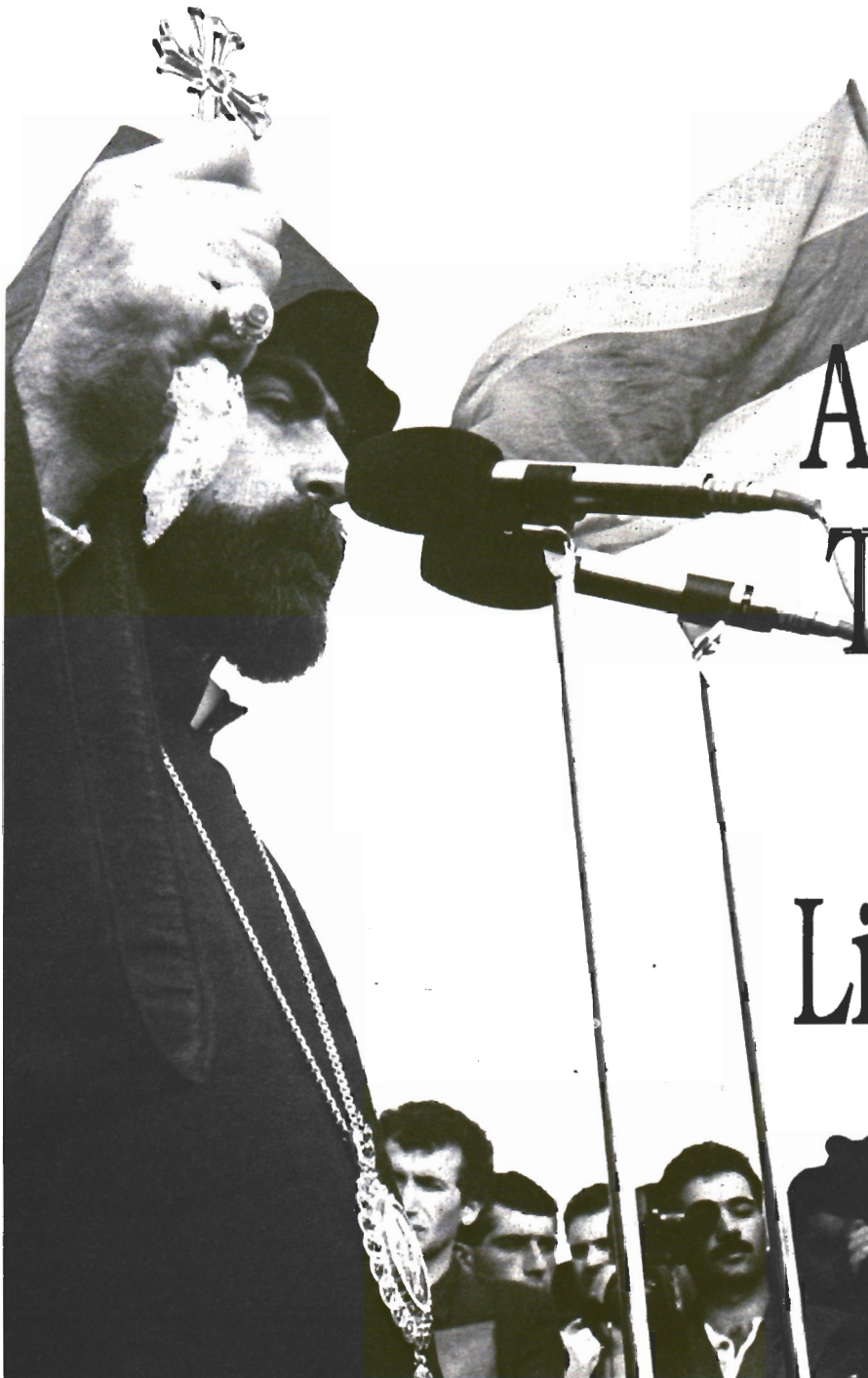


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view of the Armenian Church

Vol. I, No.2

Spring 1990



In Search
of an

Armenian Theology of Liberation

*Its implications for
Armenians in the
homeland and the
diaspora...*

WINDOW *view of the Armenian Church*

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On the Cover

His Grace Bishop Barkev Mardrossian of Kharabagh addresses the crowd assembled in demonstration of solidarity for the Armenian demands.
Photo: Khatchig Muqrachian, Armen Press

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EDITORIAL

"RISE!

Take up your pallet and walk"

Fr. Vazken Movsesian

A mass grave was opened on December 7, 1988, not only to bury the victims of the Armenian earthquake, but also the disunited diaspora. The suffering and death of the innocent quickly united Armenians in an effort to aid, console and rebuild the homeland. The reality of disunity became apparent in the immediate disfunctionality of the diaspora. (Small town newspapers printed lists where readers could send donations. The lists sometimes ran ten, sometimes twenty, organizations long.) But soon, that disfunctionality ceased and efforts became one. Calls for a united church and people came from our siblings in the shattered fatherland and from our Catholicos. Armenian religious and secular organizations joined forces in assistance. Once "banned" from serving together, clergymen began praying in unison. Today, the diaspora is seemingly united, at least in its commitment to rebuild Armenia.

The reconstruction effort is only one part of Armenia's woes. Since February 1988, Armenians have been in a life or death struggle over the Artzakh (Nagorna-Kharabagh) dispute. With atrocities unparalleled since the 1915 Genocide, over 300 lives in the region have been lost. Once again, we see the diaspora heeding the call from the homeland, united in a voice of solidarity.

It is evident that the events in Armenia are directly influencing and defining the dias-

pora. In turn, the Armenian Church also subscribes to a definition in relation to the turmoil in Armenia. For the Armenian Church, a new generation has arrived at Her doorsteps, seeking the direction that allowed for the survival, endurance and liberation of their forefathers. For the most part, however, that direction has come by way of caring for the physical needs of the people in Armenia. In the post-earthquake period, the Church has been involved in fund raising and collecting supplies, essential to the recovery effort. But so have all Armenian organizations. The Church has not stood apart, but joins the united rush to aid, as *another* Armenian organization.

The earthquake rocked much more than Armenia, it had measurable casualties throughout the world. The psyche and soul of Armenia, which transcends geographical boundaries, which exist in the hearts of Armenian children throughout the world, has been shaken from its foundations. As the lamentation over our 1915 casualties was coming to an end and we were beginning to enjoy a renewed vigor, proclaiming to be a resurrected people, we were thrown back into mourning. The impact of the earthquake shook the Armenian psyche back 75 years. No more are we heralding the "good news" of resurrection, rather we are once again singing the songs of lamentation. One day, when the building finishes and all the mouths are fed, we may come to a rude awakening that we have survived but are far from living. Armenia, the country, will be reconstructed, but Armenia the spirit, Armenia the people, will need to be *resurrected*.

Only the Body of Christ has the power to heal and ultimately resurrect from the ruins of death. Unfortunately, in favor of being "another Armenian organization," the Church has placed her conquering and liberating message of hope and resurrection on a back burner. This action is seemingly justifiable. The tense political atmosphere and immediate physical needs of the homeland, coupled with talk of unity among Armenians has excited the Church in this direction, while the spiritual welfare of the people is dismissed as a secondary concern. As the living Church, we must be alarmed that our brothers and sisters in Armenia, as well as in the diaspora, find their hope of salvation from the political realm. Political parties, with a renewed sense of nationalism have become the new messengers of hope while the Church has been "granted" a small jurisdiction within the cast of the nation. In a morbid way, the Church finds a comfortable niche in burying the dead. The

offering of the Holy Communion, the "life and hope of resurrection" has been overshadowed by the requiem service in our parishes. The anthem of the Church, *Krisdos hanyav ee mere-lotz* (Christ is risen from the dead!), has been replaced by *Ee verin Yeroosaghem* (from the requiem service). This "practice" by the people, consciously but mostly unconsciously, reflects upon the Armenian clergyman, who is recognized as the shepherd of a dead flock, of sheep who have been sacrificed. As such, he has lost his sense of usefulness. And the sheep who remain are fair game to secular trappings and unorthodox schools of thought (sometimes under religious guise) that capitalize on the shortcomings of the Church.

With this issue of *Window* we begin our search for an "Armenian theology of liberation." We are not interested in re-inventing the wheel. The message of the Armenian Church has always been liberating in all its manifestations. This terminology addresses the relevant message that has spoken to the people throughout the centuries, that can, and must speak to the people today in times of persecution and bondage (both physical and spiritual). We must acknowledge that the physical security of a people cannot be guaranteed without first waking the spirit. Only thus, can the Church be considered relevant and therefore alive for today's generation. By liberating the Armenian people spiritually, they gather the strength to be liberated physically and in so doing the Church finds Her liberation from the non-relevant to the relevant.

We begin our quest for an Armenian theology of liberation with He who liberates: Jesus Christ. Our Lord began His earthly ministry with a simple, yet poignant proclamation, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18f). With this quote from the Prophet Isaiah, not only did Christ set the stage for His mission throughout Judea, but he aligned His Holy Body, the Church, in the direction of social action, with justice as a goal. The Mission of the Church is and always will be Christ's mission.

We are hindered in actively joining Christ's crusade because all too often we find ourselves viewing Christianity as a religion disengaged from the ordinary. Our heroes, the saints, are removed from our lives by time and by relevancy. We have placed our saints on such a high pedestal that they have lost their humanity. Furthermore, our perception of Christ is distorted by "Hollywood" images of a fair-skinned, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Jesus, who aside from turning the tables in the Temple, refrained from displays of anger, advocated turning the other cheek and promised eternal

bliss as reward for suffering through social inequity. We live in a real world with real problems. We are overwhelmed with worry, debt and disease, yet in reality, we are flesh and bones. We live in a world that is cosmetic and stress-filled. We expect our wants to be immediately gratified. And so, we are reluctant to turn our problems over to the Christ for any real rectification. After all, afflictions such as poverty and disease do not warrant a "pie in the sky" response, but are in need of real solutions.

People have true afflictions for which the Church must provide answers. Poverty, hunger, disease, captivity are all issues demanding an answer *from above* and therefore from the Church, the mouth of God on Earth. Indeed, we start our daily liturgy with "Lord, open thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth thy praise" (Ps. 51:15). Criticism about the efficacy of religion to bring about change is usually based on this false impression of Christ. Karl Marx argued that religion is mere illusion and therefore cannot solve man's problems. Christianity in particular, says Marx, preaches "cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, humility — in brief, all the characteristics of the canaille [the rabble; mob]." If we were to take Christ as defined by a "Hollywood Jesus," then Marx's assessment has validity. But the Church has recognized a Jesus that is part and parcel of our living reality, a Jesus who suffers and conquers with us. Our Faith, as transmitted through our Holy Church is something quite different from fiction. In fact, it is a faith that not only instructs us but provides examples and *demands* us to follow and do likewise.

Announcements by our Lord such as, "I have not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword" (Mt. 10:34) —albeit out-of-context, nevertheless stirring— paints a different picture of this "Eternal Pacifist" and His message. Over the past few decades alone, we have witnessed the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Ceasar Chavez grab that "sword" of Christ, by adopting His principles to seek the liberation of their particular communities. More recently we have seen church leadership actively involved in the struggle for freedom, by offering support and hope, by turning concepts into action. Bishop Desmond Tutu has been outspoken against apartheid in South Africa. The Polish Roman Catholic Church in supporting Lech Walesa and the Solidarity movement, provided intellectual leadership, spiritual succor and sanctuary while the movement went underground. For more than a decade, the East German dissident movement was sheltered in the Lutheran Church in East Germany. Only last December, in Czechoslovakia, a dissident Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Vaclav Maly rallied the opposition and crystallized the demand for a new government. And finally the Roman Pontiff, John Paul II held a meeting with communist leader Mikael Gorbachev. And the list continues, in Eastern Europe, in South America, in

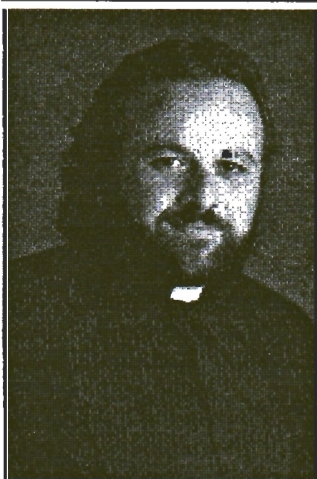


Central America, etc. Why not in Armenia? Why not for Armenians throughout the world?

Black liberation theologian James Cone prefaces his work, *A Theology of Black Liberation*, "... Christianity is essentially a religion of liberation. The function of theology is that of analyzing the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed community so they can know that their struggle for political, social and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in the society is not Christ's message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology... Christian theology is a theology of liberation." Cone's definitive avowal may leave much of Christendom searching for new nomenclature, but assuredly dismisses Marx's "opiate of the people" argument. Christ and Christianity provide movement toward liberation. We the Church cannot proclaim to be the arms, legs, hands, feet of Christ if we are stagnant or if we are merely *another* secular organization. Christ is unique, awake and moving and so must be His Body.

Our discussion need not be limited to large scale concerns either. If the "Spirit of the Lord is upon [us]" and if we, as the Church, have been "anointed ...to preach good news to the poor" then we must expand our perception of the captives, the blind and the oppressed. The object of our action cannot be confined by ethnic nor geographic boundaries. We must include *ourselves* in the list of these "handicapped" people of whom Christ speaks. We are the captives of materialism. We are the blind. We have eyes yet do not see the love of God. We are the oppressed. We are free by liberties guaranteed by our government, yet we are oppressed by the self-imposed shackles of pettiness and self-glory. We remedy global problems by first healing the self. The resurrection of the Armenian nation is contingent on the liberation of the Armenian soul from its ailments.

Christ's message is a message of liberation. It provides for the self, for the people, for the nation and for the world.



In this issue of *Window* we have selected articles to begin our search for an Armenian theology of liberation. We hope the material we provide will stimulate the minds of our readers and possibly be the building blocks on which our Church can

develop and guide Her people as does no other organization.

The message of the Catholicos to the Armenian National Movement has been translated for our readership. It provides a unique insight into the problem plaguing our Church.

Next, we have presented some excerpts from Islamic newspapers, *Kharabagh: The Islamic Factor*. In a joint statement issued by leaders of the Armenian Church and American Muslim communities (Feb. 1990) the Kharabagh dispute was dismissed as "not based on religious differences. It is a direct result of a territorial struggle..." Nevertheless, Armenia is labeled as a Christian nation and is surrounded by countries that profess Islam as their religion. The fundamentalist mentality made infamous during the Khomeni regime continues to fuel the masses. The Mulah in the Kharabagh region proclaimed *Jehad* (religious war). The question arises, if Armenians were Muslims, would this dispute have surfaced? Would there have been this type and manner of crime between neighbors? Would the outcome have been the same? We can only guess at the answers to these questions. The fact remains that Armenians as Christian have been nurtured for centuries with the message of resurrection and freedom through Christ. This message has denied Armenians a peaceful existence in their homeland. We are convinced that today, only this message, if pronounced uniformly, can be a weapon strong enough to break the sword of oppression.

Armenia: A Historical Survey, by Adrienne Krikorian, (p. 11) provides the historical context to many of our discussions. As a Patriarch of the Armenian Church, in 1878, Khrimian Hayrig gave specific direction to the Armenian people (p. 15) concerning their physical liberation and salvation. "Weapons, weapons and again weapons," was his direction. Heeding the call, in *Liberation & Witness*, (p. 16) Dr. Hratch arms the Church with the necessary vocabulary for an Armenian liberation theology that is every bit as real and as powerful as the weapons of the world. Finally, Prof. Guroian steers us *Toward a Diaspora Theology*, (p.22) offering both a descriptive and an interpretive study of such a theology. In so doing, we come to understand the interplay between church and state.

We trust the issues presented on these pages will instigate healthy discussion. The Armenian Church has guided our people spiritually and moved them toward liberation. This continues today to be among the duties of the Body of Christ, the Church. The secular cannot be allowed to usurp the duties of the sacred. Armenia needs healing, as does the soul of every Armenian. We are the captives, the blind, the poor and the oppressed. The Church can no longer afford to hand out crutches but must loudly exclaim, as Christ did, "Rise! Take up your pallet and walk." (Jn. 5:8).

Address of His Holiness Vazken I to the delegates of the Armenian National Movement

(Holy Etchmiadzin, November 9, 1989)

Translated by Dn. Hratch Tchilingirian

Dear friends,

You have come to this holy place as pilgrims. Perhaps, for some of you, it is the first time that you are in Holy Etchmiadzin. Those of you who come from the internal diaspora, you are also pilgrims as the beloved children of the Armenian Nation and the Armenian Church. Unlike other churches, we are not preoccupied with inquisitions (*havadaknootyoor*). All Armenians, whether believers or not, we consider them true children of the Armenian Church without discrimination.



I greet your organization, your National Movement, and I am happy to see so many of your delegates present here today. I wish that after you leave, you take my greetings and blessings to all those who could not be here today. I know about you and I feel the pounding of your hearts, the flight of your thoughts and your dear expectations for the present and the future of our people. The fundamental idea of your organization, or movement, has been expressed by the

Editor's note: For the first time, Window is providing the English translation of the address of His Holiness spoken to the delegates of the Armenian National Movement. The address is very significant, because it underlines the Church-Nation relations in light of contemporary developments in Armenia. In October 1989, the Armenian National Movement held its first congress in Yerevan, with some 1500 people attending. The Movement was conceived by the Karabagh Committee, which also hosted the congress. The Movement was officially recognized by the Soviet Armenian government and the Armenian Communist Party leadership. Although this was a speech, rather than a written address, fidelity to the printed text and accuracy were foremost in our mind. Therefore, we translated the text with minimal editorial input. For those who are unfamiliar with the terms "interior diaspora" and "external diaspora," the first refers to those Armenians who live in the various Republics of the Soviet Union, and the latter refers to those Armenians who live outside the Fatherland and the Soviet Union.

word National—by the National concept. That is very dear to our heart.

I do not know how familiar you are with the history of our Church... [or] with the achievements of our Church through the centuries, from the perspective of strengthening and realizing the national idea (*kaghapar*). I would like to remind you that since you are talking about the nation... at this moment you are at a historical Center which created and shaped the national idea [nationalism].

The national identity of the Armenian nation, the national ethos of the Armenian people, [and] the national ideology of the Armenian people have been forged here at Holy Etchmiadzin, especially, in the fourth and fifth centuries. Let it not be assumed that in the formation of the national ideology the Armenian



Church was a follower or a conformist. No. The Armenian Church for the past seventeen centuries has been the author and the leader [in these matters].

Until the fourth century—until the acceptance of Christianity... [our] national ideology and national ethos were not yet formed. The Armenian nation, in a total sense, took birth, formed and started to radiate as a spiritual force throughout the centuries, [with] three historical events or indicators: first, by christianization in 301; second, in the beginning of the fourth century with the creation of the Armenian alphabet and the dawn of Armenian literature; and third, in the middle of the same century, with the Battle of Avarayre. These three dates, these three historical events are the core foundations, they are the rock of formation of the Armenian national consciousness. And these three events are directly related to our Church.

It is through our Church that Christianity finally spread throughout the land of Armenia (historical Armenia). Through Christianity the moral and spiritual identity of the Armenian nation was formed.

The second milestone was in the beginning of the fifth century, with the great work of St. Mesrob: the creation of the Armenian alphabet, with the translation of the Holy Bible into Armenian by the Translators, which is one of the most perfect translations in the world, something that brings pride to our nation in the world. It was during these times that the national spirit of the Armenian people took its final shape and the Armenian literature took birth.

And finally, again from Holy Etchmiadzin, [the Armenian people] in the holy hands of Vartan Mamigonian went to the battle field of Avarayre. The battle of Vartanantz is a religio-national battle. In the past, sometimes wrong interpretations have been made concerning this. In reality, as historian Yeghishe mentions in his famous history book, the battle of Vartanantz was a battle for faith and for national freedom. And I could say that the inspireer and the initiator, even before Vartan, has been the priest Ghevont Yeretz. I could even say that Vartan followed the call of Ghevont.

Hence... in the subsequent centuries, from the fifth century to our days, to the battle of Sardarabad, all the significant events in our

history have been rooted in these three initial, anchored emotions: anchored on spiritual foundations, Christian faith, national literature, fortified culture and liberation of the fatherland.

I believe that now, as new circumstances are created in the Soviet Union, these truths should more forcefully be forged and underlined, so that our people not only understands the essence of the Armenian Church, not only understands correctly our national ideology, but also understands himself correctly as an Armenian person, that who he is as an Armenian in this world and what kind of a calling he has under the new circumstances in our days, and what kind of longings he has toward our future.

You could be assured that our Church, headed by Etchmiadzin, is always ready to open her wings and heart before all those Armenians, before those organizations who would be willing to think, speak and work by this spirit and by properly understood national realization. This spirit, this spiritual national realization has preserved also our Church in the last decades, here in a Soviet country; even in the bad times of self-worship, though under isolated conditions, the Armenian Church has always kept the light of this spirit lit in Holy Etchmiadzin and in the diaspora.

And after the War [WWII], when the situation considerably improved from the perspective of the Church, especially the last 30-35 years, during my tenure, we were able to accomplish worthy tasks by rebuilding our church life in Armenia. Numerous monasteries and churches were renovated and opened, of which you all know. It is that fundamental work that we continued. You might also be familiar with

Christianization of Armenia, the creation of the alphabet and Avarayre are the core foundations of the Armenian National consciousness.

the decrees of the Mother See during the past thirty years, in my homilies, encyclicals, pronouncements, by which you should understand clearly that Holy Etchmiadzin has justly proceeded in the same road. Allow me to say,

perhaps a little unmodestly, that in all the land of Armenia, we built the first monument dedicated to the Genocide in Etchmiadzin, then our government followed our example and erected the magnificent monument of Didzernagabert.

Second, for a long time the battle of Sardarabad was not remembered amongst us, it was left to forgetfulness. In this case also, for the first time in Armenia, the battle of Saradarabad was proclaimed [as a national holiday] publicly by the encyclical of Vazken Catholicos. With this I would like to show once again that not only myself individually, but our Church in its entirety has remained the bearer of the flag of the national spirit, also during the last decades, both here and in the diaspora.

In the diaspora, where more than two million Armenians live, in different countries, (my reference is to the external diaspora), the Church is the essential Armenian national organization. It could be said, without hesitation, that the Armenian Church is the backbone of the Armenian life in the diaspora. It is true, there are numerous organizations, political parties and all have their *raison d'être*, but the foundation of the Armenians' life, in practice and legitimately, remains to be the Armenian Church. Conclusively, this is what Armenian Aposotlic Church means and this is what its historic center Holy Etchmiadzin means.

You have come forward in the name of a new movement and started to be organized and you will continue to prosper, just as here, perhaps also in the diaspora, especially in the interior Diaspora.

Naturally, amongst our people, not every Armenian individual thinks in the same way about different issues, concerning national issues, political issues, social issues or economic issues, neither here nor in the diaspora. That is a natural phenomenon. Yesterday, a well-intentioned fellow asked me that now that there are different waves and streams among our people, here and in the diaspora, which side is the Church with? I said the Church is not with any side, the Church is with all the sides. In other words, the Church stands on the idea of unity and it should remain so; because, the calling of the Church has been to be a reconciling and peacemaking bridge among different sides.

A question is raised: what do we mean when we say unity? The way I perceive it, unity is desirable, but that should not be understood as absolute uniformity. As in the life of all nations, also it is possible in the common life of our people to exist different streams, different ways of thinking concerning the same issues, for the benefit of the nation and the fatherland. In fact it is good that such is the case. It is also impossible in the diaspora for the Armenians to be completely united in the

true sense of the word. That is simply not feasible. Whoever thinks otherwise, he does not understand the diaspora. Therefore, plurality exists and will necessarily remain so. The wisdom is in the fact that in our plurality, nevertheless, we can preserve a unity concerning fundamental issues, fateful issues and in the vital issues concerning the future of our people and the fatherland. I could even venture to express a bold idea, that sometimes, in the history of nations, the children or groupings of the same nation could walk separately, but strike the same target; walking separately but striking together. I wished that the children of our nation, in the fatherland and the diaspora, could reach to the maturity of such political, national thinking and effort. I would like also to add another definition expressing the same reality that is so often mentioned in the sphere of religion, that is, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." This means freedom of thoughts and expressions, but unity in vital issues, that is becoming one, and love for all, extended to all, towards each other, without feelings of enmity towards the other. This is extremely important. We might all disagree on this or that issue, there would always be debatable issues, but we shall never be enemies. Indeed, this is the true spirit of democracy; otherwise, democracy is void if one shows an intolerant spirit towards the opinions of others; that is not democracy anymore, that leads to dictatorship.

....In my view, there are three important imperatives that we need to consider. First, [it is] the guarantee and the strengthening of the political security of our Republic. I consider this of essential matter in view of the geopolitical position of our country. We should be very careful and realistic. By all means, whatever we think, we should first and foremost be concerned with the political security and strengthening of our fatherland.

Second, [it is] security of the economic reconstruction and development of our country. By economic I mean agriculture, prosperity and rebuilding, especially after the tragic disaster [of the earthquake]. The economic reconstruction of our country has a vital significance. We cannot survive with the present situation. Particularly, now that new opportunities have been created in the diaspora, to initiate new economic ventures with Armenian and non-Armenian organizations, henceforth, if we are able to utilize those opportunities, then great, unprecedented economic successes could be called to life.

Third, the fundamental issue is the urgency to create a uniformity to advance the prosperity of our national culture in our fatherland. We [have been] a people of culture for a several thousand years. That is one of our



pride. We, the Armenians, have created kinds of cultural treasures on the level of universal human history, that we are worthy of being called culture-creating and culture-enduring people, with our literature, with our church, with our architecture, with our marvelous religious and popular music and other forms of artistic expressions. Let me recall a famous pronouncement of a renowned European historian, in the end of the last century, who said, "there are no nations in the world, there are cultures." He means, there are nations, but real nations are those who have created cultures, and not robbed other cultures, as it is the case with some [nations]. Our people has been a culture creating nation from the very beginning, especially, as I mentioned earlier, from the fourth century on ward.

Therefore, today also, we should bring forth all our efforts, energy and genius, to preserve our dignified place, in this world and throughout our small fatherland, by holding high the torch of national culture. Of course, on the road of development of our national culture, our mother tongue, the Armenian language has a decisive place, for which you are also the defenders and you have recorded in your program what is necessary concerning the Armenian language. Our language is one of the most important treasures of our culture. It is a genuine creation of the Armenian people. The image of the Armenian nation's spirit is in our mother tongue. Without the Armenian language it is difficult to remain and survive as Armenians, not to say even impossible. During the last 60-70 years, the Armenian language was not dominantly defended in our country, and it remained to be one of the languages. Even sometimes I have met parents who do not send their children to Armenian schools, considering the Armenian language a dead language. Of course this is a painful reality, a tragic mentality of some. I am absolutely not against the Russian language. I greatly appreciate the language of the Russians and their literature, to which I am familiar through Romanian translations. There is no doubt that the Russian language and literature are worthy of universal respect. But that does not mean that we should consider our language as some kind of a secondary or dead or imperfect language. The Armenian language is our existence, it is our dignity, it is our identity, it is the fountain of our culture and it is the mold of realization of all our expectations. We cannot live without our mother tongue. In my opinion, gradually, a special policy should be adopted so that increasingly the Armenian language becomes the operative language not only in the

families, not only in the Armenian schools, but also in the institutions and the work place; [to make it the operative language] by learning it better than the Russian and making it as the language of intra-national relations in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it is desirable, that the Armenian intellectual speaks freely not only in Armenian and Russian, but also at least in a third foreign language. The Armenian man should be able to speak with the world.

I have a special word of greetings to the representatives of the interior diaspora. Finally, it is time for the interior diaspora to stand on its feet. Glory to God, the movement has already started now. I am especially greeting the representatives of the interior diaspora and I wish them strength, enthusiasm and courage to be organized and to pronounce their words in the life of our people. If I am not mistaken, we have more than a million Armenians in the interior diaspora. But organization is needed, work is needed, dedication is needed, love and faith are needed. Now those opportunities are provided, we should take advantage of them. In the past, before Word War I, we had a strong interior diaspora throughout Czarist Russia. Even the culture of our western Armenians created its rebirth in the interior diaspora: Tbilisi, Rosdov, Moscow, Asdrakhan, Artzakh and other places. Where are those Armenians now? I invite you to stand up and work together, always in contact with the mother land and Holy Etchmiadzin. This is a very important matter for the present and the future.

The Armenians of the diaspora are an integral part of our people in the mother land: just as the interior diaspora is, so is the external diaspora. I would like to end my words with an announcement: in order to encourage the use of the Armenian language in educational and other institutions, I wish to donate one hundred Armenian typewriters, which will be under the discretion of your newly elected committee.

I wish all of you strength, enthusiasm and inspiration so that you may continue your mission in patience, with courage, balance and

*...the Church is not with any side,
the Church is with all the sides*

wisdom; so that everything is realized in their natural progression and step by step, for the glory of the Armenian people and our reborn Fatherland.

Love, peace and blessings to you all now and always. Amen.

Vazken I
Catholicos of All Armenians

Karabagh: The Islamic Factor

From the Armenian perspective, the turn of events in Armenia, particularly the problem of Karabagh is definitely not religious, but rather a territorial problem. However, in as much as we want to avoid religious characterizations or undertones to the problem, the Islamic world in general, and the Azerbaijanis in particular, perceive the issue to be a religious problem. This religious fervor is further agitated by the reaction and response of the Islamic media, primarily by the fundamentalist groups.

The false and provocative news accounts, written with religious passion, is not only very damaging to the peaceful and just solution of the Karabagh issue, but it has already caused a serious rupture between Armenian-Arab and Armenian-Moslem relations in the Middle East. In the event that such dangerous sentiments continue to be voiced in the Islamic media, over one half of a million Armenians who live in the Arab and Moslem countries could face animosity and rejection by their host countymen. Presented here are some excerpts:

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- √ We read the following accusations in "Al-Shi'raa" weekly (Beirut, January 15, 1990) signed by Husain Sabra: "When in 1988 Gorbachov visited the United States, a group of Armenians, together with immigrant Soviet Jews, organized a demonstration asking Gorbachov to take a concrete position towards the issue of Nagorno-Karabagh, favorable to Armenians, against the Moslem Azerbaijanis." Sabra continues his "analysis" by fabricating an Armenian-Islamic issue and blames all Armenians for cooperating with the Zionists.
 - √ In the January 21, 1990 issue of "Al-Safir", the second largest Islamic newspaper in Lebanon, we read: "Over the weekend planes from Lebanon have been landing in Yerevan, loaded with heavy weapons, rockets and bombs. These weapons were being unloaded under the supervision of the Armenian customs officers. . . The gurella warfare is being launched by the Armenians, who have arrived from Beirut and Damascus and are close to terroristic circles and to the Lebanese Christian militiamen. Lebanese Armenians, who have gained experience in street warfare, have entered and spread throughout the capital of Yerevan and border areas without permission visas, by the thousands."
 - √ In the January 26, 1990 issue of "Al-Ah'hed," the organ of "Hezb Alla" (Party of God) reports that, "In Moscow, Azerbaijani sources have claimed in "Al Hayat" newspaper that the fighters of the 'Armenian Secret Army' have joined the Armenians in Karabagh and participated in the fightings. However, the Azerbaijani forces have overpowered the fighters, among whom were 'individuals who spoke only Armenian and Arabic and did not know Russian.'" The report continues: "Arab, foreign and Russian sources, who are stationed in Moscow, have confirmed this report respectively which the Azerbaijani sources we already mentioned. In Beirut the 'Armenian National Movement' has denied this rumorr to 'Al-Ah'hed' (through contacts with [local] Armenian sources), considering that the purpose behind such alligations is to leave a negative view of Armenian-Islamic relations in Lebanon. . . We in turn, in order to defend this relationship, ask the same question surrounding these issues to those non-responsible Armenian forces and to the 'Armenian Secret Army' and await for a clear answer, so that those who play with fire may loose their chance."
 - √ In the January 29, 1990 issue of "Al-Kifah" weekly, an article entitled "Very Important" reports: "Reliable sources in East Beirut reveal that the 'Lebanese Forces' [Christian Militiamen] have moved their struggle to the Caucases, this time not against federalism, but with separatist intentions." The report not only disregards the territorial validity of Karabagh issue, but it directly links it to the dilemma of Lebanese proposal for a "federal administrative system."
 - √ The January 19, 1990 issue of "Al-Ah'hed" considers the U.S. Congress' decision to consider a resolution on the Armenian Genocide to be "a creation of the imperialist intentions of the Americans, which targets the supression of the escalating Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey." Furthermore, one of the most dangerous declaration comes from the Assembly of Islamic Religious Leaders. According to them, "The issue of unifying Karabagh with Armenia is not realistic, it is unjust and not attainable, because, the enclave is situated within the boarders of the Republic of Azerbaijan like an island. . . Many Armenians, escaping their areas for numerous problems and complications, found hospitable refuge among Moslem Azerbaijanis [and they were welcomed], just as they were welcomed by the Lebanese, Syrians and others [in the past]." The declaration continues, "The demand of Azerbaijan concerning the enclave is legal and that legality is rooted in geographic and historical evidence. . . the Czarist armies concured Armenia and separated it from Turkey and the Soviet armies concured and separated Azerbaijan from Iran." The Assembly finds certain Armenians guilty of provocting and instigating an unjust demands for Karabagh. Then, it calls upon all Armenians, to stop their demand for Karabagh and warns them to avoid being insturments of Soviet arrogance . . . Armenians should try to come to a realistic and just understanding with Azerbaijanis to realize the flight of the two nations for independence.



The history of the Armenian nation is a story of survival. The continuous struggle for autonomy, fueled with determination and persistence, has been inspired by common religious beliefs and the perpetual desire to preserve a rich and unique cultural heritage.

Armenia has been a republic of the Soviet Union since 1920. The remainder of historic Armenia, including Mt. Ararat, the biblical site of the resting place of Noah's Ark (Gen.8:4), is part of Eastern Turkey. For Armenians, the return to an independent homeland is only a dream to be realized.

But, what if the opportunity presented itself and an sovereign state was formed? The obstacles facing an independent Armenia would be many. As an independent nation, it would have to govern itself in a world of strong political dilemmas. Armenia's geographic location would result in a need for constant self-protection by its people. By what law would it be governed? What effect, if any, would the religion play in this government?

My object here is to take a brief look at the political history of Armenia, the history of the Armenian Church and present an introduction to a more detailed analysis of the law by which "an Armenia" might govern itself if the dream of independence were to come true.

HISTORY OF A NATION

The Armenian uplands are on the northern borders of the Near East, above Syria and Mesopotamia. At its greatest extent, two thousand years ago, the territory of Armenia, i.e., Greater Armenia covered over one hundred thousand square miles, extending East from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caspian Sea, and South from the Caucasus Mountains to what is know today as Iran.

Armenia has been continuously inhabited by civilized man since the fifteenth century B.C. However, it was not until the ninth century B.C. that the first know state, known as the kingdom of Urartu emerged. The area was ruled by a succession of rulers from Assyria and Persia from the end of the seventh century B.C. until Alexander the Great's victory over Persia in 331 B.C. With the rule of Alexander came the influx of Greek civilization into Armenia and it remained an influence over Armenians for several centuries.

The Armenian kingdom grew and flourished, along with the neighboring Parthian and Roman Empires, until it reached its greatest size under the rule of King Tigran the Great (95-55 B.C.). During this period, Armenia consisted of several independent kingdoms and principalities as well as vassal kings. Its links with the Roman Empire and its active expansionist

ARMENIA

A Historical Survey

Adrienne Krikorian

policy resulted in cultural and linguistic consolidation of the Armenian people. The Armenians had a language; however, until the development of the Armenian alphabet in the fourth century A.D., all works of literature, religious texts and government decrees were recorded in Syriac characters or in Greek. Paganism was the practiced religion in the area until the adoption of Christianity in 301 A.D..

After the death of King Tigran the Great, Armenian royalty continued to reign over the next several hundred years, creating alliances with the Romans, Parthians, Persians and the Byzantines, being influenced by the Arabs and subjugated by the Turks. While the constant invasions by these empires reduced the amount of land which belonged to the Armenian nation, Armenia continued to evolve as a nation with its own language, culture and civil law, and its people endured the constant struggle for autonomy.

The nation suffered its final loss of independence in the twentieth century. From 1894 until 1915 the Armenians suffered mass deportations and Genocide by the Ottoman Turkish Empire. By 1915 over a million and a half Armenians had been killed.

In 1918, the political situation allowed for the formation of an independent state on a small portion of the historic homeland. However that independence was short lived and in

1920, amid divisive political dissension, the independent nation lost its final struggle and became one of the republics of the Soviet Union.

CHURCH AND STATE: ONE NATION UNDER GOD

Historians trace the introduction of Christianity to Armenia to two of the original Apostles of Christ, Saints Thaddeus and Bartholomew. Hence, the Armenian Church is "apostolic." During the first two centuries after Christ, Armenia had regular commercial and cultural relations with the great city of Antioch, and the Christian religion found its way to Armenia through the church in Antioch and from the nearby Christian centers of Edessa and Ceassaria in northern Mesopotamia.

The Armenian nation was converted to Christianity in approximately 301 when King Tiridates accepted Christianity through baptism. St. Gregory the Illuminator, who was responsible for the king's conversion, was unanimously elected by the people as Catholicos of the newly established Church. The Armenian Church grew outside Roman jurisdiction and independent of the churches of the Byzantine Empire. Subsequently, the Armenian nation declared Christianity as its state religion several years before the conversion of Constantine and the Roman Empire. Armenians proudly claim to be the first nation to accept Christianity as a state religion.

In the early years of the Armenian Church, there was no specific administrative structure per se. As the Church developed, a formal hierarchy emerged which consisted of a catholicos, bishops, priests, deacons and local community members. The church leadership established local schools and seminaries from which the tenets of Christianity were passed on

Christianity became the unifying element of the Armenian nation and the Patriarch shared political influence with the monarchy

to the people. Christianity became the unifying element of the Armenian nation and the Patriarch shared political influence with the monarchy.

Following the death of King Tiridates in 330, his successors struggled with continued political invasions and were ineffective rulers.

Widespread religious reforms took place against a background of economic and social crisis at home with political and military threats from outside. The Armenian monarchy ultimately fell in the middle of the fifth century, and Persian rule returned to Armenia. The Persians attempted to bring their Zoroastrian religious beliefs back to Armenia in order to unify their empire. However, the Armenians resisted and remained Christian.

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CANON LAW

The body of ecclesiastical rules and regulations which govern matters of faith, morals and discipline with the traditional Christian Churches (Orthodox, Roman, etc.) is known as canon law. This corpus of law grew gradually during the early centuries of Christianity. The documents which comprise Canon Law date back to the first century, and were sanctioned to be used by church councils which convened to settle matters of uncertainty or dispute on matters of doctrine and discipline.

Canon law is historically continuous from the early Christian Church to the present. However, as a result of doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences, various, though often similar, patterns of codification have developed in the churches which have incorporated canon law into their frameworks. Amidst doctrinal and political disputes in the Christian world during the fifth through the seventh centuries, the Armenian Church developed a corpus of canon law which often reflected local needs.

Canon law has had an essential role not only within the Christian church, but also in the transmission of ancient Greek and Roman law, and in the reception of Justinian law in Europe in the Middle Ages. Canon law had a lasting influence during the Reformation in the

17th century, namely on the secular law of marriage, property, wills, crimes and the law concerning proof and evidence. International law also owes its origin to canonists and theologians and the modern concept of state goes back to the constitution of the church.

The Armenian Church participated with other Christian churches in the early ecumenical councils which developed and codified canon

law. The Nicean Council in 325 was the first of a series of synods which systematically collected ecclesiastical legislation that would bring order and discipline where uncertainty had prevailed.

When the Council of Chalcedon assembled in 451, the Armenians were engaged in



a life and death struggle with the Persians, and thus unable to be represented. It was at this council that the two natures of Christ was discussed. There were two conflicting views expressed at the Council. The Armenians refused to accept the view ultimately accepted by the Council and promoted by the Patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople. This difference in belief, coupled with the establishment of an independent calendar (still in use today), resulted in the Armenians breaking off doctrinal unity with those who accepted the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon.

Along with the canons of the ecumenical councils, Eastern Christian canon law also consists of canons of local councils and the Canons of the Holy Fathers (e.g., the Canons of the Holy Apostles), letters and authoritative answers written by the clergy to individuals or communities. Church leaders of the various patriarchates, including the Armenians, met regularly in local councils from the 4th century on, issuing decrees and regulatory provisions which addressed local matters.

During the Middle Ages the Eastern Christian Churches lived within the tight framework of the Byzantine Empire. Once the emperor became a member of the Church, it was universally accepted that he had a responsibility for managing the practical affairs of the Church. Practical necessity led to a codification of church canons together with state legislation and religious discipline. The resulting *nomocanons* had a profound influence on the development of the Eastern churches. In fact, Justinian himself ordered that canons have the force of law and it was generally known that the emperors were above neither the dogmas nor the canons of the Church.

The Armenian Liber Canonum, the original collection of Armenian canon law (which includes accepted Byzantine canons), was compiled in one edition by the Catholicos John of Ozun (717-728).

MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN CANON AND CIVIL LAW

In the twelfth century, amidst a period of internal and external national turmoil, emerged a young monk, Mekhitar Kosh, who was known as an intellectual giant. He was frequently called upon to offer a solution to a problem or to settle a dispute. Mekhitar Kosh dedicated his life to the moral and spiritual enlightenment of his people.

While in sanctuary at the monastery of Quedag, Mekhitar spent many hours considering the insufficiency of the existing laws and customs in affording protection to the Armenian people. He believed there was an urgent

need of a set of rules to determine and safeguard individual and collective rights and obligations of the inhabitants of the country. Christian beliefs and canons were inadequate to protect the rights of all without discrimination and prejudice. What concerned him the most was the fact that the absence of national jurisprudence or a body of law compelled Armenians to humiliate themselves by seeking solution of their own problems under foreign laws. Civil and religious leaders who were asked to judge and decide controversial issues were often bribed or were so corrupted that they often distorted the facts and penalized the innocent.

During this time, feudalism was the accepted system, and many Armenians had lost their independence under ruthless lords, who neither tolerated nor accepted interference by the church hierarchy. In approximately 1184, Mekhitar, in response to his growing concerns, yielded to the urgent requests of the Catholicos and Prince of the local province. He embarked on the monumental task of preparing, classifying and compiling a complete set of laws which became known as Mekhitar Kosh's Corpus Juris.

Mekhitar recognized the need to formulate a code of laws within the principles of Christian beliefs and concepts; laws based on ethics, that the right and the moral were one and the same. He was inspired by natural law, laws of Christian nations including Byzantine codes, Islamic laws, the Bible, and Armenian Canon law. He recognized two tribunals: secular and ecclesiastical, with the right to appoint members and jurisdiction for enforcement reserved to each group, respectively.

The code contained provisions for the establishment of courts, the methods of conducting trials, administering oaths to witnesses, and confession of crime by the accused. It also contained several chapters on wills, descent

Practical necessity led to a codification of church canons...

and distribution of intestate properties, rights of widowers and widows, children and next of kin. There were chapters devoted to laws of real and personal property, ownership and use of land, and feudal lords and serfs. The final chapters related to subjects such as purchases and sales, contracts, property rentals, partnerships, trusts and securities for loans.

Mekhitar's code could not be compared in scope or content to the codes of Justinian and Greek jurists, but this monumental work was the only one of its kind for the Armenians, and his efforts have earned Mekhitar Kosh the gratitude of Armenians. While he held no position of importance in the church hierarchy, he was

considered one of the most influential and authoritative jurists of all the Armenian clergy. The Justinian of Armenians died around 1213, leaving behind a legacy which is influential even in present day Armenia.

During the tenth and eleventh centuries a number of Armenians migrated West into the western area of Turkey known as Cilicia. A secondary center of Armenia known as Cilician Armenia became a leading commercial center. Subsequent internal and political disruptions resulted in a divided Armenian society and Armenian Church, the Eastern factions loyal to the ancient traditions of St. Gregory the Illuminator and the Western faction faithful to the Papal and Frankish influences brought in by the Crusaders. The establishment of Cilician Armenia opened the door to the West for Armenians and eventually led to their migration to Europe, the continent of Africa, and the United States.

During the 19th century the eastern and western sections of the Armenian church were under the rule of the Persians and the Ottoman Empire, respectively. Political and social events resulted in the eastern part of Armenia being occupied by the Russians and incorporated into the Czarist Empire in 1828. This resulted in the severing of the link between Caucasian Armenia and Persia dating to the pre-Christian era. In 1836, Russian imperial authorities regulated the Armenian Church by a decree commonly known as *bolofenteh* (constitution). The document, ratified by the Catholicos, gave the Church a large measure of internal autonomy and dictated a precise, democratic procedure for electing the Catholicos. At the same time, it gave greater, more extensive powers to the synod, which previously only advised the Catholicos. This body, consisting of eight priests, was placed under the control of the Czar; it was virtually impossible for the Catholicos to act independently of its decisions and ultimately those of the czarist secret police. Nevertheless, it was a liberal document in the context of Russian autocracy and worked in practice to the benefit of the Armenian people, thus returning some of their cher-



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ished autonomy.

In Western Armenia, under Ottoman rule, a National Constitution was established in 1863. This constitution was based on the principle that a religious community, *millet*, as a people and as an ethnic minority is in itself a juridical entity and has the inherent right to administer its own internal affairs in accordance with its own customs and usages and its rules of inherent organization. The Constitution recognized the democratic rights of the people for its internal self-government, the adjudication of matters of civil status by community courts being included in those rights. The National Constitution, by applying these principles, reduced the traditional canonical authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the bishops and the clergy in general. It established the rule for popular election of all candidates for the hierarchy of the Church, and created organs for the government of the Church almost completely dominated by laymen, irrespective of the degree of their commitment to the Christian faith.

During its brief struggle to establish a republic from 1918-1920, Eastern Armenians established political parties with their own constitution. (Some of these parties continue to function today.) Western Armenians who survived the Turkish massacres either fled to the West or assimilated into Turkish society.

What remains of Armenian today, is part of the U.S.S.R. As one of its republics, it enjoys a measure of autonomy within the rule of the Soviet Union. Since the election of President Mikhail Gorbachev and as a result of his move toward government reform, the Armenian Church is enjoying a new religious revival and freedom. Several religious leaders in the Soviet Union were elected members of the Soviet parliament, including Catholicos Vazken I.

Armenia has rich cultural, religious and political history upon which it can build a new, independent nation. The Armenians enjoy a solid foundation of civil and canon law unique to their beliefs and traditions.

An independent Armenia might establish its government by relying on its historic canon and civil law, the Constitutions by which its people have been governed, including those of the Western democratic world, on general principles of Socialism under which the nation now exists, and on the strong religious principles which have provided the foundations for the eternal endurance for which Armenians are so well known. Such a government would serve the unique needs of Armenians living throughout the world, and make it possible for reunification of Armenians who were forced to scatter in the early 20th century.



TRANSLATION

Khrimian Hayrig: The Paper Ladle

Blessed and beloved Armenians:

Now, you have all perked up your ears, impatiently and anxiously waiting to hear what sort of news Khrimian Hayrig has brought us from the Berlin Congress, and what will he say about Article 61 which the powerful governments of the world have bestowed upon the Armenian provinces. Listen carefully to what I am about to say. Grasp the profound meaning of my words and then go and contemplate on my message.

As you know, upon the decision of Patriarch Nersess and the National Assembly, we went to Berlin to present the Armenian Case to the great powers of the Congress. We had great hopes that the Congress would bring peace to the world and liberation to the small and oppressed nations, among which we count ourselves.

The Congress convened, the statesmen of the great powers of the world gathered around diplomatic tables covered with green cloth. And we, the small and suppressed nations waited outside the Congress. In the middle of the Congress, upon a table covered with green cloth was placed a large bowl of *heriseh* (a thick and pasty stew-like meal) from which large and small nations and governments would draw their portion.

Some of the participants pulled to the East, some pulled to the West, and after long debates, in order, one by one, they called the representatives of the small nations [into the meeting]. The Bulgarian entered first, then Serbian and the Gharadaghian. The rattling of the swords hanging from their sides attracted the attention of the assembly.

After speaking for some while, these three, pulled out their swords, as if *ladles made of iron*, and dipped into the bowl, took their portion of *heriseh* and proudly and boldly departed.

It was now the turn of the Armenian delegate. I drew near with the paper petition from the National Assembly, presented it and asked that they fill my plate too with *heriseh*. Then, the officials standing before the bowl asked me, "Where is your iron ladle? It is true that we are serving *heriseh* here, but he who does not have an iron ladle cannot draw from it. Listen up. In the future, if this *heriseh* is distributed, do not come without a ladle or you will return empty handed."

Editor's note: Affectionately called "Hayrig" by the Armenian people, Megerdich Khrimian was the Catholicos of the Armenian Church between 1892-1907. In 1878, at the request of Patriarch Nersess and the National Assembly, Khrimian represented the Armenians at Congress of Berlin. Upon his return to Constantinople he recited this message at the Cathedral. (Hatq Ajemtan, Hayotz Hayrig, page 511-3; translated by FVM).



Dear Armenian people. Could I have dipped my *paper ladle* in the *heriseh*? It would have become wet and stayed there. There, where guns talk and swords make noise, what significance do appeals and petitions have?

And I saw next to the Gharadaghian, the Bulgarian and other delegates, several brave [men], blood dripping from the swords hanging at their sides. I then turned my head, as if I was looking for the brave men from Zeitoon, Sasoon, Shadakh and other mountainous areas. But where were they? People of Armenia, tell me, where were those brave souls? Should not one or two of them have been next to me, so that showing their bloody swords to the members of Congress I could have exclaimed, "Look, HERE IS MY IRON LADLES! They are here, ready!" But alas, all I had was a paper petition, which got wet in the *heriseh* and we returned empty handed. Truly, had they compared me with the delegates of the Congress, I was taller, my facial features were more attractive. But to what avail? In my hand was placed a piece of paper and not a sword. For this reason we were deprived of the *heriseh*. In spite of all, in view of the future, going to the Congress of Berlin was not useless.

People of Armenia, of course you understand well what the gun could have done and can do. And so, dear and blessed Armenians, when you return to the Fatherland, to your relatives and friends, take weapons, take weapons and again weapons. People, above all, place the hope of your liberation on yourself. Use your brain and your fist! Man must work for himself in order to be saved...

Liberation & Witness

Deacon Hratch Tchilingirian

*"The loud cry of the mobs . . . sounded like the clash of the clouds above, and the thundering sound of the noises rocked the caverns of the mountains. . . The flashing of countless swords and the swaying of innumerable spears seemed like an awful fire being poured down from heaven. But who can describe fully the tremendous tumult caused by these frightful noises - the clashing of the warriors and the snapping of the bow strings —which deafened everyone alike!"*¹

- Yeghisheh

These words were not written after the massacre of Armenians in Baku on a tragic January day. These words were not written to describe the struggle of Armenians in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Karabagh... These words were written 1500 years ago—by Yeghisheh, the eminent 5th century historian—to evoke the *reality* of Vartanantz. All nations in the world have their turning points: in ancient times, for Jews it was the Exodus, in modern times, for the Germans, the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. These events not only mold and shape the on going life of a nation, but they provide a point of reference and reflection in times of crisis. Thus, Vartanantz is such a timeless event in the history of the Armenian people. An event that does not exhaust itself in the past, but perfects itself in the future. Just as in the case of the Exodus, Vartanantz is not simply an event, but a pattern of deliverance that provides a key for interpreting Armenian history and for interpreting present experience.

For the Jews the greatest miracle in the Bible was the Exodus miracle, the crossing of

the Red Sea. Still this remains the greatest miracle in the Old Testament. The embellishments which were added to the story through centuries of retelling were intended only to underline the need to discern and marvel at what God had done for his people.² In Exodus 3:7-9 we read: "Then the Lord said, 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings . . . behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.'" Here we see a God who can hear the cry of the oppressed, who comes down, and who leads them to liberation. Correspondingly, Yeghisheh reflects on the oppression of the Armenians. When the Persian *Tenshabuh* (ambassador) asks the Armenians to submit themselves to their demands, Ghevont the Priest eloquently responds saying, ". . . You scorn us for our afflictions which have come upon us against our own will, as they come to everyone according to the nature of one's body. But Christ, the living and life-giving true God, by His beneficent will became the healer of souls and bodies and Himself first suffered tortures and pains to cure the entire human race. Through His tenderness and mercy, moreover, He granted us a second birth in health without pains and afflictions; He healed the old sores secretly inflicted upon us by the dragon and made us scarless and pure in body and soul, so that we may join the hosts of angels and become warriors of our heavenly King. But you, not aware of this and not having enjoyed God's heavenly gifts, are unwilling to learn from us; on the contrary, you wish to misguide us, but that is impossible; it will not happen and you will not succeed."³

Our Witness

Today, like Vartanantz, the religious-national aspect of our struggle is relevant perhaps more than anytime in our history. On a global level, the *mélange* of religion, nationalism and ultimately liberation has been noticeable in most liberation movements of the past few years. For example, in Poland, the church had a definite role in shaping the Solidarity movement; in East Germany, the New Forum was conceived on the pulpits of the church, in South Africa, Nicaragua, Panama... The current global atmosphere has reestablished the role of religion in the life of the nations, as opposed to the hostile attitude of the Cold War era.



It is apparent that, at least from a theological perspective, we cannot be liberated if we are not ready to be witnesses first: witness to our faith, witness to the suffering and cross of Jesus Christ. Yegheshah, describing the dynamics of Vartanantz, explains our uniqueness: " [The Persian King] persecuted the Armenians more than all the others, because he observed them to be the most zealous in the worship of God, especially those who belonged to the families of the Armenian *nakharars* who had sincerely adhered to the holy teachings of the apostles and the prophets."⁴ Today, are we ready to follow in the footsteps of our forefathers, who saw Christ above all else? Our nationhood was defined by our forefathers through Christ. Unfortunately, many of the Armenian leaders see little or no value in our Christian faith, because politically that is a baggage of added burden for our "self-determination" and "liberation." Armenian Christian faith is viewed as a "custom" of the past rather than the source of potency of Armenian identity. It is as if we are reluctant to say we are Christians, that we are determined to hold on the tenets of our Faith, because otherwise, the world might deprive us of our rights. But this was not the case with Vartanantz: for them Christ was first, then politics, Nation, then self-glory. Politics, outside the context of a national ethos, is self-defeating. From a broader perspective, politics can be considered a chapter of theology. "A true 'political theology' takes upon itself serving man according to his nature and his truth; and consequently serving the political nature of humanity—i.e. the power of love, which is at the heart of existence and which is the condition of the true communion of persons, the true city, the true *polis*."⁵

According to the Scripture, faith is the total response of man to God, who saves through love. In this light, "the understanding of the faith appears as the understanding not of the simple affirmation—almost memorization—of truths, but of a commitment, an overall attitude, a particular posture toward life."⁶ This understanding and witness of Vartan and his companions is illustrated in one of the dialogues between the King of Persian and a young Armenian *nakharar* (nobleman):

" . . . References to Christ's name, His torture, crucifixion, death and burial irritated [the King].

"He made such demented boasts daily, that one of the youngest Armenian *nakharars* disputed his words and asked: 'Vallant King, where did you learn the words which you utter concerning our Lord?'

"The King answered and said: 'The books of your heresy were read before me.'

"The youth replied and said: 'Wherefore, O King, did you have it read only that far? Have the reading continued still farther, and you will hear of His resurrection, His appearance before many, His ascension to heaven, His sitting at the right of His Father, His promise of His second coming to cause the miraculous resurrection of all men; and of His summary reward in just judgment.

"When the king heard this he was deeply hurt, but, laughing forcibly, said: 'All that is deception.'

"The soldier of Christ replied and said: 'If you take as true His bodily sufferings, so must you yet more believe in His awesome second coming.'

"Having heard these words, the king burned like the fire in the glowing furnace of Babylon, and even those who were with him felt themselves scorched like the Chaldeans. Then he poured his entire wrath and indignation over the blessed youth, whose name was Karekin. Having his feet and hands bound, he subjected him to tortures for about two years; and after having deprived him of his dominion, sentenced him to death."⁷

The importance of Armenian history, particularly Vartanantz, is not in its temporality but in the eschatological dimension of the event and its role as praxis. Indeed, Armenian history is above all else an opening to the future, hence it is a task, a *political occupation*, through which the Armenian man orients and opens himself to the gift which gives history its transcendent meaning: "the full and definitive encounter with

The importance of Armenian history, particularly Vartanantz, is not in its temporality but in the eschatological dimension of the event and its role as praxis.

the Lord and with other men. 'To do the truth,' as the Gospel says, thus acquires a precise and concrete meaning in terms of the importance of action in Christian life. Faith in God who loves us and calls us to the gift of full communion with him and brotherhood among men."⁸

The Current Situation

St. John Chrysostom, in one of his homilies, asserts that "Familiarity causes admiration to fade."⁹ Surely enough, as we become more familiar with the present reality of our church and our rival Armenianism, it seems that our initial admiration is gradually fading away. There is a whole generation of Armenians whose commitment to the Armenian church is shifting to other directions. A generation of young, enthusiastic, excited and educated flock of Armenians, who feel frustrated and disillusioned, and mourn the inadequacy of their role models. There is a whole generation of Armenians who escaping the *reverent emptiness* and misunderstood nationalism of the Armenian Church, find refuge in other places. The most tragic aspect of this plight is the fact that the new generation is unable to find Christ in the Armenian Church—Christ, "The Son of God [who] shares our nature so we can share His; as He has us in Him, so we have Him in us."¹⁰ On the other side of the coin are those who—without rejecting what is good in contemporary Armenian Church life—are rediscovering the traditional sources of the Armenian Faith. It should be noted that this phenomenon is not unique to the Armenian Church. It is happening also in other churches, namely, the Roman Catholic Church. In an article entitled "Coming Home to Tradition," a young Fr. Wood, 33, explains the dilemma: "I consider myself very avant-garde in my methodology but very traditional in the content.' These young priests are rediscovering the classic theologians, the Divine Office, community life...to deepen and enrich their lives rather than to simply protest against what they see as negative trends in the contemporary Church. One thing many of

*God is speaking to the
Armenian people in a new way
today... in the events
and problems of our times...*

them have in common is a problem describing themselves—a problem of identity."¹¹ In the case of the Armenian Church there is some anticipation and hope, but in the long run, the situation remains dormant.

One of the difficult questions that the Church must address, from a theological per-

spective, is *What or Who is an Armenian?* We proudly claim to be a national church, but never speak about the theological implications of this nationalism or how does it fit in the ecclesiology of the Armenian Church.

Evidently, "Armenian" is an adjective that describes the national or ethnic identity of a person, by virtue of that person's association with that particular group and culture. Yet, what is it that makes this group distinct from other groups or cultures?

In order to deal with this question, we need to examine its historical context. From the crossing of the Bosphorus by the Armeno-Phrygians, ca. 1250 B.C., to King Trdat III, third century A.D., did not exist a distinct Armenian culture *per se*, but there was what could be called a "Hay-Armen Culture," i.e. the culture of two principal ancestral tribes of the Armenian people.¹² Obviously, an indecisive and a "shapeless" culture and a language (means of communications) existed, but without distinct national characteristics.¹³ Rather the people living in a specific geographic location, within specific boundaries, constituted the people of Armenia, i.e. the people who lived in a land called Armenia. There was a pagan culture which sought to unify many deities and cults under one earthly or heavenly monarch.¹⁴ "During the Classical era, the Armenians laid the foundations of their rich and splendid national literature. It is true that the distinctive alphabet was not invented until after the introduction of Christianity, but *pagan* [all italics mine] Armenia was far from being illiterate. From Moses of Khorene, the national chronicler, we have the texts of ancient ballads and legends, which were earlier handed down by word of mouth. Official documents and inscriptions were written in Greek or else in *Iranian* using *Aramaic*

characters....King Artavazd II, son of Tigranes the Great, maintained a *Greek theatre* in his palace, and himself wrote dramas in Greek to be staged there. Roman legions brought *Latin* script with them, nota-

bly in the reign of Emperor Trajan, though this *failed to take root among the local population.*"¹⁵

Until the 4th century, an Armenian culture was in formation, but without a national character. Each period and dynasty in history contributed to this cultural evolution, however, it was the Christianization of Armenia (ca. 301)



that "determined the entire future course of Armenian history"¹⁶. It was after the adoption of Christianity as the state religion that Armenia became a NATION. It was through Christianity that the people living in the Land of Armenia became the Armenian Nation. Moreover, with the establishment of the Church, the entire Armenian nation was unified as the Body of Christ. With the Good News of Jesus Christ, a new "formula," a new apparatus of defining Armenian nationhood was provided. Thus, the Church became a central institution in the life of the Armenian nation. And henceforth, the Armenian monarchy prioritized the Church as one of the most important institutions to secure the religious, cultural, social and political unity of the Armenian Nation. Henceforth, Armenian culture (i.e. Armenian-way-of-life) was defined and expressed within the context of the Good News, the new message of Christ (*avedis*). The Armenian nation embraced Christ in its own land where Christ himself descended, (*etch-miadzin*). Whether the Etchmiadzin-vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator was a legend or real, its meaning is not negated in either case. The vision of St. Gregory is a definite expression of the total acceptance and adoption of Christ by the Armenians. Christ was not only the Savior of the Jews and the gentiles, but distinctly the Armenians. As the new FAITH and the redefined national identity of the Armenians took roots in the life of the nation, the invention of an Armenian alphabet was necessitated. Otherwise, why an Armenian alphabet was not invented 200 or 300 years before Christianity? Why was it that the necessity of a unique Armenian alphabet was felt soon after the establishment of Christianity? Consequently, this was a significant result of Christianization of Armenia.

With the invention of the Armenian alphabet, this newly molded Armenian-Christian national identity was shaped and secured with a unique Armenian spirit and quality. It is significant

that the first book that was translated after the invention of the alphabet was the Bible. This indicates that the Armenian alphabet was not invented primarily to record ancient Armenian culture, or to preserve the Armenian culture—the way we interpret preservation now—but rather it was invented to translate the Scriptures, the new Faith and the message of Christ,

henceforth, making the Good News of Christ accessible to the people and giving it a fundamental role in the Armenian national reality.

The Good News of Christ is an essential part of our national equation. It is a proof once again, that without this renewed Faith, we cannot have a definition of Armenian nationhood. Ultimately, if we want to understand the Armenian nation and Armenian history, we need to understand the Good News of Jesus Christ. A full appreciation and evaluation of Armenian history cannot be done apart from Christ. And this is consistent in our history: starting from the 4th century to the Persian Rule (430-634 A.D.) and Arab Domination (654-851 A.D.), from the Bagratid Dynasty (885-1079). . . to the Armenian Genocide. . . It could be argued, that if we were not Christians, we would have been lost long ago in the winds of history. Yet it was because of our Faith and its implications to our nationhood, that we survived. It is indeed, Faith, the understanding of death and resurrection, the way of the Cross, the suffering and victory of Christ, that gives a nation perpetuity. Without that concept and understanding, a nation will be doomed to disappear. The message of Christ is central to this survival. Many times we speak of Armenians as being survivalists. But what is it that gives us the desire to survive. It is that very teaching of Christ, that "he who believes in [him], though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in [him] shall never die" (John 25-26), that "whoever follows [him] will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). It is through His cross, suffering and resurrection that this national Armenian survivalism is measured and qualified.

It is Faith, the understanding of death and resurrection, that gives a nation perpetuity...

Without the Cross there is no liberation. Liberation from all types of tensions in the life of the nation and the life of the nation in relation to the world. It is only through the process and understanding of the Cross that a true liberation can be assured. A liberation that even a person locked in a prison cell could experience, it is the liberation of Christ.

As Armenians, "confessing Christ is to receive His cross into our lives and to translate it into action. It implies a new form of *kenosis* ["self-emptying"], a renewed discipleship of Him who 'trampled down death by death' and became and remained our Way, our Truth and our Life. Confessing Christ today entails not only continuous and conscious participation in His sacramental presence in the church. . . but it demands a deeper commitment to His liberating action in the world, an active and sacrificial involvement in the struggle of social justice, and authentic humanness. Confessing Christ eventually orients us to a community which transcends our own particularities, a world community undergirded by the power of His cross and resurrection."¹⁷

Believing in Christ does not consist in pious exercises only, but rather in a new mode of existing before God and in the light of the movement announced by Him. Leonardo Boff, one of the notable liberation theologians, convincingly presents this thesis. "Conversion," he writes, "always implies a rupture: 'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No. I tell you, but rather divisions. For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three . . .' (12:51-52). Nevertheless, this reversal in one's mode of thinking and acting is to be life-giving, it is to lead a person to a crisis and to deciding for the new order that is already in our midst, that is Jesus Christ himself (Luke 17:21).

"Jesus is not so much interested in whether a person before all else observed all the laws, paid tithes on all things, observed all the legal prescriptions of religion and society. He is primarily interested in whether a person is

Liberation is not a way of thinking, it is a way of living and it can only be adequately understood in a living praxis.

disposed to sell all properties to acquire the field with hidden treasure; whether one is ready to sell all to buy the precious pearl (Matt. 13:4-46); whether, in order to enter the new order, one has the courage to abandon family and fortune (Matt 10:37), risk one's life (Luke 17:33), tear out an eye and cut off a hand (Mark 9:43 & Matt.

5:29). This *no* to the established order does not signify asceticism but an attitude of readiness to comply with the exigencies of Jesus.

"Now therefore, it is urgent that one open oneself to God. This demand goes so far that Jesus threatens us with the following harsh words: 'If you do not change your way of thinking and acting, you will all perish' (Luke 13:3,5). The flood is imminent and it is the final hour (Matt. 24:37-39; 7:24-27). The ax has been put to the root of the tree; if it will not bear fruit, it will be cut down (Luke 13:9). The owner of the house will close the door and those that are late will hear these sad words: 'I do not know where you come from (Luke 13:25); it is already too late (Matt. 25:11). For this reason, those are called prudent who understood this situation of radical crisis (Matt. 7:24;24:45;25:2,4,8,9; Luke 12:42) and opted in favor of a kingdom, making a choice capable of supporting and conquering all temptations (cf. Matt. 7:24-25). The invitation is given to all. Most, however, find themselves to be so busy with their affairs that they reject the invitation to the nuptial feast (Luke 14:16-24). Chiefly the rich are so installed (Mark 10:25; cf. Matt. 23:24). The gate is narrow and not all make sufficient effort or work hard in order to pass through it (cf. Luke 13:24). The necessity for conversion at times demands a rupture from the most rudimentary ties of love for dead relatives that are about to be interred (Luke 9:59f; Matt. 8:21f.). A person who has opted for the tidings of Jesus looks only ahead. . . The option for Jesus cannot remain at some half-way point like the constructor of a tower who laid the foundation but ceased work when it was half finished. It is urgent that one reflect before accepting the invitation. To say, 'Lord, Lord,' is easy, but one must also wish to do what the Lord says (Luke 6:46). Otherwise, one's last

state is worse than the first (Matt. 12:43-45). Conversion itself is like a nuptial gown, like an oiled head and a washed face (cf. Matt. 6:17), like music and dance (Luke 15:25), like the joy of the son who returns to the father's house (Luke 15:32), like

the satisfaction one has on finding lost money (Luke 15:8-10)."¹⁸

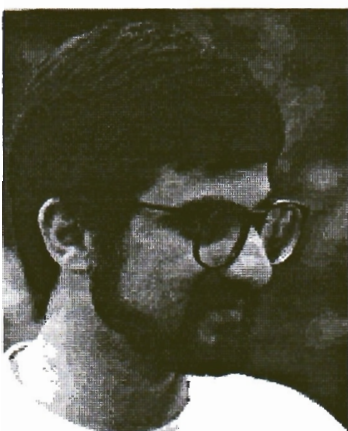
It is in fact a Christocentric reflection that would provide a theological framework for Liberation. Of course, words and theories will always be inadequate. In the final analysis, Liberation is not a way of speaking or a way of



thinking, it is a way of living and it can only be adequately understood in a living praxis. Understanding Christ's liberation is only meaningful in so far as we try to live as he lived and to order our lives according to his values. Only a true practice of our Armenian faith can verify what we believe. We can refer to history, tradition and experience, but what we believe can only be made true, and be seen to be true, in the concrete results which our faith achieves in this world, today and tomorrow. Hence, an Armenian theology of liberation is the attempt to read the signs of our times as Jesus read the signs of his times. There are similarities but there are also differences. We cannot merely repeat what Jesus said; but we can begin to analyze our times in the same spirit as he analyzed his times. Accordingly, searching for the signs of the times in the spirit of Christ, will then mean recognizing all the forces that are working against our nation as the forces of evil. After all, is not the present world order ruled and governed by the evils of men?

An Armenian theology of liberation would reaffirm the faith of our forefathers, that goodness can and will triumph over evil. Despite the system, despite the magnitude, complexity and apparent insolubility of our problems today, our nation in Christ can be, and in the end will be, liberated. The power that can achieve this is the power of our faith that believes. It is only through our witness to the power of Christ that would make this possible.

With this kind of approach to our national problems, one will surely come to recognize the impending catastrophes facing our people as a unique opportunity for the coming of the His Kingdom and our witness to it. By shaking the very foundation of our lives, Christ awakens in us the faith and the hope to see the signs of His kingdom here in our midst, to see



our eschaton as an either-or event and to see our time as the unique opportunity for the total liberation of his people. God is speaking to the Armenian people in a new way today. He is speaking in the events and problems of our times. Christ can help us un-

derstand this voice of Truth, but ultimately, it is we who must decide and act.

In contemporary Armenian experience, fidelity to Armenian nationalism and ethos should revolve around the themes of *remembrance, critique, affirmation* and *witness*, all within the "limitations" of a broken world. As a Nation, presently our choices are difficult, delicate and fateful. Our collective existence, particularly in Armenia, is threatened by political and economic predicaments. Yet, despite the fact that we are somewhat dependent on regional powerbrokers, an Armenian solution to Armenian problems has been most desirable. It is at this critical juncture that a new Armenian theological reflection is urgent—a theology that will be accountable to the experience of the people. An Armenian theology that will articulate significant events in Armenian history; a theology that will serve as a guide for direction and choice in the present; a theology that will provide the resources necessary to create a future for the Armenian people.¹⁹

There is no Armenian nationhood in any meaningful sense without a deepening of the WITNESS its values offer to the world.

Notes

¹Yeghisheh, *History of Vartan and the Armenian War*, (New York: The Delphic Press, 1952.), p. 74.

²cf. Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, (New York: Orbis Books 1978), p. 34.

³Yeghisheh, *History of Vartan*, p. 110

⁴Yeghisheh, *History of Vartan*, p. 10

⁵Christos Yanaras, "A Note on Political Theology," SVTQ Vol 27, No. 1/1983, p. 54.

⁶Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books 1973), p. 7.

⁷Yeghisheh, *History of Vartan*, p. 7.

⁸Gutierrez, *A Theology*, p. 10.

⁹St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), p. 49.

¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 51.

¹¹"Coming Home to Tradition," *Catholic Twin Circle*, March 11, 1990, p. 4.

¹²cf. Vahan M. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia*, (New York: A.G.B.U., 1964), pp. 19-21.

¹³There were local customs, manners and traditions but not a universal Armenian culture. cf. David Marshal Lang, *The Armenians*, (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1988), p. 44.

¹⁴cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), p. 8.

¹⁵Lang, *The Armenians*, p. 47

¹⁶*ibid.*, p. 47

¹⁷Aram Keshishian, *The Witness of the Armenian Church*, (New York: Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, 1978), pp. 67-68.

¹⁸Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), pp. 64-66.

¹⁹cf. Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 110-122. I have utilized Ellis's typology of a "Jewish theology of liberation," which in many ways is applicable to the Armenian experience. The author provides an insightful and provocative study of Judaism and the challenges it faces in the light of the Holocaust and the emergence of the potent state of Israel. In so doing, he offers a critique of certain Jewish political and theological positions, and lay the foundation for an authentically Jewish theology of liberation.

In his helpful and provocative book *All the Fullness of God* the Orthodox theologian Fr. Thomas Hopko has argued that diaspora is "a notoriously unchristian term which betrays in its very utterance how far we are in practice from what, by God's grace, we still somehow retain in theory." In so characterizing the use of diaspora by Christians, Hopko is reminding us of Christ's evangelical commission to the Church to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20 RSV). For Hopko the only acceptable theological use of the term diaspora is to have it refer to the salvific mission of the Church in its temporal pilgrimage as a sign of the promised Kingdom of God. But as he so rightly points out, this is not how Russian, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox Christians or Armenians have used it.

I agree with Fr. Hopko that diaspora has become a dangerous, even heterodox, term in the hands of Orthodox Christians, who yet carry the memory of forced dispersions from historical national homelands. Often in these contexts the term diaspora has legitimated a wholly unbiblical, even antibiblical, theology of survival. Repeatedly diaspora is employed by Armenians in such a way as to set forth a deceiving contrast between a so-called normal Armenian religious existence in a pre-Armenocide Turkey, or in present day Soviet Armenia or in the Middle East with an entirely abnormal and peripheral religious life of Armenians in America. The deception in such thinking is that there simply is no longer an Armenian religious culture which is normal in the traditional sense; nor is it possible or desirable to rebuild in this pluralistic secular society a religious ethnic community which approximates the Armenian Christian order of the Ottoman *millet*.

And yet how often does one hear the argument that if only Armenians retain the use of the Armenian language in the liturgy, teach Armenian to their youth, perpetuate idealized recitations on St. Vartanantz Day about a once glorious *Hayastan*, keep eating the right food, dance the right dances, they can preserve or recreate such an order right in the midst of that abnormal *odar* society in which Armenian-

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Toward a

Diaspora Theology

VIGEN GUROIAN

Americans spend virtually all their waking and sleeping hours, of which the vast majority are citizens, in which they work, play, go to school, socialize and upon which they rely for necessary information, goods, and services. So much of the talk of survival heard in Armenian religious and secular circles is, in fact, the reification of this self-delusion for which diaspora serves as a shorthand term. I say this without intending to belittle a rich cultural and religious heritage to which even a third generation Armenian-American such as myself owes so much of his identity and strength, sense of belonging and personal worth. Nevertheless, a heritage such as this is a dead matter unless it projects those whom it claims into a vital human reality.

Fr. John Meyendorff in this book *Catholicity and the Church*, has pointed out that diaspora is a concept belonging to the Old Testament and rooted in Jewish faith. "In the Old Testament," writes Meyendorff, "God acted in history through the mediation of a 'chosen people,' Israel, to whom he had granted the 'promised' land of Canaan, where Solomon built a temple and where the Messiah was to establish His reign. The Chosen People were called to cultivate this land and possess it, and any exile from it was seen as cursed by divine wrath." To this day the notion of a diaspora therefore has a vital theological significance for Jews for whom one particular place is identified with the divine call. For Christians this cannot be so. They have taken their name from the very Messiah who revealed in his life, death and resurrection that the "promised land," the new



Jerusalem, is no longer to be identified with any single time or place but is present and coming into existence whenever and wherever two or three gather in His name. This is the tremendous import of Christ's words to the Samaritan woman at the well as reported by St. John in his gospel. "Woman, believe me," said Jesus, "the hour is coming when neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

The analogy sometimes drawn between the Armenian diaspora and the Jewish diaspora, therefore, is imperfect at best and at worst introduces a theological heresy. Armenia might have been one special place in which Christ established His Church. But that Church's identity ultimately cannot be defined by nor its mission limited to the historic location of the Church's origination or even the historic culture which it Christianized and nurtured. Neither can the new life in Christ which the Armenian Church promises and bestows through baptism and sustains in eucharistic worship be meant solely for that people whose name it took. For no church is the universal catholic apostolic Church if it is so limited and if its energies are restricted to ethnic or national aspirations.

In this vein, I am reminded of two bits of dialogue in William Saroyan's play *Armenians*. Early in the play, the priest Fr. Kasparian says to his Armenian Protestant counterpart "[T]he true church . . . is Armenia itself." Later a character who carries the name of the historic Armenian region of Van exclaims: "The water of Van is water. This [Fresno's water] is also; but it is not the water of Van. It does not give life to

the soul, it gives life only to the body." These two characters express a religio-nationalism common among Armenians. This religio-nationalism owes much obviously to Christianity. In the clear light of

the gospel story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, however, Fr. Kasparian's religion errs in the same way that the Samaritan woman erred in believing Jesus a prophet of that cultic religion which identified God and his true worship with a particular place - for Samaritans, Mt. Gerizim, for the Jews, Mt. Sion or Jerusalem, for those like Fr. Kasparian, Mt. Ararat or

Etchmiadzin.

Van's statement certainly expresses a pathos familiar to anyone brought up Armenian. In that sense it is an accurate portrayal of Armenian consciousness. I cannot help thinking, however, that Saroyan sought to embody in the character Van that quintessential Armenian paganism which he once said sacralizes Armenian family, community and nationhood through the use of Christian symbols. Van invokes these symbols quite sincerely. He does not consciously or cynically manipulate such symbols. Of course, there are Armenians who, smitten with survivalism, will use any strategy to save the *Hye Tad*. Van, however, is simply devoted to the religio-ethnic cult of Armenianism. He like the Samaritan woman mistakes a local source of refreshment or nourishment with that which truly gives life to the soul. The Samaritan woman would attribute such power to the water drawn from that well called Jacob's well. Van thinks it is the water of Lake Van. But Jesus says that He Himself is the true life-giving water. "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). The religion of the ethnic cult may go on even within the body of the Church, but Christ has and is presently bringing this to an end.

Van is the character who at the conclusion of *Armenians* exclaims, "Long live the Armenian spirit." Yet, significantly, this is an antiphonal to the exclamation, "Long live the human race," offered by the character named Bitlis. Van is not a one dimensional character. Saroyan endows him with a capacity to experience the tension between universalism and

The survivalist mentality of both the Diocese and the Prelacy has subordinated the catholic memory and evangelical mission of the Church to nationalistic purposes...

particularism in human life. He perhaps has even grasped, if only fleetingly, the truth that a national church is not church at all if it fails to embody also the Universal Church. Near the close of *Armenians*, Saroyan leads the reader to the brink of this theological truth. Bitlis admits that in his youth he went to the school of the Protestant missionaries in order to get "a

little education." Fr. Kasparian responds: "It is desirable to acquire knowledge. The missionaries did not convert anybody to Christianity, they only took some of the Christians away from the national church and put them into their church." Van interjects with the remark: "The international church, perhaps? Isn't it the aspiration of civilized people to become citizens of the world rather than merely citizens of one country? I must say I am strongly tempted, now, to such a citizenship. Now that it does appear our long day is coming to a close."

Saroyan is not terribly interested in doing theology, and probably that is just as well. Nevertheless, he is a humanist who articulates the tension between the human good of cultural particularity and that of universalism. Saroyan translated theologically might say: "There is no such thing as an accultural and locationless church and likewise there is not such a thing in history as a Christianity which is universally held by all Christians. There is, however, one Universal Church, variously located, transforming in and through its eucharistic life not some abstract human essence but the many particular historical cultural expressions of that nature into the Body of Christ. Of course, Van might not be right that the Protestant missionaries quite literally represent the "international," or the Universal Church. We may be faced here with Saroyan's impression, having been brought up as a Protestant, that Protestant Christianity has done better at presenting the universal message of the gospel, even if at the significant cost of having abandoned the human good associated with the cultural particularity of the Armenian Church. But Van's comments and the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at

ingly irrelevant for people seeking biblical religious meaning for their lives. Fr. John Meyendorff has said that "this does not imply at all, as many would think, that Orthodox immigrants" in other lands other than that of their origin abandon their original cultural identity or forget their ties with the motherland. St. Paul himself "boast[ed] of being the seed of Abraham (II Cor. 2:22), a faithful Jew, willing to die for his people (Rom. 9:3). "And yet," continues Meyendorff, "it is Paul who [also] wrote and preached in Greek to the Greeks, and became the one, of all the apostles, to be the 'apostle to the Gentiles.'" Even if every Armenian Christian cannot be expected to behave as St. Paul, the Church must, lest it lose all identity as the body and mission of Christ in the world.

Presently, the survivalist mentality of both the Diocese and the Prelacy has subordinated the catholic memory and evangelical mission of the Church to other cultural or nationalistic purposes as well as intra-and-extra ecclesiastical power machinations. In so doing they have encouraged especially those who, finding it difficult to consciously adopt the ways of others in order to be of service to them, circle the wagons of the ethnic train to protect themselves from the aliens in whose midst they have come. Nor have the Diocese or the Prelacy found a way to reach the increasing others who slip the wagon circle at night and, never looking back, endeavor to become full members of American society at the cost of all Armenian and Apostolic Orthodox identity.

As long as the Armenian Church in America conforms itself to the image of a church in diaspora, there can be no hope of mediating these two extreme yet regular behaviors. As Meyendorff has said of churches, such as the Armenian Church, which identify so totally with ethnic diasporas, "the problem is not that [the church] helps immigrants to preserve their human and religious identity, but rather that the church expects to be limited by the immigrants' particular interests and goals, which in turn are defined and supported by foreign ecclesiastical or political

*...no church is the
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the well still recommend some crucial insights for an Armenian theology in the American diaspora.

For example, might we not conclude from what I have just reviewed in Scripture and Saroyan that if the Armenian Church communities dispersed here in North America continue to think of themselves as primarily diaspora the Armenian Church will become increasingly incapable of behaving as church and be increas-

interests." Are Etchmiadzin and Antelias foreign? In some real sense they are, unless we believe the extraordinary myth that there is a singular Armenian nation dispersed throughout the world, and that we here in America belong in a more concrete way to that mystical nation than to the society in which we live out our daily lives and in which most of us expect our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren to live out their lives.



Likewise, it is no more helpful to say that the Armenian Church in America is a national church than it is to say that it is a church in diaspora. Bishop Aram Keshishian of Lebanon has argued in his book *The Witness of the Armenian Church in a Diaspora* that a theology of the diaspora is necessarily a theology of survival. He then goes on to define this survival as "a continuous attempt to rediscover and reinterpret the ethos of the Nation." Perhaps such a statement makes sense in certain Middle Eastern contexts with which Bishop Keshishian is far more familiar than I. To be fair, he does go on to say that such "survival is not religious ethnocentrism, a monological existence. It is basically an inter-dependent dialogical co-existence." But the overall significance of such a theology of survival, however carefully nuanced, is that it substitutes a projective myth of national restoration for the hope in the in-breaking of God's eschatological Kingdom, founded in the person of Jesus Christ, expressed and experienced through the Church's liturgical life and in charitable deeds toward the neighbor. In such a theology the former myth not the latter hope is the subject and goal of the witness of the Church. Even in America, the Armenian Church has been making this myth its goal. It has devoted the larger portion of its energies to uniting the Nation. But what would it take for the Church to accomplish this end. Armenian-Americans are not living in the Ottoman millet, and the last remnants of an integrated Armenian Christendom have long since vanished. The Armenian communities of the diaspora have gone the secular ways of the societies in which they are located. The nation will not be united on Christian premises. The

Church inevitably discovers that in order to keep the mystical nation alive it must subordinate its Christian witness to cultural activities and political agendas far removed from the praxis of prayer and worship by which it is defined as church. Who is transforming whom?

This matter of the secularization of the Church's own self-interpretation can be illustrated through a brief consideration of how St. Vartanantz day functions presently. Professor Kachig Toloyan of Wesleyan University has argued persuasively in several articles on Armenian terrorism how utterly secularized the Vartanantz story has become and that the

Church is fundamentally to blame for this, thus even unintentionally having provided Armenian terrorists with a narrative justification for what they do.

Over the past several years we have witnessed hierarchs of the Church liken the conflict over Karabagh with the Vartanantz War. Yet that which has been happening in Soviet Armenia recently has to do almost exclusively with nationalism. Even the innocent lives lost to Azerbaijani atrocities cannot easily be counted as Christian martyrdoms as the deaths of Vartan and his followers are depicted in the hagiographic accounts. In contemporary Armenian religious life this hagiography has gradually been stripped of its christological bearings and removed from its location within the larger biblical narrative of salvation. It is interpreted as an exemplary narrative of virtuous action in defense of national identity. This has happened across diocesan and jurisdictional lines. The story of Vartan has been transformed into a model for a post-Armenocide national struggle for survival in the diaspora. In that struggle the ethnic goals of preservation of culture and language or nationhood have replaced the Christian eschatology. The national life which a particular geographical location might provide Armenians has been valued above the life that Armenians can bring to others as bearers of the catholic apostolic faith.

Vartan transformed into a hero of survival and nationhood, whether understood culturally or politically, has even eclipsed St. Gregory the Illuminator in the consciousness of Armenians. This I venture to say has primarily to do with the fact that St. Gregory's story of conversion and mission is not terribly useful to

The diaspora is permanent because never will all Armenians return from whence their ancestors fled... it is transitional because it is a phase in a process of acculturation....

a religion of ethnic survival. Ironically, St. Gregory's story and those narratives of our other mission and ecumenically minded saints are far more instructive in how Armenians might behave as church in this North American location than the Vartan narrative. These hagiographic narratives have the power to instruct and inspire Armenian Christians toward a renewed understanding of themselves as apostolic wit-

nesses in a society whose suffocating secularism leaves so many people, Armenians and non-Armenians alike, gasping for a faith greater than the measure of man or nation.

How shall I put it? As a church we are suffering from such distortions of our tradition that our first act of theological renewal may well require that we seek from other Christians to whom we tell our story a critique of it, so that we can once again tell it correctly. And that critique most often need not and probably will not come as a univocal address to our circumstances but will be something that we ourselves must conscientiously listen for in the midst of an ongoing dialogue the concerns of which cross church or denominational boundaries. For this reason, I am persuaded that the Armenian Church's involvement in the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, in spite of all the theological and ecclesiological booby-traps along the way, has been a good which Armenian Christians have not the critical distance from their own concerns to yet measure. In a somewhat different though related way, the positive side of the so-called mixed marriages increasingly populating our parishes is that those strangers whom we accept into our midst will by their involvement, indeed by their very presence in the Church, require us to think hard about how the Church can be instructing persons who are not Armenian in the Christian life. This may well be where the rebirth of our sense of the Church as mission will begin.

In concluding, is there then any sense in which we might want to retain the use of the word diaspora when reflecting upon the future of the Armenian Church in America? I would recommend a sociological meaning which can be put to critical and constructive use toward the renewal of Armenian theology and church life. Thus understood, diaspora describes an historical dispersion of a people and its institutional forms from an indigenous homeland. Armenians came to America not only as a church,



but as an immigrant community. And over several generations and waves of immigration they have continued to think of themselves and behave as a displaced or even exiled religious ethnic community. The term diaspora correctly accounts for this experience and invites thought-

ful reflection upon the particular and universal dimensions of it. This diaspora is both permanent and transitional. It is permanent because never will all Armenians return from whence their ancestors fled or were expelled. It is transitional because it is a phase in an inexorable process of acculturation and ecclesiastical adjustment by which the Armenian Church increasingly becomes a mission to America and is no longer identified even primarily with an historic culture to which it once gave a Christian character. As a permanent state the diaspora challenges the Armenian Church to incorporate into its divine remembrance and doxological prayer some accurate valuation of a past to which there is no return but from which those who worship and pray as that church might seek wisdom and guidance in living a Christian life. As a transitional phase the diaspora challenges the Armenian Church to turn its energies away from a concern for preservation of old religious forms and practices which have gotten hopelessly confused with secular national aspirations and ethnic folk customs toward the nurture of new forms of ecclesiastical life which are demonstrably vivified by biblical faith and the greater Orthodox Christian tradition from which the Armenian Church long ago derived the marrow of its spiritual life.

At the end of an oral history conversation I had some years ago with a survivor of the Genocide, a woman whom as a child saw some seventy of her relations die on the march from Marash to the Syrian desert, I asked: "How in view of all you have suffered could you still believe in God?" At first she demurred saying that she was not a priest or a theologian. But I pressed her. Surely she had thought about this matter. "Yes," she said finally. Some of the men and women of her generation who settled in Richmond had succumb to bitterness and resentment, even anger at God. They would accuse God: "Why did God do this to us?" or "Why did he permit it to happen?" She, however, had not grown bitter. There were, of course, moments of doubt and questioning even so many years after. But she would remember Jesus on the cross. "This," she said, "is what gives me hope and sustains me. And I believe in the resurrection and that we will live even after this death on earth . . . Maybe God means for us, I mean the Armenians, to be an example to the world." Here is the beginning of a diaspora theology, a theology not of survival but of renewed witness to the crucified and risen Lord. For we can be like "the grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in the shade." (Mark 10:31-32).



TRANSITIONS

IN MEMORIAM

His Beatitude Archbishop Yeghische Derderian (1910-1990), Patriarch of Jerusalem passed to his eternal rest on February 1, 1990. His Beatitude was born in Van. Ordained as a celibate priest in 1932, he was consecrated a bishop in 1951 and in 1960 he was elected Patriarch of Holy Jerusalem.

His Beatitude Archbishop Shnork Kaloustian (1913-1990), Patriarch of Constantinople passed to his eternal rest on March 7, 1990 at the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. His Beatitude was born in Yozgat. Ordained a celibate priest in 1935, he was consecrated a bishop in 1955 and in 1961 was elected Patriarch of Constantinople.

His Eminence Archbishop Vazken Keshishian (1935-1990), Primate of the Canadian Diocese passed to his eternal rest on March 27, 1990. His Eminence was born in Alexandria. Ordained a celibate priest in 1959, he was consecrated a bishop in 1984 and elected to the newly established Diocese of the Armenian Church of Canada.

ELECTED

His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoukian was elected as the Patriarch of Jerusalem on March 21, 1990 by members of the brotherhood. His Eminence was born in 1919 in Baghdad. Ordained a celibate priest in 1939, he was consecrated a bishop in 1962. Since 1967 he has been the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America.

Letters to the GROUP

Thank you for opening a new window on our church. I look forward to reading more specific ideas on how the Armenian Church can better meet the great demands of its Christian mission.

Specifically on "A Pious Minimalism" [January 1990], I was struck by the socio-economic approach you took to the church and its current condition. I am less ready to explain the church's difficulties in such secular terms, since I think the problem is really a spiritual matter. The church should be the common ground and the high ground in the community's life. Its only reason for existence to be the reconciler of the community, since reconciliation with one another is a prerequisite to reconciliation with God. Instead it has become the propagator of a kind of socio-political apartheid, which cannot be justified by any amount of canon law or socio-economic analysis. Our leadership must once and for all repent, take responsibility for perpetuating and reinforcing intercommunal divisions, incooperation and even hatred, in direct contradiction of the vows they took upon ordination and in complete violation of Christ's commandment to love one another and to seek reconciliation with one's brother before coming to worship God. In short, it is this flagrant disregard for the fundamental tenets of Christianity that have sapped the church of the strength to carry out its mission, and maintaining the national character of the community is neither a substitute for spirituality nor an excuse for disobeying the Gospel.

Perhaps this theme will be reflected in succeeding issues. Otherwise, I thought the layout was classy, the material fresh and interesting. I wish you well in all your endeavors.

Tom Samuelian, *Harvard University*

LAST WORDS . . .

"... By now you've learned of Patriarch Kaloustian's passing. It was just awful. He fell down the stairs of the Veharan, face first. Although he was conscious for another six hours, he didn't survive more than 15 hours after the fall. Until he became unconscious, he recited Psalms over and over again. He ended with "AZADYA INTZ, AZADYA INTZ" (give me freedom, free me). FAITH UNTIL THE END."

(Quote from a letter received from seminarian Dr. Deron Petoyan, dated March 8, 1990, from Holy Etchmiadzin.)

I received your first issue and have handed out many copies to individuals whom I felt would benefit. You have put together a good piece of work; something that has been sorely (?) needed by our people. God grant you the wisdom and courage to continue. Love in Christ,

Fr. Tateos Abdalian, *Wateruliet, NY*

The unannounced appearance of "Window" took me by surprise, but I enjoyed reading it. The articles are informative, the writing crisp and the layouts and illustrations are pleasing to the eye. However, after reading every word, I found myself search for the publication's *raison d'etre*. Perhaps an editor's note or policy statement on page 2, above the masthead, would have been appropriate to explain its objectives.

I commend The Group for the time and effort it took to produce "Window." However, I wonder if the average parishioner understands what you have written, despite occasional insertions of an Armenian word I'm afraid the language is too difficult, especially for newcomers.

In any case, I wish you success, because I am always in favor of disseminating the printed word for the benefit of better understanding among our fellow parishioners as well as the entire Armenian community.

Charles R. Nazarian, *Van Nuys, CA*

The first issue was great, but it will be a tough act to follow! May God be your inspiration.

David Madajian, *Carlsbad, CA*

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