

# WINDOW view of the Armenian Church Volume II. Number 2 – 1991

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### Editorial

### THE ARMENIAN CHURCH:

# GLASNOST WITHOUT PERESTROIKA ?

#### **Deacon Hratch Tchilingirian**



Just as we were working on the material for Vol. II No. 2, we decided to postpone our publication date and focus on the Interna-

tional Conference of Armenian Clergy, which was held in New York from July 17-21, 1991.

The International Conference was a major event in the contemporary life of the Armenian Church. Its significance centers on the fact that the Armenian Church in the Diaspora, for the first time after the Genocide, came together to discuss current issues facing the Church and specifically, to turn its attention on the events transpiring in Armenia. Representatives from all the Hierarchical Sees (except the See of Cilicia) and Armenian Churches from around the world came together to join forces. Obviously, the Conference provided the clergy of the diaspora an opportunity to acquaint themselves with each other and lay the groundwork for future cooperation. While the practical results of the Conference are yet to be seen, we can make the following observations regarding the Conference:

• Throughout the Conference, the single most concerning issue was the situation of the Church in Armenia. Internally and externally, the Church is living in very crucial times. Internally—as it was pointed out during the Conference—the administrative infrastructure of the Church needs a serious reevaluation and restoration. It needs perestroika. The need for modernization is imperative. While Armenia as a country is going through a democratization process, the Church seems to continue its status quo. Externally, the Church is faced with the enormous task of fighting the new religious movements. Besides the cults, the Roman Catholics and the Protestants have also created confusion among the people of Armenia. The credibility of the Armenian Church is at stake.

 The demographic distribution of the participants attests to the fact that the Armenian Church in the Diaspora could potentially become a viable force in itself, if it could bring its energies and resources together. as it did at the Conference. Nevertheless, it is also true that the Church in the Diaspora could not act on fundamental issues-whether pertaining to Armenia or the Diaspora-without the consensus of the Catholicos. As far as assisting the Church in Armenia, there has not been any organized effort by the churches in the Diaspora to help the Mother See-except the efforts of the Eastern and Canadian Dioceses. Obviously, this is partly due to the fact that the churches in the diaspora are hardly meeting their own needs. For example, in Argentina, other than the Primate, there is not a single priest to tend to the needs of the community.

•The Conference made it very clear that the Armenian Church and all clergy have a tremendous task ahead of them. The challenge is enormous, resources are limited, personnel is scarce, and time is short. However, the Conference took a practical approach to the issues, and appointed sub-committees who worked on specific problems.

The Conference was a vivid example of the openness (glastnost)) that has taken place in the Armenian Church. The Independence Movement in Armenia has not only enhanced this process, but has necessitated it. Nevertheless, a reconstruction (perestroika) with tangible results has not yet started in the Armenian Church, By now-whether we understand politics or not-we all know that glasnost without perestroika is not enough. Mikhail Gorbachev and the explosive situation that he has created is proof of that. At the Conference, the diaspora clergy were somewhat surprised at the sincere and candid remarks of the delegation from Armenia. Indeed, this was a very encouraging phenomenon. It was glasnost in practice. However, we do not see any glimpse of perestroika in the near future of the Armenian Church. It is hoped that the practical actions of the Conference will be the beginning of a new reconstruction, in light of the new challenges and the renewed mission of the Church.

In this issue of Window, we present a wide range of material to highlight the significance of the Conference. In his reflection, Fr. Vazken Movsesian provides an inside view of the Conference. The opening remarks of Archbishop Vatché Hovsepian sets the general context of the Conference and states the purpose of the gathering. Since the Conference paid special attention to the situation in Armenia, we have translated the presentation of Fr. Abraham Mgrdtchian, who reported on the activities of the CPF and traced the events that lead to the recent religious awakening in Armenia. While at the Conference, the we conducted lengthy interviews with Fr. Abel Oghloukian, Director of CPF and Bp. Hovnan Derderlan, Primate of Canada. The interviews were candid and informative. Fr. Abel's interview gives a general view of the events, conditions and challenges of the Church in Armenia, while Bishop Hovnan underlines the major administrative and pastoral problems of the Church and the Holy See. Finally, Vigen Guroian sets the theological foundations for the Armenian Church's mission in the Diaspora.

This issue of Window is not intended for informational purposes only. We hope that it will serve as a spiritual challenge and invite our readers to active participation in the life of the Church, especially at this crucial historical juncture.

# THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ARMENIAN CLERGY

### **Father Vazken Movsesian**

he elderly priest arrived in the Bronx on Monday morning. He greeted friends and "brothers" he had not seen in years, some since his days at the seminary. They had gathered at this retreat center on the Hudson River to discuss the current trends in the Church and arrive at some meaningful conclusions. His participation at the conference, he knew, was purely symbolic. After all, he had been through these types of meetings before: the clergy get together; issues are brought to forum; the *vartabeds* give their opinions; the bishops make the decisions and they leave. That was the system in the past, and this priest had no anticipation of a change for this meeting. He was there as an observer.

But this was not the past and certainly not the system. The year is 1991 and the place is New York, at the Cardinal Spellman Retreat Center, where clergy from five continents

## REPENT, BE BAPTIZED AND COMMUNE

The soft-spoken yet dynamic primate of the Diocese of Artzak (Kharabagh) Bishop Barkev Mardirossian has been the leader of that community since 1988. A young and spiritual leader, who's rough beard and strong features give the outward appearance of a rugged mountain man, is just as tough in his spiritual outlook for the community he served. In a mountainous region, which for the past three years has been actively engaged in a struggle for freedom, one would have to be physically as well as spiritually virile to assume the responsibility and mission which Bp. Barkev has successfully undertaken.

The Kharabagh region has been void of any organized religion since 1931, when the last primate was exiled. Only those over the age of 70 had, until 1988, any understanding of religion and the function of the Church. Although 130 monasteries and churches remained in the area, there were no religious services or Christian education until the National Movement began and His Holiness Vazken I re-established the diocese of Artzakh.

Two years ago Bishop Barkev was assigned to the diocese. Because of the rough and dangerous life in the

area, he only took volunteers to serve with him. He began by systematically educate the people. Beginning with the kindergartners, he taught them the basics — how to pray, how to cross themselves, spiritual songs and so on. What happened next was, what Bp. Barkev calls, the "good conflict." The parents of those children protested to the bishop not because their children were learning to pray, but because they, as the parents, did not know how to pray. They demanded to be taught as well!

Apart from this, he has overseen the renovation of churches. (They had to receive the building permits from Moscow because Baku was uncooperative.) They now have seven operational churches and five choirs (two children's) all singing in four part harmony. They have purchased cars and buses for transportation. The priests and workers of his diocese can now better serve their partshioners.

Bp. Barkev is very modest about his activity in Kharabagh. He does not hesitate to label the activities in the region as a miracle. "Only God can save the Armenian people now," he exclaims, "and it is only God that will save us." Despite there being no gas, food, or resources, God's work has not been hindered! It continues in the region — "God provides and God establishes."

In the capital of Stepanagerd there is no church. They use the local auditorium which they fill beyond capacity with the all faithful singing the Divine Lil-



gathered to discuss concerns of the Armenian Church. Rank and position were certainly respected but by no means intimidating to the voices that spoke up. Each participant was the possessor of a mutual Calling and this was an opportunity to engage in dialogue about the most vital issues of the Church they served.

The hot, humid and stale air of a Summers day in New York was cooled by the air conditioners. That drift of air into the meeting room was the extent of any artificial means of movement. Dialogue was flowing in a dynamic manner during the days of June 17 - 21, 1991.

This was the first international conference of Armenian clergy. Over sixty clergymen accepted the invitation to attend. The gathering was organized by the Primates of the North American Dioceses and financed by philanthropist Louise Simone. The hierarchical sees each sent representatives yet, to the disappointment of all, the delegation of the House of Cilicia had refused the invitation to participate. Although Antelias' attendance was deemed important, their absence did not hamper the atmosphere of brotherly respect and fellowship.

After reading a letter from His Holiness Vazken I, which officially conveyed the blessings of the Catholicos upon the meeting, a council was elected to run the meeting. Abp Vatche Hovsepian was elected president of the assembly, along with Abp. Zaven Chinchinian of Egypt, Bp. Mesrob Krikorian of Vienna and Bp. Khajag Barsamian of the Eastern Diocese. Abp. Hovsepian's comments addressed various issues that are pressing for answers. Many of his points became the focus of subsequent discussions during the week.

The theme of the first two sessions was the spiritual awakening in Armenia. Bishop Barkev Mardirossian and Father Abraham Mgrdtchian presented an overview of the Church's renaissance in Armenia. There was no effort to hide the fact that the Church is ill-prepared to deal with this "spiritual awakening." Today in Armenia, not only can churches be renovated, but new churches may be built.

Bp. Barkev answered many questions from the clergy, mostly about the political climate and situation in Kharabagh, especially in regard to the relations of the Church with the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments. Bp. Barkev was thoroughly convinced —ironically, a conviction which was difficult to transfer to this audience —that the only hope for salvation would be from God.

The discussion intensified when the issue of cults in Armenia surfaced. The Church finds itself in a very competitive environment. What began as a means of dealing with grief in post-earthquake Armenia, has now become a battle to "win souls." Perhaps the greater battle is against Armenian Christian denominations. The Armenian Roman Catholic Church and Armenian Protestants have set up camp, challenging the Armenian Church in its once exclusive domain. With cults, the opposition is easy to target. However, people who are re-awakening to the Christian message, find it difficult to comprehend the differences between Christian denominations.

The struggle with cults is parallel to the situation in the diaspora. Modern means and media are utilized by these newly arrived groups, while the Armenian Church is limited by

urgy and other services.

They have two organizations which help the primate in this spiritual work — one is the Kutootiun Benevolent Organization and the other is the Brotherhood (as is operational in Beirut and now in the United States) who bought the Bibles for distribution among the people. The Artzakh Diocese is now publishing educational material, including a newsletter called KANTZASAR. The publication focuses on liturgical, feasts, architectural and dogmatic facets of the Church.

However, not all is bright. On November 21, 1990, the Azerbajani government decided to close two of the monasteries. The militia fired on the churches and the Turks destroyed the Amarasi monastery. Despite this set back, Bishop Barkev's outlook for the future is bright. He asks only one thing: PUT YOUR FAITH IN GOD — HOPE IN GOD! He is mindful of the psalms which state that it is foolish to put faith in men! We Armenians have put our faith in others for too long and it is time to return and put our faith in God. He asks for only one thing for Kharabagh: our prayers.

With a moments hesitation, His Grace recalled two incidents which have joited the people of Artzakh. One occurrence centered around a 39 year old parapiegic who experienced a miracle and after 10 years of paralysis began to walk. In the words of Bp. Barkey, "He repented, he was baptized and communed [through the Eucharist]." The day after this miracle and conversion he was seen in town celebrating with a bottle of spirits. When people saw him without his wheelchair, they were amazed and asked him what he was doing, to which he responded that he was now looking for a bride.

A similar miracle happened to a girl who was paralyzed for three years. After experiencing her miracle she "Repented, was baptized and communed."

Naturally, word of these two miracles have spread throughout Artzakh rather quickly. Bishop Barkev does not like to elaborate on these incidents but he says, it attests to the fact that God is with our people and is working in Artzakh.

The words, "Repented, baptized and communed," were repeated by Bp. Barkev as descriptive of those who were being saved in Armenia. REPENT: to turn from our sins; BAPTIZED: to start anewin faith; COMMUNE: to receive and be united with Christ Jesus.

As the diaspora focuses its attention on the changes in Armenia and is quick to offer help. It would be wise for the diaspora to be receptive to homeland's call. The profound and basic message of the Gospel is being spread through this troubled region and there is an unquestionable faith in the power of God. Bishop Barkev has presented the message to his people— a message which needs to be echoed throughout the world and especially in our heart:

REPENT, BE BAPTIZED AND COMMUNE.

# Memorable Quotes from the Conference:

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Protest is a sign of the weak. —Bishop Hagop Vartanian France

If you want to do nothing, then write letters of protest. --Fr. Abraham Mgrdtchian Armenia

I do not serve the Armenian Church or the Armenian People. I serve God; therefore, I must serve the Armenian Church and the Armenian People.

> —Bishop Barkev Martyrosian Artzakh



primitive means. Furthermore, the propagation of non-Armenian Church groups is a thorn upon the blossoming rose of freedom. We in the diaspora are pinched —and more often than not wounded — by this thorn daily. It leads us to question the value of the diaspora's advice to Armenia. Inherent in any democracy is the right to the freedom of conscience. While we may hope for a relationship between Church and State as is enjoyed by the Church of England, the right to worship elsewhere is still a guarantee of English citizenship.

Participants at the conference were eager to voice their concern over the expansionist goals of Christian denominations. Protest to the Vatican, to Etchmiadzin and to the government of Armenia were seen as a means of repressing their progress. Yet, the worker in the field, Fr. Abraham, advised, "If you want to do nothing, then write letters of protest." The battle of the Church in Armenia cannot be won by legislation, but only by providing for the spiritual needs of the people.

Bishop Mesrob Krikorian of Austria addressed the conference about the spiritual awakening in the diaspora. He began his speech with a candid question, "Is there or isn't there a spiritual awakening in the diaspora?" The Church in the diaspora is not uniformed and therefore, not easily defined by generalizations. For instance, over the past few decades a number of Armenian-American men have been moved to enter the priesthood. Yet during the same time period, Bp. Mesrob cannot recall even one Armenian in Europe accepting the call.

Subsequently, various papers were presented by a number of clergymen (see middle pages of this issue for a list of presentations). Six subcommittees were formed, headed by a president, to explore issues in the Church.

1) Relations between Church and State: Bp. Voskan Kalpakian

2) Christian education in Armenia: Bp. Hovnan Derderian

3) Denominations and sects: Bp. Mesrob Moutafian

4) Unity of the Church: Abp. Zaven Chinchinian

5) Youth movements: Bp. Kisag Mouradian

6) Liturgical issues and the Book of Rituals: Bp. Aghan Baliozian

The deliberations of these subcommittees as well as the conclusions of the entire conference were to be compiled and sent to the Catholicos. Officially, the conference held the status of a consultation.

To a Church in need of emergency care and attention—whether in Armenia or in the diaspora—this conference was a positive sign that help is on the way. The fact that the problems facing the Church were openly and candidly brought to forum is a major achievement and certainly the first step toward recovery.





# "Let Us Spiritually Arm the Armenian Church"

Opening Remarks of Archbishop Vatché Hovsepian President of the International Conference of Armenian Clergy June 17, 1991 – New York

(Translated by Window staff from the Armenian text)



Dear Brothers: With heartfelt and warm feelings, we welcome you all to this conference.

For the first time in the recent history of our church, and in our memory, a conference like this is being held outside of Mother Armenia, with the blessings of His Holiness Vazken I. Catholicos of All Armenians and by the initiative of the dioceses of the United States and Canada, and their respective primates.

We open this conference with the participation of the representatives of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, St. James Brotherhood of Jerusalem [Patriarchate of Constantinople] and with more than sixty clergymen from all over the world.

Naturally, there is a purpose for this gathering and that purpose does not pursue any personal goal. Instead, as clergy of the Armenian Church concerned with the spiritual, national, educational and cultural circumstances of our people, as well as, the social and political conditions, we will attempt, over the next five days, to reflect on and to scrutinize the present situation in Armenia and the diaspora. And with prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the exchange of ideas and opinions, we will try to find a cure, with the intention of progressing the thoughts expressed in the prepared presentations and at the conclusion of this



Presiding: (l. to r): Bishop Khajag Barsamian, Bishop Mesrob Krikorian, Archbishop Vatché Hovsepian, Archbishop Zaven Chinchinian.

conference, we will issue statements and appeals to our people.

We believe, in order to keep the Armenian Church in her primary mission and to further brighten her future, we need clergy who are aware of their calling, dedicated and prepared. These will be the ones who will keep alive the Armenian faith, language and traditions—the ones who will give direction to the faithful.

So then, our first obligation is to spiritually arm the Armenian Church. We seldom emphasize, and it is worth repeating again, that the Armenian Church and Nation, seventy five years later, still bears the wounds of the Genocide in their blood, mind and soul. Along with the hundreds of churches and historic monuments, we lost hundreds of clergymen, which created a large void in our churches. Those who escaped the massacres, were dispersed around the world.

To come out of this horrible situation, our church and people, within

the limits of their abilities. have tried to dispense spiritual, educational and national nourishment to the survivors. We lacked the financial means and the needed number of candidates for the clergy. In the diaspora, particularly in the Middle East, political instability has been the primary reason our monasteries were unable to continue their natural and successive spiritual mission. To a

certain extent, insecurity prevailed and the future did not look bright. After rising with our strength in the Middle East, we sent clergy to Europe, the United States, China, later to Australia and elsewhere. These clergy who had received monastic training and education, had tremendous difficulties in organizing communities. Our monasteries did not have the capability to produce married priests for pastoral positions. Therefore, the celibate monastic clergy began pastoral service to fill the needs [of the Church].

In the Mother land, the situation is completely different. Because of the Communist rule, our people endured a second 1915—this time a spiritual massacre. What the Turks were unable to do to us spiritually and morally, the Soviet government, with its strict and anti-religious preaching, lead our people toward atheism. This happened despite the fact that Holy Etchmiadzin remained

firm, and some churches were in operation. The situation was the same throughout the Soviet Union. Now that religious freedom has embraced the Mother land—which has facilitated the free advancement of the mission of our ancestral orthodox faith—we stand before great difficulties, because once again, we do not have adequate numbers of clergy to instruct our people.

On the other hand, the cults are invading and changing the tender minds of our people and are alienating our children from the true faith. It seems that the Uniate period is being repeated. Yet we are glad, that the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, under the supervision of the Catholicos of All Armenians, has established a Center for Propagation of Faith, which is engaged in serious work. Naturally, Holy Etchmiadzin needs the assistance of each of us. For your information. the dioceses of the United States and Canada have already developed programs to accomplish this mission. I am sure, every diocese will, to the best of their ability, extend a helping hand to the Mother See.

After this brief introduction, we consider it important to address the issue of contributing to the contemporary spiritual welfare of the faithful. In the diaspora today, our people no longer live in closed confines or isolated villages. The circumstances of life have changed. To succeed, we are forced to learn and speak the language of our adopted countries. We live according to the prevailing customs. There are preachers of different religions, different churches of Christendom, as well as, cults, whereby utilizing modern means, such as television, radio, the press, visitations, promises of monetary gain, and political outlooks, try by all means to attract our people. Our life is a perpetual struggle.

Christ sent His disciples as sheep among wolves. We too, today, are sent among wolves. Our numbers are small and in the tides of this world, we must struggle to keep our faith and nationality. Therefore how is an Armenian born in a foreign land, who does not know his mother tongue, does not attend Armenian school, and in the case of many, one of the parents is not Armenian— to keep his ties with the Armenian Church people?

This question gives rise to the issue of the language of the service and sermon. We cannot expect the person in the circumstances described above-Armenian or part Armenian-to be able to receive Armenian nutrition and be tied to the Armenian Church. The transitions are unlimited. In the Middle East, because of the political situation, Armenians in large numbers have moved to America, Australia, Canada and Europe. From Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan, Armenians have immigrated to America and they do not know the Armenian language. They have formed small communities in themselves. We all know how difficult is the preservation of Armenianism in large communities. It is much more difficult in these new communities.

Thus, we realize that there are many serious questions in regard to the reawakening of the Armenian Church and people, which need consultation and decisive steps. We will suffice by just enumerating a series of vital issues, which in our opinion, can serve as topics of discussion:

- •The issue of the Constitution of the Armenian Church, in which the following must be seriously considered:
  - a. Election of the Catholicos of All Armenians
  - b. Election of a locum tenens of the Catholicos of All Armenians.
  - c. The jurisdiction of the hierarchical sees
- d. The authority of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council
- e. The relationship between the Catholicos of All Armenians and the dioceses and related problems
- •Methodic gathering of the National Ecclesiastical Assemblies
- Regular and periodic meetings of the Synod of Bishops
- •Assisting the Mother See and the Hierarchical Sees
- •Preparing clergymen
- •Relationships among dioceses
- •Regional dioceses [re: Archdiocese) and diocesan bishops
- •Preparation, publication and translation of liturgical and theological books
- Religious education books
- •Revision of services and participation of the faithful
- •Preparation of educational tapes
- •The status of "free lance" clergy
- •The requirements for ordination
- Marriage for clergy

•Divorce of clergymen

- •The conditions for defrocking a clergyman
- •Ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood
- •Relationship of the Armenian Church with the Armenian Catholics and Protestants
- •Having various versions of the Divine Liturgies
  - a. For feast days
  - b. Regular Sundays
  - c. For Summer seasons
- (taking into account the liturgles of St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom and others)
- •Reciting the liturgy [vs. canting]
- •Use of non-Armenian music
- •Re-evaluation of canons related to marriage
- •Inter-religious marriages
- •Validity of civil marriage
- Cohabitation without marriage
- •Conceiving out of wedlock
- •Adoption: age, race, color
- •Counterceptives and Abortion •Euthanasia
- Second remarriage
- •Minimum age for marriage
- •Infant baptism
- Adult baptism
- •Status of the godfather
- Place of baptism
- •The Armenian Church's position regarding the rebaptism of a baptized member in another church
- •Reinstatement of holy orders upon defrocked clergymen who have good characters.
- •Resignation of celibate priests, marriage and their status to remain married priests.

We bring these issues to your attention for consideration. As we stated earlier, this convocation is the first in its kind. We think, that serious consideration should be given to making this an official body. Moreover, we hope, that during the course of these meetings, various subcommittees would be formed or appointed, as necessary, which would in turn complete their designated responsibilities and perhaps in a few years, we can re-convene, review our accomplished works and accordingly make decisions for the benefit of the Armenian Church and people.

- Thank you
  - Archbishop Vatché Hovseplan Primate, Western Diocese

# RELIGIOUS AWAKENING IN ARMENIA

Father Abraham Mgrdtchian

Presented at the International Clergy Conference June 18, 1991 – New York

(Translated by Window staff from the Armenian text)



The issues that I will be presenting today are familiar to most of you in one way or another. My intention in presenting

this talk is to give you, the clergy of the Diaspora, an overview of the religious, ecclesial and religio-cultural awakening in Armenia. Moreover, I will outline the development of the national awakening and how we should unite our efforts in finding new ways of operating in light of the present reality.

The Kharabagh Movement, the Earthquake and subsequently, the Independence Movement, in the last few years, have fundamentally affected and changed the internal political posture, as well as, the internal administrative and economic system and the national ideology of the Armenian people. This, indeed, has created a new process of national self-examination and self-assertion. This new self-understanding has given rise to self-criticism, a search for new ways of conducting business and finally, a determination to be independent. Naturally, for a nation who has chosen such a road for independence, the reevaluation of spiritual values-and creation of new ones-is very significant. It was at the starting point of reevaluation and self-assertion that the Armenian nation-with the eyes of her soul and call of her blood- clinched to her Mother Church, to the true faith of her ancestors. It is this reality in our homeland that today we are calling the spiritual awakening of Armenia. However, the responsibility to give shape and content to this awakening, together with its present and future direction, has fallen on the shoulders of the Armenian clergy.

The seventy years of communist rule has devastated the fundamental foundations of our national, spiritual, religious and cultural life. The Armenian nation, which had preserved its existence through her church and culture, started to be foreign to its own holy convictions. The "white genocide" that was described by Paruyr Sevag continued until 1988. But in 1988 the unexpected happened, as if the Armenian nation instinctively realized and saw her frenetic situation. The Opera Square [in Yerevan] became the theater where the Armenian nation was remolded and it received a new quality. And the expression of this new quality and perception was the declaration of independence last August. The newly formed national government turned its attention toward the national church. Today a close cooperation has been created between church and government. It has become natural to see the President of the republic or other government officials, during major holidays, at the Mother Cathedral Holv of Etchmiadzin. Complete freedom has been given to the Armenian church. Today, in Armenia, we can not only reopen monasteries and churches,

but we are allowed to build new ones. Soon the government will ratify legislation concerning freedom of conscience in which the Church has played an important role. However, we should bear in mind that the republic is following democratic principles and as such, it is not possible legally to put pressure on other religious movements. This compels us to be alert and laborious. Unfortunately, many of the clergy in Armenia see themselves as ritual performers. Such concepts have no place in the Church today. On the contrary, we should expand religious, pastoral, literary, cultural and educational activities.

It is for these reasons, that in August of last year [1990], through the arrangements of His Holiness [Vazken I] a Center for Propagation of Faith (CPF) was established at the Holy See. The Center is headed by Fr. Abel Oghloukian. Fr. Shnork, Fr. Abraham and Fr. Mikael of Etchmiadzin and Fr. Sebouh of the See of Cilicia are the appointed associates. The Center developed its own course of activity, as follows: 1) To prepare teachers to teach religious subjects in middle schools; 2) To give a series of lectures on religious subjects at centers of higher learning; 3) To prepare programs for television broadcasting; 4) To give lecture visits in various cities and areas of Armenia; 5) To prepare and publish books, pamphlets and articles; 6) To organize Sunday Schools.

It is absolutely necessary that in Armenia, the pastoral evangelization and religiouscultural activities be developed and spread on a much wider range

This plan was presented to His Holiness in detail. During the ensuing nine months, though the staff was few in numbers, the Center was able to accomplish what it had set out to do. First, in Yerevan and Etchmiadzin, by a special selection process, three hundred fifty liberal arts teachers were gathered for instruction. With each group we had six-hours-a-week of classes at St. Sarkis Church in Yerevan, the Diocesan headquarters and at the Youth Hall in Etchmiadzin. The courses that were taught were theology. Armenian Church history, Church history, introduction to the Bible, New Testament and Religious Education. Since such a program was first in its kind and there were no preexisting textbooks, lectures were being prepared individually for each class. Some of these lectures were later published in the media. Lectures on religious topics were also organized at various schools in Yerevan and Etchmiadzin; periodically lectures were given at Yerevan University and other Institutes. Also, Armenian television and media extensively used the educational and religious material that were prepared by the Center. Two television programs were set up, Khoran Looso (Alter of Light), twice a



month and Geeragameditz Khosk (Weekend Message), once a week. Presented in these programs were sermons, biblical stories and interpretations, explanations about religious and national holidays, liturgical services, sacraments and stories from Armenian Church history. A number of clergy from the diaspora participated in these broadcasts. The Center also paid special attention to the media and publications. As such, articles, research papers, reflections and responses were published in various newspapers of the country.

Here, I would like to specifically mention the major contributions of His Grace Bishop Hovnan Derderlan [Primate of Canada], who in response to the requests of the Center, printed and shipped over four hundred thousand prayer cards (decorated with Armenian miniatures), pamphlets, booklets, sermon books and religious educational literature. These materials were distributed by the Center throughout Armenia—from Ghapan to Spitak, from Artzakh to Georgia and to the Armenian population living in the area of the Black Sea. The publications of Bishop Hovnan are known throughout Armenia. Similarly, the publication of the sermon of St. Gregory the Miracle Worker by the Eastern Diocese was widely distributed in Armenia. The Eastern Diocese also donated a computer for the needs of the Center. Here, on behalf of the Center, I would like to express our thanks and appreciation to Bishop Hovnan and Bishop Khajag [of the Eastern Diocese].

Before I conclude my remarks about the Center, let me just say that during the past nine months, despite our limited resources, the Center, through dedication and determination, has accomplished a lot. The proof is the fact that many high level institutions, news agencies, publishing organizations, and particularly the Ministry of Education in Armenia are consulting the Center for advice on religious and church matters. It is true that the Center had many difficulties and struggles, but we are consoled by the results of our activities and work. However, it is absolutely necessary that in Armenia, the pastoral evangelization and religiouscultural activities are developed and spread on a much wider range. This is the imperative of the day. If we are late, things will be lost without the possibility of recovery. In recent years, Armenia has become a competitive ground for Catholics. Protestants. cults and ideologies of foreign religions, who have major and organized support systems and resources, such as literature in massive numbers. They are very successful in their proselytization and are expending on a daily basis. The Catholics, Protestants, Krishnas, Pagans, and other religious movements are leading our people to a definite destruction. In view of our glorious history and realizing the consequences of these disastrous movements, we, the Armenian clergy, cannot remain passive. If we want to lead our people in its entirety by the Gospel of Christ, if we want to have a strong Church, if we want a free and strong fatherland, then we should utilize every mean and self-sacrifice to stop the spiritual break up of our people and its disastrous course. It is disastrous, because the Catholic proselytization is removing from the hearts of our people the spirit and faith of our forefathers. Protestantism is depriving the Armenian from his national church. The



cult movements are distancing our people from the true God that our people have believed in for two thousand years. And altogether they are alienating the Armenian from his national traditions and unique culture. Isn't this a new "white genocide?"

Beautifully published religious literature, abundant financial resources, and high compensations are some of the deceptive ways by which the foreigners are operating in Armenia. I am convinced that is issue concerns us all. Two priests from the Eastern Diocese were sent to the Holy See to assess the situation. They became familiar with the religious and ecclesial situation, they had meetings, gave lectures, and together with the CPF, they formed a plan which will be implemented by the clergy of the Eastern Diocese of America. According to this plan, the following are being formulated: short and long term clergy visits to Armenia to organize lectures, Sunday Schools and camps, and to work with the local clergy on pastoral and evangelical activities. We hope this project will soon be implemented through the continuous efforts of the Diocese. It is imperative that other Dioceses and capable clergymen also express their practical advice on this issue.

There are several avenues by which we can develop the spiritual awakening in Armenia-in a true Christian and national sense. When we look at the fifteen hundred year old history of our people, it is very clear that during difficulties, invasions, religious and cultic movements, and exiles there were two active functionaries that emerged: the Church and the national culture that was developed in monasteries and religious institutions. The first requirement for the perpetuation of the church is the preparation of the new generation. In recent years there has been much talk about this. His Holiness is also concerned about this issue, as well as, those who are concerned about the future of the church. It is true that in recent years there has been progress. However, in my opinion, in order for us to be more effective, it is necessary that well prepared and dedicated clergy teach at the Seminary [of Holy Etchmiadzin]. Also, our primary work should be to educate hundreds of lay teachers in this institution. It is impossible to leave this enormous responsibility on the shoulders of a few clergymen. The second requirement is to separate the students of the Seminary from the populated environment of the Mother See [of Holy Etchmiadzin]. Perhaps this problem can be solved with the return of the

> If we are late, things will be lost without the possibility of recovery.

building of the Kevorkian Seminary in the area. As for the new educational centers in Sevan and Haghpad, they were designed to prepare students for the [Etchmiadzin] Seminary, [rather than becoming selfsupported seminaries themselves].

The second important factor in preserving the nation is the national culture. There is progress in this aspect too: the formation of a youth group at the monastery of Khor Virab which consists of teachers and educators from the Ardashad and Ararat regions. They are publishing the now famous religious weekly "Gavit" and organizing lectures for their members. Also, the ten member editorial group organized by Bishop Barkev of Artsakh has embarked on tremendous work. Other church groups are functioning out of the Diocesan Center in Yerevan. This progress is very pleasing. We should not forget that during the most difficult times of our people and church, it was our monasteries that, through much sacrifice, developed our national culture. The role of our holy ancestors in creating a unique culture is undeniable. Our ancestors were well aware that more than the daily bread, it was the church and culture that preserved the nation. Today, if we were

able to understand and transmit our Medieval unequaled culture-if we were able to re-familiarize our people with our Saints-then cults and other foreign beliefs would not find a place among our people. Considering the history of centuries, it is my sincere belief that it is only through underlying our national and religious culture that we can develop, strengthen and unite our nation as a whole. It was with these convictions, that two years ago, the Momik Youth Association of Armenian Christian Culture was founded. The Association consists of artists, miniaturists, painters, literary individuals, and editorial staff of the "Momik" publication. The Association intends to bring together creative individuals as well as apologetics of Armenian Christian culture. Already, a group of writers and translators-among whom are professors from Yerevan Universityare working on the texts of medieval Armenian religious literature. On the other hand, the artists are preparing a unique Armenian Christian exhibition. The miniaturists are preparing an Armenian children's Bible with paintings that follow the style of Armenian medieval miniatures. The Association has many plans and its activities are quite tangible. Upon the request of the Association, on April 15, [1991], the government of Armenia gave official recognition to its by-laws. Subsequently, the Association was given offices and a exhibition hall, by a special decision, near the Opera House in central Yerevan. As the President of the Association, I assure you, that the members, with much dedication are working diligently to put the national reawakening on national foundations, to save our people from various foreign ideologies and teachings.

Finally, by utilizing the vast resources and opportunities, we should reassign the church the mission of rebuilding our national culture. As it is the case in both Armenia and the Diaspora, in order to achieve the expected results, it is absolutely necessary that we combine our efforts and resources.

May the Lord help us—with the faith of our forefathers and their undying legacy—to lead the people entrusted to us.

### EXCLUSIVE

# CHALLENGES OF THE CHURCH IN ARMENIA

An interview with **Father Abel Oghlookian** Director of the Center for the Propagation of Faith Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia

Conducted in New York by the Editors of Window

WINDOW: Would you give us a general overview about your work and the CPF.

FR. ABEL: The Center for Propagation of Faith (CPF) is a department of the Mother See, as established by His Holiness the Catholicos. As the other departments of the Mother See, such as the seminary, the CPF is a separate department. It was founded because of the new spiritual awakening in Armenia. It was formed so that the Gospel message and Christianity could be preached and spread among our people in Armenia. Its fundamental purpose is to evangelize.

While the government of Armenia has expressed an empathy to teach religion as a subject in schools. I should note that there are some technical difficulties. First, we have a problem of text books, which are practically non-existent. To this end. we are working with the Ministry of Education, which is providing us with the necessary and relevant information, for instance about the laws regarding this project. We are now preparing religious text books for grades 1 to 11. However, we cannot prepare these books overnight or prepare and secure enough teachers. For instance, in Armenia, in order to teach religion in all the public schools, we need 5000 teachers. This is an impossibility. At the very least, it will take 10 to 15 years to prepare this many teachers.

We have come to the conclusion, that at least for the time being, as an

interim measure, we must incorporate the subject of religion with the subjects of Armenian history and to a certain extent with Armenian literature. For instance, a few years ago, in Armenian history courses, they would not acknowledge the entry of Christianity into Armenia, or mention the corresponding facts of history of that process. Mesrob Mashdotz was responsible for the invention of the Armenian alphabet only. They would not explain and/or emphasize the reasons. He invented the alphabet so that the Gospel, the Holy Bible, could be preached in Armenian. Therefore, our plan is to incorporate the religious history with Armenian history. As I said, we are doing this as a stop gap measure.

WINDOW: How are your efforts accepted by the general public, especially by the youth, who have been brought up for many years as atheists? FR. ABEL: I would like to compare it with the West. I cannot say anything about America, because I am unfamiliar with the circumstances here. But in Europe, there is a preponderance of indifference toward religion, the supernatural and the mvstical. The same is true within Armenian circles, which have long since been found indifferent and not interested. But in Armenia there is a great awakening. Religion is now being tied with the national awakening, the national renaissance. There is nothing which ties us to 2000 years of national history than our religion, our Christian faith. Some

even appeal to heathenism to find more ancient ties to our national history. But we don't feel the heathens will find much ground, because the entire Armenian culture and Armenian self-consciousness has been kneaded by the light of Christianity. Therefore, it is not possible to separate one from the other.

The youth show a great interest in this respect. Their souls are thirsty for religious nourishment, the supernatural and the mystical. The only issue here is that the instructors must be well trained, present the material in an accessible manner and be prepared to give correct answers to questions. If one is not well prepared, the results will be disappointing or in the extreme case, will create psychological complexities and neurosis among the youth.

# WINDOW: What is the current status of the CPF?

FR. ABEL: There has not been an official announcement yet, but there exists some degree of uncertainty. The CPF has its own staff. His Holiness is concerned with the new operational systems which have emerged vis a vis the new sociopolitical currents. New systems are needed to be created. new communities and parishes must be formed. So now, he is placing more emphasis on pastoral work and operations. While, His Holiness understanding the importance of the CPF, nevertheless, he gives greater importance to the parishes and dioceses. As a result our staff is sent to different areas to carry



out pastoral duties rather than do the work of the Center. Obviously, when the staff is disbanded, then the department will be weakened. Our request is that the importance of Christian evangelization and the mission of this department be considered in light of the new developments in Armenia. We ask that help and all assistance be rendered, so that the Center may work for the glory and building of our Church and our people on a large scale.

### OTHER RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN ARMENIA

As you know, their is a religious awakening in Armenia. I did not expand on this idea earlier. This awakening is still an abstract idea. It has different colors as well. The cults are also part of this awakening. Also the Armenian pagan movement is a part of this awakening. But, we understand the religious awakening as the spiritual rebirth of the oppressed majority, which is tied with our Church, our nation and culture. It is founded on the faith of our Church and St. Gregory the Illuminator.

Of course, the cults and their movements present serious problems and distress. They have used different methods to propagate their work. Unfortunately, because our Church, or more precisely our clergy, at this historic juncture are not well prepared, they stand before an unexpected reality. Our difficulties arise from this situation. Therefore, it is my humble opinion that, while we need clergy in the parishes and dioceses, we need to expand our specific efforts at least in Yerevan and in Etchmiadzin. In other words have a group of priests (*Vartabeds*) who are educated, familiar with administration and who have familiarity with the needs, come together, develop a program, and plan a working process.

I do not wish to lower the Catholic and Protestant churches to the levels of the cults, but they are organizing their efforts at their pace-- specifically, the four denominations of Protestants, the Hare Krishnas, and the Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation. But the serious problem comes from the Pentecostals. The other cults and pagans are careful not to tangle with the Church. They want to find solid ground first, and perhaps later they will go against the Church. But the Pentecostals are directly opposing the Church. They take parts of the Old Testament selectively and preach that salvation is only based on the Bible, not the Church. They oppose the "madagh." They oppose the Church traditions, lighting candles. etc.

In Yerevan, their gathering place is on a hill, near the Paros restaurant. You would think that Christ's Sermon on the Mount was taking place. On television, once a reporter asked what is the Pentecostal's position in regard to the traditional Church. Their representative replied that they were based on the Holy Bible and that the Church is not what is made of stone, but is all those you see assembled on the hill. And in fact, they do have hundreds of people who gather for their meetings. This should distress us seriously.

My conclusion regarding all this is that there is a religious awakening and if our clergy, our hierarchy do not organize in a corresponding fashion and a concerted display of energy is not shown, then we will not be able to lead our people. I do not want to make false prophecies, but the danger is that a different church will be formed outside of the Mother Church, driven by inner motivations. Perhaps, at one point, these cults will receive a different role and we will have an "Armenian" church along side the traditional Armenian Church. This is what the current situation is showing, if we are not able to properly understand and deal with this religious awakening. My belief is that an investigation and analysis of this awakening should be the responsibility of certain individuals at CPF who have expertise in this regard. This should be their sole concern. This is a serious matter. Specifically, they should look at the causes and the effects of the awakening, and suggest what has to be done.

#### WINDOW AS A PROTOTYPE

Along with this, I have to express my happiness to you, and the happiness of our priests and Brotherhood, regarding the Window, view of the Armentan Church. We call it "Loosamoud" in Armenia. If we say Continued on p. 22

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE CONFERENCE

Abdalian, Fr. Tateos (Eastern Diocese, USA) Aljalian, Dn. Serop (Eastern Diocese, USA) Altounian, Fr. Shahe (Western Diocese, USA) Anoushian, Fr. Papgen (Eastern Diocese, USA) Ashjian, Fr. Arten (Eastern Diocese, USA) Ayvazian, Fr. Arshen (Eastern Diocese, USA) Balian, Fr. Asbed (Western Diocese, USA) Balian, Fr. Yeznig (Eastern Diocese, USA) Baliozian, Bp. Aghan (Primate, Australia) Barsamian, Bp. Khajag (Primate, Eastern Diocese, USA) Bekdjian, Fr. Karekin (Germany) Chinchinian, Abp. Zaven (Egypt) Damadian, Fr. Krikor (Turkey) Derderian, Bp. Hovnan (Primate, Canada) Gdanian, Fr. Garen (Eastern Diocese, USA) Gerejian, Fr. Daron (France) Gulgulian, Fr. Oshagan (Eastern Diocese, USA) Hairabedian, Fr. Krikor (Eastern Diocese, USA) Hairabedian, Fr. Yeghia (Eastern Diocese, USA) Hekimian, Fr. Isahak (France) Hirkacian, Fr. Partog (Canada) Hovsepian, Abp. Vatche (Primate, Western Diocese, USA) Iknadiossian, Fr. Vatche (France) Jebejian, Fr. Nersess (Eastern Diocese, USA) Kabaradjian, Fr. Varoujan (Eastern Diocese, USA) Kalayjian, Fr. Vertanes (Eastern Diocese, USA) Kalpakian, Bp. Voskan (Primate, Greece) Kaltakjian, Fr. Ararat (Canada) Karayan, Fr. Vazken (Eastern Diocese, USA) Karibian, Bp. Datev (Primate, Brasil) Kasparian, Fr. Arnak (Eastern Diocese, USA) Kasparian, Fr. Karekin (Eastern Diocese, USA) Krikorian, Bp. Mesrob (Legate, Austria) Maksoudian, Fr. Krikor (Eastern Diocese, USA) Mardikian, Abp. Dirayr (Primate, Romania) Mardirosian, Bp. Barkev (Artzakh, Armenia) Metilian, Fr. Paree (Eastern Diocese, USA) Mgrdtchian, Fr. Abraham (Armenia) Mouradian, Bp. Kisag (Argentina) Movsesian, Fr. Vazken (Western Diocese, USA) Mutafian, Bp. Mesrob (Turkey) Najarian, Fr. Haigazoun (Eastern Diocese, USA) Nalbandian, Fr. Untzag (Eastern Diocese, USA) Nalbandian, Fr. Zenob (Eastern Diocese, USA) Nersessian, Fr. Nerses (England) Oghloukian, Fr. Abel (Armenia) Papazian, Fr. Diran (Eastern Diocese, USA) Sarafian, Fr. Mesrob (Western Diocese, USA) Sarkissian, Fr. Sarkis (Italy) Semerijan, Fr. Mesrob (Eastern Diocese, USA) Shirvanian, Bp. Aris (Western Diocese, USA) Tatoulian, Fr. Datev (Western Diocese, USA) Tchilingirian, Dn. Hratch (Western Diocese, USA) Terzian, Fr. Aved (Eastern Diocese, USA) Vartanian, Bp. Hagop (Legate, France) Zakarian, Fr. Kegham (Eastern Diocese, USA) Zeghtchanian, Fr. Anoushavan (Jerusalem) Zumrookhdian, Fr. Sasoon (Western Diocese, USA)

### STATISTICS

compiled by the Armenian Church Research and Analysis Group from registered participants at the International Conference of Armenian Clergy,

### RANKS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Bishops	25%
Celibate Priests	32%
Married Priests	39%
Deacons	4%

### GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS

United States	58.0%
Eastern 42	%,
Western 16	%
Europe	18.0%
Middle East	7.2%
Armenia	5.3%
Canada	5.3%
South America	3.6%
Australia	1.7%

### **AGES OF THE PARTICIPANTS\***

Average Age	49 yrs
Youngest	29 yrs
Oldest	73 yrs
AVERAGE AGE OF	
Bishops	50 yrs
Celibate Priests	43 yrs
Married Priests	56 yrs
Deacons	29 yrs

•The ages of the bishops and the cellbate priests are based on the data printed in the litergucal calendars of Holy Etchmiadzin and Jerusalem. The ages of the married priests are based on the estimates of ACRAG.

### International Conference of Armenian Clergy June 17 - 21, 1991

Under the auspecies of His Holiness Vazken I Catholicos of All Armenians Invited by the Primates of North America with representatives of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Armenian Churches in the Diaspora

> At the Passionist Spiritual Center Cardinal Spellman Retreat House Bronx, New York.

### PRESENTATIONS AT THE CONFERENCE

### Spiritual Awakening in the Motherland

 Present spiritual and political situation in Kharbagh Bishop Barkev Mardirosian
 The spiritual awakening in Armenia; relations between church and state; relations of seminaries and churches; cultic movements; uses of the media; the CPF and current needs Father Abraham Mgrdtchian

### Spiritual Awakening in the Diaspora

Current status of the Armenian Church — unity and diocesan inter-relations Bishop Mesrob Krikorian

### The Ministry of the Armenian Clergy within the Community

Introduction
 Archbishop Zaven Chinchinian
 2. Youth and the Armenian Church
 Father Sasoon Zumrookhdian
 3. The Mission and Role of the Armenian Church
 Father Mesrob Sarafian
 4. Cultivation of Means of Communications
 Father Vazken Movsesian

### Current Status of Seminaries and the Possibility of a Uniform Curriculum

Introduction
 Father Yeznig Balian
 2. Seminary of Holy Jerusalem
 Father Anoushavan Zeghtchanian
 3. St. Nersess Armenian Seminary
 Father Mardiros Chevian
 4. Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin
 Father Abel Oghlookian

Publication of a Journal of Armenian Church Theology Father Nerses Nersessian

### OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE

Archbishop Vatché Hovsepian President Archbishop Zaven Chinchinian 2nd President Bishop Mesrob Krikorian 3rd President Bishop Khajag Barsamian 4th President Father Krikor Maksoudian 1st Secretary Father Oshagan Gulgulian 2nd Secretary Father Garen Gdanian 3rd Secretary

### EXCLUSIVE

# "Without Hesitation..."

### An interview with Bishop Hovnan Derderian

Primate, Diocese of Canada

Conducted in New York by the Editors of Window



WINDOW: What is your assessment of the Center for the Propagation of Faith?

BP. HOVNAN: The CPF has not yet completed a year's operation. The experimental period has shown that the center has a huge missionary field placed before it-not only in the capital Yerevan, but even more, in the outlying large and small villages. Methodically, in a more organized manner, efforts must concentrate on preaching the Gospel. I think the fundamental work must be diffused during the next few years, particularly in the villages. It seems to me that we have forgotten the villages and the [Roman] Catholic Church is using the techniques to immediately find ground in the villages. Because the villages are not the focus of our attention-they live in more modest economic conditions---it is easier to convince them and change them to Catholicism, these are the children of our Church.

### WINDOW: What about Etchmiadzin?

Religion has to be taught in the school systems of the country and the Church must fulfill its purpose through evangelization. However, there is a fundamental problem, and I have openly brought this problem to the attention of the Catholicos during the bishops' meeting [March 1991]. I feel that now both the diaspora and Etchmiadzin clergy, bishops, celibate priest, etc. without hesitation or embarrassment, must criticize this problem-and criticize obligate harshlv—and must Etchmiadzin to act with serious responsibility. The primary fault is that pastors do not live within their parishes. [Ed. note: the word "parish"

describes a community organized around geographical boundaries. As used here, "parish" does not refer to the physical church building.] All these programs, such as the CPF and its affiliated programs, will fail if



parishes throughout the country are not established in an organized manner. Moreover, we will fail if the clergy continue to live outside the boundaries of their own parishes.

Today, unfortunately, Etchmiadzin has turned into a "nest of clergy," where the parish clergy reside. The diocesan primates in Armenia administer their dioceses by sitting in their rooms in Etchmiadzin and the priests go once a week to their parishes. The few priests who are involved with CPF cannot evangelize all of Armenia, that's just impossible. Their work will be productive only when His Holiness the Catholicos insists on the most essential changes to take place in the life of our Church.

This is a serious concern, and I will stress it unceasingly. All efforts will be in vain and they will not succeed if the pastors do not organize their parishes. I cannot criticize the laity, because the laity will learn from the clergy. This concern of mine, should be the concern of every Armenian clergyman, every bishop, every primate, whether they live in Armenia or in the diaspora. The shortcomings of the Church must be the concerns of all clergy.

This concern should be spread through your Window, as well as other newspapers. You should not hesitate for a moment, on the issue of whether or not it is right to criticize Etchmiadzin regarding this issue. We have to criticize. The time has come where we have to openly express the real situation to the public so that the public can criticize Etchmiadzin and the existing situation. I am sorry to say this. Until today, I would have approached this topic with caution. After all. I am a member of the Etchmiadzin brotherhood. But, I think the greatest fault will be not to express ourselves on these wrongs.

In March, at the Bishop's conference (where there were also Vartabeds), I spoke about this concern. This is a fundamental concern which coincides with the efforts of the CPF. I am sorry to say, but the CPF and its efforts do not receive the necessary encouragement from certain diocesan bishops in Armenia. I do not want to dwell on this because those circumstances can exist within all dioceses. Today's reality does not allow for even the minimum work to be done to this end. This hurts the entire mission of the Armenian Church.



WINDOW: Is this a problem of administration?

BP. HOVNAN: They know very well who is supposed to do what. When I presented this observation to His Holiness, he responded very naively that he wasn't aware that pastors do not live within their parishes or that primates do not live within their dioceses. Primates are living outside their dioceses. A few times a week they are found within their dioceses. In Koris, or Sunik or Shirag, the primate is in his diocese only a few days a week. The same is true for priests or pastors. They are not permanent pastors, but "visiting pastors." This situation should be corrected from its roots otherwise the work of the CPF or all other programs within the Armenian Church will fail.

### WINDOW: What is their justification? How can they justify running a diocese in absentia?

BP. HOVNAN: They give many reasons. The main problem is that a diocesan primate does not take considerable efforts to make sure that his clergy are living within their parishes [i.e. an organized church body within a given geographic area]. This is a question of discipline. When he, as the primate, does not live in his diocese, he cannot insist on his pastors to live there or to establish their families within the boundaries of their parish.

I think the second problem is that the clergy do not feel a necessity to live within their parishes because they understand their role to be that of a "ritual-performer," which is a fundamental wrong. Today, Etchmiadzin or any primate or any clergyman cannot say that they do not know how to establish parishes or organize formal parish systems. They all are aware of our system in North America and Europe--where there is organization, formal administration and the role of the clergyman is specified. During the past 20 years, thank God, a multitude of clergy from the diaspora have visited Armenia, explaining their systems and their work. Many clergymen from Armenia have visited North America and Europe and have seen the kinds of work the clergy are engaged in, aside from performing rituals. This kind of dialogue has already been created. Obviously, this interaction was not just a formality. These ex-

changes of clergy have been created with a specific purpose. I think that these exchanges over the past 20 years, should have at least motivated them, at least the individuals, if not the administrative bodies. Today. not one parish "system" [dzkhagan vijag] exists in Armenia. I have been an eyewitness to this. Parishioners approached me personally in Yerevan, saying that this priest who has blessed the madagh for years has never once visited me. He has never once knocked on my door and asked who am I? What do I do? Do I have any needs? . . . This shows indifference on the part of the clergy.

Take for instance St. Sarkis Church in Yerevan, which is surrounded by many residential buildings and homes. If the Jehovah's Witnesses are going without invitations and knocking on the doors, and advancing their ministry, why shouldn't our clergy do the same, I believe our clergy have even more reason and would be more welcomed in these homes to propagate Christianity? No one will stop them, and I guarantee you that our people will open their doors with love. Some people might be inhospitable, but that is not a reason to refuse such a procedure.

We stand at a crucial moment in the history of our Church, we either bravely address our shortcomings and do something practical about it—and I underline the word practical— or else, God forbid the worse...

### Armenian Church Hall Razed by Turkish Authorities by Barbara Baker (excerpts)

Istanbul — A church hall under construction next to the Armenian Church on Kinali Island near Istanbul was bulldozed down without any warning April 11 and 12 by municipality officials of the Princes' Island, who said they were acting on orders from Ankara, the seat of the Turkish government.

It was not clear if the directive, which was never produced in written form, originated from the Foreign Ministry, under which the Turkish Minorities Desk is positioned, or the Interior Ministry, which controls the Turkish police and security forces.

Local Armenian parishioners who rushed to the hillside churchyard on the morning of April 11 found city workers using two bulldozers to knock down the roofed structure.

"We have never encountered such a problem before," declared Bishop Mesrob Moutafian of the Princes' Islands, where some 20,000 Armenians reside or have Summer homes. "All the Armenian and Greek churches and Jewish synagogues in Istanbul have built adjoining halls for their congregations. Through the years, as the necessity has arisen, they have been repaired and renovated."

Turkish government officials quoted Public Trust Law #2672, a 1936 regulation still in effect over religious foundations, as justification for razing the Kinali Island building. This law prohibits any of Turkey's religious minorities named in the Lausanne Treaty from adding to or repairing any of their buildings without first obtaining a string of written permissions from the Public Trust Directorate, the local municipality and the central government.

"This is such a paradox for a government which says it is secular," declared one church member who had seen the demolition in process. "The fact is that the church and the mosque are not equal in this country."

"We will take legal action. We have to, it is our duty," said Armenian Patriarch Karekin Kazanjian, after the second day of buildozing. "I have never seen such a tragedy before, after so many years have passed peacefully here for us as a minority community" The Patriarch continued, "We are not going to allow anyone to touch this ruined building.. The ruins will be left there the entire summer, so that everyone can see what has been done. This is a small case, but it is a very serious case."

# MISSION IN THE DIASPORA: MARY'S EXAMPLE

### Vigen Guroian

n his frequent journeys from Galilee to Judea and Jerusalem our Lord took special pleasure in visiting with friends. Among these friends of our Lord were Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. They lived in the village of Bethany on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. We have mention of this family in St. Luke's touching story of Mary and Martha. St. John also informs us in his gospel that at the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, our Lord revealed his great power over death itself by raising Lazarus; and visited these friends just before his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But for the moment, I would like to turn to Luke's story of Martha and Mary. It has been a story of enduring interest and speculation in Christian theology and spiritual reflection.

While they were on their way Jesus came to a village where a woman named Martha made him welcome in her home. She had a sister. Maru. who seated herself at the Lord's feet and stayed there listening to his words. Now Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to get on with the work by myself? Tell her to come and lend a hand.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha, you are fretting and fussing about so many things; but one thing is necessary. The part that Mary has chosen is best; and it shall not be taken away from her.\*(Luke 10:38-42)

This domestic scene captures how any one of us might respond when visited by a guest of great im-

portance. Martha, caught up with preparing for the arrival of Jesus and his disciples, hurries to tidy the house and prepare dinner. "Martha made him welcome in her home. . . . Now Martha was distracted by her many Meanwhile, Jesus seated tasks." himself and began to teach. We do not have difficulty imagining the scene. Mary and all the other guests have gathered around Jesus breathing in his every word. Martha is left by herself to finish setting the table. In the midst of her toil, she grows increasingly angry at her sister Mary who she thinks is avoiding her responsibilities. Thus Martha bursts out, "Master, do you not care that my sister has left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to get up and attend to her tasks." But Jesus refuses to reprimand Mary. He will not command her to help Martha. Instead, he says, "Martha, dear Martha, there is no need to worry and become aggravated. Such lavish preparation is not necessary. Something simple will be enough. Your sister, Mary, has chosen the best repast of all. Would you take it from her? I will not do such a thing."

Jesus recognized Martha's good intentions. It is right to attend to the physical needs of others, to feed and comfort the weary traveler, to heal the sick, and care for the less fortunate. The story of Martha and Mary immediately follows the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of St. Luke. When viewed in light of that parable, Martha's behavior cannot simply be condemned. She acts consistently with the Samaritan story's exhortation to practice charity. Works of charity belong to the kingdom of God. Jesus is the autobasileta, the kingdom in Person. Martha's actions fall short of the demands of the moment only because she forgets that the physical preparations for the celebration of God's kingdom are of secondary not primary importance.

For Armenians there is a larger lesson in this story. It reminds us that there is such a thing as being too concerned with physical wellbeing and political survival. Our Lord and his saints did not value physical and political survival so highly. The vicissitudes and needs of this life all too easily can distract us from the 'one thing [that] is necessary." What a curse the Turk set upon Armenians when he persuaded them through all the years of the Ottoman captivity and then the massacres and genocide of 1915 to think in obsessively survivalistic terms. There is little in this sort of temperament or behavior which belongs to the kingdom of God. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt. 16:25)

Jesus' answer to Martha is humorous. He makes a pun. But this is a play on words which instructs and does not merely entertain. "Mary," says Jesus, "has chosen the right portion, the best part of the feast." He is referring in metaphor, not to the food which fills our stomachs, but to the food which is the word of God, the spiritual bread of eternal life. Mary has chosen to listen to Jesus. She understands that without this spiritual food salvation is not possible.

The irony of Armenian life which the story of Martha and Mary exposes is painful to admit. The irony is that while our enemies nearly



starve us to death by denying the people earthly bread, Armenians themselves do much worse by denying themselves the heavenly bread-Mary's good portion.

As I think back upon my childhood, I am overwhelmed with memories of grandmothers and great aunts placing in front of me more food than I could ever eat - fruit and nuts, bread and cheese and delicious sweet pastries and candies. I still can hear them saying to me: "Anott es. Ger!" These beloved women by their attention to my small needs were feeding vicariously all those whom they saw go hungry during the years of great tribulation at the hands of the Turk. I am struck by the pathos of our shared lives. While I will remain forever grateful for the love and affection given to me as a child and do not blame those beloved women for trying to make my every visit and meal a feast - as Jesus did not blame Martha. still I wonder whether the behavior of these mothers, excusable in view of their own past, does not also stand as a symbol of our utter distraction and neglect of the "one thing that is necessary."

For in the thirty years since my childhood, nearly all of my generation, which carries with it such memories of grandmothers and great aunts, has wandered from the Armenian Church. The Church-so obsessed with its own survival and Armenian identity, having been so attentive to provisions of earthly

bread-has starved its people of the Word of God. It does not matter which parish one visits of the Diocese or the Prelacy. All are marked by the conspicuous absence of the second and third generations and now their children. The subsequent immigrations from the Middle East and Armenia belie the fact that this is indeed a critical and dangerous moment for the

Armenian Church in America. The pews occupied by recent immigrants are also empty pews, emptied of the second and the third generations and their children. Whenever I visit an Armenian parish there is the haunting reminder of the children who left and never returned because their church lacked the courage and vision to change and transmit the tradition in the idiom of the new culture into which it was cast.

My former teacher, the late Will Herberg, himself a Jew, dedicated his classic study of religion and ethnicity in America, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, with these words: To the Third Generation upon whose return so much of the future of religion in America depends.

Well, the third generation has not returned to the Armenian Church. And the Church is in serious dilemma. despite its habitual denials. What a loss it is. For in my generation and its progeny there is a near complete recovery from the genocide of 1915. In these second, third and even fourth generations the dreams of the fathers and mothers have come true. Among them are doctors, musicians, scientists, business leaders, lawyers and educators who should have become the lay leaders of the Armenian Church. But they are not present. Their absence is the terrible measure of how we have misdirected our energies and avoided attending to the "one thing necessary."

Martha the Armenian Church has been. We have kept the feasts, we have repeated the ancient rituals, and we have celebrated the nation's past glory. But without Mary what is Martha? Without the living word of God vibrating in our heads, rushing in our veins, pounding in our hearts, the Church is a museum,

Her yearning was for the kingdom of God and she knew that the kingdom had been made present in Jesus of Nazareth whom she could call friend as well as Lord.

> a repository of heavenly artifacts and ancient rituals displayed on feast days whose meaning has all but been forgotten by the participants.

> This a gross caricature of what a national church, such as the Armenian Church, was in its "natural" culture, but can no longer be in

America. There must be a renewal of mission. Sadly, instead of facing the challenge and the new realities of the diaspora, Armenians have persisted in viewing their church as the place in which is made present, not the kingdom of God, but the old world long since disappeared, which although it can be fantastically projected into the future as a dream or hope, is alien to the world in which God has placed them to live out their real lives. No wonder that for my generation and now their children the Armenian Church is a strange place, irrelevant to their lives.

Let us return to Mary for a moment. Mary's devotion was not a private one. Her yearning was for the kingdom of God and she knew that the kingdom had been made present in Jesus of Nazareth whom she could call friend as well as Lord.

Six days before the Passover festival, Jesus came to Bethany. where Lazarus lived whom he had raised from the dead. There a supper was given in his honor, at which Martha served, and Lazarus sat among the guests with Jesus. Then Mary brought a pound of very costly perfume, pure oil of nard, and anothted the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hatr, till the house was filled with the fragrance. At this, Judas Iscariot, a disciple of his - the one who was about to betray him - said, "Why was this perfume not sold for thirty pounds and given to the poor?" he said this,

> not out of any care for the poor, but because he was a thief; he used to pilfer the money put into the common purse, which was his charge. "Leave her alone!" said Jesus. "Let her keep it till the day when she prepares for my burial; for you have the poor among you always, but you will not always have

me." (John 12: 1-8)

Martha served a feast on that fateful occasion before Jesus' passion. And so should we when the Lord is with us, when the kingdom is present among us. Yet Mary poured out the fragrant oil of her heart's desire. "And the house was filled with the fragrance," says St. John, the fragrance of Mary's abiding witness to the truth which gives us life and sets us free.

We must pay serious attention to Mary's example at this critical moment in the history of our church and the Armenian people. Yet Mary's example is not the only model to which we can turn. We should be reminded of other women whom our church venerates and upon whom it bestows the glorious title of saint. I am reminded of the witness of Hripseme and Gayne, of Ashken, and of Nooneh and Maneh. They were Mary's co-workers. They were not content to educate themselves in the faith only, but sacrificed their lives to pass on the holy tradition of the apostles to family, nation and all who would accept the word of God into their hearts.

#### MARY AND MISSION

ary's example is not merely an example for women, though we have gotten used to portraying it that way. Mary is an example for all who feel called by Christ and know him as their friend. Mary was a visionary. She recognized that this friend was also the Lord and Messiah. She anticipated the awful sacrifice he would make for

her. And she was willing to sacrifice for his sake. Those who labor in the Lord'svineyard must also be visionaries. They must look into the future with courage and truthfulness and the willingness to sacrifice. I will not avert my own eyes for the sake of false comfort, from the terrible failure of the Church to be a mission to the world. It has forsaken my generation. The Lord will judge the leaders who have failed.

The Lord will hold all of us accountable for this. For we have not loved the Lord enough as Mary did. Do we dare sacrifice future generations on the altar of our extreme ethnocentricism, having turned the Church into a servant of nationalism rather than a community of Christian discipleship? In America the Armenian Church must no longer encourage Armenians to hide in ethnic ghettos making itself the house into which they retreat. Such retreat provides only the illusion of protection against the massive assimilative forces of a pluralistic society. The answer is not total Americanization of the Church. But it does mean that Armenians must risk their identity in order to preserve and renew it. For too long the Holy Spirit has been closed out of our churches, barred from entering by closed doors and stained glass windows. But we must pull open the windows, unbar and open the doors, and let the Spirit in to blow where it wills (John 2: 7-8). Only the Spirit will set us free and give us the courage and vision to discern ways of change and reform. We must engage the American order creatively and translate our church's universal truth and ethnic uniqueness into an idiom suited to future generations.

How much sense can the Armenian Church's relentless efforts to link the Armenian nation (inevitably interpreted politically by its people) with the Christian faith make to third and fourth generation Armenian-Americans? Furthermore, the Christian nation which St. Gregory the Illuminator founded was strangled by the Ottoman yoke and crucified and put to death finally by the Young Turks. In Soviet Armenia the Com-

In America the Armenian Church must no longer encourage Armenians to hide in ethnic ghettos making itself the house into which they retreat.

> munists made certain the Christian nation would not revive. The resurrection of the Armenian Church in the diaspora is in the form of a spiritual body. This will be so in Armenia, as well, as autonomous secular institutions of national life take primary responsibility for the nation. The compulsive reiteration of the fact that Armenia was the first

Christian nation becomes the pathetic testimony that Armenians have not yet come to terms with what actually happened in 1915 and subsequently in Soviet Armenia. In spite of the conscientious commemoration of the slaughter of the two million we do not yet believe that with their deaths the old Armenian world died. As the disciples who after the crucifixion could not believe that their leader was killed and when encountered by Jesus in his resurrected, glorified body did not recognize him, Armenians also have have not been able to recognize the Armenian Church in its resurrected body. The Church's long isolation from the other Christian churches is over. The era of the millet ended seventy years ago. The era of Soviet captivity is ending. The old survivalism which persists as a habit especially within the Church must no longer be mistaken for the gospel" of Jesus Christ.

Our old ways of instructing the young must change. Instruction in the Armenian language and the transmission of historical information which fails to make connections with the living reality of this culture and its "faiths" is not sufficient to equip them for the kind of spiritual combat they will have to do in a society which is not Armenian. A society in which nearly all the supports of Christian faith have

> crumbled. We must not be content with instilling in the young a mere loyalty to the Church as a cultural institution. Rather an education in Christian life as discipleship, witness, and service is required. The young must be trained not merely to be custodians of ancient and venerable institutions, but truly the faithful in Christ

called to be the salt of the earth.

There is a need for a prophetic laity in the Armenian Church, like the monastics of a bygone era, men and women alike, who will courageously bring attention to our shortcomings and call us back to our faith. The old monastic system has been utterly clericized and limited to a training ground for hierarchs and



administrators. Administrators almost by definition find the prophetic spirit dangerous, not useful or necessary. A prophetic laity in the ancient monastic spirit of renewal and reform, however, will come about only if we pursue the sort of Christian instruction which I just described.

Furthermore, believers evervwhere must join together in praver and study of scripture and pursue together projects of service. Like Mary, we must sit attentively at Christ's feet and listen to the living Word of God. But after we listen, we have a right and a duty to serve. It is time that the ancient order of deaconess be restored in our Church. And let us not quibble over whether such women must be celibate or live in monastic communities. That is a tactic of the fearful and those who refuse to permit the Church to adjust to the times. The church historian Jarislov Pelikan has written: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of living." The Armenian Church is afflicted by the latter. Real tradition is liberating, not confining. Over the centuries the diaconate has been reduced to a narrowly defined liturgical function. It is time the diaconate be returned to its intended role of total service to the community. And that must include our mothers. sisters, wives and daughters.

Our church is in desperate need of regaining its identity as mission. Though we are not told so, we must believe that Mary not only listened to the words of the Lord, but also preached them. I sometimes think the Armenian Church forgot the meaning of the words mission and discipleship somewhere between the fourth and twelfth century. An evangelization of the people must begin anew - here in America and now in Armenia. We here must create a model that can be appropriated with adjustments in Armenia. Preparing feasts for the lost sheep to attend is not sufficient. Jesus went to the lost sheep. He did not wait for them to come to him. If the liturgy does not extend beyond the four walls of the sanctuary then it is an abomination. "I will praise the Lord at all times. Let His praise be always on my tongue." This is what the deacon chants after the benediction in the Divine Liturgy. A massive effort is required to recover and return all those Armenians whom the Church counts on its roles, but who are not really present. A massive effort is required in Armenia to evangelize a people separated from the Lord by seventy years of state enforced atheism.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul exhorted: "So then brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess. 2: 15). We are in the habit of calling our church the Armenian Apostolic Church. We call it that not just because in the distant past our ancestors were evangelized by Thaddeus and Batholemew or because our bishops claim what is called apostolic succession. Apostolic is derived from the Greek apostolos, meaning one sent forth who is especially commissioned to act in behalf of the one who sent him. We are the ones sent. He who sent us is the very Son of God. He has commanded us to "go... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father. and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 19-20 ). In this century, Armenians have been scattered to the four corners of the earth. Had we the choice we might have picked another fate. Nevertheless, this was not a choice to be made by us. But it remains for us to decide whether or not we will make of our situation a holy service to the Lord and in God's good time earn, as our forefathers and mothers did, the appellation apostolic.



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Oghlookian, continued from p. 13 Loosamoud in Etchmiadzin, we all know we are talking about the Window publication. The issue in which you dealt with the Cults in Armenia [vol. II No. 1] is very important. We read it and hope that it would be printed in Armenian also. I already presented to you an official request from Armenia. Of course we will be willing to help you with the translation efforts. Even if it takes some time, it is important for that issue of Window to be published in Armenian. The publication of Window should be saluted by all clergy. Considering the situation in Armenia, in addition to your English version, an Armenian version should be published under your guidance, direction and editorship. In Armenia, we certainly need a publication which has the caliber and professionalism of Window. Especially, the presentation of Fr. Vazken [at the Conference] on the considerable use of computers and telecommunications should be available to us in Armenia.

WINDOW: Bishop Hovnan Derderian has taken it upon himself to have that issue translated at the Canadian Diocese. We hope to type set it and do the final editorial work very shortly.

### THE PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS IN ARMENIA

WINDOW: Can you give us some details about the Protestants in Armenia.

FR. ABEL: Yes. The four Protestant denominations that are organized in Armenia are the Baptists, the Pentecostals, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Evangelicals. These groups organized a program in an athletic stadium and invited Armenian and American clergy from America to preach. They had gathered about 5,000 people in that stadium. To see what was happening, I went there personally and attended this gathering. I asked those attending: "Do you know why you've come here? Do you know who has organized this event?" They said, they thought it was the Church organizing this activity. Whatever they hear in the name of Jesus, they think it is organized by the Church. But the fact is that the organizers are others, not the Church. They passed out brochures and Bibles: they exchanged addresses:

they established ties. This is how they gain converts.

# WINDOW: When you went to this event, did the people know who you were or were you incognito?

FR. ABEL: No. I made it clear who I was. I even told them that this gathering was organized by different denominations and asked what they thought about the Armenian Church. or the advancement of the Armenian culture or national aspirations. Whoever I talked to or asked they weren't really in favor of the advancement of these Protestant groups. Some of these Protestant preachers were speaking against the honor given to the Holy Mother of God. They spoke out against "madagh" and the custom of lighting candles, which is an expression of faith among our people. So many people were disturbed and uncomfortable. In place of our Church hymns, they were playing many undignified musical selections. Even the Lord's prayer and the Der Voghormia were sung in a screaming manner. I myself felt a wave of uneasiness.

### PREACHING METHODS

WINDOW: Let us turn our focus to the practical question of preaching. You have a Center for Propagation of Faith, what is the message, what is the substance of preaching?

FR. ABEL: There are different levels of preaching. In general, our goal is to make the people familiar with the Gospel—what is the New Testament: what is the content of the New Testament: who is Jesus Christ; who is the Mother of God; what does Jesus say: what does the Sermon on the Mount say; who is John the Baptist; who is Matthew, who is Luke, the Synoptics: who is Paul the Apostle, the Letters, etc.-very basic facts that the people should know. Until now, the people have not had an opportunity to know these things. They have been deprived of this basic education. They are unfamiliar with the Bible. For instance, in regard to the story of the Prodigal Son, we have to tell them to open the Gospel of Luke, where to find it, what Jesus is explaining, what is the kingdom of heaven, what is the coming of the kingdom. We do this with public sermons, through television and by visiting the villages, so that the general public can hear and be informed.

Evangelization is also geared toward educating the new generation. We do this through our efforts in the schools. We have programs for the elementary schools, as well as, in the institutions of higher learning. We have organized curriculums for theology, dogmatics, sacraments of the Church, etc. Sometimes we present these subjects to the intellectuals by using their language. Sometimes we explain these with very simple language for the general public, so that they may open their hearts to the light of the Gospel. We do this from the elders to the kindergartners. .

WINDOW: Are your efforts localized in Yerevan, or do other Dioceses in Armenia avail themselves to your expertise?

FR. ABEL: All written work that we do is shared. For all the major feast and saint days we prepare special pamphlets---Ephiphany, Easter, Pentecost, St. Gregory, etc. —and we place in these pamphlets printed icons of the corresponding saints. For instance, if it is prepared for the feast of St. Gregory of Narek, then there is a picture of him in the pamphlet. Then we incorporate that with religious text (a prayer or hymn) from the works of the saint along with a biography. We print between 30,000-40,000 copies of these. We give 5,000 to each diocese and to churches throughout Armenia, where they pass them out to the people during the services on those feast days. On the feast of St. Gregory of Datev, it was very moving to see 13 and 14 year old youngsters, taking these pamphlets and reading them, standing under the walls of the church. They could of course take that paper and throw it in the trash, but when they read it, then that is a major step toward progress for us. When they know what the feast of Pentecost is, the feast of the Holy Spirit, then they will understand their faith better.

### RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH

WINDOW: Could you tell us about the movement in Khor Virab? FR. ABEL: Yes. A few years ago, Fr. Mkhitar, the priest at the Monastery of Khor Virab, was able to organize a church youth group in the Ardashad



and Mirtzda areas. The group is consists of educated young people, who are mostly university graduates. To the best of our abilities, the CPF assisted this effort in every way, so that they could stand on their own feet. Every Wednesday, we send someone from the CPF to Khor Virab to give a lecture or a presentation. Sometimes, when we have visiting clergy from the diaspora, we make every effort to take them there to speak. Now, this group has a religious-cultural newspaper called "Kavit." They also published their first booklet, Barouyr Sevag's "Andib Namagani." These enthusiastic young people produced the whole publication by themselves- from typesetting to binding-through their own efforts and they sold it for a nominal amount to cover their costs.

Aside from Khor Virab, there are other small groups which have been organized throughout Armenia. Of course, the CPF assists all of them. The main purpose of the CPF is to make sure that the national, cultural and spiritual awakening takes place in the traditional and beautiful nest of our people.

### WINDOW: Are these grass roots movements? Where do these feelings for the Church come from?

FR. ABEL: These feelings emanate from the spiritual awakening in the country. When there is a clergyman like Fr. Mkhitar, who takes the initiative and organizes, then he becomes the pastor and the leader. It is already an organized group, operating under the umbrella of the Church. But, there are hundreds of similar groups, about which we do not have any information, but we know they exist. Anyone can pick up a cross, hold a Bible and organize a group. There is a similar group in Hogtemberian, in Arshaloys and in Gosh. These groups stand up with false teachings and proclaim themselves as a Church. Since the people have a thirst for this spirituality, they think it is the right way and they start to follow them. These groups should to be organized under the umbrella and auspices of our Church. When these groups become large and we loose control over their teaching, then they become another reality, about which we can not speculate yet. As I said earlier, besides our Armenian Church, if this trend continues, there will be another Armenian Church which has no ties to the Mother Church.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

WINDOW: How relevant is religion to the day-to-day lives of the people? FR. ABEL: This is a separate question which needs study. But in a general way, this is an existential question. When such a political and economic situation is created, as it is in Armenia today-when people are disappointed with the political and economic prophets and leadershipthen they begin to put their only hope in the living and real God, who exists above all the standards of man and above the material realities of life. God is not material, He is a spiritual, living energy, a reality, with whom our fathers have spoken in Armenian and have given the name "God." [Asdvadz]. This is the faith of our fathers. They have put their only hope on that Reality who lives among our people, lives in our Church and leads our people and protects the existence of our people—despite all kinds of atrocities and dangerous situations. Throughout our history, God has protected us, whether in disaster or in political and economic difficulties of Armenia.

For our people, the Church and religion is a question of liberation. It is liberation theology, however, not the way it is understood in Latin America. In the case of the Armenian people it is not a class struggle. It is rather a liberation created on politics and ideology. It is the liberation from Marxism, Leninism and political materialism—from the oppressive and sore reality of man's soul and body. It is also a liberation from what relates to our neighboring countries, Azerbaijan and to some degree Georgia.

WINDOW: This pertains to the collective, how about the individual? In other words, does the individual regard himself as part of the collective experience or does he see religion as a way of personal salvation?

FR. ABEL: These are interrelated issues. He is part of the collective and this understanding is a universal phenomena. On the other hand, for himself and his family, religion is a source of optimistic outlook on life. If there is no faith in God, then all the strength and energy required to survive that material life has crumbled. Therefore, there is another reality beyond this, that is faith or belief. With this faith man can be filled with hope, that he must be optimistic toward life, he must believe in the continuity of life and its eternity. This is also a source for man to be filled with love-love toward Godand that love is based on his love for his friends and others. I am hopeful that with this practice, by extending a hand to one another, by helping one another-if not today, if not tomorrow, then in the near future-we will be able to overcome these difficult times and our people will be able to continue its peaceful and safe existence.

WINDOW: You've spoken about the youth, what about the middle aged generation. In the past with the influence of Marxism and atheism, religion has been seen as the sign of the weak. We see this even in the recent immigrants from Armenia to the United States, that the Church is really a place for the weak. Has there been a change through your efforts in this perspective?

FR. ABEL: The situation in Armenia has changed in a truly amazing and unbelievable manner. We do not see any real difficulties on an ideological ground. At least presently, they accept us with open arms, they give us the means and they allow dialogue to take place. Where faith can be spoken and spread, it is there where Faith can be propagated. They have to hear, they have to be convinced, they have to see the testimony of people-from the Gospel and from the Faith---so that they can believe. This is one of the ways. This is not to say that the remnants of the past have been completely vanished. Though there are still people who are influenced by the ideology of the past, nevertheless, we do not see a definite opposition to our work, but perhaps a certain reservation. That reservation is natural. That reservation. instead of indifference, can be turned to curiosity. Thus, it is our work and responsibility to break the ice and fill it with warmth. The fulfillment of this responsibility will depend on the ability of the Armenian clergy. What was above our abilities in the past, we could not do, but now we can. So then, we must do the work. Of course, if this is the will of the Lord, and if the Armenian Church and clergy have the blessings of Jesus' Cross, then the mission of the Armenian Church and the work of the Armenian clergy will undoubtedly be crowned with success. We can do nothing if we are guided with human capabilities, with human mind and muscle. God gives us the blessing through faith, and it is up to us to use our human capabilities for the service of our Church and the propagation of the Gospel.

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Abraham Vartabed Mgrdtchian, Elementary Textbook of Christian Education (in Eastern Armenian). Holy See of Etchmiadzin: Center for the Propagation of Faith, 1990, 105 pp., + appendix.

An old woman makes her daily rounds of veneration under the arches of the ancient cathedral, systematically kissing every pillar, wall and painting, quite undisturbed by the deafening echo of unrestrained conversations. A young couple stands mute before a candle stand, blankly engrossed by the drops of wax falling from the candles they have just lit. An unshaven man searches for a priest to say a prayer so that his daughter might be cured of her irrational fear of dogs. A nervous woman seeks direction from a young priest after seeing a terrifying vision of God. A trio of teenage boys giggle nervously at the thought of venerating the Cross at the foot of the Alter of Descent. The candle sellers just inside the cathedral are doing record business as the line outside for baptisms grows to forty. A walk through the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin on any given afternoon reveals much about the nature of the much-talked about revival of Christianity in Armenia.

The faith which is being awakened in the hearts and souls of the Armenians is nothing short of miraculous. At its best, it is genuine, spontaneous and innocent; unquestionably, the faith of "these little ones" which our Lord so admired (Mt. 18:1-6). But for all its innocence and purity, the fledgling faith of our people in Armenia is also characterized by an overwhelming lack of direction and focus. It is a gut piety which lacks the guidance and formation necessary for it to mature and develop into that faith which is real, sustaining and life-giving. An essential element of the Church's mission is its provident rearing and nourishing of the faith of her people by teaching them the basics of the Christian faith. For its own health and well-being, the Church must teach her people the narratives of our faith as revealed in the Bible, the history of our Church and the lives and writings of her saints, and in general what might be called living the life of the Church. Our people in Armenia are in desperate need of nothing more than simple answers to simple questions about the Christian faith. Without this basic information their "faith" will remain mired in ignorance and superstition.

Elementary Textbook of Christian Education, the first publication of the newly formed Center for the Propagation of Faith, is therefore a cause for excitement. The book is intended for use in the schools, as a primary source for teaching about the faith of the Armenian Church. The 27 short one to two page articles are distributed among three chapters. The first is entitled "General Information," and includes articles on faith and doctrine. The second chapter is "The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ" containing retellings of the pillar events in Christ's life from his birth and childhood to his death and resurrection. The third chapter is "The Church, " where the sacraments and ceremonies of the Church are discussed. The textbook also has an appendix for manners of addressing the clergy, prayers for various occasions, and a glossary of names from the New Testament.

The articles are written in a very clear and simple style which will certainly facilitate the use of this book by readers of all ages and backgrounds. The clarity of Fr. Mgrdtchian's writing is evident from the very opening pages of the book: "Christianity is the religion established by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ's followers are called Christians...Christianity demands that people worship God with living FAITH, with firm HOPE and sincere LOVE (p. 5)."

Without exception, the articles are very informative and well written regarding the topic at hand. The essay on prayer, for example, emphasizes the meaning of prayer ("talking to God from the depths of one's heart"), the various types of prayer (thanksgiving, glorifying, supplicatory), and how to go about praying (reciting out loud, reflecting to oneself, singing, crossing oneself, bowing, raising the hands, etc.).

Each article is followed by a passage from the bible and an assignment for homework. The Bible passages that are cited are usually, but not always, relevant to the preceding article. For example the article on prayer concludes with Genesis 1:20-2:2, the account of the creation from the fourth to seventh days.

More troublesome are the assignments, which consist of copying selected Biblical passages. Though the assigned verses to be copied are interesting, the reader is more often than not left wondering what the connection is between the Bible passage and the preceding article. This is particularly problematic in the case of the neophyte, who then finds himself in the precarious predicament of fabricating his own potentially false connections. This is to say nothing of the questionable pedagogical value of rote copying. It would have been more valuable to provide short explanations for each of the assigned Bible passages, and perhaps a few simple questions to check understanding, with answers provided in an answer key at the end of the book.

There are also a number of instances where the assigned verse has been quoted out of context, and thus leading to gross misunderstanding. A striking example is John 5:39, which is assigned following the article on Faith. The verse as assigned reads, "You search the continued on bottom of next page

### Letters to the Editor

Dear Editors:

The most recent issue of Window is truly representative of a quality publication; both educational and informative. I have passed on this issue, "Cults in Armenia" to many non-subscribers than usual and they have been quite interested.

I have seen many

within our parishes who were approached perhaps at their most vulnerable moment(s) by members of some "pseudochristian cult." Unfortunately, they "come to the rescue" so to speak to some of our Christian brothers and sisters in need.

In my eyes, the Armenian Church can and should be there during these vulnerable moments as well as those moments of strength. Our people must and should be able to maintain the same life and family within the Church while simultaneously experiencing Christian and spiritual support and fellowship.

This issue has, as other issues of Window have in the past, touched a delicate and sensitive spot in our lives. My hope is that more people will receive this publication and truly absorb its contents. It is one of the few publications that I have seen that is not only well written and professionally done, but that has an identifiable mission which can be easily understood. It is the only publication my entire family reads from cover to cover. My thanks to Fr. Vazken, Dn. Hratch and staff for a job well done.

Meline Grigorian Margate, FL

#### Dear Editors:

I was at once disturbed and delighted by the "Cults in Armenia" issue of Window (Vol. II, No. 1). Disturbed be-

#### BOOK REVIEW, continued

scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." The key to this saying of Jesus is the next verse—not included in the given assignment—which reads, "Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." Add to this, the less than obvious connection to the concept of faith, a novice might misinterpret the saying, give up, close the book and go to sleep.

Another shortcoming of the book is the often stiflingly scholastic approach. Does a textbook on the Christian faith necessarily have to be scholastic? On the contrary, it must be more pastoral and practical. We are no longer in the middle ages at the height of Catholic scholasticism.

The Divine Liturgy is by far the single most important act of the Church. It is the expression par excellence of the Church's faith and identity. It is also by the Divine Liturgy that most people are regularly exposed to the Church. Yet Fr. Mgrdtchian includes a mere page and a half of rather academic information on the sacrament. A more thor-



cause of the pernicious influence modern cults are exercising on native Armenians unfamiliar with the tenets of their church. Delighted because of my long standing interest in the phenomenon of pseudo-Christian cults. More often than not these cults revive long discredited heresies such as Docetism, Arianism, Sabellianism and

Adoptionism, to name a few. Of more immediate concern however, is the spiritual impact these alien movements are having on certain segments of a newly democratized Armenian society.

From a purely defensive perspective it is imperative, particularly for the Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy, to understand the role of the message, that is the ideology being propounded by these cults. Remarkably, as Dr. Hrair Dekmejian has often emphasized, it is not so much the sublimeness of the message as the mind set, the psychological predisposition of the targeted individual, that determines the acceptance or rejection of the proposed ideology. Indeed, a number of sociologist of religion have convincingly shown that nay spiritual, social or emotional crisis (loss of a loved one, disease, unemployment, lack of adequate housing, the trials of adolescence, etc. can lead clear-headed individuals to accept uncritically cult teachings.

The first and right step in the onslaught upon the cults was taken by the Catholicos himself. I am hopeful that the creation of the Center for the Propagation of Faith will play a decisive role in revitalizing the faith of our forbearers within the confines of a free, independent and democratic Armenia. The objectives of the Center, as stated on page 26 of *Window*, should reassure all Armenians.

I would like to express my gratitude for your foresight in devoting an entire issue of Window to such a timely topic. The preservation, promotion and transmission of the apostolic faith to our young people should be the concern of every Armenian who sees a glimmer of hope and a new direction for a tormented land. It is my conviction that a budding democracy such as Armenia should not attempt to prohibit cult activities by legislation, as some well meaning diaspora Armenians have advocated. Rather, the errors of the cults should be boldly forestalled through massive and systematic religious education of the youth. Only then will the peddlers of instant salvation and nirvana operating on the blood drenched soil of Mother Armenia wither and die out.

> —John Bezazian Fresno, CA

We would like to see *Window* published monthly. You are filling a big void! Keep up the good work!

> •Krikor Yessayan Mayfield Heights, OH

Having read previous issues of *Window*, I wish to encourage you to keep up the good and insightful work. May God be honored and the Armenian Church strengthened by your efforts.

-Rev. Nishan Bakalian San Francisco, CA

Space does not permit the printing of all the letters we receive; however, we do appreciate them. Letters may be sent to: ACRAG, P.O. Box 700664 San Jose, CA 95170 or e-mail on the SAIN System 1-408-257-1846

ough treatment is certainly called for, one which has as its point of departure the experience of the Divine Liturgy—the meaning of the hymns, prayers, litanies and psalms, which the participant hears, as well as the rituals which he sees. This is the key to a more practical and pastoral approach which emphasizes the involvement and participation of the faithful. Fr. Mgrdtchian's presentation is frequently weakened by his detached, theoretical commentary.

Several important elements of our Christian faith and tradition have been overlooked in the text, including the place of the Saints and the Church calendar. A broader discussion of the Bible and its use in the Church and in private devotion is also sorely lacking.

However, despite even the most serious of its shortcomings, this book undoubtedly will serve as a useful tool for the development our people's faith in Armenia.

> -Dn. Michael Findikyan Holy Etchmiadzin



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# Past Windows you may have missed...

### Window Vol. I, No. 2 "IN SEARCH OF AN ARMENIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION"

ARTICLES: Address of His Holiness to the Armenian National Movement; Karabagh: The Islamic Factor; Armenia: A Historical Survey; Khirimian Hayrig: The Paper Ladle; Liberation and Witness; Toward a Diaspora Theology

This issue provides a series of articles in search of an Armenian theology of Liberation, stimulating discussion and dialogue between Armenian church members and theologians. The issue provides a descriptive and interpretive study of the subject and underlines its application in the Armenian Church.

### Window Vol. I, No. 3 "1915—THE YEAR THE ARMENIAN CHURCH DIED"

ARTICLES: How Shall We Remember?; Teotig: Golgotha of the Armenian Clergy; Fallen Grains of Wheat; Data Analysis of Teotig; Canonization of the Victims; Church Treasurers: "Proven Profit Potential"

This entire issue is dedicated to the martyred clergy of the Armenian Church during the Genocide of 1915. With this issue, *Window* turns the views of its readers back 75 years and provides a glimpse of the pre-Genocide Armenian Church. For the first time in the English language, the monumental work of Teotig—a scribe who tediously recorded the lives of the martyrdom of the Armenian clergy—is presented with statistical and analytical charts. Addressed in this issue are the issue of remembrance, the problem of canonization of the victims and the silence of Church leadership concerning religious treasures.

### Window Vol. I, No. 4 "IS THE COLLAR CHOKING THE ARMENIAN PRIEST?"

ARTICLES: Beneath the Collar; Where does the Buck Stop?; Requirements and Gualifications for Priesthood; Chaos and the Need for Reform; Wounded in the Jungle; Priests don't Fall from Heaven:; Lost Meaning of Sainthood

This issue discusses the role for the Armenian priest from the perspective of both the Armenian community and the Church. In doing so, it dispels some of the stereotypes and myths associated with the Armenian clergy. Issues such as reform, recruitment, and contemporary challenges to the church are discussed in a very sincere and open forum.

### Window Vol. II, No. 1 "CULTS IN ARMENIA"

ARTICLES: As for those Who Say...; What is a Cult? Coercive Cult Techniques; Sects in Armenian History; Heretics denounced by the Armenian Church; Profiles of Cults in Armenia; biblical Doctrines; Interview with an Armenian Hare Krishna

In an attempt to educated the Armenian community on the dangers of cults, this issue provides an extensive coverage of cults presently operating in Armenia. The deep psychological wounds caused by the 1988 earthquake have facilitated the infiltration of various cults into Armenia under false pretenses. This issue of *Window* poses a challenge to the Armenian community and the Church, by the fact that "the cults will do what we neglect! They will extend where we cannot reach! They will be heard where our voice is silent."

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