

Prof. O. Lotocky

**PRINCE VOLODYMYR
SAINT AND EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES:
ORGANIZER OF THE UKRAINIAN CHURCH**



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**ЛІТТЯ ХРЕЩЕННЯ УКРАЇНИ У СВ. ПРАВОСЛАВНУ ВІРУ
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PRINCE VOLODYMYR, SAINT AND EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES: ORGANIZER OF THE UKRAINIAN CHURCH

by

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With Kievan Prince Volodymyr the Great's name are connected the most venerable names in the Christian world: Saint and Equal-to-the-Apostles. The later appellation best imprints his Christian significance in general, and for his people especially and in particular. Just as Saint Equal-to-the-Apostles Constantine the Great introduced Christianity as the recognized religion of his nation, so our St. Volodymyr the Great by his Equal-to-the-Apostles deed, brought his nation which up to that time was still pagan, to the family of cultural nation of the Christian world. This event was a deed of great significance in the national life; it indicated its active influence on the entire further fate of the Ukrainian people.

I.

Even before Volodymyr's time, Christian teaching was not entirely foreign for our forefathers. Although not throughout the entire territory of our country and not always with single success, the proclamation of Christ's faith, nevertheless, spread among us and became familiar for our forefathers. National legends associate the beginning of Christianity among us yet with the name of Apostle Andrew, the First-Named. If it is difficult to prove that the Holy Apostle was on the Kievan hills and blessed the location of our future national capital, then the most skeptical scholarly researchers, however, do not reject the fact the feet of the first-called Apostle of Christ still could have stepped on some part of present-day Ukrainian land—even if on the north shore of the Black Sea. This gives our Christian consciousness the basis to name our Holy Orthodox Church, the Church of Apostle Andrew the First-Called. Christian Greek colonies to the north of the Black Sea from antiquity

were the source of Christianity of our territory, populated by tribes of Ukrainian roots — Ulychians, Tivertsians, and Polianians. Concerning Christianity here we find mentioned in Church writers still of ancient times: in Tertulian, Athanasius of Alexandria, and His Beatitude Jeronimy; the latter testifies that “cold Scythia”, by which name our land was called at that time, “is heated by the warmth of faith.” Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus gives very important information that during his time (Xth century) there were ruins of six cities above the Dniester, where structures with signs of churches and crosses engraved on stones were found.

There is nothing unusual in the fact that neighboring nations among whom Christianity was already spreading, could not have turned their attention to Christian sermons among our ancestors, and by those means, to influence good-neighborly relations with them, as to the source of Christian faith. The chief source of Christianity among us was Byzantium, as the centre of Eastern Orthodoxy. From ancient times Rus'-Ukraine had entered into direct relations with it; by peaceful, in other words, trading, and hostile, through sea campaigns, on the dominions of Byzantium. Even the last means of relations lead to the acceptance of Christianity by our ancestors. Greek sources disclose that sometime near the year 860 A.D. after the attack of Ukrainian boats on Constantinople (Tsarhorod), a delegation appeared requesting baptism and that request was fulfilled: Rus' received a bishop. We have very important documents concerning Christianity in Ukraine at the beginning and middle of the Xth century in the agreement of Kievan princes with Greeks; in the agreement of Princes Oleh and Ihor. From this latter agreement we see that in the prince's retinue there was a significant number of Christians — they took the oath separately from the pagan faction in Constantinople, and upon their return to Kiev, they took an oath here in the Church of St. Elia(s). Following Ihor's death, his mother Olha became the ruler of the State, on behalf of the minor Sviatoslav, who not only had been favorably disposed to Christianity, but finally became a Christian. Although the Christian religion of peace and

love did not conform to his was-like disposition, even Sviatoslav, the last Varangian pagan-warrior on the Kievan throne, nevertheless, in fact favored the spread of Christianity; during his military campaigns the Prince's retinue become acinted with various cultured people who belonged to the Christian world, and this prepared the ground for the subsequent general introduction of Christianity into the Kievan State.

But with the masses of people, paganism persisted traditionally, and it was not difficult to fanaticize it. Similarly, Sviatoslav's son, Volodymyr profited from the pagan disposition for political purposes. Having received help from the Normans, he hit hard at Kiev, and relying upon the pagan population, he overcame his older brother and deprived him of his life. The result of this conquest was the revival of paganism in Kiev. Volodymyr erected idols and brought solemn sacrifices before them.

Such strategy was really dictated, not by religious but by political motives, which are easily understood, of the ruler who had aquired power by violent means and who sought support under new circumstances for that power. In reality, reared by his grandmother Olga, Volodymyr was not militarily disposed towards Christianity. Besides this, his retinue, like the retinue of his predecessors, must have contained sufficient numbers of Christians, and this by itself was made possible by the intolerant pagan exploit of the Prince.

II.

Not being hostile to Christianity for its religious disposition, Volodymyr, at last became a Christian formally and Christianized his State. This was an event of great historical significance, not only for Rus' itself, but also for the wider international sphere, to the extent that Rus' at that time, and in subsequent times, accepted participation in the life of closer and farther neighbours.

Christianity affected the live of the people from all sides — not only by its religious side, but also culturally and politically. Those religious and culturally-pagan Asian influences, which up to this time had existed in Rus', yielded

to different influences — European, more progressive, with wider perspectives of further civilized development. The basis of European civilization was Christianity; therefore, the acceptance of Christianity introduced Rus' into the rotation of that civilized process, in which European nations participated, into the spiritual family into which Christianized Rus' had entered. With Christianity, the entire character of the life of the people became changed by this means; all its historical progress in cultural and political outlook. That is why this historical event is surrounded with such numerous and substantial legends, which the viewpoint of its contemporary and its closer successors reflects and attest to the fact that the significance of the event was already well understood in its time.

Closer to the time of the Baptism of Rus' the literature of church origin presents this event as a result of the very internal disposition of the Prince — his decision under the influence of religious motives themselves. The most enlightening expression of such an opinion we read in the words of Metropolitan Ilarion, "The Most High visited him and enlightened the understanding of his heart in order that he may understand the vanity of idolatric adulation, so as to find the One God Who created all things, visible and invisible".

In the legend about the selection of faith, with the acceptance of various religious delegations, and the dispatching of his delegater for information of various religious rites, the same thought about the exclusion of religious motives themselves in the baptism of the Prince, always prevails.

The significance of these motives cannot be discarded. Brought up by Olha in Christian moral conditions, Volodymyr, as we see from the facts of his later life, having become a Christian is deeply impressed with Christian philosophy and submitted to that philosophy even in matters of civilian order; and to the episcopal question, for example, why he does not punish robbers, Volodymyr replied, "I am afraid of sin." The religious moral stature of Volodymyr appears already glaringly in the fact that the Church has recognized him a saint and equal-to-the-Apostle. However,

not discarding even the significant role of the religious motives in the baptism of the Prince himself and in his Baptism of Rus', it is always necessary to recognize that the chief motives of those events emerged from the position of the prince and his tasks, as the head of State's and thus had a political-national character.

Already in the very essence of his concern of the change of faith, particularly at those times, it could not have been a matter of personal religious views of this or any other head of state. In addition, Volodymyr was a person of wide national understanding, and foremost directed all his actions in the interests of the State. Understanding well the political significance of religious reforms, he dealt with the religious concerns from that national point of view. Having strengthened his rule, he could not rely upon the principles which had already become antiquated separating him from the political and cultural world at that time. That is why he cautiously examined the religious life of the neighbours, with the aim of restraining his selection upon the religion which would answer the best the interests his State. Did not the legend arise from here about the delegations into foreign countries with the clamour, "to inquire about all faiths"? Before him was the choice between two worlds: Byzantium and Rome. The formal division of the one Christian Church had not yet taken place then, but the cultural and religious difference between the mentioned two worlds was already clearly apparent; and the choice as to what sphere of influence to submit his State required deep and far-reaching consideration, because upon it depended the further direction of the life of the whole nation.

Volodymyr selected that choice not only on religious-ecclesiastical grounds, but also, a main factor, on political ones; and in that choice he revealed his deep political prudence. It would have been easier and more tempting to accept Christianity from the West — here from the hands of the Roman bishops, western rulers, together with the faith, received the confirmation of their national grandeur, strengthening thus their rule. But Volodymyr selected his choice on Byzantium. Former trade and political relations had connected Rus' with Byzantium; with all its external

splendour, Byzantium, whose grandeur was already sufficiently shaken, was given to the contracting party with whom it would be less dangerous to have closer connections. Out of necessity, one must admit that Volodymyr had in mind the relation with Byzantium of another Slavic State, the Bulgarian which had already succeeded in revealing its great spiritual productiveness and could be a source of spiritual preciousness for Rus'. All this influenced Volodymyr to select his choice on Byzantium.

Knowing his mighty adversary very well, and having compelled the Byzantine Emperor by force of arms, Volodymyr wanted to safeguard himself from the excessive pretension from his side, and on the other hand, to attain better political results. One of the indications of grandeur borrowed from Byzantium by young states was to be related by marriage with the family of the Byzantium court. Volodymyr took measures to attain such a relationship by marriage. The chronicle narrates about this event that Volodymyr, having resolved to be baptized, went on a campaign into Crimea, and during a siege captured one of the most important Greek colonies — the city of Chersonesus or Korsun. He sent a delegation to the Byzantine Emperors (Constantine and Basil were joint rulers at that time) with request to wed their sister, threatening to wage a campaign against Constantinople in the event of opposition. In consideration of the fact that it would not be appropriate for Christians to wed pagans, Volodymyr promised to be baptized, and indeed accepted the Christianity yet in Korsun, and many of his followers together with him.

Historical criticism regards this narrative of the Chronicle as a legend. More worthy of credence is regarded the fact that Volodymyr was baptized not at Korsun from the Greeks, but prior to his campaign against Korsun. He had accepted Christianity for himself at home from local or Bulgarian priests, having been favorable disposed to it, much the same as his grandmother Olha, by local Christians who were already numerous in Kiev. He led a campaign against Korsun already after his baptism, bringing clergy from there, not for the purpose of his own baptism but for that of his people. Having been baptized Volodymyr did not

make any preparations for some time for the baptism of his people. Being a Christian himself personally, he still did not consider it possible to embark forthwith upon the baptism of his people and was preparing the groundwork for it. He could not neglect the eruption of pagan feelings in which he himself had taken such active participation at the commencement of his reign.

III.

The matter of the acceptance of Christianity was resolved by the campaign against Korsun. In Kiev, as the centre of the State, there was sufficient agreement favorable for the mass baptism of the local population. The retinue and merchants, through their relations with foreign countries, were to a certain measure already acquainted with Christianity, and in Kiev there were churches, therefore priests and that means faithful Christians. The remainder of the population could accept baptism either by the example of the mentioned privileged class, or as Metropolitan Ilarion attests about it, from fear before the whole State had to follow, and first of all, the land of the Polianians.

The Chronicle and other memorials present the process of baptism of the land quite straightforward. The Chronicle states that the Prince, "instructed the people to be brought for baptism in all cities and villages.

Likewise another memorial authenticates that Volodymyr, "Baptizing all the Rus' land from end to end, destroying all the pagan gods, and devils, Perun and Khros and many others besides, and penitent idols and all the godless flaterers. In actuality the matter of spreading of Christianity beyond the capital could hardly have been that direct. In the larger centres and the last centres of Christianity closer to the Black Sea, it could have spread almost as it did in Kiev. But further north, the matter was significantly made more difficult. In Novograd, for which we have one concrete evidence, idols were destroyed, Perun, in particular was knocked down and thrown into the Volchova, but there is no information here about a mass baptism as had occurred in Kiev. On the contrary, Christianity here encountered active resistance. To what

degree that opposition was met is evident from the adage, which was recorded in the Chronicle, that, "Putyata Volodymyr's commander of a thousand, baptized the Novogradians by the sword, and the Dobrinia with fire".

Even with more active or passive resistance Christianity must have spread in other regions of the State, that were annexed comparatively recently and were, in the composition of their population, for the most part non-Slavic. But the new religion, planted from above, not having any serious active protest from the side of unorganized paganism, must have spread even slowly in the Ukrainian State during the quarter century of Volodymyr's rule following his baptism.

The first and foremost degree to accept Christianity were the city elements and the higher strata of the population: the prince's retinue, the boyars, and the merchants. In the national masses, Christianity, not guided by menas or organized enlightenment, could not overcome the former pagan philosophical conception of life, in its eternal ritualistic manifestations as well as in its internal disposition. Memorials closer to Volodymyr's time attest, for example, that the common people regarded church wedding ceremonies as compulsory only for princes and boyars', but they themselves were satisfied with the customary ritual of the wedding ceremony.

That is why after the Baptism of Rus' there arose the great task of instituting Christian civilization into the depth of national life. Externally there was insignificant work, the details of which owing to the remoteness of time did not reach the chronicler, but from the programme of the work which the Chronicler does present: the baptism of cities and villages, the construction of churches, the instruction of the children, we see that activities of Volodymyr in the second half of his princely rule were cut out systematically and widely.

IV

As we see from the foregoing, the source of our Christianity was Byzantium. The leaders of the Ukrainian State focused their eyes upon it, making use of endeavours to ob-

tain Christianity from this source. The attainment of this goal, as we see, was not achieved without any significant difficulties. These obstacles were not diminished after the factual Baptism of Rus'-Ukraine. Traditional Byzantine politics was to use its participation in the Christianization of pagan people usually for their subordination. In the given instance, after famous military events and having already agreed to marry the Byzantine Empress to "the northern Varangian", which was a great blow for Byzantine arrogance, Byzantine politics could not submit in the matter of the recognition of the independence of the new church from the Byzantine Church; the Greeks, in such cases, regarded that, through the mediation of their hierarchy, very great benefits could be derived from the newly-baptized people; and this is why it submitted very unwillingly on this point. From sources available at that time we do not see that the Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the independence of the Ukrainian Church. In the course of some forty years there was no formally recognized church administration in Kiev by the Greeks.

However, Volodymyr did not yield. Deciding upon the complicated matter of the Christianization of the young State in order to bring in into the circle of cultured nations and to bring it out into the pathway of a wide political life the Ukrainian ruler understood well that the dependence of the Church upon Byzantium could naturally draw it into political dependence upon it. This must have led him to the thought of securing himself by all means, from such a threat which hung over his State from the aggressive Byzantine plans. Volodymyr attained this by a very skillful political step — by this armed, "conquest" of faith by taking advantage of the difficult circumstances of the Byzantine emperors. Having obtained suitable military agreements for the Baptism of his people and having attained the external dispatching of his grandeur through marriage with the Byzantine Empress, Volodymyr, for his, and without it, mighty internal and international position did not really require the formal recognition of the Ukrainian Church autocephaly from the Patriarch of Constantinople. Not being acknowledged by the Patriarch of Constantinople

the Ukrainian Church, being independent of every other Church, was indeed autocephalous. As we see, similar circumstances were reiterated for our Church for almost a thousand years.

V

Under such circumstances, the second source of our Christianity, after Byzantium, was Bulgaria which had accepted Christ's faith earlier. From this source the young Ukrainian Church was able to receive helpful resources for its Baptism: hierarchy, divine service books, and ecclesiastical literature. Old national traditions naturally led to this, which the Chronicle had concealed in the narration about Kiy, who had conducted a campaign on the Dunaj and captured here the town of Kiyevets. Sviatoslav and Volodymyr upheld that tradition with their campaigns against Bulgaria. Although the latter's campaign did not effect any real results, but directed by the traditional plans of Volodymyr's ancestors, lead evidently, to a deeper enlightenment of those plans. From the point of view of political interests of the Ukrainian State, the source of Christianity in Bulgaria was completely secure. The Bulgarian Church seized upon by the Greeks from the time of Volodymyr, did not in itself conceal any political uncertainty from the Rus' State, and although it was by that deprived of a Patriarch head, was still Orthodox to give the Rus' Church a canonical hierarchy, bishops and priests; and from the practical point of view could have served the Slavic Church in a significantly greater degree than the foreign-language Greek Church; having begun its existence a hundred years earlier, the Bulgarian Church had already attained cultural magnitude from which the young Rus' Church could have benefitted — namely Slavic Church service books, significant Church literature and those "many writers" who translated from the Greek language and transcribed books.

VI.

During the rule of Prince Volodymyr began the germs of almost every direction of life which had emerged out of the new-Christian circumstances of Rus'.

Along with the Baptism of the people, Volodymyr undertook measures to enlighten appropriate her new Christian civilization. The beginnings of book learning probably had existed in Rus' prior yet to the official Baptism of Rus'. There were churches and clergy in Kiev; therefore book learning must have existed there, too. But with the new order, that learning with private concerns stands on the firm soil of organization by the powers of the State. The specially invited teachers who arrived with the hierarchy he assigned to the teaching of "intentional children" of people of higher class.

Although Volodymyr set for himself, in the given time, goals of a more common order, "to bring Rus' into the circle of cultural interests of the then cultured Byzantine world" (M. Hrushevsky), but from this beacon would emerge people educated for ecclesiastical field of activities. We see a brilliant example of this in the person of the highly-educated Metropolitan Ilarion.

The construction of churches commenced. Shortly after his baptism Prince Volodymyr began to build in Kiev a huge stone church which would outwardly represent the grandeur of the new faith. The construction took five years and was completed in the year 996. From the grant to this church of one tenth of his princely income, the church received the name "Desyatynna" (Tithe Church). In addition to this stone church, Volodymyr constructed still many churches of wood: "he ordered to build churches and put them up in the cities, where idols were standing".

In the time of Volodymyr church organization was begun, first records of church law and literature appeared. With his name is connected for the first time with our people the term, "Church Statutes".

VII

Volodymyr died on July 15, 1015, not quite 60 years of age. He was buried in the "Tithe Church", in the wing of St. Clement, where his marble grave is placed next to that of his wife — the Greek Empress, Anna, who had predeceased him in 1011. During the Tatar onslaught on Kiev, Volodymyr's remains were concealed under a blockhead,

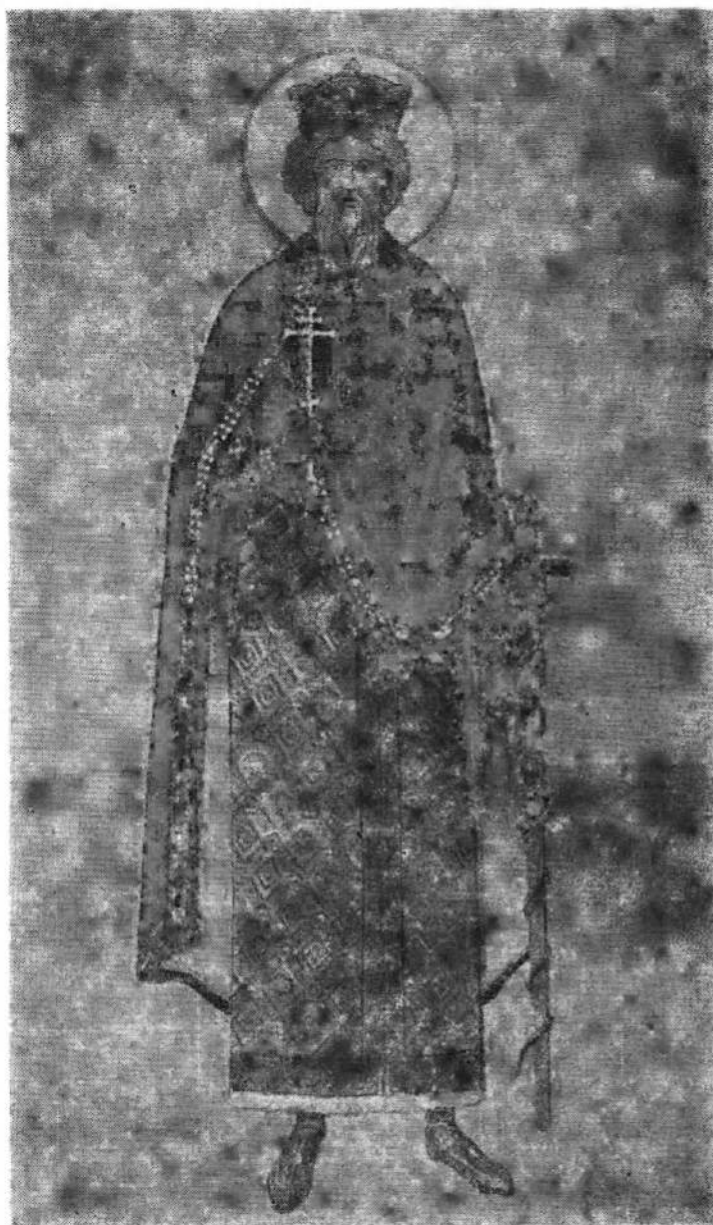
and there they remained up to 1635. At that time Metropolitan Petro (Peter) Mohyla, remodelling the Tithe Church, found the remain of Volodymyr, one part of which, (one jaw-bone) he sent to Moscovite Tsar (Czar) Alexander Mykhailovich; and one part of which were later preserved in the Cathedral of St. Sophia, and in the huge church of the Kievan-Pechersky Lavra (Monastery).

Prince Volodymyr was not canonized soon after his death, disregarding the fact that the great deed of introducing Christianity into Rus' gave all bases for his canonization in a short time. The reason for such a delay is noted in the national memorial about those happy watchdogs upon which the generous prince laid a burden. Perhaps the tradition about the Prince's life prior to his acceptance of Christianity is added to that. However, it would be more positive to search for reason in the general unfavorable relations with the Byzantine hierarchy, from whom the Ukrainian church hierarchy originated, to the recognition of saints from the bosom of the Varangian people. Prince Volodymyr is found to be under personal Greek negative objection by reason of these circumstances under which Christianity arose in Rus', upon compulsion from the Greeks, and for which we see, conflict was conducted over the independence of the Church from the Greeks. On every occasion, the service to honour Prince Volodymyr already calls him, "the first father" of the princes who were contemporaries of the insurrection of that service — therefore, it probably appeared sometime at the end of the XIIth, or at the beginning of the XIIIth century; and the first mention about Prince Volodymyr as a saint we find in the Chronicle under the year 1254. "You became the favourite — the Church extols the Saint-prince — to the merchant who searches for the precious pearl, nationally-famous Volodymyr, sitting on the high throne of the mother of cities, Kiev, saved by God. Inquiring about, and dispatching to Constantinople, you found the Orthodox Faith, the priceless pearl — Christ, who chose you as a second Paul... Pray for the salvation of the people of your State".

VIII

Nearly a thousand years have passed since the Ukrainian people, illuminated have become the light of Christian faith, from the time when Ukraine became a country of Christian culture. Like a poor seagull on a treaded road, from that time on it has endured much good and evil, but particularly, the latter. Played by fate of the pathway of the Asiatic destroyers, it remembered those first most difficult attacks of the irresistible Asiatic power, which at the very beginnig strained its young national strenght, yet abundantly gifted with natural wealth attracted upon itself convetou eyes from all directions. In spite of all the difficult cincumstances, not only did it retain its place under the sun, but also extended the borders of the growth of its population; did not become impoverished in its paradise-like land, but procured from it unexhausted material treasures, not only for itself, but also for her neighbours; not only did it hold fast on ti its proper principles of national quality, but also developed spiritually, becoming a rich source at the time of spiritual culture. For all this, it is mainly grateful for the reason that under all circumstances of its fate, it had one preserving foundation, one refuge from which it derived its strenght in life's sttruggles; it enlivened hope during bright moments and provided consolation at times of dark stormy weather. This foundation was the Holy Orthodox Faith, introduced into the Ukrainian land by the equal to the apostles builder of the Ukrainian State and its national culture; that spiritual refuge was the Holy Orthodox Church whose first organizational foundation was laid by Prince Volodymyr and in whose institutions, sobors, brotherhoods, schools, publications (publishing houses) found a manifestation of religious-moral and national community striving of the Ukrainian people.

The work of the Equal-to-the-Apostles Volodymyr the Great having revealed its charitable activities in the courses of almost a thousand year period, has preserved the the new life force up to the present day, and will have strength for ages, as long as Christian principles of faith, goodness, and truth are active on the earth; as long as the name of Ukraine is sounded under the sun.



Св. Рівноап. Кн. Володимир.



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