

Persecution of Eastern Orthodox Christians

Persecution of Eastern Orthodox Christians is the persecution faced by the clergy and the adherents of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Eastern Orthodox Christians have been persecuted in various periods when under the rule of non-Orthodox Christian political structures. In modern times, anti-religious political movements and regimes in some countries have held an anti-Orthodox stance.

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Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth

During the end of the 16th century, under the influence of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, rising pressures towards Eastern Orthodox Christians in White Ruthenia and other Eastern parts of Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth led to the enforcement of the Union of Brest in 1595-96. Until that time, most Belarusians and Ukrainians who lived under the rule of Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth were Eastern Orthodox Christians. Pressed by the state authorities, their hierarchs gathered in synod in the city of Brest and composed 33 articles of Union, which were accepted by the Roman Catholic Church.

At first, the Union appeared to be successful, but soon it lost much of its initial support,^[1] mainly due to its forceful implementation on the Eastern Orthodox parishes and subsequent persecution of all who did not want to accept the Union. Enforcement of the Union stirred several massive uprisings, particularly the Khmelnyskyi Uprising of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

In 1656, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch Macarios III Zaim lamented over the atrocities committed by the Polish Catholics against followers of Eastern Orthodoxy in various parts of Ukraine. Macarios was quoted as stating that seventeen or eighteen thousand followers of Eastern Orthodoxy were killed under

hands of the Catholics, and that he desired Ottoman sovereignty over Catholic subjugation, stating:

God perpetuate the empire of the Turks for ever and ever! For they take their impost, and enter no account of religion, be their subjects Christians or Nazarenes, Jews or Samaritians; whereas these accursed Poles were not content with taxes and tithes from the brethren of Christ...^[2]



Christian denominations in Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1573 (Catholics in yellow, Eastern Orthodox in green, Protestant in purple/gray)

Persecution in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire grouped the Eastern Orthodox Christians into the Rum Millet. In tax registries, Christians were recorded as "infidels" (see giaour).^[3] After the Great Turkish War (1683–99), relations between Muslims and Christians in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire were radicalized, gradually taking more extreme forms and resulting in occasional calls of Muslim religious leaders for expulsion or extermination of local Christians, and also Jews. As a result of the Ottoman oppression, destruction of churches and violence against the non-Muslim civilian population, Serbs and their church leaders headed by Serbian Patriarch Arsenije III sided with the Austrians in 1689, and again in 1737 under Serbian Patriarch Arsenije IV, in war. In the following punitive campaigns, Ottoman forces conducted atrocities, resulting in the "Great Migrations of the Serbs".^[4] In retaliation of the Greek rebellion, Ottomans authorities orchestrated massacres of Greeks in Constantinople in 1821.

During the Bulgarian Uprising (1876) and Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), persecution of Bulgarian Christian population was conducted by Turkish soldiers who massacred civilians, mainly in the regions of Panagurishte, Perushtitza, Bratzigovo, and Batak (see Batak massacre).^[5]

Interwar period

The eastern part of Poland has a long history of Catholic–Orthodox rivalry.^[6] The Roman Catholic clergy in the Chełm region in Poland was unambiguously anti-Orthodox in the Interwar period.^{[7][8][9]} Ukraine, which has been a religious borderland, has a long history of religious conflict.^[10]

World War II

Genocide of Serbs

The Croatian fascist Ustashe created the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) four days after the German invasion of Yugoslavia. Croatia was set up as an Italian protectorate. Around a third of the population was Eastern Orthodox (ethnic Serbs). The Ustashe followed Nazi ideology, forced Serbs to wear armbands with "P" for pravoslavac (meaning: "Orthodox") on them like Nazis forced Jews to wear armbands with a yellow Star of David,^[11] and implemented their goal of creating an ethnically pure Greater Croatia; Jews, Gypsies and especially Serbs were targeted and victims of genocidal policies.^[12] The Ustashe recognized Roman Catholicism and Islam as the national religions of Croatia, but it held the position that Eastern Orthodoxy, as a symbol of Serb identity, was a dangerous foe.^[13] In the spring and summer of 1941, the

genocide against Eastern Orthodox Serbs began and concentration camps like Jasenovac were constructed. Serbs were murdered and forcibly converted, in order to Croatize,^[13] and permanently destroy the Serbian Orthodox Church.^[14] The Catholic leadership in Croatia mostly supported the Ustashe actions.^{[13][15]} Eastern Orthodox bishops and priests were persecuted, arrested and tortured or killed (several hundreds) and hundreds (most^[14]) of Eastern Orthodox churches were closed, destroyed, or plundered by the Ustashe.^[13] Sometimes, the entire population of a village was locked inside the local Eastern Orthodox church and the church was immediately set alight.^[12] Hundreds of thousands of Eastern Orthodox Serbs were forced to flee from Ustashe-held territories into territory of German-occupied Serbia.^[15] It was not until the end of the war that the Serbian Orthodox Church would function again in western parts of Yugoslavia.

The persecution of Eastern Orthodox priests in World War II increased the popularity of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Serbia.^[16]

Contemporary

At the Eastern Orthodox conference in Istanbul on 12–15 March 1992, the church leaders issued a statement:^[17]

After the collapse of the godless communist system that severely persecuted Orthodox Churches, we expected fraternal support or at least understanding for grave difficulties that had befallen us ... Instead, Orthodox countries have been targeted by Roman Catholic missionaries and advocates of Uniatism. These came together with Protestant fundamentalists ... and sects

Former Yugoslavia

Some Serbs viewed the Catholic leadership's support for political division along ethnic and religious lines in Croatia during the Wars in Yugoslavia, and support for the Albanian cause in Kosovo as anti-Serb and anti-Orthodox.^[18] Yugoslav propaganda during the Milošević regime portrayed Croatia and Slovenia as part of an anti-Orthodox "Catholic alliance".^[19]

Kosovo

Observers described that Orthodox ethnic Serbs of Kosovo have been persecuted since the 1990s.^{[20][21][22][23]} Most of the Serbian population were expelled following ethnic cleansing campaigns and many of them were victims of massacres and captured in camps.^{[24][23][25][26]} Heritage from the medieval Serbian state and Serbian Archbishops period, including World Heritage Site, is widespread throughout Kosovo, and many of them were targeted in the aftermath of the 1999 war.^{[27][23]}

Karima Bennoune, United Nations special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, referred to the many reports of widespread attacks against churches committed by the terrorist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).^[28] She also pointed out the fears of monks and nuns for their safety.^[28] John Clint Williamson announced EU Special Investigative Task Force's investigative findings and he indicated that a certain element of the KLA intentionally targeted minority populations with acts of persecution that also included desecration and destruction of churches and other religious sites.^[29] According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, 155 Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries were destroyed by Kosovo Albanians between June 1999 and March 2004.^[30] World Heritage Site consisting of four Serbian Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries were inscribed on the List of World Heritage in

Danger.^{[31][32]}

Numerous human rights reports have consistently pointed to social antipathy towards Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as discrimination and abuse.^[33] In the annual International Religious Freedom Report, the State Department wrote that the municipal officials continued to refuse to implement a 2016 Constitutional Court decision upholding the Supreme Court's 2012 ruling recognizing the Visoki Dečani monastery's ownership of land.^[34] Displaced Serbs are often barred from attending annual pilgrimage for security reasons because of protests by Kosovo Albanians in front of the Orthodox churches.^[34] The Minority Rights Group International reported that Kosovo Serbs lack physical security and consequently freedom of movement, as well as they have no possibility to practice their Christian Orthodox religion.^[35]



Destroyed Serbian Orthodox Holy Trinity Church in Petrić village



Ruined medieval Serbian Orthodox monastery

Russia

Russian nationalists view the United States as the centre of Western anti-Russian, anti-Slavic and anti-Orthodox 'conspiracy that aims to destroy Russia', and has used the NATO intervention in the Bosnian War (1992–95) as an argument for this.^[36]

See also

- Anti-Catholicism
- Anti-Mormonism
- Anti-Protestantism
- Byzantine Iconoclasm
- Persecution of Christians
- Persecution of Christians by Christians
- Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses
- Sectarian violence among Christians

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