

Faith in Action



WESTERN DIOCESE OF THE
ARMENIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA

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PRINTED BY DIOCESAN PRESS 2014

Faith in Action

2nd Edition

Conversations with
Archbishop Hovnan Derderian
on his life, service to the community,
faith and views

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Ronald Alepian

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"Life is a promise; fulfill it."

- Mother Teresa

Ronald Alepian

Burbank

2014

I dedicate this book to the 24 inaugural participants of the 1993 Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia (CYMA) and to Father Mkhitar and the volunteers in the Ararat Region. Together, we opened the doors of Armenia to a new generation. And it was Archbishop Hovnan Derderian who had the courage to believe that we could make a difference. He believed when even we weren't certain.

Ronald Alepian

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This publication was made possible
through the generous contribution of

BERJ RICHARD SVAZLIAN

In Loving Memory of his mother

REBECCA SVAZLIAN

A FEW WORDS OF THANKS

Life is a journey. Each and every one of us embarks on one. We each take our course - whether by choice or by circumstances beyond our control. We end up in places, meet new people – we encounter the good and evil in life. We struggle, we learn, we coach, and we learn how precious and delicate life can be.

We are God's creation - hence we have a purpose. This book walks you through my journey, but is not about my life. It is about the people I met and worked with along this journey. It is about individuals and groups. It is about leaders of our great nation; leaders who struggled to keep our faith alive; made our nation survive; and made our communities in the Diaspora live with hope.

Life is a journey. You meet new people almost every day. Ronald Alepian is one of those individuals who I now know for the past 15 years. Ronald wanted to capture a segment of my life in a book. This book is a collection of conversations. It is a recollection of various phases of my life as a priest. It is a recollection of years, days and even

certain minutes that have had special significance in my life and the lives of many. Our conversations were in a casual format. We talked at various intervals about my childhood, why I chose to become a clergyman and what it means to serve one of the oldest churches in Christianity – the Armenian Church. We touched upon the challenges facing our communities, the role of our communities in the Diaspora regarding the motherland and their responsibilities to preserve our heritage, our language, our schools. We spoke at length about Etchmiadzin and the central role of the Armenian Church.

We shared our passion for Hayastan – now free and independent, rising from the ashes of communism. We talked about family, the role of parents and how the youth are the cornerstone of our future. We agreed most of the time and differed on certain issues.

I take this opportunity to thank Ronald for taking the time to write this book, for his thought provoking and sometimes controversial questions. I thank him for raising sensitive yet very important issues every Armenian asks and tries to find answers. He has challenged me to talk

about matters some clergy would consider taboo. Yet I understood that we cannot ignore those matters that weigh so heavily on the minds and feelings of us all. We have to talk of our convictions, our mistakes and learn to appreciate them.

I would also like to thank Raffi Kendirjian for editing this book and for spending time with me to choose the quotes and going through the various drafts to arrive at this final version.

Life is a journey. It is precious. It is God given. Live it passionately.

PREFACE

I started writing this book in the early days of 2005, the year of the 25th anniversary of Archbishop Hovnan Derderian's (Hovnan Srpazan) ordination as a priest. I hope that this book, this collection of thoughts and passages, does justice to his ministry. For those of you who know him well, much of what you will read is not new. For those of you who do not, I hope it is the first step towards knowing the man and the priest.

This is by no means a definitive account of the life of Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, nor is it an attempt to write a biography; it is simply a collection of conversations that I have had with him over several months and recollections of times we spent together over many years. It touches on subjects that he has written on in the past, and a few that he will probably write about in the future. But mostly, it is an attempt to understand the thoughts, motivations and lessons that this simple priest uses in the service of his people.

Commitment. This one word encompasses the practical calling required from us. We are committed when we pray. Commitment is reflected with a new zeal when we are among our fellow brothers and sisters, as we attend special celebrations through works of faith, art and achievement and see the glory of God. Commitment is the most vivid and true reflection of the Christian faith.

***Prayer is the Mirror
of Our Lives***

*Archbishop Hovnan
Derderian (2006)*

Although this book is biographical in nature, it does touch on many of the issues facing the Armenian world today. In the months and years ahead, Archbishop Derderian and I will collaborate on additional books that will talk more specifically about these issues, and the moral challenges faced by Armenians of the Motherland and in the Diaspora, and others, in the 21st Century.

In the years ahead, the Armenian world faces many challenges. As the Republic of Armenia continues to rise out of the ashes of seven decades of communism and centuries of occupation, it must re-establish, almost from scratch, its moral, secular, political and economic

foundations. It has many strong roots, born of millennia of history. It has strong institutions. And most of all, it has faith empowered people, who protected the land and preserved the homeland against all odds. But it also has much evolution ahead of it to establish itself as a permanent and sustainable member of the community of nations. The Church, as a lasting institution, and its leaders, are core participants in this transformation.

Just as importantly, the globally scattered and rapidly assimilating Diaspora is also at an important juncture of its own evolution. With more than half of the Armenian nation living abroad, born abroad, raised abroad, preserving the nation becomes paramount; a task that is at the heart of his work as a priest and as a spiritual leader of the Armenian people.

As a leader of the Church, the words and thoughts of Archbishop Derderian are important, therefore, from both a spiritual as well as historical and political perspective.

I hope you enjoy it.

INTRODUCTION

"O Thou, Who makes old things new, renew me also and adorn me with newness".

St. Nerces the Graceful

"The climax of the divine creation is the creation of man through his ability to comprehend and his vision to evaluate human aspirations."

Vazken I, Catholicos of All Armenians

In these few words, St. Necess Shenorhali and Vazken I, Catholicos of All Armenians said more than volumes of prose and mountains of rhetoric have tried to say about the role of religion. They identified a core belief, a core lesson, that so many of us forget as we debate the various theological and spiritual implications of the religion we espouse to follow: that it is not only what is in our heart that matters – but the way we live our lives and the decisions that we take each day that defines us.

In my own introspections on the true meaning of religion, I have found that for me, as for so many others,

religion is more than simply a belief system. Yes, there is no doubt that faith, in its core and elemental form, is the foundation that binds us to our God and to our religion. But it is our deeds that matter most. In our daily lives. In the decisions that we take. In the words that we speak. In the way we behave towards others and the way we make others feel.

The life of a man is a spiritual journey. Through baptism, we are born anew. From that moment we are followers of Christ, and of his teachings.

As clergymen, we are servants of God, before men.

It is only through service to our congregation and to our people that we clergy can achieve our calling.

To us is entrusted the care of the church, not as a building, but as a gathering place for Christ's faithful flock, that we have sworn to serve.

***Prayer is the Mirror of
Our Lives***

*Archbishop Hovnan
Derderian (2006)*

What more could a Church or a religion, or God for that matter, ask of us than to have our lives be an expression of our faith? To take the words written down and transform them into actions lived each day.

And I suppose that is why Archbishop Hovnan Derderian first caught my attention. And that is why almost two decades and a half after we first met, I continue to see him as my priest, and as my friend. It is true that his words, either in private moments or in sermons, in short letters or in the many books he has authored, are strong testaments to the man's faith and calling. But it is his actions, as a pastor, a Diocesan Primate, a leader and a man that define him. That makes him who he is.

I have been fortunate to have been with him in moments of great joy and success – from his elevation to Archbishop in 1993, his re-elections to the Primacy of the Canadian Diocese, to quiet moments with close friends over dinner at his home in Montreal.

But I have also been with him in more challenging times – in Giumri in the fall of 1993, meeting with local

authorities years after the 1988 earthquake that killed thousands, trying to devise ways to ease the suffering of the thousands of families that remained homeless; at Holy Etchmiadzin, the Mother Church of the Armenian world, in the summer of 1994, while he stood by his spiritual father, the ailing Vazken I, the late Catholicos of All Armenians, in his last hours; and back in Canada where I have seen him care for the sick, the old and the dying.

Regardless of the situation, regardless of what he was feeling, whether it was sadness, frustration or happiness, the man never lost his strength and his desire to take action. He remained calm, and in that calmness brought sound thought and reason to any situation. Where others would bring down their guard and give way to their emotions, he remained composed, in charge of his thoughts – always mindful of his responsibilities both as a priest and a leader of our Church. And then he acted. Took decisions. Moved forward. Advanced the yard stick.

This character, the discipline of character, serves as an example to us all. For me, it was an example that has served me well over the years.

“Faith is not simply an inner sense, like rationality, but more than that: it is a sparkle that passes from heart to heart, from generation to generation; it is the light that illuminates spiritual life.”

Spiritual Reflections

– Return to God

*Archbishop Hovnan
Derderian (2004)*

I remember the first time I met Archbishop, then Bishop, Derderian. It was the summer of 1992, and I was a 21 year-old university student. A close friend, active in the Church, convinced me to help with an ACYOC (Armenian Church Youth Organization of Canada) event. I attended a meeting at the Church, and later that night a group of volunteers went out, and with us came the young bishop.

Over the coming weeks, I slowly became a regular volunteer on this or that project at the Church and got to know Srpazan a little better, eventually working with him over many months to organize, launch and lead the first CYMA (Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia) project in 1993.

I learned of his family, his years as a youngster in Beirut and the hardships his family had to endure during the civil war. I learned of his days as a seminarian in Armenia, as a young scholar at Oxford, and of the challenges he faced as a young parish priest in Toronto, Canada. And over the years, I learned about the man, his calling, his faith and his belief in the future of the Church and of the Armenian people despite all the obstacles and challenges of the world

From 1992 until the late 90's, I used to see Srpazan several times a week. But it is only now, over a decade after we first met, that I can measure the impact that he had on my life, and on the life of the thousands of people he has touched in his career so far.

He guided me through the challenges of launching the Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia (CYMA) and the effort it took to convince the first 24 volunteers (and their parents...) to spend a month volunteering in the country at a time when very few people visited Armenia (it was less than two years since Armenia's independence and the nation was in a state of constant power outages, war in

Karabakh and an economic blockade that devastated a country not yet recovered from the massive 1988 earthquake). He gave me counsel when I was elected to the Montreal parish council. And he helped me manage various projects when I served as the volunteer Director of Armenia Projects of the Diocese.

"In order for human beings to become perfect, we ought to follow the journey, the path towards God; we ought to turn our bodies into temples of God in actuality; we ought to live life in such a way that God is glorified through our physical existence. By knowing God we bring light into our inner world and transform it; especially when we surrender to God."

Spiritual Reflections

– Return to God

Archbishop Hovnan

Derderian (2004)

But most of all, he taught me how to be an adult. How to apply myself. How to overcome obstacles and dodge adversity in my quest to move forward. How to

remain loyal, steadfast and strong. How to love, how to be a friend and how to celebrate life.

There have been two men who have influenced me in my life. My father, who taught me the value of work and family, and Hovnan Srpazan, who showed me how to take those lessons and apply them in my life every day. And I am not alone.

Since 1992, I travelled to Armenia several times, often with Archbishop Derderian. I met with priests, seminarians, Primates of Dioceses from across the homeland and around the world, political leaders, business leaders and countless young Armenians who have either crossed paths or had the opportunity to study or work with Archbishop Derderian. I have yet to meet one that did not share my respect for him – and I met hundreds who viewed him as a mentor and a leader.

My first conversation with Archbishop Derderian in preparation for this book started with a simple question:

Why did you decide to dedicate your life to the Armenian Church? Several months later, in our final conversation, having talked of everything from politics to family, from leadership to sacrifice, from marriage to abortion, I asked him a final question: Any regrets?

These bookends in themselves provided a glimpse into the conviction of the man, for despite countless hours of discussion, where he openly expressed the challenges of his day to day life, his belief in his calling never wavered.

To the first question, he answered: *“There was never a debate in my mind – this is a calling, not an occupation. Although there were and continue to be sacrifices, the sacrifices are easy to bear given the joy that they bring to me.”*

To the second question, which I posed in the fall of 2005 and which I was certain would cause him to hesitate, he answered before I could finish the question: *“My work*

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brings me joy. To share that joy with others is a blessing. How can I regret such a blessing. In fact, every day I am more and more convinced that the life I chose was perfect for the man I am."

And then he added, with great firmness: *"it is more than just a calling to God, although that is paramount, but it is a calling to serve the Armenian people. They have been massacred, dispersed, deprived and abused, but yet the nation, in Armenia and around the world, survives and even flourishes. To dedicate my life to ensure the continued enrichment of a people that so many have tried unsuccessfully to annihilate...well...that is a privilege. We stand on this earth today because of the sacrifice of millions of our ancestors. A few of us need to dedicate our entire lives to say thank you. How can I regret that?"*



CHAPTER 1: THE ROAD TRAVELED

Before diving into discussions on faith, service, leadership or the challenges that face the Armenian nation, Archbishop Derderian and I spent some time discussing his early life, his family, his evolution from precarious young child growing up in Beirut through to his development years in the seminaries of Antelias and Etchmiadzin and at the University of Oxford. We also discussed the challenges a young priest faced arriving in Toronto, Canada in the 1980's that led to his election as Primate of the Armenian Church in Canada.

"Youth comes but once in a lifetime."

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,
American poet

Q. You've told me today, and often over the years, that becoming a priest was not a decision but rather a natural evolution. But despite this calling, despite the fact that you firmly believe that this was the only road you were chosen to travel, there must have been people or events that

influenced your decision. How did you make this all important decision?

Becoming a priest in the Armenian Church cannot be a career decision, or a lifestyle decision. As I have said many times, if the decision is difficult, don't make it. Choose this life only if it clearly presents itself to you. This is so much truer for those few who are contemplating a celibate life. That is the ultimate sacrifice to God, the Church and to the Armenian nation – and that can only come from within.

For me, it was so – and it was so for every successful clergyman I have ever met or ordained, whether into the married or celibate priesthood. Deep in my heart, from a very early age, the calling took root. As I grew over the years, from child to adolescent, it too grew with me until the choice become matter of fact...obvious.

I entered the seminary of Antelias in Lebanon in 1970, I was only 13 but the calling was already strong. Over the next five years, my religious education further nourished my faith and strengthened my calling. Throughout those years, my closest teacher, my mentor,

was Archbishop Zareh Aznavourian, who was then one of the most distinguished and talented leaders of the Church, a strong thinker and writer. Through his tutelage, I was able to focus my faith and discover a new world. A world of contemplation, prayer and, above all, service – to God and to my people. Most people, whether businessmen, teachers, lawyers or doctors can look back at a successful career and remember the mentors that guided their progress. For me, there was Zareh Srpazan– the first of many great men who influenced my life.

In 1976, at the age of 18, the second and probably most powerful milestone of my progress into the priesthood took place when I arrived at the seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin to begin my formal training and education for the priesthood. From the moment I passed through the gates of our Mother Church I knew that I had come home. I anticipated this emotion, and expected to feel closer to my calling when walking through the grounds of the Mother Church. What I did not expect, however, was what I felt the next day when I met His Holiness, the late Vazken I, Catholicos of All Armenians.

As I bent to kiss his hand for the first time, I received, in all sincerity, an electric shock that both jolted my body and my soul. That day, without any doubt in my mind, was the day I became a priest in my soul. So you see, it was not a decision, but rather a natural occurrence. Today, nearly thirty years later, I think of and remember Vazken I Catholicos every day of my life. He was my father, my teacher, my mentor and my guide. Each day of my life, I am celebrating the joy and the mission that he gave me. And each day, I use his teachings to guide me.

“With the presence of Vazken Vehapar, the new man is constantly renewed within me, his inspiring presence has constantly cultivated my mind and my soul with Christian love and faith, with the vision to dedicate my life to the Motherland, and with the zeal to serve the Mother See of Holy Etchmiazdin throughout the journey of my life”

Asdvadsaherave

Badkamner

Archbishop Hovnan

Derderian (2006)

Vazken Catholicos kept the Holy Armenian Church alive through great personal sacrifice in a time of repression from the Communists. He negotiated, pleaded, manoeuvred, attacked and retreated for decades to keep the gates of Etchmiadzin open. And under his tutelage I learned the art of priesthood as well as of true leadership. I learned that a man can serve only if in his heart he is selfless – but in his actions bold. I learned that love can conquer even the evil of Communism – but that reason and logic can allow us to rise above the noise and the barricades and allow us to drive forward. But most of all, I learned that none of this can happen if the true calling is not deep in the soul of a priest. That is why I say once again that those who take the path that I have taken must know it is the right one – in their heart – and not view it as a career choice.

For married priests, who in the end form the foundation upon which our parishes and therefore our Churches and communities are built, the answer is much the same. If in your heart, in your soul, when you are alone, you know that it is the path for you, then take it and you will never regret it.

Q. It is clear that your time at the seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin strengthened your resolve and trained your mind and soul for the priesthood. But it must have been a difficult time, being far from the family you grew up with, alone in a Communist country.

Holy Etchmiadzin was both the most important as well as the most challenging time of my early years. As my family prepared to immigrate to the United States from Lebanon, I left my parents and my brothers and travelled alone to Armenia to continue my education. I was homesick, and sometimes scared. But at the same time, it was exhilarating. I met men there that had gone on to become great priests, Bishops and leaders of the Church, academics and writers. I formed a fellowship, a bond with my fellow students and my teachers that would last a lifetime. I learned the power of monastic life and the beauty of the Church. And it was where I grew into a man.

Every child has a moment in time where he or she stops being his or her parents' child and become an independent individual. For me, it was the years spent at

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*Ordination to the priesthood in Holy Etchmiadzin
June 8, 1980*



Holy Etchmiadzin 1980



England 1981

the seminary in Armenia. Without those years of solitude, combined with a new solidarity with my fellow students, I could never have become a pastor or a primate.

Despite the turbulence of my final years in Lebanon, the poverty, the civil war, the economic and political chaos that surrounded me, it was in the tranquil gardens and classrooms of Holy Etchmiadzin that I became a man – not in surviving the troubled days in Beirut in the 70's.

Q. What was it like in Lebanon, growing up amid that level of chaos and terror?

Despite the pain of living through the tragic chapter of Lebanese history in those years, I have nothing but fond memories of my childhood. It wasn't because we were well off, we were not. But because in a lawless and even reckless society, my parents created a world that allowed my brothers and I to grow and mature.

My father worked hard his entire life. He ensured there was bread on the table every night. He taught me that only hard work, perseverance in the wake of great

obstacles and an unrelenting pursuit of one's goals allows people to advance.

My mother was the rock upon which our family was built. Many families that come from that part of the world have similar stories. And like all sons, I believe that my mother was in a class all to herself. She was our nurturer, our teacher, our disciplinarian, our law and order all. While my father was the strong, silent listener who said little but said it with imposing authority, my mother was warm, gregarious and very present in our lives.

As first born, I was probably...no, definitely, the most precarious. I would be in trouble every day, getting into mischief almost every minute. And it was my mother that took that young child, who so easily could have become a truant, and literally pushed me in the right direction by sheer force of her character and wit.

Q. There are not many young boys who grew up in Beirut and ended up at Oxford. What was it like to attend one of the world's greatest learning

institutions? More importantly, what did it teach you?

After several years at Etchmiadzin, Vasken I Catholicos called me into his office. I had been ordained a celibate priest and I thought he wanted to discuss my first posting. I was completely shocked when he said that the future of the Church rested on the shoulders of a new generation of clergy, and that in order to function, succeed and lead the Armenian church we had to expand our horizons. He told me that Oxford would give me that perspective. And he was right.

A few months earlier, the Archbishop of Canterbury and His Holiness had held a summit at Holy Etchmiadzin. Among the topics discussed was the issue of clerical education. The two church leaders formed an exchange program as one of the concrete steps to bring our two movements closer together. I was fortunate to have been chosen to benefit from this new partnership.

I arrived at the University of Oxford at the age of 22. You have to remember, that at that point, I had lived in

Beirut and in Armenia. Both wonderful places, but a world away from the halls of Oxford.

At first, it was very difficult. Very challenging. When I think back, it is the only time in my life that I experienced real fear. The bullets in the streets of Beirut never scared me, but my first months at Oxford petrified me. It was a complete culture shock. Not dissimilar from the culture shock that so many Armenians experience when they leave the land of their birth and first set foot in Europe or North America. I felt lost, confused, isolated.

However, over time, at first through my teachers then with friends that I continue to hold dear, I began to appreciate my time at Oxford.

Dr. Peter Baker, then a student at Oxford, told me early on that “these years will give you a foundation of education and growth that will serve you throughout your life.” He was right.

At St. Stephen’s College, Oxford between 1980 and 1983 I earned a Master’s degree in Theology. To this day, I

reach back to those years for strength. They are my foundation. To the young Armenians studying in university today, I can only say: cherish this time. Experience as much as you can. Throw yourself into your studies. In later years, when the pressures of work and life mount, it is those years that you will remember, and that will give you the strength to persevere.

Oxford opened another door for me as well, and one that I hope all Armenians around the world, and all people really, open as well. The door of fellowship with my fellow men, regardless of his or her background. Through my friend, Dr. Baker, I had my first real experience with non-Armenians. I learned through him that love of one’s language, religion and people is not exclusive to one’s nationality but should allow us to love the language, culture and people of other nationalities. Every day, even today, I hear bigotry, racism, hatred expressed. And each time I hear words spoken against a nationality, a people, a religion, I shudder. For we, the human race, must learn to love one another if we are to share this small planet. And although I see progress, I am regularly disenchanted by its slow pace.

“Human life is infinitely deep. Nevertheless, he has the ability to study his inner world, to know her capabilities and shortcomings. But human knowledge is useless if the driving force of love is absent in a person’s mind, heart and soul. Love is a necessity, with a pure heart, good intentions, and sincere faith.”

Spiritual Reflections

– Return to God

*Archbishop Hovnan
Derderian (2004)*

Q. In 1984, armed with degrees from the Seminary at Holy Etchmiadzin and from the University of Oxford you arrived in Toronto, Canada. How did you apply transition in your new life?

When I arrived to Toronto, I was a young, inexperienced priest and all of a sudden had to learn my vocation as well as integrate into a new country – a new world really. I had absolutely no idea what to do first, how to win people over, how to govern a parish. The culture of the

land was different. The people had different expectations of their clergy.

For weeks, even months, I stumbled along. Sometimes wondering if I would ever be able to succeed in Toronto. But I was fortunate. A small group of highly devoted, dedicated and capable families came to my rescue. They took me in, guided me, coached me, taught me and nourished me with their love and affection. And slowly, with their love and support, my spirit began to move and a call to action entered my body. Today, when I look back, I remember my years in Toronto as my greatest time.

To be an Armenian priest and to arrive in Canada is truly daunting. The community could have criticized my lack of understanding of the society, of North American management style, of financial affairs, of organization. But they did not. They gave me a blessing in their patience and in their support. They could have tried to force me into a mold – but instead gave me the time to adapt and to learn. And then, strengthened by their support and my own determination, I went into action.

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Henry Nouwen, a Catholic theologian once said “True leadership is reflected in fellowship”. And that is what the people of Toronto, from the Parish Council to the community leaders to each and every parishioner gave me. And in turn, I gave them every ounce of my energy and youthful enthusiasm.

What we did over the six years that I served the Toronto community was truly remarkable. I say we, because it was a collective effort that hundreds of parishioners engaged in with me. We took a community that was in dire need of re-established confidence in the Church.

We built a new Church building, a project that galvanized the community into action and showed me the generosity of parishioners that I had not expected. We cared for hundreds of Armenian refugees who had come from all over the world. We built institutions, organizations, camps and Church committees. We transformed Toronto into a model of what a Church and a community can do if their heart is in the right place.



*With H.H. Vazken I Catholicos
of All Armenians*



University of Oxford, graduation 1983

When Vazken Catholicos visited Toronto in 1987 to consecrate our new Church, he said “what has happened in Toronto is truly a miracle.” I was both filled with pride and emotion. But not for me – for the parish that had risen up.

Throughout the period of this project many stood in our way and criticised our decision. But we moved forward boldly, with the support of leaders that today still are serving that community. We needed to make a decision, knowing that some would resent it. And we took the decision, then acted to make it into a reality. It is an important lesson: when you start advancing, some will follow and others will try to stop you, but when you hesitate, everyone will eventually oppose you.

*“Standing in the middle of the road is very dangerous;
you get knocked down by traffic from both sides.”*

- Margaret Thatcher,
Former British Prime Minister

Farewell Commemorative Booklet Commendations from
Canada

Dear Srpazan, since 1984, you gave us, the Canadian Armenians, nineteen uninterrupted years of your young life in the service of God and The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Nineteen years of distinguished service during which you touched the thousands of your faithful. Your unwavering support to Holy Etchmiadzin, your strong love of your people, and your unending energy will be remembered for many years to come.

Jack Stepanian
Chairman, Diocesan Council

Archbishop Derderian, your dedication to serving others has made Ontario a better place to live, work and raise a family. May the years ahead for you in the United States bring you continued success, health and happiness.

Ernie Eves, MPP
Premier of Ontario

It is fitting that you pay tribute this evening to His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian. His extensive

work on behalf of the Armenian community stands as an admirable example of commitment and benevolence. I would like to join with you in commending Archbishop Derderian for his wise stewardship and spiritual leadership, first as Pastor of Toronto Armenian Parish, then as Primate. I know that the strength of your faith will continue to guide you in the years to come.

Jean Chrétien

Prime Minister of Canada (Ottawa 2003)

Q. In 1990, at the young age of only 32, you presented yourself as a candidate to become Primate of the Diocese. I did not know you then, but have heard of the challenges and controversies that you faced during and immediately after your election. When you won the election, a huge part of the community thought you would fail, especially those in Montreal and other parts of the country that did not know you. How did you rise above those early doubts to lead the Diocese?

The Diocesan election of 1990 was not, in my opinion, the Diocese's greatest hour. Just months earlier, Archbishop Vasken Keshishian, our first Primate, had passed away suddenly at the young age of 53. A great man and a loving priest, he stood by me in the early days of my work in Toronto and both intellectually and spiritually guided me and even pushed me forward. We barely had the time to mourn him before the tension and manoeuvrings began.

I knew that I was young. In fact, I discussed it with Vasken Catholicos and we both felt that it was perhaps too soon. But in Toronto, a groundswell of support began and I was encouraged to put my candidacy forward. Almost immediately, politics took over. Various groups emerged, almost out of the woodwork, and took sides. The political parties became involved and politicized the election. It was truly remarkable how quickly people become polarized. And how so many who had so little to do with the community suddenly took interest in the election.

My young age, of course, opened the door to immense criticism. But there were other attacks against me

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*Episcopal ordination in Holy Etchmiadzin,
October 7, 1990*



*With H.H. Vazken I Catholicos
of All Armenians, November 17, 1987*

as well, some quite personal. I spoke often to Vazken Catholicos in those days, and he gave me the strength to continue. “If the community wants you,” he said, “then so be it.”

When the final ballots were counted, and I had won the election I did not feel joy or a sense of accomplishment. In that moment, I felt the weight of my responsibility. I knew that once again my life had changed and I was entering a new era in my life as a priest. But what gave me strength was that it was the community, the grass roots, that elected me – not the various “groups” and so called “leaders” but the parishioners who put their trust in me.

But every journey requires a first step, so I started to work almost the next day – and I never stopped.

CHAPTER 2: LEADERSHIP: LESSONS AND EXPERIENCES

In 1990, a young priest from Toronto was elected Primate of the Canadian Diocese and soon after ordained a Bishop by Vazken I, Catholicos of All Armenians. Over more than a decade, he led the Canadian Diocese as it emerged as one of the most active territories in the Armenian world. I got to know Archbishop Derderian quite well over this period. By watching him, learning from him and observing the way he managed the Diocese and led the community I learned my first lessons in leadership.

If he became a man while studying at Oxford as we learned in the previous chapter, I became one through his mentorship. In this chapter, I'll try and probe a little into his leadership role of the Diocese, the challenges he faced and the leadership lessons that he has to offer. Some of these lessons will be relevant to other clergymen, but others, in my opinion, can be of use to anyone.

“All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move. Strive to avoid the first and be the latter.”

- Benjamin Franklin,
Founding Father of the United States

Q. When you became Primate, you arguably became a “political” as well as spiritual leader. The Diocese has many constituent groups, and it is, in many respects, your job to satisfy them all equally. How do you balance and ensure that you keep the various groups happy?

In short – you don't. It's not that you don't want to; it's just that you cannot. I learned early on in my role as Primate that people support you if you are leading and turn on you if you waiver. It is probably the single most important lesson I learned from my years leading the Canadian Diocese. There is no force more powerful, no argument more convincing, and no negotiation more effective than action. Always action. To transform the Church into a living, breathing part of society.

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A leader must listen, no doubt of that. He or she must hear the views, understand the concerns and empathise with the priorities of his people. In the end, we are there to serve.

But once the listening is done and you have consulted thoroughly, you simply have to act, for example. If I had waited for every last member of the community in Toronto to support the construction of a new Church, we'd still be debating it today. With a strong group of supporters I charged forward and as we gained momentum we also gained support.

The same goes for my time as Primate. If each step I took depended on consensus, then I would have spent my life convincing rather than doing.

For example, in 1992, everyone said that sending a group of young Armenian students from Canada to Armenia for a month to build a school was irresponsible and dangerous. The country had just shaken off the binds of Communism and was in utter chaos – a war in Karabakh, a national power failure, food shortages, unheard-of poverty.



They said, “send money – not students, what can they possibly do?” Do you remember what we did? We sent them anyway. And guess what? Once they came back and told of their experience, that little project that you and I dreamt up in my apartment called CYMA (Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia) became the most famous project we ever accomplished?

Why? Because we acted. We didn’t wait for everyone to agree. We just went forward because we believed that it was the right thing to do. Today, more than a decade later, over 400 young Armenian Canadians have travelled to Armenia, five schools have been built or renovated, camps have been organized that took care of thousands of young children, hundreds of thousands of dollars of direct aid has been given, and a bond now exists between Armenia and Canada that cannot be broken.

Throughout my tenure as Primate, people told me that I was wasting my time visiting the small communities, in Hamilton, Quebec City, even Yellowknife. But when I left Canada, we had mission parishes across the country, and

hundreds of Armenian families that would have drifted away are now bound forever to the Church and to their roots.

They urged me not to open a parish in Laval, saying that it would split up the Montreal community. But we did it anyway. And what happened? We filled it every Sunday and today the Montreal area has two highly successful parishes and hundreds of families have come into the Church.

I am not boasting. Each of these projects, and dozens more, were necessary, and could not have happened without the support of hundreds of volunteers. But in each case, although I had support from many quarters, a few always sought to stop us.

There is an old saying: ‘that it is sometimes better to ask for forgiveness than for permission’. I think that is one of the most important leadership lessons I have learned. Listen. Seek counsel. Build support. But never err on the side of inaction. For those who continue to disagree, I offer my apologies. But we had a job to do – and we did it.

"I feel that the greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more."

- Justice Earl Warren,
14th Chief Justice of the United States
(1953-1969)

Q. But doesn't that cause you to make enemies?

'Enemies' is a big word. But critics? Certainly. You cannot be in a position of leadership and satisfy everyone. It is simply impossible. Even the greatest leaders had critics that tried to stop them. But what are you to do? Stop? Never!

If you believe that you have something important to contribute to society and you seek a position of leadership, you have to trust your own judgement as well as that of others you trust, and lead. Otherwise you are not leading but simply taking up space. There can be no personal ego. If there are critics, then so be it.

And ultimately, you must have trust in God. Faith will give you the strength to deal with the criticisms and even

the insults. I welcome constructive criticism, as should all people. But unnecessary critics who try to block you are surprisingly easy to ignore.

In brief, my faith in God led my life...

How could one explain faith and the role it plays in his or her life today? If we want to speak in figure, we could say that faith is like electrical energy, which is the inseparable connection between God and man. Without faith man is disconnected from God; he is lost and the Godly savour has departed from his life. In other words, faith is what regenerates man continuously, provides him with God's light and at the same time strengthens the life of the Christian who, by his baptism, is called to follow the example of Christ's life.

"Khoher"

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian

February 6, 1994, Canada

There is an old football analogy that a good friend of mine shared with me years ago that I will always remember. In football, the player gets the ball and starts to move forward. He has an objective: the goal line. When the opposite team's player attempts to block his advance,

rather than stop, he accelerates. Rather than take him on and try and blast through, he moves to the side, goes around the opposite team's player and keeps running. If he is tackled, he stands up and tries again. He never, ever, stops trying to move forward. And if he has a capable and committed team behind him, he will eventually get to his destination. I have been blessed, in my years of service, with many incredibly capable teams and individuals – and more often than not, that has allowed me to reach the goal line.

"I have found it advisable not to give too much heed to what people say when I am trying to accomplish something of consequence. Invariably they proclaim it can't be done."

- Calvin Coolidge,
30th President of the United States
(1923-1929)

Q. You are a priest – but you are also a human being. And I have heard some of the critics. Some of it is very personal. How can you not hear it? And how can you not be affected by it?

Yes, it is true – some people cross the line. It is an unfortunate truth that some people find it easy to criticise. Some people feel that by being critics they are espousing wisdom. That by being negative, they are sounding intelligent. That by having an opinion on every topic, whether they are knowledgeable or not, they can freely share it with the world.

And I am always surprised at the stories they invent. To discredit, some people have no problem lying and telling tall tales. I guess in the end, they are the unfortunate ones...

But I have to believe, in my heart, that they are motivated by their desire to serve the community. No matter how misguided they may be, or how stubborn in their inability to accept progress. I truly believe, deep in my heart, that their intentions are to do good. It is unfortunate, but true, that in order to lead you have to accept that some will always resent your leadership and disagree with your direction. And it is sad, but a small, extremely small, minority will give in to their frustration and make a lot of noise.

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By definition, decision making means that you have to choose between two or more sides. There will always be losers and winners. There will always be those that agree and those that do not.

So what do you do? First, you listen. You try and ascertain if what they say has some truth to it. If the comments resonate, then they have done you a favour and you change. Even my closest supporters have sometimes disagreed with me. And often, they have been right and I have changed my views. You always have to be open to change.

However, if after contemplating and reassessing you continue to believe in your cause, in your mission, then you owe it to yourself, and to those you serve, to stay on the path you have chosen. In other words – move forward.

Thankfully, in my career, I have had more agreement and support for my actions than criticism, more counsellors than adversaries. No leader, no priest, no man, can succeed alone. Finding advisors, real friends, with whom you can share your thoughts, let down your guard and

explore ideas is extremely important. These friends will give you strength, and remind you why you are trying to always push forward.

In my years as Primate in Canada I always had a strong Diocesan Council. As the “Board of Directors” of the Diocese, it is their responsibility to challenge the Primate at times. And at times, the debates have been rather heated. But in the end, the Primate must move forward with what he believes - a leader must lead. That is what he has been elected to do. Very often, I moved forward against the wishes of the Diocesan Council. More often, luckily, with their support. But I always moved forward.

Q. The Church, like many organizations, is led by its members. By people who give of their time to try and make their community better, their Church stronger. How do you keep these volunteers motivated, year after year, to give their time, their money, their heart, to the Church and the community?

Volunteer is not the right word. In the Church, there are no volunteers. For it is not someone else's Church that they are working to strengthen but their own. I believe that those that give their time and effort are not volunteers, but soldiers in the battle to preserve and grow their community. And it is a battle.

We are surrounded by forces that try to tear down the walls of the Church and the community. The greatest forces conspiring against the Armenian world in North America today are apathy and assimilation. And those that come to the Church, to give it their effort and their love, have decided to actively engage in the battle to stop these two forces.

Apathy is a curse, in all nations, in all peoples. It is the number one cause of empty pews on Sundays, of empty community centres, of poverty, of hunger. And here in North America, it is so easy to give in to apathy. We see it every day, in politics, for example, engaging a new generation and getting them to participate in the process is the greatest challenge. And it is so throughout the Armenian world as well. Volunteers, as you put it, are

simply those that have not given in to apathy and temptation of inaction and have decided that the Church is their home and that it's health and growth their responsibility.

But assimilation is even worse. For it not only empties the churches, the schools and the community centres, but it attacks the very foundation of the Armenian world. In North America, we are blessed with the most open, prosperous and envied society in the world. And therefore, assimilation is that much easier, that much more attractive. So, once again, these volunteers, I still don't like that word, are simply those that refuse to give in and state firmly, for all to hear: "we are Armenian, we are Christian, and we are here to stay."

To answer your question, I can not take credit for motivating the hundreds of people that work each day for their Church and their community. The credit goes to them; for recognizing that the continued survival of their people is their responsibility; for taking ownership of the future of their children and grandchildren; and for understanding, unequivocally, that they can and must make a difference.

My job, as the leader of their Church, is to provide the tools – the vehicle – through which they can do what they have set out to do.

So are they volunteers? I prefer to call them participants or contributors. And in the way an employee earns a salary that feeds his or her family, those that participate in the life of the Church should take strength and spiritual nourishment in what they are doing.

Take CYMA for example. You gave an enormous amount of your time and energy to build up this program. But were you really a volunteer? Didn't you get something in return? Didn't you see your homeland up-close? Learn the skills of leadership? Experience the joy of cutting the ribbon to open a new school? Feel a sense of accomplishment when you saw the tears of joy in the eyes of participants as they bid farewell to their host families after a month? You were not a volunteer – you were a participant and a contributor. You gained as you gave. And for me, that is so much more important.

The Church is not seeking those who only wish to give, but those that are also ready to receive; to receive love, a sense of accomplishment, the joy that comes from being part of something bigger.

Take the hundreds that regularly visit aging Armenians in old age homes. Some people do not visit their own aging parents as much as these people visit complete strangers. So why do they do it? Is it simply to give? Or is it also to receive the love of the old man who smiles each time he sees you walk through the door. That is the living Church.

And then there are the hundreds that give their time to coach and mentor young students and entrepreneurs. Who take the time to listen. Who actively support those who are just starting to chart their course, to begin their journey. Some parents believe that once they have done their duty, clothed and fed their children and married them off that their responsibility ends there. While others give their time and energy to help complete strangers build successful lives. They do it not out of a sense of charity, but out of a sense of responsibility. Because they know that by giving their

time, they are improving the world around them. And that way everyone gains.

All of this to say that what we seek, in the Church, is so much more than volunteers. We seek individuals that want to participate in the mission of the Church, in service of their society. We want people with a sense of duty and of responsibility. We want people who are seeking solidarity, camaraderie, a sense of family. We want people who are generous of time and of spirit. These people are not recruited. They simply come when they sense that something of value can be done. They are soldiers.

Q. Does that mean that a priest or a Primate can simply work hard and not reach out to bring people in?

No. It means that you must build something of value if you want to attract people of value.

Make no mistake about it, a priest must reach out. Can a business leader run a business without meeting clients, speaking with employees or participating in

business associations? Can a politician serve his constituents if he does not know and interact with them? Of course not. It is the same for a pastor.

To be a good pastor, and to initiate the projects and programs that are most valuable for your community, you must live with your community. It may sound ridiculous, but I say this in all seriousness: a pastor must spend more than half his time on the road. He must become part of the community he serves. He has to know people by name, know the challenges they face, understand their day to day worries. He must be with them when they celebrate great moments and comfort them when they are in need. He must be advisor and counsellor. He must feel at home in their homes as they must feel at home in the Church. It is this kind of Pastor who will celebrate mass with a full church.

Being a pastor, and a Primate for that matter, is about a constant, sustained and even hectic outreach. It is not an easy job. But it is a fulfilling one. It expands the family that is the congregation and serves to unite people around their Church.

Q. There is an inescapable need to raise funds in the Armenian community. We have bills to pay, mortgages to finance, programs to launch. Within the Church, that need exists as well. It seems to be the central question: how will we fund our future?

Fund raising is a fact of life, for the Church, the community as well as any non profit organization. The formula for successful fund raising is simple: if the cause is just, the funds will flow in. In the 1980's, when we were building the new Church in Toronto, our job was to promote the project, talk of the benefits to the community and involve the parishioners. The fundraising became an adjunct to that activity. The same is true of fund raising of any kind. It is not about soliciting funds, but about motivating people with ideas.

I have been in several meetings where fund raising became the pre-occupation, and budget a focus of long discussion. Those meetings should have instead been focused on the programs, the projects, the efforts and the reasons why they are meaningful to the people. If we focus

on those attributes above all others, then fund raising will be successful.

For many years I have heard criticism that the Church takes more than its fair share of funding out of the community, not leaving money enough for the centres and schools. But fund raising is not a competitive sport. It is simply a vote of confidence in a program or an institution by its members.

No doubt, it is a difficult, if not sometimes frustrating task. But it is made so much easier when the cause is just and the people support it. People do not give to organizations but to ideas.

CHAPTER 3: ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

A religion that takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion.

- Mahatma Gandhi,
political and spiritual leader
of the Indian independence movement

Every day, newspapers are filled with pages on issues ranging from issues such as same-sex marriage, to abortion, crime, war and tragedy. We are bombarded by the opinions of our political leaders and other so called “experts”. But in the end, it is up to each individual to make his or her own judgement calls on the principle issues that our society faces today. The following Chapter was probably the most difficult one for me to write. It was difficult to ask some of these questions to an Archbishop of the Church. And it was at times difficult not to disagree with him at times. But in the end, these issues are not black and white. They are not simple. But they are also not going

away. And therefore, if we were to truly capture his thoughts in this book, we had to discuss even the most controversial topics.

Q. Srpazan, talk to me a little about your overall views of the world, where it is headed and how? You read the same newspapers as we do, and they speak of a decline in human values and peaceful coexistence. Where do you stand?

This may be a controversial position, so I'll state it first and then try to give my position some context.

I firmly believe that the world is a better place today than at any time in the history of mankind. I believe in the progress of humanity, and in our continuous struggle to better ourselves and the world we inhabit. And I believe that every generation has advanced, for millennia. Today we are the inheritors of the most advanced society, most free society, most fair society in history. I have nothing but optimism for the future and firmly believe that the generation that succeeds us in the decades to come will

inherit an even better world. I believe in our progress as a society.

I too read the same newspapers. I too hear the fear mongers. I too listen to talk of a world in peril. And I do not believe a word of it. When they talk of hatred, try to place blame, or prophesize on the doom of humanity they breed fear in the hearts of man. And I believe that we must celebrate our progress and give hope, allow dreams and open the doors to the continued betterment of the world.

You may think this a naïve or overly optimistic opinion. I assure you that it is not. Have we ever had it better? I don't mean this year, or this week, or even this morning. But in this era? Can you point to an era in the history of humanity that has been better, more open, more advanced, and more compassionate?

Was it better in ancient times? When slavery was a common practice?

Was it better in the time of Christ our Lord? When men were crucified? When the Son of God was tortured for preaching love?

Was it better in the middle ages? When illiteracy was the norm and millions died of disease each year?

Was it better in the 18th century? When child labour was the norm and child birth the cause of so much death?

Was it better in the first half of this century? With two world wars that claimed tens of millions, the Armenian Genocide murdering our people, the Nazis Holocaust obliterating the world's Jewish population and women not even having the right to vote?

Was it better in the 60's or 70's? When black Americans couldn't ride the bus or use the same washroom as whites, when an American president was assassinated, when the Cold War kept the world divided and in fear of nuclear war?

It is true, that there is much injustice in the world, much hatred, much suffering. It is true that what is taking place in the Middle East is awful. It is true that AIDS in Africa is a tragedy of epic proportions. And here at home, it is true that the divorce rate is alarming, that there are millions that live in poverty in the richest nations of the world, and that global terrorism has emerged as a real threat.

But at the same time, it is also true that this is the best time to be alive. More people live in freedom today than at any time in history. Modern medicine saves the lives of millions each year. Minority rights are more protected than ever before. The risks to the environment are being addressed, slowly but more effectively. And most importantly, there is a higher level of global consciousness about what needs to be done to make the world even better.

And I know that the world will get better. Yes, there are ups and downs. And yes, there is much that makes me sad, deeply sad. But I firmly believe that the trend, despite

the occasional roadblock, is to move forward, to better our world, to advance society, to improve the lives of people.

We must remain focused on what needs to be fixed or improved. But we must always do so knowing that over time, the world will improve. The problem is that we are mortal, and change, progress, takes time. Decades. Sometimes centuries. But I want all parents to bring children into this world knowing that we are on the right track.

What is most dangerous, what is in my opinion the biggest threat to this continuous progress, is if we give up. But as long as we want the world to be better and work to make it so, it will become so...over time.

"It is said that life is a pilgrimage of the soul. In other words, the meaning of life must be the quest for godliness. Often, during this journey, we deviate from the narrow path. Our minds and our emotions take wrong turns until a collision takes place in which God

intercedes to salvage us from the wreckage of our lives. He takes us by our hand and places us back on the safety of the homeward path."

- Archbishop Hovnan Derderian

January 6, 1995, Montreal

Q. But as the world progresses, much will change. Some of this change goes contrary to the belief system of the Orthodox Church. The right of a woman to choose to have an abortion, for example, is a right that they have earned only in the last few decades. But it is firmly opposed by the Church and by many corners of society. How can the Church put itself in the way of progress?

Abortion is a complicated issue. As a priest, an Archbishop of the Armenian Church, I am, in principle and in doctrine, opposed to abortion, unless there is a life threatening and medical emergency threatening both lives.

I firmly believe that the right belongs to the child to live and grow into an adult. The word of God should always

guide us in our behaviour and actions. Those who put their trust in Him cannot be at fault.

Q. As you noted earlier, the divorce rate has become alarming in the past couple of decades. In the Armenian world this is true as well. What can be done to preserve the family and reverse this trend?

It is not divorce that is a trend. It is bad marriages that are a trend. People often get married for the wrong reasons. Or have incorrect expectations of married life. Or are not willing to live as one with the person they have married. Divorce is simply the regrettable result of these unhealthy marriages.

Within the Church, divorce is not an acceptable outcome. Do we tolerate it? Yes. We have no choice. But we condemn it as a sign of failure. Do we understand how it can come to pass? Of course. But that does not make it any easier for us to accept.

However, even more important than the opinion of the Church is the reality of what a divorce does. It shatters a family. Destroys the unit upon which a home is built. Harms children. Confuses adults. And simply adds to the pain of this world.

As a clergyman, but even more so as a member of society I am dedicated to eradicating divorce. How? By ensuring that the marriages begin on sound footing. Every couple that comes to me I have to view with an eye to the future. I probe them. Query them. Help them open their eyes to the reality that marriage is not a partnership of convenience but a commitment that must stand the test of time, the test of sorrow, the test of the worst the world can throw at you. If on the first day a couple is not prepared for such challenges, then, even 10 or 20 years later the marriage can collapse.

To parents whose children are getting married I must also give you counsel. Your children will always love and cherish you, but they must now build their own family. Support this. And understand that it is not a simple job.

*As the family goes...so goes the whole world
in which we live.*

- Pope John Paul II

*Q. But there are times, Srpazan, when a couple
simply cannot go on. When it is actually healthier
to be apart than together. Don't you agree?*

Yes, it is true. Sometimes, and mostly due to adultery or some other form of unfaithfulness, a marriage is doomed. But in reality, these are the only times when I will understand the failure of a marriage. Too often I hear of couples whose “ambitions have changed” or who are “seeking new experiences.” This, I am afraid, cannot be accepted. By me, but most importantly, by them.

I have been fortunate in my life to know many couples who have strong marriages. Many, like you and Diana, I have married myself – and with immense joy. These are couples that will form the bedrock of modern society. So let us not focus on the bad – but the good. Let's put our focus on building the relationships and families that are born of healthy minds.

*Q. Can we discuss parenting for a while? I am not
yet a father, but when I become one I believe that
I will be taking on the biggest responsibility of my
life. And I know that many in the world feel that
way as well. It's actually rather scary, to think
that your actions and behaviour will shape an
individual. What do you think is the most
important thing to remember?*

Parenting is the most important job in the world. It is a full-time job that begins when the child is born and does not end until you take your last breath? It is not a project with a beginning and an end. It is a new way of life.

There are two ingredients to successful parenting, which I have seen from the thousands of families that I have known in my life. The first is love, not passively but expressed through words but most importantly through actions. Nothing will give a child more strength than the support that comes from unconditional love. And as an adult, as that love continues, the child will pass it on to the next generation.

The second is respect. Respect for your children is paramount. It breeds respect in them for society and for their own families. Treat them with respect. Explain to them the lessons of the world through your actions. And they will learn from it and grow from it.

“Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to this country and to mankind is to bring up a family.”

- George Bernard Shaw,
Playwright and Nobel Laureate

Q. I am often completely surprised when I see parents spanking their children or threatening them. Some people think it is completely logical to use force to discipline children. What do you think?

Force is a coward's approach to life. It should not be used to settle disagreements between nations, or people. And it certainly cannot be used to teach your children love and respect. Imagine the effect of a man, twice your size coming at you in anger with hand raised to strike you. That

is what a child sees. And that breeds fear, weakness and in some, hatred. It is both irresponsible as well as unforgivable to breed fear in a child at such a young age. If we are to create a family built on love and respect, then how does violence find a place in that equation? It simply does not.

As a pastor, I have actually come across families which reflect exemplary parenthood as well as respect on the part of the children towards their parents. This has inspired me tremendously and has given me the reassurance of established dialogue between parents and children and all parties unlike others who fail to establish a peaceful relationship with their sibling.

As a pastor, I have always been touched and inspired by these people, but above all have always felt that their loving, companionate and meaningful relationship is the greatest reward from God. It all starts with the parents and their respect for their children, the time we spend with our children, the patience we render for them, the ability to listen to them and the ability to see in them the presence of God.

In addition to what I have said above, it is also important to note that the church being a divine institution continues to fulfill the role of guidance in the life of the children. The Church enriches the spirituality of the parents, the parents become the partners in the mission of the church, and the children benefit from all this. The beauty of partnership in the mission of the church lies in the fruition of the transformation of the child's life. Much happens on that level. Parents become the spiritual tools in the hands of God to cultivate the life of their children. Parents and the church together help the children to have a vision of sharing their gifts with others.

In short, the church and parents have a greater responsibility in the upbringing of children as role models, to safeguard the life of the children from all tribulations which may leave a scar on their spirituality. God's greatest challenge is the gift of life.

We need to make sure that we are able to pass on this message clearly to our children.

Are other approaches more complicated? Absolutely. Taking the time to raise your children, reason

with them, grow their minds is much harder than raising a hand. But that is what you must do.

"It is a disgusting and slavish treatment which would certainly be regarded as an insult if it were inflicted on adults... And consider how shameful, how dangerous to modesty are the effects produced by the pain or fear of the victims. This feeling of shame cripples and unmans the spirit, making it flee from and detest the light of day..."

- Quintillion, A.D. 35-95, Roman
rhetorician and teacher

Q. Racism is a part of life. But it must stop. Every day walking down the street you hear racial slurs, anti-Semitism and blatant racism. How do we force society to grow up?

Racism is bred through the stupidity that exists in our society. There is no basis for it other than the ignorance of people. A statement that is racist in nature must force you

to react. Counter the person. For staying silent in the face of this reprehensible behaviour is just as wrong.

Racism is one of the great curses of mankind. And it gives me great pain to hear grown men and women pollute the world with hatred. And hatred is what it is. Illogical, unintelligent and unfounded hatred based on racial stereotyping.

As for anti-Semitism, it has been part of society for centuries. And it is time that it was put to rest. It is merely an expression of hatred, and of jealousy.

As Armenians, we have been the victims of racism in its most horrible form – Genocide. It is therefore incumbent upon us to fight racism wherever it may be and whoever it is directed towards. Because we know, better than most, what calamity it can lead to.

Statements that degrade a race are so illogical that they defy reason. People must grow up, intellectually and in terms of their maturity as adults.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Q. Talk to me about death. Very recently, I lost a family member that was very close to me. A loving woman, who was mother to one of the most beautiful families I know. God took her from us, from her family, from her grandchild, at a relatively young age. And he took her after years of suffering. Why? And why does God take a young child from his or her parents? Why does God allow millions to suffer? In the end, how can we remain loyal to God when He allows suffering in the world?

Thank you for asking this question. Not because it is easy to answer – but because it is actually very hard. It is even harder to accept.

God does not cut people down. He allows them to live. If you think back to your aunt, whom I too knew and loved dearly, is it her final moments that you want to think about? Or is it her life. The blessings that she gave to all

those she was in contact with. The love she filled the world with through her children, and their children. The pride she felt at her daughters' marriage, in the birth of her grandchild. The strength of character she injected into this world.

And if you think of that. How can you but thank God for her. And thank God for her very existence as a blessing He gave the world. Her body betrayed her, and pushed her into death. But her soul never did. Her soul lives on. In her family. In the love that surrounds every memory of her.

As for the child who dies too young, too early, he or she dies sinless in a sinful world. Rising to the heavens, to sit in the kingdom of God without any doubt.

It is difficult, I know, to accept death. Especially when it comes in the wrong order and a parent must bury a child. But it is not death that we must think of, but life and eternal life. For both lives are a blessings. The miracle radiating from the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Resurrection of Christ is the rejection of darkness. Through Faith we proclaim: "Christ is risen from the dead", and at that moment Christ descends into the depth of our being and illuminates our darkness.

Christ's Resurrection is assurance of spiritual rebirth; His Resurrection inspires the entire world for a new renaissance and guides humanity towards spiritual rebirth. For through Resurrection, Christ, the Son of God, defeated death and bestowed on us all the hope of renewed life".

- Archbishop Hovnan Derderian
Spiritual Reflections: Return to God
(Los Angeles 2004)

"...it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

- Abraham Lincoln,
16th President of the United States
(1861-1865)

Q. The world is filled with violence today. The War on Terror has been going on for many years, and there is no end in sight. Are we just going to have to cope with a world where we look over our shoulders? A world where we do not feel safe?

What took place in New York on September 11, 2001 was a turning point. It is when America realized that the battleground could actually be on its soil. For the first time since the Civil War, Pearl Harbour, American civilians came under fire. This would change the outlook of a people – and it did. America went on a war footing, and has not really come down from it since.

I completely respect the nation's right to defend itself, and to protect its people. It is, in fact, the number one responsibility of a government to take the actions that it deems necessary and appropriate to defend its citizens and its national borders. When Armenians in Artsakh were threatened, it's people who took up arms and defended the villages and towns. How can America not do likewise.

In parallel, it is important to note that war, in the end, harms everyone. The victors as much as anyone else. I pray that violence is not the long-term solution. That violence is not the only way to protect America from the real threats that exist.

I believe that a careful analysis is required. We need to understand the underlying cause of this hatred by some towards America. That way, we can do more than tactically stop assaults on American people and on American soil, but actually root out the cause of the assaults. The cause of the hatred.

Q. In an effort to combat terrorism and what the US administration called rogue states, the United States and the United Kingdom led an unsanctioned invasion of Iraq. Thousands of Americans and tens of thousands of Iraqis have died in this conflict. Do you support the war?

I will not comment on the politics of the conflict. It is not my position to do so. But I will comment on war in general.

First of all, my heart, my prayers and my support go to the families of those fighting in Iraq. May God bless those that have fallen, and protect those that are there serving their country.

I have personally experienced Iraq during Saddam's regime in 1984 when I first visited the Armenian community there. During that time as a young priest, I immediately felt the imprisonment of the human soul and the abuse of the freedom of speech. On many occasions I was challenged by undercover agents with similar questions: "How do you like our President?" Today I remember immense respect the wisdom of my people who have endured these conditions and have equally worked hard to maintain their schools and churches.

It was obvious that Saddam was in every place; however the church continued to be the only place that was the harbour of peace.

Today, what goes on in Iraq is certainly the result of decades of oppression and tyranny which has paved its way into the spirituality of the average citizen.

But I am worried. I am worried that war can come so easily. That we see war too often as the only solution to world problems. As I said before, war has no winners. Only losers. The young soldier who dies in Baghdad is a hero for

his bravery, but is also a son, a father, a husband. In fact, he is those things first, and foremost, for the family he leaves behind.

I am a priest. And therefore I will not solve this issue on my own. But I implore all people to seek solutions that do not cause the death of thousands. I believe, firmly, that war, in any form, must be avoided. And that other solutions need to be explored. When a nation goes to war, it is essentially a failure. A failure of civilized behaviour. A failure of diplomacy.

Is it unavoidable at times? Yes. But that does not make it easy to accept.

"Wisdom born of experience should tell us that war is obsolete... If we assume that life is worth living, if we assume that mankind has the right to survive, then we must find an alternative to war."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.,
American Civil Rights Leader
and Nobel Laureate

Q. What is taking place in Lebanon is truly a nightmare for the people of that embattled nation. After a decade's long civil war, Lebanon was finally finding its strength again and being re-born. And in a short time, it has been plunged back into chaos. This must hurt you, having been raised in that country.

On a personal level, I feel for the people of Lebanon. I saw firsthand their suffering during the civil war and can only imagine the heartache that this new war must bring them.

The Middle East is a very complicated place. As with all wars, once again, there are no winners or losers, only those that suffer. Israel suffers – with civilians being killed and its borders regularly compromised. The Palestinians suffer, unable to bring peace to their people and stability to their land. And the Lebanese suffer, caught between two warring groups.

There are thousands of Armenians in Lebanon as well. And they too suffer through this. I pray that the

hostilities come to end and that diplomacy and compromise can undo what war has destroyed. It will be a long process, of that I am certain. A process that will see the leaders of that part of the world forced to look beyond their grievances and think of the lives of their people. A process that will force nations and peoples to rise up above hatred to find the path towards peace.

Q. But there will always be war Srpazan. It is one of the only definitive statements that we can make in this world. That people will find a reason to kill each other.

War is a constant I am afraid. But that does not mean that we must not fight it, find a way to counter it, look for a way to stop it. If the Church has any role to play, aside from consoling the grieving and helping those that suffer, it is to encourage continued conversation among opposing parties to try and avoid war wherever possible.

Conversation is the key to avoiding conflict. As long as two sides are talking, they are not fighting. It may sound simplistic, but it is true. And that is the role I see for the

Church, and that is the path I see that will most effectively reduce the pain and suffering of war.

CHAPTER 4: YOUTH – ENGAGE THEM OR LOSE THEM

“It is only when people begin to worship that they begin to grow.”

- Calvin Coolidge

From the first days of his ministry, Archbishop Derderian has focused his most active days on young Armenians. From children to young adults this has been his most consistent effort. Through him, I became close to the Church, saw my homeland and participated in its rebirth, met my wife and started my life. Were it not for his intervention, I too might have been among the lost Armenian – detached from their heritage.

Q. You and I have never spoken, not once, without you bringing up youth programs, projects or ideas. You give youth programs more attention than anything else and dedicate enormous time and energy. Is it because you fear they might leave the Church and the Armenian community?

Dedication to the youth in our church community has a special significance. Once we are able to secure the presence of the youth and their engagement in our church community life we then are able to tie their lives to its mission.

This aspect resembles the grain of wheat which is fallen into the fertile ground while other less fortunate grains which fall on rocky ground and do not receive the necessary care, and are withered.

The youth have a unique message to all of us. On the one hand we are obliged to guide them and lead them to a better future, and on the other hand, we are compelled and challenged to keep pace with their wisdom and level of understanding.

The wisdom lies with those who can play the role of a teacher for the youth and at the same time humbly accepting that which is new and inspiring from them.

When I was a young student in Antelias, it was the time and patience of clergymen and teachers that formed

my character and guided me on the life that I have chosen. I firmly believe that there is nothing more important for Armenian leaders today than to focus on the youth. After all, only they represent the future.

There is an old saying that I firmly believe in:

"...we do not inherit the world from our ancestors; we borrow the world from our children..."

This is the guiding principle of my entire ministry. And what I promote to all of my clergy. It is the central reason for the existence of every school, community centre, church or Armenian institution: to preserve, strengthen and enrich the Armenian world so that our youth may inherit it.

For decades, we held the flame of Armenian identity alive in the Diaspora so that we could transfer it to the next generations. We fought for the independence of our homeland, so that our successors could have a place on this planet to call their own. We built schools to educate and

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centers to congregate. All this with a single purpose: to pass on the Armenian identity to the next generations.

Throughout history, youth and student movements have shaken the world and changed it. Through them revolutions are born and ideas are generated. They create the future.

If the young, idealistic, energetic segment of our community is not consulted, then there is no future for the community. It is not about lobbying, organizing or managing. In the end, we, community leaders of the Diaspora, are here to do only one single thing: Create an environment in which our community can continue to flourish. And that means embracing the youngest members of our society.

In my years in the Canadian Diocese, youth projects have been the most successful. The Armenian Church Youth Organization was the strongest organization in the Canadian Diocese, CYMA – the Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia one of our most important projects and the CFFA – Children's Fund for Armenia one of our biggest fundraisers.



There is nothing more powerful than capturing the imagination of a young man or woman and galvanizing it, focusing it, and letting it loose.

Why is it that so many of our so-called leaders today give youth programs lip service? Perhaps they have forgotten what it feels like to be young, and filled with a sense of purpose. If we, as leaders of the Armenian community have any missions it is to give our youngest members the reigns so that they can lead us into tomorrow.

For if we do not, then our halls will be empty, our schools silent., our pews vacant. We would be like a fallen star.

Q. But do you think that the youth can actually make a difference? How can they?

They have all the knowledge. They know, better than anyone else what the community needs to be in order and they want to ensure their participation in achieving it. They are the future – so shouldn't they plan it?

When I was elected Primate of the Canadian Diocese I was only 32. Many thought I was inexperienced. I had countless people trying to teach me the right way to think, to act, to plan. None of it helped.

But a few took me under their wing, guided me, coached me, advised me. They gave me two things that I needed: confidence and friendship. And through them I gained the strength I needed.

And then, it was young participants. People like you and others, who came into the Church, took on projects, programs and responsibilities and transformed the Church. You remade it in your image. You launched the programs that you wanted. And for more than ten years, it drove the Diocese forward.

Yes. It is my strong belief that the Youth can make a difference. So if I have any advice to give to Diocesan or Parish councils, executive committees and Boards it is this: let the youth come in, give them freedom within our institutions, guide and mentor them and they will lead us forward.

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With Sunday School children, Toronto, 1984



Toronto 1988-89



Toronto 1986

If every member of the Diocesan Council, Parish councils, committees and working groups could replace him or her self with a young man or woman, then within two years the face of the community would change and the Armenian world would advance.

Let me read to you a passage from a lecture I delivered to the University of California in Los Angeles on May 12, 2004 entitled:

It is high time that we teach the youth the messages of Christ, the history of the Church, the tradition and the theology of the Armenian Church, but above all to trust the youth for all leadership and engagement in the life of worship. Bonding can not take place in any other way than entrusting the youth with specific responsibilities and roles. Therefore, participation is the key word to secure the vitality of the Church.

CHAPTER 5: THE WESTERN DIOCESE – BUILDING A NEW ARMENIA

In 2003, Hovnan Srpazan left Canada after two decades to lead the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. He left behind a strong Diocese in Canada, on a per capita basis one of the most active in the world, both in terms of community life as well as its involvement in supporting the re-emergence of the Republic of Armenia. A long tenure, and one filled with many successes.

He arrived in Los Angeles that year, was elected Primate of the Western Diocese and now leads one of the largest Armenian communities in the Diaspora, worldwide. Yet by many accounts, his work as a priest and leader of the Church has just begun. I have spoken with many of his new parishioners and they look to him, not only guide them, but to invigorate the community.

Q. Your administration in the Western Diocese is still young, but already there has been an enormous

amount of activity. Can you give us a snap-shot of the main priorities you see for this community?

When I arrived to the Western Diocese I inherited enormous spirit and great potential. To maximize that potential, I broke down the activities into three main challenges. As you may recall, you and I wrote the initial proposal to the Diocesan Assembly several years back.

First, I focused on the clergy. I learned over the years that leadership is more about building a good team than anything else. I immediately initiated a training program, registered clergy by the handful to universities to complete their Master of Divinity and began a recruitment drive to strengthen the ranks of the Church. If I don't have the priests, there is little I can do.

Second, I turned my attention to Christian Education. I focused on the introduction of religious programs in the Armenian day schools and Saturday schools. I have recruited professionals to work on the development of textbooks and other writings and have focused on building

a best-in-class education program through which to breathe religious life into the community.

And thirdly, I completely re-aligned the Diocesan organizational structure. I have added seven new full time staff members, each an expert in their field. I have handpicked people who are professional administrators, educators, writers and managers to drive the Diocese. Each share two characteristics: they are committed to their work, and have the education to back their commitment. I also focused on the Diocesan institutions, launching TV programs, religious publications and newsletters.

Q. In Canada, you spent a lot of time expanding the Diocese, launching mission parishes and establishing new communities. Does this work continue in your new role in the Western Diocese?

The creation of mission parishes is the job of a Diocesan Primate in the Diaspora. In the Western Diocese, we have established close to 20 new parishes, first as mission parishes and over time, as they strengthen their membership ranks, we would assign full-time priests and

transform them into full parishes to serve the people. This has both expanded our reach and our ranks.

Q. And what of the Youth?

As always, my primary concern is the youth. They are, as I have said many times, the lifeblood of the community. With the appointment of a Youth Director, I now have a leader that is galvanizing the youth organizations and driving our programs forward. We have launched a new CYMA program (Christian Youth Mission to Armenia) similar to what we established together in Canada back in the 1990's, and a new program called Brighter Future for Armenia ("BFA") that sponsors youth in the homeland. Lately, Archbishop Derderian was called upon by Karekin Vehapar to organize the International Pan-Armenian Youth Organization.

Over the last couple of years, we have also initiated pan-American youth programs, retreats and assemblies, across the Diocese and at the inter-Diocesan level as well.

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And the ACYO (Armenian Church Youth Organization) is stronger than ever, with close to 1,000 attendees at the annual general assembly and sports weekend.

Most interestingly, I have presided over the ordination of close to 300 acolytes, sub-deacons and deacons, breathing fresh new talent and participation into the ranks of the Church.

And my most proud accomplishment is the recruitment of 10 new candidates to the priesthood, a new generation of clergy to lead our Church forward.

Q. Where do you see the Western Diocese in 5 or 10 years?

Let me try to explain how I see the role of the Diocese. The Armenian world is divided in two parts: Armenians that live in the homeland and those of us who inhabit the Diaspora. They are, together, the two constituent parts of the Armenian nation. I therefore believe that the



work of the Diocese is nothing less than the development of the Armenian nation. It is the extension.

Everything we do, preserves not only our historic identity in the United States, but actually contributes to the enrichment of the Armenian nation.

So how do I see our progress? It's rather simple really: more churches, more members, more projects, more programs, more activities...more work. We are nation-builders, not just church-builders.

Let me share with you a passage from an article I wrote back in 2001 that I hope will shed some light on my thinking with regards to the role of the Diaspora in Armenian life:

The Armenian Diaspora: A Permanent Reality

The 1915 Genocide changed the course of our history, stripping us of our rights to live on our ancestral lands, and dispersing our nation throughout the world. We were faced with numerous challenges as we struggled within countless communities around the world. Out of this turmoil and change came a new awakening for a new life and in this respect the spiritual guidance of the Armenian Church became this unifying force.

Today the Armenian Church continues to play a crucial role in the life of the Armenian people. Surrounded by different cultures and languages, they are in an ongoing state of change and adaptation. As they go about their daily lives, between work and home, Armenians take on many new customs and habits in order to be able to survive in the host country. In times of difficulty, the role of the Armenian Church is one of a spiritual guide as well as a facilitator and a problem solver. The Church's mission is also to reinforce and teach those very values that are so dear to our people and pass them on to the younger generation of Armenians. I believe that a strong Church has meant the survival of our people. I also believe that a strong Church in the future will mean the continued rebirth of our nation in the homeland and in the Diaspora.

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Spiritual Supreme Council, Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 2007

Throughout the history of mankind, interactions between cultures have influenced nations in numerous ways. As we observe such developments, we witness the benefits as well as the less desirable results that are sometimes unavoidable. Yet most of the time the benefits are more noteworthy for the society at large. Armenians, wherever they are, have shown great skills of adaptation: learned the language, worked, established ties within their communities and with other cultures and peoples. It is also true that Armenian communities have clearly contributed to the well being of their host countries on many levels such as culturally, economically and lately even politically and they will continue to do so as they grow and prosper in different parts of the world.

Therefore, as a permanent reality, The Diaspora should not be regarded as a threat, but more as a challenge which stirs us to wakefulness, and motivates us to focus our strength on matters of national identity. This new commitment to preserve and safeguard the Armenian identity empowers us to become influential players in the societies we live in, adding to the dynamism and wisdom in our interactions with our fellow citizens. With the help of our deep-rooted faith and a positive attitude towards the host societies, we are more likely to secure the future of our Nation in its two permanent realities.

On the one hand, our homeland as the focal point of Armenian history, on the other hand, The Diaspora as our undying remnant in the midst of many nations. In this context, The Armenian Church continues its indispensable role as the “spiritual link” between Armenia and the Diaspora.

It is quite a challenge to be a Armenian in the Diaspora. One must fully integrate with the laws, cultures and language of the host country while never allowing full assimilation to take place. Achieving this balance and maintaining it for many generations is the challenge of every Armenian in the Diaspora. I believe that the role of the Church is to help the Armenian Diaspora survive this balance and grow into a mature nation.

CHAPTER 6: THE ARMENIAN WORLD

The Armenian Church clearly serves two purposes, one is religious and spiritual, and as a national church, it serves a second purpose which is one of a unifying force. In fact, it is the single most powerful unifying force in the Armenian world and has been for centuries. Kings came and went. Conquerors occupied our land. Governments rise and fall. But for over 16 centuries, a single institution – the Armenian Church - remained firm, protected our national identity and kept our language, our culture and our religion alive. These next conversations with Archbishop Derderian try to probe his thoughts on the future of the Armenian Diaspora and the role the Church can play in its continued survival.

“The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving. To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and

sometimes against it, but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.”

- Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.,
American jurist, United States Supreme
Court of Justice (1902-1932)

Q. There are more Armenians living in the Diaspora today than in the homeland. Close to a million of them within the jurisdiction of the Western Diocese alone. But every year, a few slip away. They move on. Adopt other cultures. At least a dozen times I've heard the words “my grandmother was Armenian”. Is the Armenian world threatened?

You cannot force someone to be Armenian. You actually have to convince them. I don't mean this in a negative way. What I mean is that our job, as leaders of the community and of the Church, is to find ways of attracting and retaining people in the community. That is why I travel so much. I spend my time reaching out, talking to people, initiating projects, trying to understand their needs and wants. By learning about their day to day lives, I

then can find the thread, the issue or the thought that will resonate in them and compel them to think about their roots. And only then can I provide an environment within the Church that our people will find appealing.

It is a fine balance, being an American and an Armenian. But one that can be so grand by combining the virtues of these two great communities that blend so well in each other. I'll leave you with a short passage from a speech I delivered in Los Angeles last year:

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My Dear Faithful Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

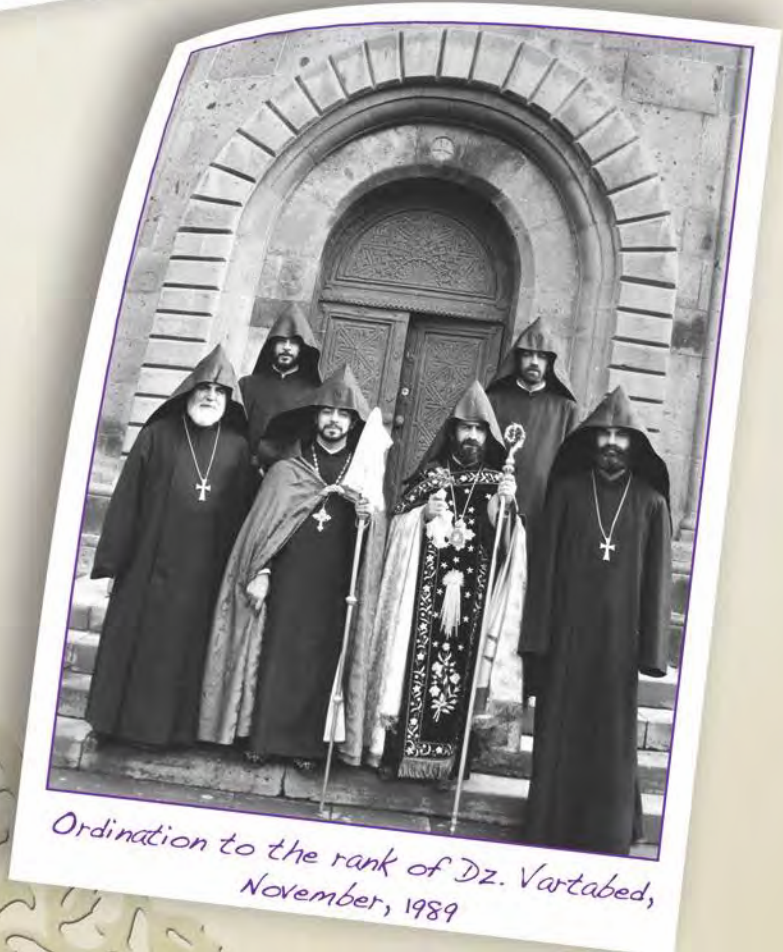
(...)

This blessed country, America, has not only sheltered the survivors of the First Genocide of the Twentieth Century, but has also nurtured us with the zeal to uphold our identity as Armenian Christians. Therefore, as dedicated citizens of America, whose patriarchs have put their trust in God alone, we also have the moral responsibility to bond our spiritual lives with the Holy Land of Armenia. We have walked through the valley of darkness and death with the hope of resurrection. We glorify God for the rejuvenation of our nation.

Both in Armenia and in the Diaspora, the new life is reflected in the excellence of our youth. We ought to be proud of our achievements on all levels; however, there is yet much to be done. Unity of our people ought to be perfected. True Christian love and collaboration ought to dominate and penetrate in the lives of the Armenian Community. And the perception to serve humanity at large ought to be our vision.

I believe in miracles and firmly believe that every Christian can turn his life into an instrument of love, change, but above all... an instrument of miracles. I humbly render my love and my life to you all.

I'd like to close in the words of President Woodrow Wilson: "I know now what the task means. I realize to the full responsibility which it involves. I pray God may give me the wisdom and all the prudence to do my duty in the true spirit of this great people."



Q. In 1995, I spent two hours with His Holiness, Karekin I, the late Catholicos, at his office in Holy Etchmiadzin, shortly after his consecration. During our conversation I asked him why the Armenian Diaspora was assimilating so fast and what could be done to save it and protect it. He told me that it was not enough to save it – our job was to enrich it. And only then could we ensure that it continues for centuries to come. What do you think he meant by that statement?

Karekin I was a great man and leader. And he was right when he made this statement. Survival is not the only goal. We want the Armenian race to flourish both in the Motherland and in the Diaspora. We need to keep the language alive, and show our people its beauty and richness. We need to publish books, poetry and prose. We need to support our Armenian artists and allow them to rise up. We need to strengthen our Churches, our centres and our schools. In short, every year, we must strive to make the people and the culture grow, intellectually, spiritually. Yes, in small increments. But steadily. Our goal isn't to keep the Churches full. It is to fill them so much that we

need to build new ones. Our goal isn't to stem assimilation, but to foster new Armenian families and guide them to enrich the Armenian world and the communities they live in.

Let me give you a parallel. If you are running a business, what is your focus? Is it to sustain revenues? That may be the outcome but not the goal. The goal is to seek ways of maximizing revenues. The same is true of a people. Is our goal to protect the culture? No, it is to look for ways to enrich it. And by doing that, we keep it alive. Thriving is the word.

Preservation is done out of fear. Enrichment is done due to love.

When Pope John Paul II visited Armenia, he had this to say about the wealth of the Armenian nation:

“If today the West can freely profess its faith, this is also due to those who sacrificed themselves, making their bodies a bulwark for the Christian world to its further reaches. Their death was the price of our safety ...”

“The Armenian people’s heritage of faith and culture has enriched humanity with treasures of art and genius that have now spread throughout the world. Seventeen hundred years of evangelization makes this land one of the cradles of Christian civilization, which is revered and admired by all the disciples of the divine Teacher.”

Q. Why should we turn to the Church to protect our culture and our heritage in the Diaspora? Wouldn’t the secular organizations be more apt to the task?

The Armenian Diaspora has many very successful and very productive institutions. Community centres, schools, charities, cultural and political groups. All of them play a part in our continued effort to enrich the Armenian world and raise the next generation of Armenians outside of the motherland.

And the Church is a central part of this effort. As I have said many times before, the Armenian Church is more than a religious institutions, it is a national one as well. It is

tied to the history of our people more closely than any institution in the world today. It has outlived any institution or organization.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has been around since the days of the apostles and therefore has a rightful claim as one of the oldest denominations in Christianity. The earliest accounts of the Armenian Church date from the 1st century, when Christianity was first preached by St. Bartholomew and St. Thaddeus. And our history has been intertwined with the Church since then.

For example, Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity as its official religion, in 301, when St. Gregory the Illuminator converted Tiridates III. Since then, the Church has been the centerpiece of the Armenian world.

And in a thousand years, if we do our work, it will remain as such.

Q. In the summer of 1993, I spend many weeks living at the official guest house within the walls of Holy Etchmiadzin – (the Vanadoun). And in that time I

met many of the Bishops and Patriarchs that lead the Armenian world. What struck me in my conversations with them was the one theme that seemed to unite them all: the need to tie the Diaspora and the homeland together. But what surprised me, even then, was that their goal was not only to leverage the wealth of the Diaspora in support of the emerging Republic, but to use the emerging Republic as the centrepiece of continued expansion of the Armenian world outside the homeland. Can the Armenian Church play a part in this?

Without trying to sound too one-sided, I am firmly of the belief that the Armenian Church is the best way to link homeland and Diaspora. Let me explain. In addition to our 1700 year existence as the spiritual center of the Armenian world, by our very structure, the Church is linked to the homeland. All members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, across the world, have as their center the Mother Cathedral at Holy Etchmiadzin and the Catholicos of All Armenians who lives on the grounds of the Cathedral.

His Holiness is more than a spiritual leader within Armenia, he is also a pillar of the Armenian society. And therefore, our link to him, and the Mother Cathedral can be extended to the Armenian people living throughout the Diaspora.

It may be controversial to say, but whether an individual is religious or not, the Church can provide a nationalistic bond to the homeland. It can provide the bridge over which Armenians of any age and any background can cross from North America to Armenia.

And as Bishops of the Church, we all recognize this. It is why, in addition to our spiritual and religious function, we also act as patrons of the arts, of cultural events, or education. It is why we sponsor humanitarian efforts. It is why we connect to local and federal political leaders. Because by our very structure, the Church can represent the people of the local community, but also indirectly the people of Armenia.

And because we are a democratic Church in North America, we can do so with the support of our parishioners.

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It is a unique position that we find ourselves in. But one that must be used for maximum impact.

Q. I have been fortunate to see first hand the evolution of the Republic of Armenia. When I first visited Armenia in the winter of 1992, it was a nation in total despair. As my plane landed in Yerevan at 10 in the evening, the reality of the power failure that had gripped the nation, and that would last throughout the winter, became real when I looked out the window of our approaching plane and could not see a single light on in a city of over one million. I remember that time in Armenia vividly, jumping out of our car to help push a tram car that had stalled due to lack of electricity, collecting wood in the forest so that a young family could cook a meal and warm their home, going to border towns to deliver humanitarian aid between shelling spurts, and consoling the mothers of soldiers who had fallen in the war.



Mousa Ler Monument, Armenia



With the students of the Kevorkian Theological Seminary, Holy Etchmiadzin



Ararat Home - Mission Hills, CA

I visited and worked in Armenia several times since, and during my most recent visit some ten years after the first, I saw a nation that had changed dramatically. Yerevan was filled with light and with noise. And in the countryside, when I met with villagers and workers, there was hope where once I heard only despair. But even now, the nation's economy is in a weak state, and its people still struggle. Will this nation be able to rise up and truly prosper?

What has taken place in Armenia over the past 15 years is truly a miracle. With no natural resources, a continued blockade of many trade routes and a birth that was hampered by war and a massive energy crisis, the nation has actually survived. In fact, in many respects, it has thrived.

When I walk the streets of Yerevan, I hear laughter when once I did not. And the economy is starting to develop as well. With new businesses and industries starting to take route.

But let us be realistic. There is still a long way to go....

Economically, Armenia still needs to identify a sustainable development model that will allow it to grow incrementally, but consistently, in the years ahead. Trade routes need to be established, market forces must dictate the future survival and growth of its industrial base, and governmental institutions and procedures have to be modernized.

Socially, the nation must complete a very difficult transition, from Communism to a market economy. It requires more than simply a change of policy, but a mind-set transformation as well.

And politically, the strong institutions that have been established must continue to take root. Corruption must be eliminated. And democratic principles must slowly evolve.

Having said that, a remarkable level of progress is evident in a very short time.

Q. You speak of the transition from communism. Some will make that transition naturally. But others will resist. Can this be done in one generation?

It is already happening. Across Armenia we are seeing the shift as people take ownership of their lives, their finances and their future. A level of stability in the political and diplomatic fronts over the last few years has also supported this transition.

I think there is a long way to go, but I think the country is on the right track. Certainly, compared to many of the other countries in the Caucasus, Armenia is in a stronger position, both politically and socially, to advance in the years ahead.

Q. And within that context, will the Church continue to thrive or will it face opposition from an increasingly secular market-driven nation?

Actually, since the fall of Communism and the re-birth of the homeland, the Church has had a remarkable

resurgence. People, in their hearts, had never turned away from the Church even after seven decades of Communist rule. In fact, across the country they kept the flame of their faith burning, waiting for the opportunity to re-start a more formal relationship with the Church.

In Holy Etchmiadzin, we have seen a massive revival, major renovations, expansion of the seminary, creation of a publishing house and an information office. And across Armenia, in various dioceses, the same thing is happening as millions flock back home...to the Church.

Q. There have been many projects from the Diaspora, sophisticated ones and grass roots ones, in support of Armenia. Is this making a difference? If so, what can be done to keep the support going?

The programs and projects from the Diaspora are essential for the future of Armenia. In the final analysis, it is the people of Armenia that will build their nation. It was they who protected it under centuries of occupation. But both morally and financially, the Diaspora has a central role to play.

For example, no Diasporan group is going to drive economic growth in Armenia. There are significant funds and programs, but in the end, a national economy requires time, a concrete plan and sound efficient execution. And that can only come from within.

But morally, Diaspora involvement shows the people of Armenia that they are not alone, that if they need partners and know-hows, from the world at large, there are Armenians who can facilitate those. And there are Armenians that believe in the future of the country – enough to invest in it.

And from a financial perspective, a national struggling to rebuild its institutions and infrastructure needs the support that Diasporan organizations can bring, from paving roads, to caring for orphans. The contribution the Diaspora has made has actually had an impact—a real impact. We've seen it.

But mostly, it is the Diaspora's job to keep Armenia top of mind, within the Armenian community. But also within the community at large in which we live. Building ties that

bind us to the homeland is a key component of national revival. And it is also a key barrier to assimilation.

Q. The Armenian Genocide remains a hot issue – as it should – in the Armenian world. It is a tragedy that must be remembered, not only for the Armenian world, but for the world at large. How can mankind advance if it regularly forgets the crimes of the past? But there are many that say that after 90 years it is time to move on. What is your position on this?

Both points of view are right. There is no way we can forget nor should anyone forget the genocide. The crime that was perpetuated by the Ottoman Turks on the Armenian people scattered a civilization to the four corners of the world. Its aim was simple: annihilation. By the grace of God, and through the fortitude of a people, that goal was resoundingly quashed.

But the effect is still there. The pain is still felt. The rebirth has just started. How can we, as a people, turn away from a tragedy that devastated our ancestors – some who

are still alive to this day. They shed blood for us. We must never let it be in vain.

And that is why recent proclamations from various governments, including Canada's, must continue. The pressure must never let up.

But in parallel to that, recognition of the Genocide is not, in and of itself, a purpose that can keep the Armenian people motivated. It should not be. Today, we have a homeland. A nation that is rising out of the rubbles of communism and trying to build a new tomorrow, one based, as much as possible, on principles of an open economy, democracy, and certain basic freedoms. And that journey, that mission is the ultimate priority. There is no use in a recognition of the Genocide if the Republic of Armenia, God-forbid, collapses. Its growth, enhancement, enrichment is what must keep the Diaspora focused and alive.

For centuries we have dreamt of a free and independent homeland. That dream is now realized, despite all of the odds being stacked against us. We must now work for its growth and development, with our governments here

in North America, with our parishioners, within our community, everywhere.

Q. What do you see as the biggest barrier to the continued evolution of Armenia?

It took two hundred years, a civil war and a massive civil rights battle for America to get where it is today: a free and open society. Compared to that, Armenia has actually come a long way in a very short period of time. However, to really succeed, it must continue to move down the path of democracy, rule of law, peace and tolerance. It is on the right trajectory. But the effort must continue.

The government has done a lot in the one and half decade since independence. Infrastructure, public policy, economic and social development have all shown signs of progress. Yes, there is some corruption, but that is to be expected and gradually eliminated.

And on the more local level, we have to carefully watch the disparity between rich and poor. Like all developing countries, a small proportion will get rich as the

balance remains stuck in poverty. But even there, I see signs of progress. Signs that a middle class is starting to emerge.

So, overall, I am very optimistic. But with a word of caution: if the progress made over the past several years does not continue, and even accelerate, I fear the country's ability to grow and prosper.

On a final note, let me stress the importance I place on the ability of the people of Armenia to define their own future. It is not always up to the government to lead. It is up to the people of Armenia to tell them where to go and what they want and need. The destiny of the country is in their hands, and I hope that they will take this task and work seriously, since it's their own future.

"...rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God."

- John F. Kennedy,
35th President of the United States
(1961-1963)

Q. After 40 years, Armenia held two pontifical elections within a four year period. In the first, Karekin II of Cilicia was elected and became Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians. In the second election, just four years later, Archbishop Karekin Nersessian of the Ararat Diocese was elected to serve as Karekin II. However, much controversy surrounded these two elections, despite their historical importance. You were there for both, Srpazan. What were your impressions and what can you share with us?

When the late Vasken I passed away in the summer of 1994, I was at his side in his final moments. It broke my heart when he took his last breath. This man who had guided my career from the day I stepped foot in Holy Etchmiadzin to his last day on this Earth. For a while, we all felt like orphans. We all felt the magnitude of his loss.

Over the weeks that followed, preparations commenced under the guidance of Patriarch Torkom Manoukian, who acted as Locum Tenus of the Church. Across the world, delegates were chosen and then at the appointed time, we all converged at Holy Etchmiadzin for

the first election of a pontiff of the Armenian Church in 40 years, and the first within a free and independent homeland.

There were clearly two sides to the election. One side wanting to keep the Church under the leadership of an Archbishop who had administratively reported to Vasken I. The others wanted to bring Karekin II from Antelias, Lebanon to Etchmiadzin and through that move began the work of repairing the divisions within the Armenian Church that so harmed the Church and the Armenian nation.

I knew Karekin I well, and had worked with him over the years. And I was convinced that he was both the most accomplished of the clergy gathered at Etchmiadzin, as well as the one most likely to heal the wounds of the divided Church. And to this day, I believe that we did the right thing.

Over the years, Karekin Catholicos had written several books and booklets in Armenian, English, and French and published many articles and studies on theological, Armenological, philosophical, ethical and literary subjects.

He also made frequent visits to the Mother See of the Holy Etchmiadzin and met frequently with Catholicos Vazken I. He was the man to work on the issues of the modern Church within a newly independent Republic.

It is extremely unfortunate that soon after his election, Karekin I was struck with cancer. In November 1998 he had to undergo cancer treatments in New York and he died in June 1999, not having had the time to make the impact that he so wanted and the contribution that we all knew he could make.

The second election took place later that same year. Karekin Nercessian, who had served as head of the Diocese of Ararat was the front runner from the beginning. He was a young, energetic and accomplished leader and had made enormous strides at improving the situation of the Church and of the people within his Diocese, which included Yerevan. From his days as head of the Araratian Diocese, we knew of his interest in using communications, modern technologies and telecommunications to modernize the Church. And he was a formidable leader in helping

Armenia manage through the early days of the transformation from communism to a democratic nation.

I believed then, as I do now, that the Church needed a leader who understood the specific situations within the homeland, had existing relationships with the government, knew the inner workings of the Church and possessed the energy and vigour needed to jump-start our efforts to rebuild the Church.

There were some difficult moments during the election, as with all elections of a democratic nature--they become politicised and factions do emerge. Debate and argument are facts of life if we are to preserve the democratic model for electing our Supreme Pontiff.

However, as the final ballot approached, there was a clear sense of purpose among the delegates. And his election was both acclaimed and approved by all as having been democratic, fair and open.

I believe that both of these elections demonstrated that throughout debates and even disagreements, the

Armenian Church remained firmly rooted in its democratic principles and followed the rules as laid out by the Supreme Spiritual Council.

If today, some look back to those elections and express negative sentiments, I am truly disappointed in their inability to see the bigger picture. We promised an election that was open, with secret ballot, with respect and fairness. Not a closed conclave. And we delivered.

Yes, there were debates. Yes, there were disagreements. But with open and democratic principles being paramount in the process, these things will, and must occur.

Most importantly, these elections proved that the system does work. That delegates from around the world, from varied cultures, with social and linguistic barriers, can come together and make the right decision, in the right way.

It is a testament to our strength as a Church and as a people; that we can debate in a healthy fashion, vote and then unite to serve our new leader.

The system may not be perfect, but it works. The administration of Karekin II since the day of his election has proven that. And the Church today is stronger and more effective due to the debates we had at the time of the election. Better to have debated then, than to be still arguing today...

CHAPTER 7: THE CHURCH – TODAY AND TOMORROW

Organized religion, in general, has come under an enormous amount of criticism in the past several years. Some say that it actually does more harm than good, by promoting obsolete ideas and unsafe practices. Even harsher critics accuse organized religion of criminal cover-ups, like with the Catholic Church scandals of harassment and sexual abuse. There is certainly a vocal majority that believes that significant reform is required if the church is to stay relevant at all.

In the Armenian Church, we have stayed true to old traditions and orthodox practices. But this has given rise to a variety of competing forces, such as evangelical and other movements, both in Armenia and in the Diaspora. In this final chapter, I spent some time probing Archbishop Derderian on these topics to get to the root of his vision for the Church of tomorrow.

Faith in Action

Conversations with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian

Q. Srpazan, you have dedicated your life to the service of your Church and your people. But it is getting increasingly difficult to make the Church relevant to a wide audience. In fact, some would say that the Church, in general terms, is on the decline. What can be done to save it from obscurity?

This is the big question. And there are many challenges to maintaining the relevance of a 1700-year old institution and a 2000 + year old faith. For example, globalization has a major effect on people's perceptions of religion. It is changing the world, posing new questions, shifting the dynamics of trade and diplomacy. Constants that have been true for centuries are changing, making people doubt what they thought they knew. Within that context, it is imperative for the Church to also adjust and change. To ensure that it is not a victim of change, but rather a catalyst for stability during times of transition.

For example, the political upheavals that take place in the developing world as nations shift from despotism to democracy actually start by pushing many of these nations



With H.H. John Paul II, Armenia, 2001



*With H.H. Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians,
Holy Etchmiadzin*

into chaos. The Church has and can play a role in those times, as conciliator, moderator, partner. It is not that we believe it is the role of organized religion to get involved in the politics of a nation. But it is the role of the Church to moderate the effects of such significant and sudden change on the daily lives of the citizens. It must become a place of refuge, of stability – a steady ship in the storm.

How? By becoming part of the fabric of society. By understanding the shifts that are taking place and of the geopolitical realities of the increasingly global universe we live in. And rather than try to counter these forces, we must learn to ride and not oppose the waves of change, so that we can nourish the people and strengthen them.

In his book The Purpose Driven Church, Rick Warren puts forth five Dimensions of Church Growth. I think they remain very appropriate:

1. Churches grow warmer through fellowship.
2. Churches grow deeper through discipleship.
3. Churches grow stronger through worship.
4. Churches grow broader through ministry.
5. Churches grow larger through evangelism.

"Sometimes a church's situation may look hopeless from a human standpoint. But I am firmly convinced, as Ezekiel's experience (Ezekiel 37) proved, that no matter how dry the bones may be, God can breathe new life into them. Any church can come alive if we allow the Spirit to infuse us with a new sense of his purpose. That is what the purpose-driven church is all about."

- Rick Warren,
Christian author

Q. Concretely, what does that entail? What can Church leaders actually do to assuage the difficulties of the people and to make themselves relevant as a beacon in stormy waters?

Two things. Love and a moral compass. Let me explain.

Love is not a passive emotion, it is an active verb. When I say that the Church must love its people, I mean the Church must actually reach out and tell the people that it

loves them. It must show them, through words and deeds, that the love is unconditional, complete and constant. Nothing gives an individual more faith, in God, in themselves and in the future, than unconditional love. As Christ loved all people, so must do the Church. That is our duty and calling.

And when I speak of a moral compass, I do not mean dictating rules of living to the masses. What I am referring to is the expression of the teachings of Christ. Because whether you have faith or not, whether you are Christian in your belief or not, the teachings of Christ can and should act as a guide to steer people to a better place in their hearts and in their lives. The love He preached, the forgiveness He stood for, the brotherhood that He called for and the compassion with which He saw the world are all lessons that must be taught. Not to convert or impose religion, but to serve all men and women, anywhere in the world.

So when you combine these teachings with abundant love do you know what you get? Strength. You strengthen and empower people. It is like having loving

parents that teach you the lessons of life proactively. That is what gives the world sound and honourable adults. It is the same for the Church. If we show love, and promote a more peaceful way of existence, society will become more whole, more steady. And the Church becomes more relevant in their lives.

“For us, church has two meanings, one is the physical edifice made of stone into which we enter as the House of God. We enter with great awe and reverence from the bottom of our hearts.

The second meaning has a more spiritual and lively significance that can be understood according to the explanation of our church fathers who said: the church is herself--the people.

- Archbishop Hovnan Derderian,
March 12, 1995, Montreal

Q. It's not a small challenge to be able to connect with individuals at the level that you are talking about. It requires enormous talent, and huge doses of

patience. Do we have enough pastors in the Armenian Church to be able to reach out the way you just described?

We have many good priests in the Armenian Church. But we need so many more. We need people who have the calling, not only to the faith, but to the work – because it is work, hard work. You see, a priest is not a religious man leading a service and delivering the sermon. A priest is, at all times, regardless of rank, from the newly ordained to the Catholicos himself, a pastor.

Anyone can study hard and earn a doctorate in theology or learn the prayers and scriptures. But to truly be a pastor, you must feel it from within. You should deliver with passion. It entails sacrifice and true self-devotion.

A pastor is first and foremost born. It is an instinct. Certainly you spend many, many years in study and contemplation before being ordained. Some, such as myself, well after ordination as well. But the central theme in your life must be a pastoral one. You must feel the need to serve individuals. You must feel a sense of accomplishment from that deed. Of course education will

hone those skills, enhance your thinking, give you the time to reflect and grow. But you must have the will to sacrifice your time, your effort, your very life for the people and for the community. The parish is your life.

And that, I am afraid, cannot be taught. As I said, you can be trained to do it better, but no one can train a priest to be dedicated. It doesn't change you know when you become a Bishop or a Primate. You add more administrative responsibilities, but basically, you remain a pastor. You remain a man, whose mission is to touch the lives of as many individuals as possible and show them the love you feel for them.

Q. You speak of a pastor as head of a family. Making sacrifices to keep the community whole and strong. But celibacy must be the biggest sacrifice of all. And the question I have, with all respect Srpazan, is how can celibacy still make sense?

Celibacy was not there in the first few centuries of Christianity. It eventually became a requirement for priests of the Armenian Church as well, but interestingly is also

practiced by other monastic orders in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

In the Armenian Church, the majority of the parish priests are married men. In fact, we actually encourage them to have families and children. This means that they will have to balance both home and professional obligations throughout their pastoral career.

However, the Church also recognizes and promotes celibacy. And under the present rules, only celibate priest may be elected to the Primacy of a Diocese or ordained a Bishop of the Church. It is, in my mind, the greatest sacrifice. For it forces upon those of us who have chosen this path a life without the partnership that comes from family.

To be honest, there have been times when I have questioned this path, lonely times when my faith is challenged. But I have been married to the church for over 25 years now. And that marriage has grown stronger each year.

To your question, does it make sense...well, it is hard to answer.

I believe that celibacy, living a monastic life, will always be necessary and will always call those of us who feel the need to make the ultimate sacrifice. But practically speaking, if the President of the United States can run a nation while having a family, why can't a married priest rise in the Church?

I believe that in time, married priests will be allowed to rise in the ranks of the Church hierarchy, perhaps, not as Bishops at first, but certainly as Primate of Dioceses. If a married priest is given a diocese to lead, I am convinced that the people will welcome it and that it will ultimately benefit the Church in general.

And who knows, perhaps one day we will loosen the rules further and liberalize the Church regulations on ordination. Although I believe that monastic and celibate priests must remain as part of the church structure, I can actually see, or contemplate the day when we ordain married Bishops. This was not a thought I had twenty years

ago. But as the years move forward, my thinking on this topic is starting to change. The concept of celibacy was rooted in decisions made in the 11th and 12th centuries. So why would they not be reversible? We certainly need to keep asking ourselves the questions and evaluating the options. Relevance doesn't mean simply changing the doctrine and updating the teachings, it can also mean updating the structure and the rules.

With time, the need for a change of some sort should be considered. When and in what form it is hard to say. But I believe some level of change may be necessary.

More and more, I encourage students of divinity to rethink their aspirations and their calling. It is my firm belief that married priests can best serve their parishes. They understand the family unit, the challenges of raising children, the complexities of marriage. But most importantly, they have a partner in life who can support them, guide them and be their backbone. This is a gift that you must do without if you chose the celibate life. A much more lonely and solitary existence.

Q. There is a lot of talk about the Divine Liturgy (Badarak) being too long – irrelevant to most of the parishioners. Do you think it can be shortened? In my mind, it is a part of our history and should not be modified. But others disagree. Where do you stand?

The Divine Liturgy is at the heart of the Orthodox faith. From its first moments to the final prayer it is the embodiment of our religion. It cannot be changed or shortened without sacrificing its true meaning. However, steps can be taken to modernize it. Some prayers can be done in English, if we can find appropriate translations. And already in America we conduct our sermons in English and Armenian. But in the end, the liturgy of Gomidas is recognized across the world as one of the most beautiful musical creations of all time. How can we dismantle it?

Q. Catholicos Karekin II spoke to a group of us in 2001 at Holy Etchmiadzin on the need for a revival of religion in Armenia. In the years following, the Church has completed the Cathedral in Yerevan, re-opened seminaries across Armenia and renovated countless churches. The Armenian Church is clearly

Faith in Action

Conversations with Archbishop Hovnan Derderian



Consecration of the Altar, Noravank, Karabagh, 1999



*With H.H. Karekin II in Khor Virab, Armenia,
September 21, 2001*

in revival. But at the same time, it is under attack by other religious groups who are evangelizing within Armenia's borders. Some call on the Armenian government to outlaw other religions to protect the Armenian Church. What is your position?

An enormous effort has been made in the past decade and a half to revitalize the Armenian Church in the homeland after seven decades of forced atheism at the hands of the communists. The ability of the Church to rise so quickly demonstrates the influence that religion still had in the hearts of the Armenian people – and the respect in which they held the Armenian Church as an institution.

In terms of its future development, the Church must continue to work very hard. Yes, it is true that others are landing on our Armenian soil and trying to convert our people. But this is not something that the government can or should get involved in. If they are breaking laws or harming our people, I see the government's role. But aside from that, it is our duty, the leaders of the Church, to win back our flock.

You cannot impose religion, you must ensure that it seeps into the social fabric of a community and takes root. It is our job to rekindle the love that is dormant in our people and rebuild the ties that bind them to our Mother Church. By becoming a part of their lives, by making their worries our worries, by hearing their calls and answering their needs.

As we strengthen our Church infrastructure further, we will be in a position to reach even further into the Armenian society. And that will strengthen the Church, and ultimately the people.

Q. Srpazan, the schism that presently exists in the Armenian Church is truly a tragedy. It has divided a small people into even smaller tribes, with petty issues that are no longer relevant in the modern world we live in. But yet, it continues. Driven by the petty historical prejudices of people long since irrelevant, the Church remains divided, and therefore weaker. In 1994, the election of Karekin I to the Catholicosate promised an era of closer cooperation.

But that never materialized. Can this schism be repaired? Will it happen?

The divisions in the Armenian Church must not overshadow the unity that exists within the Church. All members of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church share the same core beliefs, celebrate the same Divine Liturgy and share a common bond with the homeland and the mother Church at Holy Etchmiadzin. The election and consecration of Karekin I in 1994 is further evidence of how close we are in terms of our faith and approach to strengthening the Church.

We are the inheritors of an apostolic Church, all of us, regardless of allegiance. And we are the world's oldest national church, having celebrated our 1700th anniversary in 2001.

Accounts of Christianity in Armenia date back to the first century, when the Apostles St. Bartholomew and St. Thaddeus first preached on our land, and is one of the oldest denominations in Christianity. All of us share the heritage of Saint Mesrob Mashdots, who created the

alphabet that allowed the translation of the Bible to Armenian.

The division should not be overemphasised, as it stems from frequent relocations of the Church headquarters under Ottoman rule and was further reinforced during the period in which Armenia was part of the Soviet Union. Basically, foreign powers, not Armenian powers, hold the blame for the issues that we have today. However, in their hearts and prayers, all Armenians of the Holy Apostolic Church must, and many do, recognize and respect the sovereignty and supremacy of the Catholicos of All Armenians within the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

With this basic premise, we continue to work to rid our small world of a division that at its heart is not Armenian in nature, but political and secular in its motivation. We work together, and must find ways of working even closer together. Not to have one administrative branch supersede the other, but rather to ensure that both work together for our shared ultimate goal: the prosperity and enrichment of the Armenian world, in Armenia and across the Diaspora.

The days of political parties influencing the development and progress of the Church are over. It is time for the clergy, the parishioners and all Armenians to put these divisions behind us. And I firmly believe that this is not only possible, but likely as we continue to move forward.

I think the readers of this book might be interested in a speech I delivered in Toronto back in 2002 to a symposium studying the future of the Church in Canada. In fact, you helped me write that speech which I believe is as relevant today as it was then.

THE CANADIAN CHURCH IN THE 3RD MILLENNIUM

Ensuring a Relevant Voice in Canadian Society

The evolution and place of the Canadian church in the years ahead is a primary concern to me and truly to all clergy and church leaders who are looking for ways in which to ensure our continued relevance in Canadian society. Here, I would like to share with you a passage from the book "A knock and Midnight", by Martin Luther King. The author invites us all to attain the true mission of the church.

“The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the Church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. If the church does not participate actively in the struggle for peace and for economic and racial justice, it will forfeit that has atrophied its will. But if the church will free itself from the shackles of a deadening status quo and recover its great historic mission, speak and act fearlessly and insistently in terms of justice and peace, it will enkindle the imagination of mankind and fire the souls of men, imbuing them with a glowing and ardent love for truth, justice, and peace. Men far and near will know the church as a great fellowship of love that provides light and bread for lonely travelers at midnight”.

I believe that Martin Luther King’s observations are as true today as they were some forty years ago when he wrote them. That it is, essentially, the Church’s mission to provide individuals and society in general with the moral compass upon which a nation stands and a people act. However, we live today in a society of instant communications; rapid evolution; ever-changing priorities; and an intense desire for the latest and greatest idea. The Church is faced with a society whose attention span has been reduced to mere minutes – but yet we must capture people’s attention nonetheless.

The best movies stay in theatres for under six months. A hit television show may run five or six years. A politician may stay in favour for a decade at the most. And a pop icon has limited shelf life that can be measured in months. We in the Church are in our 3rd millennium. We have lasted a long time – and overcome great odds to be here. Our story, the gospel that we preach, is two thousand years old. And with that in mind I ask: How do we keep people interested? Our Challenge, stated simply: to capture the imagination, the hearts and the minds of a society obsessed with change by delivering, essentially, a two thousand year old story. In this time of short attention spans and fickle loyalties our job has become that much more difficult. In turn, our efforts must become that much more concentrated. My presentation today will be on this topic: how do we ensure that the Church remains relevant in the 3rd millennium?

Our ability to stay relevant depends on our ability to adapt to our surroundings. We must never change the true essence of what we preach, however, we must change the way we preach it. We cannot expect the same communications strategy that worked for the apostles to work for us today.

In the end, the gospel is blessed by being a perfect document, without flaws. But as mere humans, we need to adapt to our external environment to ensure that the messages we deliver is heard and influences people’s lives. Here I would like to quote the words of the late Karekin I, the Catholicos of All Armenians, who gives us a short response to our concern and conveys to us a clear message that we ought to stay the actors of times: “Le monde change. Le changement n’est pas nouveau. Le monde à toujours connu le changement et il continuera à changer. Nous sommes nous-mêmes entré dans le changement. Nous ne sommes pas des objets mais des sujets, non des victimes, mais des acteurs”. (page 297)

In summary “Change is nothing new. The word has always known change and it will continue to change. We ourselves are also changing. We are not fixed objects, but subjects – we are not victims of change but its actors.”

And that, honoured guests, is truly the heart of the matter. It is not that the Church must live through the changes in society, but that we must become an integral part of them. In another passage I would like to share with you the vision of the late Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey, whose perception of being a Christian enriches our Christian vocation.

“To be a Christian does not mean being “on the side of” Christianity, like one who supports a movement or approves of a cause. It means the submission of self to Christ, and the sharing in the life of his family. Christ is the vine, and you are one of the branches. Holy communion, and prayer, and the Bible are ways in which Christ can keep you united to him; and these are wonderful gifts, involving stupendous demands, unless you are setting yourself to be part of its glory.”

Once again, this great thinker asks us to act, not just to be a passive observer. There are, in my opinion, three ways in which we can focus the Church movement in Canada and reinvent us in the eyes of our people.

1. We must, first and foremost, re-energize our institutions and become active participants in the lives of our people. Be prepared for change and, in fact, look forward to it. Do not be afraid to adapt to modern society, embrace that change as a way of re-inventing the Church and approaching your flock on their level. In the end, we are there to serve and to lead and to do so people must be prepared to listen. Our people must feel that it is their Church, not the clergy's. For example, in the Armenian Church I do not want my pastors in the Churches but in the homes of their congregations. Live with your people, not in isolation. Be a part of their daily lives and not just their ceremonial occasions. In the end, we must work harder-but that, my friends, is what our calling about.

2. The second major point: we must not be afraid to tackle, head on, the psychological, moral and ethical issues facing our society today. Broken families, single parents, drug addiction, pornography, racism, corruption, crime and punishment affect the day-to-day lives of our people. They are the paramount issues being dealt with by our clergy. Recently I was reading the official newsletter of the Orthodox Church in America, where I came across statements issued by the Holy Synod on sexual abuse, and the crisis in the Holy Land. These statements are important for they reflect the official stand of a respective church. I want to read the passage on sexual abuse.

“We lament the horrible sin of sexual abuse at any age by any person and will not tolerate it,” the hierarchs stated, adding that “the Orthodox Church in America will comply with the civil laws of the jurisdiction in which any allegation is made in regard to reporting any incident and cooperate in any subsequent investigation.” Guidelines for Initial Response to Allegations or Charges of Sexual Misconduct” initially issued by the Holy Synod on March 28, 1994.

In other words, we as clergy live within society and must also follow society's rules. Only then will we be in a position to provide moral and ethical guidance to our people. We must feel free to address these issues, privately and publicly with our people. Help guide them through their challenges and use the gospel as the foundation upon which your counsel and your work stands. Our story and our teachings are simple but they must become real in the lives of our people so that we may have an impact on them. In this vein, let us also not forget our role in the overall socioeconomic and political debates that take place around us. True the church and the state may be separate but the activities and hardships of the state do affect our people.

America may fight the war on terror, but it is our job to fight the war on evil, injustice and desperation, whether it is taking place in Afghanistan, the Holy Land, or over the skies of New York one fateful September morning, the outrage and total opposition to evil, in all its forms, must be vocalized.

3. And finally, number three: we must return to our charitable roots and focus on the ills and challenges of society. Become the voice of the weak and the shepherd of the strong. Be at the forefront of our people's daily struggles. Christ said that the "weak shall inherit the Earth". It is our duty, as His servants, to actively seek the betterment of people's lives whether physically or emotionally. The very young and the very old are of paramount importance. For the young shall set the stage for the society of tomorrow and the treatment of the old is a reflection of the society we live in today!

Life is a miracle given to us by God. And as His servants, it is our role to protect, help and serve His people. The Church that does not hold these values and that does not engage itself in the active role of charity will never gain the trust and respect of its flock.

Here, I would like to share with you a thought by the late Catholicos Karekin I. He conveys to us the basic message that the gift of life should be shared with our fellow men. However, to do so, we must have respect for the gift of life bestowed upon us.

"Our life is the greatest gift of God, the best and the most precious, that man could ever imagine to acquire. And we are the stewards of that life, to live it to its full value and produce works which are deserving and pleasing to God, so that we may prove ourselves worthy of this priceless possession of our entire existence".

"Our life, whether long or short, will eventually come to an end. what will be left of it? If we live like grass and even if it produces a flower, that too, will fade away and nothing will remain in its place. But if it produces fruits, it will be perpetuated in someone else and will be fulfilling a purpose. This is the meaning of our life".

And the same is true of our Church. If we were created as a living Church, dedicated to the betterment of people then we must act the part. These three issues address what I believe to be the main priorities of the Church in Canadian society moving forward. In short, my position is that in order to remain relevant we must integrate ourselves in people's lives, have opinions on issues that affect them, have a role to play in the challenges that they face and become the guide, both spiritual and moral.

An active Church that in addition to preaching sets an example and is actively engaged is what Canadians will be seeking. I can sum all of my teachings today in one word: leadership. In order to be relevant, the Church must provide leadership. For many of us, this means a dramatic shift in the priorities of the clergy and of the role of the Church. We will remain the preachers, but we will also return to becoming the shepherds and the guides. As the leader of the Canadian Diocese of the Armenian Church I am faced, every day, with the challenges of articulating this vision to an Orthodox and highly historical church.

We, as a national church, have had our share of challenges: In 2001, we celebrated the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's conversion to become the first officially Christian state in the world. Although we are proud of this long Christian history, we have faced our share of hardships.

In North America, our Church has been formally present for just over 100 years. The first century of our existence on this continent was, basically, a struggle to survive. Fleeing from Ottoman Turkey's genocide of the Armenian people, or from war and oppression in countries of the Middle East and elsewhere, Armenians themselves become pre-occupied with survival in their first century in North America.

The result was the creation of a healthy, active, yet highly separate Church. In fact, in many ways, we became an island within the North American community and, particularly in Canada, highly nationalist. As the protectors of our national culture and language this was, at that time, a necessity.

But in 2002, we need to open our doors. The Canadian Diocese is now made up of second, third and even fourth generation Canadian Armenians, who face, for the first time, the same issues, challenges and dilemmas of any Canadian.

My three points for the survival of a Church in Canada are now just as important for the Armenian Church as any other: re-energized participation; addressing of moral and ethical issues and a return to charitable priorities.

However, we are faced with yet another challenge, forcing open the doors that we ourselves locked tight. As we enter a new phase in our own development in Canada, and we strive to become a more inclusive Church, two truths prevail in my instructions to our clergy:

First, engage your parishioners and your community in conversation, debate and education. Become apart of their lives. And second, engage the greater Canadian community; you are part of the Canadian community of Churches but also of Canadian society overall. Know their issues and problems and be a part of the solution.

This is happening, slowly, across Canada and I am seeing first hand the results. More importantly, those clergy that believe in my message and that are following a more open path are seeing youth re-entering the Church and become part of its daily life.

Let me take a moment now to address an issue that I see as being fundamentally wrong with the Church in modern Canadian society. Many of us, not all, but certainly a sufficient number, believe that it is the role and the right of the Church to judge the actions of people. Let me be very clear: we do not have that right. That right is reserved only for God. We cannot lead our people with rules and orders. In the end, they will stop listening. We must set an example, provide a moral compass and then embrace and welcome all of our flock with open arms. Diversity, ideas and debate are at the heart of the modern Church, not conformity.

Gone are the days when a Church can impose its rules. In the 3rd millennium, we cannot tell people what to do, we must convince them. And convincing is a much more difficult task. I am not saying that we will discard the teachings of the Bible and that we will take modern attitudes to replace the word of God as our moral compass.

As Martin Luther King once said: "Moral principles have lost their distinctiveness. For modern man, absolute right and absolute wrong are a matter of what the majority is doing..."

Which brings me to my final point: the fear factor. Everywhere I go I see clergy and laypersons alike that fear change and do not want to deviate from the old ways. Many believe that a Church is a place of prayer alone, and one that cannot and should not evolve less it loses its significance. I say, do not fear change, celebrate it.

Becoming an active Church, involved in the daily lives of our parishioners and of our community, a Church that reaches out to those who need help and guidance and leads our people through their daily challenges – a Church that teaches and educates and leads...

This should be the face of the Canadian Church in the 3rd Millennium. The inspiring words of Michael Ramsey, of blessed memory, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, remain a source of the life for all Christians and especially for the servants of Christ's Church, who have responded to God's calling with the firm commitment to transform people.

"The Church pledged to influence society and criticize society."

In this task its deepest influence should always be upon persons in their character as persons. Christ himself lived and died and rose again in a world full of social abuses, including the appalling abuse of slavery.

But Christ's chief method was not to attack institutions, but to transform people. And there can be no substitute for the impact of Christianity upon people at their deepest level, always remembering that a person never lives in a vacuum; he is always a bundle of social relationships, both private and public, and these relationships all need to be Christianized. So the Church's mission to change personal lives cannot be separated from its critique of wrong attitudes in society.

And that is, in itself, a lesson worth remembering. That is we are to criticize, we must also be in a position to nurture, to help and to guide people to a more correct path. And that takes leadership, courage and, once again, engagement.

So, let us move forward with a commitment to engage our people, to integrate in their lives, to serve them from birth until death during every phase of their lives. And then we will remain a relevant Church, a strong presence and a moral compass.

CONCLUSION

***I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference***

- Robert Frost,
American Poet (1874-1963)

The road that Hovnan Srpazan chose over 25 years ago, the road of service and self-sacrifice, has allowed thousands to grow stronger, enrich their lives and solidify their Armenian identity. I have known him for over fifteen years, and have seen him operate and work. And I know that this man could have done anything that he had wanted. He could have been a businessman, a scholar, a professor or a writer. Instead, he chose to serve—to serve his people and his Church.

There are few people who are fortunate enough to touch the lives of so many. In that vein, I suppose that Hovnan Srpazan was a very fortunate man. For, had he chosen any of the other paths that were open to him as a young man, or as a scholar coming out of the halls of Oxford, then perhaps thousands around the world would not hold him in the high esteem that they do now.

In the summer of 2001, my wife and I spent two weeks in Armenia with Hovnan Srpazan as he presided over celebrations of the 1700th anniversary of the declaration of Armenia as a Christian nation. It had been nearly a decade since he and I first traveled to Armenia together in the early nineties and much had changed, much work had been done.

One afternoon, we were sitting together sharing a coffee just in front of Hotel Armenia, which sits on Independence Square in central Yerevan. Over the course of two hours, over a dozen people came by to say hello. Priests, Diocesan Primates and Bishops, political leaders, students, volunteer workers, friends and acquaintances. Many of these people I had known for many years and each

shared a common belief that this simple man and pastor had made a difference in their lives.

Later that day, we walked together on the grounds of Holy Etchmiadzin with some of the young seminarians. He turned around at one point, pointed to the Cathedral and said “isn’t it just perfect.” I guess that sums up his motivation better than anything else. And I know that for the half dozen or so seminarians walking with us, it resonated loud and clear.

History will judge his performance as a Diocesan Primate in Canada as well as in the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. And I am certain it will judge him to have been an active, steady and motivated leader. I’ll leave that to others. But until then, I am just happy to know him and to share his friendship.

If there is a lesson in the words of Hovnan Srpazan it is: move forward. So perhaps what we need to take from these conversations is that to take simple steps...forward. Over the year, that has been his greatest contribution, both to his community as well as to me personally; he has

always encouraged people to move forward. Never dwelling on the past. Never seeing the obstacles. Never listening to the petty critics. Just acting.

And it is not a thoughtless momentum of which I speak, but one based on reason and a passion to serve. You see, his strength is not in the constant motion forward alone. It is in his capacity to see the future optimistically despite the odds. And it is his ability, through force of character and will, to shape the future.

Some people rely on inspiration to guide them every day. Yes, I agree, inspiration is absolutely critical. But as Srpazan has taught me over the years, it needs to be backed by action otherwise will just sit on the table and collect dust.

As Pablo Picasso once noted: *“Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.”*

In the summer of 1995, under the shade of a tree in the forest of Khosrov in the Ararat Region of Armenia, my future wife and I were engaged in the presence of several hundred villagers, workers and local partners with whom we had worked over the previous years. On that hot day, as Father Mkhitar Seribegian, Very Revered Father Ararat Kaltakdjian and Father Shnork Souin jointly preformed the engagement ceremony, she and I became permanent parts of the Armenian nation.

We joined a list that was already long and one that continued to grow in the decade since. A list that Hovnan Srpazan wrote through his life's work. A list of happy marriages and Armenian families.

All of us owe him a great debt of gratitude. And even more importantly, our support – so that he may continue to fill the world with his message and his faith.

“To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and to endure the betrayal of false friends; to

appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

