

INTERVIEW OF H.B. THEOFILOS III TO AL-RAI ABOUT THE US- ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM IN DOHA- QATAR

On the first day of the Forum, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III gave an interview to the newspaper Al- Rai. In this interview His Beatitude expressed optimism as far as the success of the 7th Forum of Doha resulting in a new beginning towards forming a strong partnership on the basis of mutual respect with the Islamic world.

His Beatitude noted during his interview that the state of Qatar ensured the proper environment which guarantees the success of this Forum wishing for all the participants to take steady and decisive steps towards a new vision which will eliminate the dark memories of the past.

Al-Rai: Your Beatitude, how do you see your participation in the Forum between the US and the Islamic worlds?

HB: We arrived from Jerusalem, after receiving the invitation to participate at this significant Forum which we consider necessary for all leaders of the world in order to meet and discuss many issues of their concern and which will eradicate any negative impression and prejudice from others. In order to achieve this goal we must first familiarize ourselves with each other by approaching each other and attending meetings. We would like to express our gratitude to the state of Qatar which we have visited numerous times in the past and is a good example for developing dialogue and

transparency. We also had the honour of meeting with his Highness Sheikh Hamand Ben Khalifah A- Thani. In the state of Qatar there is a Christian community that enjoys all its rights and respect, which is solid proof of the respect and love that prevails in this country.

Al-Rai: What is represented through Your participation in this Forum?

HB: We participate in this significant Forum with regard to politics and religion, as this is a very important issue. We also participated in two other Forums (sessions in this Forum?) and we have declared Our opinion on many issues. Today politics and diplomacy are in great need of spiritual guidance and advice.

Al-Rai: Even on religious issues?

HB: Truly, we must separate religion and politics as to their activities. The clergy should not become politicians and vice versa. However politics and religion must co-operate. Indeed our cultural heritage is based on religion, and has shaped our civilization, therefore politicians are influenced by religion. Either way religion is something positive, not negative.

Al- Rai: Your Beatitude, according to your understanding how will this Forum contribute to the understanding of the different points of view of the participants and Your meeting with them?

HB: This helps decisively, not only between American and the Islamic worlds, but between all religions. As you know the conflicts and disputes have very deep roots in history. As for Jerusalem where We come from, it is a unique

place of different religions and cultures. It is a place where the three religions share and it is a good model for coexistence regardless of mistaken perceptions which followers of either religion may have for the others.

Al-Rai: What steps should be followed in order to remove these mistaken perceptions?

HB: I believe the first step is dialogue and secondly how to work in order to promote the trust between us. We are clergy and having lived in Jerusalem for 40 years believe that this is the core of the problem, the lack of confidence between the opposing parties.

AL-Rai: Your Beatitude, what are your activities in promoting trust between the followers of these religions.

HB: Certainly we protect the rights of other religions, we respect them, and ask for this respect in return. Also we work for the spread of knowledge and understanding between all, because ignorance is the main reason for all bad impressions, prejudice of others and the lack of understanding between them.

Al-Rai: Taking into account that You come from Jerusalem what is Your opinion about the excavations that the Israelis are undertaking?

HB: In Jerusalem there are many religions, and Jerusalem accommodates them all, not only the three great monotheistic religions Jerusalem is described as the heart of the World, and a very important city to the whole world. Therefore when we see that a religion in the Holy land is exposed to harm or damage we demand and ask for it to be

respected. In My opinion all Holy places must be respected by everybody.

Al-Rai: In the domestic sector, how do you deal with the Palestinian situation?

HB: We issue announcements where we condemn these acts. We are against any attack on the religion of others and we do not accept certain religions to be exposed to danger from any other religions.

Al-Rai: What are the other obstacles for the mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians?

HB: As I mentioned before it is sometimes the prejudice and the extremism coming from all religions. I don't believe that religion is a source of violence but the opposite. However there are some people who use religion to promote private agendas and various ideologies, and this is a big problem.

Al-Rai: How do you explain the wars waged by the US in the world and especially against Islamic countries, which reinforce the feelings of hatred between religions?

HB: Allow me to say that everybody knows the truth of what is happening, and the world has become like a small village due to globalization and international communications. The only manner of exit from these main crises is to understand each other and at the same time to be realistic. We condemn any kind or form of violence irrespective of where it originates. However we must keep in mind that we are human beings and not perfect, that we may make mistakes which create many problems.

Al-Rai: Do you agree with the term used for war as “a crusade” against the Muslims?

HB: We must say this, whatever is happening is the result of ignorance from both sides, and because people are no longer interested in religions in our day, this leads to a situation in which there is a lack of respect towards the other side. Now the politicians and the decision makers are convinced that religion plays an important role in social and political life, although in the past this role has been neglected. Therefore we can say that religion and politics influence each other very much.

Following the interview, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III escorted by the Patriarchal Representative in Qatar Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Makarios and by Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Ieronimos who is serving in Fhes of Jordan, visited and surveyed the works carried out at the church of the Patriarchate in Doha, which is under construction. This church is in honour of Saint Isaac the Syrian and the Great Martyr Saint George. His Beatitude congratulated Rev. Arch. Makarios for his efforts to complete this work.

Chief Secretary's Office