

**ENCYCLICAL OF HIS HOLINESS ARAM I, CATHOLICOS OF THE  
GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 1600TH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE INVENTION OF THE ARMENIAN  
ALPHABET**

**ARAM**

Servant of Jesus Christ and, by the will of the incomprehensible God and by the selection of our Nation, Chief Bishop and Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia

Pontifical greetings with the love transmitted by Jesus among us, and blessing with the right of our father, St. Gregory the Illuminator, to the consecrated diocesan prelates, the bishops, the archimandrites and priests, the National Representative Assemblies and the Executive Councils, the vestrymen and the members of the board of trustees, the charitable organizations and the servants of Armenian literature, the teachers and the workers of the press, and all our faithful children of the Armenian nation scattered throughout the world,

May the peace of God the Father, the love of His Only Begotten Son, and the grace of the Holy Spirit be with all. Amen.

Our people are aware of the fact that one of the greatest events in Armenian history, the invention of the Armenian alphabet, occurred in 405, at the beginning of the fifth century AD. The creation of the Armenian alphabet was an important event not just in the linguistic or cultural sense. In order to grasp the total meaning and unique importance of this singular event, it is necessary to view it in the context of the centuries-old history of our people. It is necessary to appreciate it within the spiritual, cultural, educational, social and other realms of the collective life of our people.

Other peoples too have had the invention of their own alphabets. The creation of letters to give form and meaning to their worldview and culture is an accomplishment representing great importance for them, as well. However, the invention of the Armenian alphabet, which was the result of St. Mesrob Mashdots's spiritual and intellectual labors, sacrifices and visions, and which was equivalent to a miracle, had great significance and critical importance for our people. The history of our songs and wounds, the crucifixion and resurrection attests to this.

Indeed, the alphabet created by Mesrob became a spiritual and intellectual force in the formation of our people's national identity. It became the bright sun illuminating the road of our people's history. It became the ever-flowing spring irrigating the life of our people with spiritual values. Furthermore, it became a powerful stronghold fortifying our struggle to survive. And, in addition to all this, the golden Armenian language embodied by the alphabet became the supreme gift sent by God and the road to eternity securing and grounding the unity of our people. The Armenian alphabet, flowing from the lips of Armenian children, rising to heaven through prayers of Armenian priests, flowing from the limpid springs of the Armenian mind and soul, became for and remains us the living

and life-preserving presence of God in the life of our people. For centuries on end, Armenian clergymen and poets, writers and musicians, teachers and intellectuals have spun the ever-shining glory of the alphabet, which has traversed through the centuries and emerged intact throughout. Non-Armenians, in turn, have admired the intonational, grammatical and other unique aspects of the Armenian language, which have taken form and structure through the alphabet.

This is why the Armenian language is justly classified in the ranks of our people's "holy of holies." Going beyond current linguistic concepts and approaches, the Armenian language is an invaluable national treasure for each and every Armenian. Therefore, any degree of indifference regarding the Armenian language is equivalent to national desertion for our people. Even if, for various and sundry reasons, some Armenians have an incomplete grasp of, or do not use, the Armenian language, nevertheless they certainly consider, and they must consider, the Armenian language as one of the singular treasures and sacred values of our people, and, as such, they must have a love and piety toward it, bordering on adoration.

Now, it is the 1600th anniversary of the invention of the Armenian alphabet, which, for centuries, has guaranteed the identity of our people, strengthened its existence, made its culture flourish and determined the course of its life. Our people, along with the government of Armenia, the Armenian Church, all its communities and institutions, shall observe this anniversary during the course of the year 2005. The 1600th anniversary of the invention of the alphabet must not be approached with the mentality of its being an ordinary anniversary. The singular meaning and powerful message of the invention of the Armenian alphabet, which became one of the greatest revolutions in the life of our people and which fundamentally revolutionized our national life, must be brought under the spotlight against the imperatives and challenges of our present life. Indeed, in the face of the frightful current of globalization, which assimilates cultures, destroys communities, annihilates values and alters identities, the Armenian language must become, above all, a sacred forge of nation building and mighty shield of national self-defense for our people. It must remain the vital factor authentically expressing and comprehensively giving definition to the palpitations of our hearts, the flights of our souls and the conceptions of our minds. Furthermore, the Armenian language must become the unbreakable axis of the national consciousness and the strong cement of unity of our people scattered to all parts of the world.

The Armenian language is endowed with all these possibilities. Therefore, the role to be played by it in Armenian life is more critical now than at any other time. The anguish suffered by the immortal Khachatur Abovian over the healthy and inalterable preservation of the Armenian language is, and must be, the anguish experienced by all of us. Without the Armenian language, the Armenians will get cut off from their roots, will become removed from their identity and will become lost on the crossroads of history. Without the Armenian language, globalization, with its destructive values, will disfigure our profile and destroy our "little nation" in the garden of nations.

Now, it is not enough to engage in the glorification of the Armenian language and speak

of the definitive role that the Armenian language has had in the past. For all Armenians, the 1600th anniversary must become a challenge to renew their vow of loyalty to the Armenian language. Indeed, the Christian faith, which the apostles Saint Thaddeus and Saint Bartholomew brought to Armenia and which achieved official status through Saint Gregory the Illuminator, took on Armenian color and national identity in 405 by means of the invention of the Armenian alphabet. In other words, God spoke with us in Armenian and, through the Armenian language we entered into live communion with God and accepted, grasped and spread divine truths and heavenly values among our people.

For 1600 continuous years, our church has been the rich treasury of the Armenian language. It has also been the strong fortress for the healthy preservation and unblemished protection of the Armenian language. The Armenian Church has been and remains the apostle undertaking the flourishing and spread of the Armenian language and literature. Thus, our church, which is faithful to the same mission, is obligated to also display special zeal today, in terms of the constant and proper use of the Armenian language and its pure and unadulterated maintenance.

Therefore,

First, the 1600th anniversary must become an occasion for our people to reassert their steadfast loyalty with respect to the Armenian language. Indeed, we consider the proper and authentic use of the Armenian language, with its conversational and written forms, and especially its constant use within our families, schools and organizations, as well as during the everyday interrelations of our people and, particularly, our adolescents and youths, an urgent necessity and imperative obligation. Let us not forget that the degeneration of our language will also degenerate us in the spiritual, national and cultural sense. Let us not forget that the indifference displayed by us toward our language will lead us toward alienation. We consider the healthy and living preservation of the Armenian language a sacred, top-priority and pan-national obligation for the Armenian government, our church, and our cultural, educational and social institutions and organizations.

Second, the 1600th anniversary must become an occasion to underscore the pivotal role of the Armenian language especially today, as the solid and immovable foundation of the ethnic, national and cultural unity of our people. Due to certain conditions, different orthographies were imposed on our people and foreign words, linguistic forms and expressions were adopted. The present differences existing within our language, especially when we consider the present geographical dispersion of our people, can bring about breaches of division in our life. Therefore, it is necessary for them to be rectified in stages, on a pan-national level and with a planned approach, and for our language to be subjected to a serious and comprehensive review and reformation. Armenia and the Diaspora must undertake such a process jointly and without delay, for the sake of the maintenance of the integrity of the Armenian language and the strengthening of its unity, as well as the guarantee of the protection of the integrity of our people and the strengthening of its unity.

Now, it is with infinite blessing and spiritual joy that we hail the 1600th anniversary of the invention of the Armenian alphabet, and, with this sacred Pontifical encyclical issued from the Monastery of the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias --

We call upon the Prelates and Executive Councils of our dioceses, our educational, cultural and social organizations and societies, to underscore the critical place and role of the Armenian language in the spiritual, educational, cultural, social and public realms of our community life, with importance and by means of special programs, plans and efforts.

We also call upon all Armenians entrusted to our spiritual care to place value on the 1600th anniversary of the invention of the Armenian alphabet in their individual and collective lives, with deep awareness and special zeal.

May you live with the Lord, gain strength with the Holy Spirit and be blessed forever.

**ARAM I  
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA**

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