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## Ukrainian Orthodoxy

The Orthodox faith is lived in its fullest precisely within the context of its ethnic expressions. To take away the ethnic connection of the Orthodox parishes, they said, would be to take away the very thing which helped them to maintain their faith in the first place.

In the case of the Ukrainians, having been Orthodox for over 1000 years, our whole identity has been infused with Orthodox spirituality: the rhythm of life (fasts and feasts), the basic world view of the Orthodox Church, the way we interpret our personal life experiences, and the list goes on.

Faith and culture are intricately inter-related for the Ukrainian people and indeed for all Orthodox people in their historic countries of origin. What follows is a consideration of only some of those areas where we see this connection in a clear and profound way.

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## The Calendar

One part of our faith/culture experience where we can see the inter-relation of belief and custom is the annual celebrations of feasts and fasts. All of the most popular elements of Ukrainian folk art and customs, for example, have some connection to the liturgical year of the Church (the twelve meatless dishes are part of the Christmas celebration, pysanky are a Paschal tradition, etc.). While it is true that many of these customs have their roots in pre-Christian times, they have endured over the centuries because of their "Christianisation". As we practice these customs today, they find their true meaning and value now only within the context of the Faith which they celebrate.

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The liturgical calendar of the Orthodox Church sets the tempo for our lives. The daily routine is broken with periods of intensified spiritual struggle during the fasts. The reflective times of fasting give way to the joyous celebrations of the feasts. Every season bears with it respective holy days with their particular celebrations and rites connected to - and guided by - the time of year in which they fall. All of time is sanctified by the Church calendar. This sanctification is "brought home" by the people through our participation both in liturgical celebrations and in the customs and practices handed down to us in our ethnic heritage.

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## Names

Ukrainian names which are so familiar to us are the names of Saints. These names became popular among our people because of the role that these Saints played in the life of the Church as martyrs, teachers, healers, etc. Among the Ukrainian Orthodox people, popular saints include St. Volodymyr, the Baptiser of Rus'-Ukraine, and St. Anthony, co-founder of the Pecherska Lavra — Caves Monastery — in Kyiv. Part of a child's upbringing should include knowledge of who their spiritual namesake is and how this person glorified that name through his or her dedication to Christ and His Holy Church.

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## A Unique Worldview

The worldview of a people is shaped by the land in which they live and the experiences which form their history. One unique feature of our Ukrainian worldview is our willingness to address both the joys and pains of life. For exam-

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ple, we have as many folk songs that speak of unfortunate circumstances as we do those that sing of happiness. Life is both bitter and sweet and to be truly alive one must accept both realities. Modern-day psychotherapists and psychologists speak of the importance of not living in denial — of honestly accepting what one's life brings to you. This truth has been part of the Ukrainian worldview for centuries.

Another element of our worldview is that Ukrainians are a people close to the land. The reason for this deep love of the was because our people viewed the earth as a sacred gift from God, and viewed themselves as the custodians (or more to the point, "stewards") of that gift. As people become more and more interested in environmental issues, our closeness to the land gives us a natural openness and sensitivity to these concerns.

Accepting life in all its glory and pain, and a deep respect for the environment are two facets of the Ukrainian cultural heritage which can be our spiritual gifts to the modern world. The journey of life must be accepted in its fullness - the good with the bad - if it is to be authentic, nurturing true inner growth. Likewise, as we look at the world, we must always remember that it bears the signature of the Creator, and that it can lead us to a deeper adoration of God if we treat it with due respect. In our modern world, where we seek the quick fix and all things are so easily looked upon as commodities to be consumed, both these concepts can guide us to look at our world and our journey through it in a more balanced way.

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## 1000 Years and Counting

For over 1000 years, the lands of Ukraine have been infused with an Orthodox identity. In fact, the Orthodox Church has had an even longer presence in these lands as is witnessed by the New Testament itself. In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul teaches that in the Christian life " there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all."(Col. 3:11) The Scyth'ians mentioned in this passage are the ancestors of our Ukrainian people. Ours is a people who have heard the Good News preached for two millennia.

This long-standing heritage has withstood the test of time in good moments and bad. The Church in Ukraine celebrated a golden age of the great Metropolitans of Kyiv such as Saints Ilarion, Makaryj, and Peter Mohyla. The Ukrainian Church has withstood persecution at the hands of the Muslim Tartars and the atheistic communist regime of the USSR. Over the centuries, we have amassed a great choir of Saints who stand before the Lord and pray for each and every one of us. Men and women such as St. Volodymyr the Great, St. Ol'ha, Saints Anthony and Theodosius of the Kyivan Caves Monastery, St. Job of Pochayiv, St. Anna Vsevolodivna, and St. John the New Martyr of Suchava are our fathers and mothers in the faith, and our brothers and sisters in heritage.

All of this great legacy is not simply a thing of the past, a museum piece. This twenty-century history also speaks to us today. The same faith that fed our forebears in days gone by can feed us today as well. While times may have changed, the essential spiritual journey we are on — a journey from darkness to light, from sin to salvation — remains the same. Our Orthodox Ukrainian heritage provides us with a multifaceted model or template for living our faith today. Far from denying it, we should celebrate it and share it with all those who wish to make one of our parishes their home. Even though such people may not be Ukrainian by birth, all can become sons and daughters of the spiritual legacy that is the Ukrainian Orthodox tradition. The key is that we do not allow this heritage to become an obstacle for the non-Ukrainians who come to us, by placing heritage over the Faith — rather, let us regard our heritage as the means of celebrating and expressing the Faith that will save us.

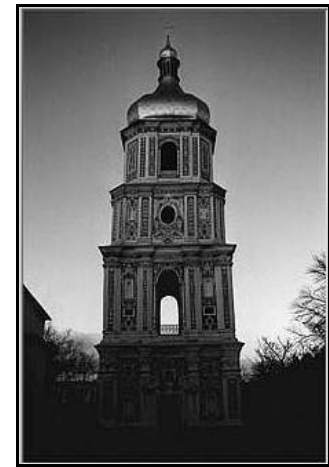
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### Tropar to All Saints of Rus'- Ukraine

As a beautiful fruit from the sowing of your salvation, O Lord, the land of Rus'-Ukraine offers to you all the saints that have shone in it. By their prayers keep the Church and our land in profound peace, through the Theotokos, O Most Merciful One.

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## What does "Ukrainian" have to do with "Orthodox"?



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Fr. Andrew Jarmus, Director