

Presentation by Archbishop Lazar to the CEMES symposium in Thessaloniki, Greece to be presented on 29 March. The symposium will be available on YouTube after that date.

INTENT

The intent of this paper is to explore the general background of the present invasion of Ukraine and then focus on the problem of the ecclesiastical support for the invasion given by Patriarch KYRIL of Moscow of the Russian Orthodox Church and others of his hierarchs. Finally, we wish to make a response to the reasons given by the Patriarch and do some hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church for supporting the military invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO THE INVASION

With regard to the current Russian invasion of Ukraine, I will not discount the ideas that the rapid and radical expansion of NATO had something to do with influencing this. The idea that NATO wished to create a massive naval base on the Crimean peninsula with certainly have helped to provoke the Russian seizure of Crimea. However, there is absolutely nothing that will excuse the invasion of the independent republic of Ukraine and the massive war crimes that are taking place with the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians and the destruction of Ukrainian cities. The ideological factors, including the religious justification for this horrendous action their examination, even if only briefly.

In addressing the current conflict in the Republic of Ukraine and the roots of this conflict we do have to briefly look back in history. Our national foundational mythologies often explain some of our later tragedies. The idea of the city of Kiev in the beginnings of what would eventually become Russian history should be briefly examined. The city itself was created by Vikings from Scandinavia, and the first principality which existed there was a Norse principality. The idea that there was a nation-state in ancient Kiev is not entirely correct. At the time the Viking colonialists and the local tribes which were gathering around them ultimately formed a series of appanage principalities which were largely entities governed by local warlords. The principality of Kiev, ruled by the Norse Rurik dynasty until it collapsed in the 1100s, was a "city state" from which the surrounding area was ruled. Both Russia and Ukraine claim is for their foundation story, and both mythologised it. Presently, this foundation story and

the mythos that accompanies it does figure into at least the justification for the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Notwithstanding, both countries are fully constituted independent nations which happened to share a similar foundation story and mythos. This shared origin story and mythos does figure into the creation of the mentality and doctrine behind the present invasion of Ukraine by Russia. A certain segment of both the political and religious elite and Russia has not been able to reconcile itself to the fact that Ukraine is a fully constituted republic, a nation self-contained and independent. This has led to peculiar both political and religious concepts, even novel doctrines about the relationship between Russia and Ukraine. These concepts and doctrines are perverse but this is not the first time such unstable and catastrophic results have arisen from such foundation mythos. A "mystical" vision of this foundation mythos can prevent the acceptance of present realities and can often cause real tragedies.

In this particular case this common foundational mythos appears to be being used as one of the perverted pretexts for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Certain leaders simply cannot come to grasp with the reality that Ukraine has developed its own culture and language, some aspects of which it shares with, not only other Slavic peoples but other Eastern Europeans.

THE PROBLEM OF IRREDENTISM:

Before I touch on the actually heretical doctrine put forth by religious authorities in Russia to try to help justify the invasion, I want to speak of another disturbing political motion that certainly figures into this matter, and we have heard it actually voiced by Mr. Putin, and in some ways endorsed by the Russian Orthodox Church. This ideological problem is the concept of irredentism.

Basically, irredentism is a doctrine or concept whereby areas of a country outside your own in which a majority of your particular nationality lives should be united to your country, by force if necessary. The doctrine was first announced in Italy in the 19th century. The most famous use of this doctrine was in the Third Reich, Nazi Germany, which is the doctrine of irredentism as a pretext to seize the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia – a military action which later led to the full invasion of Czechoslovakia by the German army. The same doctrine has been used by Mr Putin's government with regard to Luhansk and Donbas in Ukraine, followed by the full invasion of that nation.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL ISSUE

We must begin this discussion by examining a new messianic religio/political doctrine put forth by the Russian Orthodox Church in support of the military invasion of Ukraine. A doctrine which is a clear heresy and that goes well beyond the heresy of phyletism. new doctrine of "Russkii Mir."

The heretical doctrine called "Russkii Mir," in essence, it conceives of the Russian state as having a messianic calling to invade and purify other countries, beginning with Ukraine, a former subservient republic in the Soviet Union. The roots of this new doctrine are found in previous manifestations in Russian mysticism and religious thought. This doctrine reflects back on the two older concepts of "Holy Rus'" and the idea of Moscow as the "Third Rome." These two phyletistic¹ doctrines are summed up in the heresy of "Russki Mir," which is a messianic delusion that accords a special Messiahship to the State and thus makes the State an idolatry. That the Russian Orthodox Church fully endorses the doctrine makes it a genuine heresy. What has been formed is a straightforward "cult of the State" into which the Russian Orthodox Church has been incorporated. This delusional doctrine accords to the Russian State, and to Mister Putin in particular, a "Mandate of Heaven" to act as a "purifier of nations." This is an extremely dangerous doctrine and it is shocking that Russian Church officials would accept and advance this idea, surely knowing that it is a heresy and a betrayal of the concept of the Church itself.

It is notable that in the justification for this horrendous invasion of the Republic of Ukraine, reference is being made to the time of Ivan the Terrible. Ivan was a bloodthirsty tyrant who invaded surrounding principalities and territories and incorporated them into the Muscovite State which was the centre of the future Russian Empire. His deeds are among the most unspeakable in history. However, he is now one of the heroes of the current Russian regime which is invading Ukraine.

Aside from this doctrine, it is one of the most peculiar and devious scapegoating excuses that the Moscow Patriarch and Metropolitan Hilarion of the Russian State Church have given for and hoping to support this war. the justifications given by the Patriarch of Moscow and other senior hierarchy for their support for this immoral and illegal invasion of a sovereign nation by their own nation. A scapegoat refers to the Hebrew practice of ritually placing the sins of the nation on the back of a goat which would then be driven into the wilderness bearing away the guilt for the sins and wickedness of the tribe. Among the

peculiarities of this religious practice was the fact that it also took away the responsibility of the people for their sins and wickedness. This is the nature of "scapegoating," it puts the blame for your own actions onto someone else so that you are no longer responsible for your deeds and actions. Simply, it is a way of denying your responsibility and guilt by pointing to someone else. That is what I would like to discuss here.

Patriarch Kyril and Metropolitan Hilarion Have chosen a small marginalized and, quite frankly, persecuted group of human beings as a scapegoat. They have suggested that the existence of an LGBT community and the possibility of "pride parades" in Ukraine are among the justifications for the slaughter of tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens of all ages, and the destruction of ancient Ukrainian cities. The staggering immorality of this conclusion is self-evident. Russian Orthodox hierarchs are thus giving this horrendous invasion in aura of more complete messianic ideology by adding a weak theological or spiritual motivation, simply a deadly prelest.

The fact that the thousands of people being wantonly and ruthlessly killed are fellow Orthodox Christians only compounds the wickedness of the actions.

The idea of using a remote "moral" issue in order to justify the gross immorality and criminality of the mass murder and the destruction of the cities of the Ukrainian people must make the demons tremble.

THE RED HERRING THEOLOGICAL ISSUE IN PERSPECTIVE

My purpose here is not to advocate for or against any particular group of people, but rather to speak about the incorporation of the persecution and condemnation of certain segments of the population for purely political purposes, to seek to enhance the credibility of the efforts of one nation to completely destroy another independent nation. To even consider using a scapegoat community under the pretext of theologically justifying the mass murder of fellow Orthodox Christians should be inconceivable, and yet it is clearly manifest in our own eyes that this is precisely what is happening.

This theological endorsement for the monstrous invasion of Ukraine is certainly peculiar. The Patriarch and the Metropolitan have both used the presence of a minuscule LGBT community and Ukraine and the possibility of a "pride parade" as a scapegoat justification for the invasion of this sovereign nation. This is something we must discuss at length in a manner more befitting Orthodox Christian perspectives.

Theologically endorsing a war is reprehensible in itself. But justifying mass murder and the destruction of cities, massive war crimes, crimes against humanity with a supposedly Orthodox Christian theological construct, and using a pretext which in fact should be a strictly pastoral matter for every local church involved instead of a church from outside the nation. Using the State power to enforce religious concepts testifies to the weakness of the religion which does so. It is also an attempt to make the State military apparatus into a Church military apparatus, something that is beyond an abomination and a clear heresy.. While much of the world has accepted this question of homosexuality and transgender as a civil and human rights issue, we find the opposite only in right wing extremist groups, whether political or religious, in clear forms of neo-fascism. Both a nation and a religion which think they bear the Mandate of Heaven to purify the world are extremely dangerous. Turning the state into the military wing Of the Church is certainly in no way related to Christianity.

Decency and a sincere acceptance of the Gospel, let alone common sense, should inform us that we know so little about these issues of sexual variation that we must approach them with some humility and compassion and seek to come to an understanding, not without the sciences.

Regardless of ones actual attitude and position with regard to this community, it is clear that they are being used as scapegoats to help justify an illegal and brutal invasion of the sovereign nation. There is absolutely no reason why the subject of the LGBT community should have arisen at all except as a means of drawing ultra right-wing sympathy for this invasion from some Western nations. Such scapegoating is usually connected with people who wish to divert attention from their own misdeeds and crimes, and that appears to be precisely what is unfolding here. Because of this animosity, it is easy to overlook the fact that the LGBT community is made up of human beings, individuals at every level of society most of whom lead perfectly ordinary lives.

This is why I want to address this matter in pastoral terms, concepts of Christian ministry where we treat any group of people within the framework of the gospel and not as "enemies." In the case of the use of this community as a scapegoat to help justify a ruthless and brutal invasion causing tens of thousands of deaths and the destruction of cities, we see absolutely no pastoral concerns or concerns for transformation and redemption, but only a spirit of brutality and destruction. Since this scapegoating and justification is coming from one of our sister Orthodox churches and its leadership, it is a matter which is of deep concern to us and which we do need to consider and the most thoughtful and prayerful way

that we can. We need to look beyond some of the misconceptions and even ideologies that have been formed about this community so that we can see them as fellow human beings and not fall into the trap of degrading them and passively allowing them to be used as scapegoats, but rather see them as people for whom Christ shed his blood, people beloved by the Saviour and people to whom we should be ministering in the most caring and compassionate manner.

In fact, the relationship of the Church toward the LGBT community should be a strictly pastoral one and not a militant adversarial one. Our calling is not to persecute and seek to harm other human beings but to minister to them, to all humanity and to the world around us, not only with healing compassion, but also with humility. In the case of this particular community, and we should also have the grace and humility to acknowledge that we do not know enough about the causes of LGBT to form religious ideologies about it rather than acknowledging that there is a neurobiological complexity involved which is far from being unravelled and explained. The problem with forming concrete ideologies deprives us of the ability to minister of the gospel to those people whom we have thus "locked out."

We are not talking here about some kind of blanket acceptance where people feel unable to do that; we are speaking of pastoral openness that leaves one open to ministering to people and a Christian and compassionately rather than an adversarial way that sees some people as enemies and fails to see their humanity, fails to see that they are human persons.

RETHINKING THE LGBT COMMUNITY

In order to approach this situation in a genuinely pastoral manner we need to think prayerfully on the knowledge and information that has been developed over the past centuries. We know that about 4-5% of the population in every culture and society that has been studied carefully will be Gay and that transgender has existed from the most ancient times, even before recorded history in the traditions of all cultures. That both these conditions have existed for as long as history has been recorded, and in traditions from before the advent of writing and recorded history, a careful rethinking of our approach to a construct that is so universal, and that maintains a steady balance in all known populations of 4 to 5% over the centuries, and not only in humans but in other mammals as well, is certainly in order if we are to maintain our own integrity.

When we are speaking about 4 to 5% of a population that is in over a

billion, we are not speaking about a small number of human beings. Quite apart from that, we are not speaking about a statistic, we are speaking about human beings; sentient human beings with a heartbeat, with precisely the same emotions, feelings, needs hopes and aspirations as every other human person created in the image and likeness of God. Moreover we need to gain at least enough understanding to realise that when we are dealing with LGBT people, we are not dealing with a syndrome but with an ontology, with flesh and blood human beings who have exactly the same feelings and emotions, joys and sadness and pain that we do. I also want to comment that, while I do not approve of the pride parades that we see in North America, I do realise that these parades are the expressions of a people who have long been persecuted, driven to suicide and murdered and considered to be outcasts, even though they have given us some of our greatest geniuses, I thought of suspended as anyone else and our wars – often fighting to defend liberties and freedoms of which they themselves were being systematically and intentionally denied. We need to bear all this in mind carefully if we are to have any integrity at all, and give it every serious consideration.

Until we have addressed this and seek to comprehend it, we will find ourselves in a sometimes militant adversarial situation which makes all pastoral concerns and sincere ministry impossible.

This is not a circumstance which can be dealt with in a fundamentalist, ideological manner. It is increasingly evident that our attitudes must be informed by the relevant sciences and that we must become much more open to having our theology informed by not only relevant sciences but by cultural histories as well.. We could discuss a large number of matters in which this is so glaringly evident, and we cannot sustain ourselves with iron age and medieval levels of knowledge and understanding. To do so would only be to advance atheism among educated young people.

Let us bear in mind, sincerely and honestly, that when we referred to a member of the LGBT community we are referring to a human being, a person who is essentially no different from us. I have heard the saying "we are all different." I do not agree, rather "we are all variations on a theme in a Symphony composed by God." We imagine most of our differences and the imagination arises from our own egos. Let us begin with this in mind. Let us also remember that we hate most in others what we fear most in ourselves.

The Actual Origins of Sex and Gender

In science, and when speaking scientifically, "sex" means "exchange of genetic material." We need to bear that in mind. In a scientific context, it has none of the prurient meanings that it is given in general society.

We often cripple our understanding by interpreting the creation narrative in Genesis as literal history instead of an allegory. Far too often, the whole narrative is reduced to a moral fable rather than to something ontological and existential. This is a serious error and it deprives us of a profound revelation and understanding which are actually vital to us. ²

The reality is that sexual intercourse began before there were two distinct sexes. Inspect scientific terms "sex" indicates the exchange of genetic material between two bodies. And this is exactly how sexual intercourse began when some fortunate eukaryote cells somehow collided alternating haploid/diploid/haploid, exchanging genetic materials and then divided again. They were the ones that survived and reproduced because the exchange of genetic material between two bodies makes each one stronger and able to pass on its own genetic material. This took place around 3 billion years ago and it began the process of evolution. Multiple cellular organisms had to wait until mitochondria had invaded some cells in one manner or another so that cells can produce their own energy from fuel and did not have to each one faced the sun in order to gain energy. It is not yet known when sex differences began to take form, ending in the definition of male and female. Notice that we do not use the word gender here. Gender is a social construct and defines what any society or culture expects from each sex.

Since we understand that God is the only source of life, we understand that organisms became actual living organisms according to God's plan and according to his Divine Energies. Intercourse in the eukaryote era had no designation of male/female and no gender expectations. These constructs would only develop with the unfolding complexity and organisation of the elementary lifeforms. They did not develop for moral purposes but to facilitate the most efficient and prolific manner of transmitting genes from two cells to a third, which would be more fit for survival. The development of distinct male and female roles in breeding – in passing on genes – made four more efficiency and more survivability. We do not know exactly when this developed and we do not know what variations there were in the development of it. However we do not wish to spend more time in this discussion because we need to get onto something more contemporary in our understanding of sexual constructs.

**VARIATIONS ARE NOT DEVIATIONS,
BUT PRECISELY VARIATIONS**

We are not "all different" rather we are variations on
a theme in a Symphony composed by God.

I want to continue here from a pastoral perspective as well is inviting some serious thought, perhaps rethinking, and about a matter which affects a few million human beings. I have seen too many times when a young person has been driven to suicide by his interactions with clergy and family. I mention wants to two Romanian priests but I was personally aware of two specific instances where a young man had gone directly from confession to suicide. Both priests acknowledge that they were aware of more than one such instance. I will not go into some of the serious problems that occur in confession when priests are ideological rather than pastoral but I do want to point out that we, the clergy, and as a unit caused many suicides and episodes of the destruction of other human beings, and we have done so by being fundamentalist ideologues rather than pastoral, spiritual healers.

If anyone actually chooses, of their own free will, to become either homosexual or transsexual, and it must be rare in the extreme. I presented a great deal of material in my book on the neurobiology of sin demonstrating the variations that did take place and a foetus. There seems to be a misperception that each foetus is personally engineered by God. There is also always the statement that there is no "Gay gene." Let me begin by saying there is also no Down syndrome gene, there is no gene that is there to give a foetus cystic fibrosis, which is a clearly genetic disease with which a person is born. Down syndrome is a trisomy and not something genetic. If God personally engineered each foetus, could such variations which begin in the features actually occur? I let me take the matter of cystic fibrosis as an example. No gene exists for the specific purpose of inflicting cystic fibrosis. A gene is only a direction for producing a protein. The CF gene is supposed to produce a protein which helps create an intracellular pump to regulate the salinity in a cell. It is if that gene does not produce that protein, then there is no pump and the salinity is not regulated, and the person will ultimately suffocate on their own mucus. Not because a gene existed for suffocating children on their own mucus, but simply because the gene that was supposed to do so did not produce a specific protein. So let us put the question of "is there a gene for..." Out of our considerations. We can speak of epigenetics, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome and a variations on it elsewhere. But let us focus

on what they have learned over the centuries and how it should affect our pastoral approach and concern.

The word "passion" does not mean "sin" rather it means suffering. Often we are much too anxious to judge a person's manifestation of what we call sin without regard for the fact that the root cause of most such manifestations is the inner human suffering that our passions inflict upon us. Many of the manifestations of what we call "sin" [that word itself is severely deficient and expressing the actual meaning of *'amartia'*]. Too often, with a gate lack of understanding, we are ready to condemn, shame and punish instead of attempting to heal. It is time for us to recognise the deficiency of our knowledge on both sides of this question but come to the necessary conclusion that when we deal with LGBT people, we are not dealing with a syndrome but with an ontology. This must inform our pastoral approach, and we need to put aside our mythologies at understand that certain previous legal systems which condemned such people, even to death, must be seen in the context of their own time and place and conditions, and the even grosser lack of understanding that was available in prescientific eras when anything that appeared to be out of the ordinary was thought to be the result of witchcraft, an evil eye, or some kind of magic spell cast by some maleficent individual..

I want to close this with an anecdote from one of my last visits to Thessaloniki. I was a very close friend of a notable lay theologian in the city, and even baptized some of his grandchildren. When some of his grandchildren became reticent to go to church I had a conversation with him to accepting why. One of them told me that the problem is in the religion classes they teach us that in order to be Orthodox Christians we must believe things which we absolutely no are not true. What are the problems faced by youth everywhere is that they are more educated and have much more access to information and knowledge, and they are constantly being told by priests and pastors that, in essence, they must choose between God and truth but they cannot have both. I am just going to finish at this point and ask everybody to just think very seriously about that statement. It happens to be a profoundly true statement.

SUMMARY

In summarizing the paper which I have presented, I have the following considerations in mind.

I want to focus on something that I consider to be a very dangerous religious/political delusion – delusion as well as ideology. I keep coming to the

Chinese expression "mandate of heaven." I am using the expression, but I feel that I am also expressing a psychological condition which can involve, not just one person or group of people, but even a whole national self-identity. I suppose one should begin with the "temptation on the Mount" as a revelation. We can say that it is a revelation about Antichrist, who would accept all the things which Christ rejected, and perhaps that is its primary revelation.

Perhaps all of the manifestations of hyper-religiosity and a Messiah complex are actually manifestations of a type of antichrist. When people come to think that they have a "mandate of heaven" to be either the "Scourge of God" or the "sword of Allah" for the purification of a nation, mankind, etc., and when that Messiah complex extends to a nation's image of itself, or even a particular religion's image of itself, giving either that nation or that religion – or a national religion combination – a sense of righteous privilege or even obligation to dominate others, other nations, other people and enforce what they perceive to be the will of God, the will of Allah, there is a dangerous extremism which that entity can actually perceive as God's special ministry for them. I certainly feel that there is something more coarse and pragmatic behind Mister Putin's actions, but the "mystical and spiritual" justifications of them is especially disturbing. That these justifications are being given even a tacit blessing by the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy only adds gravity to the matter..

To some degree we did see it in the doctrine of "manifest destiny," and some shade of it in a "British Israel complex." We certainly saw it in the person of Ivan the Terrible, who slaughtered by day and prayed by night, alternating between his warrior persona and his ascetic persona.

We have seen episodes of this national messiah-ism in Russian history and expansionism before.. There are all manner of psychiatric designations which refer to such a condition. I prefer to refer to it as those who are obsessed with having the mandate of heaven and a Messiah complex. I see that at work to one degree or another in this doctrine of "Russkii Mir" and the preoccupation of the Moscow patriarchate with LGBT community, merging it with this doctrine of "Russkii Mir."

In my summary, I wish to work out a way of expressing this. When a nation with such a doctrine is intent on the obliteration of another nation and the ruthless massacre of its population, it would be hard to exaggerate the intensity of this demonic messianic complex. It is quite evident that the Putin/Kyryl Construct is a, to lesser or greater degree, something that considers itself to have this mandate of heaven, and also to be possessed of a delusional messianic complex. Not only a heresy but a major blasphemy. And possibly a grave danger to the world.

NOTES:

1. Phylitism Is a heresy which blends the Church with the State in a way that actually identifies the Church and the state as one. In actual practice, it renders the Church subservient to the State.
2. Something which I spoke of at length in my books "FREEDOM TO BELIEVE," and "MIRROR OF THE SCRIPTURE."