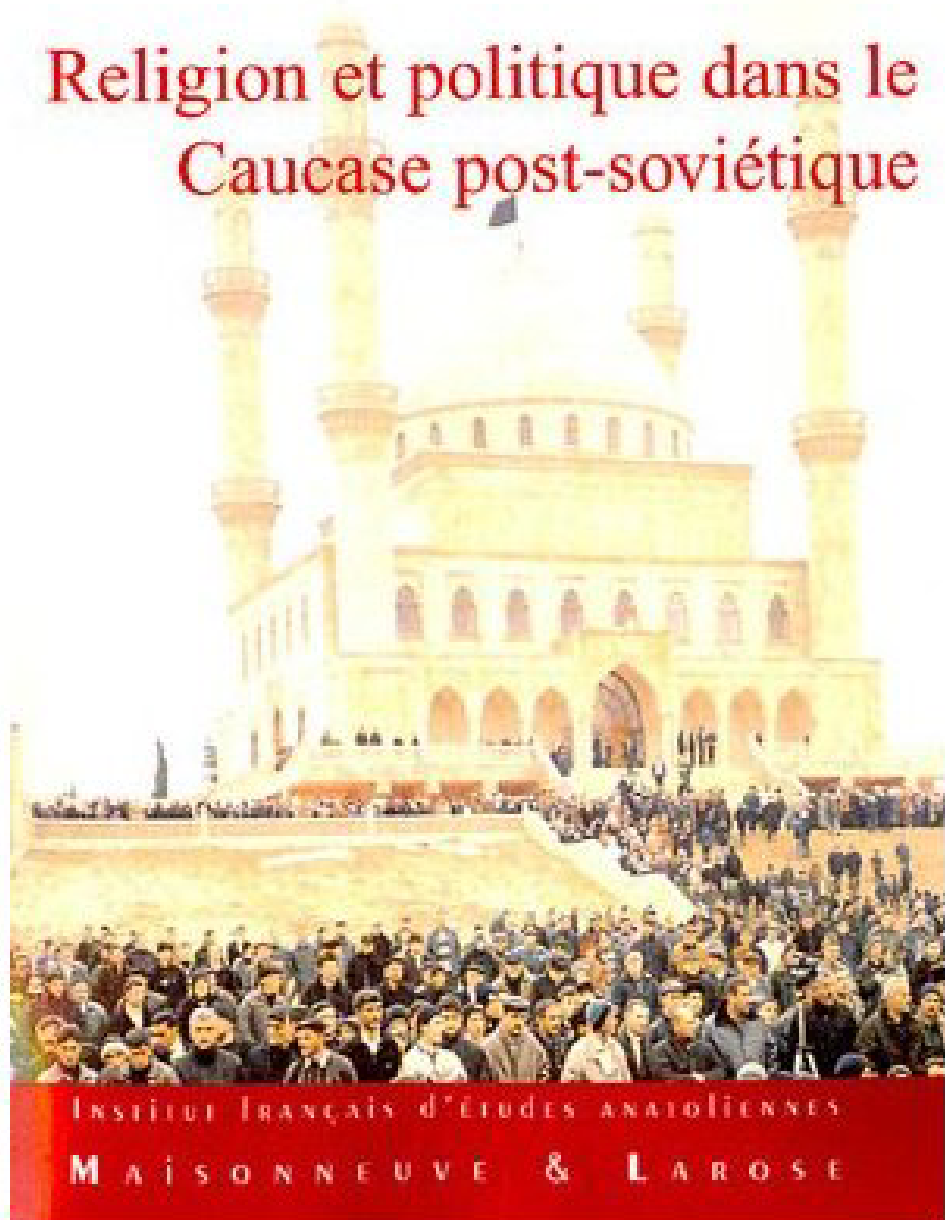


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Religion et politique dans le Caucase post-soviétique



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15. In Search of Relevance: Church and Religion in Armenia since Independence

Hratch TCHILINGIRIAN

When Armenia became independent in 1991, words such as *renewal*, *restoration*, *reformation*, *renaissance*, *re-evangelisation*, *re-Christianisation* and a host of similar expensive terms gained currency among religious leaders. « The reformation of the Armenian Church should be our goal, our target and our point of departure. That reform should preserve an order that is alive, not an order that is just a structure. We need to reform the Church... for the benefit of our nation », Catholicos Karekin I had declared enthusiastically upon his election.¹ But, soon, such words lost their lustre and power as they turned out to be just grandiose ideas without praxis. The transition from decades of « ungodliness » under Communism to « knowledge of God » in a newly independent country appeared to be more complex, problematic and difficult. Neither the society nor the religious establishment were prepared to accept the unexpected realities of freedom and liberty. This chapter will present a discussion of some of the key dimensions of this process. Starting with a brief presentation of the Soviet and perestroika periods for context, the chapter will then focus on the Church and the critical issues since Armenia's independence.

The overwhelming majority of the population of Armenia adheres to the Christian faith (98.7%) — at least nominally.² There are 55 religious organizations (some of them congregations of the same denomination) officially registered in Armenia (see Appendix 1). The largest religious institution is the Armenian Apostolic Church, the « National Church », followed by Armenian

¹ Tchilingirian 1996: 12-14.

² Armenian Apostolic 94.7%, other Christian 4%. World Factbook: Armenia. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/am.html> (9 August, 2005).

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Catholic and Protestant Churches,³ and smaller Russian Orthodox (14,600), Assyrian (3,400) and Jewish (300) communities. The Yezidis, numbering 40,620, are the second largest ethnic-religious group in the country.⁴ Since independence, other new religious movements have appeared in Armenia, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Transcendental Meditation and pagans.⁵ Interestingly, when intellectuals in Armenia were asked (in a 2004 poll) « which component [of religion] prevails in the average Armenian's worldview? » they said: 34 percent Christian, 32 percent pagan, 24 percent atheistic.⁶

It is traditionally believed that two of Jesus Christ's Apostles, Thaddeus and Bartholomew, preached Christianity in Armenia as early as the second half of the first century. Armenia is considered to be the first nation to adopt Christianity as State religion in 301 through the efforts of Gregory the Illuminator (c. 240-325) and King Tiridates III (c. 238-314). The Armenian Church — officially the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church — belongs to the Orthodox family of Churches, known as the Oriental Orthodox or 'Non-Chalcedonian' Churches. It shares many commonalities with the Byzantine Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, especially in liturgy, but differs over certain theological issues.

The Catholicosate of All Armenians — also known as the 'Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin' — is the supreme ecclesiastical centre of the Church, located in the town of Vagharshapat, 25 km from Yerevan. It is recognised as 'pre-eminent' among the four Hierarchical Sees of the Church, which include the Catholicosate of Cilicia located in Antelias, Lebanon (starting in 1930, but with roots going back to the 13th century), the Patriarchate of Jerusalem from the early 14th century and the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Istanbul established in 1461 by the Ottoman Sultan. The 'Catholicos of All Armenians' (more or less equivalent of the Pope or Patriarch) is elected for life by the

³ For profiles of these communities, see Tchilingirian 2000: 44-47 and Tchilingirian 1999: 57.

⁴ Republic of Armenia, Census 2001, Table 5.1. <http://docs.armstat.am/census/pdf/51.pdf>. According to the 2001 census, Armenia's total population is 3,213,011. In addition to the mentioned groups, there are also other ethnicities: Greeks (1176), Ukrainian (1633) and Kurds (1519).

⁵ In addition to Christian denominations and alternative religions, there are also a number of groups following old pagan rituals. Eduard Enfiajian, a political commentator and member of the pagan community, explains: « In Armenia, many people identify religion with the Church establishment. Not us. We have nothing against Christianity, but as a social institution, it is not acceptable to us. Religion is constitutionally separated from the State, but in reality, they teach Christianity even in kindergartens, not to mention schools, universities and the armed forces. To me, this is wrong; a person should be able to choose which God he will obey » (Ter-Saakian 2004).

⁶ « Value and Ideology Benchmarks: Imperatives and Alternatives », Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan, July 2004: 10 (www.acnis.am)

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National Ecclesiastical Assembly — the highest legislative body in the Church — and enjoys 'primacy of honour' among the other hierarchical heads. The Assembly is made of two-thirds lay representatives of the Armenian people from around the world and one-third clergymen.

The Church under Communism

Under decades of Soviet rule, anti-religious propaganda and State-sponsored atheistic indoctrination, the Church suffered heavily as an institution. Vast Church properties were lost, priests were exiled or executed, assets and treasures of Ejmiatsin were confiscated and the Church was stripped bare to its liturgical functions.⁷ Like all other Churches and religious groups in the USSR — where « millions of peasants were slaughtered in order to eradicate faith from the very roots of the people », as Solzhenitsyn wrote⁸ — the Armenian Church, too, was persecuted, especially in the 1920's to 1930's. Most notably, new archival material and studies reveal that the secret police (the NKVD, KGB's predecessor) murdered Catholicos Khoren (Muradbekian) by strangulation at his headquarters in Ejmiatsin on April 6th, 1938, for refusing to hand over church treasures.⁹ The following day, the entire treasury and religious artefacts of Ejmiatsin were confiscated by the State and taken away. Indeed, the Communist authorities in Armenia, headed by K. Arutyunov, wished to liquidate Ejmiatsin entirely and, to this effect, had appealed to Stalin in August 1938. They accused Ejmiatsin of « anti-Communist activities » and collaboration with Armenian nationalists.

Although in the end the headquarters of the Catholicosate were not completely closed down, the seven years following the assassination of the pontiff were among the most difficult period in the history of the Catholicosate. In addition to the loss of property and income, out of some 70-75 clergymen in Ejmiatsin all but seven were arrested and exiled for « anti-revolutionary activities », and hundreds of churches were closed. By 1940 there were only nine functioning Armenian churches in the entire Soviet Union.¹⁰ In general, the Church in Soviet Armenia « was kept on a very tight leash, reduced to just

⁷ For a more extensive discussion on the confiscation of Church properties, see Stepanyants 1994: 61ff.

⁸ SOLZHENITSYN 1989: 15.

⁹ BEHBUTYAN 1996; KERTOgh (Stepanyants) 2002: 8ff.

¹⁰ For instance, in Soviet Georgia out of 23 Armenian churches, only one was left open. Prior to 1917 the large Armenian Church diocese of Russia had 44 churches, 3 monasteries and 57 priests; the diocese of Astrakhan had 57 churches and 39 priests; the diocese of Artsakh (Karabakh) had 208 churches, 14 monasteries and 236 priests. See KERTOgh (Stepanyants) 2002: 7ff; TERCHANYAN 2001; *Soviet War News* (published by the Soviet Embassy in London) 22 August 1941, quoted in Corley 1996: 11.

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a remnant of its former glory », asserts Felix Corley in his extensive study of the period. It was thanks to the relevance and importance of the Catholicosate to the large Armenian Diaspora that the centuries-old institution was saved from « complete oblivion ». ¹¹

Stalin allowed the election of a new Catholicos to take place only in 1945, as he needed support after the « Great Patriotic War » — in which 600,000 Armenians participated and 200,000 died. The Armenian Church delegates from around the world were invited by the Soviet government to take part in the election. The murdered pontiff's confidant Archbishop Cheorekchian became Catholicos Gevorg VI and was consecrated in the Cathedral of Ejmiatsin. ¹² As reported by Edward Alexander :

« The Soviets went to great pains to record and film the centuries-old ceremony of consecration in all its pomp and splendour.... The films... were dispatched to all parts of the world as new evidence of religious freedom in the homeland. Not only some of the old émigrés, but even recently displaced persons who know Communism more intimately were convinced that genuine freedom was descending on Armenia. The films were the prelude to the clarion call which followed: the call to return to the homeland. The Kremlin was already exploiting the sacred office of the Catholicate to lure back expatriates. ¹³ »

Indeed, in his inaugural address as Catholicos of All Armenians, Gevorg VI officially called upon the Armenians in the Diaspora to return to the homeland. Nearly 90,000 Armenians, mostly from the Middle East — whose homeland was actually historical Armenia and Cilicia in Turkey — repatriated to Soviet Armenia between 1946 and 1948. The Soviet Armenian authorities organised the entire enterprise. It was only after they were behind the « iron curtain » that they realized the tragic situation in the homeland and generally in the Soviet Union. « Soon [they] were overcome by a disquieting realization: inside the borders of Armenia the Catholicos was a stranger to his own people ». ¹⁴

The persecution of the Church eased after Stalin's death in 1953. The election of the Romania-born Bishop Baljian as Catholicos Vazgen I in 1955 ushered a new period in the life of the Church. Under his leadership, the Church gradually came out of its isolation. Using the Church's long-established network of dioceses and churches around the world, he created bridges between Soviet Armenia and the Diaspora through Ejmiatsin and strengthened relations with wealthy communities and institutions outside the USSR. This

¹¹ See CORLEY 1996: 9; Corley 1996a: 289-343; Corley 1998: 291-355; and STEPANYANTS 1994.

¹² Upon Gevorg's request Stalin had also allowed the reopening of the seminary in Ejmiatsin to educate and train the much needed priests. For a more extensive discussion of this period, see TERCHANYAN 2001 and MOURADIAN 1990.

¹³ ALEXANDER 1955 : 359.

¹⁴ ALEXANDER 1955: 360. See also Chapter 8 in MOURADIAN 1990.

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increased Ejmiatsin's prestige in the eyes of the Communists, who were ever mindful of projecting a good image abroad, and asserted the Catholicos' national position. Moreover, numerous donations and sponsorships from the Diaspora enabled Vazgen I to renovate many historic churches and monasteries and to engage in cultural-educational activities inside Soviet Armenia, including the building of a modern museum and the establishment of state-of-the-art printing press in Ejmiatsin.

At the helm of the Church for nearly 40 years — one of the longest serving pontiffs in the history of the Church — Vazgen I had also endured State pressures and interference in the Church's affairs. But, over the years, he had come to be respected and recognised as a « national figure » in Soviet Armenia. Raymond Oppenheim, an Episcopalian chaplain stationed at the US embassy in Moscow (1972-75) noted: « The modus vivendi achieved by Catholicos Vazgen I has permitted a greater degree of religious freedom to flourish in Soviet Armenia than in any other part of the Soviet Union ». ¹⁵ By the late 1970's, the Church enjoyed even more freedom to carry out its basic religious functions. The number of active churches had reached 40. Another important development, for example, was the permission granted by the government to the Catholicos to send young priests abroad to further their theological education at European and Western universities.

The Soviet Armenian government's « concessions » to Catholicos Vazgen I were in recognition of the Church's "cultural" and "national" role in history, rather than an endorsement of religion by government officials and society in general. « We are Communists, but we are also Armenians » affirmed one Armenian Communist official, who credited the Church for preserving the Armenian language and culture. ¹⁶ In the 1970's and 1980's Church-State relations were cordial rather than hostile as in previous decades and Vazgen I could publicly state: « Face to face with the Communist ideology, we do not have to prove the right of our existence with intolerance and enmity ». ¹⁷ While some observers point out that the Church enjoyed freedom because it did not « oppose the ruling ideology » of the Communist regime, others assert that « survival ranked higher than defending doctrine and developing Christian response to change in society ». ¹⁸ As in the case of the Orthodox Church in Russia, the Armenian Church too, « had to pay for its survival as an institution, beginning in 1943, with unquestioning loyalty » to Soviet authorities. ¹⁹ From the vantage point of what is known about the Soviet

¹⁵ CORLEY 1996a: 315.

¹⁶ *Nor Gyank* (Los Angeles), 18 July 1985: 16.

¹⁷ HADIDYAN and SHAHBAZIAN 1976: 292.

¹⁸ CORLEY 1996a: 316 and Corley 1998: 346.

¹⁹ MOURADIAN 1988: 357-362; ALEXANDER 1955: 357-362.

regime today, it is clear that the balancing act was difficult. Under the controlling conditions of Soviet rule, the Armenian Church, led by Catholicos Vazgen I, had to make difficult choices, both to survive and to preserve its legitimacy in the life of the nation.

Perestroika: a new era

Mikhael Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980's ushered a new era for the Church under Communism and brought changes of attitude in the government and society. Matters of Church and religion, in general, were openly and publicly discussed. As one prominent Diaspora visitor to Armenia at the time observed:

« The most positive result of *glasnost* and *perestroika* is the change in the status of the Church and religion in general. Bible classes, Sunday Schools, the printing of Church music and books, the attendance and acceptance of sacraments by government officials and the re-opening of countless churches (over 30) throughout Armenia have brought the Armenian Church back into the lives of the people.²⁰ »

This was part of the unprecedented processes of rapid and long-term transitions in virtually all aspects of life in the Soviet Union — social, political, economic, religious, cultural and territorial. Like in other former Soviet republics, the old socio-political boundaries changed in Armenia: a process of social relocation and strengthening of old identity references were quickly in place. The restoration of the « national character » of Armenia and Armenian institutions was part of this process, which included, for example, renaming cities, towns, villages and streets.

At the individual level, reclaiming Armenian religion, vis-à-vis the national Church, became one of the means to assert one's re-appropriated freedoms. Indeed, in the late 1980's and the early 1990's, it was fashionable to be baptised and become a « believer », virtually overnight. Other new and non-traditional religious groups — such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Hare Krishnas, and Transcendental Meditation — appeared on the fringes of this euphoria, challenging the monopolistic « exclusivity » of the national Church, which was expected to play a role in the construction of a new social order in newly independent Armenia. But, the return to religion and spirituality, enhanced by *perestroika*, was eclipsed by several major national events and developments, which have had far reaching impact on Armenia and Armenians: (1) the Karabakh Movement, starting in February 1988, which later turned into independence movement; (2) the devastating earthquake in December of the same year; (3) the pogroms of Armenians in Azerbaijani towns; (4) the war with Azerbaijan in and for Nagorno Karabakh and (5) the

²⁰ SIMONE 1990: 75-76; cf. "Cross Meets Kremlin," *Time*, 4 December 1989: 75-76.

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subsequent economic and energy blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey, which created harsh conditions for the population, especially in the winters of 1992 and 1993. As one young clergyman described, these major turn of events « created a new process of national self-examination and self-assertion ».²¹ The « Mother Church » was expected — at least from the point of view of the clergy — to play a role in these “historic” developments.

The beginning of the Karabakh Movement in early 1988 — demanding the reunification with Armenia of Nagorno Karabakh, an autonomous region within Azerbaijan SSR — was a major test for Gorbachev’s new policy of openness and a major turning point in Soviet Armenia. The conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Karabakh — a small enclave of 4388 sq. km., with a population of about 150,000 — is the oldest conflict in the former Soviet Union, starting in the 1920’s. A popular movement for self-determination by Karabakh Armenians turned into a full-scale war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in 1991. The war is not officially over, but a fragile ceasefire since May 1994 is still in force.²²

The Karabakh Movement gained strength in both Yerevan and Stepanakert, the capital of the enclave. Some one million Armenians demonstrated in the streets of Yerevan, the movement attracted enormous international attention and became an urgent matter for Gorbachev and the Communist Party leadership in Moscow. In the early stages of the movement, the role of the Armenian Church, personified in Catholicos Vazgen I, was ambiguous. On the one hand, Ejmiatsin was reluctant to publicly oppose the Kremlin’s policies, on the other hand, as an Armenian national institution, the Church could not be indifferent to its people’s struggle. Catholicos Vazgen I believed that Armenia’s survival was only possible « within the great and mighty family of Soviet nationalities » and popular demands for Karabakh’s union with Armenia would not lead to any tangible results.²³ On the contrary, based on his decades-long experience with Soviet authorities, he feared — as expressed in his appearance on Armenian television — an anti-Soviet movement would lead to « offer[ing] Armenia on a platter to our centuries-old enemy ».²⁴ Thus, throughout the initial phase of the movement in Armenia, Vazgen I appealed for « good sense, far-sightedness and discipline. »

Vazgen I was widely criticised by both intellectuals and the public for not supporting the people and for accommodating the policies of Soviet authorities. Some demonstrators during street protests in Yerevan carried placards

²¹ MGRDTCHIAN 1991: 5.

²² For a more detailed discussion of the conflict, see TCHILINGIRIAN 1995 and TCHILINGIRIAN 1997.

²³ Rebroadcast on Armenian radio for Europe, 11 July 1988; SWB SU/0202 B/1-2, 13 July 1988.

²⁴ FBIS-SOV (Armenpress), 15 July 1988: 59.

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declaring: « The Catholicos has crucified our Faith ». ²⁵ In response to his critics, Vazgen I appeared on Armenian television on February 25th, 1988 and assured the people that he had sent a telegram to Gorbachev supporting the calls of the people. « I believe that this demand is natural, legal and constitutional », he said, appealing to the population « to remain calm and to await the decision of the Soviet authorities on the Karabakh's status ». ²⁶ When a popular uprising flared up in the streets of Yerevan, the Communist Party leadership of Armenia was unable to control the escalation of the situation. Moscow sought Vazgen I's help to exert his influence on the people. He did. A few days later Gorbachev reported to the Politburo (February 29th):

« [Vazgen I] promised to use all his authority not to allow any anti-Sovietism. He received many telephone calls from abroad. According to his word, he has given all of them this response: don't interfere in these matters; there must be no anti-Sovietism; only here, within the bounds of the Soviet Union, the Armenian nation is reviving. At the same time he said that real problems do exist, that these events have not arisen from nowhere. In this he referred to one example of his experiences. ²⁷ »

In an appeal during one of the most critical moments of the mass protests Vazgen I, appearing on television on July 7th 1988, shocked the population of Armenia with a harsh warning: « If you do not listen to me — your patriarch — I will curse my destiny and remain silent until eternity. » ²⁸ This « final call » for calmness had a great impact on the population.

By 1989, the Karabakh Committee, which grew out of the popular movement, had been successful in consolidating political activities in Armenia under the banner of the Armenian National Movement (ANM). ²⁹ The first congress of the ANM, with some 1,500 delegates, convened in Yerevan in October 1989. The Soviet Armenian government and the Armenian Communist leadership officially recognized it. This was the beginning of the erosion of Soviet power in Armenia. In early November 1989, the ANM del-

²⁵ Libaridian 1988: 93.

²⁶ *Keston News Service* (KNS), No. 295, 3 March 1988: 17. Vazgen's appearance on television followed shortly after dissident Paruir Hairikyan had sent the Catholicos a telegram accusing him of betraying the people's interest.

²⁷ Quoted in Corley 1998: 294. Politburo minutes, 29 February 1988, *Tsentr khraneniya sovremennoi dokumentatsii* (TskhSD), f. 89, op. 42, d. The "experience" refers to Vazgen's visit to Baku. He said, "I was in Baku at a reception with [Azerbaijani communist party leader Heidar] Aliev. In Baku there is an Armenian church. Two hundred thousand Armenians or more live in the city. Vazgen asked to hold a service in this church, but for 12 years he's been waiting for an invitation, which he hasn't received. He's an unwelcome person, they don't want him to turn up there." *Ibid.*

²⁸ FBIS-SOV (*Armenpress*), 15 July 1988: 59.

²⁹ For an extensive discussion of this period, see MALKASIAN 1996.

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legates visited Ejmiatsin to meet with the Catholicos. Despite Vazgen I's earlier cautious stance, the leaders of the Movement still considered him an important national figure and a supporter of pan-Armenian causes, especially in the view of the fact that he had influence in the Diaspora through the Church's dioceses and parishes abroad. In his welcoming address, Vazgen I assured his audience, mostly ill-informed about Church and religion: « unlike other Churches, we [the Armenian Church] are not preoccupied with inquisitions. All Armenians, whether believers or not, we consider them true children of the Armenian Church without discrimination ». ³⁰ He explained to them the place, role and position of the Church in the « long history » of the Armenian nation and positioned the Church right in the centre of national life:

« The national identity of the Armenian nation, the national ethos of the Armenian people, and the national ideology of the Armenian people have been forged here at Holy Ejmiatsin ... All the significant events in our history have been.... anchored on spiritual foundations, on the Christian faith, on the national literature, on a fortified culture and on the liberation of the fatherland.

Let it not be assumed that in the formation of the national ideology, the Armenian Church was a follower or a conformist. No. The Armenian Church for the past seventeen centuries has been the author and the leader [in these matters].

You can be assured that our Church, headed by Ejmiatsin, is always ready to open its arms and heart before all those Armenians, before those organizations, who would be willing to think, speak and work by this spirit and by properly understood national realisation. This spirit ... has preserved also our Church in the last decades, here in a Soviet country; even in the bad times of self-worship, though under isolated conditions, the Armenian Church has always kept the light of this spirit lit in Holy Ejmiatsin and in the Diaspora. »

As for the Diaspora, the Catholicos declared: « It could be said, without hesitation, that the Armenian Church is the backbone of Armenian life in the Diaspora ». He then outlined three « important imperatives » for Armenia: 1) « guarantee and strengthen the country's political security » in view of Armenia's geopolitical position; 2) reconstruct and develop the economy, especially after the earthquake; 3) create uniformity to « advance the prosperity of Armenian national culture in the fatherland. » ³¹ On the one hand, Vazgen I cautiously avoided endorsing the political aspirations of the ANM — subordinating independence to security and democracy to national unity — on the other hand, he showed readiness to help them in their « national struggle ». ³² Most importantly, as the ANM was quickly becoming the leading

³⁰ « Address of His Holiness Vazgen to the delegates of the Armenian National Movement, » translated by H. Tchilingirian, *Window View of the Armenian Church*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1990: 6.

³¹ *Ibid* 6-9. Curiously, at the conclusion of his address to the ANM, "in order to encourage the use of the Armenian language in educational and other institutions," Vazgen donated one hundred typewriters of Armenian language "under the discretion" of ANM's "newly elected committee."

³² For an extensive discussion of the Church's political stance in the Soviet period until the

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political force in Armenia, Vazgen I made it very clear to the emerging new leadership that « the Church is not on any side; the Church is on all sides. »³³ Thus, reiterating the Church's place and legitimacy above and beyond the emerging national entities.

When two years later Armenia became an independent State, the Catholicos was already fully behind the newly independent State and its leadership. In an appeal right before the national referendum on independence held on September 21st, Vazgen I declared:

« The cry for freedom and independence is the imperative of our centuries-old history, the dictate of our nation's consciousness and the guarantee of our future existence. The Armenian Apostolic Church anxiously and unhesitatingly looks forward to hearing our people's historical affirmation, and to following that voice. ... On the horizon of the Armenian land rises that star of independence. Blessings and glory to that radiating star and to the forever free Armenian nation.³⁴ »

Shortly after the overwhelming *yes* vote for independence, the Catholicos presided over the swearing in of the first democratically elected president of the newly independent Republic of Armenia and gave him his blessings. As Armenia's independence was eclipsed by the continuing conflict and war with Azerbaijan, the Catholicos continued to speak out for an end to the hostilities in Karabakh and for the peaceful resolution of the conflict.³⁵ In terms of his standing in Armenia and the Diaspora, while the entire Communist leadership was discredited, the Catholicos was the only national figure who still enjoyed respect and public standing. Less than three weeks before his death in 1994, Vazgen I was the first national figure who was awarded the newly created highest honour of the Armenian State, the Order of National Hero.

The Church after Independence

The Armenian Church has had three leaders since independence – the incumbent Catholicoses Vazgen I (1955-1994), Karekin I Sarkissian (1995-1999) and Karekin II Nercessian (since October 1999). Each leadership change brought its own set of issues into the Church life: from government meddling in the Church election process to the personal style of leadership

mid-1980's, see MOURADIAN 1988.

³³ Op cit. "Address of His Holiness Vazgen..."

³⁴ *The Armenian Reporter* (New York), 19 September 1991.

³⁵ On several occasions, Catholicos Vazgen met Azerbaijan's religious leader, Sheik-ul-Islam Allah-Shukur Pashazadeh, in an effort to enhance resolution of the conflict and to underline that the conflict is not religious in nature. They met in May 1988, November 1993 and April 1994.

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and vision of each incumbent.³⁶ Since the end of Communism in Armenia, the critical challenges facing the Church have more or less remained the same: a) the relevance of the Church to society, which includes the issues of “re-evangelization” — as Catholicos Karekin I characterized it — of the population after decades of atheism, the lack of adequately educated and trained clergymen, and the non-existence of church communities around which parish life could be organised in towns, cities and regions; b) Church-State relations and « competition » created by other religious groups; c) relations and problems with the Church in diaspora communities spread around the world.

Church and Society

When Armenia became independent, there were high expectations in Armenia that the Church would provide the much-needed guidance in filling the ideological and spiritual gap left behind by the failure of the Communist ideology. In 1991, as one priest described it: « The responsibility to give shape and content to this [national and spiritual] awakening, together with its present and future direction, [had] fallen on the shoulders of the Armenian clergy. »³⁷ However, the Church in Armenia was not up for the challenge and lacked capacity. Decades of restraints under Communism had rendered the Church ill-prepared — in terms of human and material resources — to respond to the growing interest of people in religion and spirituality. « We never anticipated that the freedom of religion that was granted would create such a situation for which we were certainly not prepared », admitted Catholicos Vazgen I in 1992.³⁸

Indeed, beyond the initial enthusiasm about religious freedom, the Armenian Church’s impact on individual religiosity in Armenia was minimal and continues to be so. Like other nations, say, in Europe, Armenians only nominally belong to the « Mother Church ». Interestingly, in the late 1960’s, the Russian writer Andrei Bitov, describing a visit to Holy Ejmiatsin, wrote:

« The church was full, jam-packed, you couldn’t breathe, your neck and tiptoes ached, but there were no believers. On the right, the philharmonic [choir]. On the left, theatre [altar]. In the rear, curiosity. ... The service took its normal course, yet its mystery meant nothing to anyone.³⁹ »

To a large extent, this was still the case more than two decades later. In the aftermath of the earthquake in 1988, Yuri Rost, who spent considerable time in Armenia, wrote:

³⁶ For more extensive discussion of these issues, see Tchilingirian 1999a: 24-25.

³⁷ MGRDTCHIAN 1991: 5.

³⁸ TCHILINGIRIAN 1992: 7.

³⁹ BITOV 1992: 34.

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« [...] faith in a world beyond the grave, in spiritual salvation, as taught by the Church, is to a great extent lost. The old churches lie empty, converted from places of worship into architectural testaments to their ancient historical culture.⁴⁰ »

Right after independence, the Church preoccupied itself with re-establishing its pre-Soviet status and reclaiming its legitimacy as a national institution, which, ironically, it already had. Other denominations — such as the small Catholic and Evangelical Churches — engaged in the « re-evangelization » of Armenia. The Armenian Apostolic Church, instead of copying the zeal of other Christian denominations and religious groups, chose to marginalise the competition by securing a privileged position in the law — as it is, for example, in Russia and Georgia. While multi-level transitions were (and are) taking place in the country, the Church remained on the periphery of both national and social life. For instance, over 98 percent of Armenians consider themselves Christians, but only 8 percent attend church services at least once a week.⁴¹ The effects of State-sponsored atheism in Soviet Armenia on the one hand, and the impact of secularisation and globalisation on the other hand have had crucial consequences on religiosity in general and on church practice in particular. However, these far-reaching processes were never seriously studied or addressed by the Church hierarchy. As one study in 2003 put it: « The situation in Armenia proper is still influenced by 70 years of anti-Church propaganda. For many in Armenia, a well-educated Christian is a contradiction in terms. Religious faith is seen as incompatible with reason, knowledge, science and education ». ⁴²

In a society faced with an endemic culture of corruption, socio-economic hardships and a continuing territorial conflict, the national Church was expected to provide moral, ethical and spiritual guidance. But this has hardly been the case. In fact, even on issues where the Church has traditionally had clear theological positions, such as abortion and homosexuality, the official Church has been publicly silent. It is telling that a 2003 poll of 1875 people around Armenia found that 60 percent of the respondents 'did not know any clergy' — of those who knew, 35 percent had positive, 20 percent negative and 43 percent neutral impressions.⁴³ One young professional working

⁴⁰ ROST 1990: 156.

⁴¹ In neighbouring Georgia it is 10 percent and Azerbaijan 6 percent. « Study of worldwide rates of religiosity, church attendance », 10 December 1997, University of Michigan, <http://www.umich.edu/~newsinfo/Releases/1997/Dec97/chr121097a.html> (2 September 2005).

⁴² Armenia 2020, 'Church, State and Religion in Armenia', Issue Paper prepared by Arak-29 Foundation, Yerevan, 2003: 1 (www.armenia2020.org).

⁴³ *Ibid* 3.

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in Yerevan captured the general attitude: « In Soviet times there was more respect for the clergy than now ».⁴⁴

The effects of Communist legacy remain all too tangible in post-Soviet Armenia. Arguably, one of the most affected areas is theological education and training of clergymen in seminaries, which has had a long-term implication for the functioning of the Church. Throughout the Soviet decades, the seminary curriculum was deeply compromised. While subjects related to the Armenian Church life and culture were (and are) emphasised and taught by highly qualified scholars, theology was taught at rudimentary or « Sunday School » level. This low standard of theological education is due to several key reasons. First, theological scholarship was officially forbidden and later discouraged during the Communist regime. In these circumstances, it was practically impossible to train an indigenous cadre of theologians in Armenia. Priests and seminarians from Ejmiatsin were allowed to study abroad only from the mid-1970's — including the current Catholicos — but only a handful benefited and many stayed abroad as parish priests. Second, as Church life in Soviet times was restricted to liturgical and ritual practices, the standards of clergy education were determined by the functional needs of the Church. As such, the criteria for graduation from seminary were the knowledge of the liturgical practices of the Armenian Church and some general knowledge of the Scriptures and Church history. Eventually, under Communist pressure, the Church increasingly retreated into a « cultural ministry » and came to see its primary role as the preserver of the Armenian national identity. This affected the Church's « religious mission », which was weakened with each passing decade under Soviet rule. The lack of qualified teaching staff, textbooks in Armenian for theological and Biblical subjects, adequate libraries and research resources compounded this critical problem.

Although the restructuring and improvement of clergy education is a long-term process, a new development in this direction started with the establishment of a faculty of theology at Yerevan State University in 1995 — for the first time in the institution's 84-year history. Some 50-60 students graduate from the program every year. Since the mid-1990's there has been a gradual and steady increase in the number of students studying in Ejmiatsin, as well as in the two seminaries established in Sevan and Gumri since independence. Whereas in the late Soviet period the average at Ejmiatsin was about 40-50 students a year, in recent years the figure has reached several hundreds. This has translated into the increase in numbers of ordained priests serving in Armenia (see Appendix 2).

⁴⁴ Interview in Yerevan, 4 May 2005.

The Church and the State

Despite expectations that the Church would be free of State influence in non-Communist Armenia, Church-State relations have been problematic since 1991. Constitutionally the Church and State are separated, but both have attempted to exploit the other. The Church has sought the patronage of the State — especially through legislation — to fend off the challenge and competition posed by foreign missionaries and other much smaller religious groups. While this has put the State in an uneasy position vis-à-vis its human rights and international obligations, successive governments, in turn, have used the Church to boost their legitimacy and declining popularity, especially in the Diaspora. The drafting of legislation on religion, the issue of religious pluralism — or rather religious intolerance — and the State's interference in the election of the head of the Armenian Church are some of the main areas of conflict since independence.

On the eve of the election of a new Catholicos in 1995, when asked about the role of the Church in independent Armenia, President Ter Petrossian explained:

« It is true that along with the restoration of Armenian statehood, the Church was relieved of its secular obligations. However, as long as a considerable number of Armenians live abroad, the Church will preserve its role of uniting the Armenian people. The activities of the Church in the nation's spiritual and moral education should not be underestimated. »

In the same interview, he openly endorsed the candidacy of Catholicos Karekin I (Sarkissian) of the Great House of Cilicia — one of the four hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church located in Lebanon — because of his « Armenian theological and historical knowledge, diplomatic abilities and administrative skills ». Ter Petrossian explained that the Cilician Catholicos was an « undeniable authority for believers » in Armenia and the Diaspora.⁴⁵ But the President and the government had another agenda in mind.

The long conflict between the Catholicosate of All Armenians in Ejmiatsin and the Catholicosate of Cilicia (in Antelias, Lebanon) is a « major wound » in the history of the Armenian Church. Until 1956, Ejmiatsin and Cilicia had good relations and complemented each other's work by sharing resources and clergy. But during the Cold War, the administrative schism in the Church took a political slant, whereby the Catholicos in Ejmiatsin became known as 'pro-Soviet' and the one in Antelias 'anti-Soviet'. By then the Catholicosate of Cilicia had come under the influence of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation — the *Dashnaks* — the nationalist party, which was involved in anti-Soviet politics in Lebanon in the 1950's. In this back-

⁴⁵ *Hayastani Hanrapetutian* 8 March 1995; see also *Window view of the Armenian Church*, Vol. V, No. 1, 1995: 4.

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ground, the Cilician See stepped out of its historically recognised ecclesiastical boundaries (Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus) and established counter dioceses in the United States, Iran and Greece, thus putting the « division » in the Church at the jurisdictional level.

A few months before the election of the new Catholicos, in an unrelated political development, Ter Petrossian had banned the Dashnak party on dubious charges during a television appearance on December 28th, 1994. At the time the party was one of the largest opposition groups in Armenia and an influential organization in the Diaspora.⁴⁶ In view of this critical situation at home and deteriorating relations with the Diaspora, the President and his close allies thought that the decades-old rift in the Armenian Church could be resolved by bringing Catholicos Karekin II of Cilicia to Ejmiatsin as « Catholicos of All Armenians ». On the opening day of the pontifical election in Ejmiatsin on April 3rd, 1995, in his address to the 400 delegates of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, Ter Petrossian said, « I would like to put diplomatic language aside and speak with you with simple human language » :

« Let us all admit that the current situation that exists in our Church — that is, her division — is a national disgrace. I do not accept any justification, any argumentation, from all those who have contributed to that division. They have no justification. I do not accept the false passions that caused the division. I do not accept the view that the Church in Ejmiatsin, which was regarded as subservient to the Kremlin or the KGB, has served our people worse than the Cilician See. Simply, the Armenian nation, as in the past, in this era as well, had turned into a pawn of the Cold War. Today, we have the opportunity — without the demands of foreign forces — for the first time, to solve our problems ourselves; to solve the greatest problem that our Church faces.⁴⁷ »

Without naming him, the reference to Catholicos Karekin's candidacy was clear in his speech. Ter Petrossian's characterisation of the qualities of Catholicos Karekin was a widely held impression, especially among the elites — although he was less known in Armenia than in the Diaspora. As expressed by Dariel Barseghian, a judge in Armenia and Chairman of National Ecclesiastical Assembly, everyone expected that the new Catholicos would « contribute to the unity of all Armenians, think about the

⁴⁶ The two main charges were that members of the Dashnak Party's leadership, the Bureau and the Armenian Central Committee, included non-Armenian citizens (i.e., diasporans with foreign citizenships) and that the party had created a clandestine cell, called Dro, which was engaging in illegal activities threatening Armenia's national security. In January 1995, the Supreme Court of Armenia ruled that the Dashnak Party should be suspended on the grounds of the first charge, for violating the Law on Civic-Political Organizations and the Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Nationals. The court did not rule on the second charge as the criminal case was still under investigation.

⁴⁷ *Window view of the Armenian Church*, Vol. V, No. 1, 1995: 5-6.

concerns of the Armenian nation — not only spiritual, but in other areas as well — and contribute to the establishment and straightening of independent statehood ».⁴⁸

Many thought that Karekin I's election in Ejmiatsin would bring a de facto unity in the Armenian Church and indirectly weaken the Dashnak Party. But that did not happen and could not have happened as the party was still involved in the affairs of the Catholicosate of Cilicia and continued to be influential in the Diaspora. In June 1995, Aram I (Keshishian) was elected Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias to succeed Karekin. Upon their elections, both catholicoses considered the Church unity a most pressing national issue and pledged their commitment for a new *modus operandi*. But, over a decade later, « Church unity » remains a desired outcome. Contrary to popular perception, unity in the Armenian Church is not likely to imply the merging of the Sees of Ejmiatsin and Cilicia. The Catholicosate of Cilicia has existed for over 700 years. It was established in the year 1293 when the headquarters of the Armenian Church was transferred to Sis, the capital of the Cilician Armenian kingdom (in present day Turkey). Since then, the activities and mission of the Catholicosate of Cilicia has been closely related to the Armenian communities in dispersion. After the Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the Catholicosate of Cilicia was re-established in Lebanon. Since then it has contributed to the development of the Diaspora by providing Armenian communities around the world with tens of clergymen, teachers, intellectuals, and community leaders. It is difficult to imagine that such a national institution will dissolve any time soon or, as some circles suggest, be demoted to a Patriarchate, as the ones in Jerusalem and Istanbul.

The reactions to Karekin of Cilicia's election as the « Catholicos of All Armenians » were mixed and at times harsh. While with the end of the Cold War the reasons for the division within the Church were no longer justified, Catholicos Karekin I of All Armenians was unable to bring full reconciliation and end the jurisdictional disputes. His « duty and desire [to see] the realisation of cooperation and unity », as he had stated on the day of his election in Ejmiatsin Cathedral, remained unfulfilled.⁴⁹ Karekin I also lost influence and lustre when Ter Petrossian was forced to resign as the president of Armenia in 1998. Karekin I's 18-year service and legacy in Lebanon were virtually forgotten as the members of the Catholicosate of Cilicia viewed his move to Armenia as a « betrayal » of their historical See. It was the first time in history that a Catholicos of Cilicia had been elected Catholicos of All Armenians. His short tenure in Ejmiatsin did not allow him to leave his mark on the Church in Armenia. On his election, Karekin I had outlined four

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 4.

⁴⁹ *Window view of the Armenian Church*, 5, 1, 1995: 23.

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ambitious priorities for his pontificate: the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of Christianity in Armenia in 2001; training of clergy and lay workers for the « religious revival of the nation »; « the reinterpretation » of Armenia's national and religious identity; and the financial stability of the Holy See.⁵⁰ His death due to cancer before the end of the millennium meant that he could not preside over the jubilee celebrations, the preparations for which were largely carried out during his tenure.

In 1995 the National Ecclesiastical Assembly had convened to elect a new Catholicos 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. Arguably, the election of the head of the Armenian Church was the most pan-Armenian event involving Armenia and the Diaspora. There were great expectations, excitement and vigour surrounding the election. However, in 1999, when it was time to elect a successor to Karekin I, the mood had changed: instead of excitement and enthusiasm, there were petty politicking and internal bickering. Indeed, preparations for the election of the new Catholicos went almost unnoticed by the public except for the odd press release on procedural matters.⁵¹

With the early death of Catholicos Karekin I, who was expected to lead the Church into the 21st century, a leadership vacuum emerged. There were hardly any public discussions about the election or about the essential qualities of the prospective candidates. Instead, clergymen, patrons and politicians, both in Armenia and the Diaspora, were engaged in a behind-the-scenes promotion of their favoured candidates. Revealingly, two days before the election, one bishop said: « We are not going to elect the worthiest candidate, but we are going to elect the most suitable candidate ».⁵² One of the questions that emerged after the death of the Syria-born Karekin I was whether the next Catholicos should be a native of Armenia (“insider”) or a Diasporan (‘outsider’). The Church establishment in Armenia, with its own cronyism, preferred continuity of the « status quo » without major changes. The Diaspora, in turn, had its own few candidates and felt the ‘inside-outside’ debate was offensive. A group of archbishops — including the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Istanbul — publicly complained that the government of President Robert Kocharian was unduly interfering in the election process. In a statement issued in New York they said: « the high echelons of the government of Armenia have arrived at a consensus in favour of one of the candidates in the upcoming election, and are employed in an effort to enthrone him

⁵⁰ TCHILINGIRIAN 1996: 12-14.

⁵¹ See, for example, “Residents Indifferent about Catholicos Elections”, *Asbarez-On-Line*, 28 February 1995.

⁵² Interview in Ejmiatsin, see Hratch Tchilingirian, “Catholicossal Election Special Daily Coverage”, 25 October 1999, *AIM*, posted on groong@usc.edu (www.groong.com).

as Catholicos ». The government supported the candidacy of Archbishop Karekin Nersessian, the Vicar of Yerevan, the largest diocese in Armenia, who had considerable support among the clergy and laity in Armenia. Indeed, in the previous election of 1995, Nersessian had received the largest number of votes on the first ballot over Catholicos Karekin of Cilicia. But, under pressure, Nersessian withdrew his candidacy on the third ballot in favour of the candidate endorsed by President Ter Petrossian. In the 1995 election, the archbishop of Yerevan was not seen as a match to Catholicos Karekin. As one Diaspora newspaper described him: « Archbishop Nersessian is a hard-working and efficient administrator, but his reputation as a demanding taskmaster has made him enemies in the ranks. Nor is he known as a particularly knowledgeable theologian or a charismatic speaker ». ⁵³ He lacked Catholicos Karekin I's formidable intellectual background — who had authored some three dozen books — and diplomatic skills. ⁵⁴ But just as Ter Petrossian had secured the election of his predecessor, the Kocharian government secured Catholicos Karekin II's election in 1999.

The Armenian government, including President Kocharian, strongly denied any direct pressure in the election, but claimed every right to display interest in this most important process. Indeed, on the opening day of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, President Kocharian's absence — unlike his predecessor — was interpreted as an expression of the government's indignation at charges of interference. Levon Mkrtchian, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Religious Affairs, had been sent to deliver the government's message. He explained the State's expectations from the Church:

« We are interested in seeing a strong Mother See, which will enjoy respect in society, will have irrefutable authority, will have strong clergy who will truly work with their flock. Only then can the Church provide the moral assistance, which is so needed by the population today. »

Prior to his election, Archbishop Nersessian, in turn, had said that he would « pursue a policy whereby Church-State relations are defined more concretely and clearly, » as this had not been possible to implement after the country's independence. Mkrtchian, at the time the government's appointed man for religious affairs, had confirmed that the authorities had a similar desire. « Together with the Church we should develop a document, a concor-

⁵³ MERGUERIAN 1999.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, in a 1995 poll in Armenia on the eve of the catholicossal election, 51.5 % of those questioned underlined that the future Catholicos “should possess diplomatic qualities” and only 25 % thought the Catholicos should not get involved in politics; 48.7 % thought that prior to his election, the Catholicos should have done “something important for the nation and be an expert of religion and theology”. See “Inhabitants of Yerevan about the Future Catholicos of All Armenians”, *Noyan Tapan Highlights*, 52, 8 March 1995; and “Residents Indifferent about Catholicos Elections”, *Asbarez-On-Line*, 28 February 1995.

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dat, where the duties and responsibilities of our relationship are clarified. There are many European countries where such an arrangement already exists. »⁵⁵

Upon his election, one of the priorities of the new Catholicos was to formalise the Church's relationship with the State.⁵⁶ Within five months of Karekin II's pontificate, on March 17th, 2000, a « Memorandum of Understanding » between the Government of Armenia and the Armenian Church was signed in Ejmiatsin, in the presence of the Catholicos, the Prime Minister and the President of the Constitutional Court of Armenia. The Catholicos explained that through this first-ever formal agreement with the Armenian State « will be fixed all the spheres of cooperation, where the Church and the State will undertake joint efforts directed to the sacred work of strengthening the Motherland and the Church, and creating a happy life for the people ».

The Memorandum reiterated « the importance of the undeniable role and the significance of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church in the further development and strengthening of the Armenian statehood. » The agreement had the « intention of better clarifying the essence of the relationship between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church ». Most notable, the sides agreed to (a) further improve and develop regulations governing the relationship of the State and the Armenian Apostolic Church; (b) further clarify the problems related to Church lands and properties; (c) define « certain tax privileges » for the Church and « its traditional organizations » ; (d) clarify the Church's role in State ceremonies and protocol ; (e) recognise « the importance of the role and significance » of the Church « in national, educational, cultural and social security, health and spiritual spheres »; (f) acknowledge the priority of the Church's « history, dogmatic preaching and education by the State mass media and during other State activities » ; and (g) establish Armenian Church chaplaincies in the army and prisons.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ TCHILINGIRIAN 1999a: 24-25.

⁵⁶ An unrelated national tragedy took place on 27 October 1999, the day of Karekin II's election. Immediately after the results of the voting were announced in the Cathedral of Ejmiatsin where over 400 delegates had assembled to vote, the jubilation over the election of the new Catholicos lasted only a few minutes as Karekin II interrupted his acceptance speech to announce the murder of Armenia's Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Assembly and five MPs and officials by a group of gunmen who stormed the parliament hall. The news was brought to the Catholicos as he was addressing the delegates. The first duty of the Catholicos-elect was to preside over the funeral services of the slain government leaders on Sunday, 31 October. His consecration as the 132nd Catholicos of the Armenian Church was postponed to 4 November.

⁵⁷ "A Historical Day in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin", Press Release, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 17 March 2000, posted on groong@usc.edu list.

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The agreement is revealing when viewed in the context of other problematic areas in Church-State relations, namely the law on religious organization and pluralism of faith in a democratic society. Immediately after independence, the Church heavily lobbied and was instrumental in the drafting of the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in Armenia, in which the Armenian Church is given certain privileges and is declared the « National Church » of Armenians. (In neighbouring Georgia, too, the constitution recognises « the special role » of the Georgian Orthodox Church « in the history of Georgia and its independence from the State ».)⁵⁸ According to the law, other Christian denominations and alternative religious groups in Armenia were not allowed to proselytise, a privilege granted to the Armenian Church only. Religious groups and organizations whose doctrine was not based on « historically recognized holy scriptures » were not allowed to register officially. This meant that they could not own property, publish literature, and rent places for worship and education, and were subject to other such restrictions. In 1993, a Presidential Decree further strengthened the legal position of the Armenian Church, by granting it the right to « restore and develop the spiritual life of the Armenian people ». The State's Council on Religious Affairs (which was later disbanded as a separate entity and integrated into government administration) was directed to investigate the activities of all registered religious groups and to ban those who are involved in activities contrary to their status. In effect, the decree questioned the legitimacy of all non-Apostolic religious organizations. In June 1997 the Law on Freedom of Conscience was amended again. It reiterated the special status of the Armenian Church and its exclusive right of « proselytizing » (which is not defined in the law). The Church was given the right:

« [...] to freely propagate and disseminate its belief on the whole territory of the Republic of Armenia. The official enlightenment of the Armenian Apostolic Church's belief through media or mass activities can be accomplished solely after receiving an official permission from the Armenian Apostolic Church" (Article 17, 2). »

The law made it more difficult for non-Apostolic denominations and religious groups to register. For instance, the minimum number of membership in a religious organization to qualify for registration was raised from 50 to 200 (Article 1, e). A human rights report in Armenia pointed out that « Even during Soviet time, when atheism was a part of State politics, only 20 people were required, and under Gorbachev' rule in 1991, only 10 signatures would be enough [to register a religious group] », which is still the case in post-Soviet Russian Federation — although, there too, the law favours the Russian

⁵⁸ Gvosdev 2000; http://www.parliament.ge/LEGAL_ACTS/CONSTITUTION/consten.html (30 August 2005).

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Orthodox Church.⁵⁹ Groups applying for registration must « be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature, » and subscribe to doctrines based on « historically recognized holy scriptures. »⁶⁰ The law also gave exclusive right to the Armenian Church « to have permanent ecclesiastics in hospitals, nursing houses, and centres for disabled people, military units and prisons, including detention centres for preliminary investigation » (Article 17, 2.8). Collaboration for Democracy, an NGO in Armenia, in an analytical report on the development of the law on religion since Armenian's independence, asserted: « It seems that [new] amendments to the law which had to eliminate the [previous] law's shortcomings and controversies, instead made the Law more confusing than it was ». ⁶¹

Although the special privileges given to the Armenian Church are controversial and widely criticized by human rights groups, Ludwig Khachadrian, the then head of the Council of Religious Affairs, explained the government's « rationale » during an interview in 1991:

« The Armenian Church is the father of the Armenian people. This father was imprisoned and stripped of his children for seventy years. Now that the father is free, others have come to adopt his orphaned children. What we need to do is give the father a chance to reclaim his children. Some of the children would want to go to other homes and some would return to their father's home. It's up to the children. But, it is only fair to give the father a chance to embrace his children, after wrongful imprisonment and persecution. ... I have explained this to various denominations and religious groups who have come to Armenia. All we are saying is give the father, the Armenian Church, a chance. ⁶² »

Fourteen years have passed since then: what was considered a “chance” given to the Armenian Church has become a privilege and a right insured by the law.

The Armenian State's imprecise and, at times, contradictory laws on religion, on the one hand, and the intolerant stance of the Armenian Apostolic Church vis-à-vis other religious groups, on the other hand, have created a general confusion among both the population and the established religious groups. In late April 1995, a few weeks after the election of Catholicos Karekin I, all non-Apostolic religious groups in Armenia — including the Evangelicals, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Bahais and Krishna devotees

⁵⁹ "Contradictions in the Armenian Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations", Collaboration for Democracy NGO, 4 February 2005; <http://www.hra.am/old/eng/index1.php?goto=guest&id=72> (30 August 2005).

⁶⁰ "Armenia Human Rights Practices, 1994", U. S. Department of State. February 1995. "Armenia" in Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2000. U. S. Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, February 2001 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/index.cfm?docid=672> (30 August 2005).

⁶¹ Op cit. "Contradictions in the RA Law on Freedom of Conscience..."

⁶² TCHILINGIRIAN 1991: 4.

— were subjected to coordinated attacks by armed groups. They caused extensive damage to properties belonging to these groups and several cases of beatings were reported. (The Roman Catholics were spared the havoc, reportedly because of Armenia's diplomatic relations with the Vatican.) Government officials subjected the Yerevan offices of a US-based Armenian religious charity, the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), and the Evangelical Baptist Church to unlawful entry, search and seizure of property.⁶³ International human rights groups and the US government filed an official protest with President Ter Petrossian regarding the violence committed against religious groups.⁶⁴ The Interior Ministry apologized for the 'hooligan' actions and launched a criminal investigation, but no one was ever punished for these illegal activities.

Indeed, ten days before Karekin I's election, Pope John Paul II had told Armenia's ambassador to the Vatican:

« It is not the [Catholic] Church's desire that it should enjoy special privileges from the Armenian Government, but that it should enjoy the freedom to act, according to the Gospel mandate. This involves the freedom to organize itself at the local and national levels in order to better meet the spiritual needs of the Catholic faithful and to be able to extend compassion and help where required. The faithful too must be free to form communities of faith and service under local Church leadership, while a just solution should be sought to the Armenian Catholic community's existence in relation to the law on religious freedom and according to international standards.⁶⁵ »

The attack on the Armenian Evangelicals was a major embarrassment for the government, especially in view of the enormous humanitarian assistance that the AMAA, a respected organization in the Diaspora, and its affiliate organizations had provided to Armenia. Since then, however, relations between the government and the Evangelical community have improved. « Many government people and clergy do not understand people's spiritual needs, » said Rev. Rene Leonian, the French-Armenian head of the Evangelical community in Yerevan. « The State should come up with fair laws. Law on religion should be clear and just. The freedom of religion and conscience must be guaranteed by the State ». He believed that the rules and regulations should be instituted through discussions with various groups who

⁶³ See "AMAA, Evangelical Church Violated in Armenia", *Asbarez-on-Line*, 8 May 1995; Lewis 2000: 259ff.

⁶⁴ See, for example, "Temple of Krishna Awareness Society in Yerevan Attacked", *The Armenian Reporter International*, 6 May 1995 and, on the Jehovah's Witnesses, http://www.jw-media.org/region/europe/armenia/english/human_rights/arm_background2003.htm.

⁶⁵ Pope's English-language address on 25 March 1995 to Armenia's new Ambassador to the Vatican, during the ceremony of presentation of his credentials. *L'Observatoire Romano*, 29 March 1995.

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are affected by them and « in consultation with all religious groups in Armenia. »⁶⁶

The current Church-State relations in Armenia make the so-called “non-traditional” religious groups nervous. As it stands, the law grants special privileges to the Apostolic Church only, such as the right to train teachers of religion for State schools throughout Armenia. The 1997 « Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations » states that « within the boundaries of the procedure provided by the Law », the Armenian Church is:

« [...] to promote the spiritual education of the Armenian people, including in the educational institutions where the teaching of religion is permitted solely on the basis of the belief professed by the Armenian Apostolic Church and by teachers who have adequate qualification and authorization from the Armenian Apostolic Church (Article 17, 2.5). »

Since independence hundreds of teachers have received special training by the Apostolic Church to teach the « Armenian brand » of religion in public schools.⁶⁷ While minor attacks and scuffles with non-traditional religious groups take place occasionally in Armenia — but not on the scale of the April 1995 attacks, which seemed to be pre-planned and coordinated — the arrest and sentencing of conscientious objectors remains a problem. Since Armenia’s ascension to the Council of Europe in June 2000 and the country’s commitment to introduce alternative service, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, especially, who generally refuse to serve in the military because of their beliefs, still have problems with the State and the legal system.⁶⁸

The policies and attitude of the national Church and State officials do not inspire other religious groups with confidence that their rights would be protected. Speaking to an audience at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Karekin II rejected suggestions that the Armenian Church infringed the human rights and religious liberty of the « sects » — as he called them. On the contrary, he scolded those « who come and criticize us on the basis of their own understanding of religious liberty » and thought « sometimes the freedom of conscience was being confused with anarchy. » While admitting that he might sound harsh in his expressions he said, « If you were in my place, you would have said the same things ».⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Interview in Yerevan, see Tchilingirian 2000: 44-47.

⁶⁷ By 1997, over 600 teachers had already been trained by the Church, 90 percent of them women. See “An interview with His Holiness Karekin I” by Rev Michael Westh, posted on groong@usc.edu, 3 November 1997.

⁶⁸ For further discussion, see “Report on Armenia, CRI (2003) 36. European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. Adopted on 13 December 2002 and made public on 8 July 2003. http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Armenia/Armenia_CBC_2en.asp; Corley 2002 and Corley 2003.

⁶⁹ BROWN 2001.

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During the first five years of his tenure, several key issues have been high on Karekin II's agenda: efforts to increase the number of priests serving in Armenia; the retrieval of properties that were confiscated during the Soviet period; the renovation of churches and monasteries; construction of new facilities in Ejmiatsin; and a number of charitable projects with assistance from Diaspora organizations and individuals. So far, the State has returned dozens of churches and religious properties to the Church. Many churches and monasteries have been renovated, especially for the 1700th anniversary in 2001. In July 2005, Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan and the Catholicos discussed the issue of the further transfer of monastic and Church properties to Ejmiatsin. They also discussed matters pertaining to yet more « reforms » in the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.⁷⁰ « The Church did the impossible, » said Karekin II reflecting on what has been accomplished in recent years. « In a very brief period we trained hundreds of teachers, established new educational and theological institutions, and sponsored youth work. » But he was also aware of the enormous work ahead: « All that we did is really nothing in view of the huge needs that still exist in the country ». ⁷¹

The Church and the Diaspora

Outside Armenia, the Catholicosate of All Armenians has dioceses and church communities in over 30 countries (the largest are in the Russian Federation and the United States). Not only during Soviet times, but also for centuries church communities in dispersion have been a source of human and financial wealth, prestige, power and political influence for Ejmiatsin. Furthermore, besides Ejmiatsin, which is recognised as the « pre-eminent » or the « Mother See » — three of the four Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church are also located in the Diaspora — Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Turkey — with their own monastic brotherhoods, churches and dioceses. These Sees are autonomous in their internal affairs and have cordial relations with each other. Indeed, the Catholicosates of Ejmiatsin and Cilicia participate in each other's elections through two representatives. However, since Armenia's independence, especially, other Sees have openly challenged the extent of the « supreme authority » of the Catholicos of All Armenians — an old issue raised during the Soviet period as well. The crux of the matter is the proclaimed powers of the Catholicos of All Armenians over the other three Sees and their incumbents. While the Catholicos in Ejmiatsin is acknowledged and respected as the « Supreme Patriarch », his right to interfere in what is considered internal affairs or prerogatives of the others is a matter of debate. Historically, the nature and boundaries of the authority of the Catholicos of All Armenians

⁷⁰ *Arka News Agency and AI+ online*, 14 July 2005.

⁷¹ BROWN 2001.

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have never been defined, nor the extent of his jurisdiction clarified « in any clear and systematic manner ». ⁷² In arguing against a case of interference in 1951, the Patriarch of Istanbul wrote to the Catholicos of All Armenians:

« [The Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church] are intimately linked to each other in terms of faith, doctrine and liturgy, constituting the genuine unity of the Armenian Church, having the Mother See as its centre.... The Armenian Church's administrative form is democratic with a decentralized system. The Mother See and the other three Sees have this form and system as the bases of their inter-relationship, without infringing the unity of the Church and [without] lessening the pre-eminence of the Mother See. ⁷³ »

Externally, relations remain cooperative, but since the election of Catholicos Karekin II in 1999 the “centralisation” of authority continues to cause internal tensions in the relationship between the Church in Armenia and the Diaspora. At times, disagreements and dissatisfactions are expressed publicly. The Patriarch in Istanbul, in an interview published in 2001, said:

« There are obvious tendencies [in Ejmiatsin] to marginalise the three Hierarchical Sees [in the Diaspora]. This is something that, if not prevented, could be detrimental to the Church and her constituents.... Let us admit that Holy Ejmiatsin, while being the spiritual birthplace of the Armenians, in the present realities of the Diaspora does not represent the totality of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. ⁷⁴ »

In response to a stinging « Communiqué » issued by Ejmiatsin over the disputed diocese in Canada, the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Lebanon « rejected » the « spirit and tone » of Ejmiatsin's Supreme Ecclesiastical Council. Antelias pointed out that, as it is a generally « accepted practice »:

« the Cilician Catholicosate has always favoured conducting discussions between the two Catholicosates and responsible bodies of [the two hierarchical Sees] on issues concerning the Church and the nation through correspondence and meetings [rather than through the media, which] confuse [the public] and are often one-sided and are incomplete pronouncements. ⁷⁵ »

In addition to the lack of formal clarity on functions and powers, there is also a clash of personalities and leadership styles. The Catholicosates in

⁷² In the 19th century, State-imposed church 'constitutions' were established for the Armenian Church in Tsarist Russia (1836) and the Ottoman Empire (1863) respectively. However, both constitutions have been long defunct since the end of the empires that created them. For more on this topic, see NERSOYAN 1996; and ASHJIAN 1994: 3ff.

⁷³ « Letter of Patriarch Karekin I to Catholicos Gevorg VI ». Patriarch Karekin I Trabizontsi's [Khachaturian] report to the Joint Session of the Religious Council and National Central Committee of the Patriarchate”, 17 November 1951, Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople.

⁷⁴ « His Beatitude Patriarch Mesrob of Istanbul and all Turkey: What's missing is, perhaps, fuller co-operation », *Haratch* (Paris) 2 & 3 July 2001.

⁷⁵ *Hask* (Antelias), April 2005: 296.

Ejmiatsin and Antelias — as well as the Patriarch in Istanbul — were elected relatively young. Enthroned on centuries-old thrones while in their 40's, they are ambitious, but with different visions as to how the Church should be administered and led. Indeed, due to their young age at election, they are to lead the Church for a long time. Thus, their personal style and inter-relationship may have significant effect on wider Church affairs. For instance, Karekin II tends to emphasize « discipline » and « loyalty » in the Church, while Aram I of Cilicia speaks of « service » and « renewal ».⁷⁶

The emphasis on strict « discipline » in the Church and among the clergy ranks — rather than, for example, the religious mission of the Church — has been a controversial aspect of Karekin II's rule so far. In an « Open Letter » of dissatisfaction — signed by « concerned lay people and clergymen » in Armenia and published in Yerevan in March 2005 — the authors state that within the short period of his tenure, Karekin II has defrocked more priests than all his predecessors combined in the last 300 years of the Church's history.⁷⁷ He has also made the subject of « discipline » — meaning obedience and loyalty to Ejmiatsin and the Catholicos of All Armenians — an important part of his discourse during « pastoral » visits to Diaspora communities.

More problematic, however, is Ejmiatsin's lack of understanding and appreciation of the complexities in Diaspora communities and differences not only between communities in different diasporas around the world, but also most critically between societies in Armenia and in dispersion. For instance, the Armenian community in the United States is much different sociologically and culturally from the communities, say, in France or Germany. Indeed, the dioceses and parishes in the US are the best organised and administered in the entire Church. There are more functioning churches and parishes in the US (around a hundred) than in Armenia itself. With 44 percent attending church services at least once a week, American Armenians attend more church services than any other community in the West.⁷⁸ Lay people are actively involved in the Church life and religious matters. Unlike in Armenia and other parts of the world, important moral and social issues are passionately discussed, debated and fought over. By all standards, members of the Armenian Church in the US are more active, more educated in the Church and religious matters and more « spiritually aware » than their counterparts in Armenia or Europe.⁷⁹ Yet, all this was overlooked during Catholicos Karekin II official visit to California (June 2005), one of the largest dioceses outside Armenia. For instance, at one of the welcoming ceremonies in a Fresno church, Karekin II had this to say to the congregation:

⁷⁶ See, for example, *Hask* (Antelias) November-December 2003 and June-July 2004.

⁷⁷ *Chorrord Ishkhanutiun*, No. 449 (online No. 609), 4 March 2005 (www.chi.am).

⁷⁸ Cf. <http://www.umich.edu/~newsinfo/Releases/1997/Dec97/chr121097a.html>.

⁷⁹ See Tchilingirian 1998: 10-13.

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« I have come also to inform you that our spiritual life [in Armenia] is living a renaissance. Regrettably, I cannot affirm the same about the Armenian community in Fresno... I remember vividly that mere four years ago there were more people gathered in this church [to greet the Catholicos].⁸⁰ »

While it is not clear on what criteria Armenia is experiencing a “spiritual renaissance”, the Catholicos was clearly disappointed that fewer people had come to greet him in the church. The pattern was repeated in other places, such as during his visit to London in June 2004. Instead of taking this reality in the Diaspora as a wake up call for the Church, the Catholicos reportedly rebuked the priests and the organisers for not mobilising the people. This was not reflecting the lack of « discipline » in the Church or the lack of « loyalty » towards Ejmiatsin, but how distant the Church hierarchy is from the people. Cilician Catholicos Aram I's evaluation of the current situation in the Church captures the essence of this problem. Speaking at the graduation ceremony of the seminary in Lebanon, he said self-critically:

« Look at the present picture of our life. We have many men of the cloth, but unfortunately, we have very few priests who have the calling and spiritual-intellectual capacity. We have many people in high positions, but unfortunately, we have very few exemplary leaders. We have many people who occupy thrones, but unfortunately very few who are capable of flourishing and strengthening the thrones [institutions]. The list could be very long...⁸¹ »

Another simmering conflict in the relationship between the Church in Armenia and the Diaspora, especially in the US, is over the language of liturgy, which the Catholicos insists should be conducted in classical Armenian (*grabar*). The vast majority of the parishes in the US are made of second, third and fourth generation Armenians, who neither have any knowledge of the Armenian language nor are fluent in modern Armenian, let alone classical Armenian. Most American Armenians « are unable to fully participate in the practice of their religion », says Ara Dolarian, a professor at California State University, adding: « Though the doors of the Church are open, in reality, the doors are closed since the English speaking population does not understand the Church's religious rites and teachings ».⁸² Indeed, a number of American Armenian parishes have requested that the liturgy be conducted in a language they understand, i.e. in English. But, instead of addressing this hotly debated problem, a few weeks after Karekin II's pastoral visit to California, the bishop of the Western Diocese sent an official communiqué to

⁸⁰ « Address in St. Paul Armenian Church in Fresno on 11 June 2005 », see video clip at <http://www.armenianchurchwd.com/vehapar/movies.htm> (7 July 2005).

⁸¹ *Hask* (Antelias), June-July 2004: 477.

⁸² DOLARIAN 1993: 21.

all the priests in his diocese on the matter: « Submitting to and following the strict order and directive of His Holiness Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians, no part of the Divine Liturgy should be conducted in English ».⁸³ Ejmiatsin and proponents of preserving the ancient language of the liturgy generally argue that this is necessary for « unity » and « uniformity » in the Church. However, neither the Catholicos nor any official Church body has given any theological, doctrinal or canonical justification for the exclusivity of classical Armenian. In the Californian diocese, at least, sermons and biblical readings in the church are allowed to be repeated in English, but being first read in Armenian.

By design and tradition, the involvement of laymen in the affairs of the Armenian Church is one of its unique features. Unlike the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition, which have respectively monarchical and aristocratic structures, lay people actively participate in the administrative, legislative and financial affairs of the Church.⁸⁴ The laity elects almost all clerical leaders in the Church, the most significant of which is the Catholicos. On the other hand, this has contributed to the politicisation of the Church and its relationship with the Diaspora especially. A long lasting division — which remains unresolved and continues to have a divisive impact on church communities in North America — is the highly politicised administrative schism between the Catholicosates of Ejmiatsin and Cilicia. As discussed earlier, as long as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation — the Dashnak Party — continues to dictate the diocesan affairs of the Cilician Catholicosate, the resolution of the decades-long dispute will not be in the hands of the Church hierarchy, but will depend on the political leaders of the communities involved.

Arguably, the most critical issue facing the Armenian Church in the Diaspora and its relationship with the Church in Armenia is the changing demographics of the clergy. The Diaspora is not producing enough locally born clergy and is increasingly reliant on Ejmiatsin to supply parish priests and diocesan bishops. Neither Ejmiatsin nor the Church as a whole has seriously addressed this problem, which has a lasting impact on its mission and viability in the Diaspora. While it is politically incorrect within the Church to speak about « Armenia-born » and « Diaspora-born » priests — because it belies the rhetoric of « One People, One Nation, One Church » — it is a significant issue, at least sociologically. So far, the Church hierarchy in Armenia

⁸³ « To All the Reverend Clergy of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church », Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate; Armenian Church of America Western Diocese, Burbank, 8 July 2005.

⁸⁴ The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the exception, where the ordained members (monks) of the St. James Brotherhood elect the Patriarch and administer the affairs of the Patriarchate without any lay involvement.

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or the Diaspora have not even identified the problem, let alone studying its socio-ecclesiological implications. As shown in Appendix 2, since Armenia's independence, there has been a steady decrease of the number of Diaspora Armenians who are going into the clergy as celibate priests. Only celibate priests (*vardapets*) are allowed to become bishops and diocesan prelates. Of the total number of priests belonging to the Brotherhood of Ejmiatsin, 72 percent are born in Armenia and 28 percent in the Diaspora. The sharp fluctuation is also caused by the fact that 46 percent of all celibate priests were ordained after 1999 – during the tenure of Karekin II – of which 92 percent are born in Armenia. As for bishops, 86 percent who were consecrated *before* Armenia's independence are born in the Diaspora; since independence this number has gone down to 41 percent. Interestingly, even in the seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which used to be an important Church centre supplying priests to Diaspora churches, 95.5 percent of the students are born in Armenia. Since Armenia's independence, the number of recruits from Armenia studying in Jerusalem has gone up sharply, replacing students who once came mostly from the Middle East.

If these trends continue, it would mean that in 20-25 years, virtually all the bishops serving in the Diaspora would be born in Armenia. Some may view this as a « positive » development: for sure, it would make Ejmiatsin's reach and influence in the Diaspora even stronger. But the longer-term implication is that the Armenian Apostolic Church would continue to be an « immigrant Church » for decades to come rather than become a « native » Church vis-à-vis the hierarchy. It would mean gradual *hayastanisation*⁸⁵ of the Church in the Diaspora, with all its consequent dynamics and problems. For instance, for 100 years since the first Armenian Church was consecrated in France in 1904, there have not been any French-born bishops or celibate priests in the Armenian Church. Of course, there are socio-cultural and a host of reasons that contribute to this phenomenon, such as secularisation, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. The relevant point here is that the current demographics of the clergy in the Armenian Church is another reflection of the hierarchy's lack of vision and isolationist « Christian mission ».

Conclusion

The independence of Armenia after decades under atheistic Soviet rule has brought many positive developments in the Armenian Church and generally in terms of freedom of religion and faith in Armenia. However, the Church, the State and society face many challenges: from religious tolerance and pluralism to fairness and full guarantees of rights, to addressing social

⁸⁵ *Hayastan* = Armenia.

and moral issues in a still evolving post Soviet country. The Church hierarchy can no longer simply pontificate about the difficult issues, and complex problems of society without real engagement in the life of the people. As Aram I put it: « Today we cannot serve our people by the titles, thrones, [or] ranks we have, but with our moral character and spirit of servitude ». ⁸⁶ The question is which mission takes priority in the life of the Armenian Church today: the preservation of « Armenian identity » (as was the case in Soviet times) or preaching the Gospel to « all nations » (Matthew 28: 19), including the Armenians? A critical question that the Church leadership needs to address: What is the relevance of a 1700-year-old Church and religious faith to contemporary Armenians living in Armenia and outside, all around the world?

Appendix 1

Religious organizations officially registered in Armenia (2004)⁸⁷

Armenian Apostolic Church

29.12.00 ⁸⁸	Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, the Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin
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Catholic Church

30.05.00	Armenian Catholic Church
29.12.00	Mkhitarist Centre of Armenia
13.10.00	« Mother of God » Convent, Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

Russian Orthodox Church

29.12.00	Russian Orthodox Community – Mother of God Church, Yerevan
29.12.00	Russian Orthodox Community – St. Nicolas Church, Gumri
29.12.00	Russian Orthodox Community – Holy Mother of God Church, Vanadzor
18.01.01	Russian Orthodox Community – Sts. Kirik & Elata Church, Dimitrov (Ararat Marz)

⁸⁶ Hask (Antelias), November-December 2003, p. 778.

⁸⁷ Based on data provided by the Armenian Government to the Council of Europe. "Second Report Submitted by Armenia Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of the Framework convention for the Protection of National Minorities" (24 November 2004), Council of Europe, ACFC/SR/II(2004)010. Not all religious groups or communities in Armenia are registered. According to Armenian authorities, there are some groups, such as the Russian "Old Believers" and some Yezidi congregations, who do not wish to register. "Report on Armenia, CRI (2003) 36. European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. Adopted on 13 December 2002 and made public on 8 July 2003. http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Armenia/Armenia_CBC_2en.asp.

⁸⁸ Date of (re-)registration.

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Protestant/Evangelical Churches

26.10.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Yerevan
13.11.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Abovyan
13.11.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Ararat
13.11.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Arevshat
13.11.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Shirak
13.11.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Stepanavan
13.11.00	Armenian Evangelical Baptist Church, Vanadzor
29.12.00	Armenian Evangelical Church, Yerevan
16.08.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Masis
04.06.03	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Shirak
10.07.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Vanadzor
30.10.00	Cloister Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief
29.12.00	Erebuni Community Pentecostal Religious Organization, Yerevan
30.10.00	Evangelical Church, Yerevan
02.06.00	Organization of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Yerevan
29.12.00	Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches
14.11.00	Union of Churches of Evangelical Baptist Christians of Armenia
13.06.00	Bethel Church of Armenian Evangelical Baptist Christians, Yerevan
11.07.00	Church of Armenian Brotherhood
12.06.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Yerevan
23.07.03	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Ararat
02.06.03	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Armavir
05.10.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Artashat
10.07.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Charentsavan
13.11.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Ejmiatsin city
29.12.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Kotayk, Gegharkunik
13.11.00	Church of Christians of the Gospel Belief, Lori and Tavush

Yezidis

14.11.00	Shekhi Shekhu Bakra Yezidi National Committee
16.08.00	Yezidi (Sharfidini) Religious Organization

Assyrian

15.05.03	Assyrian Religious Organization of Armenia (Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East)
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Jewish

29.12.00	Jewish Religious Community of Armenia
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Other

29.12.00	Adventist ('Saturday Keepers') Church of Armenia
20.06.00	Bahai Community of Armenia
20.06.00	« Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints » Community of Armenia
27.07.00	Church "Word of Life" of Armenia (Charismatic)
23.05.00	New Apostles Church Community of Armenia
19.07.00	« Space Mission » Religious Union of Armenia
03.07.03	Yerevan Church of Gospel Christians (Watchman Nee Memorial Church)
13.06.00	Pagan Order of Arordy Religious Community

Religious-Charitable Organizations

13.10.00	Armenia Branch, "Agape" religious-charity of USA
29.12.00	Armenia Branch, "Hope for Armenia" organization, France
29.12.00	Armenia Branch, Armenian Evangelical Association
03.03.01	Armenian Bible Society
29.12.00	Armenian Bible Society Charitable Organization
01.01.01	Gandzasar Theological Centre (Armenian Apostolic)
29.12.00	Gideon Charitable Organization, Yerevan

Appendix 2

This table shows the number and percentage of bishops and celibate priests (*vardabets*) who are members of the Monastic Brotherhood of Holy Ejmiatsin of the Catholicosate of All Armenians.

Bishops

Rank	Born in the Diaspora	Born in Armenia
Total: 46 (in 2004)	70 % (32)	30 % (14)
Consecrated <i>before</i> independence	86 % (25)	14 % (4)
Consecrated <i>since</i> independence	41 % (7)	59 % (10)
<i>Consecrated by</i> Vazgen I, ex Vazgen I « Catholicos », (1955-1994) 33	88 % (29)	12 % (4)
<i>Consecrated by</i> Karekin I, ex Karekin I Catholicos, Sarkissian, (1995-1999) 5	20 % (1)	80 % (4)
<i>Consecrated by</i> Karekin II, ex Karekin II Catholicos Nercessian, (since 1999) 9	55.5 % (5)	44.5 % (4)

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Priests (celibate)⁸⁹

Rank	Born in the Diaspora	Born in Armenia
Total: 83 (in 2004)	28 % (23)	72 % (60)
Ordained <i>before</i> independence	50 % (10)	50 % (10)
Ordained <i>since</i> independence	21 % (13)	79 % (50)
<i>During the tenure of</i> Vazgen I (1955-1994) 25	56 % (14)	44 % (11)
<i>During the tenure of</i> Karekin I (1995-1999) 22	32 % (7) ⁹⁰	68 % (15)
<i>During the tenure of</i> Karekin II (since 1999) 38	8 % (3) ⁹¹	92 % (35)

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⁹⁰ Includes priests ordained in the Diaspora

⁹¹ Idem

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