

**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 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 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. Renewal 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.

**ARAM I  
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA**

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Antelias-Lebanon*