



Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna

By Nora Carmi

During the past decades, the name Archbishop Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sevestia (Sebastia), from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, has become widely known in local, regional, and international arenas as the eloquent and courageous voice crying out for justice for Palestine and Israel! Daring to speak the truth to power as an ordained servant of the Creator is in no way contrary to doing the will of God – even though it can be a costly discipleship that invites both positive and negative criticism, as witnessed in many countries that are struggling for a just peace.

In the picturesque little village of Rameh in the Galilee, Nizar Yacoub Hanna (who would be ordained a priest as

Theodosios Atallah Hanna) was born in 1965. As the elder brother of Hanna and Khulood, he grew up in a conservative Greek Orthodox family, anchored in faith and connected to the land that had experienced a noble resistance to injustice since its occupation in 1948. It is not surprising that Rameh, like many villages in the Galilee that are proud of the warm and close relationships among their inhabitants, has molded many prominent Christian, Muslim, and Druze leaders in a variety of fields. They include the late poet Samih al Qassem and the Israeli Knesset member Bassel Ghattas. Nizar's love for prayer and church was instilled in him by his maternal grandmother (who recently passed away at the ripe old age of 98). Early in his life, Nizar acquired the nickname *nus-khoury* (half-priest) for helping the local priest in church and community events. There was no doubt in young Nizar's heart and mind about his call to serve God and his country. For one year, Nizar attended the Greek Orthodox seminary on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, studying Greek and basic religious subjects. He then continued his studies towards priesthood in Athens, Greece. Slowly but surely he discovered the important role of the church not only as a spiritual mentor but also as a staunch protector of community rights. Armed with this conviction and vocation, he was ordained in 1990. True to his Orthodox beliefs, Abuna Theodosios Atallah Hanna initially served the Greek Patriarchate well as its spokesperson. With his highly visible tall stature, he performed all religious responsibilities and proved himself an accomplished eloquent orator able to reach out to young and old. He soon became involved in nurturing stronger bonds among the various churches, but his genuine desire to unite the people extends further than the ecumenical circles. Also in civil society, Atallah Hanna serves as an active board member in a multitude

of nongovernmental and charitable organizations. He calls for the rights and liberation of all the oppressed, defending the sanctity of holy places, supporting prisoners, and comforting families of martyrs in demolished homes and on defiled land. Atallah Hanna, archbishop since 2015, fulfills his ministry faithfully, understanding very well the mission to “preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set free those who are downtrodden.” (Luke 4:18)

This advocate for a just peace is welcomed and respected in the Muslim world, in the Middle East, and in conferences and assemblies in the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Australia. A member of the Kairos Palestine movement and co-author of the document “A Moment of Truth,” he does not miss an opportunity to remind all religious circles, decision-makers, and the international community of the Kairos message: the time has come to ACT NOW, and it is a universal responsibility to resist evil in a nonviolent manner. His Grace repeats the message that Palestinian Christians are not only an integral, founding component of the Palestinian tapestry but also an important presence in the whole Middle East, without whom the heritage, legacy, and rich culture of the region would be lost.

His innumerable prizes and certificates of recognition from governments, officials, and renowned global institutions testify to the integrity and commitment of the blue-eyed, soft but steadfast child of God from Galilee, a devoted Christian cleric, a deeply-rooted human being who continues to work for the unity of the Palestinian people, the preservation of humanity, sovereignty, and peace for all based on mutual respect, coexistence, and equal rights. An entire book should be written to speak about the miracles that faith, hope, and love can achieve.

