

THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MUNICH VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Saturday September 25th /October 9th 2011 the Orthodox Theological School of Munich consisting of its students and several accompanying pilgrims led by His Grace Bishop Remezianis Andreas of the Serbian Patriarchate and the Bishop of Stuttgart Agapitos of the Russian church of Dispersion as well as the Professor of the Faculty Mr. Athanasios Vletsis, visited the Patriarchate.

The above mentioned had already been on an educational pilgrimage trip to the Holy Land since the feast of the Elevation of the Most Precious Cross on Tuesday September 14th/27th 2011 and sealed their pilgrimage tour and theory with their visit to His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

During this visit through the words of Bishop of Remezianis Andreas, they expressed their joy for their pilgrimage visit to the Holy Land and their sincere thanks to His Beatitude for His warm welcome.

In response His Beatitude spoke to them about the Patriarchate of Jerusalem as the local Church of the Holy Land which having Jerusalem as its center embodies the Holy History and the Divine Economy of our Salvation by means of the Incarnation of our Savior Lord Jesus Christ at a time and place, His birth in flesh, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

“The Zion Mother of Churches” His Beatitude stated, “together with the Fathers of the Holy Sepulcher kept and protected the Holy Land through the centuries as sacred, as concrete

evidence, as tangible testimonial of the Acts of God that took place in the Holy Land for our salvation as well as the existence and the identity of the Christians who have been living in it until today. The Church kept and protected the Holy Land as a liturgical place for the spiritual cultivation and holiness of Its Christian residents and pilgrims.

“You” continued His Beatitude “have been blessed to visit the Holy Land not only as pilgrims but students of Theology as well and to ascertain the existence of Christian congregation leaving in it whose guard and guarantor is the Patriarchate.

This mission and role of the Patriarchate acknowledge and ask for the local political, authorities of Israel, Jordan and Palestinian Autonomy. As you give testimony in Europe on Orthodoxy so do we in the Middle East.”

All the Orthodox nations with their different cultural traditions experience here the event of Pentecost. They visit the Holy Land and concelebrate with us at the Most Holy Sepulcher and the Holy Shrine of Calvary.

“We congratulate you all on participating in the organization of this interorthodox trip and we convey the message that all Orthodox Churches are nowadays obliged more than ever to abandon competitiveness and protest for their unity that is in fact the substance of their mission, namely the salvation of man.”

During these, His Beatitude gave encolpia to the Head priests, ivory pectoral crosses to the priests and for the Faculty the book of History of the Church of Jerusalem by the Father of the Holy Sepulcher Archbishop of Athens Chrisostomos Papadopoulos, and other blessings from Jerusalem.

Chief Secretary’s Office

(translated from the original document in Greek by Mrs. Irini Valasi)

THE CHURCH CHOIR “BRANKO” AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Saturday, September 25th / October 8th 2011, two large groups of pilgrims from Serbia one with eighty members and another with forty members constituting the Church Choir Branko of Nis in Serbia and a forty-member group from Thessaloniki visited the Patriarchate.

These groups had itinerated the Holy Land during the previous days and sealing their pilgrimage they arrived at the Patriarchate in order to be blessed by the Primate of Zion Church His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

The priests of the groups from Serbia chanted troparia in their own dialect, and the singing of the <<many years>>/polychronismos to His Beatitude. His Beatitude blessing these groups of pilgrims reminded them of the unifying character of the Orthodox Church regarding the integration of the individual national and cultural traditions and congratulated them on their decision to take this pilgrimage trip despite the prevalent economic crisis. Moreover, he complimented their musical charisma after the choir chanted <<Kyrie Eleison>>/Lord, Have Mercy and the Megalynarion of the Theotokos.

During the singing of the choir, His Beatitude gave the priests ivory Pectoral Crosses and Holy blessings from Jerusalem to each and everyone of the pilgrims.

Chief Secretary's Office

(translated from the original document in Greek by Mrs. Irini Valasi)

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THE MINISTER OF CULTURE AND TOURISM OF UKRAINE VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday, September 22nd/October 5th 2011, the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Ukraine, Mr. Mykhailo Kulyniak, escorted by the Ambassador of Ukraine Mr. Hennadii Nadolenko, visited the Patriarchate.

His eminence the Minister was cordially welcomed by His Holy Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

According to the prearranged schedule of the visit, the Minister briefed His Beatitude concerning the efforts made by the state of Ukraine as for the peaceful cooperation of the conflicting Orthodox groups as well as the cooperation among various religions.

His Beatitude made a reference to the numerous pilgrims arriving at the Holy Land, many of whom from Ukraine, and the efforts of the Patriarchate supporting the establishment of Peace in the Middle East and wished for achieving Peace in the Middle East and Ukraine and the bridging of the past-created ecclesiastical schism.

Moreover, His Beatitude gave further details regarding the role of the Patriarchate concerning the preservation of the pilgrimage status in Jerusalem and the peace-making procedure in the Middle East, due to Its ecclesiastical, cultural, spiritual and territorial legacy.

The Minister thanked His Beatitude for the visit; the time devoted to him and His words of wisdom and promised to apply them suitably.

Chief Secretary's Office

(translated from the original document in Greek by Mrs Irini Valasi)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKPfYP7VSIo>

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**MEMBERS OF THE MOUGRABI
FAMILY RECEVEIVED BY H. B.**

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III.

On Friday, 9th September 2011, members of the Mougrabi family visited His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III. Legal expert of the Patriarchate, Mr. Mougrabi, arrived with four of his five children. The children, who currently attend school overseas, came to receive the blessings of His Beatitude.

His Beatitude, who was delighted to welcome Mr. Mougrabi and his children, was informed about their lives and their progress, and praised them for their success and good manners. He then presented them with blessings and gifts.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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AN ADDRESS OF GREETING TO H.E. HILARION, METROPOLITAN OF ROCOR.

An Address of Greeting to His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion Metropolitan of Eastern America and the New York Diocese and First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia.

The Divine Liturgy

The Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene

Sunday, 4 September

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Hilarion,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Archimandrite Tikhon,

Mother Elizabeth,

Beloved monastics,

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Christ is in our Midst!

As we continue to keep the Afterfeast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, we are glad to welcome you, our dear brother Metropolitan Hilarion, to Jerusalem. In this church on the Mount of Olives, we are very near to Mary's tomb, and we pray fervently to her today for you and for your arch pastoral ministry.

As we remember the gathering of the Apostles for the falling asleep of Theotokos,

We recall the words of the Psalmist, who said

How very good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! (Ps 132: 1)

The Church of Jerusalem, the Mother of all the Churches, is happy to have gathered under her wings all those faithful Christians who, over the years and because of difficult circumstances, have been separated from the bosom of their homeland and of their own Local Orthodox Churches.

Today by our presence at this Eucharist gathering, we

celebrate the fullness of the communion of the Mother Church of Jerusalem with all her children, and we celebrate the fullness of the communion of the Mother Church of Jerusalem with all her children, and we celebrate the coming together of the brothers and sisters of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The restoration of canonical communion between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia is a living sign of the ecumenical and catholic life of the Orthodox Church. In just this ecumenical and catholic life does the Orthodox Church give witness to the power of love and humility that produces the fruit of reconciliation and unity. This is the will of God for the Church.

Our unity in the Orthodox Church is for the sake of our common mission, and our unity is our chief assurance of the respect that each Local Orthodox Churches has for the integrity of other Local Churches. In our common life there is no place for suspicion, mistrust, or antagonism. As we say in this and every Divine Liturgy,

“Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Holy, Consubstantial and undivided Trinity!”

Let us guard our unity and our proper relationships as gifts from God.

We give thanks to Almighty God that through the *diakonia* of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Christianity has taken deep root in this Holy Land over the centuries. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem not only represents the Orthodox world in the Holy Land; the Patriarchate also guarantees the Christian prescience in the Holy Places and ensures that these sites retain their fundamental spiritual significance and are accessible to all pilgrims without distinction. Since the earliest times, the Brotherhood of the Holy Tomb has been faithful in this ministry.

So as we welcome you, Your Eminence, we do so fully conscious of the communion of brotherly love that exists between us, and that is sustained by the witness of the living faith of the Church in this Holy Land. We are certain that this same true brotherly love, by God's Grace, will always characterize the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

We extend to you, and to Archimandrite Tikhon and Mother Elizabeth and to all the faithful gathered here our Patriarchal blessing, and our best wishes to you as you continue on your pilgrimage in the Holy Land. As a sign of this blessing, we are pleased to present to you this encolpion.

We pray for Your Eminence many years!

Thank you.

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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U . S . CONGRESSMAN GUS BILARAKIS VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE .

On Wednesday 17th / 4th August 2011, the Greek-American Congressman Gus M. Bilarakis, visited the Patriarchate with his son Michael.

Congressman Bilarakis was warmly received by His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III. At the meeting, the honoured guest gave his impressions of his second pilgrimage to the Holy Land, expressing his deep respect for the Holy Shrines and the Patriarchate.

His Beatitude presented to the Congressman and his son Jerusalemite crosses and icons of the Holy Sepulchre.

Having wished his young son Michael well, and good health to the Greek-American Congressman, His Beatitude blessed this auspicious visit and expressed the hope that through the grace of the Holy Sepulchre, he will fulfil his duties in serving the United States and its people.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS AT THE OPENING SESSION FOR THE MEETING OF THE HEADS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES OF THE MIDDLE EAST.

The Baptismal Site

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 01 August 2011

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Psalm:133.

Your Beatitude, Patriarch of Antioch Kirios Ignatios,

Your Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus, Kirios Chrysostomos,

**Your Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Hermopolis,
Representative of His Beatitude Patriarch of Alexandria,**

Reverend Fathers, distinguished guests, brothers and sisters,

With a joyful heart we express Our warmest greetings on this special gathering that demonstrates our unity and oneness in the Holy Spirit of Christ, which has brought us to this part of the Holy Land, that is under the protection and rule of His Majesty King Abdullah II.

We are grateful to His Majesty, our beloved King Abdulla II, and his government that were extremely cooperative in hosting us in this dear Holy Land. We greatly value His Majesty's diligence and vision in both, continuing and furthering, the freedoms that exist in Jordan and always point

to this great example of living together, co-existence and of symbiosis.

We are here, at the Baptismal site of our Lord, in order to confirm Our mission as the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic church. Our mission as the Eastern Orthodox Church, known as the Rum Orthodox Church, is to be a living witness to the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ and the saving power of His baptism, that by and through it, Christ has made us members of His Kingdom.

Our mission is to spread the message of Christ's sacrificial love and peace for God is love, "if someone says ' I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God, whom he has not seen?" John 4:20.

The Middle East region which has been the motherland of Abraham's children, Muslims, Christians and Jews, has enriched them with great religious and cultural heritage that has shaped and formed our modern civilization. A civilization that embraces freedom of expression, diversity of religious affiliation and ethnic identity which at the same time constitutes a harmonious symbiosis.

Today the very fabric of this harmonious symbiotic, cultural and religious diversity is threatened by the dark, invisible forces who want to impose their own conception of peace and co-existence.

The Christian presence that constitutes an inseparable and integral part of the Middle East countries [Cyprus included], is experiencing despair, uncertainty and difficulty and this is no more evident than in our region; but we must not fear. It is precisely for this reason that we have come to join with our Christian brothers and sisters in encouraging them to continue their lives in hope and strength and help in sustaining peace, justice, mutual respect and true co-

existence.

For we are not the masters of history. We serve the master of history, who in truth is the eschaton, fulfilment and completion of all things. It is in this context that we as ritual leaders are announcing the Middle East Rum Orthodox Churches initiative; in order to serve the good interest and concerns of the Christians of the Middle East and beyond.

I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all the endeavours of His Royal Highness, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad and recognise his attentiveness in further developing this Holy Site.

Allow me please to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to all those who sacrificed their time in order for this to become a reality not in the least the team here at the Baptismal Site.

Last but not least we like to thank the director of Our Middle East Council of Churches office in Amman, Miss Wafa Goussous.

Thank you all and may God bless our deliberations.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS IN HONOUR OF CHURCH LEADERS AT THE ORTHODOX HEAD OF CHURCHES MEETING IN AMMAN-JORDAN.

31 July 2011

An Address at the Dinner in honour of His Beatitude Ignatius IV, the Patriarch of Antioch, His Beatitude Chrysostomos II, the Archbishop of Cyprus, His Grace Bishop Nicholaos, the Representative of His Beatitude Theodoros II, the Patriarch of Alexandria and Representatives of the Royal Family and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Your Beatitudes, my dear Brother Primates,

Your Eminences,

Yours Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Your Royal Highnesses,

Esteemed Members of the Government,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters

“Your children like olive branches around your table. Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.” (Psalm 127:3).

It is a great honour for us to host this dinner for all our distinguished guests with us this evening, who are like olive branches around this table. We come here as those who fear and love God, and who seek to serve God faithfully. This gathering is of paramount importance because it takes place at a

delicate time for our region, as we experience unrest and change.

This evening we remember our forebears, Patriarch Sophronios and the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, and the foundation that they laid in the Al-'Udha Al-'Umariyyah In the year 637 for the peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land. We recall that Patriarch- Sophronios acted not simply on his own behalf, but as the recognized leader of all Christians in the region. And the Caliph Omar, too, entered into this treaty on behalf of the Islamic leadership as a whole. As a consequence, this treaty has formed an historic basis for the relationship between our Christian civilization and our Arab Muslim civilization and our life together in the Holy Land for many centuries.

We who are here this evening are the heirs of Patriarch Sophronios and Caliph Omar. The presence of leaders of the Rum Orthodox Church of our region demonstrates the united witness to the historical relationship of the Church to the land and all our peoples. The presence of representatives of the Jordanian Royal Family and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan this evening is an eloquent testimony to the ongoing guardianship of the religious heritage of our region that is yours.

We sit round this table today as the descendants of Patriarch Sophronios and Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, We inherit their awesome responsibility, and we are acutely aware, as the Scriptures remind us, that we "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians, 6:2).

This great foundation, on which our present work is based, is once again threatened. The religious; cultural, and historic principles and circumstances of co-existence that have shaped and formed us are at risk. It is to ensure that this crucial heritage is preserved that is the primary motivation for our gathering.

To the Rum Orthodox here this evening we would like to emphasize the urgency living out the unity that is ours as we provide leadership in our region. We are called to join with our fellow leaders of other Christian churches and communities for the sake of the well-being of all. And we are further called to act together with our Muslim brothers and sisters who are our compatriots in our respective countries.

To our Muslim brothers and sisters here with us this evening we have a similar challenge. As you look to the beginning of the holy season of Ramadan, a time of recollection and re-commitment, we encourage you to be leaders in a new collaboration on behalf of peace and justice for all our people.

Whether we are Muslim or Christian, we cannot allow the forces of division to disrupt our historic relationship. And let us not forget that as we share this meal together, this common food is a powerful and effective sign of our common nature as members of the human family and our common destiny.

Thank you all for being at this dinner this evening, and for showing such solidarity for the sake of our region and all our peoples.

And now would you please rise and join us in a toast to His Majesty King Abdullah, under whose gracious encouragement we meet, and who has been instrumental in following in the footsteps of Omar ibn al-Khattab to ensure the great heritage of the Al-'Umariyyah that has been handed on to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Your Beatitudes, Ladies and Gentleman – the King.

Please would you join me in a second toast to His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius, His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos, and to the other Church leaders here who labour diligently in our mission of safe-guarding not only the spiritual freedom of our people, but also in protecting and maintaining national order

and unity in a time of great difficulty,

Dear friends, I give you Their Beatitudes and our fellow leaders.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE FUTURE OF JERUSALEM

*The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, was interviewed by **Palestine-Israel Journal** intern/journalist Anna Koulouris.*

Politically speaking, Jerusalem is often discussed in terms of only two sides Israeli and Palestinian. This fact does not imply denying or ignoring the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which insisted in its peace agreement with Israel on being a major partner when the status of Jerusalem is decided between Israel and the Palestinians. The religious significance of Jerusalem is kept a separate matter it is simply a city of the utmost importance for the three Abrahamic faiths. The Greek Orthodox Christians, or Rum Orthodox as they are historically called, have had a history in Jerusalem for more than 2,000 years. As the inheritor of tradition, property and leadership, the Greek Orthodox Church aspires to play a significant role in the political future of this city. The jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, which

includes more than 150,000 Christians, stretches across Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA), including Jerusalem, and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. By default, the patriarch takes on a role as a political leader whose voice is considered integral in many local and international matters. As a local institution, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Israeli government rely on cooperation in order to carry out many of their respective functions. At the same time, any newly elected Greek Orthodox patriarch has to seek the approval of his nomination by the three parties: Jordan, Israel and Palestine. Members of the synods should have Jordanian citizenship. The primary function of the patriarchate is to preserve and protect the holiest sites in Christendom, as it has done since the birth of Christianity.

The 141st Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, discusses the Greek Orthodox Church's current and future role in Jerusalem and the peace process, responds to criticisms and shares personal opinions.

Palestine-Israel Journal: What is the significance of the Greek Orthodox Church for Jerusalem?

Patriarch Theophilos III: The role of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the church is extremely important for the current and future status of Jerusalem. Its history cannot be dissociated from the political and cultural-religious history of Jerusalem. It has an unbreakable historical presence for 2,000 years and is the only religious institution that has been here throughout the ages. Its purpose and mission continues to be crystal clear and purely religious and spiritual; it does not promote any other interests. Today, if Jerusalem enjoys a certain status and cultural and religious character, it is due to the presence of the patriarchate, which is the inheritor of the spiritual heritage, but also the natural heritage. By natural heritage I mean churches, basilicas, places of worship, holy places that

have been handed over to the patriarchate by the Byzantines who left Palestine in the 7th century with the coming of Omar ibn al-Khattab. It was at this time that the Patriarch of Jerusalem became both the spiritual and ethnic leader of the Greek Orthodox community.

Speaking of heritage, there have been accusations by some local Arab Orthodox residents that the Greeks have maintained cultural dominance and that Arabs have not been promoted to certain official positions in the church to the same degree as the Greeks have. Is this true?

There is a bigger question here. The name of the patriarchate and all Eastern Orthodox Christians locally here is Rum. This is how they are recognized and identified by the Muslim Arabs and Palestinians, in general. It is a matter of cultural identity or identity crisis that many people have difficulties understanding the meaning of Rum. The West has also brought them confusion about their identity, which could be remedied with education and [an] understanding [of] history. And you have to refer back to your roots. You cannot disregard the Byzantine presence that was here. The stones are talking everything is talking. I have prepared an academic study which gives a very thorough and complete analysis of the meaning of Rum and what it means to be a member of that church.

Although the Greek Orthodox Church has had a presence in Jerusalem since its existence, looking forward, there is a political agenda on the part of Israel. No one can deny they would like to gain property that the patriarchate owns, especially in the Jaffa Gate area. Has this put pressure on the church?

You have touched upon a very delicate issue, the core of the importance and significance of the patriarchate's presence and role concerning Jerusalem and the greater area. From the religious point of view, many of the holy places under the charge of the patriarchate have remained accessible to all

pilgrims and visitors without any discrimination whatsoever. It is due to the presence of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher. What has been acknowledged by everybody locally, regionally and internationally is that if it were not for the presence of the patriarchate here, most of the holy places would have been destroyed, or at the end of the day, turned into museums or archeological sites and tourist attractions. But so far, the holy places have been maintained as places of blessedness and worship.

In terms of culture and even politics, the patriarchate is very important, first of all because it gives legitimacy to the historical claims that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the PA have over the holy places because they both have claims from the Muslim Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, when the Muslims took over the city of Jerusalem from the then-Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius, and it is well known that they made a peace covenant known as the Covenant of Omar. This fundamental agreement has been the basis of all the legal transactions or legal agreements that have taken place so far between the patriarchate and the states and their respective authorities. The other thing is that the patriarchate has been the inheritor of the natural heritage, that is to say, churches, monasteries and other properties, which later were augmented. This is what makes the patriarchate important for the natural, the physical and the demographic [aspects] of Jerusalem. The patriarchate continues to hold properties within and around the Old City within politically strategic places.

Is any of this, the strength of the patriarchate, a source of tension with the Israeli government today?

Jerusalem is [at] the heart of the political developments here, so it is natural that the patriarchate is part and parcel of the political conflict and interests. But the mission of the patriarchate remains spiritual and religious. Unlike the other Christian churches here and they do have a lot of properties as well the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate is

the only church institution that is independent, autonomous and autocephalous. This means the properties of the patriarchate are properties of the country here, the land here they belong here.

As for the properties belonging to the other churches, for example, those belonging to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Russian Church, these are state properties. They do not belong here to the locality, but to the respective states. Some time ago, if you visited Notre Dame you could see written [there] Vatican Property. The same happened recently, the Russians asked for some properties to be restored and returned to their proper owners. But who is dealing with the state about these properties, or with the Palestinian Authority? It is the state, not the church.

The other thing is that all the other churches have their point of reference far away from Jerusalem. The appointments of the leaders of the other Christian churches and institutions are coming from abroad, from outside not from within. So you understand the importance of the patriarchate; it is a local institution.

How is the relationship now between Jordan, Palestine and Israel, the states within the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem?

The relationship today is excellent. After the crisis that the patriarchate passed through, and [when] I assumed my responsibilities as the head of the church here, of course there were all sorts of problems, difficulties and misunderstandings. But eventually everybody realized that my task is to give what is due unto God and what is due unto Caesar.

How much of a role does the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate play in speaking about Palestinian rights, especially with its close proximity to areas like Silwan? Does the church feel a

responsibility to take a political stance on the issue?

We try not to interfere or turn ourselves into politicians, but at the same time this does not mean that we do not have compassion for the suffering and the affliction through which the people are passing here. And this is why the churches here have established a kind of council to discuss issues of common concern. We are addressing issues like the recent shooting in Silwan and others. Our purpose is to try, from our position, to contribute to mutual respect and understanding and to peaceful coexistence and symbiosis. This is the duty of the church. This is why we as churches have officially and repeatedly made statements and expressed our position over the status of Jerusalem.

Our position on Jerusalem is that we want it to be an open city, to be accessible to everybody, and that Jerusalem has enough space to accommodate all religious communities. We say it is enough for us to be allowed to visit and venerate the places that are commonly holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians. Even if we do not have claims over the site itself, we have claims to the holiness and sanctity of the place. The Temple Mount is an example. Another example is King David's Tomb on Mount Zion. When we have our holy day of Pentecost, which we celebrate in our monastery and at the school on Mount Zion, after the service we go in our liturgical vestments in a procession to King David's Tomb, which is a synagogue. There we go for worship, to say our prayers and leave. This is what we want. This is our understanding of the holy places. This is why I have said Jerusalem has enough space to accommodate everybody.

Politically speaking, everybody has claims over Jerusalem and everybody wants Jerusalem to be his or her own capital. But from the religious point of view, Jerusalem is the capital of God. And my personal position is that Jerusalem breathes with three lungs: a Christian lung, a Jewish lung and an Islamic lung. And those lungs, they breathe harmoniously. This is how

we see the future of Jerusalem.

What is your opinion about the ongoing negotiations of a taxation agreement between the Israeli government and the Vatican, which could mean that church institutions would have to pay income, property and municipal taxes? Does this Orthodox Church feel sidelined knowing that if an agreement is reached, it will set a precedent for the other churches?

The situation with the Vatican negotiations is far more complex. The Greek Orthodox Church is not sidelined because the legal status of the patriarchate differs from the Vatican. It is the only church institution with Jordanian law. The patriarchate is a local institution. The Vatican is a spiritual and political entity, so its representatives cannot speak on behalf of the local Christians here.

There are many videos online of infighting that takes place between the Greeks and Armenians in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. They seem shameful, and it is hard to understand how such clashes occur in holy places. How would you explain the dynamic here to an observer?

I understand your question, but people try to limit those religious conflicts and fights to certain events that have taken place between Franciscans, between Greeks and Armenians, Armenians and Syrians, Copts and Ethiopians, and so on. But, in fact, we must think a bit deeper and ask ourselves what the entire conflict is about between Palestinian Muslims and Jewish Israelis. Is it not about religion? It is about religion. What is the importance of Jerusalem, politically speaking? Is Jerusalem important for military or strategic purposes? It is purely religious, nothing else. The conflict here is religious. When you see clashes in Jerusalem, especially over the Temple Mount and al-Haram al-Sharif, what is it all about? Is it not about religious areas? So they focus on a particular point in the Holy Sepulcher; that makes sense; it is natural. But they cannot focus on the broader

picture of what is going on here in the Holy Land.

Now, there is another thing that we should not forget; we have to take into consideration our human predicament. Actually, all the fights and clashes in the past were in the name of God. The Crusades, what were they all about? Were they not in the name of God? And there are so many others. Today, it is not called in the name of God, but in this game, in one way or another, religion is involved.

In the World Council of Churches, how does the Greek Orthodox Church view its need to be there or to be a participant?

The Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem were among the pioneers, the founders of the World Council of Churches. It was established at the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and then all the other churches followed. The council plays an important role in bringing together all the Christian denominations and has done great work because all sorts of prejudices have been dissipated.

The problem is this: During its inception years, the council focused on the unity of the Christian churches and denominations, but then the focus was diverted from a theological discussion to social matters because of the influence of the Protestant churches. Later on, in many cases, it got involved in political matters. Today, the council still plays an important role, but not as prominent as in the past because of many political changes and developments.

Still, the Orthodox Church is committed to the mission of the World Council of Churches. This is why we participate. I myself was the first representative of the patriarchate to become a member of the central committee of the council. Now we have our current representative, and we have recently welcomed the new secretary-general of the World Council of Churches. We are trying to contribute as much as possible

because today this is important, especially for our religion. It can help in the peace process and reconciliation, and to bring peace and justice as well.

After the contact you had with the Greek prime minister recently when he visited Israel, what does the patriarchate expect from the Greek government? Do you believe Mr. George Papandreou will help to better relations in the area? Will you and he act as middlemen in political matters here?

The visit of Mr. Papandreou was really very important because he made it clear that his mission is to strengthen this initiative of the peace process. It is a well-known fact that he enjoys respect from both the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership. It is known that his father was a great supporter of the Palestinians during the time of President Yasser Arafat. And to come here to the patriarchate, it is another sign that everybody realizes the importance of the patriarchate, not only in the religious but also in the political sphere. Since the conflict, as I said, is religious, all those leaders are slowly realizing that without the assistance or advice of the religious leadership, not only Christian but also Muslim and Jewish, they cannot succeed in their efforts to bring peace and reconciliation to the area.

Your position is one of great importance and very demanding, yet you seem to have a low profile and live simply. From where do you draw strength on a daily basis?

It is a very hard question. I think all the strength is from above; it is from the church, from prayer. That is it.

What kind of advice would you give to people in the world today who may be struggling with the current economic state of affairs and other challenges that modernity and globalization present?

To people I would say that the exit and refuge from this world's complexities is faith in God.

A GROUP OF PILGRIMS UNDER N.G.O. "ROMIOSINI" VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Saturday, July 3rd/16th 2011, a fifty-member group of pilgrims, during the framework of a pilgrimage trip of N.G.O. "Romiosini" under the General Manager of the Website of the Patriarchate Dr. Christos Nikolaou and the Deputy Manager Mrs. Aikaterini Diamantopoulou and the Professor of the Theological School of Athens Mr. Spyridona Tsitsigon, visited the Patriarchate, as well as a fifty-member group of the Greek community in Jerusalem under Mr. Theodore Varakla.

These were cordially accepted by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem who welcomed them and spoke about the Most Holy Shrines as places which accepted and offered hospitality to Godman our Lord, Jesus Christ and were sanctified by Him by His Grace, Work, and Word and they therefore have the power to convey this grace and blessing of our Savior Jesus Christ and contribute to the resolution of questions and problems of individuals and to the patients cure.

The Deputy Manager of N.G.O. "Romiosini" Mrs. Aikaterini Diamantopoulou thanked His Beatitude for the foundation of N.G.O. "Romiosini" the reception of the pilgrimage group at

the Patriarchate, sent greetings on behalf of Mr. Petros Kyriakidis and offered a donation of the pilgrims/members of the pilgrimage group in support of the Patriarchate.

Thanking them, His Beatitude wished “worthy pilgrimage” and distributed pilgrimage blessings.

Continuing, Mr. Nikolaou with Mrs. Diamantopoulou discussed with His Beatitude in private concerning the Office equipment of “Romiosini” and the official beginning of Radio Romiosini and Romiosini TV.

Chief Secretary’s Office

(translated from the original document in Greek by Mrs. Irini Valasi)

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