

MESSAGE
HIS HOLINESS ARAM I
CATHOLICOS OF THE HOLY SEE OF THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA

To: Prelates of the Prelacies of the Catholicosate of Cilicia,
Clergy,
National Representative Assemblies,
Executive Councils and
Faithful of the Armenian nation

On the threshold of the New Year, from the Holy See of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, we bless the beloved children of our nation with warm love and ardent national feelings. We pray that the Most High God will fill and brighten the lives of all of the children of our nation, our families, institutions and organizations, Church, and Homeland with His heavenly and abundant goodness.

As you know, for the past several years at the beginning of the New Year we have invited our people to focus their thoughts and work upon one of the correlated fundamental values, deep concerns, or serious expectations of our nation and church.

Therefore, in explaining the imperative of renewal in our lives, I proclaim 2017 as THE YEAR OF RENEWAL.

A.

Renewal: The Goal of the Holy Bible

The Bible, by its essence, is a celestial message that leads human beings to spiritual and moral renewal—God’s revelation transferred to humankind. God’s revelation, from the creation of the universe to the creation of humans, from the message of the prophets, to the birth of the Son of God, from the narration of the coming of the Messiah, to the mission of Christ’s disciples—had one distinct purpose, the salvation of humanity and creation, freedom from evil and sin; in other words, a total renewal.

Especially the Psalms and the Prophets widely extol the importance of renewal. The Prophets ask God to renew humankind and the universe by heavenly intervention and to send messages to humans to turn to God, waiting for God’s Messiah.

Renewal in the New Testament is presented as an indispensable necessity. The purpose of Christ’s incarnation and His mission of salvation was the renewal of humankind and the universe. Indeed, the New Testament is the history of the renewal of humanity and creation by divine intervention. The Book of Revelation condenses this with the following words: “Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev. 21:5)

Life in its essence was renewed with Christ. Christ is the source and the path to renewal. Through his miracles, parables, and teachings, Christ gave renewal a pivotal place. Christ’s directive for renewal was echoed by the apostles in their epistles and sermons to the newly established churches.

B.

Renewal: The Axle of the Mission of the Church

The message of renewal that came from the Bible became the foundation and central point of the Church’s mission. Throughout history the Church, not only by its servants, epistles, social services, humanitarian work, and spiritual and ethical education, but also through local and ecumenical councils with established canons, have always given renewal a prime place on the agenda.

Truly, the Church Fathers in their teachings have often reflected on renewal, especially in spiritual and moral spheres. The literature of our elderly fathers is rich with testimonies and profound commentaries.

Our Church Fathers have also emphasized the importance of renewal by Christ. The Armenian Church's councils have very often also reflected upon the imperative of renewal, always regarding spirituality as the source and starting point of true renewal.

C.

The Imperative of Renewal Seen Through a Christian Perspective

Renewal is one of the most fundamental conditions in Christian life, and it receives its direction usually from the teachings in the Bible, especially in the earthly mission of the Son of God.

According to Christian thinking, human beings are the central point of renewal. The Apostle Paul condenses the purpose of Christ's mission with the following thoughts: Forget the old person and become a new person (Ephesians 4: 22-24). It is necessary to understand the renewal of a person with global perspective, beyond physical re-establishment of spiritual and ethical values

It is difficult to renew a person in the face of the current corrupting ways of the world that destroy the God-like man in humanity. Many and various concerns are challenges to people belonging to society who often forget themselves. In a book written in 1935 by the great French intellectual and well-known surgeon, Alexis Corelli, "Man, The Unknown," is still relevant today. Persons without God are strangers to themselves. The renewal of people begins with self-knowing and the faith they have in establishing their faithfulness to their God-given calling.

The Armenian people are also susceptible to surrounding realities and their effect. Therefore, it is important to renew the Armenian person first of all by strengthening in him the Christian faith. The renewal of the Armenian person is of primary importance because the Armenian person is the foundation and starting-point of our nation, church, fatherland, communities, and institutions.

The second phase that needs renewal is our community life. Human beings are not self-existing persons. Christianity looks at humans, and values them within the surroundings of their collective life. Christ approached the people with His miracles, parables, and teachings related to an individual person. The people were the object of Christ's mission. Christ turned people who were distanced from God into God's people—new people with lives that are God-centered and God-purposed.

The Armenian Church, as a people's church and faith community, is in need of renewal. Renewal within this circle should not be interpreted only as administrative or liturgical reform, but rather to greatly deepen the zeal of belonging to the Church, to make the relationship amongst members more cordial, to brighten its inner life, strengthen both internal and external evangelization, give more effort to social services, Christian education that is better organized, together with well-planned and improved work. In other words, it is necessary to achieve the renewal of the Church beyond its location and institutions with the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit, collective and constant effort to transform it to service. Thus was the Church during the time of the apostles: Persecuted, but dispersed; martyred, but always remaining vital and strong through the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible also connects renewal to creation. As the Apostle says, With Christ the entire universe was created and renewed (Colossians 1:16). Christ's salvific mystery goes beyond human beings and includes the whole universe. This thinking is also found in our church theology and rituals, and usually in the writings of our Church Fathers. The creation nowadays known as ecology is an indivisible part of the Church's life and mission, because according to Christian belief and thought the relationship and cohesion of "God-Man-Creation" must be seen as one indivisible entity. If the current cases of ecology are related to the natural development of the universe, then most of it is the result of the consequences of the exploitation

of the creation by humans. It is the God-given obligation of humans to keep renewal of the universe sound and free from catastrophe.

D.

The Imperative of Renewal—A National View

It is not possible, nor is it proper, to draw a demarcation line between Christian and national approaches and concerns of evaluations. These two areas of Armenian life are inseparably united with the Armenianization of Christianity and Christianization of Armenianness.

In the history of nations there are dates and events that become reminders and challenges for renewal. This is how we perceive the year 2015. Indeed, without doubt, the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the 25th anniversary of the independence of Armenia, the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Karabakh, and the sanctification of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide became the eloquent witness of our people's renewal. At the same time, Armenia's continuing economic difficulties, the continuing emigration, the April war in Karabakh, the turmoil of the Syrian Armenian community, along with the fundamental and many varied concerns facing the Diaspora—from the threat to Armenian identity, to the decline of western Armenian language, from the deterioration of cultural values to the pessimistic consequences of globalization are warnings for serious self-examination and self-evaluation based on the imperative of renewal that cannot be postponed.

- First, we consider the renewal of our Fatherland, in light of 25 years of experience, to be essential. The Fatherland is not only land. What gives the land its meaning, identity, and strength is the people. The vitality and stability of our people in the Fatherland and their strong attachment to the Fatherland are effective ways to greater strengthen the Fatherland.
- Likewise the strengthening of Karabakh's independence depends solely upon our people's strong attachment to their rights and land liberated by blood and sweat. All of the sons and daughters of our nation—including in Armenia, Karabakh, and the Diaspora, must expend their utmost effort so that the strengthening of the independence of Karabakh will become a constant effort. Any retreat in this course can have harsh and irreparable consequences for both Armenia and for our people's struggle for their rights.
- The renewal of the Diaspora is a more complicated challenge, taking into consideration its vast dispersion and multiple and different internal compositions and surrounding and unique conditions of each community. One may renew a community by re-evaluating its institutions by giving new quality to the relationship with Armenia, and to re-organize the Armenian school that preserves identity.
- For Armenia and the Diaspora—The primary condition and pledge for the renewal of our entire nation, as we emphasized, is the renewal of the Armenian person. Indeed, renewal is not only to complete that which is lacking or fix defects. Rather it is to go from good to better; it is to examine our lives, ourselves, and our work under current situations and to enrich them with new possibilities, to adopt new approaches for new challenges, seek new means for new realizations, to open new horizons. Let us remember Nerses Shnorhali's plain but profound words that we often recite like a prayer under the arches of our churches: *O Lord, You renewed the old; renew also me and adorn me again.*

E.

Toward Renewal

Under the light of Christian teachings, as well as our imperative national concerns, our reminders and highlights will surely seriously impel our people to think about the vital importance of renewal. Repeating the same, keeping the same, only looking at the past, only being proud of past achievements will keep our institutions and community in the past, out-of-touch with current realities. Just as all the components of the development of the universe are in constant movement, so human life in all its spheres, internally and externally, must be in continuous renewal, advancement, and contemporary.

The Church has the directive from live-renewing Christ, to become the incentive power for spiritual and moral renewal that forms the foundation for true renewal of social life. Therefore, our people, clergy and lay leaders, intellectuals and teachers, activists, and political leaders, men and women, have the duty to devote their complete and active participation to those leading the renewal effort. The standard-bearers of this very important task of renewal must be the Armenian youth, because they are intimately knowledgeable of the current conditions, concerns, and challenges of the world. And, therefore, they feel the actual need for renewal and they can also bring important help to the collective effort of renewal with their expertise and new ideas.

We bless the beloved children of our people and pray to All-Mighty God to adorn the life of our people with good health, success, and happiness.

With fatherly warm love,

Prayerfully,

ARAM I

Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia

January 1, 2017

Antelias, Lebanon