

REMARKS AT A MEETING OF THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL WITH THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES & CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE HOLY LAND.

13 April 2016

Your Excellency, Mr President,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Graces,

Your Eminences,

Respected Members of the Government,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods^

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are grateful to be able to be with you to join our voices in the condemnation of violence and terrorism, wherever it .takes place, and especially in our region. The Holy Land is a beacon of hope to the World, and when the Holy Land and our peoples suffer violence of any kind, the bright light of that beacon of hope dims. We must always stand united against violence of any kind from whatever source it comes, and we are grateful, Mr. President, for your strong stand in precisely this regard.

As we reflect upon such matters, we are reminded of the words of the Psalmist, who wrote these haunting words:

*“Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts;
there is no fear of God before their eyes.*

*For they flatter themselves in their own eyes
that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.*

*The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit;
they have ceased to act wisely and do good.*

*They plot mischief white on their beds;
they are set on a way that is not good; they do not reject
evil”l.*

Psalm 35 (36) :1-4

The Scriptures are clear. Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, and are endowed by with free will. Sin and evil are not inherent in our human nature, for human nature was created good by God. Rather sin and evil happen when men and women “cease to act wisely and do good.” In other words, sin and evil are acts of humankind’s free will, and, as we would say, the wrong use of free will.

The fruits of such a misuse of free will are many and destructive, but perhaps the most virulent of these fruits of the misuse of free will is arrogance. Arrogance is free will’s worst expression, for it blinds us to everyone and everything around us, and enables us to treat other human beings as means to our own ends.

In this terrible and terrifying misuse of free will are violence and terrorism born. We are right to condemn violence and terrorism, but we are also under a moral obligation to be very clear about the origins, from which such destructive actions emerge.

Yet we are not without hope, for in the same psalm that is so clear about the consequences of the misuse of our free will, there is a declaration of the power of the love and mercy of God:

*“Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.*

*Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your
judgments are like the great deep;*

you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

How precious is your steadfast love. O God!

*All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,*

and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the fountain of life;

in your light we see light”.

Psalm 35 (36), 5-9

We assure you, Your Excellency, of our ongoing commitment to the spiritual work of opposing the forces of sin and evil and in condemning violence and terrorism. May God bless you, Mr. President, in your work of the defense and well-being of all the peoples of this land, and may we together build a safe and secure future for all our communities.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem