

THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF  
ANCIENT RUSSIA

A MILLENNIUM

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**A Millennium: 988–1988**

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U N E S C O

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# The development of Kievan Rus' in the wake of Christianization

Boris Rauschenbach

The Millennium of the introduction of Christianity into Rus' was celebrated in 1988. This is, of course, an arbitrary date; taken from the chronicle's account of the baptism of Rus', it indicates the moment when Christianity became the country's official religion. In actual fact Christianization was a gradual process and began much earlier than this.

If we discount the legend that the Apostle Andrew preached on the banks of the Dnieper, the first clear evidence of the beginning of Christianity among the ancient Russian tribes dates from the ninth century. This is mentioned in a number of sources, but perhaps the strongest proof is archaeological. Burials dating back to the ninth and tenth centuries, with all the features of Christian funerary rites, have been found in Kiev and the territory of the Polyane. Prince Igor's treaty with Byzantium, dating from the first half of the tenth century, was signed on behalf of Kievan Rus' not only by pagans but also by Christians. This treaty attests that pagans and Christians had equal rights. It is interesting to note that the oath on conclusion of the treaty was taken by the Russian Christians in the Cathedral of the Prophet Elijah in Kiev. The use of the word 'cathedral' indicates that there were already several Christian churches in Kiev. There were also Christian communities in Novgorod.

Thirteen years after this treaty was concluded, the Great Princess Olga went to Byzantium where she was baptized. On her return to Kiev, she contributed greatly to the spread of Christianity. Thus, long before the official baptism of Rus', Christianity was already well known there and was widely appreciated.

Very probably, the steady spread of Christianity aroused serious concern in the circles of the pagan priesthood, whose influence was great. This may explain the persecution of Christians (going as far as massacre) that began after

the death of Olga and continued during the reign of Vladimir until the time of his baptism.

What reasons induced Vladimir and his court (which could be called the 'government' of Rus') to adopt Christianity as a state religion despite open resistance from the pagan priests? To answer this question, the situation, both internal and international, of Kievan Rus' should first be examined. In the ninth century, Rus' had already begun to form a unified, albeit unstable, state in the form of an association of Slavonic tribes. The Prince at its head was constantly faced with the attempts of one tribe or another to usurp his authority, which led to constant campaigns against recalcitrants. Within the tribes (and consequently in the state as a whole), the primitive order was gradually breaking down and feudalism developing (albeit still without the feudal form of landholding).

In 978, when the young Prince Vladimir ascended the throne of Kiev, his most urgent task was to make Rus' more cohesive. For this reason he abandoned lengthy military campaigns and took up permanent residence in his country's capital, Kiev, so as to remain in control of the country's political life at all times. More importantly, he decided to strengthen the union of Slavonic tribes by imposing a single form of paganism on them as a state religion. We know from the chronicle and from archaeological excavations that a state pantheon of six gods, headed by the Prince's god, Perun, was established at Kiev. Worship of Perun was also introduced in Novgorod. Such efforts may have had some positive effects, but these were not enough to solve the basic problems.

It should first be pointed out that the pagan religion and the legal concepts and customs associated with it in no way fostered the development of feudalism; if anything, they even hindered it. Completely attuned to a primitive tribal system that was now on the wane, they were incapable of inspiring members of society with ideals of behaviour appropriate to the age of feudalism. They looked backwards and not forwards.

The international situation of Rus' presented Vladimir with even more serious problems. During the previous century the young state had proved itself a power to be reckoned with militarily, and Russian merchants had come to take a constant part in international trade. The countries surrounding Rus' that could have presented a threat to her (such as the Khazar kaganate) had been defeated, and Vladimir had fortified the frontiers against warlike nomads. There may have been some temptation to continue as before, but this was no longer possible. The policy of military campaigns for purpose of plunder had reached a dead end. Subjugation of the comparatively close, brilliant and powerful Byzantine Empire was clearly impossible. The only realistic aim was to seek to rise to the level of Byzantium and the other advanced states, drawing strength from Rus's own resources. This was precisely the aim that Vladimir set himself.

He understood that it would be futile to wait for his pagan state to develop gradually until it caught up with the feudal monarchies. What was needed was a leap forward, boldly taking from the developed countries their culture, science, crafts, building skills – in a nutshell, everything that made of Byzantium and similar feudal monarchies the most advanced states of their time. It was clear that the model should be adopted in its entirety, including religion. In Byzantium, for example, state and church were so closely linked and interwoven that it was practically impossible to separate religious from secular activity. Moreover, Vladimir had no need to do so.

The Byzantine version of Christianity (which we shall call 'Orthodox', though the formal schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches only took place in 1054) was the one that best lent itself to the unification of Rus'. It was well suited to the needs of a feudal society (being borrowed from a feudal country) but it had two other important features.

First, unlike the Western Church, the Orthodox Church was not a political force independent of the Emperor. The Church did not have its own forces, and it is quite impossible to imagine the Byzantine Empire as the scene of battles such as those that opposed the armies of popes and kings. Vladimir, whose aim was to unite his country, needed a Church just like this, obedient to his will (in political matters), rather than another disruptive force in the state.

Secondly, Rus's neighbour was Orthodox Bulgaria, which had been converted approximately 100 years earlier. Bulgaria already had church service books in the Bulgarian language as a result of the activity of the evangelists of the Slavonic peoples, Cyril and Methodius and their successors. At that time the ancient Bulgarian and Russian languages were so close that, unlike Greek books, Bulgarian books did not need to be translated, just copied. What is more, the Bulgarian clergy could easily, without interpreters, preach the new religion and conduct church services in Rus'. As Christianity had to supplant the pagan religion whose priests used the country's language, the use of Latin or Greek in Christian church services would have constituted an enormous and totally unnecessary obstacle to the spread of the new religion (this is confirmed by history: when, at a later date, the Byzantine clergy attempted to introduce Greek as a liturgical language in Rus', they were forced to give it up immediately). Bulgaria had to a certain extent already prepared the ground for the rapid conversion of its close neighbour and was later to take an active part in its baptism.

Such were the internal and external political preconditions of the baptism of Rus'. It should again be stressed that Vladimir regarded the baptism not only as a religious act, but as an accompaniment to far-reaching feudal reform, making it possible within a short period to draw level with the progressive feudal monarchies in all the most important fields. The introduction into Rus' of Christianity based on the Byzantine Church appeared ideal for Vladimir's plans, yet an obstacle of principle barred the way. We have already seen that

Church and state were very closely linked in Byzantium. Therefore, from the Byzantine point of view, a state receiving its baptism from Constantinople automatically became the latter's vassal. However, the purpose of Vladimir's reforms was to raise Rus' to the level of the most advanced countries of his time, and certainly not to lose its independence.

It is difficult to say how events would have developed if the Byzantine Emperor, Basil II (with his brother and co-ruler Constantine VIII, who, however, played only a secondary role, so that hereinafter only Basil II will be mentioned), had not suffered a crushing defeat in 986 and even been in serious danger of losing his throne in 987 when his commander-in-chief, Phocas, rebelled, declared himself Emperor and advanced with his forces on Constantinople. Basil's only hope of keeping his throne lay in seeking help from Vladimir, which he did forthwith.

Vladimir agreed, but set very harsh conditions. First, the baptism of Rus' should not make the country an official vassal of Constantinople, and, secondly, he was to receive the hand of the Emperor's sister, Anna, in marriage. The latter demand was of an almost scandalous nature, as it was completely out of keeping with existing Byzantine practice in foreign relations. Seeing no other way out, however, Basil II agreed to these conditions.

Vladimir needed to marry Anna for political reasons. Such a marriage would immediately raise him to the rank of the foremost royal houses of Europe. It is certain that Vladimir's aid saved Basil II's throne. The latter then tried to renege on his obligations, but Vladimir's rapid military response (the taking of Cherson, an important Byzantine stronghold on the Black Sea, and the threat of an advance on Constantinople) forced the Byzantine Emperor to honour the conditions of the treaty. Anna became Vladimir's wife (by church marriage) and the mass baptism of the population of Rus' began.

The question naturally arises as to whether there was resistance to baptism on the part of the people. Was this baptism 'forced' as is sometimes claimed? It should first be noted that the baptism was an internal affair of Rus'; it took place on the basis of a decision freely taken by Vladimir and his court, what could be called the 'government' of Kievan Rus'. It would therefore be terminologically inexact to apply the word 'forced' to the carrying out of a lawful government's decision. However, to analyse the problem in greater depth, what was the attitude of the different strata of the population of Kievan Rus'?

The Prince and his court and retinue had nothing to lose from baptism, rather it was to their advantage. The Prince, for example, became a monarch by the grace of God and not of men. It was also advantageous for the merchants as their relationships with counterparts in European Christian states were facilitated and improved. The ordinary members of the tribal community did not lose anything either (intensive feudalization did not take place until later), and slaves only gained, since slavery was not typical of feudalism and the Church



condemned it, especially the sale of fellow tribesmen to the 'infidel'. As a result of all this, Christianity spread surprisingly quickly and painlessly as compared with other countries that were baptized at approximately the same time, such as Sweden and Norway.

The only privileged class that lost everything was the pagan priesthood. Even before the official baptism of the country this class was aware of the threat represented by Christianity with its growing numbers of adherents. As has already been said, the pagan priests attempted to strike a forestalling blow at Christianity by persecuting Christians under Svyatoslav and at the start of Vladimir's reign, but the inexorable laws of the development of society made the downfall of paganism inevitable. The resistance of paganism to the baptism was an expression of the general law by which the new and progressive always encounters resistance from the old and obsolete.

The reaction of the pagan priests to Vladimir's reforms was twofold. Some of the priestly caste openly opposed the Prince and his reforms, followed by some of the populace, on the usual pretext in such circumstances of fidelity to ancestral custom. Vladimir put down armed rebellion by force of arms. It should, however, be borne in mind that it was not so much resistance to the new religion that he suppressed as resistance to the system of feudal reforms. This can be seen from his reaction to the tactics of another wing of the priestly caste that did not openly oppose him but withdrew to remote parts of the country and continued to perform pagan rituals there. Vladimir was aware of this but did not interfere with these priests, as they presented no danger to his main project – feudal reform. He understood that these survivals of paganism would gradually die out.

In this way, the baptism was immediately followed by a transitional period, during which paganism co-existed with the main religion, Christianity, albeit mainly in outlying areas. Its survival can be partly explained by the fact that its priests carried out certain socially useful functions, such as treating the sick. This transitional period continued for approximately 100 years. If the ordinary people willingly repudiated their tribal and common Slavonic gods, belief in friendly and local spirits (such as house and forest spirits) continued in places up to the twentieth century. This was not only because they were sometimes regarded as members of the family or village community, but also because it was easy to reconcile their existence with the Christian religion. We know from the Lives of the Saints that spirits of a lower order – demons – often tempted the saints or tried to frighten them. In the minds of the people, house, forest and other spirits came to be seen as demons, taking on as a result of this 'adaptation' a negative character. Therefore continuing belief in household spirits is in no way evidence of the survival of paganism as is sometimes claimed.

To conclude our consideration of the question of whether the people resisted conversion to Christianity, a few words should be said about the 'sor-

cerers' revolts' as mentioned in the chronicles. The most important took place in the years 1026 and 1071. The chroniclers interpret these popular disturbances as attempts at restoring paganism. However the description in the chronicles of these events gives a completely different picture. In both cases the risings took place in famine years. At that time, a decade after the baptism of Rus', the process of feudalization had increased in pace. The formerly free tribal communities had become hierarchical and their leaders, gradually becoming feudal lords, had taken possession of the communities' lands and reduced their members to serfdom. This process became particularly intense in years of famine when, hiding their supplies, the leaders of the community showed particular cruelty to its other members, who had formerly shared equal rights with them. It is not surprising that in years of particular shortages there were spontaneous uprisings against feudalism (and therefore against the Prince's power), but the rebels struck mainly at the former tribal leaders. The pagan priests joined in these justified popular disturbances in an attempt to exploit them to restore paganism. The princes forcefully crushed the uprisings, not because of their pagan character but because they were anti-feudal. After all, before the risings the princes had calmly observed the activities of the pagan priests, leaving it to the Church to struggle with them. It was advantageous to the chroniclers, who represented the interests of feudalism, to stress the pagan and anti-Christian nature of the uprisings, in order to avoid the need to describe the oppression of the feudal class coming into being. That is why these popular disturbances were given the name of 'sorcerers' revolts'.

To sum up, it may be said with confidence that Prince Vladimir's reforms were well received by the vast majority of the population and supported by it. Their results were felt in all branches of the country's life: religious, political, socio-economic and cultural.

As for the religious aspect of the question, the change-over from paganism to Christianity was a transition from a barbarous religion (with human sacrifice, etc.) to a civilized one. Most important (especially in later times) was the centralized organization of the Church (headed by a Metropolitan with control over the bishops at diocesan level who, in turn, had priests under their authority). This organizational unity of the Church, unknown to paganism, played a markedly positive role in the country's history, as will be seen below.

Prince Vladimir's reforms immediately began to influence all aspects of the life of ancient Russian society. The introduction of Christianity required priests. Bulgaria was able to help with this to a certain degree, but first of all there was an urgent need to train clergy locally. Accordingly schools were established, and many children forced to attend them. There is evidence that not only children from the upper classes, but also poor children attended school. This is quite understandable, bearing in mind that by the end of Vladimir's reign there were several hundred churches in Kiev alone. The mass training of

clergy led to a notable increase in literacy. In time, learning reached all parts, as can be seen from the birch-bark manuscripts found in Novgorod, written by both men and women belonging to various strata of society.

Not only service books but icons, too, were necessary for church services. At first they were imported from Byzantium, but it was both impossible and inappropriate to supply the many thousands of churches springing up on the territory of Rus' with imported icons. Foreign artists were invited to Rus' to paint frescoes in the great churches of the principal towns, and to train Russian icon-painters. In a similar way local masters learnt the art of building in stone. As a result, during the reign of Vladimir's son, Yaroslav, all the main work of building and decorating churches (and also buildings such as the princes' palaces) was carried out by Russian craftsmen.

Rus's borrowings from Byzantium were not limited to those directly connected with worship. As has already been noted, a more developed way of life was borrowed as a whole. The process was not limited to crafts; agriculture too was stimulated and horticulture appeared. Increasingly intensive trade with other countries led the Kievan State under Vladimir to begin minting its own gold coins.

It is difficult today to describe Vladimir's radical reforms in greater detail. The ancient Russian chronicles (only those written after the death of Vladimir have come down to us) have one astonishing peculiarity: describing in detail Vladimir's activities as a pagan, the baptism of Rus' (*The Cherson Legend*) and the foundation of the main church in Kiev (the Church of the Tithe), they say nothing of his many years of activity following the baptism. The authors of the chronicle do not appear to have approved of all the Prince's acts. Some researchers link this to the fact that the chronicle was kept at the outset by Byzantine writers who had come to Rus', and the political line taken by Vladimir was based on the interests of Rus' and did not take those of Byzantium sufficiently into account. There is indirect confirmation of this in folklore: the Prince is remembered in it under the name of Vladimir the Radiant Sun, in folk epics (*byliny*) he is called the 'sweet prince' and the image of a prince beloved by the whole people shines through all the later accretions.

This calls for a few words on the nature of human happiness. The feeling of happiness is in no way connected with wealth. If a man has everything, he does not experience happiness, but rather the tedium of surfeit. This is the condition depicted so well by Fellini in his film *La Dolce Vita*. True happiness for man is movement towards something better, with today being better than yesterday and tomorrow better than today. It is the rate at which life improves and not the standard of living that should be taken as the measure of happiness, and it was in Vladimir's day, when the pace of change in all aspects of life in Rus' was greatest, that people must have had a particularly strong feeling of happiness and of satisfaction with life.

This was also helped by one specific feature of religious life at the time of Vladimir. Although Byzantium was taken as a model by Russian Christians, the Russian Church was markedly different from that of Byzantium. This difference appeared first and foremost in the absence of monasticism (which, as is well known, played a very important role in Byzantium), and consequently in that of the ascetic element in religious life. This made it possible for some historians to describe the beginnings of Christianity in Rus' as 'joyful'.

Why were there no monasteries in Rus' at the time of Vladimir? The answer is probably that even though children can be forced to go to school, the forcible creation of monasteries is completely impossible. A monastery is a refuge for people who have taken the tonsure of their own free will, and at the time of Vladimir there were not yet any such people: to feel the desire to enter a monastery, a person must have become accustomed to the ideals of Christianity, preferably from childhood. What is more, the Christians of the first generation considered the very fact of their baptism such a feat of personal piety that there seemed no need to add to it the strictures of monastic life. Therefore of all the Christian virtues, love of one's neighbour took first place.

Vladimir put this love into practice in two ways. First, he held banquets for hundreds of people, though it is true that these banquets also had a political purpose, rallying together the retinue and tribal aristocracy from which the feudal class was formed. Secondly, Vladimir gave assistance to the poorest of his people. At his court any citizen of Kiev and any traveller could receive free meals, and food was taken to the homes of the sick and the old. Vladimir redeemed prisoners (slaves) and set them free, giving them means to live on. It is not surprising that the people remembered him as 'Vladimir the Radiant Sun'.

After the death of Vladimir in 1015 and the internecine war between his sons, Yaroslav the Wise (1015–54) became Prince. He continued his father's policy energetically by founding schools, fostering trade (minting not only gold coins, but silver ones too), constructing fortresses on the frontiers and building churches. In his reign, however, a new element was introduced.

A civilized state cannot exist without a standard written code of law for the whole country, and under Yaroslav the *Russkaya Pravda* (*Russian Justice*) code and a number of other written statutes were drawn up. These legal documents replaced the tribal customs that had existed in pagan times.

Another of Yaroslav's concerns was that of raising the cultural level of society. To vie with Byzantium, literacy was not enough; Rus' needed its own writers and philosophers. During the Middle Ages the monasteries were centres of learning, and under Yaroslav Russian monasticism came into being, monasteries were founded and works of literature, not only of a theological, but also of a philosophical and political nature, were written.

For a better understanding of the political nature of the literature of Kie-

van Rus', one peculiarity of Rus's relations with Byzantium should be mentioned. As has already been said, after the conversion to Orthodoxy, Byzantium tried to treat Rus' as its vassal, while the ancient Russian State was very sensitive to anything that might be interpreted as a limitation of its sovereignty. It would probably be an exaggeration to describe the policy of the Princes of Kiev as anti-Byzantine, but Kievan Rus' insisted on equality with Byzantium, as is borne out very clearly by that remarkable work of ancient Russian literature, the *Sermon on Law and Grace* by Metropolitan Hilarion.

This renowned *Sermon* would appear to be a treatise on a classical theological theme. The question of the relationship between the Old Testament (Law) and the New Testament (Grace) had already been raised by the Apostle Paul (Heb. 10:28–29). In complete agreement with the Apostle, Hilarion, giving many examples from the Bible, comes to the conclusion that Grace is higher than the Law, that is to say, what is new and young is better than the old. His words can be interpreted as a refutation of the thesis of the superiority of Byzantium (baptized long since) over Rus'. This thought is expressed even more explicitly in parts where Hilarion compares Vladimir to the Apostles who preached Christianity to many nations. This is a bold comparison, to say the least, as in it the merit for the baptism of Rus' is ascribed to Vladimir alone, and neither Byzantium nor Bulgaria is even mentioned. This is followed by a detailed comparison between Vladimir's actions and those of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine, who had also made Christianity his country's state religion. In conclusion, Hilarion asserts that Vladimir is in no way inferior to Constantine and is consequently worthy of the same glory and honour that he received, that is, that he should be numbered among the saints.

The *Sermon* speaks very clearly of the equal honour of Rus' and Byzantium, and any relationship of vassalage between the two countries is out of the question. In this way Hilarion makes a classical theological theme into a politically topical one. This work of literature also shows the high level of culture reached towards the end of Yaroslav's reign. Its complex structure presupposes in its readers an excellent knowledge of a large number of texts, and Hilarion himself mentions this at the beginning of his work: 'After all, we are not writing for the ignorant, but for those who have already savoured the sweetness of books.' Kievan Rus' was becoming not only literate but also truly cultured, as can also be seen from the further development of ancient Russian literature, which is not confined to Metropolitan Hilarion's *Sermon*. At the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries the monk Nestor of the Kiev Caves Monastery wrote *The Tale of Bygone Years*, the first account of Russian history. His work is no bare summary of facts but a work of literature. As in Hilarion's work, but to a much greater extent, this work gives support for the idea of Rus's independence of Byzantium. The middle of the twelfth century saw the composition of the works of the first Russian philosopher, Metropolitan Clement Smolyatich, and of Cyril,

Bishop of Turov, as well as many others. Secular literature also began to appear; a representative masterpiece is *The Song of Igor's Campaign*.

The aspiration to equal Byzantium in everything can also be seen in Yaroslav's building activity: by analogy with that of Constantinople, the magnificent Cathedral of St Sophia was built in Kiev, and the city walls of Kiev were beautified, as in Constantinople, with a Golden Gate. Abbot Daniel's *Travels* (late eleventh century) are quite revealing; in them he writes that on seeing at the Holy Sepulchre a large number of candelabra (votive lamps) from different countries, including Byzantium, he obtained permission from King Baldwin to place a candelabrum there in the name of the land of Rus'. Rus' should be in no way inferior to Byzantium.

It was a circumstance of great significance for the country's culture, not only at the time of Yaroslav, but also later, that Rus's conversion to Christianity gave it architects, artists and writers. These artists did not simply copy Byzantine examples, but created something new – ancient Russian culture. This culture had a clearly marked national character. It is impossible to confuse an ancient Russian church with its Byzantine or Bulgarian counterpart. The ancient Russian icon was also distinct from those of other countries. This new Russian culture was an organic synthesis of the Byzantine element with a purely national one, with deep roots in the pagan culture of the past age, which in its own way had been highly developed.

The energetic implementation of the well-considered programme of reforms begun by Vladimir and completed by Yaroslav made Rus' an advanced centralized monarchy in no way inferior to the foremost countries of its time, whether in terms of its economy or culture or the degree of development of its politico-economic structure. The swift rise of Rus' aroused in its neighbours sincere admiration and the desire to enlist the support of this new strong and enlightened power. This factor is well illustrated by the dynastic marriages that were concluded. If Vladimir had to have recourse to arms to win a wife 'worthy' of him, by the time of Yaroslav the most distinguished royal houses of Europe regarded it as an honour to ally themselves with the monarch of Kiev.

The death of Yaroslav was followed by a period of feudal disintegration, the country gradually splitting up into a number of practically independent principalities, constantly contending with one another. The Prince reigning in Kiev became a mere figurehead, as became abundantly clear when in the twelfth century Andrei Bogolyubsky, after seizing Kiev and taking the title of Great Prince, refused to settle there and instead made the town of Vladimir the capital of Rus'. This break-up had the same causes as similar processes in Europe. The role of the Church as a powerful unifying factor became particularly important at this time. First of all, it should be noted that if Rus', which had once been united, had become divided into warring principalities, this did not happen to the Church. The Russian Church was led by a single Metropol-

itan whose power over the bishops at the head of the dioceses was incomparably greater than that of the Great Prince of Kiev over the other princes.

Basically, it is easy to see that any prince taking hostile military action against another prince always did so in the hope of improving his position. Seizing someone else's territories always enriched the aggressor and increased his strength. Yet military action between Russian principalities was contrary to the interests of the Church, as it brought ruin to the common people and so reduced the Church's revenues. Internal war was further unacceptable from the point of view of the love towards one's neighbour preached by the Church and fidelity to the obligations taken on by the princes.

For these reasons the Church acted as a political and ideological factor counteracting the centrifugal effect of the princes' internal struggles. The organization of the Church formed a political structure, echoing, often more effectively, the corresponding state or princely structure of authority. For this reason the role of the Church as a factor resisting the division of Rus' into independent principalities seems to have been extremely beneficial and important.

This unifying role of the Church becomes even clearer as we move away from the period immediately following the adoption of Christianity. It became particularly important in the fourteenth century when Rus' was to cast off the intolerable and humiliating yoke of the Golden Horde.

In the pre-Mongol, Kievan period of Russian history, the Church counteracted feudal fragmentation by opposing internal struggles between princes, as can be seen from the works of literature that have come down to us. In the fourteenth century, Rus', already fragmented and oppressed by the Golden Horde, was faced with an even harder task – that of establishing a new national unity and of armed struggle against the oppressors. The new centre around which the country united was to be Moscow.

When Moscow was only beginning to rise and no one could yet imagine its future role, Metropolitan Peter, then at the head of the Russian Church, moved his residence to Moscow, thus distinguishing it from the other capitals of principalities. His successor, Metropolitan Alexis, continued to live in Moscow and governed not only the Church but all of fragmented Rus' in the name of Prince Dimitri who was still in his infancy. Metropolitan Alexis's diplomatic skills did much to strengthen the role of Moscow as the new centre of Rus'.

At this time, in addition to the normal ecclesiastical hierarchy, a new religious and political centre came into being in Rus', the Troitse-Sergieva Monastery. Its founder, Sergius of Radonezh, astonished his contemporaries by the strictness of the monastic rule that he introduced, by the simple way of life led by him and his monks, and, most of all, by his preaching of the unacceptability of internal warring between the Russian princes and of the need for them to unite to free Rus' from the foreign yoke. St Sergius came to embody the national conscience. His authority was enormous.

In 1380, when the forces of the Golden Horde advanced on Rus' under the command of Mamai, it became clear that this invasion could not be repelled by the princes' retinues alone. The whole nation had to be mustered. It is hard to overestimate the help that Sergius of Radonezh, with his nationwide authority, gave to Prince Dimitri Donskoy in this. Sergius not only blessed Dimitri before the battle, but also sent to the battlefield two of his monks, former warriors, to give the coming battle the nature of a holy war, as all those taking part in the battle – princes, retinue and warriors – represented only their own principalities, whereas the warrior-monks – Peresvet and Oslyablya – stood for the Church, and hence for all Rus'. Contrary to all the rules of military theory, the Russian people's army, the humble infantry, given heart by Sergius and Dimitri Donskoy, withstood the terrible impact of Mamai's cavalry and, acting in concert with the princes' retinues, finally carried the day.

The role of Sergius of Radonezh in the unification of the Russian lands around Moscow was not limited to this victory. Succeeding where others had failed, he reconciled princes who had long been at odds. His word carried more weight than the military victory of either side in the internecine struggles between princes.

The examples given here are sufficiently convincing evidence of the unifying role of the Church, which was so essential during the period of the feudal fragmentation of Rus'.

The conversion of Rus' to Christianity constituted a revolution beneficial to all aspects of social life in ancient Russian society. The sweeping nature of Prince Vladimir's reforms entitles them to be considered as a comprehensive programme of feudal reforms. This unfamiliar appellation gives a deeper understanding of the innovations brought in by Vladimir's reforms, which were not limited to religion. We today should be grateful to our far-sighted ancestors, and above all to Vladimir and Yaroslav, who spared no effort to map out the future course of the Russian people.

The boldness, decisiveness and lack of compromise of Vladimir, who aspired to raise comparatively backward pagan Rus', in what was historically an extremely short period, to the level of a great European power, stand comparison with those of Peter the Great who embarked upon a similar endeavour in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is interesting to note that, even in his methods, Peter frequently (perhaps unconsciously) followed Vladimir's example. He also took an advanced country as a model and boldly introduced a whole series of innovations to serve as standards in all aspects of life in Russia as a whole.

*[Translated from Russian]*



dius, Rus' not only received books and concrete ideas, but joined a vast programme of civilization and a system of communication with Byzantium already tried and tested by other Slav societies. This was, in particular, a synthesis of Byzantine tradition and local traditions. In conclusion, N. Todorov said that if Rus' had originally been mainly on the receiving end, she subsequently contributed to the development of the modern culture of the Southern Slavs.

In the course of the discussion, D. Angelov stressed that the introduction of writing had been the essential factor in the creation of the nation. V. Vodoff for his part wondered whether Bulgarian influence had begun before or after baptism and said that he himself inclined towards the latter theory. Rector Ahrweiler stressed the importance of the Christian community on the Black Sea and the first conversion to Christianity of 867, in view of the fact that that of 988 was passed over in silence by Byzantine sources.

Academician B. Rauschenbach then discussed 'The Development of Kievan Rus' in the Wake of Christianization'. According to him, the adoption of Christianity by Vladimir was part of a whole system of reforms, as the Byzantine form of Christianity was the one best suited to assure the unity of the country as a whole and not just that of the Slav tribes. It was completely appropriate to the needs of feudal society. B. Rauschenbach evaluated the effects of the adoption of Christianity on the society of the time. In conclusion, he drew a parallel between the work of Peter the Great and that of Vladimir. He showed that there were several points in common. However, whereas Vladimir was the builder of the Church, Peter's work was destructive of it.

During the discussion that followed, D. Angelov asserted that Christianity had begun to spread before being recognized as an official religion. S. Averintsev, for his part, wondered about the role of Novgorod, while Metropolitan Juvenal laid particular stress on the importance of the articles of Academician Rauschenbach in the context of preparations for the Millennium.

Academician Y. Shchapov presented a paper on 'The Assimilation by Kievan Rus' of the Classical and Byzantine Heritage: The Role of Christianization'. Returning to the legend of the *Chronicle*, Y. Shchapov considered that Judaism and Islam were not a real alternative for Vladimir. He then analysed the reasons for the prince's choice of Byzantine Christianity, raising in particular the possibility of evangelization of the country in its own language. He stressed the significance of this choice for the development of the culture of the country which thus, in particular, received the heritage of the ancient world, but he also asserted that the adoption of Christianity had, on the other hand, deprived Rus' of its original pagan culture (choreography, musical instruments, etc.).

In the course of the ensuing discussion, V. Vodoff wondered whether Byzantium had always been favourable to local languages and whether, immediately after the baptism, the language of worship was Slavonic rather than Greek.