

*COMMON DECLARATION
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
AND HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II
AT HOLY ETCHMIADZIN, REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA*

The celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the religion of Armenia has brought us together — John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Catholic Church, and Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians — and we thank God for giving us this joyous opportunity to join again in common prayer, in praise of his all-holy Name. Blessed be the Holy Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — now and for ever.

As we commemorate this wondrous event, we remember with reverence, gratitude and love the great confessor of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Gregory the Illuminator, as well as his collaborators and successors. They enlightened not only the people of Armenia but also others in the neighbouring countries of the Caucasus. Thanks to their witness, dedication and example, the Armenian people in A. D. 301 were bathed in the divine light and earnestly turned to Christ as the Truth, the Life, and the Way to salvation.

They worshipped God as their Father, professed Christ as their Lord and invoked the Holy Spirit as their Sanctifier; they loved the apostolic universal Church as their Mother. Christ's supreme commandment, to love God above all and our neighbour as ourselves, became a way of life for the Armenians of old. Endowed with great faith, they chose to bear witness to the Truth and accept death when necessary, in order to share eternal life. Martyrdom for the love of Christ thus became a great legacy of many generations of Armenians. The most valuable treasure that one generation could bequeath to the next was fidelity to the Gospel, so that, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, the young would become as resolute as their ancestors in bearing witness to the Truth. The extermination of a million and a half Armenian Christians, in what is generally referred to as the first genocide of the twentieth century, and the subsequent annihilation of thousands under the former totalitarian regime are tragedies that still live in the memory of the present-day generation. These innocents who were butchered in vain are not canonized, but many among them were certainly confessors and martyrs for the name of Christ. We pray for the repose of their souls, and urge the faithful never to lose sight of the meaning of their sacrifice. We thank God for the fact that Christianity in Armenia has survived the adversities of the past seventeen centuries, and that the Armenian Church is now free to carry out her mission of proclaiming the Good News in the modern Republic of Armenia and in many areas near and far where Armenian communities are present.

Armenia is again a free country, as in the early days of King Tiridates and Saint Gregory the Illuminator. Over the past ten years, the right of citizens in the burgeoning Republic to worship and practise their religion in freedom has been recognized. In Armenia and in the diaspora, new Armenian institutions have been established, churches have been built, associations and schools have been founded. In all of this we acknowledge the loving hand of God. For he has made his miracles visible in the continuing history of a small nation, which has preserved its particular identity thanks to its Christian faith. Because of their faith and their Church, the Armenian

people have developed a unique Christian culture, which is indeed a most valuable contribution to the treasury of Christianity as a whole.

The example of Christian Armenia testifies that faith in Christ brings hope to every human situation, no matter how difficult. We pray that the saving light of Christian faith may shine on both the weak and the strong, on both the developed and developing nations of this world. Particularly today, the complexities and challenges of the international situation require a choice between good and evil, darkness and light, humanity and inhumanity, truth and falsehood. Present issues of law, politics, science, and family life touch upon the very meaning of humanity and its vocation. They call today's Christians – no less than the martyrs of other times – to bear witness to the Truth even at the risk of paying a high price.

This witness will be all the more convincing if all of Christ's disciples could profess together the one faith and heal the wounds of division among themselves. May the Holy Spirit guide Christians, and indeed all people of good will, on the path of reconciliation and brotherhood. Here at Holy Etchmiadzin we renew our solemn commitment to pray and work to hasten the day of communion among all the members of Christ's faithful flock, with true regard for our respective sacred traditions.

With God's help, we shall do nothing against love, but "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, we shall lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and shall run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (cf. Heb 12:1)

We urge our faithful to pray without ceasing that the Holy Spirit will fill us all, as he did the holy martyrs of every time and place, with the wisdom and courage to follow Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Holy Etchmiadzin, 27 September 2001

His Holiness John Paul II

His Holiness Karekin II