



# Seth Ferris

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## Georgia-Ukraine-Russia: “Rome vs. Orthodoxy?”



You would imagine the Russia-Ukraine conflict to be a political dispute. News coverage focuses on the political claims of both sides, and the military operations and economic and political sanctions resulting from these.

But it is becoming ever more obvious that this is actually the Forth Crusade reborn. Under the radar, efforts are being made to divide Orthodoxy, and take Ukraine and Georgia closer to Rome and its supporters.

Why is this necessary? What does it have to do with the geopolitical issues and NATO expansion, etc., the conflict is all about?

It is not hard to see that in Georgia, Russia and even Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Orthodox Church is under attack in ways not seen since the time of Stalin's terror. This assault is disguised as rooting out collaborators with Russia, or resisting efforts to discriminate against sexual identities and religious minorities. But when it happens over and over again, and is linked to conflict, it does beg the question of what these armed conflicts are really about.

Church and populations are being divided, with Orthodoxy presented as the corrupt and backward option which has created the problem, with the West, represented by Rome, as the solution. We might expect this from religious leaders who want to prove they are right, but when this effort is being directed by various governments, NGOs and think tanks - the Hudson Institute, the Potomac Institute, the Soros Foundation, etc. - it is clear that anything people prefer to the new agenda has to be destroyed - which tells you a lot about what the Church of Rome actually is, and thankfully also a lot about Orthodoxy.

### The Old Confrontation

In Ukraine, political parties who don't toe the line are simply banned, and their members and leadership touted as traitors, even arrested. How do you identify a traitor without having to go into the ins and outs of what they have said and done? You criminalise whole populations, the very thing representative democracy is supposed to protect us from.

The New York Times reported last year that Zelensky **Proposes Barring Orthodox Church that Answers to Moscow**, as he called for legislation to prevent the Ukrainian parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate from operating in his country. The fact that the Moscow Patriarchate parishes still exist is due to the dubious canonical nature of the Ukrainian Autocephalic Church, and this is what has prevented it from becoming the national Church.

Orthodoxy is organised on the basis of national jurisdictions, one reason for this being to engender a proper relationship between Church and State, so people can live in both without difficulty. However there are also other national jurisdictions present in countries which have a national Orthodox church - there is always a Greek Orthodox Church for example, under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, often related to an embassy.

Ukraine is divided between the parishes which remained under the Moscow Patriarchate after independence and those of the self-proclaimed Ukrainian national Church. The problem with the latter, from a religious point of view, is that it long separated itself from the rest of Orthodoxy, and the legality of its ordinations and sacraments was for decades highly dubious.

Critics of the Ukrainian Autocephalic Church used to refer to it as the “Ukrainians of the Severed Hand”. This is because it had so few bishops, and so few other Orthodox wanted any connection with it, that on at least one occasion it preserved its alleged Apostolic Succession of bishops by cutting the hand off a dead one in order to have enough bishops to ensure the consecration of another.

Having nowhere else to go, it finally became part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which preserves its own existence by consisting of every Greek parish outside Greece and a ragbag of other groups, some with a genuine reason for separateness and some kicked out for breaching the canons of the Church. Constantinople then steers these groups back into the fold, with varying degrees of success.

Most Ukrainian faithful don't have a big issue with either side in the ecclesiastical dispute - they go to the church they can get to. But from a Church point of view, there are obvious difficulties with accepting the independent Ukrainian Church as the only genuine one, and just telling the Moscow Patriarchate parishes, whose authenticity is not in dispute in religious terms, to give up their property and move out.

Zelensky, a self-proclaimed Jew, has directed his government to conduct an inquiry into the Moscow Patriarchate-allied Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its ties to Moscow, as if he doesn't know them, "and, if necessary, to take measures provided for by law." The Ukrainian Constitution forbids this, but the move is about using a blanket stereotype to root out "collaborators", and simultaneously exonerate everyone on his own side.

Already there are other proposals to change the dates of religious holidays. Ukraine uses the Church Calendar, i.e. the one based on the Julian calendar, whilst many other Orthodox have adopted the Gregorian calendar used in the West. Consequently the feasts based on the movable part of the calendar, those relating to the date of Easter which changes every year, are celebrated on the same physical day in every Orthodox Church, whereas those with a fixed date, such as Christmas, are celebrated thirteen days apart, December 25th on the Gregorian Calendar being only December 12th on the Julian.

Why should the Soros Foundation care what date Christmas is? If anyone wants to argue, several recurring miracles only happen on the Julian calendar date, the Holy Fire at the Resurrection in the Tomb of the Holy Sepulchre at Easter and the cloud descending on Mount Tabor on Transfiguration being two of particular note.

But this is a matter for the Church to resolve, which is why the New (Gregorian) Calendar was not universally adopted when Greece did it after WW1. Most of the Orthodox Churches, considering that observing the cycle of feasts is the best way to live your life, did not agree with what was recognised as a blatant piece of secularism, nothing to do with the Faith, which did not replace that cycle with anything better but corrupted it.

### **Case Study of Georgia**

Georgians and their political parties don't have a tradition of collaborating and working for the interest of the country, as they are too self-centred and greedy—and for those who know the REAL history, the greatest threat to Georgia comes from within, as its first president found, as there are fewer spoils to be had than crooks who want to claim them.

So it is hardly a surprise that, when those crooks look for friends, they turn to the West. Not because it has money, but because it will attack the Georgian Orthodox Church, which has a multitude of sinners in its ranks, but doesn't elevate criminality to a principle of reasonable conduct.

Like any country seeking Western sponsorship, one of the terms of this is not ensuring a functional, accountable democracy, as it should be, but holding Gay Pride marches.

In Orthodoxy homosexuality is a sin to be fought against and repented of, nothing something to be proud of. No form of persecution or discrimination against gays is acceptable, but this orientation is not regarded as a natural and alternative lifestyle, for which the evidence is clear from all the prisoners who turn gay inside, but never were or are the rest of the time.

On 5th July 2021, as in every other recent year, a "March of Dignity" was held by "Tbilisi Pride" with the backing of many NGOs and the Foreign Service community. It was attacked by violent, homophobic, ultra-right groups, who gathered near Rustaveli Metro and Kashveti Church to demand its cancellation in accordance with the call of the Georgian Orthodox Church and various other groups.

The Church has never, at any time, condoned violence towards Gay Pride marchers. As an official statement from the Georgian Patriarchate condemning the violence which ensued reads:

"We shall remember that hurting even one person is not only harmful to the individual, but also harms the entire society and goes against Christian teachings".

One day earlier the same press service had said, "We address our population with a call not to rise to deliberate provocations, in order that the peaceful protest of people is not transformed into violent confrontation." Indeed the head of Tbilisi Pride, Giorgi Tabagari, who well knows the views of the Church, said that he believed the State Security Services may have been assisting counter-protestors throughout the day, rather than the Church.

Tabagari wrote on Facebook(banned in Russia) that the group had privately changed the location of the Pride March five times during the day, but that anti-Pride protestors had arrived at those locations ahead of them every time. He claimed that no outsiders had been informed of the planned location changes, and questioned how the information could have leaked. But the Church was, predictably, painted as one of the main villains in this conflict.

In this country whose official agencies would rather have the West than the Church, which is recognised as the cornerstone of its nationhood even by those of other faiths, human rights are being violated left and right and the population left in abject poverty due to policies imposed by the "free world". But the press barely seems to mind, as everything in Georgia has to be about trying to keep up with the West, and accepting this alternative "sexual identity" is perceived as a badge of so-called Western values.

This does of course have one consequence: if Georgia steps out of line, Uncle Sam can send the cavalry in to rescue it, and impose more of the same on people who have suffered enough. But to do that, the West has to undermine the Church. It will however find out the hard way that Matthew 16:18 can be taken literally: on this rock He has built His Church, and the Gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

Georgia is, and will remain, a Christian country, and as such Gay Rights will never be accepted by the vast majority of the population. The same is true of any political orientation which goes against local values and cultural dependencies, just as socialism is not acceptable in the US.

If you read the reports of the NGOs and statements of foreign missions, you would be convinced that Georgia was "improving" in its treatment of the LGBTQ+ community. But the fundamental flaw of all these reports is that they assume that Georgians are on one side and Gays on the other.

In a culture as venerable as Georgia's, Gays are Georgians too. Whichever side of the debate they are on, no one wants to be used as a tool against their own country. Gays are not going to overthrow every aspect of Georgian culture to keep living there, and if anyone doesn't like them living there, they are dealt with by both the law and their priests as they are in every other country.

Georgia's proud history of non-discrimination against its ancient Jewish community is something which should be celebrated in every country which holds a Holocaust Remembrance Day and makes denying the Holocaust a criminal offence. But it is little known and less discussed in the West, because it doesn't suit the stereotype of barbarous East Europeans the West is trying to promote.

If Georgia has this history, it makes it an ideal political partner for the trendy West. But it did all this whilst predominantly Orthodox, so no one talks about it. So is the agenda to end Holocausts, or to start a new one?

### **One People Under God!**

If anyone wants the Ukraine conflict to end, it is the Orthodox Church. It has consistently spoken out against Orthodox fighting fellow Orthodox. It is more affected by this conflict than either side, which were separate to begin with, and is therefore ideally placed to broker a peace agreement.

But such an agreement would leave Orthodoxy in place, and its distinct practices would remain the standard. So no one in the West wants the Church, the one thing the sides have in common, to be involved. Hence the only solution is a Western one, and the only interests which peace can serve are those of secular governments in the West, not Ukrainians, Russians or anyone else.

One wonders why the Church is such a threat. Could it be because the more credence you give it, the more you have to accept your own sinfulness? Or is the real issue that the Tradition of the Church has developed over centuries, and has more validity than the latest schemes and values of people who have been here five minutes?

We all saw Western humanity during the global financial crisis - destroy everyone's savings and then bailing out the people who did it so they didn't have to admit they were wrong. Imposition of Western practices because the West is desperate to survive has no moral basis, and never will, and that is exactly why it needs to be done in countries which know that.

***Seth Ferris, investigative journalist and political scientist, expert on Middle Eastern affairs, exclusively for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook".***