

THE BLESSED HEGOUMEN OF THE HOLY MONASTERY OF HOZEVA ARCHIMANDRITE ANTONIOS (+1993)

In eternal remembrance is the righteous...

Blessed Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Hozeva

Archimandrite Antonios (†1993)

This year marks thirty years since the sudden and tragic death of the blessed Hegoumen of the historic Holy Lavra of Hozeva, Archimandrite Antonios. Fr. Antonios Iosifidis from the village of Avles Serbion, Kozani, was born in the year 1958 and received the name Apostolos. The third son of pious parents, a child restless in spirit, dynamic, daring, fearless! He had the blessing that his good parents taught him the faith and when they moved to Thessaloniki in 1966, to lead him to the Catechetical of their Parish, Saint Athanasios of Evosmos, where blessed Fr. Alexandros Kalpakidis, later Metropolitan of Stavropigiu, worked a lot on his childhood soul! Fr. Antonios himself wrote:

“[God] took pity on me, Most Merciful and does not want the death of the sinner and he protected me and here is my Elder the great miracle, because now looking behind me with a now clear intellect I remain a speechless fish. Now I understand God’s protection for me, and now I see and say that I came to know Christ through you, Christ spoke in me with your voice, with your sermon and your life was an example for me. ... You had dug into my soul very deep from a tender age and planted the Word of the Gospel which over time with your preaching became assimilated and became second nature and when I wanted to do something good or bad I weighed it with the Gospel, and

that kept me from many great sins.”

Following the call and inclination of his heart, he directed his steps to the Lavra of Saint Savvas the Sanctified in the year 1985 at the age of 27. As a Monk, he was distinguished by obedience, exemplary self-denial, but also respect and love for everyone. She received the first degree of the Priesthood under the blessed Patriarch of Jerusalem Diodoros in December 1985 on the feast day of the Holy Lavra and exactly one year later she received the second degree of the Priesthood. In 1990, he was appointed a Priest in Bet Sahour – the so-called village of the Shepherds – where he won the love and appreciation of the entire Arabic-speaking flock. In the same year, he shows extreme obedience to the Patriarch Diodoros and moves, at the Patriarch’s order, to the Historic Lavra of Hozeva, due to a vacancy in the abbotship. For three years, he offered his utmost in the reorganization of the Monastery, both materially and spiritually. He took care of the renovation of the infrastructure, the maintenance of the existing ones and the reconstruction of new spaces especially Monastic cells. The most important thing, however, was that he proceeded to establish and faithfully observe a Monastic program: a daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy and all twenty-four-hour services according to the Monastic Ecclesiastical Order. The example that he gave to those who lived in the Monastery at the time was a very catalytic argument so that everyone was convinced to follow it!

The thread of his earthly life was cut early, because he belonged to those “which were redeemed from the earth” (Rev. 14,3). On December 14/27, 1993, after the end of the Divine Liturgy, during manual work in the Monastery, “... **suddenly... a deafening bang... My God, what a terrible crash... Loud noise, as if something had collapsed and a thick cloud of dust... With a lightning leap his spiritual Son{Fr Germanos} rushes into the room. The wall has given way, or rather, a section of the rock has come off and crushed the Geronda, leaving his head intact!**

... Fr. Antonios is fully conscious and talking! ...Without hesitating for a moment {Fr. Germanos}, or being discouraged by the volume and weight of the granite boulders, he begins to grab them one by one and throw them over with his hands, in a superhuman effort to free the injured. When he succeeds, he carefully picks him up and carries him, as gently as he can, to a bed. He sees no signs of external injury, but the Geronda, with difficulty, repeats:

-“It hurts... it hurts... in my back...”

Father Germanos is really starting to get scared now! Perhaps for the first and last time in his life, he, the lion-hearted man, experiences what “fear” means!... Later, in the taxi, he holds him tightly, but carefully so as not to hurt him and Germanos is afraid! He is very afraid now because he hears something like heavy breathing and the Old Man’s breathing is making it difficult... making it difficult... getting heavier and heavier... until it stops completely.....!”

As St. Gregory of Nyssa says in the funeral speech of St. Meletius of Antioch, Fr. Antonios “put on his leather tunic, for there is no need for such tunics in heaven to be worn, but he adorned himself with garments of the purity of his life”.

Indeed, our brother and father Anthony is among us in spirit! His values and principles, how he lived, his unparalleled obedience and his Monastic alienation, his dynamism and spontaneity, are our “lamp at our feet”. In our difficulties we invoke his wish, we try to think what he would do, how he would answer, how he would react... His bravery moves us, his love for his neighbour, his merciful heart pushes us to imitate him. His asceticism teaches us... His Monastic renunciation guides us... The optimism and Divine Love that flowed from what was said and done under him, flood us with the joy and expectation of the common Resurrection of the sleeping!...

May his memory be eternal!

PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM INITIATES MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE FOR HEALING IN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

The Vatican, 29th September 2023

During his meeting with Pope Francis in the Vatican today, His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, conveyed the Patriarchate of Jerusalem's commitment to mediation, fostering dialogue and healing in Ukraine and Russia. This initiative aims to address the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the threat of schism within the body of the Orthodox Church.

Acknowledging the profound pain, His Beatitude stated that the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as the Mother of all the Churches, emphasises Christian unity and is deeply concerned about the Orthodox Churches worldwide. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and potential schism within the body of the Orthodox Church affects not only Orthodox Christians but the entire Christian world and people of goodwill.

The Patriarchate, rooted in centuries of reconciliation and peace efforts, offers a hand of goodwill and mediation to sisters and brothers in Ukraine and Russia. This initiative

seeks to foster dialogue that may bring about an end to suffering and promote healing within the Orthodox family.

Recognising the challenges and deep divisions, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is committed to the spiritual mission of dialogue and reconciliation. As Saint Paul wrote, "Christ is our peace," and the Patriarchate stands ready to assist in any way possible to help end conflict and suffering.

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THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM MEETS WITH POPE FRANCIS AND INITIATES CRUCIAL MEDIATION ON RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Vatican City, September 29th, 2023

His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, has taken a significant step towards fostering dialogue and reconciliation in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. During his visit to the Vatican, attending the ceremony of celebrating the elevation of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pizzaballa to the Sacred College of Cardinals, Patriarch Theophilos met with Pope Francis, and extended the hand of goodwill from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for Mediation to initiate a fresh dialogue aimed at ending

suffering and promoting healing within the Orthodox family.

In his statement, Patriarch Theophilos emphasised the importance of Christian unity, stating that the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as the Mother of all the Churches, emphasises Christian unity and is deeply concerned about all the Churches worldwide. He acknowledged the profound impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, not only on Orthodox Christians but on the entire global Christian community.

The initiative stems from the Patriarchate's rich history of reconciliation and peace efforts. It seeks to address the challenges posed by the deep divisions and wounds caused by the conflict. The Patriarchate is committed to the spiritual mission of dialogue and reconciliation, echoing Saint Paul's words: "Christ is our peace."

Expressing gratitude during the meeting, His Beatitude commended Patriarch Pizzaballa for his unwavering pastoral dedication to preserving the Christian presence in the region. He recognized the challenges facing Christians and Christian heritage in the Holy Land, particularly the rise of Israeli radical groups. Patriarch Theophilos pointed that these groups have been systematically undermining the legitimate "Status Quo" and the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious nature of the region. "Hate crimes, illegal property acquisitions, vandalism of Christian sites, and mounting pressure pose significant threats" His Beatitude said.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is grateful for the support of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, Custodian of the holy places, of the efforts to preserve Jerusalem's Christian and Muslim character amidst these challenges.

His Beatitude ended his meeting with Pope Francis by emphasising that the journey towards dialogue and reconciliation is undoubtedly challenging, but the Patriarchate of Jerusalem stands ready to contribute in any

way possible that may bring about an end to conflict and suffering.

His Beatitude's speech reads as follow:

"Your Holiness,

We bring you greetings from our fellow Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land and the blessing of the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We rejoice in the elevation of our brother Patriarch Pizzaballa to the Sacred College of Cardinals, and we assure you of the prayers and support of the Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land and of the Christian communities.

As the Custos of the Holy Land and now as Latin Patriarch, he has been steadfast in his pastoral zeal for the Christian presence in our region, and resolute in opposition to all those forces that seek to undermine the integrity of the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As Your Holiness is well aware, we face deepening challenges and difficulties. While the majority of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land recognise the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious reality of our region, in recent years we have seen the rise of Israeli radical groups that are working systematically to undermine the legitimate "Status Quo" and to reshape our common life. Hate crimes, the underhanded and illegal acquisition of historically Christian properties in strategic locations, vandalism and desecration of church buildings and holy places, and increasing pressure at various levels are evidence of the single greatest danger to our life that we face.

Patriarch Pizzaballa has been, and continues to be, a strong presence and voice in opposition to all this, and he has been

responsible over the years in building trust and effective co-operation between our two Brotherhoods so that we may speak and act with a united voice.

We are united and steadfast in routing out this existential danger, and are encouraged by the multitude of support that we are experiencing in particular through the Hashemite Custodianship of the Holy Sites.

We are appreciative to you, Your Holiness, for your ongoing support of a vital and vibrant Christian presence in the Middle East. May God continue to bless you, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

As the Mother of all the Churches, the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has a special concern for the unity of Christians generally, and especially of the Orthodox Churches around the world. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the threat of schism in the body of the Orthodox Church, are matters of deep pain and difficulty not just for Orthodox Christians, but for the entire Christian world and for all people of good will.

In our life and witness in the Holy Land, we seek continually for reconciliation and peace. We have come to understand over centuries that true dialogue is the only way to effective reconciliation and lasting peace, and this has been our constant commitment.

It is in this spirit and mindfulness that we extend the hand and effort of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to our sisters and brothers in Ukraine and Russia, to mediate and do all that we can to initiate a dialogue that may lead to an end to suffering and to a healing within the Orthodox family.

This work will not be easy. The divisions that have occurred over the decades are deep. The wounds of conflict will take time to heal. And trust, once broken, is hard to restore.

But the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, that was built upon the redeeming blood of Lord Jesus Christ, understands all this. Our life down the generations has been forged in the same crucible. We are strangers neither to conflict nor to the new life that is possible beyond it. As Saint Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Ephesians

Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph. 14-16).

The journey in dialogue to reconciliation is our spiritual mission, and this is our wish for the Church and the peoples of Ukraine and of Russia. We stand ready to assist in any way that we can to help bring an end to conflict and suffering.”



Photo Credit: Vatican Media



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HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III LEADS THE OPENING CEREMONY FOR 'BETHLEHEM REBORN PALESTINE: THE WONDERS OF THE NATIVITY' EXHIBITION IN GENEVA

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III , Patriarch of Jerusalem and all Palestine, spoke today, Tuesday September 12, at the opening ceremony of “Bethlehem Reborn Palestine – The Wonders of the Nativity” exhibition held at the Ecumenical Center of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland.

“The exhibition shows the renovation of the church building itself and the beauty of the mosaics, the columns, and the different types of tiles and crafted wood. It is of crucial importance that this unique architectural structure be carefully and faithfully preserved, but the basilica is more than a building of historical or artistic interest, and Bethlehem is more than just another city.” With these words His Beatitude started his opening speech as one of the key speakers at this monumental event.

“As we struggle to preserve a vital and vibrant Christian presence in the Holy Land in the face of a resurgence of radicalism and hatred in the society, and as our world is plunged deeper and deeper into confusion and despair, the universal spiritual vocation of Bethlehem and the Basilica has

never been more urgent.”

His Beatitude emphasized that the church is not a mere archaeological site or museum but rather “it is a living witness to hope and to light and to life.”

Giving a small history background to the audience regarding the Church of the Nativity, His Beatitude added “There has been a church on this site since the early 330s and the present structure dates from the reign of the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century. It was one of the first of the Holy Places to be reconstructed by the Emperor Saint Constantine and his mother Saint Helena, and it is the oldest complete church in the Christian world. The Rum Orthodox Church has been the guardian and servant of this church from its very foundation, and has been a witness down the ages to the embodiment of our common sacred history in the region and to the divine-human encounter. For here the divine Logos was revealed.”

Towards the end of his speech His Beatitude thanked the World Council of Churches (WCC) for their tremendous efforts to establish this exhibit and their unwavering support to the Church in Jerusalem and the communities. Patriarch Theophilos also thanked His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State, Mr Mahmoud Abbas, who took the initiative and has been instrumental in the restoration work and who continues to show concern about preserving the Church of the Nativity, “which is a symbol of hope and peace and a symbol unity and co-existence for the Palestinian people, both Christian and Muslim.”

His Beatitude was accompanied by a high-level delegation from Palestine, including: Dr Ramzi Khoury, member of the Executive Committee of the PLO and chairman of the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine; Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi, permanent observer of the state of Palestine to the UN-Switzerland; Ambassador Issa Kassisieh, ambassador of the state of Palestine to the Holy See; Ambassador Omar Awadallah;

assistant minister for UN and specialized organizations; Minister Khouloud Daibes, executive director of the Bethlehem Development Foundation; Ambassador Amira Hanania, Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine; Ahmad Hammoudeh, chargee d'affaires at the Embassy of the state of Palestine to the Holy See; and Doa Nofal, second secretary at the POM of the state of Palestine.

On his behalf, Dr Ramzi Khoury, member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and chairman of the High Presidential Committee for Church Affairs, said that "Our demand is for our people to live a dignified life free from occupation, like any other nation in the world, to build a prosperous future and preserve, with your assistance, the remaining Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land." Mr. Khoury added "our people, despite all obstacles mentioned and more, are a resilient people who safeguard their heritage and sanctities."

The exhibition is promoted by the State of Palestine; Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine; Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity; and the Embassy of the State of Palestine to the Holy See in cooperation with Bethlehem Development Foundation; Piacenti S.p.a and with the participation of University of Pavia.

The exhibit will be available to the public from 13 September-5 October daily. Marking the first renovation of the Church of the Nativity in hundreds of years, has toured different world cities, including Paris, Rome, and other parts of Italy. After four weeks in Geneva, it will move to Washington, DC, in November.



Photo credit: Ivars Kupcis/WCC



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Canary in a Coal Mine: The Case of the Churches and the Status of Jerusalem

Canary in a Coal Mine: The Case of the Churches and the Status of Jerusalem

By: Anna Koulouris – Palestine-Israel Journal

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When one asks what the future for Israel and Palestine might

look like, visions of what it could and should be – as opposed to what is taking place on the ground – are increasingly disparate. Here, Jerusalem is of utmost concern, since there is no conceivable negotiation that could take place without the Holy City at its center. And at the heart of the issue of Jerusalem lies the vital question of how to preserve the ever fragile Status Quo.

Jerusalem's churches are natural advocates for maintaining the Status Quo, since it is built into their history, namely, the Ottoman firman of 1852, which preserved the status of the Christian holy sites. This preservation facilitates the churches' general stance to allow open worship, without distinction or discrimination, and so it is built into their value system as well. Since the Status Quo was adopted into international law by way of the Treaty of Berlin and broadened to apply to all holy sites, even being recognized by the Israelis in 1967, although violated later in regard to the Al-Aqsa compound, maintenance and protection of the Status Quo has been crucial for peace. The churches' advocacy extends to the protection of the compound, and all of Jerusalem's holy sites.

But there is an important distinction to be made in the churches' understanding of holy sites, which makes them a unique target of the settler agenda. In the Christian view, holy sites are not part and parcel of a nationalistic framework, but rather are understood purely in terms of their spiritual significance; hence the policy of inclusivity, and the churches' emphasis on remaining independent actors. It may be for this exact reason that the churches have become a "canary in the coal mine" to the extent that the coal mine is a quick and quiet breakdown of the Status Quo, and that Jerusalem's ancient multifaceted religious, ethnic, and cultural character is being irrevocably damaged.

It is important to emphasize that the growing boldness and impunity of radical settlers is harming everyone in Jerusalem

and not only Christians. However, the churches provide a unique and effective target – a fact sometimes overlooked by outside observers. As independent, visible, ancient guardians of holy sites, as well as the largest landowners after the state, they have emerged as a symbol of what radicals seek to change about Jerusalem. Thus, moves against the churches have proven to be advantageous for political aspirants during recent election periods, including in terms of the support they receive from settlers who in turn perceive sponsorship, direct or indirect, of their often criminal activities. At the same time, settler groups secure Western Christian funds – posing as charitable organizations – from donors who are often unaware of the activities they support.

In the last few years there has been a series of actions attempted or executed by radical entities within and spanning the Israeli political arena, interweaving local and national governments, toward a unified agenda of weakening the Christian presence. These include court rulings that legitimize underhanded means of acquiring land, the introduction of discriminatory legislation, police and governmental interference in religious ceremonies, expansion onto church land for nationalistic purposes, and turning a blind eye to violence committed by Jewish radicals.

How Do the Churches Respond?

These days, the churches act in tandem, particularly when facing threats to their autonomy as religious institutions. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem provides a solid example of both the church's autonomy and the essentiality of that autonomy, being the oldest institution in the Holy Land, and uniquely autocephalous over its jurisdiction. Over millennia, it survived dozens of takeovers of the city, wars, and challenges to its own existence. This is due to the posture that the church assumed amid tumultuous political realities, often captured with the Biblical verse, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things

that are God's" (Matt. 22:21).

An eminent example of this policy is found in the Arab Muslim takeover of Jerusalem in 637, when the Muslim Khalifa Omar Ibn al Khattab and Patriarch Sophronios, who emerged as a post-Byzantine ethnarch, signed a covenant in order to avoid war. The Patriarchate's abdication of sole authority over Jerusalem not only saved lives but also provided a solution to a problem that leaders of that period foresaw would never have an ideal answer: How to share holy space upon which everyone lays legitimate claims.

Over centuries, the Patriarchate provided another benefit to the Abrahamic faith communities: it offered witness to their historical ties to Jerusalem and protected the sacred heritage which these faiths share – the places of divine-human encounter. To characterize the city thus is to see its inherent indispensability to all humankind. This reasoning informs the church's policy toward inclusivity, which views Jerusalem as a city on a hill that can't – that mustn't – be hid. Ideologies to the contrary undermine the nature of Jerusalem, and deny people their natural right to venerate what is holy.

"Jerusalem is mentioned always as a model – not a theoretical, but a tangible model – of co-existence; a model of the Abrahamic religious co-existence, of civilization, and of cultures. This is what the world is in need of today," says Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem.

He and other Heads of Churches, as well as the Status Quo Committee, have signed joint letters, held press briefings, and even agreed to close the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in protest in early 2018 in response to a surprise move by the municipality to impose retrospective taxes equaling around \$200 million on historically exempt church property. This move was particularly startling considering the special status of the religious institutions, the Status Quo of 1852, and

philanthropic services the churches provide to the general population, including schools, nursing homes, hospitals, food distribution centers, and health clinics, which would have been immediately closed. During the visit of United States President Joe Biden in July 2022, the Patriarch outlined the church's deepening concerns in a letter, to which he received a strong, supportive response. The situation on the ground has reached a level which has caught international attention.

What Are the Issues at Hand?

A wave of attacks against the churches beginning in 2017 emanated from the judicial, municipal, and national levels. Often, such moves can be traced back to individuals who sympathize with, receive support from, or work in the name of the settler agenda. Moreover, the initiatives appear to have a tendency to move vertically through official channels. For example, municipal initiatives may be adopted by ministries or Knesset members, settler initiatives may find support in the municipality, or Knesset bills may be supported by settler groups. Consequently, there exists an effective apparatus by which the status of Jerusalem may be altered, to the detriment of Jerusalem's non-Jewish indigenous communities, and in betrayal of Israel's declared commitment to freedom of worship, the protection of all its inhabitants and the diverse fabric of society in the Holy Land.

Radical Influence in the Judicial Sphere

The Jaffa Gate properties case is one of the most blatant examples of how settler activity is destabilizing the Old City. In July 2017, the Jerusalem District Court ruled in favor of radical group Ateret Cohanim, whose mission statement is to "redeem" Jerusalem from non-Jews. At the center of the case was the question of whether the unauthorized sale of Patriarchate property, situated prominently at the entrance of the Christian Quarter, was indeed a valid sale.

The deal had been attained through Ateret Cohanim's frequent

underhanded tactics, as documented by *Haaretz* journalist Nir Hasson. In 2004 the group, working under the cover of four different off-shore shell companies, bribed a junior employee in the church's finance office to sign lease deals that he was never authorized to sign, and of which the Church's synod and patriarch were unaware. In court, the church provided concrete evidence of bribery, bad faith, conspiracy, and that the deal lacked due authority from the Patriarchate. However, these and other strange circumstances surrounding the case were disregarded, including Ateret Cohanim's failure to produce material evidence that was in their possession, or to bring the group's leader, who was directly involved with the deals, as a witness.

In March 2022, while the properties' legally protected tenants, the respective Dajani and Kirresh families, continued their own court battles, members of Ateret Cohanim unlawfully seized a portion of Petra Hotel – one of the properties in question – with police protection. Although the tenants went to the Magistrate Court with an *urgent procedure* request in order to address the break-in and takeover, the judge published his decision two weeks later, ruling not to evacuate the settlers. Moreover, he granted Ateret Cohanim permission to renovate the property, although this was later suspended so that the tenants could appeal. The final decision regarding the legally protected tenancy rests with the Supreme Court.

The pattern of settlers gaining Church-owned property in the Old City using deception, violence, and squatting is well-established. In 2016, members of Ateret Cohanim broke through the walls and roof of an Orthodox chapel adjacent to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the early hours of the morning, then erected iron bars to seal off the area they intended to steal. The group had already seized the neighboring St. John's Hostel, also across the courtyard of the Holy Sepulcher, in the 1990s by deceiving police and breaching a judicial agreement. Church properties which aren't

subjected to these types of takeovers, are often vandalized or torched, such as the Catholic Church of All Nations in Gethsemane in 2020, and a Romanian Orthodox Church near the Old City in 2021, among others. The outcomes of the Jaffa Gate properties case underscore the fear that coercion, violence, and disregard for the law, are being normalized in Jerusalem. Moreover, the strategic takeover of Jaffa Gate by Jewish settlers assures that a climate of intimidation and criminality will infiltrate the Christian Quarter, as is evident of Ateret Cohanim's pattern of activity. "This is not about the individual properties, but about the whole character of Jerusalem including the Christian Quarter," wrote the Heads of Local Churches in a statement. "If the properties are occupied by radicals, we know what is going to happen," says Patriarch Theophilos.

Radical Influence in the National Sphere

One of the most disturbing trends is increasing interference in the Church's administration of the holiest place in the world for Christians – the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

The policy of the Major Communities, i.e., churches that administer the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, is to cooperate with officials to ensure that pilgrims can safely visit and venerate site. This is especially important during large feast days which welcome thousands of believers. However, the churches note growing interference by police and government in their services, including strictly limiting who may enter, using police violence toward congregants, and intrusion into their regular administrative affairs.

Archbishop Isidoros, the Superior of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, says that police are increasingly requiring permission for internal decisions and asking excessive questions in an unofficial manner. Typically, they report back to the Israeli Antiquities Authority, which subsequently inserts itself into various works within the church. For

example, the archbishop said that when he began construction on the Monastery of Abraham, situated on the church roof, the authorities first asked questions related to security, then asked for building plans, and finally began asking personal questions about the workers.

After police illegitimately, and without prior notice, closed the Holy Tomb in 2015, citing safety concerns, the churches banded together to restore the site and remove any doubt of its safety. Presently, they are restoring the floor and sewage system underground. However, the reasons for governmental interference continue to shift in relevance to the times. For example, after complying with safety ordinances during the COVID-19 pandemic, the churches found that historical precedents around the Holy Light service did not return to normal. In 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave the impression to the diplomatic corps that it was responsible for coordinating the service, which is irrelevant to the ministry's official role and historically unprecedented. Videos circulated, in the meantime, of police brutality at the Old City gates. In 2022, at a time when Israel imposed no vaccine or mask mandates, the churches were notified by police

of new regulations and an extreme limitation to the number of worshippers allowed at the service – less than one-tenth the usual attendance. The Major Communities wrote to the president of Israel, Isaac Herzog, expressing their “deep concern and disagreement to this unfair decision that limits the rights of Christian pilgrims to worship freely on our faith's most important day of the year.”

In the same month as the Jaffa Gate decision in 2017, the discriminatory Bill of Church Lands was presented to the Knesset and immediately received 40 signatures as well as vocal support from the former minister of justice. Its author, MK Rachel Azaria, had previously been deputy mayor of Jerusalem, and likely would have been familiar with the

churches and the social services they provide. However, her bill attacked the churches in a way that found no parallel in Jewish or Muslim communities. It proposed to give the state the right to nationalize (expropriate) church lands if they met particular conditions related to their leaseholds.

In the early years following the establishment of the State of Israel, Patriarchate lands, particularly in the West Jerusalem area of Rehavia, were subject to an ultimatum: be confiscated for national use, or otherwise contracted under long-term leases with the Jewish National Fund (JNF). Decades later, when the JNF sought to renegotiate these leases at an unfair value, the church sold part of their rights to a third party. This effectively allowed the church to free itself from the dead weight of the properties, and redistribute the resources to relevant church or community projects. The proposed Bill of Church Lands was designed for the Rehavia case and others like it. It directly interferes with the church's property rights and exploits the artificially generated fear of the residents of those properties.

International pressure garnered through the Patriarchate's awareness campaign paused the bill's passage several times. However, it teems with radical support and could be brought back to life at any time.

Radical Influence in the Municipal Sphere

Earlier this year, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) advanced a plan for large portions of the Mount of Olives to be designated and declared a national park. The proposal, which resembles controversial gerrymandering maps around U.S. political districts, allows for nearly 20 Christian sites to be included or encircled by the park boundaries. The churches were never consulted, informed, or brought into the conversation.

"This is an initiative of the Municipality," says Patriarch

Theophilos. "First of all, they don't want the Churches to develop their own lands or to build housing projects to accommodate the local Palestinian population. Secondly, they are trying to reduce the influence and authority of the Churches here, on the environment of the Holy City and around the city walls."

Upon hearing of the INPA plans, the Heads of Churches wrote to Minister of Environmental Protection Tamar Zandberg. "Although the plan is officially presented by the INPA, it seems that it was put forward and is being orchestrated, advanced and promoted by entities whose apparent sole purpose is to *confiscate and nationalize* one of the holiest sites for Christianity and alter its nature," they wrote.

The INPA claims that the purpose of the expansion is to restore lands "neglected for years and (which) suffer from vandalism and arson," according to a *Times of Israel* article. However, it is precisely the threat of settler vandalism and violence which the Church is calling attention to, which is being on the whole unaddressed by local authorities.

In addition to the Mount of Olives, massive developments on Mount Zion extend down through Silwan, into the Kidron Valley. For decades, the City of David Foundation has worked to move Jewish populations into Silwan and facilitate tourist experiences. Documentation by *Haaretz* and Peace Now reveals that the group uses various techniques, some illegal, to alter Silwan's demographics.

On Mount Zion, in June 2022, a group of about 50 radicals broke into an ancient chapel on Patriarchate property, telling the guard, "We know where you live and we will kill you," he reported. The municipality uses such complaints in order to propose permanent changes to the site, including on Church property. These include removing trees, adding lights and concrete, and building a cable car apparatus for tourists, rather than addressing hostile conduct at the holy site.

Efforts of the local government to serve tourism objectives or radicals are not conducive to the protection of holy spaces. For example, each year, the municipality requests that Patriarchate grounds, some of the only natural green spaces left in the area, be open for settlers to camp out on during particular Jewish feasts. According to Father Matheos Siopis, who is in charge of the Patriarchal Seminary School of Mount Zion, every time the Church has complied in good faith, the groups engage in drug use, play loud music, build fires, uproot trees, threaten students who board at the school, and refuse to leave. Conversely, on the Christian feast of Pentecost, significant police protection from armed settlers is required in order for the clergy to complete one litany around the Upper Room and their own chapel.

The municipal strategy of development as a front for altering the character of Jerusalem is also visible within the Old City. About a decade ago, Jaffa Gate became the site of secular summer spectacles which attracted thousands. The activities blocked movement within the Christian Quarter. Without Church consent, speakers were placed near monastery windows, playing loud music on sound loops late into the night. Activity maps were distributed which brought droves of people into the heart of the quarter, disrupting the privacy of residents and clergy, and turning reverent spaces into an obstacle course. The churches addressed the municipality, arguing for due respect to religious life within the Old City.

In 2022, New Gate became a center of similar activity. Most of the area is owned by Greek Orthodox and Franciscan Brotherhoods, respectively, which operate monasteries, religious offices, and schools there. However, neither of these institutions was consulted when the municipality converted most of the street extending from New Gate into bars and a zone of disruptive activity. For the duration of summer, the street was completely blocked by concerts, yoga sessions, circus acts, and other non-traditional activities. While local

shop owners may have benefited economically, it came at the expense of benefiting only on the municipality's terms.

Often, when the churches request permits on their own property, they are denied. For example, after the municipality re-paved the Patriarchate Road in late summer 2022, it gave away Patriarchate parking spaces to non-church affiliated individuals, even after several attempts by the church to acquire one space for a priest who is fully handicapped.

Safeguarding the Status Quo, a Key to Peace

Blatant assaults to the Status Quo, which find support among members of Israeli governmental bodies, are indicative of a huge tide shift. They beg the question: To what extent and by whom is the Status Quo seriously upheld in Jerusalem? As can be inferred from the above examples, the pattern here is this: While the churches extend their cooperation, entities animated by ideology systematically undermine their missions and move the goal posts. It would be prudent for all people of good will in politics and civil society to heed the warning of these ancient institutions who have witnessed every occurrence in Jerusalem for 2,000 years: Safeguarding the Status Quo, respecting the right of all people to worship freely, as well as the institutions which guarantee this right, and nurturing co-existence, if not symbiosis, is the only true path to peace. The word has become meaningless in the political arena, and will degrade further if not honored by those who call Jerusalem home. True peace is respect for one's neighbors, including their right to exist on the two fundamental levels which humans seek to exist: the human and the spiritual.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE CORONATION OIL OF HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

A historical event took place today, Friday March 3, in Jerusalem where the oil that will be used for the anointing of His Majesty King Charles III in the coronation ceremony on the 6th May 2023, was consecrated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch Theophilos III, and later by the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, The Most Reverend Hosam Naoum.

Below is the press release issued by Buckingham Palace.



ROYAL COMMUNICATIONS

THE CONSECRATION OF THE CORONATION OIL

The Crown oil which will be used to anoint His Majesty The King on 10th May 2023 has been consecrated in Jerusalem today, Friday 3rd March 2023.

The ceremony took place in The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem at 10:00hrs (GMT +3).

The oil has been consecrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, and the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, The Most Reverend Hosain Nassim.

The oil has been created using olives harvested from two groves on the Mount of Olives, at the Monastery of Mary Magdalene and the Monastery of the Ascension. The Monastery of Mary Magdalene is the burial place of His Majesty's grandmother, Princess Alice of Greece. The olives were pressed just outside Gethsemane.

The oil has been perfumed with essential oils - saffron, rose, geranium, cinnamon, cardamom, benzoin and amber - as well as orange blossom.

The Coronation oil is based on the oil used at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I, the formula of which has been used for hundreds of years. It will also be used for the anointing of Her Majesty The Queen Consort.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said:

‘I am honoured and grateful that His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III and Archbishop Hosain Nassim have consecrated the oil that will be used to anoint His Majesty The King. I want to thank especially His Beatitude for providing the Coronation Oil, which reflects The King’s personal family connection with the Holy Land and his great care for its people. I am also delighted that the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem shared in the consecration of the oil.

‘Since beginning the planning for the Coronation, my desire has been for a new Coronation Oil to be produced using olive oil from the Mount of Olives. This commemorates the deep historic link between the Coronation, the Bible and the Holy Land. From ancient kings through to the present day, monarchs have been anointed with oil from this sacred place. As we prepare to anoint The King and The Queen Consort, I pray that they would be guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.’

END



Credit: Patriarchate of Jerusalem/Buckingham Palace



Credit: Patriarchate of Jerusalem/Buckingham Palace



Credit: Patriarchate of Jerusalem/Buckingham Palace



Credit: Patriarchate of Jerusalem/Buckingham Palace



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All captions end with: Picture date: Friday March 3, 2023. PA Photo. The King will be anointed, blessed and consecrated with the oil by the Archbishop of Canterbury in a sacred ritual during his coronation on May 6. The anointing is the most sacred part of the coronation ceremony, and takes place before the investiture and crowning. The Archbishop anoints the

sovereign on the hands, breast and head. See PA story ROYAL Coronation. Photo credit should read: Patriarchate of Jerusalem/Buckingham Palace/PA Wire.

PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III SPEAKS AT THE ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON DC

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III attended this morning, Monday January 30, the opening session for the annual International Religious Freedom Summit (IRF) held in Washington DC, United States.

After greeting the attendance with the peace of Jerusalem, His Beatitude took the opportunity to relay the current circumstances of Christians of the Holy Land and Jerusalem to the audience. Pointing out that the “peaceful mosaic that we have known for hundreds of years is under threat” explaining that for years now “the Christian community has faced hate crimes and acts of vandalism” that are no longer targeting properties alone but carrying subtle messages with every attack, that being “that Christians are not welcome in Jerusalem”. In addition, Patriarch Theophilos III underlined that those attacks are intensifying and targeting the Christian pilgrim route at Jaffa Gate, New Gate, as well as the Mountain of Olives, which will impact the Garden of Gethsemane.

Being a main speaker at this summit, representing his fellow Church leaders as well as the faithful communities of the Holy Land, His Beatitude utilized the joint statement published yesterday by the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem regarding the increasing cycle of violence in the Holy Land, “we have been constantly warning of an exploding, senseless cycle of violence that will only cause hurt and suffering to everyone. Such a state of affairs will almost certainly bring further atrocities and anguish, driving us away from the much sought-after peace and stability that we all seek.”

Towards the end of his speech, His Beatitude called on Members of the Congress and leaders of American civil society to support the Christian existence in the Holy Land to thrive alongside other communities, highlighting that although “we are small in number but large in mission” and to ensure that the upcoming generations would be able to visit the Holy City and walk in the footsteps of the Prophets and Christ, and be welcomed not only by stones “but by a vibrant Christian presence.”

The IRF summit of 2023 is going to be held for three days in Washington D.C., starting January 31st and ending on February 1st.

Article by: Heba Hrimat





LETTER OF MR LEONIDAS KOLLAS REGARDING THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM DURING THE YEARS 1961-1965

The website of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem publishes the letter sent to it by the honourable Architect Mr Leonidas Kollas from Corfu, which refers to the Restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during the years 1961-1965, sponsored by the pious source of Greece.

In April 1961, during the Patriarchal Office of the memorable Patriarch Benedictus, Mr Kollas, serving in the Management of the Directorate of Restorations of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Restoration of the Ministry of the Presidency of Greece, was sent to Jerusalem as a representative of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Restorations of the Ministry of the Presidency, by the General Director of the Ministry of Antiquities at the time, Mr Ioanniss

Papadimitriou, in order to undertake service in the Joint Technical Clerk established in 1958, by a joint decision of the three Major Pilgrim Communities, Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Franciscan, for the purpose of the Restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Mr Kolla's letter covers a gap in the space on the website of the Patriarchate, which is unable, due to workload and lack of personnel, to refer to the signed historical Status Quo Agreement and conservation and renovation work carried out very successfully with fixing, conservation and renovation work in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the period 1695-1961, during the Patriarchal Office of the late Patriarch Benedictus. These were the forerunner of the completed historical work of the renovation of the Sacred Edicule and the now completed maintenance works of the floor of the Rotunda and Seven Arches area, at the blessed initiative of the current Primate, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III.

Warmly thanking Mr Kollas, we wish him the grace of the Holy Sepulchre to continue his scientific Pilgrimage research through his personal archive of the period 1961-1965, as he served on the project.

We quote this letter in detail, in this link:
<https://jerusalem-patriarchate.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/1%CE%B7->

[%CE%95%CE%A0%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%9F%CE%9B%CE%97-%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%82-](#)

[%CE%93%CE%AD%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B1-](#)

[%CE%91%CF%81%CF%87%CE%B9%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AD%CE%B1-](#)

[%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%AE-](#)

[%CE%A0%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%81%CF%87%CE%B7.pdf:](#)

From Secretariat-General

MRS MOROPOULOU GIVES A LECTURE ON THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED EDICULE

On the evening of Wednesday, October 6/19, 2022, the emeritus professor of the National Technical University of Athens Mrs Antonia Moropoulou gave a lecture in the context of the Conference “New Studies in the Archeology of Jerusalem and its region” in the Auditorium / ceremonial hall of the Friends of Israel Museum, in the centre of the New City of Jerusalem. The lecture was about the restoration of the Sacred Edicule, a historical and symbolic work, according to the study of the Interdisciplinary Team of the National Technical University of Athens, of which Mrs Moropoulou is the architect. and in accordance with the agreement of the three Major Pilgrim Communities, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Patriarchate of the Armenians, the guardians of the Status Quo.

Mrs Moropoulou presented this work through her clarifications and relevant images on a screen to a group of experts in Archeology and other experts, in the presence of the representatives of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Geronda Secretary-General, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Hierodeacon Dositheos.

This in-depth lecture is published for those interested on the website of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, see **link**:

On the eve of the lecture on Tuesday, October 5/18, 2022, Mrs Moropoulou was accepted into the Secretariat office by the Geronda Secretary-General His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos

of Constantina and the Patriarchal Commissioner, His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolias, and the day following the lecture, by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

In both visits, the decisive role of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for the preservation of the Status Quo and the Status of the city of Jerusalem and peace in the Holy Land was underlined, as well as that of Mrs Moropoulou for the accomplishment of this historic work.

From Secretariat-General

PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III: “CHRISTIANS ARE UNDER THREAT IN THE CRADLE OF THEIR FAITH”

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III wrote the following article for The Times newspaper.

Having served as a priest in the northeast of England many years ago, I remember the cloudy days of January. Here in Jerusalem, while we enjoy a brighter and warmer climate, we know what it is to live in the darkness. As Patriarch of Jerusalem I have the privilege of leading the Greek Orthodox church in the Holy Land. The first of my 140 predecessors was St James, the first leader of the church in Jerusalem and the brother of Jesus Christ. Along with a number of other leaders St James was martyred for his faith. As a community we have seen empires rise and fall. We have survived sieges,

invasions, plagues and persecutions. And through it all, we have remained faithful to our Lord, because in the darkness we know that he is our light and our life.

In the Gospel of St John the Evangelist we read that St John the Baptist "came as a witness to the light" of Jesus Christ. As churches this has been our mission for two millennia. We are not simply the custodians of holy sites; we are living witnesses to God's light.

As witnesses to the light we seek to be a blessing in the changing and challenging societies in which we live. We provide healthcare, education and community services. We look after the elderly, welcome refugees and care for the destitute, regardless of their faith, nationality or background. We welcome millions of pilgrims and preserve and serve Christianity's most holy sites. In all of this we direct people to the light of Christ.

Despite these good works, our presence in Jerusalem is under threat. Our churches are threatened by Israeli radical fringe groups. At the hands of these Zionist extremists the Christian community in Jerusalem is suffering greatly. Our brothers and sisters are the victims of hate crimes. Our churches are regularly desecrated and vandalised. Our clergy are subject to frequent intimidation. The sworn intent of these radical groups is to extinguish the light of the Christian community from the Old City.

A short walk from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on the pilgrim route, stands the Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to

the Christian quarter of Old City Jerusalem. To walk this way is to share in the journey of the Christian community; one is immediately surrounded by church groups from around the world as crowds of pilgrims process to worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. On Christmas Day I am among those who pass through the Jaffa Gate as we travel to Bethlehem to celebrate Christ's birth.

It is at Jaffa Gate that an Israeli radical group is seeking to occupy two big buildings, acquired through illegitimate transactions. Quite disingenuously they claim that their physical presence in there will not affect the integrity of the Christian Quarter. However, we know from their previous actions at St John's Hostel, a site even closer to the Holy Sepulchre which was also deceitfully taken over by them some years ago, that this is not true. Their behaviour will be devastating for all Christians. Local families, who have lived here for generations, will be made to feel unwelcome in their own home and pilgrims who have longed to visit the birthplace of the Christian faith will have their experience diminished.

The change of status of the Jaffa Gate properties would not only be a misfortune for local families and the global Christian family but for the Holy Land itself. Jerusalem is home to three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and has long been an illuminating example of a mosaic community. It is the spiritual capital of the world, comprising a family of faiths, all of which enjoy a long and unique rich heritage. The beauty of this city rests upon its cultural and religious diversity. By working to exclude one community, the Christians, these radicals pose an existential threat not only to the Christian family but to Jerusalem itself, a point upheld by so many of our Jewish cohabitants of the Holy Land.

We all share the vision that these radicals are not representative of the state of Israel or the Jewish people and that it is essential for the diversity and distinctive characters of all quarters of the Old City to be protected for the benefit of Jerusalem and the whole world.