

ACCOUNT OF THE VISIT OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM TO RUSSIA FOR THE 70TH BIRTHDAY OF THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW

A. The meeting of H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem with H.H. the Patriarch of Moscow

Before moon on Saturday, the 6th/19th of November 2016, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow and His Entourage met with His Holiness Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow who was accompanied by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Metropolitan Sergei, Protopresbyter Nikolai Balasov and other clerics. Patriarch Kyrill expressed joy over the meeting, the first after the 2013 Joint Liturgy on the anniversary of the Russian's baptismal. "Such meetings" He said, "solidify our unity, in spite of occasional differences. We welcome you with great joy as the Patriarch of the Holy City and the Holy Land, sanctified by the footsteps of Christ our Saviour. We welcome you from the land from where the Apostles left to proclaim the teachings of Christ across the earth".

His Beatitude Theophilos replied that the meeting is indeed a special joy and honour bestowed by the Patriarchate of Moscow on the occasion of Patriarch Kyrill's birthday. "This is particularly important", His Beatitude added, "not only for strengthening the ties between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Church of Russia, but also for expressing the unity of the Church as a whole".

The Russian people and the Russian Church have greatly benefitted the Holy Shrines, e.g. the Russian Church's

contribution, of 3.000.000 USD, to the restoration of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. "The renovation", said Patriarch Theophilos, "was effected through the Palestinian Autonomy, because of disagreement between the three Communities" and He added: "We, on our behalf, will restore the Cavern with the Franciscans, aspiring to Your interest in the subvention of the project".

We thank our Triadic God for this project and for the fact that pilgrims from Russia and Ukraine keep supporting the Holy Lands, said Patriarch Theophilos. "These pilgrims reinforce the Christian regime and the Christian character of Jerusalem", He said.

Patriarch Theophilos went on to invite Patriarch Kyrill to visit the Holy Land on the completion of works on the Basilica of the Nativity and of the restoration project of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre. He expressed joy over the recent visit of Prime Minister Medvedev and his interest in the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre.

On this subject, Patriarch Kyrill said He was recently informed by PM Medvedev that Russia will sponsor the renovation of the street that leads to the Basilica and of the forecourt of the Church.

Patriarch Kyrill also referred to a war of misinformation against the Church of Russia, that blames it for the absence of a total of four Churches from the Great Synod of Orthodoxy. Our absence, He said, was also due to strong critique against the text on the relation of the Orthodox Church with Christian Communities. "However", Patriarch Kyrill said, "we are not negative against the Synod. Its approval by the consciousness of the Church will be proven in the future", and He added: "We are looking forward to a future Pan-Orthodox Synod".

Patriarch Kyrill also spoke of the crisis in Ukraine, a country "ruled by dictatorship that aims at destroying the

Orthodox Church", in His words.

In His response, Patriarch Theophilos said that the absence of the four Churches from the Great Synod had not damaged the unity of Orthodoxy, as the conference paved the way for a Pan-Orthodox Synod. With regards to the crisis in Ukraine, Patriarch Theophilos said that He recently met with the Ukrainian President at the Patriarchate where He stressed the need to restore church unity in the country before anything else.

On the occasion of the meeting, the two Patriarchs exchanged gifts.

On the evening of the same day, Patriarch Kyrill hosted all the Heads of the Orthodox Churches and their attendants to dinner.

There, Patriarch Theophilos delivered an address in English, see: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/11/19/27882>

B. Joint Patriarchal Liturgy on the 70th birthday of His Holiness Kyrill, Patriarch of Moscow

On the morning of Sunday, the 7th/20th of November 2016, a Joint Primatial Liturgy was held on the occasion of the 70th birthday of Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow.

All Churches participated in the Joint Liturgy, namely: the Ecumenical Patriarchate, represented by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France; the Patriarchate of Alexandria, with Patriarch Theodoros; the Patriarchate of Antioch, with Metropolitan Nephon; the Patriarchate of Serbia, with Patriarch Irinej; the Patriarchate of Bulgaria in Western Europe, the Patriarchate of Georgia, represented by Patriarch Elias of Georgia; the Church of Cyprus with Archbishop Chrysostomos; the Church of Poland, the Church of Romania, the Church of Greece, the Church of Albania, and the Church of the Czech Republic.

The Joint Liturgy was headed by Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria and it expressed the Orthodox faith of all Orthodox Churches, in accordance with the Nicene Creed.

On the apolysis, Metropolitan Onouphrios of Ukraine read the message of Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow. Addresses then followed by other Churches, i.e. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France and representatives of the state of Russia.

During the lunch that followed, His Beatitude Theophilos addressed Patriarch Kyrill in English, see link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/11/20/27885>

On Sunday evening, His Beatitude left the Radisson hotel for Moscow airport, accompanied by Metropolitan Barsanuphius of Petersburg, Archbishop Tikhon of Austria-Hungary and Archimandrite Theophanes.

At the airport, the Patriarch and His attendants boarded a plane of Aeroflot airlines to land safely at Ben Gurion Airport around midnight.

From the Secretariat-General



**REMARKS AT THE CELEBRATORY
DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE 70TH**

BIRTHDAY OF HIS HOLINESS KIRILL PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA.

19 November 2016

Your Holiness, dear Brother,

Your Beatitudes, our Fellow Primate,

Your Eminences, Yours Excellencies,

Reverend Fathers,

We rejoice with you, Your Holiness, and we congratulate you on your 70th birthday, and we also recognize that this year you celebrate the 40th anniversary of your episcopal ordination in 1976. For all of this we give thanks to Almighty God, that you have been called to his service, and that you have exercised the dignity of archpastoral ministry for so long.

We take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to you for the unwavering support of the Russian Church and People of the Church of Jerusalem. We would also like to express our gratitude to His Excellency the President who not only made a significant donation for the recent restoration of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, but, even more importantly, has been steadfast in his support of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East.

We are glad to be here with our fellow Primates and bishops from across the Orthodox world to give witness to our unity. In almost every region the Church faces fresh challenges, and in some parts of the globe Christians are enduring renewed persecution, and we must be ever vigilant. The unity of faith that our worship together manifests reveals also a unity of purpose, and our unity is crucial not only for us as Orthodox Churches; our unity is crucial for the whole Christian community.

As the leaders of the Church, we are reminded that to us has been entrusted by Divine Providence the mission of making clear in our modern world the values of the Gospel. For this mission our gathering this weekend gives us both strength and encouragement. We pray that God may be your constant support, Your Holiness, that your continued primatial service may be just such a strength and encouragement to the Church of Russia.

May God bless the Church of Russia, and may God bless all the peoples of this beloved country.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE RELICS OF ST GEORGE THE TROPHY BEARER IN LYDDA

On Wednesday, the 3rd/16th of November 2016, the Patriarchate celebrated the translation of the relics of St George the Trophy Bearer in the city of Lydda.

The feast commemorates the translation of the holy relics of St George from Rome where he had suffered a martyr's death to his mother's birthplace in Lydda. The relics were then placed in a tomb upon which, between 326 and 336 AD, St Helen founded a magnificent Church that went on to serve as veneration centre for the Christian Community in Lydda. The city draws its origins from the years of the New Testament (Acts 9, 32).

Patriarchal Liturgy was held on the aforementioned day, led by His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who had as concelebrants: Metropolitan Panteleimon of the Church of Xanthi, Greece; Archbishop Damascene of Joppa, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Zambia, and Metropolitan Theodosios, visiting from the Church of Russia; Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, led by Archimandrite Ieronymos, hegumen in Fhes, as well as priests from Communities adjacent to Lydda, and deacons Agapios and Markos. A crowd of faithful from cities of Israel and the Palestinian Autonomy venerated the Tomb of St George, as Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang on the right in Greek, Russian and Arabic. Members of the Rum Orthodox Community of Lydda sang in Arabic in the presence of the Serbian Ambassador in Tel Aviv.

To the pious congregation, His Beatitude preached the Word of God in Greek, pointing out that when St George proclaimed himself a Christian in front of Diocletian and the Roman Parliament, he suffered cruel torture and a martyr's death.

“The saint’s desire”, said His Beatitude, “was neither emotional nor illusory. It was a fervent desire, moved by the enlightening power of faith in Christ, the light and truth of the world. *“Whoever believes in me”* said the Lord, *“has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.* (John 3, 36); and elsewhere: *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”* (Mathew 16, 24-26).

“In other words”, Patriarch Theophilos added, “George’s desire for Christ was the desire to acquire freedom in Christ, freedom that relieves man of the worship of material and earthy things, whilst bringing out the magnificence of his soul”.

In Arabic, the Patriarch’s sermon can be reached here:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/11/15/25377>

On the conclusion of the divine Liturgy, Archimandrite Nicodemus, hegumen at St George, hosted the Patriarchal Entourage at the hegumeneion, together with Ambassadors, the members of the Church Board, and others.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/izvyaFy95wk>



PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM IN MAFRAQ, JORDAN

On Saturday, the 30th of October/12th of November 2016, H.B. Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, crossed the bridge of the River Jordan to arrive at the Patriarchate's Bishopric in Amman, from where He left for the city of Mafraq, Northern Jordan.

The Patriarch was accompanied by the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Zambia, Archimandrite Hieronymos, hegumen in Fhes, f. Issa Mousleh, and Hierodeacon Markos.

Nearing the city, His Beatitude was courteously greeted by a delegation of officials before being welcomed to the Church of the Dormition of Theotokos of the Mafrak Community, numbering approximately 120 families, by Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella, Archimandrite Hieronymos, some twenty priests of adjacent parishes, the members of the Church Board and a crowd of faithful.

The Patriarch went on to lead panegyric Vespers before inaugurating a hall built on the subvention of the Patriarchate, to host several events organized by the Rum Orthodox Community.

During dinner hosted in the inaugurated hall, His Beatitude addressed attendants in Arabic, see: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/11/12/25264> and offered financial aid amounting to ten thousand dinars.

Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella extended thanks for the aid and for the Patriarch's overall moral and material support, offering Him an enameled icon.

The following day, Sunday the 31st of October/13th of November 2016, a Joint Prelatic Liturgy was held in the aforementioned church, led by His Beatitude, who had as concelebrants: Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina and Philoumenos of Pella, Metropolitan Joachim of Zambia, local priests, Hierodeacon Markos and deacon Evangelos Psiaras. Attending the service was the Greek Ambassador to Jordan, Mr V. Bornovas. A choir of young men and women sang in Greek and Arabic for a large congregation.

Patriarch Theophilos preached the Word of God in Greek, referring to the wise and salvaging word of the Apostles, the Gospel of Christ's Love. "This is the light", the Patriarch said, "of Christ, the Sun of justice, we are called upon to put on, not the porphyry of the unjust rich man of today's Evangelical pericope, indulging in material goods and looking down on impoverished Lazaros who had wished to feed on crumbs falling from the rich man's table".

To explain the pericope, the Patriarch spoke of man's condition in this world and his condition in life after death, where his soul will be judged by the Son of God according to the testament of the Evangelist John: *"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me"* (John 5, 26-30).

In Arabic, the sermon can be reached here:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/11/13/25262>

After the Apolysis, the pious congregation venerated the Holy Cross, held by His Beatitude, and received the *antidoron* and an icon of Theotokos.

Patriarch Theophilos offered a Byzantine icon of Theotokos for the Church, and a pectoral cross for the priest, f. Demetrios Samai. An enameled icon of Theotokos was offered by the Community to His Beatitude.

During the reception that followed, the Patriarch offered financial blessings to the choir and to the Women's Association.

At noon, His Beatitude and Entourage sat at lunch hosted in his honour by the Community.

On the way to Amman, Patriarch Theophilos was toured by a Jordan archaeologist to the ruins of two recently excavated Byzantine churches with mosaics and Greek inscriptions, in the Irhab area. From there, He left for the Bishopric of Amman from where He returned to Jerusalem, praising God for this visit.

From the Secretariat-General



**THE FEAST OF ST DEMETRIUS THE
GREAT MARTYR IN RAFFIDIA,**

SAMARIA

On Friday, the 29th of October/11th of November 2016, the feast of St Demetrius the Myrrh-Streamer was observed belatedly at St Demetrius church in Raffidia, at a short distance from Jacob's well, in Nablus, Samaria.

In this church, built by the ever-memorable Patriarch Cyril circa 1850, Patriarch Theophilos led the divine Liturgy, having as concelebrants Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Zambia, Archimandrites Epiphanius and Leontios, Archdeacon Marcos and Hierodeacon Agapius. Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang on the right in Greek, as cantors sang in Arabic on the left. Parishioners, a minority within a Muslim population, observed mass in piety.

To the pious congregation, His Beatitude delivered a sermon in Greek, quoting the Evangelical pericope of the day: *"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning"* (John 15, 26-27).

"This testament", Patriarch Theophilos said, "that 'you have been with me from the beginning', is fervently proclaimed by the Church of Christ, constituted and held together by the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, namely the Spirit of God and Christ our Saviour".

St Demetrius, His Beatitude added, imitated Christ's life-giving passion, from which he drew the energy of miracles and the enlightening power to teach the Gospel's message, but also to heal diseases.

"Let us all beseech St Demetrius", Patriarch Theophilos concluded, "through the mediation of Theotokos and all other saints, to guard us from danger and grief".

On the conclusion of the divine Liturgy, the hegumen and church board hosted His Beatitude and Entourage to lunch at the hegumeneion.

From the Secretariat-General

<http://youtu.be/yK-pz2JFZXM>



HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM PARTICIPATES IN “BYZANTINE THESSALONIKI” CONFERENCE

On Sunday, the 24th of October/6th of November 2016, H.B. Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, accompanied by the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and Archdeacon Markos, led the Divine Liturgy at the magnificent St Demetrius Church in Thessaloniki, having as concelebrants H.B. Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus, Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki, and other Prelates.

The Divine Liturgy was held on the conclusion of the Conference on the city's Byzantine ecclesiastical heritage. During lunch, His Beatitude spoke in Greek, see link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/gr/2016/11/06/40580>

During the Divine Liturgy, Patriarch Theophilos delivered a sermon, referring specifically to the Apostle Paul. Paul, His Beatitude said, had never known Christ during His presence on earth, but was taught the mysteries of God. "Such mysteries enlightened his mind, expanded his horizon and, mainly, fashioned his heart in perfect love and dedication to Christ, so that he denied everything, even his own life, in order to devote himself to evangelism, demonstrating zeal that exceeded that of the other Apostles".

Though he previously adhered fervently to Jewish laws and principles, he turned this zeal to the basis "on which Christ built the new relationship, guiding him to the right path". His earnestness, the Patriarch said, we must all emulate in our daily lives, proclaiming in deed the testament of Christ. We must, His Beatitude added, willingly carry our own cross, obeying the Lord's advice to stand firm in the face of adversities.

After the divine Liturgy, the Most Reverend Anthimos, Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, hosted lunch in honour of H.B. Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and all representatives of sister Churches at the Liknon restaurant in the suburbs.

In the spirit of hospitality, Metropolitan Ioannis of Langadas, Liti and Rentinin, welcomed His Beatitude and Entourage at his Holy Bishopric.

On the evening of Sunday, Patriarch Theophilos sat at a dinner hosted in His honour by the Most Reverend Barnabas, Metropolitan of Neapolis and Stavroupolis, and Metropolitan Pavlos of Drama, who offered H.B. the amount of 5.000 euro for the restoration and conservation of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre.

On the morning of Monday, the 25th of October/7th of November 2016, His Beatitude visited the Monastery of Vlatades and the Centre of Paternal Studies that stands within its area.

There, He was warmly welcomed by the Hegoumen and Director of the Centre of Paternal Studies, Metropolitan Nikiforos of Amori.

Then Patriarch Theopilos was courteously welcomed to the Holy Bishopric of Serres and the Cathedral of Sts Taxiarchs by Metropolitan Theologos of Serres and the pious congregation of his Bishopric.

On His return to Thessaloniki, He was hosted to lunch at the "Macedonia Palace" where He was staying, before boarding Aegean Airlines to arrive in Tel Aviv and from there return to Jerusalem.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/hSn8-afC8Ck>



THE FEAST OF ST JAMES THE BROTHER OF GOD AT THE PATRIARCHATE (2016)

On Saturday, the 23rd of October/5th of November 2016, the Patriarchate observed the memory of St James the Brother of God, first Bishop of Jerusalem, at the Cathedral dedicated to his name, connecting the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood with the Church of the Resurrection and used, over the last centuries, for the veneration needs of the Arabic-speaking Rum Orthodox Community of Jerusalem.

St James is called Equal to the Apostles for, as son to Joseph

the Betrothed, he is considered the Lord's brother by law. This was established by the Lord so that he would become, after His Resurrection and Ascension, the first Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem. During his diaconate, St James had played a significant role in the affairs of the Church of Jerusalem, leading the First Apostolic Synod of Jerusalem in 49 AD, and writing his Catholic Epistle in the New Testament "on the twelve tribes of Israel in diaspora". He suffered a martyr's death for Christ, when pushed down by the Jews from the arch of the Temple of Solomon.

His Beatitude Theophilos led Vespers, Matins and the divine Liturgy for the feast, having as concelebrants Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebaste and Michael of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, i.e. the Elder Kamarasis, Archimandrite Nektarios, the vicar of the church, f. Charalambos-Farah Bantour, Archdeacon Markos and deacon Agapios. The congregation consisted of Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox faithful, and pilgrims from Greece, Russia and Ukraine.

To the pious, His Beatitude spoke in Greek, quoting words from the Catholic Epistle of St James and the significance of patience in Christ: *"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him"* (James 1, 12). Similarly, Patriarch Theophilos quoted the Apostle Paul from the Epistle to the Romans (5 2-5): *And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

"The value of patience" the Patriarch added, *"has been demonstrated by the Lord Himself, who said: "By your patience,*

possess your souls” (Luke 21, 19). In other words, patience is compared to fire through which gold is tried and cleaned, just like men are welcomed by God once they have been through the furnace of humility, namely of patience through temptation”.

The commemoration of St James’ death for Christ, Patriarch Theophilos added, invites us, in the words of the Apostle Paul, *“to be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Col. 1, 9-10).

After the divine Liturgy, His Beatitude and Entourage walked to the roof of Sts Constantine and Helen Church, passed through the Gate of the Central Monastery, and received “blessed loaves of bread” from Archimandrite Paisios and Elder Nun Seraphima.

At the Hall of the Throne, after a supplication and the Patriarchal Polychronism, Patriarch Theophilos wished on everyone the mediation of St James, first elected Bishop of Jerusalem.

From the Secretariat-General

[httpv://youtu.be/Vl5c7L0PB80](http://youtu.be/Vl5c7L0PB80)



THE HEADS OF THE HOLY LAND

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES VISIT AUSCHWITZ

Between Sunday, the 17th/30th of October to Wednesday, the 20th of October/2nd of November 2016, the Heads of the Religious Communities in the state of Israel – Christian Churches, the Rabbinate of Israel, the Druze Religious Autonomy, Ahmadiyya Muslims and Baha'i – visited the Nazi concentration camps in Auschwitz and Birkenau, Poland, in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, represented by Mr Yakub Solame and Mr Cesar Margiye.

The visit was organized in order to condemn the inhuman crimes of Nazi Germany during the years of World War II, 1940-1944, and as a token of support to millions of victims, mostly Jews, but also Polish, Russian, Slavs, Roma and others.

The heads of the religious communities and their attendants, toured by the Israeli Ministry's guide, Ms Naame, and by the Auschwitz and Birkenau Museum guide, witnessed with their own eyes the macabre camps where innocent men, women and children were concentrated before being condemned either to forced labour, torture or death in the gas chambers and the crematoria. Horrible ways of dying demonstrated inhuman mechanisms of death, made by godless men, stripped of love and respect to their fellow beings.

On the end of a heartrending tour, participants laid a wreath in honour and commemoration of the victims, along with a dedicatory plaque that reads:

“Eternal be the memory of the victims of one and a half million of men, women, and children, mostly Jews and others, victims of the Nazi atrocities during World War II”.

The tour was followed by a meeting between participants in

this initiative and political dignitaries of Poland, as well as religious dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church of Poland.

At the meeting, His Beatitude Theophilos, accompanied by Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, addressed attendants in English, see link:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/11/02/27432>

A declaration was then issued on behalf of the Council of Religious Community Leaders in Israel, condemning the crimes of Nazi atrocity and any violence persisting today in the Holy Land and across the earth, for the sake of a peaceful religious coexistence. The declaration can be read here:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/11/05/27436>

On the conclusion of the visit, His Beatitude flew via Polish Airlines to Ben Gurion airport on the morning of Thursday.

From the Secretariat-General



SPEECH AFTER THE VISIT TO AUSCHWITZ BY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF THE HOLY LAND.

2 November 2016

Your Eminence Cardinal Dziwisz,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Fellow Religious Leaders from the Holy Land,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This morning we have paid a visit to Auschwitz, the place which, above all others has come to be the symbol of Nazi terror as well as a horrible reminder to us even in our own day of the depths to which man's inhumanity to man can plummet. Here unspeakable atrocities were committed; here a policy to eradicate an entire people was implemented. Here Christians and others also died, for the ravages of Nazism were indiscriminate. In the face of what happened here, and what Auschwitz represents, there is a sense in which any and all words are inadequate.

Yet Auschwitz must continue to speak, and we must struggle to find the necessary words. We must find those words, because the evils that Auschwitz embodied remain alive in the world today.

Anti-Semitism is on the increase in many parts of the world, including Europe. Persecution of peoples on the basis of their ethnicity or their religious convictions is on the rise, especially in the Middle East, where ancient communities face extinction. Millions of people are displaced from their homelands at a level unknown since the Second World War. Untold damage to individuals, families and indeed to our human civilization is being done every day.

At the end of the Second World War, someone found a sign that had been put up on a barbed-wire fence in one of the concentration camps. It read "Where was God?" Beneath that was written in a different hand, "Where was man"? We who profess the historic Abrahamic faith traditions understand God to be deeply involved in and concerned with our human life. God is

our creator and our sustainer. In our Christian tradition especially we understand God to be so committed to our humanity that God became a human being like us in order to restore us to our proper dignity.

We know that God does not abandon us in our need. God is always present among us. But we also know that we human beings sometimes fail in our vocation as those who are made in the image and likeness of God to be those who take our stand against violence, injustice, prejudice, and persecution. The human family has the chief responsibility to ensure that the evils to which Auschwitz is a silent, but damning, witness are eradicated from our world. The commandments of God are clear: It is our response that must be equally clear.

We who are the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land have a special responsibility in this regard, not least because some of the worst atrocities that are being committed in our world today are happening on our own doorstep. There is no rest from vigilance; there can be no excuse for denial.

Any inhumane act of one human person against another is not just a crime against a fellow human being; It is an insult against God. One might go so far as to say that such acts amount to a denial of the Creator. Violence dehumanizes all concerned, both perpetrators as well as victims. It is the moral imperative of all who desire to build a new future for the human community, based on mutual respect and peaceful co-existence, to do all in our power to break cycles of violence wherever they manifest themselves.

This must be the resolve of all who are committed to mutual respect, to peace and to reconciliation. Those who perished here so tragically and unnecessarily at Auschwitz are our inspiration. We pray that Almighty God in his infinite mercy and philanthropy, may give rest to the dead who bear such a clear witness still. May their memory be blessed and eternal. And may we, the living, learn a new commitment to resistance

to persecution and prejudice, as well as a new commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation, for these are the firm foundation of our human society.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

HIS BEATITUDE OPENING SPEECH IN THE 6TH INTERNATIONAL EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE NICOSIA, CYPRUS.

31 October 2016

Esteemed Dr. Ioannides,

Esteemed Professor Moropoulou,

Beloved Fellow Religious Leaders,

Respected Representatives of all Organizations dedicated to the preservation of Cultural and Religious Heritage Sites,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are delighted to be present at this significant conference that is focused primarily on the protection and preservation of sites, that are of cultural and religious significance and we bring greetings to you from the Holy Land, a region that is rich in such sites, and where for many generations peoples of many faiths, ethnicities, languages, and cultures have lived together and formed a unique tapestry of civilization.

The work before this conference is urgent. The current situation of change and disruption in the Middle East has already resulted in the destruction of precious and irreplaceable historic and religious sites, even to the extent of almost eradicating the communities that have lived by and worshipped in these sites for centuries. The barbarism of these actions is extreme and the damage that is being done may prove to be irreversible.

We, in the Middle East understand the importance of our uniquely diverse cultural and religious heritage. This diversity is at the heart of our identity and the preservation both of the physical and spiritual witnesses of this diversity as well as of our diverse communities themselves, is absolutely necessary for any truly peaceful future for our region that will be founded on mutual respect and reconciliation. With each act of persecution against a particular religious or ethnic group, with each act of destruction of a holy place, such a peaceful future for the human family is profoundly threatened.

In this situation, the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is a beacon of hope. The Patriarchate has always been, and remains, committed to spreading the message of peaceful co-existence mutual respect, and fruitful reconciliation. As our long history has proven, most especially the Church is a beacon of hope that embraces so many nationalities and cultures in the Middle East.

Ladies and Gentlemen, why are we here?

This gathering itself, by being truly international, and especially by representing the principal national authorities and cultures of our region, including the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Egypt, along with so many others, in a major initiative for peace in the Middle East. We know that peace will only be established through such international co-operation and collaboration and this conference is a major step in this direction.

Most importantly this conference recognizes the centrality of the role of religion in human society. Religious sites are not simply cultural artifacts of archaeological curiosities. Religious sites are the living testimony to sacred history, and are signs of the deepest human longings and aspirations. While religious sites can and have been places of division, they are properly and in the Holy Land often are, places of unity, where peoples of different traditions find common ground. We, who are the servants and guardians of Christian sites, for example, are often moved by the devotion and respect that those of other faiths show, when they come to these sites.

As you know, we are currently engaged in the most significant joint venture in the Holy Land to have been undertaken in many years. The three Communities of the Patriarchate, the Franciscan Custody and the Armenian Patriarchate have established a joint project for the restoration of the Sacred Aedicule of the Holy Sepulcher. This work is being supported by the three Communities jointly, and the work is being carried out by a team of experts under the supervision and direction of Professor Moropoulou of the National Technical University of Athens, who is with us here.

Once again in this work of technical renovation and reconstruction we see more than simply a feat of extraordinary

engineering and scientific accomplishment. For here, in this renovation, we see a new venture in reconciliation. The Holy Sepulcher has been one of the most keenly contested religious sites in history: and today it is being restored on the basis of an innovative and fresh co-operation. This is significant beyond words and we consider it to be a sign of real hope for our Holy Land and for the world. We look forward to the successful completion of the project before Easter next year, and we hope very much that this has laid the basis for other such projects in the Holy Land and around our region.

We have said at similar gatherings that those who engage in the necessary physical restoration of sacred buildings and sites exercise an important role as structural engineers. We, who serve those buildings and sites exercise that complementary role of

of being spiritual engineers— the spiritual engineers not simply of the religious lives of individuals, but of the religious identities of our cultures and our civilization. As you give yourselves to the protection of sites, so we who are spiritual leaders give ourselves to the oversight of those who worship in them, and whose identity has been shaped by them.

There is a deep *symbiosis* here between our roles and work. Without communities that practice a living faith, religious sites are one- dimensional. Equally, communities of a living faith, especially the communities of the Abrahamic traditions that all have deep roots in both the land and in history are diminished when they are unconnected to the sites of their sacred history.

We wish to commend the deliberations of this body, now holding its sixth conference. This shows a proper commitment to the issues at stake, which are both immediate and long term. It is of special importance that you recognize the role and power of religion with respect to the protection and renovation of cultural and spiritual sites, as well as in dynamics of the

difficulties that currently affect the Middle East and other parts of the world. Not to do so is to misunderstand the nature of the human community.

We also wish to acknowledge and thank our dear brother, His Beatitude Chrysostomos, the Archbishop of Cyprus, for his commitment to the Church and the peoples of the Holy Land and for the support he gives to efforts at peace-building, co-existence and reconciliation.

May God bless the work that you are doing at this conference, do that generations to come may continue to enjoy and be renewed by the cultural and religious sites that have for centuries nurtured and sustained the human spirit.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem