

Vatican City Communiqué **Joint Communiqué of Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin II**

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, and His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, give thanks to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for enabling them to meet together on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 and on the threshold of the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion of Armenia.

They also give thanks in the Holy Spirit that the fraternal relations between the See of Rome and the See of Etchmiadzin have further developed and deepened in recent years. This progress finds its expression in their present personal meeting and particularly in the gift of a relic of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, the holy missionary who converted the king of Armenia (301 A.D.) and established the line of Catholicos of the Armenian Church. The present meeting builds upon the previous encounters between Pope Paul VI and Catholicos Vasken I (1970) and upon the two meetings between Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I (1996 and 1999). Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin II now continue to look forward to a possible meeting in Armenia. On the present occasion, they wish to state together the following.

Together we confess our faith in the Triune God and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who became man for our salvation. We also believe in One, Catholic, Apostolic and Holy Church. The Church, as the Body of Christ, indeed, is one and unique. This is our common faith, based on the teachings of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. We acknowledge furthermore that both the Catholic Church and the Armenian Church have true sacraments, above all – by apostolic succession of bishops – the priesthood and the Eucharist. We continue to pray for full and visible communion between us. The liturgical celebration we preside over together, the sign of peace we exchange and the blessing we give together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, testify that we are brothers in the episcopacy. Together we are jointly responsible for what is our common mission: to teach the apostolic faith and to witness to the love of Christ for all human beings, especially those living in difficult circumstances.

The Catholic Church and the Armenian Church share a long history of mutual respect, considering their various theological, liturgical and canonical traditions as complementary, rather than conflicting. Today, too, we have much to receive from one another. For the Armenian Church, the vast resources of Catholic learning can become a treasure and source of inspiration, through the exchange of scholars and students, through common translations and academic initiatives, through different forms of theological dialogue. Likewise, for the Catholic Church, the steadfast, patient faith of a martyred nation like Armenia can become a source of spiritual strength, particularly through common prayer. It is our firm desire to see these many forms of mutual exchange and rapprochement between us improved and intensified.

As we embark upon the third millennium, we look back on the past and forward to the future. As to the past, we thank God for the many blessings we have received from his infinite bounty, for the holy witness given by so many saints and martyrs, for the spiritual and cultural heritage bequeathed by our ancestors. Many times, however, both the Catholic Church and the Armenian Church have lived through dark and difficult periods. Christian faith was contested by atheistic and materialistic ideologies; Christian witness was opposed by totalitarian and violent regimes; Christian love was suffocated by individualism and the pursuit of personal interest. Leaders of nations no longer feared God, nor did they feel ashamed before humankind. For both of us, the 20th century was marked by extreme violence. The Armenian genocide, which began the century, was a prologue to horrors that would follow. Two world wars, countless regional conflicts and deliberately organized campaigns of extermination took the lives of millions of

faithful. Nevertheless, without diminishing the horror of these events and their consequences, there may be a kind of divine challenge in them, if in response Christians are persuaded to join together in deeper friendship in the cause of Christian truth and love.

We now look to the future with hope and confidence. At this juncture in history, we see new horizons for us Christians and for the world. Both in the East and in the West, after having experienced the deadly consequences of godless regimes and lifestyles, many people are yearning for the knowledge of truth and the way of salvation. Together, guided by charity and respect for freedom, we seek to answer their desire, so as to bring them to the sources of authentic life and true happiness. We seek the intercession of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Thaddeus and Bartholomew, of Saint Gregory the Illuminator and all Sainly Pastors of the Catholic Church and the Armenian Church, and pray the Lord to guide our communities so that, with one voice, we may give witness to the Lord and proclaim the truth of salvation. We also pray that around the world, wherever members of the Armenian and the Catholic Church live side by side, all ordained ministers, religious and faithful will “help to carry one another’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Gal 6: 2). May they mutually sustain and assist one another, in full respect of their particular identities and ecclesiastical traditions, avoiding to prevail one over another: “so then, as often as we have the chance, we should do good to everyone, and especially to those who belong to our family in the faith” (Gal 6:10).

Finally, we seek the intercession of the Holy Mother of God for the sake of peace. May the Lord grant wisdom to the leaders of nations, so that justice and peace may prevail throughout the world. In these days in particular, we pray for peace in the Middle East. May all the children of Abraham grow in mutual respect and find appropriate ways for living peacefully together in this sacred part of the world.