

Church State Agenda (2005)

1. **Environmental Conditions**

1. Church, State, People all under-resourced. However, State started with a very large role and therefore undertook more than it had the resources to perform; church started with a small role and is slowly ramping up. In either case, both fall short of expectations, since people expect more
2. The role of each changed dramatically with independence. Church is no longer surrogate state. State went from colonial executor to keeper of the nation. People went from paternalistic subservience to self-reliance without a safety net. Diaspora went from Cold War division and statelessness, to statehood with an unclear sense of belonging.
3. All suffer from institutional inertia. Still run by old generation recruited for and schooled in a different mission. New mission, new calling, new training, but old generation self-replicating itself out of inertia.
4. Why is now a favorable time to act? – relatively more resources, though none to waste; relative stability and recovered balance after EQ, Independence, War, Blockade; generation change upon us- it's 20 years since Perestroika began, 15 since independence; relatively little time to waste, world's changing so fast.

2. **What to do?**

1. Need new roles. All institutions need to immediately identify the new roles required for new circumstances, recruit for them, create opportunities for them, in many cases, raise up a new generation quite different from themselves. Although quite difficult, it is something Armenians have succeeded in doing several times in the past century – refugee orphans raising high achieving children in the alien cultures of Mid-East, Soviet Union, America and Europe, for example.
2. Overcome obstacles. Inability to create a model of the new world in order to identify the new roles, held back by old thinking – values and world view; lack of vision in marshalling/inspiring existing and potential resources toward common goals.
3. Three-phase solution. Thought, word and deed. (1) Thought – bring a new generation out of its isolation and provincialness by continuously conducting exercises in dealing with new or different situations – so that they begin to see the limitations of their existing values and world (2) Word – create a new language culture, with new narratives and examples, that promote the values of the new world view and cultural attributes necessary for adaptation – flexibility, tolerance, reverence for tradition, awareness of fallibility, willingness to take risks, (3) Deed – create situations to develop awareness of the limitations of the last generation's views and hone the skills, values and world view to handle the challenges facing Armenia and Armenians.

3. **Some specific thoughts to enrich our world view and overcome inertia:**

1. examine the experience of other national churches –differences, similarities, lessons for Armenia
2. examine the experience of other small Christian nations – similarities, differences, lessons for Armenia
3. examine the experience of other Christian peoples and the means and methods whereby Christian/religious values influence the shape of public life
4. examine the role of religious references in public discourse

4. **Examples from which to derive methods and models:**

1. the Irish Constitution compared with the Armenian
2. the English Bible vs. the Armenian Bible in public discourse – new narratives for a new world.
3. the Jewish/Middle Eastern tradition of the Church providing alternative dispute resolution
4. the Catholic tradition of religious orders, hospitals and schools – organized service and teaching – thought, word and deed. Transmitting what has been learned – mission of enlightenment and charity/mercy. Tend to body, soul and mind.
5. the Protestant tradition of community building, stewardship and co- Creatorship – welcoming people at church, making ceremony and doctrine more understandable and contemporary. Good shepherd – people recognize as their own – recognize his voice. Environmental protection, just society – co-Creatorship.
6. the diasporan example of opening most public events with prayer and using biblical references in public discourse – validate religious values outside of the church, in all aspects of life – sanctification of all life.
7. the post-feudal Natural Law tradition of questioning of authority – since humans are fallible, human law is prone to error; therefore, the governance system, first and foremost, with its monopoly on force, must be designed to avoid state abuse and protect the legal equality of individuals.

5. **Lessons:**

1. Draw upon early Christian simplicity – make the altar a holy table, vs. with bejeweled, ornate “show” of ever more worldly embellishment, while the exchange of ideas, education and growth shrivel in the Armenian context.
2. Leading the flock: begins with a return to the vocabulary of service, casting off the role of nay-sayer and keeper of superstitious hold over common people.
3. Dialog with currents in Christianity and world religion v. closed continuation of ghetto mentality
4. Emphasize service as a road to redemption for all – no man is all good or all bad; open door to salvation as one’s life evolves.
5. Key to success and longevity of Armenians: fostering unifying ideas and goals common to all, beginning with aspiring to be worthy of being the first Christian nation under God – a small nation as an exemplary society, in stark contrast to its neighbors.

6. **How do we do this? Put our state back on its traditional, Christian**

1. Non sub homine, sed sub Deo et lege. The most advance legal system in the world at its time, the Roman system, tried and crucified one who was completely sinless– Jesus Christ. That’s the lesson that is most important for Christian institutions – the requirement to be humble and careful in the exercise of power. Christians neither seek to rule nor be ruled, but to serve God and make His Garden prosper by serving each other.
2. The first commandment to man was “tend the Garden.” The greatest commandment is to love God. The next greatest commandment is to love one another.
3. Such a society characterized by an environment of tolerance, mutual respect, self-sacrifice and courtesy, not cheating, not abusing, helping, not hurting others, forgiving, not bearing grudges. These are all learned more by example than by preaching.
4. What to do – foster an environment of enlightened vigilance (“Gregory means vigilance”) – assure that both Church and State leave the impression of being Christian in their words and deeds, that is, they must first do no harm and tolerate no harm – they must be non-abusive. They must second try to do good – helpful, kind, courteous, respectful, tolerant, self-disciplined and self-restrained, stop and prevent abuse. They must be perceived as doing God’s work, not serving their own interest.