

H.B. SPEECH IN THE CONFERENCE OF THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS & PREVENTION OF EXTREMISM & XENOPHOBIA- UKRAINE.

28 March 2011,

**“World religions and civil societies united against hatred and
extremism”**

Keynote speech

Your Beatitude,

Metropolitan of Ukraine, Mr. Vladimir,

Distinguished Participants,

Dear Mr Feldmann,

There is no doubt that we must face the issue of violence and intolerance squarely in any discussion about the fights against hatred and extremism.

We have continuously and consistently heard that either religion is the problem at the root of violence, or that it is part of the problem. We cannot escape the fact that some adherents of all three major monotheistic faiths have cloaked their acts of violence with the mantle of religious principle. This must be a cause for honesty and repentance.

We have gathered at this Conference to listen to one another. Throughout our journey in this Conference and others, we have been hearing speakers remind us, quite rightly, that it is a

perversion of the fundamental tenets of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to use these traditions to justify acts of violence and terrorism, and that it is the duty of those who do understand religion as a tool for peace to condemn violence quickly and without equivocation. We are called so to teach and preach that the faithful of our traditions understand clearly the role of religion for the building of just and lasting peace in our world.

In the cause of resisting violence and promoting non-violence and coexistence, the role of religious leaders, especially the clergy, is crucial. We do not believe that the clergy should behave like politicians; clergy have different, but equally serious ethical, theological and pastoral responsibilities.

But we do consider that, just as political leaders must be shaped by the moral principles of their religious traditions, in the same way religious leaders have a role in forming congregations and communities of faithful people to exercise responsible citizenship. This role manifests itself at the grass-roots level through educating our congregations and the general public on the importance of peaceful co-existence; in providing social services that focus on the equality of all people regardless of religious or ethnic differences; in taking strong positions in denouncing violence; in leading and participating in public and private dialogue between different religions and ethnicities; and in supporting initiatives, institutions and leaders who are committed to the same social and civic good.

You will forgive us if, as an Orthodox clergyman, we use an important Greek word in this context- the word "symbiosis". With respect to peace-building the Patriarchate of Jerusalem understands the essential role of symbiosis -of living together in society in a way that is based on genuine mutual respect, support and forbearance. We think, for example, of the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the Holy Land over the last 1400 years, and we recall the foundation that

was laid between our predecessor, Patriarch Sofronios and the Caliph Omar –Al ‘Udha Al – ‘Umariyya – was issued, and it remains the basis for all subsequent law and regulation of relations between the religious communities of the Holy Land. In this part of what contributes to genuine symbiosis and to communities that understand each other’s customs, traditions and beliefs.

As we reflect on issues of violence and peace-building, we must always begin and end with our understanding of God, and of our relationship with God. The Scriptures and the theological traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam give us ample help.

Let us remember together this afternoon just a handful of texts that we all know so well, but with which it is important always to be in close relationship:

Of Jerusalem the prophet Isaiah says: “Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders”. (Isaiah 60: 18).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is clear about the role of peace-making when he says “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”. (Mt 5:9).

In one of his earliest letters, Saint Paul calls God, “the God of peace”, and in an early Christian document, the letter of Saint Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians, we read the clear words “Nothing is better than peace, by which every battle is abolished, whether waged by those in heaven or by those on earth”. (ad. Eph. 13:2).

Let these voices from Scripture and tradition and the call that is ours to be those who live in a true God-given symbiosis, be our encouragement and our guiding principles as we continue to strive to free ourselves from the destructive nature of violence, hatred and extremism; and build peace and mutual respect.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem