

The Riurikid Dynasty's Relationship with  
the Orthodox Christian Church in Kievan Rus

By

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Senior Seminar  
(HST 499W)

June 11, 2012

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Prior to the late tenth century, the princes of the Riurikid dynasty were rulers over the loose collection of pagan Slavic tribes and minor city states that were Kievan Rus. However, in a relatively short period, the dynasty had linked itself and its legitimacy to rule to the Orthodox Christian Church centered in Constantinople. Though mostly limited to particular aspects of life, the Riurikid princes seemed willing to relinquish a certain amount of power and wealth to the Church. In certain ways they tried to blur the lines of distinction between Riurikid secular suzerainty and the Church's spiritual authority. After 988 and throughout the eleventh, twelfth, and early thirteenth centuries, the princes promoted the Church through the granting and sustaining of a special privileged status. They made Church personnel and lands immune from taxation and relinquished jurisdiction in certain areas of law enforcement to the Church as well. The Riurikid princes gave tithes from their own revenue collection and gave up a portion of fees and bloodwites<sup>1</sup>. The princes' promotion of the Church was reciprocated by Church officials who, in sermons and chronicles, would elevate the appearance of piety among the members of the dynasty. According to historian Janet Martin, the result of this relationship was that "the Church became a second institution, along with the Riurikid dynasty, that gave shape and definition to the emerging state."<sup>2</sup> Though it most likely played a role, their relationship with Orthodox Christianity was less about personal piety and more about a pragmatic investment in the future. Once Christianity was adopted, the Riurikid princes, by relinquishing a share of their wealth and governing power to the Church, attempted to create a perceived link between religion and government that would legitimize their claim to rule in the eyes of the population. Evidence of this Church/State relationship would be demonstrated time and again in the princes' actions from Christianization in 988 through the next two and half centuries and would continue to be

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<sup>1</sup> A "bloodwite" is a fine paid as punishment for the crime of murder. It was usually paid to the victim's kin, the prince's court, or sometimes both. See Daniel H. Kaiser, *The Growth of Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Janet Martin, *Medieval Russia 980-1584*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

employed in one form or another by subsequent dynasties until the end of Russia's Imperial period in 1917.

Kievan Rus existed from the late ninth century until its collapse in the mid thirteenth century as a result of the Mongol invasion of 1240. The reigns of Vladimir I [978-1015] and Iaroslav the Wise [1015-1054] are generally considered the "golden period" for the adoption of Christianity, consolidation of dynastic power, and the creation of the first Slavic law codes. Kievan Rus occupied the region known today as the Ukraine and western Russia and it spanned from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and from the upper Volga River region to Poland. The nature of the Kievan Rus state, founded in 880 by Oleg, was that of a loose confederation of principalities or city states. Its population had been composed of a diverse collection of pagan Slavic tribes which were being ruled by the foreign Varangian (Scandinavian Viking) Riurikid dynasty. The region of Kiev was the political center, and the Grand Prince was the ruler, of a relatively weak central government. The Grand Prince controlled the lands around Kiev and collected tribute from his theoretically subordinate relatives who ruled the surrounding principalities. Though legitimacy and governing power of the non-Slavic princes was limited, the state prospered through foreign exports of wax, furs, and honey as well as control over the valuable Dnieper River trade route from the Black Sea and Constantinople through Kiev, Novgorod, and up to the Baltic Sea and Scandinavia. Trade and cultural exchange with Byzantium helped shape the development of the new state. Due to the prior tribal society with diverse pagan traditions and an ever-growing population of dynastic princes competing for various thrones, there was a wide diversity in political traditions among the different regions that contributed to the weakness of the central government. For example, Novgorod had a history of popular participation in political decisions through semi-democratic town councils, or *veche*. They had influence in choosing their prince whereas many city-states' princes were appointed by Kiev. In addition, the system of lateral succession, where the throne often passed laterally from eldest brother to youngest rather than vertically to offspring, created an atmosphere of frequent

inter-dynastic conflict that further decentralized government power. These characteristics, unsolved by Christianization, would eventually contribute to Kievan Rus's inability to counter the Mongol onslaught.<sup>3</sup>

Kievan Rus's path to Orthodox Christianization, unification, and Riurik legitimacy essentially began in the year 972 when Sviatoslav, the Varangian ruler in Kiev, died. In 980, his son Vladimir I, then the Prince of Novgorod, defeated his brother Iaropolk in battle, and ascended to become the Grand Prince of Kiev. Kiev was the center of power in Kievan Rus. However, Vladimir had a couple of major challenges. At that time he had very limited power because the population lived in provinces or small city states that were separated by differing pagan religions and cultures. In addition, the legitimacy of the Riurikid line was somewhat questionable since Vladimir I was a descendant of Riurik, the foreign born Varangian progenitor of the Riurikid line, and his subjects were predominately native Slavs. Vladimir was also interested in developing bonds with his prosperous neighbors, Byzantium in the south and Europe to his west, in order to foster trade and generate wealth. This goal, however, would not benefit him if he was unable to achieve resolution to the first two issues and was therefore secondary. His decision to adopt Orthodox Christianity as the state religion in Kievan Rus and to link his line's secular rule to it would do just that. It eventually united the Rus lands and population under a single religious ideology. Over time it allowed the princes and clergy to create a perceived link between secular and religious authority so that the newly converted Christian people could not reject the Riurikids without rejecting Christianity and vice versa. The fostering of financial and cultural ties to Byzantium, and to a lesser degree in Western Europe, was icing on the cake and was likely of secondary concern to Vladimir and his heirs.

Historians in the study of Kievan Rus over the years have been intrigued by the traditional narrative of the late tenth century conversion mandated by Vladimir I. They have

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<sup>3</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Russia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/rutoc.html#ru0004> (accessed May 19, 2012).

questioned the time and place and above all his motivations. Was it a spiritual calling or political pragmatism? Was it he, influenced by Kievan Christians who had previously adopted the Byzantine faith, including his own grandmother Olga who was baptized by the patriarch in Constantinople in 955, or Byzantine political or diplomatic pressure that had initiated the conversion of Rus? Some studies have focused on Olga's conversion by the Byzantine patriarch in 955 as a motivator for Vladimir. More radical interpretations have proposed that conversion happened in the early ninth century and was covered up to protect the national myth of St. Vladimir. The debate seems to have moved towards a view that, for whatever the reasons, a significant number of Kiev's ruling class had already been Christianized in the Byzantine Orthodox tradition since decades earlier and may have been ripe for a mass conversion by 988. This influence of Byzantium on the Kievan upper class was due to proximity and sustained contact through trade and occasional conflict. Kiev sat on the Dnieper River which was the critical trading route between Kievan Rus, whose economy was primarily driven by foreign commerce, and the Black Sea markets, especially the particularly wealthy Constantinople. Interest in this subject has long endured because of both the lasting effects on Russian culture and politics and the mystery that surrounds the events due to the relative scarcity of written sources, particularly native Russian sources. Because of this, the field has typically remained grounded in the high profile, yet often imprecise, Russian chronicles and a search for clarifying and corroborating outside sources.

Several historians have been on the side of the debate that a sizable Orthodox Christian community existed in Kiev prior to the 988 conversion and Vladimir, under their influence to some degree, came to conversion on his own rather than Byzantine pressure. In 1926, Matthew Spinka, a historian at a seminary in Ohio, published an article titled "The Conversion of Russia". The primary thesis of the article was that at that time non-Russian historians were, for lack of another trusted English source, clinging to the often inaccurate and literary *Russian Primary Chronicle's* depiction of Vladimir's conversion. Spinka's article set out to revise the narrative

based upon new sources found in recent Russian research that adjusted the dates, place, and circumstances surrounding the event.

Spinka approached this piece with a modernist empirical methodology and based his arguments entirely on alternative primary source documents taken from the work of a historian, E. Golubinskii of the Moscow Academy of Divinity, published around 1900. The author's principle use of these documents was to find evidence of an existing and growing population of Orthodox Christians in Kievan Rus's ruling class prior to Vladimir's conversion in 988, including his grandmother Olga, and also that he had come to it on his own initiative because of that influence. He used a ca.944 trade treaty with Byzantium that mentioned a Christian population in Rus 44 years prior to conversion. He also utilized the eleventh century eulogies of Vladimir by the monk Jacob and Metropolitan Ilarion to indicate that they had no knowledge of the event as the later written chronicle described it.<sup>4</sup> Ilarion's, Jacob's, and a non-Russian account from Yahya of Antioch also corroborated Spinka's claim that Vladimir was already baptized when he took Cherson from Byzantium proving that the conversion was not initiated by Basil II but a relationship had been sought independently by Vladimir.<sup>5</sup> He also claimed that his new narrative would become "epoch-making... and its conclusions should become familiar to our English scholars."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, an article written by the prominent Polish historian in Slavic studies, Andrzej Poppe, in 1976 was called "The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus': Byzantine-Russian Relations Between 986-89". The article's purpose was to investigate the motives of Vladimir's 989 capture of Cherson in the Crimea when he was believed to have already been baptized in 988. Poppe conducted an extensive scientific review of the primary sources and concluded that Vladimir's baptism of Rus was not an act initiated by the Byzantines. He argued that the ruling class had been penetrated by Christian influence for decades and especially after Olga was

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Spinka, "The Conversion of Russia," *The Journal of Religion* 6, no. 1 (1926): 46-9.

<sup>5</sup> Spinka, 50-1.

<sup>6</sup> Spinka, 42.

baptized in 955. The timing of Vladimir's baptism and subsequent attack on Cherson were based upon the diplomatic vulnerability of Basil II who needed the Rus as allies against the usurper Bardas Sclerus<sup>7,8</sup>.

As mentioned above, this was an extensive analysis of the available sources. He focused mostly upon non-Russian sources and Russian sources outside the *Primary Chronicles*. The Byzantine sources included the historian Psellus who confirms Vladimir's battle with Sclerus in 989. Skylitz is also cited and recounted Vladimir's marriage to the emperor's sister. He also used the account of Leo the Deacon on the capture of Cherson. He cited Arab and Armenian sources which unintentionally corroborated time lines while not necessarily providing details of these events. Poppe also referenced a significant number of historians as he exhaustively laid out the prior conflicting theses that lead to his study.<sup>9</sup>

A more recent effort was a study of chronicle construction that generally supported Spinka and Poppe that Olga and others had been baptized prior to 988 yet had not accepted a level of Byzantine incorporation that would have driven Vladimir. Francis Butler's 2008 article "Ol'ga's Conversion and the Construction of Chronicle Narrative" was a literary analysis of the chronicle account of Olga's 955 baptism in Constantinople. Butler was arguing against the conclusions of historians like Shakhmatov<sup>10</sup> and Likhashev<sup>11</sup> that the dual depiction of Olga as respectful of the Patriarch while simultaneously tricking the emperor to avoid a likely fictitious marriage proposal was the result of amalgamating two accounts from different time periods. Butler's thesis was that the chronicler wrote the factual account of Olga as the humble Christian

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<sup>7</sup> Bardas Sclerus was a former Byzantine general who led an unsuccessful rebellion in 989 against Emperor Basil II [976-1025]. Sclerus surrendered that same year and died in 991. See Andrzej Poppe, "The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus': Byzantine-Russian Relations between 986-89," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976): 198-200.

<sup>8</sup> Andrzej Poppe, "The Political Background to the Baptism of Rus': Byzantine-Russian Relations between 986-89," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976): 243.

<sup>9</sup> Poppe, 202-4.

<sup>10</sup> A. A. Shakhmatov, *Razyskaniia o drevneishikh russkikh letopisnykh svodak* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 111-14.

<sup>11</sup> D. S. Likhachev, "Povest' vremennykh let: Istoriko-literaturnyi ocherk," in *Povest' vremennykh let*, eds. Likhachev and V. P. Adrianova-Peretts (St. Petersburg, 1999): 304-5.

novice and knowingly added the fictive account of Olga tricking the emperor. He argued that this indicated that the Russians saw themselves as joining the Christian community but not accepting the expected incorporation into the Byzantine Empire.<sup>12</sup> This seems to support part of A.A.Vasiliev's claim that Byzantium failed to possess Russia as a vassal state.<sup>13</sup>

Butler's main source was the 955/956 entry in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. He turned to contemporary accounts from the German emissary, Alalbert, and the Greek historian, Skylitz, to corroborate the verifiable facts in the entry. He also used Theophanes account of various foreign rulers' baptisms for insight into Byzantine views of suzerainty through conversion.<sup>14</sup> Butler basically employed an empirical analysis of the Russian chronicle entries but he was less interested in determining facts than he was in determining meaning. He found he could still glean from the fictive portion the contemporary point of view of political independence from Byzantium even if not an accurate narrative of the events. He employed a textual analysis to find what the chronicler was trying to say about the attitudes at the time while corroborating the factual quality of the narrative with outside sources.

Some historians have argued that an Orthodox Christian population may have existed in Kiev since being converted on Byzantine initiative more than a century and a half prior to the 988 conversion and that the credit given Vladimir in the traditional conversion narrative may have been overstated. In 1966, K. Ericsson proposed, in his article "The Earliest Conversion of the Rus to Christianity", that the Rus around Kiev may have been converted to Christianity as early as the period of 830 – 840. He suggested that records of that event were omitted from both the Byzantine and Russian chronicles on ideological grounds. He believed that the founder of Kiev, Kyy, and his tribe of Polyane had attacked Constantinople during the reign of Theophilus. Subsequently, they accepted baptism at the behest of the Byzantine emperor. Ericsson proposed

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Butler, "Ol'ga's Conversion and the Construction of Chronicle Narrative," *Russian Review* 67, no. 2 (2008): 233-4.

<sup>13</sup> A. A. Vasiliev, "Was Old Russia a Vassal State of Byzantium?" *Speculum* 7, no. 3 (1932): 350.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, 231-2.

that the Byzantine records were purged of this to cover up any accomplishment of the hated iconoclast emperor and wished to reserve credit for the subsequent Orthodox emperors of the tenth century. Similarly, he suggested that the Russian chroniclers purged their entries to protect the nation building and faith bringing narrative that they had created for Vladimir I.<sup>15</sup>

Ericsson stayed primarily in the Russian and Byzantine sources. He looked for clues that might have uncovered inconsistencies that indicated omissions and then made inferences as to their meanings. For instance, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* called the Khazar conquest of the Polyanes a calamity of which suffering they had been relieved by God. He inferred that pagans would not have received such treatment in the Orthodox influenced chronicles. He used Byzantine sources as well, such as Theophanes Continuatus, which told of a savage people, presumably the Rus, who had attacked Constantinople during Theophilus's reign and accepted baptism.<sup>16</sup> The continuing scholarly interest in the subject of Vladimir's, and to a lesser degree Olga's, conversions indicates that these conclusions have not been widely accepted by historians.

On the other side, many historians have been on the side of the debate that Vladimir's 988 conversion of Rus' was motivated largely by political considerations, both domestic and in relation to Byzantium. The 1949 article "Vladimir and the Origin of the Russian Church" was published by N. Zernov. Its thesis was that the politics of Vladimir's conversion of Rus were purposely obscured in the Russian chronicles to protect his image as Kievan Rus's pious bringer of the faith. Zernov argued that the compilers of the existing chronicle editions from the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries omitted signs of Vladimir's political motives and desire to maintain his autocracy over both secular and religious institutions. Zernov contradicted some conclusions

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<sup>15</sup> K. Ericsson, "The Earliest Conversion of the Rus' to Christianity," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 44, no. 102 (1966): 98.

<sup>16</sup> Ericsson, 106-7.

drawn by other historians, like Vernadsky, who had argued that, after conversion, the Greek clergy and patriarch controlled the Russian church.<sup>17</sup>

Zernov made a straight scientific empirical comparison between the narrative drawn from the Russian sources and the one drawn from the Byzantine sources. He first gave his interpretation of the conversion narrative based upon Byzantine accounts that described Vladimir's political initiative. Already baptized in Kiev, he sent 6,000 troops to aid in the emperor's struggle against the rebel leader and usurper, Bardas Sclerus. This led to his taking of Cherson in 989 which had to be shifted to 988 to fit the chronicle account of his Cherson baptism. Zernov focused on the Russian chronicles to show that they contained scant information about Vladimir's church policy after conversion. He also used the Chronicle of Novgorod to show that a Greek layperson, Anastas, who aided Vladimir at Cherson, held a leading role, if not the status of bishop, under Vladimir. Zernov concluded that the chroniclers had disapproved of and omitted his church policy and appointment of a figurehead bishop to do his bidding. This attempt by the compiler to omit political motives was even contradicted by Ilarion who had posthumously praised Vladimir for both piety and his dictation of will to the emperor.<sup>18</sup>

Also in the same methodological vein was an article from 1956 written by Francis Dvornik. He was a Czech historian who specialized in Slavic and Byzantine history and ultimately became a professor at Harvard. The article was called "Byzantine Political Ideas in Kievan Russia". In this article, Dvornik argued that though previous scholars had believed that Byzantine influence was negligible in Rus political theory, that impression was incorrect. He claimed it was based upon the lack of sources that discussed political theory in the Kievan period. He argued that there were documents that had been neglected in study that showed heavy Byzantine influence on Rus political development. These included Russian collections of canon law, translated from Greek, and included canons of councils and imperial novels and church

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<sup>17</sup> N. Zernov, "Vladimir and the Origin of the Russian Church," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 28, no. 70 (1949): 125.

<sup>18</sup> Zernov, 128-30.

legislation.<sup>19</sup> Much like Spinka, Dvornik used a modernist empiricist approach by finding new but trusted sources from outside the traditional chronicles.

Dvornik's sources focused on Russian translations of Byzantine canon law codes. Particularly the law handbooks created by Byzantine emperors like the *Ecloge* and its replacement, the *Procheiron*. He also used the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and Kievan Rus law codes such as the *Russkaia Pravda*. In addition, he compared the first Slavonic Russian handbook of law to the above mentioned Byzantine handbooks. These were chosen because the first missionaries to Kievan Rus brought the laws with them and educated clerics after conversion. Clerics were the primary advisors of the princes and comparison between Byzantine political theory and that of Rus indicated a high level of Greek influence. For example, the emperors and grand princes were both considered the head of the religion appointed by God over the Patriarch.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Spinka, who was trying to find points of divergence to show an independence from Byzantium in Vladimir's conversion, Dvornik used these sources to find commonality between the Russian sources and the Byzantine sources.

An obvious theoretical and methodological anomaly was the Soviet historian Boris Grekov's *Kiev Rus* from 1959. In Russia during that time Marxist history was the order of the day and this certainly followed that pattern. Grekov's thesis for his discussion of the conversion of Rus was that Christianity was a natural progression based upon Kiev's preceding history of classes and feudalism. Working backwards, he argued that the pagan religions formed in the earlier tribal system were not compatible with the religions of class, those being Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as they did not demand subjugation of lower classes. His conclusion was that Christianity, due to sustained relations with Byzantium, had existed for some time among the

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<sup>19</sup> Francis Dvornik, "Byzantine Political Ideas in Kievan Russia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9, no. 10 (1956): 75-6.

<sup>20</sup> Dvornik, 77.

ruling class prior to Vladimir and its inevitable adoption was indicative of their achievement of real power over the lower class.<sup>21</sup>

Grekov relied almost exclusively on Russian primary sources. In particular, he focused on the Russian chronicles as well as *bylinas* (epic narrative poems usually transmitted orally), treaties, and religious documents. Though he acknowledged potential inaccuracies in dates, names, and even facts, he claimed that these were the people's histories and that "the assessment of events was always correct" because the people were "direct participants in the events described."<sup>22</sup> Grekov used accounts such as Igor's 944 Treaty to show the split in Rus society between Christians and pagans. He also used an eleventh century chronicle from Novgorod that indicated a popular revolt against the bishop where the princes sided with the bishop and the people sided with a pagan soothsayer. He read this as an expression of class attitudes towards the new religion. Grekov also utilized religious writings of the Russian bishops Ilarion and Kirill. In contrast to the other historians mentioned here, he used these to highlight the literary quality and level of culture attained by the classes that had access to education. The only secondary source Grekov cited was Marx himself which he employed for Marx's analysis of Christianity's spread globally.<sup>23</sup>

Grekov's approach was basically a Marxist analysis of the known primary sources. He interpreted the meanings of the sources, and thus the 988 conversion, through the lens of class. He concluded that the educated ruling class's adoption of a class based religion was inevitable. He made the conversion his starting point and looked backward to the ruling class's gradual subjugation of the Rus people and then to the earlier, and allegedly classless, pagan tribal society. In early Marxist style, he showed a progressive and almost determinist view of Vladimir's conversion and how it related to the development of a new feudalized class society. Because of

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<sup>21</sup> Boris Dmitrievich Grekov, *Kiev Rus* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 636.

<sup>22</sup> Grekov, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Grekov, 637-40.

this, in contrast to most historians, he considered Christianization to be the beginning of the end of the Kievan Rus period and thus placed it near the end of his book.

More comprehensive studies have been written that have argued that Vladimir's motivations were much more multifaceted than just political or personal. In 1995, Janet Martin, a History professor at the University of Miami, published her monograph called *Medieval Russia 980-1584*. Her thesis for the section concerning Vladimir's conversion of Rus was that he chose Christianity to both integrate the diverse pagan tribes into one society and to introduce an ideology that would legitimize his rule. She further stated that his choice of Orthodox Christianity over Islam or Judaism was affected by his desire for a political alliance with the embattled Basil II as well as a personal inclination possibly inspired by his grandmother Olga who had been baptized in Orthodox Byzantium.<sup>24</sup>

Martin's approach seems to have been lightly influenced by postmodernism yet, like most of the scholars above, she employed an empiricist methodology in analyzing the primary sources. She utilized the narrative of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* but referred to it as a "tale" and explained that it was a post-event "amalgam of legend and fact" that "contains numerous lapses and inconsistencies."<sup>25</sup> She followed the chronicle narrative and employed other Russian and non-Russian contemporary sources to fill the gaps or provide alternative views, for example an account of Rus tribute collection by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the tenth century. In addition, Martin offered alternative interpretations and arguments from secondary sources written by prominent historians such as Andrzej Poppe and George Vernadsky. She acknowledged linguistic issues as well. For instance, she clarified that her usage of the word Rus referred to the Scandinavian rulers as opposed to the debated ancient usage that described all Russians.<sup>26</sup> In her conclusion, Martin directed the reader to literature with both supporting and alternative

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<sup>24</sup> Martin, 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Martin, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Martin, 8-9.

arguments and seems to have welcomed reinterpretation by stating that her narrative only “presented one set of perspectives” on the subject.<sup>27</sup>

Based upon the literature reviewed, the study of Vladimir’s conversion of Rus has remained, over the last century, reasonably consistent in its focus on the questions surrounding the nature of the relationship between Byzantium and Kievan Rus prior to the event. In particular, whether Vladimir chose baptism or was converted by the lure of diplomatic overtures, or even coercion, from Byzantium. The focus of Byzantine religious influence has shifted from investigating a possible influence on Vladimir of a Christian population within the Kievan ruling class to evidence that Princess Olga had wanted to convert all of Rus decades earlier but lacked the political power to do so. Some have even argued the possibility that some tribes were converted by Byzantium as early as 830-840. Based upon the amount of interaction with Constantinople and an apparent absence of resistance to conversion from the lower princes, boyars, and elders, it appears almost certain that Byzantine culture and Christianity had already infiltrated the Rus’ ruling elite by 988. The focus of my paper is not on foreign motivations or the level of piety and predisposition to the faith but rather on the pragmatic motivations for Vladimir I’s 988 conversion of Rus as evidenced by the subsequent relationship that he and his heirs developed with the Orthodox Christian Church over the next couple of centuries.

As evidenced above, these methods have consistently centered on a modernist distrust of the pre-modern poetic and literary *Russian Primary Chronicle* and a search for new empirical trusted sources. However, for a lack of other contemporary native sources, the field has generally remained somewhat grounded in the chronicle accounts for the big picture narrative. As this paper focuses primarily on the mutual endorsements between the dynasty and Church, the chosen sources are Russian sources such as Russian chronicles, statutes, testaments, and law codes issued by dynastic princes. It will also use eulogies, sermons, and charters from Russian clergymen. Though the earliest existing edition of the chronicle was compiled in the thirteenth century, it is

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, 416.

assumed that the compilers had access to the original documents. Additionally, it is acknowledged that the original chroniclers, who were usually clergy with a vested interest in maintaining Riurikid legitimacy, were biased to some degree and the potential for inaccuracies in dates, names, and sometimes facts exists. However, as Grekov argued, even though these inaccuracies do exist, the original writers were direct participants and the general assessments of the events are relatively representative.<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the biases, while perhaps exaggerating the piety and standing of a prince, seem to further support the thesis.

The methodology employed in my research will be a straight empirical analysis of primarily post-Christianization Russian sources to demonstrate the mutual reciprocal endorsements of legitimacy between the Church and the dynasty after 988. This will provide a different perspective from which to infer Vladimir's motives for adopting Orthodox Christianity that indicates that legitimizing the Riurikid autocracy domestically was his primary concern. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* entries for 987-8 will be used to show the steps that Vladimir took to choose a religion that could attract boyar and elder support and the acceptance of the population that he hoped would unify them and legitimize his rule. Statutes, testaments, and law codes will be analyzed to illustrate the steps taken by the Riurikid princes in the tenth through twelfth centuries to build legitimacy and influence for the Church. Law codes like the *Pravda Russkaia* as well as statutes and testaments from princes, such as Vladimir I, Iaroslav, and Rostislav, demonstrate this in the granting of tithes, legal jurisdiction, and privileges to the Church and its personnel. The Church's reciprocation in building legitimacy and influence for the Riurikid dynasty is exhibited in the praising and pious language used in the chronicle entries. It will also be demonstrated in sermons from prominent clergymen such as Metropolitan Ilarion's *Eulogy on St. Vladimir I*. Additionally, *The Confirmation Charter of Smolensk Bishop Manoil* will demonstrate immediate and direct reciprocation of promotion to Rostislav Mstislavich's charter creating a bishopric in the mid twelfth century. Ultimately, these primary sources will be

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<sup>28</sup> Grekov, 7.

analyzed and presented as chronologically as possible with the intent to show that the Riurikid dynasty pragmatically adopted and strengthened the Orthodox Christian Church as a second institution in Rus'. Also, by highlighting language that conveys princely piety and princely concessions that enhanced church influence, these sources will illustrate the ways in which the Riurikids linked themselves and their legitimacy to it through a relationship of mutual promotion.

The beginnings of this progression were demonstrated in some of the subtle actions taken by Vladimir I [980 – 1015] when choosing Orthodox Christianity which indicated that the pragmatic concerns of strengthening his power base and unifying the Russian people likely outweighed his own personal religious convictions. A ruler with firmly established legitimacy would have chosen the religion that he preferred and imposed it on the population. However, Vladimir I was in the process of creating that legitimacy and he needed the population to accept his choice. The 987 chronicle entry indicated that Vladimir, after receiving emissaries from all the major religions, rejected Islam and Judaism as being too modest and restraining, nor could they facilitate trade and cultural exchange with Byzantium or the western Christian countries. Though either Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox Christianity would have suited his domestic political needs, Vladimir was quite taken with the religion of the Byzantines for its beautiful churches and ostentatious ceremonies, or perhaps merely for the wealth in trade that those suggested. Rather than just choosing, however, he felt the need to consult his vassals and city elders. He asked them “what is your opinion on this subject, and what do you answer?”<sup>29</sup> He was gauging their reaction in order to predict the likelihood of acceptance from the general populace. At their suggestion he sent out emissaries of their choosing to obtain more information on each major religion. Upon their return he again had them report to the vassals and city elders. Their glowing report on Orthodox Christianity, particularly the splendor and beauty of its churches and ceremonies, convinced the boyars and elders to accept baptism. Vladimir asked of them, “Where shall we

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<sup>29</sup> “The Laurentian Chronicle on Vladimir and the Christianization of Russia,” in *A Source Book For Russian History From Early Times to 1917, Vol.1*, ed. George Vernadsky (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 25.

accept baptism?” and they replied, “Wherever you wish.”<sup>30</sup> With the boyars and elders accepting his authority here, Vladimir had begun strengthening his legitimacy by making himself a combination of secular and spiritual leader perhaps emulating the role of the Byzantine emperor.

Backed by the support of the boyars and elders, Vladimir implemented Orthodox Christianity as the new state religion and used the opportunity to strengthen his position as the ruler. He physically and symbolically destroyed pagan idols and replaced them with grand Orthodox churches, such as The Church of the Tithe in Kiev. The clergy of those churches, most from Byzantium, were assigned by him. He directed that children be taken away from their homes in order to be educated in the Orthodox tradition. Most importantly Vladimir ordered the population to come to the Dnieper River and accept baptism. Those that refused were to be considered an enemy of the prince.<sup>31</sup> Another translation of the same chronicle entry for 988 referred to all who refused as “rebels and traitors.”<sup>32</sup> Either way those that refused were not referred to as sinners against God but rather as traitors to the prince and state. This seems to have been a deliberate blurring of the lines between Vladimir’s rule and religious authority. It forced people into a position of having to accept the prince’s authority to remain in the good graces of the faith and having to accept the Church’s authority to remain in the good graces of the prince. Vladimir had created an image for himself as the bringer of the faith and had successfully linked his legitimacy to rule to the new state religion.

Vladimir, having successfully introduced a unifying state religion and linking his legitimacy to it, soon embarked on the next step in the process that he had initiated. He needed to expand the legitimacy, power, and influence of the Orthodox Church, and by association his own, over the entirety of the Russian population. He also needed to extend any power and legitimacy

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<sup>30</sup> “The Laurentian Chronicle on Vladimir and the Christianization of Russia,” in Vernadsky, *A Source Book For Russian History*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> “The Laurentian Chronicle on Vladimir and the Christianization of Russia,” in Vernadsky, *A Source Book For Russian History*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> “The Chronicle of Nestor,” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*; available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/nestor.html>; Internet; accessed October 9, 2010.

that he would gain to the entire Riurikid dynastic line. He did this by relinquishing, or investing, a portion of his princely power and wealth to the Church. In return the church reciprocally promoted him, the dynasty, and their heirs as pious and rightful rulers of Kievan Rus. He distributed his sons, accompanied by clerics, to principalities around the country to replace tribal leadership by setting up a political structure based on this linkage of a common religious ideology and Riurikid authority.<sup>33</sup> This contractual relationship with the Church became the dominant Riurikid pattern for the next two centuries to come and indeed for future dynasties in the centuries beyond.

Eventually, scholars estimate around the turn of the eleventh century, Vladimir I issued a statute that defined the relationship between the Church and the State. These laws led to an exponential expansion of the Church's influence. They provided wealth for the Church by providing a tithe of ten percent. This was taken from the tribute collected by the princes and used by clergymen to support and expand the Church's activities and sphere of influence throughout the entire land. He also relinquished jurisdiction for family, moral, and Church related law from his secular court to those of the metropolitan and his bishops. Oversight of scales, weights, and measures used for trade were transferred to Church personnel as well.<sup>34</sup> These transfers were very purposely made to insert the church into the average citizen's everyday life in a position of authority and trust.

Vladimir's statute also very astutely extended his claim of Riurikid legitimacy with several subtle references to his descendants. He stated first that he had consulted with his wife and children before making these concessions of power and wealth to the Church. He also included that "neither my children, grandchildren, nor any of my descendants ought ever interfere with either Church people or in any of their courts" and that "if anyone violates our statute, they

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<sup>33</sup> Martin, 22.

<sup>34</sup> "Statute of Saint Prince Volodimir [Vladimir, ca. 980-1015], Who Converted the Rus' Land, On Church Courts," in *The Laws of Rus'—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt Lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 42-44.

will not be forgiven by the law of God”.<sup>35</sup> With those laws and his use of that language he achieved three things. He facilitated the rapid growth of the Orthodox Church to which his legitimacy was linked. He staked the claim that his descendants would be the rightful heirs to his ruling power in the future and for the long term. Then, for the Riurikid line, he further blurred the line of distinction between their secular laws and the law of God.

The transformation that Vladimir’s ordered conversion and church statute had set in motion, however, did not immediately sweep throughout the country and bear all of the anticipated fruit. The princes and elites in the population centers, a significant number of whom may well have already been Christians before 988, were receptive and rapidly Christianized. Paganism, however, was still flourishing in much of the countryside and outer principalities among the commoners. The spread of popular acceptance of Christianity and Riurikid suzerainty would be a gradual process extending over the next few centuries. Resistance, and occasionally violent revolts, against the Church and Riurikid princes made Vladimir’s conversion of Rus an ongoing struggle for his successors. Mutual endorsement and interdependency between Church and secular authority played a fundamental role in that struggle.

The *Russian Primary Chronicle* entry for 1071 clearly illustrated that struggle. It recorded the story of just such a pagan revolt that occurred in the northern principality and city of Novgorod. The chronicler tells of a pagan magician [*volkhu*] who had deceived the commoners by blaspheming the Christian faith and claiming to be a god. This magician incited a popular uprising against the Church causing the Novgorod bishop to call on all true believers to defend the faith. A violent battle ensued where the Riurikid prince, the future saint Gleb, and his boyars stood with the bishop while the commoners followed the magician. The resolution came when the prince personally approached the magician with an ax concealed in his coat. The prince discredited the magician’s claim of pagan god status when he “cleaved him so that he fell

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<sup>35</sup> “Statute of Saint Prince Volodimir [Vladimir, ca. 980-1015], Who Converted the Rus’ Land, On Church Courts,” in Kaiser, *The Laws of Rus’*, 42-44.

dead...and the people dispersed.”<sup>36</sup> The Riurikid prince had persuaded the people of his legitimacy by having demonstrated the power of absolute fidelity to the faith in allying with the Church to defeat paganism.

Novgorod had developed a traditionally influential *veche* (town council) that moderated, to some degree, the legitimacy of princely authority.<sup>37</sup> This likely made legitimacy building an even larger challenge for which conversion of the population must have been a necessary priority. While some of the details of the event may have been reduced by the chronicler to symbolic representations, for instance the prince heroically slaying the magician himself and bringing immediate popular acceptance, it was a relatively accurate representation of pagan uprisings common in the eleventh century, of the interdependence between the Riurikid’s and the Church, and especially of the conversion struggle in the country as a whole. Vladimir Marinich suggested that the word *volkhu* translates more closely as shaman than as magician. A shaman would have been a highly compelling leader as he held a much more prestigious cultural status. He further concluded that these pagan revolts, far from being small isolated pockets of resistance, were often relatively significant nativist movements that were intent upon expelling the Varangian outsiders and eradicating their radical cultural changes.<sup>38</sup> The 1071 chronicle entry’s depiction, whether symbolic or literal, illustrated the relationship of mutual support between Church and dynasty that strengthened both institutions as they extended Christianity and Riurikid suzerainty throughout a sometimes resistant Rus land.

As discussed above, the concessions of wealth and power made to the Church by the Riurikid princes were made as an investment. The return on that investment increasingly came to fruition as the Orthodox Church gradually secured a growing hold on the people of Kievan Rus and proceeded to use its new found influence to promote the piety and legitimacy of the Riurikid

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<sup>36</sup> “The Laurentian Chronicle on the Revolt of the Pagans in Novgorod, 1071,” in *A Source Book For Russian History From Early Times to 1917, Vol.1*, ed. George Vernadsky (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Martin, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Marinich, 61-6.

rulers. As will be discussed below, the clergy, from metropolitans and bishops down to the lowest priests and monks, gave sermons and wrote chronicles that often preached of the divine legitimacy of the dynasty's claim to secular rule. When necessary the clergy used their pulpits and writings to explain away societal misfortunes and/or improper, and therefore sinful, princely behavior as simply the sometimes vengeful will of God. Some of the dynastic princes were elevated to sainthood while some were dismissed as being influenced by the devil and perhaps a divine punishment of the people for leading sinful lives, but in all cases always seeming to acknowledge the divine right of the Riurikid line to rule over the common people of Kievan Rus.

The constant wars for succession to the throne in Kiev, as well as individual principalities, to which the dynasty princes frequently subjected their people, provided ample evidence of the attempt to provide divine explanations for both laudable as well as detrimental princely behavior. In the 1073 entry in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* a violent fight for succession in Kiev took place among three sibling princes. The chronicler castigated the eventual victor for having betrayed and expelled his brothers due to a sinful desire for more power. However, the Riurikids in general were not denounced as their collective connection to divine legitimacy was seemingly maintained by claiming simply that "the devil stirred up strife among these brothers" to explain why the victorious brother "broke the injunction of his father [Iaroslav] and of God."<sup>39</sup> In a similar event a generation earlier, Boris and Gleb had been tricked and murdered by their brother, whom the chronicler compared to the biblical Cain, after each made a refusal to "raise my hand against my eldest brother" even if it meant foregoing the throne.<sup>40</sup> Chronicled as an act of princely Christian piety, Boris and Gleb would later be canonized for their alleged refusal to fight their own kin for power. Whether the chroniclers, likely monks, saw the princes' actions as pious or sinful, the connection with God was always maintained and though an individual Riurikid's conduct may have been questioned, the dynasty's legitimacy never was.

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<sup>39</sup> "The Struggle for Succession," in *Medieval Russia: A Sourcebook, 900-1700*, ed. Basil Dmytryshyn (New York: Holt, 1967), 55.

<sup>40</sup> "The Struggle for Succession," in Dmytryshyn, *Medieval Russia: A Sourcebook*, 49-50.

A very vivid and significant example of clerical reciprocation of the Riurikids' Church support was the monk Ilarion's *Eulogy of Prince Vladimir*. Written and delivered in the mid eleventh century, dated to ca. 1047 – 1050 during the reign of Vladimir's son Iaroslav [1019-1054], the eulogy very powerfully endorsed the piety and sanctity of Vladimir I. It was perhaps even intended to be an endorsement for canonization. Ilarion opened with the suggestion that Russians should elevate and praise Vladimir as Rome praised the early saints Peter and Paul. He equated the three as being holy purveyors of the faith. He stated, "Rome sings the praises of Peter and Paul, through whom it believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and so "let us also, according to our power, praise...our teacher and instructor...the great Khan of our land."<sup>41</sup> He further implied that Vladimir was worthy of saintly consideration with suggestions of his capacity for the miraculous. He subtly suggested that Vladimir's choice of Orthodox Christianity was a divine epiphany with no forethought or ulterior motives. Additionally, he calls upon Vladimir to rise from his grave, as he cannot be truly dead, and witness the fruits of the seeds of faith he had planted.<sup>42</sup> These would have been powerful endorsements to an expanding Christian population and the Riurikid elites whose legitimacy expanded with it.

One possible motivation for such a strong endorsement of Vladimir's sanctity, and perhaps Ilarion's primary purpose, was the linkage of that sanctity and legitimacy to his Riurikid heirs. After portraying Vladimir on the same saintly plane as Peter and Paul, Ilarion implied that those attributes extended to Iaroslav and his descendents. The monk said that "a very good and fine testimony is also your son Georgii (Iaroslav the Wise) whom God has made an heir to your power...who finishes what you have left unfinished" and "your grandchildren and great-grandchildren, how they live and are cared for by God."<sup>43</sup> It would likely have been quite difficult for a believing Christian to doubt the legitimacy of the ruling dynastic line with that kind of

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<sup>41</sup> Ilarion, Metropolitan of Kiev "Eulogy on St. Vladimir," in *Anthology of Russian Literature From the Earliest Period to the Present Time, Pt. I*, trans., ed. Leo Wiener (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), 48.

<sup>42</sup> Ilarion, "Eulogy on St. Vladimir," in Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Ilarion, "Eulogy on St. Vladimir," in Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature*, 49.

saintly connection to the faith. The stronger the Church had become then the stronger and more compelling its Riurikid promotion became. Thus as the Christian sphere expanded it could only have further diminished the pagan hold while the Riurikid's hold on the lion's share of the ruling power grew in parallel.

If Ilarion's primary objective was to sell the eleventh century Church authorities in Constantinople on Vladimir's candidacy for canonization, then he was not successful. Vladimir was not officially sainted until the thirteenth century, ca. 1263, after the Kievan period had ended. It appears, however, that his intended audience was the already converted Russian elites rather than the Byzantines. In this prime example of mutual promotion, and perhaps an attempt to rally them to the ongoing task, Ilarion's eulogy presented a highly idealized portrayal of the Riurikid princes and a Rus society where Christianity had conquered paganism. Likewise Iaroslav, the Grand Prince of Kiev, had continued and expanded the church privileges provided for in Vladimir's earlier statute. He also appointed Ilarion as the first native born Rus to serve as the metropolitan in Kiev. A post the monk held from 1051 until Iaroslav's death in 1054 when he was replaced by a Greek metropolitan as had been the tradition prior. Both Ilarion and Iaroslav the Wise contributed to the legitimacy of their own institutions in the eleventh century by promoting and strengthening the other.<sup>44</sup>

A comparison of Russian law codes from the tenth and eleventh centuries provides some insight into the evolving relationship between the Riurikids, the Church, and the general population following the Christianization of Rus. In 944, during Prince Igor's reign and prior to Vladimir's Christianization, a treaty was made with the Greeks that implemented a new set of laws. These laws applied to both the Christian Greeks and the pagan Rus. Though the document acknowledged the prince as being the authority that agreed to the treaty, his authority over the Rus people individually was hardly mentioned and seemed more symbolic than absolute. Social

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<sup>44</sup> Simon Franklin, Ilarion, Klim Smoljatic, and Kirill, *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus'* (Cambridge, MA: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University, 1991), xxxv - xxxvii.

status was only differentiated by slave or free. A free Rus man was subject to the law regardless of his status or wealth. The treaty stated that “if someone from among the princes or Rus people violates that which was written in this document then he will deserve to die”.<sup>45</sup> The authority behind those laws was in the punishment rather than from the prince or God. Retribution and/or compensation went to the victim, or their family, rather than to a prince or Church official. This was illustrated in article 13 of the treaty which declared, “If the murderer flee, and he be wealthy, then let the kinsman of the victim take his property”.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the post-Christianization law codes implemented in the eleventh century, *The Statute of Prince Iaroslav* and the *Ruskaia Pravda*, indicated a shift had occurred in the power of the Riurikids, in conjunction with the growth in the Churches power, in their relations to the common citizens. These further increased the power of the dynasty through continued promotion of the Church and their connection to it.

*The Statute of Prince Iaroslav*, dated to Iaroslav’s reign as Grand Prince in Kiev from 1019 to 1054, confirmed and fleshed out the earlier statute issued by Vladimir I. It continued the policy of the tithe and gave the metropolitan and his people immunity from taxes and duties. The statute clarified the legal jurisdiction given to the Church’s courts but also took two important steps in enhancing the power and perceived legitimacy of the princes. It differentiated by social status valuing the Church’s and prince’s personnel above the citizenry. It also added to Church coffers by transferring a portion of fees, fines, and bloodwites to it. This further strengthened the Church financially and authoritatively. Article two was a prime example. It stated that if someone abducted and raped a girl then the offender was required to pay fines to her and the Church court in equal amounts. The fines were determined by the social status of the victim. For example, a boyar’s daughter was a five *grivna*<sup>47</sup> fine and the daughter of a lesser boyar was only a two *grivna*

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<sup>45</sup> “The 944 Treaty,” in *The Laws of Rus’—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 8-12.

<sup>46</sup> “The 944 Treaty,” in Kaiser, *The Laws of Rus’*, 8-12.

<sup>47</sup> A “grivna” was a monetary unit whose value was based upon weight of a given commodity, principally silver and furs. See Daniel H. Kaiser, *The Growth of Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 269.

fine.<sup>48</sup> This both enriched the Church and enhanced the positions of both the Church and the dynasty by creating a social hierarchy and placing themselves, and their personnel, above the common citizens.

*The Russkaia Pravda* (“Rus’ Justice”) essentially served the same function in regards to the laws enforced by the prince’s secular courts. Written sometime in the eleventh century, one section issued under Iaroslav [1019-54] and a supplement issued by his sons in 1072, it defined the fees and fines paid for offenses to the victim and to the prince. It again differentiated the seriousness of a crime and the amounts paid by social status with the princes and their personnel at the top. If a prince’s steward was murdered the fine was eighty *grivnas* but “for the killing of a peasant or a slave, five *grivnas*.”<sup>49</sup> These documents indicated a continuing process of the dynasty princes’ securing of power and legitimacy through their connection with the Church. The laws continued to tighten the reins by elevating the Church and princes further and further above the population in more and more aspects of their everyday lives.

By the twelfth century, the predominantly Orthodox Christian population of Kievan Rus had generally accepted the legitimacy of the Riurikid dynasty as a whole. While the princes fought among each other for succession of Kiev, or for their branch’s principality, the dynasty itself had more or less achieved its goal of unifying the population and solidifying popular acceptance of their legitimacy as rulers. The way the princes viewed their relationship to the Church seems to have begun to shift to some extent. The belief that God had made them the legitimate rulers allowed them to view themselves as both secular rulers and, to some degree, spiritual leaders. It is possible that by this point, if they had not before, the religious convictions of the princes had begun to play a role in their promotion of the Church but their pragmatic needs remained as well. The struggles for succession, and the need for popular support to be victorious,

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<sup>48</sup> “The Church Statute of Iaroslav the Wise, 1019-54,” in *A Source Book For Russian History From Early Times to 1917, Vol.1*, ed. George Vernadsky (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 40.

<sup>49</sup> “*Pravda Russkaia: The Short Redaction (Eleventh Century)*,” in *Reinterpreting Russian History*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser and Gary Marker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 26-29.

made it necessary for the individual princes to maintain their relationship with the Church. The Orthodox Church maintained its special status throughout Kievan Rus and continued to promote the piety and legitimacy of the dynastic line. Evidence of this can be seen spreading outside of Kiev in distant principalities such as Smolensk and Novgorod.

A statutory privilege charter was issued during the reign of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich [1128-60], who later succeeded the Grand Prince of Kiev, which further illustrates the pragmatic linkage to the Church as well as the nature of that relationship in the twelfth century. Similar to Vladimir I's church statute, issued a century and a half earlier and with similar motivations, Rostislav's charter established a bishopric in Smolensk. It provided the church with substantial lands from the prince's holdings, including any slaves or freedmen residing on them, and the rights to any wealth derived from them. In addition, it provided the Church with a one tenth tithe taken from tribute collected by the prince. These tithes were itemized by the amounts in grivnas expected from each district. Perhaps most noteworthy was the relinquishing of legal jurisdiction to the bishop's court over all family law cases, such as divorce and polygamy. It further granted Church personnel immunity from the secular court in favor of the bishop's. With that provision of wealth and power, as Vladimir had granted, the Church had the means to enhance its, and the dynasty's, hold on the population.<sup>50</sup>

Though this charter followed the same pattern of relinquishing a portion of wealth and power to enhance church standing, the line between secular and spiritual was increasingly blurred in regards to the prince's status. The language Rostislav employed implied a clear link, and an assumption of authority, between Riurikid and religious authority. He claimed that his father, Mstislav, had intended to create the bishopric before his death. He also stated that his Smolensk principality would be protected from evil due to his creation of the bishopric which would garner God's favor and the prayers of his father and grandfather. This not only implied a link between

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<sup>50</sup> "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich [1128-60]," in *The Laws of Rus'—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 51-54.

the princes' authority and God's but also extended that link to his dynastic lineage by putting his predecessors in divine company. Rostislav's charter further laid claim to divine authority when it declared that "the bishop is to live with my clergy all my days in my principality which god gave me".<sup>51</sup> The use of this language clearly implied a view that it was his clergy and his God given principality rather than the Church's clergy and human secular authority. Mutual promotion between Church and dynasty seems to have evolved into a perception of divine right legitimacy.

The first Smolensk bishop, Manoil [1137-68], issued a confirmation charter in reciprocation of Rostislav's statutory charter. This document was essentially an acknowledgment of the creation of the new Smolensk bishopric to which he had been appointed as well as an endorsement of Rostislav's piety and authority for having done so. Manoil used language in reference to the prince that somewhat subtly confirmed Rostislav's own implications from his charter. After referring to himself as a sinner and unworthy, Manoil credited the prince with ratifying the church statute and referred to him as "my well-born and Christ-loving prince, Mikhail [Rostislav]," and further endorsed the piety of his line by labeling Rostislav's father, Mstislav, as "his holy father."<sup>52</sup> Manoil's charter both credited the prince and the Rus' metropolitan with having the grace of God for creating the bishopric and threatened God's wrath upon the successors of either if it was not maintained. A notable implication of the above mentioned aspects of Manoil's charter was that he seemed to have placed both prince and metropolitan, though no order was implied, in the same hierarchy of spiritual rule rather than distinguishing between spiritual and secular authority. Both the clergy and the dynasty had blurred the lines to enhance the perception of mutual legitimacy.

A similar statute was issued in Novgorod around this same period. The Riurikid prince Vsevolod [1135-37], following a similar pattern as Vladimir, Iaroslav, and Rostislav before him,

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<sup>51</sup> "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich [1128-60]," in Kaiser, *The Laws of Rus'*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> "The Confirmation Charter of the Smolensk Bishop Manoil [1137-68]," in *The Laws of Rus'—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 56.

issued his statute on church privileges. Much like those of his relatives, though much more specific and detailed, Vsevolod's statute granted privileges of income, legal jurisdiction, and authority to the Novgorod archbishop that insured the Church a prominent place in the lives of the principality's population. It guaranteed the standard ten percent tithe from the prince's treasury and granted legal authority over all church personnel. The prince relinquished to the church court legal jurisdiction over all family law and provided specifics that ranged anywhere from divorce, rape, and adultery to infractions like genital crushing, sexual bestiality, and abortions among unwed mothers. If a case involved both church people and non-church people the statute allowed for a joint court though, to show deference to those that served God, it conceded ninety percent of collected fees and fines to the Church's court. The statute also followed Vladimir's precedent of giving to the Church, through the bishop, power over official weights and measures in the market place. The provision states that per God's will "the bishop is to supervise without trickery all trading balances, measures, and all...scales."<sup>53</sup> Nearly a century and half after Vladimir's conversion and church statute, it is clear that promotion of the Church was still deemed a necessary investment for the Riurikid princes.

Indeed, even in the twelfth century, some of the insecurity that necessitated these investments to build and maintain legitimacy still existed and were apparent in Vsevolod's statute in several ways. He alluded to his dynastic line's legitimacy by tracing his lineage back through Vladimir to his sainted ancestor, Olga. He touted their piety for having accepted baptism from the acknowledged center of orthodox Christianity, Constantinople. This was perhaps an appeal to a substantially converted population who looked to the Byzantines as the primary authorities of the faith to demonstrate a longstanding dynastic connection. Furthermore, Vsevolod subtly extended that connection, and thus ruling legitimacy, to his heirs. In order to give assurances that the privileges granted in his statute would be upheld, he promised that "neither my children, my

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<sup>53</sup> "Statute of the Novgorod Prince Vsevolod [1135-37] on Church Courts, People, and Trade Measures," in *The Laws of Rus'—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 60-62.

grandchildren, nor any one of my lineage henceforth and forever shall interfere with church people and their courts.”<sup>54</sup> This was not just an assurance that the statute would last but also a claim of legitimacy in his implication that his Riurikid line would rule the land henceforth and forever.

Signs of local concerns of legitimacy that further facilitated the prince’s need to link to and strengthen the church can also be discerned from the statute. As mentioned above, Novgorod had a traditionally influential *veche* that by this time had resulted in above average popular participation in government and even the selection of the Novgorodian princes.<sup>55</sup> This was evident in Vsevolod’s apparent need to justify and attain acceptance for the statute rather than simply decreeing it. He felt the need to explain that his statute, and those of his predecessors, were based upon and supported by the Greek nomocanon (an ecclesiastical law code containing elements borrowed from both secular and canon law). Much more telling was his assurance that he had consulted his boyars, the town elders, church leaders, merchant representatives, and the ten heads of the hundred-men<sup>56</sup> before relinquishing those powers to the Church. He further indicated a need to garner popular acceptance for his statute by promising that if an official fails to carry out the elements of the statute correctly and justly then that official’s wealth and property would be taken and given not to the prince but divided evenly between St. Sofia’s Cathedral, the church of St. John, and “a third portion for the hundred-men and all Novgorod.”<sup>57</sup> It seems clear that the investments in, and partnership with, the Church was a continuing necessity and perhaps particularly so in the more independent principalities like Novgorod.

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<sup>54</sup> “Statute of the Novgorod Prince Vsevolod [1135-37] on Church Courts, People, and Trade Measures,” in Kaiser, *The Laws of Rus’*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> Martin, 113-114.

<sup>56</sup> “Hundred-men” is a reference to medieval military or militia forces organized in units of 100 men. See George Vernadsky, *The Origins of Russia* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1959), 281-2.

<sup>57</sup> “Statute of the Novgorod Prince Vsevolod [1135-37] on Church Courts, People, and Trade Measures,” in *The Laws of Rus’—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 62.

By the mid-twelfth century in Kievan Rus, the Riurikids as a dynastic line had achieved a relatively comfortable degree of legitimacy for their claim to rule. Their continuous efforts, begun by Vladimir's statute around the turn of the eleventh century, had elevated the Church to being a second institution of authority alongside and interdependent with their own. It seems, however, that the princes had begun to feel secure enough in their suzerainty that the Church's institutional wealth and power became attractive. The 1137 statutory charter of Prince Sviatoslav Ol'Govich of Novgorod [1136-1138] indicated that, by that time, the princes were secure enough to adjust the conditions of the Church's statutory privileges.

In his statute, Sviatoslav, Vsevolod's immediate successor, sharply reduced the Novgorod church's income and transferred the remainder back into his own treasury. He revoked the tithes from the bloodwites and fines that had been the tradition established by his predecessors. He replaced them with a fixed tithe payment of 100 *grivnas*. The observation that he recorded was that he was paying a tenth of all of his collected tribute to the Church while "the Church received as much of a tithe from the bloodwites and fines as came all the days into the prince's hands, into his storehouse."<sup>58</sup> In addition, the statute set fixed payments, in furs and goods, to be collected as tithes from each of the districts in the principality. While still maintaining the church in a partnership of mutual promotion, it is evident that the Riurikids, certainly in this case, were asserting more and more direct autonomous authority. It is possible that this was done to weaken the Church in Novgorod for its involvement in supporting anti-Sviatoslav unrest. He would be removed by the increasingly independent Novgorodians after only two years as their prince, however, by this stage there was never any consideration given to replacing a deposed prince from outside of the dynasty. It is clear that the princes had achieved a level of legitimacy that allowed them to begin to comfortably assert their authority and occasionally adjust the status of the Church and their relationship to it as needed.

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<sup>58</sup> "The Statutory Charter of the Novgorod Prince Sviatoslav Ol'Govich [1136-38]," in *The Laws of Rus'—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans., ed. Daniel H. Kaiser (Salt lake City, UT: Charles Schlacks, 1992), 57.

My research has attempted to look beyond the events of 988 for evidence of why Vladimir I chose to convert Rus to Christianity while the majority of prior research seems to have focused upon the decades preceding the 988 conversion in attempting to explain his motives. They have focused on pre-Christianization Russian and Byzantine sources in an attempt to determine where, when, and by whom had the earliest baptism taken place. The scarcity of pre-Christianization Russian sources outside of Byzantine/Russian treaties and the use of Byzantine chronicles to compare and corroborate cultural and political borrowing have created a focus on byzantine relations in these studies. Because of this, the debate has been somewhat limited to whether Vladimir was personally predisposed to Christianity through the influence of Olga and an existing Christian population, as argued by historians like Spinka and Butler, or whether it was motivated mainly by diplomatic concerns with Byzantium as argued by Poppe and Dvornik.

By looking at how Vladimir and his heirs, over the subsequent two centuries, implemented the faith and partnered with the Church in actual practice, my research has provided another perspective from which to infer his primary motivation. It has demonstrated that the enhancement of his autocracy through a unifying and legitimizing ideology took clear precedence over previous influences on personal belief or Byzantine diplomatic relations. This was done using post-Christianization Russian sources that, despite some inaccuracies and biases, illustrated both that conversion was a long process to which the princes and clergy devoted a lot of resources and that they were written, or delivered, for the benefit of a somewhat resistant Russian audience. The law codes and statutes did not simply maintain an existing societal hierarchy but were gradually establishing one. The eulogies and sermons did the same in the spiritual realm. Zernov concluded that the later sources omitted political motivations to protect Vladimir's pious image. While I do not dispute this, I would argue that it is further evidence that legitimacy was still an issue when they were written and thus politics were a secondary motivation for conversion. I also would not dispute Janet Martin's broad study which argued that Riurikid legitimacy, diplomacy, trade, Olga's conversion, and etc. were all motivating factors for Vladimir but I would, based

upon my reading of the post-Christianization sources, argue that the issue of Riurikid legitimacy to rule took precedence over all other concerns.

In conclusion, the policies of Vladimir I and his Riurikid heirs had been an investment in the future that paid off. In time they largely achieved their primary goals of unifying the population of Kievan Rus and expanding their own power and legitimacy as the ruling line. By choosing Orthodox Christianity and creating dual institutions of linked, though disproportionate, authority, the Riurikids were able to systematically legitimize and empower themselves by taking steps to legitimize and empower the Church. The documents analyzed above demonstrated this relationship and its progression. Vladimir and his heirs issued law codes that expanded the influence of the Church throughout Kievan Rus. They granted special status and wealth from their own treasuries to aid in that expansion. They inserted the Church into the everyday lives of the population in positions of trust and authority. The princes also relinquished jurisdiction of certain areas of law enforcement to church courts. As the Church gained in stature so did the perceived validity of its promotion of the Riurikids. In sermons and eulogies the clergy praised the piety and legitimacy of the princes. Some were even elevated to sainthood. Spiritual and secular leadership blurred together and the princes further distanced themselves from the rest of the social hierarchy that they had created. By the twelfth century, princes were referring to their principalities as God given and some felt secure enough to make adjustments in their relationships with the Church. The small portion of wealth and power relinquished by the Riurikids yielded a significant return in the form of generally unquestioned legitimacy for their dynastic line, even if not always for the individual prince. That legitimacy would more or less survive the Mongol yoke [1240-1480] and would, directly or indirectly, influence future dynasties' claims of legitimacy for centuries after.

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