

Dođru söyleyeni dokuz köyden kovarlar.

1971-2021

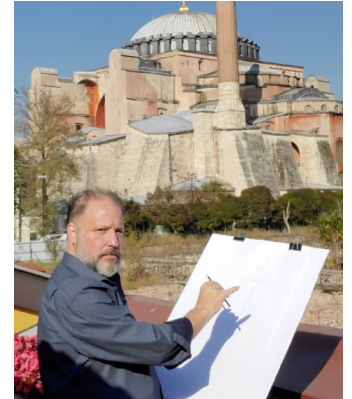


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The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

-Maya Angelou

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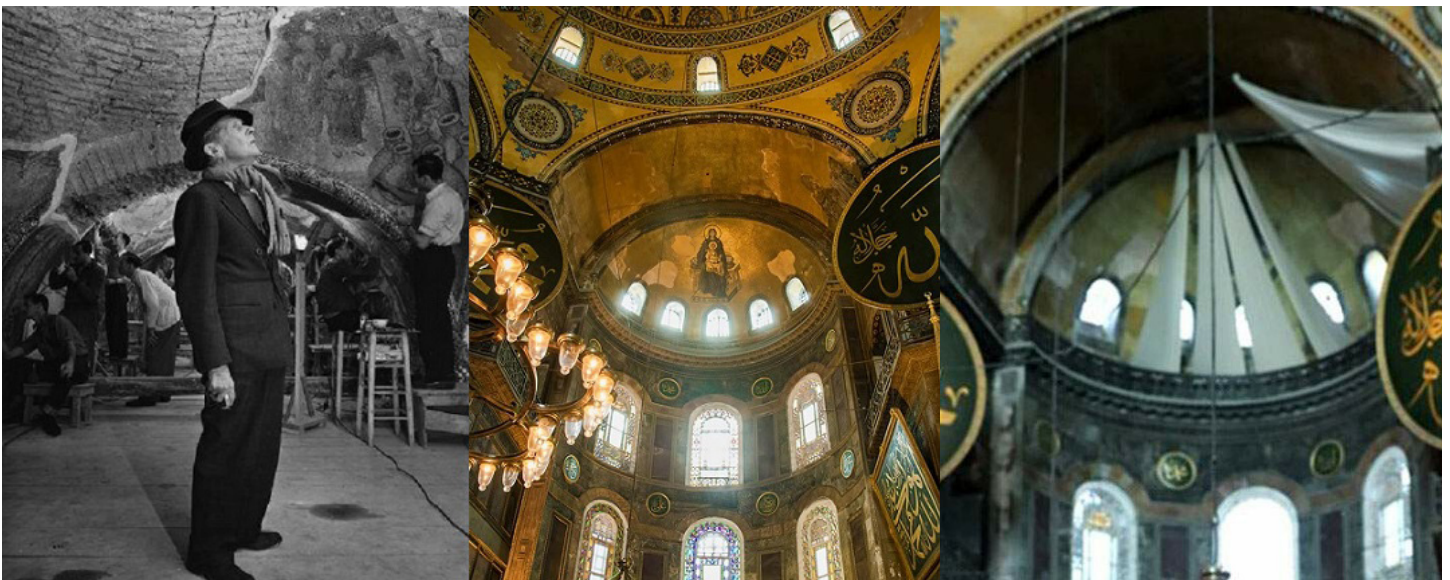


The author Archon Elias Damianakis *seeks to enlighten, educate, and inspire the reader to challenge conventional thinking to break the shackles which holds man back, making him a slave to a system of corruption which separates and controls our thoughts by keep us in a mental haze of social unawareness and growing ignorance.*

Justice delayed is justice denied. Fifty years of delay is fifty years of denied justice.

Inasmuch as there appears a real need of an appeal, our religious rights are encroached upon in Turkey. Recent equally worrying, unjust, and prejudicial actions by Turkish President Erdogan in the last year (2020) have raised serious concerns. Several conversions of historic Christian monuments which served as museums in some cases for nearly a century transferred from cultural agencies to religious authority and converted into mosques. A few examples are the monuments of the “Great Agia Sophia” in Constantinople, Agia Sophia -Nicaea, Agia Sophia -Trebizond, and Holy Trinity -Konya, the largest Armenian church in Asia Minor was converted into a Turkish cultural center in December 2020.

To further exacerbate the situation, magnificent artworks have been covered up in Chora, Agia Sophia and elsewhere. Whereas in other “Byzantine museum mosques” the artworks are visible like Pantocratora (Zeyrek Mosque) Pammakaristos (Fethiye Mosque) and several others scattered throughout the city. Is this simply pandering to one’s constituents, bloviating to one’s perceived enemies or is there a more sinister intent? These cheap political acts and factional comments such as “This is an internal Turkish concern” are reminiscent of former dictators and are beneath the dignity of our friends in Turkey.



1931 Thomas Whittemore

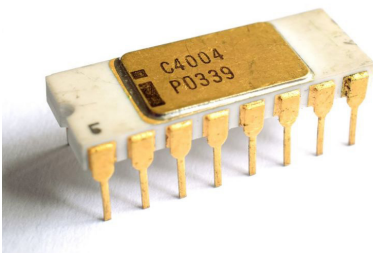
Today



Consider how far we have come in last fifty years.

In 1971, human achievements around the world reached new heights:

- NASA's Apollo 14 mission to the Moon was launched.
- Soviet Union launches first space station, Salyut 1, into low Earth orbit.
- Mariner 9 becomes the first spacecraft to orbit another planet.
- Women are granted the right to vote in Switzerland
- Greenpeace formally comes into existence.
- Intel releases world's first microprocessor, the 4004.
- Texas Instruments releases the first pocket calculator.
- The first ever email was sent.



BACK IN 1971

WHAT THINGS COST

A first class stamp	\$0.06
A gallon of gas	\$0.36
A dozen eggs	\$0.53
A gallon of milk	\$1.18
A movie ticket	\$1.65

U.S. PRESIDENT

Richard Nixon

TECHNOLOGY

Ray Tomlinson invented internet based email.

Intel releases world's first microprocessor, the 4004.

Texas Instruments releases the first pocket calculator.

FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

\$1.60

AN HOUR

'70s SLANG

Psyche! - Just kidding

Far Out! - Cool

Dream On - Unrealistic

Right On! - In agreement

Can You Dig It? - Do you understand?

IN THE NEWS...

The New York Times begins to publish sections of the Pentagon Papers, showing that the US Government had been lying to the American people.

Amtrak is created to provide US inter city passenger train services.

Federal Express is started by Fred Smith.

The first soft contact lens became available commercially in the U.S.

The first Starbucks opens at the Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington.

The Walt Disney World theme park opens in Florida.

IN THEATERS...

The Owl and the Pussycat

Summer of '42

Ryan's Daughter

The Aristocats

Love Story

ON THE RADIO...

1. Joy to the World - Three Dog Night
2. Reason to Believe - Rod Stewart
3. I Feel the Earth Move - Carole King
4. One Bad Apple - The Osmonds
5. How Can You Mend a Broken Heart - Bee Gees

ON Television...

All My Children

Mary Tyler Moore

McCloud

The Odd Couple

The Partridge Family

IN Style...

WOMEN

Polyester

Flared trousers

Platform shoes

Farrah Fawcett Flicks

MEN

V-neck velour shirts

Turtlenecks

Chest hair • Sideburns

Afros • Mulletts



Correspondingly, in 1971 the Turkish Republic forcibly closed the historic Theological School of Halki. A site founded by Photios in the 9th century and converted into preeminent Orthodox center of higher education in 1844. Prior to the Universities of Paris (1875), Geneva (1872), Dublin (1854), and Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (1847)... In fact the University of Notre Dame received its charter from Indiana in 1844. Yet Turkey deems fit to keep Halki Theological School closed.

50 years on, Orthodox are still denied the right to educate clergy in Turkey.



Halki Theological School functioned and produced the world's most eminent theologians, many Patriarchs, international Archbishops and even saints. Alumni such as the current Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who graduated in 1961, Archbishop Iakovos (1926-30), Saint Raphael of Brooklyn (1879-86) and St. Chrysostom of Smyrna (1884-90).



Still closed half a century after the tragic decision of the Turkish government in 1971 to forcibly shutter the school compels all freedom loving peoples to evoke voices from the past.

Let us take a stroll down memory lane, and revisit historical precedents that are important to religious freedom. We begin in the fourth century where Britannica states the:

Edict of Milan proclamation that permanently established religious toleration for Christianity within the Roman Empire. It was the outcome of a political agreement concluded in Mediolanum (modern Milan) between the Roman emperors Constantine I and Licinius in February 313. The proclamation, made for the East by Licinius in June 313, granted all persons freedom to worship whatever deity they pleased, assured Christians of legal rights (including the right to organize churches), and directed the prompt return to Christians of confiscated property.



In 626 AD the Prophet Muhammad sent a message to the monks of Saint Catherine in Mount Sinai which guaranteed to protect the rights of Christians. It is worth quoting at length:



This is a message written by Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, far and near, we are behind them. Verily, I defend them by myself, the servants, the helpers, and my followers, because Christians are my citizens, and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be changed from their jobs, nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses. Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet.

Verily, they [Christians] are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, this is not to take place without her own wish. She is not to be prevented from going to her church to pray. Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nation is to disobey this covenant till the Day of Judgment and the end of the world.

Nevertheless, these rights and privileges, afforded by Mohamed himself, including freedom of worship and religious organization, were and are seldom corresponded to any reality.

For example, this charter and many more privileges provided by myriads of previous Islamic rulers, do not prompt the current president of Turkey, Recep Tayep Erdogan to conform to Mohamed's teachings. The promise of liberty and justice for all citizens remains elusive.

“This is Hagia Sophia breaking away from its chains of captivity. It was the greatest dream of our youth,” Erdoğan said before the reopening. “It was the yearning of our people and it has been accomplished.”

“I see the condemnation from the Christian world as meaningless...”

-Congregant Haghia Sophia

7/24/20 theguardian.com/



A thousand years after Mohammed's covenant with Christians, in the new world, old ambitions continue to formulate. Nearly two centuries after the fall of Roman Empire and conquest of Constantinople (1453), in 1635 -Rhode Island becomes the first colony in the new world founded with no established church and the first state to grant religious freedom to everyone.

Isaac Backus' 1773 appeal still resonates today:



“The true liberty of man is, to know, obey and enjoy his Creator, and to do all the good unto, and enjoy all the happiness with and in his fellow-creatures that he is capable of; in order to which the law of love was written in his heart, which carries in its nature union and benevolence to Being in general, and to each being in particular, according to its nature and excellency, and to its relation and connection to and with the supreme Being, and ourselves...”

Now how often have we been told that he is not a freeman but a slave, whose person and goods are not at his own but another's disposal? And should the higher powers appear to deal with temporal oppressors according to their deserts, it would seem strange indeed, if those who have suffered intolerably by them, should employ all their art and power to conceal them, and so to prevent their being brought to justice! But how is our world filled with such madness... spiritual tyrants!”

In eighteenth century Europe, the tide of religious tolerance began to sway as well with the 1781 Patent and 1782 Edict of Tolerance in the Hapsburg Monarchy which granted religious freedom to the Lutherans, Calvinists, Serbian Orthodox and eventually the Jewish population.

Soon thereafter in 1791 the First Amendment was adopted as part of the United States Constitution which guarantees freedoms concerning religion, expression, assembly, and the right to petition.

One does not advocate religious freedom only for doctrines with which we agree.

Case in point, Joseph Smith, who in 1844 wrote:

Asia was not immune to intolerance



“The history of Russia is the history of a country that colonizes itself.”

“This phrase, first coined by the historian Sergei Solov’ev in the 1840s” and was based on Russian intolerance of Buddhism and central Asian religions, glazing over the Amritsar Massacre and other atrocities...

“It becomes our duty on account of this intolerance and corruption—the inalienable right of man being to think as he pleases, worship as he pleases..., being the first law of everything that is sacred—to guard every ground all the days of our lives... Nothing can reclaim the human mind from its ignorance, bigotry, superstition, etc., but those grand and sublime principles of equal rights and universal freedom to all men.

Let us from henceforth drive from us every species of intolerance. Hence in all governments or political transactions a man’s religious opinions should never be called in question.”

In an honest and morally good way, in 1844, in what was still known as Constantinople, the high principled declaration of His Highness the Sultan Abdulmejid “The Edict of Toleration” makes international news by declaring:

***“Hence-forward neither shall
Christianity be insulted
in my dominion nor shall
Christians be
in any way
persecuted for their religion.”***





The 1872 Constantinopolitan Synod declared:

“We renounce, censure and condemn phyletism, that is racial discrimination, ethnic feuds, hatreds and dissensions within the Church of Christ, as contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and the holy canons of our blessed fathers which support the holy Church and the entire Christian world, embellish it and lead it to divine godliness.”



Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimos VI



This hard-secured moral and ethical right -hundreds of years under Ottoman rule- has not translated into a modern moral imperative that is recognized by Turkish Republic as being, fair and just. Religious Freedom is non-negotiable. This is somewhat surprising considering the concept of fairness remains a central pillar of Turkish cultural identity.

Why have we abandoned our brothers and sisters having forgone personal duty and accountability for the cause of religious freedom? Getting equal opportunities falls to only to Christians in Turkey having to raise the issue with their homeland government, rather than having an expectation of being treated fairly. It is regrettable, an Orthodox Christian must endeavor to be heard in Turkey, struggle for their rights, labor for what, should be.

“Turkey is officially a secular country with no official religion since the constitutional amendment in 1928 and later strengthened by Atatürk's Reforms and the appliance of laicism by the country's founder and first president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on 5 February 1937.”

Unfortunately the “Justice” and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey has passed a condemnation verdict on Orthodox Christians, yes even upon those of us beyond Turkey's territorial borders. This verdict is counter to the Koran's teachings about "People of the Book."

Justice is abused in modern Turkey and justice is overdue.

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly defines freedom of religion and belief in a “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” adopted as follows:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance. (Article 18)

One hundred and fifty years after this declaration, part of the fabric of our shared values and society is still blockaded. Half a century of obstruction by Turkey, to a worthy institution and her people is unjust by any measure.

Even if we ruminate the circumstances by worldly standards the historical importance, artistic treasures, and culture identity housed at the Halki Theological School manifests an international spiritual inheritance and the forced closure a tragic chapter in human history.

Our common and shared spiritual inheritance requires attention. Its vitality and importance are under siege and some attempt to put out the light. Orthodoxy’s “portion of goods” (meros tis ousias) cries for justice. “Oppression is a cruel and unjust exercise of power. Minorities were historically subject to oppression by those in power and, unfortunately, oppression still exists today” and Halki Theological School is just the tip of the iceberg for Orthodox in modern Turkey.



Recently the Ecumenical Patriarch said “This year marks the 49th anniversary since the imposed suspension of the operations of the Department of Theology of our School. Unfortunately, the efforts made by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the calls of high-profile individuals in politics and society around the world for the reopening of the School have not borne fruit, despite occasional positive signs. We carry on hoping and fighting. On Mount Hope, hope never disappears! We know that our God blesses and strengthens our efforts,” he said.

The Ecumenical Patriarch added, “We pray to the omniscient Lord, to give all of us the joy of the reopening of the School, to be able to hear the sweet sound of the bell, to invite the new students to the courses of the teachers, to invite them to study theology. But all that in a world, where theology must dialogue and the Church must give a good witness, contributing to its transformation.”

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is not simply “an internal” affair for the Turkish Republic. The Ecumenical Patriarchate’s international headship, privileges, and obligations are millennia in the making and are not defined by the will of any temporary public servant.



The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reported:



Religious minorities in Turkey expressed concerns that governmental rhetoric and policies contributed to an increasingly hostile environment and implicitly encouraged acts of societal aggression and violence. Government officials and politicians continued to propagate expressions of anti-Semitism and hate speech, and no progress was made during the year to repeal Turkey’s blasphemy law or to provide an alternative to mandatory military service and permit conscientious objection. Many longstanding issues concerning religious sites, such as the inability of the Greek Orthodox community to train clergy at the Halki Seminary, remained unresolved.

There is hope. It is found in our hearts, and on a hill.

We are living through a radical moment in history when the public is questioning how our society values the social and religious liberty of minorities. Devotion necessitates “Peace-and-Justice.” God instructs us to work together, “Love thy neighbor,” Inshallah!

My Turkish friends, Lafla peynir gemisi yürümez.

OPEN THE HALKI THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, NOW.

What the world needs most,
to tell and investigate today are humanity's basic fears:
the fear of being left outside, and
the fear of counting for nothing, and
the feelings of worthlessness that come with such fears;
the collective humiliations, vulnerabilities, slights, grievances, sensitivities,
and insults, and the nationalist boasts and inflations that are fears next of kin...

— Paraphrased Orhan Pamuk, Nobel Lecture

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