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The Holocaust in Ukraine – Christian Leaders

Translation: *D02 Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky Informs Pope Pius XII about Murders of Jews, Lviv, 29-31 August 1942*

Lviv, 29-31 August 1942

Holy Father,

I did not write to Your Holiness since we live under the German regime, as there never was enough surety that my letter would not fall into the hands of those who should not read it. Hoping, however, to have a good opportunity in the nearest future, I write these few test words in the hope that they will reach Your Holiness.

Freed from the Bolshevik yoke by the German Army, we have felt some relief which all the same did not last more than a month or two. Gradually the Government has instituted a regime of terror and truly unbelievable corruption which is – day by day – becoming more onerous and unbearable. Today, the entire country agrees that the German regime is bad and diabolical to a maybe even higher degree than the Bolshevik regime. Since then, for at least a year, there is no day when the most horrible crimes, murders, thefts and robberies, confiscations and extortions are not committed. The Jews were the first victims. The number of Jews killed in our little country certainly exceeded two hundred thousand. As the army advanced eastward, the number of victims grew. In Kiev, in a few days, one has executed a hundred thirty thousand men, women and children. All the small towns of Ukraine have witnessed similar massacres and this has been going on for a year. The authorities had, in the beginning, been ashamed of such inhuman acts of injustice and tried to make sure there were documents which could prove that the local inhabitants or militia men were the perpetrators of these murders. Over time, they began killing Jews in the streets, in full public view and shamelessly. Naturally masses of Christians, not only baptized Jews, but “Aryan” as they say, were also victims of unjustified killings. Hundreds of thousands of arrests, mostly unjust, crowds of young men shot without any plausible reason, a regime of serfdom applied to the rural population, which one has imprisoned, moreover, almost all the youth forced to go to Germany as factory workers or agricultural labourers; one takes away almost everything the peasants produce, and has started to require twice as much. One has proclaimed the death penalty for all those who sell or all those who buy anything directly from the producers. One proclaims repeatedly restitution of private property, without realizing those promises. Conversely, the Authorities will help themselves without reservations to all the property confiscated by the Bolsheviks and declare that all the land is state property. It is often said quietly that the property of individuals are the spoils of war. They continue, broaden and deepen the Bolshevik system. There are certainly, among the leaders, honest people. One sometimes even meets good Catholics, but the vast majority of

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all civil servants who have been sent are people without faith or law, who allow themselves quite incredible abuses. One treats the villagers like the blacks in the colonies. They have been whipped, one slaps them without any reason, one confiscates all the food they are carrying, e.g. to give to their children in town, and it's all done with so little human feeling that one does not even believe in the possibility that the types one meets do exist. And yet they are real. For sure witness, I know that e.g. one district chief has the passion to personally confiscate whatever he can find in the baskets of villagers going to town by throwing it into the river. He did so during times of real famine which raged before harvest in many villages. And nobody dares complain because he would avenge himself with death. One cannot do anything to him because he is said to have high-ranking protection.

A trustworthy eyewitness told me that he personally saw a young SS officer rush from afar in order not to lose the opportunity to give a blow to a dying man, unknown to the rest, and killed by the police for wanting to do something that displeased it.

I can supply multiple similar cases, which are innumerable.

It's just as if a band of madmen or rabid wolves had cut down this poor people. And these are not only the peasants and ordinary folk who are thus exposed to beats and blows. A clerk, if he is German, who has dealings with a non-German official two or three times higher than him, allows himself to beat e.g. a prosecutor.

Police men suddenly beat up the public using rubber bludgeons in the stations, or even in the streets. Sometimes they let loose police dogs against the public. These dogs sometimes have muzzles, but there are cases when they do not.

Despite our repeated requests to restore order in the small rural farms which, under the Bolsheviks, had been de facto confiscated, but not "nationalized", as they said, we got nothing and the endowment of the clergy is almost reduced to what is given to the poor. I should mention, with great gratitude, the relief German Catholics have given us, through the channel of an association to help the Germans outside the borders of the Reich. The Ukrainian clergy indeed gets what one calls "eine freiwillige Unterstützung" [voluntary support] – 50 RM per month – from the Government, but this is more of a "political demonstration" than true support. Yet we are expected to pay 25% as tax on it. One does not yet apply the anti-Catholic laws of the Reich. One allows priests to teach the catechism to children in the schools. One does not yet meddle too much in sermons and the administration of parishes. One wishes to regulate marriage, but not in an anti-canonical sense. One mandates to vex the clergy like all citizens by passports requirements, permissions and all sorts of restrictive proscriptions against civil liberties which one can only imagine. But one does allow for the opening of seminars, for example. Our seminar and our theological academy function almost normally. However real persecution threatens us continually, like a sword of Damocles over our heads. One allows me to print the official

organ of the diocese every month, i.e. the Pastoral Letters and Instructions. One confiscates them for the most trivial reasons in the world. But I was able, nevertheless, to publish six fairly full issues, of about 32 pp. each. I was able to convoke a diocesan synod, which lasts almost throughout the year with large intervals and gives me the opportunity to be in continuous communication with the clergy of the diocese. The monasteries are reorganizing gradually. But all this is far from being a sufficient counterweight to the demoralization without a name experienced by the simple and the weak. They in fact learn to steal, to commit homicides; they lose the sense of justice and humanity. I protested by Pastoral Letters against homicide; naturally these were confiscated, but reread four or five times before the assembled clergy. I have declared homicide to be a reason for excommunication reserved to the Ordinary. I again protested in a letter written to Himmler and I tried to prevent young people from registering their names in the militias where they can become scandalised.

But all this is nothing compared to the growing waves of moral filth that overwhelm the whole country.

We all expect the regime of terror will grow, and that it will turn much more often against Christians, Ukrainians and Poles. The executioners, in fact, used to massacring the Jews, thousands of innocent people, are used to see blood flow and have blood lust.

Because now everything is already allowed to the Germans, it is likely that their anger will not know how to stop, and there will be no power to impose any discipline. We therefore expect that the whole country will still be immersed in the waves of innocent blood unless some extraordinary event will stop the tide.

The only consolation one can have in these terrible times is that nothing happens to us without the will of our Heavenly Father. I think that among the massacred Jews there are many souls who are converting to God; for centuries they have never been placed before the probability of a violent death as in the present, often for months before it becomes an actuality. The fate of Christians, of which hundreds of thousands are dead or dying without sacraments, is also in the hand of God. What pain is it to see these poor dissidents starve or be executed in the concentration camps, unable to do anything for them. Because, really, it amounts to nothing, what can be done. One does not ordinarily allow hospitals to serve prisoner of war or concentration camps, where hundreds were dying every day, in a few months the vast majority of all prisoners. I have statistics and discouraging and frightening lists. One does not let our priests serve our faithful, who are numerous in Greater Ukraine. One is afraid for the cause of the Union of the Churches. One is afraid of any concord, because if any regime uses amply and even deftly the maxim "Divide ...", it is the regime that we are the victims of. I do not add any criticism of the system that Your Holiness puts together much better than all of us. This system of lies, deceit, injustice, looting, of a caricature of all ideas of civilization and order. This system of selfishness exaggerated to

absurdity, national chauvinism quite mad, of hatred of all that is honest and beautiful, this system is something so phenomenal, that stupor is, perhaps, the first feeling one feels at the sight of this monster. To what does this system lead the unfortunate German nation? This may be a degeneration of race as history has not known it yet. God grant that they do not pull into their fall parts of the Catholic Church which cannot not feel the counter-shock of this hellish influence.

If the persecution takes the form of killings because of religion, it may be the salvation of these lands. There is a huge need for blood voluntarily offered to expiate the blood shed by the crimes. Three years ago Your Holiness denied me the grace of an Apostolic Blessing which by its apostolic mission would have designated and destined me to a death for the salvation of my diocese. I did not insist, persuaded that Your Holiness could see better than I; I think I lost the best and perhaps the only occasion under the Bolsheviks. But these three years have taught me that I am not worthy of such a death. And I understood that the sacrifice of my life probably would have less value before God than a prayer recited by a child. Today I ask for a special Blessing for my prayers and sacrifices. The huge portion of these sacrifices is destined for the entire Catholic Church, a small part remains for my diocese and my people, but these sacrifices will be fruitful only by the Blessing of Your Holiness and the grace of God that this Blessing obtains for us.

Therefore, prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, I beg for You to want to properly bestow Your Apostolic Blessing to my poor people, the poor clergy of my poor diocese and my nullity.

*Translated by Giles Bennett*