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To His Beatitude Theophilos III

Your Beatitude
Eminences
and dear Brothers,

Thank you very much for your kind words and wishes on the occasion of New Year and Christmas. Once again we are standing on the threshold of a "Great Mystery" that announces the birth of the Son of God and our Savior. Centuries and many generations have gone by since that unique event, empires, mighty rulers and ideologies have come and become a part of history, yet the presence of the Word of God that became flesh on the night remains vivid in the minds of true Christians.

This year, the birth of our Savior, whom the Prophet Isaiah announced as "The Prince of Piece", is indeed celebrated at a time when a serious threat overshadows the Middle East, and when serious violence continues to dominate our region, where brothers have turned against brothers and neighbors against neighbors.

A hundred years ago, in 1915, the Ottoman Turks undertook the most serious and biggest project of ethnic cleansing of their not only Armenian but Syrian and Greek populations as well and their entire spiritual patrimony. And nowadays, we are witnessing another ethnic cleansing that is taking place in neighboring Syria and Iraq, where ancient communities, with two millennia of history are being uprooted and destroyed. And now it is the mission of each and every Christian to serve our brothers and sisters in faith at this moment of their distress.

On April 24 of this year, Armenians will commemorate the Centennial of the Genocide of our nation. Besides a Million and a Half martyrs, hundreds of churches and monasteries were razed to the ground and thousands of manuscripts were torched. The same fate awaited our clergy, 5,000 of them were executed in public. In a few months time almost two millennia of Christian history went up in flames. But with the grace of God the Church rose from the ashes to serve Lord and its flock. Along Armenians, Greeks and Syrians also were subjected to the same fate.

Your Beatitude, at this joyous time of our New Year and Epiphany, let us share once again the joy of the feast of Nativity of our Lord and Savior, so that it may serve us as a source of inspiration and spiritual strength. May we all be blessed with the graces of our Savior.

Happy New Year and Merry Christmas.



To His Beatitude Fouad Twal

Your Beatitude
and dear Brothers in Christ,

Our late Patriarch, Abp. Yeghishe Derderian Derderian, once told the dramatic story of a sacristan, by the name of Marcos, who served in the St. James Cathedral in the 20s. Marcos came from a well to do family, in a small town in Turkey. In 1915, at the height of the massacres he sought refuge in the residence of the mayor, who was a family friend. The mob found out where he was hiding, they surrounded the mayor's residence and demanded him to hand Marcos over. The mayor informed them that Marcos converted into Islam, but they wanted to hear it from him. The Mayor asked him to come to the door and declare just for a moment that he had converted to Islam. Marcos' reply was: "Even one minute is too long. I will not deny my lord for a second". And he never did. However, later on the mob took the mayor's word and went away. The bloody years of 1915 - early 20s were full of such stories when Armenians stood on their ground and preferred the crown of martyrdom.

In the early 20th century, the Turkish authorities implemented their biggest project of ethnic cleansing, not only involving people, but their churches, monasteries and their entire spiritual patrimony. And nowadays, we're are witnessing another ethnic cleansing that is taking place in the Middle East. Syria and Iraq, where ancient communities, with two milleniums of history are being uprooted and destroyed.

His Holiness the Pope does not miss any oppor-

tunity to stress the urgency and the seriousness of the problem, and He is always articulate about it. We, in our turn, should be resourceful and think of ways to mobilize the public opinion and governments to apply more pressure on this issue, otherwise in a debate we will have only ghost communities in these countries.

Your Beatitude, on this festive occasion, on behalf of St. James Brotherhood and the Armenian community, I pray God, the Heavenly Father, to grant you health and long life to continue in Your efforts for the glory of the Church flock. I wish you, your clergy and community a Happy and a healthy year as well as a Merry Christmas to all. May God the Lord send his blessings.



To Franciscan Brothers

Your Paternity and dear brothers,

At this joyous season of the New Year and Christmas the eyes of the Christian world are centered again on the Manger of Bethlehem and the New-born King and Savior, whose message of Love, Peace and Brotherhood still remains strong and unshaken among the true believers. His great things of "Peace and Goodwill among men" have echoed for centuries and have surely brought relief to suffering people and turned their sorrow into joy.

This blessed season of New Year Christmas provide us, Christians, with a wonderful opportunity of a renewed life, to put on a NEW MAN, so that we can tread along the way that is ahead of us, to be able to accept the Light and the Truth that our Savior offers to us.

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We feel that, in this Centennial year it is the duty of each Armenian to remind to the world about the plight of the Armenians. His Holiness, Pope Francis has already set a special day in April of this year to commemorate the event and I think it would be appropriate that Christians join in prayers in Jerusalem.

And nowadays, in our own region of the Middle East, again ancient communities are in danger of disappearing, and it should be the duty of each and every Christian to try to mobilize our resources to attenuate this threat. It is our mission to serve our Christian brothers and sisters at this moment of their distress.

Your Paternity and dear brethren, at this point let us share the joy of the feast of Nativity of our Lord and Savior, so that it may serve us a source of inspiration and spiritual strength.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



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