

“The Media Coverage on Syria is the Biggest Media Lie of our Time”: Interview with Flemish Priest in Syria

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*Flemish **Father Daniël Maes** (78) lives in Syria in the sixth-century-old Mar Yakub monastery in the city of Qara, 90 kilometers north of the capital Damascus. Father Daniel has been a witness to the “civil war” and according to him, Western reports on the conflict in Syria are very misleading. In short: “the Americans and their allies want to completely ruin the country.”*

Interviewer: You are very critical of the media coverage on Syria. What is bothering you?

Father Daniel: “The idea that a popular uprising took place against President Assad is completely false. I’ve been in Qara since 2010 and I have seen with my own eyes how agitators from outside Syria organized protests against the government and recruited young people. **That was filmed and aired by Al Jazeera to give the impression that a rebellion was taking place. Murders were committed by foreign terrorists, against the Sunni and Christian communities, in an effort to sow religious and ethnic discord among the Syrian people.** While in my experience, the Syrian people were actually very united.

Before the war, this was a harmonious country: a secular state in which different religious communities lived side by side peacefully. There was hardly any poverty, education was free, and health care was good. It was only not possible to freely express your political views. But most people did not care about that.”

Interviewer: Mother Agnès-Mariam, of your Mar Yakub (“Saint Jacob”) monastery, is accused of siding with the regime. She has friends at the highest level.

Father Daniel: “mother Agnès-Mariam helps the population: she has recently opened a soup kitchen in Aleppo, where 25,000 meals are prepared five times a week. Look, it is miraculous that we are still alive. We owe that to the army of Assad’s government and to Vladimir Putin, because he decided to intervene when the rebels threatened to take power.

When thousands of terrorists settled in Qara, we became afraid for our lives. They came from the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, Europe, Turkey, Libya, there were many Chechens. They formed a foreign occupation force, all allied to al-Qaeda and other terrorists. Armed to the teeth by the West and their allies with the intention to act against us, they literally said:

"This country belongs to us now." Often, they were drugged, they fought each other, in the evening they fired randomly. We had to hide in the crypts of the monastery for a long time. When the Syrian army chased them away, everybody was happy: the Syrian citizens because they hate the foreign rebels, and we because peace had returned."

Interviewer: You say that the Syrian Army protects civilians, yet there are all sorts of reports about war crimes committed by Assad's forces, such as the bombardments with barrel bombs.

Father Daniel: "Do you not know that the media coverage on Syria is the biggest media lie of our time? They have sold pure nonsense about Assad: It was actually the rebels who plundered and killed. Do you think that the Syrian people are stupid? Do you think those people were forced to cheer for Assad and Putin? It is the Americans who have a hand in all of this, for pipelines and natural resources in this region and to thwart Putin."

Saudi Arabia and Qatar want to establish a Sunni state in Syria, without religious freedom. Therefore, Assad must go. You know, when the Syrian army was preparing for the battle in Aleppo, Muslim soldiers came to me to be blessed. Between ordinary Muslims and Christians, there is no problem. It is those radical Islamic, Western-backed rebels who want to massacre us. They are all al Qaeda and IS. There are not any moderate fighters anymore."

Interviewer: You once mentioned Hillary Clinton to be a 'devil in holy water', because as foreign minister, she deliberately worsened the conflict.

Father Daniel: "I am happy with Trump. He sees what every normal person understands: That the United States should stop undermining countries which possess natural resources. The Americans' attempt to impose a unipolar world is the biggest problem. Trump understands that radical Islam is a bigger threat than Russia.

What do I care whether he occasionally takes off his pants? If Trump practices geopolitics the way he has promised to do so, then the future looks bright. Then it will become similar to Putin's approach. And hopefully then, there will be a solution for Syria, and peace will return."

Interviewer: You understand that your analysis is controversial and will encounter much criticism?

Father Daniel: "I speak from personal observation. And no one has to believe me, right? But I know one thing: The media can either contribute to the massacre of the Syrian people or help the Syrian people, with their media coverage. Unfortunately, there are too many followers and cowards among journalists."

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