

Volhynia, Fatima, and the Donbas

Opinion

Posted by:

Posted on : 2017/7/9 13:42:22

The Russian aggression in the Donbas is neither similar nor analogous to the Polish-Ukrainian war. To imply that the former is divine retribution for the latter is to misstate the moral equities, for it has been acknowledged that the Volhynian atrocities were mutual.

Commentary by Andrew Sorokowski* In a recent interview with Fr. Robert Go?embiowski published in the Polish periodical *Niedziela*, Archbishop Mieczys?aw Mokrzycki, the Latin-rite Catholic Metropolitan of L?viv, made some statements that were widely circulated and criticized in the Ukrainian media („Uczy?em si? od nich,” *Niedziela*, 17 May 2017). As reported in the prestigious British *Tablet*, members of the Ukrainian Galicia Party even called for his deportation (Jonathan Luxmoore, “Ukrainian Politicians Demand Deportation of Archbishop,” *The Tablet*, 14 June 2017). Meanwhile, the Latin-rite bishop of Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia, Stanis?aw Szyrokoradiuk, did some damage control by glossing the archbishop’s words (tactfully citing a remark of the recently deceased Patriarch-Emeritus of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church (UGCC) Lubomyr Cardinal Husar in an interview of 24 December 2004). What did the Archbishop say?

First, we need to consider what he did *not* say. Perhaps due to the error of a sloppy headline writer, the press and the internet widely reported that Archbishop Mokrzycki had characterized Russia’s war against Ukraine as divine retribution for the Volhynian tragedy of 1943. He had not. What he did say, however, implied it. In response to a question about the future of a Ukraine at war, he first spoke with sympathy for the sufferings of the Ukrainian people. But then, he stated that Ukraine needed to reflect and to ask itself “why this is happening.” The Archbishop mentioned the centenary of the Marian apparitions at Fatima, where the Virgin Mary had said that Communism would be punishment for sin and apostasy, and had called for conversion, repentance, and penance. “The sin of genocide,” he went on, “continues to lie upon [the conscience of] the Ukrainian people, [a sin] which it has found difficult to acknowledge and of which it is difficult to cleanse oneself, though there have been a few attempts at this, among other occasions on the 70th anniversary of the events in Volhynia.” He referred to the 2013 joint declaration of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, the Synod of the UGCC, and the Conference of Latin-rite Bishops of Ukraine. But Archbishop Mokrzycki complained that this document “had not been read out” in Ukraine. “I would like to express my conviction,” he concluded, “that until this people acknowledges its fault, stands in the truth and purifies itself of this sin, it will not be able to enjoy blessedness.” He expressed hope that the Fatima anniversary “will bring about the realization that the absence of peace in Ukraine demands this gesture, which we await out of love and with love. Apology and forgiveness for this great sin of genocide are needed.” In this context, he added, “we pray for the conversion of Russia – that it may respect other peoples.” That the Archbishop mentioned Russia – the immediate cause of the war in the Donbas – only after faulting its victims and almost as an afterthought, would be enough to anger Ukrainians. But a brief look at the history of Polish-Ukrainian conflict and rapprochement shows why the chief import of his statements – that the Ukrainians still need to repent of genocide – is unfair. During the German occupation of Poland and Soviet Ukraine in World War II, Poles and Ukrainians fought a “war within a war.” The

Polish *Armia Krajowa* (AK) or Home Army sought to re-establish the Polish state that had been destroyed in 1939 by Hitler and Stalin, and which had included territories like Eastern Galicia and Volhynia with majority Ukrainian or other non-Polish populations. From 1942, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) sought to establish a Ukrainian state on Ukrainian ethnic territory. Since the territorial claims of these two groups overlapped, conflict was inevitable. It was particularly vicious in Volhynia in 1943, but spread to other regions, notably Galicia. At various times, nationalist groups on both sides called for the elimination of their opponents from the territories they claimed – in other words, ethnic cleansing. If there was genocide, it was mutual. Naturally, neither genocidal intent nor genocidal conduct can be attributed to either national group as a whole. Indeed, there were leaders on both sides who tried to stop the mutual destruction. But the German occupation authorities fomented the conflict, with the aim of weakening both Polish and Ukrainian resistance to their rule. Where rival ethnic groups claim the same territory, there can be no mutually satisfactory outcome. At best, the territory is divided into two states, as with Israel and Palestine, neither of which satisfies the maximum demands of either people. Remaining minorities are exchanged, so that each state is ethnically homogeneous. This is what happened after World War II, when Poland was given some areas of mixed population like Western Galicia, part of Polesie and Podlachia, while the Ukrainian SSR took eastern Galicia and western Volhynia. Some Ukrainians in Poland were repatriated after the war to Soviet Ukraine (while others were deported to Poland’s ‘‘recovered’’ northwestern lands), and many Poles were resettled from Ukraine to Poland. On 22 May 1945, August Cardinal Hlond, primate of Poland, and Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Bishop Ivan Buchko, meeting at St. Josaphat Seminary in Rome, issued a joint appeal for Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation. Since then, Polish and Ukrainian churchmen have made similar statements. A dialogue of mutual forgiveness for past wrongs begun by Major Archbishop Myroslav Ivan Cardinal Lubachivsky and Józef Cardinal Glemp in Rome on October 17, 1987 was strengthened by the joint celebrations of the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus’ at Jasna Góra (Cz?stochowa) in September 1988. In a declaration issued in Warsaw and Lviv in 2005, Polish and Ukrainian Catholic bishops ‘‘forgave and asked forgiveness’’ for past wrongs. On 11 March 2013, marking the seventieth anniversary of the ‘‘Volhynian tragedy,’’ the synod of the UGCC issued a declaration calling for Christian reconciliation and honoring those individuals who had saved lives during the Polish-Ukrainian conflict. Although Archbishop Mokrzycki initially raised objections to the wording of a draft joint document on the tragedy, on 28 June 2013 he signed a declaration along with Major Archbishop Sviatoslav (Shevchuk), head of the UGCC; Archbishop Józef Michalik of Przemy?l, president of the Polish Bishops’ Conference; and Archbishop Ivan (Martyniak), UGCC Metropolitan of Przemy?l and Warsaw. Calling for forgiveness and reconciliation, the document condemned extreme nationalism and chauvinism as well as violence and ethnic cleansing, and called for Polish-Ukrainian cooperation, especially among Churches. Significantly, His Beatitude Sviatoslav, citing his predecessor Patriarch Emeritus Lubomyr Cardinal Husar, asked the Poles for forgiveness for the violence committed by Ukrainians against them during World War II, and Archbishop Michalik likewise begged the Ukrainians for forgiveness for the crimes perpetrated by Poles. One would expect that this declaration would have settled the matter. Yet Archbishop Mokrzycki is not satisfied. He wants yet another Ukrainian gesture. He has attempted to connect the Volhynian tragedy with the war in the Donbas and the centenary of Fatima. The Russian aggression in the Donbas is neither similar nor analogous to the Polish-Ukrainian war. To imply that the former is divine retribution for the latter is to misstate the moral equities, for it has been acknowledged that the Volhynian atrocities were mutual. If the Fatima anniversary is a time for moral reflection and renewed repentance, then in the case of the Volhynian tragedy it should be a joint effort. But this was already done in 2013. As for his allegation that that joint declaration was not ‘‘read out’’ in Ukraine – this seems to be little more than a quibble. There is always an opportunity to make this eloquent document better known (for example, on each

anniversary of the tragedy), it is easily accessible on the internet, and it is likely to find its place in the history books as well. Archbishop Mokrzycki is not, of course, the first high-ranking Catholic churchman to have made puzzling off-the-cuff remarks in an interview. And even the words of a prepared interview do not carry the weight of an official statement or declaration. But the archbishop is surely aware that a man of his authority must be careful with everything he says. In Volhynia in 1943, the words of a parish priest could mean the difference between peaceful co-existence and massacre. In today's uncertain international situation, as Ukraine suffers from a protracted war, Polish-Ukrainian peace and cooperation are essential. Re-opening old wounds raises the question of the ancient Roman judge: *Cui bono?* To whose advantage? The answer is all too obvious. * Andrew Sorokowski is a lawyer and historian. In 1984-87 he was the Ukrainian researcher at Keston College, England, which monitored religious liberty in communist countries. In 1989-90 he served on the staff of the late Myroslav Ivan Cardinal Lubachivsky's Rome chancery, participating in the transfer of his offices to L'viv in 1991. He worked as Managing Editor of the scholarly journal "Harvard Ukrainian Studies" in 1993-1997. Currently he is a historical researcher at the U.S. Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division, in Washington, DC. He has published a number of scholarly articles, and is the editor of a collection of articles and documents on the history of the Ukrainian Patriarchal movement published by "Svichado" in 2009. The op-ed above represents the views of the author and appears here through the courtesy of the Religious News Service of Ukraine. Ukraine Business Online presents this information merely as a matter of public information. Our publication of this material should not be construed in any way as an endorsement - or rejection - of the views contained therein. *Editor's Note: Ukraine Business Online invites comments from readers on this or any other subject of interest to the Ukrainian people. You may provide feedback to any news story by use of the reply function at the bottom of the page. If you have more general thoughts you would like to share, send commentary of any length to: editor@ukrainebusiness.com.ua*