

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.”



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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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THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE MONK PANTELEIMON

The Funeral Service of the Holy Sepulchre Monk Panteleimon Andronikos was held on the morning of Wednesday, August 3/16, 2023. He slept in the Lord on Thursday, July 28/August 10, 2023, due to a heart attack in his hometown Kythera. The Funeral Service was held in the holy Church of Saint Theodore in Kythera under the fraternal care of the Holy Metropolis of Kythera and Antikythera in consultation with H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

The night before that, the complete Monastic Funeral Service was sung to the deceased.

The funeral service was presided over by His Eminence the Metropolitan of Kythera and Antikythera, Seraphim, in the concelebration on behalf of the Patriarchate of the Elder Sacristan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, His Eminence Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, the Exarch of the Holy Sepulchre in Athens Archimandrite Raphael and priests of the Metropolis of Kythera, as the service was attended by many faithful, fellow citizens of the deceased, honouring his memory.

The obituary was delivered by the Elder Sacristan as follows:

“Your Eminence Metropolitan of Kythera and Antikythera Seraphim,

Reverend Pastor of this Holy Metropolis,

Respected fathers and beloved brothers

The venerable Primate of the Church of Jerusalem, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III commissioned us to represent Him together with the Archbishop of Hierapolis during the funeral service of the blessed monk Panteleimon and to place before Your venerable face, Metropolitan of Kythera, His thanks and gratitude, but also the sympathy of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood for all you did for the blessed one, and to all those who honour his memory with their presence in this funeral service. We also convey to the relatives and friends His sincere participation in their mourning and His wholehearted Patriarchal wishes for the repose of the soul of the blessed one, in the land of the living and in the tents of the righteous.

A sacred duty, but at the same time a sad one, led our steps to this holy Monastery of Saint Theodore in Kythera, in order to send to eternity the now-blessed Holy Sepulchre Monk Panteleimon, who "through death passed into life" and was transplanted from the earthly army to the triumphant Church in the heavens, from the earthly to the heavenly, from the perishable to the imperishable, from the temporal to the eternal to the bosoms of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, where "there is no pain, no sorrow, not sighing, but eternal life".

And where the soul of the departed dances in heavenly chambers, we, some sensibly and others intellectually, stand at this sacred moment in the circle of his honourable tent, to honour him for the last time, to give him our thanks for his many years of ministry in the Holy Land and to send him forward with faith and expectation of the Resurrection of those who sleep in the Lord and the "life of the age to come".

Humanly, we are saddened by the separation and the deprivation of his physical presence. We are comforted, however, by the exhortation of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, "Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of those who are

asleep so that you do not grieve like the rest who have no hope. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so may God raise up with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus" (Thessal. 4, 13-14). And the late Panteleimon lived in Christ Jesus and in Christ Jesus he fell asleep.

The late Panagiotis Andronikos of Nikolaos and Maria was born in Kythera on March 24, 1944. The first encyclical lessons were taught in Kythera. He went to the Holy City of Jerusalem on September 21, 1979, and lived in the Holy Lavra of Saint Savva the Sanctified. He was ordained a monk on August 15, 1981, by his Elder and Spiritual Father of the Lavra Archimandrite Seraphim, taking the name Panteleimon. From July 23, 1984, until his last day, he served with dedication and patience as a minister of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and a watchful guardian of the Holy and Life-giving Tomb of the Lord. Throughout his ministry, he showed hard work, consistency and commendable responsibility. In him, the pilgrims saw a man of God. Because he was friendly, welcoming, cheerful, eloquent, rough and at the same time sweet, steadfast and honest. He embraced them all with love and simplicity, communicating Christ to them and writing His divine messages in their souls.

In particular, he relayed to them his experiences from his ministry at the Holy Sepulchre, the infinite miracles he experienced and his struggles for the preservation of the Holy Places. He distributed to everyone blessed oil and candle wax from the Holy Sepulchre, to have them as a blessing in their homes. That is why he was loved and appreciated by all. And here now the blessed one has left for endless eternity in the middle of summer, and is being buried today, one day after the Theotokos feast of the Dormition, and "he hastens to the grave, without taking care of the things of futility and hard-working flesh".

Therefore, all of us, let us address a fervent request to the All-Good and Omniscient God, with the supplication of the

hymn:

“May Christ, grant you rest in the land of the living, and the gates of Paradise will be opened for you, and the kingdom will be shown to you, and you will be spared the sins of your earthly life friend of Christ.”

May his memory be eternal.”

The local Metropolitan also spoke, praising the monastic and Holy Sepulchre zeal of the deceased and his offering to the Holy Places and his hometown.

As soon as the Funeral Service was dismissed, the ascetic and fighting monk Panteleimon, who turned to the Lord, was buried in the Cemetery of the Monastery of Saint Theodore in Kythera.

May his memory be eternal!

From Secretariat-General

THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM FACES REPEATED ATTACKS ON ITS PROPERTY, ESPECIALLY IN JERUSALEM

A video clip circulating on social media revealed on Thursday 20/7/20, Israeli radicals lying on a “couch” inside the lands belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate on the Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and they attack the Patriarchate employee refusing to leave the land, and they bid him and the patriarchate of insults, and they claim to be right without

others with this Orthodox land.

The Patriarchate issued a statement shortly after the wide circulation of this video on social media, in which it said that this painful video revealed little of what its property has been exposed to in general, since many years of frenzied attacks by radicals, and exposed a small part of the ongoing suffering, war and battles between the Patriarchate and the far right-wing groups with the aim of protecting its property and rights in the face of the radical tendencies and provocative attacks of these groups.

The Patriarchate affirmed that with the increase in the attacks on the Patriarchate's property, His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, issued instructions to appoint permanent guards for the targeted sites. He also instructed the legal team in the Patriarchate to follow up diligently and decisively.

The Patriarchate's statement placed great responsibility on the official authorities that fail to follow up on the attackers on churches and their property, especially when the attackers are from the far right, which made these radicals persist in their attacks.

It is noteworthy that the property of the Patriarchate on Mount Zion includes a cemetery for the community of the Greek Orthodox Church, a church, a seminar high school, and a playground belonging to the school, in addition to an ancient church that is considered one of the oldest rock-hewn churches in the world. It was a haven for Christians to hide from persecution by the authorities while performing their rituals at the dawn of Christianity.

The statement stated, "A large number of Orthodox sites have been exposed, and are still at risk, from attacks by radicals who write slogans offensive to Christianity, Christ, and Christians, and throw paint on their walls as part of the

disgraceful acts, attacks, and behavior they practice against Christian sanctities and property in general, and Orthodox property in general, and the Orthodox in particular. The statement also indicated that the Israeli authorities, unilaterally, have published, since the seventies of the last century, a regulatory scheme in which the lands of the Patriarchate on Mount Zion have been classified as public areas, and that despite this unjust decision, the Patriarchate has succeeded over the past many years in preventing the confiscation of these historical and strategic properties of high religious and cultural status and value.

The Patriarchate stressed that it will not hesitate and will do its best not to allow these radicals or those who stand behind them or support them to gain any foothold in these properties, stressing that the permanent presence and presence of the Arab Islamic and Christian people alongside the monks and the guards of the Patriarchate in this region is the most important guarantor to deter the persistence of these radicals, especially with the absence of the will to deter them by the official Israeli authorities.

JERUSALEM PATRIARCHATE REGAINS STRATEGIC LANDS IN JERUSALEM, AFTER EFFORTS THAT LASTED MORE THAN A DECADE AND A HALF

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem successfully regained its' full

rights to a plot of land in Abu Tor neighborhood in Jerusalem, for about 80 million shekels. Thus, the Patriarchate was able to completely liberate the land from all the restrictions that were hindering its ownership, which arose as a result of old lease agreements and reservations made by the Israeli government in response to judicial decisions issued in previous eras.

The Patriarchate with the guidance and follow-up of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III was able to restore the strategic piece of land in Jerusalem after more than a decade of continuous effort, given the value of this religious heritage and archaeological land.

The Patriarchate had previously entered into partnerships to develop this piece of land for many reasons, including the financial hardship it suffered at the time, but as time passed by the Patriarchate found solutions and ways to regain its ownership. The aforementioned plot of land is located next to the Orthodox Church in Abu Tor, which contains antiquities from the Byzantine era.

In addition, the Jerusalem Patriarchate issued a statement announcing that the restoration of the land is considered a positive progress and a tangible result of the policy of restoring and protecting Orthodox property adopted by the Holy Synod since the election of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III as Patriarch of Jerusalem and all of Palestine and Jordan, who personally follows up, on a daily basis, the file of recovering Orthodox properties.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem considers this historic regain of rights to the land of Abu Tor, a practical and realistic response to the attempts of radical groups which seeks to seize the Church's real estate and to restrict the authentic Christian presence in Jerusalem.

HIS BEATITUDE RECEIVES THE CHURCH COMMUNITIES FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ACRE AND GALILEE

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III received today, Friday July 8, a number of the Orthodox Community leaders and Church distinguished members from the city of Acre and its' surrounding areas (Metropolitanate of Acre, Ba'neh, Jedaideh, Makr, Ebillein, Kufr Smai', Kufr Yasif, Sakhnin, Rameh, Shafa'amer, Abu Snan).

During the meeting which was attended by their Eminences Metropolitan Benedictos of Bethlehem, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina (the Secretary General), and Archbishop Christophoros of Jordan, His Beatitude recalled late Archimandrite Philotheos, the Patriarchal Vicar in Acre, who played a monumental role and served his community with utmost dedication, asking the Lord to grant him a place in heaven.

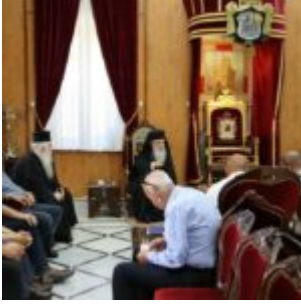
In addition, His Beatitude listened carefully to the concerns and needs of the various communities of Acre, more specifically their ecclesiastical and pastoral requests, a region that the Patriarchate holds near and dear to its heart. His Beatitude affirmed the role of the Patriarchate in embracing all members of the Orthodox Church and Christians in the Holy Land, emphasizing that the demands of the communities of Acre and the Galilee are the demands of the Patriarchate, as they are inseparable entities, and these demands stem from the devotion to both the church and the region. Therefore, His Beatitude affirmed that these requests will be taken into

consideration in the upcoming Holy Synod, which will be held soon.

Furthermore, Archbishop Christophoros expressed the spirit of love and unity among the attendees, emphasizing the importance of joint cooperation between the Patriarchate, led by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, all the spiritual leaders working with responsibility, and a shared clear vision aimed at the revitalization of the Church and the stability of its communities, recalling the achievements that have been accomplished to that effect in Jordan by the blessing of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Towards the end of the meeting, His Beatitude blessed the attendees, calling upon the compassionate God to inspire the Holy Synod Fathers to make the appropriate decision that serves the interests of the Jerusalem Church community in the city of Acre and the towns and villages in its surroundings. In return, the attendees expressed their gratitude to His Beatitude for his love, concern, warm reception, and hospitality.





JERUSALEM PATRIARCHATE CALLS FOR AN END TO THE ATTACK ON JENIN AND CALLS FOR A SAFE AND DIGNIFIED LIFE

The Jerusalem Patriarchate sent an appeal this morning, July 4, to the international community and the forces concerned with the cause of peace in the Holy Land, asking them to work to stop the attack on the city of Jenin and its camp, and to put an end to violence and bloodshed based on the values of peace and justice proclaimed by the Abrahamic religions.

In the statement, the Patriarchate stressed that the world is witnessing today an alarming escalation of violence and bloodshed in our region, and that the world, with great regret, is silently witnessing the continued violation of human rights and the targeting of innocent civilians, and that this painful reality requires everyone to take urgent action

to prevent further human losses and suffering.

The Patriarchate affirmed the words of His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, "we believe in the inherent right of every human being to live in peace and dignity, and we call for an immediate cessation of violence and an acceptance of the voice of the global conscience that calls for an end to armed confrontations and a peaceful settlement of disputes. A just solution for the Palestinian cause is not only a humanitarian necessity, but it is also a political and moral necessity. The continuation of violence leads to more tension and division in the region, and exposes the lives of thousands of innocent people to danger and suffering." Recalling what was stated in the Holy Gospel: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem called on the entire international community and all political and religious forces to assume their responsibilities in establishing peace and stopping the bloodshed in our stricken region, calling for effective intervention by the competent international bodies to stop hostilities and find just and comprehensive political solutions to the Palestinian file.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem renews its full commitment to the values of peace, justice and love that we learned from the monotheistic religions, and calls on all peoples to achieve harmony, cooperation and mutual respect on the basis of truth and justice.

THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF THE BLESSED ARCHIMANDRITE PHILOTHEOS OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE BROTHERHOOD

At 11:00 am on Saturday, June 11/24, 2023, the funeral service for the repose of the soul of the blessed Archimandrite Philotheos Vardakis of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, who served as an Episcopal Commissioner at the Province of Acre – Ptolemais of Northern Israel and slept in the Lord on the evening of Thursday 9th / 22nd June 2023, after falling from scaffolding while repairing the wall of the Holy Church of Saint George in Acre.

The Funeral Service was presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, along with the Holy Sepulchre High Priests and Hieromonks, in the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras, Jerusalem faithful and Greek Orthodox Arabic-speaking Priests and the faithful people, who came from the communes of the region of Acre.

The obituary was delivered by the Elder Secretary-General, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina as follows:

“The sudden and violent departure to the Lord of our beloved brother Archimandrite Philotheos, Hierarchical Commissioner of the Metropolis of Ptolemais – Acre, gathered us together in mourning around the completion of his funeral service. We stand in tears before his corpse, just like the Lord stood in tears before the tomb of this four-day-dead friend Lazarus, whom He resurrected from the dead. Our soul is captured by fear and cowardice before the mystery of death, but never despairing, since even our Lord was afraid before His death on

the cross and begged the Father, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Him". Cowardice before death is one of the ineradicable human passions, which the Lord condescended to, becoming Incarnate for our salvation. Circling the dead body of our beloved brother, we are "sad for the parting" and hear the words of the hymnographer, "I mourn and weep when I think of death".

Nevertheless, while we humanly contemplate these things, it does not distract our attention that death was redeemed through death, namely the death on the Cross of the Son of God, the God-man Jesus Christ. Our Lord willingly accepted death and through His death, He redeemed our death. He died as a man and rose as a God-man. Life arose from the grave, the grave shone bright with life. In the power and light of the Resurrection of Christ, death is only the separation of the soul from the body. It is sleep. Death is the sleep of those who sleep in hope of the resurrection. As the Holy Bible says: "those in the monuments are raised". Those who believe in Christ pass to eternal life in the soul and in the spirit and enjoy the joy of the uncreated works of the Holy Trinity.

Moved by this faith, our deceased loved one, born in 1962, left his hometown of Charakas, Monofatsiou, Heraklion, Crete, at the age of twelve, and came to the Holy Land, in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and studied at the Holy Zion Priestly School with care and conduct excellent and praiseworthy – the speaker had this student for six years. After graduating, she accepted the monastic schema in 1979 and joined the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood. He ministered initially as a deacon and then as a Hieromonk in various ministries assigned to him, such as that of the Hegoumen of Beit Jalla, the Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Saint Charalambos, the Hegoumen of Hoseva and the Hegoumen of Haifa. He was sent by the Patriarchate for theological studies in Belgrade and after transferring universities, he graduated from the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki.

In the years 2001 and 2002, he served as the Patriarchal Representative of the Metropolis of Ptolemais – Akris, and from the year 2003 until his death as the Hierarchical Commissioner of this Metropolis, which had under its spiritual and pastoral responsibility twelve communes; Acre, Abelin, Sakhnin, Kufr – Yasif, Kufr Smea, Rame, Pkea, Sfaamer, Baane, Zdeide, Tarshiha, and Maker. In these, he developed in consultation with the Patriarchate for over twenty years a remarkable and praised Pastoral work of spiritual Orthodox catechesis and excellent teaching of Byzantine Music by a group of male and female Byzantine chanters, spreading contrition to the souls of the faithful in the Patriarchal liturgies of Tabor, Nazareth and others. He was esteemed and loved by all.

His main concern was the dignity of God's house and for this reason, we can pray for him saying "Sanctify them, Lord, who love the dignity of your house". In this work, he was prematurely interrupted by death, when he accidentally fell from the scaffolding, from which he was building the wall of the Holy Church of Saint George in Acre by his own hands. Asking myself why this happened to him like this, I said that "as unsearchable is His will". The Lord only knows!

Nevertheless, I found comfort in recalling that in the year 1979, the Archimandrite Modestos met his death, just after rescuing a pilgrim during the pilgrimage baptism in the Jordan River. In 1990, the Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Hoseva, Archimandrite Anthony, while repairing the narthex of the Church, met his death by landslide stones that covered him. Saint Athanasios the Athonite met his death with other monks from the collapsed dome of the Catholicon of the Great Lavra Monastery, which he had climbed to inspect.

Worthily commemorating his good works in his Funeral Service today, we beseech the Most High to consider him and forgive him as a human being who sinned intentionally or unintentionally and rank his soul among the faithful and

righteous in Paradise. So be it".

The deceased was accompanied by their Eminences, the Archbishops Theofanes of Gerassa and Makarios of Qatar, and all congregation to the place of his burial in the Holy Zion Cemetery.

May his remembrance be ever-lasting!

From Secretariat-General

ARCHIMANDRITE PHILOTHEOS OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE BROTHERHOOD HAS SLEPT IN THE LORD

The Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood announces, after sorrow, not the Lord's sorrow, the departure to the Lord of its distinguished member, Archimandrite Philotheos Vardakis. His death occurred at noon on Thursday, as a result of a fall from a high scaffolding, where he was repairing a wall of the Monastery of Saint George in Acre- Ptolemais, where he served as Patriarchal Representative.

The day and time of his Funeral service will be announced soon.

HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III WELCOMES EUROPEAN DIGNITARIES, REAFFIRMING COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING CHRISTIAN PRESENCE AND HERITAGE IN JERUSALEM

His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, received today at the headquarters of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem a high level delegation of European dignitaries, led by His Excellency Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission, and His Excellency Sven M.G. Koopmans, European Union Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, along with distinguished members of the European Union Commission and the European diplomatic corps in Jerusalem and Ramallah.

The delegation embarked on a visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Christian Quarter of the Old City. There, they witnessed firsthand the imminent threats posed by radical Israeli groups to the Christian presence and the rich heritage in Jerusalem.

Later in the evening, the dignitaries, alongside the heads of Churches in Jerusalem, convened for a dinner at the Imperial Hotel, an emblematic bastion of the Christian struggle to safeguard the mosaic nature of Jerusalem. The gathering at this specific location meant to symbolise Christian steadfast determination to counter the attempts of radical groups,

seeking to undermine the Christian and Muslim presence, thereby preserving the diverse character of the holy city.

In his address, Patriarch Theophilos eloquently highlighted the challenges faced by the Christian communities in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. He expressed gratitude for the support received from the European Union and emphasised the need for continued attention and intervention from the international community. In his speech, the Patriarch of Jerusalem condemned radical groups that seek to force the Christian community out of their historic home and called for the preservation of the multi-religious character of Jerusalem and the Status Quo. H.B. suggested avenues for assistance included: international governmental delegations and diplomatic visits to raise awareness, support for the Hashemite Custodianship of the Holy Places in Jerusalem, and collective efforts to preserve the Christian Quarter and uphold the Status Quo. Patriarch Theophilos concluded his speech with an appeal to the governments of the European Union to persist in their support for the mission of defending the Christian presence and heritage in Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land.