

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will begin with Eccl. 1:9: **“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun”**. In other words, history repeats itself. Regarding this the cynic has said: “One thing we learn from history is that people do not learn from history.”

With this in mind, let us take another look at Ukraine. As you know, this Texas sized nation is west of Russia and borders on the Black Sea. Since it is so much in the news today, let's consider some history. Ukraine was once the center of the first eastern Slavic state, Kyivan Rus, which during the 10th and 11th centuries was the largest and most powerful state in Europe. During the latter part of the 18th century, most of the Ukrainian territory was absorbed by the Russian Empire. Following the collapse of czarist Russia in 1917, Ukraine achieved a short-lived period of independence (1917-20), but was reconquered and subjected to brutal rule by the Soviets. During World War II, German and Soviet armies were responsible for killing 7 to 8 million Ukrainians. Although Ukraine achieved independence in 1991, democracy and prosperity remained elusive as the legacy of state control and endemic corruption stalled efforts at economic reform, privatization, and civil liberties.

A peaceful mass protest in 2004, known as the "Orange Revolution," forced the authorities to overturn a rigged presidential election and to allow a new internationally monitored vote that swept into power a reformist slate under Viktor YUSHCHENKO. Subsequent internal squabbles in the YUSHCHENKO camp allowed his rival Viktor YANUKOVYCH to stage a comeback in parliamentary elections and become prime minister in August 2006. He was elected president in February 2010. In 2013 President YANUKOVYCH's backtracked on a trade and cooperation agreement with the EU in favor of closer economic ties with Russia. New elections in June 2014 allowed pro-West president Petro POROSHENKO to assume office. He was succeeded by Volodymyr ZELENSKY in May 2019.

Shortly after YANUKOVYCH's departure in late February 2014, Russian President PUTIN ordered the invasion and annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. His excuse for grabbing this land was falsely claiming that he was protecting ethnic Russians living there. His illegal action was condemned by the Ukrainian Government, the EU, the US, and the UN General Assembly. On February 24, 2022, as you know, Russia again invaded Ukraine. This present struggle is the largest conventional military attack on a sovereign state in Europe since World War II.

A review of history indicates that Christianity factors into this story. Wikipedia informs us: *“Before the fall of the Soviet Union over half the 1.5 million acknowledged Baptists and Pentecostals in the USSR lived in Soviet Ukraine. Prior to its independence in 1991, Ukraine was home to the second largest Baptist community in the world, after the United States, and was called the “Bible Belt” of the Soviet Union. Today Ukrainian Baptists continue to be among the largest Protestant denominations in Ukraine and the country has the second highest number of Baptist churches in the world.”* It is worth remembering that dictators see Christianity as an enemy!

So the strength of Evangelical Christianity in the Ukraine helps us to understand why they were targeted. It also helps to explain the genocidal starvation of the Ukrainians by Stalin in 1932-1933. The Ukrainian famine is known as the “Holodomor”. This is a combination of the Ukrainian words for “starvation” and “to inflict death”. Approximately 4 million people were starved to death by Stalin in

his effort to replace Ukraine's privately owned small farms with state-run collectives. Bible believers pose a threat to totalitarian authority. Alex de Waal, executive director of the World Peace Foundation, described what happened as a "clear case of man made famine". Soviet officials wanted the land and drove the peasants off of their farms by force. Stalin's secret police deported 50,000 people from Ukrainian farm families to Siberia. Historian Trevor Erlacher notes: "*Stalin appears to have been motivated by the goal of transforming the Ukrainian nation into his idea of a modern, proletarian, socialist nation, even if this entailed the physical destruction of broad sections of its population,*"

Collectivization in Ukraine did not go well. By the fall of 1932 it was apparent that the Ukrainian grain harvest would fall short of the Soviet goal by 60%. As punishment Stalin ordered that all their food be confiscated. Stalin's wife, Nadezhda, opposed this and committed suicide. Stalin, however, plunged ahead with his genocide and called for the arrest of all who resisted. Meanwhile, Stalin had already arrested tens of thousands of Ukrainian teachers and intellectuals. He even removed Ukrainian-language books from schools and libraries. When Stalin's crop collectors went out into the countryside looking for hidden food they used long wooden poles with metal points to poke the dirt around the homes of the peasants. Those hiding food faced severe punishment. Two boys, for example, were caught hiding fish and frogs they'd caught. They were beaten, bound hand and foot, then dragged into a field with their mouths covered and left to die.

Ukrainian peasants resorted to desperate methods in an effort to stay alive. They ate their pets, flowers, leaves, tree bark and even roots. One woman found some dried beans and was so hungry that she ate them on the spot without cooking them. She died when they expanded in her stomach. Waves of refugees fled the villages in search of food. By the summer of 1933, some of the collective farms had only a third of their households left, and prisons camps were jammed to capacity. With hardly anyone left to raise crops, Stalin's regime resettled Russian peasants from other parts of the Soviet Union in Ukraine to cope with the labor shortage.

Perhaps this brief review of history will help you to better understand the present and possibly predict the future. While we cannot do everything to stop the tragedy unfolding in the Ukraine, we can still do something. Here is the "first" thing we should do according to the Apostle Paul: **"I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4).**

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce