

STATEMENT OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III ON THE STATUS OF HAGIA SOPHIA SHRINE

On Wednesday, June 25/ July 24, 2020, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos stated the following regarding the keeping of the Status of the Church of Hagia Spophia:

It is with utmost seriousness that We express Our concern over recent calls from members of the Turkish government to alter the current status of the Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque.

This magnificent Byzantine Church structure, which captivates the world until today, has a history stretching even farther back into Christendom than the 6th century. Over the course of generations, the region and its people have passed through challenging times that have left painful memories. However, it has been to Turkey's credit that for nearly 100 years it has administered the Hagia Sophia as a museum in order to maintain an extent of neutrality over the site. Subsequently, people from all over the world and from every background are able to enjoy its spiritual, architectural, and historical splendor.

Furthermore, museum status, i.e. indiscriminate accessibility, to Hagia Sophia has born fruit where there otherwise could have been further contention. Hagia Sophia today remains a symbol of tolerance. Some may find spiritual refreshment within its boundaries, others may be inspired by its testament to human accomplishment, and others may view it through individual prisms of meaning. However, this array of outcomes

does the best possible justice to the site, which without question was always intended to inspire awe and to glorify Almighty God.

As stewards of sacred heritage in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for nearly 2,000 uninterrupted years, in a land over which three Abrahamic faiths lay equal claim, We strongly attest to the fact that accessibility promotes peace and mutual respect, whereas attitudes of exclusivity promote conflict and bitterness. We hope and pray, for the benefit of all people of good will, and for Turkey as a nation with the potential to influence our entire region down a path of growth and mutual co-existence, that the present status of the Hagia Sophia is respected and preserved.

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

From Secretariat-General

NIKOLAOS MATAR DOES NOT BELONG TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

Fr. Nikolaos Matar, Dean Priest of the Holy Church of the Nativity of Theotokos in Corona town of the State of California in the U.S.A. continues to falsely claim that he acts under the blessing and guidance of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem despite the enclosed below Release Letter, which was issued to him since the year 2018 and was posted to his canonical Ecclesiastical Authority, namely to His Eminence

Bishop Antonios of Fasiani, in New York.

Protocole Number: 75

To His Eminence

Bishop of Fasiani

Mr. Antonios

Chancellor of the Holy Archdiocese

In New York

Your Eminence,

With much brotherly love I have sent to Your dearly beloved Eminence the Letter with protocole number 210/17 on 28th November 2017, regarding the case of Priest Nikolaos Matar in Corona of California at the Community of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, who refused to subdue to the spiritual guidance of His Eminence the Archbishop of America.

Taking under consideration this case at the Meeting of our Holy and Sacred Synod, I dutifully notify you, that our Patriarchate has no relation with the afore mentioned Priest since the foundation of its Vicariate in America and up to the present, and we have issued a Release Letter to him, as he was canonically ordained by the Church of Jerusalem.

I therefore enclose a copy of his Release Letter, I convey the wishes and love of His Beatitude, from the All-holy and Life Giving Tomb of the Lord, I remain.

In the Holy City of Jerusalem 9th February, 2018.

With love in Christ,

Aristarchos

Archbishop of Constantina

Geronda Secretary-General

RELEASE LETTER

By this Patriarchal letter, We verify that the Reverend Father Nikolaos Matar, a priest of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, following a resolution of the Holy and Sacred Synod that was duly convened on 22 February 2018, has been canonically released from the roll of the clergy of the Patriarchate. This release was granted without prejudice or as a consequence of any ecclesiastical discipline, and Father Nikolaos Matar is free to be received into any canonical Orthodox jurisdiction without impediment.

In witness thereof, We have affixed Our seal to this Letter in the Holy City of Jerusalem, on the 19th day of March in the year of Our Lord 2018.

THEOPHILOS III

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem denounces the exploitation of its name and its website and announces it has no relation, cooperation, nor any communication with Father Nikolaos Matar, for the information and benefit of the Orthodox Congregation in America and elsewhere and that it is not being represented by any one in America.

From Secretariat-General

EASTER ADDRESSES OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

During Easter 2020, it was a common agreement not to exchange visits with the Churches of Jerusalem due to the COVID-9 pandemic, and therefore, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos handed in privately the letters with the Easter wishes to the Custos of the Holy Land, Reverend Francesco Patton, the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa, His Beatitude the Armenian Patriarch in Jerusalem Nourhan Manukian and His Eminence the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem Suheil Dawani.

The letters follow below;

His Paternity Fr. Francesco Patton

Custos of the Holy Land

Saint Saviour's Monastery

Replying to His Beatitude's Easter letter, Reverend Francesco Patton sent the following letter;

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

Your Beatitude,

First of all, I want to express my gratitude for your fraternal Easter Wishes and reciprocate them in the words of this beautiful Easter hymn, which we sing in Medieval Latin:

Death and life contended

in a spectacular battle:

the Prince of life, who died, reigns alive...

We know Christ is truly risen from the dead!

To us, victorious King, have mercy!

Amen. Alleluia.

When we celebrate Easter at the Holy Sepulchre, the Holiest Sanctuary under our shared and fraternal care, we understand that hope is not the projection of our desires, but it is the Risen Lord Jesus Christ who has overcome death. In the Easter celebration we understand that the Risen Jesus is the gardener of life, the One who overcame death by passing through it and has conquered all our fears, all our anguish.

Today, just as the pandemic is still sowing death all over the world, we feel that it is our common commitment to accept the invitation that Jesus made to Mary Magdalene: "Go to my brothers and tell them that you have met Me! Tell them I Am alive! Tell them that My grave is empty!". This is the Good News of Easter, and we have to invite all our brothers and sisters to welcome the Risen Lord with faith, because this is the only vaccine that can save from the virus of death, fear and anguish, from the virus of selfishness and evil that infects our humanity and our history, from the virus of a meaningless and aimless life.

We feel that this Easter we have to pray and bring hope especially to the sick, their families, the nurses and doctors who assist them, to those who find themselves passing from this world to the heavenly Father, to all those who are putting their lives at risk to guarantee essential services to our society.

Your Beatitude, we reciprocate your wishes and prayers and we feel deeply united in Christ with you and with all the

brothers of the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem: united in the care of the Holy Places of Christianity, united in proclaiming the Risen Lord, united in the struggle for the safeguard of Christian freedom, united in the pastoral care of the flock that the Lord has entrusted to us.

With these feelings, we want to express the best wishes of our Fraternity to your Beatitude and to all the community of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

May you continue to enjoy a Happy and Holy Eastertide!

Fr. Francesco PATTON OFM

Custos of the Holy Land

—

Your Paternity, dear Fr. Francesco,

We greet you with deep joy, and with the Paschal hymn

Christ is risen from the dead

Trampling down death by death

And to those in the tomb, bestowing life

and We wish to extend to you Our prayers and best wishes as you celebrate the Easter Feast.

We give thanks to Almighty God that, notwithstanding the present difficult circumstances of the coronavirus, our Brotherhoods have been able to celebrate the Great Holy Week and Pascha in the empty All-Holy and Life-Giving Tomb of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and all the Holy Places, to the benefit of the Church and our people.

Despite all the restrictions and all the distressing circumstances surrounding the present crisis, our common martyrria to the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been of paramount significance for our communities here in the Holy City of Jerusalem, as well as our fellow brothers and sisters of the other Abrahamic faiths.

We rejoice in this common witness, and we are thankful to you and your Fraternity for your steadfast commitment to our common mission as guardians of the Holy Places, which continues to bear fruit in this difficult present moment, and “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,” (Ephesians 4:13). Despite this time of crippling restrictions, we are still able to maintain our important relations for the good of all.

We join in prayer for all those who continue to be affected by the pandemic, especially the sick and all those who care for them. And we remember all who have passed away and those who mourn them. May those who carry the yoke of our Lord find rest in their souls (Matt. 11:29).

Your Excellency, We extend the assurance of Our prayers for you, your brothers in Christ, and your community in this Paschal season, and We look forward to meeting again in our Christian fellowship.

H.E. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa

Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate

Your Excellency, dear Archbishop Pizzaballa,

We greet you with deep joy, and with the Paschal hymn

Christ is risen from the dead,

Trampling down death by death,

And to those in the tomb, bestowing life.

We wish to congratulate you on your celebration of Easter, and we give thanks to God that our respective communities have been able to keep the Great Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In spite of the enormous difficulties posed by the coronavirus pandemic, we have been able to enter into this great mystery of our faith in our Holy City, in the empty Tomb in the Church of the Anastasis, at the very heart of the divine-human encounter.

We have experienced once again that Christ is the way, the truth, the life, and the resurrection, for he who believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die (John 11:24-25).

We are living through these days joined in prayers of both our Churches, and in our common martyria here in the Holy Land. We pray especially for all those in our region and around the world who continue to suffer from the pandemic and its consequences, and we pray fervently for those who have passed away and all who mourn them. May those who carry the yoke of our Lord find rest in their souls (Matt. 11:29).

In our united prayer above all we continue to serve our Lord and his Church both here in the Holy City of Jerusalem as well as the Church and all its faithful the world over. For Jerusalem has been throughout the ages, and remains today, the harbour of hope, peace, and of consolation.

We wish to extend you, Your Excellency, the assurance of our prayers for you, your clergy, and your community this Paschal season, and we look forward to meeting again in our Christian fellowship.

His Beatitude
Archbishop Nourhan
Armenian Patriarch in Jerusalem

Your Beatitude, dear Archbishop Nourhan,

We greet you with deep joy, and with the Paschal hymn

Christ is risen from the dead,

Trampling down death by death,

And to those in the tomb, bestowing life

and we congratulate you and your community as you celebrate the Great Feast of Pascha.

This difficult and complicated situation of restrictions and hardship that so many are enduring makes us realise how crucial is our common mission as guardians and servants of the Holy Places, especially during this sacred period where we venerate Golgotha and the All-Holy and Life-Giving Tomb from where our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected. We have been entrusted with this responsibility by Divine Providence, and it is incumbent upon us to enact this sacred trust in all humility and diligence in true collaboration. Let us, as Saint Paul says, "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

We join with you in keeping in our fervent prayers all those who are affected in any way by this pandemic, especially the sick and those who care for them, and we remember all who have passed away. May those who mourn be consoled by the promise of the resurrection.

Your Beatitude, We assure you of our prayers for you, your Brotherhood, and the community that you serve. We wish you from the bottom of our heart both spiritual and bodily health, and look forward to meeting and joining our prayers for the strengthening of both our fellowship and of our common mission and witness in the Holy Places.

May the light of the resurrection fill the hearts and minds of all people of good will in this holy Paschal season.

The Most Reverend Suheil Dawani
The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem
& the Middle East
Saint George's Cathedral

Your Grace, dear Archbishop Suheil,

We greet you with deep joy, and with the Paschal hymn

Christ is risen from the dead,

Trampling down death by death,

And to those in the tomb, bestowing life

and We send our warm congratulations as you and your community celebrate Easter.

We are united in celebrating the Paschal Feast at a time of great difficulty for our Holy City, the Holy Land, and our world. The coronavirus pandemic has meant tremendous hardship for so many, and Jerusalem, usually overflowing with pilgrims and local faithful at this time of year, is practically deserted.

However, we have been able to keep the sacred ceremonies of the Great Holy Week and Easter in the All-Holy and Life-Giving Tomb in our respective Churches, and have been able to share a common martyrria to the truth and power of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for He is the resurrection and the life, and he who believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in him shall never die (John 11:24-25). In this way, we have been able to show the world that Jerusalem remains a harbour of hope, peace, and consolation in a challenging time for the human family.

We join our prayers with yours, particularly for all those who are affected by the pandemic, the sick and those who care for them, as well as for those who have passed away and all who mourn.

We wish to extend to you, dear Archbishop Suheil, the assurance of our prayers for you and your family, your clergy, and your community in this Paschal season, and We look forward to meeting again in our Christian fellowship.

With our Patriarchal wishes for Pascha,

Christ is Risen!

THEOPHILOS III

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Holy City of Jerusalem

Pascha 2020

EASTER 2020 MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

THEOPHILOS III

By the mercy of God Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem

and all Palestine

for all the congregation of the Church, grace, mercy and peace

from the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb

of the Resurrected Christ.

“We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of an everlasting life. And with leaps of joy we praise the Cause thereof, the only blest and most glorious God of our Fathers”. (Troparion Ode Seven of the Canon of the Resurrection by St. John Damascene)

In unspeakable and absolute joy, with pure hearts and undefiled lips, with unceasing merry voices and pious cheering, the Church proclaims during the night of the Resurrection, and during the whole Easter period, echoing the “Christ is risen from the dead, by death hath he trampled down death, and to those in the graves hath He bestowed life”. In firmness of faith in the Crucified and Resurrected from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the hope of the Resurrection unto eternal life, the Church chants “It is the day of Resurrection; let us be radiant for the festival, and let us embrace one another. Let us say O brethren, even to those that hate us; let us forgive all things on the Resurrection”.

This wondrous and joyful message of the victory of death is

the fruit of Christ's crucifixion, for, "behold, through the cross, joy has come unto the whole world". Christ's victory over death came through His sacrifice on the Cross. Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Word of God, came down to earth from the bosom of the Father, became incarnate through the Holy Spirit and Virgin-Mary, willingly brought Himself on the Cross as an immaculate sacrifice for the remission of our sins. As Prophet Isaiah had foretold, "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7), and just as St. John the Baptist pointed at Him in recognition, He became on the Cross "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The most wondrous of all in this mystery, which signifies the excessive love of God for us, is what the Apostle of nations also says: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8). Being without sin, Christ "being in the form of God...made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant: (Phil. 2:6-7), He humbled Himself, willingly came to the Cross and through His immaculate blood "He that forgiveth the ancient debts, rent asunder the handwriting against them and wished to bestow His grace"(Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos, 4th Part).

Having suffered in the flesh for us and buried, Christ went down into Hades. In his greed, Hades was waiting to devour the Son of God. But because of the humility of His sacrifice, Hades was not able to have power over Him. Hades was deceived and embittered. Thinking that he had received a mortal being, he met God, God and man, the God-man Jesus Christ, Who by both the power of God the Father and His own, was risen from the dead, becoming the first-fruits of the dead, and led the way for all humans in flesh to the resurrection from the dead. He sought the lost sheep in Hades, just as He did on earth, ,

preached the Gospel of repentance and salvation to Adam and Eve and their descendants and as it is depicted on the Orthodox icon of the Resurrection, He drew them into Paradise along with Him. Since then, by the power and faith in the Resurrection, we humans die only in flesh, we dispose our earthly body, for, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50), and live with Him in soul and spirit, "awaiting for the resurrection from the dead and life of the age to come" (The Creed).

Christ had foretold this mystery of the resurrection from the dead to His friends and disciples, while He still lived with them on earth, and after His Resurrection "he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3), appearing to them in His crucified body with the nail signs, but radiant and glorified. Through His Disciples who were His eye-witnesses, He passed on this mystery to His body the Church, which He established with the Comforter Spirit, that He sent down to us from the Father, after His Ascension in Heaven on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after His Resurrection.

Ever since, the Church, which according to the true words of the Lord "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18), continues His mission on earth. It preaches Christ Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected, and baptizes in His Name those who believe in Him, sanctifies them with its sacraments and prays for the reconciliation of humanity and for the whole world. It supports the suffering man with all its strength, prays to our Lord Jesus Christ, the healer of souls and bodies, for the cessation of the ongoing pandemic of the current virus, for the healing of those affected by it and for His mercy for those who died by the virus so mercilessly, in the certainty that "though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you" (2 Cor. 13:4).

On the bright day of the Resurrection, our Church of Jerusalem, the Mother of Churches, also prays from the Life-giving Tomb where Christ was buried and resurrected, for the unity of the Church and for peace in the Middle East, and wishes to its flock in the Holy Land and all over the world, the power and the blessing of the Resurrected Jesus Christ.

Christ is Risen!

In the Holy City of Jerusalem, PASCHA 2020

With Fatherly and Patriarchal blessings,

Fervent supplicant for all before God,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

CHRISTMAS 2019 MESSAGE OF HIS HOLY BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

*“Heaven and earth are made one today,
for Christ is born.*

*Today God is come upon the earth,
and man is gone up into the Heavens.
Today He Who by nature is invisible,
for man’s sake is seen in the flesh.”*

(Sticheron Idiomelo 2 – Christmas Entreaty)

Today the Church all over the world celebrates the Metropolis of the Feasts, the feast of the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ from the Virgin, in fullness of joy, gleefulness, thanksgiving and doxology.

On this feast the Church gives thanks to God, because being faithful, He fulfilled the promises He made to man through the Prophets. "He sent redemption unto his people" (Psalm 111:9). Being merciful and a philanthropist, "the times of ignorance God winked at" (Acts 17:30) and the times of man's apostasy, and "became an emigrant to the land of those who had emigrated from His grace". God sought the runaway man, the man who had runaway from His communion according to St. Cyril of Alexandria (P.G. 75 908 C), found him as a lost sheep, which He reformed, regenerated, vivified, "transformed its elements" and rehabilitated in its former communion with Him in Paradise at the time of creation.

God the Father made this manifest through His Only Begotten Son. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). The Father found it pleasing that "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria; "God the Word Who was from the beginning in the bosom of the Father, suffered willingly kenosis for us and was made flesh, namely a man, humbled Himself for our sakes and became son of man, so that we might be rich in God the Father through Him, He received a body from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, not a soulless body, but a body with a logical soul (On incarnation, PG 77, 989D & 1092C), in order to make man "a communicant of the Divine Nature" (2 Peter 1:4). What He received by His Incarnation, namely the whole of humanity, the Lord sanctified with His life, and through the Cross, the Resurrection and His Ascension He raised it to heaven and put it on the right side of God. What a philanthropy! What a favour! What a gift! God came down to

earth through Christ and raised man to heaven.

This mystery beyond nature and word took place in a specific time and place, during the reign of Caesar Octavius Augustus in Bethlehem of Judea, in the humble cave therein, with the cooperation and witness of the elements of nature and the Bodiless Hosts. These, according to the, Patriarch of Jerusalem Saint Sophronios, the theologian of the one hypostasis of Christ our God in two natures, wills and actions, were; "the motivated by the stars coming of the Wise Men, the heavenly initiation of the shepherds, the bringing of gifts and the worship" (Synodical Letter PG87, 3176D). Wise Men Kings of Persia guided by a star and shepherds keeping the night watch, invited by Angels with the "Glory to God in the Highest and to earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), met and fell down in astonishment and worshiped, "for they saw The One without Beginning lying down as a babe in the cave".

This very beginning of Christ's mysteries has been received from the eye and ear witnesses and kept intact throughout the centuries by the Church. Through this mystery, the Church educates, shapes, grants peace, vivifies and sanctifies its members. This is proclaimed to those near and afar, to the ends of the universe. For this reason, the Church exercises its peace-making mission all over the world, "the ministry of reconciliation" which was given to us by God (2 Cor. 5:18), "reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19) through the Incarnation of His Son.

This transcendental and salvific mystery is being preached by the Church of Jerusalem, the First Church of Christianity, at the place where it happened, the God-receiving Cave and the Basilica above it, which was constructed by the Byzantine Emperors Constantine and Justine, blessing its flock in the Holy Land and at all places around the world, merrily receiving all the pious pilgrims who honour Holy Bethlehem and worship the manger, "where the Uncontainable One hath reclined", and prays for the prosperity, peace and the good

state of the whole world.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, CHRISTMAS 2019
Fervent Supplicant for all before God,
THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem

EASTER 2019 MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

By the Mercy of God Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem
and all Palestine

to all the members of the Church, grace and mercy and peace
from the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb
of the Resurrected Christ.

“Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him” (Mark 16:6).

The Myrrh-bearing Women who came on the morning of the first Saturday to anoint Jesus with myrrh, heard this joyful and hopeful words from the luminous angel who was sitting by the tomb.

The angel’s words were confirmed with the sight of the empty tomb, with the “the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself” (John 20:7). Moreover, they were confirmed with the

vision of the resurrected Christ. Christ went down to Hades through the cross but Hades did not hold Him. With His descend in Hades, the Lord removed and retrieved from it those who had been bound in hell for centuries, "He stood and cried aloud to those in Hades, enter again Paradise". "For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4), He was risen from the dead by His Divine-Human power and appeared to the Myrrh-bearing women and to His disciples many times. He appeared to them at the Upper room on the first and on the eighth day after His Resurrection (John 20:19 & 26), on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:15), in Jerusalem "the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them" (Luke 24:33), "not as a spirit, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), but with His illumined and glorified body with the signs of the nails in His hands and feet" (Luke 24:40), asking them "Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:41-43).

"To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days" (Acts 1:3), He was then ascended to heaven in glory from the Mount of Olives, He sent to the gathered disciples in the Upper room "another Comforter" from the Father, the Spirit of truth, and through them captivated the whole world, founded and established the Church in it.

The Lord established the Church as the witness of His truth and continuer of His mission. The Church, in the Holy Spirit teaches and preaches Him to be Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected. It teaches through the word and manifests the teaching through works, while it sanctifies through the Sacraments. It conveys the Divine Grace, transforms the morals, the life and the whole being of the people. It becomes both paradise and heaven, as the troparion says "as we stand in the temple of Thy glory we think we are in heaven". The

Church is an earthly oasis, a spring of living water, of truth and of peace, of righteousness, of brotherhood, of reconciliation, of rapture, and of fulfilled happiness. It deters wars, dispels enmity and unites the nations. The Church preserves and protects the environment and the planet as the creation of God for the habitation of the humankind.

The Church of Jerusalem, as the Mother of Churches, works its pilgrimage, pastoral and salvific mission at the divine dwelling places, at the places that have been sanctified through the grace of the Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected from the dead, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From them, and especially from the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb, through the offering of the bloodless sacrifice "on the salvific and bright night of the luminous day of the Resurrection" we pray for the peace-making of the whole world, and especially for the troubled Middle East, for the cessation of the schisms of the Churches and for the unity of the Orthodox Church in the bond of peace, and greet our reverend flock in all parts of the world along with the noble pilgrims, and wish to all, the joy, the power the hope and the light of the Resurrected Christ.

Christ is Risen!

In the Holy City of Jerusalem PASCHA 2019

With Fatherly wishes and Patriarchal blessings

Fervent Supplicant for all before God

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARIAT- GENERAL OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM TO ANT1 TV STATION REGARDING MR. ALIKAKOS' PUBLISHED BOOK

Protoc. No: 133

Honorable Gentlemen,

Regarding the issue that arose from the forthcoming publication by Ekkremes Publications of a book by the journalist Dimitris Alikakos with the title "Redemption – About the Holy Light", we state the following;

1. The writer visited the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and met with its executives initially to meet his spiritual needs and then as part of a survey of the history of our Patriarchate.
2. Any videotaped interviews he claims to have at his disposal took place illegally, without the knowledge of his interlocutors, and of course without the necessary consent.
3. From the videos that have been seen, fraudulent stitching (editing) is evident, in order to extract the "desired" effect, an act which apart from being morally reprehensible, is also criminally verifiable.
4. All necessary legal action towards Google has already been launched in order to remove the videos in question from the internet as tampering, containing misleading and defamatory content, and defying people and Truths of

our Faith. In any case, we expressly reserve our generally legitimate right to the necessary legal actions that will take place de facto.

5. What is written in the book in question is a product of fantastic inventive stories of the author with the obvious aim of triggering the believers and gaining economic benefits from the sales of the book. The choice of circulation of the book in question at the given time, amidst the Holy and Great Lent and as our Church is heading towards the Holy Pascha, proves beyond any doubt the deepest motives of the author and the publishing house.
6. The official position of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for the Service of the Holy Light is that which is included in the program of the Holy Saturday of each year, at the Website of the Patriarchate, in the studies of the Hagiotaphite Fathers and especially of the late Hagiotaphite Kallistos Miliaras in the "Nea Sion" Journal and to what is deducted from the Holy Bible and the Fathers of the Church.

Jerusalem, 18 March 2019,

Yours Sincerely,

ARISTARCHOS

Archbishop of Constantina

Geronda Secretary-General

MESSAGE OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ON THE OCCASION OF EPIPHANY 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we approach the Great Feast of Epiphany, the day in which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan River and the Holy Trinity made manifest, we are also thankful that this year, for the first time in more than 50 years, this holy place will be freed from the landmines which have defiled it for so long.

For this, we are grateful for the commitment and meticulous work of the HALO Trust, as well as the cooperation of Israeli and Palestinian authorities together with the Churches. We welcome the coming together of so many people to achieve this clearance as a sign of peace and reconciliation, which We hope can be replicated throughout the Holy Land and in the greater region. We also look forward to continuing to welcome hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year to the Baptism Site, who can now visit our monasteries and appreciate the fuller experience we knew several decades ago.

The Baptism Site, which we also call Qaser al Yahud, or “crossing place of the Jews,” is a meeting point between heaven and earth, venerated by followers of the Abrahamic religions around the world. It was here, around the Jordan River, where according to the New Testament, Saint John the Baptist lived, preached, and baptized believers. The submersion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into those same waters allows us to enter into the spiritual Promised Land, i.e. the Church. It is by Baptism that we are clothed with the Holy Spirit, for according to Saint Paul, “As many of you have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There

is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye all are one in Jesus Christ. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26).

We pray, that through our human efforts to reconcile ourselves to this consecrated land which we share, stewarding this physical oasis of divine-human encounter, we also reconcile with one another for the sake of peace, love, and the mutual flourishing of all peoples created by God. May the Light of Epiphany warm our hearts and enlighten our minds in this New Year, and always.

With Our Patriarchal blessings and best wishes.

Holy City of Jerusalem January 2019

THEOPHILOS III PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

**MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE THE
PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM
THEOPHILOS III ON THE
OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS 2018**

"Make ready, O Bethlehem, let the manger be prepared,

Let the Cave show its welcome.

The truth is come the shadow is passed away;

God hath appeared from a Virgin unto men,

Formed as we are and deifying that which He hath assumed."

(Plagal of fourth Tone by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem)

During the joyful Twelve-day festivities of Christmas, and especially on this day of Christ's Nativity, primarily the Church, celebrates in doxology and thanksgiving but also the whole of humanity, socially participates in the celebration of a supernatural and extraordinary event, a strange and paradox mystery that surpasses any human reasoning.

This festal event is the incarnation of God the Word. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1,14) according to the Evangelist of love. In the excess of His love towards man, God our Father found it pleasing that His Son would become the Son of man, being incarnate and born in the flesh from the All-holy and pure Virgin. "God was seen in the flesh on earth and consorted with the people", according to the hymn writer of the Church. "The Son of God", writes the God-bearing Holy Father John of Damascus, "partakes of the worst, namely, our human nature, so that He may reform man in Himself according to the image and likeness of the Father and grant us the communion in life, and deliver us from corruption, becoming the First among us to lead our resurrection and thus renew our villainous and crushed body"(Ed. Orthodox Faith, Vol. 77). This philanthropic action of God is called by St. Gregory the Theologian "epidemic of God on earth, so that we humans may emigrate in heaven" (PG 36, 316A).

The incarnation of God the Word by the Ever-Virgin takes place at the time of the world census, during the reign of Caesar Octavian Augustus, when Herod was the King in the town of Bethlehem in Judea (Luke 2,1 & Matt. 2,1). Then, as there was

no place for them in the inn (Luke 2,7), Christ "in a hidden way, was born in a cave and laid in a manger". Nevertheless, the *kenosis* of the Incarnation and the birth in the flesh of God the Word is hidden from the mighty ones of the earth, and it becomes known to people by God in heavens. God summons wise men from the East bearing gifts with a star (Matt. 2,1) and with angels He informs the shepherds who stayed overnight in the fields and sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2,14).

This heavenly and divine message of peace from the Master of peace, the Angel of the great Will, namely, of the reconciliation, of God's condescension towards us men, of the pardon, the ultimate humility, which reached the point of the sacrifice on the Cross, is embraced, appropriated, proclaimed, exercised and preached by the Church which has been founded by the Incarnate Christ, towards all those near and afar, to its members as well as the whole world, regardless of race, religion, nationality, colour and language, calling us and saying just as the Apostle of the nations did, "receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15,7). The Church especially projects this message to the powerful ones of the earth, who direct the lives of people and determine the developments in the Middle East and in the Holy Land, so that they may not be puffed up with pride, but being magnates, they may minister in righteousness and truth, for the prosperity the dignity and the freedom of their people.

The Mother of Churches, having par excellence the privilege among all Churches, of the blessing to minister the Incarnate Christ in the God-receiving Cave and at the Basilica built above it by the Emperors Constantine and Justinian, prays for the peace-making in the Middle East, prosperity of the city of Bethlehem, the unity of the Churches, and wishes to its Christian Congregation within its jurisdiction and all over the world, life, health, peace, prosperity, progress, success,

diligence, and salvation, and to the pilgrims, the grace, the power, and the peace and the blessing of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who became an infant for our sake and was born in the flesh from the Ever-Virgin Mary.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, **CHRISTMAS 2018**

Fervent prayer for all before God,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY IN RAMALLAH

On Saturday, April 29/May 12, 2018, at the Graduation ceremony of the Ramallah School Students of the Patriarchate, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed those present at the ceremony through the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, underlining the following;

Your Grace Archimandrite Mattheos, Chairman of the Schools Board of the Patriarchate in the State of Palestine,

Respected School Manager Mr. Richard Zananiri,

Dear parents and teachers,

Tonight's Graduation Ceremony of the Greek Orthodox School students of the Patriarchate in the town of Ramallah is a great honour for us; this is an annual event that brings joy to all. Our hearts are filled with happiness because we are among people whom we dearly love. These students would not have come to this point in their lives, had there not been a common effort between the school teaching staff and their families. All of you have been watering this effort with the water of knowledge, of studying and love for many years; and today you reap the fruit of this effort and of your hard work. We make an appeal to all of you to strengthen the relationship of the school with the family.

Dear Students,

Beloved Children in Christ,

Today is the end of one field of your life and the beginning of another, similar to your school progress, which is filled with studying and participation in knowledge. In this new field you will distinguish the difference between the higher and the secondary education. For this reason I encourage you to always seek studying and education, because this is the way that leads to knowledge and the fulfillment of man's goals.

All religions lead man in the seeking of wisdom and the civil laws allow the citizens study at the educational institutions, in order to contribute to the building to the society and the elevation of civilization. According to the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 2:26) "For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God".

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem does not hesitate when it comes to support its schools and stand by them, and toil day and night for the provision of all necessary things in all fields, without distinction for their progress. The

annual students' ceremonies and distinctions are the greatest proof of the success and progress of these schools, by the help of God and the common care of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, "The Mother of Churches" with the School Board.

We would like to congratulate the Management, the Teachers, and the students for this year's progress and we wish them God's blessing for the success of their goals.

Moreover we pray for the good outcome of the hopes of the Palestinian people in gaining their freedom, its human rights and independence under the good leadership of His Excellency the President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abas Abu Mazen, for the prevailing of universal peace and especially in the sensitive Middle East region.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude and respect to the School Manager Mr. Richard Zananiri, who is responsible for the great percentage of the school's success, who works wholeheartedly for the progress and development of this school. We would also like to thank all of you and the staff of this Greek Orthodox institution, with great love and Patriarchal prayers and blessings.

THEOPHILOS III

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM