2005

IDENTITY IN EVANGELICAL UKRAINE: NEGOTIATING REGIONALISM, NATIONALISM, AND TRANSNATIONALISM

Esther Grace Long
University of Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Esther Grace Long

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky
2005
IDENTITY IN EVANGELICAL UKRAINE: NEGOTIATING REGIONALISM, NATIONALISM, AND TRANSNATIONALISM

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Esther Grace Long

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Directors: Dr. John Paul Jones III, Professor of Geography and Dr. Susan M. Roberts, Professor of Geography

Lexington, Kentucky

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IDENTITY IN EVANGELICAL UKRAINE: NEGOTIATING REGIONALISM, NATIONALISM, AND TRANSNATIONALISM

This dissertation examines identity formation among evangelical Protestants in contemporary Ukraine. The overarching question is this: how do Ukrainian evangelicals view themselves and their churches in the context of Ukrainian regionalism, Ukrainian nationalism, and religious transnationalism? This question demands a closer look at Ukrainian regional variation, the status of Ukrainian national identity among evangelical practitioners, and the process of religious transnationalism, including how evangelicals perceive the West. This project is primarily based on qualitative research methods carried out over a ten month period. Field methods included participant observation, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. A set of maps produced by research subjects is also evaluated.

In order to permit a regional comparison, case study churches were selected in four Ukrainian cities. Before beginning the field research it was hypothesized that Baptists, those evangelicals whose religious roots date to the nineteenth century and who survived the Soviet Union, would have different perspectives on many of the research questions than members of churches founded recently by American missionaries. To test this assumption, one Baptist church and one new evangelical church were selected in each of the four cities.

Among Ukrainian evangelicals, regionalism is closely related to language preference and to notions of national identity. Members of churches in L’viv are strong supporters of Ukrainian-only language practices; members of churches in other parts of the country identify themselves as Russian speakers who dislike the exclusive language policies in western Ukraine. Study participants generally rejected a Ukrainian nationalism that was connected to religion, although members of new Protestant churches incorporated aspects of civic nationalism into their religious practice. In terms of their
participation in a transnational religious network, all churches (both older Baptist and newer evangelical) were highly integrated with people, ideas, and money from the West. However, evangelicals’ views towards the West and their own identities as transnational actors were correlated to church type. Members of older Baptist churches were much more critical of Western churches and missionaries than were members of new evangelical congregations.

KEYWORDS: Transnationalism, Nationalism, Identity, Ukraine, Religion
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Chapter One: Introduction

Ukrainian evangelicals are building their lives and their churches in the aftermath of political revolution and in the midst of societal transformation. Although they hail from the ‘Bible Belt’ of the former Soviet Union – the birthplace of the Baptist movement of Russia and Ukraine, and the place where the church is strongest – these Protestants exist in a country where, until recently, their religion was publicly discriminated against and widely scorned. Fourteen years ago a state that repressed the expression of religious faith was replaced by one in which religious freedom is the norm. As part of a newly independent Ukraine, the members of these churches, together with their countrymen, are working out what it means to be Ukrainian in a newly independent state. In the case of Protestants, their faith is an interesting complicating factor in the process of nationalization, because while their churches are replicating rapidly, they remain a distinct religious minority in a country where several other religious groups (varieties of Orthodoxy and Catholicism) claim a special status as Ukraine’s ‘national’ religion.

When the ‘iron curtain’ collapsed, Ukrainian churches were suddenly deluged by visitors from around the world. After spending decades in an essentially closed society, Ukrainian evangelicals found themselves incorporated into (and helping to build) a vast transnational religious network. Since then, Protestant churches have collectively received millions of dollars in financial contributions from the West; they regularly host missionary groups from Western countries, particularly the United States; they send their future leaders to seminaries and Bible colleges run by or funded by foreigners; their pastors visit Western partners overseas; and their members read Bible study books and other theological materials translated from English into Russian or Ukrainian. This has happened both in the older Ukrainian Baptist churches and in new churches founded since 1991 by Western missionaries. Both historical Baptist churches and new evangelical churches are now intimately connected with churches, people, and religious ideas in other parts of the world. Studying Ukrainian Protestants provides us with an opportunity to find out how one kind of transnationalism is initiated, received, negotiated, and lived out in daily practice.
While this dissertation contributes to the growing literature about post-Soviet transition generally and the social transition in Ukraine more specifically, it is written by a cultural geographer who has a geographer’s eye for questions about space. As a geographer I seek to understand three spatial aspects of the lives of Ukrainian Protestants – their regional, national, and transnational identities. Before beginning the research I suspected that the three were closely connected, that regionalism would be related to nationalism and nationalism would, in turn, be germane to an understanding of how transnationalism has been incorporated into Ukrainian religious life. Recent events underscore the relevance of these questions.

Not long before I completed this dissertation, the world watched as a highly contested, and rigged, Ukrainian presidential election raised questions about each of these identities – regional, national, and transnational – and emphasized their significance in contemporary Ukraine. The election reminded us that Ukraine is a country with deep regional divides, various regions having become part of a unified Ukrainian state through completely different historical paths over several hundred years. Eastern Ukrainians tended to vote for Viktor Yanukovich, the government endorsed candidate also supported by those who control much of the industrial complex of eastern Ukraine. Western Ukrainians tended to vote for Viktor Yushchenko, a man who promised to draw Ukraine closer to Europe. Not only was there a regional pattern to the voting, but questions were raised about the independence of Ukraine (did Russia interfere in the election?) and the relationship between Ukraine and the rest of the world. The election forced Ukrainians to consider their country’s relationships to Western Europe and Russia, and citizen protests after the first, fraudulent, election took place on Independence Square in Kyiv, a spot that evokes Ukrainian national identity and independence. The roles of regionalism, nationalism, and transnationalism in Ukrainian life have not been settled. This dissertation increases our understanding of Ukraine’s regional divisions, how they do or do not exist in the minds of one subset of the Ukrainian population, and how they affect the residents’ views of Ukraine and the rest of the world.

The research questions that drive this study can be organized according to these three scales of geographic identity: regional, national, and transnational. The overarching question is this: how do Ukrainian evangelicals view themselves and their
churches in the context of Ukrainian regionalism, Ukrainian nationalism, and religious transnationalism? This broad question demands a closer look at Ukrainian regional variation, the status of Ukrainian national identity among evangelical practitioners, and the process of religious transnationalism, including how evangelicals perceive the West.

In order to speak about Ukrainian regionalism I chose case study churches in four different Ukrainian cities: in the West (L’viv), the center (Vinnytsia), the South (Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy), and the Southeast (Kherson). Before beginning the field research I hypothesized that Baptists, those evangelicals whose religious roots date to the nineteenth century and who survived the Soviet Union, would have different perspectives on many of the research questions than members of churches founded recently by American missionaries. To test this assumption I chose one Baptist church and one new evangelical church in each of the four cities. I also hypothesized that young people who have come of age since the collapse of the Soviet Union might have different ideas about their identity and the identity of their churches than would older people who were already adults in 1991. For that reason, in each of the eight churches I collected data both from young adults and older people.

The first set of research questions focuses on regional identity:

- How do Ukrainian Protestant churches vary regionally?
- How do Ukrainian evangelicals portray Ukrainian regions? How do they position themselves and their churches within their respective region of Ukraine?
- How does their self-awareness of regional identity contribute to, or undermine, national and transnational identifications?
- Are there differences between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, or between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of regional identity?

These questions acknowledge long-standing regional variation in Ukraine, and seek to determine how Ukrainian regionalism impacts evangelical churches in the country. In particular, I wanted to find out how and to what extent regionalism is connected with Ukrainian nationalism and religious transnationalism. Do people living in different Ukrainian regions approach their identity as Ukrainian nationals differently from others? Are there differences in how they view their participation in a transnational religious network?
The second set of research questions investigates the place of national identity in Ukrainian evangelical churches:

- How do congregation members position themselves and their churches within the Ukrainian nation?
- How does their self-awareness of national identity contribute to, or undermine, regional and transnational identifications?
- To what extent do Ukrainian evangelicals challenge or accommodate the idea of a Ukrainian national church?
- Are there differences between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, or between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of national identity?

Here the key question is the second one, about how national identity is linked to regional and transnational identity. Are evangelicals who are more expressive about their Ukrainian identity less enthusiastic about their participation in a transnational religious network? How is national identity related to regional identity? Because of the historically close relationship between Ukrainian national identity and the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches, question three above inquires about how Protestants incorporate or reject those traditional aspects of Ukrainian identity.

The final category of questions considers transnational identity. The previous questions were ultimately pointing here, to the place of Ukrainian evangelicalism within a large and active transnational religious network:

- How do Ukrainian evangelicals position themselves within a transnational religious network?
- How does their self-awareness of a transnational identity contribute to, or undermine, regional and national identifications?
- Are there differences between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, or between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of transnational identity?

Ukrainian regionalism has been a persistent characteristic of Ukrainian social life for generations, and Ukrainian nationalism has existed in various guises for a couple of hundred years. However, the fact that Ukrainian evangelicals are active in religious transnationalism at this scale is something new. In this dissertation I investigate how exposure to Western evangelicalism is impacting Ukrainian Protestant churches, and how it is challenging and interacting with their national and regional identifications.
Chapter Two lays the theoretical foundation by situating this work in the context of other scholarship about post-Soviet Ukraine, showing how I am responding to ongoing debates in the literature of Ukrainian Studies and post-Soviet transition. I also examine three relevant theories of social life in the contemporary world: globalization, transnationalism, and nationalism. I define my use of the terms and how I contribute to the debates surrounding them. Finally, I define what I mean by ‘identity,’ a concept that is used throughout the entire work.

Chapter Three presents the research methodologies and research design of this dissertation. I explain my use of ethnographic research methods, how and why I chose the eight case study churches, and what I actually did as part of the field research. I also consider my positionality in relation to the research subjects, including any special benefits or challenges it brought about.

Chapter Four lays the historical foundation for this dissertation and traces the history of Ukrainian evangelicalism from its roots in the nineteenth century Russian empire. The history of Ukrainian Baptist churches was influenced by state policies towards religion from that time until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and Soviet church history continues to influence the identities and actions of Ukrainian evangelicals today. I also explain how the deep regional divides in contemporary Ukraine are direct consequences of the regions’ different historical trajectories in the twentieth century and before.

Chapter Five examines the transnationalization of Ukrainian evangelicalism after 1991. I show how openness to the West has not only impacted older Baptist churches, but has also created a new set of Ukrainian Protestant churches – those that have been opened through the efforts of Western missionaries working in Ukraine. Each church has its own personality – worship style, ministries, history – and also has its own experiences of interacting with people and churches in other countries. This chapter is based on my experiences living for ten months in Ukraine (September 2002 through June 2003) while I was collecting data for the dissertation. It is also influenced by previous visits to Ukraine, including a summer of pre-dissertation fieldwork (2001). I describe the two main categories of Ukrainian evangelical churches, and present a profile of each of the case study congregations.
Chapter Six presents empirical research from the ethnographic data that is relevant to questions of regional and national identity. I examine Ukrainian regional and national identity as expressed by the Ukrainian evangelicals who participated in the study. This chapter includes an analysis of maps of Ukraine’s cultural regions that were produced by research subjects. The maps tell us where the participants think Ukraine’s regions are located, and which regions are more or less well defined than others.

Chapter Seven, also based on the ethnographic material, examines transnationalism in Ukrainian evangelical churches. This chapter pays close attention to differences between older Baptist and new Protestant churches in how they approach transnationalism and view the West. We will see how transnationalism presents particular challenges to older churches now operating under a new set of conditions from when current church leaders were raised. The interaction of Ukrainian and Western churches is something that all Ukrainian evangelicals have an opinion about, and we will examine those opinions in Chapter Seven.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation by drawing together the findings of the previous chapters, presenting thematic connections between them, and offering suggestions for further research.
Chapter Two: Theoretical and substantive context

2.1 Introduction

The transnationalization of Ukrainian Protestant churches is taking place in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of a post-Soviet political and social order. This dissertation fits into a larger body of scholarly work examining the Ukrainian post-Soviet transition; throughout the chapter are discussions of how it responds to and advances the research of other Ukrainian-focused scholars. Other literatures – of transnationalism, globalization, nationalism, and identity – create a theoretical framework for the study. These four terms have been widely used by scholars and non-scholars alike, with the result that their definitions have multiplied and become more generalized, and their usefulness has been diluted. Here we will examine how this dissertation contributes to the key debates surrounding each theme.

2.2 Post-Soviet transition

The identities and actions of Ukrainian evangelicals cannot be adequately understood without situating them within the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the tumultuous period of transition in subsequent years. The lives of religious Ukrainians were revolutionized: devout religious practice went from being restricted to completely legal. In the past Baptists were persecuted by the state and ridiculed by society; now the state has backed away and society’s views towards this large religious minority have been challenged. Many of those who were atheists and members of the Communist Party before 1991 are now devout Protestants. They worship publicly and interact with people they were formerly taught to revile. Meanwhile, the economic and political foundations of life also shifted. The government no longer promises lifetime employment, pensions are nearly worthless, and a Moscow-based government does not control the political parties and elections in Ukraine.¹

Many responses to the collapse of the Soviet Union treated the demise of state socialism as perhaps the greatest achievement of the twentieth century, and recommended the implementation of drastic economic reforms to reverse the damages caused by seven

¹ Moscow still tries to keep Ukraine in its fold – Russia has been accused of interfering in Ukraine’s 2004 presidential election.
decades of communism. Authors who wrote in support of rapid and complete economic transformation included Jeffery Sachs and Anders Åslund, two prominent proponents of ‘shock therapy’ who advised government officials in newly independent post-communist states how to develop market economies based on Western models.

Those who advocated rapid economic transformation endorsed what John Pickles and Adrian Smith have called the “techniques of transition” (Smith and Pickles 1998). For example, an examination of the Ukrainian economic transition literature shows that nearly all of the authors have blamed Ukraine’s dismal economic performance on the failure of the government to properly and quickly carry out appropriate economic reforms. These authors have evaluated nearly every category of Ukrainian economic life in relation to transition, laying out either a diagnosis of what “went wrong” or a prescription for solving the problems, and usually doing both. The difficulties have been traced to privatization that was too slow or of the wrong kind, a populace that was overly resistant to the entrance of foreign companies, a country that was unwilling to undergo the stresses necessary to adjust its economy, and the lack of sufficient loans from institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. The goal is always assumed to be a liberalized capitalist economy formed on the pattern of most in the Western developed world. Specific examples include reports from agencies such as the World Bank (see, for example Hansen and Cook 1999) and research articles in prominent journals (examples include von Cramon-Taubadel and Koester 1998; Yekhanurov 2000). Support for rapid economic and social transformation has also become embedded within popular accounts of the post-Soviet transition period, as seen, for example, in a book by journalist Rose Brady, who documents the history of Russia’s economic reforms in the early 1990s (1999).

An alternate group of scholars disputes the idea that post-Soviet economic reforms must be rapid, must have a set goal (Western-style capitalism), and are best carried out at the national scale (see Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Smith and Pickles 1998; Verdery 1996a). These authors successfully address some of the most obvious flaws of the ‘transition techniques’ set. While they do not agree with each other on all counts, in general they reject the idea that post-communist transition is a process with a clear beginning, an obvious path forward, and a visible and agreed-upon end. They take
seriously the variety of ways post-communist transition has been experienced (and created) by people in local contexts, acknowledging that it occurs in diverse ways and has no certain conclusion. A theme in the writing of these scholars is opposition to the idea that economic reform should primarily take place at the scale of the nation state. They do not think that a truly capitalist system fashioned on western models will be achieved in post-Soviet countries in the near future, and in fact it appears that western capitalism is a system these authors would like post-communist countries to avoid. Burawoy and Verdery, for example, place themselves among those that “see change in less apocalyptic terms, that see evolution rather than revolution, that see hybrid societies rather than polar extremes” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 1). They propose that no theory or set of theories for understanding transition can suffice, because economic transition can best be understood within the local, everyday contexts of lived experience.

Although economic transition is not the focus of this dissertation, the church members who participated in this research project have been living through that transition. Ukrainians know the effects of economic instability first-hand; some of the most vulnerable among them live in desperate poverty. It is within that context that Ukrainian evangelicals seek relationships with Western churches and international Christian organizations. The financial inequities between Ukrainians and Westerners color the entire missionary enterprise.

2.3 Ukrainian regionalism

A recurrent theme in Ukrainian studies literature is the country’s regional variation. The differences between western and eastern Ukraine go back hundreds of years, and are rooted in the completely different histories of Right and Left Bank Ukraine. Some of the more recent history of Ukraine’s regional differentiation is examined in Chapter Four. Ukraine observers have wondered how regionalism might change after the country became independent in 1991. Regional variation in the results of the highly contested 2004 presidential election reminds us that regional differentiation remains a powerful force in Ukraine.²

² Eastern areas of Ukraine served as the support base of government-backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich, with western parts of the country supporting opposition candidate, and ultimate victor, Viktor Yushchenko.
A number of social scientists have recently evaluated the “regional effect” in Ukrainian politics and economic development. The overwhelming consensus is that regional variation in Ukraine is profound. Birch (1995, 1035) found that “region” exerts independent impact on political beliefs, even when variables like ethnicity and occupational sector are accounted for. Craumer and Clem (1999) showed that regional variation is evident in the results of the 1998 elections, although Hesli and her research group (1998) concluded that over time Ukraine’s regional polarization has been in decline.3 I agree with Kubicek that a regional effect continues to persist in Ukrainian life (2000).

Those who are interested in Ukrainian regions typically carve the country into two pieces, East and West. Stephen Shulman writes that:

The structure of Ukrainian society is basically ‘bipolar’. Geographic cleavages in Ukraine reinforce ethnic, linguistic, religious and economic cleavages. Predominantly agricultural Western Ukraine is composed mainly of ethnic Ukrainians, many of whom are Greek-Catholic. Predominantly industrial Eastern Ukraine is composed mostly of ethnic Russians or Russified (Russian-speaking) Ukrainians, many of whom are Eastern Orthodox (1999b, 1012).

Not everyone agrees with this assessment. It is argued that Ukrainian regionalism is much more complicated and blurred than an East-West, linguistic divide (Wanner 1998, xxvi). While I agree with Wanner that Ukraine’s regional variations are too complex to be reduced to an East – West, Russian – Ukrainian dichotomy, I will show that L’viv churches stand apart from the others in this study in a number of respects. The idea of Western Ukraine is firmly lodged in the minds of the Ukrainian evangelicals I interviewed, both in what they said about themselves, their churches, and their country, and in how they cartographically represented Ukraine’s regions on blank outline maps.

Because of a long history separating Western Ukraine from other parts of the country, it is no surprise that residents of L’viv have a different understanding of what it is to be Ukrainian than do residents of Kherson. This research contributes to the discussion, not by providing a comparison of regionalism over time, as some scholars have done (see, for example, Subtelny 1994), but by opening the field of inquiry into a

3 Among others who have evaluated post-Soviet regional divisions in Ukraine are Barrington (2002), Furman (1999), Liber (1998), and Zimmerman (1998).
previously unstudied population and examining the interrelationship of region, nation, and the transnational. Ukrainian Protestants from L’viv clearly have different ideas about the nature of the Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian national identity than do evangelicals living in the other cities (Kherson, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, and Vinnytsia).

2.4 Globalization

The term ‘globalization’ tends to be widely and imprecisely used. It refers to the increasing scope and intensity of linkages between states and societies of the modern world system (cited in Dicken 2000, 316; McGrew 1992). Globalization describes the process by which social relations across space are being globally integrated both intensively and extensively (Kelly 1999). A standard definition is as follows:

Time-space compression...has so transformed the structure and scale of human relationships that social, cultural, political, and economic processes now operate at a global scale... [Globalization processes] involve not merely the geographical extension of economic activity across national boundaries but also – and more importantly – the functional integration of such internationally dispersed activities (Dicken 2000).

The globalization literature is immense, but here I focus on two of the aspects of globalization as defined by Jameson: the economic and the cultural (1999). There is a risk to this strategy of explanation, because economic and cultural processes are obviously interconnected. As Dicken, Peck and Tickell have written, globalization processes “involve highly intricate interactions between a whole variety of social, political and economic institutions operating across a spectrum of geographical scales. They involve processes of both collaboration and competition and of differentiated power relationships” (1997, 159). Nevertheless, separating them out for the purposes of defining globalization will help me show how globalization theory relates to this dissertation work in Ukraine. I will then outline one of the key debates in globalization research: the intersection between globalization and the nation state. Within that same

4 I will omit Jameson’s third aspect of globalization, communication, because it is not so much a variety of globalization as the foundation upon which economic and cultural globalization rest. Without the changing technologies of communication and transportation, the complex and rapidly changing business and social transactions between countries and continents would not be possible. These new technologies of communication also make it possible for new forms of identity to be produced that do not require face-to-face contact (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).
discussion I will show how identifications ‘smaller’ than the global (such as the national, regional, or local) can be affected by globalization processes.

2.4.1 Economic globalization

It is generally agreed that the world economy of the past several decades since the 1970s Bretton Woods agreement has been globalizing. This can be seen in: the centrality of a global financial structure which creates, allocates, and uses money; the increase in the power of finance over production; the increase in the importance of knowledge structure as a factor of production; the internationalization of technology; the rise in the importance of transnational economic diplomacy; and the increasingly global orientation of state economic strategies (Amin and Thrift 1997). Globalization is usually associated with an increase in free trade, the rise of post-Fordist flexible accumulation, increasing volumes and frequencies of cross-border economic transaction, and fluid labor pools that migrate across international boundaries. Economic globalization also refers to the increasing power of transnational corporations (TNCs) in relation to the state in regulating the economic activities within its borders. Of course, the degree to which globalization is at work is under debate. Gertler (1997) showed that capital, even in this era of post-Fordist flexible accumulation, is not as mobile as some think.

Beyond its identifiable processes, globalization also involves the idea of a deeply connected economic world, “a vision of the world market and its newfound interdependence, a global division of labor on an extraordinary scale, new electronic trade routes tirelessly plied by commerce and finance alike” (Jameson 1999, 56). This idea often becomes a value: globalization is presented as a redemptive process through which poverty will decrease as integration with the world market increases. Typical of this viewpoint is the remark by the chief executive of Singapore Petroleum, who was quoted in the New York Times saying that globalization “has to mean a better life for everyone.”

It is this attitude that many scholars who write about economic globalization find particularly reprehensible. They view globalization processes as oppressive to the poor and as fraught with very uneven power relations. For example, Daly interprets
globalization as a code word for “unfettered individualism for corporations on a global scale” (1999, 31). Likewise, Slater argues that globalization is a form of economic colonialism whereby the North uses neoliberal economics to gain power over the South (1996, 281).

2.4.2 Cultural globalization

I take cultural globalization to be the cultural effects of the global intensification and extensification of social relations across space. Crudely speaking, cultural globalization could be the unidirectional cultural transfer from the West to the non-West through technology and media. This would be “Americanization” or “commoditization” (Appadurai 1990, 295). However, I do not consider that cultural change could ever be so flat, predictable, or uniform. Instead, the outcomes in the cultural realm of globalization processes will be heterogeneous and multi-directional across space and time. For example, the transmission of cultural ideas through globalization processes could promote a global culture while at the same time induce the rise of racist nationalisms that react against those processes (Hall 1997). Appadurai notes that we see a conflict between cultural homogenization (global culture) and cultural heterogenization (Hall’s example of racist nationalism) (1990, 295). Featherstone does not see a world where a “global culture” is forming, but he argues that individual cultures are being “globalized” through their interactions with other cultures in the global system (1990).

2.4.3 Globalization, the state, and national identity

In recent years scholars have been preoccupied with how globalization interacts with the state, and how it intersects with identifications ‘smaller’ than the global, such as national or local. First, are we living in a globalized world without effective borders, so that capital, labor, technology and ideas can flow freely, making the nation-state obsolete? Second, are national, regional, or local identifications becoming increasingly irrelevant in an era of globalization? Although there has been a heated debate in the literature, I argue that the answer to both of these questions is “no.” The world is not as globalized as some people think: the nation-state continues to hold relevance for much of the world, and in many instances globalization can elicit responses that demonstrate the
continued salience of national, regional, and local identifications. In short, globalization produces a complicated set of responses that vary according to each particular situation, such that it is far too soon to announce the creation of a borderless world with borderless identities. Furthermore, globalization should not be considered the opposite of nationalism, because the two processes are far too complex and interconnected to be the opposites of anything.

Globalization in its purest form would result in a Borderless World, as Ohmae has written (1990). A borderless world would lead to the forced irrelevance of national states. In this vein, Daly has argued that globalization is the “effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes” (1999). Likewise, scholars have also linked globalization to the erosion of state autonomy and the weakening of “traditional bonds of identity between individuals and the state” (Falk 2000, 5). It has been pointed out that citizens are now turning to global civil society for many of the services formerly provided by the national state, services which the state is either “loathe” or unable to provide (Lipschutz 1992).

However, for each example of how globalization hollows out the nation state or erodes national (or regional or local) identifications, others show that the nation state continues to be strong and that other spatial identifications remain in place. For instance, Hirst and Thompson (1995) have shown that in today’s world economy, national-level economic processes remain central; nation-states continue to represent their populations, and they serve as sources of legitimacy for new forms of international, regional, and subnational governance. The state continues to perform such tasks as enforcing corporate governance, producing and encouraging national knowledge networks, and providing services such as social security, education, wage negotiations, and job training (Amin and Thrift 1997). The national state should not be thought of as “an aging leviathan” or as a shrinking entity, because it can use new technologies of surveillance to control the social world more than it could in the past (Marden 1997). Cameron and Stein (2000) acknowledge that the state faces new and powerful challenges, but they argue that it continues to be an indispensable institution. They conclude that the state has the capacity and the opportunity to make important strategic choices about its economic, social, and
cultural investments. If globalization stumbles, how the state responds now will have a significant impact on its capacity to respond later.

Globalization does not make the state obsolete, nor does it necessarily erode national (or regional, or local) identities. The opposite may be true: the ideals of global society may lead to struggles over identity and a sense of belonging. Arnason showed that globalization can in fact strengthen or ‘reactivate’ the nation as a focus of identity as “the national level of integration complements, conditions and counteracts the global one” (1990, 225). While there is indeed tension between nationalism and globalization, in some communities globalization processes have actually facilitated “new senses of national identity,” and have not brought about the feared homogenization of culture (Marden 1997, p. 58). A specific empirical example of this was described by Jenson, who examined three nationalist movements in Canada to illustrate both how globalization challenges states and nationalist sentiments, and how it creates “new possibilities for nationalist movements to make claims for expanded rights, including those of citizenship” (1995, 98).

Global processes of late modernity have bypassed neither Ukraine nor Ukraine’s Protestant practitioners. To the extent that Ukraine’s Protestants are engaging in globalization processes through technologies that collapse the time-space continuum, and to the extent that they are participating in a “global social movement,” the globalization literature is directly relevant to my work. This dissertation contributes to the literature on globalization in at least two ways.

First, the debates about the “end of the nation-state” and the “end of national identity” run a bit extreme at both ends. However, the processes that Ukraine’s Protestants are engaging in do challenge their national identity and may challenge the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, although the Ukrainian state remains robust. What does it mean for their national identity if Protestants in Ukraine find more in common religiously with, say, Southern Baptists in the United States than they do with Ukrainian Orthodox or Greek Catholic believers? Does their identity as part of a global religious network serve as the medium through which they are resisting a hegemonic national discourse? As the Ukrainian state seeks to control the involvement of Ukraine’s Protestant churches with ‘global’ Christianity (through taxation of international gifts, visa
restrictions on foreign visitors, and visits of worship services to make sure no foreigners are preaching) we see that the Protestants are still subject to the structures of the state. This shows that the state has not been hollowed out by the global processes at work, even if identities may be changing.6

Second, this project contributes to the literature on global social movements. Protestants in Ukraine are part of what can be called a global social movement that is shaping and being shaped by globalization processes. Cohen and Rai write that “the evolution and diffusion of the big global religions are vital parts of the process of globalization” (2000, 11), and Beckford (2000) points out that religions that make universal truth claims and desire to span the globe are in a unique position to be influenced by globalization as they take advantage of globalizing technologies to spread their ideas. Evangelical Protestant Christianity makes truth claims that it asserts are valid in every part of the world, and Protestant activists work towards expanding their religion globally. This dissertation shows that while Ukrainian Protestants unevenly accept the global claims of their religion (and so ‘globalization’ may not be a perfect term to describe what Ukrainian Protestants are involved in), they are savvy in adopting and transforming certain globalization processes while rejecting others.

2.5 Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a term that is closely related to globalization in that it refers to cultural, economic, and demographic processes that work across territorial boundaries, through time and space. Scholars of transnationalism examine how social processes under conditions of globalization operate (Bailey et al. 2002, 125). While globalization emphasizes the stretching and deepening of global social processes, I take transnationalism to refer to the complex social interactions between people at individual, organizational, community, or national levels, that involves the transfer of people, information, or money across national borders (see Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995, 49). These interactions do not remain one dimensional, but become intricate webs

6 Shortly before this dissertation was submitted, Ukraine’s new president dismantled the Ministry of Religious Affairs, opening up the possibility that government monitoring of religious activities would further diminish in the future.
of social relations operating at multiple scales. Furthermore, transnationalism should not be seen as a mysterious process carried out by nameless individuals or the inanimate forces of globalization. It is a process carried about by identifiable social actors, including what Sklair calls the “transnational capitalist class” (2001) and those who Katharyne Mitchell labels “transnational subjects” (1997c).

Transnationalism has been used by social scientists in a number of different ways. Here I examine five of them, showing how this project fits in with other work on transnationalism. The basic structure is adapted from Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001):  

(1). Transnationalism is a useful term to describe migration, and this is by far its most prevalent meaning. Examples of scholars who study migration as a transnational phenomenon abound. They theorize transnational migration as a process by which “immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995, 48). Geographers who have examined transnational migration include Bailey, Wright, Mountz and Miyares (2002), who study Salvadoran immigration to the United States. They argue that “Salvadoran transnational fields emerge when Salvadorans construct simultaneous daily lives across and between places of core, periphery, and periphery states” (p. 126), and that these transnational fields are constituted, along with space-time reactions and scale, through “the visible and invisible actions and experiences of daily life” (p. 128). Lily Kong has examined how Singaporean transnationals in Beijing re-imagine and negotiate their Singaporean national identity (1999).  

Ukrainian Protestants, particularly Ukrainian Baptists, are active participants in transnational migration networks. Although this aspect of transnationalism is not the primary focus of the dissertation, all of the Baptist churches in the study have lost large percentages (up to half) of their congregations as families have moved to the United States, Canada, and other countries. The Baptists involved in this project maintain relationships with many of their former members living in the United States, and a few of

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7 For another take on transnationalism, see Steven Vertovec (1999), who describes six uses of the term, not all of them overlapping with those laid out by Grewal and Kaplan.

8 See also a special issue of Ethnic and Racial Studies, including (Guarnizo, Sánchez, and Roach 1999; and Popkin 1999; Roberts, Frank, and Lozano-Ascencio 1999).
the émigrés occasionally return for visits to family and friends. Others maintain contact through financial gifts to the church. In Chapter Seven of the dissertation we see how this migration process impacts how Ukrainian Baptists view the West and their own identity as Ukrainians.

(2). As with globalization, the concept of transnationalism is often used to signal the demise or irrelevance of the nation-state in a “borderless world.” In this case, globalization and transnationalism are often used as synonyms, so the discussion in the globalization section above about the continued relevance of the nation-state for Ukrainian Protestants remains applicable here. Grewal and Kaplan argue that when the term transnational is used in this way it suggests that cultures are more important than nations, and that identities are tied more closely to cultures than to the nation-state. If transnationalism trumps political borders then “flows of people and shifts in culture appear to be almost inevitable and strangely ahistorical” (p. 665).

In response to these kinds of critiques, this study of Ukrainian Protestants contextualizes transnationalism within its historical, geographical and social setting. The transnational flows of money, people, and ideas that tie together Central Baptist Church in Vinnytsia with First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina exist within a particular historical period and are subject to the political and economic realities of life in our early twenty-first century world.

(3). Transnational can refer to a form of neocolonialism. This usage directly overlaps the use of the term globalization, as described above, when transnational capital is portrayed as trampling on and destroying local social or economic structures. Some critics may wish to apply this label to the relationship between wealthy Western churches and poorer Ukrainian ones. However, while the effects of Western churches sending large amounts of money to Ukrainian churches are significant, this dissertation makes clear that Ukrainian Protestants are not the unwilling recipients of these transnational relationships. In some cases they are the initiators, and at other times they act as gatekeepers as they seek to control the nature of their relationships with Western partners.

(4). Transnational has been used to signal the “NGOization” of social movements, as in “transnationalism from below” or “transnational women’s movements” (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 666), often used as an alternative to ‘global’ because of that term’s
connotation of entering into new markets. In these instances transnationalism becomes a site of political engagement (Vertovec 1999). Although some transnational religious movements, such as those described by Hervieu-Léger (1997) and Eickelman (1997), can fit into this category, the transnational religious movement studied in this dissertation does not. “Transnationalism from below” implies a grass-root, anti-establishment effort extending across international borders. The purpose of transnational Protestant involvement in Ukraine is not to make a radical political statement or to carry out a political agenda (although it has some political implications). Rather, there are a multitude of reasons why Ukrainian Protestants involve themselves in transnational activities, be they spiritual, economic, or social.

Finally, some authors are focused on understanding the power relations inherent to any transnational relationship. As we geographically contextualize the studies of global processes and “the actual movements of things and people across space” (Mitchell 1997b, 110), we should be mindful that the concept of transnationalism does not flatten out power relations. Massey has written about the “power-geometries of time-space” (1999). Mahler (1998) has identified three power-related scholarly tasks not sufficiently developed in transnationalism literature: “(1) assessing whose interests are served by engaging in transnational activities, (2) determining whether such activities reaffirm and/or reconfigure ‘traditional’ relations of power and privilege, and (3) the implications of transnationalism, particularly with respect to metanarratives of power” (p. 87).

This Ukrainian-based research contributes towards understanding the place of power in transnationalism. The most obvious power imbalances in the transnational networks studied here have economic roots. There are vast financial inequalities between Ukrainian and Western churches. Among other benefits brought by access to financial resources is the ability to move freely throughout much of the world. Western Christians can easily travel into many countries with their versatile passports and deep pockets.

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9 The phrase “transnationalism from below” is also the title of a book edited by Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (1998).
10 To illustrate: in 2002 a 325 member church in Lexington, Kentucky, had an annual budget of $640,000, of which $75,000 was designated for missions outreach. That same year a small church of a similar denomination in Nikolaev, Ukraine, collected barely enough to rent a meeting room, but could not pay their pastor a salary.
Ukrainian Christians can also travel, but their trips are typically funded by Western partners and visas are regularly denied by the consulates of the destination countries. An analysis of the voices heard here shows how these power imbalances are both resisted and accommodated by Ukrainian Protestants. In fact, this dissertation shows how Ukrainians insert their own fields of power into the transnational networks as they seek to define, control, and use the networks for their own benefit. One example of this will be seen in Chapter Seven, as Ukrainians assert a spiritual privilege because of their material poverty, thus reversing the assumed power structure in the West/Ukraine relationship.

### 2.5.1 Transnationalism: Emancipation and uneven distribution

In addition to the issues raised above, I wish to briefly comment on two additional aspects of transnationalism. First is the celebration (in the transnationalism literature) of liminality and in-between spaces of resistance and possible emancipation. Second is the geographically and socially uneven nature of transnationalism as observed in Ukrainian Protestant circles.

It is sometimes argued that transnational subjects use their positions of hybridity, in-betweenness, and liminality to resist a hegemonic authority such as the state, with its ability to establish such structures as migration laws and economic policy. Transnationals often maintain close personal and economic ties with the home country, or they create a hybrid identity that does not fit any mold that is given from the outside. Other transnational groups resist “neo-liberal globalization” through protests against organizations such as the World Trade Organization (Featherstone 2003).

An example of the celebration of hybridity in a non-transnational context is from Homi Bhabha, who wrote that from a “liminal, minority position . . . emerges the force of the people of an Afro-American nation” (1990, 296). Luin Goldring has written about Mexican transnational migration as an opportunity for migrants to develop “alternative power hierarchies” (1998, 167). For her, “transnational social fields . . . provide a special context in which people can improve their social position and perhaps their power” (p. 167). Katharyne Mitchell warns that abstract celebration of travel, multiculturalism and hybridity is premature (1997a; 1997b, 107). In fact, some transnationals – such as many wealthy overseas Chinese – are not resisting hegemonic narratives at all, but are using.
their transient positions for their own economic gain and capital accumulation. Lily Kong agrees that some transnationals occupy central, not peripheral sites (1999).

I raise this issue because Ukrainian Protestants seemingly stand outside of the dichotomy (resistant to the hegemon or working along with the hegemon for personal advantage). At a global scale, the participants in Ukrainian Protestant churches are not competing with transnational migrants from wealthier countries in terms of capital accumulation or economic gain, although limited economic gain appears to be part of their motives for engaging in transnational activity. Moreover, these Ukrainians are not resisting the state through their transnational activities, and some of their activities (such as distributing humanitarian aid or contributing to the physical needs of orphans in a state-run institution) can even be interpreted as supporting the state apparatus. On the other hand, their transnational activities serve as a backdrop for resisting some aspects of the government agenda. For example, an emphasis on multi-culturalism in Southern or Eastern Ukrainian churches may serve to promote Russian language church programs when in fact the official government policy is for the expansion of the Ukrainian language in government and business life. Ong has responded to this dilemma:

In our desire to find definite breaks between the territorially bounded and the deterritorialized, the oppressive and the progressive, and the stable and the unstable, we sometimes overlook complicated accommodations, alliances, and creative tensions between the nation-state and mobile capital, between diaspora and nationalism, or between the influx of immigrants and the multicultural state (1999, 16).

In my examination of transnational Protestantism in Ukraine, I wish to avoid looking for resistance where none can be found, or finding complicity with ‘Capital’ or the ‘State’ when that complicity is absent. My research subjects have nuanced and variegated relationships with larger structures that cannot be wholly defined as either resistant or complicit.

A second point about the nature of transnationalism as practiced by Ukrainian Protestants is its uneven nature. Although much of the unevenness is an outgrowth of financial differences between Ukrainians and those from Western churches (this is introduced above in the section about transnationalism and power), another aspect of the uneven terrain is the way transnational opportunities are distributed throughout Ukrainian churches. Access to the West is typically clustered among a few individuals in each
congregation. In a typical Ukrainian Baptist church, for example, the senior pastor has the most chances both to interact with foreigners and to control their access to the rest of the church. This same pastor would have more opportunities for foreign travel than other congregation members. He (and they are always men) will also be the person primarily responsible for distributing material benefits of transnational contacts (humanitarian aid, seminary scholarships, etc.) within the congregation. Another category of people in a strategic position for benefiting from transnationalism are the English language speakers. Language interpreters typically spend a great deal of time with foreign visitors and in their own ways are gatekeepers in the transnational information network. The empirical material in this dissertation explores this aspect of religious transnationalism, which I suspect will be applicable to transnationalism in other settings as well.

2.6 Nationalism

In defining ‘nation’ I follow Anderson, considering it an “imagined political community” rising from cultural roots and made possible by the intersection of a number of historical events including the rise of print-capitalism, European colonialism, and (later) the growth of global capitalism (1991). In this project, however, I focus on cultural rather than political aspects of nationality. Partha Chatterjee notes that consideration of political nationalism to the exclusion of other forms of nationalism is a serious mistake made by many scholars (1993, 5).

Nationalism is an ideology that promotes the nation as the ideal unit of political and cultural life. Nationalism can be produced at many different sites by innumerable agents, notably the state, nationalist intellectuals, institutions such as universities and churches (such as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine), and individual and collective members of the nation. In the case of post-Soviet Ukraine, Wanner writes that the state has created conditions “that inform everyday practices and in which cultural production takes place” (1998, xix). She argues that specific sites at which Ukrainian national culture is “articulated, contested, negotiated, and perhaps, institutionalized” include schools, cultural festivals, the state calendar, and monuments memorializing people or events of Ukraine’s past (p. xix). While this is true, I argue that cultural nationalism is also produced at sites that on the surface may seem ‘non-national.’ If there
were to be a state church in Ukraine, the leading candidates would be either the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) or the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church. However, nationalist discourse, for better or for worse, is thoroughly embedded within Ukrainian social life, and it also appears in what may seem to be unlikely places – such as in Ukraine’s Protestant communities. This dissertation explores the complicated Ukrainian Protestant response to nationalism, and the diverse ways these communities are formulating their own visions of what an independent Ukraine should look like. In general the nationalist (or anti-nationalist) attitudes of Protestants reflect the Ukrainian region in which they live.

I would like to raise three points about nationalism in Ukraine that are informed by Chatterjee’s insights about Bengali nationalism in *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993). First of all, there is no such thing as a unified “Ukrainian nationalism.” Instead, there are many nationalisms: those that are hidden, unavailable, official, cultural, political, everyday, resistant, hegemonic, borrowed, or imagined. Secondly, each of these nationalisms intersects with the others and with social fragments that include gender, class, ethnicity, regional or local orientation, religion, generation, political affiliation, etc., to produce an even more complex field of nationalisms. Thirdly, it seems as though the most visible contemporary Ukrainian nationalism is found in opposition to Russian identity. Are there other elements influencing Ukrainian nationalism? If so, what do they look like? The question for this dissertation is whether and how Protestants in Ukraine construct their own nationalisms, and how these nationalisms incorporate aspects of other more prominent Ukrainian nationalisms. Do Ukraine’s Protestants partition their national identity into religious and non-religious spheres? These insights guide this research on national identity in Ukraine, and help guard against searching for a monolithic or uniform nationalism within Protestant communities. Here I seek to know how the various spheres of Ukrainian nationalism are interconnected in these communities.

Below I briefly review two streams of thought within the broad field of nationalism studies: the relationship between nationalism and modernity, and nationalism as produced in the lived experiences of national citizens.
2.6.1 Nationalism and modernity

The notion that the formation of political nations coincided with the arrival of modernity has been widely accepted, although the exact nature of the relationship between nationalism and modernity has been disputed for half a century. Ernest Gellner famously argued that nationalism appeared in Europe because industrializing people needed to have a common language created and enforced by a national state to ensure the smooth functioning of the economic and industrial system (1983; 1996). In this case nationalism is seen as a practical mechanism that arose to promote economic functioning and industrialization. Alternatively, nationalism has been presented as something that arose in order to limit the deterritorialization of capitalism (Lloyd 1997). This second interpretation fits into the globalization vs. nationalism debate, and can be deployed by those who consider globalization and nationalism to be opposing forces. However, this raises the question of whether people always produce nationalism because of an economic motivation.

I argue with many others that there are also other contributing factors to the development of nationalism. Gellner’s critics have long rejected the idea, and emphasize non-economic components and motivations for the nationalist project that include ethnicity (Kuzio 2001; Smith 1987) and political power (Breuilly 1996; Davidson 1994). However, it seems clear that neither ethnicity nor political power stands alone at the heart of national identity. In the Soviet Union, for example, nationality was considered to be both an ethnic marker and a matter of opinion. The 1926 Soviet census required respondents to first give the nationality of their mother and then to identify their own nationality, saying that “the determination of one’s nationality has been left up to the respondent himself/herself” (quoted in Wanner 1998, 12). While ethnicity itself is a socially constructed category, it does have material consequences that can make it difficult for certain groups to be accepted as part of a nation. In Ukraine, for instance, it has been difficult for people from certain ethnic groups (such as Central Asians or Koreans) to be accepted as Ukrainian nationals.

Lloyd argues that nationalism (created to oppose capitalistic deterritorialization) is formed through the state. The state produces modern citizen-subjects, just as it creates institutions that allow the integration of the nation-state into the world economic system.
(Lloyd 1997). Political aspects of nationalism are important, and the everyday nationalism observed in Ukrainian Protestant churches intersects in complicated ways with political nationalist discourse and government policies. Ukrainians live within a political Ukrainian state and are subject to nationalist laws (enforcing the gradual supremacy of the Ukrainian language) and media (such as state-owned television stations). However, while the state is an important focus of Ukrainian nationalist thought, not all nationalism originates there. Some nationalist discourses are created in their own domains, for example, discourses of folk culture and history.

In general, considering nationalism to be wedded to modernity creates interesting problems, including the paradox that although our modern states depend on nationalism, often nationalism asks us to express ‘premodern’ feelings that are sometimes said to be rooted in ideas of ethnicity (Dogan 1997; Hobsbawm 1996). This idea has been popularized in accounts that the collapse of the Soviet Union has allowed ‘ancient nationalisms’ to come to the surface again. One author, for example, wrote that nationalism in the post-Soviet period emerged “like steam from a pressure cooker” (Khazanov 1997). Ukrainian nationalists popularly (but spuriously) invoke ninth century Kievan Rus’ as the foundation of the modern Ukrainian nation.

A more tangible problem with linking nationalism and modernity is that if nations came into being within a world system in which the national level was the most useful way to organize economic, social and political life, it stands to reason that as our world becomes increasingly integrated economically, culturally and politically, the validity and future of the nation are put into question (Zelinsky 2001). Here discussions about nationalism intersect with the discussions about globalization and transnationalism, in which nationalism is simplistically posited as the opposite of globalism, an argument dealt with above.

2.6.2 Everyday nationalism

This dissertation research has been carried out under the assumption that nationalism is an ideology constructed in part through the daily lived experiences of national citizens. Many scholars have written about how national elites construct and employ a national identity through literature, the creation of national cultural institutions,
and national political movements (e.g., Hroch 1996; Kamusella 2001). A number of scholars have examined contemporary national elites in Russia and Ukraine (Haas 2000; Molchanov 2000; Shulman 1999a, b; Smith et al. 1998). Kubicek blames national elites for producing a weak national identity in post-Soviet Ukraine (Kubicek 1999), and other scholars of nationalism in Ukraine rely on analysis of nationalist political parties and the results of post-1991 elections to determine the success or failure of the development of a Ukrainian national identity (Kuzio 1997b; Wilson 1997a). While these official nationalisms cannot (and should not) be cleanly separated from the nationalisms of everyday life (especially since the people who produce them presumably live everyday lives themselves), it is the latter nationalist articulations that have been underrepresented in the literature on Ukraine (for exceptions see Arel 1996; Wanner 1998). Borneman (1992) draws attention to the differences between ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationness,’ the second being unarticulated but lived in everyday experience. Verdery (1996b) calls ‘nationness’ “the daily interactions and practices that produce an inherent and often unarticulated feeling of belonging, of being at home. . . . To research it would direct attention away from the noisy and visible rhetorics of nationalists and toward the techniques through which receptive dispositions have been quietly laid down in those to whom they appeal” (p. 229).

By choosing to examine how national identity is expressed in the lives and practices of Ukrainian Protestants, this dissertation answers the call for studies of everyday nationalism. Examples include churches that display a Ukrainian flag in their worship halls, churches in which the Ukrainian language is used exclusively, and pastors who enjoin members to pray for the Ukrainian president. Examining how Ukrainian Protestants express nationalism in their actions as well as in their words provides a complex picture of the extent and nature of nationalism in these church communities.

2.6.3 Ukrainian nationalism and transnationalism

Studies of Ukrainian nationalism have examined Ukrainian political parties (Kuzio 1997b; Wilson 1997b), the distribution of Ukrainian language use (Arel 1996), the Ukrainian reinterpretation of historical events, especially with respect to Russia (Wanner 1998), and Ukraine’s relationship to Russia (Kuzio 1997a). I wish to contribute
to this growing literature by situating Ukrainian national identity within a constellation of other identifications, particularly regional and transnational. Earlier in the chapter I laid out my contribution to the scholarly discussion of Ukraine’s regions. Another goal of the dissertation is to find out if, within a given population segment, there is a relationship between the extent and character of transnational involvement and the nature of Ukrainian nationalism espoused.

2.7 Identity

A fourth major concept that informs this research project is identity. Identity is notoriously difficult to define, and in fact there is no equivalent to the word ‘identity’ in the Russian language. In English, the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology reports that there is “no clear concept of identity in modern sociology. It is used widely and loosely in reference to one’s sense of self, and one’s feelings and ideas about oneself” (Marshall 1998). The word is often attached to a descriptor word to refer to some more specific kind of identity, such as “religious identity” (Batalden 1993), “Muslim identity” (Dwyer 1993), national identity, and so on. My understanding of the term is based on post-structural, anti-essentialist theories of identity formation. The most important point is that there is no such thing as a stable, coherently formed identity, such as that formed solely around race, gender, religion, or any other social structure. That said, I will make five comments about identity:

1. The raw material for identity is formed within and through discourses, which construct subject positions and initiate processes of subjectification. For example, ‘Black’ identity was not possible until discourses of race were produced, ‘gay’ identity was not possible to conceptualize until discourses of homosexuality were constructed, and so forth.

2. Identity “is always defined in relation to and inhabited by what it is not” (Pratt 2000, 803). In this process the ‘other’ of any category (the constitutive outside) is at work on both sides of the boundary, and is always leaving its trace on the category (Natter and Jones 1997, 146). Anzaldúa says this in a way that is easy to understand:

Identity is not just a singular activity or entity. It’s in relation to somebody else because you can’t have a stand alone; there must be something you’re bouncing off of. The whole tree of the person is embedded in the world of TV, popular
culture, film, commercials, malls, education, the world of information, even computers and the Internet. When I try to identify and name myself it’s always how I see myself as similar to or different from groups of people and the environment. Identity is not just what happens to me in my present lifetime but also involves my family history, my racial history, my collective history (2000, 240).

Moreover, the process of boundary construction must be continually maintained. Geraldine Pratt calls on us to make boundary constructions visible, and to keep mindful how those who are excluded are defined (1999, 164). These boundaries are not only produced between individuals or social groups (such as Filipina domestic workers in Canada – the group that provoked Pratt to think through the process of identity construction). Boundaries are also constructed between national groups. In other words, embedded in Ukrainian identity is the idea that it is not Russian, nor Polish, nor anything else. Furthermore, the boundaries between Ukrainian identity and these others will have to be continually enforced for Ukrainian identity to endure.

3. Individuals are subject to multiple discourses, and because we find ourselves at different places with respect to each of these discourses (of sports, religion, politics, the nation, etc.), we occupy multiple subject positions, or identities (Anderson 1996). Anzaldúa writes that “identity is an arrangement or series of clusters, a kind of stacking or layering of selves, horizontal and vertical layers, the geography of selves made up of the different communities you inhabit” (2000, 238). I disagree with Castells, who argues that most social actors in contemporary society organize meaning around a primary identity that frames the others (1997, 7). While that may be true for some, human identity is too transitory and complicated for us to assert that most people have a primary identity.

4. Often identities are hybrid, meaning that multiple identities do not assimilate evenly but produce a new identity that is a result of mixing, fusing, and creolization (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1988).

5. Identities are always spatialized (McDowell 1999; Natter and Jones 1997). Identities are constructed in space, and may change as the individual in question moves from one place to another (Blunt 1994). This spatialization is profound when it comes to collective identities, such as those organized around the nation.
National identity is almost always predicated on the idea that there is a specific piece of territory which belongs to the nation. Paasi writes that nationalism is “a specific, strategic form of territoriality and the struggle for control over land and socio-spatial consciousness” (1999, 5). The boundaries that must continually be enforced between identities become dramatically spatial when it comes to national identity, and these identity boundaries can be mapped out on the ground; they are presumably at least somewhat aligned with the territorial borders of the nation-state (Newman 2001). This process of boundary-construction makes national political communities possible, and if it breaks down, the communities will deteriorate. Chris Brown (2001) links these ideas to discourses of globalization. If economic de-bordering is related to the global political order, and if political borders are weakening, then identity itself is put into question (p. 130). This fits in directly with the debate outlined earlier in this chapter about the relationship between nationalism and globalization.

This anti-essentialist formulation of identity is used in this work on Ukraine, as national, regional, and transnational identities are examined in several Protestant congregations. This work contributes to the literature on identity in at least two ways. First, this project provides an opportunity to investigate how identities are spatialized, which in the case of the individuals involved is a complicated process. Their identities are spatialized repeatedly and at various scales. Claiming to be Ukrainian asserts a spatial identity, and here we see how that spatiality intersects with other spatial assertions such as regional or transnational identity. Secondly, this dissertation examines the process of boundary construction and maintenance conducted by Protestants in Ukraine. Boundaries are constructed, maintained, and also at times dismantled between ‘the West’ and ‘Ukraine,’ between ‘Protestant’ and ‘Orthodox,’ between ‘Western Ukraine’ and ‘non-Western Ukraine,’ and between ‘Baptist’ and ‘American’ churches in Ukraine.

2.8 Conclusion

The processes of religious transnationalism analyzed in the following pages are rooted in the ideas and debates presented in this chapter, where I introduced the social and intellectual context of this study of post-Soviet Ukrainian evangelicalism. I examined several theories of social life in the contemporary world: globalization,
transnationalism, and nationalism. I also considered the foundational concept of identity, acknowledging that people can have multiple, shifting identities that are difficult to define.

This is a dissertation about how the flows and connections of a transnational world are produced by and embedded in the human relationships of daily life. I will also show how events of the past can have a direct impact on how a group of people perceive their own place in the world, and how they choose which aspects of a transnational identity to accept, which to reject, and which to transform into something new. Ukrainian evangelicals began the twenty-first century thoroughly enmeshed in a transnational religious network, yet at the same time they are living with the legacy of decades under repressive Soviet rule, a legacy that colors their interpretation of their transnational partners and their experience of life in a transnational society. It is this legacy that we turn to in the following chapter.
Chapter Three: Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

This project is based on qualitative research carried out in eight Protestant churches in four Ukrainian cities. Ethnographic field methods included participant observation in all churches, fifteen focus group interviews with church members, fifty individual interviews, and three small focus groups of two or three people each. Most of the findings presented here come out of the focus groups and interviews, although Chapter Six also includes an evaluation of maps produced by focus group participants. This chapter discusses a number of methodological concerns: (1) why ethnographic research methods were the most appropriate choice for this dissertation, (2) how the research design was structured (with an introduction to the research sites), (3) how the fieldwork was conducted, (4) how the data was analyzed, and (5) how my positionality in relation to the Ukrainian Protestants affects the research findings.

3.2 Ethnographic research methods and identity

Human identity is a complicated social construct. Scholars have shown that all identities are the products of blending, creolization, and fusion (Hall 1988; Marshall 1998; Minh-ha 1996). They recognize that identity is complex and multi-layered, and that identities are unstable, usually changing over time. Moreover, geographers contend that identities are always grounded in and experienced through social space (McDowell 1999; Natter and Jones 1997).

Although this project investigates the regional, national, and transnational identities of Ukrainian Protestants, many of the research subjects do not consciously identify themselves as national or transnational actors. Furthermore, like all people, they inhabit multiple identities. One person may consider herself a Ukrainian citizen, an ethnic Russian from Odessa, and a Presbyterian who participates in a transnational religious network – and each identity is woven with the others into what can become a new cultural form.

Ethnographic research methods are particularly suited for the study of complex social constructs such as identity. By spending time – sometimes months or even years – interacting with research subjects in their own environments, researchers can understand
social life, relationships, ideas and convictions with nuance and depth. Examples of researchers who have examined identity from these anti-essentialist viewpoints using ethnographic methods include Claire Dwyer (1993; 1999; 2000), who studied the construction of identity of young British Muslim women; Ruth Frankenberg (1993), who examined the identities of white American women; and Janel Curry (2000), who investigated the worldviews of people living in religious farming communities. These authors based their analyses on a combination of participant observation ethnography, focus group interviews, and in-depth interviews, and I did the same. Curry’s work is particularly relevant to my own. In order to find out how rural Iowans envision themselves within larger society, she chose five farming communities founded by different religious groups; she gathered participants for focus group interviews from local churches in each town; she conducted gender-specific focus group interviews; she interviewed four individuals or couples from each community. Curry productively analyzed the interview transcripts to answer her research questions.

3.3 Research design

For my own project I employed ethnographic research methods in eight churches located in four different Ukrainian cities (See Figures 3.1 and 3.2). I spent about two months in each city, dividing my time between the congregations there. I participated in and observed congregational life while I also conducted focus group and individual interviews with congregational members. The sites were selected to present both a regional cross-section of Ukraine and a comparison of older, pre-Soviet churches with new churches that had been started under the supervision of American missionaries since 1991. Ukraine’s regional variation is profound, and I anticipated that church members from different parts of Ukraine would have different experiences of transnational Christianity and different perspectives on Ukraine’s national identity. I also expected that newer churches, particularly those founded by American missionaries, would see their place in the transnational world differently than churches with a longer history in Ukraine that extended back to the nineteenth century. All eight of the selected churches – like most Protestant churches in Ukraine – have built extensive relationships with organizations and individuals in the United States.
Figure 3.1: Research locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City (Region, language)</th>
<th>Historical church</th>
<th>New church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy</strong></td>
<td>Central Baptist Church (ECB)</td>
<td>Evangelical Presbyterian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Southern Ukraine, Russian speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vinnytsia</strong></td>
<td>Central Baptist Church (ECB)</td>
<td>Nazarene Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Western Ukraine, mixed Ukrainian and Russian speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kherson</strong></td>
<td>Central Baptist Church (ECB)</td>
<td>Evangelical Presbyterian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Southern Ukraine, mostly Russian speaking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L’viv</strong></td>
<td>Central Baptist Church (ECB)</td>
<td>Greater Grace Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Western Ukraine, strongly Ukrainian)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2: Map of research locations

Cartography by Dick Gilbreath
The first research site was Bilhorod-Dnestrovskiy, known more commonly by its Russian name, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy is a small city of 52,000 inhabitants on the western banks of the Dneister River estuary not far from where it empties into the Black Sea. This city is one of the oldest in Ukraine – founded by the Greeks and over the centuries being claimed by powers that included Moldovan princes, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Romania, and the Soviet Union. Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy was formerly part of Bessarabia, a region within the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union prior to the Second World War, and was not administratively attached to Ukraine until 1945, although many of the people who live there have long considered themselves ethnically Ukrainian. Economically the area has a struggling industrial component (factories include a large one that produces medical syringes); vineyards dominate the agricultural landscape; and many local people rely on seasonal jobs serving tourists in a nearby Black Sea beach town to supplement their annual incomes. Belgorod is part of the Odessa administrative region and Russian is the dominant language heard on the streets and used in public and private life. Several years ago one scholar observed that Odessa was in a state of transition from a weak Russian to a mixed Russo-Ukrainian identity, but what that identity would look like remained a major question (Pirie 1996). That question remains open.

The new church I focused on there was Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a small congregation that traces its origins to a 1994 visit by American missionaries to the city. This church is described in greater detail in Chapter Five. The older church was the Central Baptist Church, the largest Baptist church in the city and a member of Ukraine’s largest and oldest Baptist denomination, the Evangelical Christian-Baptists (ECB). Most of the core members of this church grew up in Baptist families that survived the years of religious persecution and had stories to tell of family members who were imprisoned because of their religious activities during the Soviet era. As in most of the cities I spent time, spending equal time with each church proved to be an unrealistic goal, in part because of the logistics of attending services at different churches that were usually all on one day of the week. In Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, most of my participant observation time took place in the Presbyterian church, and it was only

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11 This and other population figures cited in this chapter are reported in the 2001 Ukrainian census.
towards the second half of my two-month tenure in the city that I was able to gain access to the Baptist church and conduct interviews there. Another reason for the lopsided observation time was that as relationships developed with people in one particular church, it was difficult to break away from the activities and events of that congregation to go elsewhere.

The second research site was the central Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia. Vinnytsia (population 357,000) is the capital of Vinnytsia region (population 1.77 million) and as such it has all of the resources that would be expected – government offices, universities, a medical school, factories, large church buildings, markets, and a prized McDonald’s restaurant. The surrounding province contains fertile agricultural land that produces crops like sugar beets and wheat. Both the Russian and Ukrainian languages are used in Vinnytsia, but neither dominates. Vinnytsia was long part of the Russian Empire and was part of the Soviet Union as it emerged from the Bolshevik revolution and civil war.

Protestantism, particularly the Baptist tradition, is quite strong in Vinnytsia. As in all four of the research sites, one of the case study churches here was the Central Baptist Church. Vinnytsia’s Central Baptist is the largest Baptist congregation in Ukraine with over fifteen hundred adult members. The pastor is well known and respected in Baptist churches across Ukraine, and people I met in various parts of the country, even non-Baptists, commonly knew of the Vinnytsia Central Baptist Church. The Baptist church is so strong in Vinnytsia that there are several ECB congregations throughout the city in addition to other Baptist congregations that are unaffiliated with the ECB. The city boasts at least one large charismatic Protestant church and some other churches that include the Vinnytsia Nazarene Church. The Nazarene church, my second case study congregation there, had been in operation for about one year and was already attracting about one hundred worshippers every Sunday. Most of my Vinnytsia research time was spent with members of the Baptist church; I only gained access to the Nazarene church towards the end of my two months in Vinnytsia and conducted only one focus group interview and one individual interview there. That is the least coverage of any of the eight churches in this study.

12 This figure according to the senior pastor in a 2002 interview.
The third research site was Kherson, a city in southern Ukraine about halfway between Odessa and Crimea near the mouth of the Dnieper river. Like Vinnytsia, Kherson is a regional capital, and has a similarly sized population (328,000) in a region of 1.1 million people. Unlike Vinnytsia, in Kherson the Russian language strongly dominates and the Ukrainian language is rarely heard on the streets. In fact, some people in Kherson referred to themselves as “Russian” during focus group interviews. Although Kherson is generally considered part of ‘Southern’ Ukraine rather than ‘Eastern’ Ukraine, it has important features in common with Eastern Ukrainian cities, particularly the strong affinity to Russian language and culture and the long history as part of the Russian Empire prior to becoming part of the Soviet Union. In this study Kherson is used in place of more prominent Eastern Ukrainian cities such as Kharkiv or Donetsk to provide a regional comparison with churches in Western and Central Ukrainian cities.

The case study churches in Kherson were the Central Baptist Church (ECB) and the Kherson Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church (a sister congregation to the one in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy) was my key to the city, since the pastor of Belgorod Presbyterian had requested that the pastor of Kherson Presbyterian invite me to do research there. I also had good access to the Central Baptist Church through a research assistant who was a member there. The balance of time spent between the two churches was more equal in Kherson than in the other three cities, although I did spend more time with the Presbyterians than with the Baptists.

The final research site was L’viv, a Western Ukrainian city that famously boasts a strong nationalist spirit. L’viv stands apart from the other three cities in nearly every way. It is about twice the size of Vinnytsia or Kherson, with 732,000 inhabitants. The Ukrainian language is the strong favorite for both public and private use, although there continue to be some who speak Russian in the home. Of the four cities, L’viv has the shortest tenure in the Soviet Union and was not part of the Russian Empire. As will be explained in more detail in Chapter Four, L’viv was part of Poland until it was annexed by Stalin before the Second World War, was occupied by Germany for most of the war, and then was attached to the rest of Ukraine as part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in the USSR until Ukraine’s independence in 1991. L’viv is wealthier than the other three cities, and because of its Hapsburg roots the architecture of the city center has
more similarities to Krakow or Prague than Kiev or Moscow. An interesting feature is that L’viv, so close to the Polish border, is a gateway city for Ukrainians who migrate to the West (typically Poland) for agricultural or construction work. It was not uncommon in L’viv to find people who used to live in Poland, or who had family members currently working there.

In L’viv the two churches I studied were the Central Baptist Church and L’viv Greater Grace Church. As with the main Baptist church in each of the four chosen cities, the Central Baptist Church is a prominent, well-established congregation. Greater Grace Church, on the other hand, is an evangelical church started in the 1990s by American missionaries from a large independent church in Baltimore, Maryland. Greater Grace in Maryland is a mission-minded congregation, and has ‘daughter’ churches in over 50 countries around the world, including four congregations so far in Ukraine. I spent more time participating and observing at Greater Grace than at L’viv Central Baptist, but my focus group interviews at Central Baptist were a bit more productive. Because of poor attendance, I only held one successful focus group at Greater Grace, and I held two at Central Baptist.

3.4 Fieldwork components

The actual fieldwork had three main components: participant observation, focus group interviews, and other (mostly individual) interviews. Here I will explain each in turn. An important component of any ethnographic research is participant observation, or observing and participating in the communities that are being evaluated. Kearns argues that observation as a research practice has been undervalued in geographic research, and that in fact “all observation is participant observation” (2000, 104). A primary purpose of observation as research practice is to achieve contextual understanding of the people or places that are being studied. As Kearns explains, “the goal is to construct an in-depth interpretation of a particular time and place through direct experience” (105-106). During the process of participant observation, the researcher typically writes fieldnotes which are the basis for coming “to grasp and interpret the actions and concerns of others” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, 13).
Some research methods enable researchers to collect information about how people answer specific questions in an interview or survey setting; in contrast, participant observation allows us to evaluate identity as expressed through people’s lives. By observing and participating I could discover how transnational relationships, for example, are produced within the context of daily life and everyday experiences. Verdery and others have called attention to the merits of researching the nationalism of daily life, what she calls ‘nationness.’ This is “the daily interactions and practices that produce an inherent and often unarticulated feeling of belonging, of being at home. . . . To research it would direct attention away from the noisy and visible rhetorics of nationalists and toward the techniques through which receptive dispositions have been quietly laid down in those to whom they appeal” (1996b, 229). I do not know any other way to research everyday life effectively than by participating and observing.

In each of my research sites one church became the primary location of participation and observation, and I spent less time at the second church. What this means is that of the eight churches, there are four that I know better than others: the Presbyterian churches in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy and Kherson, the Central Baptist Church in Vinnytsia, and Greater Grace Church in L’viv. The nature of participant observation differed slightly at each church, but it boiled down to this: I sought opportunities to spend time on a daily basis with people from the church; I attended worship services regularly; and I participated in as many church-sponsored activities as possible. In Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, for example, I ate lunch every day with the staff of the medical clinic that the Presbyterian church runs. In Kherson and L’viv I played the violin each Sunday with the church music team, which also meant that I attended weekly music team rehearsals. In Kherson I spent one week as a full-time volunteer at the drop-in center for street children sponsored by the Presbyterian Church. In Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, Vinnytsia, and Kherson I joined at least one weekly small group Bible study led by church members. I went on an evangelization trip to a remote village with a small group from Kherson Baptist. I attended youth group activities including a picnic and a party with the Greater Grace youth group in L’viv. At Vinnytsia Baptist I visited a class at their adult Bible school and children’s Sunday school; I went to several meetings of their

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13 See also (Paasi 1999; Thompson 2001).
largest youth group and a prayer meeting frequented mostly by older women. I spent a morning at a long-term care hospital with a team from Vinnytsia Central Baptist that goes weekly to make and distribute sandwiches to the sick. I visited many church people in their homes as they offered me tea and conversation. In Vinnytsia I lived with an elderly member of the Central Baptist Church. In Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy and in Kherson I stayed with American missionaries working at the Presbyterian churches there. These housing arrangements were particularly helpful as I sought to establish relationships with people in the various churches. In short: I tried to have daily encounters with church people as I participated in the activities of their lives. The research product was a written record of my observations and my interpretations of those interactions.

The second component of my research, and one heavily relied on in the dissertation, was focus group interviews. A focus group is “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan 1997, 6). The group is invited together because they have something in common with each other (in this case, they are members of the same church and are in the same age category). In an interview people respond directly to questions posed by the interviewer, but in a focus group an advantage is that people respond to other group members. The moderator will raise a question that she wishes participants to answer, and in the process of answering it other topics may be brought up and group members may have a much larger discussion about it and related themes. Interacting in a focus group allows for people “to explore different points of view, and formulate and reconsider their own ideas and understandings” (Cameron 2000, 86). This was an advantage for my research project because the focus group discussions raised issues that I had not always thought of, and it allowed me to gauge the relevance of my research questions to the lives of the participants. Sometimes the questions generated very little discussion; at other times the focus group members had a great deal to say to me and each other about the topics. I was able to listen in on debates between church members, thus hearing a wider range of opinions, and defense of those positions, than ever came out in individual interviews. On more than one occasion I was thanked for bringing the participants together. They appreciated having a forum in which they could talk with fellow church members about
these issues. At least three focus groups should be conducted using the same basic set of questions so that data can be compared and contrasted for more productive results.

For this project my goal was to conduct two or three age-segregated focus groups at each church. I anticipated that the views held by young people about national identity and transnationalism might differ greatly from those of their parents and grandparents who lived most of their lives in the Soviet Union. As can be seen in Figure 3.3, the goal was generally met, although with greater or lesser success in each church. Where the focus group is described as a ‘mini-group’ below, it generally indicates that a full focus group was planned but that not enough people showed up to consider it a successful group discussion. In the case of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian, there are very few young adults who attend the church and who were eligible to participate in a young adult focus group. The two men who came for the discussion were actually college students whose parents attended the church but who themselves were studying in another city and were home for the weekend. In other cases the failure of participants to show up for a scheduled focus group can be attributed to a number of factors, most specifically the method of subject recruitment. Some groups were recruited by me after I had already established a personal rapport with the potential participants. These had a high rate of attendance. Others, which also had a high rate of attendance, were set up by a respected person of authority in the church (such as a pastor or youth group leader). The most ineffective recruitment method was a general invitation given from the pulpit by the pastor. Unfortunately, in two of the churches (Greater Grace and Central Baptist in L’viv), this was the method suggested/implemented by the church pastor for recruiting middle aged and elderly group participants, and those groups were therefore poorly attended. At those churches I scheduled focus groups with young adults directly (without going through the pastor), and so the young adult groups were much better attended. While offering a financial incentive would have been helpful for recruiting participants, cultural advisers uniformly recommended against introducing money into the researcher-participant relationship in this context.
Figure 3.3: Focus groups conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Baptist Church</th>
<th>New Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy</td>
<td>• A focus group with young adult women</td>
<td>• A mini-group with two young adult men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A mini-group with two middle-aged women and one man</td>
<td>• A mini-group with two middle aged adults (a man and a woman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A focus group with middle aged adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A focus group with retired adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinnytsia</td>
<td>• A focus group of young adults</td>
<td>• A focus group with adults of various ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A focus group of middle aged adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A focus group of retired women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kherson</td>
<td>• A focus group of young adults</td>
<td>• A focus group of young adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A focus group of middle aged adults</td>
<td>• A focus group of middle aged adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’viv</td>
<td>• A focus group of young adults</td>
<td>• A focus group of young adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A focus group of retired women (although half of them left part-way through)</td>
<td>• A mini-group of two middle aged men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A mixed-age (mostly young) focus group at a daughter congregation of Central Baptist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus groups were conducted either at private apartments or at church facilities. I served as the moderator and my English language questions were translated into Russian or Ukrainian by a research assistant. The resulting discussions, except for those in L’viv which were in Ukrainian, were not translated back into English because I understood nearly everything that was said in Russian. Voices were captured on audio tape and either transcribed in Russian by a native speaker research assistant to be translated into English later by me or someone else, or they were translated directly into
English from the Russian/Ukrainian audiotape by a research assistant and later checked and edited by me. All of the transcripts were worked on by at least two, but sometimes three people to ensure the most accurate possible translations.

In my focus groups, questions, most of them open-ended, were carefully chosen and arranged with more general ones at the beginning and the more specific, focused ones towards the end. As explained by Krueger and Casey (2000, 12), questions towards the end of the group discussion tend to provide the most useful information. Focus group interview questions (see Figure 3.4) covered each of the main research questions posed in this project. They were arranged to begin with general comments that could open people up for discussion and then hone in on specific aspects of regional/national identity and transnationalism. Focus groups usually lasted about one and a half hours, but were as short as one hour and as long as two hours. The same (or nearly the same) questions were asked at each group so that there would be a basis for comparison across churches, regions, and age groups.

Before explaining how the focus groups transcripts were analyzed, I will present the third research component – individual interviews. Some of the groups listed above in Figure 3.3 – the ‘mini-groups’ with only two people – can be considered in this category because they were too small to be defined as focus groups. In addition to those interviews of pairs that primarily answered the focus group questions, I interviewed a wide variety of church members and leaders (see Figure 3.5). The interviews were semi-structured; that is, I had several questions to ask, but I let the interviewee take the conversation in new directions if they chose. Usually the interviews began with an opportunity for participants to tell the story of how they came to faith and became involved in the church – their conversion narrative. Giving a ‘testimony’ (*sviditelstvo*) is a common practice in Ukrainian Protestant churches. Many evangelicals have already prepared a short presentation about their conversion that they share in church or during a small group Bible study or prayer meeting. Others write theirs down for publication in a church newspaper or magazine. Although this was not the primary methodology for this project, some researchers have collected and analyzed Protestant conversion narratives (both historical and contemporary) in Ukraine and Russia (Coleman 2002; Wanner 2003). Allowing interviewees to begin by telling their testimony was a good way to break the ice.
and start conversation. It also provided an opportunity to find out what the subject believed were the most important aspects of church life in contemporary Ukraine. From this point on I usually asked (both pastors and lay people) questions about the history of their congregation and about their views towards the West and its impact on their church and on Ukraine as a whole. Most interviews, even in L’viv, were conducted in Russian by me without an interpreter. Several interviewees chose to speak in English. Nearly all of the interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed/translated using the same procedures described above that were used for the focus groups. Some of the interviewees declined to be taped, and their responses were recorded on paper only. Interviews lasted from between ten minutes (short testimonies only) to one hour or more in length.

**Figure 3.4: Focus group questions**

1. Introductions: name, hometown.
2. Think back to the first time you went to your church. What prompted you to go and what did you think about it?
3. What do you like the most about your church?
4. What are the two most serious/important issues that your church faces right now?
5. What are specific ways your church is connected to people & churches in other countries? How has this contact has affected the life of your church? How do you evaluate the role of foreign missionaries in Ukraine?
6. After receiving the maps of Ukraine that are being passed out, please mark on your map your opinion of where the main regional divisions in Ukraine are located. In your opinion, are Protestant churches in one region different from Protestant churches in another region? Also mark on your map places in Ukraine where your church has connections with other people or churches. How has this contact affected the life of your church?
7. Do you think that Ukraine has a national religion? If so, what is it? To what extent (if any) can your church be considered a Ukrainian church?
8. What would you like to see in your church in 20 or 30 years? What dreams do you have for your church?
9. I need input from you about the evangelical churches in Ukraine and their position in the country and in the world. Are there any important issues that I missed? Is there anything about this that you have on your mind that you have not had a chance to say?
Figure 3.5: Interviews conducted (in addition to mini focus groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Baptist Church</th>
<th>New Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinnytsia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kherson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’viv</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Data analysis

At the end of ten months on the ground in Ukraine and many more months spent transcribing audio tapes and translating and editing the transcripts, I had accumulated hundreds of pages of research documents: fieldnotes, focus group and interview transcripts, and other written materials such as church bulletins, advertising brochures, and hard copies of church web sites. The contents of the documents were then analyzed both in terms of what they said about themselves and also in relation to how they spoke to the research questions. I followed the advice of Gillian Rose, who recommends, among other steps, “immersing yourself in your sources”, “identifying key themes in your sources”, and “paying attention to their complexity and contradictions” (2001, 158). I read the transcripts several times, paying attention to repeated themes, contradictions, and what seemed to be the most important ideas that the research participants were trying to express. I read them again, this time focusing on what the research participants were saying that related to the research questions – how did their comments and actions tell a story about the regional, the national, and the transnational? The primary data, therefore, are the words spoken by the Ukrainians involved in this study. This dissertation is based primarily on content analysis of interviews and focus groups, allowing the research subjects to speak on these pages. Throughout the chapters I provide direct quotations from the interviews to support my analysis and to guard against misinterpretation. Since my theoretical framework of identity construction is one in which identity is formed through the negation of the other, there are many times in Chapters Six and Seven in which I quote at length from church goers who speak about how they are not Orthodox or
Catholic, they are not Ukrainian or American or Russian, they are not Baptists or new evangelicals, and they are not from Western Ukraine or other regions of the country.

Chapter Six contains an analysis of maps created by the focus group participants. This part of the dissertation relies on alternate methods than those described above. I distributed blank outline maps of Ukraine’s administrative oblasts to participants at focus groups, asking them to draw in the regional boundaries of Ukraine according to their own interpretation. Most people drew a circle around several oblasts in Western Ukraine, and several in the south, center, and east. To analyze the resulting maps I determined how many maps categorized each oblast in a particular region. (For example, L’viv oblast was put in a ‘western’ region in nearly all of the maps, but Vinnytsia was considered ‘western’ in only 12.4 percent of them. I then used the data in a mapping software package to create chloropleth maps of Western Ukraine, Eastern Ukraine, Southern Ukraine, and so forth. I also made maps that broke the data down by city, so that I could compare the boundaries of Western Ukraine as mapped by people from different Ukrainian cities. This will be further explained along with the results in Chapter Five.

3.6 Positionality

This research project, like all research projects, has been impacted by the researcher’s position in relation to the research subjects. That is, my gender, nationality, and religious affiliation came with me into the field and affected how I related to the research subjects and how they related to me. My identity also affected how I viewed and interpreted the research material. In this section I will address (1) my positionality in regard to the Ukrainian research subjects and (2) how that positionality affects the research findings.

Early discussions of research positionality assumed that the researcher was either an insider or an outsider to the social community being studied, although there was no agreement about which position produced more reliable results. More than three decades ago Roger Merton exposed the absurdity of the idea that one position was better than another. At the time some Black scholars argued that only a Black person could properly study Black communities. Merton said that if it were true in the case of Black Americans, it would mean that, for example, “only French scholars can understand
French society and of course, that only Americans, not their external critics, can truly understand American society” (1972, 13). He also critiqued the opposite view, that “knowledge about groups, unprejudiced by membership in them, is accessible only to outsiders” (p. 31).

Contemporary theorists acknowledge that the boundaries between “insider” and “outsider” are difficult, if not impossible, to identify (Merriam et al. 2001, 415). Any research, either within or across cultures, presents challenges that arise from gender, race, class, religion, and other factors. Ethnographers are commonly urged to carefully examine their positionality, to situate themselves, their informants, and their research findings within these larger fields, and to “write this into our research practice” (McDowell 1999, 409). Michelle Fine recommends that “researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations” (1994, 72). Of course the exercise is limited by our own finiteness and fallibility and the complex nature of our social world. As Gillian Rose has written, “assuming that self and context are, even if in principle only, transparently understandable seems to me to be demanding an analytical certainty that is as insidious as the universalizing certainty that so many feminists have critiqued” (1997, 318).

In the case of this research project I found myself both an insider and an outsider in relation to the Ukrainian Protestants I met. I was accepted as a “believer,” and in some cases I had personal friends who helped establish connections to specific churches. I was also seen as an American – with all of the baggage that that entails. I was well off financially compared to most of the participants. I was a single woman, and most women my age in Ukrainian Protestant churches are married. I was well-traveled, whereas most people I interacted with had never left the former Soviet Union, and could only dream about international travel. I have always lived in a world where freedom of speech, religion, and assembly has been the norm; until recently Ukrainian Protestants lived in a world where those freedoms were usually in name only. Even my religious beliefs – convictions about particular theological points or church practices – were different from many of the people I interacted with in the churches.

There were times when my research subjects accepted me as one of their own. I was nearly always asked shortly after initial introductions whether or not I was “a
believer.” When I said yes, sometimes there were further questions to verify if I really knew what I was talking about (“what kind of church do you go to?” or “do you have a believing family?”). Being identified as a believer helped give me access to conversations and events that might otherwise have been closed. One young woman at the Vinnytsia Baptist Church invited me to participate in her weekly small group Bible study. After a few weeks she came to the place where I was staying one evening without an invitation. She wanted me to record the story of her own spiritual pilgrimage. At times in tears, she related how she had come to faith as a young girl against the wishes of her parents, and she told me about the hardships and difficulties she had faced. This was not the ‘testimony’ that every good Ukrainian Baptist has prepared as a public narrative they can give on command for evangelism and exhortation. Instead, this was a story that would only be told to a trusted listener. Although I was marked as an outsider by my nationality, bank account balance, and life history, my religious faith helped set the research subjects at ease with my presence in their communities.

There were other times when my research subjects clearly did not accept me as one of their own. These moments reinforced the distance between us, and magnified my identity as Other. One example is when I asked for permission to read the official church history volume of one of the Baptist case study churches. Word came back that if I wanted to look at the history book, I would need to explain to the pastor all about my research – what information I had already found and where, and what I hoped to find in the future. Then I would need to examine the volume at the church building in the presence of the pastor or another church officer. The church leaders clearly perceived me as an outsider and a potential threat to their church; perhaps if I had been more of an insider I could have read their church history. (I refrained from reading the book on their terms.)

Another incident further illustrates my outsider status. An elder at the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church was born and raised in a nearby village. Although Grigoriy converted to the Presbyterian church from atheism, his village was home to an unregistered Protestant church (probably Baptist), and he was on friendly terms with some of the church members. Grigoriy wanted me to come with him to the village to visit the Baptist church. On a trip home to see his parents, Grigoriy met with church
members to work out the details. The Baptists refused to meet with me, despite the fact that Grigoriy told them I was a trustworthy fellow believer. My outsider status prevented them from allowing the visit and trumped any potential insider benefits.

In the course of the field research I did what I could to avoid complaints against me as an outsider. For example, I wore culturally appropriate clothes to church – skirts and dresses only; no pants were permitted in Baptist churches. I refrained from drinking alcohol. I learned Russian, and even a little Ukrainian. To minimize the appearance of an economic gulf between us I seldom invited Ukrainian acquaintances to cafés or restaurants, or even to McDonalds’ for ice cream. I also tried to avoid talking about my personal purchases or financial habits. In short, I tried to make the Ukrainians I interacted with comfortable enough to talk freely despite our differences.

It is important to keep in mind that the pool of participants was in part self-selected. If a person did not like Americans they may not have decided to come to a focus group – no one was forced to talk to me. Moreover, disaffected people who are pessimistic about religion or pessimistic about life in general were also self selected out of the study. If there is a pro-Western bias to the findings it may be because blatantly anti-American church-goers declined an invitation for an interview or a focus group.

As a final note to this methodological chapter: while the names of the cities and denominations mentioned in this dissertation are true, I have changed the names of all research participants to protect their privacy. No last names are used, even of pastors or other church leaders, and the specific name of each Baptist church has been generalized to become the “Central Baptist Church.”
Chapter Four: A history of Ukrainian evangelical churches before 1991

4.1 Introduction

Ukrainian evangelicalism was born in the steppe region of southern Ukraine when the area belonged to the Russian empire. This chapter traces the history of Ukrainian evangelical churches from the late tsarist period until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. From their inception, these churches were shaped by state policies and resistance to those policies. Throughout the decades of the Soviet regime, Ukrainian believers endured the same political tumult as secular society, and they also faced persecution aimed at them as religious enemies of the state. Even today, social life in Protestant churches with pre-1991 roots reflects their history as relatively closed and persecuted communities. Half of the churches examined in this dissertation are direct descendants of the first Ukrainian evangelical groups examined in this chapter. The other four were part of a large wave of new post-Soviet churches that will be considered in Chapter Five.

As explained previously, the fact that Ukrainian regions are a common feature of contemporary Ukrainian discourse is a foundational assumption in my research design. Here I show how the regionalism of today was born in the Ukraine of the past – how current differences between areas around L’viv and other parts of the country have developed out of the regions’ dissimilar historical backgrounds. Ukrainian regional variations result from the distinct geopolitical trajectories of the different parts of the country.

4.2 Nineteenth century foundations of Ukrainian Baptist churches

In the 1860s the Ukrainian Baptist movement was forming in rural areas of what later became southern Ukraine. Although Ukrainian peasants had recently been emancipated from serfdom, they continued to work in menial agricultural occupations. Some villages of the region were inhabited by German speakers – Mennonites who had settled the area in the eighteenth century and had brought their Anabaptist version of Christianity with them (Latourette 1941, 142). Most others, peasants and nobility alike, practiced Orthodox Christianity. There was also a sizable Jewish minority. A few Mennonites began giving Bible lessons (or the German Bibelstunden, Bible hours) to the newly freed peasants who worked for them. Some of the peasants organized themselves...
into what they called Stundist churches. This coincided with the rise of popular education and literacy among Ukraine’s peasants, enabling them to read the first Bible portions ever distributed into the Russian language in the 1860s. The first complete Bible translated in Russian was not released until 1876 (Blane 1977, 389; Kolarz 1961, 283; Sawatsky 1993, 320). Although parts of the Gospels were translated into Ukrainian in 1842 and 1862, the Pentateuch was published in L’viv in 1869, and the New Testament in 1871, the entire Ukrainian Bible was not published until 1903. It was published in Vienna, and not available to churches inside the Russian Empire at that time because of opposition from the Russian Orthodox Church.  

The first documented Ukrainian convert to the Mennonites’ faith was Fyodor Onishchenko, an itinerant farm laborer from the village of Osnova, near Odessa, who was working in the Nikolaev area, also in southern Ukraine. He converted in 1857 or 1858 and returned home, telling his friends and neighbors about his newfound faith. His neighbor Mikhailo Ratushny was converted in 1860, and the two men were instrumental in the early decades of Ukrainian Baptist churches. By 1861 a small church was formed in Osnova with Ratushny as the preacher. The church had 20 members by 1865, including several from nearby villages. Two years later they had 300 adherents and churches in three villages. Similar processes were at work in other villages, also by way of contact with German Protestant settlers (Rowe 1994, 15-17).

At first the Stundists maintained connection with the Orthodox church, going to the priest for marriages, funerals, and baptisms, services for which they had to pay. The new religion was attractive in part because it was understandable (in their native language, not the archaic ecclesiastical language, Old Church Slavonic) and did not require the services of a priest, a representative of the established order which had oppressed them as serfs. As they sought to free themselves from the priests, the priests would call upon the police to harrass the Stundists, and persecution began. The Stundists decided to separate from the Orthodox Church in 1870. In May of that year the Stundists in the village of Osnova (home of Onishchenko and Ratushny) brought their icons to the

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priest to publicly separate themselves from the parish, and to avoid accusations that they were not properly respecting the icons (Rowe 1994, 17).

Another early Stundist, and a man who brought the Stundist movement closer to the Baptist church than the Mennonites had been, was a blacksmith from the village of Lyubomirka, near Yelizavetgrad, north of Odessa. Ivan Ryaboshapka came to faith through discussions with his boss, a German Mennonite farmer. He acquired a New Testament, began reading it to his neighbors, and his mill eventually served as a Christian meeting place (Rowe 1994, 17). He became convinced of the necessity of believers’ baptism (as opposed to infant baptism). This same belief was spreading to the German settlement of Alt-Danzig in 1864. Thirty Germans from Alt-Danzig, along with Ukrainian convert Yefim Tsymbal from the village of Karlovka, were baptised in 1869. Tsymbal baptized Ryaboshapka in 1870, who in turn baptized Ratushny in 1871 (p. 18). In this way the Stundist movement separated even further from the Orthodox church.15

From 1884 there was a campaign to get village assemblies to declare the exile of Stundists, and between 1889 and 1891 six Stundist leaders were sent into exile for five years in Giryusy, a place where the soil was very poor and livelihoods were difficult to maintain (Rowe 1994, 33). Thirty families were still living in exile in 1895 and 1901 (p. 38). Evangelicals faced measures such as fines and community labor as punishment for holding prayer meetings and Bible studies. In 1885 some of the movement’s leaders (including Ratushny and Ryaboshapka) had their movements monitored and were confined to their home villages. Some stonings and violent mob acts against evangelicals were reported in 1886 (p. 33).

By 1881 there were 1000 Baptists reported living in Kherson, Yekaterinslav and Kyiv provinces. The churches grew rapidly. In May of 1882 three thousand Stundists/Baptists lived in Kherson. By 1884 there were more than 2000 members of Ukrainian Baptist churches, and by 1893 there were more than 4500 Ukrainian Baptist members, plus children (Rowe 1994, 35). One of the churches in this study – Kherson Central Baptist – is the oldest Baptist church in the city and a direct descendent of the

15 The Orthodox church baptizes infant children of church members, a practice rejected by Baptists, who endorse adult believer’s baptism only.
Baptists that were in Kherson in the nineteenth century. The Baptist community in Kherson is among the oldest in the former Soviet Union.

The distinction between Stundists and Baptists is vague. Some churches that began as Stundist eventually became known as Baptist; others called themselves Evangelical, which was evidently a less strict group than the Baptists. Baptist churches were organized into the Union of Russian Baptists (formed in Ukraine in 1884) under founding president Johann Wieler. Wieler was exiled in 1886 to Romania (Rowe 1994, 38). The Baptist Union aligned Ukrainian congregations with the strict Baptist tradition, meaning that communion was closed, and membership was only granted by adult Baptism by faith, two tenets that have remained characteristics of Ukrainian Baptist churches into the twenty-first century. Near Kyiv the Stundists called themselves “evangelical brotherhoods” and were independent congregations, without an association (p. 39).

Baptist activity was largely illegal for 21 years until religious toleration was proclaimed after the Revolution of 1905 (Kolarz 1961, 285). In 1894 an earlier (1883) religion law began being interpreted more strictly. It was declared that the Stundists were among “the most harmful non-Orthodox denominations” and they were banned from holding worship services (Rowe 1994, 39). Many leaders were exiled, exiles were extended for those already in exile, and some children were forcibly taken from evangelical families to be raised in monasteries or by Orthodox families (p. 40). In 1894 the Bible society was banned from distributing Bibles in southern Ukraine (p. 41).

Restrictions against Protestant religious expression were not uniform. The Baptist Union was permitted to hold its first conference in 1891, and church leaders also invited representatives from Evangelical Christian congregations. Later conferences, also with Evangelicals, were held in 1902, 1903, and 1904. Some of the Evangelicals asked to join the conference, while keeping the Evangelical name. That was approved and in 1903 the denomination became the Evangelical Christian-Baptists (p. 43). Other Evangelicals decided to form their own denomination, and after a series of congresses approved the All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union in St. Petersburg in 1911 (Rowe 1994, 54).

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16 Congregations formed mostly of aristocrats in St. Petersburg called themselves “Believers of Evangelical Faith” or “Evangelical Christians” by the 1890s (Rowe 1994, 38).
Baptists and Evangelicals shared many tenets of the Baptist version of Christianity, such as believer baptism by immersion. However, one area of differentiation was in church governance. Baptists used a congregational structure with a clearly defined leadership of ordained ministers, while Evangelicals had Brethren roots, thus rejecting the idea of an ordained minister. Instead they elected leaders out of the congregation, although this changed over time. One of their pastors, Ivan Prokhanov, was ordained to ministry in 1924 (Rowe 1994, 89).

The Baptist movement continued to grow in the early twentieth century. New churches were opened. One of these was a mission church in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, begun near the turn of the century through the work of missionaries from nearby Odessa. It was registered as an official church in 1908, and is one of the four Baptist congregations examined in this dissertation.

Although foreigners were instrumental in introducing Protestant Christianity to Ukraine both through the German settlers and active missionaries from other countries,17 several authors have stressed that the Protestant churches in Ukraine should be considered indigenous, or at least “naturalized and nationalized” (Blane 1977; Kolarz 1961, 245). By 1897, 4.85 percent of the population of the Russian Empire was Protestant (Latourette 1941, 142), and the Protestant population was especially pronounced in Ukraine.

4.3 The political and social setting circa 1900

As seen above, Ukrainian evangelicalism began in what is now southern Ukraine, but by 1900 had spread to central Ukraine (Kyiv) and parts of what is now Russia. To complement the ecclesiastical history, we need to understand it in the context of the political, economic, and social setting of the day. The largest denomination in Ukraine today, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, covers a territory that was held by separate countries at the turn of the twentieth century. Parts of what is now western Ukraine had

17 Protestant organizations active in the Russian empire during the nineteenth century up until 1914 include the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Evangelical Alliance, the Berlin Bible School, the Plymouth Brethren, Evangelical Christians of Sweden (several denominations), the (British) Evangelical Continental Society, American Methodists, the London Missionary Society, the Continental Mission of the Sunday School Union, the Society of Friends, the Young Men’s Christian Association, the World’s Student Christian Federation, the Deutsche Orient Mission and the American Bible Society (Latourette 1941, 143).
been part of the Habsburg Empire ruled in Vienna since the 18th century, and before that had been part of Poland, Austria, or Hungary. Eastern Ukraine (called the Left Bank) and central Ukraine (called the Right Bank, in relation to the Dnieper River) was part of the Russian empire. The Right Bank had been part of Poland until conquered by Russia in 1793; the Left Bank had been under the authority of Moscow since the Pereiaslav Agreement of 1654, when the Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky placed Ukraine under Moscow’s protection (and not the protection of either Poland or the Ottoman Empire, the two other choices). Southern Ukraine had belonged to the Ottoman Empire until the 18th century, when it was claimed by Russia. These diverse histories set Western and Eastern Ukraine onto quite different trajectories that would extend well into the twentieth century, and their effects are still felt today, after the unification of Ukrainian territory into an independent Ukrainian state. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the differences between Eastern and Western Ukraine were dramatic, and could be observed in terms of demography, religion, economy, and the character of the Ukrainian nationalist movement.\footnote{For an excellent explanation of the territorial formation of Ukraine from the beginning, see “Ukraine, from imperial periphery to a sovereign state,” in (Szporluk 2000).}

In Western Ukraine, peasants were mostly Ukrainian, townsmen were primarily Jewish and Polish, and bureaucrats of the Habsburg Empire were largely Germans or German-speaking Czechs. The landowners and nobility were Polish, since Galicia and Volhynia had been part of the Polish Commonwealth before being annexed into the Habsburg Empire. Most Ukrainians in this region belonged to the Greek Catholic, or Uniate, Church. The church used Orthodox worship forms but fell under the authority of the Roman pope. The Church had been formed in 1596 at the Union of Brest when four Orthodox bishops wanted to unite (thus the name, Uniate) with the Catholic Church for pragmatic reasons. The Uniate Church was not widely accepted in the region until the seventeenth century (Himka 1990, 53). Most Poles and Germans were Roman Catholic, and Protestantism also had a presence in Galicia and Volhynia.\footnote{At the time of the Protestant Reformation, 25-30% of the Polish nobility in these regions became Calvinist, although that was largely suppressed during the Counter Reformation (Subtelny 1994, 94). I have not found any statistics about the extent of Protestantism in nineteenth-century Western Ukraine, although Baptist and Reformed Churches were active in the area.} In Transcarpathia, the
Hungarian Reformed Church was quite strong among the ethnic Hungarians, and remains strong into the twenty-first century.

Economically, Western Ukraine at the dawn of the twentieth century could be considered a colony of the Habsburg Empire, providing food and low-cost labor for wealthier parts of the empire. The peasants, while officially free (serfdom was abolished gradually since the end of the 18th century), were quite poor. Galicia was considered one of the poorest areas of the Habsburg Empire, with high population growth, low economic growth, and a very small (almost nonexistent) industrial sector. Most Ukrainian immigrants to the United States prior to 1914 came from Galicia and Transcarpathia to escape the dire poverty found there (Nahaylo 1999, 8).

In terms of a Ukrainian nationalist movement, Western Ukraine at this time was considered by some “a bastion of Ukrainianism” (Subtelny 1994, 307). The Austrian government allowed Ukrainians to form cultural and political societies, elect Ukrainians to a parliament, publish Ukrainian-language books and newspapers, and educate their children using the Ukrainian language. Officially, however, the region was becoming even more Polonized than it had been in the past. Polish nationalism was on the rise, Polish language and culture came increasingly to the fore (an example of this is that Polish replaced German as the language of instruction at L’viv University in 1867), and the Polish population increased. In 1910, 58 percent of the population of Galicia was Polish and 40 percent was Ukrainian (even though the Ukrainian population had been over 50 percent in 1849). The Poles continued to own most of the land and were considered the most important part of the region’s population by the Habsburg state (p. 308).

At about this time Poles were instrumental in founding what eventually became one of the churches in this study – Central Baptist Church in L’viv. A Polish Baptist evangelist named Ivan Petrash moved to L’viv in 1920 or 1921. He worked with an American missionary named Julia Savage and they founded the first Baptist church in the city, a mixed congregation of Poles and Ukrainians. The church operated under the authority of the Slavic Baptist Alliance in Warsaw.20 Later in the twentieth century the two ethnic groups separated into different churches.

20 This church history was related by the church pastor in an April 4, 2003 interview.
The rest of Ukraine, meanwhile, belonged to the Russian Empire. The Russian tsar and the Russian people commonly considered Ukraine an integral part of Russia itself. In terms of ethnicity, most Ukrainians were peasants, although there was some Ukrainian nobility. Most urbanites were Russian or Jewish. In Odessa, for example, 45.5 percent of the population were Russian in 1897; 34.7 percent were Jewish; 9.4 percent were Ukrainian; and 4.3 percent were Polish; with smaller amounts of Germans, Greeks, and Armenians (Weinberg 1993, 11). Overall in imperial Ukraine, about one-third of urban dwellers were Ukrainian, and 11.7 percent of the population of the region was Russian (Subtelny 1994, 274). Poles were economically dominant on the Right Bank; Jews made up 8 percent of the population (12.6 percent on the Right Bank) (p. 276). Small portions of the population were descendents of settlers (mostly German) invited to Ukraine by Catherine the Great in the 18th century, and among these were the Mennonites who introduced Ukrainian peasants to evangelical Christianity.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was the dominant religion of Russian-ruled Ukraine, and was under the authority of the Moscow Patriarch, which had effectively been an arm of the Russian state since the eighteenth century. Of course, the Jewish minority practiced the Jewish faith, and there were small numbers of Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics. Protestantism also had a strong foothold here, both within foreign communities and among Ukrainians.

The economy of Ukraine under Imperial Russia was in some respects better than the economy of Galicia and the rest of Western Ukraine. Russian-ruled Ukraine was considered the granary of Europe, and mines had been established in the Donbas (for coal) and in Kryvyi Rih (for iron ore), although industrialization was limited. Odessa was a bustling seaport and attracted Jewish and Ukrainian peasant migrants in large numbers in the early 20th century (Weinberg 1993, 8). However, Ukrainian peasants were very poor, having only been recently released from serfdom. By 1914, two million Ukrainian peasants had migrated to the Russian Far East to work as laborers, many for the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Others were moving into Ukraine’s urban areas (Subtelny 1994, 262).

Ukrainian nationalism was weak in this part of Ukraine. Ukrainian language books and plays, Ukrainian education, and Ukrainian nationalist organizations had been
banned since the 1870s, because the Russian government viewed nationalist activities as Polish interference (Szporluk 2000, 380). The government made some concessions to the nationalists after the Revolution of 1905. Most revolutionary groups were based on class (working against the economic oppression of the peasants, for example), not nationality. As Bohdan Nahaylo writes, the Ukrainian nationalist movement was weak when the Russian Empire collapsed:

Deprived of schools in their own native language, of knowledge about their own history, and of their own cultural and religious institutions, many Ukrainians had come to regard themselves as *malorusy* or Little Russians, in other words as a regional offshoot of the ‘Great Russian’ people (Nahaylo 1999, 8).

As we have seen, at the beginning of the twentieth century Ukraine was far from a unified territory in any sense. Ukrainian lands were governed by two different empires, populated by people who practiced different religions, were educated in different languages, were dominated by people of different ethnicities (Polish and Russian), and were aware of themselves as ethnically Ukrainian to different degrees. This divided history would persist throughout the years of Revolution and the First World War, although attempts were made to unite them. Ukrainians would remain politically divided until 1939, and the regional differences never disappeared.

### 4.4 Protestants after the Revolution

Europe, and Ukraine, plunged into the First World War in 1914; the Russian tsar fell in March 1917. Western Ukraine was scene to some of the bloodiest battles of the war, and Ukrainian territory shifted between Austrian and Russian occupation. Meanwhile, efforts were being made to establish an independent Ukrainian state both in Western Ukraine (one Ukrainian state was formed) and in the areas of Ukraine that had been ruled by Moscow (three Ukrainian states were formed). The three Ukrainian states formed in Central and Eastern Ukraine between 1917 and 1920 all failed, and eventually succumbed to the Bolsheviks, providing the way for Ukraine to become part of the Soviet Union. Western Ukraine was attached to Poland, as decided by the European powers at the Treaty of Paris in 1918.

From the time of the Revolution through 1929, Protestantism grew rapidly in Ukraine. Bolsheviks viewed the Orthodox church as a remnant of tsarist Russia, and for
a few years supported Protestantism as a way of weakening Orthodoxy. Protestants were living in a small window of religious freedom. Moreover, initially government officials were too busy fighting wars and bringing about revolution to take interest in religious affairs. The 1920s has been called a “golden age” for Soviet evangelicals. As they grew, they expanded religious publishing and established seminaries and Bible schools. They conducted missionary work and evangelism without fear of reprisals from the state. In the Russian empire there were 105,000 adult members of Baptist and Evangelical Churches reported in 1905. By 1920 the number had grown to 350,000; by 1929 it had risen to 500,000. Including children and other non-baptized churchgoers, there were approximately three million Baptist and Evangelical adherents in the Soviet Union on the eve of Soviet religious crackdowns (Sawatsky 1993). Of these, a large number were found in Ukraine, since Ukraine was the strongest center of the Baptist-Evangelical faith in the Soviet Union. Rowe estimates that there were about one million full church members in Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in 1927, five times the number that existed ten years previously (Rowe 1994, 91).

Other Protestant groups besides the Evangelicals and Baptists also found the 1920s to be a period of rapid growth. These included Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists. Ivan Voronayev, a former Baptist from Siberia, converted to Pentecostalism when he emigrated to the United States. He traveled to the Soviet Union as a missionary in 1921, founding a Pentecostal church in Odessa called “Christians of Evangelical Faith” (Rowe 1994, 88). Through those who became Pentecostals under him a pattern emerged of new Pentecostal congregations being formed from people who came out of existing Baptist and Evangelical churches (p. 89). The Pentecostal movement spread across the Soviet Union, but was concentrated in Ukraine. The German Mennonites and Lutherans, however, declined rapidly during the post-Revolution years because of outmigration to North and South America.21

21 About 100,000 Mennonites emigrated from the Soviet Union by 1929; even more German Lutherans emigrated. There had been 1.35 million Lutherans in the Soviet Union in 1923 (one million of them were Germans); by 1926 only 900,000 remained (540,000 of them were Germans) (Sawatsky 1993, 321-322). Mennonites had been prominent in Ukraine, Lutherans had not.
4.5 The decline of organized religious life during the 1930s

During the 1930s, Soviet Ukraine faced the horrors of Stalinism, including forced agricultural collectivization, liquidation of the kulaks (the supposedly rich peasants), the imposition of high grain quotas to provide food for Russia and urban dwellers, massive famine (3-6 million deaths), and the Great Terror, when all people who supposedly posed a threat to the Soviet Union were executed or sent to labor camps. Ukraine was also rapidly industrialized and urbanized. Churches and the clergy were hit especially hard. By the Second World War, fewer than twelve Orthodox parishes were operating in all of Ukraine. In Kyiv alone, which had boasted 1,435 priests and 1,600 churches before the revolution in 1917, only two churches were operating (with only three priests) when Germans occupied the city in 1941 (Davis 1995, 12). In the USSR as a whole, 80,000 Orthodox priests, monks, and nuns were killed by the late 1930s (p. 11). These figures do not take into consideration the loss of large numbers of non-Orthodox churches and clergy, including Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews. One estimate of the number of Protestants sentenced to Siberian camps, usually not to return, is 22,000 (Rowe 1994). Many church buildings, including prominent cathedrals in nearly every city, were destroyed. Others were converted to non-religious uses such as storage buildings and theaters.

Mennonite settlements were destroyed during the period of dekulakization and collectivization; many of the ethnic Germans were exiled to the Russian Far east. Between 1929 and 1939, the number of Protestant evangelicals declined in the Soviet Union to one-fifth of their previous number. High taxes were demanded of churches; clergy were arrested; contact with believers abroad was limited and finally severed completely in 1935; the Baptist Union ceased to exist by 1935, at which time all Protestant leaders were in prison or killed; the Lutheran church collapsed in 1937-38; the Mennonite church also collapsed at that time; the National Council of Evangelical Christians was disbanded in 1930; the Pentecostal Union was banned (Rowe 1994, 100; Sawatsky 1993, 322). The Soviet government “uncovered” espionage cases against Baptists who they accused of working for Poland. There were other instances of Baptists convicted of organizing mining or other industrial accidents (Kolarz 1961, 303). Ukrainian Protestants were left with no pastors, few places to worship, and little
communication with each other, let alone believers in other parts of the world. By 1931 at most ten evangelical churches in Ukraine remained open (Rowe 1994, 99). Bibles were printed in 1928 for the last time in the Soviet Union until 1956 (p. 95). The evangelical church of the 1930s Soviet Union became largely invisible, meeting in small groups in private homes.

The greatest tragedy of the 1930s was the Great Famine of 1932-33, “the result of a reckless collectivization and dekulakization policy and an even more reckless exporting of grain in 1930-31 to acquire hard currency, combined with a mediocre harvest” (Martin 2002). Since the decision was made to spare urban populations the brunt of the famine at the expense of those in the grain-growing regions, and because Ukrainian evangelicals were predominantly a rural, peasant population, they suffered severely at the time. The loss of church members to hunger contributed to the decline of Ukrainian Protestant churches during that decade.

One unplanned outcome of the events of the 1930s is that the divide between Ukrainians in Poland and Ukrainians in the Soviet Union increased. The famine, the purges, and all of the horrors of the 1930s meant that Soviet Ukrainians entered the era of World War II after enduring a decade of terror that their Western cousins had escaped. Western Ukraine was never part of the Russian Empire and had not been through the Russian Revolution or its tumultuous aftermath of agricultural collectivization, purges, and religious persecution. Western Ukraine had a much more robust nationalist movement, a longer history of nationalist institutions, and would have a much shorter acquaintance under the Soviet regime than the rest of Ukraine. These important differences would persist throughout the rest of the twentieth century and into the era of the independent post-Soviet Ukrainian state.

While Soviet Ukraine suffered through the 1930s, Western Ukraine – the Polish provinces of Volhynia and East Galicia – remained a cultural battleground between Poles and Ukrainians. The Polish government pursued a policy of confrontation with the Ukrainians, bringing in Polish settlers after the First World War. The Greek Catholic Church remained strong, and the Ukrainian nationalist movement gained momentum. One of Western Ukraine's Protestant organizations was the Ukrainian Evangelical

\[\text{22 For a more nuanced explanation see (Martin 2001).}\]
Reformed Church, which had about thirty congregations and fifteen pastors operating in Galicia in 1939. The Ukrainian nationalist spirit had evidently infused this body of believers, who desired to be a nationalist church. They claimed Ukrainians of the past as direct antecedents to their movement, including the philosopher Skovoroda (1722-1794) and poets Ivan Franko (1856-1916) and Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), who once wrote a poem memorializing the Czech Protestant reformer Jan Hus (Kolarz 1961, 272-273). A few of these Reformed congregations survive in Western Ukraine to the present day.

4.6 The Second World War and the reshaping of Soviet Protestantism

The war changed the territorial makeup of Ukraine when Stalin moved West into Poland. The economy of the new lands annexed by the Soviets in 1939 was predominantly agricultural, the Greek Catholic Church was pervasive, and the Ukrainian nationalist movement was strong. The Soviet Union immediately added the Western Ukrainian territories to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, sending in scores of Soviet administrators, teachers, journalists and other workers to enable the transition. They also began the process of agricultural collectivization in the newly annexed territory. Church lands were confiscated, religious education in schools was banned, and massive repressions were conducted against possible enemies of the state. These enemies included 1.2 million Poles and 400,000 Ukrainians who were subsequently deported to the Far East (Subtelny 1994, 456). The Sovietization of Western Ukraine was interrupted by World War II. For a time nearly all of Ukraine became a German colony when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union during the Second World War.\(^\text{23}\) When the Soviets recovered and sent the Germans into retreat (1943-44) they continued processes of political and economic consolidation that had begun earlier. Ukraine’s border was established just west of L’viv, where it remains today.

The Ukrainian people, and especially Ukrainian Jews, suffered enormously during the war years. Ukraine lost 5.3 million people during the war, and many more in the war’s aftermath. This represents perhaps one in every six people who had been living in Ukrainian territory (Subtelny 1994, 479). During the war Soviets exiled Poles, Crimean Tatars, ethnic Germans (including Mennonites), and others to the Far East and Central

\(^{23}\) Portions of southern Ukraine were occupied by Romanian Nazis.
Asia. After the war ended many of those suspected of collaborating with the Nazis were killed, including former prisoners of war. The Soviet government also liquidated the Greek Catholic Church\textsuperscript{24} and implemented collectivization in Western Ukraine.

The long term significance of this period for Ukraine was the annexation of areas that had been attached to Poland or Austria-Hungary since the 14\textsuperscript{th} century. It also permanently annexed Bukovyna from Romania and added to Ukraine Southern Bessarabia, an area southwest of Odessa along the Black Sea coast that had previously belonged to Russia and that included the city of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy (another of this project’s research locations).

In terms of the Protestant churches of Ukraine, the World War II era was important for several reasons. First, churches under German occupation experienced a brief moment of religious freedom and had time to recover from the purges of the 1930s. Second, during the last years of the war the Soviets thawed towards religion in general, perhaps because they realized that their suffering people needed a morale boost that the church could provide (and thus help the country defeat the enemy). In October 1944, Evangelical Christians and Baptists were encouraged to convene a conference in Moscow; church leaders were released from prison to attend. They organized the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists (ECB), an umbrella denomination under which all evangelical groups were expected to register. In post-Soviet Ukraine a version of that 1944 group remains the largest and most influential Protestant denomination. Following that agreement, other smaller denominations joined the ECB; otherwise they would not have been permitted to function as legal religious organizations in the Soviet Union. Of these the largest group was the Pentecostal movement. In 1946 four Pentecostal leaders met with ECB officials to draft an agreement whereby they could join the denomination. In order to satisfy the Baptists, the Pentecostals agreed to refrain from speaking in tongues and footwashing in public worship. About 40 percent of Pentecostals in the Soviet Union went along with that agreement and joined the ECB; the rest went underground. The merger was evidently rocky: one person wrote that “there wasn’t even a honeymoon period” (Durasoff, 1972 #763, 28, cited in Teraudkalns 1999, 227). The Christians in the Apostolic Spirit (the oldest Pentecostal denomination) and

\textsuperscript{24} See especially (Bociurkiw 1987).
the Temperance Christians joined the ECB in 1947; Baptists in the Baltics and Western Ukraine and Belorussia (new additions to the Soviet Union), also joined, as did about 70 Churches of Christ, in Ukraine. The Free Christians (Brethren) in Transcarpathia joined in 1946. Methodists could not join, because they did not believe in adult-only Baptism. In Latvia and Western Ukraine most Methodist church members were baptized and joined a Baptist church (Rowe 1994, 117). The ECB was able to actively register congregations until 1949; it also tried to provide Bibles and other Christian literature for church members. The leadership was under considerable pressure from the state and from congregations, and was accused of being “entrenched” and “authoritarian” (Rowe 1994, 116; Sawatsky 1992, 323-324). Some congregations chose to remain independent, and operated underground until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

4.7 Post-war to Perestroika evangelicalism

The immediate post-war years were spent rebuilding Ukraine as an integral part of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party of Ukraine was purged (half of the party leadership was replaced) and new members were incorporated into the rank and file. Stalin died in 1953, and the Soviet government in Ukraine was immediately realigned. The decision was made to strengthen the Communist Party in Western Ukraine and recruit local party officials, instead of continuing to send in loyal outsiders from other parts of the Soviet Union.

According to scholar Andrew Wilson, during the postwar years the processes of Russification and Sovietization had a great impact on the population of Ukraine, especially in the east and south, where urban areas aligned with “the official Soviet-Russian hybrid identity” (Wilson 2000, 148), and education was predominantly in Russian. In parts of Western Ukraine, however, Wilson reports that 90 percent of children were educated in Ukrainian in 1989.

Economically, the postwar decades brought relative prosperity to Ukraine when compared to the difficult years of the past. Politically, Ukraine was stable, thanks in part to an active government that arrested political and religious dissidents. In the 1960s and 1970s up to 1,000 Ukrainian nationalist activists, most of them from L’viv or Kyiv, were
held in Russian prisons. About half of all political prisoners in Russia at the time were Ukrainian (Wilson 2000, 153).

During Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ following the death of Stalin, many Christian prisoners were released from the gulag and evangelical churches grew. At that time problems within the ECB between Pentecostals and Baptists surfaced, and more Pentecostals withdrew from the Union, forming unregistered churches. Even some non-Pentecostal churches had trouble registering with the ECB, and so remained independent (Rowe 1994, 132).

Khrushchev ended his thaw and implemented an anti-religious campaign between 1959 and 1961, banning unregistered churches, regulating all religious services, and arresting various church leaders. By 1962, ninety-four evangelical activists (from the entire USSR) were in prison (Sawatsky 1993, 325). Baptists reported that there were 200 imprisonments during the campaign, and Rowe has counted even more trials of Protestant Christians from news accounts (Sawatsky 1994, 142). From 1959 to 1964 about half of all registered churches were closed (including Orthodox). Most monasteries and convents were closed, and five of eight Orthodox seminaries were closed. In June 1961 the Komsomol newspaper announced that 500 places of worship had been closed in two regions, and Baptists reported that 300 of their Soviet churches were closed in the first six months that year. Included among them were almost all of the village congregations in Kherson and Nikolaev, the historical heartland of the Ukrainian Baptist movement, and a region that plays prominently in this dissertation (Sawatsky 1994, 138).

During this time of persecution the ECB leadership was torn between wanting to faithfully administer a large Christian denomination and wanting to please the Soviet government out of fear that their Christian work could be terminated completely. Many pastors and church members within the ECB felt that their denominational leaders were too concerned with following government rules and not concerned enough with carrying on the life of the church. However, the fears of the leaders were not unfounded: in 1960 the national council of the Seventh Day Adventists was disbanded after refusing to submit to the government (Rowe 1994, 139).

A reform movement grew within the ECB, but after failing to achieve their goals of bringing about change within the denomination, in 1965 a group formed their own
association, the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Ukrainian Georgi Vins was the most prominent member of this group. The reformers were upset by, among other things, the decision of the ECB leadership that government rules forbidding children to attend public worship be followed. The KGB is said to have told Vins that “Children and young people belong to the government, not to you” (Rowe 1994, 146). The services of the unregistered groups were under constant surveillance. Government agents would visit churches and report the names of children attending to school officials. Some children were even removed from their homes to be raised by the state (Sawatsky 1993, 326). Vins was arrested in 1974 (already having previously spent several years in prison), exiled to the United States, and spent the rest of his life raising awareness in the West of the conditions faced by Soviet Protestant believers.

Although maintaining churches continued to be difficult for unregistered groups, during the 1970s and early 1980s the situation stabilized for registered congregations. Leaders of the ECB became increasingly successful in bargaining for concessions with their government handlers, arguing that otherwise more people would move to the unregistered churches. During this time Christians in unregistered congregations became a “shield” for the entire evangelical community, “bearing the brunt of the atheist attack for twenty years until the advent of glasnost and perestroika” (Rowe 1994, 185).

By the mid 1980s Ukraine and the Soviet Union was beginning to change under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. He addressed deep problems of economic stagnation through what he called perestroika, or restructuring. Economic restructuring was carried out alongside a program of openness: political prisoners were released, free speech rights were advanced, and in 1988 the Soviet government officially celebrated the first millennium of Christianity in Russia. The occasion marked the end of religious repression in the USSR. Protestants were allowed to print or import 100,000 Russian language Bibles and 100,000 Ukrainian language Bibles, which had chronically been in short supply (Sawatsky 1993, 333).

The denominational organization of Protestant churches in the Soviet Union changed. In 1990, on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Evangelical Christians-Baptists declared themselves a union of national Baptist associations, although they did not completely federalize until 1992 when Baptist associations in the newly
independent states organized national unions (only Estonia and Latvia had done so in 1990). The denomination’s president and other officers were elected without government interference (Rowe 1994, 223). At about the same time (1989), Pentecostals withdrew from the ECB and joined with other Pentecostals to form an independent Pentecostal Union. Others who left the ECB included ethnic Germans emigrating to the West (this was especially so in Kazakhstan, which lost one thousand German Baptist families by 1990), and Ukrainians who emigrated to various Western countries. Unregistered Baptists in Ukraine formed the Fraternal Council of ECB Independent Churches of the Southern Region, and were granted government registration in 1989 (224). The Council of Churches (the reformers mentioned earlier) met openly in 1989. One of its leaders had been living in hiding for twenty years (225).

4.8 Conclusion

At the close of the Soviet period, Ukrainian evangelicals had no idea that they would soon enter a period of religious freedom, openness to the West, and rapid growth. Instead, they were a tired group of people – scarred by decades operating within an anti-religious state. Thousands of Ukrainian believers had endured prison or worse, and all church members were in survival mode. They thought little about open evangelization campaigns or mission work, and instead were focused on meeting the spiritual needs of church members and their children. Communities were essentially closed systems, with few new converts who were willing to join such a stigmatized group. Evangelical churches were marked by strict rules of behavior and dress, and churches were ruled by hierarchical systems of church government.

We also see that the Ukraine in which these long-suffering evangelicals lived was a country with a varied regional history. Among other things, this meant that religious life in western parts of the country was arguably more vibrant than elsewhere, perhaps because the strict religious policies of the Soviet Union had only been in effect there since the end of the Second World War. Despite the decades of religious persecution, Ukraine remained the Bible belt of the Soviet Union, and was poised to become the former Soviet state most known for religious tolerance, religious diversity, and religious growth.
Chapter Five: Ukraine's evangelical churches after independence

5.1 Introduction

This chapter picks up where the previous one left off – at Ukraine’s independence in 1991. At that time the existing evangelical churches faced a completely new set of circumstances that opened them up to interaction with believers overseas and provided them with the money and the free atmosphere in which to make changes in church life. Simultaneously a new set of evangelical churches came on the scene. These were founded on Western models by (mostly) American missionaries using (mostly) American money. When Ukraine declared its independence from Russia in 1991, nearly every aspect of social life changed. Religious life was particularly affected, as formerly strict religious policies loosened to allow freedom of religion and the presence of foreign missionaries on Ukrainian soil. This chapter examines the growth of evangelicalism in post-Soviet Ukraine, a growth that occurred both in traditional Ukrainian churches which outlasted the Soviet regime and in new churches founded primarily by foreign missionaries and their recent Ukrainian converts. The following two chapters analyze four traditional Baptist churches and four new churches and their members’ views towards Ukrainian regionalism, nationalism, and the West. Here I will provide the backdrop for that discussion, documenting the growth of evangelical churches in Ukraine, explaining the place of transnational activity in those churches, and describing congregational life in three of the case study churches.

5.2 Growth of religious organizations in Ukraine

Of special importance for processes of religious transformation in Ukraine is a background of religious diversity that sets it apart from other post-Soviet republics. Both Belarus and Russia are dominated by the Russian Orthodox Church. In Ukraine, however, there are three Orthodox churches that have not been able to come to agreement for a merger. As a result, there is no one church for the state to support. Complicating matters, Ukraine also has a large Catholic minority. The country has been called a “model of religious pluralism among formerly socialist societies” (Wanner 2004, 736). A history of religious diversity has set the stage for a degree of religious freedom that, more than a decade after independence, has led to the growth of all religious faiths represented.
in Ukraine. These include traditional faiths such as the three main divisions of Orthodox Christianity, two forms of Catholicism, and historical Protestant churches. Moreover, the diversity of organized religious expression in Ukraine continues to grow. Figure 5.1 documents the growth of a wide range of religious communities registered with the Ukrainian government. It is safe to assume that other religious groups, while present in Ukraine, remain off of the list because they are unregistered.

**Figure 5.1: Registered religious communities in Ukraine, 1994-2003***

<table>
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<td>1536</td>
<td>1652</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>2033</td>
<td>2153</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostal)</td>
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<td>802</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>1066</td>
<td>1240</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
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<td>712</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>840</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witnesses</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day Adventists</td>
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<td>526</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>916</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church</td>
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<td>1163</td>
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<td>988</td>
<td>1013</td>
<td>1107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>244</td>
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<td>Transcarpathian Reformed Church</td>
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<td>98</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old Believers</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>Muslim communities</td>
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<td>192</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>289</td>
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<td>Jewish communities</td>
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<td>119</td>
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<td>Other Charismatic Churches</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>257</td>
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<td>Church of the Full Gospel (Charismatics)</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>278</td>
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<td>Other Protestant Churches</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>292</td>
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<td>Hare Krishna</td>
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<td>Pagan organizations</td>
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<td>Other Eastern religious communities</td>
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<td>Armenian Apostolic Church</td>
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<td>Other Pentecostal communities</td>
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<td>304</td>
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<td>The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious organizations</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15459</strong></td>
<td><strong>17610</strong></td>
<td><strong>19005</strong></td>
<td><strong>21693</strong></td>
<td><strong>23400</strong></td>
<td><strong>26271</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>


* ‘Religious communities’ include places of regular worship, administrative centers of religious organizations, monasteries, missions, and theological educational institutions.
The arrival of religious freedom led directly to the development of transnational linkages between religious organizations in Ukraine and religious organizations in other countries. This is happening in virtually all types of organizations, from Orthodox to Protestant to Jewish to Muslim. Although Ukrainian Baptist churches have a history of interaction with the West that dates back to the nineteenth century and that continued, albeit in a limited way, during the decades of the Soviet Union, the transnational networking has flourished at a new level since the era of *glasnost’* and Ukraine’s independence in 1991. This transnational access has fundamentally impacted Ukrainian religious life. For people involved in religious organizations in Ukraine, transnational affiliations do not remain in the purely religious arena, but can affect all areas of life. Examples of this include education, as more people study at religious colleges and seminaries funded by international partners; economic, as jobs are created in church construction, humanitarian aid, religious publication houses, and so forth; social, as Ukrainians develop friendships and even establish families with foreign visitors; and medical, through the work of visiting medical teams or through humanitarian projects to send needy Ukrainians overseas for complicated surgical procedures. This phenomenon is taking place in other post-soviet contexts. For example, Melissa Caldwell has written about a network of soup kitchens sponsored by the transnationally oriented Christian Church of Moscow, and how these kitchens provide not just material, but social, support for needy Muscovites (2004).

In 1996 Mark Elliott, a well-known scholar of evangelical missions in the countries of the former Soviet Union, published a list (Figure 5.2) of Protestant denominations in the former Soviet Union (1996). Nine years later the list is obsolete (after all, 1,000 new religious communities are registering in Ukraine every year), but it provides a sense of the first Protestant churches to be active in the newly independent republics, including in Ukraine. Of the five categories Elliott includes, the churches examined in this dissertation fall into the first (Churches present since 1917), the fourth (New churches), and the fifth (Unaffiliated churches). That last group can be considered a variation of ‘New churches,’ since many in both categories were founded by Western missions organizations.
A common thread that ties the disparate collection of Ukrainian Protestant churches together is their internalization of transnationalism. That is, even the historical, Ukrainian Baptist churches are highly integrated within transnational networks of people, ideas, finance and theological training. At the same time, these churches are now an indispensable part of the Ukrainian religious landscape. Catherine Wanner has written about what she sees as the likely future cultural influence of Protestant churches in Ukraine. She predicts that their current magnetism “will grow and slowly influence the practices, identities and understandings of community and morality” in Ukraine. She thinks they will find “an audible political voice,” and that “over time, along with other aspects of Western culture and ideology which are indigenously adapted to local cultural values and practices, evangelical communities will contribute to the social fabric and a new moral order in Ukraine” (2003, 285).

When the Soviet parliament declared freedom of religion on October 9, 1990, a new era of church life began. 25 This freedom brought many changes to the established

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25 This law was called the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. It gave legal standing to religious groups, allowing them to be involved in religious education, publishing, and charity. It
Protestant churches, and opened Ukraine to receive missionaries from abroad. Missionaries came from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, including some sent by denominationally based churches (like the Southern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church in America), those sent by non- or inter-denominational mission boards (like SEND International), and those who came independently or were sent by one or two home congregations. Some of the missionaries partnered with existing Ukrainian congregations, while others formed new independent churches. Churches begun by missionaries included all types of traditions: Charismatic, Baptist, Nazarene, independent evangelical, Presbyterian, Methodist, and so forth. Also active were groups like the Latter-Day Saints.

Gauging the number of foreign religious workers who came to Ukraine in the first years after independence is difficult; also nearly impossible is determining the amount of foreign currency that was sent or brought into Ukraine by missionaries and recent Ukrainian Baptist emigrants during those years. In 1994 one source estimated that more than 1,113 foreign missionaries were working across the former Soviet Union as a whole (Schindler, Bedford-Adamski, and Elliott 1994); the figure cited in the same publication increased to 3190 a year later (Miller 1995). In another source only 48 missionaries were listed as working in Ukraine in 1994, but the figure rose to 463 by 2001 (Johnstone and Mandryk 2002, 10). Most of the missionaries were from the United States, although others came from a variety of countries including the Netherlands, South Africa, Canada, and South Korea. According to the *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, the largest non-indigenous missions organizations active in the countries of the former Soviet Union in 1995 were Youth With a Mission, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Church of Christ, and the Southern Baptist Convention (Meadows 1995, 10). By 1997 the Institute for East-West Christian Studies had identified 561 Western and South Korean agencies working in the former Soviet Union. Of those organizations, about 90 percent were Protestant and the rest were Orthodox and Catholic. They reported that 5,049 Western missionaries and 557 South Korean missionaries were working in the former Soviet Union in 1996, but did not have figures for individual republics. These included about 1,962 career missionaries.

ended government funding of atheistic education, and removed the ban on religious education in public schools (Glanzer 1999).
Between late 1991 and early 1993 at least 50 million Bibles were sent to Russia and Ukraine by American church groups (Ramet 1998, 266).

Ukrainian evangelicals fondly recall the early years of independence as the most fruitful era of their churches, when large numbers of people would show up at minimally advertised evangelistic meetings. Of these, the most prominent large-scale evangelization in Ukraine and Russia in the early 1990s was by American evangelist Billy Graham and his organization, although others came as well. A *New York Times* article from 1993 mentions Jack Finley, Morris Cerullo, and a charismatic preacher named Bob Wilcox visiting Moscow (Schmemann 1993). As part of this project, young adults interviewed in 2003 at a Baptist church in Kherson described being raised during the first decade of religious freedom and the era of the large stadium-style evangelistic events. Although they had been children ten years earlier at the time of the Billy Graham work, in a focus group meeting they mentioned their church’s participation in the Moscow event as a significant connection between their church and the West. Several people from the church had traveled there to sing in the 7,000 voice choir, and one young woman said that “many of the songs they sang there we now sing in our choir.”

Russian evangelical pastor Sergei Nikolev was involved in evangelism in Russia in the early 1990s, even serving as interpreter for Billy Graham’s preaching tours there. He later wrote about the immediate post-Soviet years in an American magazine:

> When the Communists fell and the door was opened, we thought we needed only a few years to convert Russia for Christ. We started very intensive evangelization. We preached to hundreds of thousands, started missions and Bible studies, distributed millions of Bibles and Christian literature, and planted a lot of churches (1998).

Ukrainians told me that the situation in their new country was much the same. Churches could invite an American evangelist and on short notice fill a large hall with seekers. All evangelistic activities were well-attended; churches were full and were multiplying.

Although the percentage of Ukrainians who identify as Protestants remains small, especially when compared to the traditional Orthodox churches and the Greek Catholic Church, the 1990s saw real growth. According to sociological surveys, in 1994 only 0.6 percent of Ukraine’s population considered themselves to be Protestant. That figure rose...
to 2.5 percent by 2001 (Krindatch 2003, 42). The following chart (Figure 5.3) uses information from Figure 5.1 to show the growth in the number of registered religious communities from 1994 to 2003. The number of Protestant communities more than doubled during that time period, which was faster growth than most other groups. This data also shows that Protestant churches make up about one quarter of all registered religious communities in Ukraine. (See Figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.3: Registered religious communities* in Ukraine, 1994-2003**

[Figure showing growth of different religious groups from 1994 to 2003]


* ‘Religious communities’ include places of regular worship, administrative centers of religious organizations, monasteries, missions, and theological educational institutions.

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26 Krindatch reported findings from a 1994 survey by the Institute of Sociology of the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences and a September 2001 survey by the foundation ‘Sotsys i Deminitsiatiivi’, Kiev.

27 The only exception is the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which grew by 74%. The number of registered Protestant communities grew 53%; Ukrainian Orthodox Church (both Moscow and Kiev Patriarchates) grew by 40%, the Roman Catholic Church by 30%, and the Greek Catholic Church by 11%.
5.3 Ukrainian Baptist Churches adapting to the new era

At a Baptist church in Kherson I met a visiting American at a Saturday afternoon wedding. Fred owns a construction company in Arizona and is a frequent guest of the church. He has been to Ukraine about twenty times since the early 1990s, and my Ukrainian host explained that Fred was the main financial sponsor of their church building project, currently underway. Fred and his wife, Marge, had come to Ukraine for a short visit with another American couple, first time visitors. Before the service Fred came up to me to talk – evidently my Ukrainian host had told him a bit about my project. He told me that he always tried to remind himself that “Salvation does not come from the West,” and had written that phrase in the front of his Bible. We met up again after the wedding, and he described his first experience in Kherson years ago, an experience that
made him want to return time after time. This narrative, an excerpt from my field notes, captures the heady atmosphere of the early and mid 1990s as remembered in 2003:

*When the service finished, we were all told to leave the room so that the wedding banquet could be set up. And please, a woman called out, due to the difficult economic situation, only those with an invitation are allowed to stay. I met up with Fred and Marge again in the foyer. The other American woman is clutching a wedding gift in her hand. She somehow looks so uneasy, as if she’s been put in a position in which she is culturally out of her comfort zone. I don’t see anyone else with a gift.*

*Fred tells me the story of how he began his involvement here in Kherson. A number of years ago he was involved with Josh McDowell Ministries on a trip to Russia, but in the group there were thirty Americans and only one interpreter. He was really frustrated that he couldn’t talk directly with the Russian people. Then a friend in the States invited him to go to Ukraine with another organization, based in Texas. On that trip there would be one interpreter for each person. They came to Kherson, where they had contacts in the Central Baptist Church. They were told to knock on doors in the Shumin’sky area of the city, a section with about 100,000 residents and no known Protestant believers. Fred was not a pastor or a trained evangelist (he owned his own construction company) and this was really new to him. But he and his interpreter went door to door and told people about a loving heavenly Father, and about a movie (the Jesus film) that would be shown at the end of the week. He said that most people opened their doors and invited them in for tea. Others stood in their entranceways and talked for 45 minutes. Many people came to the film, and many of them repented. When his train left at the end of his time in Kherson, about 150 people met at the station to see him and his group off. As the train departed, it started out slowly, and the crowd of people moved along with it, many of the people weeping. Fred wept, too, for the next several hours, and knew that he would be coming back.*

Fred’s work in Kherson is representative of the partnerships that many ECB churches developed with Westerners at that time. It was short-term; he came back for repeated short visits; he was a large financial donor; he never learned Russian; he brought friends and family members with him; and he developed friendly relationships with people in the church over the course of several years.

Most ECB church members that I met in Ukraine spoke of American groups who had worked with them in a variety of evangelistic, humanitarian, educational, and building projects. It was not uncommon for large urban ECB churches to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars from Western supporters, primarily for church building projects. Most Ukrainian cities, and many small towns, now boast new Baptist church buildings constructed primarily with Western funds and Ukrainian labor. Western short-
term teams came to work alongside Ukrainian Baptists at children’s camps, evangelistic projects, English classes, medical ministries, and construction projects. Some missionaries worked within ECB churches for longer periods, helping establish Bible colleges and seminaries (like Tavriskiy Christian Institute in Kherson) and other ministries.

When I talked with young adults from various evangelical churches in Ukraine and asked them their conversion stories, they often described their first visit to a church. They had come with common stereotypes in mind, thinking that most religious people were old babushki and that the church would not be relevant for young educated people like them. They had been expecting to find a place filled with old ladies in black headscarves, and instead found that young people also attended worship. An example of this is Sergey, a young man in his 20s living in Kherson. He became a Baptist through the influence of a Christian army commander while he was serving his mandatory military tour of duty:

The first time I really encountered believers was when I was in the Army. Our commander was a believer. And he told the soldiers regularly to come to God because we’re young and God can change our lives and God would provide everything in our lives and can help us live in a right way. And when he said that, I perceived him as I could imagine Orthodox believers, and I understood that in the church there should be old ladies and gentlemen in the church – that is, people who were old. That’s how I understood life, that people who go to church are that age. . . . And, of course, when I came and when I left the army he took us around a bit and we were in Baptist churches and I didn’t think that it would be that way; there were even young people. It was very interesting for me. That impression was great and joyous, I understood that my prior understanding of the church had been wrong.

Somber-looking babushki are still the backbone of many Baptist churches, but the present leadership core consists of men who grew up in Baptist families in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Newcomers of the 1990s are an important congregational segment, and in some cases make up half or more of a given church, particularly in urban areas. These newer believers include people of all ages. In Vinnytsia I participated in two women’s Bible studies made up mostly of new Baptists. One group consisted of grandmothers in their late 50s and 60s; the other group included young mothers, middle aged matrons, and an elderly war veteran. These women came from both atheist and
Orthodox backgrounds, and one woman had returned to the Baptist faith of her childhood after living most of her life away from the church.

The young adult segment of Baptist churches, while bringing energy and creativity to congregational life, poses a great challenge for the churches. These young people were raised during the free era and have few personal recollections of the anti-religious persecution that was endured by church elders. Young people who have entered from outside the Baptist tradition have even less in common with church leaders. This generational dichotomy has been difficult for many congregations, and will be examined more fully in Chapter Seven.

I visited Central Baptist Church in Vinnytsia the first time on a Saturday evening in October. I had traveled with my Ukrainian research assistant to visit the city for the weekend, intent on making contacts that would open up Central Baptist to me as a research site. The church was widely known by Baptists in other cities to be one of the largest churches in the country, with about 1500 members. Since members include only baptized adults, the actual number of people involved with the church is at least twice that. We arrived on Saturday afternoon after a long day on the road and were guests at the apartment of relatives of a Ukrainian Baptist woman, formerly of that church, that I had already become acquainted with in the United States. After a quick but bountiful supper we raced over to the church for the evening service. The building itself was impressive: the main church hall had three balconies; skillful painting made concrete columns look like marble from a distance; and extensive gold highlights reminded me of the interior of an opera house. The entire front wall was covered by a mural of green hills, flowers, and a mountain in the distance, with an angel flying overhead – presumably a rendering of heaven.

The grand atmosphere of Vinnytsia Central Baptist underscores the central role of the church building and worship services in Ukrainian Baptist life. Devout Baptists are expected to attend all of the services, which in Vinnytsia were held Sunday morning and evening, Wednesday evening, and Saturday evening. Most urban Baptist churches, this one included, have more than one choir which rehearses twice a week for a couple of hours at each rehearsal, preparing two or more anthems for each worship service (in which the choirs sing on a rotating schedule). Other regular church activities include
Bible classes for adults and children, prayer meetings, small group Bible studies, youth group meetings, community service (such as serving at soup kitchens, children’s shelters, or medical clinics), and evangelism in prisons (and orphanages, hospitals, and at youth camps).

Some Ukrainian Baptists make extremely high time commitments to their church activities. A lay youth leader at Central Baptist had gathered a team of eleven people to help him in the ministry, including several full-time volunteers. Pastors have little time off, and work often seems to take priority over family life. A deacon I met in Vinnytsia works two jobs to keep his family financially afloat, sleeping only two or three hours per night, but is unwilling to curtail his church obligations. In addition to his jobs he spends several evenings each week at church for diaconal duties. One Presbyterian pastor, a Ukrainian who had previously served as a Baptist pastor, complained that American missionaries in Ukraine are teaching lazy habits to the upcoming generation of church leaders by taking time off and only working a certain number of hours each day. He does not approve of the forty hour work week and thinks that people should work as hard as they can for the church. There is a very strong work ethic in Ukrainian Baptist churches – people are expected to devote themselves physically and financially to the greatest extent possible to the labor of the church.

Great care is put into planning, funding, and constructing church buildings that are impressive, attractive, and functional. Marina, a young woman from a Baptist church in Kherson, said that “we have a very beautiful building and when people come here they can see that it is a real temple [khram], and they feel the presence of God here and it affects them somehow.” Vinnytsia Central Baptist was typical of the Baptist churches in this study in that its building was largely paid for by Christians in the United States, but the actual labor was done by church members. When asked, pastors and church members admitted that the building had been funded by people overseas, but they seemed edgy about the question and never disclosed detailed financial information. Vinnytsia Central Baptist was also typical of the four Baptist churches examined here in that raising money for building projects (as opposed to human resource needs) was a central focus of its international fundraising activities. In late 2002, for example, the pastors had recently
returned from a fundraising tour in the United States to support the construction of a Bible college adjacent to the church.

My observations of that first evening service speak to the diffusion of transnational relationships into Ukrainian Baptist church life. Foreign visitors appear regularly in the pulpit, pastors speak about the West, and choirs sing some of the same anthems that are known to church choirs in the United States.

*The first sermon of the night was given by a young assistant pastor from Florida, his nationality immediately betrayed by his bleached blond hair, slick haircut, and sideburns. His senior pastor back in Florida, he told the congregation through a Russian interpreter, had already visited here in the past, and he himself was very happy to do the same. His sermon was based on Romans 1:8-15, about the importance of the gospel message. A few times he resorted to the line, “In America…” For example, he told the congregation that Americans drink sweet tea (and “just as the sugar is dissolved in the tea, so should the gospel be dissolved into our lives”). In America, we use the phrase “24-7.” In America, sometimes we think of teenagers as barbarians. The second sermon was given in Ukrainian by an older man, so I understood little of it. I did catch him talking about Canada at one point, and asked my helper Tanya about it later. She said that he told people that Canada is the best country in the world, that it was one of the first countries which accepted Ukraine’s independence and is quite simply just a wonderful country. The young-looking choir sang songs that I know as American hymns, but translated into Russian. A solo was sung by a young girl with blonde hair, in Russian. There will be a marriage conference for two days next weekend. Come meet for prayer at 6:30 a.m. some day this week. When the service ended, Tanya and I went up to the front with Maksim (our host’s nephew) to talk to the pastor, Viktor Sergeyevich. I thought it was a good sign [for me] when I noticed his tie decorated with American flags…*

This passage illustrates how interaction with the West is woven into almost every aspect of Ukrainian Baptist church life. In this worship service a visiting American preached the first sermon (most services have three sermons); one of the Ukrainian pastors, newly returned from a visit to North America, described the wonders of Canada from the pulpit; the senior pastor greeted me wearing a tie covered with American flags. The next day one of the Sunday morning sermons was preached by another American guest, a worker with Gideons, the group that distributes Bibles worldwide. Other public reminders of foreign friends observed that weekend (along with the building itself) included American songs translated into Ukrainian and Russian as well as Western missionaries from two
different mission organizations who worked in Vinnytsia and attended Central Baptist Church.28

As we will see in Chapter Seven, Ukrainian Baptists do not wholeheartedly accept this omnipresent transnationalism in their midst, even though they have participated in its development and embrace aspects of the transnational relationships. One thing, however, is clear: Western (chiefly American) influence in Ukrainian evangelical churches is not limited to those churches actually founded by missionaries. All of the congregations that I visited of the country’s largest and oldest Baptist denomination are living a transnational existence. All of them are engaged with Western ideas, funded with Western money, and assisted by Western missionaries.

5.4 New Protestant churches have arrived in Ukraine

One important missionary foray into the former Soviet Republics was initiated by Russian deputy minister of education Aleksandr Asmolov in 1992. He invited religious groups from other countries to come to Russia to teach religious ethics in public schools. Asmolov wanted to give Russian children information about “the history of spiritual culture” so that they could “freely choose any religion they want” (quoted in Woodward and O'Brien 1993). This came about as a follow-up to a 1990 showing of Campus Crusade’s Jesus film to a group that included “the minister or deputy minister of education from almost every republic and country” of the Soviet Union. The education leaders of fifteen republics and countries liked the film and asked that it be shown in their public schools (Glanzer 1999, 289).

After a series of experimental “convocations” during which Campus Crusade workers showed the film in a small number of cities, it became clear to the Campus Crusade staff that a larger effort explaining evangelical Christianity in the former Soviet Union was possible and desirable. American evangelicals formed an organization called the CoMission to bring several thousand lay volunteers from more than 60 denominations and mission agencies for one to two year terms to teach a course of Christian ethics in public schools. They went to other former Soviet countries besides Russia; many also

28 The foreign missionaries at Vinnytsia Central Baptist were from the United States (2), Canada (2), South Africa (1), and Finland (1).
worked in Ukraine. Each volunteer needed to raise about $20,000, and brought with them supplies (like Campus Crusade’s *Jesus* film) and money to pay Russian language interpreters. Up until 1997 CoMission volunteers traveled to 52 cities in six countries of the former Soviet Union, although their Protocol of Intention with the Russian Ministry of Education was canceled in 1995 – largely because of opposition from Orthodox church leaders (Glanzer 1999, 305).

CoMission workers traveled to the former Soviet Union to teach ethics in schools, and in the course of their work some teachers and students converted to evangelical Christianity. Two of the case study churches in this dissertation have core members who became Christians through the work of CoMission teams in their Ukrainian cities. In Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, a group of interpreters converted to evangelical Protestantism during a Bible study for the CoMission interpreters and their friends led by an American volunteer, a retired Presbyterian layman from Alabama. That 1994 Bible study dramatically changed the life courses of those involved. Two are now pastors in a fledgling Presbyterian denomination in Ukraine; one is the director of a Christian medical clinic; one is a full-time translator of theological books from English into Russian; another is the administrator of a theological seminary in Kiev; and the rest are active lay leaders in their churches. After the Bible study ended and the Americans left Bilhorod, the group decided to form their own Presbyterian church, about which more details will be given later.

The missionary phenomenon across the former Soviet states did not go unchallenged, although the backlash was more severe in Russia and Belarus than in Ukraine. Ukraine already had a strong multi-religious history – with more than one faith competing for the position as the dominant religion. Although during the Soviet Union the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was the main religion, even then there was more accepted religious diversity than in other republics. This softened the impact of the arrival of post-Soviet missionaries. Orthodoxy was dealing with its own inner divisions between the Moscow and Kyiv Patriarchates at the time, and the Greek Catholic Church was reestablishing its existence and influence in Western Ukraine. These traditional churches had enough occupying them without having to worry about Western Protestant missionaries.
An example of the anti-missionary ethos in Russia can be seen in an opinion piece published in 1994 in the *Moscow News*. A non-Russian named Thomas Price wrote that missionaries threaten “the very survival of Russia’s culture and the future of Russia as a land in which moral and ethical principles will rule.” It is interesting that this strong view was voiced by a non-Russian, but others, particularly stake-holders in the Russian Orthodox Church, also spoke out against the work of foreign missionaries in Russia. For example, Russian Orthodox Archbishop Anatoly (Kuznetsov) of Kerch wrote in a Western journal:

Chaos occurs when different preachers – not only Christian – come to Russia with a lot of money and hire stadiums, theaters, or similar facilities suitable for their purposes, and advertise themselves, inviting people to meetings, services, and talks. Often no denominational aims are mentioned. Of course, it is not just atheists and agnostics who will come to these meetings but mostly traditional Orthodox believers who are not qualified to judge denominational matters. We know of cases where after such services and sermons people have been invited to accept rebaptism and become members of a new faith. Such baptism into a new faith of people who were traditionally Orthodox believers, who had already been baptized but were theologically ignorant and did not understand what was happening to them, has often taken place (1996, 22-23).

The Archbishop continues by condemning what he calls “proselytism” and asking the readers to “leave our people in their own native Orthodox Church!” Archbishop Kerch displays little faith in the ability of Russian Orthodox believers to understand and hold to the teachings of their own religion.

Russia and Belarus passed laws limiting the rights of foreigners to evangelize on Russian soil, and in 2002 Belarus enacted a strong law regulating religious activities (for example, banning religious meetings in private homes). Laws passed in Ukraine were milder, and generally Ukraine remained one of the former-Soviet countries with the most tolerant religious atmosphere. In December 1993 legislators in Ukraine passed an amendment to regulate the activities of foreign religious workers. It states that “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 canonic activities only in those religious organizations which invited them to come to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that has registered the statutes” (Triggs 1994). In
other words, missionaries from other countries cannot come to Ukraine on their own, but
must be invited by an existing religious organization and work only on behalf of that
organization.

Although some foreign missionaries worked with established Ukrainian churches,
others came to Ukraine to start their own congregations. These post-Soviet Protestant
churches have some commonalties with the older Ukrainian evangelical churches, and at
times even collaborate with them on specific projects, but by and large the newer
churches are quite different from the more traditional ones. These new churches
represent a wide variety of Protestant denominations and traditions, including
Charismatic, Baptist (often independent Baptist), and churches started through the effort
of denominationally based missions.

In line with recent patterns of church growth around the world in which
Charismatic churches have tended to grow faster than other forms of Christianity
(Hutchinson 1998), one of Ukraine’s largest and fastest-growing congregations is a
Charismatic mega-church in Kyiv, the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All
Nations. The Nigerian pastor, Sunday Adelaja, started the church soon after graduating
with a journalism degree from the Belorussian State University in the early 1990s. He
moved to Kyiv to work for a television station and began the church in early 1994. The
church web site (www.word-of-faith-ch.org) claims that the church now has 17,000
members in Kyiv, 15 satellite congregations in Kyiv, 15 daughter churches in the Kyiv
district, and 70 daughter churches throughout Ukraine and in Russia, Moldova, Belarus’,
and Georgia. Another large Charismatic in Kyiv is Victory Christian Church (5,000
worshippers), also with an African pastor who studied in the Soviet Union, Henry
Madava, from Zimbabwe. Madava started Victory church in 1992 with five supporters,
and now the large congregation has opened thirty branch churches in Ukraine and in
Russia, Poland, Germany, India, and Angola (www.victorychurch.kiev.ua).

Other Ukrainian cities also have at least one sizable Charismatic congregation that
has begun worshipping after independence. For example, a large Charismatic church
with an African pastor meets every Sunday at a sports arena in Vinnytsia. Kherson has a
Charismatic church, Great Commission Church, whose pastor is a former Ukrainian
Pentecostal. The church began in 1992 and now, according to its website
(www.gcc.kherson.ua), has more than 2,000 members, making it the largest evangelical church in the city. It is a member of the Independent Charismatic Christian Churches Union of Ukraine.

A second category of new churches are relatively small, independent, often Baptist churches started by foreign missionaries. These are what Elliott has called “unaffiliated” churches (see Figure 5.1) (1996, 19). L’viv, for example, is home to about three independent evangelical churches. One of them still has an American pastor and meets in the center of L’viv in a rented hall. The second church, with an all-Ukrainian pastoral staff, has purchased and is in the process of renovating property in a former factory. There are some American missionaries who attend the church, but who don’t work in the church per se. The third is a new church plant (begun in 2002 or 2003) with a team of Baptist missionaries from Texas working to draw in people living in a L’viv suburb.

Finally, there are new churches started through the efforts of missionaries representing established denominations from other countries. Many of these activities take place at a relatively small scale, with just one or a handful of churches started by each mission so far. An example of this kind of work is the Nazarene church in Vinnytsia. The Nazarenes describe themselves as a “Great Commission church and Holiness church” with roots in the Wesleyan revival of the 18th century and the Holiness movement of the 20th century (www.nazarene.org). According to the web site of the American-founded denomination, the church has two missionary families (with Anglo names) working in Ukraine. No Western missionaries are working at the Nazarene church in Vinnytsia, but an American Nazarene missionary in Kyiv recruited a Ukrainian man to head up a church planting team for that city. The new Ukrainian pastor, his wife, and another Ukrainian couple moved to Vinnytsia in 2001 to begin work there. One year later the congregation already had about 100 members and was continuing to grow. They had bought their own property and had just begun construction of a new building. A focus of the Vinnytsia Nazarene Church was ministry to drug addicts and their families.

The first time I visited the Nazarene church, I was taken by Vika, a young woman of about 20 who had been raised in the Baptist church but had recently come through several years of hard living, with a husband in prison, no job, and a child to support. She
and her five year old son had been attending the Nazarene church faithfully since her conversion a month before, and spent time at the church nearly every day of the week for Bible study, prayer, worship, or some other event. She never suggested that she received any financial or humanitarian aid from the church – it seemed to be spiritual and social reasons that drew her to the group. One cold December Sunday I met her in the city and we walked down a steep cobblestone street to the river, where the Nazarenes had purchased a lot with an old (I assume pre-revolutionary) house in terrible repair. Until they could finish constructing a new building (which they had already begun) they were meeting in the original house. I described the worship service in my fieldnotes:

The ‘sanctuary’ is basically three small rooms that are laid out end to end, with the walls knocked out in between them. Old wallpaper covers the walls, and in places the plaster in the ceiling and moldings is cracked. A single light bulb hangs down from the ceiling of each room. Folding chairs are set up in rows in the center room and the back room, facing the ‘stage’, which is the front-most room. A young man was standing there warming up his hands on the electric guitar. On the front wall was a poster with John 8:32 written in marker (in Russian): “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

I was told by Vika that many people in the church are ex-drug addicts. As I sit and wait, I can’t help wondering, who are they? The man with the deeply lined face? Which guys are in the treatment program right now? The young man with the vest that says, “Local 670” on it in English? (humanitarian aid?) I heard that they aren’t allowed to go anywhere but to church while they are in the program.

While I was sitting in my seat waiting for the service to start, a man holding a small child in a snowsuit came in the door and called out loudly, “Praise the Lord!” A lady with her hair neatly put up in a French roll, with extremely green eye shadow to match her pantsuit, was handing out little slips of paper and pencils. “What are they for?” I asked Vika. “So you can write your needs on it.”

The service started with the congregation singing several praise songs to the accompaniment of the band up front. There was one guy on guitar, another on bass guitar, an electric keyboard, and three women singing into microphones. They were swaying and clapping along to the music, as were most of the people in the audience. I didn’t recognize the songs, but everyone around me was singing loudly, without words in front of them. In between songs one of the ladies prayed into the microphone, and they put a ‘stadium’ effect on the sound system, so that her voice echoed.

The pastor asked people who’ve had successes in their life to come up and share them publicly. One man was almost hit by a bus this week, but it didn’t hit him. God provided one of the worship leaders money when they needed it this week. The Local 670 Union guy had had a high temperature, and said something about drugs, but he is still alive and was praising God for that. The wife of
another man had left him, and taken their son with her. Now, after his conversion the son has accepted him again, and is grateful that God has changed his Dad. A woman got a new refrigerator. A young guy was at a youth camp that was just great. A pregnant woman (one of the worship leaders) had a high fever that could have harmed her baby, but the doctor said that the baby is doing fine.

The worship style and physical appearance of the congregation at the Nazarene church was quite different than at the ECB church in the same city. The Nazarenes had adopted a worship style commonly called “contemporary” in Western churches (as opposed to “traditional”). They had no choir, they replaced the piano with an electric band, and they sang new songs instead of the early twentieth century hymns favored by the Baptists. This kind of worship is increasingly practiced by young Protestants of various Ukrainian denominations, but has not yet entered widespread use in Evangelical Christian – Baptist churches in Ukraine. It is seen as Western and not ‘holy.’ The physical appearance of the congregation also separated them from the ECB church. Most of the women were wearing pants, makeup, and jewelry, all of which were forbidden at the Baptist church. Some men were dressed in blue jeans, worship attire frowned upon by Baptists. The Nazarene worship had a joyous, party-like atmosphere, a strong contrast from the somber tone of the Baptist church.

Another example of a Western denomination actively starting new churches in Ukraine is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a conservative group that left the mainline Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1973. Through their mission agency, Mission to the World (MTW), the PCA has been working in Ukraine since 1994 and now has ten churches in that country. Two of these have already become ‘particularized’, or independent. The other eight are at various stages of development, from a small Bible study (two of them), to a mission church with Ukrainian pastor and a board of what they call ‘proto-elders’ (they will become elders after particularization). Their churches form a new Ukrainian denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine (EPCU), which is run by Ukrainian pastors and elders of these Presbyterian churches. Their churches are concentrated in Southern Ukraine (Izmail, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, Odessa (2), Nikolaev, and Kherson), but with three in Kyiv, one in Kharkiv, and plans for more
underway. Several of the EPCU congregations began as Bible studies led by CoMission workers in 1994, including the two Presbyterian churches in this study, in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy and Kherson. In their current church-planting strategy Ukrainian pastors lead each new mission team, with an American ‘coach’ and other North American missionaries in the background. At the time of the fieldwork for this project the Belgorod congregation did not have an American church planter in residence, but the Kherson church had four full-time American missionaries in addition to a Ukrainian pastor. Several young men who attended seminary also worked part-time at the Kherson church.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine is an example of a small evangelical denomination (fewer than 1500 members in all churches combined) whose size cannot compare to the much larger Baptist or Charismatic movements, but which contributes to the complex and growing mosaic of Protestant churches in Ukraine. The flagship EPCU congregation in Odessa meets in a restored church building originally constructed at the end of the nineteenth century by a Reformed congregation with French, German, and Swiss members. French and German language services were held there until at least 1914, but the Soviet government confiscated the property and used it for, among other things, a puppet theater. In the mid-1990s, after MTW had begun work in Odessa and a small congregation had been formed, some of the new Ukrainian Presbyterians made contact with an elderly Reformed pastor still living in Western Ukraine. He wrote a letter on behalf of the Reformed denomination declaring the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Odessa to be the physical and moral heirs of the Reformed church in that city. The Odessa Presbyterians were able to use that letter in a court case, and the city gave the Presbyterians the Reformed Church/puppet theater building with the expectation that the Presbyterians would renovate it. MTW missionaries were able to raise considerable funds in the United States, and by the end of my fieldwork in 2003 the renovations were well under way.

The EPCU has opened a theological seminary in Kyiv in partnership with the Ukrainian Evangelical Reformed Church (UERC), the denomination that gave the Odessa Evangelical Presbyterian Church their rights to the old Reformed building. This other

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29 By early 2005 the Kherson team had started an additional two churches in that city, led by Ukrainian seminary students and their wives under the supervision of an American missionary.
small denomination existed in Ukraine before the Bolshevik Revolution, and remnants survived in several Ukrainian villages and towns during the Soviet era, mostly in the western part of the country. Despite a long history in Ukraine, by the time of Ukraine’s independence only a handful of Reformed churches existed outside of Transcarpathia (a largely ethnic Hungarian region of Ukraine that had been strongly influenced by the Protestant Reformation of the late 16th century). The Reformed Church’s closest foreign partner is a Dutch denomination, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (liberated), which has been sending missionaries and financial resources to support Ukrainian Reformed churches and the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine. The seminary was registered with the Ukrainian government in 2003 and relies on professors from the Netherlands and the United States who teach modular classes several times a year for men and women seminarians who also work part-time in their home churches.

One of my case study churches, Greater Grace in L’viv, falls outside these parameters (large Charismatic, smaller independent, or denominational). It was started by missionaries that were affiliated with the Greater Grace Church of Baltimore, Maryland, a large independent congregation that has ‘planted’ over 100 churches in 54 countries. The team that started Greater Grace in L’viv was a mix of Americans and Poles who arrived in the early 1990s. By the time I arrived in L’viv in 2003 the Americans had all left, the church owned its own building, and it was more or less financially independent from the American home base. A businessman in the congregation had helped them purchase a three story storefront building within walking distance from the opera house. The church paid the utility bills with the profits from its English language school – a business catering mostly to Ukrainians preparing themselves to emigrate to the West. They also had recently opened a Christian day school for children, although the school was not yet financially independent and only consisted of kindergartners and first graders. Of the four new churches profiled in this dissertation, Greater Grace was seemingly the most independent and mature. The church operated a wide variety of ministries (e.g., an adult evening Bible school, a crisis pregnancy center, an evangelistic mime team) and was continuing to grow in size. Attendance was about 150 people in early 2003, filling the worship hall to capacity. They were about to move worship services off-site to a larger rented facility at the end of my stay.
5.5 Relationships between the evangelical churches

The broad spectrum of evangelical churches in Ukraine encompasses most Protestant ideologies and practices. Some churches believe in speaking in tongues, while others forbid it. Some groups permit moderate alcohol consumption, dancing, and card playing, while others prohibit them. Most churches in Ukraine believe in salvation by free will and teach that salvation can be lost; others (such as Presbyterian and Reformed churches) adhere to predestination and the doctrine of eternal security. There are differences in practices regarding baptism, communion, relevance of the Old Testament to the Christian, and so forth.

While some of these theological and social differences are contained within the more traditional Ukrainian churches and do not necessarily mark the divide between indigenous congregations and Western church plants, one apparent distinguishing mark of churches begun by foreign missionaries is their willingness to move away from traditional outward signs of religious submission, particularly regarding clothing styles and cosmetics for women. In most Ukrainian Baptist churches, for example, women are required to wear skirts or dresses to worship services, and married women must cover their heads with a scarf or hat. Women should have long hair, minimal makeup, and minimal jewelry. Men must wear pants, not shorts, to church, and must have short hair.

These differences came to the foreground in 1994 when the CoMission Bible study in Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy was deciding whether to join the local Baptist church or to form their own Presbyterian church. I asked the Presbyterian pastor and his wife, both of whom were converted during that initial Bible study, why they chose to form their own church and not become part of a more established organization:

Dmitri: By that time we already had some experience, and we knew what the Baptist church was like. We were young Christians, but we knew the difference. We knew that there we would have to wear scarves –

Lena: No makeup.

Dmitri: That this and that would be forbidden, that it was forbidden to dance, drink alcohol and many other things were ‘forbidden, forbidden, forbidden.’ And we didn’t want someone other than God to restrict our freedom. Do you understand? And in that case we saw that Baptist church would restrict the freedom that we already had in Christ.

Lena: [English] We already understood the difference between the Presbyterian and Baptist church.
Dmitri and Lena shied away from the behavioral restrictions well known in Baptist churches. Like the Nazarenes in Vinnytsia, they wanted to be able to wear any kind of clothes, dance, and take part in other activities forbidden by the Baptists.

During the course of the decision-making process about which church to join, the American pastor of one of the CoMission workers visited Belgorod. Although the CoMission team had promised not to promote their own church, this visitor had not made that commitment. The new Christians told him about their dilemma.

Dmitri: And when we said that we had visited Orthodox, Adventist, and Baptist churches, but were not satisfied . . . he just told us, “Organize your own church.” Do you understand? It was such a revelation.

Esther: [in English] It was the first time you’d thought of that?

Dmitri: Yes. That was exactly what we wanted, but it was something we were even afraid to think about at that moment . . . [And] when we talked with the Baptist pastor several months later, we remembered what [the American pastor] had said. He said that there is a possibility of starting a Presbyterian Church. And we wanted our church, of which we would be members, to be Reformed or Presbyterian. We knew a little about the Reformation then, very little, but we knew people from that church and wanted to be like those people. Do you understand?

Esther: [in English] You wanted to . . .

Dmitri: [in English] be like people from the Presbyterian church.

Esther: Okay, right.

Dmitri: [in English] Look like them . . . [in Russian] Yes, we wanted to be such people. And only then, later, when Peter Ford came for seven months – he had lived in the Philippines, and he was from a Reformed church – only then we learned for the first time about what was Reformation, what was Reformed teaching, theology, we learned about Jean Calvin and so on. And there was a moment when I believed and it was a joyous moment for me in my life. Because I received confidence . . . that I am saved, that God loves me, and that God would change my life. It was a wonderful moment. Of course, later I was assured of it many, many times.

In this exchange Dmitri and Lena discuss the moment when they were standing at the edge between the Western missionaries and the Ukrainian Baptist Church – a denomination that to them represented a restriction of freedom. The church of the American missionaries symbolized freedom – freedom from social rules of dress and behavior, spiritual freedom (what Dmitri calls “freedom in Christ”), and freedom to organize their own church from the ground up (the freedom to have agency in their
These new Ukrainian Protestants chose to model their lives on the American CoMission workers who lived with them for one year. Dmitri says repeatedly that “we wanted to be like the people from the Presbyterian Church.” To “look like them,” to “be such people.” Because of this choice, this small group of new believers founded an Evangelical Presbyterian congregation in Belgorod. They maintain a friendly relationship with the Baptist church in town (and treat many Baptists at the Christian Medical Clinic they subsequently opened), but they decided not to join that church.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of two strains of Ukrainian evangelicalism in the post-Soviet era. The traditional Baptists come out of a multi-generational history that endured hostile government policy towards their religious practices. During the past fifteen years people, ideas, and money from the West have infused these churches, often creating new cultural forms and sets of challenging circumstances that would not have been imagined two decades ago. The new Protestants were converted to their churches by Western missionaries; most of the new believers came out of atheist or nominally Orthodox backgrounds. These new churches are in the process of being indigenized, as the leadership positions are being assumed by Ukrainian church members and the Americans begin returning home.

Among questions raised by the contrasting histories of the two groups is the matter of identity. Will their church members approach identity in different ways? Do Ukrainian Baptists perceive their identity as Ukrainians differently than do members of new churches? Moreover, how does each group embrace or reject a transnational identity? How do they perceive the West and participation in a transnational religious community? The following chapter examines questions of regional and national identity among these groups, and also divides them regionally, to compare the identities of Western Ukrainians with those living elsewhere in the country. Then Chapter Seven takes up the question of transnationalism, and that is where we see that the old church/new church dichotomy comes into full effect.
Chapter Six: Regionalism and nationalism in Ukrainian evangelical churches

*We’re a totally Ukrainian church.*

–Pastor Mykola, L’viv Greater Grace Church

*We don’t think of our church as Ukrainian. . . . That’s the Orthodox Church. . . . Who calls our church a Ukrainian church? We don’t even think of that. It is just a church of – a Christian church. Baptist. We even speak in Russian.*

–members of Kherson Baptist Church

6.1 Introduction

Evangelicals in L’viv and Kherson disagree about whether their churches are “Ukrainian” or not. They disagree about what language to speak at church: the Russian language dominates Ukrainian churches in the East and South; Ukrainian prevails in the West, and a combination of the two languages is used in churches in the central parts of the country. The evangelicals involved in this study also vary regionally according to their views about the Ukrainian nation. Although nearly all Ukrainian evangelicals represented here reject a notion of Ukrainian national identity that is expressed through their religious faith (that is, if they espouse nationalism it is secular, not religious), L’viv church goers were much more likely to express patriotic feelings than those from other cities, and at times their patriotism was evident in their religious life. L’viv evangelicals stand apart from those in the other three cities in their perspective towards regionalism and Ukrainian national identity.

Is Stephen Shulman correct when he divides the country up into two halves, East and West? He writes:

*The structure of Ukrainian society is basically ‘bipolar.’ Geographic cleavages in Ukraine reinforce ethnic, linguistic, religious and economic cleavages. Predominantly agricultural Western Ukraine is composed mainly of ethnic Ukrainians, many of whom are Greek-Catholic. Predominantly industrial Eastern Ukraine is composed mostly of ethnic Russians or Russified (Russian-speaking) Ukrainians, many of whom are Eastern Orthodox* (1999b, 1012).

Catherine Wanner disagrees. She argues that “the fracturing of Ukraine goes beyond an east-west dichotomy” and has divides “far more blurred than the national allegiances that are assumed to follow linguistic lines” (Wanner 1998, xxvi).
Wanner is correct – Ukraine’s regional variations are complex and varied. However, the findings presented in this chapter show that within that diversity, the East-West division remains relevant: there are real differences between churches in L’viv and elsewhere in the country. The notion of ‘Western Ukraine’ is strongly held by the Ukrainian evangelicals involved in this study, both those who live in western parts of the country and those who do not. I suggest that while it is an oversimplification of Ukraine’s human mosaic to divide the country into two pieces, it can also legitimately be divided into ‘Western Ukraine’ and ‘Everything Else.’ This chapter will examine how Western Ukraine impacts Ukrainian Protestants in how they see their own national identity.

Churches from all four cities and from both denominational categories (Baptist and new churches) are considered jointly in this chapter because the location of the church proves to be a more powerful variable than denominational type for explaining the views of Ukrainian Protestants towards issues of regionalism and nationalism. In L’viv, for instance, both Baptists and members of the Greater Grace Church, despite deep differences in other areas, share common views towards Ukraine’s regionalism and the Ukrainian nation. In the other cities it also held true that, in terms of questions of region and nation, there were few discernible differences across denominational lines.

Although this chapter examines some potentially divisive issues for Ukrainian churches, at the same time there is widespread agreement that matters of regionalism or nationalism do not fundamentally disrupt relations between the churches. As Ruslan from the Nazarene Church in Vinnytsia said, “There are no differences. God is the same. What differences could there be?” Vika continued, “There can be difference only in language. That is in L’viv and Lutsk where, for example, they speak pure Ukrainian. So it is just formal differences. But in church, in spiritual matters, there’s no difference.” That said, some tensions in these areas became apparent in many of the interviews. In the same focus group interview in Vinnytsia, Tatiana, a young woman who recently came into the church, expressed the frustration that she feels as a Russian speaker towards those in Western Ukraine, particularly Western Ukrainians outside of the church:

Really, we can define these . . . regions just because there are strong language conflicts. In the west of Ukraine they despise Russian-speaking Ukrainians. . . . I traveled a lot around western Ukraine. Even when I spoke Ukrainian and
accidentally said some Russian word, people were kind of hostile and said, “Moskalka.” People there are very aggressive toward Russian-speaking Ukrainians, to say nothing about Russians. They are raised in a nationalistic environment from childhood. And really it’s not just love for Ukraine; it’s simply nationalism. They simply don’t accept – and even if we came there to bring them the good news in Russian, they would be hostile toward us.

Although Tatiana’s heartfelt feelings against regionalism and nationalism were among the most extreme I encountered in any of the interviews, and perhaps do not represent the typical attitude of Ukrainian Protestants towards these issues, they illustrate the close relationship between regionalism and nationalism in Ukraine and how those identities are present within evangelical churches. Of particular note is that in this passage Tatiana used language as a marker for national identity. Competition between the use of the Russian and Ukrainian languages is a controversial topic in other social spheres, so it comes as no surprise that the debate extends into the Protestant religious community.

6.2 Where is Western Ukraine?

Before examining expressions of regional and national identity through the results of the ethnographic research, here I want to report how the research participants cartographically conceived of Ukraine’s regions. Each focus group participant was given a blank outline map of Ukraine’s administrative regions (oblasti) similar to the map in Figure 6.1. They were asked to draw on the map their own impression of where Ukraine’s cultural regions were located – as few or as many regions as they felt appropriate. The data on these maps represents a collective mental map of Ukraine’s regions. In this section I analyze the maps to get a picture of how Ukrainians divide their country regionally. Are some regions universally accepted? Are others less so? Does the regional division of Ukraine vary according to the hometown of the participant?

Not all focus group participants turned in a map, and of the 108 maps collected, only 89 contain information about Ukraine’s regions. The other nineteen maps have no regional boundaries marked – perhaps the participants decided that Ukraine has no

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30 *Moskalka* is a derisive term for Russians that derives from the word *Moscow*.

31 As Dominique Arel has written, language and nationality are often equated in Ukraine, and even in the most recent (2001) Ukrainian census, Ukrainians answered the question about native language to reflect their political preferences more than their actual language use preference (2002). In other words, in the census the phrase ‘native language’ was often interpreted politically, with those in favor of an independent Ukraine likely to select ‘Ukrainian’ regardless of what language they actually prefer to use in daily life.
regional boundaries, they did not understand the task, or they simply did not wish to participate in the activity. Only maps with understandable information on them are considered here.

**Figure 6.1: Ukraine’s Administrative Divisions**

Although a wide variety of regional divisions can be seen on these 89 maps, Ukraine was most commonly divided into four regions: West, Central, East, and South. An alternate pattern divided the eastern two-thirds of the country into northern and southern regions, with the West remaining the same as before. Some people subdivided the regions into smaller areas (North Central, Southeast, Southwest, etc.). About one-third of the maps showed Crimea in its own region. Some maps left certain oblasts out of any region in particular – they only marked regional centers (L’viv in the West, Kyiv in the center, etc.) – and the other oblasts remained unattached.

By compiling the data from all 89 maps, we can see that Western Ukraine is the area with the strongest regional identity. Seven oblasts are firmly in its grasp: L’viv (96.6 percent placed it there), Ivano-Frankivsk (88.8%), Ternopil’ (87.6%), Zakarpatya (85.4%), Volyn (82%), Chernivtsi (79.8%), and Rivne (76.4%). Nearly two out of three
maps placed Khmelnitskiy in that region (64%). Weak contenders were Vinnytsia (12.4%) and Zhitomir (10.1%). (See Figure 6.2).

**Figure 6.2: Western Ukraine**

There was much less agreement about the location of Central Ukraine. All oblasts were considered ‘Central’ on at least one map, and no oblast was placed there on more than 71 percent of the maps. The strongest Central oblasts were Cherkasy (70.8%) and Kyiv (69.7%), although Figure 6.3 shows that three other oblasts were also placed in the Center more than half of the time (Zhitomir 61.8%, Kirovograd 53.9%, and Vinnytsia 58.4%).
There were also a wide variety of opinions about the location of Eastern Ukraine. Some people placed the boundary between East and West much farther to the west than others, who placed only the easternmost border oblasts in that region. In sum, there were five oblasts grouped in Eastern Ukraine on more than half of the maps: Donetsk (82%), Kharkiv (74.2%), Luhansk (80.9%), Dnipropetrovsk (68.5%), and Zaporizhya (59.6%). (See Figure 6.4).
There were only three oblasts placed in Southern Ukraine more than half of the time: Kherson (60.7%), Mykolayiv (60.7%), and Odessa (53.9%). Crimea was considered together with Kherson and the others on 36% of the maps. (See Figure 6.5). Southern Ukraine is shown to be the weakest of the main four Ukrainian regions; each of the southern oblasts was also at times considered to be in the eastern or central portions of the country.
These maps show that there is not a uniform understanding of the territorial makeup of Ukraine’s regions. Not everyone agrees that Vinnytsia, for example, should be considered part of Central Ukraine. It is variously placed in the West, Center, East, South, North, and West Central portions of the country. Despite the wide range of responses, one region stands out as having the strongest cartographic identity: the West. Western Ukraine is the Ukrainian region that the largest majority of respondents identified, and they tended to agree about which oblasts were part of it.

When the regional maps are separated according to the hometown of the participants, there are very few changes in the results. One difference is that people who live in L’viv marked a smaller core area for Western Ukraine than did participants living in the other three cities. In other words, L’viv residents placed some oblasts outside of Western Ukraine that other Ukrainians would consider part of the region. An example of this is Vinnytsia. Only two people out of the 27 L’viv respondents considered Vinnytsia...
to be part of Western Ukraine (7.4%), while nine of the 82 others (14.5%) put it in the West.

This map data refutes Shulman’s statement that Ukraine is “essentially bi-polar” in its regional divisions, with a Ukrainian language West and a Russian language East. We see that on these maps most people divided the country into four or more cultural regions. In this sense Wanner was correct when she stated that the division of Ukraine “goes beyond an east-west dichotomy.” However, these maps are strong evidence that the western Ukrainian oblasts are not categorized with the rest of the country in the minds of many Ukrainian people. This cartographic data reveals that the majority of Ukrainian evangelicals who participated in this study believe in the existence of a Western Ukrainian cultural region and are in general agreement as to its location. I suggest that Western Ukraine remains a distinct region in the minds of many Ukrainians, and the rest of this chapter will show that the notion of Western Ukraine is present in Ukrainian evangelical churches, and makes a real difference in the lives of Ukrainian evangelicals.

6.3 Regional identity in Ukraine’s evangelical churches

The maps analyzed above and the ethnographic research that will be explained here show that Ukrainian Protestants do produce a regional scale in how they divide and order space. For the most part, the strongest expressions of regional identity were found in western Ukrainian churches. Church members in other areas were more vocal about not being from western Ukraine than they were in affirmation of their own Ukrainian region. For Protestants living in central and southern Ukraine, western Ukraine serves as ‘other’ for their image of a Ukrainian national identity as multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan. That is, they believe that Russian is a valid language for the modern Ukrainian nation, and they contrast their desire for a bilingual national identity with what they perceive to be a monolingual Ukrainianism favored in the western part of the country.

Here I examine the strongest indicator of regional identity: language use and opinions about language use in Ukraine. Then I examine the widely held belief that western Ukraine is a site of traditional religious devotion when compared to other parts of the country.
6.3.1 The politics of language as a regional issue in evangelical churches

In the excerpt from the Vinnytsia Nazarene focus group quoted in the chapter introduction, Tatiana identified language difference as the most significant conflict between western Ukraine and the rest of the country. Language is always one of the first topics to arise when Ukrainian regionalism is discussed, although Kuzio (1996) cautions against viewing language as the central component of Ukrainian national identity. He notes that one can be a Russian speaker and still be loyal to an independent Ukrainian state. In Liber’s (1998) analysis of Ukraine’s regional variations he identifies linguistic differences as one of three areas (in addition to political and economic) distinguishing western Ukraine from the eastern and southern parts of the country. Regional divides show up repeatedly in Ukraine, whether it be in language spoken or in the results of the controversial 2004 presidential election (where western Ukraine and eastern Ukraine generally supported different candidates.) However, language is the most visible marker of the regional divide, and remains a divisive issue in Ukraine. Although Russian was the state language during the years of the Soviet Union, and is still the language of choice for about half of all Ukrainians, since independence Ukrainian has been the country’s official language. Now most schools teach all of their subjects in Ukrainian, Russian is taught as a foreign language, and all official government business is transacted in Ukrainian.

Unsurprisingly, the regional linguistic variation in Ukraine is reflected within evangelical churches. In fact, to an outside observer of worship services, the only clear difference between the Baptist churches in the various cities is language use: in L’viv (western Ukraine) Ukrainian is spoken almost exclusively in the services, in Vinnytsia (central Ukraine) a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian is used, and in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy (southern Ukraine) and Kherson (southeastern Ukraine) Russian is used with very little Ukrainian. The only Russian I heard in L’viv Central Baptist was in the lyrics of an occasional choir anthem; in the Russian-speaking cities of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy and Kherson, Baptist choirs likewise occasionally sang in the non-dominant

32 According to public opinion surveys as reported by Roman Solchanyk, between 43 and 55 percent of Ukrainians used Russian as the language of convenience in the late 1990s (2000). See also (Arel 2002), p. 238.
language, Ukrainian. The non-Baptist churches that I visited in these cities shared the pattern of language use found in the Baptist churches. The Greater Grace church in L’viv used only Ukrainian, and the Presbyterian churches in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy and Kherson used only Russian. Churches in Vinnytsia had the most complicated linguistic situation of all the churches. Evidently in the past the pastor of Vinnytsia Central Baptist, a man with a university degree from a prestigious academy in Leningrad, used to preach only in Russian. Now he preaches only in Ukrainian. Each pastor at the church is permitted to make his own choice regarding what language to speak from the pulpit. The congregants seem to understand both languages equally well, and the language slides back and forth repeatedly during the course of a service.

Although most Ukrainians claim to know both Russian and Ukrainian, I found evidence that this is not always true among the Protestant community. When asked, some Kherson Presbyterians were in disagreement about the correct pronunciation of a certain phrase in Ukrainian (the Ukrainian equivalent of the French *bon appetit*). A L’viv shopkeeper in a Protestant bookstore could not remember the Russian word for ‘April’ when he tried to explain when a certain book might be in stock. At a Christian education conference in L’viv to which people came from across the country, all talks presented in Russian were translated into Ukrainian to ensure everyone’s comprehension, to the surprise of some in the crowd. Two women from the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church who attended the conference expressed their amusement and frustration about having to listen to every talk twice, since they were bi-lingual, and incorrectly assumed that all other Ukrainians would also be able to comfortably listen to both languages.

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33 However, an independent Baptist church in L’viv, not one of the case study churches, is known as a “Russian” church. More of the congregation are native Russian speakers than at other L’viv churches, and Russian is used more often in their services than at other churches.
6.3.1a The view toward language in Vinnytsia, Belgorod, and Kherson

Here I will further analyze the language issue by region, starting with evangelicals living outside of L’viv. At a Kherson Presbyterian Church focus group several people debated whether or not people living in western Ukraine understand Russian, and whether or not they themselves understand Ukrainian:

Lina: But listen, they all [people in Western Ukraine] understand Russian. They understand.
Nelya: No, they don’t understand in L’viv.
Sergey: They understand.
Nelya: Uh-uh.
Nadia: Yes! How can Ukrainians not understand Russian?
Woman: No.
[several talking at once – several remarks are inaudible].
Nadia: I’m a Moldovan by nationality and I’ve never studied Ukrainian but I understand everything. Tell me any word. I understand everything in Ukrainian.
Nelya: You won’t understand the western dialect.
Lina: It’s true – it’s hard for us Russians to understand.
Woman: Right.
Lina: It’s hard, but there [in Western Ukraine], Ukrainians can understand Russian.

Through this conversation these residents of Kherson are making a case for the validity of Russian as a national language. They want Russian to be seen as a legitimate language for Ukrainians to use in daily life. They want the two languages to be equal; they want people in all parts of the country to be able to understand both Ukrainian and Russian equally well. Lina, Nadia, and Sergey insist that all Ukrainians do understand Russian, and it seems to be more important to them that all Ukrainians know Russian than that all speak Ukrainian (they admit that as Russian speakers they struggle to understand the Western Ukrainian dialect). In the context of the interview (more of which follows), this conversation is a criticism of Western Ukrainian churches for requiring visiting preachers to speak in Ukrainian, not Russian.

Yura, a former Baptist but now a young seminary student from the Kherson Presbyterian Church, spoke of regional language differences as a difficulty in his own ministry:
First of all there is the problem of language, and in Ukraine there is an emphasis on the importance of language. So when I visit Reformed churches in Western Ukraine and when I come to a Reformed church to preach, I preach in Russian with my southern Ukrainian accent. Then they understand that I’m their brother but they have a negative attitude toward my language.

At one level the western Ukrainians know that Yura is a spiritual “brother” and they come to hear a sermon from him at church, presumably because they want to receive religious instruction from him. However, as soon as he opens his mouth and speaks in his native Russian with a “southern Ukrainian” accent they know where he is from. The language marks him as an outsider. Despite the fraternal aspect of their relationship they have a “negative attitude” towards his language. The listeners and the preacher are different from each other – his language marks him as Other. At least, Yura senses that his language marks him as Other and he is aware of his own Otherness. Here language indicates a regional identity that differentiates western Ukraine from the rest of the country, and at its core the regional marker has to do with national identity. Perhaps Yura thinks that his audience is judging him as somehow less Ukrainian because of his language and accent.

The following excerpt is taken from the same Kherson Presbyterian focus group that debated whether or not all Ukrainians could understand Russian. Like Yura, they are aware of a prejudice against the Russian language in western Ukraine. As before, we see that they want Russian to be a valid language for the Ukrainian nation. However, they don’t interpret their own claim to the Russian language as a nationalist move. Instead, they are prepared to cede “nationalism” to the Ukrainian speakers, and because they reject that version of Ukrainian nationalism, they claim to reject nationalism itself. They especially reject a nationalism in the church that is based on the Ukrainian language. First Nadia, an English teacher and ethnic Moldovan, downplays the Ukrainian aspects of their church. Then Sergey, a former Baptist from central Ukraine who switched to the Presbyterian church, talks about the expectation that visiting preachers to western Ukraine will speak in Ukrainian, not Russian:

Nadia: We love all the nationalities and we’re always glad to see all and we never emphasize that we’re Ukrainians and want to communicate only with Ukrainians.

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34 Yura is talking about a congregation of the Ukrainian Evangelical Reformed Church, a denomination referred to in Chapter Four. Yura’s seminary is a joint Presbyterian and Reformed institution, and thus provides cross-denominational (and cross-regional) ministry opportunities.
We don’t have something like that. We’re glad to communicate with all people from different countries. It enriches us with experience. And, in general, a lot more.

Lina: In one word we’re Christians.

Woman: We are brothers and sisters.

Sergey: But I came from – There are Christian denominations, even in Ukraine, especially in Western Ukraine in L’viv, there you have to preach, if a man comes from another church, he is obligated to, if he doesn’t preach in Ukrainian, he needs to preach through an interpreter. And that is required by the members, by those who attend that church. And that kind of nationalism [natsionalnost] –

Lina: There’s not enough love, it seems to me.

Sergey: But more, it’s just that they’re turned more to nationalism in language and in traditionalism.

This exchange illustrates that these Presbyterians imagine western Ukrainians as different from themselves: they are more nationalistic, more focused on the Ukrainian language, more traditional in their religious beliefs (something discussed later), and do not exhibit enough love towards others in Ukraine who do not share those views. The Kherson group is uniform in their belief that western Ukrainians have rejected the Russian language as a valid language for the Ukrainian nation. In return, they themselves reject that definition of Ukrainian nationalism. Moreover, they add a spiritual level to the discussion, saying that focusing on the Ukrainian language and disallowing Russian in church represents a deficit of “love” and a focus on things that are not important.

Kherson Baptists agree with the Presbyterians that western Ukrainians are overly concerned about Ukrainian language use and nationalism. Yura remarks that western Ukrainians accuse the Russian speakers of living in Ukraine but “not know[ing] the Ukrainian language like we should.” This small group of Russian speaking Ukrainians downplays the importance of the Ukrainian language for Ukrainian churches. Tanya continues, “When we have celebrations, holiday services, we have to sing in Ukrainian, in Russian, in English, in Gypsy, in Hebrew. We really love this and it is a holiday for us, when we sing in various languages. For us there is no difference.” She puts Ukrainian on the same level as all other languages for use in the church, stripping it of its special character as a national language. This group of Kherson Baptists is critical of the western Ukrainian emphasis on using solely the Ukrainian language in church services. When Nadia says that in their church they “love all nationalities” she is actually making a
claim for a Ukrainian nationalism that is cosmopolitan, multi-lingual, diverse, and that above all speaks Russian.

Before turning to what the L’viv evangelicals said about this language issue, I will give one more example of a non-L’viv point of view, this time from Vinnytsia. Maksim is a member of the Vinnytsia Central Baptist church and the thirty-something father of three. He said that:

if people from here go to the west [of Ukraine] and preach a sermon in Russian, then 80 percent of the congregation thinks about something else. If it is in Russian. Because that region was under Poland until 1945, and they gave more freedom for Ukrainian. Here, we have the expansion of the Russian language, mainly in the eastern regions. That’s why the majority of the population here speaks Russian. I know that it is a bit of a problem. I personally heard and witnessed it, when people said, “Oh, here come these Russians.”

Maksim places the language issue in its historical context, remembering that western Ukraine was not part of the Soviet Union until the era of the Second World War. Russian was not an important language in L’viv until the russification and sovietization efforts of the post-war period. Maksim realizes that when Ukrainians from other parts of the country come to L’viv speaking Russian, they are thought of as “these Russians,” as in “these Soviets.” Whether the L’viv listeners “think about something else” during a Russian sermon because they don’t understand the language, or because they don’t want to understand, remains unclear.

On the whole, the notion that regional language differences are an obstacle for the Ukrainian Protestant church community is a common one in both Baptist and non-Baptist churches outside of L’viv. These evangelicals tend to be more comfortable speaking Russian than Ukrainian and they associate the Ukrainian language with nationalism. A nationalism based solely on the Ukrainian language is something they wish to avoid and they are trying to keep it out of their churches. Instead, they are in favor of a nationalism that includes the Russian language.

6.3.1b The view towards language from within L’viv

All of the church services I attended in L’viv were conducted in Ukrainian, and people I met in those churches took it as a matter of course that Ukrainian should be the dominant language in a Ukrainian church. Of those I asked, few people outwardly
attributed any importance to language as a marker of regional difference. They did not seem to be interested in the Russian-Ukrainian language division. Others, however, particularly at the Baptist church, did voice strong support for the mandatory use of Ukrainian language at their church and for the distinction of western Ukraine as a regional identity.

Vitaliy, a man in his mid-40s who teaches at the L’viv police academy, recognized that Ukraine has regional differentiation. However, he did not even list language as one of the features distinguishing Christians in other regions from each other. I asked whether or not a church in western Ukraine would be different from a church in eastern Ukraine. Vitaliy replied:

I think they are different, because churches are first of all people, and the mentality of people differs depending on the place where they live, traditions, their way of life. For example, the western region is more traditionally religious and it’s harder here for the Protestants to grow. In the East it’s easier, because they are in a more atheistic region. From one side, Protestants in the East and West are going to be different from each other. But from still another side, if they believe in Christ as the center of their life, then they will be able to understand each other even if they are different. That’s what I think.

Regional differences may exist, but Vitaliy does not think they are spiritually important. Instead of identifying language as the main difference between eastern and western Ukraine, Vitaliy focuses on the regions’ previous histories with regards to religion. Eastern Ukraine, which was under the Soviet anti-religious regime for a longer period of time than was L’viv, is a more atheistic part of the country. Vitaliy thinks that because people in L’viv have close ties to the traditional faiths (Orthodoxy and Catholicism), they will be less willing to accept a new religion than those in atheist areas.

When I interviewed young adults at the L’viv Central Baptist church across town they wanted to completely deemphasize regional divisions as significant in the church. Instead, they argued that of more importance were the differences between traditional and less traditional Protestant churches within all regions:

Kolya: The Baptist movement has many common things in Ukraine.
Miroslava: Kolya, maybe the culture. . .
Kolya: They only speak in Russian, but in general there are no big differences and no differences in doctrines because the Baptist churches are centralized.
Miroslava: Sometimes there could be differences in the meetings.
Artyom: No. Well, it is possible to find some differences [between traditional and less traditional churches.]

Esther: So it doesn’t have to do with region, it is just differences.

Artyom: It is just differences.

The participants went on to talk more about those differences, what they see as largely a generational divide that threatens the church. In the following chapter I will examine their concerns in the context of transnationalism. However, despite disavowing regional differences here, later in the interview other members of the group actually named a “Western Ukrainian mentality” that is linked to the Ukrainian language. I asked them if they considered their church to be a Ukrainian church:

Ihor: The thing is that people are not really welcome to preach in Russian, and some people are really against that. Guests can get away with preaching in Russian, guests don’t know the language, and okay, we can forgive. But if a member gets up and starts preaching or singing [in Russian], then it’s a problem –

Bohdan: It is natural. Because here there are a lot of people and they have children who just don’t know Russian. They may be able to understand in general, but they can’t say anything in Russian and because of this and because it is Ukraine and western Ukraine it needs to be in Ukrainian.

Misha: Also there is the influence of a “Western Ukrainian” mentality. They got used to the pure Ukrainian language and some people who want to learn Ukrainian come here from other countries to L’viv to study the literature and language because there’s something special in the Ukrainian language.

These young people support the notion that western Ukraine is distinct from elsewhere, and that language use is rightfully enforced by the church members. The Kherson interviewees were not exaggerating when they said that they were not welcome to speak in Russian in L’viv churches. In this excerpt, L’viv Baptists give two reasons for their hostility towards the Russian language in church: First, their children do not know Russian, and if a visitor speaks Russian then they will not understand what is said. They suggest that adults understand Russian, but that the new generation does not. This is perhaps an outcome of the new Ukrainian education policy that teaches all subjects in Ukrainian, not Russian. The second reason given for enforcing a Ukrainian language policy in L’viv churches is that “it is Ukraine.” Because they are a Ukrainian city, and especially because they are a western Ukrainian city, Bohdan says that things need to be in Ukrainian. He implies that there is no reason for Ukrainians to speak Russian, a foreign language. Misha adds that they are under the influence of a “Western Ukrainian
mentality” and that “there is something special about the Ukrainian language.” They clearly articulate the existence of a western Ukrainian region and its effects on church life.

The L’viv evangelicals have a completely different perspective on the relationship between being Ukrainian and speaking Ukrainian than do those in Kherson and Vinnytsia. The Kherson residents who participated in this project took offence at the Ukrainian-only policy enforced in L’viv churches. L’viv believers, on the other hand, wouldn’t have it any other way. To them, speaking Ukrainian is part of their identity as Ukrainians in general and as western Ukrainians in particular. They will not be swayed by their Russian speaking brethren, although if a visitor speaks Russian in church they “can forgive.”

Earlier we saw how Sergey from the Kherson Presbyterian Church described Christians in western Ukraine as “turned more to nationalism in language and in traditionalism.” He associates all three of those concepts with western Ukraine: nationalism, the Ukrainian language, and traditional religious practices. Before moving on to other aspects of nationalism in Ukraine’s Protestant churches (besides language, which is both a national and regional issue), I want to briefly unpack the third idea that Sergey tied to western Ukraine, that the region is known for “traditional religious practices.”

6.3.2 Western Ukraine as a site of traditional religious devotion

The notion that Christians in western Ukraine are more serious about religion and more traditional in their practice of it than those in other parts of the country came up several times in interviews of people inside and outside the region, but in different ways. One Protestant man in L’viv viewed the traditional religiosity of fellow western Ukrainians as an obstacle to the growth of Protestantism. Recall that Vitaliy, the police academy instructor and western Ukrainian native, said that “the western region is more traditionally religious and it’s harder here for the Protestants to grow.” This reflects the commonly-held belief that Protestant churches will flourish more readily in places where there is less religious competition from other churches, and so are at a disadvantage in
L’viv. L’viv is known as a stronghold of the Greek Catholic Church and, to a lesser extent, the Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

Members of the Presbyterian churches of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy and Kherson also attributed more conservatism and religiosity to western Ukrainians, but they were not only talking about members of traditional churches. They even viewed other Protestants in western Ukraine as being the most conservative in the country. A vivid example of this is from a focus group interview with Presbyterians in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy in the South. Galina, a senior citizen and church member, talked about visiting other Protestant churches, including Pentecostal churches, on a trip to western Ukraine:

In western [Ukrainian] churches there is stricter, firmer, stauncher faith, stronger faith. That’s what I perceived, because when I was there I visited [churches]. When I went to church in western Ukraine a zealous lady at church gave me a Bible in the Ukrainian language. They are really devoted – they even drink mineral water, they don’t drink [alcohol] there. They are devoted and they work, they evangelize, they always work, work. And because they work so much, they told me, they build new buildings, then they will work even harder. “We always need to work and work.” Here we don’t work all the time. To this point we work very little.

Galina, a southern Ukrainian, labeled Protestants from western Ukraine strict, firm, staunch, strong, zealous, devoted, and hard-working. This is in contrast with how she portrays believers she knows in her own region, including herself, who work “very little.” Nelya, a woman from the Kherson Presbyterian Church, held similar views about Christians in western Ukraine, although she didn’t specify which Christians she was talking about (Protestant, Orthodox, or Greek Catholic). For Nelya, western Ukrainians are more traditional and rule-oriented than zealous and hard-working:

Oh, there in the West they have so many traditions! They don’t go [to church] without scarves. You can’t wear lipstick or eye makeup, earrings. . . . It’s all forbidden in church. There is no make-up. Hair is not cut, and everything. . . .”

Nelya’s list of restrictions resembles the list of rules followed at the Baptist churches in her own, non-Western, city. In fact, Nelya herself is a former member of a Baptist church in Kherson, a Baptist church at which women are expected to wear skirts or dresses to worship and avoid excessive use of cosmetics. Married women are to attend worship with their heads covered. Even though these rules are upheld across Ukraine, Nelya attributes religious traditionalism primarily to the western part of the country.
A member of the Vinnytsia Central Baptist Church remarked that people in western Ukraine are generally “more God-fearing” than in other parts of the country. However, perhaps because of their national-level organization and close ties with fellow Baptists who live in all areas of the country, the Baptists I asked about this tended to see western Ukrainian Baptists as more or less like themselves when it came to religious devotion. Valentina, a member of the Vinnytsia Baptist Church and the wife of a retired military officer, denied that western Ukrainian churches would be any more conservative than her own: “We don’t have differences within our churches. We are all the same. All churches in Ukraine belong to the Brotherhood. I also wanted to say that our pastors keep to conservative, fundamental evangelism. And I accept conservatism.” Valentina is proud of her conservatism, and unwilling to call any church more conservative than her own.

In summary, there is somewhat of a consensus that western Ukraine is a more religious place than other parts of the country. Vitaliy in L’viv finds it to be a region where the traditional faiths of Orthodoxy and Catholicism are particularly strong; these traditional churches pose a hindrance to the growth of evangelical churches. Nelya in Kherson and Galina in Belgorod apply the traditionalism label to other Protestant churches. They find that western Ukrainian Protestants hold traditional customs (somber clothing, long hair, no alcohol) and are generally more zealous and devout than evangelicals elsewhere. The non-L’viv Baptists, however, seem not to want to find anyone more conservative than they are, since conservatism (fundamentalism) is an important value in their religion. Thus Valentina in Vinnytsia said that they “don’t have differences” in their churches, “they are all the same,” and that her pastors “keep to conservative, fundamental evangelism.”

6.3.3 Regionalism conclusion

In Chapter Four we saw that regional variation, most notably between western Ukraine and the rest of the country, has deep historical roots. So far in this chapter we have seen that ‘region’ expresses itself in the practices and opinions of Ukraine’s Protestants, most notably through the policing of language use in worship services and views toward language politics, as well as by a casting of western Ukraine as a site of
traditional religious devotion. Protestants from Russian-speaking churches (especially in Kherson and Belgorod) used their chastisement of the language policy in western Ukrainian churches to argue for a Russian language component of Ukrainian national identity. They perceive the dominant Ukrainian nationalism as narrow and traditional, and instead want a national identity that is diverse and cosmopolitan.

Western Ukraine looms large in the geographical imagination of most Ukrainian Protestants, and from other studies we know that in this respect Protestants share the views of most Ukrainians. Birch (1995, 1035) showed that ‘region’ exerts independent impact on political beliefs in Ukraine, while Craumer and Clem (1999) also found that regional variation has political implications, in their case on the results of the 1998 elections. Although Hesli’s research indicates that Ukraine’s regional polarization is weakening over time (Hesli, Reisinger, and Miller 1998), this project with Ukrainian Protestants shows that regional identity definitely remains in play among this population subgroup. Like Kubicek (2000), I found that regionalism persists as a feature of Ukrainian life.

6.4 Nationalism in the evangelical Protestant churches of Ukraine

We have already seen that evangelicals from Russian-speaking areas have a different idea of Ukrainian national identity than do those from L’viv. Probing the question of regional identity revealed that Russian-speaking evangelicals from both old and new churches want a multi-lingual national community; evangelicals in L’viv, on the other hand, want a Ukrainian-speaking national community. Here we will further examine the idea of nationalism as it appears in Ukrainian evangelical church life.

Nationalism is not something that I ever heard Ukrainian Protestants talk about unless they were answering a direct question, although of course their relationship to the national state as a political unit and a geographical reality is something that all of them negotiate in their personal lives and as members of a church. For example, most denominations are organized nationally, and have some sort of governing structure at that level. The Evangelical Christians-Baptists have central offices in Kyiv and ‘oblast pastors’ who are in charge of the churches in each of the country’s 25 administrative regions. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine, a denomination with Ukraine
in its name, has a national governing body which is a Presbytery of elders from each of the churches that have been organized in Ukraine so far. All congregations from every denomination are expected to register with the Ukrainian state and follow Ukraine’s laws for religious organizations, which include obligations like procuring the proper visas for visiting missionaries and filling out the paperwork to register Christian schools and theological seminaries.

Apart from obvious elements such as a national church organization, relationship to the Ukrainian state and use of the Ukrainian language for church-state business, I observed Ukrainian Protestants demonstrate affection for their country and engagement in civic affairs in all four cities, even in heavily Russified areas, and especially in newer churches. Indeed, engagement with the civic state was much more prominent in newer churches than in older Baptist ones. One of the most popular contemporary praise songs in the evangelical churches I visited was a Ukrainian language song called “I Pray about Ukraine,” which is a prayer for the future of the country. The song seems to tap into a genuine love of country and raises questions about what it means to be a Christian believer in Ukraine. One young Presbyterian told me that even non-Christians know the song and sing it as a patriotic anthem:

Lord, I pray about Ukraine
Lord, I pray about the people
Forgive them, save them
Show us your mercy
Lord, I know you will be with us
In your temple under the skies
You gave your life for people
And wrote our names in the Book of Life.35

This song was sung in Ukrainian even in the Russian-speaking cities of Kherson and Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. Although “I Pray about Ukraine” was occasionally heard sung by young Baptists, I heard it more often in newer churches like the Kherson and Belgorod Presbyterian churches and at L’viv Greater Grace. This song represents a desire to place the Ukrainian nation under the protection and salvation of the evangelicals’ God. Ukrainian evangelicals, especially those in new churches, are quite serious about their role in society. They want to engage society and spiritually redeem it.

35 Author unknown; English translation of the Ukrainian by Olga Koch.
People in newer churches were more likely than Baptists to discuss their practices of praying for the government and participating in civic affairs. This statement was made during a focus group with Nazarenes from Vinnytsia:

Ruslan: We pray for our president and our Parliament. And we believe that the church has to influence the upper circles, and all the spheres. . . . And our church is not one of those churches that just exists for the sake of existing. We have a definite goal we are trying to achieve, toward which we are moving. We just don’t want the government, and president and the world’s ideas to influence us, but we try to influence and carry this light, God’s light, to the world. That’s why we pray for our president and the Parliament. We also pray for the youth. We are trying to reach the youth for God. . . . For example, youth in this town, not only in this town, but also all over Ukraine, are drowned in sin, and not only the youth – we are trying to reach all spheres of the population.

This attitude of civic engagement – concern for the spiritual well-being of all government leaders in Ukraine, as well as for Ukraine’s youth – is quite separate in their minds from their beliefs about nationalism (this group is one that was especially critical of western Ukrainian hostility toward Russian speakers). They consider themselves part of Ukraine, and they see themselves as in a position to influence “all spheres of the population.”

Greater Grace Church in L’viv, while differing with the Vinnytsia Nazarene Church about language issues, shares with them a desire for civic engagement and influence. Pastor Volodymyr at Greater Grace in L’viv mentioned several times in conversation how his church hopes someday to have the children that are now going through their Christian elementary school to become influential leaders in business and government. During the course of an interview, Pastor Volodymyr, also the church elementary school principal, asked me to

Pray for us to have a big influence in society in L’viv. That our kids will grow up and become a part of the society and be . . . presidents of this country, mayor of this city, and lawyers, honest people, you know, that . . . will change this society. This is, I guess, the vision for, for L’viv. And also we have [a] vision . . . for [all of] Ukraine.

Greater Grace and the Vinnytsia Nazarene church, where these statements were made, are new churches without the same long history in Ukraine as the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. For Greater Grace and the Nazarene Church, their reluctance to wholeheartedly embrace nationalism does not equate to a disengagement from civic life. Indeed, they desire to influence their country’s political and social future.
Among Baptists there is more of a tendency to draw boundaries between the spheres of ‘the church’ and ‘the world’ and to reserve church activities for religious life. While I observed an affection for their country – for example, pride in the language, customs, and physical land of Ukraine – Baptists were less likely than members of the new churches to talk about sending church members to become government leaders, or even reaching Ukrainian elites for Christ. However, they are not completely cut off from political life: the pastor Vinnytsia Central Baptist church did make an announcement one Sunday about an upcoming parliamentary vote that would directly impact church life, and asked people to remain in prayer about it throughout the week.

Despite these denominational differences towards civic engagement, opinions towards national identity and its place in the church vary more by region than by denomination. That is, as expected, Protestants from L’viv hold stronger national sentiments – regardless of denomination – than do Protestants from elsewhere in the country, and within that city members of the new church seemed more enthusiastic about nationalism than those in the Baptist church. The regional differences concerning nationalism in the churches are stark. While Protestants from L’viv readily called theirs a “Ukrainian” church and themselves “patriots,” Protestants outside of Western Ukraine reacted to ‘nationalism’ as a bad word, and few of them were even comfortable labeling their church as Ukrainian. As Pavel from Greater Grace Church in L’viv said, “When I am proud that I am Ukrainian, that is patriotism. When I am going to kill you because you are not Ukrainian, that is nationalism.”

While I did find strong regional variations – with western Ukraine closer to endorsing (or at least accepting) nationalism in the church than others – overall there was a pervasive anti-national spirit in Ukraine’s Protestant churches. This chapter began with a quotation from Tatiana, of Vinnytsia’s Nazarene Church. She remarked that people in western Ukraine “are raised in a nationalistic environment from childhood. And really it’s not just love for Ukraine; it’s simply nationalism.” She views nationalism as separate from love of country, and something that should be avoided in the church. She is not alone in those convictions. The next section of this chapter examines what church members in Vinnytsia, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, and Kherson had to say about a Ukrainian church. Then we will return to the L’viv churches.
6.4.1 Perspectives on a Ukrainian church from outside L’viv

Although some people in L’viv admitted that a few of their fellow church members were nationalists, no one I spoke to at any church in any of the four cities would use the nationalist label directly about themselves. Participants in the research project clearly distanced their churches from having national characteristics (which I did not define for them), and most, especially outside of L’viv, also denied that theirs was a Ukrainian church. People in seven focus groups, including two in L’viv, drew my attention to the multi-cultural aspects of their congregations. In their logic, it followed from this that they could not also be considered national, because to them nationalism is the opposite of multi-culturalism. Another common reason given for evangelical churches not being national or Ukrainian is that the Orthodox Church (or the Greek Catholic Church) is already the national church, and there is no room for more in that category. An excerpt from a focus groups at the Kherson Baptist church provides an example of both of these responses in the same conversation:

Man: We don’t think of our church as Ukrainian.
Woman: That’s the Orthodox church. . . .
Yura: Who calls [our church] a Ukrainian church? We don’t even think of that. It is just a church of–
Ivan: We even speak in Russian. . . .
Tanya: I came here from Russia and here we have absolutely the same church. There are no differences.
Esther: So are there any ways in which your church is national? . . . .
Ivan: Nations [natsii] generally don’t exist for us. The conductor of our choir is a Moldovan and he came directly from Romania.
Tanya: He came from Romania and now we have a main director.
Man: So for us nations are not –
Woman: It doesn’t play a role.

These Baptists identify the Orthodox church as the Ukrainian church and their own church as anything but Ukrainian. It seems apparent that the reason they reject a Ukrainian identity for their church is because they speak Russian and identify themselves with the larger post-soviet world (here they mention Russia, Moldova, and Romania).
Ivan, Tanya, Yura, and the others deny connections between their Baptist church and the Ukrainian nation because people in their Southern city speak Russian, not Ukrainian, and because their church includes members of various nationalities. They mention speaking in Russian and say that their church is “absolutely the same” as the church in Russia. They are unwilling to take on a Ukrainian identity that could compromise the multicultural and Russian speaking aspects of their church.

Their fellow Baptists in Vinnytsia agree. When one group there was asked if they considered their church to be Ukrainian, Valerie, a young mother of three, immediately said no. When asked why, she elaborated, “Probably because it depends on who the members of a church are, not where a church is but of whom it consists. Our church is international.” Others in the room began listing various nationalities represented in the church, including Cuban, Jewish, Polish, and Chechen. The group rejected a uniform Ukrainian identity in favor of one that is cosmopolitan and multicultural.

Earlier in the chapter I quoted from the Kherson Presbyterians criticizing the western Ukrainian focus on the Ukrainian language. Recall what Nadia and Lina said:

Nadia: We love all the nationalities and we’re always glad to see all and we never emphasize that we’re Ukrainians and want to communicate only with Ukrainians. We don’t have something like that. We’re glad to communicate with all people from different countries. It enriches us with experience. And, in general, a lot more.

Lina: In one word we’re Christians.

Woman: We are brothers and sisters.

Here we see them separate a solely Ukrainian identity from a cosmopolitan transnational/international identity that is linked to religion. Being “Christian,” being “brothers and sisters,” means that they want “to communicate with people from different countries,” not just their own. These evangelicals believe that being a Ukrainian church would mean excluding other nationalities, something that is in clear opposition to their idea of Christianity. I heard an American missionary to a Ukrainian Presbyterian church teach from a book by the popular Minnesota pastor John Piper. Piper writes about the diversity of the church as an integral part of the Christian life: “The ultimate goal of God in all history is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (1993, 222). He later adds that “by
focusing on all the people groups of the world God undercuts ethnocentric pride and puts all peoples back upon his free grace rather than any distinctive of their own” (p. 223).

At times the anti-Ukrainian perspective moved away from a multi-cultural diversity argument to a purely humanistic view that claimed to ignore nationality completely. Tatiana from the Vinnytsia Nazarene church said that people in her church don’t “care what nationality people are.” Indeed,

We don’t even ask. We don’t care what color the person is, what his nationality is, or what language he speaks. And this is one more thing I like about our church, that we don’t look at a person’s appearance, but value him just because he is a human.

Here Tatiana describes ignoring difference through focusing instead on a common human bond. This is different from the diversity angle described by Nadia in Kherson, but similarly stands in opposition to a specifically Ukrainian identity. The notion of the Ukrainian church already being multi-national or at the very least, multi-cultural, even before consideration of post-Soviet transnationalism, lays a foundation for our discussion of transnationalism and transnational identities in the next chapter.

Besides rejecting a national or Ukrainian identity because it would preclude multi-national diversity or be tied to more traditional religious faiths, the study participants also raised other objections. Baptists in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy said that any specifically Ukrainian church would have to have all services in Ukrainian, and they implied that their church would be unable to fit that requirement. When asked what a Ukrainian church would look like, a group of Baptists in Vinnytsia described a typical Soviet era Ukrainian ideal: they said that a Ukrainian church would have activities like reading Taras Shevchenko poetry during worship services and people wearing national costumes. The rumor was going around in their congregation that Ukrainian Baptist churches in Canada carried out these activities, holding on to the traditions of pre-revolutionary Ukrainian villages when their forebears emigrated a century ago.

Finally, another Vinnytsia Baptist group was asked if there were any ways in which their Baptist church was national. Several of them said no, because before considering themselves national, Baptists would have to make up a larger percentage of Ukraine’s population. Andrey called their church “the leading church in Vinnytsia,” but added that
it’s not like that in all the other regions. But if to judge by the Vinnytsia church, then maybe. I guess it has like five thousand people, right? So five thousand out of a 400,000 population. And in Ukraine – no. Maybe in Vinnytsia, but not in Ukraine. No way.

They consider their Baptist church to be the dominant church in their central Ukrainian city, but still too much of a minority in the grand scheme of things to have any national aspirations. The closest Protestants came to embracing a specifically Ukrainian Church was in the prayer for Ukraine they sang in worship. As for embracing a coherent Ukrainian Protestant identity – none of them even approached that.

Before addressing nationalism in L’viv, it should be pointed out that even in Russian speaking churches away from western Ukraine participants made room for some sort of cultural identity, although they didn’t call the church itself Ukrainian. At the Kherson Presbyterian Church, one woman said that “Ukraine has its own mentality.” By way of elaboration, she said:

Lina: Well, we have our own understanding of many things . . . Specifically, a peculiarity of our culture is that it has its effect upon our church. And other cities, or other countries have their own understanding. How can I say it properly? . . . We have our own worldview about many things. It’s not like, for example, in other countries . . . .

Nadia: Something that can be acceptable in our culture would shock someone from another culture, right? . . .

Lina: And naturally it exists in our church. Do you understand? That which is in our culture is in our church.

This exchange shows that even in areas that claimed to reject Ukrainian national identity – perhaps because of its unwelcome emphasis on the Ukrainian language – evangelicals acknowledged that their churches would be unique to that part of the world. Their churches would be different from the churches in other countries because of the culture of the people worshipping there. In other words – there is some kind of a cultural identity recognized in the church, but not by the name of Ukrainian national identity.

6.4.2 Perspectives on a Ukrainian church from L’viv evangelicals

Stereotypes of western Ukrainians cast them all as staunch nationalists. Recall what Vika said about people from that region: “They are raised in a nationalistic environment from childhood. And really it’s not just love for Ukraine; its simply
nationalism.” This stereotype would lead one to believe that all L’viv natives are nationalists, and that a nationalist attitude would pervade all social institutions. I thought this might be true during my initial visit to Greater Grace in L’viv, when for the first time in a Ukrainian church I spotted a Ukrainian flag displayed in the front of a church meeting hall. However, I found that nationalism in L’viv churches is not uniform or without contestation, and it is hardly the rabid nationalism that Vika suggested. A helpful illustration of the contested nature of nationalism arose in a focus group at L’viv Baptist, which at one point became a debate between two elderly women about the place of nationalism in the church. Maria was a woman who had been born in Russia but had lived in L’viv for decades. She provided the interesting perspective of a non-Ukrainian member of a Ukrainian language congregation, and lamented the nationalism she saw in the church. Valentina, a Ukrainian, disagreed with her, and appreciated the church’s Ukrainian emphasis. This conversation is worth quoting at length as Maria makes a case for a multi-lingual, multi-national church. Maria speaks in Russian; the others are speaking in Ukrainian. I am speaking in English with a Ukrainian interpreter, although sometimes I speak in Russian.

Maria: We have many Russians who come and then they say, “What is this, a Ukrainian church? Because no one [here] is speaking about God in Russian.” We need to speak in both languages.

Esther: Do you agree with her?

Valentina: Yes. Our church has no place for nationalism.

Maria: Sometimes it happens. There is a little nationalism. Because we don’t speak much in Russian. I’ve even heard comments from the older brothers that we help Ukrainian believers, but not you Russian Moskali.

Valentina: But I know that God gave me a gift to bring people for repentance. And most of them – Ukrainians – they say, why is everything here in Russian? Are you Russians?

Maria: And Russians come with me and ask, “why is it only in Ukrainian?”

Valentina: But there are few of you Russians. Not everyone in the church would understand.

36 Or perhaps the third remaining woman at the interview. Several participants had already left to go to a funeral.

37 Church members are customarily called ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ by others in the church.
Maria: We need to have everybody in one church: Russians and Ukrainians, and among us Armenians and Greeks. In all languages. Because the church is for people of all languages. . . .

Esther: So you would agree that you have a Ukrainian church?

Valentina: Yes, it’s Ukrainian. And in Kiev they say that it’s a Ukrainian church, but they’re more used to speaking in Russian, and their Ukrainian isn’t very good.

Esther: So you think that the churches in eastern Ukraine are not really Ukrainian.

Maria: I wouldn’t divide it that way, who is a proper Ukrainian and who isn’t. I think that they are either Christian, or they are Orthodox. Or Catholic. But I wouldn’t divide things according to nationality.

Valentina: I agree.

Here we clearly see two contrasting visions for the church. One is national, where a Ukrainian church service will be conducted only in Ukrainian, and people who speak other languages can attend different churches. The other is multi-cultural, where both Russian and Ukrainian languages are used. Maria mentions Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, and Greeks as part of her multi-cultural church, and says that she wants all languages spoken in church. However, the only other language besides Ukrainian that she makes a strong case for is Russian. We can argue that what she really wants is a church in which the Russian language is welcome and where it is an equal partner to Ukrainian in the service. Maria wants a church in which Russian believers are treated equally to the Ukrainians. Her view is similar to the view of Protestants in other Ukrainian cities where Russian is the dominant language, perhaps because she herself is a native Russian speaker. We saw that Kherson church-goers resented the Ukrainian language dominance of Ukrainian identity; Maria does the same. In fact, Maria has decided that because of its exclusive nature, nationality is not a useful concept for the church. Valentina, on the other hand, is one of the first people to openly call her church a Ukrainian church in a focus group interview, even though she then goes on to agree with Maria that people should not be categorized by nationality.

Others in L’viv, like Valentina, also labeled their church as Ukrainian. Kolya, a church employee at Greater Grace and originally from Transcarpathia, and Vitaliy, the
police academy instructor, agree that national elements have a natural place in their church:

Kolya: Here we function as believers in Ukraine. We are in one Spirit, but we have many national elements.

Esther: For example?

Kolya: We speak in Ukrainian. We try to speak in Ukrainian, because the [city] authorities want us to and we do it, although we’re not saying that things should only be in English or in Russian. If an American comes, we’ll fellowship with him in English. If a Russian comes, then we’ll fellowship with him in Russian. I think that we have many elements [of Ukrainian] that I could talk to you about, but I can’t think of them. I think that I was in the Budapest church, and here I see very many things. . . . But it doesn’t hinder our ability to understand each other.

Esther: [to Vitaliy] Do you also see elements of Ukrainian national. . . .?

Vitaliy: When I came I didn’t see any of them, but after I’d been here for four years and Pastor Jason had left, and especially when we got a national pastor, then I saw, for example, we sang songs for Christmas and Easter that were mostly Ukrainian Christian national [narodniy] songs, for weddings we also sang national songs. It is clear that national roots go deep, people want to sing their songs, they want that –

Kolya: In their own language.

Vitaliy: Yes, in their own language. Of course some things from the Protestant way of life crept in, but there are some national traditions . . . and it is impossible to get rid of them.

Theirs was the most thorough exploration I heard of what national elements, apart from language, that any Ukrainian Protestants saw in their church. They are also the only ones who used the word narodniy in their description, a word that can be translated ‘national’ but includes connotations of folk culture. From their perspective, if the people in a church have narodniy roots, then the church itself, even a Protestant one, will have narodniy elements. Others at the Greater Grace church wanted to distinguish their attitude, what they called patriotism, from a negative one they called nationalism. They said that at Greater Grace patriotism, or pride in being Ukrainian, was more important than nationalism, something they saw as a violent, hateful attitude.

Earlier I showed that new churches tend to be more civically engaged than older Baptist ones. We see this again in how Greater Grace incorporates national elements into the Christian school the church runs, although this is controversial within the Protestant

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38 This interview took place in Russian out of consideration for my lack of Ukrainian knowledge.
community more generally in Ukraine. At the Ukrainian-wide Christian education conference held in L’viv that spring, a woman from a Seventh Day Adventist church expressed her opposition to a government requirement that the national anthem be sung in all Ukrainian schools, including religious schools. I asked Pastor Volodymyr about this later. He explained that because in the past the state apparatus persecuted the church, now the Seventh Day Adventists are “still afraid . . . to sing the national anthem.” On the contrary, at the Greater Grace school they sing the national anthem “gladly because, you know, I am Ukrainian, and I’m really thankful to God that he gives us the freedom, and I’m proud of my national anthem and I’m proud of my national flag.”

Participants in the young adult focus group at the L’viv Baptist church, on the contrary, avoid calling their church a Ukrainian church. In accord with the statements quoted earlier about a “western Ukrainian mentality,” these young people are more comfortable calling their church a regional church than a national church. One man remarked: “Our church in general is like many of the other churches in the western region. We don’t have something really national but it is like most churches in the western region.” This edginess towards claiming their church as Ukrainian or national surprised me. It was not a shock in Russian speaking areas of the country, but in L’viv I expected Protestants to be more eager to claim a national identity in their church. This was not the case.

Thus far in the discussion of regional and national identities in Ukrainian Protestant churches we have seen that the western Ukraine/non-western Ukraine division remains a strong force in the national imagination. The related issues of language use and national identity in secular society are also present within evangelical congregations profiled in this dissertation. While Protestants tend to avoid calling their churches “national” or (outside L’viv) “Ukrainian,” they do incorporate aspects of Ukrainian culture and even civic nationalism into their church life. The final theme of this chapter, and one that has implications for both the regional and national issues, is how Protestants perceive Ukraine’s traditional faiths.
6.4.3 Protestant view of a traditional national church

One reason evangelicals offered for why their churches were not national or Ukrainian was that there was already a national church in Ukraine – the Orthodox church. ‘The Orthodox Church’ is seemingly a single entity in the national imagination, even though there are three major Orthodox divisions that are not on friendly terms with each other. Moreover, in western Ukraine the Greek Catholic Church predominates, but, perhaps because of its years of being under the Orthodox umbrella during the Soviet Union, in L’viv it is often mentioned in one breath with the Orthodox Church as one of the “traditional churches.” Few of the Protestants I interacted with had much to say about the Catholic church, so I focus here on their views towards Orthodoxy. In this section I examine what aspects of Orthodoxy led my informants to label it the national church; how they portrayed Orthodoxy and Orthodox identity; and their alternative views of a Ukrainian national religion. In terms of the larger research questions, this portion of the chapter addresses how and to what extent Ukrainian Protestantism either challenges or accommodates aspects of a Ukrainian national identity such as a national church.

Most Protestants – including Baptists and non-Baptists, those from western Ukraine and those from elsewhere – named the Orthodox church as Ukraine’s national religion. Some, especially in western Ukraine, also mentioned the Catholic church as a prominent Ukrainian faith. The only variation on this theme was from several individuals in three Baptist focus groups (in both Vinnytsia and Kherson) who identified paganism as the national faith, an alternative view I will examine a bit later. Those Protestants with mainstream views listed all of the obvious reasons that Orthodoxy is the national faith: its close relationship with the Ukrainian state, the church’s historical roots, and Ukrainian traditions practiced in the church.

Kristina, a twenty year old student from Greater Grace Church in L’viv, spoke about government ties to Orthodoxy. She said that Ukraine’s national religion is “the kind of religion approved by the government, and what they show on television at Christmas or other holidays. And the president goes to church, and this is government at the national level.” Nelya, from the Kherson Presbyterian Church, mentioned that school textbooks are now published under Orthodox guidance. Grigoriy, from the Belgorod Presbyterian Church, also pointed out that school children are taught about the Orthodox
church in school, are taken to church on class trips, and the teachers “make them kiss icons.”

This perceived government blessing of the Orthodox church and close relationship between the Orthodox church and the Ukrainian state highlights a material difference between Orthodoxy and Protestantism. While the state and the Orthodox church have a cozy relationship, Protestants have never had a good relationship with the state; even in tsarist times Protestant activities were restricted. Of course, both Orthodox and Protestant churches were persecuted during the years of the Soviet Union, but now Orthodoxy is a mainstream religion and perceived to be close to the Ukrainian government, whereas Protestants are often treated as outsiders and still have occasional squabbles with the state.

Evangelicals acknowledge that most people see them as outsiders when it comes to Orthodoxy’s relationship to Ukraine over one thousand years of history, but in several focus group and individual interviews they stressed that Protestantism is not new to Ukraine and has its own historical legitimacy. The Orthodox church’s deep Ukrainian roots were mentioned by several study participants when they explained why Orthodoxy is the “national religion.” Often it is a casual acknowledgment that people in Ukraine have been Orthodox for generations, but occasionally people mentioned a specific historical era or person that Orthodox history is based on. One Baptist from Vinnytsia recalled that Ukraine’s Orthodox Church started in Kievan Rus. A woman from the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church likewise mentioned that Prince Vladimir and Princess Olga brought Christianity to Ukraine from Greece. This historical pedigree explains, in their minds, why Orthodoxy is a privileged Ukrainian faith. But after mentioning Kievan Rus or Prince Vladimir, they would then sometimes talk about Protestantism’s own historical roots. Grigoriy, a former factory worker and an elder at the Presbyterian Church in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, said that the Orthodox church does not understand the Middle Ages, the time of the Protestant Reformation, from which his own church arose. Other Presbyterians explained that there have been Reformed churches in Ukraine since the Reformation. Valerie, the dynamic Bible study leader at the Vinnytsia Baptist Church, did her own research into the history of her city, and found
that there was a Protestant church in Vinnytsia as early as 1570.\textsuperscript{39} Many Baptists were familiar with (and described to me) the history of their own churches in Ukraine from the mid-nineteenth century.

While these men and women acknowledge Orthodoxy’s long history in Ukraine, they are also staking a claim for Protestantism. They want to emphasize that the Protestant Church has its own equally valid historical claims to Ukraine’s people. To further underline the historical legitimacy of the Protestant Church in Ukraine, Valerie explains some connections between Baptist and Orthodox churches. They both have similar traditions and rules for behavior, because, she points out, historically Ukrainian Baptists came out of Orthodoxy:

Originally the Ukrainian Baptist Church came from Orthodoxy. We have some Orthodox traditions. For example, women in our church cover their heads with scarves like women in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Baptists wore only dark clothes before. They couldn’t wear bright colors. They used to wear black clothes. In the villages people even wore black scarves when they went to church. It’s just a tradition. They couldn’t wear pants. Women wouldn’t wear low-necked dresses or short skirts. All this is connected with the traditions. . . . I was in Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra\textsuperscript{40} in Kyiv. There I saw written rules of behavior in the church. . . . There’s nothing in it that we don’t have in our list. Our church has exactly the same list of the rules for behavior in the church and on its grounds. So these are all traditions.

Although as we saw earlier in this chapter, few of the research participants wanted to label their church Ukrainian or national, they did want to emphasize their own church’s legitimacy based on historical roots. Valerie, for instance, reported both on the long history of Protestantism in Ukraine and, here, on the similarities between the Baptist and Orthodox churches. Later she also said that the Orthodox and Baptist churches share some similar foundational religious beliefs, since they both acknowledge the Apostles’ Creed. The fact that their Baptist church came out of the Orthodox church and has some similar traditions helps validate it. The Belgorod Presbyterians emphasized that their church grew out of an old Reformed tradition that was present in Ukraine hundreds of years ago, thus giving it a special historical legitimacy not found in some other new churches.

\textsuperscript{39} This has not been independently verified.
\textsuperscript{40} A famous Orthodox monastery.
Views toward Orthodoxy are complicated and diverse. Although Valerie emphasized similarities between her church and Orthodoxy, few others went to such lengths in support of the Orthodox church. They viewed turning to Protestantism as a separation from Orthodoxy and a rejection of Orthodox religious beliefs. Despite drawing a firm boundary between their church and the Orthodox church, they exhibited a deep respect for the Orthodox church at a certain level. This respect perhaps comes out of personal and family history in Orthodoxy: many of the new converts to both the Baptist and non-Baptist churches came to Protestantism via Orthodoxy or have Orthodoxy in their background. In Ukraine, Orthodoxy is usually the first religion people turn to in a time of spiritual need. As explained by Lydia, a physician and single mother who entered the Presbyterian Church in the late 1990s from a fairly non-religious Soviet background: “People here usually come to the Orthodox Church at a certain age. And when something happens, some tragedy, the death of a loved one, then a person starts going to church and turning to God.”

Grigoriy, the ex-factory worker and now Presbyterian elder, was somewhat typical in this respect. He had been a good Soviet atheist as a child, but with an Orthodox grandmother, to whom he partially credits his salvation:

I was sure God didn’t exist. I believed what I was taught. But I think a lot was done by my grandmother. She was an Orthodox believer. Every evening she prayed for me, for my brother, for my mother, for my father. She prayed before going to bed. It was always, every day. . . . I think that her prayers were heard because she was an Orthodox believer. She had a very close relationship with God. She did a lot of good things for the people, and she did that with no self-interest.

Pastor Volodymyr of L’viv Greater Grace Church started attending the Orthodox church as a young man. After seriously studying the Bible on his own when he was a university student, he decided that he should make the church his professional career. He thought that it would be better for me to be a priest, maybe go to some kind of academy or maybe even go to the monastery to be a monk. Or just be in monastery and be by yourself and study Bible, pray to God, and be like a better person. And I start thinking about this. And it take [sic] me another year and I was, in 1994 I was almost ready to go to monastery. Just, I need someone [to] lead, and if there was someone in my
life to tell me, you know, “Go!” I will go. But in 1994 my friend come [sic] and invite me to [Greater Grace] church. Lydia, Grigoriy, Vitaliy and Pastor Volodymyr were only four among many people I met who converted to Protestantism after spending at least some time exploring Orthodoxy. Although none of these four were Baptists, I did meet some Baptist converts with Orthodox backgrounds.

Perhaps because of this close personal relationship with Orthodoxy, a large number of the Protestants I spoke with made sure to mention positive qualities in addition to anything negative when asked about Ukraine’s traditional faiths. For example, Pastor Mykola at Greater Grace voiced respect for Orthodox and Catholic priests that he comes in contact with at interfaith meetings in L’viv:

I don’t have any presumption against them. I know they may have little [sic] different and strange doctrines, but okay. I know that they preach the gospel, they try to teach people the right things, so I want to honor that, you know?

Valentin, a port worker and deacon in the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Baptist Church, emphasized that Orthodox church-goers are normal people and some are real Christians:

But our attitude is that they are not our enemies. If we can say so, they are not our enemies; they are ordinary people just like us. Many of them are sincere believers. I can’t even have a slight remainder of hostile attitude toward them. Let them serve the Lord if they think so.

This general respect towards believers in the Orthodox Church was widespread among Ukrainian Protestants.

Nevertheless, Protestants had many criticisms of Orthodox teaching, principally about the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of how people can relate to God. A main theme in what Protestants told me is that they do not consider most Orthodox people to have a high respect for the Bible. While Valentin, as we saw above, thinks that there are sincere believers in the Orthodox church, he added that people who go to the Orthodox church “do not want to know the Scriptures.” Pastor Dmitri, a former pathologist and pastor of the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church, found that there “was very little food” at the Orthodox church in terms of serious biblical teaching. Evgeniy, a young Baptist in Kherson who used to attend the Orthodox church, similarly found that:

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41 Pastor Volodymyr gave the interview in English, just as it is written here.
42 Pastor Mykola also gave the interview in English.
Nobody in the Orthodox Church told us anything about the Word of God. I hadn’t read the Gospel. In that church I did only those things that other people did. I just followed the rules established in that church. . . . Now, of course, I understand that it was stupid and ridiculous to do all that. The Word of God doesn’t require so many things. I also got to know that the Orthodox Church breaks both the Word of God and God’s commandments. It was also a shock for me.

Evgeniy’s journey into an evangelical church led him to doubt the Orthodox church – he came so far as to believe that the Orthodox church teaches doctrine contrary to a correct interpretation of the Bible.

Even more pervasive than the skepticism towards the Orthodox view of the Bible was a frustration towards Orthodox teaching of how people can relate to God. This seems to be one of the principal reasons people left the Orthodox church for Protestantism – that in Orthodoxy God is distant and mysterious, but in Protestantism God can be known intimately. As Dr. Lydia said:

I felt like I had to come and know him closer, but it was impossible to do so in the Orthodox Church, because when you come there, you are separated. And you can ask some saint, praying to him for someone. There are many barriers. And here [at the Presbyterian Church] it is like I can be driving and praying, walking and praying, and at home I can pray. I don’t have to go to church to do it. Though I go to church, but still, there is direct communication.

Lydia felt that she couldn’t come close to God in the Orthodox church like she could in the Presbyterian church. Vitaliy, the police instructor and former Orthodox believer in L’viv, shared Lydia’s views, and expressed disappointment in the Orthodox emphasis on doing good works to achieve God’s favor. In the Orthodox church, he said,

it is very hard to believe that you can easily come to know God. And it’s hard for these people to believe that. Very hard. It’s hard to believe that you can come to God easily. People think that to find God you need to go down a very difficult path, and you need to do something to earn it. That’s the way it is with most people. And the traditional churches support this.

Pastor Dmitri in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy expresses it with more theological terminology. When he “became a believer” in 1994 he came to realize that

Jesus is a personal Savior. In Orthodoxy God and man are very distant from each other. A human is here. He’s sinful, insignificant, miserable. He’s nothing. He’s sinful. And God is there. He is holy. And that is true, but it’s like 50 percent of the truth. And the second 50 percent is that this great God came to earth and became as miserable as me, even worse, to take my sins on Himself. And it was very important for me that I felt, I saw, that this God didn’t come to
[my wife], but he came to me, personally to me. He is my Savior. It was a special time.

All of these examples underscore how far out of the Orthodox fold evangelicals have come. They may respect the Orthodox church because of family history or because of certain church customs that they approve of, but their core theological beliefs are incompatible with Orthodox teachings.

We can now re-ask a relevant question: Does Ukrainian Protestantism challenge or accommodate a national church as an aspect of Ukrainian national identity? While most Ukrainian evangelicals do consider the Orthodox church to be the national church of Ukraine, their disagreements with the church trump any desire they may have to be part of it. They seem to have accepted that their own national identity will not include an Orthodox component. Interestingly, no one expressed disappointment in being outside of a national faith, and those outside L’viv held their anti-nationalistic views quite strongly.

One interesting alternative view of Ukraine’s national religion was heard in three different Baptist focus groups, where paganism was identified as the national faith. Participants told me that Ukrainians were pagan before they adopted Christianity, and they were aware of a pro-pagan organization that is trying to revive worship of Ukraine’s indigenous deities like Yarylo, Veles, and Smaragd. The organization is called RUNaV, short for *Ridna Ukrainska Narodna Vera* (Native Ukrainian People’s Faith) – and according to some from Vinnytsia, is supported by “people with higher education” and spread “in teacher training colleges, humanitarian universities.” This pagan organization is evidently active in Vinnytsia. According to Yura, the pastor of Kherson Central Baptist Church, Orthodoxy itself is tied to paganism. Although “real Orthodox believers are even close to us in their faith,” Yura said, “most people just observe rituals, and paganism is in one line with the Orthodox church. The church and paganism are literally entwined. People don’t even notice it.” He then explained in some detail how certain Orthodox festivals have pagan roots.

These Baptists are making two points here, both meant to discredit Orthodoxy. The first is to show that the ‘real’ Ukrainian religion is paganism. The Orthodox church would then lose its purchase as the country’s ‘original’ national religion. The second is to link Orthodoxy with paganism. If the church is actually based on paganism, then a
good Christian should not trust any of their teachings. Instead, seekers should turn to other, more trustworthy faiths, like the Baptist church.

6.4.4 Nationalism conclusion

The themes of nationalism and religion are frequently connected by scholars of both religion and nationalism. People have written about such topics as the relationship of church and state (Daniel and Durham 1999; Evans 2002), violent clashes of religious nationalisms (Juergensmeyer 1993; 1996; Marty 1997), and the relationship between religious institutions and national sentiments (Verkhovsky 2002). A standard way of relating religion and nationalism is to see religion as an inspiration for nationalism, and religious institutions as being repositories for national identity. Anthony Smith writes that many “past and contemporary nationalisms can be seen as reinforcements and revivals of premodern religious traditions of particular ethnic communities” (2003, 16). He gives the example of The Tale of Bygone Years, a twelfth century chronicle in the land of Rus’ in which “religion constitutes the main strand” of history, and that history is later drawn upon for a sense of Russian national identity. The Russian Orthodox Church has often been cited as an institution that represents a component of Russian national identity, as when Peter Duncan called the Church “one of the principal centres of Russian nationalism in the Soviet Union” (Duncan 1990). Another example is in Britain, where Protestantism is typically seen as a foundation for national identity (Claydon and McBride 1998).

This formulation of national identity being connected to a dominant faith does not represent the nationalist views of many Ukrainian Protestants. Indeed, perhaps Ukraine as a whole is moving away from this type of nationalism. Andrew Wilson, a British scholar, has written a great deal about contemporary Ukrainian nationalism. On the question of a national Ukrainian church he writes that:

At various times in the past the distinctive characteristics of local religious faith have been a factor, sometimes the key factor, in creating a sense of distinct Ukrainian identity. The period since 1991 has not been one of those times. . . . Nationalists have constantly bemoaned the failure to create a united national Church, without, however, stopping to think whether Ukraine really needs one (2000, 234).
The nationalist sentiments expressed by Ukrainian evangelicals have few connections to mainline Orthodoxy or Catholicism. Those evangelicals who do claim to be “Ukrainian patriots” seem to have no trouble holding nationalist views while adhering to a minority faith.

Even those evangelicals who claim not to be nationalists have opinions about the Ukrainian nation and their place in it. Outside of L’viv, Protestants are vehemently opposed to incorporating national elements into their faith, and are reluctant even to depict their churches as Ukrainian. This anti-national behavior actually represents a belief that the Ukrainian nation should include a Russian language component. A civic nationalism seems to be developing in some Protestant churches, but for the most part this phenomenon (represented by flags in churches and prayers for the president) is found in new churches, not in the older Baptist ones which are still suspicious of the state. For those who wish to consolidate a Ukrainian national identity, there are several challenges that would need to be overcome in order to fully engage Ukrainian evangelicals in the national project:

- Nationalism is perceived as a concept about ethnic or national exclusion. Nationality was used as an ethnic marker in the Soviet Union, and had little to do with political community, imagined or not. Ukraine’s Protestant church members back away from the idea of connecting the Ukrainian nation with their churches because as diverse communities they do not want to create a church only for people of one ethnicity. Their evangelical doctrine also teaches that “The Church” should include people from all nations and not focus on any one group. Furthermore, evangelicals from Russian speaking areas of Ukraine are not interested in a Ukrainian identity that excludes the Russian language.

- Ethnic and language diversity in Ukraine, a legacy of Soviet and other history, has resulted in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Protestant congregations. Each of the evangelical churches included in this study have congregations drawn from various backgrounds. In addition to a Ukrainian congregational core are other members with roots elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Russia is the most common alternate country of origin, but there were members from countries scattered across Eurasia. This diversity contributes to a reluctance to be a church that excludes non-Ukrainian
congregation members. People outside of L’viv were the most concerned about this, probably because as Russian speakers they felt the most threatened by a Ukrainian-only nationalism.

- Interactions between Ukrainian evangelical churches and American missionaries create a tension between transnational and national identifications. We will examine this more closely in the following chapter, but one example of this tension at work is that some churches have developed reputations as “American” churches, and for them it is particularly challenging to develop an independent Ukrainian identity.

- There is a historical relationship between Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian nation. Ukrainian evangelicals acknowledge this relationship and believe that it precludes them from fitting in with traditional Ukrainian identity. Those evangelicals with nationalist views tend to adjust their own national identity to omit Orthodox or Greek Catholic religious beliefs.

- Ukrainian Baptists believe that their identity as believers is more important than any earthly identity associated with nationality or region of origin. They put everything into one of two categories – the church and the world – and the church is infinitely more important. We will investigate this dual framework in the next chapter.

6.5 Conclusion

Regionalism is a component of Ukrainian evangelical church life. While a tidy East-West dichotomy oversimplifies the nuanced and complex aspects of social life in Ukraine, this chapter has shown that Western Ukraine persists as a discrete region in the minds of at least one subset of the population. At a basic level, Ukraine’s regional differentiation can be observed in that the dominant language spoken in churches varies regionally, as does the degree to which church-goers incorporate aspects of a Ukrainian national identity into their church life. In L’viv, not only is Ukrainian the exclusive language at the two case study churches, but church members identified their churches as Ukrainian, a step that was rejected by church members in the other three cities.

We have seen that attitudes towards Ukrainian nationalism have a strong regional component. Members of L’viv churches (as opposed to those outside of L’viv) are much more comfortable with a nationalism that exclusively uses the Ukrainian language.
Indeed, evangelicals from Kherson and even Vinnytsia were quite vocal against the Ukrainian language agenda and made their own case for a national identity that incorporates the Russian language and pan-Soviet national backgrounds.

However, we also saw that something beyond regionalism was at work in how evangelical churches responded to nationalism. Although both L’viv churches used the Ukrainian language in their services almost exclusively, and people in both churches labeled themselves a “Ukrainian church,” members of Greater Grace were more willing than members of the Baptist Church to use the political symbols of the Ukrainian nation at church. Greater Grace was the only church of the eight case study churches where a Ukrainian flag was displayed on the premises – and in this case, at the front of the sanctuary. Church members proudly taught their children the national anthem and purposely built up ideas about Ukraine and the future of Ukraine among their people. I did not observe any of those elements at the L’viv Baptist Church, and the debate that took place in one of the focus groups there is evidence that the congregation does not agree about the extent to which they should embrace a Ukrainian national identity. Overall, members of the new Protestant churches were more hospitable to civic nationalism than were members of older Baptist churches. I can speculate along with Pastor Volodymyr of Greater Grace that people in older Protestant churches such as L’viv Baptist are reluctant to sing the national anthem or publicly honor the Ukrainian flag because of their fear of the state that was bred during decades of persecution. The people of Greater Grace do not have that fear because the religious persecution did not directly affect them, as their church began only after Ukraine’s independence and during the time of religious freedom.

Another area in which we see a difference between new and old evangelical churches is in relation to transnationalism. This chapter did not explore whether the emphasis that Russian-speaking members of new churches placed on multi-nationalism and diversity was in any way connected to their views about missionaries and the West. The claim that the reason new churches wanted a Russian language nationalism was their unique relationship to the West is contradicted by some of the data. For instance, older Russian-speaking congregations that were not founded by missionaries shared some of the same views, and the Greater Grace Church in L’viv is both pro-Western and pro-
Ukrainian language. However, the way Ukrainian evangelical churches perceive the West and their relationship to a global church is an important one and is the main theme of the following chapter.
Chapter Seven: Transnationalism in Ukrainian evangelical churches

It’s very important that there be connections around the world, that we know each other there and in other places. We receive greetings from people there and it is like being there.

—Maria, L’viv Baptist Church

And I must say that our brotherhood strictly watches that the Western liberalism won’t get to our churches. The pastor sets certain limits that young men shouldn’t have long hair, chew gum; girls shouldn’t wear makeup, shouldn’t wear pants. They should keep the Christian rules that are written in the Bible. And he watches it strictly. And we are thankful to him for this.

—Lidiya, Vinnytsia Baptist Church

7.1 Introduction

The West is an integral part of evangelical church life in post-Soviet Ukraine. As a source of money, missionaries, and other resources — and as a destination for Ukrainian church members permanently moving out of the country — the West is loved, hated, credited with helping Ukraine, and blamed for causing problems in the Ukrainian church and in the country more generally. It is a place of freedom, wealth, sin, and opportunity. ‘The West’ has no firm definition, but as used by Ukrainian evangelicals it refers to a place outside of Ukraine that includes Western Europe, Anglophone countries like Australia and Canada, and of course (and especially) the United States. This chapter analyzes Ukrainian Protestants’ views towards the West, including towards Western churches and missionaries and the transnational processes they are involved in, and is organized according to church type. I found that involvement in transnational activities and attitudes towards them does not correlate with region in Ukraine but is related to denominational type. That is, Baptists in Kherson are likely to view the West similarly to Baptists in L’viv, and members of the Presbyterian church in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy share some perspectives about the West with members of Greater Grace in L’viv. We will explore the reasons for this pattern later in the chapter. The first half of the chapter examines transnational issues with respect to Ukrainian Baptist churches, while the second half covers these themes with respect to Ukraine’s new Protestant churches.

The research questions that guide these inquiries interrogate the place of Ukrainian evangelicalism within a large and active transnational network. I seek to find
out how self-awareness of a transnational identity contributes to, or undermines, regional and national identifications. I also seek to find out what differences there are between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, and between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of transnational identity.

The American missionaries I encountered in Ukraine held to an evangelical version of Christianity that emphasizes spiritual rebirth, dependence on the Bible, sharing the faith, and Christ’s death on the cross as “the only way to salvation” (Noll 2001, 13).\footnote{Noll credits British historian David Bebbington with articulating these key elements of evangelicalism (1989). A similar list of characteristics was developed by George Marsden (1991, 4-5).} Similar beliefs are taught in evangelical churches around the globe, and have been portrayed as an “American Gospel.” In their book Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism, Steve Brouwer and his co-authors write that

While the leaders of the new Christian faith come from various nations, the message is predominantly American. When believers enter a church in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, they participate in a form of worship that can be found in Memphis or Portland or New York City. Perhaps it will be Pentecostal, or Southern Baptist, or a ubiquitous charismatic product marketed by Bible schools in places such as Tulsa and Pasadena. These Protestants disseminate beliefs that can comfort middle-class businessmen at a prayer breakfast in Rio de Janeiro and inspire the poorest of the world’s would-be consumers at a Bunnke crusade in Lagos (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996, 2).

I do not wish to debate the legitimacy of calling this version of Christianity “American.” Instead, I question the view that evangelical Christianity is a homogenizing force, leaving little room for local adaptations and interventions. Instead, this chapter will show that Ukrainian evangelicals do not hold a uniform view towards the West or the Western missionaries in their midst. The religious ‘product’ of American missionaries is carefully evaluated by Ukrainian consumers before aspects of it are incorporated into Ukrainian churches. The transnational religious networks of which Ukrainian Protestants partake are not wholly endorsed by the participants, and have uneven impacts on the ground.

In each focus group discussion, and in most individual interviews, participants were asked about their views towards missionaries working in Ukraine and about the impact the West was having on their church. Responses to these questions indicate what the churches’ relationships were like with foreigners; often the resulting conversation delved into financial relationships with the West, opinions about church independence
and dependence, and participants’ general feelings about the West. Most of the evangelicals had at least something good to say about Western influence or foreign missionaries at work in Ukraine, although the depth of goodwill was considerably shallower in older Baptist churches than in the new churches. Often a Baptist would compliment some aspect of having international partners before launching a critical discussion of the partners or of the West more generally. These criticisms should not be interpreted as complete opposition to the process of transnationalism itself, because Ukrainian church leaders continue to actively seek out international financial and ministry partners. Nor should we assume that the initial compliments towards particular missions organizations or missionaries were disingenuous attempts at setting the American interviewer at ease, because there were positive comments about specific foreigners in nearly every interview conducted. However, overall fewer Baptists had close relationships with foreign missionaries than did members of new Churches, and those Baptists who did have close relationships with Westerners tended to have more positive things to say than those who only knew of missionaries in general.

7.2 Ukrainian Baptist churches and transnationalism

Views towards transnationalism in Ukrainian Baptist churches fall into a broad spectrum from joy and thankfulness for Western friends and ministry partners to fear and disappointment in its processes and outcomes. Sometimes missionaries are considered beloved friends; other times they are portrayed as outsiders who do not understand Ukrainian culture and who represent the evil ‘West’ – a place from which dangerous forces come to threaten the spiritual well-being of the Ukrainian Baptist Church. Baptist pastors were more negative about this than most Baptist congregation members, although middle-agers who grew up in the church were as a rule more critical than new converts or young people towards missionaries and the West.

Profound ambivalence towards missionaries, the West, and the process of transnationalism itself was expressed in many of the interviews. Two men from different churches exemplified this attitude. Both said outright that while they did not oppose having foreign missionaries in Ukraine, they did not really understand why the missionaries were coming. According to Bohdan, a young Baptist from L’viv, there are
more believers as a percentage of Ukraine’s population than there are believers as a percentage of the population of the United States, which makes the presence of American missionaries in Ukraine counterintuitive. This statement tells us what he thinks about the United States (it is a place with few Christians) as well as what he thinks about his own country (it is a Christian nation). His logic undermines the entire foundation of the mission-sending enterprise in Ukraine.

Viktor, an older man from the Baptist church in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, said that missionaries have not brought anything new to Ukraine and are not needed, except for their money:

Financially I think [missionaries] helped a lot. But spiritually I don’t think so, but it’s my personal thoughts. Let’s say Americans. When they come, let’s say for a conference, or some meeting, or even just a service in the church, the people that come are interesting. He would say the sermon and it would be interesting and exciting. Or he would say some idea that we hadn’t seen before through the Scripture. But for some reason, it’s my personal attitude, maybe many people look at it from a different point of view, but for me personally they preach what we already know well. . . . It seems to me that they don’t bring anything new. . . . But well, if they have a desire to come and serve, let them do it. Honestly, we are happy for them. No matter who comes with whatever purpose.

Viktor is not impressed by the missionaries he has seen. He has a laissez-faire attitude (“let them do it”) but feels that the missionaries are not bringing any real spiritual benefit to the Ukrainian church, although the inflow of cash is appreciated. To some extent this kind of ambivalence was expressed at nearly all of the interviews and focus groups conducted in Baptist churches. On the one hand missionaries are a help, some of them are loved dearly, and they should keep coming. On the other hand they are not needed, they have not given anything new, and the criticisms get even more specific and hard-hitting from there. The next two sections evaluate in more detail the positive, then the negative, views Baptists hold towards religious transnationalism and the West.

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44 If Bohdan means that there is a higher percentage of Protestant believers in Ukraine than in the United States, he is misinformed. Although the number has fallen in recent years, in 2002 approximately half of the U.S. population considered themselves to be Protestant. Of those, 31% attend church weekly, according to one research report (Smith and Kim 2004). Ukraine’s Protestants make up only 2.5% of its total population (Krindatch 2003, 42).
7.2.1 Baptists and their positive perceptions of religious transnationalism

One indicator of how Baptists perceive religious transnationalism is their attitude towards foreign missionaries working in Ukraine. Each of the four Baptist churches profiled has had interaction with Western missionaries, some to a greater extent than others. As explained in Chapter Five, at the time of the fieldwork for this project there were foreign missionaries living in L’viv and Vinnytsia who were affiliated to a certain extent with the Baptist churches in those cities. In the past Kherson had several missionary families living there who were well acquainted with the Baptist church in this study. No missionaries lived in Belgorod to work with its Baptist church, but like all of the others, the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy church had previously hosted various short-term teams from North America or Western Europe and so had some basis for evaluating the role of missionaries in their country.

Positive responses to missionaries ranged from the basic “Thank God for missionaries” to the more specific “Glen, who opened the Bible Institute, is a star.” Ivan in Kherson said that “When our missionaries Glen and Chris with their families lived here we loved them very much.” The following excerpt from a focus group of middle aged Baptists at the Vinnytsia Baptist Church illustrates appreciation for the missionaries with a hint of caution mixed in. Participants compliment missionaries in general without mentioning anyone by name, but also imply that not all Baptists have positive opinions of those who come to Ukraine:

Alex: We thank God for missionaries. We receive literature through missionaries. They come and preach here. And the Word is opened through them.
Svyeta: They are doing God’s ministry.
Irina: And are helping us.
Alex: We don’t know about other churches, but it is great in our church. Praise God. And we thank God for missionaries. And none of us is against them here, right? . . .
Julia: On the contrary, we are glad to see them. And want them to come here more often.

Alex’s remark that “none of us is against them here, right?” can be interpreted as an acknowledgment that not all Baptists share their positive opinion.

Nadia, an elderly woman at the same church and an adult convert, also expressed her positive opinion of missionaries, but like Alex, she hinted that there were sometimes
problems. She remarked that “These missions bring us positive things. And God helps us not to accept the negative. But in missions I never saw negative. Videos, attitudes, accepting, worshiping God, everything is according to the Gospel.” Although Nadia “never saw negative” things with missions, she also said that “God helps us not to accept the negative.” That is, God helps them not to accept the negative things that missionaries bring into the life of the church, whatever those negative things might be. For Nadia, the benefits of having missionaries outweigh the costs.

Nadia and Alex were not alone among the Baptists interviewed for this project in their positive, but guarded, opinion of missionary work. Several others included criticism of Western influence in the church along with compliments for the work missionaries were contributing to their churches. At a fundamental level the Baptists I spoke with seemed happy that missionaries were investing materially and spiritually in their country, despite possible problems.

At the focus group of young adults at the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Baptist Church one woman commented about missionaries: “I say, let them come.” She especially wanted foreign Sunday School teachers to come and share experiences with the Sunday School teachers at her church. One of her fellow church members appreciated the prayer support provided by missionaries: “I think that they also pray, and I know that those who come here provide a lot of prayer support. And I think it’s God’s will for them to come and do just that.”

Upon occasion Ukrainian Baptists expressed tender and even familial affection for Western missionaries. While I saw this more often in the new churches, at times a Baptist church member would also speak about their strong admiration for missionary contacts. Zhenya is a forty-something mother of three and an adult convert at L’viv Baptist Church. She is Russian, and met her Ukrainian husband when he was in the army and stationed in her Far Eastern city. Together they converted to the Baptist church when they still lived in Russia, and subsequently moved to L’viv around the time of Ukraine’s independence. Zhenya said that she had accepted Americans as “older brothers and sisters” unquestioningly until recently. In fact, she seemed to look on American Christians as superior to Ukrainian believers:
I just look at Western Christians like, you could say, as family. There are older people in the family, brothers and sisters, who are wiser and stronger, and they can teach those who are younger. I always accepted those who came with missions as older brothers and sisters. Even though some of them are younger than me, but I thought of them as older brothers and sisters who could take your hand and walk together with you.

Zhenya’s feelings changed a bit after the onset of the U.S. war in Iraq, when she learned that many American Protestants supported George Bush’s foreign policy decisions. She was astounded that people she looked up to and thought were older and wiser Christians could support the Iraq war. Despite her disappointment, however, she still considered American Christians to be family.

One of Zhenya’s pastors, Oleksandr, has duties that include fundraising trips to the United States and close interaction with Westerners visiting the L’viv church. When describing the process of reconstructing their church building, he counted cooperation with brothers and sisters from many countries a joy:

Brothers and sisters from overseas helped us . . . . with finances a bit. They helped with their presence, with their literature. They often came to visit. When we restored this House of Prayer, many groups from America and Germany came to help us, who even worked here in the church. They brought tools with them, they brought some money. It was a great joy for us, that there was someone to share joy and labor with, that together we could build a House of Prayer. If you could have seen this House of Prayer ten years ago, you would be shocked.

Oleksandr was grateful to the American and German groups. Unlike Zhenya, he did not describe them with adoration or familial love, but as partners in labor. However, Pastor Oleksandr did not want all of the credit to go to those from overseas. It is “first of all, God’s blessing. Secondly, it is the help of our friends, and also our own labor, and the answer to our prayers. Altogether – God’s blessing which gave that result.” He puts God first in the hierarchy, then three entities share the secondary place: friends (from abroad), the hard work of Ukrainians themselves, and their own prayers.

At the Kherson Baptist Church, Yuriy put this in perspective, saying that international relationships were more difficult than the internal connections with other Ukrainian Christians, despite a spiritual connection between believers in the West and in Ukraine:

Our internal connections are more important for us because they’re closer to us. It’s natural and we feel more natural. Western connections are also important
because we’re related spiritually, but it’s a little bit more difficult in terms of communication and a different culture.

Yuriy senses that no matter how close he may feel to a Western Christian because of a spiritual bond, the relationship will always be different from the relationship with a fellow Ukrainian believer. There is a sense of community (perhaps a sort of national identity?) within the Ukrainian church that trumps spiritual connections with Christians who live in other parts of the world.

Views towards missionaries came into sharper focus when the Baptists described specific qualities they appreciated in the missionaries, qualities such as sacrificial living (a high value in Ukrainian Baptist society), strong faith, and willingness to work hard. Living patiently under circumstances of material hardship is a common reality for Ukrainian Baptists, and it is a quality they admire in particular missionaries who purposely live under similar circumstances while working in Ukraine. The Ukrainians I interviewed felt that American missionaries in Ukraine were making big sacrifices to live in their (poor) country when they could be living in a rich one. It is clear that they perceive the West to be a land of plenty. In their minds, people who live in Western countries live in abundance. Peter and Zhenya (the Ukrainian-Russian married couple in L’viv) described spiritual aspects of the economic imbalances when I interviewed them in their apartment:

Peter: But in general we are impressed by those people who come with missions as people who give up their vacations, leave their families, spend their money and come here to help, to preach.

Zhenya: Life here is harder than in America.

Peter: They always come and say, “Oh, it was so hard for you to believe in God here!” I always say to them –

Zhenya: For us it’s not as hard as it was in the past. Maybe they mean right now–

Peter: Or there were difficulties there, maybe.

Zhenya: Because there were always fines or something, it was a big battle.

Peter: I always tell them that they are the giants of faith, because for us it is easier, it is hard and we can only hope in the Lord. . . . For you it is harder because you have everything, life is easier. You have more temptation and need to resist it. To stand firm. So it’s not clear yet who the giants of faith are.
Zhenya and Peter believe that it is spiritually easier to live in a poor country than a rich one. A Christian in Ukraine has to trust God for everything, and is not tempted to depend on wealth instead. Financial prosperity is seen by this couple and by others as a spiritually treacherous condition. In this line of thinking, Ukrainian Baptists who are poor have no choice but to depend only on God. Zhenya and Peter admire missionaries for their willingness to make personal sacrifices to come to Ukraine. Peter even calls the Western missionaries “giants of faith” because they live faithful Christian lives despite having a materially easy way of life. This is an interesting stance: Western Christians are admired because of their ability to stand firm despite living in a wealthy place; the West itself is criticized because of the perceived prosperity that people there enjoy.

At a focus group with young adults at the Kherson Baptist Church, I asked the participants to react to the phrase “American missionary.” Their first responses also had to do with sacrifice:

Valera: Praise the Lord we have him. [quiet group laughter] May he minister furthermore.

Oksana: Really. Praise the Lord that he had a desire to come here. To us. They –

Marina: and leave his life there that was much better and sacrifice many things to come to Ukraine. One missionary who often comes to Ukraine – what is his name? I can’t remember.

Woman: Steve.

Marina: He starts Christian music schools in Ukraine. And when he and his family came to Kherson for the first time their taxi cab broke down and then they spent much time to get to the place they needed. Finally when they got there they got stuck in an elevator for two hours. And Steve decided not to take his family to our city anymore. To work here means to be a hero a little bit. [group laughter]

Although they joke about it, these young people believe that life is “much better” in America and they call missionaries “heroes” because of the material sacrifices they make to live in Ukraine. Their expectation is that Americans would not want to leave a materially comfortable life to stay for any length of time in Ukraine. This passage not only speaks towards their views of America (rich and comfortable), but it also speaks about the image these Ukrainians have about their own country (poor and difficult). However, unlike missionaries who come to Ukraine for a short time, these young people were born in Ukraine and live there permanently. Using Marina’s logic, that means that
their heroism might even surpass the heroism of Steve, the American missionary. I think it surprises and pleases them that Americans will leave lives of plenty to live and work in Ukraine, but at the same time they mock the visitors for struggling with taxis that break down and elevators that get stuck. Perhaps they are also embarrassed at the failures of their own land.

In the case of an American missionary named Glen who worked in Kherson from 1992-1999, members of the Baptist Church have only good to say, but once again we see them honoring the simple life. Tanya responded to a question asking the group to evaluate foreign missionaries working in Ukraine:

It depends on the missionary. If it is somebody like Glen, then it’s a star, of course. He revolutionized things. Nothing that he did can be repeated. He opened the Bible institute, thanks to which we can now have many educated teachers and competent preachers and Sunday school teachers. He really did so much. He became an example of how to sacrifice by how he lived here with his family, with his children. He even lived like all of us, without his own car, using public transportation. He was a really simple person.

This passage shows deep respect and admiration for Glen, and it also shows that one characteristic the Ukrainian Baptists particularly admired was Glen’s willingness to live a materially simple life at the same level as most others in the church. Tanya says that he “lived like all of us.” Sacrifice is an important value to Tanya and other Ukrainian Baptists. Perhaps the respect for sacrifice is rooted in the decades the church struggled during the Soviet period, but it also likely goes even farther back in history to the roots of the Ukrainian Baptist church as a movement of Russian Orthodox peasants. Orthodox Christianity places a high value on suffering as a pathway to sanctification, and these Baptists have inherited those ideas.

Besides admiring Americans for making material sacrifices, Ukrainian Baptists mentioned several other qualities that they appreciated in missionaries. Zhenya (L’viv Baptist) spoke of the love that an American team showed for each other, and desired that same attitude within her own church:

Well as for culture, there’s this kind of influence: If in the church – I, for example, really liked it when Glen Walker’s team\footnote{This is not the same Glen referred to in the previous paragraph.} started coming here with the medical mission. I saw how the team, how they relate to each other in a Christian way on the team. I really liked that. I was just amazed, I saw the love which...
shows that we are in Christ. I really liked that and to this day I dream that we would also have that, that people would unite not with traditions . . . but with the love of Christ. Where the love of Christ is you have the church, you have Christians.

In this case Zhenya’s compliment about the American medical team is also a criticism of her Baptist church: that people in the church are more concerned about traditions than they are about showing the love of Christ to others. Zhenya grew up an atheist in the Soviet Far East, and came into the church after moving to L’viv with her Ukrainian husband. Perhaps being somewhat of an outsider frees her to voice these criticisms of the church.

Besides these admirable qualities of American missionaries, Baptists appreciated specific ministry skills they had learned from the Westerners. Valentina, an older woman at the Vinnytsia Baptist Church, followed the example of Americans and learned how to raise funds for her ministry. The concept of asking other Ukrainian church members for financial contributions was a new one (forbidden during the Soviet Union) and recommended by missionaries. Another example is that a young woman at the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Baptist Church said that missionaries “taught us to interact with children that aren’t accepted.” While I did not ask a follow-up question to ascertain exactly what children she was talking about, I assume she meant ministering to children with mental retardation or special health needs. (There are two orphanages for these kinds of children near her church). At that same interview one of her fellow church members said that they planned to open a Christian youth club in their town, and they got the idea from an American magazine. Even Dima, a fairly anti-American and patriotic youth leader at the L’viv Baptist Church conceded that his youth group had benefited from American materials:

Right now we are using a lot of literature and study books from the West. Right now the leadership team is studying – I’m leading the lessons – a course on youth leadership by Doug Fields and Rick Warren and Saddleback Church in Carolina. There are things which have certainly helped us. Now the things we’ve gleaned from there have really helped our youth. Recently we have been having growth in the youth group and it is in great part due to that Western material.

46 The church is actually in California.
One of the authors Dima cites, Rick Warren, wrote the popular *Purpose Driven Life* (2002) that has swept evangelical churches in the West in recent years. *Time* magazine called Rick Warren one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in America in 2005. L’viv Baptist is engaged in some of the same literature, trends, and ideas as churches in the United States.

Dima immediately continued: “Honestly, I always try to be a patriot. I don’t really like the influence of the West, but I have to say that in these ways it has been a big blessing.” Here Dima portrays the influence of the West as a challenge to patriotism. A fellow L’viv resident (but member of a different church, Greater Grace) defined patriotism as being proud that he is Ukrainian. Later we will see that Dima himself defines patriotism as having Ukraine “the first country in my mind.” He ties his patriotism to his stance against emigration. Dima is proud of his country and accepting Western influence in the church is difficult for him because of his strong sense of patriotism, but nevertheless he finds some of the specific ministry tools a blessing.

The most extreme case I found of a Baptist church member emulating Americans was Marina at the Kherson Baptist Church. Marina speaks English and has been one of her church’s main English interpreters for the past several years, thus having a great deal of interaction with Americans who visit Kherson. She has become close friends with a number of Americans, and aspires to move to America to study in a Bible college there. She is hoping that her many American contacts will help her reach the funding level she needs to come to the United States. In the meantime, Marina acknowledges that she has adopted some American habits such as eating with a fork in her right hand and using American cosmetics (a friend in Texas sends her Mary Kay and Clinique products through the mail). Marina told me that her friends think she does not behave like a Ukrainian, and that her “understanding of life was half-American.” When pressed for a specific example, she said that Ukrainians are not flexible in their behavior and that she wants to emulate American flexibility. Ukrainians “think . . . their traditions are, uh, very important and [there is] no other way to do that. So, I think Ukrainians should be more flexible.” In other words, the American value of flexibility stands in opposition to the Ukrainian value of tradition. Marina does not want to be bound by Ukrainian traditions,
but wants to be free to make decisions without having to bow to what is always expected of her.

Many Baptists appreciate the preaching skills of visiting American pastors. Valentina, a retired woman who attends L’viv Baptist, said that American and Canadian pastors preach at a “high level,” and that people in her church, other than the pastors, “don’t have that spiritual level.” Her friend Maria implied that American pastors are more educated than Ukrainian pastors, and that usually (but not always) leads to better sermons:

> The congregation listens to the foreign preachers more attentively, and with more interest. They know history better – and I love and study history anywhere I can get it, so that I can say something to someone. So it’s good when they come, but some of those who come also preach poorly.

Most American pastors are good preachers, then, but at times offend because of not knowing or following cultural practices. Maria related the story of an American pastor who talked about his alcoholic son from the pulpit and offended his audience. Specific sins like that should not be talked about in public, and especially not from the pulpit! (Maria was shocked). Similar incidents of American preachers revealing too much about their sinful lives were also reported at the Vinnytsia and Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Baptist churches.

Education is a sensitive topic in Ukrainian Baptist Churches, since for years Baptists were routinely denied admission at institutes of higher learning for political reasons. Baptist pastors did not attend seminaries or Bible colleges but became qualified to preach through their upright living, baptism, and membership in the church (Harris 1996, 8). Today’s young adults are the first generation of Ukrainian Baptists to have open access to colleges and universities, and the educational disconnect between them and their parents and grandparents at times leads to dissatisfaction on their part and worries on their parents’ part. I will discuss Baptist youth and the generational divide later in this chapter, but here note that not only are visiting missionaries viewed as highly educated, but that the opposite is also sometimes true: that Ukrainian pastors are seen as uneducated. Kolya, another one of the youth leaders at L’viv Baptist Church, is concerned about what he calls the “professional level” of the church ministers. While he does not compare them to American ministers, we already saw that Maria at the same
church made that connection. An urbane cosmopolitanism is desired by this group of college-educated young adults, part of what is likely the first generation of educated Ukrainian Baptists ever. Kolya says that “leaders will need to be taught and to be on a professional level and they need to be able to represent our church well in the society.” Another young man adds that church leaders need to be educated at a Bible college or university and “then they will be able to preach well.” According to a third person at the focus group, “preachers with high education could preach on good and serious topics, and it goes to the heart of the people.” Uneducated preaching would be satisfactory for a village church, but in the city of L’viv:

the level should be higher, because more people with high education come here and they are more intelligent. They are seeking God and it is good for them to see that the believers . . . can be educated, too. . . . they must be able to give the Word of God at a deep level.

Kolya and his friends consider high education a necessity for leaders of an urban church. There is little sophistication in their argument that highly educated people are “more intelligent” than those with a simple village education. We begin to see a possible rupture in the unity of Ukrainian Baptist churches as a result of the massive post-Soviet societal changes.

In a personal interview Kolya’s brother, Dima, said that he wants to attend seminary either in Prague or Dallas, Texas. Education is valued in Ukrainian Baptist churches. It is linked closely to transnationalism because of the seminaries and Bible courses led by foreign missionaries in Ukraine, and also because foreign pastors are generally seen as more highly educated than a typical Ukrainian Baptist pastor.

Before moving on to clearly negative portrayals of missionaries and the West, I will end this section by quoting Valentina, an elderly woman who attends L’viv Baptist Church. Valentina thought that an American guest, especially one who was “a believer” would have easy access to all American missionaries, and may even know them personally. She asked me to telephone the missionaries Glen and Greg she had met from North Carolina. When I told her that I would first need to know their last names and the name of their city, she seemed undaunted:

But call them, and tell them thank you! And hello. Tell them that we love them very much. We are waiting for them. They have done a very big work here,
God’s work. . . . And tell them a very big thank you, blessing, and hello from the church.

Valentina obviously loved the two Americans who had visited her church, but her knowledge of them was limited at best. She knew their home state, but not their last names or how to get in contact with them. She is not one of the gatekeepers of transnationalism at her church, and views the Americans through rose-colored glasses.

Baptists’ positive opinions of Western missionaries give the impression of polite support overall with moments of warm affection and love, although even here we see caution about some aspects of the transnational interactions. Dima pointed out that transnationalism challenges his Ukrainian patriotism. Bohdan thinks missionaries are useless, and Viktor thinks they are only useful for their money. Maria likes the sermons, but was shocked by the scandalous story of an alcoholic son told by a visiting American pastor as a sermon illustration. In the following section we will more closely examine the negative remarks Baptists made about missionaries and the West, gaining a much more nuanced picture of their attitudes towards transnationalism and of how religious transnationalism is impacting their churches and lives.

7.2.2 Negative perceptions of transnationalism

Ukrainian Baptists are deeply engaged in transnational activities, and, as seen above, have affection for certain missionaries and appreciate aspects of their transnational relationships. However, they also have a great deal of criticism for missionaries, Western churches, and their effects on Ukrainian churches. Overall, this criticism centers on perceived corruption in the West and how it may negatively impact the Ukrainian church. In what follows I will first examine how the West is portrayed as a place of liberalism and modernity that could potentially corrupt the Ukrainian church. Then I will look specifically at criticisms of missionaries in Ukraine who are seen as ignorant of Ukrainian Baptist traditions and rules, and who are critiqued by Baptists as being disrespectful of their culture and independence.

Most Ukrainian Baptists, and certainly the church leaders, strongly value theological and social conservatism. As Evgeniy, the pastor at the Vinnytsia Baptist Church, said:
The most important issue is to hold the church on a godly foundation, that we will be faithful to the apostolic principles of faith. This is what we concentrate on. It’s really hard to hold the church as different forces have an influence on it. We are for the Gospel, the Gospel that the Apostles preached. We do not modernize the Gospel. We do not try to adapt it to the world. We proclaim the Word of God to the world. We keep to the fundamental principles of faith. This is probably what makes our church different from other churches that appear nowadays. But we keep to that foundation.

In individual and focus group interviews, Ukrainian Baptists like Pastor Evgeniy often talked about something they called “the world.” This is similar to Augustine’s *civitas terrena*, the earthly city “against whom the City of God must be defended” (Augustine 1998, 5). The world is everything that is outside of the church, and Ukrainian Baptists consider it a great threat to the church. The West and the world are not the same thing, but the West brings Ukrainian churches closer to the world, and Western churches are portrayed as having succumbed to the temptations of the world to a greater extent than have Ukrainian Baptists. This association of the West with the world is primarily a condemnation of secular Western society, but even religious life in the West is at times portrayed as tainted. As we will see, the Western church is labeled as the source of liberal theology which Ukrainian pastors seek to keep out of their church. Criticism of the West and of Western missionaries represents a conservative stream of thinking in Baptist Churches that is mostly, but not completely, located within the middle and older generations, among those people who lived through years when the Soviet government placed strict controls on the church and when the outside world had very little opportunity to influence the church.

A group of middle aged members of Kherson Baptist Church labeled the West as the source of liberal theology that is “sneaking in” to the Ukrainian Church, and also as a source of loose behavior that people in the church, especially young people, imitate. The church pastor, Yuriy, was a participant in this group, and strongly links the West to liberalism and license:

Unfortunately in Ukraine the church has definitely felt the influence of the West because a liberal theology started to sneak in, and the life of the church, how to say it? Liberty – in the negative meaning of this word – appeared. Because freedom – I understand that there should be liberty and openness. But just, we are a special people (narod), and especially now in this time if there is freedom, then – how to say it – “feather and fuzz are flying all around” as we say.
When asked to be more specific about the kinds of freedom that were negatively influencing the church, Pastor Yuriy mentioned music (presumably contemporary worship music that resembles popular rock music in style). Another man in the group, Igor, said that now believers wear the same kinds of clothing that he used to see when he was part of the criminal world. Pastor Yuriy continued with more about how Baptist youth are imitating the American way of dress and worship style:

I’ve been to America and I’ve seen how they dress there and what kind of church services they have and everything that takes place. But here it’s not accepted for people to wear shorts to the service, and our youth challenge some with it. “We’ve seen what they do and we’ll do the same thing.” . . . . And I say that there is also a liberal theology, a bit of liberal theology.

As the senior pastor of a prominent Baptist church in his city, Pastor Yuriy is one of those who have been especially active in the processes of transnational religious practice in Ukraine. His church and the Baptist community in Kherson at large host various American groups annually, and in the past received money towards their new church building. Pastor Yuriy has even visited the United States and has observed American Christians in their home environment. His criticisms of the Western church have to do with the way American Christians dress and the theology that they hold to. These two themes of freedom (or license, as it could be translated here) and liberal theology were repeated many times in conversations with Ukrainians about the West.

At the Vinnytsia Baptist Church the middle aged focus group participants expressed similar opinions, introducing as a topic of conversation the notion that the Bible is preached properly in their own church, but is perverted in many other countries. They believe that Ukrainian believers have superior morals and a more correct theology than believers in the West. The Vinnytsia Baptists are pleased that their own pastors will not hesitate to correct a visiting pastor who speaks in error. At their church, Andrey said, the Word of God is not perverted yet. Because it’s a problem in the world now. It is preached from one Bible. But it is perverted by interpretations and so on. Praise God that the most important issue for the whole world and humanity is that it is not yet perverted [here] as in other places. For example, in many countries it is not preached the way it should be.

Irina added:

Even when people come from America, or one of the brothers preaches and something is wrong, “Stop brother. Look how it is in the Bible. That’s what is
written.” There are situations like that. They even correct a brother who comes from Australia or America. 

Irina is pleased to report that her church does not blindly embrace every foreign visitor or new religious teaching. She places herself and her church on high moral ground within these transnational relationships. They receive visitors from abroad, but they also control what influence the visitors can have on the beliefs of people in the congregation.

Irina’s pastor, Evgeniy, also said that foreign churches often do not hold to the same standards as his own church. For Pastor Evgeniy, the most important quality of a church is to stay on a “godly foundation,” to not allow “the world” to negatively influence the church. When asked if the international interactions of Ukrainian churches are creating any problems, he replied:

The problems really exist. Because the churches that come from there (from the West) are not always fundamental. There are lots of liberal churches and missions that adhere to independent, liberal principles. They bring disharmony. And our churches (some of them) do not try to keep to that foundation built by our forerunners. This foundation is the Gospel, evangelical principles. We build our church in accordance with God’s commandments. And now they want to introduce know-how. All this brings the church closer to the world. It does not lift the world to the church level, to the level of morality God calls us to, but the church goes down to the world. And then it becomes difficult to distinguish the church from the world. You can hardly tell the difference. Of course we are very concerned about that. Such a problem exists in Ukraine.

For Pastor Evgeniy, qualities that should be condemned are liberalism and independence, both of which move the church closer to ‘the world.’ He values a separation between church and world, and when Ukrainian churches imitate Western churches they lose that distinctiveness. Pastor Evgeniy is making a case that Ukrainian churches tend to be superior to Western churches. Ukrainian churches are “fundamental;” they are built on the historical foundation established by previous Christians. These churches are at a high level of morality, and they keep God’s commandments. Liberal churches, on the other hand, include many Western churches and even a few Ukrainian churches (who have been swayed by foreign liberals). The arrival of liberalism has brought “disharmony” to religious life in Ukraine. These churches are “independent,” and they do not want to follow the lead of older Ukrainian churches. They are not built on God’s commandments, but are built on “know-how” – expertise that comes, perhaps, through professional education. These liberal churches are at a low moral level – at the world’s
level, and are in fact indistinguishable from the world. Here ‘the world’ is everything that is not ‘the church.’

Bohdan is a twenty-two year old whose parents joined the L’viv Baptist Church when he was a child. Although young people I interviewed tended to speak more positively about the West than older people did, Bohdan was an exception. He is critical of new churches started by American or other foreign pastors because people in those churches “want to live with their feet in the modern world.” To Bohdan and many others, the “modern world” cannot and should not enter the church, nor should the church enter the world. The two realms need to remain separate.

Bohdan was also critical of the West because he thinks that Ukrainian Baptists are not as devout as they were in the past, and he views openness with the West as part of the problem. According to Bohdan, the church’s relationship with the West attracted people who were not real believers. They came because they thought they would receive money or they wanted to use the church to achieve special consideration for easier emigration:

In general . . . I personally don’t much like the influence of the West. I think, my opinion is, that it isn’t a good influence. Because when . . . there was the Soviet Union, and the church was in bad shape, then believers were real believers. . . . And when the Soviet Union collapsed, when Ukraine became free and independent, faith became fashionable or prestigious. And many people began coming to church. On the other hand, many people started going to church just to be able to emigrate abroad. . . . I also know some people who were in church just so that they could leave for the USA. And also, humanitarian aid began.

Bohdan sees openness with the West as one reason for the diluting of the Ukrainian Baptist Church as people came to church because of the material gain they hoped to receive there.

Another major area of criticism against the West is that Western missionaries do not always follow the traditions and culture of Ukrainian Baptists. Bohdan complained about Western-oriented new churches in Ukraine: “We have our own traditions, and these traditions don’t mean anything to them.” The defense of traditions and culture was also prominent in what Bohdan’s pastor, Volodymyr, had to say about the West. Pastor Volodymyr’s comments are instructive especially as they relate to his view of Ukrainian Baptist culture and how it is impacted by processes of transnationalism. He appreciated missionaries who “don’t come to change our culture or to teach us, but to help.” He admired missionaries who wanted to partner with his church without telling the
Ukrainians what to do. Since Pastor Volodymyr did not wish to have his interview recorded, below is a paraphrase of his thoughts about missionaries:

They come and behave the same as they do at home, without following our traditions. Many of them don’t even know about our traditions before they come. They don’t come prepared. I believe that all believers are equal to each other, and don’t want Americans looking down on us. So if they come just with money, and don’t want to be in a relationship with us, we don’t want it. It would be better for them to go home. Instead, they should come to us as friends. In general, Western missionaries should come to Ukraine better prepared to understand our culture.

In Pastor Volodymyr’s missionary critique he places the Ukrainian church on an equal footing with American missionaries, and he rejects any missionary endeavors that discount Ukrainian traditions and culture. Money is not worth it, and friendship is the only acceptable basis for a relationship between his church and foreign churches. Here Volodymyr is not arguing for the superiority of Ukrainian believers, as some of his colleagues did, but he is making a case for the equality of all believers from other countries. He is offended that some Western missionaries come to Ukraine without understanding Ukrainian culture, and with what he interprets as an attitude of superiority over the Ukrainians. For Volodymyr, the transnational church has potential (if the Westerners come in friendship and with cultural understanding). But without those conditions, he would rather sever the transnational connections.

What are specific aspects of Ukrainian (Baptist) culture that visiting Americans often do not respect or imitate? Many of these had to do with clothing, cosmetics, and form of worship. People mentioned that visiting American men sometimes wore shorts to church. One American missionary was criticized for not removing his hat during an English club meeting. American women sometimes came to church wearing pants and jewelry; some of them have short hair and use cosmetics. Americans often pray while seated, which is forbidden in Ukrainian Baptist churches, where everyone stands or kneels for prayer. Americans told stories in the pulpit that were deemed inappropriate by Ukrainian audiences who do not want to hear amusing things in a serious situation, and do not want to hear about sinful behavior at church, even if those stories are part of a visitor’s personal narrative of coming to faith. As Andrey, a middle-aged man in

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47 Maksim from Vinnytsia Baptist mentioned the fact that missionaries pray while seated as a cultural stumbling block and ‘a bit of a problem’ at church. However, he thinks the problem is actually with the Ukrainians, ‘because we look at them and think that we are better than them because we kneel and they sit.’
Vinnytsia, explained at a focus group interview, “there are many things that just shouldn’t be talked about,” and “church is meant for the preaching of God’s word,” not for stories about drinking too much or going to prison. Stories about conversion are permitted, and the process of conversion is very important. However, specific details about how sinful the person was in their pre-conversion life should be kept quiet and are unwelcome in the church.

A young man from the L’viv Baptist Church complained about the lack of cultural understanding exhibited by visiting missionaries:

I have one wish for the missionaries who come from other countries. Especially in our church sometimes there is a lack of cultural understanding. It is a great labor on behalf of our Ukraine for the missionaries to come here but sometimes they do not understand some things about us. Sometimes this causes conflict in the churches and only if they had a really good understanding of our cultural differences, of the conditions in our church, of the specific things about us. . . . When they are building churches on the Korean or American system, then they’re not really thinking about the differences. It’s not a good work.  

For this Baptist, the lack of cultural knowledge means that despite the effort and intentions, the work of the missionaries is “not good.”

By criticizing their foreign partners, Ukrainian Baptists assert their own identity as spiritual equals (or even superiors). They want to show that they are the experts in Ukraine, and should be the leaders in any missionary ventures in the country. For example, Pastor Oleksandr of L’viv Baptist disapproves of the way some missionaries spend money in Ukraine. He recommends that Ukrainians, not Americans, determine where and how the money will be spent:

It’s not a secret that sometimes a missionary came and would bring some money. And he had been told how to spend the money. But you understand, that support was wasted, and it wasn’t the most effective plan. Because here people know better how to use that money to greater effect – such as in putting on evangelizations, or various things.

By not relying on Ukrainians to determine how to spend the missions money, Pastor Oleksandr believes that the support is “wasted.”

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48 He mentions the “Korean or American system” because in addition to having many American missionaries, in L’viv there is also a Korean Baptist missionary who pastors one of the ECB churches.
Timofey, a youth pastor at the Kherson Baptist Church, gave a specific example of missionaries who think they can teach the Ukrainian Baptists a spiritual discipline (prayer), when the Ukrainians are probably better at it than the visitors:

I’ve seen many missions of Americans to Ukraine. I worked with them for two years and we have had many missions groups since 1990. Almost all of the Americans had euphoria. They all traveled here to teach us and it seemed that God revealed much to them and not to us. They wanted to teach us how to pray. There is an expression – the closer sorrow is to you the closer God is to you. I think that God is closer to people from countries with wars and unstable economies. It seems to me that God is closer to them because people need God always and they ask and plead to Him for help.

Timofey here states that because life is difficult in Ukraine (with sorrow and an unstable economy), believers already know how to pray. He finds it silly that Americans think they can teach Ukrainian believers how to pray more effectively. Once again we see a case made that Ukrainians are spiritually superior to Americans. Because of the suffering Ukrainian believers have endured, Timofey believes that God is closer to them than to the Americans who have not suffered as much.

As we have seen, Ukrainian Baptists respond in complex ways to Western missionaries and to the processes of religious transnationalism. To generalize, it seems that when there is a personal connection to a missionary the Ukrainian Baptists have a positive response; when they are speaking about missionaries in general they have a negative response. Ukrainian Baptists reject what they see as Western liberalism, and they are disappointed that some missionaries do not show respect for Ukrainian Baptist customs and the authority of Ukrainian Baptist leaders. They recognize that in the relationship with international churches the Westerners are the ones with the money and its ability to help build infrastructure for the Ukrainian church; however, the Ukrainian Baptists tend to feel spiritually superior to these rich guests and often wish they would just go back to America. Despite these problems, personal aspects of transnationalism are able to overcome some of the negative feelings. Through the friendships and even love that develops when an American missionary returns summer after summer to stay as the houseguest of a Ukrainian Baptist family the negative impressions of Americans and their liberal churches can be overcome, at least on a case by case basis.

The next three sections of this chapter examine themes that emerged as significant ones in understanding Ukrainian Baptists and their involvement with the West. First is
the idea of freedom, which is something that nearly all of the Baptists mentioned during their focus groups and interviews. They associate freedom with the West, and it symbolizes both what they admire and what they fear in the West. Next are the generational elements of transnationalism and how they impact these churches. Older people often accuse the West of being a corrupting influence on their young people, and the young people have some interesting responses to these fears. Finally we will briefly look at emigration to the West. Baptist churches in Ukraine have lost thousands of families to America, Canada, and other countries in recent years, and this loss colors the attitude of those who stayed behind.

7.2.3 Freedom, Independence, Liberty, License

As we saw earlier, Ukrainian Baptists often associate the West with the idea of freedom, liberty, or license. Pastor Yuriy of Kherson Baptist Church said that because of influence from the West, “Liberty – in the negative meaning of this word – appeared.” Freedom and its ill effects were common refrains among members of all the Baptist churches studied here, and the topics were usually raised in the context of a discussion of transnationalism and interactions with the West. Before beginning this research project I expected Baptists in Ukraine to cherish religious freedom and some of the changes that have been available to them since 1991. Instead, they portrayed freedom as a test from God, as something dangerous, and as the cause of serious conflict in the church. Here Katya, a middle aged woman from Vinnytsia, compares freedom to the persecution previously endured by the church:

Well, like they say, God is testing us by the times. When there was persecution, God tested us by that, if we would stand through that. There were different tests, and hard times in school and at work. Everywhere. And now it is freedom. And God is testing us by freedom.

The angst that freedom has brought to Ukrainian Baptists is instructive of the central role that it plays in many aspects of church life. Of particular note is that freedom is partly blamed for what is perhaps the most contentious issue in Ukrainian Baptist churches today: the divide between young people (who have come of age since 1991) and the older generations. Here we will examine three dominant uses of the term ‘freedom’ in
Ukrainian Baptist churches. In the following section we will look more carefully at the youth issue which develops from the first issue of freedom.

Baptists talk about several kinds of freedom, although they do not always carefully distinguish between them. First is the religious freedom that was permitted towards the end of *glasnost* in the late 1980s and then became institutionalized with the advent of Ukraine’s independence. Two aspects of religious freedom are (1) that foreign missionaries are permitted to work in the country and (2) that Ukrainians themselves are free to evangelize their fellow countrymen. With the arrival of (mostly Western) missionaries a wider variety of religious organizations are active in the country. Ukrainians can now choose their religion out of many possibilities. This kind of freedom, Baptists say, is difficult because the average Ukrainian person does not know enough to distinguish the ‘good’ religions from the ‘bad’ religions. According to Pastor Oleksandr in L’viv,

> All the new things which came from the West sometimes brought us some danger, or, because when the borders were opened, we had so much freedom. And while that was good, with it came lots of bad. What used to be forbidden by the government, by the communist regime, now became available. Understand? . . . Someone said that in the past the government gave us hard, iron handcuffs to wear. Now we are happy to put out our hands to receive gold handcuffs. So now we act like we are free. Freedom came, many various denominations came, they could confess freely, and it was very hard for an average person to figure out where the truth is.

He mentions the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses as examples of false churches that lead astray Ukrainians who are not grounded in Bible knowledge. Following these false religions is as dangerous now (gold handcuffs) as religious persecution was in the past (iron handcuffs).

Not only are foreign missionaries now allowed to work in Ukraine, but Ukrainians have the freedom to propagate their own religion to others in the country. Several Baptists complained that their church is not doing enough to take advantage of that kind of freedom while they have it. Maksim grew up in a village Baptist church and at the time of this research was in his mid-thirties and the leader of an evangelistic team of young people at Vinnytsia Baptist Church. (He has since emigrated to Sacramento, California). Maksim thinks that the purpose of church in society has fundamentally changed from what it was before religious freedom came. In the past the church was a
refuge from society, whereas now people in the church should go out into society and
spread their faith, but are not doing so:

Our church probably wasn’t ready and even now is not really ready for the times
we have now. There was a time in the past when we just sat in church and
listened and it was so good because it was like a breath of fresh air. Only there
we could hear something different, what we didn’t hear every day. And suddenly,
the time came when we could make the services different. And it is very hard,
this turning point. Freedom. . . . And I see that the pastors worry about this a lot,
and people who worry about the church are hurting because of this. I see it. It is
a theme of sermons. And we are just not ready to accept this freedom and use it.

I asked Maksim to clarify what kind of freedom he was talking about. He replied:

I was talking about freedom of faith. Believers were used to just sitting in church
and doing nothing. And when freedom came very few people started some
movement, action that has to be in Christianity. That’s telling others, doing
evangelism activities, talking with people, charity, and so on.

Maksim identifies freedom as a great opportunity for the church to take on
responsibilities that “have to be” in Christianity. But he also identifies moving out and
using freedom as a difficult step for the church, which is “not ready” to use it.

After religious freedom, a second type of freedom that Baptists mentioned is the
free, relaxed behavior of foreign guests. Ksenia (Vinnytsia Baptist Church) noticed an
overall difference in attitude between Americans and Ukrainians, that “when people from
America or any other country come to our church, we can see that they look more relaxed
or uninhibited, and we have the so-called code of obligations drawn up by our
brotherhood which tells us what Christians we should be.” This code is an unwritten
collection of rules, with scriptural supports, that are generally agreed to regulate the
behavior of church members. In recent years, one former Ukrainian Baptist told me,
some congregations post the rules in a prominent location on the church premises. Since
the Americans do not have the “code of obligations” they may behave quite differently
from their Ukrainian partners.

One young Baptist complimented the free behavior of foreign guests, and said
that people in the church were imitating that openness. His attitude is similar to that of
Marina, described earlier, who tries to imitate the attitudes of Americans that she meets.
Misha is a young man at Vinnytsia Baptist who believes that the nature of church people
is changing through their contact with the West:
I think that ministers or youth that come here from other countries, they are more open, free in their behavior. And it is also I think an example for us. I see that many people try, not that they try to be like, but they become like them. It’s not like they are copying them, but there is something in their behavior. Something like independence.

Regardless of intentions, Misha sees that Ukrainian church people are becoming more open, free, and independent in their behavior through their transnational relationships.

A third variety of freedom that the Baptists discussed, and this is perhaps related to the carefree attitude observed in Westerners by Ksenia and Misha, is freedom from the strict rules that governed the behavior of Ukrainian Baptists for generations, a freedom or license to behave as desired. This kind of freedom is often associated with the West, as the West influences Ukrainian culture in general. Young Baptists feel free to wear more stylish clothes, listen to popular music, and watch Western films. This is the freedom that most worries people I spoke with in Ukrainian Baptist churches. Pastor Oleksandr in L’viv is quite concerned: “That which was bad in the West came here and was very quickly taken in by our people, by our youth. They want to be free.” He continues:

Now people say that you are completely free. No one has power over you, and you can do what you want. This has a very bad influence on people, because the sinful nature which a person has leads us to do very bad things. We see that we, say, have very high divorce rates. They used to be lower and now are very high – more than fifty percent of marriages. The number of abortions has gotten enormously high. In this way the West has influenced our country very badly. In our church we try to . . . explain to people that freedom is not always good. If I am free in Christ that is a completely different thing.

Pastor Oleksandr is misinformed about the impact of freedom on Ukraine’s abortion rates, which during the Soviet Union were already astonishingly high. According to the Population Resource Center, there has been little change in Ukraine’s abortion rate from 1994 to 1999, which remains more than double the rate in the United States (Westoff 2003). Nevertheless, Pastor Oleksandr’s concerns about the West’s bad influence on Ukraine and on Ukrainian churches represent common fears within Ukrainian Baptist circles and particularly among the middle and older generations.

Of note is that many of the symptoms of ‘worldliness’ that Pastor Oleksandr and others cited during conversations about the influence of the West are related to gender. Women wearing trousers in church, using makeup, cutting their hair short, and having gold jewelry were all examples of being “in the world” that were condemned by most
Baptists I spoke with. Everyone acknowledged that rules about what women can wear have relaxed for this generation. Middle aged women now typically wear dresses at church but are free to wear pants at home. Their mothers, however, (those women in their 60s and above) usually wear only dresses for all occasions. Some younger women would like to wear pants occasionally to church, although it is still generally frowned upon by the church establishment. (It is nelzya, not allowed, as they say in Russian).

The L’viv Baptist young adult focus group reported that a few years ago the clothing rules had been strictly enforced at their church, but had since been relaxed to the point where Miroslava did not think that “anybody would forbid me to wear pants in church if, for example, I just came back from classes and I had pants on.”

Of course this shift towards a more liberal dress code for women cannot be pinned solely on interactions with the West through church channels, but should be seen as part of a general shift of culture. Valentin, the young interpreter from Kherson, explained it this way:

Sometimes, when you speak to the old ladies or the old people from the church, they can tell that the church was influenced [by the West], because now the girls start to wear the – instead of skirts they are wearing trousers. They are using more of the makeup. And they are having different style of haircuts. But, uh, I don’t know whether it’s the influence on the church. I think it’s the general influence of the Ukrainian culture. And because we, as a church we are a part of the culture, it does influence the church also. . . . [It’s] a part of the changes in the whole Ukrainian society. It comes into the church also.

This is what some Ukrainian Baptists fear – that the secular culture will come into the church. Valentin sees that “Ukrainian culture” has things in common with the West. Perhaps “the world” that other Baptists so frequently referred to as influencing Ukrainian churches is not only the foreign missionaries, but also Ukrainian society itself.

Why the focus on clothing as worldly and fearsome? A young man in L’viv explained that people are not afraid of fashion per se, but with the other “worldly things” that are often associated with more relaxed dress standards:

The nature of this problem here is not in the clothing but in the people; unbelievers are dressed in a fashionable way. They go to discos and do some other things and people from the church are afraid that with the fashionable clothing will come other worldly things. They try to protect themselves from the influence of the world.
Once again, “the world” is something to be feared, something that could potentially harm the church. In fact, these fears lay at the root of another important issue in the church: generational conflict, which I will now address.

### 7.2.4 Youth and generational conflict in Ukrainian Baptist churches

Disagreements between youth and their elders are nothing new. Even in societies that have not experienced a major governmental regime change and the economic, social, and cultural shifts that are ongoing in Ukraine, throughout the world generational tensions are a recurrent theme. Generational conflict was cited in one study as a component of post-Soviet religious change and the growth of western-oriented evangelical churches in Lithuania (Lankauskas 2002). In Ukrainian Baptist churches the topic of generational conflict was raised by my informants as a problematic church issue more often than anything else, but even then, the feedback was not unanimous. Some churches (like Vinnytsia Baptist) appear to be hit particularly hard by youth-adult disagreements, while others (like Kherson Baptist) appear to be doing a better job of understanding people of different generations. A few older people seem oblivious to the simmering struggles in their midst, and a number of young people assured me that there were no generational conflicts in their church. (Although at times they would then go on to describe just such a conflict). Valentin, a man in his early 20s who often works as an interpreter for American guests at his Baptist church, identified the generation gap as one of the main problems at his church. So did participants in a focus group of middle agers at Vinnytsia Baptist Church. One man in that group, Andrey, said that the problem of how the world is influencing youth is “the most important issue in our church today.”

Some of the conflicts between young people and their parents’ generation are about simple issues like when the youth group should meet (at Kherson Baptist Church) and misunderstanding about youth group plans. At the L’viv Baptist Church, young people grumbled that the older generation has different ideas about youth ministry, and often “they don’t have an understanding of what we are doing” and this leads to “many unpleasant times.” An example of this is that the youth group has begun a ministry called the “Club,” where they can invite non-Christian young people to hear the gospel in a non-threatening way. The older generation, however, is not excited about this idea, not
because they disagree with the goal of evangelization, but because they do not approve of
this means of doing it:

They don’t understand some simple things about the new vision like the Club. We see the Club thing as a good thing for outreach, for the evangelization of young people. For our older generation because of some things from the past, for them club is the place for communist meetings and it is absolutely a negative thing.

This kind of disagreement can be explained as an everyday generational conflict that might spring up in any society, where the refrain of the young people is “they don’t understand us.” However, in other ways the generational divide among Ukrainian Baptists is more formidable and telling about changes in these churches and how they are being impacted by transnationalism.

A key component of this other aspect of generational conflict has to do with how new social freedoms are filtering into the church. Young people point to freedom as an important component of these tensions. Miroslava, a young woman from L’viv Baptist Church, explained that the older generation:

had different values and they had different problems. It was forbidden to meet, and they had unity. Now we have freedom, but now different methods are needed, but older people want to offer to us old methods and they are not effective any more and it is hard for them to understand, and this is a problem.

Miroslava and her team of youth leaders believe that the newfound freedoms in Ukraine mean that the methods the church should use for its activities have changed. She is frustrated with the opposition to these changes among church leaders.

From the adult perspective it is the young people who are misusing the new-found freedoms. Some who were raised in the Soviet-era Baptist church expressed the opinion that today’s young people are indiscriminately adopting ‘worldly’ customs that lead them away from true faith. Yulia, a participant in the middle aged focus group at Vinnytsia Baptist, put it this way:

So now I tell them [the children] that we tried to be different from the world in our appearance. And now you are not different. You just feel freedom. Now no one is pointing at you with their fingers that you are stundas. And you need to have this desire from inside to be different from the world. Unfortunately, this new generation doesn’t really understand it. They don’t want to be different from the world and to be saints in their appearance. At least in appearance. That’s what our brothers and pastors are struggling for now.
In the past Ukrainian Baptists were clearly marked as “different” from all those around them. They were generally barred from higher education. They associated mostly with each other. They wore somber, conservative clothing and very little jewelry. Children at school were called *stunda*, a derogatory nickname for Baptists. Now that the restrictions from the state have been lifted, Baptists are free to mingle with the rest of society and become like those around them. Yulia finds it imperative, however, that the pressure to be “different from the world” be maintained as an internal desire. She is particularly upset that young people are losing the desire to be and look different from the world, and they are starting to look more and more like secular society.

Yulia believes that the nature of Baptist youth has changed from when she was young. In the past young people were “simple and obedient”; now they are not. They used to be kinder; now they are less so. Because of the influence of popular culture (through television, for example), and because they study together with unbelievers, it is difficult for young people to maintain their difference from the world.

Yulia: As long as I can remember, when I was young, about 20, it was easier then. Youth were simpler and more obedient. And now it is hard to discipline youth. It is hard for the youth because the influence of the world through TV is strong. Most of the youth now study. When I was young, it was practically impossible to study in institutes. They didn’t accept us there.

Esther: Because you were believers.

Yulia: Right. And we were kinder and simpler. Today most of the youth study and it is hard for them to be equal with unbelievers and to be different. They seem to have little spiritual strength.

This blending of Baptist young people with society is a sign, according to Yulia, of their spiritual weakness. It is also an outcome of post-Soviet transition. Despite the fact that Yulia and her friends point to the West as a culprit here (see below), much of what she is complaining about does not actually come from the West but is part of the changing nature of Ukrainian society after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Later I asked Yulia and her fellow church members what they thought the West’s role was in the problems with the youth. Is what is happening with young people, I ask, in any way connected with Ukraine’s being more open to the West? At first Andrey, the group leader who invited all the others, does not hesitate in his reply, although he then goes back and hedges his response:
Andrey: Directly. All 100 percent.

Viktoria: It has a great influence on our youth.

Yulia: It all comes from the West, right? . . .

Andrey: Well, West or not West. You know, I also used to say that but I have softened my opinion a little now. The West has done some damage and they have the same problems we do. But there are also Americans who really come here and carry themselves as the light. Not all. It is the same here and there.

Andrey’s gut instinct was to blame the West for all of the problems with Baptist youth. Viktoria and Yulia support that idea, as well. Then Andrey softens his stance. Some of the problems can be traced to the West, but he does not want to label all Americans as corrupt and dangerous for the church. Perhaps because his interviewer is American, or perhaps because he remembers some specific American missionaries who “carry themselves as the light,” Andrey changes his mind.

While there are young people who speak out against the older generation, or who at least vigorously defend themselves against these kinds of criticisms, others agree with Yulia and Andrey that Baptist youth are going down the wrong path. I asked the Vinnytsia young adult focus group to identify the most important issues facing their church. A lively discussion ensued, with three different viewpoints expressed. Vika, a young woman who converted and joined the Vinnytsia Baptist Church as a teen, expressed some of the same sentiments about the problems of becoming like unbelievers as Yulia and Andrey did in their focus group. Maksim, the group leader and oldest (at age 35 he was not actually a young adult, but had agreed to invite young adults to his home for the interview), countered with the idea that the outward signs of changing to be like the world (for example, wearing makeup) are not the real problem, but are symptoms of spiritual malaise. Misha, another participant in the discussion, said that control issues are at the heart of the matter, that the adults are simply afraid of losing control of the youth:

Vika: Well, people that come, we need to change them, but often it is the other way around. That we change and become more like them, like unbelievers.

Esther: For example?

Vika: Before it wasn’t allowed to wear any makeup at all in church. And now young people have started to use makeup more and more. . . . I think that the problem is that we become more like them, and not they like us. . . .
Maksim: I think that. . . the problem is not about makeup. But I judge for myself. I guess it’s fear of God or, I don’t know. And generally we are not the way we used to be before. I don’t know why. I guess it’s also time that changes, and I see that pastors and many other people and we worry about it. But unfortunately, it is very hard to change something. Because freedom always leads to this, a person is not persecuted and he can freely come to church, or not go there. Same with makeup – wear it or not. Well, the pastors talk about it, but people disobey, get used to it. And it’s like people lose God’s fear. . . .

Misha: Well, I don’t know. I was thinking here and the first thought was that there is a problem that older members of the church are kind of afraid to lose the control over the church, the youth. Well, new people that come to church, just repented, or younger by age. And it seems like they don’t trust them.

Maksim then suggests to Misha that it is not that the older people want to control the youth, but that they are concerned about the spiritual well-being of the church. Sasha rejects that explanation:

Sasha: There is a clear line between the older members, who are in the right, and there are the youth who always need to be prayed for, and who regularly need to be taught, who regularly need to be corrected. They are making youth go to church, do ministries. And these youth need to be always under control, and they always go astray. And they talk about it all the time. . . . They don’t want to hear anything new. They don’t even want to learn anything new. They are not interested in what I think. They think they are right and nothing else can be accepted.

Elsewhere Sasha implied that he was experiencing difficulties in the church with some of the older congregation members. Despite Maksim’s suggestion that the adults merely feared for the spiritual well-being of the church, Sasha frets under what he sees as the heavy controlling hand of authority figures at church.

Clearly, generational conflict troubles many Ukrainian Baptists. Parents and grandparents worry about their decreasing ability to control the younger generation and protect them from the corrupting influence of the West and from being “in the world.” Some young people fear the same forces, while others chafe under the magnifying lens and want the church to change its methods. At times the dispute becomes even more serious. At one of the churches in this study a nineteen year old youth leader was called before the board of elders because of his activities and the Western-style methods he used in youth ministry. Church members said that the elders disapproved of his non-traditional ministry that included sports ministry, movie discussions, and games at meetings. His youth group was similar to American church youth groups that aim to
reach young people through entertaining activities. He was also supposedly criticized for his hairstyle (a trendy short cut). The senior pastor told me that the man was “charismatic” and defiant to church authority. This young leader was banned from ministry at the church and led to believe that excommunication would be the next step. Instead, a group of his supporters left their church and started a new one in the same city a few months after I left.

7.2.5 Ties that bind: Ukrainian Baptists and migration to the West

In any conversation with Ukrainian Baptists about the West, the topic of emigration invariably arises. Although none of the churches in this study provided detailed statistics of the number of their families who left to live in the West, people in all of the churches expressed the opinion that their churches were damaged by the emigration process. They are disappointed that those who moved away no longer sing in the choir, lead various ministries, or pastor churches. Members of L’viv Baptist reported, for example, that 150-200 of their church members plus children left for places like Philadelphia, Seattle, Germany, Canada, and Poland. This seems a high number, but there is no way to disprove the statistic. Young adults at Kherson Baptist said that they lost “more than half” of their church in this way, more than 100 families. Pastor Evgeniy at Vinnytsia Baptist told me that about 150 families from his church emigrated to the West. Out-migration from Ukrainian churches fits in with the larger trend of migration out of Ukraine in general.49

While transnational connections through migration do increase the exposure Ukrainian Baptists have of the West, nearly all of the people who spoke with me were opposed to the idea of emigrating and felt abandoned by those who had already left. Although some who moved away maintain contact with the church and support it financially, one young man in Kherson said that “the rest have forgotten us. We don’t hear or see anything from them.” The general consensus appears to be that when a church family gets ready to emigrate, they make big promises about helping the church financially when they get to their new home, but that most of the promises fall short.
Pastor Oleksandr in L’viv, eager for American financial support, took a fundraising trip to the United States in which he especially hoped to recruit Ukrainian Baptists to donate to the church. Some people did help, he said, but:

Our desire was that those people who wanted to help would be much more. But a person has various personal problems: “I have a house, or a car, I need to pay insurance for my car” or “I’m sorry, I can’t help you.”

Pastor Oleksandr actually found that recent immigrants were more generous than those who had been in the United States for a longer period of time. He felt that after being in the United States for awhile, Ukrainian church members had become more concerned with their own personal financial needs and less concerned about the needs of the church they had left behind.

Ukrainian Baptist pastors try to discourage their flocks from leaving Ukraine. In response, those who do decide to leave sometimes provide Christian excuses to justify their exit. Pastor Evgeniy in Vinnytsia quoted some parishioners as claiming that they would go to America to raise up the level of morality there. Pastor Evgeniy remained unconvinced, and blamed some of the problems in the church on the fact that so many of his parishioners had left for the West:

They could be ministers, of whom we don’t have enough. We could establish more churches in our region, but there’s a lack of ministers. It is very sad that those families emigrated. I worried a lot about that. I preached trying to stop them. Of course there were people who did not like me for that. I mean those people who were going to emigrate. I told them, “You have to be here. America is for Americans. They evangelize, and you won’t help them evangelize. God’s will for you is to be here and to evangelize your nation.” They said, “We will go to America. Its morality has fallen, and we will go to raise it.”

All of the preaching against migration and the teaching about the corrupt influence of the West cannot persuade some Baptists to stay in Ukraine as they leave for what they hope will be a better life. The parishioners who move away go with the disapproval of their church leaders. Even so, they believe that the morality of America has fallen, and they are hoping that a missionary attitude will make their pastors at home feel better about losing them.

\[49\] From 1992 to 2003, for instance, over 223,000 Ukrainians legally immigrated to the United States (Office of Immigration Statistics 2003). Ukraine’s population decreased from 52.2 million in 1993 to 48.5 million in 2001. Part of this decline is a result of emigration (Malynovska 2004).
An interesting statement included in Evgeniy’s remarks is that “America is for Americans.” He also means that Ukraine is for Ukrainians, and the rightful place for Ukrainians to live and minister is in their own country. Perhaps he also believes that the rightful place for Americans to live and minister is in America. Baptist church leaders do not seem very fond of the transnational networks they find themselves in, apart from the money.

Dima, a young musician and youth group leader at L’viv Baptist, is so against emigration that he considers it an unpatriotic act. He accuses those who leave of “just searching for an easier life.” He defined being a patriot in this way:

First, that Ukraine is the first country in my mind. That is, I won’t move from here permanently. If there would be the possibility, I would be happy to study in the United States or somewhere in Europe, but with the purpose of bringing it here to Ukraine. That is in the first place. I don’t want to run away because there are economical or other problems here. That’s what I see as a patriot.

Dima, not by coincidence, is a nationalistic native of Western Ukraine and vows never to turn his allegiances from his country. In the previous chapter we saw that evangelicals in Western Ukraine were much more likely than those elsewhere in the country to identify themselves or their churches as “Ukrainian,” and were more likely to identify themselves as patriotic. Here we see that Dima connects his patriotism to his opposition to transnationalism. He is opposed to emigration. Earlier in the chapter, in a discussion of ministry tools borrowed from the West, Dima said that he did not “really like the influence of the West” and that he always tries to be a patriot. Even though transnationalism may open doors for bettering himself, Dima stands in opposition to much of it because it is unpatriotic.

7.2.6 Baptists and transnationalism: Conclusion

The attitude of Ukrainian Baptists towards transnationalism and the West is marked by skepticism and caution. They fear the corrupt influence of the West (“the West has influenced our country very badly”) even as they continually seek out Western ministry partners. They seek to construct and maintain boundaries between themselves and the West in order to control the its influence on their churches, and especially on their young people. Independence from the West is an assumed standard, and feelings are hurt when visiting missionaries do not show adequate respect for or knowledge of
local customs and history. Despite all of the safeguards in place to protect the church (such as sermons against leaving Ukraine or social pressure to maintain traditional practices), Ukrainian Baptist churches are seeing themselves change before their very eyes. The church that split over the wayward (and Western oriented) youth leader is just one example of what can happen as Ukrainian Baptists continue to engage a global and interconnected church.

7.3 New churches and transnationalism

The new evangelical churches in this study approach transnationalism from a much different perspective than do the Baptists. While exposure to the West has been a difficult adjustment for Baptist churches as they emerged from the repressive Soviet system, for the new churches transnationalism has always been the status quo. Members of these churches joined organizations that had a great deal of American influence from their inception. In the following pages I examine how members of new churches have responded to transnationalism. Then I use two themes as ways of further interrogating the relationships between these Ukrainian Protestants and their foreign partners. The first is the idea of dependence. To what extent do members of new churches feel financially or spiritually dependent on the missionaries and American church partners? What are they doing about it? The second theme is the juxtaposition of transnational and national identity. At times the new churches are labeled as American churches. What do their church members think about the American label, and how does it relate back to their own national identity?

7.3.1 New churches and their positive views of transnationalism

Nearly all of the remarks that new Protestants made about missionaries exuded enthusiasm and affection. A focus group of retirees at Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church, all of them adult converts to evangelical Christianity, provides an example of this. The group was asked to evaluate the role of evangelical missionaries in Ukraine. One woman responded that “they are like God’s helpers.” A man added, “They have a great role. They are God’s servants, God’s children working among us.” Another expressed satisfaction that ideological enemies had become friends: “We are glad, of course, that the so-called most evil enemies became our close friends; they became like
family.”  Galina called the first Presbyterian missionaries who worked in her town her
“spiritual parents” because through them she came to know God. Lila, in the same group,
said that by the time most of the frequent American visitors come to Belgorod for a
second visit that

we already look out for each other like our own relatives, because we already
know each other. We know these people. We even know their families. When
Rod from Odessa, when he came, when he was in the car accident, we suffered
through it with him, we prayed. . . . [When he came back with crutches] how I
threw myself at him like a family member! He’s already one of the family.

After these men and women were introduced to evangelical Christianity by Americans,
their lives changed dramatically. For this reason, it is understandable that they had such
strong praise for the missionaries they came to love. They consider the missionaries to be
parents, relatives, and emissaries of God.

Unlike the Baptists, the members of new churches are almost all new converts, so
initially missionaries were their primary religious role models. Vitaliy from Greater
Grace Church in L’viv said that when the missionaries started coming in to Ukraine,
“really for the first time in 70 years we saw what it means to be a real believer, we saw
that example. And we heard the good news, the gospel, like we’d never heard it before,
because earlier we just didn’t have any information about this.” At times the Ukrainians
were so impressed by the missionaries that they wanted to model themselves after them.

Pastor Dmitri of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church explained that when he and
the other Bible study participants were deciding to organize a church, they decided it
should be Presbyterian not because they knew a lot about Presbyterian doctrine at the
time, but because they wanted to be like the Presbyterian missionaries who had been
instrumental in their conversion:

We wanted to be such people. And only then, later, when Alex Monroe came for
seven months . . . only then we learned for the first time about what the
Reformation was, what was Reformed teaching, theology, we learned about John
Calvin and so on. And there was a moment when I believed and it was a joyous
moment for me in my life.

Here Dmitri associates the Western missionaries with the “joyous moment” in his life
when he became a believer. He wanted to model his life after these Americans who came

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50 Translation note: This portion of the interview recording was lost after a preliminary transcription and
could not be checked and edited.
to Ukraine, and he did. He studied at the seminary they opened in Kyiv, was ordained into the ministry, quit his job as a pathologist, and now works full-time as a church pastor.

Nadia, at Kherson Presbyterian, just loves the Americans: “There is so much [good] that I can’t even say anything bad.” She says that she finds it hard “to imagine how I would be in the church without them. It’s just that on their side, they were the initiators. They just, they helped me” come to the Lord. “Thanks to their help, you could say, I realized that I am a child of God.” The collective, exuberant response of these new evangelicals to the American missionaries who started churches in Ukraine is quite different from the mixed and guarded feelings of many Baptists.

Of course, the enthusiasm of these respondents should be presented with a caveat: the people who chose to participate in this study were self-selected. That is, some church members who were offended by the Americans they may not have chosen to speak to an American researcher. Furthermore, this study only included current church members – I had no contact with former members who may have left the church out of dissatisfaction for any reason. At Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church, for example, there was one couple who had been deeply hurt by other Ukrainian church members and some American missionaries in the recent past. Church people were very discreet and did not want to gossip – no one told me the whole story of what had happened, although it had to do with the expectation of a church job that did not come through. While I did spend time with the husband and interviewed him, I was never able to meet the wife. Valentina had stopped attending church before I arrived in Belgorod, and her relationships with other church members were still raw. Although I invited her and she agreed to come to a focus group interview with a small group of carefully selected people (who were not involved in the disagreement), at the last minute Valentina decided not to attend.

There were two areas in which many of the participants, both new Protestants and Baptists, saw eye to eye. Both groups admired the high education level of foreign missionaries as well as their willingness to make material sacrifices to come to Ukraine. Galina, a retired doctor and Presbyterian from Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, was particularly impressed by the missionaries she met the first time she visited the church. What she saw countered the stereotype that Protestants were uneducated people. The only Protestants
she knew about were Ukrainian Baptists – a group that during the Soviet period had a
negative reputation as being made up of uneducated country people. To her surprise,
“When I came to the American people I saw that they were educated people – doctors –
and I believed!” The American missionaries she met were highly educated
professionals, not peasants. She saw that the evangelical faith was something that might
fit into her life after all. She was attracted in part by the urbane cosmopolitanism of the
American missionaries.

In an earlier portion of the chapter we saw that many Ukrainian Baptists think of
the United States as a wealthy country where everyone lives comfortably and well.
Several members of new churches also expressed pleasant surprise that Americans would
leave the land of plenty to live in Ukraine. Serhy, of Greater Grace in L’viv, praised the
material sacrifices made by American missionaries:

In general I’m really thankful for the American families. . . . Because it was due
to their desires and strivings to share the gospel, regardless of the fact that they
could live quietly there [in America]. . . .La, la, la, everything is there. There are
no needs. But, you understand that happiness is not found in that. All of life is
not in that. There is something bigger that cleanses my soul. Something bigger.
That is to serve God, to serve other people, so God serves other people through
me. And . . . there’s a lot of bad things that we didn’t talk about, but you could
say that the greatest praise goes to the missionaries.

It is unclear what “bad things” Serhy declined to discuss. Perhaps he had reason to
criticize missionaries, but felt that their willingness to make sacrifices to come to Ukraine
outweighed the bad. Sergey has lofty ideas about America, where there are “no needs,”
because “everything is there,” and is glad that missionaries are willing to leave that land
of abundance and come to Ukraine.

Something that rarely arose in conversations with Ukrainian Baptists but that was
observed among some members of new evangelical churches was a deep pessimism
about Ukraine and about the ability of Ukrainian churches to prosper without ongoing
American support. Nadia was an English teacher in her forties and a member of Kherson
Presbyterian Church. Her enthusiasm for American missionaries simultaneously
criticized Ukrainians:

I have a dream. Maybe someday our Ukrainians will have such radiant faces as
you Americans. I think that we have our lives printed on our foreheads and we

51 This is also from the unverified recording.
can read it from a kilometer away. Our people can’t even smile like Americans
do. I don’t even understand. Maybe they teach it to them, or else they have their
own mentality and different life. But we have our own problems printed on our
faces. We can’t even be open, joyful in life and smile. Maybe in 20 or 30 years
we’ll learn to do it.

When Nadia admires the cheerfulness of Americans and regrets the grim faces of
Ukrainians she is critiquing Ukrainians in general, not necessarily just other Ukrainian
evangelicals. In this instance her negative view towards Ukrainian identity stands out as
quite different from what we heard Baptists saying. They were more likely to criticize
Americans and compliment Ukrainians. Here it is the other way around.

Other members of new evangelical churches also were critical towards the
weaknesses of Ukrainians, Ukraine itself, and Ukrainian churches. Some people were
particularly pessimistic about the ability of Ukrainian Protestant churches to stand on
their own financially, without regular support from their Western sponsors. The whole
issue of dependency is one that arose frequently in conversations with members of new
Protestant churches in Ukraine, and is the focus of the following section.

7.3.2 Dependency and independence

All of the churches in this study, both Baptist and non-Baptist, would look quite
different if not for the financial support of Western churches in recent years. The amount
of support given and even the fact that churches rely on this help was often an
uncomfortable topic of conversation, and no one provided detailed financial information
for this study. The financial inequalities between Americans living in Ukraine and their
Ukrainian friends were large, and missionaries uniformly reported a history of awkward
situations because of those economic differences. Missionaries would like Ukrainian
churches to eventually pay their own way, and Ukrainians would also prefer to be
financially independent. However, this kind of independence, especially for the new
churches, seems a lofty and unrealistic goal to some church members. One exception to
this is Greater Grace in L’viv, which has made great strides to be financially independent
from its American sponsors.

Nadia, the English teacher in Kherson who commented on Ukrainians’ sad faces,
finds it hard to imagine a future in which her church would be fully functioning without
American support. She is grateful to Americans,
Because I think that our Ukraine is too weak to stand on its own feet, to have enough of its own missionaries without the help of Americans. I can’t imagine if it could or not. It seems to me that it couldn’t. The help is enormous and without it we wouldn’t manage. We just wouldn’t manage. Their work – in the future if we think about it, it’s hard to imagine that we would be able to function independently. It seems to me that we are not yet ready for this at all.

In Nadia’s world Ukraine is sad, poor, and weak while America is happy, wealthy, and strong. Ukraine and its churches depend on help from America. She knows that functioning independently is something that could happen in the future, but is so overwhelmed by the problems she sees before her that she finds it hard to imagine that the church will ever be able to stand on its own.

Sergey, a father of two young children, is the church music director at the same church in Kherson. He, too, expressed discouragement about Ukraine’s economic situation and said that the church continued to need help from abroad:

International relationships are everything, because we all have really different possibilities. And God has blessed us all differently, and some he hasn’t – that is, financially, like us right now. When we receive support and help from America, when God has blessed America financially and they can share God’s blessing with Ukraine, with us. At this time we have a collapsed economy, destabilization in the whole economic structure. There’s no work, there are no finances.

Sergey thinks of help from America as a blessing from God, and finds it absolutely normal that a country with plenty should share with a country that does not have very much. The wealth that belongs to America does not really belong to them, anyway, but is from God and should be shared with those in need. He finds it natural and right that Kherson Presbyterian church should receive help from Western churches.

Despite eagerness for eventual independence, at one new church people expressed disappointment that the transnational involvement had not been even greater. They regretted that more missionaries had not actually lived in Belgorod during the first critical years of church development there. The Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church was not started in a conventional way by a group of missionaries living there for a time for that purpose, but was begun by a group of Ukrainians after missionaries had already left. With the exception of a short period of less than a year, there were no church planters in residence to train the people in how to start a church. Instead, missionaries based in Odessa would take regular trips to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy to meet with church leaders, and several men from the church enrolled in the Presbyterian seminary in Kiev to
receive theological education and ministry training. The one long-term American missionary in residence is a nurse who helps in the administration of the Christian medical clinic started by the church. One man interviewed, Grigoriy, expressed disappointment that the Presbyterian mission did not send a pastor to help them for a longer period of time, and thinks the lack of missionaries may have contributed to the fact that the church has not continued to grow rapidly in size after its initial founding.

At the time of my two month stay in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy the church was embarking on the process of particularization, or becoming independent. Particularization at Presbyterian churches entails developing and training lay leaders (deacons and elders) and having the particularization approved by the regional ruling body – the Presbytery. Once a church is particularized it has more privileges within the denomination and the elders and deacons move from being called ‘proto-deacons’ and ‘proto-elders’ to the real thing. In this case the Presbytery consists of ordained American missionaries and ordained Ukrainian pastors and elders from churches that have already been through the particularization process (the churches in Kyiv and Odessa).

At one congregational meeting several people voiced fears about the future if they should actually move from a mission church status to being fully independent. The following excerpt from my field notes describes the interaction between members at that meeting.

*An older woman suddenly called out from the front row: “Our church is not ready to be independent financially!” She explained that in order to live in Ukraine you need a minimum of 340 rubles (grivny) a month, and that pensions were usually only 120 rubles a month. How will we pay a pastor? “If America doesn’t help us, I don’t know how we’ll do it.” Grigoriy responded that that was an important and serious question. In his opinion, the job of a pastor is a full time job so the pastor should not work elsewhere in addition to serving as pastor. “Are we ready” to pay a pastor, he asked. “This is very serious,” how will we pay a pastor tomorrow? When in the future will we be able to pay? Pastor Dmitri stood up at this point: Independence (samostoyatelnost’) isn’t financial. It is independence in other ways. His wife Lena called out: “We aren’t financed by America, but by our Lord.” The older woman from the front row then said loudly: “America is far away. They are rich.” Grigoriy: We need to pray for people to help us. “The Lord will not abandon us.” We have faith.*

52 In conversation, many older Ukrainians continue to call their currency the ruble, even though it has been grivny for years. In September 2002, the time of this congregational meeting, these figures were $65 for living expenses and $23 for the pension.
This exchange shows a range of opinions about the hope of being independent, what independence means, and their relationship with people in the United States. The first woman has no hope that the church could continue to function without help from “America,” an abstract place that is rich and far away. Her notion of participating in a transnational network means receiving money from a faceless, distant, abundant place. Grigoriy (the same man who wished for more missionaries) is also pessimistic about the church’s independent future, and does not think they should rush into any decisions about moving from mission church status. He does express confidence, however, that “the Lord will not abandon” them. Dmitri and Lena are more optimistic. They want their church to move from a mission church to independence. Lena sees the financial help they receive as not “American” but from God himself. God rules over all churches around the world – he is above transnationalism – and is using American churches to help the Belgorod church. Lena wants her church to exist as an independent, self-governing congregation within a wider network of “our Lord’s” churches, who can help each other.

Discouragement about church finances was present at both Presbyterian churches. Pastor Oleg at Kherson Presbyterian told me that church members collectively provide about $110 per month towards the church’s operating expenses. This is not enough to carry on the ministries of the church (Bible studies, help for the poor, the drop-in center for street children) or cover salaries of church staff and rent the meeting hall. This $110, Pastor Oleg said, is “not so much,” and church leaders are thinking through how they can encourage their people to give more. He continued:

And I know it will be a difficult time because I know we haven’t money, but we can teach our people about what it means to give money to God. But for example we did fund raising in Ukraine here for some kids ministry and other, and we received some money from another church [in] Ukraine and from some personal people who want to give this money. But the situation right now is we can’t have ministry without money from Western Europe and the U.S.A.

Because of the finances of the congregation, Pastor Oleg doubts that they can survive financially without continued help from partners in the West. In other remarks it becomes clear that Pastor Oleg, like Pastor Dmitri and Lena, sees help from Americans as help from God, not a polite favor from American churches to Ukrainian churches. His church, too, was making preparations for particularization, which is a slow and serious process in these Presbyterian churches.
The financial dependence of Presbyterian churches in Ukraine on their Western partners stands in sharp contrast to the independence of Greater Grace Church in L’viv. Pastors and lay people alike reported their church’s financial self-sufficiency. Kolya, a middle aged church member who works as the church administrator, realizes that his church is different from many others in Ukraine:

I am always thankful to God that he sometimes sends us good Christians to help us from other churches – like missionaries – for various reasons. Because I think that now there are very few good churches. Good churches, in general they are few. Few. And God somehow, it is interesting that we support our own church, 100 percent comes through people, not automatically from America, like some people think.

One of Kolya’s pastors reported that the church actually does receive some gifts from people in America, but that they are unsolicited and are not considered in the regular budget. The church relies on giving from church members and profit from the English language school they operate. The language school basically pays for the building’s utilities. Most of the students at the language school are Ukrainians who are learning English in preparation for emigration to Canada or the United States. Half of their building’s purchase price was paid by a Ukrainian businessman in their congregation, and the rest apparently came from the United States. The church also opened a Christian kindergarten and elementary school that they hope will be financially self-sufficient.

The fact that L’viv Greater Grace is operating a business is unusual among Ukrainian evangelical churches, but not unknown. What is unusual is that it is making a profit. Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church also has a business – a medical clinic. Patients are expected to pay a small fee to see a doctor and for lab tests, and there is a pharmacy kiosk on the premises where they can buy their prescriptions. Doctors actually rent their consultation rooms from the clinic and the patient fees go directly to the doctors. At the time of my fieldwork the clinic housed a pediatrician (the only privately practicing pediatrician in the Odessa oblast), a general practitioner, a gynecologist, a surgeon (for consultation only), and a doctor who performed ultrasounds and other lab work. They were preparing space for a dentist, who arrived shortly after I left. The clinic was a unique medical institution in the area, and some patients traveled from other cities to visit the doctors. Among other qualities the physicians there were known for was not accepting bribes from patients and promising to tell them the truth
about their medical condition! The clinic hosted several visits each year from American physicians (most of them Presbyterians) who would spend a week or two working alongside the Ukrainian doctors seeing patients. However, the clinic certainly was not a financial success, and relied on donations from churches in the United States for most of its operating expenses.

7.3.3 On being ‘American’

Close affiliation with American missionaries gives some new churches a reputation as ‘American’ in the cities where they are located. Even an American missionary living in L’viv who was unaffiliated with Greater Grace referred to it as an ‘American’ church. Despite Greater Grace’s strides towards financial independence, the ‘American’ label lingers. Church members seemed sensitive about the subject. One woman, the director of their English language school, responded vehemently when asked if she considered Greater Grace to be an American church: “This is NOT an American church! I am a Ukrainian patriot!” No one else at Greater Grace responded as strongly when asked about the American nature of the church, but they all seemed to agree with her sentiments.

One of Greater Grace’s pastors, Serhy, also objected to the American label, and said that it should be considered Christ’s church instead:

I don’t think that this church should be called an American church. . . . It’s clear that the church is where Christ is. Nobody owns it. That we are accountable to Pastor Chris, or Pastor Stevens who is in Baltimore – that’s another thing. We are just accountable to them.

According to Serhy, the connections with two prior American pastors and people at church headquarters in Baltimore are important, but do not bestow any kind of American identity on the congregation. Like Lena at Belgorod Presbyterian, they see God as a being who stands above all churches, in Ukraine and in the United States. Christ stands outside of national identity and transnationalism.

Just as the Presbyterians have particularization, Greater Grace churches have their own established procedures for church development. An American pastor and his family lived in L’viv for several years as the work was beginning. Eventually the first pastor left and his brother took over the pastorate. The missionaries encouraged any interested people – men and women – to enroll in a Bible college there in L’viv, with courses taught
primarily by the American pastor. Several men completed Bible college and then began working at the church under the Americans. Eventually some of them were selected for ordination. At least one of the Ukrainian pastoral candidates spent a few months studying in Baltimore at the ‘mother’ church. When the American missionaries decided that the Ukrainian candidates were ready, they sent them to Baltimore for ordination. Once the American missionaries left L’viv (in 2002), they maintained close contact with the L’viv pastors through visits, phone calls, and email exchanges. They communicated with each other at least once a week, and the Americans were always available for consultation about any issues that arose. The Ukrainian staff ran all church activities without an American in residence: worship services, the Bible college, the Christian elementary school, the English school, the crisis pregnancy center, the youth group, the music team, and a pantomime troupe.

Antonia, the director of the church’s crisis pregnancy center and a fluent English speaker, considers the church to be Ukrainian, not American. However, because of the close association with Americans over the years she thinks that people at her L’viv church have grown in their thinking from before.

With co-working with people from other cultures, you are kind of being made many ways of thinking, you know? It’s kind of [an] exchange. . . . So it’s [a] Ukrainian church, I would say, but people, like, here they think in [a] much broader way [than the] average Ukrainian would think, you know?

According to her, an example of what people at Greater Grace received from the West is the notion that a leader should be a servant of the people, not just tell everybody what to do. Antonia told me that most Ukrainian leaders are autocrats – they lead by giving orders and expect them to be obeyed. Instead, after interacting with Americans, people at her church realize that the best leaders are actually servants – they lead by taking care of their people.

The senior pastor at Greater Grace, Mykola, is about thirty years old. When I asked him about the American label he spoke strongly that the church was not American, but Ukrainian. He pointed to the church’s use of the Ukrainian language and the presence of the Ukrainian flag in their church meeting hall as evidence:

Yes it was founded by Americans, but it’s not [an] American church . . . . You can see the flag in our chapel, and really, like, in [the] right way we are patriots of our country, of city, of our language, and no it’s not [an American church]. Yes,
um, maybe a little of that culture which you have in America came in our church, so people can see this freedom [emphasis his].

When asked what kind of freedom he associates with America that is now in his church, he replied that it is freedom in worship to clap hands and laugh, which is not allowed in older churches in Ukraine. Even though the church was started by Americans and people in the church “deeply respect Americans,” they are unanimous in their rejection of the American label and demand their own identity and independence as Ukrainian believers. Moreover, the Ukrainian flag (usually interpreted as evidence of nationalism), is here instead deployed as protection against an ‘American’ identity.

7.3.4 New churches and transnationalism: conclusion

Unlike most Baptists, members of new evangelical churches tended to have strongly positive impressions of transnationalism, missionaries, and the West. Because new churches were started by missionaries, the American connection was nothing new. In fact, the American influence is what initially attracted some church members to these organizations, and then later they developed other reasons to stay.

Members of these new churches were, for the most part, pessimistic about their ability to survive independently from the Western partners, although Greater Grace was an exception to this rule. Not only was Greater Grace a more nationalistic church than the others (with a Ukrainian flag in the sanctuary, for example), but it was also the only church that did not count on American financial contributions to stay in operation. There is not enough evidence to support a link between nationalism and financial independence. Instead, I think that American missionaries did a better job training people at Greater Grace about sacrificial giving and financial stewardship than did the missionaries at the Presbyterian churches. Even members of other new churches that were not financially independent expressed a strong desire to move from being someone else’s mission project to being an equal partner with the Americans.

7.4 Conclusion

Interaction with Western Christians and participation in a transnational religious network has had profound impacts on the lives of Ukrainian Protestants. Responses to transnationalism vary widely, however, and are not correlated with region of origin but
according to church denomination, age of the church member, and personal history in the church (e.g., whether they grew up in the church or are adult converts). The most significant differences found are between older Baptists and members of new churches. Overall, a Baptist perspective on transnationalism is one of control and caution, while the response of new Christians is typically more enthusiastic and desiring of even closer relationships. Within Baptist churches, younger people and relatively new converts tend to be more welcoming of missionaries and new ideas than the older members, although even some young people are critical of transnational processes.

One young Baptist in L’viv expressed his view this way: “As for the church, we want to keep the current positions, and we want to be able to be in control of the influence on the church from everywhere, East or West.” For many Baptists, transnationalism has brought economic, social, and spiritual opportunities but also opportunities for moral danger. For the Baptist church as a whole the West also represents a great threat as a high percentage of old Baptist families have moved away to seek new lives in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere.

New evangelicals acknowledge that transnational relationships have completely changed their lives. Most were non-religious people before their encounter with Protestantism at their foreign-connected churches. Now many have strong personal religious faith as well as opportunities for social interaction, education, and even employment (if they work for the church or a church ministry) that would have been unthinkable before. These new Protestants warmly praised missionaries and even complained that there were not enough of them working with their churches.

Transnational processes in Ukrainian churches are clearly not a matter of American missionaries coming uninvited and unwelcome to force ideas on unsuspecting Ukrainians. Nor can it be said that Ukrainians embrace all transnational activity in their churches with open and undiscriminating arms. Instead, Ukrainian Protestants are continually navigating their way through these waters as both initiators and recipients. Wanner described a process in which Ukrainian evangelicals adapt outside ideas and create new hybrid religious forms:

To the extent that evangelical congregations in Ukraine acquire or adapt western missionaries’ discourses, customs, and institutions, they do so by molding them to their local preferences and in the process change the original model. . . . [W]e see
a highly discerning selection of certain attributes and practices and a rejection of others (2004, 743).

Ukrainians are active agents in processes of religious transnationalism. At the same time, they are well aware of their position as players with few economic and geographic options.

We have seen that transnationalism is an uneven process with uneven results. That is, religious transnationalism has unevenly penetrated Protestant churches in Ukraine. This means, for example, that not all church members have regular personal contact with foreigners, not everyone has the opportunity to travel abroad to visit churches and Christian conferences, not everyone can obtain employment at a Western funded religious organization or charity, and not everyone attends classes at a foreign-run theological seminary. While each church in this study had significant interactions with Western contacts, the extent to which these contacts affected people in the church varied greatly. It is obvious to Ukrainian evangelicals that the mobility and opportunities of transnationalism are not equally distributed. Nadia, the English teacher at Kherson Presbyterian Church, said that

Sometime in the future I want there to be the possibility that not only the pastor [because of his work] can travel to various countries and work, but I want there to be the possibility for every brother and sister to have an opportunity to go to different countries to see how people work in other churches, and how people glorify the Lord, and to learn something, and to return to share their experience and impressions. But we can’t do it because of finances. We can’t go anywhere. Nadia knows that her possibilities of moving easily across the world – one of the chief components of transnationalism – are limited at best. Those who can reap this benefit include all American missionaries but only a select few from her church.

Nadia and other Ukrainians cannot ultimately control their transnational experiences. Their earthly identities remain rooted in the physical places where they work, worship, and live. Their transnational relationships depend in part on the desires of Westerners and on the economic disparities of the larger world. While Ukrainian Protestants have been fundamentally impacted by their social, spiritual, and material interactions with the West, the mundane facts of poverty and the tight net of visa restrictions for travel to Western countries remain barriers to their full participation in a transnational world.
Chapter Eight: Conclusions

From the fieldnotes:

February 22, 2003
Ira is a young believer in Kherson. She told me that in Kherson she doesn’t feel Ukrainian, she doesn’t feel anything. It was only when she lived in L’viv that she began to feel Ukrainian, and love it. It is primarily so that she can feel more Ukrainian that she wants to go back to L’viv.

Human identity is complicated. People hold several identities at once – identities that sometimes seem to contradict each other and that usually change over time. The above excerpt from my fieldnotes records a conversation with a young evangelical woman who had recently moved back to Kherson after university studies in L’viv. Her remarks show that identities do not always follow the rules – here is a Kherson native (Khersonians are not supposed to be nationalists) who would rather live in L’viv than in her home city because she wanted to “feel more Ukrainian.” She recognized the regional differences in her country as they relate to nationalism, and yearned to live in a more nationalistic area. Ira was not a member of either case study church in Kherson, so I cannot evaluate her remarks in the context of the opinions of others in her congregation. However, unlike other evangelicals I spoke with in her city who de-emphasized a Ukrainian identity, Ira verbalized national longing. She reminds us that as we consider how this dissertation contributes to our collective understanding of spatial identities, regional differentiation in Ukraine, Ukrainian nationalism, and the processes of religious transnationalism, we should always be looking for exceptions, contradictions, and variegated patterns.

This dissertation has investigated the complex, shifting, and interconnected spatial identities of Ukrainian Protestants. The voices that speak on these pages represent a historical account of post-Soviet evangelical life, and they also provide detailed examples of how identities are reworked by the transnational processes of contemporary life. The preceding chapters examined three spatialized identities within the Ukrainian Protestant church community: regional, national, and transnational. Here I summarize the research findings and organize them around the original questions that were presented in the first chapter.
8.1 Regional identity

This study recognized that the long history of Ukrainian regional differentiation would need to be addressed in any examination of Ukrainian spatial identities. Furthermore, if regionalism is important to accounts of Ukrainian politics, language, and religious history, then regionalism must also be relevant to evangelical life. The regional identity research questions were as follows:

- How do Ukrainian Protestant churches vary regionally?
- How do Ukrainian evangelicals portray Ukrainian regions? How do they position themselves and their churches within their respective region of Ukraine?
- How does their self-awareness of regional identity contribute to, or undermine, national and transnational identifications?
- Are there differences between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, or between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of regional identity?

Research participants did not agree on how many regions exist in Ukraine or where the boundaries between regions are located. Despite this lack of overall consensus, on one regional matter they did unite: participants were nearly unanimous that the oblasts including and surrounding L’viv should be considered a region apart from the others. Western Ukraine is distinct from the rest of the country in a number of ways, and evangelical religious life there reflects the regional distinctiveness of its inhabitants.

The most obvious difference between churches in L’viv and elsewhere is the language used at church events: church services in L’viv are conducted in Ukrainian, services in Kherson and Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy take place in Russian, and services in Vinnytsia use a mix of the two languages. Language is more than a way to communicate – it is an expression of identity. Participants in this study had strong feelings about language use, and were uncomfortable with the language division in their churches. They described a regional disconnect about the place of the Ukrainian and Russian languages in Ukrainian church life.

The pattern of language preference in Ukraine is closely related to beliefs about Ukrainian national identity. The L’viv Protestants that participated in this study find the Ukrainian language integral to Ukrainian national identity. They consider themselves
Ukrainian patriots, and cannot imagine a national identity that incorporates the Russian language. They enforce the use of the Ukrainian language at their church services. Meanwhile, members of churches outside of L’viv feel alienated by the nationalist push for the exclusivity of the Ukrainian language. Instead, they desire a Russian-speaking identity, and express this desire by casting themselves as diverse and cosmopolitan – qualities they think are excluded by nationalism.

Another example of regional differentiation is the portrayal of western Ukraine as a bastion of religious traditionalism. Within L’viv the region is understood as a stronghold of the traditional Ukrainian religions of Orthodoxy and Eastern Rite Catholicism. Elsewhere evangelicals described all western Ukrainians – including Protestants – as traditional in their religious practices. It is convenient for a member of a Russian speaking church to name L’viv evangelicals as religiously traditional, a label that can easily be interpreted as code for ‘backward.’ Thus, L’viv evangelicals are also characterized as linguistically narrow-minded and fanatical. In contrast, the Russian speaking Protestants see themselves as open-minded, ethnically diverse, non-judgmental about language use, cosmopolitan, and forward thinking. One wonders whether a L’viv pastor would actually feel comfortable preaching in Ukrainian at a Kherson church. These regional stereotypes tell a story about the battle for Ukrainian identity.

Despite obvious regional differentiation in the churches, only in L’viv was regional identity explicitly identified as important to religious life. L’viv evangelicals described the Ukrainian language as an important component of their national and regional identity, and most of them defended the exclusive use of Ukrainian in their churches. In the other three cities, church members did not describe their own region as important to their sense of identity, and the only Ukrainian region they consistently referred to was not their own, but “Western Ukraine.” I found matters of Ukrainian regionalism to be unrelated to church type or the ages of church members. Instead, perspectives on Ukrainian regions seemed to be a function of the location of the church, of whether it was in L’viv or not. That is, the members of L’viv Greater Grace and L’viv Central Baptist responded to questions about Ukrainian regionalism in similar ways, but differently than evangelicals of any church from the other cities.
Because Ukraine is a linguistically divided country, and because its pattern of language use is largely a regional one, we see that regional and national identity are closely interconnected. Regionalism and transnationalism, however, are not as obviously linked. One possible connection between the two is this: church members outside of L’viv seemed to place more stress on the multi-cultural aspects of their churches than did church members inside L’viv. However, this emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity should not be interpreted as a byproduct of transnational connections with the West, because evangelicals in all parts of the country participate in these same processes. Instead, it is related to a desire for a pan-Soviet, Russian-speaking identity. That is, it can reasonably be argued that evangelicals in the Russian speaking areas of Ukraine perceive themselves as more culturally connected to other parts of the former Soviet Union than to the western region of their own country. They acknowledge that they belong to the Ukrainian state and are pleased about that (see below), but they reject a Ukrainian identity that excises the Russian language. These findings corroborate the work of Anna Fournier, a scholar who examined Russophone resistance to linguistic Ukrainisation in central and eastern Ukraine. She wrote that when Russophone Ukrainians speak against Ukrainian language laws, they are protesting against “a perceived linguistic/cultural exclusion” from Ukraine. Fournier found that these Ukrainian citizens resist a language law “that does not recognise (empire-generated) hybridity within Ukraine” (2002, 415). The Russophone evangelicals are also resisting the erasure of hybrid identities formed in the Soviet era.

8.2 National identity

This dissertation has provided an opportunity to examine the place of national identity in the lives of one population subset in a newly independent state. Ukraine has now been independent for fourteen years – the longest time the country has ever existed. However, being a new state does not mean that national identity will be uncontested. Studying the national identity of members of this minority religious group adds an interesting layer to the analysis. The questions are as follows:
• How do congregation members position themselves and their churches within the Ukrainian nation?
• How does their self-awareness of national identity contribute to, or undermine, regional and transnational identifications?
• To what extent do Ukrainian evangelicals challenge or accommodate the idea of a Ukrainian national church?
• Are there differences between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, or between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of national identity?

The Ukrainian evangelicals who participated in this study overwhelmingly reject a Ukrainian national identity expressed through religion. To them, ‘nationalism’ retains negative Soviet connotations of exclusion, not inclusion, and they find this kind of nationalism contrary to their religious beliefs. Despite this aversion to nationalism per se, expressions of national identity are evident in Ukrainian Protestant churches, although only in western Ukraine do they go by that name.

Some ideas about the nature of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people were commonly held by research participants in all four cities. Collectively, these evangelicals described their country as poor, as a place where people are heroes because they live in material deprivation. They believe that life is difficult, and this theme was repeated both by Baptists and by members of new evangelical churches. What could legitimately be viewed as a problem (poverty) actually becomes a rallying point for Ukrainians. The concepts of suffering and sacrifice are elevated to a high moral plane and contrasted with wealth and comfort, both of which are seen as inherently dangerous to moral purity. This component of Ukrainian national identity actually contributes to how Western missionaries and the West itself are perceived. Ukrainian evangelicals admire missionaries for their willingness to leave behind lives of wealth and material comfort. They may even envy them because of the freedom that wealth has brought – they have freedom to travel around the world, build large church buildings, and finance large church budgets. They believe, however, that Ukrainian believers often have stronger faith than Americans, because their faith has been forged in the fires of poverty and suffering.
Another component of national identity in Ukrainian evangelical churches is the widespread agreement that the Orthodox Church is Ukraine’s national religion. Evangelicals also accept Catholicism in this role, and sometimes (especially in L’viv) group the two faiths together. Despite the fact that their Protestantism defines them as religious outsiders in their own nation, the participants in this study seem to feel no loss about not being part of the Orthodox Church. Protestants – from churches of various kinds in multiple regions – often pointed to theological differences as reasons why they could not be Orthodox. Some Baptists went even farther. While they recognized a common history with Orthodoxy (since their churches began as offshoots of the Orthodox Church in the nineteenth century), they also sought to discredit the Orthodox Church in two ways. First, they said that the real national religion of Ukraine is not the Orthodox Church but is paganism, a religion that predates Christianity. This would strip away the Orthodox Church’s presumed claim as the religion with the oldest relationship with the Ukrainian people. A second tactic does not remove Orthodoxy’s tie to the Ukrainian nation, but undermines its validity as a Christian faith. One Baptist pastor said that the Orthodox Church is influenced by paganism, that Orthodox traditions and rituals are actually built upon pagan rituals, and that the two religions are closely related. To him, losing Orthodoxy as a component of his national identity is not a big loss. These evangelicals recognize that while most people hold Orthodoxy as part of their Ukrainian identity, they themselves cannot participate in that national tradition.

Despite not owning one common component of Ukrainian identity (Orthodox Christianity), evangelicals do incorporate aspects of nationalism into their religious practices. New evangelical churches, especially, portrayed a strong sense of civic nationalism among their members. This was true not just in Ukrainian-speaking L’viv, but also at other churches, including the mixed Ukrainian-Russian language Nazarene congregation in Vinnytsia and the Presbyterian church in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. New Protestants at more than one church told me that they prayed for their president. They also openly spoke of their desire for their children to grow up to be influential members of Ukrainian society. They would like their fellow evangelicals to be mayors, business people, members of Parliament, and even the president of the country. L’viv Greater Grace Church displayed a Ukrainian flag prominently in its worship hall. On January 24,
2005, the day after Viktor Yushchenko was finally inaugurated as Ukraine’s new president, Pastor Dmitri of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church sent an email to American supporters, thanking them for their prayers for Ukraine and pledging his own prayers for the American president in return:

In this short time we have begun to more fully understand how God uses the power of the governing officials in society and also how it relates to the church. Therefore we are continuing to pray for President Yushenko [sic] now that he has taken office and we are also praying for President Bush. May the Lord richly bless you, your families and your country.

Dmitri’s civic nationalism is related to his theology – he believes that God rules over society and uses governments for divine purposes. Because of this belief, Dmitri feels that God will hear his prayers for President Yushchenko. Transnational relationships add an interesting dimension to this civic and religious act. Not only does Dmitri pray for his own president, but he also prays for the United States president, and the prayers and the internet (through which this message was sent) serve to unite people from his Ukrainian church and churches in the United States.

Civic nationalism in Protestant churches in some countries is nothing new. For example, Protestant congregations in the United States often display an American flag and sing patriotic songs in worship. However, the trend towards civic nationalism is noteworthy in Ukrainian churches, given Protestantism’s status as a minority faith. Although Baptists at times also prayed publicly for their government, civic nationalism was observed less often in their communities. This can likely be traced to the fact that until recently Baptists were persecuted as enemies of the state.

8.3 Transnational identity

Religious transnationalism and its effects on identity are the issues that drew me into this dissertation study. Our world is an increasingly interconnected one, and the transnational religious networks to which Ukrainian churches belong have branches in nearly every country. This phenomenon is being produced within and through local and national networks that are also in constant flux. How does transnationalism work itself on the ground in this religious context? The specific questions are as follows:
• How do Ukrainian evangelicals position themselves within a transnational religious network?
• How does their self-awareness of a transnational identity contribute to, or undermine, regional and national identifications?
• Are there differences between members of older Baptist churches and newer evangelical churches, or between people of different generations, in how they approach matters of transnational identity?

One element of the transnational processes examined here was experienced by members of both kinds of evangelical churches – old and new. Despite many striking differences between these kinds of churches in how their members dealt with transnationalism, an important feature for both groups was the personal nature of transnational processes. People from every church described close personal friendships they had developed with visiting American missionaries. No matter what their overall impressions were of American culture, the United States, American missionaries, or American churches, Ukrainians expressed admiration for Americans they knew well. They may have had a bad opinion about some or many missionaries, but at every focus group and at every church, particular Americans were identified by name in an admiring and even loving manner. That said, as a researcher I could not remove my American identity from my relationship with the research subjects, and any pro-American language used by them should be received with caution. Nevertheless, in this project I found that transnationalism is not only about money, ideas, education, and immigration – it can also be a personal experience that affects the emotional lives of individuals involved and can transcend previous prejudices.

Apart from that important commonality, the two kinds of evangelicals responded to transnationalism in quite different ways. Members of new churches were extremely positive about their American contacts and church partners. Foreign missionaries were influential in opening each of the new churches, and current church members’ lives had been (usually dramatically) affected by their association with the church. The new evangelicals who participated in this study were happy about how their lives had changed because of their church involvement, and several of them spoke in somber tones as they considered how their lives would have been different without the transnational encounter.
None of the new Protestants I spoke with described any regret for their decision to join the church.

Despite the overall positive tone towards their transnational experiences, many of the new evangelicals expressed a desire for independence from the missionaries. They longed for both fiscal and organizational independence. Some of them positioned themselves as equal partners to the Americans; others presented themselves as equal in some areas (say, spiritually) but not in others (e.g., financially). During my field research, members of the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church were debating the merits of becoming “particularized,” or officially independent. At a service of the Vinnytsia Nazarene church one of the worship leaders repeatedly emphasized the need for members to give generously for the financial needs of the church. Kherson Presbyterians described a future day when they could be financially self-sustaining. In contrast with new churches outside of L’viv that avoided the ‘Ukrainian’ label, at L’viv Greater Grace members emphasized their church’s independence by insisting that theirs was a Ukrainian, not an American, church. For Greater Grace members, being Ukrainian was not only about having the Ukrainian flag in their church hall and singing “I pray for Ukraine” in Sunday services. For them, their Ukrainian identity was especially important because it signified that they were NOT American. They wanted to establish a distinct identity from the Americans who founded their church and set them on a Protestant spiritual path. No matter where they lived, new Protestants were generally positive about transnationalism but did not want to be swallowed up by their Western partners.

Baptists had a more complicated and contradictory response to transnationalism than did members of new churches. While on the one hand they actively used transnationalism to materially benefit their churches, on the other hand Baptists treated transnationalism as a threat to the spiritual well being of their people. Three of the Baptist churches in this study had spacious new buildings that were largely financed by Westerners, and the fourth (in L’viv) had a historic building that was gutted and renovated with the help of Western friends. The churches regularly hosted long and short term American missionaries; they sent their pastors and members to American-run seminaries and Bible colleges for advanced training, and their people read Bible study books written in English that had been translated into Russian or Ukrainian. Ukrainian
Baptists were not at all averse to gleaning financial and spiritual benefits from their membership in a transnational religious network, and they were adept at pursuing the benefits and rejecting unwelcome aspects of their transnational relationships.

The negative side of religious transnationalism as seen by Ukrainian Baptists is related to their cosmology, in which everything fits into one of two categories: the church and the world. The church is holy and sacred, while the world is secular and sinful. The duty of Ukrainian pastors is to guard the church from the influence of the world, keeping harmful forces at bay. This is relevant to religious transnationalism because Ukrainian Baptists do not approve of everything that Western evangelicals do. They consider Western believers, including many missionaries and other visitors, to be worldly. After all, American women wear pants and makeup at church, and most American evangelicals see nothing disrespectful about sitting down while praying, and may even do so during a prayer service at a Ukrainian church. Because of these and other worldly behaviors exhibited by Western guests, Western evangelicalism is often placed in the ‘world’ category. Of course, most secular Western influences on Ukrainian society (through Hollywood, for example) are included in ‘the world.’ Since Ukrainian Baptists observe evidence of ‘worldliness’ in many of the American Christians they meet, they perceive religious transnationalism as a risky endeavor. Liberal foreign churches active in Ukraine are seen as bringing the world into the Ukrainian church, threatening its very foundation.

Three other attributes of religious transnationalism were also seen as threatening to Ukrainian Baptists churches: the West representing freedom, the West as the destination for Baptist émigrés, and the West as the cause for generational division in the church. The freer behavior of American Christians visiting Ukraine reminds Baptists that not only does the West represent ‘the world,’ but it also represents ‘freedom.’ Baptists expressed gratefulness that they no longer live in an oppressive society that forbids the free practice of religious faith. However, their gratefulness is not overwhelming; they perceive freedom as having negative consequences. Freedom threatens the church because it means that Baptists now have more opportunities to stray from their historic, fundamental roots. When writing about the post-Soviet Lutheran church in Latvia, one author used the phrase “romancing freedom.” Before freedom came the church
“romanced” it; when it arrived it was more difficult than they had anticipated (Hoppenbrouwers 1999).

The West also threatens Ukrainian Baptist churches because it is the destination of many Baptist families who are permanently leaving Ukraine. Each of the four Baptist churches in this study lost large numbers of people – up to half of their pre-1991 families – as they emigrated to America, Canada, and other countries. The Baptists who left were seen as abandoning their church, depriving it of pastors (actual and potential) and lay leaders. Once Baptists arrived in America they tended to disappoint those who stayed behind by not sending as many plump checks as had been hoped for from the land of plenty.

The West is also blamed for generational disagreements prevalent in Ukrainian Baptist churches. Middle aged and older Baptists often disagree with young people about how much to accept from Western Christians in their dress, music styles, theology, and ministry methods. One striking example of this rift was the removal from ministry of a young youth leader at a large Baptist church. He was criticized for using Western methods in his church-sponsored youth group. In a focus group interview, some middle-agers pointed to ‘the West’ as a source of problems among the youth of their church.

Although Baptists in all cities portrayed religious transnationalism as somewhat of a threat to the church, in only one of them – L’viv – was it identified as a threat to national identity. One young man there said that although he appreciated the help of some Western religious study books, the influence of the West challenged his patriotism and he did not like it.

8.4 Money

An incident that sparked this research project took place in 2001 after a visit to a Baptist family in rural Poltavskaya oblast, in central Ukraine. This family occasionally hosted Americans from a Pennsylvania church that financially supported their local Baptist congregation. Two of those former guests had been my parents. After a week’s stay I reimbursed the Ukrainians for what I estimated had been my expenses, plus some. They agreed to the amount, but one of them later emailed my father to report his “empty pockets.” I was startled, and wondered about the larger picture. How did my Ukrainian
hosts perceive America, the American church, and American visitors? What were their goals for their transnational relationships? How had their churches been impacted by these transnational processes? How did interactions with Americans affect their identity as Ukrainians and as world citizens? And what role did money play in the transnational relationships?

The ‘empty pockets’ episode introduced me to the significance of the disparity of wealth within transnational networks. The sharp differences in economic level provoke different kinds of reactions among Ukrainian evangelicals. One reaction is what I saw in Poltavskaya oblast. The young man who sent the message requesting money was eager to financially benefit from his contact with an American visitor. While I do not believe it to have been the case in that instance (although I could be wrong), at times money seems to be the central feature of the transnational relationship. Wanner quotes a Ukrainian Baptist pastor talking about American supporters: “As long as we are still building our church, we will be patient, but after that, it’s goodbye” (Wanner 2004, 745). He would tolerate their worldly ways only while he was receiving financial compensation; after the building project was completed, he wanted the Americans to leave. An American missionary and seminary professor in Odessa spoke with me about this issue. He believed that if given a choice, the Ukrainian Baptists he worked with would rather have had the money it took to support him and his family than to have him teaching at the seminary.

The economic disparity between Ukrainian and Western churches seems to color the entire transnational project. In some ways this unevenness is the fuel behind the religious networks. If Ukraine had emerged from its Soviet past as a prosperous country with wealthy churches, what would these transnational flows look like? Are the spiritual aspects of the transnational relationships vibrant enough to carry on if money were not involved?

While the Ukrainian-Western economic difference is a persistent theme in religious transnationalism in Ukraine, it is not always the central feature. Pastor Oleg at Kherson Presbyterian Church described an exchange he had with a retired Presbyterian pastor from a Southern U.S. state. The American wanted to come to Kherson and conduct leadership seminars out of the Kherson Presbyterian Church. After investigating
the retired pastor’s background and the details of the project, Oleg decided that he did not want to invite the man to his church. The pastor said, “But you know, I can bring a great deal of money.” Oleg replied, “We can’t be bought.” That was the end of the conversation.

8.5 Future directions for research

Although missionaries play a central role in religious transnationalism, on the pages of this dissertation the missionaries are nearly silent. Many questions remain about missionaries, their place in the countries of the former Soviet Union, and within transnational religious networks more broadly. What are their views about the churches that they are helping to build? What are the missionaries’ goals? What are the goals of their sending churches? How do American evangelical missionaries formulate their own identities as Americans and as members of a ‘global church’? If I could go back and do anything differently on the field, I would spend more time focusing on the missionaries themselves and their own actions and identities, and not just investigating missionaries from the Ukrainian point of view.

Another aspect of religious transnationalism that demands further study is the finances. Looking back on my field experiences, I acknowledge that I was reticent to deeply probe the financial relationships between Ukrainian churches and their Western sponsors. Although the few specific questions I did ask were rarely answered, I need to ask if my reluctance to investigate the money was because of my own sense of what is ‘private’ or because it really was something that was unavailable to me? After ten months visiting Ukrainian churches I still do not have a thorough grasp of how much money actually comes into Ukrainian churches from the West. How much money enters churches through private donors, through foreign churches, and through independent mission boards? How much is sent to church members as remittances from former church members who now live abroad? Are the emigrants really not sending very much money (as the people left in Ukraine testify), or do those at home have a mistaken view of the wealth of America and how much money is realistic for the emigrants to actually send? There are many financial aspects of religious transnationalism that call for a more detailed examination.
A natural project to follow this one would examine the communities of Ukrainian evangelicals who have migrated to the United States and other Western countries. How do religious migrants position themselves in the transnational religious networks? How do they construct their own identities in relation to the Ukrainian nation and the world? Where do they see the place of language in national identity? Do they use their position with feet in both places to increase their own power or prestige? How do they perceive their relationship to the churches back in Ukraine – it is unlikely that they consider themselves the ungenerous, forgetful, deserters that they are portrayed at home. How do they position themselves spiritually – as part of ‘the church’ or ‘the world’? Do they believe, like many of their co-religionists in Ukraine – that freedom is a threat to the church? How have they maintained or transformed the religious traditions that they grew up with?

8.6 Conclusion

It often happens that an academic paper about a religious topic gives secular aspects more in-depth treatment than spiritual ones. I fear that this dissertation has fallen into that pattern. In one sense that is to be expected: this is not a dissertation in the fields of theology or religious studies but in geography. Spirituality is but one aspect of the lives of Ukrainian evangelicals – lives that have economic, political, national, familial, and geographic components. However, the research subjects who participated in this project were always more interested in their religious faith than they were in their views towards their national identity or the West. They were more eager to converse about religious topics – worship styles, the Bible, what they thought about a sermon, how their life had changed since coming to God, or why they decided to convert to their faith in the first place – than they were to talk about my research questions. Their sense that spirituality outweighs other identities rarely comes out on these pages.

Although he patiently answered my questions in an interview, one member of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Presbyterian Church told me that these issues were not important to him. How should I interpret his comment? Should I have walked away from my dissertation project because one research subject felt that it was an unimportant endeavor? Obviously I believe that questions about regional, national, and transnational
identity are important, and that Ukrainian evangelicals are an opportune group through which to examine these ideas. However, in analyzing the impacts of involvement in transnational religious networks I have given more emphasis to the ‘transnational’ than to the ‘religious.’ Where is God in all of this? The religious components of transnational relationships may be more significant, in the end, than social or economic ones. The spiritual elements of church involvement should fit somewhere in a scholarly examination of post-Soviet religious life. Valerie, from the Vinnytsia Central Baptist Church, described her conversion. In essence, it was a spiritual experience, unrelated to national identity, the West, or post-Soviet economic life: “I repented at home, in my room. Without anybody. Only with God and the Bible.”
References


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