

## In Celebration

We celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination into the priesthood of His Grace Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Armenian Church of America. It is a joyful occasion, yet as with all deeply joyful occasions the joy is inescapably interwoven with threads of sadness, making a still richer tapestry. His Grace seems always to have lived with this truth; indeed, he himself underscored it this past November during a reception given for him at Gracie Mansion in New York City by his friend, Mayor Edward Koch.

In thanking the Mayor for his hospitality, the Primate spoke briefly of a recent visit to the Armenian Seminary in Jerusalem. At breakfast one morning with the young seminarians he asked if they felt sadness at being separated from their mothers. The twelve-year olds answered that they did. "I was unhappy too," he told them, referring to his own arrival there in 1931 from the far off desert town of Bakuba in Iraq, as the youngest boy in his class. However, after acknowledging this sadness and sharing it with them, he had gone on to speak to them simply of the joy this sadness had brought him, the joy of lifelong service and commitment to something beyond himself, the joy of sacrifice - although he did not use this word.

As I stood in that large room full of people, sensing the warmth flowing from those in attendance, seeing the attentive expression of the Mayor himself who was so clearly moved, I knew that it was true. This is an essentially joyful man who has not, however, flinched from the tragic aspect of life, whether it be the open bleeding wound that is our Gharabagh, the unfathomable immensity of the recent earthquake, the savagely mendacious revisionism to which our history continues to be subject, or the earthly sufferings of mankind generally.

Having acknowledged the "black wings of night", Archbishop Torkom, once the boy Avedis Manoogian, has himself done what he the poet, in a beautiful and striking poem, once admonished an imaginary seminarian to do: *to Walk, walk, seminarian, down the shadowed road you foresaw.*

In the Seminary in Jerusalem, the young man was deeply influenced by his remarkable teachers, including the Patriarch Torkom Koushagian, Shahan Berberian, Tiran Nersoyan, Krikor Mekhalian, and the writer Hagop Oshagan, who encouraged him to write poetry. He was ordained into the

deaconate by His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Koushagian, and on July 23, 1939, was ordained into the priesthood by the newly-elected Patriarch, Archbishop Mesrob Nishanian, who renamed him Father Torkom, to perpetuate the memory of his favorite teacher.

The shrewd old priest of Torcy, in the French writer Georges Bernanos' great novel *Diary of a Country Priest*, advises the nameless young priest who is his protégé that the function of a priest is *work*, or, in the original French, *travail*. Certainly His Grace has spent the past fifty years performing that priestly function in a prodigious fashion.

If the work required of a French village priest in the early part of this century was demanding, let us consider the unremitting task of an Armenian cleric in The Diaspora. First, of course, there is his immediate pastoral responsibility toward parishioners. No one who has seen His Grace in the company of our children, to whom he is so naturally and wholeheartedly drawn, or among the older members of our Church for whom he has unlimited time, can help but be awed by the degree of dynamic energy he generates. Beyond this, the more objectively measurable instances of his work concerning religious education, summer camps, teaching programs for retarded children, the development of psychological healing skills among his clergy, and the ordination of priests, are pervasively manifest, along with the day-to-day administration of an enormous, critically-important diocese.

There is also the parallel course of his career as a teacher, or *var-tabed*, in which he carries the work of his own teachers on into the future. This of course includes preaching, but also his participation in study conferences, his own studies, and his active role in the establishment and development of St. Nerses Armenian Theological School.

Finally, regarding pastoral work, there is his awareness of the special needs of Armenians in The Diaspora. All of our strengths notwithstanding, there is the difficult issue of continuing and debilitating suffering among Armenians. As Dr. Levon Boyajian and Dr. Haigaz Gregorian point out in a recent article: "The nonrecognition of the Armenian genocide generates an identity formation problem in the life cycle of Armenians. This identity devaluation may continue for generations to come unless and until it is resolved by proper recognition of the genocide by the world at large." The Primate, in the conferences and commemorations he has initiated over the years, has tirelessly demonstrated a profound sensitivity to this complex issue. The French word for *work* - *travail* - as used by the priest of Torcy in Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest* reminds us of the relationship of suffering to work, since in English the word *travail* carries such a connotation. Yet just as labor pains bring forth a joyful birth so may this underlying aspect of the Primate's work be regarded.

As those who know him have consistently observed, His Grace loves people. However, as central and demanding as his pastoral duty is, in the case of the Primate of the Armenian Church of America, it cannot be disassociated from two other interrelated areas of responsibility - the diplomatic and the cultural.

With the outgoing nature that is his, the Primate has been extraor-



dinarily successful in relating to the world-at-large and representing his people effectively. As a result, the relationship of the Church with Presidents, governors, legislators and mayors, as well as other civic leaders, has not only continued to be warm and positive but has developed more and more fruitfully with time. His genuine collegiality with clergy of other denominations and faiths is also well-known, as is his active and prominent involvement in the work of the National Council of Churches.

In the ancient tradition of the Catholicos St. Sahak and the monk St. Mesrop, through whom we understand how intimately are the Armenian Church and culture are intertwined, the Primate is himself a writer and poet, a scholar, a highly accomplished musician, and a vigorous sponsor of artists. It is clear that he is intensely mindful of the importance of maintaining, perpetuating, and developing a threatened, yet persistently thriving culture. Evidently, this work is a critical tenet of the charge laid upon the Church.

Already in 1948 as a young pastor at the Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia he organized and led the successful Torkomiantz Chorus; since then he has promulgated countless musical programs of all kinds and written extensively on both Church and secular Armenian music. One suspects that one of the most heroic figures in the Primate's personal pantheon is that of the great Gomidas, that rescuer and resurrector whose terrible sacrifice has been so crucially important. His important book, *The Genius of Gomidas*, was published in 1987.

Then there is the Primate's own remarkable collection of poems, *Vankee Orer*. Twenty of these poems were translated into English and published in 1983 under the title, *The Arc*. In them we discern the exemplary outline of the soul of a man of action whose actions are the expressions of that soul, whose actions do not contradict it, but are reflections of its integrity. The poet, writing under the name Shen Mah, is seen to be at one with the man of action and service, His Grace Archbishop Torkom Manoogian.

Peter Sourian