

Antoni Mironowicz

Wydział Historyczno-Socjologiczny
Uniwersytet w Białymstoku

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Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th–18th Century

The society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to a greater or lesser extent was always diversified in terms of religious affiliation and nationality. The issue associated with the communities of different religious specificity occurred in Poland on a large scale as early as the fourteenth century, when within the country's borders areas inhabited by people ethnically non-Polish could be found. In the fourteenth century the Kingdom of Poland lost significant areas of ethnic Polish lands in the west. As a result of incorporation in 1366 by Casimir the Great of Halych Ruthenia, the structure of the country's religion and ethnicity changed. Poland lost its national-confessional homogeneity. Change of the ethno-religious structure of the country contributed to a change of its political attention. Containing within its borders a large Ruthenian population, so far linked with Lithuania or Moscow, aroused fears about their loyalty to the new homeland. The Polish state had to develop a policy towards religion represented by a large part of society. Catholicization of the communities of different religions, or providing them official status in the country, was one of the major concerns of Polish internal politics. In contrast to the countries of Western Europe, where only the Reformation resulted in religious differentiation, Crown land, especially the land of the Great Duchy of Lithuania, had been already previously inhabited by various Christian and non-Christian religions. Common lots of the citizens of different faiths of Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Crown, contributed to development of the specificity of Polish tolerance. Its most characteristic features manifested in the phenomenon of multi-faith and multicultural coexistence of residents of the Republic.

The importance of the presence within the limits of the Polish State Orthodox Church believers was understood by the last representative of the Piast dynasty – Casimir the Great. Casimir the Great preserved the law and ordinance of the Orthodox Church¹. Under his reign over the lands of the Crown and Lithuania con-

¹ W. Abraham, *Powstanie organizacji Kościoła tacińskiego na Rusi*, Lviv 1904, pp. 218–219; A. Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w dziejach Rzeczypospolitej*, „ΕΛΠΙΣ” A. I (XII), no. 1 (14), Białystok 1999, pp. 89–90.

tacts on a large scale occurred between Latin and Byzantine-Ruthenian traditions. Ruthenian language was the official state language in Lithuania and Ruthenian culture was eagerly adopted by Lithuanian dukes and boyars. Under the influence of Ruthenisation, Lithuanians were partially Christianized by the Eastern Church with all the consequences of that fact. Lithuania, having within its borders Russian lands, was only formally a pagan country. Through the Orthodox Church the Byzantine culture became widespread in the Ruthenian and Polish territories. Orthodox culture aroused interest among the last representatives of the Piast dynasty. Casimir the Great used the services of Ruthenian painters and constructors. Ruthenian artists were designing funded by the King's Cathedral in Wiślica and the chapel of Wawel castle. Ruthenians also built the "hetmańska" mansion on the Main Market Square. During the reign of Casimir the Great one of the largest churches at that time was built – St. George in Lvov.

Significant changes in the status of the Orthodox Church followed the death of the last king of the Piast dynasty. Louis I of Hungary referred with reluctance to Eastern Christianity. Key facts determining the position of the Orthodox Church in the Polish state occurred after the Union of Krewo in 1385. At that time, on the lands of Poland and Lithuania, contact on a large-scale between Byzantine-Latin and Russian trends took place. Both countries had long been engaged in joint expansion to Halych Ruthenia and Volhyn. Those days, however, Ruthenians have become citizens of those countries, in some regions constituted a majority of the population.

Political union between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Catholic Poland had important consequences in relations between the religious communities – it inhibited the development of Orthodoxy and paved the way for the Latin Church with all of the political and cultural consequences. Orthodoxy from being the dominant religion became the tolerated one². After the Union of Krevo, the Yagiellons did strive for the establishment of an independent Orthodox structure in the area of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the division of the Orthodox Church in Ruthenian territories finally ended. The, so far, single metropolitan area Kiev was divided into Lithuanian and

² Makarii (Bulgakov, M. P.), *Istoriia Russkoi Tserkvi*, vol. IV, Sankt-Petersburg 1886, pp. 41–97; J. Fijałek, *Biskupstwa greckie na ziemiach ruskich od połowy XIV w. na podstawie źródeł greckich*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny”, vol. XI, 1897, pp. 27–34; M. Hrushevs'kyj, *Istoriia Ukrainy-Rusy*, vol V, Kiev 1905, pp. 100–179; W. Czermak, *Sprawa równouprawnienia schizmatyków i katolików na Litwie 1432–1563*, Cracow 1903, pp. 7–17; K. Chodynicki, *Kościół prawosławny a Rzeczpospolita Polska. Zarys historyczny 1370–1632*, Warsaw 1934, pp. 3–72; T. M. Trajdos, *Metropolici kijowscy Cyprjan i Grzegorz Camblak a problemy Cerkwi prawosławnej w państwie polsko-litewskim u schyłku XIV i pierwszej ćwierci XV w.*, [in:] *Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia*, vol. II, Poznań 1985, pp. 213–214; *ibid*, *Kościół katolicki na ziemiach ruskich Korony i Litwy za panowania Władysława II Jagiełły (1386–1434)*, Wrocław 1983; A. Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w państwie Piastów i Jagiellonów*, Białystok 2003.

Vladimir-Suzdal parts. The dividing line of the two metropolias proceeded along the borders of the Great Duchy of Lithuania and the Principality of Moscow. In 1415 Gregory Tsamblak was selected the Metropolitan of Lithuania (Kiev-Halych), and Photios (Fotsius) the Metropolitan of Moscow. In Poland, there were tendencies to implement the Union of Florence. Arguably, therefore, King Vladislaus III of Varna in 1443 delivered privilege in the Buda, which legally equalized the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church. This privilege remained only on paper and did not become law. The privilege was nothing more than a royal declaration, in no way corresponding to reality. The death of Vladislaus III of Varna and the exile of Isidore, church union supporters, again tightened the policies of Polish rulers against the Orthodox. This issue should be combined with events in Moscow. The Metropolitans of Kiev, actually of Vladimir, were striving to maintain their power over all the Orthodox dioceses. On the other hand, Duke of Moscow Ivan III adopted the title of tsar and began the process of merging Ruthenian territories under the aegis of Moscow. Already at the time of Mongolian slavery emerged the idea of Holy Russia defending “True” Christianity. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 was considered to be a manifestation of divine wrath because of the Greeks signing the Union of Florence with Rome. Although the idea of The Third Rome was proclaimed by the government of Vasil III, the special role of the Orthodox religion as an integrating factor in the Ruthenian territories was widely known and understood by neighboring countries. Those opinions were not unfamiliar to the Orthodox elite in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In Poland and Lithuania, they were acknowledged with fear of the loss of Ruthenian territories within the boundaries of both countries. Those concerns were not dispelled despite official renunciation of the title of the Kiev Metropolitan by the Moscow Metropolitans in 1458³.

The Yagiellons understood that the Orthodox population was in their ethnic territory. The Yagiellons, unlike the Andegavens or Valois, built their power on the multi-faith structure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They were unfamiliar with the Western model of a uniconfessional Roman Catholic country with one dominant Latin culture. This attitude was enforced by the ethnic structure of the Duchy of Lithuania. The Duchy, dominated by a Ruthenian population of the Orthodox religion, was a multinational mosaic of Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish, Tatar, and Armenian people. Interfaith relations in the Duchy were differently understood in the Polish Crown. The political elite submissive to the Catholic Church treated the Orthodox Church as a stranger⁴. Already in the 15th century the universality of Christianity remained unnoticed and Latin peoples (Łacinnicy) defined

³ A. Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w życiu Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] *Przełomu historii. Pamiętnik XVI Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich we Wrocławiu*, vol. III, part 1, Toruń 2001, p. 496.

⁴ K. Chodyncki, *Kościół prawosławny...*, pp. 41–45, 76–79.

Orthodoxy as a “schismatic confession”. Even long before the Council of Trent, Orthodoxy was not deemed as part of the universal Church, but as a religion competing with Rome. Such reasoning can be found in the Polish chronicles of Johannes Długosz (Longinus), who described Poland as a “bulwark of the Christian faith”⁵. At this point we can recall the allegations raised by the Teutonic Order against Poland for aligning with pagans and “schismatics” in the war against Christianity. Teutonic propaganda at the Council of Constance attempted to remove Orthodoxy outside the frames of Christianity. In fact, Churches east and west had a sense of common origin, a long common history. This issue was also raised in ethnically Polish lands, during discussion of their re-unification. It was noticeable then, that more than Poland, in this part of Europe, Russian lands could more likely be called “the bulwark of Christianity”, since the thirteenth century faced them with the expansion of the Mongolians. It was only in subsequent centuries when Polish influence would face the Turks in Podole, Wallachia, and Transylvania. In each of these areas it was the Orthodox population who defended the Christian world.

In the age of the Yagiellons, Orthodox religion became a national and folk faith, through the ubiquity of various forms of worship and rites. The universality of worship of miraculous icons and holy places raised the religious awareness of believers. The cult of miraculous icons of Mother of God came from Byzantium to areas of Kiev, and from there to areas of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The cult of miraculous images had an impact on the spiritual awareness of believers, and penetrated into literature and art. The cult of icons of Mary caused the emergence of new sanctuaries, which integrated the society of various estates. The cult of the miraculous image of Our Lady, developing under the influence of Orthodoxy, spread through Polish soil on a scale unknown in other countries dominated by Latin Christianity. The cult of the icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, offered in 1382 by Władysław Opolczyk to the Pauline monastery at Jasna Góra, is the best example of that. The Mother of God icon brought from Belz to Częstochowa monastery initiated the miraculous icon worship, which became a constant of Poles’ and Ruthenians’ religious tradition⁶. Equally popular in this period was the cult of miraculous icons of Our Lady of Kiev Pechersk, Smolensk, Vladimir, Zaslav, Novodvor, Polotsk, Korsun, Kupiatych⁷.

⁵ J. Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae*, ed. A. Przędziecki, vol. II, Warsaw 1878, p. 405.

⁶ T. Mroczo, B. Dab, *Gotyckie Hodegetrie polskie*, [in:] *Średniowiecze. Studia o kulturze*, vol. III, Wrocław 1966, pp. 20–32; A. Rogov, *Chenstokhovskaia ikona Bogomateri kak pamiatnik vizantiisko-russko-polskikh sviaziei*, [in:] *Drievnierusskoie iskusstvo. Khudozhestviennaia kultura domongolskoi Rusi*, Moscow 1972, p. 316–321; *ibid*, *Ikona M. B. Częstochowskiej jako świadectwo związków bizantyjsko-rusko-polskich*, „Znak”, 1976, no. 262, pp. 509–516; F. Sielicki, *Polsko-ruskie stosunki kulturalne...*, p. 101, 102.

⁷ A. Różycka-Bryzek, *Bizantyjskie malarstwo jako wykładnia prawd wiary. Recepcja na Rusi*

On Polish soil, we also have examples of worshipping Ruthenian icons from the Halych Ruthenia. Great popularity gained the twelfth century mosaic icon of Mother of God, kept in a vault in Clarisse monastery in Krakow. The Poznan icon of Our Lady of Hodegetria, dated at mid-fifteenth century, is yet another proof of the impact of the Orthodox Church on religious life and art among citizens of Poland⁸. Many of the clergy and secular dignitaries kept in their homes Ruthenian icons. The art of painting, especially religious, acquired some elements of Ruthenian art. Ruthenian influence is visible in painting techniques and universality of use of the Eastern iconographic forms of performance⁹. Ruthenian books were commonly found in the courts of dukes and magnates. From the end of the fourteenth century a symbiosis of Polish and Orthodox culture can be observed, particularly in Orthodox monuments of architecture and literature¹⁰.

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The power of the Commonwealth was based upon recognition by the Ruthenian population of the Orthodox faith of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as their own state. Recent studies show that loyalty of Orthodox Christians to the Catholic *hospodar* was the result of growing ties with the Grand

– *drogi przenikania do Polski*, [in:] *Chrześcijańskie dziedzictwo bizantyjsko-słowiańskie*, ed. A. Kubiś i A. Ruseckiego, Lublin 1994, pp. 65–66; P. Chomik, *Kult Supraskiej Ikony Matki Bożej*, „Elpis”, no. 1(14), Białystok 1999, pp. 199–206; A. Mironowicz, *Kult ikon Matki Bożej na Białorusi*, „Białostocki Przegląd Kresowy”, vol. V, ed. J. F. Nosowicz, Białystok 1996, pp. 137–141; *ibid.*, *Jozafat Dubieniecki – Historia cudownego obrazu żyrowickiego*, „Rocznik Teologiczny”, Y. XXXIII, no. 1, Warsaw 1991, pp. 195–215; G. Luzhnitsky, *Słownik Chudotvornikh Bohorodichnykh ikon Ukrainy*, „In trepido Pastori”, Rim 1984, pp. 153–188; L. A. Kornilova, *Stranitsy bieloruskoi mariologii: Zhyrovichskaia, Bielynichskaia i Ostrobramskaia ikony Bogomatieri*, [in:] *Sbornik Katuzhskogo khudozhestviennogo muzieia*, vol. I, Kaluga 1993, pp. 30–33; N. Talberg, *Prostrannyi miesiatseslov russkikh sviatykh i kratkia sviadenia o chudotvornykh ikonakh Bozhyei Materi*, Jordanville 1951; S. Sniessorieva, *Ziennaia zhyzn Presvatoi Bogoroditsy i opisaniie sviatykh chudotvornykh ieie ikon*, Jaroslavl 1998; A. Jaskievich, *Spradviechnaia akhoūnitsa Biarusi*, Minsk 2001.

⁸ E. Chojecka, *Sztuka średniowiecznej Rusi Kijowskiej i jej związki z Polską w XI–XV w.*, p. 422; A. Różycka-Bryzek, *Bizantyjskie malarstwo jako wykładnia prawd wiary. Recepcja na Rusi – drogi przenikania do Polski*, [in:] *Chrześcijańskie dziedzictwo bizantyjsko-słowiańskie*, eds. A. Kubiś and A. Rusecki, Lublin 1994, pp. 65–66.

⁹ A. Różycka-Bryzek, *Bizantyjsko-ruskie malowidła w kaplicy zamku lubelskiego*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 9–10; E. Chojecka, *Sztuka średniowiecznej Rusi Kijowskiej i jej związki z Polską w XI–XV w.*, [in:] *Ukraina. Teraźniejszość i przeszłość*, ed. M. Karasia i A. Podrazy, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne”, Y. CCXLVII, no. 32, Cracow 1970, p. 422; A. I. Rogov, *Kulturnyie sviazi Rusi i Polshy w XIV – nachale XV v.*, „Vestnik Moskovskogo Univiersitieta”, sieria IX, Istorია, 1972, no. 4, pp. 63–71.

¹⁰ T. Friedłówna, *Ewangeliarz ławryszewski. Monografia zabytku*, Wrocław 1974; M. Nikalajeū, *Palata knihapisniaia*, Minsk 1993.

Duchy of Lithuania, and commitment of the Ruthenian population to the rule of Yagiellonian dynasty¹¹. Links between the Gediminas dynasty and the Orthodox princess of Tver, Julianne, were stressed back then. Orthodox hierarchy referred with distance to a vision of Moscow concerning reconstruction of a state from all the lands once belonging to the Principality of Kiev. Subordinating Ruthenian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Crown to Moscow meant the elimination of the self-ecclesiastical province, the metropolia of Kiev. Among Orthodox hierarchy prevailed the conviction that dukes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were more legitimate to the religious traditions of Kievan Rus rather than the rulers from Moscow. Some other facts state the loyalty of Orthodox elites. None of the three Orthodox senators from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (castellan of Vilnius Hrehory Chodkiewicz, castellan of Novogrod Hrehory Wołłowicz, and Brest-Lithuanian governor Jerzy Tyszkiewicz) was in favor of the candidacy of Ivan IV at *sejmik* in Rudniki in September 1572. Lithuanian magnates, who advocated the candidacy of the tsar's candidate, were charged, by Orthodox Prince George Olelkowicz of Slutsk as the traitors of the Commonwealth¹². This sort of attitude characterized not only the highest estates of the Orthodox population. Orthodox Boyars' departure from Smolensk Voivodeship to Lithuania, after the occupation of Brańsk and Smolensk by Moscow, is the best evidence of that¹³. It may be recalled at this point the attitude of the Prince Constantine Ostrogski in the Battle of Orsha in 1514, whether the opposition of the Belarusian Orthodox nobility and peasants against Swedish and Moscow invasions in the seventeenth century was much stronger than in the Crown. In the face of the growing power of Moscow only the Lithuanian-Ruthenian Grand Duchy of Lithuania opposed Moscow rulers. Internal conflicts among Ruthenians within the Duchy did not hinder realizing the main purpose, preservation of its independent state.

In the end, during the reign of the last two Yagiellons, Orthodox Church was guaranteed autonomy and the ability to govern according to their own regulations. Its position and legal status were affected by two applicable laws: the right of "nomination" (*podawania*) and "*ktitors*". Both laws gave Polish kings the right to nominate the clergy to positions in church's administration and to care for the moral and material wellbeing of clergy. In accordance with the law of "*ktitors*", the highest *ktitors* (patrons) in Orthodox Church were the kings. The monarchs

¹¹ H. Grala, *Kołpak Witoldowy czy czapka Monomacha. Dylematy wyznawców prawosławia w monarchii ostatnich Jagiellonów*, [in:] *Katolicyzm w Rosji i prawosławie w Polsce (XI–XX w.)*, eds. J. Bardach and T. Chynczewska-Hennel, Warsaw 1997, p. 59; T. Wasilewski, *Prawosławne imiona Jagielly i Witolda*, [in:] *Analecta Cracoviensia*, vol. XIX, 1987, pp. 107–115.

¹² M. Krom, *Mizh Rusiu i Litvoj. Zapadnorusskie zemli v sistemie russko-litovskich otnoshenii konca XV – pierwo, tretii XVI v.*, Moscow 1995, pp. 204–209.

¹³ H. Kowalska, J. Wiśniewski, *Olelkowicz Jerzy*, [in:] *PBS*, vol. 23, 1978, p. 743; H. Grala, op. cit., p. 58.

benefited from both of the rights by selecting candidates for election at the bishop's cathedrals, but rarely cared to choose appropriate people¹⁴. A similar policy was conducted by lay magnates towards Orthodox clergy in properties which included a monastery and churches¹⁵.

In the sixteenth century, there were significant changes among Orthodox communities. Development of The Protestant Reformation also embraced adherents of eastern Christianity. It had spread over a broad range of magnates and Ruthenian boyars. In 1572 among 69 senators from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania only 24 were Ruthenian nationality, 8 were Orthodox, 15 were Protestants, and 1 was Catholic¹⁶. The political role of Ruthenian senators, however, was much more significant than their number. The role of Orthodox Lithuanian-Ruthenian dignitaries was also creating and implementing eastern policy of the Commonwealth.

The principles of harmonious religious coexistence that had been worked out in the past centuries in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Ruthenian lands of the Crown, helped, in the period of the greatest religious conflicts in Europe, to create a new model of Polish tolerance. People of different faiths were accepted in the Commonwealth not only because of their power, but because of political doctrine, about the need for ensuring peace between religions. In the sixteenth century, Reformation adherents cited traditions of peaceful coexistence of various faiths in Lithuanian-Ruthenian lands. It was remarked that in the country of the Yagiellons, in addition to Catholics and Orthodox, lived Mohammedans and Jews. Enrichment of this religious mosaic with Lutherans, Calvinists, Nontrinitarians, Anabaptists, Arians, Mennonites, Quakers, did not make any significant change in residents of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's attitudes to religious matters. At the root of Polish tolerance lay the historical experience of harmonious religious coexistence on the Polish-Ruthenian borders in the period of the reign of the last Piasts and the religious policy of the grand Lithuanian dukes in 14th and 15th centuries. Numerous alliances by marriage and the constant presence of Orthodox culture within the limits of the Polish state turned Orthodoxy into their "own religion" rather than a foreign one. The multi-faith Commonwealth continued the great achievements of the religious policy of

¹⁴ K. Chodynicki, *Kościół prawosławny...*, pp. 107–120; A. Łapiński, *Zygmunt Stary a Kościół prawosławny*, Warsaw 1937.

¹⁵ L. Bieńkowski, *Organizacja Kościoła wschodniego w Polsce XVI–XVIII w.*, [in:] *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce*, eds. J. Kłoczowski, vol. II, Cracow 1969, pp. 779–837; K. Chodynicki, *Kościół prawosławny...*, pp. 107–192; M. Papierzyńska-Turek, *Kościół prawosławny na ziemiach ruskich Litwy i Korony*, „Przemyskie Zapiski Historyczne”, A. VI–VII, 1990, pp. 139–162; A. Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w dziejach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Białystok 2001, pp. 28–54.

¹⁶ A. Jobert, *De Luther á Mohila. La Pologne dans la crise de la Chrétienté 1517–1648*, Paris 1979, p. 322.

the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. A new model of Christian civilization had arisen in the Commonwealth, much different from Christianity in Western Europe and in the East. The principle of tolerance, in spite of religious coercion, had become an essential element of state policy.

The experience of tolerance of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, affected in the sixteenth century its theoretical and actual character in the whole Republic. At the time of the Counter-Reformation, where attempts to convert the Orthodox to Catholicism failed, stress was placed on an inevitable compromise, providing them with limited tolerance. There was no reference to German or French methods from the Thirty Years' War or The St. Bartholomew's Day massacre.

Enactment of the great parliamentary constitution which was the Warsaw Confederation (1573), should be recognized as one of the achievements of Polish tolerance. Unlike in Western Europe, where tolerance edicts were in fact reprieves towards religious minorities (Edict of the French king Charles IX – 1562, Augsburg Peace – 1555, finally Edict of Nantes – 1598), the Warsaw Confederation set out a compromise between the nobility of different faiths, providing dissenters access to dignity, offices, and benefices. State could not interfere in matters of conscience of its citizens¹⁷. This collective work, evidence of the great maturity of the nobility, referred to existing rules of coexistence in the Commonwealth. Another aspect of the specificity of religious tolerance was patronage performed by magnates and nobility over dissenters¹⁸. Even the king's edicts on the removal of Polish Brethren (1658) were not always respected.

In the eastern voivodeships of the Commonwealth, rules of harmonious coexistence of different religious groups and nationalities were of particular importance. *Sejmiks* from the eastern provinces often demanded from the king respect for the law and religious freedom. Nobility assembled at the Słonim Sejmik in May 1632 made participation in the election of the king conditional on regulating religious matters. Nobility obliged members of parliament to make efforts "so each religion, all church services were moderated"¹⁹. In Vilnius University studied together Orthodox and Calvinists, and at Orthodox Ostroh Academy studied Catholics. Collective participation in religious ceremonies (pilgrimage to holy places, participation in wedding celebrations), often occurring in fringe areas marriages between people with different religious backgrounds, provoked one of the greatest advocates of Counter-Reformation, Piotr Skarga, who con-

¹⁷ J. Tazbir, *Specyfika polskiej tolerancji*, [in:] *Naród – Kościół – Kultura. Szkice z historii Polski*, Lublin 1986, pp. 63–64; J. Kłoczowski, *Tolerancja w Rzeczypospolitej polsko-litewskiej z 1573 roku o zachowaniu pokoju religijnego*, [in:] *Historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. II, ed. J. Kłoczowski, Lublin 2000, pp. 88–112.

¹⁸ J. Tazbir, *Bracia polscy w służbie Radziwiłłów w XVII w.*, „Miscellanea Historico-Archivistica”, vol. III, Warsaw 1989, pp. 141–158.

¹⁹ A. Mironowicz, *Prawosławie i unia za panowania Jana Kazimierza*, Białystok 1997, p. 52.

demned those Catholics who “shall marry to heretics, conduct with dissenters discussions on faith, attend their funerals, hire heretics as servants and clerks, send sons to schools and heretic lands”²⁰. Judgment of the zealous Jesuit confirms that religious indifference in the society of the Commonwealth could be observed. Super denominational forms of social life, in which mixed marriages were something natural, came into being.

Religious tolerance in the Commonwealth was linked with much broader issues than good coexistence of different faiths. Freedom of public expression of worship, and to propagate ones own religion, affected other areas of public and private life. Religious tolerance created foundations for opening up Ruthenian and Polish society to news coming from abroad. In the case of eastern fringe areas these novelties were coming from the west, east, and south. The important role of Byzantine culture and the eastern Orient, so well rooted in the culture of Sarmatians, could not be forgotten. Along with religious openness, the customs and culture of borderland society were subject to change. One can observe this phenomenon in literature, art, political attitudes, and the mindset of the next generations.

The diffusion of cultures in the eastern borderlands to the greatest extent could be found in art. Orthodox Church art had a major impact on the sacral architecture of various religious faiths. The Holy Trinity Chapel in Lublin castle, with Byzantine frescoes, is a synthesis of Byzantine-Russian and Latin cultures. Similar fusion of cultures can be found in the design of the Orthodox Church of the Annunciation of the Mother of God in Supraśl²¹.

The Orthodox Church, and to some extent the Uniat Church, became beneficiaries of Byzantine civilization, enriching the cultural and spiritual heritage of the whole Commonwealth. Great merit for the Polish state have had excellent Orthodox families such as Buczaczy, Chodkiewicz, Czartoryscy, Sanguszko, Sapiehowie, Siemaszkowie, Słuccy, Sołomercy, Tyszkiewicz, Massalscy, Olelkowicze, Pacowie, Puzynowie, Wisniowieccy, Zasławscy, Zbarascy and many others. Sz wajpolt Fiola, inspired by the above mentioned, opened in 1491 in Krakow a printing-house which utilised the Cyrillic alphabet, providing for the needs of Orthodox Church. His work was continued by Belarusian scholar Francis Skoryna from Polotsk, who in the years 1517–1519 published in Prague the first Bible in Old-Belarusian. Patronage of the prominent Orthodox magnate Grzegorz Chodkiewicz enabled establishing a Ruthenian printing-house in his family residence in Zabłudów. The two printers Piotr Tymofiejewicz Mścisławiec and Iwan

²⁰ J. Tazbir, *Specyfika polskiej tolerancji*, p. 65.

²¹ A. Różycka-Bryzek, *Sztuka w Polsce piastowskiej a Bizancjum i Ruś*, [in:] *Polska–Ukraina. 1000 lat sąsiedztwa*, vol. II, ed. S. Stepień, Przemyśl 1994, pp. 295–306; *ibid.*, *Bizantyjsko-ruskie malowidła w Polsce wczesnojagiellońskiej: problem przystosowań na gruncie kultury łacińskiej*, *ibid.*, pp. 307–326.

Fedorow published in 1569 “*Ewangielie Uczitelnoje*”, a collection of auxiliary religious teachings to serve as guidance to biblical texts. *Zabłudów Gospel*, the equivalent of Catholic and Protestant *Postyllas*, came out 12 years after *Postylla* by Mikołaj Rej (1505–1569) and four years before publishing *Postylla* by Jakub Wujek (1541–1597).

Magnates and Orthodox brotherhoods played an important role in the development of Ruthenian education and culture. A special place among them was held by Prince Constantine Ostrogski (1527–1609), governor of Kiev, founder of numerous Orthodox schools, churches, and monasteries. This prominent Orthodox magnate was planning to transfer the Patriarchate of Constantinople to Volhynian Ostroga. He established in 1580 the famous Orthodox Academy with a printing-house in his patrimony. The printing-house published a year later the Ostrogska Bible, which was the biggest editorial project in the Orthodox Church at that time²². Multi-faith Commonwealth offered good conditions for the transfer of the capital of Constantinopolitan Patriarchate to Ostroga, and creating there the center of Orthodoxy. Printing-houses working for the Orthodox Church were launched in Lvov, Vilnius, and many other places. A publishing house of the Mamonicz brothers was operating in Vilnius and after their accession to the union a printing-house of brotherhood of Holy Spirit and Bogdan Ogiński typography in Vievis started to work. In Lvov special significance had the publishing house of *stauropigial* brotherhood operating until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cyrillic printing-houses were supposed to, according to the assumption of their founders, help promote liturgical texts corresponding with Orthodox spirit. Printing-houses were one of the attempts to reform the Orthodox Church and evidence of the rising awareness of Ruthenian religious communities. These typographies were mostly conducted by orthodox brotherhoods, firmly embedded in the environment of Ruthenian bourgeoisie. Brotherhoods, acting as a collective *ktitor* in the Orthodox Church, became the main force defending Orthodoxy and affecting the renewal of the intellectual life of clergy and the faithful. A special role in reforming the Church played brotherhoods, which were granted *stauropigialne* rights by patriarchs Joachim of Antakya (1586) and Jeremiah II of Constantinople (1588).

The best indicator for determining the role of Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth’s society is the level of literacy among believers of the “Greek faith”. Literacy was practically common among Ruthenian magnates, boyars, and in urban communities²³. The greatest achievement of legal thought was elaborated

²² I recommend the latest edition: T. Kempy, *Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski, wojewoda kijowski i marszałek ziemi wołyńskiej*, Toruń 1997.

²³ J. Kłoczowski, *Cywilizacja bizantyjsko-słowiańska*, [in:] *Chrześcijaństwo na Rusi Kijowskiej, Białorusi, Ukrainy i Rosji (X–XVII w.)*, ed. J. Kłoczowski, Kraków 1997, p. 95.

and issued as the Statutes of Lithuania (1529, 1566, and 1588). This collection of customary law contained many elements of Orthodox legislation. The statutes were the result of the spread of Renaissance thought among the Ruthenians. These cultural achievements could be obtained only thanks to the Orthodox Church. Under its influence evolved sacred architecture, iconography, chant and literature. Even today we are fascinated by the depth of thought contained in the *Sermon on Law and Grace* written by Hilarion, Metropolitan of Kiev. Ruthenian historiography (latopisarstwo), with the greatest work *The Primary Chronicle* of Nestor, is the basic source of knowledge about the medieval past of Central and Eastern Europe. The role of Ruthenian chroniclers and historiographers (latopisów) was understood by Maciej Strykowski, writing in the *Chronicle of Poland*: “So, Lithuanian, brother, you also will not look in Ruthenia, since they are no less famous, everyone must testify, without them, order of your affairs you shall not know, because a long time since Ruthenians sit in their countries, have older testimonies: whereas Lithuania of them had grown”²⁴.

The phenomenon of good multi-faith and multicultural coexistence was disturbed by the conclusion of the Union of Brest (1596). Union undermined the main element of Ruthenian culture, based on spiritual unity with Byzantium. To the existing Catholic-Orthodox scheme, came yet another intermediate element suspended between two traditions. Union promoters mistakenly assumed that its attractiveness would provoke Ruthenians to leave Orthodoxy. Despite this trend, Orthodox culture did not fall into decline, and moreover caused its development in new forms, better adapted to seventeenth-century reality. As a result, Union of Brest turned not against Orthodoxy as such, but against Orthodoxy in the Commonwealth. In effect, it brought little benefit to the Roman-Catholic Church, and did not solve any internal problem of the country. Distance of Catholic elites between Ruthenian culture and Orthodoxy in Poland deepened. Protestants, bred in western culture, were still closer to Catholic than Ruthenian, professing to Byzantine traditions, but closely bonded with Polish culture²⁵. This fact had for Orthodox community positive implications. Orthodox elite had evolved in their cultural attitudes. Pressure of Uniats and Catholics on Ruthenian Orthodoxy led the mobilization of Orthodox milieu. Scripts of Stanislaw Hozjusza, Benedict Herbst, Piotr Skarga, or Hipacy Pocij provoked discussions on many issues of a dogmatic, legal and ritual matter. The polemics with Uniats gave Orthodox a basis for development of transparent exposition of their own religious doctrine and explicitness of cultural identity. Uniat type of Ruthenian culture has contributed to development of defense mechanisms in Orthodox culture in the

²⁴ M. Strykowski, *Kronika polska, litewska, żmudzka i wszystkiej Rusi Kijowskiej, Moskiewskiej, Siewierskiej, Wołyńskiej i Podolskiej...*, ed. G. L. Glücksberg, vol. I, Warsaw 1846, p. 219.

²⁵ A. Naumow, *Wiara i historia*, Kraków 1996, p. 30.

Commonwealth. Orthodox culture and education, on the one hand, became more involved in religious polemics, on the other hand, more and more often used Latin patterns.

Progress in Orthodox education and culture occurred at the time of the Metropolitan Peter Mohyla. Orthodox culture developed when the central position in Kiev metropolitan was taken by not a Ruthenian, but a representative of a polonised Moldovan family. On the initiative of the Metropolitan Mohyla, the famous Kiev-Mohylan Academy was established – a modern school modeled on Jesuit colleges. Mohyla's actions triggered outrage among the Orthodox clergy, reluctant to adopt Latin patterns. Around the Metropolitan Peter Mohyla rose the so-called "Mohylan Athenaeum" bringing together eminent humanists²⁶. It should be stressed that the Orthodox hierarchy, by virtue of their education, was strongly associated with Polish culture. The activities of Mohyla and his successors were confirmation of a separate Orthodox culture functioning in the lands of the Commonwealth, which was shaped while the Ruthenian Orthodox Church was threatened. Consciousness of belonging to Orthodoxy under the new conditions resulted in breaking with post-Byzantine and Moscow isolationism and opened the Ruthenian community to the achievements of Western thought. As a result, defense of Orthodox faith was made utilizing elements of Latin culture, yet always sticking to their own religious traditions. The adoption of Latin language and traditions by Orthodox culture was a form of defense against total cultural and political marginalizing. The reforms of Peter Mohyla actuated spiritual life and significantly enriched the Orthodox culture of the second half of the seventeenth century.

The Commonwealth was a stable country, providing that at the time it would be characterized by relative tolerance of religion, and Ruthenians, Lithuanians, and Poles enjoyed equal rights. The Commonwealth was back then a European power. Abandoning this tradition, shaped in "nobles' democracy", and especially the principle of equality of noble people regardless of religion, led to internal divisions and to the collapse of the state. Significant example of the time was the fate of the Zaporogian Cossacks, who were faithful to the Commonwealth until realizing that Orthodoxy could not be reconciled with Polish eastern policy. As a result, they became subject to Moscow rulers. Cossacks guarded the south-eastern border of the state. Most troops defending the Khotyn fortress in 1621 were Cossacks with Hetman Peter Konaszewicz Sahajdaczny. The Common-

²⁶ T. Chynczewska-Hennel, *Akademia Kijowsko-Mohylańska*, [in:] *Szkolnictwo prawosławne w Rzeczypospolitej*, eds. A. Mironowicz, U. Pawluczuk and P. Chomik, Białystok 2002, pp. 40–54; A. Jabłonowski, *Akademia Kijowsko-Mohylańska. Zarys historyczny na tle rozwoju ogólnego cywilizacji zachodniej na Rusi*, Cracow 1899–1900; R. Łużny, *Pisarze kręgu Akademii Kijowsko-Mohylańskiej a literatura polska. Z dziejów kulturalnych polsko-wschodniostowiańskich w XVII–XVIII wieku*, Cracow 1966; J. Kłoczowski, *Młodsza Europa*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 337–338.

wealth, instead of increasing the number of registered and restoring Orthodox Church prerogatives, started a fight against the emancipation of the Cossacks. Sigismund's III Vasa policy ultimately led to turning the Cossacks into defenders of the Orthodox faith. The royal authority, increasingly influenced by papal nuncios, lost its conviction that guaranteeing the Orthodox their rights was in pursuit of the national interest, a historic matter. Understanding this fact, Władysław IV reactivated official structures of Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, this policy ended with the death of the king; Bohdan Khmelnytsky's Uprising in the first place highlighted the problem of equality of Orthodox Church. This problem was no longer just an internal matter of the Commonwealth. Not only Russia but also Sweden, Transylvania, and even England stood up for the rights of dissenters. No wonder that Cossacks, disappointed and deceived by the empty promises of the Commonwealth, turned in 1654 to Moscow to ask for patronage. For Poland this meant not only war with its eastern neighbor, but also deepened the political divisions among the Orthodox population²⁷.

The last chance for halting the separatist trends among members of the Orthodox Church was the Treaty of Hadiach. The agreement, reached in 1658 by Cossack Hetman Ivan Wyhowski and Ruthenian magnate George Niemirycz with the Commonwealth, determined establishment of a third member state – Rus, the Orthodox monopoly on filling offices in the Kievian, Braclaw, and Podole voivodships and access of *vladikas* to the Senate. Under pressure from Roman Nunciature and Uniats, the Treaty of Hadiach was not ratified in full version by Parliament. Point for liquidation of the church's union, "a source of contention between Greeks and Latiners (Łacinnicy)" was not approved. In this way a chance to integrate the Orthodox population with the Commonwealth was missed²⁸.

Tolerant attitudes, developed over centuries in the East borderlands, were shaken in the era of Counter-Reformation, wars conducted by the Commonwealth against Orthodox Moscow, Muslim Turkey, Protestant Sweden, and multi-faith Transylvania. The stereotype of the Polish/Catholic and bulwark of Christianity arose²⁹. Fortunately, these negative trends collapsed with the Enlightenment. The Commonwealth during the Enlightenment, similar to the past, remained a multi-faith country. This multiethnic and multi-faith structure occurred mainly in the eastern voivodships of the country. In 1789, on the already truncated territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, lived 53% Roman Catholics, 30% Greek

²⁷ A. Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w życiu Rzeczypospolitej*, pp. 502–503.

²⁸ A. Mironowicz, *Prawosławie i unia za panowania Jana Kazimierza*, pp. 149–189; *ibid.*, *Projekty unijne wobec Cerkwi prawosławnej w dobie ugody hadziackiej*, [in:] *Unia brzeska z perspektywy czterech stuleci*, eds. J. S. Gajek and S. Nabywaniec, Lublin 1998, pp. 95–122; *ibid.*, *Piotr Mohyla a idea unii kościelnej*, „*Studia Podlaskie*”, vol. XI, Białystok 2001, pp. 25–33.

²⁹ J. Tazbir, *Polskie przedmurze chrześcijańskiej Europy. Mity a rzeczywistość historyczna*, Warsaw 1987.

Catholic, 10.5% Jewish, 3.5% Orthodox and 1.5%, Evangelicals, nevertheless in the eastern voivodships dominated Uniats and Orthodox. Other, mostly small religious communities of Karaites, Muslims and members of the Armenian Church could also be found in the eastern provinces of the state³⁰.

At the time of the Four-Year Sejm an attempt to normalize the legal situation of Uniats, Orthodox, Protestants and Jews was made. For the first time Uniat Metropolitan was granted a place in the Senate, and Jews were covered with legal guardianship. On the 21st of May 1792 Sejm passed a constitution, which confirmed the provisions of the Pinsk Congregation of 1791. Orthodox Church received proper legal status and independent organizational structure. Orthodox also acquired equal rights with other citizens of the Commonwealth. It was understood that excessive advantaging of the Catholic religion led to actions of intolerance against Protestants, Orthodox, and non-Christian faiths.

Worth mentioning are the evaluations of the Pinsk Congregation of 1791 provisions, which regulated the status of Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth. Supporters of the reform in the spirit of The Constitution of May 3 recognized them as “very reasonable that in no way oppose prevailing religion or national laws”. “Foreign and National Newspaper” wrote: “If the Commonwealth had formerly with those people behaved likewise, if, instead of persecution and oppression, the people would find in the government of their ownership, and rites protection, then fertile fields of Ukraine and Podolia would not be with our blood so many times stained, or foreign maneuver would not so easily access to the hearts attached to their homeland and therein happy”³¹. At the occasion of Pinsk some publicists reminded, using numerous historical examples, that all the disasters which had fallen upon the Commonwealth, had been caused by religious intolerance and were punishment for persecutions of “non-Uniats and dissidents”. The change in Commonwealth policy towards the dissenter population was a result of the international situation and an attempt to repair the political system of the country. Just then, the Commonwealth’s multi-faith and multinational nature was acknowledged, where promoting one prevailing religion had adverse consequences. The conclusion of this policy, however, came too late to bring measurable results³².

³⁰ S. Litak, *Od Reformacji do Oświecenia. Kościół katolicki w Polsce nowożytnej*, Lublin 1994, pp. 133–134.

³¹ *Gazeta Narodowa i Obca*, from 16 of July 1791.

³² E. Sakowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w Polsce w epoce Sejmu Wielkiego 1788–1792*, Warsaw 1935; A. Deruga, *Walka z rusyfikacją Kościoła prawosławnego w Polsce w epoce Sejmu Wielkiego (1788–1792)*, „Ateneum Wileńskie”, vol. XI, 1936, pp. 2–32; A. Mironowicz, *Cerkiew prawosławna na terenie Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w latach 1772–1795*, [in:] *Ziemia Północna Rzeczypospolitej Polsko – Litewskiej w dobie rozbiorowej 1772–1815*, ed. M. Biskup, Warszawa – Toruń 1996, pp. 81–94; *ibid.*, *Kościół prawosławny w dziejach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, pp. 255–267.

Specific religious tolerance, shaped over centuries in the eastern voivodships of the Commonwealth, affected the attitudes of people living there in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Adopted model of coexistence with dissenters, often violated by external impulses coming from Warsaw and St. Petersburg, enabled the local population to survive the most difficult moments of history. The existing symbiosis of cultures and faiths shaped the appearance of borderland society; on the one hand, more patriotic than elsewhere, but at the same time accumulating cultural elements of other nations.

German historian Professor Johan Rhode has drawn attention to the impact of religious tolerance on the attitudes of the population living in the former eastern fringe areas of Commonwealth during the January Uprising. “There was no other country in Europe, which by sixteenth and mid-seventeenth century practiced the rights of religious and ethno-national tolerance, as did the Polish-Lithuanian Union. It recognized six languages as official and four of religion, giving almost a perfect example of coexistence with Judaism and Islam, and until the Counter-Reformation, not fighting against Protestantism and Orthodoxy. The memory of that peaceful coexistence was still alive during Russian military operations in the nineteenth century”³³. That was probably the reason why Polish uprisings for independence in the territory of Belarus and Lithuania gained the support of local populations.

About the specificity of tolerance in the Eastern borderlands decided, not Polish high culture, but the folk culture of many nations. This culture was characterized not only by openness, but also a tendency to absorb foreign influences: Byzantine, Oriental, and Latin. Culture emerged from the tradition of the old Republic that had a rich aesthetic expression and was, in principle, more tolerant. The specificity of religious tolerance in the Eastern borderlands was the acceptance of dissenters and respect for their cultural traditions. Ruthenian elites, by *polonising* themselves, had given impetus to other social groups to tolerate different faiths and cultures. Hatred of Jews or Poles, expressed during the Cossack’s uprisings, was more political than religious. Destabilization of traditional religious tolerance always followed the inspiration of external factors.

The Belarusian and Ukrainian political elite poorly stressed their aspirations for independent nation-state building. Population of Eastern borderlands in the nineteenth century was more attached to archaic traditions than postulating the creation of an independent state. In their opinion, national ideologies infringed on historic tradition and were treated as a foreign element, destructive to the contemporary social system. In this ethnically diversified area it was difficult to

³³ As cited in K. Okulicz, *Białorusini, Litwini i Polacy w powstaniu styczniowym na Litwie Historycznej*, „Zeszyty Historyczne” vol. VII, Paris 1964, p. 19.

input national postulates, especially the same as those of the single dominating Church. Even inside a particular ethnic group the choice of confession and nation was often different. The coexistence of many nations and religions in the former Commonwealth led to the development of a specific cultural tradition, shaped under the influence of two great religious and cultural civilizations: Eastern (Byzantine-Ruthenium) and Western (Latin). Multi-faith Commonwealth, and especially its eastern fringe areas, for many nations were the place of forming their cultural identity, where tolerance was one of its basic elements. Culture, formed under the influence of religious and national diversity, embedded in all forms of life of people all over the country. The lack of radical religious conflicts taking place in other regions of Central and Eastern Europe, is a good example of the impact of historical tradition of the old Commonwealth, homeland to many nations and many faiths³⁴.

The Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th–18th centuries

Summary

The society of the Commonwealth was always characterized – to a greater or lesser degree – by a diversified religious and national structure. The problem with a society with different religious characteristics had appeared on a large scale already in the 14th century, when ethnically non-Polish people could be found within the borders of the Commonwealth. In the 14th century the Kingdom of Poland lost extensive ethnically Polish areas in the West. The religious and ethnic structure of the state changed due to the incorporation of Red Ruthenia by Casimir III the Great (Kazimierz Wielki).

Casimir III the Great – the last representative of the Piast dynasty – understood the importance of the problem connected with the presence of Orthodox Church members within state borders. The king preserved the rights and rites of the Orthodox Church. Political relations between the grand Duchy of Lithuania and Catholic Poland had religious repercussions. It curbed the development of the Orthodox religion and paved the way for the Latin Church – with all the political and cultural consequences. The Orthodox religion changed from the dominating position to a tolerated one. Yet the Jagiellonians understood that Orthodox people inhabited their own – in an ethnic sense – territories. The Jagiellonians, as opposed to the Angevin (Andegawenowie) or the House of Va-

³⁴ Picture of multi-faith Commonwealth has been recently depicted by Andrzej Sulima Kamiński in his *Historia Rzeczypospolitej Wielu Narodów 1505–1795*, Lublin 2000.

lois (Walezjusze), built their power on the multireligious structure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They did not intend to follow the western model of a single religion Roman Catholic state, with one dominating Latin culture. Their stand resulted from the ethnic structure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

During the Jagiellonian dynasty, the Orthodox religion became a national and folk denomination, through the omnipresence of various forms of cult and rites. The power of the Commonwealth was based on its recognition by the Orthodox Ruthenian population of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as their own state. Good multireligious and multicultural cohabitation was shaken by the 1596 Union of Brest (Unia Brzeska). The Union of Brest undermined the main element of Ruthenian culture, based on its spiritual unity with Byzantium. A medial element, situated between the two traditions, was added to the existing Catholic-Orthodox model. The Union's initiators were mistaken in their beliefs that its attractiveness would move Ruthenians from the Orthodox Church. Despite this tendency, the fall of Orthodox culture did not take place; on the contrary, it developed in new forms, which were more adequate to 17th century's reality. Consequently, the Union of Brest did not turn against the Orthodox Church as such, but the Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth. The Union of Brest was in some aspects beneficial for the Roman Catholic Church, yet it did not solve any of the internal problems of the state. In Poland the distance between Polish elites and Ruthenian culture increased. A Protestant, brought up in western culture, was closer to a Catholic than a Ruthenian following Byzantine traditions, though increasingly more and more immersed in Polish culture.

Key words: Orthodox Church, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, multicultural society, religion relations, tolerance

Prawosławni w wielowyznaniowej i wielokulturowej Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku

Streszczenie

Spółeczeństwo Rzeczypospolitej w mniejszym lub większym stopniu zawsze posiadało zróżnicowaną strukturę wyznaniową i narodową. Problem związany ze społecznością o odmiennej specyfice wyznaniowej pojawił się w Polsce na szeroką skalę już w XIV w., kiedy w jej granicach znalazły się obszary zamieszkałe przez ludność etnicznie niepolską. W XIV w. Królestwo Polskie utraciło znaczne obszary etnicznych ziem polskich na zachodzie. W rezultacie włączenia przez Kazimierza Wielkiego Rusi Halickiej zmieniła się struktura wyznaniowa i etniczna kraju.

Wagę problemu obecności w granicach państwa polskiego wyznawców Kościoła prawosławnego rozumiał ostatni przedstawiciel dynastii piastowskiej – Kazimierz Wielki. Kazimierz Wielki zachował prawa i obrządek Kościoła prawosławnego. Związek polityczny Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego z katolicką Polską miał ważne konsekwencje w relacjach wyznaniowych. Zahamował rozwój prawosławia i utoruwał drogę Kościołowi łacińskiemu ze wszystkimi skutkami polityczno-kulturowymi. Prawosławie z wyznania dominującego stało się wyznaniem tolerowanym. Mimo to, Jagiellonowie rozumieli, że ludność prawosławna była na swym etnicznym terytorium. W odróżnieniu od Andegawenów czy Walezjuszy, swoją potęgę budowali na wielowyznaniowej strukturze Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego. Obcy był im model zachodni jednowyznaniowego katolickiego państwa, z jedną dominującą kulturą łacińską. Do takiej postawy zmuszała ich struktura etniczna Księstwa Litewskiego.

W epoce jagiellońskiej prawosławie stało się wiarą narodową i ludową, poprzez wszechobecność różnorodnych form kultu i obrzędów. Potęga Rzeczypospolitej opierała się na uznaniu przez ludność ruską wyznania prawosławnego Korony i Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego za własne państwo. Fenomen dobrego wielowyznaniowego i wielokulturowego współżycia został zachwiany zawarciem unii brzeskiej (1596). Unia brzeska podważyła główny element podstawy kultury ruskiej, opierający się na duchowej jedności z Bizancjum. Do istniejącego układu katolicko-prawosławnego doszedł jeszcze jeden element pośredni, zawieszony między dwoma tradycjami. Inicjatorzy unii błędnie liczyli, że jej atrakcyjność spowoduje odejście Rusinów od prawosławia. Pomimo tej tendencji nie nastąpił upadek kultury prawosławnej, a nawet jej rozwój w nowych formach, bardziej dostosowanych do XVII-wiecznej rzeczywistości. W rezultacie unia brzeska obróciła się nie przeciwko prawosławiu jako takiemu, ale przeciwko prawosławiu w Rzeczypospolitej. W efekcie przyniosła ona niewielkie korzyści Kościołowi rzymskokatolickiemu, ale nie rozwiązała żadnego problemu wewnętrznego kraju. W Polsce dystans elit katolickich wobec kultury ruskiej i prawosławia został pogłębiony. Katolikowi nadal bliższy był protestant, wychowany w kulturze zachodniej, aniżeli Rusin, hołdujący tradycjom bizantyjskim, ale coraz bardziej powiązany z kulturą polską.

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