

H.B. ADDRESS IN THE OCCASION OF THE JERUSALEM SYMPOSIUM ON GREEN AND ACCESSIBLE PILGRIMAGE.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 21 April 2013

Madame Deputy Mayor, Naomi Tsur

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us begin with some stirring words from the Book of the Prophet Daniel:

"Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, mountains and hills;

Bless the Lord all that grows in the ground;

Bless the Lord, seas and rivers;

Bless the Lord, all people on the earth;

*sing, praise to him and highly exalt him forever". (Dan. 3:3
5, passim)*

Our Holy Scriptures are full of the celebration of God's creation in all its beauty and wonder, and from the beginning, God's human creatures, the crown of God's creative act and energy, have been charged with the stewardship of creation.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, all reflection on creation begins with the declaration that the creation is God's, and not ours. This is the essential starting-place. As the Psalmist says, "*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in*

it, the world, and those who live in it", (Ps. 24:1). Here we see clearly another essential truth, that all human beings belong to God, and are intimately a part of creation, and not somehow separate from it.

All of us, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who live in this part of God's creation, in this Holy Land, understand the particularity of this region. As the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem has written recently, the three Abrahamic faiths, and the many diverse cultures of our city, have a deep reverence for this place, and it is crucial that we sharpen our sensitivity to the sense of holiness that we all feel here. This region, in which we all live is a blessed land, a land of God's special promise and presence, a land that has been bathed in the blood of the prophets, a land that has received the blood of Jesus Christ.

This Holy Land therefore lives a unique vocation as the spiritual meeting place between earth and heaven, and we are connected to heaven here precisely because of the blood of so many innocent martyrs from all our traditions down the ages.

As we think of the subject of "green pilgrimage," a number of points suggest themselves.

Although it may at first seem odd, the desert is a place of "green pilgrimage." The desert of the Holy Land is both a physical and a spiritual garden, and is full of the life of nature and the life of God. Just as the waters from the mountains flow to join the waters of the Jordan River, so the life of God, that breathes through the sacred history of the testaments of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, as well as through the heritage of the faith of Islam, has flourished down the ages in the life of our communities. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Mother of all the Churches, has always understood its mission to be the embodiment of this sacred history from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, from ancient times to the present day.

Nor let us forget the “green” significance of Jerusalem itself. The Garden of Paradise was the first Jerusalem, the original place of true peace, and it was indeed a spiritual garden. Into that green place, that place where the Divine Presence was in communion with human soul, Cod put the first human being to flourish. This Holy City stands as a promise to the world, that is, to our common humanity, for Jerusalem is also considered to be that eschatological green Garden to which all people are summoned in accessible pilgrimage to peaceful co-existence and abundant life.

If the Garden of Paradise was the first oasis for humanity, so in our time must Jerusalem – the pledge of Paradise to come – be an oasis for the human family. It is our duty and mission precisely to ensure this identity of Jerusalem, so that Jerusalem may be a beacon of hope and an example for other cities and places of pilgrimage.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem