

## 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 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.

As Christians, a life-centered spirituality must undergird our reflection and action. Life-centered spirituality must guide our life 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 nonviolence. 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 life each year because of 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 TV screens the horrible images of people, men and women, children and elderly, dying in Africa because of genocide, AIDS and mal-nutrition; or in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Bangkok because of the Tsunami disaster.

The human beings, who are endowed by God's gift of life, are destroying everyday and everywhere, the 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**

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Antelias*