

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS TO THE MEETING OF THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC & THE ORTHODOX CHURCH.

15 September 2014,

The Baptism Site Bethany-Beyond-the Jordan / **Jordan**

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Beloved Monastics,

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We greet you, dear distinguished participants, with words that we shall sing in a few days as the Orthodox Church in the Holy Land celebrates the Nativity of the Mother of God,

Your birth, O Theotokos, brought joy to the whole world, for from you dawned the sun of righteousness, Christ our God. Freeing us from the curse, he gave us his blessings. Abolishing death, he granted us eternal

life. (Apolytikion, 4th Tone)

We meet, therefore, in the light of the Incarnation, which was promised to us in the birth of the Theotokos. This is the light that shines from the cave in Bethlehem. This is the eternal, uncreated light that shines from Mount Tabor and from the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is "*the light of all people,*" "*the light that shines in the darkness*", "*the true light, which enlightens everyone*", (John, 1:4,5 and 9). May this same light illumine your work in this dialogue!

Just four months ago, we welcomed Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis to Jerusalem to commemorate the historic meeting in the Holy City 50 years before of their predecessors Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI. That meeting led to the lifting of the mutual excommunications that had been directed against our respective Churches in 1054, and opened the way to a new ecumenical future, of which this international dialogue is a principal result.

The work of reconciliation must be carried out at every level of our life – in the Church, in our local communities, and in our world. At a time of unprecedented violence and turmoil in so many parts of the world, and especially in our region, we know how crucial the witness of the Gospel is for the human community, and how much people long for the light of hope. The Churches must find new ways of acting together in common witness and common work so that, in spite of the differences that divide us, we may show a hurting world that the reconciling love of our Lord Jesus Christ is real, and transforms individuals and nations.

The proclamation of the Gospel is under pressure everywhere, even in countries that have historically been shaped by Christian civilization. Your work in examining carefully our respective theological and spiritual heritages and the ways in which we can grow more closely together in mutual respect and understanding, help to ensure the integrity and effectiveness

of this proclamation.

As we welcome you, we wish to acknowledge the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn al-Hussein in ensuring in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan freedom of worship, and a genuine symbiosis where people of different religions, ethnicities, and cultures live side by side in peace and harmony as one nation. And we wish to express our gratitude to His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, who has been principally responsible for all the arrangements for your work here in Jordan.

We are gathered here in this Holy Place of the Baptism Site, and we recall the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to Nicodemus: *"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit"* (John 3:5). There can be no genuine dialogue without the presence and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Holy Spirit that leads us into all truth (cf. John 16:13).

May God bless you and may the Holy Spirit be present in your work together. May the light of the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, shine upon you, and illumine your hearts and your minds, and may both our Churches benefit from fresh understandings of ancient truths, so that we may be faithful in our path of dialogue and our spiritual mission.

Thank you.

HIS BEATITUDE

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem