Mormonism in a Post-Soviet Society: Notes from Ukraine

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> We have separated the church from the state, but we have not yet separated the people from religion.
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> —V. I. Lenin

LEGEND HAS IT THAT IN THE year 988 A.D., Prince Vladimir,[1] ruler of ancient Kievan Rus', brought Christianity to the Slavs. The apparent catalyst for his own conversion was a plea from Emperor Basil II of Constantinople. A renegade general had gathered an army to march on the Christian capital, and the emperor begged Prince Vladimir for an army to buttress the defense of his throne. In return for this great favor, Basil II was prepared to offer the hand of his sister, Anna, in marriage—providing, of course, that Vladimir convert to the one true faith, for Anna could hardly be expected to marry a heathen. Anna herself was none too thrilled with this backwater arrangement—heathen *or* Christian—but Prince Vladimir sent his army, saved the emperor's throne, and was baptized. He also sent out a decree to the residents of Kiev offering them a choice: report to the banks of the Dniepr River on a given day to shed their paganism or incur the enmity of the prince. His population prudently bowed to his will, some perhaps less willingly than others, and were baptized in the river en masse by priests lining the shore and pronouncing the necessary rites. Now a commemorative statue of Prince-turned-Saint Vladimir, holding a cross far taller than himself, pokes through the trees of the lush green park lining the western bank of the Dniepr.

In 1991, one millennium later, Elder Boyd K. Packer stood at the foot of this statue of St. Vladimir and dedicated the land of Ukraine to mis-

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1. I have elected to use the more familiar Russian transliterations in this essay, i.e., *Vladimir* and *Kiev*, rather than the less-known Urkrainian transliterations of *Volodymyr* and *Kyiv*.

sionary work and a great harvest of souls. I arrived in the capital city of Kiev in January 1992 to join some thirty-odd missionaries working to bring his words to fruition. I served six months in Kiev, followed by ten months in the southeastern coal mining city of Donetsk.

Proselyting in the streets of Ukraine was hardly what I had pictured myself doing only a year earlier. I came to the missionfield having only recently returned to the church and faith after a five-year disillusionment with organized religion, and on the heels of earning a bachelor's degree in "Peace and Conflict Studies," a small interdisciplinary major at U.C. Berkeley. Thus I arrived in Ukraine trained to see the world in sociological terms and with several years of college Russian stuffed in my head. I was also well-trained to recognize the evils of large institutions, patriarchy, and western cultural imperialism. With the ink still drying on my diploma, I found myself bringing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ along with an arguably large, western, patriarchal institution to an Eastern European culture in the throes of an identity crisis.

In this essay I hope to share ethnographic observations that I made as a missionary in 1992-93 and as a graduate student in sociology during a subsequent visit to Ukraine for the summer of 1995. My main purpose is to provide some general history and cultural context for Mormonism in a little-known country. I hope to shed light on the fascinating processes by which an American-based church with a lay clergy has established itself in a transitional "post-Soviet" society. My observations also lead me to reflect on some of the global issues facing an increasingly international Mormonism.

Within two years of the first LDS missionaries entering Russia via Helsinki, the first pair of elders to start work in Ukraine arrived in Kiev, then part of the Vienna East Mission, in October 1990. Over six years later the church has grown to two missions and well over fifty branches in ten cities, as well as several branches in Minsk, the capital of neighboring Belarus. The growth rate for baptisms, however, has tapered off dramatically over the last few years, a phenomenon I will discuss later.

The pattern of missionary work in Ukraine has to some degree reflected much of the history and culture of the country. Until recently, for example, missionaries have only been trained and taught in Russian language, rather than Ukrainian, and the growth of the LDS church extended only to the east and south of Kiev. This geographical splintering can be traced back to 1654, when a Ukrainian cossack formed an alliance with the Russian Empire to fend off the expansion of Poland. He was partially successful in his goal: the ultimate result of his treaty was a split through what is currently Ukraine—the east under the control of Russia and the west under Polish rule for three hundred years, each half of the country developing along different cultural, religious, and linguistic

lines. In fact, parts of western Ukraine were not annexed to the Soviet Union from Poland until the end of World War II.

To this day the East is dominated by Russian language and the Russian Orthodox church. The West is dominated by Ukrainian—a Slavic language closely related to Russian—and the relatively strong Ukrainian Catholic church.[2] For this reason, western Ukraine is better known for its ardent nationalism and for more effectively resisting the Soviet indoctrination of atheism. One Ukrainian woman I talked to about the impending plans of the LDS church to send Ukrainian-speaking missionaries to the western city of Lviv, asked, puzzled, "But why? They already have religion there!"

President Howard L. Biddulph, the first president of the Kiev Ukraine Mission and a professor of political science and Soviet studies at the University of Victoria in Canada, was interviewed in 1991 for a lengthy Kiev newspaper article on the future of Mormonism in Ukraine. The skeptical journalist concluded in his article that the relatively ascetic lifestyle of Mormons would hardly appeal to Ukrainians and that doctrines such as moral agency and "man is that he might have joy" were too optimistic for the Soviet soul. A few years and several thousand converts later, President Biddulph attributed the successful establishment of Mormonism in Ukraine to four major factors: a favorable political climate, a favorable ideological climate, disillusionment with traditional religious options, and the popularity of the West.[3]

Political Climate

Introducing the church to Ukraine in October 1990 proved to be fortuitous political timing. Mikhail Gorbachev had just been personally involved in ousting the tight-fisted president of the Ukrainian Republic, Volodymyr Shcherbitsky, who had long resisted the reforms of *perestroika.* The Ukrainian nationalist organization *Rukh* (meaning "movement") was growing dramatically in popularity. Massive demonstrations, involving first students and then factory workers, were held in spite of Communist Party attempts to stifle them.

LDS missionaries arrived between two of these demonstrations, when the republic seemed most open to change. In fact, the first church meeting in Kiev, with seven investigators in attendance, was held in a building fifty yards from the Communist Party headquarters on the day

2. Sometimes referred to as Eastern Rite Catholicism, Greek Catholicism, or the Uniate church.

3. From a 1994 lecture at BYU on the growth of the LDS church in Ukraine. In this context, President Biddulph was concentrating on historical and sociological factors, rather than the role of spiritual conversion.

of a large student demonstration downtown.

Also relevant was the passage only two weeks earlier in Moscow of an historic freedom of conscience law that guaranteed, among other rights, equal legal protection to all religious confessions and the right of religious organizations to establish themselves according to their own charters. The law also allowed for religious organizations to be directed from abroad.[4] The Ukrainian Republic soon passed its own freedom of conscience law, similar to the earlier Moscow version, and within a month of the failed coup and Ukrainian independence, the LDS church was officially registered in Kiev on 9 September 1991.[5] By 1993 this open-armed attitude toward "new" religions would change dramatically, but during the first few crucial years that missionaries worked to organize the church, the political climate in Ukraine was remarkably favorable to the introduction of a foreign, non-traditional faith.

Ideological Climate

Historians point to "religious revivals" in several periods of Soviet history. Some refer to a growing renewal of faith in the late 1950s and early 1960s, in response to Krushchev's destalinization policies,[6] a renewal which continued through the stagnation and disillusionment of the Brezhnev years. Other historians emphasize the more recent reforms of *glasnost* in the late 1980s. It was Gorbachev who finally accepted "believers" as equal citizens. During his term, for example, school excursions to churches rose and Orthodox seminaries experienced a surge in students.[7] In Ukraine 450 churches (mostly Orthodox) were opened or reopened in 1988.[8] Certainly the easing of sanctions against religion brought about by Gorbachev, followed by the failed right-wing coup of August 1991 (a convenient event to symbolize the collapse of Communism), dramatically forced a nationwide evaluation of both official and personal ideologies and brought the search for new meanings in life out of the underground and into more public spaces.

An excited, widespread interest in religion was evident in Ukraine at the Saturday street displays we held, especially in the first year of my mission. We would set up a small table with scriptures and literature in

4. Paul Mojzes, *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1992), 105.

5. Howard L. Biddulph, "Religious Liberty and the Ukrainian State," *BYU Law Review* 2 (1995): 321-46. See esp. 328-35.

6. Jane Ellis, "The Religious Renaissance: Myth or Reality?" in *Candle in the Wind: Religion in the Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Centre, 1989).

7. Lynn Eliason, *Perestroika of the Russian Soul* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1991), 47.

8. Jim Forest, *Religion in the New Russia* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990), 192.

an underground street crossing or at the corner of a grocery store, tape up a few LDS posters on the wall behind us, and start talking to the small crowd that would soon gather—either one-on-one or town-crier style. Many were hungry to buy the Bibles on display or the colored posters of Christ. And many would accept invitations to church and come to the meetings the following day. During my mission no missionaries ever went tracting door-to-door: these displays and simply stopping people on the street were the most effective ways of finding people who later joined the church.

One young branch in which I served, with fewer than a dozen baptized members, went through several months with 80-100 people attending sacrament meetings. More than once during that time our week's schedule was booked solid with teaching appointments and new member visits before meetings were even over, and I had to postpone requests from church-goers to take the missionary discussions until the following week.[9]

In that same area of the city of Donetsk, my companion and I stumbled into an unusual service project involving local day care centers.[10] A teacher at one of the centers had met LDS missionaries at a street display and invited us to meet with her class of five-year-olds and talk to them about God. My civil liberties separation-of-church-and-state side wrestled mightily with my missionary side, and, although I remained ambivalent, in the end we committed to the project. Casual visits involving playing and teaching Primary songs soon evolved into a more organized story-time with games, object lessons, and a theme for each week. I revamped and recycled every Primary lesson I had used during the first six months of my mission and we taught them every Primary song available in Russian. One week the theme would be "honesty," another "kindness," another "gratitude," and underlying everything was the basic thread that we are children of God, who loves us and wants us to be happy. We discussed Jesus and prophets and scriptures and commandments. I did not simply teach ethics; I taught explicitly Christian ethics.

One week a music teacher from a neighboring center observed our presentation and invited us to do the same thing at her school for a classroom of six-year-olds. Then a third school requested our "program." By then we were short on time, so we visited the third day care center every other week and worked with several classes combined—about forty chil-

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9. I attribute this unique experience in part to the fact that there were only two missionary pairs assigned to the branch at the time, and, as sisters, we often taught more than the elders simply because there were more women interested in taking the discussions than men. It nevertheless illustrates the enthusiastic interest in the area when Mormonism first arrived.

10. With the high number of men and women in the work force, these "kindergartens" were designed to provide up to twelve hours of daily care for children ages 2-7.

dren at a time. Within a few months, as I sat in the music room of the first kindergarten waiting for our original five-year-old class to file in, I noticed that there seemed to be more teachers milling about the hallways and more energy than usual in the school. When the children finally appeared, they were on their best behavior—the boys wearing little neckties and the girls wearing bows in their hair. Evidently, word of these visits from American missionaries had made its way up through the administration and that day we would be observed by three regional directors of day care centers for the city of Donetsk. All three directors looked like stern matronly Communists from central casting. I was sure that this would be our last presentation, but I went ahead with what we had planned for that day. I told the story of Daniel in the lions' den with a flannel board shipped from home and we talked about standing up for what we believe. We sang songs and then ended with a game I had improvised using American Sign Language: we would sit in a circle and one person would sign and say "I love you" to a neighbor, who would say "thank you!" and then pass on the "I love you" to the next person until it went all the way around the circle and the person who had first expressed "love" got "love" back.

When it was all over and the children had returned to their classroom, several teachers and the director of the day care center promptly set up a table with chairs to serve tea (herbal, just for us), as is customary when guests visit. My companion and I joined them and I waited for a "thank you but that will be all" speech from the regional directors. Instead, the three women were beaming and excited. They had never seen material or a presentation style like this and it was just what the children needed. One regional director exclaimed that her favorite part was the "I love you" game and suggested that we play it again right there. And so there we sat, eight adults, signing "I love you" and saying "thank you" all the way around the tea table. They asked us to bring our presentations to every day care center in that region of the city. When I explained that we were stretched thin as it was, they decided to send the schools to us. The following week our lesson was observed by about thirty day care center directors, who were required to attend. In subsequent weeks teachers from around the region came to watch and take notes. Our presentations continued for nine months—all the way through that 1992-93 school year, including a Christmas pageant we helped stage which was attended by parents.[11]

The welcome we received in these schools and the remarkably high levels of church attendance in this Donetsk branch during 1992 certainly

11. This general acceptance of our presence in schools was no doubt facilitated by the lack of negative stereotypes about Mormonism at the time and the very low numbers of non-Christians in Ukraine.

point to a time of excited interest in what Mormonism had to offer. In the aftermath of national independence, with its accompanying freedom of access to information from new sources, Ukrainians were open to exploring religious options and going out of their way to seek them out.

Ambivalence Toward Orthodoxy

Russian Orthodoxy is deeply embedded in the national identity of Russia and Ukraine, perhaps in much the same way as Catholicism is embedded in Italy and Shintoism in Japan. In the early 1990s wearing and displaying crosses became more and more fashionable, and Orthodoxy enjoyed a surge in baptisms—especially among the younger generation.[12] But this religious revival did not lead all Ukrainians back to their Orthodox roots. The more firmly established Catholic church fared better in western Ukraine, but the general population in central and eastern Ukraine had lost considerable respect for Orthodoxy.

Even before the Bolsheviks came to power, nationalism in Ukraine had split the Orthodox church into three major factions: Russian Orthodoxy, which remained subordinate to a patriarch in Moscow; Ukrainian Orthodoxy, which answered to a patriarch in Kiev; and the independent, nationalist Autocephalous church.[13] Although the Communist Party spent seventy years destroying church buildings of all denominations, persecuting priests and church-goers, and preaching atheism, Russian Orthodoxy—which could be more easily controlled through its Moscow-centered hierarchy—was more tolerated. As a result, it was considered common knowledge that many of those with authority in the Russian Orthodox church were KGB-friendly and corrupt. In 1992, for example, the highest ranking member of Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine (Kiev Metropolitan Filaret) resigned his post following allegations of KGB collaboration and sexual immorality, allegations he never publicly denied.[14]

Property disputes further discredited traditional Christianity in

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12. It was actually fairly common for the older people I talked with to have been baptized as infants in secret—usually on the initiative of their grandparents. Soviet researchers estimated that 40-50 percent of children in the USSR were baptized in the early 1960s. Other statistics indicate that in 1975 32 percent of all baptisms in the USSR took place in Ukraine, even though Ukrainians constituted only 19 percent of the Soviet population. See Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 207-208.

13. The word "autocephalous" means "self-governing." For an interesting description and analysis of Autocephalism, see "The Rise of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 1919-22," by Bohdan Bociurkiw, in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, (Basingstoke, Eng.: MacMillan in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1991).

14. John B. Dunlop, "KGB Subversion of the Russian Orthodox Church," *RFE/RL Research Report* 1 (20 Mar. 1992): 51-53.

Ukraine. In many cases, Russian Orthodoxy had taken over church buildings and cathedrals abandoned by the more persecuted factions. With the revival of these formerly repressed branches of Orthodoxy, as well as Catholicism, each claimed to represent true Christianity and began to fight bitterly over historical ownership of church property. Many Ukrainians found this squabbling to be confusing and decidedly *un*-Christian. In fact, a 1991-92 opinion poll indicated that 52 percent of Ukrainians described themselves as non-denominational Christians: a possible indication of disillusionment with traditional options of organized religion.[15]

Popularity of the West

Mormon missionaries have ridden the coattails of American popularity in many parts of the world, and the former Soviet Union is no exception. The opening of long-closed borders made any foreigner intriguing and exotic—especially Americans and Canadians. *Glasnost* exposed Ukrainians to the positive aspects of North American life formerly neglected by Communist media. Most people I talked to about the West spoke bitterly of the now-exposed high capitalist standard of living relative to life under Communism. They often harbored stereotypical visions of America as the golden land of opportunity where anyone could "make it big," and I had frequent jesting marriage proposals from would-be emigres. Many were anxious to ask what America was "really like" since they didn't know what to believe in the media anymore. Offering English classes and making appearances in schools to talk about life in the West were common ways for missionaries to establish visibility in communities. People were generally more likely to pause on the street or to invite Mormon missionaries into their homes out of curiosity about their country of origin, rather than their religion. An elders' quorum president from Odessa acknowledged this initial attraction as an accepted fact and verbalized a common feeling among members of the church: "Of course, many came to church for America. But they stayed for God."[16]

But while American passports opened some doors, they closed others. American presence and leadership in the church have posed several dilemmas for Mormonism in Ukraine, and gradual change in the social

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15. Biddulph, in his 1994 BYU address. See also comparable Russian statistics in L. Vorontsova and S. Filatov, "Religiosity and Political Consciousness in Post-Soviet Russia," *Religion, State and Society* 22 (1994): 397-401.

16. From an August 1995 interview with the author. It should be noted, however, that more recently returned missionaries and local Ukrainian leaders say this attraction has faded. In April 1996 Howard Biddulph stated: "American missionaries are no longer a novelty and people no longer have illusions about material advantages or emigration which American contacts can provide" (Apr. 1996 letter, in my possession).

and political climate slowed down the expansion of the church. By 1993 the sense of excitement and openness to new religions seemed to be waning. Many Ukrainians I spoke with talked of feeling overwhelmed by the number of religious choices now surrounding them. Mormonism was only one of dozens of Western-based religions to begin active proselyting in Ukraine. As different churches became more established alongside Mormonism, and, as Western stereotypes about Mormons along with anti-Mormon literature began to circulate, the "playing field" became more crowded. The energy required to sort through a barrage of conflicting claims on truth discouraged many from even trying. When in doubt, many Ukrainians fell back on the Orthodox church more for reasons of cultural or national identity than through religious conversion. One woman I taught and saw baptized in 1992 identified herself as Russian Orthodox when I saw her again in 1995. Several questions later I learned that she rarely attended religious services, but that she now identified with Orthodoxy because it was the religion of her ancestors and her country.

Another major contributor to a slow-down in church growth is precisely this issue of national identity. In 1991 Ukrainians voted overwhelmingly (even in the Russified east) to separate from the Soviet Union and become an independent state. Politicians found favor by distancing themselves both from Russia and the West, and there were strongly expressed sentiments that Ukraine could and should forge its own path in the world. Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of independent Ukraine, was elected using stirring nationalist rhetoric and speaking fluent Ukrainian, rather than Russian. It soon became clear that his strategies for shaping a new national identity included favoring the religion of Ukrainian Orthodoxy over Russian Orthodoxy and other foreign "transplants" to Ukrainian soil.

In December 1993 an amendment to the 1991 freedom of conscience law was passed emphasizing that the law only guarantees the religious rights of *citizens,* not foreigners. The law is now interpreted to mean that foreigners can only preach and perform rites by invitation of already registered religious congregations—effectively both banning the proselyting of foreign missionaries in new cities where congregations have not yet been established and protecting churches more native to Ukraine from competition for converts.[17]

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17. A direct quote from the amendment reads as follows: "Clergymen, religious preachers, teachers, other representatives of foreign organizations who are foreign citizens and come to visit temporarily in Ukraine may preach religious doctrines, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities only in those religious organizations which invited them to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization." See U.S. Department of State Dispatch, *Ukraine Human Rights Practices, 1994* (Mar. 1995). For an in-depth discussion of religious liberty and the law in Ukraine, see Biddulph's "Religious Liberty and the Ukrainian State," 321-46.

Government officials also made it clear that they preferred to deal with Ukrainian representatives of the church rather than Americans. In order to qualify for missionary visas, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was required to create a national organization with a Ukrainian citizen as its president. Ukrainian branch presidents from all eight cities where the church was established met in Kiev to work on a charter and to nominate a president. Their nomination was approved by the area presidency, but the position is not an official church calling.[18]

Even in cities where the LDS church is already established, Ukrainian government officials have found ways to control the influence of this foreign-based religion by limiting the number of visas allotted to foreign missionaries. And since Ukraine still operates under the old Soviet system of requiring a separate visa clearance for each city visited, the Council on Religious Affairs of each city can arbitrarily set a limit on the number of proselyting Mormon missionaries it will allow. Thus LDS mission presidents do not have the ability to freely transfer missionaries between cities—they must do constant battle with Soviet-style red tape and resistant city governments.[19] These efforts constitute a considerable drain of time and energy for mission presidencies and office elders. City officials have also found other ways to discourage missionary work. Over the past few years, several missionaries have been arrested for having their registration as foreigners expire. In some cities street displays have been banned, and facilities such as schools and cultural halls have been discouraged from renting space to non-Orthodox religions. At least three Ukrainian cities, at one time or another, have temporarily expelled all foreign LDS missionaries over visa disputes.

The church has developed several strategies for coping with these limitations and the severe drop in the number of full-time missionaries allowed into the country. One solution has been to apply for humanitarian aid visas as well as missionary visas. Missionaries who arrive as humanitarian aid workers generally do not wear identifying tags in public and put special effort into community service projects. They are not allowed to contact people about the church but may answer questions, participate in Sunday services, work with church members, and teach non-

18. Other countries, such as Switzerland, have similar requirements.

19. According to the U.S. State Department's report on Human Rights practices in Ukraine during 1994: "Some local authorities refused to respond officially to the requests [for missionary visas by the LDS church] but stated in private that they will not grant visas because of the opposition of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. When the Mormon Church continued to press its case for visas, some members of the Council on Religious Affairs threatened to deregister the Mormon church if it did not cease its efforts."

members when invited to do so.[20]

Another strategy, with interesting implications for the church as an American presence in Ukraine, has been to use native Ukrainians more frequently as full-time and part-time missionaries. Ukrainian missionaries do not need visas to transfer between cities, and although they generally lack familiarity with the scriptures and details of church doctrine and organization, they come with the obvious benefit of language and cultural proficiency. An increasing number of Ukrainians are submitting papers for full-time missions, and single members of the church have been invited to serve mini-missions as their time allows. In 1995 I met a divorced man and older teenage Ukrainians who donated some or all of their summer to become full-time companions to Americans.

One incident that speaks to the success of Ukrainian missionaries and the potential for Ukrainian self-sufficiency in the church took place in the coastal city of Odessa in late 1993. Odessa had been opened to missionary work for less than a year when the American elders there ran into visa expiration problems and abruptly had to pull out of the country until they could renew their documentation. They left behind twenty-five investigators who had committed to be baptized sometime in the upcoming month. In response, the Kiev Mission president gathered together a group of district missionaries—all Ukrainians with some experience proselyting with full-time missionaries—and, after a brief orientation, sent them that very night to Odessa to live in the full-time elders' abandoned apartments and to take over their teaching appointments. By the end of that month, twenty-three of the twenty-five who had committed to join the church were baptized.

Thus the same factors that may have slowed the expansion of the church in the past few years also seem to have propelled the church toward its established goal of having all-Ukrainian leadership in place as soon as possible.[21] Many Ukrainian members have expressed frustration with the church being labeled "American." In testimony meetings I heard frequent emphasis on the international character of the church and assertions that "this is Christ's church, not an American church." U.S. mission-

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20. In Minsk, Belarus, where the church has yet to gain the right to extend invitations for missionary visas, a group of Belarussian members organized a charity society called "Sofia" that could extend invitations for humanitarian aid workers. Thus foreign LDS volunteers are officially members of Sofia, not representatives of the LDS church, and it is illegal for them to wear tags in public or to proselyte. Most teaching appointments come through member referrals.

21. This goal was firmly in place for the mission from its inception, long before nationalist political pressures became acute, and in accordance with LDS policy worldwide. When President Biddulph left the Kiev Mission in 1994, all forty branches in Ukraine had entirely local leadership, and three all-Ukrainian district presidencies with district-level auxiliary officers had been established in the city of Kiev (Apr. 1996 letter from Biddulph).

aries may have been an important initial draw for Ukrainians, but once committed to the church, members put considerable effort into disassociating it from its American roots. Leo Merrill, president of the Ukraine Donetsk Mission in 1995, stated clearly that "the best thing that can happen is for the Americans to get out so it can be seen as a Ukrainian church."[22]

The future political climate for the church in Ukraine is difficult to predict. Leonid Kuchma, who defeated Kravchuk in the 1994 presidential elections, speaks poor Ukrainian and was elected on a platform of re-establishing economic ties with Russia. Since obtaining office, however, his rhetoric has become more explicitly nationalist. Perhaps in relaxing economic independence he has been seeking for stronger cultural and religious autonomy. In fact, it was President Kuchma who dissolved the national Council on Religious Affairs (a remnant of Soviet government) and reorganized it under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture—an organization whose primary goal is to cultivate and revive Ukrainian identity and pride.[23] Non-traditional religious affairs are now handled by the "Ministry of Nationalities, Migrations and Cults." In the summer of 1994 an official proclamation from this ministry went out to all public education administrators forbidding visits from religious representatives and the presentation of religious materials in schools—an enforcement of the separation of church and state that was only a matter of time in coming.[24] How receptive future administrations will be to foreign missionary work remains to be seen.

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22. From an Aug. 1995 interview with the author.

23. A number of teachers and parents I interviewed in the summer of 1995 (particularly those from central and eastern Ukraine) felt that nationalism had gone overboard in many respects. They were disappointed, for example, with hastily-written, poorly-produced Ukrainian history textbooks and with the teaching of scarce Ukrainian literature at the expense of the richness of Russian literature. One of the most prestigious schools in Kiev has thus far resisted government pressure to switch to Ukrainian-language instruction because the directors believe that Russian literature has more to teach their students in terms of culture and morality.

24. The memorandum referred to foreign-based religions taking advantage of economic and religious instability in Ukraine and the lack of relevant legislation and enforcement in order "to spread new untraditional religions. Sometimes foreign preachers disrespect Ukrainian laws and do not take into consideration difficulties in the religious situation, our spiritual and historical traditions and public opinion. . . . Such uncontrolled activity of foreign preachers and missionaries complicates the religious situation in Ukraine and provokes negative reactions from Clergy of traditional religions and from the public . . . The activity of such foreign religious representatives from the Church of Unity (Moonies), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Unity of Krishna Consciousness (Krishnaites), and so on, which sometimes are registered as public, humanitary [sic], cultural educational organizations, etc., arouse great anxiety." None of the subsequent examples given as evidence of such disturbing activity involved the LDS church. Copies of the full text of this decree in both Russian and English are in my possession.

Mormonism in a New Culture

Experience and scholarship in recent years have shown that the LDS church faces considerable challenges as it expands outward from an American center into other cultures of the world.[25] Just how far can and should Mormonism assimilate into host cultures? Lawrence A. Young suggests that retention rates in new religious movements are positively correlated with the degree of compatibility in mores, values, and behaviors between the religion and its host culture.[26] Will this hold true for the Ukrainian case? To what degree is Mormonism compatible with post-Soviet culture and society? In the case of the former republics of the Soviet Union, caught up as they are in turbulent political, economic, and social transition, these questions are especially difficult to probe.

In such a complicated climate, what constitutes being "Ukrainian" is very much contested. How is "Ukrainian" different from "Russian" or "Soviet" or "Slavic"? Many sociologists and political scientists argue, for example, that it is premature to speak of a "post-Soviet" society; the former Soviet Union is still very much steeped in Soviet culture and its legacy.[27] Indeed, I witnessed many examples of Mormonism grating against and sometimes finding surprising compatibilities with that Soviet culture. In Ukraine, where new effective social institutions have yet to replace those that have disintegrated, some cling to the past, some only react against it, and others have widely diverging hopes for the future. Mormonism has both clashed and connected with many types of people.

Surprisingly, a high number of those who joined the church in Ukraine have been well-educated. This is an unusual pattern for the church in its early stages in most other countries, but the Ukrainian intelligentsia are relatively well represented among early converts to Mormonism. Especially in Kiev there are scientists, lawyers, university professors, business executives, engineers, two prominent surgeons and other health professionals, musicians and artists, a ballet master and a dramatist, several journalists and a prominent anchorwoman for Ukrainian television, linguists, teachers, and museum docents.[28] President Bid-

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25. See, for example, Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young, eds., *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (Spring 1996), entire issue.

26. "Confronting Turbulent Environments: Issues in the Organizational Growth and Globalization of Mormonism," *Contemporary Mormonism*, 56.

27. See, for example, Robert C. Tucker's "Conclusion," in Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker, eds., *Patterns in Post-Soviet Leadership* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 235-40, and Alexander Dallin's article "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" in Gail Lapidus, ed., *The New Russia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 245-62.

28. Apr. 1996 letter from Biddulph.

dulph suggests that the intelligentsia are always the critics of the former orthodoxy, a role which in a Soviet context may lend itself to reject atheism and embrace religion. Indeed, Soviet emigres from the 1970s referred to a growing underground acceptance of religion and spirituality among the intelligentsia.

By far, most people I talked with believed there was no going back to a totalitarian regime and they embraced the new freedom of religion openly. Others, however, were not so sure. One woman in southeastern Ukraine took the discussions and agreed to be baptized—until she discovered that the church kept meticulous records on its membership. Fearful of retribution in the event of a repressive political reversal, she finally agreed to baptism, but on the condition that it take place in the privacy of her own apartment with only American missionaries in attendance. Fortunately she was a petite woman, but even then it took three tries to completely immerse her in her bathtub. The witnesses, who could hardly fit in the tiny bathroom, leaned in from the doorway to observe the ordinance. I have also heard stories of Ukrainian parents living under Communism who quietly hired an Orthodox or Catholic priest to come to their apartment in plain clothes and baptize their children away from prying eyes. At least for this woman, some things had not changed.

Issues of trust loomed large in a society that suffered from a serious split between public and private worlds. A Soviet Ukrainian said one thing to her boss, another to her co-workers, and yet another to her family in the privacy of her home. Candid thoughts and deepest beliefs were reserved for a well-tested close circle of friends; those outside this intimate circle were usually suspect. Although American missionaries would be welcomed into the inner circle of the kitchen table with ease, some Ukrainians I spoke with felt that, with few exceptions, others had converted to the church not for God or truth, but in hopes of personal gain—perhaps church welfare, marriage to a missionary, or an invitation to America.

Part of this lack of trust came from lack of experience with a lay church. In trying to organize and train a lay clergy in young branches, I often experienced difficulty finding people with effective organizational and leadership skills, especially outside of Kiev. Some scholars, journalists, and businessmen have suggested that the paternalistic Soviet state killed the spirit of personal initiative and entrepreneurship in the former USSR, and at least one Ukrainian member of the mission presidency in Kiev cited the lack of initiative or "slavish mentality" on the part of the members as one of the main obstacles to the growth of the church in Ukraine. Another church leader from Odessa commented that the Relief Society president in his branch was perfectly willing to work—she just wanted to be told exactly what to do.

The first generation of converts had an especially difficult time. Few materials besides the Book of Mormon and the missionary discussions were translated into Russian during the first few years.[29] What limited religious experience converts had was usually as spectators rather than active participants or leaders. I remember clearly the horror of one woman when we asked her, two weeks after her baptism, to become the first Relief Society president for her branch. Feelings of ignorance and inexperience, therefore, led many members to prefer relying on foreign missionaries to get things done, in spite of their young age. And because they frequently mistrusted the experience and sincerity of their peers, members were sometimes openly reluctant to support and sustain Ukrainian leaders.

Each branch I worked in went through the rocky transition of having foreign missionaries move out of leadership positions and Ukrainians from the congregation called in their place. This transition was almost always accompanied by complaints and a drop in church attendance. One older woman in Kiev told me with feeling: "When the [North American] missionaries are there, I feel the Holy Spirit. When they are not, I don't. Church leadership should have been left in the hands of the missionaries—it was given away too soon! Everyone here is too selfish—they think only of themselves. Only our grandchildren will grow up genuine believers." In a similar vein of resignation regarding the adult generations, a day care worker once told me, "It is too late for us, but teach our children." I also experienced difficulty trying to teach new members that callings were egalitarian and rotational by nature, and that they were more opportunities to serve than positions of power. The common perception that Ukrainians with wealth or social status must have done something illegal to obtain their position (e.g., bribed the right official) sometimes seemed to spill over into impressions of local leaders, and even more so toward members doing paid work for the church.[30]

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29. As of April 1996, Russian translations of the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price were beginning to be distributed in Russian-speaking missions. Ukrainian translations of the Book of Mormon were introduced to Ukraine and missionary work opened in Lviv (a dominantly Ukrainian-speaking city near the Polish border) in June 1996.

30. Journalist Alessandra Stanley commented on this culture of status in Communist life: "There was no shame to poverty when only criminal and party officials were rich. Obscurity was noble when professional achievement was bound up with political compromise" (see "Auld Lang Syne: A Toast! To the Good Things About Bad Times," *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 1995). Writer Bruce Sterling also described this perceived link between disenfranchised poverty and honest living: "Muscovites directly equate poverty and squalor with elemental human decency. Cracked ceilings, leaking faucets, and moaning, clunking radiators are signifiers of moral integrity" (see "Compost of Empire," *Wired*, http://www.hotwired.com/wired/2.04/features/compost.empire.html [Apr. 1994]). President Biddulph, however, suggests that these perceptions in the church are waning as branches become more established and leaders more experienced. See chaps. 13-14 in his book, *The Morning Breaks: Stories of Conversion and Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1996).

Some people I spoke with pointed out similarities between the church and the Communist Party, citing, for example, their top-down hierarchical structures and strong centralized ideologies with certain emphases on conformity. To some Ukrainians, the distant center of Salt Lake City seemed all too much like the distant center of Moscow and was perceived to undermine hard-won national autonomy and identity. Others commented on the seemingly meaningless process of sustaining people to callings in the church. It was too much like party voting: everyone was expected to raise their hands in a consensus for a decision they knew little about that had already been made by those with authority.

Others considered their church experiences to be a stark and welcome contrast to the hypocrisy and insincerity they had observed in Communist organizations. Anna was a hairdresser and single mother of three and served as a Relief Society teacher in her branch. Once in a testimony meeting she related how the Relief Society president called her one evening and asked Anna to represent her at a leadership training meeting that night with the mission president who was in town for his monthly visit. Anna agreed to go out of a sense of responsibility but was not looking forward to it. She had been to "training" meetings before. The bosses were stern and usually chided the group for goals unmet, and it was all very boring and unpleasant. But this meeting caught her completely by surprise—she described it as being full of love and purpose and she was astonished to watch as the mission president shared a personal story about leadership with tears rolling down his face. To her, at least, the church was nothing like the party.

Anna's positive response to the patriarchal leadership she encountered in Mormonism highlights the complex intersection of gender, religion, and politics in Ukraine. To my surprise, I met few Ukrainian women who struggled with the issue of women's roles in the church as I had in my own conversion process. In many respects, women in the former USSR are experiencing a backlash to Soviet-style "equality." During Stalin's era, the "woman question" was proclaimed solved and emancipation declared when the number of women in the paid labor force reached levels higher than in any other country.[31] Since then, politicians and academics have discussed the need to relieve women's domestic bur-

31. In the 1970s 92 percent of working-age Soviet women were in the paid labor force, although that figure dropped somewhat in the 1980s, and due to strong maternity leave policies, only 20 percent of women worked during the first year after the birth of a child. However, in spite of holding 61 percent of degrees in higher education, women overall earn less than men and continue to be dramatically underrepresented in management positions. See James Maddock, M. Janice Hogan, Anatolyi Antonov, and Mikhail Matskovsky, eds., *Families Before and After Perestroika: Russian and U.S. Perspectives* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994), 18-19.

den in the home for decades, but have hardly resolved it, and women still do far more household work and child care than their husbands in spite of comparable hours working outside the home.

Western media have been quick to point out in recent years that many women would gladly drop half of the double burden they carry and return to the home,[32] a preference that has been encouraged in the last few decades by demographers alarmed at the falling birth rate, psychologists warning against the "masculinization" of women,[33] and politicians anxious about the rising unemployment rate. In his book *Perestroika*, Gorbachev posed the "question of what we should do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission."[34] The 1990s, with their surge in job instability and negative population growth for the former Soviet Union, have only added fuel to this agenda. Most popular and academic debates assume an essentialist "different but equal" stance toward the sexes: man as primary breadwinner, woman as primary homemaker—a stance compatible with the views of the LDS church. And in my experience, few men and women question the suitability of these prescribed sex roles. Although research indicates that a majority of women prefer to keep their jobs,[35] Ukrainian women are still quick to distance themselves from the term "feminist"—a word with only negative connotations in Russian.

Most of the religious women I spoke with agreed that the ideal was to have a strong righteous man as head of the household. Few claimed to have such a household. And more Ukrainian women than men show interest in the church. This is certainly nothing new for Russia or Ukraine, where women have historically dominated more traditional religions.[36]

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32. See Wendy Sloane, "Liberated Women Doff Hard Hat, Don Apron," *Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 1994.

33. See Lynne Attwood, *The New Soviet Man and Woman* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990).

34. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 117.

35. In one poll in the early 1980s, 65 percent of working women said they would not quit their jobs even if their husband earned as much as their current joint income (only 22 percent said they would). In a similar poll a few years later, 87 percent of working women said they would not give up working if the financial need were eliminated. See *Families Before and After Perestroika*, 160. See also Sarah Ashwin's 1996 unpublished paper, "Russian Mineworkers in Transition," privately circulated.

36. Soviet research in the 1980s suggested that female "believers" (i.e., church-goers) outnumbered male "believers" three or four to one (see Paul D. Steeves, *Keeping the Faiths: Religion and Ideology in the Soviet Union* [New York: Committee for National Security, Holmes & Meier, 1989], 163). Nathaniel Davis in *A Long Walk to Church* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995) also reports that during the Soviet era 80-96 percent of those attending a normal Orthodox service were older women. Although more men are attending in the 1990s, the percentage of women in churches is still overwhelmingly higher (199).

Perhaps the more interesting fact is the relatively high percentage of men and two-parent families converting to Mormonism compared to other religions in Ukraine. President Biddulph calculated that approximately 45 percent of all converts in the Kiev Mission from 1990-94 were men, a percentage comparable to the proportion of men in the general population. Although anecdotal evidence in Ukraine suggests that Mormon women have a higher activity rate than men, it is still interesting to note the relatively strong attraction of Mormonism to men in "a country where few men join or participate in religious bodies."[37] The city of Kiev, where all branch and district presidencies are filled by Ukrainian priesthood holders, is an example of visible local (male) leadership. In other parts of Ukraine, however, and especially in areas where the church is still new, establishing sufficient priesthood leadership for each level of organization remains a challenge. One Ukrainian church leader in Kiev explained that women tend to take responsibility from men; he suggested that men need to take more initiative and that women need to be more supportive of their leadership.[38] The strong, essential, stable woman versus the superfluous, transient man is a recurring theme in Russian and Soviet literature. Many Ukrainians I spoke with—both male and female—saw similar themes in the church.

Another gender issue is the difficulty of marriage for young women. In Ukraine finding a man played a central role in the self-esteem of young women—even more so than what I have observed in the United States. I knew of at least two young women who were discouraged by their mothers from serving full-time missions, because "who would marry you at the age of twenty-three?" These kinds of pressures notwithstanding, of the growing number of young full-time missionaries from Ukraine, approximately half have been women. A special difficulty for Ukrainian women, as for women in many other countries, is the emphasis on marrying within the faith when there are few LDS men to date. And to date a non-member man but insist on celibacy before marriage is to lose him very fast. Many strong young women I knew, when forced to choose between full fellowship in the church—which, by their own admission, had become a central, vibrant force for good in their lives—and a potential husband, chose the man.

Generally speaking, virginity before marriage is not as highly valued or expected in the former Soviet Union as it is in the United States, and my impression is that those youth who commit to keep the law of chastity in Ukraine, especially first-generation Mormons, receive far less support for their choice than Americans. At one extreme, prostitution is a growing industry and source of income for young women. One recent survey in

37. Apr. 1996 letter from Biddulph.

38. Vasilii Lyubarets of the Kiev Mission presidency in a July 1995 interview with the author.

Moscow found that "over one third of high school girls freely admitted they would exchange sex for hard currency."[39] Adultery is also more tolerated and often taken for granted. One woman, in trying to explain to me the sexual culture of the Soviet Union, told me the following joke:

> A married man went to visit his married lover in her apartment when both of their spouses were away. As he sat sipping tea in her kitchen, she asked him to sharpen her knives while he was there. He set down his cup with exasperation and cried, "Every time I come over you ask me to sharpen your knives! I'm tired of it! Why don't you get your husband to sharpen them?!" She turned to him and asked, "Well, who sharpens *your* knives at home?" The man thought for a moment and replied, puzzled, "No one. They're always sharp!"

Other Ukrainians explained to me that it was commonplace for women to be pressured into sex with their male supervisors in order to keep their jobs. One young Mormon woman who responded to a newspaper ad for a secretarial position in Kiev was asked her bust size over the phone. She assured me that such incidents were standard in her job search thus far. Her experiences are supported by other sources. A March 1996 article in *Russian Life* quoted a typical newspaper ad as follows: "Twenty three year old girl, admirable in every way, great measurements, well-built, efficient, communicative . . . seeks serious work as a secretary-abstractor (I have experience) . . . I will be an ornament to your office. No intimate relationships. Natasha." Other ads are not so chaste. The article goes on: "The phrase *bez kompleksov* ('without complexes') is so common in Russian employment ads that it is simply abbreviated: b/k. Everyone knows what it means, too. More and more young women, out of choice or economic necessity, are sleeping with the boss."[40] Pornography is prolific in public spaces: lewd posters are openly displayed for sale in kiosks and underground walkways, and pornographic images often decorate the interiors of public buses and taxicabs. Movie ads, usually hand-painted, regularly feature bare-breasted women in provocative poses.

Along with the lack of prevalent norms that support LDS sexual values, Ukrainians have suffered from the lack of available contraception.[41]

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39. See Helena Goscilo, "Domostroika or Perestroika," in Thomas Lahusen, with Gene Kuperman, eds., *Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Novostroika* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 240.

40. See Katharine E. Young, "Loyal Wives, Virtuous Mothers," *Russian Life*, http://www.friends-partners.org/rispubs/r1.top.html (Mar. 1996).

41. When I first realized the difficulties in obtaining birth control and the dilemmas this posed for those who did not believe in abortion as an option, I joked in a letter home that we missionaries should be passing out condoms with our copies of the Book of Mormon. A few months later I opened a care package from a younger sister to discover a generous shipment of assorted condoms. There I was—a Mormon missionary—with a lot of condoms to give away. I finally slipped them to a married mother of three I had grown close to, who accepted them very gratefully. In 1995 condoms were more available in ubiquitous sidewalk kiosks, but for a price.

Abortion has long been accepted as the most standard form of birth control. In the last decade roughly one out of every four abortions performed in the world took place in the Soviet Union.[42] Various studies report averages of anywhere from six to fifteen abortions per Soviet woman in her lifetime.[43] In 1991 roughly 1 million abortions were performed in Ukraine alone: over three times as many abortions per capita as in the United States.[44] If we taught any woman over the age of twenty-five who decided she wanted to be baptized, we could safely assume that she would need an "abortion interview" with the mission president. For many Ukrainian women, it was difficult to talk to a man about the sinfulness of such life choices, usually made in the context of extremely limited options. No one in my experience, however, ever refused the interview.

Average family size is smaller in Ukraine than in the U.S.: a family with more than two children is considered unusually large. This has been attributed at least in part to the tight housing crunch in the former Soviet Union, where multiple generations are often crammed into two- or three-room apartments. Young married couples can be on waiting lists for years to receive their own apartment. For Ukrainians in such conditions—tight living quarters, financial struggles in an uncertain economy, and poor access to contraception—to give up the customary option of abortion is a sacrifice requiring much faith.

Along with sexual lifestyle considerations come the usual conflicts with the Mormon dietary code. The Word of Wisdom, which generally marks Mormons in any society, certainly sets them apart in the former Soviet Union. Popular images of Slavic culture include the vodka bottle and the samovar full of hot tea, and Mormonism's prohibition of both is often met with ridicule and disbelief. It is considered insulting, for example, not to drink with co-workers or for a guest at a birthday party not to drink vodka to the health of the birthday celebrant. As foreigners, we were more readily excused from such traditions, but Ukrainian Mormons usually meet with considerable internalized and overt peer pressure in all kinds of settings.

Smoking is also widespread. The former Soviet Union has some of the highest levels of teenage smoking in the world—for both boys and girls. I knew at least two twelve-year-old boys who had to quit smoking in order to be baptized with their families. One sixteen-year-old Mormon

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42. Goscilo, 241.

43. James P. Gallagher in "Russians Wising Up to Contraceptives: Abortion No Longer Their Only Option," http://www.nd.edu/~astrouni/zhiwriter/spool/90.htm (10 Sept. 1995), cites an average of six to eight abortions per woman. Goscilo cites even higher averages of twelve to fifteen abortions per woman (251).

44. United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook 1993* (1995), and *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1995).

girl in Kiev was the *only* member of her high school class who did not smoke. The pressure against living a Mormon lifestyle, especially on teenagers, is enormous.

On the other hand, health consciousness is on the rise in Ukraine. Many Ukrainians have experienced only too well the terrible consequences of alcoholism in their families, and they recognize alcohol abuse as a tragedy on a national scale. To these people, such a seemingly stringent lifestyle makes enormous sense and is met with easy acceptance. Many Ukrainian Mormons laugh ruefully about the Word of Wisdom and say that it is just as well: some of the most expensive items at the market are coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, and meat, and in these hard economic times, abstaining from such luxuries makes sense for their strained pocketbooks, as well as for their health.

With inflation running out of control, real prices soaring, and job security collapsing, Ukrainians have waded grimly through the past few years of economic turmoil. The average Ukrainian standard of living is estimated to be three times lower than in Russia. I remember one sick, older woman we visited regularly. Her husband was an abusive alcoholic who rarely brought money home, and she was struggling to make ends meet on her pension. We started to bring food with us on every visit—usually fresh vegetables or fruit, which we knew to be expensive. One week I discovered by chance that she was storing on her balcony the cucumbers we had brought her the week before. She ducked her head, embarrassed, and confessed that she was saving them for a special dinner the following week to commemorate the anniversary of her older son's death. She knew she wouldn't be able to buy much and so was hoarding the cucumbers as a special treat, even though they would no longer be fresh, to honor her son.

Stories like hers were not uncommon. A number of the Ukrainians I knew could not count on a regular paycheck even if they were officially employed. State sectors frequently fail to pay their employees for lack of funds. In 1995 the parents of my host family in Lviv both worked at the same electronics factory, which had almost completely shut down for lack of business, forcing employees to take unpaid "vacations." The company already owed the mother three months of back pay. In 1996 coal miners in the Donetsk area have been striking to protest delayed paychecks. Hardly anyone owns a car and many members walk or travel long distances on increasingly more expensive and unreliable public transportation to attend church. Simple things like aspirin or disposable diapers are only available at exorbitant prices, and often only for American dollars—Ukraine's de facto currency. The average monthly salary is barely sufficient to buy one pair of shoes. And still Ukrainian converts

commit to pay tithing, and some make even more financial sacrifices to attend the temple in Freiburg, Germany.

One method Ukrainians used under Communism to supplement the unstable food supply is now used to extend their unstable incomes: growing and preserving as much of their own food as possible. It is fairly common for a family to have a plot of land, usually on the outskirts of the city. Generally, the best time to work these plots is on weekends, especially when families must travel fair distances into the countryside. Ironically, this laudable Mormon trait of pursuing self-sufficiency thus detracts from church attendance, especially during good weather and harvest times. When it is a struggle to put food on the table, setting aside every single Sunday for rest and worship is another substantial sacrifice. Commitments to desperately needed paying jobs, family gardens, as well as the culture of weekend trips to the dacha for work and play, combined with other familiar reasons for inactivity, have put church attendance rates in Ukraine at roughly 40-70 percent of membership, depending on the city.[45] Ukraine, it would seem, has been no more successful with member retention than many other countries.[46]

There are still more dilemmas for Mormons in the former Soviet Union. The LDS church believes in obedience, law, and order, but what if there is no law and no order? As an American writer in post-Soviet Russia observed: "Anything is possible, except surviving while obeying all the laws. Corruption is absolutely inescapable."[47] Tax laws are erratic and oppressive. The "mafia," which has received much attention in the Western press, is indeed a powerful force in Ukraine. At one point the church

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45. Although I do not have full access to official church statistics on activity rates, missionaries have suggested that they vary widely from branch to branch. President Biddulph calculated that in mid-1994, the activity rate for the Kiev Mission was above 72 percent, although reports from more recently returned missionaries cite much lower numbers. Sacrament meeting attendance in the three largest cities of the Donetsk Mission for March 1996 averaged 38 percent. It should also be noted that activity rates for the first generation of converts (1990-91) are much lower than for later converts. Although there may be many reasons for this, I suspect it at least has to do with the fact that going from being the fifth member in a branch to being the sixtieth requires a far more dramatic adjustment than going from being the sixtieth member to the hundredth. In contrast, Gary L. Browning, mission president in Russia from 1990 to 1993, found consistent retention rates betweeen early and later converts in three major Russian cities.

46. See, for example, Wilfried Decoo's article "Feeding the Fleeing Flock: Reflections on the Struggle to Retain Church Members in Europe," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (Spring 1996): 97-118.

47. For a fast-paced, dry, witty, but perceptive description of life and conditions in post-coup Moscow, see "Compost of Empire" by Bruce Sterling on the World Wide Web at http://www.hotwired.com/wired/2.04/ features/compost.empire.html.

had to buy train tickets from the mafia to transfer missionaries because they were impossible to buy over the counter.[48] Organized crime is also an attraction to young men: to make in a day what an honest laborer makes in half a year is a strong temptation.

Even besides the issue of organized crime, finding an honest job to support a family is a challenge. Several Mormon Ukrainian men I talked with in 1995 had been offered much-needed work in shady business ventures and struggled with the choice between integrity and putting food on the table. In a culture where money once hardly mattered, and where now paychecks are never guaranteed, many Ukrainians seek work that can offer non-monetary benefits. Those who work in a bakery, for example, quietly take home flour and sugar when needed. Factory workers steal and sell scrap metal and other raw materials. It is illegal, of course, but it is also expected, and everyone does it for survival. How does a Mormon Ukrainian, then, define honesty? One American church leader I spoke with expressed sympathy for the dilemmas of economic subsistence that face many members of the church. He made clear that in worthiness interviews, he is far more concerned that members pay an honest tithe than an honest income tax—at least during the current economic turmoil.

Such efforts to be sensitive to national and local circumstances have certainly characterized the establishment of the church in Ukraine. Although church leaders have promoted local leadership wherever possible, there have still been inevitable clashes between the American administrative structure and customs and some abiding aspects of Slavic culture. One clear example is the contemporary American Mormon tradition of addressing members by their last names. In Slavic culture using first names is the familiar form of address, while the polite form requires the first name with the patronymic. Last names are hardly ever used, ex-

48. When I traveled through parts of Ukraine in 1993, I was privy to this process: in order to get train tickets to the Black Sea, I had to go through a Mormon contact who took me down to the central train station of Kiev. There, in a crowded corner of the station, we met a mafia ticket broker. A price was settled on, American dollars were exchanged, and the broker disappeared to get the tickets. While I waited, the broker's mafia supervisor, who had noticed my American origin, wandered over and struck up a conversation out of curiosity. I asked him about his work and he spoke freely, and with some pride, of how he was in charge of all business that took place on the ground level of the train station (i.e., taking cuts from ticket sales, food and cigarette sales, currency exchange booths, etc.). He also spoke of his new cars, many girlfriends, and high-tech toys. He was single, in his late twenties or early thirties, and made several hundred dollars a day—a fortune almost incomprehensible to the Ukrainians I knew. Most families of four I associated with were struggling to survive on about one hundred dollars a month. My monthly living allowance as a missionary from 1992-93 (not including rent which varied widely) was between $80-$100.

cept perhaps with children in school.[49] Early members of the church called each other "Brother Alexander" or "Sister Tatiana," occasionally adding patronymics as etiquette required. Our insistence on using only our last names as missionaries was bewildering to many Ukrainians, and even offensive to the older generations. Halfway through my mission, we were asked to encourage members to address one another, and especially leaders, by their last names. Although in American culture this might be taken as a sign of respect, by Ukrainian standards it added an awkward level of distance and formality between members.[50]

This example raises familiar issues of a globalizing church and the need to divest Mormonism from its American upbringing. Armand Mauss suggests the need to develop a form of *minimal Mormonism*: "a religion which can jettison *all* forms of American influence and reduce its message and its way of life to a small number of basic ideas and principles that will, on the one hand, unite Mormons throughout the world but, on the other hand, will leave Mormons everywhere free to adapt those principles to their own respective cultural settings."[51] Others suggest what I will call *customized Mormonism*, which is essentially the logical extension of Mauss's minimalism: a recognizable form of Mormonism shaped to resonate as appropriately as possible with local and national customs and needs.[52] My experience participating in the pioneering stages of the church in Ukraine, however, leaves me wondering how feasible such forms might be, at least where the church is very young.

As in any country where the church is breaking new ground and the first generation of missionaries is necessarily foreign, establishing a religion unbiased by the cultural experiences of those missionaries is impossible. In an ex-Soviet Republic lacking civic culture, civic infrastructure,

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49. The patronymic acts as a middle name and is formed by adding a masculine or feminine ending to the name of one's father. For example, a brother, Mikhail, and sister, Natasha, with a father named Anatolii, would be politely addressed as Mikhail Anatolievich and Natasha Anatolieva, respectively. Since I did not fill out membership records or baptismal certificates for the people I taught, I sometimes never learned the last names of many families I knew very well.

50. By recent reports, this practice—at least among members addressing each other—is no longer particularly enforced or adhered to.

51. "The Mormon Struggle With Identity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27 (Spring 1994): 149.

52. See, for example, the comments of a Japanese bishop and Yasuhiro Matsushita, mission president of the Japan Kobe Mission, as quoted in an article series "Making Saints" in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 Apr. 1996, A7: the campaign to place more emphasis on Jesus Christ in the church "may work well in such Christian countries as Mexico or the Philippines. But . . . it may not be the best way to appeal to converts in Japan and other non-Christian countries. . . . [President Matsushita suggests] the Japanese church should put more emphasis on such practices as the 'baptism of the dead'" to draw more on the appeal of ancestor worship and eternal families in Japanese culture.

and developed religious traditions, establishing a "Ukrainian-style" Mormonism is especially difficult. Even as members in new branches struggled in a climate of nationalism to divest their religion from America, they also looked constantly to American missionaries to show them how to worship and how to organize themselves. A unique set of doctrines and principles would not have been enough. New members asked to run their own branches were hungry for concrete instructions and a sense of form. The form they were offered came largely from first generation missionaries, most of them North Americans, who drew necessarily from their own backgrounds. Minimal Mormonism may be too shapeless to export, and cultural sensitivity comes only with time, experience, and the growing confidence of native members.

Perhaps in areas like central Kiev which have now enjoyed over five years of organized worship, Ukrainians will begin to feel confident enough about their faith to shape it to their own concepts of culture. The all-Ukrainian leadership in place in Kiev is one positive sign. Also telling are the new mission presidents called to both the Donetsk and Kiev missions as of July 1996. President Wilfried M. Voge, now of the Kiev Mission, is married to a Ukrainian-American, Maria Kozbur Voge, who speaks fluent Ukrainian and has maintained ties with her relatives in Ukraine. President Alexander Manzhos, now of the Donetsk Mission, is a biological scientist in the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev who joined the church in 1990 and is now the first Ukrainian to be called as a mission president. President Manzhos was a district president in Kiev and remains president of the national association organized to represent the church to the government. These two mission president calls indicate the commitment of the church to establish native leadership: a step which can only move the church toward a more culturally-sensitive Mormonism.

The journalist who interviewed President Biddulph in 1991 predicted Mormonism's failure within the context of a Soviet legacy and Ukrainian culture, but intriguingly the church has grown at a far more rapid pace in Ukraine and Belarus than in Russia. Considering that the aspects of Slavic culture and Soviet legacy I have discussed are largely shared by all three of these former republics, Ukraine's greater receptivity to Mormonism seems to challenge Lawrence Young's cultural compatibility theory of religious success, referred to earlier. One explanation might be that more churches and religious belief survived in Ukraine, and especially in western Ukraine, than did in Russia through the Soviet years, leaving Ukrainians with stronger traditions of faith and sympathies toward any religion. If the growth rates of other churches in Ukraine relative to Russia are comparable to the LDS phenomenon then this hypothesis would gain more support. Another clear difference between Ukraine and Russia

is the contrast in their economic conditions. Ukraine and Belarus have fared far worse economically than Russia during reforms since independence. Perhaps this correlation fits with the global pattern of Mormonism's growth: where there are poverty and crisis conditions, there is greater openness to what the church has to offer. These observations suggest that economic instability and low standards of living may influence the growth of the church more than cultural compatibility between Mormonism and its host culture. A third explanation, suggested by Gary L. Browing, professor of Russian language and literature at Brigham Young University, and a former Russian mission president, has political undertones: Ukrainians may have been more open to all things Western as a way of turning their backs on Moscow's long domination. They may have been more willing than their Russian counterparts to leave the Orthodox church—associated with Russian hegemony—for a less traditional declaration of faith. Clearly, further research is called for to test these hypotheses.

Finally, with so many institutions in upheaval since the collapse of the Iron Curtain, I was very conscious that part of my work as an LDS missionary in Ukraine in 1992-93 was organizing community and building a civic institution in a country desperate for them. We would find one energetic family of three in an apartment building, an elderly *babushka* living alone in the building next door, and knit them together in a common cause. Organizing a Mormon congregation means establishing patterns of mutual visitation among church members to facilitate the identification and fulfillment of needs, both spiritual *and* temporal. Sick pensioners could receive both blessings of healing or comfort and money for expensive medicine from priesthood leaders. Single mothers found access to shipments of donated children's clothes from Germany as well as a women's meeting on Sunday where they could share their problems and discuss the challenges of responsible parenting.

In North America the church is one of thousands of organizations designed to meet a variety of social needs. In Ukraine the branches being formed and trained to become as self-sufficient as possible offer not only a spiritual haven, but also a rare social and psychological safety net in a chaotic world where so many needs are no longer being met by a powerful central government. Perhaps such civic life is in itself American. Continuing to adapt the American graft of Mormonism to Ukrainian roots may depend on Ukrainians' successful acculturaltion to this kind of community building. And how Mormonism will resolve some of the tensions between its highly correlated and centralized organization and its increasing expansion into dramatically different cultures remains to be seen.