

Studies Varia

Responsibility and Challenge: Psychological Analysis of Covid-19 Information in a Journal of the Czech Christian Academy.

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Abstract:

The purpose of the research is to analyse information about Covid-19 as it relates to religion in a Czech periodical *Universum* in the year 2020. We examine coping strategies to deal with the pandemic situation. Thematic analysis is used as a method. Five main themes are found: Challenge, Searching for the spiritual dimension of the crisis, Use of online space, Ineffective management of the pandemic by the Church, and Balancing different approaches. The disease is presented as a challenge to face and the published information gives the pandemic a spiritual dimension, but without apocalyptic fear. Spirituality has emerged as an adaptive coping mechanism to deal with the pandemic not only for practising believers.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Covid-19, coping, religious coping, religious fundamentalism.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic confronted society with situations that were, until then, unimaginable. Schools were closed, most services and shops were reduced to the bare minimum and in the ecclesiastical environment, churches were unprecedentedly completely closed. Almost overnight, the Church had to start functioning in a completely different mode. Worship services were moved to an online environment and a new believer-led phenomenon of worship appeared.

During the pandemic, Christian periodicals were published to respond to the situation. In our study, we build on the research of Moravec and Lacková,¹ who examined how information about Covid-19 was presented in 2020 (i.e., at the beginning of the pandemic) in the Czech Catholic conservative magazine *Regina*. The magazine was not an official periodical of the Church. It was published by Centrum Verité, and it was monthly.² The authors found that the illness was first downplayed and then portrayed as an eschatological combat between Good and Evil. Readers were implicitly led to accept the status of a chosen minority in contrast to the rest of the corrupted

1 Pavel Moravec and Lucia Lacková, 'Denial and Fear: Psychological Analysis of Covid-19 Information in Czech Fundamentalistic Catholic Journal', *Open Theology* 7, no. 1 (2021): 475-490, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0176>.

2 Covid-19 was mentioned in 13 articles that were analysed.

world. Most of the articles lacked an author and source (foreign articles lacked the name of the translator). The texts were full of emotions, especially fear. The authors were also looking for coping strategies³ that would express how the journal coped with the disease. The Trivialisation of illness was matched by the strategy of Denial and the eschatological Combat between Good and Evil by the strategy of Marking religious boundaries.⁴ In our study, we decided to examine how information about Covid-19 was presented in the Christian magazine *Universum*, which can be placed at the opposite end of the conservatism-liberalism spectrum and *Regina* magazine. We then compared our results and pointed out the difference in the approach to the disease in conservative and liberal Christian periodicals.

Background

Religious Situation in the Czech Republic

According to a 2018 STEM survey, 25% of residents reported they were religious, 31% reported they were atheist, and 35% did not consider themselves religious (the rest of the respondents did not respond). However, 55% of respondents believed that ‘there is something that transcends us’. It turned out that ‘even among people who do not consider themselves religious or who are atheists, there is a part of those who also believe in the existence of some transcendent.’⁵ In the spring of 2021, a census of people was held in the Czech Republic. Compared to the 2011 census, it was not smaller churches that strengthened in numbers, but general categories such as ‘Catholic faith’, ‘Christianity’ or ‘Protestant/Evangelical faith’.⁶

The Czech Republic is incorrectly described as one of the most atheistic countries in Europe. Rather, ‘apatheticism (indifference to religion), agnosticism, religious illiteracy (absence of even elementary religious knowledge), anticlericalism (adverse to many actions of the Church) and various kinds of alternative spiritualities and spiritual seeking are intertwined here.’⁷ Halík speaks of *nones* – people who neither profess any organised religion, nor atheism. These people make up the largest group in the Czech Republic.⁸

Christian Media in the Czech Republic

The most widely read official periodical of the Catholic Church is *Katolický týdeník*.⁹ The current overview of Catholic media in the Czech Republic was described by Moravec and Lacková.¹⁰ The official monthly magazine of the Orthodox Church in the Czech Republic is *Hlas Pravoslaví*.¹¹ The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren regularly publishes the monthly magazine *Český bratr*,

3 Charles Carver, ‘You Want to Measure Coping But Your Protocol’s Too long: Consider the Brief COPE’, *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 4, no. 1 (1997): 92–100, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327558ijbm0401_6; Kenneth I. Pargament, Harold G. Koenig, and Lisa M. Perez, ‘The Many Methods of Religious Coping: Development and Initial Validation of the RCOPE’, *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 4 (2000): 522–524, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4679\(200004\)56:4<519::AID-JCLP6>3.0.CO;2-1](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(200004)56:4<519::AID-JCLP6>3.0.CO;2-1).

4 Moravec and Lacková, ‘Denial and Fear’, 483.

5 ‘Postoj Čechů k náboženství, STEM. Empirický výzkum pro demokracii, cited 7th June 2023, <https://www.stem.cz/postoj-cechu-k-nabozenstvi/>.

6 ‘Nové výsledky zpochybňují pokles věřících tradičních církví. Sčítání proběhlo i na Slovensku’, *Christnet.eu*, 20th January 2022, https://www.christnet.eu/zpravy/30886/nove_vysledky_zpochybnuji_pokles_vericich_tradicnich_cirkvi_scitani_probekhlo_i_na_slovensku.url.

7 Tomáš Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství. Odvaha k proměně* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2021), 187.

8 Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 187.

9 *Katolický týdeník*, cited 8th June 2023, <https://www.katydz.cz/>.

10 Moravec and Lacková, ‘Denial and Fear’, 478.

11 *Hlas Pravoslaví*, cited 7th June 2023, <https://www.hlas.pravoslavi.cz/>.

three times a year *Ekumenický bulletin*, and twice a year the so-called programmes of religious services under the title *Cesta církve*.¹² Among the ecumenically focused periodicals we can include the monthly *Getsemany*¹³ and revue *Universum*,¹⁴ which is the subject of our research.

The Course of the Pandemic in the Czech Republic in 2020

The first case of Covid-19 was confirmed in the Czech Republic on 1st March.¹⁵ On 12th March, a state of emergency was declared,¹⁶ which significantly reduced social contact – schools were closed, most stores were closed, and people were advised to work from home. Thanks to strict measures, the disease managed to get under control, and since mid-April there has been a gradual easing.¹⁷ The second wave began to be talked about in the autumn.¹⁸ After a minor improvement at the turn of November and December, the situation deteriorated again by the end of the year.¹⁹ As for church activities, the declaration of a state of emergency on 12th March cancelled public worship services.²⁰ Starting 27th April, services for 15 people have been resumed, and this number gradually increased.²¹ From 8th June, religious services were allowed for 500 people by observing hygiene measures such as wearing face masks or social distancing.²² With the deterioration of the epidemiological situation in the autumn, only 6 people were allowed to worship on 14th October.²³ These numbers changed according to the current regulations, but the participation in worship services was significantly limited (from 18th November, 15 people,²⁴ from 23rd November, 20 people,²⁵ from 3rd December, 30% of the church's capacity was allowed to be filled,²⁶ from 18th December, 20% of the church capacity was allowed²⁷ and from 27th December, 10% of the church capacity was allowed).²⁸

12 'Tiskoviny', *E-cirkev.cz*, cited 7th June 2023, <https://e-cirkev.cz/rozvijime-vztahy/tiskoviny/>.

13 *Getsemany*, cited 7th June 2023, <https://www.getsemany.cz/archiv>.

14 'Časopis Universum', *Česká křesťanská akademie*, cited 8th June 2023, <http://www.krestanskaakademie.cz/casopis-universum/>.

15 'V Česku jsou tři lidé nakaženi koronavirem. Předtím byli v Itálii', *Česká televize*, 1st March 2020, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3056228-v-cesku-jsou-tri-lide-nakazeni-koronavirem>.

16 'Nouzový stav. Vláda zakázala akce s více než 30 lidmi, omezí se provoz restaurací po osmé večer', *Česká televize*, 12th March 2020, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3061328-zive-brifink-po-mimoradnem-zasedani-vlady-kvuli-koronaviru>.

17 Kubal Michal and Vojtěch Diviš, *Pandemie* (Praha: Kniha Zlín, 2020), 560-561.

18 'V Česku je druhá vlna, počet hospitalizovaných může rychle narůst', *Česká televize*, 13th September 2020, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/specialy/koronavirus/3182790-v-cesku-je-druha-vlna-pocet-hospitalizovanych-muze-rychle-narust-uvodl>.

19 'Zavřené obchody, služby i vlekly. Vláda vyhlásila od neděle 5. stupeň PES', *Idnes.cz*, 23rd December 2020, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/vlada-koronavirus-pes-stupen-cislo-5-blatny-nouzovy-stav.A201223_023602_domaci_kop.

20 'Prohlášení českých a moravských biskupů k mimořádnému opatření vlády ze dne 12. března 2020', *Cirkev.cz*, 12th March 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/200312prohlaseni-ceskych-a-moravskych-biskupu-k-mimoradnemu-opatreni-vlady-ze-dne-12-brezna-2020>.

21 'Vyjádření ČBK k rozhodnutí Vlády ČR o znovuoobnovení bohoslužeb', *Cirkev.cz*, 17th April 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/200417vyjadreni-cbk-k-rozhodnuti-vlady-o-znovuoobnoveni-bohosluzeb>.

22 'Od 8. června jsou povolené bohoslužby do 500 osob', *Cirkev.cz*, 3rd June 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/200603podle-vladniho-narizeni-od-8-cervna-jsou-povolene-akce-pro-500-osob>.

23 'Nová omezení vlády od 14. října ohledně bohoslužeb a náboženských akcí', *Cirkev.cz*, 13th October 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201013nova-omezeni-vlady-od-14-rijna-ohledne-bohosluzeb>.

24 'Od 18. listopadu na bohoslužby, svatby a pohřby 15 osob', *Cirkev.cz*, 16th November 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201116od-18-listopadu-na-bohosluzby-svatby-a-pohrby-15-osob>.

25 'Od 23. listopadu na bohoslužby, svatby a pohřby 20 osob', *Cirkev.cz*, 20th November 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201120od-23-listopadu-na-bohosluzby-svatby-a-pohrby-az-20-osob>.

26 'Nová pravidla pro účast na bohoslužbách od 3. prosince 2020', *Cirkev.cz*, 30th November 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201130nova-pravidla-pro-ucast-na-bohosluzbach-od-3-prosince-2020>.

27 'Nová pravidla pro bohoslužby od pátku 18. prosince 2020', *Cirkev.cz*, 15th December 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201215nova-pravidla-pro-bohosluzby-od-patku-18-prosince-2020>.

28 'Vláda schválila přechod do pátého stupně systému PES', *Cirkev.cz*, 23rd December 2020, <https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/201223vlada-schvalila-prechod-do-pateho-stupne-systemu-pes>.

Covid-19 and Christianity

Isiko finds two main theological attitudes towards Covid-19. The first is apocalyptic and sees Covid-19 as the fulfilment of prophetic predictions about the end days,²⁹ and the pandemic is seen as God's 'punishment for some kind of collective sin, such as gay marriages, sexual immorality and abortion.'³⁰ The second attitude to the pandemic is pleading and emphasises trust in a God who never leaves man.³¹

The pandemic confronted believers and the whole Church with a difficult dilemma: either to become modern martyrs (trying at all costs to fulfil all religious precepts – even at the cost of ruining one's own life), or to give up some activities for a while, to adapt to the situation and to survive as a society.³² There were calls to ignore the bans issued by state authorities. Fundamentalists saw compliance with these prohibitions as a sign of inadequate faith.³³ This position ignores the fact that 'miracles happen only in certain moments, for particular persons and only in very mysterious circumstances; they cannot be invoked upon a nation, or rather upon humankind.'³⁴ Another response to the ban on public worship was to move them to a virtual space, allowing those who would not normally attend worship to watch the services. Austin Iwuhoa believes that the online worship transmission will remain in some form even after the pandemic subsides; overall leading to positive changes in the life of the church.³⁵ Halík, however, warns that the real presence of believers belongs to the worship celebration. 'Social networks are a welcome help in transmitting data and information ... but they cannot enable the celebration, let alone the celebration of the Eucharist.'³⁶

Another reaction to the ban on gatherings was the home worship services, which may be carried out, for example, by conversation over the Sunday Gospel with family. In these activities, Halík perceives one of the most precious spiritual fruits of the pandemic era. 'The courage to overcome clerical fear and one's own shyness and to express and share one's experience of faith has helped to discover the charisms of those closest to us and often the treasures of Scripture, often buried under the routine of church phrases.'³⁷

The pandemic has brought to light real attitudes towards supernatural realities. Believers from vibrant parishes worked with civil society and developed various types of aid, while people for whom going to church was just part of the habit did not return to churches after the pandemic ended. For others, watching TV worship was a comfortable fulfilment of their Sunday duty. On the contrary, for some people who had not attended churches before, the confrontation with human suffering and helplessness awakened metaphysical, existential and spiritual questions.³⁸

29 Alexander Paul Isiko, 'Religious construction of disease', *Journal of African Studies and Development* 12, no. 3 (2020): 84, <https://doi.org/10.5897/JASD2020.0573>.

30 Paul Galea et al., *The Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Religion and Spirituality during the challenging times*. (Msida: University of Malta, 2021), 6.

31 Isiko, 'Religious construction of disease', 84.

32 Cosmin-Tudor Ciocan, 'The measures religious cults took in front of COVID-19: weakness or diligence?', *Dialogo Journal* 6, no. 2 (2020): 154, <https://doi.org/10.18638/dialogo.2020.6.2.14>.

33 Ibid., 158.

34 Ibid., 163.

35 Clara M. Austin Iwuhoa, 'Corona Virus Disease: Impact On The Church And Society', in *The Socio-Religious Dynamics Of Covid-19 Pandemic*, in *Africa*, eds. Ikechukwu A Kanu, Ejikemeuwa J. O Ndubisi, and Chiugo C. Kanu, (Maryland: The Association for the Promotion of African Studies, 2021), 118.

36 Tomáš Halík, *Čas prázdných kostelů*, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2020), 14-15.

37 Ibid., 14.

38 Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 127-128.

Religion and Difficult Life Situations

Pargament describes coping as a 'transactional process between the individual and situation within a larger milieu'.³⁹ This process is multidimensional (includes the cognitive, affective, behavioural and physiological dimensions of the individual), it always takes place in a certain context and its main characteristic is the possibility of choice. Therefore, coping can take various forms.⁴⁰

The COPE is a scale to examine coping strategies.⁴¹ Carver later shortened it to Brief COPE with 14 strategies.⁴² These strategies are presented and described in Table 1.

The connection between coping and religion is addressed in Pargament's studies. His meta-analysis showed that religion and coping are more intensely intertwined in specific groups of people (e.g., people who are disadvantaged), in specific situations (e.g., people at risk), and in specific social contexts (e.g., in some communities and cultures).⁴³ In his later work, Pargament et al. described 21 different ways of religious coping grouped into five main categories.⁴⁴ These strategies are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Coping strategies (taken over Carver et al.).⁴⁵

- *Active coping* – taking active steps to try to remove or circumvent the stressor or to ameliorate the stressor.
- *Planning* – thinking about how to cope with the stressor.
- *Positive reframing* – emotion-focused coping aimed at managing distress.
- *Acceptance* – functional coping response and engagement in the attempt to deal with the situation.
- *Humour*.¹
- *Religion* – turning to religion in times of stress.
- *Using emotional support* – seeking out for moral support, sympathy, or understanding.
- *Using instrumental support* – seeking advice, assistance, or information.
- *Self-Distracton* – using alternative activities to take one's mind off the problem.
- *Denial* – refusal to believe stressor exists or trying to act as though the stressor is not real.
- *Venting* – tendency to focus on whatever distress.
- *Substance use*.²
- *Behavioural disengagement* – reducing one's effort to deal with the stressor.
- *Self-Blame* – poor adjustment under the stress.

39 Kenneth Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping* (New York and London: The Guilford Press), 1997, 84.

40 Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping*, 86-87.

41 Charles S. Carver, Michael F. Scheier, and Jagdish Kumari Weintraub, 'Assessing Coping Strategies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, no. 2 (1989), 267-283, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/20228888_Assessing_Coping_Strategies_A_Theoretically_Based_Approach.

42 Carver, 'You Want to Measure Coping', 92-100.

43 Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping*, 143.

44 Pargament et al., 'The Many Methods', 521-525.

45 The names of the strategies are taken from Carver, 'You Want to Measure Coping', 92-100. The description of the strategies is from the author's earlier work: Carver et al., 'Assessing Coping Strategies', 267-283. In his later work ('You Want to Measure Coping') he omitted the strategies of Restraint coping and Competing activities. He renamed the scale Positive reinterpretation and growth as Positive reframing, he renamed the scale Focus on and Venting emotions as Venting, and he renamed the scale Mental disengagement as Self-Distracton. He added the strategy Self-Blame (the definition is taken over from the later article 'You Want to Measure Coping', 95). Taken from Moravec and Lacková, 'Denial and Fear', 479.

Table 2. Religious coping (taken over from Pargament et al).⁴⁶

<p>Religious methods of coping to find meaning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Benevolent religious reappraisal</i> – redefining the stressor through religion as potentially beneficial. • <i>Punishing God reappraisal</i> – redefining the stressor as a punishment from God for the individual's sins. • <i>Demonic reappraisal</i> – redefining the stressor as an act of the Devil. • <i>Reappraisal of God's power</i> – redefining God's power to influence the stressful situation.
<p>Religious methods of coping to gain mastery and control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Collaborative religious coping</i> – seeking control through a partnership with God in problem solving. • <i>Passive religious deferral</i> – passive waiting for God to control the situation. • <i>Active religious surrender</i> – active giving up control to God in coping. • <i>Pleading for direct intercession</i> – seeking control indirectly by pleading to God for a miracle or divine intervention. • <i>Self-directing religious coping</i> – seeking control through individual initiative rather than help from God.
<p>Religious methods of coping to gain comfort and closeness to God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Seeking spiritual support</i> – searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care. • <i>Religious focus</i> – engaging in religious activities to shift focus from the stressor. • <i>Religious purification</i> – searching for spiritual cleansing through religious actions. • <i>Spiritual connection</i> – seeking a sense of connectedness with forces that transcend the self. • <i>Spiritual discontent</i> – expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with God's relationship to the individual in the stressful situation. • <i>Marking religious boundaries</i> – clearly demarcating acceptable from unacceptable religious behaviour and remaining within religious boundaries.
<p>Religious methods of coping to gain intimacy with others and closeness to God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Seeking support from clergy or members</i> – searching for intimacy and reassurance through the love and care of congregation members and clergy. • <i>Religious helping</i> – attempting to provide spiritual support and comfort to others. • <i>Interpersonal religious discontent</i> – expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with the relationship of clergy or members to the individual in the stressful situation.
<p>Religious methods of coping to achieve a life transformation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Seeking religious direction</i> – looking to religion for assistance in finding a new direction for living. • <i>Religious conversion</i> – looking to religion for a radical change in life. • <i>Religious forgiving</i> – looking to religion for help in shifting from anger, hurt, and fear associated with an offense to peace.

Methodology

Goal of the Research and Research questions

The aim of our research was to investigate how information about the Covid-19 disease was presented in the Christian magazine *Universum*, which can be classified in the liberal part of the spectrum of Czech Christian periodicals. Another aim was to compare our results with those of Moravec and Lacková,⁴⁷ who examined information about Covid-19 disease in the conservative Catholic magazine *Regina*. Therefore, we chose research questions similar to their research.

RQ1: Which psychological topics of Covid-19 related to religion can be found in the 2020 edition of Universum magazine?

⁴⁶ Pargament et al., 'The Many Methods', 522-524.

⁴⁷ Moravec and Lacková, 'Denial and Fear', 475-490.

RQ2: Does the pandemic information include some coping strategies⁴⁸ suggesting to change past habits, including religious ones?

RQ3: How does information about Covid-19 in connection with religion differ from the Czech fundamentalist magazine *Regina*⁴⁹ and the *Universum* magazine?

Sample of Analysed Articles

The subject of our research was the analysis of texts focusing attention on the topic of Covid-19 in the thirtieth edition of the magazine *Universum*, i.e., four issues published in 2020. The magazine *Universum* began to be published after the Velvet Revolution (1989) first as a Christian-oriented natural science revue. Since 1999, the Czech Christian Academy has started publishing it as its own revue,⁵⁰ which is published four times a year.

Data Collection

In our research, we were interested in what information concerning Covid-19 in connection with religion was contained in four editions of the *Universum* revue published in 2020. We were not interested in general information about the disease, such as statements about the lockdown or an analysis of its economic impacts unrelated to religion.

The first issue of 2020 was published on 18th March and did not yet contain any information about Covid-19. The second issue was published on 10th June, and the Covid-19 disease is covered in six articles. The third issue was published on 14th October, and the topic of coronavirus in relation to religion is mentioned in six articles. The fourth issue was published on 10th December. Coronavirus in connection with religion was covered in two articles.

In all articles analysed, the author was always indicated (in the case of an interview, the name of the editor who conducted the interview). In the Join-Lambert article translated from French (Issue 4), the original source and the name of the translator were given. When comparing them with the original, we found that the article was shortened in the Czech translation, which was not mentioned.⁵¹ In the article 'Cardinal Hollerich: Defeat the Virus of Nationalism and Selfishness' (Issue 2), the Editorial Board was listed as the author. The article is an interview with the Cardinal, but it is not stated who led the interview. It is clear from the introduction before the interview itself that the Cardinal spoke his words in Schengen on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the borders between the signatory countries. The first statement of the Cardinal only states that the Cardinal gave it to the Vatican media, but the name of the specific media was not given.

Method

To analyse the data, we used Thematic analysis. The authors propose the following six steps:⁵²

1. Familiarising with the data (we have carefully read all the issues).

48 Carver et al., 'You Want to Measure Coping', 92-100; Carver et al., 'Assessing Coping Strategies', 267-283; Pargament et al., 'The Many Methods', 522-524.

49 Moravec and Lacková, 'Denial and Fear', 484-485.

50 'Universum (časopis)', *Wikipedie*, cited 7th June 2023, [https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universum_\(%c4%8dasopis\)](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universum_(%c4%8dasopis)).

51 Join-Laqmbert, 'Leçons du confinement pour l'Église', *Études*, 62, no. 10 (2020): 79-90. <https://doi.org/10.3917/etu.4275.0079>. This article was translated by Petr Kolář.

52 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006), <https://doi.org/77-101>. 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

2. Generating initial codes (after a careful reading of the entire magazine, we have selected the parts of Covid-19 that are related to religion. Each unit has been given a separate code by issue number, page number, and order of the theme on the page).

3. Searching for themes.

4. Reviewing themes (we have specified the themes found so that they do not overlap with each other).

5. Defining and naming themes (in some cases we have also created subthemes for more precise specification).

6. Producing the report.

‘To check the reliability, the analysis was done by two researchers separately. Later, the common points were connected. The results were created as an agreement between both researchers.’⁵³

Results

RQ1: Which psychological topics of Covid-19 related to religion can be found in the 2020 edition of Universum magazine?

Five main themes were found: *Challenge*, *Searching for the spiritual dimension of the crisis*, *Use of online space*, *Ineffective handling of the pandemic by the Church*, and *Balancing different approaches*. Except for *Balancing different approaches*, all other themes are divided into subthemes.

The results of the topics, subtopics, and selected examples found are displayed in Table 3. A specific statement describing the topic is always indicated by a sign that indicates the issue number, page, and order of the statement on the given page (e.g., the character 3/20d means that the statement was taken from the number 3 from page 20 and was the fourth in the order).

53 Moravec and Lacková, ‘Denial and Fear’, 483.

Table 3. The overview of found themes, subthemes, examples, and assigned coping and religious coping strategies.⁵⁴

Theme	Subtheme	Examples	Coping strategy
Challenge	Challenge of slowing down the pace of life	‘There was something very obvious and yet uplifting in how, in this pre-Easter time, we cut off our “necessary” swarming and running, wasting, and hunting and being forced to focus on what was essential.’ (2/9a)	Collaborative religious coping
	Challenge for new forms of liturgy	‘We celebrated the resurrection by fire in the garden, where we read all the biblical texts of this Night and then went to ring the church bell.’ (2/9e)	
	Fasting from the Eucharist as a Challenge to solidarity	‘After a month of quarantine, I was sorely missing the Eucharist. But don’t many Christians around the world find themselves, at times, and sometimes often, or even always, in a situation where they cannot access the Eucharist? ... Perhaps it is good to realise that our Christianity, our relationship with God, does not stand or fall with regular communion.’ (2/8b)	
	Opportunity to experience a deeper relationship with God and with people	‘Easter was, of course, different this year, but it cannot be said that it was less experienced. Thanks to the fact that they all fit into the atmosphere of a kind of silence ... were experienced perhaps more internally.’ (2/8d)	
	Challenge for a new conception of ourselves and the Church	‘We can, of course, accept this Lent of empty and silent churches as little more than a brief, temporary measure soon to be forgotten. But we can also embrace it as an opportune moment to seek a new identity for Christianity in a world that is being radically transformed before our eyes.’ (3/15a)	
	Challenge for solidarity	‘We have experienced, either vicariously or figuratively, a long wave of solidarity and human sharing. An example is the “little big act” of centenarian British veteran Tom Moore, who decided to support the health workers in his country by crossing the garden a hundred times and calling for a £1,000 collection.’ (2/3b)	
	Challenge to realise the need for a living community	‘Even though I felt God’s closeness, I missed sharing the joy of the Resurrection in the wider community. Sharing in communion is certainly one of the irreplaceable dimensions of Christianity.’ (2/8c)	
Searching for the spiritual dimension of the crisis	Covid as a defence of nature against human actions	‘[The coronavirus] sometimes evokes the feeling of an almost “sneakily deliberate” defence of nature against the human rampage in it. ... From a biblical point of view, the coronavirus can be understood as another conflict of (ruthlessly greedy) homo sapiens with God’s creation.’ (2/17a)	Benevolent religious appraisal
	Covid as revenge for inappropriate human behaviour	‘In moments of catastrophe, the “sleeping agents of the evil, vengeful god” come to life, spreading fear and extracting religious capital from it for themselves. Their vision of God has been water for the mill of atheism for centuries.’ (3/14b).	
	Covid as a reminder of existential issues	‘Many lives show a constant hunger and desire for transcendence, for a sense of meaning through which it will be possible to live on, develop oneself, and work.’ (3/22c)	

⁵⁴ Carver, ‘You Want to Measure Coping’, 96; Pargament et al., ‘The Many Methods’, 522-524.

Use of online space	Addressing not only church members	‘In Austria, according to the first information, more people watched the transmission of Sunday worship through television and other electronic media than are payers of the (voluntary) church tax, and thus also participants in regular Sunday services.’ (4/29b)	Using instrumental support
	Insufficiency of the online space	‘It is necessary to appreciate the efforts of the media, through whose action the proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel was brought to the whole of society at a time of practical absence from public worship. But the Catholic Christian in particular undoubtedly experienced painful detachment from the physical experience of the Eucharist.’ (4/27a)	
Ineffective handling of the pandemic by the Church	Return to clericalism	‘This was followed by a period of lonely priests in front of the cameras ... Never before has the liturgy stood out so prominently as the priestly affair: the simple faithful have disappeared from churches and screens; they have not been invited to comment or offer meditation. ... The fundamental approach of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to the liturgical reform is different, it is the active participation of.’ (4/28a)	Behavioural disengagement
	Absence of Christian masters of social distancing in the provision of practical advice to public	‘Secular media ... brought articles from American and Japanese astronauts who had spent months in orbit and were now giving practical advice to people on how to live life under house arrest and how to find solutions to stressful situations in solitude. ... Where were the monks and hermits? Where were the church leaders offering thousands of years of experience of these Christian masters of social distancing?’ (3/17a)	
	Absence of incentives on the part of the Church to find a new lifestyle	‘During the pandemic, Churches found themselves in a situation where – despite their inferior political status – many people, believers and nonbelievers, expected from them, if not help, then at least inspiration for how to find direction in life, how to grasp this strange time and live it well. The reduction of situations where these things happened to “spiritual needs” and the “fulfilment” of these needs made the churches more comprehensible to people with a utilitarian mentality, but at too great a “cost”.’ (3/20c)	
	Escape from the first line of help to spirituality	‘I am grateful to the supermarket shop assistants, the tram drivers, the nurses for being on the front line in those difficult first days, while many people who consider themselves spirituals praised how they experienced a wonderful period of inner peace and deepening of their personal relationship with God in the sheltered seclusion somewhere.’ (3/43a)	
Balancing different approaches	‘In general, I think it turned out that the Church in a similar crisis can actually do a lot: for example, being disciplined and in solidarity with the people of her time, being able to spend the Eucharistic fast and stimulate creativity and a sense of the Church of the individual faithful – and at the same time somehow feeding those who do not feel comfortable at the domestic liturgy.’ (2/9g)		Collaborative religious coping

The first topic found is named *Challenge*. It contained statements that saw the coronavirus pandemic as a challenge and an opportunity. This topic is divided into seven subtopics.

For the first subtheme, we determine the designation ‘Challenge of slowing down the pace of life’. Lockdown, coupled with physical social distancing, was an opportunity to let go of the daily hustle and bustle typical of the pre-pandemic period. The second subtheme is named ‘Challenge for new forms of liturgy’. Pandemic measures banned public worship services from mid-March to

the end of April, making it impossible to publicly celebrate Easter ceremonies. One of the forms of replacement for participation in Sunday worship became the home liturgy, when (mostly) family members met, together analysed the biblical texts intended for that Sunday, and prayed together. Some of the statements included in this topic appreciated the alternative way of experiencing Easter ceremonies. Due to the ban on public worship, the faithful could not receive the Eucharist. Two texts described this as a call for solidarity with people who, for various reasons, cannot receive the Eucharist – whether divorced people or people living in areas where there is a great shortage of priests. This subtheme is called ‘Fasting from the Eucharist as a challenge to solidarity’. The next subtheme is called ‘Opportunity to experience a deeper relationship with God and with people’. The fifth subtheme is named ‘Challenge for a new conception of ourselves and the Church’. Most broadly, this topic was elaborated in Halik’s article ‘Christianity in a time of sickness’, in which the author perceived empty churches (as a result of the ban on religious services) as a possible reality of the Church in the near future, if it does not find the courage to reform, which, for example, the current Pope Francis is calling for. The last two sub-themes concerned the call to communion – ‘Challenge for solidarity’ and ‘Challenge to realise the need for a living community’.

The second theme deals with *Searching for the spiritual dimension of the crisis* and is divided into three subthemes. In the texts found, there is an effort to look for a deeper (and primarily spiritual) dimension in the current pandemic situation. The first subtheme ‘Covid as a defence of nature against human actions’ contains the idea that the coronavirus can be seen as an expression of a certain rebellion of nature pointing to its limits in the ability to recover. The second subtheme is called ‘Covid as revenge for inappropriate human behaviour’. Three articles mention that catastrophes can be perceived as an instrument of God’s punishment, but at the same time they argue with such an interpretation. The third subtopic contains the statement that the pandemic has confronted people with the temporal limitations of earthly existence, and thus raised various existential questions more than ever. This subtheme is called ‘Covid as a reminder of existential issues’.

During the pandemic, the online space became heavily used, as it was one of the few ways in which people could be connected to each other without physically meeting each other. Of course, the online space was also used by the Church, which was mentioned in the analysed texts. The fourth theme *Use of online space* contains both a positive appreciation of this option and a list of its limitations. The subtheme ‘Addressing not only church members’ includes the possibility of reaching out to people who do not go to church regularly. The subtheme ‘Insufficiency of the online space’ contains texts that appreciated, for example, the possibility of online transmission of services, but at the same time mention the shortcomings of this approach – the absence of communion within the liturgy and the impossibility of receiving the Eucharist.

In the analysed articles, criticism of the Church for some inadequate responses to the pandemic is repeatedly expressed. The fifth theme is called *Ineffective management of the pandemic by the Church* and is divided into four subthemes. The first subtheme is called ‘Return to clericalism’. Two texts criticise that a large part of church activities have moved online during the pandemic with the purpose of at least in this way ensuring that believers participate in worship. This emphasised the role of the priest as a minister of the sacraments, without revealing other possibilities, such as family worship. The second subtopic is the lamentation that church leaders did not pose an important voice to politicians or the media at a time of the strictest restrictions – ‘Absence of Christian masters of social distancing in the provision of practical advice to public’. The third subtopic contains criticism that churches have not responded adequately to the challenges of a broad

society that has been asking a number of existential questions during the pandemic, instead of using simple phrases. This subtheme is called 'Absence of incentives on the part of the Church to find a new lifestyle'. The last criticism was the sad contrast between the (often unbelievers) on the front line and the believers who enjoyed the seclusion. The subtheme is called 'Escape from the first line of help to spirituality'.

The pandemic has taken most people by surprise – from state leaders, church leaders to ordinary believers. Approaches to managing it ranged, from panic fear to downplaying. The last topic found contains statements that stated an effort to seek a kind of balance – *Balancing different approaches*. This single topic is not divided into multiple subtopics.

RQ2: Does the pandemic information include some coping strategies⁵⁵ offering to change past habits, including religious ones?

The themes *Challenge* and *Balancing different approaches* can be attributed to the strategy of Collaborative religious coping, i.e., the effort to solve a problem situation through cooperation with God.⁵⁶ The theme *Searching for the spiritual dimension of the crisis* can be attributed to the strategy Benevolent religious appraisal – trying to redefine the stressor through spiritual insight and see it as potentially beneficial.⁵⁷ The theme *Use of online space* is attributed to the coping strategy Using instrumental support – seeking assistance to confront the stressor.⁵⁸ The theme *Ineffective management of the pandemic by the Church* corresponds to maladaptive coping strategy Behavioural disengagement – giving up the effort to fight the stressor.⁵⁹

RQ3: How does information about Covid-19 in connection with religion differ from the Czech fundamentalist magazine Regina⁶⁰ and the Universum magazine?

In Regina magazine, we can observe two different tendencies. The first is the denial of the symptoms and consequences of the disease on human health, which was typical of the first information about the disease (from number 5). The second tendency, on the contrary, is an effort to escalate the whole situation, i.e., to present it as combat good and evil. In the texts, there are apocalyptic reflections on the approaching end of the world. This description of the pandemic situation was typical for later editions (from September).⁶¹

In contrast with the Regina magazine, the texts in the Universum magazine do not contain a polemic about the meaningfulness of various pandemic measures, the texts rather deal with the consequences of a serious situation interfering with the ministry of the Church. The new situation is understood as a call to new forms of experiencing one's own spirituality ('Lent and Easter in the time of coronavirus invited us to return to the essence and to the courage to try new ways' (2/9f)). Efforts to exploit the possibilities of online space are mentioned and the limits of this approach are described (see Table 3). Figuratively, the whole situation is understood as a call for a new conception of the Church ('Maybe this time of empty church buildings symbolically exposes the churches' hidden emptiness and their possible future unless they make a serious attempt to show the world a completely different face of Christianity.' (3/14c))⁶²

55 Carver et al., 'You Want to Measure Coping', 92-100; Pargament et al., 'The Many Methods', 522-524.

56 Pargament et al., 'The Many Methods', 522.

57 Ibid.

58 Carver et al., 'Assessing Coping Strategies', 268.

59 Ibid., 269.

60 Moravec and Lacková, 'Denial and Fear' 484-485.

61 Ibid.

62 The English translation of this article is taken from <http://halik.cz/en/tvorba/clanky-eseje/clanek/642/>.

Unlike Regina magazine, the texts in Universum magazine do not contain apocalyptic reflections on the approaching end of the world due to the pandemic. On the contrary, it is disputed with cheap ideas of a punishing God (see Table 3). In the texts, there is an effort to give the pandemic spiritual content, but instead of the apocalyptic clash of good and evil, the whole situation is described as a reminder of existential questions (see Table 3).

Discussion

In serious life situations, people look for ways to understand and cope. Religion and spirituality offer one possibility of interpreting difficult situations.⁶³ The majority of the Czech population is not atheist, rather, people who believe in some transcendent reality and who are not anchored in any religious society.⁶⁴ The coronavirus pandemic brought most of them a completely new experience of threat and restriction. Universum magazine offered ways to effectively deal with the pandemic through spirituality, using language that was not overly burdened with incomprehensible religious terms. It tried to show the pandemic as a call for change in the personal life of an individual, a call for greater solidarity, and a new concept of the Church. 'The Church must abandon the fixation on the "little self", the fixation only on the institutional form at a certain time and on institutional interests.'⁶⁵ The magazine Universum also offered a search for the spiritual dimension of the crisis, e.g., through the posing of existential questions. The transition of church services online made it possible to reach people who would not normally go to church, but the pandemic also made them think about existential topics. Universum magazine also critically reflected that the Church itself had not used the potential that the pandemic had brought to it and warned against returning to the 'old days' when the pandemic subsided. One of the possibilities for further research in this area is to analyse whether these fears would be realised.

Regina magazine very often used religious language typical of the Catholic community, but which is incomprehensible to readers not rooted in the Catholic Church. The magazine often worked with the emotion of fear and framed the situation of the coronavirus pandemic in the eschatological framework of the last days that are to come. Readers were given the illusion of a faithful minority in contrast to the rest of the corrupt world, which is not Christian.⁶⁶ Eschatology, as conceived by the Second Vatican Council, describes an earthly Church that 'will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven.'⁶⁷ The earthly church belongs to this world and has its transient form. 'Since however, we know not the day nor the hour, on Our Lord's advice we must be constantly vigilant.'⁶⁸ Christians, then, should be careful to understand earthly events with the view of eschatological end times.

In this respect, it is closer to theology Vatican II. the magazine Universum with its effort to accept the reality of this imperfect world (e.g., in the concept of a pandemic) than the magazine Regina, polarising the world into 'us' (good) and 'them' (bad). From the point of view of the two basic theological positions on the pandemic as presented by Isiko,⁶⁹ Regina magazine corresponds to

63 Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, 'Recent Progress and Core Issues in the Science of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality', in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, eds. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, 3-22, (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2015), 11.

64 'Postoj Čechů k náboženství'.

65 Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 240.

66 Wilfried J. Harrington, *Revelation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 16.

67 Lumen Gentium, 48.

68 Ibid.

69 Isiko, 'Religious construction of disease', 84.

an apocalyptic approach (and perceives Covid-19 as the fulfilment of prophecies about the last days), while *Universum* magazine corresponds to the approach of perceiving the pandemic as an opportunity to show trust in a good God who does not abandon man even in difficult times.

The created topics in the magazine *Universum* are assigned to some coping strategies. The themes *Challenge* and *Balancing different approaches* are assigned to the strategy Collaborative religious coping,⁷⁰ and the theme *Searching for the spiritual dimension of the crisis* is assigned to the strategy Benevolent religious appraisal.⁷¹ Both coping strategies are classified by Pargament as positive.⁷² The theme *Use of online space* is assigned to an adaptive strategy Using instrumental support⁷³ and this coping strategy Carver et al. classify as active coping.

With its view of the pandemic, *Universum* magazine had the potential to reach a wider part of the Czech population that is not grounded in any religious organisation but retains faith in supernatural realities. It offers its readers positive and active coping strategies to manage the crisis with a spiritual overlap. The theme *Ineffective management of the pandemic by the Church*, which corresponds to a maladaptive coping strategy Behavioural disengagement⁷⁴ is described as a criticism of the undeveloped potential that the pandemic has brought to the Church.

Two topics are found in the fundamentalist magazine *Regina* due to Covid-19. The topic of *Trivialisation* corresponds to the coping strategy Denial.⁷⁵ This strategy is included in Carver et al. under maladaptive coping.⁷⁶ The theme *Combat between Good and Evil* corresponds to the coping strategy Marking religious boundaries.⁷⁷ Pargament, in its original division into positive religious coping and negative religious coping, does not include this strategy in either of them.⁷⁸ *Regina* magazine targets a small proportion of conservative Catholics. It offers a maladaptive coping strategy of reality denial, which may be useful in first contact with a stressor, but problematic in the long run.⁷⁹ Pargament et al. classify the Marking religious boundaries strategy as one that seeks comfort in spirituality. Nevertheless, we can see here a tendency to close ourselves off from the reality into the spiritual world, thus falling into a dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. With polarising tendencies and vague or no attribution of the sources, *Regina* magazine is close to the disinformation scene.⁸⁰

If we look at the comparison of the two magazines in the longer term, we find that the information on the Covid-19 pandemic fits into the long-term strategy of both magazines. *Regina* magazine repeatedly works with fear, which was evident in the first issues of 2020, where the topic of the coronavirus was not yet present. A big theme was the Synod on Amazonia.⁸¹ The magazine – again without citing sources – criticised the position of Pope Francis, who raised the issue of the ordination of married men as a solution to the acute shortage of priests in the Latin American region. Because of these critical positions, the Czech Episcopal Conference issued a ban on distributing the magazine in Catholic churches. The warnings of the end times to come were very similar to

70 Pargament et al., ‘The Many Methods’, 522.

71 Ibid.

72 Kenneth I. Pargament et al., ‘Patterns of Positive and Negative Religious Coping with Major Life Stressors’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 4 (1998): 712, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1388152>.

73 Carver et al., ‘Assessing Coping Strategies’, 268.

74 Ibid.

75 Moravec and Lacková, ‘Denial and Fear’, 485.

76 Carver et al., ‘Assessing Coping Strategies’, 268.

77 Pargament et al., ‘The Many Methods’, 523.

78 Pargament et al., ‘Patterns of Positive’, 712.

79 Carver, ‘Assessing coping strategies’, 270.

80 Moravec and Lacková, ‘Denial and Fear’, 487.

81 ‘Local Churches welcome Querida Amazonia’, *Vatican News*, 12th February 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-02/local-churches-pope-francis-querida-amazonia.html>.

the description of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Universum magazine, too, has been consistent with its long-standing position on the Covid-19 disease. The first issue in 2020 (which did not yet feature the coronavirus) hopefully discussed the Amazon Synod and Pope Francis' ecological efforts. The magazine looked to the future with an emphasis on the responsibility of Christians not only for the present but also for the future.

There seems to be an opportunity for future researchers to analyse the development of attitudes towards Covid-19 in both journals over time, i.e., to examine the information that journals published about Covid-19 in the following years.

Study Limits

One of the possible limits is the danger of subjective analysis of data by qualitative research. Text analysis was led by two researchers. Both authors are psychologists with a research orientation to qualitative and combined data analysis; one of them has also theological education. The authors performed the analysis individually and then discussed the results together. The analysis was previously performed according to the procedure described by the authors of the Thematic Analysis.⁸²

Conclusion

The aim of our study was to analyse information about the Covid-19 disease in the liberal journal of the Czech Christian Academy Universum in 2020. We compared the data obtained with the results of the study by Moravec and Lacková,⁸³ who analysed information about Covid-19 disease in the conservative Catholic journal Regina.

In the Universum magazine, spirituality was presented as an adaptable tool for coping with the pandemic, in a language that is understandable to the general public. It led the reader to be responsible for the Church and the world in the present moment. By contrast, the conservative magazine Regina appealed only to a narrow section of conservative Catholics, was close to the disinformation scene, and presented eschatology in a way that was different from the theology of the Vatican II.

Our research has shown that the healthy and open spirituality presented in Universum magazine has the potential to appeal to Czech society, which is largely made up of people not anchored in any religious institution. The coronavirus pandemic was presented on various levels as a challenge that must be faced and can be managed.

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⁸² Brown and Clarke, 'Using thematic Analysis', 96.

⁸³ Moravec and Lacková, 'Denial and Fear', 475-490.

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