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ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ФОРМУВАННЯ ТЕОЛОГІЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ ЧЛЕНІВ ЦЕРКВИ МЕТОДАМИ ВИКЛАДАННЯ БОГОСЛОВ'Я В ХРИСТІЯНСЬКИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ

FEATURES OF FORMING THEOLOGICAL THINKING AMONG CHURCH MEMBERS THROUGH METHODS OF TEACHING THEOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

У статті досліджуються особливості формування теологічного мислення членів церкви через методи викладання богослов'я в контексті християнської освіти. В умовах стрімких суспільних, культурних та інформаційних змін багато євангельських громад переживають «кризу богословської (теологічної) ідентичності», що проявляється у втраті доктринальної цілісності, домінуванні емоційної релігійності та зниженні здатності критично осмислювати віру. Показано, що теологія є не лише системою доктрин, а процесом формування світогляду, духовного характеру та практики служіння. Спираючись на біблійні поняття настанови (תורה) та вчення (διδασκαλία), а також класичні розділи богослов'я, автор виокремлює три ключові елементи формування богословського мислення: Писання як джерело істини, практичне застосування доктрини та наставництво як передача віри. Особливу увагу приділено ролі догматики у збереженні чистоти віровчення та запобіганні поширенню псевдовчень. Зроблено висновок, що повернення богослов'я в центр церковного життя є необхідною умовою духовної зрілості, стабільності та успішної місії сучасних християнських спільнот.

Ключові слова: теологічне мислення, християнська освіта, методи викладання богослов'я, доктринальна ідентичність, догматика, формування.

The article investigates the features of forming theological thinking among church members through methods of teaching theology within the context of Christian education. Under conditions of rapid social, cultural, and informational change, many evangelical communities experience a “crisis of theological identity”, manifested in the loss of doctrinal integrity, the dominance of emotional religiosity, and a reduced ability to reflect critically on faith. The study shows that theology is not merely a system of doctrines but a process of shaping a worldview, spiritual character, and ministerial practice. Drawing on the biblical concepts of instruction (תורה) and teaching (διδασκαλία), as well as the classical divisions of theology, the author identifies three key elements in the formation of theological thinking: Scripture as the source of truth, the practical application of doctrine, and mentorship as the transmission of faith. Special attention is given to the role of dogmatics in preserving doctrinal purity and preventing the spread of pseudo-teachings. The article concludes that restoring theology to the center of church life is a necessary condition for spiritual maturity, stability, and the successful mission of contemporary Christian communities.

Keywords: theological thinking, Christian education, methods of theology teaching, doctrinal identity, dogmatics, formation.

Relevance of the problem. The contemporary evangelical church functions under conditions of rapid social, cultural, and informational transformations¹. Globalization, digital communication, the secularization of thinking, and the fragmentation of spiritual experience lead to a phenomenon that

¹ Smith J. K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 240 p.

researchers call a «crisis of theological identity».² In many Christians, the ability to reflect critically on faith decreases, to distinguish true teaching from pseudo-theological constructions; the temptation increases to replace ecclesial tradition with emotional religiosity or popular internet discourses. As a result, theology ceases to be the foundation of life and ministry and becomes a background notion detached from the church's real practice.

Against this backdrop, the need is growing for the formation of integral theological thinking that not only informs the Christian but also shapes his or her worldview, spiritual character, and ministerial practice³. Theology that is deprived of living teaching or limited to purely academic knowledge does not influence the spiritual development of the congregation; by contrast, theological education carried out in the context of the church can become a decisive factor in its spiritual maturity and stability.⁴

The problem is that today in most churches there is no integral, systematic model for teaching theology, and existing approaches are fragmented, unsystematic, or reactive.⁵ Knowledge is transmitted randomly – through preaching, isolated individual lessons, viewing video materials, or through the personal convictions of particular ministers – which does not create a stable worldview framework. The absence of purposeful formation of theological thinking leads to the loss of doctrinal continuity, spiritual immaturity, conflict, theological relativism, and believers' dependence on extra-ecclesial authorities⁶.

The relevance of the topic lies in the necessity of returning theology to the center of church life.⁷ Theology is not a discipline for an academic elite; it forms the worldview that determines what the church will be like tomorrow⁸. Therefore, studying the mechanisms for forming theological thinking and effective methods of teaching theology has direct practical and strategic significance for the future of the church.⁹

Degree of scientific development of the problem. The problem of forming theological thinking and the methods of teaching theology has been developed in the works of a number of researchers, including representatives of the Pentecostal theological tradition.^{10 11}

In global Pentecostal theology, a significant contribution has been made by Amos Yong, who analyzes the interrelationship between theology, culture, and pedagogy; Frank D. Macchia, who studies Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology in a Pentecostal context; Wonsuk Ma, who focuses on missiology and biblical hermeneutics; Wolfgang Vondey, who develops the concept of Pentecostal theology as “liturgical” theology; as well as Gordon D. Fee, known for his research in New Testament exegesis and his influence on the formation of theological education in Pentecostal churches.¹²

In the Ukrainian and broader Eastern European context, issues of theological education and the formation of Pentecostal identity have been explored by such authors as Mykhailo Cherenkov, who analyzes the transformation of Pentecostal theology in the post-Soviet context; Yaroslav Lukasyk, who addresses questions of church education and theological culture; Pavlo Khomyn, who studies the development of the theological tradition of Ukrainian Pentecostalism; as well as other contemporary theologians working in the field of Christian education and pastoral formation.

² Vondey W. *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*. London: T&T Clark, 2017. 256 p.

³ McGrath A. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 528 p.

⁴ Ma W. *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*. Oxford: Regnum, 2010. 244 p.

⁵ Menzies W. W., Menzies R. P. *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. 240 p.

⁶ Keller T. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. New York: Dutton, 2012. 336 p.

⁷ Fee G. D. *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994. 967 p.

⁸ Packer J. I. *Knowing God*. Leicester: IVP, 1973. 286 p.

⁹ Ma W. *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*. Oxford: Regnum, 2010. 244 p.

¹⁰ Fee G. D., Stuart D. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 288 p.

¹¹ Anderson A. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 318 p.

¹² Fee G. D. *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 196 p.

Despite the existing contributions, the issue of creating a systemic model of teaching theology in Pentecostal churches in Ukraine, as well as the mechanisms for forming integral theological thinking among members of a local congregation, remains insufficiently studied.¹³ There is a lack of comprehensive works that would combine theological foundations, pedagogical methods, and the practice of church ministry.¹⁴ This determines the relevance of further theoretical and methodological development of the topic.

The aim of the article is to analyze the theoretical foundations and practical methods of teaching theology in the contemporary church with a view to forming theological thinking among members of the congregation.

Presentation of the main material. Theology is not only a system of church doctrines but a way of knowing God that shapes worldview, life decisions, spiritual identity, and the mission of the believing community.¹⁵ In the classical tradition, the term «theology» derives from the Greek θεολογία – «word about God», «reflection on the divine», where θεός means God and λόγος means word, reason, principle¹⁶. Already in antiquity, *Logos* meant not merely speech but the meaningful structure of reality that defines the human mode of being.

The formation of theological thinking includes at least three interrelated elements¹⁷:

1) Scripture as the source of truth. «*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine...*» (2 Tim. 3:16; King James Bible). The Bible functions as the norm of faith, the criterion of truth, and the foundation for the formation of doctrine.¹⁸

2) The practice of theology. Right doctrine must lead to right living. Thomas Watson aptly remarked: «Theology must come down into the feet», that is, it must be embodied in the practice of obedience, ethics, and service to one's neighbor.¹⁹

3) Mentorship. «*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men...*» (2 Tim. 2:2). This is the transmission of the meaningful structure of faith – a holistic theological vision rooted in the lived experience of the congregation.²⁰

Scripture consistently points to the necessity both of knowing about God and of knowing God personally.²¹ «*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*». (John 17:3). The God who created the world in all its beauty is the One who can be known.²² He reveals Himself, inviting human beings into personal relationship. Therefore, we are called not only to know about Him but to know Him Himself, personally (Jer. 9:23–24). Knowledge about God presupposes possessing biblical information, whereas knowing God means applying the biblical truth received in practice²³ (2 Pet. 3:18; Phil. 3:7–9; Col. 3:10).

In contemporary academic and church practice, theology is divided into a number of sections: biblical theology, doctrinal theology (dogmatics), historical theology, and practical theology (moral,

¹³ Anderson A. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 318 p.

¹⁴ McGrath A. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 528 p.

¹⁵ Erickson M. J. *Christian Theology*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. 1200 p.

¹⁶ Etymology of the word theology. Retrieved from: <https://ccel.org/entity/theology>

¹⁷ McGrath A. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 528 p.

¹⁸ Grudem W. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. 1296 p.

¹⁹ Keller T. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. New York : Dutton, 2012. 336 p.

²⁰ Yong A. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2005. 320 p.

²¹ Packer J. I. *Knowing God*. Leicester : IVP, 1973. 286 p.

²² Grudem W. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1994. 1296 p.

²³ Keller T. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. New York : Dutton, 2012. 336 p.

comparative, liturgical, etc.).²⁴ Such a structure makes it possible to embrace holistically both the content of faith and its historical development and practical application.

Christian theology is an attempt to understand God in accordance with how He reveals Himself in Scripture.²⁵ No theology can fully explain God and His ways because God is infinitely higher than human beings²⁶ (Rom. 11:33–36). At the same time, God desires that we know Him as much as possible within the limits of our finitude; theology is the art and science of organizing and making accessible what He has revealed about Himself²⁷. True, biblical theology does not divide but unites the community around the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Thus, theology is nothing other than the study of the Word of God in order to understand His revelation.

Methods of forming theological thinking in the Pentecostal context. The formation of theological thinking in a Pentecostal environment is complex in character and is grounded in the integration of biblical literacy, spiritual experience, ministerial practice, and communal mentorship.^{28 29} A distinctive feature of the Pentecostal tradition is the integration of theological education with the experience of the work of the Holy Spirit, which determines the specificity of methodological approaches³⁰. Conventionally, the methods may be divided into four groups: biblical-educational, formational-spiritual, practical-missional, and communal-mentoring.³¹

Biblical-educational methods are aimed at systematic and deep study of Holy Scripture and the foundations of Christian doctrine.³² This group includes exegetical and textological study of the Bible. The method presupposes analyzing the biblical text in its literary, historical, and theological context, taking into account genre features and linguistic structure. Leading Pentecostal theologians such as G. Fee and W. Ma emphasize that sound theology begins with correct exegesis that combines an academic approach with spiritual sensitivity.³³

Biblical-educational methods also include: systematic theology and dogmatics, catechetical programs, formational-spiritual methods, prayer and spiritual practice, liturgical-theological training, personal spiritual mentorship, and practical-missional methods.³⁴ Theological truths attain their fullness when they are applied in ministry.

The system of methods for forming theological thinking in a Pentecostal church is grounded in the integration of biblical education, spiritual experience, practical ministry, and mentoring-communal interaction.³⁵ Such a multi-level model corresponds to the nature of Pentecostal theology, where the union of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit forms a holistic Christian worldview and contributes to strengthening the doctrinal identity of the congregation.³⁶

²⁴ Erickson M. J. *Christian Theology*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2013. 1200 p.

²⁵ McGrath A. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 528 p.

²⁶ Boice J. M. *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove : IVP, 1986. 832 p.

²⁷ Keller T. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. New York : Dutton, 2012. 336 p.

²⁸ Ma W. *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*. Oxford: Regnum, 2010. 244 p.

²⁹ Anderson A. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 318 p.

³⁰ Macchia F. D. *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006. 320 p.

³¹ Ma W. *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*. Oxford: Regnum, 2010. 244 p.

³² Fee G. D., Stuart D. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 288 p.

³³ Ma W., Ross K. *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*. Oxford: Regnum, 2011. 600 p.

³⁴ Hirsch A. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids : Brazos Press, 2006. 272 p.

³⁵ Yong A. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 320 p.

³⁶ Ma W. *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*. Oxford: Regnum, 2010. 244 p.

Conclusions. The analysis has shown that the formation of theological thinking among church members is not a secondary supplement to church life but a structuring factor of it³⁷. Theology, understood as the process of knowing God on the basis of His revelation, shapes believers' worldview, spiritual identity, and ministerial practice³⁸. The absence of purposeful theological education within the church context leads to a «crisis of theological identity», manifested in doctrinal fragmentation, the dominance of emotional religiosity, and a reduced capacity for critical reflection on faith.³⁹

A special role in this process is played by dogmatics, which systematizes the basic biblical truths, preserves doctrinal purity, and serves as a barrier against pseudo-teachings and relativism.⁴⁰ Dogmatic theology, rooted in Scripture, ensures doctrinal continuity, supports the unity of faith, and creates conditions for responsible theological dialogue within the church community.

Therefore, returning theology to the center of church life is a necessary condition for the spiritual maturity, stability, and missional effectiveness of contemporary Christian congregations. The formation of theological thinking should be regarded as a strategic task of the church that requires intentional educational models aligned with biblical, historical, and confessional foundations.⁴¹

Prospects for further research. A promising direction for further research is the development of concrete models for integrating theological education into the life of local congregations of different types (urban/rural churches, small/large communities, churches with varying levels of members' education).⁴² The issue of adapting theological courses to different age and social groups – particularly youth, new believers, and ministry leaders – requires separate study.

Further theoretical and empirical analysis is also needed regarding the effectiveness of particular methods of forming theological thinking – especially small groups, catechetical programs, hermeneutical clubs, and team-based project learning^{43,44}. It is advisable to investigate which combinations of these methods yield the greatest results in forming doctrinally stable and missionally oriented communities.

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