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Academic address by His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk
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Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas
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Most Reverend Excellency, Most Reverend Father Rector, professors, dear students,

For eight months now, Ukraine has been the victim of large-scale Russian military aggression, i.e., the war that has brought death, destruction and much suffering to our land.

To understand the seriousness of the situation in our country, I wish to quote here some official data from the Ukrainian government and various international organisations. As of October 11, 2022, it appears that, since the beginning of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, 422 children have died and 805 children have been wounded. According to UNICEF in Ukraine, about 1.6 million children are at risk of living on the brink of hunger and are facing food shortages.

Attacks on the water network's infrastructure and power outages have deprived about 1.4 million people in Ukraine of access to water. Another 4.6 million have only limited access.

Putin announced the comprehensive "Screening" of children in the temporarily occupied portions of the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk and Luhansk regions. That terminology, as used by the leader of the occupying power, is to be understood as "denazification" or, in other words, genocide of Ukrainian children. The media of the aggressor state have rebroadcast the principal ideas of this process: the eradication of a "chronic disease" in children, namely Ukrainian national identity, history and memory. Children will be brainwashed and bombarded by Russian propaganda.

To date, according to data from the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission, 6,221 civilians have been killed and 9,371 civilians have been injured.

On Oct. 10, in a forest plantation in the village of Synycheno, in the Izyum district of the Kharkiv region, law enforcement officials found the tortured body of a man. His head was completely wrapped in cloth while his hands were tied with rope. Believe me, we have many such cases in Ukraine.

Murder of the the civilian population, shelling of peaceful towns, and civilian targets by the army of the aggressor state are war crimes and crimes against humanity which the aggressor commits in every Ukrainian town that it manages to occupy.

According to the UN, due to Russia's war against Ukraine, 14.3 million people have been forced to flee in search of safety. From February to October, more than 13.7 million (13,736,198) people crossed Ukraine's border. According to the Ministry of Social Policy, some 4.7 million Internally Displaced Persons are officially registered in Ukraine.

These facts, and especially the experience of the war lived out in the lives of our people, make us realize that this is not just one country's war against another, let alone a simple "military operation," but a true genocide of our people and the terrible crimes of Russia's war in Ukraine.

During my visits to Ukrainian cities that had been occupied by the Russian army and subsequently liberated, I became an eyewitness to these incidents: I saw the tragedy of the mass graves of civilians; I heard several testimonies of rape victims committed by Russian soldiers; We were shaken by the harrowing testimony of the corpses executed and abandoned on the streets of our cities.

Unfortunately, these were not isolated cases but the systematic actions of Putin's army at the expense of the innocent people of Ukraine. Mass graves have been found in Bucha, Mariupol, Makariv, and probably there will be more. There have been many cases of torture of civilians and of children. Among the many war crimes, there is also the bombing of the Mariupol theatre, which happened despite the fact that the word "children" had been stamped on the pavement and was clearly visible from above.

Another weapon of war against the civilian population is sexual violence. Rape, psychologists explain, is usually performed in public, to humiliate people considered in need of re-education. Rape is used to terrorize and intimidate others who are forced to watch. The gunmen receive not only permissions, but also orders to do so: which is demonstrated by the phenomenon of extreme revelation of evil. Of these terrible facts we already have the evidence collected by international organisations, confirmed both with new technologies and with the use of traditional methods.

When I saw a family – father, mother and two little girls aged 6 and 11, murdered and then burned – I confess to you, humanly speaking, a question arose within me: *Why, Lord?* This existential question makes us realise that our world, a world on the threshold of the third millennium, was forever changed after February 24, 2022. This question challenges our human and Christian consciousness today and poses questions to contemporary civilization and the intellectual world of the Church.

Finding adequate answers to this cry of pain of the human heart becomes a challenge and duty. Today it is becoming more and more evident that this evil, which has shaken humanity and threatens to explode a new world war, has a clear ideological structure called the ideology of the "Russian world." A few weeks after the war began, an official Russian website "Ria Novosti," one of the best-known news agencies in Russia, published a document explaining the reasons and orders given to Russian soldiers to conduct this mission. A commentary entitled "*What Russia should do with Ukraine*" is written by Timofey Sergejtsev, who explains what Moscow means by denazification, one of Putin's proclaimed goals of the war in Ukraine (English translation, *What should Russia do with Ukraine?*

https://medium.com/@kravchenko_mm/what-should-russia-do-with-ukraine-translation-of-a-propaganda-article-by-a-russian-journalist-a3e92e3cb64).

With deep sorrow I must testify that this agenda was executed by the Russian military "to the letter" and turned into unprecedented cruelty to the civilian population. This text, with its cruel clarity, shook the academic and scholarly world to such a degree that Timothy Snyder, the well-known scholar of the Shoah in the territory of the former Soviet Union, called it Russia's handbook of Ukrainian genocide (*Russia's genocide handbook*,

<https://snyder.substack.com/p/russias-genocide-handbook?s=r>). He writes,

"The Russian handbook is one of the most openly genocidal documents I have ever seen."

But the deepest pain is to hear a Christian justification of the Russian war against Ukraine, that is, the Russian Orthodox Church's perfect support and harmony with the ideology of the "Russian world." Starting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and extending all the way to propagandists, Orthodox priests who methodically justify these crimes, the Christian message is being instrumentalized for the Russian nationalist ideological purpose. This justification of war is getting closer and closer to the Isis doctrine elaborated by the Islamic State. The propagandists themselves explicitly cite it; they put forward the same arguments, although wrapped in this case in Christian garments. Even clerics in these churches wearing liturgical vestments shoot into battlefields, proclaiming "Christ is risen." Others teach how to load weapons by accompanying ammunition with prayers.

The leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate has proclaimed a metaphysical war, that is, a war against universal globalism, especially Western and American globalism. That is why the Holy Father Francis called this war a sacrilegious war.

Throughout the entire period of the war in Ukraine, unfortunately, we have not heard – from the bishops of the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, let alone from the Patriarch – any words against the war, nor expressions of solidarity with, at the very least, their own Orthodox faithful residing in our country; we have not found any appeals to Russian soldiers to refrain from cruelty to innocent people and to behave humanely with the hostages, the wounded and the civilian population, far from it: we heard the glorification of war crimes and the ideology of violence by Patriarch Kirill himself.

Importantly, more than 1,300 prominent theologians of Orthodox Churches around the world have condemned the ideology of the "Russian world" as a heresy of ethno philosophical religious fundamentalism of a totalitarian nature.

[\(https://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2022/04/11/over-1300-orthodox-theologians-conde-mn-heresy-of-russian-world/\)](https://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2022/04/11/over-1300-orthodox-theologians-conde-mn-heresy-of-russian-world/).

It is especially important to note that, at the international level, the ecumenical reaction to this war has been one of explicit condemnation. We are very grateful to the Ecumenical Council of Churches (ECC), and its Secretary Rev. Ioan Sauca, who addressed an open letter to the Patriarch of Moscow asking him to stop the war. The Primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, also contacted Patriarch Kirill to explicitly condemn

this war and ask that everything possible be done to stop the slaughter. In the Orthodox world, a clear and eloquent condemnation of this war was also made by His Holiness Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople. The Holy Father Francis, on several occasions, has denounced this war as "morally unjust, barbaric and sacrilegious."

Dearest academic community of one of the most prestigious pontifical universities,

I am very grateful to you for the opportunity to share with you the pain and the outcry of the Ukrainian people, but above all, I take this opportunity to invite you to study and work out an intellectual assessment of the causes and consequences of the war in Ukraine, with special attention to the ideology of the "Russian world" which is becoming a huge challenge to the credibility of the Christian message and objective truth, a serious threat to international law and peaceful coexistence among peoples. In this way I appeal to all scholars around the world, in particular to Catholic universities, not to remain silent. The genocide of the Ukrainian people perpetrated on our land by the Russian Federation – if not denounced and stopped today – will tomorrow be the cause of the countless victims as Nazism and Communism have already done in the last century. We feel an urgent need for an in-depth study of the issues of violence, war, and the quest for peace and justice in the context of the new ideology of the "Russian world," to develop a theological vision capable of responding to the challenges of the third millennium. The fruits of such reflections might become very useful for both Christians and the secular world.

To all of you I send the warmest greetings from the country fighting for freedom and European values, I thank you for every gesture of your solidarity, and ask you to continue to pray for peace in Ukraine and the world.