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Outreach

Հատարակութիւն Ամերիկական Եկեղեցւոյ Արքեպիսկոպոսի
A Publication of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America

Volume XIV, Number 10 — February 1992

Ս. Աստուածածին Եկեղեցւոյ Փորձերու Դպրոց Դաս

Քորնիթի Ս. Աստուածածին Հայց. Առաքելական Եկեղեցւոյ զըզպաց դասը, կիրանջօրեայ Ս. Պատարազի երեցեցորութեան կողքին, աննշօրեայ իր մտահոգութեան ասարկան զարժուցած է Հայց. Եկեղեցւոյ հոգեւոր ծառանցութեան փոխանցման զժուարին բայց անխտածգելի առաքելութիւնը:

Հայց. Եկեղեցւոյ ասանդութեան եւ երաժշտութեան փոխանցումը ապագայ սերունդին, խոխալ առաքելունքին մըն է եւ ամբողջապէս կը ծառայէ ազգապահպանման մեր աշխատանքներուն:

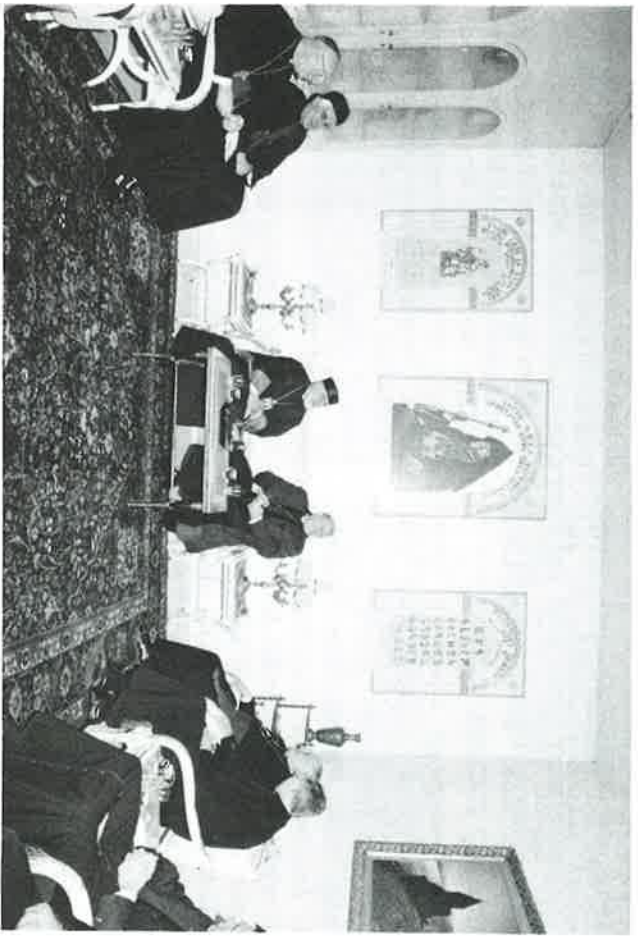
Հայց. Եկեղեցւոյ Ս. Պատարազի երեցեցորութիւնը լսել մեր ծառայանքներուն անմեղ շրթներէն, վախճել անոնց կայտառ ու եռանդուն ներկայութիւնը մեր եկեղեցւոյ կամարներուն ներքեւ, զիւրիշ վախճ ու եղակի ապրում է մեր հաւատացանքներուն համար:

Ան այդ, զպրոց գաւի առաջնահերթ մտահոգութիւնը գարձած է յառաջանցնել նոր սերունդը ներկայացնող զպրոց գաս մը պատրաստ իր տեղը գրաւելու ընկերային գաղտնաբարկան եւ հոգեւոր կենցիկ մարզերէն ներս:

Հոգեւոր կրթութեան այս արժէքով է անհաւասկի, որ Ս. Աստուածածին Եկեղեցւոյ զըզպաց դասը այս տեսականի իրագործման ճամբուն վրայ, հաւաքական աշխատանքի երաշխիքը անհրաժեշտ պայման նկատելով, զպրոպետ, զպիր եւ ծնող ծնաթներէ պատասխանատուութեան գիտակցութեամբ, անդու ու անանծրոյթ ճիգերով, հետեւողական եւ համբերատար աշխատանքով, հաւատացանքներուն իսկ խոստովանութեամբ երեցեցորու որակաւոր զպրոց գասի կողքին, յառաջանցին փոքրերու զպրոց գաս մը, որ կ'ընդգրկէ 7-12 տարեկան եւ 40-ի հասնող պատանի-պատանուհիներ, պատրաստ Ս. Պատարազի երգեցողութեան:

Ներկայ ժամանակաշրջանի ներթապալտ ծանօթ պայմաններուն մէջ, նման ծրարքի մը իրագործման յարմարագոյն անձը Ս. Աստուածածին Եկեղեցւոյ զըզպետ Պրն. Վարուժան Նիկոլեանն էր, որ Հայց. Եկեղեցւոյ երաժշտութեան անդաստանին մէջ 30 տարիներու փորձառութեամբ, ունի ժամուկները սիրաշահելու, ինչպէս նաեւ հիգիւնն ու իր շարականները մանուկներուն

Cardinal J. O'Connor Visits Lebanon; Meets With Karekin II in Antelias

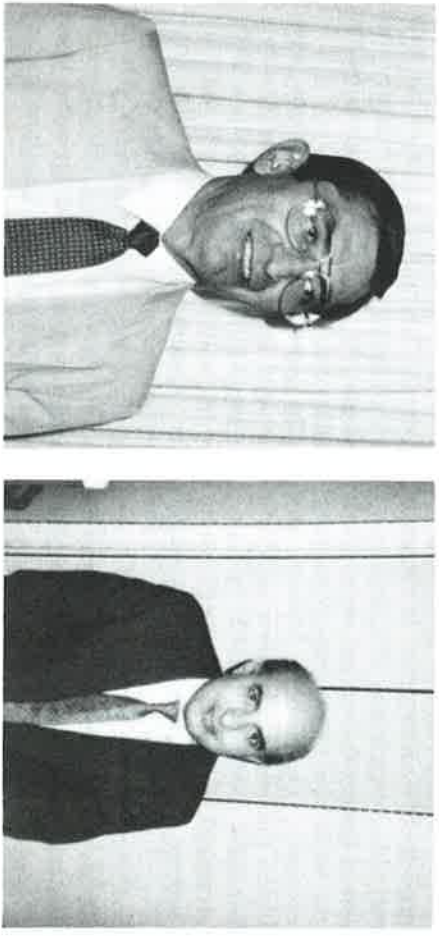


The Archbishop of New York, John Cardinal O'Connor, arrived in Beirut on January 1, for a three-day visit to Lebanon. He was accompanied by a delegation representing the Catholic Welfare Association for the Near East and the Pontifical Mission. Before arriving in Lebanon, His Eminence had met with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican and also spent two days in Egypt.

On January 2, the Cardinal was the guest of honor at a luncheon hosted by the President of Lebanon, Mr. E. Hraoui at the Presidential Palace. Catholics Karekin II accompanied by Archbishop Aram Keshishian, attended the luncheon, as did other heads of the Christian churches in Lebanon.

On January 3, Cardinal O'Connor together with his delegation visited His Holiness in Antelias at the headquarters of the Catholicate of Cilicia. The discussions centered on the present-day situation in Lebanon, the contribution of the local churches for the redressment of Lebanon, and the role of the Church and people of the United States. That same evening a meeting took place at the Patriarchal See of the Maronite Church, at which the Catholics and Archbishop Keshishian participated, along with representatives of the other churches. Prior to this gathering, the Cardinal met with representatives of the Islamic communities of Lebanon.

Prelacy's 1992 Raffle Campaign Begins; Garibian and Ohanessian Co-Chair Fundraiser



Sarkis Garibian

Sarkis Ohanessian

The 1992 raffle fundraising campaign for the Prelacy is underway under the co-chairmanship of Sarkis Garibian of Massachusetts and Sarkis Ohanessian of New Jersey. Now in its 17th year, the annual campaign has become a major source of funds for the Prelacy helping to finance the many educational projects the Prelacy undertakes.

The drawing of the winning raffle tickets will take place on May 17, 1992, at the closing banquet of the National Representative Assembly which this year will take place in Dearborn, Michigan. In

tional prizes, valued at approximately \$100 each, have been added. A special separate drawing will take place for sellers of multi-tickets. For each five tickets sold, the seller will be entitled to one chance in a special drawing. The winner of the "seller's drawing" will receive a special prize.

Raffle tickets are \$100 each, giving the buyer the opportunity to win one of the top five cash prizes: \$10,000; \$5,000; \$3,000; \$2,000 and \$1,000. This year the design of the raffle tickets is a reproduction of St. Mesrob Mashdot's statue at the

Prelacy Churches Celebrate Christmas; Prelate Visits Old Age Home in N.Y.

More than a decade ago the churches within the jurisdiction of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America began to celebrate Armenian Christmas on the exact day of January 6 rather than on the closest Sunday, as had been done previously. Now, it has become so much a part of the life of the faithful that the annual celebration of Christmas and Ephiphany finds the churches filled to capacity and beyond.

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, Prelate, officiated at Christmas services at St. Illuminator's Cathedral in New York City with the Cathedral's pastor, Archbishop Rev. Moushegh Der Kaloustian. As announced previously, prior to the Hayr Mer a special prayer service of "Thanksgiving for the Armenian Republic was offered. The text used was from the prayer prepared by Archbishop Torqom Koushagian in 1920 for the Armenian Republic of 1918. The prayer, so relevant that it appears to have been written recently, provided a moving and meaningful experience for all those present.

In his Christmas sermon, His Eminence again voiced hope and faith for the future noting that, "The Christian world faces many challenges." The Prelate spoke of Mankind's constant need of renewal. "While it is true that we cannot renew our bodies which are mortal, we can renew our immortal souls." He called for renewal in both the Diaspora and the Homeland, emphasizing that Armenia cannot be truly independent until it makes basic changes and moral readjustments.

"Armenia is in this process of renewal," he said. "During the recent installation service of the newly-elected President, we saw him walk to Catholics Vazken I to receive the Pontiff's blessing. I could not help but wonder the thoughts that must have been in His Holiness' mind when one remembers the past relationship between the state and church in Armenia."

Following the Divine Liturgy Archbishop Ashjian presided over the traditional Blessing of the Water in remembrance of the Baptism of our Lord, Jesus Christ. During this service His Eminence used the right hand relic of St. John the Baptist, which was recently created by the Kharhadourian Brothers. The relic contains remnants of the bones of St. John the Baptist.

Visit to Old Age Home

On January 7 Archbishop Ashjian accompanied by Archpriests Moushegh Der Kaloustian and Asoghik Kelejian, went to the Armenian Old Age Home in Flushing, New York, as they do each year. The clergyman conducted the traditional House Blessing service and Archbishop Ashjian spoke to the residents of the Home about the Good News of Christmas and the new reality in Armenia. He congratulated the residents for keeping the dream alive for decades and now sharing in the joy. The clergyman were invited to share luncheon with the residents and ad-

Ս. ԱՍՏՈՒԱԾԱԾԻՆ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՈՑ ՓՈՔՐԵՐՈՒ ԴՊՐԱՑ ԴԱՍ

2տր. էջ 1-4Ը



Փոքրեւորն անծանօթ մէկը էջ ան, Հայց. Եկեղեցի անխախտ է, Իսկ անոնց ելքէի եւ քրիստոնէական դաստիարակութեան ուսուցիչն է ան, կրօնըէ ապագայ սերունդին, վառ որ ամսական եռօրեայ չեղթա- կանութեամբ կատարուած փորձերուն ընթացքին, անոնց սորվեցուց Ս. Պատարազի բովանդակ երգեցողու- թիւնը, ինչպէս նաեւ յատուկ սաղ- մունք ու շարականներ՝ զորս համ- մեց քրիստոնէական գիտելիքներով: Փոքրեւոր զւարաց զաւի ծնող- ներէն բազկացած յանձնախում մը կը կարելին Ի գործ կը զնէ ստեղ- ծելու համար մանուկը շահագրգռօր, հաճելի եւ օգտաշար մթնոլորտ մը կը լի՛ խաղերով, պտոյտներով, հան- զէններու կազմակերպութեամբ, ընդունելութեամբ, ճամբորդութեամբ, նուէրներով եւ զանազան այլ ծամանցներով:

Վարդապարտ տոնակատարութեան արիթմով թեմիս Առաջնորդ՝ Տ. Մեսրոպ Սրբ. Արքեպիսկոպոսին քաղաքս սուրած այցելութեանէն օգտուելով, Շաքաթ, 6 Յուլիսին, զւարաց զաւի յանձնախումբը ընդունելու թիւնը նուիրական այս գործին կարեւորագոյն մասը վերցուցած լլկարուն համար:

Ապա Սրբազան Հայրը, օրհնեց զիրենց ու բոլորին մարդեց ուժ ու կրող շարունակելու համար սկսուած էկեղեցանուէր եւ յոյժ գնահատելի այս գործը:

Կիրակի, Նոյեմբեր 3-ին, 30 փոքրիկներ հրեշտակային կրօնց ձայներով, Ս. եւ Անմահ Պատարազի բովանդակ երգեցողութեամբ, եկան շեփոհելու ներկայ հաւատացեալներուն, որ հայ ժողովուրդի հաւատքը զէպի Աստուած եւ զէպի

Հայց. Եկեղեցի անխախտ է, Իսկ կրենք՝ ջահակիրները հայ ժողո- վուրդէ ապագայ սերունդին, վառ պիտի պահեն Լուսաւորչեան անմար կանթեղը նաեւ Ս. Աստուածածին Եկեղեցոյ խրատին վրայ:

Ս. Պատարազի արարին հաւա- տացեալներուն աչքերը թաց էին. Բրթուած էին նաեւ աչքերը հո- գեւոր հովիւ Խաժակ Հայր Առաքին, որ կը շուրջ հաւաքեց փոքրիկներն ու անոնց ծնողները եւ խոստովա- նեցաւ անոնց՝ թէ այդ օր մանուկ- ներուն չեա մասուրացած կը պատա- ռազը յատուկ յուզում մը արթած է կը մէջ:

Ան նորհաւորեց բոլորն ալ ու թեխարեց՝ յետ այսորիկ ամսուան արաջին Կերակին սրամարզելի փոք- րեւոր երգեցողութեան, որ ըն- դերուն երգեցողութեան, որ ըն- դարունեցաւ յուզական անխառն ու- բանութեամբ: Ապա՛ Հայր Առաքը «Հաւատով Խոստովանի՛նք զբոյժ- ներ մակարեց փոքրիկներուն եւ խոստացաւ բարեխօսել Առաջնորդ Սրբազան հօր մօտ, յարմար արիթմով զիրենց զւար ձենաւարելու Ս. Աստուածածին Եկեղեցոյ մէջ: ■

Montclair University Armenian Club Team is Victor In Siamanto Academy Annual College Bowl

It was the battle of wits of the decade! Five area university Armenian club teams took up fighting positions as the Siamanto Academy College Bowl Quiz Show got underway on the evening of November 23 in the auditorium of St. Illuminator's Cathedral in New York City before 100 cheering spectators.

The Montclair University team (N.J.) gained its first victory ever in the eight year old competition. The runner-up team of Queens College put up a valiant fight while the teams from New York University, Queensboro College and Rutgers University, who were gallant in their races, deserve honorable mention.

A unique competition, the Siamanto Academy College Bowl is designed for university students but is organized and conducted by the high school age students of the Academy. The annual invitational game show was under the

FEAST OF STS. GHEVONTIANK
— PANEL DISCUSSION —
The Armenian Church in the 21st Century
Introduction:
Rev. Antrang Badjian
Chairman, Armenian Religious Education Committee
Panelists:
Dr. Vigen Gurvorian
Associate Professor of Theology & Ethics, Loyola College
Dr. Khachig Tölölyan
Associate Professor of English & Comparative Literature, Wesleyan University
Dr. Marzbed Margossian
Moderator

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1992, 8 p.m.
Sts. Vartanantz Church Hall
461 Bergen Boulevard — Ridgefield, New Jersey

PRELACY RAFFLE CAMPAIGN

(Continued from page 1)

in Yerevan, symbolizing education and culture, for which the total raffle income will be allocated.

Mr. Garbrian and Mr. Ohanessian, co-chairmen of the Prelacy campaign, are NRA delegates representing Indian Orchard/Springfield (Massachusetts) and Ridgefield (New Jersey) respectively. Mr. Garbrian is a past member of the Prelacy's Executive Council, where he served as treasurer. He chaired the Prelacy's computer committee and was instrumental in installing the Prelacy's first computer system in 1978. He is the past principal of the St. Gregory's Armenian Saturday School, and a council member of the Board of Trustees. Last year he served as the national chairman for the 1991 raffle campaign.

Strong advocates of the community's educational efforts, Mr. Garbrian and Mr. Ohanessian, expressed pleasure at chairing the Prelacy raffle. "With an extra effort from everyone," they said, "we can make this the most successful in terms of the number of tickets sold. The hundred dollar donation is for a good cause, and at the same time gives the buyer an opportunity of winning one of the top prizes.

Mr. Garbrian is employed by Monsanto Company of St. Louis and heads the company's R&D Computing Information Department at Springfield, MA. In addition, he consults in the plant's strategic planning of "Computer Integrated Enterprise." Mr. Garbrian is married to Mary Baltanian. They have four children, Rosemarie, Hasnig, Eddie and Lenna. ■

guidance of Academy Director, Mrs. Hourig Papazian-Sahagian and Dr. Herand Markarian, Director of the Academy's Armenian language and literature department.

The evening got off to a rousing start with the singing of an anthem dedicated to the Tricolor, *Trosh Yerakoun*, performed by the 30 voices of the Academy students. This musical salute set the tone of high enthusiasm as the audience was led into the quiz show program by Dr. Markarian.

The multiple-choice questions were prepared by members of the Academy faculty: Mr. Haroutune Misserhian, Director of the history department; and Very Rev. Anoushavan Tanielian, director of the department of religion/church history. Quiz materials were selected from the curriculum of Siamanto Academy courses which form the 3-year cycle of Armenian studies. Upon graduation Academy students become eligible for nine college credits in universities and colleges throughout the United States. College Bowl '91 represented personal triumphs for Academy students who worked unobtrusively and efficiently in organizing and conducting the event. The skills obtained in planning and coordinating cultural programs are integral components of the Siamanto Academy goals: to offer a program of study which will expand students' knowledge of Armenian culture while training them for roles in community leadership.

At the conclusion of the College Bowl's academic Olympiad, Mrs. Papazian-

Sahagian conducted the awards ceremony and thanked parents and guests for their enthusiastic support and encouragement of the Academy for the 11th consecutive year. Special thanks went to the participating teams members, the Siamanto Academy students, the Academy board and the Armenian National Education Committee, sponsor of the Siamanto Academy. ■

CHURCH WORSHIP

REGULAR ATTENDANCE

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Heb. 10:25)

REVERANCE

"Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker." (Ps. 95:6)

PRAYER

"... for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." (Isaiah 56:7)

OFFERING

"Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Cor. 15:2)

SOCIABILITY

"Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby you have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:1,2)

PARTICIPATION

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col. 3:16)

OUTREACH

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Iris Papazian, *Editor*

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The Ferment of Faith in Post-Soviet Armenia

by VIGEN GURROIAN

THE Bishop of Yerevan in Armenia, Karekin Nersissian, is a young and enormously energetic man. He has responded to the revival of faith among Armenian youth by almost literally turning over to them his diocesan building and the parish church of St. Sarkis. They come to sing and dance, learn the ancient hymns and study Scripture. The parents complain that the children are neglecting their school work. The young people hurry to the church in the afternoons and evenings to attend meetings and practices. An inspired group of high school and college students edits a journal. They excerpt theological writings of the Armenian church fathers, compose summaries of Armenian church history and write commentaries on the Bible. The bishop spends several hours a day with these youth in Bible studies and discussions of their projects.

During my visit this past spring Bishop Karekin organized a pilgrimage for the youth and their families. Three hundred people piled into buses and cars and made an hour-and-a-half trip some 7,000 feet up into the foothills of snow-capped Mt. Aragats. The bishop was dressed in a cassock and black high-top sneakers. Our destination was the church of the medieval fortress of Am-Berd, which dates from the 11th to the 13th centuries. What Armenian-Armenian who had grown up during the cold war ever could have imagined that in his lifetime he would make such a pilgrimage?

The bishop asked me to offer the homily. I spoke on Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. Armenians had done well to observe the feasts of the church over these many centuries of Ottoman and Soviet captivity, I said. But they would need to become like Mary, listening to the Word of God and then taking the gospel beyond these walls to the many who for so long have been deprived of the gospel.

The choir had missed a cue from the altar just before I spoke. They were visibly upset with themselves. After all, they were opening an ancient church which had been closed for longer than anyone could remember. I turned to these men and women and reminded them of what Jesus had said to Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing."

A cold highland wind had been blowing all morning on the hilltop, and it kept sweeping open the heavy wooden door of the church. Every now and then someone would push the door closed, only for it to open once again. I concluded the homily with a reference to these occurrences. "One last thing," I said. "Today the wind blew strongly through the door. And we kept trying to keep it out to protect ourselves from the chill. But we should have let the door open and the wind blow in on us and through us. For St. John writes that Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'The wind blows where it chooses.'"

Several days after the pilgrimage to Am-Berd I sat with Yervant Melkonian, editor of the periodical *Etchmiadzin* of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin (home of Vasken I, the Catholics of All Armenians), as he was recalling his stu-

dent days. One story in particular stood out. During the 1960s Yervant and some other seminarians made trips deep into the mountains in search of ancient *khatchkars*, crosses carved in stone. "We would take them out of the ground and restore them. We wanted to do something special to celebrate our faith. We did this on our own." Eventually, said Melkonian, the KGB took steps to stop the practice, viewing it as "an expression of religious nationalism."

The long communist captivity sustained and even increased this identification of church and nationhood. These churches were isolated from the rest of Christianity, and the hegemony of Soviet rule often left the churches as the sole remaining historic symbol of ethnic identity and national pride.

IN ARMENIA religious discussion almost inevitably turns to nationalism. Much of Christianity in the formerly communist lands of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union bears a strong national character. We have come to refer to these churches as national churches—the Romanian church, the Serbian church, the Georgian church and so on. The history of how the churches got to be so closely identified not only with ethos but with nationalism is a long and not un-complicated one. The 19th century was a critical period. In that century emergent nationalist ideologies and movements all but evacuated these churches of their memory of a universal faith and mission. These churches entered the 20th century as handmaids of nationalist aspirations and governments. The gospel they preached was a faith in the nation and its survival.

The long communist captivity sustained and even increased this identification of church and nationhood. These churches were isolated from the rest of Christianity, and the hegemony of Soviet rule often left the churches as the sole remaining historic symbol of ethnic identity and national pride. The collapse of communist ideology and Soviet repression has unleashed these pent-up forces of nationalism. Perplexing issues of the relation of church and national culture have been raised anew, and new possibilities for different configurations of faith, national identity and the peoplehood of God have opened up.

One sign of the perplexity was my exchange with His Holiness Vasken I about the challenges of religious pluralism. The patriarch explained that new religious groups had come into the country after the earthquake of December 1988. Some gave valuable assistance, but most remained to take advantage of the situation for proselytizing. Now they were making great financial profits, he said. The patriarch did not concede that any blame ought to be assumed by the church for the difficult situation in which it finds itself. Yet many Armenians speak pointedly of the church's lack of initiative after the earthquake and in the wake of the nation's newly found freedom. Armenia had become a vast mission field, but the church waits for the people to

come to it. The several efforts to address this problem, including an ill-fated Center for the Propagation of the Faith, have been poorly managed and hamstrung by the conservatism of the church. During my conversation with Melkonian, his own critique was blunt. Cults and other Christian denominations were making inroads partly because the Armenian church had been restricted in the past but partly because the church had failed to respond wholeheartedly when it

was free to do so. For him, the patriarch's account of the new religions did not take seriously the convictions which motivated them. The patriarch's response was predictable, however, from the leader of a church which had long ago taken upon itself a custodial role as spiritual protector of the nation. "Our church is founded more as an institution of religious nationalism than one founded in faith," Melkonian explained. "Even our understanding of Christ has been nationalized."

In Yerevan I visited with two scholars, Erna Melikyan, a philologist and historian of classical culture, and Lillet Zagarian, a historian of medieval art. The topic turned to faith and morality. Morality is much discussed in the formerly Soviet society. The people have been left without anything in which to believe and without any authority in which moral responsibility might rest. Lillet thought that religious belief and morality need not be church-centered. She wanted to define morality as autonomous values or principles universally recognizable. But she also suspected that there is something specific about Christian morality. I said that I thought this was so. I explained that Christian ethics is founded not in an abstract theory of moral principles but in a person who lived a life that is the model for those that follow him. "There was such a man as Jesus," Lillet stated. "I shall not dispute that he was a historical person. . . . But Christianity teaches us to turn the other cheek and love our enemy. This is difficult. How can we love Turks or Azeris? . . . When faced with such enemies maybe it is better not to be so Christian." Erna agreed: "Such a morality is next to impossible."

My hope is that the Armenian church will regain its sense of mission. Let it assume its special responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Armenian people. This church bears such a responsibility because it has had the privilege of journeying with the Armenian people through much of their history.

FOR THE FIRST time in perhaps centuries, Armenians are realizing that being Armenian is not to be equated with being Christian. This is difficult for a people who boast that Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion in 314 A.D. I asked Erna and Lillet if their resistance to following Christ the whole way was not the manifestation of a larger national affliction brought on by the magnitude of the nation's unanswered suffering from genocide and Soviet oppression. Weren't repentance, forgiveness and reconcilia-

tion the way to a deeper healing for individual and nation? They agreed. Perhaps forgiveness and reconciliation could be approached indirectly by establishing economic ties with Turkey. Both understood that real reconciliation would require a change of heart toward which the church alone could show the way.

I arranged to lengthen afternoon Bible discussions with the cadre of young church activists at St. Sarkis to talk about what it means to be a Christian and Armenian. I asked the students if they might begin with a scriptural passage which was important to them. Psalm 68:11 was selected at the first meeting. "The Lord gives the command/great is the company of those who/bore the tidings." What did this say to them? Armen spoke first. "This verse is about spreading the gospel. God commands it. He expects it to be so. But the Armenian church is failing. The Armenian church doesn't know how." There were nods of approval throughout the room.

Several of these young people had for a time been drawn away from the Armenian church by Baptists and Pentecostals. They had a certain admiration for these churches which through the preached word were able to convey hope to ordinary people. They had returned to the Armenian church because it was the church of the Armenian people, but they realized that a church which is only national cannot follow Christ wherever he leads.

The discussion turned to what it means to be a Christian. Someone said: "To be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ. To be like him as much as possible." And there was one last important stipulation. This imitation of Christ and following after him had to be "deliberate." The meaning was shatteringly clear. Being born an Armenian was not the same thing as being a Christian. The students were voicing a protest against the priestly religion.

This criticism was forcefully expressed at our second meeting. My companions chose to open the discussion with Ezekiel 22:2-26: "[T]he house of Israel's priests have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them." They stated that the bishop himself had said to them on other occasions that the priests were "more concerned with performing the ritual and selling the sacraments than preaching the word of God."

Vigen Gurroian, associate professor of theology and ethics at Loyola College in Maryland, has written and lectured extensively about the Armenian Church. This article which appeared in The Christian Century is a follow-up to his "Armenian Nationalism and the Ferment of Faith," which was also published in The Christian Century and reprinted in the March 1991 issue of OUTREACH.

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also a Samaritan who identifies God with Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans had a temple. "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshiper will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Anahid, a bright young woman who is coeditor of the religious publication, spoke. "We behave in the same way as

the Samaritan woman. Our mistake is like that of the Samaritan woman. We are very near to the Samaritans. We are proud that Christ descended at Etchmiadzin" (which means literally "the Only Begotten descended"). Aram interjected, "The Protestant sects have come and gotten people in large stadiums and other places to preach the gospel. But our church leaders want us to return to the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin because that is where they tell us God is. We are proud of what we had in the past... But we need new apostles."

This talk had made an older man in the room nervous. He wanted to insist on the national character of the church, and was suspicious of ecumenical trends that

might diminish that character. I pointed out that the story of the Samaritan woman does not suggest that she stopped being a Samaritan after encountering Christ. Something, however, was added to her knowledge of God. Her Samaritan religion had been transformed into a faith in the living God.

I do not presume to know just how faith, national identity and the people of God will come to be understood by Armenians. My hope is that the Armenian church will regain its sense of mission. Let it assume its special responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Armenian people. This church bears such a responsibility because it has had the privilege of journeying with the Arme-

nian people through much of their history. Let it be a church for the Armenian people. But not exclusively so. Let it also be a church for all others on all the continents among whom it is present. Toward these ends, there is inspiration from the earliest and greatest of the church's saints. The truth should be told. St. Gregory the Illuminator did not set out to found a national church. Rather, he brought the gospel to a people who he saw were without it. The Holy Translators, St. Sahag and Mesrob, rendered the Bible into the Armenian tongue not in order to create a dead object of pride as "the queen of all translations," but to breathe the life of the Spirit into a people. ■

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