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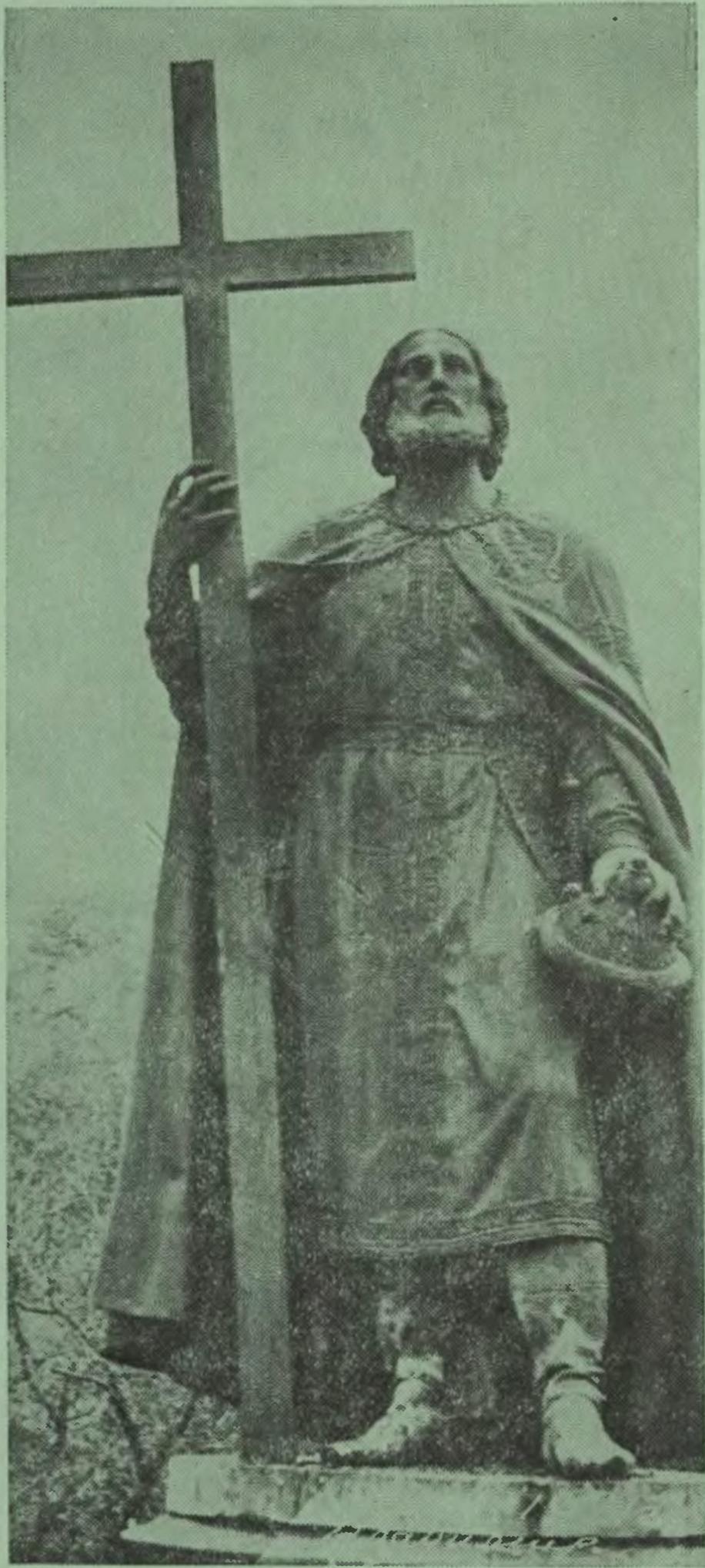
**THE MILLENNIUM OF
UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

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St. Volodymyr's monument in Kiev.

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THE MILLENIUM OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The great Kievan Prince Volodymyr in the early days of his reign commanded an assembly of his state council to resolve an urgent matter: Should the state adopt a new form of religious faith, and if so, what faith? The assembled boyars and counsellors offered their Prince some wise and practical advice:

“If your Majesty wishes to ascertain the very essence of truth in the matter of a new faith, then dispatch wise and observant men of your realm to examine closely each of the faiths practised in the world”.

Prince Volodymyr accepted the counsel of his court and sent out ambassadors who betook themselves into different countries. On their return they presented their findings to the Prince and his assembled court.

It turned out that the religious services as conducted in Greece, presumably in Constantinople, made the greatest impression on the ambassadors. According to their enthusiastic report — “We wondered whether we were on earth or in heaven, for no such spectacle and such beauty could appear on earth. We have no words to adequately convey our impression, but we are convinced that God Himself dwells among these people, and we shall never forget the beauty of their worship”.

These words, spoken almost a thousand years ago, deserve our careful attention. They indicate that our forefathers' sensibilities were especially susceptible to beauty. The word “beauty” is particularly stressed in the quotation contained in the paragraph above.

It is uncertain to what extent the ambassadors familiarized themselves with the dogmas of Christian religion; however, we do know from chronicles of the time that the “wise men” (or even the chronicler himself) felt that where there is beauty there “God dwells with the people”.

The "wise men" were simply captivated by Orthodox Church service.

The ambassadors reported what they saw and felt in regard to other faiths. In their consensus of the Roman Catholic Church the word "beauty" was also used, but with a different connotation, as follows:

"We visited the German kingdom and saw their religious services but we did not notice any beauty in them". Any of us who have on occasions visited German churches will have no difficulty understanding the ambassadors' feelings.

The state council was favorably impressed by the opinions expressed. The boyars advised the Prince: "If the Greek custom were devoid of goodness your grandmother, Queen Olha, would not have adopted it as the best for her people. She was the wisest in the realm".

Prince Volodymyr made the final decision: "Then it is clear. We shall accept baptism in accordance with their faith", he said.

It is important to note that there was no dissention at the council meeting. The council unanimously accepted and endorsed the decision respecting the selection of the new faith which, in fact, was determined beforehand by the Prince's ambassadors.

Prince Volodymyr applied himself energetically to spreading the new faith. Inhabitants of Kiev were asked to assemble at the confluence of the Pochaina and the Dnieper Rivers where a mass baptism ceremony was held.

The baptism into the new faith elsewhere in the country was a different matter. Unlike the Kievans the people in the hinterlands of the large Kievan kingdom refused to be baptized and resisted the innovation in certain instances by force, as was the case in Novhorod. Some individuals make use of this incident (and others of similar nature) to argue that Prince Volodymyr forced Christianity upon the people.

Admittedly, in light of our present concept of moral principles, it is wrong to coerce people into a religious belief which they are reluctant to accept, and no one does that now. But in the ancient past the rules and viewpoints were somewhat different.

To condemn someone who lived a thousand years ago, one must do so in a very circumspect manner; often it is better to refrain from condemnation altogether. Michailo Hrushevsky, the historian, writes that it is very unlikely that Prince Volodymyr issued orders to treat opposition to the new faith with severe repressive measures.

Indeed it is highly improbable that Prince Volodymyr used any Draconian measures when he, followed the baptism of his nation, proceeded to abolish the death penalty even for murderers, being obviously motivated by humanitarian and religious considerations.

We, as Ukrainians, should thoroughly recognize that Prince Volodymyr, as an enlightened monarch, preceded all other cultural peoples. Other nations, including Canada, did not abolish the death penalty until the 20th century — *and Prince Volodymyr did away with punishment by death in the 10th century!*

I have at hand an editorial which appeared in the Edmonton Journal. It commends the fact that Canada has taken a great step forward by abolishing the death penalty, thus proving that the Canadian nation has reached a high degree of spiritual and moral enlightenment. This is obviously a commendable gesture — *but the Ukrainian nation achieved this pinnacle of spiritual culture ten centuries ago!*

This points out that Prince Volodymyr, in perspective of a thousand years of history, *is a great figure not only in terms of Ukrainian history but also in the history of all humanity in its cultural development*, and his canonization by our Church is understandable and fully justified.

Should we be inclined to consider the matter of forced baptism from a purely practical point of view we must bear in mind that quite often an imposition of unsavory legislation brings about a benign result. We frequently employ compulsion in bringing up our children, for their own good, as it turns out.

We know from historical chronicles that Prince Volodymyr compelled boyars to send their children to schools. Some parents protested the decree and mothers cried in dismay. During classes the Prince's commissionaires were posed at the doors to prevent the escape of pupils.

It is evident that schooling at that time was organized and promoted under duress. It would be ridiculous today to condemn Prince Volodymyr for following a rigorous line in the institution of education in Ukraine. All countries in our time have compulsory education laws for their children. It is to his credit that Prince Volodymyr introduced obligatory school attendance in Ukraine in his time — as well as obligatory baptism for his people.

One thing is quite certain and dispels all doubts. To St. Volodymyr the welfare of his people was his first priority. After lengthy deliberation, intensive study, and conferences with the boyars, he reached a decision that acceptance of Christian faith will benefit his people. He envisioned that the new faith will strengthen his kingdom and give it greater sway. He was eminently aware that Christianity was the key to the whole of European civilization.

Prince Volodymyr's expectations were fully realized. As a result of the acceptance of the Orthodox faith in Ukraine there occurred a three-dimensional stimulus in cultural progress: in religion, in education and in art.

The first schools in Ukrainian territories were set up by Prince Volodymyr's decree *after* Ukraine's baptism.

All known written literature (with the exception of the Book of Vles), including documentaries, was written *after* Ukraine's baptism.

The influence of Christianity on the sequence of Ukrainian art was positive and strong. Evidence of this are the frescoes of the Church of St. Sophia, in Kiev, and the marvellous wooden churches in the Hutzul district of Ukraine. The church music compositions of Bortniansky, Archangel, and Vedel, are permeated with the simple, yet unequalled heavenly beauty.

Let us recall the sensitivity of Prince Volodymyr's wise ambassadors to beauty's touch. Our people have had similar sensibilities over the ages and still have them.

Some individuals claim that acceptance of Christianity in Prince Volodymyr's time had an adverse effect on the development of the Ukrainian nation. They argue that the new religion caused Ukrainian spirituality to generate subservience to alien influences, weakened the nation, and

eventually brought about the downfall of its sovereignty. This theory, though initially attractive, has no foundation; it is a contradiction of historical facts. The protagonists of this hypothesis claim that, had our people remained with their pre-Christian indigenous religion, then our history would have proved a better course.

Let us examine this hypothesis sensibly and impartially. After all, we want to know the truth.

It is quite possible for the sake of argument to suppose that had our forefathers retained their old religion, then by now that religion would be fully developed and matured, and may have occupied a prominent place among world religions. It is also conceivable to suppose that this religion would have had a positive effect upon the evolution of our people and its history. But all this is idle speculation. When our conclusions are based on conjecture and speculation — the process is similar to building castles in the air.

All discussions and arguments which begin with “What would have happened if . . .” is merely an intellectual diversion devoid of any practical utility. Our arguments must be based on sound factual knowledge. This factual knowledge is common to all who are initiated. It is:

1. Nations which, in their time, embraced Christianity, are today the richest in culture, in wealth, and in power. This is an obvious fact, not a digressive speculation;

2. The Kievan state (more precisely, an empire) enjoyed its greatest glory in power, in territorial extent, in wealth, and in international prestige (or glory, as our forefathers called it) immediately *after* its acceptance of the Christian faith.

The Kievan Metropolitan Ilarion of the XI century in one of his sermons referred to the Kievan empire, saying that it was “widely known and famous throughout the world”. And so it was. History provides ample proof of this.

In reference to Ukraine’s loss of sovereignty (250 years after her baptism) two major causes stand out — and no acute historical discernment is required to recognize and understand them. The first cause is the recurrent devastating raids by Mongolian hordes pushing into Europe from

the east; the second, much worse and much more destructive in its results, was the incessant internal turmoil — internecine wars among native princes.

The Orthodox Church and its hierarchs were very conscious of these two destructive agencies of the Church and the state. Our Church has constantly prayed to God for His intercession and protection from “attacks of alien hordes and the disunity of our own kind”.

Metropolitan Ilarion whose memory is still fresh in our minds, wrote a historical epos entitled, “Our Struggle for Sovereignty”. The title itself explains the text. In the foreword to the epos, Metropolitan Ilarion has this to say: “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church works and exists throughout the centuries in full unity with its people; it has never ceased to pray for its people and is actively engaged in a universal struggle for the restoration of Ukraine’s independence”. To indict the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the premise that it contributed to the fall of our sovereignty is both unfair and preposterous; it is immoral and obscene propaganda.

From the perspective of a thousand years it would be interesting to make an assessment of the value of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the Ukrainian people and to mankind in general. The subject deserves a thorough and systematic research. It is to be hoped that our intellectuals, both clerical and lay, will provide us with complete detailed accounts on this topic. This short and incomplete article can only provide a few comments, comparisons and conclusions.

In order to appreciate the intrinsic value of anything, one must *necessarily* compare it with something of equal or similar value. There is no other way to ascertain the true worth of anything. We compare the value of a Canadian dollar in terms of an American dollar, metrical measures in terms of imperial, etc. Spiritual values, however, cannot be measured in dollars or metres. They may be compared with other similar or parallel values. Thus we are obliged to compare the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with other church-religious affiliations. Should such a comparison turn out to be in any way damaging to other church denominations, it should not be interpreted as intentional on our

part. The characteristic of the Ukrainian psyche is complete tolerance of, and even cordial accord with, other religious faiths. On the other hand, if history has recorded that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has sometimes committed deeds inconsistent with Christ's teaching, then no useful purpose will be served by suppressing or denying them.

"No human being has ever lived and not sinned". If humans are so disposed it follows that organizations comprised of human beings, which have been in existence for a thousand years have committed numerous sins. And should we try to suppress unpleasant historical episodes, then others will bring them to the fore, very likely magnified and exaggerated in form and extent.

Before we make the suggested comparison of the Ukrainian Church with other Christian Churches, we must first make the following distinction: the "church" is not the same as "religion", by definition. The Church, being an institution differs from the religion it professes. The Church, then, is to be identified with the people who belong to it.

Many historical events initially incongruous are explained in this way. For example, Orthodox and Catholic religions in their teaching are almost identical. But in practice the two Churches are mutually exclusive.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church throughout its 1000 years of being, conducted itself in accordance with Christ's teaching so that its theory and practice were always in harmony. By contrast, the western Churches in previous centuries digressed from Christ's ideals and even committed heinous crimes in His name.

It is not my intention to enumerate the odious details. It would be emotionally difficult and unpleasant to do so. I shall mention a few well-documented historical events which were perpetrated with the full blessing of the western Churches, some of which were initiated by them.

1. The Crusades. The practice of the Crusades was a definite taint upon European civilization, in the opinion of many historians.

2. The Holy Inquisition. This organization, the creation of the Holy Roman Church has upon its conscience several

million martyrs who were burned at the stake, among whom were many eminent reformers and intellectuals.

3. St. Bartholemew's Day Massacre. During one week the French Catholics massacred 70,000 Huguenots — with the blessing of the Roman Church and the full consent of the French king — who received a commendation and a symbolic gift of a gold rose from the Pope, as a token of appreciation.

4. The burning of witches. This practice was indulged in after the Reformation. However, the people did not change with the change in religious orientation. Several handbooks appeared with instructions in the methods of torture to be employed in dealing with witches to elicit confessions of guilt. Once a confession was obtained the "witch" in question was disposed of "according to the provisions of the law", that is, burned at the stake. One of such "witches" who died at the stake was a young girl who earlier saved her country — France — from alien occupation. Her name: Jeanne d'Arc.

5. Catholic Poland, in modern times, used a scheme to force Orthodox Ukrainians living in the Kholm region "to return" to Catholicism, employing barbaric methods in the process. The Poles demolished and burned Churches, imprisoned, tortured and murdered the recalcitrant Orthodox, along with their priests. All this happened quite recently, in fact only 40 years ago. Many who witnessed this operation are still alive, among whom is our Metropolitan Andrew who, as a young priest in the Kholm region, courageously and resolutely defended the faithful, ignoring his own safety.

When we speak of this infamous Polish act in the Kholm region we must emphasize that the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in Halychyna was vehemently opposed to the act of "conversion". Metropolitan Andrew Sheptycky issued a strong protest denouncing the Polish action, but the Polish authorities confiscated his remonstrance. The protest, however, served to publicize the general opinion prevalent among the Ukrainian populace in Halychyna. We are citing this as an excellent example to illustrate our claim that "the church is always identified with the people who belong to it".

It is unpleasant to recall all those shocking events — from Inquisition to the Polish Pogroms — but unless we compare our Church with other Churches, we shall never know its true worth. Only through comparison we realize that our Church has not tainted itself with such anti-Christian acts.

Our Church has never launched an Inquisition. It has never burned witches and spiritual or religious dissenters at the stake. Its annals do not record any expeditionary crusades.

Not only that what we do is important but also that which we do not do. The ten commandments that God gave to Moses are expressed in two ways — positive and negative: “Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not kill”, and others similarly worded. In reference to these the Ukrainian Orthodox Church during the millennium of its existence, achieved an incomparably lucid and unblemished record. It could well stand as a shining example to other Churches and nations. In that domain lies the worth of our Church to all mankind and its cultural values. There may come a time when the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will command its rightful place in the world.

What good did our Church attain for its people?

In the most trying times of our history our Church provided spiritual comfort to the Ukrainian people, a cohesive force which preserved its unity as a nation.

Ivan Vlasovsky, in his “History of the Church”, writes: “With the fall of sovereignty the Church remained as the only unifying institution for the people”.

Mychailo Hrushevsky, describing Bohdan Khmelnycky's period, states that: “The Orthodoxy at that moment was the only form of resistance of the Ukrainian element in the cultural-national sphere”.

The conclusions drawn by our historians are quite clear and require no further comment.

The activity of our Church in the areas of culture and education is well-known; there is no need to cite more examples and offer further particulars in this connection. I shall only mention in passing that Ukrainian monastics in the sanctuary of their monastic cells laid the foundations for the science of history. Most of our historical chronicles

were written by Orthodox monastics, the first of whom was Nestor the Chronicler.

The culture and education promoted and nurtured by our Church filtered into neighboring countries. Many foreigners from all regions of eastern Europe came to study at the Kievan-Mohyla Brotherhood College. Muscovy derived the greatest benefits from the high calibre of Ukrainian scholarship. An eminent Russian historian, V. Kluchevsky, writes: "A western Ukrainian monastic called to Moscow was the first protagonist of western enlightenment."

The spread of Ukrainian church-religious culture was not only eastward. I had, on several occasions, an opportunity to view and admire the ornamentation lavished on an ancient Catholic Cathedral in the city of Plotzk, located west of Warsaw, and indigenously Polish. The icons are of the highest artistic beauty; they simply captivated my attention and admiration.

Many years later, already domiciled in Canada, I chanced to come across a book in which it was claimed that many churches in Poland, dating back to the Middle Ages, were decorated by Ukrainian artists from Kiev, among which the Plotzk Cathedral was also cited. Only then did I realize why there were almost no statues (I remember seeing only one). There were only icons and ornamentation on the walls. This is a typical Ukrainian Church style. This has been the physical appearance of our church interiors for a thousand years.

The Church impersonates the people belonging to it. Ukrainian Church is the Ukrainian people. These are our forefathers, beginning with those "wise men" who as ambassadors of Prince Volodymyr travelled to different parts of the world to observe the practice of Christian worship in each.

These are they, our early predecessors, who during the thousand years not only professed but also practised the high ideals of Christian faith: love, goodness and beauty. And they succeeded in perpetuating ideals into the day of our generation — and passed them on to us.

This, intrinsically, is the meaning and the essence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

