

Electing A Holy Father



Will the new Catholicos heal, build and lead the Church into the next century?

At the end of October over 450 delegates from around the world, elected by their respective communities, will convene the National Ecclesiastical Assembly (NEA), the Armenian Church's highest body of authority, to elect a new Catholicos of All Armenians. (See page 18).

The 1995 NEA was filled with great expectations, excitement and vigor: It convened for the first time in 40 years and in an independent Armenia. The old, Soviet era had ended and a new one was about to be shaped.

But this time around, that excitement and enthusiasm is missing. Indeed, preparations for the election of the new Catholicos went almost unnoticed except for the odd press release on procedural matters. Yet, electing a new head of the Armenian Church is among the most pan-Armenian of events, one that involves the "entire" Armenian nation, at least in theory.

With the early death of Catholicos Karekin I, who was expected to lead it into the 21st century, a leadership vacuum has emerged in the Armenian Church. Who will be the next Catholicos?

While there is virtually no public discussion about the elections or, more importantly, about the essential qualities required of candidates, clergymen, patrons and politicians are busy promoting their favorites behind the scenes.

Various circles, based on their different agendas and interests, would present different lists of qualifications for the position of the Catholicos. But, in this highly advanced world, perhaps, going back to the fundamentals of the ages is not a bad idea. The Catholicos "should have a virtuous, holy and spotless life, with a record of good deeds," says the Book ("Ritual of

Consecration of a Catholicos"). And adds: "He should further be learned and full of wisdom, capable of leading the people of God."

One of the "debates" that has emerged since the death of Catholicos Karekin I is whether the next Catholicos should be a native of Armenia (insider) or a Diasporan (outsider). The fact that the Catholicos in Ejmiatsin is the "Catholicos of All Armenians" makes this issue irrelevant.

The NEA is not called to elect a Catholicos of Armenia, but of All Armenians. The new Catholicos will be the head of the Church both in Armenia and the Diaspora, where more Armenians live. The idea that the people of Armenia would "prefer" a native candidate seems to be an idea promoted by those who have a stake in the elections rather than a reflection of the actual feelings of the people. The Church establishment in Armenia, with its own cronyism and clan networks, would prefer the continuation of the "status quo" without major changes.

Rather than focusing on a narrow "insider-outsider" issue, the leadership capabilities, charisma, educational background and intelligence, and most important, the spiritual and moral standing of the candidates should be the central criteria for electing a new Catholicos.

First and foremost, the Catholicos of All Armenians should represent the spiritual, moral and ethical consciousness of the nation, and then everything else. It is only through a strong spiritual and moral stand (and symbol) that the new Catholicos can become the father of All Armenians.

Will the new Catholicos become truly the Holy Father of the nation? Soon we shall see if those who are entrusted to elect him will make a conscientious choice. ■



ARMEN Siran Der-Bedrossian
 18 Years of Experience Pager: 954.992.0630
 REALTOR CRS - GRI Fax: 954.938.8966
 MORTGAGE BROKER Eve: 954.565.0462
 NOTARY PUBLIC
 TRANSLATOR
 E-mail: armenrealty@att.net
 Web page: www.newmls.com/armenrealty



YOUR REAL ESTATE CONNECTION IN FLORIDA (954) 938-9858