Articles

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The Digitalization of Worship Practices during the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Context of the Mediatization of Orthodoxy

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The article describes how the closure of churches during the Easter period due to the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures led to the shift of everyday liturgical and communication practices online. The experience of "distance church life" in April-June 2020 has shown that both the mediatization of Orthodoxy and the development of the Orthodox section of the Internet reached a fundamentally new stage. The author examines this stage using the concept of participatory culture introduced by Henry Jenkins and cultural studies approaches based on the categories, interactivity and immersion. The shared experience of online worship over a span of several months and the degree of participants' co-presence and level of emotional involvement point to a new level of mediatization that entailed the production and consumption of textual, audio, and video content in the course of vertical and horizontal communication. This experience also showed the active development of participatory practices, including the strengthening of the interactivity of worship, the unprecedented intensity of immersion, and the prospects of substantial changes in liturgical life driven by digitalization.

THE coronavirus pandemic and related quarantine restrictions were not themselves the cause of changes in various social and cultural areas; rather, they catalyzed existing processes and trends. Religious life is no exception. Unforeseen circumstances — the inability of believers to attend services and habitually live according to the Church calendar, necessary changes to the rite due to sanitary measures, the transformation of churches and monasteries into hotbeds of infection, death among the clergy, including high-ranking prelates, conflicts with local authorities over restrictions, and declining income due to the lack of parishioners — all exacerbated previously existing contradictions and revealed tendencies that will gradually change various aspects of church life and Church-societal relations. Perhaps the most radical experience for millions of believers was the closure of temples to the laity and the migration of everyday liturgical and communication practices to the online environment.

In this text, my goal is not to describe an established, representative, and average picture (it does not yet exist), but rather, to identify situations, examples, practical experiences, and points of view that demonstrate the potential and direction of transformations. This text is based on theoretical and practical works and concepts in cultural and media research (immersiveness, participation, and the like), and in theological, sociological, and anthropological research (liturgical practices and the mediatization of religion).

The Internet and the mediatization of Orthodoxy

Researchers of the mediatization of religion have mainly examined the presence of religious organizations, communities, and their individual representatives in the media space, in information exchange, and in communication. One of the main mediatization of religion theorists, Danish sociologist Stig Hjarvard, believes that mediatization leads to the "banalization" and "mercantilization" of religion, that is media institutions take away from religion its functions (i.e. they become moral and spiritual guides, give a sense of community, and so on) and equate religion with various forms of entertainment (Hjarvard 2008; Hjarvard 2016). German author Oliver Krüger, in his critical review of different approaches to describing the mediatization of religion, concludes that "most research simply defines mediatization as a process of using new media" (Krüger 2018). Krüger shows that researchers have not developed a single concept of the mediatization of religion, and thus all existing interpretations are vulnerable to criticism, but provide much room for interpretation and development.

Sociologist Elena Ostrovskaya, for example, wrote about the application of the concepts of mediatization to Russian Orthodoxy and its digitalization (Ostrovskaya 2019). Ostrovskaya believes that "for twenty years there has been a steady tendency for Russian Orthodoxy to enter public social arenas, mediated by its mediatization and the digital reconfiguration of its basic institutions" (Ostrovskaya 2019, 310). This trend has had two directions: "the semantic, organizational, and ideological formation of the media and the digital dimensions Russian Orthodoxy" and "the restructuring by the forces of Orthodox media communications of a wide media environment and digital space" (Ostrovskaya 2019, 310). That is, the focus is first and foremost on the use of new media as tools for internal and external communication.

Since 1996 and the first appearance of Orthodox sites in the *ru* domain zone, the Internet has performed almost the same functions as traditional media, information dissemination and communication. Despite the presence of properties that distinguish the Internet from the "old media" — hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity (Lukina and Fomicheva 2005) — and even though the authors of church sites, both informal and official, enjoyed all the advantages that these properties provided in comparison with traditional broadcast media, the usual model of media content consumption persisted: producers published information and readers / viewers received it. I have described this stage in detail in previous works (Luchenko 2008; Luchenko 2015). Gradually, Internet communities emerged that could be called extraterritorial religious communities, indicating interaction greater than the simple exchange of information. These include, the community of the first large independent forum of Deacon Andrei Kuraev (http://kuraev.ru) and the Orthodox segment of LiveJournal (www.livejournal.ru) in the 2000s, and later, numerous thematic Orthodox groups on VKontakte and Facebook. These, however, cannot be considered parish communities in the full sense due to their limitations in regards to both vertical and horizontal communication.

The experience of a distanced church life in Russia during April-June 2020 showed that a fundamentally new stage has begun both in the mediatization of Orthodoxy and in the development of the Orthodox Internet. No longer just characterized by the "process of using new media," about which Krüger writes, nor the traditional creation and consumption of content, nor the presence of religious topics and representatives of the Church in the media, etc. . ., this stage features the massive transfer of church practices, including the liturgical, into the digital space, the emergence of various hybrid forms, and a new level of involvement — immersion.

In part, this was a projective situation, an experiment, a demonstration of opportunities that will not yet be in demand on a daily basis following the return of a normalized offline church life, but which will determine the trajectory of changes and the directions of discussions. It should be noted that the practices discussed further did not arise due to the coronavirus and quarantine; rather, the crisis showcased and strengthened them. For example, two years ago Elena Ostrovskaya published a study on the Internet mediatization of confession, in which she studied confession as a topic of communication in parish groups on social media (Ostrovskaya 2018). Distancing in 2020, however, raised a topic scholars have yet to discuss, that of confession or other sacraments as online practices.

Henry Jenkins, the American media and cultural studies scholar, formulated and developed the concept of participatory culture in relation to the digital practices of an information society (Jenkins et al. 2009). Participatory culture presupposes a high degree of self-regulation and informal relationships within online communities, but most importantly, extensive user involvement in content production. While Jenkins wrote more about traditional content, engagement and participation are key categories that describe the qualitative change in digital religious practices. Orthodox Internet users, including the clergy, exist in a participatory cultural space, in which the church component cannot be separated from their everyday life and habits, a phenomenon that was especially pronounced during the period when access to tangible worship was limited. In Jenkins' conception, users involved in the production of cultural meanings unite in communities, elevate their status, and get the opportunity to influence institutionalized culture. If this pattern is extrapolated to religion, then one can assume that the experience of being in the "participatory space" will allow laymen and priests from the generation of "digital natives" to influence the transformation of practices and the system of hierarchal relationships within the Church, at least in its mediatized, virtual projection. It is useful to consider some of the trends in this direction that emerged during the pandemic.

Online worship during self-isolation

On April 13, 2020, the website of the RBC news agency published the results of a Qrator Labs survey that claimed that "in the last week of March the volume of traffic consumption on religious sites increased by 30-500 percent" (Skrynnikova 2020). Company representatives attributed the rise to increased interest in the religious topics and the

fact that "many are participating in church services via video link" (Skrynnikova 2020). There may be pretense in this report: the company does not disclose which religious sites the study assessed, and furthermore, traffic on Orthodox sites always increases during Great Lent and major holidays. Even with these faults, it is clear that at the very beginning of self-isolation online services became a pronounced phenomenon in the Russian segment of the Internet.

The period of self-isolation fell on those weeks of the church calendar when services are most intense and attendance increases significantly — the end of the Great Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Bright Week. On April 11, a circular letter issued in Moscow and signed by the first vicar of the Moscow diocese, Metropolitan of the Resurrection, Dionysius (Porubai), stated that services would be performed only in the presence of clergy, church staff, and volunteers. (Metropolitan of the Resurrection, Dionysius 2020). In other cities Church authorities issued similar orders with reference to the decisions of the regional sanitary authorities. And the next day, Patriarch Kirill called on believers "to spend time in front of the television during service broadcasts" (Patriarch Kirill 2020).

The "working group under Patriarch Kirill for coordinating actions in the context of the spread of the coronavirus infection" made Telegram its official messenger for informing the media, the flock, and the interested public. On April 7, the group reported that "in conditions of forced self-isolation, the Russian Orthodox Church offers its parishioners online broadcasts of services. This allows home prayer to be filled with the joy of contemplation of the Divine Liturgy and other services" (Telegram 2020). It also contended that 100,000 users on the Odnoklassniki social network watched the broadcast from the Yelokhovo Cathedral of Patriarch Kirill's morning prayers for the Feast of Praise of the Most Holy Theotokos (Telegram 2020).

On April 15, Natal'ia Rodomanova, the press secretary of the St. Petersburg diocese, reported that from April 1 to April 12 there were 800,000 views of broadcasts of divine services. According to Rodomanova, "in the fifth week of Great Lent about 65,000 users watched the broadcast of the service in which the Metropolitan participated," and "in those churches where amicable parishes formed or in those where the format of online broadcasting has been used for a long time, the average views are up to 26,000" (Galeeva 2020). According to *Fontanka*, 15 churches of the diocese broadcasted regularly, most on VKontakte, but some via Facebook and Instagram. By April 2, similar news appeared from Orenburg: 2,500 people watched the first broadcasts of services on the official account of the Orenburg diocese (ProOren 2020).

There is no aggregate data on nation-wide viewership of online broadcasts of the Easter night service, but scholars can derive approximate numbers from regional news (on Easter churches in 42 of Russia's 85 regions were officially closed to parishioners). In St. Petersburg, about 500,000 users watched online broadcasts on the night of April 19 (Kolash 2020). The Yekaterinburg diocese also provided statistics on views of Easter services; on the night of April 18-19, 107,000 users watched the broadcast from the Holy Trinity Cathedral on the YouTube account of the regional Orthodox TV channel (*Soiuz*), 5,000 tuned in for the broadcast from the Novo-Tikhvin monastery on VKontakte, and several thousand viewed parish broadcasts in groups on social networks (Ekaterinburgskaia eparkhiia 2020).

It was not only dioceses and individual parishes that conducted online broadcasts on their websites and social media accounts. With assistance from "Match TV," which specializes in broadcasting sporting events, Gazprom-Media organized broadcasts of the pre-Easter and Easter services from churches in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Orel. It created a special section on the Premier service, where on the main holidays and during Holy Week one could watch several services a day from different cities ("Priamye transliatsii bogosluzhenii" 2020). In this service, the live broadcasts themselves were free, but their recordings were only available to subscribers.

In contrast to the Internet, television broadcasts of services is familiar, and thus there exists complete statistics of viewership. Three channels, "*Pervyi*," NTV, and the Orthodox channel, "*Spas*," annually broadcast the patriarchal service from the empty Cathedral of Christ the Savior. According to Mediascope, in 2020 the television audience for the Easter Night Service on April 19 reached 2.9 million viewers, 81 percent higher than in 2019, when 1.6 million watched the service (Dobrunov 2020).

It is clear from this review that online broadcasts became a very popular format on various sites. The hierarchy itself called on believers to pray in front of the screens, and the broadcasts became more technologically diverse, conforming to the standards used in the broadcasting of other major events like sports.

Broadcasting services: from television to Instagram

Professional official online broadcasts from diocesan cathedrals and large churches do not differ from television, except for the channel of distribution. The traditional passive, unengaged consumption of con-

tent persists. The genre of commentated television broadcasts of patriarchal services, which appeared on television channels in the early 1990s and has since undergone minor changes, underscores the substantial distance between the viewer and the employees and those present in the temple: those present are participants while the viewers are spectators, a type of "teletourist." The result is a "double intermediary" effect, whereby not only the media channel and the screen separate the viewer from the events, but also the commentator, who shapes the perception of what is happening on the screen, who dictates what and how the viewer sees.

A different situation arises when watching live broadcasts on the social networks of parish churches. Amateurs use mobile phones to broadcast the service, which often includes background noise, their breathing, and the shaking of the tripod or their hands. This is a completely different level of involvement — immersion — which shrinks the distance between the viewer and what is happening on the screen. As noted by media researchers Anna Novikova and Il'ia Kiriia, "the distinct 'low quality' of the image and sound, the informality of speech, and so on, along with the promptness of information transmission, do not interfere but contribute to create the effect of presence, the involvement in the reality of the spectacle" (Novikova and Kiriia 2018, 281). Moreover, in this way it is not just possible to broadcast the main services — liturgies, all-night vigils, and so on — but also *molebens*, *akathists*, vespers, and other events of church life.

For example, those wishing to watch the ceremony of the descent of the Holy Fire from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in 2020 could choose between a traditional television broadcast with commentary and a live amateur broadcast on Facebook, which creates the effect of presence. There were also broadcasts of funeral services for clergymen who died from the coronavirus. On April 23 about one hundred Facebook users watched the funeral service for the rector of the Yelokhovo Cathedral in Moscow, Archpriest Alexander Ageikin. And on May 1 about the same number of parishioners attended the online broadcast of the funeral service for the Rector of the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Krylatskoe, Archpriest Georgii Breev. Both were broadcast simultaneously on YouTube.

At the same time, on social networks it is possible to see which accounts view events. Thus, parishioners who know each other may have the feeling that they "saw each other"; that is, they did not watch separately but were all together at the same time in one place. Viewers wrote about this in the comments accompanying the broadcasts. In

addition, they can respond to what is happening in the broadcast window — put a "like" or sympathetic "emoji," leave a public comment expressing gratitude, support, sympathy, or send a personal message to the filmer. In this way, an exchange of emotions occurs that increases engagement.

Also popular among church users were "stories" — fragments of the broadcast posted on the church Instagram accounts. This was often the format for sermons and the reading of names for commemoration at the liturgy. In comments or via personal messages on the same Instagram accounts or VKontakte pages, individuals posted requests to remember the names. This is a new contactless way of submitting memorials: parishioners sent them in the comments, listened to them being read in the "stories," and sent offerings through an online payment system. In the case of "stories," the effect of presence and involvement is asynchronous: a person can see what happened today at the liturgy in their parish, hear their name being read, or listen to a sermon over a twenty-four-hour period (this is how long the stories are available in the account that published them).

Thus, interactivity implies ample opportunities for active interaction of the users with what is happening on the screen and with each other. Furthermore, the variability of virtual presence strategies has the potential to transform the practices of believers' participation in worship and the role of online events in church life.

Interactivity and immersion

To describe and analyze the transition of liturgical practices online and the ever-increasing degree of involvement, the approaches adopted in cultural studies and art history are useful. Rituals in Christian worship harken back to the most ancient religious rituals, which have always had performative properties. The symbolic structure of the liturgical action and the nature of the relationship between those who perform the service and those present still have much in common with the theater. Therefore, it is appropriate to apply the categories that researchers use to describe the transformations of theaters, museums, and other cultural institutions to the participatory culture of the digital sphere — interactivity and immersion. Interactivity is interaction provided by a media carrier, between a user or a recipient and something. Immersion is the next step: "in immersive projects, the environment becomes both the place where a user's needs can be met and one that generates emotion through a unique combination of con-

vention and reality" (Novikova and Kiriia 2018, 282). Both liturgical practices and theatrical performances emerged from the ancient mysteries, but an important difference is that divine services always presupposed greater involvement of the "spectators," some form of co-existence with the "protagonists" performing the rituals and sacraments, sometimes emotional or even active presence within the performance. That is, worship services were initially more immersive than theatrical performances and shows, which, while gaining online involvement, use digital techniques to create immersive spaces in real offline halls. It is important that the participants of interactive and immersive actions always have a choice of the degree of interaction and immersion — they are given the opportunity to enter into a dialogue and immerse themselves, but regardless of whether the action takes place online or offline, the choice of distance remains with the user: the creation of conditions for interactivity and immersion does not guarantee it. One of the main features of modern multimedia shows is that the recipient has the right not to accept the proposed rules of the "game" and may determine the degree of interactivity and immersion, according to their own individuality or mood" (Evallyo 2019, 269).

A Television broadcast of a liturgy or any other worship service, especially if it features commentary, is a type of passive content consumption. This is the "old" form of interaction that places the spectacle at maximum distance from the viewer. Live broadcasting on the Internet assumes interactivity — the ability to react and to follow events without intermediaries. In addition, it provides new opportunities, for example, the ability to "move" between different churches during one service, to connect to different broadcasts or even turn on two different screens (desktop and smartphone) simultaneously, and to send comments to some of the employees (for example, to tell the operator of the broadcast to adjust the tripod) or to others watching the broadcast. At the same time, the participant is completely invisible and protected from possible reactions from those present, which creates a more comfortable situation. For example, there is no need to observe church etiquette (wear a skirt and a scarf or, for men, a long-sleeved shirt).

This is how Anna Lyudkovskaya, a parishioner of the Orthodox Church in America living in Chicago, described this experience on her Facebook account:

> Isolation does amazingly progressive things to church services. Last night I went to YouTube (to listen to Byzantine singing at a Moscow

church), and on the right are recommended videos, all live broadcasts from Orthodox churches in Chicago, Minnesota, and Washington — they read the twelve Gospels everywhere (Lyudkovskaya 2020).

Among the comments from Orthodox users that I collected from social networks were the following:

> Broadcasts are simply considered as television or theatre. I watch them from this perspective. This is the case in some huge cathedrals, where the service goes somewhere distant and incomprehensible... I watch broadcasts from different churches [...] Of course, it is sad without icons, well I have them at home, and without incense and Holy water of course. But this is a chance to feel grace where it is without the incense. And I am very grateful for this opportunity!... There is a feeling that you are gaining more than you are losing: there is a composure and harmony of prayer at the service, listening to every word, it is a very personal experience for those who serve. The vision of what is happening in the altar is very close and there is an amazing unity between all who pray together at a great distance. All this is akin to the sacrament. All that is missing is the ray of light from the high window to the altar and the beauty in people's faces after communion. Well, that, and I really want to hug (Leonova 2020; Luchenko 2020).

On the one hand, the variety of reflective responses collected in real time, when the experience is still transpiring or when it is just beginning, confirms the thesis that the degree of involvement and immersion depends more on the individual characteristics of the user and their mood than on their technical skill. On the other hand, they suggest that participation in these online practices brings an unexpected novelty to believers' church life and becomes a valuable joint experience. As a result, this experience, which thousands of Orthodox Christians endured at the same time, may, in the long term, change their daily behavior and affect their attitude towards worship in general, especially considering that the sanitary measures churches took demonstrated the very possibility of these changes and innovations.

During the time of isolation new practices arose that allow scholars to discuss a gradual transition from interactivity to one with some elements of immersion and even the emergence of hybrid forms of worship. The next stage of interactivity/immersion after broadcasts on social networks is worship on Zoom or any other conferencing platforms, which permits many participants to be equally connected to events at

the same time. In some parishes, especially Orthodox communities in America and Western Europe, it was common to hold services together, when all the employees, including the priest, were at home. Deacons and choir members, lay worshipers, altar men, and priests all participated in the worship services via Zoom. Often, these were not liturgies centered around the celebration of the sacrament but services consisting of joint prayers, reading and singing — canonical hours, morning prayers, Holy Week services, prayer services, and so on. For example, parishioners from Paris, Moscow, and cities across the US, who only attend the Cathedral of Christ the Savior during visits to New York, joined the divine services conducted by Archpriest Mikhail Meerson. They saw each other, sang together, said prayers, and appreciated this as a unique opportunity and experience. One of the believers described this experience on Facebook: "The constant joint Zoom services in which I participate are no less church to me than the usual liturgical cycle. In some ways, they are even more acute. One feels the globality of the Christian community more strongly, without the limits of distance and space" (Leonova 2020). Parishioners wrote less openly about liturgical services over Zoom because the remote administration of the sacrament is very sensitive and not approved by the hierarchy. Nevertheless, there is evidence that informal ecumenical congregations gathered on Zoom to consecrate the sacraments, and here, the degree of immersion is even higher. One of the participants, O.G., briefly described her experience:

> If I do not go to the temple and do not take communion in the temple, I am deprived of the society of the parishioners, of my temple, communion, and worship. But I am not deprived of the community of believers, the sacrament, and worship as such, because I participate in ecumenical worship services via Zoom, where I take the home sacrament and pray with friends or with participants in online services. (G 2020).

The Archpriest Andrei Dudarev from the Moscow region shared his experience of delivering a Zoom liturgy on Akhilla.ru. This service included "the liturgy of the Word," one without the Eucharist and which laymen can serve. Fourteen parishioners who received assigned roles in advance attended. Dudarev wrote: "I had a complete sense of participation in fellowship and service with everyone. At first, it seemed that technological innovations would get in the way, but this did not happen. In general, everything worked well. The transition of worship to the online format was psychologically perceived as a transition from reading a text from a book to reading a text from a smartphone" (Dudarev 2020).

Experiments with online liturgies

In the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) a large discussion took place around the practice of online liturgies. Two clerics — priests Dmitry Vaysburd and Igor Savva — were added to the ranks of supernumeraries after announcing that they digitally delivered the liturgy to parishioners, consecrating bread and wine digitally. On his Facebook account Father Igor Savva wrote:

> Last Saturday Fr. Dmitry Vaisburd and I had the amazing experience of serving a full-fledged liturgy with Communion using the Hangouts video conferencing program. Each of the worshipers prepared bread, wine, and water in front of the monitor. I performed the liturgy of John Chrysostom, as we took turns reading and singing parts of the succession. The consecration of the Gifts took place in the same way as during the divine service in the church. All participants received the Holy Communion, each in his own home. It was an amazing and inspiring service. (Savva 2020).

Here, the parishioners were actively involved in what was happening, they were no longer passive viewers of the broadcasts, but rather immersed participants in an online worship service. Deacon Andrei Kuraev commented on this experience in his blog:

> The isolated layman puts a piece of bread and a cup of wine in front of a video camera. At the same time, the priest in the church (or where he spreads his antimins) begins the Liturgy of Preparation, holding in his mind and his prayer not only the bread that is presented to him, but also the one that is "at a distance." The layman simply listens to the prayers of the priest. Maybe sometimes he burns incense (if he has such an opportunity). And in the end, he hears from the priest — "with the fear of God and by faith, approach." I am convinced that his experiences will be much deeper than in a regular service. (Deacon Kuraev 2020).

He writes of the depth of experience (immersion implies the emotionality of engrossment through the senses) and the possibility of being included in the liturgy, of participating in it, not only preparing bread and wine, but also, for example, burning incense.

Bishop Savva (Tutunov) on his telegram channel called this practice "marginal," "unacceptable[,] and impossible in Christ's Church" (Bishop Savva 2020). Finally, the official speaker of the Russian Orthodox

Church, the Chairman of the Synodal Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media, Vladimir Legoyda, also noted on his Telegram channel "the theological absurdity of this venture" (Legoida 2020).

Another OCU cleric, Archpriest Georgy Kovalenko, in his blog described in detail the experience of delivering the liturgy online on Easter (Kovalenko 2020). He blessed the gifts during the liturgy on Thursday and individually packed them, for which he "developed technology of 'pious' packaging, taking into account the ease and ecological dimensions of recycling"; held personal conversations with the parishioners in messengers in which he explained what would happen; and distributed these carefully packed gifts to all those who wished to receive the Holy Communion on Easter. On the night of the Easter Liturgy, parishioners watched an online broadcast of the service and received communion with the gifts prepared in advance. Thus, the digital online liturgy and real physical participation in the sacrament are linked. Another OCU cleric, Archpriest Andrei Dudchenko, spoke out sharply against the practice of online liturgies with a full Eucharist. He questioned: "is this an event in which they are participants rather than observers" (Dudchenko 2020)? Dudchenko compares the liturgy to dance because of the role of non-verbal, tactile contacts. In his words, the "liturgy can be compared to dance. How does one conduct a circle dance (*khorovod*) or a pairs dance via videoconference" (Dudchenko 2020)? Furthermore, He believes that "a communal meal is not the same as a collection of several individual meals" (Dudchenko 2020). That is, for Dudchenko, who by education is a specialist in the theological liturgy and not simply a clergyman-practitioner, the degree of involvement in the process as well as the level of emotional, sensory, participatory immersion are extremely subjective, but as has been observed, the parameters and the technical capacity for overcoming these already exist.

Prospects of the digitization of worship

The concerns that clergy and Church officials voice about online sacraments sends scholars back to cultural theory. In works on immersion (Novikova 2020; Evallyo 2019), researchers often draw on Walter Benjamin's essay "A Work of Art in the Era of Its Technical Reproducibility," where he reflects on the category of authenticity and argues that by gaining reproducibility, a work of art loses its unique aura. Benjamin wrote that "These changed circumstances leave the artwork's other properties untouched, but they certainly devalue the here and now of the artwork" (Ben'iamin 1996, 21). The Catholic theologi-

an, Antonio Spadaro, also references Benjamin in his study *Cybertheology: Thinking about Christianity in the Internet Age*, in which a separate chapter is devoted to the possibility of an online liturgy. Spadaro believes that "In reality, the liturgical event is never technologically reproducible, because it incorporates in its *hic et nunc* [here and now] — in which is celebrated in an unreproducible way the cation of the Holy Spirit — which makes the mystery of Christ present and actualizes it[.]" (Spadaro 2014, 79). Further he writes that "the liturgy always 'works' on the body, organizing the spheres of emotions, of sensibility, of actions, in such a way that these spheres will be the presence of the sacred, of the mystery of Christ" (Spadaro 2014, 79).

Spadaro wrote his book in 2012 (published in 2014), when technology did not yet permit the level of interactivity or the near immersive practices demonstrated during the coronavirus crisis and associated with self-isolation and the inability to visit temples. The key question that has been raised thanks to the collective experience of more or less interactive participation in online services is whether to consider presence at the liturgy via technical means as a reproduction, or a genuine representation of "here and now." Is the degree of co-presence and emotional involvement sufficient for all participants to accept the service and the sacrament as valid and repeatable in this format?

Thus, the extreme experience of limited access to temple services during April, May, and June 2020, which included the traditionally intense Easter period, demonstrated potential directions for further mediatization of Russian Orthodoxy, the new level of which includes not only the production and consumption of information content in text, audio, and video formats, vertical and horizontal communication, presence in the media and social networks, but also the active development of participatory practices, in particular, strengthening the interactivity of divine services, the appearance of elements of immersion in them, and the prospects for significant changes in liturgical life due to its digitalization.

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