Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox church

The absence of Ukrainian priests - Catholic and Orthodox - opened the door to proselytization by Russian Orthodox missionaries, who began to penetrate Ukrainian settlements during the 1890s. By 1898-9, Russian Orthodox missionaries were visiting Ukrainian rural colonies in all three Prairie provinces. Widespread fears that the French Roman Catholic hierarchy wanted to 'latinize' the Ukrainian Catholic Church's eastern rite, and take control of parish property incorporated with Roman Catholic episcopal corporations, contributed to the growing appeal of Russian Orthodoxy in rural settlements and in Winnipeg. So too did the fact that many Russian Orthodox missionaries - those born and educated in eastern Ukraine, as well as Galician and Bukovynian converts educated in the Church's Russian and American seminaries - spoke fluent Ukrainian. Because, the Russian Orthodox liturgy, sung in Old Slavonic, was virtually identical to the liturgy celebrated in the eastern rite Catholic and Orthodox churches of Galicia and Bukovyna, many immigrants were not inclined to draw distinctions between the churches. Finally, Russian Orthodoxy was attractive to many immigrants because Russian Orthodox missionary activity was subsidized by the government of tsarist Russia; as a result, missionaries made fewer financial demands on their flock than did Ukrainian Catholic pastors, and they did not require the incorporation of land and property with the hierarchy of their Church.

Holy Trinity Russian (Greek) Orthodox church (UCEC)

The founders of Winnipeg's first Russian Orthodox congregation, Holy Trinity, established in 1904, included Orthodox Ukrainian immigrants from Bukovyna and central Ukraine, who were dissatisfied with the eccentric Bishop Seraphim, as well as Ukrainian Catholic immigrants from Galicia, among them prominent individuals like Theodore Stefanik and Joseph Dyma, who had serious misgivings about the willingness of the Basilian Fathers at St Nicholas to work with Archbishop Langevin. Holy Trinity was built at the northeast corner of McKenzie Street and Manitoba Avenue under the leadership of its first pastor, Father Yaroslav Sichynsky, who had dropped out of a Ukrainian Catholic seminary in Galicia, converted, and completed his theological studies at the Russian Orthodox seminary in Minneapolis. The church was consecrated in September 1905 by Archbishop Tikhon Beliavin, Head of the Russian Orthodox Mission in North America and soon to become Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Ukrainian teachers studying at the Ruthenian Training School sang at the consecration ceremony. Construction burdened the congregation with a heavy debt and hastened Sichynsky's departure in June 1906, but Holy Trinity survived when Archbishop Tikhon's agents purchased the church at auction from the City. Like Sichynsky, the pastors who succeeded him, Fathers Mykhailo Fekula and Mykhailo Skybinsky, were both Ukrainians who had converted from Catholicism. During their pastorates the Ukrainian language prevailed in congregation administration and activities, while their readiness to perform sacramental services free of charge attracted some impecunious Ukrainian Catholics to their flock.

Theodore Stefanik (UCEC)

From 1908 to 1910, Holy Trinity and the Russian Orthodox Mission in Canada were administered by Archimandrite Arseny Chekhovtsev (Chagovtsov). A native of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, the 42 year-old Arseny was an able organizer and missionary, and an excellent preacher fluent in Russian and Ukrainian. Under his leadership Russian Orthodoxy made rapid strides in Canada and Winnipeg's Holy Trinity prospered. Travelling extensively and publishing a bi-monthly newspaper, Arseny focused on welcoming Ukrainians from Bukovyna into the fold and winning converts among Ukrainian Catholic immigrants. By 1910 there were 27 Russian Orthodox congregations in Manitoba alone; at least 4 Ukrainian Catholic and Independent Greek Church priests had been converted; a two-storey residence with rooms for monks and students had been erected on Manitoba Avenue adjacent to Holy Trinity; and plans were being made to build a student residence. It was even rumoured that Tsar Nicholas II, who bestowed a gold pectoral cross on Arseny, read and admired his published sermons.

Arseny Chekhovtsev

Although cultural-educational activity was limited to a Sunday school and a drama circle that was occasionally active prior to 1915, Holy Trinity provided a friendly environment for Ukrainian immigrants before the First World War. As late as March 1914, during the pastorate of Father Mytrofan Poplavsky, a native of central Ukraine, a requiem was held in memory of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, who had been imprisoned and exiled for his criticism of the Tsars and their Empire. This state of affairs changed dramatically after the outbreak of war, in the fall of 1914, when the congregation became the base of operations for a circle of Galician Russophiles

led by Viktor Hladyk, a supporter of the reactionary Russian National Party in Galicia, which was subsidized by the Imperial Russian foreign ministry. In their publications, which appeared under the slogan "One Indivisible Russia, One Russian Orthodox People," and at meetings and rallies, Hladyk and his circle denied the existence of a Ukrainian nation, insisted that Ukrainian immigrants from Galicia and Bukovyna were in fact "Carpatho-Russians," and maintained that those who claimed to be Ukrainians were treacherous supporters and allies of Germany and Austria, Britain's adversaries during the Great War. At this point some of the Ukrainian immigrants from Galicia, led by Joseph Dyma and Ivan Negrich, left the congregation. In 1916, Father Poplavsky was replaced as pastor of Holy Trinity by Archimandrite Adam Phillipowsky, a native of Hungarian Carpatho-Ruthenia and a convert from Catholicism, who shared Hladyk's extremist views. During a service in 1917, after the liberal and democratic February Revolution had overthrown the Russian monarchy, some of the faithful shouted "the tsar has been put out to pasture" while Phillipowsky was praying for the deposed Nicholas II. Rival parties also clashed at a June convention of the Russian Orthodox Church when a large number of Ukrainian members called for Ukrainian autonomy in a federal and democratic Russian state and rejected Phillipowsky's proposal that Galicia, Bukovyna and Carpatho-Ruthenia be incorporated into a restored Russian Empire. A year later, in 1918, simmering dissatisfaction with the ambitious and arrogant Phillipowsky boiled over and led a large number of Bukovynians to leave the church and establish their own independent Orthodox St Michael's congregation in Point Douglas.

The fall of the tsarist regime administered a crushing blow to the Russian Orthodox Church in North America and Winnipeg was no exception. Financial aid from the Holy Synod dried up and Russian Orthodoxy throughout the world split into warring camps led by rival patriarchs and bishops. By the 1920s, most of the Ukrainians who had established Holy Trinity in 1904 had left the congregation. The majority now belonged to St Michael's independent Orthodox church, while a minority had returned to the Ukrainian Catholic Church, joining the Ss Vladimir and Olga parish. Belarusans, Russians, and other Orthodox believers from Eastern Europe now outnumbered the Ukrainians in the congregation. Adam Phillipowsky, who had been consecrated bishop of a Canadian "Carpatho-Russian" exarchy by two of the bishops competing for primacy in the United States, remained at Holy Trinity until 1926. He spent the last four years of his pastorate in Winnipeg defending his jurisdictional claims and challenging those of rivals. When a compromise was reached, he left for Poland. From 1926 until his retirement in 1936, Arseny Chekhovtsev, who returned to Canada as Bishop of Winnipeg and Canadian primate of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America, was the pastor of Holy Trinity. But by this point, the congregation had little in common with the city's Ukrainian-Canadian community.

-- Orest T. Martynowych

Books

Panteleimon Bozhyk, *Tserkov ukraintsiv v Kanadi* (Winnipeg, 1927).

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<u>Websites</u>

<u>Holy Trinity Russian Greek Orthodox Church</u>
No historical articles on the website
http://www.holytrinitysobor.ca/