

Address by Berberian, Dr. Dorian

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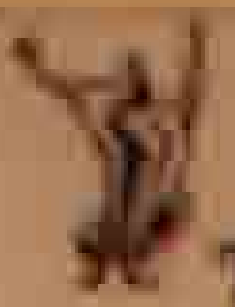
THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

MARASH *

I lived in Marash from 1905 until February 1922 and was an eyewitness to the brutal and tragic massacre of my people during the Franco-Turkish conflict which erupted in that city as the initial phase of Mustafa Kemal's movement. I will not relate the causes and the consequences of that war. All that has been written and is available to you. For those who can read Armenian, the book entitled "Marash", edited by Mr. Krikor Kaloustian and published in 1934 under the sponsorship of your organization, is available. For those who cannot read Armenian I urge the reading of the memoirs of the Rev. Abraham Hartunian, the account of the Armenian Genocide by the Turks, translated into the English language by his son, the Rev. Vartan Hartunian of Belmont. The book entitled: "Neither to Laugh nor to Weep" and published by the Beacon Press, is a record of the experiences of the author and of the Armenian nation. It covers the period from 1895 to 1922. It begins with the Great Armenian Massacre of 1895 and ends with the account of the Massacre of Marash and its aftermath. I love the book because it is historically accurate and is written neither for revenge nor for opening old wounds, but rather to warn people and nations that in any kind of armed conflict, regardless of the participants, results are always terribly inhuman.

When I received your invitation to address this audience I had some personal reservations about expressing publicly

Delivered on April 12, 1970 at a Memorial Service held in Watertown, Mass. by the Union of Armenians of Marash on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Tragedy of Marash.



my own feelings on the subject of Armenian-Turkish relations. In order that I may not be misunderstood, permit me to give you a very brief autobiography of my life in so far as it relates to my involvement in the tragedy of Marash.

My father, Apraham Khodja Berberian, was born in Adana in 1873. After graduation from the Central Turkey College in Aintab, he came to Marash and studied at the Theological Seminary in Marash graduating in 1902. After his graduation he was sent to Diarbekir as "Karositch" where I was born in 1903. When I was a 40 day old baby, my father was sent to Sis and then we came to Marash where my younger brother Harutune was born in 1905. In Marash my father decided to leave the ministry as a vocation and chose the teaching profession. He taught Turkish at first in Marash Academy for boys, later at "Miatzial Varjarian" and lastly in the German orphanage school at Beit-Shalom from 1913 to 1920.

When the war of Marash began on Jan. 19, 1920 we were a family of seven; three brothers and two sisters. Because of Christmas vacation my parents, two sisters (Lousatzin and Angele) and my youngest 4 year old brother (Emmanuel) were at home in the "Divanli Mahalessé" and were brutally murdered according to the facts disclosed to me by one of the participants in the crime. When the French occupation forces withdrew from Marash it was largely due to the intervention of the American Missionaries, Mr. Lyman in particular, and several members of the Near East Relief Organization, Dr. Wilson, Dr. Kerr and others, that a truce



was established and the wholesale massacre of survivors who had congregated in several churches and orphanages was averted.

Of my family of 7 members, my brother Haruntune and I escaped death because we were not at home that day. I was 16 and my brother 14 years old. As soon as the fighting stopped the Near East Relief organization began its relief and care program, I was given a job to work as a helper to the pharmacist, Mr. Stepan Tchobadjian. A few months later Mr. Tchobadjian became sick with typhoid fever and was hospitalized. The responsibility of running the pharmacy fell on me. During this period a young Turkish lad in his early twenties came to the pharmacy with a prescription to be filled. We recognized each other for we were neighbors. He asked me where I was during the hostilities, saying "you weren't with your family when we killed them." He said "you do not believe my story do you, look at this pocket watch, whose was it?" It was my father's pocket watch. He added "your father had a small Browning with 7 cartridges; we found it in his coat pocket." That was also true, my father hadn't used any of the cartridges. He then recounted the details of the massacre. He told me that my family and many other families were congregated in a house in "Kumbat" near the Turkish cemetery with the hope of fleeing to Beitshalom where a garrison of French troops was stationed. He said "we surrounded them and they surrendered." He added: "Knowing that we had come to kill them your father



asked permission to pray; He took a small book out of his pocket, read a portion, prayed, and said, "we are ready." As soon as your father finished praying we fell upon them and sl^oughtered them, robbed them and dumped their naked bodies into a ditch."

The story of this Turkish lad was true. Two or three weeks after the withdrawal of French troops and the occupation of the city by Turks, Armenians who had survived were permitted to return to their homes to look for the corpses of their loved ones and to bury them if they wanted to; permission was granted to minimize the stink. One day a few men approached me and asked me if I would join them in their search. I could not bring myself to go with them, knowing full well that even if it were possible to find the rotting bodies piled up in a ditch, their immortal souls would have passed long ago from death into eternal life. Moreover, it would have been a very traumatic experience for me to identify the mutilated corpses of my parents, two sisters and youngest brother, nothing of value would have been accomplished by transferring their remains from one ditch to another.

What I am about to say now may appear odd to some of you but it is what I most sincerely and deeply believe. Unhappy periods in our lives can bring us heightened understanding and compassion for others. Adversity like unpleasant medicine is somehow good for the soul.



We Armenians do not hesitate to tell the world that we were the first nation to embrace Christianity as our national religion. We suffered martyrdom for our faith, yet we must admit that the glorious pages of our national history relate to those brief periods when our forefathers lived and died preaching the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Christians our mission was and is to preach the Gospel of love. The most glorious pages in the history of our nation were the days when Armenian Christians carried the message of the Gospel to Georgia, Azerbaijan, Persia, India and to the far distant land of China. We suffered martyrdom for our faith. But when we forsook our missionary calling and became indrawn and kept our faith bottled up within us, we lost our luster, our glow, our kindness, our generosity, our steadfastness, our courage and our self-respect. We stood for our rights, we emphasized our differences, we boasted of the superiority of our Christian religion over the religion of Islam; of our God given capacity for creative work and intellect and we failed miserably to recognize goodness in others. We looked down on our neighbors and became despicable in the eyes of the Turkish people.

We passed through fearful times, we lost over a million and a half of our dear ones in exile, deportation and massacres, the lives of those of us who survived were threatened. We felt we were forsaken but we weren't forsaken.



No one who believes in Jesus Christ is ever forsaken. We felt helpless, adrift in darkness, and beset by dangers. We had no one to turn to and nowhere to go, other than to strangers. In our darkest moments of despair God saved us thru the intervention of the American missionaries and the officers of the Near East Relief Organization.

The fact that you and I are alive today is a positive proof to the fundamental goodness even in the hearts of many Turkish people. After the night of sorrow, oppressions disenchantment and dismemberment a remnant was left and we survived. Our faith in immortality renders less bitter separation from those we have loved and lost. Though disillusioned let us now live greatly and joyously.

The real demonstration of our Christian heritage is the lives that we live. Our encrusted fears, suspicions and hatred of the Turkish people blinded us to our opportunities, to the possibility, under God, of deeper commitment for peace and understanding between us Christians and our neighbors. We failed by abandoning attempts to reduce conflict to a minimum. We have failed to get out of the way to let God to come out of the eclipse of our selfishness and to shine through us.

I do not mean to sound callous. Those blows we suffered when our loved ones were massacred hurt us deeply. Time and God can solve many problems. God also cares and provides not



only our daily necessities but also the innate forces for good within us which if exercised are greater than forces of evil in the world. Active faith knows no fear and is a safeguard against cynicism and despair.

Let us not build walls around ourselves shutting the light of God. Let us go on to meet the world, with a sense of discovery that we are brothers capable of forgetting and forgiving the past. Let us work for betterment of relations between us and the Turkish people. Let us forsake and forget the foolish thoughts of regaining parts of Turkey where no Armenians have lived for more than ten decades. Let us not commit the same mistake the Zionist Jews committed and are committing in claiming and acquiring lands which once may have belonged to them but for centuries have been the land of Arabs. Their selfish zeal made the Holy Land a battle ground for a quarter of a century and the end is not yet in sight. The Holy Land may yet become the site of an Armageddon of unimaginable suffering and destruction.

It seems that we have an innate capacity for creating misery, unhappiness and destruction for ourselves and for our fellowmen. Salvation for our world will not come through political or economic factors but through divine intervention. Our problems are fundamentally the result of a lack of spiritual power in us, the lack of faith in us that God will give us His Holy Spirit if we ask of Him. Jesus Christ died for the world, for the Armenian and for the Turk, in order that the Turk and the Armenian may live a joyous and peaceful



life free from fear. It is only through the workings of the spirit that we can be delivered from the spirit of defeatism which haunts us all. Let us admit that without the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives we cannot do even our daily chores effectively, whether the job is the raising up of children at home or whether it be the responsible job of establishing bridge-heads of friendship and fellowship with people. The inhumanity of man to man is the basic problem of life and in the form of wars and massacres has extinguished nations and races. The one and only salvation to the human problem is in a living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our fault is that we Armenians are always thinking that the Turks were unfair to us. If we could stop classifying people together by their nationality or color and liking or hating them as such, we would soon come to realize that even the Turkish people are the children of God. We can only turn our thought and mind away from fear and hatred when we turn our thoughts to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have insuperable problems but we cannot conquer them by material things. If this were true we Americans ought to be the happiest and most fearless of all people. We are rich in material things but we are poor spiritually. We lack faith. We say like Naaman the leper "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus better than all waters of Israel?" If Naaman had not changed his mind and exercised his

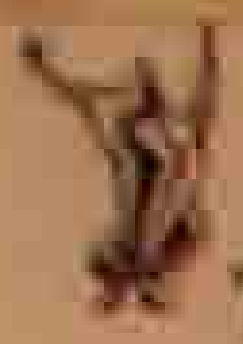


faith in the God of Israel to wash himself in the waters of Jordan he would have lived and died a leper.

Life is not a one way street. What we do and say here today even what we think has a direct effect on our relationship with our Armenian brothers living in Turkey. My advice to our brothers still living in Turkey today is to be loyal, sincere, honest, courteous and fair Turkish Armenians, to exercise their faith in Jesus Christ and to stop hating each other. Respect begets respect, suspicion begets suspicion, hate begets hate.

We must learn to respect the Turkish people and their views though we may be in total disagreement with them. No person and no nation has a monopoly on wisdom or talent. Without belief in God life makes no sense. I like to think that when Turks massacred us they did it because of motives which appeared right to them. The more we hate the more cynical, unhappy, resentful and little we become. Anger and hate is waste. It hurts no one but the hater. Life becomes worth living only when we make it worth living. Let us not dissolve in self-pity. Let us play our bad hand well. Let us pray God that we may find gladness even in our sorrow and failure in order that we may bring the gift of gladness to a sick world.

I invite you to have faith in God, in ourselves and in our fellowmen. I am an optimist at heart, because I see daily that an ever growing number of people have faith. In



my childhood years, at the beginning of this century very few people thought of world food, world health, world education, world pollution, world over-population. Many millions are thinking of these things today. My question to my fellow Armenians, are there enough of us who now believe to become ambassadors of Christ for truth and reality. The world need not be a dog-eat-dog jungle if we believe that we are the keepers of our brothers.

Evil can only be obliterated by good. Hatred is destructive. Are we gathered here to hate the Turk for having massacred our loved ones, for having attempted to obliterate Armenians from the face of the earth? It is not easy to love people, nations, one's enemies and even ideals unless one's thoughts and actions are led by the spirit of Jesus Christ. If we cannot love let us at least stop hating.

We all came to the shores of this land as fugitives from the tyrannies and hatreds of Turkey. The restless human endeavor, the great "American Dream", the ceaseless energy, the vitality of the pioneers stirred and infected us. We became Americans. We built homes, factories, business establishments and churches. In this endeavor we lifted our spirit and spread our opportunities. Some have achieved wealth and fame. We became strong. "It is for those who are strong to help the weak; for those who are sound in mind and body to help those afflicted" (Newbold Morris). This is what the Christian life is all about. Hence the Armenian



General Benevolent Union, the Armenian Missionary Association of America, the Association of Friends of the Armenian National Sanatorium of Lebanon, yes, also the Compatriotic Union of Marash Armenians. When we are awakened to the social evils of cheerless, unsanitary, unsafe tenements in which many of our compatriots still live in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere and decide to tax ourselves to subsidize their health, education and welfare, then we are acting as Christians. Many of us have become active in social life and in business. As such, do we live only for ourselves? Have we thereby become generous or selfish? Has our major interest in people been what they represented as business contacts? If so, rather than living with a purpose we are pouring cocktails into our stomachs because of boredom. We can only live a full life if we become aware of, and appreciative of people in all walks of life. This is Christianity and it can change our lives.

To serve our neighbor with love. But to do this we need a spiritual rebirth. Are we going to set an example of sound Christian thinking and integrity with a moral purpose of becoming the keepers of our brothers, even of our enemies? Are we gathered in a church this afternoon to mourn our dead or are we here to celebrate our rebirth? I shall love my enemy the Turk, even the very ones who killed my father, mother, two sisters, and youngest brother. This I cannot do of myself. I need the touch of God's finger as Isaiah and Jeremiah, the prophets of old, were touched



of God and then I must work and struggle to acquire the gift of love that can forgive, forget, serve patiently, joyfully, peacefully, gently, kindly, and temperately. Herein lies eternal happiness. May this be the gift of God the "touch" of God to every one here present this afternoon.

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