

# Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Photo — P. Shkurka

**St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Cathedral  
400 Bathurst St., Toronto, Ont.**



## THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH AND ITS DOCTRINE

The Holy Orthodox Church, of which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is an integral part, also known as the Eastern Orthodox Church, and popularly as the Greek Orthodox Church, is One Holy Universal and Apostolic Church founded by Christ.

The Orthodox Church began with Christ and His Apostles at the very beginning of the Christian Era. There was no time in this Era when the Orthodox Church did not exist, and there has been no interruption of the life of the Orthodox Church to this day.

Throughout the centuries the same principles, the same Head have remained. It is in fact an Apostolic Church, and its age is the same as that of Christianity itself.

The doctrine of the Holy Orthodox Church is founded on the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Traditions, and the dogmatic decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

The Holy Scriptures are interpreted in accordance with the teachings of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and the Holy Fathers. The Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed is held only in its original form. It is a written statement which was formulated in the First (325 A.D. in the city of Nicaea) and Second (381 A.D.) Ecumenical Synods-Councils as the shortest and the most accurate summary of the Divine Truths. The Orthodox Christian must accept and believe in these Truths for his salvation. This Creed is also known as the "Ecumenical Symbol of Faith." This Ecumenical Symbol of Faith is considered as the Constitution of the Eastern Church, and is called Ecumenical as having been issued by the undivided entire Church, and is, even today, adopted by all Christian Churches.

The Eastern Orthodox Church believes in the Holy Trinity, and it is the outstanding characteristic of its Faith. God is one in substance, He is in three Persons or Hypostases, as the liturgical confession reads: "I worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, a Trinity consubstantial and undivided." God the Holy Trinity is revealed by Himself, in His Revelation, and especially by Jesus Christ. This Truth can be reached only by faith. It is mystery above our comprehension, and one which cannot be simplified by any illustration.

Orthodox Churches honour Mary as the Mother of God, and honour the nine orders of Angels, and the Saints. They reverence relics of the Saints, pictures of the Holy Subjects and the Cross, but forbid the use of carved images.

For the transmission of the Divine Grace to faithful in the Eastern Orthodox Church are the sacred ceremonies. The divine

grace of God is granted directly to the members of the Church by means of sacred ceremonies, which have been instituted either by Christ or by His Apostles. These ceremonies are performed by an ordained priest, using proper objects and words. These ceremonies, which are called Sacred Mysteries rather than Sacraments, are seven: Baptism, Chrismation (or Confirmation), Eucharist (or Communion), Confession, Holy Orders, Marriage and Holy Unction.

Baptism of either infants or adults by pouring water, or by immersion, is proper form. The Sacrament of Anointing with Holy Chrism is administered immediately after the Baptism and the chrismated infant or adult is thereafter a full communicant in Eucharist.

Doctrine of Transsubstantiation is taught. In the Eucharist leavened bread is used, which is consecrated and placed in the consecrated Chalice from which all members of the Church receive both the Holy Body and the Precious Blood of Christ, by means of a spoon. Communion is taken after confession and Priestly Absolution. Children who are under the age of seven years receive the Holy Sacrament without confession.

Holy Unction is administered to the sick, and not alone to those in danger of death. The Orthodox Church rejects the Roman Doctrine of Purgatory but believes in the beneficial effect of prayer for the dead.

The teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church was always ecumenical in character. During the first one thousand years the Church was one. Her divine constitution was made in Seven Ecumenical Councils; all of them convened in the East. It was discussed and written in Greek, the original language of Christendom and especially of the East. Up to that time the Church was one in teaching, faith and type of government. From that time on many things have taken place; the separation of the churches and the innovations by the Western Church. At that time the Orthodox Church did not believe in the primacy of any one of them. The Orthodox Church did not believe in the "filioque" or in the communion of one element of the Holy Eucharist to the laymen; nor in the compulsory celibacy of the clergymen. The Orthodox Church did not believe in the immaculate conception of the "Virgin Mary" nor in other innovations which were proclaimed later in the West after the separation of the Church. The Eastern Church never has created or added officially any other teaching after the separation. The teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church is Ecumenical in character and in fact.

## THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN UKRAINE

Christianity in Ukraine dates back to the times of the Holy Apostles. St. Andrew, the Apostle of Greece and Scythia, preached on the shores of the Dnipro River in Ukraine at the place where later Kiev was built.

As a state religion Christianity came to Ukraine from Constantinople, the Greek capital of the Byzantine Empire, in 988 at the command of the Ukrainian Grand Prince Vladimir the Great. The rite, the practices of the majestic Byzantine Church, and the advanced culture were incorporated. Kiev, the capital city of Ukraine, became subsequently a second Constantinople in splendour, power, and cultural leadership.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church introduced the national culture, and besides promoting education, the Church also encouraged other creative works such as art, church music, icon painting, and architecture. Ukrainian church buildings on the North American continent are but a fragment of the beauty and richness of designs in comparison to those built on Ukrainian soil.

Although the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was in very close communion with the Byzantine Orthodox Church, it was entirely independent in its internal structure for seven centuries.

Towards the end of the 17th century, due to the intrigues and aggression of Moscow a large part of Ukraine, including the capital city of Kiev, fell to Russia and by 1686 the Moscovite penetration sealed the fate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a separate entity.

The Russian revolution of 1917 gave the Ukrainian people and their Church an opportunity in their struggle for independence. The Ukrainian Independent National Republic was proclaimed, and in 1921 a Council of faithful and clergy in Kiev proclaimed the Ukrainian Autocephalous (Independent) Orthodox Church as the official Church of Ukraine.

The growth and expansion of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in the first years there were over two thousand parishes and about thirty bishops) were halted by the Soviet government. Thousands of priests and most of the bishops were persecuted and they perished in jails or in the Northern regions of Siberia.

Today the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine is again a subjugated church and struggles to exist even under the severest oppression from Moscow controlled communist rule.

## **THE UKRAINIAN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN CANADA**

A movement to establish a Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada began towards the end of World War One. Ukrainian pioneers who settled in Canada at the end of the 19th century needed a church which could fulfill their spiritual needs, provide progressive leadership and permit them to retain their traditional Ukrainian culture within the Canadian framework. No Church in Canada at that time met all these requirements.

The resurgence of national consciousness among Ukrainians and more favourable conditions in this new land eventually led to the creation of the independent Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada. The first General Council was called for December 28, 1918, in Saskatoon and at this Council the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada was officially established.

Administratively the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada was founded as an autocephalous democratic institution, governed by its own faithful and independent of any outside foreign domination. However, spiritually it conforms to the dogmas and rites established by the first Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Christian Church and it is in spiritual communion with other Orthodox Churches.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church grew rapidly in Canada during the past fifty years, so that today it is the largest Ukrainian Orthodox Church beyond the boundaries of Ukraine.

It numbers over 140,000 followers, organized into almost 300 congregations and served by 85 priests and at present 3 bishops. Its faithful are further served by a denominational college — St. Andrew's College — in Winnipeg on the campus of the University of Manitoba and three Institutes — in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Toronto.

### **ST. VLADIMIR'S UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL IN TORONTO**

#### **Highlights:**

Towards the end of World War One, after the first group of Ukrainian immigrants arrived in Toronto a movement to establish a Ukrainian Orthodox Congregation was started. The first definite plans towards the organization of the congregation were taken on October 31, 1926, by a group of laymen without the participation of priests. This demonstrates that

they considered the Church to be indispensable to their philosophy of life and to meaningful progress in their newly acquired homeland.

At this meeting, held at the Ukrainian People's Home, it was resolved to lay the foundation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Congregation of St. Vladimir in Toronto.

The first Divine Liturgy to be celebrated in Toronto entirely in the Ukrainian language took place on November 14, 1926, at St. John's Anglican Church on Portland St. Immediately after the service an official meeting was held and an executive was elected. This was a great historical event for Ukrainian Orthodox faithful. Progress was at first slow but later the young congregation showed definite signs of popularity.

On March 18, 1932, the Congregation of St. Vladimir's was admitted and recognized as a part of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada.

The early thirties also brought before the Church leaders the necessity of their own church building. Therefore, in 1935 the Congregation bought a site at 400 Bathurst St. on which they planned to erect a church. But for their immediate needs and activities the Congregation acquired a large building at 404 Bathurst St.

In 1947 the erection of the church was in progress and on May 7, 1948, the new church was officially opened. Three years later Toronto and St. Vladimir's Church were chosen as the see for a ruling Archbishop of Toronto and of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Eastern Canada. Thus St. Vladimir's Church was elevated to the rank of a cathedral. Since then its official name is "St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Cathedral."

The iconostasis of St. Vladimir's Cathedral was installed in 1952. It was designed by the architect G. Kodak and its icons painted by 3 artists — W. Balas, M. Dmytrenko, and I. Kubarsky.

Next year the interior of the Cathedral was beautifully painted by the same artists. The iconostasis and the interior of the church are painted in the "Cossack baroque" style which is traditional and typical of the interiors of most churches in Ukraine.

To cultivate love and respect for the Ukrainian people, and to safeguard our children learning their mother tongue, a Ukrainian school was established. At the present time over 300 students are in attendance, studying the Ukrainian language, culture, literature, and other aspects of Ukrainian life.

The Congregation has its own summer centre "Kiev" where children attend summer camp and make use of the swimming pool and other recreational facilities.

In addition, St. Vladimir's Cathedral takes an active part in the life of the Ukrainian community and on its premises are located numerous cultural, social, and auxiliary organizations.

St. Vladimir's congregation has grown in membership and now includes 500 families. Its net assets exceed two million dollars to make it one of the best organized and dynamic Orthodox congregations in Canada.

## THE ICONOSTASIS

The main Altar of the church is separated from the body of the church by a grating or altar screen called the Iconostasis, that is, a wall which is covered with pictures (icons).

The iconostasis has three doors by which one may enter or leave the Altar. The central opening is called the Royal Door or Royal Gates which are used only by the clergy during certain ceremonies. On the left and on the right of the Royal Gates are the deacon's doors. They are used by deacons when they wish to enter or leave the Altar. Laymen, when the need arises, must also use these side or deacon's doors. Women are never permitted to use these doors.

To the left of the Royal Gates is the icon of the Mother of God with the Christ Child, and to the right is the icon of Jesus Christ. Small icons on the Royal Gates depict the four Evangelists. Immediately above the Royal Gates is the icon of the Last Supper.

Over the Royal Gates and the deacon's doors there are usually two or three rows of holy pictures which represent the 12 Apostles, 12 prophets, and the 12 most important feast days of the year. In this manner the iconostasis is symbolic of the whole history, glory and salvation of mankind as fulfilled by Him through His Church, and Saints, teachers, and ministers of the Church.

The iconostasis is a tremendously intricate and delicate work of art. It is a thing of sheer beauty. Its origin can be traced back to the "Catacombs" of the early days of Christianity in Europe.

The original Altar screens were simple columns with curtains hiding the Altar from the worshippers. Later they were made of metal and adorned with sculptures of the Apostles. Ultimately, they became more elaborate, ornamented with painted icons and covered with gold leaf.



The Eastern Church throughout its history constantly sought to demonstrate the relationship between heavenly and earthly things, and used the iconostasis to portray that relationship. At first, its significance may be lost on the layman. With a little explanation it can be seen as a sort of panoramic history of the ancient Christian faith as adopted by the Eastern Church.

At first glance the viewer may see this work of art as quite traditional as to style and colour. Yet closer examination reveals subtle differences from other Altar screens seen in the artist's own interpretation of colour, the facial features of the figures, and in the more than usually delicate carvings.

The remarkable thing about the Iconostasis at St. Vladimir's Cathedral, and indeed in all examples of Ukrainian Orthodox Church Altar screens in North America, is the fact that there is a style in religious art that has survived several centuries without change in concept. It has been said that even an expert cannot tell at what point in history a particular iconostasis was created.

History tells us that the first Orthodox theologians did not regard icons as products of the creative imagination of human artists. Icons, in their view, were a kind of window between the earthly and celestial worlds — a window through which the inhabitants of the celestial world looked down into ours and on which the true features of the heavenly archetypes were imprinted. Thus, iconologists tell us that the repetitive quality of all icons is not due to any lack of artistic imagination on the part of the painter. By the very nature of the icon, any intervention of human imagination is excluded.

Perhaps this will change in years to come, but the iconostasis in St. Vladimir's Cathedral and in other Greek Orthodox Churches will remain as a particularly fine example of art in an ancient tradition, in effect a treasure of religious culture brought to this continent by the people of Ukraine.







