

Dorota WEREDA* (Siedlce University, Poland)

Reformation as an Inspiration for Reforms of the Eastern Churches in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Key words: the Uniate Church, the Orthodox Church, Hipacy Pocięj, Józef Welamin Rutski, Reformation

Reformative ideas, which appeared in the 16th century as a response to a crisis in the Church and spiritual unrest among individuals asking themselves the question “how to be a good Christian”, apart from changes in the religious denomination map, brought about a change in the structures of thought all across Europe. It was a phenomenon transforming intellectual circles, basic social units and bonds between them, structures of feeling and intellect. Reformation influenced transformations in the area of attitudes, awareness, cultural aspirations and religious dilemmas.

The aim of this article is to present the directions of these transformations in the Eastern Churches: the Orthodox Church and the Uniate Church in the multi-denominational Polish-Lithuanian state. These transformations should be emphasised against the European background. From the Eastern Church only noblemen from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania moved on to communities being reformed, whereas others left another western type of Christianity.

In 50s and 60s of the 16th century elite Orthodox Church Lithuanian families converted into Calvinism. Protestantism attracted converted Orthodox Church members with its methods, doctrine but also with its similarity to the Eastern Church in a practical aspect: non-existence of celibate, the use of a local language in liturgy, receiving the Holy Communion by the faithful in two forms¹.

In Lithuania and Russian lands of the Crown, the Reformation became a serious competitor to the Orthodox Church, most of all due to a deep internal crisis within the Orthodox Church, encompassing both its organisational and moral sphere. Lack of education was particularly severe when confronted with the Reformation. In the 16th century, Orthodox Church people, both clergymen and the faithful, were completely deprived of education at the higher and secondary level². Inability to get

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¹ SNYDER 2006: 34; ДМИТРЕВ 1990.

² ДМИТРЕВ 1990; КЕМПА 2007: 28.

access to education and modern teaching was especially painful in the time of Renaissance and humanism. The 16th century brought about a need for more profound education of noblemen's sons, and in the time of humanistic movements a person's acquaintance with knowledge and sharpness of the mind became also an important advantage, being taken into account in a person's official career and in social life. In respect of that, both the wealthy, as well as wealthy nobility, tried to ensure proper education and good manners to their sons, at least in a minimum extent³. In this situation, Protestant schools enjoyed a good reputation among Orthodox Church nobility. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania a significant role was played by Calvinistic schools, e.g. schools at a good level in Vilnius. Omissions by the Orthodox Church authorities in the area of education contributed to educational initiatives being undertaken by lay persons, which is confirmed by setting up the Ostrogska Academy by Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski, and creating their own educational institutions by fraternal organisations in the last quarter of the 16th century⁴.

Deficiencies of the Orthodox Church education led to a situation where the Orthodox Church had few talented polemicists, both writers and speakers, who could have been able to confront religious opponents. Protestantism, by severe criticism of church dogma, constitution and customs, exerted its influence to change conservative feelings among wide circles of the Orthodox Church people, brought about interest in disputes concerning dogma, and acquainted these people with new forms of religious apologetics⁵. Konstanty Ostrogski tried to initiate theological discussions in the 80s of the 16th century, but Orthodox Church clergymen only started to participate in discussions open to the general public following the Union of Brest. It stemmed from the fact that there were no clear attacks on the Orthodox Church in the Evangelical polemic literature from the second half of the 16th century. Protestants did not view the Orthodox Church as their religious opponents in the same way as it did the Catholic Church. Some Orthodox Church polemic writers took advantage of their influences in the Reformation in a debate with the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy⁶.

The Old Orthodox Church Slavonic language became a limiting medium for formulating and spreading the ideas of the Reformation among Orthodox Church inhabitants of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although it served well in the Middle Ages for converting pagans into Christianity, it did not rise to the modern challenge of the Reformation. It did not offer any links to classical patterns. Over the course of centuries, it was less and less useful for Orthodox Church clergymen as a means of communication among themselves and with the faithful. Protestants (similar to Catholics) had tried to use the Old Orthodox Church Slavonic language in schools and their publications until they decided that they could only convey what they wanted to in the Polish language. The Polish language was a live language, a language of culture, proper for propaganda goals and proselytism. Also Orthodox Church circles convinced themselves that the Polish language suited their needs best. The use of Polish by clergymen did not result from a national bias, but was

³ TOPOLSKA 1984: 60; LIEDKE 1994: 7-8.

⁴ LIEDKE 1994: 8-12.

⁵ BENDZA 1983: 182.

⁶ KEMPA 2007: 30-38.

a choice of weapon in the fight for souls. After 1605, most polemic treatises penned by Orthodox Church priests were written in Polish, and after 1620 Orthodox Church priests wrote their names in Polish, and then after 1640 most official documents were drawn up in the Polish language. Piotr Mohyla (died in 1647) drew up his last will and testament in the Polish language. As a consequence of the Reformation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Ruthenian culture and language lost their dominant position. The Reformation introduced the Ruthenian culture to the Latin/Western European cultural zone.

Protestants became to use printed word, the local language and rhetoric modernised by the Renaissance. Defenders of the Orthodox Church Slavonic language also took up the challenge in view of the undergoing cultural changes. Ruthenians living in the Crown and in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania changed their attitude to the Bible. The Ruthenian, owing to the Reformation, noticed a necessity to print religious works in the Ruthenian language⁷. A novelty when confronted with the Orthodox Church culture is reception of a biblical text outside the liturgy. Non-liturgical Biblical codes appeared in the Ruthenian lands, sometimes with an added liturgical equipment. Such codes include: the codes of Mateusz Joannowicz Dziesiąty, Franciszek Skoryna, Iwan Fedorowicz, the Ostrogska Bible and the Peresopnicka Evangelion. *philologia sacra* Renaissance developing biblical studies in the whole Europe in the Polish-Lithuania lands created more response than in other Orthodox Church centres⁸. In the specific nature of this phenomenon we may find some influence of Protestant-like treatment of the Bible. These circumstances also contributed to the development of research into the language. Pamwo Berynda published his lexicon of the Old Orthodox Church Slavonic language⁹.

Transformations of the Orthodox Church inspired by the Reformation were further developed and led in a systematic way by Piotr Mohyla and his continuers¹⁰. In the middle of the 17th century, this high-ranking official created a new model of culture in the Orthodox Church. The programme of Piotr Mohyla broke intellectual isolation of the Orthodox Church with the Western Christianity, whose expansion into the East it tried to stop not by closing itself, but through creative assimilation of all this that in the Latin culture could contribute to strengthening the tradition of the Byzantine-Slavonic Christianity. Piotr Mohyla is credited with leading the Orthodox Church to restoration in the Commonwealth through reforms covering practically all the most important areas of life of the Orthodox Church community. He particularly concentrated on changing the legal status of the Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth, on reforming education and raising the level of Orthodox Church liturgical and theological ideas; he was also engaged in the Catholic-Orthodox Church dialogue. Piotr Mohyla set up an Orthodox Church academy, later transformed into the Academy of Kiev. The instruction language in this educational institution was the Old Orthodox Church Slavonic language, although textbooks were written in Latin, and exercises were usually done in the Polish language. This situation forced Orthodox

⁷ KEMPA 2007: 37.

⁸ NAUMOW 2017: 122-123.

⁹ SNYDER 2006: 125; KEMPA 2007: 40.

¹⁰ The profile and achievements of Piotr Mohyla are presented, among others, in the following publications: CAZACU 1984: 188-221; SYSYN 1984: 155-187; ŠEVČENKO 1996; BARTNIK 2000: 25-33; LUŻNY 1996: 333-348; NAUMOW 2017: 124.

Church clergymen to learn foreign languages, ancient rhetoric and eristic. Orthodox Church priests from the Polish-Lithuanian state became remarkable translators of Old Orthodox Church Slavonic texts which made them really sought after people in Moscow. The threat of Protestantism transpiring into the Orthodox Church contributed to making efforts of creating a general outline of the Orthodox Church doctrine in Kiev. The situation gave a strong impulse to crystallise ideas of the Orthodox Church catechism¹¹.

The Reformation was an impulse for the Orthodox Church to carry out studies on its doctrine. In uncertain times, when in Constantinople sat a patriarch suspected of Calvinism, Orthodox Church Ruthenians needed a solid doctrine. In response to the situation, Sylwester Kossów, Orthodox Church Mohylew Bishop, compiled an Orthodox Church prayer book, approved in 1643 for printing and distribution by superiors of ancient Orthodox Church patriarchs. It was the first publication of this kind, and its popularity went beyond the borders of the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth. The catechism was printed and distributed also in Russia and among Orthodox Church southern Slavs. In the Commonwealth of Both Nations two versions of it were published: Polish and Ruthenian.

Meanwhile, Piotr Mohyła, Orthodox Church Kiev Metropolitan, penned a large treatise in the Latin language on the subject of the Orthodox Church credo. Mohyła's theology spread across the entire Russian state. Graduates of the Academy of Kiev occupied prestigious posts in the Russian state: Szymon z Połocka was a preacher to Tsar Aleksy, and a teacher to his children; Stefan Jaworski was an adviser to Peter the Great and a career of the patriarchal throne - a title granted by Peter the Great, who restrained himself from appointing a patriarch, thus striving to gain full control over the Russian Orthodox Church. Mohyła's theological thought radiated to the East and survived not only in Kiev, but also in the Latin Moscow academy, in a seminary in Petersburg, in an Old Orthodox Church Latin school in Kazan¹².

The new situation meant a change in balance between the Eastern and Western Christianity, but also became an impulse for undertaking changes in the Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Faced with inertia of the Orthodox Church episcopate, groups of lay people took initiative, and an institutional base for their activities was created by Orthodox Church fraternities. These religious societies became open for nobility, who joined fraternities, gave them political power that was used to acquire the right for stauropegia i.e. submission directly to a patriarch. Fraternities received a mission from the patriarch of Constantinople to remind those failing to observe God's rights by both laymen and clergymen. The fraternities could refuse to be obedient towards a bishop and call him for improvement if he led life against the canon. This solution showed some influences of Protestant ideas. Placing clergymen under the control of lay people seems to be consistent more with the discipline of Calvinistic Churches rather than the tradition of Eastern Churches¹³.

It seems that under the influence of the Reformation a new quality of relationships and social bonds was created in the Orthodox Church society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Orthodox Church fraternities in their

¹¹ MELNYK 2008: 99-116.

¹² JOBERT 1994: 274-277.

¹³ JOBERT 1994: 240; ІСАЄВИЧ 1966.

activities reached far beyond the religious plane taking over the organisation of educational, typographical and charitable activities influencing one's artistic tastes. When compared with this kind of societies in the Latin Church, they showed a much larger scope of autonomy of Orthodox Church fraternities and their larger role in consolidating local communities.

Some Orthodox Church circles made a decision to choose to reform the Orthodox Church based on hierarchical structures of the Latin Church. Initiators of a union of the Orthodox Church with the Papacy in their efforts thought that it would be a better choice to improve the situation of the Orthodox Church. A Vladimir-Brest eparch, and then Hipacy (Adam) Pocij, the Uniate Metropolitan Bishop of Kiev, and later his successor in the Kiev metropolis, Józef Welamin Rutski, a reformatory of the Basilian order, should be indicated as the most influential and most engaged people in the work of introducing the union and developing a programme creating the identity of the Uniate Church. The ideas of the Reformation were present in both hierarchs' life experiences Hipacy Pocij (born on 1541) coming from an Orthodox Church family, following his father's death, left his family home and stayed in the court of Mikołaj Radziwiłł «Czarny», where he abandoned the Orthodox Church in favour of Calvinism. The stay at the court of Radziwiłł gave Pocij, apart from preparation for participation in the political life, education in a Calvinistic school. Probably being influenced by his wife, he returned to the Orthodox Church. Being educated and having influential protectors, he soon started to play an important part in the Lithuanian Brest province and occupied several functions and posts¹⁴. Józef Welamin Rutski (born on 1574) was a son of Feliks and Bogumiła of Korsak family, follower of Calvinism. He attended a Calvinistic school in Vilnius. He received culture and refinement at the court of Konstancy Wasyl Ostrogski. In 1590, his mother sent him to study in Prague. Under Jesuit influence he adopted the Catholic creed and started philosophical studies in Würzburg, and later on theological studies in Rome, in the Greek College of St Atanazy¹⁵. The erudition and career of both Adam Hipacy Pocij and Józef Melamin Rutski would suggest that they made their choices based on a multifaceted reflection to which Calvinism, as they grew up being surrounded by it, was an important inspiration. Hierarchs, showing the greatest commitment in the issue of the union with the Papacy, carried on traditions of the generation that raised its voice in the middle of 16th century, as propagators of Church reforms and revival of Christianity. They belong to a social group distinguished by more than average intellectual ability and self-awareness. Their actions are marked with enthusiasm to reform and improve. It was them who were carriers of intellectual and spiritual energy that pushed people to act, encouraged to write, translate, study and publish¹⁶.

Their championing of the union with Rome did not result from their opportunistic attitudes or efforts to raise their material status or prestige. Hipacy (Adam) Pocij in as a lay person was, after all, a senator. Having decided to enter the clergy, he lost his post. In his letter to Melecy, Alexandrian patriarch, Hipacy (Adam) Pocij reasoned that in his efforts to create union with Rome, he was guided

¹⁴ DZIĘGIELEWSKI 1982-1983: 28-34.

¹⁵ SZEGDA 1967: 35-39.

¹⁶ MELLER 2017: 11-12.

by “purity of faith, sanctity of life, the English order , [...] and his care about souls in the Roman Orthodox Church”¹⁷.

Motivations of hierarchs voting for creating union with Rome, we may see a deepened reflection over soteriological issues. One of the pillars of the Reformation was criticism of indulgence practices and adoption of the principle of *iustitia passiva* i.e. redemption by faith. Hierarchs looking for ways to rectify the Orthodox Church by uniting it with the Papacy rejected eschatological assumptions of the Reformation. It can only be guessed how they perceived their will in putting into practice the declared “care of people’s souls”. In the Eastern Church indulgences were not known and practised. Indulgence practices belonging to folk piety in the Latin Church along with the theology of purgatory were precisely defined in the 13th century by scholastics¹⁸. Uniate bishops then decided that the traditional Church was better equipped to provide spiritual food to souls searching for God according to their needs. Dwelling outside the culture of written word, priests and faithful ones of the Eastern Churches had other needs and required other reforming actions. The awareness of an important cultural role of a strong connection between the living and the dead could have been a crucial argument, which is echoed in “Dziady” by Adam Mickiewicz). The problem is confirmed by Jesuits’ reports submitted to the Propaganda Fide College showing the largest number successes in fight against witchcraft¹⁹. Indulgence practices related also to the dead.

The union chosen by the Orthodox Church elites on behalf of the Orthodox Church community was a reform possible to be introduced by everybody. The ratio of literacy below 10% would have made it impossible to spread the ideas of the Reformation and determined other needs and possibilities. The existence of the Uniate society outside literacy brought another consequence: the choice of the Baroque form of conveying messages referring to gestures, emotions and visualisations.

We can then suppose that the Reformation inspired reflection over a need for reforms of the Orthodox Church plunging into a crisis at the time. The choice of union must also be interpreted as an attempt to save cultural identity of his own Church and an expression of responsibility of its initiators. Protestantism could have then satisfied their intellectual aspirations and enabled them a career in the social hierarchy.

The Union of Brest by its initiators was perceived as a guarantee of rescue for the rite and tradition, but also for preserving dogma. In their letter addressed to Pope Clemens VIII, Orthodox Church rulers by expressing their will to join the union declared that their obligation was to led Christians to unity, according to Jesus’s teachings, “especially in so miserable times, when people indulge in numerous and various heresies, and so many of them distance themselves from the true Christian faith [...] separating themselves from the God’s Church and the true cult of God in Trinity”. Bishops were terrified with antitrinitarian blasphemies to which Protestantism very often led²⁰.

¹⁷ ПАСЛАВСКИЙ 2013: 32.

¹⁸ CHAUNU 1989: 392.

¹⁹ L'Archivio Storico della Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli, Città del Vaticano, Scritture Riferite Congressi Moscovia, Polonie e Ruteni, vol. 11-16.

²⁰ JOBERT 1994: 244.

Supporters of the concept of union of the Orthodox Church with the Papacy were able to convince representatives of Ruthenian families to their ideas. It is confirmed by leaving Protestantism in favour of the union by Połocki District Governor Michał Drucki-Sokoliński and the Castellan of Smoleńsk Jana Meleszko, probably, as a result of Jozafat Kuncewicz's missionary activities. Later, Meleszko made his contribution in a significant extent, to furnish the Basilian facility in Żyrowice²¹, where in the 16th and 17th century a place of Virgin Mary's worship was being consequently developed. In Żyrowice indulgence practices were introduced based on papal privileges²².

The Reformation transformations forced reforms in educating clergymen of the Eastern Churches in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth both at the level of parochial clergy and its hierarchs. Publishing activities covering printing of school textbooks, religious books, and most of all liturgical books aimed at improving of the condition of the clergy of both religious communities, used almost through the entire 17th century by both Orthodox Church and Uniate Church followers. Rectifying activities undertaken by Orthodox Church followers and then Uniates were analogous to the ones carried out by Protestants and Catholics²³. The Reformation contributed to leaving religious issues to a vernacular language.

The examples of the above transformations in the Eastern Churches confirm a significant role of the Reformation as an inspiring impulse for changes permanently reconstructing the Eastern Churches in the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth. Transformations of the Eastern Churches occurring as a result of the Reformation confirm that in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth a dialogue with the European tradition was undertaken. The elites of Eastern Churches were not ignorant passively watching the changing Europe.

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²¹ LULEWICZ 1977: 433-434.

²² MELNYK 2000: 495-522.

²³ NOWAK 2017: 174-195.

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Summary

Reformation as an Inspiration for Reforms of the Eastern Churches in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

The Reformation was a phenomenon influencing transformations of the Orthodox Church and the Uniate Church in the multi-denominational Polish-Lithuanian state. In response to a particularly severe lack of education compounded by the influence of the Reformation in the Eastern Churches, certain educational initiatives were undertaken, translation of the Bible and liturgical texts into the Old Orthodox Church Slavonic language, acquainting people with new forms and ways of religious apologetics. Ideas initiated by the Reformation were developed in the 16th century by Piotr Mohyła. Under the influence of the Reformation a new quality of relationships and social bonds was created in the Orthodox Church society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The activities of laymen and Orthodox Church fraternities became more intensified. The ideas of the Reformation on soteriological subjects became an inspiration for part of Orthodox Church elites to enter into union with the Papacy.

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