Historians have paid surprisingly little attention to historical thinking in Kiev Rus'. Major monographs have been penned to explain the complex composition of the old Russian chronicles and their usefulness as evidential material.1 Still other works have appeared to elucidate the political and the religious values reflected in these sources.2 Yet all of these works neglect a fundamental component of the Kievan world view: historical consciousness—how Kievans thought they fit into universal history and how they looked upon the present and the future, given their perception of the past.

The historical consciousness of the Kievans ought to be examined in its own right. It is a crucial component of a culture—particularly of one which so manifestly valued the recording of its deeds. Kiev Rus' produced many historical works—most prominently, the Primary Chronicle,3 the Paterikon of the Kiev Cave Monastery,4 the Novgorod Chronicle,5 and the continuations of the Primary Chronicle.6 The Kiev chronicle tradition was rich and complex; it reveals a historical consciousness at once pagan and Christian, religious and secular, tribal and political, local and universal. This tradition clearly warrants an extended study.7

1. See, for example, A. A. Shakhmatov, Razyskania o drevnerusskikh letopisnykh svodakh (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Arkheograficheskaia Kommissiia, 1908); M. D. Priselkov, Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia XI-XV vv. (Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1940); D. S. Likhachev, ed., Povest vremennnykh let, 2 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1950); B. A. Rybakov, Drevniaia Rus': Skazaniia, byliny, letopisi (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1963); A. N. Nasonov, Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia XI-nachala XVIII v. Ocherki i issledovania (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1969).


3. Likhachev, Povest . . .


7. I am currently at work on such a project.
The present study attempts to isolate one aspect of Kiev historical consciousness and to evaluate its effect upon the mentality of the ruling elite of "Russia's" oldest polity. We have chosen to examine the vision of how Rus' Christians fit into the universal historical scheme of things from Creation to time's end. The religious aspect of historical consciousness is more often assumed than expressed in the chronicles, but happily is the central theme of a homiletic work of the Kievan era. For an appreciation of the effect of conversion upon the historical attitudes of Kiev's Christian elite, let us turn now to the Slovo o zakoni i blagodati, the "Sermon on Law and Grace," by Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev.8

Hilarion was a highly literate and articulate spokesman of the Kievan ecclesiastical establishment. Schooled in the Byzantine fashion, Hilarion brought a thoughtful and delightfully playful historical imagination to his writing. Talented, too, as politician, he applied his experience as Kiev's highest ecclesiastical officer to his exposition of the place of Rus' in the universe of Christians. Champion of the Rus' claim to historical legitimacy, the Metropolitan Hilarion linked the grand prince to the emergence of Kiev as a divinely-ordained, historically preconditioned Christian polity.

When Hilarion wrote his Sermon, in about the year 1050, he had recently become Metropolitan of Kiev.9 He may very well have been the first citizen of Rus' to attain such a lofty position, one traditionally assigned to a Byzantine, deemed "safer" back in Constantinople. Hilarion's prestigious position in the Rus' Church placed him close to the famed Iaroslav the Wise, who, like his father Vladimir, supported the spread of Christianity across the land of Rus'. Hilarion and Iaroslav appear to have worked closely together to bring enlightenment to Kiev. Indeed, the Sermon itself expounds the merits of the faith in the historical context of the evolution of Christianity in Rus' from conversion by Iaroslav's father, Vladimir, in 988, through the reign of his worthy son and successor, Iaroslav. Whether composed to enhance Vladimir's chances for canonization or merely as a celebration of the emergence of Christianity in Rus', the Sermon captures the bond between political and religious commitment which gave purpose to the struggle for civilization in Kievan Rus'. Hilarion's Sermon fuses political ideology and Christian consciousness with the exposition of a historical vision from creation to Iaroslav the Wise. Rus' becomes part of the Christian oikumene; she is not alone, for Romes One and Two remain alive and well; she does not resent her mighty forebears, but is proud to partake in their experience; she is not, as Muscovite Russia would be

9. Müller’s critical introduction to this sermon includes an excellent summary of Hilarion’s career. See Müller, Des Metropoliten Ilarion, pp. 1-32.