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Formation of Political Discourse of Orthodox Western Russian Clergy during January Uprising of 1863

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Abstract: The author examines the regional characteristics of the Polish separatist uprising of 1863 (January Uprising) in the territory of Lithuania and Belarus, a territory which was part of Western Russia at the time. The general goals of the uprising aimed at separating the Kingdom of Poland and Western Russia from the Russian state, and its regional Western Russian characteristics had a direct impact on the formation of the political discourse of the Orthodox clergy and their conceptual output. The special role played in the uprising by the politicized Roman Catholic clergy determined the content of those concepts and the ideological values of the component of discourse used by them. An important role in the religious and political propaganda of the Polish Catholic clergy was played through the issue of restoring the Uniate Church of Western Russia, which had been abolished at the Synod of Polotsk in 1839. The Western Russian Orthodox clergy, which mainly consisted of former Uniates, turned out to be an attractive subject for such propaganda. The propaganda arguments in favor of restoring the union were accompanied by threats, violence, and murders of Orthodox priests. The response to the actions of the separatists was a political discourse, the main concepts of which were formed by Metropolitan Joseph (Semashko) of Lithuania, who had previously belonged to the union. The historical basis of the discourse was the conceptual ideas of N.G. Ustryalov, who considered the history of Russia as all-Russian, including the history of Western Russia. The author comes to the conclusion that the main concepts of the political discourse were “Russian nationality” and the unity of Western Russian Orthodoxy (political, ecclesiastical, and ethnic) with the Russian monarchy, the Russian Church, and the Russian people. The political discourse of the Western Russian clergy found expression in church services, publications of the church press, sermons, and overt actions to support the policies of Alexander II.

Keywords: church union, Russian nationality, unity, church periodicals, noble-priest rebellion

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Становление политического дискурса православного западнорусского духовенства в период польского мятежа 1863 года

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Аннотация: Исследуются региональные особенности польского сепаратистского мятежа 1863 г. на территории Литвы и Белоруссии, которые являлись частью Западной России. Общие цели мятежа, направленные на отторжение от Российского государства Царства Польского и Западной России и его региональные, западнорусские особенности оказали непосредственное воздействие на становление политического дискурса православного духовенства и его основных концептов. Особая роль, которую играло в мятеже политизированное римско-католическое духовенство, обусловило содержание концептов и идейно-ценностной составляющей используемого им пропагандистского дискурса. Важную роль в религиозно-политической пропаганде польского католического духовенства играл вопрос восстановления Униатской церкви Западной России, упраздненной на Полоцком соборе 1839 г. Западнорусское православное духовенство, состоявшее в основном, из бывших униатов, оказалось привлекательным объектом для такой пропаганды. Аргументы пропаганды в пользу восстановления унии сопровождались угрозами, насилиями и убийствами православных священников. Ответом на действия сепаратистов стал политический дискурс, основные концепты которого стали формироваться митрополитом Литовским Иосифом (Семашко), ранее принадлежавшим к унии. Историческую основу дискурса составили концептуальные идеи Н.Г. Устрялова, который рассматривал историю России как общерусскую, включив в нее историю Западной России. Автор приходит к заключению о том, что, основными концептами политического дискурса стали «русская народность» и единство западнорусского православия – политическое, церковное, этническое с русской монархией, Русской церковью и русским народом. Политический дискурс западнорусского духовенства находил свое выражение в богослужениях, публикациях церковной печати, проповедях и акциях поддержки политики Александра II.

Ключевые слова: церковная уния, русская народность, единство, церковная периодика, шляхетско-ксендзовский мятеж

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Introduction

Relevance. During the January Uprising of 1863, an event which threatened the territorial integrity of the Russian state, the issue of western Russia was in the limelight of the government policy, as well as socio-political and historical thought¹. The political solution to the issues affecting the region from the point of view of Moscow required not only an unconditional military victory over the separatists in the Kingdom of Poland and portions of Western Russia, but also an all-class-confessional and monarchist-patriotic mobilization of Russian society, which took the form of mass support for the actions of the government of Alexander II to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Empire.

The separatist uprising of 1863, which took place in the Kingdom of Poland and in Western Russia, was characterized by a religious component, which had inherent ideological values and psychological features, some of which were characteristic of a part of the Roman Catholic clergy². The impressive confidence of the Polish separatists in their indisputable right to political power and territorial domination in Western Russia was based on the historically established economic and socio-cultural dominance of the Polish elite in the area, combined with complex of ideas of political and religious revenge for the lost statehood, the defeat in the Uprising of 1831 and the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in 1839³.

The special political and religious mission in the armed uprising with its sacred, ideological and mobilization functions, was guided by radically minded part of the Roman Catholic clergy, who voluntarily took part, and in the process, it became a challenge and then direct threat to the Orthodox clergy of Western Russia and their flock⁴. The historical opponent of Western Russian Orthodoxy, which had previously came from Poland and had earlier added armed force, combined terrorism and nationalistic ideas with the traditional theological and canonical arguments of the Catholic Church's local superiority, and appeared in a political role during the Uprising of 1863. The separatist claims by rebels to Western Russia determined the need for a retaliatory ideological and religious argument from the Orthodox clergy, who substantiated the historical primacy of Orthodoxy in the ancient Russian lands and the right of Western Russians to live in western Russia under the legitimate authority of the Russian emperor.

¹ The matter concerned the state ownership of the ancient Russian lands – Lithuania, Belorussia, Volynia and Podolia, which were annexed to Russia by Catherine II as a result of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772–1795, and the unity of the large Russian people – Belarussians, Little Russians and Great Russians within the borders of a single Russian state. According to M.O. Koialovich, Western Russia included Little Russia, which consisted of the Kiev, Podolia and Volyn Governorates; Belorussia – the Vitebsk, Minsk and Mogilev Governorates; Lithuania – the Vilna, Kovno and Grodno Governorates: M.O. Koialovich, *Istoricheskoe issledovanie o Zapadnoi Rossii, sluzhashchee predisloviem k Dokumentam, ob 'iasnyaiushchim istoriiu zapadno-russkogo kraia i ego otnoshenii k Rossii i k Pol'she* [Historical research on Western Russia, serving as a preface to the Documents explaining the history of the Western Russian region and its relationship to Russia and Poland] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia E. Pratsa Publ., 1865), X–XII.

² Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (thereafter – RGIA), f. 821, op. 10, d. 44, l. 204–205; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 7, d. 30, l. 127.

³ A.V. Beletsky, *Sbornik dokumentov muzeia grafa M.N. Murav'eva. Tom I* [Collection of documents of the museum of Count M.N. Muravyov. Volume 1] (Vilna: Obshchestvo revnitelei russkogo istoricheskogo prosveshcheniia Publ., 1906), XVII–XVIII; S. Sierakowski, “Pol'skii vopros [The Polish Question],” *Russkaia Starina*, no. 1 (1884): 53–55.

⁴ *Izvechenie iz vsepoddanneishego otcheta ober-prokurora Svyateishego sinoda grafa D. Tolstogo po vedomstvu pravoslavnogo ispovedaniia za 1868 g.* [Extract from the most humble report of the Chief Prosecutor of the Holy Synod Count D. Tolstoy on the Department of the Orthodox Confession for 1868] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia Sinodal'naia Publ., 1869), 36.

Elaboration of the problem. In Western Russia, the Orthodox nobility, officials, merchants and urban commoners were relatively few. It was representatives of the Orthodox clergy, performing church service in the territory where the uprising was spreading, who became subjects of political discourse along with secular publicists. There are several works written by Belarussian researchers about the manifestations of loyalty of this clergy to Emperor Alexander II, the hierarchy of the Russian Church in Lithuania and Belorussia, and about the sacrifices of the clergy due to the terrorism on the part of the rebels⁵. However, there are practically no works in which the subject of the study is the political discourse of clergy of Western Russia during the Polish uprising of 1863-1864, which makes the stated topic of the study relevant.

The scientific novelty of the work lies in the fact that for the first time the subject of the study is the political discourse of the Western Russian clergy of Lithuania and Belorussia, which were a reaction to the political, ideological and ecclesiastical challenges of Polish separatism, is analyzed in-depth.

The purpose of the study is to determine the features of the formation and development of the regional political discourse of the Orthodox Western Russian clergy, as utilized during the Polish uprising, and as expressed in church periodicals, worship, and sermons as a means of forming all-Russian self-awareness, legitimizing the right of the autocratic monarchy to Western Russia, and developing readiness to defend the Russian state.

The source base of the study is a number of archival and published materials on church and political events during the Polish uprising of 1863-1864, which were found and analyzed by the author. These include the funds of the Russian State Historical Archive: Chancellery of the Minister of Internal Affairs (F. 1282), Council of the Minister of Internal Affairs (F. 1281), Western Committee (F. 1267), I.P. Kornilov (F. 970); Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions (F. 821), as well as the M.N. Muravyov Collection (F. 811) of the State Archive of the Russian Federation. There were used materials from the Chancellery of the Vitebsk Governor (F. 1430) of the National Historical Archive of Belarus. In the National Historical Archive of Belarus in Grodno there were found documents from the fund “Chancellery of the Grodno Governor” (F. 1). In addition, materials from the Lithuanian State Historical Archive were used: the Archive of the Museum of Count Mikhail Muravyov (F. 439) and the Chancellery of the Vilna, Kovno and Grodno Governor-General (F. 378).

The source base includes pre-revolutionary collections of the published documents from the Muravyov Museum, thematic publications of the documents of the Soviet period on the events of the 1863–1864 uprising, and the “Litovskiy Eparkhialniye Vedomosti” [“Lithuanian Diocesan Gazette”], published in the first half of the 1860s.

Regional features of the Polish uprising of 1863 in Western Russia

Following the victory of the Russian army in the Uprising of 1831, the government of Nicholas I implemented several measures to limit Polish Catholic dominance in Western

⁵ V.N. Linkevich, “Relations between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the Belorussian provinces in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries,” *Russian Collection: Research on the History of Russia* 12 (2012): 96–118; G. Shcheglov, *God 1863. Zabytye stranitsy* [Year 1863. Forgotten pages] (Minsk: Vrata Publ., 2013); A. Romanchuk, “Confessional aspects of the Polish uprising of 1863–1864,” *Notebooks on Conservatism*, no. 3 (2023): 42–59, <https://doi.org/10.24030/24092517-2023-0-3-44-61>; A.Yu. Bendin, “Patriotic Mobilization of Orthodox Dioceses of the North-West Territory of Russia during the First World War (August 1914 – Early 1917),” *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 23, no. 4 (2024): 427–440, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2024-23-4-427-440>

Russia and its further integration into the Russian state⁶. The key element of the integration under Nicholas I was the voluntary reunification of Uniates in Western Russia with the Russian Orthodox Church, which took place at the Synod of Polotsk in 1839. This turning point in the life of the Russian Church was also a political event, which led to a significant expansion of the social support of the Russian monarchy in Western Russia. The abolition of the Greek Catholic Church on the territory of Russia, in turn, completed the ecclesiastical reunification of the large Russian people – the Great Russians, the Little Russians and the Belarussians under the jurisdiction of the “dominant” Russian Orthodox Church. In Lithuania and Belorussia, the reunited episcopate, clergy and laity became numerically predominant compared to the “Old Orthodox,” made up of believers who had remained faithful to the Orthodox Church since the Christianization of Rus’⁷.

From that time onwards, the process of assimilation of the traditions and rules of the Russian Church by the former Uniates, who had been subjected to longtime Latinization and Polonization, accelerated. However, the process of church integration further assimilation toward Great Russian culture was hindered by the diverse heritage of the areas as well as Polish cultural customs, poverty, and local economic dependence on Polish landowners, which had taken root in the consciousness and behavior of the local church hierarchy and clergy⁸.

The abolition of serfdom in 1861, which liberated the Western Russian peasants from the rule of Polish landowners, was soon followed by the separatist uprising itself, which began in January 1863 in the Kingdom of Poland and was then spread in an organized fashion into Western Russia. The main goal of the rebels, who relied on external and internal allies, was the restoration of an independent Polish state within the eastern borders of 1772. The main places where armed clashes between the units of the Russian army and irregular rebel detachments in western Russia took place were Lithuania and Belorussia⁹.

In Little Russia, the armed uprising of the Polish gentry posed no danger and was quickly suppressed by military units with the help of the Orthodox peasant population¹⁰. In Lithuania and Belorussia, due to the proximity of the Kingdom of Poland and the broader

⁶ *Zhurnaly Komiteta Zapadnykh gubernii: v 2 tomakh* [Journals of the Committee of Western Provinces: in 2 volumes], vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin Publ., 2017; vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin Publ., 2021).

⁷ G. Shavelsky, *Poslednee vossoedinenie s Pravoslavnoi tserkov’iu uniatov Belorusskoi eparkhii (1833–1839 gg.)* [The last reunification with the Orthodox Church of the Uniates of the Belorussianian Diocese (1833–1839)] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia “Sel’skogo vestnika” Publ., 1910), 293–256; M.O. Koialovich, *Istoriia vossoedineniia zapadnorusskikh uniatov starykh vremen* [History of the reunification of the Western Russian Uniates of old times] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia Vtorogo otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo velichestva kantselyarii Publ., 1873), 352–392.

⁸ S. Tikhomirov, *Khronika moei zhizni. Avtobiograficheskie zapiski. Tom 3* [Chronicle of my life. Autobiographical notes. Volume 3] (Sergiev Posad: 2-ia tipografiia A.I. Snegirevoi Publ., 1901), 196–200; M.O. Koialovich, “Istoricheskoe prizvanie zapadno-russkogo pravoslavnogo dukhovenstva [The Historical Calling of the Western Russian Orthodox Clergy],” *Litovskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti*, no. 2 (1863): 67; A.I. Milovidov, *Zaslugi grafa M.N. Murav’eva dlya Pravoslavnoi tserkvi v Severo-Zapadnom krae* [Merits of Count M.N. Muravyov for the Orthodox Church in the North-West Territory] (Kharkov: tipografiia Gubernskogo pravleniia Publ., 1900), 39–42, 53–56.

⁹ *Arkhivnye materialy Murav’evskogo muzeia, odnosyashchiesya k pol’skomu vosstaniu 1863–1864 gg. v predelakh Severo-Zapadnogo kraia* [Archival materials of the Muravyov Museum related to the Polish uprising of 1863–1864 within the North-Western Territory], part 2 (Vilna: Izdatel’sтво pri Murav’evskom muzee v g. Vil’ne Publ., 1915), C. 430–432.

¹⁰ S.V. Ananyev, “Ukrainian aspect in the polish uprising in 1863: forgotten lesson of the past.” *Vestnik Saratov state technical university*, no. 3 (2014): 150–154; V.D. Krenke, “Usmirenje pol’skogo myatezha v Kievskoi gubernii v 1863 godu. Otryvok iz vospominanii [Suppression of the Polish Uprising in Kyiv Province in 1863. Excerpt from Memories],” *Istoricheskii Vestnik*, no. 10 (1883): 106–134.

socio-religious and ethnic base of the uprising (nobility-gentry, Catholic, Poles and Lithuanians), the armed clashes between the units of the Russian army and the separatists took on a larger-scale and was more violent character¹¹. The guerrilla war waged by irregular detachments of rebels which had relied on the economically dominant Polish minority and Lithuanian Catholic peasants, was accompanied by terrorist tactics aimed at intimidating the inhabitants of the territory still loyal to the Russian monarchy¹².

It is apparent from available sources, that Roman Catholic clergy played a unique role in preparing and carrying out the uprising in Lithuania and Belorussia. By having spiritual power over the parishioners, the Roman Catholic clergy in those areas mobilized them into rebel units and underground organizations through utilizing confession and oath taking. The Roman Catholic priests also took part in the military operations against the Russian army and often acted as chaplains and field commanders¹³.

The divine sanction of the priests to their parishioners' participation in the uprising gave the armed actions of the separatists, the characteristics of a "holy war" waged by Catholics in defense of their faith, and a faith which the Russian government from their perspective, had allegedly "intended to exterminate."¹⁴ The religious propaganda of the uprising, carried out with the help of proclamations, posters, and sermons of priests was enacted to incite religious fanaticism as well as political and national "hatred of everything which was Russian."¹⁵

Orthodox Russians were called "Muscovites" and "schismatics" who were considered "enemies of God" because they did not respect the authority of the Pope, and therefore, they were "rebels and like devils" due to their hostility to the authority of the Catholic Church. According to Catholic clergy, "schismatics are the children of devil, the church of schismatics is devil's synagogue, devil is in the communion of schismatics." This form of rhetoric was preached by priests during confession, and in sermons the clergy called on their flock to take up arms to kill "Muscovites" and "schismatics" in the name of liberating Poland, and thereby to later receive a reward in heaven. By utilizing suggestion, priests were to manipulate the religious consciousness of the flock and bring it into an affective state with calls of "Sharpen your scythes to exterminate schismatics!"¹⁶

Thus, the radicalized propaganda of the separatists, along with socially populist promises aimed at creating a social peasant base for the class-based "nobility and priest uprising," also made extensive use of religious division, which was effective propaganda in enabling the fanatical, all-class, and multi-ethnic Catholic environment, which in part, was

¹¹ *Arkhivnye materialy Murav'evskogo muzeia*, part 2.

¹² A.N. Mosolov, *Vilenskie ocherki. 1863–1865 gg. (Murav'evskoe vremya)* [Vilnius essays. 1863–1865 (Muravyov time)] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia A.S. Suvorina Publ., 1898), 27.

¹³ A.Yu. Bendin, "Role of the Roman Catholic clergy of the North-Western Krai of the Russian Empire in the 1863 Polish uprising," *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 17, no. 2 (2018): 357–386, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2018-17-2-357-387>; A.P. Storozhenko, "Ksendz Matskevich, predvoditel' shaiki myatezhnikov [Priest Matskevich, leader of a gang of rebels]," *Vestnik Zapadnoi Rossii* 4, Book XII, no. IV (1866): 243–266; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 7, d. 79, l. 114.

¹⁴ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 19 (1863): 742.

¹⁵ RGIA, f. 1281, op. 7, d. 79, l. 114; *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 12 (1863): 424.

¹⁶ A. Zubko, *O Greko-uniatskoi tserkvi v Zapadnom krae Rossii* [On the Greek-Unite Church in the Western Region of Russia] (Minsk: Izdatel'skii sovet Belorusskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi Publ., 2019), 90; A.Yu. Bendin, *Mikhail Murav'ev-Vilenskii: reformator i usmiritel' Severo-Zapadnogo kraia Rossiiskoi imperii* [Mikhail Muravyov-Vilensky: reformer and pacifier of the North-Western region of the Russian Empire] (Moscow: CIS-EMO Publ., 2017), 189–208; N.P. Tanyshina, "The Polish question as an instrument of the West's Ideological Struggle against Russia," *Science. Society. Defense* 10, no. 4 (2022): 35–51, <https://doi.org/10.24412/2311-1763-2022-4-25-25>

lead locally by priests¹⁷ The main instrument for involving Catholics in the uprising was the development of a propagandistic religious-political discourse which used concepts of aggressive Russophobia in order to promote the forced abolition of the union of Poland with Moscow, the taking of Western Russian territory as the apart of the Polish fatherland, and for a long-term struggle to restore the dominance of Catholicism and the Polish gentry in Western Russia¹⁸.

Political aspects of the Uniate issue in Lithuania and Belorussia

On the eve of the uprising, the issue of Uniates had acquired relevance for both sides of the conflict. The one of the largest problems were that of political loyalty to Russia, and the Orthodoxy of the former Uniates, that became reunited with the Orthodox Church; the local Orthodox hierarchy, priests, and laity, all worried over the issued including the administration and bishops of the North-West Territory. For example, Archbishop Mikhail (Golubovich) of Minsk expressed doubts about the loyalty of the former Uniates to the Orthodox Church and Russian state:

Here people are not yet established in Orthodoxy and, if a storm of unfavorable circumstances breaks out, everything will disappear irrevocably. Old people have not yet given up the union, the youth and the new generation do not adhere to Orthodoxy yet, and therefore there will be probably no ancient struggle for the Russian faith. Then the faith was strengthened over the centuries, and now barely 2 decades have passed since the day of reunification¹⁹.

The separatists sought to involve the reunited Orthodox laity and clergy in the uprising, by counting on their commitment to Rome, Poland and traditional Polish identity preserved in the former Uniates, and by promising on behalf of the Pope, to restore Polish rule and abolished in Western Russia at the Synod of Polotsk in 1839²⁰.

To achieve this goal, the separatists aimed to split the Western Russian Orthodoxy and its clergy as the main basis of support of the monarchy, and to promote the enmity of former Uniates against the “Old Orthodox” as well as to begin the mobilization of Uniates into rebel detachments to oppose the central government. The political technologies used in this case were based on deliberately falsified information about violence applied during the abolition of the Commonwealth under Catherine II. This message in turn was widely conveyed in the sermons of priests in the Kingdom of Poland and Western Russia, and was indoctrinated by a “trustee” of the underground “national government” in local areas²¹.

The leaflets distributed among the reunited clergy, whom the separatists addressed as “apostates from the true Uniate faith,” contained calls for repentance before the Polish

¹⁷ RGIA, f. 821, op. 11, d. 36, l. 35 ob.; f. 1282, op. 1, d. 248, l. 6, 37–38; f. 1281, op. 7, d. 34, l. 68; f. 1281, op. 7, d. 51, l. 37; f. 1281, op. 7, d. 39, l. 76; Litovskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (thereafter – LGIA), f. 378, op. 1866, d. 46, l. 18.

¹⁸ V.F. Ratch, *Svedeniia o pol'skom miatezhe 1863 g. v Severo-Zapadnom krae Rossii. Tom 1* [Information about the Polish uprising of 1863 in the North-West region of Russia. Volume 1] (Vilna: tipografiia Gubernskogo pravleniia Publ., 1867), 124; RGIA, f. 1267, op. 1, d. 3, l. 25, 69.

¹⁹ P.M. Meyer, *Podgotovka k pol'skomu miatezhu v Minskoi gubernii v 1861 g. Zapiski* [Preparation for the Polish uprising in the Minsk province in 1861. Notes] (Belgrad-Minsk: Izdatel'stvo zhurnala “Aspekt” Publ., 2019), C. 34–35.

²⁰ K. Kalinovskiy, *Iz pechatnogo i rukopisnogo nasledii* [From the printed and manuscript heritage] (Minsk: Belorussia Publ., 1988), 57–58.

²¹ A.N. Popov, *Posledniia sud'ba papskoi politiki v Rossii* [The final fate of papal policy in Russia] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia F.S. Sushchinskogo Publ., 1868), 196; *Arkhivnye materialy Murav'evskogo muzeia*, part 1, 29–34; A.A. Romanchuk, “Regarding the question of Uniate persecution during the reconciliation between the Uniates and the Orthodox in 1839,” *Theological Bulletin* 1, no. 28 (2018): 154–177.

Uniates and the Polish fatherland, as well as threats of reprisals and hellfire in the event of remaining faithful to Orthodoxy and the Russian Tsar²².

The preservation of the legacy of the Polonized union in church life, in the consciousness and everyday culture of the reunited clergy contained a potential political danger for the both the Orthodox Church and the Russian state as leaders of the uprising tried to use for restoring Polish rule over Western Russia. Under these conditions, the Western Russian clergy, both the those now reunited with the church and the “Old Orthodox,” had become the object of terrorism on the part of the rebellious Catholics. However, they used the available means of church communication (press, sermons, messages and appeals) to demonstrate their ideological and value-based demarcation from the separatist; their aim was to affirm the Russian identity of the reunited Orthodox of Western Russia and to show their loyalty to the Russian Church and the Russian monarchy.

Political discourse of the Orthodox clergy and its main concepts

The formation of political discourse around the renunciation of the union and return to the Orthodox Church began after the reunification of the Synod of Polotsk in 1839. At the same time, members of the Orthodox Church formulated the church-historical and national narratives used in the political discourse to justify the relative correctness of the religious choice made in favor of the church-wide return of the Uniates to Orthodoxy. The creator of these narratives was the former Uniate Bishop Joseph (Semashko) of Lithuania, the initiator of the reunification of the Western Russian Uniates. In particular, the “Act of Reunification” and the “First Most Humble Petition” provided theological justification for the restoration of the unity of the Greek Uniate Church with the Orthodox Universal Eastern Church and the transition to the jurisdiction of the Holy Synod of the Russian Church. This shift contained a supporting conceptual scheme of all-Russian history, a concept which explaining the ecclesiastical and ethnopolitical significance of the adopted conciliar decisions.

The main provision of this historical scheme was the concept of an all-Russian history of Russia, which was proposed at that time by N.G. Ustryalov²³. In his early works, the historian argued for the transition from the primarily Great Russian-centric history of Russia, created by M.N. Karamzin and his predecessors, to an all-Russian history, which included the history of the peoples of Western Russia with a reunited Great Russian people or “Russian nationality.”²⁴

The church interpretation of all-Russian history was based on a theological-ethnic argument, which appealed to a common ancient Russian heritage, a time when the Orthodox Church of Western Russia was an “inseparable part” of the Universal Orthodoxy and a unified Greek – Russian Orthodox Church and the Western Russian ancestors were an “inseparable part of the Russian people.” The separation of the western territories of Russia by Lithuania and their subsequent annexation to Poland resulted in “Russian Orthodox people,” from their perspective, being separated from “our mother Russia” and in the process they were torn away from true Orthodoxy and subordinated to the Roman Church under the name of Uniates. The intolerance of the local Roman Catholic clergy towards the “spirit of the Russian people and the ancient rites of the Orthodox East” became the cause

²² *Arkhivnye materialy Murav'evskogo muzeia*, part 1, 47–48.

²³ N.G. Ustryalov, *O sisteme pragmaticheskoi russkoi istorii: Rassuzhdenie, napisannoe na stepen' doktora filosofii* [On the System of Pragmatic Russian History: An Essay Written for a Doctor of Philosophy Degree] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia L. Snegireva i K° Publ., 1836).

²⁴ A.Yu. Bendin, “All-Russian history in the early works of Nikolai Ustryalov and Mikhail Pogodin,” *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History* 70, no. 2 (2025): 528–534.

of the oppressed position of the Uniates, a movement which marked the beginning of new Polonization of the traditional Russian identity and the Latinization of Western Russia. The Russian state, which returned the “ancient heritage of Russia”, created the conditions for the reunification of the Uniates with the “ancestral Orthodox Russian Church” and “all the Russian people”. The state, in the person of Emperor Nicholas I gave the conciliar decision on the reunification of the Western Russian Uniates with Orthodoxy the force of law²⁵.

The officially adopted narratives of reunification contained the basic concepts such as the Russian identity of the population of the western governorates of Russia and was determined by such factors as the all-Russian history originating in ancient Russia, a universal and all-Russian form of Orthodoxy, and citizenship in the Russian state. As a result, an ideological and value-based component to political discourse was created by the Western Russian clergy as the threat of Polish irredentism and separatism was growing.

The state-church legitimization of the narratives of Russian identity became decisive for their subsequent development in the early 1860s. During the period of the Polish noble-Catholic irredentism movement that began in Lithuania and Belorussia in 1861, the participants of which demanded that the government administratively reunify Lithuania and Poland, and in response, Metropolitan Joseph (Semashko) of Lithuania addressed all the deans of the churches and monasteries of his diocese. In the order of December 19, 1861, he warned the reunited clergy against Uniate temptations and threats of “revenge of the Poles,” which were contained in the secretly distributed “rebellious appeals.” The political discourse created by the authoritative hierarch and addressed to the clergy was intended to convince the priests to fulfill their duty to their flock, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Russia itself.

The Metropolitan asserted as follows:

“These appeals and suggestions are as impudent as they are ignorant. They direct us to Poland! But what do we care about Poland? We are Russians, children of the countless Russian family, descendants of St. Vladimir; we were born in Russia and swore allegiance to the Russian Tsar... They direct to us the Uniate faith! The Union could be just a cunning bait for our fathers to turn away from Russia and from the true Orthodox Eastern Church!”²⁶

After the beginning of the armed uprising, which engulfed much the Kovno, Vilna, Grodno and Minsk Governorates, the political discourse of the Orthodox clergy was developed further, including ideological and value-based components. The need for the discursive changes that were taking place was caused by the emergence of new factors that influenced the behavior and sentiments of the Orthodox clergy and their flock. The armed uprisings of the separatists covered vast territories, and as a result, the rural Orthodox clergy and laity found themselves increasingly vulnerable to terror and violence on the part of the separatists²⁷. At that time, more active underground “Roman Catholic-Polish propaganda” was addressed to the reunited clergy, as it made threats and calls for ecclesiastical and political betrayal of the local hierarchy of the Russian Church and the Russian Emperor²⁸.

²⁵ *Zapiski Iosifa, Mitropolita Litovskogo. Tom I* [Notes of Joseph, Metropolitan of Lithuania. Volume 1] (St. Petersburg: tipografia Akademii nauk Publ., 1883), 119–124.

²⁶ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 2 (1863): 44–45.

²⁷ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (thereafter – GARF), f. 811, op. 1, d. 68, l. 36; O. Karpovich, “ ‘Innocent Victims’ of Muravyov, or Why Participants in the Polish Uprising of 1863–1864 Were Executed,” *Bulletin of the Brest Technical University*, no. 6 (2011): 22–34.

²⁸ *Arkhivnye materialy Murav'evskogo muzeia*, part 1, 47–48; M.N. Katkov, 1863 god. *Sobranie statei po pol'skomu voprosu, pomeshchavshikh v Moskovskikh vedomostiakh, Russkom vestnike i Sovremennoi letopisi. Vypusk pervyi* [1863. Collection of articles on the Polish question, published in the Moscow Gazette, the Russian Herald and the Contemporary Chronicle. First issue] (Moscow: Universitetskaya tipografiya Publ., 1887), 308–309.

The need for decisive opposition to the growing uprising required that the local government administration and church hierarchy strengthen the religious and ideological influence on the clergy and flock in order to encourage them to support the actions taken by the government of Alexander II.

The formation of the political discourse of the clergy was influenced by the rationally structured and systematic policy of Vilna Governor-General M.N. Muravyov, who aimed at decisively suppressing the uprising based on the coordinated actions of the military units, the military-civil administration, and rural guards²⁹. The administrative discourse of the Instructions and orders of M.N. Muravyov, alongside the vigorous and tough activities of the administration to implement them, strengthened the fortitude of the clergy and laity and gave them confidence in the current strength of the government and an eventual government victory over the rebels. For instance, the provisions of M.N. Muravyov's Instruction were published in the "Litovskiy Eparkhialniy Vedomosti" and were written to "inform the clergy."

The formation of the political discourse was influenced by the Christian teaching of the Orthodox Church, which found its expression in liturgical practice. By order of the local Orthodox hierarchy, in March 1863 the Western Russian clergy included in the text of the Great Litany additional prayers about the reconciling power of Christian love, the spirit of meekness, brotherly love, peace and decorum, as well as about the ceasing of: bloodshed, sedition, unrest, and internecine strife³⁰.

In connection with the above circumstances, the political discourse of the clergy in the extraordinary conditions of the uprising was not to contain narratives of hatred towards the "enemy of Russia" and revenge for the committed atrocities. Even after the news of executions and violence against Orthodox clergy by the rebels in the Lithuanian and Minsk dioceses, the attitude of the clergy towards their political enemies remained unwaveringly Christian in its language:

"It is not Orthodoxy that seeks oppression and enslavement of Catholicism, but it is Catholicism that encroaches on the sanctity and rights of Orthodoxy. The Orthodox people respond to the hatred of Catholics with prayer and love."³¹

The editors of the "Litovskiy Eparkhialniy Vedomosti," which on the initiative of Metropolitan Joseph (Semashko) became the first regular church outlet in the Northwestern territory of Russia, published from the beginning of 1863, and in its program statement defined the ecclesiastical, ideological and value-based priorities of further initiatives. One of the priority tasks of the outlet was to form all-Russian and church-wide consciousness of the "Russian nationality" within Lithuania through mutual rapprochement with the Orthodox Great Russians³². However, the events of the uprising made significant adjustments to the program of the outlet by powerfully defining new topics for future publications.

In the propaganda discourse of the separatists, of decisive importance was the concept of the "taken" Polish land, that is land in Western Russia, whose inhabitants were then labeled as "eternal Poles,"³³ and among which, the Polish language was assumed to serve as a linguistic marker of class-ethnic and ecclesiastical superiority over the Orthodox

²⁹ N. Tsylov, *Sbornik rasporiazhenii grafa Mikhaila Nikolaevicha Murav'eva po usmireniyu pol'skogo miatezha v severo-zapadnykh guberniakh 1863–1864* [Collection of orders of Count Mikhail Nikolaevich Muravyov on the suppression of the Polish uprising in the northwestern provinces 1863–1864] (Vilna: tipografiia A. Kirkora i brat'ev Rommov Publ., 1866), 101–156.

³⁰ *Arkhivnye materialy Murav'evskogo muzeia*, part 1, 330.

³¹ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 12 (1863): 442.

³² *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 1 (1863): 1–5.

³³ LGIA, f. 439, op. 1, d. 12, l. 114.

clergy and their peasant flock³⁴. In this regard, in the political discourse of the Orthodox clergy, a key role was played by the issue of ethnic self-determination in favor of the “Russian nationality,” whose identity had historically been connected with Orthodoxy.

In the situation of acute ideological confrontation with Polish political nationalism and its Russophobic component, the clergy, as an educated bearer of ethnic identity in the peasant environment, became the spokesman for the all-Russian self-awareness of their flock, the public demonstration of which served as a manifestation of local Russian patriotism and loyalty to the Russian state. Consequently, from a substantive point of view, the term “Russian nationality” was in those conditions not only the definition of a large Russian people as highlighted through works of N.G. Ustryalov, but at the same time it served as a criterion for the historical ethnocultural identity of the Orthodox population of Western Russia.

From the beginning of 1863, the reports and articles of the reunited parish priests published in the “Litovskiiye Eparkhialniye Vedomosti” contained numerous pieces of information about the participation of the Orthodox clergy in organizing public education in the “spirit of Orthodoxy and Russian nationality,” as it was aimed at attempting to get the peasantry out from under the cultural influence of the Polish nobility and the Roman Catholic clergy³⁵. In this regard, a question arose about all-Russian self-awareness and cultural preferences of the clergy in Western Russian, and for whom the Polish language was a traditional means of communication, including within family circles³⁶.

On the eve of the uprising, it was the clergy themselves that began to speak about the need to de-Polonize the cultural traditions of the western Russian clergy. Thus, priest I. Kontsevich, who served in the town of Derechin in the Grodno Governorate, addressed his spiritual brothers working in public schools as follows:

“It is time we stopped being ashamed to speak Russian; we have been Russians since time immemorial and should contribute to the awakening of the Russian nationality that has been suppressed in our people.”³⁷

The clergy’s call for the liberation from Polish cultural hegemony was supported by the church hierarchy of the Northwestern territory – Metropolitan Joseph (Semashko) of Lithuania, Archbishop Vasily (Luzhinsky) of Polotsk, and Archbishop Mikhail (Golubovich) of Minsk, who in March-June 1864 issued orders prohibiting the use of the Polish language by the families of the clergy.

Thus, the order of Archbishop Vasily specified that the priests should consequently “drive out the Polish language and everything Polish” as well as “constantly instruct and admonish their flock in the immutable truth that their ancestors have eternally been Russian, that although, by God’s permission, and that even though they once fell under the heavy yoke of the Polish government, they never ceased to be truly Russian.”³⁸

³⁴ G.Ia. Kiprianovich, *Iysokopreosviashchennyi Iosif Semashko, mitropolit Litovskii i Vilenskii: ocherk ego zhizni i deiatel'nosti po vossozdaniiu zapadnorusskikh uniato v pravoslavnoi tserkov'yu v 1839 g.* [His Eminence Joseph Semashko, Metropolitan of Lithuania and Vilnius: an essay on his life and work on the restoration of the Western Russian Uniates with the Orthodox Church in 1839] (Vilna: tipografia I. Blumovicha Publ., 1894), 90.

³⁵ M.N. Muravyov, “Zapiska o nekotorykh voprosakh po ustroistvu Severo-Zapadnogo kraia [Note on some issues regarding the organization of the North-West Territory],” *Russkii Arkhiv*, no. 6 (1885): 186–187; A.A. Komzolova, “Metropolitan Iosif (Semashko) and reforms of the public school in the North-Western Provinces,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 2 (2020): 159–173, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086956870009263-0>

³⁶ RGIA, f. 970, op. 1, d. 876, l. 19.

³⁷ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 5 (1863): 163.

³⁸ LGIA, f. 378, op. 1864, d. 1616, l. 1–7.

The political discourse of ethnic and political self-determination was used by the clergy in Western Russian as a traditional means of communication with the monarch and was the accepted form of submitting “loyal salutations.” At the beginning of the Polish uprising, the clergy and laity of the Minsk Governorate in addresses to Emperor Alexander II had opposed to ally themselves with the “Poles” and instead declared their commitment to the “Russian nationality” and the Orthodox faith, the salvation of which they owed to Russia and its monarchs³⁹.

Slonim dean, Archpriest I. Solovievich reported that the reunited peasants of the Starye Zhirovitsy estate in the Grodno Governorate “have always been Russian, and they have preserved and are preserving the Orthodox faith bequeathed by their ancestors, [including their] intact Russian nationality and unwavering loyalty and devotion to the Orthodox all-Russian sovereigns.” The loyal salutation of the Zhirovitsy peasants was also sent to Alexander II⁴⁰.

In addition, members of the Lithuanian Theological Seminary declared their connection to the “Russian nationality.” The sons of the reunited clergy by calling themselves “Russian by blood and spirit,” and by publicly expressed their patriotic and national position by calling the Orthodox Belorussian people of Western Russia “originally Russian,” which signified that they were children of Russia, rather than Poland. This was the answer to the provocative calls of the separatists, who called had them “sons of the Polish land” and demanded that they take up arms for the war with Russia⁴¹. The seminarians claimed as follows: “We do not sympathize with the Polish uprising; moreover, we consider the Poles our implacable enemies. We, Russians, are ready to stand against you, rebels, rather than for you.”⁴²

The seminarians defended their right to be called Russian and Orthodox, citing the negative historical experience of the Polish rule in Lithuania and Belorussia, including their suppression of the “Russian nationality” in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the forced imposition of Greek and Roman Catholicism among the Orthodox as well as the form of serfdom which the Polish landowners subjected the Belarussian peasantry.

The historical narratives used and interpreted in the political discourse of the seminarians’ patriotic and ethnic self-identification were discovered in the process of studying civil history, using N.G. Ustryalov’s textbook “A Guide to the Initial Study of Russian History.”⁴³ Judging by the extensive information from the history of the confrontation between Orthodoxy and the Union, the seminarians’ mentors used the work of Western Russian historian M.O. Koialovich “Lithuanian Church Union” published in 1859–1861 to guide their actions.

The danger posed by the actions and goals of the separatists required from the Orthodox clergy not only ethnopolitical self-determination and value-based and cultural demarcation from the Polish environment, but also an expression of a broader concept of unity, in which Orthodoxy and Russian nationality was realized through an inextricable connection with the territorial integrity of the Russian state and loyalty to the monarch. It was the position of Alexander II, which gave persuasive force to the political discourse of national-

³⁹ RGIA, f. 1282, op. 3, d. 559, l. 202, 261.

⁴⁰ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 8 (1863): 253–254; Natsional’nyi istoricheskii arkhiv Belarusi v g. Grodno (thereafter – NIAB v g. Grodno), f. 1, op. 34, d. 344, l. 58.

⁴¹ I. Kotovich, *Istoricheskaya zapiska o Litovskoi dukhovnoi seminarii* [Historical note on the Lithuanian Theological Seminary] (Vilna: tipografiia Gubernskogo pravleniia Publ., 1878), 69–70.

⁴² *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 14 (1863): 524–538.

⁴³ B.V. Titlinov, *Dukhovnaia shkola v Rossii v XIX stoletii (Protasovskaia epokha i reformy 60-kh godov)* [Theological school in Russia in the 19th century (Protasov era and reforms of the 60s)], issue 2 (Vilna: Russkii pochini Publ., 1909), 124.

patriotic unity. He publicly declared his determination to defend the western governorates from the encroachments of enemies “on the ancient Russian heritage” and to protect the “unity of the all-Russian kingdom” from any threat⁴⁴.

The political discourse of the ethnic-ecclesiastical and state unity found its more acute expression in the celebrations in honor of the name day of Governor-General of the North-West territory M.N. Muravyov, who was revered by the western Russian clergy as the “archistrategos of the Russian land,” and who stopped the enemies’ pursuit of “the violent separation of our region from the integral political body of Russia” as well as had spread among the people “education on the principles of pure Orthodoxy and Russian nationality.”⁴⁵

The unity of the key concepts, historical, and ecclesiastical narratives of the political discourse of the clergy were semantic and functionally important during the Polish uprising, according to Metropolitan Joseph (Semashko) in a speech delivered in Vilna on March 25, 1864, in memory of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the reunification of the Uniates with the Orthodox Church. A date which coincided with the final defeat of the uprising.

Based on the experience of the clergy, people and state in 1863, the Metropolitan had reproduced and developed the main provisions of the conceptual scheme of the all-Russian history of Russia, which had been utilized in the Act of Reunification of 1839. This scheme was based on the thesis that Orthodoxy and Holy Russia were symbols of the “integrity and indivisibility of Russia.” The Metropolitan’s judgments about the Russian identity of the population and the rule of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the struggle of Orthodoxy with the union and Polonization of the “Russian people” in the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth, revealed the significance of Russia’s long-term struggle for the lands of Western Russia. This long confrontation ended with the annexation of the “Russian regions” to the “integral body of the Russian land” and the restoration of the unity of the great Russian people, first in a political and then ecclesiastical form⁴⁶.

The uprising of 1863 was aimed at making the previous history of the “gathering of Russian lands” meaningless, and was aimed destroying the practical results of the reunification that had taken place; that is, it was aimed “at breaking up powerful Russia in order to subjugate to Poland again the Russian regions, the Russian Orthodox people, who still have fresh memories of the hated three-century enslavement”. However, the violence and threats of the separatists, “Western Russian people” which had only recently reunited with Orthodoxy showed themselves to be as devoted to Russia as “other Russians,” that is, other “Old Orthodox” people.

Thereby, the Metropolitan asserted not only the historical and moral rightness of the defenders of the territorial integrity of the Russian state. His discourse revealed the ecclesiastical and political significance of the historical activities of the Russians autocrats – the gatherers of Russian lands, and the ruling hierarchs who carried out the church reunification of 1839. As a result, the return of the Uniates to the Orthodox Church restored the ecclesiastical and ethnic unity of the greater Russian people, and the test of the uprising showed the strength of their Russian identity and loyalty to the Russian Church as well as the Russian Tsar-Liberator, Alexander II⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 8 (1863): 264.

⁴⁵ *Natsional’nyi istoricheskii arkhiv Belarusi* (thereafter – NIAB), f. 1430, op. 1, d. 31530, l. 179–187.

⁴⁶ In his “Word” Metropolitan Joseph relied on the work: N.G. Ustrialov, *O Litovskom knyazhestve* [About the Lithuanian Principality] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia Ekspeditsii zagotovleniia gosudarstvennykh bumag Publ., 1839).

⁴⁷ *Litovskie Eparkhialnie Vedomosti*, no. 6 (1864): 187–196.

Conclusion

The defeat of the Polish army in the Uprising of 1831, the abolition of the Uniate Church in western Russia in 1839, the liberation of the Western Russian peasants in 1861 as well as the suppression of the uprising of 1863 became the main ecclesiastical and political events that help consolidate Western Russia as fully a part of the Russian state, and of the Western Russian Uniates, in particular, with the Russian Church and the broader Russian people. During the separatist uprising of 1863, an important role was played by the religious factor, which found its expression in the political activities of the Roman Catholic clergy – in terms of propaganda, organization, and directly in military affairs. The objectives of the religious and political propaganda of the separatists had involved both Roman Catholics and former Uniates, who had been reunited with the Russian Church at the Synod of Polotsk of 1839, in the armed struggle against the Russian state. To achieve this goal, the rebels utilized revanchism over the Polish region “taken” by Russia in 1772–1795 and as well used Polish identity of the Catholic population of the territory against the Russian state, including former Uniates.

The response to the challenges of separatist propaganda was political discourse from Western Russian clergy themselves, the formation of which began with the reunification of the Uniates. The decisive role in the formation of this discourse was played by Metropolitan Joseph (Semashko), the original initiator of reunification of the two churches. The historical views of the Metropolitan on the fate of Orthodoxy in Western Russia, which were used in the current political discourse, were based on the all-Russian concept of the history of Russia created by N.G. Ustrialov in the 1830s. The terms of all-Russian history, such as; “Russian nationality,” the unity of the “Russian land,” the Russian Church, and the Russian state became concepts of the political discourse of the Western Russian clergy, which applied those concepts in the articles of the church press, sermons and patriotic actions in support of the monarchy. At the same time, the political discourse of the clergy was also influenced by the Christian doctrine and liturgical traditions of the Orthodox Russian Church through calling for peace and forgiveness to enemies.

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