

The Laurentian Chronicle as a Witness to Some Distinctive Characteristics of the Religious Culture in Old Rus



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"Culture" is a very difficult term; and yet it is central to all branches of human knowledge, creativity, ethos, *Weltanschauung*, religion, politics, and so on. It seems that the best definition to date is that of A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.¹

It is my contention that the religious culture of Kievan Rus', both in its pre-Christian and Christian forms, has exhibited many distinctive characteristics, some of which are as follows:

1. There is a great tendency towards the portrayal of the sacred, the redeemed, the divinized and the glorified, but

1. A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952; reprint: New York: Vintage, 1963), p. 357. The first major ecclesiastical document dealing with the idea of culture was: *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum Secundum, Constitutio pastoralis de ecclesia in mundo huius temporis* (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis): "De culturae progressu rite promovendo," nos. 53-62, pp. 51-59.

primarily under the aspect of Beauty, that is in the aesthetic dimension.²

2. It interprets all the history of the Kievan Rus' as a sacred history, or a history of salvation. This means a series of mighty acts and interventions of God (or gods) as the Creator and the Giver of Grace in historical developments and events.³
3. It is very strongly prophetic, that is, seeking for prophecy as the means of foretelling the future.⁴ It also interprets the contemporary situation in the light of aetiology, that is, it states that a prior event which the Kievan Rus' experienced is seen as a conditioning reason for a contemporary situation.

Aetiology is etymologically derived from the Greek *aitia* 'cause'.⁵ Here we must distinguish between the *mythological* and *historical* aetiologies. *Mythological aetiology* is usually of an unscientific and popular nature, based on folklore; and yet it can be extremely important in the development and meaning of a culture, religion, and historical consciousness. It is a picturesque portrayal of an alleged and mythical cause located in the undetermined

2. The epoch-making analysis of religious mystery was: Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917). English version: *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958). See A. Holl, "Otto, Rudolf," in *NCE*, 10:822. Cf. my articles "A Theological Meditation on the Mystery of Theosis or Divinization," *Studies*, 1:45-67, also the relevant articles in *Studies* 2 and 3.

On the religion and religiosity of the Eastern Slavs, cf. V. Mansikka, *Die Religion der Ostslaven* (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1922); V. Lypyn's'kyi, *Relihiia i tserkva v istorii Ukrainy* (Philadelphia: Z drukarni Ameryky, 1935); M. Hrushevs'kyi, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini* (2nd ed., Winnipeg: Uks. Evangel. Alliance of North America, 1962); S. Lesnoi Rus', *otkuda ty? Osnovnye problemy istorii drevnei Rusi* (Winnipeg, 1964); Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko), *Dokhrystiians'ski viruvannia ukrains'koho narodu* (Winnipeg: Instytut Doslidiv Volyni, 1966); V. Ianiiv, ed., *Relihiia v zhytti ukrains'koho narodu* (Munich: Zapysky Naukovoho Torarystva im. Shevchenko, 1966). Cf. also G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religions Mind, 1, Kievan Christianity: The Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946; Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1960). pp. 329-33.

3. Cf. H. Kistner *et al.*, *NCE*, 12:998-1001; R. Schnackenburg *et al.*, "Heilsgeschichte," *LThK2*, 5:148-57 (with Bibl.). On the pre-Christian concept of sacred history, see my article "The Ultimate Reality and Meaning in the Pre-Christian Religion of the Eastern Slavs," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 11 (1988): 247-66.

4. Cf. G. Lanczkowski *et al.*, "Prophet(en)" *LThK2*, 8:894-804.

5. Cf. K. Rahner, "Ätiologie," *LThK2*, 1:1011-12; L. F. Hartman, "Etiology in the Bible," *NCE*, 5:592-93.