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“We do not identify with the highly offensive views allegedly expressed by a Hierarch of the Ecumenical Throne”



On Saturday afternoon, 15 February, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was present joined in prayer at the Great Vespers which took place at the venerable Patriarchal Church of Saint George, at the end of which he welcomed a group of Teachers and Students from the 10th Lyceum of Katerini.

During his address, His All-Holiness also referred to the alleged statements of a Hierarch of the Throne against Ms. Maria Karystianou, mother of a victim of the tragic Tempe train accident, saying the following:

“Our beloved children,

In a few days, it will be 2 years since the fatal day of the tragic accident in Tempe,

where 57 of our fellow human beings, including many young children, like you, tragically lost their lives, and many others were injured.

I will never forget that morning how shocked I was, as everyone else was, by the tragic news. My thoughts went to the parents, to the relatives of the victims. To all those who were waiting to see their children, their parents, their loved ones get off the train, but they never arrived. They did not call them upon their arrival. Silence. Mourning. Unspeakable tragedy.

That morning, during the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, which I officiated here, in the Patriarchal Church, I prayed to the Lord for the repose of the souls of the victims, for the support and comfort, as much as possible, of their relatives, and for the speedy recovery of the many injured. I also contacted the President of the Hellenic Republic, Ms. Sakallaropoulou, and expressed to her my shock and the condolences and sympathy of the Mother Church, our Ecumenical Patriarchate.

A few months later, on my way to Volos, where I was to visit the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias and Almyros, I stood at the site of the tragic accident and chanted a Trisagion for the victims, and expressed my condolences in person to relatives of some of the victims. His Eminence Metropolitan Ieronymos of Larissa and Tyrnavos, in whose district the site of the accident is located, was with me.

Since then, I have always had in my prayers the 57 victims, their relatives, but also all those who are in any way affected by this unspeakable tragedy, which continues to shock Hellenism everywhere, which anxiously looks forward, we all look forward, to the officials of Justice, who are unprejudiced, to shed light, as those competent in the matter, on every aspect of this case.

Therefore, the Mother Church and I personally could never identify ourselves with the highly offensive views, such as those that saw the light of day on the internet, yesterday, today, and which were allegedly formulated by a Hierarch of the Ecumenical Throne, with carelessness and meddlesomeness. No one has the right to insult a grieving mother, every mother, every father, who wants to know what happened that night in Tempe, and for justice to be served for the unjust death of their child, or relative, or friend, or fellow student.

If, unexpectedly, the alleged Hierarch of the Mother Church did indeed express these thoughts attributed to him, then he must make amends as quickly as possible and publicly apologise to all those whom he offended and embittered.

The Mother Church and the Patriarch will continue to be spiritually at the side of the families of the victims, and of every person affected by this tragedy. But also at

the side of the families of the victims of the other tragic accidents that occurred in previous years in Tempe, with victims being students and very young people.

Eternal be their memory! And you, and all of us, may we remember them, commemorate them and pray for their repose, and that God may give strength and comfort to their loved ones.”

Photographs: Nikos Papachristou

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