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Thessaloniki: “Anti-Semitism is a stigma for our culture” said Archbishop of America Elpidophoros at a remembrance event for the Holocaust - Fanis Grigoriadis



Thessaloniki: “Anti-Semitism is a stigma for our culture” said Archbishop of America Elpidophoros at a remembrance event for the Holocaust - Proclamation of Archbishop Elpidophoros and G. Boutaris as honorary members of IKTH 01/28/2024 21:08 APE-MPE Thessaloniki, Greece 1623

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“Evil has a name, evil has an identity, evil has a history and it is called fascism and Nazism” underlined His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, delivering the keynote speech at the Remembrance of the Greek Jewish Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, organized by the Central Jewish Council of Greece.

“These are the ideologies that bloodied Europe and the world and that have nothing to do with Christian theology, no matter how much some try to clothe their extreme ideological fantasies with a Christian mantle” added Archbishop Elpidophoros and continued: “Those who think to associate Christianity and especially Orthodoxy with fascism and National Socialism, “the doctrine of grudge” are putting themselves outside the sacred precinct of the Church.

The Shoah almost wiped out the Jewish race, but the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 made the Jews once again an active and vigorous part of the world community, Archbishop Elpidophoros continued and underlined: “Holocaust denial is not just a scientific disagreement, but constitutes an armed denial of history and a targeted distortion of reality”.

Elpidophoros emphasized that “the universality of the message of Christianity, as a consequence of the universality of Christ’s redemptive work and the declared unity of the human race” is “at the opposite of the fundamental doctrine of National

Socialism, regarding the value distinction of races into superior and inferior ». He emphasized that “the value of every human being is due to his referentiality and referentiality, i.e. the fact that he is a unique, living and unrepeatable image of God” and referred to the historic decision of the local synod of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople, in the year 1872, which characterizes tribalism as a “new glory”, as “something new and unacceptable” and condemns it explicitly, as a “heteroteaching, contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and the Fathers of the Church” and “foreign to the Christian orthodox ethos”.

“For all these reasons, I feel a special emotion, being here tonight in the welcoming and familiar space of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in whose Theological School I was taught and taught the Orthodox theology of open horizons, extroversion, dialogue and respect for any kind of otherness”.

During the ceremony, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America and the former mayor of Thessaloniki, Yiannis Boutaris, were declared honorary members of the Israeli Community of Thessaloniki by the president, David Saltiel, and its administration. Archbishop Elpidophoros also referred to the close historical relations of the Greek diaspora with the Jewish element in the USA.

“The relations of the Holy Archdiocese of America with the Jewish element of New York and the United States in general are historic, fraternal and deeply rooted in our common spiritual tradition,” Elpidophoros said and added: “Let me also express our heartfelt and my sincere thanks to the historic Israeli Community of Thessaloniki for the honor of declaring me an honorary member”.

Archbishop Elpidophoros presented an analysis of the modern world and the way in which political and social forces, internationally, taking advantage of the global recession, the popular intolerance towards the political elites, the inequalities and the problems of everyday life and “the inability of countries to form at the national or regional level coherent immigration policies”, develop “an extreme rhetoric, openly flirting with ideologies, which are related to the darkest pages of our recent historical experience”.

“In our common belief, the world is not inherently evil. It is the “very good” creation of God’s love. The world, however, is plagued by the forces of evil that nest within human history.... At the same time, we are all witnessing an alarming rise in anti-Semitism, internationally” said Archbishop Elpidophoros and continued:

“However, the most critical, but also most heartbreaking issue is the instrumental use of anti-Semitism, and indeed, let’s face it, by religious and church officials. I

have no intention of excluding anyone. The oil of religion in this case, instead of healing the wounds, rekindles the fire. It is necessary to say it in the clearest way. Anti-Semitism is not just “an affront to common sense”, as Hannah Arendt rightly wrote, but anti-Semitism is a stigma on our culture.

The Archbishop of America underlined that for this reason “the Christian Churches and Confessions of the European continent, represented by the Council of European Churches and the Council of Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences, in the Ecumenical Charter, which they jointly signed in 2001, condemn explicitly and unequivocally anti-Semitism” and “ask God’s forgiveness for Christian cases of anti-Semitism and reaffirm their unwavering commitment to settlement and reconciliation with Judaism.”

Elpidophoros referred to historical figures of Orthodoxy, such as “Damascus of Athens, Chrysostomos of Zakynthos, Gennadios of Thessaloniki, Demetriados Joachim and others” who “gave witness to the free and genuine Christian conscience”, but also to statements by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew , “who was and remains the Patriarch of dialogue, settlement and reconciliation”. He also referred to the actions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, such as his “text on the social ethics of the Orthodox Church”, of 2020, where “the cases of philanthropy and understanding of the Orthodox towards our severely afflicted Jewish brothers, throughout of the Second World War, a fact recognized by giving them the title of “Law of Nations”.

At the same time, however, it is underlined, said the Archbishop of America, that “other historically Orthodox nations show dark aspects of anti-Semitic violence and oppression”. “For individual or collective failures, omissions or even crimes, the Orthodox Church feels the need to ask for God’s mercy and to deepen even more its relations with the great tradition of Judaism” said Archbishop Elpidophoros.

“The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, convened in Crete in 2016, repeatedly emphasized, on the one hand, that fundamentalism does not belong to the essence of the religious phenomenon and is an expression of morbid religiosity, and on the other hand, that honest and sober dialogue between religions contributes decisively in the promotion of mutual trust and world peace” added the Archbishop of America.

Elpidophoros made a historical review from the time of the persecution of two hundred and fifty thousand Sephardic Jews from Spain in 1492 and the arrival of twenty thousand of them in Thessaloniki, their contribution to the economic and social life of the city and to national struggles, mentioning specifically the sacrifice

of colonel Mordochaios Frizis, a hero of the Albanian front. Finally, he highlighted the martyrdoms, persecutions and extermination of the vast majority of the city's Jewish community during the German occupation. "This unimaginable atrocity for the human mind aspires to be recorded and this liberating and educational function of historical memory is to be served by the planned Holocaust Museum of Greece here in Thessaloniki" said Archbishop Elpidophoros and noted: "I am particularly happy, because after the recent publication of the construction permit and with the material and moral support of the Greek government, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, as well as Dr. Albert Bourla, through the Genesis Prize Foundation, we will soon be able to enjoy the inauguration of such an important work for the history of our Jewish compatriots".

Statement by Yannis Boutaris

"The Holocaust deprived Thessaloniki of its future," said the former mayor of Thessaloniki, Yiannis Boutaris, who was declared an honorary member of the IKTH tonight.

He noted, in fact, that the Jewish community of Thessaloniki is Sephardic and intertwined with the history of the city, while he emphasized that the population composition of Thessaloniki changed significantly after the Occupation. He pointed out that it will take generations to overcome this "trauma" in the city's demographics.

Mr. Boutaris also emphasized that it is a great honor to be declared an honorary member of the IKTH, but at the same time a "responsibility" in the effort to recover its old glory, without of course being possible, as he said, to do this at the levels that it was before the occupation.

"The Holocaust is also our history, Greek Jews were the victims of the Nazis," added Mr. Boutaris.

Greetings Giorgos Tsounis, Lazaros Sefichas, David Saltiel

"We will not forget the members of the Jewish community, who perished in the Holocaust," said US Ambassador to Greece George Tsounis, among others, and added: "Never again. We will stand up to those who deny this atrocity."

Mr. Tsounis praised Yiannis Boutaris for "his progressive vision and his inspired administration", while he also praised Archbishop Elpidophoros, noting that he has

known him for many years and is connected to him by friendship.

The vice-president of IKTH Lazaros Seficha referred to the work and the contribution of Yiannis Boutaris on the side of the Jewish community in all the steps of his mayoral term. At the same time, he also referred to the work of Archbishop of America Elpidophoros and his fight against discrimination and in favor of human rights.

“Two people with international recognition” emphasized Mr. Sefiha, noting that the distinction of the honorary members takes place at the same time as the issuance of the building permit for the Holocaust Museum.

Yiannis Boutaris was thanked by David Saltiel, the president of IKTH, saying:

“Yiannis Boutaris is unique, that’s why he will go down in history. When others were afraid, Yiannis Butaris spoke the truth. He is highly regarded by the Jewish people of Greece.”

“You will always be mayor for me” David Saltiel added with emotion. He praised Archbishop Elpidophoros and wished to meet him in America next week. “He’s a friend, he’s a leader,” Mr. Saltiel said.

The event was attended by, among others, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki Filotheos, the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure Nikos Tahiaos, the Governor of Central Macedonia Apostolos Tzitzikostas, the MPs Kostas Giulekas and Dimitris Kouvelas, members of the Jewish community, university students, etc.

In the first part of the event, a musical event was held, based on a research program of the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, with songs written during the Holocaust, performed by the tenor Mariandzela Hatjistamatiou.

The event closed with a concert by the State Orchestra of Thessaloniki and the Mixed Choir of Thessaloniki.

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