



Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the XII Christmas Parliamentary Meetings at the Federation Council of the Russian Federation



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*On the 23rd of January 2024, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' **spoke** at the **plenary session of** the XII Christmas Parliamentary Meetings in the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.*

Dear Valentina Ivanovna! Dear participants of the XII Christmas Parliamentary Meetings! Dear brothers and sisters!

I cordially welcome you all and express my joy and satisfaction at the established tradition of holding such meetings on the platform of the Federation Council and the State Duma.

Addressing the Chairman of the Federation Council and distinguished senators, I would like to note that the

Church has always highly valued dialogue with the upper house of the Russian parliament on a wide range of issues: from protecting the rights of our fellow citizens, developing public life, strengthening civil peace and harmony to preserving Russia's spiritual and cultural heritage and traditional moral values.

The work of the Parliament, the work of each of you largely determines the well-being of our people and the entire country, as well as the successful development of state-society relations. This is not a closed office work, but a living link with the people, and you know it well, because you not only sit in this hall, but also communicate with your constituents, the residents of the regions you represent. In the practical implementation of this principle of communication with the people lies true people's power, proclaimed and defended by the Constitution of our country.

The responsibility entrusted to parliamentarians is truly great and has not only a significant professional but also a very sensitive moral significance. Therefore, each time we address the representatives of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, conducting a heart-to-heart dialogue with legislators, we try to convey to our fellow citizens, those in power, the expectations, aspirations and problems of Orthodox believers, and not only Orthodox believers, but also believing citizens of our country in general, who undoubtedly make up the majority of the inhabitants of Russia, as well as to formulate the position of the Russian Orthodox Church on topical issues and to express the concerns that the Church and its faithful members have about various problems. There are quite a lot of such issues at the moment.

Let me move on to consider these issues, the first of which is global change in the world and the role of values shared by people.

As we know, times are never simple; in the past few years, however, global turbulence has been increasing rapidly. We are experiencing a period of, without exaggeration, epochal changes in international relations and in the life of many countries and peoples, and our country is no exception. The unfolding global crisis concerns many aspects of life, but the Church is called to evaluate what belongs to the sphere of spiritual and moral values. Unfortunately, there are very alarming trends in this area.

It is no secret that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a significant part of our society felt a certain optimism about the development of relations with the Western world. And the optimism was a bit childish: cars are better there, houses are better, salaries are higher, so what else do we need? There was virtually no assessment of the cultural and spiritual state of Western society. We had an ideology before, we were disappointed in it, but no one looked for an alternative here, on the spot, although there was and is such an alternative - the spiritual, historical, cultural tradition of our people. The alternative was sought exclusively abroad, hence the uncritical perception of the Western civilisation by the majority of our citizens and especially by our elites. They saw only good things in it and did not express anything critical about it.

And now a few words about the Western world. It is well known that the European Union was founded by people whose Christian beliefs shaped much of their public and political activity: for example, French Prime Minister Robert Schumann or German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.

In those years we saw in European integration, among other things, the prospects for cooperation in the Christianisation of public life in Russia. But in just a few decades, the Western world has reoriented itself to values that are completely different - and to put it bluntly - hostile to Christianity. And this is a fact.

Western elites are now waging, in essence, a war against the institution of the traditional family - of course, under the pretext of respect for human rights, free choice and so on and so forth. Gender ideology in its many variations, from juvenile technologies to the legalisation of same-sex cohabitation, massive propaganda for sex change and other moral perversions that are *indecent to name* (Eph. 5:3), is destroying traditional European culture, including the moral values generated by Christianity and adopted by European humanism. We are told that European humanism has its roots, among other things, in pagan-antique culture - but all European humanism grew out of the Christian principles! Another thing is that the consciousness of the leaders of public opinion has been reformatted, so that Christian origins have been silenced, imposing a different theory of the emergence of European humanism.

Today we can regretfully state that the elites of Western countries are actually deconstructing the Christian heritage, abandoning their spiritual roots - everything that formed Western civilisation as such and made possible its previous successes and achievements in scientific, cultural, socio-political spheres. The European house increasingly resembles, in the Gospel expression, a *painted coffin, which appears beautiful on the outside, but inside is full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness* (Matthew 23:27). Yes, the building is still beautiful on the outside, striking in its splendour and luxury, but the foundations are hopelessly sagging, the communications are rotten, the load-bearing walls are about to collapse....

I say this without the slightest gloating or arrogance. I have lived in the West, I know Western life well, and I remember the moral and religious state of Western society thirty or forty years ago. It was a different society, different values prevailed there, and therefore it was quite easy for us Orthodox people to come into contact with Western Christians. Why did we join the World Council of Churches in 1962? And there was no opposition in Russia to that step, because the development of relations with Western Christians was perceived as a norm, as something very positive. But I will not talk about the disappointment that has befallen us in recent decades.

Now we can ask the question: what next? How does everything that is happening in the West today in the field of relations between the sexes, in the field of personal and public morality relate to our country? It is possible, of course, to lament and complain that Western political elites, like *blind leaders* (Matthew 15:14), are leading their peoples to the abyss, to moral and spiritual devastation. But Russia must learn a lesson from this and realise how important it is to remain faithful to its spiritual traditions and values. We must not stumble on what Western countries have stumbled on - that is what we must remember. To learn a lesson not just theoretically, moralising, but actually correcting those crookednesses, sinful tendencies, which are already partly present in our public life. This should by no means become a reason for Pharisaic pride, saying that we are not like them. As Christ said, first of all we should look at ourselves and confess our weakness, our sinfulness. We should not look down on anyone, we should fight against this temptation in every possible way, because pride always blinds the mind and hardens the heart, preventing us from seeing the problems clearly and distinctly and realising the dangers. Dangers do exist, and they are not insignificant.

The main of them lies in the ideal of happiness and the way of life, which is promoted and so appealingly embodied by Western civilisation, which in its version of the last centuries has become, in fact, the culture of the "golden calf" and which puts economic values and earthly well-being at the centre.

Many people perceive the Western world as a vivid image of abundant material wealth, a fairy-tale land of happiness and comfort. This is eloquently evidenced, in particular, by the flows of refugees that have flooded European countries in recent years. After all, people are fleeing for happiness, sometimes exposing their lives to terrible dangers; they are looking for a well-fed and prosperous life. Of course, this is not objectionable in itself. But at the same time, it should be noted that they themselves refuse to create this life in their countries, they are unable to do so due to various circumstances. They want to come ready-made and *build*, as Apostle Paul says, their life *on someone else's foundation* (Romans 15:20). Unfortunately, this situation is familiar to you and me.

It is not only that migrants who came to Europe do not want to integrate, learn the language, history and culture of these countries. Europe's migration problem is connected with the fact that migrants have met a very weakened and disorientated, from a spiritual point of view, environment. Why did this happen? Because Europeans are no longer aware of their Christian roots, they are ashamed of them. They shamefully avoid mentioning Christ even in the names of holidays. Even Christmas cannot be written - Xmas, i.e. the word "Christ" cannot be used in public. They remove crosses from places where they were traditionally located, such as classrooms, and try to adapt biblical texts to justify gender ideology. But the holy place, as they say in our nation, is never empty. Therefore, it is quite possible that the "flowering garden" of Europe will soon take on very different shapes and forms, which have little in common with what we are used to admiring.

However, I repeat: when discussing this, we should not gloat, but openly put uncomfortable questions before our society and ourselves, especially since certain disturbing tendencies are present in our country. Being fascinated by European culture and the material benefits it promises, many of our compatriots, sympathetic to the Western way of life, condescend to the moral deviations and outrages of modern Europe, considering them, at best, either quirks or a normal manifestation of freedom and democracy.

There is a great danger in this approach, including for our society. Church tradition has preserved for us the words of the outstanding teacher and Saint Basil the Great, the great philosopher and theologian, who warned: *"Whoever looks at evil without disgust will soon look at it with pleasure"*. Strongest words. There is no disgust for evil - it will become a pleasure. Together with love for Western values and immoderate longing for European prosperity and satiety, such people imperceptibly carry into the public space and tolerant attitude towards sin, which has caused the moral degradation of modern European civilisation.

We should not be ashamed to call evil evil and sin sin sin. People of different religions are present in this hall, but I think that all of you will agree with an important thesis common to all traditional religions: real human freedom is connected with realisation of moral responsibility. If there is no moral responsibility, don't try to organise a free society, it will turn into hell! And no laws will not help, because sinfully liberated human nature will strive for evil. This is the law, we did not invent it, and in theology it is described very well. That is why the

Church fights against human sin - so that human life does not turn into hell.

True freedom has nothing to do with permissiveness, which justifies any vices and moral ugliness. Healthy freedom of a person and society is based on the observance of certain rights and rules, I would say, "spiritual hygiene". Traditional religions can and should make a significant contribution to maintaining the spiritual immunity of the people. I would also like to say a few words about this.

Today we can rightfully assert that the talk about the inevitable marginalisation of religion around the world, which was so popular in the twentieth century in the West and presented in the form of serious scientific research, has shown its complete untenability. Religion is not going anywhere from the life of society, moreover, its influence on public life in some regions of the world is even growing. And it is not only a number of countries of the so-called "Global South", where adherence to traditional culture is perceived as an essential component of national identity. Even in the countries of the collective West, the picture is heterogeneous - take Hungary or Poland, for example, which strive against all odds to remain committed to Christian values.

I watch with interest the speeches of both Hungarian and Polish leaders, and I just ask myself: when will you tell the truth, that we are different, that we don't want to be like you? Of course, there are many political factors that hinder them. But the national consciousness and, I think, the convictions of these leaders cannot tolerate what is happening in the West today. So far it doesn't come to an open conflict, but potentially this conflict is laid down if Poland and Hungary keep their identity and in a sense their freedom in the spiritual sphere.

Religious feeling cannot be taken away, because it is embedded by God in the very nature of man. But this feeling can be weakened, stifled and perverted, which, in fact, is happening literally before our eyes in most European countries.

The rejection of the spiritual foundations of cultural tradition leads to spiritual collapse, to national tragedy. It is religious faith that forms the spiritual immunity of a nation. We experienced something similar in our Fatherland in the last century, when the Russian Orthodox Church and our other religions were subjected to unprecedented persecution, and manifestations of religiosity were brutally persecuted.

But, as the great Blaise Pascal correctly pointed out, *God has created within the heart of every human being a void that cannot be filled by anything other than God the Creator*. Nothing created by man can fill this vacuum. These are Pascal's "Thoughts", they have been published, including in Russian, and deserve to be referred to again and again. And these words of the outstanding French mathematician and philosopher can be fully attributed to the life of an entire nation. The break with religious tradition inevitably leads to the fact that people, inwardly feeling the need for spirituality, turn to alternative forms of religiosity. There is a reformatting of the spiritual life of society and, ultimately, a change in the national cultural code, which has a very direct impact on the state existence and on the existence of the people.

"Culture is not only what we live by. It is, to a large extent, what we live for", as one of the famous

contemporary thinkers wonderfully writes (Eagleton T. The Idea of Culture. M., 2021. P. 189). What does this mean? It means a simple thing: no material goods, scientific and technological achievements and high economic indicators, which characterise people's well-being, can be the real goal-setting of people's life.

The high evangelical ideal of love for God, Fatherland and neighbours, standing up for the truth, mercy, honesty, conscientiousness, fidelity to the word and spiritual nobility - this is the moral bar set for our people by the Orthodox faith, as well as the ethics of traditional religions. I especially emphasise the Orthodox faith, because it is the Church that has become the state-forming force, if we talk about the historical formation of our society and our state. Therefore, we can say that the marginalisation of religion, attempts to push it to the periphery of public life are nothing but an attempt to crush the spiritual immunity of the people. They are pushing out faith? Remember that behind this, most likely, are specific political forces aimed at weakening our state from the outside.

It is no coincidence that Orthodoxy was chosen as a target by the God-fighting Western political elites, who do not hide their true intentions to destroy our country, who encourage Russophobia and want to sow enmity, hatred and division between brotherly peoples. With the connivance and tacit approval of the West, the greatest crime is being committed today: the hands of the Kiev regime are being used to carry out the actual destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Church has been praying for peace in Ukraine since 2014, when the tragic events of the coup d'état took place. Our prayer was also for a new global confrontation not to happen. But already the beginning of the conflict showed the depth of rejection of our values, the unwillingness to seek a space for peaceful coexistence and the conviction of Western and pro-Western forces in their own greatness. We have heard nothing from Western politicians except the desire to inflict a strategic military defeat on our homeland, which would deprive us of our sovereign development. We also know that our country has many friends in the West who have been deliberately marginalised, banished from public space; some of them have moved to Russia. Where are human rights, where is free choice, where is equal access to the media? Everything became clear at once: only what corresponds to the political position of this or that state is said from the television screens.

Today the Church prays for the participants in the Special Military Operation, for Orthodox Christians and representatives of other religions who defend our people on the battlefields. Cynical political technologists have succeeded in driving a wedge between the inhabitants of Russia and Malorossiia, fraternal and co-religionist peoples. I am sincerely convinced that this policy of inciting hatred will sooner or later be assessed in the court of world history and, of course, in the Judgement of God.

Defending and preserving traditional values is the defence of Russia's sovereignty. This is not just participation in philosophical discourse, not abstract "conversations on the topic" - it is a fight for our sovereignty. Our warriors fight and die for Russia to remain an independent state, of which there are not many on the world map. I found only five truly sovereign states, the rest are quasi-sovereign. Indeed, drawn borders do not always mean the sovereignty of a state. And today it is becoming more and more obvious that it is in the interests of the people of Ukraine to live in peace with Russia, to share with it a common history,

culture and faith. This has always been and will always be the key to the prosperity and free development of our brotherly nation.

It is with great heartache that we perceive everything that threatens Ukraine today. The requirements for candidates to join the European Union are predictable: legislative recognition of immoral phenomena - destructive gender ideology, same-sex unions, the possibility of sex reassignment, feminism, Childfree and euthanasia. Having recognised and especially having learnt all this, it is no longer the people of Ukraine who will find themselves in the European union, but a population with an inverted idea of good and evil, deprived of its own spiritual and cultural identity. And the Ukrainian people should be aware of this danger. I think that my words spoken today will reach someone in Ukraine as well.

Now a few words about patriotism - it is a very important concept. I agree with the Head of State, who once said that patriotism is the foundation of the Russian national idea. Patriotism is not a look into the past, but a look into the future in terms of the spiritual ideals that underlie the life of our people, who have created a great culture and a powerful state from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. With such an understanding of patriotism, there will be no need for any external ideology: we already have all the most important things, we only need to be faithful to our spiritual tradition and strive to organise our lives on the basis of moral values.

Patriotism, as follows from the very internal form of the word, is inseparable from the concept of fatherhood. Pater is "father"; patriotism is "fatherhood". Love for the Fatherland cannot be built on anything but love, on the family, on the respect of children for their parents. This is well understood by those who purposefully destroy the idea of the traditional family. By destroying the institution of family, you can destroy the state without tanks and missiles. Because the basis of national life and the basis of national solidarity will be destroyed; such a nation can be taken with bare hands.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the very proclamation of the thesis on the protection of traditional moral values should not have only a declarative meaning. It is necessary to explain in detail in modern educational programmes and in the public space such concepts as love, strong family, mercy, what practical meaning they have, how to make them a norm of personal and social life. I believe that it is a common understanding of values that can and should become a factor that forms the ideological basis for the development of our country. It is necessary to do a lot of work to form such a common understanding of moral values. In other words, a nationwide moral, if you will, ideological and political consensus should be reached. And let me first of all address this wish to the Federation Council and the State Duma.

Of particular concern is the situation in the educational sphere, in particular, in the field of school teaching of literature. More than once we have heard parents' sincere perplexities about the works chosen by teachers for children's reading. Taking into account the importance of school for the formation and education of personality and moral qualities of a person, what, for example, should a child learn from modern works, for example, about the normality of an incomplete family, extramarital affairs, indifferent attitude of a father and irritability of a single mother who sends her child to his grandmother on the pretext of being tired of the child? Or what moral meaning does the study of a story that romanticises unnatural same-sex love have? These

and many other questions arise among parents and the public concerned about the dubious values that, unfortunately, some of our schools are trying to instil in children.

Therefore, I would like to emphasise once again that it is important not only to make declarative statements of intentions, but also to implement them, so that we do not end up creating with one hand and destroying with the other.

Allow me now to speak about some changes in legislation. I would like to note with satisfaction the positive changes introduced last year, in particular the adoption of a law enshrining traditional values in the education system.

Equally important is the law banning sex reassignment in Russia and banning LGBT propaganda, as well as regional laws banning inducement to abortion and banning private clinics from performing abortions, which have been adopted in some Russian constituent entities. One cannot but applaud the position of many private clinics that have decided to voluntarily refuse these operations, considering the killing of a child in the mother's womb incompatible with the medical vocation and oath of a doctor. It is very good that more and more often we hear a professional assessment from medical professionals: abortion cannot be safe. I hope that over time, active educational work will bear fruit, and the federal law will only consolidate the formation of negative attitudes towards abortion in our society.

On 30 November last year, the Russian Supreme Court declared the LGBT movement extremist and banned its activities on the territory of our country. I hope that the law will be fully implemented rather than remain on paper. This is a very important achievement, and we should not listen to the cries of the "outside world". Of course, they do not like all this, because we offer a different civilisational path of development, but, believe me, this path is becoming very attractive. Russia has a colossal potential to unite a large number of nations around itself. Not military unification, but worldview unification, because many countries and peoples, especially in the Third World, are tired of obsessive Western liberal propaganda, which contradicts their traditional values and culture. They say to us, "Well, the whole world is like this, but you are different?" - No, not the whole world, and the war is not lost yet! But it is very important that our country, which is based on centuries-old spiritual and cultural tradition, which has formed its own code of moral values, is able in a sense to lead the resistance - I will say an incredible word now! - to the Antichrist. Resistance to the coming of global evil into the world. After all, what is the Antichrist? We, of course, personify and say that it is a personality. But a personality cannot arise on its own. We are talking about the victory of evil, about the confusion of values, when people will not be able to distinguish between good and evil. That's when the Antichrist will come and people will believe in him. Therefore, the struggle for morality, the struggle for the ability to distinguish between good and evil, the struggle to maintain our, as we rightly say, traditional values is a struggle for our future, but also for our present day.

Undoubtedly, many of you are aware of some of the proposals of the Russian Orthodox Church to improve Russian legislation, but I will allow myself to remind you of something else.

First of all, I should like to speak about the need to adopt a federal law on the status of large families. Today

the President signed a decree on measures of social support for large families. This is a very important step in supporting large families. The President has declared 2024 the Year of the Family, and this is of particular importance. It is necessary to take all measures to prevent a decline in Russia's population. This can be done, in particular, through popularisation of educational projects in society, raising the status of large families and their comprehensive support, including material support. Most families today decide to have children because they are concerned about their future. Therefore, it is necessary to expand financial and other support for large families, perhaps using the experience of other countries, to simplify the issuance of allowances for them, as well as the procedure for recognising a family as low-income. The possibility of adopting a law on early retirement for parents with many children should also be considered. A mum who has several children cannot not work because her income is small, but retires the same way as those who have no children. There should be some kind of coefficient for people to consider such a law fair.

Many times I have spoken about the need to address the issue of removing abortion from the compulsory health insurance system, and I will say it again. Some say that this decision will lead to an increase in the number of illegal abortions that are dangerous to women's health. This is a highly debatable statement, as there are no free illegal abortions. The Church will continue to witness tirelessly to the value of human life from the moment of conception. Of course, the fight against abortion cannot succeed without the support of women. I would also like to remind you of my proposal to extend maternity leave for pregnant women for the first trimester, which is the most difficult from a psychological point of view. I believe that would be an important support measure for pregnant women, enabling them to make a choice in favour of preserving the life of the child. In no way, I would like to say again, should abortion be presented as a mere operation. Abortion is an intrusion into the very core of people's personal lives and, moreover, a great sin before God, because by abortion a mother kills her child. There can be no justification for it. Of course, the problem cannot be solved in a hurry, and therefore everything must be done to develop conditions of social and, if you like, political support, because political support includes propaganda for having many children, as well as information about the dangers of abortion procedures.

I would also like to say that it is inadmissible, as the President has rightly argued, to violate the sovereignty of the family, which provokes discord between children and parents, and to parasitise on this by some unscrupulous officials. We are talking about intrusion into personal, family life when children are taken away. Of course, there may be a critical situation when a child staying in a family may die or become disabled, but one should think dozens of times. And if a child is taken away from the family, it is necessary to ensure that he or she does not feel like an orphan and even more so an outcast in the collective where he or she is placed. A serious reform of the work of the guardianship authorities is needed, and broad, unjustified interference in the affairs of the family and its destruction under various plausible pretexts must be excluded.

The family is a sacred place. One can only interfere there if there is a real threat to life. There may be exceptional cases, say, when parents are crazy schismatics or extremists, but the situation requires careful study. In no case should one enter a family "with boots on" and trample on someone else's family life on the pretext that "we have come to help make your children happy". Interference in family affairs is necessary in certain cases, but it is a very delicate work, requiring especially careful training of those staff to whom it is entrusted. In our Church not every bishop is allowed to come and teach someone; he must be a spiritually

experienced person. And if an official, not being prepared morally, spiritually, intellectually, intrudes into someone else's family life, it can lead to the most unfavourable consequences.

It is very important, through educational and cultural activities, the media and the education system, to create in society a perception of the value of chastity. Don't shudder, please, I am deliberately using this ancient and very correct term, which has been denigrated, attached to women who were called blue stockings or to men who were called losers. The very word "chastity" means wisdom aimed at preserving the integrity of the human person, the integrality of the human person. And the absence of chastity destroys the personality, every person who sins against chastity knows this. He knows what happens to him when he has two families, or when he has a family, but also some parallel life. When a man satisfies his instinct, he works against himself, and there is a destruction of the integrity of the person. Therefore, when the Church calls for chastity, she is not pulling out of the coffers old rudimentary ideas and values that are incapable of being actualised in our time. The Church is talking about something very relevant, important, something that can lead to a reassessment of many of life's behaviours, especially by our young men and women. So, this is really one of the most important factors, chastity, which forms the wholeness or, as I said, the integrity of the human person.

It is necessary to promote the rejection of the romanticisation of "free sexual relations", especially among the younger generation. The state has the tools and opportunities to do so. Indeed, it is impossible to destroy the unstable psyche of a young person by pushing him through certain temptations to actions that can destroy his life. And I will say once again that through educational and cultural programmes we need to create in society an idea of the value of chastity as one of the most important factors in the formation of a holistic, and therefore, truly strong personality," I took the liberty to repeat, in my opinion, one of the central thoughts that I would like to convey to you today.

In order to save the nation and stimulate the birth rate in Russia, I believe it is important at the federal level to legally prohibit the mobilisation in peacetime of fathers with many children who have three or more children. This is especially important now. According to the current law, fathers of four children have the right to a deferment, but families with three children should also be given the opportunity, because it is precisely this kind of family that gives our population a real, albeit minimal, increase.

A large market of various esoteric services, fortune-tellers, astrologers and others has now formed in Russia. It is wrong to think that all this does not bring harm to people and is not subject to legislative restriction. I will not talk about this topic again, but I suggest you think about it.

I have already raised the topic of migrants many times in various speeches, in particular at the World Russian People's Council. I will repeat the same point, since the situation is becoming really critical. The massive influx of migrants into our country, who often do not speak the Russian language, have no idea of Russian history and culture, traditions and customs, but the saddest thing is that they do not want to integrate into Russian society, is changing the image of Russian cities and leading to the deformation of the country's unified civilisational space. If we replace a part of the Russian multinational people with other peoples who follow their own historical path and do not accept our identity, our country will become quite different. Russia needs

a significant adjustment of migration policy. When I spoke about this at the World Russian People's Council, I heard criticism from Muslim brothers, but after verbal explanations, many withdrew this criticism, because it is not about those who live with us, but about those who come to us.

At present, about 100 clergy are fulfilling their pastoral duty in the zone of the SSE. Some of them have been wounded; unfortunately, there are also dead. The point is that a priest in a trench is a very attractive target for the enemy. I tell our bishops when I send them into a war zone: "Under no circumstances should you be in the front line. The first person to be killed by a sniper will be you. But under no circumstances should you be in the mess, where the barbers and cooks are - that's not your place either. Your place is on the second line, where our soldiers are preparing to attack or where they come after the attack. That's where your place is for pastoral work, for consoling, supporting, enlightening those who sometimes leave the battlefield in a very difficult condition." There is a lot of work going on, and I thank our clergy for it. As it is said, there are losses, but we will continue to co-operate with the Armed Forces. And for this purpose it is important to define the legal status of the military clergy at the level of federal law and to provide military clergy with social benefits that are available to all participants of the NWO. Everyone has them, but the clergy do not, although they are not in the wagon. They are among those who were wounded, they are among those who are preparing to go on the attack, and they are very much needed there, their word helps, inspires, encourages, strengthens. And bullets reach these places too, that's why we suffer losses.

On 3 November 2021, an agreement was concluded between Russia and the Vatican on mutual recognition of higher education, qualifications and degrees awarded to graduates of Vatican universities. However, the issue of state recognition of theological titles and degrees awarded to graduates of domestic theological schools has not been resolved to date. So, if you have studied in the Vatican according to practically the same programme, with adjustments for the bias towards Western culture and Western theology, then your diploma is recognised here. But if you graduated from a theological academy and became a candidate of theology, it will not be recognised. So why such discrimination against one's own theological education? But now it is in theological seminaries and academies, among other things, that we train priests who are able to carry out their pastoral work in the NWO zone.

So, the Russian state recognises degrees and diplomas of the Roman Catholic Church, but refuses to recognise diplomas issued in higher education institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church. At present, the State Duma has passed in the first reading a bill that makes it possible to overcome this contradiction and restore justice, and I would ask you to support it.

Dear and honoured legislators and all participants of the meeting! I am grateful to all those who have laboured to make our communication today possible. The dialogue of the Patriarch with representatives of state power and public forces has indeed become possible and is carried out regularly. The Church and religious associations of Russia look with hope at your labours, expecting that they will lead to qualitative changes in public life. I testify that the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as representatives of other traditional religious communities in Russia, are ready to work with you in this important endeavour.

I call God's blessing on all of you, on your labours, on your relatives and friends and thank you for your

attention.

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