

**RELIGIOUS SECURITY DURING COVID-19:  
FOREIGN EXPERIENCE – LESSONS FOR UKRAINE**

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**Abstract.** The study reveals the features and specifics of the functioning of religious security in a coronary pandemic, which began in late 2019 and continues. The conceptual model of religious security is an interconnected multilevel system of relations of practice of a new format of communication, which is possible only in the system of dialogue – «religious organizations-man-state-society» in conditions of internal and external pandemic threats and identifying heuristic opportunities that can affect new trends in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

The implementation of new communicative forms between believers of different denominations testifies to the need for a new perspective on the religious practices of religious organizations, which, falling into the contextual field of the pandemic, undergoes transformational changes in the system of «safety-danger». The degree of trust in church hierarchs and authorities, the number of patients, the rate of spread of the coronavirus, the approach of major religious holidays, etc., and the individual perception of the situation. The conceptual model of religious security should be characterized by flexibility, mobility, adaptability, openness, and take into account regulatory, institutional, resource, information capabilities, mental, ideological and ideological guidelines of the Ukrainian state.

Western European countries adapted relatively quickly in the context of a new model of state-religious relations during the pandemic. At the same time, it should be noted local protests and/or ignorance of quarantine

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measures taken by the authorities of a particular country, which led to the detention of responsible persons and/or increased morbidity among the population. In our opinion, this is due to the fact that most religious leaders in Western Europe demanded strict implementation of quarantine measures imposed by the authorities of a particular country. If there were covid dissidents, they were not representatives of the higher clergy (as in some Eastern European countries), but representatives of the middle clergy and laity. Relations between the authorities and religious organizations during COVID-19 in Eastern Europe are characterized by a certain diversity and ambiguity. This is due to the decisions of the authorities of a country. At the same time, despite some confrontation and conflicts (hidden or overt) in this region of the world, the Church changed both the practice of worship and was forced to improve the doctrine, to make adjustments to the ritual and cult activities.

Paying attention to the international experience of overcoming the coronavirus pandemic, its state-confessional and inter-confessional connotations, in Ukraine it is expedient to use the following positive potential: prevention of illegal and destructive activities against various denominations, including religious minorities, religious institutions it is advisable to constantly monitor their safety, creating an appropriate information center, etc.); religious security, as a component of national security, needs proper legal consolidation, first, it is worth including this concept in the legislative process of Ukraine, as no law provides even its definition; secondly, the place and role of ethno-confessional communities in the religious space of Ukraine, prevention of formation on their basis of the regional dominant confession in this or that territory needs legislative fixing; thirdly, it requires the introduction of constant monitoring of identification / assessment of religious security risks at the national and regional levels, taking into account local, demographic, geographical and socio-cultural aspects, which must be constantly reflected in the infographics of the coronavirus pandemic .

### **1. Introduction**

The coronavirus pandemic, «shaking» today's civilization and changing interstate and interpersonal relations, introduced unprecedented restrictive measures and, restricting the constitutional human right to freedom of

religion and movement, reformatted its activities in the information and virtual space. Rationality (often manipulative, affective rhetoric began to displace criticism and argumentation) and morality (the emergence of an ethical problem – when it comes to the different «value» of human life) came under pandemic influence. Undoubtedly, these changes, reflecting on religious security, have been a catalyst for a number of problems inherent in the modern religious space (for example, in Ukraine, the reformatting of the Orthodox landscape, the military conflict in the East, lack of constructive partnership between religious organizations and the state; religiousization of public authorities, unregulated legal documents in the field of interfaith and state-religious relations, etc.). The result is a rather multivariate reaction of denominations to the relevant prohibitions during the coronavirus pandemic in ritual and cult practice – from understanding and assisting the authorities to showing disobedience and deliberate violation of the quarantine regime. Among religious movements such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, COVID-19 is even seen as an additional weapon against infidels.

The coronavirus pandemic, which swept the world in late 2019 and continues to this day, remains a threat to the population of many countries, including European countries, radically affecting both public and private life. In this context, the effects of the pandemic have affected various spheres of society, including religious organizations, the system of state-confessional relations. Public authorities in almost all European countries, both Eastern and Western, have been forced to develop new policies on religious institutions to prevent mass illnesses among the population and large numbers of deaths.

In turn, religious organizations find themselves in a situation of dilemma:

- either to completely submit to the authorities and cease to operate their religious buildings;
- to partially restrict the access of their believers to worship so that they are not sanctioned and at the same time protect the population from many diseases. life and health.

On this basis, religious security undergoes a certain reformatting, its peculiar algorithm is formed, the factors of which are, on the one hand, the worldview and value crisis, which is most pronounced in ritual and cult practices, and on the other – a significant part of religious hierarchs. God's

election, charisma among the adherents of the organization, resorted to even more spread eschatological ideas, new forms of religiosity, which are cultivated as an alternative to the established traditions of state-confessional and inter-confessional relations.

Based on this, it became important to comprehend the experience of state-confessional relations during the coronavirus pandemic in Europe, in particular, to identify the relationship between religion and government in Eastern and Western Europe, to identify the positive aspects that need to be implemented in Ukraine.

Based on the monitoring of sociological research [3; 16; 17], including a study conducted by the project «Religious Security in Ukraine in a Coronavirus Pandemic» [2], we can distinguish two views on the impact of the global pandemic on the religiosity of the population:

- on the one hand, it is the growth of religiosity;
- on the other hand, on the contrary, a decrease in the level of religiosity or its immutability.

In this case, we are talking about religious security:

- firstly, in the context of strengthening faith as personal security;
- secondly, the role of religious faith for the security of the state and society.

Thus, the space of religious security extends to the personal security of man and the national security of society and the state. Thus, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in the summer of 2020 in 14 economically developed countries among 14,276 people showed that the vast majority of respondents in different countries declared both the strengthening of personal faith and its role in the lives of compatriots:

- US 28% (personal faith) and 28% (in the country as a whole);
- in Italy – 15% and 19%, respectively;
- in Canada – 13% and 16%;
- in Australia – 10% and 15%;
- in the UK – 10% and 14%;
- France – 10% and 11%;
- Belgium – 9% and 13%;
- the Netherlands – 7% and 17%;
- Germany – 5% and 10%;
- Japan – 5% and 5%, etc. [17].

66% of countries say that the religious faith of the people in their country is about the same as before the pandemic, while 15% say that the faith in their country has become stronger and 8% weaker. conducted by D. Meza, showed that the hypothesis of the growth of religiosity in the Catholic environment was not confirmed [16]. In Ukraine, there is also a slight increase in the level of religiosity 2%) [3, p. 28]. Also, the authors of this study show a small percentage increase in the level of religiosity compared to the pre-pandemic period (3.5-4%) [2]. The coronavirus pandemic also tracked intolerance, discrimination against religious minorities in many parts of the world, and entire religious communities were stigmatized, harassed, and accused of «bringing COVID-19 to their countries».

Many studies have focused on the mental state of believers, which is similar to that during religious epidemics, [18] long-term cognitive impairments, such as dementia, those who have contracted the coronavirus (University of Texas at San Antonio), and COVID pandemic prevention factors. COVID-19 and its impact on psychology, environment and economic perspective [11], analyzes the psychological impact of coronavirus on university students and its socio-economic determinants [13; 14], reveals the short-term and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for mental health population [20; 21], analyzes the role of quarantine measures and social distancing from depression, anxiety [12]. New research reports that 60% of the 400 coronavirus survivors have experienced long-term cognitive impairment [17]. Cognitive problems were found in those who experienced mild to moderate COVID symptoms, as well as in those who experienced more severe symptoms. One in three survivors experienced severe cognitive symptoms similar to dementia. The presented results of an expert survey of research psychologists and psychologists-practitioners on the socio-psychological aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic showed the psychological consequences of the coronavirus pandemic for the individual, interpersonal relationships and society as a whole [9]. Survey participants predict, on the one hand, an increase in the importance of family and friendships, and on the other – an increase in tension, anxiety, as well as mass psychological trauma, the search for psychotherapeutic means to relieve depression, insecurity. Religious psychopractices often become such a refuge; sometimes they are quite exalted, variously motivating others

to drastic changes in organizational, dogmatic, ritual and cult activities. Religion often acts as a factor that mitigates the borderline situations of human existence (serious illness, death of loved ones, physical and moral suffering, etc.). At the same time, these peaks of the giant iceberg of psychic life are exacerbated by shifts in the coronary crisis, which is rapidly changing history, affecting and influencing the fate of many people.

Today there is also a rather ambiguous situation with vaccination. For example, a survey conducted by the Razumkov Center's sociological service from May 21 to 26, 2021 [10] using a face-to-face interview at the respondents' place of residence showed the following results. 2017 respondents aged 18 and over were interviewed in all regions of Ukraine, except for the Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, according to a sample representing the adult population according to the main socio-demographic indicators.

«Compared to March 2021. from 51.5% to 43% decreased the share of respondents who answered that they do not intend to be vaccinated against coronavirus, from 12% to 19% increased the share of those who intend to do it in the near future (or have already done so), from 16% to 19% – the share of those who intend to do so, but later, 10% (as much as in March) intend to do so only when required by formal requirements (for example, for a trip to border).

The older respondents. the more often they express a lack of desire to get vaccinated (their share increases from 38% among those aged 18 to 29, to 51% among those aged 60 and over).

Among those who do not give up their intention to get vaccinated against COVID-19, 59% are ready to do it only if it is free (this is 7% more than in March), 23% of them are willing to pay for him, and another 6% are willing to pay to be vaccinated out of turn. The older the respondents, the more often they answer that they are ready to be vaccinated only free of charge (the share of such people increases from 49% among those aged 18 to 29 to 77% among those aged 60 and over).

Respondents who do not intend to be vaccinated are more likely to say that the vaccines they use in Ukraine are not effective or safe enough, but they are willing to be vaccinated with “some other” vaccine (this answer is given by 31% of those who do not intend to get vaccinated). Although compared to March, the proportion of those who do not trust the vaccine

has decreased (then it was 45% of those who refused to be vaccinated). 30% of them motivate their refusal by the fact that in their opinion, the risks of vaccination outweigh the risks of the disease itself, 15% – by those who have already contracted the coronavirus, 12% have medical contraindications, 7.5% believe that the probability that they will get COVID-19 is very low» [10].

### **2. Different approaches to the understanding of religious security in the conditions of a coronavirus pandemic**

Monitoring of works on religious security allowed us to identify the main areas in which its research is conducted: legal (O. Aftakhova, O. Ovchinnikov, I. Tarasevych, M. Fominskaya, etc.); political science (O. Bilokobylskyi, S. Zdioruk, A. Maigari Ibrahim, I. Ebrahimzadeh, N. Orizu, A. Sahraei, etc.); state administration (K. Vashchenko, O. Kornievskyi, S. Teleshun, O. Pavlov, Y. Saenko, etc.); historical and cultural (B. Nosenok, S. Rudenko, V. Turenko, etc.); theological (A. Kuraev, O. Filonenko, M. Cherenkov, etc.); religious studies (V. Zaporozhets, Y. Jansen, A. Kolodnyi, M. Nesterova, O. Predko, E. Kharkovshchenko, L. Fylypovych, S. Shapravskyi, etc.). These areas are important for a holistic study, as they form the methodological basis of this study.

The coronavirus pandemic has affected various social institutions, including and religion. As one of the clearest evidences is that already in the English-language Wikipedia there is a rather voluminous article called «Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religion», which still has 6 versions in other languages. In turn, work on the impact of the coronavirus epidemic on religion and vice versa to some extent is already in the Ukrainian humanitarian discourse in general and religious discourse in particular.

First of all, it is necessary to mention information-analytical materials (D. Gorevoy, V. Tokman, K. Shchotkina) and sociological studies (D. Belanenko, I. Volosevych, D. Savchuk), devoted to the reactions of religious organizations to pandemic challenges and clarifications. public opinion on the coronavirus pandemic, the threats and dangers it has caused in Ukraine. A number of researchers ask questions about changes in the system of «sacred-profan» (O. Shchipkov). Also, a series of scientific and journalistic materials on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on religious

relations, ritual and cult practice was posted on the leading Internet sites of domestic religious studies «Religious Information Service of Ukraine», «Church». To understand the position of various religious organizations in Ukraine, it is important to use the materials of official websites and printed periodicals (including the «Local Church» of the PCU, the «Patriarchate» of the UGCC and others).

Heuristically fruitful for the disclosure of the research topic are the works of V. Lukanova [4–7], which presents the socio-philosophical understanding of the pandemic as an antisystem in the unity of its structural and functional characteristics, as well as the study of R. Lunkin [8], who raises questions European identity during the corona crisis, the semantic axis of which is the thesis: «From the» new responsibility «to the» new manageability».

The work «Psychology and Pedagogy in Counteracting the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Internet Guide», edited by V.G. Flint.

A number of legal documents (in particular, «On the prevention of the spread of coronavirus COVID-19 in Ukraine», etc. [1].) Have provoked different views (V. Krivorot, A. Martynenko) on interference with human rights, restrictions on her freedom, personal inviolability, as well as restrictions on the right to hold religious events. These legal issues highlight a number of issues related to religious (insecurity) regarding the interference of state authorities in the activities of religious organizations during pandemics.

This study is based on a set of methods that will allow a comprehensive and detailed study of its subject field. The authors consider religious security not in a static, unchanging form, but in the context of its historical dynamics – the synchronous method allows semantic correlation of religious security issues related to the coronavirus pandemic in Ukraine and other countries; instead, the diachronic method allows us to track the social dynamics of the process, which unfolds under its influence.

The semantic range of research requires the implementation of interdisciplinary approaches, the meaning and significance of which contributes to the combination of knowledge, their integrative capabilities. Such polydisciplinarity made it possible to outline various interpretive «slices» of the study of religious security, to reveal their methodological possibilities in the context of both the semantic horizon of the synergetic paradigm and the network approach and to introduce



them into the context of research goals and objectives. It is the synergetic approach (characterized by openness, self-organization, nonlinearity) and the network approach that is the most productive in terms of obtaining practice-oriented results, as the focus of the network approach is not state authorities and religious institutions, but connections. and the relationship between them, as their intensity, the level of mutual involvement of these subjects of network interaction in activities, and their transactional, communication, instrumental, ideological, personal nature) allow «building» methodological synthesis as the deployment of integrative research strategy – transdisciplinarity. In this case, in the field of research under the pressure of problematization «falls» not only the cycle of socio-humanitarian disciplines, but also natural science knowledge, in the context of which are considered both religious security and religious epidemic, pandemic, etc.).

The methodology of studying the content of religious security is based on a comparative method, which reveals both the defining characteristics of the pandemic (extreme and extreme situations, etc.) and the general and specific elements used to influence believers; a systematic method used for a comprehensive study of the processes of religious influence; the method of typology, which is important in describing the relationship between public authorities and religious institutions; phenomenological method, which is used to analyze religious meanings that are constructed during the interaction of religious ideas and religious consciousness.

In addition to special methods inherent in certain sciences, the analysis of religious relations should be based on general methods of scientific knowledge, among which should be noted: methods used in both theoretical and empirical aspects of research (analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, abstraction and generalization, comparison and analogy, modeling), methods of empirical research (observation, comparison, measurement, experiment), as well as methods of theoretical research (ascent from the abstract to the concrete, the method of unity of logical and historical, etc.). Particularly important for the presented study are the principles that are considered fundamental in academic religious studies – objectivity, non-confessionalism (rather than confessional supremacy), tolerance (rather than prejudice), ideological pluralism (rather than ideological bias), which allow a scientific approach.

### **3. Religious security during COVID-19: foreign experience**

As part of the study, this problem was monitored in six countries – Ukraine, Georgia, Poland, Turkey, Italy, Greece. For analysis, we took these countries, focusing on the fact that the process of religious genesis, the religious space in general in each country reflects the problems, «pain points», areas of concern in Ukraine. Undoubtedly, the coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected both the world confessional community in general and religious security in particular. It encouraged the reformatting of religious practices, due to direct restrictions on ritual and religious activities. In each country, these restrictions have their own specifics and depend on the current situation, a number of contextual factors, in particular, the relationship between the status of religions (churches) and state-confessional relations – the basis of state-church relations – the principle of state support – Poland, Greece, Georgia, the basis of state-church relations – the principle of separation of church and state – Ukraine, Italy, in Turkey, religion is separated from the state by law, but in fact is state); differences in the capabilities of the health care system; socio-economic and cultural differences. The team of authors of the project «Religious Security in a Coronavirus Pandemic» built a comparative table, which, taking into account regulations, the specifics of state-religious relations, the reaction of state and religious institutions, identifies criteria and tracks the pandemic in different countries (Poland, Georgia, Georgia, Turkey, Italy, Greece).

As we can see, during the coronavirus pandemic in different countries, the range of religious security issues is quite variable. For example, in Italy, personal worship services were suspended, and as a result, many churches broadcast Mass through online broadcasts, radio, and television. Church funerals could not be held due to a nationwide lockdown. In some northern cities, the authorities had trouble storing large numbers of coffins, and churches offered to look after them. In the cities of Seriate and Bergamo, the Italian army voluntarily transported some of these coffins from churches and morgues to cemeteries and crematoria in other provinces.

The comparative state of religious security in the context of the coronavirus pandemic has shown that religious organizations are becoming a very powerful factor of perception among believers; usually this situation is completely different than among other ordinary citizens. The situation is quite clear, as religious organizations in a crisis situation

to combat the coronavirus were able to sacrifice the most important – the real ritual and cult activities, which are the basis of life of believers in all denominations and religions. For most believers, this refusal has been a test of the stability of the faith, as the lack of common prayers leads to the disunity of members of religious communities, the cessation of activities of individual parishes, and the deprivation of part of their income. People who do not go to churches and mosques also do not make donations. Although in many churches (among Catholics and in almost all churches in Russia and Europe among Protestants, to a lesser extent among Orthodox), the practice of online donation is becoming widespread, it can be done without leaving home on the religious association's website. In general, Christians, Muslims, and Jews took the necessary measures, in accordance with the recommendations of the national authorities. Therefore, the question of the attitude to the performance of worship and the reception of the sacrament has become a kind of test for the «tradition» in various European countries, in particular, in Western Europe.

Moreover, state-confessional relations in Western European countries have not always been harmonious. We can state the existence of both implicit and explicit protests against the restrictive measures of the authorities of a country regarding the functioning of certain religious activities. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the protests and conflicts took place mainly among the middle clergy and the laity; instead, the higher ranks of the clergy (for example, bishops, cardinals, etc.) supported the urgent need to comply with all quarantine restrictions.

Undoubtedly, a significant educational and psychotherapeutic role during the coronavirus pandemic belongs to religious leaders. They provide pastoral and spiritual support, helping the most vulnerable. «Religious leaders and faith-based organizations can strengthen their communities and combat self-isolation through regularly checking in on individual members, preferably via phone. This is particularly important to account for individuals who may be living alone, who are elderly, who have disabilities or are otherwise vulnerable. They can ensure that community contact lists are up-to-date and accessible to their members. Organizations can create “calling trees” in which individual members volunteer to phone several other members regularly to check on their well-being. In-person visits should be avoided where possible and if necessary, should employ appropriate physical

distancing and other preventive measures. Additionally, religious leaders are encouraged to prevent family separation and promote familybased care options in situations where children are separated from their families» [18].

At the same time, we can argue about some confrontations and conflicts (hidden or overt) in many parts of the world. Although there are differences in the basis of these conflicts: if in Catholic countries (eg Poland) the protest was associated with memories of the recent atheistic past, when churches were closed, in Orthodox countries (Ukraine, Greece) it manifested itself in a possible transformation (sometimes radical) form of participation in the sacraments, especially in connection with the celebration of the Eucharist.

It is noteworthy that the regulations of Ukraine and Georgia at different times have identified similar priority areas of national security, which, firstly, are the most sensitive to threats, and, secondly, determining the activities of public authorities. However, the analysis of these documents showed that the focus is primarily on the security of society and the state, while the individual and the citizen are only formal objects of national security. As for the place of religion in the national security systems of these countries, for a long time the religious factor remained largely on the sidelines of their national interests.

It can be concluded that the traditionally Orthodox countries of Eastern Europe, namely Greece and Ukraine, were dominated by the idea of the need to preserve traditions and permanence of worship. In particular, in these countries there was a discussion about the form and type of participation in the Eucharist. In March 2020, the Permanent Holy Synod of the Greek Church, discussing the coronavirus epidemic, issued an encyclical, which was sent to the dioceses of the Greek Church. It stated that the Holy Eucharist could not be a way of transmitting disease, and the Permanent Synod decided to continue to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. At the same time, in Ukraine there was a discussion about the possible transformation of the form of the sacraments. The UOC clergy also often ignored quarantine restrictions, especially in large monasteries. We believe that such intransigence of the UOC representatives to the recommendations and restrictions imposed by the state authorities is due to the fact that it is in this Orthodox denomination that a large part of the fundamentalist believers are present.

In our opinion, if we innovate in worship in accordance with the recommendations and restrictions imposed by the authorities, including

those concerning participation in the sacraments, we must be very careful, tolerant, taking into account the psychology of believers. After all, by avoiding health hazards, you can provoke the other side of religious danger – conflicts and clashes between supporters of different views on this issue. Thus, the main task is not so much the introduction of new forms of sacraments, but the protection from potential religious conflicts that may arise, depending on what radical decision can be made or rejected. Thus, the process of modernization of ritual practice for some churches is painful because of the rigidity of the ritual tradition, the low quality of education of the clergy, the priority of rites over values. Therefore, the implementation of ritual practices on the Internet poses new challenges to traditional religions, the sacred space of which is an integral part of their organizational, dogmatic activities.

### 4. Lessons for Ukraine

Based on the processed information, recommendations were developed to public authorities to ensure religious security at both the national and regional levels.

First, in the context of ensuring religious security in Ukraine, we emphasize the need to develop updates for legislation aimed at rethinking the phenomenon of religion and the role of religious organizations in society, especially in the event of a coronavirus pandemic. Thus, at the moment, there are certain disagreements, problems in communication between the secular authorities and religious communities, at least regarding the observance of quarantine norms. As a result, it hinders the activities not only of religious organizations, but also prevents public authorities from fully ensuring the interests of religious communities in the field of religious security.

That is why we are convinced that in the context of a coronavirus pandemic, faith should be considered as a primary necessity of a religious person. Consequently, public authorities must ensure that citizens can freely realize their spiritual and religious needs. Therefore, it is logical to introduce a functional paradigm of interaction between church and state, which will be based on the actual needs of religious organizations in the implementation of religious activities. This requires the development and implementation of active dialogue practices, both offline and online. A significant role is given to dialogue, which should be aimed at finding common solutions that

can be reached by consensus. It is necessary to form an unbiased, objective view of the real state of religious security in Ukraine in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, which should be formed in the field of neutrality in relation to one or another religious organization. Moreover, it is necessary to integrate the believers themselves in understanding how organizational and social processes take place within the interaction of religious organizations with public authorities, which helps to express their own ability to express their will to find common solutions.

Secondly, it is recommended to pay attention to the formation of such a phenomenon as «online religion». In our opinion, this phenomenon is clearly ambivalent. The fact is that, on the one hand, due to the tendency to virtualize religion, there is a high probability of establishing interfaith contacts, there is a possibility of dialogue between different religious movements. Discovering the diversity of religious experience, the ability to communicate with completely different people remotely opens the possibility of free, unbiased exchange of information. Awareness and understanding of the other, albeit different, opens up new opportunities for the formation of religious tolerance and empathy. Due to this, worldview pluralism develops, the ability to find and rationally weigh the spiritual potential of different religious denominations, even without leaving home. It seems that this, on the contrary, should contribute to the active renewal of church life both online and offline; application of new technologies in covering the activities of religious communities, focusing on online broadcasts of sacraments and services. Finally, the ritual potential of new technologies in the religious sphere is revealed in the so-called convergent practices, ie an active form of adaptation of religious rituals to the format of online interaction, which, in turn, can stimulate the emergence of new and uncharacteristic past behaviors (online sermons), online churches, etc.). All this allows even deeper involvement of adherents of religion in the virtual space of religious life, through the maintenance of social networks, the development of various religious applications for smartphones.

However, one cannot fail to notice the ambiguity of such an impact of the virtualization of religion. Free access to any, in particular, religious information, gives unlimited space for the creation of certain «online religions», which is, rather, a religious simulation, a game. An important participant in the action and later a mediator between the person and the

«higher powers», becomes an IT specialist who is responsible for the installation, configuration and operation of the device. In this context, religious competence is complemented by technical ability. Thus, a new religious space is being formed. At the same time, the entire information space can become a wide field for missionary activity of these quasi-religions, which are likely to provoke tendencies to violate religious security in the country. Uncontrolled information flows are often replete with unverified, fake information that can be disseminated by specific religious organizations in order to incite religious hatred. The consciousness of the individual, which exists within a rather religious worldview, is extremely vulnerable to all sorts of religious manipulations, especially in cyberspace. This, in turn, can lead to increased social tensions between adherents of various religious organizations, provoke aggression and unwillingness to understand a different position. In view of this, a certain constructive and destructive social potential of virtualization of religion in the context of ensuring religious security in Ukraine is obvious. However, public authorities should not underestimate the impact of such communities on human consciousness.

Third, it is considered important to provide the media with only verified, official information from representatives of both public authorities and leaders of religious organizations. At the moment, you can find a large amount of fake information on various Internet resources, which only provokes the undermining of religious security in Ukraine. Existing information wars, especially with the aggressor country, provoke the emergence of a bifurcation of religious identity, distort the value component of the individual and affect its perception of reality. The main trends that can be seen in this are the encroachment on religious security in the country through the formation of religious conflicts in cyberspace and the gradual, methodical destruction of the spiritual and cultural identity of both adherents and the general population. All these things pose a threat to the implementation of religious security, and therefore must be taken into account by public authorities at the legislative level to ensure the rights and freedoms of the individual in cyberspace.

Thus, having analyzed the trend towards virtualization of religion and the possible consequences of this phenomenon, we consider it necessary to ensure religious security in Ukraine, especially during the coronavirus

epidemic, in the Internet space. The activity of various religious organizations in cyberspace and the formation of a new existential dimension of spirituality requires, above all, the education of tolerance, tolerance among different religious denominations. On the part of the state, we consider it necessary to take measures to ensure information security in the field of religious communications, as well as control and analysis of the activities of destructive religious organizations in the information space of society.

### **5. Conclusions**

The conceptual model of religious security is an interconnected multilevel system of relations of practice of a new format of communication, which is possible only in the system of dialogue – «religious organizations-man-state-society» in conditions of internal and external pandemic threats and identifying heuristic opportunities that can affect new trends in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, in determining the content of religious security, the following aspects must be taken into account: first, it is the protection, preservation and dissemination of those communities that spiritually develop and improve modern man, form in him a human-centered consciousness that is responsible for itself, the state, humanity, the world. ; secondly, it is a state of stable functioning and original development of the “religion-man-state” system, which can have both constructive and destructive manifestations; thirdly, it is a person’s assessment of the situation in the system «efficiency-economy-humanity».

The implementation of new communicative forms between believers of different denominations testifies to the need for a new perspective on the religious practices of religious organizations, which, falling into the contextual field of the pandemic, undergo transformational changes in the system of «safety-danger». the degree of trust in church hierarchs and authorities, the number of patients, the rate of spread of the coronavirus, the approach of major religious holidays, etc., and the individual perception of the situation. The conceptual model of religious security should be characterized by flexibility, mobility, adaptability, openness, and take into account regulatory, institutional, resource, information capabilities, mental, ideological and ideological guidelines of the Ukrainian state.

Western European countries adapted relatively quickly in the context of a new model of state-religious relations during the pandemic. At the



same time, it should be noted local protests and/or ignorance of quarantine measures taken by the authorities of a particular country, which led to the detention of responsible persons and/or increased morbidity among the population. In our opinion, this is due to the fact that most religious leaders in Western Europe demanded strict implementation of quarantine measures imposed by the authorities of a particular country. If there were covid dissidents, they were not representatives of the higher clergy (as in some Eastern European countries), but representatives of the middle clergy and laity.

Relations between the authorities and religious organizations during COVID-19 in Eastern Europe are characterized by a certain diversity and ambiguity. This is due to the decisions of the authorities of a country. At the same time, despite some confrontation and conflicts (hidden or overt) in this region of the world, the Church changed both the practice of worship and was forced to improve the doctrine, to make adjustments to the ritual and cult activities.

The author of this study, using legal documents of Greece, Poland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Italy, Turkey, carefully studied the situation regarding religious security on government portals, websites of religious denominations, speeches at conferences. Paying attention to the international experience of overcoming the coronavirus pandemic, its state-confessional and inter-confessional connotations, in Ukraine it is expedient to use the following positive potential: prevention of illegal and destructive activities against various denominations, including religious minorities, religious institutions it is advisable to constantly monitor their safety, creating an appropriate information center, etc.); religious security, as a component of national security, needs proper legal consolidation, first, it is worth including this concept in the legislative process of Ukraine, as no law provides even its definition; secondly, the place and role of ethno-confessional communities in the religious space of Ukraine, prevention of formation on their basis of the regional dominant confession in this or that territory needs legislative fixing; thirdly, it requires the introduction of constant monitoring of identification / assessment of religious security risks at the national and regional levels, taking into account local, demographic, geographical and socio-cultural aspects, which must be constantly reflected in the infographics of the coronavirus pandemic.

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