

# wind<sup>o</sup>w™

view of the Armenian Church



**IS THE COLLAR  
CHOKING THE  
ARMENIAN PRIEST?**



# WINDOW *view of the Armenian Church*

Volume I, Number 4 – Fall 1990

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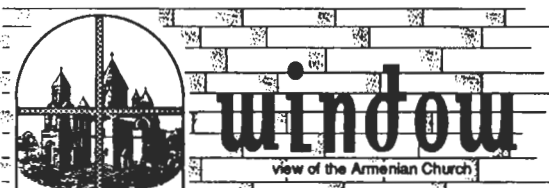
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Published quarterly by  
The Armenian Church Research & Analysis Group

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A.C.R.A. Group  
17808 Sherman Way, Suite #315, Reseda, CA 91335

**Cover Photos:**  
*Bruce Burr Photography*



The views expressed in *Window* are not necessarily those of the Armenian Church hierarchy. *Window* is an independent publication supported solely by reader subscriptions. Subscription information: Send name, address and \$18.00 (payable to SRP) for each subscription to: The Group, 17808 Sherman Way, Suite #315, Reseda, CA 91335. An electronic Version of *Window* is available on the SAIN System: 1-408-257-1846, supporting transfer up to 2400 baud. Address all correspondence to: The GROUP. *Window* is produced on a Macintosh/Apple II system and Laserset on a LaserWriter II. Printed in the United States of America by Group Publishing. *Window* and the logo appearing on the cover are trademarks of The Group. Use of original articles, translations, art work or photographs without the expressed permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited by law. Macintosh, Apple II and LaserWriter are registered trademarks of Apple Computer.



# Beneath the Collar

FATHER VAZKEN MOVSESIAN

**“E**at Free at Italian Restaurants” claims a full page ad in a major U.S. magazine portraying the face of satirist “Father” Guido Sarducci. The caption reads, “Go on. Mangia. I’m not talking subs, either. I’m talking cacchatore. You think they’re gonna let the check slide if you’re a doctor or a lawyer? Don’t hold your breath. But when you’re a priest, it’s on the house! One of what I call ‘the padre perks.’ Other padre perks are sleeping late, getting first crack at parish rummage sales, and helping your fellow man. Could be these perks are right up your alleyway. Which makes you

priest material.” The tounge-in-cheek plea is followed by the address of the recruiting director of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Overshadowing a sincere plea for recruits by this Roman Catholic order is a humorous

description of a priest, who fits a stereotype. This priest has his counterpart in the Armenian Church. Though we are more likely to admit it behind closed doors, our view of the Armenian priest may in fact be a bit more radical than the one presented by the Oblates in their ad.



Based on an informal survey of parishioners, here is a stereotypical characterization of the Armenian priest. He has a one-day-a-week job. He lacks intelligence and has therefore accepted the only occupation available to him. Driven by greed, he celebrates the sacraments for their monetary reward.

The reason he enjoys the work is because it is easy and financially stimulating. He is first in line for food and never pays for his meals because he does not feel the need to contribute to his own cause. If he is celibate, his activities are embellished with sexual

connotations. If he is married, his wife’s personality becomes an issue. The priest is a nice ornament at parties and functions. He is also the president of all parish organizations: a figurehead with all the wit and intelligence of a department store dummy.

The so called “Dumb Priest” is the focus of this issue of Window. Presumably he is so dumb that all he can do is God’s work! One would quickly be branded a bigot should s/he make such a blanket statement about the Blacks, Mexicans, Jews or any other group. Yet the priest is fair game for stereotypical projections. Like the comment of a bigot or racist, stereotypes blind the senses to reality. Even as the youngest Armenian priests in America, with only eight years since receiving the holy order, I can verify that it is far from a sleep-in-late-one-day-a-week-job. The “dumb-priest” myth unjustly ignores: the disappointment of finding church pews empty, while church dinners are sold out to capacity; the nights away from the family for the infamous “meeting”; the preparation to make sermons relevant; the difficulty in expressing sympathy at premature death; the tuning of a deaf ear to misdirected criticism;

the dilemma of juxtaposing fund raising with the free love of God; the anguish at witnessing the moral decay of parishioners; the loneliness at partaking of the Lord's supper alone; and so on and so on.

This is not an apology. "Where there is smoke there is fire," we say, and so stereotypes are fabricated on some bit of truth. Maybe so. Perhaps there are a few "bad apples" that spoil the bunch. Or possibly recent sensationalistic revelations about televangelists have made us suspicious about all clerics. Or maybe the socio-economic conditions of our day, where job security is so vital, has necessitated compromise. But the sting of this stereotype is felt in its wide-spread acceptance among the Armenian laity and even among the projectees—the clergy. And this betrays the Armenian Church to disfunctionality because the role of the priest cannot be seen outside of the *myth*. The inability to conceptualize the priest as a man of God, who has a sincere dedication and devotion to the Church, prevents us, as the Church, from exploiting the talents of the clergyman for the greater glory of God.

Case in point: According to the by-laws of the Armenian Church in America (all jurisdictions), the priest is the head of the parish. He is the president of all parish organizations. It is a nice title with very little function behind it. Nevertheless, he is the one most familiar with the day-to-day routines and needs of the parish. Yet the operation of the parish is delegated to a parish council (a body which changes every year). The parish council makes the decisions about what and where to invest money, how to operate the church facility, what office equipment to

buy,... etc. If, by chance, the priest understands investing, if he is computer literate, if he is knowledgeable in contract law, it does not matter. His opinions are dismissed, "What can he possibly know about anything in the business world? After all he is only a *dumb-priest*." Perhaps not in these words, but the stereotype has a tight grip: The collar is choking our clergy!

Furthermore today, the Diocese-Prelacy unity committee has submitted a draft of a united by-laws to be debated and adopted by the respective assemblies. One of the striking points in the document is the vote of the priest at diocesan assemblies which will count in a 1:7 ratio. Could it be that the grip on the priest, vis-a-vis the stereotype, is so profound that he must be repressed within the very organization which defines him?

**From the beginning**

The Father "consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36) the Son, Jesus Christ in fulfillment of the prophetic call "to preach good news to the poor... 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." (Is. 61:1,2). As the manifestation of the

and the apostles *organize* the church, with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to continue Christ's work in this world. Tertullian, a the second century theologian, precisely writes, "The Church from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, Christ from God."

With the spread of Christianity and with the greater demands upon the apostles a formal structure for the Church became necessary. The apostolic church had its own hierarchy: bishops, priests and deacons. Each order had its specific duties, responsibilities and authority.

Jesus Christ, as the proto-priest, is the "alpha and omega." He has never changed, nor has His mission. What has changed is our perception of the priesthood.

In the Book of Acts, chapter 6, we see when the apostles could no longer minister to the physical needs of the congregations, they chose deacons, so that the spreading of the Good News would not suffer. In the same sense, we may argue that for the Armenian Church also, the physical demands of the congregation have become great. Yet for a variety of reasons, we have not taken that next step to appoint "servers of the table" (Acts 6:2). I

am not making a case here for expanding the responsibilities of the diaconate, but rather the point that the priest in the Armenian Church has been left alone to carry out these responsibilities, while the *myth* constricts his office to a frivolous insignificance.

Our problem with the priesthood is not that we necessarily lack a definition, but that we have cluttered the definition with excess.

*...the Armenian Church is betrayed to disfunctionality because the role of the priest cannot be seen outside of the myth.*

unseen God, Jesus in His work and ministry becomes the supreme example of the priesthood. He *establishes* the Church, His Body,





**"I never learned plumbing in seminary"**

Along with his responsibilities of spreading the Good News, healing the sick and consoling the bereaved, comes the administration of a parish. In the parish, the priest is now called to a new ministry, which he may or may not be qualified to hold. He is the chief fund raiser, the door keeper, the janitor, the secretary and the supplier of raffle tickets. In essence, the priest is the man who keeps the church running. Amidst this clutter of responsibilities, the spiritual shepherd is put out to pasture. Hence, the priest *learns* and *masters* a new career, albeit, by way of on-the-job-training.

The dumb priest myth—like all myths—reflects the mind-set of the projector, i.e., the stereotype says more about those who harbor these sentiments than about those for whom they are targeted.

Marshall Shelley, in *The Problems of Battered Pastors* (Christianity Today, May 17, 1985) further explains that today the general changes in life are necessary to consider in our analysis of the priesthood. "No longer are pastors allowed to be generalists, jacks of all trades; today is an age of specialization," writes Shelley. "Different church members expect pastors to be specialists in almost every area...." He further notes, "The office is no longer guaranteed respect.... few positions are so open to public evaluation... sermons are received not so much as a word from God to be obeyed but a suggestion from the pastor to be debated."

It is somewhat encouraging to learn that this problem is not endemic to the Armenian Church. In an age of specialization, the Armenian priest continues to be a "jack of all trades." Where no one is exempt from rules, the actions of the priest is open to scrutiny. When there are no moral standards, the Armenian priest's job cannot be taken seriously. Here begins our

confusion about his role within the community and our misunderstanding of his *profession*. Amidst this confusion arises the corrupt definition of the priesthood, one which can only be dismissed when we understand the meaning of the priesthood as defined by the Traditions of the Church.

The priest is a anointed server of God. Yet, above all else, he is not God. Nor is he a superman. He is human. He breathes, talks, laughs, cries, sings, hurts. He is perhaps the happiest of all humans, because he is called to witness to a resurrected Lord—the Champion of life. At the same time, he is one of the saddest human beings, when confronted with a seemingly impossible mission.

The comments, opinions and reference material in this issue of *Window* are focused on the priesthood. These articles are not intended to dismiss the "dumb-priest" concept. That is a reserved right of the belief holder. Rather, the presented material is for our readers to test the concept—the myth—within their own experience and against the ideal. Christ reminds his apostles, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." (John 15:16). It is this reminder that the congregation, through its love and understanding of the priest, must provide for the bearing of the true fruits.



## On the Priesthood

St. John Chrysostom  
(the "golden mouthed")

*The work of the priesthood is done on earth, but it is ranked among heavenly ordinances. And this is only right, for no man, no angel, no archangel, no other created power, but the Paraclete himself ordained this succession, and persuaded men, while still remaining in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels. The priest, therefore, must be as pure as if he were standing in heaven itself, in the midst of those powers....*

*Anyone whom considers how much it means to be able, in his humanity, still entangled in flesh and blood, to approach that blessed and immaculate being, will see clearly how great is the honor which the grace of the Spirit has bestowed on priests. It is through them that this work is performed, and other work no less than this in its bearing upon our dignity and our salvation.*

*If a king confers on one of his subjects the right to imprison and release again at will, that man is the envy and admiration of all. But although the priest has received from God an authority as much greater than that, a heaven is more precious than earth and souls than bodies, some people think he has received so slight an honor that they can imagine someone entrusted with it actually despising the gift. God save us from such madness! For it is patently mad to despise this great office without which we cannot attain to salvation or God's good promises.*

(translated Graham Nevill, St. Vladimir's Press, 1984, New York)

# Where Does the Buck Stop?



HRATCH TCHILINGIRIAN

**A**s a concept, to speak about the political dimension of the Armenian Church's mission might seem "unreligious" or even dangerous. And yet, it is not the notion, in and of itself, that causes a dilemma, but the possible assumptions and interpretations attached to it. His Holiness Vazken I, in a written address to the clergy conference of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem (1980), warned the servants of the Armenian Church, when he wrote, "The Armenian clergy ought to bear responsibility for the task of RELIGIOUS-MORAL UPBRINGING [OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE] (caps. mine); to stand guard to the unity of the Armenian Church and the unity of the Armenian faithful . . . In order for the Armenian religious servant to dedicate himself to this, [which is] his real mission, he shall stay away from the Diaspora Armenian political streams . . . However, if [the matter] concerns the present [Republic of] Armenia, he should stand in PRAYER (caps. mine) for the preservation of the peaceful and safe life of [our] reborn Mother Armenia . . . The Armenian clergy should also stay away from expressing a pro or con opinion concerning international political rhetoric . . ."

It was a decade ago that His Holiness warned the Armenian

priests with these words. This *policy* was further reiterated in a speech to the delegates of the Armenian National Movement (1989), where his Holiness said, "the Church is not with any side, the Church is with all the sides." This statement could either be read as a positive political neutrality or more correctly as a no position at all. Nevertheless, despite this *policy*, we see a double standard at work in the Armenian Church. We hear and read that this bishop or that primate met with this politician or attended a banquet for that congressman. We hear that the prelate or diocese honored that diplomat, or met with this president. Furthermore, it seems that the church hierarches are permitted to get involved in politics but not ordinary priest, who one might assume are not "qualified" to carry out such tasks. Obviously, the intention of such activities should not be minimized, as long as they are not substitutes for the real purpose of the church. We never hear the bishop or the diocese or the prelate take a stand on contemporary moral or social issues. We never hear what our church is doing about the poor, or the drug addicts or the pregnant teenagers, or for that matter the growing cults in Armenia . . . we have other "national priorities." We do not read in the newspapers what this or that diocese is doing about the youth or the elderly.

All we hear about is the "political stuff." Admittedly, politics is a fact of life, but not a preoccupation or excuse for procrastination.

Where does the buck stop? Who is in charge of what? The lack of a concrete and structured "church policy" concerning involvement of the church in national affairs, has created a large gap in the minds of the Armenian clergy between their mission and the expectations of the community.

The Armenian community, particularly in the Diaspora, expects the clergy to stay away from politics and confine himself to the religious services in the church. Nevertheless, the anticipation of the community proves to be just the opposite. Besides the new trends in Armenia-Diaspora relationship that exact an undefined role to the Armenian Church the clergy are constantly patronized by the laity to be on the forefront of *Azka bahbanoom* (i. e. perpetuation of the Armenian nation). The Armenian political "establishment" expects the church to be an insurance policy for the preservation of the Armenian language, as a God given admonition. The list of such expectations is very long . . . discouraging the increasing intermarriage of Armenians with non-Armenians (*Odar phobia*), establishing contacts with local, state or national government officials who might be sympathetic to



Armenians political and other needs, speeches before national and international organizations, representing the Armenians at public ceremonies and forums . . . so on. While, from a secular perspective, the Church is constantly scrutinized for its involvement in political affairs, experience and reality proves that the Church is not completely *apolitical*. In fact, as long as the Church exists in society, it is necessarily a political entity, (here I use the term political with an Aristotelian understanding, i.e. the striving for the good or fair life by a society or community. Politics which denotes those processes of human action by which conflict concerning on the one hand the common good and on the other hand the interests of groups. Certainly, this involves the use of, or struggle for, power). Historically, the politicization of the Church, particularly in the Armenian experience, can also be seen in the Church-State symbiosis.

**I**n recent years, this resurgence of political involvement has been so emphatic, across the line in the church, that the *real* mission and purpose of the church has been put on the "back burner."

Nowadays, when one follows the stories or news accounts in the Armenian media, it is not difficult to observe that the Church has assumed more of a capitulating role in the affairs of Armenian politics than being what it supposed to be—the Body of Christ. In the wake of a political emergency, it is very easy to lose sight of the unique characteristics of the Church. While, on the one hand the Armenian political establishment and leadership approves this "assumed" role of the church and reaps the fruits of its efforts, on the other hand, the *ordinary* Armenians that we see in our churches every Sunday, expect the Church to give them spiritual nour-

ishment. Having said this, I am aware of the fact that, most probably, I will be accused of being "too religious" in my views, because I used the word "Christ" and "spiritual." And this exactly, brings us to the core of the problem. We can speak about the Armenian Church, its glorious history and how the Church has preserved the Armenian nation . . . but we have to be careful when and how we use the word "Christ." In many people's mind the Armenian Church precedes Christ. Thus, the Armenian Church can and should exist "without using too much Christian stuff." For example, in most Armenian Churches in America, the sermon is delivered bilingually, Armenian and English. I think many priests will agree with the observation that you can use the term "Jesus Christ" as many times as you want in the English sermon, but if you repeat it more than three times in the Armenian sermon, you will most probably be accused of being *poghkagan* [protestant]. In fact, in my experience I have come across people who have said openly that the priest is "preaching Christ too much," or "Enough of Jesus, preach a bit about

ops are not going to speak about Christ, the spiritual . . . the "religious stuff," then who will? I agree that the Armenian Church is a national church and there is a certain degree of "nationalizing" the Message of Christ, but "Armenian" should only be the context of the message and not the content. If the Armenian Church is not going to preach the gospel, then who will? Certainly not the political parties or the cultural organizations or the numerous Armenian organizations that are increasing on a daily basis. If the Church is not going to preach the Good News to those who hunger for it, then let us not blame them for finding it in other places. The fundamental question that we need to ask is "What remains of the Armenian Church if we take Christ out?"

To a certain degree, this confusion of mission stems from the fact that our churches are run by a few people who are vested with enormous authority to prioritize the needs of the Armenian faithful. No, the church is not democratic in this sense. People would acknowledge that there is a political system at work in the church, but they are afraid that "democracy" is going to be equivalent to, or a subterfuge for, anarchy. In the Armenian Church "democracy" is interpreted as "abandonment of all authority. Granted that at the present time, the independence of Armenian, the rehabilitation of the earthquake stricken Armenia is a top priority, but this should not be actualized on the cost of ignoring the needs of the local churches or communities. Whatever happens in Armenia, there will still be people on the local level, in the local churches, who need to be "fed," who

*Historically, the politicization of the Church, particularly in the Armenian experience, can also be seen in the Church-State symbiosis.*

the Nation as well." It should not be surprising that many priests or even bishops would agree with this rationale. But on a more serious note, if the clergy, the priests or the bish-

need to be healed and renewed. The fate and the ministry of the Armenian Church in the Diaspora cannot be dependent on the outcome of

*continued on page 9*



# Requirements and Qualifications for Ordination in the Armenian Church

## (Excerpts)

*Note: The Mayr Mashdots (Book of Rituals) or the Grand Euchologion of the Armenian Church contains all the sacraments and rituals that are performed in the Armenian Church (except those performed by the Catholicos). The requirements and qualifications of Ordination were translated from the 1807 edition of the Mashdots (printed in Constantinople); the first and only official manual of liturgy of ordination. The following are excerpts from said translation. For further discussion and translation of the entire text, see: Hratch Tchilingirian, Ordination to the Priesthood in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church, (Thesis at St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary, 1987. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilm International, TREN 015-0069).*

*In the evening, before the calling service, the bishop, vested for the ordination service, sitting on his throne in the nave and before the people, shall examine the candidate with great caution, as prescribed by the instructions of the eminent teacher, St. Gregory the Rhetor.*

1. **Examination for Education:** The Bishop shall determine whether the candidate has fully completed the education for the priesthood or not. Ignorance is for the illiterate and the illiterate cannot be a priest. In the words of the prophet, "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord," (Malachi 2:7).
2. **Examination for Orthodoxy:** If he (the candidate) be a heretic, he cannot be ordained; for the apostle says, "Pull out the leaven of wickedness, that it may not leaven the whole," (I Cor 5:6-8).
3. **Examination for Good Deeds:** The candidate, although he might be knowledgeable and orthodox, has to prove himself worthy by deed; for if he is unworthy by deed, even though he has all the knowledge, he cannot be ordained. As Paul says "do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, so you will not be an accomplice in his sins," (I Tim 5:22).
4. **Examination for Maturity:** If he be immature and not of age, he cannot be ordained. For youth is fond of virtue and glory... it is necessary to examine his age to ascertain whether his nature has settled down and whether he chooses what he wants with complete free will, so that his sponsors will not have to answer for him or his actions.
5. **Examination of Family Background:** If he is a child of non-believers or apostates or born of adultery, he cannot be ordained. For though the child is cleansed through the baptismal font and we do not judge the son by his father; nevertheless, he brings unto himself the nature and ways of his parents.
6. **The bishop shall ask the father confessor** before all the people "Do you affirm to the worthiness of the candidate for this high rank and divine authority? And the father confessor shall give testimony to the best of his knowledge.
7. **The bishop shall deliver to him the message of God:** Today you have been assigned to be a watchman over the people of God, (cf Is 21:6; Jer 6:17). If you see someone in sin and you do not warn him to turn from evil, "I shall demand his blood at your hands," (Ezk 33:8) says God.
8. **Bishop's responsibility:** The bishop shall be on guard lest he neglect all that has been said. For, if on account of others' requests or on account of fear of outside pressure, or on account of possessions, or on any other account whatsoever he should ordain such candidates against his will, he shall be condemned and receive punishment for the sins of others. Rather adhering to all the requirements he should ordain him worthily according to the pleasure of God and the canons of election, that neither the ordained nor the ordainer shall have anything to answer for thereafter; so that, he might say boldly on the Day of Judgment, "Behold me and my children whom God has given me," (Is 8:17-18; Heb 2:13).
9. **Imposition of the two codes of conduct on the candidate:** a) For the immediate future—the bishop imposes upon him a period of abstinence to last approximately two years, as it is fitting for him to stand before the church with purity and diligence, with prayer and worship and tears. Until the sixth day, he shall stand in awe of God with the love of a servant. Until the twentieth day in solitary penitence he is recompensed with the love becoming of a hired worker by participating in the crucifixion of Christ. From twenty days to forty days by filial love he becomes steadfast in God. And as the baby by the fortieth day takes the thinking spirit, likewise the new candidate shall be filled by the grace of God the Spirit. And he celebrates the Mass of the body and blood of Christ, partaking of God the Spirit. Second, he should fast for forty days in order that he become accustomed to the habit of vigilance and awakefulness, standing on foot, for prayer and holiness. Thus he would forget the easy living he was accustomed to. For it is necessary for the new "receiver of grace" to receive a new life and be renewed. b) Code of Conduct unto Death: to take the image





of Christ—gentle, humble, compassionate, man-loving, forgiving and joyful-minded. For our Lord says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves," (Mt 11:29). This means do not be proud, angry, jealous, contentious, selfish, arrogant, lewd or cunning, for these are the marks of Satan and do not receive Grace from God. As the Apostle says, "The Lord opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble," (I Peter 5:5; Prov 3:34).

Second, he shall admonish him not to be vagrant and drunken. He should advise the celibate under any circumstances not to be acquainted with women: neither to have a foster mother nor to adopt a mother or sister or keep a female servant; for all these are temptations and are the ways of Satan. For on what grounds does he who leaves his own mother get involved with other women?

10. **Exhortation to the rank of priesthood:** the bishop shall admonish the candidate, saying, "Behold to what rank you are called, it is the rank of angels!" Henceforth, your honor and punishment shall be not in the manner of the world, but in the manner of angels, those who have fallen and those who yet stand... Moreover, the priest's authority is greater than that of the angels; for he becomes a servant of God by doing the work of Christ; that is, [through the sacrament of communion] administering the bread and wine, body and blood of Christ; [through the sacrament of baptism] making of the sinful child the child of God; and [through the sacrament of marriage] making two strange persons into one body [through the sacrament of penance] granting absolution for the sins of man and so on. Such works are the works of God and not the work of angels, and God gave man this great office. Thus, by keeping in mind at all times this fear and awe, henceforth, I commit you to the grace of the Holy Spirit and we beseech the all-merciful God, together with all members of the Holy Church, that He may tenderly spread forth the grace of the Holy Spirit through you like an irrigating river, like shining rays of light of celestial splendor. And may he who adorned all beings with splendors of all kinds, adorn you with the same wondrous brightness through the emanating light of his divinity and seven-fold grace, unto the ages of ages, Amen. [-Translated by Deacon Hratch Tchilingiran © 1987]

*continued from page 7*

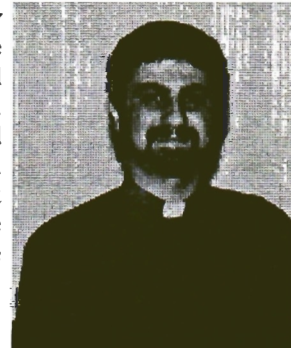
events in Armenia, per se. Otherwise, the very *catholicity* of the Armenian Church would be in question, i.e. the Church's "mission to all, its responsibility for saving the world, and its ability to assume and bless whatever is worth saving, especially when that assumption leads to the salvation of many." (John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church*, SVS Press, 1983, p.46-47) "A church whose only function is to maintain ethnic identification loses the character of true 'Church of God.'" Ultimately, if we continue to ignore the *part* we will damage the *whole*. As the old Armenian proverb explains, "In attempting to fix the brow, let's not damage the eye."

Certainly, politics is not new to Christianity. A look back to the time of Christ, shows that even Christ in his time was *conditioned* by the socio-political environment of his era. But, Christ was not "with all the sides," his *messianic mission* was to feed the hungry, to console the grieved, to quench the spiritual thirst of the people... to save those who believed in him. As Christ himself went through the "political process" of his time, so ought the Church to prepare itself in the political process of her time. As far as the Armenian Church is concerned,

the need to reevaluate the church's position regarding political involvement is vital. Without a clear assessment and articulation of issues, the church will capitulate to the political ends of the establishment, as it has done in the past.

If the church ought to have a political agenda, it should be contemplated within the parameters of her ecclesiology and theological vision. The search for shared commitment to beliefs for which the church could live or die is, and has always been, a messy process. It involves the mind and the spirit, the senses, intuition and passion. It is inevitably enmeshed with bias and projection, with love and hate. It is often a drama of heroes and villains. It has been lingered with venality and arrogance and polished to a distinction with holy audacity. It is in and through the agency of this messy interplay of human, and therefore political, holy and sinful commitments that the Spirit of God leads the earthly body of the risen Christ to the truth that frees. To reduce the work of the Spirit into an attainment of political goals is to caricature the God who delights in passionate creatures and respects them as free agents. Those who have the responsibility for fidelity to that Spirit must actively strive to

create the human strategies and processes whereby the true voice of the church can be heard. The Armenian Church cannot be "with all the sides", but it has to be on the *side* of its flock. It is imperative for the church to reevaluate its contemporary mission and fulfill that which has been entrusted to her. Church means, as T. Hopko writes, "those called as a particular people to perform a particular task. The Christian Church is the assembly of God's chosen people called to keep his word and to do his will and his work in the world and in the heavenly kingdom." As such, the Church ought to assume more of a prophetic role in renewing and redefining the life of the Armenian nation—a prophecy that does not necessarily announce the events that are supposed to happen, but rather it comprehends the march of history and the historical obligation attached to each moment in the life of the Church.



# St. Nersess the Graceful: Chaos & the Need for Reform



SEROP ALJALIAN

**T**oo often nowadays, we find ourselves overwhelmed with the problems in the Church. However, when we look back at history, we find that certain issues were always prevalent in the life of the church. *The General Encyclical* (Unthanrakan Dought) of St. Nersess the Graceful *Shnorhall* (c. 1102-1173) is such a document which bears the unmistakable mark of the turmoil, suffering and unrest that troubled Armenia during his years as Catholicos (c. 1166-1173). Indeed, few documents of the time give so clear an image of the chaos in the nation's religious, political, social, and economic life as does this work. It is essential to note, however, that the encyclical is of more than mere historic interest, for its influence continues to be felt throughout the world in the Armenian community and church.

St. Nersess wrote *The General Encyclical* in a direct, oratorical style. However, the reader soon discovers a wide variety of rhetorical devices in the writing. Among these are: the humble, magisterial tone of the narrator, the effective use of biblical and patristic allusions, lyric references to the coming of Christ, colorful, pastoral imagery, and illustrations from the common life. Even in translation, the range of the *Shnorhall's* vocabulary is evident. The encyclical employs the lan-

guage of rural life, of political and military life, of the world of business, and of the church. Like so many ancient writings, *The General Encyclical* gives the impression of being dictated to an amanuensis by an author in the white heat of inspired emotion.

Since its composition, St. Nersess' great work has been accepted by the Armenian Church as an enlightening guide to reform, worship, ritual, rules of conduct and canons. It is a document that the church can ill afford to disregard as it carries on its work among the people of the Armenian nation.

In keeping with apostolic and patristic usage, St. Nersess begins the encyclical by establishing his authority in the Armenian Church. There is no doubt in his mind that the church and nation require reform; however, he is equally aware that the forces against reform can overcome only through the voice of the duely enthroned Catholicos.

It seems that at the time of his elevation to the Seat of the Catholicos there was much trouble, warfare and poverty, and Armenians were scattered. As a spiritual leader of the nation, it was impossible for St. Nersess to visit the various places in which the scattered Armenians were living in order to nourish them as a spiritual father with the knowledge and fear of God. St.

Nersess writes, "Our nation does not have a royal capital or assembly anymore, so that sitting there on the patriarchal and doctrinal throne, we taught our people God's law like the first patriarchs and doctors. But we are like the wild goat that has escaped from the dogs and hunters, living in caves." So while living in a cave, he addresses himself in writing to the whole Armenian nation. "We speak with the writing of our hand as if with our mouth to everyone who has ears to hear, repeating that you might hear the strength of the words of the apostles, prophets, and church fathers, and not our own words."

The encyclical opens with general admonitions to the Armenian. This section provides a colorful picture of the customs and traditions of the times. It is clear that St. Nersess' major concern is the orthodox faith of all Armenian Christians. "The confession of the true faith is the foundation of the divine temple which is in us." Subsequently, all that he says later about the lives of all Armenian Christians grows out of this faith.

St. Nersess provides specific instructions for all ranks of clergy. Some of the instructions bear the mark of the time in which he wrote as well as the economic, social and political situation in Armenia. They seem therefore to be of chiefly historic interest. Moreover,





members of the Armenian Church in America may find little practical interest in the exhortations to the monks and priors because there are no Armenian monasteries in the United States.

However, when a reader looks at the admonitions to the clergy as a whole—monastics, priors, prelates, and priests—he finds instructions of timeless significance. It is in the combined instructions that the voice of St. Nersess still speaks to the church.

Throughout the section dealing with clergy, St. Nersess expresses grave concern about the worldliness of the clergy. He finds the general preoccupation with money, property, personal enrichment at the expense of the church, church taxes and perquisites to be contrary to the holy faith and the canons. He becomes especially exercised when this worldliness takes away from the glory of the church, a glory seen not only in splendid buildings and vestments but also in holy worship. Surely current clerical concerns about salary, travel allowances, and fees for weddings, funerals and baptisms reflect something of St. Nersess' concerns, and his encyclical stands as a reminder to the clergy of the twentieth century to place self-interest behind the glory of the church.

Catholicos St. Nersess is no less concerned about the manner in which the clergy lead their lives. His concern begins with individual clerical morality and ethics and continues through virtually every aspect of the ministry of Word and Sacraments. The major thrust of his instruction is in the area of the avoidance of anything that would in any way bring the general reputation of the clerical order into disrepute. He includes in his instructions references to the marriage of clergy, handling of offerings made for baptisms, weddings and funerals, and general behavior in the community. The faith and life of the clergy of every rank are to serve as models for the lay people committed to their charge.

For St. Nersess it is of special importance that the clergy maintain holiness of life and uphold the faith when they are carrying out their priestly functions at the altar or the baptismal font or at confession. Not only are they to avoid giving offense to the faithful, they are also to remain free from all personal prejudices and favoritism. This applies to officiating at the marriages, to the treatment of rich and poor, and to the handling of Christians who belong to other parishes or jurisdictions. The clergy are God's servants, not lords in their own right. It is God's law, the traditions of the fathers and the canons of the church which form the standard for judgment and action, not the whim and caprice of the clergy. These warnings are appropriate for the church of all ages. As M. Ormanian writes, "Truly, if the Encyclical were to be written today as an encyclical not even one word would need to be altered."

He warns against the sort of external appearances which border on the blasphemous. He speaks against standing before the altar in common dress or without bathing. He insists that the clergy be aware of the significance and necessity of appropriate vestments. A careful reading of St. Nersess serves as a reminder to today's clergy to be more aware of what they are about when they prepare to offer the Holy Mysteries.

Through all the instructions

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to the clergy there runs a solemn warning against the sins which are closely associated with the misuse of the tongue. These warnings include: strife, gossip, quarrels, and contention. He makes it quite clear that when clergymen open their

mouths to speak, they have the power to edify or tear down the church. The dangers of the sins of the tongue continue even to our own time.

The Encyclical is also clear on the subject of jealousy and dissension among the members of the clergy. Priests are jealous of primates; monks are contentious; primates and priors fail to care for, instruct and give example to the men under their jurisdiction; clerical peers are jealous of one another because of supposed preferential treatment. Such problems will probably remain with the clergy of the church until the end of time, but Shnorhall's instructions can serve as a much needed corrective to this weakness.

St. Nersess exhorts that clergy of all ranks must be faithful to God's calling, devote themselves to their ministry of the Divine Word and the Holy Mysteries and cultivate lives of Christ-like virtues. While this admonition is really applying it to all the faithful, St. Nersess seems most urgent when applying it to the ranks of the clergy. Taken together these instructions can serve as a guide for the entire life of the man called to serve as a priest of the Armenian Church.

Perhaps the specific instructions and warnings to those in secular positions—princes, army personnel, women, etc.—are of less interest and importance to the present day Armenian community. This

is the case because the instructions are quite dated, and some areas are governed by civil law. At the same time it must be noted that admonitions and exhortations to honesty, justice, morality, compassion, and Christian charity are always appropriate and never out of date.

St. Nersess' specific applications of these virtues may strike the reader as somewhat quaint, but a second reading will show that perhaps times and people do not change as much as we sometimes imagine.

# Excerpts from St. Nersess Shnorhali's General Encyclical

Translated from St. Nersess Shnorhali; *Encyclical*. Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1871.

## **To the Primates of the Church who are in the World and are called Bishops**

Let us speak to you the ranks of holy bishops, who are ordained overseers by God over the souls of the faithful who are in the world. Although we address you second for the sake of orderliness, speaking first to the monastics, you who are primates in the world are nevertheless first in rank. Before all else I beg you to bring to mind and recognize with wisdom the rank which you possess, the dignity and the work, where it began, and why it was established, and what was commanded to be done by those who established it. For when one knows these things as he ought to, he profits threefold, recognizing the gravity and hardship of the post and not willingly approaching it as a easy or pleasant task, knowing his weaknesses, but renouncing it completely, although he is condemned by infirmities of his mind or by those who are close to him, as the first saints did and taught. Or taking upon himself to be a bishop, he strives according to God's pleasure to perform the work of providence, or shall not do what is worthy, and recognize the harm and the deficiency in goodness to be in himself, and by the con-

science of his mind he judges himself, considering himself guilty. . . .

It is also necessary to know for what reason the work of the office of bishop was established by Christ and the Apostles. It is evident that the primary purpose is to be the head and commander of the priests and people and to watch over everyone like a sleepless sentinel and with the eyes of the mind to straighten the crooked and to keep the straight firm in their rectitude. And what a bishop is commanded to be or do, that Paul reveals in writing to Timothy, "Now a bishop must be above reproach . . . temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money" and so forth, (Tim 3:2)....

He adds this, "He should be an overseer of the ministry of the word," that is, he is to study and to know and to serve the ministry of the divine laws, and first to accept the work and then the material responsibility, as the Apostles did and taught. For they say, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." (Acts 6:2) Although the table is service to the poor and not to themselves, nevertheless he commanded that they feed the bodies of the poor less than the souls impoverished of good

with spiritual food, which is the ministry of the word. For the sake of physical nourishment they established the Order of Stephen to serve the people and they themselves preached the Word of God (cf. Acts 6:5). And this is what is commanded to the bishops: to be overseers of the ministry of the word, to comfort those who are recovering, that is, to those who do not have infirmity of faith, who accept the apostolic See, they are bound to carry on the work of the Apostles, as they are the followers of the first holy patriarchs. And those who shall have the rank of bishop and are not trained in the ministry of the word, it is necessary to surround themselves with those who will cultivate them in this divine grace, so that they can give to their co-servants the nourishment of the word of God at any hour.

Thus did the ranks of Apostles who first accepted the office bishop from Christ conduct themselves and teach their followers to act according to his law. Yet, in these troubled times we have departed greatly from their good example. While those who are willing to accept it know no other reason to be bishops, but to collect belongings from those who obey them by various schemes and from glorifiers, to hunt for glory which ought to be





called dishonor and not glory. According to the Lord's commandment, good works in the name of God are the cause of one's true glory: "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven," (Mat 5:16). And the glory of men is opposed to the glory of God, as was said by the Lord about some, "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," (John 12:43). But also they shall be condemned to their faces as infirm by those who praise them because of the desire with which they pursue praise and glory. . . .

But you who are apologists for the truth and followers of the same goodness, we ask you to be ready in all the spiritual deeds of your pastoral ministry, which you receive from the true Pastor according to the above mentioned bounds and according to the canonical advice of the holy Apostles and their followers. Thus you may stand boldly and with an open face before him who passes on to you the talent of the commandment, giving an account of their gain, with double increase for himself. For which you hear the blessed words, "Good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." (Mat 25:21) We too through your prayers may meet the same in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### **To the Ranks of Priests**

. . . You are designated by your priestly ministry to dedicate your whole soul to God, by giving birth to all into the adoption of the Heavenly Father and into the joint inheritance of Christ. God through the baptism of the holy font, and by the redeeming body and blood of the Lord feeds their souls on immortality.

And now I beg all of you with the love of Christ to open the

eyes of your minds, to awaken from the deadening numbness of daily life, and to know the power of the heavenly work to which you were called by invitation. Your rank is higher than the supernatural angelic host, who with spotlessness and holiness worship Him. And because you became worthy to offer yourselves to this heavenly work, for no reason and under no circumstances let yourselves fall into fault in your ministry as the Apostle warned (cf. II Cor 6:3). But bravely, with willing heart and without laziness perform unflinchingly the regimen of prayers canonized by the holy fathers for each hour. And with a clean soul and pure heart, with spotless faith and great hope, with innocent mind and perfect love serve with fear and trembling the divine mystery. Do not go mindlessly, like water through a pipe, through the mystical words of prayer which you offer, whether they be Psalms, Scripture, Hours [services] or private prayers of the priest during the Holy Eucharist or other canonical rites, rather do them with great thought. And if possible, do them with tears and great fear, so that you bring them forth in a renewing manner from your heart and your

fervent supplications of a petitioner. He grants yet more abundantly what is asked, according to the Gospel, "For every one who asks, receives," (Mat. 7:8) and so forth.

Know that in the earliest times of the Apostles when the spring of faith had just blossomed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and through the grace of the Holy Spirit from their own minds they spoke the words of prayer as was proper to the hour of the performance of all rites and the Divine Mystery. And in later times, since the winter of sin was close at hand freezing by its ice and severity the warmth of the love of all toward God and dulling men to the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which was seen with the eye of their souls by the Spirit-bearing holy Doctors of the Church, therefore, in the Scripture, they bequeathed everything to those who followed them, so that guided by these Scriptures we might perform without error or stumbling all the rites of the church. Thus, it is necessary to offer these things with thought and with great faith and hope.

Know this too, that the calling of your priesthood is not by man and not through man, but from Him, who was called priest according to the order of Melchisedek, who was Himself a true priest, a high priest and a sacrifice to God the Father. And He gave you the calling of His name, and took upon Himself with that name also the work associated with it, to shepherd his people, and always to teach them good works, and to give Himself as a good example for everyone, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance

when the council of elders laid their hands upon you" (I Tim 4:14) and again, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who

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mind, for all are prayers to God for various and sundry gifts and good things from Him. When God Himself, the gift-giver of good, sees the

labor in preaching and teaching," (1 Tim 5:17). Therefore we pray that you perform your work according to the name of your calling, and as the fathers and parents of your people, give them at all times spiritual guidance, always teaching in the church, in public places, and at home, admonishing each according to his or her age and exhorting them to godliness...

And now we ask all of you to be slow to move to argument and fights and to be quick to move to reconciliation and peace. And let no one who is strong in physical aggressiveness try to deprive his fellows or wrong them, so that he may not have as his judge and prosecutor God-who defends the rights of destitute and may not pay for the eternity what he embezzled doing this temporary life. ...

Let none of you love the blindness of ignorance of priestly knowledge on account of laziness or worldly preoccupations. It is not possible for everyone to be perfect in all grace, which the divine commandments demand from priests; however, those who minister must be faultless, that is, they must read the church books correctly, observe the finest study of the chants in church, and then present themselves for ordination to the priesthood.

Again, let no one among the priests or people judge the church before princes of this world or before the people of other nations or before Christians, so that he will not be judged by the apostolic and canonical commandment, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, "When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the righteous instead of the saints." (1 Cor. 6:1) And the holy fathers in their canons command that priests who do this be defrocked...

And now, let these few admonitions which we wrote be enough from us to you priests, given not by commanding as a ruler but by beseeching as a co-servant. And what

is missing from our advice you must to learn from the canonical writings of the first fathers, by which they guided the children of the church to the glory of God.

When you disgrace baptism and the baptizing priest, this disgraces the Holy Spirit, for through Him the baptized are born in the font. And when you disgrace the soul of man, the same blasphemy goes up to God, for the soul is the breath of God, and the face is the image of God, so too the mouth is the receiver of the body and blood of Christ. And now, do not sadden the Holy Spirit of God with such base and vile words, lest the Spirit of God that dwells in you through the font depart from you and the spirit of Satan

enter and dwell in your hearts in his place.

Furthermore, we give the following commandment to all believers in general, that you nourish your children in the fear of God, admonishing them during the days of their childhood to be God-loving, merciful, prayer-loving and teaching them the word of prayer and rebuking them so that they do not learn filthy words and swearing, for in the time of childhood the advice of parents takes root better in the minds of children with uneraseable memory, with them you will receive the reward of your good deeds from the Lord.

And hold love toward each other as the head of all good. Toward the poor, the naked, the strangers, the imprisoned and the sick, show sympathy and mercy, through this you will become the heirs of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ.

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**To the People**

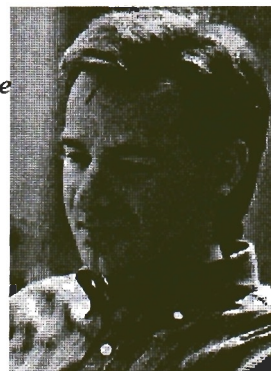
Farmers and people in general listen to the advice of God's commandment which we give to you. The spiritual medicine is especially necessary for you for the healing of your souls, so that you may be cured of the infirmity of your sins.

Hence we ask you, do not lose the eternal pleasures of the soul which the saints enjoy in the kingdom of heaven through the pleasures of the body in this ephemeral life.

And since you are temples of God, as the Apostle said (cf. 1 Cor 3:16) and the spirit of God dwells in you through the baptism of the font, do not corrupt your Divine temple of your souls by abominable prostitution or promiscuity, so that God does not corrupt you on the day of judgment with the fire of Hell, as the Apostle Paul writes, (1 Cor. 3:17)...

Moreover, do not make your tongues work for Satan through evil and bitter swearing, especially since it defiles the faith, the soul, the baptism of the font, the baptizing priest, the face and the mouth. These are transgressions greater than renouncing one's faith and circumcision. When those of other nations make Christians deny their faith, they do not make them disgrace God. But when you disgrace the faith, you do not disgrace man, but God, for the faith of all who worship is in God.

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# Wounded in the Jungle



## An interview with an Ex-Armenian Priest

Interview conducted by  
**R. PANOSSIAN**

*Note: Upon the requests of the interviewee, a former married priest, we have kept his identity anonymous.*

*Q. Can you give us a brief introduction about yourself?*

A. I have been educated both overseas and here in this country and have graduate and post-graduate degrees. I have been involved in our Armenian community life in this country for the past thirty years. . . . Instead of speaking about myself, I will concentrate mainly on two close friends of mine who went to school with me overseas, namely at the Seminary in Antelias, where they were ordained celibate priests. Both of them quit and got married. I knew them while they were priests in this country and was very close to them. I am close friends with them even after they left the priesthood. I also know some others who quit the priesthood in the last so many years, whom I have seen also since they became laymen. However, I will concentrate on my two good friends, with whom I have associated both before and after their priesthood in the Armenian Orthodox Church or rather Armenian Apostolic Church. Parenthetically, we should say Apostolic rather than Orthodox because some Armenians, unfortunately, misinterpret the term *orthodox* by voiding the term from its original meaning.

*Q. What was it that drew these priests or individuals into the Church in the first place?*

A. I know these ex-priests because I went to school with them in Antelias. They were in Antelias because it was one of the best secondary schools at the time. Obviously this was not the only reason. There were other reasons too: poverty, which was a terrible fact at that time, that is 35-40 years ago in the Middle East. Hence, these young people, at the age of 13 or so were in the Seminary because it was a good school, good discipline, away from some of the dangers of the outside world and the parents liked that. And then poverty got them into this school. Later on as they went through the Seminary, they were brainwashed to become celibate priests. This is how my two friends became celibate priests; others also went through the same process.

The brainwashing took place during the six or seven years in the Seminary. It was done through various methods. Primarily, these young souls at the age of 13, 14, or 15 up to the age of 16 or 17 were constantly brainwashed to believe that "devotion to your Armenian nation" was a big attraction. This is called *ad hominem* in Latin, [i.e. a form of argument that rests on prejudice rather than on proof, designed to influence feelings rather

than intellect]. There were many other ways *ad hominem*, great people, teachers, both clergy and lay, were able to convince these young souls to take the vow of celibacy. So ultimately, it was a way out... an exit out of a "no exit" life. Hence they went into the priesthood. After ordination, they stayed in the monastery for a while, though I think they should have stayed longer. Perhaps they should have stayed for another 20 years until they reached the age of 40, so that they were more prepared and mature, emotionally, intellectually and otherwise. . . maybe we'll come back to this question later on.

So they stayed in the Seminary for a while, some of them went and studied in colleges and universities and others went to Europe to study. My two friends continued their studies and eventually became Vartabeds and came to the United States. (I do not wish to delve further in respect of their anonymity.) After some years overseas, they came to the United States, however they had no parish experience. One of them came to New York, a good priest with many capabilities, but unfortunately young, in his 20's, and there he is in New York and he is in his parish.

It is difficult to say what attracted them to the Church. Perhaps some devotion to the Armenian

nation and the Armenian Cause, because they were trained in that area for many years. Something like eighteen hours a day and 365 days a year. The brainwashing took place with all the arguments, one of them being the service to the Armenian nation plus the fact that this was a better way of life than being a shoe repairman, or being hungry on the street. Obviously, all these were the wrong reasons to become a priest. I know these people, I talked with them and I was a part of them during our years in the Seminary.

*Q. Was there a "payback" for the education they received?*

A. Well, they did serve the Armenian Church. But then, later on we will see what will happen and why they will quit. They went into the priesthood because it was a way out. I don't think there was much devotion or calling by God. Not in the cases of many of these people that I know. There may be individuals who had the calling to serve God later on, for example Vazken Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and Torkom Srpazan of Jerusalem. These two individuals have shown true devotion and calling. There may be others but let us suffice with these two examples.

Going back to my two friends, I don't think there was any real calling. When the time came, as we say in Armenian "*Yerpuor tanagu vosgoreen hasav*" [when the knife reached the bone], when they were cornered and the going got tough, they could not be tough enough. So they said, "Alright, I can't take it any more."

*Q. Were these two celibate priests?*

A. Yes, both were celibate priests.

Here, I don't want to comment on married priests. They have different motivations in life, and I have to confess that many of them fail as a married priest, or let's say most of them. I know a married priest who is successful and he be-

came a married priest as an adult only after having succeeded in life, in general.

*Q. What are your thoughts on the age of ordination?*

A. Both of my friends were ordained between the ages of 19 & 21, so I will concentrate on this rather than on those who have chosen celibate priesthood at a mature age. My friends were ordained priests, *apeghas*, under certain circumstances. The brainwashing that we mentioned earlier, had made them think that devotion to the Armenian nation was in itself a duty or calling by God. It was an artificial calling by God, dictated by the teachers, professors and the other priests and the ordaining bishop. It seems that most of them went into it because they found an easy way of life... to serve the Armenian nation and the Armenian Church. They couldn't do anything else. Their years of training, their whole teenage years were spent in the seminary. There was no way out. If they had left the seminary, they needed to start from zero in the outside free world. These were the circumstances in which these young people were ordained.

*Q. Were the assignments of these priests on a parish or a diocesan level?*

A. They were ordained as priests and stayed in the monastery

edge. But eventually, they ended up leaving the monastery and going into a parish. One of my friends was assigned directly to parish ministry and that killed him because a) he was not ready, b) the parish was not ready. Let me explain the second reason. Although there are very respectable and honorable people among the Armenians who can treat their clergyman with enough respect and at least tactfully, the ones who consciously hurt the priest are the most dangerous. Although there are people in the Armenian Church who are Christian people, there are also those people who happen to be *Hokapartzoos* [parish council] or *Yerespokhans* [diocesan delegates] of the parish. These people are not deserving to hold these positions in the church and it is such people who hurt the priest the most. They hurt the priest so much and they band together for numerous reasons. These priests were not ready to take this kind of a blow, this kind of abuse, to a point that priesthood became too narrow. They couldn't survive because they were not ready. Well, one might ask, why weren't they ready? Because there wasn't enough preparation before ordination and there wasn't enough time to mature.

For example, they should have taken more pastoral theology courses. They should have had tools or weapons to work with. They should have had courses and training that would teach them to survive within thorns and within a jungle—the Armenian Church. Figuratively speaking, a jungle where there are many dangerous and wild animals... there are tamed animals also. There are animals that would eat the priest up. There were

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for some years. While in the monastery, they assumed teaching assignments or administrative duties within the monastery. Some of them even went to a university nearby or were able to gain further knowl-

such cases, there have been and will continue to be such cases. A friend of mine would say that the profession or the business of a priest is of the road where it is full of thorns, rocks and so forth... It's





not an easy road. These priests were told that it was an easy, rosy road. They were not prepared for the rough conditions of the road, so that when the going got tough, they could take it. These priests could not take it because they did not have thick skin. You see, a priest should probably be sensitive, sensible, understanding . . . all that, plus at the same time, have a very very thick skin, so that the people in the jungle wouldn't be able to hurt him with their words, their insults. They wouldn't be able to insult a human being who has been raised very sensitive and fragile since the day he went to the seminary at the age of 13.

*Q. Are you saying that the priest is supposed to have the right answer for everybody despite how he feels?*

*A. The priest should be loving and all merciful and all forgiving and at the same time have such a tough skin that when those people come to hurt him, he would be protected. It is not easy to develop a sensitive spirit and mind and then face the dangerous people in the jungle.*

*Q. Do you think that a parish assignment was a wrong assignment for these priests?*

*A. Yes, that was a mistake, being assigned to a parish without preparation.*

*Q. So then, if they were not assigned to a parish could they have been cultivated as better leaders in other areas?*

*A. They would have remained in the monastery, teaching or doing administrative work. Hence, by the time they reached the age forty, they would have developed a kind of balance between compassion and the proper skills needed to survive in a parish. It is very difficult to be so compassionate, to be an embodiment of Christian virtues and survive in troubled waves of parish life. These priests could not survive. When the going gets tough, you*

have to be tough. You can not be a Gomidas Vartabed if you are in Turkey. If you are like Gomidas Vartabed and so sensitive, so humane and so compassionate and then the Turks do to his people what they did . . . then you go crazy, you

*Aren't they saying,  
"I pity you my son, why  
did you go into the  
priesthood? You could  
go and beg or drive a  
bus and make a living."*

burst and you die. You die and live as a mad person all your life like Gomidas Vartabed did. Why do you think Gomidas went crazy? It's because he was not able to face man's inhumanity to man. Our parish priests were not ready and are not ready to face man's inhumanity to man. Parishioners, parish council, delegates, etc. going out and insulting him and hurting him all the way to his bones. Now this is real . . . there are real things like this in our parishes. When people or parishioners look at a priest and indirectly insult him by saying, "Son what drove you into the priesthood? You're not blind, neither lame nor deaf; you are a complete human being physically. How come you went into the priesthood? Aren't they saying, "I pity you my son, why did you go into the priesthood? You could go and beg or drive a bus and make a living." Is that why he went into the priesthood? Of course these were not the only reasons that these two priests quit. Nevertheless, there are people in our parishes who have no right to call themselves Armenians or Christians. Not at all. These people do not even know they are hurting the priest. The animal does not know that he is a dangerous animal in the jungle. They hurt people left and right, but they are

there for their business, to promote their own self and business in the parish church. And when one day the parish priest faces these people, they "poison" him. Unfortunately, there are many of these in the Armenian parishes. Again, these priests were not ready to face these realities.

*Q. Rather than resigning why didn't these priest ask for reassignment?*

*A. Because, wherever they turned they would have faced the same situation, the same jungle. As I said, though there were other reasons, they quit primarily for two reasons: the parish was too "wild" to survive and they weren't ready to live in such environment. Perhaps,*

*reassignment might have worked better, but in the case of these two, they said, "Good-bye! Let others fight in this jungle . . . I quit."*

*Q. What do you think the Church should do or should have done to better prepare parish priests?*

*A. Well, that's why I thought Torkom Srpazan went to Jerusalem. Probably to do his best in preparing one or two better priests. The demands are many; we do need better priests. In order to prepare them, we need to keep them in the seminary for a longer period of time. We need to give them higher education, college or university, before they are ordained into the priesthood. They need to know how to survive in a society. They need to know the tools to survive in parishes, the kinds of parishes that I described earlier. One day a young priest asked an older priest how should he survive, the older priest said, "Look, you have to be both blind and deaf in order to survive well in a society like this." Both of your eyes should be blind not to see some of the things that you see as a parish priest, or as a holy person, both your eyes and ears. At a moment's notice, you should be wise enough to make yourself completely deaf and completely blind and then wise enough to absorb the sticking*

attacks of your parishioners. In order to do that you need some maturity. You need not only university education, theological education and pastoral theology, but also skills that teach you how to survive in a society. This education and training should take place in the seminary at first, not in the parish. So you prepare yourself until the age of thirty or older and then you serve and practice some of your skills in the monastery. Then maybe at the age of forty you may be assigned to a parish. The two priest that we mentioned, if they had been prepared until the age of forty and then assigned to a parish, they would not have quit. The case is the same with many other classmates of mine who were ordained celibate priests and then quit. Of course the age is only a relative point. There may be a turning point or some mature faster at the age of thirty or thirty five, but the preparation is crucial. Otherwise, you will be burned out and you will quit.

*Q. What should the parishes do?*

*A.* Well, the parishes should see that those one or two percent of ill-willed people are not permitted to participate in the ongoing life of the parish. These individuals should not be permitted to come forward and serve as parish council or delegates and then at the end destroy the priest, both with their words and deeds. There are other things that the parishes can do in order to show love and respect to their priest. I would say that 50% or more of the people in the parishes should learn how to be reasonable and cultivated Armenian Christians. In reality there is a lack of this. The rest fall into the other percentage of the parishioners who are neither true Armenians nor true Christians. It is in this kind of a *milieu* that the young Armenian priest finds himself. He finds himself among people who might not even believe in the church, but are there for their own reasons,

for their own business. Perhaps to find a bride for their son or a husband for their daughter. This is why it is imperative that a priest is aware of these situations and comes to a parish with a wider perspective. It is only then that he might move more correctly and not be burned out. These factors should be considered when preparing young people for the priesthood.

*Q. How should the priest be prepared in the United States?*

*A.* It is a very difficult road. Of course there have been educated people, with masters degree and above who have gone into the celibate priesthood, but those are the exception. In the United States, until we have a good monastery or seminary, and until we have parishes with better Armenians and better Christians, we will not be able to prepare priests very easily. If the groundwork is not there, why should a person go into the priesthood? After getting a bachelors degree in a given field, why priesthood? What is there for a priest? God's calling?...What calling? In a parish community like ours, do you think there would be people who would want to go into the priesthood? Of course, I do not wish to hurt the deacons or the seminarians who are going into the priesthood, maybe they have God's calling. But the people that I am talking

*...both your eyes  
should be blind not to  
see some of the things  
that you see as a  
parish priest...*

about are the people that I know do not have the calling. Is it because the Turks killed our parents, why . . . why? Having described our parishes, what reason is there? Is God

calling them at the age of 20 or 21 or is somebody brainwashing them, or is it that the world is too tough and they have the easiest way out in the priesthood? Each priest or deacon will have to answer these questions for themselves. If it is God's calling, then I challenge them to prepare themselves properly.

*Q. Can you make a brief comparison between the life of these individuals as priests and life as laymen?*

*A.* Well, life as a priest brought them to the end of the rope. Another problem of these celibate priests was loneliness and the need for companionship and so on. Thus, the lack of preparation and the need for companionship lead them to "failure," and they quit. I have in mind a half a dozen educated people who, under the circumstances I described, left the priesthood.

Now as a layman, they learned their trade and they are doing quite well. As a priest they had 602 headaches and they had to speak 601 different languages. As a layman now they have just one language and one family, hard work and existence. These ex-priests that I know are still involved in Armenian life, but at their free will. Either as a writer or some other capacity . . . they come and go. They are not very active in the church...none of them are Sunday School superintendents, although they could have been or could be. They are like others, but they treat their priest or bishop with more respect and in a more civilized manner. They work hard as a layman. They have their own little family. One job and no headaches. Now, why couldn't we, Armenians, bring our priests or our parishes to such a level, where there was more order and less headaches, instead of 1001 unnecessary problems. Why? What is the problem? Life as a layman gives them a chance to be a private person again, gives





them a chance to be an Armenian . . . Probably, they teach their children a little better value system, about the Armenian Church and Armenians. And if they are not involved, I don't blame them, because of the great hurt that they have felt.

...  
As a priest your life is not yours, but as a layman you dictate your own course of life. As a priest you are ever visible and are working for the church community and you are expected to be totally selfless for your community. This in itself can exhaust you mentally, emotionally and physically.

It seems to me that we should not let young people come to the Armenian Church as an unprepared young priest and serve in that wild jungle.

*Q. What about married priesthood?*

*A.* You know, they asked Socrates, the great philosopher, "Should one get married or stay single?" Socrates was hesitant to answer. When they asked why he was hesitant, he said, "Because it does not make a difference whether one should be married or single . . . It does not really make a difference, because at the end both will regret." So it doesn't make a difference whether you choose to be a married priest or a celibate priest in the sense that Socrates implies. Now that I have past that stage of 40 or 50, I am convinced that it really doesn't make a difference. That's not the thing. A married priest has his own different way of life, family, responsibilities and so forth. On the other hand, who is the Armenian girl who will honestly marry a priest or a priest-to-be? Show me one . . . with all the headaches . . . that girl must be crazy if she does. The difficulties that marriage will bring will prevent him from fulfilling some of his duties. But a celibate priest, might have a better chance to serve his church. The question of marriage or celibacy is just like

Socrates's anecdote, "It doesn't make a difference." The wise person will understand that that is not the question. In fact marriage could be "detrimental to the survival of the Armenian Church, just as the Catholic Church now feels the effects of

*The brainwashing had made them think that devotion to the Armenian nation was in itself a duty or calling by God.*

that. Therefore, the Catholic Church is letting hundreds and hundreds of priests leave the priesthood and their excuse is marriage . . . nonsense. . . that is not the reason. Marriage will hurt his priesthood, in some cases it may help him. As Tiran Srpazan Nersoyan used to say, "Will marriage all of a sudden make a person wiser?" . . . No, marriage will just give him some physical satisfaction, perhaps nothing else . . . So, therefore, the question is not married or celibate priesthood. The question is the priest and his preparation.

*Q. What would you say to a young person who is contemplating to become a priest, celibate or married, but is unable to make a decision?*

*A.* His timely choice will be to take his bag and go to a monastery and serve there as a teacher or administrator; live there in that community until certain urges come to nil and until he is prepared. This is the way I think a priest should be prepared. If, however, he feels that marriage will not hinder his service to the church and his community, and if he finds the person of his heart, and if this person honestly, 100% honestly, agrees that "Yes, my husband will be a priest and I will help him to the best of my ability

and I know that he will have 1001 headaches" then fine, let him get married. Then marriage will not be a hindrance. In fact, it may be an asset in that case. But, you cannot find an Armenian girl who will get married with an Armenian priest, with such a spirit and honesty. Which Armenian girl in her right mind will do this? And if she does, I bet you after the honeymoon, things will change because she is more down to earth, and she will pull him to the earth and she will want all the material things . . . all those material things which will be against his own profession.

This type of a wife will be a disaster, both to the priest and the parish. It would be a scandal to her husband, to the parish and to herself. . . I know such a woman . . . I know such a wife. I know women who are wives of priests . . . they got married just because they fell in love or something with that deacon and zooooom. . . After the honeymoon things change, because she is more materialistic. . . she is not Gomidas Vartabed. She doesn't want a husband with 1001 problems, a husband who is working for a different "world" than hers. Now, after the honeymoon she creates such a disaster . . . well, there fails the marriage. . . there fails the priesthood. . .

*Q. Where does the church hierarchy fall in this picture?*

*A.* Well, I would rather not comment on this. All I can say is that the hierarchy did fall short of supporting the priest in his turmoil. Only a few members of the hierarchy are some source of inspiration or motivation, the rest barely provided basic support and guidance.

To bring this conversation into a conclusion, I would say that proper preparation of our priests is extremely important on the one hand and the respect, support and cooperation of the parish on the other.







priests every year for the next ten years.

This plan provides only the absolute minimum number of priests. It does not take into account the diocese's 12 "mission" parishes, young communities which are growing toward full parish status. These "mission" parishes are currently served in part by clergy who visit from nearby and not-so-nearby parishes. These priests are expected to provide for the liturgical and pastoral needs of the mission parishes in addition to their regular full-time home parish responsibilities.

Neither does it provide for adequate staffing of the very large parishes in Boston, New York, Detroit and elsewhere, where even two or three full-time priests are not enough to meet all of the parishes' liturgical, sacramental, educational and pastoral needs.

The plan also ignores the need for clergy in non-parish positions such as education, youth ministry and administration, to name a few.

In the last ten years only five parish priests have been ordained for service in the Eastern Diocese. This is woefully short of the projected number of new priests needed in the Diocese, to maintain even the current deficient levels. With the supply of clerical leaders in the Church dwindling, the very existence of the Armenian Church in America is in jeopardy in the coming decades.

Where will the Church's new priests come from? Formerly the Armenian seminaries in Jerusalem; in Etchmiadzin, Armenia; and in Antelias, Lebanon supplied the overwhelming majority of priests for the American dioceses. But for various reasons, the number of priests arriving in America from these seminaries has all but shut down. In the last ten years, the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin supplied only two priests to the

Eastern Diocese; the Seminary of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem provided one. Faced with their own particular vicissitudes (not the least of which being the dramatic growth of the Church in Armenia), the Armenian seminaries abroad are challenged at the mere prospect of providing clergy for their own needs, much less those of the American dioceses.

In short, the Armenian seminaries abroad may no longer be considered an endless source of priests for the Armenian Church in America. Providing adequate numbers of qualified priests to serve the churches in America is no longer the problem of far-away ecclesiastical authorities. The recruitment, training and ordination of priests must now become (indeed should have become years ago) the concern, the business and the responsibility of the Church in America—of the hierarchy in America, of the priests, and of all of those who consider themselves children of the Armenian Church.

The clergy shortage in the Armenian Church in America is clearly related to a larger phenomenon being experienced by many religious groups in the United States. A 1989 New York Times article brought to light the concern of Jews, Catholics, and various Protestant

young adults who are shunning human service careers including the priesthood, in favor of more financially lucrative professions. There is no question that young Armenians growing up in America in the 1980's are influenced by this trend away from community, ethnic and spiritual awareness and concern. Like the vast majority of their American peers, our Armenian young people are choosing their professions in a single-minded pursuit of financial success, with the misguided belief that it alone will breed complete fulfillment and meaning in life.

Responding naturally to their own collective memory of the tragedies of genocide, Armenians have a particular instinct to steer their children toward careers which will lead to financial independence.

But there are other factors particular to the Armenian Church which are responsible for the tragic decline in the number of qualified young men considering priesthood. Among our people there prevails a negative perception of priests, a distorted mindset which does more to discourage talented young men from considering the vocation of the priesthood than any force in our society. It is a throwback to the village priest, uneducated but basically good-hearted, who worked once

a week for whatever spare change and food handouts the villagers could muster that week. The village priest was nevertheless given some degree of honor as one who knew the mystical and mysterious rites of the Church, and as one who provided an essential service to the community: baptisms, weddings and funerals. A

talentless beggar—hardly the inspiring model for an upwardly mobile, future-oriented generation of American youth. And surprisingly it is a prevailing attitude. I cannot count the number of well-intentioned Armenians who, when

*Armenian young people are choosing their professions in pursuit of financial success, with the misguided belief that it alone will breed complete fulfillment and meaning in life.*

denominations alike, that the number of entrants to the clergy is on a sharp decline ("Shortage of Entrants to the Clergy Causing Alarm for U. S. Religions," July 9, 1989). The article credits among other things, the so-called "Me Generation" of



they discovered that I wanted to become a priest, exclaimed, "But you're such a smart boy. You could choose any career," as if only helpless waifs become priests.

It is curious that our people remember the image of the village priest, and not of the countless priests in our history who became charismatic leaders, intellectuals, writers, musicians, builders, teachers, and theologians. Our people are either unable, or refuse to see the potential for greatness and excellence in the

priest, and in the Church. As a people who have suffered through centuries of occupation and oppression, we have become stuck on, and content with mediocrity. When we begin to show our young people the greatness of the Church; the dynamic power by which our Armenian Church's unique expression of the Christian faith can touch and inspire a person, strengthen and give meaning to his or her life, and provide hope and joy in a hopeless and troubled world filled with despair and loneliness, then our young men will be more willing to be a part of this good work as priests in the Armenian Church.

Our youth will not come forward, however, until the hierarchy makes the recruitment of priests a priority. As shepherds to the flock, the bishops have an obligation to provide for the assured and continued life and growth of the Church. Seeking out and encouraging talented young men to consider choosing the profession of priesthood in the Armenian Church must be one of the bishop's fundamental goals in the administration of his diocese; it must be a regular theme whenever and wherever the bishop addresses his people, especially at convocations of youth. The bishop must involve himself completely in efforts to attract and train young men for the priesthood.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Over the years our bishops seem to have proceeded from the premise that seminary candidates will spontaneously come forth from the youth, without active

recruiting efforts by the Church hierarchy and leadership. Sermons, speeches, articles and programs related to the priesthood and other church vocations are all but non-

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existent. There is no Catholic diocese in the country which does not have a Director of Church Vocations to oversee the important work of actively seeking out and advising prospective priests and other church workers. No such position exists, or has ever been contemplated in any of the American dioceses of the Armenian Church. The only institution for recruiting and training Armenian priests in America, St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, has received only lukewarm support from the hierarchy.

The failure of the hierarchy to recognize and to respond to the clergy shortage in America is yet another bitter consequence of the crippling short-sightedness demonstrated by the Church leadership in America in virtually all phases of its administration. I fear that our Church is wandering into the 21st century with little sense of direction or purpose, satisfied merely by its day to day survival, and by the accomplishments of our ancestors centuries ago. It is high time for the Armenian Church to objectively and critically assess her place in America, to define her purpose and mission and to chart a course for the future, directing all of her efforts and energies toward the fulfillment of these goals. Until the Church is able to concisely articulate her *raison d'etre*, the ends toward which she is striving and her specific plan of action to attain those ends, she can never hope to engage the hopes, and dreams, the talents and professional goals of our young people as they make career decisions. In this future-oriented society, few young men will eagerly step forward to

devote their lives to the service of a Church or any institution which exists exclusively as a curator of ancient traditions and past glories. When the hierarchy begins to use the history and traditions of the Armenian Church as a point of departure, rather than as an end in itself; when the bishops feel ready to move on from an attitude of preservation and conservatism to an attitude of risk-taking, creativity, challenge and growth, then we will have a Church which breeds qualified leaders in abundance.

Attracting talented men to become priests in the Armenian Church is a task which demands the attention of the entire Church community: the bishops and priests, as well as all of the faithful children of the Church. Priests do not fall from heaven. Neither does a young man devote his life to the Church as the result of a sudden, lightning bolt of divine intervention, or by perusing the Help Wanted section of the New York Times. Tomorrow's Armenian priests are our altar servers, our choir members; our sons, grandsons and brothers whose devotion to God is nurtured and cultivated in a loving Armenian Church community, in which our ancient faith is made vital and relevant to the people.



*Dr. Michael Findikyan has spent the past year developing programs and visiting parishes for recruitment for St. Nersess Armenian Seminary. He is currently completing his post-graduate studies at Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia.*



# The Lost Meaning of

VIGEN GUROIAN

**T**here has been talk of late within the Armenian Church that new members should be added to its list of saints. Dn. Hratch Tchilingirian cites in his article "Canonization of the Victims," (*Window*, Summer 1990) the joint communique of Vazken I and Karekin II, of April 1989, in which both Catholicos proposed canonization of the victims of the Armenocide. In his article, Dn. Hratch raises the important question of whether the Armenian Church is actually prepared to engage in such a serious activity. Rightly, he points out also the theological and practical pitfalls of blanketly canonizing all 1.5 million victims of that awful catastrophe.

There is no question that among that number there were many who died in the way of the ancient martyrs or whose suffering even short of death (need we think further than Komitas Vartabed?) must count as a mark of supreme holiness. Yet, oddly, perhaps even ironically, the Armenian Church, which has given the whole catholic and universal Church so many new martyrs and confessors in this century, may lack, as Dn. Hratch suggests, the clarity of vision and the will to make the crucial distinction between victims and martyrs. Indeed, the Armenian Church has

been confusing victimology with martyrology for some time now. The political as well as psychological reasons which have tempted the Church into this confusion are not difficult to identify. As Dn. Hratch observes: "Seventy five years have passed and the world seems to 'ignore' the victims of the Genocide, thus, in our frustration, the ultimate honor that we can render our victims is to declare them as saints." The confusion of victimology and martyrology has been a useful expedient, since a godless world knows what victims are and honors them under such banners as human rights and national sovereignty but does not know how to value as martyrs in the Christian sense victims who died as witnesses to the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. One cannot wholly begrudge Armenian secular and political leaders for adopting the strategy of "victim politics." The Church, however is another matter. It ought to be able to make and insist upon the distinction between dying because one is Armenian and willingly giving one's life up for Christ.

#### *Sainthood and the Culture in Which We Live*

The ill effects for the Church of the strategy of victimization are compounded by the cultural environments in which most Armenians

live, whether in the diaspora or within Armenia. But here I restrict my observations to the culture in which Armenians of the Western diaspora live. In this culture's art, music, literature, television and cinema the saints are virtually absent. In such a context, even the repeated mention of the saints in Christian liturgies loses the power to persuade people that the saints are truly present, that there really is a *communio sanctorum*. I need only look within myself to realize that for modern people, including the vast majority of those who sit in the pews of Armenian parishes here in America, the saints are culturally "useless." We do without them; and if we give thought to why once saints were important to people, we are baffled.

Yet within antiquity, as Christianity expanded in a pagan world, saints were expected, looked for by Christians as proof and testimony to the truth of their faith. Indeed in the early Church the identification of the saints was populist and spontaneous. There were no set rules for identifying saints or for their canonization. At first the honor was reserved primarily for persons who died for the faith as witnesses to Christ, i.e. martyrs. But in the second and third centuries in the last days of pagan Rome when persecution of Christians

# SAINTHOOD



increased, it became evident that death by capital punishment could not be the only test of exceptional holiness and imitation of Christ. There were in the various churches individuals who for reasons largely beyond their control escaped violent death but who, nevertheless, made supreme public profession of their faith. These took the name of confessor.

Later after the great persecutions, with the Emperor Constantine's conversion and the legalization of Christianity in 313) and its institution as the religion of the empire under St Theodosius in 381, persecution ceased. Martyrdom had been held forth as special because of its likeness to Christ's willing surrender of his life for the sake of God's redemptive truth and purpose. Now the lives of the ascetics and monks were venerated because of their cruciform way of living. Their paths of discipleship and self-denial were held up as equal in holiness to the way in which the martyrs had died and the confessors had expended their lives.

And so there followed from this new veneration of the lives more than the deaths of persons other categories of sainthood. Confessors came to include men, most often bishops, who dedicated their lives to pastoral concerns. Nobility and monarchs who served the Christian realm well were also included. And the lists expanded to include mystics and scholars, missionaries and founders of monastic orders.

In this duration, the process of identifying saints became increasingly more formal requiring the interventions of local bishops and, later, gatherings of the bishops in councils and special sessions. In the Latin West, this process became highly formalized and legalistic. Very specific criteria for beatification and canonization were in place by the late middle ages and there was the added require-

ment of papal approval. In the Christian East there was less tendency toward formalization and centralization. In both East and West, however, there were practical reasons and circumstances which required some formalization and central control of the cults of saints. For instance, local cults of saints and their veneration threatened to overwhelm the church calendar, detracting from the significance and commemoration of other feast days.

All this makes very interesting history. But one is bound to question whether this discussion *about* sainthood gets any of us closer to a knowledge of the saint. The church historian Peter Brown has argued in his remarkable study *The Cult of the Saints*, that for Christians of antiquity and the middle ages "the holy man" served "as Christ made accessible." In him was available "in distilled" form the very character of Christ. The saint bridged in a personal and immediate fashion, as the high theology and doctrine of the Church could not for the peasant or villager, life and death, time and eternity, the here and the hereafter. So it is not surprising that after the holy man's death early Christians held forth such a figure as an efficacious

even at the level of the trivial, local and everyday."

I find it difficult, however, to imagine how Coleman's or any similar experience and understanding of the saints can be rehabilitated in our time. Let us face it, the many saints of the Armenian calendar whose initial, often local, veneration got their lives included ultimately in our *Haysmavoork* [the book that contains the daily readings of the saints' lives] are about as remote to contemporary Armenian Christians as the Chinese emperors of the Middle Kingdom. And how many believers turn to these saints as a comfort to their own suffering, as illumining of Christian virtue, or as intercessors in prayer. Those saints with whose lives Armenians are most familiar are celebrated because they have become understood as creators and defenders of the Armenian nation and symbols of a resurgent nationalism. There is little sense that I get when in Armenian churches that the invocation of the names of the saints is experienced as a holy presence among the worshippers, that those living are in real communion with the saints, or that the saints represent a compelling example as to how those living ought to conduct their lives in conformity to a crucified God.

But we are all moderns. We carry our cameras and notepads and we visit the places where our ancestors once worshipped - in Armenia, where Gregory with his God-scorned eyes saw the Son descend, where the holy translators labored to breath the breath of God into the flesh of Armenia, where the monks prayed and martyrs shed their blood. Do we, however,

hear the voices of the saints? Do we experience their presence? The great twentieth century poet T. S. Eliot raised these questions when he wrote of a sojourn to the site of an abandoned 17th century English monastic community. Yet it might have been in Armenia or anywhere

*...saints were  
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intercessor through prayer and worship with a divinity who in so many other respects was hidden and unapproachable. As the Roman Catholic theologian John A. Coleman has put it: "Saints . . . traditionally served as God's mediators, signs of the divine presence



where Christians have set down the cross and prayed: "If you came this way/Taking the route, starting anywhere, / It would always be the same: you would put off/ Sense and notion. You are not here to verify? Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity/Or carry report. You are here to kneel/ Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more/ Than an order of words, the conscious occupation/ Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying./ And what the dead had no speech for, when living,/ They can tell you, being dead; the communication/ Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the/ living./ Here, the intersection of the timeless moment/Is England - [Armenia] - and nowhere. Never and always."

#### Why We Need Saints

**A** version of this article was given as a lecture this year at the annual retreat of priests of the Prelacy. The retreat is traditionally held on the feast of St. Levond, the patron saint of priests. I noted, how remote such a feast was from the consciousness and daily living of the people priests serve. Did any of us honestly believe that for the vast majority of even those who were regular church attenders patron saints and guardian angels had any strong reality? Wouldn't it be more honest to admit that patron saints were about as important to Armenian Christians as other curiosities of medieval folk, such as fairies, demons, and leprechauns? In the minds of us moderns, sickness is accounted for in strictly scientific terms. Vocations and professions are not perceived as having any relation to an eternal or supernatural destiny of persons. In such a world what need is there for healing intercessors or models of holiness?

At issue in the Church's contemporary consideration of sainthood is our very identity as Christians in a post-Christendom world. We may not be aware of it, but we need saints for reasons we have forgotten. The Russian reli-

love is more than a pleasant sentiment or good feeling but is the divine measure of our sinfulness and the purifying flame of God's judgment.

Still more importantly, Berdyaev was making the point that we moderns have lost a unified vision of the virtues and of the whole human being before God. We live fragmented lives with a multitude of roles which compete in our minds with no sense of coherence or goal. Marxism tried to rehabilitate the complete image of the ideal human being in the new Communist man. We all know better than ever as a result of the events and

*In the saint, the Christian recognizes the path to perfection to which Adam was called by God when he created the human being in his own image and likeness.*

gious philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev once observed: *The Christian world created the ideal of the saint, i.e. of man completely enlightened and transfigured that had conquered its old nature. What image of man comparable to the ideal . . . of the saint . . . has been created by modern history? The ideal of the citizen cannot be put on the same level. . . A number of professional types which have their own ideal qualifications have appeared - the type of the scientist, the artist, the politician, the business man, the workingman. It is characteristic of our age that the ideal of man is split up into a number of professional images and ideals, [but] the wholeness is lost. . . [Marxists have tried] to convert [the type of the workingman] into a complete ideal image - the image of the "comrade" . . . But in the "comrade" the ideal of man is finally extinguished, the Divine image and likeness is distorted.*

We live in a culture which does not know what virtue is, except in the loose and distended sense of just and fair treatment of others. Ours is a culture which has not the sufficient narrative accounts of life to persuade us that there are some things worth dying for (except perhaps nation), that truth and error have eternal consequences, or that

disclosures of our most recent contemporary political history, even in Armenia itself, the utter disaster of that Promethean venture. The ancients achieved an image of the whole and mature human being in the sage and in the Homeric hero. For Christians it was the saint. The saint was the ideal of the theanthropic human being, - the perfect practitioner of divinemanship. In the saint, the virtues were united and gained a permanence of character through a profound love which witnesses to its divine origin and burns with a desire for a life with God. In the saint, the Christian recognizes the path to perfection to which Adam was called by God when he created the human being in his own image and likeness.

Our culture has lost the example of the saints and the stories of their lives which once upon a time provided in Eastern and Western Christendoms alike the narrative contexts in which persons could strive to be virtuous and discern to what end such a life well lived was directed. But then I am resigned to the fact that Christendom has passed, as has Christian Armenia. As Christians in a post-Christendom age we are challenged to answer the question posed by a twentieth century Christian martyr and



victim of Nazism, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Asked Bonhoeffer: How can we live the Christian life in a "world come of age?"

St. Anthony of Egypt, St. Basil, Sts. Hripsime and Gayané, St. Gregory the Illuminator, St. Nersess the Gracefull can yet be instructive to us in living the Christian life. I am convinced, also, that they need the help of new saints whom we have not yet named. Remembering the holy men and women of the Old Testament the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "What a record all these men have won by their faith! Yet they did not receive what God had promised, because God had decided on an even better plan for us. His purpose was that only in company with us would they be made perfect" (Heb. 11: 39-40). It is important that Armenians today identify persons of this age who have lived sanctified lives and from whom we can take example in living the Christian life. These new saints will bring alive the old and contribute to our union and perfection in Christ.

One sure indication of the vitality of a Christian religious community is not only its capacity to produce such lives but to know how to identify them and hold them forth for remembrance and veneration. And so there is much to think about and be concerned about as to why the Armenian Church has been incapable of identifying and honoring such lives since Gregory of Datev

in the 15th century. We are desperately out of practice in naming saints, leave aside giving up our lives to imitation of their lives.

The point I want to close with is that the ancient wisdom of the catholic churches which have retained the veneration of saints is worth keeping. Christians gain an understanding of salvation, of holiness, and receive instruction in good and evil not primarily from something called Christian philosophy or in bodies of ethical rules or laws but in the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection. On the basis of this revelation our vision extends backward to the lives of the patriarchs and matriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament who in faith waited upon the Messiah; and our vision extends forward from Christ to the proto-martyr Stephen and all the martyrs, confessors, ascetics and monks, bishops, doctors of the faith, Christian princes and queens who followed Christ's example and whom we call saints.

The call for the Armenian Church to canonize those martyred in the Armenocide is valid. But I tremble at what meaning might be given to these lives and deaths by a national community traumatized with a sense of victimization and driven by all too often desperate nationalistic aspirations. Will these new saints merely serve our most atavistic and self-preservationist instincts or will we recapture in their lives and deaths the paschal

and redemptive meaning of our Christian faith? Martyrs and confessors of the Genocide must be remembered. But I suspect also that the saints we need most are those we look for least. For Armenians in the diaspora, especially, are thoroughly modern and captive to the same myopic and morally vacuous secularity as their non-Armenian neighbors and fellows in the workplace. We must look for saints of ordinary life, saintly parents, lawyers, businessmen or teachers, whose lives strike us as, in and of themselves, a kind of miracle, in so far as they show in their lives a measure of heroism and sanctity not expected by the world in which we live. Let us always remember that the first mark of a saint is quite simply holiness.



Dr. Guroian is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at Loyola College in Maryland and visiting lecturer at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary.

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# Reviews

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**Fr. Hovnan Derderian, *Hovvagan Asdvadzabanootyan Kordznakan Tzernark [A Practical Guide to Pastoral Theology - in Armenian] Toronto 1989, 94pp.***

As a pastor, a priest is deeply concerned about what his people need. Sometimes these needs are formulated as questions; sometimes there is only the cry of anguish or silence of grief that has not learned to speak. But the questions are always there, whether voiced or not. The pastor tries to speak to the need of his parish, whether his speaking is in sermons, in writing or in individual or group meetings. The position of the pastor becomes more significant and responsible when he has to make recommendations to his parishioners or to a parishioner. Some of these recommendations are general ones, and are intended to apply to large groups of people, and perhaps universally, like for instance the sermons. Some pastoral advice may be universal and still need to be highly individualized for individuals in varying circumstances. The central questions is "What can the priest do that will best help this particular person meet his/her needs?"

In *A Practical Guide to Pastoral Theology*, Fr. Hovnan Derderian presents the Armenian priest in this pastoral milieu. He presents the priest as the key functionary of pastoral care, and as such, develops his discussion of pastoral theology through three major inter-related themes: a) the calling of the priest, b) the priest in the parish, c) the Armenian priest in the Armenian Apostolic Church. Accordingly, the book is divided into three sections:

In the first section, Fr. Hovnan articulates a biblical definition of the priest and formulates the parameters of the priest's calling, i.e. the priest as a praying person, the priest as a preacher of God's

word, and the priest as a humble servant of Christ.

The second section of the book deals with the practical aspects of a pastors ministry. Here, Fr. Hovnan uses the functions of the priest, as defined in the By-Laws of the Canadian Diocese, as his guide. Then, he explains and expands on each function and provides ample, as well as very useful examples of numerous situation. Indeed, for a person who is studying to become a priest or preparing to become a parish priest, this section will be most valuable in giving them actual scenarios, occasions and situations and the practical solutions or *how to do* of each situation.

The main functions of the priest that are discussed are:

- a) To perform all church services and sacraments according to the canons and traditions of the Armenian Church.
- b) To visit his parishioner and console the sick, the needy and the grieved in his parish and perform all duties that are related to the spiritual growth of his flock, as they are defined in the Scriptures and by the Fathers of the Church.
- c) To supervise the Parish and the Sunday schools.
- d) To supervise the correct application and execution of the instructions and recommendations of the Diocesan by-laws, the decisions of the Parish Assembly, the Primate and the Diocesan Council.
- e) To support and encourage the church choir, the altar servers (deacons, acolytes, etc.) the Sunday and Parish schools.
- f) To present his annual

progress report at the Annual Parish Assembly and to the Primate.

g) And other related tasks, such as ecumenical relations, acknowledging the work and services of his parishioners, etc.

In the last section, the various issues related specifically to the Armenian clergy in the Armenian Church are discussed. Here, Fr. Hovnan expands on the discourses of His Holiness Vazken I concerning the Armenian priests.

Large sections from His Holiness' speeches and encyclicals are quoted and integrated in the conclusion, which gives the book an added value in underlining the viewpoints of the Catholics.

*A Practical Guide to Pastoral Theology* is written clearly and in simple language. As the title suggests,

it is a practical guide, and it should be read by every seminarian or ordained priest who is preparing for a pastoral assignment for the first time, especially in North America. The book is further valuable for it integrates the thoughts, experiences and the difficulties of a young Armenian priest in the field of pastoral care. As such, it is a welcomed contribution to the field of Armenian pastoral theology, which so far lacks in quality and quantity. It is hoped that this book will be the beginning of a series of books that would deal with pastoral issues and problems, discussed specifically from the perspective of the Armenian Church.

The book can be obtained from the bookstore of the *Diocese of the Armentan Church of Canada, 615 Stuart Avenue, Outremont, Quebec H2V 3H2, Canada.*





# Reviews

**Fr. Garen Gdalian, *Medz yes Too Der, [Great are You, O Lord - in Armenian]* (New York, 1989) 136pp.**

*Great are You, O Lord* is a collection of sermons or homilies by Fr. Garen Gdalian, prepared during the forty years of his priesthood in the Armenian Apostolic Church. The sermons are organized under three major themes: a) The Words of the Lord; b) Religious Lessons; c) Contemporary Issues; and an Appendix at the end. Written in a simple, yet endearing language, the sermons reflect the gratifying, as well as difficult experiences of Fr. Garen as a pastor, whose concern for the spiritual well being of his flock seem to be the essence of his ministry.



As in the Preface, Fr. Khajag Barsamian notes, the book does not endeavor to make theological or doctrinal assertions. But rather, Fr. Garen converses with the reader on everyday matters in life, with simple, practical and realistic suggestions. His words are warm, genuine and direct. Certainly, the Armenian reader will appreciate the sermons of Fr. Garen for their value and practical wisdom.

Fr. Garen was ordained a priest in 1948 and has served the Armenian Church until his retirement in 1988. He is also the author of *Key to Inner Peace* (in English) published in 1986.

*Great are You, O Lord* can be obtained from St. Peter Armenian Church, F. G. Gdalian Literary Fund, 100 Troy Schneckady Road, Watervliet, NY 12189.



**Fr. Garabed Kochakian, *Armenian Portraits of Faith*, 1989, Racine.**

The *Armenian Portrait of Faith* presents the traditional iconography of Armenian miniature painting transformed into the genre of colorful stained glass. The relications are of the stained glass windows from the sanctuary of St. Mesrob Armenian Church in Racine, Wisconsin. The history of holy images in the Armenian Church is a long, rich and beautiful one portrayed in sculpture, mural painting and the art of illuminated manuscripts.

The artistic style and didactic quality recapture the best examples in Armenian Miniature painting of the 11th-13th centuries and in conforming to the liturgic traditons of the Armenian Church, explain the Christian message in the medium of colored glass. This multifaceted volume, presents 72 pages filled with full color replications. An invaluable resource book, archive of history, guide to the propriety of liturgical art. Available: St. Mesrob Armenian Church, 4605 Erie St., Racine, WI 53402.

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## On the other side of the Window

# News from A.C.R.A. Group

### Let ACRAG Do It For You!

A broad range of services are available from ACRAG for parish development. With the move toward computerization, more and more parishes are blindly jumping into high technology, over-extending themselves needlessly. ACRAG has put together a package with recommendations that are church-oriented and cost efficient for large and small parishes. Consultation can be done locally or remotely. Before spending money needlessly consult with ACRAG.

Surveys are essential for any organization and in particular the church. The ACRAG Research Department can structure, produce, mail and compile data from your parishioners and return a *thorough* report. Analysis can also be provided.

**NEW!** **DRUGS AND ALCOHOL** are destroying our youth in record proportion.

Now, the ACRAG Department of Community Services has prepared a Drug and Alcohol pamphlet for parents *written in Armenian*. A valuable guide to be distributed by Armenian Churches and priests committed to combatting this epidemic. Available in lots of 50. \$10



As part of a three month tour of the United States, Garegin Chookaszian, Executive Director of the Academy of Sciences in Armenia, made a stop at the ACRAG offices to "look through" the *Window* with co-editor Fr. Vazken Movsesian.

The distribution of *Window* in Armenia was the primary focus of the meeting. Mr. Chookaszian has been commissioned by the Parliament of Armenia to set up a global network for the dissemination of Armenian information. ACRAG will be a vital link in that network. By Summer of 1991, ACRAG will be distributing the electronic version of *Window* in Armenia.

### OPEN a Window FOR A FRIEND!

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## COMPENDIUM . . .

### CONSECRATION

Four priests of the Armenian Church were consecrated bishops by His Holiness Catholicos Vazken I on October 9, 1990 at Holy Etchmiadzin:

**BISHOP KISAG MOURADIAN**, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Argentina. Bishop Mouradian was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1951 and studied at the Armenian Seminary of Jerusalem. He was ordained a celibate priest in 1971. He has served the Armenian Church in Argentina for a number of years.

**BISHOP KHAJAG BARSAMIAN**, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. Bishop Barsamian was ordained a celibate priest in 1971 in Jerusalem. He was elected as primate of the Eastern Diocese in May 1990, after years of service as Vicar General.

**BISHOP HAGOP KILINJIAN**, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Uruguay. Bishop Kilinjian was born in Kessab, Syria, in 1955 and studied at the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. He was ordained a celibate priest in 1978.

**BISHOP HOVNAN DERDERIAN**, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Canada. He was born in 1957 in Beirut. He was ordained a celibate priest in 1980 in Holy Etchmiadzin. Bishop Derderian was elected as Primate of the Canadian diocese in May 1990.



**ARCHBISHOP KAREKIN KAZANJIAN** elected Patriarch of Constantinople (September 5, 1990). Archbishop Kazanjian was born in Istanbul in 1927. In 1940 he was accepted to the Armenian Seminary of Jerusalem, where upon graduation, he was ordained a celibate priest in 1950. In 1951, he returned to Istanbul and was appointed Dean of the Holy Cross Seminary by the then Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian. In 1959, he came to the United States and served as the pastor of St. Mary's Armenian Church, in Washington, D. C. In 1966, he was consecrated a bishop by His Holiness Vazken I and was appointed as the Patriarchal Legate to the Far East. Later, he was elected Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Australia. In 1980, he returned to Jerusalem and served as the Grand Sacristan of the Patriarchate, until his election as Patriarch of Constantinople.

**ARCHBISHOP TORKOM MANOOGIAN** had an audience with His Royal Highness King Hussein of Jordan, in Amman, (September 14, 1990) during which the King presented the Patriarch with his *ferman*, thereby giving him official recognition as the Armenian Patriarch of Jordan and the Holy Land. This tradition goes back to the seventh century, when Khalif Omar Ibn Khattabi gave the first *ferman* and royal recognition to the Armenian Patriarch. Following his enthronement (Oct. 27-28) as Patriarch of Jerusalem, On October 31, 1990, His Beatitude, with a Patriarchal delegation, paid a courtesy visit to the President of Israel, Chaim Herzog.

**BISHOP TAVIT SAHAGIAN** was elected Grand Sacristan of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, (October 26, 1990). The position of the Grand Sacristan is the second highest position of the Patriarchate, which encompasses administrative duties, protection and maintenance of all church belongings and supervision of the orderly performance of all liturgical services and ceremonies. Bishop Tavit was ordained a celibate priest in 1957 and was consecrated a bishop in 1976, by His Holiness Vazken I.

**ARCHBISHOP MESROB ASHJIAN** attends conference in Lausanne, Switzerland — During the week of October 6-11, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian participated in the 9th General Assembly and International Symposium of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). ICOMOS is a non-governmental agency which counsels the UNESCO on the choice of endangered historical monuments which need protection. Archbishop Ashjian brought to the attention of the Assembly the situation of Armenian monuments that are endangered, particularly the historical monuments in Turkey. It is hoped that the International Committee on Historic Towns will meet in Yerevan in September of 1992, where perhaps the current condition of the medieval city of Ani could be discussed and conveyed to UNESCO.

September 23-28, 1990, the Armenian Church participated in the **THIRD CONFERENCE OF THE JOINT COMMISSION OF THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE** between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, hosted by the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambezy, Switzerland. The meeting was aimed at repairing the rift which has existed since the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Representing the Holy See of



Etchmiadzin was **BISHOP MESROB KRİKORIAN**, and the See of Cilicia, **ARCHBISHOP MESROB ASHJIAN** and **ARCHBISHOP ARAM KESHISHIAN**.

Thirty-four theologians from 16 countries unanimously adopted an "Agreed Statement and Recommendations to the Churches" to transcend the theological differences over the nature and person of Jesus Christ. They now agree that "both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of apostolic tradition, though they may have used Christological terms in different ways." The theologians recommended that "anathemas and condemnations of councils" be lifted as they seek deeper unity.

The Armenian Church representatives participated also in the "Faith & Order" Conference of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. **ARCHBISHOP ARAM KESHISHIAN** is the chairman of the Appointment Conference, which is responsible to appoint the 136 members of "Faith & Order" and its thirty member Executive Body for the next seven years.

**DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY ESTABLISHED AT YEREVAN UNIVERSITY**—Upon the requests of the student body, the Ministry of Education of Armenia, in cooperation with His Holiness Vazken I, has formally announced the establishment of Department of Theology at Yerevan University. His Holiness has appointed **VERY REV. FR. ABEL OGHLOOKIAN** to teach and develop the program. Fr. Abel was born in Beirut in 1959 and studied at the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. Upon his ordination to the priesthood in 1980, he was sent to Vienna, Austria, where he continued his studies at the University of Vienna. He is soon to receive his Doctorate in Theology from the same institution.

**UNITED BIBLE SOCIETY SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH ETCHMIADZIN**—On October 20, 1990, the United Bible Society and Holy Etchmiadzin signed a formal agreement, under which the Society will finance the reorganization and acquirement of advanced equipment for the printing press of the Holy See.

## Letters

Dear Editors:

We recently received the third issue of your magazine *Window*. This publication is a very important development, not only in the life of the Armenian Church but also in creating enthusiasm among Armenian youth and leading them to an interest in our spiritual roots as well as to the importance of serving the Armenian Church. With your thought-provoking, scholarly, and informative articles, you create an "environment" which should especially inspire Armenian youth in America to consider serving our people through the Church.

We are very fortunate to have talented young Armenian clergy such as you who have not only the ability but also the dedication and "calling" to serve. The Church is the most important institution of our Armenian people; and it has served for many centuries as a very strong foundation for our survival as a nation.

We congratulate you on a job well done and encourage you to "keep up the good work."

*-Garbis Der Yeghtayan, President  
American Armenian International  
College, La Verne, California*

I received the latest issue of *Window* and offer my congratulations on continually producing a

quality product, something very rare when it comes to Armenian publications. Whenever I pass out copies of *Window* to Armenian and non-Armenians alike, I feel very confident that both will come to understand the richness of our Church while witnessing to your desire (and mine) to awaken our people to their calling as baptized Christian Armenians. Now all we have to do is get them to subscribe.

*—Rev. Fr. Tateos Abdalian  
Waterliet, New York*

Thank you for the copy of the *Window* which is a professional publication. I am sending a copy of the Summer 1990 edition to a friend who needs information about the Genocide to answer a letter written to him from the Turkish Embassy. Keep up the outstanding work.

*-Victor V. Arzoomanian, Director  
Armenian Church Endowment  
Fund.*

Congratulations on embarking on this adventurous, ambitious new publication. I especially liked "Towards a Diaspora Theology" (Vol. I, No. 2). I recommend, however, that you encourage an economy of words among your writers. Try to stay away from too scholarly articles. Let's have down to earth

"daily bread" kinds of writing too. Sign us up!

*— Ted & Lucine Iskenderian  
Pasadena, CA*

I am very much enjoying reading some "serious" material about the Armenian Church. While I don't agree with everything I read, I find the concept challenging.—and yes, it is all the more enjoyable because I don't agree with it all. I wish the Group good luck and sincerely hope you receive enough subscriptions to keep *Window* "open." Keep the faith.

*—Iris Papazian  
Dumont, New Jersey*

*Publishers note: We thank the many readers of Window who have taken the time to write to us. Space does not permit us print all these letters, but we do appreciate your comments. We have received many requests for Vol. I, No. 1. The premier issue of Window is now out of print.*

**CORRECTION:** In the Summer 1990 issue of *WINDOW*, the poem cited by Vigen Guroian, in his article "How Shall We Remember," (p. 5), was inadvertently attributed to Yeghishé Charents. The correct author of the poem is Vahan Tekeyan.



