

Christian Infighting in Ukraine a Travesty

It has been a long time since I've included a commentary on Mission Network News, but today I'm doing it. The topic isn't pretty. It's divisive. It's hurtful. It's not what Christians should be doing. And yet because of our humanness, Christians fall into the same everyday political discourse that everyone else is facing today. The Ukraine/Russia conflict is causing a serious division among Christian believers in and out of Russia and Ukraine.

The conflict is this: Some evangelicals say the Ukrainian government was corrupt and needed to resign. They believe the Ukrainian-elected parliament voted to remove President Viktor Yanukovich from office. The interim government is in place, awaiting national elections in May. Many Russian Christians believe Yanukovich is still the legitimate leader of Ukraine and that Russia is acting on his behalf and on behalf of the safety of Russians in Crimea.

Those lines have also been drawn by Russian and Ukrainian believers, but with a twist. They're starting to attack each other. One organization's Facebook page was laced with verbal volleys from influential Russian/Ukrainian Christian leaders and pastors.

One wrote, "There is more aggression of the West against us here in the East. It is sad to see how you build a parallel between your personal political views and theology/Bible. It is not the same. Let us not be fooled by the politicians."

These barbs keep growing. Some accuse Christians of being too actively involved in the political situation. Other Christians suggest believers *need* to be involved in the political situation so they can influence decisions made on their

behalf. So, it's not only Russian Christians opposing Ukrainian Christians; sometimes it's Russian against Russian and Ukrainian against Ukrainian.

This crisis could have serious repercussions for the world, both politically and spiritually. How?

Let's talk about the political side first. Ukraine is wrestling with a new government that has basically divided the country. The pro-Ukraine side appears to outnumber the pro-Russia side. Unfortunately, that divide could cause the country to lose a portion of a treasured region: Crimea. This pro-Russian mindset may be the spark of succession. Ukraine is mobilizing troops to try and defend its sovereignty, but it doesn't stand a chance. It lacks numbers and resources.

That leads to other questions: If Ukraine attempts to defend itself, will it ask for help from the United States and the European Union? If those nations respond, will China get involved? If the United States assists Ukraine, what will that mean for the future of U.S./Russian relations?

If the United States and the EU are asked to help and they don't, what kind of message is that sending to the rest of the world? Is it a sign of weakness? Is it a sign of disinterest? Will Ukraine ultimately fall into Russian hands, creating another Soviet-like state? If the U.S. doesn't respond, will this be the end of U.S. influence in the region?

On the spiritual side, the crisis in Ukraine is creating an uncertainty that this generation in Ukraine hasn't seen before. Openness to the gospel has never been better. Russia has a similar openness, which I witnessed while I was in Russia during the Winter Olympics.

Will the strained relations between Russia and the U.S. prevent American Christians from being able to go to Russia to help people understand the gospel? Will short-term mission trips to socially needy parts of the country end? Will anti-

American sentiments in Russia get even worse, making travel there dangerous?

These are all questions that have no answers. Because there are so many questions, we must pray. Don't just pray for the country. Pray specifically for the following:

1. Pray that Russia will leave Crimea and that peace would be restored to a sovereign nation.
2. Pray that the newly appointed Ukrainian government will be given wisdom from God to be able to handle this difficult situation.
3. Pray that God would use this uncertainty to help Christians share the certainty that can only come through the gospel.
4. Pray that the EU and the U.S. would be used by God to help the situation end in peace.
5. Pray that each nation's leadership would be given divine inspiration on what they should do to fulfill God's plan.
6. Pray that God would use this crisis to lead entire cities and communities to Christ.
7. Pray that planned ministries would be allowed to move forward despite the uncertainty.
8. Pray that Christians would be unified behind one thing: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mission Network News will continue to cover the unfolding situation in Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula.

This article originally appeared on .

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