

The Fasting of Others

Constructing Interreligious Boundaries through Bodily Practices in Christian Discourses around 1600

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Abstract. As cultural historians have shown, various discourses about food and eating are correlated with processes of religious identity construction within European pre-modern societies. This article focuses on such a relationship between bodily and structural contexts during the transformative phase of the late sixteenth century in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. A selection of exemplary polemical sources of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians illuminates the significance of fasting for the semantical constructions of religious collectives in times of societal upheaval. Regarding the increasingly uncertain circumstances due to the union of the Church, this paper argues that religious elites revolved around norms of fasting, which represented a semantic means of defining and defending their respective collective selves, their political claims, and legitimation in relation to a collective Other. Considering bodily practices such as fasting to be a methodological lens, the paper attempts to develop a novel perspective on the study and understanding of religious ordering in early modern European contexts.

Keywords: Fasting [Catholic, Orthodox], bodily practices, religious identity, Poland–Lithuania

The Warning to all Orthodox Christians of our Times,¹ Orthodox polemic dated 1606/1607, tells a story of Orthodox proponents² of union with the Church of Rome being invited by a Catholic cardinal for dinner. After arrival, the former find out that

- 1 *Perestoroga, vsim pravoslavnym zilo potrebna na potomni chasy pravoslavnym hrystyjanam*, 1605/1606, Wilno. This text was not printed. Written by an Orthodox author against Union of Brest 1596. Printed for the first time in: *Akty zapadnoj Rosiji* 4, no. 139 (1851): 203–36. According to Myhajlo Vozniak's hypothesis, the author of the text was Iov Boretsky (1560–1631), Orthodox Metropolitan of Kyiv, Galicia and Rus (1620–1631), see: Vozniak, *Pys'mennytska dijalnist'*, 3–20.
- 2 Based on the context, by the “proponents” are meant Hypatius Pocij (1541–1613), Metropolitan of Kiev and Galychna from 1599 to his death in 1613, one of the architects of the 1595 Union of Brest, and Kyrylo Terletsky (1540s/1550s–1607), Orthodox bishop of Pynsk-Turiv (1572–85) and Lutsk-Ostrih (1585). Both were key Orthodox proponents of union with the Catholic Church, and in 1595 travelled to Rome to negotiate the respective terms.

there are no fish dishes on the dinner table, only meat-based ones, from which they abstain due to Orthodox religious norms and traditions. However, on seeing this, the Catholic hosts insist that because from now on they come under the highest pastor's domination, their fasting is not appropriate anymore and need not be observed. From that day on—as the narrative goes—the members of the Orthodox Church started to eat meat and let their monks do so too.³ In this seemingly simple way, the author tells us the story of the complex and transformative union of part of the Ruthenian Orthodox Church with the Church of Rome in 1595/96, which was not accepted by a significant part of the Orthodoxy and therefore led to a split within the group. But he tells us more: the allusion to breaking the religious fasting norms semantically defined a confessional boundary within the Ruthenian Orthodoxy. Yet in reality the united part of the Ruthenian Orthodoxy sustained their liturgy and their customs, embracing fasting norms. Regardless of whether this narrative represented the contemporary historical, regional reality, it enabled the author to draw clear semantic boundaries between the religious denominations and thus formulate his normative position. This precise kind of argumentative use of fasting in the context of religious identity construction in relation to the religious Other and during times of societal upheaval is the focus of this article.

The interrelation between discourses on fasting and the construction of religious identity has a long history, which in recent decades has increasingly become a subject of historiography. Throughout the pre-modern era, practices related to food were an integral element of disputes within and between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim collectives. Both in terms of its normative and practical dimensions, as Dorothea Weltecke has shown, fasting helped co-shape religious boundaries, enabled exclusion or belonging, and underpinned interreligious rivalry.⁴ Yet it was only in the early modern period that fasting as a means of religious formation was imbued with its systematic political function.⁵ This was particularly the case in the context of the (re-)ordering of the Christian collectives.⁶ Historians of the European Reformation have dedicated much attention to analysing the centrality of fasting as a collective attribute of early modern religious formation.⁷ Following these historiographic developments, Eleanor Barnett was the first to systematically question the ideas about food and eating in terms of their relation to faith in the context

3 Cited from edited sources: Vozniak, *Pys'mennytska dijalnist'*, 25–56, here 33.

4 Weltecke, "Essen und Fasten."

5 Weltecke, "Essen und Fasten," 7.

6 See: Kissane, *Food, Religion and Communities*; Pollmann, "Being a Catholic in Early Modern Europe"; Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*.

7 See: Albala, "The Ideology of Fasting in the Reformation Era"; Ryrie, "The Fall and Rise of Fasting in the British Reformation."

of English Protestantism.⁸ Barnett demonstrated how fruitfully these discourses became part of the process of the construction of confessional boundaries and collective identities during the transformative period of the Reformation.

Within the framework of these historiographic developments, however, the systematic meaning of fasting as a discursive technique of making interreligious distinctions has not received the attention from scholars that it deserves. Considering bodily practices as a methodological lens for increasing the understanding of religious ordering during the transformative early modern era,⁹ this paper attempts to partially fill this gap by focusing on one particular aspect: the semantic construction of religious self and religious Other through the argumentative use of fasting. Particularly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, when confessional boundaries remained contested and emerging formations competed for position, religious discourse touched on fundamental issues, seeking legitimation and power. Records of Christian polemics attest in this respect not only to theologically and dogmatically based denominational claims but also to arguments about fasting—a topic that may at first seem trivial. Based on the methodological assumption that collectives are relationally constructed,¹⁰ this article traces how fasting was argumentatively used and semantically modelled¹¹ to define the religious Other and thus to draw interreligious boundaries.

The context of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth is particularly interesting in this respect because it is here we can identify diverse religious groups living in close proximity, navigating their distinct identities. Especially around 1600, the latter became of central importance, as this was a time of new religious and political upheavals and under these circumstances religious formations made claims for their prerogatives and influence. Another reason for this regional focus is a major geographical asymmetry; historians of early modern Europe interested in the relationship between fasting and religious identity have neglected the entire context of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹² Following recent historiographic

8 Barnett, “Reforming Food and Eating in Protestant England.”

9 This methodological approach to religious ordering through bodily practices in early modern Europe is one of the conceptual foundations of my current monograph (in progress). For a methodological perspective see: Sennefelt, “Ordering Identification.”

10 See: Powell and Dépelteau, eds, *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*.

11 See: Åkerstrøm Andersen, *Discursive Analytical Strategies*; Klymenko, *Semantiken des Wandels*, 23–64.

12 Polish food and culinary and dietary norms of the pre-modern period have received considerable scholarly attention within Polish historiography, yet this has mostly been dedicated to the kinds, nutritious values, and cultural meaning of food, rather than to their functional dimension in the context of religious formation in early modern times.

developments,¹³ this contribution aims to begin to counterbalance this asymmetric apportionment by asking how discourses about fasting helped religious elites to define and defend their religious identity in relation to the religious Other in transformative times around 1600. Through selected examples of polemic Catholic and Orthodox sources, it traces forms of the semantical modelling of religious boundaries according to arguments about fasting in the context of denominational claims and interests in transformative circumstances. Starting with a close reading of the Jesuit Piotr Skarga (1536–1612) in the first part, this article reconstructs the disputation surrounding fasting in relation to his advocacy of union between the Church of Rome and the Ruthenian Orthodox Church. Even though this union became reality in 1595/96, it was accompanied by major conflict and dispute before and after, as a number of Orthodox Christians never accepted it. The second part of this paper analyses the work of the Ruthenian Orthodox Christian Zacharias Kopystynski (?–1627) and his arguments about fasting, which he semantically modelled as a sign of the one true faith. Based on this mosaic of two disparate cases, the aim is to reconstruct the forms and functions of fasting as a semantic tool for constructing interreligious boundaries rather than questioning norms of fasting as attributed to particular groups. By choosing such a perspective, this article attempts to explore the methodological meaning of fasting as a lens for increasing the understanding of religious ordering in early modern Europe.

Uniting through Fasting: Piotr Skargas' *On the Unity of the Church of God*

From the late sixteenth century onwards, in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth the landscape of religious formations underwent a period of substantial transformation.¹⁴ This crisis created a sense of profound uncertainty for religious groups and their elites regarding their status and privileges and how they could protect their interests in a rapidly changing environment. These were the general circumstances under which one of the most influential Jesuits, preachers, proponents of Counter-Reformation, and promoters of the Union of Brest of this region and

13 Jarosław Dumanowski recently demonstrated the structural meaning of phenomena of *ieiunium Polonicum* in the context of the construction of ethnic and religious identities in early modern times, see: Dumanowski, “Old Polish Fasting”. For the interrelationship between Jewish dietary regulations and identity construction in this time and region see: Klymenko, “Körperpraktiken und Bekenntnis.”

14 See: Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform*, 59–256.

time, Piotr Skarga,¹⁵ published his programmatic book, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem. Y o Greckim od tey iedności odstąpieniu* [On the Unity of the Church of God under One Shepherd and on the Greek Separation from that Unity].¹⁶ This book was first published in Vilnius in 1577 in Polish and, as its expressive title reveals, passionately advocated union between the Roman Church and the Ruthenian Orthodox Church. The contemporary reaction was quite symptomatic of both the great influence of Skargas' preaching for union and the profundity of the religious crises in which it first came to light: multiple copies of the first edition were bought and burned by representatives of the Ruthenian Orthodox nobility, who rejected union with the Roman Church.¹⁷ The second edition, with some amendments and a modified title, appeared about a decade later, in 1590,¹⁸ shortly before the partial union Skarga advocated for passionately and persistently became reality in 1595/1596.¹⁹

In *On the Unity of the Church of God*, a programmatic outline of this union, Skarga the Jesuit staunchly sought, as church historian Borys A. Gudziak put it, “[i]n persuasive and passionate prose, [...] to discredit the Ruthenians’ Byzantine patrimony, their religious ethos, and Orthodox ecclesiology”.²⁰ Within this frame-

15 In addition to being a well-known preacher, and author of numerous polemics and theologues, he also served—among other posts—as the first rector of Alma Academia et Universitas Vilmensis Societatis Iesu in Vilnius (Wilno) and as a court preacher under Sigismund III Vasa and an adviser to the king. On biography of Piotr Skarga see: Tazbir, *Piotr Skarga: szermierz kontrreformacji*. Among his literary legacy: *Pro Sacratissima Eucharistia contra haeresim Zwinglianam, ad Andream Volanum* [For the Most Sacred Eucharist, against the Zwinglian Heresy, 1576]; *Żywoty świętych* [Lives of the Saints 1579]; *Artes duodecim Sacramentarium, sive Zwinglio-calvinistarum. Siedem filarów, na których stoi katolicka nauka o Przenajświętszym Sakramencie Ołtarza* [The Seven Pillars on Which Stands Catholic Doctrine on the Most Sacred Sacrament of the Altar, 1582].

16 *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem. Y o Greckim od tey iedności odstąpieniu. Z przestrogą y upominaniem do narodow Ruskich, przy Grekach stoiących: Rzecz krotka, na trzy części rozdzielona, teras przez k(siędza) Piotra Skargę, zebrania Pana Iezusowego, wydana. «Proszę, Oycze, aby byli iedno, iako y my iedno iestesmy» (Ioan. 17). W Wilnie, z drukarni iego kxiazęcey miłości pa(na) Mikołaiia Chrystopha Radziwiła, marszałka w(ielkiego) kxię(stwa) Lit(ewskiego), etc. Roku 1577.* The following quotations are based on this edition, included in the footnotes as: Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*.

17 This was recorded in the preface to the second edition of Skargas' book, published in 1590. It is yet to be clarified if this is an exaggeration included for argumentative reasons.

18 Skarga, *O rządzie y jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem. Y o Greckim y Ruskim od tey iedności odstąpieniu. Pisanie X(siędza) Piotra Skargę, Societatis Iesu. Ioan. 17: «Proszę, Oycze, aby byli iedno, iako y my iedno iestesmy» (Ioan. 17). W Krakowie. W drukarni Andrzeia Piotrkowczyka. 1590.*

19 On the union and its consequences see Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform*, 209–56.

20 Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform*, 83.

work, Skarga employed a sophisticated rhetorical strategy: rather than arguing for the union of both Churches, he primarily concentrated on invalidating the distinctive features of Ruthenian Orthodoxy by approaching those as historical failures. According to his narrative, union was the true condition but had deteriorated because of mistaken developments in the past, so the differences between religious denominations had emerged artificially and therefore were meaningless. To paraphrase Skarga's rhetoric regarding the distinctiveness of the Ruthenian Orthodox Church: when one aims to get rid of a friend, one looks for a reason.²¹ Therefore, his rhetorical strategy was to highlight the distinguishing features of the religious groups so that the religious 'Other' could appear as the religious 'self'. Among his other arguments, one after another he specifically referred to the twenty-six accusations of heresy that were commonly levelled by Ruthenian Orthodox Church theologians at the Church of Rome.

Strikingly, no less than five of these twenty-six heresies, referred to by Skarga as the distinctive accusations against the Catholics of the Orthodox Church, concerned norms of fasting:

"1. That the Romans [the Catholics] fast on Saturday. [...], 5. That their [Catholic] carnival days [Pol.: *zapusty*] before Lent last longer. [...], 11. That their [Catholic] children are given dairy products during fasting time. [...], 16. That they [Catholics] eat animals and poultry that ha[ve] been killed by strangulation and whose flesh contains blood as well as foxes, frogs, and bears. [...], 24. That their [Catholic] monks eat meat"²²

The responses Skarga attached upon listing these "heresies" seem determined and yet ambivalent. On the one hand, he remained clear about his point that the sought-after unity of faith and church must not be endangered by something as marginal as differences in fasting, which therefore should not bother the Orthodox: "Why does it even preoccupy them [the Orthodox] who fasts and when? After all, we do not reproach them in their choice to shorten their carnival period [Pol.: *zapusty*] so that they start to fast earlier, so it shouldn't bother them that we [...] fast on Saturday [...]"²³ And further: "The Greeks [the Orthodox] can fast even every day the whole year, if they want; and we will praise God for what is absolute and perfect, that is church union (without which neither fasting nor other good deeds will help)"²⁴ On the other hand, however enlightened Skarga may appear in these words, he made sure to critically respond to the mentioned accusations, rejecting

21 Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*, 230–31.

22 Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*, 231–33.

23 Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*, 233.

24 Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*, 235–36.

them one after another, characterizing some as ‘foolish’ and out of place: as he wrote “It is stupid to say that children or other people for whom fasting is not possible for very good and necessary reasons [...] should nevertheless fast”.²⁵ Regarding the purity of food, following the ironic remark that a healthy man can even eat a frog, he referenced the distance between Roman Catholic practice and the dietary laws of the Old Testament²⁶ and the teaching of St Peter, who was told to eat and to never call impure what his God had created for people; the laws regarding animals and poultry that had been killed by strangulation and whose flesh contains blood, as taught by the apostles, were thought to be temporary unless the Jews adopted them.²⁷ By arguing in this manner—especially interesting in the context of this article—Skarga in his response resorted to drawing boundaries between religious Others by referring to eating and fasting.

Striking, and especially interesting for the methodological reconstruction and interrogation of fasting as a means of arguing for religious distinctiveness, is the emphasis on the temporal dimension. It was not only the correct type of fast but the correct schedule for fasting that seems to have been relevant in co-shaping the boundaries of the religious Other. Skarga illustrated this while formulating three reasons why it was appropriate for Catholics to fast on Saturdays, despite the Orthodox accusation that this was a sign of heresy. First, he replied, this supposedly marked opposition to the Jews by rejecting their day of feast: the Shabbat. This part of his argument is indeed striking, as it recalled a traditional, mutual distinction between Christians and Hebrews that was valid to both Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, and added power to his rhetoric about the need for union between both

25 Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*, 236–37.

26 Here we can presume the reference to Leviticus 11:1–47, and Deuteronomy 14:1–21 of the Old Testament.

27 Marginal note: *O potrawach i zadawionych*. Act 15. Act 10. This is a reference to the Acts of Apostles, here cited after the new international version: Acts 15:19–15:20: 19. It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. Explanation: meat of strangled animals, *πνικτοῦ* (pniktou); strangled (i.e., killed without bloodletting). Acts of Apostles, Acts 10:09–10:16: 9. About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. 13. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” 14. Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” 15. The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” 16. This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

churches. Arguing about the correct time for fasting could therefore be semantically adapted, depending on one's purpose, to address the problem underlying the disputes and the subject of the religious Other being addressed. Second, according to the narrative, fasting on Saturday was preparation for feasting on Sunday: it helped the practitioner to pray more passionately and to listen to God more carefully. Third, fasting on Saturday supported reflections on the sadness of the Mother and the Apostles that they experienced on that day, and enabled one to meet the resurrection of the Son with greater joy.²⁸ The temporal dimension of fasting/not fasting on Saturday was used to make distinctions in diverse ways: it helped with both drawing a line between Christians and Hebrews, and setting—or illuminating—boundaries between Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians.

Worth comparing in regard to the research question are the two editions of Skarga's work from 1577 and 1590: despite some changes in the content of the second edition and a different title—interestingly, in the second edition Skarga, additionally to 'union' mentions 'order' or 'government' [Pol.: *rząd*] in the title²⁹—, the passages about the religious practice of fasting, as discussed above, remained alike. This argumentative continuity is confirmed in an additional study of Skarga's sermons as well. For instance, in a sermon on Luke 2 dedicated to Saint Anne for the first Sunday after Christmas, he stresses that genuinely Catholic fasting (or more precisely, its observance among Catholics) is a sign "that among us [Catholics] is the true Church of God".³⁰ Nevertheless, here we primarily deal with types of sources of a normative and discursive nature. Therefore, it is important and interesting, in the context of further exploration, to analyze more different types of sources; for instance, the correspondence³¹ of Skarga, which offers additional—praxeological—insight into the topic.

Even though Skarga passionately advocated for union between the Church of Rome and the Ruthenian Orthodox Church, and therefore the overcoming of respective religious differences, he also insisted that differences existed, and illuminated many of these in relation to arguments about the use of fasting. This paradox shows that the striving for unity did not entail the undoing of differences altogether; the argument defined a new framework of markers that redefined or shifted—but

28 Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*, 233–34.

29 *O rządzie y jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem*.

30 Here cited from: *Concionones pro diebus dominicis et festis totius anni reverendi patri Petri Skarga... iam olim ab ipso authore cum additione de septem sacramentis et aliarum quarundarum concionum saepius recognita et editae, nunc vero in latinum idioma translatae... a Joanne Odrowaz Pieniazek...* 40 [from the second part (dedicated to Saint Anne) of the sermon for the first Sunday after Christmas, Luke 2, 33–40].

31 E.g. edition by Jan Sygański, *Listy Piotra Skargi z lat*.

did not eliminate—boundaries between the religious collective self and religious collective Other. And norms of fasting—presumably due to how flexibly they could be activated and semantically applied—seem to have played a part in these processes too. This became even more obvious after 1596 when the Union of Brest became a reality³² but continued to be denied by a core group within the now-divided Ruthenian Orthodox Church.

The correct fasting at the correct time: Zacharias Kopystensky's *A Book on the True Faith*

“Adam and Eve were banned from paradise [...] because they did not fast because they ate the fruit from the tree from which God had forbidden them to eat. Everything created by God is good and can be eaten: except for what the Church of God [...] ordered us to abstain from in particular times, as abstinence leads to salvation”.³³

“If you willfully, disregarding the prohibition by the Church, will eat meat during the fasting time, not only will you become an apostate of the Church of God, but also a sinner, and expelled from the Church, excommunicated. Adam, too, was thus banished and expelled from paradise [...]”.³⁴

With this impressive allusion to the central narrative of Christianity, Ruthenian Orthodox theologian, writer, churchman, and (from 1624) archimandrite of the Kyivan Cave Monastery Zacharias Kopystensky (?–1627) aimed at nothing less than framing fasting as a means of defining religious boundaries and, more importantly, as a sign of the only true faith: Ruthenian Orthodoxy. His hand-written *A Book on the True Faith* appeared around 1619/1620, right at the time when the narrative of Kyiv as a second Jerusalem became a reference point for members of the Orthodox Church who claimed it to be the new center of Christianity. We cannot prove whether Kopystensky was familiar with the works and arguments of Skarga, and if he was, whether this was the reference point for his own writing. Yet knowing this is less essential in relation to the topic of this contribution, which is interested primarily in the semantic construction of arguments about fasting as a matter of

32 This situation resulted in ideological but also practical difficulties—for example, in the use of two different calendar systems, which were out of step by ten days and consequently led to different calculations, which also affected fasting periods. Accordingly, fasting as a marker of the ‘Other’ became imbued with additional and specific practical implications.

33 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 146–47.

34 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 141–42.

religious distinction, not in their perception or reception. Essential instead is the fact that Kopystensky, exactly like Skarga, was an architect of a fundamental religious project of his time and region.³⁵ Kopystensky was one of the proponents of the vision of centering Christianity around the Kyiv Orthodoxy. His book on faith revolved around this idea, arguing against the Union of Brest, therein a full chapter was dedicated to the argument that Orthodox fasting practices that followed the correct form and schedule were the only correct type of fasting.

In the opening section of this chapter, Kopystensky claimed that contemporary rejections of the “fasting of the Church of God, and due to the apostles and their followers”³⁶ was the problem that had inspired his writing. The latter is the specific subject of the following pages. Kopystensky’s references were the Old and New Testaments. As with the narrative of Adam and Eve, he drew his arguments from history, describing those fundamental sources as the one and only origin of Orthodox fasting practices. Employing one argument after another, and citing the passages from both Testaments, he made Orthodox fasting practice discursively appear to be original and true, tracing a line back to the very beginning of Christianity. At the same time, his argument specifically regarding Orthodox fasting was implicitly divided into two categories: its temporality, and its quality. With reference to readings from the apostles and prophets, particularly Zachariah,³⁷ he clearly defined the only correct times for fasting. These occurred four times a year. The general fasting days were defined as Wednesday and Friday. In case of illness, however, fish and oil were allowed during these times, although under no conditions were meat, eggs, or butter permitted.³⁸ Kopystensky repeatedly stressed that the temporal—i.e., the stress on Wednesday and Friday as fasting days³⁹—and qualitative nature of the practice was not based on contemporary innovation by the Church but was originally rendered by the apostles. This historically framed argument is indeed fascinating.

Starting at this point in the reading, the logical strategy that Kopystensky followed becomes increasingly clear. After presenting the different facets and aspects of Orthodox fasting practice as adopted from the most fundamental sources of Christianity, he strikingly turned to drawing clear religious boundaries by the same means. He writes:

“Regarding the days of Saturday, the Church of Christ has never ordered anything like that, except for the only Great Saturday, when the body of the Christ lay

35 Tymoshenko, *Berestejska Unija 1596*, 98–110.

36 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 146.

37 Hebrew Prophet, the eleventh of the Twelve Minor Prophets in the calendar of saints of the Eastern Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches.

38 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 134–35.

39 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 138.

in the coffin, [the Church] ordered us to fast. Whoever would fast on Saturday shall be punished by the Church, and with severity. [...]. If a cleric was seen to fast on Sunday and Saturday, except for only one [Great Saturday] he would be expelled [zlozhenij]; and if it was a layman he would be excommunicated [viluchen]. [...]. He who fasts today on Saturday must know, that he commits a sin [...].”⁴⁰

Obviously, Kopystensky is critiquing Catholicism (in his words “the Church of Rome”) and its practice of fasting on Saturdays. From a methodological perspective, it should be noted that religious collectives are hostages of religious Others, and cannot be understood outside the relational context.⁴¹ A fasting schedule can only work as a distinguishing marker if there is a religious Other with its own—different—timetable. Therefore, what we find in Kopystensky’s text is a sophisticated argument about fasting that aimed to draw the boundary between the religious Other and the religious self: at least the rhetorical exaggeration of the meaning of the particular fasting calendar seems, in this regard, to be such a technique, and regardless of whether it had any practical application, it was a discursively operational one. What we see is that by these means Kopystensky sought to paint Catholics as heretics. He writes: “Beware heretics, how holy fasting is to be celebrated without meat and wine. This is the law followed by the Church of God that watches over its believers and teaches them to fast.”⁴² Kopystensky referred in this context explicitly to the Catholics.

The criteria in support of this accusation, according to his telling, was not just fasting at the wrong time but also the quality of fasting. According to Kopystensky, Orthodox fasting is strict and allows for only minor exceptions in the case of illness, while Catholics, over and above the fact that they fast on the wrong days, eat fish, eggs, cheese, and butter, all of which are forbidden, and may even drink wine. This is—Kopystensky continues—not fasting at all, due to the teaching of the only true—Orthodox—Church.⁴³ This micro-logic of making a religious difference reminds on Bourdieu’s sociological understanding of making social difference, as relational and dynamic process.⁴⁴ Unlike Jewish or even Protestant norms and practices of food abstinence, the boundaries for Catholics were not as obvious. This differentiation in terms of the dimensions of quality and temporality was a reaction to the need to draw a line in times of new religious formations and upheavals. The problem with these arguments seems to be a structural or even political one that is connected to

40 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 143–44.

41 Powell and Dépelteau, eds, *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*.

42 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 130.

43 Kopystensky, *Kniga o vere iedinoi*, 144.

44 Originally developed in context of reproduction of social inequality in the late twentieth century, see e.g.: Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

the agenda of ordering a religious field in a particular way. In another of his pieces of work, *Palinodia*, from 1621, Kopystensky emphasizes this point by listing the conditions under which church union could be possible even from his perspective. One of the related bullet points is: the Church of Rome has to follow the fasting norms of the Greeks, say the Orthodox.⁴⁵

The topic of the forgiveness of fasting-related sins is another subject that allowed Kopystensky to draw confessional boundaries. He explicitly contrasted Orthodox Christian and Roman Catholic policies in this regard. According to his framework, the ‘Eastern Church’, no matter what, would never forgive the sin of breaking a fast. Exceptions are conceivable for bodily illness and in extraordinary cases, but even then only fish, oil, and wine, but not meat or butter, could be allowed.⁴⁶ Even for travelers, exceptions were impermissible.⁴⁷ This reminds one of the original crime of Adam and Eve and their banishment from paradise for their sin of breaking the rule of abstinence. This motif was quite programmatic for Kopystensky’s polemic, and furthermore didactically quite sophisticated. He argumentatively used fasting to define the points of differentiation between the denominations. Even though Kopystensky stressed the nature of the fasting of believers, he systematically drew a line to distinguish the religiously collective Other. In this regard, he compared the sin-forgiving Catholic Church with a careless stepmother, and the rigorous Orthodox with a loving and caring mother. He pointed out that fasting purifies a man, while “the devil sits on the navel.”⁴⁸ We see that forgiveness for fasting-related sins associated with the temporality and quality of fasting may be granted relationally to respective religious others, and becomes a distinctive feature of the only true faith.

Ordering through fasting: concluding remarks

In conclusion, I would like to go back to the story presented in the introduction about the non-observance of the fasting norms of the adherents of the united Orthodox Church after the dinner at a cardinal’s place following the latter Church’s union with the Church of Rome.⁴⁹ In reality, this was not the case: quite the opposite. This is exactly because Orthodox norms and practices of fasting—and even the liturgical calendar⁵⁰—remained intact, fasting became a major subject of regulation

45 Kopystensky, *Palinodija ili knjiga oboroni kafolicheskoj*, 1115.

46 Kopystensky, *Knjiga o vere iedinoi*, 150.

47 Kopystensky, *Knjiga o vere iedinoi*, 155.

48 Kopystensky, *Knjiga o vere iedinoi*, 150.

49 Perestoroga, vsim pravoslavnym zilo potrebna na potomni chasy pravoslavnym hrystyjanam, 1605/1606, Wilno. Cited from: Vozniak, *Pys’mennytska dijalnist’*, 25–56, here 33.

50 Tatarenko, *Une réforme orientale à l’âge baroque*, 256, 276, and 279–81.

both by the Orthodox⁵¹ and Catholic elites.^{52,53} Nevertheless, the mentioned story semantically fulfilled its function of drawing the confessional line, especially where it was not that obvious.

My starting point was a desire to examine the discursive use of fasting to explore the construction of Christian collectives as a relational and contingent process. In choosing this perspective, an attempt was made to develop a novel approach to increase understanding of religious ordering in early modern European contexts. I have tried to reconstruct this on the basis of material from two different Christian sources that demonstrates how the rhetoric related to fasting can be applied both as a productive and ordering moment in the construction of religious collectives. The latter also shows that this construction must be conceptually framed as a diachronically dynamic and synchronically variable process. Both forms and functions of fasting could be relatively flexibly adapted and attributed, depending on the relational setting, interactional contexts, and problem references employed. The former helped religious elites to clearly draw boundaries, semantically empowering their political claims. As such, they represent examples of how the construction of religious entities is dynamic, differentiated, and pluralistic, and therefore emphasize that the latter should not be conceptually perceived as single, fixed structures.

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51 Tatarenko, *Une réforme orientale à l'âge baroque*, 281.

52 See e.g.: *Litterae S. C. de Propaganda Fide Ecclesiam Catholicam Ucrainae et Bielarussiae*.

53 These regulatory and further praxeological types of sources require analysis, in addition to normative and discursive/polemic ones, which uncover only one particular dimension of religious ordering through fasting.

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