

## Religion and “Americanization”: An International Conference



Amy Frykholm and Serhiy Holovashchenko moderating the conference “Exporting Religion, Translating Belief: Exploring American Religions in Europe”

been those with American roots, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and different charismatic groups. At a conference organized by the Fulbright Program, scholars from five countries set out to explore this phenomenon and measure its impact on Ukraine and on Europe.

The conference “Exporting Religion, Translating Belief: Exploring American Religions in Europe” was the result of collaboration among different organizations and individuals. Sponsored by Fulbright and the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy and the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the conference brought together scholars from the Department of Religion at the Institute of Philosophy, National Academy of Sciences, Odesa National University, Ukrainian Catholic University, and Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Foreign participants came from the University of Utah (USA), the University of Madrid (Spain), Kaliningrad State University (Russia), and Aristotle University (Greece).

Signs of Ukraine’s diverse religious landscape are everywhere in Kyiv. On an average weekend, hundreds of religious groups hold meetings in Kyiv: several people gather in a house church or 10 thousand assemble for the meetings of Pastor Sunday Aledjah’s Embassy of God Church of All Nations. Among the most influential of these religious groups have



A Church in Poltava

The conference began Friday April 16 with lectures from two prominent scholars — Dr. Colleen McDannell, Professor of History and Religious Studies at the University of Utah, and Dr. Liudmyla Fylypovych, Director of the Center for Religious Information and Freedom in Kyiv. Examining Western and Eastern Europe separately, McDannell and Fylypovych made surprising conclusions during their talks. Both agreed on the low impact of religions with American origins. These groups represent only a small percentage of practicing believers in Europe and Ukraine. Fylypovych

argued that the impact of Americans working in Ukraine is greater than statistical data suggests. Growth rates among American religions are high and their influence has included movements toward technology, an interest in the Ukrainian Bible, and extensive charity work. She believes that the Ukrainian press too often disparages the work of missionaries and overlooks its positive aspects.

Conference panels on the following day focused on religious movements, including Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, the Church of Christ, and charismatic movements. Pavlo

Pavlenko and Eduard Martynyuk provided differing overviews of American religions in Ukrainian society. Pavlenko argued that American religions could never be fully integrated into Ukrainian identity while Martynyuk proposed viewing the impact of American religions in Ukraine as "convergence" rather than replacement.

An afternoon panel highlighted legal aspects of non-traditional religious movements in Ukraine, Spain and Russia. Speakers from these countries look to the United States as a model for religious tolerance manifested in legislation and governmental structures and all acknowledged limitations. At the same time, speakers suggested that a replication of the U.S. system would not satisfy particular needs of individual countries. Mykhailo Babiy summed up the consensus when he said, "All religious organizations are functioning in a multi-cultural, poly-religious atmosphere, and legal structures need to do more to reflect that."

The conference was very lively: participants stayed to talk for a full hour after the library's closing; the translator became excited during Saturday's panels and left the booth to participate; conversation and panel sessions were dynamic.

Amy Frykholm,  
Fulbright Scholar in Ukraine at the  
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla  
Academy and at Drahomanov Pedagogical  
University (2003-2004)  
Research field: American Culture  
and Literature



An early morning service