the Seventh-day Adventist Church), the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Church (Ukraine), the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, and German Evangelical Church (Ukraine). The leaders of these religious groups unanimously condemn commercial surrogacy. The All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches defines surrogacy as a “socially glaring problem” regardless of the form in

motherhood and international child trafficking]. (Kyiv, 14.05.2020).https://risu.ua/zaboroniti-surogatne-materinstvo-ta-mizhnarodnu-torgivlyu-ditmi-vimagayut-vid-vladi-ukrajini-yepiskopi-ugke-ta-rkc_n104504.

²⁷Соціальна концепція мусульман України. [Social concept of Muslims of Ukraine]. (Kyiv, 11.12.2017).<https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/1890>.

²⁸Муфтії СаїдІсмагілов про родину, штучне запліднення, розлучення та нагальні проблеми мусульман на конференції УАР. [Mufti Said Ismagilov on the Family, Artificial Insemination, Divorce and Urgent Problems of Muslims at the UAR Conference]. (27.09.2018).<https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/2067>.

²⁹ H. E. Fadel, “The Islamic Viewpoint on New Assisted Reproductive Technologies”. *Fordham Urb. L.J.* 30(1), (2002), p. 154. <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol30/iss1/8>.

³⁰M. Raucher, “Whose Womb and Whose Ethics? Surrogacy in Israel and in Jewish Ethics”. *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 3(1), (2017), p. 70. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jjewishethi.3.1.0068>.

³¹Ibid., p. 85.

³²G. Y. Kao, “Toward a Feminist Christian Vision of Gestational Surrogacy”. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39(1), (2019), pp. 161–79. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48616987>.

which this problem is solved.³³ The Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Ukrainian Church) has issued a statement condemning all forms of surrogacy.³⁴

Respect to the Human Embryo

Ethical problematization of medical manipulations with the human embryo comes from the recognition of a certain status of the embryo in a particular religious teaching. The most severe criticism of in vitro fertilization procedures comes from the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches of Ukraine, which consider artificial insemination to be morally unacceptable for two reasons. The first is that several embryos are usually used during in vitro fertilization. Most of them are usually disposed of immediately or during medical experiments. As we know many Christians consider the beginning of human existence from the very first moment of conception, when the germ cells of the mother and father of the future human being emerge, and thus the embryo has all the rights and freedoms declared by modern society, including the main value right—right to life. Referring to the scientific data of modern biology and embryology, Ukrainian researcher Igor Boyko (priest of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) studied in detail the ontological, ethical, and legal status of the human embryo and concluded that from the moment of fertilization the embryo is a separate human being in relation to God³⁵ and is a separate human person in relation to biology and embryology.³⁶ In his view, the zygote cannot be considered simply a “human in potential,” as this new cellular formation, endowed with a new information structure, begins to act as an individual unity with its own genetic code.³⁷ The religious justification of the dignity of human embryonic life is carried out in the *Donum Vitae* (Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation), which is a normative document for churches subordinate to the Pope.³⁸ The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk confirmed his fidelity to the instructions of this document.³⁹

³³Хода за сім'ю. Чому твоя участь є необхідною? [March for the family. Why is your participation necessary?]. <https://www.baptyst.com/hoda-za-sim-yu-chomu-tvoya-uchast-ye-neobhidnoyu/>

³⁴Звернення Української Церкви Християн Віри Євангельської щодо проблеми сурогатного материнства [Appeal of the Ukrainian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith on the problem of surrogacy] (Kyiv, 29.05.2020). <https://www.chve.org.ua/surogatne-materynstvo290520/>

³⁵І. Є. Бойко, “Ідентичність і статус людського ембріона у сучасних біоетичних дискусіях”. *Наукові Записки. Сер. Філософія* [I. E. Boyko, Identity and status of human embryo in contemporary bioethical discussions. Proceedings. Ser. Philosophy]. 8, (2011), p. 223. <http://er.ucu.edu.ua/handle/1/750>.

³⁶Ibid., p. 228.

³⁷Ibid., p. 228. [Editor's note: Many Protestant churches and believers elsewhere do not agree with the above.]

³⁸*Donum Vitae. Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation issued February 22, 1987.* <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/donum-vitae-2085>.

³⁹Блаженніший Святослав про проблему штучного запліднення. [His Beatitude Sviatoslav on the problem of artificial insemination]. (06.03.2012).

The second reason for moral rejection is the fact that during the artificial creation of the embryo the unitive and the procreative qualities of marriage are divided. As the theologian Gilbert Meilaender wrote, conception of a child in artificial in vitro fertilization seems to distort the moral meaning of the child; it removes the biological end of marriage from the context, in which it is personalized and humanized.⁴⁰

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has a somewhat softened position on medical technology using human embryos, which is set out in the “Social Concept.” This church does not condemn certain medical technologies that help overcome obstacles to pregnancy, but only if the unifying function of marriage is preserved (sexual intercourse before insemination, homologous fertilization). However, heterologous in vitro fertilization, destruction of “extra” human embryos or their use in medical experiments is considered unacceptable and sinful. The use of donor gametes, as stated in the “Social Concept,” distorts family relationships, because it raises questions about the “biological” and “social” parents.⁴¹

According to “Social concept of Muslims of Ukraine,” the followers of Islam consider artificial insemination as permissible, but biological material can be used only from a man and a woman who are legally married.⁴² That is, homologous in vitro fertilization without the involvement of donor gametes is morally acceptable. The use of donor cells and embryos is not specifically stated in the “Social concept of Muslims of Ukraine,” but there is a general statement that bioethics are regulated by *Fiqh* (Islamic law). It means that this practice is prohibited because it is similar to adultery in confusion of the lineage in Islamic law.⁴³

According to Jewish religious principles, the homologous artificial insemination is allowed “if no other method is possible for a wife to become pregnant.”⁴⁴ As Fred Rosner showed, a lot of rabbis allow to obtain the husband’s sperm for analysis.⁴⁵ Jewish leaders of Ukraine follow the main religious trends in Judaism.

http://news.ugcc.ua/news/blazhenn%D1%96shiy_svyatoslav_pro_problemu_shtuchnogo_zapl%D1%96dnennya_62618.html.

⁴⁰Gilbert Meilaender, “Sweet Necessities: Food, Sex, and Saint Augustine.” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 29(1), (2001), p. 17 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40017871>

⁴¹Соціальна концепція [Social concept] (Kyiv, 04.02.2013).

XII.4 <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/sots%D1%96alna-kontsepts%D1%96ya>.

⁴²Муфтії Саїд Ісмагілов про родину, штучне запліднення, розлучення та нагальні проблеми мусульман на конференції УАР [Mufti Said Ismagilov on the Family, Artificial Insemination, Divorce and Urgent Problems of Muslims at the UAR Conference](27.09.2018). <https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/2067>

⁴³Hossam E. Fadel, “The Islamic Viewpoint on New Assisted Reproductive Technologies” *Fordham Urb. L.J.* 30(1), (2002), p. 153 <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol30/iss1/8>

⁴⁴Fred Rosner, “Test Tube Babies, Host Mothers, and Genetic Engineering in Judaism” *Traditions: a Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 19(2), (1981), p. 142 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23258689>

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 142.

The issue of prenatal diagnosis and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis stands out as a separate issue. The use of diagnostic results to select the healthiest embryos is condemned by the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic⁴⁶ and Orthodox Churches of Ukraine.⁴⁷ Testing to treat early-onset disease may be justified “in order to prepare parents for the special care of a sick child.”⁴⁸ According to David S. King, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis may exacerbate the eugenic features of prenatal testing for determining the best interests of the future child and may make possible an expanded form of free-market eugenics.⁴⁹ The “dark side” of this procedure is the destruction of inappropriate embryos before implantation or abortion of the fetus. An alternative to such manipulations is the proposal of the Orthodox Christian ethic “that genetic counseling should most appropriately take place before marriage.”⁵⁰

Abortion

In Ukraine, ethical debates around artificial fertilization and genetic diagnosis often resonate with sharp discussions about admissibility of ‘abortions on demand’ because, as we said, some artificially fertilized eggs are usually disposed of immediately or during medical experiments. All churches that were members of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations condemned the practice of abortion in a special Appeal, which equated abortion to murder.⁵¹ Doctors who perform abortion operations, legislators who legalize abortion, and social services that do not adequately support low-income families had received negative ethical assessments. The Appeal does not specify which abortion is in question: at the request of the woman/man, after rape or on medical grounds, when the mother or fetus is in imminent danger to life, etc.

Documents outlining the doctrines of the All-Ukrainian Union of the Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists,⁵² the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church,⁵³ and the

⁴⁶*Donum Vitae. Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation issued February 22, 1987.* <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/donum-vitae-2085>

⁴⁷Соціальна концепція. [Social concept]. (Kyiv, 04.02.2013). XII.5. <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/sots%D1%96alna-kontsepts%D1%96ya>.

⁴⁸Архієпископ Львівський і Галицький Августин (Маркевич). *Проблеми біоетики: православний погляд*. [Archbishop Augustine of Lviv and Halyskyi (Markevich). *Problems of bioethics: Orthodox view*]. <http://orthodox.org.ua/node/1704>.

⁴⁹D. S. King, “Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis and the ‘New’ Eugenics”. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25(2), (1999), p. 176. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27718280>.

⁵⁰Harakas, *For the health of body and soul: an Eastern Orthodox introduction to bioethics*.

⁵¹Звернення Всеукраїнської Ради Церков і релігійних організацій про гідність і велич дару людського життя. [Appeal of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations on the dignity and greatness of the gift of human life]. (Kyiv, 31.05.2021). <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/uccro-statement-pro-life>.

⁵²Віровчення. [Beliefs]. VIII <https://www.baptyst.com/virovchennya/>.

Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals)⁵⁴ state that abortion is intentional sin of taking the life of an unborn person. The Ukrainian Union Conference (the Seventh-day Adventist Church) is guided by an international document, the Statement “Biblical Perspectives on Unborn Children and Conclusions for Abortion,” which states that “abortion is not God’s plan,” but women who committed abortions should be emotionally supported.⁵⁵ The Ukrainian Lutheran Church considers abortion permissible if it is “caused by the purpose of preserving another gift of life, for good reasons.”⁵⁶ The Ukrainian Orthodox Church allows medical abortion when there is a direct threat to the life of the mother or unborn child, especially when the woman has other children, but still considers it a sin to be redeemed.⁵⁷

Followers of Judaism in Ukraine adhere to their traditional teaching, which considers the unborn fetus as a part of the mother’s body. Jewish legal views on abortion are based on religious teaching that fertilized egg is “mere fluid” until forty days after conception.⁵⁸ It means the abortion is not considered murder. A woman’s life takes precedence over the fetus, so medical abortion is allowed. The Social Concept of Muslims of Ukraine states that abortion is forbidden in Islamic doctrine but is possible in exceptional situations: endangering the lives of mothers and children in early pregnancy.⁵⁹ Mufti Said Ismagilov explained that a woman could terminate a pregnancy that resulted from rape. However, she must do so within 120 days, when “the angel comes and brings the soul.” If the woman did not have access to medical services before this time, the child should be born. After birth, if a woman does not want to see and raise her child, this child can be given up for adoption.⁶⁰

Earlier in 2012, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, together with the Roman Catholic Church, which is guided by the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*,⁶¹ took the

⁵³ *Основи віровчення Української Християнської Євангельської Церкви*. [Fundamentals of Beliefs of Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church]. 16. <http://wolua.org.ua/virovchennya.html>.

⁵⁴ *Основи віровчення та богослужбової практики*. [Fundamentals of Beliefs and Liturgical Practice]. I.2 https://www.chve.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/osnovy_viry.pdf.

⁵⁵ *Біблійна точка зору на ненароджених дітей та висновки для вирішення питання про аборти*. [Biblical perspective on unborn children and conclusions for abortion]. <https://adventist.ua/ru/articles/article/zayavlenie-o-biblejskom-vzglyade-na-nerozhdennuyu-zhizn-i-posledstviyah-abortov/>.

⁵⁶ *Коротке доктринальне твердження Української Лютеранської Церкви*. [A brief doctrinal statement of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church]. 12. <http://ukrlc.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>.

⁵⁷ *Соціальна концепція*. [Social concept]. (Kyiv, 04.02.2013). XII.2. <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/sots%D1%96alna-kontsepts%D1%96ya>.

⁵⁸ F. Rosner, “The Jewish Attitude toward Abortion.” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 10(2), (1968), p. 55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23256252>.

⁵⁹ *Соціальна концепція мусульман України*. [Social concept of Muslims of Ukraine]. 8.3. (Kyiv, 11.12.2017). <https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/1890>.

⁶⁰ *Ісламський погляд на штучне переривання вагітності — слово муфтія*. [Islamic view of abortion — Mufti’s word]. <https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/1769>.

⁶¹ Ioannes Paulus PP. II. *Evangelium vitae*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

initiative to completely ban abortions. Then the public debate began. Several public activists⁶² raised questions in the public sphere about the activities of right-wing radical political parties and movements that use religious narratives and values to influence Ukrainian society and the development of reproductive technologies in medicine, restricting women's rights and depriving them of choice. The list of so-called anti-choice (anti-abortion) organizations and initiatives that call on women to abandon abortion and enshrine this prohibition in law was rather unsystematic.⁶³ It is difficult to separate the strict requirements for the country's leadership to limit women's rights to their own bodies, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of encouraging a free and conscious decision to give new life a chance to develop further, on the other. The ideology of protecting traditional family values, according to feminist researchers, has a negative impact on gender equality in the country, and even gives rise to homophobic sentiments.⁶⁴ However, such conclusions were somewhat exaggerated, on the one hand. On the other hand, the beginning of the war of Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2014 has shifted the issue of gender equality to secondary positions in the public debate.

The new phase of the Russian war against Ukraine has again raised the issue of abortion to the surface of public life, along with its complex ethical aspects. It has been registered an official petition that demanding an abortion ban “for the restoration and growth of the Ukrainian people.”⁶⁵ The justification for this request cannot stand any criticism. Even ethical arguments against surrogacy can be applied to it, in particular the inadmissibility of conversion of unborn children into goods, when the state is the beneficiary. The issue of ethical assessment of abortion after rape has become particularly relevant. One of the victims of military crimes in Bucha, 14-year-old girl made her decision (together with her parents) to give a birth. One of the reasons for that decision is the religious beliefs of her family⁶⁶. There is no official statement yet from individual religious organizations or from the Ukrainian

⁶²Гендер, релігія і націоналізм в Україні.[Gender, religion and nationalism in Ukraine]. (Kyiv: Ltd. «VTS PRINT», 2012), 150 p.

⁶³Г.Ярманова, “Право на вибір: вплив релігійних організацій на репродуктивну політику в Україні”. *Гендер, релігія і націоналізм в Україні*. [H. Yarmanova, The right to choose: the influence of religious organizations on reproductive policy in Ukraine. Gender, religion and nationalism in Ukraine]. (Kyiv: Ltd. «VTS PRINT», 2012), p. 100.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.104.

⁶⁵Про заборону абортів в Україні.[On the ban on abortion in Ukraine]. <https://petition.president.gov.ua/petition/138582>.

⁶⁶A 14-year-old girl from Bucha, who was raped by five Russian invaders, has got pregnant and plans to have a child. 27.04.22. <https://tsn.ua/en/ato/a-14-year-old-girl-from-bucha-raped-by-russian-invaders-plans-to-leave-the-child-2047786.html>.

Council of Churches and Religious Organizations on the attitude of church leaders to the termination of such an unwanted pregnancy.

In general, the position of religious organizations and churches of Ukraine regarding the latest reproductive medicine and abortion seems to be quite consistent. The activities of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations demonstrate a sample of interreligious and interfaith dialogue and possibly elements of the new “Abraham’s ethics.” Spiritual leaders and official leaders try to emphasize delicately the value of prioritization of human life and dignity so as to preserve the humanistic component of medicine. Meanwhile, the development of biotechnology moves much faster than their awareness and therefore impacts substantial assessment in the medium and long term. However, religious leaders have failed to put enough pressure on the legislature to control reproductive technologies, including surrogacy and abortion. We do not now assess whether it is good or bad, but we state the fact – the state regulation of reproductive technologies in Ukraine is characterized by a significant degree of freedom, even permissiveness. However, Ukraine as a rule solves such issues in accordance with international law and within its borders.

Ukrainian Religious Landscape and Ideological Background

According to Razumkov Center’s sociological study, distribution of religions in Ukraine as of 2020 is as follows: 83.5% of the population of Ukraine are Christians, fifteen percent of the population are unaffiliated with religious teachings, the followers of Islam make up 0.5% of the population, followers Judaism make 0.1%. Among Christians 62.3% are Orthodox, 9.6% are Greek Catholic, 1.5% are Protestant, and 8.9% consider themselves “mere Christians.”⁶⁷ These data correlate with a report “Global Religious Landscape” by Pew Research Center.⁶⁸

The number of followers of Islam decreased after 2014. The vast majority of Muslims of Ukraine are Crimean Tatars and ethnical group of Volga Tatar origin. Mufti Said Ismagilov said that about one million Muslims in Ukraine and at least 700,000 of them found themselves in occupation in Crimea and Donbas.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2020 рр. (Інформаційні матеріали). [Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of the citizens of Ukraine: tendencies of 2000-2020 (Information materials)]. (Kyiv: Razumkov Centre, 2020), p. 13. https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf.

⁶⁸*The Changing Global Religious Landscape. A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Major Religious Groups as of 2010.* Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life. (Dec., 2012), p. 50. <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2014/01/global-religion-full.pdf>.

⁶⁹*Ukrainian Muslims.* 2022. <https://umma.in.ua/en/ukrainian-muslims>.

In Ukraine, there are three largest Orthodox Christian Churches, which are subordinated to different centers. These are the Orthodox Church of Ukraine,⁷⁰ which is subordinate directly to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,⁷¹ which may still be subordinate to Moscow Patriarch Kirill, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church,⁷² which retains the Byzantine ritual tradition, and is subordinate to Pope Francis of Rome. Russia's cruel attack in February 2022 caused confusions between the priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and their center in Moscow because their 'chief' Kirill Gundayev blessed the Russian troops for this war. Metropolitan Onufriy appealed "to the President of Russia and ask for an immediate end to the fratricidal war."⁷³ He did not get a public response in Moscow. To avoid accusation of sympathy for the enemy, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church accepted a Resolution condemning the war and disagreed "with the position of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus on the war in Ukraine."⁷⁴ This is not enough, and many people wait more determinative actions. Nowadays many individual churches join to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which is subordinate directly to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Nevertheless, this issue requires a lot of attention and analysis, which is not directly connected with our topic. It seems this situation should not affect numbers of followers Christianity in general but only distribution between churches and denominations.

The official position of these churches on ART and abortions is ethically close. However, the context in which attitudes toward these procedures were highlighted varied greatly across denominations. To some extent, it was due not only to ethical, but also to other, primarily political, and not actually religious factors, which are only exacerbated in the context of the current war of Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Assisted reproductive technologies and abortion are part of human reproductive right, which is the same also for couples of different sexual orientations and for single people. The Orthodox Churches of Ukraine view reproductive rights as part of gender ideology and condemn it, according to their social doctrine⁷⁵ and ideological recommendations from

⁷⁰Православна церква України. 2022. [Orthodox Church of Ukraine]. <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/>

⁷¹Українська православна церква. 2022. [Ukrainian Orthodox Church]. <https://church.ua/>

⁷²Українська Греко-Католицька Церква. 2022. [Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church]. <http://www.ugcc.org.ua/>

⁷³*Appeal of His Beatitude Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Onufriy to the faithful and the citizens of Ukraine.* (Kyiv, 27.02.2022). <https://news.church.ua/2022/02/27/appeal-beatitude-metropolitan-kyiv-ukraine-onufriy-faithful-citizens-ukraine/?lang=en>.

⁷⁴ Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of May 27, 2022.

<https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-church-may-27-2022/?lang=en>.

⁷⁵Соціальна концепція. [Social concept]. (Kyiv, 04.02.2013). XII.2. <http://orthodox.org.ua/page/sots%D1%96alna-kontsepts%D1%96ya>.

Moscow. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church more or less gently but persistently formed the idea among its followers that gender ideology is synonymous with European thinking, which is excessively secularized and sinful in essence, and is forcibly imposed on the traditional mentality of Ukrainians.⁷⁶ Meanwhile the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine does not believe in such an idea but emphasizes in every way that true European culture lays on Christian norms and values, and Ukrainians are historically and culturally an integral part of Europe. However, despite certain ideological nuances, the general cautious and mostly negative attitude of representatives of religious organizations in Ukraine to reproductive rights dominates—especially against the background of the common religious rejection of liberal gender policy. The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations calls gender ideology a new totalitarian ideology used in opposition to “traditional family and European values, which is nothing more than a cynical substitution of concepts and a planned attack on the European choice of our people.”⁷⁷ Thus, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church provoked additional emphasis on religious differences in the dissemination of the church message on the attitude to reproductive technologies and abortions in matters of attachment or, conversely, opposition to European values.

Let us look at the real commitment of Ukrainians to religious traditions and the relation of life practices to Christian values and norms without the ideological factor. According to a recent poll, most Ukrainians consider themselves Orthodox Christians—73% of the population, Greek Catholics—at least 9%, belonging to Protestant denominations and other religious traditions, according to opinion polls, allegedly about one percentage,⁷⁸ which is also surprising against the background of high public activity of Protestant denominations. These somewhat strange sociological data need further clarification.

Echoes of the years of being part of the USSR affected the peculiarities of the disclosure of their own religious affiliation, especially by the followers of Protestant denominations. The long stay of Ukrainian territories in the USSR, where open declaration of religious worldview and attendance at church services could not only cancel professional career growth, but also deprive a believer of a job, is now capable of distorting the religious

⁷⁶Митрополит Волоколамский Иларион (Алфеев). *Христианство в современном мире*. [Metropolitan Volokolamsky Ilarion (Alfeev). Christianity in modern world]. <https://pravoslavie.ru/66779.html>.

⁷⁷Заява ВРЦіРО щодо необхідності захисту традиційних сімейних цінностей українського народу. [Statement of the UCCRO on the need to protect the traditional family values of the Ukrainian people]. (Kyiv, 14.09.2021). <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/statements/uccro-statement-on-protection-of-traditional-family-values>.

⁷⁸Релігійна самоідентифікація населення і ставлення до основних церков України: червень 2021 року. [Religious self-identification of the population and attitude to the main churches of Ukraine: June 2021]. (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology Press Releases and Reports). <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1052&t=9&page=1>.

landscape of our country. The point is that many Protestants, especially the so-called post-Reformation movements, do not call themselves Protestants. At least this is the situation in the Kharkiv Christian Church, where believers call themselves New Testament Christians or just Christians.⁷⁹ The self-identification of these believers as “mere Christians” may also indicate that the Protestant number is greater than the 1.5% in the Razumkov Center study and the number of Ukrainian Protestants is actually a higher percentage due to the number of believers who answered positively, when asked “What religion do you belong to?” did not choose “Protestantism,” but “mere Christians,” whose total number according to the poll is 9%.⁸⁰ In addition, the number of Protestant religious denominations is higher than the number of Protestant religious organizations, which is 10,768 or 29% of the total number of religious organizations in Ukraine.⁸¹ This figure, on the one hand, is a consequence of the greater religious diversity of Protestant organizations, and on the other hand, may indicate a somewhat hidden real number of Protestant Christians.

Another question that surprises, after reading the data of Ukrainian sociology, is the significant difference between the declared religious self-identification of the citizens of Ukraine and their real insufficiently expressed religious behavior. The figure of about 80% of followers of Christianity should be at least approximately equal to the number of people who are guided in their life practices on religious values. However, the percentage of citizens who “recognize the importance of religion in their lives” is only 57%,⁸² and notably “the importance of educating children in religiosity in the family noted only 14% of respondents.”⁸³ Such differences make one wonder about the fictitiousness of the general high level of religiosity of the population of Ukraine shown by sociologists, and especially if we analyze each of the main Christian denominations in Ukraine.

The largest number of believers of Christian denominations in Ukraine who recognize the importance for a believer to be a member of their religious community, attend services, adhere to religious norms and values belongs to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Their

⁷⁹Kharkiv Christian Church. 2022. <http://khcc.center/en/about/>.

⁸⁰*Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2020 рр. (Інформаційні матеріали)*. [Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of the citizens of Ukraine: tendencies of 2000-2020 (Information materials)]. (Kyiv: Razumkov Centre, 2020), p. 13. https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf.

⁸¹Державна служба України з етнополітики та свободисовісті. *Звіт про мережу релігійних організацій в Україні станом на 1 січня 2021 року*. [State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience. *Report on the network of religious organizations in Ukraine as of January 1, 2021*]. <https://dcss.gov.ua/statistics-2020/>.

⁸²*Особливості ...* [Peculiarities ...], p. 6.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 7.

figures range from 87% to 90%.⁸⁴ It is expected that a significant number of both public organizations and socially significant actions and events dedicated to the problems of the family and reproductive health without excessive political involvement and with a traditional Christian value orientation is relevant to this religious denomination. Among them are the civil movement “All together!”⁸⁵ which has existed for more than ten years and conducts a variety of street themed events, interacts with the authorities, publishes analytical and media materials focused on Christian values. Active educational work is carried out by Charitable Foundation “Society – Together for Life”⁸⁶ and the Ukrainian Charitable Foundation “For Human Dignity!”⁸⁷ These charitable foundations disseminate information about the symptom-thermal method of recognizing fertility, which is approved by the Roman Catholic and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Churches as a method of planning a pregnancy in married life.

Conclusion

Analysis of open sources and official websites of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church shows the involvement of these churches in all-Ukrainian projects related to reproductive health and family issues, which were initiated by Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. But the main focus of both the news feed, agenda, and the activities of these denominations, in addition to the actual religious issues, had other priorities. The activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church concerned primarily the economic aspect of church life—the consecration of new churches, lawsuits for church property, etc. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, in addition to direct pastoral activities, highlighted involvement in political life and issues related to the aftermath of the war in Ukraine.

Thus, despite the formally high level of self-determination of religious affiliation to the Christian faith in the population of Ukraine, real religiosity as implementation of religious norms and rules in everyday life was observed in only half of the population, according to the study “Features of religious and ecclesiastical self-determination of Ukrainian citizens: trends 2000-2020.” If priorities and values are outside the Christian world of values, public opinion will not actively respond to the actions and appeals of caring Christian activists, including on

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Громадянський рух «Всі разом!». [Civil movement "All together!"]. 2022. <https://vsirazom.ua/>

⁸⁶Благодійний фонд “Товариство – Разом за життя” [Charitable Foundation “Society – Together for Life”]. 2022. <https://togetherforlife.kiev.ua/>

⁸⁷Всеукраїнський благодійний фонд «За гідність людини!». [Ukrainian Charitable Foundation “For Human Dignity!”]. 2022. <https://www.4dignity.eu/home>.

the careful treatment of reproductive technologies and observance of the right to life of the unborn.

We are currently observing how the new phase of Russian aggression against Ukraine affects religious landscape of our country, especially changes the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is subordinate to Kirill Gundyayev, and how it affects real religious commitment. Anyway, even a high level of social solidarity with religious values and moral norms cannot change the fact of solitude of limit situations in human life when only his or her personal religion does matter. Most individuals are acting outside of the scope of prescribed religious beliefs that appear in human reproductive ethics even though they identify themselves in name with affiliation of religious organizations that are opposed to such behavior. It means that ethical debates on human activity spheres, which lead to an individual worldview, personal values, and ethics can never be completed.

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