



HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY – FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

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R E S O L U T I O N

The Faculty of Theology of the School of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, which for more than 180 years has served Orthodox Christian Theology and at the same time is open to inter-Christian and interreligious dialogue, unequivocally condemns the conversion of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople from a museum, as it has been from 1934 until today, to an Islamic mosque.

Hagia Sophia of today, established by Emperor Justinian, is not simply a Byzantine monument; it is **the pre-eminent and unparalleled monument** of Byzantine civilization, which for over a millennium shed its lights on both the East and West; it shaped the religious and cultural identity of the Slavs and other peoples in the north and benefited exceedingly the Ottomans themselves, who occupied the territories of the Byzantine empire in bygone days. Moreover, it constitutes the point of reference of all the Orthodox peoples that received enlightenment from the Mother Church of Constantinople. Hagia Sophia, just like every monument of such prestige, does not belong to a specific state entity; it belongs to the whole world (oecumene), just as the values of Civilization are ecumenical.

Turkey by converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque unquestionably chooses the reorientation of its foreign policy and its actual placement increasingly further away from its European course. The President of Turkey is debunking the key choices of the “father of the Turks”, Kemal Ataturk, claiming for himself the role of the “father of the Muslims”, adopting the most hardcore, anachronistic and overly pious positions of the extreme Islamic circles of his country.

The conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque violates the principles of religious freedom, the spirit and terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, by which the state of Turkey was founded, but also the decisions of UNESCO. The new use of the monument will no longer permit the highlighting of its mosaics of unique artistic value and the existence of the Christian symbols incorporated into the building. Furthermore, the attempt to conceal them evokes multiple questions concerning their safe preservation.

However, besides the historical and cultural value of Hagia Sophia, there is also the theological dimension. When the Parthenon, this supreme monument of Hellenic classical antiquity, ascribed architecturally the dialectic relation between heaven and earth, God and men, it placed God in the centre and positioned the people, in the form of columns, in the colonnade perimetrically. An encircled wall, which essentially reflected the inaccessible and the chasm of heaven and earth, of God and men, separated God and men. Christianity brought to prominence a new structural and architectural perspective to the dialectic relation between heaven and earth, between God and men, consistent to His theology.

Everything inside the church of Hagia Sophia, the architectural concept and its materialization, the tessellated and other ornamentations reflect and proclaim the Christian doctrine of Divine Incarnation, of the Incarnation of the Word, the Wisdom of God. The luminous dome, symbol of heaven, supports and embraces everything, just as God's infinite love supports and embraces man, the culmination of the reception of earth by heaven and the transcendence in Christ of the ancient Hellenic chasm between heaven and earth. In its dome, the Pantocrator, depicted and visible, gazes towards earth receptively; with a numberless opening and breadth, all of Creation and with an architectural space-time calls all the people. In the apse of the sanctuary, which like a ladder unites heaven with earth, the depiction of the Virgin Mary, holding the Infant Christ, proclaims the medium, by which this union, the Divine Incarnation, was realized.

Hagia Sophia was delivered to us by its creators as the supreme architectural and pictorial expression of Christian Theology. Its conversion to an Islamic mosque takes away this identity, it distorts the function and the overall aesthetic of the monument and at the same time, it "entraps" the worship of Islam in a space with theological and aesthetic presuppositions that are alien to it.

As Christian theologians, we do not forget that God "does not live in temples made by man". However, such an aggressive intervention of domination of Islamic symbolism in an emblematic monument of a city, which was the place of cohabitation of many ethnic and religious groups, forebodes, with religion as the axis, a wave of intolerant conflict and hatred among people who, regardless of religion, constitute, just like edifices, an inviolate temple of God.