Metropolitan Hilarion: For the Orthodox Church, Hagia Sophia church is the same as St. Peter's Cathedral for the Catholics

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, at a request of Associated Press, makes comments on the decision of the Turkish authorities to change the status of Hagia Sophia Cathedral in Istanbul.

'It is with deep regret that we have taken today's decision to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque. This church was built in the 7th century and was dedicated to Christ the Saviour. For us it was, is and always will be a church dedicated to Christ, and we sincerely regret that this decision has been adopted now. From our point of view, this decision violates the fragile interreligious and inter-confession balance that has been achieved in today's world; it is a blow to the entire world Orthodoxy.

I think that the Turkish leaders did realize what impression this decision would make on the whole Orthodox world, but the reaction of Orthodox people has been ignored. For the Orthodox Church Hagia Sophia is the same as St. Peter's Cathedral is for the Catholics'.

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