

WITNESS

pamphlet #1

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INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the 1982 ACYO General Assembly which was hosted by the St. John San Francisco ACYO chapter, general members of the ACYO and members of the ACYO Central Council expressed a desire to make the General Assembly a more meaningful event. They felt that the Annual General Assemblies had degenerated into being a mere exercise in correcting spelling, punctuation, and typographical errors and playing parliamentary games with the ACYO By-Laws. Their conclusion and feelings can best be summed-up in the Scripture: “. . . holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.” (2 Tim. 3:5)

Subsequently, the ACYO Central Council decided that the 1983 ACYO General Assembly would be different. Accordingly, they decided that at the 1983 General Assembly, all business sessions would be concluded by noon on Saturday. The entire afternoon would then be spent in group discussions of topics relevant to the real world of today.

It was then decided that these group discussions would be conducted around the following topics: *PRE-MARITAL LIVING ARRANGEMENTS, THE VALUE OF LIFE, CULTS, and THE FAMILY*. Further, each discussion group would have both a clergy advisor and a lay advisor. Guidelines for the functioning of these Discussion Groups were also worked out.

With the blessings of the Primate, His Eminence Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian, all of this information was duly communicated to all the ACYO chapters, delegates and members, as well as to the parish priests and lay leaders in the Diocese.

When the delegates began to arrive for the 1983 ACYO General Assembly which was hosted by the St. Peter, Van Nuys ACYO Chapter, there was an excitement, a kind of buzz, in the air, about this new General Assembly activity.

What follows is the result of this modest but important endeavor. While some might not view the various comments as profound, they are important because they reflect some mature Christian thinking on the part of our young men and women. Such comments, while not speaking for the entire Armenian Church or even for the entire Western Diocese do present an important and necessary Christian witness by our young people. This Christian witness is now presented for all to see.

When the Discussion Groups were concluded, it was the sentiment of all that such activities should be held with greater frequency in the coming years.

Our young men and women are to be complimented for their insight about the on-going need for such an activity and for their determination to bring it about. Perhaps their deeds will serve as an example for all of us.

THE REV. FR. VARTAN KASPARIAN — COORDINATOR
Western Diocese
Department of Youth Activities and Christian Education
Feast of Holy Etchmiadzin
June 24, 1984

GROUP #1 — PRE-MARITAL LIVING ARRANGEMENTS & RELATIONS

Clergy Advisor — Rev. Fr. Vazken Movsesian

Lay Advisor — Richard Melikian

Members — Lena Gozurian
Mihran Jebejian
Steve Hekimian
John Mihranian
Nicole Hayalian
Gail Saraydar
Paul Zakian

Karen Ohanian
Elena Dardarian
Sandy Dergazarian
Nicole Bedikian
Andrea Kirazian
Debbie Meymarian

CONCLUSIONS

We differentiate between the act of love and the act of sex.

In keeping with this view:

We believe that love was created by God and, in the context of marriage, sex is a very special and meaningful part of a relationship. Yet, in our society, the search for intimacy and love in a lonely world often leads a person to compromise his/her moral values and give in to peer pressure. We believe that the intimacy sought through pre-marital sex inhibits and hinders the intimate relationship that God wants to have with each and every person.



GROUP #2 — VALUE OF LIFE: ABORTION AND EUTHANASIA

Clergy Advisor — Rev. Fr. Vartan Kasparian

Lay Advisor Dr. Gary Lulejian

Members — Rev. Fr. Levon Arakelian
Jeff Marderosian
Daron Haboian
Vaksen Demirjian
Dale Agajanian

Asbed Tatoulian
David Balakian
Sandra Mehterian
John Yaldezian

CONCLUSIONS

While this topic deals primarily with the areas of abortion and euthanasia, it also included a general discussion of the value of life.

Speaking to this broad topic, the observation was made and agreed to that life is important beyond words. It is most sacred and most special because it is the most precious gift which has been given by Almighty God. It is this gift which in a real sense makes the others possible.

Speaking to the issue of ABORTION, the following points and observations were made:

- 1.) It is necessary to look beyond what the law says. There is a need to view the question of abortion in its full moral ramifications. It is not enough to simply ask what the law is in this area. The moral aspect **MUST** be considered.
- 2.) The one female participant in this group was surprised that no other females were interested enough in the topic to be present. Her feeling was that for many girls abortion is simply a convenience that is being used for birth control. She felt that this is murder. The other members of the group concurred in this.
- 3.) Reference was made to the canons of St. Basil (CanonII): *A woman that aborts deliberately is liable to trial as a murderess. This is not a precise assertion of some figurative and inexpressible conception that passes current among us. For here there is involved the question of providing justice for the infant to be born, but also for the woman who has plotted against her own self. For in most cases the women die in the course of such operations. But besides this, there is to be noted the fact that the destruction of the embryo constitutes another murder, at least in the opinion of those who dare to do these things. It behooves us, however, not to extend their confession to the extreme limit of death, but to admit them at the end of the moderate period of ten years, without specifying a definite time, but adjusting the cure to the manner of penitence.*

From the above, it was pointed out that:

- a.) The Church views abortion as murder.

- b.) This involves the embryo and the mother. In times past, many women would die from this procedure. However, an improvement in the procedure still does not alter the basic fact of abortion, the killing of an unborn child.
 - c.) A period of penance is imposed upon the woman and the one who performed the abortion.
 - d.) The period of penance should last until such time as genuine sorrow is exhibited or ten (10) years.
 - e.) If the individual(s) is in danger of death, the sacraments should not be withheld, even though the period of penance has not ended.
- 4.) Reference was also made to Jeremiah 1:4-5: *Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

A consideration of this passage leads to the following conclusions:

- a.) From the moment of conception, we are persons.
- b.) Our personhood is known and acknowledged by God.
- c.) Existing legal or medical concepts and/or procedures do not alter this.

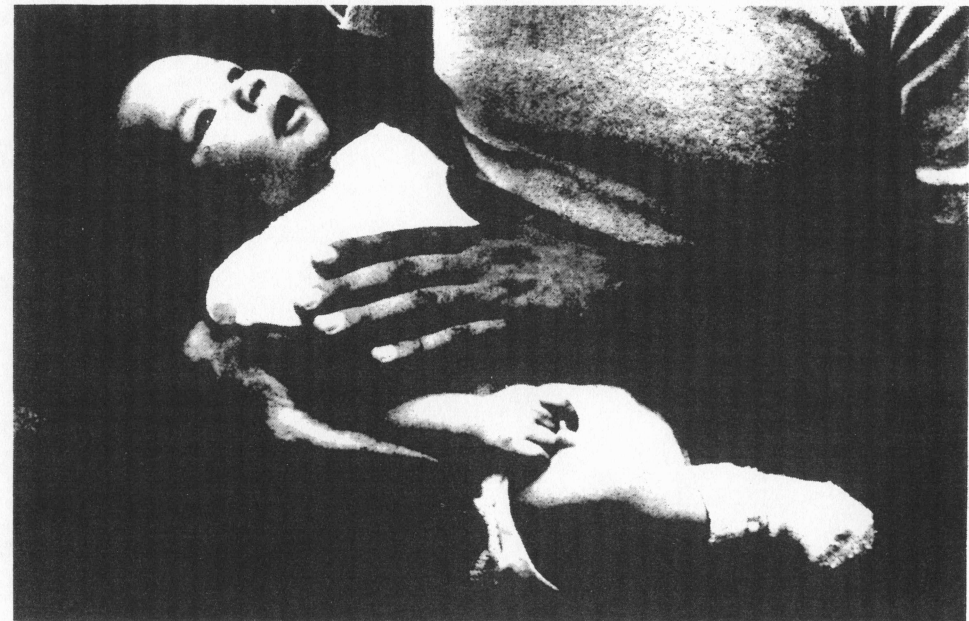
Reference was also made to Psalm 139:13-16: *For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works! Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

In considering the above points, it was felt that these spiritual truths must be acknowledged and respected.

- 5.) In the discussion of pregnancy resulting from rape, the following points were raised:
 - a.) Conception occurs rapidly, certainly in less than 24 hours.
 - b.) Procedures exist to prevent pregnancy from occurring, when these procedures are used as soon as possible after the rape has taken place.
 - c.) The question was raised as to why the unborn child should be punished for the crime of his/her father. This point was raised by the female participant.
- 6.) The unanimous conclusion of this Discussion Group is that abortion is murder.
- 7.) It was further stated that in a situation in which it is medically possible to save the life of only the mother or the baby, the decision becomes a medical one in which the best informed medical judgement of the doctor comes into play. He must decide which one stands the best chance of survival and proceed accordingly.

Speaking to the issue of EUTHANASIA, the following points were made:

- 1.) Medical science has progressed a great deal. However, in some cases, medicine does not actually extend life. Rather, it simply delays death.
- 2.) There is nothing moral about artificially prolonging clinical life.
- 3.) After all reasonable precautions have been taken, there is no moral need to use extraordinary means simply to delay death.
- 4.) One of the clergymen in this group noted that he had counselled a parishioner to "pull the plug" when the parishioner's relative had been completely brain dead for 5-6 days. All medical evidence at the time indicated that the patient was only artificially alive.
- 5.) These circumstances are qualitatively different from giving an injection or some other like procedure which would abruptly end the person's life.
- 6.) Letting a person's life end naturally is quite different from taking an action which is calculated to end it.



GROUP #3 — CULTS

*Clergy Advisors — The Rev. Fr. Moushegh Tashjian
Deacon Michael Chevian*

*Members — Dennis Takessian
Paulette Kasparian
Darlene Ouzounian
John Lulejian*

CONCLUSIONS

Cultism appears to be a phenomena of Western Europe and the United States more than anywhere else in the world.

Christ Himself gave us a warning about cults when He admonished His Apostles and Christians for all time saying: *For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matt. 24:24).*

These false Christs will give people a false *high* or feeling of well-being. However, those who follow and join the cults will end up in self-destruction.

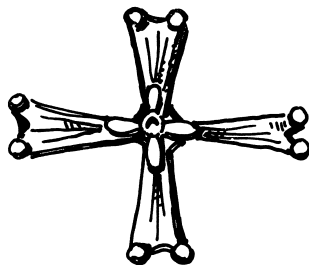
Those who become attached to cults are misguided, lonely, and insecure. They seem to have no roots and are confused. The cults embrace and enlist these people by actively going after them with “*answers*”, false though they are.

The cults have no apostolic succession like the Armenian Church. Among other things, this means that there is no assurance or safe-guard that what the cults are saying is true.

One of the causes of cults in the Western World is the religious freedom and diversity which one finds there.

Cults are not new. Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about them. The parable about the sower and the seed — Matthew 13:18-23 — tells about seeds falling upon different types of ground. Some fell on good ground and bore much fruit, and others fell on rocky, thorny ground or by the side of the road. These did not take root but were devoured by the birds.

The Church, the Body of Christ, must make His message known to the world, so that, as Christ says: *He who hears you, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me reject him who sent me. (Luke 10:16)*



GROUP #4 — THE FAMILY

*Advisor — Deacon Barlow Der Murdechian
Members — Jim Shapazian
Alan Farsakian
Lisa Agajanian*

CONCLUSIONS

The ACYO assumes an active role in promoting family unity and incorporating the family unity into the social activities of the ACYO as an organization.

Each member has the duty to support the ACYO in its role as an individual member of the Church family.

As a Christian, each member must respect and uphold the family unit as well as being honest to the family unit, based upon the teachings of The Bible.

Regarding family relations, the following Scriptural passages are illustrative of the type of situation which should prevail —

Ephesians 5:21-6:4

21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church. 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; 33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

And 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

4 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; ⁵it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

