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THE ADVENTIST DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF AGENCY IN THE CONDITIONS OF WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

The study presents two positions of Ukrainian Adventists in relation to volunteer work in the conditions of war. The first position is professional, which involves the provision of charitable assistance to people from the Adventist Relief and Development Agency in Ukraine. Such charitable assistance is based on the principle of charity and is aimed solely at providing the necessary assistance to victims. The second position is to also assist the affected members of the Seventh-day Adventist Churches, as people who do not have professional volunteer training. With the second category of helping Adventists, a number of controversial issues tend to arise. Namely, when members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ukraine mix humanitarian aid and preaching about the teachings of the Church into one process there is a dissonance between the mission of the Adventist World Relief and Development Agency and the actions of the members of the church to which it belongs. The study attempts to look at the problem from different angles and assess the impact of humanitarian aid from ordinary church members in Ukraine on the reputation of Adventists in general.

Keywords: War in Ukraine, unconditional help, lack of professional volunteers.

Relevance of the Research Topic

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022, at last count, about 6.6 million Ukrainians left the country, another 6.6 million have become internally displaced persons, and 17.7 million people need humanitarian assistance. It is shown: "As of August 15, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine recorded more than 13,000 civilian casualties (5,514 killed and 7,698 injured) since the start of the war, although the real numbers could be much higher."¹ Understanding the level of damage caused, namely material, physical, psychological, moral, and others, the church organizations of Ukraine responded and joined with the help of

¹ "Криза в Україні 2022: 6 місяців гуманітарного реагування," *IOM UN. Migration*, last modified 2022, <https://ukraine.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11861/files/documents.8F.pdf>. [Crisis in Ukraine 2022: 6 Months of Humanitarian Response].

believers, church humanitarian organizations,² various social projects, etc., to help everyone who needs it. One such organization is ADRA,³ the Adventist Relief and Development Agency, founded by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴ Christian churches want to support the needy, however, there are always a number of differences in how churches provide humanitarian assistance that non-religious humanitarian centers and organizations do not have. Therefore, the **purpose** of our study is to highlight and evaluate these various aspects, using the example of ADRA, as well as the example of their interaction, without diminishing or exaggerating the role of some organizations over others.

The Main Results of the Study

According to the report posted on the official website of ADRA Ukraine, as of October 7, 2022, assistance to victims of this organization was provided in these following areas:

Evacuation from hot spots, social transportation—more than 46 thousand people received assistance; food aid in the form of food parcels, bread, etc.—more than 2,800,000 people; supply of drinking water—delivered more than 194,000 liters; financial support—the total amount of payments is UAH 189543600; as well as the supply of medicines, psychological and informational support.⁵

It can be said with certainty that such areas of work are also priorities for other humanitarian organizations, whose statistics can be much larger. However, since the study is based not on comparing the amount of aid, but on assessing the relationship between social and spiritual in the process of implementing humanitarian aid, we will focus on this. As a basis for the study, we took the humanitarian organization ADRA Ukraine, which is a division of the World ADRA. The organization itself was founded by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has a long history of over 100 years. ADRA chose the credo “Changing one life, we change the whole world.” Although ADRA is the global humanitarian arm of the SDA Church, it always positions itself as a charitable organization; one which is guided by basic religious values (faith as motivation and “source of strength,”

² Valentyna Kuryliak, and Maksym Balaklytskyi, (2021) "Armed Conflict and Protestant Volunteering in Eastern Ukraine," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41: Iss. 4, Article 20, pp. 268-287. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss4/20>.

³ Valentyna Kuryliak, (2021) "Activities of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Eastern Ukraine," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41: Iss. 4, Article 21, pp. 288-310. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss4/21>.

⁴ ADRA Ukraine, <https://www.adra.ua/>.

⁵ “Продовольча і фінансова допомога, психологічна підтримка, соціальні перевезення — підсумки тижня ADRA Ukraine.” *ADRA Ukraine*. Last modified 2022. <https://www.adra.ua/b8/>. [Food and Financial Assistance, Psychological Support, Social Transportation - the Results of the Week of ADRA Ukraine]

“biblical beliefs in justice, compassion and love,”⁶) but at the same time distances itself from external religious practices. In its briefs for employees and partners, the charitable organization emphasizes that “ADRA Ukraine helps all those in need, regardless of their religion and attitude towards religion in general. So, we ask you not to focus on the religious component of the process. We also ask you not to connect the gospel ministry with the distribution of humanitarian aid, as we help all those in need, without exception.”⁷

The problem is that such an argument for completely separating evangelical preaching from social service is not clear to all Adventist believers. After all, many church members are accustomed to understanding social service, including the issuance of humanitarian assistance to those in need, as a part of missionary service. Such Adventists may consider it a sacred duty to spread doctrinal teaching to those in need of help. Many believers are bound to wonder why they can't combine humanitarian aid with preaching when they still help “everyone in need without exception”—that is, agreeing with preaching or accepting doctrines is not a condition to receive help. However, such Adventists would like to make the condition for people to receive help not their religious views, but only the formal hearing of a sermon—with the hope that at least some people will be interested in this sermon for its content.

It should be said that specially trained Adventist volunteers working for ADRA Ukraine are familiar with the instructions of the charitable organization and follow them. In this instance, we are talking about Adventists who can be involved in the field by helping spontaneously in a situation where it was not possible to undergo special instruction. The vision of the process of organizing help by such Adventists can be as follows: inviting people to the church with a promise to help, a pastor preaching to an audience of those invited, and only at the end of the event providing humanitarian assistance. Ordinary Adventists (ordinary church members) may not see such a sequence as a problem because they wholeheartedly believe that, above all, a person should receive “spiritual bread” that can save for eternity. It doesn't matter if it happens individually or publicly, but in essence, the motive here is the desire to give to the person in need something more important than the physical content of which the humanitarian aid consists of. At the same time, such an understanding of the “sacred duty of the believer,” and such a sequence of actions often

⁶ ADRA Graphic Standards Manual & Branding Guide, n.d., 7. https://www.brandebook.com/index.php?option=com_jdownloads&view=download&id=3161&catid=34&Itemid=1034&lang=en.

⁷ Brief for Partners of ADRA Ukraine.

leads to disappointment in the social service itself and sometimes even to its rejection. After all, those believers expect that the sermon should immediately affect people from the world and make them more spiritual, but in practice they are faced with the fact that in many cases no social service (not only those related to ADRA) is effective. As a rule, poor strata of the population, who may not have little education, but have problems with unhealthy habits, problems in the family, with health, etc., come for humanitarian assistance. Accordingly, many of them display uncivilized behavior at the points of distribution of aid. This manifests itself in fighting among themselves, in finding out who got the most help, or why it can't be received every week. Most of these accusations are unfounded since the separation of products or other humanitarian cargo occurs according to general rules. One of the pastors who helps distribute humanitarian aid in the South of Ukraine said that once people came for humanitarian aid who did not meet the criteria of those to whom it was intended, they went to complain to the mayor of the city about the church. The mayor advised me to go and thank the church volunteers for the amount of help the church had given since the start of the war. One person from this group returned and apologized to the volunteers.⁸

Among such people, swearing or complaining is their habit. Observing such behavior by some recipients of aid, ordinary believers see the difference between themselves and those who are being helped. They may lose the desire to continue helping, realizing that the spiritual is not really of interest in the majority of those who come. Such disappointment can lead to a certain self-aggrandizement, the perception of oneself as more righteous, more pleasing to God than those who do not appreciate the fullness of the gifts that the Church has prepared for them.

Another problem may be disappointment from those who come to receive humanitarian assistance. Occasionally, one hears stories such as the following (it is not about getting help specifically from ADRA, but this case demonstrates the vision of social service for many believers). One person, knowing the condition that in order to receive help, one must attend five meetings in the church, already after the third one asked if it was possible to receive at least part of the help so as not to attend the remaining meetings. He was told: No, you need to visit all five, because help is not divided into parts. In this case,

⁸ V. Kurylyak and G. Merenkov. "Unconditional assistance as a basic principle of the mission. Aspects of interaction between ADRA Ukraine and believers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." *Anti-crisis development of social and economic processes in the conditions of globalization: Materials of the XVII international scientific and practical conference*, (Bucha, 2022): Additional abstracts: Kyiv: Millennium, 2022. pp. 76-81.

the strict conditions of attending the entire series of sermons in order to receive help may repel people because of the manipulative nature of such evangelism. Attending sermons can be a mere formality.

Therefore, one can understand the position of ADRA leaders, who insist on the absolute unconditional distribution of humanitarian aid by church volunteers. Not just because of the demands by charity's donors. Thus, according to the vice-president of ADRA Ukraine, Artem Dikhtyaruk, such social service is much more effective when nothing is demanded in return for help. For example, some people themselves could ask what kind of organization provides such assistance; then a church volunteer or pastor can talk about ADRA, about the church, and invite them to worship—but only when the beneficiary asks the question himself or herself. “To impose yourself is wrong. On the contrary, it seems to me that it pushes people away from God and the church,” Artem Dikhtyaruk maintains.

Thus, the vision of social service and its connection with the gospel message is fundamentally different for ADRA workers and for many believers of the SDA Church. ADRA workers are trying to ensure that humanitarian aid is distributed by church volunteers to all people without additional conditions, though some believers desire to be missionaries for these people. Social service itself is considered a part of the mission of the church and can indirectly make some people open to spiritual truths, since such unconditional service enhances the reputation of the church and its image.

At the same time, many Adventists (ordinary believers and pastors) are determined anyway to use humanitarian aid as a missionary tool, an occasion for evangelization, while believing that this does not create any problem because the aid is still distributed free of charge. They feel the condition that one has to attend lectures or sermons before receiving help should show the person's interest, but also should help the church fulfill its mission to share the biblical message with the world.

Conclusion

It is clear that the above two positions contradict each other. What is the source of this contradiction? The following factor plays a significant role in this. Adventists are accustomed to perceiving the physical, social, and spiritual in integrity, and the inseparable unity of these components. Therefore, it is difficult for many of them to imagine help through the physical or social components without a spiritual component. In addition, Adventist teaching contains such statements, particularly about medical missionary work, where it is said that it is the “right hand of the gospel,” because the medical ministry “opens

the door” for biblical preaching. In addition, gospel programs have become a tradition for the church, during which, part of the lectures are devoted to health and part to spiritual truths. Free distribution of Bibles at evangelistic programs is also conducted after attending a certain number of lectures. By analogy, many believers perceive humanitarian service in a similar way, believing that it is called upon to “open the door” for preaching to people who need humanitarian assistance. Although this instrumentalization of social service reveals a certain manipulateness that believers may not be fully aware of, most of them operate within their own church traditions because it is the church that teaches to use other types of service as a springboard for missionary work. The way out of this situation is the understanding that “the social must precede the missionary,”⁹ and not vice versa. It means that Adventists in Ukraine need both instruction from charitable organizations, such as ADRA Ukraine, and a rethinking of the mechanisms of communication between spiritual, social, and missionary.

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