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Dear Peter,

On the 27th of November, His Beatitude Snork Kalutsian returned to Istanbul from a ten-week trip to the Soviet Union, Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and West Germany--where he visited various of the Armenian communities abroad. For the Gregorian Patriarch, it was, I should think, an inauspicious moment in which to arrive at Yeşilköy Airport. Just a few days before, in Vienna, an Armenian terrorist had gunned down a Turkish national working as deputy director of the United Nations Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. Evner Ergun, the international civil servant killed on this particular occasion, was the 32nd Turk serving in a diplomatic capacity or in a comparable position to be murdered by Armenian terrorists since 1974.

The Patriarch was apparently equal to the occasion. According to Turkish press reports, the 73-year-old Kalutsian made a public statement on his return. "I have met with religious leaders in Britain and West Germany and published communiques against terrorism, violence and anarchy," he said. "I condemn terrorism once more with all my belief. I consider it a great sin and an action of inhumanity. I am a man of religion, an emissary of peace. I pray for mankind to live in happiness and honor."

A few days later, the Patriarch sounded the same theme once again. "The Armenians of the world are disgusted with the terrorist incidents," he remarked. "However, they are also too scared to speak out or write against them. The Armenians stood up and applauded me throughout my visit whenever I said that terrorism is against our religion, that we condemn it and that it

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dishonors Armenian nationals."

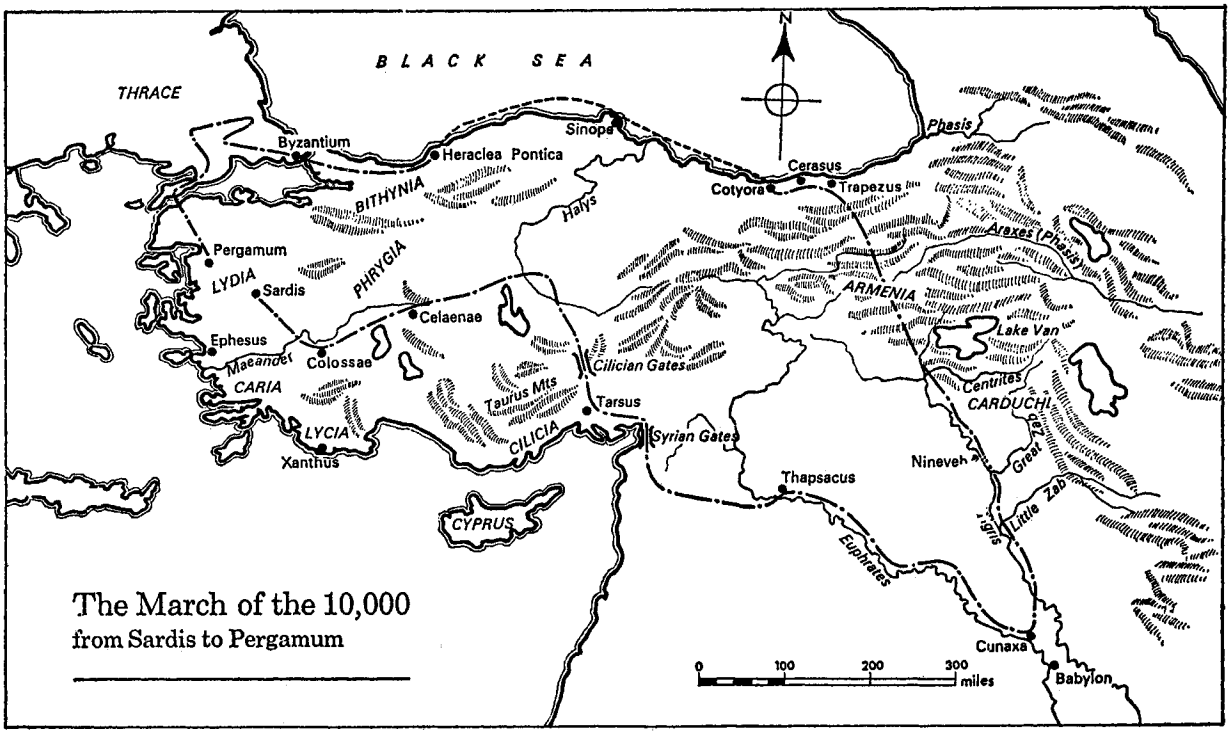
I allude to the murder of the unfortunate Ergun and cite the subsequent statements of the Gregorian Patriarch not because they are of more than passing interest in and of themselves. It is regrettable that this is the case--but terrorism is now much too commonplace to merit extended notice per se, and consequently the wringing of hands has become an almost ritual response. I therefore mention the assassination in Vienna and the Patriarch's response chiefly for another reason: the obvious connection between the deed accomplished in Austria and the words spoken here is a useful reminder that in Istanbul there is a large and prosperous Armenian community numbered in the tens of thousands--a community that has much to lose both from the resurgence of anti-Turkish Armenian agitation in the United States and in Europe, and from the related upsurge in Armenian terrorism against Turkish citizens living abroad. The existence of this community is but one of the many little-known facts which an American contemplating the Armenian question should keep in mind.

In the handful of pages that follow, I will trace the origins of the Armenian community and its development until very recent times; in my next letter, I will discuss what is now known and what can be surmised about the massacres inflicted on the Armenians in the 1890s and during the First World War. In the process, I hope to throw some light on what was then and is still today a festering sore.

I

In the year 401 B.C., an adventurous young Athenian disciple of Socrates named Xenophon accompanied some ten thousand Greek mercenaries on a march up-country from the coast of Asia Minor to the neighborhood of Babylon. These men were in the pay of Cyrus, the younger brother of the Great King of Persia. They had been hired to fight on his behalf as he made a bid to oust his brother from the Persian throne. As readers of the Anabasis may remember, Cyrus's troops won the battle that took place at Cunaxa near Babylon, but the young prince lost his life in the process--and the Ten Thousand unexpectedly found themselves stranded in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, cast adrift in a sea of strange and hostile peoples. Thanks in large part to Xenophon's presence of mind, they managed to save themselves by marching from Babylonia to the Greek city of Trapezos--up the Tigris to the river's sources and then across the eastern reaches of Asia Minor to the Black Sea.

On their journey, Xenophon and the Ten Thousand passed through the mountainous region separating Assyria from Anatolia and suffered terrible losses in battling a warlike people whom Xenophon calls the Karduchioi; there is every reason to suppose that these were the ancestors of the equally fierce



mountaineers whom we know as the Kurds.[1] When the Greeks finally completed the trek from northern Iraq into eastern Anatolia and gladly turned their backs on Kurdistan, they encountered yet another new nation. These were the people whom Xenophon identifies as the Armenioi.[2]

There is no way to know for certain just when those speaking the Indo-European language we call Armenian first entered the Transcaucasus and eastern Anatolia. Their national epic attributes their arrival to a period two millenia or more prior to the march of the Ten Thousand, but that document is not a particularly dependable source. The archaeological record, mute though it may be, is, in fact, a far more plausible guide. On the basis of it, one may with reasonable safety assert that, by Xenophon's time, the Armenians had been residing in the region in which he found them for at least two or three centuries already.[3] They were certainly there in 521 B.C., for

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1. Xenophon Anabasis 4.3.1-4.1.

2. Xenophon Anabasis 4.5.1-36. See also ibid. 4.3.1, 3-4, 4.1-4.

3. One scholar has recently suggested that the ancient Armenians first entered the Armenian plateau in the late 7th or early 6th century in the wake of the

they are mentioned on the great trilingual inscription that the Achaemenid King of Persia Darius I had carved into the cliffs above Behistun.[4]

In antiquity, the Armenians were a sedentary people. Some seven hundred years went by after the Ten Thousand passed through, but the Armenians were still in the same place, working the land in the area of Mt. Ararat and Lake Van, at the time that Diocletian became Emperor at Rome. It was during his reign that a Greek-speaking missionary from Cappadocia named Gregory the Illuminator managed to convert Tiridates the king of Armenia to Christianity. The resulting establishment of the Gregorian Church as the national religion of Tiridates's subjects was among the most important, formative events in Armenian history.

The Armenians had gained their independence in about 322 B.C. as a by-product of Alexander the Great's conquest of Achaemenid Persia. From the time of Pompey the Great, their kingdom served as a buffer state between the Roman Empire and its Parthian, then Persian rivals to the East. Prior to Tiridates' reign, the Armenians owed their religion, much of their culture, and often even their kings to the Zoroastrian dynasties of nearby Iran. Tiridates' conversion in 294 A.D. or thereabouts signalled Armenia's rejection of the East--and it prepared the way for her subsequent adherence to the West.[5] Constantine's conversion just a few years thereafter and his succcess in making the entire Roman Empire his personal dominion insured that Christianity would be the established religion throughout the Mediterranean world.

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great Cimmerian invasion. Their language, he argues, was quite close to that spoken by the ancient Phrygians. See H. Pasdermadjian, Histoire de l'Arménie[2] (Paris 1964) pp. 21-26.

4. For this inscription, see Roland Kent, Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon[2] (New Haven, Connecticut 1953).

5. For the date, see Brian McDermott, "The Conversion of Armenia in 294 A.D.: A Review of the Evidence in Light of the Sassanian Inscriptions," Revue des études Arméniennes 7 (1970) pp. 281-359. The evidence is almost impossible to sort out, and some scholars are inclined to place the event a decade or so after 294. See, for example, P. Ananian, "La data e circostanze delle consecrazione di S. Gregorio Illuminatore," Le Museon 74 (1961) pp. 43-73. It perhaps deserves notice that, in Armenia, Christianity was a persecuting religion from the start. One of Tiridates' first acts as a Christian was the destruction of the Zoroastrian fire temples of Armenia. This provocation appears to have occasioned a Persian invasion.

II

Today, it is quite common to speak of Christianity as being divided between the churches of the West and those of the East, but that distinction obscures another that was of considerable importance in antiquity and that was decisive for the development of the Armenian nation. In the 5th century, at the very time in which the Patriarch of Constantinople was starting both to hint that he was not inferior to the Bishop of Rome and to assert his independence from the Papal See, the Christian church in the East began to split over a great theological question. The dispute seems trivial today, but it was once thought far more important than life or death--and it played a central role in shaping the subsequent history of the eastern Mediterranean. The world as we know it would be a very different place had it not been for the great schism that took place in eastern Christianity at this time.

In late antiquity, Christian doctrine was a matter of central importance. Of Constantinople in this age, Gregory of Nyassa wrote, "If in this city you ask anyone for change, he will discuss with you whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of the bread, you will receive the answer, 'The Father is greater, the Son is less.' If you suggest that a bath is desirable, you will be told, 'There was nothing before the Son was created.'" What was true for Constantinople was even more true for Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch. The passions engaged by politics in classical times were aroused by theological disputes in the later Roman empire and in the Byzantine period. These disputes were many, but none was more bitter than the quarrel that erupted at the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon in 431 and 451 A.D. over the mystery of the Incarnation--Christ's nature as both God and man.

At the first of these two events, Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, squared off against Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and secured a decision in his favor. Nestorius was deposed; his doctrines were condemned; and his followers were subsequently harried from pillar to post. Ultimately, the persecution became so intense that they fled from eastern Syria and sought refuge in Sassanid Persia--where a Zoroastrian monarch intent on sponsoring division within Christendom gave them a warm welcome. Cyril's victory was very nearly complete.[6]

At the second Council, however, Cyril's successors found themselves pressed to modify their doctrinal stance. Though outnumbered, they were

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6. Within the Sassanid realm and in the lands to the East, the Nestorian Church continued to maintain a vigorous existence. Later, Nestorian missionaries established a Christian presence in China and in southern India. The latter presence survives to this day.

reluctant to do so. Everyone was agreed that Christ was somehow both man and God, but they were at odds with regard to what this meant. Did Christ partake fully of both natures? Or was he of a single nature somehow derived from both? And was Mary properly described as the bearer of Christ (Christotokos)? Or was she, in fact, the bearer of God (Theotokos)? Ultimately, the dispute turned over the selection of a single preposition. Once made, that choice would determine whether the Church would emphasize Christ's divinity or his humanity. The Pope at Rome and the Western Church in general taught that Christ partook of both natures and described Mary as Christotokos; Cyril and his followers leaned the other way. In 451, the Byzantine Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople were intent on seeking military aid in the West; and they rightly feared that, if the pronouncements of the Council of Ephesus were not softened, a schism would open up between the churches of the East and West and preclude their securing the help they needed.[7]

The Gregorian Church was not immediately caught up in the quarrel. In fact, the Armenians were not even represented at Chalcedon. Nonetheless, they were forced in due course to make a choice between the contending parties. Partly because the Katholikos who then presided over the Gregorian Church happened to consult the Patriarchate at Constantinople at a moment when that office temporarily lay in monophysite hands, and partly also because the Persian enemy was sponsoring the Nestorian Church which vigorously rejected the monophysite dogma, the Armenians made a doctrinal decision that resulted in their eventually becoming allied with the Jacobite dissidents of Syria and with the Copts of Egypt both against Rome and against the orthodox churches of the East.[8]

In the decades that followed the Council of Chalcedon, positions gradually hardened--until neither side was willing to recognize the legitimacy of the priests and bishops consecrated by the other. By 600 A.D., the monophysite rebellion dominated a region stretching from the Black Sea along the eastern frontiers of the Roman empire to Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia. This was an area larger than the regions loyal to Rome and Constantinople combined.

The mutual withdrawal of recognition--with each side branding the other with heresy--had important political implications. No one in either camp doubted that it was the proper task of the civil authority to stamp out heresy and enforce religious orthodoxy. When St. Augustine touched on the matter in an epistle of exhortation penned to a Roman provincial governor, he spoke for all Christians--those of the East as well as those of the West. In this

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7. For the origins and development of the dispute, see W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church (Cambridge 1972).

8. See Frend, The Rise of the Monophysite Movement passim, and K. Sarkissian, The Council of Chalcedon and the Armenian Church (London 1965).

letter, Augustine first mentions the virtues--prudence, courage, temperance, and justice--that the magistrate must exhibit and employ in the course of carrying out his responsibilities. Then, he suddenly makes a striking assertion. "If you exercise your virtues and strive for this," he contends,

> that those whose welfare concerns you may be uninjured in body, safe from the evil-doing of the wicked, and at peace; if you exercise your virtues and strive that they may have sons like young plants, daughters dressed in the image of a temple, storehouses full and flowing, their sheep prolific in young, their oxen fat, the walls marking their estates intact, and no outcry of quarrelsome men sounding through their streets--if so, then, yours are not true virtues and the happiness of these men is not true happiness. If, I tell you, your administration, fitted out with the virtues I have listed, is limited to this one end that men may suffer no evil and distress in matters pertaining to the flesh, and if you judge that it is no business of yours to what end they employ the peace and quiet that you have so striven to provide--that is, lest I speak ambiguously, that they should worship the true God (in whom lies the fruit of all peace and quiet in this life)--then this great labor cannot truly be of profit to you with regard to a happy and blessed life.[9]

For the serious Christian, government was ordained by God not chiefly to provide for the material wants of men; it did not exist solely or even primarily to protect their rights and to promote their happiness. It was, instead, created by God to encourage human beings to grow in Christian virtue and to devote their efforts morning, noon, and night not to the bootless quest for satisfaction in this world but rather to the attainment of salvation in the world hereafter. Accordingly, serious Christians (men like Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and their counterparts in the East) were never hesitant to argue for the persecution of heretics. Distasteful though it might seem to human beings reared in modern, liberal republics and accustomed to think of matters of faith and religious doctrine as proper subjects for contemplation in the privacy of the individual conscience, such persecution was in fact demanded by Christian charity--at least as that charity was understood prior to its reformation in keeping with the dictates of the modern virtue that the philosophes of the 18th century and their successors called humanity.

Until the last four hundred years, nearly all Christians agreed that salvation depended on true belief and on access to divine grace through sacraments administered by priests who had been properly ordained. Furthermore, Christians in the age of faith were absolutely firm in their conviction that a man who gained the whole world but lost his immortal soul had gained nothing and sacrificed all, and they were similarly persuaded that

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9. Augustine Epistulae 155.10. Augustine's description of prosperity is a paraphrase of Psalm 144.12-14.

it was only too easy to lose one's immortal soul. It should not, then, be surprising that the Emperors at Constantinople acted vigorously to stamp out the monophysite heresy within their realm.

This persecution had a startling and unforeseen effect. By the fourth decade of the 7th century A.D., the beleaguered Copts of Egypt and their Jacobite brethren in Syria were willing to seek refuge from Byzantine tyranny in a tacit alliance with the Moslem invaders then erupting from the wilds of Arabia into the Mediterranean world. Because of sectarian strife, a Christian Empire that had survived the onslaught of the Huns and the Persians easily gave way before the Arab armies of Islam. This had an almost immediate effect on the Armenians as well.

Armenia had not become a part of the Roman empire until just a few decades before that empire collapsed in the western Mediterranean. Late in the 4th century, the Emperor at Byzantium and his Sassanid rival in Persia had joined together to eliminate the buffer state separating them by the simple expedient of partitioning it between them. Thus, when the Byzantine armies retreated before the Arab hosts, Armenia was left virtually undefended and dangerously exposed. In the 7th century, like Egypt and Syria, it too fell to the Arabs--and, for a time, the only monophysite realms to lie outside the House of Islam were Ethiopia and the various Christian kingdoms of Nubia.[10]

III

Eventually, of course, the Arab empire broke up, and the Armenians seized the opportunity to regain their independence. For a period stretching from about 886 to 1045 A.D., the Bagratid dynasty ruled parts of the Trans-Caucasus and eastern Asia Minor--but this kingdom, too, was destined to fall. When Armenia once again succumbed to outside pressure, that pressure came not from the Arabs but rather from a resurgent Byzantine Empire--which itself soon lost eastern Anatolia to the Seljuk Turks. After the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, Byzantium never again reasserted her hold over the Armenian plateau.[11]

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10. The Nubian kingdoms managed the remarkable feat of holding off their Moslem neighbors to the North until the middle of the 15th century; Ethiopia was often beleaguered, but she never fully succumbed. For the considerable contact maintained between Armenia and Ethiopia over the succeeding ages, see R. Pankhurst, "The History of Ethiopian-Armenian Relations," Revue des études Arméniennes 12 (1977) pp. 273-345.

11. For the Bagratid kingdom, see Pasdermadjian, Histoire de L'Arménie[2] pp. 149-179.

The Armenians proved to be a remarkably resilient people. The Byzantine, then Seljuk conquest of their ancestral homeland was a considerable setback, but not even it was enough to finish them off altogether. As the generations passed, a sizeable Armenian population had drifted away from the Black Sea down to Cilicia on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor. They managed to gain control of this district in about 1080 and to maintain it for some centuries thereafter with sporadic help from the crusaders active to the South and from the Mongols to the East. The last Armenian principality in the region was not crushed until the Mamluks of Egypt intervened in 1375.[12] That event put an end to Armenian indepence once and for all, but the Mamluk dominion was itself relatively short-lived. In the 15th and 16th centuries, when Byzantium, eastern Anatolia, and the Arab heartlands fell one by one under the rule of the House of Osman, so also did nearly all of the various regions of Asia Minor once under Armenian control.[13]

IV

The Armenians can hardly have welcomed the Ottoman conquest, but that there were worse alternatives--this they knew only too well. The period of Byzantine rule had apparently been unpleasant in the extreme. Like their brethren in Egypt and Syria, the monophysite Christians of Armenia preferred Moslem to orthodox Christian dominion. As one Armenian Katholikos put it at the end of the 13th century, "We are prepared rather to be in hell with our fathers than to ascend to heaven with the Romans." The rulers of the eastern Roman empire had sown a bitter harvest.

Under the Ottoman Turks, the Armenians prospered. Soon after the fall of Constantinople, Mehmed the Conqueror invited the Gregorian Bishop of Bursa to take up residence in the new capital as Patriarch of the Gregorian Church. As "a people of the book," the adherents of that church enjoyed a protected status in Moslem law. This was a privilege that none of the non-monophysite Christian communities would have accorded them. To be sure, like the Jews and the Christians of other sects, the Armenians were denied the freedom to proselytize, and they had to pay a poll tax that was not similarly assessed on their Moslem neighbors. But, in return for paying that tax, they were free to practice their own religion and to manage their own affairs and those of their community in the fashion that suited them. They were second-class citizens,

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12. For the Armenian principalities of Cilicia, see Pasdermadjian, Histoire de L'Arménie[2] pp. 197-235.

13. For the gradual growth of Ottoman power, see Stanford J. Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey (Cambridge 1976-1977) I Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808 pp. 41-111.

the subjects of a foreign king who practiced an alien religion, in a land that they had once ruled themselves. In times of disorder, they were an easy mark. But at least they were not subject to systematic persecution for their particular doctrinal beliefs as they once had been. Under Ottoman rule, the Armenians became known as millet-i sadika--"the loyal nation." At least until late in the 19th century, they were evidently prepared to make the best of what was only a half-bad situation.[14]

Had it not been for the Arabs and their Seljuk and Ottoman successors, there probably never would have been an Armenian question. The Byzantine Emperor would arguably have succeeded both in crushing the dissenters to be found within the ranks of eastern Christianity and in welding the various peoples of the Levant into a single Greek nation. If, today, the visitor to Istanbul, to Aleppo, and to Jerusalem sometimes has the feeling that he is strolling through a museum of peoples filled with strange relics from the distant past, it is largely because the Moslem intervention put an end to the sectarian strife that had been the bane of the later Roman empire and its Byzantine successor. Unfortunately, the arrangement that allowed these various peoples and sects to maintain for so long a precarious existence on the periphery of the large and growing Moslem community ceased to be workable when modern nationalism began to make itself felt within the Levant.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Rahe

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14. For the millet system, see Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey I pp. 151-153.