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TENDENCIES OF CHANGE AND GROWTH OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN UKRAINE

by Lyudmila Filipovich

In the last decade, the religious map of Ukraine has changed substantially. Along with the revival of traditional religions (Orthodoxy, Greek-Catholicism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism), new religious movements (NRMs) have appeared. Developments on the religious landscape in contemporary Ukraine should not be explained (though it often is) simply as ‘ideological aggression from the West,’ against the ethnic and spiritual ‘monolith’ of Ukraine. But, it also cannot be denied that the majority of NRMs have become popular—to the extent that they have—as a result of the foreign missionary presence. Even so, there are other factors that affected these developments, without which all the efforts of all the missionaries in the world could not have successfully established new religions in Ukraine.

What are these factors? First, it should be pointed out that Ukraine had long been dominated by foreign totalitarian regimes that cordoned it from contact with the outside world. The Soviet system actively protected Ukraine from the ‘innate stains of capitalism,’ while ‘shielding’ it from outside influences. After achieving Independence in 1991, Ukraine began to enter the global community of nations, as well as the global religious expanse. Thus, Ukraine no longer stands aloof from worldwide religious currents, and gets its share of NRMs.

The indicators that Ukraine is subject to worldwide religious currents are the following:

- the universalism and syncretism of religious teachings and cultural influences
- the need of believers for religious meaning, expression and experience
- a crisis of traditional churches and religiosity, which are perceived to no longer satisfy the religious needs of the contemporary believer
- the established authority of charismatic leaders of new movements. Religion is becoming mystical, irrational, and individualized.
Ukraine has experienced global changes since the collapse of communism. The unique circumstances in Ukraine that account for the appearance of new movements on its territory have to do with the socio-economic and political instability of Ukraine which provokes feelings of uncertainty and social and spiritual vulnerability. The discrediting of the totalitarian regime’s value system and monolithic worldview compounds the cultural state of affairs for Ukraine. Because of the former atheistic pogroms, society has lost respect for individual and collective meanings of religion and the Church. The ideological vacuum that resulted remained after the demise of Communism. A significant portion of the population was and remained alienated from the previously established spiritual tradition. Communist power had in fact destroyed the authority of traditional churches, transforming them into elements of the official political establishment. This weakened trans-generational ties by devaluing cultural and religious tradition. Additionally, Ukraine’s national rebirth lacked a dominant powerful traditional religious movement or alternative to the anti-religious value system of Communism.

The NRM's capitalized on this vacuum by providing new theories for living. New religions competed to satisfy the daily needs of the individual for knowledge of the supernatural. The active work of foreign missions, including preachers and humanitarian aid, facilitated the establishment of alternatives to the historical religiosity of Ukraine.

There were also internal factors that influenced the individual and national search for spiritual values and meaning. Ukrainian citizens naturally searched for spiritual meaning, intellectual stimulation, notions and theories about God, the world, humanity, and the individual. Being a member of a religious movement allowed them to feel connected with the transcendental, and to participate in socially beneficial and heretofore forbidden spiritually meaningful activities. Participation reduced the stress in one’s inner life and in one’s relation with others and the world and provided a better balance than was known previously.

NRM's in Ukraine today are heterogeneous in origin, character and structure. This is why they are considered 'new.' They appeared in Ukraine primarily at the end of the
1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, and often demonstrate a synthesis of religions from East and West.

**Categories of religious movements**

New religious organizations may be grouped into several categories. The most potent and numerous are the **neo-Christian groups**, such as the Christian mission “Immanuel,” the Salvation Army, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), the Church of the Full Gospel, Church of Christ, the Kiev Christian Center ‘New Life,’ the Christian church ‘Glory and Worship,’ ‘Golgotha,’ the New Apostolic Church, the Church of New Jerusalem (Swedenborgs), the pro-Russian neo-Christian creation ‘Church of the Resurrected Mother of God,’ ‘Alpha and Omega’ (with an orientation towards Mary), and others. A majority of these groups originated outside of Ukraine. In recent years, however, modernized Christian associations of Ukrainian origin have appeared, e.g., the Association of Inter-Confessional Christian Harmony (*Logos*), and the Council of Evangelical Churches.

All these religious movements emerged within the parameters of traditional Christianity and were determined to become ‘relevant’ to modern times. They focused primarily on evangelism, basing their teachings on the Bible and focusing on Jesus Christ in their rituals and theology. They tended to be critical of the historic churches for “straying from the original teachings of Christ and Christian tradition,” as they claimed to be the one ‘true’ church, reviving evangelical Christianity. They believe in personal interpretations and liberal readings of Scripture: they promote the teachings and books of their own leaders/prophets and some even hold them to be more authoritative than the Bible. They consider their leaders (along with Jesus Christ) to be the ‘heads’ of the Church, emissaries of God Himself. Neo-Christianity differs from traditional Christianity in its own interpretation of, for example, the Trinity, the nature of Jesus Christ, the essence of the Holy Spirit, and heaven and hell.

**Neo-Oriental groups.** The second category consists of religious organizations of an Oriental bent. Representatives include neo-Hinduism, branches of a Buddhist outlook, and the Shintoist movement. Neo-Hinduism today is an integral element of
religious life not only in India but also in many countries of Europe and America. It emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century within the framework of Hinduism, as a kind of modernized interpretation of the intellectual East and West. A reliance on ancient Vedic scriptures and tradition along with an eclectic mishmash of other traditions characterizes these movements. All branches of neo-Hinduism proclaim themselves to be the disciples/successors to a common spiritual tradition centered around the principles of monism, unity in the multi-faceted indivisibility of the spiritual and the material, the worldly and the sacred. Universalism, syncretism, the equality of all religions in the search for god, and a spiritual foundation in the reconstruction of society, are popular ideas in neo-Hindu teachings. Obligatory for neo-Hinduism is the presence of a guru as a teacher of doctrine and a leader of the search for spiritual truth of the movement. Neo-Hindu movements adapted to modernity and spread actively until the mid-twentieth century due to the efforts of Eastern missionaries. Evangelism included cultural, educational or healing methods. NeoHinduism representatives in Ukraine include the congregations and Centers of the International Community of Krishna Consciousness, Osho Radjnish, Sayi-Baba, Shri Chin Moy, Mission 'Light of the Soul,' the international union 'Worldwide Pure Religion' (sakhadji), Transcendental Meditation, and others.

The Buddhist movements in Ukraine are mostly modernized versions instead of the historical traditional religion. Historically neo-Buddhism emerged in the first half of the last century in Japan. Its most widespread growth occurred after the Second World War in Japan, the USA, and Western Europe. Typical of neo-Buddhist movements is their accent on one or several traits of Buddhist teachings. Each claims to be the 'orthodox' interpretation of Buddhism though they incorporate ideas from other Eastern traditions including Christianity. Examples of Buddhist groups in Ukraine include Zen-Buddhism, Niteren, and various schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Karma KahoU, Dzo Chen, Helupha, and Rimeh).

**Paganism.** The rebirth of paganism is an especially curious phenomenon in Ukraine. Congregations comprised of followers, teachers, and prophets of Volodimir
Shiyan and Lev Silenko, disciples of ancient pre-Christian faiths (RUNVira—Native Ukrainian National Faith, Knights of the Order of the Sun, Native Believers, Lado Believers, Fire-Worshippers, devotees of the goddess Berehinia of ancient Rus, etc.) belong to this neo-pagan category.

'Synthetic' or artificially created religions comprise a separate group that draws upon numerous traditions (Christianity, Vedism, Buddhism, Islam) in their dogmas and rituals. They do not simply unite these teachings in an eclectic fashion; they also create their own teachings, systems and rituals along with church structures. They aspire to be 'super religions.' The cult of the leader (as the author of doctrine) is overly developed and followers believe they are divinely chosen. Members of this category include the Great White Brotherhood, the Unification Church, the worldwide Faith of Bihar, and AUM Sinriko.

There are even other esoteric associations (theosophical, anthroposophic, followers of Hurdjieff, extrasensory psychics, etc.) and scientological movements (Dianetics—Hubbard, Science of the Mind, and Christian Science). Drawing on the esoteric traditions of various epochs, they have incorporated faith in the supernatural with mystical notions about the supernatural world. They use magical means for communicating with the supernatural and to subject it to their own interests. The founders of esoteric groups are convinced that only they give extraordinarily deep and positive knowledge about the world, knowledge that is hidden from the 'unordained' or uninitiated. Scientology strives to combine science and religion to address the problems of modernism. The majority of esoteric and scientological movements have originated from abroad. Fellow citizens have also played a founding role (i.e., Olena Blavatska, the Rerikh couple).

Satanism. Ukraine has another creed that is more difficult to categorize: the Satanists. These are followers who worship the forces of evil and adore Satan (i.e., Lucifer, the Devil). During the late 1970s in Russia and in the early 1980s, in Ukraine, Satanism appeared in several congregations. Its dogma and ritual are antipodal to Christianity, based on the mirror image of the latter. For example, Satanists worship not
God, but Satan. They read the Bible in reverse, conduct ‘black magic’ with black candles and use upside down crucifixes. They pronounce curses, and offer ritual sacrifices of animals, etc. The moral program of Satanism distinguishes itself by extreme individualism, pragmatism, and egoism that assert personalized priorities, dominance over others, and the cult of force. The followers of Satanism in Ukraine are uncounted and unorganized, but exist as clusters of young extremists, ‘trashophiles,’ or hard-rockers, whose worldview and passions reflect interests of the young. It appears that members may outgrow these views and passions with time.

**Growth of NRMs vs. growth of traditional religions**

The proportion of new religious movements is small compared to the whole of religion in Ukraine. The statistics of the Ukrainian State committee of Religious affairs reveal that as of January 1, 1997, close to 350 new Christian congregations were registered in Ukraine. Among them were 104 congregations of the Church of the Full Gospel, 169 congregations of charismatics, 42 new Apostolic churches, 25 of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. There are 63 congregations of Oriental persuasion (Krishnas: 31, Buddhists: 26), and over 30 pagan congregations. Of the total number of congregations of all religions (18,482), the new religious movements comprise only about 2.5%. However, official quantitative indicators do not convey the whole religious picture of the emergence and propagation of new religious movements in Ukraine. Many function without registering—either because the government refuses to recognize them, or the congregation refuses to expose themselves. Using official statistics, we will examine the dynamics of change that have occurred during the growth of religious congregations generally and compare them to the growth of new religious movements.\(^1\)

The Ukrainian government registered its highest number of religious organizations in 1989. We call this the year of Ukraine’s religious ‘boom.’ The

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\(^1\)This statistical data is taken from the annual report of Ukraine’s State Committee of Religious affairs. A summarized version was published in the journal *Person and the World* (1997, No. 2). The full report is located in the archives of the State Committee of Religious Affairs.
following two years saw a decline in the growth rate of religious organizations. In 1992-93, the numbers stabilized and in the following four years there was only a slight increase, i.e. 2-5% annually. The growth of the new religious movements differs. In 1991-95 alone, they grew an average of 500%. RUNVira congregations increased tenfold (3 in 1991 to 31 in 1996). Oriental groups increased 300% during this period (21 to 63). Christian congregations new to Ukraine achieved the most dramatic growth, however. From 1991 to 1996, the Church of the Full Gospel swelled from 3 to 104 congregations. Charismatic congregations multiplied from 17 to 169 during this period and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the last five years has blossomed from 2 to 25 congregations.

**Geographical distribution of growth**

In terms of geography, there are specific patterns in the expansion of NRMs that are different from the development of traditional religious groups. Western Ukraine, the country's most religious region, is the home of more than half of all religious congregations. Yet, they have felt the least impact of NRMs. Today the southern and eastern oblasts (large administrative districts) and the city of Kiev are the sites of the most intense growth of new movements. The greatest number of neo-religious congregations is registered in the oblasts of Donetsk (36), Zaporozhia (29), Kherson (13), the Crimea (30) and Kiev (12). These numbers are significantly greater than the growth of NRMs in the Western oblasts. However, at the same time in the Lviv oblast, among 2,463 congregations, only 6 belong to NRMs: in the oblast of Ivano-Frankivsk, 2 of 1,180; in TransCarpathia, 2 of 1,338; in Ternopil, 2 of 1,479; and in Vinnitsa, 2 of 1,058. The main network of new religious movements is located in eastern and southern Ukraine and continues to grow, usually on account of these regions being predominantly atheist in the past. It is fair to say that the explosion of new movements has a regional, rather than a nationwide, character.

The NRMs emerged mainly in the cities in the central and southeastern oblasts of Ukraine where for the most part they remain today. Urbanization has hurt traditional
religiosity. More generally, it has destroyed the customary way of life and traditional mechanisms for influencing public opinion. These (religiously) ruined areas proved to be the most fertile soil for the growth of new religions. It is indicative that in the Lviv oblast, home to almost three million citizens, registered religious congregations number 2,463. In Kiev, however, where the population is comparable, there are only 305. New religiosity has appeared as an urban phenomenon and it retains that trait today.

Though only a small proportion of officially registered religious organizations are NRMs, we should not underestimate their roles in the spiritual life of Ukraine. Their presence has had a diversified effect on Ukrainian religious life. Today 67 different religious movements have registered and close to 100 are active. In 1989 only 9 such organizations were registered. The numerical growth of religious movements demonstrates the pluralism of the society's consciousness and especially of its religious worldview. This diversification process encourages democratization and co-existence with other faiths. At the same time there is no basis to exaggerate the influence of NRMs on the spiritual development of Ukrainians, though they are active in the field of religious education. At least the Christian NRMs are taking the word of God to the people, drawing attention of ordinary folk to spiritual issues and stimulating them to study religious literature, especially the Bible.

Those who regard the NRMs as a threat to traditional religion, the spiritual health of the nation, and the religious rebirth of the country, overestimate the potential of these movements. The bulk of Ukraine remains outside the confines of faith and are indifferent to religion. This is so despite the five-fold growth of missions in Ukraine, from 20 to 104, during the period 1991-96 (according to official statistics). The number of ministers and church workers in religious organizations ballooned from 9,773 in 1992 to 16,429 in 1996—an increase of 70%.

The official statistics of Ukraine do not include data about the numbers of believers who belong to particular faiths. We may estimate the numbers of new believers from the structures of new religious organizations. Traditional churches lack registration of a congregation's members and thus their numerical size is unclear. In contrast,
Christian NRMs in particular tend to grow to a certain size (usually up to one hundred individuals) and then split into more groups of they become unwieldy. There are about 30-40,000 new Christians in Ukraine. Different approaches are used to determine the numbers of adherents in new non-Christian congregations and the quota of one hundred believers is not realistic for them. It is far lower. According to our rough estimates, Krishnas and Buddhists in Ukraine number about 3,000. Together with 'sympathizers,' the number of neo-Orientals approach 10,000. Not more than 1,000 persons in the entire population espouse paganism. The disciples of neo-religious and meta-religious movements, such as the Shri Chin Moy, Osho, Maharishi, Theosophs, Rerikhites, White Brotherhood, and others, comprise close to 4,000 individuals. The total number of followers of new religious movements in our opinion approaches 50-55,000 of the country's total population of 50 million. This is about 0.1%. This number is not really significant for a country such as Ukraine. In comparison with Italy, the Italian journal Prospective nel Monde reports that in Rome alone, 250,000 persons take part in new religious movements (Agency of Religious information, 1997:9.05).

In analyzing the data, we encounter definite paradoxes. On one hand, the number of neo-religious congregations has multiplied rapidly and its membership grows moderately. On the other hand, society is sluggish in becoming religiously oriented. This paradox is reconciled by the fact that after the lengthy period of a-religiosity, when open faith in God was allowed. a significant portion of the population turned to the familiar religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. During the years of Ukraine's independence, the number of believers (self-identified), rose from 7-10% to 70%. Yet research conducted in 1997 by Sotsis-Gallup, (a bureau of sociological studies), and the Ukrainian center 'Social Monitoring' sheds additional light on the situation. In response to the survey question “How often to you attend church (or synagogue, etc.)?” the following results from a sample pool of 1200 respondents: 1% frequent church daily, 11% weekly, 12% monthly, 30% once–few times a year, and 46% hardly ever (Agency of Religious Information, 1997:5.09).
‘New’ and ‘traditional’ believers

Contemporary new believers differ from traditional believers. Sociological research\(^2\) paints a demographic portrait of followers of the new religiosity. In new movements, over half of all members (51%) join as young people, ages 20-29. The middle-aged group, ages 30-49, also comprise a substantial portion (38.2%). The great majority of members of new congregations are the most socially active segment of the Ukrainian population. It is this age bracket that works and creates material and propagates spiritual values, and thus has its finger on the pulse of society’s thinking and mood. This group’s life experience has a major impact on those around them. If this experience is positive, then it serves as a model for emulation and a guarantee of the ‘correctness’ of the chosen spiritual path. Among those who are not young (10%), we find a wide range of ages. There is a basis for viewing the appearance of non-traditional religiosity as predominantly a ‘youth’ phenomenon. In time, however, as NRMs become established in Ukraine, the age makeup of new movements may shift and age as the pioneers of the NRMs themselves age and as older people, usually parents of today’s neophytes, join the ranks.

The intellectual and educated segments of the population are the principal sources of growth of NRMs and congregational growth of traditional religions as well. They comprise the brains of the NRMs around which the movements’ other disciples cluster. The degree of education among new believers is rather high: 54.1% have some level of higher education. The highest concentration (82%) of those with at least some higher education is among the B’hai. Of those surveyed, 52.4% of Buddhists possess a similar level of education. Clearly, only the well educated have the capacity to bring new ideas and to establish new views in society.

New believers occupy a relatively privileged position in society, functioning as ideologues, preachers, and spiritual leaders. Among them are representatives of the intelligentsia (teachers, scholars, doctors, artists, engineers, and others) and students who comprise 29.2% and 21.5% respectively of the total number of those surveyed. The least represented among the NRMs are the strata of blue-collar workers, service workers, and agricultural laborers.

The spirit of the intelligentsia in the NRMs has both positive and negative outcomes. Though the most educated and cultured stratum of society, the intelligentsia is also the least churched. Thus any proposed teaching is swallowed as definitive truth or revelation if it is sincere. However, they lack the capacity for critical thinking, to discern the ‘wheat from the chaff,’ and the ability to pass on new teachings through the prism of their own tradition or worldview. This often leads followers of new movements to an altered worldview that is universalist, indiscriminate, and denominationally blurred. They drift from one congregation to another, and even from movement to movement, sometimes confused as to what it all means.

Research findings refute the theory that followers of NRMs are predominantly Russian. It was once thought that Ukrainians, clinging to an inherent, natural religiosity that they never lost but simply concealed in Communist times, already had a religious identity when NRMs emerged en masse. Researchers expected that Ukraine would have chosen traditional churches. However, research has unveiled the fact that Ukrainians compose half of non-traditional congregations, while Russians comprise only a third.

A certain percentage of those surveyed did not answer the question of national allegiance, which may demonstrate the immateriality of ethnicity in their values or identification schema. The majority of Ukrainians (neo-pagans aside) who joined NRMs (a) do not have a command of the Ukrainian language (as evidenced by Russian answers to a Ukrainian-language questionnaire), (b) in no way identify themselves with Ukrainian ethnicity, (c) speak out against the existence of national and state churches in Ukraine, (d) emphasize the universal human values of religious teachings, and (e) for the most part reject the idea that nationalizing religious rituals is essential or that

39
theological literature and church service materials must be published in the Ukrainian language.

Sociological research demonstrates that NRM s attract more women than men. This is a universal finding. Among disciples of NRM s, women comprise 62%.

**A new religious understanding**

In NRM s new believers formulate new understandings of God. They find non-traditional ways to commune with God, practice modernized rites, and they may experience unusual psychological states. New kinds of believers and new religious understandings are clearly being created. The Ukrainian neophyte differs from his foreign brother in that the latter comes to a new religion as a result of contemplating traditional religious symbols and the doctrines of official churches. The NRM believer may be tempted to rationalize or dismiss dogmatic beliefs and norms. In Ukraine NRM s swelled from the ranks of non-believers and former atheists, i.e., those without previous religious experience. Of course, this will substantively impact the character of these religious organizations, whose leaders play decisive roles. At the same time the congregation usually manages to maintain a democratic form of government.

Chronologically NRM s have emerged with the demise of Communism. Scattered followers of non-traditional religions existed before the ‘Gorbachev revolution’ and were persecuted in Soviet times because they had no right to exist—though this was in violation of the Law on Freedom of Conscience. In contrast to Western countries, where NRM s arose as an alternative to existing traditional religions, in Ukraine they emerged as movements of protest. Initially these movements were not so much a religious protest as they were an ideological and worldview protest against the theory and practice of Communism. In time they metamorphosed from movements ‘against’ to movements ‘for.’ A positive change occurred in the attitudes and content of their movement. On the whole, new movements proposed constructive and specific ways to overcome the crises of the individual, family, and society.
NRMs are not the consequence of internal development of Ukrainian religion or the modernization of traditional churches. They are imports into Ukraine and the result of the activities of preachers and missionaries from other countries. Even new religions of native origin, e.g., the Great White Brotherhood, emerge as the result of a synthesis of various movements, mystical cults, and esoteric teachings, and whose genesis is absolutely absent of native tradition. Nevertheless, many new religions have settled in Ukraine, having found constituencies. At first Eastern and New Age movements enjoyed keen popularity because they offered such a clear alternative to traditional religiosity. However, in time, Ukrainian new believers seem to return to the course of familiar and understood symbols, to Christianity, though perhaps in a modernized form.

In the course of its short but complex history, the majority of NRMs have progressed through certain developmental stages during which clearly defined objectives were achieved. At the beginning, pioneer missionaries came from abroad and created a small core of followers. Due to intensive campaigns of propaganda, these groups multiplied. Simultaneously, Ukrainian preachers and leaders were trained and educated. Missionary activities increased in type and kind from evangelism to material assistance.

NRMs today are taking stock of their own growth and experience and are learning from each other as well. They are moving away from isolationist stances, and from being rejected and criticized, and are "going mainstream." Charity work, education, publication and dissemination of religious literature, propagation of doctrines in the mass media, state registration and recognition and a desire to establish relations with traditional churches all serve to socialize new movements. They increasingly strive to integrate as fully as possible into the diverse spheres of social life and culture.

NRMs have little choice but to adapt to the concrete realities of modern society if they wish to be successful. In the early years new congregations faced an acute language problem. Almost all new NRMs entered Ukraine from foreign-speaking (usually English) countries or through Western intermediaries. Thus the language of liturgical services and organizational activity was English, a language unintelligible to most Ukrainian newcomers. Translation was normally into Russian rather than
Ukrainian. In contrast to the West where nontraditional religions already spoke the local language, Ukraine had to overcome this language barrier. This slowed the process of the establishment of NRMs. In the end there were two results. First, congregations attracted an increasing number of individuals who understood English. Second, the NRMs began to publish instructional literature and to preach in Ukraine. The Krishnas have a Ukrainian edition of the works of Swami Prabhupadi. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints disseminates a Ukrainian translation of the Book of Mormon. A similar process is happening among other NRMs as well. In the past, congregations satisfied the need for essential literature with Russian-language editions. But their use has eased and complicated the adaptation of new religions to Ukraine. From a survey of the contemporary language landscape, Ukrainian believers understand Russian-language sermons, booklets, and religious periodicals with ease.

Today the majority of NRMs have taken shape organizationally, clarified their articles of faith, and fortified their positions in society. The quantity of NRMs, the number of religions represented in Ukraine, and the membership of these congregations have all stabilized. The most organizationally stable are the Church of the Full Gospel, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, New Apostolics, and Krishnas. They have already established the channels of normal operation as religious organizations. But there are other religious movements that organizationally are not well integrated. It remains for them to become 'proper' religious organizations, socialized to fit the environment. The tendencies testify to the incomplete nature of Ukrainians' spiritual search and about the unsolidified nature of religious institutionalization. In time we expect Ukraine's own religious creativity to waken. The Great White Brotherhood provides an example of this creativity, though it is preferable that Ukraine not produce such extreme forms of religious expression.

Conclusion

The above survey and analysis of the panorama of non-traditional religiosity enables us to forecast certain phenomena and processes in the near future. The tendency
towards denominational and religious expansion on Ukraine’s religious map is irreversible. The current palette of new religiosity will remain or perhaps become somewhat more colorful. During the next several years, the process of religious innovation will continue, but with a diminished measure of intensity. The quantity of nontraditional religious congregations will grow, but slowly due to the appearance and spread of new movements and to the conjunction and fragmentation of existing ones. Still, Christianity will remain the dominant religion in Ukraine.

In succeeding years, the development of NRMs will encounter more difficult conditions than they did in earlier years. In former days, neither society nor the government, nor public opinion were aligned against the NRMs. Now society is more informed, but unfortunately only with the negative evaluations of NRMs. Hence future NRMs will sense opposition to their expansion from the state, church and civic structures. Negativity will replace indifference towards new religions. On the whole, in its relation to non-traditional religiosity, society is shifting to the ‘right.’ The state moves ever nearer to banning the activity of NRMs that violate the law as well as the democratic rights of citizens. In 1997 Kiev’s city government which in recent years had registered 300 new Protestant congregations, forbade the renting of meeting halls to Protestants who understandably suffer from the absence of church buildings. Directors of local movie theaters and clubs were forced to break contracts with them. Another example of such opposition is the emergence of a new association of representatives in the Ukrainian Parliament, entitled ‘For the Advocacy of Canonical and Traditional Faiths of Ukraine.’ Its objective is to advance the interests of canonical (i.e., traditional) churches. It is perfectly clear that these do not include NRMs (API 1997: No. 8).

At the local level, oblast committees of religious affairs have refused entry to representatives of many religious organizations and to foreign missionaries. In the southwestern region of Bukovina, numbered among the forbidden totalitarian sects that allegedly cause harm to an individual’s psyche, are the congregations of Mormons, Shri Chin Moy, Maharishi, and the White Brotherhood (API, 1997: 9.05). There are cases in the Rivna oblast that barred Americans from missionary activity. As we see, relations
between new religious congregations and the state are not unfolding smoothly. Moreover, these restrictive tendencies will persist. Not law, but the personal emotional and politically pragmatic attitude of the local government clerk will determine the fate of this or that congregation. Decisions will be based on whether the official ‘likes’ or ‘dislikes’ a church and whether it is expedient to assist or suppress the congregation. The absence of a clear state policy regarding religions and churches, including new ones, and the arbitrariness of local power structures that flout existing legislation, together provoke individual congregations to noncompliance and precipitates conflict with the local government. These governments still frequently balk at granting registration rights or construction permits for church buildings.

However exotic individual religious orientations may seem, it is imperative that all are given equal rights as long as they do not harm health or the interests of human society. Whether a NRM can continue to exist should depend not on decrees but on natural social processes. Will it survive when it encounters the local tradition and cultural mentality? Will it become a fixed component of the spiritual life of Ukraine?

Various evaluations of NRMs in Ukraine have themselves faced obstacles. However, the presence of NRMs has initiated a raised awareness in society towards religious issues in general. Ukrainians have begun to investigate more critically issues of faith and the fundamental teachings of various religions. They have begun to define their own religious identity. Curiosity about NRMs does not necessarily correlate with a healthy knowledge of one’s own tradition in its cultural religious, linguistic and spiritual facets. But this is a fact of modernization and joining the host of nations that are subject to the religious currents of the world.

Thanks to the NRMs in Ukraine, a dialogue has begun among religious groups. This dialogue is taking place between traditional and non-traditional churches, among believers, and among their leaders. This dialogue is about value systems and regions of cultural influence. If dialogue is successful, it will facilitate the cohesion of society. We are optimistic about the future of this dialogue. Ukraine has always been open to diverse influences because of her location at the crossroads of East and West, and North and
South, where various cultural and religious worlds intersect. This has also served to enhance pluralism in the Ukrainian worldview and a tolerant attitude toward different ways of thinking, including the religious. These are vital pre-conditions for inter-denominational and inter-religious understanding and cooperation.


The face of Christianity in the former Soviet Union (FSU) has been transformed several times this past decade. When the Soviet Union dissolved, it was common to speak of a spiritual vacuum needing to be filled, and to report on the ‘harvest of souls’ in Russia. Then came warnings about ignorant and inappropriate evangelists/missionaries and their methods. This era came to be known as the ‘Struggle for the Soul of Russia’, to cite one UMC video that showed contrasting images of non-denominational baptisms in swimming pools and multi-generational families lined up for baptism by an over-worked Orthodox priest. After 1997 the new Russian Law on Religion produced images of new restrictions on religious practice, in which Russian Orthodoxy has privileged status, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism are recognized in geographic regions, and the Catholic and Protestant (mainline & evangelical) traditions that can show legal recognition from the Soviet era may apply for re-registration.

The law was an outright attempt to stop missionary activity, especially by new religious movements and undisciplined independent groups. There was a serious problem of proselytization threatening Orthodoxy and the cultural future of Russia, so said many prominent Orthodox leaders. Universal rights of religious freedom were once more threatened, so said many prominent Western legislators and spokespersons for the mission agencies.

This book of essays represents part of the research findings from a major Pew Foundation funded project on “Soul Wars...in the New World Order”. managed through Emory University. That accounts for the human and religious rights framework for the book, even though its contents at many points transcend that western legal mentality. The proselytism debate within ecumenical Christianity requires addressing the issues of missiology and of ecclesiology, missing here are theologians and missiologists, especially from the Orthodox world. The WCC affirmations of common witness which included a rejection of proselytism as “perversion of witness” were more easily arrived at in 1961 when the point of reference was the distant third world. Now a renewed decade of mission within Europe. east and west, has brought to the fore the present relevance of the long legacy of confessional strife. Although *Proselytism and Orthodoxy*... hardly represents the definitive treatment of the topic, it offers some rich reading.

First of all, the diversity that is Russian Orthodoxy today comes through quite well. The essays by Philip Walters and James Billington offer numerous shrewd insights. For example, Walters noted the parallels between pre-soviet mission efforts that described Orthodoxy as moribund, hopelessly tied to the state, and the current descriptions of its tendency “toward schism...