

MIXED MARRIAGES/EPILOGUE

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By Artin Boghossian PhD, Toronto, 3 July 2009

Dr. Artin Boghossian is a retired mathematician. He is the owner and moderator of 24 April Forum (Canada) where much of the "independent" deliberations take place in the community about various subjects that concern Armenians at large. Over the past few weeks a near exhaustive discussion was devoted to the subject of mixed marriages and the following is an excellent summary.

24april is not an organization; hence it cannot make decisions or take actions as such. It is a virtual "coffee shop" like medium, where individuals come and go and leave their impressions and opinions. However, it is known that many people inside and outside the group closely monitor the discussions and take notes. While we were on the topic of Mixed Marriages, people have been privately pondering methods to further encourage and involve mixed couples in Armenian community life.

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The fact that there were no readily available statistics on Mixed Marriages involving Armenians was not the main interest for initiating this discussion. One of the intents was to highlight that we are so engulfed, albeit justifiably, with matters involving Turks, Azeris, and are forced to repeat the same old information so often and to such an extent that we are left with no time or opportunity for institutionalizing various studies in timely social and other issues, mixed marriages being one such matter.

Mixed marriages are a fact of life. One purpose in tackling this matter was, as it was also the majority opinion expressed here, to publicize the need for a liberal outlook within the community as a whole to accept and retain all members of mixed marriages, and appreciate the vitality and other benefits that they may import to our community. In this regard, I have personally heard in Toronto sermons by Father Zareh Zargarian and Rev. Sam Albarian, who have exhibited an exemplary attitude, which I have no reason to doubt that other clergy also share it.

This discussion also brought to light the efforts of Dr. Hranoush Hagobyan, the Minister of The

Diaspora, with Calabrina Boyajian as her assistant for North America, to recognize the mixed married group as an important component of our community and that a conference in this regard is scheduled to take place in March of 2010 in Yerevan. This is a first of its kind and one cannot expect perfection at this time.

The second aim was to see if members thought there was any direct correlation between this phenomenon and the often-mentioned disappearance of the Western Armenian language and the Diaspora by assimilation. Actually, the question is not even well defined. To begin with, the Diaspora is not disappearing anytime soon, except perhaps as poetic proclamations of doom and gloom conveniently used for various effects.

Sure, the Armenian Diaspora may be shifting centres, but certainly not disappearing. If it appears to be disappearing perhaps because of the divergence of youth priorities and their dispersion away from Armenian centres, one wonders if that is due to our traditional approach being out of synch with the times.

Whole new sets of generations are probably eagerly waiting for the emergence of novel ways of conducting our affairs for them to step up their involvement in a meaningful way. Our youth cannot be expected to perceive nor cope with their surroundings with an outlook identical to those of the survivors of the Genocide and their immediate descendents, who continue to this day to grab the reins of all our organizations.

The verdict on the fate of the Western Armenian language in the Diaspora is far from being clear. Some seem to feel that we need to keep it alive at all costs, rightfully pointing out the desirable end result that this will instill and enhance a sense of national belonging, association and attachment. Why not, if possible, and at what cost.

On the other hand, the facts on the ground seem to suggest that the language is on its way out of circulation. To address and offer a solution to this problem, Onnig Beylerian may have hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "I believe that the idea of Armenia goes well beyond its language. Armenia is a creed or belief, a perspective of life and values, a way of acting and behaving, all of which can be learned and acquired even if you are not Armenian."

There was a suggestion to discuss in this forum "more important" topics than mixed marriages, such as Church unity, the role of political parties in the Diaspora, etc. Church unity has been discussed in the past in this forum. The subject definitely continues to remain of paramount interest and it cannot be separated from political parties. There is no reason why we cannot revisit such topics in the weeks ahead by launching appropriate subject lines for discussion, provided extra care is exercised to refrain from making off-the-cuff statements.

I truly wish to thank and commend all members who provided their opinions on this sensitive issue of mixed marriages. The fact that I labeled this message "Epilogue" should not be interpreted as the end of the road.

