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**Radzik Ryszard****RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF POLISH  
AND BELARUSIAN IDENTITY**

*The present article sets out to discuss religion as an important factor in the formation of social macrostructures, including their identity. In the last two centuries, the nature of its impact on Polish and Belarusian community has been very different. The text presents these differences against a broad sociohistorical background of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in both countries.*

**Key words:** Polish religious identity, Belarusian religious identity, Orthodoxy, Catholicism.

**Радзік Р.****РЕЛІГІЙНІ ОБУМОВЛЕННЯ  
ІДЕНТИСНОСТІ ПОЛЯКІВ ТА БІЛОРУСІВ**

*У статті аналізується релігія як вагомий чинник, що формує соціальні макроструктури, в тому числі ідентичність. Протягом двох останніх століть її вплив на виникнення спільнот, які межують: польською та білоруською, дуже відрізнявся. Мета цієї статті – показати ці відмінності з широким посиланням на історію: історичні обставини виникнення двох християнських віросповідань: католицизму та православ'я.*

**Ключові слова:** релігійна ідентичність поляків, релігійна ідентичність білорусів, католицизм, православ'я.

**Радзик Р.****РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ ОБУСЛОВЛЕННОСТИ  
ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ ПОЛЯКОВ И БЕЛОРУСОВ**

*Предметом нижеследующих рассуждений является религия как существенный фактор, формирующий социальные макроструктуры, в том числе идентичность. В течение последних двух столетий она явно по-разному влияла на образование соседствующих друг с другом*

*общностей: польской и белорусской. Цель настоящего текста – показать эти различия с обширными ссылками на историю: социальных обусловленностей возникновения обоих христианских вероисповеданий: католицизма и православия.*

**Ключевые слова:** *религиозная идентичность поляков, религиозная идентичность белорусов, православие, католицизм.*

Religion, which at the lower level of society (individuals, small communities, parishes) functions as the core element building the axiological orientation based on the idea of the sacred, is also often an important identity component of large-scale social groups and shapes national and civilisational distinctions. The present article sets out to discuss religion as an important factor in the formation of social macrostructures, including their identity. In the last two centuries, the nature of its impact on Polish and Belarusian community has been very different. The text presents these differences against a broad sociohistorical background of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in both countries.

## **1. Historical background**

Following the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between Russia, Prussia and Austria, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to the First World War neither Belarusians nor Poles had their own state. Polish elites, in a bid to preserve their cultural identity, remoulded the political nation of the former Commonwealth (a supra-ethnic category including the gentry, regardless of their language) into a cultural nation based on ethnicity, with the language as the central distinctive factor. As redefined, the Polish nation was confined to a much smaller geographical area, but the total number of its members, now including also lower classes (particularly peasantry), expanded considerably. The process of formulating the new national ideology intensified after the fall of the January Rising (1863-1864). Forged mainly by intelligentsia descending from the nobility, the new concept of nation was based on the cultural heritage of the former Commonwealth and involved elements which clearly differentiated the Polish national character from that of the occupying powers, mainly Russians and Prussians. Apart from language and literature, it included also historical awareness (fostered by the awakeners of the period and relatively late to spread among the peasantry) and religion

(with the institutional role of the Catholic Church), as the Catholic faith distinguished Poles from Protestant Prussians and Orthodox Russians and united them across the partition borders.

Aware of the fate of the Uniate Church in Belarusian and Ukrainian territories, the Roman Catholic Church was anxious to ensure its own survival and supported the consolidation of the modern ethnolinguistic form of Polish national identity it could rely on. Thus, converging interests of the Polish society (mainly gentry, for the most part of the century) and the Church stimulated their cooperation to enable the survival of both of them. Society, especially the peasantry, which constituted the majority of the Polish population, was emotionally committed to the Catholic cause as an important element of their own culture. This was also one of the reasons explaining a considerable involvement of a large proportion of Catholic priests in the national movement. Such cooperation was motivated both by emotional (cultural and national) concerns and by common interests. (A European analogy to the Polish situation was to be found in Ireland.)

Consequently, Polishness became firmly connected with Catholicism and with the Catholic Church as a powerful institution which was able to exert considerable political influence, while remaining distanced from the state structures. At the time of ordeal (national uprisings, defiance against Germanisation and Russification), Poles relied both on their religion as a cluster of distinctive values and on the Church as an institution defending their cultural identity, which sometimes involved playing a political role. Such a cultural and political function of the Church and, even more importantly, its civilisational role could also be observed at the time of communism.<sup>1</sup> On a smaller scale, similar processes occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century among Lithuanians, Slovaks, Ukrainians living in Galicia and Romanians from Transylvania. In all these cases, the Greek-Catholic or Roman Catholic clergy played an important role at various stages of the nation-making process. Although strongly centralised, the Catholic Church often lent support to national separatism, as demonstrated by tensions between the Lithuanian and Polish clergy within the church structures. The Church was also a major institutional com-

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<sup>1</sup> In the article, civilisation is understood in terms of a value structure, as in studies by Feliks Konieczny and Samuel Huntington, and not as the level of material development.

ponent of the Western civilisation conducive to the nation-making process, which relied on such values as individualism, empowerment of individuals in relation to the state, respect for law, rationalism, social pluralism and activism.

The above mechanism made Catholicism an important element of Polish collective self-identification and national identity. The fact that in terms of their religion ethnic Poles were a relatively homogeneous community was instrumental in the process. However, the nation-making potential of Catholicism is not to be identified with the intensity of religious experience or internalisation of religious values on the individual level. In fact, among the peasantry, who remained largely illiterate until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, religion was mostly perceived as a ritual. To some extent, the Catholic Church functioned in lieu of the state institutions and such was also the case under communism. With the questionable legitimacy of Moscow-imposed authorities and the Soviet system perceived as alien, the Church came to be regarded as a guarantee of political empowerment and civilisational identity of the Polish nation.

Thus, while secularisation made its progress both in Western societies and in communist Central-Eastern Europe, the Church maintained, or perhaps even improved, its standing in Poland. Arguably, at the level of social macrostructures religion was 'subordinated' to the nation: Catholicism was 'nationalised', absorbed by the concept of nation as a distinguishing feature, and became the religion of politicised symbols of the national community. In very simple terms, even though obviously not all Catholics were Poles, every Pole had to be a Catholic by definition. Consequently, the national status of communist atheists was sometimes treated with suspicion and they were often seen as representatives of Moscow. On the other hand, individuals and parish communities perceived religion in terms of the sacred, providing believers with an axiological perspective. Thus, religion was treated differently at the national level (a more secular approach) and at the lowest level (the sacred). Although each of them was characterised by different mechanisms, intensity and type of emotions, these levels were not entirely independent: a national dimension of religion stimulated a personal attachment to parish communities and ensured the perpetuation of the vision of a Catholic Pole. In other words, what provided a more important link with the European culture on the level of emotional (subjective) reference was the nation (with Catholicism

as its component) rather than religion as perceived on the parish level (even though, objectively speaking, this was the medium of 'European' values providing civilisational identification of the Poles).

The process of forming Belarusian identity and its religious context was entirely different. Unlike ethnic Poles, Belarusians experienced large-scale religious conversions: they moved from Orthodoxy to form the Uniate Church and later returned to their former denomination while retaining a considerable Roman Catholic minority (there was also conversion of the elites to Protestantism during the Reformation). Following the Bolshevik revolution, Belarusians were subjected to decades of an effective programme of atheisation. Consequently, religion was not a stable or strongly perceived element of their cultural and social identity, as it was in the case of Poles. Orthodoxy, imposed as of 1839, distanced Belarusians from Poles and Lithuanians and brought them closer together with Russians and the majority of Ukrainians. Its Russian caesaropapist tradition involved domination of the state, which meant that the Orthodox Church was not in a position to stimulate separatist national movements within the Eastern Slavic Orthodox community. An instrument of implementing the national policy of the autocratic monarchy, it certainly lacked a nation-making potential in Belarus or Ukraine; even in Russia itself, it contributed to the level of national awareness mainly among the elites and not among the peasantry.

In the Eastern Orthodox Slavic societies, the distance between the elites and peasantry (in terms of national awareness, empowerment, or the standard of living) was much more considerable than in the countries of Western Europe, and the nation-making process was far less advanced. What contributed to the low level of national awareness was also the fact that the Orthodox Church had not destroyed the richness of pre-Christian folk culture, whereas its Catholic counterpart had done so, thus paving the way for accepting ideological bonds, national ones among them. Belarusian peasants were still immersed in their folk tradition and did not feel as much need to accept modern ideologies describing the world as Catholics (and Protestants), who had largely lost it. Consequently, Belarusians were more susceptible to class ideology, as divisions of this kind had long been part of their own experience.

This mechanism helps to explain the popularity of Bolshevik revolutionary slogans in Orthodox societies. In 1920, the Red Army invad-

ing Poland met with warm welcome only in Orthodox areas and Russian commanders were astonished to have encountered the opposite in Catholic regions, which mounted a popular resistance in defence of the newly reborn Polish state. In Polish society, just like in the rest of Europe, class ideology was generally much less popular than nationalism. In the East Slavic areas, where the Bolshevik revolution prevailed, class ideology radically undermined the nation-making processes, destroyed religion and constructed a different type of identity than the Western or Central European model. As indicated by the examples of Eastern Galicia (a Uniate region which until 1939 had never been controlled by Russia) or, to a certain extent, Volhynia (a part of Poland in the inter-war period), alternative processes were also possible.

Interestingly, the 19th century Belarusian literature was written only by Catholics. They were also the main leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century national movement, active particularly in the so-called *Nasha Niva* period (1906-1915). From 1906 to 1912 *Nasha Niva*, the main journal of Belarusian nationalists, was published both in the Belarusian Latin alphabet (*lacinika*) and in the Cyrillic script (later only in Cyrillic); it had a much wider circulation among the Catholics. In his analysis based on the all-Russian census of 1897, Jerzy Turonek estimates that on the territory approximate to the present-day Belarus the Orthodox population amounted to 70.36 %, while the figure for the Catholics was 13.46% (Jews: 14.00%) [1, p. 113].<sup>2</sup> As propagated by *Nasha Niva* activists, Belarusian nationalist ideology largely resembled, or even copied, patterns typical for models established by other Central Eastern nationalities with an ‘incomplete social structure’ [3, p. 20], and demonstrated distinctly different features from its Russian counterpart (which was, to an extent, only natural, given the fact that Russians had their own elites and state).

As Belarusians were a religiously diverse community, religion was not included as a prominent element of the nation-making process. An occidental vision of the nation pursued by the Catholics entailed values which were somewhat foreign to, and only reluctantly accepted by, the Orthodox majority, and this is why it failed to gain a more substantial social support.<sup>3</sup> Religious differences weakened

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<sup>2</sup> М.Я. Гринблат [2, p. 252] estimates that at the end of the 19th century Belarusian population was 75% Orthodox and 25% Catholic.

<sup>3</sup> This view is shared by Włodzimierz Pawluczuk, a well-known

the national process as they ‘ethniced’ both communities at the non-national level: in a conflict situation, they reinforced the role of religion and created a civilisational divide. At the same time, the nation-making process operated among the elites and their Orthodox members became (West) Russians, while the Catholics generally gravitated towards Polish identity. Orthodoxy was perceived as a Russian (or pan-Russian) religion and Catholicism was identified as a Polish faith. Exceptions to this rule were few and far between, and occurred only among the Catholics. Although Catholicism had certainly much greater nation-making potential (as corroborated by the developments in Lithuania or Galicia, a Uniate province), the Church in Belarus was in minority and felt strongly threatened by the state-supported Orthodoxy. Consequently, it was not in a position to give a clear support to the Belarusian element, which was very weak at the time, as such a move would expose it to attacks from both the Russian and Polish opponents. The case of Lithuania was different since Russianness was not perceived as a threat to Polish or Lithuanian cultural (or national) identity.

Since the elites had been Catholic for generations, social advancement of Orthodox Belarusians almost invariably meant becoming the so-called ‘West Russian’, i.e. Russian (but not ‘Muscovite’) with a distinct element of Belarusian localism. They became members of a large community, a pan-Russian, Orthodox, East-Slavic civilisation including: Russians, the so-called ‘Little Russians’ (Ukrainians) and Belarusians. This entailed embracing most of the Russian cultural heritage, together with its clear sense of distance from the West (in the course of their cultural, national and imperial evolution of the previous centuries Russians defined themselves in opposition to the West) and its specific type of community (alien to the Western European tradition). Their religious identity (Orthodox) did not separate them from Russians. Quite on the contrary, given the fact that in the reality of the period the Orthodox Church functioned practically as an extension of the state structures, they were almost unreflexively immersed in Russianness. Thus in modern and contemporary history, Orthodoxy radically undermined separatist nation-making processes

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sociologist of Orthodox origin from the Białystok region: [4, p. 85-99; 5, p. 60-66; 6, p. 31-50] and, to a certain extent, also by Jerzy Turonek, a Polish historian of Belarusian origin [7, p. 20-21].

in the areas between the territories inhabited by ethnic Russians and ethnic Poles. As an instrument of Petersburg's policies, it also aggravated conflicts and created civilisational divides in the region. On the other hand, Christian denominations in the Latin Europe of the period did not produce such rifts or stir national conflicts. However, they were sometimes used instrumentally by national movements (especially in Central-Eastern Europe) with a view to consolidating their own power: religions were 'nationalised', and thus acquired a certain conflict potential.

During the communist period, the Soviet government and the authorities of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic made a considerable effort to successfully implement their anti-religious atheist policies. As a result, the level of religiousness fell dramatically, with the eastern regions more severely affected than the west of the country, which had been a part of Poland before the Second World War [8, p. 178]. Viktor Odinochenko, a Belarusian scholar, observes that 'under the Soviet rule, most Belarusians had neither an opportunity to take part in religious practices, nor access to any information on religion other than the official sources' [9, p. 151]. Despite repressions against the Orthodox Church, historical studies pointed out that Belarusians were clearly a traditionally Orthodox society, thus closely connected with Russians, while Catholicism had been imposed from abroad. The Catholics were referred to as 'potential agents of the Vatican', whereas the Orthodox were presented only as 'backward people' [9, p. 157]. By the time of the fall of the Soviet Union, Belarusians in general, and the younger generation in particular, had become a largely atheist, agnostic or religiously indifferent society.

## **2. After communism**

Considering the reality and context of most European states, the fall of communism saw both the Catholic Church and the Polish national community in exceptionally good form. Owing to a number of factors, under communism '(...) in its social dimension, the Catholic Church had become the only platform of protest against the communist rule. At first expressed by the very fact of taking part in religious practices, in the course of time the protest made an increasing use of the Church structures for the purposes of anticommunist activity. The 1980s saw the culmination of the role of the Church in the expression



of Polish national aspirations for freedom' [10, p. 191-192]. However, Polish national identity certainly weakened in the course of the next two and a half decades, especially among the younger generation. If positive answers to a survey question 'Are you proud to be a citizen of your country?' are treated as an indicator of the level of national feelings, they fell from 66% to 50% between 1990 and 2008. Although the proportion is still above the European average, and it was among the top figures in 1990, its later rate of decline was second only to Latvia (17%) [10, p. 175-176]. While the reasons of this situation are quite complex, it is relatively easy to enumerate the main ones: the fall of communism, which meant that the system perceived as a vital threat to the Polish nation and its sovereignty was no longer in place; opening up to Europe and the world, as well as to the culture of mass consumption; and a sharp fall in the standard of education, resulting in lower historical awareness and literary knowledge among young people, thus, needless to say, affecting crucial elements of Polish national identity. The extermination of Polish elites during and immediately after the Second World War made a severe impact not only on the society under communism, but also on the political reality of the post-1989 Poland. Also, democracy naturally meant more divisions in the society than had been the case in the old system.

Strong national (sometimes chauvinist) sympathies on the right of the political spectrum are coupled with a-national (not to say anti-national) feelings on the left (and especially the extreme leftist) wing. The authority of the Church, understood as a vital component of the national community, has decreased as a result of lowering levels of national identity. However, Irena Borowik, referring to the majority of Central-Eastern European states, observes that '(...) the role of traditional functions of religion has increased. One of the reasons is [often] that religion could return to its traditional place and can now be treated in terms of individual and collective freedom, a right that people exercise. Individual and collective religious practices have become an important form of manifestation of identity. Religion also plays a particular role in legitimising politics' [11, p. 33]. Thus, while some political parties and their followers refer to the Church and to Catholicism as important elements of their identity, others reject such a connection. Borowik also observes that 'there is a certain correlation between political preferences and religious attitudes. Higher religiousness is linked with the right-wing sympathies (...), while lower

– with the left (...)’ [8, p. 138]. Discussing differentiation of religiousness and religious activity, Borowik also points out the following directions of the processes under consideration: (a) fundamentalist, (b) individualistic (more profound or selective), and (c) cultural (nominal or indifferent) [11, p. 28-29].

Mirosława Marody and Sławomir Mandes observe that ‘[r]eligion is an important element shaping the cluster of attitudes to national identity in society. As it turns out, in most countries with a high level of religiousness there is a connection between this factor and national identity. Although Denmark is an example of a country where a high level of nationalism is coupled with a low level of religiosity, the opposite correlation has not been observed at all. In most European countries we observe a low level of religiousness and nationalism’<sup>4</sup> [12, p. 184-185]. Poland has been going in this direction for over two decades. Although the Polish national community can be considered an ethno-cultural nation to a lesser extent than it used to in the inter-war period or under communism, it still has not become a political nation. What stimulates this slow, but by no means inevitable, change is involvement of Polish citizens of other religion (Protestant or Orthodox), ethnicity (e.g. Belarusians in the Białystok region) or race (African descent) in public life, both political and cultural.

Apart from connections between religion and national identity, there is a link between religion and socio-cultural identity in a broad sense. Another factor to be considered is religious identity as such, independent from other types of individual and collective identification. Two surveys of European Values Study carried out in Poland in 1990 and 2008 revealed that answers to two questions relating to the religiousness of Poles hardly changed at all: 94.2% of respondents professed a religion and 96.1% declared they believed in God. However, in the period spanning eighteen years between the two surveys, the proportion of those who saw themselves as a religious person fell from 90% to 83.5% and the change was most evident after 2005. Another trend involved falling frequency of religious practices, even though the proportion of those who did not go to church, did not have a church wedding, did not baptise their children or give their dead a religious burial did not rise considerably. ‘Thus, Poland is not a country where

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<sup>4</sup> Following the Anglo-American tradition, as used here, the term ‘nationalism’ is descriptive and has no judgmental value attached.

we could observe a social phenomenon of abandoning religion, and the number of atheists or agnostics is not rising sharply. What can be noticed, however, is a slow process whereby the level of identification with the Church as an institution is falling' [12, p. 195-198, 203].

The surveys indicate that religion has clearly lost some significance on the individual level and the proportion of respondents declaring themselves as religious fell. It can be said that religious feelings among Poles are becoming lukewarm. However, at the same time there is an increased acceptance for public voice of the Church on political questions (such as election preferences, government decisions), which means that society, at least to a certain extent, is departing from ideologically and politically conditioned attitudes formed by the communist authorities of the former period. In their analysis of the survey results, the authors try to find out what 'maintains the attachment of the Polish society to Catholicism', and '(...) why is it the case that in spite of the clearly visible impact of the processes of modernisation, religious identity is still the core element of their [Poles'] individual identity? The shortest possible answer to such a question would have to point at tradition and at a deficit of forms of identity that would be an alternative to religion and at the same time root individuals in social life. Although blurred by modernisation, religion still remains the only system which provides the Poles with a structure of their everyday reality, with a link to the past and with rituals that put actions performed by individuals in a social frame, thus making them meaningful' [12, p. 200-204].

In Belarus, the fall of communism brought different consequences than in Poland. While in Poland the level of religious practices and identification with the Church declined, the Orthodox Church in Belarus not only began to follow its religious mission openly, but also returned to the tradition of Russian autocratic monarchy and became closely attached to the authorities and the state. Viktor Odinochenko observes that under the Soviet Union 'Belarus identified itself with the Soviet reality much more readily than any other Soviet republic (...) ' [9, p. 150]. After independence, 'numerous ideological stereotypes changed in a very short period of time, which included also those relating to religion: formerly treated as «the opium of the people», «a form of reactionary ideology», «a relic of the past», it now turned into «an inherent element of cultural tradition», «the foundation of morality», etc.' [9, p. 150-151].

In 1990, a year before the fall of the Soviet Union, 20.7% of Belarusian population declared themselves as religious, while the figure for those indifferent and non-believers was 50.7%; the proportion of practitioners was very low (regular: 1.3%, irregular: 8%) [8, p. 192]. After independence (as indicated by answers to the question: ‘What is your religion?’), most Belarusians gradually began to identify themselves with Orthodoxy – 1993: 43.5%, 2002: 67.4%, 2010: 78.8% (the figures for Catholicism were: 8.4%, 13.1%, 11.1%, respectively) [13, p.16]. Whatever its depth, this increased religiousness can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, just like in other former Soviet republics, it was conditioned by the approval from the new authorities of independent Belarus. In the new political reality, Marxist-Leninist ideology no longer performed its traditional functions and religion was to become a factor of stability integrating the social life of the new republic. After the election of Alexander Lukashenka as president, the Orthodox Church received his favours and supported the state authorities in return. Secondly, Belarusian society saw religion as a cluster of values providing them with a system of reference in the post-Soviet ideological vacuum. At the individual level, it gave emotional support offering a connection with the transcendental, which was very much appreciated when the entire communist world had fallen apart. At the community level, it not only built social structures (such as parish communities) and provided strong role models (the authority of the clergy increased sharply), but also offered a connection with the past by ensuring cultural continuity and a sense of belonging to tradition. Thirdly, religion also made it easier for people to survive the hardships of the economic slump and social insecurity. It was an element that made it possible, at least for some, to deal with the trauma of transformation.

Declaring oneself as a believer does not always involve real religiousness, but can only mean that the person has been baptised. Also, ‘social consciousness has it that Orthodoxy is an inherent part of East Slavic cultural tradition, hence in most cases a personal declaration of being an Orthodox does not mean that the person is an Orthodox believer, or a Christian at all. Rather, it is a statement of East Slavic identity’ [9, p. 152]. Self-identification as a religious person is still a more frequent phenomenon in the west of the country than in the eastern regions, which were a part of the Soviet Union before the Second World War. At the same time, surveys conducted in western Belarus

reveal that Catholics are much more religious than Orthodox: they attend church services more often and are a more distinct religious community. In a 1994 survey, Catholic respondents declared a 'spiritual need' as their main religious motivation (57%), while Orthodox ones said that 'it is a thing done' (44%). A considerable proportion of Catholics identify themselves as Poles and the overwhelming majority of Belarusians are Orthodox. In western Belarus, answers to the question 'What is your religious denomination?' were as follows: 87% of Belarusians, 80% of Russians and 91 % of Ukrainians stated they were Orthodox believers, while 94% of Poles declared themselves as Catholics (2.6% as Orthodox). 'However, it is only the majority of Poles that consider themselves as religious or deeply religious (73%) and the corresponding figures for Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians were 44%, 34% and 33%,<sup>5</sup> respectively. Also, the level of regular religious practices declared by Poles is by far higher than in other national communities: 21% go to mass every Sunday and 28% at least once a month. In the case of Belarusians and Russians, the corresponding figure for both categories is 10%. In the hierarchy of eleven values, Poles rank religion in the fourth place, while it is the bottom of the list for Belarusians and Russians, and last but one for Ukrainians. In all cases, «happy family life» came as number one' [8, p. 195-196]. This situation probably stems from the minority position of both Catholicism and Poles in Belarusian society, as well as from the historical developments of the last two centuries.

Surveys conducted in 1998 in the entire country showed that regular service attendance was declared by 19.6% of Orthodox, 44.7% of Catholics and 93.6% of Protestants (who are about a 1% minority in Belarus); the corresponding figures in 2007 were: 11.3%, 55.7% and 96.8% [14, p. 229]. The 1999 European Values Study indicated that the overall average figure (all denominations) for service attendance at least once a week was 5.6% (in Poland: 58.9%) [15, p. 147]. Sociologists and other experts in Belarusian studies often underline that, especially in the case of Orthodox believers, a large proportion of people declaring this affiliation treat it in terms of rejection of atheism and identification with the East Slavic cultural tradition, or the

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<sup>5</sup> I. Borowik notes that although the study sample of the Ukrainians (twenty two informants) reflected their proportion in the population, it was too small to make the results fully reliable.

spirit of the times: it is a fashion, 'a thing done'. Such members of a religious community have their children baptised, follow burial rites, sometimes attend church service twice a year, but at the same time their awareness of religious dogmas or knowledge of the Bible is often very low or almost non-existent. In addition to this, there is also religious eclecticism, belief in various types of magic practices and supernatural forces, or collecting symbolic religious artefacts [11, p. 27-28; 8, p. 196; 9, p. 161].

To a certain extent, religion (particularly Orthodoxy) plays a different function than it does in Poland. Since it reinforces civilisational affiliation of Belarusians with the 'Russian world' (русский мир), common also to Russians and most Ukrainians, Orthodoxy is not really a factor of Belarusian nation-making process. In Moscow's perspective, strong mutual relations within this community are sometimes treated as equivalent to national bonds. Andrzej Wierzbicki observes that '[t]he concept of «pan-Russian nation» (общерусская нация) as the backbone of the Russian national civilisation still remains on the agenda of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has been safeguarding the idea of the «Holy Rus» [Святая Русь], now in the form of the «Russian world» (русский мир), throughout the entire Russian history. The «pan-Russian nation» invariably consists of «ethnic Russians» (этнические русские), that is Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. The conviction of «pan-Russian» unity is based on a belief in the common origin of Eastern Slavs, which gives it a primordial character with elements of constructivism. However, it is the spiritual and religious community rather than common origin that is emphasised by the Russian Orthodox Church' [16, p. 34-35].

This type of affiliation clearly sets Belarusians apart from the West and brings them close together with their eastern neighbour. It also creates a much less dynamic identity than in the case of the Latin denominations. At the same time, it is so peculiar that president Lukashenka can declare himself as an 'Orthodox atheist' (it would be quite difficult indeed to find a Western analogy). Such an approach is rooted in Russian culture, which throughout its history defined itself in terms of clear distance from the West, a pattern unknown in Western Europe. Orthodoxy was brought to Belarus from Russia, along with the Russian institutional and cultural background. It does not use the Belarusian language in its liturgy, which contributes to the spread of Russian. Also, Belarusian Orthodox Church is entirely de-

pendent on the Moscow Patriarchate: until recently it was headed by Metropolitan Filaret, a Moscow-born Russian, and since 2013 it has been led by Metropolitan Pavel, a Russian born in Karaganda and a former Metropolitan of Ryazan. However, accepting Orthodoxy with its Russian language liturgy did not amount to Russification in the national sense, but rather involved a cultural and linguistic assimilation which regionalised Belarusians within the pan-Russian community.

Thus, the Orthodox Church does not function as a nation-maker, but rather as a factor of Russian cultural (and civilisational) orientation. On the other hand, the Catholic Church supports the national emancipation of Belarusians by including their language in liturgy, even though most parts of religious services are still held in Polish. It has greater nation-making potential than its Orthodox counterpart, but at the same time one can observe a certain duality of its national character, oriented as it is both towards Polishness and Belarusianness. This situation is not conducive to forming a uniform modern pattern of Belarusian identity.

The Catholic Church certainly fosters a pro-European orientation among Belarusians and it cannot remain unnoticed that a considerable proportion of elites of Belarusian national movement, now forming the political opposition, are Catholic. This obvious overrepresentation of Catholics resembles the situation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century period of the 'national revival'. After independence, between 1991 and 1994, the most prominent Belarusian politicians were of Catholic background, which sometimes provoked negative comments in a predominantly Orthodox society (Vyacheslav Kebich, the Prime Minister; Stanislav Shushkevich and Myechyslav Hryb, Chairmen of Parliament, and thus heads of the state; Zianon Pazniak, the founder of Belarusian National Front, an anti-communist national party, a leader of the national movement, a member of parliament and a presidential candidate in 1994). In 1994, Belarusians elected Lukashenka as president: he was 'one of their own', a typical Russian-speaking Soviet man and a former sovkhos director on the Russian border. Since attitudes promoted by the Catholic community, mainly by its more active part, are conducive to the western orientation, they are not favoured by the Orthodox Church. In this way, whether intentionally or not, to a certain extent both Churches play a political role, promoting Belarusian identification with either the East or the West.

Compared to Catholics, the Belarusian Orthodox community is more conservative, less active and characterised by a higher level of social inertia. Such differences in values and attitudes were revealed in a representative survey conducted in September 2005 by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IIEPS), a leading Belarusian independent centre of sociological studies. Oleg Manaev, its founder and director, compared the replies of Orthodox and Catholic respondents and their choices were as follows:

‘The general situation in Belarus is: improving’<sup>6</sup> – Orthodox: 62.6%, Catholics: 43.8%;

‘How important is it to you personally that Belarus should be a democratic state: very important’ – 32.7% and 45.5%, respectively;

‘In a referendum, would you vote for: an economic union with Russia’ – 53.5% and 34.1%, respectively; ‘for EU membership’ – 12.0% and 21.8%, respectively;

‘In 2001, you voted for: Lukashenka’ – 56.3% and 43.6%, respectively;

‘I would be ready to vote for Lukashenka again’ – 47.7% and 35.6%, respectively

‘I am interested in / I talk about political questions relating to Belarus’ – 65.8% and 80.1%, respectively

The Orthodox less frequently stated that Belarus was facing economic (23.9% and 36.3%, respectively) and political crisis (25.9 and 40.5%, respectively), were less inclined to welcome the country’s accession to NATO and showed less support for a presidential candidate who would introduce reforms (47.2% and 64.3%, respectively) [17, p. 45-46]. Noting that ‘Catholics are more critical of the situation in Belarus’, Manaev also adds: ‘the country is dominated by Orthodoxy, a value system closely corresponding to that of authoritarian power’ [17, p. 47]. The distance between the attitudes of the two communities would certainly be even greater if Catholics had not lost their elites as a result of the Bolshevik revolution, repressions in the newly established Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, repressions of the 1939-1941 period and the post-war exodus to Poland. In spite of all their differences, relations between members of both communities are mostly proper. However, in exclusively Orthodox areas Catholicism may be perceived as alien, in accordance with the stereotype that a (Belo)Russian

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<sup>6</sup> Generally, only the first (and, in my opinion, the most significant) of the available options is included in the text.



is Orthodox by definition, a mirror image of a ‘Catholic Pole’ tradition in Poland. The sovkhos and kolkhoz Catholic population is sometimes just as Sovietised as the Orthodox one. Animosities between the two communities are mainly stirred by the authorities. It would seem that one of the factors contributing to their peaceful coexistence involves a generally low level of national awareness among Belarusians, whereby concerns of everyday existence prevail over ideological ones. Without nationalist movements and with a low level of emotional engagement in politics, the question of a civilisational orientation does not excite social interest; in fact, among rural population it is often hardly noticed at all. In comparison not only with Polish, but also with Russian reality, where some nationalist groups often invoke Orthodoxy as an important element of Russian national culture, it could be said that Orthodoxy is a relatively ‘lukewarm’ component of Belarusian identity and does not function as a strong factor of social integration.

Olga Breskaya, a Belarusian academic, refers to the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map of the world based on the analysis of ‘survival versus self-expression values’ and ‘traditional versus secular-rational values’, to observe that ‘Belarus has a high score in secular-rational values and a low score in self-expression values. (...) Changes in religious life in Belarus are characterised by (...) a paradox: on the one hand, we can observe a growth in factors indicating rising religiousness on the individual, institutional, social and state level; on the other hand, Belarusian awareness is highly secularised, which implies the opposite tendency’ [14, p. 242-243]. Poland has also experienced processes of secularisation, especially in large cities, as well as among the younger generation and social elites. However, despite some analogies, the place and functions of religion in the two societies are clearly different, which stems mainly from the historical context.

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