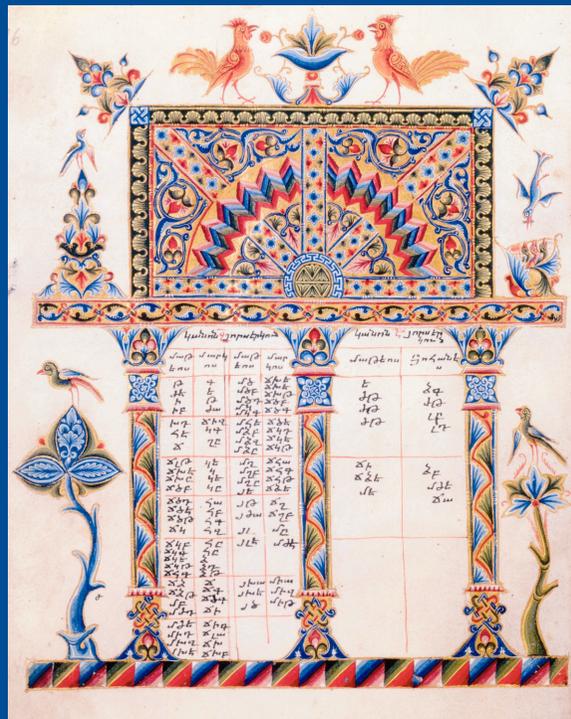


«ԲԱՆ ԵՒ ԳԻՐ» ՄԱՏԵՆԱՀԱՐ ԹԻՒ 6

ARAM I

# DIALOGUE WITH THE YOUTH



# DIALOGUE AVEC LES JEUNES

Traduction française par

Daniel Racine

MONTREAL 2009



**Copyright 2009**

by the Armenian Prelacy of Canada  
All Rights Reserved

Published by  
the Armenian Prelacy of Canada  
3401 Olivar-Asselin  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada  
Prelate, Archbishop Khajag Hagopian

Library and Archives of Canada  
His Holiness Aram I Keshishian  
Dialogue with the Youth / Dialogue avec les jeunes  
English with French translation  
Publication Date: September 1, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-9737550-2-2

«ԲԱՆ ԵՒ ԳԻՐ» ՄԱՏԵՆԱՀԱՐ ԹԻՒ 6

ARAM I

**DIALOGUE WITH THE YOUTH**

Traduction française par

**Daniel Racine**

**DIALOGUE AVEC LES JEUNES**

**MONTREAL 2009**

**The Maecenases**



*Mrs. Diana Hadjetian*

Who donated graciously in the memory of her beloved husband

**Dicran Hadjetian**



*Mrs. Karen Kazandjian*



*Mr. and Mrs. Garo and Lena Posdadjian*



*Mr. and Mrs. Haroutioun and Salpi Varjabedian*



*Mr. and Mrs. Hagop and Anahid Amirian*



*Dr. and Mrs. Barouyr and Catherine Toukhmanian*

## IN LIEU OF A FOREWORD

Throughout past centuries and various societies marking human existence, the youth has been and continues to be the lifeblood of nations. Youth is a force that revolutionizes life and mentality, renews culture and art, and puts in motion ideals and ideologies.

The planned, harmonious interplay between society and youth has brought forth some of mankind's greatest ideas and achievements. Yet, there have been—and will surely be in the future—generational and ideological conflicts, especially when the new generation is impatient and has no time to test-trial its ideas, while the old, scared stiff because of the uncertainty of those new ideas, remains perched on its conservatism. Nevertheless, no barriers ever erected before youth and progress have stood long. Youth is mankind's continuously regenerating future.

We believe in our youth. We wish that they play an even greater role in all spheres of our Church life.

His Holiness Catholicos Aram I has proclaimed 2009 the "Year of the Youth."

In the past years, His Holiness has been promoting a series of conversations entitled "Dialogue with the Youth". He has done so because of his conviction that a well-prepared and conscious youth only can be active and fruitful in the life of the Church.

On the occasion of the "Year of the Youth" the Religious Council of our Prelacy has decided to collect all those dialogues written in English and, along with their French translations, publish them in the form of a booklet to make it available for our youth.

Naturally, His Holiness had not written these dialogues with their publication in mind. They were rather open-hearted remarks on various occasions and about various topics, to be shared with the youth in the form of an intimate conversation.

We believe that this publication will be of an important

bridge between the youth and the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church.

The French translation was done by Mr. Daniel Racine, former French Educational Services Supervisor of Montreal's Sourp Hagop Armenian School, and the editing was undertaken by Reverend Fr. Karnig Koyounian, pastor of the Sourp Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church of Montreal.

May God bless all the people who were involved in the publication of this booklet.

Prayerfully

**ARCHBISHOP KHAJAG HAGOPIAN**

Prelate

# **DIALOGUE WITH THE YOUTH**



## **For a life-centered spirituality** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 1)*

We lived the last days of 2004 confronting an unprecedented disaster caused by nature. This tragedy comes to add to the burden human beings and particularly youth are facing as a result of man-made tragedies, like wars, violence, poverty, unemployment, and a sense of meaninglessness and uncertainty. These are times when people question, pray and yearn for spirituality.

Indeed, spirituality is a frequently and widely used word today, a word employed in different contexts and with different connotations. In Christian life, spirituality means being with God.

Being with God... Is this not the very meaning and purpose of Christian life? Is this not the way a Christian should live his or her life? God became man in Jesus of Nazareth in order to be with us. The evangelist describes Jesus Christ as Emmanuel, which means God with us. In fact, in Christ God became a man with us, like us and for us in order to restore His fallen image in human beings. Through the incarnation, by becoming man, God recovered the authentic humanity in the human beings. In Christ God became the true life of the world.

Christian spirituality invites us to acknowledge Christ in word and deed as the center of our life. Christian spirituality challenges us to follow Jesus Christ as the only way of our life.

Christian spirituality is life-centered. It is rooted in Christ. The Christ-event is the recreation of life. Hence, whoever is in Christ, he or she is endowed with a new quality of life, with the “abundant life”, the “eternal life” (John 1: 16).

What are the significant features of a life-centered spirituality?

1. It values life as God’s gift. The existence of life on this planet is not a sheer accident. For centuries the human mind has failed to understand the origin of life. The Bible clearly affirms that God is the creator of life in all its forms and expressions.

2. It perceives life as God centered. Being the gift of God, life must be lived as a God-centered reality. A human-centered life is the rejection of God; and a life without God is a source of evil.

3. It considers the values and principles revealed through Christ as the purpose of human life. The human being is called to live his life for the promotion of love, justice, peace, unity, reconciliation and other values of the Kingdom of God.

4. It upholds life as a sacred reality. The sacredness of life pertains to its very nature since life comes from God and is owned by God. Therefore, any attempt aimed at corrupting the sacredness of life and undermining its integrity and dignity is a sin against God.

For Christians, a life-centered spirituality must undergird human reflection and action. Life-centered spirituality must guide our lives in a world full of life-destroying forces. In this context I want to draw your attention to the following:

a) *Globalization*, in all its aspects, manifestations and implications, has become integral to our daily life. Our individual and community life are strongly impacted by the values and forces of globalization. This means that we must discern those values that enhance life, and challenge those forces of globalization that destroy identity, morality and community.

b) *Violence*, in different forms and ways, has become omnipresent in our societies. It touches all aspects and areas of our life. Violence is the negation of God's gift of life. The Christian way is active non-violence. Life-centered spirituality rejects any way of life or form of action that generates violence.

c) *Pluralism* has become an important feature of modern societies. People of different religions, races and cultures are living together. I consider this living together both as a gift of God and a task. In this small globe we are bound to live together, and therefore, must learn to respect our differences and accept and trust each other. We must live as one community, preserving at the same time our own religious, cultural and human values and traditions.

Life-centered spirituality challenges the Christian to *turn to God* whoever, whatever or wherever he or she is. The world in which we live is full of life destroying forces. Some of these forces are due to ecological disorder, and others to moral and spiritual disorder, namely to human sin.

Millions of people lose their lives each year because of the AIDS pandemic; millions of children die because of poverty; millions of people are killed each year due to natural disasters. We are all shocked watching on our television screens the horrible images of people, men and women, children and elderly, dying in Africa because of genocide, AIDS and malnutrition; or in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Bangkok because of the Tsunami disaster.

Human beings, who are endowed by God's gift of life, are destroying everyday and everywhere, life itself in its human and ecological manifestations. Life as a supreme gift of God must be respected, preserved and enhanced. This is basic in our Christian faith.

It is my expectation, that our youth will sustain and enrich their lives by the spirituality that is rooted in the Bible, and experienced and witnessed for centuries by the church. The world of today offers many kinds of "spiritualities" with attractive names. Our youth are called to neglect the kind of false "spiritualities" that cause moral decay, endanger identity, and destroy community. Our youth must reject the kinds of "spiritualities" that abuse religious principles and promote violence and death.

The Armenian Church, with its rich spiritual heritage and moral teachings, can offer a life-centered spirituality to our youth, as they prepare themselves to become the future leaders of our church and people.

On the eve of the New Year and Christmas, I wanted to share these few reflections with our youth. This is not a formal message but the beginning of a frank dialogue with our youth. I consider dialoging with the youth of crucial importance for the future of our church and nation. Therefore, I would like to continue this dialogue with our youth by addressing, from time to time, issues, challenges and concerns pertaining to the present day societies in general, and the Armenian Church and community, in particular.

Prayerfully  
**Aram I**  
**Catholicos of Cilicia**  
December 2004  
Antelias - Lebanon

## **For a quality of life sustained by values** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 2)*

In my first dialogue with the youth early this year, I emphasized the vital importance of spirituality for human life. In this second dialogue, I would like to underscore the centrality of **values** that must undergird and orient the life and work, the reflection and action of a human being.

While science deals with the various aspects, dimensions and manifestations of life, it cannot provide proper answers to questions pertaining to the purpose of life. Life comes from God. According to the Bible, which constitutes the basis of our Christian faith, God is the Creator of life both in its rational and irrational dimensions (Gen. 1: 1-27). The Bible clearly states that God has created human beings in a special way by endowing them with “His image” (Gen. 1: 27) and giving them a special vocation within the created order. What does this mean?

First, the “*image of God*” must not be understood literally. Basically, it means rationality, the ability to take decisions. It means moral consciousness, the ability to choose between bad and good. It also means the privilege of entering into communion with God. The “*image of God*” is, therefore, the unique mark of a human being. It differentiates humans from the other creatures.

Second, human beings have also been granted by God with a *special mission* to be His representative in this world, the guardian of His household, the steward of His creation (Gen. 1: 28). What a distinctive privilege; what a blessing given to humanity!

These God-given privileges have concrete implications:

a) Human beings should live their lives in total *obedience* to the Creator. Their entire life and work should be sustained by an obedient and humble response to God for His gift of life.

b) Life is not the *possession* of human beings; it belongs to God and must be directed towards God. Human beings must live their lives with this profound awareness and strong commitment.

c) This awareness generates *responsibility* vis-à-vis life and God,

the source and the owner of our lives. We must live our lives in a way that pleases God. We must enrich our lives with the kinds of deeds and thoughts that clearly articulate the sacredness of life and our faithfulness to this God-given vocation.

d) With this responsibility comes *accountability*. As stewards of God's creation, we are accountable to Him. The time for accountability will not come only at the end of our earthly existence, but also on the day of final judgment. We should be ready to give account for our life and deeds each day of our worldly life.

Hence, human life must be strongly supported by those values that give quality and purpose to human existence and allow human beings to fulfill their God-given vocation. Without values human life will lose its quality, its proper meaning and importance. What are these values that must govern our personal and community life?

1) *Spiritual values*. Humans are not only physical beings. They are essentially spiritual beings. Their existence is not merely determined by physical factors and concerns but also by spiritual feelings and goals. There is something in human beings that goes beyond their physical existence in time and space. All religions depict in different ways, this transcendental element which constitutes the specificity of human creatures and their essential identity. Values, such as, pre-eminence of non-material values, drive for transcendence, centrality of the divine in human life, etc. are fundamental. The role of the church is precisely to form our children and youth with these spiritual values, as well as to promote these values in the daily life of the people.

2) *Moral values*. Humans are also moral beings. The sense of moral responsibility is integral to their very nature. Spiritual and moral values are closely interrelated; they condition and enrich each other. The Bible is a living source of moral values. Love, compassion, helping the others, overcoming violence, etc. are at the heart of moral values. One can discern these values in the teachings, parables and miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must bear in mind that Christianity as a religion is not founded on a set of rules and teachings. It is a way of life guided by moral values; it is a quality of life anchored

on the very life and mission of Christ.

3) *Human values.* These pan-human values are included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contain the dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. They also refer to the principles of justice, freedom and peace as the foundation of human society. Values pertaining to human rights are fundamental for a dignified human life as an individual and as part of a community. Any society that is not governed by these basic human values will be dominated by oppression, alienation and conflict.

4) *Community values.* By these values I understand those values peculiar to the Armenian Nation. These values are articulated through our faith, traditions and culture. They constitute the cornerstone of our identity. Besides our Armenian-Christian values, a true Armenian is called to embrace also all these values referred to above. To lose one of them is to lose all of them since they are intimately inter-connected.

Every human being has an ethnic, religious, social or cultural identity. The identity of a person makes him part of a community or a nation. In spite of growing globalization and disappearance of all sorts of fences and boundaries, the sense of identity will always remain strong as a refuge against the forces of globalization. One cannot deny his or her roots. In Diaspora we have become integral to ethnic, religious, cultural and social specificities of our environments. This is unavoidable and even indispensable. In the midst of diversities we must remain firmly attached to our heritage, to our own traditions, values and particularities. This is not the denial of our local identity; it is rather enriching it by our original identity and strengthening our own roots by values of our specific context.

The question is: how can we integrate in our society and yet not lose who we are? How do we keep our Armenian identity in a globalized world, and, at the same time, keep pace with the process of globalization? In the diaspora, we have been able to live as communities and keep our history, traditions and culture alive through church, schools, clubs, community centers and community-related

activities. We have inherited rich spiritual, social, and moral values through our Christian faith.

At a time when people are searching for meaning in life, spiritual experience and values that will guide their lives, we must uphold and promote the basic spiritual and moral values common to all religions and cultures.

In a world dominated by value destroying forces, as Armenians we must rediscover the rich values of our Armenian Christian faith.

In environments overwhelmed by ideologies of hate and violence, we must reaffirm those values which generate compassion and tolerance and respect for human life.

This is how we can build the quality of life.

Our youth are called upon to aim for a value-centered and value-oriented life by articulating it in all aspects of their lives: in the family, in the church, in the school and in the public.

I invite our youth to reflect seriously on these issues and challenges.

Prayerfully  
**Aram I**  
**Catholicos of Cilicia**  
August 2005  
Antelias - Lebanon

**Jesus Christ: the liberator**  
*(Dialogue with the youth — Number 3)*

This year, in my Pontifical Christmas Message to our people I focused on the theme of liberation. I would like, in the context of this fourth dialogue, to share some of my reflections with our youth.

The concept of liberation is at the heart of the Holy Bible. The Old Testament is the history of the expectation of the Messiah, and the New Testament the history of the coming of the Messiah. However, the people of the Old Testament believe that Messiah would come to liberate them from slavery, and restore their political kingdom in Jerusalem; while in the New Testament the Son of God comes to liberate the entire humanity from the slavery of sin and establish God's kingdom in the world.

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is, therefore, the enfolding of God's gift of liberation. Jesus perceives His earthly mission essentially as one of liberation. Hence, it is not by accident that Christ embarks on His mission by reading that chapter from the prophet Isaiah where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4: 18-19). It is significant that after reading this passage Jesus affirms that "Today this scripture is fulfilled" (Luke 4: 21).

We must look at the Christ-event from this perspective, and grasp the very meaning and implications of Christ's miracles, parables and teachings in light of God's engagement to liberate humanity. Salvation, which is the core of the New Testament, means liberation. Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise because of their sin. The purpose of Christ's mission was to liberate human beings by restoring to them God's fallen image and making them the adopted children of God. Christ would achieve the liberation of human beings by His cross.

As we turn once again to Bethlehem, let us greet in the incarnate Son of God our true liberator; a liberator who has made history;

a liberator who is always ready to liberate each of us from our own slavery today. Christ is Emmanuel, which means God-with-us.

– Christ is with us to liberate each of us from our own *self*. Our self can be our greatest enemy, for, by concentrating on our own self, we enslave ourselves. Because God is both the cause of our existence and the purpose of our lives, we have no right to live our lives according to our own desires and designs. A self-centered life rejects God. By living a God-centered life, we will live life properly. As an individual, as part of a family, and as a member of a community, we must live our lives with a sense of responsibility and accountability.

– Christ is with us to liberate each of us from the slavery of *law*. As an instrument of organizing and governing society, law can liberate. However, it can also enslave. Law which enslaves is a source of evil. Referring to the codified religious laws of the old dispensation, the Apostle says: “We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Romans 7:6). With His blood, Christ saved us from the captivity of the old law. Law which liberates is sustained by moral and human values and promotes justice, peace and freedom. For Christianity, freedom is an essential ingredient of law; it is a God-given gift to humanity. But we are called to use the freedom responsibly.

– Christ is with us to liberate each of us from the slavery of *material wealth*. Spiritual and moral values constitute God’s image in human beings. Present societies, however, are dominated by material values and are governed by materialistic purposes and interests. As Christians, we must not allow material values to be at the center of our life, impacting on our way of life and our decisions. Spiritual and moral values promote the basic principles that are at the heart of our human existence and that help us to lead a purpose-driven life.

– Christ is with us to liberate each of us from the slavery of *evil*. Evil surrounds us and seizes any opportunity to approach us. When Christ was approached by evil, His response was firm: “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matthew 4: 10). Wearing different faces and using different names, evil constantly approaches us. Liberated by Christ, we

have the courage to reject evil, which may be attractive in appearance but destructive in essence. To strengthen ourselves, we must worship only Christ, our liberator.

– Christ is with us to liberate each of us from the slavery of *death*. According to the Bible, death is not only the cessation of physical existence; it is also the absence of God and the dominion of sin. God so loved the world and humanity that He sent His only begotten Son to liberate us from the bondage of sin, as states the Evangelist (John 3: 16). The Christ-event is God’s offer of “abundant” life to humanity. We are invaded in our daily life with the kinds of trends and tendencies, with the sort of ways of life and patterns of thought that make us the captives of fear and insecurity. Christ conquered the death by His cross and gave us new life.

We are living in a world full of uncertainties and anxieties. Let us remind ourselves that the Child of Bethlehem is with us, as we carry on our combat of faith and hope. Let us not forget the words of Saint Paul: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4: 9), because Christ is and will remain our Liberator.

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

January 2006

Antelias-Lebanon

## **An assembly of youth and for youth** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 4)*

I just returned from Porto Alegre, Brazil, where the World Council of Churches (WCC) had its 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The gathering of four thousand people (delegates, advisors, guests and journalists) was a landmark event in world Christendom. Through prayer, celebration, reporting, discussion and decisions, the Assembly set a new process in the life and witness of the WCC. I am sure that church historians, theologians, ecumenists and journalists will make a critical assessment of the Assembly. At a later stage, I would like to make my own evaluation of this event by identifying its challenges and vision for the future of the ecumenical movement.

With this *fourth dialogue* with the youth of the Armenian Church, I want to share some information and my perspectives pertaining to the presence of youth delegates and their participation in the Assembly and discuss with you my expectations from our youth.

In my report to the Assembly, I challenged the youth to make the Assembly a “Youth Assembly”, not only by their strong presence, but also by seeking the most efficient ways of making an impact. Further, I emphasized the crucial importance of the role that youth are impelled to play in the ecumenical movement, and called upon them to become the pioneers of a new ecumenical order, as well as the avant-garde of a new ecumenical future.

The response of the youth was positive. In fact, their commitment, participation and forward-looking vision permeated all aspects of the Assembly. In my dialogue with the youth, I reminded them that the dignity of service and not the arrogance of power must guide us, that we must look for substance and not for position, and we must be after quality and not after visibility.

This is what I have learned in this world-wide ecumenical movement and in my ministry. This is what I expect from our youth.

Now that the “Youth Assembly” is over, how can the youth make it an “Assembly for Youth” by translating its recommendations and vision into action-oriented process in the life of their churches

and the ecumenical movement at large? This is the real challenge. I hope that the youth will take this challenge courageously and responsibly.

I was very pleased to see the young delegates of our church actively and seriously involved in all spheres of the life and work of the Assembly. The intervention particularly of our two young women delegates from Los Angeles and Boston in the plenary sessions made me proud. They reminded me of my first intervention as a young delegate at the 5<sup>th</sup> Assembly, in Nairobi, in 1975. The contribution, the zeal and the seriousness of our youth give me hope for the future of the ecumenical movement and the active ecumenical role of our church.

With this strong conviction and forward-looking perspective, I want to underscore a few points.-

1. Those who are taking part in the ecumenical movement are not necessarily clergy or theologians. They come from different walks of life and with different experiences. This diversity of age, gender and expertise constitutes one of the rich expressions of the ecumenical movement. Yet, for these people, basic information about Bible, church history, the confessional communions and church families, etc. is vitally important. This background information will significantly enhance the intellectual and spiritual dialogue between people, who come from different churches and from different parts of the world, seeking the unity of church and a common Christian witness.

2. For our youth, who want to engage in the ecumenical activities, the *knowledge of the Armenian Church* is essential. I say this because I know the limited scope of the information that our youth have about their church, its history and theology, liturgy and spirituality. Representing a church means representing its doctrinal positions, theological teachings, moral principles and spiritual values. The ecumenical movement is a space where not only people but also values, traditions, experiences come together and engage in creative and mutually enriching dialogue.

3. The *ecumenical formation* of our youth must become a continuous process. By ecumenical formation I do not mean only accu-

mulation of information on ecumenical history, agenda, goals, priorities and structures, etc. By ecumenical formation I basically understand a process whereby through the acquisition of knowledge, a person is transformed and learns to look beyond the narrow boundaries of a particular church, to open up to the other churches, to different contexts and traditions, and to look at realities, issues and concerns in a broader context. Hence, ecumenical formation is a learning process.

4. Knowledge and formation are not enough if they are not undergirded by firm *commitment*. Fully equipped with the necessary tools, our youth must become active participants in the ecumenical movement. Ecumenism deals with vision. It has clear goals. Being ecumenical means being engaged in a faith-sustained and vision-driven life. Being ecumenical means being involved in struggle for the visible unity of the church and for the promotion of Gospel values.

5. Finally, ecumenism is a sort of *school*, where one always remains a student and never becomes a graduate, where one knows what and how to give and what and how to receive, when and how to talk and when and how to remain silent. Indeed, quality, commitment and vision count more in ecumenism than any other thing.

I invite the Armenian youth to engage in ecumenical life with this spirit, openness and vision.

Prayerfully  
**Aram I**  
**Catholicos of Cilicia**  
March 2006  
Antelias - Lebanon

## **The imperative of a faith-sustained life** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 5)*

This year, in my Easter message I emphasized the crucial importance of faith. I based my reflection on the following verse of St. Paul: “*Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess*” (Hebr. 4: 14). As we spiritually prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter, I would like to share briefly with our youth the following few points:

First, in its general understanding, faith is an inner drive of human being to yearn for and to have confidence in a reality that is beyond the scope of human life. The human being is a limited creature, endowed with a life marked by limitations. Therefore, the desire for a transcendental reality, in order to protect and support him, has been a permanent and salient feature of human existence from its very inception. In the course of history, each religion has identified its own object of faith, which has provided the substance, context and basis of a religion’s life, thought and vision. The object of faith could vary from religion to religion; yet faith is a basic necessity. The human being cannot live without some sort of faith.

For Christianity, faith is not a mere attachment to, or close interaction with a supernatural reality; it is a full allegiance, dependence and obedience to God. In fact, God is the source and the cause of human existence and the sustaining power of earthly life in all its forms and expressions. The true faith is a powerful force even if it is “as small as a mustard seed”, it can “move the mountain from here to there” (Mt. 17: 20).

Second, the source of our faith is the Triune God who is not a conceptual notion, an abstract idea, or an unapproachable and ungraspable essence. God is a living being, both immanent and transcendental, who has revealed Himself to humanity in history. God has revealed and communicated Himself to human beings through Jesus Christ. Therefore, faith for Christianity is of an incarnational nature. In the Nicene creed, which is recited during the eucharistic celebration after the Gospel reading, the basic components and aspects of our faith are clearly defined and articulated.

Indeed, the unique importance of faith has been at the heart of Christ's teachings and miracles: "Your faith has healed you" (Mt. 9: 22) was a major message of Christ's ministry. The healing, empowering, life-giving, reconciling and transforming power of faith was also dominant in the events pertaining to the early church in the apostolic period.

Third, being Christian does not mean merely knowing about our faith or even witnessing about it. It means keeping firm our faith. This is the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church, the mystical body of Christ, constantly reminds her faithful to remain faithful to the Christian faith by responding to its challenges, demands and implications. What does this mean?

a) It means placing the faith at the center of our lives by making it the guiding force of our thoughts, of our dreams, of our work. The Apostle says: "We live by faith" (2 Cor. 5: 7). Without faith our life will lose its integrity, its identity and purpose. To what extent is faith a living reality in our lives? To what degree are our thoughts, our commitments, our projects, our relations, our friendships determined and underpinned by faith? Let us think about these questions. Our daily prayer must be: Lord, increase and strengthen our faith. This is how we pray every day in the Armenian Church. Let us always remember what Jesus said to His disciples: "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Mt. 21: 21).

b) It means preserving the integrity of our faith. The source of Christian faith is the Bible as taught and interpreted by our church fathers, by saints and theologians. Nowadays, I see a tendency to give pre-eminence to the form rather than to the substance of faith. I see an emerging trend to expose ourselves to the sort of perceptions and norms that are not compatible with biblical teachings and with the traditions of our church. Let us listen to what Christ says: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves: (Mt. 7: 12).

c) It means participating fully and actively in the life and mission of the church. The church is not an institution in the ordinary sense of the word; it is essentially a community of faith. It is, therefore, by partici-

pating in the life and witness of the community of faith that we deepen our faith. Believing means belonging to the body of Christ. As Armenian Christians, we must be careful not to follow the kind of erroneous teachings and heterodox practices that reduce the Christian to a self-contained existence. I cannot imagine a genuine Christian life, an authentic expression of Christian faith outside of the community of faith.

d) And finally, keeping firm our faith means translating the faith into work. As the Apostle points out, “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2: 17). Christianity by its very nature and vocation is action-oriented. Reflections, meditation and prayer need to be changed into a quality of action that transforms the life of individual and the community.

We cannot survive in the terrible storms of this world without faith. We cannot maintain our Christ-based identities in this globalized world without faith. We cannot preserve our integrity in the midst of morally and spiritually decaying societies without faith. We must keep firm our faith in Christ. This is a faith sustained by hope and strengthened by love, a faith enriched by spirituality and translated into action. This is the real understanding of Christian faith; this is the kind of faith that we are called to live out and articulate in our individual and community life.

Therefore, we are called to renew our faith in Him who always remains our way, our truth and our life (Jn. 14:6).

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

April 2006

Antelias-Lebanon

## **Being different is God's gift and call** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 6)*

It has been a consistent truth that when individuals and communities have blindly affirmed their 'difference', they have generated religious, national and cultural tensions. This exclusive behaviour has more often than not led to alienation. We should avoid this sort of exclusive and alienating behaviour. In fact, acknowledging diversity is an important aspect of Christianity.

Diversity is manifest in God's nature as Trinity and is an essential part of His revelation and work. For Christians, therefore, diversity is a profoundly important concept.

1) *DIVERSITY IS GOD'S GIFT*. God created for us a world of diversity. God-given diversity is sustained by coherence and interaction, wholeness and integrity. Diversity, which is a dominant feature of the human race, has produced identities and roots.

2) *DIVERSITY IS GOD'S CALL*. God called people to be the steward of His creation, to be His 'co-worker'. What a distinct privilege, indeed. We are called to witness the richness of diversity and preserve and enhance it for the fulfilment of God's design for humanity and creation.

Today we are living in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. As Armenian Christians, how should we respond to God's call to preserve and protect diversity? The direction we should take to deal responsibly with pluralism in the context of our Christian self-understanding and vocation is clear, we must:

a) *Affirm our identity*. Roots shape identity, ensure continuity, safeguard integrity and give security. Because identity is not only a social necessity, but also a vital dimension of human existence and self-understanding, in order to occupy a specific place in human society, we must remain faithful to our identity. In order to give substance and meaning to our lives, we must attach ourselves firmly to those values, traditions and beliefs that constitute our specific identity.

b) *Respect the other's identity*. While we should remain faithful to our identity, we must respect the other's identity. Affirming our

identity does not mean becoming its prisoner. The other is not our enemy; he or she is our neighbour, our fellow human being. Hence, we do not have the right, under any circumstances, to impose our values and reject those of the other. Mutual respect and mutual acceptance must determine the way we treat each other.

c) *Understand ourselves in relation to the other.* The globalised and interdependent world of today compels us to broaden our sense of identity. I am because you are, and you are because I am; we are, indeed, interconnected. Self-centred and self-contained identity breed intolerance. When we recognize the values of the other, we gain strength and become responsive to the challenges of our times.

d) *Work towards deepening common values.* Living together with others as a community means that our values and perspectives, our traditions and beliefs are in harmony with the other. Living together may produce harmonious community in one place; yet, in other place, it may engender fragmentation. Therefore, we must commit ourselves to a dialogue of values; we must also deepen the core values rooted in our belief systems, in our cultures and our common humanity.

e) *Learn to live as a community of diversities.* God not only created us to be different, He also called us to live together peacefully with our differences. This is precisely the Christian understanding of community which implies diversity. When diversities creatively interact, then community is built; when diversities collide, then community is destroyed. Societies cannot progress without diversities. And the community is enriched and strengthened by reconciled diversities.<sup>(\*)</sup>

In our 'global village', we have become global citizens; we have become interdependent. We are no longer strangers; we are neighbours. We share many things with our fellow human beings. We have commonalities, but we also have differences. Because God created us

<sup>\*)</sup> I have elaborated some of these thoughts in my new book, *For a Church beyond its walls*, which is under publication.

different, we must respect the other's right to be different. Rejecting the other as an expression of our faithfulness to our values and identity will polarize us and lead to violence. By rejecting the other, we deny his or her humanity. Rejection creates exclusiveness, and exclusiveness fragments the community. Our differences must interact, not collide; they must lead us to dialogue, not isolation. We must transform living together into a source of mutual responsibility and accountability.

The Armenian people have a long and rich experience of living together with others. Interaction with our environment has fostered our resolve to preserve our identity. It has also helped us to broaden our perspectives, enhance our knowledge and enrich our experience. Indeed, the very fact that a church of apostolic origin, the Armenian Church, and an ancient people, the Armenian people, have survived the upheavals and vicissitudes of history is an eloquent testimony to the courage, openness and commitment to live as community in the midst of diversities. The same vision should guide us today. The youth have a pivotal role to play in this respect.

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

November 2006

Antelias-Lebanon

**A few perspectives  
for the renewal of the Armenian Church**  
*(Dialogue with the youth — Number 7)*

2-3 December 2006 were marked in my pontifical ministry with my encounter and open dialogue with the Armenian youth. This Youth Gathering took place in Detroit and was organized on the occasion of my short visit to the USA.

I want to express my deep appreciation to His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate of Easter Diocese, His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Hagopian, Prelate of Canada, and His Eminence Archbishop Moushegh Mardirossian, Prelate of Western Diocese, for taking this initiative as an essential part of their pastoral responsibility. My special appreciation is due to those young adults who came from different parts of North America to attend the youth event.

The renewal of the Armenian Church was the core of this gathering. In my dialogue with the youth, I touched on a number of issues and identified challenges pertaining to this pertinent theme. By carefully listening to them, I became more aware of their expectations as well as of their unwavering dedication to our Church and its values and traditions.

Upon my return to Antelias, I would like to share succinctly with the Armenian youth of other communities some of the major perspectives that I conveyed to the youth in Detroit.

1) The renewal of the Armenian Church is an *urgent necessity*. In order to carry on its God-given mission efficiently, our Church is called to keep pace with the changing conditions of modern societies. Therefore, the question is not *why* renewal, but rather *how* renewal? (In my book, *Beyond the 1700th Anniversary* (2001), I have already addressed basic issues concerning the renewal of the Armenian Church). The renewal of our Church will not be accomplished simply by shortening the liturgy and introducing certain adjustments within the church structures. This perception must be changed. Renewal is not easy; it is a long, critical and all-embracing process. The Church's total life, in its institutional and spiritual, theological and liturgical

dimensions and manifestation, must be included in any serious renewal process.

2) The Armenian Church must become more *responsive* to the new realities, concerns and challenges of its specific environment. This is, indeed, a vital feature of renewal. We are living in a new world. Tremendous changes are taking place in our immediate milieu. The Church must be neither indifferent nor reactive. In order to be relevant and reliable, the Church must respond proactively to the imperatives of changing times and circumstances, remaining firmly attached to its own identity and vocation. It is vitally important that in the Church's response, the global and the contextual be interwoven in a way that the unity and integrity of the Armenian Church are preserved intact and solid.

3) Being in dialogue with its environment implies meeting the expectations and needs of the people and *seeking solutions* to their problems. The world today is marked by growing anxieties and despair. People are caught in turmoil; they are in search of meaning and direction. They are facing in their daily life ethical, moral and social questions and dilemmas related to sexual orientation, family, marriage, spiritual life, etc., which require clear guidance. Our Church cannot remain silent. Globalization has made the inter-dependence of humanity even more acute and existential. Others' concerns are our concerns and the other way round. The Armenian Church must deal with socio-ethical issues with utmost care and sensitivity.

4) The Church must give priority to the promotion of *spiritual values*. These values come to us from the Bible and the Apostolic tradition, from our church fathers, from our liturgy and traditions. Those who say that the Armenian Church has no spirituality or gives no attention to it are mistaken and misguided. Every church has its own ways and forms of expressing spirituality. We must beware of 'cheap' and 'false' spiritualities that surround us, often with 'attractive' forms and expressions. We must stick to our own spirituality which is so rich and profound. We must renew our own spirituality by making it more compatible with new conditions.

5) *Christian education* must occupy a central place in the re-

renewal of the Church. By Christian education I do not understand only formal education, but basically Christian formation that must start in the family. By Christian education I also mean re-Christianization of our people. In a world dominated by secularism and materialism, the Christian values are often pushed to the periphery of our life. We have become nominal Christians. Our Church must take the re-evangelism of its people seriously. Our missionary outreach must be perceived and practiced essentially as an inreach. True renewal is re-evangelization and transformation of the community of faith.

6) *The reformation of liturgy* is an area of particular and immediate concern. Any attempt to introduce changes in the liturgy – shortening the text, changing the language, introducing new prayers, editing the texts, etc. – must be made on the basis of well-established criteria and clear guidelines. Arbitrary, superficial and a one-sided approach to the liturgy may become counter-productive. The inner unity, integrity and particularity of the Armenian liturgy must be preserved.

7) *Clergy* has a crucial part to play in the renewal of the Armenian Church. In order to renew our Church our clergy must be renewed. We need a clergy who are well versed in Armenian Church history and theology as well as in contemporary theology; who have a comprehensive knowledge of the context in which they are called to exercise their pastoral ministry; who, driven by ecumenical vision, are engaged in dialogue and collaboration with other churches; who are courageous enough to take the Gospel to our people in response to the new challenges of modern societies, and in faithfulness to the values and spiritual and theological heritage of the Armenian Church. Our Church in the 21st Century needs a clergy for the 21st Century.

8) We must embark on a kind of renewal process which takes our Church beyond its institutional confines and makes it a dynamic reality in the life of our people. The Armenian Church must become a *missionary church* through Christian education, pastoral work, social service, and living spirituality.

This is only an outline of some major issues, concerns and challenges that must be considered in the renewal of our Church. Re-

newal must be carried on carefully and in an organized manner. Holistic and contextual, realistic and pragmatic approaches, in their coherent interconnectedness, must become the driving force and the guiding principle of a credible renewal. A committee representing the Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church is already in formation to lead the renewal process.

The youth are called to play an important role in this respect. With their perspectives and experiences they can significantly contribute to all efforts aimed at making the Armenian Church a church for the 21st century. We must give space to the youth in our Church. They are integral and vital part of the Church's life and witness. I have strong confidence in our youth.

Prayerfully  
**Aram I**  
**Catholicos of Cilicia**  
December 2006  
Antelias-Lebanon

## **For a new human being in a new world** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 8)*

This year, on the occasion of Christmas, in my pontifical message I shared with our people a few thoughts concerning the new human being in a new world. This theme is at the center of the New Testament; it constitutes the focus of Christ's earthly mission.

Speaking to the newly converted Christians, St. Paul says: "...you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3: 10). The message of the Apostle is clear: in Christ you have been recreated; being Christian means being a new human being. This is, indeed, the essence of Christian faith and the aim of Christian mission. Hence, any approach, any teaching, any way of life that claims to be Christian must be assessed in this perspective and with this criterion.

What should we understand by being a new creature and what are its implications?

a) *Christ: the new being.* God, the Creator created the first human creature according to His own image (Gen. 1: 26–30). The expression of "God's image" should not be perceived literally. It means that the human being is endowed with rationality and the divine privilege which enabled him to be in communion with God. Human beings were called to articulate this God-given privilege as stewards of the creation and accountable to God. The Book of Genesis tells us that because of their disobedience, the first man and woman disgraced God's image, and thus they distorted their human nature and vocation.

Christ restored God's fallen image in human beings by assuming human nature. He recreated the human being. Salvation is essentially recreation. That is why Christ is also referred to as the New Adam and His redemptive work as new creation.

Therefore, the Christian is the one who has been recreated and renewed by Christ: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The Christian is a new

human being. Sin, corruption and evil are destroyed in him by Christ, and in Christ he has become a new creature.

b) *Christ: the new life.* God is both the source and the purpose of human life. For Christianity life should not become a human-centered and human-driven reality. Life, in all its expressions, acquires its true meaning only in God.

Christ restored human life to its original quality by re-establishing the authenticity of human life. In fact, Christ defined Himself as the “true life” and described His mission as granting the “abundant life” (Jn. 10:10) to human beings. Human life acquired its fullness through the cross and resurrection.

Thus, for the Christian “*to live is Christ*” (Phil. 1: 21); Christ is the beginning of the renewed and transformed life. Apart from Him life loses its integrity and credibility. The Christian life should be Christo-centric.

c) *Christ: the inaugurator of a new world.* The recreator of the new human being and the new life is also the recreator of a new world.

The new world is the Kingdom of God which began with the incarnation of the Son of God and will reach its consummation with the second coming of Christ. God’s Kingdom is founded on justice and peace, on love and reconciliation and is governed by moral values. In God’s Kingdom, good triumphs over evil, light over darkness, value over interest, truth over falsehood.

God’s Kingdom is already in this world, but not of this world. It is in constant combat against “the powers and principalities” (Col. 1: 16) of this world. The Christian is a militant of this Kingdom. He or she is called to fight against the evils of this world, which, in different forms and different names, have invaded our life.

The Child of Bethlehem is the inaugurator of a new humanity, of a new life and a new world. He said: “Behold I make everything new” (Rev. 21:5), and in fact, He did. He renewed the old; He overcame the evil and offered us a new quality of life, and showed us the right way to be human.

What does it mean to be human in the image of God? What does

it mean to be renewed by Christ? Christ is God's gift to humanity. He is also God's invitation to be a new human being committed to the transformation of the world.

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

January 2007

Antelias-Lebanon

## **For a world in search of humanization** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 9)*

Recently I received an e-mail from an old friend of mine from Boston, U.S.A., who, referring to my lecture at the Notre Dame University, wrote: to achieve an all-encompassing spirituality as you described in your lecture, there must be a complete transformation of humanity; man must become true man.

Indeed, one of the complex problems facing humanity today is the way human beings perceive and fulfill themselves. Man distorted the image of God at the very moment when he questioned his imperfection and failed to respond to God's call for responsible stewardship and accountability. According to biblical teaching, every human being bears the burden of original sin. In the course of time, original sin has acquired new dimensions and manifestations. A general diagnosis today will identify among many the following trends that destroy the image of God in human being:

1) *The human claim for self-sufficiency.* Striving for self-sufficiency is a human desire arising from the urge to satisfy basic human needs. Every individual, organization or community aims for self-sufficiency in all spheres of life. However, this inherent desire turns evil, when it becomes a source of arrogance and superiority; when it is abused and misused as a means to achieve absolute and uncontrolled power; when it oppresses, overpowers, and impoverishes. Taken in its exclusive sense, self-sufficiency also generates unilateralism and hampers progress. It leads to self-centeredness and self-isolation.

Hence, the endeavor for self-sufficiency must aim at self-reliance, creativity and progress. It must be undergirded by ethical values. Otherwise, it may undermine the dignity of human being, violate human values and rights, ignore human obligations, and jeopardize the unity of society and the integrity of the creation.

An exclusivist understanding of self-sufficiency distorts the image of God in human beings and becomes rebellion against and alienation from God.

2) *The human drive for absolute liberty.* In theology liberty

means freedom from the bondage of sin. It is therefore a God-given gift and vocation. In social and political language liberty implies breaking the chains of oppression, which is a fundamental component of human rights. Hence, liberty is both an ethical and political imperative. The human being is called not only to exercise fully his liberty, but also to become its advocate.

Human societies are facing two contradictory trends:

First, oppression of liberty. In many societies, the individual and community, civil and political, economic and religious liberties are being denied or reduced. To violate liberty is to sin against God, for it undermines human dignity and jeopardizes God's image in the human creature. Liberty belongs to all humans and societies. No worldly power has the right to suppress the liberty of an other. This gift of God must be equally shared by all, without any distinction or discrimination.

Second, the human claim for absolute liberty. Today, the term liberty has become identical to greed, limitless acquisition of power, and justification for new values. The exercise of liberty in its absolute and exclusive form and expression has increasingly become a political tool and a dominant trend of technologically advanced, morally permissive and economically globalized societies. For such societies, liberty has no limits and limitations.

This is indeed a misconception of liberty. Liberty must be sustained by moral values and be expressed responsibly within the framework of laws and regulations to help people make appropriate choices. Liberty must not become a goal in itself, but only a means to attaining a quality of life driven by a sacred purpose. Absolute liberty belongs to God. Human beings must recognize and accept their imperfection. Claiming perfection and absoluteness is a denial of God.

3) *The human rejection of accountability.* Being human means being accountable. Human beings are created by God and are accountable to their Creator. Human beings are given particular responsibility in the created order. As God's stewards and co-workers, they are accountable to God.

Accountability both in its vertical and horizontal dimensions is

an essential component of human nature. Its rejection generates evil: human denial of his stewardship towards the creation has resulted in environmental degradation; human disobedience to law and order in society causes violence; human failure in accountability disrupts families, destroys organizations and threatens the fabric of society.

Accountability applies both to those who are denied power and particularly to those who are in power and who exploit and exclude the powerless. It is an interactive process between the powerful and the powerless. Lack of accountability on both sides leads to violence.

Accountability does not oppress, it liberates; it does not marginalize, it empowers; it creates sense of mutual responsibility and belonging to each other. Accountability encourages interaction and interdependence; it builds community. Accountability is a source of progress and success.

To reject accountability is to ignore, the other and, therefore, practice the arrogance of power. To reject accountability is to reject God's presence in the human being through His image.

\*

\* \*

Claim for self-sufficiency, exercise of absolute liberty and rejection of accountability endanger the creation, destroy community, dis-integrate society and create violence.

The world of today is suffering from this chronic selfishness. Cosmetic approaches and short-term remedies will further deepen and intensify it. Time is running short. We need new paradigms, new value systems. This ill may be cured if human beings become consciously aware that they carry in them the image of God. The way to authentic humanness is commitment to:

- mutuality over against self-centeredness;
- vulnerability over against arrogance;
- empowering over against overpowering;
- inclusiveness over against exclusiveness;
- accountability over against unilateralism;
- responsibility over against domination;

- participation over against marginalization;
- education over against ignorance.

When such common values are developed in our own selves, in our families, in our public lives and in all aspects and domains of our individual and community life, then all sorts and forms of ills, which shake the very foundations of societies, will disappear, and “man’s inhumanity against man” will be transformed into man’s true humanity towards God, towards creation and towards his and her fellow human beings.

These values transcend religious, cultural and ethnic identities and barriers. When common values are in jeopardy, they must be addressed through common efforts, locally and globally.

The youth have a major part in wrestling with these concerns and challenges. The youth have a particular role to play in advocating these values in societies in dire need of humanization.

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

March 2007

Antelias-Lebanon

## **On the renewal of the Armenian Church** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 10)*

In the *Dialogue with the youth — Number 7*, I succinctly discussed the renewal of the Armenian Church by spotlighting a few concerns. The renewal of the Armenian Church is so complex in nature and extensive in scope that it is not possible to deal with it properly within the framework of a pastoral letter. By raising questions pertaining to the renewal of the Armenian Church, I intend to remind ourselves the pivotal importance of renewal, and second, by sharing a few thoughts with our youth, I intend to challenging them to engage in this process through reflection and discussion.

We must bear in mind that the church is essentially a community of faith built on Jesus Christ. The church is not a reality out there, it does not exist outside of our lives, our thoughts and our concerns. We are the church, the people of God, united in Christ and joined together with the bond of love, and sustained by a common hope and vision. The prevailing misconception that the church is a mere institution needs to be corrected. The institutional expression of the church must not be confused with its nature, its essence must not be altered by its form. In the church, the divine and the human, the ecclesial and the societal, the eternal and the timely, the transcendent and the imminent embrace each other. However, the qualitative difference between the divine and the human dimensions need be clearly distinguished.

As we seek to renew the Armenian Church in a new world context, I believe that we must seriously consider the following:

1) *The Armenian Church is the people's church*. This reality is concretely articulated in all aspects and areas of the church's life and witness. The concept of 'national church' has different connotations in different socio-religious settings. In the Armenian Church it denotes the intimate interaction between church and people. Indeed, through its spiritual, educational, social and humanitarian programmes and activities the Armenian Church is so deeply involved in the daily life of the people that it is simply impossible to draw a line of demarcation between the church and the people. Our Church's

living presence and transforming role permeate the entire life of the nation. They are a source of spiritual renewal, richness and strength both for the Church and the Nation. However, excessive emphasis on the national character of the Church may expose it to the blunt intervention of state or political structures into the internal church affairs. Such behavior weakens the Church's strength, undermines its authority and jeopardizes its integrity.

2) *A Church with a multi-faceted mission.* In its mission our Church embraces most of the spheres, dimensions and manifestations of the community's life. In fact, not only has the Church invented the Armenian alphabet, it has also played a significant part in enriching the nation's culture. Not only has the Church defended the rights of its people for justice and freedom, it has also assumed a remarkable role in pursuing the Armenian cause. Not only has the Church emphasized the vital importance of social justice and humanitarian aid, it has also established welfare institutions, orphanages and hospitals. Not only has the Church promoted educational values, it has also established large networks of community schools. Our Church must preserve multi-dimensional character and comprehensive nature of its mission. But, in view of the growing and diversifying needs and challenges of our communities, the Church is called first, to review its traditional programmes and methodologies in order to make its witness more efficient and relevant, and second, to clearly spell out its priorities, laying a particular emphasis on the spiritual and moral aspects of its witness.

3) *A participatory Church.* One of the characteristic features of our Church is the full participation of the people in the Church's total life. Men and women, disabled and youth, people from all walks of life without any discrimination contribute, in one way or another and on a larger or smaller scale, to the witness of the Church. The Armenian Church is not strictly a clerical church, it is open to the people. Laity takes an active part in almost all aspects of the Church's life and mission, including decision-making structures and processes, and often with a determining voice. The people-based and people-oriented character of the Church must be further enhanced. However, the nature and the limits of the participation of laity in church matters and

structures be clearly defined. Otherwise, it may eventually weaken the Church's spiritual character, ecclesial integrity and prophetic vocation. The Armenian Church, both in Armenia and Diaspora, must be extremely careful to this potential danger at a period where secular interests and values are increasingly becoming dominant in the life of societies.

4) *The Church: identity marker*. Religion is a strong identity marker in many societies. In Christianity, the inter-relation of faith and culture is an area of profound ecclesiological and sociological importance and implications. Due to ecclesiological self-understanding and historical circumstances, the Armenian Church has become a major player in nation-building. It has become a powerful promoter of national values and aspirations. Today, particularly in a diaspora situation, the community life *de facto* evolves around the church. With its cultural and educational role, and as a custodian of national values and traditions, the Church plays an instrumental part in forming, preserving and enhancing the Armenian identity. In globalized societies particularly in the West, in which all sorts of distinctions and specificities are increasingly disappearing, this unique role of the Church has undoubtedly become even more urgent and crucial.

It is vitally important therefore that well-defined criteria be established for the renewal of the Armenian Church, taking into account all these considerations. Abrupt decisions and arbitrary changes will create further confusion. Change is not always constructive; it could distort the identity of the church and endanger its integrity. What guidelines should be established to lead the church in its renewal efforts? To this effect and as a follow up to my previous dialogue with the youth, I would like to make a few observations:

a) *To blend tradition and modernity*. Generally people think that tradition and modernity are in conflict. In my view, they complement each other. For some, tradition means old, outdated, referring to the past and with no relevance to the present. This is a misconception of tradition. Tradition is always alive in the self-understanding and self-expression of a community. It is existentially articulated through the values, aspirations, and way of life of a community. For

some, modernity means rejecting the old and turning to the new. Again, this is a misunderstanding. Modernity signifies the human effort to keep pace with the changing times and realities. We cannot build and sustain community without tradition. It is equally true that we cannot make a community credible, viable and an integral part of modern societies without opening its traditions and values to new conditions and challenges.

Hence, a critical and creative interaction between tradition and modernity is imperative. We must avoid extremes: we must neither blindly reject conservatism, nor uncritically embrace modernism. Through a critical dialogue, tradition and modernity must strengthen and challenge each other. We must develop new approaches and outlooks in dealing with our church traditions. We must keep the essence and specificity of the ancient traditions, while make them more reliable and responsive to new concerns and expectations. Adapting the church to new times is a critical and arduous task that requires clear strategy, new methodology, and long-term planning.

b) *To strengthen the relation between the local and the global.* The church is both a local and a global reality. These dimensions of the church condition each other. Our Church lives in different local contexts; it is also a global church exposed to global changes and a multitude of problems and influences. Today, in many parts of the world, including Armenia, our Church displays a picture of distorted traditions, disconnected practices and disoriented perceptions almost in all spheres of its life. To respond to changing circumstances and expectations of the people, our dioceses and even parishes have, each in its own way, already engaged in 'reformation'. The continuation of these hasty changes may lead the church to even greater disintegration.

First and foremost, we must recognize that the growing trends towards localization on the one hand, and lack of serious attempt to establish a meaningful interaction between the global and the local on the other hand, may eventually endanger the very identity and the wholeness of our Church.

In the renewal process the basic traditions, teachings and practices of the Church must be maintained, namely those elements that

ensure the continuity, unity and specificity of the Armenian Church. At the same time, our Church must have the courage to adapt its traditions to local conditions and needs.

c) *To make the Church's interaction with its environment more dynamic and creative.* The survival of a community or a structure in society is basically determined, besides its firm attachment to its values, traditions and dreams, by its openness and relevance. A self-centered and introverted community or structure cannot survive. Interaction and interdependence, interconnection and interpenetration, brought about by globalization, are salient marks of modern societies.

The Armenian Church cannot organize itself, reactivate its missionary outreach, and revitalize its community life as a self-centered and self-sufficient institution. It must engage in a meaningful dialogue with its environment. It must constantly grapple with issues and challenges facing the society in which it is called to give witness to the Gospel. Besides inter-church collaboration, inter-faith dialogue, which has become a major feature of modern societies, cannot be ignored by the Armenian Church. Our Church cannot ignore also socio-ethical issues facing the modern societies. These factors and issues affect, in one way or another, the self-understanding and self-fulfillment of our Church.

These are only a few reflections that need to be further deepened and be given due consideration in the renewal of the Armenian Church (I have addressed some of the issues concerning the renewal of our Church in my book, *The Armenian Church Beyond the 1700th Anniversary*, 2002, Antelias).

Our Church is one of the ancient churches of the world Christendom. It must know how to remain young; it must not become a petrified institution but a church for the 21st Century. Our Church must be in tune with its time. Its theology must become more intelligible, its liturgy more attractive, its clergy more educated, its mission more evangelistic, its education more spiritual, its service more effective and its message more prophetic. It must reach the unreached and even the unreachable. This is not being a progressive or modern church, but a

responsive church (In this context, you may read my new book, *For a Church Beyond its Walls*, 2007 Antelias).

Our Church is facing multiform problems and challenges related both to its internal life and to its relations with its environment. These problems and challenges may soon become intractable if we do not wrestle with them responsibly. Cosmetic approaches, provisional arrangements and superficial changes will never ensure the renewal of the Armenian Church. We must go beyond slogans and nice statements. We need new paradigms, a new vision, and a critical self-assessment. Renewal is crucial for the future of the Armenian Church; we must take it most seriously.

I consider the active participation of the youth in the renewal of the Armenian Church of paramount importance. With their fresh ideas, creative imagination, challenging views and critical approach, they will bring a new vitality to our Church. The growing involvement of the youth in the various functions of the Church is encouraging. In order to make the youth identify with their Church, the Church must have the vision to identify itself with the youth, with their concerns and perspectives, frustrations and expectations. Our Church must be a spiritual haven for its youth, where they can protect themselves from the powerful storms and tsunamis of new times.

The reports that I receive from the Youth Department of our Catholicosate, as well as from the youth activities of our Prelacies, are promising. We must build on what we have achieved thus far and look forward with renewed faith and vision.

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

June 2007

Antelias-Lebanon

## **How to interact with globalization** *(Dialogue with the youth — Number 11)*

I consider my sharing of perspectives and concerns with our youth on special occasions and in respect to important and timely issues to be a vital dimension of my pontifical ministry. I believe that we must engage our youth in responsible dialogue with our church, with our community, and the world at large. It is my deep conviction that our youth must not only listen but also talk, not only take but also give, not only wait but also act, not only follow but also lead in all spheres and at all levels of our common life.

In my opening remarks to the International Conference on “*Culture of Cilician Armenia*”, organized by the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, January 14-18 2008, in Antelias, I said that “critical openness and creative interaction have been significant features of Armenian culture in Cilicia”.

What do we mean by culture? Let me underscore a few points.—

1) Culture is the totality of a community’s life in its various aspects, dimensions and expressions. Through forms and actions, colours and perceptions, culture articulates the values and traditions, inner world and aspirations of a community. Culture is a source of identity; it ensures unity. Without a common culture, a community may sooner or later disintegrate losing its identity.

2) Interrelation and interaction are conditioned by culture. In fact, culture both safeguards the integrity of a community and plays an instrumental role in promoting and enhancing relations between communities, religions and civilizations. Through culture manifold features of communities enter in dynamic interaction. Mutual impacting is integral to this process.

3) Culture is the self-expression of a person or community in time and space, and it is essential for human survival. Preserving culture means preserving community, and preserving community means preserving culture. Culture cannot live without people and people cannot perpetuate without having a distinct culture. History is full of concrete cases.

4) Culture is a force which can be used in contradictory ways. It can become a source of prosperity and creativity. It can also lead to self-contained existence and marginalization. It can become a decisive factor for unity and survival. It can also generate discrimination and violence. Although this ambiguity is inherent in culture, it is largely due to misuse and abuse of culture. Hence, the inner renewal of culture is crucial.

5) Culture must respond to the challenges and changing conditions of its environment and time. To remain relevant, reliable and credible, culture must reflect the realities of its time and place. When a culture becomes a museum of ancient heritage, it loses its responsiveness. When a culture stagnates, it loses its creativity. Culture is renewed when it is in a dynamic process of realistic self-assessment, critical dialogue with its milieu, and creative openness to new horizons.

Indeed, this is how we perceived our culture and its role in Armenian Cilicia (11th to 14th Centuries) which became the first Armenian organized diaspora. Our experience in Cilicia is a model and a point of reference in the context of the global Armenian diaspora.

In a globalized world, which destroys all cultural norms and patterns and promotes a mono-culture, its own culture, we as Armenians must stick firmly to our centuries-old cultural values and traditions, paradigms and norms. But how? In fact, being directly exposed to the forces and values of the culture of globalization, on the one hand, and affirming our own culture, on the other hand, is not easy. Indeed, a globalized Armenianess is arising with globalization. The Armenian diaspora is a global reality; it has also its contextual expressions. How to engage in creative dialogue these two dimensions which affect the way we perceive and articulate our identity. This requires strategy and vision. We face this challenge daily and existentially. Let me share with you my perspectives.-

a) We cannot stop the steady penetration of globalization into our life. We must be realistic. All aspects of our individual and community life are strongly impacted by globalization. The repercussions of radical changes and developments taking place in al-

most all areas of society will continue to affect our lives. But we must not blindly appropriate the changes and values offered by globalization. We must know how to dialogue critically and responsibly with this new culture.

b) Dialoguing with globalization is risky; it is both enriching and distorting. If dialogical interaction with globalization takes place with a profound self-awareness of who we are as Armenians, then it makes our culture more creative and dynamic. If openness towards the culture of globalization is not underpinned by a firm conviction of the crucial importance of our cultural and spiritual heritage for the survival of our people, then it becomes a source of alienation.

c) We must dialogue with globalization in order to keep our culture from becoming parochial. We cannot live in isolation; isolation generate loss of identity. Opening our traditions and values to globalization will give to Armenian culture broader perspectives and new insights. It will also strengthen the inner resistance of our culture. Our experience in Armenian Cilicia is a concrete example.

d) Dialoguing with globalization will not only promote interactive approaches; it will also challenge our culture to renew itself. By renewal I do not simply mean change. Renewal will make Armenian culture more perceptive and receptive, more relevant and meaningful to the modern Armenian man and woman. I consider this an absolute necessity and an urgent priority.

e) Dialoguing generates tolerance. In fact, tolerance has been a characteristic feature of Armenian culture. This inherent character of our culture, which acquired tangible expression in the Cilician period of our history, needs to be emphasized and given concrete manifestation. Indeed, preserving the ethos and identity of our culture is the cardinal task of each Armenian. Yet, we must accept and respect others' cultures, and the dignity and freedom of others.

Reactive cultures will sooner or later die.

Exclusivism will make culture a source of enslavement.

Parochialism will not protect culture; it will make it more vulnerable.

Faithfulness will lose its true meaning, if it is not translated

into critical and creative openness.

If a culture does not undergo a continuous process of evolution and renewal, it will become history. Likewise, if a nation does not remain faithful to its culture, it will disappear from the arena of history. Therefore, it is through FAITHFULNESS and OPENNESS, that the Armenian youth will be able to preserve our cultural heritage, the source of our identity, becoming at the same time an integral part of broader society.

Prayerfully

**Aram I**

**Catholicos of Cilicia**

January 2008

Antelias - Lebanon

## CONTENTS

<b>In lieu of a foreword .....</b>	<b>5</b>
I.- For a life-centered spirituality .....	9
II.- For a quality of life sustained by values .....	12
III.- Jesus Christ: the liberator .....	16
IV.- An assembly of youth and for youth .....	19
V.- The imperative of a faith-sustained life .....	22
VI.- Being different is God's gift and call .....	25
VII.- A few perspectives for the renewal of the Armenian Church .....	28
VIII.- For a new Human Being in a new World .....	32
IX.- For a World in search of humanization .....	35
X.- On the renewal of the Armenian Church .....	39
XI.- How to interact with globalization .....	45