

SPEECH AT THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES AT THE BAPTISM SITE BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN.

Jordan, 27 May 2014

Your Royal Highness Your Beatitudes, Your Eminences, Your Graces,

Beloved Monastics,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our distinct honor and our great privilege to welcome you all to this Holy Site on this historic occasion. Never before have so many hierarchs of the Orthodox Church throughout the world gathered here at the site of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ to pray and to take counsel together for the well-being of the Holy Land, our Church, and all our people.

We wish to express our profound gratitude to His Majesty King Abdullah II for making this gathering possible, and for the example of leadership that he exercises on the world stage on behalf of all the people of this region. His Majesty stands in succession to a long line of eminent leaders that includes His Majesty's late father, King Hussein, as well as his great grandfather and great-great grandfather, and that stretches back to the 7th century, when the Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab and Patriarch Sophronios approved their momentous agreement

that still forms the basis for much of our common life.

This tradition of leadership has ensured the support of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the spiritual integrity of the Holy Places, up to and including the Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement which was signed by His Majesty and President Mahmoud Abbas on 31 March 2013, and which continues to guarantee crucial historic relationships and responsibilities.

At a time of great complexity and challenge in our region and around the world, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a principal example of a society in which there is peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, freedom of worship, and interfaith harmony. We know that the human family, regardless of ethnicity, religion, language, or culture, shares a common human destiny, and it is incumbent upon us all, both in the civic and the religious realm, to foster peace, reconciliation, and dignity.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as the Mother of all the Churches and as the oldest religious institution in our region, carries out a unique spiritual mission. Christians are a part of the natural fabric of society in the Middle East, and the integrity of our region depends on a strong, vibrant, living Christian presence in this land. Our brother Patriarchs and Heads of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches around the world share our commitment to this mission, and we are grateful to you, dear brothers, for your presence here today, and for the sign of our unity that your presence signifies. We encourage you to continue in your support of the Christian community of the Holy Land and the Middle East.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem remains dedicated to serving all our people, as well as the countless pilgrims who visit the Holy Places throughout the year. The Holy Land is home to the three monotheistic faiths and their believers, but in fact it is the true home of every person of good will. For here humanity has encountered God in a special and particular way,

and this land is the source of both light and refreshment for weary souls. With the assistance of the civil authorities, whose role is to ensure the proper privileges of our religious communities and with the collaboration of our fellow Christians around the world, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is able to be a true witness and a true minister to all and for all.

May God bless this gathering, and may we find in this place where our Lord Jesus Christ himself was immersed in the waters of baptism, the wisdom and strength to lead our congregations and to live faithfully and graciously, for the well-being of all the peoples of this region, and especially of our beloved Kingdom.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem