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the 180th  
Anniversary of  
the Armenian  
Evangelical  
Church

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## From the Editor's Desk

By Rev. Kevork George Terian

The seeds of the Armenian Evangelical Reform Movement had been planted and were beginning to grow a considerable time before European and American missionaries arrived in Istanbul, the capital of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of the 19th century, Armenian young people were sent to Europe to pursue higher education at major universities where they became exposed to the ideals of the enlightenment that had engulfed almost the entire continent. When, after completing their education, the students returned to their homes, they began to question and challenge the validity of all traditional thought patterns, customs and norms of behavior.

The revival of the Armenian printing press within the Ottoman Empire in 1794 accelerated the spread of new ideas that threatened the established status quo which upset the wealthy and influential Armenian *Amiras* who had gained full control over the Armenian Apostolic Church and its affiliated institutions.

The Turkish Sultans who ruled their vast empire from the 17th through the 19th centuries, bestowed the honorary *Amira* title upon certain Armenians who had amassed great wealth through their business activities. Some of the *Amiras* held high positions within the Turkish Imperial Court and served as consultants to the Sultans.

The number of the Armenian *Amiras* fluctuated between 100 and 200 people who formed an exclusive class whose members maintained full control over the Istanbul Patriarchate. They elected the Patriarchs and dismissed them whenever it suited their personal agenda. For example, early in the 19th century, they removed Patriarch Stepanos II from his office simply because he favored the reform-minded Armenians and replaced him by the traditionalist Archbishop Matteos Chouhajian. The power of the *Amiras* stemmed from the fact that they provided most of the funds that were needed to operate the Patriarchate, its churches, the Armenian community schools, plus its only hospital in Istanbul.

As a privileged class, the *Amiras* fiercely resisted all attempts at church reform and were opposed to the introduction of democratic management into the church-run institutions. Their sole aim was to retain absolute control over the church and the affairs of the Armenian community. By creating a rigidly centralized institution, the *Amiras* prevented the Armenian Apostolic Church leaders from adapting to the changing conditions in their environment. Unfortunately, the religious leaders lacked the power and freedom to initiate new programs. The *Amiras* had veto power over all policies that guided the church.

In the early 1800's, the Istanbul Patriarchate re-opened the Armenian Seminary for Religious Studies under the guidance of Professor Krikor Peshtimaljian who led his students into serious study of the New Testament. Through his persistent efforts to promote Biblical literacy, the Society of the Pious was founded with the aim of reviving and reforming the Armenian Apostolic Church. The idea of establishing a separate church to rival the Armenian Apostolic Church was never contemplated by the members of the Society of the Pious whose motto was to recapture the vibrant faith and missionary zeal of the Early Apostolic Church that is described in the Book of Acts.

Peshtimaljian's intensive and regularly held Bible studies hit a responsive chord in the hearts of many Armenians who dubbed him the Erasmus of the Armenian Church. It is interesting to note that Erasmus of Rotterdam was a 16th century Dutch scholar and theologian who paved the way for reforming the church in the Netherlands by advocating for education, tolerance and a return to "simple" Christianity.

The following timeline of events verifies the undeniable fact that the Armenian Evangelical Church is not an alien implant, as some have claimed, but is a legitimate religious reform movement that was born within the bosom of the Armenian Apostolic Church:

1. The Society of the Pious was founded and led by Armenian reformers in the early 1820s.
2. The first European and American Missionaries arrived in Istanbul in 1831.
3. At the urging of the *Amiras*, Patriarch Matteos Chouhajian excommunicated the Armenian reformers on June 21, 1846.
4. The birth of the Armenian Evangelical Church was announced on July 1, 1846, in Istanbul, Turkey.
5. The Turkish Sultan, Abdel Mejid I, recognized the Armenian Evangelicals as a separate community on September 15, 1847.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

In July 1996, during the 150th Anniversary celebration that was held at the National Academic Opera & Ballet Theater, in Yerevan, Armenia, the Catholicos of all Armenians, Karekin I, of blessed memory, praised the ministry of the Armenian Evangelical Church in the life of the Armenian nation, and prayed that Evangelical Armenians continue to spread their moral and ethical values among their kinsmen in cooperation with the Armenian Apostolic Church. The significance of this encouraging endorsement of the legitimacy of our church and mission, stems from the fact that it came from the highest-ranking clergyman of the church that once had labeled our pioneers as “heretics” and expelled them from their congregations.

Despite all the conflicts and hostilities of the past, Evangelical Armenians have proved to be an integral and inseparable part of the Armenian nation, sharing all the joys as well as the sorrows that our compatriots have endured during all the upheavals of our tumultuous history. Instead of erecting walls of separation, let us strive to build bridges of understanding, tolerance, mutual love and cooperation for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has commanded us to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34-35).

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## Խմբագրի Գրասեղանէն

Հայ Աւետարանական հոգեւոր բարեկարգութեան շարժման սերմերը ցանուած էին և սկսած էին ծլիլ ու աճիլ նախքան Եւրոպացի և Ամերիկացի միսիոնարներու ժամանումը Սթամպուլ թուրքիայի Օսմանեան կայսրութեան մայրաքաղաքը: 19-րդ դարու սկիզբը՝ Հայ երիտասարդներ գացին Եւրոպայ բարձրագոյն ուսում սրանալու հոչակաւոր համալսարաններու մէջ, ուր անոնք ծանօթացան միջի եւ հոգիի լուսաւորութեան իրէջաններուն, որոնք տարածուած էին գրեթէ ամբողջ Եւրոպական ցամաքամասի երկիրներուն մէջ: Իրենց կրթութիւնը աւարտելէ վերջ, երբ ուսանողները վերադարձան իրենց տուները, անոնք սկսան վերաքննել բոլոր աւանդական մտածողութեան ձևերը, սովորութիւնները և ընդհանրացած վարկերակերպերը:

1794 թուականին, Օսմանեան կայսրութեան մէջ գտնուող Հայկական տպագրութեան վերածնունդը արագացուց տարածումը նոր գաղափարներու որոնք կը սպառնային միապետական կառոյցներու գոյատեւման: Այս վիճակը մեծ վրդովում պատճառեց հարուստ և ազդեցիկ Հայ «Ամիրաներուն», որոնք յաջողած էին ձեռք բերել լիակատար վերահսկողութեան մենաշնորհը՝ Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցւոյ և անոր հետ կապուած բոլոր հաստատութիւններուն վրայ:

Թուրք Սուլթանները, 17-րդ դարէն սկսեալ մինչև 19-րդ դարաշրջանի վախճանը, «Ամիրա» տիտղոսը շնորհեցին որոշ ընտրեալ Հայերու որոնք մեծ հարստութիւն կուտակած էին եւ ճանչցուած էին որպէս յաջող գործարարներ, վաճառականներ եւ կամ հնարամիտ արհեստագործներ: «Ամիրաներէն» մի քանիսը բարձր պաշտօններ սրանձնած էին Թրքական արքունի պալատներուն մէջ ուր կը ծառայէին որպէս սուլթաններուն խորհրդատուները:

Հայ «Ամիրաներու» թիւը փոփոխական էր: Սովորաբար անոնք 100 անձերէ բաղկացած խումբ մը կ'ըլլային, բայց երբեմն պատահած է որ անոնց թիւը հասած է 200ի: Այս մարդիկը կը կազմէին բացառիկ եւ առանձնաշնորհեալ դասակարգ մը, որուն անդամները լիակատար վերահսկողութիւն ունէին Պոլիսի Հայոց Պատրիարքարանին՝ եւ անոր հետ կապուած բոլոր հաստատութիւններուն վրայ: Անոնք կ'ընտրէին Պոլիսի գահակալ պատրիարքները եւ իշխանութիւն ունէին գահընկեց ընելու այն պատրիարքին որուն գործնէութիւնը համապատասխան չէր իրենց անձնական շահերուն եւ օրակարգին: Յոյց տալու Ամիրաներու բացարձակ իշխանութիւնը, կ'ուզեմ յիշել թէ ինչպէս 19-րդ դարու սկիզբը անոնք Ստեփանոս

II պատրիարքին պաշտօնազուրկ ըրին պարզապէս այն պատճառով որ ան կը նախընտրէր համագործակցիլ բարեփոխումներու կողմնակից հայերուն հետ:

Այս արարքէն անմիջապէս վերջ, առանց ժամանակ կորսնցնելու, անոնք պատրիարքական աթոռին վրայ նստեցուցին իրենց համախոհ եւ աւանդապաշտ Արքեպիսկոպոս Մարթէոս Չուհաճեանը: «Ամիրաներու» անսանձ եւ անվիճելի իշխանութեան երկու գլխաւոր պատճառներ կային: Առաջինը՝ անոնք կը հայթայթէին պատրիարքարանին բոլոր ծախսերը, ներառեալ հայկական համայնքային դպրոցներու տարեկան պիւպիլէին մեծ մասը, ինչպէս նաև Սթամպուլի Սուրբ Փրկիչ հիւանդանոցի գործունէութեան համար անհրաժեշտ նկատուած նիւթական միջոցներու մեծագոյն մասը: Երկրորդ պատճառը՝ հասարակ մարդիկ չէին կրնար Ամիրաներուն հակառակիլ որովհետեւ անոնք կը վայելէին պետութեան պաշտպանութիւնը:

Որպէս առանձնաշնորհեալ եւ ազդեցիկ դասակարգ՝ «Ամիրաները» խիստ կերպով կը դիմադրէին եկեղեցական բարեփոխումներու բոլոր փորձերուն և դէմ էին եկեղեցւոյ կողմէ կառավարող հաստատութիւններու ժողովրդավարական կառավարման միջոցառումներուն: Անոնց միակ նպատակն էր պահպանել եկեղեցւոյ և Հայ համայնքի գործերուն վրայ իրենց ունեցած իշխանութեան դիրքը: Սրեղծելով խիստ կեդրոնացուած հաստատութիւն մը, «Ամիրաները» **խոչընդոտեցին** Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցւոյ առաջնորդներուն ճկունութիւնը յարմարուելու իրենց միջավայրի փոփոխական պայմաններուն հետ: Դժբախտաբար, կրօնական առաջնորդները չունէին նոր ծրագիրներ մշակելու ազատութիւնը: «Ամիրաները» ունէին բացարձակ իշխանութիւն սահմանելու եկեղեցին կառավարող բոլոր օրէնքները:

1820ին երբ Պոլիսի Հայոց Պատրիարքարանը վերաբացումը կատարեց Կրօնագիտութեան Հայկական ձեւարանին՝ ուսուցապետ Գրիգոր Փէշտիմալճեանի ղեկավարութեամբ, որ իր աշակերտներուն առաջնորդեց Նոր Կտակարանի լուրջ ուսումնասիրութեան: Աստուածաշունչի գիտութիւնը խթանելու համար անոր թափած ջանքերուն շնորհիւ հիմնուեցաւ **Բարեպաշտներու Միութիւնը**՝ Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցին վերակենդանացնելու և բարեփոխելու նպատակով: Այս Միութեան անդամներու կարգախօսն էր վերականգնել Վաղեմի Առաքելական եկեղեցւոյ կենսունակ հաւատքն ու միսիոնարական եռանդը՝ որոնք նկարագրուած են Գործք Առաքելոց Գիրքին մէջ: Անոնք երբեք չմտածեցին հիմնել նոր եկեղեցի մը որ մրցակից ըլլայ Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցիին:

Փէշտիմալճեանի յարատեւ և կանոնաւոր Աստուածաշնչական ուսումնասիրութիւնները դրական արձագանգ մը ունեցան շատ հայերու սրտերուն մէջ, որոնք անոր անուանեցին **Հայ եկեղեցւոյ Իրասմուսը**: Հետաքրքրական է նշել որ Իրասմուսը (Erasmus) 16-րդ դարու Հոլանտիացի համբաւաւոր գրագէտ և աստուածաբան էր որ հարթեց ճանապարհը իր երկրի եկեղեցւոյ բարեփոխման համար՝ պաշտպանելով կրթութեան կարեւորութիւնը, հանդուրժողականութիւնը և «պարզ» քրիստոնէութեան վերադարձը:

Հետեւեալ իրադարձութիւններու ժամանակագրութիւնը կը հաստատուէ այն անհերքելի փաստը՝ որ Հայ Աւետարանական եկեղեցին օտար արմատներ չունի, ինչպէս որոշները պնդած են, այլ օրինական կրօնական բարեփոխումներու շարժում է, որ ծնունդ ունեցած է Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցւոյ ծոցին մէջ:

1. Բարեպաշտներու Միութիւնը հիմնուեցաւ և ղեկավարուեցաւ Հայ բարեկարգիչներու կողմէ 1820ին:
2. Առաջին Եւրոպացի և Ամերիկացի միսիոնարները ժամանեցին Սթամպուլ 1831 թուականին:
3. «Ամիրաներու» դրդումով Պատրիարք Մարթէոս Չուհաճեանը 1846 թուականի Յունիս 21-ին եկեղեցիէն անդամազրկեց Հայ բարեկարգիչներուն:
4. Հայ Աւետարանական եկեղեցւոյ ծնունդը յայտարարուեցաւ 1846 թուականի Յուլիս 1-ին, Պոլիս քաղաքին մէջ:
5. Թուրքիոյ Սուլթան Աբդել Մեջիտ Ար 1847 թուականի Սեպտեմբեր 15-ին ճանչցաւ Հայ Աւետարանականներուն որպէս առանձին կրօնական համայնք:

1996 թուականի Յուլիսին, երբ Հայ Աւետարանական եկեղեցւոյ հիմնադրութեան 150-ամեակի

Կրօնակարարութիւնը Կրօնական Երկրանի Ազգային Ակադեմիական Օպերայի և Բալետի Թատրոնին մէջ, Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսը, Երջանկայիշարակ Գարեգին Ա-ը գովաբանեց Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցւոյ մատուցած ծառայութիւնները Հայ ազգին և աղօթեց որ Աւետարանական Հայերը շարունակեն Կարածել իրենց բարոյական և հոգեւոր արժէքները իրենց ազգակիցներուն միջեւ՝ համագործակցելով Հայ Առաքելական Եկեղեցիին հետ: Այս խրատական գովեստը շատ մեծ կարեւորութիւն ունի որովհետեւ կը վաւերացնէ Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցիին օրինականութիւնը որ վերստին հաստատուեցաւ Հայ Առաքելական Եկեղեցիին բարձրագոյն հայրապետին կողմէ:

Անտեսելով անցեալի բոլոր անախորժ դէպքերը և հակառակութիւնները, Աւետարանական Հայերը ապացուցած են թէ իրենք անբաժանելի մասն են Հայ Ժողովուրդին՝ բաժնեկից դառնալով մեր հայրենակիցներու կրած բոլոր տառապանքներուն եւ վիշտներուն մեր փոթորկալից պատմութեան բոլոր ցնցումներուն ընթացքին: Բաժանարար պատեր կառուցանելու փոխարէն, եկէք ձգտել միասին կառուցանել հանդուրժողականութեան, փոխադարձ սիրոյ և համագործակցութեան կամուրջներ՝ մեր Տէր և Փրկիչ Յիսուս Քրիստոսի փառքին համար որ մեզ պատուիրած է սիրել միմեանց, ինչպէս ԱՆ սիրեց մեզ (Յովհաննէս 13:34-35):



## Curators' Remarks

By Doris Melkonian & Arda Melkonian

We had the privilege to curate this special issue of the Forum dedicated to the 180th anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church. In 1846, a handful of faithful men and women sought reform within the Mother Church, emphasizing a personal relationship with their Lord and a return to biblical authority. What was once a humble beginning burgeoned into a denomination that has spread throughout the world, touching the lives of many. In this special issue, we sought to pay homage to the movement that has been a witness to all, spreading the message of Christ's sacrificial love for us.

The issue is organized into topical sections that create coherence of the overarching theme and as articles by different authors complementing one another. We begin with overviews of the Armenian Evangelical Movement with its roots in the Middle East and the establishment in the United States. We provide a section on the educational institutions in Turkey (Historic Armenia) and later in Lebanon, that have shaped and molded the spiritual leaders of our churches and communities. We get a glimpse into two unique communities, Anjar and Kessab, that have remained steadfast, safeguarding the Armenian Christian identity. We have inspirational pieces that challenge us and nudge us to continue in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. We conclude with a section covering the Armenian Evangelical movement on a global level. We have included rare images from private collections to complement the articles and provide the readership with a rare glimpse of what was once and is today. The content is not, by any means, exhaustive as there is so much more to unearth and present. We plan to delve into this topic in future issues.

Today, we express gratitude for the sacrificial dedication and service of the 40 men and women, and all those who followed them, acknowledging that we stand on the ground they formed. We praise God for His unwavering presence and protection, for His guidance and support, and for His tender mercies over the last 180 years.

May we continue to be a witness and blessing to others.

# Features



**From the Minister to the Union**  
By Rev. Hendrik Shanazarian

## Celebrating 180 Years of Armenian Evangelical Witness (1846-2026)

We give thanks to Almighty God as we commemorate the 180th anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church, born in Bera (Pera), Constantinople, on July 1, 1846. What began with the courageous faith of thirty-seven men and three women—shaped by spiritual renewal, biblical conviction, and a passion for reform—grew into a vibrant movement of gospel witness, education, service, and mission that has reached Armenians throughout the world.

Our founding fathers did not seek to establish another institution. They envisioned a Christ-centered community renewed by the Word of God, committed to discipleship, moral and spiritual transformation, education, evangelism, and service to both church and nation. Their legacy has been preserved not only through churches, schools, seminaries, and charitable ministries, but also through suffering—surviving persecution, genocide, displacement, and diaspora, while continuing to bear faithful witness in every generation. In North America, this vision found renewed expression through the growth of Armenian Evangelical communities, the formation of the Unions on the East and West Coasts, the establishment of the AMAA, and ultimately the unification of the two unions into the Armenian Evangelical Union of North America, which has carried this mission forward in a new context.

As we celebrate this milestone, anniversaries call us not only to remembrance, gratitude to God, and recognition of our past leaders, but also to renewal. We face serious challenges: the secularization of younger generations, pressures of assimilation, weakening ties to Armenian language and heritage, declining patterns of discipleship, leadership transitions, and the urgent need to reimagine ministry amid rapidly changing social and cultural realities. Our communities must also respond faithfully to the wounds of the Armenian people worldwide, including instability in the homeland, challenges in the diaspora, and the spiritual hunger of our people in a fragmented world.

Yet these challenges are also a summons. If we are true heirs of our spiritual forebears, we must recover their holy courage, evangelical conviction, and missionary vision. We are called not simply to preserve structures, but to renew the church through deeper spiritual formation, bold proclamation of the gospel, intentional discipleship of younger generations, and a fresh commitment to mission. Our churches must become communities where faith is lived, not merely inherited; where leadership is cultivated; where Armenian identity and Christian witness strengthen one another; and where service to the wider world reflects the love of Christ.

*"...committing ourselves anew to what God is calling us to do."*

Especially in North America, thriving in ministry will require both faithfulness and imagination: investing in younger leaders; strengthening our congregations as centers of worship and formation; embracing collaborative ministry across churches and institutions; engaging the next generation in their language and realities; and renewing our commitment to evangelism, justice, and compassion, in cooperation with Armenian Evangelical churches, unions, and institutions throughout the world, as well as with other major Armenian churches.

The founders of 1846 entrusted to us more than a history; they entrusted to us a calling. Their mission is still relevant, and their work remains unfinished. On this 180th anniversary, may we honor their legacy not only by celebrating what God has done, but by committing ourselves anew to what God is calling us to do. With gratitude for the past, courage for the present, and hope for the future, may the Armenian Evangelical Church continue to thrive as a faithful witness to Jesus Christ for generations to come.

# The Contributions of the Armenian Evangelical Church to the Armenian Nation in the Realm of Religion and Spirituality

The greatest and most important contribution of the Armenian Evangelical Church to the spiritual life of their compatriots was the **translation of the entire Bible to modern Armenian**. Until the middle of the 19th century, the only Bible that was accessible to Armenians was the *Grapar* Bible that had been translated by Saint Mesrob Mashdotz and his linguist students in the early 5th century. Most biblical scholars called the Armenian *Grapar* Bible "The Queen of Translations" because of its linguistic refinements and its textual accuracy.

The problem was that languages are living organisms that constantly grow, and over a period of time, undergo drastic changes. For example, Chaucer's English is largely unintelligible to modern English readers. Similarly, the *Grapar* Bible was incomprehensible to most Armenians. Only a small group of highly trained elite scholars could understand it. Time takes a heavy toll on any language because the meaning of words and phrases change. Due to this natural phenomenon, old literary works must be revised; otherwise, they become archaic and outdated.

The reform-minded Armenian Evangelicals, who were keen students of the Bible, were cognizant of the importance of God's Word largely due to Jesus' declaration, "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away**" (Mark 13:31). The realization that the only thing in this world that will never perish or fade away is the Word of God, motivated

the pioneers of the Armenian Evangelicals to spare no effort for translating the Bible from Classical Armenian to modern Armenian (*Ashkharapar*) which admittedly lacks the grandeur of its predecessor; however, it served the purpose of providing biblical literacy for the general public.

The Armenian Evangelical Movement, from its inception, **encouraged people to study the Bible** regularly. "**The Society of the Pious**" was established in the early-19th century for this special purpose. As they progressed in their study of the Holy Scriptures, they discovered that some religious traditions and practices that had gained widespread acceptance among the Armenians, either had no biblical base, or were in direct conflict with the Gospel. Consequently, they **did away with everything that eclipsed Jesus or veiled the clarity of the Gospel**. Their main concern was and has been to retain and preserve the purity of the original Gospel in its unaltered and undiluted form.

Evangelical Armenians **promoted a distinctive Christian lifestyle** by living what they preached and by making sure that their personal conduct conformed to the teachings of Jesus. In a nutshell, they **established a link between spirituality and morality**. Pretty soon, not only their Christian neighbors, but also the Turkish and Kurdish Moslems observed the marked difference that existed between the Evangelicals and the general population. The Evangelicals' moral character was so impeccable, and their reputation for honesty, integrity and uprightness was so noticeable, that the Ottoman Government exempted them from taking the customary oath in courtroom settings. It was generally acknowledged that the Evangelicals' testimony would be completely free from falsehood. **True theology is always practical.**

Evangelical Armenians **transformed Christian doctrines from an abstract theory into practical theology** by teaching that Christian communities must demonstrate God's love in a tangible way by caring for people who were in need regardless of their religious affiliation or ethnic origin. Based on the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Christians ought to regard all human beings as their brothers and sisters and alleviate their suffering by emulating Jesus' example of unselfish giving that was vividly revealed on Calvary's Cross. **Love does not neutralize faith; on the contrary, it validates it.**

Evangelical Armenians **taught the principle of Christian Stewardship** should be the vital means for financing the operations of their churches and schools. They insisted that

financial contributions to the church should not be dependent on a person's mood or whim, but are to be considered as a Christian obligation prescribed by Jesus to gauge the level of the donor's spiritual maturity, and to ensure the recipients' general welfare. **According to James 2:20, faith without deeds is worthless**, therefore, not only good deeds cannot be separated from faith, but are the evidence of genuine faith, and the demonstration of unselfish love. This core belief led Evangelical Armenians to establish and fund humanitarian institutions, such as orphanages, medical clinics, soup kitchens, and old people's homes.

In the same vein, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew word *dabar* which is used 1441 times in the Old Testament, means "a spoken word" and "an act" simultaneously. In Psalm 33:9 we read, "God spoke, and the universe came into existence; He commanded, and the earth stood firm." The creation of our vast universe was dependent on God's spoken word and His expressed command. **Concrete action followed God's spoken Word.**

Armenian Evangelicals **transformed church members from mere spectators to active participants** in worship services. The lay people who sit in church pews participate in religious services through responsive readings, congregational prayers and responses to calls made from the pulpit. This practice **replaces fixed rigidity by spontaneous flexibility, and innovative adaptability**. The congregational polity that Evangelical Armenians embraced gives every church member a voice in how the church is run, led and governed. This system also has the added advantage of **making church leaders directly accountable to their constituent members** for all their activities. Since everything in this world is in a state of flux, the congregational system of church government makes it easy to respond to the ever-changing environment in a reasonable way without sacrificing the core doctrines of the Gospel.

Evangelical Armenians **elevated the status of women** by urging them to pursue and attain higher education. Besides being housewives, Armenian women were propelled to positions of leadership by becoming teachers, school principals, nurses, hospital administrators, writers and civic leaders.

Armenian Evangelicals have **advocated a renewed understanding of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus**. In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Apostle Paul says that sinners are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast. This foundational doctrine of the New Testament demolishes the erroneous notion that people can enter into a right relationship with God by obeying the Law. The Apostle Paul makes it crystal clear that "No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the Law" because the function of the Law is only to point out sin (Romans 3:20). **Good deeds are not meritorious because they are the evidence, the fruit, the outgrowth of faith, not the source of it.**

Although the Armenian Evangelical Church is primarily a religious institution, she has **never separated Christian**

**piety from patriotism**. For this reason, Armenian Evangelical ministers and laymen performed an active role in the self-defense of the Armenian communities at Musa Dag, Aintab, Marash, Hadjin, Zeitoun, Dortyol, Van, Erzurum and Shabin Karahisar. They fought courageously and admirably with their Apostolic and Catholic brethren to resist the Turkish plundering of Armenian towns and villages, to stop the cruel mass killings and deportations of the indigenous Armenians, and to protect the honor of their women.

"the only thing in this world that will never perish or fade away is the Word of God..."

Drawing their inspiration from the Battle of Avarayr, Armenian Evangelicals have always believed that self-defense is permitted and justified by the teachings of the New Testament. When Jesus revealed to His disciples the severe hostilities that they will confront in the future, He advised them to sell their outer garments in order to buy swords (Luke 22:36-38). Since the Bible considers human life to be sacred, it must be preserved by all means. **The refusal to resist evil becomes the worst imaginable evil**. While Christians are not allowed to initiate violent acts, they are instructed to oppose and resist them.

In closing, I want to cite the **beneficial effects** that Armenian Evangelicals have had on the Armenian Apostolic Church:

- Prelates and diocesan leaders started demanding that priests attain higher education prior to their ordination. Previously, a man could be ordained a priest if he had a melodious voice and had the ability to sing in an enchanting way.
- Accelerated the distribution and the reading of the *Ashkharapar* Bible.
- Solidified the support for social justice.
- Organized parochial schools that were patterned after the Evangelical Sunday Schools.
- Adopted the personal "Pledge System" to fund their churches and other institutions.
- Established mid-week Bible Study classes that have become very popular.
- Replaced rivalry and animosity by mutual love, respect and cooperation.

In the Diaspora and in our ancestral homeland, there are Armenians who attach a great importance to the ancient liturgy and solemn rituals of the Armenian Apostolic and the Armenian Catholic churches. Such people will seldom, if ever, gravitate



By Rev. Kevork George Terian

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to the Armenian Evangelical Church. On the other hand, there are Armenians who have an insatiable desire to delve deep into the study of the Bible, and these are the people who will feel comfortable in the fellowship of the Armenian Evangelical congregations. I have noticed that where an Armenian Evangelical Church does not exist, the people in this latter category usually join non-Armenian churches where, in due time, they become assimilated and gradually lose their Armenian heritage. Therefore, the very existence of Armenian Evangelical churches fills a void by providing an environment that is conducive to deep and meaningful Bible study for those Armenians who have no interest in a formally structured worship style, and desire, more than anything else, to have a personal encounter with the living Christ in order to experience moral regeneration through the life-transforming power of His amazing grace.

I want to end my brief discourse by stating unapologetically that every Armenian Church, regardless of her name and type, plays a pivotal role in the daily life of Armenians and gives them the freedom to choose a spiritual home where their spiritual needs can be met in an adequate manner. The Armenian Evangelicals, throughout their history, have consistently upheld the inalienable right of all individuals to choose, in full freedom, their religious beliefs and worship God according to the dictate of their conscience, without any external coercion. Armenian Evangelicalism and freedom have been and will always remain inseparable twins.



## Our Cloud of Witnesses

By Rev. Ron Tovmassian, AEUNA Field Pastor

On July 1, 1846, 37 men and 3 women, gathered in the Mission Chapel in Pera, Turkey to pray and study scripture together. This is how Leon Arpee, a 20th century Armenian evangelical historian, describes what happened next as the Armenian Evangelical Church was born.

**After Scripture-reading and prayer...the evangelicals were called upon to give their assent to the confession of faith (what we today know as the 1846 Armenian Evangelical confession of Faith) which they did, as they rose to their feet, and declared, "We do thus believe!"<sup>1</sup>**

When I first read Arpee's books, I was moved with awe at the legacy of faith that has been passed down to us. He writes with such passion and describes their sacrifices so powerfully that it gave me a whole new perspective on my own Armenian Evangelical identity. Arpee describes at length many scenes and stories that illustrate what it cost them to make this confession and to live by those words, considering the opposition they faced from the Armenian Apostolic Church of that time!

I want to share with you some passages from Arpee's book to shed a bit of light on the events of those days. At one point he quotes the memoirs of William Goodell, an American missionary in Turkey at that time, describing what happened after the Armenian Evangelicals adopted the 1846 Confession of Faith:

**Many are driven from the homes and denied a shelter, or a drop of water from any sect. Refused a place to live in, a place to die in, or a place to be buried in, unable to flee to a mountain, or a cave for want of a passport, unable to work, for whoever employs them shares their fate, thrown into the filthiest prisons for want of security and whoever offers himself for security is thrown in with them.<sup>2</sup>**

Goodell goes on to describe the way these faithful people bore such injustice:

**They had days of public fasting and prayer and the spectacle was an affecting one. Their songs of praise from the whole congregation went up like the sound of many waters, and reminded me of the singing of the ancient Bohemian brethren amidst the raging fires of persecution. And, indeed to see them stand from day to day with such firmness on the Rock of eternal ages, unmoved and undismayed, to see them manifest such unshaken confidence in the power and wisdom and faithfulness of Christ, to see them take joyfully the spoiling of their good, knowing that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance, to see them called up, one after another from time to time, even women and children, and going alone, single-handed, cheerfully and fearlessly into the presence of the greatest and craftiest of their enemies and there witnessing a good confession, to the utter confusion of their inquisitors was a spectacle for angels and for men.<sup>3</sup>**

Finally, Goodell quotes one faithful Armenian Evangelical believer, stating that this sentiment was at the heart of what they all believed:

**"My daily prayer to God is that even if there should not be left a single person except myself to witness for the Truth, he**

**would still give me faith to stand firm for the doctrine of salvation by grace in Christ alone. I know that all resistance we now make to error we are making for coming generations."<sup>4</sup>**

I wonder how many of us are truly aware of the tremendous sacrifices that were made to secure our right to pursue faith through the true gospel of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know about you, but reading these accounts written by an objective, non-Armenian observer, had a great impact on my life. It was convicting to realize there were so many people, with families and children who stood strong in order for us to be living as Armenian Evangelicals today 180 years later.

In Hebrews 11, the author reviews a long list of the great examples of faith throughout the history of the Old Testament. After this powerful parade of incredible people, he starts chapter 12 with these words:

**1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,**

This simple verse made me realize that we have our own cloud of witnesses. We need to remember them in the same way, be grateful for their sacrifice and let their testimony inspire us to consider how our lives will impact generations to come.

By starting Hebrews chapter 12 with the word "therefore" he makes it clear that he is referring to the list of the faithful in the last chapter. He says they represent a "cloud" or a massive throng of people that surround us for a reason. Because they are all around us, we will act with more intentionality, focusing on the race before us.

But what does it mean to say that they are witnesses? Does he mean that their lives are simply a testimony of faithfulness? They witness to us of the power of faith and the glory of even dying for faith in God. In fact, it is from this word, "witness," that we get the word martyr.

But the imagery of this passage is of an athletic contest. The cloud, or throng of witnesses, seems to be a group of spectators who had gathered to witness a competition. Could it be that they are witnesses in the same sense of spectators witnessing a sporting event? The intention seems to be a bit of both. It is as if it were a relay race and those in the crowd are those who have already run their part of the race. They are witnesses to what they experienced when they ran the race themselves. They are also presently watching and witnessing the race that others are running.

Since we have this cloud of witnesses watching us, who have faithfully run this course ahead of us, this should motivate us to be faithful ourselves. It should cause us to remove every hindrance, any extra weight that may be attached to our bodies, or any burden we might be carrying. He is saying that for us, the hindrance is the sin that entangles us. We need to understand the need for righteousness so that our efforts for the kingdom of God may be fruitful. Unresolved sin holds us back from accomplishing God's purpose in our lives. Perseverance means having the faith to stick it out for the long haul, regardless of the cost required.

It is interesting that he speaks of a specific course that is marked out for each of us. The course is not of our own making any more than a runner in a race chooses their own course. It is already marked out for us, and we need to follow God's Word to run that course faithfully. The author of Hebrews continues in verse 2:

**2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

The focus of the runner is not to be on the witnesses. We know the witnesses are there and what they represent, but our eyes must be on Jesus and His example. Jesus completed our course for us in a way that we could never do. His course looked beyond the cross and its shame. He persevered through pain and death, for the sake of the joy that lay beyond. With the cloud of witnesses surrounding us and the example of Jesus fixed before us, we will not grow weary nor lose heart. We will finish the race victoriously.

This passage from Hebrews puts things into a grand perspective. The Church is not something that exists only in the present. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians that the Church is a Holy Temple that is being built brick by brick. It started with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as the foundation. It is growing with every generation of believers and will not be complete until the Lord comes again in glory.

So, the race is not just my race or our race, it is a relay that has been going on for centuries, One generation hands the baton to the next. Which means that we not only have received the baton from the witnesses that went before us, but we are also witnesses who will be the cloud surrounding the next generation as we pass the baton on to them.

Reading Arpee's books and the quotes from Goodell that I cited earlier, I had to ask myself, "What gave these people such strength to persevere? Where did they get such faith in the promise of God, such desire to adhere to God's Word without compromise and such

"We need to understand the need for righteousness so that our efforts for the kingdom of God may be fruitful."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

conviction that their witness and sacrifice would impact future generations?" They suffered and were persecuted, not for some vague idea of an institutionalized Christian faith or an Armenian Evangelical tradition that would need to be preserved. They made these sacrifices because they were committed to a relentlessly biblical understanding of Christian discipleship grounded in the true Gospel of Salvation by faith in Christ alone.

In their quest for reform of their beloved Mother Church, it was clear to them that there is Truth and there is error. They were vigilant in seeking Truth regardless of the consequences to themselves and their families, primarily to honor God and for the sake of future generations.

As we run the race set out specifically for us today, it is important to remember that it is not our race alone, it has been going on for centuries. The Armenian Evangelical leg of this relay started in 1846 and has been going on for 180 years. We have our own cloud of witnesses who have run the race before us and are now watching us to see how we will complete our leg of the course.

Knowing that they are watching, and fixing our eyes on Christ whose example goes before us, it should motivate us to run the race with excellence, faithfulness and perseverance, taking seriously the Word of Truth and clinging tenaciously to the pure gospel of salvation by grace in Christ alone. As individuals and as a community, we must put aside any unnecessary incumbrance by becoming spiritually fit and ridding ourselves of the sin that entangles us and keeps us from finishing victoriously.

July 1st is a day that reminds me of my very personal role as an Armenian Evangelical in the mission to advance the kingdom of God. If I don't look back and consider the witness of those who went before me, I will take the race lightly. I will run at my own speed, for my own purpose, on my own path, as long as it is comfortable and for only as long as I feel like it. Knowing that this cloud of witnesses surrounds me and having my eyes fixed on Christ, changes everything. Suddenly, I run hard to win the race for the glory of God, to complete the course and honor those who went before me, to successfully hand off the baton to those who will follow me, to persevere to the end so the baton does not fall, to even suffer loss for the sake of seeing the relay continue to another generation as the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of God continue to grow.

As Armenian Evangelicals, I pray we may never lose touch with our rich heritage of faithfulness for the glory of God. Our church was founded on a commitment to God's Word and a clear understanding of the gospel of Christ. Since our great cloud of witnesses is watching and the example of Christ is fixed before our eyes, let's run the race with excellence, faithfulness and perseverance, for the glory of God and our witness to future generations.

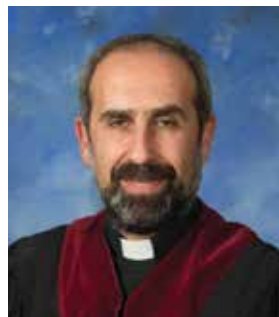
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<sup>1</sup> Leon Arpee, *The Armenian Awakening: A History of the Armenian Church, 1820-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909), 136.

<sup>2</sup> Arpee, *The Armenian Awakening*, 125.

<sup>3</sup> Arpee, *The Armenian Awakening*, 125-26.

<sup>4</sup> Arpee, *The Armenian Awakening*, 126.



## 180 Years of Witness: The Risen Church

By Rev. Serop G. Megerditchian

This year marks a monumental milestone in the life of our community: the **180th Anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church**. Founded on July 1, 1846, in Constantinople, our church was born from a desire for spiritual renewal, reform and a deep commitment to the Word of God. For nearly two centuries, this "remnant" has served as a beacon of faith, education, and service, weathering the storms of history to remain a vibrant witness for Christ today.

As we celebrate these 180 years of grace, we also solemnly commemorate the **111th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide**. To look at the history of the Armenian people is to witness a "jar of clay" that has been struck and hammered by the forces of empire and displacement. Yet, looking back at 1915, we do not merely see a graveyard; we see a sanctuary. Like the burning bush of Moses, the Armenian people were surrounded by flames but were not consumed.

This is the story of **The Risen Church**. We are a resurrection people who have walked through death and emerged, by the life of Christ, still standing.

### The Fourfold Pressure: A Theology of the Cross

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, the Apostle Paul outlines four dimensions of suffering that have defined our 180-year journey.

#### 1. Hard Pressed, But Not Crushed.

Throughout our 180-year history, the Armenian Evangelical Church has been pressed by persecutions and systematic attempts to erase its identity. During the horrors of 111 years ago, our churches and schools were leveled, and institutions built through decades of sacrifice were reduced to ashes. Yet, while the buildings fell, the Gospel did not. The walls were broken, but the witness remained.

#### 2. Perplexed, But Not in Despair.

There is no deeper confusion than the "perplexity of faith" amidst the suffering of 1915. We can only imagine the questions of a mother in the desert of Deir ez-Zor or a pastor watching his congregation vanish. The Armenian Evangelical Church cried and lamented, but it refused to surrender hope. Despite the destruction, despair did not have the final word. Confusion was real, but hopelessness was rejected.

#### 3. Persecuted, But Not Abandoned.

During the Armenian Genocide, hundreds of clergy and pastors were killed; churches were turned into ruins. Yet, the Armenian Evangelical Church held to a deep truth: abandonment by the world is not abandonment by God. Because Christ walked the *Via Dolorosa* ("Way of Suffering") first, our martyrs did not walk alone. The Shepherd was with His flock in the fire, sustaining the movement from its 1846 foundations through its darkest hours.

#### 4. Struck Down, But Not Destroyed.

Church pulpits fell silent, and cities and villages emptied. In later decades, especially in the Middle East, migration threatened to finish what violence began. Every departure raised the question: *Can this church survive?* The answer lies in the source of the Church's life. It does not come from numbers, but from the Risen Christ. This is why, 180 years later, congregations thrive all over the world, from Aleppo and Beirut to Paris, Los Angeles, and Yerevan. We are not kept alive by geography; we are kept alive by resurrection.

### Carrying the Death, Revealing the Life

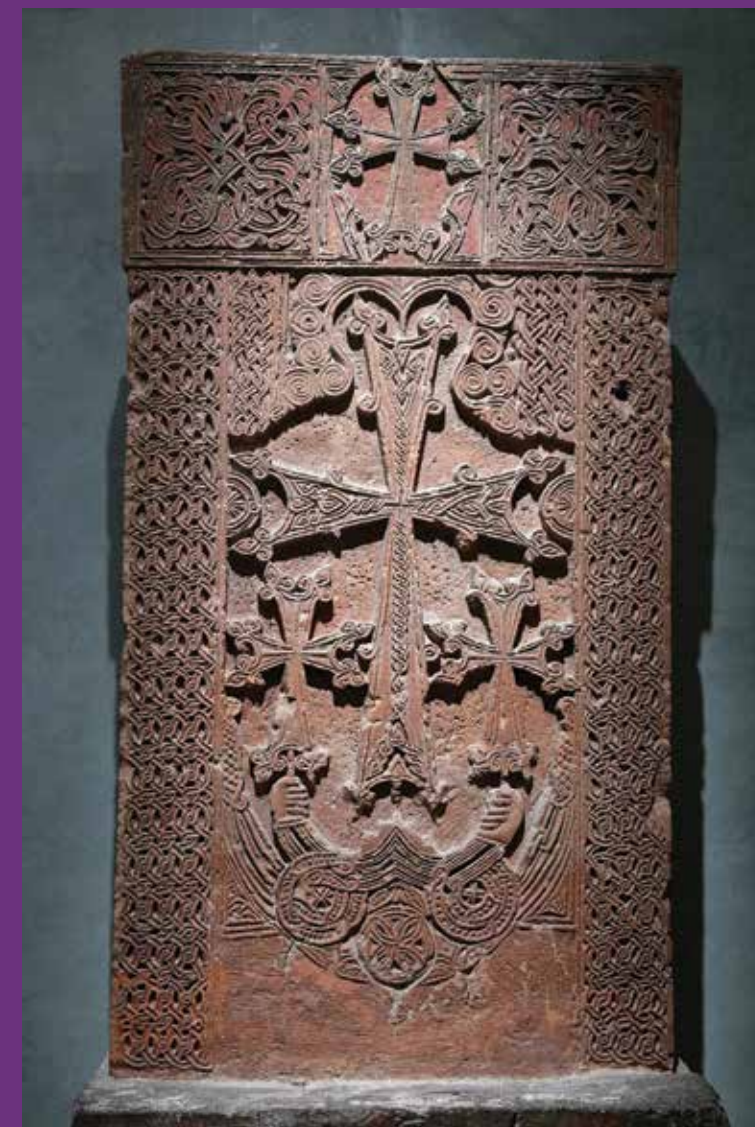
The Apostle Paul writes that we "always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed" (v. 10). In the Armenian tradition, the cross is a Khachkar—a carved stone cross. It is beautiful but heavy, rooted in the earth, showing that death and life are intertwined.

The Armenian Evangelical Church, in its 180-year pilgrimage, has carried this "death" visibly. A congregation that loses its building but keeps its hymns and sharagans is carrying the death of Jesus. A school that is burned and later reopened is revealing His life.

During the 1915 Genocide, families cut their Bibles in half to carry the Word into exile. They didn't carry gold; they carried the Truth. When they reached new lands, they didn't seek comfort first; they asked, *"Where will we worship? Where will we teach our children?"* This resilient spirit has defined us since 1846.

### The Modern Challenge: From Memory to Mission

As we celebrate 180 years of faithful service, we must acknowledge that the burden remains. Many of our churches face the "slow pain" of diminishment through migration, instability, and indifference. To keep worship alive after massacre, deportation, and modern war is not ordinary



Khachkar from the cemetery of Arinj, in the Kotayk Province of Armenia, turn of the 13/14th century. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

endurance—it is **resurrection endurance**.

The challenge for the current generation is to be worthy of the 1846 founders and the 1915 martyrs. If our forefathers rebuilt churches from rubble, can we not stir ourselves to rebuild devotion and community from our distractions, indifference, and spiritual “coma” or “survival mode”? If they preserved their faith under the threat of death, can we not preserve and spread it from within our comfort?

**Conclusion: A People of the Morning**

We are a "Good Friday" people, but we are a **"Sunday Morning" Church**. The Risen Church does not deny history or minimize the lives lost 111 years ago. The Risen Church declares that no empire or desert can undo the decree of God.

The Armenian Evangelical Church rose from the persecutions of 1846 and the deserts of 1915. After 180 years, the jar may be fragile and cracked—but the treasure inside is divine, and the light it holds is blinding.

# 180-Ամեայ Վկայութիւն. Յարուցեալ Եկեղեցին

By Rev. Serop G. Megerditchian

Այս փարի մեր համայնքի կեանքին մէջ կը նշենք պատմական հանգրուան մը. **Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցւոյ հիմնադրութեան 180-ամեակը**: Հիմնուած 1 Յուլիս 1846-ին, Կոստանդնուպոլսոյ մէջ, մեր եկեղեցին ծնունդ առաւ հոգեւոր վերանորոգութեան, բարեկարգութեան փափաքէն եւ Աստուծոյ Խօսքին հանդէպ ունեցած խոր յանձնառութենէն: Մօտ երկու դարեր, այս «մնացորդը» ծառայած է որպէս հաւաքքի կրթութեան եւ ծառայութեան փարոս՝ դիմագրաւելով պատմութեան փոթորիկները, այսօր ալ մնալով Տէր Յիսուս Քրիստոսի կենսունակ վկան:

Մինչ կը փօսենք Աստուծոյ շնորհքին այս 180 փարիները, նաեւ յարգանքով կը նշենք Հայոց Ցեղասպանութեան 111-րդ փարելիցը: Հայ ժողովուրդի պատմութեան նայիլ՝ կը նշանակէ ականաբես ըլլալ «կաւէ ամանի» մը, որ հարուածուած ու կոփուած է կայսրութիւններու եւ փեղահանութեան ուժերուն կողմէ: Սակայն, եր նայելով 1915-ին, մենք պարզապէս գերեզման չենք փնտր, այլ՝ եկեղեցի-սրբարան: Մովսէսի մորենիին նման, հայ ժողովուրդը շրջապատուած էր բոցերով, բայց չայրեցաւ:

Ասիկա պատմութիւնն է **Յարուցեալ Եկեղեցւոյ**: Մենք յարութեան ժողովուրդ ենք, որ քալած է մահուան մէջէն եւ Քրիստոսի կեանքով վերապրած ու ուրբի կանգնած է:

**Քառապարիկ Ճնշումը. Խաչի Աստուածաբանութիւնը**

Բ. Կորնթացիս 4.8–10-ի մէջ, Պօղոս Առաքեալ կը նկարագրէ փառապանքի չորս երեսներ, որոնք բնորոշած են մեր 180-ամեայ ուղին:

1. **«Ամէն կողմանէ վշտացած ենք (Ճնշուած), բայց նեղը ինկած (ընկճուած) չենք» (Բ. Կոր. 4.8 ա)-**  
Մեր 180-ամեայ պատմութեան ընթացքին, Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցին Ճնշուած է հալածանքներով եւ իր ինքնութիւնը ջնջելու համակարգուած փորձերով: Ցեղասպանութեան արհաւիրքին ընթացքին, մեր եկեղեցիներն ու դպրոցները հաւասարեցան հողին, իսկ փանամեակներու զոհողութեամբ կառուցուած հաստատութիւնները մոխիրի վերածուեցան: Սակայն, երբ շէնքերը փլան, Աւետարանը բարձր մնաց: Պատերը քանդուեցան, բայց վկայութիւնը շարունակուեցաւ:
2. **«Տագնապած ենք, բայց յուսահատած չենք» (Բ. Կոր. 4.8 բ)-**  
Չկայ աւելի խոր շփոթութիւն, քան «հաւաքքի փազնապը եւ փարակուսանքը» 1915-ի փառապանքին մէջ: Կրնանք միայն երեւակայել Տէր Չօրի անապարին մէջ գոնուող մօր մը կամ իր հօտի անհետացումը դիպող հովիւի մը հարցումները: Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցին լացաւ ու ողբաց, բայց մերժեց յոյսը կորսնցնել: Հակառակ ծանր աւերներուն, յուսահատութիւնը վերջին խօսքը չունեցաւ: Տագնապը եւ շփոթութիւնը իրական էր, բայց անյոյս վիճակը մերժուեցաւ:
3. **«Հալածուած ենք, բայց երեսէ ձգուած չենք» (Բ. Կոր. 4.9 ա)-**  
Հայոց Ցեղասպանութեան ընթացքին հարիւրաւոր հոգեւորականներ սպաննուեցան, եկեղեցիները

աւերակ դարձան: Սակայն, Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցին կառչած մնաց խոր ճշմարտութեան մը. աշխարհի կողմէ լքուած ըլլալը Աստուծոյ կողմէ լքուած ըլլալ չէ: Որովհետեւ Քրիստոս նախ ինք քալեց փառապանքի ուղիէն (Via Dolorosa), մեր նահապարկները առանձին չքալեցին: Հովիւը Իր հօտին հետ էր կրակին մէջ՝ պահպանելով այս շարժումը իր 1846-ի հիմնադրութենէն մինչեւ իր ամենամութ ժամերը:

**4. «Վար ձգուած ենք, բայց կորսուած չենք» (Բ. Կոր. 4.9 բ)-**

Եկեղեցւոյ ամբիոնները լռեցին, քաղաքներն ու գիւղերը պարպուեցան: Յաջորդող փանամեակներուն, յարկապէս Միջին Արեւելքի մէջ, արտագաղթը սպառնաց աւարտին հասցնել այն, ինչ որ բռնութիւնը սկսած էր: Իւրաքանչիւր մեկնում կամ գաղթ հարց կը յարուցէր. Կրնայ այս եկեղեցին վերապրիլ: Պատասխանը կը գտնուի եկեղեցւոյ կեանքի աղբիւրին մէջ: Անիկա թիւերէն չի գար, այլ՝ Յարուցեալ Քրիստոսէն: Ահա թէ ինչու, 180 փարի ետք, Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցիները կը ծաղկին աշխարհի փարբեր երկիրներու մէջ, Հալէպէն ու Պէյրութէն մինչեւ Փարիզ, Լոս Անճելըս ու Երեւան: Որովհետեւ, մենք աշխարհագրութեամբ չէ որ ողջ ենք, այլ՝ Յարութեամբ:

**Մահը Կրելով, Կեանքը Յայտնելով**

Պօղոս Առաքեալ կը գրէ, թէ մենք «Ամէն արեւն Յիսուսին մահը մեր մարմիններուն մէջ կը կրենք, որպէս զի Յիսուսին կեանքն ալ մեր մարմիններուն մէջ յայտնուի» (Բ. Կոր. 4.10): Հայկական աւանդութեան մէջ, խաչը հաչքար է. քանդակուած քարէ խաչ: Անիկա գեղեցիկ է, բայց ծանր, հողին մէջ արմատացած՝ ցոյց փալով, որ մահն ու կեանքը միահիւսուած են:

Հայ Աւետարանական Եկեղեցին, իր 180-ամեայ ուխտագնացութեան ընթացքին, այս «մահը» փեսանելիօրէն կրած է: Այն ժողովուրդը, որ կը կորսնցնէ իր շէնքը, բայց կը պահէ իր հոգեւոր երգերն ու շարականները, Տէր Յիսուսի մահը կը կրէ: Այն դպրոցը, որ կ'այրի եւ ետքը վերստին կը բացուի, Տէր Յիսուսի կեանքը կը յայտնէ:

1915 Ցեղասպանութեան ժամանակ, ընդանիքներ իրենց Աստուածաշունչերը երկուքի կը բաժնէին՝ Խօսքը աքսորի ճամբուն վրայ կրելու համար: Անոնք ոսկի չտարին, այլ՝ ճշմարտութիւնը: Երբ նոր երկիրներ հասան, նախ հանգիստ չփնտրեցին, այլ հարցուցին. «Ուր պիտի պաշտենք: Ուր պիտի սորվեցնենք մեր զաւակներուն»: Այս հաւաքքն ու ոգին փոկուն է, որ մեզ բնորոշած է 1846-էն ի վեր:

**Մարտահրաւէրը՝ Յիշատակէն դէպի Առաքելութիւն**

Մինչ կը փօսենք Հայաստանեայց Աւետարանական Եկեղեցւոյ **180 փարուան հաւաքարիմ ծառայութիւնը**, պէտք է ընդունինք, որ լուծը կը մնայ: Մեր շար մը եկեղեցիները կը դիմագրաւեն արտագաղթի, անկայունութեան, նաեւ անարարբերութեան «դանդաղ ցաւը»: Ջարդէն, փեղահանութենէն եւ արդի պատերազմներէն ետք Եկեղեցւոյ պաշտամունքը վառ պահելը սովորական փոկունութիւն չէ, այլ՝ **Յարութեան փոկունութիւն**:

Այսօրուան սերունդին մարտահրաւէրն է՝ արժանի ըլլալ 1846-ի հիմնադիրներուն եւ 1915-ի նահապարկներուն: Եթէ մեր նախահայրերը աւերակներէն եկեղեցիներ վերաշինեցին, միթէ՞ չենք կրնար մեր ցրուած, անարարբեր եւ «մահաքուն»ի վիճակէն արթննալ, վերաշինել եւ վերականգնել մեր նուիրումը եւ եկեղեցաշինութիւնը: Եթէ անոնք հաւաքքը պահեցին մահուան սպառնալիքի փակ, միթէ՞ չենք կրնար զայն պահել եւ փարածել մեր հանգստաւէտ պայմաններուն մէջ:

**Եզրակացութիւն՝ Առաւօտեան Ժողովուրդը**

Մենք «Աւագ Ուրբաթի» ժողովուրդ ենք, բայց նաեւ՝ «Կիրակի Առաւօտեան» Եկեղեցի: Յարուցեալ Եկեղեցին չի նսեմացներ պատմութիւնը կամ 1915-ի կորուստները: Բայց Յարուցեալ Եկեղեցին կը յայտարարէ, թէ ոչ մէկ կայսրութիւն կամ անապար կրնայ ջնջել Աստուծոյ վճիռը: Հայաստանեայց Աւետարանական Եկեղեցին յարութիւն առաւ 1846-ի հալածանքներէն եւ 1915-ի անապարներէն: 180 փարի ետք, կաւէ ամանը թերեւս փխրուն է ու ճաքած, բայց անոր մէջի գանձը աստուածային է, իսկ անոր լոյսը՝ պայծառակերպող: Ամէն



# A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

By Doris K. Melkonian

*A mighty fortress is our God,  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood  
Of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
Does seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great,  
And armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.*

## Background to the Hymn

*Ein feste Burg*, or *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, as translated to English, was birthed under dire circumstances in the 1500s. It is a majestic hymn of great significance in the Christian church, having served as an anthem of strength and courage. This staple hymn has withstood the passage of time, resounding with the reassurance in the comforting presence of God and in His enduring protection. The powerful message of this hymn is augmented by a majestic melody which is steady and rhythmic, almost march-like. The imagery of the lyrics, poignant and memorable, fortifies and sustains us. *Ein feste Burg* is a hymn of declaration, a testament of faith in the face of unfathomable suffering. It is a call to arms, a rally to forge ahead under the protection of God.

*Ein feste Burg* was penned by the father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546), around 1529 in Germany at a time when he was facing turbulence, both in his private and public lives. Martin Luther, a man of unshakeable faith and deep convictions, found solace in the Psalms, which inspired him to write *Ein feste Burg*. The message of Psalm 46 is expressed in the lyrics of this powerful hymn. The tune, steady and commanding, reinforces the imagery of a

mighty God, sovereign over all nature, poetically expressed through the lyrics. The complementary aspect of the powerful lyrics and uplifting tune, both products of Luther's creative talent, attest to its timelessness and enduring impact.

This theologically poignant hymn, *Ein feste Burg*, was translated from the original German to English by Dr. Frederick Henry Hedge in 1852. It is this version of *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*

that has remained in Christian hymnals, and it is this version that we sing today.

## A Look at Psalm 46

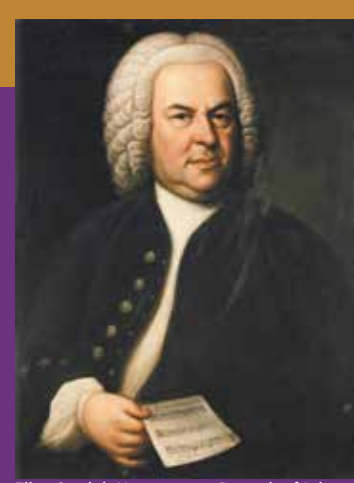
The Psalms are a powerful source of comfort and strength. They are prayers of praise and petition, and thanksgiving and lament. They are prayers of fortification and endurance. They are songs of adoration of the Almighty. They are prayers of praise and glorification of the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. The Psalms are poetic expressions of our inner thoughts, often articulating feelings that we find difficult to express. Finally, the Psalms meet us in our seasons of suffering: loss, betrayal, disappointments, injustice and despair. They embrace us where we are and carry us to where we need to be.

In Psalm 46 we encounter a prayer that evokes the stronghold of God, reinforced through imagery of catastrophic events: "the earth shakes" (v. 2), "the mountains slip into the heart of the sea" (v. 2), "waters roar and foam" (v. 3), and "the mountains quake" (v. 3). These images of unstoppable and unpreventable forces of nature are no match for the power of the Almighty God. Although the magnitude of destruction evokes fear as the landscape is beaten and pummeled, the psalmist asserts, "we will not fear" (v. 2) because "The LORD of armies is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold" (v. 7). The psalmist expresses such a declaration of faith in the face of destruction. In so doing, he acknowledges the supreme authority, unmatched protection and comforting presence of God. The psalmist underscores this assertion of unwavering faith by repeating it, as a refrain, in the closing of the psalm. Indeed, Psalm 46 is a powerful declaration of faith in the Almighty God and reliance on His power.

## An Exploration of A Mighty Fortress is Our God

Psalm 46, the inspiration behind the magnificent hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, conveys the comforting message of God's presence and His protection in "times of trouble" (v. 1). This message is amplified throughout the four stanzas of the hymn as Luther utilizes imagery of commanding power. It is a message of strength and fortitude.

In the first stanza, Martin Luther uses the terms, "fortress," "bulwark," and "a defensive wall" to refer to God as indomitable and invincible. These structures of protection, often used to safeguard from enemy attack, are used here to convey God's protective ability. The imagery evokes a sense of strength and fortitude in the face of afflictions. In the second stanza, Luther uses the term "battle," depicting conflict on a grand scale that results in carnage and destruction. Luther emphasizes that battles which can cause massive devastation are no match for the divine power of the Almighty. In the third stanza, Luther references "devil" and "prince of darkness," the source of worldly



Elias Gottlob Haussmann, Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach, 1748. Bach-Archiv Leipzig

pain and suffering. Yet, we are assured of God's sovereignty and His mighty powers against any human army, any natural disaster, and any forces of evil. Finally, in stanza four, Luther redirects our attention from the imagery of war, battle, destruction and death to the presence of the "Spirit of God who sides with us." The assertion of God's presence with us is a source of unshakable hope in the midst of struggles and suffering. It is the comforting presence of God that sustains us through our seasons of turbulence, and the reliance on His power allows us to forge ahead. The hymn concludes with a triumphant statement, "His kingdom is forever!" underscoring His ultimate sovereignty.

## Bach's Cantata No. 80 - Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was a musical genius with a prolific output. He gifted the world with a treasury of the most inspirational compositions. His religious music is reflective of his deep-seated faith as can be expressed only through his musical craftsmanship. Bach, a devoted Lutheran, drew on the hymn that functioned as the anthem for the Protestant Reformation, *Ein feste Burg*, to commemorate Reformation Day and composed Cantata No. 80. It is a masterful transformation of the Lutheran melody into a stunning choral work.

Martin Luther's influence is seen in the works of J.S. Bach (born about 150 years after Luther), as well as in the composition of Felix Mendelssohn (born about 250 years after Luther).



Eduard Magnus, Portrait of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys, 1833. Berlin State Library.

Both composers expand on the chorale melody of *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, thus creating classic compositions that are inspirational, and have become a staple in the classical music repertoire.

## Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 5 - "Reformation"

Felix Bartholomew Mendelssohn (1809-1847) composed Symphony No. 5, "Reformation" Symphony, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. The foundational document of the Lutheran Church, the Augsburg Confession, contains a summary of beliefs adopted by the Lutheran denomination.

Symphony No. 5 is a work in four movements in the classical sense. Mendelssohn includes Martin Luther's chorale, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* for instruments only in the fourth movement. Mendelssohn, who was influenced by the works of Bach, emulates him by incorporating this Lutheran hymn in his symphony. Both Bach and Mendelssohn elevate the humble hymn, *A Mighty Fortress* by skillfully incorporating it in their compositions, thus paying homage to Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformation and furthering the message of Psalm 46.

## Armenian Evangelical Reformation

The Armenian Reformation took place in Constantinople, Turkey in 1846, more than 300 years after the Protestant Reformation of Germany. The separation from the Armenian Apostolic Church was a period of individual and collective strife for many, but they forged ahead, sustained by their faith in God. Although the hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, was written in response to the turbulent period of the Protestant Reformation of Germany, its message is applicable to the Armenian Reformation, as well. God's unwavering protection and His comforting presence was with the 40 faithful believers and the early church members who endured. As a result of their faithfulness, the Armenian Evangelical Church flourished. Today, the Armenian Evangelicals bear witness to God's love and compassion throughout the world. They stand strong in proclaiming the power and majesty of the Almighty as penned by Martin Luther centuries before in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. This Lutheran anthem has a powerful message that the Almighty God has been present during times of suffering and turbulence in the history of the Armenian people.

## Conclusion

The reality of God's mighty presence and his invincible power fortifies us and sustains us. It is a message of reassurance that allows us to endure our seasons of tribulations. Although we encounter afflictions that seem overwhelming and face difficulties that are unimaginably painful, we are bolstered with the hope in the power and presence of God. The message of Psalm 46 set skillfully to music in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* by Martin Luther is a source of hope and strength in the reality of God's steadfast protection and His presence. It is this message that has universal effect, thus making this a beloved and powerful hymn.

Psalm 46, the bedrock of Luther's hymn, Bach's Cantata and Mendelssohn's Symphony, reinforces our faith in the power and protection of God. Despite the devastating circumstances, God's comforting presence is with us, sustaining us and breathing hope in our lives.

"God is our refuge and strength, A very ready help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

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# Called to Witness: 180 Years of Armenian Evangelical Faith, Servant Leadership, and Hope

By Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian

On the occasion of the 180th anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church, I would like to pay tribute and thanksgiving for the powerful witness and unwavering faith and Christian service many pastors and lay leaders exhibited at various times and in various locations, often under dire conditions, for the glory of God, for the edification of the church, and for the restoration of Armenian lives, communities and institutions.

Here are simply five dedicated lives I will focus on:

## Rev. Stepan Utujian (1823–1911)

Rev. Stepan Utujian stands among the earliest architects of Armenian Evangelical identity, not primarily as an administrator or strategist, but as a faithful witness and chronicler of the Church's birth. A member of the original forty signers of the 1846 Declaration, and brother to two pioneering Evangelical pastors, Utujian embodied the spirit of freedom of conscience that defined the Evangelical movement. His life reflects the early Church's balance between congregational independence and deep commitment to the Gospel.

In the later years of his ministry, marked by physical disability and personal loss, Utujian transformed limitation into vocation. He devoted himself to writing and documenting the origins, struggles, and spiritual life of the Armenian Evangelical Church. His work offers rare firsthand insight into worship practices, ordinations, theological debates, hymnody, and relations with both Apostolic clergy and foreign missionaries—often with remarkable honesty and self-critique.

Utujian's enduring legacy lies in his conviction that the Church must tell its own story with humility and truth. His writings preserve the warmth, faith, and inner life of a people seeking reform, reminding later generations that church history is not about personal achievement or titles, but about discerning how God has worked among His people.

## Rev. Hamparzum Ashjian (1863-1938)

Rev. Hamparzum Ashjian emerges as a prophetic and unifying leader during one of the darkest chapters of Armenian history, the Adana massacres of 1909. As the Armenian Evangelical pastor of Adana, he earned the trust of all Armenian denominations and was chosen by Apostolic and Catholic bishops alike to represent the collective Armenian voice before authorities. His leadership combined courage, balance, and moral clarity in a time of chaos and fear.

Ashjian documented the catastrophe in meticulous detail in *Hishadagaran Adanayi Aghedi*, producing not merely a historical record but a testimony of conscience. He named injustices boldly, exposed systemic impunity, and articulated the moral failures of the state and society. At the same time, he worked tirelessly to unify Armenians across ecclesial boundaries, embodying servant leadership rooted in responsibility rather than power.

After Adana, Ashjian's ministry continued in Konya, Beirut, and eventually the United States. Wherever he served, he remained a pastor who stood with the persecuted, accompanied the vulnerable, and spoke truth to power—leaving a model of ecclesial leadership grounded in courage, unity, and prophetic witness.

## Rev. Dr. Armenag Haigazian (1870–1921)

Dr. Armenag Haigazian represents the Armenian Evangelical commitment to education as a sacred calling. A scholar of exceptional breadth—biblical studies, Semitic languages, archaeology, music—he embodied the ideal of the learned Christian servant. His academic journey from Hadjin and Aintab to Yale University reflected a deep conviction that faith and intellect belong together.

Returning to his homeland, Haigazian devoted his life to education and ministry, most notably as director and president of the Apostolic Institute in Konya. Under his leadership, the Institute became a center of Christian formation, intellectual rigor, and ethical responsibility. Even amid war, deportations, closures, and repeated arrests, he remained committed to rebuilding educational life for the Armenian community.

Haigazian's death in exile in 1921 sealed a life of costly faithfulness. His legacy affirms the Armenian Evangelical vision of *grtaavedaranchutyun* (educational evangelism), where teaching, scholarship, and Christian formation are inseparable. Through figures like him, the Church testified that education itself is an act of hope.

## Rev. Hagop Yeranian (1856–1922)

Rev. Hagop Yeranian's ministry exemplifies perseverance in hostile mission fields. From humble beginnings and limited early education, he rose through determination and faith to become a pastor of remarkable courage and creativity. His long ministry in Afion Karahisar unfolded amid resistance, persecution, and danger, yet he remained unwavering in proclaiming the Gospel.

Through patient endurance, Yeranian transformed rejection into acceptance. He established a thriving church and school, nurtured hundreds of students, and became a respected public figure, eventually even preaching in the Armenian Apostolic Church. His life demonstrates how steadfast witness can reshape communities over time.

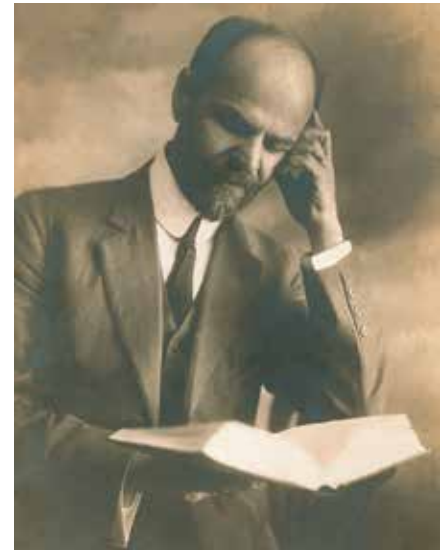
His death during the burning of Smyrna in 1922, collapsing amid refugees and cast into the Aegean Sea, crowned a life of sacrificial service. Remembered as a hero by contemporaries, Yeranian stands as a symbol of pastoral faithfulness unto death, bearing witness to Christ amid catastrophe.

## Rev. Yenovk Hadidian (1883–1962)

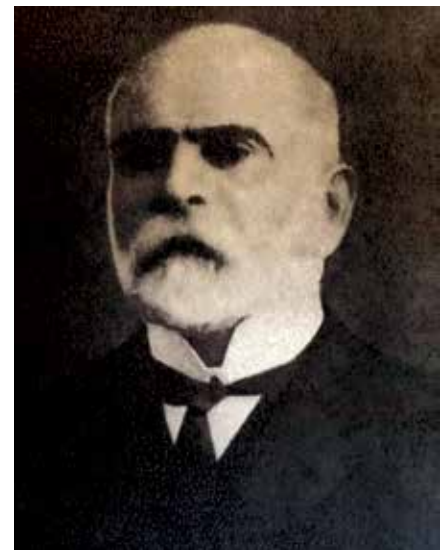
Rev. Yenovk Hadidian was a builder of communities in new lands, following national tragedies. Formed through pastoral service, survival, and suffering during massacres and deportations, he emerged as a tireless organizer of Armenian Evangelical life in Lebanon and Syria. His ministry was defined less by titles than by relentless presence among the displaced and the poor.

In refugee camps and emerging neighborhoods in Beirut, Hadidian founded churches, schools, and institutions almost instinctively, often responding to need before structures existed. He believed that being church and preaching the gospel also meant educating children in the way of Christ, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and restoring dignity. Thousands of Armenian children benefited from schools and aid he helped establish.

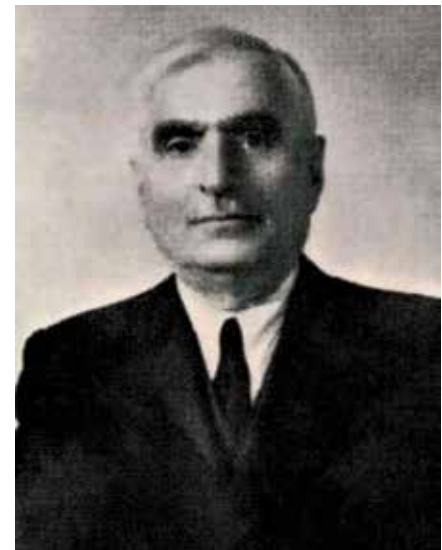
His vision extended beyond denominational boundaries, as seen in the founding of the Maameltein Armenian Tuberculosis Sanatorium, later known as the Azounieh Sanatorium. Hadidian's life bears witness to a holistic understanding of faith: a Church that transforms society through preaching, education, healing, organization, and hope.



Dr. Armenag Harutune Haigazian (Digitized by Rev. Vicken Cholakian, Armenian Evangelical World Council Digital Archive Project.)



Rev. Hagop Yeranian (Digitized by Rev. Vicken Cholakian, Armenian Evangelical World Council Digital Archive Project.)



Rev. Yenovk Hadidian (Digitized by Rev. Vicken Cholakian, Armenian Evangelical World Council Digital Archive Project.)



**2026 Թ.  
180-ԱՄԵԱԿԸ ԻՄԱՍԱԻՈՐԵԼՈՒ ՏԱՐԻ**  
By Dr. Yervant H. Kassouni

Օրերը թիւ չունեցող մէկ քանի քայլ եւս ու Հայաստանեայց Աւետարանական Եկեղեցին կը դիմաւորէ իր կազմաւորման 180-ամեակը: Ո՛վ կը յիշէ 150-ամեակի, թէկուզ 175-ամեակի «յաղթական» ճառերը, ծափ-ծափերը, եւ...: Բայց մինչեւ 180-ամեակ միայն չորս ամիս, եւ... անգամի մը համար առանց փող ու թմբուկի, առանց ծափ-ծափերու եւ առանց ճաշասեղաններու, պարտադիր, **180-ամեակը պիտի հռչակել ինքնաքննութեան, ինքնաճանաչման, ինքնաքննադատութեան եւ ինքնարժեւորումի տարի:** Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցիին շնորհուած առաքելութեան գիտակից՝ այդ առաքելութեան հաւատարմութեան երաշխիքի առաջին գիտակից քայլը պիտի ըլլայ այս: Եւ ուրեմն, 180-ամեակի միակ ու մեծագոյն ծառայութիւնը պիտի ըլլայ Հայ Աւետ. Համաշխարհային Խորհրդաժողով մը, թիւի քանակէն առաջ՝ պարմական կշռադատ խօսքի, որակի ներկայացուցչութեամբ: Հովիւներու, պատուելիներու ու քարոզիչներու խորհրդաժողովի մասին չէ խօսքը. ի պաշտօնէ, անոնց ներկայութիւնը հասկնալի է եւ սպասելի, սակայն փրկապետող պիտի ըլլայ աշխարհականներու ներկայութիւնը: Ո՛վ կը պահէ Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցին: Հարցումին պատասխանը խնդրին բացայայտումն իսկ է:

Պիտի չվախնալ բառերու անկեղծութենէն ու պիտի դիմագրաւել գոյատեւման ճակատագրական հարցը: Հայ Սփիւռքի գոյատեւման ճակատագրական պայքարին մէջ իր պատասխանատուութեան բաժինը ունի եւ Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցին ու Հայ Աւետ. Համայնքը: Ոչ ոք կարող է ուրանալ ցարդ անոր բերած՝ նպաստը այդ պայքարին: Սակայն ժամանակները փոխուած են, նահանջը համընդհանուր է, ու նոր ռազմավարութեան պահանջն ու գործադրութիւնը անյեղաձգելի: Պահանջը հրամայական է Հայ Սփիւռքի բոլոր հաւաքականութիւններուն համար՝ Համայնք, Եկեղեցի, Կուսակցութիւն, Մշակութային, Բարեգործական, Ընկերային, Մարզական միութիւններ եւ ընկերակցութիւններ, Դպրոց, Մամուլ, ամէն-ամէն ինչի համար, որ իր գոյութիւնը կը պահէ Սփիւռքի անունով: Այլապէս վաղը շատ ուշ պիտի ըլլայ: Վերականգնումի, վերանորոգման աշխարանքի այս խնդրանք-պահանջը նոր չէ: Դժբախտաբար, ճանապարհին, շատ բան, զոր կարող էինք փրկել, անփութօրէն փրորեցինք, միայն ուշացած «ափսոսանք» լսելու:

Բայց քանի որ բարեգործութիւնն ու բարեկարգութիւնը փունէն կը սկսի, վերադառնանք փուն: Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցիի 180-ամեակի սեմին, Եկեղեցի եւ Համայնք ո՛ր ենք այսօր, բայց մանաւանդ՝ ո՛ր ուղղուած են մեր քայլերը: Առաջադրուած Խորհրդաժողովը այս հարցումներուն պատասխան որոնելու, ճշդելու եւ լուծումներ առաջադրելու համար է: Առաջնահերթ աշխարանքը պիտի ըլլայ՝ նուազագոյնը վերջին երեսուն տարիներուն մեր անցած ճանապարհին քննարկումն ու քննադատութիւնը: Ինչ նուաճումներ արձանագրած ենք հոն, բայց մանաւանդ՝ ինչ ընկրկումներու տեղի տուած: Խնդրանք մը. յաղթանակները յրբեւեակական հանդիսութիւններու արծաթ ափսէներու վրայ չներկայացնել: Պահանջուածին, բայց չիրականացածին ինքնախաբէութեան ծածկոյթ են անոնք: Քարացած հարցումը մէկ է՝ ՎԱՂԸ:

Համաժողովը տեղեկագիր-զեկուցում ճամբարակելու համար չէ. անոր առաջին նպատակը պիտի ըլլայ դուռը լայն բանալ՝ Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցին յուզող հիմնական հարցերու մասին բարեխիղճ, միայն գիտական մակարդակով պատրաստուած զեկուցումներու ներկայացումին ու բարձրաձայն խորհրդակցութեան: Քաջ պիտի ըլլալ նաեւ լսելու զանոնք՝ որոնք այլազան պատճառներով կամ անտարբերութեամբ կոնակ դարձուցած են Եկեղեցիին ու Համայնքին, անոնց աչքով դիտելու մենքզմեզ, եւ երբեք պիտի չզարմանալ որ կարելի պիտի ըլլայ անչափ ճշմարտութիւն գտնել իրենց խօսքերուն մէջ:

Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցիի խնդրայարոյց հարցերէն ոմանք կու գան անոր կազմաւորման առաջին օրերէն, ուրիշներ երբ փարիներու հողովոյթին հետ, հայ ժողովուրդի ճակատագրին բախտակից գաղթական Եկեղեցին ապրեցաւ ու կրեց օտար աշխարհներու բարիքն ու չարիքը, յաւելեալ հարցեր գումարելով

իր կրօնաբարոյական ու ազգային աշխարհայեացքին վրայ: Համաժողովը պիտի յանգի գործնական եզրակացութիւններու ու որոշումներու, որոնց իրագործման հետապնդումը պիտի վստահուի կեանքի կոչուած «**180-ամեակի Որոշումներու Յանձնաժողով**»ին:

Տարածաշրջաններու Հայ Աւետ. Եկեղեցիներու Միութիւններուն պատասխանատուութիւնն էր ու է՝ պատրաստուելի 180-ամեակի Խորհրդաժողովին: Մինչեւ Խորհրդաժողով, փուտալ Միութեան ծիրէն ներս օրակարգի հարց պիտի ընել արծարծելի ու քննելի հարցերը, պատասխանատու ու գիտակ ուսումնասէրներու վստահելով իւրաքանչիւր հարց, ու ներքին խորհրդակցութիւններէ ետք, ձեռք բերուած եզրակացութիւններով ներկայանալ Համաժողովին:

Հարցերը բազմաթիւ են, որոնց հանդէպ փորոզ անտարբերութիւնը կը մատնէ Եկեղեցի-Համայնքի, եւ ուրեմն ազգին նկատմամբ հետաքրքրութեան մակարդակը, որ զուրկ է աստիճանաչափէ: Աստիճանաչափը անկասելի ընկրկումն է: Բայց կայ խաբկանքը՝ շքեղ ճակտոցներով զարդարուած տեղեկագիր-զեկոյցներու շրջագայութիւնը, եւ հիմա՝ Դիմապետողի հրաշքը... գովազդողներու ձրի կամ վարձու բանակով:

**ՊԱՏԱՍԽԱՆԻ ՈՒ ԳՈՐԾՆԱԿԱՆ ՔԱՅԼԵՐՈՒ ՍՊԱՍՈՂ ՀԱՐՑԵՐ**

- Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցիի մէկ ամբողջական վարչական կառոյցի ստեղծումը, կողքին՝ կրօնական-ընկերային-հասարակական իրաւակարգի մը հաստատումը:
- Քանի՞ գոյնի ու տեսակի Հայ Աւետ. Եկեղեցի կայ, ո՞վ է հաշուողը եւ ո՞վ՝ հաշիւ պահանջողը: Եւ ինչո՞ւ են անբաղձալի այս նոր ծնունդները... նորանոր «աստուածաբանութիւն»ներով:
- Հայց Աւետ. Եկեղեցիի Բեմն ու Պաշտամունքը: Որպէս թէ պարզութեան ջարագով, պաշտամունքը մերկացած է աղօթատունի պահանջած մթնոլորտի սրբութենէն, սկսեր է քայլ առ քայլ մօտենալ դասախօսական պահի «հոգեւոր երգեր»ու կցորդով:
- Ինչ է հաղորդական անդամակցութեան հաւաքքի արժեքափի երաշխիքը: Իրաւ անհրաժեշտ է հաղորդական անդամակցութիւնը: Հին է հարցումը...:
- Այդ երբ է որ Հայց. Աւետ. Եկեղեցիի Բեմին սպասաւորը, բեմակալը, իր ասպարէզին Հայօրէն պիտի պատրաստուի Հայ Աւետ. Աստուածաբանական Դպրոցին մէջ:
- Հայ Աւետ. Եկեղեցի ու Համայնք մերկացած են ազգային սեփական մշակոյթի տարագէն: Պիտի գիտակցիլ թէ մարդը՝ ինք, մշակոյթի արտադրութիւն է եւ արտայայտութիւն, ու Հայուն կրօնքը՝ Քրիստոնէութիւնը, այդ մշակոյթին իւրայատկութիւնը շեշտող փրկական բաղադրիչ մասերէն մէկը:
- Սեփական ժառանգութեան փրորութիւնը: Երբ իմաստութիւնը կ'ունենանք գիտական արժեւորումի ենթարկելու Հայ Աւետ. մարդուն ստեղծագործական ժառանգութիւնը, ու տե՛ր դառնալ ժառանգին: Ո՛վ հաշուած է թէ ինչ է քանակն ու որակը արդէն կորսուած ու կորուստի դատարարուած ժառանգութեան: Երբ իմաստութիւնը կ'ունենանք մէկտեղելու ինչ որ կարելի է փրկել ու դնել գիտական հսկողութեան տակ, եւ ուսումնասիրել:
- Մշակոյթի հանդէպ փորոզ անգիտութեան եւ անտարբերութեան խօսուն վկայութիւնն է մերօրեայ Հայ Աւետ. Մամուլի ապրած ողբերգութիւնը: Այդ ինչու է որ գիտակցաբար, եթէ ոչ ծրագրուած կերպով, անտեսումի ենթարկուած է մամուլը:
- Ազգային կեանքին մէջ Հայ Աւետ. գործօն ներկայութիւնը չի կրնար տեղ ունենալ առանց Համայնքային ու Քաղաքական ժողովներու կազմաւորման: Եկեղեցին օրինապահ վերաբերմունք պիտի ցուցաբերէ այդ ուղղութեամբ, բայց Համայնքը լիիրաւ ներկայութիւն եւ Հայ Աւետ. խօսք պիտի ունենայ:
- Ո՛վ կը հարցնէ թէ այսօր Քրիստոնէական Չանից Ընկերակցութիւնը ո՞րքան հաւատարիմ է «Քրիստոսի եւ Եկեղեցիի Համար» իր նշանաբանին: Ամառնային համագումարները կէտ նպատակ դարձուցած Չանիցը, կողքին՝ Պատանեացը, կ'արդարացնէ իր ներկայութիւնը:

Սկիզբն ենք երկանց: 180-ամեակը յրբեւեակական ճակատագրական տարի է, եւ արծարծուած հարցերուն՝ պատասխանատու պատասխանի սպասող: Անտարբերութիւնն ու թերացումը գուժկանը պաշտօնի կը հրաւիրեն:



# Armenian Evangelical Church – Past, Present and Future

(On its 180th Anniversary)

By Rev. Dr. Vahan H. Tootikian

The year 2026 is the 180th Anniversary of the founding of the Armenian Evangelical Church. It was born in Pera Istanbul (then Constantinople), on July 1, 1846. The formal recognition of the Armenian Evangelical Church, however, was granted by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Medjid, on November 27, 1850.

The causes for the rise of the Armenian Evangelical Church were primarily a direct outcome of the Armenian Renaissance in the nineteenth century. There was a revival of thinking in the social, economic, political, and religious realms. Some reform-minded Armenians insisted that the Armenian Apostolic Church should be reformed and revitalized. They were met with strong resistance and opposition from the Armenian Patriarchate.

Failure to reform the Armenian Apostolic Church became a basic source of conflict. The reformists continued to push their demands, which provoked strong retaliation from the Armenian Patriarchate. Persecution and suffering did not alienate the Armenian Evangelical reformists from their “Mother Church.” It was the Patriarch’s act of excommunication that forced them to organize into a separate religious community, the Protestant Millet. It was this separation which resulted in the formation of the *Armenian Evangelical Church*.

In spite of all of the restraining circumstances, the Armenian Evangelical Church has kept its existence since 1846, and continues to render its services to the Armenian nation.

The Armenian Evangelical Church, which began as a religious movement, was, and still remains, primarily a religious institution in nature. Although its benefits to the Armenian nation were essentially spiritual in nature, nevertheless it made some educational, cultural and moral contributions, and left its indelible impact on the Armenian people.

Initially, the Armenian Evangelical reform movement subjected the theology of the Armenian Apostolic Church to fresh scrutiny, translated the ancient Krapar Bible into modern, vernacular Armenian *Ashkharapar*, and expanded both religious and secular education in the interests of an intelligent laity.

The early Armenian Evangelical reformers claimed that salvation depends on a new relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than any task (or duty) one can perform to merit God’s favor. They believed that the will of Christ for the church and its members is revealed in the Bible. Thus the sufficiency of the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice for all Christians became one of the most consistently maintained principles of Armenian Evangelicalism. Moreover, these reformers asserted that Christians can come into the presence of God without priestly intermediary, and have the right of direct access to God. Hence the “priesthood of all believers” became fundamental to the Armenian Evangelical position.

*“... if this Anniversary is to have any meaning, it must become a promise for the future.”*

The Armenian Evangelical Church also affirmed the principle of the liberty of Christians. Thus, individual conscience, not the dictates of the Church, became the guide for Armenian Evangelical behavior.

Moreover, the Armenian Evangelical Church became instrumental in opening the doors of mass education and progress for the Armenian people. Scores of Armenian Evangelical educational institutions produced numerous religious and intellectual leaders, professionals and businessmen. The influence of Western literature and history, ideas and ideals of human rights, self-determination and constitutional rights of freedom of thought, conscience and the media left a tremendous impact on the Armenian masses.

The Armenian Evangelical Movement served the Armenian people in many ways for many decades, administering to their needs, healing their wounds,

and lightening their sorrows. Armenian Evangelicalism put no limit to service, nor did it discriminate against other creeds, but served equally all those who bore the name Armenian.

The Armenian Evangelical Church also brought a strengthening influence to the life of the Armenian nation. From the middle of the 19th century until World War I, it reached intellectual and spiritual prominence: partly because of its readiness to examine and accept what seemed relevant from the world of scholarship; partly because of the noble way of life it inculcated in its adherents; and chiefly because of its spiritual impact. In the early years of its growth, it made rapid progress among Armenians because it met the social, intellectual and spiritual needs of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian Evangelical Church gave the Armenian nation a potent medium for disclosing its latent intellectual and spiritual forces. Indeed the Armenian Evangelical Church has made major contributions to the Armenian nation—contributions sufficient to ensure its important place in the religious, educational and cultural life of the Armenian nation.

Undoubtedly, the Armenian Evangelical Church does not bear the stamp of perfection. Like any other organization, it has its faults and foibles, shortcomings and sins. In some areas, there is an erosion of long-established religious and cultural values and a decline and deterioration of spiritual lifestyle. Succeeding generations of Armenian Evangelicals have been losing some of the original vision, dedication, and enthusiasm of the “faith of their fathers.” It is ironic that the early Armenian Evangelicals transcended adversity and even grew in strength and spiritual stature in the midst of it. In contrast, freer and more prosperous times seemed to nourish complacency rather than vision.

We celebrate the 180th Anniversary by looking back to better understand the past, but our real purpose must be to look forward to reinvigorate the Armenian Evangelical Church and make it relevant to our future generations. Thus if this Anniversary is to have any meaning, it must become a promise for the future.

The 180th Anniversary should challenge us to renewed dedication to enlighten the Armenian people with the gospel of Jesus Christ and better serve the Armenian nation and humankind.

Churches can be compared to different kinds of institutions. There are churches which are like *museums*. Museums are places or buildings in which works of historical and cultural value are cared for and exhibited.

In a sense, the museums keep part of our heritage.

From them comes to us a body of experience through which we gain knowledge and wisdom without which we would be unrelated to the present. From museums we can learn to appreciate the past and be able to build upon them.

Museum-type churches can provide us with pride about our forebears, our “faith of our fathers.” But the faith of our fathers is not enough for us. One generation cannot operate on the faith of another. The vital faith, which accomplishes and sustains must be a contemporary faith. If the sacrifice and contribution of our ancestors is to have any significance for us, their Christian faith has to be reborn in our generation and we have to come to grips with it in terms of our own problems and challenges.

The Armenian Evangelical Church is called to be a church that not only honors its past but also embraces its future.

The Armenian Evangelical Church is called to be a *spiritual academy* where members get together to cultivate their faith and practice; where they learn to translate the spirit and concern of Christ into concrete programs of ministry and service.

Our church Unions, churches and organizations are called to be spiritual academies where members learn to reach out; where they learn that if people live for themselves, they will die by themselves; where they learn they are Christ’s agents here on earth and they have to do what Christ wants them to do; where they learn to care for those who are hungry, homeless, sick, sorrowing and suffering.

Moreover, Armenian Evangelical churches are called to be places whose worship services help people feel God’s presence, where warmth and friendliness make them feel so genuinely accepted that they know they “belong” rather than simply “attend;” where the variety of involvement opportunities provides meaningful participation for people at every stage of spiritual, emotional, and physical development.

Finally, the Armenian Evangelical Church is called to be a Church that is distinguished by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the *elan vital* of the church. The descent of the Holy Spirit in His fullness on the church took place on the Day of Pentecost. This gave birth to the church. The early church is represented in the Book of Acts as possessed by belief in the Spirit’s operation.

Many churches and ecclesiastical institutions simply allow circumstances to dictate their fate. Such institutions are dying. The future does not belong to fate, sociological and external forces. It belongs to God and to the people who constitute the church. This means that each generation, by the guidance and help

of the Holy Spirit, must take its part in building a future for the generations to come that is worthy of the past.

We should not lose sight of the fact that we are the spiritual beneficiaries of those who have gone before us, so those who come will be the beneficiaries of our dedication and stewardship.

On the 180th Anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church our prayer is that it will become a dynamic, forward-moving and witnessing church relating faith to all areas of life through ministry, work deed and lifestyle; that it should embody, interpret, and communicate Armenian Christendom in its spiritual and cultural dimensions.

May this Anniversary become an occasion for rededication and consecration for all Armenian Evangelicals, with the sure knowledge that "He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).



## 2026: Year of Awakening

By Rev. Gilbert Léonian

"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!" - Ephesians 5:14

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God." - 2 Timothy 1:6

With the beginning of 2026, we are entering a very important period for Armenian Evangelical Christians, both in France and throughout the world. Indeed, it was on July 1, 1846, that the first Armenian Evangelical Church was born in Istanbul, Turkey.

I will not dwell on the historical circumstances of this birth 180 years ago. I would like to focus on the causes and motivations behind this spiritual awakening. For it was indeed a true spiritual revival of great magnitude, the importance of which we must fully measure. This awakening was born in 1846 within the Armenian nation, and today in 2026, we are its fruits and heirs.

Why this awakening?

The Armenian Apostolic Church, its clergy, and its faithful had fallen asleep on their past laurels; they had become calcified in a Christian tradition that had lost the flame of first love, much like the Church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter three. The fervor and zeal of the founding fathers—the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, and Gregory the Illuminator—had given way to a surface-level religious practice that cultivated rituals, however beautiful they might be, at the expense of a biblical, living, nourishing, and dynamic faith.

The people were thirsty for an awakening and spiritual renewal. Three elements favored this desire for reform:

1. The rediscovery of reading the Bible and its life-giving message in an understandable language.
2. The rediscovery of an intimate and personal relationship with God through individual and community prayer by using everyday language.
3. The centrality of the person of Christ and His offer of personal and free salvation, which alone can transform a person from within.

As at Pentecost in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit visited 40 believers: 37 men and three women gathered with a deep desire for a new life. The fruits of this awakening were immediate. These awakened Christians became fervent witnesses of Christ and the gospel, the source of salvation for all mankind.

Let us listen to Pastor Jean-Daniel Sahagian on page 34 of his work, *The Armenian Evangelical Movement*: "The first 10 years following the constitution of the AEC were followed by an extraordinary boom...Within 10 years, 25 organized churches were to be added to the first Church founded in Istanbul."

The fire of revival spread from Istanbul to Anatolia and beyond. "In 1852, Pastor Der Sahagian, accompanied by a teacher, Simon Tavitian, undertook an evangelization tour in 25 cities in eastern Turkey, as far as Kessab, Aleppo, and Beirut" (p. 35). He writes: "No one can, without having seen it, have an exact idea of the extraordinary awakening among our compatriots in this region" (p. 36).

What was the heart of this spiritual awakening? They gave priority to evangelism and the planting of new churches.

IN 2026, OUR ARMENIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES URGENTLY NEED A NEW AWAKENING!

Where do we stand as Armenian Evangelical Christians in 2026 regarding our spiritual health? Let us stop criticizing the lukewarmness of other historical Armenian churches. Let us ask ourselves individually and sincerely: "What has become of the flame of my first love? Is Christ still the priority of my life? Where are my zeal and dynamism in witnessing my personal faith in Jesus Christ to those around me?"

"What is my vision for evangelism and my passion for the salvation of lost souls?"

Without falling into self-flagellation, we must observe that a number of our churches in the 24 countries where we are established have seen their flame weaken, and sometimes even more. Evangelical tradition and formalism have taken the place of evangelical enthusiasm and dynamism. We are more in protection mode than in extension mode.

My prayer is that this anniversary year 2026 will be the year of a deep and lasting awakening through the powerful visitation of the Holy Spirit! May God rekindle in each of us the flame of a living faith centered on the authority of the Word of God, on victorious prayer, and on the person of Christ—a Christian life that reflects His person and His holiness.

"But above all these things put on sincere brotherly love, which is the bond of perfection." (Colossians 3:14).

Beyond our large gatherings, which certainly have their place, let us seek this year that heart-to-heart with God. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to search and purify the depths of our Christian life. Let us drop our masks and confess to God with a repentant heart our compromises, our hypocrisies, and our lack of love for God and for our neighbor.

May 2026 be the beginning of a new fire in our lives, our families, our churches, and within our people, in Armenia and in the diaspora. Let us prepare for the return of Christ, which is imminent, through sanctified lives, inspiring Christian living, and an authentic Christian commitment that God will use, as in 1846, for a spiritual awakening that will impact the neighborhoods, cities, and countries where we live.

This awakening, before spreading, must begin with me and with you who are reading these lines. Are you willing to live it starting today?

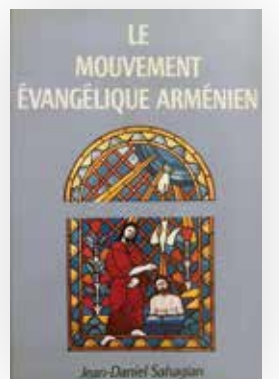
I pray that this vision becomes a reality.

I encourage you to obtain and read Pastor Jean-Daniel Sahagian's book: "The Armenian Evangelical Movement: From its Origins to the Present Day."

### Source Consulted

Sahagian, Jean-Daniel. *Le Mouvement Évangélique Arménien*. IMEAF, 1986.

"May 2026 be the beginning of a new fire in our lives..."



# 2026 - ԱՐԹՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՏԱՐԻ

By Rev. Gilbert Léonian

**«Արթնցիր, դուն որ կը քնանաս, ու կանգնէ մեռելներէն, եւ Քրիստոս պիտի փայլի քու վրայ» – Եփես. 5. 14:**

**«Կը վերյիշեցնես քեզի՝ որ արծարծես Աստուծոյ շնորհը» – 2 Տիմ. 1. 6:**

2026 թուականի մեկնարկով մենք կը սկսինք շար կարեւոր ժամանակաշրջան մը Հայ Աւետարանականներուն համար, Ֆրանսայի թէ համայն աշխարհի մէջ: Իրօք՝ 1 Յուլիս 1846-ին ծնունդ առաւ առաջին Հայ Աւետ. Եկեղեցին՝ Կ. Պոլսոյ մէջ: Ես պիտի չանդրադառնամ 180 տարի առաջ տեղի ունեցած այս ծնունդի պատմական հանգամանքներուն:

Ես կը փափաքիմ կեդրոնանալ այս հոգեւոր արթնութեան դրդապատճառներուն վրայ. որովհետեւ ան ստուգիւ լայնածաւալ, իսկական հոգեւոր զարթօնք մըն էր, որուն կարեւորութիւնը պէտք է գնահատել, արժեւորել եւ ընկալել: Այս արթնութիւնը հայ ազգէն ներս ծնունդ առաւ 1846-ին, ու մենք այսօր՝ 2026-ին՝ անոր պտուղներն ու ժառանգորդներն ենք:

Ինչո՞ւ տեղի ունեցաւ այս արթնութիւնը: Որովհետեւ Հայ Առաքելական Եկեղեցին, անոր հոգեւորականներն ու հաւատարմները կը բաւականանային իրենց անցեալով. կարծրացած էին քրիստոնէական աւանդոյթներու մէջ, կորսնցնելով առաջին սիրոյ բոցը՝ Լաւոդիկէի եկեղեցին նման (Յայտ. 3. 14-19): Հիմնադիր հայրերուն՝ Թադէոս եւ Բարթողոմէոս առաքելներուն, Գրիգոր Լուսաւորիչին ջերմեանդութիւնն ու նախանձախնդրութիւնը տեղի տուած էին մակերեսային կրօնական արարողութեան, որ կը սատարէր ծէսերու մշակման, որքան ալ գեղեցիկ ըլլային անոնք, ի վնաս կենդանի, անուցիչ եւ եռանդուն աստուածաշնչական հաւատքին: Ժողովուրդը ծարաւ էր արթնութեան, հոգեւոր զարթօնքի:

Երեք գործօններ նպաստեցին վերածնունդի այս բաղձանքին.

1. Աստուածաշունչին եւ անոր կենսատու պարգամին հասկնալի լեզուով ընթերցումը:
2. Աստուծոյ հետ մտերիմ եւ անձնական յարաբերութեան յայտնաբերումը՝ անհատական թէ հաւաքական աղօթքի միջոցով, օգտագործելով խօսակցական լեզուն:
3. Քրիստոսի անձին կեդրոնական դերը եւ անոր պարգեւած անձնական ու ձրի փրկութիւնը, որ միակ միջոցն է մարդուն ներքին փոխակերպութեան:

Ինչպէս Հոգեգալուստի օրը՝ վերնաբան մէջ, Սուրբ Հոգին այցելեց 40 հիմնադիր հաւատարմներուն՝ 37 այր ու երեք կին, որոնք նոր կեանքի խոր փափաքով հաւաքուած էին: Եւ այս արթնութեան պտուղները չուշացան բացայայտելու: Սոյն վերանորոգուած քրիստոնէաները դարձան եռանդուն վկաները Քրիստոսի եւ անոր աւետարանին, որ փրկութեան աղբիւրն է բոլոր մարդոց:

Վեր. Դանիէլ Սահակեան՝ իր «Հայ Աւետարանական Շարժումը» գիրքին մէջ գրած է. «Հայաստանեայց Աւետարանական Եկեղեցիի հիմնադրութեան յաջորդող տասը տարիներուն՝ արտասովոր աճ մը արձանագրուեցաւ. 25 կազմակերպուած եկեղեցիներ միացան Պոլսոյ մէջ հիմնուած առաջին եկեղեցիին»: Արթնութեան կրակը տարածուեցաւ Պոլիսէն մինչեւ Անատոլիա եւ աւելի հեռունները:

1852-ին՝ Վեր. Տէր Սահակեան, ընկերակցութեամբ ուսուցիչ Սիմոն Դաւիթեանի, աւետարանչական շրջագայութիւն մը կատարեց՝ այցելելով Արեւելեան Թուրքիոյ 25 քաղաքներ, ու հասնելով մինչեւ Քեսապ, Հալէպ եւ Պէյրութ: Ան գրեց. «Ոչ ոք՝ առանց տեսնելու՝ կրնայ ճշգրիտ պատկերացում մը կազմել այդ տարածաշրջանի մեր հայրենակիցներուն մէջ տեղի ունեցած արտասովոր հոգեւոր արթնութեան մասին»:

Ինչ էր այս հոգեւոր արթնութեան կորիզը — նախապատուութիւն տալ աւետարանչութեան եւ նոր եկեղեցիներու հիմնադրութեան:

2026-ին ՄԵՐ ՀԱՅ ԱԻԵՏԱՐԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՆԵՐՈՒ ԾՏԱՊ ԿԱՐԻՔԸ ՈՒՆԻՆ ՆՈՐ ԱՐԹՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ: Որպէս Հայ Աւետարանական քրիստոնէաներ՝ ինչ է վիճակը մեր հոգեւոր առողջութեան: Եկէք դադրինք հայ պատմական եկեղեցիներու գաղջութիւնը քննադատելէ: Անհատապէս եւ անկեղծօրէն մենք մեզի հարց տանք. «Ինչ պատահեցաւ իմ առաջին սիրոյ բոցիս: Արդե՞օք Քրիստոս տակաւին իմ կեանքիս առաջնահերթութիւնն է: Ուր են իմ եռանդս եւ ուժականութիւնս, իմ շրջապատիս վկայելու Յիսուս Քրիստոսի վրայ ունեցած անձնական հաւատքիս մասին: «Ինչ է աւետարանչութեան նկատմամբ իմ տեսլականս, ու կորսուած հոգիներու փրկութեան հանդէպ իմ տեսչանքս»:

Առանց ինքնախարազանման ենթարկելու մեր անձերը, պէտք է հաստատենք որ 24 երկիրներու մէջ արմատացած մեր եկեղեցիներէն որոշ մաս մը ակնհայտ է այս բոցի տկարացման, եւ երբեմն՝ նոյնիսկ աւելին: Աւետարանական աւանդոյթն ու ձեւապաշտութիւնը փոխարինած են աւետարանական ոգեւորութիւնը եւ ուժականութիւնը: Մենք աւելի շար պաշտպանողական դիրքի վրայ կը գտնուինք, քան թէ տարածման:

Կ'աղօթեմ որ տարեդարձի այս 2026 տարին ըլլայ խոր եւ տեսական արթնութեան տարի՝ Սուրբ Հոգիին հզօր այցելութեան միջոցով: Թող Աստուած մեզմէ իւրաքանչիւրին մէջ վերակենդանացնէ կենսունակ հաւատքի բոցը՝ կեդրոնացած Աստուծոյ խօսքին հեղինակութեան, յաղթական աղօթքի եւ քրիստոնէական կեանքի վրայ, որ կ'արտացոլացնէ Քրիստոսի անձն ու սրբութիւնը: «Եւ այս բոլոր բաներուն վրայ սէրը հազնինք, որ կատարելութեան կասն է» – Կող. 3. 14:

Թէեւ մեր մեծ հաւաքները անշուշտ իրենց տեղն ունին, եկէք այս տարի ձգտինք սրտանց զրոյց ունենալ Աստուծոյ հետ: Թո՛յլ տանք որ Սուրբ Հոգին քննէ ու մաքրէ մեր քրիստոնէական կեանքի խորերը: Հանենք մեր դիմակները եւ զղջացող սրտով խոստովանինք Աստուծոյ մեր զիջումները, կեղծաւորութիւնները, Աստուծոյ եւ մերձաւորին նկատմամբ մեր սիրոյ պակասը:

Թող 2026 տարին նոր հուր մը բռնկեցնէ մեր կեանքերէն, ընդանիքներէն, եկեղեցիներէն եւ ժողովուրդէն՝ ներս՝ Հայաստանի թէ Սփիւռքի մէջ: Եկէք պատրաստուինք Քրիստոսի մօտալուր վերադարձին՝ սրբագործուած, ոգեշնչող քրիստոնէական կեանքերով, իսկական քրիստոնէական նուիրուածութեամբ, որպէսզի Աստուած մեզ եւս գործածէ, ինչպէս 1846-ին, հոգեւոր արթնութեան համար՝ մեր թաղերուն, քաղաքներուն ու երկիրներուն մէջ: Նախքան այս արթնութեան տարածումը, ան պէտք է սկսի ինձմով եւ քեզմով՝ որ այս տողերը կը կարդաս: Արդե՞օք համամիտ ես...: Կ'աղօթեմ որ այս տեսիլքը իրականութիւն դառնայ:

# Educational Institutions



## Theological Institutions that Trained Armenian Evangelical Pastors and Church Leaders in Turkey (1839-1915)

By Arda Melkonian

Following the establishment of the Armenian Evangelical Church, the American missionaries in Turkey provided significant assistance to the newly established community. Their contribution was primarily in the field of education by establishing schools and theological seminaries.

### Two Key Developments:

#### Formation of American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1810 and Turco-American Treaty of 1830

In 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was formed. It developed from a religious revival called the Second Great Awakening during the late 18th to early 19th century. Formed by members of the Congregational Church in Massachusetts, it was the first American foreign mission society, and became the most consequential missionary organization. In the early days, the ABCFM consisted of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and German Reformed churches, but after 1870, it became the missionary arm of the Congregational denomination.

Board missionaries sought to empower local communities by establishing educational institutions. They provided all levels of education, from kindergarten through seminary, allowing members of the community to advance their educational training. The presence of American-run institutions of higher education allowed females to pursue educational opportunities that had been previously denied to them. These institutions also played a vital role in the training and development of church leaders.

Two decades later, the 1830 Treaty of Navigation and Commerce, also known as the Turco-American Treaty of 1830, established official U.S.-Turkish relations. The treaty allowed American citizens to enter and travel within the Ottoman Empire, opening the door for American churches to send missionaries to Turkey.

#### Boys' and Girls' High Schools, and Theological Seminaries

By 1850, the American Board had seven centers of missionary work: Constantinople, Bebek, Bursa, Smyrna, Trebizond, Erzurum, and Aintab. And by 1860, the Board had divided Turkey into three Mission fields: the Western, the Central and the Eastern.

The American Board established a theological school in each of the three Missions. In the Western field, they founded a school in Bebek (Constantinople) which was moved to Marsovan in 1865. In the Central field, they established a school in Aintab which was moved to Marash in 1865. And in the Eastern region, they established an institution at Tocat which was moved to Kharpert in 1859.

The Board opened the following colleges: Central Turkey College (Aintab, 1874); Euphrates College (Kharpert, 1876); Anatolia College (Marsovan, 1886); International College (Smyrna, 1902); and St. Paul's Institute (Darson (Tarsus), 1904). There were plans to open a College at Van when World War I started.

The missionaries opened boarding schools and seminaries for females. A girls' boarding school was opened in Pera in 1845, and another was opened in Marsovan in 1868. A Home School was established in Constantinople in 1871, which in 1890 became the American College for Girls at Constantinople, later renamed Constantinople College in 1914. A girls' school was opened in 1874 in Nicomedia and later moved to Bardezag, and in 1886 moved to Adabazar. In 1880, the Central Turkey College for Girls, a girls' seminary, was opened in Marash. The following year, in 1881, the Collegiate Institute for Girls was founded at Smyrna.

*"American missionary schools fundamentally changed the educational landscape..."*



Bebek Seminary (Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian Collection)



Marsovan College Main Building (Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian Collection)

#### Bebek Seminary (1839-1862)

The Bebek Mission Seminary, a seminary for boys, opened in Bebek, near Constantinople in 1839. Initially, the institution provided both secular and religious education, but eventually shifted its focus to theological training. The Bebek Seminary thrived during the late 1850s and early 1860s and made a significant contribution to the Armenian Evangelical community by training the first two generations of its preachers. Concerned with operating a seminary in a cosmopolitan city like Constantinople, the Board decided to close the Seminary at Bebek and move it to Marsovan. The Bebek Seminary was closed in 1862.



Marash Theological Seminary (Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian Collection)



School of Religion of Athens (Faliro). (Digitized by Rev. Vicken Cholakian, Armenian Evangelical World Council Digital Archive Project.)

### The Three Theological Seminaries - Marsovan, Kharpert, Marash

#### Marsovan (1864-1915)

Marsovan Seminary opened in 1864-65 strictly as a theological institution, having eliminated its liberal education curriculum, with classes taught in Armenian (not English). Marsovan was a small town located in the Black Sea region on the road between Ankara and Samsun (on the Black Sea coast). The location was considered to be better suited for a theological seminary than Bebek, near Constantinople. The Seminary became part of Anatolia College which evolved from the seminary's High School for Boys. Marsovan Seminary, along with Anatolia College, continued its educational mission of training leaders until 1915.

#### Kharpert (1859-1915)

The oldest Armenian theological seminary was founded at Tokat (Yevtogia in Armenian), 100 miles southeast of Marsovan, in 1854. When a fire destroyed the campus in 1859, the Board decided to move the Seminary to Kharpert. Kharpert became the headquarters for the Mission to Central Turkey. The Seminary initially offered both religious and secular instruction but later changed its focus to theological education.

During the massacres of 1895, several pastors and teachers were murdered and the Seminary was forced to close. In 1900, the Seminary reopened and continued to operate until the Genocide of 1915.

The American missionaries also founded a coeducational high school, Armenia College (later Euphrates College) in Kharpert in 1878. With the establishment of Armenia College, students took prerequisite courses at the College, allowing the Seminary to focus on more advanced instruction. The campus included a hospital and an orphanage in addition to the theological seminary and high school for boys and girls.

Following the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire that began in 1908, the school experienced a revival. A printing press was installed, and the college began printing a newspaper as well as religious books and textbooks in Armenian. However, a few years later, during the Armenian Genocide, several Armenian faculty members were arrested and executed. The Ottoman army occupied the buildings, converting them into a training camp and military hospital. Euphrates College closed after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and there is no physical evidence of its existence today.

#### Marash (1867-1915)

Theological classes began in 1850 in Aintab as "home study" groups. Within a few years, it became apparent that more advanced, formal religious instruction was needed. The Board decided to re-open a school in Aintab which had closed a few years earlier. The school had provided instruction between 1854-66, training the pastors and leaders of the Armenian Evangelical churches in Cilicia.

The Board recognized the need to establish a Theological Seminary in Cilicia, and they started the school in Marash in 1867-68. The Marash Theological School evolved to resemble American seminaries similar to the Theological Seminary at Kharpert. It is notable that

the Marash Seminary accepted non-Evangelical students. It opened its doors to individuals training to become priests in the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Marash Seminary continued to operate, training pastors and teachers for the churches of the Armenian Evangelical Churches of Cilicia, until the Armenian Genocide.

The Board also founded a Christian high school, Central Turkey College or Aintab College in 1874 which also had a branch for girls, the Central Turkey Girls' College. The Central Turkey College relocated to Aleppo, Syria in 1924 and was renamed "Aleppo College."

#### The School of Religion in Constantinople and Athens (1922-1932)

The Armenian Genocide eliminated all forms of Armenian existence in Turkey including educational institutions. Several years later, in 1922, the American Board recommended opening a School of Religion to train pastors and teachers. The decision was made to open the school in Constantinople in order to serve students from Turkey as well as Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. The School enrolled both male and female students, from various denominations - Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Armenian Orthodox, and Russian Orthodox.

The School had just begun operating when the Burning of Smyrna took place (September 13-22, 1922), destroying the Armenian and Greek quarters of the city. The inhabitants of these quarters were driven out. The Board moved the Armenian and Greek students to Athens as a temporary measure with the intention of bringing them back to Constantinople eventually. When it became clear that the Armenian and Greek students would not be able to return, the Board concluded that they could not continue to operate the school in two locations - Athens and Constantinople. The decision was made to close the Athens location but before it was implemented, the Turkish government ordered the School in Constantinople to close. So the School of Religion in Constantinople was moved to Athens where it trained students for ministry until 1932. When it was no longer financially feasible to maintain a branch in Athens, the School considered the possibility of a merger and relocation to Beirut, Lebanon. In 1932, the School of Athens and the School for Religious Workers in Beirut merged to form the Near East School of Theology (NEST).

#### Summary

The American missionary schools fundamentally changed the educational landscape in these cities and towns, introducing American educational methods and providing educational opportunities for girls. They honored the local culture by providing instruction primarily in Armenian. The institutions they established provided vital educational training for Armenian Evangelical youth and clergy.

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# The Athens of Cilicia: The Aintab College Testimony

By Rev. Dr. Haig Kherlopian

It started, as many great things do, with a group of college students who had no idea what they were getting themselves into.

In August 1806, five students at Williams College in Massachusetts gathered to discuss spreading the Gospel to Asia—not exactly typical Saturday afternoon plans. Before they could get far, a thunderstorm drove them to seek shelter under a large haystack. Huddled in the rain, they didn't pack up and go home. They prayed. They talked. They emerged from that field with a conviction to evangelize the world.

Their leader, Samuel Mills, summed it up simply: "We can do it, if we will."

Six years later, the first American missionaries set sail. The organization they founded—the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)—eventually sent nearly 5,000 missionaries to 34 countries. Hospitals, schools, and colleges sprouted across the Middle East, all tracing their roots back to five students and a haystack in New England. One of those schools was Central Turkey College in Aintab.

In the mid-nineteenth century, missionaries began working among the Armenian population of Aintab, near the birthplace of the Apostle Paul. The early days were fraught with friction; the first missionary to preach was driven out by a hostile crowd. Yet, that very incident produced the community's first Protestant convert: a young man so struck by the missionary's composure amid the mob that he joined the movement.

A cholera outbreak later gave the mission an unexpected foothold. Dr. Azariah Smith, a medical missionary, remained in the city to treat the sick. His selfless service earned the community's trust, and in 1848, he opened the first Armenian Protestant congregation with eight Armenians. Notably, three were former Armenian Apostolic clergy: Bedros Jizmejian, Margos Papazian, and Mikael Vartabed. Within two decades, Aintab became one of the largest evangelical communities in the Ottoman Empire.

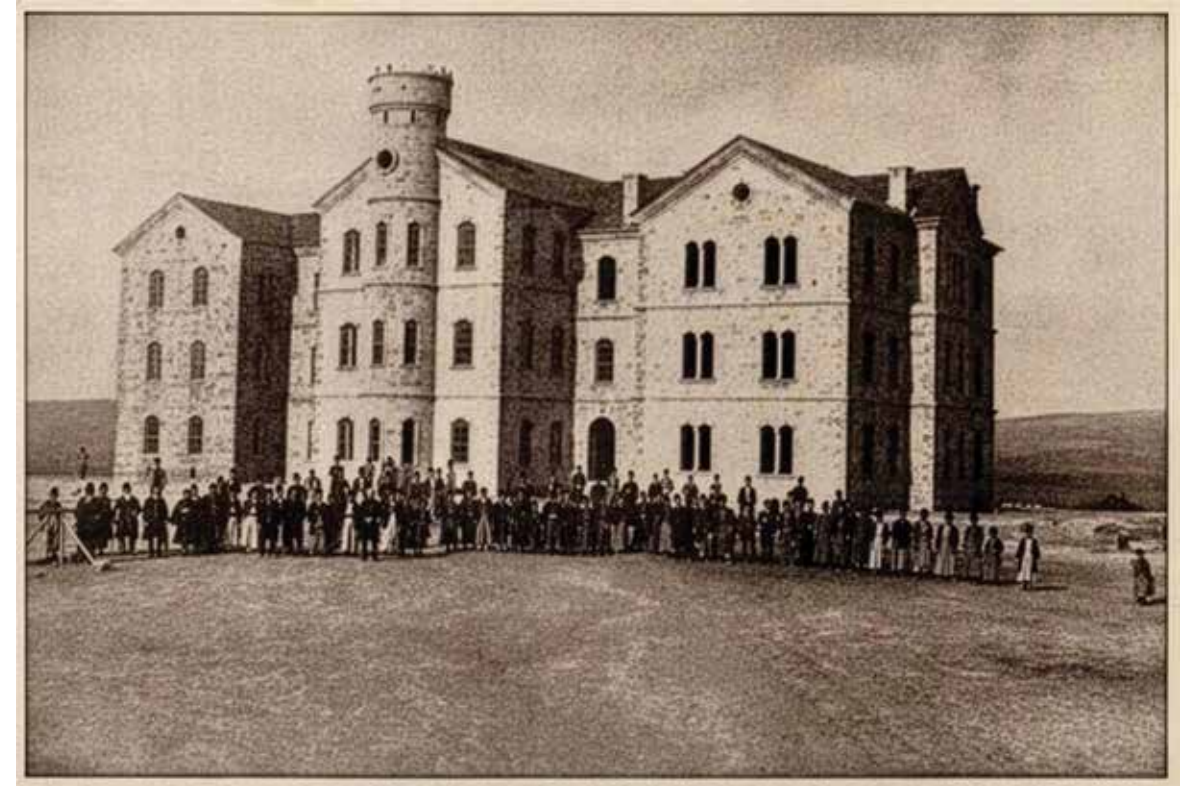
As the church grew, so did the need for educated leaders. The local Armenian community raised significant funds, and Central Turkey College received its official charter in 1874, which stated that: "The primary object of the Central Turkey College is the thorough education of Pastors, Preachers, and Teachers for the evangelical churches of Central Turkey. A secondary, but important object, will be the general advance of true Science and Civilization. Hence the College shall always be a Christian College, conducted and governed according to the principles of evangelical Christianity."

The college opened its doors on October 11, 1876. My great-grandfather, Hanne Kherlopian, was a graduate of that inaugural class of 1880.

The college stood apart from other mission institutions of its era. Historian Judd W. Kennedy notes it was defined by three core ideals:

**Native Rule:** A commitment to local control. Many professors were Armenian—some trained at Yale—and classes were conducted in Turkish and Armenian. **Community Priority:** Prioritizing local spiritual and physical needs over the ABCFM's rigid administrative goals. **Christian Character:** An unwavering mission to produce "Christian men" for regional regeneration.

*"...the Armenian Genocide failed to extinguish the evangelical mission."*



Aintab College, 1911 (Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian Collection)

Under its first president, Rev. T. C. Trowbridge, the college established a robust curriculum of theology, science, history, and medicine, affiliated with the Azariah Smith Hospital. By 1885, it enrolled 142 students from thirty different towns. The college was the hub that gave Aintab the moniker: "The Athens of Cilicia."

Rev. Americus Fuller took the helm during a season of both spiritual renewal and physical catastrophe. His presidency began with a vibrant revival, but the college's endurance was soon tested. On December 26, 1890, a devastating fire leveled the main building. Fuller's steady leadership guided the community through a painstaking reconstruction, reopening the doors in 1893.

His tenure proved even more vital during the Hamidian massacres (1894–1896), as he transformed the campus into a sanctuary for those displaced by the violence. Under his care, the college didn't merely survive; it reached record enrollment before his health necessitated a return to America in 1905.

Dr. John Merrill inherited a thriving institution of 144 students, but his presidency was ultimately defined by an increasingly hostile political landscape. He navigated the college through the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the horrific Adana massacres of 1909, during which students and Professor Sarkis Levonian were martyred.

Five years later, during the Armenian Genocide, the situation reached a breaking point. Ottoman authorities demanded faculty lists and deported nearly all Armenian staff members. The military soon occupied the campus, and the student body was decimated. In 1919, Aintab College was officially closed.

Despite this unspeakable evil, the Armenian Genocide failed to extinguish the evangelical mission. The uprooted Armenian community began planning anew in Aleppo, Syria. Reborn as Aleppo College, the spirit of Aintab continues today in Syria and across the Armenian diaspora wherever the gospel is preached. Rev. Dicran Kherlopian (Class of 1913) perhaps summarized the resilience of the institution best: "We did not leave our faith in the ruins of Aintab. We carried the Word of God as our only map, and where we opened the Bible, there was Armenia."



# Euphrates Seminary-College (1859-1915)

**A Brief History and Sacred Mission of Learning in Kharpert**  
By Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian

The story of Euphrates College in Kharpert is far more than the history of a school. It is the story of a sacred vision which joined faith, education, service, and national awakening in the life of the Armenian people of the Ottoman Empire. Its founding belongs to a wider 19th century movement in which Christian mission was understood not merely as preaching from the pulpit, but also as forming minds, shaping character, and preparing leaders for both church and society.

The establishment of Euphrates College must therefore be understood within the broader educational efforts of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). During the 19th century, the American Board increasingly came to believe that evangelization and education were inseparable. For that reason, the Board founded schools, seminaries, and later institutions of higher education throughout the Ottoman Empire and collaborated with local Armenian Evangelical Unions for overseeing their missions.

This vision gave birth to some of the most significant educational institutions of the era. Among them was Robert College in Constantinople, founded in 1868 through the generous philanthropy of Christopher R. Robert of New York. In the decades that followed, the American Board helped establish a network of advanced schools across Anatolia, including Central Turkey College in Aintab (1876), Euphrates College in Kharpert (Seminary in 1859; College in 1878), Anatolia College in Marsovan (1886), St. Paul Institute in Tarsus (1887), and the Apostolic Institute of Konya (1888), later known as Jenanian College.

Within this larger movement, Euphrates College emerged as one of the most important centers of higher learning for Armenians in eastern Anatolia. Its significance lay not only in its academic achievements, but also in its role as a spiritual and cultural institution. It stood at the intersection of Christian mission, Armenian identity, and educational renewal.

*"Euphrates College...is the story of a sacred vision..."*

## From Seminary to College

The roots of Euphrates College go back to 1859, when three visionary leaders—Rev. O. P. Allen, Rev. Crosby H. Wheeler, and Rev. G. Dunmore—founded a three-year theological seminary in Kharpert. This seminary was the seed from which the later college would grow. It was not merely a training school for clergy; it was a center of Christian formation intended to strengthen the Armenian churches and prepare capable servants for the life of the community.

The seminary attracted students from all ages. A school for women was also established, with the important aim of preparing teachers of religious instruction and educators for the churches and villages of the region. This alone reveals the breadth of the founders' vision. They understood that a healthy Christian community required not only pastors, but also educated women and men who could teach, nurture, and guide the next generation.

Nineteen years later, in 1878, this theological seminary became the cornerstone of what was first called Armenia College, and later Euphrates College. The transition from seminary to college represented a major development in Armenian Evangelical educational life. The institution's purpose broadened: it would now serve not only as a place for ministerial preparation, but also as a center for higher learning, teacher training, and intellectual leadership.

## A Mission Beyond Denominational Boundaries

One of the most remarkable aspects of the seminary and later the college was its openness. Although founded within the Protestant missionary context, students from the Armenian Apostolic Mother Church also attended. They were not compelled to abandon their own religious convictions. On the contrary, the institution's central aim



*Euphrates College (Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian Collection)*

was not sectarian control, but the spiritual and intellectual enlightenment of the Armenian people.

Students were taught, first of all, to live a pure life, to possess a consciousness of national identity, and to be devoted to serving the nation. These principles show that the college saw education not as an end in itself, but as a sacred trust. Knowledge was to be joined with virtue, and learning with responsibility.

## A Broad and Noble Curriculum

The curriculum of the theological seminary was strikingly rich and wide-ranging. Students were taught: Armenian language; Classical Armenian (Grabar) and Modern Armenian grammar; Rhetoric; Armenian national and church history; World history; Theology; Ethics; Philosophy; Church music; Astronomy/Cosmology; Anatomy; Health and hygiene.

This curriculum demonstrates that the founders sought to educate the whole person. Students were to be rooted in their Armenian Christian heritage, trained in theology and moral thought, and also introduced to the sciences and humanities.

## Those Who Taught and Served

The seminary and college were shaped by both foreign missionaries and Armenian educators. Among the missionary teachers were Prof. O. P. Allen, Rev. Crosby Wheeler, Rev. G. Barnum, Rev. G. Brown, Dr. Henry Riggs, and Rev. Ernest Riggs. Alongside them stood a distinguished group of Armenian instructors whose service gave the institution its local depth and national character.

These included:

- Prof. Nigoghos Tenekejian, teacher of Turkish and History
- Prof. K. Soghikian, teacher of Armenian Language and Elementary Sciences
- Prof. Hovhannes Boojikian, teacher of Philosophy
- Prof. Khatchador Nahigian, teacher of Mathematics
- Rev. Asadour Eghoian, preacher and teacher
- Rev. Vartan Amirkhanian, preacher and teacher
- Der Vartan Fr. Aslanian, teacher of the History of the Armenian Apostolic Church

Their presence reminds us that Euphrates College was a shared labor, in which Armenian teachers and clergy played a vital role in forming their own people.

## Its Fruit in Church and Nation

Over the course of 56 years, the seminary graduated 116 students. Though the number may seem modest by



Euphrates College (Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian Collection)

modern standards, its impact was far-reaching. These graduates became pastors, teachers, and servants of the Armenian people in many places. Among those who later served as pastors were Mourad Mouradian, Krikor Khachadourian, Kevork Enfiejian, Garabed Vartabed Lulejian, Sarkis Sakalian, Asadour Topouzian, Bedros Garabedian, Zakaria Bedrosian, and Socrates Mkhitarian.

#### The College Proper and Its Unfulfilled Future

After the success of the theological seminary, Rev. Crosby Wheeler envisioned a full academic college of comparable caliber. To realize this dream, he traveled to the United States and launched a fundraising campaign. Within three years, he raised the remarkable sum of \$180,000, making possible the formal establishment of Armenia (Euphrates) College in 1878.

The college was administered through a Board of Trustees in the United States, which handled financial matters, while a local governing board oversaw educational affairs. Importantly, there was a long-term plan that after 1925, the administration would be fully transferred to local leadership. That vision suggests that the founders ultimately hoped for a mature, self-sustaining Armenian-led institution.

Tragically, that hope was never fulfilled. The Armenian Genocide of 1915 intervened and shattered the life of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire. What might have become a lasting center of Armenian Christian higher education was violently cut short.

#### A Legacy Worth Remembering

Euphrates College had six presidents, beginning with Rev. Crosby Wheeler (1878-1893) and ending with Rev. Ernest Riggs (1910-1915). Yet the true legacy of the college is not found merely in administrative succession or institutional dates. Its enduring significance lies in its mission.

Euphrates College stood for the conviction that Christian faith must engage the mind, that education is a ministry, and that a people can be strengthened through the formation of morally serious, spiritually grounded, and intellectually capable leaders.

For the Armenian Evangelical heritage, and indeed for the wider Armenian Christian memory, Euphrates College remains a powerful symbol of what can happen when the church commits itself to both truth and service, to both Scripture and learning, and to both God and nation. Its buildings may have fallen silent, but the spiritual and the educational mission of the Armenian Evangelical Church still speaks.

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# Haigazian University: Inspiring Visionary Leadership

By Mira Yardemian

Founded on October 17, 1955, Haigazian University in Beirut, stands as a testament to perseverance, vision, and the enduring spirit of education. Named in honor of Armenag Haigazian—a distinguished theologian, musician, academic, and linguist who tragically fell victim to the Armenian Genocide—the university was established through the collaborative efforts of the Armenian Missionary Association of America and the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. As an American style liberal arts institution, Haigazian's mission has remained steadfast: to provide higher education grounded in the principles of its motto: truth, freedom, and service.

In the face of Lebanon's turbulent history, Haigazian University has embodied the idea of "resurrection in action," overcoming the nation's many challenges to continue its commitment to academic excellence and social contribution.

A key figure in the university's inception was American missionary Ms. Elizabeth Webb's ten-room house in Beirut's Kantari district where she hoped Armenian girls would be educated. These humble beginnings would eventually evolve into the bustling university campus that now occupies seven buildings, serving as a center for learning for more than 600 students annually.

The university's academic legacy includes notable achievements, one of the most remarkable being the launch of the first rocket in the Middle East during the 1960s, known as the Cedar Rocket.

Beyond these early triumphs, Haigazian University has continued to develop and expand its academic offerings. The Center for Continuing Education has become a hub for lifelong learning and teacher training, offering a range of programs across various disciplines. The Armenian Diaspora Research Center and the Armenian Studies Program are among the university's proudest initiatives, dedicated to preserving and promoting Armenian heritage and culture. Since 1970, the Haigazian University Armenological Review has published over 1,600 academic reviews, contributing to the global



Inge Markarian's Etching Mugar Building, Haigazian University.

understanding of Armenian studies through 48 books. The university's publishing arm, Haigazian University Press, has already released 59 books, adding to the scholarly richness of the Armenian Diaspora.

Among its many achievements, Haigazian University's Faculty of Business Administration and Economics recently received accreditation from the "International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE)" further solidifying its reputation as a leader in higher education.

The university's reach extends beyond the classroom. It has forged valuable partnerships with both Armenian and non-Armenian institutions, philanthropic organizations, and universities across the globe. As a member of the Association of American International Colleges and Universities and the Consortium for Global Education, Haigazian's global network continues to expand.

Haigazian University is not only a center for intellectual pursuit but also a cradle for future leaders. Its alumni have made significant contributions to various fields, including academia, politics, business, technology, healthcare, media, and nonprofit organizations.

At the heart of Haigazian's mission is its commitment to the financial needs of its students. The university places great emphasis on offering need-based and merit scholarships, ensuring that all capable students have access to the education they deserve. Securing funding for scholarships remains a critical priority for the institution's continued success.

As it celebrates its 70th anniversary, Haigazian University reflects on its rich heritage, its many accomplishments, and its clear vision for the future, embodying its anniversary slogan: "**Inspiring Visionary Leadership.**"



Mugar Building, Haigazian University.

# Our Community



## The Early Years of the Armenian Evangelical Community in Anjar, Lebanon<sup>1</sup>

By Dr. Vahram L. Shemmassian

The year 2026 marks the 87th anniversary of the establishment of Anjar, home to Musa Dagh Armenians situated in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley along the Beirut-Damascus international highway, near the Syrian border. The genesis of this unique rural town in September 1939 was fraught with myriad difficulties. Despite the challenges, the settlers from the outset made every effort to reconstruct their personal and communal lives in the new milieu.

It all started in the Sanjak of Alexandretta/Iskenderun, an autonomous province in northwestern Syria between the two World Wars. Musa Dagh was situated within this administrative unit. A political crisis beginning in 1936 shook the Sanjak society to its core as winds of change from the French mandate to Turkish suzerainty increasingly caused panic. The turmoil grew to alarming proportions when a farcical election in 1938 installed a Turkish majority in the Sanjak's legislature. A year later, Turkey annexed the area. Refusing to live under Turkish rule, the overwhelming majority of Musa Dagh Armenians exited the Sanjak and relocated to Anjar with French assistance.<sup>2</sup>

As soon as the refugees arrived in Anjar, the Sanjak refugees committee of the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE) wrote to Colonel Philibert Collet, French High Commission's bureau chief for the installation of the Sanjak Armenian refugees in Syria and Lebanon, with the following: the value of the fixed properties of the Bitias and Yoghun Oluk Armenian Evangelical communities in Musa Dagh amounted to 35,000 Syrian liras and 5,000 liras, respectively, for a total of 40,000 liras, in lieu of which the UAECNE requested 4,000 square meter separate lots for each of the two Evangelical groups in Anjar to build churches, schools, and parsonages on.<sup>3</sup> During a meeting held on September 7, 1939 between Rev. Yenovk Guekguezian, president of the UAECNE Sanjak Refugees Committee, and Col. Collet to discuss the above

letter, the latter promised to comply with the stated request.<sup>4</sup> In a follow up letter to Col. Collet, Rev. Guekguezian assured his committee's commitment to assume the cost of building the churches entirely, as well as promised to build the schools if the French provided the cement and iron. As for the parsonages, he asked that the French treat them similar to regular houses, that is, to build them with French money.<sup>5</sup> Information is lacking whether Col. Collet complied.

In any case, a certificate issued by the UAECNE on October 24 announced the designation of Rev. Sisag Manougian as its representative in the new Sanjak refugee camps in Lebanon to oversee the Armenian Evangelical affairs there.<sup>6</sup> Four months later, on February 23, 1940, the UAECNE decided to build a church (instead of two) at Anjar, and asked the *Inspecteur Général du Contrôle des Sociétés Concessionnaires et Travaux Publiques du Haut-Commissariat* at Beirut if he would "assume the execution of that edifice," expressing readiness to place at his disposal the funds necessary for the construction.<sup>7</sup> We do not know if this request was fulfilled. What we know, however, is the fact that by March 6 the Evangelical community in Anjar received a lot (instead of two) for a church, two schools (but only one would be built eventually), and a parsonage.<sup>8</sup>

The first worship service of the Armenian Evangelical congregation in Anjar took place on September 17, 1939 in a tent-church. A year later, on September 22, 1940, the inauguration of an actual church building took place with a special service in the presence of more than 300 persons. Rev. Aram Hadidian, who was the Bitias church minister from 1935 until their relocation to Anjar, led the service. Five guest pastors, namely, Rev. Manougian, Rev. Guekguezian, Rev. Siragan Aghbabian, Rev. Asadur Sadakian, and Rev. Piuzant Kalfayan, delivered distinct sermons. A choir consisting of singers brought together from neighboring villages participated under maestro Hagop Uvezian.<sup>9</sup> During 1941-42 there were in Anjar 103



Armenian Evangelical Church of Anjar in the early years (Dr. Vahram Shemmassian Collection)

Armenian Evangelical families with a total of 423 persons. Of the latter, seventy-nine (18.7%) were church members.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most active groups affiliated with the Evangelical Church was the *Chanits* (Christian Endeavor) society. It originally was formed by Pastor Hagop Giurlekian in 1926 in Bitias. In Anjar, the *Chanits* was revived in 1940. By the spring of 1944, it consisted of a 28-member honorary ladies' section, a 15-member young women's section, and a 41-member teenagers' section for boys and girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen. These groups held their meetings immediately after the Sunday morning worship services, in which they also participated by singing new songs. As was customary in Musa Dagh, they likewise staged dramas once or twice a year.<sup>11</sup>

Besides the *Chanits* society, in 1943-44 there existed a 24-member association for young men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, led by Tovmas Kadeian. The purpose of this Youth Association was to keep individuals who were not members of the *Chanits* in "the church orbit." Their activities included sports competitions and especially lecture series and informal chats on literary topics for the public at large. Singing and playing musical instruments constituted an integral part of the programs.<sup>12</sup>

The Sunday school was one of the most dynamic aspects of Evangelical life. The number of children attending Sunday school during 1943-44 amounted to

about 150. As a positive development, they were taught by eleven homegrown teachers, whereas in Musa Dagh their instructor was a single, non-native female teacher. These teachers were trained weekly by Rev. Hadidian. The various sections based on age carried the names of flowers and precious stones. There was even a Swing section (*Ororotsi pazhin*) for the youngest kids with a three-month special program. The upper classes were tested on their Bible study lessons to assess their spiritual growth. A *bon* (coupon) system was implemented for children to be able to afford offerings each Sunday. Due to shortage of space, instructions took place during mornings for the first half of the year and evenings for the second half.<sup>13</sup>

A Women's Auxiliary was initiated, albeit somewhat late, to play an important role in the church life. Its main objective was to ensure the mental, psychological, and physical wellbeing of members. They met on Friday afternoons under the leadership of Mary Varbedian, who served as chairwoman of a 12-member committee.<sup>14</sup> A woman evangelist who spoke the Musa Dagh dialect and had good spiritual experience additionally provided Christian nourishment. Similarly, an evangelizing team composed of male and female church members conducted prayer sessions four days a week in four different neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup>

During 1943-44 the Evangelical School consisted of a kindergarten, an elementary section with six grades, and a special class for slow learners and those who did not attend school regularly. The general student body

comprised 240 boys and girls. A single, female educator from outside the village was hired when the school opened its doors (date not indicated). Miss Frierson, a British humanitarian in charge of an orphanage at Shimlan, Lebanon (mostly for Armenian children), subsequently provided and subsidized the salaries of Yeghia Khoja Bakamjian and two additional teachers. When Bakamjian died unexpectedly, Miss Frierson continued to support the school by assuming the annual salary of a teacher. By 1944, the faculty consisted of seven homegrown instructors. The school budget increased from the initial 150 Lebanese liras to 4,000 liras. This amount did not cover all the expenses; the teachers "being the offspring of our church, they assume all sacrifices and we are able to sustain such a school." Last but not least, the Anjar Evangelical school maintained a seventh, extension class in the nearby town of Zahle with thirteen students taught by six teachers with different specializations.<sup>16</sup>

Parental involvement in school life was deemed essential from the outset. Special gatherings aimed to draw their attention "toward cooperation with the board of trustees and the teachers, in order [for them] to provide more care for children's education." The subjects discussed in those assemblies also included "parents' responsibilities vis-à-vis their children, vis-à-vis human society and vis-à-vis the [Armenian] nation and the church."<sup>17</sup>

A turning point for Anjar came in 1946-48, when more than half of its population relocated to Soviet Armenia together with tens of thousands of other Armenians mostly from the Middle East and Europe. They hoped to find better living conditions in the homeland albeit under a communist regime. Those who stayed behind in Anjar naturally felt the shock of losing a significant part of their society. The Armenian Evangelical community was no exception. Even so, its church, school, and boarding sections for boys and girls continued—and still continue—to function under adverse political and socioeconomic conditions caused by perpetual civil and regional wars that have no end in sight.

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# A Glance at the Early History of the Armenian Evangelical Churches of the Kessab Region

By Dr. Tsolag Apelian

The region of Kessab consists of the main synonymous town, surrounded by roughly 12 smaller villages in close proximity. Within this setting, evangelical work was underway as early as the first half of the 19th century, beginning with the distribution of printed scripture and spiritual literature. The annual report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of 1852 states: “Kessab, about sixty miles south-west of Antioch, at the base of the highest peak of Mount Cassius, ten miles from the sea.<sup>1</sup> It has an entirely Armenian population of two thousand souls. A Protestant community of one hundred and fifty souls is fully organized here. Many are convinced of the truth of the gospel. This work was commenced and chiefly carried on by a colporter supported by the monthly concert contributions in Smyrna.<sup>2</sup>

This community grew to 200 individuals by 1853, with a core group of 12 communal members, and formed an independent Armenian Evangelical church in Kessab on May 23, 1853. Despite the economic hardships caused by failed crops in the 1860s, as well as competition from the Anglican movement, the number of active members rose to 192 in 1868, while the broader community reached 1,010 individuals—roughly half the population of the Kessab region. This proportion remained relatively consistent until around 1915.



Armenian Evangelical Holy Trinity Church of Kessab (Interior) (Dr. Tsolag Apelian Collection)

Kessab held special significance for the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches of Cilicia, which convened its annual conference there in 1873. It was also of considerable importance to the mission of the Board, which relocated its regional headquarters from Antioch to Kessab in the 1870s.

The first native pastor from Kessab was Rev. Stepan Mahshigian. Educated at the Malta Protestant College, he began serving in Kessab in the early 1870s and was ordained in 1874. He continued his service into the 1880s and later returned to Kessab in retirement, where he passed away in 1911.

The first evangelical church building was in use by February 1860, and school buildings soon followed. However, the Armenian Evangelical Church of Kessab, along with its school, was among many structures that were burned and left in ruins during the 1909 pogroms (Adana Massacre), when all Kessab residents sought refuge in Latakia. Following their return, Rev. Dikran Koundakjian envisioned the construction of a fortified church capable of accommodating more than a thousand souls. That same year, a decree was obtained from the Sultan permitting construction. Fundraising took several years, and construction began in 1912. By the outbreak of World War I, the structure had taken shape, with 23.6-inch-thick walls



Armenian Evangelical Holy Trinity Church of Kessab (Exterior) (Dr. Tsolag Apelian Collection)



Armenian Evangelical Emmanuel Church of Ekizoluk. Occasion Joint Easter service 2023 (Dr. Tsolag Apelian Collection)

enclosing an impressive 91.8 by 72.2 feet interior, using locally sourced white stones from the region of Bashord. The project had cost 17,600 gold dollars (approximately 4 million U.S. dollars in 2026) when the Genocide interrupted construction in 1915. The building remained unfinished until 1967, when roof construction commenced. Dedication took place in July 1970, during the 38th General Assembly of the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches of the Near East. Today, the church is known as the Armenian Evangelical Holy Trinity Church of Kessab.

Other churches in the Kessab region initially emerged as branches of the Kessab church through the evangelistic efforts of its members. The first outpost was established in Kaladouran, gaining momentum in the 1860s and formally organizing as a church in 1873 with seven communal members. The church building, measuring 32.8 by 49.2 feet, began construction in 1908 and was completed in the 1920s.

Evangelical work in Ekizoluk began as early as 1851. The entire village population of 80 had joined the evangelical movement by 1854, followed by additional members from the village of Upper Baghjaghaz in 1856. The church in these villages became an official branch of the Kessab church in 1882 and eventually formed an independent congregation in 1899, known as the Armenian Evangelical Emmanuel Church of Ekizoluk. Services were initially held in an older structure until 1911, when Rev. Hovhannes Eskijian organized the construction of a new building. This structure remained incomplete at the onset of the Genocide and was not finished until after the 1950s.

Although the evangelical movement reached Keorkune somewhat later, it developed steadily. The church was founded in 1898 as a branch of the Kessab church but became independent the following year. A decree from the Sultan authorized the construction of its church building.

Despite a massacre, a genocide, two world wars, and the recent 15 years of turmoil in Syria, by the grace of God, the Armenian Evangelical community of Kessab continues to persevere in the face of immense difficulties and monumental challenges. The four churches of the region continue to come together to worship and praise God through regular Sunday services, as well as various community and youth gatherings. The Missakian Cultural Center and the Armenian Evangelical Martyrs School remain enduring sources of cultural and educational light for the greater Kessab community. The Kessab region also remains a summer retreat hotspot for the entire Armenian Evangelical community of Syria, which gathers for conferences at the KCHAG center in Kessab.



Armenian Evangelical Church of Kaladouran (Dr. Tsolag Apelian Collection)



Armenian Evangelical Church of Keorkune, Belltower. (Dr. Tsolag Apelian Collection)

## Sources Consulted

<sup>1</sup> Both distances are correct in kilometers rather than miles..

<sup>2</sup> —, *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1852), 71.



# Անդրադարձ Հայաստանյայց Ավետարանական Եկեղեցու 180 ամյա Առաքելութանը

By Rev. Hovhannes Hovsepyan

«Միայն թե Քրիստոսի Ավետարանին վայել կերպով ապրեք, որպեսզի ձեզ տեսնելու գամ, թե հեռու լինեմ, ձեր մասին լսեմ, որ հաստատուն եք մեկ հոգով ու մեկ շնչով, պատերազմում եք Ավետարանի հավարի համար»: - Փիլիպ. 1.27

Հայաստանյայց Ավետարանական Եկեղեցին 180 տարեկան է: Իր կազմավորման օրից մինչ այսօր ՀԱԵ-ն մեծ կարևորություն է տվել իր կոչմանն ու առաքելութանը՝ որն է.

- Քարոզել Քրիստոսի Ավետարանի պարզամտ աշխարհասփյուռ հայությունը և օգնել մարդկանց անձնապես ճանաչել, սիրել ու հնազանդվել Աստծուն:
- Հայրենանվեր ու հայրենասիրական ծառայություն մատուցել հայ ժողովրդին իրենց գտնված վայրերում:

Նմանօրինակ ընթացքն արձանագրված ու փաստված է անցյալի պատմության էջերում: ՀԱԵ-ի պատմության էջերը թերթեղիս գրեթե յուրաքանչյուր հանգրվանում միշտ ակնդիր ենք լինում այդ օրերի մարտահրավերներին ու դրանք դիմագրավելու կոչերին: 180 տարի անց ՀԱԵ-ն այսօր էլ դիմագրավում է բազմապիսի մարտահրավերների և քիչ չեն նաև այսօր հնչող կոչերը: Կախված աշխարհագրական դիրքից, երկրի տնտեսական և քաղաքական ներկա վիճակից՝ Հայաստանյայց Ավետարանական Եկեղեցիները միգրացիոն փոքրամասնություններում են իրենց առօրյա մարտահրավերներով, բայց դրանք ընդհանրացնող մեկ ուղղություն կա՝ մեր անվանը և կոչմանը հավատարիմ ապրել և մնալ:

## ՀԱԵ-ն այսօր էլ «Հայաստանյայց» մնալու առաքելությունն ունի:

Հայրենիքի սահմաններից ներս և դուրս, հայրենիքում և աշխարհում մեկ ցրված հայության մեջ հային հայ պահելու, հայ լեզվամտածողությանը, մշակույթին ու ժառանգությանը տեր կանգնեցնելու մարտահրավերն ունենք: Անցյալում ձևավորված ավետարանական հարուստ ժառանգությունը հայ գիրն է՝ իր հոգևոր և հայրենասիրական հոգիվածներով ու հրապարակումներով: Մտավորականությունն է՝ իր եկեղեցակենտրոն կյանքով, եկեղեցիներում ակտիվ ներկայությամբ ու գործունեությամբ: Կիրակնօրյա պաշտամունքն ու քրիստոնեական դաստիարակության բոլոր բնագավառներում Ավետարանի պարզամտ ուսուցանելն է: Եվ այս ամենի հետ միասին անհարկ հայեցի, հոգևոր հոգեկերպումն է: Որքան էլ որ ժամանակի մարտահրավերները մեզ առաջնորդում են ձկունության, որքան էլ որ հասանելի լինելու մեթոդները մեզ խրախուսում են ավելի լայն մրաօճողության, մենք միտքով ենք մեր առաքելության մեջ մեր անվանը հավատարիմ քայլելու, մնալու «Հայաստանյայց» հայրենիքում և դրա սահմաններից դուրս:

## ՀԱԵ-ն այսօր էլ «Ավետարանական» մնալու առաքելությունն ունի:

«Ավետարանական» անունն ուղղություն չէ, հարանվանություն չէ, մեր ով լինելը վկայակոչող տերմին չէ, մնացյալ եկեղեցիներից մեր տարբերանշանը չէ: «Ավետարանական» անունը մեզ վստահված Ավետարանին է հենում: Մենք չենք հենվում գաղափարի, արժեհամակարգի կամ սկզբունքների վրա:

Ավետարանը նույն ինքը Քրիստոսն է: Սուրբ Գիրքը հայտարարում է, որ Աստծո Ավետարանը Իր Որդու մասին է (Հռոմեացիներ 1:1-3), և առաքյալների քարոզի էությունը՝ Տեր Հիսուս Քրիստոսն էր (Բ Կորնթացիս 4:5)՝ խաչյալ Քրիստոսը (Ա Կորնթացիս 1:23): Ուստի, Ավետարանը պարզ և մեզ Աստված տվեց Իր Որդուն

(Հովհ. 3:16), Քրիստոսը մեռավ և հարություն առավ մեր մեղքերի համար (Ա Կորնթացիս 15:3-4), և Նրա մեջ ու Նրա միջոցով մենք ունենք հավիտենական կյանք (Ա Հովհաննես 5:11-12):

«Ավետարանական» անունը մեզ կապում է Քրիստոսին, իսկ եկեղեցական բեմը միայն Քրիստոսի Ավետարանի մատակարարման հարթակն է: Քրիստոսի և Իր Ավետարանի քարոզչությունն ու ուսուցումը, ապաշխարությունն ու անձի անհատական հոգևոր փորձառությունը՝ աստվածձանաչողությունը, քրիստոսակենտրոն առաքելությունն ու համայնքի հոգևոր կերպմանն ու աճին նպաստող ծառայություններն են մեզ դարձնում «Ավետարանական»: Այս ամենով է նշանավորվում «Ավետարանական» անունը, որի զորությունն ու հենարանը Քրիստոսն է:

## ՀԱԵ-ն այսօր էլ «Եկեղեցի» մնալու առաքելությունն ունի:

Եկեղեցին մարդածին չէ, բայց կազմված է մարդկանցից, եկեղեցին մարդկանց հավաքականությունն է, բայց այդ հավաքն ինքնանպատակ չէ, այդ հավաքը մեզ եկեղեցի չի դարձնում, եթե այդ հավաքվածները կանչված չեն Աստծուց. կանչված աշխարհից դեպի Աստված, Իր Որդու փրկարար արյունով գնված, Սբ. Հոգու ներգործությամբ ամեն օր վերափոխվելու և կերպվելու Քրիստոսի հասակին և մտքին, վերադառնալու դեպի աշխարհ և դառնալու Աստծո դեսպանները, Իր Թագավորության համար ապրող, գործող անհատներ և հավաքականություն: Պողոսը հիշեցնում է մեզ մեր իրական քաղաքացիության և պատկանելիության մասին Փիլ. 3.20-ում:

Եկեղեցին կանչված է «աշխարհի մեջ, բայց ոչ աշխարհից» սկզբունքով (Հովհ. 17.11,14): Եկեղեցին կանչված է լինել եկեղեցի իր գտնված վայրում՝ բարձր պահելով Աստծո Թագավորության սկզբունքները: Կանչված է ապրելու քաղաքի ու գյուղի մեջ և ներսից հետքերով հասարակական կյանքի անցուդարձին՝ Աստծո Խոսքի վրա հենված կեցվածք, դիրք ու կարծիք արտահայտել, բարձրաձայնել Աստծո սերն արելության և անհանդուրժողականության նկատմամբ, Աստծո արդարաբանությունն՝ անարդարության և բարոյազուրկ դրսևորումների նկատմամբ, Աստծո խաղաղությունը՝ պատերազմների մեջ տառապող հասարակությունների, անխաղաղ ընդհանրություններում ցավ քաշող մարդկանց նկատմամբ:

Եկեղեցին միայն այսօրվա համար չէ: Եկեղեցին եկեղեցի է, երբ աղոթում և գործում է նոր մշակներ պատրաստելու ու այդ մշակներին ծառայության դաշտ պահովելու համար: Եկեղեցին եկեղեցի է, երբ մնայուն պրոպագանդա է ունենում՝ Որթի վրա ամուր կառչած մնալով (Հովհ. 15:5):

Անդրադառնալով ՀԱԵ 180-ամյա պատմությանը, այսօր էլ մենք կարիք ունենք կրկին արժևորելու մեր ժամանակակից մարտահրավերները, արժևորելու մեր ներկան և ապագայի տեսիլքով խոնարհվելու Աստծո առաջ:

Թող Աստված Իր շնորհով և իմաստությամբ առաջնորդի ՀԱԵ-ն, որպեսզի իր երկար տարիների հայանպասք և աստվածահաճ առաքելությունը շարունակվի այսօր էլ հայրենիքում և հայրենիքից դուրս՝ իր անվանն ու կոչումին հավատարիմ մնալով:



# Questions from the Initial Flame

By Harout Nercessian, AMAA Global Field Director



"...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..." - Hebrews 12:1 NKJ

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." - Martyred missionary, Jim Elliot

As I reflect on the beginnings of the Armenian Evangelical Church 180 years ago, I find myself asking: what questions do the lives of the founders—the 37 men and 3 women who first became members of the Armenian Evangelical Church in 1846—ask us today?

To begin answering that question, I need to step into their world—their faith, values, priorities, and lifestyles.

Like the Apostle Paul, the Armenian Evangelical pioneers saw the Gospel as a treasure worth preserving, practicing, and propagating at any cost. What they once valued—social status, wealth, and comfort—became loss compared to the knowledge of Christ. These former priorities became weights that slowed their race.

In this light, their aim was faithful endurance in witness to Christ. The founders of the Armenian Evangelical movement ran with single-minded resolve even through severe opposition, sacrificing comfort, status, employment, businesses, and financial security. Their steadfast witness mirrored those who first carried the Gospel into a hostile world. They were ostracized, denied legal and social rights, dismissed from jobs, and saw their livelihoods destroyed—yet they did not turn aside.

## What marked early Christians?

**Sacrificial service** has marked Christians throughout history. Glen Scrivener reflects on the response of believers to the lethal pandemic known as the Plague of Cyprian (249–262 AD). While the heathen deserted those who began to fall ill, "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains."<sup>1</sup>

## How did this pattern continue among Armenian Evangelicals?

German historian **Dr. Hilmar Kaiser** writes extensively about the role of Armenian Evangelicals in the rescue efforts of Armenian Genocide survivors. He notes that "a second and much wider Evangelical relief network emerged around **Reverend Hovhannes Eskijian** of Aleppo's Evangelical Emmanuel Church."<sup>2</sup> Eskijian tirelessly rescued hundreds of children from deportation trains bound for Der Zor, ultimately dying of diphtheria contracted through his work. Kaiser also highlights **Rev. Aharon Shirajian** of Aleppo, who cared for countless orphaned children—providing food, education, vocational training, and even arranging suitable life partners—embodying Paul's words, "poor, yet making many rich" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Referring to **Evangelical young pastors**, graduates of the Marash seminary, Kaiser writes that they "formed the backbone of the relief work in many places."<sup>3</sup> He further notes that "the relief network at Hama was independently organized by Evangelical preachers Dikran Koundakdjian, Haroutiun Nohoudian, and Kaspar Haidostian,"<sup>4</sup> who played an important role in organizing the deportee camp; all three were later arrested and imprisoned.

Armenian Evangelicals carried forward the legacy of sacrificial service that has marked Christians throughout history.

## How did their sacrificial services influence the dominant Armenian culture?

During its early decades, Christianity had a powerful transformative influence on the prevailing culture—norms, values and practices. In his book *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, historian **Tom Holland** writes extensively about the transformation that Christianity ushered into Roman culture. His assertions can be summarized in the following three points:

- Pre-Christian societies admired power, strength, hierarchy, and domination.
- Christianity inverted these values by elevating the weak, the poor, the suffering, and the marginalized.
- The cross—once a symbol of the strong oppressing the weak—was, within three centuries, redefined by Christians as the emblem of the strong sacrificially serving the weak.

In his book *The Benefits and Contributions of The Armenian Evangelical Church to the Armenian Nation*, **Rev. Dr. Vahan Tootikian** shows how the Armenian Evangelical movement positively influenced the Armenian people through the revival of spiritual values, the popularization of the Bible, advances in education and Christian formation, and the development of modern Armenian language and literature, along with its contributions to mission and philanthropy. He highlights as one of its greatest contributions its distinctive Christian lifestyle—believers distinguishable not only in conduct, but in faith and service—demonstrating to their Armenian Apostolic compatriots that faith is a way of life.

Armenian Evangelicals were not shaped by the prevailing culture; rather, they influenced and enriched it. Over the past 180 years, through their exemplary lifestyles, they have imitated the early Christians by exerting a positive influence on the religious and

cultural mindset and practices of the Armenian people.

## What questions do the lives of the founders ask us today?

Today, we run the race of faith in North America, carrying the baton handed down to us by the founders, who now, as part of the great cloud of witnesses, sit in the stands cheering us on.

- Their presence speaks louder than their cheers. Their lives and legacy challenge us with questions like:
- How does our North American value system compare with that of the pioneers?
- How have we influenced the North American culture around us?
- How has the North American culture influenced our mind and lifestyle?
- What weights are slowing us down in the race set before us?
- What are we holding on to that our pioneers would have willingly laid aside?

The pioneers exhort us to fix "our eyes on Jesus...For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame..." (Heb. 12:2-3), so that we do not grow weary and lose heart.

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- 1 Glen Scrivener, "Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History," The Gospel Coalition, March 16, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-lessons-church-history>.
- 2 Hilmar Kaiser, "Rescue of Armenians in the Middle East in 1915–1923," in *The Rescue of Armenians in the Middle East in 1915–1923: Proceedings of the International Conference (November 8–9, 2019)*, Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation, Yerevan, 2020, 10.
- 3 Kaiser, "Rescue of Armenians in the Middle East," 18.
- 4 Kaiser, "Rescue of Armenians in the Middle East," 30.



# 100th Anniversary of Calvary Armenian Congregational Church - April 11, 2026

By Rev. Calvin Sagherian

Calvary Armenian Congregational Church of San Francisco celebrated its 100th anniversary at a gala banquet on April 11, 2026. Rev. Calvin Sagherian shared his opening remarks:

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Calvary Armenian Church, we have so much to be thankful for! I am reminded of the words of a song by John Mohr (*"Find us Faithful"*) that says:

*We're pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road  
And those who've gone before us line the way  
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary  
Their lives, a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace.*

*Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses  
Let us run the race, not only for the prize  
But as those who've gone before us  
Let us leave to those behind us the heritage of faithfulness  
Passed on through godly lives.*

I am so grateful to God for His goodness and His faithfulness in sending before us faithful people who paved the way for us to be here and to continue the ministry of preaching the gospel of salvation, which Jesus entrusted to us.

I'm so grateful to those who had the vision to establish this church 100 years ago. They gathered for worship and fellowship, for instruction and prayer; they built the church; they became the church, and they spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to the broken-hearted. They had an eternal impact on so many individuals and communities, both locally and around the world.

The author of the book of Hebrews talks about a cloud of witnesses who have surrounded us to cheer us on, not to give up, but to serve the Lord and His church faithfully.

Who are these clouds of witnesses who surround us and cheer us on? We can go way back to the Israelites, who were rescued from slavery in Egypt and led to a land flowing with milk and honey. It took them forty years to learn to trust God, but they finally did!

In just a few days, we will be commemorating the Armenian genocide and the failure of the Ottoman Turks to annihilate the Armenian nation. I think of our grandparents and great-grandparents who suffered through the genocide. They survived terrible atrocities. Many of them experienced hunger, malnutrition, rape, the murder of their parents and siblings, but so many of them decided not to be bitter, but continue to focus on God's goodness and faithfulness. Your grandparents and mine were among those who survived.

When we hear of what they had been through, we wonder how they could continue to trust God and worship Him. It was a conscious decision they made.

Our forefathers would look back and weep, and then look ahead and stubbornly trust God and teach their children and grandchildren to do the same. As our theme verse for this gala says, *"One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts"* (Psalm 145:4).

*"God has been and will continue to be with us as He has promised."*

Many of you were born and raised here in the United States. But we need to keep in mind, on this 250th anniversary of the United States of America, that this country took us in when many of us were refugees and gave us a home and opportunities to thrive, and thrive we did! Through it all, we have decided to worship God and remain faithful to Him.

This year, we also celebrate the 180th anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Church, which was instrumental in founding CACC through the many pastors and lay leaders who came and served here.

We see that God has continued to be faithful. He has made His face to shine upon you. God took care of you as our heavenly Shepherd by providing earthly shepherds – pastors who have faithfully preached the Word of God, taught the practice of the Word, loved you, cared for you, and most importantly, prayed for you. As you look back on your life, *where have you seen God's faithfulness, both in your personal life and in the church?* I'm sure if we took the mic around, we'd hear a lot of wonderful testimonies that would glorify the Lord.

I have seen and tasted the fruit of the ministry that took place at Calvary Armenian Church. A few people have testified to me how they were taught and mentored by the pastors, youth leaders, and even lay leaders when they were in high school and college. The seeds of the gospel were planted, the water of the Word brought those seeds to fruition as young people were given opportunities to study the Word, to serve, to lead, and to be affirmed and encouraged by the church family.

Today, as we gather to celebrate our 100th anniversary, all we have to do is look around us. We have been witnesses of God's grace for ten decades!

God has been faithful, God still is, and will always be faithful. Now, our challenge is to be faithful and pave the way for those who come behind us.

I think of the warning God gave to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:10-12, saying, when you inherit this new land, and live in houses you did not build, and enjoy the fruit of the trees you did not plant, and are satisfied, be careful not to be complacent, and forget the Lord your God who brought you here.

We pray that this evening will be one of celebration of God's goodness as we testify to His faithfulness and the faithfulness of those who went before us.

### Closing remarks

God has been and will continue to be with us as He has promised. Hebrews tells us that we are also "surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, so let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:1-2).

The last stanza of the song I shared earlier says:

*Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful  
May the fire of our devotion light their way  
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe  
And the lives we live inspire them to obey  
Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful.*

As we do this, "His faithfulness will continue through all generations" (Psalm 100), so that generation after generation will praise the Lord.

# AEWF - West Coast Conference

By Noelle Nightingale

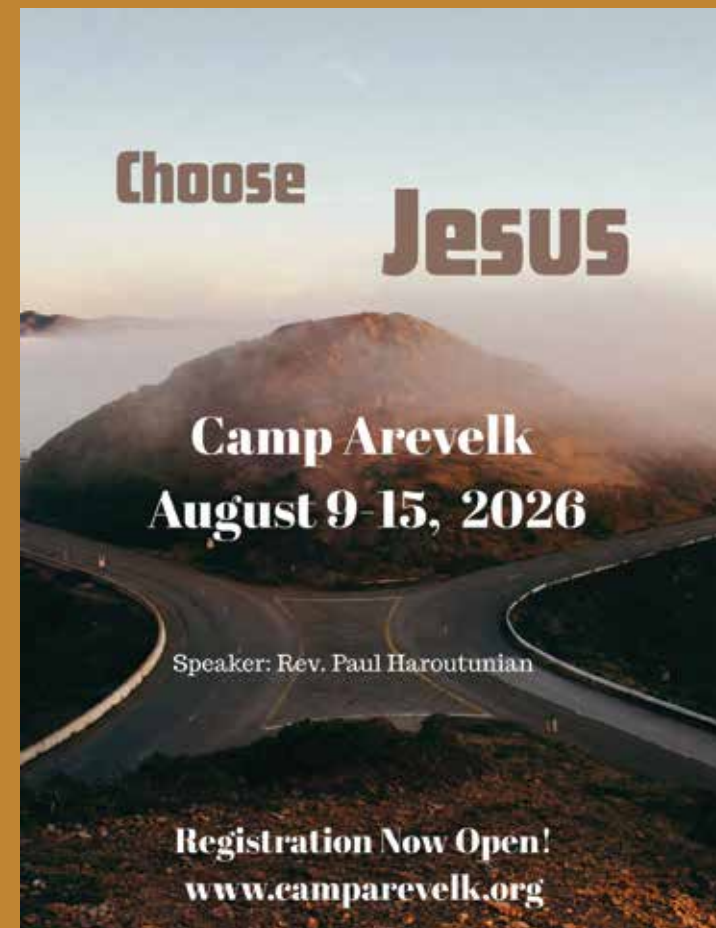
The AEWF-West Conference was held November 7-9, 2025, at the Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo, California. The conference was attended by 150 women representing most of our Union churches throughout California. The main speaker, Jodi Ware, a women's ministry teacher and leader from Kentucky, taught about trusting the Lord through the various seasons of life and emphasized the trustworthiness of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our theme verse was Jeremiah 17:7-8: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." We had three sessions with her, Who is this God We Trust?, Why is it so Hard to Trust God?, and How Can We Grow in Trusting God?, as well as a fourth session of Question and Answer.

Worship throughout the weekend was led by Nazani Manjrian of UACC, Los Angeles, who led in both Armenian and English and guided attendees into meaningful worship. A special testimony was shared in Armenian by Houri Panossian of CACC, San Francisco, who spoke about trusting God through a cancer diagnosis.

The Saturday evening banquet carried the theme "Music Through the Decades." Guests were encouraged to wear costumes from different decades, and a costume contest was held. Entertainment was provided by the Cal Poly Jazz Ensemble, featuring music from each decade beginning in the 1950s. Attendees also enjoyed playing "Name That Tune" with accompaniment from the ensemble. During the program, Noelle Nightingale shared the history of the AEUNA. The evening concluded with Armenian dancing.



Our conference concluded with a church service with Jodi Ware sharing more truths about how we can grow in trusting God and Badveli Aren Balabanian shared communion with us. The conference was encouraging for all the women in attendance spiritually and relationally, and we praise God for all He did during that weekend.



# Committee on Youth about the AEYF National Leadership Training Conference

By Haley Surmeian and Mesrop Khachataryants

The AEUNA Committee on Youth was excited to organize this year's, much-anticipated, AEYF National Leadership Training Conference in Dallas, Texas. It took place from November 14-16, 2025, and brought together 42 eager participants that were recommended by their respective AEUNA churches across North America.

This conference aimed to train current leaders, in AEUNA churches and youth ministries, to build on the leadership skills they possess and to apply their newly-acquired skills within the communities and groups they serve. Much to our joy, our conference speakers were Tim and Noelle Nightingale of Nightingale Resolutions from the First Armenian Presbyterian Church in Fresno, California. By applying an effective hands-on-approach, they led the group through interactive workshops and discussions over the course of the weekend. Their topics touched on trust, respect, forgiveness, and collective decision-making while focusing on Christ as our example for fostering collaboration within our existing ministries.

Holding true to the intended spirit of unity and communion, the training conference also presented many opportunities for fellowship among the leaders from the East and West Coasts; as well as several members of the local Armenian community in Dallas. On Saturday afternoon, we had the privilege of taking a trip to the Fort Worth Stockyards, where we spent time with one another exploring and enjoying the local tourist attractions. In the words of the late theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "the physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer."



# Vartanantz Commemoration

## Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church, Fresno, CA

By Edward S. Saliba

February marks a commemorative day of Vartanantz for the Armenian community. On February 12, 2026, the Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church hosted a meaningful ecumenical joint worship service of all Armenian Churches in the Central Valley in remembrance of Vartanantz.

Rev. Nerses Balabanian, senior pastor of Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church organized and led the event, with the participation of clergy from Fresno, Fowler, and Yettem churches. The program featured special musical selections led by Reverend Balabanian. The keynote speaker was Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian, pastor of the Armenian Brotherhood Bible Church in Pasadena, California.

Rev. Ekmekjian shared an inspiring message about faith, freedom, and the soul of a nation. Below is a synopsis of his speech.

Nearly 200 people attended the worship service, which concluded with the singing of the Lord's Prayer in Armenian, followed by all clergy reciting the Bahbanich. The benediction was given by Rev. Balabanian. The guests were then invited to the church fellowship hall, where students from Charlie Keyan Armenian School gave inspiring presentations. Refreshments were provided by the Knights of Vartan.

*Synopsis of Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian's speech, "Vartanantz: Faith, Freedom, and the Soul of a Nation:"*

The commemoration of Vartanantz draws us into one of the most profound paradoxes of our history: a battle lost in military terms yet victorious in spiritual consequence. The Battle of Avarayr of 451 AD fought by Armenians against the Sassanid Persian Empire, stands as a reminder that the survival of a people is not determined solely by power or numbers, but by what they refuse to surrender. What was preserved there was not territory, but identity, a faith-rooted consciousness that shaped the destiny of a nation. In remembering Avarayr, we do not indulge in nostalgia; we rediscover the foundation of who we are.

At the heart of this witness stand Vartan Mamigonian and his brave companions. Vartan was a leader whose courage was born of clarity rather than impulse. He was neither naive nor reckless, but a seasoned commander who understood both the cost of resistance and the temptation of compromise. Privileged and accomplished, he chose fidelity over security and conscience over comfort. His decision reveals the true nature of heroism: not the absence of fear, but the unwavering commitment to truth even when the outcome appears uncertain.

Avarayr was not merely a political confrontation but a struggle to keep the faith in Christ. The Persian Empire sought unity through religious assimilation, confident that Armenia would yield as others had. Yet it encountered a people whose spiritual identity, language, and ecclesial life had already taken deep root. Clergy and laity, peasants and nobles stood together, demonstrating that faith in Christ is not a private conviction but a collective reality capable of sustaining a nation. Their unity transformed the battlefield into a testimony of living faith.

The sacrifice of that generation did not end with defeat. The blood of the fallen became seed, nourishing resilience and resistance across decades. In time, the demands for religious freedom and internal autonomy were granted through the Treaty of Navarsak in 484 AD, revealing a truth often hidden in history: faithfulness may suffer in the present yet prevails in the future. Avarayr teaches us that sacrifices offered for truth and faith are never wasted, even when their fruits unfold beyond the lifetime of those who give them.

The message of Vartanantz remains deeply relevant for our own time. Though the nature of conflict has changed, the pressures upon faith, family, and identity endure. We are called to strengthen our spiritual shields, to cultivate both moral and spiritual vigilance, to resist quiet compromise, and to live without fear of standing as a faithful minority.

As we honor those who safeguarded our spiritual inheritance, we are reminded that the measure of our faithfulness will be seen in the generations who follow. May their legacy inspire us to stand with the same courage, clarity, and faithfulness to Christ.





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- The development of an Armenian Evangelical heritage residency program in Lebanon for our In Care students and lay leaders
- Church planting and evangelism events
- Aid to our youth who cannot afford travel to AEUNA camps and support for Youth Leadership training events, and retreats
- AEUNA's work to help our churches and sustain their missions
- Armenian Evangelical Women's Fellowship (AEWF) events
- Union-sponsored seminars, retreats and Church to Church (C2C) in-person gatherings
- The development of the FORUM magazine, AEUNA website, and other publications
- The development of materials to educate our youth in Armenian Evangelical history
- AEUNA biennial activities

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*Thank you for your generous gifts  
and continued support of the AEUNA.  
Donations to the AEUNA are tax-deductible.*

## Evangelism Committee Prayer Calls



*Did you know that the AEUNA has an Evangelism Committee and that we gather people on a monthly basis on Zoom to pray for Gospel-centered growth in our churches?*

YOU are invited to join us:

- on the first\* Thursday of the month (\*except in Oct.)
- for 30 minutes
- 12:00-12:30 p.m. PT/3:00-3:30 p.m. ET
- scan the QR code to join or go to <https://zoom.us/join> - type in the Meeting ID: 559 250 5475

The password is Aslan

Aug. 06, 2026	Sept. 03, 2026	Oct. 08, 2026	Nov. 05, 2026	Dec. 03, 2026
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**Questions?** E-mail [evangelism@aeuna.org](mailto:evangelism@aeuna.org) or reach out to Paul Haroutunian at [hyepaul7@gmail.com](mailto:hyepaul7@gmail.com)

*"... pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ ..." (Colossians 4:3, ESV)*



# In Memoriam

## Anie Orchanian Manoushagian (1945–2025)

Anie Orchanian Manoushagian lived a life marked by deep faith, strength, and unwavering devotion to others. Though her passing on December 23, 2025, came suddenly and tragically in a car accident shortly after her 80th birthday, her life remains a powerful testimony to what it means to serve God and love people wholeheartedly.

Born in 1945 in Beirut, Lebanon, Anie was the daughter of the Rev. Barkev Orchanian and his wife, Arousiag. Her early years were shaped by her father's pastoral ministry within the Armenian Evangelical community, leading the family to move throughout Syria, including Aleppo. From a young age, Anie learned that faith was not simply something to profess, but something to live for. The church was not just a place she attended, it was the center of her life.

In 1979, Anie immigrated to the United States with her brother John. Soon after, she returned to Beirut when her brother Norayr fell gravely ill, remaining by his side until his passing. This moment reflects who Anie was: when someone needed her, or when someone was suffering, she went to be with them, stayed and did everything in her ability to help.

After returning to the United States, Anie made her home in Watertown, Massachusetts. Her house affectionately known as the "Red House" became a place of warmth, hospitality, and community.

Anie's life was deeply rooted in the Armenian Memorial Church in Watertown. She was a devoted and active member, serving in countless ways from hospitality and flowers to fellowship gatherings and nominating committee. She had a gift for making others feel welcome and valued, always serving with humility. Her guiding motto, often spoken with a gentle smile, was: "We are doing this for the Lord."

In January 1987, Anie met her husband, Berj Manoushagian, at the Armenian Memorial Church hall. They married just a few months later, beginning a partnership grounded in faith and mutual devotion that lasted nearly 39 years. Anie loved Berj deeply, often describing him as a thoughtful writer and godly man. Together, they built a life centered on service, love, and shared purpose.

Anie's love for her family was constant and sacrificial. She cared for her mother during years of illness and supported her sister Megheti with lifelong devotion. She cherished her brother John, his wife Maral, and her nephews—Norayr and Arie, taking great joy in their lives and accomplishments. She encouraged them, supported them, and delighted in simple moments together.

She also embraced life with joy and curiosity. Anie loved music and sang with her husband in the Yerevan Choral Society. She enjoyed gardening, nurturing flowers with care. She traveled to more than 30 countries and even learned to ski at the age of 50, a reflection of her willingness to grow and try new things.

In her final year, Anie read the entire Bible twice, a testament to her enduring faith. Her life was rooted in Scripture and expressed through daily acts of kindness, service, and love.

Tragically, Anie's life was cut short in a car accident that also claimed the life of her beloved nephew, Arie Orchanian, at just 32 years old. The accident occurred near the Armenian Memorial Church as they were returning from a family burial, a poignant reflection of how closely her life was tied to both her family and her faith.

Though her absence is deeply felt, those who knew Anie take comfort in the hope she held so firmly. She belonged to Christ, and her life bore witness to that truth. As Scripture reminds us, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Anie's legacy is found in her example and countless lives she touched through quiet, faithful service. She trusted the Lord, served His church, cared for people with her whole heart, and loved her family deeply.

Her life remains an enduring example of faith in action and a life lived, truly, for the Lord.



## Arie Orchanian (1993–2025)

Arie Orchanian, age 32, of Lexington, Massachusetts, entered eternal rest on December 23, 2025, following a tragic automobile accident in Watertown, Massachusetts. He was returning with his beloved aunt, Anie Manoushagian, to Armenian Memorial Church after attending a funeral service for another family member when the accident occurred. In a moment that is still hard to understand, they went to be with the Lord together. Arie's passing has left a deep emptiness in the hearts of his family, friends, and church community, and he is missed more than words can express.

Arie was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the cherished son of John and Maral Orchanian and the grandson of the late Rev. Barkev and Arousiag Orchanian. He grew up in Watertown and Lexington, where he built lifelong friendships and strong connections within the Armenian and Evangelical communities. From the time he was young, Arie had a joyful presence that people were naturally drawn to. He had an unforgettable smile, a gentle way about him, and a kindness that made everyone feel comfortable. He was intentional with people, always taking the time to ask how someone was doing, to listen, and to make them feel valued.

More than anything, Arie was a man of faith. He loved Jesus Christ and sincerely wanted others to know God. His faith was steady and real, shown through the way he lived and treated people. Armenian Memorial Church was a big part of his life, and he served with a willing heart wherever he was needed. He helped faithfully on the church fair committee, was active in the Joint Youth Group, and spent time serving as a counselor at Camp Arevelk, where he enjoyed encouraging youth to build a relationship with Christ. This year, he was preparing to serve as a Trustee at AMC, something he was looking forward to with a sense of responsibility and love for the church.

Arie had a peaceful, joyful spirit that made people feel at ease. His smile could brighten a room, and his kindness left a lasting impression. He never tried to be the center of attention, but his presence was always felt. He cared deeply about his family, his friends, and his church, and he showed that care in quiet, meaningful ways every day.

The loss of Arie at such a young age is something his family and friends continue to carry with heavy hearts. He is tremendously missed, and the space he has left cannot be filled. At the same time, there is deep thankfulness for the life he lived, the love he gave so freely, and his faith and trust in his Lord Jesus. His life made a lasting impact on more people than we know, and the memories of Arie will stay with everyone who knew him.

He is survived by his loving parents, John and Maral Orchanian; his brother, Johnie Norayr Orchanian, and sister-in-law, Garin Haidostian Orchanian; along with extended family, and dear friends who loved him very much.

Though his life here was far too short in our eyes, the purpose our Lord had for Arie is now complete. "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).





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## July 1, 2026 marks the 180th anniversary of the Armenian Evangelical Movement



Armenian Evangelical Church in Pera, Istanbul (Constantinople), Turkey.  
Photo: Rev. Vicken Cholakian

On this pivotal day, 180 years ago,  
the Armenian Evangelical Church  
was birthed in Pera, Istanbul (then  
Constantinople), Turkey.

A handful of Armenian believers,  
37 men and 3 women, founded the  
Church on July 1, 1846, which grew  
and multiplied over the years as the  
loaves and fish in the Feeding of the  
5,000 (Matthew 14:13).

