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Armenian Apostolic Church of America
138 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016

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Vehapar Speaks

Vehapar's words are compiled from a variety of sources including excerpts from his speeches, sermons, essays, interviews, and conversations. Some of the items printed were compiled by Mihran Aghabian from an interview by the Italian journalist Giovanni Guaitta. All others were compiled by Iris Papazian from many different sources. His quotable words are so extensive it was most difficult to make the choices.

—Editor

Childhood: *I was born in Kessab, an Armenian village in Syria quite a distance from metropolitan areas, near the border of Turkey. My family was modest. I was the eldest of three children. Until the age of thirteen I had not known about the existence of electricity. Our house was very close to the church and therefore my closeness to the church was not only spiritual. What has remained in my memory is the soil of Kessab. I knew personally how it was possible to obtain from the soil the basic needs for existence through hard work. My grandmother, a very pious person, taught us the existence of God with her life and her prayers, and told us about God's gift through the crops of the soil. When a piece of bread fell on the floor, she would say, "Pick it up, it's a gift of God."*

Early Education: *My education in my family was by example. Moral principles were not talked about but lived by my parents in their daily life. My religious education consisted of a transmission of faith from my parents. My identity as an Armenian, this feeling of belonging to my people, was tied inseparably with my religious faith. I entered the seminary at the age of fourteen. By and by, the seminary became my home. The inscription at the door of the seminary impressed me: "Think and enter." As time went by, in the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere of the seminary, I thought a lot about my vocation. Becoming a priest was not a condition to enter the seminary. I had started in Kessab my apprenticeship to become a tailor to help support the family, but Father Moses, the village priest, advised me to go to the seminary. The idea of having the priesthood as a vocation matured in me rather gradually during the six years I was at the seminary. Spiritual values were internalized during these years, and my studies gave me a foundation in traditional Christianity.*
(Continued on page 8)

ՆՈՐԷՆ ԵԿՈՒՐ

Չկրցար ըսել «նորեն եկուր»: Չէիր կրճար, բայց գրեցիր՝ «նորեն եկ՛ուր»:
Վերջին խօսքերդ էին որ անձայն ըսիր, բայց սրտով ըսիր, ինձի՛ ջու աշակերտիդ և ձեռնասունդիդ, որուն դարեվանքեան և միաբանական երեսունհինգ տարիները եղան այնքա՛ն մօտիկ քեզի: Դարեվանքէն մերս աշակերտական առաջին իսկ տարիէն Հայր Գարեգինը մշտապէս հարստացոց զիս, սորվեցոց սիրել եկեղեցին ու ազգը, իր կեանքի օրհնակով թելադրեց ինձի Աստուծոյ տուած օրերը արժետրելու կանոնաւոր ու անխոնջ աշխատանքով:

Ահա նորեն կուգամ քեզի: Բայց դուն չկաս հիմա: Լուռ անցար գացիր, վերջին ամիսներուն զրկելով զիս ներկայութենէդ, մանաւանդ ձայնէդ ու խօսքէդ: Ո՞վ էիր դուն, Աստուծոյ ընտրած ո՞ր արարածն էիր, որ Աստուծոյ շնորհքին մէջ մեծցար ու մեծցոցիր քեզի եկողները:

Հայր սուրբն էիր, վարդապետը, որուն հանդիպեցայ առաջին իսկ վայրկեանին երբ վանք մտայ: Շուարած ու տարտամ քայլերով երբ Ամթիլիասի դարպասէն մերս մտայ, անշուք ու վայրի խտերով բակին մէջ սարկաւագ մը ըսաւ ինձի. «Տեսուչին քով գնա՛»: Տասներեք տարեկան տղայ, վեր ելայ աստիճաններէն և տեսայ քեզ՝ սեղանին ետին: Ժպտացիր և ըսիր հոն գտնուող սարկաւագին. «Գնա՛ և ցոյց տուր իրեն իր տեղը»: Հակառակ ընտանիքէս բաժնուած ըլլալուս, այդ ժամերուն տունի կարօտ չզգացի. նոր տուն մը գտած էի: Տեսուչ էիր երիտասարդ, տարբեր իմ գիտցած սնօրէններէն, որոնց մագերուն մէջ ձմեռն ու ձիւնը շատոնց իջած էին: Երիտասարդ վարդապետը, հայր սուրբն էր, հայրութիւն ընողը, որուն գուրգուրանքին արժանացայ մինչև վերջ:

Վարդապետն էիր: Բեզմէ սորվեցայ զիրքը սիրելը, աշխատանքը սիրելը: Աշխատանքէն չձանձրանալը: Եւ այս բոլորը խօսքով չըսիր միայն, այլ կեանքի օրհնակովդ ցոյց տուիր: Դասարանին մէջ միջին ընկալումին չափ կարեւոր էր քեզի համար ժամանակին օգտագործումը և անձանձրոյթ ու հետեւողական աշխատանքը, անոր կարգն ու կանոնը: Ուսանող սարկաւագին մէջ ուզեցիր տեսնել նաեւ վաղուան մարդը՝ ինքնավստահ, գիտակից և գիտութեամբ աւուցուն: Այո՛, վարդապետն էիր: Սուրբ գրային գիտութիւնը, գործնական ու վարդապետական Աստուածաբանութիւնը և հայ եկեղեցւոյ պատմութիւնը սրճահարող մեր ուղեղներուն մէջ: Ուղեղս որքա՛ն բան պարտական է քեզի, խեղճուկ ուղեղս քու ծով գիտութեան և փորձառութեան դիմաց: Հայ եկեղեցւոյ իւրաքանչիւր դէմք և ողէպք կը կենդանանար ամէն դասապահի, կ'ըլլար պատգամ և ուղի մեր կեանքին: Այդպէս սորվեցոցիր:

Եղար կաթողիկոս: Բայց երանի՛ մնայիր վարդապետ, իմ վարդապետս: Հեռացար որպէս կաթողիկոս, բայց կը մնաս իմ վարդապետս, միշտ երիտասարդ, հեղինակաւոր և ուսուցանող:

Այժմ հեռու ես ինձմէ. լսէ ինձի, արքայութեան երանութեան մէջ՝ հեռու աշխարհիկ ցաւերէ, որովհետեւ կարգը իսկ է ըսելու քեզի. «Նորեն եկուր»: Մի՛ հեռանար:

Օ. Կ.

A Personnel Tribute

His Holiness Karekin I Catholicos of All Armenians

1932 ✦ 1999

by Iris Papazian



I saw my friend for the last time on March 13, 1999. My son Michael and I went to visit him at the New York town home of Hirair and Anna Hovnanian where His Holiness was staying during his medical treatment. I had visited him over the past year many times at various locations in the city, almost on a weekly basis, sometimes twice a week to chat, to bring gifts of books, and to try to keep him in an optimistic mood even though deep in my heart I felt there was little room for optimism.

On that day in March, which also happened to be Michael's birthday, we spent nearly two hours with him. The next day he was to begin his slow journey back to Armenia, making some stops in Europe.

Over the past months he had endured extensive radiation to the point where his throat and mouth were so burnt that he could only consume liquids. The radiation did not get rid of the cancer so an operation was performed leaving him with the ability to speak, albeit with difficulty and with some slurring of words. The doctors were hopeful. We were all hopeful.

It was not meant to be. The disease returned quickly which necessitated a second and more radical surgical procedure which left him totally speechless.

(Continued on page 3)



1995. Enthronement of His Holiness as Karekin I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. On the left is Archbishop Karekin Necessian (now Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians). On right is Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

An Ecumenical Giant

The Universal Church mourns the loss of Karekin I, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church

One of the great Christian leaders of our century, Catholicos Karekin I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, died on 29 June in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, after a long struggle with throat cancer.

Renowned as an ecumenist, the leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church participated while a young priest as an observer at three sessions of Vatican II.

On 13 December 1996, he and Pope John Paul II signed a joint declaration expressing a mutual understanding of the human and divine natures of Christ. The declaration reflected the conclusion of both faith communities that Christological disagreements dating to the Council of Chalcedon in 451—thus separating the two churches—were based on differences in terminology and culture, not on a different understanding of Christ.

John Paul II hoped to visit the stricken Catholicos, whom he called a “pioneer in the field of ecumenism,” but was unable to do so because of Karekin’s rapidly deteriorating condition.

The Catholicos met with the Pope at the Vatican on three occasions—in 1983, in 1996 and in March of this year when he attended the opening of a Vatican exhibit devoted to Armenian history and culture.

His post-Communist pastoral achievements were significant. Under his direction, the Armenian Apostolic Church started a number of pastoral and humanitarian projects, many of them supported by CNEWA. These included a mobile preaching unit, increased stipends allowing priests to settle in rural and poorer areas, emergency humanitarian relief, soup kitchens for the elderly and the disabled and development programs enabling the church to move from charity and emergency relief to a line of action eliminating dependency.

Speaking of an impoverished nation emerging from decades of Communist domination, the Catholicos observed in a 1997 interview, “We have to relate the teachings of Christ to the everyday life of our people. We have to explain in practi-

cal terms the sacredness of life, the value of the human person and of honest work.”

Born Neshan Sarkissian on 27 August 1932, in Kessab, Syria, the future Catholicos began his studies at the age of 14 at the seminary of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. He was ordained a deacon three years later in 1949. In 1952, he entered religious life for the Catholicosate of Cilicia, took the name of Karekin and was ordained to the priesthood. He studied theology at Oxford in 1957-1958 and led dioceses in the United States, Iran and India during the 1970’s.

Karekin was elected Catholicos of Cilicia in 1983. [Elected Catholicos-Coadjutor in 1977; became Catholicos following death of Khoren I—Editor]. From his see near Beirut, he guided his flock in Cyprus, Greece, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and parts of North America. In 1995, he was elected Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, whose see is based in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, the ancient residence of the Armenian Catholicos.

Speaking of the late Catholicos, Msgr. Robert L. Stern, Secretary General, said, “Catholicos Karekin was a great priest and distinguished leader of the Universal Church. He was in the forefront of the ecumenical movement and a loving pastor and father to his people. I feel privileged to have enjoyed his friendship. His loss is mourned not only by the Armenian Apostolic Church but by the Church Universal.” ✚

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Prelacy Establishes Fund in Memory of Catholicos Karekin I

The Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America has established the “Catholicos Karekin I Religious Education Fund.” The fund will be utilized to assist in the publication of religious education texts.

Archbishop Oshagan, Prelate, recalled how His Holiness had a deep devotion and respect of the written word. “He was always looking for new books to read. Even during his illness when he was being treated in New York his favorite outing was to one of the city’s many bookstores. In addition, he himself has written many books and was working on many more. Unfortunately, his life was cut short and we will never see his full potential.”

Donations to the Fund can be sent to the Eastern Prelacy, 138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016. Checks should be payable to “Armenian Apostolic Church of America,” with a notation of “Karekin Fund.”

Donations received as of December 31, 1999 are listed below. Donations received after that date will be acknowledged in future issues of Outreach.

St. Sarkis Armenian Church, Douglaston, NY	\$1,100.00
St. Asdvadzadzin Armenian Church, Whitinsville, MA	850.00
St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church, Philadelphia, PA	1,105.00
St. Sarkis Armenian Church, Dearborn, MI	2,000.00
Sourp Kevork Armenian Church, Laval, Canada	136.00
St. Mary Armenian Church, Willowdale, Ont. Canada	640.00
Sourp Khatch Armenian Church, Bethesda, MD	1,040.00
Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, Ridgefield, NJ	250.00
St. Stephen’s Armenian Church, Watertown, MA	400.00
Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, Providence, RI	200.00
St. Hagop Armenian Church, Montreal, Que. Canada	520.00
Pierre Papazian Literary Fund	2,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. Vasken Masmajian, Weston, MA	200.00
Mr. & Mrs. Levon Der Ohannessian, Bryn Mawr, PA	100.00
Mr. & Mrs. Yervant Terzian, Rosemont, PA	500.00
Mrs. Seda Andrikan, Forest Hills, NY	500.00
Mr. & Mrs. Karl and Emma Sogopian, Royal Oak, MI	1,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. Varkis A. Markarian, Cranston, RI	500.00
Dr. & Mrs. Varant Hagopian, Wayland, MA	500.00
Mr. & Mrs. Antranig Sarkissian, Plandome, NY	300.00
Mrs. Sosie Kachikian, Old Tappan, NJ	1,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. Mourad Sebouh Nersessian, Williamsburg, VA	500.00
Mrs. Anna Kayaloff, New York, NY	150.00
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Kerbeykian, Tenafly, NJ	1,000.00
Col. & Mrs. Harry Sachakian, Sterling, VA	1,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. John and Rose Manoogian, Plymouth, MI	300.00
Mr. & Mrs. Vahagn Agbabian, Bloomfield Hills, MI	500.00
Mrs. Nelly A Yervant, Tiverton, RI	1,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. Levon Shahnazarian, Elkhart, IN	500.00
Dr. & Mrs. John S. Manuelian, Winchester, MA	1,000.00
Ms. Margaret Sohigian, Worcester, MA	25.00
Mr. & Mrs. Hagop Kasparian, Lewiston, NY	25.00
Judge & Mrs. Sarkis Teshoian, Worcester, MA	1,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. John Doustourian	40.00
Dr. & Mrs. George Dermksian, New York, NY	500.00

Vehapar and Books

All of his life Karekin Sarkissian was devoted to the written word. He was happiest when he had a book in his hands. During the long months of his medical treatment in New York his favorite past time was going to a bookstore...usually Barnes and Noble, although he also loved to browse in used book stores for unknown treasures.

In every position he held one of his first tasks would be to set a schedule of publications and modernize the printing plant to accommodate his ambitious plans.

Here are just a few of his thoughts on books.

—Editor

The man or the nation who is cut off from the world of books turns into a dry wilderness or a steppe where only thorns and thistles grow and snakes and scorpions thrive. Men and nations who live in the world of books turn their lives into flower gardens or orchards where life flourishes into brilliant greenery, abundant fruitfulness and joyous beauty.

What is a letter? A sign on a piece of paper. What is a book? A pile of papers. The letter becomes alive when it meets the eye. The book vitalizes when it penetrates the soul. Yes, the book itself is an inanimate, uncommunicative object, but reading it sets the soul, the heart and the mind in motion. It imparts life, communion and emotion. It arouses aspirations and joy, sometimes anxiety, protest or revolt, other times quiet enjoyment, meditation and searching. It may even lead to discovery and happiness. In short, reading defeats desolation, lifelessness, apathy and self-negation, because man himself is life and motion.

Books are a weapon against the greatest evil in human life—idleness. Idleness is an abyss and an abyss is a place of perdition. Idleness is death, even worse than death—hell! It is because of this explicit truth that the human being cannot bear idleness just as nature

which is God’s creation cannot tolerate vacuum. Like vacuum, idleness should be filled with something. There are people who fill the emptiness of their lives with pleasure; others fill the boredom of idleness with entertainment. In both cases all they get is not fullness, but only the illusion of it. Fullness implies personal thinking, work, commitment and devoted service. And books constitute a genuine and authentic source of fullness.

Give and take! Just like light and the eye. What is the use of giving if there is no one to receive. And what is the use of light if the eye is closed? Open your eyes and you will see the light from heaven. Open your hands and you will receive bread from the earth. Open the books and you will be filled with the bounties of wisdom and knowledge.

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Karekin I ❖ A Personal Tribute

(Continued from page 1)

How could this be? The man we all described as having a "golden tongue," a "master of the spoken word," unable to utter a word! But still we thanked God for sparing his life. "He can still perform his duties," we said. "He can write, after all his pen is as mighty and as beautiful as his speech."

On this day of March 13 we were all, His Holiness, Michael and I, somber. We tried to make light conversation but it was impossible. His sister, Esther, who was at his side throughout his illness, was making preparations for their departure. Michael and I were alone with him. We talked. That is Michael and I talked. His Holiness wrote on his slate. He had a kind of typewriter where he could type in sentences and then have it speak for him. He had little use for this. He used it to pacify others. He preferred to write on his slate.

His Holiness had taken an intense interest in Michael's education since childhood. He was proud that Michael, after receiving his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Virginia went to Oxford (a place His Holiness spoke of with reverence) to learn Classical Armenian with Professor Robert Thomson. His Holiness spoke—wrote—about my late husband, Pierre, saying how much he missed him. His Holiness and Pierre had a strong bond of friendship. The Catholicos often introduced him in this way, in Armenian: "Pierre does not talk very much but when he does you know he is saying something very important." His Holiness had a short request of me on this day: "Make sure you collect Pierre's writings in a volume."

When it was time to depart I told my dear friend, "I will come to Armenia this summer to see you." He hesitated and then wrote, "I don't think so." He quickly erased the slate so that Michael would not see the message.

I knew—and he knew—that we would not see each other again in this life.



During the many months he was in New York I taped many of our conversations, with his permission. His passion, besides trying to bring Christianity to Armenia in a vibrant and living way, was the ecumenical movement and the importance of Christian unity. He spoke so eloquently and passionately about ecumenical concerns and the important work left to be accomplished. His legacy surely will be in ecumenism, like Nersess Shnorhali.

On the eve of his second surgery, sensing what was to come, I urged him to speak about his illness. It was very difficult for him to do so. He spoke of losses and suffering, but somehow he managed to speak of it in a greater context, the suffering of the Armenian nation, rather than one person facing death.



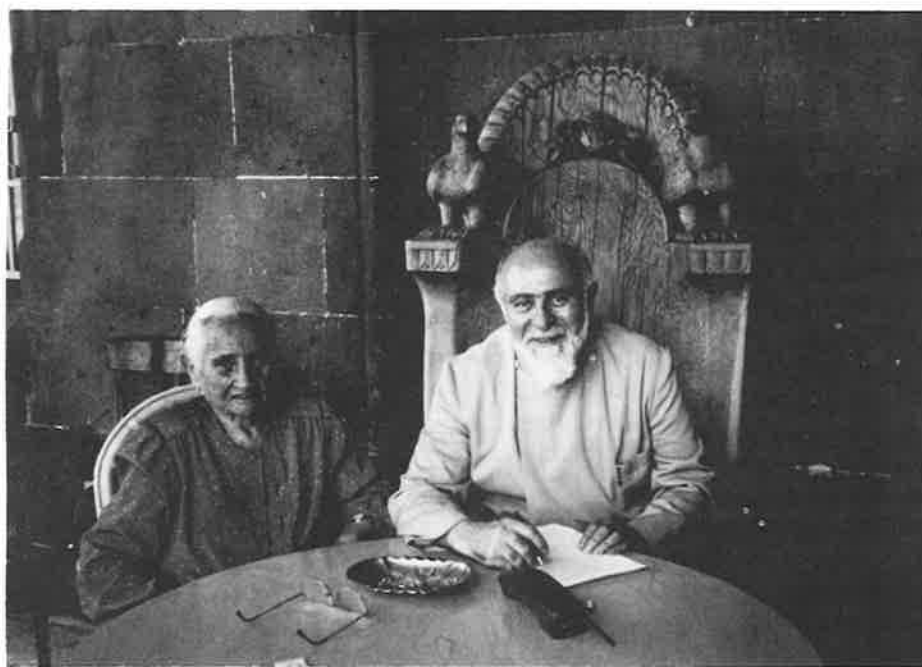
I met the Very Rev. Karekin Sarkissian forty years ago. He was in the United States on a visit to attend an ecumenical conference and I attended a reception in his honor. It was a brief introduction of no real consequence. But the words "dynamic," "young" and "Oxford educated," were prevalent in everyone's conversation.

The name Karekin Sarkissian was put out of my mind until many years later when I heard that he was elected Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy. There was a great deal of excitement in the



1996 Two scenes from the Blessing of the Holy Muron (oil) in Etchmiadzin.

Photos by Iris Papazian



1996: Vehapar with his mother, Diramayr Ovsanna, on the porch of the Catholicos's residence in Etchmiadzin.



1996: Vehapar with Michael at the Catholicos's summer residence, Haigashen.

community. The "young, dynamic, Oxford-educated" Karekin Sarkissian was coming to New York.

I recall arguing with many of my friends that building up such grand expectations was a disservice to the community and to the Archbishop. No one person could be expected to fulfill all that was expected.

I met the Archbishop for the second time soon after he arrived in New York. We soon found that we had a common love of books and theological questions. For the first time I met an Armenian clergyman with whom I felt very comfortable, with whom I could talk, discuss, argue, and love and respect. During his short tenure in New York—barely four years—we, my husband, our son, and I, developed a true friendship that would continue for decades.

When Archbishop Sarkissian was elected Catholicos-Coadjutor of the Great House of Cilicia, in May of 1977, I went to Beirut for his consecration and subsequently produced a book, *Faith, Hope, Love*, about His Holiness. In the summer of 1977, Pierre, Michael and I went to Beirut where we spent ten days with His Holiness. The bond of friendship was now forever.

In 1983 when His Holiness made his first extensive pontifical visit to the United States and Canada, we were able to spend a considerable amount of time with him. This resulted in a second book, *A Pontifical Journey*, about His Holiness and his mission.

Our paths continued to cross through the years until Pierre's death in 1995, a few months before His Holiness was elected Catholicos of All Armenians. In 1996 Michael and I went to Armenia where we spent three weeks with His Holiness in Etchmiadzin providing us with some of the best memories of friendship.



It has been said that a great man never reminds us of another. And so it is with Karekin Sarkissian.

In his inaugural encyclical, Karekin I wrote:

"We do not know—and cannot know—where we are going.... That is God's work. Ours is a duty of response. But we know very well that what God knows and does is only for our goodness: for the goodness of both our individual and collective existences, which is the kingdom of heaven in us, the original fountain of unsurpassable happiness."

Rest in peace dear shepherd, teacher, philosopher, prelate, catholicos, and most importantly friend.



His Holiness Catholicos Karekin I, by baptismal name of Nishan Sarkissian, was born in Kessab (northern Syria) on August 27, 1932. After attending the Armenian Elementary School in his native village, he was admitted to the Theological Seminary of the Armenian Catholicate of Cilicia in October 1946. On May 29, 1949, he was ordained deacon and graduated with high honors in June 1952.

On September 28, 1952, he was ordained priest and renamed Karekin in memory of the late Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian. He joined the Religious Order of the Armenian Catholicate of Cilicia. Upon presentation of his doctoral thesis, *The Theology of the Armenian Church According to Liturgical Hymns*

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(Sharakans), he was elevated to the rank of Vardapet on June 5, 1955. He then assumed the duties of supervisor and member of the faculty of the Cilician See's Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon. He was appointed Dean of the Seminary in 1956.

From 1957 to 1959, he studied Theology at Oxford University in Great Britain. Oxford, he often said, was a life-changing experience for him. It was an experience he often talked about with reverence and longing. During his tenure as Prelate in New York he liked to walk in the rain because, he said, "It reminds me of Oxford."

After successfully completing the course at Oxford he received his B.Litt. (OXON) upon presentation of his scholarly thesis, *The Council of Chalcedon and the Armenian Church*, published in London by S.P.C.K. in 1965 and reprinted in New York in 1976.

Upon his return to Lebanon in January 1960, Father Karekin resumed his responsibilities as Dean of the Seminary. Under his dynamic leadership and wise guidance the Seminary flourished and new generations of clergymen, inspired by his own example, joined the ranks of the Cilician Religious Order.

Following the death of his beloved Catholicos Zareh I, and the election of Catholicos Khoren I, he organized the official visits of the new Catholicos to the Archbishop of Greece, Pope Paul II, the headquarters of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the headquarters of the World Council of Churches and to the Mekhitarist Fathers.

As one of the principal promoters of the Ecumenical movement within the Armenian Apostolic Church, he regularly attended inter-church conferences, consultations and meetings. He took part in the General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches of 1961 (New Delhi), 1968 (Uppsala), 1975 (Nairobi), and 1983 (Vancouver). At Uppsala, he was elected member of the Central and Executive Committees of the World Council of Churches and during the Nairobi Assembly he was elected Vice-Moderator of the Council, a position he held until 1983.

As an observer, he attended the three consecutive sessions of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) and the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church (1968). In 1965, he was one of the organizers of the Addis-Ababa Conference of the leadership of the Oriental Orthodox (non-Chalcedonian) Churches.

Upon the invitation of His Holiness Justinian, Patriarch of the Romanian Church, he delivered a series of lectures in Romania. Within the context of the Commission of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, he took part in conferences, namely in Zagorsk (Moscow), Bangalore and Kotayam (India), lecturing on theological issues.

A strong believer in training the youth for leadership and involvement in the religious and cultural life of the nation, he founded in 1963 the Armenian Church University Student Association (ACUSA), grouping students from various universities in Lebanon.

During this period, alongside his regular activities, he lectured on theology, literature, history and culture in a number of schools and universities in Beirut, namely the T. Hagopian College, Palandjian College, Beirut College for Women (now Beirut University College) and the American University of Beirut.

In recognition of his intense activities and contributions, he was elevated to the rank of Senior Archimandrite on June 16, 1963, and was consecrated Bishop on January 19, 1964, by Catholicos Khoren I. He was granted the rank of Archbishop on April 26, 1973.

In 1971, Bishop Karekin was elected Prelate of the Diocese of New Julfa, Isfahan (Iran). There he promoted religious and cultural activities, thus greatly contributing to the spiritual renewal of the Diocese, particularly among the youth.

In 1973 he was elected Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America headquartered in New York City. He worked diligently in promoting various activities and services in the United States and Canada for the benefit of the people, especially the younger generations whom he was able to reach and teach. Although his tenure as Prelate was to last a short three and one-half years the impact he left was far-reaching as the Prelacy became a vibrant and dynamic institution.

On May 22, 1977, Archbishop Sarkissian was elected and consecrated Catholicos Coadjutor of the See of Cilicia, to help the ailing Catholicos Khoren I, who died six years later.

During the eighteen years of his reign as Catholicos of Cilicia, Karekin II gave new impetus to religious education by establishing a special Christian Education Department to promote Christian values through public activities and literary productions. His beloved Seminary was given his immediate attention. He revitalized the teaching staff and courses and transferred the Seminary from Antelias to Bikfaya, the summer home of the Catholicate in the mountains overlooking Beirut. Antelias, although once a quiet suburban town, was now a bustling metro area, and His Holiness felt that the seclusion of Bikfaya was more conducive to learning. The on-going civil war in Lebanon continued during His Holiness's tenure and he and his faithful people were to witness some of the darkest days in the history of the Armenian community of Lebanon.

Through his leadership, the cultural role and mission of the church was promoted with special emphasis on publishing. The Cilician Press was modernized and computerized. During his 18-year tenure as Catholicos of Cilicia more



1962: With Pope John XXIII at the Second Vatican Council.

then 300 volumes were published. A new Museum/Library was constructed—a "new house of light" he said.

Programs for the youth and with the youth received his personal attention. The social services of the Catholicate were also expanded to reflect the needs of the people.

Under his leadership the ecumenical involvement of the Catholicate was promoted through his own visits as well as the active participation by clergy and lay people, both men and women, in the various activities of the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, of which he was a founding member.

Invited by universities and churches, he travelled extensively to lecture on a great variety of subjects. In the last few years, he undertook extensive pontifical visits to the parishes of the Cilician See in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Cyprus, the United States, Canada, Kuwait, and the Gulf States. Within the framework of ecumenical activities, he visited His Holiness John Paul II, Dr. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury; the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches; the Lutheran Church of Denmark; the Lutheran Churches in Germany; the Australian Council of Churches as Head

of the Middle East Council of Churches' delegation, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Head of the Coptic Church.

In 1989, having completed his term of office as one of the three presidents of the Middle East Council of Churches, he was elected honorary president of that organization.

His Holiness paid frequent visits to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia, both during the Soviet rule and after Armenia regained independence. He witnessed the efforts and great accomplishments of the Holy See and the Homeland. In the aftermath of the earthquake of December 7, 1988, he visited the stricken area and expressed solidarity with the late Catholicos Vazken I. He was elected a member of the Central Board of Directors of the All Armenia Fund, established by the President of the Republic of Armenia.

His Holiness has written numerous articles and studies on theological, armenological, philosophical, ethical, and literary issues and subjects in *Hask Monthly*, the official organ of the Holy See of Cilicia and other periodicals, as well as numerous books and booklets in Armenian, English, and French.

In April 1995, Karekin II, Catholicos of Cilicia, was elected Catholicos of All Armenians by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly and became Catholicos Karekin I of the Holy Mother See of Etchmiadzin, becoming the 131st occupant of the throne of St. Gregory the Illuminator. His election came amidst great jubilation with enormous hope and promise. But, alas, His Holiness was not given the time to fulfill his full potential.

During the four years of his pontificate at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, he guided the Armenian Church with wisdom and unfaltering devotion and he dedicated all of his mental and physical abilities, in word and deed, to the sacred task of spiritually reviving, strengthening and unifying the people in the Motherland, in Artsakh, and in the Diaspora.

With a deep-rooted commitment to duty, His Holiness set his eyes on that milestone event, the 1700th anniversary when Armenia declared Christianity as its state religion in 301 A.D. He filled every hour and minute of that short period of his pastorate to render them effective and fruitful. Due to his efforts, the dioceses of the Armenian church in



1977: The Rev. Dr. Edward Scott, head of the Anglican Church of Canada and Moderator of the World Council of Churches, welcomes Vehapar to Geneva.

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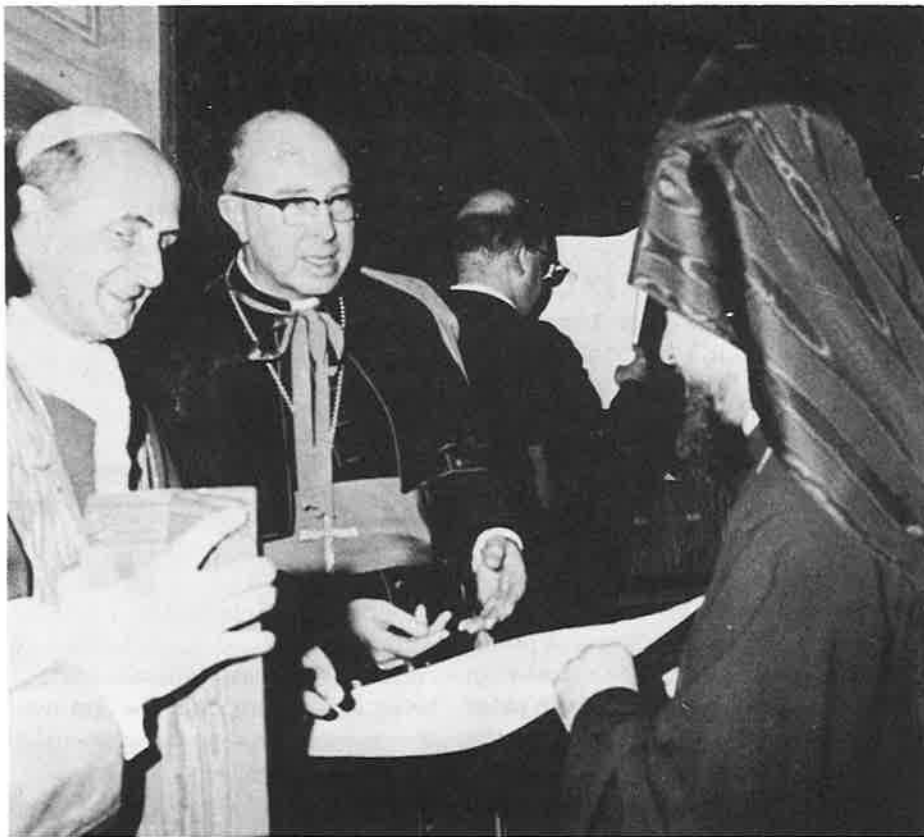
Armenia and CIS countries were reorganized. In an unprecedented flourish of construction activity, many churches and monasteries that were in serious decline, were renovated and revived, and even new churches were built. A new generation of spiritual servants were educated at the Kevorkian Seminary which was thoroughly renovated. The activities of the Center of Christian Education and Preaching were invigorated and expanded. The St. Mesrob Center in Oshagan opened its doors. The press of the Mother See launched an extensive program of publications and many works of theological, spiritual, and Armenological nature were published. Within the context of the 1700th anniversary of Christian Armenia, a number of exhibitions were opened in Moscow, the Kremlin, and the Vatican. In many other sites scholarly symposia were organized. Also, as part of these activities, pilgrimages were planned to various venerated sites in Armenia and abroad. A number of social development projects were introduced aiming at overcoming the economic difficulties faced both in Armenia and Artsakh.

Because of the prestige he commanded internationally, His Holiness was instrumental in strengthening the ecumenical ties between sister churches and by means of numerous pastoral-pontifical visits he established closer relations between the Motherland and the Diaspora. His Holiness was an honorary member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. A prominent scholar, he was the recipient of honorary doctorate degrees from a number of academies and universities around the world.

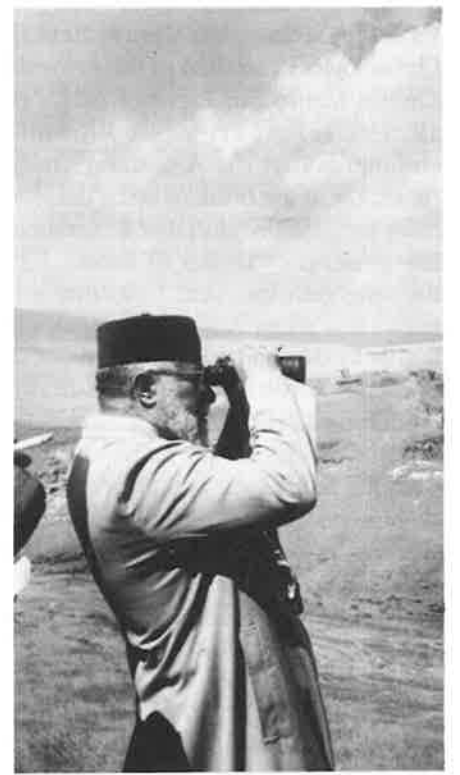


"I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith."

2 Timothy 4:7



1963: With Pope Paul VI at the second session of Vatican Council II.



1996: At the Armenian-Turkish border. Vehapar looks at the ruins of Ani. So near yet so far.



1983: Ecumenical services at sixth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver.



1996: Reburial services for Catholicos Khoren Mouratbegian.



1988: With His Holiness Vazgen I.

1999: One of the last photos of Vehapar. He is with the Minister of Defense Vazken Sarkisian at ceremonies marking the fourth anniversary of the reign of Karekin I.



The Contemporary Significance of Armenian Christology: On the Controversy over the Joint Declaration of Karekin I and John Paul II

by Vigen Guroian

IN a recent article entitled "The Joint Vatican Declaration Contradicts the Christological Tradition of the Armenian Church" (*Armenian Reporter Int'l*, April 12, 1997), Rev. Fr. Mesrop Aramian comments that the Armenian Church "is almost at the brink of being detached from its tradition" and that in Armenian life generally "issues of faith...have become unimportant." No one who truly cares about Armenian religious life and is in the least bit honest about the present condition of the Armenian Church could disagree. This lamentable state of affairs ought to have moved church leaders long ago to bring about genuine reform in the Church and meet Armenians around the world at the level of their lived lives as members of diverse societies requiring different strategies of evangelism, education and pastoral guidance. Likewise, I wholeheartedly agree with Rev. Fr. V. N. Nersessian's comments in his recent letter to the *Armenian Reporter* (May 3, 1997). He writes: "Armenian theology...needs to bring the value and the insight of its patristic and monastic thought to bear on the reality of life as lived by the contemporary Armenian Orthodox faithful." I believe that these statements invite a much needed discussion about the Armenian Church's theology and contemporary ethical practice. And I also want to suggest that they are quite related to the principal issue at hand. Thus, in my closing remarks I intend to return to these concerns about the practical place of faith in the lives of Armenians.

However, I do not see that much good can come from the criticisms leveled at these same individuals against His Holiness Karekin I for recently having signed a joint declaration with Pope John Paul II. Both have expressed grave misgivings over the Armenian Catholics' actions because they believe His Holiness has compromised the Armenian Church's historic teaching about who Jesus Christ is. Similarly, I find it incredible and most unfortunate that three Armenian Primates of the Armenian Church have publicly joined this criticism (*Armenian Reporter*, April 19, 1997). For years I have conscientiously withheld from becoming engaged in the polemics that appear regularly in the pages of the Armenian weekly newspapers and sadly seem to characterize much of Armenian public speech. But the recent ill-spirited public attacks upon the religious leader of the Armenian Church require some sort of response. And so I am glad also that Archbishop Mesrop K. Krikorian of Vienna has already submitted a sober rebuttal to the critics (*Armenian Reporter* April 12, 1997). The Archbishop has laid the essential groundwork for any worthwhile discussion that might follow on this matter.

If Fr. Aramian is correct that vast numbers of Armenians are hardly knowledgeable of the tenets of their faith—and I believe that he is—then his article and other statements in the same spirit that have appeared of late in the Armenian press are only bound to confuse, mislead or alienate people still more. So I would issue an appeal that we find the appropriate forums wherein these and related matters could be argued and discussed to some constructive end with real benefits that might accrue to the faithful.

In the remarks which follow, I will try to explain to the ordinary reader what seems to be at issue. And while I believe that reasonable persons might disagree about the precise meaning conveyed by the paragraph on the teaching of Christ

in the joint statement signed by Karekin I and John Paul II, I am persuaded that the content of the paragraph does not betray Armenian teaching. I also believe that Karekin I was acting well within his prerogative as Catholicos in signing the statement with the contested paragraph in it.

What Is At Issue

Stated in the simplest terms, a principal historic reason why the Armenian Church is not in communion with either the Roman Catholic Church or the greater body of so-called Eastern Orthodox (e.g. Greek or Roman) churches is that the Armenian Church has refused to consent to a fifth century formulation about the Person of Jesus Christ that was agreed to by a great gathering of the universal church at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Armenian Church, together with the several other churches that we now refer to as Oriental Orthodox churches, was at that time suspicious that this formula logically divided Christ in two and thus jeopardized the ancient scriptural confession of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5).

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the context of a profound modern ecumenical
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thirty-five years ago and in the spirit of the
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How might Christ be divided in two? In the first place, by carelessly speaking of Jesus acting as a man in certain instances, such as when he hungered, and with his divinity when, for example, he performed miracles.

Armenians detected the influence of just such bifurcated thinking in the definition on the faith of the Council of Chalcedon. They worried that this way of thinking and speaking about Jesus Christ would lead people to believe that the One Lord confessed in Scripture was actually *two beings* who were joined in the physical individual known and seen as Jesus of Nazareth: the human individual gestated in the womb of his mother Mary and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who came to dwell within that individual during his earthly life. Armenian Christians certainly had reason for concern. Many members of the so-called Chalcedonian party were receiving the words of the council in a spirit that at least bordered on the Nestorian heresy which represented such a belief. They were prone to speaking as if Jesus acted as God in some instances and as a human being in other instances. From the standpoint of Armenian churchmen the definition of Chalcedon did not emphasize sufficiently the essential unity of Christ's Person in his being and in his acts. Christ is one, the Armenians insisted, and he acts as one single being in his divine-human Nature at all times and on every occasion.

In more technical terms, Armenians objected to the "two natures" language adopted by the Council of Chalcedon. This terminology of two natures had been used to explain how Jesus was

both fully human and fully divine. Christ was composed of both a human nature and a divine nature, said the council. By contrast Armenians adhered strictly to the language and meaning of the first Great Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.). The Nicene Creed that we say at every Divine Liturgy was the product of that council. The Nicene Council had employed the term nature with a very specific intent to connote a concrete existence. Thus God was one being and nature. And the Son was of the same being and nature of the Father. That was how the council interpreted the words of Christ in the Gospel of John 14:9-10: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father... I am in the Father and the Father is in me." The theologians of Nicaea used nature with a sense analogous to what modern physics means by a solid. Solids, like diamonds or ice cubes, are discrete substances, and cannot be mixed together as can liquids or gases. So when the Chalcedonians spoke of two natures in Christ, Armenians balked. How could Christ be two "solids," two natures. What sense did it make to speak of these natures as united but not confused and so on, as

the definition of Chalcedon prescribed? And if the Chalcedonians were using nature differently to connote something more analogous to a liquid or a gas, nature as a kind of abstract and amorphous essence, new problems arose. A gas or a liquid can be mixed with or emulsified into another gas or liquid. But if nature were being used in this sense, then logically what was to prevent us from saying that Christ had three or four natures—air is made up of not just oxygen and nitrogen but also hydrogen and carbon dioxide and so forth—or, on the other hand, that Christ might himself be yet another unique combined nature neither strictly human nor divine?

Thus Armenians continued to embrace the original language and intent of the Council of Nicaea and rejected the Chalcedonian language of two natures. They would speak of Christ as One Person and Nature of the Divine Word who had become Incarnate, namely a human being. Christ, the eternal Word and Son of the Father, acted (or assumed) full manhood by being born of a woman and participating in all of our human ways, excepting sin, and even dying humanly on the Cross, and still he was God.

The Joint Statement in the Present Ecumenical Context

This was the debate in the fifth and sixth centuries. Fifteen hundred years hence on December 13, 1996, His Holiness Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians, signed a joint statement in Rome with Pope John Paul II in which the two agreed to the following common formulation of who Christians

believe Christ is:

They [Karekin I and John Paul II] particularly welcome the great advance that their churches have registered in their common search for unity in Christ, the Word of God made flesh. Perfect God as to his divinity, perfect man as to his humanity, his divinity is united to his humanity in the Person of the Only-begotten Son of God, in a union which is real, perfect, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without any separation.

It is to this paragraph that today's critics object. They say it echoes and indeed repeats for all practical purposes the definition of Chalcedon. They point in particular to the phrasing "in a union which is real, perfect, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without any separation" as the principle offense. They do not point out, however, that the two leaders avoided the use of the term *two natures*, even though Armenians at least since St. Nerses the Graceful have expressed a willingness to embrace that terminology so long as it is understood that this is simply a shorthand way of expressing *in thought* that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine in his single undivided Person. This was an important concession from the Roman Catholic side.

But I think that what most makes the critics' accusations misleading is their conspicuous inattention to over forty years of discussion between Armenian theologians and theologians of the other so-called Oriental (Monophysite) Orthodox churches and theologians of all churches have labored to reinterpret the historic patristic debate and the inherited terminology in ways leading to new consensual language that accommodates Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians alike in a common affirmation that we all worship One Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who is wholly God and wholly human.

His Holiness Karekin I participated in these discussions virtually from the start and it cannot be gainsaid that he brought his understanding of these accommodations and clarifications of meaning into his conversations with the Pope and that he and the Pope understood precisely what they needed to say and to avoid saying in the paragraph on christology. But to a fault, I have to say, the critics of the joint statement remain wedded to the fifth and sixth century debate and its linguistic distinctions and limitations. This is a kind of patristic fundamentalism and rigid ahistorical scholasticism that throughout his life Karekin I has avoided for the sake of the unity of the whole church.

Interpreted from a standpoint frozen in the fifth century the language employed in the joint statement might look suspect. But even thirty-five years ago, as strict a defender of the original inspiration of the Armenian christological position as Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan was prepared to go further than Karekin I did in the joint statement. Thirty-five years ago in an article published by the Diocese of the Armenian

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Church of America (an article recently collected by N. V. Nersessian in *Armenian Church Historical Studies*, 1997) Archbishop Nersoyan tendered this opinion:

The Chalcedonian formula has of course come to stay. But the sense in which the formula was taken has fortunately gone.... The history of the Church, I believe, has worked out the implications under the pressure of common sense.... There still exist in the West people who move in the atmosphere of the real Chalcedon. But I don't think they have much of a chance of survival....

We need not, therefore, quarrel about the terms as long as Chalcedonians really mean what orthodox Monophysites have always meant. I think that out of respect for the incontestably imposing greatness of the Dyophysite [i.e., Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Protestants] section of the Church, Monophysites should take a favorable view of the Chalcedonian formula. They should do this in the way in which Nerses IV [the Graceful] has done, adhering, however, to the correct meaning of the formula.

In Rome, Karekin I did not go so far as to take all of Nersoyan's advice. As I have said, the wording of the paragraph on christology entirely avoids the two natures terminology and, I would add, it begins with a formulaic bow to the historic Armenian way of expressing the union of humanity and divinity in Christ, echoing the great Father of Orthodox Monophysitism, St. Cyril of Alexandria. The Pope and the Catholics state that the Christ whom we worship is 'the Word of God made flesh,...his divinity [being] united to his humanity in the Person of the Only-begotten Son of God.'

In Rome, Karekin I consciously acted within the context of a profound modern ecumenical achievement alluded to by Tiran Nersoyan thirty-five years ago and in the spirit of the greatest of our ecumenical patriarchs, Nerses Shnorhali. Much has happened in the subsequent thirty odd years since Archbishop Nersoyan made his observations and recommendations. For example, the language Karekin I and John Paul II agreed to echoes a recent agreement reached between Eastern Orthodox and Church representatives in a document issued in September of 1990. This document, which agreed on some common meanings in the ancient language of our shared faith, consummated a twenty-five year long dialogue. The Joint Commission of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches that met in Geneva called for unity and full communion between their respective churches based upon the kind of common understanding that Archbishop Nersoyan insisted had all but been accomplished thirty-five years ago.

The Commission's statement was signed by representatives of both Etchmiadzin and the Cilician See. All members agreed to say the following which employs the natures language that I have already noted Karekin I and John Paul II conspicuously avoided, although they might have used it without offense to either party:

Both families agree that the Hypostasis [concrete personal being] of the Logos became composite by uniting to His divine

uncreated nature with its natural will and energy, which He has in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit, created human nature, which is assumed at the Incarnation and is made His own, with its natural will and energy.

Both families agree that the natures with their proper energies and wills are united hypostatically [by the Word who assumed our flesh] and naturally without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation, and that they are distinguished in thought alone.

I know that I have risked stretching the patience of the common reader by introducing these citations which are replete with such technical theological terminology. But even the layman can compare the language cited above with the language agreed to by the Catholicos and the Pope and see that nothing was added that would significantly distinguish the meaning of their statement from the Statement of the Joint Commission.

I have not addressed the additional charge the critics make that His Holiness Karekin I spoke out of turn in Rome. This seems to me a highly specious argument. The critics maintain that His Holiness ought to have consulted with the other bishops before signing the joint statement. But as witnessed from the comparison above, Karekin I broke no new ground in his joint statement with the Pope that might have warranted such consultation. Furthermore, does anyone seriously suggest that the religious leader of the Armenian Church is prohibited from speaking theologially when meeting or even issuing joint statements about our faith with leaders of other churches? The words of the Catholicos and the Pope have a sure and secure context which transcends the fifth and sixth century christological controversies. That context is the modern ecumenical movement in which new theological and ecclesiological meanings of old concepts have been developed and agreed upon. If Karekin I's critics believe that that movement is fundamentally misbegotten and that Armenians have had no business agreeing to what they have agreed to with representatives of other confessions (and I suspect some of them do), then let them say so outright. But they cannot say that the Catholicos has to abide by their statements. Let there be renewed discussion but without red herrings cast about. More important, the unseemly public criticism of the Catholicos on this matter by bishops and other clergy needs to end as well as the no less mean-spirited insinuations about Papal motives.

The Meaning of the Debate for Armenian Life Today

I have before me a wire copy of a news piece distributed through the Catholic News Service entitled "Nun-Physician Cites Major Health Care Problems in Armenia." It was sent to me by the editor of a major Catholic weekly; and he passed it on to me because he is genuinely concerned about the Armenian people and the Armenian Church. You see, he is married to an Armenian woman and he frequently attends the Armenian Church.

This article reports the observations of Sr. Rosenthal, a Sister of Charity from Cincinnati, who recently visited hospitals and medical facilities in Armenia and

Georgia. She spent a year in Armenia, August 1995 through August 1996. What she witnessed was nothing less than horrid as regards hospital conditions and health care generally. However, I am raising up for consideration only two of her statements. The text in which they appear reads as follows:

She [Sister Rosenthal] said one of the things she found most striking was the extent to which abortion is practiced in Armenia as virtually the only method of birth control.

"It's not uncommon to find women still in their birth-bearing years who have had 40 abortions," she said. "The condition under which these are performed are largely unsanitary and in many rural areas they are done without anesthesia.... Women with post-operative complications are largely ignored," she said.

If a baby is born with a handicap, infanticide is not uncommon, she said. She related a conversation with an Armenian doctor who wanted to talk about healthy babies because with handicapped infants, "only an hour or two and the problem's all over with."

When she pressed him on what he meant by "all over with," he matter-of-factly told her, "We give an injection. An hour or two later the problem is over with."

I think that these practices reported by Sr. Rosenthal are connected with the impoverished state of Armenian Christianity referred to by Fr. Mesrop Aramian in the passage I cited at the start. I also think Fr. Nersessian's remark that the ancient teaching of the Church needs to be made to speak to the lives of contemporary people is relevant. For if Armenians believed in the Church's teaching about Christ to which these two writers come to such an impassioned defense the horrendous practices of nearly obligatory abortion and routine infanticide in Armenia could not occur as they do presently and are happening as I write.

For the moment let us consider this question: "How much practical difference is the Church's christology making in Armenian life regarding attitudes and behavior toward abortion and infanticide?" Chalcedonian and Monophysite teachings both affirm in explicit and implicit ways that our Savior was born of a human mother who would not have thought of having the young child in her womb aborted. Now consider the extraordinary pressure Mary would face to have an abortion were she a young woman in Armenia today (a non-Chalcedonian country) and how little the Armenian Church has said or done to prevent what is going on. Then consider the strong position the Roman Catholic Church (of Chalcedonian conviction) has taken against abortion, infanticide and, most recently, physician assisted suicide. I wonder which church is looked upon with more favor by our Risen Lord and his Holy Mother.

I am not dismissing the vital importance of what theologians call the soteriological (salvational) truth which is at stake in the historic debate over the relation of Christ's divinity and humanity. I personally believe that the Armenian Christology holds fast to a vital aspect of Christian faith that became muted in the theologies of many of the churches over the centuries. However, I do wonder how come we have heard such passionate denunciations from bishops and priests of the Armenian Church about

the wording of a brief paragraph on christological teaching when they have not responded with similar outrage to the destruction of innocent young lives and the profound psychological, spiritual and physical harm being done to women in Armenia today. They would do better to begin to explain to the faithful the deep connection between our christological teaching and the Church's ethics. This would be a positive response to legitimate concerns about the condition of belief in the Armenian Church. Does not the epidemic of abortion and infanticide indicate something profoundly troublesome about the beliefs and values which actually dominate in Armenian life? Is not the truth of our faith in the gravest danger because of a failure of belief, religious instruction and moral courage, not withstanding anything said or signed by the Catholicos in Rome? Opportunities exist to instruct our people by word and deed about the fundamental presenting of faith for their lives, but at present those opportunities are being squandered everywhere.

In light of all this, I would not blame ordinary persons who have followed this debate if they were to ask why there has been such a furor over a paragraph in a statement that they have not seen nor much care about. If these same readers should think this is all wasted breath, like debating over how many angels are able to dance on the head of a pin, I would not fault them for that opinion either. What existential meaning does the Church's christology doctrine really obtain in contemporary Armenian life? The truthful answer is *scarce little*. The Armenian teaching about Christ, the Son of God who has suffered with us has profound potential for pastoral care. This is an age in which theologians of other churches have been rediscovering the ancient theology of a crucified God with its deep roots in our own tradition. Among brilliant Western theologians of so-called Chalcedonian churches the sources of our tradition have been taken seriously and creatively appropriated. The names of Hans Urs von Balthasar (a Roman Catholic) and Jurgen Moltmann (a Protestant) are the most notable. But for many Armenians this christology remains remote. It is as removed from their daily lives as the gold and silver Armenian crosses in museums. It has not been employed pastorally to help the aggrieved and the angered get over the genocide or deal with personal losses in the Azeri pogroms and the earthquake of 1988. This is the fault of bishops and priests, but especially the bishops. The buck cannot be passed.

I am afraid the wrong battleground has been picked once again—unless, perhaps, the criticisms that have been issued of late are really motivated by ecclesiastical politics and the desire to maintain a precious ethno-religious identity and not about faith. In the meantime, "Rachel is weeping for her children and refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (Jeremiah 31:15). †

"We give thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."

I Thessalonians 1:2-3

Vehapar Speaks

(Continued from page 1)

Monastic Life: I don't know if it was a rational act to enter monastic life at age twenty. However, I did not hesitate. The desire to serve my church was so strong that I could not envision other avenues for my life. I had the motivation, and I knew that, in our tradition, monastic life did not mean separation from my people. In my final year at the seminary, I was so engrossed with my studies and my teaching that forming a family did not enter my thoughts. The zeal of my youth for service in the church has surprised me in my later life. It was the spiritual and intellectual that had captivated me completely. I had personal and psychological difficulties, but I never seriously thought of retracing my steps. My colleagues and my students became my family. I was alone, but I was not isolated.

Oxford: When for the first time in my life I went to a non-Armenian environment, in England, I was terrified, shaken to the depths of my heart. Facing British people in their highly renowned university of Oxford! I was feeling so terribly humble, I was saying to myself: How can I speak with these British people in my broken English? And one evening, the first evening of my arrival—and this was the first time in my life I had left Lebanon or Syria—while passing through the common room of the college room of the college library hall, a person who was walking next to me said, "My name is Robinson" and I said "My name is Sarkissian," and I added, "I'm Armenian." "Where is Armenia?" he said. "You don't know?" I said. And that challenged me. I began to think, if these people, highly-educated as I thought them to be, did not know where Armenia was then what was I going to do? I was challenged and happily so, positively so, because in that context I began to take my student life very seriously and responsibly: How could I show people who I was and who were the Armenian people.

Cilicia: Fifteen of the eighteen years when I was Catholicos of the See of Cilicia, Lebanon was at war. As the first among my duties, I had to inspire hope to those in despair. As a second task, I planned and carried out the expansion of the Catholicosate, the further growth of the seminary, the building up of a cadre of clergy, and modernizing the printing press and the publication program. We were able to hold on to all of our spiritual, cultural and physical resources during the war years. Lebanon has been the most dynamic part of the Armenian Diaspora. By work and action we have been a witness to our attachment to Lebanon and to the feeling of hope. I believe strongly that Lebanon must remain united at all cost. It is important to be engaged in an Islamo-Christian dialogue. If this dialogue is broken, there will be no Lebanon. In the Middle East dialogue does not mean an exchange of ideas but the art of living together. I have always said, My motherland is Armenia and my country is Lebanon.

Etchmiadzin: Although I had not lived in Armenia before my election, I always had my motherland in my heart. There are two major tasks for me: to repair what was destroyed for the past 70 years by an aggressively atheistic regime, and to build the new conscience of a Christian nation in a free and independent country. It is easier to begin to build when there is nothing there rather than to restore a heritage that is so profoundly wounded, as is the case in Armenia. This transfiguration of our nation requires a spiritual, moral, humane and cultural reformation. A nation cannot exist simply on the basis of economic and political stability. It needs moral perseverance, and the source for this is the church.

Another of my tasks is to keep strong ties with the Diaspora. I try to identify with the people, speak their language and show interest in their problems. This is not a strategy. Saint Paul was Greek with the Greeks and Jew with the Jews. I am Armenian with the people of Armenia and with the people of the Diaspora. As I was raised in a rural area, I have had the experience of a simple life, and I have a strong bond with the simplest of our people.

The idea of an aloof and reserved Catholicos belongs to the past. During Soviet domination, the Catholicos was forced not to be with his people. My predecessor had an easier time traveling in the countries of the Diaspora than in his native country. A pastor has to be with his people."

Faith: Faith was born in me since my childhood, and with time it has become more profound. To ask why I believe is the same as asking why I exist. Faith is a grace of God. It is a question of life and not of reason or conviction. Christian faith is not a philosophy. It has found a concrete expression in my life, in my service, and in my works. I believe that every human being has an innate faith, but some let it die and others accept it and become witnesses to God's gift. Man transcends reason. Our intelligence is not an obstacle but an important element in a life of faith. The Gospel tells us that Jesus showed his faith in every one of his actions, and, therefore, faith should direct every aspect of a Christian's existence.

Armenian Church: The church is not a human institution because it was founded by the Son of God. It is God's work with the collaboration of human beings. It is where God and humans meet. Christ's work continues in the church by the Holy Spirit. I would like to say that in Etchmiadzin, every day, when I pray at the altar, the place named as the "descent of Christ from heaven," I think that it has not only been for seventeen centuries an altar for pious worship, but that it has had and has at present the mystique of Christ, that He lives in us. I don't look at Etchmiadzin as a historic monument, but a mission, because Christ's presence in the church is its mission. I often tell our bishops and priests that our Armenian church is called apostolic not only because of the grace and works of the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, but because we should have in us the spirit of the apostles, and we should manifest it in today's environment. Historic circumstances have identified our church with the destiny of the Armenian people, but we join with other Christians in the universality of the church, because Christ had not divided Himself among different confessions.

Ecumenism: For me, ecumenism is a profound spiritual reality. It is an essential dimension of our Christian faith. Unity is at the heart of the existence and the works of the church. On the path to ecumenism there have been failures and setbacks, but they do not take away from the essential process of ecumenism. We should never be discouraged. We should remain in dialogue, in communication, in spite of all obstacles. Unity is an obligation that we have received from our Lord, and in spite of our

weaknesses and human fragility. We should never renounce it. Unity is love. I believe that, above all dogmatic, intellectual, cultural considerations, it is the universal love, this attitude toward God, to others and to us, that makes dialogue possible. What is important in ecumenism is not the process of theological exchanges, but the manifestation of this love.

Suffering: God is love and the source of happiness, why does He then permit suffering? Why the Armenian genocide where 1.5 million people perished? This century has been called the century of genocides. I cannot find a logical or scientific explanation. The answer should be a personal one rather than a scientific one. We cannot judge God by human criteria. In our lives, suffering and joy, grief and happiness coexist all the time, and it is important to guard against seeing suffering as the dominant aspect of our life. In a crisis there is always a moment when we experience that God has left us. It is important to overcome this moment of abandonment with an act of faith and love. We will then see that God is with us and He has always been with us.

The Future: I see the dawn of the new century. I have hope that the next century will be better than the present. Among the young, I see a new consciousness of their responsibilities and a rebellion against the injustices of our times. And when the young are awakened it is a sign that a better future awaits mankind. If we dwell only on material things, we renounce our true humanity, because it is in the profound spirituality of our lives that we see the presence of our Creator. I am very optimistic about the future.

Hope: An Armenian poet has said, "How can you make the impossible possible?" That is the whole art of life. I know it is difficult, particularly when you are so thinly spread all over the world. How can you maintain hope when you are losing almost every day. But, at the same time, when the hope is rooted in a sense of value, in an attachment to a faith, which is the backbone of our human existence, then the hope is not that kind of empty dreams—an ivory tower type of thing—the hope becomes part of your existence. I say...very simply...I have the hope to be awake tomorrow morning...

Youth: The second immediate area of concern should be the integration of our young generation, both men and women, in the whole process of our community life in all its various aspects. Young people should be participants in the process of both planning and implementation of such projects and activities that are aimed at the renewal of our community life. We should look to the future, with brighter eyes and with more determined spirit. The future is theirs. The young people should not appear on the margin of the page of our community life, but rather in its very center.

Violence: Religion is for peace and for progress of mankind. Religion is against violence, per se. I am sure nobody, whether in the Christian faith, or in any other religious faith ever endorses violence. On the contrary, the religions in the world are to help mankind overcome those violent expressions of hatred against each other. This is the message of Christ, Peace on Earth, as we read it and as we hear it every Christmas and everytime we go to church. There is, however, one very important human element that one has to take into serious consideration, when violence is not just the outburst of hatred or enmity, but is rooted in the whole system, interwoven into the whole structure of society.... For instance, the Armenian massacres were not just the result of a kind of a sudden hate by the Turks vis-a-vis the Armenians, but devised as a plan of extermination to sweep away the Armenian race from its ancestral lands. When a person or a group commits an act of violence against another person or group as just an expression of momentary kind of attitude of hate, then of course that violence can be forgotten, can be overcome by a gesture of magnanimity. But when violence is directed to the suppression of an entire nation, then one cannot forget such an act of violence. It is more than violence, I would say, not a violence in the ordinary sense of the word, but a matter of degradation of human dignity. We usually call violence an act in the street, an act by people looting stores, and doing other similar things. But this thing is different and much more serious and shocking than what we call in western terminology just violence.

Truth: What do we mean when we utter the word, truth? Are we after truth or after fallacy? Are we after life or after name? What do we seek in life? The Gospel states that truth liberates Man. If you look forward to truth where do you find it? In books? In the treatises of philosophers or theologians or scientists? I think truth is by nature existential, incarnational. A great philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard of Denmark, opens up new dimensions and horizons of spiritual insight. He says truth exists for the individual only as he himself produces it in action. What does it mean, two by two makes four? I don't believe that is the real truth. This is the abstraction of truth. Two books and two books make four books. I am sounding perhaps a bit naive in the way in which I try to present this experience of mind, but I always believe in what Jesus Christ himself told us. He did not say, This is the truth. He said, "I am the truth, I am the way, I am the light." In other words, whatever value, whatever principle, whatever truth we look for in life, we have to give it expression in concrete action. Otherwise, truth, value, principle become notions in the air while life goes on. Therefore, we have to find a new way of looking at the basic truth in life.

Dedication: I believe there is one word whose true sense we have lost these days. That word in Armenian is "undzayum,"—dedication. I personally believe that if there is one word to be used as a synonym of life, that word will be dedication, because life itself is a gift of God, to be dedicated to Him through the dedication of the people.... One day when I was in Geneva, in the World Council of Churches headquarters, I was asked to be the preacher for that morning's service. I chose this theme of dedication. I did not know then what the response would be. But from representatives of all the churches from around the world—from Russia to Asia, from Africa to Europe and North America, they responded in this way: Dedication, that is the response to our human crisis today. Because there is the crisis of agony of the world, there is the crisis of emptiness among the youth. What is the meaning of life? What do we live for? We have everything, we have food, we have clothes, we have shelter, we have pleasure, we have everything. Then what? What is the meaning? What is the quality of life? That is the big question today among the youth. And the emptiness of life is hell on earth...I believe that the meaning of life is that self-dedication, the self-disclosure, the self-realization for the sake of others.