

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».

Excerpts of His Beatitude's interview for the newspaper «Eleftheros Typos».

Chief Secretary's Office.

H. B. ADDRESSES TO THE LEADERS OF CHURCHES ON OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS.

“Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The feast of Christmas is the *Metropolis* of all feasts, according to St. John Chrysostomos.

Indeed, Christmas is the *Metropolis* of all feasts. For, it is the feast of God's philanthropy i.e. God's love, peace, justice and reconciliation, for His own creation, Adam and Eve, who have been made after His image and likeness. This Christmas and festive gathering give us once again the opportunity to demonstrate our Christian mission here, in this land, where heavens meet with earth and where from the incarnate message of peace was spread all over the World.

We, I mean Christians, as a living witness of the unique and universal historical event that has shaped and formed our civilization. A civilization of absolute respect and dignity for the human being continue to bare witness, despite the many difficulties and obstacles that we are experiencing in our everyday life and activities.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who was born at the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar in the humble cave of Bethlehem, is always born to us, who worship Him and to those who are willing to receive the knowledge of the Incarnate Truth, the light of His peace and His justice.

Christmas, I repeat, is the feast of God's love to us, the humans.

Our mission as Christians is precisely this: to loudly pronounce and practically tangibly communicate to our fellow human Christian message. For is God, the Father's incarnate Love in the person of Jesus Christ, born from the pure blood of Virgin Mary of Nazareth, that has hypostatic existence and therefore prevails over all forms of dark and evil powers.

Christ is born, Blessed and Happy New Year".

Jerusalem, 10-1-2011.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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H. B. THEOPHILOS' III LETTER OF CONDOLENCES TO THE COPTIC CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

His Eminence

The Coptic Archbishop, Dr. Anba Abraham

Coptic Church Jerusalem

Your Eminence,

We were shocked to hear about the tragic death of twenty two faithful of the Coptic Church in Alexandria, victims of a terrorist action together with a hundred of injured. We strongly condemn this lethal action of violence and express Our deep condolences to the Coptic Church and to the relatives of those ones who passed away.

We pray to Our Lord Jesus Christ from His Holy Tomb to alleviate the injured and protect innocent people from such arbitrary actions in the future.

With Our fraternal wishes,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

Holy City of Jerusalem

Tuesday, January 04, 2011

**HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS'
III, SPEECH BEFORE THE
PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL FOR THE**

NEW YEAR 2011.

Mr President,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Guests,

“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel”. (Isaiah 7:14)

We are highly appreciative of what is a traditional gathering in which we share the Season’s cheerfulness, in particular the Christmas spirit, and impart our messages of hope. Events and gatherings such as this are of great significance both for celebrating the common bonds of our humanity, and for reminding ourselves of those fundamental moral values that are essential to our common life. Humanity today is confronted and confused on every side with dark forces of disrespect and even humiliation. And unfortunately much of this is being done in the pretence of religious allegiance and in the name of Almighty God.

As we are here today in a clear expression and manifestation of inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding, presence and symbiosis, it should be acknowledged that any form of polarization; political, social or ideological, have increasingly posed a serious challenge to our humble efforts and our sincere intentions.

We are thankful to the Authorities’ efforts in facilitating the access for pilgrims and worshipers that has enhanced a great number of Christian pilgrims from around the world. We commend them to continue this holy and important provision; and allow us to say: “more can always be done” on the local

and regional frame. Also we acknowledge the many positive steps that the State of Israel has taken to evaluate our concerns, and we stress the need for the continuation of progress on:

- Continued free movement of the faithful;
- Availability of entry visas for clerics; and
- Honouring the privileges of Tax exemption sanctioned by the sacred history as well as by the historic standing of the "Ownership of Church Property".

The ineffective endeavours to attaining peace should not be disregarded this festive season. This should be a reminder amidst our joyful celebrations that God's will is loud and clear for both the political and religious leadership to persevere in our commitment to reaching reconciliation and peace.

It is our mission, as servants of the Lord and thus of our fellow man, to relentlessly enhance our efforts for improving the living and socio-economic conditions in which people of the Holy Land are passing through and to alleviating the suffering of all affected. We are confronted with challenges and raised concerns for our communities over peaceful coexistence and we feel the urgency to address this, diffuse it and channel the positive outcome to achieving peace.

We are cautious about the rising negative sentiments fuelled by extremists and appeal for the fact that we consider all humans as equal to one another. A perception substantiated in the monotheistic faiths and upheld by the many decent citizens who also feel threatened by the moral decline witnessed today.

Christian institutions and Leadership, in the Holy land, have committed themselves by employing their blessings and resources in constituting peace and reconciliation in the region; for we firmly believe that this enjoins one of the divine commandments of our faith which solidifies our

existence and determines our mission.

Our fraternal noble wishes for this happy occasion on the New Year to all Jews, Christians and Muslims, who persistently pursued peace during times of great turmoil, as they set a role model for all those who are inspired by the true and historic prophetic message of the incarnation of the divine logos.

As the custodians and servants of the Holy Places that bare testimony to the sacred history of redemption and salvation of human kind, we time and again commit ourselves to promoting peace and invite every human being to "soul searching"; in order to recognize the other's entitlement to peace, respect and dignity; and we should always remember to behave in the same way as we would like people to behave towards us. For it is written: "... whatever you want man to do to you do also to them for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12)

Your Excellency, we express our sincere thanks to you for this cordial invitation and for your gracious hospitality. We pray God for his special blessing upon the approaching New Year: may the Divine spirit of this Festive Season warm our hearts, enlighten our minds, and fulfil the lives of all the citizens of the State of Israel. Happy New Year and Hanoucha Samech.

For, as prophet Isaiah says: "... unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him. Great shall be His government, and of His peace there is no end..." (Isaiah 9:6&7).

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

29 December 2010

THE DEPUTY MAYOR OF JERUSALEM, MS. NAOMI ZUR, VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Tuesday 8th / 21st of December 2010, the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Ms. Naomi Zur, along with the Advisor on Christian Affairs of the said Municipality, Mr. Jacob Abraham, visited His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III at the Patriarchate for matters regarding co-operation between the Patriarchate and the Municipality. Within the framework of this visit the Deputy Mayor offered His Beatitude a miniature relief of an ancient Synagogue. His Beatitude presented Ms. Naomi Zur and Mr. Jacob Abraham with the book by Professor Demitrakopoulos about the site of the Baptism of the Lord.

Chief Secretary's Office.

H.B. THEOPHILOS' ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO H.B. METROPOLITAN SAWWA OF WARSAW AND ALL

POLAND.

Your Beatitude,

We welcome you with great joy again to the Holy City of Jerusalem, to our Patriarchate and to our monastery in the name of our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ! Once again, let us say that your presence among us evokes happy remembrances of our recent visit to the Holy Polish Autocephalous Church, and we rejoice in the ever-deepening ties that bind the Polish Autocephalous Church with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, "the first-born of all the Churches." These ties have received the great blessing of our celebration last night of the Divine Eucharist in which we demonstrated our witness to our unity in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The roots of Orthodoxy in Poland go deep. It was the great Saints Cyril and Methodios who first brought the Gospel to the region in the 9th century. It is in their footsteps that the Patriarchs of Jerusalem have followed and cared for the Orthodox faith, which has lived on in among your people, in good times as well as in challenging times. As we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented- of whom the world was not worthy", (Hb. 11:37). Allow us to say that today, after almost a century since you took your place among the autocephalous Orthodox Churches of the world, you have emerged as a beacon of the light and the selfless love of Christ, of peace and reconciliation.

We can say this because during our fraternal visit to the Polish Orthodox Church, we became a witness of the breath and strength of your life and ministry. Your seven dioceses as well as your military chaplaincy, your flourishing monastic communities, your schools, and your centers for the care of

the elderly and those in need, as well as Your Beatitude's important influence both in Church and society, are an eloquent testimony not just to your common life, but to the witness of Orthodoxy in our modern world. In the work in promoting Orthodox culture and in your ministry to young people, you ensure the vitality of Orthodoxy in our society.

The Polish Orthodox Church lives out its life in a unique situation where the cultures of East and West meet. The concern of Poland for the deepening of relations between people of our different faiths and cultures, and especially with respect to the peoples of our region, is a great encouragement to us. As Orthodox Christians in Poland, in and through your fraternal relationship with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, you have a unique way of demonstrating your concern on behalf of your government and people. Here we can see the importance of Orthodoxy in the international arena in a special way. And it is in this respect that the Orthodox Church maintains its genuine inclusiveness and openness.

The Orthodox Church values deeply its life of unity in diversity, its insistence on the dignity of the human person, and its witness to genuine inclusiveness and openness. Throughout our history, the Orthodox Church has stood firmly for peace in our region and for the well-being of the entire human family.

We celebrate today once again the historic relationship and the unity of faith that exist between our two sister Churches, and our common witness to the role of a living, vital Orthodoxy in our world. We give thanks to God for your primatial ministry, Your Beatitude, and we offer our fervent prayers for our brothers in the Polish episcopate, and for all your clergy and people.

May our risen Lord Jesus Christ richly bless your pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and may God bless all the people of your beloved country of Poland.

And we offer this toast for your Beatitude.

Thank you.

Jerusalem, 28 November 2010

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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THE CHIEF OF THE HELLENIC POLICE VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Saturday, 17th / 30th of October 2010, the Chief of the Hellenic Police (EL.AS) Mr. Eleftherios Economou along with a small escort and accompanied by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem, His Excellency Mr. Athanasios Sotiriou, was received at the Patriarchate by His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III. The Chief of the Hellenic Police was on an official visit to the State of Israel. Within the framework of this visit at the Patriarchate, Mr. Economou said to His Beatitude that he considers it his religious and national duty to visit the Holy Sepulchre and the Patriarchate in any way possible.

His Beatitude expressed His joy regarding the visit saying that He appreciates this attitude of respect towards the Holy Sepulchre and the Patriarchate and that no one is capable of separating Hellenism from Orthodoxy. This union has been achieved since the era when Hellenism joined the Church and,

especially, the Church of Jerusalem. The Byzantine Emperors, the genus of the Rum Orthodox during the years of slavery, and Hellas (Greece) after her liberation, all assisted morally and materially in the religious, social, and philanthropic work of the Patriarchate and of the Brotherhood.

This work is visible in the Holy Shrines, the Holy Churches and in the civic and real estate property of the Patriarchate. All of the above contribute to the maintenance of the religious character of Jerusalem and to the identity of the Christians.

The Patriarchate requests that Greece appreciates its work and its role, not least for the sake of the Patriarchate itself, but for the spiritual support and progress of Greece itself.

The Chief of Police expressed his wish to His Beatitude for a series of lectures to be given by Fathers of the Brotherhood in Athens for the benefit of the various units of the Hellenic Police personnel may acquaint themselves more closely with the work of the Patriarchate.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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THE GEORGIAN MINISTER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Tuesday 6th / 19th of October 2010, Georgia's Minister of Economic Development, Mrs. Vera Kobalia, accompanied by a

small diplomatic team led by the Ambassador of Georgia to Israel, was received by His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III at the Patriarchate. His Beatitude welcomed the Minister to the Holy Land and to the Patriarchate, affirming that as guardian of the Holy Places the Patriarchate joyfully welcomes missions and pilgrims from various Orthodox countries including Georgia, which has always had close bonds with the Holy Land.

The Minister stated to His Beatitude that she had come within the framework of economic cooperation with the State of Israel and that she also considered this visit to the Holy Sepulchre and the Patriarchate as her strong personal religious obligation and inner call.

Her Excellency Mrs. Kobalia offered His Beatitude an icon of Saint Nicholas. His Beatitude presented the Minister with a golden cross and the book authored by Professor Votokopoulos on the illustrated manuscripts of the Patriarchate's Library, along with commemorative medals minted for the celebration of 2000 years of Christianity and a crib made of ivory depicting Christ's Nativity.

Following her visit to the Patriarchate, the Minister visited the Holy Sepulchre for veneration.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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THE CONSUL OF BRITAIN IN

ISRAEL VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Thursday the 1st / 14th of October 2010 the Consul of Great Britain to Israel, Mr. Richard Makepeace, visited His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III at His office on the occasion of the conclusion of his diplomatic duties in this position.

Within the framework of this visit both sides expressed full satisfaction for the existence of a truly excellent cooperation in order to tackle affairs of mutual interest and also the wish and the willingness that this cooperation be continued by the successor of Mr. Makepeace.

His Beatitude blessed him with the grace of the Holy Sepulchre for the successful support of his diplomatic career.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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THE GREEK MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Monday, the 5th/18th of October 2010, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs His Excellency Mr. Demetrios Droutsas visited His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III at the Patriarchate. On this visit, the Greek Minister of Foreign

Affairs was accompanied by the General Secretary of his office, Mr. Ioannis-Alexios Zepos, and other officials namely the Greek Ambassador to the State of Israel His Excellency Mr. Kyriakos Loukakis, and the Consul of Greece to Jerusalem His Excellency Mr. Sotiris Athanasiou.

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III congratulated the Minister on his official appointment. "We recognise", He said, "the difficult mission you have undertaken. We thank the Greek Government for showing its concern for the Patriarchate which is demonstrated by your visit. Furthermore we enjoy very good cooperation with the diplomatic representatives of Greece to Israel. The Patriarchate plays a significant conciliatory role in the ongoing religious and political issues of the Holy Land".

The Minister conveyed the greetings of the Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. George Papandreou and praised the work of the Patriarchate and His Beatitude personally. "I saw", he said, "the Patriarchate's work in Jordan and I heard plenty of commendatory words from the King of Jordan about Your work as President of all the Heads of the Holy Land's Churches".

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III decorated the Minister with the Order of the Grand Commander of the Holy Sepulchre as a sign of recognition of his service to Greece and the Patriarchate.

Moreover, His Beatitude offered His Excellency the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Hellenic Republic a publication by Professor Votokopoulos on the illustrated manuscripts of the Patriarchate's Library and Professor Demitrakopoulos' book entitled 'The Site of The Baptism of Our Lord on the River Jordan'.

The Minister proceeded to visit the Church of Resurrection to venerate the Holy Sepulchre and the Holy Shrines therein.

Chief-Secretary's Office.

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