"BIRTHPLACE OF MY SOUL..."

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Editorial, 5 October 2013

Armenians—Apostolic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and even those who rarely go to church—are disappointed, disturbed, worried, and irate—about the questionable life of Catholicos Karekin II. Many demand an investigation and the possible defrocking of the ecclesiastical oligarch. But other than complaining, usually among themselves, most accusers of the catholicos don't seem to have an idea as how to get rid of the destructive kleptocrat ("klepticos") who rose to the Etchmiadzin throne through fraud. Those who condemn Catholicos Karekin II are hamstrung by their less-than-adequate knowledge of the Armenian Apostolic Church while the casual or nominal attachment of many others disqualifies them from legitimate criticism of the Church.

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Do you know the structure and hierarchy of your Church?

Do you know who reports to whom in the Church hierarchy?

Do you know anything about the levers and rules intended to provide transparency and accountability in the management of the Church?

Do you know how Etchmiadzin is financed?

If the catholicos is the CEO of the Church, do you know who are the members of the Church's management committee?

Do you know the qualifications of the management committee members?

Do you know whether your parish priest, a collective of priests, or diocese heads can bring about change in KII's reign?

Do you know whether your primate is elected or appointed? Who decides who will be your diocesan head?

Do you know who decides who will be your parish priest?

Do you wonder whether your parish priest is a spiritual person?

Do you wonder whether your parish priest is a contractor whose primary job is officiating at rituals—"Badarak", baptisms, weddings, and funerals?

Do you know how much your parish priest earns or whether his pension is adequate?

Do you donate money to your parish church?

Do you care whether you understand the "krapar" (classical Armenian) recited at "Badarak"?

Do you know the theological differences between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant Churches?

Do you wonder whether KII is reflective of the Armenian Apostolic Church… that the fish is rotten from its head down?

Armenians get poetic about their Church… and quote Vahan Takeyan's "Yegeghetsin Haygagan Dznntavayrn eh Hokvooys…" ("The Armenian Church is the birthplace of my soul…"). Certainly, beautiful and evocative words. But words are meaningless—even the best lines--if not followed by action. Words can also be destructive when they delude us into fantasy and wishful thinking.

If you don't know your Church, how can it be the birthplace of your soul?

If the head of your Church is corrupt, unaccountable, and devoid of spirituality, how can the Church be the birthplace of your soul?

If your Church is the birthplace and fortress of your soul, why are you so indifferent, inattentive to it?

Are we one with our Church or is the Church just a mere agency which provides tenuous links to our heritage through rituals, pageantry and a few ounces of incense?

It's because of the ignorance and inattention of the members of the Armenian Apostolic Church that when 62 bishops and archbishops gathered in Etchmiadzin at the Episcopal Synod (Sept. 24 to 27), there was nothing on the conference agenda about Catholicos Karekin II's mismanagement of the Church, let alone an investigation of his questionable lifestyle. There were also no reports whether his crony, "Bentley" Bishop Kojoyan, drove to the conclave in his ostentatious car. Meanwhile, the catholicos was oiling the wheels (not that of the Bentley), giving a medal to one of his acolytes, and elevating several bishops to archbishops.

The Church Fathers considered whether to canonize the Genocide martyrs, although the topic has been in the books for nearly 40 years. One worthwhile proposal was setting up a fund to assist needy children in Armenia, Artsakh and Syria. But most of their time was spent in how-many-angels-can-dance-on-a-needle ecclesiastical arcana. When only 8% of Apostolic Armenians attend church with any regularity, the bishops dwelled on the wording of sacraments, confirmation, baptism, Chrismation and other top-of-mind rituals.

Then on the last day (Sept. 27) the Fathers of the Church devoted the day to national, religious, social, educational, community, economic, and demographic… issues. It took the embarrassingly unqualified clergymen a mere working day to tackle these wide-ranging, challenging, complex and mostly secular issues. "At the conclusion of the Synod, the Bishops happily reflected on the productive outcome of the meeting…." reported ArmRadio.

We wait with bated breath for the spiritual fathers' redundant solutions to the multifarious challenges the nation faces.

Their next clerical confab is in the fall of next year.