

# New History Book Sets a Feast from the East

Father Ivan Mina, Ph.D., *The Ruthenian Catholic Church*, The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

Reviewed by Anthony P. Joseph, Jr.

"By the 1880's, another people had been added to the rich ethnic mosaic of America. ... they were called *Ruthenians*, *Carpatho-Russians*, or *Slawisch*. ...

These newcomers were mostly 'Greek Catholics', *i.e.* in union with the Pope of Rome, but of the Byzantine or Greek rite and ecclesiastic tradition."

With this introduction, Father Ivan Mina, Ph.D., Archivist of the Ruthenian Archdiocese of Pittsburgh pastor of Ascension of the Lord Parish begins a very detailed and scholarly approach to deciphering and to understanding the intricacies of the Ruthenian Catholic Church. Father Mina divides his work into four sections: Ecclesiastic and Ethnic Description, Historical Sketch, Ruthenian Catholics In The USA, and Signs Of Renewal.

He begins by relating the Church's development in relation to the ethnic and subsequent ecclesiastic history of an evolving story of a people and of a Church. He states, "The Ruthenian Catholic Church is the designation reserved by the Vatican since 1960 for the Church that came into union with Rome as a result of the Union of Uzhhorod (1646), .... Before 1960, the Ruthenian was also applied to those Churches that had submitted to Rome as a result of the Union of Brest (1595-1596), but ... are now known as *Ukrainian Catholic* or *Belarusian Catholic*." The ethnicity of the people is outlined with detailed explanation as to ancient and contemporary locations

and major ethnic dialects. He divides the people into 3 major groups; *Rusiny*, *Rusnaky* and the *Rusnaci/Rusnatsi*.

In his "Historical Sketch", Father Mina carefully outlines the development of the Ruthenian Church. He traces the Ruthenian ancestry to the Slavic tribes of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries who settled "...both sides of the central Carpathian Range." He goes into detail in relating the various political developments from the Great Moravian Empire, to the Varangian Prince and their Rus' Empire and finally to the Kievan Grand Prince Vladimir.

Father Mina then relates the fascinating details of the historical rise of the Church. Father Mina carefully analyzes the missionary work of Saints Cyril and Methodus, the influence of the monastics and the last days of the Byzantine Empire. He further explains the influence of Orthodoxy and the Protestant Reformation, primarily the Calvinists on the region. Slowly over time a gradual orientation to the Western Roman Church took place culminating with a strong and capable leader, Bishop Joseph DeCamillis. The Bishop published, among other noteworthy works, a *Catechism*.

But the prime religious concern, Orthodoxy, will remain as a constant on the fringes of the Ruthenian Church exerting pressures down to contemporary history.

In Father Mina's description of the Ruthenians in the United States, Father Mina mentions the first Greek Catholics coming from Hungary and Galicia. To administer to these faithful, in 1885, Father John Volyansky arrived from Galicia and established the first Greek Catholic Church in the United States at Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. Following him, other priests, all but one of these priests was

married, were to arrive in the United States. To complicate the Greek Church in the United States in relation to the established Latin Church, conflicts arose over the issue of celibacy, with the added problems of ecclesiastic jurisdiction. The Greek Catholic priests recognized jurisdiction from their bishops in Europe. In hoping to resolve the problem, over the next several years, the Vatican sent numerous apostolic visitators to the United States. Finally Bishop Basil was to select Pittsburgh as his residence. But, Bishop Basil was to meet opposition from others and from Orthodoxy in the Pittsburgh area. Eventually after World War II, Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary was established in Pittsburgh, a diocesan newspaper was started, and the Ruthenian Church grew to where Pittsburgh became an archbishopric.

In his section "Signs of Renewal," Father Mina concludes with the contemporary historical analysis of the Ruthenian Catholic Church, in Eastern Europe and in the United States.

In Father Mina's lucid and carefully detailed work, the reader is given a glimpse of an ancient rite of the Roman Catholic Church. Father Mina's candor in telling of the Ruthenian Catholic Church is intriguing as well as fascinating. For the novice in attempting to understand the "Greek-Byzantine" rite or the astute and trained historian, Father Mina's work is a must read. Father Mina's excellent footnotes provide the beginnings of future research and study on such a fascinating subject, the Ruthenian Catholic Church.

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