

THE FEAST OF ST ONOUPHRIOS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday the 12th/25th of June 2014, the feast of Hosios Onouphrios the Egyptian was celebrated by the Patriarchate.

The feast was observed at the Holy Monastery bearing his name, which lies at the junction of the Gesthemane-Josaphat and Gihon valleys to the south, and opposite the hill of St Sion, in the area known since the days of our Lord, Jesus Christ, as "akeldama" – field of blood, as it was purchased for the thirty silver pieces that the repentant Judas had returned.

At this Convent of the Patriarchate, His Beatitude Theophilos, Our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, led the feast. Co-officiating were the Most Reverend Isychios, Metropolitan of Kapitolias and their Eminences, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Elder Sacristan; Methodios of Tabor, and Demetrios of Lydda. Also in attendance were Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Archdeacon f. Evlogios and Deacon Markos; and visiting priests from the Holy Bishopric of Patras. Cantors from Greece sang in the Byzantine style, together with the Head Cantor of the Church of Sts Constantine and Helen, f. Eusebius. A crowd of faithful, monks, nuns, locals and pilgrims from Orthodox countries attended the service.

During Communion, His Beatitude Theophilos preached the Word of God in Greek.

The apolysis was followed by a procession to the Monastery's departed proprietors. Wishes were read for their repose, and the repose of the soul of Nun Seraphima who lived at the Monastery. Also recited was a blessing wish for the products of the fig tree.

After the divine Liturgy, Abbess Paisia, courteously hosted

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2014/06/22/6084>

He went on to present Chief Judge Mr Mahmoud Habbash with a plaque representing Jerusalem and a second plaque with a relief representation of Palestine.

The Chief Judge thanked His Beatitude for the invitation and the presents, and congratulated all on the meeting which, as he said, took place in the heart of Palestine, namely Bethlehem, where Christians and Muslims live as one people, and where thousands of pilgrims flock to venerate either the Holy Sepulcher or the Omar-Haram al Sharif Mosque, as has been the case since the days of Omar Al Hatab's treaty with the ever-memorable Patriarch Sophronios of Jerusalem.

Mr Habbash added that Christians are not a minority within the Palestinian State; they are, he said, a majority alongside the Muslims and that Muslims owe to respect the Gospel as they respect the Koran: respect they Church as they respect the Mosque.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/m4Xi6FxmBT4>



**REMARKS AT THE MEETING OF THE
PRESIDENTS AND THE EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE OF THE MIDDLE EAST**

COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AMMAN.

Amman, Jordan, 19 June 2014

“ Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Respected Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Just over a week ago, the Church celebrated the Feast of Pentecost and in the Orthodox tradition we sang these words:

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, he parted the nations. When he divided out the tongues of fire, he called all to unity; and with one voice we glorify the All-Holy Spirit.

(Kontakion for Pentecost)

We greet you in this same Spirit, and the Feast of Pentecost is a timely reminder to us all of the importance of the work of the Middle East Council of Churches and of the responsibility that is laid on our shoulders as leaders of our Churches and Christian communities. The current developments in the Middle East and the predicament of the Christian population in this region and in our neighbouring countries are a sober and urgent reminder to us of our mission.

As we gather here in Amman, we remember especially the displaced and the refugees from Iraq and Syria who have fled to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in fear of their lives. We also wish to express our gratitude to His Majesty King Abdullah for the example that he sets not only to our region, but also to the world in his commitment to inter-faith

dialogue, peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, and the well-being of all our peoples, regardless of religious, ethnic, or cultural identity.

We are glad that this meeting is taking place after so long a hiatus. And we are also glad to have with us distinguished members of the European diplomatic corps, who have expressed their desire to be partners with us. The Middle East Council of Churches has the potential to be a genuine source for good and an agent of real help at this time of crisis, and we cannot let anything get in the way of this work. The lives of whole communities depend on the concerted effort of people of good will to work together to end war, injustice, and suffering, and to restore order to our societies. There is no time to waste.

There is a potential partnership between the Council and the international community that could make a crucial difference and we cannot let this moment pass. Together we can make a significant contribution both to the support of communities under persecution and to the establishment of a lasting peace, and we have the moral obligation to leave no avenue unexplored in this mission.

The office of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, established here in Amman with the support of His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi, stands ready to encourage this partnership and this work. Our Director, Mrs Waffa Khasous, is available and able to give all necessary guidance. Here we can show the fruits of the Feast of Pentecost in unity of action and commitment to our region. Jerusalem has always been a beacon of hope for our region and our world, and it is our responsibility to make that hope a reality.

The current situation in the Middle East puts a new and high premium on our work, and we have an obligation before God and our people to allow nothing to get in the way of this. By remaining focused on our mission, we can know that we are

living into that unity of the Spirit to which the Feast of Pentecost has summoned us.

May God give us the grace to accomplish the work we have been given to do, and may God bless His Majesty King Abdullah II and our beloved Kingdom, all our peoples, and the work of this Council. Last but not least, we have to thank Mr. Nadim Mouasher for hosting us now” .

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

INAUGURATION OF NEW PREMISES FOR THE GREEK CONSULATE IN OLD JERUSALEM

On Tuesday, the 4th/17th of June 2014, the new building of the Greek Consulate General of East Jerusalem was inaugurated. The Consulate stands at the end of the Latin Patriarchate street, in the old city of Jerusalem. The building, which is owned by the Patriarchate, was appropriately restored and rented to the Consulate General for a symbolic price.

The inauguration-blessing rite was performed by His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem and attended by the Consulate personnel, Hagiotaphite Fathers and members of the Greek parish.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, His Beatitude addressed Consul-General, Mr Georgios Zacharoudiakis, his esteemed wife, and all attendants, pointing out how the granting, by the Patriarchate, of new premises for the Consulate General of Greece in East Jerusalem, was the great wish of the ever memorable Patriarch Benedict, who *“counted upon the Greek State as the natural, moral and legal protector of the ab antiquo acquired and inalienable rights and privileges of the pious race and nation of the Rum Orthodox in the Holy Land”*.

The Consul-General thanked His Beatitude for His support during the preparatory process and arrangement of every detail towards housing the East Jerusalem Department of the Consulate General, which is expected to strengthen the relations between the Patriarchate and Greece as heir to the Byzantine Empire for the protection of our nation.

From the Secretariat-General



THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM PARTICIPATES IN THE OPENING OF THE CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION IN TIRANA

On Sunday the 19th of May/1st of June 2014, the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, the Church of the Resurrection of the Archbishopric of Albania was inaugurated in Tirana.

The magnificent, fine church is one of the many works of public benefit offered by the Holy Bishopric of Albania. The said Archbishopric was spiritually inert under the atheist Communist regime, yet it is now reborn owing to the faith, wisdom and endeavours of His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Albania.

In attendance at the ceremony were the Leaders or representatives of most Orthodox Churches.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem was represented by His Beatitude, Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem. H.B. was accompanied by the Elder Secretary General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and Archdeacon Evlogios.

His Beatitude and retinue were received at Tirana Airport by His Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Demetrios of Argyrokastro and assistant Bishop Nathaniel of Amantia, on Friday the 18th/30th of May.

On the afternoon of the same day, H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem visited the Monastery of St Vlasios in the Bishopric of Dyrrhachium, where the Archbishopric of Albania maintains a boarding school, an orphanage, a convent and a Theological School. There, His Beatitude was warmly received by nuns and residents of the aforementioned institutions.

The following day, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and His retinue, accompanied by Mr Orpheus Bitsis, representative of the Archbishopric of Albania, visited the martyrdom site of St Cosmas of Aetolia within the Bishopric of Berat.

On this very site, a Church dated to 1814 was discovered and unearthed at the initiative of His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Albania. The Church, dedicated to St Cosmas of Aetolia, has been renovated to serve today as the parish church of a small Orthodox settlement. Its vicar, f. Raphael, welcomed the Patriarchal retinue.

The tomb of St Cosmas, its originality verified from the saint's wall-painting over it, was discovered in an adjacent chapel where His Beatitude and Retinue proceeded to venerate.

On the morning of Sunday the 19th of May/1st of June 2014, the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, the Church of the Resurrection was inaugurated in the framework of an Orthodox ceremony which included the procession of the holy relics thrice around the Church, deposition of the relics on the Holy Altar, the smearing of the Altar with Holy Myrrh, the setting of the icons of the Evangelists, and the sealing of the church walls with myrrh.

After the consecration of the holy Altar, the Divine Liturgy was held, led by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Co-officiating were His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem; H.B. Patriarch Irinej of Serbia; H.B. Patriarch Daniel of Romania; H.B. Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus; H.B. Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece; H.B. Archbishop Savva of Poland; and representatives of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Russia, Bulgaria, Georgia, and of course H.B. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania. In attendance was a great crowd of faithful, as well as the President of the Albanian Government, alongside the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader, and the Mayor of Tirana.

The service was indeed a pan-Orthodox testament to the rebirth and resurrection of the Church of Albania, and also to the unity between Orthodox Churches.

Addresses between the Archbishop of Albania and the Ecumenical Patriarch were exchanged during Communion.

At the conclusion of the divine Liturgy, the Heads of Churches and their attendants proceeded to the Synodicon, where the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Albania exchanged gifts.

An official lunch followed at the hotel where the Leaders are staying, in the presence of the Albanian President and the Mayor of Tirana. During lunch, Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem addressed the Archbishop of Albania in Greek and offered him an icon of Theotokos and a stone from Golgotha, to be placed for veneration at the newly inaugurated Church of the Resurrection.

Addresses to the Archbishop of Albania were also delivered by the rest of the Leaders of Orthodox Churches or their representatives.

After lunch, the Leaders attended a music concert, after which His Beatitude Theophilos left for the Airport of Tirana. He arrived at Ben Gurion Airport on the 20th of May/2nd of June via Constantinople.

From the Secretariat-General



ORTHODOX CHURCHES INVITED BY THE KING OF JORDAN

On Tuesday the 14th/27th of May 2014, His Majesty King Abdullah ibn Hussein of Jordan received at the palace delegates of Orthodox Churches, headed by Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem.

The meeting took place at the invitation of the king (see photo) addressed to the Heads of Orthodox Churches through

Patriarch Theophilos. Positively responding to the invitation were the Patriarchates of Russia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria.

The distinguished delegates arrived in Jordan on the day before the Meeting.

On the evening of Monday the 13th/26th of May 2014 they were hosted to dinner by the Patriarchal Commissioner in Amman, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Benedict, in the presence of Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and the Hegoumen at Fhes, Archimandrite Ieronymus.

His Majesty the King of Jordan received the delegates on Tuesday the 14th/27th of May, for lunch at the palace.

At the beginning of lunch, His Majesty the King welcomed the Patriarch and Church delegates as “brothers”, congratulating them on their participation in that historical meeting and in the scheduled assembly at the Lord’s baptismal site. The assembly, held in favour of a peaceful coexistence of religions, contributes to the efforts made by Jordan in the context of its custodianship of both Christian and Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, towards supporting Christian and Muslims in Jerusalem and the occupied areas against the challenges of extreme Israeli elements.

The Jordanian Government, according to the King, continues to have its say over the frozen but not ceased negotiations between the Israeli and the Palestinians, and can already see their results, while several other issues are expected to be resolved too, such as the Jerusalem question. The King went on to say that they wanted for the churches to look at Jordan as an open door for positive response and the royal Hashemite family as their supporter.

On the evening of the aforementioned day, the representatives of Churches assembled on the site of the Lord’s baptismal, on

the Easter Bank of the river Jordan, at the Monastery of St John the Baptist, erected by Metropolitan Benedict of Philadelphia.

There, the Patriarch of Jerusalem put on a mantle and a pallium before they all prayed for reconciliation, understanding, peace and justice. The Arab-speaking choir of the Bishopric in Amman chanted in Greek and Arabic.

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos went on to recite a wish for peace. Likewise, all representatives of the Orthodox Churches recited a wish for peace in their own language.

The Patriarch then addressed all those present in English, see link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2014/05/27/7172>

After His address, His Beatitude offered Prince Emir Ghazi and each delegate an icon of Theotokos, before hosting all to dinner at the “Four Seasons” hotel in Amman.

From the Secretariat-General



**SPEECH AT THE ASSEMBLY OF THE
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
ORTHODOX CHURCHES AT THE
BAPTISM SITE BETHANY BEYOND**

THE JORDAN.

Jordan, 27 May 2014

Your Royal Highness Your Beatitudes, Your Eminences, Your Graces,

Beloved Monastics,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our distinct honor and our great privilege to welcome you all to this Holy Site on this historic occasion. Never before have so many hierarchs of the Orthodox Church throughout the world gathered here at the site of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ to pray and to take counsel together for the well-being of the Holy Land, our Church, and all our people.

We wish to express our profound gratitude to His Majesty King Abdullah II for making this gathering possible, and for the example of leadership that he exercises on the world stage on behalf of all the people of this region. His Majesty stands in succession to a long line of eminent leaders that includes His Majesty's late father, King Hussein, as well as his great grandfather and great- great grandfather, and that stretches back to the 7th century, when the Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab and Patriarch Sophronios approved their momentous agreement that still forms the basis for much of our common life.

This tradition of leadership has ensured the support of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the spiritual integrity of the Holy Places, up to and including the Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement which was signed by His Majesty and President Mahmoud Abbas on 31 March 2013, and which continues to guarantee crucial historic relationships and responsibilities.

At a time of great complexity and challenge in our region and around the world, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a principal example of a society in which there is peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, freedom of worship, and interfaith harmony. We know that the human family, regardless of ethnicity, religion, language, or culture, shares a common human destiny, and it is incumbent upon us all, both in the civic and the religious realm, to foster peace, reconciliation, and dignity.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as the Mother of all the Churches and as the oldest religious institution in our region, carries out a unique spiritual mission. Christians are a part of the natural fabric of society in the Middle East, and the integrity of our region depends on a strong, vibrant, living Christian presence in this land. Our brother Patriarchs and Heads of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches around the world share our commitment to this mission, and we are grateful to you, dear brothers, for your presence here today, and for the sign of our unity that your presence signifies. We encourage you to continue in your support of the Christian community of the Holy Land and the Middle East.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem remains dedicated to serving all our people, as well as the countless pilgrims who visit the Holy Places throughout the year. The Holy Land is home to the three monotheistic faiths and their believers, but in fact it is the true home of every person of good will. For here humanity has encountered God in a special and particular way, and this land is the source of both light and refreshment for weary souls. With the assistance of the civil authorities, whose role is to ensure the proper privileges of our religious communities and with the collaboration of our fellow Christians around the world, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is able to be a true witness and a true minister to all and for all.

May God bless this gathering, and may we find in this place

where our Lord Jesus Christ himself was immersed in the waters of baptism, the wisdom and strength to lead our congregations and to live faithfully and graciously, for the well-being of all the peoples of this region, and especially of our beloved Kingdom.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

MEETING BETWEEN THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH AND POPE FRANCIS AT THE HOLY SEPULCHER

On the evening of Sunday, the 12th/25th of May 2014, at 7:00 pm, His Holiness Pope Francis I met with His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Holy Sepulcher, in commemoration of the meeting held fifty years ago between their predecessors, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI.

The meeting was hosted by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem jointly with the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and the Brotherhood of the Franciscans Monks, according to the schedule drafted by both.

As per this schedule, Pope Francis, accompanied by the Custodian of the Holy Land, f. Pierrebatista Pizzaballa and

the Armenian Patriarch Nourhan, proceeded to the Court of the Church of the Resurrection from the Muristan quarter, through the Gate of the Gethsemane Dependency, whereas His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, accompanied by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem, and Primate accompanying the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, walked from the Patriarchate along Christian Street through St Helen's Gate.

From these two Gates, the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch proceeded to the beginning and the center of the Courtyard of the Church of the Resurrection, and exchanged embraces as a testament of love and the will to continue the theological dialogue initiated fifty years ago.

From there, the two Primate proceeded to the Gate of the Church of the Resurrection, where they were received by the three Abbots of the Church, namely Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, the Franciscan and the Armenian Abbots.

Subsequently, the Primate venerated the Stone of the Holy Apokathelosis. The Greek choir of the Church of the Resurrection, under the direction of the head cantor, Archimandrite Aristovoulos, chanted, as the two Patriarchs walked to the Holy Sepulcher.

In front of the Holy Aedicula, the two Primate took their places whereas a crowd of 400 faithful had already been seated.

As the crowd observed in silence, His Beatitude Theophilos delivered an address in English, on behalf of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Franciscans and the Armenians, see link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2014/05/25/7064>

The address was followed by hymns and the Evangelical pericopes of the Resurrection, and speeches delivered by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis.

“Our father” was then recited in Italian by Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch, whereas guests recited the same prayer in their native tongues.

Of note is the fact that the hymns were sang and the Evangelical pericopes recited in the absence of sacerdotal vestments, because of the lack of full communion between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

At the end of this ceremony, the Primates and a small retinue venerated the Golgotha.

From there, the Primates and their guests were hosted to a reception at the Latin Patriarchate.

From the Secretariat-General

[httpv://youtu.be/TU4aj2BUdeY](http://youtu.be/TU4aj2BUdeY)



H.B. PATRIARCH THEOPHILO'S ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF H.A.H. PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I AND H.H. POPE FRANCIS I IN THE HOLY SEPULCHER.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER, 25 May 2014

An Address on the Occasion of the Visit of His All-Holiness
Patriarch Bartholomew I and His Holiness Pope Francis I to the
Church of the Anastasis in Commemoration of the 50th
Anniversary of the Meeting of the late Patriarch Athenagoras I
and the late Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem in 1964

**Your Holiness Pope Francis and Your All-Holiness Patriarch
Bartholomew,**

Christ is risen!

As we gather here in this sacred place before the Most Holy and Life-Giving Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ in commemoration of the historic meeting 50 years ago of the late Patriarch Athenagoras I and the late Pope Paul VI, we recall the words that we pray with great intention at every celebration of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom:

For the peace of the whole world,

for the stability of the holy Churches of God,

and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.

We to whom divine providence has entrusted the guardianship and diakonia of the Holy Places, and to whom the pastoral ministry to the Christian communities of the Holy Land has been committed, welcome Your Holiness Pope Francis and Your All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew to this gathering in the bright and glorious light of the resurrection. Our gathering here is a confirmation and a celebration of the common path towards reconciliation and full communion that began 50 years ago in this very place.

In the course of the last half-century, we have enjoyed the fruits of deepening theological dialogue between our Churches. This dialogue has fostered encounters between our faithful, removed all sorts of obstacles between us, encouraged reconciliation, prompted the healing of unfortunate memories, and been an example to Christians of other communities to seek a more profound and enduring unity in Christ.

According to Saint Makarios of Egypt, “the Lord came on this earth to suffer on behalf of all and to buy them back with his blood and to put the heavenly leaven of goodness into faithful souls.” He also said that the Lord continues to perfect in faithful souls “all virtues until they are leaven into one in the good and they can become with the Lord One Spirit'” (Hom. 24:3).

Our commitment to the pilgrimage of unity is precisely this: to grow in the perfection of the virtues so that the heavenly leaven that makes us one Spirit with the Lord may rise in us, and be a sign of hope for a world in despair and confusion. For, as Saint Makarios wrote, “without this heavenly leaven which is the power of the divine Spirit it is impossible” for us to “be leavened with the goodness of the Lord and so reach life.”

We pray today not only for the union of our Churches and for the union of all, but also for the peace of the world, and particularly for the peace of this region, which is the cradle of peace. We remember our sisters and brothers and all innocent victims in blood-soaked Syria.

The Holy Places in this Holy Land are the eloquent martyria of our faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, “who is now crowned with glory and honour” (Heb. 2:9). The Holy Places are the common refuge of humanity, and they shine with the brightness of the true Light, a beacon of peace and

spiritual refreshment for all.

On behalf of our brothers, the Custos of the Holy Land and the Armenian Patriarch in Jerusalem, and the other Heads of Churches and Christian communities gathered here, we call upon God our Father that the light of resurrection that shines from the Most Holy Tomb of his Son our Lord Jesus Christ may enlighten our minds and warm our hearts, so that the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of unity and the Spirit of the bond of love, may guide our steps towards the fullness of that unity for which Christ prayed.

O Christ the true Light, you enlighten and sanctify every person who comes into the world: may the light of your countenance shine upon us, that in your light we may see the unapproachable Light. And direct our steps to the keeping of your commandments; through the intercession of your Most Holy Mother and all the Saints.

(From The First Hour)

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS OF H. B. PATRIARCH

THEOPHILOS III TO MR. PLAMEN ORESHARSKI, PRIME MINISTER OF BULGARIA.

Jerusalem, 20 of May 2014

Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski,

It is with great joy that we welcome you and the distinguished members of your delegation today, during the Paschal period, here in Jerusalem and to our Patriarchate. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is considered to be the Mother of all Churches, for Jerusalem has been the wellspring of our Christian faith and our common Orthodox traditions, i.e. the values that we share together with the Orthodox Church and the people of Bulgaria.

You are here on a state visit to Israel; however, for us your visit is considered a pilgrimage to the holy places, more specifically to the Church of the Anastasis, which encompasses the crucifixion and burial site, i.e. the tomb, of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, together with the order of the Brotherhood of the Holy Tomb, has been entrusted by Our Lord the guardianship and service of those holy places, which attract thousands of pilgrims every day of the year. Needless to say, the majority of these pilgrims come from Orthodox countries, including of course, your own beloved country of Bulgaria.

In saying this, we would like to emphasize the fact that our common Orthodox Christian faith and heritage serves as a point of unity between our Orthodox people and nations, and as a bridge of reconciliation. We are saying this because first of

all, we here do not represent ourselves – we represent the Orthodox Church as a whole and Christendom. Secondly, the mission of the Patriarchate is and has remained throughout the ages, a purely religious and spiritual one, which promotes peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and understanding between the various religious communities.

Furthermore, the mission of the Patriarchate has been to protect the existing political and diplomatic Status Quo of Jerusalem, in which Jerusalem is equally sacred and holy to the three monotheistic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Mr. Prime Minister, your pilgrimage here is not only a blessing for you and your countrymen, it is a blessing for the Holy Land; for every pilgrim is regarded as a messenger of good will and a messenger of peace and reconciliation, which is so greatly needed in this region and for the broader area of the blood-soaked Middle East.

Allow us to take this opportunity to confer upon you the honor of the Cross of the Order of the Holy Tomb of Christ in appreciation of your commitment to the wellbeing of your country and for the peace of the world. Let this be a sign of communion between the Bulgarian people and the Church of Jerusalem. You are welcome and God bless you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.