

Call for papers

from

the Centre for French Civilisation and Francophone Studies (Warsaw University, Sorbonne University)

the Centre Roland Mousnier (CNRS, Sorbonne University)

the Institute for East European History (University of Vienna)

*Uniatism among the Slavs:
religious cultures, political assertions and territorial constructions
in Central and Eastern Europe (16th – 21st centuries)*

The history of divisions between the Catholics of the Greek rite (also called “Uniates”) and the Orthodox from Central and Eastern Europe is one of the expressions of the ancient oppositions that form the roots of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The increasing politicisation of religious affiliations, produced by the confessional splintering of the Eastern Slavs and by the affirmation of Uniatism on the margins of the Catholic world from the 16th century onwards, provides one of the keys to understanding the shaping of both divergent and competing memories in these regions of Europe. This international symposium aims to examine in a fresh way the place of the Uniate communities – whose role remains largely unknown in France – in the recurrent redefinition of the political and cultural borders in this Slavic area. Such an approach makes it possible to go beyond the apparent exoticism of the subject and to place it within the global history of religious transformations since the early modern era, but also within the power relations that opposed the former Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian empires and that weigh heavily on the current geopolitical reconfigurations.

Beginning with the pontificate of Gregory XIII (1572-1585), a renewed interest in Eastern Christians gave rise to a post-Tridentine unionist model that accepted into pontifical obedience various local Orthodox Churches placed under the authority of Catholic monarchies in Eastern Europe and the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The constitution of this Uniate network raised the problem of the reconfiguration of affiliations within a common cultural entity, originating from the ancient *Slavia Orthodoxa*.

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the Habsburg territories – both largely marked by confessional diversity – the Union gradually became an expression of loyalty to the state. If this reciprocal approach attempted to resituate the “Greek-rite” populations in the local socio-political hierarchies, for the rulers it was also a mean to consolidate and to govern borders affected by frequent military conflicts, promoting the separation of their Eastern Christian subjects from the Orthodox of the Ottoman or Muscovite area. In this way, the Uniate structures gradually opened up to local secular cultures and acquired the features of true “national” Churches despite their ritual differences with the dominant Latin Church.

In the shifting balance characterizing the Eastern Slavic populations, the end of the 17th century appears to be a time of transition towards a tightening of confessional affiliations within local political frameworks. The acceptance of the Union by the last three Orthodox dioceses of the Crown of Poland between 1691 and 1702 and of the Orthodox clergy of Transylvania (1697-1701) testify to this drastic reduction of the interstices between the confessions, which until then had still left sufficient room for an “in-between” position. This development gained momentum in the course of the 18th century, with the strengthening of the Eastern Catholic confessional culture (in its Slavic version), sometimes tinged with patriotic overtones expressed in some Uniate printings, and, conversely, with a deterioration of the situation of this community in the regions controlled by Russia during the military operations of the Great Northern War. Although the period 1725-1762 remains poorly known, the times of Catherine II represent a major turning point, marked by the three partitions of Poland. The Russian authorities did everything possible to bring the Uniate populations back into the Orthodox camp.

The Ruthenian Catholics who came under Habsburg rule after 1772, had a different fate, as Vienna assigned them an outpost role in the rapprochement between the papacy and the Orthodox Churches. In the 1770s and 1780s, Empress Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph II, strengthened the privileges granted to the “Greek Catholics” and promoted the development of educational institutions for the Uniates from Galicia, which later became founding places of the Ukrainian national awakening. Despite the tensions and persecutions to which they were subjected, the Eastern Catholics left their mark on imperial and regional

identities, helping to deepen the relationship between religious cultures and national claims. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the political aspirations of the various communities from these regions gave the Uniate populations a special place in the rivalry between the Russian and then Austrian empires and even in the conflicts within these States. The politicisation of the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches and their singular ecclesiological path partly explain their eventful fate.

While in the Soviet Union, persecution affected all forms of Christianity with varying chronologies until the Second World War, the situation was more complex in the Eastern regions of Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary during the inter-war period. In Romania, after the creation of the independent state, the Uniate Church, which had been an important actor in the national assertion since the end of the 18th century, gave way to the Romanian Orthodox Church, which, according to the 1866 constitution, became the representative of the “dominant religion”. Following the restoration of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1943, the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Slavic area had to face a cross-border offensive aimed at establishing a pan-Orthodox front desired by Stalin after the end of the war. The accents expressed by this ecclesiastical diplomacy and largely penetrated by the anti-Western rhetoric deployed by the Soviet power on the international scene, can be found today in different Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Cyril assertions alongside references to the Russian imperial policy, dating back to the 19th century. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian war should also be examined from the perspective of the religious practices and traditions that shaped this part of Europe.

To conduct our reflection, we propose to gather the communications following four chronological lines, which conduct to analyse the main issues characterizing the successive stages in the deployment of that original religious culture:

- Eastern Slavic Christians facing confessional splintering (second half of the 16th – beginning of the 17th century)
- Disciplinary reforms and administrative consolidation (mid-17th century – mid-18th century)
- Eastern Catholicism in the projects of the empires (mid-18th – beginning of the 20th century)
- State re-constructions and political polarisation (20th – 21st centuries)

This colloquium, to be held on 23 and 24 October 2023 in Paris, at the Fondation Singer-Polignac, will bring together some fifteen researchers. Speaking time is twenty minutes, followed by a discussion; papers will be exclusively in French or English. The scientific committee will select the proposals according to the use of archival documents. Unpublished papers will be welcome for publication at the conference. We expect a short curriculum vitae and a summary of the paper by 30 January; this will be sent to you shortly, if your proposal has been selected. The organizers will provide two nights' accommodation, lunch and dinner; our possible contribution to travel costs will depend on the grants awarded.