

On the 15th of July, the holy Church commemorates the holy Martyr AVOUDIMOS.

Avoudimos (Abudimos), the martyr, hailed from Tenedos, an island in the northeastern Aegean Sea, off the shore of the Troas near the entrance to the Hellespont. He flourished during the years of Emperor Diocletian. In the year 299, he was arrested and charged with being a Christian. Since it proved futile to the pagans to persist in attempting to persuade him to offer the prescribed sacrifice to the idols, he was stretched out and fastened from his four limbs to stakes. Nine soldiers appeared over him who administered a mighty thrashing from every direction. When Avoudimos refused to taste the food offered at the idol oblations, the torturers manipulated their iron claws over the confessor's flesh and shredded it to pieces. Finally, they decided to relieve him of his head. Thus, Avoudimos mounted into the heavens, bearing away the prize of victory.

On the 15th of July, the holy Church commemorates the holy Equal-to-the-apostles VLADIMIR, who in holy Baptism was called BASIL, and who brought about the Christianization of Russia.⁶

Vladimir (Volodymyr or Volodimer) the Great, the holy equal-to-the-apostles and saint of the Russian Church, was known as Grand Prince of Kiev (Kyiv). He was born circa 956 at Kiev. Vladimir's mother was Malusha, the

⁶ Together with the brief biography in *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), see also *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, Vol. II, translated by Paul Hollingsworth (Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, 1992), containing the memorial, encomium, and life of the saint written by 11th-C. Monk Iakov (Jacob). See also Vladimir Volkoff's *Vladimir the Russian Viking* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1984), as well as George Vernadsky's *Kievan Russia* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1980). See also the scattered biographies on the Internet at <http://www.roca.org/OA/59-60/59f.htm>; Vladimir I's family life and children from Wikipedia; as well as the online www.encyclopediaofukraine.com; and www.standrewuoc.org/christianity_in_ukr_.htm. See also Stephen Bobulsky, *Rulers of Nations, Servants of Christ* (Syosset, NY: Department of Religious Education, 1980). For an excellent biography with background information, see Isaac E. Lambertsen's article, entitled "The Life of the Holy Prince Vladimir the Great of Kiev, Ruler and Enlightener of All Russia, the Wonderworker, Who Received the Name Basil in Holy Baptism," trans. from the Church Slavonic in the work "The Service and Akathist Hymn to the Holy Equal to the Apostles, Prince Vladimir the Great, with His Life Appended for the 900th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus 988-1888" (Moscow: Synodal Press, 1888), pp. 36a-44a, as seen in English in the periodical *Living Orthodoxy*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (July-August 1985):16-30. Icons of Saint Vladimir and Baptism of Russia are reproduced by courtesy of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY.

former stewardess in the household of his grandmother, the holy Grand Princess Olga. It was Malusha, daughter of Malk of Lubeck (Chernigov region), who also accompanied Olga to Constantinople. The history of his mother Malusha, and grandmother Olga, are found on the day of the latter's commemoration, the 11th of July. His pagan father, Svyatoslav, was the only child of Grand Princess Olga and Grand Prince Igor. Igor was the son of Rurik the Varangian who ruled in Rus.⁷ Now Vladimir also had half-brothers, since his father begot other sons from other wives. They were Yaropolk and Oleg. From the life of Saint Olga, we learn that though Svyatoslav was not interested in Christianity; yet, he did not persecute his mother Olga or interfere in her missionary endeavors.

Since Svyatoslav was a warrior, spending most of his time in the lands about the Danube, he was often absent from Kiev. He bade his mother, Olga, the grandmother to his three boys, to raise them. Although she was forbidden to actively convert them, her life of prayer and charity did not go unnoticed by Vladimir who would remember her example later in life. By all reports, when Svyatoslav was at home from the wars, he was a loving family man. Svyatoslav, who was noted for his bravery, attacked the Byzantines in the summer of 971. He waged war against his mother's strenuous admonitions. He, as Olga properly foresaw, was roundly beaten and forced to sign a peace treaty, under which he ceded his territories in the Danube region. On the way back to Kiev, Svyatoslav was ambushed by Pechenegs. His army was routed and he was put to death.

Before Svyatoslav was slain, however, he had already divided his vast land holdings into three principalities among his three sons. His eldest son, Yaropolk, was given Kiev. His middle son, Oleg, was bequeathed Dereva. His youngest son, Vladimir, received Novgorod the Great. Since Vladimir was still



Saint Vladimir

⁷ See the "Family Tree of the Early Rurikids" furnished in the Life of Saint Olga, who is commemorated by the holy Church on the 11th of July.

young, he ruled under the guidance of his uncle, Dobrynya.⁸ It was in response to the city's demands for recognition that Svyatoslav had designated the lad as the token prince. As it turned out, the youth grew into a capable and fair administrator. A power struggle among the brothers broke out in the year 977. Yaropolk rose up against his brother Oleg, warring against him and slaying him that he might take for himself his brother's princedom. Vladimir learned how his eldest brother killed Oleg. Fearing he could not resist Yaropolk at that time, he took himself away. Vladimir knew he was outnumbered and without allies. Yaropolk, desiring to be master of all Russia, not only took the Derevlian land but Novgorod as well. Meanwhile, Vladimir put out to sea and visited the Varangians of Scandinavia. It was in 980 that Vladimir returned to Rus with a well-trained Varangian force behind him. Vladimir succeeded in expelling Yaropolk's governors from Novgorod. Vladimir also took Polotsk (Polatsk) after a battle in which Prince Rogvolod of Polotsk was slain. Vladimir also took Rogvolod's daughter, Rohnida, to wife. Later that year, Vladimir captured Kiev and had Yaropolk murdered, thereby becoming the grand prince. Vladimir also married Yaropolk's widow, a Greek woman by birth. During the next thirty-five years, Vladimir expanded the borders of Kievan Rus, turning it into one of the most powerful states in Eastern Europe. With regard to the killing of his brother, Vladimir, ten years after the fratricide, after he was baptized, repented and lamented for all he had done while still a pagan and ignorant of God. When he came to know the true God, as part of his repentance and renunciation of the devil and the demons and all his services, he sought to expiate his sins by serving the Lord Jesus faithfully with good works and almsgiving.⁹

Now Vladimir had begun his rule in the idolatrous tradition of his idolatrous predecessors, indulging in a warring and passionate life. He took the Cherven towns, as well as Peremyshl from Poland (981). He waged successful wars against the Viatichians (981-982) and the Radimichians (984), thereby uniting the remaining East Slavic tribes. He divided his realm into territories, installing his sons as viceroys to govern them. They, consequently, dispensed princely justice and collected tributes. In 983, Vladimir waged war against the Yatvingians. He was victorious and gained access to the Baltic Sea. In 985, he defeated the Khazars and Volga Bulgars and secured his state's eastern frontier. Vladimir devoted considerable attention to defending his southern borders against the nomadic Pechenegs and Chorni Klobuky. He had lines of fortifications built along the rivers, namely the Irpin, Stuhna, Trubizh, and

⁸ Dobrynya or Dobrynia was his mother Malusha's brother.

⁹ Monk Iakov, "Memorial and Encomium for Volodimer," *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus*, pp. 175, 176.

Sula. He also founded fortified towns—such as Vasylkiv, Voin, and Bilhorod—that were joined by earthen ramparts. Together with his idolatry, fratricide, and bloodshed, his carnal appetites were feted on woman after woman. The chronicler Saint Nestor of the Caves describes his great profligacy. He had a few hundred concubines in Kiev and in the country residence of Berestove. He also kept official pagan wives, the most famous being Rohnida of Polotsk. His other wives are mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*. Speculations abound regarding the women he maintained in his households.

Vladimir attributed his victory over his brother Yaropolk I Svyatoslavych to the support he received from pagan forces. He, therefore, had idols of the deities Perun, Khors (Xor), Dazhbog, Stryboh, Symarhl, and Mokosh erected on a hill overlooking his palace in Kiev. The people worshipped demon gods of thunder and lightning, of joy, of festivals, of the rain, of the air, and of the fruits of the earth. Vladimir ordered that such idols and other lesser deities were to be fashioned and erected at Kiev and throughout his realm.

It is not spiritually profitable to describe the excesses of Vladimir and his people. But we see how God “is long-suffering toward us, not willing to have any perish, but to have all come to repentance [2 Pe. 3:9].” We shall soon see how Vladimir learned the truth in Christ Jesus and put off from himself “the old man, with respect to the former manner of life [Eph. 4:22],” which is corrupted according to the desires of the deceit, that is, the deceit of lusts. He came to be renewed in the spirit of his mind, and to put on the new man, who, according to God, was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.¹⁰ But all along, we see how God “is long-suffering toward us, not willing to have any perish, but to have all come to repentance [2 Pe. 3:9].” We also observe here that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound [Rom. 5:20].”

Once, after one of Vladimir’s successful campaigns, the grand prince was incited by the demons to offer a human sacrifice in thanksgiving. Lots were drawn, which fell upon a Varangian lad, the young John, with his father Theodore. Both were Orthodox Christians. Theodore, unwilling to sacrifice his son to the idol madmen, refused to surrender his son. He attempted to explain to the heathen that their gods were demons that dwelt in the idols, which were “the works of the hands of men [Ps. 113:12].” The idols have mouths, but neither speak nor make a sound in their throats. They have eyes, but see not. They have ears, but hear not. They have noses, but smell not.

¹⁰ Eph. 4:22-24.

They have hands, but feel not. They have feet, but walk not.¹¹ He urged them to turn to the Christian God Who is in heaven and on earth.¹² The heathen, even after having the obvious pointed out to them, became enraged at this rebuke of their wooden gods. They snatched John and Theodore, slaying them inside their house. The senseless slaying of father and son to satisfy the idols struck Vladimir's conscience. He regretted his harsh caprice. He had seen much blood and gore in his military campaigns, but the martyrdom of these Christians suddenly reminded him of the martyric accounts that his grandmother would recount when he and his brothers were boys.

He had seen many men slaughtered on the battlefield. He understood that. But what was the point of slaying his own subjects, unarmed civilians, for gods which he had seen often enough made by his own craftsmen? How could flesh and blood, and the taking of mens' lives, possibly satisfy these insensate and soulless statues? In fact, thought Vladimir, nothing seemed to satisfy his own desires or lusts. He was weary of everything, and thought inwardly, "There must be something more than this savage existence into which we have fallen prey. What is true? Where is the truth? Was grandmother right?" Thus, Vladimir—who became like unto Saul of Tarsus, "who persecuted this Way even to death [Acts 22:4]"—was chosen by God to be His new apostle, His new Constantine the first Christian emperor. Vladimir recollected the story of how his grandmother returned from Constantinople, thinking to himself, "Though she persuaded many to receive the Faith of the Byzantines, she could not bring over our Slavic people. She did not have adequate support for her goals. Even her own son, my father, followed after the gods of his people and forbears. I recall her efforts in trying to set up a hierarchy and to bring German missionaries among our people. But it was not time. Many of the princes and nobles had been, and still remain, against the Christian Faith. They, together with their pagan priests, are belligerent and cling to their graven images. Then there were so many other issues for survival occupying our land. There was the constant fighting, not only in my father's time along the Danube and with the Pechenegs, but even in my own days I have been continually at war. Is it not time to cultivate the arts of peace? Is it not time that my people should have one Faith that will unite us? I need to find out the truth. For this I require information to gain the proper knowledge. I must, however, do it from a position of strength lest I and my people should appear weak or vulnerable." Word soon spread, however, that Vladimir found his homespun religion stale and superstitious. Paganism was stagnating and confounding the many different peoples under his rule. Now Vladimir had gained world renown

¹¹ Ps. 113:13-16.

¹² Ps. 113:11.

not only for his manly acts of bravery on the battlefield but also for his strong rule and stateliness. People of other nations, wishing to win his favor and open up all kinds of opportunities for themselves, came to him in order to introduce him to their religion.

It seems that emissaries of Islam made the first state visit. They spoke of Allah and Mohammed, who permitted a man to have many wives. Polygamy pleased Vladimir. When he heard them speak of circumcision and abstinence from wine and swine, he was displeased. He said that his people would never tolerate a religion without wine. He, therefore, dismissed Islam as unsuitable. Missionaries from the pope, the emperor of the west, and the Germans also attempted to interest Vladimir in their brand of religion. They, too, did not hold any interest for Vladimir. Following them, Jews approached him. When Vladimir heard them claim Jerusalem and Palestine as their land, he knew that they did not possess it but rather others occupied it. They explained that since the Jewish people angered God, they were scattered about the world. Vladimir thought it odd that they should attempt to peddle their religion when they were spurned by their God. He, in no wise, wished the people of his realm to be dispersed as well. He sent away these self-important meddlers without further ado.

Finally, co-Emperors Basil II (976-1025) and Constantine VIII (1025-1028) dispatched a prominent man, named Cyril or Kyros, from Patriarch Nicholas II Chrysoberges of Constantinople (979-991). Cyril expounded on Orthodoxy, beginning with how God made the world. He disclosed the prophecies of the prophets, and how they foretold of Christ and His Passion. He also discoursed on the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus, giving the significance of these saving events to mankind. He discoursed on the second coming and the judgment. Cyril brought icons and embroideries portraying many of the points he discussed. The depiction of the dread judgment of the Lord, however, made the deepest impression upon Vladimir. Cyril explained the embroidered image to Vladimir, saying that "whenever the Son of Man should come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. Before the Lord Jesus shall be gathered all the nations. He shall separate them from one another, even as the shepherd separates the sheep from the young kids. He shall set the sheep on His right, but the young kids on the left." Cyril then quoted the words of Christ to those on His left: "Go from Me, ye who have been cursed, into the fire, the everlasting one, which hath been prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal [Mt. 25:41, 46]." The icon depicting this scene of demons and torments made Vladimir shiver. He sighed and said thoughtfully, "Blessed are those who shall be to the right of Christ! But woe unto those to His left!"

Vladimir could hardly take his eyes off the icons. He wished to give further consideration to all that he heard from Cyril regarding Orthodoxy. He said he would need to ponder upon everything that he heard. There was no doubt, nevertheless, that the discourse of the Greeks affected the heathen monarch, who was burdened with the heavy sins from as far back as his tumultuous youth. He then dismissed in peace both Cyril and his party for their return to Constantinople.

Vladimir then summoned his nobles. Taking counsel with them, he remarked, "Men learned in their religion have come to us, discoursing on how and what they believe. We have had in our midst Mohammedan Bulgarians, western doctors from among the Germans, Romans, Khazarian Jews, and others. Each group tried to recommend its religion as the best for the land of Rus. The Greeks came last, but they made the most profound impression upon me. They spoke of their God and their Faith from the beginning of the world to our present day. They spoke of another life beyond this one. They believe in a resurrection and in a recompense." The nobles listened carefully to their sovereign's review of each religion. They commented, "Surely, one must expect that each will praise his religion. Instead of making a decision based on their recommendations, we need to learn the truth for ourselves. We, too, have wise men. Dispatch them to the various nations. Let them see firsthand the practise of each of these religions. Let them make a report. For only then shall we be apprised of the truth, through those whom we know and trust for a sincere representation of each religion." Vladimir believed this view to be the most prudent and sure way to learn the truth. Men of understanding and knowledge were thus gathered from among them. Departing, they went about hither and thither. After they collected notes from all their other travels, they arrived last in Constantinople. The royal brothers Basil and Constantine were notified of the purpose of Vladimir's ambassadors.

The Russian embassy, as guests of the emperors, attended the Church of Hagia Sophia, that is, the Church of the Holy Wisdom of God.¹³ The sheer size of the building and the impact of the overwhelming interior of colonnades and galleries were unforgettable. Polychrome marble everywhere—green and white with purple porphyry and gold mosaics—encrusted upon the brick. There were colossal candle stands, rich and artistic decorations, and a fifteen-meter silver iconostasion. The vast nave was covered by a central dome that had a maximum diameter of thirty-one meters and a height from floor level of fifty-six meters. The dome appeared weightless by the unbroken arcade of forty

¹³ Hagia Sophia was the largest cathedral in the world for nearly a thousand years, until the completion of the Medieval Seville Cathedral in 1520. The Constantinopolitan structure is one of the most advanced and ambitious monuments of late antiquity.

arched windows under it, which helped flood the colorful interior with light. The dome, which seemed suspended in space, was borne upon four pendentives—triangular sections of masonry that serve as a rectangular base for a circular dome. The impression given to them was that the dome seemed to be floating upon four great arches. The forty windows were set around the base of the dome, adding to the cathedral a greater mystical quality; for the light reflected everywhere in the interior of the nave. In the upper gallery, they could see the empress and the court-ladies attending the proceedings below. There was also a gallery, wherein the clergy met for synods. Who can count the number of treasures, wonderworking relics, and painted icons? Apart from the richly decorated mosaics, there was also a large number of figurative decorations and geometric patterns. In the central dome, of course, was the image of Christ. There were also images of Christ's Mother, saints, prophets, and holy men. They also saw portraits of emperors and empresses.

The divine Liturgy was conducted by the patriarch, together with many bishops and priests. The Russians were escorted to a place where they could see and hear everything transpiring—clerical processions, chanting, and readings. They never experienced before what they had seen and heard. There was a multitude of candles, the sacred and otherworldly icons, the magnificent and costly vestments, the mystical and melodious chanting, the fragrant incense, the piety of the faithful—all of which could hardly be taken in by them. Divine enlightenment and gladness filled their hearts. The Byzantine Chronicle says of the Russian ambassadors that during the divine Liturgy, at the time of carrying the holy gifts in procession to the altar, as the choir was chanting the Cherubic Hymn, the eyes of their spirits were opened. They, being in a state of ecstasy, beheld glittering youths who joined in singing the Trisagion. Vladimir's men were transported with spiritual joy. They felt they were no longer earthbound. They were awestruck by the transcendent beauty of the divine offices. There was a huge congregation, and a crowd of priests, deacons, deaconesses, subdeacons, lectors, chanters, and doorkeepers.¹⁴ The delegation from Rus was at a loss how to describe what each man witnessed, saying only, "During the service in their Great Church, we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. The Christian Faith must be true. Indeed, there is no such splendid service and glorious exaltation of God anywhere else on the earth. The true God dwells among these people. They have seen God." After the dismissal of the Liturgy, the patriarch honored the guests from

¹⁴ In the time of Justinian [*Justinian novellae*] regulations called for sixty priests, one hundred deacons, forty deaconesses, ninety subdeacons, one hundred ten lectors, twenty-five chanters, and one hundred doorkeepers.

Vladimir. The royal brothers held a splendid banquet and gave their guests gifts. The embassy then departed for Kiev.

Upon returning home Vladimir wished for the embassy to make an open report, in the hearing of the nobles and elders among the people. They recounted the events of their expedition in the order they made their visits. They characterized the religion and rituals of each group. When the people heard what took place among the Muslims, they found the telling of it grim and fearsome, saying, "We saw how the Muslim Bulgars worship in a temple, standing without belts. They bow, sit down, and glance here and there as if possessed. There is no joy among them, but rather grief and a great stench. Their religion is not good."¹⁵ The embassy declared that their visit among the Germans lacked beauty. When they came to describe worship among the Greeks in their imperial capital, they said, "No tongue can adequately explain what we saw and heard. They escorted us into their Great Church—the beauty, the grandeur, and glory of which defies description. The gorgeous vestments and the ornate ritual are rich and dazzling. The music was like nothing we ever heard before: at times it was the sweetest sound, and at other times it had the melody of another world. The people all stand very reverently. We are certain that in no other place is there more fitting and heavenly praise of God. We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. No one, having tasted what is sweet, desires what is bitter. It is the same with the Faith among the Greeks. We should want no other." The elders, hearing the envoys speak in this manner, were quite enraptured. The travelers concluded their description, saying to Vladimir, "If the Greek religion, the Christian Faith, were not the best, thy wise grandmother would not have accepted it. She adopted their Orthodoxy because she found it to be very good." This fact, too, had no small claim on his good will. Vladimir was becoming more convinced that Monotheism was correct. When he heard the elders speak of the wisdom of Olga, the weight of whose name made him more decisive, memories of her piety and righteous life flooded his memory. He also brought to mind the Christian witness present in his own city, that is, Kiev's Christian dwellers. The Holy Spirit enlightened Vladimir to perceive the worthless and mindless worship of idols and of nature instead of the Creator. Vladimir, however, was very cautious and a proud man. Many of his nobles and advisors were still riveted to their ancestral religion and customs. He felt he did not have enough support for such a sweeping change. He needed time to think upon how he could engineer such a transition, mindful of the past difficulties faced by the wise Olga in her attempts to both establish a Church hierarchy and bring the people to convert. If he undertook the project of unifying his people and

¹⁵ Monk Iakov, p. 176.

consolidating his power under the Christian God, he must not fail. Now there was also an element of pride that prevented him from asking straight-out for Byzantium's assistance.

After ruminating upon all these issues, it took him one year to hit upon a way of approaching the Greeks for instruction and Baptism. But that which he orchestrated was a mix between a purely pagan response and a heartfelt prayer which he framed: "Lord God, Master of everything, I entreat Thee: grant me this city and I shall take and bring Christians and priests to my land, who will instruct the people in the Christian religion." Thus, Vladimir was resolved to act in a manner which would constitute both his and his people's happiness and esteem. He mounted a surprise attack on the Byzantines, taking the Crimea and Capha. He next besieged Cherson (known as Korsun by the Slavs).¹⁶ By such aberrant conduct, Vladimir hoped to acquire the Christian teachers and clergy that he needed as missionaries. But when he encircled Cherson, the Byzantines did not surrender. They bravely defended their city. Vladimir informed them that if they peacefully surrendered, he would deal with them mercifully—and he meant it. The inhabitants would have none of it. Vladimir kept persisting, even if it took him, as he said "three years to capture the city." After six months of mounting attrition, the inhabitants kept enduring more and more hardships. Then, by God's permission, the archpriest of Cherson, Father Anastasios, helped the barbarians. He notified Vladimir by a written message that the city could be his if he shut down the water supply. He informed him that the aqueducts bringing fresh water into Cherson lay to the east. If he were to divert the water supply, the defenders would have to capitulate or die of thirst. He sent this message in the Greek language, affixing it to an arrow which landed before Vladimir's tent. When the message was translated for the grand prince, he went forth to discover the pipes. With the dwindling water supplies came an increase in mortality. The defenders had no other choice than to relinquish the fight and agree to Vladimir's terms. He entered Cherson triumphantly and kept his word—no one suffered any injury. Thus, with the fall of the Crimea and Cherson, Vladimir now decided to notify the imperial capital of his desire to become closer with them. What did he do at Cherson? He seized Church vessels, icons, and relics.

Emperors Basil and Constantine received the news, to their shock and surprise. They had lost Cherson and all of the Crimea. Even more astonishing was the conqueror's desire to pay his addresses to the royal brothers' sister, the unmarried and lovely maiden Anna (b. 963). In pressing his suit, he warned the imperial brothers that unless Anna became his wife, he would seize

¹⁶ Cherson, a Greek colony and the most significant city of the Crimean peninsula, is near modern Sebastopol. Christianity had been firmly established there since the 4th C.

Constantinople. Vladimir then made the offer that such a union would unite the realms of the Rus and of the Rhomaioi. As for the imperial brothers, they marvelled at his intentions that were introduced to them with no endeavor at civility. He misrepresented himself by pursuing physical violence with such gusto in order to gain Byzantine's spiritual riches. His code of behavior was so alien to anything they could have expected. At first the brothers had difficulty in distinguishing between appearance and reality. But then the imperial brothers agreed between themselves that it would not be proper to give away their sister's hand in marriage to one who was not a Christian. In fact, they were forbidden by Church canons to wed their sister to a pagan. They could not affect to misunderstand him, for they soon received further intelligence of the great military power of the Russians and that Vladimir was not to be brooked in attaining what he set out for himself.

The brothers, consequently, crafted a well thought-out letter, writing: "According to our Christian Faith, it is not meet for us to join our sister with a man who abides in a benighted religion that pays homage to graven images. If thou wilt come to believe in Jesus Christ, as the true God, and receive divine illumination in the waters of the Mystery of holy Baptism, then we shall be pleased to have thee take our sister in honorable wedlock and become our brother-in-law. Indeed, if thou wilt be of one mind with us in our holy Faith, we shall love thee as a brother and abide in peace with thee not only in this life but in the one to come."

When Vladimir received the imperial letter, he was not a little pleased that their demand fell in with his hoped-for conclusion of his campaign. He again brought to mind his revered grandmother and the words of his envoys regarding Orthodoxy. Being impelled to go forward in faith, he sent back his heartfelt response to the brothers: "I conceived a love for your Orthodox Faith from the time that I received such sterling reports from my embassy, the one which of late you entertained in your imperial city. I have come to believe that your worship of God is the true religion and that it is beyond compare what is being practised among other peoples. I will embrace your Faith. Dispatch to me one of your hierarchs to come among us. Let him confer Baptism upon me. I also invite you and your sister to be present. If you cannot attend, then send your sister to me that we may be wedded. As a wedding present, I shall gladly make over to Byzantium both Cherson and all of the Crimea."

Basil and Constantine were elated upon receiving such affirmations from Vladimir. Their sister, however, the Princess Anna, was keen neither to go to Cherson nor to take such an uncouth barbarian as her husband. Her brothers, not wishing to urge her against her will, reasoned with her: "Dear sister, reflect upon how many shall find salvation. An entire nation shall be converted to the knowledge of the truth. Consider the other benefits. Our

empire shall suffer no further invasions from these barbarians. They will be one with us. This great achievement is in thy power if only thou wilt marry him. The Lord will work with thee, for He wishes to bring these people to Himself. As for thee, Anna, thy name shall be glorified and blessed to the ages!" Anna could hardly counter such arguments.

Now Anna Porphyrogenneta,¹⁷ daughter of Emperor Romanos II and Theophano, saw that she would be the only princess of the Macedonians to marry a foreigner. For the Byzantine emperors, at that time, had regarded the Franks and Russians as barbarians. Previously they refused French Hugues (Hugh) Capet's proposals to marry Anna to his son Robert I. This is why the Baptism of the bridegroom Vladimir and Kievan Rus had to be a prerequisite for this marriage. The imperial brothers took care to follow the prudent and pious policy of the predecessors, who ever sought to bring their fierce neighbors under the humanizing influence of the Orthodox Faith.

As for Anna, she knew she must marry one day. It was her duty. She had hoped to marry, if not for love, at least someone affable and compatible. She had hoped to see a portrait of the prospective bridegroom. Intelligence that she received about the heathen Vladimir, that is, regarding his wars and his women, did not recommend him and certainly did not inspire confidence in her. He did not seem to be a man of great refinement. His previous attack hardly warmed her disposition toward him. Yes, he was brave and manly; and he desired to bring his people to Christ. The latter was deemed commendable to the gentle princess. At first, there seemed to be little inducement to marry him. But thinking better of it, she came to perceive that such a union would ensure peace for her own people and salvation for countless pagans. The union promised equality rather than oppression. She no longer felt herself ill-used by so forced a relinquishment. It was her faith alone which influenced her to sacrifice herself at once for the temporal interests of her own country and for the eternal welfare of a strange people. She, nevertheless, wept at what awaited her, but then said with piety and stoicism, "God's will be done!" After she bid farewell to family, friends, and the court, the Byzantine princess entered a ship bound for Cherson. Her brothers gave her precious gifts and relics to present to Vladimir. In her party was Bishop Michael, as well as priests and notable men of the nobility. The *Book of Genealogies* gives the name of Bishop Michael, a Syrian by birth, and of six other bishops who were sent together with him to Cherson by the Patriarch Nicholas Chrysoberges.

While all this was transpiring, Vladimir contracted an eye ailment that left him blind. The disease was quick and devastating. Finding himself in utter

¹⁷ Porphyrogenneta, an imperial epithet meaning "purple-born," designates a daughter born after her father had become emperor.

darkness, he began to meditate inwardly. "Have I angered the gods of my Russian land, in my departure from them, that I should be thus chastised by them?" But our God permitted this affliction to befall Vladimir that the Lord might better win the warrior's heart and mind. Previous to Vladimir's blindness, everything took place neatly with regard to his victory over the Byzantines, which was calculated to win for himself the upper hand over them. For he sought two prizes from the Byzantines: a superior Church hierarchy for Kievan-Rus and a Byzantine bride to cement the union of their peoples. But now instead of vaunting himself over those whom he took by stealth, he was very much humbled. On the one hand, he began to waver in his decision to renounce the gods of his ancestors and to receive Baptism. On the other hand, he reflected seriously on his past life and what becoming a Christian would really mean for him.

During this crisis, Anna and those with her arrived at Cherson. She was greeted by all enthusiastically. She was quickly notified that the prospective bridegroom could not meet her ship because he confined himself to his quarters in his blindness. Her heart, moved with pity, reached out to him. She perceived in this sudden reversal of his fortunes that the hand of God was upon him. She quickly sent him a message, writing: "Take courage, O Grand Prince Vladimir! Though thy vision has been extinguished, thou canst quickly recover thy sight. Thou canst receive the power of vision not only for thy physical eyes but for thy spiritual ones as well. Make haste and receive holy Baptism. Only then shalt thou be delivered from all the darkness that clouds thy sight and thy soul." (She spoke thus, being mindful of another persecutor of Christians—Paul. For in the Book of Acts it is written that Ananias was sent to Damascus in order to baptize Saul that the latter might recover sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.¹⁸) Now when Vladimir heard the letter of his would-be bride read out to him, he answered her: "If, O princess, thy words prove true and I receive my sight, then shall I know of a surety that great is the Lord thy God, the God of the Christians!"

As a consequence, Vladimir summoned the bishop in order to prepare himself for holy Baptism. The bishop deemed it proper to first catechize the blind grand prince. Vladimir listened attentively, learning well the Orthodox Faith and what was expected of him. After Vladimir was made a catechumen, he was baptized in the Church of the Holy Wisdom at Cherson.¹⁹ He received triple immersion from the Bishop of Cherson. At the moment that the bishop

¹⁸ Acts 9:17.

¹⁹ The Laurentian copy of the *Povest' vremennyx let* [PVI] or *The Tale of Bygone Years* reports that Vladimir was baptized in the Church of Saint Basil in the center of Cherson. The Hypatian tradition names the Church of Holy Wisdom at the site.

laid his hands upon the newly-illumined one, straightway “as if scales fell from his eyes [Acts 9:18],” Vladimir recovered his sight forthwith. By this miraculous event, Vladimir, who was renamed Basil (Vasilij) in Baptism, acknowledged that “great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised [Ps. 47:1]”; for what God is as great as the Christian God Who works wonders?²⁰ Basil-Vladimir cried aloud, “Now have I come to know the true God!” Many of the grand prince’s nobles and soldiers, witnessing this wonderworking, also sought Baptism at Cherson. This took place in the year 987.

Not much time passed before the betrothal service took place between Anna and Basil. Although Anna had seen no portrait prior to her arrival and Vladimir was blind at the time, each was pleased with the other. Then, not many days later, the grand prince was crowned with the princess in lawful matrimony. Although he felt unworthy of her, she being all delicacy and cultivation, still nobody minds having what is too good for him. She helped guide his mind. Vladimir built a great church and palace at Cherson, also embellishing the city with monuments and works of art. He also kept his word regarding Cherson, making peace with the Byzantines and returning their city as a wedding gift. Vladimir, nevertheless, stipulated that Bishop Michael, as well as the priests and monks, were to stay with him and accompany him, together with all their sacred vessels and books, back to Kiev. They all agreed and set off with Anna and Vladimir. Michael became the first Metropolitan of All Russia.²¹ Vladimir also made a point of asking the Archpriest Anastasios to return with him. This was the same priest, inspired by the holy Spirit, who had sent a secret message, via arrow shot, to Vladimir regarding the water supply of the besieged city.

Vladimir entered Kiev in triumph with his new bride, Anna Porphyrogenneta, and the ecclesiastical party. In his zeal, he tarried not in enlightening his people, in Kiev and throughout his realm, to the Christian Faith. True religion turned the raw materials he possessed to the best account. He set for himself the goal of demonstrating the impotence of the people’s wooden idols. He ordered the destruction of all the graven images, including Perun, their god of thunder, and all those in the benighted pagans’ pantheon. The idol of Volos, whom they called the god of cattle, he ordered to be cast into the Pochainya (Pocajna) River. He pronounced Orthodox Christianity as the religion of his realm. He also did not neglect his own household, for he had many children. He ordered all of the children of his household, born of various

²⁰ Ps. 76:13.

²¹ In the time of Vladimir, the Primates of Russia, Metropolitans of Kiev, appointed by Constantinople were: Michael I (988-991); Leontios I (992-1007); John I (1008-1035); Theopemptos (1035-1049); Kyri I (1050); and Hilarion (1051-1054—the first non-Greek). The first native Russian Metropolitan was Ephraim I (1055).

women, to receive holy Baptism: (1) Svyatopolk, by a captive Greek nun who was raped;²² (2) Vysheslav, by a Czech princess; (3) Izyaslav of Polotsk; (4) Yaroslav the Wise; (5) Vsevolod of Volhynia, son by Princess Rohnida of Polotsk; (6) Svyatoslav of Smolensk; (7) Mstislav of Chernigov; (8) Boris; (9) Gleb, by a Bulgarian noblewoman named Adela;²³ (10) Stanislav by a Czech woman; (11) Pozvizd; and, (12) Sudislav, by another woman.²⁴ This listing is suggestive rather than comprehensive. The wives are mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle*, with various children assigned to a variety of wives in the different versions of the document.

Following his marriage to Anna, Vladimir is said to have divorced all his pagan wives. Of all his previous liaisons, it would be Anna with whom he would be interred in his Church of the Tithes. Anna is not known to have had any children. If she had any progeny, such a prestigious imperial parentage would have certainly been advertised by her descendants. The hagiographic sources, contrary to the *Primary Chronicle*, posit Boris and Gleb as her offspring—with the idea that the holy brothers ought to have had a holy mother. The Baptisms of Vladimir's sons were conducted by Metropolitan Michael at a spring, since no nearby church had remained standing for years. The spring overlooked the river Dnieper. Vladimir enlisted the assistance of his sons in spreading the Gospel among the people.

Vladimir's Byzantine brother-in-law, Basil, also called upon him for help. Vladimir sent several thousand warriors from Rus to fight in battles at Bithynian Chrysopolis (January 989) and at Abydos (April 989), which contributed to Basil's victory over Bardas Phokas. Vladimir besieged Chersonese Taurica, seized it from Bardas Phokas, and returned it to his brother-in-law Basil. Vladimir's auxiliary troops from Rus also participated in Basil's campaign in Asia Minor and against Bulgaria.

As for Basil-Vladimir's personal life, he forsook the deeds and lusts of the old man so as not to serve sin. While he sent his sons to learn letters, he had to deal with the numerous mothers of all his children. His marriage with

²² Svyatopolk I or Sviatopolk, also known as "Okaianyi" ("the Damned" or "the Accursed"), was probably the son of Vladimir's brother, Yaropolk I, whose widow, Predslava, Svyatopolk's Greek mother, Vladimir took as his third wife. Thus, the nephew Svyatopolk was counted among Vladimir's sons. See online at <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com>, s.v. "Svyatopolk I."

²³ See the moving account of the martyred brothers Boris and Gleb, commemorated by the holy Church on the 24th of July.

²⁴ Following the death of his beloved Anna in 1011, Vladimir married again. He became affiliated with the Roman emperors of the German Ottonian Dynasty and produced a daughter, Dobronega, who became the consort of Casimir I the Restorer of Poland (1016–1058).

Anna was successful. He lived with her according to the law of God. He learned many things by her wise words and example. As for his pagan wives, it is said that he had sent them away even before his calculated Baptism. He endowed each with a generous settlement. He told each one that they were free to marry another. To his favorite pagan wife, the Princess Rohnida, he sent a message after his return from Cherson. He notified her of his acceptance of Christianity. He informed her that the law of the Christians forbade him from keeping more than one wife. He suggested that she choose one of his nobles, for which he would arrange the marriage. She, however, would not defer to his plans for her. She told him that she would not become the handmaid of one of his servants. She stated that she did not desire another husband. She asked Vladimir to have her betrothed to Christ. While she wrote these things to Vladimir, his son, Yaroslav, lame from birth, gave thanks to God for his mother's prudence. At that moment, he who formerly never took a step in his life, miraculously leaped up and began to walk for the first time. Vladimir was overjoyed not only at Rohnida's salutary choice of the Bridegroom Christ but also that his son was no longer disabled. Rohnida, indeed, received holy Baptism and the tonsure into the Angelic Habit, being renamed Anastasia.

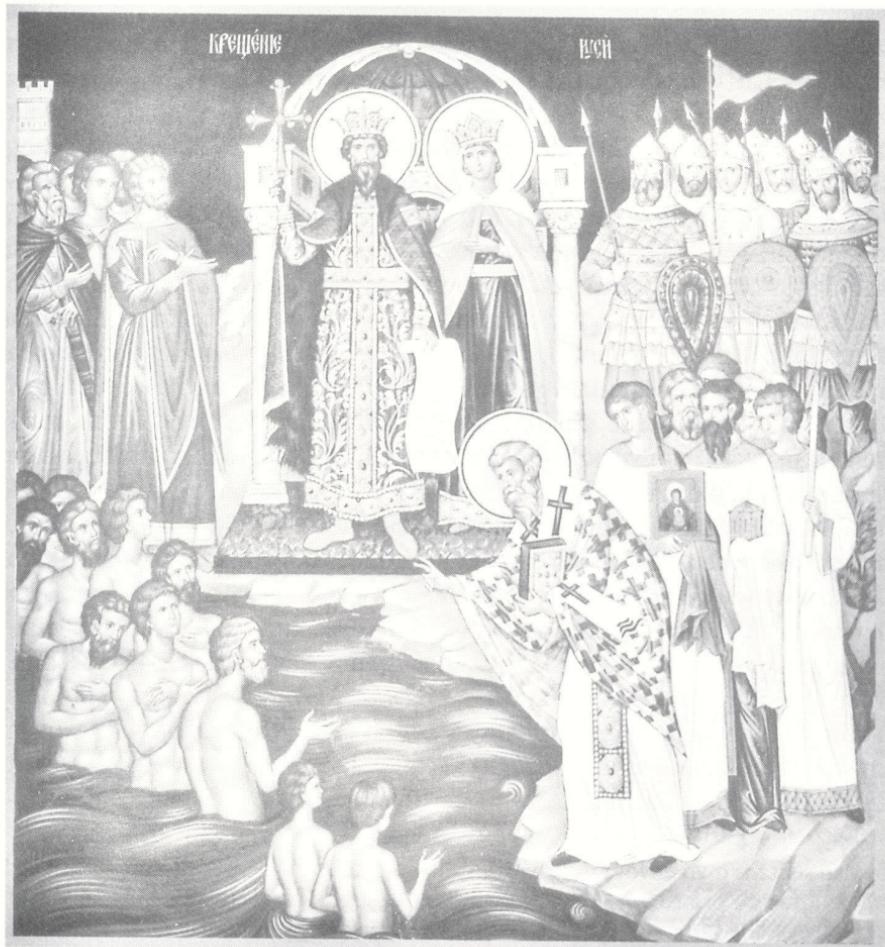
Also, on the domestic front, Vladimir soon ordered the Christian conversion of Kiev and Novgorod. Idols, as we said, were either destroyed on land or hurled into the Dnieper River, that is, after local resistance had been suppressed. The new Rus Christian worship adopted the Byzantine rite in the Old Church Slavonic language. The Byzantines, nevertheless, in order to keep an eye on the infant Church's growth into maturity, maintained ecclesiastical control over the new Rus Church. They appointed a Greek metropolitan, or archbishop, for Kiev, who functioned both as legate of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate and of the emperor. The Rus-Byzantine religio-political integration checked the inroads of the Roman Latin Church in the Slavic East. Thus, this unity between Constantinople and Kiev determined the course of Russian Christianity. Nevertheless, it is known that Kiev still exchanged legates with the papacy.²⁵ Russia, thereupon, live and developed under the political, social, and commercial influence of the Byzantine Empire. The Russians had become gradually enlightened, even since the times of Askold (Oskold).²⁶ This was facilitated by means of commerce, peace treaties, and all manner of dealings with the Byzantines—as well as with the Bulgarians and Slavonians of kindred

²⁵ Grand Prince Vladimir received papal emissaries in 986, 988, 991, 992, and 1000. He also sent his own envoys to Rome in 993 and 1001.

²⁶ Askold was a prince who ruled Kiev in the 870s. He had converted to Orthodoxy. When Rurik died, he was succeeded by his kinsman Oleg who took care of Rurik's minor son Igor. Oleg attacked and conquered Kiev, ca. 882, killing both Princes Askold and Dir.

origin with themselves, who had already been in possession of the sacred Scriptures in their own tongue. After many years, the Russian sovereign of Kiev, and later of Moscow, became the protector of the Orthodox Church.

The accounts of how Vladimir rid his nation of their dependency on idols are very interesting. Some of the images were cut to pieces before the people, while others were consigned to the flames. Vladimir instructed that it be carried out so that the people would recognize that they were in no danger of retribution from their so-called gods. Vladimir also ordered that twelve men beat the idols with sticks. The most feared of the pagan deities, Perun, was heaved into the waves of the Dnieper, so that it should float downstream and over the falls. The onlookers were astonished that no repercussions were forthcoming when their gods were desecrated and destroyed.



The Baptism of Russia

Vladimir now had been surrounded and supported by the faithful Orthodox in his own domestic circle. He was further encouraged by seeing his boyars²⁷ and suite prepared to receive the Faith through holy Baptism. Vladimir then dispatched messengers into Kiev and throughout the countryside. He gave orders that all the people were to gather by the shore of the Pochainya, which flows into the Dnieper, in order to receive holy Baptism. The heralds announced: "Whosoever, on the morrow, should not go down to the river Dnieper, whether rich or poor, shall be deemed an enemy of the grand prince." Most did not oppose the invitation, trusting that their prince chose for them the best religion. Multitudes assembled by the river on the dawn of the 1st day of the month of September, in the year 988. As they stood on the banks of the river, Grand Prince Vladimir was present with all the priests. He explained Christianity to the people and told them that they must prepare to immerse themselves in the streams of water. Three times the priests dipped the fingers of their right hands into the Dnieper, tracing the sign of the Cross over it and sanctifying its water. Male and female were bidden to enter separately after they removed their clothing. They divided into groups and waded into the waters. The older people were able to go deeper into the water, while the younger, with their mothers, stayed closer to the shore. Wooden planks were lined up on the riverbank for the priests, as they read the sacred prayers over the candidates. The people were ordered to immerse themselves under the water three times. The priests, meanwhile, invoked loudly the name of the Holy Trinity over the people, as it is recorded in the rite of this holy Mystery. Indeed, both heaven and earth were glad that day.

Vladimir, observing the priests baptize his people, was filled with the Spirit and exclaimed: "O great Lord God, Who created heaven and earth, look down upon these new people. Grant that they come to know Thee, as the other Orthodox Christians know Thee, as the true God. Do Thou strengthen and make them steadfast in the true and pure Orthodox Faith. Do Thou glorify Thine all-holy name in the lands of the Rus. Yea, Lord, give me help in warring against the wily adversary, both visible and invisible, that, believing in Thee and Thy mightiness, I can overcome the devil's intentions." The newly-illumined flock went back to shore, confident that a new life had begun for them.

Since the land was overrun with idols, Vladimir issued more orders to rid his domain of pagan images and temples. As we said, the idol of Perun, the

²⁷ At that time, boyars in the land of the eastern Slavs possessed considerable power through their military support of the Kievan princes. They occupied the highest state offices and through a council (Duma) advised the prince. They received extensive grants of land and, as members of the Boyars' Duma, were the major legislators of Kievan Rus.

chief deity of Slavic superstitions, was hitched to the tail of a horse. The graven image was dragged along the rough terrain of the hill along the Boryciv to the stream. Twelve men were assigned to use wooden staves and thrash the idol. By this public display, Vladimir desired to make two facts obvious: the wooden idols were insensible and the indwelling demons were put to open shame. When the horseman assigned to drag the idol, together with the squad of men armed with staves, arrived at the bank, they hurled the odious object into the waters. The idol floated downstream and over the rapids. Beyond that heavy winds brought it to the point where a mighty wave disgorged the idol at the foot of a mountain. The site became known as Mount Perun. Some faithful Christians discovered the Perun idol and smashed it to pieces with a club.

Other idols, as they tossed about on the waves, were followed by intransigent pagans. As they observed the progress of their gods, they kept crying aloud, "Swim, O supreme god!" The demons that kept the idol afloat brought it to the shore.²⁸ While the pagans desired to rescue it, Christians overtook them. They fastened a rock to the abominable statue and threw it into the river and it sunk. Others idols, as we said, were committed to the flames. Many of the Kievens lamented the death of their gods. When they finally came to realize the errant nonsense of their mourning, they declared, "Our Grand Prince Vladimir is a wise man. He would not have chosen another religion, a superior one, if our gods had been strong and good. It was proper that he has rejected those that we see cannot even help themselves."

Vladimir's energy for his former passions were transformed into zeal for good works. He commissioned architects and craftsmen from Constantinople to construct a church, dedicated to our Savior Christ, on the site where the graven image of Perun had been set up for worship. He also erected a church to his patron, Saint Basil the Great. He was responsible for the building of many other churches. But one of the most famous among the churches erected by Vladimir was the Desyatinnaya (Tithe), dedicated to the Dormition of the Theotokos, designed by Byzantine architects. That hallowed edifice came to be the symbol of the Rus conversion. Vladimir was desirous of making a sacred precinct in which services could be conducted daily. It was called the Tithe Church because Vladimir gave ten percent of his income for the construction and maintenance of the cathedral. The tithe, according to the ordinance ascribed to Grand Prince Vladimir, consisted of the fixed quota of corn, cattle, and profits from trade for the support of the clergy and the poor. Apart from these, there was a further tithe collected from every cause which was tried; for the right of judging causes was granted to the bishops and the

²⁸ The Vyubitsky Monastery now stands where the idol came ashore. The name given to the monastery is in recognition of the idolaters screaming "Vydbai!" ("Swim!").

metropolitan; and they judged according to the *Nomocanon*. The canons of the holy synods and the Greek ecclesiastical laws, together with the holy Scriptures, were taken, from the very first, as the basis of all ecclesiastical administration in Russia. In addition with them, there came into use some portions also of the civil law of the Greeks, through the influence of the Church. This Tithe Church, furthermore, held particular significance for Vladimir, because its foundations settled on the spot where the two Varangians, Theodore and John, father and son, had suffered martyrdom.²⁹ The first metropolitan, Michael, was not to live to view its completion. His relics, nonetheless, were buried within the sacred precinct. Afterward they were translated to the Pechersky Lavra. Another metropolitan, Leontios, a Greek by birth, sent by the same Patriarch Nicholas, consecrated the new temple, to the profound joy of Vladimir. On the day of consecration, Vladimir uttered this prayer to God, even as Solomon of old who built the temple in Jerusalem: "O God, 'look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vine. And perfect that which Thy right hand hath planted [Ps. 79:15, 16].' Look upon Thy new people named after Thee, whose hearts Thou didst convert that they may know Thee, the true God. Look upon this new church which I, Thine unworthy slave, have constructed in honor of Thine all-pure Mother, the Theotokos, Thy Birth-giver. If one should entreat with faith and fervor in this church, hearken unto such a one's petition. Forgive him his every sin, through the intercessions of the immaculate Mother of God. Grant him those things which are profitable for his salvation." Vladimir then paused, continuing with interior prayer. He then said aloud, "Behold, of all that I have and from all of my cities, do I give one-tenth to this Church of the Theotokos!" He not only spoke these words, but he also committed them to writing. He, furthermore, enjoined upon those who succeeded him, that they dare not misappropriate what belonged to the Church. The priest assigned to that church was none other than Archpriest Anastasios, formerly of Cherson. The relics of Saint Clement, Pope of Rome, were also enshrined therein.

Grand Prince Vladimir took no small part in the apostolic work among his people. He shared this burden with the Greek bishops and priests, who went about the towns and villages proclaiming the Gospel and building churches. Since 980, he had consolidated the Russian state from the Ukraine to the Baltic. The union of the conquered city-states would be wrought far more easily if they all adopted the one true Faith. Thousands willingly accepted and embraced Orthodoxy, but there were also many who were entrenched in the ancestral deception of paganism. The population of Kievan Rus along the main water routes was baptized gradually. As might be expected, the larger

²⁹ The date of their commemoration on the Slavonic Calendar is the 12th of July.

centers were converted first, which were followed by the outlying regions. The process did not always take place as smoothly as it had in Kiev. Most of the opposition came from the pagan priests. Though the latter had little influence in southern Rus, yet in the north—in Novgorod the Great, Suzdal, and Belozersk—yet they incited their followers to perpetrate acts of hostility against the Christian priests.

Although Christianity diffused throughout the whole of Russia, still the Faith was nowhere firmly established. Why was this? Because there were no bishops regularly settled in the towns. Metropolitan Leontios, whom we mentioned earlier, formed the first five dioceses. He appointed Joachim of Cherson to be Bishop of Novgorod, Theodore of Rostov, Neophytes of Chernigov, Stephen the Volhynian of Vladimir, and Niketas of Belgorod. Assisted by Dobrynya, the uncle of the Grand Prince Vladimir, who had long governed in Novgorod, the new Bishop Joachim threw the statue of Perun into the Volkov. He broke down the idolaters' altars without any opposition on the part of the citizens; for they, too, as the Kievens, from their comparative degree of civilization and from their relations of intercourse with the Greeks, were in all probability already favorably disposed for the reception of Christianity. Tradition asserts that, even as far back as the time of Saint Olga, the hermits Sergios and Germanos lived upon the desolate island of Valaam on Lake Ladoga, and that from thence Saint Abramios went forth to preach Christ to the wild mannered inhabitants of Rostov.

The attempt to found a diocese at Rostov was less successful. The first two bishops, Theodore and Hilarion, were driven away by the fierce tribes of the forest district of Meri, who held obstinately to their idols in spite of the zeal of Saint Abramios. It cost the two succeeding bishops, the holy Leontios and Esaias, many years of extraordinary labor and exertion, attended frequently by persecutions, before they at length succeeded in establishing Christianity in that savage region, from whence it spread itself by degrees into all the surrounding districts.

In actual practise, for a long time, the pagan religion and its rites were countenanced by the new converts to the Christian religion. The stubborn pagans and their practises were a grief for Vladimir, but he did not relent in bringing Orthodoxy to his benighted people. He believed that the best path to lead his people to the light of Christ was through education. He no longer wished to take up the sword to achieve victory. He, therefore, founded schools where even youngsters from the neediest echelons of society were given the opportunity to learn letters—though there were instances when rude peasant parents were unwilling to send their children. Some were also trained for a future homegrown clergy. He also insisted that his own children take up book learning. Consequently, his children, together with those of the nobility, were

given lessons in both Greek and Slavonic letters. Vladimir spared no expense in providing competent instructors. Vladimir's goal was not limited to the confines of Kiev. He sent priests to all the cities of Russia in order to baptize the people. He had the priests from the Chersonese Taurica, those who could speak in the Slavic tongue, serve as teachers. The liturgy was in Slavonic, and this made the new religion less alien to the people.

Education was not the only program he established. He also set up humanitarian programs for the poor and needy. They could come to his residence at any time and receive alms. As for those whose infirmities made them immobile, he dispatched carts laden with provisions. His baskets of charity consisted of bread, meat, fish, vegetables, honey, and kvass. No major Church feast day passed without three huge tables laid out: "The first table was for the metropolitan, bishops, monks, and priests; the second for the paupers and the poor; and the third for himself, his boyars, and all his men. The blessed Prince Vladimir likened himself to the holy rulers—the Prophet-King David, King Ezekias,³⁰ the thrice-blessed King Josias,³¹ and the great Constantine³²—who embraced and desired God's law more than anything else. They served God with all their hearts and received God's grace. Upon their repose, they inherited Paradise and received the kingdom of the heavens with all the saints who pleased God."³³

Those writers who were practically contemporary with Vladimir note the following. Even as a pagan prince, Vladimir used to behave kindly and mercifully. Once he had become a Christian, his generosity knew no bounds. Jacob the Monk in the *Chronicle* says that "Vladimir was charitable not only toward people in his own house but also to all the city. Indeed, his alms were not confined to Kiev but found their way throughout the towns and villages of the Russian land. His munificence was practised everywhere in the form of clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, refreshing the thirsty, setting foreigners at ease by his charity, showing love and favor to clerics and providing for their needs, taking care of paupers, orphans, and widows, as well as the blind, the lame, the overburdened, and anyone else." Contemporary Metropolitan Hilarion adds that "Vladimir would free laborers and redeem debtors. Beggars would assemble in his courtyard every day, and he would receive them always and give them what for which they asked: food,

³⁰ Ezekias or Hezekiah instituted religious reforms by destroying the pagan shrines of Baal worship and by restoring the temple at Jerusalem to its primacy.

³¹ Josias or Josiah was a religious reformer who extirpated paganism by purging the Jerusalem temple of idolatrous shrines and statues.

³² Emperor Constantine I was the first Roman emperor who made Christianity the state religion.

³³ Monk Iakov, pp. 171, 172.

drink, or even marten skins and money. As to the sick and the weak who could not come and ask, the grand prince organized a whole service for them: wagons would be loaded with bread, meat, fish, fruit, also casks of mead and of kvas (Vladimir would not dream of depriving a poor ne'er-do-well of a healthy drink), and driven around Kiev. The driver, who was sometimes one of Vladimir's sons, generally Boris—would cry out, 'Where is there a poor man who cannot walk?' This was done so that everyone received what he needed. On the Lord's Day, three plentiful banquets were arranged: one for the clergy, one for the poor, one for the prince and his retinue. If Vladimir happened to be away, the banquets still went on as scheduled."³⁴

Vladimir also abolished capital punishment, that is, the death penalty. As to the latter, his counselors complained that the criminal element within their society was increasing. When the metropolitan asked the grand prince why he did not execute those malefactors worthy of death, Vladimir admitted to him that he feared sinning. The metropolitan explained to him that God appointed him as ruler, so that he who sets himself against the authority has withheld the ordinance of God; and they who have withheld shall receive judgment to themselves. For the rulers are not a terror to good works, but to bad ones. The ruler is a minister of God for the good. But if one commits evil, he should be afraid. For the ruler does not bear the sword in vain. He is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to the one who commits crimes.³⁵ Vladimir was, therefore, encouraged not to let the evil prevail and multiply lest the good people should be prevented from living in peace and engaging in fair commerce. Vladimir, consequently, expanded judicial institutions. Capital punishment, predictably, was replaced by money fines.

By this time, the Patriarch of Constantinople was Sergios II (1001-1019). Vladimir needed more bishops and priests. His sprawling empire was in need of more laborers to bring in the harvest. Most of his people were still uneducated and not much inclined to spiritual discipline. Sergios tried to help by sending Bishop Joachim, a Greek native of Cherson, with other bishops and a great number of priests. Vladimir accompanied them throughout his lands. They went to the province of Rostov and Suzdal. They established a city above the Klyzama River, calling it Vladimir, where the grand prince built a church to the Theotokos and installed a bishop. At Rostov, he built a wooden church.

Liturgical texts were of course Greek in origin, but only the Slavonic translations made by Saint Cyril-Constantine were used. Vladimir did not wish to let Russia fall under an exaggerated Greek influence. However, it was different with building, construction, and design. Inevitably some architects

³⁴ Vladimir Volkoff, "Basileus," *Vladimir the Russian Viking*, pp. 254, 255.

³⁵ Cf. Rom. 13:2-4.

had to be imported from Byzantium, certainly to raise up the largest churches. Willy-nilly, craftsman also were brought in for the adornment of the sacred precincts with traditional icons and mosaics. The Russians, who were deemed to be the best carpenters of their time, were quick to learn. They soon imitated the Greeks and were building their own wooden buildings. Now the architecture of all these buildings was of course conceived as an imitation of the Byzantine. Nevertheless, different materials and climates produced different styles. Greek structures had to be adapted to Russian necessities. Recruitment of priests was not a great problem. It was rather where clerical hierarchy was concerned that difficulties arose. Vladimir strived to make the Church in his land if not already autocephalous, at least as independent as possible. Vladimir surrounded himself with a council of bishops with whom he consulted frequently to find better ways of establishing true Christianity among the new converts.

With regard to the foundation of an ecclesiastical judicial power, the following points were made. The Church would have her own tribunals and no one but the Church could take cognizance of the following cases: divorce, adultery, fights between married persons, abduction, incest, magic, poisoning, witchcraft, incantations, accusations of fornication, poisoning, heresy, biting, striking of a father or of a mother by a son or by a daughter, or striking of a mother-in-law by a daughter-in-law, contests about legacies among siblings or descendants, robbing of churches, robbing of a dead man's clothes, mutilation of the Cross or of the walls of a church, introduction of cattle or dogs or birds into a church without great need, other unbecoming actions in church, in the case of a fight between two men the sexual mutilation of one by the other's wife, intercourse with four-legged creatures, heathen worship in barns or woods or by streams, and abortion. Simply put, the Church held jurisdiction over family, sexual, and religious matters.

There was no trace of an inquisition in Vladimir's time. One must remember that the Vikings' judicial traditions were extremely mild. If the worst came to the worst, it would have been a question of a fine but not burning at the stake. Vladimir had his council of bishops for religious matters, but he consulted his boyars, generals, and city elders for other issues. First of all, he began to mint coins. No other Kiev prince had ever done this. Though they were crude gold and silver pieces, they were stamped with an engraving of either a hammer, or Jesus Christ in imperial attire, or an hereditary trident. Vladimir could have entrusted the work to Greek artisans for a more satisfactory product, but he insisted that a Russian prince should have coins, the symbol of sovereignty, minted by Russians. He figured that, with time, his

minters would master the making of coins that were much more smooth, symmetrical, and detailed.³⁶



Saint Vladimir

years, he kept to Kiev. He continued his programs, such as the dispatch of wagons laden with food stuffs for the poor and articles for the adornment of churches and monasteries.

It is true that Vladimir, as much as he would have liked to devote himself exclusively to peacetime activities and missionary work, found it impossible to put away soldiering completely. He was forced to defend his people and his Faith from the invading hordes of the fierce Pechenegs. Although he was successful in vanquishing his foe, for which he gave thanks, still he was more elated at the Baptism of one of the Pecheneg princes.

³⁶ V. Volkoff, pp. 245-256.

³⁷ This is Vladimir's grandson: Bryachislav Izyaslavich (b. ca. 997-d. 1044) who was the prince of Polotsk between 1001 and 1044. He was the elder of the two sons of Izyaslav Vladimirovich. Perhaps this grandson replaced Vladimir's son who is not mentioned herein, Pozvizd, who died in 1015.

Vladimir continued from city to city, making the complete circuit until he arrived home in Kiev. He then proceeded to carve out his domain into twelve princedoms, that is, one princedom per child: (1) Svyatopolk in Turov; (2) Vysheslav in Novgorod the Great; (3) Izyaslav of Polotsk in Polotsk; (4) Yaroslav the Wise in Rostov; (5) Vsevolod in Vladimir; (6) Svyatoslav in Drevlyany; (7) Mstislav in Tmutorokan; (8) Boris in Rostov; (9) Gleb in Murom; (10) Stanislav in Smolensk; (11) Sudislav in Pskov; and, (12) Bryachislav in Lutsk of Volynia.³⁷ When Vysheslav died in Novgorod the Great, he transferred Yaroslav to his place. Boris was then set in Rostov. Vladimir, not forgetting what took place between his own brothers, counseled his sons to remain within their own appointed boundaries. He urged them to live in peace and harmony. He also exhorted each son to bring about the full conversion of the people in his own inheritance. Each son received a bishop and priests for the edification and building of the Church in each princedom.

As for Vladimir, since he was getting on in

Vladimir loved God with all his heart and soul, and he sought and preserved His commands. All the lands feared him and brought him tribute. The Grand Prince Vladimir exulted and rejoiced in God and in his holy Baptism, praising and glorifying God for all this. In joy and with a humble heart he would say, “Good Lord and Master, Thou didst remember me and lead me to the light; and I came to know Thee, Maker of all creatures. Glory to Thee, God of everything, Father of our God, the Lord Jesus Christ! Glory to Thee with the Son and the Holy Spirit for having had mercy on me! I was in darkness, serving the devil and demons, but Thou didst enlighten me through holy Baptism. I was like a beast. I committed much evil while a pagan and lived as an animal, but Thou didst tame me and train me through Thy grace. Glory to Thee, O God, Who art glorified in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! O Holy Trinity, have mercy on me, direct me onto Thy path, and instruct me to do Thy will, because Thou art my God.”³⁸

The introduction of Christianity did not lead to Byzantium’s political domination of Rus. Much rather, new contacts were engendered between Rus and her neighbors—those close and those more distant. Vladimir’s vision for the Church was to secure her within the structure of his state. He very much wished to have the Russian Church emulate the position held by the Church within the Byzantine Empire. The Christianization of Rus was engineered by Byzantium: she not only supplied the first hierarchs and missionary clergy but also introduced Byzantine art, education, and literature.

Vladimir’s life of mercy and munificence won him the love of his own people and the respect of foreign governments. This included the Poles, Hungarians, and Czechs, whom he no longer engaged in battle. (The only exception was the nation of Pechenegs.) At length, Vladimir’s past life of pagan ferocity became a half-forgotten memory. While our Savior granted him a long life, which he filled with good deeds upon embracing Christianity, he had a final temptation, a final cleansing as it were, before he departed this life to the Master Christ. The repose of his beloved Anna, in 1011, with whom he had shared twenty-three years of mutual counsel and love, was a grief to him. After a period of mourning, Vladimir married a German princess, the daughter of Count Kuno, related to the Emperor Otto I, from whom his grandmother Olga had requested missionaries when she hoped to Christianize Russia. It was at about the same time that Vladimir came face to face with the perfidy of two of his offspring: Svyatopolk of Turiv and Yaroslav the Wise. Vladimir prepared a campaign against Yaroslav. But the impending battle was checked when Vladimir succumbed to illness brought on by age. Concurrently, dreadful tidings of a Pecheneg advance forced the elderly Grand Prince

³⁸ Monk Iakov, pp. 172, 173.

Vladimir to send to war his beloved young son Boris. The young man, of course, obeyed his father and went out to meet the adversary with all his military force.

Meanwhile, Vladimir grew weaker and weaker. He remained in Kiev with Svyatopolk, whom he had not long before imprisoned for having plotted against him with the Poles. Svyatopolk, for his part, was counting the moments till Vladimir's death. As Vladimir's illness grew worse, he still prepared for a proper Christian end. He made a good confession before he surrendered his soul into the hands of God. This was his prayer to God, even as he was departing from this world: "Lord, my God! I did not know Thee, but Thou didst have mercy on me and enlightened me through holy Baptism. I came to know Thee, O God of everything, holy Maker of all creation, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to Thee with the Son and the Holy Spirit! Master, God, recall not my wickedness! I did not know Thee while I was still a pagan, but now I know Thee. Lord, my God, have mercy on me! If Thou desirest to punish and torment me because of my sins, punish me Thyself, but do not hand me over to the demons!"³⁹ Saying this and praying to God, he peacefully commended his soul to the Lord's angels and reposed on the 15th day of the month of July, in the year 1015, at Berestove.

Saint Vladimir had held the principality of Kiev for thirty-five years, that is, eight years as a pagan before his Baptism, and twenty-seven years and several months as a Christian after his Baptism. Since Svyatopolk was present at Kiev, they actually tried to conceal the repose of Vladimir. At night they made a break between the boards, wrapped the body in a rug, and lowered it in the Tithe Church of the Holy Theotokos—the one built by Vladimir. John, the third metropolitan, who had been sent from Constantinople upon the death of Leontios, buried the grand prince in a marble tomb in the Church of the Tithes, near the tomb of the Byzantine princess, his wife Anna; and the incorrupt relics of his grandmother, the holy Olga, were translated to the same spot.⁴⁰ The boyars and the Kievans, mourning the loss of their holy grand prince as their own father and enlightener, laid him to rest in a marble sepulcher. He was fifty-five years of age. Svyatopolk succeeded his father briefly.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 174, 175.

⁴⁰ The Tithe Church of the Dormition was almost consumed by fire in 1017. It was rebuilt and rededicated in 1039. It was, in 1240, finally destroyed by the Mongols. Archeological excavations of the site indicate that the church was built using the three-apse, six-column plan that would become typical for medieval Rus stone churches.

⁴¹ Svyatopolk I, born 978, is counted among Vladimir's sons. He was the son-in-law of the Polish prince Boleslaw I the Brave and prince of Turiv, from which position he was

(continued...)

With regard to the canonization of the Grand Prince Vladimir, the exact year is unknown. His canonization, however, was first mentioned in the *Hypatian Chronicle*, in the year 1254; so this could well be the year of his canonization. He was venerated by the clergy for his unstinting support of the Church. He was known as the holy, equal-to-the-apostles, Grand Prince of Kiev. He was also called the baptizer of Russia. Vladimir and his grandmother, Saint Olga—considered the spiritual mother of the Russian people, who was as the dawning light that heralds the sun, Vladimir—are venerated as enlighteners of their people. O Vladimir, as the grandson of the all-blessed Olga, thou wast confirmed by the love of that new Helen; and thou didst show thyself to be a new Constantine the Great, loving Christ and teaching thy people to believe in and worship the one God in Trinity.

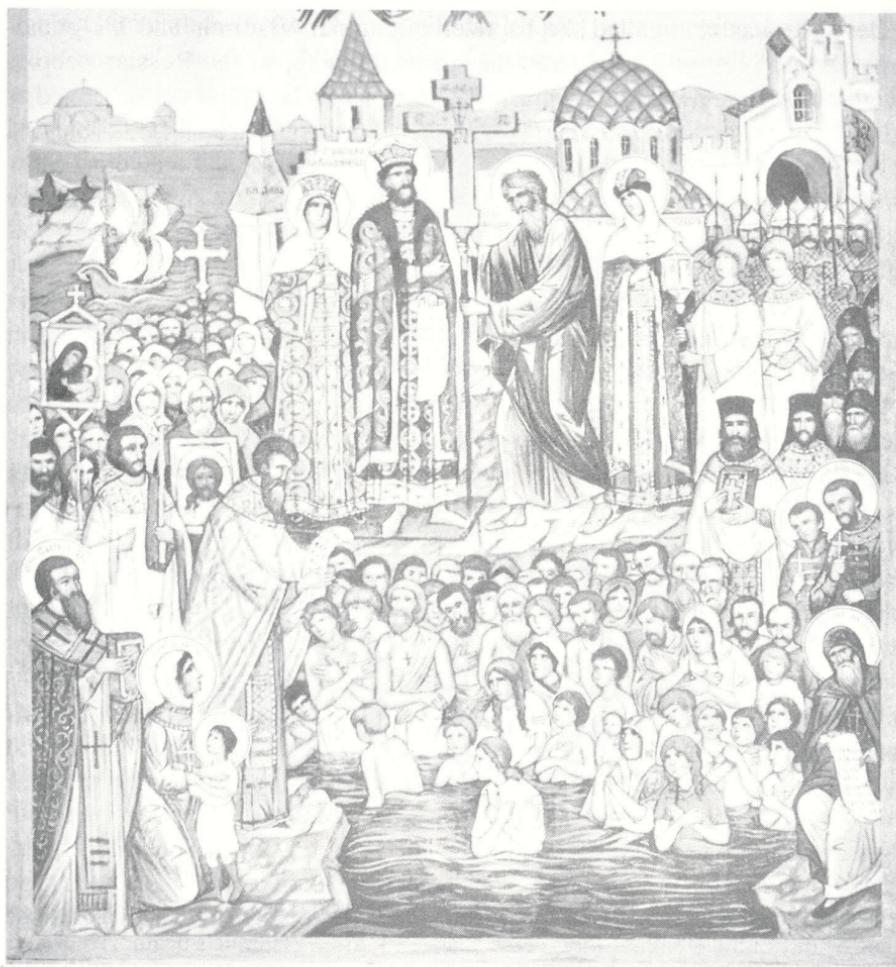
Encomium to Saint Vladimir

In enumerating the wonders of the Christian Faith, we must not forget those innumerable and great miracles, the changes of heart and character in people truly converted to Orthodoxy. How many senseless evildoers has the Faith tamed!...How many debauched men has it reformed into men of chaste life! How many persecutors has it turned into defenders! How many self-seeking and avaricious men has it made compassionate!...Metropolitan Philaret wrote thus about the Russian Prince Vladimir: "A lover of all the passions, he could not have loved them more, yet the pagan Vladimir found Christianity and became a model of pure and chaste married life. He put away from himself all the women and the concubines, and lived with Anna, a faithful and devout woman. Once a malicious, vengeful, and bloodthirsty fratricide stained him while a pagan, but once he became a Christian he became the most compassionate friend of the deprived and unfortunate. They had free access to him, and he distributed both food and money to them with a generous hand. And he even went further than that: he said that the sick were in no state to come to the

⁴¹(...continued)

ousted in 1012 because of a conspiracy against Vladimir. Svyatopolk captured Kiev on the 15th day of the month of July, in the year 1015, after Vladimir's death. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, he ordered the death of his brothers, Boris and Gleb, and Svyatoslav. He planned to unite the lands inherited from his father, but his stepbrother, Yaroslav the Wise, then prince of Novgorod the Great, opposed him. Svyatopolk allied with the Pechenegs, but he was defeated by Yaroslav's armies at the Battle of Liubech at the end of 1016, and fled to Poland. With assistance from the Polish army, he regained the Kievan throne in August of 1018; that same year, however, Yaroslav the Wise returned and banished him. Svyatopolk again enlisted the help of the Pechenegs, but he was defeated at the Alta River in July of 1019. He died while fleeing westward to the wilderness between Czech and Polish lands. See online at <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com, loc. cit.>

palace, so he ordered that meat and fish, bread, yeast and honey be taken round the streets. The words of the Gospel: 'Blessed are the merciful,'⁴² penetrated into the very depths of his heart and became a principle of life for him."⁴³



*The Baptism of Russia
(Apostle Andrew holding the Cross,
flanked by the holy Olga, Vladimir, and Anna)*

⁴² Mt. 5:7.

⁴³ "For Consideration," *The Prologue from Ochrid.*

The Monk Iakov (11th C.), in his "Memorial and Encomium for Prince Volodimer of Rus," writes: "The gift of God overshadowed him. The grace of the Holy Spirit illumined his heart. He wished to walk according to God's commandment and to live virtuously in God and to hold a firm, indomitable faith. He baptized all the land of Rus, from one end to the other, and he trampled upon the pagan gods, or rather demons, that of Perun and Xor and many others. He became as the mouth of God. He led people to God from the devil's delusion."⁴⁴

The blessed Vladimir emulated the deeds and conduct of the holy men of old. He loved the story of Abraham and imitated his hospitality, as well as the account of the trust of Jacob, the gentleness of Moses, the innocence of David, and the piety of Emperor Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor. Most of all, Grand Prince Vladimir performed almsgiving. He heard and believed that charity and love would cover a multitude of sins.⁴⁵ If the infirm and the aged could not come to the prince's court and receive their necessities, he would send the goods to them at home. The blessed Prince Vladimir would provide every necessity to the infirm and the aged. It is not possible to calculate the abundance of alms he dispensed in his own household and throughout the entire city—indeed, not only in Kiev alone but even throughout the towns and villages of the land of Rus. He would clothe the naked. He would give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. He showed respect and charity toward churchmen, supplying them with what they needed. His contributions covered multitudes of paupers, orphans, and widows. His benefactions provided comfort and assistance to the blind, the lame, and all the afflicted. Thus, he maintained good works to the end. God's grace illuminated his heart, and the Lord's hand abided on him. He conquered all his enemies, and they feared him. Wherever he went, he prevailed.⁴⁶

"O holy Emperors Constantine and Vladimir, help your kinsmen against their enemies and deliver your Orthodox people, Greek and Rus, from every misfortune!"⁴⁷

⁴⁴ P. Hollingsworth, *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, Vol. II, p. 165 ff.

⁴⁵ 1 Pe. 4:8.

⁴⁶ He conquered the Radimicians (a Slavic tribe dwelling northeast of Kiev between the Desna and the Dnieper) and imposed tribute on them. He conquered the Vjaticians (a Slavic tribe living to the east of the Radimicians between the Desna and the Oka) and imposed tribute on them twice since they rebelled again. He seized the Jatvingians and their land. They were a Lithuanian tribe living northwest of the river Pripet. He conquered the Silver Bulgars. He campaigned against the Khazars, conquered them, and imposed tribute. Monk Iakov, pp. 173-175 and notes.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 181.