

Monuments to Faith: Ukrainian Churches in Manitoba

By Basil Rostoff, Roman Yereniuk, and Stella Hryniuk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1990). ix, 197 p., illus., biblio. ISBN 0-88755-621-3 (pbk). \$19.95.



*St. Michael and the Angels
Ukrainian Catholic Church,
Tyndall, Manitoba, built in 1962,
Radoslav Zuk, architect.
(Manitoba East European Heritage
Society)*

Just over one hundred years ago the first Ukrainian pioneers came to this country. To this unfamiliar part of the earth they brought a world they knew and loved, a complex and rich world of values and traditions dating back a millennium and more. In the new and often hostile environment their world provided them a much-needed source of meaning and “rootedness.” Soon after the bush was cleared and crops established, the new land was further reshaped, into their world. Most visibly for the Ukrainians this meant churches. *Monuments to Faith: Ukrainian Churches in Manitoba*, by Basil Rostoff, Roman Yereniuk, and Stella Hryniuk, documents and explores these churches in the province where the Ukrainians first settled.

To most observers, the forty-nine churches in this book may at first appear to be quirky, often modest little structures. We are asked, however, to understand them in a larger context and thereby see more than a few exotic domes. To the credit of the producers of this book, this objective is achieved clearly and simply.

The book begins with a brief but useful history of the Ukrainian people and how they came to the Canadian west, paying particular attention to the role of their church and to the adaptations – especially architectural – which were necessary to make the transition to Manitoba. In the chapters which follow, the roots of Ukrainian church architecture are traced to Judaic, Syrian, and Roman sources by way of Byzantium, as well as to more autochthonic Ukrainian sources. Even in its earliest manifestations more than one thousand years ago, Ukrainian church architecture involved adaptation of key Ukrainian folk and Byzantine building traditions. The evolution of plan types, building forms, and styles are discussed with reference to the major determinants which shaped them. The information is condensed but remains insightful. We learn, for example, that, while urban churches built of masonry held onto Byzantine models, rural churches developed what appear to be more flamboyant forms and ornamentation in wood. We also learn that Ukrainian Baroque came to dominate the east

*Book Review by
Walter Daschko*

after the 17th century, while architectural influences such as Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance prevailed in the west. We are also offered an interesting interpretation of the development of the pear-shaped domes characteristic of the churches.

At the heart of the book are three chapters which elaborate the architectural adaptations found in the Manitoba churches. Aided by photographs and sketches, the authors illustrate how most of the Manitoba churches are, in varying degrees, adaptations of the regional church types (*Hutsul*, *Boyko*, *Lemko*, and *Ternopil* types, for example) found in Ukraine. Indeed, the authors tell us that “most of the traditional church types that evolved in Ukraine from the eleventh through the nineteenth centuries are represented in Manitoba.” They quickly add, however, that “few of the churches were built in a purely traditional style.”

Among the many churches presented and discussed, a few, such as the “prairie cathedrals” of Father Philip Ruh (a notable individual with an interesting and prolific career in Canada), stand out because of sheer scale. Others, such as the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Petlura, are memorable for their delightful eccentricity. Many of the adaptations found in Manitoba’s churches were the result not only of new building materials and techniques, but of the “new” styles such as Gothic and the Romanesque Revival. Interesting, too, is the influence of Russian architecture – not by way of the Eurasian steppes, but, curiously, by way of Minnesota and the very active proselytism of its Russian Orthodox Mission.

The contemporary churches presented are for the most part a mixed bag of buildings struggling – and not always succeeding – to be both modern and traditional. The churches of Montreal architect and McGill University professor Radoslav Zuk are the most successful, and the most interesting.

The book is not restricted to architectural issues. Provided is useful information on those who commissioned and built the buildings, and the iconographers and wood carvers who elaborated the interiors. Also included is a short guide to the art and architecture of Ukrainian churches in general.

The authors see all these churches in their larger role: how they “define the cultural and religious character of the communities in which they stand.” The “communities” are not limited to Gardenton, or Winnipeg; they include Manitoba, and Canada. The “cultures” the authors define are diasporic as well as regional; and the cultures to which they stand in opposition – mass culture, globalization – are becoming increasingly important issues to all of us. It is in these contexts that *Monuments to Faith* proves particularly engaging.

However, the authors appear to have targeted the lay reader as their prime audience, and never squarely address the central process of adaptation as a complex architectural issue. As a result, the

book, while generally quite accessible, nonetheless misses an important opportunity to expand the idea of adaptation in Ukrainian architecture already identified by others (referred to variously as a process of “synthesis” or “hybridization”) in earlier explorations of the subject. Similarly, and perhaps more significantly, *Monuments to Faith* misses the chance to link the architectural processes in Manitoba with others around the world which are likewise beyond the mainstream (such as the architectural expressions of “critical regionalism” identified by critic Kenneth Frampton).

Most scholars will be frustrated by the scanty notes and the incomplete bibliography. Missing from the latter, for example, are significant and useful references such as the essays of Prof. Zuk (“Endurance, Disappearance and Adaptation: Ukrainian Material Culture in Canada,” in *Visible Symbols: Cultural Expression Among Canada’s Ukrainians*, ed. Manoly Lupul (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1984); “Architectural Significance and Culture,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984); and “Sacred Space in Ukrainian Canadian Experience: Tradition and Contemporary Issues,” in *The Ukrainian Religious Experience: Tradition and the Canadian Cultural Context*, ed. David J. Goa (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1989), to name the most important); the many church- and architecture-related essays in the Canadian Museum of Civilization’s *Material History Bulletin* 29 (spring 1989); and *Polyphony* 10 (1988), published by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, which explores many of the same issues raised in *Monuments to Faith*.

In spite of these shortcomings, *Monuments to Faith: Ukrainian Churches in Manitoba* remains an intelligent and useful document, well written and attractively laid out. All involved are to be congratulated, especially the Manitoba East European Heritage Society, who initiated and prepared the book, and the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, who funded the book with the cooperation of the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre. This is, I believe, the best book about Ukrainian Canadian architecture published to date.

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