

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR ANGLICAN ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE.

Jerusalem, 18 September 2014

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Respected Members of the International Commission,

Sisters and Brothers,

We welcome you, dear friends, to the Holy City of Jerusalem for this meeting of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue. It was just over 40 years ago that the first meeting of what was then the newly established Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions met in Oxford, and the intervening years have seen much progress and the publication of three important reports. This fourth phase of the Dialogue on which you have been working continues this significant work.

Your focus is on Christian anthropology, and this is proving to be a timely subject. Recently your Orthodox co-chairman, His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos, published a small but important book, in which he has stated that he believes that the focus of Orthodox theological enquiry will shift from ecclesiology, which occupied so much Orthodox thought in the 20th century, to anthropology. This is certainly a welcome development, and we are encouraged that this Dialogue is

taking this subject seriously.

Metropolitan Kallistos reminds us of four reasons why a proper theological understanding of anthropology is so urgent. He cites the phenomena of globalization and urbanization and the threat that these pose to the integrity of the individual; the dominance of technology and its growing role in supplanting direct human to human relationships; issues of ethics, including genetic engineering and changes in the institution of marriage; and finally the growing ecological crisis that the world faces.

These are all pressing issues for the Church, and demand a principled, theological response. But we would like to add a fifth urgent reason why we believe that a focus on anthropology is a crucial one for you, and for the Church as a whole. It is a reason that is profoundly shaped by our experience here in the Holy Land and in the broader region of the Middle East, especially during the present crisis.

We are experiencing war, violence and terrorism on an unprecedented scale and the integrity of the fabric of the life of the Middle East is under terrible threat. Essential to our identity in this region is our cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity. But there are forces abroad in our region that seek to eliminate individuals, communities, and entire cultures from our life. Such activity, if successful, will rob us of that dynamic of mutual interdependence that has characterized life in the Middle East for centuries.

It is inconceivable, for example, to think of a Middle East without a flourishing Christian community. Just as it is inconceivable to think of the Middle East without flourishing Jewish and Muslim communities. This region is home to all of us, and in this common home we must continue to forge a human community based on fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, with security, peace and justice for all our peoples.

To eradicate war, violence, and terrorism requires a clear and convincing articulation of anthropology – of the meaning and value of the human person. Our opposition as Christians to the atrocities we see every day is founded on the biblical and patristic articulation of the human person as one who is created in the image and likeness of God. This is the irreducible truth that the Christian tradition proclaims about the dignity of the human person, and from this truth flows all that we say about the flourishing of the individual and the human community.

The Orthodox and Anglican traditions share a grounding in, and a devotion to, the patristic mind. Over the generations, Anglican patristic scholarship, always of the highest quality, and Orthodox patristic reflection, always a living expression of the Church's faith, have given us eloquent testimony to the ongoing relevance of the patristic heritage to our present life. This common ground that Orthodox and Anglicans share is a great gift to us, and one that has the power to deepen further our joint theological exploration.

We therefore commend you in the work that you are doing as being of urgent benefit not just for the Dialogue, but for the broader and crucial work for peace in this region and around the world. In too many places, too many people believe that human beings are things that can easily be thrown away or disposed of as if they are simply rubbish. We who testify to the truth of the Incarnation, of the mystery of the God who becomes fully human for the salvation of the world, have a singular contribution to make in changing the human consciousness in this regard.

With respect to Anglican-Orthodox relations more generally, we wish to remind you of the close historic relationship that has existed for so long between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Church of England, the Anglican Communion, and the local Anglican Church here in the Holy Land. This is a relationship that the Patriarchate values highly and is committed to

upholding. We recognize that there are significant challenges on the road to unity; but we also understand that we share a common human destiny and we can never tire of searching for a way to a deeper life together. For this reason of our special relationship, we are delighted to welcome you.

May God bless your work together in this Dialogue, and may you know the blessing, hope and peace of Jerusalem, which is our common home.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem