HOLLOW DREAM OF UNITY

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Keghart.com Team Editorial, 4 October 2010

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Are Nature's laws applicable to human society? Some believe so--with good reason. Nations, countries, societies, communities are all in a constant state of transformation-- in evolution or devolution. Conflict, some maintain, is the driving force of any group, irrespective of whether the outcome of the conflict is degradation or progressive change.

The above elemental musings are not an attempt at idle philosophizing, but a search to establish a contextual base for understanding certain terms and notions that are frequently used within Armenian communities in Diaspora. Unity is one such a concept. For decades we have sought the realisation of a unified Armenian nation. Trillion words, give or take a billion, have been devoted to the quest--be it the unity of our Churches, political organizations, or the much-cherished and august national goals.

Is it a futile goal, like Don Quixote's assault on the windmill? Probably yes, because Nature favours diversity and abhors unanimity, uniformity, centralization. Society, as part of Nature, follows--or should follow--the same laws as Nature does.

One is reminded of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's words, "Unity of India is in its diversity." Did it make sense when he uttered them decades ago? Does it still make sense? Are unity and diversity contradictory terms? It's a matter of interpretation and application. For Nehru, the leader of one of the most populous and ethnically-diverse countries, the notion of unity in contradictions served a clear goal, a strategy that guided India for decades following its independence in 1947.

Can the same principle be applied to Armenian communities in Diaspora? Will the same principle serve our common good and the survival of our far-flung communities? Perhaps it would if we were to perceive unity of contradictions as an expression of harmony.

It certainly makes better sense to talk of harmony rather than unity. This is not demagoguery... or preaching an impossible dream. Tearing each other apart because of the disunity of our Churches or political organizations will lead us nowhere. If we continue down this injurious path, our community will disappear in a few generations. Notwithstanding calamities, the survival of our community will depend on the absence/presence of inner conflicts, the social skills of adaptability and flexibility, intellectual potential, correct interpretation of geopolitical forces, and not necessarily physical enormity.

The Armenian-Canadian community is in a unique and fortunate position to set the trend of looking at issues through its own prism. There is almost a complete absence of arcane animosities among Armenian-Canadian intellectuals and activists. On the contrary, there is an atmosphere of mutual respect despite the partisan affiliations of some. The local partisan press is not acrimonious. And a variety of non-partisan small groups have taken their initial steps in opening up to the community at large and accomplishing deeds worthy of a reputable organization. Our professional associations function without partisan banners. People of one persuasion attend the functions of their competing groups.

Probably these trends are more apparent in Montreal than in other Canadian cities. Was it a coincidence Harout Chitilian's recent election as a council member in Montreal? Far from it. It was the concerted effort, particularly of young people, who irrespective of their party affiliations, side by side with their non-partisan colleagues were able to gather sufficient political mass to assist Chitilian to win.

Let us follow their example. Let's accept the presence of two Apostolic Churches and three rival political camps, with their affiliated cultural and other associations. Ad nauseam talk of who is right and who is wrong will not make a dent on the political make-up of our community. What will bring about real change toward harmony is participation in community activities and by simply ignoring which organization says what or does what.

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At a recent Armenian Association of Toronto and AGBU-organized gathering in Toronto, Viken Attarian, a Montreal intellectual and veteran activist, cited five crises of the Armenian Diaspora: Retention of identity and language, anti-intellectualism, disinformation, and lack of legitimacy. To overcome these challenges and be positioned in a positive groove, the Armenian-Canadian community--especially its organizations and leaders--is in dire need of concrete data. We lack valid and crucial demographic data, said Attarian. No one knows, for example, the true statistics of the Armenian-Canadian population, the number of marriages and mixed marriages, the educational

levels and migration patterns... When there is no concrete data, myths are born; without concrete data, there can't be concrete action. Without data, to paraphrase Attarian, we can't create common points of purpose. No matter the ideology, the orientation, and mission of an Armenian organization, it can't move forward and develop a common ethos without concrete information. Even organizations which are diametrically opposed require a factual, identical data as a foundation for their action plan. Data can be interpreted in different ways, but it continues to remain the unquestionable, agreed-upon truth even among groups which are not in unison. Metaphorically speaking, community statistics is the musical note; the various organizations are the musical instruments. The piano, violin and flute produce different sounds, but the end result is harmonious, sweet music. Working in coopeation, Canadian-Armenian organizations should create their own statistical data base. We can't find these statistics in government or research company computer files.

Solid data would help us critically evaluate our roles and subsequently create solid action plans. An honest goal to create solid and novel action plans (based on factual data) would open spaces for new ideas to be heard and for detached intellectuals and former activists, sitting on the margins, come forth and participate in diasporan nation-building. By asserting your presence as a person, a group, an association in a common ethos we will witness true harmony evolve. Let Armenian-Canadians help lead the way for the sustenance, survival and prosperity of the global Armenian nation.