

## **Regarding Ayasofia (Hagia Sophia), the Mosque of Cordoba (Cathedral of Cordoba), and others**

**by Gernot Galib Stanfel**

Currently, there is a lack of thinking in terms of grand gestures. History is irreversible, and its outcomes are as well. The fact that the former church Hagia Sophia in Istanbul became a mosque and remained so for centuries is simply the course of time. The same applies to the mosque in Cordoba, which was converted into a Catholic cathedral. Both buildings, aside from their world-historical significance in architecture and art, were primarily constructed as places of worship. Without this purpose, they have lost their true meaning, and the overall context of their existence is no longer in harmony.

It is, therefore, obvious to use them in their original sense. In Cordoba, Catholic Christians do so, but Muslims are forbidden to pray there. In Istanbul, no prayers take place in Ayasofia. In both cases, members of the religion of the original builders, who are now in the absolute minority in both cities, cannot pray there. Of course, the use by the majority religion for a large majority of the population is crucial.

However, a moment of great thinking in our time would be to make these two places, the Mosque of Cordoba and Ayasofia, located at opposite ends of the Mediterranean, primarily usable as places of prayer for the majority religion, but also for the original builders, who now belong to a respective minority religion. The dedicated space in each building can certainly be smaller for the minority religion. This means that the Mosque of Cordoba would remain primarily a cathedral, a space in front of the qibla, but Muslims would use it. And Ayasofia would return to being a mosque, with the right part with the mosaics being used by Christians. This can be made possible in both buildings, both architecturally and organizationally.

This would be an outstanding visionary project, in a time with a new approach to diversity, without undoing tradition and history. The states of Spain and Turkey could, through a project connecting them across the Mediterranean, set a milestone for the future, also for other places of similar significance. This could counter small-minded backward thinking with a grand vision for the future.