

ADDRESS OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM TO THE HEADS OF CHURCHES AND HEADS OF THE COMMUNITIES OF THE HOLY LAND ON THEIR VISIT FOR THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

9 January 2018

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Churches and Communities,

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are delighted to greet you, dear Friends, at this joyous season, and we thank you for your Christmas greetings. As we sing in our worship

Let the creation rejoice exceedingly:

for the Creator now makes himself to be created,

and he who was before all things now makes himself

known as God newly revealed.

(Canticle Nine from Compline of the Forefeast)

As we celebrate the incarnation of the Divine Logos, we

celebrate both the universal and the particular of the divine-human encounter. For by his incarnation, God has taken on our human flesh, and so saved all humanity; and by this same Incarnation, God became a human being in a particular time and place, and made this City and Land holy by his life, by the shedding of his redeeming blood, and by entrusting his body to this earth.

As we keep this great feast of our salvation, we wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our new-born Lord, for, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "he was born in the flesh so that we might be born in his own spirit; the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of man may become sons of God." It is in this confidence that recently we have stood united as the Heads of the Churches in the face of new and unprecedented challenges, especially related to the Status Quo of Jerusalem and more specifically the Christian Quarter. Our unity of purpose is not for ourselves alone; our unity is our Christian martyria – a sign of hope for our world in which there is so much division and confusion.

The Incarnation of the Divine Logos is the reminder to us of our spiritual mission here in guarding and serving the Holy Places, and in pastoring the Christian community, which has always called this City and region our home. Because the Incarnate Logos has walked on this very ground, we have an enduring commitment to ensure that Jerusalem and the Holy Land remain an inclusive society where there is a vibrant and vital Christian presence.

And we say this because our mission is to spread and proclaim the values of the Gospel of love, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation.

We have taken our cause to the international forum, and we have received tremendous encouragement and support. This has been deeply moving for us, and we are happy to say that those

who we have met these last several months have a clear understanding of the pressures we are all facing in our pastoral ministries to our respective communities, and many have made strong public statements of support. We take this opportunity to express our thanks to His Excellency Archbishop Pizzaballa, who was instrumental in arranging a historic meeting with His Holiness, Pope Francis, and to His Grace, Archbishop Dawani, who helped set up our meeting with His Grace, Archbishop Welby, as well as with members of the House of Lords.

We must acknowledge the fact that those who we have met have shown to us that they are indeed our brothers and our firm supporters, and that they are deeply concerned for all our respective communities.

We shall continue this work by God's grace, and we wish to take this blessed occasion to emphasize once again the importance of our unity and our mutual respect in this regard. The threats that we face are not against our community only, but against the Christian community of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a whole; and together we must face these threats to ensure that the framework and structures that have guaranteed our historic and inalienable rights and privileges down the ages remain in place and in force. This is for the good of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious character of Jerusalem.

We thank you for this Christmas gathering and your greetings. Let us congratulate today the new Lutheran Bishop-elect, the Reverend Sani Ibrahim Azhar. We assure you, dear friends, of our prayers this Christmastide as we rejoice with the whole creation that the Creator has been born among us, full of grace and truth, to be the light that enlightens our hearts and minds, who brings hope to the world.

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Thank you.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS TO THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

Your Paternity Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities,

Dear Fathers,

It is with great joy that we greet you, Your Excellency, dear Father Francesco, and your community as you celebrate the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in this year in which you also mark the 800th anniversary of the presence of the Custody in the Holy Land. We recall that Saint Francis himself had a deep devotion to this feast, and is credited with the creation of the first Christmas crèche. Saint Francis himself said:

I want to do something that will recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the

inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and donkey stood by.

The whole world looks to the Holy City of Bethlehem and the Holy Land with this same longing, the longing to see with our own eyes, and to know in our hearts, the mystery of this divine-human encounter.

As we celebrate the Christmas feast, we remember in thanksgiving the great event of this year as we celebrated the renovation of the Sacred Edicule. A momentous event in itself, it also represented a new and deeper level of co-operation between our two fraternities, to whom Divine Providence has entrusted the care and guardianship of the Holy Sites. Even now the discoveries that lay beneath the Edicule are capturing the religious and spiritual imaginations of the world. On this occasion we wish to express our gratitude to you and your fraternity once again for this special co-operation.

We look forward to the second phase of this important work, which encompasses the area beneath the floor of the rotunda.

Our deeper co-operation has also found important fruit in our joint response to less happy events of this year, most especially the proposed law that is circulating in the Knesset that will alter the provisions, rights, and privileges of the Status Quo, as well as the unacceptable attack on our "Jaffa Gate" in which radical settler groups are attempting an intrusion into the Christian Quarter in an attempt to strike at the heart of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of Jerusalem.

Our unity as the Heads of the Churches, Your Paternity in our opposition to these common threats not only to our historic rights, but also to the integrity of this Holy City and Holy Land, is so important. In our pastoral ministry we are all committed to a vital and vibrant Christian community here, and we are also committed to keeping open to all people without

distinction access to the Holy Sites as places of devotion and worship.

As we rejoice with you in the spirit of Saint Francis, who recognized the importance of the Holy Places as a source of spiritual renewal and refreshment, let us remain united in our resolve in the ministry that has been entrusted to us. The earth and the heavens exult as heaven comes down to earth and the incarnate Logos takes on our human flesh and our human life. As Saint Francis himself wrote:

Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the Glorious One,

Let us praise and exalt him above all for ever.

We wish you, Your Excellency, and all your brethren and communities, a blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year. May the light that shines from Bethlehem bring hope to our world, and strengthen us all.

Thank you.

**CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM
H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF
JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS TO THE
APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR OF
THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE IN**

JERUSALEM

Your Excellency, dear Archbishop Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

The whole creation rejoices at the birth of the incarnate Logos, as we hear in a beautiful hymn in the Orthodox tradition

*Let the creation now cast off all things old,
beholding you, our Creator, made a child;
for by your birth you shaped all things afresh,
making them new once more
and leading them back to their first beauty.*

In union with this cosmic rejoicing we greet you, Your Excellency, and your community as you celebrate the Christmas feast.

The mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Logos has made this Holy Land unique. Here in the divine-human encounter, God has restored us to our first beauty and has made all things new. The sacred history of this land, and the witness of our communities down the ages, are a living testimony to this great act of the new creation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We take this opportunity to mark once again the importance during this last year of our co-operation in the restoration

of the Sacred Edicule, the significance of which cannot be overstated. Not only have we preserved the holiest of all Sites for generations to come, but we have also understood afresh the testimony of sacred history in this land. Archaeology has confirmed what faith has affirmed. We wish to express once again our gratitude to you for the leadership that you have shown in this entire endeavor.

The investigations of the Edicule strengthen us in our resolve in the ministry that has been entrusted to us by Divine Providence to continue not only in our guardianship of the Holy Places, but also in our Pastoral leadership in the face of assaults on the traditional rights and privileges of the Churches enshrined in the Status Quo and the ongoing vitality of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and in our region.

As we co-operated in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule, so we recognize the common challenges we face, most notably with respect to the proposed bill circulating in the Knesset that would significantly alter the provisions of the Status Quo, as well as the unacceptable attack of the radical settlers on "Jaffa Gate", who unfortunately won a wrongful court judgment against us.

We cannot but thank you for the instrumental assistance you gave in arranging our recent meeting in the Vatican with His Holiness Pope Francis, where we discussed our common interests regarding the status of Jerusalem and displacement so much of the Christian population and others from their ancient homes in the Holy Land and the Middle East.

We have been moved by the support that we have received not only for us, but for all the Churches and communities in the Holy Land. The world community recognizes that the Holy Land is a unique testimony to the divine-human encounter; the world community also understands that the integrity of Jerusalem and the Holy Land depend on the well-being of the Christian presence here, a presence that is guaranteed by the Status

Quo.

As we join with you in your celebrations of the Nativity, we re-commit ourselves with you to the urgent work before us. The Divine Logos took on our human flesh in Bethlehem so that hope might be restored to the human family. Our pastoral mission is to keep this same hope alive, so that the Christian communities who live here in the Holy Land, as well as the many thousands of pilgrims who come here every month, may be renewed and refreshed.

May God bless you, Your Excellency, your bishops, your clergy, and your communities as you celebrate Christmas, and may God strengthen you in your pastoral ministry in the New Year.

Thank you.

ADDRESS OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS TO THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL ON THE OCCASION THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR RECEPTION

27 December 2017

Your Excellency Mr. President,

Your Excellency Mr. Dery,

Respected Members of the Government,

Beloved Fellow Heads of Churches and Leaders of Communities of Faith,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We greet you, Mr. President, as our communities of faith are celebrating this season of light and hope and preparing for the New Year. We in Jerusalem are keenly aware that at this time of the year the eyes of the world are focused on this Holy City and on our Holy Land. At a time of widespread difficulties and confusion for the human family around the world, Jerusalem is the universal symbol of peace and of the vision of a new future for humanity, in which all will be reconciled.

As a Jerusalemite, we know that you, Mr. President, understand the richness of the meaning of Jerusalem. We know of your firm commitment to the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, even in the face of some criticism. And we wish to express to you our gratitude for the positive action that you have taken to help promote the true integrity of this Holy City and the well-being of all our peoples. We are also aware of your support for both pilgrims and the local faithful to be able to venerate the shrines and to worship freely.

We take this opportunity to re-commit ourselves to working to ensure that this unique character of Jerusalem is maintained, since it is the divine-human encounter that gives our Holy City and our Holy Land its special character. In this regard we recall the beautiful words of the Psalmist,

Pray for the peace in Jerusalem:

May they prosper who love you.

In the recent academic dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Judaism, hosted by us in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and with the participation of distinguished Jewish scholars, two issues were highlighted; the spiritual and religious significance of Jerusalem for all people. And it was pointed out that peace cannot be achieved by raising physical barriers, but rather by opposing prejudice and bigotry of all kinds, and by promoting mutual respect in accordance with the witness of the Holy Scriptures that God made humanity in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26).

It is in this context that Jerusalem is considered theocentric and not anthropocentric, for Almighty God is the central focus of our universe. This means that the dignity of each man, woman, and child is precisely this divine image and likeness of which we read in the Book of Genesis. Without this fundamental truth, it is impossible to understand the full significance of Jerusalem.

Our Holy City of Jerusalem is passing the most testing of times. Developments are placing huge pressures on our respective communities making them experience unease, anxiety and disquietude. Mr. President, we know that you appreciate how the Status Quo, with its internationally recognized set of rights, rules and customs, enables all the religious communities and the civil authorities to carry out our respective roles in harmony, and that it must remain in full effect so that all may work under its provisions without any alteration or amendment.

Inasmuch as indeed we appreciate your sincere embrace of the communities that live in the State of Israel, Mr. President, we cannot hide our concern about recent developments that relate to our Christian communities in particular. We remain troubled about the proposed bill circulating in the Knesset that intrudes upon the rights of Churches and the provisions

of the Status Quo. We are also hoping that present decision-makers will be assiduous in curbing radical groups in our society who seek to make Jerusalem and the Holy Land an exclusive, rather than an inclusive society. We remain confident that we will soon rejoice a positive outcome in the "Jaffa Gate" case that is now before the High Court.

The true identity of Jerusalem and the Holy Land depends on the well-being of all our communities of faith. As you know, and as we are always emphasizing, this is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious landscape, and without this diversity, the true nature of our Jerusalem is lost.

We say this because our spiritual responsibilities embrace believers across civil and religious boundaries: for they are within Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as well as within the three Abrahamic traditions. As communities of the Scriptures, we are committed to promoting peace, co-existence, and harmony among all people, as we read in the spirit of the Scriptures:

For God himself is our peace...he has broken down the dividing wall, and has abolished enmity.

(cf. Eph.2:14)

We take the opportunity of this blessed celebration to thank you once again, Mr. President, for all that you do for all the peoples of Jerusalem and this country.

As we look to a new year, may this season of light and hope, in which all our religious communities are celebrating, be also a season of light and hope for our hurting world. May God bless you, Mr. President, in your leadership, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLY BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III ON THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS 2017

“He that was begotten of the Father before the
morning star without a mother, is today on
earth become incarnate of thee without a father;
wherefore, a star announceth the good tidings to the
Magi; and the Angels with shepherds hymn thy seedless
childbirth, O Full of Grace.”

(Kontakion: Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos)

During the joyous and glorious period of the Holy Twelve-days the Church as much as the whole of humanity celebrate a divine and heavenly event, an event that is at the same time splendid and marvelous, strange and paradox. We celebrate the event of God's peaceful visit and healing intervention in man's life.

The Church proclaims the event of the incarnate Epiphany of God in the world. It confesses that God, who has created man according to His image and likeness, remodeled him by the Son's resemblance to man according to the divine beauty given to him before the fall. In the presence of His Only-Begotten Son and Word, God became incarnate, He was made flesh, He became human. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1.14) Through the Incarnation and nativity in the flesh of His Son by the Ever-Virgin, during the reign of Caesar Octavius Augustus in Bethlehem, God revived and pulled man out of the depths of his fall and corruption and lifted him in the heights of heaven, making him "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1.4). For this offering, grace and unspeakable joy given to humanity, the Church chants with the hymn writer today: "the Lord hath sent forth redemption to his people"; with the Evangelist: "a Saviour has been born to us today, who is Christ"; and with the hymn writer: "Our Saviour from on high hath visited us" and "Christ is born, give ye glory, Christ is on earth, be ye exalted".

Eye-witnesses to this unheard of mystery, namely God's incarnate presence in the world, are; the Ever-Virgin, who contributed to this reality, and conceived by the Holy Spirit, became pregnant and gave birth in the flesh and swaddled Christ; Joseph the elder, her companion from Nazareth to Bethlehem for Caesar's census, from Bethlehem to Egypt on their escape, and to their return in Nazareth, from which the Lord was called a Nazarene. Eye-witnesses are also simple farmers, shepherds watching over their flocks, who drew nigh in order to see and experience the mystery, after the invitation and the vision of angels, who were chanting in heaven the angelic hymn: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2.14). Moreover, eye-witnesses were men of science, Magi Kings from Persia, researchers of the universe. They were called from afar by a star in heaven, to herald the beginning of the Church of nations, so that from the idolatry of the stars they would

come to the worship of the Sun of Righteousness. And indeed, in this simple and humble Cave they beheld in ecstasy "the babe lying in a manger" (Luke 2.16), and recognizing Him they bowed and worshiped the Incarnate God made man in the flesh by the Virgin, and offered Him their gifts of reverence "gold, and frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2.11).

In this manner did the wealth of Christ's Divinity shine upon men, in the humility of the Cave and the poverty of the swaddling clothes. Christ took upon Himself the form of a man, humbling Himself, so that in this form He would sanctify and glorify man. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8.9). Being true God, strong and mighty, He took on the feebleness of the human flesh and became God-human, one person in two natures, "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10.38).

This philanthropy of God is preached in the Holy Spirit by the Church, the Body of the Incarnate God, our Lord Jesus Christ who was Crucified in the flesh and Resurrected from the dead for the salvation of the world. Christ has bequeathed the Church with the perpetuation of His peace-making, reconciling, sanctifying and salvific mission in the world. The Church manifests and preaches His mission to its members, but also to all those who by their free will do not accept the message of the Lord of peace, but act remorselessly and inhumanly instead, just like Herod did to the new-born King and the infants. They neither sharpen their plows for plowing, nor their sickles for reaping; on the contrary, they sharpen their swords in order to rend each other to pieces. They spend the wealth of God's creation to compatible and incompatible weapons and wars, they sacrifice hundreds of thousands of innocent people through atrocious terrorist acts and they dare say this is done in the name of God. The Church speaks to them in love. It teaches peace, to those near and afar. It sanctifies the people, tames their morals and remains an

oasis, a paradise and the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth. It shares its spiritual and material goods with the people philanthropically. It tolerates persecution; being slandered, it forgives and prays. It calls everybody, saying: "come and see" (John 1.46).

This is done also by the Church of Jerusalem in the Holy Land, which defends and preserves the Holy Shrines and of course the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, built by Constantine and Justine the Emperors. The Church of Jerusalem prays from the God-receiving Cave for the peace of the whole world, peace in the Middle East and the Holy Land, for the progress, prosperity, divine blessing and salvation of the noble Christmas pilgrims, for the glory of the born-in-flesh Jesus Christ together with the Father in the Holy Spirit unto the ages of ages.

In the Holy Town of Bethlehem, **CHRISTMAS 2017**

Fervent suppliant for all before God,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

**THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF THE
PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF LOCAL**

CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

“But the angel said to them [the shepherds], “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born...a saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2.10).

At this moment the world's gaze is fixed on Jerusalem, a city that is holy to all Abrahamic faiths. We, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, as we approach the celebration of Christmas, reaffirm our clear position in calling for the preservation of the Status Quo of the Holy City until a just peace agreement has been reached between the Israelis and Palestinians on the bases of negotiations and International law.

The Christians of the Holy Land, know that their presence and witness is strictly related to the holy sites and their accessibility as places of meeting and encounter for unity between peoples of different faiths. It is the holy places that have given the region a meaning.

Any exclusive political approach to Jerusalem will deprive the city of its real essence and characteristics and tramples on the mechanism that has maintained peace throughout the ages. Jerusalem, is a great gift; a tabernacle; hallowed ground to the entire world. Attempting to possess the Holy City Jerusalem, or confine it with terms of exclusivity will lead to a very dark reality.

At this time, we await the coming of the Light, we bring you great tidings of joy, hope and peace from the City of hope and peace, Jerusalem! Year after year we join the Church universal in celebrating the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The incarnation of the Word made flesh continues, after two millennia, to be a source of joy, hope and peace, despite the suffering and affliction of many nations and communities

around the globe.

The angelic proclamation to the shepherds in Bethlehem brought good news, great joy, and a promise of peace to all people, especially those who are suffering and live in fear and anxiety of what the future holds for them and their loved ones. The angel appeared to the shepherds who were watching their flock at night, and the glory of the Lord came to dispel the darkness of their night and to announce the new day that had dawned with the birth of Christ. At that moment the shepherds were afraid and could not comprehend the meaning of the angelic proclamation, and how the birth would impact their lives and the life of their community.

These people of Bethlehem who suffered under the Roman occupation and their compatriot Herod, and subjected to the distinctions and exclusions of the socio-political economy, were confronted with a different economy: God's providence. The message of the angels revealed to the shepherds – out of their own context – a new reality, where the concepts of power and authority are transformed by the incarnation of God in a lowly manger.

The shepherds responded immediately to this theophany and went to see the “thing that has taken place which the Lord has made known to [them]”. The world today is confronted once more with the challenge of responding to the angelic proclamation which demands participation in the Divine economy in bringing forth joy, hope and peace to a world torn apart by violence, injustice and greed.

We continue to hold the whole Region of the Middle East in our prayers, and ask the Prince of Peace to inspire the hearts of all those in authority to walk in the path of peace, justice and reconciliation among the nations. As we celebrate the coming of Christ as the Light of the world, we are inspired by and take comfort in the words of the hymn of Zechariah – “the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those

who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”.

We wish you all a happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

+Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

+Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate

+Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator, Latin Patriarchate

+Fr. Francesco Patton, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land

+Archbishop Anba Antonious, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem

+Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate

+Archbishop Aba Embakob, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate

+Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek-Melkite-Catholic Patriarchate

+Archbishop Mosa El-Hage, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate

+Archbishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East

+Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

+Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

+Msgr. Georges Dankaye' , Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

THE JERUSALEM PATRIARCHATE PARTICIPATES AT THE 3RD ARCHON INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM-THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Jerusalem Patriarchate took part in the 3rd Archon International Conference On Religious Freedom – The Persecution of Christians in the Middle East, in Capitol Hill, Washington D.C. on December 5, 2017. The Patriarchate was represented by Miss Anna Koulouris, secretary at the Secretariat-General office, who delivered the following speech on the Persecution of Christians and Possible Solutions;

“I would like to convey the blessings and greetings of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, who is currently in Russia continuing a shuttle tour to garner support from the international community on some of the issues I will discuss here today. We thank the Archons of the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle for organizing such an opportunity to grapple with this issue of our time.

All the Churches in the Holy Land were completely united and immediate in their response to disturbing developments that unfolded this summer, following increasing efforts in the last

few years by radical settler groups within Israel to alter the Christian character of Jerusalem.

The developments are twofold. On July 26th, an unprecedented bill was presented to the Knesset. The so-called "Bill of Church Lands," which quickly gained 40 signatures with its initial proposal, aims to severely restrict the rights of all the Churches over their own properties and lands. It is the result of lobbying efforts from the Jewish National Fund and radical settler groups with a like-minded agenda to undercut the Churches, particularly the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is the largest property owner among them and which recently challenged the JNF for refusing to negotiate fairly on the extension of leases. Since July, a firestorm of baseless attacks in the media have fed into a campaign designed by the JNF to divert attention from their own errors and wrong-doing. Regardless of this bill's chance of passing into law, its mere concept and immediate backing by a third of the Knesset, already demonstrates a very dark reality. This is a turning point in which radical elements are fighting to strip Jerusalem of its multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural integrity.

The second occurrence in July of this year was a Jerusalem District Court ruling against the Church mainly regarding two landmark hotel buildings belonging to the Patriarchate in the Old City's Jaffa Gate. In 2004, under the leadership of the now deposed Patriarch Irineos, an unauthorized deal for long term leases was made with the radical settler group Ateret Cohanim. For 10 years, the Patriarchate has challenged this illegal deal, during which it unequivocally proved that the person concluding the deal was not authorized by the Patriarchate, had received a bribe, that there was bad faith, conspiracy, and that agreements were made without the due authority of the Patriarchate. Despite the abundantly clear evidence, the Court ruled in favor of the settler group. An appeal has been filed, but a danger is materializing in the

meantime. These radical settler groups feel encouraged in their openly stated mission to “liberate the Holy Land from all non-Jewish elements.”

Last November, members of Ateret Cohanim forcefully tried to seize part of the Patriarchate’s Gethsemane dependency, which is in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulcher Church. They broke through the ceiling and erected an iron barrier.

In the last few years, settlers have increased their violent conduct, especially toward Christians, in an attempt to intimidate them out of the city. They harass and spit at our clergy on a daily basis, desecrate our churches and cemeteries, uproot our trees, block our entry to pray at some common sites, such as the Last Supper Room, and regularly commit arson. For this, civic authorities put out condemnations but the reality is the perpetrators face virtually no consequence.

When civic organs of the city of Jerusalem, particularly the Municipality, do not actively pursue visions of inclusion and mutual respect, they aid such a vision of exclusivity and intolerance, and in fact normalize it. Commitment from the government is an essential element in fostering peace. Their silence in the face of violence sends a clear message, that such hateful acts are tolerable.

This is not the disposition of peace-makers or protectors. This is not the attitude of people who understand Jerusalem for the holy place that it is – a place of encounters between human and divine. Jerusalem embraced the bodies of the prophets. Its winds carried their voices. In fateful hours, its earth soaked their blood and hosted their relics. If this is what Jerusalem is for the whole world, who could be bold enough to claim it for only himself?

Most of Jerusalem’s holy sites are sacred to more than one, if not all three faiths. In fact, the Patriarch of Jerusalem,

Theophilos III argues that Jerusalem itself, as a whole, is a holy site. Who can say that a holy site should be accessible to some but not to others? In the Christian tradition, the holiness of a particular place is not dependent upon our presence there because holiness is not created by us. We simply nurture it where it's found. Therefore, anyone can be allowed to share in its sanctity. Fighting for exclusivity over holy sites per se, defies their very nature.

In this wisdom, the mission of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has always been to protect the holy sites as places of worship, open to all people indiscriminately. Nowhere is this more apparent than inside Holy Sepulcher Church. On any given day, at any hour, you will find people of all faiths inside. The stone walls and floors are buffed to smoothness by the thousands of hands and feet that have passed over them. With all your senses you can experience the place freely without barrier. This is by design, it's not an accident.

This mission of inclusion has also allowed the Church to survive countless invasions and war over the course of 2,000 years. In one of the Holy Land's most beloved examples, during the Arab invasion of 637, Patriarch Sophronios signed a covenant with Omar ibn al Khattab, which led to an age of peace where there otherwise could have been war. This covenant is recognized until today by all religious and civil authorities, upheld by the Patriarchate and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority.

Yet, Ateret Cohanim, and other radical settler groups, are propelled by an aggressive motive to remove non-Jews from Jerusalem, as well as certain Jews considered as non-conformant, and they're gaining ground, especially in the Old City, which is Jerusalem's crown and core. They use underhanded methods such as coercion and undue authority to acquire property, and in their view, "redeem the land." Jaffa Gate is one of the strategic centers for achieving this goal. It lies at the heart of the Christian Quarter and is the

entryway artery to all the Churches' headquarters, as well as for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who visit the Holy Sepulcher Church just meters away. If settlers gain control of this area via the Jaffa Gate properties and push out tenants with the type of intimidating and violent tactics they're notorious for using, they will be able to implement their vision to permanently change the Status Quo and work toward erasing the Christian presence from the Old City.

We take heart in the reality that as our ancient Patriarchates, "pillars and buttresses of truth," (Tim. 3:15) carry forward through turbulent waters, whether hit head-on with storms, or targeted from dark corners, they are supporting one another.

In this spirit, let us work in our respective capacities to protect the Churches, "pillars and buttresses of truth (Tim. 3:15), and the Christian presence, which are a testament to, and the protector of, the sacred heritage we share."

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SPEECH OF H . H . B . THE

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS AT THE OPENING RECEPTION OF THE ORTHODOX- JEWISH DIALOGUE

6 December 2017

Some thoughts on the religious and spiritual character of Jerusalem

Your All-Holiness,

Respected Members of this Dialogue,

Dear Friends,

We greet you in the pace of Jerusalem. We thank you for this opportunity to address this gathering, and we are deeply encouraged by this initiative. We must explore every avenue to mutual trust and understanding, and to reconciliation and peace. The relationship between Judaism and Christianity is fundamental to this journey.

We would like to reflect for a few minutes on some aspects of the religious and spiritual character of Jerusalem. It will not be a surprise to you that, when we ask ourselves questions about the meaning and significance of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem always begins from this perspective.

Of course, Jerusalem means many things to many people. Jerusalem is unique, and Jerusalem is universal. Jerusalem is a very concrete place, set in sacred and secular history; it is also the object of the spiritual yearning of the great Abrahamic traditions.

It is impossible to understand Jerusalem at all without facing and wrestling with its religious and spiritual character. The earthly Jerusalem is a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem. One cannot view Jerusalem simply from historical, archaeological, political, ethnic, or cultural perspectives. For Jerusalem holds the place that it does, precisely because of its primary religious and spiritual character, and attempts to deny or minimize this lead to inadequate understandings.

For our Orthodox Christian perspective we would say further that Jerusalem has a specifically Christian character that cannot be denied if one wishes to have a complete picture. Jerusalem has both a Jewish and a Muslim character as well, and without the fullness of this religious and spiritual landscape, Jerusalem loses its revelatory character.

For us, one of the keys to understanding the significance of Jerusalem is to appreciate the relationship between the prophetic *dabar* in the language of the Old Testament with the Incarnate Logos in the language of the New Testament. For Christians this is one continuous language of the witness of God that was made manifest in this Holy Land and in this Holy City. Just as we see the fundamental relationship between the synagogue and the Church. These aspects of Jerusalem cannot be separated.

We see this continuity both in the Scriptures and in the life of the Church. Witness the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who, in reference to Jerusalem said, "Thus says the Lord: Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion of the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

This idea is found also in the Psalms, where we read

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

Let my right hand wither!

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,

If I do not remember you,

If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

(Ps. 137:5-6)

We see this tradition carried into the tradition of the Church, most notably in the words of Saint John of Damascus, who said:

Rejoice, O holy Zion, mother of the churches and dwelling place of god, for you were the first to receive remission of sins by the resurrection.

So there is no way for Orthodox Christians to separate the Old Testament from the New.

We have seen many earthly powers come and go, but through all the changes that have affected this Holy Land, over the centuries, Jerusalem has remained as the eternal reminder of the divine-human encounter.

What is the life, what is the durability that has supported the survival of Jerusalem?

Jerusalem is for everyone. The city itself may be tiny, but it embraces the whole of humanity. And inasmuch as the divine message of the Scriptures is a message to the whole world, so Jerusalem is the embodiment of this universal message.

The Orthodox Church in general, and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in particular, takes pride in the fact that the Church is universal in its mission and its embrace. We seek to be inclusive, not exclusive, and this is seen most particularly in the role of the Patriarchate to ensure that the Holy Places are accessible to all. And accessible in a special way, because the Holy Places are not simply archaeological sites; they are points of the ongoing encounter

with the living God in prayer, devotion, and liturgical celebration.

This is how we understand the spiritual and religious significance of Jerusalem. And of course this is how we understand its mission. Jerusalem is not just a “symbol” in the modern sense of standing for some ideal, though it is certainly this. Jerusalem is the living witness to divine peace, to the divine longing for the reconciliation of all people one with the other, and with all humanity and God.

This witness is of such crucial importance in our contemporary world, in which there is a real thirst for true peace. We firmly believe that Jerusalem can be precisely the inspiration for this peace in action. As we read in the Psalms;

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Ps. 85:10)

The challenge that we face in allowing this true religious and spiritual identity of Jerusalem to flower for the benefit of humanity is not Jerusalem itself. The challenge rests with us, our human predicament, our human weakness. These are the issues that stand between us and the true nature of Jerusalem, that joins heaven and earth.

The true character of Jerusalem should be considered to be theocentric, and not anthropocentric. The logical mistake of those who have wished to try to possess Jerusalem over the centuries has made a fundamental error of comprehension. Such an error will always lead to failure, and will always stand in the way of the ultimate flowering of Jerusalem as the true City of Peace that is its vocation.

As we consider the religious and spiritual character of Jerusalem, we cannot neglect the eschatological meaning of Jerusalem. Jerusalem serves the purposes of God and we must bear in mind always that the earthly Jerusalem is always a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem, a living reminder that

the ultimate dwelling of humanity is the heavenly Jerusalem. And in that heavenly Jerusalem we shall be shown to be the children of Abraham together, the children of our common father. While the revealing of this great truth may seem a long time in coming, we remember that words of the Second Epistle of Saint Peter, who write that; *with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day* (2 Pet. 3:8).

Jerusalem is the undisputed dwelling place of the living God. Our message to all those who love Jerusalem and are committed to the revealing of the authentic life of Jerusalem is a call to lay aside all the human distractions and misunderstandings that impede our ability to discover and to live both in spirit and practice the true nature of Jerusalem. Such a pilgrimage will be costly and will force us to a new place of kenosis, of self-emptying. But this is the way of salvation, and this is the way to clear the path, so that the world may know anew the peace and reconciliation of this Holy City.

Once again, we welcome you. May God bless this dialogue, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

THE JERUSALEM PATRIARCHATE HOSTS THE ORTHODOX-JEWISH DIALOGUE

The Academic Meeting of the Orthodox-Jewish Dialogue takes place in Jerusalem from Tuesday 22nd November/5th December to Thursday 24th November/7th December 2017. The Patriarchate

hosts the meeting without covering accommodation costs.

Participants in this Dialogue are equally Jewish and Orthodox Academics, clergy or laity and their aim is to examine various aspects on both the Jewish and the Christian perspectives.

The topic of this year's Meeting is "The holiness of Jerusalem in Judaic and Christian tradition".

President of the Dialogue on behalf of Orthodoxy, is the Most Reverend Metropolitan Emmanuel of France. His Eminence belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which took the initiative for the commencement and continuation of this Dialogue.

President on behalf of Judaism is Rabi Mr. David Rozen, who is the President of the International Jewish Committee on Religious Consultations (IJCIC).

His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos marked the opening of the Meeting with a reception for the approximately eighty members of the Dialogue at the Notre Dame hotel. His Beatitude's address at the opening of the Dialogue follows in the link below:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2017/12/05/36270>

Other speakers who addressed the members were Rabi Mr. David Rozen, Mrs. Saron Regev on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Ambassador of Greece in Israel Mr. Demetrios Bikas on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece.

The proceedings began on Wednesday 23rd November/6th December 2017, according to the agenda of the Meeting. Professor Mr. Spyridon Tsitigos spoke on behalf of Orthodoxy in English, with the title "Jerusalem as archetypal of the religious".

The opening of the Dialogue was honoured by the presence of

His All-holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who visited Jerusalem on the occasion of His honorary Doctorate of Philosophy by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Mount Scopus and He also addressed the members of the Dialogue.

The closure of the Dialogue proceedings on Thursday afternoon, 24th November/7th December 2017, was followed by a meal. The Jerusalem Patriarchate was represented by the Patriarchal Commissioner Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias and the Master of Ceremonies of the Patriarchate Archimandrite Bartholomew.

The speakers' presentations and the outcome of the Meeting are published by the Most Reverend Metropolitan of France in his journal with the title Emmanuel.

From Secretariat-General