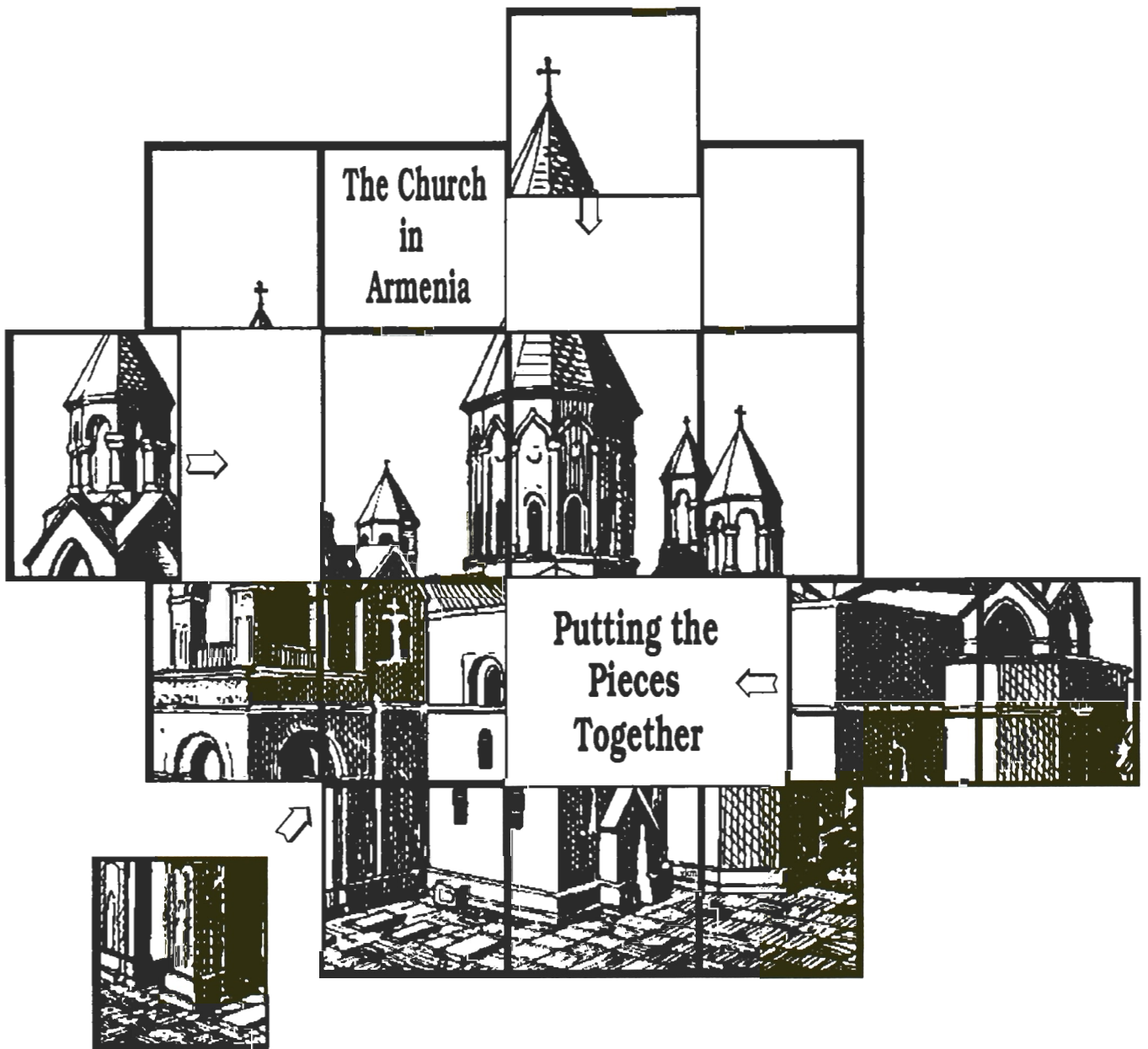


# windσw™

view of the Armenian Church



**W I N D O W**  
*view of the Armenian Church*

Volume III Number 1 — 1992

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# PAINFUL CONCERNS

## The slow revival of the Church in Armenia

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Bishop Hovnan Derderian

PRIMATE OF THE DIOCESE OF THE  
ARMENIAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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Every time I return to Canada from a visit to Armenia, I am more distressed for having witnessed the grave state of affairs currently existing in our fatherland. The struggle is evident in the political, economic, social and religious realms of life.

The problems are very clear. Our newly independent Republic is experiencing severe difficulties in a

political sense. The collapse of the former Soviet Union on the one hand, the strained situation that has arisen between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the other hand, have plunged our fatherland into a grave political situation. And as a result of this political situation, the country has been subjected to an undesirable blockade which has rendered Armenia, presenting an already bleak economic picture, into an even worse and unbelievable condition. Today various worrisome social issues are arising owing to the non-existent "normal life."

Obviously, as a clergyman, one of the most concerning problems in Armenia is the moral life of our people, both individual and collective. There is no doubt that the Armenian Church's first and primary mission is the spiritual welfare of the Armenian people and ultimately, the salvation of every human being.

Here, I would like to comment on a number of problems that are related to the current infrastructure of the Armenian Church.



*Bishop Hovnan Derderian in an Armenian village. Fr. Mesrob Sarafian (Oakland) looks on.*

Armenia today has a population of more than 3.5 million. It is also said that the Armenian population within the dioceses of the *internal diaspora*, i.e. Armenian communities throughout the former Soviet Union, runs close to 2 million. Considering these numbers, we can pose the question: What is the picture of ecclesiastical life in each situation? Let's take Armenia with her dioceses. The Araratian, or the Patriarchal Diocese, headquartered in Yerevan, is Armenia's largest. The population of the capital has reached 1.5 million. Yet unfortunately, Yerevan has only four churches which are not equipped to handle the people's spiritual needs. It is quite a different matter that these same churches don't have their own religious communities or parishes, rather they serve the needs of incidental visitors of a given area. More than twenty priests serve in these four churches and they are largely occupied with the performance of sacraments and rituals. The churches have their choirs and, to a greater or lesser extent, an internal administrative set-up. However the question remains as to what extent the church is performing the mission entrusted to her. For example, while it is true that the majority of the churches that existed throughout Yerevan were totally destroyed during the dreadful reign of Stalin, nevertheless the absence of church buildings in no way justifies the absence of the development of parish or communal life. The spiritual revival that began in 1988 has taken on a great impetus and yet Yerevan today remains in practically the same condition as before.

While underscoring these serious concerns, at the same time I wish to reflect with appreciation on all those efforts and courageous undertakings which are being directed and carried out by Bishop Karekin Nersisian, Vicar of the Araratian Patriarchal Diocese. Under his leadership, the Diocese has generated exceptional enthusiasm to the highest degree. Youth, adults and members of the newly established ladies guild are endeavoring to bring about a new atmosphere and life in the church.

Practically the same shortcomings prevail in the dioceses of Shirak, Gugark and Siunik, each of which has a population of more than one hundred fifty thousand, yet un-

fortunately there is only one working church in each region. The same state of affairs exists throughout most of Armenia, sometimes worse. It's clear that it was not possible to picture the situation any differently in the past, during the Soviet era, but now there are no restrictions to improve the situation.

As far as the *Internal Diaspora* is concerned, during the Soviet period, the situation was extremely desperate. The internal dioceses were literally abandoned and disorganized as a result of the government's position regarding religion and the church. In effect there were only three dioceses in operation: Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. These regions had their diocesan Primate, who practically had no authority. Today their status is fortunately different. The spiritual rebirth has taken on momentum within the internal dioceses as well. Churches are being reopened and the disposition to become a community is being felt among the common people. However, as a result of the destruction wrought by several decades, there are insufficient clergymen and dedicated servants of the church with of ecclesiastical knowledge.

In this situation, regrettably, various sectarian movements have found a fertile field in which to operate, particularly in Armenia. They have found various paths of entry into Armenia, particularly after the disastrous earthquake. In short, the various forms of assistance brought by them are becoming conditional gifts. The presence of sectarians in the streets of Yerevan and everywhere else has become inevitable during the past three years. The presence of cults in the life of our people is not an authentic or genuine presence. They are disturbing the unanimity of the spiritual strength of our people. Historically, Christianity has experienced growth in Armenia, not by sectarian movements, but through the true Christian faith of our forefathers who have been able to withstand numerous tense political moments. Today, we need to restore that orthodox faith of our church and people.

In view of these, one might ask the question: What sort of steps is the church undertaking in light of this grave situation? The truth is that currently no serious organized

effort is being pursued in this direction. Primarily, the administrative mechanism of Etchmiadzin needs fundamental and urgent reorganization. It is not functioning in any systematic fashion.

As for the Church and State relationship, while during the Soviet era the relationship between church and state went through various stages, from an extremely strained situation to a relatively more tolerant policy—today, with the independence of Armenia, the church enjoys a new breath of air. The positive approach taken by the state toward the church is visible.

We should underscore that government representatives are also worried. The governmental authorities are somewhat dissatisfied with the church and the clergy, and how religious work is failing in its function. Notwithstanding all this, it is evident however, that the state has great faith in the church and its functional role in the Armenian society. Last year, during a meeting, the President of the Republic of Armenia stressed the notion that today, be it in the Diaspora or in Armenia, the church represents the "most organized institution." If that is the case, then the church leadership must take its role and place very seriously, particularly at this most painful moment in the history of our people.

There are innumerable issues and problems facing the Armenian Church. I believe that as a first step in addressing the most urgent needs, the Synod of Bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Church—the highest religious body in the Church—should reconvene as soon as possible so that expedient issues are resolved. Today, the Armenian Apostolic Church faces two distinct situations: Armenia and its spiritual rebirth, on the one hand, and the Diaspora, with its church administratively divided, on the other.

The spiritual obligation of each clergyman should be total devotion to the revival of the church, by making his body the wick of the illuminator's lamp and his soul, the oil for that light. At the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, every Armenian clergyman must act with vision and prepare himself through prayer, so that he truly becomes the pastor, the leader and protector of the children of Christ's church. \*

# THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Dn. Hratch Tchilingirian



It is the end of the beginning—the euphoria that began with the freedom and independence of Armenia is over. Instead, hardship, struggle and anxiety have become part of everyday living in Armenia. For better or worse, a new era, a new “world order” has commenced in the history of the Armenian nation.

Against this backdrop, in the next few pages, I will present a series of conversations which I had in Armenia during a March 1992 visit. The conversations draw a wide perspective on the post-independence development of religious freedom in Armenia and its ramifications in the life of the Armenian Church.

Like the new Republic of Armenia, the dynamics and development of events in the Church are fascinating and yet at the same time depressing and hopeless.

Like every institution in the new Republic, the Church also finds itself unprepared and inadequate to serve the basic needs of the people.

However, the church is the only institution which has not collapsed. The irony is that unless it collapses, it will not revive. The old must fall in order to build the new one. The institutional church is the Berlin of Armenia—the Wall must come down if we ever want to see the light behind it.

While changes in political conventions and structure and uncertainties in a new country allow mistakes to be made, the incompetence and complacency of leadership are more harmful and devastating to an institution than any of its shortcomings. Leaders are not only accountable to those who they lead, but they are accountable to history as well.

The conversations presented in the following pages speak for themselves. As a whole, they enumerate very concrete and specific problems. The voice of desperation could be heard in all of them and yet the question remains whether anything is being done?

While each institution in Armenia is attempting to tackle its daily problems, the church is dormant, except for some incidental or ad hoc panacea dispensed to issues that are bound to reoccur, if not treated seriously.

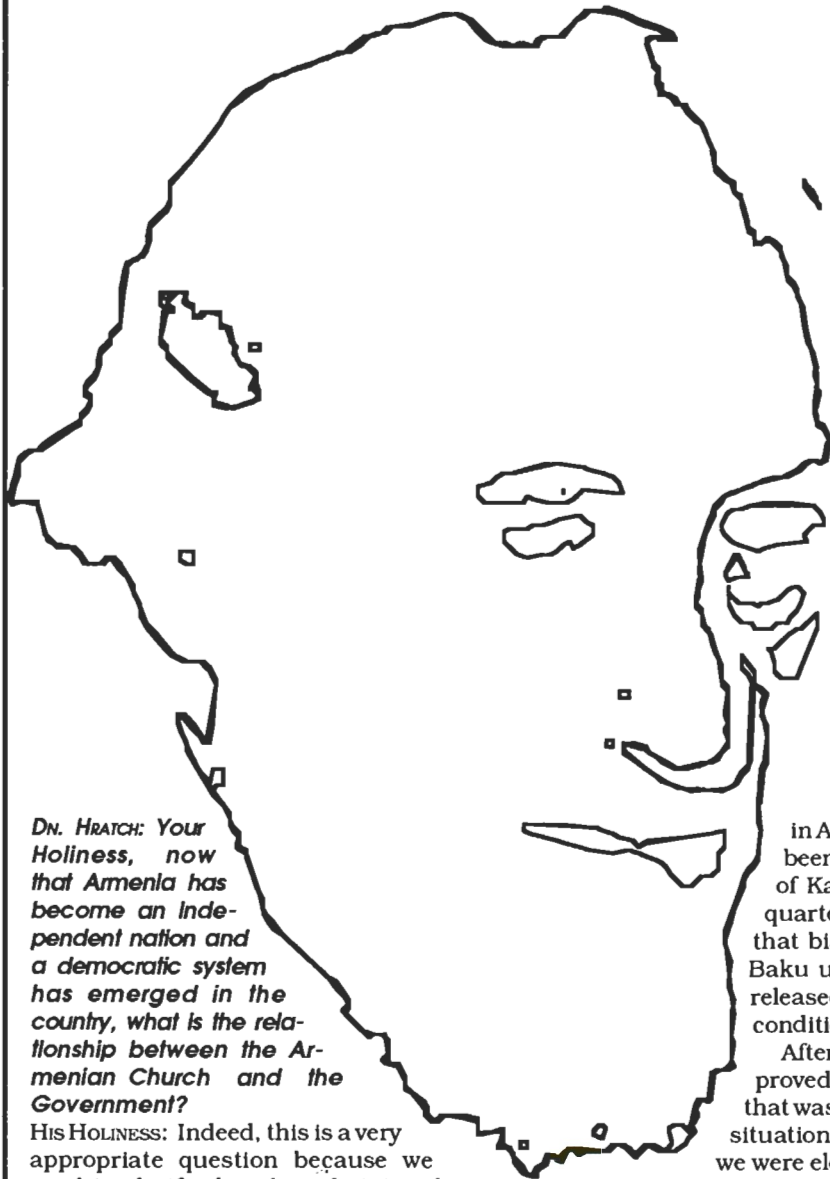
Many would say that identifying the problems in the church is the easiest thing to do. I would add that finding solutions is even easier. The difficulty is accepting the reality, i.e. the fact that we have problems that need immediate attention. By problems I do not mean the Catholics and the Protestants or the cults. They are peripheral problems and will remain peripheral if we do our job. By problems I mean the apostolic mission of the church vis a vis the hierarchs, the clergy and the faithful.

Today, the urgency to move from a *discretionary leadership* to a *participatory leadership* cannot be underestimated. The deficiencies of individual idiosyncrasy can and must be overcome by collective “team” leadership. Around the globe, the personality cult of the Cold War era is quickly changing into “team” effort. As the rapid changes in the world constantly redefine the variables of leadership, the success of leaders are being measured not by what they can do individually, but by what kind of a team and ministry they can create. Perhaps the beginning of this process is the resurrection of the Synod of Bishops and/or the National Ecclesiastical Assembly. Unless issues are discussed on the highest level of the Church, we will remain ill for a very long time. The Armenian Church is expected to cater to the needs of several *million* Armenians. As such, we cannot continue behaving as if we are running a parish or a small diocese.

The time to face our problems is next week, next month, in three months the most... not next year, next anniversary, next decade.... \*

Exclusive

# THE PRICE OF FREEDOM



Conversation with  
His Holiness Vazken I  
SUPREME PATRIARCH AND  
CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS  
HOLY ETCHMIADZIN, ARMENIA

**DN. HRATCH:** *Your Holiness, now that Armenia has become an independent nation and a democratic system has emerged in the country, what is the relationship between the Armenian Church and the Government?*

**HIS HOLINESS:** Indeed, this is a very appropriate question because we need to clarify church and state relationships. It is evident that in the past, during the Communist period until World War II—throughout the Soviet Union, including Armenia—the church was persecuted.

From 1938 to 1939, practically all monasteries and churches were closed. In fact, in Artzakh, Karabagh, it was even earlier than that. Here in Etchmiadzin, we have a letter from the last Primate of Artzakh, Bishop Vertanes, which is a significant document in this respect. The author of the letter writes to the Catholicos of the time that 18 monasteries and 105 churches have been closed

in Artzakh and he is the only clergyman who has been allowed to remain in office in the monastery of Kantzasar—which at the time was the headquarters of the Diocese of Artzakh. Eventually, that bishop was also arrested and imprisoned in Baku under false accusations and blames. They released him after a short period of time on the condition that he will never return to Artzakh.

After World War II the situation slightly improved because some churches were reopened, but that was the extent of it. Further improvement of the situation occurred a little later during the time when we were elected Catholicos and the subsequent years; even though our rights were very limited, nevertheless, 20 churches were reopened. As for building new churches, that was unthinkable.

Today, with the declaration of political independence [in Armenia], the situation has changed drastically, not only has the persecution of the church disappeared, but also the issue of tolerance has been resolved. The church today has become independent and self-governing and is enjoying the auspices of the Government, which has clarified and exacted the relationship of the church and state through specific laws, freedom of conscious laws. That law was examined during several sessions of the



Parliament, and thereafter put to a vote. We also participated in the discussions. In reality, this law is a public declaration of freedom of religion and conscious the way it is in all Western democratic countries. It is interesting, however, that in that law specific importance is given to the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national Mother Church. Accordingly, the Armenian Church has been granted privileges and as such, the church is a legal entity with all rights to all property and goods. This law has also accorded freedom to other church and religious organizations and denominations, particularly the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. However, it should be mentioned that the freedom given to these denominations are limited. They are to practice it in their respective communities only. Acts of conversion and proselytization are forbidden.

The law also gives the right of operation to certain cults which were already established and were working in the country during the former system. Recently, in addition to these cults, various new movements have come to Armenia, such as the Mormons, the Krishnas, the Pentecostals, the Jehovah's Witnesses and so on.

**Dn. HRATCH:** *Do you think that these denominations, if not now, eventually will want and will try to expand their activities and demand more freedom?*

**HIS HOLINESS:** We do not think that it will reach to that point. Nevertheless, such tendencies are evident among these denominations, particularly, when the difficult economical situation in Armenia is used as an advantage. For example, after the earthquake [of 1988], a group of people came from America and proposed to build a large factory in Armenia. We ourselves welcomed this proposal, this humanitarian proposal. However, in time they had plans to build a chapel on the same site, it was obvious that these people were Mormons and they were pursuing other missionary goals through this benevolent act. Naturally, such an activity was not allowed to take place in Armenia. We are happy to state that when such incidents occur, the state and the church are cooperative in solving them. This is very important because the infiltration of the cults in Armenia is very

alarming. It is very sad to see these groups taking advantage of the difficult economic situation and the naive, the goodwill of our people.

**Dn. HRATCH:** *This concern is also profoundly felt in the Diaspora by both the clergy and the laity. One of the most effective ways of combatting against these cults is to spread similar evangelical activities which the Armenian Apostolic Church should organize. What are your thoughts about this?*

**HIS HOLINESS:** There is no doubt, that is the accepted means of encounter. There are some programs in this regard, but on a very small scale. In reality, however, in order to fully address this issue, it is absolutely

necessary to have preachers, scholars who are prepared in this area, experts who are qualified and other individuals who have experience. Under the present circumstances, we need 50-60 preaching priests, yet in all practical terms, we only have a few as appropriate candidates for such work. We never anticipated that the freedom of religion that was granted would create such a situation for which certainly we were not prepared.

**Dn. HRATCH:** *How about the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin, where preachers and individuals who could do the work ought to be prepared?*

**HIS HOLINESS:** It is so, naturally, and we're happy that presently the student body has grown tremendously and the number has reached 110 students. However, in order for this group to start the work, they need at least three years to prepare themselves and acquire the knowledge that is needed to do such work.

**Dn. HRATCH:** *Over the years, the diaspora Armenian communities have developed the parish system where each parish has its own pastor and church organizations, and through which the community comes together under the roof of the church. Do you have any plans to create such a system in Armenia also?*

**HIS HOLINESS:** Already such a system exists here. All the churches have their pastors and the rules of the old system have been lifted. Each church has its Parish Council, Diocesan Council, just as it is in the Diaspora.

**Dn. HRATCH:** *What are the needs of the church today in Armenia, first and foremost?*

**HIS HOLINESS:** Of course presently, the most concerning need is the lack of clergymen. We have to prepare servants for the church in a very short period of time and quickly. The next question is the issue of new churches. Today many churches are being reopened and new ones are being put under the disposal of Etchmiadzin. We have to provide clergymen and pastors to all these new churches. In addition, we should also think about the internal diaspora, [Armenian communities within the boundaries of former Soviet Union]. During the Soviet period—in the various republics of the Union—Armenian churches either did not exist or were destroyed. Today, when most of them are being returned and new ones are being

“**C**ertainly  
we were not  
prepared”




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*“...the most concerning need is the lack of clergymen.”*

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built and there is a need to build more, serious work is expected. We are facing great difficulties, especially in finding building material which is scarce. It should be mentioned however, that despite these difficulties, the renovation of many churches has begun.

Here in Etchmiadzin, the complex of the old Kevorkian Seminary has been returned to us which needs renovation. The work will start probably sometime before the end of the year. We hope that the next academic year will start in the new building. The situation of the Armenian churches in the other republics is more difficult. We found out that in Russia, the Ukraine, Moldova, the Northern Caucuses and in the Baltic countries, there are more Armenians than we thought—about two million. These communities now are in need of spiritual nourishment, cultural gatherings and other opportunities to bring them together as an

organized community. In Middle Asia, benevolent and cultural associations have been organized, besides which also church bodies are being formed gradually. The needs are very clear. Today, in the Ukraine, there are four Armenian centers: Lvov, Kiev, Khargov, and Ghrim. For example in Ghrim, a large Armenian community existed in the past and until today there are eight 16th-18th century Armenian churches which have been preserved. These churches are in dire need of major renovations. Presently, there is only one clergyman for that entire region. We need at least three or four priests to serve our people in that area. There is a beautiful Armenia church in Moldova, in the capital city of Kishinevi. Recently we visited the community there which is about 1500 Armenians and the church which resembles the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin. It also needs internal renovations which cannot be delayed if we want to preserve the

building. This is the general picture of the church in the internal diaspora. ***Dn. HRATCH: In the present situation, what are the expectations of Your Holiness from the Diaspora? How can the Armenian diaspora help Armenia and the church?***

***HIS HOLINESS:*** As far as the Diaspora is concerned, we cannot be demanding. The Diaspora itself is in great need for clergymen. On the contrary, very often they apply to us to provide priests for various communities. Unfortunately, the monastery in Jerusalem, which could have greatly contributed in providing clergymen during the past 10-20 years, could not make a significant or even least contribution in preparing priests.

Whatever we could have expected from the Diaspora, we received, truly, particularly the financial help and aid which came on time and continues to help in the disaster areas. In this respect, we would like to express our thanks and appreciation to Bishops Hovnan and Khajag, who did outstanding work in North America to help Armenia and continue to help with their wise efforts.

***Dn. HRATCH: Do you think the laity should also be involved in preaching?***

***HIS HOLINESS:*** Yes, absolutely, if they are appropriately prepared and educated. For example the newspaper *Loosavoritch* [Illuminator], which is religious in nature, is published by the initiative and participation of the laity. In the beginning it had some political tendencies and it was under the auspices of the Armenian National Movement. However, when we had the opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the staff of the newspaper, we were pleasantly surprised; all of them are educated young men and women, they know Armenian well, they know their national literature, they read, they understand and they interpret the Holy Scriptures adequately. Through our suggestions, they have distanced themselves from the political currents and today they enjoy our auspices, including financially. It is such lay individuals that the church needs to utilize for evangelical purposes. We also have another group, the *Yeghpayragtzootyoon* [Fellowship] of the Armenian Church. We would like to select the members of our church councils, diocesan councils and other church bodies from such lay religious organizations. \*



From Beirut to Yerevan

# “CHURCHLOVERS”

## WHO MINISTER

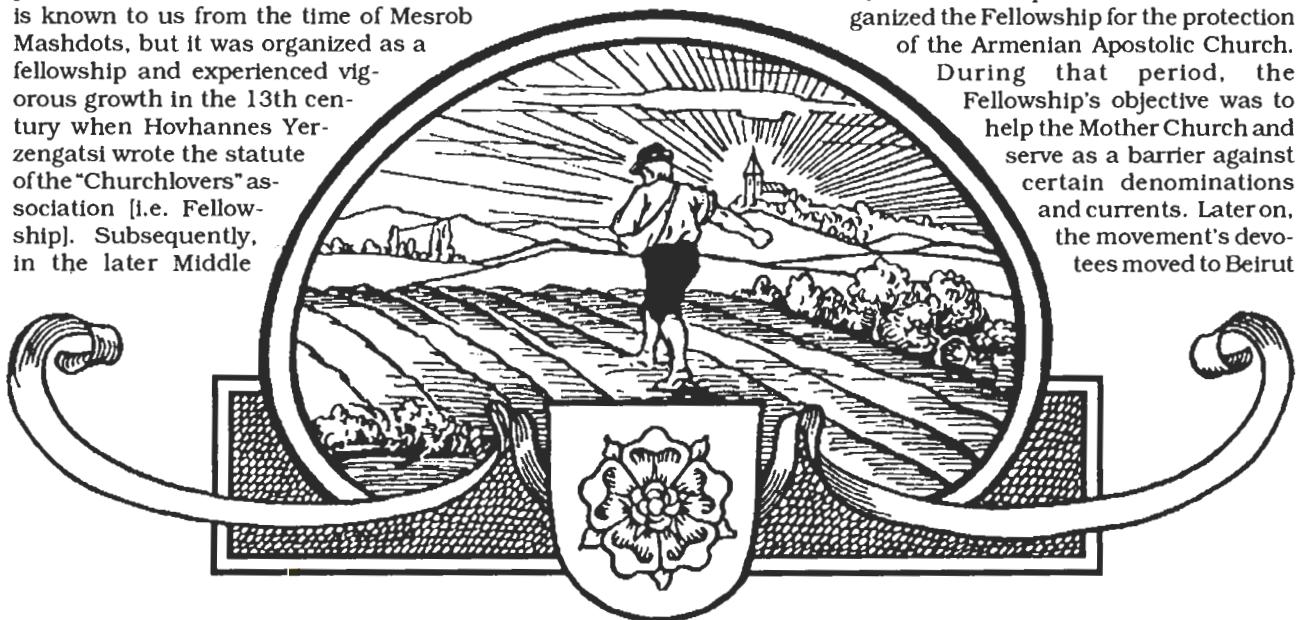
### THE FELLOWSHIP (BROTHERHOOD) OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Conversation with  
Hamlet Zakarian  
CHAIRMAN OF THE FELLOWSHIP

**DN. HRATCH:** *Can you tell us in general terms when, where and how did the Fellowship come about?*

**HAMLET ZAKARIAN:** [The Fellowship is a lay organization in the church.] The first written information about the *Fellowship* or more accurately, about the activity of lay persons devoted to the church in Armenian life, is known to us from the time of Mesrob Mashdots, but it was organized as a fellowship and experienced vigorous growth in the 13th century when Hovhannes Yezengatsi wrote the statute of the “Churchlovers” association [i.e. Fellowship]. Subsequently, in the later Middle

Ages, the movement assumed a rather instinctive nature. In the latter part of the 19th century, when different religious currents and sectarian movements had begun to make inroads and spread among the Armenian Apostolic Church and the people, [a priest named] Krikor Vardapet Voskeritchian reorganized the Fellowship for the protection of the Armenian Apostolic Church. During that period, the Fellowship’s objective was to help the Mother Church and serve as a barrier against certain denominations and currents. Later on, the movement’s devotees moved to Beirut



[Lebanon] and the movement reached Yerevan in 1947, during the period of repatriation. The movement experienced a major revival in 1960, after the death of Stalin. At that time, there were groups consisting of 50-60-80 persons who had prayer meetings in 12 locations. Today the Fellowship, with its approximately 4000 members, has 36 sites for prayer meetings in 21 cities and towns.

Our Fellowship took the initiative in forming and organizing "Sunday Schools" which the church later on took under its sponsorship. Presently we have introductory courses for Sunday school teachers in Yerevan and in other cities, in which approximately 360 teachers are participating. On October 15, 1991, His Holiness Catholicos Vazken I sanctioned the Fellowship's activity within the church, permitted the singing of religious songs, for example, those newly composed spiritual hymns which are worshipful in nature and are outside of the realm of church ceremonies and rites.

**DN. HRATCH:** *How did the process of that sanction occur? Did you submit a written document to His Holiness or did you simply make a presentation?*

**ZAKARIAN:** Through oral negotiations and meetings which lasted a few months. Let me explain the interrelationship between the Fellowship and the [Armenian Apostolic] Church.

The Fellowship was revived and became more active, starting in 1980. At that time, young and new energetic individuals—intellectuals and scientists—joined the movement in place of those who were emigrating abroad, to the United States. His Holiness welcomed the Fellowship and accepted us—approximately 300 persons who were members of the original group. His Holiness also went a step further—which was heroic for that time—and donated approximately 150 pocket Gospels to us.

However, fearing governmental interference, shortly thereafter in 1981, the church completely severed its relations and ties with us. Nevertheless, certain individual clergymen, particularly those who were in the Diaspora, continued to infuse us with

spirit and support. Starting in 1991, thanks to His Grace Bishop Karekin Nersisian, Primate of the Araratian Diocese, vigorous activity and work began anew. The active involvement of Khatchig Stamboltsiants and Rafael Babayan, President of the committee for the defense of human rights and a member of the church council, had major significance. Certain agreements



were reached, the most important of which being that the Catholicos officially sanctioned and registered us—at that time we had approximately 3000 members. Let me say that this written authorization was a major accomplishment. There were numerous religious groups throughout the world at that time, but none in Armenia. The Armenian Church was in an extremely difficult and ruinous state, but we were a *community*; for that reason, our case went as far as Moscow and the order came back, instructing that our activity be curtailed and prohibited. The government meddled a great deal in church matters; the situation was terrible. In fact, if it weren't for the rituals [liturgical practices] of the church, she would have not endured or survived the persecution.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Presently, what is the nature of your relationship with the Mother See in Holy Etchmiadzin? Does it simply sponsor you, or are you a separate ecclesiastical organization?*

**ZAKARIAN:** We have an ecclesiastical administration consisting of 10 persons, which also includes one clergyman, Father Krikor Hairabedian [of the United States]. We also have by-laws, approved and certified by His Holiness. According to those by-laws, we are not authorized to examine ecclesiastical or doctrinal matters in our meetings, but we settle internal

matters and questions completely independent and separate from the Church. Nevertheless, the Fellowship functions in each Diocese [in Armenia] with the knowledge and under the patronage of the Primate of the given Diocese. This, of course, is good and it facilitates our work in the sense that the Diocesan Council, having assumed patronage according to the by-laws, is obligated to take care of our needs; at the same time, however, certain complications do arise because the church itself is still not organized to the extent that it can overcome various difficulties.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Earlier you gave some data about your activities, are there also such data concerning the Sunday Schools? How many schools do you have and how many pupils attend those schools?*

**ZAKARIAN:** We have 21 Sunday Schools in Armenia, and 6 in Artsakh. We have over 4500 pupils, and its growing every week. Those schools have the qualification of "Christian Education Schools under the patronage of the Armenian Apostolic Church," and each Diocese has assumed responsibility for those within its jurisdiction. In this situation too, however, there are complications since the Dioceses are not in a position, presently at least, to fully provide for the expenses. The *Gtutium* [Armenian Benevolent Association] and the Fellowship are coming through with considerable financial and moral assistance for the work. For example, the Araratian Diocese is able to pay only 15 of the 70 teachers involved in this work; "Gtutium" is taking care of the rest.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Are the teachers full-time or only on Sundays?*

**ZAKARIAN:** There are both types. One segment is completely devoted to the work, whereas others come on a part-time basis, during their free time only. More than half of the 70 teachers work for free; in the past, they all taught without pay.

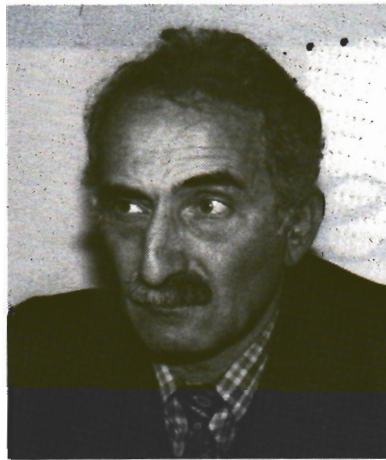
**DN. HRATCH:** *How is your Fellowship growing in numbers. What means of propaganda do you utilize to attract people and, generally speaking, what is your method of operation?*

**ZAKARIAN:** At the outset, let me say that the Fellowship has never gone after people and/or paid them with the aim of signing them up, although the KGB and related bodies have

accused us, saying that we are trying to mislead and corrupt people through religious propaganda. The main and principal aim of the "Churchlovers" Fellowship is to explain the Bible, particularly the New Testament, to the people and make them familiar with the basic tenets of our church dogma. It interacts with the people through frequent visitations in individual homes and group get-togethers which are saturated with religious spirit, and the spread of our Fellowship, the popularity it enjoys is conditioned by that as well. Of course we wish to further expand our activity and make radio-television broadcasts. There are among us competent individuals, ones who are literate in terms of religious knowledge and well-informed about general theology, who are capable of conducting those broadcasts. Television time segments have been put at our disposal, which we can utilize for that purpose. But the church is still very reserved with regard to us and doesn't trust us, whereas we, who consider ourselves her faithful children, naturally don't even think about opposing it, hoping that we will undoubtedly win that trust. Commentaries prepared by four individuals have already been videotaped and submitted to the church for review, and we expect that they will be favorably considered. A 15-minute-long religious radio broadcast in Russian, which is to be made twice a day, has already been approved by His Holiness and received his blessing. It is to be called the "Voice of the Armenian Church" and is meant for the Russian-speaking immigrants who have settled in Armenia and adjacent regions as a result of the recent political turn of events.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Are there perhaps matters of incompatibility between you and the church?*

**ZAKARIAN:** In this connection, I can state the following two points. First, the church has a certain preconceived attitude and position regarding non-religious songs, whereby it rejects their use. For example, why should permission be denied to sing the spiritual songs of Archbishop Yeghishe Tourian [once Patriarch of Jerusalem] and/or other such songs? Of course, these are not liturgical hymns, they are not connected with the Divine Liturgy, but must they be rejected on that account? What's



unfortunate is that they don't know a thing at the Seminary about spiritual life, true faith and the true believer, and that is understandable; it's no secret that, for decades, the believer clergymen have been persecuted and, in the true sense of the word, irreligious teachers have taught the stu-

**W**e have 21 Sunday Schools in Armenia, and six in Artsakh. We have over 4500 pupils, and its growing every week.

dents in the Seminary. Our young present-day clergymen have grown up with such a spirit as that, totally ignorant of our religious traditions and heritage.

The second point which I wish to address has to do with spontaneous prayer, which again is rejected by the church, if not by all clergymen then by many of them. It couldn't have turned out any differently, because until quite recently, the church was carrying on anti-religious, instead of religious, propaganda. The Bulgarian, Roumanian and Slavonic Orthodox Churches have already admitted in the press that, during the period of Soviet tyranny, they cooperated with the KGB and carried out its proposals to shake and destroy the foundations of the church. The Armenian Church, which likewise had a similar orientation during the period in question, unfortunately hasn't had the courage to date to come forth with such a confession and state the directives it had received, so that the matter could be closed once and for all.

**DN. HRATCH:** *What means are you referring to? Can you be more specific?*

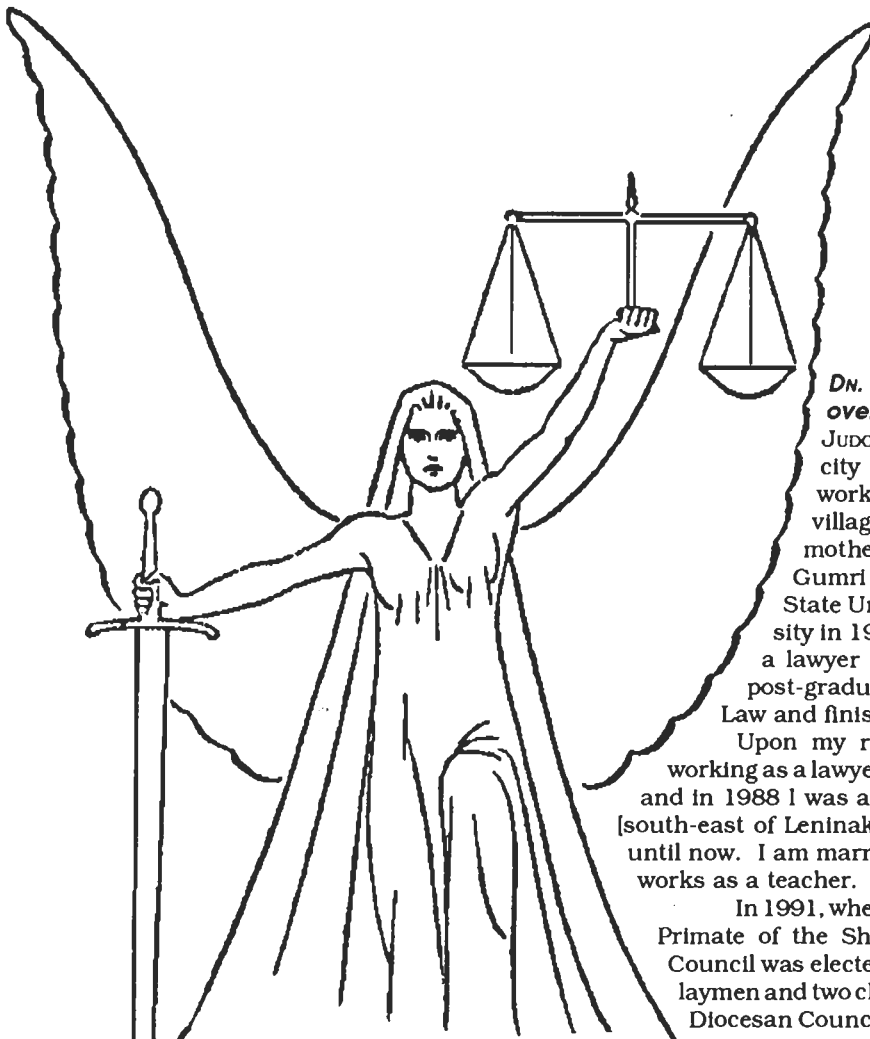
**ZAKARIAN:** Well, the Armenian Church is a parish [communal] church, yet there are no parishes, [in the true sense of the word] in Armenia at all. This situation was realized through a special decision made by the Communist regime in 1922. Other similar decisions were also carried out in later years. For example, in 1986, with the planning of the Central Committee and KGB in Moscow, it was decided to turn Armenia into an experimental field of activity for various sects. It was during that time that, owing to the KGB, the Jehovah's Witnesses penetrated Armenia via Poland and today they are flooding Armenia, along with other sectarians. This is truly a disturbing phenomenon, which is gradually expanding and spreading to the far ends of the country. For example, the Pentecostals, who are engaging in absolutely anti-church activities by downright blaspheming the church, have already become a powerful and organized community and their ranks include 12,000 members in Yerevan alone.

There's also another matter that is cause for serious contemplation. It's a known fact that, at the end of

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# CROSS & GAVEL

Conversation with  
Martin Tadevossian  
JUDGE OF THE ARTIK REGION  
& CHAIRMAN OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL  
OF THE DIOCESE OF SHIRAK (LENINAKAN)



**DN. HRATCH:** *Could you give us a brief, overall autobiographical sketch?*

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** I was born in 1942 in the city of Gumri [Leninakan] to a family of workers. My father Ghevont was from the village of Harij in the Artik region whereas my mother came from Kars. I studied first in Gumri then at the School of Law, Yerevan State University. I graduated from the University in 1973 and immediately began working as a lawyer in Gumri. From 1979-1982, I was a post-graduate student at the Moscow Institute of Law and finished with a Doctor of Laws degree.

Upon my return to my birthplace, I continued working as a lawyer. In 1984, I moved to the Judge's office and in 1988 I was appointed interregional Judge for Artik [south-east of Leninakan] and I have remained in this post until now. I am married and have four daughters. My wife works as a teacher.

In 1991, when Bishop Grigoris Buniatian was elected Primate of the Shirak Diocese, the church's Diocesan Council was elected a few months later, consisting of five laymen and two clergymen. I was elected Chairman of the Diocesan Council. I have always been close to our church,



***Dn. Hratch: How was your relationship with the church cultivated?***

JUDGE TADVOSSIAN: As I said, I've always felt close to the church and that's in my blood, it comes from my parents. Our surname was Der Mardirosian, because my grandfather's brother had been a priest; thus our home atmosphere was always filled with religious inspiration. Attending church was part of our lifestyle, despite my being a member of the [Communist] Party, and my position. Obviously, the party wasn't favorably disposed toward the church at that time. Many associates have questioned how it is possible for someone working as a Judge to be a member of the church's Diocesan Council at the same time. My response, in turn, would be that it is precisely the Judges and those working within the legal system who need faith so that they can understand what's good and bad. And with the help of that faith, they can differentiate properly and issue just verdicts and decide on suitable punishments. Thus, these two jobs of mine don't contradict each other; on the contrary, they complement and supplement one another. It's unfortunate that, until recently, the government and government employees had kept their distance from the church owing to the circumstances, whereas, in my opinion, it would have been much more proper and better if they had cooperated with it.

***Dn. Hratch: Can you explain further what you understand by the words "faith" and "believer"?***

JUDGE TADVOSSIAN: By "believer," I don't mean praying or remembering God only in times of trouble. That is merely the partial manifestation, expression of faith. The true believer shall become fused with God and the church with all the essence of his soul; shall feel and understand what true faith is; and shall believe with all his heart and soul and without any reservation. As I noted, having grown up in a family atmosphere full of faith, it was always incomprehensible and sad for me to see that rupture that existed between the church and society. That of course was conditioned by the prevailing reality; and while it's true that punitive measures weren't employed as regards the church and faith in a legal sense, yet in reality the church was severely inhibited, its rights lim-

ited, and the people's religious feelings subjected to adversities.

Now, under the present conditions of freedom, the doors of the church have opened wide for all, and all can and do enter, regardless. Unfortunately, quite a few of those who go to church are far from being true believers. At the present time, faith among the vast majority of the youth is still a formality; they don't even know what real faith is. Under such circumstances then, the question arises as to what our attitude should be and what we should do. In my opinion, our first and foremost

**T**he Judges and those within the legal system need faith so that they can understand what is good and bad.

task shall be to give impetus to religious preaching [evangelism] by putting that effort on the right track, and focus attention, first of all, on our schools and other educational institutions. We said that faith must penetrate man's soul, must become part of his being and, for that to happen, religious instruction must begin at a young age, little children must be educated with that spirit. In addition, using the press and other public media such as, for example, radio, television, etc., we must endeavor to present our church ceremonies, holy days, and other rites to the people, explain, tell about them, make them accessible and comprehensible. In that way, they will get to know and love our Mother Church. At the present time, considering this complex state of affairs that has been created, our people perhaps need such faith much more so.

The Seminary in Sevan, organized by the Vicar of the Araratian Diocese, Bishop Karekin Nersisian; the four Sunday schools in Yerevan; the creation of a separate choir and dance ensemble; and the program to prepare teachers to implement the instruction of religion are all very wonderful means which serve the purpose of sowing the seeds of true faith among the people. Similar attempts are being made in the Shirak Diocese, despite the extremely constricting and difficult conditions existing there. For example, a Sunday school is already in operation in the city of Gumri. Since there aren't any ready specialists or qualified teachers available locally, such individuals are coming from Yerevan every Saturday. The number of pupils is increasing daily; adults and even senior citizens are coming to participate.

The lessons are often accompanied by dialogue and exchange of views concerning various topics, always having religion and faith as a focal point. It also happens that, during the course of discussions, questions are raised which express doubt concerning our orthodox Christian faith. In connection with the movement in Artsakh, for example, upon seeing the tragic progression of events unfolding, certain people began to think that the Muslim religion has a greater influence and positive impact on the people. Unfortunately, I myself wasn't able to deny the fact that the entire Muslim world docilely

submits to the slightest movement of the Mollah's hand. In the current situation, we have to display such compliance with our Mother Church; for that reason, we have to come forth in greater unison, a greater spirit of togetherness, in defense of our church and people. In my opinion, what is ruining the chances of such unity are the political parties, which are increasing in number daily and which are not at all beneficial; on the contrary, they are causing division. In my opinion, the present government of Armenia must seriously think about that and, temporarily, let's say for a period of 5 years, restrict the free activity of political parties. Today the main issue on our agenda is the existence of our nation, [the defense of] its rights, and not [the hashing out of various] views or ideas. Today, religion, the sacred faith of our forefathers shall unite us and help us so that we can struggle as a nation for our survival.

**DN. HRATCH:** *You say that the Muslim mollah is more powerful, has more influence and authority over his faithful than our clergymen and the Church has over us Christians? Why?*

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** Honestly, I myself haven't been able to come up with an explanation. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan had the identical political conditions during the years of Soviet rule; however, religious feelings haven't become stifled as much among the Muslims and faith hasn't died in their souls. The reason is probably that the Armenians, being more educated, more intelligent, approach matters of faith intellectually, whereas blind, fanatical faith prevails among them.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Two years ago a law pertaining to freedom of conscience and religion was proclaimed in Armenia. Therein is mentioned that the Armenian Apostolic Church occupies a special and important place in the spiritual life of our people and, on that basis, the Armenian Church enjoys certain privileges. As a judge and a jurist, would you please comment?*

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** At present, the criminal code prepared and established in 1982 is in effect. According to the 141st and 142nd articles of that code, the laws pertaining to the separation of church and state, and school and church, have been violated, and that violation is subject to penalty. And to restrictions on per-



forming religious ceremonies, it states that they are subject to penalties to the degree that they disturb the public order. That is to say, the celebration of religious rites won't be obstructed.

**W**e have to come forth in a spirit of togetherness in defense of our church and people.

The Catholics have a church in the neighboring village and a large hospital in the Ghoukasian region. At the opening of the hospital, they conducted a big ceremony with great pomp and splendor and at which the representatives of the Pope was present. We don't prevent such things; the only thing is, we informed His Holiness the Catholicos and he, in turn, told them that they are free to perform their ceremonial rites as long as they don't create scandal or corrupt our people through their "preaching" activities.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Nevertheless, don't you think that by forbidding these various denominations from preaching, we are violating democratic principles?*

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** I agree and it is true, that is a violation of rights. However, we must not forget that those subscribing to alien creeds are very powerful and pose a serious threat to us; therefore, in my opinion, we have acted prudently in taking that step, which is temporary, until our present unstable and insecure situation is put in order. There are two courses, two forms of adjustment: either we become so strong, firm in our faith that external factors can no longer have an impact, or those foreign elements or creeds will gradually go away, leaving the field to the legitimate children of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

**DN. HRATCH:** *In various circles, there is talk of making the Armenian Apostolic Church a National church, as is the case in England, where the Anglican Church is referred to as the national church (Church of England) and enjoys the patronage of the Queen. In Armenia, of course, such a situation doesn't exist. What do you think, is such a suggestion sensible or not?*

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** [The population of] our country is generally homogeneous. There aren't [many] different nationalities; there are only different creeds—Catholic, Protestant, etc. Of course, if it turns out such that foreigners begin to establish residence among us, it would be prudent to allow them to have their own places of worship, churches. Today the Armenians are scattered and have established residence in 151 countries throughout the world, in which they enjoy the benevolent treatment of the governments of those countries. Natu-

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# THE CHURCH IN THE DISASTER ZONE

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Conversation with the  
Father Sebouh Tchouldjian  
VICAR OF THE DIOCESE OF SHIRAK (LENINAKAN)

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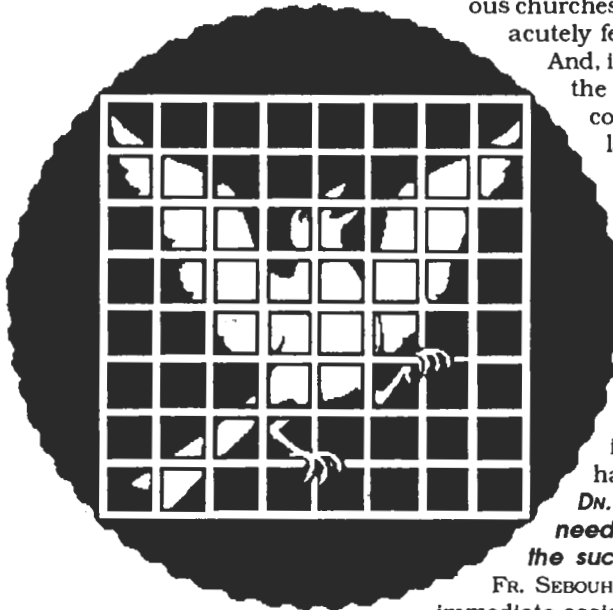
**DN. HRATCH:** *Can you describe the extent of the physical and moral damage sustained by the church as a result of the earthquake?*

**FR. SEBOUH:** The physical damage has undoubtedly been very great. Numerous churches which were half-ruined or standing—and whose need is so acutely felt by us now—came tumbling down in different regions.

And, in a spiritual sense, the damage suffered by us consisted of the loss of some very lovely traditions that had served to connect the believers with the church. The people, particularly those who lost many of their family members—especially children—turned cold in terms of faith; skepticism toward the church and God was manifested. These were people—forgive me for saying—whose faith was somewhat lame. There were other persons as well who clung steadfastly to their faith, consoling themselves like the blessed Job: “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” To a large extent, they had seemingly adopted the notion of being the remaining ones and assumed the survivor mentality of carrying on with their existence, without of course knowing, understanding that only a few members of entire clans had been saved.

**DN. HRATCH:** *How was the church able to take care of the needs of the people during the time of the earthquake and the succeeding few months?*

**FR. SEBOUH:** It is difficult for me to say anything definite about the immediate assistance provided by the church when the catastrophe hit because the blow had also struck the church and its clergymen down. It



wasn't easy, actually it was practically impossible for us to find words to comfort the disaster victims because—quite honestly—we ourselves needed solace. It was inconceivable for us, altogether incomprehensible, as to why this had happened. We ourselves didn't have the answer in order to explain it to the people and thus soften the blow. Time was needed to enable us to analyze what had happened with cold logic and explain things fortified with faith.

***Dn. HRATCH: Now that almost four years have already passed, by what means is the church endeavoring to cure the wounds caused by the catastrophe?***

FR. SEBOUH: It must be said that we're trying our best to console the people through the liturgical and sacramental services of the church as well as the celebration of Divine Liturgy. For instance, at the conclusion of each service we try to explain the meaning and purpose of the worship to the people. We're also going to the schools, having discussions with the pupils, and preaching, if necessary. Both the Primate and I, as Vicar, are often invited to various institutes, establishments, and hospitals, where we have meetings with people from different classes and walks of life. Of course, we don't have the manpower necessary to carry out the required pastoral work throughout the Diocese [of Shirak].

***Dn. HRATCH: How about the other denominations or religious groups that are active behind the scenes?***

FR. SEBOUH: There is a painful and regrettable fact of life and that is, that the church too is in the same situation as the people. We must admit, this is indeed a very difficult situation. The church's financial means and capabilities are not sufficient to provide material comfort to the people, something that the sectarians, the Protestants and the Catholics are doing. They are blinding people with fine, attractive, beautiful objects, foodstuffs, material and other possessions; in a way they're making the people indebted to them and, in lieu of thankfulness, drawing them toward their faith. Thus they are convert seekers to be reckoned with yet their influence over weak-willed and the skeptical would come to naught if our church as well had the foodstuffs and financial means in demand.

***Dn. HRATCH: Do you think that the Armenian Apostolic Church is in***



***Jeopardy, to a certain extent, of losing its predominance to the sectarians on account of the latter's capabilities?***

FR. SEBOUH: It is unlikely that they will gain predominance over our church but nevertheless they can constitute a great and serious dan-

**T**he

***Protestants and Catholics are blinding people with foodstuffs and possessions, drawing them toward their faith.***

ger, not in the sense of saving the Armenian's soul, but in terms of weakening the nation's human resources. This is the danger threatening our people in the present state.

***Dn. HRATCH: Can you tell us about some of your plans? For example, what work is being done with the orphans and how is it proceeding?***

FR. SEBOUH: In conjunction with the Diocese of Canada, we have taken charge of the care of the orphans, who have lost one or both parents, and needy children living in Gumayri and the rest of the disaster zone, by making a monthly allocation to each one. This project was undertaken by the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Canada, headed by the Primate, Bishop Hovnan Derderian, with the participation of the Canadian-Armenian community. The basis of our cooperative effort with them is as follows: we prepare lists containing the children's names as well as information sheet containing all the necessary data about each one. We submit these to the attention of the Canadian Diocese and they, in turn, send us the corresponding appropriation.

***Dn. HRATCH: In connection with this project, how many children are there receiving financial assistance?***

FR. SEBOUH: At the present time, we have 369 children [as of October 1992, the number has reached 800+] who are regularly receiving their monthly subsidy. In connection with these children, we have certain plans whose realization depends on our economic situation. If we're able to create the necessary conditions, we shall begin to provide them religious instruction, select some of them to form a choir, and draw them toward the church.

***Dn. HRATCH: As a clergyman, as a servant of the Armenian Apostolic Church, what are your thoughts concerning the conditions in Armenia at present, what with the Karabagh conflict raging on the one hand, the multifarious complications linked with political independence increasing on the other, as well as the difficulties caused by the earthquake disaster?***

FR. SEBOUH: Of course, as clergymen we are not involved in politics but we very clearly see the state of affairs our people are in. My saying that our current situation is a very difficult

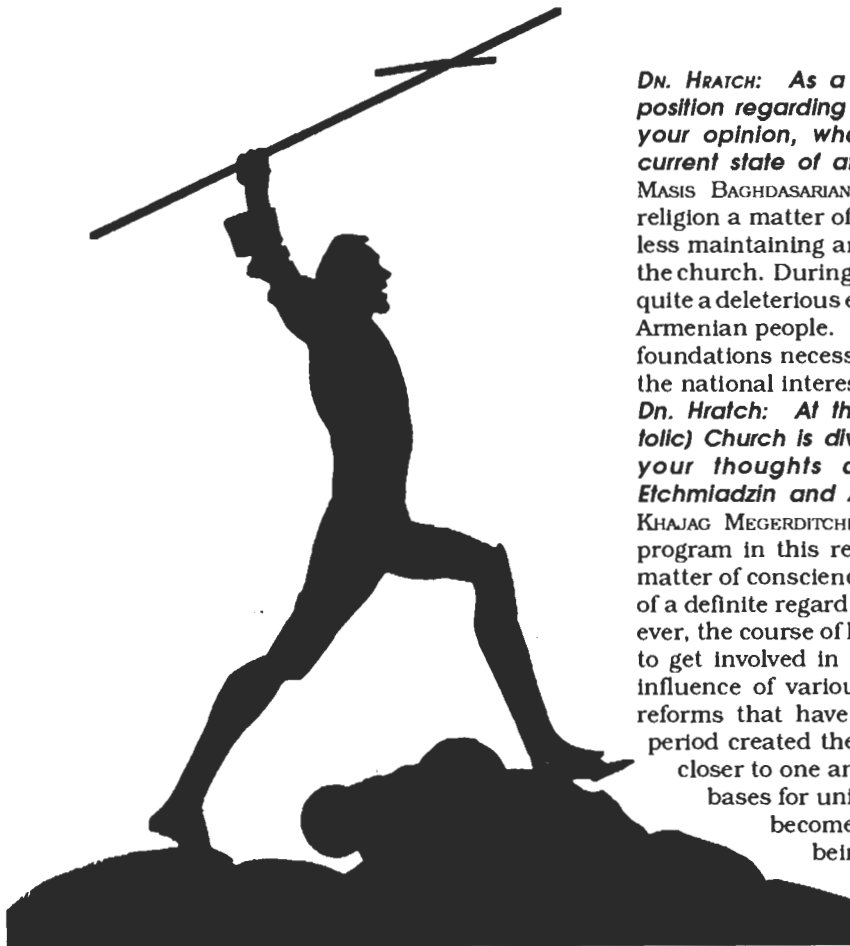
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# A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

## THE ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION

Conversation with  
Masis Baghdasarian  
MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF ARF  
&  
Khajag Megerditchian  
ARF YEREVAN BUREAU STAFF  
YEREVAN



***Dn. Hratch:*** *As a political party, what is your present position regarding the church and religious matters? in your opinion, what must the church's role be in the current state of affairs?*

**MASIS BAGHDASARIAN:** Our party has always considered religion a matter of individual conscience, while nevertheless maintaining an awareness of the great role played by the church. During the past 70 years, the Soviet regime had quite a deleterious effect on the spiritual development of the Armenian people. Now everything is changing and all the foundations necessary for religion, in its entirety, to serve the national interests, are already being laid.

***Dn. Hratch:*** *At the present time, the Armenian (Apostolic) Church is divided in two in the Diaspora. What is your thoughts about the interrelations between Etchmiadzin and Antelias?*

**KHAJAG MEGERDITCHIAN:** There is an article in the ARF's program in this regard, according to which religion is a matter of conscience; in other words, it was developed out of a definite regard for freedom of religious worship. However, the course of history was such that the church began to get involved in politics to a certain extent, under the influence of various changes and events. The political reforms that have been carried out during the current period created the opportunity for the two Sees to draw closer to one another by engaging in a dialogue to find bases for unification. It is high time that the church become disengaged from politics, revert to its being a national church and a place of Christian worship, and provide an impetus to our national life through its religious substance. In this sense,

particularly in Armenia, the church has a very important role to play. To a certain extent, it has found its place and role as a stronghold of Armenian national preservation in the Diaspora, whereas in Armenia today, church and religious activities haven't reached a sufficient and satisfactory level, considering the prevailing religious confusion and the presence of very dangerous elements leading to religious corruption, such as fire worship, tendencies to return to pagan roots, and various sectarian currents. In the first place, the Mother See must extend every effort to vitalize religious life, reestablish Christian values and, as quickly as possible, prepare qualified staff, experts, and servants of the church.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Do you think in that case, harmony and unity will become possible between the two Sees?*

**MEGERDITCHIAN:** Yes, because the cause of that division was non-religious. That cause, in turn, doesn't exist any more; that political difference leading to the separation between the two Sees no longer exists. Therefore, if the church confines itself to strictly religious matters and is divested of political issues, there will no longer be any cause for division between the two Sees, even if they continue to maintain their separate existence. There is no conflict of interest if both catholicosates remain, so long as the dissension ceases and the aspect of the church's integral structure is maintained.

**BAGHDASARIAN:** In this matter, the stance of Etchmiadzin, as the Mother See situated in the fatherland, is very important. The same holds for the political authorities: depending on the policy they pursue with regard to the already existing structures, they accordingly will either serve the fatherland in a very useful manner or, on the contrary, they too will become weakened, as a result of which the government won't benefit either. The overall question is: What position will Armenia, its political authorities and spiritual center take with regard to the Armenian Diaspora?

**Dn. Hratch:** *What should that policy be?*

**MEGERDITCHIAN:** If we suppose for a moment that the church is stripped of its political involvements, then Etchmiadzin must bring its clergymen back to the fatherland and focus its extensive plans of action on the matter of revitalizing Armenia's religious life. If we accept for a moment that the dissensions between the two Sees are eliminated, then the church in the Diaspora and its structures

shall be entrusted to the [Cilician] Catholicosate and the religious vitalization of Armenia shall be directed by the Etchmiadzin clergymen, whose acute shortage is felt at present.

**BAGHDASARIAN:** Presently the churches have been granted the right to function freely, but there isn't a sufficient number of clergymen. The vast majority of the existing ones, in turn, don't have the special calling, the education, and the manners and mores that are unique to the clergy.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Do you think that those clergymen ought to actively participate in (political) organizations?*

**MEGERDITCHIAN:** If a given individual has dedicated his life to the religious

**I**t is time that the church become disengaged from politics and revert to its being a place of Christian worship.

work, that means that he has already decided on his purpose in life, which is to serve his people through religion. Of course, it is not at all disruptive for that clergymen to also have definite political views, independent of his professional occupation.

**Dn. Hratch:** *As a political party, what relations do you have on a practical level with the Catholicosate of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin? Are you cultivating close or official ties?*

**BAGHDASARIAN:** Unfortunately, permanent ties haven't been formalized but soon we shall attempt to move in that direction. At present the ties that exist are of a purely incidental nature.

**Dn. Hratch:** *In the Diaspora, we hear and read in the papers that there is apparently discord within the ARF in Armenia, that there are two different currents or groupings—the ARF of Armenia and the diasporan ARF. Is this perception well founded?*

**MEGERDITCHIAN:** What you're referring to is not the official ARF but rather these so-called "self-proclaimed" dashnaks, who constitute a totally different grouping, another party. The ARF has already been established in Armenia and is functioning. A self-proclaimed group arose from the underground, which called itself "dashnaksakan," brought together deceived people and formed a party. The name "self-proclaimed Armenian Revolutionary Federation" came about in this manner; that party was also registered or recorded as the "Armenian Revolutionary Federation of Armenia" and it changed its plan, it accepted a totally separate set of bylaws. Our party [ARF] held parleys with that group in order to have it subjected to self-dissolution but, unfortunately, it turned out that they not only didn't have noble aims but ulterior motives besides. They were even split among themselves; in short, they were a very immature and even suspicious organization.

**BAGHDASARIAN:** If you're referring to our political party, it's not that there are different currents and dissension among our ranks; rather, there are issues which are quite different from those that have existed to date. The state of affairs that has been created has produced questions that are cause for serious deliberations and which suggest [the need for] significant structural changes. These are matters which will be examined and solved in the forthcoming general assembly, during which the relationship between the fatherland and the diaspora will be viewed in a totally different light. \*

# THE ARMENIAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION

Conversation with  
Vardan Khachatryan  
Aram Mkrtchian  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
OF THE ARMENIAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION  
YEREVAN



***Dn. HRATCH: When was your party founded?***

**VARDAN KHACHATRIAN:** The party was founded in May 1989. The founding members were: Azat Arshakian (president), Oleg Papayian, Aram Mkrtchian, Vardan Khachatryan and Vardan Haroutiunian. Its objective was to focus attention on the spiritual dimension of politics; to work towards channeling politics along a more proper, nobler, more Christianlike course and, most importantly, to be a party of the people. The objective was further clarified and became distinct through a proclamation that was subsequently approved. The union considers itself a non-religious organization comprised of extremely devout individuals. Each party member must live according to the Ten Commandments, be knowledgeable in Christian ethics and apply them in all situations, both in politics and in life. Its main objective is to create a democratic system [of government] by making radical changes and making the defense of human rights—the constituent essence of democracy—its foundation.

***Dn. HRATCH: Do you have any church affiliation or declaration of faith?***

**KHACHATRIAN:** The declaration of faith is the following: we accept as a base the Armenian Apostolic Church, considering it a national institution—that is, created by the nation. By the same token, we tolerate any other church, and seek mutual understanding with other churches, even non-believers. What is demanded of them all, regardless, is morality, and the acceptance of Christian values. Our objective and program is to create a true democratic government in Armenia, the foremost of whose basic underlying political principles shall be morality in politics, and to restore the lost faith and morality to the nation through propaganda. In all matters, including national issues as well—take Karabagh for example—the starting

point is the defense of human rights and we shall confront any issue in the event that human rights are being violated. The purpose of our Union is to create a link, serve as a bridge between the church and politics, the church and the people.

***Dn. Hratch: In Europe, for example in Germany, there exists the Christian Democratic Party. Is your party similar in form and principles to that or is it different?***

**Khachatrian:** Our organization is different and is not connected to any such organization currently in existence. We do admit, however, that the basis is the same, since everybody's focus is on the economic issue. As is the case abroad, we too are in favor of private enterprise and private ownership, by means of which people will achieve material prosperity and develop wealth. The greater the number of wealthy individuals, the richer the government will be. The more people there are with property and wealth, the more they will be able to participate in the people's spiritual life, and they will be that much more useful to the people and the nation. In the past, such a thing didn't previously exist in our country. Apparently the church was quite strong and there was no need to create such an organization to defend religion, faith, morality and the national heritage. At that time, there wasn't the need for that. During the past 70 years, however, the church and its influence on the people were destroyed, and now people are feeling their detachment, their alienation from the church. That feeling has become so deep that they cannot consider themselves believers, despite the fact that they feel the need for faith. Therefore, our task, our objective is to restore the nation's lost spiritual link with the church, its faith and the human traits which have characterized the nation and its morality.

***Dn. Hratch: In this regard, do you have any interaction with the Armenian Apostolic Church?***

**Khachatrian:** We approached both His Holiness the Catholicos [Vazken I] and the [Araratian] Diocese in Yerevan, proposing cooperation. Unfortunately, they declined; they didn't wish to cultivate relations with any political organization. It's possible that such a directive had been given to them and they couldn't be receptive.

***Dn. Hratch: What kind of cooperation had you suggested? Can you provide examples?***

**Khachatrian:** For example, when the mass baptism of the 150-200,000 Armenian emigres from Azerbaijan was going to take place at Lake Sevan, we offered our assistance and support—not financial of course—since we're not at all in a position to provide that, not having such means. An agreement was reached but they assigned us only the task of keeping order, maintaining discipline; i.e., a policing role.

**M**ultiplicity of religions is inevitable in democratic countries. So why shouldn't it be the same in Armenia?

***Dn. Hratch: What had you anticipated? What sort of participation and support had you expected to provide?***

**Khachatrian:** We had anticipated participating in all the planned activities and all the organizational tasks, except the spiritual part—religious preaching—which belongs to the church. That's their job.

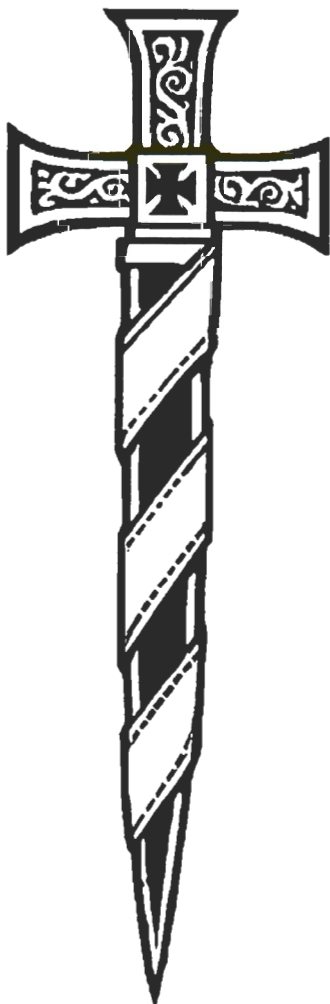
***Dn. Hratch: In the present situation in Armenia, when political and economic hangs have brought about a serious and critical state of affairs, do you think that the Armenian Church is in a position to perform its mission?***

**Khachatrian:** To tell the truth, the topic you've broached is rather complex and touchy. Our conviction, our official point of view is that the Church's role is too great and the scope of its activity has to be plainly limited. It is the Church which shall be at the head, leading the believers, and bring the word and message of God to them. We must confess, however, that such is not the case in reality. Under the present conditions of freedom, the number of churchgoers has increased disproportionately, there are more believers but the people are presently behaving instinctively in matters of religion and faith. The force to assemble them, bring them together and organize them is lacking; that force can be the church and only the church. In this regard, regrettably, the church is quite remiss in its obligation. In fact, the Church has become the mouthpiece of the views of the political authorities. Sometimes there are governmental decisions which don't have a positive effect on the people. In such cases, you see, the church must decisively intercede in order to protect the interests of the believers. In reality, however, the church maintains total silence or comes forth as the government's ideologist. Church sermons too are usually nothing more than an apology for this or that activity or policy of the government, without taking into consideration the degree to which they are acceptable and beneficial to the people. This circumstance is repulsive to the churchgoing believer who goes there to find explanations concerning faith, Christ, and our national religious beliefs and rites, and the elucidation of those sorts of matters that are of concern to them. The church has one calling: to bring the word of God to the

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# ARMENIAN “SKINHEADS”

Conversation with  
Artak Zakarian and Levon Krikorian  
16-YEAR-OLD STUDENTS AT GUMAYRI ACADEMIC SCHOOL  
GUMAYRI (LENINAKAN)



*This conversation took place during lunch recess at Gumayri Academic School (High School level). While visiting the classes, I noticed swastikas drawn by chalk on the walls of two classrooms. I asked some of the students for explanation, their ages ranged from 15 to 17 years old. During the course of our conversation, I found out that they were Armenian racist or “skinheads” as we call them here in the United States. They use the term Tseghagron in Armenian, which literally means “race as religion.” While their views were very controversial, the way they articulated their beliefs and ideas, with so much passion and conviction, was very impressive. It was hard to believe that they were only 15 or 16 year-old young men. Here is an excerpt from that conversation:*

**DN. HRATCH:** *What do you understand by the term Tseghagron (devotee, follower of the race) ?*

**ARTAK:** As to the meaning of Tseghagron, it is our understanding that man, as a divine being or creation, has to have his objects of worship; he must, in the first instance, worship his God and then the race to which he belongs, whose representative he is. Each individual must put his ideas into practice in real life and in every regard; that is, he must do everything to elevate the understanding of race.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Where are those ideas presently being cultivated ?*

**LEVON:** The aforementioned ideas were advanced earlier in the 20th century by the well-known freedom fighter Nejdeh. It was he who suggested living racially, with the concerns and aims of the race, that is. The main objective of this ideology is the national rebirth of the Armenian people, the elevation of national self-awareness; the overriding issue is the defense of the interests of the race and the placement of

those interests above all other factors, above all.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Don't you think, though, that that is dangerous? Take the case of the Germans. Didn't that ideology lead to their wrongdoing?*

**Levon:** It's true, since it is possible to think that it's the same fascism. In reality, however, there isn't such a thing because our ideology doesn't classify our nation above all the others, it does not disdain others, rather it aspires to raise our own dignity, to bring the nation to the point of self-knowledge, self-awareness, to elevate the people's national spirit and pride, without becoming haughty and supercilious.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Well, then what is the place and role of religion and the church in this ideology?*

**Levon:** Since our Apostolic Church is a purely national church, it too must play an important and definitive role and contribute, in turn, to the awakening and strengthening of the national self-awareness of the Armenian people.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Does that mean that religion must become race worship, or the embodiment of race worship.*

**Artak:** Not at all. We simply wish to stress that although religion stands above all human affairs and above all ideologies, nevertheless the qualities, the merits of the nation and the race must never be forgotten, ignored and scorned. In the word "tseghagron," race is lifted up, it is accepted as an object of worship without of course forgetting that everything on earth has been created by the Heavenly Father, and no ideology whatsoever can deny, refute, or help but accept that as an absolute truth.

**Levon:** The main object of race devotion is man; accordingly, the ideology we profess is a humanistic ideology. The Armenian Christian Church, founded by our Lord Jesus Christ and handed down to us, is likewise a humanistic philosophy; thus this race devotion ideology of ours also follows its humanistic creed and God's commandments.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Are you saying that there is no antagonism or conflict between your ideology and the church.*

**Artak:** Of course there isn't and there can't be. Even going back several thousand years, ever since the ancient times, our people have had the inclination to worship their own race. That is the reason why we had a firm



*With the "skinheads" in a classroom*

stable governmental foundation in the days of Tigran and Artashes. Our people had achieved a high level of self-awareness; they felt and knew that they were obligated to defend the race against all kinds of hostile intrusions and attacks. Owing to that noble concept, awareness of being a nation, in turn, they were able to overcome numerous adversities and survive till the present.

**Levon:** In losing their statehood, our people also lost their national self-awareness. The main purpose of our present ideology is to assist our present state and government in every way and every regard in order to protect and strengthen it.

**Dn. Hratch:** *How widespread is your current ideology? Does it exist only within your school's confines or is it being embraced more widely?*

**Levon:** The ideology has spread throughout Armenia, even to the extent that two political parties have emerged which are founded on its basis.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Why have you selected the swastika as your symbol?*

**Artak:** The origin of the sign is very old and it signifies eternity. There was a period long before Christianity when that sign was equivalent to the cross.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Nevertheless, the swastika is a symbol of fascist Germany,*

*and it shall always be associated everywhere with the ideology of fascism and therefore, whether you like it or not, you must clarify your intention and purpose.*

**Levon:** As we said, the sign symbolizes eternity, it came about in very olden times and its cradle was the Armenian Highland and its vicinity. The true meaning, or essence, of the sign is the concept of eternity, the tranquillity and variability of nature, as well as the natural order of things. The German chauvinists simply found it suitable to give form to their aims and make it serve their interests, characterized by super-power ambitions and an intolerance of foreigners.

**Dn. Hratch:** *Is your professed ideology essentially political or religious in nature? And do many in your school believe and follow that concept?*

**Levon:** In Armenia, the ideology of race devotion is represented by two political parties: "The Armenian Race-Worshipping Party," and "The Nejdehian Race Devotees." The latter, particularly among the youth, has begun to gain much popularity and has become widespread. Quite a few of both the girls and boys in our school have now become followers of the ideology of race devotion. \*

# Diary of an American Priest in Armenia

Fr. Yeprem Kelegian



*Earlier this year I was sitting in a village in Armenia, holding hands over a hot plate, trying to keep warm. I was really sick—but as fulfilled as I've ever been in nearly two decades in the ministry.*

*I was one of two priests chosen to go to the newly independent Republic of Armenia to preach in the villages; (Fr. Dajad Davidian of Watertown, MA, is the other priest I traveled with). For more than 70 years, the communists had suppressed the church. Now Armenia, the earliest nation to embrace Christianity, is having its first exciting taste of freedom in years. Things were different now. In 1970, as part of my training for the priesthood, I spent a summer at the monastery in Etchmiadzin. At that time, Armenians were repressed, and a person could be sent to Siberia just for teaching and preaching Christianity. However, today, people in Armenia thirst for religion, even though they are still trying to recover from the devastating 1988 earthquake and are fighting to free Armenians in neighboring Azerbaijan.*

*Our trip had been scheduled for January, but the Armenians urged us not to come until March because of the cold. Even so, there was always snow on the ground, and it was hard to stay warm. I have to confess that it took me a while until I fully comprehended our mission and the people who inhabit the land of my ancestors' birth. But once I did, it was hard to leave.*

## **FEBRUARY 27**

We arrive in Yerevan, capital of Armenia. There is applause when we touch down. People are happy to be in Armenia, but they probably also are relieved that the decrepit Soviet Aeroflot plane landed safely. No one is there to meet us at 3:30 am, but we find our way to Etchmiadzin, the center of the Armenian Church worldwide. No one in authority seems to know what to do with us..

## **FEBRUARY 28**

We meet with His Holiness Vazken I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. Even after meeting with him, we find that nothing is firm about our mission. By chance we run into the bishop of Leninakan. He said he would arrange for us to visit some villages in the region struck by the earthquake. But we must wait four days. I am impatient. We are wasting time!

## **FEBRUARY 29**

We are still doing nothing, but we have met the priest from Hokdemberiantz and he takes us out to visit some of the 38 villages in his community. Because of the destroyed economy, the shortages, the lack of heat and electricity, the unemployment, everyone is in bad shape, but they all have courage and strength.

## **MARCH 1**

We are still in Hokdemberiantz. I have the opportunity to do some blessing services. One is to bless a baby who has

been brought to church, along with two live pigeons (an ancient thanksgiving offering). I was never taught this in seminary.

The priest also asked me to perform a funeral. On the way to the village, I find out that the deceased is a 46 year old woman. I am 45. God, she is young. When I look at the casket, I see a very old, weather-beaten bloated body. Life is hard here in Armenia. Because of the great hardships, anybody over 35 starts to look like a senior citizen.

After the funeral, we go to the poorest of the villages of Hokdemberiantz to visit some of the Armenian refugees from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. These were middle- and upper middle-class engineers and teachers from Baku. They were forced out when the Azeris started murdering the Armenians. Now they are the poorest of the poor. Some left with only the clothes on their back. The tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan has brought more than 300,000 Armenians as refugees from Azerbaijan. We visit many of the families, trying to give them hope, leaving what money we could. The food shortage is severe in Armenia, but in places like this it is much more acute.

#### **MARCH 2**

We get a chance to speak at an adult religious education class. I find it is easy to preach because they disregard my broken Armenia and are just listening for a Christian message. It seems that faith has a language of its own.

#### **MARCH 4**

We're in Yerevan. The largest city in Armenia is bustling with entrepreneurs selling clothing, radios, lighters, cigarettes and junk. But the food shortage is evident even here. Most of the factories are closed because there is little electricity and a scarcity of raw materials. Most of the work force is unemployed and many of the men simply stand on the street corners smoking and discussing solutions to the problems of Armenia.

#### **MARCH 5**

I track down a taxi to take us to Leninakan, now officially called Gumri but still referred to as Leninakan by most Armenians. The driver tells us that he has heard that American men take too many orders from their mothers-in-law. Not so in Armenia, he declares, the men call



*Children stand in front of the grave of their father, a fedayin, or freedom fighter, who was killed in Karabakh last year.*

all the shots here. Later in the conversations, we ask him where we can get in touch with him in case we need him. He gives us his mother-in-law's number.

It is snowing and cold. It takes about three and a half hours to travel 75 miles. The roads are terrible. How does anything get done in this country?

#### **MARCH 7**

We attend the Saturday Christian education school for children and have lunch with the teachers. They are part of the Armenian church "Brotherhood" or "Fellowship," basically the former underground church. During the Soviet regime, they preached Christianity and held prayer meetings at great personal risk. They kept together a loose network throughout the country and they kept up the Christian education of their youth. In a word, they kept the living church alive, while the institutional church was under great governmental pressure and restrictions.

There's no electricity or heat today. It's cold. I'm glad we didn't come in January.

#### **MARCH 8**

I am with the other priests at the Leninakan Cathedral when a mother and daughter who had been in Hartford for medical care after the earthquake came up to me. We kiss each other on the cheek, which sent a shock wave through the old priest next to me. He said, "You don't kiss our Leninakan women in church!" To which I asked, "Where do you kiss them—outside?" Priests here don't seem to have a sense of humor.

#### **MARCH 9**

We visit the village of the Sarnaghpiur, near Leninakan. We first meet with village officials (all trying to keep warm around on pot-belly stove) and then we visit the school. The children really know their facts about Christianity.

Some Armenian fedayin (one who gives his life for a cause. When a fedayin dies, we do not say "merav" rather, "zohvetzav") have attacked a Russian garrison near Leninakan and have taken hostages. They are seeking the liberation of Nagorno-Karabagh, an enclave populated by Armenians in neighboring Azerbaijan.





They will return the hostages for arms.

#### MARCH 10

We are in Artik, a small city of about 40,000. After meeting with a few government officials, we visit the school. We also have the opportunity to meet with some fedayin who were captured during the attack on the Russian garrison. They were hanging around the district attorney's office having coffee. Two of the five kiss our hand and ask for blessings.

#### MARCH 11

I spend a couple of hours simply sitting in church to pray. Many people come up and ask religious questions.

In a way, the Armenians are lucky. They have been stripped of everything—work, money, food, heat—they are forced to lead either a meaningless and hopeless life or seek meaning in God and family, the warmth and security that the family provides.

In America we have too many comforts that distract us from the reality of life. We have so much good that we cannot appreciate a good fragment of bread. We have heat, so we cannot detect our human frailty each moment of a cold winter. We have money so we don't really need and appreciate friends and family. In Armenia, though they have nothing, they have the opportunity to have everything.

In the main square of Leninakan there is a huge pedestal where Lenin's statue once stood high. No one approaches the pedestal any more, but it is the warmest part of the city and by midday there are a dozen dogs basking in the sun by the pedestal. Lenin still has his followers in Armenia.

#### MARCH 12

We return to Sarnaghpiur and speak to the classes we missed last time. We also conduct a prayer service.



Everyone in this earthquake-struck area has a sad story. The priest who is taking us around, Father Shirag, lost his daughter in the earthquake. She was at school. He found her body, almost unmarred, in the rubble. She was 10. They were very close. This reminded me of my relationship with my 10-year-old daughter. Although Father Shirag has a son now, nothing can take the place of his daughter. When he is playing with his son, he is happy one moment and then suddenly he is sad, and I know he is remembering his daughter.

The city, though in ruins, still is beautiful. The children playing in the rubble are a sign that this city will rise again. William Saroyan put it best when he said that you can do what you want to the Armenian, but when two of them come together, "see if they will not create a new Armenia."

#### MARCH 13

Today, I go to the Cathedral again. I pull out a prayer card to give to one of the people I was talking to. I am instantly besieged by people who want one. There is a hunger, a thirst for the spiritual. Back home there are people who say that food and other supplies should be sent before religious items. They should come here and visit and open up their eyes and ears before they say such things.

It is starting to get warm. Good news for a city with little heat.

#### MARCH 14

I have a great time at the Christian Education School. I can't imagine getting such a group of enthusiastic and faithful teens like this together in America on a Saturday morning.

We have lunch with the teachers again. They will put us in contact with the Armenian Church Brotherhood [Fellowship] people wherever we want to go.

#### MARCH 15

I give the sermon in the Cathedral today. The people occasionally yell out "Amen" or "Glory to God," or they yell out answers to my rhetorical questions. It is not my skill but the people's faith that makes the preaching.

In the afternoon I go to the city of Kirovagan to visit another person who had been in Hartford for treatment after the earthquake. Anna is doing well. She and her husband just had a baby, named Haroutune

(Resurrection). Anna lost two children in the earthquake. As she limps around on her artificial leg, there is a glimmer of a smile because of her child and a shadow of sadness she remembers what had been before the earthquake.

#### MARCH 16

I visit Spitak, the epicenter of the 1988 earthquake.

It is a broken city. Even the teenagers who had visited Hartford last summer lacked the humor and lightness I have seen in other places in Armenia. It wasn't until last summer in Hartford that they even danced. Dancing simply is not done when you are in mourning, and these children had been in mourning for almost three years.

I meet with the priest of Spitak, Father Avedik (meaning "good news"). He is a melancholy young man. Certainly the ministry in this city has affected him.

#### MARCH 17

On the way back to Yerevan, we visit the city of Talin. We have to stop there because I named one of my daughters after this village. Talin has been inhabited since 2000 B.C. It is a city of great patriots and great believers. More than 500 fedayin who fight in Karabagh are from Talin. The church was reopened two years ago when residents collected 100,000 rubles (small fortune in these times) to refurbish it.

#### MARCH 18

Before going to our next work site, we spend the evening at the Etchmiadzin monastery. We meet with the Yerevan bishop and the priest of Hrazdan, where we will be going next. The bishop jokingly asks if we want to stay with a rich family or a poor one. Father Davidian, my partner, goes for the rich and I the poor.

In the evening we attend a prayer meeting in Yerevan attended by more than 700 people. When we get there, we find out that we are the main speakers for the evening. By this point in the trip, I have nothing prepared. It is easy speaking to groups like this. They are not self-absorbed and can therefore hear the word of God.

Late in the evening I suggest to the young North Americans who are here to distribute food that it would be fun to lift up Father Yeznig's car and put it somewhere else. Father

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## Reflection

# ...that you love one another

Fr. Tateos Abdalian



*Fr. Abdalian is the parish priest of St. Peter Armenian Church in Watervliet, NY. With this article, Fr. Abdalian will be a regular columnist in Window.*



Human nature is resourceful, especially in self-defense, and is no better illustrated than in the ego-defense mechanisms which we use to protect and/or insulate ourselves. Rather than expose a self which we imagine to be inadequate or ugly, we build walls, wear masks, act out roles. We do not trust or accept ourselves enough to be ourselves.

While it may seem to be a safer life behind these facades, it is also a lonely life. We cease to be authentic, and as persons, we starve to death because we have cut ourselves off from all genuine contact with the real world and with other human beings. When we resort to acting out roles or wearing masks, there is no possibility of human growth. We are simply not being ourselves but are merely performing on a stage. When the curtain falls after our performance, we remain the same immature persons that we were when the curtain went up at the beginning of the first act.

The process of maturation depends on how we react to the difficulties or challenges of life. The immature person sees only the difficulties and with his near-sighted eyes can see only the problem and pays very little attention to his own reaction, which is in fact, the critical and definite thing. Difficulties will pass, but our reaction to them does not. Left to linger on in us, it becomes habit, defining our level of maturity. It is not the problem that is critical, but our reaction to it. The reaction of the Christian must always be instilled with a confidence nourished by the conviction that God and he are a majority, stronger than his own weakness. The process of maturation as a Christian (and of course as a human being) will inevitably be marked by failures. But the only real failure is to give up, to quit. The Christian must become bigger than his problem.

If then we are to tear down the walls, take off the masks, stop playing the roles, then we become exposed to the world. We take a chance at being accepted, rejected, hurt, loved... If one is to grow with God, then one must be willing to give up of himself and take on the nature of God who is total love.

Loving others can be truly accomplished only when the focus of our minds and the object of our desires is another, and when all of our activities result from concern for another and not from concern for ourselves. If a person truly loves in this way, he will be loved and he should accept the love of others. The delusion to be avoided at all costs is to love in order to receive love. Christ teaches that we must lose our life before we can gain it, that the only real receiving is in giving. If one is totally concerned with himself, he can never lose his life, can never understand nor experience total love. Love means a concern for, acceptance of, and an interest in the others around us.

Let us pass over the obvious, i.e. family relations, friendships etc. and focus instead on the church parish community.

Christ Our Lord left no doubt about the credentials of the Christian. He said "By this shall men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another... love one another as I have loved you... this is all I command you that you love one another." St. John reminds us in his First Epistle that it is impossible to love God whom we do not see and not love those around us whom we do see. Yes, these things we have heard and maybe even read but we pay them more lip service than perform as action.

The only attitude worthy of the Christian is that of Christ who thought of others always, who gave himself totally even unto death. In his own words "Greater love than this no man than that he lay down his life for his friend." This is what love, Christian love, asks of us, that we lay down our lives for others. Only when we have consented to do this, will we find ourselves, our own happiness, our growth and maturity, our justification as a Christian community.

Becoming a true church community is a long and hard road. It is an altar of sacrifice. It asks an enormous price in self-forgetfulness on the part of the individual. It is to seek only the glory of God who is love. The true Christian community seeks only the good, the fulfillment and the destiny of his fellow man. It is difficult. But yet, the Lord Jesus Christ stands with us, and it becomes our joyous exhortation "By this shall men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another." \*

## Fellowship

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the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, simple low-cost buildings were built for religious assemblies. It's a fact too that during the period of Communist rule, 2600 churches were either closed down or destroyed in Armenia. Today, this much time has passed since the overthrow of that regime and yet not a single church has reopened in Armenia [as a functioning church]; it is distressing, if not downright ridiculous, that the first church [cathedral] is to be built in the year 2001. In Yerevan, which has a population of approximately one and a half million, we have altogether four working churches, and they, in turn, are quite small, without pews and other facilities. We don't even wish to talk about the onerous condition of the priests who are physically unable to perform their ever increasing liturgical or ritual obligations. The long-term spiritual barrenness has now come to an end, the people are already experiencing a reawakening, and now it remains for the church to wake up too, for its clergymen as well to experience that reawakening. In the first place, the church's concern must be the building of large comfortable churches and the supply of suitable clergymen.

**DN. HRATCH:** *In some circles, there is the notion that your Fellowship has adopted certain customs unique to the Protestants. What is your position in this matter and how would you differentiate the Fellowship from the Protestant churches?*

**ZAKARIAN:** The issue itself is baseless because it comes up with those persons who don't know what the church is. The Armenian Apostolic Church has its creed, dogma, and sacred traditions and unquestioningly, each and every member of the Fellowship accepts them wholly as they are. Our Fellowship recognizes the hierarchy of the Armenian Church and its liturgical tradition. Our accepted liturgical worship is that of the Armenian Apostolic Church only. We might mention that there were attempts to dictate reforms during the 1920's, but we have no such intentions whatsoever.

As far as Protestantism is concerned, for a long time the erroneous point of view has prevailed that preaching the Gospel is Protestantism and that, since we too are preaching the Gospel, therefore we have been influenced by said Protestantism in doing so. They are saying to us, "Well, what if you turn Protestant some day?" See what a baseless and absurd label is being applied to us! How and why would a believer, who applies the Armenian Apostolic

Church's declaration of faith unquestioningly, resign from it and turn Protestant? Undoubtedly the Protestant Church has certain positive and edifying aspects, such as for example the maintenance of immediate, simple, sincere, and direct contact with all members of the public—something which we are also aspiring to achieve—but that doesn't mean that we are thereby identifying ourselves with them.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Do you, having wholly dedicated your time and service to this work, think that the Fellowship's relationship with the Church can be threatened in the near or distant future, as a result of the pressures exerted by the Church, and that the Fellowship might be forced to continue its mission independently and in its own fashion?*

**ZAKARIAN:** Such a thing has happened. In 1981, due to political considerations, His Holiness was forced to reject us and it reached the point where our prayer meetings were forbidden and we were obliged to gather together in homes. We've been in existence for 15 years, yet, both government and religious bodies are making it appear that we are—and trying to make us into—sectarians; they are attempting to entice us with various promises: financial security, the freedom to expand our activity, and the necessary means and facilities. However all that of course is geared toward one basic purpose; namely, to weaken and soften the church. The Fellowship however clings tightly to its faith: our mother, the church is the birth giver of our faith and the "father" is the Gospel.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Does this mean that you would continue to exist under the wings of the Armenian Apostolic Church by all means and in any event?*

**ZAKARIAN:** Yes. Even if they put a stop to our meetings and forbid them, we shall continue our work by going underground (we have experience in that) and shall not leave the orbit of the Armenian Church at any cost. However we are optimistic and nurture the hope that our church will become transformed with regards to its officials and servants. The vision of our Holy Fathers, that Armenia and the Armenian Church shall be reborn, has guided us for 16 years already and shall continue to illuminate our path hereafter too.

**DN. HRATCH:** *Earlier you said that the lack of clergymen is acutely felt. Are there perhaps individuals among your Fellowship who are ready and able to carry on a ministry within the church?*

**ZAKARIAN:** Within the Fellowship, there are at present some 50 persons who are able to work as preachers, as well

as 10-15 women, sisters who could serve as deaconesses. As early as 1980, vigorous activity toward this end was started in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and the Catholic Church is quite seriously considering the issue of ordaining men and women in those countries. Back in October 1991, His Holiness and the Primate of the Araratian Diocese promised to ordain all the members of our executive committee as deacons and preaching priests, non-liturgical. However, they apparently have certain doubts and again they reverted to the decision that we are only able to function as aides to priests. Probably a certain amount of time must pass before they can be freed from the preconceived attitude and reservation they have toward us. The church, instead of concerning herself with the issue of sects—which have been growing like mushrooms and spreading throughout Armenia in the past few years—has made us its target. I am pleased to note the fact that, among the church officials and its governing bodies there are individuals who have understood us correctly—recognized the true essence of the Fellowship and are endeavoring to support our growth, knowing full well that the assistance provided by us to the church can help it to a great extent in its efforts to battle the sects.

**DN. HRATCH:** *At the present time, what are some of the concrete needs of the Fellowship?*

**ZAKARIAN:** The first and most immediate issue is having a building or a place with 10-15 rooms to serve as the Fellowship's office. We have already seriously discussed this matter with the Primate of the Araratian Diocese.

The next important issue is the dire need for means of transportation. If we had 20 cars now, we could increase and expand the activities of the Fellowship tenfold. Particularly in light of the fact that prices are escalating by astronomical proportions daily. Recently we bought our first car for \$2700 and thereafter our work improved considerably, especially in Kalinino and Stepanavan. Presently we have 9 Sunday Schools there already and soon we will have 3 prayer meetings.

**DN. HRATCH:** *How frequently do you hold prayer meetings? Are they held during the week or only on Sundays? What is the format of the meetings?*

**ZAKARIAN:** The prayer meetings don't follow a rigid schedule; it's different depending on the location and the place. For example, we get together twice a week in Yerevan, on Wednesdays and Sundays; once a week in other places; and there are places

continued on next page

where we meet three times a week, so it's a function of convenience and demand. The Fellowship views the prayer meetings as a form of worship; therefore, we basically sing spiritual songs, hymns and praises. Among these are our old, traditional and canonical songs; a series of non-canonical songs, as well as new ones which are authored by the members of the Fellowship. As a rule, the given lecture or Bible reading of the day is read based on the designation of the church's liturgical calendar. The Biblical reading is done during the prayer meeting and a sermon pertaining to that topic is delivered. The latter may deal with the teachings of the church or doctrinal topics, or questions relating to confession of faith. On holy days, the explanation of the celebrated feast is given to the congregation. The prayer meeting ends with "Der Voghormia" and "Hayr Mer."

**Dn. Hratch:** *Do the priests of the Armenian Apostolic Church take part in your meetings? If so, to what extent and in what manner?*

**Zakarian:** Until 1988, the KGB had forbidden the priests to participate in our meetings, so only those Diasporan priests, who were familiar with and knew the Fellowship would come and visit us. They would participate in our gatherings, bless them, perform marriages, baptisms, etc. The situation changed in 1988, when the priests in our country gained greater freedom. At the present time, either we invite the priests of the Armenian Apostolic Church to come and lead our get-togethers, or sometimes they come of their own free will and desire. But considering how overburdened they are, we can't request their presence more frequently.

**Dn. Hratch:** *How do you perform liturgical services, such as marriage, baptism, etc.? Are they performed separately among yourselves or in the Armenian Apostolic Church?*

**Zakarian:** Since we accept our church's confession of faith without any reservation and recognize its hierarchy, we don't assume any liturgical obligation. We simply explain and acquaint the individual or the applicant with the church's sacraments and take care of the preparation for baptism or marriage. The sacraments are always held in the church. There are only a few occasions, such as in the event of sickness, when an exception is made and the ceremony is performed in the home or in a hospital.

**Dn. Hratch:** *What does your Fellowship envision accomplishing in the coming few years?*

**Zakarian:** We have definite plans for the immediate future. First of all, we intend to have radio and television

broadcasts in Armenian, and the editorial board for that has already been selected. Subsequently, we plan to open working churches in all sections of Yerevan as well as in the other cities and towns of Armenia, and organize Fellowship prayer meetings in those churches. If just a few clergymen from the Diaspora support us in this, I guarantee you that we'll be able to carry out this plan in the course of just one year. There won't be any difference of opinion as to the tremendous importance of properly organizing that work and in as short a period of time as possible, particularly since that will greatly help solve the Artsakh problem.

**Dn. Hratch:** *What do you mean in reference to the Artsakh problem?*

**Zakarian:** The fact is that when the "Churchlovers" Fellowship was formed in Artsakh, approximately 500-600 people became members; they were true Christian believers, they didn't aspire toward rank or position, and the Artsakh movement became balanced owing to them. It's a fact—and a very sad and unfortunate one at that—that the political parties perpetually strove to get people to join their ranks. In this sense, our Fellowship differs, in that it doesn't lean toward any political faction and is disposed toward performing a balancing role. Under conditions in which religious concepts and faith in general were non-existent, moral norms too were totally absent in Armenia and Karabagh. As a result of that, particularly this latest turn of events and the unjust treatment often displayed toward the Armenians, the people engaged in ferocious acts. Our Fellowship played a major and positive role in this regard, forbidding such acts and calling on the people to trust in God's equitable judgment by recalling and citing the example of Jeremiah's prayer. At the present time, Karabagh constitutes a wide-open field of activity, and there aren't any sects there as yet. Therefore, if we can send five carloads there and start up our activity with a bang, I think it will be possible to prevent and impede the entrance into Karabagh of those sects that abound in Armenia, and establish Karabagh on the firm and strong foundation of true faith in a short period of time.\*

## Judge

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rally, we will treat the non-Armenian elements living in our country in the same manner. For example, approximately 6 months ago, Russia announced that the Armenian Apostolic Church is free and has the right to build its houses of worship

throughout Russia. The Shirak Diocese welcomed that step and, in response, has decided, of course with the Catholicos's agreement, to reopen a Russian church in Kirovakan that had been previously closed down.

**Dn. Hratch:** *I wish to repeat my question: Should the Armenian Apostolic Church be proclaimed as the National Church and, at the same time, give other churches the opportunity to function freely?*

**Judge Tadevosian:** Yes, I'm in agreement with both points of view. Having been in many diasporan Armenian communities, I am convinced that the Armenians there have generally clung much more firmly and resolutely to their religion and their faith and, in my opinion, that stems from the governmental structure of those countries, which has displayed an attitude of tolerance toward people, regardless of their national identity and professed faith. Unfortunately the situation was totally different during the period of Soviet rule, when the church and its role was completely ignored, scorned and isolated. The difficulties we are currently facing in religious matters are also attributable to that, but if we are able to properly carry forward what we have planned and already begun in many places, I'm confident that we will have double the number of true believers in all of ten years.

**Dn. Hratch:** *In this new situation, is the church prepared to continue its mission and expand its evangelical activity?*

**Judge Tadevosian:** Yes, it is prepared and in a position to do so. To tell the truth, the current difficult situation makes the necessity of the church's involvement more immediate as regards raising spirits, healing pierced souls, inspiring confidence in the legitimate church and reconstructing impaired faith. I think now is the time to focus attention on spiritual instruction. In this regard, marvelous work is being done by the Araratian Diocese which has already been able to assemble a large number of believers around the church, through various programs organized by it. Our situation here in Gumri is much more difficult: extreme caution, sensitivity and dedication are required in order to bring people, who are on the outs with life and God, back into the church's fold, to inspire depressed souls with faith and optimism, yet we must admit that the results are satisfying. Aiding that is the financial and moral support being shown by the Diaspora which is being realized by and large through the church and, owing to which, the people are becoming more and more tied to the church and are believing in its mission.

continued from previous page  
**DN. HRATCH: As Chairman of the Diocesan Council, what difficulties—religious and other—are you facing?**

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** The difficulties are numerous and varied, since our Diocese, the Shirak Diocese, with all its 14 regions, falls within the earthquake zone. Inasmuch as we still do not have the necessary number of assembly halls and teachers to carry out our activity, we are often obliged to go with His Grace the Primate to the citizens' homes and comfort them, provide hope, inspire faith, explain that the earthquake has nothing to do with God and that it is a horrible act of nature, a natural disaster. We must admit that our efforts are not proceeding in vain, and the people are gradually regaining their zeal, their inner drive.

Based on more practical considerations, the Diocesan Council decided to prepare a guidebook which contains a map of our Diocese's 14 regions in different languages and in color, showing also the sites of monasteries and the roads leading to them. Recently there have been frequent articles in the papers as well as television broadcasts, which explain our church services, feasts, their significance and essence.

**DN. HRATCH: As a Judge, what difficulties do you encounter and generally what sort of criminals do you have in your court?**

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** As a Judge, I can say that I don't have difficulties because I love my profession very much. I wanted to become a doctor but it didn't work out so I became a lawyer and let me say that I am very pleased about that. As far as crimes are concerned, I can say that the Artik region is quite safe: serious crimes—murder, theft, robbery—practically don't occur at all; it's been this way for 10 years now. There are, of course, cases of petty theft, plus numerous and frequent automobile accidents because the roads are very bad. Abductions constitute a high percentage of the crime committed and, in the majority of such cases, 9th and 10th grade girls are involved who, being under 18 years of age, aren't permitted by law to get married so they have no choice but to resort to such means and run away from home. Ostensibly that law has to be reexamined and changed.

**DN. HRATCH: What spiritual satisfaction do you derive from your work, both as a Judge and as Chairman of the Diocesan Council?**

**JUDGE TADEVOSSIAN:** I love to do both, I'm satisfied with what I've done and I think that my performance in both areas could receive high marks.\*

## Disaster-Zone

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one, terribly difficult, both in terms of the economy and from a political standpoint, is nothing new. Our irreparable economic situation is known to the whole world and America in particular, which is helping our country with humanitarian aid. The severity of the economic situation is basically the result of the blockade of Armenia. Our people are industrious, they don't succumb to anything but it seems that the aim of the blockade is to make them surrender. All sources of drive and energy have been exhausted so, as a result, there's no production. And if there's no production, there can't be any money. In this sense, we are subjected to a very difficult, dead end situation.

As far as the political situation is concerned, forgive me for saying, but in reality the future of the Armenian people is not bright at all. I'm constantly afraid that the year 1915 will be repeated, that we will close out the 20th century under the same terrifying circumstances with which we started it. Let this not be regarded as pessimism but, in hearing and reading news of events in the political arena, I dread that Europe and America will perhaps again close their eyes, as it happened in the case of Cyprus, and allow Turkey to carry out its erstwhile plan.

**DN. HRATCH: As a priest, how do you view this phenomenon?**

**FR. SEBOUH:** As a priest, I again feel that our fate is tied to God, the Armenian God who hopefully, this time at least, won't let us be clawed to death by the enraged dragon. I have faith in our people's power and ability, and if such a situation is again created, independent of whether we shall survive or not—forgive me for saying—the world doesn't have the right to continue existing. This much impudence committed at the expense of the Armenian people, this much deprivation of rights, this many ploys of political prostitution being committed against our people, is unforgivable. Although I understand that, in politics, the wolf prevails, the large strong powers decide the small ones' fate, I repeat, shouting to the whole world that it would be a colossal disgrace and a case of utmost shamelessness if such an ancient nation, such a people, faces the same danger, the danger of destruction.

... A few Armenians living in Gumayri had invited me to perform a baptism. The house that I went to was a little

shack (they call it "domik" in Russian) made out of iron, 6 meters deep and 3 meters wide [approximately 20' x 10']. There were four iron beds and the mattresses were covered with very thin blankets. There was nothing at all enticing there, there wasn't even a sink, let alone a bathroom. The family consisted of husband and wife and 4 small children, two of whom were twins. The godfather was also present. Under these conditions, the baptism of the 4 little ones was performed. That abode was in such a wretched state that it wasn't possible to even call it a home. The family as well was in a deplorable state but they had decided and wanted without fail that the service take place in that shack, so that it would be blessed and assume vitality through God's means and grace, so great was their faith.

I performed my pastoral duty and baptized the children. They were so poor that they didn't even have the money for kissing the cross, [which is customary in Armenia] and yet they had set aside whatever they had been able to save through tremendous sacrifice, for that purpose. I categorically refused to accept it but they would not accede under any circumstances. I had no choice then but to take it and, later on, I put it under the children's pillow as a gift to them.

The tremendous and deep faith possessed by the extremely poor, wretched inhabitants of that bare shack astonished and amazed me. They believed that—through baptism—their children would be spared illness; they believed that, by means of that ritual, their shack will be blessed; they believed that, with the grace of God, they will be able to recover their losses.

**DN. HRATCH: What thoughts went through your mind as you were baptizing the children?**

**FR. SEBOUH:** At that moment, I was contrasting this humble scene with that of the baptism of children surrounded by comfortable and happy people, sitting at lavish tables groaning under the massive weight of various fine foods and delicacies, in majestic homes, and wondering: In which case was faith stronger? In saying that, I don't mean to say that the faith of those living in such opulent surroundings is weak; nevertheless, the faith of this humble family seemed to me to be much stronger and much firmer, such that life's cruel and bitter calamities hadn't been able to shake it, even to the slightest degree. At that time, I had moments of much more fervent prayer, imploring God to hear and accept this prayer, if my prayer is to be heard.\*

## Democrats

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people. This must be its motto, this must be its basic fundamental mission.

**DN. HRATCH:** *What do you think about, the different denominations and sects that are mushrooming in Armenia? What position does your party have regarding them?*

**KHACHATRIAN:** Our party's point of view in this matter is quite plain. Matters of faith are not our business but the church's. If the Armenian Church accepts them, we have nothing further to say. As far as the sects are concerned, our attitude toward them as well is one of tolerance. We said that we, as a base, accept and recognize the Armenian Apostolic Church but

it is also our position that man is free in his belief(s), perhaps even to the degree of being misled, but he is free and we don't have the right to inhibit that freedom in any way, to limit or hinder his rights and privileges.

**ARAM MKRTCHIAN:** We defend the point of view, whereby man is free to speak, listen and profess what he pleases; no one has the right to obstruct, to prevent this activity. Moreover, if various sects and religious teachings can find an audience among the people and be spread, it means that there is an empty space, a gap in the matter of declaration of faith that the Mother Church hasn't been able to fill. The church must occupy and concern itself with that matter; it must attempt to fill that gap if it

doesn't wish for others to do that. This is not our business anyway; it is the church's. Besides, a multiplicity of religions is an inevitable phenomenon in countries governed according to democratic principles. So why shouldn't it be the same case in Armenia? \*

*We wish to acknowledge and thank Arminé Keoshgerian for transcribing and editing the Armenian text of the conversations, with great patience and care. The conversations were translated to English by Artis Sevag.*

## Diary *continued from p. 25*

Yeznig, who lived in America for several years, thinks it's funny when he sees his brand-new car next to the cathedral, a good 100 yards away from where it was parked. The resident priests don't get it. There is no sense of humor in the priests here.

### MARCH 19

I am sick again with a bad cough. Sleeping at the guest house in Etchmiadzin with its marble interior makes it humid and cold.

### MARCH 20

We get to Hrazdan, population about 40,000. We arrive on time to hit one of the schools, but first we stop at the place where Father Davidian is staying. The rich guy insists that we spend two hours having tea. I vote to leave. This insults him, but, more than angry, he is confused by my attitude. I have come to see that the clergy have to act in great deference toward someone with money. This is one custom I won't have to get used to.

I am staying with the family of a fedayin, Hratchig Tanielian, who was killed in action in Karabagh. There are 14 people in five rooms, heated by one pot-belly stove. The basic staples are potatoes, bread and tea. There's no running water, but there's an outhouse, of course.

Tanielian was killed (when under a white flag) while defending the village of Kedashen on April 29, 1991. This story of fedayin getting killed repeats itself wherever we go. This had been his sixth battle. Even if he had not died there, he would have eventually been killed.

The widow is broken by the death of her husband. The son, 6 years old, accepts the death but is still con-

fused. The daughter, 5 years old, asks every day when her father will come home. I am sleeping in a room that they have transformed into a shrine for the dead man. There are pictures of him all over, holy pictures, candles, crosses.

### MARCH 21

Today we visit nearby Dzaghgatzor. Father Hamzasb, the young priest who is showing us around, takes us to where many of the refugees forced out of Azerbaijan are. Thousands are crowded into buildings with little space and food here and there. Many of them fled Azerbaijan with just the clothes on their backs.

In the evening we have dinner and drink with about 20 fedayin. Before going to the battle front, all the fedayin take an oath in church before the priest. There is a real and almost mystical connection between the Armenian soul and the Armenian soil. It is difficult to remain Armenian apart from the soil. Thus, to defend the soil of Armenia is to defend our soul.

They tell us haunting stories of destruction in Karabagh. Many times they get to a village too late and see how the Azeris have mutilated the bodies of the civilians: smashed heads, dismembered bodies and worse. Death is daily in Karabagh.

### MARCH 22

Armenia is in a state of military readiness to defend its borders. The army of the new Republic has been officially established.

I spend a good part of the evening talking with the priest of Hrazdan, Fr. Hamzasb Papoojian. He is an intelligent, university educated young man. We talk about all of the problems of Armenia and possible solutions... a typical male discussion. To each solution we mention, we also

see a factor which would negate the solution. Finally, his wife, who is knitting on the other side of the room, simply sighs and says, "Yes, if we had fingernails, we could scratch our head." This old Armenian saying seems to sum up the situation in which we find Armenia.

I have noticed that for the past week or so I have been eating very little. There are days I can get by on bread and tea. When I see so much hunger and I see the price of food, it is hard to eat. When food is offered in a home, I tell them I am keeping a religious fast (no meat, no dairy). In this way, they can save the food for another day. Even if they do have the means to offer food, it seems obscene to eat in a country of hunger.

### MARCH 23

We hit School No. 13 and talk with several classes. It is easy to get them smiling, laughing and celebrating God.

In the evening, Fr. Dajad, Fr. Hamzasb and I met with a group of teachers. After taking questions on the Bible, I ask one of the teachers what she thinks of women's liberation for Armenia. She thinks the roles of men and women should stay as they are. A couple of days ago this same teacher said she would go to Karabagh and fight as soon as her youngest is in college.

### MARCH 25

We are back in Etchmiadzin. I have a choice: Go to Yerevan for a Pepsi at the Hotel Armenia (the only place in Armenia to get one) or go to the Yerevan post office and wait in line for an hour to call home. I call home.

It's still cold at the monastery, and I'm still sick. What's new?

### MARCH 26

We go to Abaran, a minor city in the mountains.

Enough money has been collected to renovate the 4th-century church, but the people are arguing with the architect over the plans. These are stubborn people. I like them. We meet with the city council, and the vice mayor invites us to stay at his home. We immediately go and speak to about 100 people in the Adult Christian Education class. They don't waste our time with eating and a lot of talking. I like this place.

**MARCH 27**

We hit many classes at the school. This is our last city and this is when I am really getting comfortable and good at speaking. This may sound strange, but as I was walking today, I felt that my feet really belong in this country. Every step resonated perfectly with the ground.

This is a great city. These people are down-to-earth, intelligent, faithful, courageous. They are also very proud people. Many different people told me that they are sick of the food handouts coming over. "Don't give us fish, teach us to fish," was a common refrain. They want help to get the industry going. They want work, not handouts. This sentiment is echoed by the people throughout the villages and cities like Hrazdan and Abaran. They want work and industry, not welfare.

**MARCH 29**

Today, being Sunday, there is a one-hour service at the church. It is outdoors, next to the church, since the building is not ready to be used yet. There are 150 people there, in the 30-degree temperature, blowing wind and more than a foot of snow. These people sang, worshiped and knelt in prayer. After this service we speak at their regular Sunday prayer meeting in a packed school auditorium. Fr. Mgrditch, the young priest of Abaran, assures us that the church attendance and the prayer meeting attendance are nothing unusual. It is exceptional attendance not only because of the cold, but because most of the people had to walk miles to get there.

**MARCH 30**

We are back in Etchmiadzin to rest and pack. I am depressed about leaving. I could do so much more. I am hitting stride now. This is really the work of a priest.

**APRIL 1**

We are in the plane now. I am looking at the mountains one last time. Although I am sad, I am also anxious to get home.

We arrived in Paris for a one-day layover. I took a long, long shower. I found out that my clothes really stunk. We went out and had our first Western meal.

**APRIL 2**

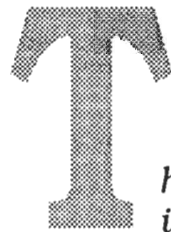
Home! It is good to be with my family. I sleep for about two days.

**POSTSCRIPT**

The depression of being back in America has subsided somewhat by now. I missed so many of the people I left behind. I am still depressed when I think about the condition of the church in America. In Armenia, faith is exploding and growing. It reminded me of the New Testament churches when people experienced a personal relationship with God and made the Lord their first priority. In America there are so many distractions, so much wealth. We do not have the Lord as the focal point, the center of our being, the ground of our existence. In Armenia, stripped of material goods, people are forced to reflect on what's important. In America, money and material pleasures have kept so many of us from much of reality and the beauty and the pain of life.

The American Armenians are proud of their success. We tend to honor and respect those who have "made it." However, it is this adoration of material success which has torn us from our roots. Christ had warned that we could not serve both God and money. We did not heed the warning.

Though Christianity is growing in Armenia, there are two dangers.



*The Fellowship is at best tolerated, at worst ignored by the hierarchy. Should this continue, the Christian movement will be stifled and institutionalized.*

One is that, as Armenia grows economically, affluence will grow and a drifting away from the faith may occur, as it is in this country. That is hypothetical, of course. An immediate danger, however, is that the Armenian Church Brotherhood or Fellowship may not be fully incorporated into the institution of the church. The Brotherhood is instrumental in the spreading of Christian preaching, religious education for children and adults, prayer meetings.... Yet, for the most part, they are at best tolerated. At worst, they are simply ignored by the hierarchy. Should this continue, the Christian movement will be stifled and institutionalized.

But, in the meantime, the "word" from Armenia is "faith." So many people come back and paint a picture of despair and hopelessness. What they say is true. But, at the same time, if you look at the growing faith, there is only life and hope.

Finally, what can Armenians in America do? Of course, we need to somehow get industry moving over there. Our material efforts must be centralized on that. Food aid should be limited only to the refugees in Armenia. The other aspect needed is for us to pray and send every type of religious encouragement...printed material, priests, as well as groups of youth to go and talk about faith, establish a sister church system....

When I was in Armenia 22 years ago, there was plenty of food, decent wages, jobs, no fear of annihilations, no pain from a recent earthquake. But Communist suppression had deadened people in so many ways. Today there is hunger, poverty and fear of the enemies surrounding Armenia, but the people are free and the church is once again alive.

What can America do for the newly independent Armenia? There is much that we can do materially. But it's more important to use our political and moral resources to bring peace to the region. Individual Americans need to put pressure on elected officials. The influence of this country is considerable when we plan to exercise it. The American eagle, in parts of the world like Armenia, represents hope and enlightenment. Let us live up to that image. Armenia has no oil, no precious metals, no strategic location. Armenia is simply trying to stay alive amid its newfound freedom. \*

*\*Excerpts of this diary were published in THE HARTFORD COURANT, Sunday, June 14, 1992 issue. Fr. Kelegian is the parish priest of the St. George Armenian Church in Hartford, CT.*

# FATHERLY ADVICE

## Joint Statement of Catholicos Regarding Religion in Armenia

During August 25-30 of this year, we, Vazken I, Catholicos of All Armenians, and Karekin II, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, met in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and had personal, brotherly and intimate conversations concerning the mission of the Holy Apostolic Church of Armenia, focusing our thoughts and deliberations on the Present-day religious situation of our motherland of Armenia and on the role of our Church within that context.

We feel it our obligation to bring the following considerations to the attention of our beloved people in Armenia and in the diaspora with our desire to keep them in communion with our thoughts and concerns so that they may continue to fulfill their responsibilities with wisdom and dedication towards their Holy Church, their Nation, and their Motherland.

1. After the proclamation of the independent Republic of Armenia (following the break-up of the Soviet Union) and under the new conditions of freedom in our Motherland, the task of the Armenian Church entered a new direction and a new process and received renewed importance. To provide Christian spiritual nurture for our people became more urgent and acquired wider dimensions.

2. The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, with its Religious Order, the ranks of its clergy, and its dioceses and its lay people, and with the cooperation of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia and the Patriarchal Sees of Jerusalem and Constantinople, displayed a dynamic and manifold activity through the expansion and reorganization of ecclesiastical life, the preaching of the Christian faith, and the humanitarian and social services rendered to the basic and immediate human needs. Particularly in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of the Leninakan district on December 7, 1988. To give only a few illustrations:

- A great number of churches were destroyed.
- New dioceses were established.
- New parishes were constituted.
- New Christian associations of youth and adolescents were organized.
- Religious journals, periodicals,

and other Publications came into existence.

- Programs of Christian preaching, sermons, talks, and interviews began to be broadcast on both radio and television on a regular and continuous basis.
  - Religious instruction was introduced in the schools.
  - Courses were established for the pedagogical preparation of teachers of religion.
  - Pontifical and pastoral visits took place in various regions of Armenia.
  - Canonical church services, particularly the celebration of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy and the Holy Sacraments acquired a new popularity involving larger numbers of lay people attending and participating.
3. A new and wider field of spiritual work was opened for the Armenian Church in what is described as the "internal diaspora," namely in such countries which came out of the former Soviet Union and where we have substantial Armenian communities. In such countries, a new movement of religious and national awakening dawned upon our people. A considerable (though not yet sufficient) number of clergymen were sent from Etchmiadzin to reorganize new parishes and to offer spiritual guidance.
4. In Artzakh (Karabakh Autonomous Region) where new conditions of liberated life were created, a new diocese was established with a Primate and clergy to provide spiritual sustenance to the people, enhance their courage and strengthen their endurance after having been denied their basic human rights for so many years. They desperately need such spiritual and moral support as they are forced to continue their struggle for justice and freedom, and for the elimination of externally imposed deprivations.
5. These and still many other kinds of services surely had and continue to have their positive and beneficial influence for our people in the Motherland. Nonetheless, the needs are of an acute nature and of immediate importance. As is often said in our language, the spiritual needs of our people of Armenia are like the water of the sea!

6. In such a state of affairs, we see that churches other than our own from outside of Armenia, both Armenian and non-Armenian, other church organizations, also para-church movements and sects of various kinds have begun an active program of preaching, which is acquiring the nature of a campaign in our Motherland. It is worth noting that such action falls within the framework of the general movement engaged in by the Roman Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Vatican, and by the Protestant churches in Europe and the U.S.A., each motivated by different aims. They are implementing well-devised policies of action by having as the major field of operation the entire area of Eastern Europe, i.e., the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries. Such action has reached exaggerated and uncontrollable proportions with those religious or philosophico-religious and ideological movements, some of which using the terms "Christian" and "Evangelical," and through intense efforts and various methods are engaged in a so called mission of evangelization.

7. Within the context of our Motherland of Armenia, we have in mind the following specific cases:

a) Armenian Catholic (Uniate) Church, which began its activity considering the fact that prior to the Sovietization of Armenia, there were Armenian Catholics, particularly in the rural areas of the northwestern regions, who now, under the new conditions of religious and human freedom, having recovered the consciousness of their religious identity, need the spiritual care of the Armenian Catholic Church. For this purpose, a priest from the Mekhitarist fathers was sent to Armenia and a new Prelate, also from the Mekhitarist Order, was appointed. The work of taking care of the spiritual needs by the Armenian Catholic Church is carried on as part of the general work of the Roman Catholic Church in this respect.

b) The Armenian Evangelical Church is also carrying on at a renewed pace its activities in this respect. Even during the time of Soviet rule, there was a small Armenian Evangelical community in Yerevan. At present, the activities of the Armenian Evangelical Church that have been given a new impetus by their extension into other regions of Armenia. Obviously the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) is offering its



contribution to this task of providing spiritual sustenance to the members of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Armenia.

c) Para-church (non-ecclesiastical) movements and organizations (for the sake of giving some examples, we mention only a few, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Pentecostals, the Nazarenes, and the Mormons) which are well characterized as radical and fundamentalist sects, mainly originating in the West, more specifically in the United States of America and Europe, and which have now started a campaign in the full sense of the word on the whole territory of Armenia. In this case, the purpose is not to provide spiritual care for their already existing members or followers (factually non-existent) their clear aim consists in "winning" new adherents, in simple words, conducting proselytism with the definite purpose of seeing the Armenian people change their Christian faith which they consider to be "conversion." They simply are taking advantage of the principle of religious freedom which is now a recognized law Proclaimed by the state authorities of Armenia.

d) Finally, there are also other movements of non-Christian origin or character, all of imported from outside—such as the Hare Krishna movement or Transcendental Meditation, even such currents that are the product of pre-Christian pagan ideologies and ancient religious traditions; these also are now engaged in an aggressive and unbridled action of spreading their ideas among the Armenian People.

8. It is no longer possible to remain indifferent in the face of all these movements and phenomena. What attitude should be adopted by the Armenian Church towards all these trends? Before taking any position or establishing any norm of reaction, one has to state and adopt as an essentially important and general principle the following historically valid and irrefutable truth, namely, that *Armenia is not a mission-field for Christian evangelization*. In simple terms, Armenia is not a heathen (non-Christian) world and therefore a field for mission-work in the generally accepted meaning of this word. Armenia is a Christianized world, with a heritage of almost two thousand Years of Christianly inspired life, molded by the Christian principles of the Gospel, and with an existing culture permeated by the Christian faith. It is not a country of gentiles. It is a country of martyrs, imbued by the prayers of the saints and irrigated by the blood of the martyrs.

There, in Armenia, one can read

the Gospel of Christ on the earth and in the stone, learn the Christian faith from the eloquent images inscribed with a living spirit in manuscript, books and miniatures, carved in memorial fountains and tombstones (*khatchkars*), magnificently built churches and sculptures. There, in Armenia, one can be initiated into the Principles of the Christian faith from the manifold expressions of the understanding of life as made manifest through the habits and living traditions of family and social community life, indeed, from the entire texture and ethos of national life.

9. In this connection, it is highly important to emphasize the fact that the Christian faith is not a matter of only a heritage from the past—it is not strictly history. It is a living and continuing witness today — Christianity for the Armenian nation remains as the "color of the skin," yesterday, today and forever.

Surely, the seventy years of Soviet totalitarian rule had its negative influence upon the life of our people in the Motherland, in just the same way as on the peoples of all states and nations which were part of the former Soviet Union. But all such influences could not erase the Christian faith from the soul and life of the Armenian people and did not succeed in eradicating it from the soil of our Motherland upon which the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ remain as an 'indelible and unshakeable seal' and as a source of continuous regeneration and renewal.

In this domain of religious life, how eloquent are the testimonies that bear witness to the vitality of the Christian faith during the reign of the Soviet rule! Such faith often was expressed in a silent manner in the last seven decades in our Motherland. One can rightly expect that in the coming years magnificent testimonies will emerge in all the countries of the former Soviet Union, including Armenia, to tell the story of the heroism of the people in keeping the Christian faith alive.

10. Therefore, to consider Armenia as an open and barren field for Christian evangelization means, above all, transgression against history and the given reality. Moreover, it means also a lack of love, recognition, and respect towards the Armenian Church founded by the Apostles and nurtured by St. Gregory the Illuminator, as well as towards the Armenian people who—let it not be forgotten—were the first nation in the world to Proclaim Christianity as their national state religion. Armenia is not a country with no master;

Christ reigns there. It is not an abandoned land; this vineyard of the Lord is not fenceless. For about two thousand years the light of Christ has been kept alive and has shone forth in this land, and this in spite of so many calamities and tempests that have befallen it. This work of Christian enlightenment, this carrying of the torch and this bearing of the Cross have been accomplished by the Holy Apostolic Church of Armenia, a fact which historians of so many nations have so universally and so frequently stated and illustrated with such eloquent testimonies.

11. Today also our Church continues its mission with renewed vigor and abundant results. To ignore that God-given vocation and role means to deliver a blow to Christian brotherhood, unity and communion and to the true and authentic ecumenical spirit, understanding and behavior.

12. History amply and clearly bears witness to the fact that the Christian churches have always suffered and lost because of unnecessary and meaningless internal competitions, controversies, and proselytizing activities. To repeat the past negative aspect of the missionary action, to rekindle the "Byzantine quarrels" means to have learned neither from the great teacher that is history; such methods and means will not contribute to the unity and common mission of the Christian Church which has such vital significance for the entire world in the last decade of the 20th century and at the dawn of the 21st.

13. With a view to formulating the attitude of the Armenian Church, one must also take into account another important truth: The national character and the role of the Armenian Church are inseparable from its Christian faith and mission. This is a fact inherited from its historical life. With its centuries-old existence and work, the Armenian Church is interwoven with the life, culture, and destiny of the Armenian people. At the present time, particularly since the proclamation of the independent Armenian Republic, the Armenian nation and state confront most difficult conditions and situations in the economic, social and security areas and in terms of structural and administrative inner reorganization and foreign relations. It is not easy to come out of a seventy-year totalitarian system and create new, democratic structures and conditions of state order and public life. Immense sacrifices, persevering efforts, and superhuman endeavors, spiritual and moral reforms, and financial and human resources are needed for the state of

Armenia, together with all of its government structures, public institutions, and all segments of its population.

The imperative obligation of the Armenian people to recover full autonomy and self-determination for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh has acquired a dimension of critical nature for the entire Armenian nation, in Karabakh, in Armenia, and in the diaspora. Such rights and justice had been denied to the Armenian people under Soviet rule. The people who have been forced to leave their homes, towns, and villages in Karabakh and reduced to the state of refugee life, the families of those who have lost their lives during the struggle, both the heroes who sacrificed themselves and the simple innocent victims, need comfort and support. This urgent obligation is also added to the one mentioned above.

The necessity for reconstruction of the villages, towns, and cities stricken by the earthquake of 1988, the need for rehabilitation of hundreds of thousands of the homeless, the human needs of a large number of people driven out of Azerbaijan who have taken temporary refuge in various parts of Armenia, all of these have become a heavy responsibility for the Armenian nation.

Under such traumatic conditions, the unity and solidarity of the Armenian people have become as vitally important as the daily bread. Internal dissensions are not compatible with the common task and responsibility for the remaking of our nationhood and the rebuilding of the motherland.

The Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church of Armenia is the spiritual-religious foundation for the buttressing of the unity and strength of the nation. Therefore, to create and develop new groupings and polarizations in the realm of religious life surely becomes detrimental to the strengthening and solidifying of the unity of our nation. Obviously, these religious radical movements have no respect for the national entity and play a negative role in this respect. Such movements are, on the one hand, a threat to Christian unity and on the other hand to national unity. And, in these days, we give top priority to both.

14. Being prompted by these truths, principles and convictions and following the exhortation of the Apostle: "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd

the Church of God that He obtained with the blood of his own Son." (Acts 20-28), we convey to our faithful people the following thoughts and exhortations:

15. With Christian love and in the sense of national unity, we greet the spiritual care that is being provided by the official authorities of our Armenian Catholic and Evangelical Churches to the faithful who already are members of their confessions.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has recognized them as a historical reality and in the spirit of brotherly love greets their action with the fold of their constituency. In that respect we find natural their services to their own people.

We expect that respecting the ethos, the faith and order, the traditions and mission of the Armenian Church, that has been the spiritual nurturing mother of the Armenian people all during the past centuries, they will cooperate, through the Mother See of Etchmiadzin, with the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church thus enhancing and promoting its religious, spiritual, educational, and social work. We expect the parallel, competitive or duplicating structures and activities will not be created and spread, producing unnecessary confusion in the life of the simple faithful and may be taken as occasions and means of proselytizing for which neither the Church of Christ nor our Motherland and nation have any need, particularly in these present times. Today it is the Christian faith that is being sought by the people and not this or that pattern of its formulation. Our people and country are called upon to respond to the appeal for unity and solidarity.

16. With thanks and gratitude, we greet all the non-Armenian sister churches, the relief organizations, and the inter-church aid associations which, during the devastating earthquake of 1988, offered their extensive and unreserved highly beneficial and deeply appreciated assistance and solidarity in an exemplary spirit of Christian brotherhood and fellowship. The Armenian Church can never forget the truly Christian and genuinely human assistance that the non-Armenian sister church from all over the world, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, with distinction extended and continue to extend to our people stricken by that calamity.

With deep satisfaction we affirm that a great many of such churches and confessional or ecumenical relief

organizations rendered their services in a truly pan-Christian spirit by working harmoniously with the Holy Apostolic Church of Armenia through the Mother See of Etchmiadzin in or association with it.

It is our sincere expectation that all such work already accomplished or in the process of implementation, which are God-pleasing actions, not be used in any way or measure for dire indirect purposes of doctrinal or confessional preaching and expansion. We consider such actions as a deviation from the authentic understanding of the Christian faith, of the true spirit of the Gospel and sound human behavior.

17. We find incomprehensible, unjustifiable, and unacceptable such activities that are being carried on in a well-planned, continuous and intensive manner by para-church, Christian and non-Christian organizations, sects and movements which use the name of the Gospel and which consider Armenia as a fertile land for their preaching. For the love of Christ and of our nation and country, we cannot let such movements, sometimes working under the name "Evangelical," Armenian or non-Armenian religious associations, groups or organizations, to spread in Armenia and among our own people under the motto of "evangelization," and often through non-religious, dishonest, misleading means and motivation to "preach Christianity" to our people who are already devoted followers of Christ.

We believe and expect that our own people of Armenia will keep sound and alive in their consciousness the sense of self-respect and dignity which is one of the distinctive features of our national character and will reject such persons and actions which sow weeds and thorns in our "small orchard" as our country has been described by Movses Khorenatsi (the 5th century historiographer par excellence). Such "preachers" should become aware that the seeds of Christianity have been sown here by the two Apostles of Christ (St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew), that this "orchard" of the Lord has been irrigated by the tears of St. Gregory and cultivated by the sacred alphabet of St. Mesrob Mashtots. The custodian and the laborer of this "vineyard planted by God" has for centuries continuously been, without interruption or weakening, the Armenian Apostolic Church. And it remains the same laborer today with renewed awareness of its mission, with reso-



lute willingness and service.

Such movements that distort the Christian faith and cause new divisions within the Christian Church, whatever name they may have, whatever richness of material means they may possess, should leave and disappear from Armenia. If they have the slightest consciousness and understanding of the mission as taught by the Gospel, they should go to such countries and peoples which have not heard the name of Christ or accepted His faith. This is the proper way of mission as indicated and opened by our Lord Jesus Christ. (See the Gospel of Matthew, 28:19-20.)

To create and promote inner spiritual awakening (sometimes referred to as "revival" or "revivalism" so often a misconceived or superficial form of true renewal) in the life of the people is the proper task of the Churches. All such people who have the thirst and the need for such inner spiritual awakening should turn to their church, to their own mother and receive the genuine milk, and should not turn and look for such mild and food which is distorted and which affect the unity of the nation and the country.

18. No church, no state, nor any public and communal organization and institution can claim to be exempt of misgivings in the course of its services. Which church, state, or organization can claim for its activity to be fully satisfactory? There always have been and still are difficulties, problems, needs, and shortcomings on all levels and in all spheres of public life. Who is perfect except God?

The Armenian Church is not an exception among them. We are in need of manpower, we lack material means. But these cannot be taken as reasons for establishing besides the Armenian Apostolic Church parallel or opposite or separatist channels of operation for Christian preaching. On the contrary, the spirit of Christian brotherhood impels all who bear in themselves the love of Christ and the love for the Armenian people to give tangible expression of the communion of faith and fellowship by strengthening the spiritual mission of the Armenian Apostolic Church by initiating various forms of solidarity with the Church of Armenia.

19. We believe that in these times the spirit of the apostolate, the renewed course of spiritual and national service will gradually be promoted within the fold of our Armenian Holy Apostolic Church. Already we see the tangible signs of large-scale move-

ment of reawakening and renewal that has dawned upon our Church. It surely will receive continued impetus and bear fruit "sixty-fold, eighty-fold and hundred-fold." (Mark 4:20)

In this respect, highly hopeful and encouraging is the deepening and the growth of the sense of unity and cooperation within the entire Armenian Church, which is made manifest through the close collaboration among all the hierarchical Sees of our Holy Church.

20. We appeal to all our clergy, in all ranks and on all levels of responsibility, to stand before God and again open themselves and always keep open their minds, hearts and lives for the operation of the Holy Spirit, and to renew in themselves the ethos and the style of life and work as these were revealed in the Apostolic age and through our Church Fathers.

We expect from all of them that they will devote themselves with the maximum degree of unreserved and self-denying dedication and sacrifice to their sacred tasks; may they with greater degree of closeness and zeal approach the people, visit local communities and with whole-hearted service respond to their basic human needs, and with renewed inspiration instill in them the virtues of hope, faith and love, steady will and endurance; may they spread in the life of their flock the light of the principles of Christian ethics and genuine and valid Armenian-Christian traditions. Let the words of the Bible, "Zeal for our house will consume me." (John 2:17), be given new dimension and vitality in the lives of our own beloved clergy.

Surely, in this respect, the encyclical of the Catholicos of All Armenians (No. 1907) which was issued on 28 August 1992 will have its beneficial impact.

We appeal to all the responsible servants of the State of our motherland to vigilantly see that the principle and law of religious freedom be implemented in its authentic sense and not let people misuse or manipulate it by the deployment of such activities which cause harm to the spiritual freedom of our people and to the unity of our Church and Nation.

We appeal to all the children of our nation, without distinction, to the aged and the children, to men and women, to those who hold high positions and those who hold lower positions, to keep their souls clean and awake, and not let alien and alienating voices and influences, often expressed through attractive

manners, distort their Christian faith with so many centuries of rich experience, with their fathers kept as the apple of their eyes, and at the cost of their blood. May the "little orchard," (our Motherland) having now fully recovered its Armenianness through the proclamation of its independence remain pure and undefiled; may the Armenian Church, the Mother Church remain a source of spiritual health; may our Motherland of Armenia remain a province of God's Kingdom for the Armenian nation.

We remind all of you of the message and directive of St. Paul the Apostle: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:10-17)

May God in the highest grant to all of you, clergy and laity, His divine grace and wisdom, His love and faith and the renewing power of His Holy Spirit so that in the spirit of unanimous communion, unshakeable faithfulness we may render viable, and hold in honor and glory, this determining and epochmaking moment in our history.

Be alive and whole in the Lord, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and ever blessed by God and us. Amen.

Vazken I  
CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS

Karekin II  
CATHOLICOS OF THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA

AUGUST 30, 1992  
HOLY ETCHMIADZIN, ARMENIA

# Yes, Even Here in America

(or how to read some  
"Fatherly Advice")

Fr. Vazken Movsesian



With the collapse of communism, the East is looking to the West for assistance and order. Following this lead, the Church in Armenia is also looking to the American dioceses for help. We have been made aware of the cults, of the need for evangelization and education, of the advances made by the Protestants and Catholics, and of the need to develop an infrastructure. How close are we to resolving these problems and achieving these goals?

As we witness the revitalization of the Church in Armenia, we notice also the new found sense of purpose for the Church in America. Bibles are sent to the "scripturally-illiterate," the op-ed pages of Armenian newspapers debate the concerns, and stories of found faith provide excellent material for inspirational sermons. On the darker side, however, dare we presume that the Church in Armenia has turned into a convenient scapegoat for the Church in America which is far from resolving its own internal problems?

What has happened to the tremendous clergy shortage facing America today? What has happened to unity between the Diocese and the Prelacy? And what of the continuing decline in membership in parishes and the further alienation of the people from their Church and Faith? For a church which has been unsuccessful in dealing with her problems at home, it is presumptuous to think that she has answers for her counterpart abroad.

What answers has the Church provided to the cult problem in America? Materialism, greed, self-glorification are the new cults which alienate us from the true Faith. Are the ministries of the American dioceses or prelacies so good/successful that it is worthy of being copied in Armenia? In fact, parishes and dioceses — relying heavily on bazaars and bingo games rather than pledges and tithes — continue to operate in red-ink. Has any one diocese (or for that matter has any one parish community) been successful in protecting its people from outside proselytizing? More often than not, our communicants are challenged on their beliefs and opt for other expressions of faith.

The current political and economic situation in Armenia presents its share of problems for the Church. As is evident from the conversations presented here in *Window* there are many dynamics at play within the Church in Armenia. She is faced with a multi-dimensional mission. As a part of the same Body, the Church in America (or elsewhere in the Diaspora) cannot stand idle and tolerate the circumstances. Naturally, she will want to involve herself in the rebirth and redevelopment process. But she cannot use Armenia as a scapegoat for her ails. A contractor whose house has fallen is unlikely to get another job. A dentist whose own teeth have rotted is unlikely to find patients. America can only be effective if it is strong enough internally. This can only be accomplished by a return to Faith. Yes, even here in America!

At stake in Armenia is not merely the primacy of the Armenian Church but rather the salvation of souls. If the Church is going into Armenia with motives other than to console, to heal or to spread the Good News, she is no better than the Protestants or Catholics. She cannot wage a war of denominations. The Armenian Church is the true orthodox church. The long "fatherly advice" given by our dear catholicoi regarding the primacy of the Armenian Church is superfluous. It is ridiculous to presume that the Protestants or Catholics are going to stay among "their own people." Not withstanding theological differences, who are "they" and who are "we" if not all the same children of God? There is only ONE Church and the others are denominations. The Armenian Church cannot reduce herself by engaging in such nonsensical discussions. Religion can never be legislated.

Our first obligation to Armenia is prayer. Our minds and sense must be opened to the real problems. Our brothers and sisters are in hunger of spiritual food as much as we — here in America — are starving. We must move beyond rhetoric. If we believe that the Armenian Church is God ordained and built on the footprints of the Apostles then we cannot underestimate the power of God to work within us. At first, we clergy and laity must be convinced that the power of God will save the Church despite ourselves. When we begin to focus individually and collectively through prayer, we begin a healing process not only abroad, but in the center of our being. Yes, even here in America.

## Compendium

• BISHOP KHAJAG BARSAMIAN was elevated to the rank of Archbishop. His Eminence is the primate of the Armenian Church of North America, Eastern Diocese.

# 43:39

• On September 27, Catholicos Vazken I consecrated four clergymen to the rank of bishop: Fr. HOUSSIG BAGHDASSIAN, a member of the St. James Brotherhood of Jerusalem and the first American born clergyman to be elevated to the episcopate; Fr. DARON JEREJIAN, Vicar of Marseille, France; Fr. VICKEN AYKAZIAN, pastor of the Armenian community in Switzerland; Fr. KAREKIN BEKJIAN, primate of Armenians in Germany. With these consecrations, the Brotherhood of Etchmiadzin claims 43 bishops to 39 priests.

• IN VATICAN: Several high ranking Armenian clergymen met with Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council to Promote Christian Unity and Cardinal Silvestrini, Perfect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, in order to express the serious concerns and discontentment regarding the Armenian Uniate Catholic Patriarch, John Peter XVIII's "Return to Armenia" Encyclical. Representing the Armenian Church were Archbishop Vatché Hovsepian, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Bishop Mesrob Mutaflan, and Bishop Hovnan Derderian. On October 26, this delegation met with the Pope, John Paul II.

• IN ISTANBUL: The same delegation continued on to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios. They were joined by the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian and his vicar, Archbishop Shahan Sevadjian.

• WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC): Konrad Raiser, 54 year old German Lutheran professor of theology, has been elected general secretary of the WCC. Eighty-six of the 150 delegates voted for Professor Raiser, an ordained Lutheran pastor, who will succeed the Methodist theologian Emilio Castro when he retires at the end of the year.

### Window Selection

# COMING HOME

Why Protestant Clergy  
are Becoming Orthodox



Edited by Peter E. Gillquist

## Eighteen Former Protestant Leaders tell of Coming Home to the Orthodox Christian Faith

Antony Hughes • Oral Roberts University  
Gregory Rogers • Church of Christ  
Kenneth Hines • Westminster Seminary  
Daniel Matheson • United Church of Canada  
Thomas Renfree • Western Conservative Baptist Seminary  
Frank Milanese • Campus Crusade for Christ  
Andrew Harmon • United Methodist Church  
Paul Waisanen • Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
Alister Anderson • Episcopalian  
Timothy Cremeens • Assemblies of God  
John Pro • Luther Rice Seminary  
Athanasios Ledwich • Anglican  
Harold Dunaway • Bible Baptist College  
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## Letters

Vol. II, No. 4

### Testing the Myth and Beyond

Dear Editors:

First, I must express my satisfaction that for once, an intelligent and decent person has treated the subject of the story (*Odzoom*) in a dispassionate, honest and courageous manner. So far, apart serious studies that some of the best minds of the Diaspora have given to that story, no one had resisted the temptation to take words or images out of context and ridicule or curse the author. In that sense, the story has failed in its intent—all the attention was fixed on the wrong ideas and themes and the "debunking" did not occur. That, in itself, is highly revealing of our national state of mind. I am not mad at anyone, even those who called for my excommunication! But I must add that a serious psychoanalytic study of Armenian sexuality is in order....

I will not correct or alter any of the ideas you have expressed—a literary text, once published, belongs to the reader and he is free to give it the interpretation he wishes. I will, however, for the sake and in recognition of your unbiased approach, make a few comments.

—The analysis of the "demythification," if such a word exists, is correct. But you should have focused on Der Avedis and his concept of God. That special God to which he prays, in my conception, is the way Armenians have understood Him and that is why they have weathered History. God is also a myth, in my book, and the best among the Armenians have seen through that myth.

—What lies beyond the shattered myth? Only despair and the sarcasm of the absurd. Der Avedis, in his simple way, feels this trap and reconciles himself with the God of the Bible.

—The universal dimension of the Armenian myth is what gives it its force. Only a terrorist's sacrilegious actions could awaken the Armenians to its strength. Your analysis on this point is very correct.

I think you have a major theme of Armenian survival in your hands and pages. Do you think of developing the myth theme further? I would certainly enjoy reading your periodical's future issues.

—Vahé Oshagan  
Killara, Australia

Dear Editors:

Your last issue was horrible. I wasn't sure if I was reading a Church magazine or pornography. You can do a great deal better. Please!

—Fr. Jerry Hamparzoomian  
San Diego, CA

Dear Editors:

I appreciate Window publishing "A Call to Excellence" (vol. II, no. 4, p. 19). Since hearing about it, I have wanted to read it, but neither the Church nor the ACYOA has distributed it. These young adults are the only Church group that has prepared a major critique of the Diocese.

The "Call" contains simple and humble requests, many of which are easy to implement. If we follow these concrete steps, some new people are likely to join the Church. Furthermore, the "Call" is written by some of the Diocese's most active and re-

spected young adults, who deserve our respect and attention.

The "Call" is the most significant statement by the Church's young adults in decades. Unfortunately, it appears that much of the Church leadership is ignoring the "Call." If the Church rejects the young adults' ideas, the Church is rejecting them and should not pretend to want them or expect they will continue to participate in the Church.

—Dean Shahinian  
Mt. Vernon, VA

Dear Editors:

The juxtaposition of the 1968 and 1992 calls from the youth were interesting. It confirmed my suspicion that not much has changed in the past 25 years, except that the youth have become a bit more wordy. Wouldn't you say?

—Malcolm Maganian  
Los Angeles, CA

### Women's Issue: Is it an issue?

Dear Editors:

The issue concerning women's roles in the Armenian Church is one which is dear to my heart. I was an editor of *Side by Side*, a newsletter which struggled with examining women's roles in the Church. At a *Side by Side* conference in March 1991, the women and men attending defined themselves as "side-by-side... an independent organization devoted to expanding the role of women and men within the Armenian Church.

As a member of this organization, I noticed that many women have verbally expressed their support of women being deacons and/or priests, of women holding more spiritual roles within the Church and of women beginning much-needed services such as daycare, etc. To my dismay, it appears that most women have not publicly shown support for these expanding roles. One reason may be the very strong fact that women's opinions are not regarded on the same authoritative level as men's opinions. I also feel that our Armenian culture encourages supporting oneself rather than supporting one another in a community. We would not necessarily have to have the same needs as others in order to support them. If a woman wanted to be a

priest and that was not my calling, I would still wholeheartedly support her because she believes it is her calling to serve the Armenian Church in that manner. I would see here as an equal, a person whose needs and ideas and gifts are valuable to my community. I would encourage her, not shun her.

If the Church expands its role and becomes more inclusive, more people will be reached, served and healed! I gave my theories, but I would like to hear from others. Maybe I am just one of few who feel women's equality within the Armenian Church is vitally important. I need to know if there are people who not only agree with me, but who are willing to go public with their beliefs. In the near future, I hope that such a dialogue can be accomplished within the *Window* forum.

—Tina Karagullian  
Austin, TX

Share your thoughts and ideas?

Address letters  
to the editor to:

Window Quarterly  
ACRAG

P.O. Box 700664  
San Jose, CA 95170





The Armenian Church Research and Analysis Group (ACRAG) was founded in 1989 by a group of clergy and laity of the Armenian Church. ACRAG attempts to feel the need for a professional and innovative approach to the matters facing the Armenian people in general and the Armenian Church in particular. With a firm commitment to the Traditions of the Church and sharing the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator, ACRAG, through its *Window*, provides a forum for contemporary Church thought. The aims of ACRAG are: Through research and observations, highlight the role of the Armenian Church in the life of the Armenian people; To provide a forum for dialogue and discussion on matters concerning the Church today; To provide publications that would further contribute to the growth of the Armenian community in the Faith of their forefathers; To fill the gap between the National and Religious characteristics of the Armenian Community.

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- Vol. I, No. 1 - Premier Issue
- Vol. II, No. 1 - Cults in Armenia
- Vol. I, No. 2 - Liberation Theology
- Vol. II, No. 2 - Clergy Conference
- Vol. I, No. 3 - Genocide & Church
- Vol. II, No. 3 - Denominations
- Vol. I, No. 4 - Collar & Clergy
- Vol. II, No. 4 - Myth

# Past Windows you may have missed...

## Window Vol. I, No. 1 **PREMIER ISSUE**

The first issue of Window is an eight-page introduction that sets the tone and scope of this "new" publication. It consists of three articles written by the editors and a translation of Patriarch Torkom Kushagian's "Revival in the Armenian Church."

## Window Vol. I, No. 2 **"ARMENIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION"**

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 CHURCH DIED"**

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 PRIEST?"**

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"**

In an attempt to educate 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."

## Window Vol. II, No. 2 **"INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ARMENIAN CLERGY"**

The first ever International Conference of Armenian Clergy held in New York, June 17-21, 1991 is covered with exclusive interviews and analysis by the *Window* editors. An inside view of the conference is provided. Detailed information about the current situation in Armenia by the directors and leaders of the Center for the Propagation of Faith. Candid and alarming revelations regarding the religious awakening in Armenia and the Church's ability (or inability) to provide for the needs of the people. Must reading for anyone concerned with the current and future state of the Armenian Church in Armenia and the diaspora.

## Window Vol. II, No. 3 **"ARE ALL BRANDS THE SAME?"**

This issue of *Window* explores the Armenian Protestant and Roman Catholics churches, providing a history of their development and place within the Armenian Community. A candid discussion of possible means of rapprochement is provided. Also, the place of the Armenian Church within the world Church community is explored with statements by the Orthodox Churches and reflections concerning the cost of unity. This issue is filled with facts and information. A map of religions is provided as a centerpiece to this important volume.

## Window Vol. II, No. 4 **"TESTING THE MYTH AND BEYOND"**

The understanding of myths and their place in religious perception is the theme of this issue, especially as it is applied in the Armenian Church and community. The main article gives an excellent definition and explanation of what Myth is. Of particular interest is a discussion of Vahé Oshagan and the controversy surrounding a piece of his writing, entitled *Odzoom*. Also, two articles discuss services in the liturgical tradition of the Armenian Church, namely Blessing of Madagh and Chrismation.



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