

ADDRESS OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM TO THE ORTHODOX-JEWISH DIALOGUE AT THE NOTRE DAME CENTRE IN JERUSALEM

5 December 2017

Your All-Holiness,

Respected Members of this Dialogue,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We greet you warmly as you meet in the important dialogue, and we are especially pleased as this is the first time that this dialogue is meeting in this official and public way.

The timing of this dialogue could not be better. Our region is facing unexpected challenges and difficulties. There is an increased violence against the innocent, and many are displaced from their homes. There is a disturbing rise of radical groups, whose stated objectives threaten the multi-ethnic, and multi-religious tapestry of the Holy Land.

We know from our own experience, and must make better known, that true dialogue is the only way forward in times of conflict. Only true dialogue, which is founded on mutual respect, genuine understanding, and accurate knowledge, can lay the foundation we need for the well-being of our society, both here in the Holy Land and around the world. Only in true dialogue do we discover the many things that we have in common.

Dialogue between Orthodox Christianity and Judaism is of particular importance, as we understand ourselves to be so deeply related to each other. Orthodoxy knows the depths of our roots not just in the great monotheistic tradition of Judaism, but also in matters of worship and church order. Even the design of our church buildings, with a veil that separates the altar from the main body of the Church, reflects this heritage.

But more deeply than this, of course, we share Abraham as our common spiritual father, whom we both also share with our Muslim sisters and brothers. Here is the tie that binds us as those who share a common heritage, a common humanity, and a common destiny. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who live here in the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land also share a unique common home, which is the spiritual symbol for the whole world of the unity of all humankind. It is for this reason most of all that hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as well as others, come to Jerusalem and the Holy Land every year to drink of the deep spiritual well of the holy places.

Even as we meet, this precious gift that has been entrusted to us by Divine Providence is under extreme threat.

The phenomena of the so-called "Price Tag Hate Crimes" and other acts of radical groups are attacks against us all, for they are focused mostly against holy sites, cemeteries, and places of worship. These acts are no doubt deeply disturbing to all of us, as history is littered with examples of such prejudice that can so easily turn to violence and persecution. We hope that this dialogue will condemn all such acts in the clearest possible terms, by whomever and against whomever they may be committed.

We are also experiencing here in Jerusalem a new attempt to intrude on the rights and privileges of our religious communities that have been protected for generations by the

“Status Quo” customs and rules. There is in the Knesset a draft “Bill of Church Lands” that seeks to limit significantly the rights of the Churches over their property in ways that violate our long-standing rights and privileges. While it is unclear what the progress of this bill will be, it is a sign of a new spirit that it is even being considered at all and supported by one third of the Knesset.

We are noticing also a disturbing rise in inaccurate and sometimes sensationalist media coverage, and this has led in some instances to a kind of reactivity in the response of some that is disproportionate to the issues at stake. This reactivity affects all our communities, Jewish, Christian and Muslim alike. This dialogue can have a crucial role to play in encouraging measured, thoughtful, proportionate responses by the civil authorities in our region to the situations that we face.

And finally we must mention the difficulty we face especially in the Christian Quarter, of the Old City of Jerusalem, from radical settler elements, that are openly working to undermine the inclusive nature of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and turn it into the exclusive domain of one group. As we have already said, the sign of Jerusalem is the sign of its universal significance. Should such radical elements succeed in their efforts, that universal significance would be lost. We are currently challenging this incursion in the courts, and once again we hope that this dialogue may be able to speak clearly and with conviction of the inherent right of all our religious communities to make their proper home in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

We are approaching a season of light that is holy to both Jews and Christians, a light that illumines Jerusalem and the Holy Land as the place of the divine-human encounter and to which the eyes of the world are turned every year in hope and expectation. May this dialogue show this light to the world and so advance the true and lasting bases for peace and

reconciliation that it is our responsibility as religious leaders to promote.

May God bless you in this work.

Thank you.