

ARMENIAN CIVILIZATION: A BID FOR AMBITIOUS PROJECT

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The attempt to bring to light the new meanings of such notions as the «Armenian nation» and «Armenian civilization» directly corresponds to the totality of definitions given to civilization by various scholars and researchers. However, it is the context and framework in which we consider the problem that is important. The nation that is cognizant of its historical mission can be regarded as a civilization; and in these terms, the demonstration of the historical essence of the Armenian nation elucidates its mission and offers an answer to the question: why do we still exist and what shall we tell to the world? In terms of our interpretation of history as a competition and dialog of civilizations, the Armenian civilization does not exist yet.

To establish one's own unique civilization, the Armenians must meet a number of civilizational parameters discussed in this article. Moreover, the maintenance and development of a unique civilization is directly tied to the existing powerful transmission channels whereby a certain code of thinking and behavior is conveyed. In our opinion, the major transmitters are the state, science, art, elite and church. However, if a nation lacks its own transmitters, or the latter are too enfeebled, inevitably, other, stronger civilizations will exert their influence. That is why our own doctrine of coexistence of civilizations must be elaborated; this will be the basic mission of the Armenian people in the 21st century. Nowadays the Armenian nation needs an ambitious project that will enable it to build up its capacity for further development.

Morgan and Engels defined civilization as a stage in the development of a society that follows barbarism. The theory of Marxism-Leninism used this definition of civilization for periodization of history in terms of dialectical materialism, i.e. this term was applied in certain ontological contexts. In this context civilization was determined as the totality of features of social and political structure and intellectual development that distinguishes the high degree of human society development from the primitive stage. If civilization is considered a stage of social development of material and intellectual culture which is linked to labor division and rationalization of production, consumption and distribution, Armenia and the

Armenianhood can be regarded as part of the global civilization.

Another context for the concept of civilization emerged in the 18th century and was closely linked to the concept of culture. The French philosophers of the Enlightenment referred to a society built upon the principles of reason and justice as civilized.

There is also a concept of technogenic civilization which suggests a society that strives to transform nature to satisfy its interests, freedom of individual activity that determines a relative independence in relation to social groups. One may assume that Armenia returned to civilization after regaining independence and introducing private property and basic democratic institutions. Western civilization is seen as a process of development of Western Europe, USA and Canada that possess conditions for successful development of the technogenic aspect of civilization.

Traditional civilization generally means a society with a high degree of dependence on natural conditions of existence as well as strong ties of the individual with his social group. In general, societies based on Islam usually belong to this type of civilization.

There is another definition of civilization where the latter is seen as an extremely broad multitude of people recognizing their common destiny. The idea of civilization is the one of common destiny.

N.Y. Danilevsky, O. Spengler, A. Toynbee, S Huntington and other authors are also known to have put forward their concepts of civilization. A new approach to history emerged in the 20th century whereby civilizations and not states appeared to be the subject matters of research. In this sense civilization was seen as cultural identity (culturological essence) of society beyond territorial borders of a state and history was rewritten from the viewpoint of competition between civilizations, and not states.

In the old notions of civilization, the states (nations) defeated in conflicts or warfare were erased from history (civilization processes) until they regained their political independence.

Therefore, when the question arises as to whether Armenia/Armenianhood is a specific local civilization, it is important to understand the context and framework within which the problem is considered.

In our opinion, if history is considered as a competition and dialogue of civilizations, the nations that lose the capacity for cultural and historical self-identification are left out of historical context. With the loss of self-identification

we are left out of history and turn into a waste of other civilizations, sometimes useful, but in most cases unnecessary.

In the modern geographical space, civilization is seen as full-fledged and systematized cultural and historical self-identification of society, in other words, the culturological essence (nucleus) of society. To qualify for full-fledged and systematized cultural and historical self-identification, the Armenians should meet the following parameters, inherent to civilizations:

- To be recognized by other civilizations as an independent subject that went beyond the borders of a nation, state and territory, through association with that civilization;
- To have unique potential of a nation directed at the future;
- The ability to maintain historical heritage, one's own history and the sense of common destiny;
- To have a critical mass of value carriers;
- presence of elite able to reproduce behavioral patterns and value criteria
- be able to absorb behavioral patterns of others.

With the acquisition of statehood in modern history Armenia has returned to history in the context of the old notion of civilization. However, in our understanding of civilization as a competition and dialogue between civilizations, we do not yet exist.

We are representatives of a once unique civilization; however, however, nowadays we are far from being a civilized nation.

Civilization as culturological self-identifiable essence is a dynamically changing system. This means that any civilization is undergoing development or degradation. As was mentioned above, the essence of civilization is in its capacity for self-identification, the ability to extract unchangeable nucleus that defines the potential of that particular civilization. Thus, strong nations are able to absorb influences and norms that come from outside and either transform and adjust them to their own civilization nature (nucleus), making themselves stronger, or push away alien and destructive ones.

Weak nations change their nucleus under the influence of alien norms, thus losing self-identification and assimilating with other civilizations.

To understand how one civilization influences another, it is necessary to explore how civilizational resources, skills and knowledge are transmitted.

The following are considered to be major transmitters:

- **State** as a public institution that institutionalizes behavioral patterns at the level of legislation and norms;
- **Science and technology progress** as a powerful tool for innovative changes in the living conditions of man and society;
- **Art** as a form of maintenance and transmission of society's historical memory;
- **Elite** as a force dictating norms, lifestyle and behavior and rethinking them;
- **Church** as a social institution, ensuring the continuum of vital objectives as well as integral perception of the world and moral and ethical norms of behavior.

These transmission channels are used to relay a certain mentality and behavior code and if a nation does not possess or has weak transmitters, the influence of other more powerful civilizations is inevitable.

As in Armenia we are unable to form our own standards through the state system, we adopt European ones. Therefore, Armenia's drive to accede the EU should be viewed as a tactical task. Yet we should be mindful of the threat of losing self-identification in a long-term perspective. Failure to understand this threat may lead to the emergence of another ailment that will take over the communist nihilism and lead to a society of consumers devoid of spiritual values. The only goal of this move is to get into the «Golden Billion» while losing one's own «ego.»

Science and technology progress engage us in the powerful process of globalization that erases borders between civilizations or serves as a tool for a certain civilization to control others. It is science and technology advances that largely contribute to the processes of Americanization today.

At a certain stage in history art remained under the influence of major global tendencies. Today the Armenian art is developing under the influence of the East and West. However, art turns into an effective transmitter of civilization only when masterpieces of a global caliber are produced under the influence of civilizational and culturological essences.

Today's elite is in disarray and has no capacity to develop an integral system of values and behavioral norms. As a consequence a disarrayed society gives birth to mutually exclusive norms of behavior.

In fact, it is elite that serves as a principle transmitter of norms and values that are projected onto our civilization. It has to ensure adaptation of those norms

and values and act as a certain buffer. The absence of this quality in elites often leads to a situation where alien norms are directly imposed on us, circumventing existing buffers and thus turning Armenia into a province (now we observe a tendency of turning Armenia into a European province.) (In our definition, «provincialism» describes a society which is unable to preserve, create, actualize and develop its own behavioral norms and values and is forced to orient itself to alien ones.)

Church is the only institution that preserves and has capacity to ensure transmission of a unique and integral spiritual image of the Armenian world. For centuries the church has been maintaining principal dogmas unchanged. Historically, representatives of the Armenian Church played the role of elite in the Armenian society. The church guaranteed *continuity* for many centuries, yet in the last 100 years it has been disconnected from broad public due to historical circumstances. New institutionalization of society that has been underway over the last 15 years, does not take into account this distinctive feature of our nation and due to this the niche for spiritual elite is free.

The uniqueness of our society is that we are influenced not only by western values, but also by eastern ones of which we often forget. Saying this, I would like to quote Valery Bryusov, who wrote: «Two forces, two extremes, crossing and mingling with each other and merging into something new and united, guided the life of Armenia and created its people's character for thousands of years: the root of West and the root of East, the spirit of Europe and the spirit of Asia. Placed at the border of two worlds, being constantly turned into an arena for clashes between nations and drawn by the course of developments into great historical upheavals, Armenia was destined to serve as a conciliator of two different cultures, the one on which the entire Christian West was built and the other one which in our days is represented by the Muslim East.» «Armenia is an outpost of Europe and Asia»; this formula that was put forward long ago truly describes the condition of the Armenian people in the modern world. The historical mission of the Armenian people suggested by the entire course of its development is to search and find a synthesis between the East and West. This aspiration has been fully reflected in the art of Armenia, its literature and poetry.

Each civilization as a specific form of social and historical development has its own culturological and value objectives and notions of truth, different from others. What is true for one civilization can be false for another. In other words, the social and historical practice that makes civilizations different is the criterion

for the truth. Concepts of justice and liberty have different content, while moral and ethical norms of behavior are absolutely different, moreover mutually exclusive. However, does that mean that one civilization should prevail over another and make it change its objectives as it often happens nowadays? The answer is negative. The essence of a dialogue is to understand those differences and look for mutually acceptable models of co-existence. The principle mission of the Armenian people in the 21st century will be to demonstrate its own doctrine of co-existence of civilizations to the rest of the world.

A key to the development of such a doctrine is in a famous formula put forward St. Augustine: «Unity in primary things, liberty in secondary things and love in all.»

This is most clearly seen when studying the history of the Armenian Church. The important thing in the history of the Armenian Church is that it kept the principal evangelical dogmas unchanged, while being full of pure Christian liberalism. Unlike other Christian movements, the Armenian Church adopts few dogmas, while giving broad opportunities for the development of teachings. Owing to this, the Armenian Church has always been tolerant towards both its followers and representatives of other religions. Although such openness was harmful for the church itself and made it easier for others to preach their word among Armenian Church followers, «it (the Armenian church) being cognizant of the negative impact of its tolerance and despite sad experience remained faithful to its holy principles of theological and ecclesiastical liberalism. It has been and will be preserving them in future. And if the Armenian Church succeeds in reconciling churches, which, in fact, is possible, it will have full right to be proud of it.» (Archbishop Magakia Ormanian)

The uniqueness of our identity is that we went through many ordeals, but survived and became even stronger. In fact, most ordeals were caused by the unwillingness of Armenians to relinquish their principal dogmas, lifestyle and way of thinking. Paradoxically, Armenians have an ineradicable and delicate sense of liberty and justice.

There are many myths that prevent Armenians from understanding their historical mission. We are trying to prove ourselves that we have great scientists who moved science in certain directions, that our art shaped new trends and that Armenians are at the root of many innovations. Such mythology is necessary for a nation in a survival mode when there is a need to find strength, energy and motivation to fight for preserving identity. However, in the context of development

such myths may push us into a mental trap, thus leaving no chance to uncover the main essence of the Armenian nation. A nation that realizes its historical mission can be considered a civilization. From this viewpoint knowing the historical essence of the Armenian nation allows discovering its mission and answers to the question: «Why do we still exist and what should we tell the world?»

The road paved for our nation was full of trials. Overcoming hardships made us stronger and each historical trial set at least two formulas in our subconsciousness and genetic code which help us live, namely:

- belief in the victory of liberty and justice;
- the mission of relaying the belief in liberty and justice onto others.

The major task for today's Armenia is to understand this mission and put forward a formula for co-existence of civilizations. It is important to understand that we are creating ourselves as a nation, as civilization. The way we want to see ourselves, is the way we will be. Today our nation needs an ambitious project that will give us an opportunity to strengthen our potential for further development.

The Word shall come first!