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MEDIATIZATION OF UKRAINIAN PROTESTANTISM IN THE BOOK CULTURE EPOCH

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Summary: Development of Ukrainian Protestantism from the 16th to the end of the 20th century is embedded in history of religious printing, which is the second phase of mediatization. During this period of narrowing of the communication subject field, egalitarianism, lowering of “entering” requirements for communicants and the audience took place. In short, it was removing the recipient’s social status as a condition of access to religious information. Analysis of factors and manifestations of this phase allows to formulate the principle of mediatization of religious life: “saturation of the religious sphere with communication means attacks the social status of recognized churches, giving religious minorities a chance to reach otherwise inaccessible audiences.”

This paper consists of studying communication of Ukrainian religious organizations with their target audience in the context of mediatization theory. The purpose of this article is to show the ways in which Ukrainian Protestant churches
transformed under the influence of new communication channels, especially printing technology.

Mediatization is the technical mediation of human communication. The first phase of informational exchange in mediatization is writing, the second one is printing, and the third one is electronic communication. Printing is a technological precondition of religious sphere mediatization. Protestant communication in the Ukrainian territory is embedded in the second phase of mediatization, i.e. history of (religious) printing.

The second mediatization challenged the exclusive authority of historical churches to possess and understand Holy Scripture by copying the Biblical text. Due to the rise of book publishing, Protestant centers tried to saturate the informational sphere with printed Bibles. Biblical text perception (listening and later reading) gradually became a personal practice. Printing as the leading communication means elucidates the common features of a variegated picture of Protestant movements in the Ukrainian territory, such as inclination to rationalism, the “sectarian” church organization, and the individualistic consciousness of the movement's followers.

We reckon the history of Protestant communication from the 16th century, when the term “Protestantism” appeared. That space of time included two periods. Printing communication of early Protestantism lasted from the 16th to the end of the 17th century. Printing communication of late Protestantism took place in the late 19th to the end of the

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20th century. Early Protestantism was the pre-journalism age, when only books were published. In the 19th century, late Protestantism used booklets and treatises, including those of Orthodox publishing houses. In the 20th century magazines dominated.

The distinctions between these periods are explained by the difference between the magisterial or “high” Reformation, and public or radical Reformation on Ukrainian ground. The communication of the magisterial Reformation was characterized by a breadth of views, inclination to ecumenism, tolerance (Renaissance thinkers expressed disregard toward confessional differences), use of advanced technologies, European orientation, union with the Orthodox against Catholics, and sporadic protection of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’s Orthodox population’s rights by Protestants. The second period is distinguished by a lower intellectual level in the informational product, conservatism, intolerance, technological lagging, and the alternate converging of churches with socialism against state Orthodoxy as well as the reverse. Ukrainian Protestants gained access to electronic mass media only in 1990s with Soviet Union collapse.

Within the two above-mentioned periods, there was a gradual narrowing of the subject field of communication, egalitarianism, and a lowering of the “entry” requirements for communicants and the audience. In short, the recipient’s social status was removed as a condition of access to religious information. Both periods are characterized by social and political instability, or rather anarchy, that made possible the short periods of religious freedom.

During the first period of mediatization, book publication (“in the second half of
the 16th century Protestant literature in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth
outnumbered Catholic one”\(^5\)) was a part of the wider cultural program that included
schooling, translating, literature, and science. Protestant educational institutions were
more open-minded than other churches' in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They
also were characterized by the “presence of a secular component”\(^6\) that provided higher
academic level than Catholic schools, educating not only priests but also political and
cultural figures.

Calvinists played the important role in preparing the Polish Radziwiłł Bible
(1563) that impelled publication of the Ostrog Bible (1581). Vasyl Tiapynskyi, a
Socinian, translated the Gospel into the Slavonic-Russian language.

Laymen activity allowed researchers to speak about the “inner reformationality of
Ukrainian Orthodoxy”\(^7\). Scientists see the reading and interpretation of Biblical texts by
secular individuals, and Orthodox brotherhoods (the search for real congregational life)
as Protestant phenomena in Ukrainian lands' Orthodoxy.

The social-psychological prerequisite of the mediatization of the Ukrainian
religious sphere was the presence of active recipients of religious non-fiction (in book
and later press formats), which under the above-mentioned conditions formed Protestant
communicators stratum. At different times Orthodox Ukrainians demanded democracy in
church life, understandability of service, and participation in church divine services
equally with clergy. These requirements of feedback, equality, and rationality turned


\(^6\) Ibid., p.130.

\(^7\) Історія релігій в Україні, р. 8.
observers of divine services into active participants of church interactions and produced a new potential audience of religious communication. As in other national versions of the Reformation, Biblical text (in understandable language) often appeared to be the central ideological basis of resisting abuse by the church hierarchy.

In the middle of the 19th century, traditions of active laymen set a basis for the gospel awakening among peasants in the south of the Russian Empire, with their seeking for holiness in an Orthodox context and *volens nolens* overrunning the borders of Orthodox tradition. “Sectarian” services were improvised and highly interactive, and this was not accidental. Ukrainians like to sing at church ceremonies, and “sects” attracted them by an opportunity to sing together. Therewith, peasants of that time “criticized Orthodoxy as the theological basis for their enslavement by nobility”.

Illiterate peasants built their contacts on personal connections and verbal communication. The informational network of reformation groups of Orthodox origin was formed by traveling preachers and messengers, who later read the movement leaders' epistles. Services were based on charismatic displays (note *Duhobors’* and *Malyovantsy’* book metaphors) and oral presentation of homilies, songs and poems.

Soon religious dissidents adopted the culture of reading spiritual literature and began to differ from the rest of the peasants by their higher literacy level. Schismatics, “supported present schools and founded their own. Ukrainian *Stundists* were the first peasants who made their own educational system in the south of the Russian Empire.

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Those were the first schools that belonged to peasants themselves in a Ukrainian village.9

During the 19th century, access of peasants to religious literature had already been growing for some time. The Russian Bible Society (RBS, 1813-1826) became the precedent of mass religious enlightenment. RBS branched out in Kamyanets-Podilskyi (1814), Kharkiv, Simferopol and Odesa (1816), Kyiv and Volodymyr-Volynskyi (1817), Chernihiv and Poltava (1818). They had been selling certain editions of books from the Elizabethan Bible in Slavonic-Russian (1751). In 1858-1876, the Synod committee worked on a Bible translation that was fated to gain “canonical” status for the next generations of Russian-speaking Christians, and even more for Protestants. Spiritual-Moral Reading Encouragement Society (1876-1884) issued more than 200 popular brochures with an average circulation of 10,000 copies each.10 Colporteurs brought spiritual editions to the remote regions of the Empire.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Protestant magazines appeared in the western (Stanislaw, Ternopil, Rava Ruska, Kolomyia, Kremianets) and eastern Ukraine (Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv). Their publication was forcibly stopped on Soviet Ukraine territory in 1928; this press continued until 1939 in western Ukraine. Only there such longstanding publications as “Vira i Nauka” (Faith and Science) (14 years of publication), “Pislanets Pravdy” (Truth Messenger) (12 years), and “Prymyrytel” (Peacemaker) (10 years) were possible. The average time of Protestant periodical publishing in Soviet Ukraine was 2 years (or even less).

9Ibid., 223.
Since then, Protestants perceived journalism as an indispensable component of church life along with mission, piety, confessional education, and other religious activity. When there was no legal possibility for journalism then ersatz appeared regularly, such as circulars and open letters, verbal correspondence during preachers' visits, and later self-publishing (samizdat).

After the Second World War, the Communist Party legalized certain denominations in exchange for their efforts to improve the Soviet Empire image that was demonized by repressions in the 1930s. The churches were meant to provide internal patriotic education. They were also expected to make efforts in improving the external Soviet public relations by means of portraying on the international level the USSR as a peacemaking state. The all-USSR Council of the Evangelical Christian-Baptists which was the Protestant churches association, was initiated by the state authority, received the permission during its foundation in 1945 to publish the “Bratskii Vestnik” (Brotherly Messenger) magazine where news from Ukrainian Baptist and Pentecostal churches was an important element.

Beginning in the 1960s, self-publishing became the main manifestation of Evangelical public protest against the USSR war with religion. The main self-publishing output was books: handwritten, made on the printing machine, or copied on the self-made printing presses.

From the 1970s, the role of foreign journalistic output increased because the Cold War strengthened the anti-Soviet attitude among Christian fundamentalists of bourgeois
countries. Western Protestants took part in long-wave radio station broadcasting that beamed to the USSR territory.\(^{11}\) They also smuggled in books and audio-video records.

At the end of 1980s, the international contacts of many churches became legal and permanent. A constantly growing flow of free literature (mostly translations) from abroad poured into the USSR. The “first swallow” of censorship-free communication of Ukrainian Protestants was Baptist newspaper “Khrystyanske Zhyttia” (*Christian Life*), founded in 1989 in Kyiv.

After the celebration of the 1000\(^{th}\) anniversary of Christianity in Russia the Ukrainian religious sphere entered the third period of mediatization, having accessed electronic communication. Gospel sermons became a common element of Ukrainian wire radio. From the beginning of the 1990s western preachers, mostly Pentecostal, appeared regularly on domestic television. Their Ukrainian pastors-coreligionists tried to promote video records of their speeches to local TV channels. From the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century the Protestant Internet has been intensively developing.

Electronic media dominance brought out a change of religious consciousness. In a post-totalitarian society, Ukrainian Protestantism found itself in unexpected conditions. Instead of Christian revival caused by printed Bible reading, it was surrounded by the relativity of postmodern television culture that qualifies religion as a “low-rating” topic. Instead of common ideology, religious or anti-religious, the informational space is filled with advertisements and a kaleidoscope of permissive opinions, thereby, the, “religiousness of both majority and minority groups undergoes reorganizations, taking

subculture forms.”12 Youth either dissociates from “herd” church life, or inclines toward “neo-protestant” churches of charismatic type that cultivate spectacular pompous rites instead of conscious simplicity. Emotions and miracles take place of theological structures, sectarian factions are substituted by calls for all-Christian fraternization whose boundaries reaches even inter-religious space through involvement of the Judaic tradition. “Miracles fever” and consumerism have been replacing modesty and diligence in the “prosperity gospel”.

**Conclusion.** The succession of the mediatization periods proves a dialectical interdependence of communication technologies and a religious audience. The audience opposed the influence of technology, used it for its purposes, gave it a specific coloring, and at the same time was transformed according to the peculiar features of each technology. In this case, it was primarily printing technology.

The conducted study lets us formulate the principle of religious life mediatization: “saturation of the religious sphere with communication means attacks the social status of recognized churches, giving religious minorities the chance to reach otherwise inaccessible audiences.” It is hardly correct to see “radical changes under the influence of technology” everywhere. Technology implementation does not necessarily revolutionize the church. Not without reason, religion is the most conservative social sphere. However, (communication) technology gives minority religious organizations a powerful means to struggle with negative public opinion and even to influence the religious balance of society.

Works cited


