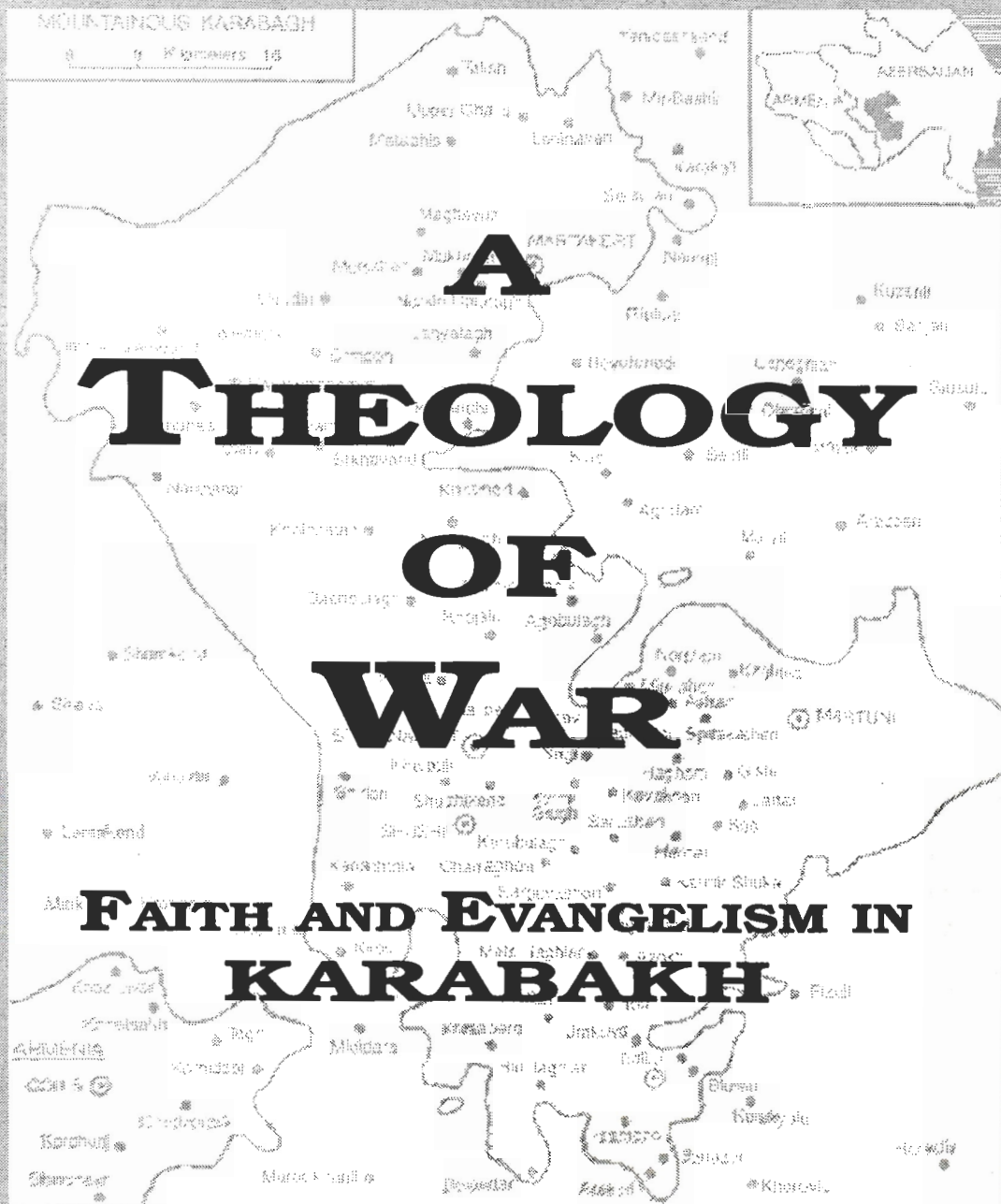


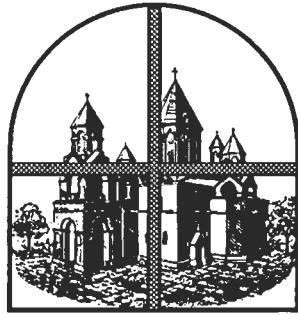
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WINDOW VIEW OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH





Window view of the Armenian Church

Volume IV Number 1 — 1994

The Light from the East

Hratch Tchilingirian

page 3

A Theology of War

A Conversation with Bishop Barkev Mardirostian

page 4

The Harvest of the Laborers

A Conversation with Fr. Mesrob Aramian

page 9

The Church on Airwaves

A Conversation with Silva Suktasian

page 13

From Baku to Hartford

Tateos Abdalian

page 15

Reflections

Vazken Movsesian

page 19

Karabakh: A Brief Historical Background

page 20

COVER MAP: ZORYAN INSTITUTE

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PUBLISHER

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
RESEARCH & ANALYSIS
GROUP

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The Light from the East

Fervor of Faith in Karabakh

Hratch Tchilingirian

"...There are great many miracles taking place throughout Karabakh. The presence of God's right hand and dominion is so strong and visible in Karabakh that when people see these miracles, they are moved from unbelief to a deep faith.

"We are actively preaching the Gospel.... We should very actively preach the Gospel to our people and beyond the boundaries of our nation. The more you give the Light of Christ to others, the more you receive it – in tenfold."

This is how Bishop Barkev Mardrossian, Primate of the Diocese of Karabakh describes the mission of the Armenian Church. Just a few years ago, under Soviet rule, this kind of pronouncements would have jeopardized Bishop Barkev's status as a religious leader and would have put the church in a precarious position. But this is 1994. Religion and faith is practiced freely.

The Light of Christ is shining in the East, in Karabakh. Bishop Barkev, the heroic apostle of Karabakh has instilled a new ministry in the Armenian Church to "reevangelize" the region, after seventy years of atheism.

There are those who were – and some still are – pessimistic about the church and her mission in Armenia and Karabakh. From a human point of view, the situation of the church in Armenia is very concerning, but if we believe that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who leads the church and not human beings, than we can better understand the spiritual dynamics of what is happening in Armenia and Karabakh. Bishop Barkev, as the spiritual leader of 150,000 Armenians living in Karabakh, has successfully established a theological context and a descriptive religions meaning to the conflict in the region.

Gustavo Gutierrez, the famous Peruvian liberation theologian, in his book *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, speaks about the spirituality of the poor people of Latin America in the context of liberation theology. In the foreword of the book, we read renowned Christian author Henri Nouwen's affirmation that "...the spiritual destiny of the people of North

America is intimately connected with the spiritual destiny of the people in Latin America. I am increasingly struck by the thought that what is happening in the Christian communities of Latin America is part of God's way of calling us in the North to conversion. I even feel that knowing God in North America can no longer be separated from the way God is making himself known in Latin America."¹

Today, we could say the same thing about Armenians: ...the spiritual destiny of Armenians in the Diaspora is intimately connected with the spiritual destiny of Armenians in Armenia and Karabakh. ...What is happening in Karabakh is part of God's way of calling us in the Diaspora to conversion.

This might seem too big of a statement to make, however, only time would justify the implications of this phenomenon.

Christian faith, unlike most other religions, is nurtured through collective experience and practice. Henri Nouwen affirms this concept – having encountered the people of Latin America and their spirituality: "I became aware of how individualistic and elitist my own spirituality had been. It was hard to confess, but true, that in many respects my thinking about the spiritual life had been deeply influenced by my North American milieu with its emphasis upon the 'interior life' and the methods and techniques for developing that life."²

Unlike our own "individualistic" experience, faith in Armenia and Karabakh is a collective, communal experience – it is *ecclesial* in the true sense of the word. As Bishop Barkev and others observe, the entire population of Karabakh is collectively experiencing a religious revival (see interview with Bishop Barkev in this issue). The Armenian Church is in dire need of spiritual reawakening, both in Armenian and the Diaspora. As the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, the Light of Christ that is shining in Karabakh may also shine over Armenia and the Diaspora – to reignite the faith of our forefathers in the hearts and minds of all Armenians.

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez. *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), p. xxi.

² *Ibid.*, p. xvi



A THEOLOGY OF WAR

Faith & Evangelism in Karabakh

A conversation with
BISHOP BARKEV MARDIROSIAN
Primate of the Diocese of Artzakh (Karabakh)

by Hratch Tchilingirian

Q. During your public addresses in the United States, you were speaking about the deep faith of the people of Karabakh, how did that faith develop?

BISHOP BARKEV: Religion, faith, piety were always present in the life of the people of Karabakh – on some level or another – but because of Communism, people were left thirsty of faith and the seeds that were planted by our forefathers were not allowed to flourish. Since 1930s, religion was forbidden in Artzakh, but today, in order to preach the message of the Gospel, we are utilizing television and radio, public forums, hospitals, old age homes. We are actively preaching the Gospel. We are distributing free Bibles to people, children's Bible and other religious publications.

As means of evangelization, we distribute religious literature published by us, we use local newspapers and magazines, we use our local radio station in Karabakh and we broadcast 30 minute sermons

...the presence of God's right hand and dominion is so strong and visible in Karabakh that people are moved from unbelief to a deep faith...

five to six times a week. Besides these, we have 38 Sunday Schools in Karabakh. Whatever means are available to us, we are putting them to good use – for the glory of God and for the benefit of the Armenian Church and our people.

Moreover, our army in Karabakh knows that our church stands besides them in their struggle and is a source of spiritual strength for them. They know that these are difficult times and they are trying to remain safe and sound as much as possible. They realize that in order to attain victory, they need great spiritual power. This is why they need God, they need God's power. As such, when troops go to the battle field, they try to make sure that all the soldiers are baptized; they make sure they have a cross around their neck for protection. If they don't have a cross hanging, they draw or paint a cross on their hand or heart or on their back, so that God's power is at hand. This spiritual awareness among the soldiers is greatly contributing to the growth of faith among the people of Karabakh.

Second, there were so many bombings, shelling and fightings, that the people, young and old, were unceasingly praying, "Lord God, please save us from this evil." These burdensome situations are also contributing to the reawakening and strengthening of faith.

Third, there are great many miracles taking place throughout Karabakh. The presence of God's right hand and dominion is so strong and visible in Karabakh that when people see these miracles, they are moved from unbelief to a deep faith.

Q. Could you give examples of these miracles?

BISHOP BARKEV: For instance, a huge bomb fell within one meter from one of our commanders, Arthur, and he survived with only a minor injury to his leg. This is impossible. No one would survive the devastation of such a bomb. But it happened. God saved this man because of his faith, because of his obedience to God. He was just slightly injured. It might sound illogical, but it is a miracle. There are numerous incidents like this.

About three years ago, Russian soldiers arrested Arthur on false accusations and then turned him over to the Azeris. At the time he had a wrist watch that had a cross in the middle and the names of the twelve apostles inscribed around the watch and he had a cross hanging from his neck. I had given him the cross when he was baptized. They took the watch from him and tried to snatch the cross from his neck. But he did not let them. Instead, he broke the

chain and put the cross in his mouth. The Azeri soldiers tried to pull it out of his mouth. But he held on. They hit him so hard that they crushed his teeth. But he held on... Later on, when he was released – they could not find anything criminal about him – he gave me his watch as a gift and told me the story and kept that cross to himself.

Q. How does this incident effect the soldiers under his command?

BISHOP BARKEV: It effects them greatly. Those commanders who have faith, transmit that faith to their soldiers. At various times, we had battalions who were commanded by very faithful men, and these commanders became the godfathers of their soldiers when they were baptized. Moreover, faithful commanders require that the soldiers say a prayer before every meal or say a prayer before going to the battle front. In these cases we make sure to give our assistance by providing a priest or a chaplain to the battalion. Praying is widely practiced among the soldiers. Not all of them, but I could say a very large number of them. These soldiers have hunger for the Scriptures, for the blessings of the priest and for the power of God. All of them want to be alive, all of them want to survive the battle, all of them want

victory through a miracle, because we are very small in numbers, we have shortage of everything, that is why our only hope is God and our people.

Q. When you preach to the people in Karabakh, what is the message that you give them?

BISHOP BARKEV: I give them a very simple message. Our movement is holy and just. God has created us as Armenians and we have been baptized Christians and He has given us this land and we are obligated to preserve it in the best way we could. We are obligated to remain good Christians. We teach that the first thing that God requires from us is cleanliness and purity. In order for us to be pure, we need to repent – because man as a human being – is mortal and sinful and is always prone to commit sin. That is why we need to do penance all the time. Because God promised that whoever repents will receive back what he has lost, in hundred fold. Therefore, if we want to have our homeland, we need to repent and God will return to us in hundred fold. This is a very simple truth, which should save and help us today. It is not easy to bring the whole population of Karabakh to faith. It is a very difficult task. I would see it as a miracle of God when all of us, all 180,000 inhabitants of Karabakh come to prayer and do penance – when all of us start a fasting period of fifteen or forty days, in vigilance and prayer. This might seem idealistic, but it is our goal.

Q. When you say penance, is it individual or collective?

BISHOP BARKEV: First, every individual should repent and live with the awareness of a repentant heart. Second, we request from the people to fast. For example, when we are faced with a

difficult week or a major battle is ahead of us, or when there is an immanent attack on us, we request that all go through a penitential period and purify themselves and pray unceasingly for our soldiers. When we are faced with great difficulties, we have perpetual prayers. We ask people to take turns to say prayers at various times, so that we have at least five or ten individuals praying at each moment, so we have perpetual prayers for twenty four hours a day. For example, twenty individuals will take it upon themselves to pray overnight: let's say a few people 12:00 midnight to 12:30 am, others from 12:30-1:00 am, and so on. In this way, we have a group of people, like "soldiers of Christ," praying at all times, even during the late hours of the night.

Q. How are these perpetual prayers organized?

BISHOP BARKEV: We send a word out and the faithful organize it among themselves through our help.

Q. How is penance done by the faithful?

BISHOP BARKEV: It is done through prayer, fasting, purifying of oneself, perpetual supplication, confession of sins and absolution; and all these are culminated at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy is our "holy of holies" and it is through communion that we receive the power of God.

Q. Since Karabakh is going through a war, whether declared or undeclared, what is your "theology of war?"

BISHOP BARKEV: War is horrendous. First, let me say that we did not start the war, they [Azeris] did. We want to stop and solve the war through peaceful means, but they are not willing. They are

forcing us to go to war. They are forcing us to use our weapons. As such, their desire is to destroy Karabakh by force – to occupy our land by force. That is evil. This is the work of the evil. This is very clear. When you are unable to stop the evil through prayer and by words, and he is coming to devour your body, by raping and perpetrating immoral acts to your sister and mother, to your daughter and children, it is your duty to protect and safeguard their lives. When they are coming with their guns, you have no other choice but to use your gun to defend yourself. This is your duty. When you are defending [the innocent], it does not mean that you are killing [your enemy] and doing evil. That's your moral obligation. Second, when there is evil, evil has to be uprooted. Like in the case of the dry branch, Christ tossed it into the fire, it is useless, [cf. John 15:6]. When there are weeds in your garden, you uproot and clean them so that they don't destroy your entire garden. Likewise, when evil is rushing over you, it needs to be uprooted. This teaching gives us the moral right to protect ourselves. This is very clear. Morally, we are obligated to do this, all of us. That's why we say that Karabakh has an army of 180,000, the whole population – all ages.

Q. Does everybody in Karabakh have this religious moral understanding toward the conflict?

BISHOP BARKEV: Definitely.

Q. Let's go to a wider question, what are your thoughts about the mission of the Armenian Church?

BISHOP BARKEV: We are the first Christian nation. God gave us that privilege and honor and we have to take that privilege very seriously. Indeed, we have to be the finest Christians in the world.

That is what God requires from us. Unfortunately, we have not reached that level yet. One day we shall.... In the past, our fathers – during the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator, St. Sahag, St. Mesrob – went to Georgia and spread Christianity, went to the Albanians and spread Christianity, went to the north Caucuses and spread Christianity. In the seventh century, when the Arab invasions started, our prince Theodore R'shduni went to the Khazars, among the Turkic tribes of the north, and tried to convert them to Christianity, but he was unsuccessful. Imagine, an Armenian prince was evangelizing. We know from history that we even preached Christianity to the Tatar Mongols, during the Cilician period, however, we were unsuccessful in converting them.

Q. Were these missions organized by the church or were they individual initiatives?

BISHOP BARKEV: They were organized and planned by the church and carried out by individuals who were capable of preaching the Gospel.

There are Russian historians, especially Pavlov, who have written that in the sixth century Armenians have done massive preaching in China. There are indications that in 635 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Tysung, all of China was baptized. China was a Christian country. But we do not know why world historians are silent about this. It is quite strange.

Q. Are there published materials on this, for instance Pavlov's theory?

BISHOP BARKEV: Yes, there are publications in Russian. These were revealed during the First World War.

Q. Do these revelations specifically speak about an Arme-

nian mission to China?

BISHOP BARKEV: Yes. It is interesting also to note that Armenians have preached in Europe in the 4th and 5th centuries. In fact, there is a martyr, in what is Hungry today, by the name of Barteve – St. Barteve the Martyr – a

the Light of Christ to ourselves, we should have actively spread it. We are obligated to spread that Light actively. I don't know, perhaps when the Seljuk Turks came and occupied Armenia, we should have preached the Gospel more widely among them.

When you are unable to stop the evil through prayer and by words, and he is coming to devour your body, by raping and perpetrating immoral acts to your sister and mother, to your daughter and children, it is your duty to protect and safeguard their lives.

preacher sent from Armenia, probably from the Illuminator's family, who is quite well known in the local tradition. He had traveled all the way to Hungry to preach the Gospel. There are indications that Armenians have reached as far as Iceland, where you find *khachkars* [cross tombstones] very similar to Armenian *khachkars*. There are indications that Armenians have preached Christianity in those northern islands. Armenian clergy have been very active and diligent in spreading the Light of Christ in various regions – and they were ready to go and be martyred if necessary. The truth is that as much as you give the Light of Christ, God gives you more. Unfortunately, as time went by, we enclosed ourselves within the boundaries of the Armenian nation and as a result we lost so much. We shouldn't have kept

Q. So indeed the Armenian Church is called to preach to "all nations," as we read in the Great Commission of Christ. As such, what should the primary task of the Armenian Church be today?

BISHOP BARKEV: We should very actively preach the Gospel to our people and beyond the boundaries of our nation. The more you give the Light of Christ to others, the more you receive it – in tenfold.

Q. I am going to ask you a difficult question – in the Diaspora this issue is quite important – what makes the Armenian Church "Armenian"?

BISHOP BARKEV: To tell you the truth, I've never thought about this subject. Obviously, this is not an issue for us [in the home-

land], perhaps it is for you here in the Diaspora. I think the question should be asked in two fold: What makes the Armenian Church "Armenian" for Armenians and what makes the Armenian Church "Armenian" for non-Armenians? These two questions are different. For non-Armenians, we have our unique theology and the founder of our theology is St. Gregory the Illuminator. He has founded a very large and distinct theological school. Even though later on our church fathers developed it further – for example, St. Sahag Bartevev, St. Mesrob Mashdotz, Yeznig Goghpatzi, Khosrov of Antzev, Khosrovig Tarkmanich and so on – it is St. Gregory who established the foundations of a remarkable theological school and created a unique ethos to Armenian theology. I'll give you an example: it is written in the Scriptures that whoever changes one word from the Bible, let him be condemned by God. However, our church fathers, in translating the Bible, have had the audacity not to translate the term "anti-Christ" the way it ought to be *haga-Krisdos*. [e.g. 1 John 2:18]. Instead of translating the Greek anti-Christ as *haga-Krisdos*, they wrote *Ner*. This is very odd and I was thinking why did our fathers went so far and wrote *Ner* for anti-Christ. I realized that our fathers have been so considerate and wise, that in their theology there is no such thing as anti-Christ. There is no equal to Christ or against Christ. Who is the anti-Christ? It is the son of the Devil and the Devil is not equal to Christ. The Devil was the prime angel created by God who fell. Therefore, our fathers, theologically, decided that no one is equal to Christ and therefore, there cannot be an anti-Christ, so they translated it as *Ner*, they just gave it a name, rather than presenting it as a concept. This is a major and brave defiance in terms of translation. But it is a unique

way of thinking. Indeed, there are many small instances such as this, which are particular to Armenians. And this spirit has remained constant in our theology throughout history. Another example is our *Badarak* (the Divine Liturgy), which – according to many non-Armenian scholars and experts – is one of the most beautiful liturgies in Christianity; take our language, our church's teachings, and so on, all indicate a unique blend of Christianity.

Q. What are your thoughts on those who say that "Armenian" is a means of expression of faith and others as something that needs to be saved for its own sake? This is a problem in the Diaspora.

BISHOP BARKEV: I understand that problem. First of all, the church's task is to preach the Gospel and tend to the spiritual needs of the people. This by itself will contribute to the preservation of our nation.

Q. What do you understand when you say "preservation of our nation?"

BISHOP BARKEV: If we are with God, then God is with us and He will protect and save us – our nation. This is it. There is no other formula. Mind you that sometimes we are not with God and sometimes we have many shortcomings.

Q. So, it is ultimately faith that is going to save the nation.

BISHOP BARKEV: Of course, first and foremost it is faith. This is very clear.

Q. How about the language?

BISHOP BARKEV: I believe that our language has a unique role. I have my personal approach to

the Armenian language. St. Mesrob Mashdotz received "divine letters" from God. The language plays an amazing role. As such, [during the Soviet period] we should not have changed the letters or spelling or any aspect of our language. This caused a lot of harm to our nation. We need to preserve the language as much as possible.

Q. Are you speaking about Classical Armenian or Modern Armenian?

BISHOP BARKEV: Primarily, I mean preserving Classical Armenian (Krabar) if we cannot do that, then Modern Armenian. The Classical language is quite different from Modern by its strength and structure. What is *Krapar*? When you look at the word closely, it means "naturally created letter," or "letter that has nature," [*bnakan araradz gir*], i.e. the letters that God gave to Mashdotz. *Ashkharabar* (modern) on the other hand, means "word of the world," it is "of the world." When you look at the names of both languages, you could clearly see their conceptual difference.

Q. How about the practical implications of language? For instance there are many people who do not understand the liturgy because it is performed in classical Armenian.

BISHOP BARKEV: In this case, we need to provide the translation to the people so that they could follow the liturgy. We need to give them books and have them in the pews for easy access. As for the sermon, that should be given in a language that people understand, whether modern Armenian or English.

Q. What do you think about celebrating the Divine Liturgy in English, here in the United States?

(Continued on page 18)

The Harvest of the Laborers

The Beginnings of *Kantzasar Theological Review*

A conversation with
FR. MESROB ARAMIAN

Editor of *Kantzasar Theological Review*

by Hratch Tchilingirian

Q. What is the main focus of *Kantzasar*?

FR. MESROB: *Kantzasar* is a theological journal, where we publish articles on the theology, liturgy, canons, arts and piety of the Armenian Church; we publish studies on Armenian patristic literature; in each issue, we print sections from unpublished manuscripts; we publish translations of significant writings of our church fathers and other Armenological and church issues. It is published twice a year. To date, we have produced four numbers, each about 350-400 pages.

Q. Besides the theological journal, do you have other publications?

FR. MESROB: Yes, definitely. Under *Kantzasar* Press, we have published over two dozen books so far. We have published several writings of our church fathers, biblical commentaries, prayer books, religious

education text books, etc. On an annual basis, we have about fifteen titles for publication – provided that we find paper and the necessary material to print them.

Q. Where and how did your ministry as a priest start?

FR. MESROB: I was born in Yerevan in 1966. After completing my primary and secondary education in Yerevan, I attended Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and studied physio-mathematics. While studying in Moscow, through friends who

were practicing their faith, I discovered a wealth of Patristic literature. My friends helped me borrow these books from the library of Zagorsk Theological School. I was so impressed and excited by the writings of the Fathers, that a desire to become a priest started to grow in me. During my last year at the Institute in Moscow, I heard that the Seminary at Etchmiadzin had started a special class for the priesthood – for those who had already had higher education and are familiar with the Scriptures and Patristic literature. So I applied to this program, through the help of my dear friend and Bishop Barkev Mardirosian, who also became my sponsoring Bishop, so that upon gradu-

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Kantzasar



ation I would serve in his Diocese, that is the Diocese of Artzakh.

I completed the three year program at Etchmiadzin in one year and on May 28, 1991, I was ordained a priest by Bishop Anania. This is how my ministry as a priest started. However, long before this, Bishop Barkev and I had conceived an idea for religious publication, especially to make the writings of our church fathers accessible to our people, and in the long run to non-Armenians. Already, while I was studying at the Seminary, Bishop Barkev and I had started working toward this goal. We had with us also – my dear friend, brother and colleague – Dikran Khatchadrian, without whom it would have been impossible to achieve anything. Dikran is an artist, but he is an expert on Classical Armenian and has a deep understanding of the writings of the fathers. He is a very spiritual person. So a few of us came together, with a very strong awareness of what our mission is and should be.

Q. How did you start Kantzasar, the Theological Review? What were the circumstances that surrounded the effort?

FR. MESROB: *Kantzasar* was established in January 1991, with the blessing of His Holiness the Catholicos and by the order of the Primate of the Diocese of Artzakh, His Grace Bishop Barkev Mardirosian. However, the work started long before January 1991. *Kantzasar* was conceived when we came to faith – when we made a conscious choice to follow Christ. When someone comes to faith and tries to deepen that faith, by necessity, he becomes in need of spiritual literature. This process enables the person to compare his own life experience with the experience of others and thus see whether he is in the right path of faith or whether he is in the wrong path. I should say that at the time when we came to faith,

there was a tremendous deficit of spiritual literature. The books that were available to us were in Russian or English or some foreign language. They were not available in Armenian. Also at that time, our knowledge of Classical Armenian was very limited.

Q. What is the time period that you are referring to?

FR. MESROB: About ten eleven years ago, 1983 or 1984.

Q. When you say “we,” how many individuals were there?

FR. MESROB: We were a close circle of friends, about ten people and we used to have discussions on religious and spiritual matters; we used to talk about the ways and teachings of Christianity; together we used to read the lives of saints; we used to pray together and spend a lot of time together.

Q. Were these all young people?

Fr. Mesrob: Yes, young people, artists, physicists and other professionals living in Yerevan. We used to get together and share our mystical experiences and thoughts about religion. We had a small group. Not all of the individuals were believers, but everyone had the desire to learn and understand what were the unique characteristics of our Armenian way of life. How would a nation that had a two thousand year history of Christian civilization differ from others, or what made Armenian Christian civilization unique, or whether there is a particular Armenian spiritual direction, or whether we should copy others and so on. We had this desire to search from the very beginning. It was with us all the time.

Q. Was this done outside the context of the church in Armenia?

FR. MESROB: Yes and no. While we were not an official body of the church, several of us were very active in the church, especially in the liturgical life of the church. We used to go to the services regularly and participate in the life of the church as much as possible. I would say that we were “ultra-orthodox,” in terms of respecting and observing the Armenian Church’s liturgical practice, the traditions, the blessings of the priest, the Divine Liturgy, etc. These were fundamental things for us. There was one basic element in our understanding, that without the church there is no true spiritual direction that will link us to Christ – to salvation. The church is the only guardian of our spiritual treasures. Therefore, for us, salvation was possible only through the church. In fact, in time, as we grew in our faith, we became apologetics for the church and tried to prove to others that this is the right path of faith by which we need to walk. In this way, *Kantzasar* was born from our practical questions and experiences.

Q. Was Bishop Barkev in this group?

FR. MESROB: At the time, Bishop Barkev was studying at the Seminary in Etchmiadzin. When he was ordained a priest, we used to visit him frequently in Etchmiadzin and have discussions. We used to have deep and intimate discussions with him. Also, we had many close friends at the Seminary, so Etchmiadzin was like second home for us.

Q. In a way, in view of the absence of material to quench your thirst for knowledge and spirituality you were filling the gap through your informal gatherings and study.

FR. MESROB: Yes, we were doing the research on our own. On

the other hand, we wished that it was done before by others and they were available to the people. However, that is our shortcoming today and we are obligated, spiritually, to provide material to our people. Because, when you are searching for the truth – and if the truth is valuable to you – then you cannot spare any effort to reach the truth, no matter how hard or time consuming it is. As such, the birth of *Kantzasar* is “soteriological” – it was started by people who were thirsty for salvation. In fact our soteriological questions gave shape and content to *Kantzasar*. I should mention that the role of Bishop Barkev was decisive and important in making *Kantzasar* possible – since he knew us and was familiar with our work. The rest is obvious. The work of *Kantzasar* speaks for itself. You will notice that from one issue to another, our work is improving and slowly but surely, we are trying to have a publication based on the norms and standards of international theological journals. In this respect, we are receiving very positive response from professional and scholarly circles from around the world. And that is a very good sign.

Q. What happened to the individuals in your original group? Are all of them involved with *Kantzasar*?

FR. MESROB: Not all of them. Just myself and Dikran Khachadrian. But fortunately, we found a third person immediately after we initiated the work. That was Hovhannes Gizoghian, a very faithful and spiritual person, who became a very important asset to our work. Even though he did not do research or write articles, he was an expert on computers and technical matters. The fact that he joined us at that juncture of our work was

providential. Bishop Barkev had given us an IBM computer and Hovhannes was there to put things in motion – in terms of programs and operational support. Then other friends gave us matrix printers and we started the production. Myself and Dikran did the research and writing, Hovhannes did the technical stuff and we had another friend who did the leg work. Later on, our staff expanded. Today, we have three people whose job is data entry and typing in the text from the manuscripts. There is



so much material and wealth of literature by our church fathers, that if we had ten people sitting all day long and typing, it would still take years. Already, we have a vast collection of raw material in the computers ready to be studied or published. As we expand, we will need more editors, proof readers, someone who will do the accounting, etc.

Initially, what helped us tremendously in our work was our close relationships and contacts with the scholars and staff of the Madenataran [Manuscript Library]. We had these relationships from the very beginning and it made it possible for us to

study the original texts. We also had good relationships with scholars and research fellows at the University's Institute of History, Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, the Seminary at Etchmiadzin and other related institutions.

Q. Earlier you spoke about salvation. How do you see the soteriology of the Armenian Church?

FR. MESROB: Generally speaking, religious literature – starting with the Bible to the writings of the church fathers – is spiritual literature. These have been written for one reason only: to reunite man with God, that is bring man to salvation. The prophets or the evangelists or the church fathers have never pursued a secular or worldly mandate. Each book or writing is written with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and their purpose is the salvation of man – the *theosis* of man. As such, spiritual literature is called to help people reach salvation. If one does not read spiritual writings from a soteriological point of view, then there is very little in them to benefit the reader. One might see es-

thetic value or poetic language or deep emotional expressions in them, but without spiritual awareness one might not see the very essence of the writing. The essence of these writings proceeds from God and is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The fathers have been “light-givers” to us, both through their writings and through the example of their lives. They have lead us in the path of salvation. It is very important to realize that whatever the fathers wrote, they lived it. Their writings are not just theoretical ideas, but reflections that come from the depth of their soul and spiritual experi-

ence. When you read the writings of the fathers, you realize and see that these are written based on a profound spiritual experience – based on a lived moment. And when you try yourself to live the way they did, you realize that indeed these are based on inner spiritual rule. Even though they lived at different times and in different centuries, you notice that the spiritual dictum and awareness is the same. So it is very important to compare your spiritual journey with others who have gone through it and see whether you are in the right track or the wrong track. In this way, the church is very important. It is where we find this connection, this gauge for a true spiritual journey. As such, the church is a divine institution – it is not the hierarchy or some other worldly aspect of it. We have to look for direction in the writings of the fathers. Not only read them, but also ask for their intercession. We need to do this in order to understand the meaning of holiness – that Christ's Light is not an abstract idea or category, but is a true and real experience. As the fathers say, "God became man so that man could become God."

Q. Having explained this, how do you see the church preaching salvation today? How does the church transmit the words and thoughts of the fathers to the people?

FR. MESROB: Let me answer this question on several levels. Today, we are not only cut off from our spiritual treasures, but we have been uprooted from the foundations of our spiritual heritage. Today, the Armenian Church finds itself in a hopeless situation. This situation is created because first of all, we do not know ourselves. Therefore, we need to learn, on a practical level, who we are and what are the particularities of our spiritual

heritage. We cannot experience a spiritual reawakening through Protestant teachings or cultic movements. If we want to live a true national spiritual renaissance, then we need to be rooted in our own tradition. We need to revitalize a spiritual awareness that is based on our centuries old religious experience. On the other hand, it is not enough to read and study, you need to encourage and motivate people to do that. We need to encourage people again, so that they may bear fruit. (Let us remember that everything has to have a soteriological direction). On the other hand, having done the research and the study, you need to make it accessible to people. This is where we need pastoral ministry – it is not enough just to publish books. We need pastoral work on a daily basis. For instance, in Armenia, practically speaking, pastoral ministry is non-existent. We need to educate people, sow the seeds of faith in their hearts and mind; we need to care and tend to the seed, daily, so that it grows and becomes fruitful. Today, people speak about cults and other religious movements in Armenia, the only way to prevent any harm to our people is to present ourselves correctly, present the Light of Christ that we have. Present it in such a way that it will shine above and beyond everything else. We cannot fight darkness with darkness. We can dispel darkness only by bringing the true Light to our people.

Q. How about the religious movements inside and outside the Armenian Church in Armenia?

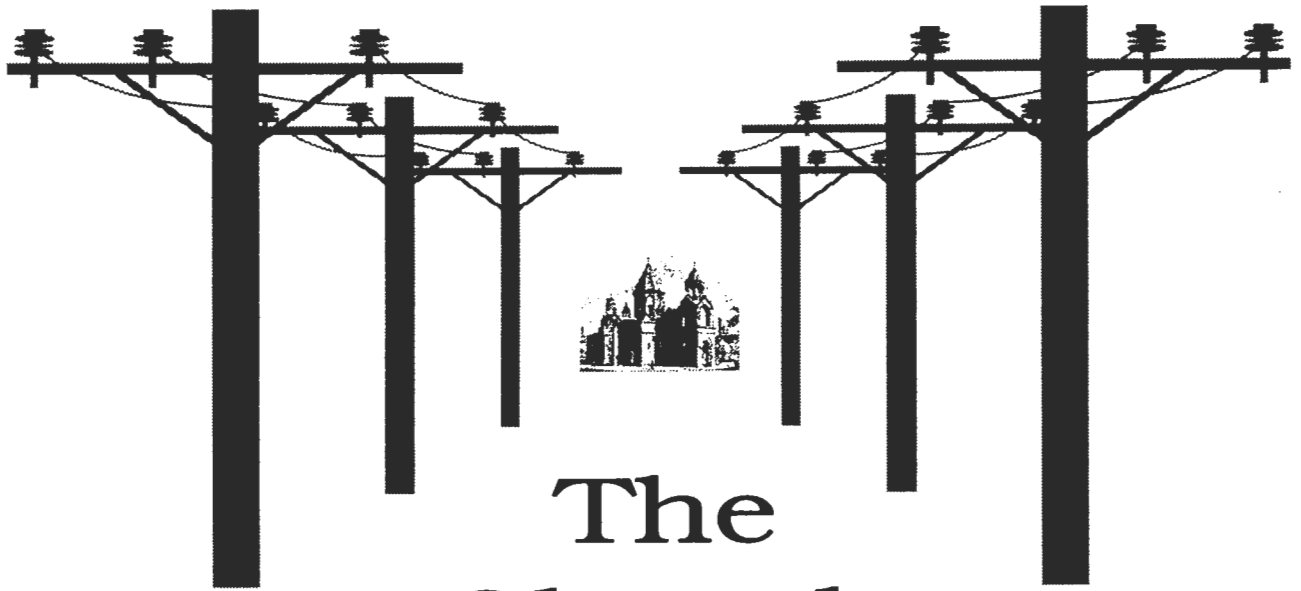
FR. MESROB: Today, when you look at certain movements toward spiritual reawakening in the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, to a large extent, these tendencies are Protestant in nature – and potentially cultic. This is the case outside the church

also. When we look at ourselves, we realize that we are more educated in non-Armenian spiritual traditions than our own. People have read more non-Armenian sources than our own. Thus, there are various levels of Protestant-cultic perceptions in our religious thought – both on the conscious and unconscious level. Our very national way of thinking is changing. We are becoming something else. Obviously, this has very serious and far reaching consequences. Therefore, we need to address these issues seriously.

I believe that Armenia – with a history of two thousand years of Christian witnessing – is one of the most important nations in the world. We have a message to give not only to our own people, but we have a message to give to others. We have spiritual treasures that can be the yeast of salvation not only to our people, but to many other nations. Having said this, at the same time, we should also learn from other people's experience and achievements. We need to be open without fear.

Q. What is your understanding of the notion that the Armenian Church is a national church? How should one understand this national aspect of the church?

FR. MESROB: The concept of national church is very simple. From the very beginning, the church [universally] has always been a local or regional church, with a Bishop as its head – such as the Church of Armenia, for the people or the nation living in that given geographic location. As such, the church is the national church of Armenians, that is, they worship in Armenian, they have their unique music, their religious artistic expressions, their unique spiritual experience, etc., but all these in the unity of the universal church. Today, there are many nations in the world
(Continued on page 16)



The Church on the Airwaves

A conversation with
SILVA-SUKIASIAN
Broadcast Journalist in Armenia

by Hratch Tchilingirian

Q. As a journalist of religion, which programs do you contribute to?

SUKIASIAN: I work for Armenia's Television and Radio Broadcast Council and as a journalist, I present religious and church programs on the national television and radio of Armenia. I prepare and produce a TV program called, "Yegeghetzin Haygagan dznentavayrn e hokvouys" [the Armenian Church is the birth-place of my soul]. In this program we present information on religion and spiritual matters, news on the activities of the church, interviews with high ranking

church leaders – including those who visit Armenian from the Diaspora. We present interviews with diocesan bishops – as well as conversations with theologians and religious scholars.

The radio broadcast is a thirty minute program, again on religious matters, where we present the history of the Armenian Church, elucidation of the liturgical practices of the church, news about church activities and programs, as well as interviews.

Q. What time of the day do you broadcast this radio program?

SUKIASIAN: Every Sunday at

1:30 PM on the national radio.

Q. How about the television program?

SUKIASIAN: The television program is once a month.

Q. Do you also contribute to other news agencies?

SUKIASIAN: Yes, I am also a correspondent and contributor to *The Republic of Armenia* newspaper, which is the official organ of the government of Armenia. Mostly, I submit interviews with church officials and dignitaries and sometimes articles on reli-

gious issues and activities.

Q. How do you select your topics or subjects?

SUKIASIAN: I am a freelance journalist and as such, I make the selections myself. I try to concentrate on the Armenian Church and faith issues related to the Church. For instance, for the radio and TV broadcasts, I present the major feasts in the Armenian Church, giving their historical background and their relevance to the faith of the individual. This is quite vital, since, as you are aware, for decades the people were deprived of knowing their own spiritual and religious heritage. In fact, the history of the Armenian Church was never taught in schools or universities. It is only recently, during the last few years, that school curricula include study of religion and history of the Armenian Church. On the other hand, we do not have textbooks or literature that is readily available for classroom use. Therefore, part of my task is to make the spiritual treasures of the Armenian Church known to the wider public.

Q. Does the state Television and Radio Broadcast Council have any policies or criterion upon which news and information are gathered and presented to the public? Or is it left up to individual journalists?

SUKIASIAN: For seventy years, it was forbidden to speak about church matters or report about church activities in the media. Journalists were not allowed to speak about liturgical, theological or religious issues. But fortu-

nately, now that Armenian is an independent country, these restrictions and bans have been lifted. We view Nation, Church, State as a "trinity" that will rebuild Armenia from the ashes of the past. In this sense, there is a cooperation between the state and the church toward this end.

Since 1985, I have been writing about the church, presenting activities and inter-

were presenting them as historical or Diaspora news. Obviously, we could not fully elucidate or comment about the real issues. We could not discuss church and religious matters openly. Thank God, today, we have the freedom to express ourselves freely and openly.

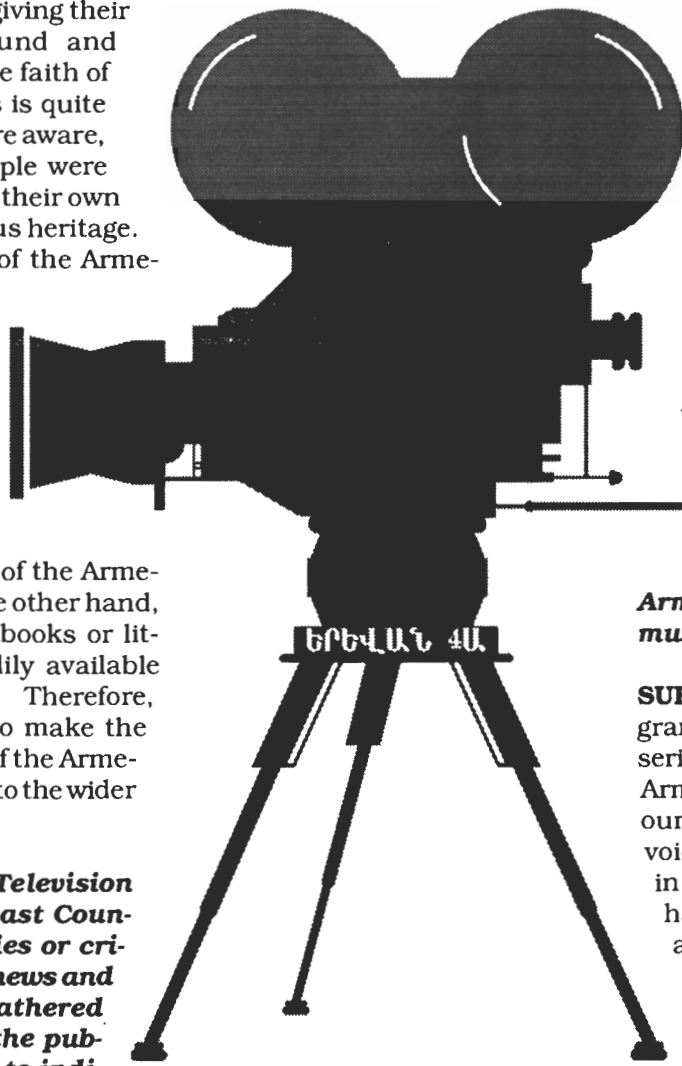
Armenia's Radio and Television agencies are very interested in religious and church subjects, especially, in view of the fact that many denominations and cults are coming to Armenia and infiltrating our society. It is important for us to present the Church - our centuries old source of faith and spirituality - to our viewers and listeners. The role and importance of the Armenian Church was also acknowledged in the Constitution of the new Republic.

Q. Having said that, as a journalist of religion, is presenting the unique tenets of the Armenian Church an editorial must for you?

SUKIASIAN: For the radio program, we have started a special series that will solely focus on the Armenian Church. As such, yes, our task is to make the Church's voice heard - what is happening in the life of the church; what is happening in terms of religious activities; how to understand and elucidate the services and religious practices of our people. etc.

Q. Therefore, the government - vis a vis the radio and TV - has an interest in presenting and speaking about the moral and religious values of the Armenian nation?

SUKIASIAN: Yes, and moreover, specific laws were drafted to limit



views, however, before the independence of Armenia, I was presenting them as series of articles on the Diaspora or historical monuments and in doing so I was able to speak about the church and its activities. We were using euphemisms - instead of presenting them as religious topics, we

the infiltration of harmful cults and religious movements in Armenian society.

Q. Do other denominations – for example the Catholics or the Evangelicals – have their own programs or do they request radio and television air time?

SUKIASIAN: Not only do they request air time and opportunity, they demand it. But at this time, they do not have any programs on Armenian airwaves. Recently, Rev. Bardakian of the Evangelical Church in Armenia has demanded air time from the broadcasting agency – both on radio and television. I am not aware of a response yet, but it is on the table. Let me note here that there are numerous organizations and groups who want to buy air waves or pay large sums of money to broadcast their brand of faith and beliefs.

Q. Are there any estimates on how many people listen or view the religious programs on Armenian airwaves?

SUKIASIAN: We do not have any estimates, but, we know that since electricity and power are scarce in Armenia, most people listen to the radio. I think numbers are inconsequential. An individual listening or viewing the programs will make his [or her] mind on the given subject.

Q. What do you think will happen to these religious trends?

SUKIASIAN: At this point, we do not know exactly how things will develop in our country, not only in terms of religion, but also social, cultural, political, economic and other aspects of life.

**The interview was conducted on April 7, 1994, in New York. Translated from Armenian by Hratch Tchilingtrian.*

From Baku to Hartford

The plight of Armenian Refugees faced with indifference

Fr. Tateos Abdalian

RECENTLY the movie “America, America” was shown on a cable movie station. It is the story of a young Greek boy coming to America, escaping from Ottoman Turkey during the reign of Abdul Hamid, the bloody Red Sultan. The book-made-movie was written by Elia Kazan in promise to his uncle, to tell his story, a pre- “Schindler’s List” if you will. The first one-third of the movie deals with the Armenians of the period and the massacres perpetrated against them during the late 1890s. One witnesses the hatred of the Turks, the burning of an Armenian Church with the people locked inside, killings, and all the rest of the horrors attested to by the survivors of the Genocide – all these portrayed in a believable re-enactment. The focus of the story however was on a young Greek boy and the obstacles that he had to overcome in America, and then, after arriving, surviving in America. It could have been the story of any of our grandfathers or fathers or uncles as well.

People become refugees as a result of invasions, or oppression, or persecution. Garen and Lilia Abalyan – along with their two children Karine and Anna – are refugees from Baku. They were forced from their homes during the ruthless pogroms of 1989-90, perpetrated by the turkic Azeris. As a result of these “new massacres,” an estimated 300,000 Armenians became refugees, escaping the sword of death again. The Abalyan family left behind their home, all their belongings, and everything they knew as a normal life, and barely making it to Armenia. Under the sponsorship of the Catholic Charities, they emigrated to the United States and were settled in the Hartford area, as were about 25 to 30 other such families.

These Armenian refugees are struggling to overcome the barriers of bigotry, language, prejudice, customs, new laws – as did our parents and grandparents one hundred years earlier. What differentiates the two groups? Does the Armenian community – firmly established here in the United States – have the ability and resources to sponsor these refugees and help them get acquainted with the culture and lifestyle of this “new world”? Unfortunately, the answer is No. The truth of the matter is that neither the Armenian Church dioceses or prelacies nor any other Armenian organization are offering refugee sponsorship to these people. When Armenian organizations are asked about this problem, the rehearsed answer one receives is that they do not wish to be accomplices in depleting the population of Armenia.

Sponsorship of these refugee families from Baku is an ongoing process. Presently, they are being sponsored by many Protestant church communities, but mostly by the agency of Catholic Charities. The refugees, after fulfilling their contractual obligations, they sever their ties with these agencies and come to the nearest Armenian Church for direction and assistance for their immediate and vital needs: housing, jobs, ESL classes, translators, household items, etc. In most cases, the churches do their best to accommodate needs of the refugees.

Rising from poverty to riches is the American dream, especially for the refugee. His determination and hard work usually will enable him to succeed. But it is interesting to see how many in our Armenian communities – who only 10-20 years ago escaped the devastation of war in the Middle East or harassment in Turkey – look upon these people as “foreigners,” who are not considered as “Armenian” as themselves. Consequently, they offer very little assistance, and have hard time accepting and including them in the life of the community. Unlike the immigrants a century ago – or even the immigrants of the 1970s – these “new” refugees are highly educated and

(Continued on page 17)

FR. MESROB*(Continued from page 12)*

that have their national churches. And this is not a negative characteristic of a church, as long as it does not pose any specific danger. Potentially, it could pose some danger – when you keep what you have to yourself and not share it with others. Imagine what would happen if we don't share the achievements of say French or British scientist, just because they are French or British. This could also happen in spiritual matters. This is dangerous.

Second, today, in our national and religious life, there is a breach of balance. For example, let us take the concept of *nationalism* [in Armenian, *hayrenasiroutyune*] – it literally means “love of nation.” To love is a basic spiritual virtue. In order to love, one has to work hard. In order to love as Christ showed us, one has to struggle firmly. And it is this love by which Christianity conquered the world. But today, forgetting this Christian understanding of love – this true love that comes from Christ – we declare that we love our people, our nation. For me, this kind of declaration and rhetoric, this kind of love-of-nation (*hayrenasiroutyune*) does not mean anything. Because, in this kind of rhetoric, I see self-serving preaching and self-serving interests. This is not true love toward your people. To me, the most profound way of loving your people is the way St. Paul understands it – he says, “I do, not seek my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.” [1 Cor. 10:33]. So ultimately, one cannot love his nation without being a true Christian. Therefore, one would be lying if he says that he loves his nation and yet he does not live by the virtues of his faith – by repenting and purifying himself and living according to the tenets of Christianity. It is easier to love in

an abstract way than in a concrete way. Christianity teaches us to love our neighbors, to love the people around us, to love a concrete human person – even to be ready to die for them. When one is able to do this, then he can truly love his nation. The Communists believed in abstract love – they believed in the bright *future* of humanity, but they could not love humanity in the *present*. They loved concepts, not concrete human beings. Likewise, nationalism, devoid of spiritual context, could become dangerous.

Q. So it is only through Christian love that we can understand true hayrenasiroutyune (love-of-nation).

FR. MESROB: Yes. There is a golden rule that says: the first ingredient of love is self-sacrifice. The first sign that you can show someone you love – that you truly love them – is sacrifice. This is a very practical love. And Christ showed us how. The saints gave us examples. One cannot learn this kind of love without Christianity – and learning, practicing is a life long task. No one has greater love than Christ, but that is the criterion for which we need to strive.

Q. Where does the church fall in terms of nationalism?

FR. MESROB: Today, we also see false nationalism in the church. What is the reason? For centuries, the church has been preoccupied with the issues of *azkabahbanoum* [preservation of the nation]. Throughout our history, having lost governments and governmental structures, everything has been compiled in the church – language, culture, preservation of national identity, administrative structures, etc. The weight of all these is so heavy that it broke the church's back. But now that we have an independent

country and government, all that weight and responsibility should be lifted from the church. Now the church should focus and do what it's supposed to do – preach the Gospel. Today, in many of our churches, we preach nationalism more than the Gospel. And sometimes this is contributing to national activism within the realm of the church – this is not pleasing to God at all. The church should preach faith, which is the true source of nationalism. The church should teach how to love, how to forgive, how to repent. The church should bring people to God, who is the source of all blessings and virtues in life. And it is only through coming closer to God that we can know who we are. The church should, without any delay, spread evangelism all across the nation and reestablish its role in the life of the nation as such.

Q. How ready is the church to do this and how long would it take to do it?

FR. MESROB: The church was not ready to face the tremendous changes that took place in Armenia – the collapse of the Soviet system, the Independence of Armenia and all the challenges and problems that came with these changes. The situation is so hopeless and complicated that it is hard to say how long it would take for the church to stand on its feet. It might take ten, twenty, thirty years. However, we have to start right now. If we do not start doing something today, then it will be a long, long road. If the illness is not treated immediately, than it will become chronic. Likewise, if we do not take decisive and effective measures in the church today, we will put ourselves in a chronically ill situation.

Q. As a last question, what do you think about non-Armenians becoming members of the Ar-

menian Church or desiring to worship in the Armenian Church?

FR. MESROB: Anybody who is baptized in the Armenian Church is a child of the Armenian Church. If someone [non-Armenian] has been given *de facto* permission to be baptized in the Armenian Church, than he is a child of the Armenian Church.

9. The prerequisite is baptism only.

FR. MESROB: Yes of course. Because, you do not baptize somebody indiscriminately. When a non-Armenian expresses desire to be baptized in the Armenian Church, it is assumed that the person is interested in Armenians, their culture, language, spiritual tradition, etc. So you have to see what are the motives that brings someone to the Armenian Church. The Armenian Church has to be open. The majority of national churches in the world are open to non-ethnics. Over the years, I have observed that the most active members or defenders of national churches are the non-ethnics or the converts. And the churches use this as a source of strength and power, in a positive sense. But in our case, most of the time we are afraid of non-ethnics coming into our church. I don't quite understand why.

9. What is the relationship of the language to the church?

FR. MESROB: Language is primarily a means of communication. However, Armenian is very important, because the spiritual heritage and tradition of the Armenian Church is in Armenian. Therefore, in order to understand the tradition of the Armenian Church one has to know the language – one has to be familiar with the language of the church. On the other hand, life is not static. Life constantly creates

new realities before us and we are obligated to consider them. If we don't pay attention to these new realities, than we will stay behind and perhaps one day realize that it is too late to do anything. For instance, in the Diaspora, the third, fourth generation Armenians do not speak the language – are we to ignore them? We cannot say to them that because you do not speak the language you are not part of the church. On the contrary, the church has to tend to their spiritual needs.

HT: On behalf of Window Quarterly, we wish you success in all your endeavors and look forward to the possibility of joint projects with Kantzasar.

FR. MESROB: Thank you. I would like to add that *Window* is a new breath, a new perspective for us. Some find *Window's* words too sharp – they say why are they critiquing our internal problems publicly. I do not agree with these people. I believe that the church is a collective entity and not only a hierarchical system. The church is an institution governed by the people, by the faithful, that's how it has been throughout the history. Therefore, every member of the church is entitled to know about this or that illness of the church. If people are not aware of the issues in the church, they cannot contribute in finding solutions to the problems. Doctors say that identifying your illness is half of your cure. So *Window* or *Loosamoud* as we call it in Armenia, is truly a window of self-awareness and self-critique. No serious work exists without criticism – constructive criticism. I believe that *Window* is providing this significant viewpoint in our church today. Besides the presentation of the issues, I find the constructive discussions and suggestions in the pages of *Window* very informative and stimulating. Reading *Window* one feels the genuine concern of the writ-

ers for the future of the Armenian Church. We pray for the continued publication of *Window*. †

**The interview was conducted on November 21, 1993, in New Rochelle, New York. Translated from Armenian by H. Tchilingirian.*

FROM BAKU...

(Continued from page 15)

accomplished scientists, medical professionals, engineers, teachers, etc., who have much to offer to our communities and churches. In Hartford, CT – as in other communities where the refugees have settled – there is a resurgence of community life, for the refugee families attend church services and activities more frequently than any other established group or community members. Hungry for knowledge and growth, their children are active students in the Sunday and Armenian language schools, while other children play soccer or help dad clean the garage or just take it easy.

For the refugees, just as it was for the earlier settlers, the church is a spiritual haven where there is peace, caring and acceptance – a place of protection from the currents of the outside world. Although they may not know the Armenian language well or lack formal education in religion – due to decades of restrictions in their home countries – they are Armenians who are seeking a role and a place in the life of the community.

The strength of the Armenian is not measured by his physical capacity, but by his indomitable will. The Armenians from Karabakh and Baku, who find themselves in these shores, have an indomitable will to survive and succeed as Armenians. Having been denied their rights as Christians to worship God in accordance to their beliefs, now in this free country, they do so with vigor and focus. They have become what they have believed they could become. They will become what they believe they can become.

It is incumbent of us to care for these refugees, as our brothers and sisters, and help them get on their feet. As they start their lives here in the United States, the initial few months are crucial. If we are not there for them now, when will we be? Ps 140.12. †

(Continued from page 8)

BISHOP BARKEV: That is something for you to decide here in the Diaspora. I do not know the specific circumstances of the community here in the States. I have not lived in the Diaspora long enough to picture the situation. Having said that, I personally think that classical Armenian (Krabar) should be the language of the liturgy and translations should be available to the people.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

9. *Could you give us a biographical sketch of yourself?*

BISHOP BARKEV: My parents and siblings were all born in Artzakh (Karabakh), in the village of Chardakhlou – the same village where Marshal Baghramian, Babajanian and Catholicos Karekin Hovsepian's father were born. But I was born in Sumgait. My mother was visiting there for a wedding around the time I was due, so I was born in Sumgait. But we returned to our village and I lived there until I was six years old. Then from the age of six to twelve, we lived in Sumgait again, where my father was working, and that's where I went to primary school. After that, my whole family moved to Yerevan. In 1971, I graduated from the State University of Armenia, majoring in Mathematics and after that, I attended the Polytechnic Institute for a year. Following that, I studied at the Russian Literature and Foreign Language Institute and graduated in 1976. My thesis was on Sergei Bulgakov's "The Master and Margarita" literary work, for which I was awarded a golden medal for best thesis in all of Soviet Union. Upon completing my military service in the Soviet Army, I worked in Yerevan for two years and then in 1980, I applied to study at the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. I graduated from the Seminary in 1984 and soon

after that, His Holiness arranged that I study in Leningrad, at the theological institute in St. Petersburg. I studied there for two years and wrote a thesis on "Knowledge of God" both in Christianity and non-Christian religions and philosophies, for which I was awarded a theological degree. Upon my return to Etchmiadzin, I served as assistant dean of the Seminary for a year and in 1987, His Holiness appointed me as Abbot of the Monastery of St. Hripsime. While an abbot, I continued to teach Systematic Theology at the Seminary, until November 1988, when I was appointed Primate of Karabakh by His Holiness. In March 1989, I permanently moved to Karabakh.

9. *How did you decide to go into the priesthood?*

BISHOP BARKEV: During the time when I was at the University of Yerevan, I had a very close friend and we were both very much interested in Mystical studies – yogatasophia, anthroposophia, etc. And we were always wondering what were they teaching at the Seminary [in Etchmiadzin] about Christian mysticism. As we studied mysticism closely, we realized that the most correct way of life is the Christian way – that Christian teaching *had to be* the most perfect teaching. I also felt this in yoga. One of the greatest yoga teachers, Ramakrishna, himself said that Christ is the greatest teacher that ever was, is and will be for all times. This surprised me very much. So we said to ourselves, why are we studying yoga if their greatest teacher or guru has been Christ himself. Second, one day we obtained a copy of the book *Practical Sorcery*, written by Papus, where he wrote that all evil can be dispelled by simply invoking the name of Christ. This made us realize that Christ is above everybody and everything. The world

of the evil is neutralized only by the power of Christ's name. So with this realization, we said to ourselves, wait a minute, we need to know and understand who and what Christ is – up to that point we didn't know much about Christianity. So we decided to learn more about Christ and Christianity and that's how we came to Etchmiadzin, out of curiosity. We had never thought about studying in the Seminary, in fact we went there to ask some questions and get some literature about Christianity. To make long story short, one thing led to another and I started studying at the Seminary. While studying at the Seminary, I was asked whether I would want to become a priest one day. I said, once I'm convinced that Christianity is the *only* way of life, then I would be baptized and dedicate my life to it and help others come to this understanding. It is important to understand what you are getting into. So this is how my spiritual journey started.

9. *What do you see for Karabakh in the next few years?*

BISHOP BARKEV: First, we need to bring peace to Karabakh. Second, we need to strengthen the faith of our people – this is crucial. Then, God willing, we need to have more religious publications; establish a seminary; repair our churches; establish more Sunday Schools in the region; establish a department of theology at the University of Karabakh and so on.

Ultimately, our wish is that Karabakh will become a uniquely Christian country, where people will live piously and according to very high moral standards. †

**The interview was held on March 18, 1994 in New York City. Translated from Armenian by Hratch Tchilingirian.*

Window: Ending Denial

Fr. Vazken Movsesian



Denial is a widespread coping mechanism. Most prominently, we see it activated when we are confronted by death. For those grounded in a faith of an afterlife, death is greeted with some degree of composure. As for those who have no set system of dealing with the pain, death is a confusing encounter. Denial becomes an acceptable means of dealing with our grief: ignore it and may go away. Unfortunately, a remedy is

not found in this simple prescription.

In the Church, denial has long-since been the coping mechanism to deal with our problems. Tragically, ignoring the situation is becoming more prevalent in our Church today.

Recently the Roman Catholic Church has endured its share of criticism. It has been riddled with allegations of misconduct by its clergy. Its social and political agenda are under scrutiny. Looking from the outside in, we see two operating models in dealing with problems. On the one hand, there are bishops who internalize the problem in the hopes that it can be disguised. With the watchdog nature of Western media, this method does not meet with success. On the other hand, we see instances where public accountings are given and, when necessary, an apology. The latter method seems to be greeted with applause by the general public which is interested in a mature handling of these matters.

Matters cannot be hid or censored in the hopes that they will cease to exist. Quite the opposite, when an issue is ignored it festers and turns into a crime bigger than its original state. Case in point: the Armenian Church.

The Armenian Church is now at the doors of death. It is struggling without a vision for the future, whether for Armenia or the diaspora. Denial seems to be a rampantly increasing sentiment among our people. We are under the impression that if we ignore the problem, it will go away. Sadly we stand at the threshold of the new millennium with a bleak picture for the Armenian Church. Failing to address the pressing issues before the Church,

not only insults the intelligence of all those concerned with its welfare, but it is a sin like no other. We can no longer hide our problems in the hopes that they will cease to exist.

A recent encyclical by the Catholicos of All Armenians (April 22, 1994) refuted the need to convene the synod of bishops, despite the urging of many of the episcopal ranks. In a tone borrowing from that of papal-infallibility, the Catholicos defended the Church with a covert denial of the difficulties pressing for answers.

Denial in the Church was the purpose for which *Window* was created. With this issue, we begin our fourth year of publication. We have earnestly strived to bring our readership a unique forum where the current situation and challenges facing the Armenian Church can be discussed honestly with constructive means for rectification. The letters, phone calls and e-mail we receive is the best indication that the Armenian faithful do not wish to settle for denial, nor do they wish to abandon the institution without a fight.

But *Window* is only the first step. Our analysis is in need of follow up. In the 1960's, Martin Luther King Jr., authoring a book, *Why we cannot Wait* brought to light the urgent need to address Civil Rights in the United States. Today, the same question — Why we cannot wait — stands begging for an answer in regard to the Armenian Church. We are at a critical juncture in the life of the Church. We cannot wait, because we are already loosing what we have struggled to preserve. Empty churches, low memberships, decreasing donations, apathy are only symptoms. The central issue is that of defining the place of Christ within His Holy Church. Ironic as it may sound, Christ's presence in the Church is what we deny. There is no denying this fact.

We cannot wait for catholicoi, bishops, priests, councils, or committees to rectify the situation. We have no one to blame for our dilemma but ourselves and therefore we must look for the solutions from within. Only through activism and an earnest commitment to work for change can we guarantee the Church as a center for Christ's love and justice here on Earth. Through our research and analysis we *end* denial. Through activism we *begin* to change and move forward. Finally, through our vigilance, prayer and fasting we focus on God's love as an expression, uniquely belonging to His Holy Church — as the rightful habitat of Christ.

We begin our fourth year of publishing *Window* fully committed to this unique ministry. We end denial with a hard look at the reality of the Armenian Church at the end of the twentieth century. Sometimes what we discover is not pleasant, but only by candid and open discussion can we raise it from the quagmire which threatens its extinction. And certainly, its continued existence and service to the Armenian nation is paramount to our actions. We thank you, our readership, for your support. We will make every effort to live up to the confidence you have placed in us.

Send comments and letters to:
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KARABAKH

A Brief Historical Background

KARABAKH (*Artsakh* in Armenian) is also known as Nagorno-Karabakh or Mountainous Region of Karabakh. It is a region of 1,699 square miles with a population of approximately 180,000 people, of whom 80 percent are Armenian. Its name means "black garden." The area is known for its rugged beauty, its wild mountains, and its inaccessibility to the rest of the Caucasus.

In ancient times, the region of Karabakh and most of eastern Transcaucasia was inhabited by a people called Albanians, not to be confused with the people of the same name now living in the Balkans. According to the Greek geographer Strabo (1st c. B.C.), Karabakh which then encompassed both the mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh of today and the larger lowlands, surrounding it, had a highly developed economy and was famous for its cavalry. Caucasian Albanians maintained close contacts with the Armenians. In the fifth century, shortly after the Armenians converted to Christianity, the Albanians too adopted the Armenian brand of Christianity. The first church established in Karabakh, in the region now known as Martuni, was established by St. Gregory the Illuminator. Tradition has it that St. Mesrob Mashdotz, the monk who created the Armenian alphabet, founded the first school in Karabakh.

Given the centrality of religion to social life during that period, it is not surprising that in the following two centuries the Albanians merged with the Armenians. The nobility intermarried, the region's bishops were often Armenians, and by the seventh century the separate identity of the Albanians was lost.

The territories of both Moun-

tainous Karabakh and the larger surrounding lowlands became parts of the Armenian provinces of Utik, Sunik and Artsakh. In the seventh and eighth centuries much of this area was conquered by Arabs, who converted a portion of the population to Islam. In Karabakh, only a very small minority was converted. The situation of Karabakh changed radically in the eleventh century when the ethnic Turkish invasions began. The Turks had emerged from Central Asia, had conquered Iran, and founded the Seljuk Turkish dynasty, which first raided, then invaded Armenia. From 1020 on, these invasions destroyed much of Armenia, and Karabakh, especially its lowlands, suffered greatly. By the mid-eleventh century, the Armenian kingdom was destroyed. But the feudal principality of Sunik, which occupied the mountainous territory in the southeast of today's Republic of Armenia and Mountainous Karabakh survived and became beacons to the rest of Armenia. In the following centuries, thousands of Armenians found refuge in Karabakh, under the protection of native lords.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Karabakh gave rise to the pioneers of the Armenian emancipatory struggle. Representatives of the region attempted to interest the monarchs of Russia and other European powers in embarking on a "crusade" to liberate the Armenian plateau, the eastern portions of which were occupied by the Ottoman Turkish and Persian Empires. During the 1720's, the rebellion of the Armenians of Sunik and Karabakh, led by David Beg, achieved notable though temporary success. The Russian Empire, expanding southwards in the

Transcaucasus, annexed the territory of Karabakh in 1805.

The Russian annexation of Karabakh was officially recognized by Persia in the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. Thus Karabakh came into the Russian Empire earlier than the areas of Yerevan and Nakhichevan, which were ceded to Russia by Persia in the Treaty of Turkmenchai in 1828. This earlier annexation benefited Karabakh in some ways, but also created a major problem for the future. Because of the time it came into the Russian empire, Karabakh was made part of Elizavetpol Province, which later became Azerbaijan. Administratively, then, Karabakh could not be joined in 1813 to the as-yet un-annexed Armenian territories of which its history and population made it a natural part. Yerevan and Nakhichevan, when they were attached to the Tzarist empire in 1828, were organized in the Armianskoy region, later the Yerevan province. Here, as in other empires, decisions made by colonial administrators laid the foundations for future difficulties.

During the first months of the Russian revolution of 1917, the situation in Karabakh was relatively calm. The Russian army had penetrated deep into the Ottoman Empire, and there was no Turkish threat to Karabakh. But by the end of 1917 the Russian army had disintegrated, and in February 1918 the Ottoman Turkish army moved into Armenia. The Ottoman Turks threatened Yerevan and made a desperate drive to oil-rich Baku, then held by a multi-ethnic coalition of Bolsheviks (headed by the Armenian Stepan Shaumian) and small Armenian military forces. While this struggle went on, repre-

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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.

Window Vol. III, No. 1 **"THE CHURCH IN ARMENIA"**

This issue presents a series of interviews conducted in Armenia, which give a general view of the state of the church and religion in the post-soviet Republic of Armenia. There are conversations with the Catholicos, representatives of Armenian political parties; Armenian "skinheads," and others who are closely involved with the church. The guest editorial is written by Bishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Armenian Church of Canada.

Window Vol. III, No. 2 **"HYPOCRISY"**

Hypocrisy is among those topics that are normally avoided in church life. However, in this issue, ordained and lay workers in the church candidly write about their experiences in the Armenian Church and share their thoughts about hypocrisy in the community. While the contributors discuss various aspects of church life, they provide practical suggestions and programs that could tackle some of the burning issues in the Armenian Church.

Window Vol. III, No. 3 & 4 **"DEATH: THE KEVORKIAN FACTOR"**

Death and Dying, Euthanasia and assisted suicide are among the main topics of this issue. The articles discuss the issues in the context of the controversy of assisted suicide that became a matter of public debate, especially through the actions of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, or "Doctor Death" as he became known by the American media.

ACRAG

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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