

«Rescue the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor» (Jer. 22:3)

The Message

of the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine

on War and Just Peace in the Context of New Ideologies

«Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,

that glory may dwell in our land» (Psalm 85:10).

Dear in Christ!

Introduction

1. For ten years now, we have been living in war, and for two of those years, Ukraine has been plunged into the flames of a liberation war against a full-scale attack by the Russian aggressor. The time of war is extremely painful and cruel: it causes countless traumas to everyone and the whole society. Every day we receive tragic news about the deaths of Ukrainians; many have already lost their family members and friends; we are witnessing the destruction of what is most precious to us - our Homeland, our families' well-being, our happiness, our dreams. In such circumstances, it is very understandable that a person is inclined to surrender to emotions: to plunge into despair and hopelessness, or to let hate reign in their soul. These feelings, despair, and hatred, enslave us and violate our dignity, which the Creator gave us. These sentiments of many Ukrainians are aptly expressed in the words of the psalmist David: «My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord, how long?» (Ps. 6:4); «How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God!» (Psalm 13:4). At the same time, a part of society is getting indifferent: some people who are affected by the war, perhaps less than many others, try not to notice it, as if to forget about it. This position can hide itself both as a psychological mechanism of self-defense and as a moral disease of indifference.
2. First and foremost, we need to realize that winning the fight against such an insidious enemy requires perseverance. It has nothing in common with indifference or detachment from what the country and people live for. On the contrary, perseverance is always associated with activity, with a sacrificial love that is ready to serve for a long period: «And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete» (James 1:4). A short-term explosion of feelings or enthusiasm cannot be sustained for a long distance rather that requires exhausting efforts. For this reason, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky encouraged young people: «It is not by a single minute's disruptions, but only by constant struggle and unceasing sacrifices, even to the blood and death of many generations, that the nation moves forward»¹. This is very well realized by our defenders, who keep watch and restrain the aggressor every

¹ Pastoral letter «To the Ukrainian Youth», Lviv, 1932.

day, for many weeks and months. That is why we call on everyone to perseverance and to perform an active act of love, and with today's appeal, we seek to present certain moral foundations and principles on which to build a lasting and just peace in our homeland.

3. Such a clear comprehension of the moral and spiritual principles that guide our actions during the war and on which we will build our future after it ends and the achievement of a just peace is essential to ensure that our persevering efforts are a purposeful movement toward the desired victory. Christianity in general, and the social teaching of the Catholic Church in particular, has a long tradition of theological and philosophical thought on peace and war that is relevant to the current circumstances of our country. Thus, our goal is to share with Ukrainian society and all people of goodwill a relevant part of these treasures.
4. The Russian war against Ukraine raises new challenges and problems for the many centuries of Christian tradition of understanding peace and war. On the international stage, we witness support for our country, but at the same time, we face a lack of understanding of the depth and the seriousness of the events and hope for an easy resolution of the conflict. Sometimes we hear too hasty calls for peace, which, unfortunately, is not always associated with a proper demand for justice. «They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, «Peace! Peace!» but there is no peace», the prophet Jeremiah calls to our conscience (Jer. 6:14). Therefore, the Christian doctrine of peace and war should be considered in the context of the contemporary Ukrainian experience, so that it may bring us the desired fruit and illuminate our aspirations and efforts with the truth of the Gospel. This message is aimed, on the one hand, at assisting our people to become wiser and stronger by being enriched by the ancient Christian thought on peace and war, and, on the other hand, at contributing to a better comprehension by the international community of the challenges of our time and the place of Ukraine and Ukrainians on the spiritual map of the modern world.

I. Causes and Origins of Russia's Modern War Against Ukraine

5. It is impossible to comprehend the reasons for Russia's war against Ukraine and to find the proper spiritual means for victory and a just peace without understanding the broader background of current events, without realizing the basic principles of social justice, both in social relations within each state governed by the law and in international relations and the foundations of international law. The roots of what is occurring today date back to at least the last century, or even much earlier. The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of totalitarian regimes in Europe, primarily in Germany and Russia, which caused terrible wars and numerous crimes against humanity. The main characteristic of totalitarianism is disregard for human freedom and dignity. In this sense, totalitarian regimes are forms of state formation that are called tyranny in the Christian intellectual tradition². Tyrants, as well as the struggle against them for freedom, have been known since the earliest times of human history, but in the totalitarianism of the twentieth century, tyranny has acquired unprecedented scales. First, in the struggle against freedom, totalitarianism used modern technical means that did not exist in the past (radio, cinema, modern weapons, means of mass systematic killing, such as gas chambers, etc.) These technical means

² Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a 2ae, q. 92, art. 1, ob. 4; q. 105, art. 1; 2a 2ae, q. 50, art. 1, ob. 2; *De reg. princ.*, lib. 1, cap. 1; lib. 3, cap. 7.

ensured total control over the subjects and led to an unprecedented number of victims, reaching tens of millions. Secondly, totalitarianism began to monitor not only the social behavior of a human being but also the private sphere of his or her life. This is how it differs from another form of tyranny, authoritarianism. The latter still leaves a person a certain amount of personal space, provided that he or she is loyal to the government. Instead, totalitarian rulers seek to conquer the soul, and completely master the human personality, the subject of a totalitarian state must adore his or her tormentors. Totalitarianism has a pseudo-religious character: the tyrants of the twentieth century destroyed or repressed the Church because they competed with religion and wanted to replace the spiritual values of traditional religions with their own ideology.

6. As a result of the Second World War, one of the two main totalitarian monsters of the twentieth century, National Socialist Germany, was defeated. The Nazi totalitarian ideology and its crimes were put on trial in Nuremberg. In the decades that followed, West Germany went through a difficult and painful process of purification and became a democratic state. In contrast, the second totalitarian monster, the Soviet Union, with communist Russia at its core, was not only not destroyed but also appeared before the world among the winners of the war, claiming to be the main liberator from Nazism. Therefore, one of the four judges at the Nuremberg Tribunal was a representative of the Soviet Union, although the crimes of the communist rulers were no less or even greater than those of the leaders of Nazi Germany. However, Ecclesiastes warned: «Because the sentence against evildoers is not promptly executed, therefore the hearts of men are filled with the desire to commit evil» (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Therefore, after 1945, the USSR even expanded its geographical sphere of influence and conquered the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, creating satellite regimes in them and founding the Eastern Bloc of Communist states, which opposed the countries of the free world. It took more than forty years of the Cold War for the communist and atheist Soviet Union to reach complete ideological, economic, and social decline and eventually cease to exist.
7. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 brought liberation to those countries of Central and Eastern Europe that had been part of the communist bloc. It also gave a chance for freedom and a decent life to the nations that had created socialist republics within the Soviet Union. Among these nations were Ukrainians, who gained the independence and national state they had dreamed of for centuries. It is worth mentioning that it was our Church, which was criminally banned by the communist rulers after World War II, was persecuted and kept underground throughout the Soviet period, that became one of the most important forces for change in Ukraine: the struggle for the legalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in 1989-1991 was an important contribution to the destruction of the Soviet atheist empire, and after independence, the faithful of our Church tried to spiritually support the new nation-state and were consistent supporters of its renunciation of the totalitarian communist past. The journey to true freedom and liberation from the negative legacy of the twentieth century has been long and difficult for our country. However, we see good achievements along the way, especially in the development of a strong civil society in Ukraine, as evidenced by the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-2014, and the current heroic struggle against Russian aggression. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is an integral part of civil society and therefore cannot stand aside from its just aspirations to have proper control over state power, build a fair democracy, and protect the rule of law and human dignity.

8. The big mistake of the Free world after the collapse of the communist bloc was that post-Soviet Russia, which was recognized as the successor to the Soviet Union, was not demanded by democratic countries to fully condemn the crimes of the communist period and to force the new Russian rulers to ensure decommunization, lustration, and purification of their state from the consequences of totalitarianism. Nothing similar to what happened in Germany after World War II was done in Russia. The thinking was not focused on spiritual values but on economics: many in the world thought that the process of democratization in Russia would take place as if by itself, under conditions of private enterprise development, strengthening of economic levers, and trade with the Free world. The world's democracies hoped that deepening economic ties with Russia would help build trust and sustainable peace. However, these hopes ultimately proved to be in vain, as the Kremlin used this situation to accumulate resources for another war. The democratic world - perhaps without realizing it - has learned over time to use double standards in its relations with Russia for economic gain, which clearly contradicts Christian teaching, which states: «Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good» (Romans 12:9). Indeed, the Bible often contains texts that warn of the danger of underestimating the power of evil and naively hoping that evil will simply disappear: «Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour» (I Pet. 5:8; cf. Eph. 5:11; II Tim. 4:3-4). However, these cautions were not considered, so not only did Soviet totalitarianism escape its «Nuremberg», but the international community did not develop mechanisms for quickly identifying the danger and responding to a possible repetition of the tragedies of the twentieth century. All of this has led to fatal consequences: today we are dealing with an attempt to restore aggressive, militaristic totalitarianism in Russia in its new hybrid or postmodern form.
9. The new Russian tyranny of the twenty-first century is similar to the totalitarianism of the twentieth century, primarily because it is a ruthless enemy of human freedom and dignity. Like the totalitarian regimes of the recent past, it uses the latest technical means and seeks to conquer not only the bodies but also the souls of people. At first glance, modern Russian tyranny seems to be less cruel and totalitarian than communist and national socialist totalitarianism. In fact, it transforms the totalitarian features of the past into much more insidious, and therefore even more dangerous forms that can be called hybrid. The first feature of the new Russian totalitarianism is that it does not need ideology in the form that was characteristic of communism and national socialism, with its own «holy scripture», i.e., a body of «canonical» texts by leaders and ideologues that set forth a more or less coherent theory of the future to achieve some utopian «great purpose». Such an ideology, although it was false and ugly, still wanted to have its own «moral code» and used the phraseology of social justice. Instead, modern Russian totalitarianism does not claim to have positive content and a coherent theory; it is propaganda for nihilism in its worst forms, and its goal is the moral corruption of man, his dehumanization to turn him into a weak-willed, indifferent to moral values, an instrument of crimes against humanity. It seeks to undermine faith in any moral principles and tempts his subjects with the opportunity to commit violence against others with impunity. It claims that the whole world is governed only by brutal force, deception, and self-interest. Putting forward various conspiratorial theories of a global conspiracy against Russia, it uses them to justify any crimes committed by the Russian government against other nations. In its cult of the ruler, militarism, corporatism, open propaganda of brutal violence, and emphasis on its own national and racial superiority, the modern tyranny of Moscow

has much in common with the fascism of the last century, therefore it is not surprising that the appropriate word «ruscism» was found to describe it.

10. The second feature of modern Russian hybrid totalitarianism is the qualitatively higher level of technical tools. The tools used by the tyrants of the twentieth century have evolved radically in recent decades; culture and technology have risen to many levels. Moscow's ruscism effectively uses the achievements of information technology, including social media. The digital (technological) revolution to some extent helps Russian propaganda to create a different, virtual reality that is radically different from reality, and even more, distorts it. In its practical actions, in producing fakes and postulating post-truth, modern Russian propaganda benefits from some of the most radical movements of philosophical postmodernism at the end of the last century, which denied the existence of objective and verifiable truth and claimed that there are no natural foundations of morality and law. That is why modern Russian tyranny can be called not only hybrid but also postmodern totalitarianism.
11. When it comes to Ukraine, all these features of hybrid totalitarianism are superimposed on another extremely important factor: the colonizing legacy of imperial, tsarist Russia. Most of the territory on which Ukrainians lived was conquered and conquered by Moscovia, a state entity that adopted the name «Russian Empire», between the second half of the seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. Since then, the Russian government has banned and suppressed Ukrainian culture, language, Church, and identity; it has claimed that Ukrainians are only a younger, smaller, secondary part of the Russian population. As indicated by numerous public texts and speeches of contemporary Russian top-level leaders and propagandists, today this traditional Moscow imperial ideology has acquired a radical militant character and calls for the complete destruction of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian identity as such. The war being waged by Russia against Ukraine has all the features of a neocolonial war on the European continent with clear signs of genocide. The destruction of everything that is Ukrainian has become the political program of the Russian leaders, their mania, which is supported by a large part of the citizens of the aggressor state, which indicates the unhealthy state of Russian society. That is why calls for a compromise with Russia, which Ukraine occasionally hears from some representatives of the international community, even from members of the religious community, have no real basis and demonstrate a lack of understanding of the situation in which Ukrainians find themselves. The problem lies not only in the fact that such calls are immoral, as they disregard the principles of respect for human dignity and just peace but also in the fact that they are simply unrealistic: a compromise cannot be reached if one of the parties denies the very existence of the other. Russia leaves Ukraine no choice but to defend itself militarily. This war is a national liberation struggle of the Ukrainian civilian nation for the right to its own existence and future and the independence, freedom, and dignity of our citizens.

II. From the «Russian World» (*Russkij mir*) to «ruscism» - the path of degradation of the aggressor state.

12. From what has been said about contemporary Russian hybrid totalitarianism, it follows that it has a particular attitude toward religion and the Church. Orthodoxy in its Moscow form is being used in Russia today to fill the ideological vacuum that arose because of the fall of communism, considering religion as a means of reinforcing state power and turning it into a political tool. At the same time, the symbols of the communist period are strangely mixed with the mental paradigms of

the tsarist empire. The Russian Orthodox Church has a long, one might say the centuries-long tradition of serving the Russian government in its various, sometimes opposing historical forms - from the Orthodox of the Tsardom of Moscow and the Russian Empire to the atheistic and communist Soviet Union. In all these state formations, the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church sought to be in unity with the political authorities and benefit from a privileged position. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the Patriarch of Moscow supported and blessed Russia's criminal war against the Ukrainian people. Such actions are in line with the Moscow tradition of the Church's ideological service to the authorities and its servility to those in power. Unfortunately, now this long-standing imperial tradition, combined with modern post-communist totalitarianism, has led to a real crime committed by the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate to propagandize the war. It was this church leadership that generated the new genocidal ideology now known as the «Russian World» and voluntarily offered its services to the criminal authorities and sanctified them. We observe this deep moral fall of the Moscow Patriarch and his religious supporters with great pain because it compromises Christianity as such and undermines the trust of our contemporaries in the Church and in all those who use the name of Christ. Therefore, today it becomes especially urgent for everyone to «test the spirits» (cf. I John 4:1) in order to be able to distinguish political ideology hidden in pseudo-Christian rhetoric from true faith in Christ.

13. For many years, Ukrainian society has been trying to convey to the international community that a new aggressive ideology is emerging in Russia, a mixture of resentment, nationalism, and pseudo-religious messianism. However, during the entire period preceding the war, no one heard us. This ideology, which the Russian authorities called the «Russian World», was established in Russia as the official and only correct ideology, and the role of the Moscow Patriarchate in creating and promoting this ideology is now well-known and undeniable. It is the Russian Orthodox Church that has given the «Russian World» ideology a quasi-religious spirit, portraying Russia as the last bastion of Christianity on earth that resists the forces of evil. At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church endows the deadliest nuclear weapons on earth with an almost sacred status.
14. The quasi-religious doctrine of the «Russian World» provided ideological justification for Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. This aggression has raised to the surface a whole layer of issues that should have been left in the past. Thus, it would seem that attempts to ideologize Christianity, when it was identified with a particular country, nation, or nations with their political ambitions and goals, have long since become history, as such instrumentalization contradicts the very essence of Christianity. However, the whole world is now witnessing Russia's most brutal use of Christian symbols and Gospel images to justify the violation of the international order, the attack on a sovereign state, and mass murder. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of such duplicity: «They ready their tongues like a drawn bow; with lying, and not with truth, they hold forth in the land» (9:2).
15. It is important for Christians around the world that the doctrine of the «Russian World» has been condemned by numerous representatives of the Orthodox community itself. In particular, a group of nearly 350 Orthodox theologians called it a heresy and a «vile doctrine that has no justification»³. According to these theologians, the basis of the «Russian World» ideology is the false doctrine of ethnophyletism. They also "denounce all those who affirm Caesaropapism, replacing total obedience

³ Declaration of the Orthodox Theologians of the World on the "Russian World," March 13, 2022.

to the crucified and risen Lord with obedience to any leader who is endowed with authority and claims to be God's anointed, regardless of the title he is known by: «caesar», «emperor», «king», or "president." And, as the previously mentioned theologians conclude, «if such false principles are considered valid, then the Orthodox Church ceases to be the Church of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, the Ecumenical Councils, and the Church Fathers. Unity becomes fundamentally impossible»⁴.

16. The Appeal of the Christian Churches of Ukraine to condemn the aggressive ideology of the «Russkij mir» states that «Patriarch Kirill Gundayaev of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church have been and remain one of the main creators and propagandists of the ideology of the «Russian World», which provides for the exclusivity of the «Russian civilization» and its separation and hostile confrontation with others. However, such a position - to exclude or delineate others based on ethnicity or cultural affiliation - does not correspond to the foundations of the Christian faith as such. Inciting hatred and waging war based on the «Russian World» ideology violates Christian principles and contradicts the spiritual norms that the Church is supposed to embody. This ideology today is a challenge to the preaching of the Gospel in the modern world and destroys the credibility of the Christian witness, regardless of confession»⁵.
17. Eventually, this quasi-Christian doctrine degraded into a complete ideology of ruscism with its cult of the ruler and the dead, a mythologized past, fascism's inherent corporativism, total censorship, conspiracy theories, centralized propaganda, and a war to destroy another nation. It seems that ruscism has combined all previous ideological constructs, from the Tsardom of Muscovy with its messianic ideas of «Holy Russia» and «the Third Rome» to the USSR with its aggressive imperialism and desire for global domination.
18. This degradation of the Christian nature of the Russian Orthodox Church has revealed major weaknesses in the previous ecumenical dialogue. Its participants, having good will and intentions, remained inaudible to warnings that the Moscow Patriarchate, as in the days of the USSR, was only instrumentalizing this dialogue. Eventually, we came to a point where this instrumentalization became visible, and the quasi-ideological formula of «dialogue at any cost» became contrary to the Gospel principle of «dialogue in truth».
19. In addition, we can state that the European practice of «realpolitik», which sometimes turned into zealotry before the powerful of this world, did not justify itself either. It was considered a reasonable approach that took into account the realities of life. However, such a position is rather evidence of implication and a recognition of the alleged inability of the Gospel to illuminate the paths of human life, where «sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life» (I John 2:16) leads people. Today, the world needs the prophetic voice of the Church, which will speak the language of justice, take the side of the offended, and shame and condemn the offender.
20. The inability of the Christian world to find adequate spiritual and worldview solutions to these challenges from Russia is partly due to the fact that current Christian postulates in the international community have also undergone a certain ideologization. Evangelical fidelity to the truth, which in a situation of violent confrontation with evil turns into the sword of Christ (cf. Matthew 10:34), has conceded to the ideology of political correctness, which creates the illusion of the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kyiv, 10 of January 2024

possibility of pacifying evil. The reasonable conclusion that only God has absolute truth has turned into a trap of ethical relativism, which gives legitimacy even to deliberately constructed lies. That is why it is so important for Christians to critically reflect on their past perceptions in order to find the truth again in the thicket of modern ideologies and thus restore their ability to «hear His voice» (John 18:37).

21. The current challenges brought about by the doctrine of the «Russian World» and the shift toward relativism are bringing great spiritual and ideological confusion to the human community, causing many people and even some governments to lose the ability to distinguish between truth and deception, good and evil. The tragedy of the current war is that the very language of spiritual values is threatened, as Russia and other authoritarian regimes use this language to persuade people's hearts to commit terrible sin: «as they make a pretense of religion but deny its power» (II Tim. 3:5). For example, the concept of «spiritual fight» has acquired a distorted meaning in Russia and is discredited at a time when spiritual confrontation with evil is becoming almost the only means of saving humanity.
22. The ideological manipulateness of the «Russian World» doctrine leads not only to worldview but also to pastoral losses. While fictitiously defending the interests of the Russian people and elevating them above other nations, this doctrine actually leaves them without pastoral care. The souls of Russians hear the voice of earthly Caesar instead of the voice of God and therefore become defenseless against the demons of Russian history. Therefore, in a spiritual sense, the flock of this Church is left to its own devices.

III. Nonviolent resistance

23. Looking to Christ and following the encouragement of his disciples and apostles, many early Christians chose a spiritual path that today is described as nonviolent resistance. They were convinced that Jesus' example of forgiveness and mercy, his refusal to defend his life through physical resistance was an ethical call that precluded discipleship that accepted the shedding of blood. This was the path taken by the ancient Kyiv princes Borys and Hlib, who refused to engage in dynastic struggle and defended themselves by violent means (cf. Matt. 26:52). For this spiritual feat, the Kyiv Church proclaimed them one of the first saints of the Kyiv land.
24. Throughout history, this form of opposition to aggression has taken on different forms and practical implementation. In particular, in the Middle Ages, those who sought to renew the Church called for a return to the «pre-Constantine» abstinence from any form of self-defense that involved the use of weapons. Nonviolent movements of the twentieth century are also widely known today.
25. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, «Gaudium et Spes», the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirmed: «Motivated by this same spirit, we cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself»⁶. Similar thoughts are found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church⁷. And in the Catechism of the UGCC «Christ is our Pascha» we read: «War is a crime against life because it brings suffering and death, grief, and injustice. War cannot be considered a way to resolve conflict issues. For this purpose,

⁶ GS, 78.

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2306.

other means are consistent with human dignity: international law, honest dialogue, solidarity between states, diplomacy»⁸. Therefore, since the time of this Council, the Church has emphasized the right of every person to moral choice and discernment in wartime.

26. This tradition of nonviolent resistance has become an important part of the spiritual experience of humanity, but it cannot be considered the only one with evangelical legitimization. St. Augustine rightly noted: «If Christian doctrine defined all wars as sin, then soldiers who asked for advice on how to save their souls would have been told in the Gospel that they should lay down their arms and refuse to serve in the military. But they were told do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages»⁹ (cf. Luke 3:14). In other words, military service should be a service of peace and justice for the common good.
27. The Gospel is peace-loving and peacemaking, but not pacifist (in the modern sense of the term). It does not eliminate the duty of the state to protect the life and freedom of its citizens. After all, as St. Paul states, the state «does not bear the sword without purpose; it is the servant of God to inflict wrath on the evildoer». (Rom. 13:4). A person has the right to a fair trial, to self-defense, to the inviolability of his or her health and life, and the state's task is to provide all the conditions for the realization of these rights. That is why God has given the state the power to stop violence, protect the innocent, preserve peace, and bring criminals to justice. For this purpose, power structures and armed forces exist. We need to distinguish between force and violence because not all use of force is violence. The state must ensure a fair trial because its task is to ensure that justice is done. If the state encourages people to do things that are contrary to their conscience, then we must be guided by what the Scriptures teach: «We must obey God rather than men» (Acts 5:29)¹⁰.
28. It is extremely important to understand Jesus' words about turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39) and loving our enemies (Matthew 5:44) in context and correctly. We can forgive personal insults, but we do not have the right to remain silent when we see violence directed against other people. Moreover, there is evidence in the Scriptures that the offended did not remain silent when violence was directed against him. For example, Jesus said: «Why do you strike me?» (John 18:23), and St. Paul warned his offender: «God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!» (Acts 23:3). Therefore, forgiveness does not mean tacit approval of the offender's actions and submission to evil, but rather overcoming them by the power of Christ. It only indicates that the Christian entrusts God with the restoration of justice, for «Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord» (Rom. 12:19).
29. Contemporary pacifists, completely ignoring the gospel foundations of the objectivity of Truth, often see peace as the fruit of appeasement of evil or compromise with it. However, in 1979, in Ireland, St. Pope John Paul II affirmed that peace is the result of adherence to «ethical principles»¹¹. This is fully in line with the prophetic tradition: «Justice will bring about peace; right will produce calm and security» (Isaiah 32:17). And in 1981, the same pope expressed his conviction that «wars arise as a result of invasions or as a result of ideological imperialism, exploitation and other forms of injustice»¹².

⁸ Christ is our Pascha, 989.

⁹ Letter 138, To Marcellinus, n. 15.

¹⁰ Cf. Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 503.

¹¹ Sermon at Holy Mass, Drogheda, September 29, 1979, n. 8.

¹² Address on the occasion of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1981, n. 8.

30. In order to achieve a fictional peace, pacifists are often willing - consciously or unconsciously - to withdraw the perpetrators of peace from responsibility. The arguments vary and sometimes are even highly moral, such as the desire to avoid further human losses. This is the argument that is often raised in the context of Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine. The words of the Apostle Paul should serve as a warning to the creators of a false peace: «When people are saying, «Peace and security», then sudden disaster comes upon them...» (I Thessalonians 5:3). Because the aggressor concludes that its violence becomes its legal right and tries by all means to achieve recognition of this «right to crime» under the guise of legitimizing geopolitical interests and justifying them. The lack of proper condemnation and opposition to such actions by the international community and church leaders creates the illusion of the success of this model of the behavior of an entire state, which [model] not only does not find fair opposition but is rapidly spreading as a legitimate model of international relations. The force of international law is being replaced by the blind law of the strong one. Instead of respect for the dignity and inviolability of the sovereignty of the subject of international law, exclusive and special «rights» of modern world powers are affirmed, which impose themselves in international relations as those who may have the right to «patronize» other sovereign states or directly declare the loss of the right of a certain state and a certain nation to exist. This undermines the credibility of international law and any international peace agreement based on it. International cooperation and mutual trust come to a standstill, the world begins to arm itself and plunges deeper and deeper into an atmosphere of fear, mutual threats, and ultimatums. This way of imposing international relations today, when the sovereignty of international law subjects is sacrificed in the name of appeasing the claims of global power, is very similar to the international climate in Europe and the world before the outbreak of World War II. Indeed, the aggressor again feels impunity and plays on this fear. Thus, the experience of the current Russian aggression demonstrates that unprincipled pacifist slogans of pacification encourage the aggressor to further violence. In this historical context, the prophetic gesture of Ukraine thirty years ago - its renunciation of nuclear weapons and its trust in the signatories of the Budapest Memorandum, an international agreement concluded on December 5, 1994, between Ukraine, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States on security guarantees for Ukraine in connection with its acquisition of a non-nuclear status - is a prophetic gesture of trust in the power of international law on the part of the Christian people and a manifest of their national aspirations for just security and peace. Today, this gesture deserves special attention and a new comprehension.
31. One of the main reasons for the current commitment to the ideas of pacifism is also the growing danger of war with the use of nuclear weapons. Often, instead of proclaiming the inadmissibility of such a war and searching for ways to abandon it altogether, one can now find theories about the «limits of legitimate self-defense» of non-nuclear-weapon states and «legitimate surrender» in order to avoid possible casualties. However, is it really possible to prevent this by laying down arms in front of the aggressor? This is a question that has become acute in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the entire international community must answer it. The hypothetical avoidance by Russia, a nuclear power, of responsibility for a criminal violation of international law and an attack on a sovereign state will only accelerate the growth of the number of nuclear powers on the planet. Now, after the start of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, non-nuclear states feel more vulnerable than ever before to the possessors of deadly warheads. And if we consider

Russia's seizure and shelling of Ukrainian nuclear power plants, the situation becomes even more alarming. How can we talk about international security today when a state that is a member of the UN Security Council and possesses one of the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, in order to achieve its aggressive goals, itself poses a threat to this security and resorts to outright nuclear blackmail of the entire international community? The prophet Micah wrote about such brutal behavior: «They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and they take them; They cheat an owner of his house, a man of his inheritance» (2:2).

32. Adherence to the Decalogue is a prerequisite for a just society, and war is a brutal violation of God's commandments. As the above-mentioned constitution «Gaudium et Spes» emphasizes, «Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and the man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation»¹³. Can the human community leave without condemnation and responsibility for the genocide of Ukrainians that the Russian army has organized in Bucha, Borodyanka, Irpin, Mariupol, and many other occupied territories of Ukraine? Who will stand up for the victims and their families? The current cry of Ukrainians to the international community for justice has the full support of the Church, as it has always made and continues to choose favor of the offended. This is the essence of her mandate from our Lord Jesus Christ and her warning against injustice, which does not come by itself: «He made a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made». (Psalm 7:15).

IV. Defensive war and legitimate defense

33. Since the time of St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397) and St. Augustine (354-430), given the real circumstances of the sinful world in which we live, the Church has been guided by a rule known today as the just war theory. This approach excluded any unprovoked aggression and any unmotivated use of force and also contained rules of warfare.
34. Throughout history, many Christian thinkers have reflected on these principles. The clear presence of evil in history has led to the realization that the defense of one's neighbor and one's own survival requires the need to resist armed aggression. Reflecting on the experience of the First World War, the righteous Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky spoke of the right of the people to self-defense and «the permissible defense of their own land, their own families, and their own homes»¹⁴. To ensure that defense does not escalate into violence and meets the criteria of proportionality of such self-defense, certain principles of a just defensive war were developed, as we say today, the principles of legal defense. Scientific and technological progress, which led to the development of new, more dangerous weapons, and thus new threats and the emergence of new forms of social organization could not but affect the evolution of the theory of justice in such a war. The process of rethinking some of its aspects was particularly active after the end of World War II. Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) considered defensive wars just and emphasized that other nations have a duty not to abandon an attacked country in trouble. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the constitution «Gaudium et Spes» stated that «As long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful

¹³ GS, 80.

¹⁴ Pastoral message to the clergy and faithful «On repentance and regular Holy Communion», Lviv, February 5, 1939.

- authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted»¹⁵.
35. After the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations, international law ceased to operate with the concept of a «just war» and moved to a complete prohibition of warfare. According to the UN Charter, the use of armed force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state is recognized as unlawful, and all disputes between states are to be settled by peaceful means in such a way as not to endanger international peace and security, and justice¹⁶. Later, in Resolution 3314 (XXIX) «Definition of Aggression», adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 14, 1974, it was stated that no considerations of a political, economic, military, or other nature can justify an act of aggression¹⁷.
 36. The use of force is authorized only by a decision of the UN Security Council to the extent necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security or in self-defense against an armed attack. Thus, the UN Charter defines that the right to individual or collective self-defense against armed attack is inalienable, and the Charter itself does not limit this inalienable right in any way¹⁸.
 37. St. Pope John XXIII sought to shift the focus of the discussion of war and peace to peacebuilding but did not deny the right of nations to self-defense in the event of an unprovoked attack¹⁹. Therefore, the Church distanced itself from the practice of naive pacifism, which often turns into moral blindness in distinguishing between good and evil. Moreover, St. Pope Paul VI warned about «the insidiousness of a purely tactical pacifism, which intoxicates the enemy to be defeated and kills the understanding of justice, duty, and sacrifice in souls»²⁰.
 38. The Catholic Church teaches that legitimate armed defense against an unjust attacker, as well as war in general, is always the last means that a party in danger can resort to. This is emphasized by the Catechism of the UGCC «Christ is our Pascha»: «The use of military force may be permissible only in cases of extreme necessity as a means of permissible self-defense, and the Christian soldier is always a defender of peace»²¹. The Catechism of the Catholic Church outlines the elements of a just defensive war: «The exact conditions for legitimate defense by military force must be carefully determined. The seriousness of such a decision subjects it to the strict conditions of moral legality. It requires at the same time that the damage done by the aggressor to a nation or community of nations be prolonged, severe, and indisputable; that all other means of putting an end to it be impossible or unsuccessful; that the possibilities of success be reasonable; and that the use of arms not cause disaster and disorder greater than the disaster to be removed»²², that is, when negotiations, arbitration, compromise, and other means have failed. As a rational being, a person is obliged to make decisions based on common sense and the law, rather than using force, whenever possible. For the legal defense to be just, the safety of civilians must be kept in mind. This defense always has a clearly limited goal: a just peace, not the complete destruction of the enemy's people, economy, or political institutions. In order to achieve a just peace, limited and proportionate means must be used:

¹⁵ GS, 79.

¹⁶ Cf. Art. 2, n. 3 and 4.

¹⁷ Cf. Art. 5, 1.

¹⁸ Cf. Art. 5.

¹⁹ Cf. Encyclical on the Establishment of Universal Peace in Truth, «Pacem in terris», April 11, 1963.

²⁰ Address on the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1981.

²¹ Christ is our Pascha, 990.

²² CCC, 2309.

armaments and force must be limited to what is absolutely necessary to repel aggression and deter future attacks.

39. In his encyclical «Fratelli Tutti», His Holiness Francis warns against «an overly broad interpretation» of the right to legitimate defense, which could be used by some to «preventive» attacks or actions that cause more evil than the one that needs to be eliminated; he also added that «today it is very difficult to choose the criteria developed over the past centuries to affirm the possibility of a «just war»²³. This is a valid point, given the way Russian propaganda justifies its aggression against Ukraine. However, does not such manipulation by Russia indicate the need to develop even clearer and more precise criteria for legal defense, which would make it impossible for the aggressor to pretend to be a victim?
40. In the light of the teachings of the Catholic Church, the Security and Defense Forces of Ukraine are legitimately defending the state and the people. Today, there is no shortage of evidence that Russia has been unwilling to resolve its contradictions with Ukraine at the negotiating table as an equal and sovereign partner. The aggressor country rejects the very right to existence of the Ukrainian people and its state as a subject of international law, refusing to engage in dialogue and negotiations with a sovereign Ukraine. It is impossible to «engage in dialogue with someone who does not exist», as Russian propaganda constantly repeats. According to the above-mentioned modern Russian ideology of ruscism, the «Ukrainian issue» must be resolved once and for all through the complete destruction of everything Ukrainian. Since 2014, Russia has carried out unprovoked acts of aggression against Ukraine, first occupying the Crimean Peninsula and then launching a proxy war in Donbas. In 2022, it launched a full-scale invasion and, using a wide range of weapons, mercilessly destroys civilian infrastructure, terrorizes, and kills civilians. The Ukrainian army is up against an extremely powerful military machine that uses the full range of sophisticated weapons and periodically threatens to launch a nuclear strike against a non-nuclear country, to which it guaranteed security and territorial integrity by signing the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

V. Neutrality in time of war

41. Neutrality can indeed be the result of prudent judgment and analysis. There are situations in which a country does not want to deepen a conflict because of its involvement in it or wants to mediate between the opposing sides. However, such neutrality has its pitfalls: there is a limit beyond which such a position begins to be a betrayal of one's own values and principles and plays into the hands of the wrongdoer. If it [neutrality] is caused by indifference, cowardice, or a biased or self-serving attitude, it becomes a morally wrong choice rather than a manifestation of a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of the dispute (cf. Prov. 24:11-12; Matt. 12:30; James 4:17; Rev. 3:15-16).
42. Keeping such situations in mind, Pope Pius XII emphasized in his 1948 Christmas message that in the case of unjust aggression, «the solidarity of the family of nations forbids others to behave as mere spectators, by showing impassive neutrality», and added that it was impossible to measure the damage «already done in the past by such

²³ FT, 258.

indifference to wars of aggression" and that such a position "has only reassured and emboldened the authors and instigators of aggression»²⁴.

43. In times of war, neutrality needs to be approached with a delicate understanding of the ethical and moral aspects. There may be a legitimate desire to prevent further bloodshed or to facilitate a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. However, neutrality should not be extended to the point where it becomes a passive approval of injustice and crimes, as there is a moral imperative to oppose unjust aggression against any country and to defend the values on which the international community is based. The lessons of history, as emphasized by Pope Pius XII, are a strong reminder that indifference to acts of aggression can have far-reaching consequences. Nations are obliged to assess the limits of their political neutrality, which cannot become moral, otherwise it will turn into a betrayal of fundamental values and principles. At such critical moments, the international community must rise above mere impartiality and actively work for justice, peace, and the preservation of human dignity.
44. Russian aggression against Ukraine is not a struggle for disputed territory: it is an attack on international law and a crime against peace. The current war in Europe is a zero-sum conflict of identities, as Ukrainians seek to preserve their state independence and the right to be Ukrainians, while Russians seek to deprive Ukrainians of their right to exist as such and revive their empire. The atrocities of the Russian army against civilians, which the whole world is watching almost live, are a brutal outrage on human dignity and a crime of genocide. Maintaining feigned neutrality in such a situation is a betrayal of the values of respect for international law, justice, and human dignity. This is a position based on interests, not principles.
45. Artificial and formal neutrality encourages many to treat both warring parties symmetrically, as politically and morally equal, ignoring the real causes of this war and its circumstances, and therefore it is destined for an ethical defeat. This defeat is also determined by the fact that the Russian-Ukrainian war is radically different from traditional military conflicts. In this situation, it is impossible to maintain moral neutrality; instead, one must make a choice in favor of values: «You cannot serve God and mammon» (Matthew 6:24).
46. Of course, there are countries in the world that, due to a certain historical trajectory or the specifics of their role in the international community, declare permanent neutrality in the event of any armed conflict, and therefore consistently adhere to the principles to which this status obliges them. Among such states, the Holy See occupies a special place, whose positive neutrality means that it does not limit itself to observation but seeks to facilitate dialogue between the parties of the conflict. In serving the cause of peace and international cooperation of the Apostolic See, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of neutrality: diplomatic and moral. However, we do not see moral neutrality in the actions of the Holy See. For example, in the case of Russia's unjust aggression against our Homeland, it clearly distinguishes between the aggressor and the victim of its attack and always supports the one who became this victim - the Ukrainian people.
47. At the same time, the millennial tradition of the role of the Roman Bishop as the highest arbiter of the Christian world, that is, the position «above the parties» at war, has enabled and enables the Vatican to play an important, sometimes decisive role in resolving many conflict situations around the world, as well as to help establish channels for the exchange of prisoners and relieve the suffering of civilians.

²⁴ Radio message to the faithful on Christmas, December 24, 1948.

48. The significance of this mediation cannot be overestimated in the context of Russia's current aggression against Ukraine, as many mothers and wives gratefully recall the Holy Father's role in the release of captured soldiers or deported children. Such facts become especially eloquent when the diplomatic mediation efforts of the Bishop of Rome are harmoniously combined with the language of faith, which dares to call evil evil, healing human wounds with this word of truth, as was the case, for example, on January 8, 2024, during a meeting of Pope Francis with the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. At that time, the Pope reminded the participants that it was Russia that unleashed an aggressive war against Ukraine and emphasized that war crimes require an appropriate response from the international community²⁵.

VI. The goal of legal defense is a just peace

49. In this message to all people of goodwill, we want to emphasize that it is our Christian and civic duty to defend the lives of our neighbors, especially children, women, and the elderly, most courageously and radically possible - by taking up arms and willingly laying down our own lives, as Jesus taught: «No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends» (John 15:13). We are in a situation where we must defend people from non-humans.
50. In Christian ethics, a just peace means more than just a victory over aggression. The ethics of just war, which prevails in the Christian understanding of war and peace, was formed in the Middle Ages when the Church used the concept of justice, a constant desire to give everyone his or her due. This concept became the basis of modern international law, which means the right of nations and peoples to independence. The roots of the understanding of justice can be found in the Bible - here it means all-embracing right relationships, which are expressed by the Hebrew term «tzadik» and the Greek term «dikaiosine». This justice is consistent with rights and the law, but it is broader than that, as it also includes virtues such as giving and mercy. It reaches its climax in God's reconciliation of the world to himself through the cross and resurrection, which the apostle Paul calls the justice of God (cf. Rom. 3:21-26; II Thess. 1:6).
51. Ukrainians, of course, want the war to end as soon as possible and the long-awaited peace to come. Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas believed that the goal of a just war is a just peace. Pope Paul VI reiterated this thesis on the Day of Peace in 1972²⁶. However, the end of war is not true peace if it means the end of Ukraine.
52. The purpose of legitimate defense of one's own people and statehood is to ensure a just peace for all parties, so revenge, conquest, economic gain, and subordination are unacceptable. A just peace can neither be the «appeasement» of the aggressor nor the so-called «minimal peace» that implies recognition of the territories occupied by the aggressor. Such a [just] peace must be long-lasting and permanent, with the restoration of the principles of international law. It involves not only defeating the aggressor and restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity, but also measures aimed at restoring proper relations between Ukraine and Russia and healing the wounds caused by the war: disclosure of the truth and recognition of criminals, international criminal courts, reparations, political apologies and forgiveness, memorials, new constitutions, and local reconciliation forums.

²⁵ Cf. Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Vatican City, January 8, 2024.

²⁶ Cf. Peace Day Address, «If You Want Peace, Work for Justice», January 1, 1972.

53. In order to achieve a just peace in Ukraine, Christian churches, international organizations, and political institutions must be able to use very clear rhetoric to condemn Russia's military aggression and genocidal acts against Ukraine, and to ensure that war criminals are prosecuted. Unpunished evil continues to cause even more damage.
54. The numerous victims that Russia has caused in Ukraine throughout history, particularly in the 20th century, as well as after the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, should be the focus of the international community's attention to properly assess these ongoing atrocities.
55. Russia's aggression in Ukraine has forced the world to live through new experiences and new traumas similar to those that humanity experienced during World War II. The terrible consequences of this Russian invasion need to be addressed now and considered when working to strengthen the security architecture of Ukraine and the world. This global and sustainable security architecture should be based on the principles of a just peace, and the efforts of states, international organizations, and Christian churches should be directed to this end.

Conclusion

56. There is «a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them», said Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 3:5), and our time confirms this. The current regime in Russia has set out to dismantle the recent international security structure, redraw the world, and establish its own rules. The international institutions and mechanisms that supported this order are now showing their powerlessness in the face of the attack of the destroyers of this order.
57. All this was not only a shock to the international community, but also a challenge to the Church of Christ. After all, its teachings, which, on the initiative of the Christian democrats of Europe, set the paradigm for the half-century development of its peaceful civilization, have largely adapted to the conventional rules. Today, we need to remember that the Gospel is not so much a collection of postulates from which Christian doctrine is built as God's word, which encourages us to eternally renew our spirit and rethink the realities of this world.
58. The same Ecclesiastes reminds us: «There is a time to be silent and a time to speak» (cf. Ecc. 3:7). So, there is a time when the Church speaks with a pastoral voice, fulfilling the commandment of the Lord: «Feed my sheep» (John 21:16-17). There is a time when the Church speaks with a teacher's voice, giving instruction: «Go therefore and make disciples of all nations» (Matt. 28:20). And there is a time when the Church must speak with her prophetic voice, giving sick people a ray of hope on how to overcome evil: «They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death» (Revelation 12:11). We, Christians, must pray a lot so that the prophetic voice of Christ's Church becomes convincing.
59. Ukraine has become a center of global change and is facing terrible challenges today. The evil is real - we have seen its face. The voices of the innocently murdered and ruthlessly tortured, brutally raped, and forcibly deported are calling out to the world's conscience. Ukrainians do not question the importance of soberly weighing threats and carefully calibrating political steps. However, it is equally important to maintain the ability to look at current events through the eyes of a victim.
60. The world has failed to stop the Moscow tyrant and warn him that «sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master» (Genesis 4:7). Today, when genocide is being performed online, it is a good time to openly tell this

tyrant that he has brought a curse from Heaven upon himself, dooming himself to «You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth», (cf. Genesis 4:12).

61. How should Christians around the world act now? First of all, we need to realize the global nature of the current threat and to affirm and develop the power of just international law. The belief of some world societies that this war is a purely local conflict between two nations is wrong, and therefore, after reconciling them, it will be possible to return to the usual comfort. Today, all the foundations of human civilization are under threat.
62. For many years, Russia has been using the so-called hybrid warfare as a tool to achieve its imperial, human-hating goals, which includes the creation of economic dependence in individual countries, information warfare through the spread of propaganda and fakes, bribing heads of international organizations and politicians, intimidation and destruction of its own dissident citizens who managed to leave for other countries, and so on. Russia's goal is to cause threats and chaos in order to annex the territories of other countries or offer them its «help» in order to gain control over them. Such an insidious and destructive policy requires the international community to quickly recognize global threats and a clear moral assessment by the Church.
63. By launching a hybrid war against Ukraine, Russia has actually challenged the entire civilized world. It has stirred it up so much that many people have ceased to distinguish between truth and deception, and thus between good and evil. Before our eyes, a terrible substitution is taking place: what is evil is dressed in the dress of good, and what is good is stamped with the stigma of hell. In such a distorted world, it will be impossible to avoid or stop wars. Blurred verbal declarations and vague political language will be powerless, and diplomatic neutrality without clear values and guidelines will gradually turn into moral relativism or even weakness, which already prevents many politicians in the civilized world from recognizing the atrocities of Russian troops in Ukraine as genocide of the Ukrainian people because it would require their intervention. At present, many Christians who belong to the postmodern generation of the Western world simply do not see the genocide of the Ukrainian people and do not hear the cries of the victims, but in order not to lose face, they continue to express their worry and deep concern.
64. All of this can be overcome only by a clear and distinct proclamation of the Gospel Truth. If modern humanity - the humanity of the «post-truth era» - does not recognize objective truth, it will gradually turn into a «post-justice world». If it does not develop and establish social justice based on the main principles of human dignity, sanctity and inviolability of human life, common good, and solidarity, it will end up in societies where the concept of *law* is replaced by the *concept of interests* of certain individuals or criminal groups, the right of the strong prevails over the rule of law, the law is not the same for everyone, and the foundations of international law and the inviolability of state sovereignty fall victim to the geopolitical and economic interests of the world powers of today.
65. The voice of the eternal Gospel Truth, and its implementation in social and international relations, has its own unique history in the tradition of the Kyivan Church and our millennial tradition of state-building. This eternal Truth and Justice is reflected in the light of our St. Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, the unchanging matrix of the development of the Ukrainian people and our native state and is precisely formulated as a guideline for social and international relations in the millennial slogan «Do not let the powerful destroy a man!» from the immortal «Teaching to Children» by Prince Volodymyr Monomakh of Kyiv (1053-1125). «Do not let the powerful

destroy a man!» is the call of the Kyivan Church to the conscience of the modern Christian and its vision of the development of the Church's social teaching on justice and peace in the modern world. «Do not let the powerful destroy a man!» is the call of the suffering Ukraine to the international community to proclaim the objective values of just social construction and international cooperation.

66. The righteous Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, during the madness of World War II, called at archeparchial synods for a new understanding of God's commandments as a way to implement the life-giving principles of the truth of God's law in building a just society. For only by restoring the legislative effect of the Decalogue can we expect the restoration of God's peace. Without this, the next threat facing humanity may be the last. This call is especially relevant in the context of Russian aggression today.
67. «Jesus Christ yesterday and today is the same forever» (Hebrews 13:8). The Lord wants His disciples to be like they were at the beginning of Christianity - courageous in their faithfulness to the truth; not to turn a blind eye to terrible injustice, seeking economic gain and peace of mind. The life of Jesus - His teachings and deeds - are an example and a gracious light for us to be true human beings, created in the image and likeness of God and carrying the peacemaking power of the Holy Spirit. They testify to His wise and just rule in the world. This example is so pure and clear that it cannot be replaced by any opportunistic diplomacy or politics that disregards the dignity and rights of individuals and nations.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

On behalf of the Synod of Bishops

of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

in Ukraine

† **SVIATOSLAV**

Given in Kyiv,

at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,

on the day of the Repose of our Holy Father Constantine, philosopher,

in the monks named Cyril, teacher of the Slavs;

Holy Venerable Father Auxentius;

St. Maron, hermit and miracle worker,

February 14, 2024