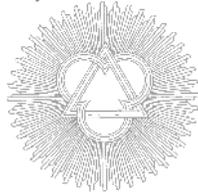

Most Holy Trinity Seminary Newsletter



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My dear Catholic people,

Since the war in Ukraine is on everyone's mind, I thought I would express some opinions about it.

Ultimately, I think that the principal fault lies with the West, that is, the United States, NATO, and the European Union.

When the Soviet Union broke up in the early 1990's, Ukraine opted out of something called the Federation of Independent States, a successor to the Soviet Union. Russia could make no objection to it, since Joseph Stalin had placed in the Soviet constitutions of 1924 and of 1936 that any of the sixteen republics could leave the Union at any time, if it wished. This guarantee was included, as well, in the constitution of 1977. Remember that the official title of the Soviet Union was *Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics*. So what was commonly called "Russia" during the Cold War was really a union or federation of independent republics.

Despite the name, however, Moscow ruled all of these republics with an iron fist. Ukraine, for example, was not referred to as "Ukraine" but "the Ukraine" as if it were merely a region of Mother Russia.

Putin is an old KGB agent, as everyone knows, and was an officer in it. He made this chilling remark a few years ago: "The worst thing that happened in the twentieth

century was the break-up of the Soviet Union," or something to that effect. This was a rather astonishing thing to say, when one considers the devastation of two world wars in comparison. It is easy to see that he longs for the "good old days" of the Soviet Union, a political, social, and economic failure.

He has this dream, therefore, of reconstructing the old Soviet Union, and Ukraine is first on his list of those who need to be reabsorbed.

History of Ukraine. Ukraine, as a nation, has a much older history than that of Russia. Ukraine was an organized state with a king and a capital (Kiev) as early as the 900's. It consisted of mostly slavs who came from neighboring regions. Russia started out as the Duchy of Moscow in the early 1400's, and did not become an organized state until Ivan III (the Terrible) who reigned from 1547 to 1575. Obviously, Ukraine is the much older state.

Ukraine, however, became weak, and fell under the domination of the Lithuanians and the Poles. By the twelfth century, it was no longer an independent state. This domination by these two countries lasted until the mid-1600's, when the Ukrainians threw off the foreign yoke, but being still too weak to stand as an independent state, conceded

by treaty to become subject to Muscovite Russia.

Although the treaty with Muscovite Russia established Ukraine as largely independent, nonetheless the Russians looked down upon the Ukrainians, calling them “Little Russians,” whereas the Muscovites were the “Great Russians.” The Ukrainians tried to expel their Russian overlords in 1658, but failed. They joined with Poland in a war against Russia. Russia prevailed, and Ukraine was split between Russia and Poland. In the early 1700’s the Ukrainians, in an attempt to free themselves from Russia, joined with the Swedes in what is called the Northern War. Russia again prevailed, and in 1709 Ukraine fell definitively under Russian domination.

Ukraine remained thereafter in the Russian Empire. In 1783, Russia annexed Crimea, which had never belonged to Ukraine, but had been a vassal state of the Turkish Empire.

In 1918, Ukraine declared itself an independent republic, as a result of the Bolshevik revolution, but the Soviets invaded Ukraine and subdued it. For a time Ukraine became independent again as a result of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, but after the defeat of the Central Powers, and after many struggles with Bolshevik Russia, it finally succumbed and was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922.

With the advent of Stalin in 1924, a constitution was adopted in that same year by all the republics of the Soviet Union, which

granted to each, as I said, the right to secede at any time.

During the 1930’s, Stalin brutalized the Ukrainians, killing millions of them through starvation, for their resistance to his collectivization of the farms.

For this reason, many Ukrainians saw the Nazi invasion of their land as a liberation, but soon found out, owing to the haughty attitude and equally brutal practices of the Nazis, that they had been overtaken merely by another oppressor.

Things returned to “normal” in Ukraine after the war, continuing its life under oppressive Moscow, until its separation from Mother Russia in 1991. The Donbas region belonged originally to Ukrainian Cossacks, but was absorbed into the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. Over time, the region was largely russified, despite the many nationalities inhabiting it. In 1922, Lenin ceded to Ukraine the Donbas region, which was by then largely Russian in language, culture, and religion. In 1954, Khrushchev gave to Ukraine the peninsula of Crimea, which had been ceded to Russia by the Turks in the Treaty of



In the map one can see that Ukraine had been reduced to a very small area in 1654. It gained territory from the Russian Empire between 1654 to 1917. Lenin gave away the eastern (Donbas) section, in pink, which is the hotly disputed area, since it contains so many Russian speakers. Khrushchev, in an unexplainable act of stupidity, gifted Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, despite the fact that its ports served as naval bases for Russian warships. So it is clear that Russia created its own problems in Ukraine by the blunders of its communist regime. This being so, Ukraine was nevertheless very imprudent by its irritation of its giant neighbor through courting the West and NATO.

Jassy in 1792.

In August of 1991, Ukraine declared itself independent of the Federation of Independent States. Immediately intense negotiations began between Russia and Ukraine over the fate of Russia’s fleet harbored in the ports of Crimea. This peninsula was essential to Russian security, since it was their only port that enabled them to have access to the Mediterranean Sea, and which was

not clogged with ice during the winter as their Baltic ports were.

From 1991 to 2013, the Ukrainian government was pro-Russian, thereby giving Russia nothing to worry about. In 2013, Viktor Yanukovich, the leader of Ukraine, solidified these ties with Russia, and as a result there were mass demonstrations against his government known as the Euromaidan Revolution. The democratically elected pro-Russian government was ejected by an insurrection and a coup, with the result that a pro-European Union government was established. Russia responded by occupying Crimea, and by aiding in the war of independence of the Donbas region.

Summary. We see (1) that Ukraine was a state long before Russia; (2) that Ukraine, early in its existence, became dominated for a long time by foreign powers, and did not become an independent state again until 1918 (with the exception of a few short years in the 1600's); (3) that Russia invaded and brutalized Ukraine on many occasions over the centuries; (4) that Crimea was never a part of Ukraine until 1954, having belonged to Turkey and then Russia; (5) that Ukraine again became independent in 1991, with a pro-Russian government until 2013; (6) Since 2013, Ukraine has thrown off the pro-Russian government and has looked west toward the United States, the European Union, and NATO, and this to the great irritation of Russia.

My assessment. There is no doubt that Ukraine has a right to independence from Russia and Russian influence, and can choose to ally itself with whomever it pleases.

At the same time, I think that Ukraine must realize that it is living in the backyard of a fire-breathing dragon, which had "owned" Ukraine since 1709. Russia has always been an aggressive country, seeking to grab land and/or influence wherever it could. This was true even under the Russian Empire.

For this reason, although I think that Ukraine is within its rights to ally itself with whomever it pleases, it must ask itself if it is willing to pay the price of poking the Dragon.

I understand Russia's serious objections to having NATO in its backyard. I also understand their objections of having to share, in Crimea, harbors with NATO warships. If the situation were reversed, the United States would have similar concerns. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 proves it.

Does that give Russia the right to invade Ukraine, topple its government, and install a pro-Russian government? Absolutely not.

Russia, for its part, must face the fact that the Bolshevik revolution brought to Russia a disastrous government, which in turn made disastrous decisions for Russia, and ruined it economically and socially. Now Russia must pay the price.

It must pay the price for Khrushchev's idiotic gesture of giving Crimea, essential to Russian security, to a republic that could declare itself independent at any time. It must pay the price of including in Ukrainian territory the Donbas region. Now it belongs to Ukraine, just as Quebec became part of to English Canada, just as German-speaking Alsace was absorbed by France in the seventeenth century, just as Danish-speaking Schleswig was absorbed by Prussia in the nineteenth century, just as German-speaking Tyrolean Austrians were given to Italy after World War I. It is the way things happen in Europe. Borders change, and peoples end up in countries to which they do not really belong. You cannot declare war every time it happens.

Europe has been a land of ever-shifting borders, with ethnic peoples ending up, without their consent, under the domination of foreign powers. (I have always said that the most lucrative job in Europe would be map-making, since the map of Europe has changed incessantly since the time of the fall of the Roman Empire).

The United States and the European Union are ultimately at fault. Both the U.S. and the EU were enticing the Ukrainians into the leftist and culturally corrupt nest of the West. The Ukrainians imprudently took the bait, and now are paying a very high price. Ukraine lives next to an enormous state known historically for its brutality and aggression. Did they naively think that Russia would blithely accept their marriage to the U.S., EU, and NATO? Did they naively think that the U.S., EU, and NATO would come to their rescue when the Dragon next door opened its mouth and breathed fire upon them?

In my opinion, the West should have left Ukraine alone as a docile ally of Russia. While Ukraine may not have been happy with this arrangement, I think that they should have faced their geographical, historical, and military reality, and realized that the price to pay for association with the West was just too high. If you live next to a fire-breathing dragon, it is not a good idea to poke it.

European land-grabbing. More blood has been shed in European land-grabbing wars than in any other part of the world. It just seems that the Europeans cannot be content with what they have. They are constantly looking to annex and dominate. The Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 is the fundamental cause of World War I. Russia was infuriated by this act. France was delighted, seeing Russia's fury as an opportunity to foment war with Austria-Hungary and Germany.

World War II was caused by German land-grabbing, that of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and then finally Poland. Would World War II have taken place if Nazi Germany had kept itself within its own borders? I highly doubt it.

European history, all the way back to the Middle Ages, has been marred by this never-ending mania to control the lands that belong to others. Now we have Russia trying to grab Ukraine.

Russia should face the consequences of the 1917 Revolution. Russia's problems go back to their 1917 revolution and their subsequent seventy years of communist rule. Even now, the red star sits at the top of the towers of the Kremlin, and Lenin's body still lies in state in Red Square. The Russian Army is still the *Red Army*, and their air force still has the communist red star on its airplanes. Russia has still not shed the Revolution.

Consequently, Russia should pay the price, the price of losing the Donbas region, the price of losing the Crimean peninsula, the price of losing the loyalty of Ukraine. The war will set Russia back at least two hundred years from the point of view of its reputation among civilized peoples. Russia will be known as a land of a brutal and barbaric people, nothing different from Ivan the Terrible or Joseph Stalin. It will take centuries to live down this Hitler-esque aggression against a nation which did nothing to merit it.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Donald J. Sanborn
Rector
