

REMARKS AT THE CELEBRATORY DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE 70TH BIRTHDAY OF HIS HOLINESS KIRILL PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA.

19 November 2016

Your Holiness, dear Brother,

Your Beatitudes, our Fellow Primates,

Your Eminences, Yours Excellencies,

Reverend Fathers,

We rejoice with you, Your Holiness, and we congratulate you on your 70th birthday, and we also recognize that this year you celebrate the 40th anniversary of your episcopal ordination in 1976. For all of this we give thanks to Almighty God, that you have been called to his service, and that you have exercised the dignity of archpastoral ministry for so long.

We take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to you for the unwavering support of the Russian Church and People of the Church of Jerusalem. We would also like to express our gratitude to His Excellency the President who not only made a significant donation for the recent restoration of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, but, even more importantly, has been steadfast in his support of

the Christian presence in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East.

We are glad to be here with our fellow Primates and bishops from across the Orthodox world to give witness to our unity. In almost every region the Church faces fresh challenges, and in some parts of the globe Christians are enduring renewed persecution, and we must be ever vigilant. The unity of faith that our worship together manifests reveals also a unity of purpose, and our unity is crucial not only for us as Orthodox Churches; our unity is crucial for the whole Christian community.

As the leaders of the Church, we are reminded that to us has been entrusted by Divine Providence the mission of making clear in our modern world the values of the Gospel. For this mission our gathering this weekend gives us both strength and encouragement. We pray that God may be your constant support, Your Holiness, that your continued primatial service may be just such a strength and encouragement to the Church of Russia.

May God bless the Church of Russia, and may God bless all the peoples of this beloved country.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem