

THE PRIMATE'S MESSAGE

This was a year full of sadness and hope, for it was a landmark year, the 70th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Everywhere, Armenian groups gathered and in their own way commemorated what happened to our people in Turkey 70 years ago. You were one of these groups.

Armenians throughout the world relived the days of grief for lost loved ones, expressed anger and frustration towards the perpetrators' ignorant denial, and towards the U.S. government's failure to recognize April 24 as a day of Man's Inhumanity to Man.

But, it was also a year of self-recognition and hope.

What is hope? Along with the explanation given in the dictionary, I have another definition which is you, our youth, you are the hope. We cherish you. We desire a future for you full of the richness as the heirs of Armenian heritage. And we expect that you will take this heritage with dignity, embellish and pass it on to the next generations.

The Armenian Church Youth Organization of America is a wonderful structure in which to build on that precious hope. The ACYOA blends together religious, cultural, educational, social, and athletic activities into building blocks to be used by the young people of the Armenian church community, who are the future leaders of that community. Together, working to meet the challenge of the future, the youth share and learn and grow. It is a voluntary avocation. You are to be commended for volunteering yourselves so fully and so successfully.

Our hopes and our prayers are with you as you continue on this precious path to our future.

Prayerfully,

Archbishop Torkom Manoogian
Primate

July 1985

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ACYOA - GENERAL ASSEMBLY - SEPT. 1984

1985 is the 70th anniversary of the execution of a heinous plan to exterminate a whole nation, the Armenian people. This nation had a history of five thousand years, had kept pace with the progress and civilization of the human race; and after accepting Christ and His teachings as the foundation of her existence and the saving light for the creative spirit of her children, this nation had enriched the lives of her offsprings with a valuable and unique spiritual heritage.

However, another human race, as the dominating political and military power, at a moment of accumulated madness, decided to up-root, to destroy and to wipe out the subjugated Armenian people and her Christian spiritual heritage.

And the first premeditated and planned genocide was executed in 1915.

We thank God for the undying spirit and faithfulness of our forefathers.

They clung to their faith and their spiritual heritage, and carried them with them to all parts of the world wherever they took refuge.

In the United States and Canada you are the grand-children and the great-grand-children of the survivors of the genocide.

You are here today united as the representatives of our youth and that is magnificent. But it is absolutely essential that you as Armenians also unite in thought and action to make the progress and the contribution we so desperately need.

Our biggest cry is a universal cry - the need for better creativity and growth. But I do not worry so much about the needs of the rest of the world as I know there are unlimited resources for them to tap. How do we meet our demands? Where do we find our resources?

The answer is just in front of me. I am looking at you. This united gathering here is what I consider our best resource and the only strength we can rely upon. You are the generation of advanced technology, well equipped to bridge the gap between you and your heritage.

Forward thinking and planning are essential for us to grow and survive. A professional approach to youth program is no longer a luxury.

Each year you assemble with all seriousness to plan, discuss, propose, and decide a course of action. Are you a step up from where you were last year or you are standing still? Are you better equipped to serve your church and your community today than a year ago?

A few years back, for example, we laid the ground work for a Youth Ministry program, with the objective of training youth workers and supervising the training of professionals for parishes. Its primary concern was to create an opportunity for young people to relate and participate in the Armenian Church and community.

I know that the program is still not off the ground, I also know that it will stay there unless you decide on a strategy today, even during these meetings, to canvass colleges, universities and other centers where potential candidates are available. Look at this matter as a challenge.

Another challenging assignment for you will be the Youth Festival in Erevan. The Government of Armenia has designated August 15-25, 1985 for a Youth Festival, inviting the participation of choruses, orchestras, song, and dance ensembles, dramatic groups, individual performers, dance, instrumental and vocal music, recitation, painting, etc.

Here is an opportunity for you to pull your resources together and participate with the best available talents. Details will be provided to you.

You all know the meaning of burned out. That could happen to all individuals, institutions, families, managers, professionals, if they lose sight of beliefs, ideals, spiritual strengths.

You cannot let that happen, you must be serious about our faith, about our tradition, about our mission as Christians. By keeping in touch with God you will be able to manage your problems better, God shall be an infinite source in solving your problems.

Let this assembly be a turning point for all. That should not be very difficult to do, since it can be done by following a few simple rules such as:

Reviewing your past - Who are you? Where did you come from? What's your philosophy in life? What are your values in life and religion?

Educating yourself - Training may be a grind, but it brings with it power. Knowledgeable person is the one who will impress the powerful.

Looking at all the options available - What are your goals? What do you need to achieve them? There are far more possibilities than you think.

Reorganizing - If you haven't yet succeeded try to reorganize yourself. You know who you were last year, the year before, but you are not the same today.

Electing the best possibility - Avoid mediocrity which can easily choke your enthusiasm. Choose to follow the best course.

Doing something daring - Take a risk. Make a commitment. Unless you dare to take a risk, you'll never get ahead. People who risk nothing, do nothing, have nothing, are nothing.

Much as I do not like to tell jokes or anectodes, I will end with the following adapted story.

A father once said "Son, you have to set a goal and never quit. Remember Katcha Vartan?

The son said "yes".

"Aram Khatchadourian?"

"Yes."

"William Saroyan?"

"Yes?"

You know what they all had in common?"

"What"?

"They didn't quit. Remember Harry Narikian"?

The kid said "No. Who was he"?

"See, you don't remember him. He quit."

Some people look upon any setback as the end. But my message to you is you cannot quit. We as a nation did not survive through all these centuries by being quitters.

I pray that we also, as the present generation, may live and work as the genuine inheritors of the valuable and unique spiritual heritage of our forefathers.

God bless you.

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HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?
(II Corinthians 5:17-20)

When I was at Wayne State as an undergrad student in a humanities class, the young Jewish instructor made light of certain Christian beliefs. I spoke up and said that I understood what he was trying to do, to make us take a critical look at what we believed and not to just accept our parents' faith but to find our own. But, I went on to say, he was just setting us adrift, cutting us from our moorings, and he wouldn't be around to help tie us up again and most people wouldn't take the time or the effort to make their own personal synthesis of a faith. He grossly misunderstood what I was trying to say and told me I could report him to the dean and he tried to embarrass me with a few other remarks but I have never been as popular in a class as I was with the rest of the students in that one.

I believe that most of us have been cut from our Christian moorings at some time in our lives. We can blame the threat of ~~the~~ atomic warfare, ^{the society we live in,} a college professor, our parents, our peer groups, even our Church and, I believe, we have not taken the time to know who we are and what our identity is.

Let's skip over a few years from that day in the university class to the teachers' lounge at the elementary school where I taught. An Irish colleague made the comment that she thought it was un-American for me to identify with an ethnic group. My answer to her was that it was impossible to identify with an American culture because it was too broad with too many subcultures. I went on to say that she had chosen to identify with her bridge club and that I found that the Armenian Church gave me a sense of identity; that it told me who I had been, who I was, and who I hoped to be; that I had no identity crisis. That last comment wasn't quite the truth because I really didn't know who I was at that time.

Because of the encouragement of minority groups by the federal government in recent years and because of our innate ability and drive, we have progressed by leaps and bounds in the field of the arts and sciences, ^{and in} literature and government but our religious life and inter-personal relationships are sorely lacking. ^{We have lost the sense of our fathers and we are not known by} We need a spiritual re- ^{our} newal now. ^{love for one another} The time is right.

As I was agonizing, and I mean that literally, over what to say to you today, these incidences came back to me. Believe me when I say it took a lot of courage to speak up to those people, but believe me, that was nothing compared to the courage I needed to live during the ensuing years within my Armenian Christian cultural group because even though I had spoken the truth on those occasions, I had not fully comprehended or experienced the truth I had expressed.

I have felt manipulated and insignificant. I have felt alienated and doubted myself as well as the individuals who made me feel so small.

Although doubt can bring a fresh look and important changes to some areas, reasonable human existence has to be based on some certainties and we need the opportunity for personal distinction as we search for our identity which is a lifelong pursuit.

What about you? I can't imagine that all of you have fared better than I and have found your identity in the Armenian Christian cultural group without a struggle. Perhaps you, like so many others, have looked for your identity in the culture that now predominates our secular society in America, the Commercial culture.

The gods of the commercial culture appeal to the insecure and those adrift from their moorings. The soap operas, pornographic X-rated movies, some of cable TV, the gambling casinos, dope, alcohol, horoscopes and other occults - you name it. They are all out there for one purpose only - to give you an escape from the realities of life and a fake identity with designer clothes, in exchange for your money. Young people are deluded into thinking this is what adulthood is all about. This is how they avoid their three worst fears: rejection, ridicule, and being overlooked. They feel they have found the answer to who they are.

What complicates this quest for identity even further is that young people are very often willing to settle for what they want others to think, a public image, even if it does not match their own inner self-awareness.

If a boy gets enough applause and recognition as an athlete or a girl enough whistles as a beauty, there is a danger that they will settle for this exterior image and they will cultivate their exteriors so religiously that they do not cultivate their interiors and their lives will be over by the time they are 35.

We can easily become like actors who have lost their identities because they are willing and almost forced to settle for an act. All of us bear some scars of childhood: anxiety, guilt feelings, inferiority complexes. We throw up all sorts of defenses around our aching areas; we repaint our masks to keep our pains from surfacing. Eventually these "games" become habit and we forget they were only "games." We are sidetracked in our pursuit of identity and interpersonal relationships. We have forfeited the fulness of human life. This is the tragedy of non-identity.

Are we involved in these "games" even here under the guise of Armenian Church Youth?

Man's most desperate need is to find some meaning in life and meaning can be built only on certainties and convictions.

Last semester while I was on sabbatical to write a textbook for the Diocesan Department of Religious Education, I had two psychology courses at U of M/Dearborn from a professor who knew all the answers to "why" kinds of questions about life. But he was a bitter man who saw only the bad in everything. He was up against a stone wall with no place to turn. He was an atheist who didn't know the answers to "who are we" and "who is God?"

Without some overview of life, some kind of personal synthesis, no one can find life truly meaningful or believe in his own personal meaning and significance.

I know intelligent people who have turned to cults and all sorts of prefabricated ideas. An Armenian friend of mine has become involved with the false prophets that Jesus reminded us would fool us.

We Armenian Christians are in desperate need of a spiritual renewal. We cannot go on clashing with infantile self-centered ideas about ourselves and our Sugardaddy or Slavemaster idea of God.

If we have learned the necessity of openness from our contact with other human beings refusing to categorize them, or imprison them in a once and for all judgment, fixed and forever, then we owe the same courtesy to God. First impressions are always incomplete.

The way you go must, of course, be your decision. What I have decided and what I have become as a result of my decision is uniquely mine and me. What you decide and what you become as a result of your decision must be uniquely you.

In choosing the title of this organization, the founders intended to identify who we are, to help our young people to find a worthwhile identity within the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America. Have we lived up to our name? Our name should help to identify us but we must be authentic, true to our name. It took Peter, the Rock, a long time to grow into the name that Jesus gave him. Saul became Paul in a more dramatic transformation. Both avenues are valid.

How do you see yourself - as a Peter or a Paul? I see myself as a Peter. Often saying the wrong thing, not having the strength of my convictions, denying Christ, not quite understanding the point Jesus was trying to make, telling the Lord to wait for me to be His, that it was too soon to give up my self-centered ways, that I wanted to try my do-it-yourself kit a little longer even though I was not ^{meeting with} ~~having~~ much success.

I would like to share what I have learned and experienced within the last few years about what it means to be an Armenian Christian. If you are the victim, you can become the victor. If you are powerless, you can be powerful; if you are insecure, you can become secure; if your life is purposeless, it can become purposeful. You can be free of all anxieties and fears. What I propose is guaranteed to work. It has worked ^{for me and} for millions of others. Some within your A.C.Y.O.A. can attest to this.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the three part key (1) Love God before all else; before power, money, success, all else. (2) Love yourself - not in conceit but in self-acceptance and (3) Love your neighbor and your neighbor includes your enemies as well as your friends.

Let's take a look at each of these separately:

(1) Love God before all else

Did you know that we are not born with the emotion of love. We learn to love after we feel loved and if we don't feel it, we die. The Bible tells us that God is love and that God so loved us that He sent His only Son (John 3:16). If you are honest with yourself, you will admit that there were times that your earthly father and/or mother have deeply hurt you especially when you were trying to find yourself. Your heavenly Father knows you completely with your weaknesses and faults and still He never stops loving you. I used to think that nothing bad could ever happen to me because I ~~was~~ special to God. Now, a lifetime later, I understand that being a Christian doesn't exempt me from suffering but that God is with me, carrying me through my suffering. Now I understand that each of us is special to God. He knew us before we were born, He loves us unconditionally, whether we are bad or good.

We separate ourselves from God by our sin. He took the initial step of loving us and waits for us to return ~~and~~ ^{our} love to Him. He doesn't force us to love Him but when we do He never rejects us and we must remember God plus one of us makes a majority. Our own St. Vartan quoted from Romans 8:35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword....(Read from Bible - 39).

Did any of these take you away from the love of and complete trust in God? I have doubted God's love in crises and felt that something was missing in my life when I drifted away from Him but thank God through prayer, study of the Bible and worship especially the sacrament of Holy

Communion and wonderful people who have supported me, I began to experience the truth of being a child of God, of turning all burdens over to Him, my fears and my anxieties. He is healing my wounds of the past as I turn them over to Him. He is not through with me yet. ^(II Corinthians 3:18) That is why I caution you not to look to any human being as your hero, to emulate. We will disappoint you somewhere along the line because of our humaness. Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but ^{by} me." This is what frees you - to know the truth - to know Christ; to emulate Him; His way of life; His teachings; to have Him live in you and you in Him. Who is your hero?

(2) To love yourself

Did you know that 60% of our success quotient depends on our self-image. Only 10% is determined by our ability and the other 30% depends upon our quest or desire to succeed.

Self-esteem is the gift of every Christian. Not only does God love us but He created us in His image, with a spirit and free will to make choices as responsible Christians.

Saul in the Old Testament by external standards had everything going for him. Saul was the tallest, most handsome, most outstanding man in all Israel. Yet he had a number of underlying flaws in his character, one of which was a serious problem of self-image. In I Samuel 9:21, he tells us that he considered himself too insignificant for the position of king because the clan he was from was considered ~~lower~~ lower class, the least of the tribes of Israel (a Benjamite). Saul was afraid of people - fear of man and their opinion led to his downfall and death. He never fulfilled God's

plan for him because of his poor self-image. On the other hand, his successor, David, was a poor, simple shepherd boy average height and looks, but he loved the Lord, pushed beyond his outward appearance and fulfilled the purpose that God ^{had for him. God} has a purpose for each of us but before He can achieve that purpose within us, we must accept ourselves both with our limitations as well as our possibilities. Perhaps we have poor health, little education, lack height, personality, ^{have} no understanding; perhaps we are limited by other faults or weaknesses. Take a good look at yourself and accept yourself as you are without exaggerating or minimizing. Accept what you can't change. Lift up your heads and say yes to reality.

Stop the if only's and begin to build a full life because we have our own special tools for our purpose. God has given us many good gifts. A genuinely humble person is not afraid of acknowledging accomplishments or weaknesses but the failure to make use of them. Don't compare yourself with others, be yourself. You will be a poor imitation of anyone else but no one can be a better you.

Don't worry about what others think. They will accept you if you accept yourself. In the mind of God, we are unique and irreplaceable and He loves each of us, just as we are. We must learn to let ourselves be loved, to receive love, to accept acceptance.

The act of self-acceptance is the root of all things, the foundation of all existence. God's love transforms us, all we have to do is accept His plan for us.

(3) Love your neighbor

When we accept our weaknesses and our shortcomings, then we can accept the humanness in others - their weaknesses and shortcomings. There is no choice if we want to be free of bitterness. We cannot love ourselves or others if we have bitterness.

There is nothing sentimental about this kind of love - acceptance of yourself and others. It is a decision to see God in everyone and everything and to accept everyone for that.

I ^{was} ~~have been~~ glued to the T.V. watching the Olympics in recent weeks. I ^{was} ~~have been~~ impressed with the balance of the athletes and their dedication, their commitment, their perserverance.

In our own way, as Armenian Christians, we are striving to maintain a balance in our lives. It takes the same didication, the same commitment, the same perserverance, but the gold medal can be won by each of us by knowing the truth of Christ.

Our parents did their best when they had us initiated into the body of Christ, the Church, at baptism. An analogy I like to use is that in this sacrament, we were wired like a new house for electricity. But each of us as the one who lives in that house must make the personal choice to turn on that switch to receive that available power.

You are the Armenian Christian Youth. You are what you are and that is not all bad. In fact, with our weaknesses and shortcomings, it is still us and with our full acceptance of God's plan for us, there is nothing better.

I offer you the challenge to respond to life because response involves acceptance of your God given responsibility. Reacting means that you will act according to the dictates of another human being. Respond in the full knowledge of who you are as Armenian Church Youth of America. Then and only then, will you find peace, joy and power in the wisdom and courage of the Holy Spirit and in the light and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will not be bound to earth as a caterpillar, but you ^{will} feel free and fly above it as a butterfly transformed by the love of God.