

At Capitol Hill reception for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, faith, nation and the “American Dream” take center stage



In a room filled with political figures, church leaders, and supporters of the Greek Orthodox faith, a grand reception on Tuesday night honored His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Foundation and Archon John S. Koudounis. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America accompanied His All-Holiness alongside members of the Holy Eparchial Synod.

The gathering drew a prominent audience, with Representative Gus Bilirakis introducing Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, who delivered one of the evening's keynote addresses.

The program, bridging themes of faith, heritage and national identity, placed the Ecumenical Patriarch's spiritual message in dialogue with Speaker Johnson's reflections on America's constitutional foundations.

Johnson, who earlier in the day welcomed His All-Holiness to Capitol Hill, tied the occasion to Constitution Day. September 17, he noted, marks the anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Calling it "the longest-existing and the shortest Constitution on the planet," he described the document as "divinely inspired" and inseparable from the nation's spiritual grounding.

"Our rights do not come from a king," Johnson said, emphasizing the Declaration of Independence's language of God-given rights. "They don't come from the state, from the government. They come from God himself." He praised the Orthodox Church for upholding what he called "eternal truths" that formed the foundation of the United States. America, he added, was in need of "spiritual renewal" — something he argued faith leaders like the Ecumenical Patriarch could help foster.

Taking the podium next, His All-Holiness reflected on the experience of Greek Orthodox faithful in the U.S. and their role in shaping and expanding the American dream. Earlier in the day, he had toured a forthcoming exhibition on the American Dream at the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream, which he described as "an inspirational exploration of what this blessed nation offers to its people."

"As we look around this magnificent room, we see in the faces of our beloved Greek Orthodox faithful the fulfillment of the American dream," the Ecumenical Patriarch said. He spoke of the "fusion" of Hellenic intellect and Orthodox spirituality, and of the ways in which Greek Americans have embraced and transformed America's national narrative.

"For America is as much a nation of immigrants as it is anything," he said, framing the American dream as both fragile and resilient, "rising up in the collective consciousness of the good people of this great nation to ever widen its reach."

He argued that the U.S. Greek Orthodox community has a catalytic presence, helping "their fellow patriots to rise to their God-given capacities." The Ecumenical Patriarch closed with a blessing for the nation: "God bless America."

The evening underscored both the Orthodox Church's centuries-old traditions and the ongoing search for common values in American civic life.

Also in attendance were Representative Nicole Malliotakis; Representative Jimmy Patronis; Deputy Secretary of State Mike Rigas; Ambassador-Designee of the U.S. to Greece Kimberly Guilfoyle; Former Representative John Sarbanes; Vassilis Kikilia, Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy for Greece; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Alexandra Papadopoulou; Ambassador of Greece to the U.S. Ekaterini Nassika; Ambassador of Cyprus to the U.S. Evangelos Savva; and officials of prominent Hellenic American organizations.

Photo by Orthodox Observer/Brittainy Newman

orthodoxobserver.org