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Christianization of the Nations of Central and South-East Europe and the Conversion of Old Rus'

Boris N. FLORJA — Gennadij G. LITAVRIN (Moskva)

Conversion to Christianity was an important event in the life of any nation in the early Middle Ages: it brought about serious changes also in the internal life of the society and in the system of its international relations. Christianity is not only a religious teaching, but also a specific social order, political doctrine, a system of cultural values, and a complex of moral ideals and rules of Man's behaviour in the family and in society. The official conversion to Christianity by the nations of South-East, Central and Eastern Europe in the 9th and 10th centuries was far from coincidental — it was a time of the foundation and consolidation of early feudal states, of the origination of classes and extension of international contacts. Christianity spread, first of all, on Slovene (8th century) and Croatian (mid-9th century) lands, bordering on Franconia and being in permanent and close contact with the population of North Dalmatian towns, Christianized long before, part of whom recognized the sovereignty of Croatian Princes. In the second half of the 9th century, Christianity was adopted in Great Moravia, on the territory of Bohemia dependent on it, and also in Bulgaria and the Serbian principalities (with the exception of Pagania — Narentania). In the middle of the next century, Poland, too, became Christianized, followed by Hungary, and — at the end of that century — Old Rus'.

The process of Christianization was taking place everywhere at approximately the same stage of social development and was due, in general, to the same causes, occurring with the decisive participation of state power, and contributing to the establishment of a new (feudal) social order and the consolidation of the apparatus of central government, as well as to the raising of the prestige of the head of State. Conversion to Christianity also gave a mighty impulse to the development of culture. Christianization and the beginnings of literary culture of the Slavic (and many non-Slavic) nations were essentially two different sides of a single phenomenon.

Many common features can, undoubtedly, be discerned in the process of Christianization in the different European countries examined in this article, but its speed, forms and methods differed in each specific case showing a number of particularities which were, sometimes, fundamental. In connection with that it seems useful to attempt, with the aim of adopting a broader approach to the problem, a comparison, albeit only a partial one, of the process of Christianization of the population of Old Rus' and a number of nations in Central and South-East Europe.

The length of time which had elapsed from the first acquaintance with Christianity of the different nations of this vast region to their official Christianization differed very much. The Slavs inhabiting the Balkans and the centre of Europe were the first to come into direct contact with

Christians at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century. But neither the missionary activities of the clergy of the Byzantine Empire and the Franconian state, nor the conditions of some Slavonians within Byzantine territory, nor outside diplomatic and military pressure on pagans resulted in any substantial success until the end of the 8th and the 9th century. Outside interference proved to be the decisive factor in Christianization only in conditions of a full political subjection of pagans (Carantania) or their direct conquest (Slavs in the Byzantine Empire, and Polabian Slavs). Polabian Slavs, whose organization of the worship of pagan gods was especially well developed, responded to outside pressure with joining their forces together ever more closely, and, in this case, outside interference did not speed up but, on the contrary, slowed down considerably the process of Christianization.

The upper social layers of the pagan society, the level of their consolidation, the existence of the necessary material means for guaranteeing Christianization, and the understanding of the need for and the advantages of the conversion to the new religion, played a decisive role in all cases. Acts of formal baptism of the representatives of clan-tribal alliances of Slavic nobility in the Balkans, and often even of entire tribes, took place, if Constantin Porphyrogenitus is to be believed, as early as the 7th century. Serbs and Croats, he writes, were baptised and received priests while forming an alliance with Emperor Heraclius (610—641) and settling in the Balkans.¹ Also baptised were part of the Bohemian Princes in the middle of the 9th century, and part of the Hungarian chiefs in the middle of the 10th century. It was characteristic that in none of those cases, a direct military danger from a Christian state had been threatening the Christianized leaders of pagan political alliances — the act of baptism did not mean their rejection of paganism, it was a formal and diplomatic act making it easier to obtain advantageous agreements with the ruler of the Christian state.

Such was, most probably, also the "baptism" of Old Russians in the sixties of the 9th century. After their first attack on Constantinople, the Byzantine rulers succeeded in winning the Russian princes over to baptism by means of expansive gifts and by granting them conditions of agreement favourable for Rus'.² Although this conversion, about which Patriarch Photius officially and broadly informed the Christian world,³ was one of the reasons why, at a later stage, the Byzantines did not assign any significance to the genuine Christianization of Rus' in 988—989, it was without any substantial consequence as were the above-mentioned cases of formal Christianization.

The ripening of the necessary social and political prerequisites for the official conversion to Christianity was reflected particularly in the crisis of paganism as an ideological superstructure not corresponding to the new conditions. Signs of that crisis can be discerned in the changed funeral ritual (burying the dead instead of the traditional cremation) at the end of the 8th and beginning of the 9th century in Great Moravia.⁴ In Bulgaria paganism had experienced an obvious crisis half a century

¹ *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. MORAVCSIK, transl. by R. J. H. JENKINS, Washington 1967, cap. 31.20—25; 32.21—29.

² *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*, Bonn 1838, t. 31, p. 342.

³ *Φωτίου ἐπιστολαί*, ed. J. N. BALETTAS, London 1864, p. 178.

⁴ Z. KLANICA, *Pokus o třídění keramiky z Mikulčic*, in: *Sborník J. Poulíkovi k sedmdesátinám*, Brno 1980, pp. 103—112.

before the official Christianization. The situation was exacerbated there with the age-old pagan dualism which, in the beginning of the 9th century, became a serious obstacle for the consolidation of the country's unity. In the course of the progressing ethnic disintegration and the assimilation of the Protobulgarian element, the sphere of influence of the Protobulgarian paganism was quickly shrinking although it was that paganism in particular which had been cultivated by the supreme power of the Khan as an official cult. High Protobulgarian aristocracy was threatened with religious isolation from the majority of the upper social layers of the society among whom Slavic nobility espousing Slavic forms of paganism had a numerical superiority, as well as from the masses of their Slavic subjects. Moreover, the number of Christians in the country was on the increase and their influence, despite the persecution, was growing. Under Krum (803—814) along with nationwide reforms in the social, administrative and judicial spheres, an attempt was also undertaken to reform the sphere of the cult: the Khan tried to force the Slavic nobility to observe pagan rites as adopted by the Protobulgarians.⁵ This attempt, however, proved in vain. Well-known is also the attempt at a reform of paganism made in the mid-eighties of the 10th century by Kievan Prince Vladimir. The significance of that, also abortive, attempt is given different evaluations by historiographers.⁶ There is, however, no doubt that Vladimir wanted to adapt the traditional forms of paganism to the social relations: Perun, as the protector of the power, and of the retinue of the Prince which formed the core of the emerging ruling class, was put in the centre of the pagan pantheon of Slavic Gods established by the Prince.

One of the expressions of the crisis of pagan ideology was most probably also the period of religious tolerance towards Christians in many Slavic countries prior to official Christianization, and the long period of coexistence of paganism and Christianity. The existence of a double religion of this kind within the region we are dealing with can be traced especially in materials related to Bulgaria and Old Rus'. Thus, beginning with the reign of Presijan, the Bulgarian Khan (836—852), mentions about whatever persecution in the country against Christians disappeared from the Byzantine and Latin sources, while in the first third of that century mentions of this kind were plentiful. We are quite justified to presume that it was this ruler in particular who refused the Turkish title and chose the Slavonic title of "Prince".⁷ It is therefore most probable that by the time of Christianization under Boris (852—889) in 865, a whole generation of subjects who had freely adopted Christianity from their parents and who had freely professed it grew up and started active life in Bulgaria. It is also highly probable that there were places in Bulgaria at that time where Christian cult was practised officially and in an organized way, as in the South and south-west of the country, i.e. in the regions taken away from the Empire. Foundations for this presumption can be found in one of the replies of Pope Nicolas I to the questions

⁵ G. G. LITAVRIN, «Введение христианства в Болгарии (IX — начало X в.)», in: *Принятие христианства народами Центральной и Юго-Восточной Европы и крещение Древней Руси*, Moskva 1988, pp. 37—38.

⁶ В. А. РYBAKOV, «Язычество Древней Руси», Moskva 1987, p. 412 ff.; H. ŁOWMIAŃSKI, *Religia Słowian i jej upadek*, Warszawa 1979, p. 119.

⁷ G. G. LITAVRIN, «Славяне и протоболгары. Традиции и реальность», in: *Втори международен конгрес по българистика. Пленарни доклади*, Sofia 1986, pp. 36—38.

of Prince Boris formulated in the summer of 866. The Pope prohibited a forcible confinement of widows to the convent,⁸ which had been practised, undoubtedly, with the aim of getting hold of the property of women who had lost their husbands. It is difficult to believe that within only one year which had passed from the time of official Christianization, the neophytes would have succeeded not only in setting up convents but also in adopting this practice of getting rid of defenceless women. We would rather think that what is meant here were old convents which had not ceased to function at the time of religious tolerance, and after the territory in question was taken away from the Empire by Bulgaria.

The period of tolerance towards Christians in Rus' was still longer. It is known that by the time of the conclusion of the agreement with the Greeks in 944, there existed in Kiev a Church of St. Elias, a Christian community, and a number of Christians among the noble entourage of the Prince professing without obstacles their faith. Consequently, the beginning of the period of tolerance can be dated as far back as the late twenties and early thirties of the 10th century. The situation was even more favourable for the spreading of the Christian faith in Rus' under the reign of Princess Olga (944—965). If the dating of her journey to Constantinople described by Porphyrogenitus to the year 946 is well-founded, then it is significant that the Princes' messengers included, officially, priest Gregory.⁹ Although Olga's son Svjatoslav did not convert to Christianity and was not particularly well disposed towards the Christians among his subjects, he did not submit them to persecution. Svjatoslav did not destroy Christian churches during the stay of his army in Bulgaria as Byzantine sources make us believe. The attitude of Jaropolk (972—980) to Christians was in all probability still more favourable.¹⁰ The resolution of the Kievan boyars in 983 to sacrifice to the idols a Christian Varyag, and his killing together with his father by pagans does not entitle us to make conclusions about a "pagan reaction" in the beginning of Vladimir's rule. In any case, if that Prince, while attempting to set up a pagan pantheon did adopt any repressive measures against Christians, they were neither longlived nor widespread.

Sources usually do not carry testimonies about the degree to which Christianity penetrated the lower social strata prior to its official adoption. The process was probably at its most intensive in the regions bordering Christian countries as we can judge from objects of the Christian cult discovered by archaeologists in the settlements in the Eastern Carpathians¹¹ which were, in the 10th century, subject to the Prince of Kiev. The subjects could have been encouraged to convert to Christianity also by the social antipathy of the people towards the Protobulgarian, a different ethnic group, rulers in Bulgaria¹². It is, however, significant that the first Christians, a quarter or a third of a century before the official

⁸ «Латински извори за българската история», т. II, Sofia 1965, p. 116.

⁹ G. G. LITAVRIN, «Состав посольства Ольги в Константинополе и "дары" императора», in: Византийские очерки, Moskva 1982, pp. 84—88; cf. V. VODOFF, *Naissance de la chrétienté russe*, Condé-sur-Escaut 1988, p. 52; L. MÜLLER, *Die Taufe Rußlands*, München 1987, p. 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88—91.

¹¹ G. B. FEDOROV, «Тиверцы», Археология (1952) № 2 (4), pp. 250—259; B. ŠČUKIN, «Городище Екиманцы в Молдавии» in: Архитектурное наследство № 8, Moskva 1957, p. 23.

¹² V. BEŠEVLIJEV, «Първобългарите. Бит и култура», Sofia 1981.

Christianization included also the members of the ruling dynasties. Suffice it to mention in this respect Enravota-Voin in Bulgaria, executed by his pagan brother, Khan Malamir (831—836), and Princess Olga.

The choice of Christianity as a state religion in the concerned region of Europe was obviously the logical result of the preceding internal development, and the shaping and consolidation of external political relations. The internal factors were of decisive significance in the process. Paganism hindered a more radical break with the outdated tribal system, and stood in the way of the consolidation of central power. As far as the countries of Central and South-East Europe are concerned, Christianity opened up the possibilities for the assimilation of the wealth of social, political and cultural experience of the neighbouring powerful Christian states with a higher level of social development, and also for the establishment of equal relations with them. Diplomatic, and sometimes direct military, pressure from the outside, played an essential role in the consolidation of Christianity there. The key problem which had to be resolved by the ruling circles in each of the countries before giving up paganism was the choice not between Christianity or any other "alien" religion, but between the two chief Christian centres (Rome or Constantinople), from one of which Christianity had to be adopted. For Carantania, Bohemia, Poland and the Polabian Slavs the choice was in fact predetermined by concrete historical conditions: the Carolingian (and later Holy Roman, German) Empire and other political unions linked to Rome were their main (if not the only) Christian neighbour. Carantanians, Czechs, Poles and Polabian Slavs did not have any stronger links with Byzantium and could not count on its help in the event that they adopted Christianity from it, complicating the relations to the Western Christian world. The fate of the mission of Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia, despite the fact that it left a remarkable imprint on the cultural life of Great Moravia and later Bohemia, revealed, among other things, the lack of perspective for Byzantium's attempts at consolidating, in the existing conditions, its political influence and the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople in Central Europe. It was only the Croatian and Serbian principalities and Bulgaria, as well as the leaders of the Hungarian military and political unions, which had some scope for manoeuvre. Their choice was eventually determined by the realization of the political advantages for their countries in the concrete situation: the Croatian and part of the Serbian Princes could not risk the harming of their relations with the population of the towns of the Dalmatian Littoral tied, from time immemorial, to the Western Roman Church and preferred the adoption of Christianity from Rome. Their decision was undoubtedly also influenced by the direct neighbourhood of Croatian lands with the Carolingian Empire. For the ruler of Bulgaria and the majority of the Serbian Princes, who preferred to adopt Christianity from Byzantium, the fact that the Eastern Christian doctrine officially recognized the factual primacy of secular over spiritual power, which was in contrast with the theocratic claims of the Latin Church that was under the supremacy of the Pope, certainly had great significance. Boris and his entourage could not fail to understand this difference in the political concept and the structure of the Roman and Byzantine Church in the struggle for an independent Bulgarian Church in 866—880 and had to take it into account making

the final decision: the Byzantine state religious doctrine looked more certain to increase the power of the ruler, consolidate his prestige on the international level, and even contribute to the defence of their own rights in the face of the authority and the claims of the Empire itself (suffice it to refer in this connection to the policy of Bulgarian Tsar Symeon, son of Boris).

The problem of the choice of faith was different for the ruling circles in Old Rus'. It could be realized much more freely there. The number of Christian subjects in Rus' under Vladimir was negligible compared to Bulgaria in the middle of the 9th century. Diplomatic pressure on Rus' on the question of faith by the Western Christian countries or Byzantium could not be supported by any effective military interference. The same can be said about the states neighbouring Rus' which professed Islam. The absence of outside threats could have been one of the causes of Rus' converting to Christianity later than many of the countries bordering it. However legendary the details of the story in the chronicles about the "examination of faith" may be, it most probably reflects two basic facts: firstly, the above-mentioned full freedom of choice of the Russian ruler on the matter of faith and, secondly, the decisive role on that matter played by Vladimir and his retinue, "the boyars and the senior men of the city".¹⁵ Let us recall that Svjatoslav, too, rejected Christianity on the grounds of remaining loyal to the paganism of his retinue.¹⁴

The decision to give up thoughts about Islam was, as can be seen, comparatively easy to make. Important in this respect was most probably the fact that towards the end of the eighties in the 10th century the international position of the Arab Caliphate (including its opposition to Byzantium) remarkably deteriorated. The choice between Rome or Constantinople was more difficult. We cannot underestimate the significance of Olga's act asking Otto I for priests in 959, after her personal talks with the Byzantine Emperor.¹⁵ Kiev's contacts with the West were maintained also later, up to the Christianization of Rus'.¹⁶ The final decision to prefer the adoption of Christianity from Byzantium was influenced, most probably, by the realizations which had guided Boris, as well as by the stability of the system of external political relations of agreement with the Empire and the seriousness of the Emperor's concession of prestige: such as establishing a relationship between the dynasties ruling Rus' and the Empire by means of the marriage of Vladimir and Anna Porphyrogenita (although the Prince achieved the fulfilment of this point only with the help of military force) and the example of the successful "Bulgarian experience". Let us remark here that in Kiev they could not ignore the fact that the First Bulgarian Empire began to prosper after the adoption of Christianity from Byzantium, that Bulgaria had, soon after that, entered in conflict with the Empire over hegemony in the Balkans, and that two years before the Christianization of Rus', in

¹⁵ «Новгородская первая летопись старшего и младшего изводов», Moskva 1977 (далее НПЛ), pp. 132, 148—150, 152.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 116.

¹⁵ *Continuator Reginonis*, MGH Scriptores, Hannover 1826, T. I, pp. 624—625. Cf. in detail: A. N. SACHAROV, «Дипломатия Древней Руси», Moskva 1980, pp. 260 ff.; G. G. LITAVRIN, «Путешествие русской княгини Ольги в Константинополь. Проблема источников», Виз. Врем. 42 (1981) 34—41.

¹⁶ V. T. PAŠUTO, «Внешняя политика Древней Руси», Moskva 1968, pp. 31 ff., 119 ff.

986, the Bulgarian troops had defeated the army of Emperor Basil II Bulgar-Slayer. Vladimir was also aware of the fact that Symeon's son Peter was married to Emperor Romanus I Lacapenus' granddaughter and held the official title of "basileus of Bulgarians".

The tempo and the methods of Christianization of Old Rus' and other countries in the region in question were very different, depending basically on the local circumstances in each concrete case. Interesting in this respect is a comparison between the situation in Bulgaria and in Rus'. In Bulgaria, the conditions for Christianization had objectively ripened, as we presume, back in the first third of the 9th century, but the transition to Christianity was slowed down essentially by two factors: internal, i.e. the artificial cultivation by the ruling circles of pagan dualism, and external, i.e. the attack by the Christian Empire as its chief and dangerous enemy pursuing the aim of liquidating Bulgaria as an independent state. After the baptism in 865 of the Prince and the dignitaries near to his court, the conversion to Christianity of the entire population of the country took hardly more than half a century regardless of the prolonged preservation of survivals of paganism. A proof of the relatively quick process of the Christianization of Bulgaria can be seen in the fact that rebellions against the Prince under the banner of restoration of paganism were taking place only in the very beginning of the introduction of the new religion, and in the fact that as early as the middle of the 10th century, the Bogomil heresy spread nationwide, not as a total anti-thesis to Christianity but, essentially, as a reassessment of its fundamental dogmas — the teachers of heresy propagated it holding the gospel in their hands. It was not so much the popular masses, but rather certain circles of the old Protobulagrian aristocracy who feared that they might lose their traditional privileges, and stood in active defence of paganism in Bulgaria.¹⁷ After the crushing of the first rebellion aimed at hindering Christianization (in 865 or 866) and after the failure of the attempt by Boris' son Vladimir to restore paganism (in 893) there is no mention in the sources about any active pagan opposition to Christianity on the territory of Bulgaria.

In Old Rus', on the contrary, a much higher degree of consolidation of the ruling circles around the Prince of Kiev was achieved by the time of Christianization: if chronicles are to be believed, Vladimir relied on the collective will of the ruling class, and did not fear any opposition by the people. He only threatened with punishment for disobedience, and although there were some who weeped for the overthrown idols, nobody rejected baptism (ни поне единому сопротивляющуся).¹⁸ But, unlike in Bulgaria, the process of Christianization of the population of Rus' took three to four centuries, in two distinct stages. At the first, which covered the last decade of the 10th and the first decades of the 11th century, baptism and organized divine services were limited only to the administrative centres. It was only at the second stage which lasted for a couple of centuries, that Christianization gradually spread

¹⁷ Cf. V. GJUZELEV, *The Bulgarians' Conversion to Christianity*, in: V. GJUZELEV, *Medieval Bulgaria, Byzantine Empire, Black Sea — Venice — Genoa*, Villach 1988, pp. 138—141.

¹⁸ ИПЛ, р. 152; «Жития святых мучеников Бориса и Глеба и службы им», Petrograd 1916, р. 4. See also: N. F. LAVROV, «Религия и церковь», in: *История культуры Древней Руси (домонгольский период)*, Moskva—Leningrad 1951, t. II, р. 87.

to the provinces.¹⁹ In this respect the process of Christianization of Rus' was nearer to the processes of Christianization of the countries of Central Europe, although there it had been shorter. Significant in this connection was also the vast territory subject to Kiev, and the presence of a considerable pagan Finno-Ugric element in the north, and Turkish in the south. The lack of educated local clergy, of a clear-cut form of parochial church organization, and of material guarantees for the needs of the clergy also played a role in the beginning.

Popular movements and rebellions in Rus' against the Christian Church were aimed at defending the disappearing paganism and took place essentially at the second stage of Christianization, when the social functions of the Christian Church protecting the interests of the central power and the ruling class as a whole became obvious.²⁰ Without the all-round support of that class the clergy would have been unable to accomplish Christianization and safeguard its material well-being. In their form and social orientation, the anti-Christian movements in Old Rus' were nearer to similar rebellions in Central Europe than to those in the Balkans, and especially to the anti-Christian rebellions in the 11th century in Poland and the Kingdom of Hungary. In those Central European countries, and later in Rus', rebellions against the Christian Church did not take the form of theological heresies but took place under the banner of restoration of paganism. It was characteristic that as the early feudal church was generally closely dependent in many ways on secular power, as regards the material resources (one tenth of the incomes of the prince, lines and trade duties) the church organization in Old Rus' was nearer to those in Poland and Bohemia than to the church in Byzantium and Bulgaria.²¹ Data concerning land property of the clergy in Bulgaria date back to the first decades after Christianization;²² the first such testimonies about the Church in Old Rus' concern only the seventies of the 11th century and, generally, the 12th century.²³

A problem of particular significance and of a more or less universal character faced by the ruling circles in a country converting to Christianity was the problem of guaranteeing maximum independence of the Church of each neophyte country. In the 9th—11th centuries, when most of the countries in the region in question were Christianized, two powers predominated politically in Europe — the Byzantine and the Carolingian (and later German) Empires. Christianity was adopted either from Constantinople or from Rome and the religious centres dependent on it. Due to the close links between the Christian Church and secular power at that time, the dependence of the Church meant also political dependence,

¹⁹ I. P. RUSANOVA — В. А. ТИМОШЧУК, «Збручское святилище (предварительное сообщение)», Советская археология (1986) № 4; V. V. SEDOV, «Распространение христианства в Древней Руси (по археологическим материалам)», in: Введение христианства у народов Центральной и Восточной Европы. Крещение Руси (сб. тезисов), Moskva 1987, pp. 40—43.

²⁰ ИПЛ, pp. 192—194, 196; «Патерик Киевского Печерского монастыря», Sankt Petersburg 1911, pp. 76—81; M. N. ТИХОМИРОВ, «Крестьянские и городские восстания на Руси (XI—XIII вв.)», Moskva 1955, pp. ff., 124—126.

²¹ Ja. N. ŠČAPOV, «Церковь в составе государственной власти Древней Руси», in: A. P. NOVOSEL'CEV et al., Древнерусское государство и его международное значение, Moskva 1965, pp. 297 ff.

²² A. MILEV, «Гръцките жития на Климент Охридски», Sofia 1966, p. 124.

²³ Ja. N. ŠČAPOV, «Церковь ...», pp. 326 ff.; V. L. JANIN, «Новгородская феодальная вотчина», Moskva 1981, pp. 229—256.

which happened in many countries after conversion. In some cases (Croatian principalities) the countries succeeded in breaking that dependence, in other cases the newly Christianized countries were swallowed up by the neighbouring Christian states (Carantania, and the emerging Obodritan principality).

Hence ensued the struggle of the Christianized states for the autonomy of the church organization not subordinated (or subordinated only as little as possible) to foreign centres of faith. This struggle for sovereignty in the sphere of the Church was characteristic for the policies of all countries in Central and South-East Europe.

The position on that matter of the rulers of the Serbian and Croatian principalities (and later the Croatian kingdom) differed in some specific aspects. Exercising sovereignty over a number of Dalmatian cities and their archbishoprics subordinated to the Roman Church, and striving for consolidating and extending their power there, the Serbian and Croatian rulers did not try to create an independent church organization separated from that in the cities. The church institutions established in the Christianized regions in the interior of their principalities were subordinated to the archbishoprics in Dalmatia which contributed, undoubtedly, to the consolidation of their own semi-autonomous position within the Croatian and Serbian states.

The struggle of Bulgarian Prince Boris for the independence of his Church was particularly dramatic, tense and unstable as he took advantage of the sharp contradictions between the Roman curia and the patriarchate of Constantinople on the question of which of these Christian capitals had the canonical right to organize the Bulgarian Church and govern it. According to the decisions of the Council of 879/880, the Bulgarian Church became de facto independent of both the Pope and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The ruling circles of Bulgaria, however, did not consider the problem to be resolved as long as the clergy of the country was composed of Byzantine (Greek) priests. It is in the framework of the continuation of the struggle for an independent Church (and, consequently, for better conditions for the development of national culture) that two measures implemented by Boris in the last years of his rule should be examined. The first consisted in the sending to Byzantium of a group of young Bulgarian men to be trained to become priests — with their installation was to begin the process of the replacement of Byzantine priests with Bulgarians. The second measure consisted in creating the possibilities for the disciples of Cyril and Methodius to carry out their fruitful activities in organizing schools, teaching Slavonic letters, continuing their literary activities and training young Bulgarians for church, cultural and political careers. This measure adopted by Boris opened up the path for a more effective and speedier progress towards an independent development of the national church and made, at the same time, a significant impact on the fate of culture not only in Bulgaria but also in Serbia and Old Rus'.²⁴

The question of the independence of the national church was faced from the very beginning also by the rulers of Old Rus'. Due to the specific international position of Rus' at the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century, their attitude towards the problem differed in several

²⁴ «История на България», т. II. Първа Българска държава», Sofia 1981, pp. 238—310.

aspects. On the eve of Christianization, neither Byzantium nor any other country with a different religion was putting diplomatic or military pressure on Rus' with the aim speeding up its abandonment of paganism; on the contrary, the upper ruling circles of Rus' themselves who had made the decision to convert to Christianity, took by force a Byzantine town in order to force the Emperor to fulfil the political conditions on the basis of which Vladimir, according to an agreement of 987, could offer the Emperor military assistance and the Emperor could Christianize Rus' and marry his sister to Vladimir. Byzantium had to yield.

How concretely had the question of the rank of the Russian Church been presented by Vladimir in the process (and the question was inevitable) is not documented. It is, however, a fact that a metropolitan see was established in Kiev immediately after the Christianization of Rus'.²⁵ The head of the Russian Church (Metropolitan) had, together with the bishops subordinated to him, the right to appoint bishops. The Metropolitan of Kiev, however, was appointed by the Patriarch of Constantinople from among the Byzantine hierarchy. This means that the right to appoint its head was not granted to the Russian Church, as it had not been juridically granted to the Bulgarian Church, either, by the Council of 879/880. Boris, as is known, was striving to achieve that and, in 866, even sought the setting up of a patriarchate in Bulgaria. It seems that the question of creating an autocephalous church was not raised by Vladimir at all. It was only Jaroslav the Wise who first tried to implement the right of autocephality, which had not been de facto juridically guaranteed, in the middle of the 11th century (the attempt was repeated in the middle of the 12th century).

Russians were not as consistent and resolved on the matter of the autocephalous right as were Bulgarians. This can be explained, in all probability, with the greater dependence of the Bulgarian Church on Constantinople, which made greater the threat to the political independence of the state by the neighbouring Empire. Byzantium did not pose such a threat for Rus'. The Empire did not have sufficient possibilities to force Rus', through its Metropolitan, to pursue the course of imperial policies. It is not excluded either that the practice of the appointment of the Metropolitan by a distant Empire was advantageous for the Russian Princes in disunited Rus', when the appointment of a candidate for the post of metropolitan was not an indisputable right of any of 'the' groupings fighting for hegemony.

Related to this question is, to some extent, the fact of the existence in Old Russian literary tradition of two versions of the Christianization of Rus'. In one of them, contained in the "Korsun (Kherson) Legend", the Christianization of Rus' is portrayed from pro-Byzantine positions. In the other, which became more widespread and which is contained in one of the earliest monuments of original Old Russian literature, namely "The Sermon on the Law and Grace" of Metropolitan Hilarion, Christianization is presented above all as the result of the activities of Prince Vladimir, described as "God-inspired instrument of Divine Providence".

This tendency towards emphasizing the decisive role in the conversion

²⁵ M. V. LEVČENKO, «Очерки по истории русско-византийских отношений», Moskva 1956, pp. 375 ff.; A. POPPE, *Państwo i kościół na Rusi w IX wieku*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 15—39.

to Christianity of individual rulers and minimizing the significance for the process of foreign ecclesiastical (and political) centres was one of the expressions of the idea of independence of the national church and its inseparable link with the sovereign power of a national dynasty. The creation of such literary historical tradition was characteristic also for other countries in Central and South-East Europe at the time of their Christianization and the organization of the Christian Church on their territories. Closely related, acting along the lines of this tendency, and pursuing common interests, the Church and the State undertook the first canonizations of their national saints. It was quite typical that the first saints, patrons and protectors of the country and nation were members of the princes' dynasties: Boris-Michael and Peter in Bulgaria, Wenceslas and Ludmila in Bohemia, Vladimir of Zeta in Serbia, Vladimir's sons Boris and Gleb in Old Rus',²⁶ István (Stephen) and Laszlo (Ladislaus) in Hungary. It would not be out of place to note that attempts at creating a cult of Olga and Vladimir himself are reported as early as the 11th century in the sources, with Vladimir canonized only in the 13th century.

Speaking about the firm relationship between the Church and the State which was particularly typical of the Eastern Christian countries, it should however be noted that, after conversion, the clergy was at first fully dependent on secular power also in the countries which adopted Christianity from the Western Roman Church. Without an all-round support of the State at a time when land ownership by churches and monasteries was only at its beginning, the Church would not be able either to maintain itself, or guarantee the accomplishment of Christianization, or function as an institution. The position of the Church in Old Rus' was, in general, nearer to its position in Byzantium and Bulgaria, than, for example, to that in Poland or Hungary. But even there, i.e. in the Eastern Christian zone, the ideological and social activities of Old Russian Church revealed features specific only for that Church at that particular time. It was the Russian Church which was the first to play, very consistently, the role of defender of the lower social strata against harsh forms of oppression and despotism.²⁷ It was actively interfering in the life of society fighting against what was "evil" according to the commandments of the Gospel. Examples of religious publicism of the 10th and 11th centuries aimed against the injustices of government officials and the greed and immorality of some religious figures could be cited also from Byzantine and Bulgarian literature. One such accusatory work is Cosmas the Priest's "Tractate against the Bogomils", written by a Bulgarian clergyman in the middle of the 10th century. Open public censure of the activity of the ruler (Prince or King) was not characteristic of the attitude of church representatives at that time in Southern and Western Slavic countries. Sharp attacks against the Emperors were allowed in Byzantium by Patriarchs, the reason, however, not being the protection of the destitute and oppressed. Sharp criticism by religious figures of secular rulers for their "greed" and "violence" was a feature unique for the social life in Old

²⁶ A. POPPE, «О времени зарождения культа Бориса и Глеба», in: *Russia Mediaevalis* I, München 1973, 6—29.

²⁷ A telling example of such activities provides the excellent foreword to the Primary Russian chronicle written by the end of the 11th century. — IIII, p. 103—104. See also: I. U. BUDOVNIC, «Общественно-политическая мысль в Древней Руси», Moskva 1960, pp. 128—130.

Rus',²⁸ if our lack of knowledge about these facts in the history of other countries is not due only to a lack of sources.

It is, however, quite natural that while priests spoke out against extremes in the exploitation of the subjects and in the exercising of power by the upper layers of society, the church preached obedience as an important precept of Christian teaching ("disobedience of the rulers is disobedience of God himself").²⁹ In other words, the policy of Old Russian Church, as of the Christian Church at large, was aimed at the preservation of a "social world" advantageous, in those conditions, especially for the ruling class, to which higher and medium clergy belonged. Nevertheless, the social activities of Old Russian Church were particularly broad, enabling it to play the honorary role of arbiter between different social strata, raising its prestige and popularity among the masses of people, thus contributing to the success of Christianization. Of great social significance were also the activities of the Church aimed at propagating and persistently realizing the idea of unity of the Old Russian state based on the principle of respect between "senior" and "junior" priests, and the subordination of the latter to the former.³⁰ Similar ideas were put forth also in other countries (as, for example, in Bohemia, in the chronicle of Cosmas of Prague), but Old Russian clergy did not stop short of public censure of priests breaking the accepted norms.³¹ Such activities helped increase the authority of the Church in the eyes of the people's masses suffering from the wars between the princes.

The singularity of the social activity of Old Russian Church may be partly explained by the particularity of the situation of the Eastern Christian Church in general. It was behind the Western Roman Church in its official status and material security, was less dependent on foreign church hierarchy, less separated from the people and hence more deeply involved in the social life of its country. The group of parish priests, lowest in rank and largest in number among the Eastern Christian clergy, did not, on the social level, differ much from the peasants and the urban toiling masses. Very important in this respect was the fact that divine service in all Eastern Christian countries was conducted in Slavonic, which was also the language of literature.

These general considerations, however, do not explain the above-mentioned particularities proper only to the Old Russian Church and its social activities. The question seems not to have been adequately studied. It is possible, nevertheless, that such factors specific for Rus' as were the difficulties of the consolidation and preservation of state unity on the vast and heterogeneous territory (and the service done by the Church for the secular power was of special significance in these conditions), the frequent wars between the princes which were a burden on the people, the continuous pressure on the country's borders by the nomadic world of the steppe, and the large number of lower clergy which was near to the people's masses, had some significance.

²⁸ On the open critic of the ruling circles in the Old Russian texts see: «Патерик» . . . , p. 109; «Жития святых мучеников Бориса и Глеба и службы им», Petrohrad 1916, p. 62.

²⁹ I. U. BUDOVNIC, «Общественно-политическая мысль . . .», p. 120.

³⁰ D. S. LIŠAČEV, «Некоторые вопросы идеологии феодалов в XI—XIII вв.» in: Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы, т. X, Leningrad 1954, pp. 87 ff.

³¹ «Памятники литературы Древней Руси. Начало русской литературы (XI — начало XII в.)», Moskva 1978, pp. 376—378.

In conclusion let us briefly stop at the question of the role which the use of the Slavonic vernacular in liturgy and literature played in the process of Christianization of Old Rus'. The question is all the more justified as the Old Slavonic letters were established by the brothers from Salonica expressly for the needs of the conversion of Slavic nations. It was with that aim that they had been broadly used in Great Moravia. In Bohemia, which took in some of Great Moravian lands after the latter's fall, Slavonic literature played, in the beginning, a fundamental role but later succumbed to persecution. The situation was similar in Croatia. With the deepening of confessional differences between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Roman (Latin) Churches, and especially after the schism in 1054, the negative attitude of Western clergy to Slavonic literature, which was considered a sign of belonging to Orthodoxy, increased. Of all the Slavic countries which converted to Christianity in the 9th and 10th centuries, it was only in Bulgaria, (and partly also in Serbia) that this literature could develop freely.

It seems that making a conclusion that literature in the vernacular played, in Old Rus', the role of factor which speeded up Christianization would be too hasty. In Poland Slavonic literature was very little spread but the process of Christianization which began there at the same time as did the conversion of Rus' was accomplished much earlier.

The significance of this factor for Rus' at the time of its conversion can nevertheless only hardly be overestimated. The Christianization of Slavic countries had an important international aspect. It was realized in conditions of an activation of inter-Slavic cultural contacts and the emergence of the idea of all-Slavic unity, at least among the upper strata of society. The Christianization of Bohemia had, undoubtedly, stimulated the process of Christianization of Poland, and the Christianization of Bulgaria had stimulated that same process in the Serbian principalities. An intensive exchange of social, political and cultural experience developed between the countries converting to Christianity.

The adoption of Slavonic writing in Rus' can, in our opinion, be also examined in the context of the mastering of a rich experience acquired, by the last decade of the 10th century, by the Slavic countries in the process of their Christianization. While in the case of Great Moravia (and later Bulgaria) Christianization practically coincided with the creation of Slavonic literature and the birth of literary tradition, Rus' had, prior to its conversion, the possibility to use extensively the vast literary legacy (in translations from Greek, as well as in original literary monuments) from Bulgaria and the Old Bohemian state, the historical successor of Great Moravia. In Rus', moreover, the development of Slavonic literary tradition was not hampered as it was in Bohemia, by Latin clergy and was not threatened with ignorance by secular and church authorities as in Bulgaria under Byzantine rule. All that created particularly favourable conditions there for the dissemination of literature and the development of local literary tradition, which can be described as one more specific feature of the process of conversion of Old Rus'. These conditions made possible the organization within a very short time of the training of priests from among the local population and the formation of a new social layer — the clergy, being an integral part of the local society and living in contact with its problems and concerns. It is there that are most probably the roots of the vigorous social activity

of Old Russian Church which was without analogy in the other countries Christianized in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Comparing the process of Christianization of Old Rus' and of other countries we cannot forget to mention two more facts: that Old Slavonic literature spread into Rus' more than half a century before its official conversion, and that almost for the whole course of the 10th century the relationships of Old Rus' with the Byzantine Empire depended on the mediation of the First Bulgarian Empire which was from where Slavonic writing (mainly in the form the Cyrillic alphabet) and its first teachers arrived in Rus'. Very problematic, however, seem to have been the political and cultural contacts between Bulgaria and Rus' in the period between 987—1018, i.e. at the first stage of the conversion of Old Rus'. At that time, Vladimir was in a military alliance with Emperor Basil II the Bulgar-Slayer and the troops dispatched by him took a very active part in the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria. Only after the Empire had conquered North-Eastern Bulgaria in 1000, and then accomplished the conquest of the country as a whole in 1018, the paths were opened up again for the spreading to Rus' of the above-mentioned very rich literary legacy compiled in Bulgaria, and of the monuments of Great Moravian tradition which had been preserved on Bulgarian territory.³² The other channel for cultural exchange along which Rus' learned about the Great Moravian tradition led from Old Bohemian cultural centres from where arrived monuments created in Bohemia itself in the 10th—12th centuries.

The process was realized, without any doubt, with the active and purposeful support to it by the Kievan rulers. At its time, Bulgaria made intensive use of the social and cultural experience acquired by the brothers from Salonica and their disciples in Great Moravia. According to the *Life* of Clement of Ohrid Boris-Michael knew about the Slavonic writing invented by Cyril and about the successes of the two brothers from Salonica and their disciples in Great Moravia long before 886. Even Boris' provincial governor in Belgrade who had received the disciples of the Slavonic missionaries expelled from Great Moravia was informed that his master "was in need of such men". The governor immediately sent them to Boris as they were those "whom he had wished ardently". On their part, those who had arrived from Great Moravia were aware of Boris' intentions: having been subject to persecution they had chosen the road to Bulgaria themselves, as it was there that they "hoped to find peace".³³

Vladimir successfully assimilated Boris' experience, and the intensive literary activity in Kiev can hardly be linked only to the name of Jaroslav.³⁴ It was obviously already under Vladimir that schools teaching Slavonic were set up and that there also existed the necessary books. There have been suggestions that Metropolitan Hilarion who was up to the level of learning of his time, could have been educated outside Rus' (in Byzantium? in Bulgaria?).³⁵ But even if it had been so, the "Sermon" written by Hilarion was undoubtedly intended for the local, Kievan audience, and for the local Russian reader. This means that, in the middle

³² G. G. LITAVRIN, «Культурный переворот в Болгарии и Древняя Русь», in: Хиляда и сто години от смъртта на Методий (Кирилло-Методиевски студии 4) Sofia 1987, pp. 393—403.

³³ A. MILEV, «Гръцките жития . . .», pp. 64, 68.

³⁴ V. VODOFF, *Naissance . . .*, pp. 104, 353—362.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

of the 11th century, Kiev already had a circle of highly educated people who could appreciate a work similar to Hilarion's treatise. This leads us to the conclusion that the education of these very knowledgeable people could have started in Kiev under Vladimir (who died in 1015). For we can only hardly imagine the Metropolitan being a young or only just mature man at the time when he wrote his "Sermon".

The high level of development of Old Russian culture in the 11th century achieved basically thanks to the relations of Old Rus' with Bulgaria and Bohemia contributed to the situation whereby at the end of the 11th century, after the decline of Slavonic literature in Bohemia, and Byzantium's domination in Bulgaria which dates still further back, it was Rus' which became the chief centre of Slavonic literary tradition and where the legacy of Old Bulgarian writers of the "Gold Age" of culture of the First Bulgarian Empire was preserved as were the works of Bohemian bookmen from the Sázava Monastery.

Concluding our work we consider it necessary to emphasize that the above attempt at comparing the processes of Christianization of the countries of Central and South-East Europe, and Old Rus', can only be regarded as a preliminary one. A more detailed and full historical comparative analysis can be made only after a more profound regional geographical study of the questions of Christianization and only with the inclusion in the comparison of other countries of the European continent (the Anglo-Saxon part of the Kingdom of England, the German lands of the Carolingian Empire, Scandinavia) in which the period of conversion and the consolidation of Christian religion also coincided with the period of the shaping of classes of the feudal society and the formation of the state.