

SPEECH AFTER THE VISIT TO AUSCHWITZ BY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF THE HOLY LAND.

2 November 2016

Your Eminence Cardinal Dziwisz,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Fellow Religious Leaders from the Holy Land,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This morning we have paid a visit to Auschwitz, the place which, above all others has come to be the symbol of Nazi terror as well as a horrible reminder to us even in our own day of the depths to which man's inhumanity to man can plummet. Here unspeakable atrocities were committed; here a policy to eradicate an entire people was implemented. Here Christians and others also died, for the ravages of Nazism were indiscriminate. In the face of what happened here, and what Auschwitz represents, there is a sense in which any and all words are inadequate.

Yet Auschwitz must continue to speak, and we must struggle to find the necessary words. We must find those words, because the evils that Auschwitz embodied remain alive in the world today.

Anti-Semitism is on the increase in many parts of the world, including Europe. Persecution of peoples on the basis of their ethnicity or their religious convictions is on the rise,

especially in the Middle East, where ancient communities face extinction. Millions of people are displaced from their homelands at a level unknown since the Second World War. Untold damage to individuals, families and indeed to our human civilization is being done every day.

At the end of the Second World War, someone found a sign that had been put up on a barbed-wire fence in one of the concentration camps. It read "Where was God?" Beneath that was written in a different hand, "Where was man"? We who profess the historic Abrahamic faith traditions understand God to be deeply involved in and concerned with our human life. God is our creator and our sustainer. In our Christian tradition especially we understand God to be so committed to our humanity that God became a human being like us in order to restore us to our proper dignity.

We know that God does not abandon us in our need. God is always present among us. But we also know that we human beings sometimes fail in our vocation as those who are made in the image and likeness of God to be those who take our stand against violence, injustice, prejudice, and persecution. The human family has the chief responsibility to ensure that the evils to which Auschwitz is a silent, but damning, witness are eradicated from our world. The commandments of God are clear: It is our response that must be equally clear.

We who are the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land have a special responsibility in this regard, not least because some of the worst atrocities that are being committed in our world today are happening on our own doorstep. There is no rest from vigilance; there can be no excuse for denial.

Any inhumane act of one human person against another is not just a crime against a fellow human being; It is an insult against God. One might go so far as to say that such acts amount to a denial of the Creator. Violence dehumanizes all concerned, both perpetrators as well as victims. It is the

moral imperative of all who desire to build a new future for the human community, based on mutual respect and peaceful co-existence, to do all in our power to break cycles of violence wherever they manifest themselves.

This must be the resolve of all who are committed to mutual respect, to peace and to reconciliation. Those who perished here so tragically and unnecessarily at Auschwitz are our inspiration. We pray that Almighty God in his infinite mercy and philanthropy, may give rest to the dead who bear such a clear witness still. May their memory be blessed and eternal. And may we, the living, learn a new commitment to resistance to persecution and prejudice, as well as a new commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation, for these are the firm foundation of our human society.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem