

AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRIARCH IRENAIOS:

The Jerusalem Post, November 22 2005:

The Jerusalem Post: Did you lease land to Ateret Kohenim?

Patriarch Irenaios: I made no deal to lease land to any Israelis. In fact the exact opposite is true. After my election there were a number of stores that had fallen out of Church control and I got them back. Some of these properties include two stores and a small hotel near the Gloria Hotel. I also regained control of a hostel down St. Francis Road and two stores on Christian Quarter Road as well as land near the Hyatt Hotel on Mt Scopus that was sold by the previous administration.

The Jerusalem Post: On Tuesday Theophilus will be enthroned and will replace you. How do you explain this?

Patriarch Irenaios: There are people who support illegality and actions opposed to Church canon. What can I say?

The Jerusalem Post: What do you expect Israel to do?

Patriarch Irenaios: Israel supports legality. That gives us joy and hope. And we thank the Prime Minister and the ministers that support legality and the Church canon by not recognizing the new patriarch. We have respect and love for Israel. And I am very grateful to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post: Do you pray for Israel?

Patriarch Irenaios: Of course. For the entire country. I have friends in all parts of the government. I always had good relations with the Jewish community in Greece when I served there as representative of the Jerusalem Patriarchate there.

The Jerusalem Post: When you were elected in 2001 Israel did not recognize you as Patriarch. What happened?

Patriarch Irenaios: Israel discovered that rumors said about me were untrue. My enemies in the Patriarchate presented me as an anti-Semitic. Israel discovered these claims were false.

The Jerusalem Post: Why don't you accept the decision and step down?

Patriarch Irenaios: All this is based on an un-canonical decision. There is no way to have called a synod without the Patriarch's support. The Patriarch dies in his throne. He is not replaced. According to law there are only two reasons to distance a patriarch - either because he is sick mentally or physically or if he becomes a heretic. The same body that elected him must convene to dethrone him. The archimandrites in the city and 12 representatives of the Arab-speaking communities in Israel and Jordan must also be allowed to vote. In our case it was done by a small group.

The Jerusalem Post: Who ousted you?

Patriarch Irenaios: Theophilus and his supporters. They had the help of people in the Greek government. If not they would never have had the courage to do what they

did. Pressure was also applied to the archbishop in Greece Christodoulos Paraskevaides]. The Greek media blew the entire issue out of proportion.

The Jerusalem Post: Do your congregants support you?

Patriarch Irenaios: They do not have a say in the matter. The congregation did not create the problem. The clergy did. Step by step through blackmail and harassment they gained force. Clergy members were threatened and intimidated. We never used threats. So those who oppose me gained power.

The Jerusalem Post: How do you explain the fact that Jordan and the Palestinian Authority have turned against you?

Patriarch Irenaios: Jordan's and the Palestinian Authority's decision is the result of four years of attempts to turn them against me. They made one-sided decisions without hearing any explanations from me.

The Jerusalem Post: Are you concerned about Muslim violence against Christians in the Holy Land?

Patriarch Irenaios: The decision to pick up and move on is made by the head of the family. It is legitimate to look for a better opportunity. In Greece this happens also. A father's first responsibility is to his family.

The Jerusalem Post: What is the Patriarch's role in the Greek Orthodox Church? How is he different from the Catholic pope?

Patriarch Irenaios: The Orthodox Church believes that Jesus is the head of the church. In the west they believe that the pope is the head of the church. That is their business. In Jerusalem the situation is different from other patriarchates. We are also a monastic order. Here the patriarch is not just the head of the congregation, he is also the abbot of the brotherhood. He is the father who looks after his children, who are both the clergy in the monastery and the flock. Of course the children owe respect to their father. Is it possible that the children rise up against the father and say get out we don't like you? In the same measure sometimes the father has to take certain measures to punish his children. Out of love I did not punish when I should have.