

The Armenian Genocide

Romans 8:18,28,31

How to Deal with the Armenian Genocide

One of the most difficult problems facing Armenian Christians today is to come to terms with the Armenian genocide of 1915. Some Armenians today hate the Turks for what was done to us at the beginning of this century. Others are entirely indifferent, taking the attitude of let "bygones be

bygones, forget and forgive." Finally, many of us are just plain confused because we want to find the Christian answer and that answer is not easy to find.

Historical Perspective

Before we can find the Christian answer, we must understand the real question. To do that, we must look at history. The Otto-



man Turks conquered Anatolia, the area of the Armenian homeland, around the fourteenth century. In those early days the Turks, being Moslems, were conscious of the Christians and the Jews as being "peoples of the Book," that is, those who believe in the Bible, which the Moslems also accept in part. Mohammed and the *Quran* (Koran, or Moslem holy book) taught that the "peoples of the Book," while not equal to Moslems, should be protected. And, in comparison with how other people were treated in those cruel days, the Armenians and other Christians were treated fairly well by the Ottomans.

The Armenian bishop of Bursa was invited by one of the early Ottoman monarchs, called the Sultan, to come to Constantinople to become the patriarch of the Oriental Orthodox people in the Ottoman Empire, including the Armenians, the Syrians, the Copts of Egypt, and the Ethiopians. His flock was called a *millet*, or community, and his people called *ryahs* or a flock. He ruled over his people religiously and politically, subject only to the overlordship of the Sultan.

Armenians in the larger cities prospered under this system, but the Armenian peasants in the interior provinces continued to live the hard life they had lived for centuries. Then, in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire began a rapid decline, and law and order suffered even more than usual. Hardly anyone felt secure. The Turks were also losing their empire in Europe as the European powers aided the Balkan Christians one by one to gain independence. What made matters worse was that as the Empire declined the Armenians were enjoying a cultural, religious, and intellectual renaissance. Turkish leaders began to fear and envy the Armenians.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II rejected the reform plans of his progressive ministers and also those recommended by the European powers. Instead of reform, he decided on repression. He organized irregular troops, called the *Hamedieh* after his own name, and used them in pogroms or massacres

against his minorities, especially the Armenians. While Hamid tried to excite hatred among the masses against the Armenians by calling them *gavours*, or infidels, he himself only accepted the Moslem faith superficially and was an agnostic at heart. The Hamedieh and the misled masses massacred the Armenians in the 1890's under the direction of the Sultan. The massacres were really politically inspired and not caused by religion. Religion was only Hamid's excuse.

The Young Turks

In 1908 the Young Turks led a revolt against the evil Sultan and re-established the constitution of 1876, which made all citizens of the Empire equal under the law. Christians, Moslems, and Jews embraced in the streets and saw a new age of religious toleration and civil equality at hand.

But the Young Turks were divided into two groups: The first was constitutionalist, but the second was inspired by secular, racist ideas. They believed in "Turkey for the Turks" and wanted to establish a new, pan-Turkish empire. All non-Turks, meaning all Christians and Jews, were in the way. Since the Armenians were the most numerous minority, the Turkish leaders went after them. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by World War I, the Young Turks carried out the Armenian genocide. But here again, we can see that their motives were not religious, but political.

The Moral Question

The Armenian genocide must be seen then as the result of the political, not religious, ambitions of the Turks. And so the moral issue must deal with the political question. We see this truth revealed in the fact that many Moslem Turkish officials refused to get involved in the genocide and were

punished by their government. Many Moslems not only refused to participate, but instead gave refuge to the Armenians. Most Moslem Arabs, who were also in the empire at that time, were strong supporters of the Armenian refugees.

Those Turks, officials and ordinary people, who refused to participate in the genocide need no forgiveness. They acted in a moral way and set a good example for us all. It is the *political* Turks and the *ignorant* masses whom they misled who need to be considered. The ignorant masses may be forgiven, for they knew not what they did. They were misled by their leaders and later mistreated by them. But the leaders, those morally responsible, cannot be forgiven until they repent and do penance.

Some people say that the Turks who massacred and destroyed the Armenian people are now dead, and they cannot repent. That is true. They are under God's judgment.

And if present day Turks repudiate the misdeeds of their ancestors and ask for forgiveness, they should be held blameless. But the present Turkish government, and all Turkish governments since the genocide, except one, have denied the deed. They are acting immorally and they are doing it for political reasons. Under international law, a successor government is legally responsible for the acts of its predecessors until it repudiates those acts. The present Turkish government has chosen not to repudiate the genocide and thus must accept the terrible responsibility for it. Furthermore, under law, people who engage in the cover up of a crime are guilty of being accomplices after the fact. Here again, the Turkish government is accepting guilt.



Our Christian Obligation to the Turks

For the Armenians to forget the genocide under these circumstances would be immoral. We are called upon to be witnesses to an injustice, and to forget it would be to participate in that injustice. But should we hate the Turks? Of course not. Hatred has no place in a Christian heart. But we cannot forget and forgive until the Turkish government and the people who back it repudiate the evil of their predecessors and do penance by making restitution.

Conclusion

If the Turkish leadership repents and does penance, then the Armenians, according to Christian morality, are obliged to forgive. But shouldn't we forgive anyway? Hasn't this gone on long enough? No, we cannot forget. We have certain Christian responsibilities. We must remember not out of hatred, but out of concern for the immortal souls of the Turks. We must encourage them to face up to the evil in their past, repent, and do penance and be reconciled with God. The most hateful and un-Christian thing the Armenians could do to the Turks today would be to allow them to be blind to the evils of their past and their separation from God. For God has promised that, unless there is repentance, the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children. Many of Turkey's great political problems today are caused by their not facing up to their past sins.

Our real problem, then, as Armenian Christians, is how to approach the Turks in a loving but effective way to bring about their repentance and salvation. This may be a hard thing to do, but it is our responsibility as their former neighbors and as present committed followers of Christ.

Dennis Papazian, Ph.D.

Victim Becomes Victor

How Christians cope with human suffering is dealt with by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament. The Good News shows that goodness is victorious and that badness is defeated, that sin is denial, and virtue the fulfillment of the promise inherent in the purposes of man. The same sorrows come upon all, including the Christian, but while they break the spirit of some, they *make* the spirit of those who have learned the secret. The ordinary artist and Mardiros Sarian use the same pigments and colors, but one transforms them into a mess and the other into a message. All this pain seems to be necessary if character is the end, for a bird cannot fly except in a resisting medium, and we cannot rise except upon something defeated. Christian wisdom elevates us above all suffering and gives a beauty to even grief itself.

God, too, is involved in all of this. When we see him toiling up a steeper Calvary than ours with the cross upon his back, we know that his cross is intimately and inseparably connected with our redemption.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross,

deserted by men and seemingly by God, the crowd cried out, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him." If God should deliver him, it would be proof that he was good and pleasing to God; but if not, then it was sure proof that God did not desire him. So they thought. God did not deliver him. But he did something better. He gave Christ victory over death.

While much of the suffering that comes upon us is not preventable, some is caused by human systems made by man. Good men have to persist and reform the evil systems. The suffering of the individual must be looked on and felt as the suffering of the whole. We are to feel the suffering of all injustice and work to alleviate and eradicate it.

The Christian is to be the most happy man on earth, for he has joy "in spite of." His happiness is not dependent on happenings; it is often in spite of happenings.

The stoic bears; the epicurean seeks to enjoy. The Buddhist and the Hindu stand apart, disillusioned. The Moslem submits. But only the Christian exults. Christianity bids us to make heaven out of our hells.

As a people, we Armenians have done this. We, the victim, have become the victor. Our accomplishments and contributions are many.

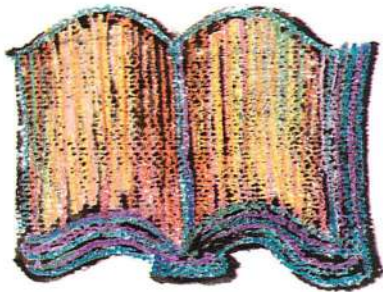
Can you list the names of Armenians who have contributed to society?

What can we do as Christian individuals to help those who are broken by sorrow to overcome their misfortunes? What can we do collectively?

What can we do as Christian individuals to correct injustices? What can we do collectively?

At-Home-Work

I JOURNAL ENTRY. Read "We Are Few" and respond to questions.



II Bible readings for the week to share with your family:

Monday Romans 8:18, 28, 31 Tuesday I Peter 3:14-18
Wednesday I Peter 2:21-25 Thursday I Peter 4:1-5
Friday I Peter 4:15-19 Saturday I Peter 5:10-11, Luke 12:49

III Read and study next week's lesson.

We Are Few

We do not consider ourselves superior to any one.

However, we must simply accept
That we, only we, have Mount Ararat
And that it is here, at the heights of
Lake Sevan,
That the sky reproduces its exact image.
Simply David of Sasoun has fought here.
Simply "Narek" has been written here,
Simply we know how to build convents
of rock,
To carve fish out of stone,
To shape man out of clay,
To be educated, we again become students
Of the Beautiful, the Good, the Noble and
the Better.

We do not consider ourselves superior to anyone.

Simply our fate has been different,
Simply we have shed too much blood,
Simply because during our centuries-old
existence
When we have been numerous
And have been erect,
We have not oppressed any other nation,
No one has suffered of the blow of our
arm.
If we have enslaved,
Only with books,
If we have dominated,
Only with talent . . .
When being obliged we have migrated from
our land,
Wherever we have reached, wherever we
have been
We have labored equally for all.

We have built bridges,
And have formed arches,
Everywhere we have ploughed the land,
Cultivated various produces,
Given to all brain, proverbs, songs,
Protected them from spiritual shivering.
Everywhere we have left rays from our
eyes,
Relics from our spirit
And consecrated bread, from our heart . . .
We are few, yes, but we are called
Armenian,
We know how to groan of unhealed
wounds,
But we know also with new happiness to
rejoice and be elated;
We know how to thrust into the loin of the
enemy,
And to help our friend in case of need,
To repay any good others have done to us,
Giving ten to compensate one.

For the sake of righteousness and the Son
We know how to vote at the cost of our life.
And if they wish to burn us by force,
We know how to smoke and extinguish the
fire
And if need be to expel the darkness,
We know how to burn as an immense
torch.
We know how to like each other with
passion,
And yet always respecting the others.
We do not consider ourselves superior to
anyone,
But we ourselves know too;
They call us Armenians,
And why shouldn't we be proud?
We exist.
Shall exist.
And yet . . . increase. *Baruir Sevag*
(Translated by *Diana Der Hovanessian*
and *Marzbed Margossian*)

In Luke 12:49 Jesus said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!" What do you think this means?

How would you relate this to the line in the poem: "We know how to burn as an immense torch?"

Baruir Sevag has put our entire history into these few lines of poetry. In your own words write your own summary of the history of the Armenian people from what you have learned in this unit of study and from this poem.
