

Future of the Armenian Church

Armenia 2020
Church, State and Religion in Armenia Issue Paper

prepared by the

Arak-29 Foundation (Yerevan) Research Team Leader:

Thomas J. Samuelian, J.D., Ph.D.

Fr. Mesrop Aramian Fr. Dajad Davidian

Manuk Hergnyan, Ph.D.

Tamar Hajian, J.D., LL.M.

Jason Demirchian, M.Div.

Church-State and Religion

I. Current status

Ask any Armenian anywhere to define the Armenian nation, and within two sentences, you will hear, “We were the first Christian nation.”

Even during the soviet era of official atheism, the ancient tradition of Christianity being definitional to Armenians persisted. According to the Armenia 2020 Survey, “being Christian” is second only to “belief in the future of Armenia” as a defining characteristic of Armenian identity for Armenians in Armenia.

The Armenian Church is one of the world’s oldest continuous institutions, while the Armenian state is one of the world’s newest. During centuries of statelessness from the

13th through 20th centuries, the Armenian Church acted as a surrogate state. With independence, the equilibrium between the Church and the State is being redefined. Today both are under-resourced: there is a shortage of clergy and churches to meet the needs of the 3 million potential parishioners in Armenia and a dearth of financial and technical expertise to formulate and administer State policy. Both institutions are struggling for credibility with new constituencies. World-wide, the Church has an old and continuous constituency and bureaucracy, together with a well- defined, unique and honored place in Christendom. The State's relationship with the Diaspora and other states is less well-defined. The dual hierarchies of the Catholicate of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin and the Great House of Cilicia, as well as their relations with the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem, affect the Church's efficacy in its function as a pan-national institution. As shown by recent events in the Armenian Diocese in Moscow, which culminated in the appointment of a new Primate, rivalries may undermine the church's pastoral and administrative function as a community-building institution in the Russian Diaspora. By and large the church is financed by Diasporan contributions, and the larger part of organized parish life is in the Diaspora.

The situation in Armenia proper is still deeply 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. In the aftermath of the 1700th Anniversary Celebration of Armenia's adoption of Christianity as its state religion, there has been an increasing awareness of the Church and Christian traditions in Armenia.

Currently, in both the Diaspora and Armenia a number of issues are being rethought, e.g., the role of Christianity in Armenian identity, the disconnect between individual Christianity and the organized Church, the emergence of a new generation of pastors and parishioners, the role of Christian youth groups and movements, and the appeal of cults to distressed populations. Also under reexamination is the Church's mission, its public outreach, and where the Church could now complement the activities of an under-resourced State, demonstrating, at the same time, its efficacy and concern for the people. Secularization and globalization, combined with the under- resourcing of the Church could weaken the relative position of the church in Armenia as in other countries. In addition, generation change and assimilation in the Diaspora could continue to erode the Church's support base in the Diaspora, limiting its capacity to rise to the new challenges of reestablishing itself in Armenia. At the same time, non-Armenian Christian and other denominations that are better funded may find a fertile field in Armenia, which has traditionally been a country of faith.

Armenia 2020 results show that Diasporans tend to go to church slightly more often than Armenians in Armenia, usually on holidays or special family occasions, but less than once a month on average. Higher Diaspora church attendance may be attributable to the church's

role of ethnic, cultural and spiritual center in the Diaspora; in Armenia, other institutions, including the state, play these roles. Nevertheless, Armenians in Armenia view the church more specifically as a national unifier and teacher of morality, with the role of spiritual center as less important, perhaps in part because this role was suppressed during the Soviet era. Thus, Armenians in Armenia view the church almost equally as a teacher of morals and ethics (57.9%) and unifier of Armenians worldwide (57.9%), whereas Diasporans see the church as spiritual center of society (61%) and teacher of morals and ethics (49.5%) and keeper of cultural and linguistic heritage (41%) and only then as a unifier of Armenians worldwide (30%).

While it would seem that the church with its international network and membership could function as unifying pan-national institution, 2 out of 3 Diasporans do not view this as one of the church's top 2 functions. This latter result is consistent with the Diaspora's de-emphasis of institutional affiliation as its tie to Armenia. This may also reflect the divisive history of the church and clergy in the Etchmiadzin-Antelias rivalry in America, which some Diasporans could view as an impediment to the church's acting as the unifying shepherd of the nation.

Armenia2020 survey results show quite similar value systems for both Diasporans and Armenians in Armenia. Both consider responsibility/tolerance/respect for others as the most important value to be taught children at home, although as might be expected, Diasporans, living in multicultural societies, prioritized tolerance, whereas Armenians in Armenia facing the new responsibility of self-government, emphasized responsibility. Interestingly, Armenians in Armenia ranked hard work as the second most important characteristic, whereas Diasporans ranked it fourth after determination and perseverance. Thus, the Armenians in Armenia perhaps carry forward a form of "work ethic" reinforced by Soviet ideology, whereas Diasporans appear to have progressed to the post-modernist position, which recognizes that hard work is not always rewarded and therefore place higher value on determination.

Both ranked religious faith and unselfishness highly, 1 in 5 considering these among the top 3 values children should learn at home. What is quite striking is that compared to Diasporans, nearly double the number of Armenians in Armenia valued thrift, indicating that Diasporan affluence de-emphasized this value, whereas in Armenia's emerging market economy, thrift is essential for prosperity. While independence was valued highly by both groups, Diasporans placed considerably more emphasis on imagination than Armenians in Armenian, whereas Armenians placed considerably more emphasis on obedience than Diasporans. These attitudes of Armenians in Armenia are consistent with the more traditional culture in Armenia, versus the affluence and post-modernist tendencies of

Diasporan culture. This post-modern tendency may be a reaction to the conformism of the modern, bureaucratic society and economy in which Diasporans live and work.

As in the Armenia2020 values survey, an earlier survey of Armenians in Armenia conducted prior to the 1999 Parliamentary Elections shows that most Armenians consider themselves believers. According to the 1999 survey of 1875 people around Armenia¹, more than 65% of those surveyed had been baptized, as had their parents. About half reported that their family members were believers as well. About 43% had attended (badarak) mass from beginning to end, and approximately 50% knew the Lord's Prayer from memory, some having learned it at home and some elsewhere. Nevertheless, less than a quarter had taken communion. Further supporting the hypothesis that for Armenians being Christian is definitional, approximately 65% of respondents said that baptism and church-going are not essential for being a Christian. Their attitudes toward the church were generally positive. Most (60%) said they did not know any clergy, but of those that did, only 20% had a negative impression; the rest were positive (35%) or neutral (43%). In the abstract, however, the overall impression of the clergy was more negative, with more than 40% not considering the clergy a moral role model worthy of emulation, and another 40% being undecided. People are opposed to the activities of sects and cults by a 2 to 1 margin and blame the state for their proliferation. Nevertheless, people are largely positively disposed toward the church: 84% believe that churches destroyed by the Soviet regime should be rebuilt. 75% know where their neighborhood church is and about half know the local parish priest; 61% have lit candles in church. When asked in 1999 whether the church should have the right to operate schools, 40% thought it a good idea, and even more thought that the church should operate hospitals (63%). Approximately half the people thought the school day and Parliamentary sessions should start with a prayer, and 63% thought the schools should teach religion. There is a strong belief both in the Diaspora and Armenia that the Church should be a moral force and spiritual center in society, although for most Armenians economic and social matters are more pressing items on the national agenda than making the church central to Armenia life.

There are currently under 300 active Armenian Church Parishes world-wide, under 50 dioceses, 2 Catholicoi, 2 Patriarchs, under 100 bishops, under 200 vardapets (unmarried clergy), and under 500 parish priests, under 1000 sarkavags, under 3000 choir members, and under 50,000 dues paying parishioner/families that are members of the Armenian Church world-wide, under 7 seminaries, with fewer than 75 seminarians graduating each year, under 2500 properties worldwide under its direct management and control. Armenia has 9 dioceses and under 70 parishes.

¹ Public Interest Research and Advocacy Group, Yerevan, July 1999.

Although the issues of Church-State and religion in modern society are very broad and have a long history in Armenia's development, this study will focus on three key issues:

1. The major driving forces influencing the role of religion and church in everyday life in Armenia and their relative importance.
2. The major factors influencing the attitude and the relations between the Armenian Church and Armenian Government
3. The possible scenarios of development for the role of religion and the Church in Armenia

II. Some critical factors

1. Role of Christianity historically in Armenian identity

Armenia's ties to Christianity are ancient and contemporary with Christ and his apostles. King Abgar of the Armenian City of Edessa sent a delegation to Jerusalem just before Christ's crucifixion in search of healing, and ultimately declared Christianity the official religion of his city. Two of the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew did missionary work in Armenia, bringing with them the lance that pierced Christ's side on the cross, which was kept for generations at Geghard (which means 'lance') Monastery and is now in the possession of Etchmiadzin. In 301, St. Gregory the Illuminator converted the Armenian nation to Christianity, and King Trdat proclaimed Christianity the state religion, more than a decade before Rome adopted Christianity. Shortly thereafter, St. Gregory had a vision of Christ descending, directing him to build the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin on "the place where the Only Begotten Descended". Thousands of Armenian pilgrims made their way to the Holy Land in the intervening centuries, creating a stronghold now known as the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. Within a century the Armenian alphabet was invented by Sts. Sahag and Mesrop in order to translate the Bible into Armenian, setting Armenian culture on its modern trajectory and further distinguishing the Armenian nation. That Christian identity was galvanized during the Battle of Avarayr, the quintessential struggle for national identity through defense of the faith, led by St. Vardan Mamikonian. St. Gayane, St. Hripsime, St. Nune, St. Sahag, St. Mesrop, St. Nersess the Great, St. Gregory of Narek, St. Nersess Shnorhali, Khrimian Hayrig and Komitas Vardapet are links in the chain of the makers and keepers of Armenian identity, widely known and revered as sources of national pride.

1.1. Church as surrogate state historically and in the Diaspora

As the longest continuously existing Armenian institution, the Church has often stepped into the breach as the guardian of the nation, particularly in the long centuries of statelessness beginning in the post-Cilician period (1375) to the founding of the Republic of Armenia (1918). True to its etymological meaning, the church (*yekeghetsi* from the Gk. *ecclesia* – 'gathering') was where the community came together. In the Diaspora from the 14th century on, among the first collective acts of any community was the establishment of a church,

which in turn served as a religious, national, cultural, educational, and sometimes even a political institution. The role of the church as a political and administrative body in the 19th century, especially under Ottoman domination, turned the church into a surrogate state, a role it continues to play in much of the Muslim world as well as in the Western Diasporas. According to the Armenia2020 Survey, Armenians in Armenia view the church almost equally as a teacher of morals and ethics (57.9%) and unifier of Armenians worldwide (57.9%), whereas Diasporans see the church as spiritual center of society (61%) and teacher of morals and ethics (49.5%) and keeper of cultural and linguistic heritage (41%) and only then as a unifier of Armenians worldwide (30%). While it would seem that the church with its international network and membership could function as a unifying pan- national institution, 2 out of 3 Diasporans do not view this as one of the church's top 2 functions. This latter result is consistent with Diasporans' de-emphasis of institutional affiliation as their tie to Armenia and may also reflect the divisive history of the church and clergy in the Etchmiadzin-Antelias rivalry in America, which in some Diasporans' eyes could disqualify the church for the role of unifying shepherd of the nation².

1.2. Enlightener of the Armenian people – educator, developer and protector of Armenian culture

In virtually every sphere of Armenian life from the 4th through the 18th century, the church and clergy, led the nation, creating the alphabet, language, literature, translations from foreign languages, scholarship (e.g., science, history, philosophy, theology, music, art, architecture), and social services institutions (hospitals, schools, universities, orphanages, old age homes). In the 19th century, parallel to the Church, a significant non- ecclesiastic scholarly and literary life developed. As the creator and heir to Armenia's large cultural inheritance, the Church continues to be the protector and purveyor of Armenian culture, in Armenia and to Armenians dispersed throughout the world and in particular the Mid-East.

1.3. Armenians Christian “by definition”

As members of a national church, Armenians by and large consider themselves Christian by definition. This identity was forged through centuries of persecution for their faith at the hands of Persians, Arabs, Ottomans, Russians and Soviets. Like members of other national churches, religion has become a seamless part of the individual and collective identity, rarely manifested distinctly from national identity. In the 20th century, that linkage began to erode under the pressures of secularization, assimilation and political fragmentation in the Diaspora and state atheism in Armenia. Nevertheless, more than 40% of Armenians in Armenia ranked being Christian as the second most important characteristic of Armenian identity. Interestingly, Armenians in the Diaspora rank “being Christian,” fourth after affinity for Armenian cuisine and culture and Armenian ancestry. This could be explained by the fact

² This somewhat surprising result is worth further research, since our research team's intuition is that Diasporans at the same time view the Church as a communal gathering place and unifying force.

that Diasporans have been affected by the secularism of majority cultures and unbundling of religious from ethnic identity in modern, multi-ethnic cultures. In the modern, multiethnic paradigm, Armenian cuisine and culture are classified as “ethnicity,” whereas religion is considered as a personal, private choice.

The personal choice mode of post-modernism leads to disengagement from the Church, which, in any event, is often inaccessible both physically and spiritually because of dispersion and linguistic barriers. In addition, for most Armenians living in Christian majority cultures, being Christian is not objectively a distinctive feature for group identity; therefore, it is not viewed subjectively as an essential characteristic of national identity.

For Armenians in Armenia, Soviet atheism replaced Turkish and Persian Islamic and Russian Orthodox majority cultures. In these majority cultures belonging to the Armenian Church was a defining group characteristic, thus Christianity persists as a distinctive feature of Armenian individual identity. While the spiritual content of the church was banished, it was retained as an aspect of the material culture of national identity. Indeed, playing on the national and patriotic spirit of small peoples like the Armenians was a key tool of Soviet policy.

Having created a spiritual and historical void by suppressing the church and its role in Armenian life and consciousness, the Soviets tended to emphasize the pre-Christian and non-Christian aspects of Armenian national identity. In the diaspora, the Genocide generation and certain organizations also adopted an anti-Christian stance that emphasized the pre-Christian or pagan roots of Armenian national identity. As Armenians reconstitute their identity in the post-Soviet era, it is possible that these anti-Christian and anti-Church trends in both the Diaspora and Soviet Armenia, will be reinforced by global secularization, resulting in a partial displacement of the Christian with pre-Christian pagan as definitional for Armenians. The Church itself fosters this in some sense through observance of pagan traditions in conjunction with Christian holidays, so that folk beliefs and practices overshadow the Christian significance of these days, e.g., Presentation of the Lord in the Temple (Tyarnendaraj), or The Transfiguration (Vardavar). Interestingly, in Armenia the fact that Christianity and the Church were a forbidden fruit has in some ways aroused curiosity and given the Church and Christianity cache that does not exist in the Diaspora.

2. Under-Resourced Institutions: Church and State

Despite the fact that in the aggregate Armenians have unprecedented wealth today, the Church, State and other community institutions are under-resourced for the tasks that face them. In this period of economic transition the State is caught in the grip of decades of deferred maintenance with respect to a crumbling, outdated infrastructure. Massive investment is necessary to create a new economy out of the soviet legacy assets and to meet

the challenges of integration into the global economy. In a different way, the Church faces resource constraints, lacking the wherewithal to maintain and re-activate its large cultural inheritance of historical monuments, to re-establish 3000 parishes for post-Soviet Armenia, and to fulfill its mission of stewardship toward the people. Indeed, for the nearly 1,000,000 population of Yerevan there are fewer than 20 churches with fewer than 100 active clergy and capacity for fewer than 10,000 worshippers on a Sunday. These constraints of infrastructure and personnel are a significant impediment to restoration of the Church as an institution capable of national, spiritual and moral leadership.

2.1. Personnel/human resources

The Armenian Church suffered catastrophic losses in clergy, teachers, and lay leadership during the Genocide, recovery from which was precluded by decades of dispersion of Soviet persecution. With independence and renewed religious freedom in Armenia, “the harvest is great, but the workers too few.” Increasingly parishes and parishioners are placing new demands on the church, for which the old religious training with its focus on traditionalism and ritual is inadequate. In the Diaspora, as in most of modern Christendom, there is a shortage of qualified young men entering the priesthood. To some extent, the Church is a self-replicating institution; and seminarians self-select, based on their perceptions of the role models and values embodied in the hierarchy, which adds to the institutional inertia with respect to the changing needs of the flock.

The image of the Catholicos, his persona, aura and mannerisms can be decisive, as shown by Catholicos Vazgen I of blessed memory. In addition, to the extent that the bishops and hierarchy adopt secular modes of administration and behave like “princes of the church” or national leaders, they may be perceived as less spiritual. In short, it is difficult to balance the demand to be effective leaders, accessible to their flock, and at the same time project a spiritual aura that is sincere and attractive.

The church hierarchy and a substantial part of the clergy throughout the Diaspora are not an indigenous outgrowth of the community, but an exogenous element with ties to Armenia or the Middle East. Similarly, in Armenia the hierarchy and most of the clergy are not yet of the post-Soviet generation raised in religious freedom, but from the generation formed during the period of Soviet repression, when State atheism deprived them of role models and respected social status, and KGB infiltration and tampering with the seminary was a significant factor in church culture and governance. In short, the younger generation is presented in most cases with church figures that are of a significantly different background culturally, linguistically, and politically, from their own, complicating the role model or “follow me” aspect of calling to the priesthood.

2.2. Financial resources

While the Church is perceived as a wealthy institution and has the allegiance and support of the Diaspora, much of the church's wealth is locked away in real property, cultural artifacts or endowments, and not available for operating expenses, expansion of current programs or investment in the future. For current expenses, most churches rely either upon endowment income or donations. Barring an event or circumstances leading to a resurgence of the faith, in the next generation, the donor base is likely to shrink in the Diaspora as secularization, assimilation, and migration to other churches decreases the traditional Diasporan support bases in the West.

At the same time, it is questionable whether the largely unchurched populations in Russia and Armenia will allocate adequate resources for the reestablishment of the church in their respective communities as they become more prosperous. This may lead to a financial vacuum in which wealthy individuals lacking in Christian grace, for reasons unrelated to the interests of the majority faithful step in as financiers, with the attitude "he who pays the piper, calls the tune." The Church hierarchy, desperate for funds, makes the deal with mammon, believing that it can do so without selling its soul, but risks damage to reputation as well as loss of credibility as a spiritual institution.

In other countries of Europe and in post-Soviet countries, such as Russia, the national church or established churches in general either receive public subsidies or have substantial assets inherited from past bequests. The Armenian Church having been depredated by the Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Genocide and Soviet repression, has lost its economic base, which was largely passive income (rents) from agricultural properties. Although the topic of reparations to the Church for these losses has been raised at various conferences on church-state relations, especially in connection with the 1700th Anniversary celebrations, to date, this issue has not been resolved.

2.3. Endangered Cultural Inheritance

The national cultural inheritance, which is largely church-related, is in significant jeopardy, in a number of regions, including Turkey, Georgia, the Holy Land, India, and other parts of the world where Armenian communities are dwindling to critical levels. There is a risk, for example, that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, with its small numbers of laity and clergy, may one day in the not too distant future be unable to maintain and manage the significant Armenian properties and historic sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and other parts of the Holy Land. This risk was underscored in the fall of 2002, when Israel confiscated traditional Armenian holdings on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on grounds of national security, returning most of this land only after international pressure. The holdings of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and, in particular, the historic churches and properties in

Western Armenia, are similarly endangered and neither the Church nor the State have the wherewithal to intervene effectively or prevent this cultural heritage from being obliterated.

3. Diversity in the Armenian Church

3.1. Spectrum of Religiosity

There is a wide range of religiosity in the Armenian nation. While in both Armenia and in the Diaspora, Armenians overwhelmingly identify themselves as “Christians, sub- groups are diverse, spanning church-going, individual spirituality, practicing member of the Armenian Church, member of another church, atheist, or agnostic.” In the Western Diaspora, largely under the influence of majority culture models of parish life, churchgoing, Bible study, Sunday school, men’s, women’s, and youth auxiliary organizations were accepted as norms of Armenian religious life. At the same time, with the waning of Armenian language proficiency, participation in ritual declined as the fundamental expression of Christian community. Assimilation and intermarriage combined with the mobility of Diasporan populations, leading to migration to other, more convenient and accessible church venues. However, a residual sense of loyalty to the Armenian Church often impedes new affiliations, resulting in a large “unchurched” Armenian population. With independence, in Armenia religious freedom has led to experimentation with a range of Christian and other spiritual experiences, while the Armenian Church is engaged in reconstruction.

The Armenian Church has the nearly impossible mission of tending to the needs of a post-soviet population deprived by the soviet state of its ability to believe, as well as a Diaspora undergoing secularization and assimilation. The uniqueness of each constituency’s needs strains the unity of policy and practice in the church. This tension is further exacerbated by the diversity within the Diaspora along generational and majority culture axes. Here, the clergy and current population of believers may be part of the problem. Some clergy and believers, both old and new, are pharisaical in their attitudes, either rigid or extreme in their interpretations or approach to new comers to the church.

In Armenia, lacking role models of unrepressed Christianity, both clergy and believers often project an image that falls short of the commandment to “let your let so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Into this vacuum various wealthy individuals lacking in Christian humility and grace can further discredit the church as an institution that is “for sale.”

3.2. Divisions in the church and problems of church governance

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which has a self-perpetuating clerical hierarchy, the laity have had a *de jure* role in the leadership and governance of the Armenian church since the saints King Trdat and Queen Ashkhen established the church as the national church with

St. Gregory the Illuminator as the First Catholicos. Throughout the centuries, there has been significant lay participation in the selection of Catholicos, diocesan bishops and parish priests.

Thus, the Armenian Church has a long tradition of shared lay-clergy leadership and regional oversight. This system of shared lay-clergy leadership is more pronounced in the United States where lay participation in church governance is a significant part of majority culture. This lay role in church governance is accordingly less pronounced in the former Soviet space where a stable church-going laity is just taking shape after the decades of Soviet persecution of believers. For this reason, in Armenia and Russia the church hierarchy has taken a larger role in governing itself, often designating or inviting laity to fulfill functions in church governance where such positions would traditionally have been fulfilled through election or appointment by and among the laity.

While the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin traces its preeminence to St. Gregory the Illuminator's founding vision, in the course of history the Armenian Church has had as many as 5 Catholicos simultaneously. In the 20th Century, the Catholical See of the Great House of Cilicia was restored to minister to the large communities of the Middle East, which were cut off from Etchmiadzin during the Soviet era. Indeed from 1938 through 1946, the Catholical See at Etchmiadzin was empty, after the NKVD murdered Catholicos Khoren I in Etchmiadzin and postponed elections until after WWII.

While the fraternal relationship has improved since independence, the relationship between the two Catholicos and their respective bureaucracies continues to impede efficient church governance and development of a shared vision for the future of the church. This division is most problematic in the overlapping bishoprics and parishes of North America. There is unresolved tension and competition inconsistent with essential tenets of Christian community to have "one shepherd and one flock."

3.3. Denominations – Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, Protestant

While traditionally all Armenians are sons and daughters of St. Gregory the Illuminator's church, in the course of time Catholic, Protestant and other denominations have developed and adopted an Armenian ethnic hue. The most prominent of these is the Eastern Rite Roman Catholic order of the Mekhitarists, whose founder remained a faithful member of the Armenian Church, although establishing a congregation in the Roman Catholic sphere of Venice and played an important role in Armenian scholarship, education and renewal in the 18th-20th centuries. Protestantism brought to Armenians through missionaries in the Ottoman period, continues to attract adherents. While the Armenian Church has not traditionally engaged in proselytism, it faces competition from well-financed, globally evangelical denominations. Many Armenians are searching for new forms of Christian and religious expression and community, which they sometimes find more readily outside the Armenian

Church, particularly in Catholic and Protestant denominations that use more modern methods of pastoral care and Christian education.

4. Global Changes

4.1. Secularization

In modernizing societies, the place of religion and church is rapidly changing. The bureaucratic rationalism of big business, big government and big media, have displaced the life of parishes based on human-scale communities. Well-publicized scandals and abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, for example, have spilled over and weakened the authority of churches in general. Moreover, modern media, such as radio, television and now the internet have become the space for atomized congregation of the like-minded rather than the physical meeting place of church. The dehumanizing effects of bureaucratic rationalism and modernity, with their emphasis on inflexible facts and rules, have led to thorough-going secularization of society and heightened alienation and individualism, antithetical to the communal religious ethos of traditional religion. This trend has its roots in many ideologies, including the Enlightenment belief in human self-perfectibility, as well as the economic determinism of Marxism and the commodification and consumerist ethos of free market capitalism that dominates prosperous countries, which in turn is spread by their media, and coveted by have-not cultures, such as Armenia's. "Put positively, changes of this sort established the precious principles of civic equality and freedom of (and from) religion. Put negatively, they demoted traditional structures that claimed to be noncontingent and metahistorical-the people Israel, the church-to the status of mere voluntary associations. In theory one's public role would now be determined apart from rather than through these mediating structures³.

4.2. Clergy-Laity Relations

With widespread higher education, the relationship between the clergy and laity has changed dramatically. More often than not, the parson is no longer the best-educated person in the community. This places greater demands on the clergy from the laity and poses a challenge to the authority of both the clergy and church in society. If in the Diaspora, the clergy's relation to the laity is evolving from a more traditional authority figure to that of a counselor and community administrator, in Armenia and Russia, the traditional role and place of the clergy in society was obliterated by the decades of Soviet rule. Thus, a new model suited to the mentality and circumstances of post-soviet society needs to be developed and implemented.

4.3. Heightened Christian Consciousness

³ Levenson, J. Hebrew Bible, Old Testament & Historical Criticism. New York: Fortress-Augsburg, 1992, p. 119.

Religion has frequently played an important role in regional geopolitics. As the clash of civilizations brings Christians into conflict with Moslems, Armenians' Christian identity may become more pronounced and overt. To some extent this was evident during the Karabagh conflict, where the persecution and self-determination of Armenians in this region, had both ethnic and religious strands. The church in some instances rose to the occasion to give moral gravity to these national crises. As the world addresses tensions in the Mid-East there is the risk of international polarization. Armenia, as a Christian island in an Islamic sea, may be viewed and view itself through the lens of religion, leading to heightened Christian consciousness in Armenia. Heightened Christian consciousness may also emerge as a reaction to the excesses of materialism and secularism or through greater contact with other Christian groups around the world made possible by Armenia's independence.

5. Societal Trends that Impact the Church

The Church as a societal institution cannot escape the influence of broader societal trends. The faster pace of life has made the long worship services of the Armenian church less meaningful and impractical, particularly in the Diaspora where alternatives are usually half to a third as long. If in the Diaspora people are growing away from the traditional services, in part due to assimilation and language barriers, in Armenia the services have long faded from communal memory and the learning curve may prove too steep given the many other demands on the population during this transition to a global market economy. In the Diaspora and to a lesser extent in Armenia, individual freedom of choice in ethnicity and denomination, including intermarriage and migration to other churches, is also eroding the funding and parishioner base of the Armenian Church. Nevertheless, trends seem to indicate that the Diaspora, while slightly more likely to attend church now, may actually be trailing off, while church attendance might be increasing in Armenia. In these times of economic and psychological distress in Armenia, sects and cults with their panaceas are especially appealing.

However, the greatest pressure on the church may be from the point of view of preservation and propagation of national and ethnic identity. In Armenia this function is largely performed by society at large, whereas in the Diaspora this role is still largely fulfilled by the church. To the extent that other institutions, such as the Armenian State, assume this role in the Diaspora, the church may become more focused on religious matters, which some Diasporans may find more attractive, but others will consider an abandonment of a sacred trust.

6. Role of the Church in Armenian Community/Nation

6.1. Disconnect between individual Christians and the organized Church

In both the Diaspora and Armenia, there is a large contingent of people who are inclined to individual spirituality and do not find spiritual sustenance in the church. Low church attendance rates are among the indicators of this trend away from organized worship as practiced today in the Armenian Church. Although the church in the diaspora and homeland has a long and illustrious history of being a provider of social services, health care and education since the times Nerses the Great (St. Gregory's grandson and a layman anointed Catholicos), today Armenians primarily look not to the church, but to the state to meet these needs. Interestingly, the Diaspora, perhaps inspired by the role that many Western Churches play in the sphere of health, education and welfare, considers development of such services as a higher priority than in Armenia, perhaps because memory of this traditional role of the Church has been lost. Both Armenia and the Diaspora, however, look to the Church to be the voice of morality, ethics in society and the promoter of values of hard work, justice, honesty and anti-corruption.

6.2. Church-State Relations

Although there have been several communiqués by the Church and State since independence, the legal status of the Church and its property rights, have yet to be satisfactorily clarified.

Church-State relations continue to be colored by historical models developed during foreign domination. The Church-State relations of both the National Constitution of the Ottoman Empire and the Polozhenie of the Tsarist Empire were designed to exert foreign secular control over the Armenian church and nation within the confines of these respective empires. They were inspired by a "divide and conquer policy" and are ill-suited to the new relations between a free and independent state and an international church. Issues of protocol regarding the public interactions between church and civil leaders in Armenia are also ill-defined, resulting in an uncertainty and awkwardness that hinders restoration of the Church in the life of civil society.

Although the March 17, 2000 Memorandum between the Government and Etchmiadzin raised this issue, reparations for the devastation suffered by the Church during the Soviet era have not been addressed. Responsibility for church properties outside of Armenia, which entails diplomatic and state-to-state relations, has not been clarified, leaving this large patrimony inadequately protected. At the core of these issues is the world-wide leadership of the Armenian nation. The Church, though ill-suited for this role in some ways, was forced to perform these functions due to centuries of statelessness, while the newly independent state has not yet developed the capacity or earned the trust to perform these functions. The Church, with its network of parishes and dioceses has a more mature and embracing structure for this purpose, in many ways better financed than the state which has no direct

claim on the dispersed Armenians world-wide, who are neither citizens nor even émigrés from Armenia. While these issues are susceptible to resolution, the lack of defined roles could lead to rivalry.

The legal framework for Church-State relations is still underdeveloped. Unlike the constitutions of other ancient traditionally Christian nations, such as Greece or Ireland, which make explicit reference to the Church and Christianity, the RA Constitution makes no explicit reference to the national Church or the status of Etchmiadzin as the international see of the Armenian Church. The relations between the Church and State were regulated largely through the decisions of the State Committee on Church Affairs, a Soviet body established in the Stalin era to “oversee” the church. In 2002, the State Committee on Church Affairs was abolished as part of Armenia’s harmonization with the norms of the Council of Europe.

There have also been several Church-State Communiqués and Government Resolutions aiming to clarify property and protocol between Church and State. There is also a Law on Religious Institutions, as well as a registration process for religious bodies. To date the Armenian Church has resisted registration by the State, claiming its precedence and priority in its own sphere of activity, consistent with the separation of church and state enshrined in international human rights treaties and ancient tradition.

7. Generation Change in the Church

7.1. Pivotal Generation Change, 2000-2020

Throughout the Armenian nation, and particularly in the Diaspora, a pivotal generation change is taking place. By 2020, the vast majority of the Diaspora will be foreign born, non-Armenian-reading, non-Armenian speaking, and secular, unaffiliated with the Armenian Church. There may be a problem finding a critical mass to keep churches in many Diasporan communities. The generation of Genocide survivors has nearly passed, their children are retiring, and their grandchildren are born, raised and full-fledged members of the majority culture. Later waves of emigrants to the Western Diaspora from the Middle East are similarly on the cusp of the second generation born and raised in the majority culture, no longer viewing themselves or viewed by others as émigrés. The vast majority of Diasporans no longer have a sufficient proficiency in the Armenian language to attempt to make sense of the liturgy in Classical Armenia. While some of the nearly million strong wave of Soviet and post-Soviet émigrés are finding their way to church, they are not traditionally church goers and given the dominant secularism and modernism of global culture, only a small portion are likely to find their way to parish life, as dues-paying members. The Armenian Church, for its part, has little experience and a lack of resources to proselytize its lost flock.

The practices of church ceremonies (funerals, weddings, baptisms, memorial services) are traditionally occasions to make gifts to the church and are part of this wave of emigrants' customs. At the same time, third- and fourth-generation Diasporans, who may have honored the church in their grandparent/great grandparent (survivor generation's) memory, are no longer tied in this way. The first generation born in the Diaspora after the genocide was often highly assimilated and disengaged from Armenian life due to the competing demands of "making it" in the majority culture and the anti-ethnic tilt of majority culture life during the pre- and post-WWII era in which they came of age. Thus, while the Diasporan churches may still have significant donor bases and endowments, these could diminish significantly in the next generation, resulting in either endowed churches with few parishioners as in Egypt or abandoned churches as in India or the Far East where properties are difficult to maintain for lack of current cash flow.

7.2. Role of Christian youth groups and movements

The Church and laity are attempting to fill the gap between the traditional services and activities of the Church and the demands of a new generation of Armenians for a Christian life they can relate to. In the Diaspora this is largely addressed through youth organizations, Sunday schools, conferences and seminars, which attempt to provide role models and build community: binding and acculturating a new generation to the Church. The standard acculturation processes of family and local parishes continues, but is quite attenuated as the younger generation is deflected from the Church by the pervasive secularism and life-style-choice mentality of the majority culture and distanced from the Church by linguistic barriers.

In Armenia, the stirrings of a new generation of Christians awakened from the Soviet era are evident. The 1700th Celebrations organized pilgrimages and established other college and high school aged youth groups. In parishes Christian instruction directed at youth have also set many youngsters on the path to church activism on the altar, in children's choirs, or as worshipers. Instruction in Armenian Church History in the schools, as a kind of remedial measure for the active and hostile anti-church propaganda of the Soviet era, is spreading after having started in Artsakh and various schools around Armenia. There are denominational and non-denominational university Christian groups, including groups affiliated with the Theology Department at Yerevan State University. Throughout churches in Yerevan, on Sundays one can find a significant number of adolescents and young adults, especially young families with newborns, at church. A range of Protestant organizations are concentrating on developing future Christian leaders, while Armenian Catholic groups are supporting and educating some of Armenia's most vulnerable youth.

While these efforts are producing a core of young people inclined toward the Church and toward Christian values in society, these are still a very small percentage of the whole and it

remains to be seen whether a critical mass of cognizant Christians will take shape in Armenia in time to revitalize the Church and become a Christian voice in Armenian society.

7.3. Emergence of a new generation of pastors and parishioners in Armenia

In both the Diaspora and Armenia a new generation of pastors and parishioners is emerging. They are more often from the communities in which they serve, and therefore, can act as role models more easily than their exogenous predecessors. Still, due to the lack of a traditional clergy role in post-Soviet culture, the new generation of pastors in Armenia has the double burden of shaping itself and defining its place in society. It remains to be seen whether this new generation of pastors in Armenia will succeed in this double task. At the same time, a little more than a decade into independence parish life is beginning to take shape, as the profile of worshipers shifts from older women in the Soviet era, whose religious activity was usually tolerated or ignored by the authorities, to a younger mixed congregation of 15 to 45 years old. The severe infrastructure and personnel constraints on the Armenian Church, however, may prevent it from capitalizing on this historic opportunity.

7.4. The North American Church

As the largest, wealthiest and best organized part of the church, the fate of the Armenian Church in North America could have a major impact on the fate of the Church in Armenia.

The Armenian Church in North America, now the largest and probably wealthiest part of the Armenian Church, was founded a little over 100 years ago by Catholicos Mktrich, known affectionately as Khrimian Hayrig. The earliest churches served an émigré population as a community and spiritual center, a gathering place for Armenians, whose Christianity was definitional and not separable from their national identity and therefore did not need to be addressed separately. With the passage of time, that unified persona became fragmented into hyphenated American status, Armenian-American. Identification as an Armenian-American was considered, under the influence and pressure of majority culture, to be a personal life-style choice. Given the strong Protestant belief in individual freedom of conscience in the United States in particular and to a lesser degree in Europe, the Christian component of Armenian identity was unbundled from the traditional Armenian persona. This in turn encouraged individual Armenian-Americans to choose their mode of religious expression and in some cases, denominational affiliation, while continuing to identify with the Armenian Church and its auxiliary organizations and community organizations as national institutions.

Like many of the orthodox churches of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the Cold War cause their diasporan churches to splinter, and these vestiges of the Cold War continue to play a role in their churches and community life. The division in the Armenian

Church in North America was precipitated by the Soviet KGB's intermeddling in the 1931 elections of the Diocesan bishop in New York. A group of delegates walked out of the National Assembly convention and elected the candidate supported by Moscow, setting off a series of seizures of church property by the supporters of delegates, culminating in the 1933 stabbing death of Archbishop Levon Tourian in New York. Twenty five years later, a large part of the Armenian community, which had remained unaffiliated with a hierarchical see, was without priests or churches. Since affiliation with Holy Etchmiadzin was precluded by a long history of alienation fanned by the Cold War, they established the Prelacy of the Armenian Church in New York and affiliated with the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, successor to the Catholicate of Sis in the Middle Ages. Soviet interference in the affairs of the church was widespread, including the murder of the Catholicos, the postponement of the election of a new Catholicos for 8 years, and intervention in the elections of Bishops and the Catholicos of Cilicia in 1956. In an effort to save a large flock in America from nearly certain disappearance and assimilation, the unaffiliated churches of North America submitted to the Catholicate of Cilicia, as a source of clergy and spiritual leadership.

Relations between the two communities in North America have evolved from open hostility, to peaceful coexistence, to cooperation and intermingling at many levels, with the notable exception of their hierarchies and certain local leaders. For some, the distinction is an irrelevant and embarrassing holdover of a bygone era that has turned them off from the Armenian Church and Armenian life. For others, it is a difference of culture that justifies their existence. For yet others, a wound that needs to be healed so that the Armenian Church can be restored to health.

7.5. Church affiliation decreases as national identity becomes attenuated

The Armenian Church has a number of unique doctrines and customary practices, in short, a culture of its own. However, as Armenian national identity becomes attenuated under the pressures of secularization and globalization in both Diaspora and Armenia, the Armenian Church will likely face diminishing affiliation. This attenuation is compounded in the Diaspora by intermarriage, assimilation, and linguistic atrophy. Similar trends have been observed with other national churches and ethnically based religions, such as Judaism. And the diminishing affiliation is especially when viewed against the natural growth of the population. This is already evident in the Diaspora, where there are under 200 churches for more than 8 million potential parishioners. As they leave the Armenian church, however, some affiliate with other churches, but many become unchurched, often feeling that affiliation with a non-Armenian church is a kind of betrayal to the national church for which their ancestors sacrificed so much. Thus, even when the content of national identity is quite diluted, this residual sense of belonging impacts Armenian's behavior.

Whether the Armenian Church can reverse the effects of Soviet atheism and gather a critical mass in Armenia before secularization, globalization and consumerism overtake Armenians in Armenia remains to be seen. Although there are countertrends, the vast majority of Diasporan Armenians are becoming more ethnically and religiously diverse in comparison with their counterparts in Armenia, raising a serious question whether the Armenian Church can maintain unity of liturgical practice and church culture, while meeting the pastoral needs of its increasingly diverse flock.

III. Scenarios

There are several possible scenarios for Church-State Relations and the role of religion in Armenia. They are deeply affected by the global pressure toward modern secularization, which sets the current trajectory of the Church in Armenian life not only in Armenia, but also in the Diaspora. Along this axis then, the Diaspora and Armenia could be converging in a way that marginalizes the Armenian Church, especially if the pace of modernization and secularization eclipses the restoration of traditional ties to the Church in post-Soviet Armenia and Russia. In general, however, the Church and State are on independent trajectories, each the master of its own destiny. Each can impede or encourage certain developments in the other, but neither can fully shape the other's future.

8. Descriptions of Church/State and Religion Scenarios (CS-Scenarios)

8.1. Divided Alienated Church. In this scenario, the Church is disconnected from the state or the people. It becomes a self-perpetuating clerical institution, resulting in deteriorating reverence toward the clergy. Church leaders make a defensive move to unbending tradition and reject attempts to provide pastoral measures to meet the needs of a diverse, wounded, changing, assimilating flock. Religion is viewed as an atavistic cult that does not contribute to the spiritual or moral life of the society and the church loses status and legitimacy. People seek spiritual nourishment in other religions and psychological solace in various kinds of therapy and superstitions.

8.2. Church vs. State. In this scenario, the Church and State vie for leadership of the nation both in Armenia and through the Diaspora. In the Diaspora, lacking dual citizenship or other status to facilitate their relationship in the Armenian state, membership in the "surrogate state" continues to be the primary form of national belonging. The Church, with its hierarchical structure world-wide and Diasporan resource base, is a more effective network for mobilizing and connecting Armenians than the State, with its under-financed and understaffed embassies. Religion is stigmatized by the State as a competing ideology and rejected as a moral or spiritual force in public life, although it may have great sway in private life.

8.3. New Equilibrium. In this scenario, the Church has a well-defined sphere of activity that does not infringe on the role of the State. In Armenia, there is a growing acceptance of a return of believers and religious attitudes to public, state affairs. In the Diaspora, Armenians develop a relationship with the State and secular institutions that coexist with the Church which is seen primarily as the spiritual, moral and cultural center of the community. Religion and spirituality are viewed as normal and necessary parts of daily private and public life, informing public discourse and community decision-making.

8.4. Pan-National Institution. In this scenario, the Armenian Church expands its role as surrogate state, coordinating relations between Diaspora and homeland. It not only ministers to the spiritual, educational, cultural needs of the people, but also provides moral leadership to the nation, becoming a focal point for national Akin to the historical type of surrogate state, the Church becomes isolated and disengaged from the State, which is either too weak or dysfunctional to provide national leadership or absorb moral teaching from the Church.

8.5. Secularized, Marginalized Church. In this scenario, secularization, globalization, and consumerism overtake the Armenian Church as it tries to get back on its feet, eclipsing the Armenian Church before it is resuscitated from years of Soviet oppression and Cold War tensions. The Armenian Church retains administrative function as a community network/gathering place and property holding entity, but becomes increasingly irrelevant as a spiritual and moral force or power base, as assimilation erodes its flock.

9. Evolution of CS Scenarios

While it is impossible to predict which critical factors will actually materialize and impact the evolution of the CS Scenarios, it is possible to plot the trajectory toward these scenarios, assuming certain constellations of factors.

9.1. CS-Scenario 5 (Secularized, Marginalized Church) comes closest to the current reality.

9.2. The situation could continue or devolve into CS Scenario 1 (Divided-Alienated Church) or Scenario 2 (Church vs. State). The factors driving in this direction include secularization, limited resources, assimilation, inner divisions in the church, language barriers, the appeal of competing religious institutions and the disconnect between individual Christianity and the organized church, leading to diminished authority, integrity and effect. For Scenario 2 (Church vs. State), the weak Armenian State, the relative wealth of the Church, with its Diasporan support base, and the Church's historical role as the enlightener of the Armenian people and surrogate State could tip the balance of power and lead to Church-State rivalry.

9.3. CS-Scenario 5 (Secularized Church) could evolve into Scenario 4 (Pan-National Institution) if the factors of weak state, relatively strong and well-financed church, and

geopolitical factors leading to heightened Christian identity push the Church into its historical type as surrogate State.

9.4. CS-Scenario 5 could evolve into CS-Scenario 3 (New Equilibrium) if the factors of faith, generational change, new pastors and parishioners and new media for communication lead to a strengthened Church that is a separate but equal partner to the Armenian State.

10. Compatibility of Church-State Scenarios with Armenia 2020 Scenarios

With few exceptions, the CS-Scenarios are more likely to be the effect of Armenia2020 Scenarios than the drivers or causes of those Scenarios. While certain CS-Scenarios are more compatible with certain Armenia2020 Scenarios, they are virtually all compatible with the current trajectory of the Church and Society toward Secularism and a Marginalized Church (CS-5). On the other hand, the most aspirational CS-Scenario 3 (New Equilibrium) could be significantly impeded or precluded by certain Armenia2020 Scenarios (e.g., Big Brother Scenarios, Syria or Buffer State), and strong church scenarios could arise as a defensive response to weak/non-inclusive state and reversion to historic type (surrogate state). Nevertheless, the trajectories of the Church and the State are relatively independent of each other, which could be attributed among other things to the global forces of secularization, the inheritance of Soviet state atheism, and the international legal norm of separation.

10.1. The “EU scenario” is most compatible with CS-Scenarios 5 (Secularized Church) and 3 (New Equilibrium). Indeed, the EU scenario could accelerate CS-Scenario 5. The other CS-Scenarios predicated on a weak state or heightened Christian/religious identity are less compatible with the modern, secular ethos of the EU.

10.2. “Big Brother Russia” is compatible with CS-Scenarios 1 (Divided Alienated Church), 2 (Church vs. State), and 5 (Secularized Church), each of which presuppose a weakened state and insular church. Re-polarization could accelerate devolution into CS-Scenario 1, if the Church is caught unaware or the laity in the Diaspora are excessively weak, or CS-Scenario 2 (Church vs. State) if the Church is relatively strong and has Diasporan support sufficient to mount a defensive consolidation around this institution. Scenario 5 (Secularized Church) is the current trajectory and would probably be furthered by the Big Brother Russia scenario, which could drive a wedge between the Western Diaspora and the Church in Armenia, in Cold War redux.

10.3. The “Multi-national scenario” is most compatible with CS-Scenarios 1 (Divided, Alienated Church), which presupposes a weakened state and a disengaged church, and 5 (Secular State), which shares the modernizing, denationalized ethos of multi-nationals, and to a lesser degree, CS-Scenario 3 (New Equilibrium), which may not develop if the state is under the sway of modernizing, denationalizing multi-nationals. The “strong” Armenian

Church scenarios (2 and 4) are generally incompatible with the transnational culture and interests of multi-national companies, which prefer more malleable, less tradition bound societies and lack of competition from a Pan-National Church.

10.4. The “Singapore scenario” is most compatible with CS-Scenarios 3 (New Equilibrium) and 4 (Pan-National Institution), each of which draw on the moderate church’s strength as a moral leader and network and corresponding ethos of discipline and hard work necessary to become a regional economic power. CS-Scenarios 1 (Divided Alienated Church) and 5 (Secularized Church) are less compatible with the Singapore Scenario because they indicate an unraveling of traditional culture and discipline incompatible with the rigor required to evolve into a regional economic power. CS- Scenario 2, on the other hand, indicates a dysfunctional relationship between the Church and State which could impede economic development.

10.5. The “Syria scenario” and the “Buffer State Scenario” are compatible with CS- Scenarios 1 (Alienated Church), 2 (Church vs. State), 4 (Pan-National Institution) and 5 (Secularized Church). A State dominated by relatively undemocratic political and economic elites could lead to alienation of the Diaspora from the Church, resulting in a weakened Church, or in a resurgent defensive church (Scenarios 2) or a rescuer church/surrogate state (Scenario 4). The current trajectory could also be maintained, with an increasingly secular and marginalized Church.

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