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Summary of Ph. D. thesis

**“Sociocultural Factors in the Formation of the ‘Moral Community’ in the
Periodical Press of interwar Belarusian Christian Democracy”**

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Summary

Belarusian Christian Democracy (Belarusian National Association from 1936) was founded by a group of Belarusian Roman Catholic priests and lay Catholic activists in May 1917 in Petrograd, Russia, as Christian Democratic Association (first as Christian Democratic Unity, later in 1926 renamed Belarusian Christian Democracy). This political party had a great impact on the shaping of modern Belarusian political culture, structures of civil society, dialogue between various Christian denominations and dissemination of a modern Belarusian national identity among the peasantry.

From the early history of BChD, periodical press played a key role not only in the dissemination of Christian democratic ideology but also in the shaping of public sphere and public opinion, stimulating peasant participation in politics and processes of modernization.

Specifically, this study focuses on the territory of Poland's four northeastern voivodeships (Białystok, Wilno, Polesie and Nowogródek). The periodicals in question are "Krynica" ("The Wellspring", beginning from 1925 "Bełaruskaja Krynica", i. e. "The Belarusian Wellspring"), "Chryścijanskaja Dumka" ("Christian Thought", 1928-39), "Samapomač" ("Self-Help", 1932-39), "Šlach Moładzi" ("Path of Youth", 1929-39), "Šlach biełaruskaha studenta" ("Path of Belarusian Student" published in 1938-39 as a supplement to "Šlach Moładzi").

The sociocultural factors in the BChD press were conducive to the dissemination of the new values and attitudes among Belarusians. Accepting those values the peasants were to collectively achieve modernity embodied by the "moral community".

Modernity in its turn did not mean just the formation of a nation-state, functioning democracy and market capitalism (capitalism was treated with suspicion by Belarusian Christian democrats) as Barrington Moore Jr. suggested but also an ideal state in which society would be governed by these new priority values. Such perception of modernity bore similarity, on the one hand, to pastoral and romanticized images of village and peasants and modified form in millenarian beliefs in Heavenly Kingdom coming on earth, on the other.

According to K. Stauter-Halsted, "moral community", is an informal group bringing together the intellectuals, politicians and a group of new socio-political and cultural activists and correspondents in rural areas and small towns. They saw themselves as possessing superior moral qualities, values and knowledge setting them apart from the rest of the villagers.

The objectives of the thesis is to determine the role of the sociocultural factors in the press of Belarusian Christian Democrats such as the rules of participation in the public spheres,

adherence to the evolutionary paradigm of social transformation, time discipline, attitudes to the city, cultivation and preservation of selected elements of village culture in the formation of the “moral community” and to show the concomitant contradictions and obstacles\ that accompanied this process.

The BChD press is the key source and its discourse is the object of study in this thesis. The subject of the study are the sociocultural factors in the BChD press.

The author puts the following questions in his study: what were the rules of participation in the public sphere, the peculiarities of evolutionary paradigm of social transformation; how the role of time discipline was articulated; what was the attitude towards the city; how the transformation of the elements of village culture into ethnic symbols was articulated; who was defined as insider and outsider regarding the “moral community”, and how the issue of peasantry as a distinct class was articulated?

The hypothesis in this study is the following: the sociocultural factors in the BChD press played a key role in the formation of the “moral community”; this press itself was more important for articulation of the BChD ideology than political documents, programs and speeches of the leaders at the political fora.

Chronologically this thesis covers the years 1917-1939. Geographically it is concerned with the northeastern voivodeships of the Second Polish Republic, which is used alternately with the term “West Belarus”. However, for a more detailed research into the origins and specific features of BChD press this thesis looks at an earlier era of the second half of 19th-early 20th centuries.

This is a Ph. D thesis in history. It is based on general scientific methodology procedures such as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, analogy and modelling. In this doctoral thesis, the approaches of historical science were used such as the study of the origin of a phenomenon and comparative one. The elements of critical discourse analysis were used, too. Apart from that, the methodology and the advances in the field of cultural anthropology were borrowed for a better understanding of sociocultural context of the study. Among them are C. Levi-Strauss’s binary oppositions and G. Foster’s “image of limited good”. S. Hanson’s concept of social time based on weberian typology of political leadership was borrowed to analyze the problem of time discipline. Thus, this study has a considerable element of interdisciplinary research.

The scholarship of the problem is represented by both Belarusian and Polish studies before and after 1989. These studies focus primarily on political and religious aspects of BChD and its press.

The primary sources of the study were interwar Belarusian and Polish periodicals published in Wilno, documents from Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian state archives, memoirs, diaries, interwar Polish sociological and anthropological surveys conducted in West Belarus.

The thesis consists of an introduction to the topic, six chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter 1 focuses on the problem of public sphere, the role BChD press played and the rules of participation in it. It also charts the relations of Christian Democratic periodicals with censorship and the language of politics in it. Chapter 2 turns to the problem of evolutionary paradigm of social transformation in BChD press while chapter 3 focuses on the problem of time discipline. Chapter 4 deals with the attitude to the city and its ambivalence. Chapter 5 analyzes the problem of transformation of selected elements of village culture into ethnic symbols. The final chapter 6 focuses on the question of boundaries of the “moral community” and the question of peasantry as a class in the press of BChD.

Conclusions and further research.

The sociocultural factors in the BChD press played a key role in the formation of the “moral community”; BChD press itself was more important for articulation of Belarusian Christian Democratic ideology than political documents, programs and speeches of the leaders at the political fora. The way the BChD press viewed modernity bore similarity, on the one hand, to pastoral and romanticized images of village and peasants and modified form of millenarian beliefs in Heavenly Kingdom coming on earth, on the other.

Further research may focus on comparing Belarusian periodical press of various ideological and party affiliations. The use of elements of village discourse and oral peasant culture makes an excellent research topic. Comparative studies of 19th - first half of 20th century into Polish and Lithuanian press are of great interest, too.