

# H.B. PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM LECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST.

University of Bucharest,

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Your Beatitude Patriarch Daniel,

Mr. President Nistor,  
Professor Dumitru,  
Distinguished Faculty,  
Beloved Students,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **Introduction**

It is an honour for us to be with you in this historic and notable seat of learning in Romania. Your roots as a centre for education are deep in your nation's history, and it is a pleasure for us to know that when the Princely Academy of Saint Sava, the predecessor of this present university, was established in 1694 by Constantin Brancoveanu, the lectures were delivered in Greek. Today, however, we hope that you will understand that it may be easier for all if we speak to you in the modern lingua franca, that is, English!

As we know, in 1864 the former Academy was converted into the present University, and in 1884 the Faculty of Theology was established. This concern with theology now finds expression in three faculties that embrace not only Orthodox theology but Roman Catholic and Protestant theology as well. This commitment to the study of theology is essential for the well-being of the academic life of any university, and we commend

you for this work.

We are also pleased to be with you because of the important and historic ties that have existed down the ages between the peoples of this region; the Holy Land in general, and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in particular. For generations, pilgrims have ventured from this part of Eastern Europe to the Holy Land to worship with their sisters and brothers who are the native Christians of the Middle East, and to find spiritual renewal and refreshment at the Holy Places. The countries that we now call Romania, Moldova, the Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia, and other neighboring nations, have been shaped by an ancient and common Orthodox faith and culture, and this Orthodox faith and culture, Byzantine in its roots, found a natural orientation to the Holy Land.

But the traffic has not all been in one direction. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem also reached out to this region. In various parts of Eastern Europe, the great Patriarchs of Jerusalem were present as spiritual guides among the people. The Patriarchate was supported by endowments, that is, churches, monasteries, and land from this region dedicated to the support of the Holy Tomb and the defense of the rights and prerogatives of the Eastern Orthodox Church over it. The Patriarchs of Jerusalem sought to ensure the well-being of its people in return.

So we find in the relationship between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Orthodox Church of these lands a long-standing, deep, and mutual kinship that it is not only our duty, but also our joy, to foster and extend in our own generation. It is for all these reasons that we are glad to be among you.

In our lecture today, we would like to make a few remarks on the mission of the Patriarchate, and we shall divide our remarks into three sections. After a look at the history of the Patriarchate, we shall make some observations on the

status of the Holy Places, and then give an outline of the mission of the Patriarchate in our own time.

## **The Patriarchate of Jerusalem in History**

There can be no adequate understanding of the mission of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem today without some grasp of the place of the Patriarchate in the history of the Holy Land; for they are intimately related.

Let us remember that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the oldest continuous religious institution in the Holy Land. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that the Church was revealed at Pentecost, and Saint James, the Brother of our Lord, became the first bishop of the Christian community. From that great Feast of Pentecost the Church spread, initially throughout the neighboring area, and then throughout the known world.

The early years of the life of the Church in Jerusalem were difficult. The city itself suffered at the hands of the Roman emperors, and was destroyed in the year AD 70. In AD 135 the Emperor Hadrian re-built the city and it was named Aelia Capitolina after him. During this time, the Jewish population as well as the Christian community endured persecution, exile, and other hardships. But the Church survived those trials, and by the time of the Emperor Saint Constantine the Great and his mother the Empress Saint Helena, the Church in Jerusalem was robust enough to emerge from this dark early period into a time of growth and achievement.

A sign of the health of that Christian community in Jerusalem was the memory of the Holy Places. Many of them had been obliterated by the building of Roman pagan temples after the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but their locations had survived in the traditions of the local Church. For this reason, when Saint Helena was commissioned by Saint Constantine to come to the Holy Land in AD 326, she was able

to establish, with the assistance of the bishop Saint Makarios and the local community, churches and shrines at the most important sites that are associated with the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. These sites remain the heart of the Christian faith to this day, and there has been worship at these shrines, even in the face of persecution and other calamities, without interruption.

The Order of the Brotherhood of the All-Holy Tomb of Christ, first called the *spoudaeoi*, which serves the Patriarchate, came into existence in these same early days as Christian worship was being re-established in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and throughout the region. The chief purpose of the Brotherhood is to guard and serve the Holy Places, and to ensure that they are open to all people of good will who seek spiritual refreshment from them. This *diakonia* has continued unceasingly, in the face of sometimes terrible hardship, down to our own time. Many of our monasteries contain the relics of monks, nuns, clergy, and lay people who were martyred for their Christian faith during one or another of the invasions or persecutions in the area.

It was only logical that Canon 7 of the First Council of Nicea in AD 325 should attribute to the Church of Jerusalem a special status, nor is it surprising that the Council of Chalcedon granted patriarchal status to the Bishop of Jerusalem, with jurisdiction over "the three Palestines." Saint Juvenal became the first patriarch. This decree gave formal recognition to something that had been a fact from the beginning of the life of the Church - that Jerusalem is "the Mother of all the Churches" and is the city of the King of Kings, for from Jerusalem the Gospel spread to the entire *oikoumene*. This is the basis of the life and mission of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and from this all else flows.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem continued to serve the local Church faithfully. The Church grew throughout the region, and some of the oldest Christian communities in existence, as well

as the most ancient evidences of Christianity in the region, are within the boundaries of the Patriarchate.

In the Seventh Century, significant change spread through the Middle East. Initially, attacks by Persian forces, and subsequently the advance of Islam from Arabia, transformed the political, religious, and cultural landscape of the Holy Land. But the Patriarchate survived and continued to ensure the life of the local Church even under extremely challenging conditions.

In AD 638 Patriarch Sophronios handed over the keys of the city to the forces of the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab. The wise Patriarch, concerned for the well-being of the Church and the Christian empire, entered into negotiations with Caliph Omar, and the result was the well-known and deeply influential *Covenant of Omar*, which remains an essential and valid legal document in the maintenance of relations between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land, and in the preservation of the Patriarchate's rights and privileges in the Holy Places into the modern era. In a famous story, the Caliph refused an invitation from the Patriarch to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, saying that if he did so, it would be a reason for others to turn the church into a mosque. So the caliph prayed nearby, where indeed later on a mosque that bears his name was constructed. But the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was preserved as a church.

The Patriarchate continued to serve and guard the Holy Places as places of worship, and to minister to the local indigenous Christian community, in this new situation. It was the *Rum Orthodox Patriarchate*, the Church of the Rum, the successors of the Eastern Romans, known today as the Byzantines, in direct continuity both with the first Christian community in Jerusalem and the great civilization of Constantinople.

In AD 1099, during the patriarchate of Simeon II, the Crusaders captured Jerusalem and set up a Latin Kingdom with a

Latin bishop as patriarch. The Orthodox patriarch was forced to flee to Cyprus. During the time of the exile of the patriarch, the life of the Rum Orthodox Church in the Holy Land continued, even under complicated circumstances.

But the institution of the Patriarchate was not broken during this time.

Invasion continued through the centuries. In 1187, the Crusaders were defeated by Salah al-Din. During the later Mamluk rule over Jerusalem in the beginning of the 13th century, the stance toward the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate changed markedly in the form of extensive persecution against Christians and threats to turn the Holy Sepulcher Church into a mosque. By the beginning of the 14th century, the Franciscan Order was established in Jerusalem. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 signified the beginning of a new persecution under Ottoman Turkish domination. One of the patriarchs during this Ottoman period, Patriarch Dositheos, who spent time in Constantinople by the High Port, emerged as the patriarch of the Orthodox world. His pastoral activities and contributions, as well as those of his nephew, Patriarch Chrysanthos, are well known in these lands, especially in Iasi. Subsequently, the residence of the Patriarchs was restored from Constantinople to Jerusalem, and the centre of the Patriarchate is within the compound of the monastery at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

This very brief sketch serves to show us not just the antiquity of the Patriarchate, but also its continuity and vitality. The sands of the Middle East have often shifted over time and in many ways, but the Patriarchate has remained a constant and crucial presence.

We must understand from this that Orthodox Christianity is not a foreign interloper. Orthodox Christianity is native to the Holy Land and a part of its essence. And indeed the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has watched many others come and go

through the ages.

## **The Significance of the Holy Places**

Having established the place of the Patriarchate in the history of the Holy Land, let us now turn briefly to a consideration of the Holy Places. As it is the primary ministry of the Patriarchate to guard and to serve the Holy Places, it is important to grasp their significance.

First of all, the Holy Places are a guarantee of our sacred history, that is, the history of salvation. Furthermore, the Holy Places are the guarantee of today's Christian presence not only in the Holy Land, but also in the broader region of the Middle East. As those who believe in the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, the Holy Places, and especially those Places that are connected to the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, are a unique testimony to the truth of the Christian proclamation. Here in the Holy Land, God and humanity have walked together, and here men and women have seen God face to face in the person of Jesus Christ. The living witness of the Holy Places have inspired great faithfulness on the part of countless Christians, and the same living witness has inspired even great martyrs.

We must remember, of course, that there are not just Christian Holy Places in the Holy Land; there are also significant Jewish and Muslim Holy Places. Christians have a special veneration especially for many sites that mark sacred personalities and events in the Bible, and at or near many of these sites are either functioning churches or the remains of ancient churches that attest to the importance that the Church places on the continuity of the Old Testament with the New Covenant. When we talk about Holy Places, therefore, we must bear in mind that we are talking about Holy Places that are common to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

But the presence of the Holy Places of the three Abrahamic

traditions reminds us of two further significant points.

First, although the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the oldest religious institution of the region, there has always been a diversity of religious tradition in the Holy Land. This diversity is so ancient and so pervasive that it is of the essence of the Holy Land. It is impossible to conceive of the Holy Land without a strong Christian community, just as it is impossible to conceive of the Holy Land without strong Jewish and Muslim communities as well. This is who we are as the inhabitants of this region, and this integrity is always endangered whenever one or another of our communities is under threat.

So our Holy Places are more even than a guarantee of our sacred history. They are a guarantee of the genuine diversity of the communities that make up the mosaic of the region and have legitimate claims.

Secondly, we must also observe the universality and ecumenicity of the Holy Places.

The Holy Places are not just for Orthodox Christians, or even just for the wider Christian family. The Holy Places are for the whole world, for all who seek the spiritual refreshment and renewal that they give to the thirsty soul. In our Holy Places we see not only Christian pilgrims, but also Jewish and Muslim pilgrims, as well as those who practice no religious faith at all. One cannot underestimate the power of the Holy Places to mediate the presence of the Divine and to transform the human heart, for Holy Places are a visible sign that this land has been watered and sanctified by the redeeming blood of Christ.

With respect to the Holy Places, we speak not of tourism, but of pilgrimage. For according to the Church Fathers, the Holy Places constitute the Fifth Gospel, since they "speak for themselves." Pilgrimage is an inexplicable longing for



experiencing the Divine presence at particular sites. This is why, in the language of the Church of Jerusalem, pilgrimage to the Holy Land is considered a pilgrimage of *theoria*.

### **The Mission of the Patriarchate Today**

With an understanding of the broad sweep of our history, and with these few observations on the nature and function of the Holy Places, it is possible now to give a few reflections on the mission of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem today.

If the primary task and mission of the Patriarchate through the ages has been to guard and serve the Holy Places, there is other fundamental work that the Patriarchate does that is based on this.

In the first place must be our care of the local Christian community. As we have already said, the Rum Orthodox Church in the Holy Land is not a stranger, or a late-comer on the scene, or a guest. The Rum Orthodox Church and the land are inseparable in their true identity. The faithful who constitute the local Church in the Holy Land are of the land. We have lived here since the Church was revealed at Pentecost, and it is the local community of the faithful that gives a truly flesh and blood existence to the life of the Church in the Holy Land. Pilgrims come and go, but the faithful of the local Church are our pastoral responsibility. The Patriarchate exists to ensure that our parishes, schools, clinics, and social and religious institutions have the resources to serve the communities in which the Church is rooted.

The faithful in the parishes of the Patriarchate are often the unseen heroes in keeping alive the Orthodox faith in the Holy Land against often overwhelming odds. These are those whom the outside world rarely sees, but who care for our churches, teach in our schools, run our clinics, and attempt to ensure that our young people have a viable future in our region. The pressure to emigrate is intense; but the need to ensure a

flourishing local Christian community in the Holy Land is paramount.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem works with all those who seek the well-being of the Christian community of the Holy Land, and we have several flourishing partnerships that help us to provide resources at the grass-roots level. This work is never-ending, and our needs are great.

In service to the Holy Places and to the local Church are also our monastic centres. Monasticism was born in the deserts of Egypt, but by the Fourth Century, the monastic movement had spread through Gaza north to the Judean deserts of Palestine. At one time, Palestine boasted the largest number of monastic communities in the Christian world, and Mar Saba remains today one of the oldest, continuously inhabited monasteries in the world.

Monasticism, like other aspects of Christian life, has endured both highs and lows over the centuries. Many monastics perished during invasions and persecutions, especially in the seventh-century Persian invasions. And most of the ancient foundations have turned into ruins reminiscent of the past.

But monasticism continues to be a vital force in the life of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and several of our monasteries are healthy and growing, including Mar Saba, Saint Gerasimos, and Saint George in Wadi Qelt, where there are the incorrupt relics of Saint Ioannis the holy and blessed, the Chozebite of Romania, who was forced to flee his own land by his countrymen and who took refuge in the bosom of the Patriarchate.

High on the agenda of the Patriarchate is our witness to ensure the integrity and the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. As we have already observed in this lecture, Jerusalem and the Holy Land have two essential characteristics. The first characteristic is our diversity of cultures, religious traditions, ethnicities, languages, and

customs. One must be reminded that from the international legal point of view, Jerusalem is considered to be a *corpus separatum*, that is, a city where exclusivity does not apply, although it is admittedly considered to be the spiritual capital of the whole world. The Middle East is not a mono-religious, mono-cultural society, and it has never been this, even in antiquity. Attempts by some to conceive of the region without such diversity are both based on misunderstandings and destined to perpetuate conflict and persecution.

Flowing from the fact of our diversity is the second characteristic, which is the truth of the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. We have touched on this in our lecture already, but the fact needs repeating. As Christians, Jerusalem and the Holy Land are our home as well. We are culturally, spiritually and even physically natives of the land, and we have an equal claim with others to live, thrive, worship, and bear witness.

To put it negatively, Jerusalem does not belong to one group alone, but to all who call the city sacred and holy: Jew, Christian, Muslim. Jerusalem bears the indelible marks of all three Abrahamic traditions, and all must thrive here for Jerusalem to live out her common and eternal destiny.

Our final remarks on the current mission of the Patriarchate today concern the work of peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land and in the world. In her very name, Jerusalem – the City of the Foundation of Peace – proclaims not only her vocation, but by extension the vocation of humanity. Our task is to build a world of peace and reconciliation, and Jerusalem is both our inspiration and our primary arena. No one who loves Jerusalem and the Holy Land can be anything other than deeply concerned about the present and developing situation in the Middle East. Fanaticism and sectarian violence threaten the fabric of our very existence, and we stand firm in defying fanaticism in all its forms.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been an agent of peace and reconciliation for its entire history, and we have centuries of experience both in living under differing circumstances, and in bringing our diverse communities together to ensure the well-being of all. The Patriarchate has always realized that for peace and reconciliation to flourish, the peoples of the region must thrive equally, with justice, mutual recognition, fundamental human rights, safety, and security for all.

But the peace of Jerusalem is more important than even this. For we live in a world in which there is an unprecedented level of violence and war in so many places. Human life is regarded as cheap, and terrorism and persecution are widespread. The peace of Jerusalem is crucial not only for the Holy City alone, but for the whole world. For Jerusalem remains the only beacon of hope for a beleaguered and confused world.

Therefore the peace of Jerusalem must be a priority for all of us. And it is in this respect that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem must be strengthened and supported by the Orthodox Christian world. For the Patriarchate is the physical and visible representative of the Christian world in general, and the Christian Orthodox world in particular, in the Holy Land.

## **Conclusion**

We hope that in this lecture we have been able to expand your understanding of the history and life of the Patriarchate, the significance and mission of the Holy Places, and our work today. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem holds a unique position in the religious, cultural, and even political frame – fortunately or unfortunately – of the Middle East, and we recognize the burden of service that is placed on us by virtue of our vocation.

We continue to give our best efforts to be faithful to this inheritance of faith and to the *diakonia* of our apostolic mission. We ask for your prayers and your support, and we encourage you in your own generation to deepen the

relationship between your beloved country and the Holy Land. At the same time, one should be reminded that political or national aspirations should not be confused with spiritual missionary work in the Middle East region, which can lead to unprecedented or unpredictable situations for the Orthodox Church, as has happened with the Christian presence in Iraq and Syria.

The local Christian community of the Holy Land needs both your commitment and your help. In return, we know that you will be greatly enriched by your pilgrimages and your relationships with us. For the Patriarchate remains a solid bridge between Orthodox national entities and the political domains of the region.

His Beatitude

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem