

Theological Studies in Ukraine: Current Forms of Expression

Within the problematic geopolitical background in Ukraine for the Ukrainian people, there is a need to abandon totalitarian and socialist thinking dictated by the post-Soviet status of the Ukrainian people. In the context of the break with the culture formed under the influence of the eastern geographical neighbour, Ukrainian theologians, philosophers, and academia need to create a theology to integrate Ukrainian ways of thinking into the European context and develop the dynamics of Ukrainian-language theological content. Based on these and other needs, an informal youth theological organization was created, the Youth Theological Club. This club unites young theologians, students, philosophers, and others interested in humanities and theology. One of the club's main goals is to form an all-Ukrainian platform to promote the development of communication and cooperation in creating and developing theological projects.

The Christian Institute in Transcarpathian (Hust) and the Youth Theological Club were the initiators of the two-day youth theological seminar, which took place in the city of Hust, Zakarpattia region, on 24-25 September 2022. Partners of the event were the Overseas Council and the East European Institute of Theology (Lviv) - organizations that have been developing theology in Ukraine and abroad for many years. The seminar gathered more than 60 participants from many parts of Ukraine: students, teachers, and education professionals.

The program was divided into two days: on the first day, presentations of current theological and Christian projects affecting society took place. It was started by Vitalii Klodnytskyi, the author and founder of the Christian media project "InstallGod". He talked about the history of the idea of the project, the beginning of the team's formation, and the first difficulties they encountered in the development process. Vitalii emphasized the need for high-quality media support of the dialogue between the Church and society. He and his team shot different types of videos for different target areas. Such content helped establish a connection with the community in which their church lives, responding to its needs and fulfilling its evangelistic mission. An essential thesis of Vitalii was the assurance that there is now a need for quality Christian and theological content, and it can be created with the resources and opportunities available to everyone. Developing your abilities and talents can be transformed into a project that will benefit society by creating quality ideas and content.

The next block was an introduction to the Christian Institute in Transcarpathian and its educational and social activities. Valerii Fedoranych, the rector of the institute, shared how the idea of creating an educational institution in a region like Zakarpattia came about and how it changed in response to local educational needs. Oksana Denysiuk, the academic dean, spoke about the formation of the institute's team, the progress of the institute's work today, and the challenges faced by students. Since 2019, the institute has provided educational opportunities for practical theology courses for everyone who sees the necessity and urgency of serving the community and God. At the same time, the institute operates some other specialized programs, such as theatre service, a sign language course, holding children's clubs, caring for an orphanage, etc. Since the beginning of the war, the Christian Institute in Transcarpathian has been actively involved in charity and volunteer assistance to regions affected by the occupation. Also, it acts as a platform for theological events such as this seminar. Valerii Fedoranych noted the importance of such a meeting: "This was a meeting at the crossroads for each of the participants, during the war. We stopped, many people got to know each other, greeted each other, listened to each other, stayed together, agreed on something in common, and again left to face the enemy. With such theologians, we will overcome the avalanche!".

Oleksandr Marusiak, a lawyer and translator, prepared a report on modern translations of theological literature into Ukrainian. In particular, Oleksandr considered the basic principles of translation and the critical challenges faced by the translator. Much was taken from his experience because he translated the book of the American theologian Bob Utley into Ukrainian. They also talked about the obstacles preventing the translation of important world theological literature into the Ukrainian language. In the discussion after the report, there was a consensus that translation activity is necessary and very important for the development of Ukrainian theology. Therefore, qualified specialist translators will always be valuable in our context because those who professionally translate such a narrow-profile category of books as theology are very few now. Also, the importance of reading culture was emphasized in the discussion because it creates demand for translation and book publishing and can contribute to the positive dynamics of development in this area. The fundamental thesis of the report summarizes what was discussed later: "*Translating theological literature is a responsible work and service. It is an activity that can change the Ukrainian theological context and show the importance of reading books.*"

At the end of the first day, Yuri Chornomorets shared his experience of serving in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, in which he found himself from the very beginning of the war. In his report, which had the simple title "Challenges of a theologian in war", he revealed the essence of complex challenges that arise before people decide to resist the enemy with weapons. Yuri and his comrades have endured a difficult path of trials and continue their struggle by forming and providing groups of snipers. Along with physical upheavals, the warrior also receives disruptions of his faith and worldview. However, as Yuri notes, the theologian in the war asserts that his mission is

one of the noblest: to protect his family, city and country. Therefore, theology in times of upheaval is not just discipleship or preaching - it takes the form of prophetic service.

The second day of the seminar was devoted to an overview of modern theology in the world and Ukraine. In the first report, Roman Solovii outlined Ukrainian theology's main problems and prospects. He made a list of the main directions of modern Ukrainian theology and those who are engaged in these directions. Roman emphasized the relatively low dynamics of development, including the post-doc work of researchers, the result of theological institutions and organizations' outcomes, and theological book publishing. However, this should not be a conclusion, only an open field of prospects that can be developed in our country. The theology activity involves developing the community in which he is located. Studying the experiences and traditions of our predecessors is fundamentally necessary for Christians today. Theology must be in dialogue with the past to give answers to the questions of the present. The practical activity of a theologian benefits his environment and the local community.

In his speech, Anatolii Denysenko talked about key themes and figures in world theology of the second half of the 20th - beginning of the 21st century. Some vital theologians, such as Jürgen Habermas, José Casanova, postmodern theologians Perry Anderson, David Harvey, and others, have been considered. He mentioned many political theologians like Jan Assmann, Karl Schmidt, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann, and others. Anatoli noted that even the ideas of those modern thinkers who do not profess Christianity could enrich the theological discourse. Philosophical theology is people's attempts to describe the understanding and perception of God. In the discussion that followed the speech, it was noted that the study of predecessors is a precious experience for the Church today, which can study the tradition of understanding God throughout the entire life of humanity.

The following report was on the potential of theological aesthetics in modern Ukrainian theology by Denys Kondiuk. This topic is narrow compared to the other issues of the seminar, but it was qualitatively featured among them because experiencing God through beauty is one of the most common ways of knowing Him. Denys explained that beauty is inseparable from Goodness and Truth; it is a "trinitarian" whole. God appears to man in such a context, allowing himself to be known. A critical summary or quintessence of the theme is a quote by David Bentley Hart, where he asserts that God is the event of the circular course of His Persons, in which He graciously gives place to the being. God is the divine interval of the superabundance of love, life, and gift. In God, there is no inward, non-relational gaze, no silent immobility that precedes relation or is in dialectical relation to another; His eye always keeps the other in view, for He is his own Other. In this fullness, descent and exit are not secondary movements, not separate phases within a metaphysical totality, but the one life of God in joy.

Rostislav Tkachenko's final report focused on the dialogue between Ukrainian and European theology as academic disciplines. Starting with the question of the expediency of integrating Ukrainian theology into the European context, he asserted that such a connection could contribute to developing ideas and their design according to

high standards. As a piece of advice, Rostyslav gave several theses on how to carry out such a dialogue: understanding the Western and world tradition and active interaction with its heritage; anti-isolationist approach in research; active networking and building international relations; study of relevant ancient and modern languages, and many others. The discussion of this topic confirmed the importance of such a development of Ukrainian theology.

The Christian Institute in Transcarpathian and the Youth Theological Club would like to thank all participants and speakers of the seminar, as well as sponsors, for the opportunity to hold such events. The involvement of young people in the reflection and discussion of important theological topics during difficult circumstances will help maintain the dynamics of the importance of the Church for Ukrainian society today.