On the Merit and Demerit of Being a Christian: Missiological Reflections in the Wake of Medieval Arab Sources Relating the Christianization of Russia

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Abstract: In 988, Vladimir the Great was baptized and the Christianization of Russia could begin. While this seems to be an historical secure date, things are different regarding the circumstances surrounding this baptism. Only the Arab sources tell us that baptism could take place because of a military alliance between Byzantium and Russia. The alliance was needed, because of an internal rebellion in the Byzantine empire and that this rebellion could only be quelled with Vladimir's help. The recompense for Vladimir was the marriage with Anna, the emperor' s sister.
There is one other thing only the Arab sources tell us. The marriage could take place only *after* Vladimir was baptized. Anna categorically refused to be "handed over" to a man who had a religion different from her own. The next thing the Arab sources reveal is that some Russians were not happy with Christianity since it did not allow to make a living by the sword, which meant ruin and starvation for the people. The way out of this situation was to find a religion other than Christianity that *allowed* the practice of the sword *again* (i.e., plunder and jihad) and this was Islam. Given this development the present study tackles the basic question of the relationship between religion and power. Can religions survive without the sword? And what does

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it mean specifically for Christianity in light of the "peaceful way of love" inaugurated by Christianity's "founder", Jesus of Nazareth? In the past, Christianity has succumbed to the attraction of power in spite of the "founder's" principles. However, will or even can the future be different? The question is also vital for Islam, but here the problem has to be "solved', if it can ever be "solved", in accordance with the rules and regulations of the "Holy Book", the Qoran, *the* revelation of God for the Muslims.

Keywords: Christianization of Russia, religion and power, religion and politics, Christianity and the sword, Islam and the sword

Introduction

The present paper, certainly, is of historical interest. Learning about the christianization of Russia through Arab sources represents a rare opportunity to approach Russia's history from the non-Russian side. The documents we are dealing with are put together, translated into German and commented by Peter Kawerau within the frame of a series launched by the University of Marburg on the history and culture of Eastern Europe. They still respire the freshness and "simplicity" of the days of their making—besides offering some original insights found nowhere else.

Yet, the present paper also tries to go beyond this stage, since the way our Arab sources see and interpret the events opens the possibility for additional interpretations, animated by a broader missiological interest. Indeed, what is the merit or demerit of becoming a Christian and—that is the surprise our sources reveal—of leaving Christianity again *after* having wholeheartedly embraced it? Tensions and specific socio-political dynamics which are still operating today come to the fore in these ancient texts. They regard the relationship between religion and politics, i.e., religion and power.

In this way the question of the christianization of Russia has the potential to function as a case study transcending the borders of Russia while merging with some crucial human questions in general: what does it mean to "have" a religion and for what purpose?

From the deep waters of baptism to the high ground of politics

We begin with two authors, Istakhrī and Masʿūdi, who both mention the existence of Christians in the geographic area we are dealing with here.[1] Istakhrī notes: "And there is the empire of the Romans (ar-rūm, which means Byzantium). It comprises the borders of the Slavs, the neighboring Russians (ar-rūs)... and those who have accepted Christianity (dāna bi-n nazrānyyati)."[2] Kawerau comments that the term "rūs" means "the Scandinavian founders of the Russian state."[3] About these Christians we learn from Masʿūdī that they belong to the Slavs (as-saqāliba)[4]. Furthermore, we learn that

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[1]Istakhrī (circa 950 AD) is the author (around 951) of a geographic work that reworks al-Balkhis opus (between 913-923) concerning the description of countries and also offering maps. The purpose of the two authors was to describe all those countries in which Islam was the dominating religion. – Masʿūdī (circa 890 - 957) was born in Bagdad. The family name goes back to a companion of the Prophet called Masʿūd. Al-Masʿūdī was traveling through Persia, India, Ceylon, China, South Arabia, Syria and Egypt. He died 957 in Cairo. The following notice is taken from his famous Akhbār az-Zamān (News of the times), written circa 943 AD. (See AQ [=Arabische Quellen zur Christianisierung Russlands by P. Kawerau] pp 8, 11: German Text. All English translations by me, ThM. Arabic transcriptions have been simplified, especially regarding emphatic s,h,t,d).

[2]AQ, p. 5. If not mentioned differently, all page numbers belong to the Arab text.

[3]AQ p. 9, note 7, German text.

[4]In the Arabic literature of the Middle Ages *Slavs* do not only mean the peoples of East and North East Europe, but also " Germans, Finnish, Turkish and other non-'Slavic peoples'." p.9, note 6, German

the Christians have churches (kanā'is)[5] in which "bells are suspended that they beat the way they beat wodden planks (nawāqis)."[6]

The next question is how Christianity came to the Russians. To begin with we follow the relation by Jahjā of Antiochia (circa 980 - circa 1066)[7]:

> And Bardas Phokas openly rebelled (kāshafa bil - ʿasyān) and claimed for himself the imperial dignity (al-mulk). This happened on a Wednesday, the feast of the Cross, the 14. September 987 AD. And he occupied the territory of the Byzantians up to Darūlija[8] up to the shore of the sea and his troops advanced as far as Akhrasūbulī[9]. And the power of the rebel became really

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text. For further information see too Kievan Rus'-Wikipedia, p.1/2; Vladimir the Great - Wikipedia, p. 1/4.

[5]This term is also used for synagogues. The verb "kanasa" means to sweep, remove the dust, for example from monuments for the dead, to get them ready for visitors, etc. Cf. Wehr, p. 842.

[6]AQ, p. 12/3. This is a practice also adopted in the cave monastery of Kiev; see AQ, p. 13, note 10, German text.

[7]Jahjā ibn Said ibn Jahjā al-Antākī was a relative of the Malkite patriarch Eutychius of Alexandria (877-940), known in the West by his Annals (Contextio gemmarum). Jahjā was born in Cairo (circa 980). He was a medical doctor, a fact that also transpires in the way he describes what he considered the grave madness of the Fatimid Khalif al-Hākim (996-1030), known for his persecutions of Christians and his general cruelty. Jahjā's relation of the Christianization of Russia takes place within the presentation of the reign of the Fatimid Khalif ʿAzīz (975-996). It is the most ancient Arab relation of this event. Furthermore, Jahjā is the only one who links Vladimir's baptism to the rebellion of a certain Bardas Phokas. Bardas Phokas was the member of a Near Eastern ruling family, second son of Leon Phokas, a nephew of emperor Nikophorus II. Between 903-969 Phokas claimed for himself to succeed his oncle. His imperial proclamation took place in the North Eastern part of Cappadocia. (See introduction to Jahjā AQ pp. 14/5, p. 16, note 6, German text.)

[8]Today Eskishehir, in Northern Phrygia.

[9]Today Ueskuedar, Skutari, on the asiatic shore opposite to Constantinople.

> dangerous (for the emperor) and emperor Basileos[10] became worried about the rebel because of the strength of his troops and because the rebel had defeated him. Also the emperor's financial means were running out. Thus, the necessity obliged him to send a delegation to the ruler of Russia (malik ar-rūs)[11] – although they were enemies[12] – in order to ask for help relating to his present situation.

And the Russian leader gave his agreement and both of them concluded a marriage settlement (ʿaqadā bainahumā musāhara) and the Russian ruler got married (tadzawwaja) to the emperor Basil's sister *after* Basil had imposed upon Vladimir as condition (sharata ʿalayhi) to be baptized (an yuʿtamida)[13] together with the rest of the population of his country. And the Russians are an immense people that at that time was not yet associated with any religious law (sharī ʿa), did not embrace any *dīn* (any known religion). And later on[14] the

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[10]Basileos II (976-1025), the "killer of the Bulgarians". Nominally, Basil was ruling together with his brother Constantine, but de facto Basil was ruling alone. (See AQ p. 17, note 12, German text).

[11]The person in question is Vladimir I the Saint (978-1025), great prince of Russia. See AQ p. 17, note 13, German text. See too Vladimir the Great-Wikipedia.

[12]Enemies, may be because of the fact that Basil had been defeated by Vladimir in a battle that had taken place on the 17th August 986 and in which Vladimir had fought side by side with Samuel, the Tsar of Bulgaria. (Cf. AQ p. 17, note 15, German text). See too the notice in Vladimir the Great- Wikipedia, p/ 3/4: "Basil turned to Kievan Rus' for assistance even though they were considered enemies at that time".

[13]The basic meaning of ʿamada, "to be baptized", goes into the direction of "to support", "to do something on purpose", "to approach", "to embark" (see Wehr, p.641).

[14]See the speculation AQ p.18, note 18, German text, about the meaning of "later on": whether it points for example to an attempt by the emperor not to fulfill the marriage treaty, i.e., to give his sister "away". Vladimir would then have forced the emperor's hand by occupying Korsum (= Cherson, city on the Crimean peninsula. For

Basileus sent Vladimir Metropolitans (matārina) and bishops[15] and they baptized the great prince and all those his territory comprised. And he sent to him his sister who built many churches in the land of the Russians. And as soon as the marrying off (tazwīj) of Basil's sister was accomplished between the two, i.e., Basil and Vladimir, also the Russian troops arrived and were added to the troops of Byzantium, the ones Basil had (at his disposal).

After that these troops turned against Bardas Phokas, to attack him on earth and on sea as far as Akhrasūbulī (that city on the Asiatic shore opposite to Constantinople). Then they defeated Bardas Phokas and Basil occupied the coastal region and took possession of all the ships that had been in the hand of Bardas Phokas."[16]

So far the report by Jahjā of Antiochia. It clearly establishes a link between the Christianization of Russia[17], that is the baptism of Vladimir with the rebellion of Bardas Phokas. It is the need for help to quench the rebellion that makes Basil II turn toward Vladimir. However, the twist of the story lies in the fact that the military alliance, to which Vladimir agreed, is sealed by "marrying off" the emperor's sister. It is, so it seems, the sister, on whom Vladimir clearly has laid an eye, who makes him enter the military alliance.

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details see Chersonesus-Wikipedia, pp. 1/7 and 2/7) the 7th April and 27th July 989 (see AQ p. 18, note 21, German text).

[15]The basic meaning of the term "bishop" (usquf, pl. asāqifa) is "to provide with a roof, or to 'roof over'", Wehr, p. 415).

[16]AQ pp. 15/6.

[17]Some regions of Vladimir's empire, however, knew already Christianity, since Vladimir' s grand mother Olga, who governed Kiev, was already a Christian. Yet, the Christianity of Olga was only of regional influence, not to be compared to what happened in the wake of Vladimir' s baptism. For this see Vladimir the Great-Wikipedia, pp. 1/4, 2/4. Yet, also the Wikipedia article, p. 1/4, begins with the statement: "Vladimir converted to Christianity in 988 and christianized the Kievan Rus'." See too Kievan Rus' -Wikipedia, p. 1/2.

From the Greek perspective this was indeed something extraordinary. Peter Kawerau, the editor of the texts we follow here, tells us in his general introduction that Russia and the Russians in the eyes of Byzantium represented all that was cruel, archaic and barbaric in those days. Thus, "it is understandable that the people of Byzantium were not eager to talk (about the fact) that people like the Russians converted to Christianity or that the chief ("Haeuptling") of their people received an imperial princess, a true Porphyrogenita as a spouse."[18] Thus the episode of Cherson, the attempt by Basil II not to honor any longer to what had been agreed to only under circumstances of extreme military pressure and need—does it not also reveal Basil's reluctance to "spoil" pure imperial blood by mixing it with an unworthy bloodstream? Indeed, Vladimir's mother, Malusha, was only the housekeeper of Sviatoslav, Vladimir's father and thus Vladimir only Sviatoslav's "natural" son.[19]

However, Basil should have known that Vladimir was not shy of coveting women apparently out of his league, socially speaking. Thus on his way to conquer Kiev[20] Vladimir, passing by Polotsk, asked Ragnvald, ruler of that fortress, for his daughter Ragnhild. But Ragnhild, the high-born princess, refused "to affiance herself to the son of a bond-women."[21] The reaction to the princess' refusal was swift. Polotsk was conquered, Ragnvald slain and Ragnhild taken by force. She was to enter a harem of several wives and 800 concubines.[22]

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[18]AQ, Kawerau, p. 3, German text., my transl. ThM.

[19]Cf. Vladimir the Great -Wikipedia, p. 1/4.

[20]Vladimir had to conquer Kiev, because it had been given to Sviatoslav's legitimate son Yaropolk, while Vladimr, the "natural" son, had only received Novgorod. See Vladimir the Great - Wikipedia, p. 2/4.

[21]Cf. ibid., p. 2/4.

[22]Cf. ibid., p. 2/4.

Yet, that was still the "pagan" Vladimir. Up to now, no marital affair had changed anything on the religious level. There was still the power of Perun, the god of thunder and war, a Norse god, favored by the military elite; and there was Mokosh, a goddess of Finnish origin, representing "Mother Nature", and many others.[23] Vladimir might have tried to reform Slavic paganism by identifying himself "with the various gods worshipped by his subjects[24], but in the end he became known as a Christian saint and not as a pagan reformer. Yet, all this would have never occurred, had he not "boldly negotiated for the hand of emperor Basil II's sister Anna. Never before had a Byzantine imperial princess, and one 'born in the purple' at that, married a barbarian, as matrimonial offers of French kings and German emperors had been peremptorily rejected."[25]

Yet, to perform this "miracle" Vladimir had to make one big concession. He himself had to become a Christian. The text we have studied, the relation by Jahjā of Antiochia, clearly mentions this condition—however, it does not elaborate on the *reason* behind it. If we follow Jahjā's text, we get the impression, we are dealing with a simple "marrying off" of Anna. Anna being a simple object of male authority (incarnated by his brother), a price-money to pay for higher imperial political reasons. Shortly, it seems as if she had had no saying whatsoever in the negotiation. It is Basil, who dictates the condition of baptism and the reader can easily get the impression that Basil is also the author of the stipulation, that *he* has put it in place, but this impression is wrong. To understand why, we have to take into account a text by Abū Shujā' (died 1025).[26]

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[23]See ibid., p. 2/4.

[24]Ibid., p. 2/4.

[25]Ibid., p. 3/4.

[26]Zahīr ad-Dīn Abū Shujā' ar-Rūdrāwarī acted from 1083-1091 as

Abū Shujā' begins by telling us, how the rebel Bardas Phokas had forced the emperor Basil (and his co-emperor Constantine) to put Constantinople into the state of defense, since he, Phokas, had taken position with his troops just opposite to the Byzantine capital. Abū Shujā' continues:

> As the situation of the two emperors reached the degree of (total) weakness (ad-durʿf), the two met with the prince of Russia (malik ar-rūsyyat[27]) and asked for help. He, the prince, (in a countermove) requested from the two to be united (al-wuslat) with their sister. Both answered positively to the request.[28]

So far, so good, one could say. The text confirms what we have learnt already. However, what follows, opens a new horizon to the action that is just evolving before our eyes. This action, a "normal" political negotiation between two male actors—we remember that on the Greek side in fact only Basil II was really acting—i.e., normal politically unsurprising business, is suddenly interrupted by a new player. This one historians often overlook or take for granted, namely the appearance on the stage of history of the *female* voice. It takes the form of two words only: "wa imtanaʿat al-marʾa", "the woman refused"[29] Why? She refused "to surrender herself (min

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minister of Khalif al-Muqtadī (1075-1094) in Bagdad. Later Abū Shujā' went to Medina where he died on the 23th of June, 1095. Abū Shujā' compiled for the years 940-998 AD a chronicle, continuing studies undertaken by Miskawaih (died 1030), who in turn continued the famous annals by Tabarī (839-923 AD).

[27]See also the notice by Kawerau, AQ 21, note 7, German text, that "rūsyyat", that normally designates in Arabic the "Russianhood" here however designs "Russia".

[28]AQ p. 20.

[29]Ibid., p. 20.

taslīm nafsahā) to a man who differed from her in the matter of her religion (yukhālifuhā fī dīnihā).[30]

This is new information and comes as a huge surprise[31]—since which impact such a clear refusal would have on the outcome of the negotiations? It is understood, that the negotiations were not allowed to fail. Given the military reality on the ground, failure was not an option. Yet, the negotiations would have to enter a new stage. New means were required—"a coming and going of letters in this matter"[32], i.e., a serious convincing on the side of Basil was now required. Successfully—since Vladimir knows what he wants and is ready to pay the price. So everything knows a happy ending. The negotiations end "with the conversion of the Russian ruler to Christianity" [33] and at that moment "the connection with the Russian prince was completed (tammamat) and the woman was led to him (hudīt al-mar'a ilayhi).[34]" And thus as a result: "The Russian ruler helped the two emperors with an immense number of his men. And these were people of strength and tremendous courage."[35]

If we look back at Anna's refusal and Vladimir's baptism, his "entering Christianity", we cannot avoid to detect a parallel between this story and the story about Vladimir and Ragnhild[36] As we have noticed above, Ragnhild's refusal to surrender to Vladimir was based on the assumption, that Vladimir *did not fit* because he was only the "natural" child of Sviatoslav I, namely the son of

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[30]Ibid., p. 20.

[31]Cf. too Kawerau, AQ p. 21, note 8, German text.

[32]"taraddudu min al-khitāb fī dzalika" AQ p. 20.

[33]"mā intahā ilā dukhūli malik ar-rūsyyati fī nasrānyyati" AQ p. 20.

[34]Ibid, p. 20.

[35]Ibid., p. 21.

[36]The princess of Polotsk, Vladimir captured by force on his way to Kiev (see Vladimir the Great-Wikipedia, p. 1/4).

a "bondswoman" and as such lacking the privilege of "high birth". In the case of Anna-Vladimir, this blot of impure blood and the despite that comes with it on the side of the "high-born" was certainly also present. And as in the case of Ragnhild nothing could be done about it. Vladimir was and always will be a "natural" child. Yet, it is precisely here, that religion, in occurrence Christianity, could interfere, where Christianity shows its merit. It could offer to produce a situation of at least minimal equality between the marriage partners. Minimal, but in the eyes of faith and salvation of maximal value: the equality produced by baptism, a new creation in Christ (Gal6, 15; Rom 10, 12, 13). For the new self produced by Christianity "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised or un-circumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col, 3, 11). In this way, the "stain" that was attached to Vladimir forever would be overcome, also once and forever, by the new identity baptism could create.

We should not approach thus marriage with the eyes of "love of today", in categories of "falling in love" etc. Marriage in our text and its corresponding age is political. Anna knows that and she also knows that her fate is to be "married off" one day. Yet, we can only admire the masterstroke that represents her initial refusal based on solid theological grounds. Thus Christianity *does* have its merits. Finally, in this sense the Christianization of Russia did not begin with Vladimir the saint and his baptism, but rather with *what led to this baptism*, the "stubborn" refusal of a proud Porphyrogenita to surrender to a man who did not share her religion. The rebellion of Bardas Phokas and the resulting disastrous military situation it created for Basil II, which forced him to ask for the helping hand of Vladimir, certainly also belongs to the birthday of

Russian Christianity,[37] but not on the same level as Anna's intervention does. Clearly, Vladimir wanted Anna in exchange for his help, while lubricating a deal with the exchange of women was normal procedure. Women were treated like today's money. But Anna was not Ragnhild. Thanks to the means put at her disposal via Christianity, Anna saved her honor, and Vladimir became a saint, the Father of Russian Christianity.

Abū Shujā' is not the only one to have mentioned Anna's refusal regarding the alliance of Byzantium with the Russians. See for example also the famous Arab historian Ibn al-Athīr (1160-1233)[38]: "Both emperors entered in connection with the Great Prince of the Russians and asked for his help and they married him (dzawwajāhu) with their sister; but she refused (imtanaʿat) to surrender herself to someone with a religion different from her own..."[39] On the other hand al-Makīn (1205-1273) from Takrit (Iraq), who follows Jahjā, mentions Vladimir's baptism as a condition of the deal, but not Anna's refusal.[40] Finally Dimashqī (1256-1327)[41] describes the event as follows: "... and they (the emperors) married Vladimir with a sister of theirs. But she refused to surrender to someone who had a religion different from her own. Upon this Vladimir became a Christian (fatanassara). *And this was the begin (awwalu) of the Christian religion in Russia*. And when Vladimir had become a Christian, she surrendered herself to him."[42]

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[37]See AQ p. 17, note 16, German text.

[38]See biographical data AQ, p. 27, German text. Ibn al Athīr's relation ibid., pp. 28.

[39]Ibid., p. 28.

[40]See al-Makīn's relation ibid., pp. 33/4.

[41]Dimashqī was a geographer and historian, but alas interested in botanics, zoology, mineralogy and the kind of industrial activity of the countries he describes in his writings. See biographical data AQ, p. 40, German text.

[42]AQ, p.40.

The culture of the "saif"

If we believe the relation proposed by Jahjā of Antiochia[43], with which we have begun our investigation, the impact of the Christianization of Russia must have been enormous—corresponding to the enormity of the task because of the size and the strength of the Russian people.[44] Yet, what would be the future of "Christian Russia"?

Fortunately, thanks to a text by Marwazī[45] we are confronted with a scenario of post-pagan Russia (i.e., not long after Vladimir's and his people's baptism) that is as astonishing as it is instructive! It opens up a whole new series of questions:

> And what concerns the Russians... they are of great numbers (kathīrū al-ʿadadi) and they consider the sword (as-saif) (to be the foundation) of their livelihood and profession (al-maʿāsh wal-kasb), [i.e., their reason to be]. And when one of their men dies and if he has daughters and sons, they transfer the father's possessions to the daughters, setting aside for the sons the sword. There is this saying: 'Truly, your father acquired his possessions (al-māl) with the sword. Just imitate him and follow him in this matter (iqtadū bihi

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[43]Ibid. pp. 15/6.

[44]A true "umma ʿazīma' (ibid., p. 15).

[45]Sharaf az-Zamān Tāhir al-Marwazī, born circa 1046 in Merw, today Turkmenistan, worked as a medical doctor at the court of Sultan Malik Shāh Saljuqī (1072-1092) and his successors – on the Turkish Seljuk empire see Sordel and Sordel, pp.525; 740-743. Al-Marwazī was fond of Greek science. Religiously he seems to have had shiite inclinations. He must have died soon after 1120. His opus Tabā ʿi' al-Hajawān (On the specif nature of animals) comprises a general part on Islamic ādāb-literature (higher education, humanistic science, but also geography, anthropology and zoology). The geographic portion of the opus reveals a particular interest by the author for China and Siberia. Here we find also the chapter on the Russians and what happened to them after they had become Christians.

> wa ukhlufūhu fīhi).' And this was their *nushū'*, their customary way of life, their education up to (the day) they became Christians (tanassarū)... And when they became Christians, the *religion* (dīn) put their swords into the scabbard. In his way it closed for them the door of acquisition (of goods), (with the result) that it reduced them to poverty and ruin. And life smashed them down. At that point they were craving (raghibū) for Islam, so that they might be allowed (to undertake) rhazzias (ghazū) and jihād and thus might recover thanks to the return to a (very essential) portion of their (former) life.[46]

Copying Marwazī, the Persian writer al-ʿAufī (born 1176 in Buchara) produces the same suite of events with the same conclusions: "As the Russians became Christians they put their swords into the scabbard [note, that Marwazī's version is stronger; in his text it is *religion* that puts the sword into the scabbard]. Since they did not know any other method to assure their subsistence, and since the previous method (plunder and war) was now blocked, their affairs got out of order and life began for them to become difficult. Therefore they craved for Islam and they became Muslims."[47]

Still later the Anatolian writer Shukr Allāh (circa 1390-1488) reproduces the same story and clearly states: "Their goal was to legitimize the (making of) booty thanks to the conversion to Islam".[48]

Remains to see, *how* the "Russians" put their desire into action. Where to go for information, and so forth. For this we turn again to Marwazī:

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[46]AQ, p. 24.

[47]AO, p. 40, German translation of the Persian original.

[48]AQ, p. 48, French transl. of the Persian original; for details see Kawerau, AQ, p. 49; Engl. transl. of the French text by me, ThM.

> At that point they dispatched emissaries to the ruler of Khwārizm[49], more precisely four men (chosen) among the relatives of their prince (malik). (They proceeded this way) since their ruler is independent and according to his personality entirely self relient (bi dhātihi mustaqallan). The name of this prince is Vladimir!... the emissaries arrived in Khwārizm and they conveyed the message. And the Khwārizmshāh was delighted about their desire to become Muslims. He then dispatched someone to them, who taught them the religious laws (sharā'iʿ) of Islam. And they became Muslims (fa-aslamū)."[50]

The way Marwazī tells us the story poses questions. The dispatching of emissaries, close to Vladimir, to a famous Islamic ruler strangely resembles a relation of the Russian Nestor-chronicle. The chronicler Nestor has it that "in the year 987, after consultation with his boyars, Vladimir the Great sent envoys to study the religions of the various neighboring nations whose representatives had been urging to embrace their respective faiths."[51] In other words, Vladimir, at that moment, was not yet a Christian, but only wanted to inform himself about the merits of the surrounding religions. According to the Nestor-chronicle Vladimir learnt, thanks to his envoys, that in the German churches there is no beauty. Concerning the Jews Vladimir concluded, that God must have abandoned them, a fact demonstrated by the loss of Jerusalem. But neither was Islam a choice acceptable for Vladimir. His reaction upon hearing about the sharīʿa and its interdiction of alcohol

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[49]Khwārizm, "a rich medieval Islamized province in Central Asia, divided today between the republic of Uzbekistan, the autonomous republic of Karakalpakistan and the republic of Turkmenistan." (Sourdel and Sourdel, p. 479; cf. too ibid., pp. 479-481.)

[50]AQ, p. 24.

[51]Vladimir the Great-Wikipedia, p.3/4. See too AQ, p. 25, note 20, German text.

was "Drinking is the joy of all Rus'. We cannot exist without this pleasure." Only orthodox Byzantine religion impressed him, since the envoys told him: "We no longer knew, whether we were in heaven or on earth", describing the beauty of the liturgy celebrated in the Hagia Sophia.[52]

Now, the Vladimir of these various missions clearly is not the Vladimir of Marwazī's text.[53] Marwazī's report "transforms" the story of the envoys into a story of Russians no longer satisfied with Christianity and thus desiring to become Muslims. And since all this happens *after* an initially successful Christianization of Russia, the Vladimir of Marwazī's text must have been also a Christian. This begs the question: did he agree or not with the mission of the four envoys to the state of Khwārizm and above all, who and how many Russians, tribes or subgroups of Vladimir's dominion wanted to convert? And could that have happened without Vladimir's tacit permission?

In all probability the "Russians" of Marwazī's report must have been some belligerent tribes whose main occupation was nothing else than piracy![54] This is at least what we learn when we follow the rest of Marwazī's report—hence we are informed that these freshly

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[52]See for this Vladimir the Great-Wikipedia, p.3/4.

[53]The Vladimir of the Nestor-chronocle is not involved in any rescue operation because of the rebellion of a Bardas Phokas. He simply seems to want to enhance his status by marrying a Byzantine princess: "In 988, having taken the town of Chersonesos in Crimea he boldly negotiated for the hand of emperor's Basil II's sister Anna. Never before had a Byzantine imperial princess, and one 'born in the purple', married a barbarian." Ibid., pp. 3/4.

[54]"Concerning the Russians (ammā ar-rūsyyat)" – the only specification we are given by Marwazī, is that "they live on an island in the ocean". To walk through it would take three days. "And upon the island are forests and thickets, and around them is the see. And the Russians are many in numbers." AQ, p. 24. Are we dealing with the Crimea?

converted Muslims use their considerable physical strength ("they can walk on foot to far away places"[55]) for nothing else than to make booty![56]

We find these people on the ocean of the Khazars.[57] They steel ships, plunder property and sail to Constantinople (via the sea of Pontus[58]), "in spite of the iron chain (salāsil) in its bay."[59] And: these peoples' "courage (basāla) and bravery (najdat) are well known, so (much so) that one single of their men corresponds to a great number from all (other) peoples. And if they had horses and were horsemen (fursān) – their plague (balā') would be impossible to support."[60]

It is not without irony that a Muslim acknowledges (indirectly), that becoming a Muslim does, indeed, seem to comport with the permission to commit all kinds of atrocities. Under the banner of Islam the "saif", the sword rules again, violence again being a legitimate part of life. The Russian male, who was ruined by Christianity can again breathe freely in his role as warrior.

The irresistible attraction of power

What the documents on the Christianization of Russia tell us is not only interesting with regard to

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[55]Ibid., p. 24.

[56]Cf. ibid., p. 24.

[57]Cf. ibid., p. 24. – The Khazars were a "semi-nomadic Turkic people". (Khazars-Wikipedia, p. 1/40. Khazaria "became one of the foremost trading emporia of the medieval world... playing a key commercial role as a crossroad between China, the Middle East and Kievan Rus'. For some three centuries (c. 650-965) the Khazars dominated the vast area extending from the Volga-Don steppes to the eastern Crimea and the northern Caucasus." (Ibid., p. 1/40).

[58]Cf. Kingdom of Pontus-Wikipedia, p. 1/9.

[59]AQ, p. 24. These are the iron chains at the entrance of the Golden Horn mentioned for the first time in 717; see ibid., p. 26, note 22, German text.

[60]Ibid., p. 24.

Russian history. On the contrary, we see for example concerning the Kievan Rus', that Christianization was done "en gros". When the tribal chief converted to a new religion or changed within a given religion one "denomination" for another – the tribe/ the people had to follow. Religion as an individual destiny was above all reserved for the founder figures, powerful politicians, like Vladimir in Russia or Charlemagne in Western Europe, including some "specialists" like mystics and saints. As a principle, under the name of *cuius regio, eius religio* the practice even lasted through the era of the reformation in Western Christianity. All this is not a new discovery—and Russia simply confirms a widespread phenomenon.

However, more intriguing than this is the theory that emerges from relations like the one by Marwazī and others, namely the *uselessness* of Christianity, i.e., its total *demerit* with regard to a certain life style, a certain way of being in the world. In other words, what is laid open here with regard to Christianity is the eternal conflict between religion and politics. This conflict is especially "cruel" in the case of Christianity, because of the specific nature of this religion, that is because of the totally and fundamentally disruptive, controversial and unique nature of its "founder", Jesus of Nazareth.[61] However, be this as it might be, the Arabic texts we have studied describe clearly and concisely what is at stake: the religion (dīn) that refers to this Jesus *did put the sword into the scabbard* – and in doing so, ruined people's life!

Everybody knows the famous words: "Put your sword into the scabbard!" (Mt 26, 52). However, it is also known by the collective human experience, that a society built upon peace and non-violence alone never really existed or

[61]It is known that the term "founder" might not be totally appropriate, the life of Jesus being more like a sparkling rod in the dark than the biography of a "founder" or systematic organizer.

lasted for long. Those societies which tried to live more or less according to the principle of peace and non-violence were quickly criticized for effeminating their population and making their territory vulnerable to foreign invasions. I think here of the Indian Buddhist emperor Ashoka (ruled c. 268-232 B.C.), that is his politics of "ahimsa' (non-violence) and the "negative" effect that it supposedly had on the Maurya nobles.[62]

We could also mention the Hurons in Canada, i.e., whether their embracing Catholicism under the guidance of the Jesuits did not definitively weaken their dealing with the Iroquois.[63] In particular we have to consider that the "factionalism dividing Christian converts and traditionalists seriously weakened Huron confederacy in the 1640s."[64] It is also true that conver-sion to Catholicism could be the result of serious decline of the local tradition: "The Huron people faced numerous challenges in the 1630s-1640s. Rampant disease, economic dependency, and Iroquois attacks reduced Huron population and created rifts in the society. The reasons contributing to the Huron decline also prompted many of the natives to convert to Catholicism. In the late 1640s, villages that had been left demoralized and leaderless would convert en masse. The Jesuit success was short-lived, however, for the Iroquois would wipe out the Huron nations in the spring of 1649."[65]

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[62]"Some historians have argued that Ashoka's pacifism underminded the 'military backbone' of the Maurya empire..." (Ashoka-Wikipedia, p. 1/1). On Ashoka and ahimsa see too Doniger, pp. 253-2258; 270/1, etc.

[63]See Wyandot people-Wikipedia, p. 1/3; also: Jesuit Mission amongst the Huron-Wikipedia, pp. 1/6-6/6 .

[64]ibid., pp. 3/6.

[65]Ibid., p. 4/6. For the theological background and the missiology adopted by the missionaries in Canada see the masterful study by D. Deslandes, *Croire et faire croire*. Among other things it was debated whether the imperative of the mission consisted in "christianizing

The whole drama of religion versus politics within the orbit we are discussing here, i.e., modern colonialism, crystalizes itself also in the destiny and person of Samuel de Champlain, "heir of an ethical tradition that had deep roots in the teaching of Christ"[66] and who said about leadership, that a good leader "above all keeps his word in any argument, for anyone who does not keep his word is looked upon as a coward."[67]

And then there is this question that goes back to early Church history, when the barbarians invaded Italy and Rome fell into their hands (395-476AD)—was this disaster not due to the fact that Christianity had weakened the fighting spirit of the Romans? Augustine's city of God is linked to this very problem:

Augustine "heard that people was saying that Rome had been destroyed because the Romans had converted to Christianity... Augustine was very upset by this... But then why had Rome been destroyed, just as everyone was finally converting to Christianity? Augustine devoted most of the rest of his life to writing a book, the City of God, that would answer this question.[68]

Still, the question whether Christianity was useful or not for the realm of politics has never really come to rest. Indeed, one of the most striking examples of a merciless criticism in this matter we find in the writings of Machiavelli (1469-1527). Did he not really demonstrate by elaborating the "true" picture of the prince or the "true" nature of politics that these matters were diametrically opposite to "true" Christianity? That a really "good" Christian could never be a "good", i.e., successful politician? Indeed, his "concern with

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over catholicising or calvinising" the Indians. (See Deslandes, p. 212).

[66]Hackett Fischer, p. 529.

[67]Ibid., p. 531.

[68]Augustine of Hippo..., p. 1/3. See too: Augustine and the fall of rome, p. 1/1.

Christianity as a sect was that it makes men weak and inactive, delivering politics into the hands of cruel and wicked men without a fight."[69]

In sum, with Christians who take the Gospel seriously, it seems impossible to build up a "decent", functioning state. Also the young Hegel saw this problem quite clearly. The philosopher Arturo Massolo resumes Hegel's position like this: "The religion of the young (Jesus) community, taken as a pure imagination [Vorstellung] of reconciliation [Versoehnung] is in need of an objective power, in order to receive the warranty of its being real."[70] Such a warranty can only come from an "outside" force, i.e., for example the police-force, which in itself is an absolute stranger to what Jesus imagined for his own, new community. Thus we read in Luke 9, 48: "...for the least among all of you is the greatest" and in Luke 22, 25-26: "But he said to them; 'The kings of the gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves'."

The writer, who in a masterful way has put this dilemma on stage, is Michel del Castillo, in his "La nuit du Décret" ("The night of the decree"; Seuil 1981 [Points]). Therein the representative of the police force in dictatorial Spain utters this verdict on Jesus:

> If this madman would come back amongst us in order to preach his hazy doctrine, my conscience would dictate me to arrest him and if possible to put him away...Everything the police abhors – this illuminated

[69]Niccolò Machiavelli - Wikipedia, p.1/1, section "Religion".

[70]Das Problem der Geschichte beim jungen Hegel, p. 18, my transl. ThM. Massolo resumes ideas that can now be found in Hegels "The Spirit of Christianity and its Destiny [1798-1800] in: Hegel, G.W.F., Werke in zwanzig Baenden, I Fruehe Schriften Frankfurt/M. [Suhrkamp].

> incarnates it – vagrancy, subversion and the spirit of indecision."[71]

And, full of sarcasm and despite, in particular regarding the "law of love":

> (Jesus) replaces the simplicity of the law, its rigorous evidence, by a troubling commandment that ruins the possibility of an exact order... He appeals to the law of the heart against the code. He is founding the human relations on the conscience of "feeling" – which can only seduce women and artists."[72]

All this is certainly different from Islam (at least in its "political' appearance). As a religion of the "Law" (like its sibling Judaism) there should be no quarrel over what "mercy" means in any given circumstance. There is a text and there are "interpreters". Any eventual friction or tension can only be one of *application* of the law, not of inventing a new one (like the Johanneic 'new commendment' that is really an "empty" principle, waiting to be filled up!). And what violence (rhazzia, holy war, etc.) there might be – it is probably not impossible to trace it back to the original source, the *kitāb*, the book of God, the true "inspiration" behind the visible, readable text.[73]

Not for nothing the envoys to the Khwārizmshāh recieved as answer a sharī ʿa, a "law", – the term "law", indeed, in "normal" language, staying for "religion" as such. This solves one problem (the restitution of the old way of life, of the livelihood of the people the envoys

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[71]La nuit..., p. 322, my transl., ThM.

[72]Ibid., 303, my tranl., ThM. The dilemma expressed here is certainly not too far away from the recent migration crisis in Europe and the USA.

[73]For a more detailed approach to the question at hand see for example Mooren, War and Peace..., pp. 11-15, 77-84, 92-120, 141-144.

represent), but creates another – certainly a bigger one, a more dangerous one, so to speak. It places Islam forever on the side of *potential* violence, of so-called "realism", yes!, but on the detriment of genuine religious spirituality.

However, in order to do justice to history, we do not have to wait too long, to see also Christianity embracing the "objective power" the Jesus movement lacked in the eyes of Hegel, while acknowledging the usefulness of law and order, in other words, the world of the sword – "by pardoning first and then sending the guilty over to the secular arm, bowing down, this way, in front of the necessity of the law" as Michel de Castillo's police man correctly points out in his discourse of self-defense.[74]

And not only that! Christianity went so far as to invent the *miles Christi*, the soldier of Christ. I have elsewhere[75] traced back in detail the history of what the abbot of the Cistercian monastery Stella near Poitiers, Isaac of Stella (died c. 1169), called a "monstrum novum", a new monster[76]! The situation is comparable to the dilemma, reported by Marwazī', the Russians were confronted with, when they became Christians. Christianity simply could not let the sword resting in the scabbard. And why should it rest there, if we have this Jesus word in Mt10,34: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but the sword"!

Yes! Unless we could re-translate the Greek Jesus word into the Aramaic language, the one used by Jesus

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[74]La nuit du Déret, p. 322; transl. by me, ThM.

[75]Mooren, War and peace..., chapter One [the militarization of Christianity], pp. 50-64.

[76]Ibid., p. 56. See for this too Schneider, Geistesgeschichte..., p. 396-403. Among other things Schneider is of the opinion, that Christianity had become a "religion of soldiers", an integral part of the Roman Army which could no longer be ignored. Cf. Geistesgeschichte..., p. 399.

when he was teaching. We then would get: "I have not come in order to make compromises, but rather to engage in disputes!"[77] This, indeed, sounds quite different from the sword word and it would again underline the conflict between "founder" and follower, i.e., the Church. However, there are enough other texts in the Bible and the tradition that bring Christianity "back on track", so to speak.

Thus, the story about the expulsion of the merchants from the temple – "... making a whip of cords, Jesus drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle" (John 2, 15) – was used to justify the conquista of South America[78], while John 15, 6 – "Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" – was used to justify the burning of heretics of all kind, "new Christians" unmasked as "old" Jews on the Iberian peninsula, suspects in dogma and failure in morals. The smoke of these fires was certainly not the fragrance pleasing to God but stink belonging to hell.

Nevertheless, did it not work? Was this not also the same spirit that lied behind world-wide Christianization and empire building? Suffice to remember the text of the papal bull *Ineffabilis et Summi Patris* (1st June of 1497) that was part of Vasco da Gama's baggage on his voyage to India via the cape of Good Hope:

> In the hope that... you will undertake for the glory of God and the Christian cause the expropriation of the infidels and their conversion to the Catholic faith – and due to the authority of God Almighty that was given to

[77]For examples like this together with reflections on the method and feasibility of re-translating the Greek of the Bible into the Aramaic of Jesus, see the publications by G. Schwarz; among others his *Was wollte, tat und sprach Jesus wirklich?* (https;//jesus-forscher.de, p.1/1 (6/19/2019)).

[78]See Mooren, War and Peace..., p. 120, note 61.

> us in the person of the blessed Peter – We invest upon you (the authority)... over the cities, castles, territories and domains that... will be subjected under your domination or (authority over) those who will acknowledge you as your Master, i.e, (authority over) those who are willing to pay taxes. And with the authority of a Vicar of the Lord Jesus Christ, of which We dispose on earth, We are granting and yielding you all this...[79]

In the same line, already some years earlier, Pope Nicolas V (1447-55), in his letter "Dum diversas", had encouraged the king of Portugal Afonso V to do his duty by invading and conquering "Saracen" territory ("invadendi, conquirendi, expugnandi et subjugandi")... so that the Christian faith might be victorious ("contra inimicos Christi triumphans se repotasse censeat").[80]

Obviously, a re-assessment of killing as such was one of the pre-conditions for ideas like the ones expressed in these papal documents. Thus, killing was permitted, i.e., was not a sin in the following cases: 1. If you kill under the influence of the Holy Spirit (instinctu Spiritus Sancti), 2. If you kill to uphold the law (per legis ministerium), 3. Out of zeal for your faith (zelo fidei), 4. In self-defense (ex necessitate), 5. In order to defend the homeland (pro defensione patriae).[81]

Taking all this into account we could easily change the name of the pope with the name of the Khwārizmshāh instructing the Russian converts. So much the "ideological skeleton" of the Christian documents—put aside the names for God and some particular titles—would fit the "Muslim mentality". Conversion and jihād on both sides – and European

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[79]Quoted after Mooren, War and Peace..., 57, see too ibid., p. 62, note 25.

[80]Quoted after ibid., p. 57, see too ibid., p. 62, note 27.

[81]See ibid., p. 52 and ibid., 61, note 7.

nobles who could again making a living with their sword, from the crusades to the divers conquistas of the world, just as the Russian converts were able to live again by their swords, and doing it, as it seems, very successfully!

Thus, it seems, in the end, that the *raw political*—that power the young Hegel thought the Jesus community was lacking—has taken over "religion", or at least the "spiritual" part of it.[82] Or again in the words of the young Hegel: it is the destiny of the Jesus community that "church and state, worship and life, piety and virtue, acting spiritually and (acting) worldly can never melt into one."[83]

In the case of Christianity that is so, because of the life, destiny, character, and action of its "founder" himself. The gap between Jesus and what follows him is fundamental, but not *totally* unbridgeable. Indeed, what we call "Church" is essentially this permanent, never ending struggle to remain as much as possible faithful to the "dangerous memory" (J. B. Metz) of the "founder". Not a "kitāb" or a "law" but this effort, based upon the *difference* between him, the "founder" and us, is the lifeline of the Church. It is the Church's essence or its reason to be.

In Islam this gap between what is ideal and what is real does also exist. However, it is articulated under a different umbrella, namely around the faithfulness or not to a kitāb, a *text* which also is a law—albeit supported by the Sunna, the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad—as the source and norm of *revelation*. Put differently, the revelation is *not* the *person* of the Prophet himself, the

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[82]For the sake of our argument it is enough to be aware that "religion" and "spirituality" are not the same. To dig deeper into this matter, however, would take us too far away from the present paper.

[83]Quoted after Massolo, Das Problem..., p. 15, my transl. ThM. Massolo refers to H. Nohl, Hegel's Theologische Jugendschriften, Tuebingen 1907, p. 342.

"word" has not become "flesh" but a kitāb. Yet, it is one thing to be faithful to the norms and expectations of the kitāb—*including all its interpretations!*—and another to follow the destiny of a person. It is true, historically, that this person was a failure (contrary, by the way, to the politically very successful Prophet Muhammad) in as much as this Jesus ended up as a criminal on the cross. However, as such, as a person with all his words and deeds, hopes and disenchantments, this Jesus, for Christians, *is* the revelation.

How does this change a thing, in particular in the light of the result of the present research? It does change a thing, since albeit all religions in their history have succumbed to the irresistible attraction of power, they also possess—that at least is our hope—in the long run resources to *change that course*. Indeed, it is here in the present (and then the future), that we will see where the *maximum reserve of strength* lies to face the countless challenges of life, and above all, the problem of power—in the ethics provided by a religion of the Book or in embracing the mysterious power of a person like Jesus who tells us in Mt 8,22/Luke 9, 60: "let the dead bury their own dead!"—meaning: the future is open, the future is there, only the future will tell!

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