

CHRISTIAN FAITH, NONVIOLENCE AND UKRAINE'S ORANGE REVOLUTION: A CASE STUDY OF THE EMBASSY OF GOD CHURCH

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The events of Ukraine's Orange Revolution at the end of 2004 captured the minds of the democratic world and brought Ukraine to the top of the list of the recent color revolutions in the former Soviet Bloc. For millions of Ukrainians, the Orange Revolution has marked a new chapter in the country's history. It has brought out in the Ukrainian people confidence in the possibility of the democratic transformation in their country. It gave the people assurance that they possess the necessary will and power to bring justice and restore dignity, and are able to do so without violence.

On November 21, 2004, the presidential election took place in Ukraine. The election was rigged and the results were compromised by extreme corruption, abuse of power, and electoral fraud.¹ This led to a series of nonviolent protests that spread throughout the country. In the subzero temperatures, for seventeen days, more than one million people filled the streets of the national capital, Kiev (*Kyiv*), to protest the massive election fraud and to demand cancellation of the results. These events later became known as the Orange Revolution. The name came from the color scheme worn by the protesters who supported the opposition candidate. As a result of these protests, the second election run-off took place under the close watch of domestic and international election observers. It was declared fair and free² and propelled to presidency the opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko.

Although there were numerous preconditions making it likely for these protests to turn violent, all the mass rallies remained peaceful. According to earlier studies,³ the youth pro-democracy movement *Pora* (in Ukrainian *time is now*) played a major role in organizing and carrying out the nonviolent protests. They spent almost two years carefully designing a system of non-violent resistance that could be quickly enacted, should the election be rigged. What remains unexplored is the central role of Ukrainian Christians in the protests of the Orange Revolution.

The active involvement of Ukraine's Christian churches was a crucial factor in the nonviolent outcome of the Orange Revolution. Communities of faith from Kyiv, as well as from many regions of Ukraine, mobilized their membership and sustained the nonviolent character of the protests. One congregation in particular, the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations church (the Embassy of God), mobilized its 25,000 members. To understand the reasons and motivation behind the Ukrainian Christians' participation in the Orange Revolution, this paper discusses the context of post-Soviet Ukraine. It presents the case of the Embassy of God Church, a charismatic, evangelical congregation in Ukraine's capital. This paper offers an overview of the church's Biblically-based philosophy of social transformation and illustrates how this philosophy informs the congregation's social activism, including participation in nonviolent direct action (NVDA) during the events of the Orange Revolution.

¹ A. Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005; A. Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (2), March/ April 2005, 35-42.; T. Kuzio, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution. The opposition's road to success," *Journal of Democracy*, 16,2 (2005), 117-130.

² *Ibid.*

³ T. Kuzio, "Civil society, youth and societal mobilization in democratic revolutions," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 389, 3 (2006), 365-386; A. Aslund & M. McFaul, eds. *Revolution in orange. The origins of Ukraine's democratic breakthrough*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.

Background: Post-Soviet Ukraine and the Orange Revolution

When in 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine gained its independence. The nation set out to build a democratic society and the Ukrainian people as well as people of the democratic nations throughout the world experienced a mixture of hope, excitement, and anticipation about being involved in building in Ukraine a more just and transparent society. Newly independent Ukraine saw a dramatic development of its civil society and a push for democratic reforms. People experienced more openness in expressing their views, as relative freedom of speech and press was now possible. But at the same time progress in true democracy was slow.

The corruption and injustice that permeated every level of Ukrainian society saw a dramatic increase since the country's independence. People witnessed growing rates of corruption,⁴ violent crime, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and an overall decline in moral values in their society.⁵ The years passed and celebrating the anniversary of independence became a new tradition. However, little had changed in Ukraine for the ordinary citizen. With the loss of communist ideals that had for years guided the life of Ukrainian society, the nation found itself in a sudden values vacuum and with a need for a new vision or a value system to guide its life. Katie Morris, a Western missionary who spent many years in Ukraine writes about her impressions:

Over the years we worked in Ukraine during the 1990s, it was clear that little changed with the fall of communism. The same men remained in control – perhaps they had changed their ties! ... We saw their extravagant palaces go up behind high walls, and their monster 4-Wheel-Drives and the latest Mercedes arrive from the West. Ukraine was a 'banana republic' – a lawless country that could be bought for money if you had it – and was ruled by force"⁶

In 2004, Viktor Yushchenko was the first opposition presidential candidate in Ukraine's history. By the time of the November 2004 presidential elections, it was clear the nation was favoring him. According to polls, nearly 85% of Ukrainians wanted change and 57% did not believe Ukraine was going in the right direction.⁷ David Aikman quotes the director of Kyiv Bible College, whose students became active participants in the Orange Revolution protests: "It's impossible to do business in Ukraine unless you are connected to the mafia."⁸ People were "utterly sick of lawlessness and corruption, hungry for morals and ethics: 'We don't want to live in a country anymore where our President is a criminal!'"⁹

The November 2004 rigged presidential election with its voter intimidation, extensive ballot fraud,¹⁰ and even violent confrontations triggered the mass protests of the Orange Revolution. The nonpartisan Committee of Voters of Ukraine declared that the election was "the biggest election fraud in Ukraine's history".¹¹ Immediately following the vote count on November 21, 2004, thousands of people flooded Kyiv Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) to protest the fraudulent election results and advocate for social and political change in Ukrainian

⁴ A. Osipian, "Political graft and education corruption in Ukraine. Compliance, collusion, and control" *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 16,4 (2008), 323 – 342.

⁵ O. Vynoslavska, J. McKinney, C. Moore & J. Longenecker, "Transition ethics: a comparison of Ukrainian and United States business professionals," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 61, (2005) 283 - 299.

⁶ Katie Morris, "Ukraine Orange Revolution!" *Vision*, Spring 2005, 6 - 7. <http://www.propheticvision.org.uk/PV/PV35.pdf> accessed February 28, 2009.

⁷ Aslund & McFaul, p. 49.

⁸ David Aikman, Ukraine's unreported revolution – Viktor Yushchenko was swept to power by the forces of religious freedom. *The American Spectator*, March 2005, 14 -17, p. 15.

⁹ Morris, p. 7.

¹⁰ Wilson, 105-21.

¹¹ Karatnycky.

society.

The protests lasted for seventeen days. Between 100,000 to 500,000 people remained constantly in Independence Square of downtown Kyiv in the freezing weather. Participants set up tents to accommodate thousands of Kyiv residents, and residents from other parts of Ukraine arrived in Kyiv to join the protests. As a result of the protests, on December 3, 2004, the Supreme Court of Ukraine annulled the election results. On December 8, 2004, the parliament passed an electoral reform bill that would allow the rerun to take place on December 26th. The following day, December 9th, the majority of the demonstrators had left the square. Crowds filled up the square yet again on December 27th, when election results had shown an 8% lead for the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, who became perhaps the first democratically elected president of Ukraine.¹²

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this case study draws from the recent literature on the Orange Revolution that analyzes the factors that contributed to its nonviolent nature. It also utilizes earlier studies in theology and nonviolent resistance (NVR) to derive the philosophical framework and historical examples for the involvement of Ukrainian churches in the nonviolent protests.

Nonviolent Direct Action and the Orange Revolution

Despite high levels of emotion and anger towards the extensive injustice that fueled the participants' motivation to join the protests, the Orange Revolution had a nonviolent character and a peaceful outcome. There were several contributing factors to the nonviolent nature of the protests. Western mediators were involved in the conflict resolution process between the ruling authorities and the opposition,¹³ to ensure that the highly charged dispute around the election results did not turn to violence and armed conflict, and to facilitate the second election runoff that would meet international standards of fairness and transparency.

Members of the pro-democracy youth movement Pora as well as members of other civil society groups played an important role in organizing the protests. They received training from Western-funded pro-democracy organizations in nonviolence strategy and methodology. This training was critical in the mobilization efforts in Orange Revolution.¹⁴ They followed the model outlined by Gene Sharp in his book *From Dictatorship to Democracy*.¹⁵ Gene Sharp is a founder of the Albert Einstein Institution dedicated to study of strategic nonviolence. His work, particularly *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, has influenced resistance movements in the former Soviet Bloc countries, including Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus. Ukraine's Pora movement had the book posted on their website and acknowledged using it as a manual for its mobilization efforts and participants' training in the method of NVR. The Pora leader Oleh Kyriyenko recalled in his 2004 interview with Radio Netherlands,

"The bible of Pora has been the book of Gene Sharp, also used by [Serbia's] Otpor, it's called: From Dictatorship to Democracy. Pora activists have translated it by themselves. We have written to Mr. Sharp and to the Albert Einstein Institute in the United States, and he became very sympathetic towards our initiative, and the

¹² Ibid, p. 9.

¹³ Aslund & McFaul, 139-40.

¹⁴ V. Stepanenko, How Ukrainians view their Orange Revolution: public opinion and the national peculiarities of citizenry political activities. *Democratizatsiya*, 13 (4), Fall 2005, 595 - 616, p.598.

¹⁵ Gene Sharp, *From dictatorship to democracy*. Boston, MA: Albert Einstein Institution., 1993.

Institution provided funding to print over 12,000 copies of this book for free".¹⁶

While the Pora movement played a major role in political organizing and utilizing NVR strategy during the Orange Revolution, Ukrainian Churches played a crucial role in sustaining its nonviolent character.

Church Involvement in the Orange Revolution

Many protest participants acknowledged that the overwhelming presence of members of Christian churches in Kiev was central to defusing the danger.¹⁷ As noted by Patriarch Filaret Kenyzenko, a leader of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyivan Patriarchate), people "gathered on Independence Square and other cities of Ukraine sensed 'the warmth of the Christian love'".¹⁸ An American missionary to Russia writes of her communication with Orange Revolution participants in Ukraine:

Ukrainian members of our team told of the wonderful atmosphere in Independence Square and in the streets of Kiev and in every city around Ukraine during the 17 days of peaceful demonstrations. They said you could feel the very presence of God on the streets – Christians of every denomination prayed round the clock, political rallies began with prayer – such friendliness, such kindness, such support – crime down by a third in the whole nation!¹⁹

Churches organized their membership to put up tents for the protesters, provided warm clothing and food, and even offered places to sleep for the participants who arrived from other areas. They helped create an atmosphere that looked more like an evangelical revival meeting than a political protest.²⁰ Some churches operated a 24-hour prayer chain, a scenario in which one or more people take turns each hour in praying, so that there is always someone praying for a cause. However, people did not necessarily have to be at the same location to be a part of the prayer chain. Others set up prayer tents in the Independence Square.²¹ The demonstrators participated in two daily prayer meetings that lasted for two hours in the morning and an hour at night and were "reminded of their Christian duties by nuns clad in orange sashes, seminarians, and priest monks".²²

There are several factors that contributed to such an unprecedented (for Ukraine) mass participation of Christian churches in the public protests. First, the open atmosphere created in society in newly independent Ukraine facilitated development of its civil society and welcomed religious pluralism. As a result, the country saw increasing membership in evangelical Protestant as well as in the more traditional Catholic and Orthodox churches.²³ Second, Christian churches were guided by the Biblically-grounded philosophy of love, justice, nonviolence, and reconciliation to take on an active role in the democratic transformation of Ukrainian society. The following words of the church leaders well describe the level of Ukrainian churches' commitment to justice:

"a group of Catholic and Protestant pastors from Odessa declared, '[w]e turn to our faithful with a fervent challenge: to fast and pray for peace in our country. We

¹⁶ M. Strijbosch, "Ukraine: the resistance will not stop," *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, November 25, 2004. Retrieved March 02, 2009, from <http://www.radionetherlands.nl/currentaffairs/region/easterneurope/ukr041125>.

¹⁷ Aikman, p. 15.

¹⁸ K. Petrenko & P. Glanzer, "The rise of orange Christians," *Prizm*. January/ February 2006, 26-30.

¹⁹ Morris, p. 7.

²⁰ *Orange Revolution Video*. (2005). Kyiv: Embassy of God. Retrieved March 05, 2009, from www.godembassy.org

²¹ Aikman; Petrenko & Glanzer.

²² Aikman, p. 16.

²³ *Ibid*.

call our flock... and the whole Ukrainian nation, to defend the truth, to maintain unity and civil peace, to keep the Constitution and laws of Ukraine, and not to allow violence'.²⁴

Third, through numerous educational initiatives, within local congregations as well as through Christian higher education institutions, Ukrainian churches encouraged its members toward civic engagement and a life based on an alternative to authoritarianism. Fourth, the remarkable fact of unity among different Christian denominations, which contrasted with Ukraine's recent history of ecclesiastical division, was displayed and all major confessions (with the exception of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate) supported the pro-democracy protests. Christian churches, across the inter-confessional lines, united in Independence Square in support of truth and justice.

In the events of the Orange Revolution, churches did not instigate the protests. However, in an effort to end injustice and ensure a peaceful outcome, they mobilized their membership in great numbers for active participation in the events. As the protests went on for over two weeks and the ruling authorities began busing coal miners and youth from eastern Ukrainian regions, the area in which they had the most political support, the tensions in Independence Square began to escalate. But Christians among the protesters in the Independence Square welcomed them, brought them food, and organized prayers for the unity of the whole country.²⁵

To understand the reason and the motivation behind the involvement of Ukrainian churches in the Orange Revolution, it is important to explore the underlying philosophy. A Biblically-grounded worldview governs the relationship between Christian spirituality and social activism practiced by the communities of faith in the post-Soviet Ukraine.

Biblically-Grounded Philosophy of Social Justice and Nonviolence

The Bible provides the platform for a Christian philosophy of life. The principles of social and environmental justice, which it outlines, include a prescription for humanity to live in harmony with God, with fellow human beings, and with the environment.

Theological framework. Jesus' teachings lay an ethical foundation for his followers. Central to it is the message of radical love. The life of Jesus is a perfect example of the way of radical love.

Jesus' command to love one's enemies, to bless those that curse you, to do good to those that hate you and to pray for those who persecute you is both credo of his life of radical love and a call to his followers to abide by. He modeled this way of life for his followers. "In doing so he revealed the nature of God. Jesus demonstrated that God shows unending, non-coercive patience with humanity. ... The fact that God acts toward humanity in this way and Christ expects us to forgive as God has forgiven us points to a nonviolent way of life as normative for Christ's followers".²⁶

Jesus calls to us to participate with him in his ministry of reconciliation and healing and to practice a nonviolent resistance that is active, not passive; creative, not choreographed. It seizes the moral initiative. It explores a creative alternative to violence. It asserts the dignity and humanity of all parties. It seeks to break the cycle of dehumanization. It makes people face the consequences of one's action. In proclaiming the love of one's enemies, it longs to transform "us vs. them" thinking. It works tirelessly for the mutual transformation of the oppressed

²⁴ Petrenko & Glanzer, p. 27.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 28, see also Orange Revolution video.

²⁶ T. Rynne, *Gandhi and Jesus: the Saving Power of Nonviolence*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books., 2008, p. 158.

and the oppressor. By remaining nonviolent – even in the face of severe provocation, intimidation, and threat – such resistance contributes to social transformation in a profound way. In contrast to the coercive and dominant power of violence, nonviolent resistance can unleash the power of truth, love, compassion, justice, and creative collaboration to change lives and whole societies.²⁷

Peace is an inseparable aspect of the redeemed and renewed human relationships. The primary driving force in human history was God working in, with, and through the non-violent, non-resistant community of the disciples of Jesus, that was the ultimate force in human affairs. The primary responsibility of Christians is not to take over society and impose their convictions and values on people who don't share their faith, but to “be the church”.²⁸ By refusing to return evil for evil, by living in peace, sharing goods, and doing deeds of charity as opportunities arise, the church witnesses to the fact that an alternative to a society based on violence is possible. The church's life is based on the conviction that God calls Christians to imitate the way of Christ in his absolute obedience, even if it leads to their deaths, for they, too, will finally be vindicated in resurrection.²⁹

Biblically-Grounded NVDA in Recent History

The Biblical principle of radical love is central to successful NVR movements in recent history. Jesus' teachings and modeling of this principle had a tremendous impact on the formation of Gandhi (who is considered to be a father of NVDA method) and his philosophy of nonviolence. The Biblical principle of radical love was applied by Martin Luther King, Jr., and Christians in the US civil rights movement; Roman Catholic clergy and lay people in Latin America in the 1980s; and by Protestant clergy and lay people in East Germany during the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

For King, Biblical teaching provided a vision of an alternative social order, based on radical love and justice. It fueled his passion to advance justice. In response to the criticism of his engagement into NVR against segregation in Birmingham that came from numerous church leaders, he reminded them of Jesus' way of radical love and called the church to recover its prophetic role in embodying and giving a foretaste of God's kingdom. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, King writes:

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, ed. and persecute you.” Was not Amos an extremist for justice: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.” ...So, the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?³⁰

In his posthumous autobiography, King says, “nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom”.³¹ However, he states,

²⁷ K. Butigan, *The spiritual journey of Christian nonviolent resistance*. Retrieved March 02, 2009, from <http://paceebene.org/nvns/nonviolence-news/spiritual-journey-christian-nonviolent-resistance>, p. 3

²⁸ J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 1994. 93-111.

²⁹ S. Hauerwas, “When the politics of Jesus makes a difference,” *The Christian Century*. October 13, 1993, 982-987.

³⁰ M. L. King, jr. Letter from Birmingham jail (1963). Accessed March 02, 2009. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_from_Birmingham_Jail

³¹ M. L. King jr & C. Carson, *The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: IPM/Warner Books, 2001. Retrieved March 03, 2009, from http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/autobiography/chp_13.htm.

“Resistance and nonviolence are not good in themselves”.³² Reconciliation rooted in love must be present to make resistance and nonviolence truly meaningful. “Our ultimate end must be the creation of the beloved community”.³³

In Latin America, Biblical principles of love and justice and practice of Christian spirituality informed the advocacy work for the poor and disenfranchised by the practitioners of Liberation Theology Leonardo Boff, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, and Fray Juan Antonio Puigjante. Initially formulated by Gustavo Gutierrez in his *A Theology of Liberation* (1973), liberation theology is concerned with God’s liberation of poor and oppressed people from structural oppression and violence. It restates and gives a new life to the gospel message of hope and justice. Liberation theology advocates for active nonviolence that challenges and transforms structures and institutions that have become sources of or instruments of oppression of poor people throughout the world.

The work of Boff and other liberation theologians led to the creation of base ecclesial communities among poor Catholics in Latin America.³⁴ Theologically, they have recovered the gospel vision, present in the life of the early Christian church, and a call to a prophetic life as a Christian community, in which each member participates in the life of God in, with, and through the life of the community of faith. In terms of advocacy for human rights and justice, the base communities have empowered the poor to become active participants in changing their own life circumstances through a renewed Biblical vision and a stance of active nonviolence.

Adolfo Perez Esquivel, a practitioner of NVDA and of liberation theology from Argentina and a winner of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize, was a founder of the Latin American Service for Peace and Justice movement. The movement sought to end poverty, social injustice and war by means of NVDA. During his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Oslo, Esquivel stated that peace was only possible if it were “the fruit of justice. True peace is the result of the profound transformation effected by nonviolence which is, indeed, the power of love”.³⁵

The life and ministry of the Argentinean human rights activist and a tireless practitioner of liberation theology Fray Juan Antonio Puigjané is yet another example of active life of NVR in the interests of the poor. Puigjané worked for the cause of the poor in Argentina, devoting himself to more than meeting the spiritual needs of disenfranchised people. Addressing issues of their economic and social well-being, he helped them organize cooperatives and build affordable clinics that served the poor. He became an advocate against the crimes committed by the former militant regime, including numerous cases of those who “disappeared” and were later found murdered by the regime. He was the first man to join Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in their nonviolent protests.

The Christian church in East Germany, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular, was an active advocate on human rights issues and personal freedoms that had been suppressed by the communist regime, and they were a key player in the national mobilization that brought about the 1989 peaceful revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Frederick Bonkovsky in his study of this peaceful revolution writes:

“[T]he most dramatic decisions of 1988 (and 1989) were made by Protestant church leaders who with great skill and ultimate success sought change in state and society while protecting human rights and moral freedom... More than any single

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ D. Batstone, *From conquest to struggle: Jesus of Nazareth in Latin America*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991; V. Karkkainen, *An introduction to ecclesiology: ecumenical, historical & global perspectives*. InterVarsity Press, 2002.

³⁵ A. Esquivel, *Christ in poncho*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books., 1983, p. 137-8.

institution, the East German Protestant Church was mother and midwife to the revolution of 1989 and hence to the reunification of Germany in 1990".³⁶

Biblically-grounded philosophy and application of the principle of radical love have been the basis for success in all of the discussed cases of NVDA. They were also shared by the Ukrainian churches in the protests of the Orange Revolution. Biblically-informed philosophy and practice have been at the center of social activism of Ukraine's Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations Church (Embassy of God Church).

Findings: The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations Church in Ukraine. A Case Study of Christian Involvement in Social Transformation and Nonviolent Direct Action.

One of the major players in the protests of the Orange Revolution was the 25,000– 26,000 (by different accounts) member congregation of the Kyiv evangelical, Protestant, charismatic church, the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations (Embassy of God). Approximately four thousand of its members participated daily in the protests of the Orange Revolution.³⁷ As Sunday Adelaja, the pastor of the Embassy of God church, said in an interview to *Christianity Today*:

"When the rigging of the election was going on, people went ahead and went out following the example [of] what we had done [Here, Adelaja is referring to the church's prior involvement in NVDA against the unlawful decisions of Ukrainian authorities discussed later in this paper]. We were calling people to come out to join, to fight for democracy" (Wunderink, 2008).³⁸

Sunday Adelaja, the church's leader, is a Russian-speaking, Nigerian-born pastor, a former journalism exchange student in the USSR, who after experiencing personal religious transformation began a ministry to Kyiv's alcoholics. The church grew to become the largest congregation in Europe and the first mega church in the former Soviet Union, with more than 300 church branches in over 30 countries, including USA, Canada, Holland, Israel, Singapore, South Africa, and countries of the former USSR.³⁹

Bringing Realities of Heaven to Earth: Philosophy Informing Social and Political Activism

In the years preceding the Orange Revolution, Christian spirituality and faith were a motivational force in the Embassy of God congregation's involvement in social activism. The Orange Revolution was only one of a number of social justice and transformation activities the church was involved in.

It believes that the roots of Ukraine's socio-economic crisis are spiritual in nature and that churches, following the Biblical vision, have a unique mission of not just bringing people into God's kingdom, but also making God's kingdom visible.⁴⁰ In his interview with Catherine Wanner, pastor Sunday Adelaja described the mission of his congregation:

From 2002, our church became more a church that will strive to bring the realities

³⁶ F. Bonkovsky, *Sources of East German revolution and German unification*. Retrieved March 02, 2009, from http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/Bonkovsky_Sources.pdf, pp.1 & 10.

³⁷ C. Wanner, *Communities of the converted: Ukrainians and global evangelism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press., 2007, p.233.

³⁸ S. Wunderink, "Pushing boundaries," *Christianity Today*, October 2008. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2008/october/26.74.html>

³⁹ www.godembassy.org. Retrieved March 02, 2009, from The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations; cf. Wanner, 2007.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

of heaven and principles of God to every sphere of life. We are not just going to plant churches everywhere, but we are going to bring God to the ways of living of the people, to every stratum of society, in the sense that we bring God to politics, to business. The church should now begin to view themselves as ambassadors of God. Wherever they are, they are not just there to make money or to do business but to really reflect God, His principles, His holiness, and to really bring them to the structure where they are working. We are now taking responsibility to improve the world and reform the Earth through the principles of the Kingdom, the real principles. Transformations. So it's like saying that we became a reformation church. A church that has set out to reform the whole society, to bring total change, as Martin Luther did. Just transforming the whole culture, actually.⁴¹

The Embassy of God church began in 1993–1994 as an outreach to alcoholics and drug addicts.⁴² A large part of today's congregation is comprised of individuals and families that found healing, personal transformation, and a supportive community in the church. The majority of the members have in common stories of healing and restoration—addiction recovery, marriage restoration, financial health, recovery from co-dependence, or leaving unhealthy and undignifying life styles: prostitution, abuse, violence, and unethical work and business practices.⁴³

With the goal of transformational impact on society, the church began a series of educational and leadership development initiatives. The church has facilitated development of a network of non-government and business organizations begun and operated by the members of the congregation. In his sermons, pastor Sunday Adeleja encouraged the members with a passion for a particular sphere of society, to start non-profit, non-government organizations (NGOs) to effectively impact society in Ukraine. While the authorities, he said, would not take churches seriously, if an NGO promoted or advocated for a cause, they would be more open to have a dialogue.⁴⁴ For this purpose, the church compiled a collection of government policy documents and developed a set of instructions on how to form and register an NGO, all of which can be accessed on its website (www.godembassy.org). For the members interested in starting or developing an NGO, the church offers workshops and online instructions in strategic planning, fundraising, and grant writing.

In this very fashion, through its business academy established by a group of successful church business people, church members, as well as members of the community, learn essential business skills. This is a particularly notable development and an attempt to establish business practices that are based on a different set of values from those that are prevalent in Ukrainian society. Today, corruption permeates all levels of Ukrainian society. Unethical business practices and politics in Ukrainian society are inseparable. In the Embassy of God Church Business Academy, however, people are learning ways to integrate their spirituality that calls for holy and pure living, conducting business ethically and counter-culturally.

The church has also established a psychological counseling center that offers help to people with emotional struggles and provides guidance for building strong marriages and healthy families. It also operates a 24-hour hotline, to which over 100,000 people have called in for help regarding issues that range from suicidal ideas to family problems (www.godembassy.org). In

⁴¹ Wanner, p. 214.

⁴² Ibid. 219-229.

⁴³ www.godembassy.org

⁴⁴ Ibid. Christian Life Assembly, *Conference with Sunday Adelaja*. Langley, BC, Canada, August, 2007. Streaming Video retrieved September 29, 2007, from www.clachurch.com

addition, the church holds an annual conference for men, to provide fellowship and to offer teaching programs on the leadership role and mission of a man in society. The first conference took place in response to the request of women in the church to help their husbands find and understand God's vision for their role in families. It is important to understand that much damage was done during the decades of the Soviet Union's rule to men's perception of their identity and societal role. An American friend, whom I met in the late 1990s when I still lived in Ukraine, observed, "Men here seem to have lost the initiative and the drive to lead their families and society, because, under communism, for years and decades they were told to not 'stick their necks out' and complied with conformity for fear of retaliation." These conferences occur on a regular basis and are extremely well attended.⁴⁵ My conversations with Ukrainian Christians, with American missionaries in Ukraine, and my personal experience of living in Ukraine until 1997, lead me to believe that the impact of the transformation of men into ethical and moral leaders of their families and communities could be far reaching and could spread into all spheres of Ukrainian society, where leadership positions in politics and business have been predominantly filled by men.

The church has been extensively involved in charitable work. It operates a food program that feeds 1,000 to 2,000 homeless people daily (www.godembassy.org). It works with governmental programs to reduce the number of orphaned and homeless children by training its members and helping them to establish family-based homes for children (*simeinyj dutyachyi budynok, ukr.*) Church volunteers work with schools and youth centers in teaching principles and skills for healthy living. In this country where the educational system plays a crucial role in character formation and bringing up the younger generation,⁴⁶ and where today's youth are often perceived as a "lost generation" as a result of socio-economic pressures on the family, severe decline of morality, and widespread hopelessness and cynicism, education in moral and ethical principles is viewed by the government as a prevention measure to many social ills.⁴⁷

Practice of Nonviolent Direct Action by the Embassy of God Congregation

The Embassy of God church takes its mission seriously and attempts to live it out by bringing love, justice, hope and peace to the poor and oppressed. It takes steps to confront the structures of oppression and injustice, and, if necessary, engages in nonviolent direct action. The church's experience with mass peaceful demonstrations began eight years ago, three years before the Orange Revolution. The first demonstrations in the center of Kiev were organized by the church-sponsored Love Rehabilitation Center that opened its doors in 1997. Ukraine has the highest rate of AIDS in Europe, and heroin addiction is the main cause of the epidemic. Since 2001, on the Day of AIDS Remembrance, the Embassy of God church has been organizing and conducting through the main streets of Kyiv an annual March of Life parade. Its goal is "to raise awareness of the spiritual nature of addiction problems and the spiritual possibilities for cure",⁴⁸ and to celebrate the recovery of thousands people.

These peaceful demonstrations were unprecedented in Ukraine, in that they were organized by a church. They were aimed at raising awareness and did not involve confrontation. However, in November 2003 and April 2004, just a few months before the Orange Revolution, the congregation for the first time took part in an NVR action against the city of Kyiv administration. The church for years had been renting a gymnasium for its worship services. By November 2003,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ S. Filiatreau, "Moral education in post-Soviet Ukraine", Unpublished paper, presented at the research Conference of Washington Consortium for Comparative and International Education, February 21, 2009.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Wanner, p. 229.

its lease agreement with the city for the sports arena had expired and the city administration refused to renew the lease or offer alternative facilities. The church had gone through due process and applied to the city administration to lease (land is a state property in Ukraine) a vacant lot in order to build its permanent place of worship. On November 13, 2004, having notified the administration of their intent, thousands of church members appeared in an organized crowd in front of the building of the city administration, praying and blessing the city leadership. They remained in the streets until the city mayor appeared and personally promised that the church would be given premises for its own place of worship. The city administration ignored, however, the congregation's request and did not follow through with the mayor's own promise.

In April, after spending extensive time in prayer and fasting, the church came to the city administration in even larger crowds for the second time. The church leaders sensed that God was guiding them to stand up for justice and protest the abuse of power and unjust treatment by the city administration. The direction they sensed was to come in great numbers—the congregation's membership at the time was around 20,000—to the city administration with prayer, blessing, and in the attitude of love and peace, and not to leave until their rightful request would be met.

The protests could be better described as open-air worship services, with praying, singing songs of praise, and dancing. Following several days of protests, again the city mayor appeared on the front steps of the administrative building and made a personal promise to not delay the decision on the church's property any longer. Thus, by the time of the 2004 presidential election, the church had gained experience in dealing with injustice and coercion of power tactics as practiced by city authorities through NVDA.

The Ukrainian news media covered these events and broadcast them nation-wide. Because the media's accounts of the event tended to be dismissive, the positive impact on Ukrainians of seeing the potential for successful, peaceful, and even celebratory NVDA can only be inferred. It is important to note that apart from these activities of the Embassy of God church, Ukraine had no experience of NVDA until the Orange Revolution.

As the presidential election was scheduled for November 21, 2004, the congregation of the Embassy of God church was laying the foundation through prayer and fasting. Thus, when the election rigging took place, the church members again, in great numbers, took to the streets of Kyiv, joining with other protesters. In a way similar to their earlier NVDA experience in the confrontation with the Kyiv city administration, the congregation members held prayer meetings, worshiped in the open air, sang hymns of praise, danced, and provided warm clothing, food, and lodging for those who needed them. Joined by Christians from various denominations, together they erected prayer tents in Independence Square, where people could pray and receive counseling. Christians welcomed and offered assistance to the participants from both pro-government and pro-opposition groups and displayed an attitude of love, kindness, and good will.⁴⁹

The Embassy of God Church has continued to use NVDA in its social justice activism in Ukraine's new, post-Orange Revolution chapter. During the writing of this paper, I learned of the two most recent NVDA events sponsored by the Embassy of God church. A new NGO called *Gospodari Zemli* (literally translated from Ukrainian as *landlords and/ or stewards of the Earth*) organized and operated by the church members, met for the first time on February 2, 2009 and the last time on March 13th, 2009. The February 2, 2009 event aimed at protesting against the Ukrainian banking system's interest and repayment policies of foreign currency-based loans that, under the conditions of the global financial crisis and Ukraine nearing sovereign default, have exacerbated the already extreme economic conditions of millions of Ukrainians. The goal of the March 13th

⁴⁹ *Orange Revolution Video*; Aikman; Petrenko & Glanzer.

event, the Anti-Crisis March, was to *return Ukraine from its current internal political crisis through a set of anti-crisis policy measures.*

Discussion and Conclusion

The case of the Embassy of God congregation illustrates well the way a Biblically-based philosophy of active love serves as a foundation for its members' involvement in social activism, including NVDA. The following principles can be derived in the practice of social justice advocacy and NVR by the Embassy of God Church:

Centrality of faith and spirituality. The members of the Embassy of God share a belief in the transforming power of God's love and in empowerment by God's vision of a society that is built on the foundation of love, justice, and peace. Their social activism was ignited by this vision and powered by love for God, people, and justice.

Humility and gentleness. Pastor Sunday Adelajah's sermons, as well as transformation stories of the church members, have emphasized humility, gentleness, and love that spring from within people's hearts as key factors in the NVR method. Embassy of God members set aside time to prepare their hearts through prayer and fasting, while deciding a course of actions for their participation in NVDA. Resistance to violence is not limited to physical violence, and a practice of internal nonviolence and love for the enemy is central.

Belief in embodying God's kingdom on earth. The Embassy of God church members share the belief that people (particularly, people of faith) should embody God's kingdom on earth by living out God's love through their work for social justice, healing, reconciliation and restoration. The Embassy of God, whose NVDA philosophy is rooted in Biblical theology, adds another dimension: a Christian community. The Embassy of God believes in the Biblical vision of a Christian community that, as it responds to God's call to live in perfect love for God, one another, and the world, becomes a glimpse of Heaven on earth.

Nonviolence is not a method one retreats to because of fear. Nonviolence is an act of extreme courage that can only be practiced by the strongest. Strength and assurance of the course of action comes out of a time of prayer and fasting.

The goal of nonviolence is not destruction or embarrassment of the opponent. It calls for better mutual understanding between the oppressed and the oppressors. NVR is used to raise the opponent's awareness of the civil and/ or moral problems and provides an opportunity to restore his or her own God-given dignity, tainted by the actions that stripped the dignity of others.

Actions are not aimed at people. NVR actions are aimed not at specific people. They target unjust ideas, practices, and laws.

Readiness to embrace suffering. NVR comes with a price for its practitioners. In their stand for justice, NVR activists must be willing to embrace suffering without retaliation against the opponent.

The NVR philosophy of the Embassy of God church is rooted in the Biblical vision of the whole of creation as God's universe, and built on the principles of love, justice, and peace. Having faith and embracing this vision is a foundation for the congregation's understanding of their struggle as purpose-filled and, in a theological sense, is prophetic.

Critical to the peaceful outcome of the Orange Revolution was the involvement of Ukrainian Christians. As churches from across Ukraine mobilized their members, they became instrumental in sustaining the nonviolent nature of the protests. This study marks an important step toward understanding the role faith and spirituality played in the nonviolent character of the Orange Revolution. The case of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations congregation illustrates that Biblically-based philosophy and spirituality are the foundation of

social activism and NVDA practiced by Christians in post-Soviet Ukraine prior, during, and long after the events of the Orange Revolution.

The Embassy of God church views NVR not merely as a means of civil disobedience but also as a venue to and of civil justice. It has spirituality at its core, and particularly Christian spirituality. From its early conception by Mahatma Gandhi, the NVR method has had strong roots in Biblical spirituality. The social activism of Martin Luther King, Jr.; of such practitioners of Liberation theology as Leonardo Boff, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, and Fray Juan Antonio Puigjante; and of the Evangelical Lutheran Reformed Church in East Germany all share in common actively practiced Biblical spirituality. And, as the case of the Embassy of God congregation illustrates, the Biblically-grounded practice of NVDA is alive and well in Ukraine.

The Embassy of God church is leading the way in fostering context-specific, morally and spiritually based social transformation through its multifaceted charitable, educational, and political initiatives.