

A CONVERSATION WITH CASSANDRA

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Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia, PA USA, 14 February 2010

"Hi," she said, "my name is Cassandra." It was only natural that she would sit down beside me because it was the only empty seat on the bus, which had stopped to pick her up at the last station before it left the city for the highway. I had been hoping to get some sleep, and had been dozing off. "What's yours?"

I tried to look puzzled, but she would have none of it. "Your name, I mean."

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"It's an Armenian name."

"Oh, that's interesting," she said, "I know about the Armenians. Interesting people. You go back almost three-thousand years. One of the few people mentioned in the Bible who are still around. Important enough for Alexander to want to conquer." At this point, I gave up and decided not to fake sleep.

"You have been let down by your leaders, generally. Now, take Tigran the Second. You would have thought that he would have learned from what happened to his father-in-law Mithridates not to get too ambitious. I tried to warn him. But No. Had to take seriously his self-imposed title, 'King of Kings', and ended up with a postage stamp for a country.

"Of course, when you became the first country to accept Christianity, you had a long list of clergy who held you together. Strange, that. Throughout the centuries you have been oppressed because of your Christianity, and yet, it was your Church that has held you together.

"However, you also had people who figured they were better than anyone else and could do no wrong. Take that guy, Vartan. Instead of listening to his uncle to 'Cool it,' he decides to take on the whole Persian Army. I tried to warn him he would lose and everyone would die. He wouldn't listen. Now, he is a hero. What makes it so sad is that twenty years after the battle, the Persians agreed to everything that Vasak was trying to negotiate.

"But, Oh, those glorious years after you got your own alphabet. And the development of your culture. When the rest of the world was backward and barbarian, the beautiful art that was created. Especially by that guy Roslin. And, your khatchkars--did I say that right?"

"Do you know that it has been recorded that an Armenian monk visited Ireland? Remarkable, isn't it? An Armenian linking the eastern edge of Christianity with the Christians at the western edge!"

"Did the Irish create their Celtic Crosses from what they learned from the Armenian monk? Or, did the Armenian monk learn from the Irish? And, take the concept back? Never mind. It's more interesting if there is no accurate answer. Not only the crosses. The Book of Kells looks like it was inspired by the famous miniatures by Armenian artists. Or, did the Armenians learn about this form of art from the Irish? Yes, it is more interesting and more intriguing if we really don't know."

"And all those churches and monasteries. How did they learn to be such experts? You know, of course, that the Armenian architects were the first to master the challenge of putting a round dome on a square base. When Haghia Sophia was seriously damaged by an earthquake, the Byzantine emperor called in Armenian architects to do the repair."

"And, there are those who believe that the Gothic Cathedrals in Europe with their soaring arches were the result of what the Crusaders saw when they went through Armenia en route to Jerusalem. And took the idea back home with them."

"I hope you won't mind if I say that everything has been going downhill since that glorious past. Yes, I suppose much of it can be blamed on the Seljuks and the Ottomans. But, something went out of the Armenians, I figure."

"Now take your last king, Levon the Fifth. When he lost his throne and tried to get help from the West, he actually believed that if he could bring peace between England and France, their kings would help him get back his throne. That sort of stupidity--do you think that's too strong a word?--well, then, that sort of naivete is inexcusable. I tried to warn him. Even though he was a King, I told him, as the Psalmist said, 'Put not your trust in Princes.' So, how come there is still this foolish belief in Princes--who are today's politicians?"

"And, speaking of politicians, let's talk about those Armenian so-called 'political' parties. What's with the perpetuating of the nineteenth-century thinking into the twenty-first century? I tried to tell anyone who would listen that all those clever men living in Paris and Geneva and Berlin and Moscow had no touch with reality. I even tried to tell them. All they did was create movements for independence that gave the Turks an excuse to keep killing Armenians in Anatolia--not that the Turks needed an excuse. But they were quick to use these so-called political movements as proof of the disloyalty of the Armenians."

"Did those out-of-touch Armenians really think that Europe would help the Armenians? I tried to tell them to study history and see that during the nineteenth century, the West was all talk when it came to"

protecting the Armenians and other Christians. Did the West punish the Turks for the massacres of 1894 through 1896? No. Yet, they worked with the Young Turks to overthrow the Sultan, in 1908. What was their reward? The Massacres around Adana in 1909. Did the West punish the Turks for that? No. With the impunity given them by the West, the Turks went on to commit the first state-conceived, state-planned, state-executed genocide of the twentieth century. Did the West punish the Turks for that? No.

"And, here we are in the twenty-first century and still there are Armenians who think that they can deal with the Turks. I keep trying to tell them they can't. I keep telling the Armenians they don't have any friends. No real friends, that is. They have lip-service friends. But, no one listens to me.

"Part of the problem, of course, is that the Armenians are experts on everything and they never doubt their infallibility. They have made an art of being divided. The thought of unity to the Armenians means 'unity if I am on top and I dictate what we do.' The Armenians seem to think that if one organization is good, two is better, and three is even better. Some time ago, I remember reading that in Armenia there are--or were, at the time--fifty-five political parties. I remember figuring that that meant one party for every 50,000 people--that included children.

"Oh. I see that we are turning off the highway. That means we are getting near my stop where I get off.

"It certainly was nice talking to you. You Armenians certainly are very interesting people."

When I was awakened at my destination, I thought that Cassandra was just a dream, until the man who was sitting in front of me said, as I was about to leave, "That was a very interesting woman you were talking to--the one who got off a while ago."

I hope I covered my amazement, when I said, rather weakly, "Yes, she was."

