

Letter to Putin and Patriarch Kirill

Call for PEACE

In your speech on February 24, 2022, you, Mr. Putin, spoke the following words:

“Freedom is the guiding principle of our policy, the freedom independently to choose our future and the future of our children. We are of the opinion that all the peoples that live in the current Ukraine, everyone who wants to, should be able to enjoy this right to make a free choice. (...)

I ask you, however difficult this may be, to understand this and work together with us to turn this tragic page as quickly as possible and move forward together, without allowing anyone to interfere in our business and our relations, but to develop these independently, so that favorable conditions can be created to overcome all these problems and strengthen ourselves from within as one whole, despite the existence of national borders. I believe in this, in our common future.”

We conclude from your words that you seek the good of all. We would like to affirm this. This common future, so we believe, is only possible if all persons and peoples can move forward together in freedom and in peace. Only then will universal security exist for all parties. We deem, however, that from your perspective, both geopolitically and otherwise, there are options for ways to attain this good of all more adequately and optimally.

On May 15, 2022, Pope Francis will canonize the Carmelite Titus Brandsma. This is the reason for our call to end all military operations and acts of war between Russia and Ukraine. In 1931, at a time when tensions and unrest were increasing between countries in Europe, Titus Brandsma made an appeal for peace and disarmament. His commitment to peace and his resistance to violence and oppression led to his arrest and ultimately his deportation to the concentration camp Dachau. He died there in 1942, as a martyr of war. Titus Brandsma permanently regarded even the oppressors in the camp with the eyes of Love. In every human person, and therefore also in them, he recognized the Countenance of Christ. For us, Brandsma is an example of Christian life that, in the Europe of 2022, reminds us and all of humanity of the dignity of every human person.

Through the holy fathers, the Orthodox tradition also speaks of the dignity of the human person, as well as of war and peace. They first and foremost warned us about the source of this external conflict, the inner war that takes place in each human heart. We are ourselves, as human beings, at war as

long as we live, torn between personal pain and God's call to non-violence. Our inner war is first of all a spiritual war. That is the war we have to fight, inside ourselves, so that we do not take it outside ourselves and make the world pay for one single story of pain. We must, more than ever, these days, reflect and keep in our hearts the words of St Silouan the Athonite, who teaches us: 'The condition of peace among men is that each should keep a consciousness of his own wrongdoing.' But also: 'Look at the man who likes to have his own way. His soul is never at peace and he is always discontented: this is not right and that is not as it should be. But the man who is entirely given over to the will of God can pray with a pure mind, his soul loves the Lord, and he finds everything pleasant and agreeable.' Christ himself is our teacher in this. By disarming Peter, He disarmed each and every one of us.

The Russian 'people' is the bearer of a beautiful history and culture that is admired throughout the world. This is also true of the other European 'peoples' or communities that, each in very different ways, contribute wonderfully to the colorful history of humanity. This also holds true, therefore, for Ukraine. There are of course high points and sometimes missteps, but the challenge before us is to call forth the best in one another and learn from one another, with an attitude of openness and respect. Individual or national self-interest tends to reject the otherness of a person or a people as undesirable and inferior. This is a lie that does not lead to greater safety or happiness. On the contrary, this is a subtle form of abuse or murder that all too easily leads to unscrupulously killing the other or another people, under the guise of protecting one's own rights and safety.

The dignity of every human person consists in being the image of God's Countenance. The beating heart of every human being is the Countenance of God. For this reason, every person is worthy of love, every person is wanted. Every 'people' - or what we usually designate as a people - and all the members of that people deserve a high degree of respect and appreciation. For everywhere in the world there is one truth: Love. Everywhere in the world, the essence of every human soul is Love. In our heart, we all know this. This 'knowledge' is the basis for human co-existence all over the world, throughout the history of humanity. Sometimes, this knowledge seems temporarily forgotten and mutual respect and co-existence turn into mutual condemnation and strife. When we forget that the essence of human life is Love, such as currently in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, there is reason to call on one another to remain true to one's own and our common human dignity.

Standing up for the dignity of every human person is only possible on the basis of love for humanity, for every person. This calls for inner, spiritual strength. If instead of only concerning ourselves with material growth, we together also and mainly concern ourselves with spiritual growth, we offer every person and every people the chance to attain an optimal development. A development that brings true 'wealth' for every human being and every distinct 'people'. A wealth that consists in respectful and fruitful relationships, in which the safety of everyone is paramount.

For this reason, we call on you in the name of humanity to immediately put an end to all acts of war and military operations. Let us together build a new world that is based on mutual respect, interconnectedness, and love. A world in which every human person can feel welcome. Then we can live in peace with one another and fully enjoy the human and cultural wealth as persons and peoples.

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We call on all organizations that know themselves to be responsible for peace and the dignity of every human being anywhere on earth to support this appeal and spread it to as many people as possible who look forward with longing to a new world where there is room for every human being, today and tomorrow. Let us not limit ourselves to burying the fallen of whichever party, but together look forward to the birth of the true human everywhere on earth!