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The Holocaust in Ukraine – Christian Leaders

Translation: *D03 Warning by metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky: "Thou Shalt Not Kill" (21 November 1942)*

Andrei Sheptyts'kyi

By God's grace

And with the blessing of the Holy Apostolic Roman See

Metropolitan Archbishop of Galicia and L'viv

Bishop of Kam"ianets'

To the clergy and faithful

The Peace of God and blessing

Thou Shalt Not Kill

The church of Christ never stops reminding the faithful of their Christian duties, the first of which is the duty to observe God's commandments. There are times, however, when society needs to have the faithful solemnly and urgently reminded of this duty. We are profoundly convinced that such a time has come, a time when people are forgetting God's law, when sins are multiplying and are being committed publicly and loudly without sufficient resistance from Christians. This trampling on the holiness of God's law, this denial of the honour that is owed to him, which consists above all of obedience to his holy will, is a great misfortune for people and a great danger. Because God's punishment—the greatest evil and misfortune for mankind—can and does follow the trampling of his law.

Observing manifestations of such abandonment of God's law even among the faithful in the eparchies entrusted to us, fearful for the eternal and worldly good of our beloved people, we do not cease to look for ways to remind people continually of their duties to God. For this purpose we presented to the Archieparchial Council that we summoned, as a subject for consultation and decision, a number of decrees about God's law. The Archieparchial Council of 1941 conferred over the first of God's commandments and over some matters concerning the fourth commandment. Continuing the work begun in 1941, the Archieparchial Council of 1942, in the six solemn sessions that have taken place until now, approved a number of regulations that concern the fourth commandment. The work of the Council proceeded more slowly than we desired because it was our intention from the beginning to place the more specific weight of the council decisions on the observance of the fifth commandment. Waiting for the moment when we would come in logical order to a discussion of the fifth commandment, we have several times in the last year drawn the

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attention of the reverend clergy and our beloved people to the supreme importance of observing the holy law of love for one's neighbour and the extreme social and popular danger of violation of the fifth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill!"

At the preparatory sessions of the Archieparchial Council on 26 November and 3 December of this year our decrees in this matter were read and both preparatory sessions conferred on the regulations that can and should be used to emphasize the observance of this commandment. The two preparatory sessions resolved to submit for approval at the solemn session that is to take place on 10 December of this year some of the regulations concerning our decree. However, these regulations do not exhaust this particularly important matter. This is why we decided to use this solemn epistle to address the reverend clergy and the Christian people of our eparchies and in this manner to fulfill our terrifying duty to the Almighty as shepherd and preacher of the Gospel and in the sight of heaven and earth caution our faithful against the evil that has recently spread amongst them in a horrible fashion and to call on those who have fallen into the sin of murder to repent.

First of all we shall briefly present the importance, sanctity and sublimity of the divine law that orders us to love our neighbours as ourselves, and shall oppose to the luminous image from heaven, that is, the representation of divine probity, the abominable crime of murder, which is the direct and most extreme opposite of the heavenly and most holy duty with which people can assure themselves of both temporal fortune and eternal salvation in heaven.

In the first place, dear brethren, we must remind you that in Christianity love of one's neighbour is everything. Christianity is the teaching of love, and Christian righteousness is the life of love for one's neighbour. All of Jesus Christ's teachings are in that one word: "Let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love[...] and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (1 Jn3:14 [correctly 1 John 4:14]) And Christ loved us sinners so much that he gave his life for us and nourishes us with the holy Eucharist, the sacrament of his flesh and blood; he loved us so much that he wants to pass on to us participation in his eternal kingdom. Love is the supreme goal of the law. (1 Tm 1:5) Love is the fulfilling of all the commandments. (Rom 13:10) Love rescues from sin and covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pt 4:8) Without love, even faith is dead. Without love a man is nothing. Even if he speaks "in the tongues of men and of angels," but has no love, he will be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And though he may have prophetic powers and understands all mysteries and all knowledge and has all faith, so as to remove mountains, but has no love, then he is nothing. And if he gives away all he has, and if he delivers his body to be burned, but has no love, he gains nothing. (1 Cor 13)

Yet true love embraces all neighbours. It is indeed right to love one's closest neighbours more and to love those who are more distant less, but we must embrace all our neighbours with Christian love. The Old Testament said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." But Christ told us, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them

that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Mt 5:[44-]45) He who commits the terrible abominable crime against God's fifth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," does most to renounce the holy all-embracing Christian love of the neighbour for God and destroys itself within him. The murderer excludes himself from the divine society, the family that God intended humankind to be. With his grievous sin against human society the murderer separates himself from human society and draws down on himself God's great punishment in eternity and God's terrible curse in this world.

Just as in the books of divine revelation, almost at the very beginning of his teachings, God set up a monument, not made by [human] hands, of menace, warning and frightening example, the story of Cain and the punishment of being cursed, so in the law of social order, which is also the law of human happiness and prosperity, the Almighty set up a monument of his will for people by putting up the prohibition "Thou shalt not kill!" This means that the foundation of all social order, after the acceptance of and obedience to authority, must be the inviolable sanctity of human life. The Almighty Himself guards that sanctity and says to anyone who has violated it, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood calls to me from earth. Today you are cursed on earth, which has opened its mouth to drink your brother's blood from your hands. When you plough the earth, it will give you no fruit. You will be a wanderer and outlaw on earth!" This verdict of God's teaching falls like a thunderbolt of execration on all who, trampling the sanctity of God's law, shed innocent blood and alienate themselves from human society, disdain what in society is the greatest sanctity, namely human life.

The stain of being cursed that marks a murderer is only an external sign of what befalls an unfortunate soul because of the grievous sin. What is described so forcefully in the psalm takes place in the murderer's dark soul. His offence outgrows his mind. Like a great burden, it is heavier than he can bear. The wound in his soul stinks and rots in his still living and walking corpse. He has scorned the blessing of God's law, and it has distanced itself from him.

He has chosen execration, and execration has befallen him. He has dressed in execration as if it were his own clothing, and it has soaked like water into his viscera and like oil into his bones. It will serve him as the clothing in which he will dress and the belt with which he will always gird himself. God places the godless one over him, and Satan stands at his right side. When the trial comes, he will be found guilty and his prayer will become a sin. His days will be brief. Someone else will acquire his property. His children will become orphans, his wife a widow. His children will wander about and ask alms from those who ruined them. Strangers will steal his work. No one will show him mercy, and there will be no kindness for his orphans.

These are the terrible words in the Psalms that describe the state of execration that the murderer enters (Ps 37:108). This is the fate of the murderer in this world, and participation with the devils and his angels in eternity (Mt 24:41).

Political Killing

Those who delude themselves and others that political killing is not a sin do so in a strange manner, as if politics releases a man from obedience to God's law and justifies a crime that is abhorrent to human nature. This is not so. A Christian is required to observe God's law both in private and in political and social life. A person who sheds the innocent blood of an enemy, a political opponent, is as much a murderer as a person who does this in the course of a robbery and deserves the same punishment from God and excommunication from the church.

A Christian, and not just a Christian but every person, is required by human nature to love his neighbour. Almighty God Jesus Christ, the righteous judge, will judge not only Christians but all people by all their deeds and especially by their deeds of mercy and love for neighbours, as described in the parable about the Last Judgment (Mt 25). The murderer not only had no mercy for the poor suffering prisoner, but did his neighbour the greatest harm that he could by depriving him of his life and that at a moment when the neighbour, unprepared for death, because of it lost all hope of finding life eternal! With this deed he injured all the children of the victim, his wife and his elderly parents who without help from the victim were doomed to hunger and need. But he both killed his neighbour and deprived his soul of supernatural life, God's grace, and led it into an abyss from which there will perhaps be no salvation! Because with the curse of innocent blood he aroused in his soul demons of concupiscence that make him see his own joy in the suffering and pain of his neighbour.

The sight of shed blood arouses in the human soul a sensory concupiscence, united with cruelty, that searches for satisfaction in the infliction of suffering and death on its victims. Bloodthirstiness can become such an unrestrained passion that its greatest delight is torturing and killing people! A murderer who develops such bloodthirstiness and who finds sadistic satisfaction in the sight of his neighbour's suffering, pain and death becomes extremely dangerous to the society in which he lives. Crime becomes his necessary daily nourishment in the absence of which he suffers and is tormented as if he were suffering from a thirst or hunger that he must satisfy. Unfortunate are those people who are condemned to live with such a criminal as a neighbour! In such a society children disappear and crimes are committed for which the culprits cannot be found! And authorities who care about the good of society will have to take who knows what measures to track down and punish such a degenerate individual in whom almost nothing of human nature is left.

Murder is a reserved sin in our eparchy. In a letter dated 27 March 1942 the Metropolitan's Ordinariate imposed on murderers the punishment of ecclesiastic

excommunication, which is reserved for the Ordinariate. Although the excommunication does not require Christians to avoid a Christian on whom this ecclesiastic punishment has been imposed, priests should nonetheless teach the people about excommunication and its consequences so that the priest and the people can work for the repentance and improvement of those unfortunate people who have drawn down excommunication on themselves with their crimes. Let them make murderers understand by their behaviour, their frequently repeated admonitions, their avoidance of company with them, their decisive avoidance of family relations with them that they regard them as a pestilence and a danger to the village. If no one in the village greets the criminal, no one allows him to come into a house, no one speaks to him, no family agrees to become related to him, when even in church Christians avoid standing near him, when people shun him on the wayside, when no one sells him anything or buys anything from him, then perhaps he will reform and begin a life of repentance and work for improvement. Confessors must make every effort to lead penitents to the “fruits worthy of repentance.” And if they have the right to absolve the reserved sin, they must keep in mind that the penance for murder must be appropriate to the magnitude of the crime. If the crime has been committed several times and a sadistic liking for it begins to develop in the criminal’s soul, and if the crimes are publicly known, then they must impose not only severe penance, but also penance that is combined with the public making of amends with the Christian views of the people.

The Murder of Children

Particularly abominable, horrible and contrary to nature are cases in which parents kill their own children. They are perhaps even worse when those children have not been born yet. This circumstance alone, that the father or mother commits the crime, that the child cannot defend itself, that not being christened it loses eternal salvation, all these circumstances make abortion a particular kind of crime. And if we take into account that the murder of children sets the mark of Cain on the whole family and brings down a curse on the first and most important cell of social life, then we can properly understand how much energy, decisiveness and almost, one may say, relentlessness priests must apply to protect the holy social ideals of motherhood and family from the plague that abortion can be. Given such notions regarding a mother’s holy duties, the dignity of motherhood, the social importance of raising numerous progeny in sanctity— notions held by parents who murder their children—what will a society, people and state in which there are such mothers and fathers come to? What sort of an upbringing can parents who have conspired to kill one child give other children?

Similar to the murder of children, although they are a completely different kind of sin, are procedures that spouses use to restrict the number of offspring. These cases are not, of course, the sin of murder, but it is difficult not regard them as a grievous injury to the child that has not in fact been deprived of life, but has been kept from it. We cannot talk about a

true injury here because the child that was to come into the world had not yet acquired any rights as a human being. But had it acquired those rights, it may have brought its parents or even the whole people some of God's consecrated elements, if only it had not been prevented from doing so by the sacrilegious and unnatural actions of those who had been called upon to become parents. Human life is a priceless treasure, in the first place for the parents, and then for the family and the whole people. In order to attain that treasure, people must work and make sacrifices. The work and sacrifices that they invest in the rearing of their children are infinitely more valuable than any other. The human soul is an infinitely more important and valuable creation than all other material goods or consecrated elements.

The practice of restricting the number of offspring is one that leads the whole people to annihilation. A people whose women do not want to submit to the burdens and duties of motherhood, whose men look for sexual pleasure without regard to the duties and burdens of family life, without regard to the purpose of marriage, is doomed to annihilation. Sooner or later it will begin to decline. Even the practice of having two children that most of society has adopted deprives it of more individuals than even fierce and bloody war! This case is not in fact contrary to God's fifth commandment, but we mention it in passing in order to remind the clergy that only its energetic efforts can save the people from the annihilation with which God punishes in the children those families that have trespassed by not accepting God's gift of more numerous offspring.

Suicide

Suicide is one of the cases of murder that have to be discussed separately because it is marked by a particular malice.

A man has no right to dispose of his own life. Just as a soldier does not have the right to abandon the position that has been assigned to him and is treated as a deserter when he abandons it wilfully, so a man who abandons all his duties and the position that God's providence has assigned him is also a deserter. In the nature of things a man is a servant, a creation of God. He is not the master of his life; he is not self-willed. To an even greater degree a Christian is the property of Jesus Christ, a slave purchased at the great price of Christ's blood. That Almighty God and Jesus Christ do not treat a human being as a slave only increases his obligation to subject himself to God's will. Through the blood of Christ the Saviour God forgives the sinner his original sin and then all the sins that he confesses. God accepts him as his child, his heir, and gives him the right to be a member of the community of heaven together with the angels and the saints, but God's endless mercy does not release him from the duties imposed on him by nature itself. These duties become even more important because they are sanctified by God's grace. When a Christian commits suicide, he not only violates God's right and his own duties as a slave, but also oversteps the holy duties of God's son. Furthermore, he commits the crime of murder, a crime [text missing in the

original] Judge. The circumstance that the victim is the same as the murderer or that he agrees to be murdered and asks the murderer to deprive him of his life does not change the nature of the murder. The suicide is beyond doubt a criminal! He has committed a crime that makes his eternal condemnation almost certain. So it is entirely right that according to ecclesiastical law priests are not allowed to conduct Christian funerals for persons who have committed suicide. His body is not the holy relic of a Christian, and he is not owed a Christian funeral in sacred ground with prayers from the church and incense. His body, like a beast's carrion, has to be buried beyond the place intended for the funeral of a Christian.

Suicide has other features that reveal the murderer's selfish and base character. He wants to save only himself and disregards his duties and his wife and children. He escapes in fear from suffering, pain or the difficulties of life. He does not have the courage to accept from God's hands the cross that God gives him.

A person who does not know what he is doing, who throws himself to the ground from an upper story in a delirium or fury, obviously cannot be considered a suicide. He does not want to kill himself, but he does not know what he is doing and is to a certain extent insane. There is even a malady, doctors say, in which a person searches for a way to commit suicide. These people are overcome by a psychic need that pushes them into madness and commission of a terrible action. Suicides can certainly be completely innocent before God, but there is no doubt that good sermons about suicide can restrain even such ignorant people.

Priests must therefore present suicide as an abominable crime and describe the horrible situation in which a person faces God's judgment stained by still warm blood. Fortunately the suicide who can repent before he dies. Such a person can obviously be given a Christian burial.

The ecclesiastic law that forbids Christian funerals for suicides is very difficult for the families, and the church authorities find it difficult to justify a strict observance of church regulations. However, this is absolutely necessary. Because experience teaches that the thought of refusal of a Christian funeral helps overcome the temptation of suicide. I remember a case when young recruits in an Austrian regiment committed suicide out of homesickness and longing for their families. The general or colonel gave very strict orders to refuse funerals for these suicides. He emphasized his order by making a very energetic speech to his regiments. The fact is, and this was authentically confirmed, that after his speech and order there was not a single incident of such death.

The Archieparchial Council should call on the clergy to deliver very decisive and energetic sermons about the crime that we are discussing, particularly at a time when so many people are suffering from nervous illness and when the circumstances of life are so difficult and unpleasant that life often seems simply impossible!

Murder of a Fellow Citizen

Since we have occasion to weep over the incidents of murder committed against fellow citizens of the same Ukrainian nationality, we also have to mention with great pain in our heart the hostilities, hatred and strife that push brothers to civil war. There really must be blindness, which is caused perhaps by the devil, the greatest enemy of our salvation, if people who are intelligent and care about society and the good of the people can come to such a degree of party hatred that they are ready to shed blood. This disposition of hatred towards one's own and close people is so contrary to nature and so horrible and testifies so much to degeneration and to a decline in national conscience and patriotic spirit that it is impossible to talk about such cases without feeling profound spiritual pain! Even when this hatred and hostility do not lead as far as extreme cases of murder, they are still a public misfortune and cause the people more harm than the most implacable enemy. Ukraine does not need other enemies when Ukrainians are one another's enemies, hate one another and are not even ashamed of that hatred! Christ said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?" (Lk 11:[17-]18) As long as there is no Christian unity among us, so long our weakest opponent will be stronger than we are! As long as in national questions Ukrainians think more about their individual welfare, so long will the general cause not be able to develop successfully. That general cause will simply not exist because there will be nothing of it in people's minds and conscience!

Calling on the reverend clergy to deliver earnest and energetic sermons about love for one's neighbour and to an earnest struggle with all violations of the fifth commandment, I particularly address a suppliant appeal to devout Christians, monasteries, convents, brotherhoods and perhaps above all to innocent children in schools to pray for peace among Ukrainians themselves. We pray for general peace for humanity because the horrible misfortune that is the present war shows us every day how much people need peace. If we pray for peace for humanity, how much more do we need to pray for peace amongst our people, internal peace, an end to hatred, strife, hostility and, I say this with tears, bloodshed.

The world is dying for want of love, dying because of human hatred! Let us continue to beseech the Almighty for the warm plentiful rain of his grace from heaven.

Finally I address all of you, my dear brethren and faithful, and earnestly urge you to maintain the greatest possible peace. Wartime brings us more than one suffering and more than one temptation. It is a question only of remaining within God's law through his grace and hoping that his most holy mercy will turn all the suffering he has sent us to our benefit. We accept our experiences from God's hands; nothing happens without the will of the Heavenly Father. God, the good Father, will have mercy on us, will forgive us our sins and let us live to see blessed peacetime.

Do not let yourselves, my dear ones, be led away from the path of God's law by temptation to sin. Do not listen to people who incite you to commit various crimes. There

are among them those who urge you to abandon the faith of your parents. Do not forget that apostasy is a grievous sin that is very difficult to expiate. Stand firm in your faith, hold on to hope, love our Heavenly Father and our dear Saviour, love your neighbours like God's children, for God, with the Christian love for one's neighbours, and may the Almighty protect you from all evil, may he watch over your families and your children.

Blessings to you and peace from our God and from Lord Jesus Christ.

Issued in L'viv on 21 November, the day of Presentation at the Temple.

Andrei, Metropolitan

Translated by Marco Carynnyk