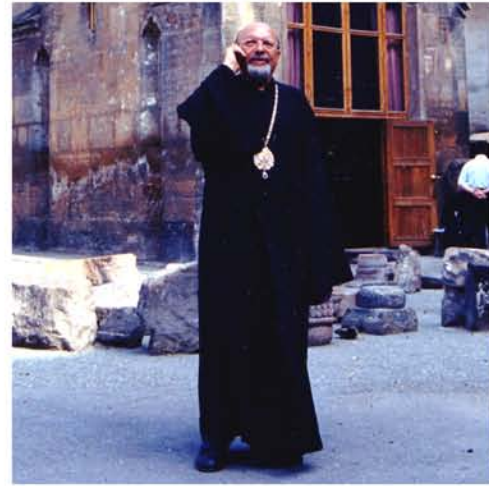


OUTREACH

March / April 2004



The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia



From the Editor

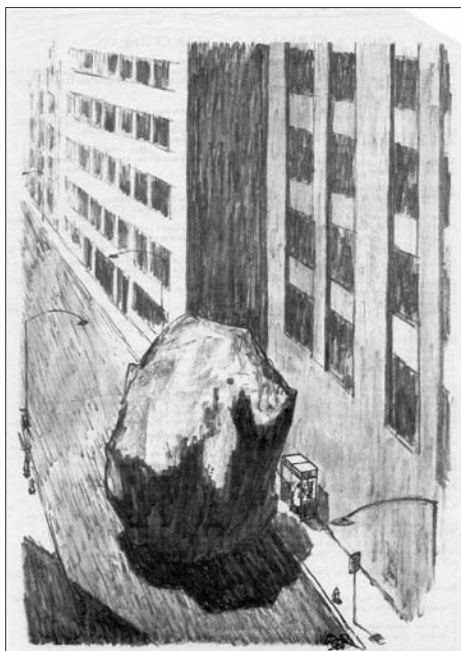
As you can see this issue of *Outreach* is primarily about Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, who was the Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy for twenty years—the longest tenure of any of our Prelates.

Included in this issue are some remembrances written by some of his fellow clergy, and friends. Included also are some excerpts of his writings in English and Armenian.

This issue is the largest we have ever had. But, in order to do justice to Archbishop Mesrob's life and service we would need countless more pages. There is so much more that can and should be said. Although we regret that we had to leave out so much, we are comforted knowing that the Prelacy is planning to publish a book about Mesrob's Srpazan life later this year which will be much more comprehensive than our *Outreach* magazine.

“Between a Rock and a Hard Place”

Some years ago—perhaps as many as 19—the *New Yorker* magazine, famous for their clever cartoons, published the cartoon shown on this page. The caption, “Could you pick me up? I’m between a rock and a hard place on Thirty-ninth Street,” caught my attention and I cut it out and sent it to Mesrob Srpazan. In the meantime someone else had seen the cartoon and thought of him and sent it to him. Of course, as most of you know, the Prelacy's office is located on 39th Street in Manhattan. Srpazan was very much amused and kept the full-page cartoon. Thereafter, it



“Could you pick me up? I’m between a rock and a hard place on Thirty-ninth Street.”

would occasionally appear, disappear, and appear again. When it was visible, I knew he was having some difficulty and the *New Yorker* cartoon provided him a measure of comfort knowing that he was not the only one who was “between a rock and a hard place on 39th Street.”

In 1998, on his final day at the Prelacy, as he was clearing his office and preparing to go to the airport for a flight to Armenia, he returned the cartoon to me, which by this time he had placed in a plastic protective cover. “I am certain you will find an appropriate use for it someday,” he told me.

Death, Dying and Cemeteries

At the time of his death Archbishop Ashjian's latest book, *The Etchmiadzin Chronicles*, had just been published. He was working on two other books, both of which were about death. I suppose we could

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This special issue of *Outreach* dedicated to Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian is sponsored by Mr. & Mrs. Vartkis and Lillian Markarian of Cranston, Rhode Island.

Front Cover: A pictorial of Mesrob Srpazan's Life of Service.

Back Cover: Mesrob Srpazan watches the raising of the Armenian tricolors at the United Nations—a day he described as “one of my happiest.”

Photographs in this issue are by: Kevork Djansezian, J. K. Hovhanness, Hrair Hawk Khatcherian, Harry Koundakjian, Kenneth Martin, Iris Papazian.

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138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016
212-689-7810 / 212-689-7168 (fax)
e-mail: email@armenianprelacy.org
web page: www.armenianprelacy.org

His Eminence

Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, *Prelate*

Iris Papazian, *Editor*
Khajag Zeitlian, *Design*

Mardiros Minas-Haftvani, *Business Manager*

Comments and/or editorial contributions may be mailed to the attention of the editor Outreach, 138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY, or by email to info@armenianprelacy.org or by fax, 212-689-7168.

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Առաջնորդ Սրբազան Հօր Խօսքը

ՅԱՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՎԿԱՅՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ

Քրիստոսի հրաշափառ յարույթեամբ Յիսուսի առաքելներուն տկարութիւնը եւ անորոշութիւնը փոխակերպուեցաւ զօրութեան եւ բացարձակ վստահութեան: Քրիստոսի յարույթիւնը՝ աննախընթաց, մարդկային մտքով անբացատրելի, մինչ հաւատքով ըմբռնելի, եղաւ այն գերբնական ու հրաշալի ոյժը, որ համեստ ձկնորսներուն, վախկոտ աշակերտներուն տուաւ անխախտ վստահութիւն մը, որ առաջնորդեց զիրենք դառնալու վկաները Յիսուսի յարույթեան եւ վարդապետութեան, բազմաթիւ եւ անտանելի տանջանքներուն դիմանալու եւ մահուան դիմաց մահը անտեսելու՝ ճիշդ իրենց Վարդապետին պէս:

«Մենք բոլորս ատոր վկայ ենք»:

Վկայութիւն Նոր Կեանքի: Ատիկա ո՛չ թէ երկրորդ կեանքի մը համար է, այլ Նոր Կեանքի մը, որ հաւատացեալը իր հոգիին մէջ կը զգայ, կը նորոգէ ինքզինք որպէս նոր մարդ, Քրիստոսով նորոգուած: «Մոռցէք ձեր հին կեանքն ու նախկին գործերը, եւ նոր մարդ եղէք՝ ձեր Արարիչին պատկերին համաձայն նորոգուելով, որպէսզի կարենաք զինք ճանչնալ» (Կղ 3.9-10): Մարդուս հին կեանքին օրերը կը մընան նոյնը որպէս օրերու գումար, բայց կը դառնան նոր՝ իրենց բովանդակութեամբ եւ այն նպատակով, որ ի վերջոյ մահուան փճացումին փոխարէն կը շահի յարույթեան յաւիտենական կեանքը: Ճիշդ ասոր համար Պօղոս Առաքել ըսած է. «Որովհետեւ ինձի համար կեանքը Քրիստոս է, եւ ուստի մեռնիլ՝ այդ կեանքը շահիլ կը նշանակէ» (Փյա 1.21): Նոր Կեանքը եւ զայն տուողը Քրիստոս է: Նոր Կեանքը իրմով է եւ իրեն հետ ըլլալով:

Վկայութիւն Ճշմարտութեան: Բոլորս շատ լաւ գիտենք թէ կայ բացարձակ մէկ ճշմարտութիւն

«Նոյն այս Յիսուսն էր որ Աստուած յարուցանեց, եւ մենք բոլորս ատոր վկայ ենք» (Գրծ 2.32):

ամէն բանի մէջ: Պարագայական ճշդութիւնները դէպքերու յարակցութենէն կը ծնին եւ չեն դիմանար: Մենք կը խոստովանինք զերագոյն ա՛յն ճշմարտութիւնը եւ կը վկայենք անոր մասին, ա՛յն հաւատքը որ Քրիստոս մեզի փոխանցեց եւ որ կը ճշմարտուի Աստուծոյ իր Որդիութեամբը, իր մարդեղութեամբը եւ փրկագործութեան առաքելութեամբը: Քրիստոսի քարոզութիւնը կամ խօսքը եթերային մտալոյացքներ չէին, այլ իրական ապահովութիւն եւ ճշմարտութիւն, որոնք փաստարկումի փորձաքարին զարնուեցան իր յարույթեամբ: Այս յարույթիւնն էր որ մղեց իր աշակերտները դառնալու վկան իր խօսքին ու կեանքին, իր ճշմարտութեան:

Վկայութիւն Յարույթեան Ուրախութեան: Որպէս հողեղէն արարածներ, մեր ցանկութիւնն է մեր օրերը լեցնել ուրախութեամբ: Ընտանեկան յարկէն ներս թէ աշխատանքի միջավայրին մէջ, մարդոց հետ յարաբերութեան ընթացքին մէջ թէ մեր հանգիստի պահուն, մեր փափաքն է որ իւրաքանչիւր պահը մեզի բերէ ուրախութիւն եւ անցնի ուրախութեամբ: Սակայն երանական այս վիճակը կը մնայ երազական, որովհետեւ ընտանիքին մէջ —այր ու կինը, ծնողք գաւակի, քոյր եղբօր յարաբերութեանց մէջ— անհասկացողութիւններ ու տարակարծութիւններ, փորձութիւններ ու սայթաքումներ պատճառ կը դառնան վէճի, ջիղերու գրգռումին, անհանդուրժող կացութեան: Մէկ խօսքով, ուրախութեան ցնդումին: Գործատեղիին կամ զբոսանքակին մէջ տարբեր-տարբեր երեւոյթներ, մրցակցութիւն, նախանձ, ազահութիւն պատճառ կ'ըլլան որ կորսնցրենք մեր համբերութիւնը, դառնանք ջղային, եւ այսպիսով, տեսնենք ուրախութեան հեռացումը մեր սրտերէն: Անձնական մեր հանգիստը կը խռովուի

մեր թէ հարագատի մը հիւանդութենէն, արկածէն, անակնկալ կամ անժամանակ մահէն: Այս բոլորը կը տրամեցնեն մեզ, կը կարծենք թէ յուսահատութեան մէջ ա՛լ ամէն ինչ վերջացած է: Մինչ երբ մեր երկրաւոր կեանքին օրերը օծուած ըլլան քրիստոնէական մեր հաւատքով ու յոյսով, մեր կեանքի ճանապարհորդութիւնը ըլլայ դէպի Քրիստոս երթ եւ ոչ թէ դէպի աշխարհ եւ աշխարհայինը, այն ատեն միայն կրնանք պայքարիլ տրտմութեան ու ցաւին դէմ եւ ընդունիլ անթառամ ուրախութիւնը, որ Քրիստոսի յարութեամբ մեզի տրուեցաւ: Յարութեան այդ ուրախութիւնը մեզ կը միացնէ Յիսուսի, եւ ոչ մէկ արտաքին ազդակ կրնայ այդ ուրախութիւնը նսեմացնել: Ճիշդ է, շատ դժուար է այդ ուրախութեան տիրանալը: Մտաբերեցէք առաքեալներն ու սուրբերը, նահատակներն ու վկաները, որոնք իրենց անանց ուրախութիւնը ոչ մէկ ձեռով ուղեցին փոխանակել երկրաւոր ու անցաւոր ուրախութեան հետ, զօրացան հոգեպէս, դիմացան մարմնապէս եւ ժառանգեցին այն կեանքը, որ իրենց հաւատքի վկայութեամբ ձեռք ձգեցին: Մարդոց կողմէ տրուած պատիւին փոխարէն ընդունեցին Քրիս-

տոսով տրուած փառքի թագն ու պսակը:

Քրիստոսի յարութեան տօնին այս օրերուն, որպէս հաւատացեալներ, յատուկ ուշադրութեամբ կը նայինք առաքեալներուն, որոնք վկայ եղան անոր յարութեան: Այդ յարութեամբ անոնք ընդունեցին եւ ապրեցան նոր կեանքը եւ վկայեցին նոր կեանքին, ընդունեցին եւ քարոզեցին ճշմարտութիւնը եւ վկայեցին այդ ճշմարտութեան, եւ հակառակ ամէն տանջանքի ու մահուան, վկաները դարձան այն ուրախութեան, որ խոստացուած է իւրաքանչիւր հաւատաւոր քրիստոնեայի:

Որպէս հայ եկեղեցւոյ եւ ժողովուրդի գաւակներ, մեր ազգին զօրութիւնն ու գոյատեւումը մեր փորձառութեամբ տեսանք ու գտանք մեր հաւատքին մէջ: Քրիստոսի եւ առաքեալներուն մանրակերտ կեանքը դարձաւ օրինակը մեր դարերու պայքարին ու կեանքին, որ անհերքելի ճշմարտութեամբ եւ բարոյական արժէքներով եղաւ խարխիսն ու ամրութիւնը մեր յաւերժական կեանքին, տրտմութենէն դէպի ուրախութիւն, մահէն դէպի յարութիւն:

Քրիստոս յարեաւ ի մեռելոց: Օրհնեալ է յարութիւնն Քրիստոսի: ✠

Witness to Resurrection

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:32)

The miraculous resurrection of Jesus transformed the disciples weakness and uncertainty into strength and absolute confidence. Christ’s unprecedented resurrection, unexplainable to the human mind, is comprehended only through faith. The resurrection became a supernatural and miraculous power for the modest fishermen, and gave the fearful disciples unshakeable confidence which led them to bear witness to Christ’s resurrection and apostleship, gave them the strength to withstand innumerable and unbearable tortures, and to ignore death in the face of death, just like their teacher.

“We all are witnesses.”

Witness to New Life: Not a second life, but a new life. A new life that is felt in a believer’s soul, and who, renewed with Christ, becomes a new person. “You have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Col. 3:9-10). The days of the old life remain the same as the sum of days, but they become new in content and purpose. In the end, in lieu of the destruction of death, we gain resurrected everlasting life. Exactly because of this, the Apostle Paul has said: “For me living is Christ, and dying is gain.” (Philippians 1:21). The giver of new life is Christ. New

life is possible through Him and with Him.

Witness to Truth: We know very well that there is one absolute truth in everything. Circumstantial correctness is born from cohesive events and does not last. We confess to that supreme truth and bear witness to it, to that faith that Christ gave us by becoming the Son of Man, by His Incarnation, and by His redemptive mission. Christ's preaching and message were not ethereal mind games, but real security and truth, which were tested on the touch-stone by His resurrection. It was the resurrection that prodded His disciples to bear testimony to His word and life, and His truth.

Witness to the Happiness of Resurrection: As creatures of the earth, our desire is to fill our days with happiness. In our relationships with people at home or work, or during our restful periods, it is our wish that the entire time passes joyfully bringing us happiness. But, that blissful state remains a dream because in family relationships—between husband and wife, parent and child, sister and brother—there are misunderstandings and dissensions, temptations and transgressions that bring about quarrels resulting in uneasy and intolerable situations. In a word, the dissipation of happiness. In the factory or the office there are many different circumstances that create unease—competition, jealousy, and greed. We lose our patience, become anxious as we see the distancing of happiness in our hearts. Our own rest is disturbed because of our or a friend's illness, accident, or sudden and untimely death. All of this saddens us. In our hopelessness we think that all is ended. But when our days on earth are blessed with Christian

faith and hope, and our life's journey is towards Christ and not the world and worldliness, then and only then can we struggle against sorrow and pain and accept unfading happiness that the resurrection of Christ gave us. The joy of the resurrection joins us to Christ, and no external factor can obscure that happiness. It is true that it is very difficult to attain that happiness. Think of the apostles and the saints, the martyrs and the witnesses, who did not want to give up their eternal happiness for worldly and fleeting happiness. They were spiritually strengthened. They withstood physically and inherited the life that they received by their witness to their faith. In place of the honor given by humans, they accepted the crown of glory given by Christ.

During this season of Christ's resurrection, as faithful believers, we view the apostles, who became witnesses to His resurrection, with special awareness. With the resurrection they accepted and lived a new life. They were witnesses to that new life, accepted and preached the truth and served as witnesses to the truth. And in spite of suffering and death, they turned witnesses to the happiness that is promised to all faithful Christians.

As children of the Armenian Church and nation, we saw through experience that our nation's strength and survival is our faith. The model lives of Christ and His apostles became an example for our centuries of struggle, which by irrefutable truth and moral principles became the anchor and fortress of our everlasting life. From sorrow to happiness. From death to resurrection.

Christ is risen. Blessed is the resurrection of Christ.



“**Y**es, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. It is my eager expectations and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two; my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.”

(Philippians 1:19-26)



Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian
January 3, 1941 — December 2, 2003
Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America
Eastern United States & Canada
1978 — 1998

«ԵՍ ԵՄ ՅԱՐՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ ԵՒ ԿԵԱՆՔԸ» (ՅՀ 11:25)*

Այսօրուան ճաշու Աւետարանի հատուածը մեզի կը պատմէ Ղազարոսի մահուան եւ յարուցեան դրուագը: Յիսուս երբ կը մօտենայ Բեթանիայի, Ղազարոսի քոյրը՝ Մարթա, ընդառաջ կ'ելլէ Տիրոջ եւ անխախտ վստահութեամբ կ'ըսէ.

- Տէ՛ր, եթէ հոս ըլլայիր՝ եղբայրս չէր մեռներ: Բայց հիմա իսկ գիտեմ, թէ ի՛նչ որ Աստուծոյ խընդրես՝ Աստուած քեզի պիտի տայ:

Յիսուս կ'ըսէ անոր.

- Եղբայրդ յարուցիւն պիտի առնէ:

Մարթա կը պատասխանէ.

- Գիտեմ որ յարուցիւն պիտի առնէ, վերջին օրը, յարուցեան ատեն:

Յիսուս կ'ըսէ անոր.

Ես եմ յարուցիւնը եւ կեանքը: Ան որ ինձի կը հաւատայ՝ թէ պէտեւ մեռնի՝ պիտի ապրի (ՅՀ 11:21-25):

Քրիստոսի այս յայտարարութիւնը ո՛չ թէ միայն իր աստուածութեան ցուցանիչն է, այլ նաեւ մեր յոյսը, մեր հաւատքը եւ քրիստոնէական ճշմարտութիւնը:

Ես եմ Յարուցիւնը: Յարուցեան գաղափարը եւ քարոզութիւնը կը կազմեն հիմը Քրիստոսի վարդապետութեան: Մարդկային մտածողութիւնը եւ իմաստասիրական որոնումները միշտ ալ փորձած են քննել ու հասկնալի դարձնել մահուան առեղծուածը, մահէն անդին «ի՛նչ կայ»ին պատասխան մը գտնել, սակայն միշտ ալ մնացած են թերի, մարդկային սահմանափակ մտքին անհասանելի եւ անհասկնալի վիճակին մէջ: Քրիստոս, մեր Աստուածը, ինք է որ իր կեանքով, մահով ու յարուցեամբ եկաւ միանգամընդմիշտ լուծելու այդ առեղծուածը: Իր յարուցեանէն ետք զինք տեսնողները վկան հանդիսացան յարուցեալ կեանքին, մահուան վրայ տարուած յաղթանակին, որուն պատճառով եւ շնորհիւ քրիստոնէութիւնը տարածուեցաւ, յարուցեան գաղափարը՝

թէ՛ մեր Փրկչին եւ թէ՛ մեր, հանդիսանալով հիմնաքարը քրիստոնէական կրօնքին: Այս վստահութեամբ է որ Պօղոս Առաքեալ կը յայտարարէ. «Եթէ Քրիստոս յարուցիւն առած չէ, գուր է մեր քարոզութիւնը, գուր է նաեւ ձեր հաւատքը (Ա. Կր 15:14): Մեր յարուցեամբ է որ կը միանանք Քրիստոսի, եւ բոլոր հաւատացեալները իրենց արդար կեանքով արժանի կ'ըլլան Աստուծոյ արքայութեան մէջ երկնային խընճոյքին սեղանակից ըլլալու անոր:

Ես եմ կեանքը: Այո՛, Քրիստոս է ճշմարիտ կեանքը, որ մահ չունի, վախճան չունի, այլ յաւիտենականութիւն է: Ճշմարիտ քրիստոնեային համար երկրաւոր կեանքը պարզապէս շուքն է գալիք իրականութեան, իրական կեանքին, որ Քրիստոսի մէջ եւ Քրիստոսով գոյութիւն ունի: Այդ կեանքը ո՛չ անօթութիւն եւ ո՛չ ալ ծարաւ կու տայ հաւատացեալին, որովհետեւ, Քրիստոսի վկայութեամբ, կեանքի հացէն ուտողը եւ կեանքի ջուրէն խմողը բնաւ պիտի չանօթենայ եւ բնաւ պիտի չծարաւի (ՅՀ 6:35): Մեր պարտականութիւնն ու պարտաւորութիւնն է մեր կեանքի օրերը այնպէս մը գործածել, որ կարենանք ձեռք ձգել երկնային կեանքը, որ Քրիստոսի հետ միութեամբ կը ճշմարտուի:

«Եթէ հոս ըլլայիր՝ եղբայրս չէր մեռներ»:

Ճիշդ է, Քրիստոսի հետ երբ միութեան մէջ ենք, երբ Քրիստոս ներկայ է մեր մէջ, մենք չենք մեռնիր: Մահը պարզապէս կը դառնայ վերջաւորութիւն երկրաւոր ու ժամանակաւոր մեր կեանքին եւ սկիզբ՝ երկնային ու յաւիտենական կեանքին, ուր մահ չկայ, ուր մահը պարտուած է, ուր կրնանք Պօղոս Առաքեալի նման ըսել. «Ո՛ւր է, մա՛հ, յաղթանակդ, ո՞ւր է, մա՛հ, քու խայթոցդ» (Ա. Կր 15:55):

Այս խօսքերը ամենէն յարմար մտածումներն են, երբ այսօր հաւաքուած ենք կատարելու քառասունքի հոգեհանգստեան արարողութիւնը մեր Թեմի նախկին Առաջնորդին՝ Բարձրաշնորհ Տ. Մեսրոպ Սրբազան Արքեպիսկոպոսին: Սրբազան Հօր վախճանումէն քառասուն օրեր ետք, երբ զգացական մեր մօտեցումները հաւատքի մեր սեղանին վրայ տրամաբանութիւն զգեցած են, որքա՛ն ճշմարիտ կը հնչեն վերոյիշեալ մտածումները: Երանաշնորհ Սրբազանը ապրեցաւ հաւատքի, յարուցեան եւ քրիստոնէական

*Այս գրութիւնը խտացումն է այն փարոզին, որ Առաջնորդ Սրբազան Հայրը խօսեցաւ 11 Յունուար, 2004-ին, երջանկայիշատակ Տ. Մեսրոպ Արքեպիսկոպոս Առնեանի ֆառասումքին առիթով, Նիւ Եորքի Ա. Գրիգոր Լուսաւորիչ մայր եկեղեցւոյ մէջ:

կեանքի իր օրերը, գանոնք արժեւորեց իր խօսքով ու գործով եւ հանդիսացաւ հաւատաւոր ծառան Աստուածորդիին: Ան իր մահէն ետք ո՛չ ամչնալիք եւ ո՛չ ալ վախնալիք բան ունի, քանի իր կեանքի օրերը շահարկութեան դրաւ շահելու համար Քրիստոսի կեանքը: Տակաւին, իր քարոզութեան եւ գործին մէջ անմասն չձգեց նաեւ իր հայրերուն ծննդավայրը, մեր մայր հայրենիք Հայաստանը: Առաջնորդական իր պաշտօնէն հրաժարելէն ետք, իր ամբողջ ճիգն ու կորովը նուիրեց Հայաստանին՝ այնտեղ քրիստոնէական պատգամներն ու արժէքները կեանքի կոչելու, ծարաւին ջուր տալու, անօթիին՝ հաց, խնամելու հիւանդները եւ այցի երթալու բանտարկեալին (Մտ 25:35-36): Ողն ու ծուծով Հայ էր, չյայտարարեց թէ

Հայաստանը իր սրտին մէջ է, այլ ինք գնաց Հայաստանի սրտին մէջ, հոն ապրելու եւ գործելու, երկնքի արքայութիւնը տարածելու, անմխիթար ժողովուրդին Քրիստոսի յոյսը, հաւատքը, յարութիւնն ու կեանքը քարոզելու: Յայտարարելու իր եղբայրներուն եւ քոյրերուն, որ եթէ Քրիստոս հոն է՝ Հայրենիքը չի մեռնիր, հայութիւնը չի մեռնիր:

* * *

Վստահ եմ, որ եթէ հոգելոյս Մեսրոպ Սրբազանը հրաչքով մը իմ տեղս կանգնած ըլլար այս բեմին վրայ, նմանօրինակ քարոզով մը պիտի մխիթարէր մեզ, մեր հաւատքը դարբնելով եւ մեր յոյսը զօրացնելով Քրիստոսի յարութեամբ եւ կեանքով: ✠

Ս. ՄԵՍՐՈՊԻ ՀԵՏ

Եւ ահա այսօր եկած ենք մեր սիրոյ տուրքը մատուցանելու մեր ժողովուրդի մեծագոյն ծնունդին, Ս. Մեսրոպի յիշատակին: Ուստի երախտագէտ սրտերով ծունկի գանք իր գերեզմանին առջեւ եւ ըսենք,

Տէր Վարդապետ, առաջին ուսուցիչ, յանուն հայոց պատմութեան, յանուն աստուածատուր մեր այբուբենին, յանուն մեր արեան կանչին, կ'աշխատինք չմոռնալ այն աշխարհը որ քուկող էր եղած: Տարօնի Հացեկաց գիւղէն ու Առաքելոց վանքի թարգմանչաց գերեզմաններէն մինչեւ Գողթան գաւառի խուլ անկիւնները, Դարանաղեաց գաւառէն մինչեւ Արարատեան աշխարհ, Աշտիշատէն մինչեւ Անի, այն աշխարհը որ դուն թիզ առ թիզ չափեցիր, այն աշխարհը որ քու ձեռքերովդ լոյս տեսաւ, եւ ուր քարը իմաստ հազաւ եւ որուն վրայ ապրող ժողովուրդին դուն երկրորդ կեանք պարգեւեցիր: Այդ աշխարհը, դառն ու մարդկային չափանիշերով անհասկնալի ու ակերակի լեզու ունի այսօր: Եւ ինչպէս մոռնանք այդ աշխարհը, ամենասուրբ ուսուցիչ: Ինչպէս մոռնանք այն եկեղեցիները, ուր Աստուած հայերէն խօսեցաւ իր ժողովուրդին եւ ուր այսօր միայն բուեր կը վայեն: Այն դպրոցները՝ ուր հայ մանուկներ Մեսրոպի

լեզուն սորվեցան՝ եւ ուր հիմա հայ մանուկ չկայ... Եթէ մոռնամ քեզ, Հայաստան աշխարհ, թող իմ լեզուս քիմքիս փակչի, չկարենամ հայօրէն ապրիլ:

Եկէք, եւ դարձեալ ուխտենք որ պիտի հաւատարիմ մնանք Թարգմանչաց սերունդի գործին: Պահենք եւ պահպանենք մերը, մեր հարազատը: Տէր կանգնինք մեր մշակոյթին, մեր լեզուին, մեր աղօթքին, մեր հայրենիքին եւ Թարգմանչաց վճռակամութեամբ ոչ ըսենք բոլոր այն ոյժերուն, որոնք Ե. դարէն մինչեւ այսօր միշտ ալ կը պայքարին մեր առանձին գոյութեան եւ սեփական դիմագծութեան դէմ:

Եկէք, եւ դարձեալ ուխտենք, որ առաքելական ու մարգարէական այն շունչը որ մաշտոցեան աւանդ իրրեւ փոխանցուած է մեզի, տիրաբար գործածենք եւ, ի մի բան, մեր կեանքով կեանքի վերածենք: Ու այն ատեն միայն մեր եռամեծ սուրբերուն արժանի որդիութեան մէջ կ'ըլլանք մեր կեանքով ու գործով փառաւորելով անունը մեր Արարչին եւ Տիրոջ, որով օրհնեալ էք եւ օրհնեալ եղերուք: Ամէն: ✠

Խօսուած Մեսրոպ Արք. Աշեփանի կողմէ՝ Օշականի եկեղեցւոյ մէջ, Թարգմանչաց Տօմիս օրը, 13 Հոկտ. 1979 թ.:

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian: A Life of Service

by Iris Papazian

“EVEN as a child growing up in Lebanon, my heart was in the church, and I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve God through my beloved church and people.”

These words written by Mesrob Srpazan many years ago encapsulates his life of service. His was a life that centered around the church, a commitment that grew in intensity and did not waiver even through some very difficult and stressful periods of his life.

“I served with the best of my God-given ability and within the limitations of my health, I always tried to ‘magnify my office’ (Romans 11: 13) through my religious, liturgical, cultural, and publishing endeavors. As to the extent of my success, may God be the final judge. Whatever I did, I did in the name of one nation and one church and one future. The best judge is history and our Lord, whom I can confront with humility and say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do,’ (Luke 17:10).

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian was born in Beirut, Lebanon, on January 3, 1941, to Necess and Martha Ashjian, and baptized with the name Hrair. The third of four children, he joined his elder brothers Hovhaness and Hagop and later they welcomed their sister, Hripsime. His father died at the young age of 46, leaving his mother with four children to raise. Throughout his life



A family portrait. Back row, left to right, brothers Hovhaness and Hagop. Front row, left to right, father, Necess, sister Hrip, mother Martha, and Hrair.

he remained close to his siblings. In 1998 he mourned the death of his brother, Hagop. He was especially attentive to his sister Hrip and her children, Liza and Hrair. He would do anything for them, and they reciprocated with their fervent love, respect and loyalty.

His early schooling and religious training took place in Beirut where he attended the St. Nishan School. Among his teachers were, the outstanding and respected educators Yetvart Boyadjian, Yetvart Daronian, Yervant Bedrossian, and a young priest—his lifelong mentor—Karekin Sarkissian, who years later became Catholicos of Cilicia and finally Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians.

He credits his early attachment to the church to his eldest brother, Hovhaness, who took him to church at an early age. Indeed, his earli-

est recollections of life in Beirut, he would say, revolved around St. Nishan Church. He often spoke about the profound effect the St. Nishan Church had on him and in particular a painting of the Virgin Mother, which seemed to “speak” to him. The painting, although damaged during the civil war, still hangs in the church in Beirut. As an ardent churchgoer and enthusiastic singer in the choir of St. Nishan Church he gained the attention of Bishop Khorren Paroyan, then the Prelate of Lebanon. He was ordained a deacon of the Armenian Church in June 1958. After completing theological and armenological studies at the Seminary, he was ordained a celibate monk on May 28, 1961, by Catholicos Zareh I, who named him Mesrob in honor of the 1600th anniversary of the birth of Mesrob Mashdotz, the founder of the Armenian alphabet. In 1963



A graduation photo with teachers Yervant Daronian and V. Rev. Fr. Karekin Sarkissian. Young Hrair is behind Hayr Karekin on the right with glasses.



In the classroom as principal of the Mardigian School in Antelias, Lebanon.

he received the rank of Vartabed by Catholicos Khoren I; in 1977 he was elevated to the rank of Bishop and in 1983 to Archbishop by his teacher and life-long friend and mentor, Catholicos Karekin II.

During his career as an educator, he enthusiastically embraced the positions of teacher and preacher at Karen Jeppe College in Aleppo, Syria, Principal of the Mardigian School in Antelias, Lebanon, and

Assistant Dean and Dean of the Cilician Seminary.

Higher Education

A man of keen intellect, with a life-long love for learning and books, Archbishop Ashjian furthered his studies at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland; participated in the International Student Fellowship, a pilot project of the World Council of Churches and the United Presbyterian Church; and Princeton Theological Seminary where he received a Master of Theology in 1970. He had completed all of his course work for a doctorate when he received word of his election as the Prelate of the Diocese of the Armenians in Iran and India.

Instinctively he knew that life as he knew it ended and he was now entering a new phase of his life of service.

“In the summer of 1973 a cable from the ecclesiastical authorities of the Diocese of the Armenians in Iran and India announced my election as prelate of that historic diocese, as successor to His Eminence Archbishop Karekin Sarkissian. I received the news with mixed feelings. It was an honor to succeed a brilliant clergyman and assume the responsibilities of a diocese which, for a good part of the past four centuries, had been one of the guide posts of Armenian Christian life, had influenced the Catholicate of Etchmiadzin, and had been the spiritual center of the Armenians living in India and beyond. But in order to assume these new responsibilities, I had to leave or at least postpone my studies and bid farewell to the academic world, because since October 1970 I had been studying at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. I already had my Th.M.



The Holy Savior's Church in Isfahan, Iran, where Mesrob Srpazan served as Prelate from 1974 to 1977.

degree and had finished the required courses, passed the Greek, French and German language exams, and I was readying myself for my written and oral exams. I was also planning to embark upon the writing of my dissertation, *The Eucharistic Theology of St. Nerses of Lambron*. Deep in my heart I believed that this departure from academia might become a permanent one, a feeling that became fact.”

He began his service in Isfahan, Iran in 1974, and served that community until 1977. During his time in Iran he was able to do some research and publish the collected works of the nineteenth century humanist, Mesrob Taliatine.

Greatest Challenge

Then came his greatest challenge. He was elected to serve as the Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada in December 1977, and began his service in January 1978. Once again he was succeeding Archbishop Karekin Sarkissian who had

been elected Catholicos-Coadjutor of the Great House of Cilicia.

The luxury of research and academic pursuits, he realized, was not possible if he were to do justice to this position. “My thousands of trips, air travel, national and international responsibilities, the emergency

situations requiring my full commitment prohibited my return to academic subjects, and least of all, to school.”

In 1991 Princeton Theological Seminary awarded him a second master's degree in recognition of the work he had completed towards the doctorate degree. He often spoke lovingly of his teachers in Princeton especially “Dr. James I. McCord, the president, and great ecumenist—and unusually open to orthodoxy; the Rev. Georges Florovsky, the frail theologian from Odessa, who left an indelible impression on U.S. theology, from Harvard to Princeton. And my advisor, Dr. Karlfried Froehlich, the German theologian and historian, who throughout my years of study made me admire his discipline, the rigor of his knowledge, and the integrity of the man.”

Vigen Guroian, the noted theologian and a close friend to Srpazan, wrote the following in a Foreword to Archbishop Mesrob's book, *Armenian Church Patristic and Other Essays*: “One of the misfortunes of



A historic photo: January 3, 1978, the day Bishop Mesrob Ashjian arrived in New York to assume the office of Prelate. Flanking the Prelate on the left is V. Ren. Fr. Aram Keshishian (now Catholicos Aram I), and on the right V. Ren. Fr. Oshagan Choloyan, (now Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy.)

the modern Armenian episcopacy is that the extreme administrative demands it places upon persons who hold the office of primate or sit in patriarchal sees limits opportunity for reflection, study and writing. Our bishops ought first to be spiritual leaders and theological teachers. The history of the Armenian Church is replete with examples of this model of the episcopacy. Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian is a man of exceptional theological talent. Most of the essays collected in this volume are products of Archbishop Mesrob's graduate study at Princeton University in the early 1970s.... These essays comprise a treasury of reflection on the Church's theological tradition and the historical origins of Armenian Christianity. They impress me greatly in one other important respect. This is their deeply ecumenical spirit."

Growth of Prelacy

During his twenty-year tenure, the Prelacy grew in scope and depth of service, largely due to his perseverance and vision. During his service the Prelacy produced more than 200 books, tapes and videos; he ordained more than 350 altar servers; he officiated at 12 church consecrations; he organized more than 125 concerts, art exhibits, and commemorations; he supervised 30 major national fundraising programs and 35 educational and scholarship programs. He founded *Outreach*, the Prelacy's monthly publication and weekly radio program; the Armenian Religious Education Council, the St. Gregory of Datev Institute, and the Siamanto Academy.

As a dedicated ecumenist he participated in the International Student Fellowship, attended conferences in Lebanon, Jordan, France, Switzerland, Ghana, Finland, Egypt, and



The Prelacy underwent a complete renovation during Archbishop Mesrob's tenure. The premises were vacated. Temporary offices were set up in St. Illuminator's Cathedral and in rented office space in Fort Lee, New Jersey. This photo was taken outside the newly renovated façade on opening night. Srpažan is surrounded by friends and supporters.



Ribbon-cutting of the new Vahakn and Hasmig Hovmanian reception hall.

Odessa. He served as a member of the standing committee of the Conference of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and was a delegate to the World Council of Churches' Assembly in Vancouver, British Columbia, as well as in Canberra, Australia. In 1991, His Emi-

nence was appointed to serve on the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission. His travels took him to every corner of the world where he lectured, preached, met with world leaders, and sought out Armenian historical sites.



Srpazan greets Pope John Paul II at the Vatican with Catholicos Aram I.

Helping Armenia

Following the earthquake in Armenia in 1988 he spearheaded a campaign to provide immediate aid to the stricken people. He was also in the forefront of bringing international attention to the Karabagh

struggle.

Following the visit to the United States in February 1989 of the two Catholicoses, His Holiness Vazken I and His Holiness Karekin II, in a joint mission for earthquake relief, Mesrob Srpazan wrote a letter of



On the occasion of the first anniversary of the earthquake the Prelacy sponsored a three-city tour of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra led by Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian. This photo was taken at the sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall in New York. The orchestra also performed in the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and Symphony Hall in Boston.

thanks to the Faithful: “I write this message with a heart filled with gratification and deep spiritual comfort. After the tribulations our people experienced for the Karabagh issue and particularly after the devastating earthquake in Leninakan, when our hearts were filled with sorrow and pain, it was most comforting and uplifting to see His Holiness Catholicos Vazken I of All Armenians and His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II of the Great House of Cilicia together from the first moment of their arrival in New York. Their presence was the most tangible and exemplary manifestation of their fatherly love and concern for their church, their people, and their fatherland. They came to jointly sponsor the participation of the Armenian communities of the United States, Canada, and South America, in the reconstruction of the devastated areas in general and of Stepanavan in particular.... Our churches, communities, organizations as well as individuals were motivated and expressed their readiness to bring their full participation in the coming months and years by providing ways and means according to their abilities for different aspects of the reconstruction work.... I take this opportunity to extend to you my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for your kindness, your dignity and your positive reactions, which you expressed towards our Vehapars.... I pray to God to strengthen you with the same spirit of love, mutual respect, and sense of belonging exhibited by our spiritual leaders.”

The Written Word

A prolific reader and writer, Archbishop Ashjian wrote many articles and at least three dozen books in Armenian and English. In 1994, as if sensing his coming health crisis, he

said of his tenure as Prelate,

“I cannot deny that these were rewarding years, in a sense fulfilling years. I was able to provide incentive to our community life. Many celebrations gave a sense of pride to the members of our community.... But after all those, now that I look back, I feel that something has been left unfinished. I ask the question many people have asked: what legacy do I leave? Almost nothing! comes my inner answer. Yes, I did try to be a good disciple of the Lord. Yes, I did try to bring the Good News to our people. Yes, I did try to be a faithful servant in the vineyard of the Lord, but I realized that ‘As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more,’ (Ps. 103:15-16). The realization of our human frailty and the wish to leave something beyond oneself prompted me to look backwards: the years of my studies, my endeavors as a student, the papers I had researched and written and which were lying about somewhere at the Prelacy. I discovered them and through them recalled my happy years as a student.”

Stricken in France

In January of 1995, while in France for meetings of the Land and Culture Organization, Archbishop Ashjian suffered a major heart attack, which kept him hospitalized for nearly one month because of severe and near-fatal complications. During his hospitalization and convalescence in Bligny Hospital, Briss-sous Forges, France, he wrote a message to the clergy serving the Prelacy advising them to take care of their health. He wrote in part,

“I found out that we must all

take care of our health and to remember that it is not only others who get sick... We are, after all, human and we have our limits. We need to know the value of good health.... Last August when I went to Yerevan, I saw Vazken Vehapar for the last time. He was on his death bed, but he was alert and aware of everything around him. During my visit he twice said to me, ‘My son, do not get sick.’ At the time I thought it odd that the Catholicos of All Armenians would utter such common thoughts. Now, I understand. At that time I still

spiritual dreams. My eyes do not look back. I am grateful to you, Lord, for this good luck. I hope that during the days you have bestowed upon me I will be closer to You...more faithful in preaching the Gospel and be a responsible shepherd to those entrusted to my care.... Dear Lord, I am thankful for the opportunity you gave me to return to all of my obligations and be of service to my church and nation to the utmost of my ability. I ask for nothing else. I am satisfied with all I have. I am more content than at anytime in my life....

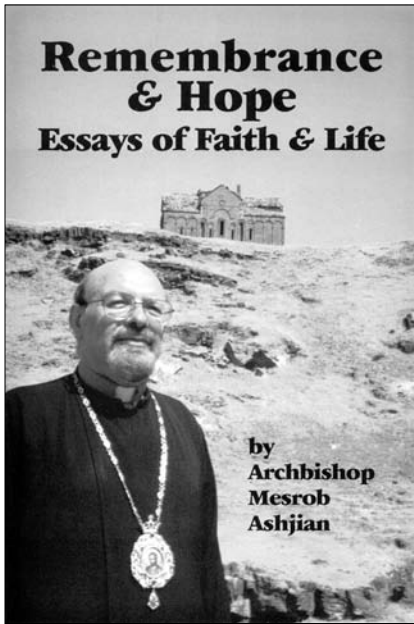


Srpażan in the convalescent home in France following his heart attack in 1995.

thought the world was mine. I could do anything and everything. There, I believe, was my mistake. Now I realize that everything can happen to everyone and you cannot continue day in and day out working like a machine. Know the value of your Mondays—your free day—even if you know that at 9 a.m. the Prelate will call to ask a favor! How easy it is to die and also how difficult. Now I realize the gravity of my illness. But thanks be to God—a thousand thanks—He gave me new life, gave me the opportunity to continue on my road to the realization of my

During my hospitalization I had with me a cross from the monastery of Moush which had been rescued by a brave Moushetzi. The cross emanated with the strength of its origin and its native soil. With it, also as a constant companion, was my prayer book, *The Nareg*, which I read over and over again.”

Archbishop Mesrob returned to the United States and on July 24, 1995, he underwent major open heart surgery at St. Joseph’s Medical Center in Paterson, New Jersey. The surgery was performed by the acclaimed heart surgeon, Dr. Harout



Books were always a passion for Archbishop Mesrob. At a certain point in his life, especially after his illness, he began to publish his own writings.

Mekhjian. In a message published in *Outreach*, Srpazan expressed his thanks to God and to Dr. Mekhjian and Dr. Raffy Hovanesian and to all those who with their prayers and good wishes helped his recovery. Mesrob Srpazan returned to his work with even greater vitality. He often said that he was “reborn in France” and God had given him a “bonus” by sparing his life.

With his recovery, his determination to publish his own writings became even more imperative for him. Up until now he was content publishing other people’s works. Now, his illness made him aware of his mortality and the importance of the written word. In a Preface to one of his collected works published in 1997 he wrote,

“It has only been in the past few years that I have felt the urgency of gathering and preserving them [his writings] in a single volume. Perhaps it is just a natural part of growing older and the realization that it is the written word that endures. Gathered

together the articles form a kind of biography. The articles touch on faith, community life, encounters with people, interviews with the press, special commemorations and events. Some of the writings are just as relevant today as when written; a few have lost their urgency because of new developments. However, all of them were written with passion and honesty.”

Declines Higher Office

With the election of the Cilician Catholicos to the throne of St. Gregory, many of Archbishop Mesrob’s ardent supporters and friends urged him to seek election to head the Cilician See. He declined the honor and wholeheartedly supported the election of His Holiness Aram I. “I just know that this is not the right thing to do,” he told his disappointed



More than 12,000 young Armenians, ages 14 to 18, participated in the cleaning of monasteries, public parks, and other sites throughout Armenia and Artsakh as part of the 17th Centenary commemorations. This photo was taken at Goshavank where the volunteers helped clean the interior and exterior of the monastery as well as the surrounding area. All of the participants received a tee shirt in remembrance of the event.

friends. Months later he confirmed the validity of his instincts and said, “God has other plans for me.”

A New Challenge

In 1995, His Holiness Karekin I, Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians, appointed him as the Executive Director of the 1700th anniversary commemorations of Armenia’s official acceptance of Christianity as a state religion, which was to be marked worldwide in 2001. Archbishop Ashjian assumed this post while still serving as Prelate in the United States. In 1998, having finished his elected term of office he chose not to run for re-election.

In a message to the Executive Council he wrote:

“I know that for everything there is a season. I know also that there is the time for all things.... Now my time has come to give myself to God completely and enjoy His gifts, which I hope will come when I know myself better through prayer and meditation. This May our National Representative Assembly, in accordance with our bylaws, will elect a Prelate for a four-year term. Since my term comes to an end, I have decided to relinquish my responsibilities and give you the occasion and opportunity to receive from the Catholicate of Cilicia a list of three candidates so that the NRA can elect the best qualified candidate. At this time I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to His Holiness Aram I, to all the delegates to the National Representative Assembly, to my spiritual brothers, to our churches, and to all of our faithful, for the years of dedication, friendship and love. Please be assured that wherever I may be and for how long God grants me life on this earth, I will remember the faith-



Mesrob Srpazan with the three chairmen he served with during his twenty year tenure. Left to right, Nerses Chitjian, Onnic Marashian, Srpazan, Judge Sarkis Tesboian, and Mrs. Artemis Tesboian.

ful of the Eastern Prelacy with great fondness. You gave my life meaning by allowing me to serve God through you. I ask that you pray for me and remember me with goodness in your hearts.”

The Executive Council accepted Srpazan’s decision with “profound regret.” Onnic Marashian, the chairman of the Executive Council, wrote of how the Council attempted to reverse Srpazan’s decision. “Mesrob Srpazan kept saying, ‘There’s no such thing as being irreplaceable. Everyone is expendable in the long run.’ In the 20 years that Srpazan spent on these shores as a dedicated servant of the church and his flock, as administrator, mentor and guide, as patron of the arts and organizer of symposia and social events, as champion of the orphaned in the motherland, and, yes, as a mendicant for projects that benefit church and nation, Srpazan has set such a high standard of performance, such compulsive dedication to fruitful endeavor that his record, I am sure, will serve as a guidepost and his example will be an inspiration to those who

succeed him.”

In the final NRA he attended as Prelate, which convened in Wattertown, Massachusetts, Srpazan bid a nostalgic message of farewell to the faithful of the Eastern Prelacy. “During the coming days the NRA will elect our successor as the fourth Prelate to serve this diocese. I am sure he will be the ‘Man of the Day’ and ‘make all things new’ (Rev. 21: 5). As for us, wherever we may be, under whatever stars we serve, we will remember you by name because we have been created in God’s image and we, like God, can say, ‘I have called thee by name; thou art mine.’ (Is. 43:1).

“Dear Armenian American Faithful, whatever we may be, wherever we go, wherever we live and work, we leave with one thought, ‘... You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves

to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.’ (II Cor. 3:3-6).

“Believe in the spirit which gives life, gives flight, gives dreams, creates the future. May there never, ever be rise to a barren spirit. I leave you with blessings, love, and prayers. Farewell.”

In extemporaneous remarks during the closing banquet of the NRA, Archbishop Ashjian recalled,

“It was Vartanantz Day of 1978 that I, as Prelate, visited the Boston community for the first time, and as Der Torkom said earlier, from that day on Boston became my second home. Since that time I have visited the Boston area at least 250 times and I have come to know this community’s history, the legacy left by previous generations, and it is with deep humility that I bow before the memory of all those who served and departed.”

He offered words of praise for the newly elected Prelate, His Grace Bishop Oshagan Choloyan, describing him as one of the Cilician See’s brightest and best clergymen. “Bishop Oshagan,” he said, “is well-known in the United States because of the years he studied at Princeton Theological Seminary. Many of you here remember him as a very popular teacher at Camp Haiastan and as *locum tenens* of the Prelacy from June 1977 until January 1978. He knows this community very well, loves baseball—especially the Phillies. At one time he even tried to teach me the rules of baseball. I must confess that I was not a very attentive student and did not learn much beyond the seventh inning stretch. My Prayers



Srpazian officiated at thousands and thousands of baptisms in Armenia and Artsakh.

are with Bishop Oshagan and I wish him every success. I hope and pray that all of my successes will be his, but that none of my problems will become his.”

Archbishop Mesrob described how his years in America made him a better Armenian. “It was the elders in America who acquainted me and taught me to love the Armenian world. They were the ones who taught me about our cities and our towns like...which ones shall I mention?...which ones shall I fail to mention?”

“Now I am returning to Armenia in a few days, where in Holy Etchmiadzin I will devote myself for the next few years as Executive Secretary of the 1700th commemorative events. I am returning to the land... to free and independent Armenia... to Artsakh whose heroic people with their blood gave us the right to live with dignity. I am returning home, and the words of the American songwriter and singer, John Denver, are mine tonight: *Almost heaven, West Virginia, Blue Ridge Mountains, Shenandoah River...country road take me home to the place I belong...*”

Armenia Becomes Home

He moved to Armenia to devote all of his time to the commemorative events. In an interview published in *Outreach*, he commented further on his decision and said: “I reflected on the fact that I served for 20 years as Prelate, and I think I gave my golden years to this community. There comes a point that you look

forward to a change, a new vision, a new commitment with new challenges, new heights to climb. And I made this decision with much thought. It was not a hasty decision, having in mind the prosperity of the Prelacy. After all, when you serve any institution, in this case the Prelacy, you look after its welfare, its greatness, its continuity. I think it was time for me to move on, that a new Prelate would bring new blood, new enthusiasm, new vitality, and that the change would be for the benefit of all parties involved.... Twenty years of my life were devoted to this community, which will always have a very special place in my heart. I leave with a tranquil heart. And I hope my successor will be much more dedicated, much more committed. I will pray for his success.”

He moved to Armenia to assume the duties of Executive Secretary of the 1700th anniversary commemorations on a full time basis, a duty he had been fulfilling since 1995 while also serving as Prelate.

He spoke of his dual commit-



The 1997-98 Executive Council, the last to serve with Srpazian: First row, left to right: Harout Chitilian, Bishop Khajag Hagopian, Archbishop Ashjian, Onnic Marashian, Very Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian. Back row, left to right, Rev. Fr. Nerses Manoogian, Jack Mardoian, Esq., Hagop Kouyoumdjian, Dr. Jean Arakelian, Bedros Tashjian, Rev. Fr. Gomidas Baghsarian.

ments in an interview: “I will be stepping down as Prelate. That is, I am not seeking re-election to a sixth term. As to why, let me say that there were several factors. First of all, since 1995 I have been holding two positions: the Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada, and the Executive Secretary of the 1700th anniversary.... It is a tough job, each one of them, and for me it was very difficult to do justice to both, because, as you know, I have a deep sense of responsibility. I tried my best, at the cost of my health, to fulfill all of my responsibilities. But there comes a point where you become frustrated and you realize you have to make a decision and sometimes there are people who help you in this decision making process. I heard some of the criticisms that I am not minding the store...I am not that visible at the Prelacy, etc. And on the other hand, that I am not doing justice to the job of Executive Secretary of the 1700th commemorative events.”

Srpazan noted that if he had the freedom of choice, he would like to retire to a monastery and dedicate himself to prayer and meditation. “Even though I have been a clergyman for some 37 years I have always been a type of activist clergyman. I had this urge within me to follow a more spiritual road, but my commitments made this impossible.... Deep in my heart, especially perhaps after my illness, I had that yearning for that inner peace that comes with prayer and meditation. But, I am afraid I will still not have that luxury as I administer my duties as Executive Secretary of the 17th Centenary. It is a challenging job and I am honored to serve in this capacity.”

Srpazan assumed the offices of his new life and new responsibility

to oversee the entire commemoration. In true Ashjian-style, he put his entire heart and soul into the project. As was true during his Prelacy years, his staff was often over-worked, but

tion were all in place.

In an essay, written in Armenian, he described the final days of Karekin Vehapar, the man who he had previously paid tribute as “the



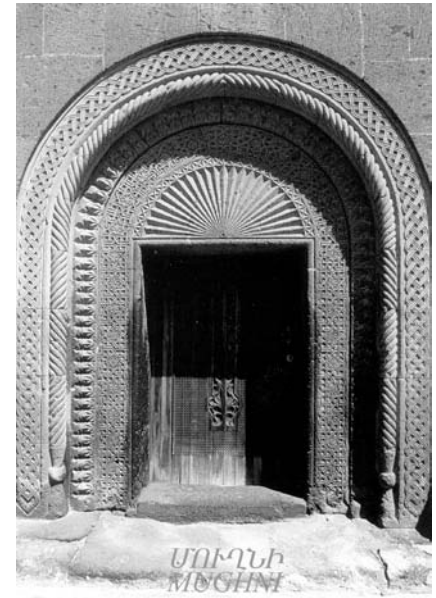
Mesrob Srpazan bids farewell to his teacher, mentor, and friend, Catholicos Karekin I.

no one worked harder and longer than the Archbishop himself. He worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He did this without a hint of resentment, but with total love and appreciation. When others praised his life of service he would in all sincerity say that he was the one to be thankful. He would often quote the words of the poet Vahan Tekeyan, “In the final accounting, what did I get out of life? Amazingly, only what I gave to others.”

Passing of Catholicos Karekin

Catholicos Karekin’s illness and death in 1999 was a great blow emotionally, physically, and professionally. He lost his lifelong mentor. It was a loss that was difficult for him to comprehend and accept. Some months later he resigned as the Executive Secretary even though all of the major work had been completed and plans for the worldwide celebra-

one who encouraged and created the conditions” for his studies in



The Monastery of Sourp Kevork of Moughni was renovated through the donations received in honor of Mesrob Srpazan’s 35th anniversary of ordination. He was very proud of the monastery and the surrounding community. This is a photo of the southern door of the monastery.

Europe and the United States and who had been his beloved “mentor and leader.”

For the last three years of his life, he intensified his mission work in Armenia through a wide variety of activities, all of which directly benefited the people. He accomplished more than large charitable institutions. He took on so many projects and worked every hour of every day to complete the projects, as if he knew that his days were limited. A project that was particularly close to his heart was the renovation of the St. Gevorg of Moughni Monastery in Armenia, which was accomplished through generous donations by his friends on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of his ordination. One of his final acts was the opening of the Terchoonian Home for orphans in Gumri.

During these years he also realized one of his greatest dreams: traveling through historic Western Ar-



Mesrob Srpazan traveled throughout historic Armenia visiting Armenian sites. He carefully researched all of the sites and then went about finding access to them. In this photo he conducts a requiem service amidst the ruins of Sourp Garabed of Moush.



A nostalgic moment at the spring of the village of Havav in Palou, his mother's birthplace.

menia, especially to visit the remains of churches and monasteries. For three successive summers he traveled throughout historic Armenia visiting sites marked by the footsteps of our greatest church fathers, as well as the birthplaces of his ancestors.

Pilgrimages to Historic Armenia

He spoke lovingly of his remarkable pilgrimages to Western Armenia, “the land of our forefathers, from beautiful Cilicia to the birthplaces of our mother and father and the holy sites of our history, tradition, and church. From the Monastery of Nareg to the Plain of Moush, from the Monastery of Aghtamar to the Mountain of Varak, from Dikranagerd's St. Giragos Church to Jebel Mousa, from the bloody Euphrates to the thousand and one churches of Ani. How blessed we are that God gave us life and strength to visit these places and be born again as an Armenian. Glory to God that we were born Armenian and will die Armenian!”

He was an honorary member of the National Academy of Armenia, a member of the Writers Union of



Srpazan tenderly touches a kbatchkar on the island of Akhtamar.

Armenia, and a founding member of the Land and Culture Organization, USA, as well as a director of Land and Culture International and the Foundation for the Safeguard of Armenian Historical Monuments.

Throughout his service he approached his duties with love and an enthusiasm that earned the love and



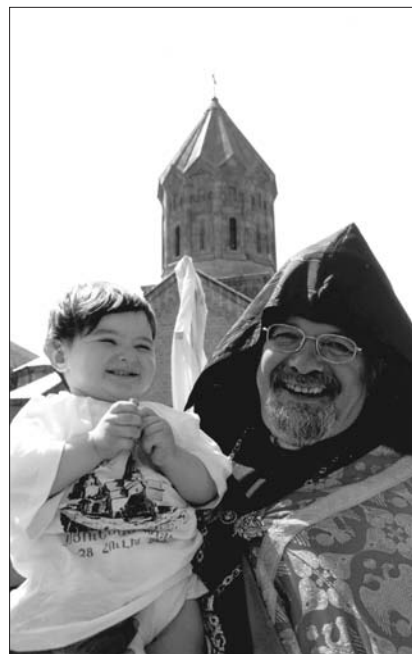
The establishment of the Terchoonian Home for children was one of the final acts of charity by Srpazan in Armenia.

respect of those around him. Young people especially related to him. At the time of his departure to Armenia he received a host of messages from children and young adults lamenting his departure from the United States.

One young girl sent Srpazan a drawing of a church. Standing outside the church is her artistic interpretation of Srpazan and herself next to a large tree. Above this scene she wrote, “I am going to miss you so much. I do not want you to leave America.”

Another youngster wrote, “I really miss you. I don’t want you to leave America and go to Armenia. To remember me I am sending you a necklace of the Statue of Liberty. I really love you. I wish I could go with you to Armenia.”

A long letter written by a young adult captured the essence of all of the messages: “This news truly up-



Mesrob Srpazan with a newly baptized child in Armenia.

sets me and my family because you are very dear and special for us. My parents have always spoken highly of your person and highly respect you.

Although we may not see you as often as we would like, always remember that you will always have a special place in our hearts and minds. As both my parents say, *Srpazan Hayreen Nemannuh cheegab* [there is no one like Srpazan]. Always remember that no matter where you are you will always be our Prelate, spiritual leader, and a dear friend in our daily prayers. We will never forget you.”

These loving tributes were offered as a token of love for a man of great vision, a true servant of God, a kind and unwavering shepherd. We thank God for giving us Srpazan, the right man at the right hour.

Archbishop Mesrob’s constant companion was his prayer book, *The Narek*. “Some days I read the prayers for those in agony. Some days I read the prayers for a ‘good death,’ and still other days I read the prayers for healing, for penitence, for grace and forgiveness. Narek,” he said, “has been the most honest interpreter of my life.” Srpazan would often recite this verse from the Narek:

“But you are my refuge. You are salvation. You are the visitation. You are expiation. You are happiness. Salvation comes from you. Mercy is yours, almighty, living, ineffable Lord Jesus Christ, benevolent God. Bless, bless, and again bless, your holy essence and glory, forever and ever. Amen.” ❖

Iris Papażian and her late husband, Pierre, were close friends of Mesrob Srpazan. This article is a condensed version of a longer, more comprehensive biography that will appear later this year in a book.

The Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian Publications Fund

In accordance with the expressed wishes of His Eminence Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, the “Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian Publications Fund” has been established at the Eastern Prelacy in his memory and in honor of his life-long devotion to the written word.



Archbishop Oshagan, Prelate, and Richard Sarajian, Esq., chairman of the Executive Council, accept a check from Mr. Edward Abkarian.

Sixteen years ago, in the summer of 1988, Archbishop Mesrob launched a Prelacy campaign he called, “Insure the Future.” The object of the campaign was to “establish a solid and lasting source of income to meet the Prelacy’s obligations to God, nation, and community.” He demonstrated his firm support of the campaign by being the first person to underwrite a \$100,000.00 life insurance policy, designating the Prelacy as the owner and beneficiary. When he left office in 1998, he instructed the new Prelate, Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, that in the event of his death the money from the life insurance policy should be used to start the “Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian Publications Fund.” At the time Mesrob Srpazan also expressed these wishes in conversations with Richard Sarajian, the current chairman of the Executive Council and specifically confirmed his wish that the Prelacy create this publications fund in his Last Will and Testament.

The “Insure the Future” program was developed by the Prelacy in consultation with Mr. Edward Abkarian of the Equitable. At the time Archbishop Mesrob said of the program, “It is the first in an effort by the Prelacy to use modern fundraising techniques to alleviate the chronic shortage of money and insufficient funding that

frustrates most attempts to plan for the future.”

Early in April Mr. Abkarian came to the Prelacy offices and presented Archbishop Oshagan with a check. Oshagan Srpazan accepted the check in the name of the publications fund saying, “From the earliest days of our friendship, Mesrob Srpazan’s passion for books was evident. His love of the written word became stronger and stronger with each passing year. When he told me that he wanted the proceeds of this insurance policy to be the beginning of a publications fund in his name I was not at all surprised. However, I truly did not expect to see it come to fruition for many, many more years. In fact, I thought, not until long after my tenure as Prelate of the Prelacy was over. But, as we learn time and again, none of us knows God’s plan. I accept this check with mixed emotions. I am happy that we are able to start this fund with a substantial sum of money. On the other hand, I



In a photo taken in 1988, Archbishop Mesrob signs the life insurance policy benefiting the Prelacy as Edward Abkarian looks on.

would give anything to have Mesrob Srpazan with us still, rushing here and there, working day and night, to complete yet another book. God bless his memory. With this Fund he and the extraordinary and visionary service he gave this community will never be forgotten.”

Together with the in-lieu-of-flowers donations received to date, the Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian Publications Fund is now worth \$125,175.00.

Donations to the fund can be made at any time payable to the Armenian Apostolic Church of America and sent to 138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016. ❖

ՎԵՐՁԻՆ ՀԵՌԱԽՕՍԱԶԱՆԳԸ ՄԵՍՐՈՊ ԱՐՔ. ԱՇՃԵԱՆԻ ՅԻՇԱՏԱԿԻՆ

Հեռախօսի զանգէն խոր քունէս արթնցայ եւ հագիւ կրցայ մոռթին մէջ փայլող բջիջայինին ձեռքս երկարել: Ակնոցս մօտ տեղ մը չէի դրած: Զկրցայ թիւր կարդալ եւ խուպոտ ձայնով երեք անգամ «այօ, այօ, այօ» ըսի:

Պատասխան չկար: Միայն աղմուկ, իրարանցում եւ ժխոր: Կրկին «այօ, այօ» ըսի: Դարձեալ անպատասխան մնացի: Բայց նոյն աղմուկը շարունակուեցաւ: Յետոյ՝ գիծը անջատուեցաւ: Մտածեցի, որ ինչպէս շատ պատահած է, սխալ թիւ եւ հաւաքած եւ կամ Լոս Անճելըսէն կամ Մոսկուայէն բարեկամներ հաւաքոյթի կամ խրախճանքի պահուն, փորձած են իրենց հարազատներուն եւ մտիրիմներուն հետ կապ հաստատել եւ գիշերուան ուշ ժամուն ուրիշ մէկը արթնցուցած ըլլալով, չեն համարձակած ձայն հանել եւ գիծը անջատելը՝ նախընտրած են: Փորձեցի տակաւին չփախցուցած քունս վերագտնել եւ գիշերուան հանգիստս ապահովել: Ժամացոյցիս նայեցայ: Քնաթաթախ աչքերով չկրցայ ճիշդ ժամը որոշել: Չորսն անց կէս, հինգի միջեւ բան մը նկատեցի: Ուրեմն ժամանակ կար քնանալու: Առաւօտեան ժամը իննին, հեռախօսը դարձեալ հնչեց: Մայր Աթոռի ներքին ցանցին զանգն էր: Սովորաբար միջեկեղեցական Վարկային Հիմնադրամի մեր գրասենեակին հետ կապուելու եւ անհրաժեշտ կարգադրութիւնները ընելու պահն էր: Զարմացայ, երբ լսեցի Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսի ձայնը: Նոյնը չէր: Սովորաբար առաւօտները կը խօսէր աշխոյժ, յստակ եւ քաջալերութիւն ու վստահութիւն փոխանցող թոնով: Այս անգամ ձայնին մէջ զսպուածութիւն, յուզում եւ վարանում գգացի:

- Աստուած օգնական, Սրբազան...

Սովորական «բարի լոյս, ի՞նչպէս ես այսօր»ը չլրսեցի:

- Աստուած օգնական, Վեհափառ...: Ես ալ, չհասկցայ, թէ ի՞նչպէս բերնէս դուրս եկան «խեր ըլլայ, Վեհափառ» բառերը:

-... Երանի խեր ըլլար, Սրբազան... Կը ցաւիմ, որ այս առաւօտ բարի լուր չունիմ քեզի տալու:

- Ի՞նչ պատահած է, Վեհափառ:

- Դժբախտութիւն մը պատահած է, գոր առաջին հերթին կ'ուզեմ քեզի հետ կիսել:

- Ի՞նչ դժբախտութիւն, Վեհափառ,- հարցուցի այլայլած:

- Մերոպ Սրբազանը... սրտի տագնապ մը անցուցած է...

- Յետո՞յ, յետո՞յ... Վեհափառ:

- Յետոյ... կեանքը քեզի...

Լախտի հարուածի պէս գոյժը իջաւ սրտիս եւ հոգիիս...

- Զեր մօտ կրնամ գալ, Վեհափառ,- խնդրեցի խեղդուկ ձայնով եւ չկարենալով այլեւս ինքզինքս զսպել:

- ... Հիմա... անշուշտ...



Մերոպ Սրբազան Տաթև Սրբազանին հետ հիւանդի մը այցելութեան պահուն

Դէպի վեհարան ճամբուս վրայ մտայ Մայր Տաճար եւ իջման սեղանին առջեւ ծնրադիր «հոգևոց հանգուցելոյ» աղօթքը ըրի, ճիշդ այնպէս, ինչպէս Մերոպ Սրբազանին հետ միասին, նոյն աղօթքը ըրած էինք երջանկայիշատակ Գարեգին Ա. Վեհափառին՝ հոգին աւանդելէն ետք: Յետոյ բարձրացայ Վեհին մօտ: Դրան առջեւ արդէն կը սպասէր: Զերմօրէն գրկեց զիս եւ հագիւ կրցաւ ըսել.

- Ափսոս, ափսոս... հազա՛ր ափսոս:

Միայն «Մոկաց միրգէն» կը պակսէր...

Փորձեցի մանրամասնութիւններ քաղել անակալ եւ ցնցիչ մահուան պարագաներուն մասին, որպէսզի մխիթարութեան դոյզն շարժառիթ մը ունենամ. տեսայ, որ անօգուտ է: Վեհափառն ալ ցնցուած էր: Որով հրաժեշտ առի փորձելով աջը համբուրել: Զթողուց:

Ընկերացաւ մինչեւ գրասենեակի դուռը, ձեռքը դրաւ ուսիս եւ ըսաւ:

- Քաջ եղիր:

Հագիւ արցունքներս զսպած՝ մտայ սենեակ, փուլ եկայ անկողնիս վրայ եւ լացի դառնապէս:

Չեմ գիտեր, թէ ինչն էր, որ զիս մղեց յանկարծ վեր կենալ եւ փնտռել բՆԻՍԿԱՅԻՆ Հեռախօսը: Բացի ստացուած զանգերուն բաժինը: Աչքերս բաց մնացին: Ստացուած վերջին զանգը Մեսրոպ սրբազանի Ամերիկայի բՆԻՍԿԱՅԻՆ Հեռախօսի թիւն էր...

- Ա՛յ Սրբազան... վա՛յ Սրբազան: Ուրեմն դուն հեռաձայնեցիր, բայց... չկրցար խօսիլ եւ տապալեցար:

Հեռախօսը իր սիրած գործիքն էր: Չէր կրնար անկէ բաժնուել հինգէն տասը րոպէ՝ անգամ մը, եթէ հեռախօսագանգը չստանար, ինք կը զանգէր: Անոնցմէ քանի մը հատը օրուան մէջ ես կը ստանայի, մանաւանդ երբ անհանգիստ զգար:

- Սրտիս վրայ ծանրութիւն կը զգամ: Ի՞նչ ընեմ:

- Ստամոքսս խանգարուած է, ի՞նչ դեղ առնեմ:

- Ուսերս եւ գլուխս շատ կը ցաւին: Ի՞նչպէս կըրնաս օգնել:

- Շատ յոգնած կը զգամ: Ուքերուս վրայ ո՞՞՞ չըկայ: Ի՞նչ դեղ առնեմ:

Պաշտօնապէս զիս կը ներկայացնէր իբրեւ իր անձնական բժիշկը: Այդ ալ անշուշտ իր պատմութիւնը ունի, զոր օր մը կը պատմեմ իմ յուշերուս մէջ: Բայց վայ որ իրեն հարց տայի, թէ ինչո՞ւ մասնագէտ բժիշկներու մօտ չ'երթար: Պատասխանը նոյնն էր:

- Սրբազան, հաւատա՛, որ կ'երթամ: Բայց անոնք զիս լաւ չեն ճանչնար, չեն գիտեր իմ ինչ ըլլալս: Ինչ դեղ որ տան չ'օգներ: Դուն զիս ողն ու ծուծովս կը ճանչնաս: Քու տուած դեղերդ գոնէ որոշ ժամանակ մը զիս կը հանգստացնեն:

Ուրեմն «հիւանդս» կրկին անհանգստացած էր: Այս անգամ, սակայն, ծանրօրէն: Յաջողած էր զանգել: Բայց չէր կրցած... խօսիլ:

Դժուար էր եւ մինչեւ վերջ ինծի համար դժուար պիտի ըլլայ այդ պահը երեւակայել, ընկալել կամ պատկերացնել: Վերջին անխօս հեռախօսագանգը... ամենամտերիմ եւ ամենահարագատ հոգեւոր եղբորմէս:

Սիրելի՛ Մեսրոպ Սրբազան,

Կը յիշե՞ս, երբ այս տարի միասին աղօթեցինք եւ մասնակցեցանք Աւագ Հինգշաբթի օրուան «Խաւարման գիշեր»ի հսկումի արարողութեանց, դուն, իբրեւ մեր եկեղեցւոյ ծիսական ականդրութեանց ականդապահ պաշտպան, շատ չբարկացար եւ չնեղուեցար: Ընդհակառակը, գոհութեամբ նկատեցիր, որ Հայաստանի մէջ շատ տարածուած խաւարման պա-

հուն ասեղներով զիրար ծակծկելու կամ կողք կողքի կանգնած հաւատացեալներու վերարկուները իրարու կարելու սովորութիւնը՝ որ եթէ սկզբնապէս մեր Տիրոջ փշէ պսակին զգացումը փոխանցելու եւ մահուան մէջ անգամ Տիրոջմէ անբաժան մնալու քրիստոնէական մեր հաւատքին գիտակցութիւնը տալու մտադրութիւն կար եւ ներկայ օրերուն վերածուած էր երիտասարդական չարաճճիութեանց եւ զուարճութեան պահերու, այդ օր, ընդհանրապէս, չկրկնուեցաւ Մայր Տաճարին մէջ: Ընդհակառակը, արարողութեան աւարտին վկայեցինք, թէ որքա՛ն հարուստ եւ խորապէս ազդեցիկ կը դառնան անոնք, երբ կը կատարուին կարգաւոր եւ վարժ դպրաց դասերու մեկնաբանութեամբ, այնպէս ինչպէս կատարեցին Հոգեւոր Ճեմարանի սաները նոյն գիշեր: Նոյն տպաւորութեան եւ ներշնչման տակ, մենք բաժակ մը թէյի շուրջ որքան երկա՛ր խօսեցանք աւետարանական ընթերցումներու մասին, որոնք մեզի կը նկարագրէին մեր Տիրոջ տաղանակը, կանգնած մեն միանակ մահուան դիմաց՝ լքուած նոյնիսկ իր ամենասիրելի աշակերտներէն: Երկար վերլուծումէ ետք նկատեցինք, որ հապէս եւ խորապէս մարդիկ միմեկ են մահուան դիմաց: Ահաւոր մղձաւանջ է ան, աստուածային յաւիտենական արժէքներու եւ հոգեւոր շնորհներու բացակայութեան: Իւրաքանչիւրս մեր հովուական փորձառութենէն օրինակներ բերինք, թէ վերջին հաղորդութիւնը ծանր հիւանդներու կամ մահամերձներու շնորհելու պահուն, մենք ի՞նչպէս նկատած էինք անոնց դէմքերէն կաթող մահուան ահաւոր թոյնը, մասնաւորաբար անհատներու անհաւատութեան եւ բարոյական անանկութեան պարագային: Յետոյ սակայն տեսած էինք նոյն այդ դէմքերուն վրայ խաղաղութեան եւ յաւիտենական հանգիստի այն պարզելը, զոր Աստուած խոստացած էր ի Քրիստոս ննջեցեալներուն: Ի վերջոյ եզրակացուցինք, թէ ամենայուսահատեցուցիչ, ամենաահեղ եւ ամենակործան այդ պահուն, Աստուած իրմով լեցուած հոգիներուն անպայման, որ կու տայ տեսիլք մը, պայծառ եւ յստակ շողքը իր իսկութեան եւ լինելութեան, որ ամէն տեսակ ցաւի, տաղանակի, յուսահատութեան եւ կորստեան միակ դարմանն է: Այլապէս՝ ըսինք, ի՞նչպէս բացատրել քրիստոնէութեան առաջին նահատակին՝ Ս. Ստեփանոսի խօսքերը, որ զինք քարկոծողներու քարերուն տարափին տակ կը բացազանչէր... «Ահա կը տեսնեմ երկինքը բացուած...»: Ի՞նչպէս կրնայինք բացատրել Իզնատիոս Աստուածագրեաց հայրապետի այն խօսքերը, որ երբ կրկէսին մէջ զագաններուն առջեւ նետուած պահուն զինք ազատել փորձողներուն կը սաստէր ըսելով-

«Աստուծոյ ցորենն էմ: Պէտք է որ գազանները իրենց ժանիքներով զիս աղան, որպէսզի սուրբ Հաց ըլլամ ժողովուրդին համար»: Ի՞նչպէս այլ կերպ կրնայինք բացատրել իրենց կեանքը իբրեւ Հաց եւ մատաղ մեր ժողովուրդին բաշխած անձնուրացութիւնն ու սրբաբանները մեր նահատակներուն եւ հերոսներուն, որոնք հետեւելով Վարդանանց սխրանքին, միշտ դաւանեցան որ՝ «մահ իմացեալ անմահութիւն է»:

Անոնք Աստուածայինով լուսաւորուած՝ մեր եկեղեցոյ, մեր ժողովուրդին եւ մեր հայրենիքի մէջ արդեօք ի՞նչ տեսան այնքան յստակ ու պայծառ, որուն համար արժէր կեանքն իսկ նուիրել:



Զախէն աջ՝ Սուրեն Արք. Գաթարոյեան, Տաթև Արք. Սարգիսեան եւ Մեսրոպ Արք. Աշնեան Շաբէ ջրվեժին արջել:

Հիմա, սիրելի Մեսրոպ Արքեպիսկոպոս, ներէ որ վերջին անգամ ըլլալով քեզի հրապարակաւ հարցնեմ: Վերջին րոպէին դուն ի՞նչ տեսար, քու հոգևոյ մաքրութեան, բարութեան եւ ազնուութեան մէջ նոր ի՞նչ բան յայտնուեցաւ, որ հեռախօսը ձեռքդ առիր եւ ուղեցիր քու սովորութեանդ համաձայն զիս այ բաժնեկից դարձնել անոր:

Այլեւս երկար մի՛ չարչարուիր եւ մի՛ տագնապիր: Քեզի հանգիստ պէտք է: Դուն խաղաղութեան պէտք ունիս: Աստուծոյ, մեր եկեղեցոյ եւ մեր հայրենիքին ազնիւ, հաւատարիմ, բարի եւ անդուլ մը շակ, հանգիստ քու յոգնատանջ ոսկորներուդ եւ խաղաղութիւն՝ Աստուծոյ շնորհներով օժտուած քու անբիծ հոգիդ: Մի՛ մտածեր մեր մասին շատ, ես գիտեմ, որ Աստուած ինքզինք իւրաքանչիւրիս կու տայ ըստ մեր չափի եւ հասակի, ինչ մեղքս պահեմ: Վերջին հեռախօսագանգդ միշտ ականջիս մէջ է եւ կը հնչէ: Պահեր կան, երբ կը մտածեմ, որ պիտի ուղեցիր ինձի յանձնարարել, որ այդ դժուարին օրերուն մօտ

ըլլամ քու հարագատ եղբօրդ եւ քրոջդ՝ որուն գաւակներէն մէկուն՝ քու աւագանի անունդ կրող Հրայրին կնքահայր ըլլալուն մխիթարութիւնը տրւիր ինձի: Այդ պարտականութիւնը տուած եմ եղբօրս Վահէին եւ իր տիկնոջ Նորային, որոնք ամբողջ ընտանիքով Նիւ Եորք չեն հիմա, քու վերջին օժումիդ ներկայ գտնուելու:

Երբեմն ինձի կը թուի, թէ դուն ինձի պիտի թելադրէիր, որ այլեւս աւելի ուշադիր ըլլամ ետիդ թողուած այն ծնողագուրկ երեխաներուն կամ մեծահասակ այն որբերուն, զորս պսակելով եւ տուն տեղ տալով անոնց նոր կեանքի կոչեցիր: Յաճախ կը մտածեմ, թէ ո՞ր կէս թողած գիրքդ պիտի ուղեցիր, որ ամբողջանար. կամ Ակադեմիայի մատենադարանի, կրթական, մշակոյթի եւ ընկերային ապահովութեան նախարարութեանց հետ սկսած ո՞ր ձեռնարկները պիտի փափաքէիր, որ իրենց աւարտին հասնին քեզի մտերիմ այնքան ակադեմական եւ գիտական գործակիցներովդ: Այս Նոր Տարուան եւ Ս. Ծննդեան տօներուն, գիտեմ բանտերու, որբանոցներու, ծերանոցներու եւ խրճիթներու մէջ խմբուած քանի հարիւրաւոր եւ հազարաւոր կիներ, այրեր, երիտասարդներ, երեխաներ եւ կարօտեալներ պիտի սպասեն քու օրհնարեր այցելութիւններուդ: Հաւատա՛ Սրբագան, բոլորը ոտքի են կանգնած եւ ամբողջ սրտով կը փափաքին, որ քու աճիւններդ Հայաստանի ճամբով տարուին Անթիլիաս, որպէսզի իրենք ալ կարենային իրենց արժանի յարգանքը մատուցել այն Մեսրոպ արք. Աշնեանին, զոր ճանչցան իբրեւ խնամատար հայր, մեծ հրապարակախօս եւ հրապարակագիր, գիտնական, պատմագէտ, մտաւորական, օրինակելի հոգեւորական, մեծ հայրենասէր, յաւիտենութեան մշտնջենական ուխտաւոր:

Այս երեկոյ անդրադարձայ, որ քու կազմակերպած իւրաքանչիւր ուխտաւորական ճամբորդութենէդ վերադարձին, քեզի հետ կը բերէիր մեր աւերուած պատմական Հայաստանի վանքերէն, քաղաքներէն սրբավայրերէն եւ հերոսամարտերու հանդիսավայրերէն մէկական բուռ հող: Որովհետեւ կը հաւատայիր, որ հայոց սուրբ հողը ունի մոգական գաղտնիք հոգեւորն ու ազգայինը իրար շաղախելով կերտելու յաւիտենական արժէքներ:

Փացի եւ փնտռեցի գանոնք: Բարեբախտաբար գտայ: Եւ հիմա փոքրիկ ճամբորդական ձեռքի պայուսակը, որ ինձի հետ Անթիլիաս պիտի գայ, ունի հիմնական մէկ բովանդակութիւն. մասունքներ այն սրբավայրերէն եւ պատմական Հայաստանի քաղաքներէն, ուր քեզ առաջնորդեցին Ս. Գրիգոր Լուսաւորիչը, Ս. Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցը (որուն անունը կրողնե-

րուն արժանաւորագոյններէն եղար), Ս. Գրիգոր Նարեկացին, մեր մեծանուն Փետայիներն ու անանուն մեծ հերոսները: Առանց այդ սուրբ հողերու բուռերը գրկելու զուն չես խաղաղիր:

Մշոյ Սուլթան Ս. Կարապետ, Մշոյ Կարմիր վանք, էրզրում, Իգդիր, Վարազայ վանք, Բագաւանի Ս. Յովհաննէս եկեղեցի, Մշոյ Առաքելոց վանք, Սոխորտ, Աղթամար, Արածանի գետի այն ափը, ուր ըստ քու պրպտումներուդ, Վառաձայուհի արքան դիմաւորեց Ս. Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցը, երբ ան «նմանեալ Մովսէսի» նոր այբուբենը կը բերէր հայոց աշխարհ, Վան, Անի:

Մուղնու Ս. Գէորգ վանք, գոր զուն վերակառուցեցիր անձամբ, 1700ամեակի առիթով:

Մէկ ժամէն Մայր Աթոռէն ճամբայ կ'ելլեմ դէպի Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսութեան տուն, դէպի Անթիլիաս, մասնակցելու քու թաղման արարողութեանց: Տակաւին չեմ ուզեր հաւատալ: Գոնէ չեմ կրնար ընդունիլ: Բայց այս է իմ ճիտիս եւ հոգիիս պարտքը:

Սիրտս այսքան մտերմօրէն, հարագատօրէն եւ անկեղծօրէն քեզի բանայէ ետք, ակամայ աչքս կ'երթայ ձեռքի ժամացոյցիս:

Ժամը 4:47 A.M. ցոյց կու տայ:

Վերջին հեռախօսագանգիդ պահն է մօտաւորապէս: Բայց հիմա իմ ողջ էութեամբս գիտեմ, որ եթէ առիթը ունենայիր խօսելու՝ պիտի ըսէիր.

- Իբրեւ ծառայ Աստուծոյ, ինչ ծառայութիւն որ կրցայ մատուցել, թող Տէրը ընդունելի համարէ, հալալ ընէ մեր եկեղեցւոյ, մեր ժողովուրդին եւ մեր հայրենիքին:

Խորապէս կը հաւատամ, որ այս է իւրաքանչիւր իրաւ, վաւերական, իմաստուն, ազնիւ եւ բարի հոգեւորականի վերջին անխօս հեռախօսագանգի պատգամը: ✕

ՏԱԹԵՒ ԱՐՔ. ՍԱՐԳԻՍԵԱՆ
Ս. էջմիածին, Դեկտեմբեր 2003

ԿԻՍԱՏ ՄՆԱՑԱԾ ՀԱՄԱՆՈՒԱԳԻ ՄԸ ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ*

Հանդարտած կեանքի մը համանուագին վերջին բաժինն է, որ կը լսենք: Ու տարօրինակ, փոխանակ ուրախ եւ յաղթական աւարտի մը, տխուր է այս մէկունը, որովհետեւ բնական եւ սովորական համանուագ մը չէ այս:

Տխուր ենք բոլորս:

Տխուր ենք, որովհետեւ կեանքը լաւապէս ու ամբողջականօրէն ըմբռնող մեծութիւն մը, այսօր բոլորիս սրտերը կը ցաւեցնէ, իր անդառնալի կորուստով:

Տխուր ենք, որովհետեւ Աստուծոյ շնորհքով գարդարուած եւ գերազանցապէս գեղեցկացած մեծութիւն մը կը բաժնուի մեզմէ՝ ցաւ ու միաժամանակ քաղցր յիշատակ մը ձգելով բոլոր անոնց մէջ, որոնք տեսան, ապրեցան ու շնչեցին իր հետ:

Տխուր ենք, որովհետեւ Աստուծոյ սիրով վահանաւորուած՝ ծառայ մը, կ'երթայ իր յաւիտենական հանգիստն ու խաղաղութիւնը գտնելու բոլոր անոնց քով, որոնք իրեն համար եղան պայծառ տեսիլքի եւ յաղթանակի խորհրդանիշ ու առաջնորդ:

Տխուր ենք, որովհետեւ Ս. Գրիգոր Լուսաւորչի հաւատքով պայծառացած, Մեծն Ներսէսի եռանդով աշխուժացած, Ս. Մեսրոպի կամքով հզօրացած, Վարդանանց ազատատենչութեան պայքարով արիացած ՀՍԿԱՅ մը կը բաժնուի մեզմէ՝ մարմնով, միանալու յիշուածներու փաղանգին եւ ի վերուստ հսկելու մեր բոլոր բարի աշխատանքներուն ու ազնիւ խորհուրդներուն:

Տխուր ենք, որովհետեւ հանգուցեալ Մեսրոպ Սրբազանի կեանքին համանուագը վերջ գտաւ առանց իր աւարտին հասնելու:

Տխուր ենք, որովհետեւ երկար տարիներ մահուան շուքին մէջ քայլելով հանդերձ չարէն չվախցող մըն էր Մեսրոպ Սրբազան, որովհետեւ հաւատացած էր, թէ Աստուծոյ ցուպն ու զաւազանը իր հետ են եւ ինք անոնցմով պիտի մխիթարուի, բայց ահա կը կտորէր Մեսրոպ Սրբազանի գաւազանը ու ինք կ'իյնար՝ սրտէն վիրաւոր:

Մանուկ տարիքէն Աստուծոյ շնորհքով մեծցած փոքրիկ Հրայրը, աճեցաւ ազգային արժանապատուութեամբ: Որպէս Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսութեան արժանաւոր միաբան եւ Ս. Մեսրոպի անունը կրող վեղարաւոր, ինքզինք դրսեւորեց իր

* Այս գրութիւնը խտացումն է այն քարտիկն, որ Գերպ. Տ. Մեղրիկ Ծ. Վարդապետ Բարիբեան խօսած է Մեսրոպ Արքեպիսկոպոս Աշնեանի յիշատակի պատարագին:

նուիրեալ աշխատանքով: Վայելեց ու ըմբռնելնեց հայրական սէրն ու գուրգուրանքը Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ տառապեալ Զարեհ Սքանչելի Կաթողիկոսին ու Խորէն Շինարար Հայրապետին:

Մեծցաւ Աստուծոյ շնորհքով, որպէսզի օր մըն ալ դառնար գործակիցն ու յօակիցը Կիլիկիոյ դարաւոր Աթոռին գահակալներէն Գարեգին Բ. Երջանկայիշատակ Վեհափառին:

Ամէն գործ, իրեն համար սրբութեան աստիճանի նուիրականութիւն ունեցաւ: Փոքր կամ մեծ գործեր չկային իրեն համար: Աշխատեցաւ, ուրախացաւ եւ ուրախացուց բոլոր անոնց սրտերը, որոնք աշխատանքով կը պայծառանային: Ապրեցաւ որպէս հաւատացեալ հոգեւորական եւ ազգային գործիչ միաժամանակ: Իր հոգիին մէջ ցուլեց ամէն ինչ որ հայութեան հաւատքին, համոզումներուն եւ ազգային արժանապատուութեան հետ առնչութիւն ունէր: Անոր համար ալ Մեսրոպ Սրբազան որպէս հոգեւորական եւ կատարեալ հայ իր մէջ խտացուց ուսանելի սկզբունքներ:-

1.- Մեսրոպ Սրբազան եղաւ հարազատ եւ իսկական ՄԱՐԴ: Աստուծոյ պատկերը կրող մարդու նկարագիրն է որ ներկայացուց եւ ապրեցաւ իր կեանքի բոլոր օրերուն: Ապրեցաւ, շնչեց, տառապեցաւ, զրկուեցաւ, ոչ միայն մտքով ու զգացումներով, այլ սրտով: Անոր փափուկ եւ մանկունակ սիրտն էր, որ սիրեց, տառապեցաւ. անոր համար ալ սրտի մարդ եղաւ իր կեանքի բոլոր օրերուն: Հայոց պատմութիւնը, մարդոց ցաւը, իր զգացումները միայն խօսքով չապրեցաւ, այլ սիրտն էր որ կ'ապրէր իր մէջ, իր երակներն էին, որոնք գայն կը մեծցնէին որպէս մարդ եւ վաւերական մարդ: Չբաւականացաւ կեանքը նուիրելով իր ընկերներուն, այլ գանոնք բարձրացուց միշտ դէպի վեր: Անոր համար ալ կեանքը ըմբռնեց որպէս մարտահրաւէր՝ ճշմարիտին հասնելու ու այդ ճշմարտութեան փնտռութիւն մէջ յիշեց Քրիստոսի խօսքը որ կ'ըսէր. «Ես եմ յարուցիւնը եւ կեանքը: Ան որ ինծի կը հաւատայ, թէպէտեւ մեռնի՝ պիտի ապրի: Իսկ անոր որ ողջ է եւ ինծի կը հաւատայ՝ երբեք պիտի չմեռնի» (ՅՏ 11.25-26):

2.- Մեսրոպ Սրբազան եղաւ աննկարագրելիօրէն աշխատունակ: Աստուած եթէ տասը մնաս տուաւ իրեն, ինք տասը վերածեց քսանի ու որպէս տնտես ինքզինք արդարացուց, որովհետեւ աղօթքը կեանքի վերածեց ու ապրեցաւ միայն ու միայն աշխատելու համար: Ծառայութիւնը իրեն համար սրբութեան հասնելու ճանապարհ եղաւ: Ծառայեց հայ եկեղեցիին ու հայ ժողովուրդին, հաւատարմով որ ծառայու-

թեամբ ինքզինք պիտի ըլլայ յաւիտենական կեանքի մէջ: Անոր համար ալ առիթով մը պիտի ըսէր. «Կեանքը, ինք, իրական, ահաւոր պայքար մըն է, որմէ յաղթական դուրս կրնայ գալ ա'ն միայն, որ պատրաստուած է նոյն այդ պայքարին համար: Եւ ասոր համար անհրաժեշտ են ճիգն ու աշխատանքը, ինքնիշխան կամքը եւ հոգեւոր ապրումները: Պէտք է կրթել հոգին որպէսզի կարենայ դիմագրաւել կեանքի երկար վազքին առթած յոգնութիւնները, ցաւերն ու տառապանքները:

Քանինե՛ր չեն գիտեր, չեն ալ փնտռած իրենց կեանքի նպատակը եւ կը թափառին, փոխանակ հաւատքով շարունակ նոյն նպատակին ուղղուելու: Մենք, եթէ ուզենք իսկ, չենք կրնար մեր նմաններուն օգնել, եթէ մենք չենք ճանչնար մեր ոյժերը, հնարաւորութիւնները, եթէ երբեք չենք նուիրուած ուսման, խորհրդածութեան, աղօթքի, քրիստոնէական եղբայրական կեանքի ու ծառայութեան»:

3.- Մեսրոպ Սրբազան եղաւ հաւատաւոր այն հայը, որուն համար Հայութիւն կոչուած ճշմարտութիւնն ու իրականութիւնը միայն խօսք ու գաղափարապաշտութիւն չեղան, այլ կեանք: Վերջին տարիներուն, հանգուցեալ Սրբազանը Ն.Ս.Օ.Տ.Տ. Արամ Ա. Վեհափառ Հայրապետին տնօրինութեամբ եւ օրհնութեամբ, ոչ միայն Հայաստանն ու Հայութիւնը ապրեցուց եւ իր սրտին մէջ, այլ ինք ապրեցաւ Հայաստանի սրտին մէջ, որպէս անոր գեղեցկագոյն գաւակը: Տուաւ ինչ որ կրնար տալ: Տուաւ այն ինչ որ մարդիկ ու բազմութիւններ չկրցան տալ: Տուաւ սրտով, հոգիով, զգացումով, նուիրումով, աշխատանքով:

Հայաստանը ապրում էր իրեն համար, Արցախը գոյութեան գրաւական, Նախիջեւանը պայքարի տեսիլք:

Սովորական մահուան մը տրտմութիւնն ու վիշտը չունինք այսօր, որովհետեւ Մեսրոպ Սրբազան տակաւին շատ գործեր ունէր կատարելիք, որոնք միայն ինք կրնար գործադրել իր զգլխիչ աշխատունակութեամբ եւ մանաւանդ սիրովը:

Իմաստութիւնը կ'ըսէ. «Մեռելները կը մեռնին, երբ իրենց երազը կը մեռնի»:

Մեսրոպ Սրբազան երազներ ունէր: Թէ ո՛վ պիտի իրականացնէ այդ երազները, միայն Աստուած գիտէ: Բայց, այսօր երազներու այդ ճանապարհը սուգի մէջ է:

Ո՞վ սակէ ետք, հայ ծերունի մօր մը դէմքին ժը-

պիտ պիտի բերէ Հայաստան աշխարհին մէջ:

Ո՞վ մեր ժողովուրդի որբացած երեխաներուն աչքերուն արցունքը պիտի սրբէ:

Ո՞վ անտէրին ու անտիրականին տուն պիտի տայ, որպէսզի պաշտպանուի ցուրտէն ու ձմեռէն:

Ո՞վ պիտի պրպտէ այնպիսի թաքուն ճամարտութիւններ, որոնք այնքան ալ հաճելի կրնան չլսուիլ այլոց համար:

Ո՞վ պիտի շինէ ու ծաղկեցնէ... Մէկ անձի գործ չէր Մեսրոպ Սրբազանին գործը: Շնորհքներով զարդարուած գեղեցիկ պատմութիւն մըն էր եւ հոգեթով համանուագ մը, որուն ընթացքը կանգ կ'առնէ:

Արդարեւ, «Մահը կլանուեցաւ. յաղթանակը շահուեցաւ: Ո՞ւր է, մա՛հ, յաղթանակդ. ո՞ւր է, մա՛հ, քու խայթոցդ» (Ա. Կր. 15.54-55):

Արեւի նման իր գերագոյնը ընծայեց իր եկեղեցիին, ազգին ու հայրենիքին:

Աբրահամի նման, վստահութեամբ լեցուեցաւ եւ ուրախութեամբ նայեցաւ բոլոր անոնց, որոնք կեանք կը պարզեւէին մեր ժողովուրդի հողանիւթ շինուածքին:

Մովսէսի նման, քաջ հովիւի ցուպը առաւ ձեռքին ու քայեց առջեւէն բոլոր այն սկզբունքներուն, որոնց ինք հաւատաց:

Ապրեցաւ հայու ցաւերով,

Բարի բոյներ հաստատեց բոլոր թեւահատ թռչուններուն համար,

Շնչեց ազատ Հայաստանի քաղցր եւ անոյշ բոլորը, Վայելեց ոտքի կանգնող Հայաստանը ու վայելցուց,...

Բայց չտեսաւ Կարինը ազատագրուած ու մայրաքաղաքը Հայաստանի...

Մեսրոպ Սրբազանին կեանքի համանուագը ընդհատուեցաւ...

Տեսաւ, չնչեց ապրեցաւ Քրիստոսով ու հայութեամբ:

Ծառայեց աննկարագրելի սիրով,

Լսեց, ինչ որ խօսուեցաւ Արարատի բարձունքէն ե՛ւ Արտաւազդէն, ե՛ւ Ակոռիէն, ե՛ւ Փրկութեան տապանէն,

Տեսաւ ու հրճուեցաւ Արագածի կատարէն կախուած Լուսաւորչի կանթեղով ու իր արցունքն ալ կաթեցուց անոր մէջ...

Լացաւ, բայց մխիթարուեցաւ:

Ու ահա կ'երթայ միանալու այն իր սրտակից հոգեւորականներու եւ ազգայիններու հոյին, որոնք վասն հայրենեաց մեռան, բայց շատ ապրեցան:

Խունկ եւ աղօթք հանգուցեալ Սրբազանի հոգւոյն: Ամէն:

ՄԵՂՐԻԿ Ծ. ՎԱՐԴ. ԲԱՐԻՔԵԱՆ

ՀԱՅ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՆ

Հայ հոգիի դիմադրականութեան վահանն է Հայ Եկեղեցին: Այդ ոգին ի յայտ եկաւ նախ՝ գրերու գիւտով, որ զօրավիզ եղաւ մեր գոյութեան, քանդելով մեր վրայ դրուած բոլոր շղթաները, մշակութային եւ հոգեկան գերութեան: Նման դիւցազներգութիւն մը տեղի կ'ունենար շնորհիւ Հայ Եկեղեցւոյ, որ դարեր շարունակ թումբեր կազմած կը ջանար վառ պահել հայու հոգին եւ պահպանել ազգային սրբութիւնները: Ու, երբ ահաւոր ցնցումներէ յետոյ, թըշնամին կը հեռանար մեր երկրէն, հայ հոգին անգամ մը եւս կը յառնէր Հայ Եկեղեցւոյ մէջէն, անգամ մը եւս վերակազմելու համար փշրուած հայրենիքը:

Ու հիմա, սփիւռքի մէջ, նոյն այս եկեղեցին է որ կը շարունակէ ըլլալ միակ հաստատութիւնը, որ դի-

մացաւ դարերու փորձին: Միայն Հայ Եկեղեցին է, որ գաղութէ գաղութ, եւ դարերու վրայէն, միութեան օղակն է հայու բեկորներու միջեւ, հարազատ մօր նման պաշտպան իր զաւակներուն: Ու մենք, որդիաբար մօտենանք մեր մօր, եւ իբրեւ խնամատարները «փոքր ածու»ին ապրեցնենք զայն մեր կեանքով եւ գործով: Զվիրաւորենք մեր մայրը, չտառապեցնենք զայն, այլ գուրգուրանք եւ սէր եւ նուիրում ունենանք Հայ Եկեղեցւոյ հանդէպ, որ կը հաւատանք, հայոց ազգին ընծայուած աստուածային գերագոյն պարգեւն է:

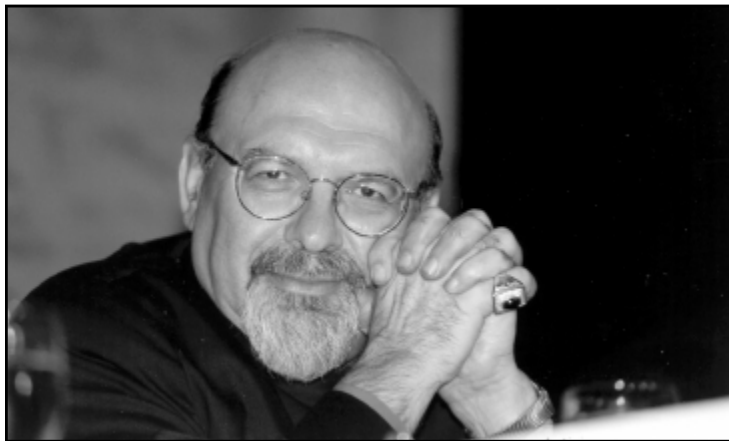
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ՄԵՍՐՈՊ ԱՐՔ. ԱՇՃԵԱՆ

Ազգ. Երեսփոխանական Ժողով, Փրակիտընս

ԵՐԹԱՍ ԲԱՐՈՎ, ՍՐԲԱԶԱՆ ՀԱՅՐ...

ՄԵՍՐՈՊ ՍՐԲԱԶԱՆ ԱՐԲԵՊԻՍԿՈՊՈՍ ԱՇՃԵԱՆԻ ՅԻՇԱՏԱԿԻՆ



Ահա այսօր
 Ես սգաւոր
 Ու ծնրադիր՝
 Լուսապայծառ
 Յիշատակիդ առջեւ անբիծ եւ ամբասիր,
 Աղօթքի պէս հոգեպարար
 Կը մըմնջեմ առանձնաբար՝
 - Երթաս բարով, Սրբազան Հայր...

- Երթաս բարով...
 Թէեւ երթըդ անակնկալ
 Եւ վաղաժամ՝
 Երթըդ ըլլայ յօժարակամ
 Աստուծոյ մօտ ամենակալ
 Եւ հիւրընկալ,
 Երթըդ ըլլայ լոյսի նման
 Լոյսերու մէջ ու բարութեան,
 Ու գոհութեան,
 Երթըդ ըլլայ ճամբորդութիւն,
 Երթըդ դէպի յաւերժութիւն...

- Երթաս բարով, Սրբազան Հայր...
 Բայց նախ քան այս երթըդ վերջին՝
 Արարիչին,
 Շնորհ ըրէ ինձի եւ իմ նմաններուս
 Հազարաւոր,
 Միշտ ենթակայ նոր փորձութեանց,
 Միշտ մեղաւոր,

Տեսնելու քեզ վերջին անգամ
 Քու սրբազան կերպարանքիդ ու տեսքիդ մէջ
 Լուսազարդեալ,
 Տեսնելու քեզ կենդանացեալ,
 Եւ լսելու ձայնըդ անշէջ,
 Հեզահամբոյր, հաղորդական
 Ու վարակիչ,
 Եղբայրութեան ու բարութեան,
 Այլեւ սիրոյ
 Յորդոր որպէս:

Ախ ես այսօր
 Ահեղ վիշտէս
 Պարտեալ մէկ անձ՝
 Պարտեալ վիշտին դէմ գերազանց,
 Աղօթքի պէս
 Երբ առանձին
 Կսկծագին
 Կը մըմնջեմ
 - Յիշատակիդ սրբութեան դէմ՝
 Երթաս բարով, Սրբազան Հայր...

Կարծես ես այլ քեզի հետ եմ,
 Կարծես ես այլ...
 Ես քեզի հետ կը ճամբորդեմ...:

Դեկտեմբեր 5, 2003
 Նիւ Եորք

ՇԱՀՊԱՆ

The Man with Vision and Mission

by Rev. Fr. Aram Stepanian

Early in the morning of December 3rd, as was my custom, I took my Armenian coffee to my office, opened my Bible for my daily study, and then turned on my computer to check my mail.

I had several emails. I opened the Prelacy mail first. There was an obituary relating the passing of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, former Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada.

I did not take it seriously at first. I thought it was a misprint because the day before I had received the obituary of Archbishop Sahag Aylvazian, the Prelate of Greece. I said to myself, "This should definitely read Aylvazian and not Ashjian." I continued reading the short biography, and to my dismay, I found out that it was Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian who had passed away with a massive heart attack.

It took me a while until it sunk in that the Lord had taken away my mentor, my spiritual father, and my friend, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian.

Two days before this sad news, Archbishop Ashjian had called me and informed me that on Saturday, December 6, he would be coming to Boston to promote and autograph his latest book, *The Etchmiadzin Chronicles*. Now, instead of his coming to Boston, I must go to see his breathless body in New York.

Needless to say, that Wednesday, I could not do much except to think and reflect upon the memories that Archbishop Mesrob had left with me.

The first time I met Srpazan was in 1978, when he visited Boston as the newly elected Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada. To get acquainted with the Prelate, the members of the Board of Trustees and delegates to the National Representative Assembly of St. Stephen's Church in Watertown were invited to Dr. and Mrs. Varant Hagopian's residence.

The first impression that Archbishop Ashjian left on me was his gentle smile and soft voice. It seemed that sometimes he was whispering, and, if I wanted to hear every word that he said, I would have to lean toward him.

That night, eager to find an empty chair next to him, I seized the opportunity to introduce myself. He did not

hesitate to immediately ask about me, my business, in what capacity I was serving in church, etc. It seemed he wanted to know me better as a person. And that is the way Archbishop Ashjian was. When he met someone, he bombarded that person with questions, analyzed the person's name and tried to find the roots of his or her ancestry.

After he finished his questions, I leaned toward him and said, "Do you mind, Srpazan Hayr, if I ask you a few questions?"

"Not at all," he answered. "Go ahead."

I welcomed him personally and offered him my humble help in any way if needed. Then I asked, "Srpazan Hayr, as a Prelate, have you come with any particular agenda for the parishes? What plans do you have for the youth that we are losing and for those who are staying away from the Church?"

Srpazan paused for a moment; maybe he was surprised at my courage to have asked such direct questions. He did not know me well, nor I him. Maybe, in his mind he was

thinking, "What guts this young man has, posing such questions to a newly elected Prelate!" But, I must admit that his silence did not last very long. He smiled gently and said, "Aram, I am glad you asked these questions. I want you to know they are also my concerns."

"This is what I have in mind and on my immediate agenda. The Prelacy will be publishing a periodical and I have picked the name already, *Outreach*. Do you see, the name tells it all, reaching out to those who are coming and are not coming to church. Through *Outreach* the readers will have the opportunity to hear the message of the Gospel and the Church. They will be informed about the activities of the churches and the communities. Who knows, maybe by getting the message, they will come back to church."

"Second," Srpazan continued, "I have in mind to establish a Christian Education Council. The responsibility of this Council will be to look after the Sunday Schools and the youth of the church, to organize retreats and regional conferences."

The first impression that Archbishop Ashjian left on me was his gentle smile and soft voice. It seemed that sometimes he was whispering, and, if I wanted to hear every word that he said, I would have to lean toward him.

That night, Mesrob Srpazan mentioned a few more of his plans. At the end, he added, “Aram, you will hear from me soon, and I want you to take part in these plans.”

I’ll be very candid. That night, when I left Mesrob Srpazan, I said to myself, “Either this man has come with a vision and a mission, or he is a bluff.” I had to wait and see.

Not too long after our first meeting, I received a telephone call from Mesrob Srpazan asking me to go to New York. He told me he had things to discuss with me. The following day I boarded the plane and went to New York to the Prelacy. Meeting him in his office, we chatted for a few minutes. Then he said, “I want you to meet our Christian Education Council Director.” A few minutes later, a young lady came in and said, “Ayo, Srpazan Hayr.” Mesrob Srpazan got up from his chair and said, “I want you to meet Miss Aghavni Aslanian (now Bashian) who will head the Christian education department. The three of us went out to lunch that day just to get acquainted with each other. I was later privileged to work for years with Mesrob Srpazan through the Christian Education Council (now called Armenian Religious Education Council).

Not too long after, upon seeing the publication of *Outreach*, I came to realize that Mesrob Srpazan *was* a man with vision and mission.

One day in October of 1983, while he was in Boston, I was privileged to drive him to his various appointments. At the end of the day, before taking him back to Logan Airport, I brought him to our house for a cup of coffee. We talked about church business generally, since in those days I used to travel extensively around the world, preaching the Gospel to Armenians of all denominations. After talking about the spiritual needs of the nation and the urgent call of the Master “to go and preach the Gospel,” he looked directly into my eyes, again with his usual gentle smile, and said, “Aram, if the Prelacy appoints you as a preacher-at-large for the church, will you accept this responsibility, that is, to visit our churches and preach the Gospel?” I was astonished by his request, thinking that he was giving me such a privilege and an honor.

Without hesitation, I answered, “It would be my privilege to be a preacher-at-large for the Armenian Apostolic Church.”

I knew it was a courageous gesture on his part, because, the Church had never had an Archdeacon as preacher-at-large. His Eminence, having seen the need to educate the parishioners with the Gospel and church doctrine, had come up with this idea. Later this idea was presented to the Executive Council and to the National Representative Assembly where it was unanimously accepted.

During his twenty years as Prelate, almost every time we got together, he would ask, “Why don’t you become an ordained priest?” And every time my answer to him was, “Srpazan Hayr, my calling is not to be a pastor. I am a preacher.”

He was a man of compassion; he always found ways and means to help the needy. He was a man with a big heart. In spite of his poor health, he did not stop pursuing his vision, extending his hand to orphans and widows. Many times I saw him with the families without fathers or with amputees in wheelchairs. He would come to me and say, “Der Hayr, I have promised to support these families and I am happy when they are happy.”

Every time I returned from my “mission field,” Srpazan would call me to ask me about the response of the community.

In 1998, just before his fifth term of office ended as Prelate, I once again had the privilege to pick him up at Logan Airport. I was outside

waiting for him when he came out of the airport. Not knowing who would be picking him up, he smiled as usual and said, “*Toon yegar, oorakb em vor toon yegar.*” (“You came; I’m glad it was you who came.”) I opened the door for him; he got in the car and immediately asked how Margaret and the children were. And then, without wasting any time, he said, “Aram, this is the last time I am going to ask you to get ordained as a priest and become a pastor. There is a small parish. I want you to take care of this church.”

“Which church are you referring to?” I asked.

He replied, “The church in Whitinsville, St. Asdvadzdzin Church. They have no pastor.”

I knew that church. I had visited that church several times as a deacon to serve the altar and as a preacher. I paused for a while and said, “Let me pray and think, Srpazan Hayr, and I’ll let you know.” This was the first time I had even considered praying and thinking to become a pastor.

It took me eight months until I was led by God to accept the ordination. On January 10, 1999, I was ordained

as a priest by the hands of His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan and was appointed as the pastor of St. Asdvadzadzin Church of Whitinsville.

Archbishop Ashjian had a passion and special interest in small parishes. He did not want to see them neglected. Every time he saw me, he asked how our church was doing and mentioned that he heard of God's blessing upon our church.

After Archbishop Ashjian's decision not to stand for re-election, and my ordination as a priest, we kept our ties and continued our working relationship. Every time I visited Armenia with a group, I took the group to see him and the work he was doing in Moughni, where he renovated St. Kevork Church and Cultural Center, and in Gumri where he founded the Terchoonian Orphanage. The latter was his pride. Srpazan Hayr would take us around, show us every corner of the building, tell us the needs of the institution, and take our pictures. What satisfaction he had when he would tell us his vision, which was to take teenagers in, give them jobs and training, and officiate at their weddings.

He asked me to send him computers and furniture, which my church did gladly. We sent fourteen computers for his orphanage. In our last container, we had 140 blankets, but unfortunately he did not have the opportunity to see them.

Last October while in Armenia, we met for a cup of coffee as usual. We discussed our ministries. He told me that he would be coming to the States and hoped to see me.

I left Armenia on Thursday, October 30. Two weeks later, he called me to tell me he was already in New York. On November 26, he called me again, informing me that he would be coming to Boston on December 6 to promote and autograph his latest book, *The Etchmiadzin Chronicles*. I promised him to do my best to see him, since that day we were holding our church bazaar. But, as we say in Armenian, "Khorboort martgantz gamkn Asdoodzo." ("We plan, but God's will is done.")

That was my last conversation with Mesrob Srpazan, my spiritual father, my friend, my co-laborer, and my mentor.

On December 6, instead of his coming to Boston, we went to see his breathless body in New York.

Mesrob Srpazan was a man of vision and mission. He knew how to lead people, convince the person for the right cause. He was a man of compassion; he always found ways and means to help the needy. He was a man with a big heart. In spite of his poor health, he did not stop pursuing his vision, extending his hand to orphans and widows. Many times I saw him with the families without fathers or with amputees in wheelchairs. He would come to me and say, "Der Hayr, I have promised to support these families and I am happy when they are happy."

Sure, so many people with me are going to miss Mesrob Srpazan. So many of us will ask, "Who will fill his shoes?" We don't know, but there is something we do know: When God took Moses away, He found a successor, Joshua. And when God took Elijah by chariots, He replaced him with Elisha. Who is going to fill Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian's shoes? I have no idea. One thing I know is that God is in control. Therefore, who am I to teach Him how to run His business?

The Apostle Paul puts it very nicely: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of

the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen." (Romans 11:33-36)

Srpazan Hayr, like the apostle, you have fought the good fight, you have finished the race, and you have kept the faith. Now there is in store for you the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to you on that day. (II Timothy 4:7-8).

Vartzkent gadar.

✠

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Rev. Fr. Aram Stepanian is pastor of St. Asdvadzadzin Armenian Apostolic Church, Whitinsville, Massachusetts.

My Bishop, My Buddy, My Partner

by Vartkis A. Markarian

When I was in Antelias in 1977 as a delegate for the election of a coadjutor Catholicos for His Holiness Khoren I, I noticed a young Vartabed walking frequently through the halls of the Catholicate. I did not know him at all, but my first impression of him was not complimentary. Was it how he sauntered, or was it his appearance? I don't know. Nevertheless, since Karekin Srpazan, who was Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy, had been elected coadjutor, I remember hoping the new Vehapar would not select this particular Vartabed to the position of Prelate for the Eastern Prelacy. You guessed it! That Vartabed was Hayr Mesrob Ashjian, and did my first impression turn out to be totally wrong!

Prior to 1977, I was mostly involved in my church in Providence. I was, however, serving as a delegate to the National Representative Assembly but only in a minor role. When the new Prelate came to America, I observed his qualities of leadership. He expanded the Prelacy Ladies Guild and formed the National Association of Ladies Guilds and he wanted medals to be given to honored women. I, being in the jewelry business, was asked if I would make them. I worked through my Providence delegate, Mrs. Grace Bagdasarian and sent her to New York with the message that I would make the medals on the condition that the Prelacy would absorb the cost of the mold and model. The newly elevated bishop promptly replied with a question: "What has Vartkis done for the Prelacy?" I was humbled and convicted by that question and soon thereafter I made the commitment to serve my Prelacy.

When I told Srpazan that I had joined his army as an

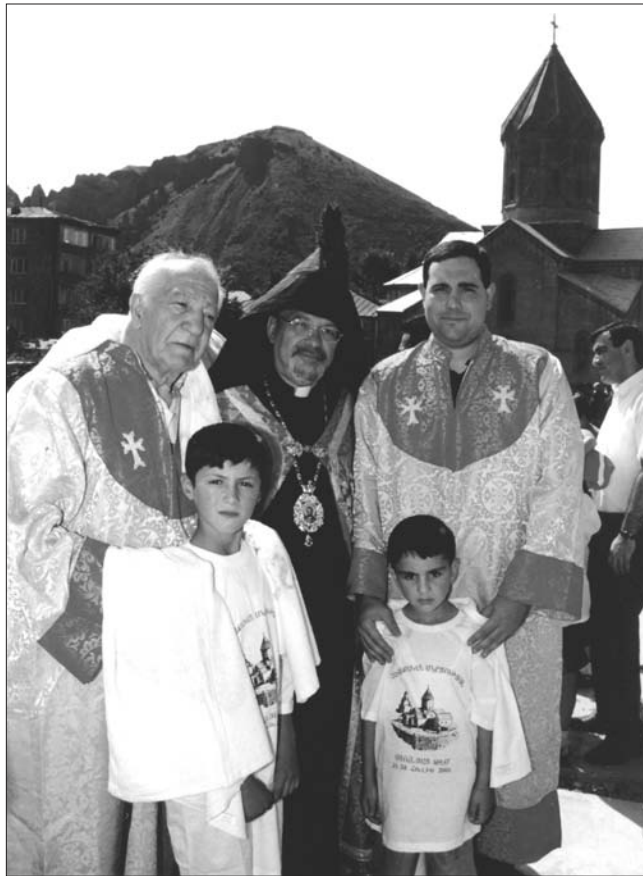
infantryman, he promptly told me that I was one of his generals. I wasted no time. I inquired what the Prelacy lacked that I could provide and a new machine called a "fax" was delivered and installed. Srpazan noticed the big change in me and he began to give me more tasks. He assigned me as the chairman of the Prelacy's annual

raffle which brings in much needed revenue for Prelacy programs, and we topped previous records. Because of my success, he assigned me to a second term. He instilled in me what I thought I had, but discovered it was not enough. I gave him the "green light" not to hesitate to ask whenever he needed something—anything from office equipment to the underwriting of books.

When the war broke out in Karabagh, he commissioned me to make the crossed flag pin of Karabagh and the Armenian tricolor. When the tragic earthquake hit Armenia in 1988, I volunteered to go and help in any capacity, but because of my age he said, "I have other plans for you."

In 1995, His Holiness Karekin II was elected as

the Catholicos of All Armenians and left for Armenia, consequently leaving Antelias without a Catholicos. Unfortunately, that year Mesrob Srpazan had a heart attack in Paris, but upon his recovery became a candidate for the vacancy. But to our dismay, before our delegation from the United States and Canada reached Antelias, Srpazan had declined the candidacy. Why? Was it his health, or did he feel that Aram Vehapar had the advantage? I was chosen by my delegation to make one more appeal to Srpazan to reconsider and submit his name for election. I told him we loved him and he responded with, "I love



Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian takes time out for a photo with Vartkis Markarian, Vartkis Markarian, Jr. and two newly baptised children in Armenia.

you, too. Thank you, but no thank you.” Sadly, I was unable to persuade him and in retrospect I see that God had other plans for him.

In 1999 our beloved Karekin I passed away. Unfortunately, his work, intentions, and goals were not yet achieved. Mesrob Srpazan, by now no stranger to Armenia, felt he could better serve our people in Armenia. I believe he was a great asset to Armenia. Who was this stranger who had come from the “other side,” doing these marvelous things, such as the restoration of churches and schools, publishing books, performing mass baptisms—doing things that people thought could not be done in Armenia.

When I asked him how his relationship was with Karekin II he replied, “Fine, as long as I don’t ask for money.” That sparked something in me personally and from that day on we became partners. Event after event took place as we had a common goal to help uplift the people of Armenia. We became so excited about our various projects that Vehapar told Srpazan not to undertake any more projects without his knowledge or consent. At that time he also requested that Srpazan make his vows to Etchmiadzin to which Srpazan answered, “I have made one vow and that was to serve God and my people, regardless of Cilicia or Etchmiadzin.”

Recently, while lunching in New York I said, “Srpazan, if you knew your health was going to be this good, are you sorry you didn’t accept the candidacy to become Catholicos?” He hesitated, and then answered, “No, if I had won, I could not have had this relationship with you.” Privately I addressed him as “Buddy” and he called me Vartkis. In public he was Srpazan Hayr and I was Baron Markarian. I was to meet him for lunch on Tuesday in New York, but because of other plans he changed the



His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia and Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian pose for a photo op with Vartkis and Lillian Markarian.

date to Friday. Instead of lunch on Friday, I went to his funeral.

Srpazan, no question you will meet with our Karekin I, and with the heavenly powers you two might fulfill what you could not while on earth, i.e., uniting Armenians worldwide.

“*Yertas parov, Srpazan.*” I am thankful for having a bishop like you who was instrumental in making me a better Armenian. Thank you “buddy” for your sincere and genuine friendship and thank you “partner” for teaching me the joy of being more generous and philanthropic to my people. ❖

Vartkis Markarian, who lives in Cranston, Rhode Island, is a generous benefactor to the Prelacy and to the Armenia projects of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian. He visited Armenia regularly during the years that Mesrob Srpazan lived and served in Armenia.

“He Became My Brother, My Friend...”

by James R. Russell

For many years both Archbishop Ashjian and I lived in the same city, but we did not know each other well. I was a young, untenured professor at Columbia University. He was very strong, very active, very political, presiding over the Armenian Prelacy. We met a couple of times. I moved to Cambridge, where I was at first not happy. One night I was reading an article by Archbishop Ashjian in the Prelacy paper, *Outreach*. He described his recent heart attack, his feelings of loneliness and fear of death, and

his return to prayer to reading the *Narek*. He, too, had been having a very hard time. I wrote to him and told him I lived now on the opposite side of the street from a small river frequented by geese. If he wished for some quiet time in his convalescence, he could come and stay as my guest, and we could take walks along the river and read the *Narek*.

He did not write at once, or visit. But he began to be in touch, often. We talked about the scholarship to

which he was turning more and more. After he moved to Armenia we talked mostly on the phone. In Armenia he convened some ethnographic meetings; he and I, it transpired, had been studying, unbeknownst to each other, the monuments called *f'ukh manuk*.

In the summer of 1997, both Archbishop Ashjian and I traveled to Western Armenia and Turkey with the famous guide, Armen Aroyan. My old friend Herand Markarian was there, as were my friends and students Shushan Teager and Sergio La Porta. At Hromkla and Ani, Archbishop Ashjian conducted worship; at places where Armenians had been murdered, such as Birecik on the Euphrates, he said memorial prayers. But being at the sites of the Genocide tore him apart. There were many happy occasions on that trip, though. At Lezk, he reclined in a haystack, easy and relaxed as a farmer, while I lectured on the myth of Ara. One evening at a Kars motel, our Turkish hosts served us cold spaghetti with ketchup, thinking this the food Americans wanted. The Archbishop took matters into his own hands, and the next evening sat down with a big smile and asked, "Qu'est-ce que nous avons sur le menu aujourd'hui?" ("What is on the menu tonight?") And a feast appeared. He always had candies and treats in his pockets for the crowds of kids who surrounded us in small towns, and at Lezk he gave me a lollipop, too.

I was particularly anxious to visit Nemrut Dag, the great Irano-Greek tomb and temple complex on a mountain top near Adiyaman. It is a spectacular place of cosmic magnificence, and nothing else surviving comes closer to the shrines the pre-Christian Armenians would have had. Archbishop Ashjian bought a Kurdish hat and just had a ball there. The valley below seemed enchanted, too: there was a perfectly preserved Roman bridge, and wonderfully fragrant trees with long, thin leaves. In Adiyaman, the hotel clerk had a little pet white rabbit who lived amongst the souvenirs at the reception desk. It is only now that I remember how that extra touch pointed to where we were: through the looking glass, in a wonderland-like dimension. In the morning I came to the hotel's cafeteria and saw a large printed book bound in old, cracked, scuffed leather lying on one of the tables. It had a big, tarnished silver cross nailed to the cover. Like Alice with the "Drink Me Bottle," I opened the book, which was the four Gospels in Classical Armenian, and

began reading, quite oblivious to the breakfast sounds all around. The Archbishop had come in; the book was for me. We also went to Narek, to the cave where the saint meditated. At Van, Archbishop Ashjian made the acquaintance of a tiny Van kitten. But it is Adiyaman that does the magic for me still.

The last time Srpazan and I spoke was on a Tuesday evening in December. He was standing outside the New York Public Library. I imagine him on that cold evening, on the wide stairs, with the great, pensive lions to either side. He had been studying. When I was in high school, I spent many weekends in that building, working on this or that paper, daydreaming about studying Armenian someday. So, there he was, with his cell phone, probably a briefcase full of stuff to do. Fifth Avenue is a river of light and energy, but it's a one-way street going downtown, and he had to go uptown to the Plaza for dinner. So probably he hails a cab and goes up Sixth Avenue. He goes into the

Plaza lobby: red carpets, palms, bellhops wheeling luggage in and out. He's been traveling a lot. The weather has gotten sharply colder. It is the end of the day, when the body is weak.

He has a massive heart attack in the lobby of the Plaza. Was there anyone with him? I have heard that arriving friends saw the ambulance there. Perhaps he was alone, then. He might have

died in any of the places where he had worked so hard for so many people, with such panache and generosity and zeal: the sunny precincts of Antelias, or the wonderfully-restored monastery of Mughni, or his sister's home, or the familiar surroundings of the Prelacy. He never did stay over at my house to read the *Narek* and take walks to see the geese. But it is certain our talk that Tuesday evening in this black, ashen month of December 2003, was one of the last he had, just before he left and the sudden departure feels like that, and not like extinction so the karmic connection already established between us is now a very thick one. And the certainty of one's tie to earth is thinner: it all passes fast, and goes; and where, then, is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Somewhere in Turkey, Archbishop Ashjian turned to all in our group, to me and to our Kurdish driver, Jemal, and said he had grown. He had not expected ever to feel that Jews and Muslims were so much his brothers. He became my brother, my friend. One of the joys of

At Hromkla and Ani, Archbishop Ashjian conducted worship; at places where Armenians had been murdered, such as Birecik on the Euphrates, he said memorial prayers. But being at the sites of the Genocide tore him apart.

Heaven will be seeing Mesrob Srpazan again. I would wish his soul everlasting peace, but I am sure he and St. Gregory and St. Nerses are busy publishing a book. And what readers they will have! ❖

James R. Russell is the Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies at Harvard University. This article is based on a presentation he made at a memorial service he organized at Harvard in memory of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian.

Remembering Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian: A Servant to God and his People

by Michael B. Papazian

The untimely and unexpected death of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian last December was a great shock to all who knew him. When I heard, I was stunned that a man of such energy and exuberance could have left us so suddenly.

The richness of the memories and legacy that he has left us belie the fact that he was only 62, a young age in our time and our part of the world. My earliest and vague recollections were of a young *vartabed* who was studying in Princeton. I was very young. I knew he was related somehow to my father. My parents would visit him often during this time and I was always included. But it was only when he returned to America to become the Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada that I got to know him well and to appreciate him as a devoted clergyman and servant to his Church and people.

When I think of Mesrob Srpazan, there are a number of characteristics that come to mind. The first—energy—I have already mentioned. He was perhaps the most energetic and driven person that I have known. In 1994, I went to Armenia for the first time with Srpazan. I remember following him around to all the homes and offices that he had made a point in his busy schedule to visit. I was amazed that even in the hot summer weather, Srpazan seemed rejuvenated every time we arrived at the next stop and greeted the people. While in Armenia, I spent some time

with Srpazan at the Prelacy's office, where the charitable activities of the Prelacy were headquartered. I was moved by the long line of elderly people who would come to receive a monthly pension, a modest sum, but crucial for their survival in the tormented country. He understood that the Church must be with the people, feeding and sustaining them. He was a worthy successor of his predecessor, St. Nerses the Great, the founder of charitable institutions in Armenia, after whom Srpazan named the Prelacy's charity in Armenia.

After his term of office as Prelate ended and he relocated to Armenia, he continued with greater vigor establishing the St. George of Moughni Charitable Fund. Srpazan's initiatives made such a tangible difference in the lives of the people, doing more good by himself than even entire governments do.

I think also of Srpazan as an intellectual, a lover of learning and truth. He produced a vast number of books and articles. His last, the *Echmiadzin*

Chronicles, was an enormous labor, a fitting testimony to his love for the Armenian Church. I myself was also impressed by a shorter book, a development of his thesis at Princeton on St. Nerses of Lambron, and I made use of his research on this important but neglected figure in my own book on the history of the Armenian Church. Like St. Nerses of Lambron, Mesrob Srpazan was also for-



Mesrob Srpazan and Michael Papazian in the Armenian countryside in 1996.

ward-looking and universal in his vision. He was strongly involved and interested in the ecumenical movement and relations between churches. In all, he was motivated by a love for God and the Church.

Love is another word that comes to mind. Srpazan's love for his flock was great. His warmth was felt by all, young and old. I especially remember with fondness his visit to my grandparents' house in Pennsylvania on Christmas, December 2000, when both were very ill and near death. It meant so much to them that Srpazan would come to see them one final time, give them Communion and comfort, and then return to New York by bus, adamantly refusing to allow us to drive him back. For Srpazan, to be a bishop was foremost to be a pastor, a shepherd to his people.

For love to be expressed, it must be communicated. Srpazan was especially remarkable as a communicator. I have often held that the cell phone was invented with Srpazan in mind. He was always in touch with people, calling them, asking how they were. Since the time I started teaching in Georgia, I did not see Srpazan as often as I used to. Somehow my trips home and his visits never seemed to coincide. My last conversation with Srpazan

was over the telephone during one of his recent trips to the U.S., just prior to his leaving for the airport to return to Armenia. He sounded strong and in good spirits. When he decided to settle in Armenia after serving as prelate, I thought that he would eventually move back to America. But his love for Armenia was so strong that he remained, working as hard as ever to improve the situation of the people and to bring light to the country. Perhaps the country had rejuvenated him too, after his terrible illness in 1995 when he almost died. So I expected that he would remain in Armenia for many more years.

That was not to be. On the night before he died, I had a very vivid dream of Srpazan. He was seated in front of the altar in his vestments facing the congregation. After my mother told me that Srpazan had died, I remembered the dream. It was his farewell to me, no doubt, asking that I remember him as a servant to God and his people. ✠

Michael B. Papazian is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Berry College, Rome, Georgia. He traveled to Armenia with Mesrob Srpazan in 1994 and 1996 and to historic Western Armenia in 1998.

A Priest of the People

by Florence Avakian

As the shock enveloped one from the untimely tragic passing of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, several thoughts took center stage. Friday, December 5, 2003 should have been a day of celebration as his latest book, *The Etchmiadzin Chronicles* was to have been presented to the community at a special reception at the Prelacy of the Armenian Church with Archbishop Mesrob present.

Instead, it became a day of mourning as hundreds of people battled a fierce and sudden snowstorm to reach St. Illuminator's Cathedral in Manhattan for the Archbishop's wake. The blizzard continued the next morning for the anointing service during the Divine Liturgy celebrated by Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy. It seemed that even the heavens were angry at this sudden tragedy, and were crying tears of white.

During the two day services, attended by his family members, and hundreds of the faithful—some from as far away as Idaho and California who braved treacherous roads and high winds to reach the church, the fragrance of flowers was ever present with more than two dozen

huge floral tributes blanketing the Cathedral. The magnificent hymns of the Yegmalian Badarak were sung by the St. Illuminator's Cathedral choir with guest soloist Isabel Bayrakdarian, the acclaimed Metropolitan Opera soprano.

Taking part in the services were two dozen priests, including Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese who read an eloquent tribute to Archbishop Mesrob from the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. Also present were Archbishop Karim and Bishop Meno of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Bishop Demetrios of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, Bishop Batakian of the Armenian Catholic Church, Monsignor Stern of the Roman Catholic Church, Rev. Father Mardiros Chevian, Dean of St. Vartan Cathedral, and Rev. Father Karekin Kasparian of the White Plains St. Gregory the Illuminator Church.

Representatives of many organizations were present including Dr. Movses Abelian from the United Nations, AGBU President Berg Setrakian, Armenian Assembly

Board of Directors member Van Krikorian, Chairman of the Diocesan Council Haig Dadourian, and members from the ARF, ADL, Hunchags, among other groups.

Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, in his moving and inspiring eulogy, called Mesrob Srpazan “a man who was many men, excelling in everything he did, a true Renaissance figure.” Poetically, he noted that even the heavens were crying for the departed church leader. Following church services, many attendees reminisced tearfully of their many memories of Srpazan Hayr.

I would like to share a few personal remembrances of the many I treasure. For me, first and foremost, Mesrob Srpazan was a priest, a people’s priest who could wonderfully communicate with both children and the elderly with equal ease and grace. Many times, I saw him comfort an older person, holding his or her hand, stroking the cheek and listening intently to what the person was saying. When my mother went to her eternal rest, he personally came to the funeral home, comforting our family for more than an hour, even delaying an overseas trip to be with us.

In 1985, he organized the large gathering of Genocide survivors in Washington, D.C. I was honored when he asked me to be the official reporter of the event. At the time, he also asked me to write an Op-Ed article for *The New York Times*, the most difficult page to enter in American journalism. Though thousands of articles are sent in daily, one or two at most are published each day.

There are never any assurances.

Restricted to 750 words, which are counted by machine, I knew the value of each word, and toiled on it for two weeks.

The morning of the day the article was published, I noticed an elderly man holding a sheaf of copies of the article and passing it out to everyone in the hotel lobby. Learning that I had written the article, he put down the papers, and hugged me tightly, while he wept. We wept together. Obviously he was a Genocide survivor attending this momentous occasion in Washington D.C. When I related this story to Mesrob Srpazan that day, his smile and shining eyes made the efforts of those two weeks even more meaningful.

Many times, I saw him comfort an older person, holding his or her hand, stroking the cheek and listening intently to what the person was saying. When my mother went to her eternal rest, he personally came to the funeral home, comforting our family for more than an hour, even delaying an overseas trip to be with us.

A sensitive, caring, talented human being, Mesrob Srpazan never forgot his calling, devoting his entire life to his people, his church and his nation. In his last years especially, he helped so many of the orphans and the destitute in Armenia, and continued his mission work there. Archbishop Mesrob will always be remembered by all who knew and loved him. May his soul forever rest in peace in the heavenly lights. ✦

Florence Avakian's articles appear in many publications. She wrote this tribute to Archbishop Ashjian for the Armenian Radio Hour of New Jersey. It was broadcast on Sunday, December 7, 2003.

Remembrances of a College Freshman: A Student’s Tribute to Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian

by Mark Albert Momjian

Twenty-five years ago, I came to New York City to start my college education. Like many of my classmates at Columbia University, I was a bit dizzy getting oriented to life in Manhattan. I remember being so distracted from my studies. Should I check out the Feast of San Gennaro in Little Italy? How hard would it be to get tickets to the U. S. Open? What’s the buzz about this new musical *Evita*?

Looking back on those days, I can’t help but smile

when I think of my first visit to the Eastern Prelacy one warm weekend afternoon. I stumbled into the Prelacy almost by accident, and in no time at all, Mesrob Srpazan greeted me. He invited me to his office so that we could get better acquainted. Here I was—a 17-year-old college freshman—and the then-Bishop (who himself was very young, perhaps under 40-years-old at the time of our first encounter) was taking the time to get to know me.

What I remember most was how comfortable Mes-

rob Srpazan made me feel as a newcomer to New York City. Surprisingly, at that very first meeting, religion and the Armenian Church were two topics that were not discussed. Instead, we talked about what courses I would be taking, what books I was reading, what major I might declare some day. Mesrob Srpazan made me feel like I had something to contribute to our community. I'll never forget the one-on-one attention he gave me at such an important time in my life.

As I was about to leave the Prelacy, Mesrob Srpazan gave me a precious gift. It was a beautifully-illustrated book on Armenia and the Armenians. He told me that as a young Armenian-American, I should know about the valuable contributions my ancestors had made to world civilization. To this day, I love reading books on Armenian history and culture, and much of my interest in book collecting and reading can be traced to that very first visit with Mesrob Srpazan so long ago.

For the seven years I lived in New York City—as both an undergraduate and graduate student—Mesrob Srpazan always invited the Armenian students at Columbia University to attend special events organized by the Prelacy. As President of our Armenian Club, I frequently asked for his advice about lectures we would sponsor on major issues affecting our community. When I asked him questions or solicited his opinion, he never imposed his personal views on me, but instead helped me to think

critically about the issues, guiding me ever so slightly, in the manner of a true mentor.

When I graduated from law school in 1986, I knew I was about to return to my native Philadelphia after a long absence. I had so many people to thank for their generous hospitality and guidance over the years. As my graduation day was approaching, I called up Mesrob Srpazan and asked him if I could stop by his office for a moment. After telling him how grateful I was for his support and generosity over the years, I pulled from my knapsack the book he had given me when I was a college freshman in 1979. I asked him if he would inscribe it for me, which he did in his usual humble and gracious manner. Here we were—two bibliophiles with a shared ancestry—talking about our love of the written word and the exhilaration we felt in exploring and discovering our Armenian past, present and future.

It was a time I will never forget and which I will cherish always. ❖

A graduate of Columbia College and Columbia Law School, Mark Momjian is an active member of the Armenian American community. He serves or has served as a member of many boards, including, the Armenian Center at Columbia University, the Armenian Assembly of America, the Armenian Missionary Association of America, and the Armenian Sisters Academy.

A \$100 Story

This editor's column appeared in the January 1993 issue of Outreach.

On December 20, 1992, our Prelate, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian was the celebrant at Sts. Vartanantz Church in Ridgefield, New Jersey. Following the Divine Liturgy a faithful member of the church approached him and gave him a \$100 donation. "I made a vow during the Liturgy," she said to him, "please take this money and use it on an appropriate occasion. You will know just when."

A few days later Archbishop Ashjian went to Armenia to help in the distribution of food and gift parcels. While there he visited the Noubarashen Center for Handicapped Children where he helped distribute gifts and sweets on behalf of SOS-Brazil Committee.

At the center, the children had decorated a small, sparse tree in anticipation of New Year and Christmas. "I stared at that tree and for me it seemed to symbolize the poverty and destitution so prevalent in Armenia," the Archbishop said.

A few moments later, looking out the window, Srpazan saw a small, scrawny lamb which the center's director told him was to be slaughtered for the children's New Year's dinner.

"That half-starved creature could not have possibly provided more than a morsel for each child. I asked the director the cost of a lamb in the market," Archbishop Mesrob said.

"About 5,000 rubles," the director answered. "Much, much more than we can afford."

"Suddenly," Srpazan said, "I remembered the woman in New Jersey and her words. *You will know when.*" Quickly calculating the current exchange rate, Archbishop Ashjian counted out 40,000 rubles and gave it to the director and related the New Jersey story to him.

The \$100 from the woman in New Jersey who made a vow during church services and entrusted the Archbishop to "know when," purchased eight plump lambs for the handicapped children of the Noubarashen Center. ❖

The Etchmiadzin Chronicles

by Dr. Herand Markarian

Editor's Note: This article is based on a presentation made by Dr. Herand Markarian at the Prelacy introducing Archbishop Ashjian's book, The Etchmiadzin Chronicles. The event was originally scheduled for December 5. It was rescheduled for January 16 as a posthumous tribute to Archbishop Ashjian's monumental achievement in compiling this book. Dr. Markarian rightly notes that Archbishop Ashjian was "a unique and outstanding clergyman of the 21st century and among the greats of our history. He was born with a purpose, lived with vision, and will live-on through his deeds."

The mood, focus and essence of this colossal book are adeptly captured at its opening in seven thematic pictures displayed within the first ten pages. The seven images, in a well thought-out manner, are presented as follows:

The book opens with Tatevosian's famous painting depicting the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator being told by God to build Etchmiadzin Cathedral. Tatevosian's painting illustrates God, who appears with a gold mallet in his hand, striking the earth with the mallet to show St. Gregory the site where the Mother Church is to be consecrated. Archbishop Ashjian opens *The Etchmiadzin Chronicles* with this photograph to take us back to the very beginning, as if to say, "This is how it all began."

Following this first image of the Vision, Archbishop Ashjian takes us out into space and prints a picture of the site, i.e., Mount Ararat and Etchmiadzin, taken by satellite from outer space. Looking at this picture we get

the feeling that God is looking down at Armenia and sees Ararat Mountain and Holy Etchmiadzin.

In the third photograph it appears as if God has "descended." The distance between the heavens and Armenia is shortened. We see the image of Mt. Ararat taken from an airplane, about 40,000 feet above ground. The photo depicts clouds through which her majesty Mt. Ararat emerges in a proud grandeur.

In the following photograph, God "descends" further to the fields of Armenia. Now, He sees Mt. Ararat the way His subjects, we the humans, see it. Here we see Mount Ararat rising above us, piercing the ether into the heavens.

In the fifth picture, we see the Aivazovsky painting depicting Noah's descent from Mount Ararat.

Then follows the photograph of the immaculate Cathedral of Etchmiadzin.

And finally, Srpazan brings us to the present day, with a photograph of St. Gregory's current successor, His Holiness Karekin the Second, Catholicos of All Armenians.

These seven images, which introduce the book, seem to tell the story of Etchmiadzin by sequentially unfolding like a movie clip as they lead us into the vast Chronicles. The book is published through the generous contribution of the Dolores Zohrab Liebman Fund of New York, in 2003 by the Moughni Publishing House in Armenia, the publishing house that was founded by Archbishop Ashjian.

The Etchmiadzin Chronicles is



Herand Markarian during the presentation of the Etchmiadzin Chronicles at the Prelacy in New York City.

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian's 41st book. His previous works can be divided into the following themes: albums, commemorative reflections; memoirs; travelogues and historical accounts of the Armenian Church.

The Etchmiadzin Chronicles is a quantum leap in his writing career. Ironically, it is the last book to be published during his lifetime. Mind you, I said the last book during his *lifetime*. I did not say his *last* book. I know for certain that Archbishop Ashjian had two volumes prepared for publication. Sadly and ironically, the topics of both of these books are about death and dying. One cannot help but wonder whether the topics of these books, in conjunction with his untimely passing, can be attributed to pure coincidence or an attempt to predict the future that was not going to be his? That we will never know.

The focus of this monumental book is Etchmiadzin. The impetus that led Srpazan to write this book

was the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the vision and construction of Holy Etchmiadzin (303-2003). The book lists chroniclers who visited Etchmiadzin from 1253 AD to 1916 AD. The 872-page book can be divided into four parts.

Part I

In a spread of 95 pages, Archbishop Ashjian presents historical background, comments and important critical, sincere, meticulous analysis that precede the chroniclers’ accounts. These pages clearly display the concerns and the care of an Armenian clergyman for the values of the Armenian Church. Archbishop Ashjian appears not only as a sentinel of our religious and national heritage, but also as a keen protector and a dismitter of false impressions about our church dogmas. He looks at the Chroniclers as if under a microscope. At times, the keen scholar and the Armenian clergyman are at odds with one another. A dilemma presents itself here. Shall he print anything and everything that the travelers have said? Or, shall he protect the essence of the Armenian faith and delete pejorative statements? Well, in resolving this dilemma, he makes a conscious decision to present practically *all* of the chronicles and eliminates only one or two that his conscience, as an Armenian clergyman, would not permit.

In these 95 pages, he takes a close look at what’s being said. Like a guard, he scrutinizes the statements and attempts to find the causes and motives that had led these people to come to Etchmiadzin and write about Etchmiadzin, Armenians and Armenia. He actually discerns the sincere ones from those who are there to mar Armenian values.

Part II

The Chronicles themselves: A massive compilation of the accounts of 99 travelers through Armenia, from the year 1253 to 1916. These documentations are spread over 663 years of Armenian history. The chronicles are printed in their original languages, namely: English, French, Russian, Italian, German and a small portion in Armenian.



Cover of the Etchmiadzin Chronicles is taken from part of a map showing the hierarchical Sees and Dioceses of the Armenian Church dated 1691.

Part III

There are three appendices: *Appendix A:* Here, a concise statement is given about the doctrinal position of the Armenian Church; the dogmas of the Armenian Church; the profession of faith and the epiclesis according to the Armenian Church.

In this appendix also are listed the dioceses of the Armenian Church in the year 1670. The latter is a historic document printed in Paris in 1670 by Vosgan Yerevantsi, who is responsible for the publication of

the first Armenian version of the Bible in 1666 in Amsterdam.

This impressive list comprises 52 dioceses. Imagine in 1670, the See of Holy Etchmiadzin had 52 dioceses in Armenia and the Diaspora. If this implies anything, it shows that, in the absence of a political power in Armenia, the Armenian Church took upon itself the preservation of the Armenian national spirit. It shows also how the Armenians, in their attempt to preserve their identity, found refuge in the Armenian Church.

Appendix B: In this appendix, Archbishop Ashjian presents several tables. One table lists the Armenian Catholicos from 1593 to date. There are lists of the ruling Shahs of Persia from 1585 to 1834; the amiras and khans of Yerevan from 1410 to 1827; the Ottoman Sultans and the Tzars of Russia from 1682-1917. He has chosen the dates and eras to coincide with the times of the chroniclers’ visitations. This is really a great addendum to the content. In some instances, the reader may want to know who the Catholicos, or who the ruler of the country was during a certain visit.

Appendix C: This is comprised of three sections. In one section, Archbishop Ashjian lists the travelers in several ways: alphabetical, chronological, by nationality and profession. His compilation amounts to 34 Frenchmen, 25 Britons, 25 Germans, 11 Russians, 4 Italians, 4 Persians, 2 Portuguese, and 1 Turk (1640-1648). Interestingly and surprisingly, the Turk’s comments are favorable.

In the second part of this appendix, there is a massive—and I mean massive—bibliography. There are 255 English references and 154 Armenian. In addition, there is a reference for geographical sites, an index of proper names, and a

substantial Table of Contents. The references are a haven for any researcher in Armenology.

Part IV

Interspersed throughout the book and accompanying the articles, are illustrations either drawn by the travelers themselves or photographs taken by them. There are 272 photographs and drawings, of which 96 are in color and 176 in black and white. There are three maps and drawings of the foundations of Holy Etchmiadzin. I direct your attention to the cover picture, which displays the hierarchical Sees and Dioceses of the Armenian Church. This map is a book in itself. One can learn so much history from this map.

Historical Background

Prior to presenting the chronicles, Srpazan meticulously writes about the history of Etchmiadzin in 23 pages. We learn that the Church was erected at the site of the pagan worship temple Sandaramet. Construction of the cathedral began in February of the year 303 in the city of Vagharshabad, which was the second royal seat of Armenia and it served as a secondary Capital of Armenia. The construction of the Cathedral was completed in seven months, during the reign of King Drtad of the Arsacid Dynasty, who himself was converted to Christianity by St. Gregory the Illuminator. If the time of construction seems too short, Srpazan reminds us that the original building had a wooden dome and roof and the size of the building was small and in all likelihood, the foundation of the pagan temple was utilized.

The Cathedral was initially ascribed to Saint Asdvadzadzin (the Mother of God, the Virgin

Mary). The word Etchmiadzin literally translated means “descent of the only begotten birth.” The coinage of the name “Etchmiadzin” to St. Asdvadzadzin Cathedral seems to have taken place in the seventh century after Catholicos Sahag III Dzorapertsi (677-703) used the name Etchmiadzin in a religious hymn.

Etchmiadzin was the Seat of the Catholicate. The Arsacid Dynasty, during which the Church was consecrated, ended in 428. The Seat of the Catholicos, however, remained active. And in the fifth century, Sts. Sahag and Mesrob used the Cathedral as a school to teach the newly invented Armenian alphabet. Eighteen Catholicos resided in Etchmiadzin from 303 to 483. Parenthetically, let me say that the Seat of the Catholicate of All Armenians moved to wherever there was political stability. Thus, it resided in Etchmiadzin, Dvin, Agh-tamar, Ani, Dزامntav, Shooghri, Dzovk, Hurromgla, and Sis.

In 1441, Armenia proper was under the rule of a Turkmen tribe called *Kara Koyounlu* (The Black Sheep). The kingdom of Cilicia had ended in 1375 and the ruling Mamlukes had destroyed and devastated Cilicia. The reigning monarch of *Kara Koyounlu* in Armenia was Jahanshah (1437-1467), a relatively mild ruler. The Armenian clergy, led by Archbishop Tovma Medsopetsi and Hovhannes Hermonetsi, sought the moment and invited all Armenian bishops and the two Catholicos of the time, Krikor Musabegyants, who was the Catholicos of All Armenians, residing in Sis and Catholicos David III of Aghtamar to a Council in Vagharshabad. The Council decided to bring the Seat back to Etchmiadzin. Catholicos Musabegyants of Sis did not attend the Council and did not return to Etchmiadzin.

The clergy at the Vagharshabad Council, contrary to the edicts of the Armenian Church, elected a second Catholicos, namely Giragos Virabetsi in 1441 as the Catholicos of All Armenians, and thus the Seat was considered to have moved back to Etchmiadzin and it has resided there ever since.

Archbishop Ashjian, the Researcher

Covering 663 years of the history of Etchmiadzin in *The Chronicles* is a major research project, amazingly accomplished in less than a year's time. Srpazan Ashjian appears in this book as a scholar who knows the magnitude of the project and the task that he has embarked on. He knows his strengths and limitations. Furthermore, he knows the requirements and intricacies of research especially during the dark ages in Armenia. Looking at the references cited by him, one finds that Srpazan had studied the writings of the following: Marx Telman, who in 1872 wrote about one visitor; Kaderays in 1880 covered visitors from the 12th to the 17th centuries; Kurdian covered 16th, 17th, and 18th century travelers; Bardakjian covered the English travelers to Armenia of the 19th century; and last, but certainly not the least, Jack Vartoogian, whose fantastic Ph.D. dissertation of 1974 covered the 17th century travelers. Srpazan states in the introductory pages, “It is a pity that Vartoogian did not see through the printing of his dissertation. If he had done so, he would have rendered a great service to Armenology, and then would have perhaps spared us the undertaking of this project. We say this in great humility, because, after almost thirty years, Vartoogian's dissertation remains as a great source of infor-

mation about the Armenian people, about Armenia, her geography, history, the trade routes, the mercantile traditions, and the character of the Armenians. It is a great source of how Armenians lived, their priorities, their shortcomings, failures, creeds and customs. In other words, the image of the Armenians in the 17th century.

With all due respect to the previous accounts, Srpazan humbly downplays the importance and the value of his own work. In truth, his book adds so much to the topic. Contrary to the other books, where the focus is on Armenia proper alone, Srpazan's book focuses only on Etchmiadzin. His book is the culmination of all the chronicles and provides as complete a coverage as possible on this topic.

The Chronicles

The Chronicles, which comprise the major portion of the book, are comprised of writings of visitors to Armenia and Etchmiadzin.

Although Archbishop Ashjian has focused his research on Etchmiadzin proper and those things that are closely related to it, the chronicles that he has selected contain so much information outside of the religious realm.

He questions the motives of the visitors. Why are they there in this remote part of the world? What drives them to this land? What are they searching for? What do they intend to gain from their visit?

Many of the visitors tried to

climb Mount Ararat in search of Noah's Ark. Srpazan Ashjian lists 31 names with the dates of their expeditions. Reading through the names, one feels a moment of pride. We come across the name of one of the most famous Armenian writers of the 19th century, namely the poet Khachadour Abovian. We learn that Abovian accompanied three expeditions to the summit: one on Septem-



During his research for this book Archbishop Mesrob came across a reference to a flower, Iris Elegantissima, which is native to the Talin area in Armenia. The reference led him to a search to see if the flower still existed. He found the flower in the Talin area, looking exactly as described by a traveler in 1694.

ber 29, 1829 with Friederich Parrot, a professor at Tartu University, a second time with Heinrich Abich in 1846, and the third time with the famous historian James Bryce in 1876. Archbishop Ashjian also brings the list of climbers to our times and

states that the record of the highest number of climbs belongs to an Italian mountain climber, Angelo Palego, who climbed Mount Ararat seventeen times. It is particularly interesting to read the admiration of the visitors for this majestic mountain.

The Monastery of Etchmiadzin

Visitors varied in their motives to come to Etchmiadzin. Some came to learn about this holy shrine; others came to see the relics claimed by the Armenians, and yet others sought a great opportunity to proselytize the Armenians to Catholicism or Protestantism.

Srpazan gives a concise account of the Christian religious movements in Armenia as a cause for the motives for the visitation of Christian clergy. We learn from the chroniclers that Pope John XXII in 1318, established several dioceses in the East with the intention of uniting Armenia to Rome (since the Armenian Church had not accepted the decision of the Council of Chalcedon of 451). He assigned Northern Armenia to the Franciscans, and Eastern Armenia and Persia to the Dominicans. The Catholicization of Armenia was successful in many ar-

reas. Added to this were the actions of Shah Abbas of Persia, who forcefully relocated 300,000 Armenians to Isphahan along with 14 large stones from the Church of Etchmiadzin and most of the holy relics, namely the arm of St. Illuminator. The latter

was brought back to Etchmiadzin in 1638 after an exile of 26 years.

Protestants' Missionary Movement

In the 18th century, the Armenian Church fell under the controlling attempts of the big powers. France and Italy as advocates of Catholicism, and England, which wanted to have a stronghold in the Middle East encouraged the Anglican and other Protestant churches to send missions to Armenia. Soon the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions developed an interest toward Armenians living in Turkey. The Americans and British met in Malta and began their preaching in Greece then in Smyrna. The Germans joined in, and thus began

German Dr. Friedrich Parrot, who climbed Mount Ararat with Khachadour Abovian in 1829, saw the controlling attempts made by the missionaries and expressed the following honest concern: "This shows the urgent necessity for the establishment of an ecclesiastical seminary, a genuine national Armenian institution, where the pupils should be under the control of the Synod of Etchmiadzin, and which should enjoy the confidence of the nation. If a foreigner should be selected to direct the studies in history, geography, and the elements of mathematics, he ought to confine himself strictly to scientific instructions; the theology should be left altogether in the hands of Armenians, whether

The Relics of Etchmiadzin and the Visitors

Almost all of the visitors describe the Mother Cathedral and the churches of St. Hripsime, St. Gayane and Shoghagat. They write about the conversion of Armenians to Christianity and about St. Gregory the Illuminator and his vision as told by the monks who accompany them. The famous British historian H.F.B. Lynch goes through the trouble of measuring the dimensions of the churches.

Most of the visitors make reference to the holy relics, which are also pictured in this section of the book.

The Armenians in the Chroniclers

As I said earlier, in addition to the religious themes, mention is made about the nature of the Armenian people.

Leonhart Rauwolf (German, 1581), remarks, "The Armenians are pious, honest, simple but zealous in their religion. They are hospitable to receive and give lodging to foreigners, something I felt during my travels. They are also very much inclined to help and assist the poor slaves, that are under Turkish confinement, and ready to help them out."

John Cartwright (English, 1600), describes the Armenians as "A people very industrious in all kinds of labor."

Sir Thomas Herbert (English, 1627) states, "They are great lovers of tradition," and adds, "The Armenians are the greatest travelers West and East of any Asiatics."

John Fryer (English, 1683) makes some misinformed and unfavorable statements about the faith of the Armenians.

Dr. Henrich Brughish (German,



The reception hall of the Old Vebaran, the former residence of the Catholicos of All Armenians within Holy Etchmiadzin monastery is now a museum dedicated to the Catholicos. Vebapar's old throne is located at the end of the room.

a concerted attempt to evangelize Armenia. Different groups were competing to convert Armenians from Christianity...ironically...to Christianity. Does this remind us of what is happening in Armenia today with the massive influx of the different Christian "missionaries"?

Only one Chronicler, namely

members of the secular or regular priesthood, and where possible, to those only who either had never visited foreign countries, or at least not for some time before, in order to avoid all appearances of a tendency to innovation, which should instantly excite suspicion in the minds of the lower orders."

1860), describes the Armenian clergy, “The Etchmiadzin clergy does not belong to the brutal, ignorant and dunderhead order of the secluded monks, whom we come across at the Christian monasteries of the East. The Armenians, on the contrary, express a vivid interest in their spiritual and secular literature and eagerness to understand the content of the ancient Armenian manuscripts.”

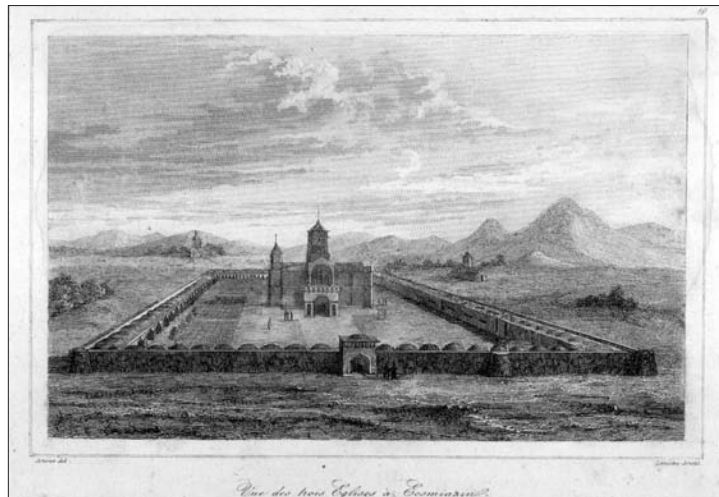
The famous historian Lord James Bryce (1876) describes the Armenian physique as follows: “Physically the Armenians are middle-sized, with complexion often swarthy, or slightly yellowish, less yellow however, than that of the Persians, who are said to be (linguistically) their nearest relatives, black straight hair, a forehead rather wide than high, and a large nose. The women are often handsome, with an erect carriage, regular features, and fine dark eyes.”

The Catholicoi in the Chronicles

First let me say, that the Chroniclers do not use the word Catholicos until around 1828. Prior to this date the writers use the word Patriarch, which if you think about it, is a direct translation of the Armenian word, *Hayrabed*. We come across the word Catholicos in the writing of William Monteith, an Englishman, writing in 1828.

There are interesting remarks about the lifestyle of the Catholicoi, about their methods of hospitality, their appearance, etc. One particularly disappointing behavior was that of Catholicos Hovhanness VIII with his visitor Tzar Nicholas in 1837. Remember, Russia had defeated

Persia in 1828 and was in control of Eastern Armenia. Furthermore, Tzar Nicholas had also verified the edict, the *Polojenye*, in 1836, according to which the Tzar of Russia had full jurisdiction over approving the elected Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. During their meeting, the Tzar asks the Catholicos, “What would you ask of me in favor of your church and flock?” The Catholicos replies, “I have two wishes, first to give a strong hand



A French color engraving of the monastery of Holy Etchmiadzin and its surrounding landmarks entitled, “*Vue des trois Eglises à Ecsmiadzin.*”

to the Armenian nation which is always faithful to the Russian throne, second, to grant Russia insignia to my two nephews, Tevumovs, so that they could become nobles.” Can you imagine? The head of the Armenian Church requesting personal favors from a man who could do so much for Etchmiadzin, especially when Etchmiadzin was so much in need of renovations. The Tzar gives him another chance and asks, “Nothing else?” to which Catholicos Hovhanness replies, “Nothing.” The Tzar says, “Modest, yet strange” and stands up dissatisfied.

In reading this episode, I could not help wondering about the massive list of requests Archbishop Ashjian would have presented to the Tzar if he had been in that position.

The Irish Armenologist, H. F. B. Lynch visited Etchmiadzin in 1893 and witnessed the consecration of Khrimian Hayrig as the Catholicos of All Armenians. Lynch’s grandmother, incidentally, was Armenian. Lynch says, “Wherever we have been in the society of Armenians, talk has centered upon the triumphal journey and the approaching consecration of His Holiness Mekertich Khrimian. It is not only the ancient ceremony,

and it is not merely the assembling of delegates from all parts of the Armenian world that appeals to the heart of the nation. It is the personality and reputation of the man.” He continues, “Khrimian is the ideal of a high priest. He is a figure, which steps straight out from the Old Testament with all the fire and poetry. At the ceremony of his consecration it seemed as if at the foot of Ararat the ancient spirit were still alive, and

that the holy oil which descended upon the venerable head from the beak of the golden dove anointed a lawgiver to the people announced the Divine word.... With him religion and patriotism are almost interchangeable terms.... A people whose spirit has been crushed and whose manhood has been degraded, gather new life from such a teacher and learn to become men.... The waves which he set in motion have never yet subsided; and who can tell upon what shore of promise or disappointment they are destined to break and disappear?”

Lynch finally meets Khrimian and remarks, “I do not remember having ever seen a more handsome and engaging face.” In their con-

versation, we come to hear one of the most intriguing statements from Khrimian Hayrig. Khrimian defines our land and says, "I have come to the land of forgetfulness." Ponder for a moment this statement in your solitude.

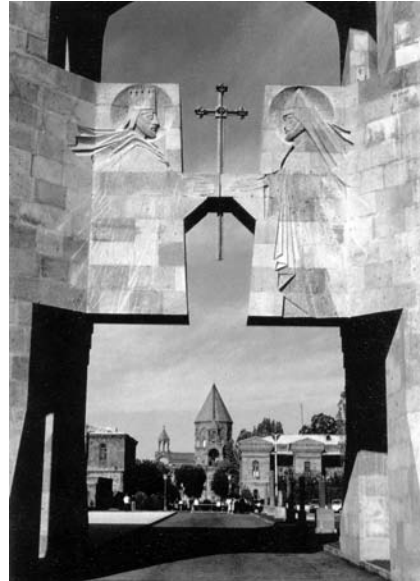
Khrimian invites Lynch to take his meals in his private dining room. Lynch writes, "It happened to be a fast day, and nothing was offered but lentils and peas. But on the following day quite a banquet was spread before us—salmon from Lake Sevan, delicious *dolmas* of minced meat and rice bound together by tender cabbage leaves, and the usual not very tasty chickens."

Conclusion

Aside from the written word, I want to emphasize the importance of the photographs, illustrations, and maps in this book. They depict so much valuable information including the development of Etchmiadzin over 700 years. We see the faces of the Catholicoi, otherwise unknown to us. We see drawings of some relics. There are quite a large number of images that are being printed for the first time. As a matter of fact, the collection of photographs and illustrations in the book easily can form a beautiful album about Etchmiadzin and its history.

As I said, Srpazan Ashjian is present in practically every account that he has printed. However, there is one account where Srpazan's zeal, his unique searching curiosity is depicted so beautifully. Of the hundreds of books that Srpazan had searched, he came across the chronicles of Dr. Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri. This gentleman had visited Armenia on May 26, 1694. Mr. Careri described a unique flower in the Talin area in Armenia saying,

"In those villages I saw a vague and a strange flower, that every Italian prince would definitely pay much to have in his garden. The stalk is no more than a half palm high, on top of which are three white flowers that are straight, and three others, that fall into the form of a triangle of purple color with a tiny black rose in the middle, and other three of lighter



A detail of the newly constructed gate of Holy Etchmiadzin that was finished for the 1700th Anniversary showing King Trdat and St. Gregory holding up a cross together.

color entangled in the same flower."

By coincidence, Srpazan had read this account on May 25th of last year. Immediately he decides to go to the village of Talin to find the flower. He takes photographers along with him. Here is Srpazan Ashjian account: "We visited the Armeno-Turkish frontier, prayed in the Haygavank Church, admired the monastery of Horomos, and finally reached Talin. We started our search with some shepherds. No hope. We inquired whether there was a knowledgeable woman in those parts who might have some special love towards flowers. We found one. She was the wife of the principal of the school,

Mrs. Rima Hakobian, who told us of a lady in town who a couple weeks ago brought some flowers from the fields 'like the one you described.' We rushed to see Mrs. Siranoush Gevorgian and her collection of wild flowers. We were late; they had wilted. But we kept insisting, so the lady told us to go to St. Christopher's Cemetery, suggesting that we might find it there. We rushed and, lo and behold, several flowers of the type described were there smiling at us, like little urchins, teasing us, and how happy we were to finally get to them. We kissed the flowers, made a bouquet of them, then prayed for the man from whose tomb we had picked them. The name of that man? Ardoush, son of Sedrak Grigorian, 1924-1976, Sorry Ardoush, instead of bringing flowers to your grave, we just stole what nature had given to you. Forgive us."

Later Srpazan learns that the scientific name for this flower is *Iris Elegantissima*.

This episode in its simplicity is the epiphany and the greatest witness of Srpazan Ashjian's perseverance, sentimentality and devotion to the precious values of his nation's pride. ❖

The Etchmiadzin Chronicles can be purchased through the Armenian Prelacy Bookstore, 138 E. 39th St., New York, NY 10016, 212-689-7810 for \$75.00, plus \$5.00 for shipping.

Herand Markarian is a well-known community leader whose theatrical, literary, and oratory talents have enriched our community life for decades. A retired biochemist, Dr. Markarian now devotes his life to all aspects of Armenian culture. He toured Western Armenia with Archbishop Ashjian several years ago and he is a frequent visitor to Armenia.

Vazken I

by Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian

translated by Iris Papazian

Editor's Note: These excerpts are from an article Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian wrote shortly after the death of Catholicos Vazken I in August 1994. Aside from being a poignant remembrance of Catholicos Vazken, it clearly shows that young Hrair Ashjian's fervent spiritual attachment to the Armenian Church and nation had already formed in his youthful years. It was an attachment that never wavered and grew stronger with age. Originally written in Armenian, the complete translated article appears in the volume, Remembrance & Hope: Essays of Faith and Life, published in 1997 by the Eastern Prelacy.

With silent and sad steps the white-haired elder shepherd passed into history. May the Catholicos of All Armenians, Vazken I, rest in peace. He departed silently from the stage of Armenian life where he was a dominant presence for forty years.

We did not think that the day would come that he would no longer be with us. For our generation, for the greater part of our life, he was a presence one way or another. We could not accept that one day he too would go to his eternal life to be united with our other most valued pontiffs—the Illuminator and Sahak; Nerses the Builder, Nerses the Gracious, and Nerses Ashdaraktzi; Khrimian and Zareh.

And now, when forty days have already passed since his death, I set down on paper words of honor and love wrapped around a few remembrances in order to relate how I first met him and how I, a youngster born and raised in the Diaspora who later became a member of the Cilician Brotherhood, came to know him.

I first saw him in 1956. It was on February 12, a Saturday. We students at St. Nerses School together with our teachers, had gone to the museum in Beirut and there we

took up our positions along the street together with other students in order to greet the Catholicos of All Armenians who only a few months after his election had come to Lebanon to participate in the election of the Catholicos of Cilicia.

I am certain that the memory of that day, and subsequent days, is fresh in the minds of all those who witnessed the large and elaborate welcome that was accorded to Vazken Vehapar. It was truly a royal welcome!

Vehapar's car came by and passed us, at the head of a long motorcade. Afterwards we each went our own way, returning to our homes. I do not remember now how it was that I went to Antelias rather than returning home, but I did so with the hope of seeing the Catholicos at closer range. That's the way I was—and remain to this day—impulsive about taking advantage of historic moments. It was this inner need that took me to Antelias that day. I went and was even able to enter the old *Veharan*

[residence], which was half-filled with the faithful who were waiting for Vehapar. He arrived and then someone announced that there would not be an opportunity for individual greetings because the Catholicos was tired. I was saddened, of course, and I remember, imitating the actions of the elder women, I stretched and touched his vestments. That was the extent of my contact with him. I then returned home.

The next few days I was to go to Antelias several times with my friend, Libarid. The first visit was on February 14—the day of the scheduled election of the new Catholicos. However, the election did not take place that day and thereafter I again went to Antelias on February



Whenever Srpażan visited Armenia, a visit to His Holiness Vazgen I was his first duty. In this 1992 photo His Holiness and Srpażan are joined by Serge Saroyan (left) and Very Rev. (now Archbishop) Khajag Hagopian.

20. I remember that it was a Monday afternoon when our headmaster, Mr. Edward Daronian, interrupted our mathematics class with Mr. Hazarabedian, to announce that Archbishop Zareh had been elected Catholicos and classes were being dismissed for the day.

Libarid and I decided to rush to Antelias, as though we were the only ones missing from the scene! The Arab bus driver told us that many Armenians had been on his bus that day and some were shouting something like, “We do not want the Abaren.” *Abaren?* Could it be they were talking about *Paren Srpazan?* Later we learned that “We do not want the *aboren* (illegal),” was the phrase being shouted by those women who had that morning taken over and violated the Mother Cathedral.

We arrived in Antelias, entered the Veharan, and a



A historic moment on February 11, 1989. His Holiness Vazken I who came to New York to mobilize earthquake relief along with His Holiness Karekin II of Cilicia, visited St. Illuminator's Cathedral where he presented Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian with a dove of peace.

short time later our Prelate, Archbishop Khoren, entered from the refectory and announced, “I present to you our new Vehapar, Catholicos Zareh.” The election had concluded and most of the delegates had dispersed and probably the students and clergy had finished supper—and that’s why they entered from the refectory. A great many people had gathered and we joined them as we applauded and applauded with all of our might.

I will not forget how when upon seeing us, Archbishop Khoren, who knew me and Libarid well from St. Nishan Church, exclaimed, “*Chakhalner*, what are you doing here!” I can’t recall exactly why, but we were very, very

happy. We were youngsters totally dedicated to our church and national life. That day’s enthusiasm stayed with us and from that moment on we were somehow mystically tied to Zareh Catholicos and later to his memory. His divine virtue, his sympathetic smile were to live within us long after his death. We clung to him as if we subscribed to the poignant words of Moushegh Ishkhan, “Stay! Unique Vehapar. Stay! Do not depart!”

And truly, our love for Zareh almost reached the heights of worship. Years later we were to come to know him better, love and respect him even more when we learned of his painful reign. He was our spiritual father and we mourned his death much as we would our biological father.

On the opposite pole was Vazken Vehapar. Everything in our young experience should have distanced us from him, as one who caused our beloved Zareh Vehapar pain and suffering. But, that did not happen. Vazken Vehapar, little by little, won our hearts and although we never forgot Zareh Vehapar we felt a close affinity to Vazken Vehapar. There is I am sure a profound psychological explanation for this. I cannot explain it, but it is there, this attachment, which became stronger and stronger.

Perhaps part of the reason is that times and circumstances changed. Perhaps inwardly we knew that Vazken Vehapar loved

Zareh Vehapar and his demeanor was due to circumstances beyond his control. I do not know. One day perhaps, when Vazken Vehapar’s diaries are opened we will know more. Certainly many, many statements made by Vazken Vehapar during the decades that followed testify to this. ...

I met Vazken Vehapar for the first time face-to-face in the autumn of 1972. In the meantime I had been accepted at the Seminary in Antelias, had been ordained a celibate priest, and was attending Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey where I was doing research work on St. Nerses of Lampron as part of my studies.

Archbishop Tiran [Nersoyan], of blessed memory, encouraged me to go to Yerevan to the Madenataran for my research work. He had written a letter of introduction and recommendation for me to which Vazken Vehapar responded with an invitation to stay in Etchmiadzin. I went to Holy Etchmiadzin and presented myself to Vehapar who received me warmly. During my stay there I had the opportunity to be with him many times and even accompanied him on some special journeys such as his visit to Geghart and the opening of *Haikashen*, the Catholicos's newly built summer residence.

At the conclusion of my stay in Armenia I went to bid farewell to Vehapar and to thank him. I was a young priest from Antelias, but his behavior towards me was warm and fatherly. I vividly remember to this day his final words that day: "My son, if only there were no problems between our two Sees, then I would have been able to receive you with even more warmth." I think that his face even reddened at that moment. But for me it represented the heartfelt confession of a truly great person. ...

The years passed. Relations between the two Sees steadily improved especially with the election of the Co-adjutor Catholicos, Karekin II of Cilicia. In 1979 I had the honor to be part of a delegation to Armenia representing Antelias to discuss ways of bringing better understanding and harmony between the two Sees. Thereafter my visits to Armenia and Etchmiadzin became more frequent. Naturally, each time I went I first presented myself to Vazken Vehapar and stayed in Etchmiadzin. He always looked upon me as a son, giving me memento gifts, books, religious items—all of which I have kept with great appreciation.

Of course, on occasions there were dark clouds on the horizon. Whispers of protest here and there would

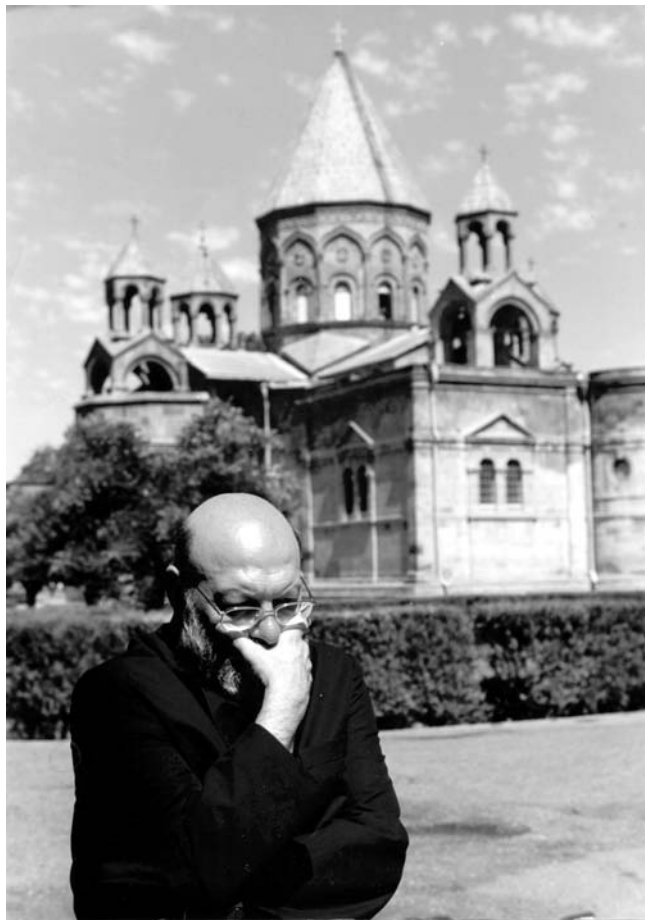
put Vehapar in a difficult position. "In America we have a battle with *them*, and you in Armenia permit them to celebrate the liturgy and preach.... Archbishop Mesrob celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Oshagan.... How can these things be permitted to happen?" Vazken Vehapar also heard these whispers with heavy heart—or I should say was made to hear them. He distanced himself from these remarks because he was a great man with a big heart. But it is good to sometimes remember these things. ...

During Vazken Vehapar's long reign he had to work with many directors, some of whom have since died. But I

know that Vehapar recalled with tenderness one in particular, Mr. Kasbarian, who was the only director who had a heartfelt and complete understanding with Vehapar and who fulfilled his duties with the utmost of respect and love. Relevant to this let me mention two incidents in order to honor and bless the memory of that noble Armenian. On one occasion, pressure was being exerted on the Armenian Church to unite with the Russian Church with the rationale that both are Orthodox. Mr. Kasbarian appealed to Vehapar to keep the Armenian Church independent, saying, "Vehapar, we are subject to them in every way. Let us at least keep our church independent."

Mr. Kasbarian's helpfulness became most visible in 1968, when Vazken

Vehapar issued an encyclical on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Sardarabad. Vehapar told me, "Had it not been for Mr. Kasbarian I could not have issued that encyclical. He was a totally different kind of man. We would look into each others eyes and we would understand one another perfectly...." How comforting it would have been if Vehapar had such a person at his side always, rather than to be put in a frustrating situation that would cause him to exclaim, "I cannot conduct



Archbishop Mesrobn Ashjian in a moment of contemplation at Holy Etchmiadzin.

a pontificate in this manner,” or “What can I do? I must fight everyday.” ...

I remember many of [our] conversations—about his ordination and the difficulties of traveling to Greece during the war. He related how his godfather, Mr. Roupen Israelian, had requested of Archbishop Garabed Mazlemian to give the newly ordained priest the name Vazken. The Archbishop refused at first to give him the “name of a revolutionary,” but finally agreed. The name Vazken is the name of a great hero of Vaspouragan, Vazken Deroyan, who is revered for his defense of Van.

Vehapar had another story to relate on this matter, especially when he wanted to emphasize the bravery of the Armenian mother. He would relate how when the hero Vazken was killed in a conspiracy, the Turks brought his remains to Van in order to locate his family and punish them. Vazken’s mother recognized her son’s remains but managed to contain her emotions and with heavy heart denied her son, thus saving her family from certain death. Vehapar related this story to members of the Armenian Relief Society as an example of and in praise of the Armenian mothers’ bravery and love of nation.

Vehapar also liked to reminisce about his days in Romania and Romanian-Armenian heroes. That country where he grew up had a profound influence on him. His point-of-reference was always Romania, the Romanian Armenian Church, etc. This is certainly no secret since Vehapar himself always acknowledged the strong attachment he felt toward Romania. Each summer when he went on vacation he always took Romanian books with him.

Vehapar especially enjoyed talking about the early days of his pontificate and his mother. His coming to Armenia and Etchmiadzin had not been easy. At that time there was no large beautiful residence that exists today and the accommodations of the old residence were not very comfortable. But he lived there modestly with his mother until the residence was renovated, and later he had his villa in Yerevan and the circumstances of his life changed.

When he first arrived in Etchmiadzin, he said, he was taken to the room where Catholicos Khoren Mouratbejian was murdered. If he had not made the point of his mother living in Etchmiadzin, he too would have probably slept in that room. It is known to all that Vehapar was very close to his mother; some would say he was too much under her influence. This is true of many celibate priests. Vazken Vehapar was an only child and his mother’s welfare was of great concern to him. ...

I do not know if it was [an] observation by his mother or the sudden and tragic death of Zareh Vehapar, but I know that Vazken Vehapar had a special place in his heart for Zareh. And I believe he regretted that Zareh Vehapar departed from this world with a wounded heart. Vazken Vehapar took this regret to the grave with him, for as it was recently related in the press, he had an unfulfilled dream, which he spoke of dozens of times to many people, including me. “You know,” he would say, “I have one desire. I departed from Zareh Vehapar in a sad manner in 1956 and now I have one wish: To go to Antelias and pay my respects to his memory and to pray at his grave.”

The last time he expressed this wish to me was last March when I saw him in the dining room of the Veharan where Very Rev. Fr. Khajag and I were his guests. Later, we asked him if he agreed that the welcome he received in Beirut was the most memorable of his pontificate. He did not contradict us, and went on to describe other welcomes where he truly felt the love of the people. In Kirovabad in 1957 where 50,000 Armenians welcomed him, and his visit to Karabagh where in a matter of a few minutes all the residents of the village gathered around him. He also spoke about the reception he received in Istanbul in 1960 where he had gone to participate in the funeral of the Patriarch. “It was an indescribable scene,” Vehapar said, “hundreds upon hundreds of Armenians came towards me in the church, kneeling at the throne, in order to take my hand. And it continued this way wherever I went in Bolis.”

If only Vehapar knew that when he died, although a period of mourning was declared everywhere, it was in Bolis where a curtain of mourning descended on the Armenian community. Women wore black. All events were cancelled. And it could be truly felt that the Catholicos of All Armenians had passed on.

* * *

My memories have taken me far away. I think this is enough for now. I hope sometime in the future there will be the opportunity to write in more detail about Vazken Vehapar’s life and legacy, especially following the earthquake, the Karabagh Movement, and the Independence of Armenia. Let me say this much: Vazken Vehapar realized, albeit a little late, the importance of reading the signs of the times. He welcomed the independence of Armenia; he blessed the new parliament and president; and he took steps to put the relationship between Etchmiadzin and Antelias on sounder footing. He freely admitted that he had made mistakes, placing the blame on the circum-

stances of the times. Did he not say on one occasion that had Armenia been free in 1956 those incidents would not have occurred?

He often repeated the words, which have become famous, “We were elected to solve questions and problems through brotherly love and by working together in solidarity. And we are convinced that we are correct in the road we have selected, that our work is just, and that our dreams are all for the greater good of our nation. We have personally taken charge and responsibility for the course we have adopted...we are fully responsible.”

He was a brave and noble person, who recognized the problems and recognized the limitations—both his own and those imposed upon him. Once when we tried to express our appreciation for his bravery he said: “No, do not call me brave. You can say that I am flexible.”

It has been said that he was not “gallant” or “brave.” He could not be. Furthermore, why should we have given another martyred Catholicos to the Soviets? He was the right man for that hour and he brought pride to the Armenian Church. His work and legacy is worthy of our respect and honor. Perhaps, some will disagree, saying he could have done more to prepare for the future by taking on a coadjutor or designating a proxy. Furthermore, had he had a young force around him he would have been able to not only prepare for the 1700th anniversary commemoration of the establishment of Christianity in Armenia, but also prepare for the reevangelization of Armenia. He knew this. He knew his limitations. On one occasion he said to me on the telephone” “I think now, if only I were ten years younger....”

* * *

August 26 is before my eyes. It was a Friday when under a scorching sun, Vehapar’s breathless body was carried into the Cathedral. A shiver went through my body. I saw before me the casket of the catholicos in Parajanov’s *Color of the Pomegrante*, surrounded by roaming sheep, colorless, homeless, leaderless.... The catholicos was dead leaving his orphaned flock.

And now the body of the Catholicos of All Armenians was being carried into the Cathedral. The shepherd is no more. Do not allow his flock to become scattered. May a new shepherd come quickly and take charge of the Illuminator’s throne in order to defend the throne of the Armenians.

September 1994



60th Anniversary of the Independent Republic of Armenia

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian delivered this message on May 28, 1978, the 60th anniversary of the Independent Republic of Armenia.

May 28 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the declaration of independent statehood of Armenia. After six hundred years of bondage and only three years after the Genocide that threatened the very existence of the Armenians, our nation that had for centuries maintained its faith in the Resurrection of the Lord, was itself resurrected. With that faith and the blood of countless martyrs, the Republic of Armenia was created. It became the foundation of our fatherland and the assurance of a future united and free Armenia.

Those were tragic days for our nation as one-half of our people mourned the loss of the other half, and the tortured remnants of the Armenian population of Western Armenia were experiencing a living hell in the deserts of Mesopotamia. Those relatively fortunate found refuge in Eastern Armenia where famine, epidemics and an uncertain future filled their lives with confusion and despair.

The leaders of Armenia at that time were faced with the necessity of choosing a course for their people, either liberty or death. This brave and fearless generation knew that only the difficult path of liberty could save its people.

Inspired by the legendary heroes of our past...new heroes emerged and the noble Armenian spirit was reborn.

It was thus that on a glorious May morning the bells of Etchmiadzin resounding that these new heroes stopped the advancing enemy on the battlefields of Sardarabad, Bash Abaran, and Karakillisa. They confronted the evil forces trying to destroy our people, and, just as the army of St. Vartan centuries before them had defended our faith and our fatherland, the heroes of Armenia secured the priceless and irrevocable right of our people to live and worship freely.

With the victory of May 28, the Armenian people threw off the yoke of slavery, destroyed the mentality of the homeless, wandering Armenian, and directed its efforts toward the eternal fatherland. The Armenian people declared to the world that it aspires to truth, justice, and life, its dream of freedom realized at last.

Today, we offer prayers and holy incense to the memory of all the martyrs who gave their lives for the freedom of our homeland. We pay homage to the freedom fighters of our nation who sacrificed themselves for the liberation of our fatherland.



Remembrance and Hope: Salute to the Survivors

by Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian

Editor's Note: On April 24, 1984, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian officially announced the Prelacy's program for the 70th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 1915. The five-day long program, under the general theme of "Remembrance and Hope," took place in Washington, D.C., culminating with a Service and Gathering of Survivors at Arlington National Cemetery's Amphitheatre on Sunday, April 28, 1985—a sunny, cloudless beautiful day. It was the most ambitious, effective and imaginative commemoration bringing together thousands of Armenians from around the world. At the Amphitheatre alone there were more than 5,000 people and it has been estimated that the number of participants during the entire length of the commemorative events was close to 10,000. It was also the largest gathering of survivors, sadly never to be repeated again. The following article is Mesrob Srpażan's message delivered at Arlington National Cemetery.

We are here in these surroundings to honor the courage of those who resisted the forces of tyranny and defended the ideals of democracy.

From your birthplaces in Bitlis and Van, Kharpert and Sepastia, Dikranagerd and Giligia, Erzeroum and Trebizond, to the inferno of Deir Zor and now to the promise of renewal in Washington is an incredible journey. A journey between worlds, between persecution and freedom, slavery and liberty, death and life.

You are living examples of the biblical passage, "I have set before you life and death. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live," (Deut. 30:19). You chose life so that we, your children, might live! I salute you.

The façade of the National Archives building in this great city bears the inscription, "The past is prologue." We are here today in Arlington National Cemetery remembering the past and honoring the American servicemen, who served their country and sacrificed their lives during World War I, still known to many as "The Great War."

We are remembering the past not just for the sake of remembering. We do so because while the past is



Mesrob Srpażan addresses the gathering. The procession of flags led by the Stars and Stripes, and the Tri-Colors, included various historic Armenian flags which Srpażan researched and had made specifically for this occasion.

prologue, it need not be destiny. We believe that an accurate memory is the best means of preventing the repetition of the horrors of history.

This sacred place is a symbol of the deep commitment of the United States to individual freedom and to the dignity of Humankind. This is the final resting place of the young men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in order to insure the continuation of the values that symbolize and guide the United States.

It has been said that only a great nation can respect and honor its dead. If that is so, these hallowed grounds, so meticulously maintained and guarded, are a testimony to the greatness of this country—a country that has opened its doors and its hearts to the poor and the oppressed, the downtrodden and dispossessed peoples of the world.

On my first visit to Washington many years ago as a young seminarian, I was awed by one of the most impressive monuments



A view of the Amphitheater of Arlington National Cemetery, where the largest number of survivors ever to gather, were honored.

in this city of monuments—the Jefferson Memorial, dedicated to the third president of the United States. Jefferson’s eloquent words, which helped shape this country, are inscribed on the walls of the monument. An unwavering champion of equal rights for all, special privilege for none, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “I have sworn on the Altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of Man.” As one of the most influential voices for human rights, his legacy remains an important part of American doctrine. His vast writings continue to enlighten the world, and the United States continues to be looked upon as the leader in the struggle for freedom. These seeds of freedom planted more than two hundred years ago by our Founding Fathers, have rooted themselves firmly in the soil and soul of our country.

Perhaps no one knows this better than the Armenian Americans who have gathered here today to pay homage to the noble ideals that have been successfully transformed into

action. It is the gift of America to include the excluded, to give home to the homeless, and refuge to the persecuted.

In the words of the Armenian poet, Vahan Tekeyan, himself a survivor of the Turkish Genocide of the Armenians,

We who survived, we who lived on after our companions, assuredly have been

spared to honor them. That neither their thoughts, nor their spirit, nor the people who gave them life nor the land that nourished them might perish and be lost forever. We who survived live on to magnify their spirit, to give life to their sacred dreams. We, who survived, bear not joy in our hearts, but scars of toil and sacrifice. And so we shall, we must, continue to labor for the sake of those who perished, for the realization of their dreams.

These days we recall the great role the United States played in aiding the survivors, first through relief aid and then with the act of welcoming thousands and thousands of refugees.

Four American presidents—Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover—took direct action to aid the Armenians. Overseas, the entire diplomatic corps, especially in the Near East—ambassadors, ministers, consuls—shared in the responsibility of administering relief. Foremost among them was the United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau. Following the Armistice, the Departments of State,



Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian with George Deukmejian, Governor of California and the international entertainer Charles Aznavour who came to Washington, D.C. for the commemorative events for the 70th anniversary of the Genocide. This photo was taken during the banquet.

Navy, and War rendered valuable assistance. It was one of America's finest hours, when commitment became action. Without this action the number of Armenian survivors would have been reduced ten-fold.

I would like to introduce two representatives of the Survivors here today. First, Mr. Krikor Derderian, who at age 110, is the oldest Survivor in attendance. Born in Kharpert, Mr. Derderian eventually settled in the

Great Depression, never losing hope; they served their country in every capacity through World War II, in Korea, and in Vietnam. Today Armenian Americans serve in national, state, and local governments and contribute substantially to the growth and prosperity of their country through business, the professions, and the arts.

In World War I, when there was just a very small Armenian

fellow Americans. He was wounded fourteen times on the field of battle.

During World War II, 18,500 Armenian American men and women served in the armed forces, out of a total population of 220,000. They served their country in the name of freedom, and many of them were called upon to make the supreme sacrifice. I salute all of these heroes, symbolized by one of our nation's most decorated World War II servicemen, Marine Corporal Harry Kezirian, who served in Okinawa and was decorated with the Navy Cross, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart with Gold Star.

The survivors of the Genocide are here today not only to bear witness, but also to transmit their testament to the next generation. They join me in addressing our young men and women. We, as Christians have the responsibility to fight for justice and to resist oppression. As Christians we also have a moral responsibility to uphold the teachings of Christ. We have made tremendous progress in our rebirth, but we can advance further still. We must always move forward with pride and without fear. Let us be confident in our abilities and remember always that the possibilities for tomorrow are without end. Above all, remember that through God all things are possible, as we are reminded in the biblical readings from the Prophet Ezekiel, which was a part of our service today. "Behold I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, O my people, And I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then



Presentations of the colors and singing of the National Anthems at Arlington National Cemetery, 1985

United States where he began a new life. He came to Washington this morning in his son's private plane. I would also like to introduce Mrs. Agulina Tatouljian, 84 years old. She traveled from Pasadena, California, to be with us. To this day she carries a bullet in her chest, lodged as a permanent reminder of her heroic deeds in the resistance of Hadjin.

Just as America has been good to the Armenians, let it be said that the Armenians have been good to America, for they came and built new lives, raised families, and became productive and participating citizens of the United States of America. They struggled through

community in America, Private First Class Vartan Aghababian from Springfield, Ohio, became the first American of Armenian ancestry to receive one of the highest military awards of our nation, the Distinguished Service Cross. Born in Van, Vartan Aghababian came to America while still a young man. At the beginning of the war he enlisted and served in the Meuse-Argonne offensive in 1918. Serving as a medical corpsman, he bravely went out to seek the wounded and to bring them back to safety. Repeatedly, under intense machine gun fire, he climbed to the top of a hill and carried back wounded

you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord.”

It has been said that all human tragedies seem to be pointless. But a tragedy that is allowed to be forgotten becomes the tragedy of tragedies. So, we must remember.

[Srpazan ended his speech in Armenian, addressed to the Survivors]:

In life there are moments when you can express yourself only in your mother tongue. Moments when you turn to the language you internalized along with your mother’s milk in order to express your truest feelings. And now it is with the language of St. Mesrob that my heart attests, my fellow Armenians, when I see you, having grown up and become ennobled in your pain.

I was afraid, for a while, that the Diaspora had killed the Armenian Spirit.

I was afraid, for a while, that the alienation had killed inside of you whatever there was, in the words of Moses of Khoren, “of the noblest of all the northerners.”

However, in recent days, you showed that you know enough to wake up in time and be yourself with sublime beauty, always consistent with yourself, always more beautiful, always more pure, like the sacred snow of Mt. Ararat.

I am proud of you, Armenian people. I am proud of the sweet, courageous, kind attitude of the survivor generation.

I am proud of the loyalty of the middle generation.

I am proud of the enthusiasm of the new generation.

These past few days became days of new devotion and new undertaking for me, and I believe that

all those who were in Washington, all those who are at Arlington today, shall return to their homes with stronger faith, with the force of a new Armenianness.

Yesterday an elderly Armenian from New Hampshire came to me and said: “Srpazan, I was under the impression that our people were no longer alive; I thought we were dying,



More than a thousand survivors attended the five-day commemoration in Washington, D.C. A special forum for survivors took place continuously where the survivors told their stories.

we were finished, but over these few days I saw that, on the contrary, we shall live.” I want every one of you to take this senior citizen’s words back from Arlington and share them with everyone.

We did not come to Arlington to bury our seventy years’ allegiance. We came for the hope of resurrection, for the joy of victory.

Seventy years could not bury us. Let us promise each other that we shall never die hereafter.

We shall survive with our spirit, our Armenianness. Let us remember. Let us make the past present in our life. Let us revive the faces of the martyrs with the breath of resurrection and render this day

of commemoration into a day of resurrection.

Today there is no old and new. There is the Armenian people which does not bury itself in the past.

Woe unto that people which dies. Forgetting is betraying. Forgetting is dying. We cannot forget our martyrs, the victims of the crime of genocide.

And we shall not forget.

However, in the face of the devastation wrought by the Diaspora, let us not become this or that kind of Armenian as a result of the various negative forces at work in the Diaspora. Let us not be identified as Armenians from... or Armenians from.... Rather, let us remain simply and purely as Armenians. ❖

*For we walk by faith,
not by sight.*

2 Corinthians 5:7

ՄՐՏԻ ԽՕՍՔ՝ ՓԱՐԻԶԻ ՀԻՒԱՆԴԱՆՈՑԷՆ ԻՐ ԹԵՄԻ ՀՈԳԵԻՈՐԱԿԱՆՆԵՐՈՒՆ

Միրելի հոգեւոր եղբայրներ,

Աւելի քան քսան տարիներէ ի վեր հաստատուած աւանդութեան մը շունչով՝ ահա հաւաքուած էք Ս. Սարգիս եկեղեցւոյ կամարներուն ներքեւ, նշելու Սրբոց Ղեւոնդեանց սօնը եւ փառաւորելու հայ քահանայութիւնը:

Բարի գալուստ կը մաղթեմ ձեզի եւ կը յուսամ, որ Ս. Սարգիսի հիւրընկալ մթնոլորտին մէջ պիտի վայելէք գիրար, միասնաբար ալ աղօթէք եւ աշխատիք՝ իրագործելու համար այս տարուան օրակարգը, որ յատկացուած է կարգ մը խորհուրդներու եւ ծէսերու ներդաշնակ, իմաստալից, վեհ եւ հնարաւորին չափ՝ միաձեւ կատարման համար:

Շնորհակալութիւն բոլոր մասնակցողներուն համար:

Անցնող տասնեւութ տարիներու ընթացքին անգամ մը միայն բացակայած էի Ղեւոնդեանց հաւաքէն. 1991ին էր, կարծեմ երբ Աւստրալիա պէտք էր ըլլայի՝ Եկեղեցիներու Համաշխարհային Խորհուրդի Ընդհանուր Ժողովին մասնակցելու համար: Ի պաշտօնէ բացակայութիւն էր ատիկա: Եւ սակայն, այսօր երկրորդ անգամ ըլլալով ձեր հետ չեմ, եւ այս անգամ՝ յակամայից, քանի կը գտնուիմ Փարիզի հարաւը, հանգստեան տուն մը, որ կը կոչուի Պլինյի: Բայց աղօթքով ձեր հետ եմ, սրտով ձեր հետ եմ եւ կ'ուզեմ այս քանի մը շաբաթներուն ընթացքին ինծի յաճախած մտածումներէն մէկ քանին բաժնել ձեր հետ:

Նախ՝ գիտցայ որ առողջութեան պէտք է հոգ տանիլ, չկարծել որ միայն ուրիշը կրնայ հիւանդանալ, ուրիշը կրնայ սրտի տագնապ ունենալ, ուրիշին կրնայ արկած պատահիլ: Մարդ ենք եւ հետեւաբար ունինք մեր սահմանափակումները եւ հնարաւորութիւնները՝ մարմնական գետնի վրայ: Յարգը գիտնանք մեր առողջութեան եւ... չհիւանդանանք: Անցեալ Օգոստոսի սկիզբը, երբ Երեւան կը գտնուէի, վերջին անգամի մը համար ներկայացայ Վազգէն Վեհափառին: Իր մահուան անկողինին մէջ էր. գիտէր ամէն բան. հանդիպման ընթացքին երկու անգամ ըսաւ «Տղաս, հիւանդ մի՛ ըլլար»: Քիչ մը տարօրինակիս եկաւ, որ Հայոց Հայրապետը այսքան «Տասարակ» բան մը կ'ըսէր. հիմա կը հասկնամ: Այն ատեն՝ տակաւին կը կարծէի որ աշխարհը իմս է,

ամէն բան կրնամ ընել: Եւ կարծեմ սխալս այդ էր: Ուրեմն՝ չչափուիլ բնութեան հետ, այլ չափաւորել կեանքդ, աշխատանքդ, ծառայութիւններդ, որպէսզի ի վերջոյ կարենաս աւելի օգտակար դառնալ: Հիմա գիտեմ, որ ամէն բան ամէն մարդու կրնայ պատահիլ, եւ չես կրնար շաբաթը եօթը օր լարուած մեքենայի նման շարժիլ: Յարգը գիտցէք ձեր Երկուշաբթի օրերու «ազատ օր»ուան, նոյնիսկ եթէ գիտնաք որ Սրբազանը Երկուշաբթի առաւօտ ժամը 9ին կը հեռաձայնէ ձեզի՝ խնդրի մը համար:

Որքան դիւրին է մեռնիլը ու որքան... դժուար: Հիմա կ'անդրադառնամ թէ ինչ փորձանքէ անցեր եմ: Բայց փառք, հազար փառք Աստուծոյ, որ նոր կեանք տուաւ ինծի, առիթ տուաւ ինծի, որ իմ հայ հոգեւորականի երազներուս իրականացման ճամբուն վրայ աչքերս ետ չմնան: Շնորհակալ եմ, Քեզի, Տէր Աստուած, այս երջանիկ բարեբախտութեան համար, եւ կը յուսամ որ ամօթով չեմ մնար եւ ինծի շնորհուած կեանքի օրերուն մէջ աւելի մօտ կ'ըլլամ Քեզի, աւելի հաւատարիմ կը մնամ Քու Որդւոյդ սիրոյ աւետարանին քարոզութեան եւ իբրեւ հովիւ՝ տէր կ'ըլլամ ինծի յանձնուած Աստուծոյ ժողովուրդին:

Դարձեալ, հազար փառք Աստուծոյ: Մանաւանդ երբ կը մտածեմ թէ գործերս կրնային կիսատ մնալ...: Ճիշդ է, ըսելու ձեւ է, եւ կը յիշեմ հոգելոյս Խորէն Ա. Կաթողիկոսի խօսքը. «ոչ ոք անփոխարինելի է», բայց եւ այնպէս՝ կը մտածեմ թէ ինչ պիտի ըլլան Առաջնորդարանի Հայաստանի յայտագիրները, 900 որբերը, 2300 ծերունիները, որոնց օգնութեան գործը աւելի դժուար է քան որբերունը: Թախչ գիւղի նորոգութիւնը յանձն առեր էինք.՝ տուն, դպրոց, եկեղեցի, ջրատար խողովակ, եւն., եւն.: Ո՞վ պիտի նայի, թէ այդ բոլորը լրիւ իրագործուեցա՞ն: Դեռ նոր հիմներ էինք «Հայաստանի Բնութեան Բարեկամներու Ընկերակցութիւնը» նպատակ ունենալով օգնել Խոսրովի անտառին, Հայաստանի կենդանական աշխարհին եւ վաղուան սերունդներուն յանձնել մեր սերունդին հասած սրբազան աւանդը: Դեռ չէ հրապարակուած մանկութեանս հերոսներէն՝ Արամ Մանուկեանի տուն թանգարանի ծրագիրը: Ո՞ր մէկը ըսեմ: Հապա՞ Առաջնորդարանի յայտագիրները, Ս. Գրիգոր Տաթեւացին, ամառնային միամսեայ դպրոցը Դիլիջանի մէջ, մեր երիտասարդներ-

րուն ծառայութիւնը, նորակառոյց եկեղեցիներն ու անոնց պարտքերը, Ս. Լուսաւորիչ ամենօրեայ դպրոցի ծրագիրը, Երկիր եւ Մշակոյթ կազմակերպութեան ծրագիրները: Տէր Աստուած, շնորհակալ եմ, որ առիթ տուիր որ այս բոլորին կարենամ ետ դանալ եւ կրցածիս չափ օգտակար ըլլալ ազգիս եւ եկեղեցիիս: Ուրիշ բան չեմ խնդրեր. ամէն բանէ գոհ եմ, ամէն ժամանակէ աւելի երջանիկ եմ: Երջանիկ եմ մանաւանդ հիմա, որ գիտեմ թէ քանի-քանի հոգիներ աղօթեցին ինծի համար, ոյժ եւ կորով ներշնչեցին ինծի, աւելի եւս զօրացուցին սիրտս: Աչքերս կը լեցուէին ամէն անգամ, երբ կ'իմանայի որ ուրիշ սիրելի մը, ծխական մը կ'աղօթէր ինծի համար: Ամենէն տրտումը եղաւ այն պահը, երբ հին ծանօթ մը, որ հեռու էր Աստուծմէ, ըսաւ. «Գիտե՞ս Սրբազան, նոյնիսկ աղօթեցի քեզի համար, ես որ երբեք չեմ աղօթած»: Աստուած լսէ անոր ձայնը:

Ի վերջ բանիս, սիրելի հոգեւոր եղբայրներ, ձեզի հետ կ'ուզեմ բաժնել երեք կէտեր.

ա.- Անգամ մը եւս զգացի, որ մեր ժողովուրդը կը սիրէ իր եկեղեցին եւ հոգեւորականները: Կրնայ չաղօթել, կրնայ եկեղեցի չբացել, կրնայ ամէն ձեւով անտարբեր ձեւանալ, բայց միտքիք կապ մը կայ հայ ժողովուրդին եւ իր եկեղեցիին եւ եկեղեցականներուն միջեւ: Յարգը գիտնանք այս խորհուրդին եւ միշտ արժանի ըլլանք այդ արտակարգ հոգեւոր վրատահութեան:

բ.- Բժիշկ մը կը հեռաձայնէր Ամերիկայէն: Ես, որ այդ օրերէն ի վեր կը հետեւէի եւ կը հիանայի Ֆրանսայի բժիշկներու կատարած հրաշքներուն, ըսի. «Տոբիթոր, կը հիանամ ձեր վրայ. ամէն մէկդ ձեր մասնագիտութեան մէջ հրաշք կը գործէք, կեանք կը փրկէք. Աստուծոյ ստեղծագործութեան մասնակից էք»: Ի պատասխանի բժիշկը ըսաւ, «Սրբազան, դուք ալ մեր հոգեւոր բժիշկն էք, մենք ալ ձեզի այդպէս կը նայինք»: Ամչցայ: Արդեօք մենք հոգեւորականներս, որքա՞ն կը յաջողինք բժշկել վէրքերը անոնց, որոնք փշրուած սրտերով, քանդուած հոգեկան տրամադրութիւններով, մեղքի գալարանքներուն ներքեւ սեղմուած, մեզի կողմէն խոստովանելու, միտքարուելու, հաւատալու համար: Երանի թէ, մենք ալ կարենայինք մարմնաւոր բժիշկներու չափ գէթ, օգտակար ըլլալ մեզի եկողներուն եւ զանոնք առաջնորդել մեծ բժիշկին, մեր Տիրոջ, Յիսուս Քրիստոսին:

գ.- Վաղը երբ վերադառնաք ձեր համայնքներուն

եւ ծուխերուն, հաճեցէք ձեր ժողովուրդին փոխանցել իմ սէրս ու օրհնութիւնս, ինչպէս նաեւ շնորհակալութիւնս իրենց աղօթքներուն եւ սիրոյն համար: Որքան զարմանայի խորհուրդ է այս սէրը աստուածային. գիտնալ՝ որ հեռաւոր աշխարհի մը մէջ մէկը քեզի համար կ'աղօթէ, կը մտածէ, լաւագոյնը կը մաղթէ, իր սրտին մէջ տեղ ունիս: Աչքերդ կը լեցուին, գոհունակութիւն մը կը պարուրէ քեզ եւ քու վիրաւոր սիրտդ կը զօրանայ, կը զօրանայ: Այսպէս եղաւ ինծի համար: Հիմա աւելի քան զօրաւոր սիրտ ունիմ եւ հոգեկան յարուստ ապրելու եւ ծառայելու համար:

Թող Աստուած արժանի ընէ գիս իմ փափաքիս մէջ եւ ձեզի բոլորիդ շնորհէ առողջ եւ արեւշատ օրեր:

Հիւանդութեանս օրերուն ինծի ընկեր էր Մշոյ Առաքելոց վանքէն հնադարեան խաչ մը՝ որ քաջ մշեցի մը գաղտնօրէն պահէր էր ամբողջ վախճան տարի, եւ օր մըն ալ յանձնէր էր իր տիրոջ, հայուհի մը*։ Առաքելոց վանքին եւ հայրենի հողին ոյժը կար այնտեղ: Եւ յետոյ, ինծի մշտական ընկեր էր Նարեկը, որուն տարբեր գլուխները կը կարգայի «Ջերմաչափի» նման...։ Օր կար «գղջուժի», օր կար «շնորհք եւ թողութիւն» խնդրելու: Միշտ սակայն Նարեկը ամենաանկեղծ թարգմանը եղաւ ապրումներուս, որով եւ կը փակեմ իմ այս սիրոյ նամակս ձեզի, կրկնելով Նարեկի խօսքերը. «Բայց Դուն ապաւինութիւնն ես. Դուն ինքդ ես փրկութիւնը. Դուն ես այցելութիւնը. Դուն ես քաղցութիւնը. Դուն ես երանութիւնը. Քեզմով է բժշկութիւնը. Քուկդ է ողորմութիւնը, միայն հօր, կենդանի, անճառ Տէր Յիսուս Քրիստոս, բարերար Աստուած, օրհնեա՛լ, օրհնեա՛լ, դարձեալ օրհնեա՛լ, Քու սուրբ իսկութեան փառքին համար, յաւիտեանս յաւիտենից. ամէն»։

ՄԵՍՐՈՊ ԱՐՔ. ԱՇՃԵԱՆ
Փետրուար 20, 1995, Պլինյի

*Տիկ. Արմենուհի Գեւորգեան, Մշոյ Տատրակին՝ Գեղամ Տէր Կարապետեանի դուստրը՝ ինծի վստահած էր Մշոյ Առաքելոց վանքէն գտնուած այս երկաթեայ խաչը, որ եղաւ իմ պահապանը եւ փրկիչը: Խաչը քիւրտի մը մօտ էր մնացել եւ 1960ական թուականներուն էր, որ այդ քիւրտը սրբազան աւանդը յանձնեց իմ Մշոյ Խաչապահի Արմենուհիին:



News from the Catholicosate

Byzantine Exhibition Opens at Metropolitan Museum with Artifacts from Cilician See

The much awaited exhibit *Byzantium: Power and Faith (1261-1557)*, opened to the public on March 23 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It will remain on view through July 4, 2004. The exhibit includes some Armenian artifacts from that era—which is the Cilician period—that have been loaned to the museum by the Catholicosate of Cilicia. Included in the exhibit are two manuscripts, one of which is the famous Gospel of Partserpert, and the reliquary of the right hand of St. Nicholas.

Archbishop Oshagan attended a preview opening and dinner on March 15 representing Catholicos Aram.

Catholicos Aram I Invited to Take Part in 10th Anniversary Commemoration of the Genocide in Rwanda

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, was invited by the government of Rwanda to participate in the 10th anniversary commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda, which took place in the capital city of Kigali. His Holiness' visit took place from April 18-21, 2004. He addressed an international conference on "Genocides in the 20th Century and Lessons to Humanity."

In his invitation letter to His Holiness, the foreign minister of Rwanda, Dr. Charles Murigande, wrote: "You stood by the people of Rwanda as they struggled to deal with the terrible consequences of genocide. It therefore gives me pleasure, on behalf of the people and government of Rwanda, to invite you to the ceremonies marking the 10th anniversary of the 1994 genocide. Join us to reflect on how to prevent and banish genocide for ever through active universal solidarity."

The delegation accompanying His Holiness included: Dr. Sam Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; Dr. Andre Karamagali, director of the De-

partment on Africa Affairs; Bishop Dandala, the General Secretary of All Africa Council of Churches; Ms Teny Pirri-Simonian, director of Church Relations Department of the WCC, and V. Rev. Fr. Krikor Chiftjian, director of the Catholicosate's Information and Communications Department.

General Secretary of WCC in Antelias

Dr. Sam Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, recently traveled to Antelias, Lebanon, for discussions with His Holiness Catholicos Aram, moderator of the Central and Executive Committees of the WCC. Discussions included the implementation of the decisions taken by the last executive committee meeting, preparations related to the international inter-faith conference to be organized by the WCC late in 2004, and particularly issues and concerns pertaining to WCC-Roman Catholic relations and collaboration.

New Donation for Cilician Museum

The Museum of the Catholicosate of Cilicia continues to receive national and religious Armenian cultural heritage, enhancing the museum's collection. Vatche Simonian and Teny Simonian recently donated an early 20th century silver belt, hand crafted with images of various Armenian churches, such as Nareg, Aghtamar, Varak, and Holy Cross. The belt, which was donated to His Holiness Aram I, originates from Van. It belonged to Rev. Fr. Hovhannes Simonian of the Holy Cross Church in Abaran, the grandfather of the donors.

Holy Week and Easter in Antelias

It was a special day in Antelias at the Catholicosate on Easter Sunday, as thousands of faithful attended the Eucharist celebration in the Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator. The Liturgy was celebrated by His Holiness Aram I. In his sermon, His Holiness described Easter as

the celebration of life. “Through His Cross Jesus conquered death and gave us abundant life. The God-given life in Christ is a quality of life that generates service, humility and commitment. Therefore, we must perceive and practice our life in a way that makes the Gospel message a living reality in our lives.”

During Holy Week members of the Cilician Brotherhood visited various dioceses on behalf of the Catholicos. Archbishop Ardavazt Terterian visited the Western Prelacy. Bishop Dirayr Panossian visited the Diocese of Cyprus. Rev. Keghart Kusbekian visited the Diocese of Aleppo. Rev. Bartev Gulumian and Rev. Vaghinag Meloyan visited the Diocese of Tehran. Various members of the Brotherhood visited churches of the Diocese of Lebanon during Holy Week.

Each year, as an expression of the existing brotherly love and collaboration between the hierarchal Sees, and upon the invitation of Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and His Beatitude Archbishop Mesrob Moutafian, Patriarch of Istanbul, members of the Cilician Brotherhood visit Istanbul and Jerusalem. This year, Bishop Nareg Alemezian visited Jerusalem and V. Rev. Yeghishe Mandjigian visited Istanbul.

International Conference on Genocide, Impunity and Justice

An international conference organized by the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia on “Genocide, Impunity and Justice,” took place in Antelias, Lebanon beginning on April 22. The conference was meant to coincide with the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, which took 1.5 million lives.

The Armenian Genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century (1915) and the Rwandan Genocide, the last genocide of the 20th century (1994) were presented as two different cases of impunity. An international body of scholars, politicians, and academicians took part in the conference.

During his opening remarks, His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, highlighted the question of impunity.

“The 20th century was an age of genocides,” said the Catholicos, despite “significant and encouraging developments.” This was the result of numerous international declarations for human rights, including the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998.

The Catholicos said that the international community “failed to respond immediately in Rwanda, which led to disastrous repercussions. While in Kosovo, thousands of human beings were saved because of a preventive action.” He also pointed out that the punitive approach is an essential factor for the restoration of justice, which only happens when the rights of the victim are fully recognized and adequately addressed.

“Why can’t the International Criminal Court bring governments or nations to justice?” he asked. He added that retributive justice should follow the punitive approach. This means that victims should be compensated, truth should be revealed and responsibility accepted.

“What is the use of all the treaties and institutions... if the powerful do not abide by [them]? Said Nawaf Kabbara, professor of political science at Balamand University. “Justice is determined by the powerful, but in the power game, the dominant emerges, but he is not necessarily the best,” he said.

Information Minister Michel Samaha, who delivered President Emile Lahoud’s address, said that the Ottoman state took the lives of 1.5 million Armenians in the massive genocide it carried in the early 20th century to eliminate Armenian culture.

However, the “Armenian people were able to survive, and rebuild their country,” said Samaha. As for refugees, “they were able to mingle with the countries they fled to and contribute to their development.”

Louis Joinet, magistrate at the Court of Cassation in France, and the rapporteur of UN special sub-commission on human rights, spoke of the natural humanitarian movement towards impunity and justice.

“There has to be a right to know individually and collectively where and when genocide took place. There also has to be a right to achieve justice,” said Joinet.

He added that “good justice” is never quick, and that he prefers reconciliation through pardon. But according to Joinet, the question is who should be pardoned? He pointed out that no one was willing to claim responsibility for such actions, as France did for the massacres in Algeria years after they had originally occurred.

Ninan Koshy, former professor of human rights at Harvard University, said that back in the 1920s there was no definition of massacre until Rafael Lemkin, a linguistics student in Poland, gave it the name genocide.

Koshy also said that the ICC is hampered by legal loopholes, such as its inability to look into crimes that took place before the court came to force in July 2002. ✱

C R S S R O A D S

A Review of Prelacy and Parish Activities

[For more information and photographs on most of the items listed please visit the Prelacy's web site, www.armenianprelacy.org].

April 24 Commemorations

Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan participated in a number of April 24th commemorations on the occasion of the 89th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

On April 22, His Eminence attended a ceremony at the New York offices of Governor Pataki, to receive the Proclamation issued by New York State.

On April 23, he delivered the invocation at ceremonies at New York City Hall, sponsored by the Armenian National Committee of New York and the City of New York.

On April 24 he attended the Divine Liturgy and Requiem Service, officiated by V. Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian, Vicar of the Prelacy, at St. Illuminator's Cathedral, New York City.

On April 25 he delivered the invocation at the annual Times Square commemoration sponsored by the Knights and Daughters of Vartan.

On April 28 he delivered the invocation at commemorative events on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Armenian National Committee of America.

NALG Mid-Atlantic Seminar

The National Association of Ladies Guilds presented its annual Mid-Atlantic Seminar on April 17 at the Prelacy offices. Guest speaker was Ms. Aghavni "Aggie" Ellian, Executive Director of the New York Armenian Home in Flushing, New York. She spoke about "The Forgotten Generation."

Prelate and Representatives Attend Meeting in Lebanon

Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan attended a conference, March 16-19, bringing together representatives of the Eastern, Western, and Canadian Prelacies. Joining the Prelate as representatives of the Eastern Prelacy were two members of the Executive Council, Richard Sarajian, Esq., (chairman), and Noubar Megerian. The Prelacy representatives met with His Holiness Catholicos Aram I and members of the Religious and Executive Councils of the Catholicosate. The discussions centered on the need for advancement in Christian education; Armenian language and culture education; recruitment and training

of clergy, deacons, choirmasters, teachers; ecumenical relations; charitable work in Armenia; and various other issues of mutual concern.

Feasts of St. Sarkis, Diarantaratch, Ghevontiantz, Vartanantz Commemorated

The Feast days of St. Sarkis, Diarantaratch, Ghevontiantz, and Vartanantz were commemorated in various Eastern Prelacy parishes with the participation of the Prelate, His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan.

St. Sarkis the Commander: Archbishop Oshagan commemorated St. Sarkis day on February 8 with the namesake parish of St. Sarkis Church in Douglaston, New York. He officiated at the Divine Liturgy and delivered the sermon in which he told the faithful that sainthood is not something reserved for a select few. "All of us are called to sainthood, following the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ," he said.

Diarnuntaratch: Last year Archbishop Oshagan invited St. Gregory Church of Philadelphia to host a regional celebration of Diarnuntaratch bringing back some of the traditions associated with this holiday. The result was very successful. This year, His Eminence asked St. Sarkis Church of Dearborn, Michigan, to host a similar regional celebration of the holiday, which commemorates the presentation of Jesus Christ to the Temple.

Ghevontiantz: The annual Sts. Ghevontiantz



Clergymen of the Eastern Prelacy gather for a group photo during the Sts. Ghevontiantz commemoration in Worcester, Massachusetts.

commemoration that precedes the Feast of Vartanantz, has become a time of edification, renewal, and reflection for the Armenian clergy. Each year they gather at a host parish to learn and to pray in an atmosphere marked by brotherhood and fellowship. This year's gathering took place February 16-18 at Holy Trinity Church, Worcester, Massachusetts. Representatives from the Canadian Prelacy, headed by Archbishop Khajag Hagopian, joined the clergy of the Eastern Prelacy.

Vartanantz: Vartanantz is one of the most popular feast days for Armenians. It is filled with both religious and nationalistic symbolisms of conscience, faith, and resolve to preserve identity and freedom of religion. It is commemorated each year on the Thursday prior to Poon Paregentan and the beginning of Lent. On Thursday, February 19, Archbishop Oshagan celebrated the Divine Liturgy and delivered the sermon at Sts. Vartanantz Church, Ridgely, New Jersey. Attending the service were Hovnanian School students from grades 4th to 8th, who took Communion and during the luncheon that followed the Liturgy, offered a charming Vartanantz program.

On Sunday, February 22, His Eminence celebrated the Divine Liturgy at Sts. Vartanantz Church in Providence, Rhode Island, with a dual celebration of Vartanantz and Poon Paregentan.

Ambassador Kirakossian's New Book Is Presented in New York



Ambassador Arman Kirakossian and Prof. Richard Hovannisian sign their books and meet their audience.

The presentation of the newly published book by Ambassador Arman J. Kirakossian, Armenia's Ambassador to the United States, brought together a capacity audience on February 20. Professor Richard G.

Hovannisian presented the book, *The Armenian Massacres 1894-1986: U.S. Media Testimony*, at the Citigroup Center in New York City.

Blessing of Foundation Stones for St. John Armenian Church Takes Place in Boynton Beach



Bedo Der Bedrosian, one of the sixteen godfathers and chairman of the Board of Trustees, holds a cornerstone as Archbishop Oshagan proceeds with the anointing.

Sunday, February 29, was a memorable day for the Eastern Prelacy and the Armenian community of South Florida. His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan, together with V. Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian, Vicar, and Archpriest Fr. Vazken Bekiarian, blessed the sixteen cornerstones of the new St. John Armenian Church of Boynton Beach, Florida. Joining the clergy on this occasion were the deacons, the sixteen godfathers, the major benefactor, Mr. George Pagoumian and his family, and the faithful of the community, which has been in existence for many years. The original church site was sold and this new property was purchased.

Archbishop Oshagan expressed his profound joy and gave thanks to God for granting him the opportunity to preside over this ceremony. He explained the meaning of the sixteen cornerstones, representing Christ's twelve disciples, St. Paul, the evangelists Mark and Luke, and the father of the Armenian Church, St. Gregory the Illuminator.

Musical Armenia Artists Perform To Sold-Out Audience

The 21st Musical Armenia concert took place in front of an enthusiastic and sold-out audience at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall on March 28. This year's concert featured the outstanding talents of the pianist Karine Poghosyan and the cellist Ani Kalayjian. Ms. Kalayjian was

accompanied by the gifted pianist Barbara Podgurski.

The Armenian Prelacy and the Prelacy Ladies Guild, under the leadership of the late Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, established the Musical Armenia concert series in 1982. Archbishop Oshagan Cholyan, the Ladies Guild, and the Musical Armenia committee dedicated this year's concert to Archbishop Mesrob's memory, in recognition of the many cultural programs that he conceived, and for his dedication to Armenian culture and to young artists.

Ambassador Ordway at Prelacy



Archbishop Oshagan Cholyan welcomes Ambassador John Ordway and Mr. Keith Simmons on behalf of the Prelacy.

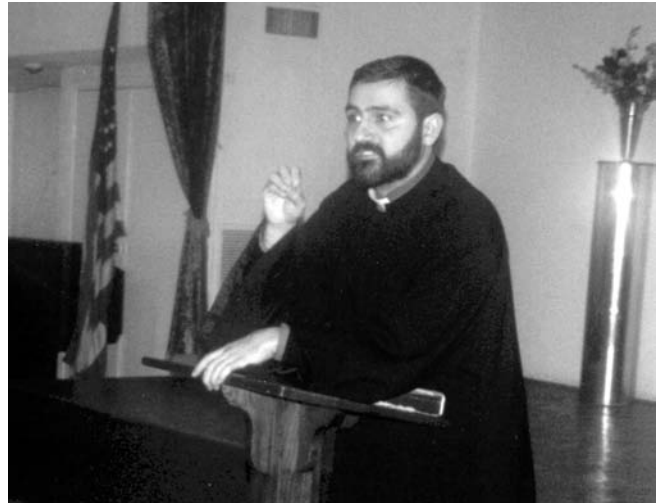
In a whirlwind series of appearances in the northeastern section of the United States, John Ordway, United States Ambassador to Armenia, met with the leadership of major Armenian organizations and the general public. On January 14 the Ambassador accompanied by Mr. Keith Simmons, the representative of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to Armenia, met with an intimate group of invitees at the Prelacy.

Lenten Lecture Series

The six-week long series of lectures during the Lenten period concluded successfully. The lecturers included V. Rev. Fr. Mashdots Chobanian, Vice-Director, Christian Education Department, Catholicosate of Cilicia; V. Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian, Vicar of the Prelacy and Pastor of St. Sarkis Church, Douglaston, NY; V. Rev. Fr. Muron Aznikian, Pastor of St. Illuminator's Cathedral, New York City; Rev. Fr. Khatchadour Boghossian, Pastor of Sts. Vartanantz Church, Ridgefield, NJ; and Dr. Vigen Guroian, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Loyola

College, Baltimore, Maryland.

The overall theme of the lectures centered on The Family. The Prelacy Ladies Guild and the Armenian Religious Education Council sponsor the lectures.



V. Rev. Fr. Mashdots Chobanian, Vice-Director of Christian Education Department of the Catholicosate of Cilicia lectures during Lent.

Baptismal Font Consecrated in Philadelphia

A new baptismal font was consecrated at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, Philadelphia, in December. His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan presided over the ceremony, assisted by the Pastor, Rev. Fr. Nerses Manoogian. The consecration of this Baptistry was made possible by the generosity of Jennie Kerbeck. It was her wish to donate money to the Church that became the funding to make the new Baptismal Font possible.

St. Stephen's Elementary School Launches Book Club

St. Stephen's Elementary School, Watertown, Massachusetts, recently launched a book club for advanced readers. Each session lasts 11 weeks. The students and their instructors meet once a week over lunch and for about 40 minutes discuss portions of the book they have read at home. Students can choose books in either Armenian or English. The program is open to all students in grades two to five. Those students who sign up for the Book Club sign a contract in which they promise to read the assigned books, all of which are outside their regular class curriculum.

Visit to Home for Aged, Flushing, New York

Archbishop Oshagan, accompanied by V. Rev. Fr. Anoushavan, V. Rev. Fr. Muron, and Rev. Fr. Moushegh

Der Kaloustian, visited the residents of the Old Age Home in Flushing, New York on March 31. The clergymen presided over Arevakal (sunrise) services for the residents and afterwards had the opportunity to visit with them. Archbishop Oshagan praised their wisdom and experience and noted when these attributes are combined with the energy of young people, a strong family unit is formed. The Prelate praised the director and board of trustees of the Home for providing a clean, happy and loving environment for our elderly citizens and said he looks forward to his visits to the Home, which are always inspirational.

**National Representative Assembly
Will Convene in Philadelphia, May 19-21**

The National Representative Assembly (NRA) of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America (Eastern United States), will convene in Philadelphia, May 19 through 21, during which time the clergy and lay delegates will deliberate on current issues as well as long-range planning for the future. The host church is St. Gregory the Illuminator, one of the Eastern Prelacy's largest and most vibrant parishes.

The NRA is the highest authority of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, and is charged with the task of supervising the ecclesiastical and administrative bodies of the Eastern Prelacy. The Assembly is composed of one-seventh clergy and six-sevenths lay delegates. The clergy delegates are elected by the clergy conference, and the lay delegates by their respective parishes. Although the membership changes, the NRA is a permanent body.

The first session will begin Wednesday afternoon, May 19, with the official "Call to Order," and opening prayer, followed by welcoming addresses by the host parish, report of the credential committee, and the election of the NRA chairmen and secretaries. All of the meetings will take place at the church, which is located at 8701 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19128.

The Prelate, His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, will deliver his message during the second session on Thursday, May 20, at approximately 10 a.m. This will be followed by the Keynote address by Professor Vigen Guroian, who will speak about "The Armenian Christian Family Under Fire." His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, proclaimed 2004 as "The Year of the Family," and the Eastern Prelacy has been focusing on this theme throughout the year. Dr. Guroian is professor of theology and ethics at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland. He is the first Armenian theologian ever elected to the American

Theological Society and the Orthodox Theological Society of America. His published works include nearly 150 articles, and six books with three more scheduled to be published later this year.

Also featured during the sessions will be a study conducted by the St. Asdvadzadzin Church, Whitinsville, Massachusetts, as "one example of how a parish is meeting the needs of its parishioners."

The various workshops will focus on the responsibilities of boards of trustees, delegates, and the Prelacy, and steps that can be taken at a parish and regional level to build on various educational programs.

Mrs. Alice Sachaklian, of Virginia, will be honored as the "Woman of the Year." Mrs. Sachaklian and her late husband Col. Harry Sachaklian have been active members of the Armenian Church for decades as well as generous benefactors, especially for clergy training. Mrs. Sachaklian recently established a fund with the Prelacy Endowment Fund, "The Col. Harry A. and Alice K. Sachaklian Antelias Seminary Fund." Col. Sachaklian served as a delegate to the NRA for many years and was elected to serve as co-chairman of the NRA on several occasions.

Mr. Aram Hamparian, Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America in Washington, D.C., will be honored with the "Spirit of Armenia" award in recognition of his years of outstanding service as an advocate for Armenian issues.

The prestigious "Knight of Cilicia" insignia issued by His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, will be conferred on local parishioner, Mr. K. Yervant Terzian, who has been an active member of the Philadelphia Armenian community for decades and benefactor to many Armenian organizations, including the Eastern Prelacy.

On Thursday, May 20, the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated on the occasion of Ascension Day at St. Gregory Church, 7:30 p.m.

The Prelacy Bookstore is organizing a mini book fair, which will be open for the duration of the Assembly for the benefit of the delegates and the Philadelphia community. The latest books, CDs, and gifts will be available.

The closing banquet, during which several local parishioners will be honored with Certificates of Merit, will take place at Doubletree Guest Suites in Plymouth Meeting.

**Near East Foundation
Returns to Armenia**

Linda K. Jacobs, Ph.D., chair of the Near East

Foundation, recently returned from a whirlwind three days in Armenia, packed with meetings with major figures in Children's social services and development assistance as well as in religion, government and art. Her mission was to explore a collaboration with Armenian agencies to help so-called "street kids" improve their lives and the lives of their families.

"We had been considering a return," Dr. Jacobs said, adding, "and with so much encouragement from many of our Armenian supporters attending last year's exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, which presented our work with Armenian survivors of the 1915 genocide—the decision was made." As previously reported, the origins of the Near East Foundation as a relief operation were the basis for "Near East/New York: the Near East Foundation and American Philanthropy" on view at the museum last fall.

She said the most striking thing about her Armenian visit was "the enormous emotional impact" on so many people she encountered of the Near East Foundation's return after so many years. "They all expressed their profound gratitude for our work as Near East Relief (the organization's name was changed in 1930). Some were so moved—they were speechless. Everyone—without exception—welcomed us back," she continued, obviously personally touched by the reception she received representing the organization. In addition, she was interviewed for a television program to be broadcast nationally on April 24th in conjunction with observances of the 1915 genocide.

Elaborating on the reasons for her visit, Dr. Jacobs commented: "Street kids have many assets to work with—'street smarts,' ambition, responsibility, entrepreneurial skills, to name a few. For starters," she continued, "we will be bringing everybody together so we can initiate a program that best meets Armenian needs, fulfills the Near East Foundation mission, and can be accomplished by our limited financial resources."

The Near East Foundation plans to partner with a Canadian group, Street Kids International, on the project, which will begin with a two-day workshop scheduled for mid-May in Yerevan.

Prelacy Ladies Guild Mothers Day Luncheon Attracts Many

Once again the annual Mothers' Day luncheon sponsored by the Prelacy Ladies Guild (PLG) attracted an over-flow attendance from the tri-state area and beyond at



Very Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian surrounded by the Prelacy Ladies Guild clutching their certificates honoring their service to the Prelacy.

the St. Regis in midtown Manhattan.

In a surprise announcement the current PLG members were honored rather than one individual as the Mother of the Year. V. Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian, Vicar of the Prelacy, representing the Prelate, explained how it was Srpazan's wish that the current members of the PLG be honored this year on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Guild. In his message printed in the special 30th anniversary program booklet, His Eminence said: "This year's luncheon has special significance because it also marks the 30th anniversary of the Prelacy Ladies Guild. It can be said that the Prelacy Ladies Guild has fulfilled the duties of a mother for the Prelacy. For the past three decades these dedicated and loving women have generously given their time, resources, and talents to tend to the needs of the Prelacy. Just like a loving mother, they have done this without any expectations of glory and thanks. They have done it simply because of love."

Datev Summer Program Brings Youth Together

The annual summer program of the St. Gregory of Datev Institute brings together junior and senior high school age students in one of the best youth programs available. The Datev Summer Program will take place June 27 to July 4, at the St. Mary of Providence Center, Elverson, Pennsylvania. For registration and information visit the Prelacy website at www.armenianprelacy.org/datev.htm and also read all the comments from Datevatzies who have attended the program.

The Datev Institute is organized and sponsored by the Armenian Religious Education Council (AREC) as part of the youth programs of the Eastern Prelacy. ✘

AREC Seminars Focus on Understanding of the Liturgy

Mandated by Jesus Christ – “Do this in remembrance of me!” (Luke 22: 17-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25), the Eucharist (*Soorp Badarak*) has been the central act of worship for all ancient churches. It celebrates, expresses, and actualizes *all* the essential aspects of what it means to be a baptized Christian.

And as such, participating in the *Soorp Badarak* presupposes a lot—at the least a basic knowledge of and commitment to biblical faith, as well as a general understanding of liturgical movements and symbolism – all of which, seem to be coming from a “strange world view,” particularly for the uninitiated.

For this reason, His Eminence Archbishop Oshagan, the Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Eastern United States, and the Prelacy Executive Council, directed the Armenian Religious Education Council (AREC) to make *Soorp Badarak* one of its priority programs for the year 2004 – to once again provide educational opportunities for the laity to learn and deepen their understanding of the inexhaustible riches and significance of the *Soorp Badarak*, “the sacrament of all sacraments” as defined by the Holy Fathers.

As a start, three seminars have been sponsored for three different audiences: A national conference for Sunday School teachers (February 27-29, 2004), a local seminar for the St. Gregory the Illuminator community in Granite City, IL (March 13); and a seminar for deacons and choirs for the Midwest region at All Saints’ Armenian Church in Glenview, IL (March 27).

Other educational opportunities are in the works, including a study guide on *Soorp Badarak*.

Christian Educators’ Conference

Appropriately, the yearlong agenda focusing on the theme of *Soorp Badarak* was inaugurated with the annual national conference for Sunday School teachers, and His Eminence keyed the conference on Friday evening with his blessings and engaging presentation, “*Soorp Badarak in our Life*.”

Held at the Wonderland Conference Center in Sharon, Massachusetts, February 27-29, 2004, the conference attracted over twenty-five Sunday School teachers, directors, and clergy, from nine Prelacy parishes, and it included lectures, discussions, workshops, and worship services.

By far the most memorable part of the weekend conference was the session with His Eminence. Srpazan

Hayr first highlighted the essential elements relative to the celebration of *Soorp Badarak*. He then spoke to the educators about its place in their lives, as well as their role and mission *vis à vis Badarak*. “People are not spectators at the *Badarak*,” he said. “They must participate. But, in order to participate, people have to be taught; they have to know and understand what happens during the *Badarak*.” And that learning must start from childhood. Hence, the parents’ and teachers’ mission and responsibility.

A lively discussion ensued on a host of issues, ranging from the language and length of the *Soorp Badarak*,



Mary M. Shamsboian Olson, Ed. D. leads the workshop for the Sunday School teachers on *Soorp Badarak*.

ways to initiate Sunday School children into the life of the eucharistic community, preparation for receiving communion, to apparent reasons why people do not attend *Badarak* and apparent solutions to get them there.

At the conclusion, Srpazan underscored that the real solution to having people attend and participate in *Soorp Badarak* is *faith* coupled with *education*. This was truly a unique opportunity and privilege that was accorded to educators to engage with their Srpazan on issues related to the Eucharist.

On Saturday, more than six hours were devoted to examining several scriptural texts pertaining to the Eucharist, as well as studying the *Soorp Badarak* service, led by Deacon Shant Kazanjian, Director of AREC.

Dn. Shant engaged in close reading of three passages with the participants (St. Mark’s accounts of



Archbishop Oshagan presented the keynote address during the National Conference for Sunday School Teachers held in Sharon, Massachusetts.

the Last Supper, I Corinthians 10-11, and Luke chapter 24), inviting them to pay attention to the theological and artistic details of the text. “Only by taking the text seriously does one come to appreciate the riches and the power of the Word of God,” said he. “The scripture is *the key* to understanding the Eucharist,” said Dn. Shant, “since all the vocabulary and the symbolic language and the images used in the *Soorp Badarak* service are scriptural through and through.”

After having presented the overall structure, Dn. Shant walked the participants through the *Soorp Badarak*, step-by-step, with the help of a *Badarak* video, highlighting basic liturgical symbols and movements, their function in the service, and the congruence of acts and movements with prayers and hymns (*sharagams*).

How do you take such huge ideas and translate them into small digestible lessons for children and youth was the focus of the Saturday evening and Sunday workshops, superbly conducted by Mary M. Shamshoian Olson, Ed. D., Director of Instruction and School Improvement, Warren District 121 (Gurnee, IL). Dr. Olson guided the participants, grouped by grade level, to draft units of lessons on various aspects of the *Badarak*. As always, prayer and worship services were an integral part of the weekend conference. Morning and evening services were observed and on Sunday *Soorp Badarak* was celebrated at the Center. Fr. Antranig Baljian (pastor of St. Stephen’s Church in Watertown, Mass.) and Fr. Vartan Kassabian (pastor of St. Gregory’s Church in North Andover, Mass.) presented meditations during the services. Der Antranig celebrated the *Soorp Badarak* on Sunday and delivered the homily.

The participants came from the following nine

parishes: St. Illuminator’s Armenian Cathedral, New York City; Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, Ridgefield, New Jersey; St. Stephen’s Armenian Church, Watertown, Massachusetts; Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, Providence, Rhode Island; St. Gregory Armenian Church, Indian Orchard, Massachusetts; St. Gregory Armenian Church, North Andover, Massachusetts; Holy Trinity Armenian Church, Worcester, Massachusetts; St. Asdvadzadzin Armenian Church, Whitinsville, Massachusetts; St. Sarkis Armenian Church, Dearborn, Michigan.

Local Seminar at St. Gregory’s, Granite City, IL

At the invitation of the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Serop Azarian, and the Board of Trustees, Deacon Shant visited the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Granite City, IL, on the weekend of March 12-14, 2004, and conducted a daylong seminar entitled *Soorp Badarak as the Supreme Expression of our Communal Spirituality*, met with the Sunday School staff, and preached on Sunday during the Liturgy.

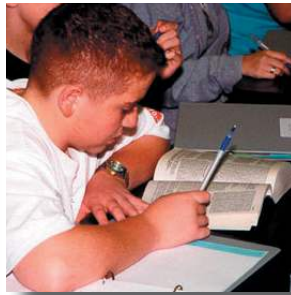


Hayr Anoushavan Tanielian and Deacon Shant Kazanjian during Q/A at a seminar for deacons and choir members for the Midwest region.

Deacons’ and Choir members Seminar

A daylong seminar for deacons and choir members was held at All Saints’ Armenian Church in Glenview, Illinois, on Saturday, March 27, 2004, for the Mid-West region. In keeping with the theme for the year, the seminar focused on the *Soorp Badarak*. Partly interpretive and partly practical, the seminar was led by Very Rev. Fr. Anoushavan Tanielian and Deacon Shant Kazanjian. Fifteen people participated from 5 parishes. Dn. Shant lectured on *Origins and the Structure of the Eucharist (Soorp Badarak)*, and Hayr Anoushavan presented two sessions: *Eucharistic Piety* and *Interpretation of Badarak* with slides. ✠

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DATEV Summer Program

June 27 - July 4, 2004

at the
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Elverson, Pennsylvania

see what "datevatzies"
are saying about it
at

www.armenianprelacy.org/datev.htm

For registration & information, visit the Prelacy website at www.armenianprelacy.org/datev.htm
or contact the AREC office at (212) 689-7810 or arec@armenianprelacy.org

Sponsored by the Armenian Religious Education Council (AREC)
Eastern Prelacy - Armenian Apostolic Church of America

Topics to be discussed:

**Marriage:
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**Reproductive
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motherhood, cloning)*

Abortion

Suicide

Cremation

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JUNE 25- 27, 2004

*(begins 8 pm on Friday, June 25
and ends 1 pm on Sunday, June 27)*

Main speaker:

DR. VIGEN GUROIAN

Professor of Theology and Ethics at
Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland

Professor Guroian is the first Armenian theologian ever elected to the American Theological Society and the Orthodox Theological Society of America. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Society of Christian Ethics, has been active in both the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, and is a member on numerous editorial boards. His published works include nearly 150 articles, and six books with three more scheduled to be published later this year.

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A Review of “The Passion of Christ”

by Rev. Fr. Nerses Manoogian

I wanted the effort to be a testament to the infinite love of Jesus Christ, which has saved, and continues to save, many the world over. — Mel Gibson

This movie—*The Passion of Christ*—has brought Jesus to the center of American life for the first time in our times. Suddenly the name of Jesus became the talk of the town, occupied cyberspace and the entire media. From its early stage of production, this movie stirred interest. Many people criticized it as being anti-Semitic, others because of its graphic brutality, and some criticized its non-textual portions. But nobody noticed that this movie was a faith affirming experience and a wake-up call to many “sleeping” Christians.

After seeing this movie with all its textual and non-textual parts, I realized that somebody who does not know the Bible would have difficulty grasping the message of the writer and director of the film, Mel Gibson.

I am convinced that Gibson was not too interested in presenting the textual passion narrative but rather wanted to transmit a message to the moviegoers. He says in the foreword of the movie’s picture book, “This film is not meant as historical documentary nor does it claim to have assembled all the facts. But it does enumerate those described in relevant Holy Scripture. It is not merely representative or merely expressive. I think of it as contemplative in the sense that one is compelled to remember in a spiritual way which cannot be articulated, only experienced.”

He started thinking about this project ten years ago because, he says, “I was trapped with feelings of terrible, isolated emptiness.”

I believe he definitely had a message, otherwise why would he alter the text and add other biblical scenes and concepts to the movie. Moviegoers should go to the theater with this predisposition. Go to capture the underlying message, which runs from the opening scene to the end.

To make an intellectual criticism about this movie, one needs to read the Gospel narrative of Christ’s passion and try to distinguish between the textual and non-textual scenes and concepts.

Having established this, let us start talking about the hidden message of the writer and the director of this movie, Mel Gibson, who happens to be a truly devoted Christian.

I believe he definitely had a message, otherwise why would he alter the text and add other biblical scenes and concepts to the movie. Moviegoers should go to the theater with this predisposition. Go to capture the underlying message, which runs from the opening scene to the end.

1. The film starts in Gethsemane, a misty garden. On the left of the screen appears this quotation from the Book of Isaiah: “He was wounded for our transgressions; ... by his wounds we were healed.” (53:5)

According to Christian Fathers and theologians this is the foretelling of the crucifixion and death of Christ. What the movie doesn’t show is the ending of this quotation:

“And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Gibson, from the opening scene of the film reminds us that the death of Christ was for a purpose, namely for the atonement of our sins. He is trying to tell us that the blood you will see on the screen is already shed and already at work, meaning it is an eternal source of salvation for the believers and the manifestation of Jesus’ infinite love. He is trying to tell us, Do not dwell or get stuck on Crucifixion; He is risen, He had crushed the head of the serpent and He gave you His mother, the symbol of the church where everybody can find comfort and benefit from His sacrifice (The Badarak).

2. This movie is not only what the title suggests, *The Passion of Christ*. The writer is not interested in presenting to the moviegoers only the crucified Jesus, but the Risen Jesus who is alive today in His churches and communities. This is why at the end of the movie he does not bother presenting the resurrection scene of Jesus. My assumption is based on what Jesus was saying while carrying his cross to Golgotha “I make *all things new*.” (non-textual). This is a direct quotation from the Book of Revelation, (21:5). The Book of Revelation deals with the risen Lord only. The message of the risen Messiah in this book is that

the second coming of Christ is at hand and that every Christian should be ready for that moment.

Gibson is telling us that the risen Lord is walking amongst us now and directing our attention to His life-giving crucifixion that happened 2000 years ago, the purpose of which was our salvation. Jesus was committed then and is committed today.

3. The Satan Controversy. Mel Gibson seems to be very much concerned about satanic power in our society. He very shrewdly brings Satan in the passion narrative. He also gives a face to Satan.

In the scene where Jesus is praying in Gethsemane, Satan shows up and tries to discourage and tempt Jesus to quit and go home. He is saying to Jesus, "Do you really believe that one can bear all the sins of the world? No one can."

He then takes the shape of a snake and crawls toward Jesus. Jesus crushes the head of the serpent. Now, this is not textual but biblical. It is taken from the book of Genesis. When Adam and Eve were caught sinning and expelled from paradise, God cursed them and then cursed the snake saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

The message to us is, Never slow down in your spiritual life. Pursue your vision and do not let anything in this world distract you and derail you from your tracks. Jesus crushed the head of the snake, so can you.

Satan is always at work in the Church. He constantly tries to cast his net. Those who are genuine in their faith will never be trapped in the web of sin.

It is interesting to notice that, when Jesus is carrying his cross and walking through the crowd, Gibson puts Satan on one side of the street still following Jesus and on the other side he puts his mother, Mary. He is trying to tell us, that in our fellowship of Christ, Satan might trap us and doom our lives, but we must look always to the other side, where Mary is, the symbol of the church. If you are in church, meaning in faith, no Satan can touch you or tell you otherwise.

Right after Jesus dies in this movie, Satan's presence decreases and vanishes from the face of the earth. (Non-textual) This again refers to the Book of Revelation, "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless

pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while." (Rev. 20:1-3)

The excessive flogging is nobody else's doing but ours. The flogging is continuing today every time we deny Jesus and stray away. The collection of flogs speaks about the collection of indifferent and passive Christians who are on the sidelines and too lazy to come in.

In the film (not in text) after Jesus is crucified, dark clouds cover the area; everybody is scared and flees the scene. The believing thief tells Jesus out loud, "There

is no one left. No one Jesus." Gibson hopes that you stay around and get involved.

Baptism Scenes: After Jesus dies and Satan vanishes from the face of the earth, a drop of water from heaven drops on earth by the side of Jesus' cross and makes a big splash. (Non-textual) The meaning of this is that after the death of Jesus

the earth is cleansed and we are saved. The Messiah had accomplished His mission.

The second baptismal scene occurs when according to the narrative they pierce the side of the Lord and water and blood gush out and wash a Roman soldier, who then seems to be converted. In the film the gushing was a bit exaggerated to convey this message very forcefully, "The blood of the Lord cleanses us and saves us."

The Last Scene: (Non-textual) When Joseph of Arimathea lowers the corpse of Jesus from the cross, Mary, her face covered with the blood of her son, holds the corpse in her arms and looks to the world with a very determined look, as if she is saying, The Christian church is born, and it is founded on the blood of Jesus.

The only sour note in this movie, in my estimation, is the selection of the Armenian tune *Dele Yaman*, which is a love song. It was played when Jesus was carrying His cross. I think Gibson was ill-advised on this matter. ✘

The message to us is, Never slow down in your spiritual life. Pursue your vision and do not let anything in this world distract you and derail you from your tracks. Jesus crushed the head of the snake, so can you.

Rev. Fr. Nerses Manogian is pastor of St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Books on My Reading Table

by Melitene Toma

THE BURNING TIGRIS

The Armenian Genocide and America's Response

by Peter Balakian

Peter Balakian's *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*, is the latest addition to the growing body of literature on the Armenian Genocide. A distinguished poet and the author of the celebrated award-winning memoir *Black Dog of Fate*, Balakian revisits the tragic history of the Genocide perpetrated by successive governments of Turkey against the Armenian people as well as the responses of the American people and official Washington to the unrelenting, organized bloodshed. Documenting the historical background, Balakian uses the vast array of sources available, including American, British, German and Turkish archives and documents, survivor memoirs, witness testimony, as well as the works of distinguished historians such as Vahakn Dadrian, Richard Hovannisian, Deborah Lipstad, Howard Sachar and others.

What distinguishes Peter Balakian's book from other works is the development of three important themes. First, Balakian places the Genocide of 1915-1923 on a continuum of Turkish state policy that leads from the Ottoman Sultans to Ataturk and beyond. The *gavour* or infidel status of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire placed Armenians in a vulnerable position and made them fair game to chronic official and everyday abuses by Turks and Kurds alike. By the mid-1890s, under Sultan Abdul Hamid, oppression and exploitation moved to officially organized and abetted large-scale killing of Armenians in numbers and patterns that justify the definition of genocide. The use of the government organized *Hamidiye* units, officially sanctioned *Chetes* and *Softas* for the purpose of repressing and killing Armenians leaves no doubt about the responsibility for this genocidal campaign. Under the allegedly reformist Young Turks, the massacres and destruction of the Armenian community of Adana demonstrated that notwithstanding the pious claims of reform or the government structure, the drive to resolve the Armenian Question always led to genocide, now cloaked in the Pan-Turanic ideology of the so-called modernizing Turkish elites. The 1915 Genocide, which

began even before April 24, merely used the screen of World War I to hide and justify the more comprehensive, organized, military and para-military national campaign to extinguish the Armenian nation. Under Ataturk's leadership the attempt to crush the Armenian Republic as well as renewed string of murders from Kars to Smyrna simply rounded up nearly half a century of bloodshed and genocide.

This is an important reminder in a time when some historians are romanticizing Ottoman rule as an era of great tolerance and brotherhood, while others seek to limit responsibility for the Genocide to a now defunct Ottoman Empire. Balakian shows that the one true continuity in Turkey's policy was the shrinking empire's obsession with the elimination of the Armenians from their historical homeland. Moreover, by revealing how from the very outset the murder of Armenians was always accompanied by a sustained and elaborate campaign of denial, Balakian clearly ties the Turkish government of our time to their Ottoman and Young Turk predecessors, through denial or "the killing of memory," a continuation of the genocide in the realm of history and culture.

The second major theme, and the underlying purpose of the book, is the American involvement with the fate of Armenians. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, largely because of the work of missionaries working in the Ottoman Empire, American public opinion was well informed about the plight of Armenians under Turkish rule. At the same time, educational institutions established by the missionaries contributed to the rise of political consciousness among young Armenians, as well as brought new levels of education to Armenian girls. From the 1880s on, the most forward thinking segments of American intellectual and social-justice elites were deeply engaged in a struggle on behalf of the Armenian people. Illustrious abolitionists like Julia Ward Howe, feminists like Alice Stone Blackwell, humanitarian activists, such as Clara Barton, writers such as Henry James publicized the Armenian cause and organized drives to protest the mass murder of Armenians organized under Sultan Abdul Hamid, to seek intervention by the Great Powers and to provide aid and comfort to survivors.

If the American people were deeply involved in the

1890s raising funds and providing aid, also growing were the calls for actual intervention in Turkey, to secure the rights and save the lives of Armenians. Peter Balakian underscores that the drive to bring about American diplomatic or even military action on behalf of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, represents the first American campaign for involvement in Human Rights issues overseas. *The Burning Tigris* covers in some detail the mobilization of efforts during the 1915-1923 Genocide, which under the leadership of Ambassador Morgenthau, Cleveland Dodge, Rabbi Stephen Wise, and others bought about the establishment of organizations such as the Committee on Armenian Atrocities, Near East Relief and others, whose works insured the survival of thousands of orphans and refugees.

A third and related theme is that of the dichotomy between the popular support described above and the official Washington policy, at best timorous at worst opposed to any action that might threaten relations with Turkey. Ironically, even some missionary organizations that had played such a positive role and that could have helped influence United States government policy after World War I sought to placate the Turks in a futile attempt to preserve their own position and assets in Turkey.

In dealing with American's responses to the Armenian Genocide, Peter Balakian reminds us that those who seek to deny the reality of the Genocide, or those who—like official Washington—would prefer to forget it ever took place, also deny and seek to forget an important chapter in American human rights and humanitarian activism.

MY FATHER'S JOURNAL:

A Soliloquy

Concise Recollections and Autobiography
by Toros Aris Gochigian

One of my favorite genres is personal recollections—be it in the form of diaries or letters. This little book—barely 100 pages—tells the story of Toros Aris Gochigian who although is not a survivor of the genocide having left his village of Odour in the province of Sebastia, in 1913, but nevertheless relates a story of loss and longing. He lost his wife, two children, and numerous relatives during the 1915 genocide.

He was perhaps five or six years old at the time of the 1894-1896 massacres and he recalls the “plundering and pillaging with a special memory of a child.” He re-

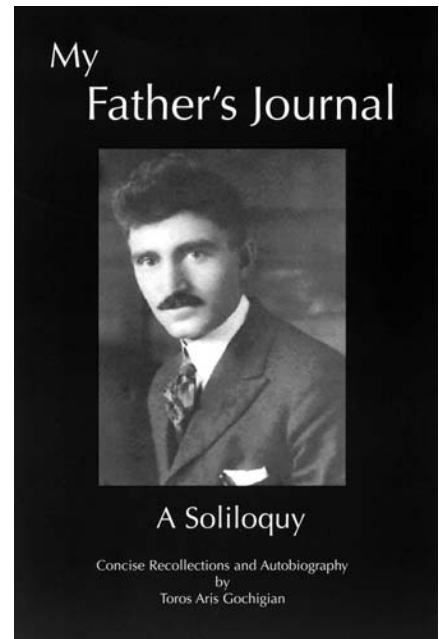
calls how difficult life became for the entire family as first they left the village to find refuge in the home of a Kurdish friend, who agreed to hide them, but then fearing for his and his family's safety asks them to leave after one night.

Eventually the family returns to their village. Toros marries

and fathers two children, a boy and a girl. In 1913 he leaves his family and begins his journey to the United States: “It was September 9, 1913, when I departed from my beloved homeland. Along with five friends, I arrived in Constantinople twelve days later... After staying in Constantinople for only one week, we boarded a ship headed directly for the United States of America... After 19 days, arrived at the famous New York harbor...” From New York he went to Watervliet, New York, where he had friends. Unable to find work he goes to Arkansas where some men from his village have gone in search of work. He remains in Arkansas for six months, returns to Watervliet, and a short time later relocates to Watertown, Massachusetts.

The story of survival in a new, strange country, coupled with his longing for his homeland and his family, makes his plight, like so many others like him, heart wrenching. The last letter he receives from his family is dated April 25, 1915. From then on his narrative is a mixture of poetry, dreams, and lamentations.

Memoirs like this are very valuable for their depiction of village life, as well as the life led by the early immigrants to the United States. ❖

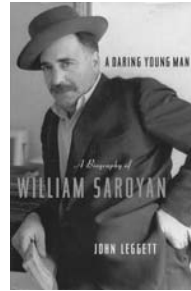


Melitene Toma is the penname of an avid reader who is eager to share her opinions. The books mentioned in this column are available at the Prelacy Bookstore, books@armenianprelacy.org or 212-689-7810.

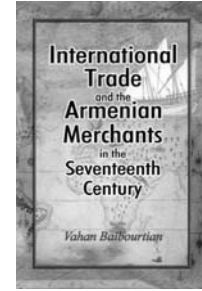
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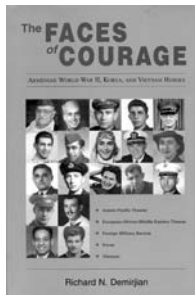
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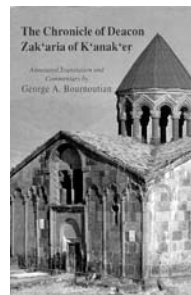
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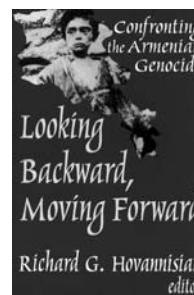
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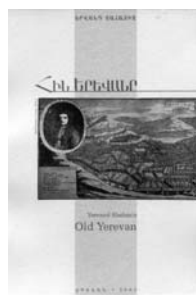
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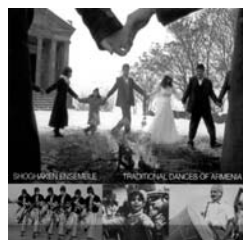


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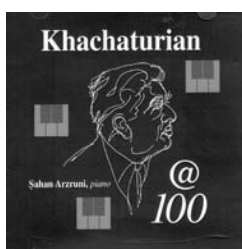
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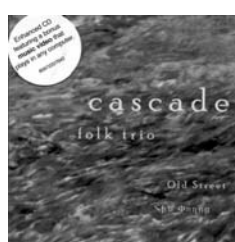
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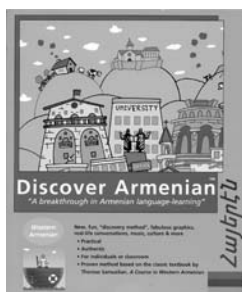
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continued from inside front cover

speculate, as some have, that he must have suspected that his own death was near. But, the truth is that he was always interested in death and especially cemeteries. In one of his most poignant essays, "A Cemetery in America," he recounts his trip to Cedar Grove Cemetery in New York with his elderly uncle, Souren *Keri*. He wrote:

Cemeteries are not unfamiliar to me, and I do not avoid going to them. In my childhood, when I was a choir member at the St. Nishan Church in Beirut, we would hold candles and walk in procession from St. Nishan to the Firin Shibbeki Armenian cemetery. We would do this once or twice a week. When I grew up, wherever I went, when I had the occasion, I would visit the cemetery of the given city. I have seen Yerevan's Tokhmakh Keol, the cemetery in Geneva, Paris's Armenian cemetery, Fresno's Ararat, and Hollywood's Forest Lawn cemetery. I have paid my respect to the memory of the dead because since I reached the age of conscience, one of Zareh Catholicos's sayings has resounded in my ears, "Rome was destroyed when it forgot to respect its dead." And because I remember this other saying, which we try to say every year on April 24th, "Our dead will die when their dream dies."

Near the end of the article Srpazan writes about his *Keri*, who at that time was 95 years old:

That Saturday at Cedar Grove cemetery continued in this way. But everything comes to an end, and our visit too came to an end. But Souren continues to remember for a long time the incidents, faces, events, and memories recalled. Each one is a jewel, and I fear that one day when this man is no longer with us, so many memories will go with him. Who will tell me that the walls of the Graceful Sourp Asdvadzadzin monastery in Havav were plastered with milk? Who will tell me about the Armenian youth who came to America for several years, worked, and returned to Armenia in 1913? His family is happy. His elderly father invites his son to sit at the most honored position around the table. The son says to his father, "Hyrig, I even miss this house's stable." Where is this boy today? The fathers and sons no longer exist today.

Srpazan's *Keri*—Souren Papazian—died in September 2003, at age 102. A little more than two months later Srpazan died, following the man whose loss he had feared would bring an end to remembrances of "incidents, faces, events, and memories." ❖

Prelacy Calendar of Events:

National Representative Assembly, May 19-21, 2004, St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Armenian Religious Education Council Programs

Bible Study at the Prelacy, 138 E. 39th Street, New York, every 1st and 3rd Monday of the month, from 7:15 p.m. to 8:45 p.m., led by Dn. Shant Kazanjian, Director of the Armenian Religious Education Council (AREC). Topic: Great Themes from the Gospel of St. Matthew. For information: arec@armenianprelacy.org

Mid-Atlantic Adult Christian Education Program at St. Mary of Providence Center in Elverson, Pennsylvania, June 25-27, 2004.

St. Gregory of Datev Institute, 18th Annual Summer Christian Studies Program for Junior and Senior High School students, at St. Mary of Providence Center, Elverson, Pennsylvania, June 27—July 4, 2004.

Armenian National Education Committee Programs

Siamanto Academy meets every Saturday at the Armenian Center, 69-23 47th Avenue, Woodside, New York, 11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The college-accredited Academy offers Armenian language, history and Christian studies classes for high school students. For information contact Gilda B. Kupelian, Director of the Armenian National Education Committee (ANEC): anec@armenianprelacy.org

Armenian National Educators' Seminar, August 28, 2004, New York.

Check the Prelacy website

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for up-to-the-minute information about events.



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