

# Review of *A Captive of Caucasus, Journeys in Armenia and Georgia*

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*A Captive of Caucasus, Journeys in Armenia and Georgia*, by Andrei Bitov (HarperCollins) 323 pages, English translation 1992.

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XENOPHON! THE ANABASIS! THE TEN THOUSAND! When *Contra Mundum* asked me to review *A Captive of the Caucasus* memories of teen age readings surfaced without delay. The classical Anabasis of Xenophon, disciple of Socrates and one of his—reliable—biographers, later chronicler of one of the most adventurous Greek military campaigns, came to mind.

Xenophon's was one of the first historical records concerning the homeland which I had not seen, and was unlikely to visit under the existing conditions at the early stages of my teen age—years of the Soviet regime. The Greek author had kindled in me flames of juvenile patriotism. The *peripeteia*—adventures of the Greek army, as described by Xenophon across the land of Armenia, at its early historical existence, had contributed, *inter alia* to the make-up of my *armenity*! In some way he too had been a captive of Armenia, 25 centuries before Bitov. A brief summary of the precious record may help.

Born in Athens in 430 BC Xenophon joined in 401 the expedition of the Younger Cyrus, who had rebelled against his brother Artachés, (Artaxerxes II) of Persia and expected to overthrow him with the help of the Greeks. The Greek general had embarked for the expedition with the “Ten Thousand”. The expedition failed as the result of the tragedy of the Greek commanders and the Persians who fought the Greeks. The Greeks were isolated in Mesopotamia. They elected Xenophon to lead them in their retreat through Kurdistan, Armenia and Lazistan, to Trapezus, or Trabizond, which was a Greek city, from whence they could embark on ships and reach Greece. It was at that occasion that the Greeks, after wandering for many months on the high plateaus of the Caucasus, physically exhausted, nearly despairing to see again their beloved Hellas, at the sight of the sea—the Black Sea—would utter the famous: *Thalatta, Thalatta*, (meaning: The Sea! The Sea!) The time was winter, which made the expedition very difficult. Nevertheless, Xenophon's account of the retreat of the "Ten Thousand" is most valuable for our

knowledge of Armenia about 400 BC.

The Armenians offered them what they had—cattle, corn, dried grapes, vegetables of all sorts and fragrant old wines. People lived underground, almost troglodytes, at least during the winter months.

The crossing of the high plateaus of Armenia of the “Ten Thousand”, hastening to the rescue of Cyrus the Young, offers the opportunity for Xenophon to describe the *mores* of the loyal and hospitable people they met on their way, during their campaign. So, he describes both the geography of Armenia and notes his appreciation of the people he meets in this part of the Caucasus. He is a keen observer of the people who occupy this portion of the Caucasus. Reading Xenophon one is impressed with the hospitality of the Armenians toward those strangers roaming around in the cold of winter in their country, whereas the Kurds and the Lazes and other people behaved most inhospitably toward them. The hospitality of Armenians has not changed since the days of Xenophon. *Anabasis* is a book that will be read with great interest, a book which portrays the land of Armenia as it existed in 400 BC and the character of the people at that time. The chronicle is one of the most precious documents in our possession about Armenia as contemporary to the Achemenide (Persian) dynasty. Between the period of the Anabasis of the Ten Thousand and the downfall of the Achéménides, information about the country and the people of Armenia is rare, or perhaps in-existent. One of the sources available tells us the valiant Darius II had been, before his accession to the throne in 336, *satrape* (governor) of Armenia. In battles fought by this monarch Armenian contingents faced the armies of Alexander the Great. Before his defeat at Issos in 333, the census of Persian forces mentions about forty thousand Armenian foot-soldiers, and seven thousand horsemen. One's overall impression is that the people occupying this country were industrious, friendly, hospitable.

Another precious ancient written document, also coming from a Greek, Herodotus, offers some valuable information about the *Armens*. This historian describes in detail how the Persian King Xerxes organized a huge army, in which were enrolled several thousand of Armenian warriors.

So far for our earliest documentations about Armenia.

Bitov's book has been hailed as an exceptional diary of someone who is more than a journalist. “This is no ordinary travel book...prose style and his descriptive power are as graceful as his ideas are daring”, you read on the jacket cover of the book, of whose 323 pages 146 describe (“Lessons from Armenia”) his encounter with Armenia and Armenians, under the Soviet regime. From the cover again: “...novelist, short story writer, poet and travel writer, was born in 1937 and graduated from the mining Institute in Leningrad. He published five collections of stories between 1963 and 1972 and this early fiction won him a reputation as one of the Soviet Union's most gifted stylists...” In 1970 and early 1980s his work came under official criticism for its excessive subjectivity. “It is difficult to do justice to the richness of Bitov... An exquisite intellectual travelogue,

casting light on the exoticism of the Caucasus for Russian literary minds from the time of Puskin...and bearing all the hallmarks of a timeless miniature painted in a time of broad censorship”, writes another reviewer. Also, the following: “Russians visit the Caucasus with a sense of homecoming and release. What they find there is a world of courage and beauty, familiar from Puskin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, and Mandelstam, in which they feel immediately at home. In the first part of the book, ‘Lessons from Armenia’, Bitov makes the journey out of Russia in the late 60s and finds himself in thrall to an old and independent civilization, yet never loses sight of the fact that he is both an agent of Soviet Empire and a captive of his real beloved homeland, Russia...”. Still another appreciation: “A Captive of the Caucasus is an intellectually spirited enquiry into the persistent idea of homeland and the individual’s cultural and creative identity.” Lastly: “The personal search for identity of a man imbued with the inheritance of one of the richest cultures on earth, who ascended for a time to live among its oldest and purest, his new life leads Mr. Bitov to see himself and Russian with new eyes”.

I will not have the incautiousness, not to say the immodesty, to add to such highly eulogious appreciations of Bitov’s intellectual journey, sentimental captivity, dramatic rediscovering of his own identity and his *deep slav subjectivity*. The above quotations may stimulate the appetite of minds open to explorations of a universe so exquisite and so personal as that of Caucasus. The Armenian reader, though, would have expected something different,—or even more so—another *touch*, which would play on his Armenian *sensibility*. On the whole, though, the reading only of the first part concerning Armenia (the only one I read) can be rewarding. I would not venture a literary criticism, not having the pretention to be counted among the literati. Comments on a few significant passages may suffice here, before venturing to share with the reader some thoughts about the tragic destiny of my people and its present spiritual plight.

Under the Soviet regime I well understand, the author could not express himself freely. For instance, he could not give expression to his religious feelings. I suspect him to be a Christian. The book is both a homage to my land and people, and also an exploration of the inner world which belongs to the author, while meeting with a highly cultured people and observing beams of a civilization he had thus far ignored, peculiar to those almost inaccessible regions of that part of Asia.

In the preface Bitov writes: “This is a book about Armenia as one might have seen it *for the first time*”, and: “In Amsterdam not long ago, on the eve of the chain of Armenian tragedies, at a sophisticated symposium on the boundaries of civilized Europe, a highly educated philosopher asked me whether the Armenian alphabet differed greatly from the Russian; (a question often asked to the present reviewer, confusing the cyrillic alphabet, invented at the end of the 9th century for Russians, with the creation at the end of the fourth century BC of the Armenian alphabet, the work of a genius, the priest Mesrop Mashdots and entirely *different* from the cyrillic). He seemed generally surprised that Armenia and Georgia lay within the limits of Europe (at least geographically). I waxed indignant, quite forgetting that I had been little wiser than he until I wrote this book.

I walked toward the terminal building (of the airport): EREVAN, (he spells it also in Armenian). Aha, so that thing's an E; that is an R, and that's the E again... So that is the V and that is A, and that last one is N. Beautiful. Thus the first scenes imprinted in my memory.... These letters could be used to shoe live horses... Or these letters might be hewn from stone, because the stone in Armenia is just as natural as the alphabet, and an Armenian letter, in its smoothness and hardness, is not inconsistent with stone... And in its upper curve an Armenian letter is exactly like the shoulder of an ancient Armenian church, or its dome, just as the curve also exists in the contours of the mountains, and as they, in turn are like the lines of a woman's breast—so universal for Armenia in its amazing conjunction of hardness and softness, harshness and smoothness, masculinity and femininity, in both the landscape and the air, the building and the people, the alphabet and the spoken word. An Armenian letter has the greatness of a monument and the gentleness of life, the biblical antiquity of round flat bread and the piquancy of the green comma of a pepper, the lushness and translucency of grapes and the severity and grace of a bottle, the soft curl of the sheep's wool and the sturdiness of the shepherd's crook, and the line of the shepherd's shoulder... And all of these exactly match the sound represented by the line... This alphabet was created by a genius with an astonishing sense of his homeland - it was created once and forever - it is perfect. That man is like God on the days of Creation. When he had created the alphabet, he inscribed the first sentence (in Armenian characters); "To attain wisdom and...for understanding words of insight" (Prov. 1:2). If I could, I would erect a monument to Mastdots in the form of that letter-stone proof of his rightness.

This is an exceptional page; it completely thrilled me. Not a single Armenian has ever thought of his alphabet in such terms, and with such amazement! It is one of the most moving, at the beginning of those captivating 146 pages. "A man endowed with even the slightest feeling and ear for language will never doubt the existence of the Creator." Remember, Bitov writes this sentence under the Soviet regime!

During the 5th century, under the leadership of Catholocos Sahag, grandson of Gregory the Illuminator, and Mesrop Mastots, after the alphabet was created, many scholars were sent to various seats of learning such as Antioch, Alexandria and Athens. These students returned home with new vision, insight, inspiration, and mental equipment. In passing it needs to be noted that the creation of the alphabet had its incentive in the will to translate the Bible into Armenian; the translation was again done by Mesrob; the work is considered to be one of the most faithful, and is termed "the 'Queen of Translations'". Greek literary masterpieces as well as Syriac and Latin classics, were also translated. Armenian, the language of Haik, the legendary founding Father of the Hye (*Armenians* in Armenian) proved to be almost as rich as the most advanced languages of that period, a mystery which still baffles literary scholars even today."

"It is impossible to contemplate without amazement the literary quality of the remnants of the language. The richness, purity, choice of poetic adornment, taste and philosophy found in the style of their exquisite relics, all indicate a high degree of national, political and intellectual culture... The Armenian

literary language of the first half of the fifth century ad, which our translators did not create, but did learn... is a marvelous work, if not a miracle itself, and only mark of its past greatness left by the Armenian Kingdom.” (Mr. Caracashian, quoted in: *A Trip in Historic Armenia*, by Dr. Stephen Svajian, Green Hill Publishing, NY, 1983, p. 165).

In a footnote, Bitov tells that “In the years when the Soviet Russia was introducing a Cyrillic-based alphabet to all the peoples of the former empire who possessed no written language, such an alphabet was offered to Armenia as well. The Armenians proudly refused it, declaring that they already had their own. The hapless clerk was astonished. When had they found the time? In the fifth century, (ad) the Armenians replied. Thus the Armenian alphabet once more stood its ground.”

The visits made by the author to some of the high places of the past and modern Armenian culture, such as the Church of Keghart, built in the 12th century, under rocks, Garni, the reconstructed pagan temple, the Modern Madenataran in Yerevan—the national Bibliotheque—with its invaluable treasures, old illuminated manuscripts, rare pieces of old Armenian culture, offers very interesting comments. The visit to Khor Virab—The Deep Pit—where Gregory the Illuminator, the Evangelist of Armenia, was kept prisoner for more than ten years, leading after his release king Trdat and the nation to accept officially Christianity in the year of our Lord 301—will raise high emotions again in any Armenian soul.

Bitov mentions many times in which he met with Armenians. Two in particular stand out.

In the family of a friend and host, Bitov is introduced to a young Armenian lady, about seventeen; she will accompany him during the remaining hours of the evening. He lengthily ponders about this event, and tries to draw some conclusions, which I am sorry, I did not quite understand well. Possibly his “slav subjectivity” is not on the same wavelength as mine, a less 'unfathomable' sensibility than is, so usually, that of the Russian soul. Obviously that meeting gave rise to nothing reprehensible. After all, Bitov, you see, is not a Hollywood scenario writer; (*Deo Gracias!*) intoxicated with pseudo-romantic emotions, obsessed by feverish profusion of degenerate love on the market. Earlier, the houselady had made the remark that Armenian women will remain faithful to their husbands under all circumstances and at any cost, even if the latter are absent for long. God bless them! I presume though, that my compatriot was not familiar with the legendary story of Ara Kaghetsig, (the Fair, third after Haig, the Founder of the nation and Aram), whose fairness had gained him such a fame that lustful Semiramis of Assyria cunningly invited the Armenian suzerain to her palace with the intention to seduce him, but to no avail. Eventually she imprisoned him, for the Armenian husband also would not betray his troth to his legitimate Armenian wife!

Further, at some point of the reading I felt extremely uncomfortable, almost irritated, about the conversation between the author and an Armenian architect in Yerevan; chatting quietly on highly abstract architectural ideas and urbanism, and how to

implement an architectural philosophy, vividly colored by national ideas. I visited the regions of Armenia devastated during the violent earthquake of December 1989, during the reconstruction. I met with people sheltered, for better or worst during the severest winters that Armenia has experienced lately, in metal trunks. The disaster, officially, has tolled 25 thousand lives, unofficially more than that double! Not to mention those who for the remainder of their life will remain physically impaired, or widows and widowers, and orphans, irremediably afflicted with trauma. My irritation therefore, I believe, was well justified, (although I will not incriminate that particular architect-urbanist) at people who under the Soviet regime, became monstrous planners of urban and social life, who in order to implement at any cost their Five year Plan, would build high-rise apartments as carelessly and hastily as one erects a card-box building. The slightest shaking of the soil could not produce effects other than disaster. The heaps of rubble and cement and ramshackle affairs are an eloquent witness to the ludicrous fecundity of an irresponsible and criminal nomenclatura, insensitive to human needs and well being. An at the present, the sight of hundreds of unfinished building in Koumri, former Leninagan and Spitak is still haunting me.

“Ever since the dawn of history, the Arminians have been defending their land, located at the crossroads where Asian Minor joins the Caucasus—and themselves—from every invading army that bridged Europe and Asia. Some of the most remarkable, yet least known defensive battles in history were fought by the Armenians to guarantee their own survival against foes as formidable as the Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Mongol, Tatar, Seltzouk Turks and Ottoman emperors”. The last toll Armenia gave to resist the diabolical advance of Nazism was during the last World War when tens of thousands of Armenians fell on the battle ground, and are buried in the cemeteries of Crimea. No one ever remembers them, while fifty years after Europe so vainly and arrogantly celebrates her liberation.

Yet captives of Armenia will not lack. Two personal experiences—indeed very minor ones—may confirm this.

The rather serious mechanical incident occurring to the Air-Afrique carrier, on its way from Africa to Paris, France, constrained the passengers for more than four hours of waiting; until a crew from another African capital would come to rescue the engine from an unwelcome host! The cause, a rather usual one on high spheres of the African skies, was a predator, who had somehow imagined that it could swallow the huge Airbus as easily as he catches a sheep and flies at an altitude almost of ten thousand meters high! Unfortunately for the bird, the struggle between nature and machine—*Natura sive Machina*—had proved once again unequal, (Oh monstrous, heartless, modern techonocosm!) and the carrier had swallowed the poor creature. The hours of waiting became profitable for me in the company of a high official of the European community, visiting the continent for an inspection of its health and hygiene conditions. After I introduced myself as an Armenian, he hardly could restrain his pleasure. A month ago, for the second time, he had been to Armenia, for a similar professional mission and among all the people and countries visited in that area of the world, Armenia, he said, had

a special place in his heart. My neighbor had also some disheartening things to say about the present conditions of living there, after I dared the opinion that Armenia might soon recover from the catastrophe of seventy years of communist regime. Not so, he said with a distressed tone; so easily and quickly, for communism has broken down all moral energy and annihilated all responsible undertakings in view of rebuilding the country. His remark reminded me of a page of Dr. Svajian's book *A Trip to Historic Armenia*. My compatriot was expressing himself naïvely, almost dythyrambically: "The miracle, that occurred in the ancient land of Armenia in 1920 (when the Soviets took possession of the Caucasus), is still taking place and embracing every new spheres of the material and spiritual life of the people. The Armenian toiler has for the first time in many centuries got a chance to stop wandering around the world, settle down in his own [sic] land and direct [sic] all his efforts and skill for the benefit of his revived land". Those words date from 1983, nine years before the downfall of the regime! An unbelievable statement about one of the most cruel regimes and political enslavement in the whole history of Armenia. One wonders how a distinguished Armenian had been so hypnotized by the state under Soviet dictatorship, probably not having experiences firsthand the tyranny to which natives were submitted.

The second incident occurred in the Airbus of Air-France, this time above the Atlantic, coming home from Paris. I helped a gentleman to find the seat assigned to him, next to mine. During the following three hours of flight, I enjoyed, at last, reading Thomas Mann's *Die Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain) in its French translation. My rather busy ministry does not offer many opportunities to read something else than theology! My neighbor needed some help to fill his declaration for the the us police and customs. I learned that he was a Russian Jew, living now in Tel Aviv, on his way to visit friends in the States. I sensed that he would be interested in my Armenian origin. My intuition proved correct. For the remaining six hours of flight, I had to bid farewell to Thomas Mann! My versatile neighbor was inexhaustible explaining almost everything of Armenia he know perfectly, having visited the country several times. Despite his broken English it was obvious that the had a high culture. He almost knew everything of the history and geography of Armenia, of its problems, past glories, expectations for the future. By means of the small map in the French pocket-agenda I carry with me, he delineated the boundaries of "real Armenia, stretching from the Caspian to the Mediterranean".

I remarked: "Zhirinovski also says that, threatening to send those barbarian Turks back to the Tartar deserts, to where they belong". "Forget Zhirinovski, he said, he is just another Fascist!" According to my latest knowledge, the number of Armenians in Armenia and the Diaspora would be seven million. He corrected me: "there are 11 million of them", he said, and a month later I read in my Armenian weekly, that corroborated his estimate with only a slight difference. (Approximately four million in Armenia).

The admiration and love for Armenia by *odars* (foreigners) is heart warming to Armenians, a kind of balm on their national wounds. A people of outcasts, "homeless and homesick" (Fr. Nietzsche), leading since the 14th century an existence of perpetual pilgrimage, Armenians are sensible and sincerely grateful to such expressions of

friendship. To ignore Armenia, someone said is to ignore what civilization is! By all evidence, to ignore its rights, history, suffering and indomitable spirit, preferring death to servility and slavishness, would be equal to ignoring and neglecting the rights of Justice. Therefore, when Lady Carolyn Cox, with her extraordinary spirit of dedication, relentlessly attempts to alleviate the suffering of Armenians, especially in Nagorno-Karabagh, Armenians will pay her a well deserved tribute of gratitude. She makes them forget the strange behavior of another member of the British parliament, the so-called Iron-Lady, who speedily had gone to Bakou, Azerbaijan, to assure this friendly people that Her Majesty's government will not tolerate the usurpaters to violate its territorial integrity, denying the rights of the Armenians of Karabagh - an enclave in that country, given in 1923 by Joseph Jougasvili, called Stalin. Obviously the interests of Her Majesty's subjects are at stake with the recovery by Armenians of what belongs to them from time immemorial; or to be more accurate, the monstrous multimillionaire oil companies's vital interests would be jeopardized in their exploitation of a prosperous underground. Naturally, the capital sin of Armenia consists of not producing *black gold!*

Politically, Armenia has always been seriously neglected in favor of some sensitive point on the modern international scene. If for instance Bosnia- Herzegovina has, on any given tv network been reported about 2,600 times, to Karabagh and the war of independence since 1990 has be devoted only forty-six reporting spots! Western powers did not spare their manipulatory and malicious ingenuity to avoid hurting the sick touchiness of Turkey, (same people and religion as Azeris). The chronic “Sick Man” of Europe (Turkey, already since the 19th century), seems still to be a precious ally and bulwark against Russian imperialist insatiable appetite! And that is to say nothing of the Pan-Touranian illusions of secularized Turkey. The impious and and hypocritical French daily, *Le Monde*, recently hosted two articles by a British and an American historian (?) denying the factuality of the 1915 Genocide of Armenians by Turks. Naturally, as it is well known, Armenians are not Jews! Were they, their plight would have been welcomed.

Since the Berlin Conference in 1878, Western powers despite the sincere sympathies for Armenians of W. Gladstone; the gratuitous declarations of Balfour in 1916 to restitute to an independent Armenia, its historic territories, such as Kars and Ardahan and the incompetent policies of Woodrow Wilson have shamelessly abandoned the Armenian cause. They finally resolved it in the infamous Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

Who remembers the Armenian massacres? asked Hitler. Indeed who still remembers the 300,000 massacred under the Red Sultan Hamid ii, in 1894-96? the 30,000 killed in Cilicia, among them some thirty Armenian ministers, on their way to Synod, by the Jeunes Turk, immediately after the Declaration of Constitution, in 1908. The more than one and a half million during the first World War?

Armenians remember. Reformed Armenians will do more than merely remember. “Christians for Armenia”, with a specifically reformed program, by means of a Broadcast ministry in the Armenian language tells to Armenians to look for help and seek salvation in the God of their ancestors. Westerners and Russia are not better than the broken reed of

Egypt was for the people of Israel. The God of the Gospel, is the Rock and the fountain of comfort for the widow and the orphan. The Gospel of Jesus-Christ is indeed the power for salvation and, according to Reformed understanding, a power to renew social, political, cultural structures. I trust, and pray that my weekly, and soon daily, radio broadcast, and tv programs, will impart to my people a solid trust in the Eternal God and help to reform all its ways for the *solī deo gloria*. Not for the ultimate purpose of making anyone A Captive of Armenia, but in order “to bring, in Armenia too—all thoughts captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ.”

“Captive of Armenia?” I had concluded my paper when an important article was brought to my attention. Reading under the signature of Dr. Guroyan of Loyola University in Maryland, it seems that I ought, by all means needed, to go beyond a point where I may have left the impression of a rather sheer emotionally expressed *patriotism*. How to relate “Religion” to “nationalism”? For, the present international scene is powerfully, and tragically, witness to the unexpected, or unsuspected, resurgence of the wildest types of nationalisms. The way over Nagorno-Karabagh, is not an isolated illustration. The war in the former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, gives a strong support to this. Nationalists in the Balkans are presently using religion as a flexible and submitted ally, or deprived-of-will tool, in view of attaining their goals.

In “The End of the Twentieth Century”, John Lucaks argues that the resurgence of nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe proves that the most powerful political force in the world for our era is nationalism. Old and new nationalism arising in the Balkans and the Caucasus may well be with us for some time. Religion is a serious factor in this nationalism, only yet one factor, even though among the more important, among others. Therefore we must not remain ignorant of political upheaval therein. The liberal imagination, stuck in its myths of autonomy, individualism and social contract, cannot fathom the true meaning of peoplehood. They readily turn Religion, irrational in their sight of course, in order to explain conduct that contradicts liberal tolerance and the peace of civil community. The simple description that Armenians are Christian and Azerbaijanis are Muslim seems to suffice for many Western observers when they seek to explain why these two peoples would be at each other's throats. But this explanation does not suffice. We need to look seriously at Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism as discrete phenomena separate from religion. “Despite the fact that the Armenians have the oldest independent church in Christendom which was in important vehicle for the preservation of national identity over the centuries, religion has not been a driving force in modern (Armenian) nationalism...” writes Peter Rutland. “The Armenian Church was not a strong advocate of independent nationhood until quite late. Armenian nationalism since the mid-nineteenth century has issued almost entirely from secular intelligentsia whose relationships to the church have often been strained, if not downright antagonistic. The conservatism of the Armenian Church under Ottoman and Soviet domination produced a powerful strain of anticlericalism among Armenian nationalists. Should Armenia survive and succeed as an independent nation-state, it will be a secular society.”

I will avoid burdening the reader quoting lengthily the extremely important analysis of Dr. Guroian, a theologian, and a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It will suffice to quote to this effect his concluding remarks on the “Crisis of the Armenian Church”, which astonishingly coincide with our own evangelical and Reformed spiritual concern.

Somewhere in the course of his paper he quotes the claim made in 1989, by Vazken i, Katholicos of all Armenians: *“The fundamental idea of your organization (Armenian National Movement) has been the word national, by the National concept. That is very dear to our heart... I would like to remind you that since you are talking about nation...at this moment you are at a historical center which created and shaped the national idea. The national identity of the Armenian nation, the national ethos of the Armenian nation, (and) the national ideology of the Armenian people have been forged here at Holy Etchmiadzin (The sea of the Armenian church) especially, in the fourth and fifth centuries”*. In another occasion Vazken i, again: *“Today, it is only just to acknowledge the Armenian Church as the proto-witness, the forerunner of our national independence”* one free nation, one free government, one free national church”, *“the holy chrism blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit (to be) the Chrism of Independence”*.

Since the late 1980 the Armenian Church has been aggressively claiming for itself the title of champion of Armenian peoplehood and has offered a sacral seal of blessing upon independent nationhood...however it faces a crisis of identity just as real and as deep as that of the nation. In the first stages of transition from the former to the present regime, the Church is jockeying to retrieve and influence in the new political order. Craftily, church leaders are drawing upon deep historical memories and powerful cultural symbols to foster the recrudescence of national feelings and claim trusteeship over it. Yet if the Armenian Church persists in its old habit (Guroyan thinks of her submission and collaboration with the former regime), of rendering obsequious legitimation to the state and persists in being the handmaid of nationalism it might commit the worst errors of national idolatry and render the faith superfluous, indistinguishable from nationalism, pride of culture and patriotism. A secularized civil religion would replace biblical faith with the church providing the solemn ceremony of national self-worship.

The author quotes that “Rafael Ishkhanian gave positive expression to this kind of Armenian nationalism in October of 1998 soon after his release from a Soviet prison for his political activities as a member of the liberationist Karabagh committee. In his now famous article, ‘The Law of Excluding the Third Force’, he argued that Armenians must no longer look to a third force, whether that be the United States, Europe or Russian, to secure freedom and sovereignty, rather they must rely on their own inner strength and best instincts. Christian faith can purify the motive. Our path to becoming a sovereign and independent nation will become barren, he warned if we forget our Christian faith, which the majority of our nation denies. We need a return to Christianity, like we need the air. Let us rely not so much on a third force but on God and the strength we can develop. He then linked land, faith, and peoplehood, not romantically or mystically, but with a deep understanding of the historical relation.”

He concluded “I am convinced that we can survive in this environment if we move not with our emotions and a sense of vengeance but with reason... In this this case God will help. And if we survive, become strong, and do good deeds, our lands will be reunited too. But if we refuse to act with logic, if we become prisoners of our emotions, of the call of revenge, this piece of land too will be taken and we will be lost as a nation.”

According to Gouroyan, “As for my own church, and this well may apply to other national churches, it is in serious jeopardy of missing the point entirely and failing to be a truthful witness to the faith in a land that it once christianized but which is now a secular nation. Rather than giving itself over to Armenian nationalism the Armenian Church ought to be taking up a higher calling. the finest service that the Church can render to the Armenian people in this hour is constantly submit the national vision to an evaluation and critique under the transcendent symbolism of the Triune God and through the Gospel story of a crucified and resurrected Lord”.

“Captive of Armenia”? or rather Armenia brought *captive* to the obedience of Christ? That is the decisive question.