

THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY THE MOST REVEREND DR. ROWAN WILLIAMS VISITS THE HOLY LAND

The Archbishop of Canterbury of the Anglican Church the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams, a scholar and writer, well disposed towards Orthodoxy, has visited the Holy Land again. Previously he had visited mainly with the aim of aiding the residents of Bethlehem and had invited His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III to participate in the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church (19 July -3 August 2008). On Sunday 8th /21st of February a reception in his honour was held at the Anglican Church of Saint George the Great Martyr in East Jerusalem by the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem His Eminence Right Reverend Suheil Dawani. Invited to this reception, amongst others were the representatives of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land, representatives of the Department on Christian Communities of the Ministry of Religion, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and representatives of the Israeli Police in Jerusalem.

At the reception the Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams was welcomed on behalf of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem by the Anglican Bishop His Eminence Suheil S. Dawani who thanked him for his visit to the Holy Land, the land where, he said, Lord Jesus Christ deigned to visit in body and was Incarnated for us, the land where a small flock resides, a Christian Community which is now decreasing due to the political tension. His Eminence Suheil Dawani expressed his wish that the mutual respect between the followers of the three Abrahamic religions will constitute the

basis and the foundation for peace in Jerusalem whilst retaining its beauty, which is also essentially its diversity.

In the name of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III addressed the Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams. His Beatitude was escorted by His Eminence Isihios Archbishop of Capitoliass, His Eminence Aristarhos Archbishop of Constantina, His Eminence Dorotheos Archbishop of Avila, Hierodeacon Fr. Athanasios and the Rum-Orthodox Dr. Halil Andraous.

The address of His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III is as follows:

“Your Grace, the Most Reverend Dr Rowan Williams

Your Eminences

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Distinguished guests

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven”. (Mathew 5:13-16).

On behalf of church leaders in the holy land, We welcome His Grace, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. rowan Williams to the holy city of Jerusalem.

We are physically only a few hundred meters away from the church of the Holy Sepulcher and a relatively short travel away from Bethlehem’s Church of Nativity.

Despite this close proximity between the two Holy cities, the faithful cannot visit one or the other freely. This situation can only be described as tragic. It is hugely unacceptable when political failures are expressed in restricting freedom of worship especially at a time when we, religious leaders, push for inter-religious dialogue and the principles of convergence and coexistence.

But not all dissimilar ideologies deal with their differences using the same methods practiced by politicians. The convergence between the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion carries in its spirit a role model for bringing together diverse ideologies throughout the world.

The dialogue between Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion began in 1973, when the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions held its first meeting in Oxford. Through its first phase of 1976, second phase in 1984 and the conclusion of its third phase concluded in the Cyprus Agreed Statement, considerable agreement was reached over a range of issues.

We and Our Jerusalem Patriarchate of Jerusalem share these important intentions and drive for these honorable fraternal relations.

Our convergence should be developed to include more faiths and take hands –on forms of manifestation through cooperation to achieve justice and peace so as to ultimately bridge the distance between the church of Nativity and the church of Holy Sepulcher.

The current political misfortune lived in the Middle East, especially in our beloved Holy Land, carries within its reality tragic human experiences. We church leaders, guardians

of faiths and carriers of holy messages intend and persevere to effect a continuation to merge through dialogue that produces practical unified vision on how responsibility can be taken towards achieving justice and peace and forming a conduit for diffusing tension and support for positive political action.

We speak with utmost sincerity about our existence as clergy and about efforts towards the realization of justice, peace and stability. At the same time, we have to be very cautious in taking the religious dimension of the political conflict and not to mistaken it for a political tool but rather as an integral part of the conflict's resolution.

Such responsibility may touch upon causing a change in the moral climate that governs this part of the world. Such change, given the nature of the relation between human and religion in the Holy Land, can only be achieved through the solid will of religious leaders and when encouragement is given to our respective congregations to rediscover the true meaning of justice and peace in the ultimate spiritual context.

We believe that we are in the company of one of the world leaders in promoting dialogue and coexistence. The work of Your Grace in this aspect has been inspirational, to say the least, to many of us who share the same values and vision, We commend the statement given Al-Azhar University in Cairo in the Third anniversary of the 11th of September terrorist attacks, when Your Grace pointed that the followers of the will of God should not be led into ways of violence. This drives Us to say: no doubt in my mind that The Most Reverend Rowan Williams is one of the utmost "Orthodox" believers in justice and peace for all human kind.

We would also like to extend our thanks and gratitude to our host and friend Bishop Suheil Duawani who has showed great responsibility in supporting and cooperating with many initiatives and events that serve the purpose of promoting Justice and Peace in the Holy Land.

Thank you”.

In response, the Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams said the following:

‘For someone to live in Jerusalem or to visit it is a grace, a blessing, a gift from God, a challenge and an opportunity to self-reflect. The work of God for mankind in the Holy Land urges and implores us to empathize with Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a city in which all nations are called upon to live ‘Let’s rise to the mount of the Lord’. This happened on the day of Pentecost and it happens also today. Jerusalem is destined to have its gates open to everyone, but for some they are closed. For some, entrance is excluded.’

‘The way of life for the inhabitants throughout the centuries in a Jerusalem which had its doors open to everyone, sets the example for peace in the present. Let’s remember the words of the ancient ascetic hermits “our life and our death entirely depends upon the life and death of our neighbour. If our neighbour lives, we live also with him; if he dies we also die with him”.

The following Monday 9th/23rd February 2010, the Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams, escorted by His Eminence Michael Jackson Anglican Bishop of Ireland, His Eminence Suheil Dawani Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem and other clergy, visited His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem

Theophilos III at the Patriarchate.

During this visit His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III addressed the Archbishop of Canterbury as follows:

“Your Grace, Archbishop Rowan

Bishop Suheil,

Bishop Michael,

Your Eminences,

Dear Fathers

With great joy we welcome you, Your Grace Archbishop Rowan, and those with you, to our Patriarchate once again.

As we welcome you, we remember with deep gratitude our time with you at the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury and the Walk of Witness against Global Poverty in London in 2008. We honor you in your archpastoral ministry of peace and justice both at home and around the world, and we recognize the care and concern that you have always shown to the Holy Land. We commend your thoughtfulness, and the wisdom and discretion that always mark your words and deeds.

We are also appreciative of the way in which, by your writings and your primatial ministry, you have helped to deepen the knowledge of Orthodoxy among Western Christians and thereby helped to lay a further foundation for the unity of all Christians.

Your efforts to articulate the message of the Gospel in an

increasingly secularized society are a reflection in a different place of the ministry of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem here to maintain the sacredness of Jerusalem and the integrity of the Holy Places in our region.

Jerusalem forms a kind of “universal parish”. Here millions of pilgrims come every year – Jews, Christians, Muslims and even those of no particular religious affiliation – and it is the special ministry of the Patriarchate to offer spiritual consolation and encouragement to all who come in search of the presence of God.

We know that you understand that a strong and vibrant Patriarchate ensures a strong and vibrant Christian presence in the Holy Land. We value your efforts on our behalf and we continue to ask for your prayers as we seek to be a living sign in the Holy Land of the message of mutual respect, reconciliation and peace that is our responsibility in the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

And in asking for your prayers we assure you of our own prayers for you and for the unity and well-being of the Anglican Communion with which, for so many generations, the Orthodox Church has enjoyed such close and mutually beneficial relations.

Despite the current tensions within the Anglican Communion, we continue to be committed to dialogue. Our dialogue helps us all to re-discover the shared sources of the fullness of the Christian faith, especially in the Holy Scriptures as well as the Church Fathers and Saints whom we hold in common. It is by returning to the shared heritage, we believe, that we shall find the best way of healing the divisions that keep us separated from each other. For it is not in administrative structures or any form of accommodation, but in faith, that

our unity in Christ will be firmly established.

This year Christians in both the East and the West enjoy the opportunity of celebrating the Feast of the Resurrection on the same day, and so we have also entered into the fast of Great Lent together.

‘Attend, O Heaven, and I will speak, and will sing of Christ, who came to dwell among us in flesh which he took from the Virgin’.

We sing these words at the beginning of Great Lent in the Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete, and they remind us of the truth that we begin Lent with the remembrance of the Incarnation of the Logos. Our celebration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy yesterday is just this, an affirmation that God came to share our human nature, and so to teach us that our human nature comes from the same divine source.

In this spirit of our common humanity redeemed by Our Lord Jesus Christ, we bestow our Patriarchal blessing on your trip to the Holy Land, and we thank you again for your visit to the Patriarchate”.

To this address the Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams responded broadly as follows:

‘It is for us, Your Beatitude, Bishop of the Jerusalem Church, a particular pleasure to meet with you again. We highly appreciate the stance of your Church and Your acceptance and participation in the Lambeth Conference. We pray for your Church as the local Church of Jerusalem that contributed greatly in conserving the Christian presence and identity in

the Holy Land. The increasing presence of Christians in the Holy Land is a gift from God to the world. This is indeed possible because the Lord said to Paul, the Apostle of the Nations: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (B' Corinthians 12,9)

Regarding the 'Sunday of Orthodoxy' which You celebrated yesterday, the Anglican Church views the decision of the 7th Ecumenical Synod on the reinstatement of the Holy Icons that they truly reflect the uncreated Light of the Lord and from Him as a source is diffused to the (faces) Saints. For all this we thank God and we thank Your Beatitude for the testimony which You give.

In light of the forthcoming visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Gaza the following day, His Beatitude spoke regarding the support of our Patriarchate for the people who were affected during last year's clashes. His Beatitude spoke to the Archbishop of Canterbury about the financial and managerial crisis of the Middle East Council of Churches and the efforts of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to upgrade its role as a Christian organization, empowering it to be a single unified Christian voice and a testament for Christians in the Middle East and for the peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims. For this His Beatitude requested the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

When asked about his Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury explained that it is founded on the apostolic faith and tradition, in which its structure is not hierarchical but based on a collective way of life and administration. However this system has a weakness in co-operation which sometimes creates difficulties, because each of the thirty one (31) Anglican Churches sometimes decides on its own regarding issues which require a collective undertaking and decision

making process such as bioethics, sexuality and women in the priesthood, etc.

The Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams said 'This is why we invited other Christian Churches, like Yours, to the Lambeth Conference to listen and to be of help. We have accepted the ordination of women into the priesthood and we are already facing the ordination of women to the level of Bishop which has become a serious problem for us.

In addition the Church of England takes part constitutionally in the issuing of state laws. This privilege is difficult because the truth has to be confessed in a secular environment'.

'The Church of England has experienced a decline in the participation in sacraments of its believers over the last fifty years. In the last twenty years protestant groups have emerged with intentions rather of evangelizing and not so in participating in the sacraments.

However in the last five to six years around five hundred New Congregations of our Anglican Church have surfaced. This is encouraging, as well as the advent of approximately twenty people who were ordained into the priesthood. I consider these to be signs of God's Grace within our Church, for which we implore Your prayers'.

His Beatitude concluded by referring to the historical connections of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem with the Anglican Church and the British Commonwealth. His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III thanked the Anglican Church for their help towards the church of Jerusalem in Qatar during the first stages of its founding there and accepted an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury for an official visit to the Anglican Church when time permits.

His Beatitude offered the Archbishop of Canterbury a commemorative gift for his visit to the Patriarchate, a ceramic icon of 'Theotokos of Bethlehem' and the Patriarchate's precious publication of sacred objects with illustrations from the Church of Resurrection edited by Professor Nikolaos Olymbiou. To the escort of the Archbishop, His Eminence Michael Jackson Bishop of Ireland, His Beatitude offered a book of illuminated manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem by Professor Vokotopoulos. To the rest of the escorts, medals were given depicting 1500 years of the history of Jerusalem together with a photo album on ceremonies of Jerusalem by photographer Ms. Gali Tibbon.

The Archbishop of Canterbury kindly reciprocated by offering his Beatitude a volume of prose by English authors regarding the spirituality of the Anglican Church.

Also present at the meeting was the elderly Jerusalemite Dr. Ioannis Tlil, an old and distinguished member of the Church and Jerusalem's community, who offered to the Archbishop of Canterbury a book entitled 'I am Jerusalem'. This was followed by a commemorative photograph taken for the visit of the Anglican delegation with His Beatitude at the Throne.

Chief Secretary's Office