Patriarch Kirill's message to the international conference on the Russian Palestine: Russia in the Holy Land

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia sent the following message of greetings to the international academic conference on the Russian Palestine: Russia in the Holy Land, which opened on October 21 in Moscow:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I cordially greet all the organizers, participants and guests of the Conference on the Russian Palestine: Russia in the Holy Land.

Having a special significance for all Christians, the Holy Land occupies a very important place in the history of our homeland and in the formation of the ideal of Holy Russia. The nature of Russian presence in Palestine was originally determined by reverence for holy places so characteristic of our national world-view and the desire of the believing heart to venerate the places sanctified by the earthly life and suffering of our Saviour. Pilgrims from Russia would not only draw spiritual strength from coming in touch with common Christian holy places but also make a considerable contribution to their preservation.

'The Russian Palestine' is not only an inexhaustible flow of Russian pilgrims and the paths paved to the places trodden by the Lord and numerous saints. The Russian Palestine is also the blood of our soldiers shed for the Church of the Resurrection at the Lord's Sepulcher. It is also donated icons and church vessels and icon-lamps burning to this day and restored churches in which prayer has never ceased to be lifted up. It is also schools and hospitals for Arab children, built through the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Jerusalem and the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society. It is also gratitude to the Russians for their selfless work for the good of Palestine, felt to this day by many of those who live in the Holy Land. It was this selflessness that determined the nature of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and old Eastern Patriarchates and relations of historical Russia and her peoples with the Middle East peoples.

Today the tradition of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church with the Holy Land continues to

develop successfully. Thousands of pilgrims from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and other countries connected with the Holy Russia's heritage have again directed their steps to the holy places in Palestine in order to experience there the special presence of God.

The phenomenon of the Russian Palestine is manifold and inexhaustible. Clearly it is of interest not only for researchers and specialists in the Middle East. I hope the present conference will make a weighty contribution to its study and spiritual comprehension.

I wish you all God's help and blessed success in your work.

+ KIRILL

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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