

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY: THE PATH TO BELARUS

*Traciak I. (2013). Belarusian Catholic Clergy and the Origins of the Sociocultural Identification of Belarusians. Hrodna: HrSU, 267 pp.*

*Трацяк. І. І. (2013). Беларускае каталіцкае духавенства ля вытокаў сацыякультурнай ідэнтыфікацыі. Гродна: ГрДУ, 267 с.*

THE MONOGRAPH "BELARUSIAN CATHOLIC CLERGY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL IDENTIFICATION OF BELARUSIANS" by Ivan Traciak, an Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies at Yanka Kupala Hrodna State University, was published by that same university. In the preface to the monograph, author stresses that the changes in the state policies, and especially those concerning religion in Belarus after 1991, allowed it to play a more significant role in Belarusian society. According to Traciak, the policies of the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the law "On the freedom of conscience and religious organisations" both contributed to the growth of popularity of religious organisations and Christian denominations, thus stimulating the interest among the scholars to study and comprehend the history of various Christian denominations in Belarus (p. 3).

The scholar from Hrodna notes that until recently the educational processes within the Roman Catholic Church and national cultural activities of Belarusian clergy were beyond the scope of fundamental historical studies. Furthermore, the phenomenon of Belarusian clergy and the processes of Belarusification of both Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches were altogether ignored by the scholars. Therefore, Traciak's study fills those gaps in historical studies.

The author defines the purpose of his research as "*Studying and comprehending the origins of self-knowledge, national identification of Belarusian Roman Catholic clergy within the framework of sociocultural process of the era when modern Belarusian national ideology emerged*" (p. 4). Chronologically Traciak's study covers the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries but he deliberately avoids giving any specific historical dates in the title of his book.

In Traciak's opinion, the term "Belarusian" in its relation to another term, "Catholic clergy," requires more elaboration and explanation. The author notes that both Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic clergy in Belarus historically were often used as instruments of policies by the forces whose interests were hostile to Belarusians. While Russian Orthodox clergy inculcated Russian culture among its believers, the Roman Catholic clergy spread Polish culture in its turn. This situation is not compatible with the teachings of the Church as both Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy have missions transcending nationality. Then, in theory, we cannot talk about Catholic clergy as of Belarusian one.

The author shares the opinion voiced by a renowned activist of the Belarusian national revival of the first half of twentieth century rev. Adam Statnkievič (1891-1949) who once reminded that Roman Catholicism while it remained single also acquired a unique form of a respective nation professing it. As for Belarusian Catholic clergy, Traciak's comment is the following: *"It is an organised confessional hierarchical structure with a large network of religious and national cultural activities under the leadership of its own bishop or a bishop sympathetic to the cause of Belarusian people and clergy"* (p. 14).

The monograph consists of four chapters. The first one deals with the state of research of the subject and the available historical sources. Analysing the state of research, Traciak subdivides existing studies of the subject both according to the place from which this or that study originated, and chronologically. He divides the existing studies into Soviet, Belarusian before WW II, Belarusian research in the diaspora, Polish, and modern Belarusian. The author analyses the studies by the outstanding authors such as rev. Adam Statnkievič, Uladzimir Konan, Aliies' Smaliančuk (Aliaksandr Smalianchuk), Jury Turonak. He divides the available sources into three groups: archival materials, memoirs and periodicals.

The second chapter is titled "The Role of Religious and Denominational Factors in Shaping National Cultures." Here the author focuses on Christianity's influence upon the formation of national cultures. He persuasively argues that Christianity does not contradict national consciousness of a nation but, on the contrary, contributes to its development. To support his thesis, Traciak cites scriptures from both the Old and the New Testaments, church fathers, theologians, religious phi-

losophers. However, Traciak concedes that *"There hardly exists a pure Christian spirituality beyond political and denominational affiliation of the clergy."* Therefore he gives a brief historical survey of the influence of various Christian confessions on national consciousness and culture of individual Slavic nations.

The author correctly observes that cultural and historical consciousness of Belarusians was influenced by the multiconfessional nature of Belarusian society. Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and the church union between Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches influenced Belarusians at various stages of their history. Ivan Traciak criticises those scholars who do not want to recognise this obvious fact and argue in favour of just one denomination having an impact on the formation of Belarusian nation.

Ivan Čarota, for example, categorically refuses to recognise the contribution made by those figures of Belarusian culture who did not belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. Traciak considers this approach to be biased. He writes that *"Generally speaking, axiological factor of contribution of a given denomination first of all to the religious and spiritual upbringing of the people has to be the criterion for an unbiased approach [to the role played by it in Belarusian history and culture]"* (p. 49).

Unfortunately, as the author observes, the factor of denomination has not always served the purposes of the spiritual upbringing in Belarus, but often become an instrument of policies of the neighbouring powers represented by Roman Catholicism serving the Polish policies, and Russian Orthodoxy serving the Russian ones. That ultimately resulted in Belarusians viewing their belonging to a denomination only as formal and in low religiosity among the ancestors of modern Belarusians.

Special attention is paid by the author to the impact the Roman Catholic Church had on the development of Belarusian culture. He emphasises an important role played by the Greek-Catholic church (Traciak uses a modern term for the Uniate church) in the formation of Belarusian nation. In support of this thesis, he gives the evidence provided by several historical sources and opinions of historians. A considerable contribution to the formation of Belarusian people was made by the Jesuits and the monks of other Catholic monastic orders who used the vernacular speech of simple Belarusian folk in their missionary activity.

The author reminds his readers that quite a few writers who were the founders of Belarusian national revival of the nineteenth century such as Jan Čačot, Jan Barščeŭski, Aliaksandr Rypinski, Francišak Bahuševič, Vincent Dunin-Marcinkevič and many others were Roman Catholics. The scholar from Hrodna also remarks that the Belarusian national revival would hardly be possible without the contribution of Belarusians of the Russian Orthodox creed.

The next chapter is titled "Belarusian Question in the Context of Denominational and National Policies between the Late Nineteenth Century and 1921." Here the author focuses on the peculiarities of the policies of the Russian Empire in Belarus, the Polonising influences of the Roman Catholic Church on Belarusians and the influence of its hierarchy on the Belarusian national movement.

As Traciak observes, the language policies concerning the Roman Catholic Church in the Russian Empire followed the Tsar's decree dated 15 June 1848, according to which it was forbidden to hold mass in Russian, but that was allowed "in all foreign languages." As the scholar observes, "*It was from that very point on that the Roman Catholic Church became a stronghold of Polishness in the Russian Empire*" (p. 89).

The author gives a very interesting historical fact from the era when Russian society was swept by the campaign of the so called "*separation of Catholicism from the Polish nationality,*" or "*de-Polonisation of Catholicism*" beginning in the 1860s. As part of this campaign, the governor-general of Hrodna appealed to the district marshals of nobility in 1905 asking them to give the information concerning the need for the use of the Belarusian language instead of Polish in Catholic churches (p. 94-98). Moreover, Traciak describes the attitude of Roman Catholic clergy to educational policies of the Russian authorities and their repressions of individual Catholic priests who were extrajudicially punished for minor misdemeanors like in the case of sermons that were not first approved by government censors.

Russian imperial authorities went to great lengths to put pressure on the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus, which ultimately led to the development of Polish patriotism among Belarusian Roman Catholics. Traciak observes that "*There is nothing extraordinary about the coincidence of the interests of Polish clergy and secular authorities in a decisive moment when Polish statehood was re-established.*"

However, in the author's opinion, Church cannot participate in political life too actively but some Catholic priests and hierarchs became

blinded by the Polish national ideology. Fortunately, not all among the highest hierarchs subscribed to extreme chauvinistic ideas. Many of them, Traciak writes, *“were eager to support and help the Belarusian national revival in general and Belarusian Catholicism in particular”* (p. 128).

The last chapter of the book titled *“Belarusian Catholic Clergy and the Process of Laying the Foundation of Spiritual Outlook”* deals with the factors of development of Belarusian national consciousness among the Catholic clergy which previously used to identify Roman Catholicism with Polish nationality.

The book by Ivan Traciak is a comprehensive study of the influence of the Catholic Church on Belarusian national identity. He gives many interesting facts concerning the life of the Catholic Church in the Russian Empire, development of Belarusian national consciousness among the Catholic clergy, repressions of the Russian authorities against the Catholic Church. He, however, goes beyond the analysis of all those facts by trying to philosophically comprehend the process whereby Belarusian Catholics developed their national consciousness, a Christian view of the value of Belarusian culture. Nevertheless, in his deliberations he makes many digressions, which is just a minor drawback.