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INTERACTION OF RELIGION AND MEDICINE IN THE PERIOD OF EXISTENTIAL CHALLENGES: UKRAINIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract. The social transitivity of Ukrainian society has only intensified as a result of the implementation of quarantine restrictions in March 2020 that covered various areas of the country's social life. In the situation of transferring most industries and services to remote work, the problems of an existential choice in citizens' perception of quarantine restrictions and the need to ensure their own economic and physiological survival in a severe socio-economic crisis in Ukraine and military aggression by Russia appeared in 2014. In this context, it remains relevant to define how medical and religious organizations should help Ukrainian citizens adapt to the existential and social challenges provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic. The peculiarities of Ukrainians' perception of the premature death threat, the growing sense of helplessness, and the impact of fatalities provoked by COVID-19 are exacerbated in the modern Ukrainian society by the post-traumatic syndrome of the Holodomor of 1932-1933, the Chernobyl disaster, annexation of the Crimea and military aggression by Russia. The conclusions of the article outline the similarities with global trends in Ukrainians' perception of COVID-19 (confusion, panic and suicidal moods) and features of the national perception of the existential threat: critical attitude of Ukrainians to public medicine, focus on self-medication, mostly positive attitude of an individual to doctors, confidence of the citizens of Ukraine that only the rich will receive proper care and vaccination, etc. The article also analyzes the role of religious organizations in the process of adaptation of Ukrainian society to the existential challenges of today in the field of palliative care and psychological support of victims of hostilities, including the adaptation of citizens to live in quarantine and a post-pandemic environment.

Keywords: existential challenges, famine, Chernobyl catastrophe, military aggression, COVID-19 pandemic, religious organizations, medical care.

Introduction

In the post-industrial society at the beginning of the 21st century, different trends in the perception of the interaction between religion and medicine collided in the public consciousness of the citizens of Ukraine. On the one hand, the influence of total communist secularism is still present in the post-Soviet Ukrainian society, as it persists in the worldview of many people, primarily scientists and physicians. The medical scientist in the Soviet state, and in the long run in post-communist Ukraine, was and is perceived as a representative of the secular, atheistic, natural-scientific sphere, which a priori should be the bearer of the materialist worldview. On the other hand, getting rid of totalitarianism together with the movement of Ukraine towards democracy in recent decades has led to a renaissance of religion and religiosity in individual and public consciousness in Ukraine.

Religious Renaissance in Post-Soviet Ukraine in the Context of Medical Development

After the collapse of the USSR and the formation of an “ideological vacuum,” there was a wide-spread opinion that the principles of religiosity were seriously undermined by the secular scientific geoculture of the USSR. But religion, deprived of the state support in a totalitarian state, has not lost its viability. In recent decades, the growth of religiosity in Ukraine, as well as in other post-Soviet countries, has been accelerating. The researchers from the American research institute *Pew Research Center* cite data that shows only 15% of Ukrainians between 1970 and 1980 saw features of religiosity in their country, while in 2017 there were already 59% of such respondents.¹ After 1991, the revival of religiosity in the countries of the former Soviet Union appears to be an objective reality, as it is a reaction to a situation in which for 70 years the official ideology demanded strict loyalty to scientific and atheistic worldviews only. This automatically drove most believers, including scientists and physicians, underground.²

¹“Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe.” *National and religious identities converge in a region once dominated by atheist regimes*. May 10, 2017. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>. Accessed 11.06.2020.

²By analogy, we can mention the People's Republic of China, where officially, according to research of the sociological agency WIN/GallupInternational, 47% of the population are atheists. See: “Больше всего атеистов в Китае, а меньше всего – среди арабских стран”. [“Most atheists are in China, and least of all – among Arab

The collapse of the Soviet ideology, which followed the collapse of the USSR itself, not only stimulated the revival of religiosity as a social phenomenon, but also revealed a significant number of latent believers in society.

Ukraine, according to the study by the Razumkov's Centre's sociological service, is one of the countries with a dominant Orthodox tradition, whereby in 2020 75.4% of Ukrainians have positioned themselves as Orthodox (supporters of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine – 34%, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) – 13.8%, just Orthodox – 27.6%), 8.2% positioned themselves as the followers of the Greek Catholic Church, 0.4% – the Roman Catholic Church, 0.7% – Protestant and Evangelical Churches, 0.6% – other religious communities, etc. Thus, it remains a state with a multi-religious society, where only 5.6% of citizens called themselves non-believers.³

According to various estimates, in 2001-2020 from 74% to 86% of the population of Ukraine declare their faith in God and belong to a religious community. Thus, in 2017, 86% of Ukrainians declared their faith in God.⁴ But it should be kept in mind that the religiosity of modern Ukrainians is often combined with the lack of real church membership of believers and active manifestations of “ritual church membership,” i. e. regular church attendance and participation in the life of the religious community.

In relation to science in general and medical science in particular, modern Ukrainians have quite contradictory views, which is partially explained by the rapid transition from the positions of extreme secularism and atheism to faith in God. Although the majority of the population positions themselves as those who believe in the existence of a God-creator, they are not so unanimous in relation to evolutionism. Thus, 54% of Ukrainians in 2017 said that humans and other living beings evolve over time, while 34% said that living beings exist in their modern state from the very beginning.⁵ Here we should mention that the highest level of support for the theory of evolution is observed in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

countries.”].

https://news.24tv.ua/ru/bolshe_vsego_ateistov_v_kitae_a_menshe_vsego__sredi_arabskih_stran_n339237. Accessed 11.09.2020.

³“Конфесійна та церковна належність громадян України (січень 2020 р. соціологія).” *Разумков Центр*. [“Confessional and ecclesiastical affiliation of citizens of Ukraine (January 2020 sociology.” *Razumkov's Center*.]. <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/konfesiina-ta-tserkovna-nalezhnist-gromadian-ukrainy-sichen-2020r>. Accessed 10.22.2020.

⁴“Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe”. *National and religious identities converge in a region once dominated by atheist regimes*. May 10, 2017. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-beliefs/>. Accessed 11.06. 2020.

⁵“Science and religion. Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe.” *National and religious identities converge in a region once dominated by atheist regimes*. May 10, 2017. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/science-and-religion/>. Accessed 09.07.2020.

in the Czech Republic (83%) and Estonia (74%) in particular.⁶ At the same time, answering the question whether there is a conflict between science and religion, 50% of Ukrainians said that there is no such conflict, and 39% that there is one. For comparison, in Greece the proportion of answers to this question is 22% vs. 74%, in Croatia – 27% vs. 66%, Poland – 36% vs. 54%, Russia – 47% vs. 43%, Estonia – 56% vs. 37%.⁷

These data correlate with the results of the research by Rice University sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund. She surveyed 1,646 academic scientists from 21 elite US universities from 2005-2009, concluded that the share of believers among the leading US scholars was 50%. Although this study has inspired a discussion on methodological practices, it at the same time questioned the common opinion about the relationship between secularization and the development of science. This allowed the researcher to conclude: “Much of what we thought about the faith of prominent scientists was wrong. “Irresistible enmity” between science and religion is just a caricature, a clichéd thought, which may be a good satire on group thinking, but it hardly reflects reality.”⁸

Similar to the situation in the US, we can assume that against the background of the religious renaissance in modern Ukraine there is an increasing recognition of the importance of interaction between scientific and religious institutions for the sake of achieving truth by a significant part of Ukrainians. The orientation of at least half of the population on the harmonious coexistence of religion and science, religion and evidence-based medicine is noticeable.

However, despite the fact that citizens of modern Ukraine recognize the possibility of harmonious coexistence of religion and science, religious and scientific worldview, Ukrainians' perceptions of the mutual influence of medicine and religion is largely dependent on a wide range of existential challenges that belong to both the historical past of Ukraine and its present. Involving the consideration of challenges only in the 20th and 21st centuries, we briefly refer to the violent secularization and “de-deification,” that accompanied the Communist revolution, genocide and famine inspired by the state authorities, the man-made Chernobyl catastrophe, worldview crisis due to the violation of good-neighborly, “fraternal” relations between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples as a result of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. At the same time, in the situation of a permanent structural

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Elaine Howard Ecklund. *Science vs Religion: What Scientists Really Think*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

https://books.google.com.ua/books?id=v6Pn1kbYjAEC&q=elaine+howard+ecklund&redir_esc=y#v=snippet&q=elaine%20howard%20ecklund&f=false. Accessed 08.25. 2020.

economic crisis in recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic is a great existential challenge for Ukrainians. While completely aware that Ukrainian society in the last century faced other existential challenges (such as the violent death of millions of Ukrainians as a result of the two world wars, the famine of 1921-1922, and the mass Stalinist repressions of the 1930s), one article cannot consider them all.

The Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine as an Existential Challenge of Human Existence

The trauma of the modern Ukrainian society is manifested primarily in the post-genocidal syndrome, which appeared among Ukrainians as a result of three famines provoked or inspired by the Soviet authorities in Ukraine in the twentieth century. The worst of them was the Holodomor – a purposeful genocide of Ukrainians in 1932-1933, which, according to various estimates, resulted in the deaths of 3 to 8 million Ukrainians. According to the estimates of the famous Ukrainian historian S. Kulchytsky, the losses in the Ukrainian SSR only from the Holodomor of 1932-1933 amounted to at least 3.238,000 dead.⁹

To a large extent, Ukrainian society up to this day has not coped with its consequences in the economic, demographic, socio-cultural and psychological spheres. It will be recalled that officially in the USSR in the 1930s, doctors did not diagnose “died of starvation,” but at best – “died of dystrophy.” Thus, the lion's share of the Ukrainians who died of starvation was never included in the statistics of deaths in the USSR, “the fairest state on Earth.”

Along with the physical genocide in the 1930s, Ukrainians were subjected to a “spiritual” genocide. During these years, religious communities were actively destroyed, and clergymen were subjected to mass repression, tens of thousands of them were purposefully shot. Although the true extent of the extermination of priests and believers in Ukraine during the Soviet era still needs to be clarified, by the end of the 1930s, as Natalia Rubleva argues, only 3% of the pre-revolutionary number of Orthodox parishes remained in Ukraine. There

⁹С. Кульчицький. “Голодомор 1932-1933 рр. в Україні як геноцид.” *Проблеми історії України: факти, судження, пошуки*. 2005, Вип. 14, с. 292. [“The Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine as Genocide.” *Problems of Ukrainian history: facts, judgments, searches*.]. <http://dspace.nbuv.gov.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/51425/14-Kulchytsky.pdf?sequence=1>. Accessed 10.06.2020.

was one church in Odessa, and two parishes with three priests remaining in the Kyiv eparchy.¹⁰

Due to the total ideological pressure and the direct threat of physical destruction, the Soviet citizen was afraid to show religiosity in the official environment, as well as in his/her own family. In political and social life, the Soviet citizen could position himself/herself only as an atheist. Gradually there appeared the conviction that instead of relying on God and divine grace, the Soviet citizen in the sphere of his/her spiritual and physical existence should rely only on the “will of the party.” In the existential context, one had to lose faith in the higher essence, and rely only on official authority.

The Chernobyl Disaster as an Existential Challenge of the Physical and Spiritual Health of Ukrainians

The second existential challenge to the existence of Ukrainians in terms of their faith in God and faith in the possibility of medicine was the Chernobyl disaster on April 26, 1986. Millions of Ukrainians have fallen victim to a human-made catastrophe that threatened their very existence. To the hundreds of dead in the short term, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians irradiated can be added. According to N. Kovalenko, and the official data, as of January 1, 2016, there were 1.961.000 victims of the Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine, 210,000 of whom were killed in the actual accident and 1.751,000 civilian victims in the years following. In addition, 49,000 workers that disabled the radiation around the nuclear power plant and 405,000 civilians became disabled in various groups.¹¹

According to the results of a joint study of the medical consequences of the Chernobyl accident, conducted in 1997 by the US Cancer Institute and the National Center for Radiation Medicine of the National Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine, every third case of leukemia in Chernobyl was the result of radiation exposure.¹²

¹⁰Наталія Рубльова. “Репресії проти “церковників” і “сектантів” в УРСР, 1917–1939 рр.” *З архівів ВУЧК-ГПУ-НКВД-КГБ*. 2008, № 28, р. 219. [“Repression against ‘churchmen’ and ‘sectarians’ in the USSR, 1917-1939.” *From the archives of VUNK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*.]. http://resource.history.org.ua/publ/gpu_2007_28_1_205. Accessed 10.13.2020.

¹¹Наталія Коваленко. “Жертви Чорнобиля і медичні наслідки радіації.” *Радіо Свобода*. 18 квітня 2016 р. [“Chernobyl Victims and the Medical Consequences of Radiation” *Radio Liberty*.]. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27677731.html>. Accessed 09.25.2020.

¹²О.Лігостова, Р. Дейниченко. “Чорнобиль і рак: українсько-американське дослідження.” *Голос Америки*. 26 квітня 2019. [“Chernobyl and cancer: Ukrainian-American study.” *Voice of America*.]. <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/chornobyl-i-rak-ukrainsko-amerykanski-doslidzhennia/4892614.html>. Accessed 11.03.2020.

Most of the workers that disabled the radiation around the nuclear power plant, and victims were never able to receive adequate medical and social assistance either in the Soviet medical system or in Ukraine after 1991, when it became independent. Probably, the embodiment of the extreme cynicism towards the state following the Chernobyl accident was the payment to the residents of the affected areas of the equivalent of one Ukrainian Hryvnias (UAH) per month, which amounted to US10-20 cents.

The feeling of existential insecurity of the Ukrainian population as a result of the Chernobyl accident only intensified after the rapid collapse of the USSR, accompanied by a significant drop in standards of living and mass unemployment. In such conditions, along with the already mentioned religious renaissance in Ukraine, the interest of the population in alternative forms of spirituality, in particular psychic, esoteric, and witchcraft practices started rapidly spreading. These processes are not brand new for Ukraine, because during the Soviet times, the Ukraine had inherited such phenomena as secret baptism of children, “for their health” (including by members of the Communist Party of the USSR); “consultations” of the Politburo members with the Bulgarian clairvoyant Vanga; the attention of physicists and medical scientists to the “Juna's Effect,” (Juna was the first recognized psychic healer without medical education in the USSR); and a medical study of the effectiveness of the P.K. Ivanov's health system called “Detka” (baby).

The “Juna's Effect” is associated with the activities of Evgenia Davitashvili, who was almost the only Soviet psychic healer to agree to undergo research in scientific laboratories. With the help of some Communist party leaders, she arrived in Moscow in 1980 and was enrolled in the staff of the Institute of Radio Electronics as a senior research worker. The “Juna's Effect” was her ability to diagnose diseases by raising her hands to the patient, driving them around the head, arms, legs, etc. In the same way, almost without touching the body, Juna “healed” sick people. However, perhaps the only thing that has been reliably established in these laboratory tests of her abilities was the conclusion that the “method of contact and distance massage,” which she used during treatment, could be used “only in combination with other methods.”¹³

The health system called “Detka” (baby) was developed by Porfiry Ivanov. Its goal is to achieve the unity of man “with his eternal divine nature.” The practical pieces of advice of the “Detka” health system, which P. Ivanov began to practice in 1933, are based on the

¹³Э. П. Круглюков. “Что же с нами происходит?” Сборник статей. [“*What's happening to us?*” *Collection of articles.*]. (Новосибирск: Издательство СО РАН, 1998). *TEDxNovosibirsk*. <https://razumru.ru/pseudo/krugl/01.htm>. Accessed 01.30.2021.

hardening of the body, the disclosure of the reserves of physical, mental, and spiritual health. “Detka” involves not only bathing in cold water, but also a purposeful rejection of excessive clothing, comfortable housing, and the greatest possible unity of humans with nature. In the post-Soviet space, the followers of this doctrine were called “Ivanovtsi.” This teaching belongs to neo-religions and is a syncretic cult that combines “pagan ideas, non-Christian interpretation, concepts of the noosphere and energy.”¹⁴

In a situation of growing distrust of the state and science-based medicine, instead of seeking medical and psychological help from official medicine, people began to go en masse to sessions with psychics, astrologers, esotericists, healers, “charge” water in front of TV screens, etc. The practice of “charging water” is one of the forms of mass psychosis that Soviet society faced in the late 1980s. Alan Chumak was one of its founders, who was a journalist by education and worked on television for a long time. He managed to start broadcasting a “Health Sessions” program on television in 1989, which was broadcast early in the morning so that viewers could watch it before work. During most of the airtime A. Chumak “did not speak, but was silent, being in a mysterious somnambulistic state, and later began to make strange cruciform movements with his hands.”¹⁵ These movements were expected to “charge” various substances and objects—water containers, ointments, creams, tapes, and even periodicals, so that they became “healing.” For three years, hundreds of thousands of Soviet and later Russian and Ukrainian viewers watched these programs, hoping that consuming “charged” water or other substances would cure them of various diseases. Over time, specialized programs began to be broadcast to help patients with cardiovascular or gastrointestinal diseases. So, under the influence of existential uncertainty as well as uncertainty about the future, many of these people also fell into the hands of fraudsters.

¹⁴Б. К. Кнорре. “Система Порфирия Иванова: культ и движение.” *Современная религиозная жизнь России. Опыт систематического описания*. [“The Porphyry Ivanov’s System: Cult and Movement.” *Modern religious life in Russia. Experience of systematic description*.]. Т. 4, 244-258. (Москва: Университетская книга, Логос, 2006). *TEDxMoscow*. p. 151.

¹⁵К. А. Богданов. “Банка Чумака, взгляд Кашпировского: О роли неподвижных предметов в социальном воображении.” *Новое литературное обозрение*. № 6, 2015. [“Chumak’s Jar, Kashpirovsky’s View: On the Role of Immovable Objects in the Social Imagination.” *A new literary review*.]. <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2015/6/banka-chumaka-vzglyad-kashpirovskogo-o-rol-i-nepodvizhnyh-predmetov-v-soczialnom-voobrazhenii.html>. Accessed 01.29.2021.

Annexation of the Crimea and Military Actions in the East of Ukraine as an Existential Test and a Factor of a Post-Traumatic Syndrome in Ukrainian Society

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine beginning in 2014 has presented significant physical and existential challenges for Ukrainian society in recent years: it significantly undermined the mental and spiritual balance of Ukrainians, destroyed the sense of security of most citizens, and led to the death and injury of tens of thousands of people.. According to Radio Liberty (Radio Free Europe), citing the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, between 42,000 and 44,000 people became victims of hostilities in eastern Ukraine between April 14, 2014, and August 31, 2020. The UN estimates the death toll at 13,100 to 13,300, of whom at least 3,367 were civilians; wounded during the war from 29,500 to 33,500 people, including 7,000-9,000 civilians, from 9,700 to 10,700 the Ukrainian military, and from 12,700 to 13,700 "members of illegal armed groups." The civilian casualties were about a quarter of all wounded and killed. In 2014, the share of losses among civilians was 33-34%, but in 2019-2020 it fell to 4-5%¹⁶.

The challenges posed by the existential threat of Russia's actions create the need for personal care, participation in overcoming life's problems, mercy, and charity. One of the defining symptoms of the post-traumatic stress disorder of servicemen is the feeling that the war continues in the midst of peaceful life. Long-term social and psychological assistance, as well as spiritual harmony, are essential for the rehabilitation of servicemen with post-traumatic stress disorder, with spiritual rehabilitation often lasting longer than that which can be provided by medical protocols. It is much easier to provide it with the churches and pastoral care involved.

In this context, assistance in the rehabilitation of servicemen and civilians affected by the post-traumatic syndrome is provided in Ukraine not only by the official state medical structures. Religious foundations play a significant role in overcoming the effects of the war. A useful example is the activity of the Lviv Hospital named after Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky. Founded in the early twentieth century, it has a mental health center, mostly\ staffed by young women who help the servicemen who survived the war, as well as their relatives.¹⁷ The palliative care unit was established in the hospital in the early 2000s, and it became the first one in Ukraine. The idea of starting a palliative care department was

¹⁶“У ООН повідомили про кількість жертв бойових дій на Донбасі.” *Радіо Свобода*. 03 вересня 2020. [“The UN has reported the number of victims of hostilities in Donbass.” *Radio Liberty*]. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-oon-zhertvy-viyny-na-donbasi/30818348.html>. Accessed 10. 19.2020.

¹⁷ *Благодійний фонд Шпиталь імені Митрополита Андрія Шептицького. Офіційний сайт. [Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky Hospital Charitable Foundation. Official Site].* <http://spital.org.ua/hospital/tsentmentalnoho-zdorovia>. Accessed 11.05.2020.

borrowed from Western medicine. This is a common practice for Catholic hospitals all over the world because it is about respecting human dignity at the final stage of one's life. "While secular medicine in some European countries offers euthanasia, the church is concerned about maintaining human dignity," says the head of Sheptytsky's Hospital, Father Andrew Login.¹⁸ The Hospital, in partnership with Caritas Ukraine, also has a project to support the network of Home Care Centers in Ukraine. As part of the Home Care program, specialists provide their wards with the necessary services: bring the necessary medication, help with household chores, feed the elderly and, most importantly, provide nursing care. The project focuses on caring for old, lonely people who, due to physical weakness, can no longer leave the house on their own to provide food and hygiene items for themselves.

In addition, a mass volunteer movement in Ukraine has played a significant role in overcoming the challenges posed by the military, economic, and information pressure of Russia. Representatives of many religious foundations participate in it. An example of this is the chaplaincy service in the new Ukrainian army, carried out by the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Orthodox Church of Ukraine), the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and many Protestant churches.¹⁹ The activity of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, where the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC has been operating since 2006, acquires special significance. The curia for 2020 has 15 chief military chaplains, 37 military staff chaplains, and 50 volunteer chaplains who provide pastoral care for 68,000 servicemen and members of their families.²⁰ The active work of the department is also focused on improving the skills of military chaplains. On December 10, 2020, the annual XIV All-Ukrainian Conference of Military Chaplains of the UGCC ended, in which 60 military chaplains took part. At the conference, military chaplains took part in the training "Overcoming the effects of psycho-physiological stress," which was conducted by the author of the course of psychological training and

¹⁸"Адміністратор Шпиталю Шептицького отець Андрій Логін: 'Церква приходить на допомогу у ситуаціях, коли людина відчувається найбільш беззахисною'." *Релігійний інтернет-ресурс "Духовна велич Львова."* 22 вересня 2017. ["Father Andriy Login, administrator of the Sheptytsky Hospital: 'The church comes to the rescue in situations when a person feels most vulnerable'." *Religious Internet resource "Spiritual greatness of Lviv."*]. <https://velychlviv.com/administrator-shpytalyu-sheptytskogo-otets-andrij-login-tserkva-pryhodyt-na-dopomogu-u-sytuatsiyah-koly-lyudyna-pochuvayetsya-najbilsh-bezzahysnoyu/>. Accessed 10. 12. 2020.

¹⁹"Релігія та національні меншини." *Хмельницька обласна державна адміністрація. Офіційне інтернет-представництво.* ["Religion and National Minorities." *Khmelnytsky Regional State Administration. Official online representation.*]. https://www.adm-km.gov.ua/?page_id=1519. Accessed 12.04.2020.

²⁰"Департамент військового капеланства Патріаршої курії УГКЦ." *Ластівка. Українська організація в Данії. Офіційний сайт.* ["Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC." *Swallow. Ukrainian organization in Denmark. Official site.*]. <https://lastivka.dk/598.html>. Accessed 11.16.2020.

prevention of combat stress Konstantin Ulyanov.²¹ In addition to direct military assistance, the department provides spiritual and psychological care and rehabilitation of the families of fallen servicemen: parents, wives, and children.

In general, in the situation of objective inability of state medical institutions of Ukraine to provide complete rehabilitation of servicemen with post-traumatic stress disorder and family members of fallen soldiers, the experience of palliative care and spiritual support of religious charitable foundations can become a promising and socially significant area for harmonious interaction of religious and medical organizations.

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Ukrainian Society: Socio-Medical and Religious Contexts

The above-mentioned trends and episodes in Ukrainian society have largely prepared Ukrainians for the COVID-19 pandemic, which has become another existential challenge. For the citizens of Ukraine, the perception of quarantine measures and the threat of death from COVID-19 national trends, which often have completely non-medical correlations, but are associated with a difficult socio-economic situation, have been added to the pervasive trends of insecurity, confusion, panic, and even a growing number of suicides and suicidal tendencies. Additionally, the vast majority of the current population of Ukraine (according to the UN, up to 60% of all citizens) lives below the poverty line. According to a comprehensive study by the Razumkov's Center “The Middle Class in Ukraine: Identification Criteria” (2014), no more than 14% of Ukrainians could be classified as middle class in Ukraine.²² And in 2019, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine published data that only 1% of Ukrainians regard themselves as the middle class, and 72% of citizens clearly identified themselves as poor.²³ In fact, the lion's share of the Ukrainian citizens in recent decades lives in a situation of a permanent struggle for survival. As a result, it has created an extremely high pain threshold in the perception of the potential for death due to the pandemic or hostilities. These tendencies are reflected in the fatalist motif “you cannot die twice,” which

²¹“Завершилася XIV Всеукраїнська конференція військових капеланів УГКЦ.” *Департамент військового капеланства Патріаршої курії УГКЦ*. 10 грудня 2020. [“The 14th All-Ukrainian Conference of Military Chaplains of the UGCC has ended.” *Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC*.]. <https://www.kapelanstvo.ugcc.ua/zavershylasia-xiv-vseukrainska-konferentsiia-viyskovykh-kapelaniv/>. Accessed 11.12.2020.

²²*Середній клас в Україні: критерії ідентифікації*. [The middle class in Ukraine: identification criteria.]. (Київ, Заповіт, 2014), p. 12.

²³“Самооцінка домогосподарствами України рівня своїх доходів. Ukraine Households Self-perceived of their Income. (За даними вибіркового опитування домогосподарств у січні 2019 року).” *Державний комітет статистики України. Статистичний збірник*. Київ, 2019, p. 17. [“Self-assessment of Ukrainian households of their income level. Ukraine Households Self-perceived of their Income. (According to a sample household survey in January 2019).” *State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. Statistical collection*.]. http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/druk/publicat/kat_u/2019/zb/08/zb_sdurd2018.pdf. Accessed 10.27.2020.

is widespread in modern Ukraine. Ukrainians are convinced that they can rely only on themselves and their closest relatives. They are absolutely convinced that the state will not help them.

These provisions are confirmed by statistics that show the level of trust/distrust in social institutions in Ukraine. In December 2018, KIIS (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology) published sociological data on the trust of Ukrainians in various social institutions. According to them, ordinary people living in their neighborhood (68%), volunteers helping the army and migrants (63% and 61%), the church (51%), and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (51%) enjoyed the greatest trust among Ukrainians.²⁴ When analyzing the dynamics of growth or decrease in the level of trust/distrust in social institutions, KIIS published a comparative chart, according to which the level of trust of the population of Ukraine in the church in 2017 was 57%, and in 2018 was 51%. It remains commensurate with the confidence in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which was 53% in 2017 and 51% in 2018. At the same time, only 14% trusted the President of Ukraine in 2017 and 16% in 2018, and the level of distrust in the President was 69% and 70% in the respective years. A similar situation was typical for the *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Council) of Ukraine, which was not trusted by 82% of citizens in 2017 and 80% in 2018.²⁵

Majority of Ukrainian citizens expressed distrust in state institutions: 76% of citizens did not trust the judiciary during this period, 65% the *Verkhovna Rada*, and 65% the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NABU).²⁶ In contrast, since 2012, Ukrainians have shown a high level of trust in their families and people around them. According to KIIS, in 2012 on a 10-point scale the index of particular trust of Ukrainians in politicians was 2.1, in all other people 6.2, in friends 8.1, and in family members 9.5.²⁷

Unlike the close family environment, religious institutions, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the state medical system in Ukraine enjoys a low level of trust of citizens. Despite

²⁴“Довіра соціальним інститутам.” *Київський міжнародний інститут соціології (KIIS)*. Грудень 2018 р. [“Trust in social institutions.” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS)*]. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=817&page=1&fbclid=IwAR1tV5Oap7Wv8tGkIvQD2ggMR2oKYOzJ6bFRIHaDL0Y31r1HSF1COeGV50Y>. Accessed 09.08.2020.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶“Оцінка громадянами діяльності влади, рівень довіри до соціальних інститутів та політиків, електоральні орієнтації громадян.” *Соціологічна служба Центру Разумкова*. 24 лютого 2020. [“Citizens' assessment of government activities, the level of trust in social institutions and politicians, the electoral orientations of citizens.” *Sociological Service of the Razumkov's Center*]. <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-gromadianamy-diialnosti-vlady-riven-doviry-do-sotsialnykh-instytutiv-ta-politykiv-elektoralni-oriantatsii-gromadian-liutyi-2020r>. Accessed 11.17.2020.

²⁷“Довіра політичним інститутам.” *KMIC. Review*. 2012, № 4, p.4. [“Trust in political institutions.” *KIIS. Review*]. [https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/KMIS-Review/04\(06-2012\)/ds.php?](https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/KMIS-Review/04(06-2012)/ds.php?) Accessed 09.11.2020.

the trend of slow growth of trust, in February 2020, 55% of Ukrainians did not trust the Ministry of Health, and 51% of Ukrainians did not trust the *Verkhovna Rada* Committee on National Health, Medical Care and Health Insurance. At the same time, 74% of Ukrainians considered the work of the Ministry of Health extremely important for them and their families.²⁸

Distrust in public medicine and significant poverty leads to a low level of appeals to medical institutions by Ukrainian citizens. According to the data for February 2020, 36% of respondents see doctors less than once a year, 15-18% every year or six months, and only 8% use medical care every month.²⁹ Distrust in public medicine in Ukraine is that for a long time, it has been a key center of bribery in the country. During the years of monitoring (2007-2015), according to the experts of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in Ukraine, the situation with bribery in the sphere of health care has not changed: more than half of patients (57%) have to provide themselves with medicines and medical instruments, 22% consider it their duty without coercion; also half (55%) are forced to make cash contributions to hospital funds, and 14% of patients did so of their own free will; a third (38%) directly demanded unofficial payment for the services received, and 13% themselves offered such payment to a health worker.³⁰ In this regard, in the minds of modern Ukrainians, two opposite trends concerning medicine coexist. On the one hand, a critical attitude to official state medicine as a center of bribery and inaccessibility for ordinary citizens is being formed. On the other hand, a sick person who is facing the existential challenge of death will seek help from a particular doctor who has the skills and ability to save them. Hence, in the mind of an individual, a mostly positive attitude is formed towards doctors, who, like most citizens of Ukraine, receive a meager salary.

According to our assumptions, the situation with the pandemic crisis and its consequences will remain difficult for a long time to come. The systemic healthcare deficiencies in Ukraine that have accumulated over the decades cannot be resolved immediately. The pandemic only catalyzed the irreversibility of change. But the question of whether the Ukrainian medicine will cope with these challenges remains open.

²⁸“Оцінка медичної сфери.” *Соціологічна група Рейтинг.* 03 вересня 2020. [“Assessment of the medical field.” *Sociological group “Rating.”*]. http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/ocenka_medycinskoy_sfery.html. Accessed 11.27.2020.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰“Стан корупції в Україні.” *Порівняльний аналіз загальнонаціональних досліджень: 2007, 2009, 2011 та 2015.* КМІС, р. 11. [“The state of corruption in Ukraine.” *Comparative analysis of national surveys: 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2015.* KIIS.]. https://kiis.com.ua/materials/pr/20161602_corruption/Corruption%20in%20Ukraine%202015%20UKR.pdf. Accessed 11.23.2020.

At the same time, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of quarantine strategies will largely depend on the position of religious leaders, whose trust remains high in modern Ukrainian society. The fate and perhaps the lives of many people will depend on religious leaders' support of or opposition to quarantine strategies.

Conclusions

Based on the study, the connection between the existential challenges of the Ukrainian society of the last century (famine, mass repressions, Chernobyl disaster) and the phenomena of growing confusion, uncertainty about maintaining health and life among Ukrainians due to hostilities in eastern Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. A direct consequence of the growing panic in modern Ukrainian society is the appeal to religious institutions for help and spiritual support.

Although modern Ukrainians have quite conflicting views on religion and medicine due to the accelerated transition from extreme secularism and atheism to religious idealism, in the modern religious renaissance the vast majority of the population recognizes the importance of interaction between scientific and religious institutions in the field. Most citizens of Ukraine are aware of the need for a harmonious coexistence of religion and science, religion and evidence-based medicine, and the importance of cooperation between religious and medical institutions in the field of palliative care and overcoming societal trauma.

The threat to the physical survival of Ukrainians as a result of the Holodomor of 1932-1933 and the mass repressions of the 1930s led to a deep distrust of state institutions; focus on survival despite even the most difficult external factors; the tendency to accumulate a significant amount of material resources, especially food; attachment to the cultivation of their own land; suspicion of the conclusions of official medicine; tendency to self-healing and seeking help from witch-practitioners, and, as a consequence, to a natural transition to faith in God as the bearer of universal grace and salvation of man in a latent hidden form.

The man-made Chernobyl disaster of 1986, which affected hundreds of thousands of citizens, only deepened the sense of insecurity in the Ukrainian society and amplified their belief in the inability and unwillingness of the totalitarian state to provide truthful information about the consequences of the accident and to ensure adequate access to a proper medical care and rehabilitation for the victims. This, in turn, resulted not only in the religious renaissance, but also the growing level of interest of the post-communist Ukraine's population in alternative forms of spiritual pursuits, including psychic, esoteric and

witchcraft practices. At the same time, the signs of a traumatized society in Ukraine deepened as a result of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, which not only destroyed the sense of physical security of most citizens, but also led to the death and injury of tens of thousands of people and appearance of more than one million internally displaced persons.

The mentioned above existential challenges have formed a high pain threshold in the modern Ukrainian society in the perception of the potential for death as a result of hostilities or a pandemic. Most Ukrainians, who in recent decades have lived in a situation of growing poverty and continual though often unsuccessful modernization, perceive their lives as a struggle for physical survival. They are convinced of the unwillingness and inability of the state to improve their lives, and trust only their closest relatives, religious foundations, the Armed Forces of Ukraine and representatives of the volunteer movement.

In modern Ukrainian society, the universal tendencies inherent in the world community, confusion, uncertainty about the future, panic and suicidal attitudes caused by COVID-19, are significantly deepened due to: a critical attitude of the Ukrainian citizens to the efficiency and accessibility of medical care in the country; focus on self-medication due to the unavailability of quality medical services, in particular in the field of private medicine; distrust of official medicine as an institution yet mostly positive attitude towards doctors and medical staff in the mind of an individual; confidence of the citizens of Ukraine that only wealthy citizens of the state will receive relatively adequate assistance; confusion and fragmentation in understanding the causes of the pandemic and the natural distrust of the citizens of the post-totalitarian state to the official state versions of the causes and consequences of the pandemic; and critical attitude towards the procedures and quality of probable vaccination as an embodiment of distrust in state institutions. The high degree of distrust in state institutions and their practices in overcoming the consequences of existential challenges for the Ukrainian society opens the way for a closer cooperation with religious institutions in the field of medicine, palliative care and rehabilitation care.

In our opinion, promising areas for a further complementary development of religion and medicine in Ukraine in terms of developing ways and means to overcome existential challenges in the Ukrainian society are: the development of confessional palliative medicine and confessional social work; the further development of the institute of chaplaincy in the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the field of spiritual and psychological rehabilitation of the servicemen; the study and potential use of religious self-regulation and self-healing by means of religious practices, such as the Institute of Mind and Life, which studies consciousness, the positive influence of Buddhist meditation.

At the same time, the situation of permanent uncertainty that the majority of Ukrainians feel about their future, together with the lack of hope for help from the state institutions, is leading to a religious renaissance in this post-totalitarian society and causing more people to believe in the transcendental essence of God as a source of grace and salvation. It is for this reason that most Ukrainians declare their own religiosity, the level of which, according to our assumptions, will only increase during the pandemic. It is this issue that remains a promising area for further research works.

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