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UKRAINIAN ORTHODOXY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: BUILDING THE CHURCH BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATIONS

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Abstract: The Internet has become a platform for popularizing traditional religious teachings and rituals, bringing together believers worldwide, and creating a network of religious communities. With the help of the Internet, religious groups and communities can keep in touch with each other, exchange ideas and sermons, and attract new followers. The article is devoted to analysis of the impact of digital technologies on Orthodoxy in Ukraine, particularly on the example of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The analysis of this problem is based on considering the general trends of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's attitude to the implementation of digital technologies, as well as the analysis of individual projects related to the use of digital solutions. The central thesis of the research is that Ukrainian Orthodoxy, in the current challenging conditions, which are caused in particular by the war, strives to find a balance between the tradition, which was formed over many centuries, and innovations, which are generated by the Internet and digital culture and which make it possible to provide communication with the faithful and their support effectively, as well as to realize their mission. The authors present the main discussion about implementing digital technologies and online services into the Church's practice. Also, the most successful online and digital projects of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine are presented.
Keywords: Orthodoxy, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, digital technologies, Internet

1. Introduction

It has already become customary to describe the time in which we live as an information (digital) era, and our societies are increasingly becoming informational. We can also mention the term "informationalism," which was introduced by the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells to denote a new stage in the development of society. In particular, this new state involves asserting the power of Internet networks. According to M. Castells, networks become permanent components of the social system and claim the role of the most effective form of organization (Castells 2001). The logic of the network significantly affects social processes and institutions, as well as our daily lives. The digital era determines the influence on the way of human existence in the world. As Sandu Frunză writes: "When we talk about the digital world or digital era, we do not mean only the virtual space that internet development provides as a separate world. We mean that human existence is ontologically marked by a new way of being, including the digital dimension as an integral component of living in the world. Here we assume at least two aspects. Firstly, the real world and the virtual world with all that scientific and technological developments involve and make the complementarity of the two worlds possible. And secondly, there is the fact that man is situated in a new perspective on existence that unifies the two registers while reconstructing the range of elements perceived as an existential given of postmodern man. Identifying oneself as a constructor of one's life, man is a being belonging to a new world, shaped by the digital revolution" (Frunză 2020, 40-41). Information technology has an impact on religion, creating new opportunities for the expression of religious experience and new challenges for traditional forms of religious life. Thanks to the Internet, it is possible to effectively develop religious culture, increase religious consciousness, and spread spiritual values among young people, for whom digital technologies are close in terms of their logic of action and constitute an element of their lifestyle (Erawati et al. 2023).

The Internet has become a platform for popularizing traditional religious teachings and rituals, bringing together believers worldwide, and creating a network of religious communities. With the help of the Internet, religious groups and communities can keep in touch with each other, exchange ideas and sermons, and attract new followers. This opens up new opportunities for believers to communicate and spread their beliefs, systems of religious beliefs, and values. However, the digital age also creates challenges for traditional religious structures. The ease of access to various information can lead to the emergence of different interpretations of faiths and even the spread of non-traditional points of

view. There is also a need to discuss the possibility of transferring traditional religious practices into virtual space. The positions of religious communities and believers regarding the Internet differ, but this emphasizes even more clearly the need to understand this problem within the framework of religious studies. As Chad Houk states, "Digital technology has come to play a vital role in contemporary religious life, both in the real world and in virtual worlds. Regardless of their comfort with it, whether for facilitating worship or for communicating religious values, all religious traditions have had to face the ubiquity of digital technology and find a place for it in their worldview. While some traditions lean more toward a positive or negative outlook on the use of digital technology, the vast majority find themselves somewhere in the middle. This may mean that they are dedicated to a neutral view on the subject, but in most cases, it simply means that they have not adequately wrestled with the issues involved." (Houk 2022, 167).

The Orthodox Church is quite conservative and preserves its traditions and rites, which are aimed at forming spirituality, which becomes the basis for uniting faithful communities. However, like other spheres of our life, it adapts to the modern world. Also, it introduces innovations related to information technologies (for example, online prayers, online broadcasting of services, and submission of notes for the priest via the Internet). These innovations open up new opportunities for practicing Orthodox and the development of their faith. At the same time, one should also remember about certain contradictions that the introduction of the Internet into religious life generates. For example, studying the impact of social media on religiosity in an Islamic environment, Ehsan Arzroomchilar writes: "Thanks to internet literacy and the reduction of the digital divide, now most of the average civilians in Muslim-majority countries have access to the online sphere. Such a proliferation may seem like a blessing as it may, among others, spread tolerance at the grassroots due to the exposure to diverse views. Moreover, the already-marginalized religious voices may extend their outreach and garner accordingly audiences through cyberspace. [...] These opportunities, however, might blind one to notice also the side effects resulting from the aforesaid virtual life, i.e., unpredicted effects which might turn out to be problematic." (Arzroomchilar 2022, 97).

In the article, we aim to investigate the impact of digital technologies on Orthodoxy in Ukraine, particularly on the example of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The analysis of this problem will be carried out based on the consideration of the general trends of the attitude of the OCU to the implementation of digital technologies, as well as the analysis of individual projects related to the use of digital solutions. The central thesis of our research is that Ukrainian Orthodoxy, in the current challenging conditions, which are caused in particular by the war, strives to find a balance between the tradition, which was formed over many

centuries, and innovations, which are generated by the Internet and digital culture and which make it possible to provide communication with the faithful and their support effectively, as well as to realize their mission.

2. Orthodox religious communication in the digital era

The problem of the influence of digital technologies on religion is related to the nature of religious communication. Religious communication is a unique type of communication that is based on faith, spirituality, and religious values. Cultural, social, and identity factors determine the peculiarities of religious communication. Therefore, a complex system of religious communication has been built over the centuries, which is relatively inert to rapid changes as it strives to preserve tradition and observance of canons. The basis of religious communication can be considered faith and discussion of spiritual issues concerning, in particular, moral aspects of human life. In religious communication, sacred language and a unique language style that does not coincide with everyday means of communication are often used. The use of sacred language aims to emphasize the special status of religious topics. The system of religious communication also includes ritual and symbolism, which aim to convey deep spiritual truths to believers. Along with this transmission of spiritual truths, there is care for the human soul, upbringing, and spiritual development support. This is done, for example, through sermons, conversations, and dialogue between members of the religious community. In this context, it is appropriate to mention the unique role of religious communication in maintaining community and community identity. In other words, religious communication is built into community structures to determine ways of interaction among believers, establish and maintain community values, and determine norms of behavior. In general, religious communication plays an essential role in forming religious identities, promoting mutual understanding, and strengthening the community of believers. However, the most important thing is that religious communication should provide a sense of connection with the transcendent principle, God, and confidence that a person is on the right path to salvation.

We pay attention to the unique nature of religious communication since implementing digital solutions and technologies in the life of the Church can pose challenges for these aspects of religiosity. Ukrainian religious communication researcher Maria Petrushkevych raises essential questions about the ability of religious communities to respond to the challenges of the information age. As she writes, "New means of communication, the unprecedented efficiency of world communication, rapid changes in the speed and possibilities of information perception - all these processes in the field of communications, which are rapidly

developing, force the Christian Church to consider new directions and forms of its missionary activity in the modern world. Christianity uses centuries-tested types of communication and has its canons both in dialogic communication and information transmission. Are they ready to change? Can they provide answers to the challenges of the information society? After all, the area of spread of religious teachings, the number of adherents, and the construction of a picture of the world by a modern person depend on flexibility and openness to communicative innovations." (Petrushkevych 2022, 10).

In sermons, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew notes that the Church, throughout its history, has developed various ways of communicating with the faithful. All available means are essential to speak to your faithful and bring them the message of the Gospel. Traditionally, the Church uses the spoken and written word, as well as iconography, architecture, symbols, and music. The discovery of another means of communication, namely the Internet, is defined as a feature of our time in history. Patriarch Bartholomew states that the Internet offers a variety of opportunities, particularly in the area of social networks, which can also be profitable and useful for the Church. At the same time, priests and believers (especially the youth) must be very careful and selective about the manner and ethos of these communications, which, like all other mass media, hide many dangers.: "The fact that there are many harmful books in circulation does not mean that the Church should refrain from publishing edifying books. At the same time, the fact that social networks are abused by people promoting falsehood and deception in order to mislead young people does not mean that the Church should not use these same networks. On the contrary, the Church must use these networks as widely as possible in order to facilitate young people in search of ways to fulfill their spiritual interests. The time that a spiritual father will dedicate for the sake of communicating with young people through the internet and social media, especially if they are separated by great geographical distance, can prove very useful and effective, so long as he is speaking in a godly way and not promoting his own ideas." (Bartholomew 2014). At the same time, it is often emphasized that Internet communication cannot replace live communication. The exclusion of live communication in religious communication can lead to the risk of fixation on virtual reality and isolation from real life and lived experience.

The implementation of digital technologies into church life also involves a kind of rethinking of the concept of Orthodoxy and ways of creating and organizing communities. In particular, such a rethinking can be connected with the idea of "open Orthodoxy." This conception is closely related to the development of the tradition of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. After all, as the researchers of this concept note, the idea, term, and phenomenon of "Open Orthodoxy" appeared in the Ukrainian Orthodox discourse in 2015-2016. It is about the reaction of part of the

clergy and believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) to manifestations of fundamentalization of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church under the influence of the ideology of "*russkij mir*" ("Russian world") and with the beginning of Russian aggression in Ukraine. The additional aspect is the need for religious communities to respond to modern challenges, such as globalization, secularization, emancipation, expansion of rights and freedoms, technological development and digitalization, ecology, the latest medical experiments, and problems of war and peace. Therefore, the idea of creating a kind of religious eco-system is formed: "Open Orthodoxy is not an organization. Open Orthodoxy is an idea that everyone who perceives it can implement in their life or project. Open Orthodoxy tries to be an open eco-system in the sense of a partnership and cooperation model. This is a pooling of everyone's efforts and resources for a common goal and a common cause." (Kovalenko 2021, 196).

Within the conception of "Open Orthodoxy," the search for an effective organization of believers, the creation and support of communities, and communication between community members are carried out. That is why we come across an appeal to analogies between the modern organization of communities and the network society. In particular, Yuriy Kovalenko, in his study of the conception of "Open Orthodoxy," notes that one of its principles is non-hierarchy. At the same time, non-hierarchy is not anti-hierarchy. It means consciously avoiding the creation of parallel hierarchies or organizational structures where there are already church hierarchies or corresponding effective institutions. The network organization of Orthodox religious communities makes it possible to draw parallels with the Internet. In particular, the concept of "Open Orthodoxy" outlines the network nature of the Church. Yuriy Kovalenko notes: "From this [outline of the network nature of the Church] comes the comparison of the Church with the Internet according to the principle of operation. Of course, it may seem too conditional to someone. But, just as in every Church community where the faithful gather and where the Divine Liturgy is performed, the fullness of the Church and Divine grace is present, so in every access point to the World Wide Web, there is a potential opportunity to access the fullness of information and communication with the whole world. And just as the faithful, who live all over the world and have never seen each other, are connected to each other in the Church by faith and the action of the grace of church sacraments, in the same way, Internet users are connected to each other in a single virtual space" (Kovalenko 2021, 198). As a result, we can talk about forming a network of communication, a network of prayer, and even the Church as a NETwork (a network of people and religious services). Similar concepts developed by Orthodox theologians and religious scholars testify that there are prerequisites for understanding the impact of new technologies on Orthodoxy as a whole and Orthodox

Churches. There is a kind of comparison of the principles of the organization, which are determined by the information society and church structures and ways of organizing communities in order to update the methods of attracting the faithful and communicating with them.

3. Digital innovations in Ukrainian Orthodox Church: discussions and opportunities

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine obtained the Tomos on Autocephaly from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and is currently at the stage of institutional development. In addition, church hierarchs and believers repeatedly declared the need to renew church life. An example can be the document *10 Theses for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine*, which outlines the main directions of change for the Ukrainian Church. This document proclaims openness to dialogue and discussion of changes, as well as awareness of new challenges and opportunities that are presented to the Church: "An era of new risks and opportunities opens before the entire Church. The Church has a providential vocation and, as a gift, the ability to experience revival, to become everything to everyone, salt to the world. On the other hand, there are risks to be satisfied with what we have or to rely on the state, which carries the danger of replacing God with Caesar and turning Ukrainians away from the Church. With this document, we would like to invite all the believers of the Church to communion and communication, to participation in the work that the Church always carries out, now and always, in the work on the deification of man and the testimony of the Gospel, in the face of new modern circumstances and challenges" (RISU 2019).

At the same time, we would like to note that the faithful of the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine are slowly adapting to the possibility of using online technologies in religious practices. We can assume that this is related to the belief in the inequality of online and offline participation in Church services and sacraments.

The use of digital technologies in Ukraine's religious life significantly intensified during the pandemic. According to the analytical report *War and the Church. Church and religious situation in Ukraine in 2022*, which was based on sociological research realized by the Razumkov Centre (Razumkov Centre 2022), the decrease in the level of attendance at religious services during the COVID-19 pandemic is accompanied by an increase in participation in religious services on the Internet. This is most pronounced among residents of the Western region, faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and Protestant and Evangelical Churches. According to the survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre, 15% of respondents participated in Internet liturgies. Residents of the Western region visit them much more often via the Internet (35%, in other regions - only from 6% to 9%). Based on the above, it is quite expected that

the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (73% have a positive attitude towards it) and the faithful of Protestant and Evangelical Churches are most favorable to the Church's use of the latest information technologies (social networks, the practice of "Church in a smartphone," etc.) churches (68%), less positively – faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (48%) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (45%). In the Western region, 57% have a positive attitude; in other regions - from 32% to 35% (overall in the country - 40%) (Razumkov Centre 2022). COVID-19 has also affected church practices carried out by priests. As the analysis of Covid-19's impact on Orthodox Churches in Ukraine conducted by Tetiana Kalenychenko, Cyril Hovorun, Tymofii Brik shows, "The OCU priests, in contrast to other churches, mentioned a lot of changes in their daily habits: new online Bible readings, online donations (through e-banking), daily sanitation, changing the schedule of liturgies to accommodate people in smaller but more frequent groups, praying for doctors and sick people, and so forth. Most importantly, the OCU priests did not feel that they were forced to change their practices by their leadership" (Kalenychenko et al. 2024, 22).

The position of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is not condemning modern technologies as a factor in the destruction of traditions but using them to realize the Church's main mission. In particular, the head of the OCU, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Epiphanius, actively uses Facebook to communicate with the faithful. In one of the posts, he noted that the Church uses various modern technologies in order to fulfill its primary mission – to carry the Word of God and help people. He explained this position by the fact that he wants the Church to be open, modern, and accessible to all believers. At the same time, Metropolitan Epiphany emphasized that we need to distinguish what is main and what is derivative, what is content and what is form, what is the goal and what is a means of achieving it. He states: "It's not the computer that's important, but what you can do with it, not the phone, but what you can say with it, not the Internet, but what you can convey through it. [...] We aspire that not only in churches but also regardless of where they are - whether on our website, on the pages of social networks, or in the columns of our newspaper - believers feel spiritually comfortable together with all our brothers and sisters – the only local autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine!" (Epiphany 2019).

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine is aware that the present cannot be imagined without information technologies, the Internet, modern communications, etc. These technologies are designed to help develop, learn, see more broadly, hear more in detail, and analyze; therefore, such opportunities cannot be neglected.

Among the faithful and priests of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Internet is mainly perceived as a tool for spiritual activity, which God created to ensure wider communication. In particular, this tool for

providing spiritual support and religious practices in the Orthodox Church opens up some essential advantages and opportunities for practicing Orthodox. Above all, it provides accessibility and convenience (online journaling and online candles have become common, making spiritual practices accessible to everyone, regardless of geographic location or time constraints. As noted on one of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's websites, "Innovations in Orthodox practice, such as online notes and online candles, expand the possibilities of believers to develop their spirituality and support church initiatives. These tools provide an opportunity to come together in a virtual space and express our faith together, thereby providing a light of faith and hope in this modern world." (Patriarchia.org.ua 2023). This was especially relevant during COVID-19, when lockdowns were established, as well as in wartime, when people, particularly military personnel, do not have the opportunity to attend religious services regularly but have a spiritual need to do so). The Internet also helps unite believers in common prayer (online technologies allow believers to join in common prayer and express their faith together using virtual space). The Internet also contributes to the realization of the social mission of the Church, in particular, the creation and implementation of charity projects and spiritual and material support of people who suffered as a result of the war. As a result of the Russian aggression, the problem of fundraising for the needs of people affected by the war (refugees, wounded) became highly urgent. Religious communities actively use Internet platforms and social networks to collect funds, find benefactors, and attract volunteers.

One of the aspects of implementing digital technologies into church life is the transfer of services to the Internet. Since Ukraine gained independence and the revitalization of religious life after the fall of communism, a peculiar development of this process took place. Archpriest Georgiy Kovalenko traces this process, identifying its three stages (Kovalenko 2020). The first stage began in Ukraine in the 1990s, when regular services started to be broadcast on television. Until recently, these broadcasts (later also via the Internet) were perceived as an additional function for special categories of people — sick people in hospitals, older adults who are infirm at home, or those who cannot attend church. Such broadcasts were often carried out on major religious holidays. It has sometimes been seen as a sign of a very modern church if it broadcasts its services.

This continued until 2020 when the Covid-19 outbreak caused such broadcasts to become widespread. According to Georgiy Kovalenko, there is a transition to the next stage - the broadcasting of the service is changing the service. The point is that broadcasts are changing the way we think about worship. The broadcast makes it possible to see more than if a person were in the temple. At the same time, the question arises about what can be shown and how to show it. There is also the problem that the

camera operators, who carry out the filming, ensure the demonstration of what is tied to the real worship service. In addition, Kovalenko notices the pros and cons of broadcasting the service at this stage. One of the most important advantages is that the broadcast ensures "participation" in the service of a much larger number of people than those present in the temple. He writes: "For the first time in millennia, even more, we can fulfill what happened in the apostolic times - all gathered together in one place for the same thing. This is an opportunity, as in the time of the first Church, for everyone to be at the service with their bishop or even with the Primate of the Church. And we saw that the leaders of the broadcasts in terms of views were precisely the broadcasts of the services of the Patriarchs of the Churches. Hundreds of thousands, and on Easter, perhaps millions, of people were together directly in one place, at one time. Admittedly, the place was virtual for those watching. But it was a real service that was broadcast online." (Kovalenko 2020). The disadvantage of mass broadcasts of religious services is that they begin to be evaluated and compared based on purely aesthetic, external criteria. Broadcasting can also cause the temptation to "wander" through services, switching between channels that broadcast services from different places and temples on major religious holidays. Georgiy Kovalenko also considers the fact that the broadcast often does not encourage prayer, but rather viewing, to be a drawback.

The implementation of modern information technologies allows for the prediction of the third stage. In the article by Georgiy Kovalenko, it is defined as the creation of an online worship service, which involves the development of traditional worship services and provides the Church with new opportunities, such as virtual reality, mixed reality, and augmented reality, when it is possible to attempt to "combine the online broadcast of the worship service with real communion." (Kovalenko 2020).

At the same time, the issue of transferring the sacraments to the virtual space remains debatable. As noted in Dmytro Horyevoy's publication, today there is an ongoing theological discussion - is it possible to preserve the Tradition of implementing the Sacraments online? An example of the debate was the practice of communion between believers online and offline in some communities of the OCU. According to OCU's metropolitan and spokesperson for the Holy Synod Yevstratiy Zorya and religious scholar Yuriy Chornomorets, such a practice contradicts the very Tradition of the Eucharist of Jesus Christ. It is possible only with a specific believer receiving a blessing from the bishop to perform the Eucharist (Horyevoy 2020). Participating in the performance of the Sacraments online is just participation or contemplation. At the same time, the presence of similar cases and their contentiousness confirms that the OCU is a living church and responds to modern challenges and the needs of its believers, especially in crisis conditions. Clergymen, believers, and the public actively participate in theological discussions, which will contribute

to adapting the Church to new conditions.

4. Online projects of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine

In the 21st century, Internet pages of churches, dioceses, parishes, and online mass media of religious organizations have become an integral part of Churches' activities. The digitalization of the ritual and cult practice of the Orthodox communities of Ukraine was intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and wartime. At the same time, information and accessibility for believers are not the only reasons for the involvement of religious organizations in Ukraine in digitalization processes. For example, the Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom was founded in 2016 as "an educational institution of a non-classical type that unites believers of various religions and denominations, who have an active civic position and are engaged in education and enlightenment" (https://oou.org.ua/). It is an example of the active involvement of new information technologies and mass communication mechanisms in religious educational activities. The Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom often uses the format of online lectures, seminars, and conferences, which contribute to the implementation of distance and postgraduate education programs in cooperation with Ukrainian and foreign HEIs. The idea embedded in the mission of the Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom involves the involvement of interested persons of various religious, political, and ideological beliefs, as well as through the availability of ideas, materials, and resources produced by this project.

Several online projects are implemented within the framework of the Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom. The "Wisdom-online" project (https://oou.org.ua/wisdom-online/) is aimed at popularizing topics of theological, philosophical, historical, religious and cultural direction through the worldwide network and the YouTube platform. The project "Bible readings" (https://oou.org.ua/biblijni-chytannya/), which goes live through the Facebook platform, offers a theological, informational, and analytical retrospective of the texts of the Bible in the context of the Orthodox liturgical calendar by Georgy Kovalenko, rector of the Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom. As part of the "TV-university" project, which was implemented jointly with the 1+1 TV channel, the series of documentary scientific and educational films *The Secret Code of Faith* is being broadcast (https://oou.org.ua/mystery-code-of-faith/). Eight episodes: *Paganism and Christianity*, *Delicate Issues in Religion*, *Gender Equality and the Role of Women in Christianity*, *Easter and the Meaning of this Holiday*, *History of the Holy Scriptures*, *Church and Science*, *Sacrifice or Conscious Help*, *Religious Community of the Future* offer an analysis of religious stereotypes, essential questions of the essentiality of religion in modern society, research based on the

analysis of the texts of the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, manuscripts, etc.

In October 2019, the Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom, the Digital Theology Center of Durham University, and the Realis Christian Center launched a new educational program titled *Digital Theology*. The purpose of the program: „to provide a general introduction to digital theology as part of a broader theological project in its historical and intellectual development; to help students understand the Christian thought of different traditions in their historical, social, and cultural context; to help students critically evaluate and understand digital culture and its impact on modern society; to explore the theological ethics of digital culture; to understand how the changes taking place in the Church due to digital culture affect the mission of the Church. The program's interdisciplinary modules combine knowledge from theology, cultural studies, ethics, and modern digital technologies. In addition to education, the program has the purpose of tracing how theology is correlated with everyday life, exploring new problems that arise in connection with this, teaching programs related to practical theology, and, as a result – organizing projects that will serve society in the future" (Oou.org.ua 2019).

The Open Orthodox University of Saint Sophia the Wisdom also joined educational online projects of the Spirit and Letter publishing house – Kyiv Summer Theological Institute and the ETHOS web platform. ETHOS is a project devoted to presenting a selection of online courses and analytical posts on theological, philosophical, and ethical problems (https://www.ethos.org.ua/pro-ethos/). The activity of Kyiv Summer Theological Institute began in 2003 with the organization of annual field training sessions. Today, it is an online educational project designed for the whole year. Studies in modern theology, science, art history, and socio-ethical sciences are provided by scientists and theologians of various branches of Christianity.

Over the past three years, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has been actively developing its presence in virtual space. The Church has its own YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@user-nz7tm7sr8u/featured). Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Epiphanius has Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. And in 2021, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine launched its mobile application, *My Church* (bit.ly/3lqX7YP, apple.co/3hyL22F). The application offers the information most requested by believers in 5 sections: *news*; daily morning and evening *prayers*, which for the convenience of believers are organized according to the principle of a regular prayer book; *calendar*; *map* of temples (the first official online map of OCU temples, which is constantly supplemented and updated) and the schedule of services, temple holidays and contacts of each temple; *personal office* with the possibility to personalize the application and online chat with the priest.

However, the involvement of religious organizations in the digital world is not only subject to the warnings of traditionalists but also carries

real threats in the field of fraud, deception (fakes), etc. For example, in July 2023, the project called the *E-Church* portal was launched. This portal offered religious services online from the OCU and purchase church goods through it. This portal was actively popularized through messengers and social networks. However, the information and educational department of the Dnipropetrovsk Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine made an official statement about the non-involvement of the OCU in the creation of the *E-Church* portal. The analysis of the information on this portal shows its authors' low level of theological awareness and their involvement of the materials in superstitions and popular beliefs that are not Christian. Using the level of support of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Ukrainian society and the existence of the application *My Church*, the creators of the *E-Church* portal decided to make easy money by fraud. Also, they played along with Russian propaganda, which uses the noise surrounding the digitalization processes in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as a reason to accuse its representatives of violating the canons of the Orthodox Church.

5. Conclusion

Informatization and digitalization have become integral components of the activities of religious organizations today. The specific of these processes lies in the desire of religious organizations to facilitate the implementation of new technologies and practices in their activities and how to respond to their use by their believers. As Georgiy Kovalenko notes: "I think that perhaps in our lifetime, no matter how strange or incredible it may seem to all of us today, we will see virtual temples, which can only be accessed through virtual reality devices (glasses, costumes, etc.). I think it is possible in principle, and it is necessary to start thinking about it now" (Kovalenko 2020).

In modern conditions, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine joins the virtual world through active communication with believers and theological discussions. The actualization of this process took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and intensified during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine is experiencing a kind of renewal, which coincides with and is conditioned mainly by the processes of building the Church. On its way, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's episcopate finds the support of clergy and believers, confirming the results of sociological studies, which demonstrate a high level of trust in this institution. Important in this context is also the ideological basis of the processes of digitalization of the church, namely the concept of "Open Orthodoxy," which is based on the idea of networking of Orthodox communities and, what is essential, non-hierarchy (i.e., equality), which does not contradict the principles of administration and church management in Orthodox tradition.

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