

INTERVIEW WITH HIS BEATITUDE PUBLISHED IN THE NEWSPAPER «ELEFTHEROS TYPOS».

Excerpts of the interview with His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III by Valia Nikolaidou for the newspaper «Eleftheros Typos» («Free Press»), December 2010

–Your Beatitude, almost five years have passed since your election to the patriarchal throne. Which do You consider is Your most important work [deed]?

« Normality in the functioning of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has returned. Subsequently, the authority and prestige of the Patriarchate has been restored and now the Patriarchate plays a most important role not only in religious practices but also, mainly, in political processes because it is inseparably connected to the status of Jerusalem.

The Patriarchate plays an important role in the abatement of religious fanaticism, contributing the most through its active involvement in various inter-religious dialogues.

Proof of that is the participation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land which was created with the initiative of the State Department and is composed of Rabbis, the Jewish religious leadership of Israel, who represent the government, the religious leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the Leaders of the various Churches».

–Did You encounter any difficulties during that time period and, if yes, what were those?

«We definitely encountered difficulties which resulted from past mistakes, but, with God's help, we managed to overcome

them and to correct them. »

–In the past, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem faced financial problems. Have those problems been surmounted?

« For many and various reasons, the Patriarchate had not fulfilled its obligations regarding many abeyances and large debts. Since then, with God's help, many gaps have been filled.

Financial matters are problems that have always required our attention and still continue to engage us, but I want to believe that we are on an upturn track. Today, everything operates with full transparency and with accountability. Also, another problem is that the Patriarchate owns land and properties which are situated at strategic locations vis à vis the political aspect. You realize that the Patriarchate finds itself between two 'Symblegades' [clashing rocks]».

–How are the Patriarchate's relations with the governments of Israel and Jordan and with the Palestinian Authority?

«With all the governments, especially with Israel and Jordan, our relations are excellent and I mean that.

Also, with the Palestinian Authority our relations are very good and continuously improving, even though sometimes misunderstandings arise between people who are known to have personal, financial or ideological interests».

–Your relations with the Ecumenical Patriarch?

«We are not talking about relations with The Ecumenical Patriarch, there exists full agreement of views in all matters».

–The Patriarchate went through a bad period due to the events that took place with the deposed Patriarch Ireneos. What is going on with his case?

«We no longer concern ourselves with the case of Ireneos. »

–To what degree can the different religions contribute to the prevalence of peace in world societies?

«The religions play a determinative role. The problem of international diplomacy and of the politicians as well, is that, they do not possess a thorough and deep knowledge of the subject of religion and consequently they have not taken into account the role that religion plays on an international scale. However, very cautiously, they have started to acknowledge that, wherever confrontations of a political (or other) nature take place, the reason is clearly religious.

They again try to emphasize the political aspect or the ethnic one; however, the root cause is religious.

I am speaking from experience. Here, in our region, it is finally proven that the root of the political problem and of the confrontation is clearly religious, and for this reason, all the governments today, European and otherwise, contribute financially any kind of initiative that pertains to the inter-religious dialogue.

I receive daily delegations from Europe and America in the political, diplomatic, religious and ecclesiastical fields. The purpose for which they come is to hear our points of view on the subject of the Middle East / Palestinian problem as well as our point of view regarding Jerusalem.

They have finally realized that diplomatic and political efforts do not bear fruit without the contribution of the religious leadership or, if you prefer, of the religion itself».

–As The Head of the Zion Church, The Church of Nativity of Christ is under your spiritual jurisdiction. What message would You like to convey to Christians from this holy place?

«That people should open their hearts and accept the message of peace and hopefulness which is Christ».

–What do You consider is the role of the Church today?

«The role of the Church is irreplaceable and this is proven by the fact that in countries where the Church (editor's note: I refer to the Western Churches) has lost its spiritual mission and disposition, people find themselves in a state of confusion and disillusion and, as a result, they turn to religions which, instead of renewing them spiritually and supporting them, complicate their lives even more.

Regarding the Orthodox Church, it is proven that in countries where it predominates, people acknowledge its contribution and turn to it irrespective of the flaws, if any, of its leaders and its clerics.».

–Is the world crisis a crisis of values?

«It is a moral crisis because the economic issue is the beginning of everything. The beginning of everything is the transcendence from the person of His self . . . »

–Because of the economic crisis most people feel disappointed, angry. The feelings of young people who declare that they fear for their future are comparable. What sort of message would You send to these people?

«I also see that people feel disappointed as I receive thousands of pilgrims from all over the world on a daily basis. This feeling is intensely apparent in their faces. Their fear and their despair are justifiable since they feel that they are betrayed by everyone.

The message of hope is exactly the message of intervention of God in history, which is Christmas. It is the face of Christ, Who is never disillusioned and never lets believers become disillusioned. Christ is the Light of knowledge; The sun of

justice. But it all depends on how much someone, young or old, is ready to make the transcendence of his/her self».

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Chief Secretary's Office.