

SPEECH OF A GREEK ORTHODOX CITIZEN OF JERUSALEM, IN THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE “NEW PREMISES” BOOKSHOP

The “New Premises” educational bookshop designed to be the cultural heart of Jerusalem. At the opening of the “New Premises” on November 20th 2009 at 19 Salah-Eddin street, East Jerusalem, Dr. John Tleel, author of the book “I am Jerusalem”, was asked to address the gathering. His address was the following:

“Respectable gathering. I would like to start by pointing out that you are facing in front of you, a three consecutive epochs person. 31 years a British Mandate epoch, 19 years Jordanian Rule, and since 1967 the Israeli occupation, and in addition my parents had witnessed the end of more than four centuries Ottoman Empire occupation, a period that to some extent affected me too. I will be very brief because to me this talk is not a gratifying task.

My first the best 20 years as a child, as a teenager, as a student at the St. Dimitri classical school of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, and as a dental student at the St. Joseph French University of Beirut from where I graduated in June 1949 when I was not yet 21 years of age, when I woke up in a state of shock at tasting the bitter taste of a 50 meters Palestinian refugee, this taste that until today has not disappeared from my tongue, my heart, my soul, my mind until death parts me the same way my father, my mother, my brother and my sister, and all those Palestinians who died with the bitterness of becoming refugees.

As a student at the Patriarchal Schools in the old city and

coming daily from a few meters outside the New Gate for 14 years you can imagine, certainly if you have the right imagination, and sense that, what an eye witness I was then and what I see and I feel and experience today when I am speaking in front of you after nearing a century of time, the 20th and the 21st. And that goes to every corner, every inch of that city that had changed so much; and nothing has changed in this changing and unchanging world for John Tleel, this is why I often feel a lonely man. A man who weeps and weeps when at night the images and the icons, the holy and sacred icons of Jerusalem I see them today and everyday desecrated and vandalized by those who think that they have the right and the power to do whatever they want in that city that never ever belonged or belongs to nobody but... you can certainly guess my inner thoughts.

As a student at the Faculté Française de Médecine de Beyrouth-École Dentaire, I am one of the handful who lived and saw Palestine- Ras el Naqura- Beirut Lebanon- Amman Jordan and Transjordan- Damascus Syria till Aleppo of that fertile and at the same time turbulent but nostalgic time and period.

Those 20 years 1928 and 1948, outside the Old City in the vicinity of the New Gate between the Notre Dame de France then and of Jerusalem today and the beautiful walls that the daily cherished and caressed with the fingers of our hands and inspired me from that time until this moment. It is the Wall, my Wall that always accompanied me even in my dreams and in "I Am Jerusalem", I sang the song of I AM THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM... I like also to use the plural form we, remembering my brother and sister, because together we used to play and feel and talked to it with love and affection, that part of the wall that was our private wall.

It is a historic moment for me to be this evening at this Palestinian, cultural, educational, national, Arab, and all that, that represent a city which accepted and heralded to the

world what no other city could never ever have given to the world, the one and only God, the God of peace, the God of love, the God of justice, the God who created us brothers and we can witness it this very evening. Though life, in Jerusalem, made me a pessimist, now, I hope, at this advanced age and stage, a faint ray of optimism was born. Thank you Imad, brothers, and the Muna family for your great achievement, Thank you".

John Tleel, Jerusalem, 20/11/2009.

Chief Secretary's Office