

# Crisis in Ukraine: Religious Schism and War

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*The signing of the Tomos or note of Autocephaly for the newly created Orthodox Church of Ukraine is not a church but a political act which may have catastrophic consequences for Ukraine.*

So said the head of the Russian Federation Council's international affairs committee, Konstantin Kosachev, on Saturday January 6, the day the document was issued.

"This is a new move towards destroying the unity of Orthodoxy, the consequences of which will be catastrophic, first of all for Ukraine itself and its people."

One of the worst crises in the history of Christianity was the split between the Church centred in Rome and the Church centred in Constantinople, between the west and east regions of the old Roman Empire, that took place in the year 1054. Today, the NATO military alliance and its vassals in the Kiev regime in Ukraine have forced a further split within the Eastern or Orthodox Church by setting up a separate Orthodox church in Ukraine that rejects the age old authority of the Moscow Patriarchate with authority over the churches in Ukraine and purports to set up a separate Orthodox Church in Kiev.

This is not just a side issue in the Christian world or world politics. It is a key element of the NATO plan to use all forms of warfare in all realms of life to further their ambition of crushing the power of Russia. It is designed to engender hostility among the Slavic peoples, to reduce Russia's prestige and Moscow's reputation as the third Rome, to further divide the Ukrainian people against themselves and harden the artificial division between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples. But to understand the new division we have to review some history.

The split or schism within the Christian church had many complex causes which neither I, nor the reader, have the patience to enter into. Some of the causes were theological, some cultural, others political. To avoid boring you I will provide only what is essential from the past to understand the present.

For centuries the emperors in control of the eastern Roman Empire based in Constantinople, favoured Rome's supremacy in Church matters because they wanted to safeguard the universality of the Empire and their claims to Italy. The separation of the churches in the two parts of the Empire evolved gradually over the centuries and reflected the long rivalry between Latins and Greeks, between Rome and Constantinople. But the Roman popes steadily expanded their control across Europe along with their spiritual and temporal power that the authorities in the second city of the Empire resented and feared. The eastern

Romans, who considered their emperor as an equal of the apostles, and who believed that matters of church doctrine could be resolved only through the Holy Ghost speaking through the Ecumenical Council, were shocked by the pope in Rome, who to them was just first among equals among all the church patriarchs, yet claimed he could formulate dogma and had spiritual and temporal supremacy over all the other churches and patriarchs; for in the early Church and for a long period, spiritual authority was deemed to be held equally between the patriarchs of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Aleppo.

The major split took place in 1054 when the Normans attacked some cities in southern Italy, defeated the army sent to stop them, and detained the Roman pope who was furious that the emperor in Constantinople had not come to his rescue. The patriarch and the Emperor in Constantinople tried to smooth things over but tempers and insults flared and the papal legates visiting Constantinople for the purpose of resolving the dispute only inflamed matters and ended their mission by excommunicating the eastern patriarch who in turn anathematized them.

This sequence of events resulted in the lasting separation of the eastern and western churches. The split need never have occurred. More goodwill, less bigotry, cooler tempers could have resolved all the issues but, as is the case now, ill will prevailed. Though the split of 1054 was not complete, for there were attempts in the 13th and 15th centuries to cement the two churches back together and another attempt in 1965 at the Ecumenical Council, the injury could not be healed, has long festered and now has begun to bleed once again, but this time within the eastern church itself and within the context of a threatened general war.

When the Turks took Constantinople in 1453 they permitted the Orthodox Christians to remain and it was Mehmet the Conqueror, acting as a Roman emperor, who designated a new Patriarch for the city. Today the Istanbul patriarch claims authority over the scattered Greek Orthodox churches in Western Europe, the Americas and Australia and the eastern orthodox churches in Russia, the Balkans, Greece, Asia and Africa, though he has very few adherents in modern Istanbul.

As Christianity spread further east, first Kiev then Moscow became the important centres of the Orthodox Church and set up their own patriarchates or divisions of the

Church. But, partly as a result of the Mongol invasions and other complicated events Moscow assumed a more authoritative and primary role resulting in the Patriarchate in Constantinople assigning the Moscow patriarchate with authority over the eastern churches, including Ukraine, in 1686. This has been the situation more or less up to the present.

But on October 15, 2018 the Russian Orthodox Church announced that it would break off all relations with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, the claimed leader of Eastern Orthodoxy, after he agreed on October 11, 2018, to the April request of Kiev leader Poroshenko, and his minions in the church in Kiev, to grant autocephaly, or self-governance, to what they are calling the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, not to be confused with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that does not recognize this action, the sole objective of which is to attempt to divide Ukrainians from the historical influence of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia.

Poroshenko who, along with NATO, backed this action, stated that this step “finally dispelled

the imperial illusions and chauvinistic fantasies of Moscow.”

Ukraine currently has three Orthodox denominations, the largest of which is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. That branch remained subordinate to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union and contains more than 12,000 parishes. This is a third of all parishes under the Russian Orthodox Church, and Ukraine contains some of the most symbolic ones, such as the monastery Kiev-Pechersk Lavra and its catacombs. The other two denominations are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate, with 4,800 parishes, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, with 1,000 parishes, which adds to the confusion when trying to grasp what is going on here.

But Russia has long been unhappy with Constantinople’s first-among-equals status and has sought to challenge and erode its role since the Moscow patriarchate sees itself as the dominant bastion of Eastern Orthodoxy. The Russian Orthodox Church alone has more than 150 million followers, half of the world wide adherents and the two patriarchates also differ on some points of doctrine, with Constantinople seeking closer alignment with the Pope in Rome, while the number of Christians in Istanbul can no longer support the claim of that city’s Christian leader to be head of the eastern church.

After Patriarch Bartholomew’s decision, which he probably had no authority to make, Patriarch Filaret in Kiev stated that he would call a council of the leaders of the

Ukrainian Orthodox Church to choose a leader for this newly created church of Ukraine. The move marked the beginning of the establishment of an independent church in Ukraine, outside the control of Moscow and its patriarch, Kirill. It is also a self-serving decision because it serves to weaken the Russian Orthodox Church and strengthen the almost irrelevant Church in Constantinople that has long been under the sway of the NATO powers and serves their interests. It also is designed to destroy the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and force people to join this new church.

This has wider dimensions since Russian allies, Serbia and Belarus, already have backed the Moscow Patriarchate and condemned the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

The split in the church may have other and more violent consequences arising from disputes over holy sites as several of Ukraine’s most holy sites and churches will be claimed by both the Russian and established Ukrainian churches and this upstart church. The Kiev Patriarchate has already laid claim to the famous 11th century Kiev Monastery of the Caves and the Holy Dormition Monastery in Pochayiv. Both sites are now controlled by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and could face protests and vandalism.

Poroshenko has said,

“If you see people who call for seizing Lavra or a monastery or church by force, you should know that they are Moscow’s agents. The Kremlin’s goal is to ignite a religious war in Ukraine.”

Vadym Novinskyi, an opposition bloc member of parliament, predicted a “civil war and clashes over property “in every village and every town.”

Kremlin spokesman **Dmitry Peskov** stated,

“If the developments spiral into abusive practices, of course, Russia will protect Orthodox Christians’ interests, just like Russia protects the interests of ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking population everywhere.”

There have already been reports of problems over the Christmas period.

It was reported in Tass that,

‘with deep indignation and disbelief that we have to inform the public that on December 9, 2018, the Ukrainian authorities prevented the incumbent head of the Donetsk and Marioupol Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Metropolitan Hilarion from crossing the disengagement line through the Novotroitskoye checkpoint to attend a scheduled prayer meeting”.

On December 26th Patriarch Kiril of Moscow and All Russia stated,

“that the creation of a new autocephalous church in Ukraine and the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) could have dangerous consequences for the whole world.”

“I believe the developments in Ukraine will undoubtedly have very dangerous effects in the lives of many countries. What is happening in Ukraine can be used as a precedent. That means that everything, which ensured inter-religious peace, religious freedom and human rights will, in all likelihood, stop to be untouchable, particularly, if these values stand in the way of solving certain political problems.”

Already priests in Ukraine face persecution arising out of this development. Over the past few weeks, Ukraine’s Security Service, the SBU, has conducted searches in the Ovruch diocese in Ukraine’s Zhitomir Region. This resulted in 20 clerics of the UOC’s Rovno and Sarny dioceses being summoned for questioning. Searches were also conducted in the apartment of Metropolitan Paul, Abbot of Kiev Pechersk Lavra. According to the SBU, these police actions were part of a criminal case on inciting inter-confessional strife opened against him, but no doubt are meant to harass and intimidate. Some already face criminal charges.

The tensions being stoked within the Church and the broader society by Poroshenko and the NATO intelligence services will no doubt be used as fuel for the fire as Kiev ratchets up its military actions against the peoples of east Ukraine in the Donbass republics and can lead not only to arrests and detentions of religious leaders and their supporters but also assassinations of those opposing their maneuvers, for on top of all the other problems faced by Ukrainians has been placed the bloody thorn of religious persecution, a Christmas gift from NATO.

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