



BETWEEN

HOPE

AND

HOPELESSNESS

PETER H. TALIA

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AND HOPELESSNESS***

PETER H. TALIA

*To my mother
who gave me hope
in the midst of hopelessness*

PETER H. TALIA

Acknowledgement

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PETER H. TALIA

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Foreword

I have known Dr. Peter Talia for the last eight years since he moved here to Chicago and started the Assyrian Evangelical Covenant Church in 1978. Ever since Peter and I have been very closely related and have enjoyed each other's friendship.

On different occasions, and under different circumstances, Peter and I have discussed certain views and interests related to the Assyrian cause, language, history, and culture. We both share these views and interests to a great extent.

I also became better acquainted with Peter when his first book, *Our Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, "History, Dilemma, And Destiny Of The Assyrian People," appeared in 1980. I recommend his first book and this one as well to every Assyrian. They offer a clue and a key to the painfully confused situation that shrouds the Assyrian community. Personally, I have derived a great pleasure in reading his two books, and I am pleased to be invited to write the foreword to this one.

In these books, Peter traces the history of the Assyrian people, conditions, miseries, dilemmas, and a way out of these dilemmas, a hope of a brighter future, and a way to a compelling national unity. I believe these books will be generally

useful to all those Assyrian men and women who are honestly and seriously seeking persistent questions on the meaning of national identity, group security, and the calls of duty. These books are significant and much needed as a major contribution toward helping the contemporary Assyrians solve many of their new and often unique problems.

My friend Peter holds a doctorate degree in theology and has taught here and abroad and has written several articles in different publications. I am greatly delighted to write the Foreword to his book.

S. Yelda, M.D.
Chicago, Illinois
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There was never a time in which human hope was so much emphasized. Yet there was never a time in which human hope was so rarely accomplished. There was never a time in which human rights were so much stressed everywhere. Yet there was never a time in which human rights were so meagerly achieved. There was never a time in which man was so powerful. Yet there was never a time in which man was so much in fear of his power. We are so much impressed by our intellectual and physical powers that we deny any presence beyond our power. We are so proud of our superficial power that we are totally incognizant of the Supreme Power.

We have grown rich materially, but poorer morally and spiritually. Hence this abundance has brought us neither peace of mind nor serenity of spirit. We have shot satellites in the space but we have a weird dread of men in our souls. Modern man has lost his direction because he failed to remember his destination. Man in his confusion is a messenger who has lost his message. How embarrassing for man to be the greatest miracle on earth and not to understand it! How disturbing for man to have been created in the image and likeness of God and to be incapable to recognize it.

Strange enough, we have been able to put man on the moon

where no man lives, and yet we have not been able to put our trust in man. Indeed, to a great extent, modern man has conquered the outer space. Yet he is impotent to conquer his own inner space. Most assuredly man has subdued nature, but has miserably failed to subdue his own nature. No wonder that Alexander Pope's axiom was, is, and will always remain true, "The proper study of mankind is man."

We have discovered the farthest islands in the Pacific, and the obscurest man in the remotest regions, and yet ashamedly we have deliberately neglected a whole people, the Assyrian people, an entire ethnic minority for hundreds of years, a people with legitimate aspirations to enjoy the rights they have coveted for centuries, a people who has experienced so many shattered dreams and blasted hopes. We wait for that blessed moment when the indifferent nations of the world awake from their slumber to our needs. When they do, we will forgive them their negligence.

Our age is the first in the history of human insanity to be identified with a highly sophisticated and drastically deadly weapon. Never before in living memory has man feared man so much. Nation suspects nation, and everyone distrusts his neighbor as himself. Since the dawn of human history, eight thousand treaties have been broken, and only one percent of the time has man spent in peace. It is reported that "since the end of World War II in 1945, the world has not been totally at peace for a single day."¹

In 1980, I wrote a book entitled, *Our Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, "History, Dilemma, and Destiny of the Assyrian People." In that volume, I briefly sketched the tale of a nation, the Assyrian nation, its history and mystery of twenty

¹Chicago Sun-Times, March 27, 1985, p. 39.

five hundred years, its present dilemma and its future destiny. This volume is a sequel to the first. In this one I suggest wholeheartedly that the Assyrian community come out of its obscurity and hiddenness and prove to the world that it is still alive. I have devoted the second chapter to a search of identity. The Assyrian people must ethnically and presently realize that they are internationally essential to world community in general and to the Middle East in particular as their forefathers were more than twenty five hundred years ago. We must realize that our present existence is important not only to ourselves but to the rest of mankind. We ought to remind the world that we are still alive and will not die unless we ourselves declare our own demise.

The third chapter I have entitled, "An Echo of Eternity." By that I mean that this nation cannot possibly perish. The reason for my argument is based on the prophetic passage in Isaiah 19:23-25. "Meaning Beyond Absurdity" is the rubric for the fourth chapter. The thesis advanced in the chapter is a search for a better existential meaning after almost three thousand years of meaningless existence. Chapter five "Where To From Here?" includes several topics, such as, "To A Sense of Direction," "To A Sense of Understanding," "To A Sense of Self-Confidence," "To Church and Politics," and "To A Compelling Sense of Unity." Finally, looking over the whole structure of the discussion I shall bring all the threads together under conclusion and end our tour. I hope this will be an interesting journey in our life, if I have the words to write and you, my reader, patience to read.

The world about us is changing rapidly and dramatically, and every change appears to make it more mandatory that we match the strains and the stresses, problems and possibilities, circumstances and seriousness of all its newly constituted inter-

relationships with added moral and spiritual and social resources.

Assyrians of today ought to be alive and sensitive to their poignant needs, grasp a serious vision of their present and future situation, and rekindle a compelling responsibility. We do not ask flippant questions, we face tantamount problems involving our entire community, calling for a solution. This is no day to let down. It is a day for all of us to rise from the graves of our national slumber. With God's help and good will of good men, a dream can come true, a distant and dreary journey can be accomplished, and a nation can be resurrected. And when that happens, many skeptics will be surprised.

I have attempted to make the book as simple as possible. Technical terms have been purposively avoided without affecting the accuracy of the main themes or ideas, so that it is accessible to any educated man or woman.

However, the book may require an effort of concentration on the part of the reader. He may have to read slowly some passages and go over them twice. There is nothing in them that an intelligent person cannot understand if he or she is willing to try.

The present writer has done his best to be lucid. Nevertheless, if there are ideas or passages that are not familiar to the reader, I beg him to make the effort of handling them, criticizing them, taking them to pieces, and by trying to replace them by better ones. Any constructive criticism is welcome.

In our case, the time has come for all men of good will and of good faith to become conscious of the part they can and must play in our national life if we desire to have a better and meaningful existence.

Everyone of us must share a responsibility in our present condition for a better future situation. But this responsibility

can materialize into a constructive effort only if we realize the full meaning of our lives, the significance of our endeavors, and of our struggles for the high destiny of our nation.

CHAPTER II

In Search of Identity

*"Every man is the architect
of his own fortune."*

Appius Claudius

In 1975, six million Americans travelled overseas, mainly to Europe in a quest for their origins. I do not condemn these seekers for their quest for their past. Today black people emphasize the black culture and history. The Red Indians, Mexicans, Irish, and many others tell us the same thing and make the same claims. And we endorse the legitimacy of their claims.

Who are we? We are the descendants of a great nation, the Assyrian nation that once ruled over many territories and climes two thousand years before Christ. We are the offspring of those noble men and women who once were masters of many arts and who taught many ancient nations many things. We are the heirs of a great and exploited country in the world named, Mesopotamia. We are the heirs of a past that has enriched the modern museums of the world. I for one am not ashamed of my past nor of my present. My shame is for those who have become so inhuman to me by their negligence, forgetfulness, and inconsideration. ²

² For a full detail on the subject, see my book, *Our Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, Chapter I

Since seventh century B.C., the remnant of the Assyrian nation has been desperately searching for its past identity and has deliberately been neglected and forgotten by superpowers, sub-powers, all powers. At this moment of writing we are possessed by thirteen nations of the world, yet we possess no national home of our own. For hundreds of years we have faithfully served many world governments, yet we have no government of our own to serve. This is Assyria's tragedy and world's shame. On most occasions for our dilemmas we have got solutions that do not solve, answers that do not answer, and explanations that do not explain. We aske the nations of the world not only to be their brother's keeper but their neighbor's promoter. We have a right to demand, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." We do not ask for protection but recognition. We ask for another chance, for another new beginning, and we shall prove to the world that we can be pioneers as were our forefathers almost three thousand years ago.

For the last three millennia we have lived in spirit of peril among friends and foes on hostile territories of many lands, from corner to corner with no permanent base and no abiding city. Albert Camus, the French philosopher, once remarked that there was only one really serious philosophical problem for man: and that was suicide. May I differ with him and suggest that there is only one serious existential philosophical problem; and that is martyrdom. Is there anything worth dying for? The miseries of this world have given us no rest. We feel fiercely because we have suffered deeply. I am writing these lines painfully because I have experienced pain personally in my own body, and I have seen it more than once in the tears of my parents. I was born in one country, raised in another, and educated in three others. At this very moment, I have no country I can call my own.

We have seen many promises broken. We have lived many lives and died many deaths. In the words of the Psalmist, "How long, O Lord? Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth." Bertrand Russel, the British philosopher, once stated: "The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long."³

Throughout these unhappy centuries of our unhappy existence, we have come to realize that life without identity is not worth living. Just to be may be a blessing, but to be needed is redeeming. We desire to be needed. We crave to be identified as a people and recognized as a nation. We do not want to be left alone unrelated to anyone. A nation cannot pour her heart, her prayers, and her aspirations into a vacuum. We are of no importance unless we are of supreme importance to God and mankind. The fundamental elements in the life of a nation are something to perform and accomplish, something to have, and something to hope for. A people cannot live without a future. A nation may die not only for the lack of material provision, but for the lack of recognition, appreciation, and self-expression. No people can live meaningfully without the past as well as without the present. We are a people in whom the past endures, and in whom the future demands toil, skill, and will. What happened to us as a nation once upon a time may happen another time.

This is our drastic dilemma. We do not ask a question to be answered, we pose a problem to be solved—a problem involving a whole nation. I emphasize this aspect as much as I can for I realize that there is no dignity without identity.

³ Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Norton, 1929), p. 56.

We seriously recognize what is at stake here in our lives is more than the fate and destiny of one generation. We are struggling for the fate of our coming generations yet unborn.

We emphasize that we no longer want to be forgotten into oblivion. For centuries we have been used, misused, abused, and misunderstood, by so many nations throughout so many centuries. We no longer want to be a thing tossed about, but a nation to be respected.

The demand for self-respect is part and parcel of our twentieth century revolutionary upheaval of our time, and is quite as essential as the economic, political, and social factors. It can hardly be suppressed. This is one of the reasons why the continent of Africa is such a powder box in contemporary civilization. Serious trouble will continue unless the attitude of many people can be changed in time, for the demands of human nature will not change. If correction does not come in a good way, it will inevitably come in a bad way, of which Libya's colonel Kaddafy and Ayatollah Khomeini are only two terrifying examples.

We wholeheartedly reject to be described by world anthropologists and historians as living fossils, as ancient relics decorating modern human history and society, but to be fashioned into a people in order to contribute to modern society as our forefathers did to theirs.

For many years the cardinal element in our national life has been pain-pain so acute, so old, and so deep that it emerges in almost every moment of our sorrowful existence. We are "a brand plucked out of fire" (Zechariah 3:2).

At this very moment of writing, in the so-called the most civilized century of human history, many Assyrian brothers and sisters are suffering the nightmare of migration. Some are ousted from Turkey and headed to some European country.

Others are migrating from Iraq to Athens, Greece. Still others are on their way from shattered Iran to Italy. Some of them have spent six years in Athens on their way to the United States, hoping some day to land on the "Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave." Still others are tossed to far Australia. And all of us are stranded between Middle East and Europe, between Europe and America, between Australia and Canada. Many of us die without being the citizens of the country in which we newly reside.

In search of our national identity and human dignity and social solidarity, we are handicapped by the stigma of belonging to no one and to nowhere. An Assyrian of the twentieth century finds himself in a vacuum. He has no base in any direction on which to build himself, to exert influence, and to attain leverage. He is a child of many cultures but he belongs to none. What a frustration! How can one entrust his destiny to a philosophy nourished solely on despair?

The following is a typical incident. Five years ago an Assyrian with his four daughters and one son walked on foot three days and three nights from Iraq to Iran across the mountains and valleys in search of a better life. Finally he ended up in Sweden.

We are a people torn apart from era to era, from country to country, yet all of us have maintained hope in the midst of hopeless and senseless situations. In the midst of these circumstances we have tried to hold onto physical life amid psychological demise. In the face of ache, anguish, and anxiety of living in so many uncertain situations and in so many foreign lands where hopes unborn have died, we have firmly believed that justice buried will rise again, a nation forgotten will be remembered again, and a tree cut off will blossom again.

Very few people like us in human history have moved about

so much from distress to distress. By no means I am a pessimist, particularly when it comes to matters of national interest. Pessimism is a poor chisel to carve tomorrow's justice and optimism, and the failure of the past must not be an excuse for the dormancy and negligence of the present and the future.

In spite of all these misfortunes, mistreats, misuses, forgetfulness, and negligence, we have never made our protests heard in public squares of the large cities. We have never arranged riots in the capitals of the world. We have never demonstrated. Our voices, our protests were uttered silently in our homes, in our sanctuaries, in our clubs, in our prayers. This is the language of the forgotten, of the neglected, of the unheard.

It is interesting and heartbreaking at the same time to note that when any mischief or disaster touches a minority group, everyone hears about it, it is immediately spread. It is advertised, popularized, commercialized, sentimentalized, and capitalized. But let such a disaster touch the Assyrian people anywhere, no one hears about it, it is not even mentioned.

For nearly twenty five hundred years we have never raised a sword against any enemy. Rather many swords have been used against us. If we have raised any arms against any enemy, it is because we have been forced to. People do not understand this: You push a man into a corner. He behaves desperately. Then you ask in wonder: Why does he behave desperately? People forget that man can suffer up to a point. The body, the mind, can endure so much torment, so much physical agony and mental distress, then no more. Yet in a fog of uncertainty, hopelessness, and despair, we have practiced patience and self-control.

We have detested and continue to detest violence in all its phases. We have categorically been admonished by the Prince of Peace, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn

to him the other also.” We believe that retaliation, violence, postpone problems; it does not solve them. We believe that by God’s mercy and in His own good time and by good will and co-operation among the nations of the world in general and of the Middle East in particular, constructive solutions to our long tragedy will be found, and our long search for our identity will cease.

Over and above the melancholy of our national existence, of our fears and tragic experiences, hovers the might of hope. Hope is our power. It is our power of expectation, perception and recognition.

It is reported that as Christopher Columbus sailed across the uncharted coarse waters of the Atlantic Ocean, not knowing where he was heading, wrote in his diary: “This day we sailed on course WSW.” Surely he must have been filled with hope, faith, and confidence that he was headed in the right direction, that he would reach his destination. Also he must have had moments of despair and hopelessness that he would never reach his desired goal, that he might flounder endlessly on unfriendly waters, perhaps lost forever to the world. Things could not have been worse with him. His ships were damaged and the men on them threatened mutiny. Did he at times lose his hope and faith and confidence of finding the New World? Of course he did.

But in moments of despair, frustration, and demoralization, Columbus gathered up his courage. He knew he had to be right, and he kept on going, because he had the inner integrity, mighty faith, and strong hope.

In these searching moments of despair, of futility, of panic, during our voyage across the rough and uncharted seas of frustration and uncertainty in search of our identity, we are called upon to show integrity, self-respect, hope and faith of

finding our new world of tomorrow after so many unhappy yesterdays. Greatness exists when we are trying to be great in the face of crisis, at the time of doubt, distress, and despair, in the frustrating attempt of searching for our roots. In the midst of such unpleasant circumstances, can we write the words of Columbus, "This day we sailed on," and then live by them? It is our moral responsibility to do so.

Many years ago, Longfellow wrote a couplet to all people for all times, but most of all for us:

When you are an anvil, hold you still;
When you are a hammer, strike your fill.

Generally, life is a great balance between the anvil and the hammer. Yet our life has been an anvil for the hammer of many nations for the last twenty five hundred years.

From the beginning of our end in 612 B.C., when we became the anvil for the Medes, the Persians, and Babylonians, we were lost in the sea of these nations that once was Assyria's vassals.

Then came Alexander the Great who swept over East and West and tried to Hellenize everyone and everything. He did to a great extent. Even our theologians and theological centers five hundred years later adopted Greek language and concepts to elucidate their theological and philosophical terminologies. Although this time we were lost in a sea of culture, in a confusion of languages, nevertheless we were lost. It is conjectured, and it might well be true that had the Bible not been written in the Greek language, it might have been written in the Aramaic language, our liturgical language. And why not? Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and many scholars argue with certainty that portions of the Bible were originally written in the Aramaic language.

The physiogomy of a nation comes alive in its language. Language alone makes common knowledge and common action possible. No people can maintain the memory, tradition, the lore, and the culture of its own without it. Parents transmit the national language to their children but they do not create it. At the moment this is our only precious legacy.

Alexander the Great and his successors passed away and a new era dawned in the horizons of the Middle East. A new people emerged rising into importance about 240 B.C. and remaining the holders of the sceptre till A.D. 240. The organization of their empire "was of the loosest description." In this respect "they present a parallel to the development of their Turkish descendants."

Someone has made an interesting observation: "It was in this period of Parthian rule, and in this religious milieu, that Christianity was first preached in Assyria. The faith was brought by teachers who arrived in the country from Edessa, though they may not have been actually of that state." ⁴

Although Assyrians were given a fair share under Parthian rule, nevertheless, there was a humiliating form of persecution. "This was the kidnapping or 'capture' of their daughters as either slaves or concubines." ⁵ And the writer continues by saying that Christians had to endure this sort of humiliating experience, and suffer still in those lands or did until very recent days. "In days shortly before the Great War, the Christians of Mesopotamia used to lose as many as 1000 girls per annum in this way, in spite of the cross, tattooed on their foreheads, to mark them, and the earliest of their chronicles complain of the custom as existing in the second century." ⁶

⁴W.A. Wigram, *The Assyrians And Their Neighbors* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1929, p. 53.

⁵Ibid., p. 38.

⁶Ibid.

We were not only losing our property; we were losing our precious daughters to heathens and barbarians. We were losing our personal identity, integrity, advanced by pagan authority. For centuries later the memory of such oppression made death more desirable to us than life itself.

Then came the Sassanid rule, and the next one hundred and fifty years (500-650) were no better for us Assyrians. From 530-579, during the reign of Chosroes I, Assyrians suffered heavy persecutions at the hands of the Sassanids. Among the victims of this period was the great patriarch Mar Aba I who held office from 540-552.⁷

Then another persecution occurred which lasted almost forty years during the reign of Chosroes II (590-628), "and was full of every kind of horror. Any time when the Shah-in-Shah happened to be at war with Rome, Assyrian Christians were subject to frequent harrassment. And for about seventy years these periodical massacres were endured."⁸ The feeling was thus expressed by the Assyrian Christians: "We are Christians, and cannot ever give up our faith. But can we not do something to show the Shah-in-Shah that we are not precisely the same brand of Christians as those in the Roman empire, and therefore need not be massacred every time he happens to have a quarrel with the emperor."⁹

Then came Muhammed and made Arabia permanently Arab. When the Arab conquest was completed, things were not very much different to us Assyrians. A foreigner remarks: "During the Arab conquest, the Assyrian nation could do nothing but remain quiet and, in fact, 'lie low' and let the storms pass over them, hoping that the blast would do as little harm as might

⁷Audrey R. Vine, *The Nestorian Churches* (London: Independent Press, 1937), p. 65.

⁸W.A. Wigram, p. 53.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 53.

be to their nation.”¹⁰

Under the Califate of Omar I (634-644), Assyrian Christians were to pay *kharj*, a tax on land, and also *jizyeh*, a poll tax levied in lieu of military service, whereas Moslems had only to pay *zakat*, a kind of alms to the poor. As to discrimination in other ways, Assyrians had to wear distinctive dress, they were not allowed to ride on horseback, and they were not permitted to carry any weapons; no new churches were to be built on fresh sites, but permission was given to repair or even rebuild existing ones.¹¹

Under Omar II (717-720), although a short reign, the Assyrians suffered greatly. In his zeal for Islam, Omar applied harsh laws to Islamize non-Moslems. The result was a great increase in professing Moslems, for the acceptance of Islam now meant not only exemption from *jizyeh*, but also from *kharj*. Besides, the punishment for renouncing Islam once accepted was death. “Omar also enforced the laws of restriction, in particular that against building new churches, and ordered the destruction of all that had been recently built.”¹²

There was another period of persecution under the Caliph Mahdi (775-785). One horrible feature of this persecution was the inhuman treatment of Christian women as many as a thousand lashes with bull’s hide thongs being applied to make them apostatize. Caliph Harun ar-Rashid (785-809), although his personal physician was an Assyrian named Gabriel, destroyed many churches in Syria, Palestine, Antioch, including those of Basrah and Ubullah.

During the Califate of Mutawakkil (846-861), the Assyrians

¹⁰Aubrey R. Vine, p. 91.

¹¹Ibid., p. 91.

¹²Ibid., p. 92.

suffered from a severe application of the repressive laws. Christians were commanded to wear distinctive garments, with a patch on their shirts, were forbidden to attend markets on Fridays. The graves of their dead were to be destroyed, their children were not allowed to attend the Moslem schools or be taught Arabic, and a wooden image of the devil was to be nailed to the door of every Christian's house. In addition, a number of churches and monasteries were demolished. This relegation to slave status, this sort of degradation by Mutawakkil meant a "spirit of intrigue and low cunning, and a readiness to adopt any dirty means to gain a desired object." ¹³

Someone concludes this period with an interesting observation: "The Assyrian church and nation then settled down to the life of a 'millet' under Muhammedan rule, which means that for centuries it had little history." ¹⁴

Then came the dreadful reign of Jenghiz Khan (1162-1227), and the terrible and terrifying age of Tamerlane (1336-1405). Both had two slogans of which unashamedly boasted: "That grass could never grow where his horse had set his hoof." And the other, "There is but one God in heaven, there should be but one ruler upon earth."

During this period, Assyrians were reduced to a position of humiliation and subjection. Under one ruler name Ghazan, fierce persecution began within his domains. One of his decrees reads: "The churches shall be uprooted, and the altars overturned, and the celebration of the Ucharist shall cease, and the hymns of praise, and the sounds of calls to prayer shall be abolished; and the heads of the Christians, and the heads of the congregation of the Jews, and the great men among them

¹³W.A. Wigram, p. 80.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 78.

shall be killed.”¹⁵ In many areas these orders were literally carried out. It is reported that Assyrians sold almost everything they had to bribe the authorities in order to save their churches. Another edict under the rule of Kharbanda Khan reads: “...that each person should pay a *kharj* tax of eight *dahecans*, that they should be smitten in the face, their beards plucked out, and should have on their shoulders a black mark.”¹⁶ Yet in spite of all these horrible incidents, our ancestors remained faithful to their faith and bore these torments silently. However, Kharbanda Khan, seeing that these means could not crush these great men, ordered them all to be made eunuchs, and to be deprive of one eye, unless they became Moslems.”¹⁷

Tamerlane was the worst of all the rulers that Assyrians had to come under. He swept down to Baghdad, plundering, ravaging the city in its entirety on its surrender, even though it was still the abiding center of the Commander of the Faithful and the successor of the Prophet of Islam. In his sack of the city, any soldier was counted disgraced who did not bring at least one head to add to the pile of skulls that Tamerlane raised. And most probably they brought many Assyrian heads. “In another campaign, the province of Adiabene-the Mosul-Erbil district was practically depopulated. This was to a great extent a Christian province at the time, having been the stronghold of the Assyrian church since the days of Mar Adai. Nisibis, a great city still, was reduced to the wretched village that the traveller sees now where carved Roman columns stand in front of mud-built hovels, to bear witness to the present inhabitants of the great men who were there before them.”¹⁸

¹⁵Aubrey R. Vine, p. 154.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁸W.A. Wigram, p. 145.

Our horrors under the Turks and Kurds are closer to our memories. We have heard them from our fathers and mothers, from our grandfathers and grandmothers with harrowing experiences. We have heard lacerating stories related to our sojourn in the unfriendly land of Turkey, in the Hikkari mountains under Turkish Valis, Khans, and under Kurdish Miras and Aghas.

In the year 1847, a heavy calamity fell upon us Assyrians in the Turkish mountains of Hikkari under Mira Bedru Khan, a Moslem fanatic. Many fearful massacres were conducted by Bedru Khnan, and in one case a number of some 2000 Assyrians who had held out as long as their food lasted in a mountain stronghold and then surrendered on solemn promise of safety, were hurled over the steep precipice. The Patriarchal House itself escaped, in spite of the efforts made by Bedru Khan to "extirpate that nest of serpents."

In another general massacre, about fifteen thousand Assyrians were butchered by the Turks and Kurds. Again, our daughters were captured and carried away. One such incident occurred in our own home.

We found life impossible under Turkish and Kurdish chiefs. So during World War I, we were forced to leave the Turkish soil to Iraq never to go back again. It was a terrible journey to make on foot. Someone remarks: "They were constantly harassed by warlike tribesmen along their route, and shortage of food, and water caused grave hardship. It is estimated that by the time they left Urmi they had been reduced from the pre-war 100,000 to about 70,000, and that of these not more than 50,000 arrived in Mesopotamia. These figures are themselves eloquent of their privations and sufferings."¹⁹

¹⁹Aubrey R. Vine, p. 198.

And not very long after our arrival in Iraq, the Moslems killed six hundred Assyrians in the two villages of Dohuk and Simmel, just north of Mosul.

One cannot study the conditions of the Assyrian people without being touched by the plight of the Assyrians. We are essentially an afflicted people with a sense of helplessness, discontent, and uncertainty. Outwardly we may seem satisfied, but inwardly vulnerable, always on the verge of misery, prone to suffer mentally and physically. Scratch our skin and you will come upon layers of affliction, misery, calamity, and uncertainty.

We claim no superiority over any people; we claim superior suffering over many people. We are entitled to a place of our own in this world because we have soaked the land of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq with the blood of our forefathers and martyrs. We do not want to expel anyone from his homeland. We do not want to rob anyone of his land; we want our own land—the land of our ancestors. We want to restore our identity and integrity.

I believe that the present time is the best and proper time to be a hammer shaping a new Assyrian society rather than to be anvils molded by the old hammers. The present moment is the right moment to make us new men and give us a new vision, a new hope infused with love and justice that will change gloomy yesterdays into cheerful tomorrows, and lift us from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope. A dark, confused, and unjust world waits for this new kind of hope.

Let us not minimize our role. The hope of the world has always been and still is in the hands of the dedicated minorities. The pioneers of the past and present in educational, scientific, philosophical, and religious freedoms have always been from among the minorities. A committed minority, a creative handful

of earnest individuals can make it evident to larger communities that hesitation, vacillation and procrastination on important national issues can no longer be tolerated. It will take such a dedicated minority to work untiringly to change or to win the uncommitted majority. Such a minority may transform our greatest dilemmas into our glorious opportunity.

Unfortunately, the political and intellectual leaders of the world have never made a serious effort to realize even in a reluctant fashion, the tenacity, the depth, and authenticity of the Assyrian people as a national and historical reality with deep roots in the Middle East. We believe that now is the time they do. For the drama of this neglected people has lasted too long. Let us finish it once for all. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests," but we the Assyrians have nowhere to lay our heads. We, a people of nomads, an Aramean race, a people of mourning, shall never abandon the hope of regaining our identity and status. For these many years of dread, disaster, distress, whether in Turkish mountains or in Iraqi plains or on Lebanese shores or in the "Home of the Brave," we have never abdicated the hope of restoring our identity with the glory of our forefathers once more. This search for our identity has become the central hope in our national life, symbol of all hopes.

I have purposively chosen this rubric because it is so important psychologically. As long as the mind is enslaved the body can never be free. Psychological freedom, a solid sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against long nightmare of physical slavery.

To end this chapter, it should be mentioned that for the last two decades there has been a national awakening, a conscientious resurgence among the Assyrian people especially among the students in this land from coast to coast. Personally I have

noticed this national spirit among our young men and women during my speaking engagements on many occasions. I have been uplifted, somehow gratified, and delighted by this new national phenomenon, by this novel spirit, by this enthusiastic search for identity. I hope this national movement will find a proper and sound leadership.

Moreover, the International Confederation of the Assyrian Nation (I.C.A.N.), is trying to secure a seat for us at the United Nations as observers. If and when that happens, it will be the first step for the first time that such an important event has occurred to us for many centuries.

At this very moment of our present social, economic, and political cataclysm, this national movement seems to be so dynamic, so powerful, that it is already affecting a national change in the motives and conduct of our men and women both individually and collectively. This movement is an indication of feeling that Assyrians must be their own spokesmen, that they must be in the primary leadership of their own organizations and institutions. It is a part of the search not only for manhood but for those who have had such a crushed and bruised history to feel and know that they are men, respected, that they have the organizational ability to map their own strategy and shape their own programs, and determine their own destinies. These young men and women want to speak for themselves.

During one of his speeches the late President Dwight Eisenhower said, "Now ours is a time when great things must again be dared in faith." I can find no better golden text than these words. Our generation need not be the last generation nor the lost generation nor the least generation. We, who are now living can become genuinely dedicated to the great dream than mankind has yet known. We dare not lose time, we dare not trifle. Our course of history in this generation depends totally

upon the nature of the dream which possesses us, upon our dedication to it and upon the courage and enthusiasm with which we pursue it.

CHAPTER III

An Echo of Eternity

“In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.”

Isaiah 19:23-25

“And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.”

Isaiah 35:8

The story of civilization itself has often been narrated in highways. In the fourteenth century when Chaucer, the English writer, wanted to describe the whole of England on a great canvas, he chose a highway—the road to Canterbury—for the scene of his great narrative poems.

The very word “highway” has thus come to capture men’s imagination. The highway is the symbol of settled life. The people with whom you walk and talk on the highway are your trusted friends. They help to mold your life and thoughts, and you in turn help to construct their opinions, thoughts, ideals, and convictions.

There are two important passages in the book of Isaiah which deals with highways. One of them is so familiar to us Assyrians that almost a schoolboy knows it. The other is scarcely known to any of us or to the typical reader of the Scripture at all. The familiar passage consists of what we may call the most outstanding, almost unbelieving series of sentences in the Old Testament. It tells us of a particular highway of friendly communication among those ancient enemies, Assyria, Egypt, and Israel. It foretells of the joyous day, its prophecies of a glorious age when all these three animical nations shall worship God together, and all three shall be known as His people, the work

of His hands, and His inheritance. This highway will one day open vistas of fraternity. It has to do with the highway of friendship.

Someone has succinctly described this highway. "Over it pass not the armed forces of contending foes, but the peaceful ambassadors of trade and politics. The oracle closes with the picture almost unique in ancient prophecy, of a great conciliation: Assyria, Egypt, Israel—the triple alliance of faith." ²⁰

Over twenty six hundred years ago, Isaiah saw clearly what the modern world dimly see, that peace and prosperity are not basically a matter of treaties but of a new spirit in human relationships. Will there be a day when the prophecy shall read:

Blessed be America my people,
And Russia, the work of my hands,
And the Commonwealth of Nations, my inheritance?

Assyria was being hated without any just cause, Egypt was suspicioned with a constantly deepening feeling, for Egypt was the coquette of the ancient world, inveigling little nations into hopeless wars and failing them in the hour of their extremity. As a super power in the ancient Middle East, she lost her credibility.

Yet it is of these nations we read that together with Israel, they are to be a blessing in the world, a highway of friendliness is to unite them, and they are all to be the happy, and fruitful possession of the living God. The enmity between these nations will turn to friendship. All narrow limitations of race and creed will be stripped off. With this verse we reach the culmination of unity among these three nations. The close connection between them is expressed by means of the figure of a highway

²⁰*The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. V, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 282.

which extends from Egypt to Assyria. They will live together when they will worship together. All three will be equally chosen people. And let it be stressed that this prophecy has not come to pass yet. We wait that some day it will be fulfilled. Never in the history of the Middle East have these three nations worked so closely together or so politically united as described in Isaiah 19:23-25. Edward J. Young, a prominent modern theologian asserts the above theory by saying, "The reference is not to the Egypt and Assyria of Isaiah's day, but to the descendants of those nations."²¹ The prophet rises to the contemplation of a glorious realization of the future situation that is extensively and intensively complete.

Isaiah closes his chapter with a solemn benediction which God pronounces upon these three nations. Assyria is the work of His hands, by which the prophet means that in a special sense, Assyria is God's people. Could anything higher be said of Assyria?

We are not God's enemy as many people think, nor is God the enemy of the works of His hands. He is our God as well as the God of our enemy. We may be each other's enemy, but we are not God's enemy. We may break His promises and ordinances as we often do, we may prove faithless, but God's faithfulness cannot be broken by man's faithlessness. He loves us as He loves Israel and Egypt, America, Cambodia, India, Japan as long as we uphold His commandments and live according to His precepts. When we break His commandments, we break ourselves on them. God is every nation's pedigree. He is either the Father of all nations or of no nations. His image is either in every man or in no man.

The unfamiliar text, almost unobserved, describes the

²¹Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. II, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), p. 43.

highway of holiness upon which no unclean foot shall walk. It has to do with the highway of exclusiveness. This highway of holiness must become friendly and the highway of friendliness must become holy. The two highways together are severely practicle and inevitable.

As part of the ancient Assyrian nation, and parcel of God's prophecy with other nations, we are endowed with a unique, a very precious and abiding promise, the promise, the consciousness that we are included in God's providence and prophecy.

There are many nations mentioned in the Old Testament, but there are only three that are particularly blessed. "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." Our blossoms may be crushed, our leaves may be dry, but we are seriously sustained, strengthened, and upheld by the faith that comes from the core of our roots in God's Book and His promise. We may be forgotten by many modern nations and peoples, but not by the One who raises up nations from dust and humbles them to dust. We may be of no significance to the world of today, but we are of supreme significance to God whose nations are the work of His hands, His people, and His inheritance. We may have many foes and few friends, but we have no substitute. We are a unique people, and one day in God's own good time and place we are going to play a unique role. A nation rooted in the Bible cannot be snuffed out like a candle or plucked out like a flower. A nation promised to form a highway with other nations, and particularly blessed, cannot perish. We are an echo of eternity. If God sustains us, who will overthrow us? If He is with us, who can be against us? If He is going to build a highway through us, who is going to block it?

We may be of no concern to man, but we are of great con-

cern to God. We are not alone when discarded by man. We have God and His promise on our side. We may have no friends in this world, but we can prove that the Lord in heaven is our strongest ally here on earth.

Biblical Assyria, God's handiwork, is going to be a model nation, its political no less than its religious life is to be lived with referencé to the law of God. But a model nation cannot exist in the geographical vacuum. It needs a territory on which to establish itself. And according to the Bible, Mesopotamia is to serve as that territory. Our imperishable homeland is in God's time. We meet God in time rather than in space, in moments of faith rather than in a piece of space.

The old sense that Israel is the only nation of God does not hold true any more. Israel is no longer the only creation of God, His chosen people, His heir; but all this applies to Egypt and Assyria now, as well as to Israel. There is an essential equalization of all these three nations. From now on there is to be no essential difference between these three nations and their relation to God.

It is this sort of ever-present flame of divine promise and hope burning in our hearts and souls that keeps us marching forward through the awful vicissitudes of modern world, and gives us strength among the strong although we are weak among the mighty. We have outgrown many a garment and many a girdle, and we will still. We as a people do not boast, not even claim that we are better than others. We only claim that we are the offspring of once a mighty nation that greatly contributed to ancient world, and that we have experienced more than others. Therefore, we claim that if we are given another chance, we shall enrich this present poor world as our forefathers enriched theirs.

In joy and in grief, in tears, torments, and tribulations, our

hearts, minds, and memories throughout these many ages, in many lands have always turned to this God's covenant, to this fundamental hope strongest than all the strength of men. Any attempt to sever this vital connection between God and us will be an outstanding affront to Biblical faith. It will not do justice to God's covenant. Over and beyond our maladies, fears, failures, persecutions, and hopelessness hovers the power of hope in God's promise. With anticipation, perception, and intuition, we wait for this promise to come to pass. Our way is paved with prophetic statements, a bulwark that never fails. In forming our nation, we are cognizant of responding to the Biblical covenant, to a categorical imperative that has kept speaking to our hearts, minds and souls, knocking at our doors throughout the ages, and which will never become obsolete or stale. Our roots are far too deep for anyone who ignorantly attempts to uproot them.

To wait does not mean inaction. On the contrary, it means readiness, awareness, and severe action. Good soldiers in battlefields while they wait for reinforcements, hold their positions. They even counterattack. But unless they believe, trust, that they can wait in confidence, they might very well surrender. To be able to wait, we must prepare for the arrival of our reinforcements from up high.

As a people, we groan in distress and hopelessness, swing between hope and frustration. Out of our land, we are scattered in many lands, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Our souls are dried away. But we have taken all these unpleasant experiences as learning experiences.

The late Dr. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist had a patient who once wrote to him as follows: "Out of evil, much good has come to me. By keeping quiet, repressing nothing, remaining attentive, and, hand in hand with that, by

accepting reality—taking things as they are, and not as I wanted them to be—by doing all this, rare knowledge has come to me, and rare powers as well, such as I could never have imagined before.”²²

That is our story. Out of evil much good has come to us. We have accepted things as they are, not as we have wanted them to be. And of all this, rare knowledge has come to us, the knowledge that no seed returns to life save by the way of death.

Materially we have nothing. Yet we have everything—faith and hope in the divine promise. Personally I believe that without this promise we are done forever. This perhaps is the secret of our history: to choose to wait for the fulfillment of God’s promise rather than to make any rash and foolish attempt without His involvement in our efforts. We believe our universe, our future, and all that contains would be an inferno mightier than Dante’s without a God who cares for us and who has included us in His program for future generations. This is not an idea but a real story, a drama to be played and completed, the drama of a people, a land, and a divine promise. God wants to do more for us than merely relieve our pain, or alter our circumstances or make life more tolerable or more comfortable, if we give Him another chance. This is our challenge. Assyria is aptly designated as “the work of my hands,” implying that this nation is lovingly fashioned out of a shapeless lump into a vessel of honor, separated, dedicated for a high and holy purpose.

Assyria is not a symbol of fantasy, but a home, and the land is not an imagination but a possession, a commitment of our destiny. How can anyone expect us to betray our pledge: “If

²²Alson J. Smith, *Primer For The Perplexed*, (New York, The John Day Co., 1962) p. 177.

I forget thee, O Nineveh, let my tongue wither within me.”

It may sound quite plausible to advance the argument that if the right of the Assyrian people to return to their land is admitted on the ground of history, then the whole map of the Middle East would have to be remade and confusion would ensue. But does the argument really arise? Do the descendants of the Romans, for instance, claim entry into England? Do they need England? Does their future, their destiny, their very existence depend on settling in England? Do British people claim their possession of India? Do they actually need India? Does their very existence depend on India? Do the Red Indians claim America? Or do the Arabs for that matter, press to return to Spain? Is it a matter of life and death to them? The argument is fallacious and misleading. But for us Mesopotamia is a matter of life and death. As a matter of fact it has been for us a matter of death for the last twenty five hundred years. Our very existence depends on it. It is very vital for us.

To have faith, to wait does not defy human reason but rather to share divine wisdom. There is no substitute for faith, no alternative for prophecy, no surrogate for hope. We have not discovered this faith, nor created this hope nor written this prophecy about us. God has revealed them to us, and we have believed His revelation. It is such knowledge that makes our soul immune to despair.

We have to face it—either there is no hope—either we will soon be erased from the face of this planet—or there does exist that mighty hand somewhere with supernatural might to intervene in our affairs and save us.

There is an interesting incident in the life of the ancient Jews in the Old Testament. The people of Israel murmured and groaned in distress in the wilderness. Out of Egypt, the land of plentiful food, they were driven into the wilderness. Their

souls were dried out; there was not much: no meat to eat, no water to drink, no garments to wear. All they had was a promise of a land they had never seen before. But they believed this promise, particularly Moses. So he cried to God: "If thou thyself do not go with us, take us not out of wilderness" (Exodus 33:15). This perhaps is the secret of our existence, history: to choose to remain in the wilderness rather than be abandoned by Him.

We, as a mourning people, have never abandoned the hope of regaining the land of our ancient forefathers and the glory of our mighty nation. Our attachment to the land of our inheritance is an everlasting link. It is true that we have been separated from our land for so many centuries, but we have not accepted that separation as final. We never will. Between hope and hopelessness, between distress and disappointment, we shall never tend to forget our original roots in our original land. And whenever we do, the sacred history sends us a reminder, saying: "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."

There is a divine plan and purpose for every nation. To have success with a machine, one must know its type, its purpose, and its operation. Each machine has distinct characteristics and is made for a purpose. We, too, are distinct—distinct from all other nations. There is a definite purpose for our existence. And no soul ever wants to fail in life's supreme purpose. It would be the same as saying, "I want to die."

Although we have died many times throughout many cen-

turies, yet death and despair have not been our last word nor our last act nor our last hope. Ours is an awesome time. A new situation arises calling for a tremendous transition, from dream to deed, from horrendous imagination to positive action. What has been so long desired now must be required. Will this people, crushed, battered, crippled, decimated, impaled, find strength to reestablish himself once again on the soil of his ancestors?

There are no easy roads, no simple solutions. But the hour calls for the voice of justice from all nations as well as for concerted and incessant action on our part. Let the twentieth century not enter the annals of Assyrian history as the century of physical and spiritual destruction of more than one million people. And if that happens, it would not be for the first time in our history. On many occasions in our tragic memory, we have offered our share of human sacrifice and martyrdom to the world. We cannot offer it any more. We cannot afford it. What is at stake here in our lives is more than the fate of one generation.

Today, more than any other day in our history, there is no excuse for abstention or evasion. Our house is in flames and the clock ticks on. We urge everyone to inform, preach, proclaim, write, stir. We do not want future generations to spit on our graves saying: "Here lies a community which living in comfort and prosperity kept silent while thousands of their brothers and sisters were exposed to physical and spiritual extermination."

When Israel, on May 11, 1949, was admitted to membership in the United Nations, Trygave Lie, the Secretary General of the organization wrote: "The establishment of the state of Israel was one of the epic events of history, coming at the end not merely of thirty, but of two thousand years of accumulated

sorrows, bitterness, and conflict, and symbolized historical forces beside which the present ideological conflict appears to be a transitory phenomenon.”²³ And a few pages later, the same writer concludes the chapter with the following words: “The majority of the world’s population hopes for real peace, understanding, and cooperation among the nations of the Middle East.”²⁴ Does it really? Is there peace in the Middle East at this moment? Has there been peace in that region for the last forty years? Will someone someday in the United Nations make a similar statement about the Assyrian people, not after twenty five years of accumulated sorrows, conflicts, and bitterness, but after twenty five hundred years of unparalleled agony?

In an exchange of correspondence on world peace between President Harry S. Truman and Pope Pius XII, President Truman on one occasion wrote: “As a Christian nation our earnest desire is to work with men of good will everywhere to banish war and the causes of war from the world whose Creator desired that men of every race and in every clime should live together in peace, good will and mutual trust. I seek to encourage renewed faith in the dignity and worth of the human person in all lands...to the end that the individual’s sacred rights, inherent in his relationship to God and his fellows, will be respected in every land. I believe with heartfelt conviction that those who do not recognize their responsibility to Almighty God cannot meet their full duty toward their fellow men.”²⁵ May it be so.

America’s task, American President’s task, every president’s

²³Trygave Lie, *In The Cause Of Peace*, (New York: The MacMillan Comapny, 1954), p. 194.

²⁴Ibid., p. 198.

²⁵Thomas J. Quigley, *The Christian Citizen—His Challenge*, (Chicago: Mentzer, Bush and Company, 1948), p. 523.

task and every nation's task will not be done as long as any injustice exists against a people.

When the Russian tanks and artillery crushed the Hungarian revolution, the Hungarian Freedom Fighter Radio Station broadcast these last words on November 4, 1956: "People of the world, listen to our call. Help us not with words, but with action... Save us... Our ship is sinking. The light vanishes. The shadows grow darker from hour to hour. Listen to our cry. Start moving. Extend to us your brotherly hands... God be with you and us."

This is our cry.

CHAPTER IV

Meaning Beyond Absurdity

“The pursuit of meaning is meaningless unless there is a meaning in pursuit of man.”

A.J. Heschel

“We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community.”²⁶ Thus spoke the Jewish reformers assembled in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1885. The statement was no great innovation. Similar declaration had already been made by Jews in France, Poland, Holland, and Germany.

For a long time we Assyrians have been considered no longer a nation but a religious community, a minority group, with no national existence and with no national meaning. For twenty five hundred years we have led this sort of existence, a meaningless existence, an absurd existence.

Excluded primarily on the grounds of our faith and race from the societies upon whom we were economically dependent, we have every reason to feel like aliens even in territories where we had taken up residence long before the populations which were later to constitute their citizenry. Our frequent expulsions from one territory to another, our constant massacres from one country to another only confirm our feelings of our absurd and meaningless existence.

Every alert Assyrian of this century somehow, on the basis of his own experience as well as his own observation of other groups and nations, realizes that his meaningless existence is a profound absurdity. No one has denied our existence, but

²⁶Jacob J. Petuchowski, *Zion Rediscovered* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 14.

we have not been given a meaningful existence. To admit the existence of a people, yet denying its rights and privileges is indeed a preposterous procedure. It is like admitting the existence of sun but denying light. It is like admitting the existence of water but denying H₂O. Yet for twenty five hundred years the Assyrian community has endured the nightmare of privation of meaningful existence. No wonder we have lost many things, partly and essentially our language, our customs, culture, certain standards, our patterns of life. There is a sense of lostness among us today because there is a loss of meaning. Someone has adequately characterized such existence by remarking: "Now there are times when a whole generation is caught...between two ages, two modes of life, with the consequence that it loses all power to understand itself and has no standards, no security, no simple acquiescence." ²⁷

There it is, "no security." A medical doctor stated that insecurity breeds anxiety, and most psychologists and psychiatrists now agree that anxiety arises from feelings of helplessness, of lostness, from a sense of being unable to control the situation. Dr. Carl Michaelson has named three basic situations which cause anxiety and meaninglessness in our lives. The first, he call the "cosmic situation," the situation in the world. We experience feelings of helplessness whenever we believe that the world is not friendly to us and cannot support us adequately. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, famines, floods, wars, etc. Also, I suppose, helplessness stemming from feelings about today's environmental crises, international relationships with other persons. We need to feel accepted, and when we do not feel that acceptance, we feel insecure, helpless,

²⁷Herman Hesse, quoted by Rallo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1950), p. 3.

alienated, and lost. It is reported that Emperor Fredrick of Germany in the fourteenth century deprived some prisoners from any relationship, and everyone of those prisoners died. In this category would be classified economic and political factors. The third fundamental cause of anxiety is the ontic (meaning, being) situation. Here the questions of our very life, of our very being is at stake. Its meaning, its freedom, its destiny, and its ultimate continuity. There are two basic prongs in this situation which cause anxiety; one is what might be called the "biological." We become insecure and helpless when we realize that we cannot really control the truth that we are going to lead meaningless existence: The second prong in this ontic situation is that we as individuals and as a group, community, have a need for fulfillment, for satisfaction, for abundant life; and when we do not find that fulfillment, that satisfaction, and that abundant life, we feel meaningless, hopeless, isolated, and abandoned.

These are some of the basic problems in our lives. Our national predicament is characterized by continuous periods of being trapped by hopeless situations and meaningless conditions than can stifle all joy, all freedom, all adventure, and all fulfillment.

Animals are content when their needs are filled, satisfied; man, however, insists not only on being satisfied but also on being able to satisfy, on being a need not simply on being needed. Happiness, security, in fact, may be defined as the certainty of being needed. There is no dignity without ability to stand alone. With us Assyrians of this generation the issue we face is not the dichotomy of being and misbeing, of being and non-being, but that of just and unjust being, of righteous and unrighteous being. The tension is not between existence and essence but between existence and performance. Our dilem-

ma is not mere meaning but meaning beyond absurdity. Existence without meaning, fulfillment, is a way of living where things, situations, systems become idols and idols become fearful monsters. This sort of existence is meaningless. In the language of mythology, it is called "Sisyphus existence," or "Sisyphus Problem."

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a king of Corinth. He was the most devious of men, and his schemes puzzled even the gods. Hermes, at last, sent him to Hades. Pluto ordered Sisyphus to roll a stone to the top of a high hill. But the stone rolled back down just as he reached the top. Sisyphus' task was never finished. We do not call this work or this sort of existence a progressive work or a meaningful existence. Yet oddly enough since the fall of our gigantic empire, our work has been facsimili to that of Sisyphus in this world. We have been destined to many hades in many quarters of the world rolling many huge stones up many high mountains with no significant progress.

It is easy to feel affliction, sympathy for another in time of abandonment, of distress, of tragedy; what is more difficult is to translate this feeling into affectionate deeds. For what is to be human but to show mercy, do justice, comfort the brokenhearted, shelter the unsheltered, and exalt righteousness? It is this sort of human feeling and appreciation that gives meaning to a meaningless existence, to a helpless generation.

To attempt to identify the meaning of a nation or even a group or even an individual is the indispensable prerequisite for bringing order into chaotic existence. It would be unfortunate for a nation to live without a conventional name; it is disastrous for an ethnic minority to live without inner identity. A name we simply receive and cherish, love, and remember; national identity we must strive for, discover, acquire, enhance, and

live by. Yet a name hardly we have maintained, and a national identity we have not been able to discover.

Mental and psychological anguish is occasioned more by the experience or fear of absurd existence, or fear of meaningless being, of meaningless career or events, than by the mystery of being, by the absence of being or by the fear of non-being. This may be illustrated in dealing with the theme of our inquiry. It is the meaning of a nation that illumines the being of a nation, and it is the being of a nation that both evokes and verifies the meaning of a nation.

My quest—my nation's quest—is not merely for theoretical knowledge about ourselves. Another discovery of a universal law in nature or another spectacular spacial phenomenon will not answer our problem nor is it simply our intention to strive to extend the length of our miserable existence on this earth another twenty five hundred years. What we are looking for, what we are contending for is primarily how to lead a life that would deserve and evoke an eternal song with an eternal amen attached to it. It is not simply a search for certitude (although that is implied in it), but for national relevance, international respect, for a degree of compatability, for a sense of responsibility; not an anchor of being but a direction of being. It is not enough for us to ask questions; we want to know how to answer the one fundamental question that seems to encompass everything we face: What are we here for?

It is a most significant fact that man is not sufficient to himself, that life is not meaningful to him unless it is serving an end beyond itself, unless it is of some value to someone else. Immanuel Kant, the German moralist philosopher of the past century, formulated a universal rule of right behavior in which he stated: "Treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end and never as a

means only.²⁸ What Kant suggests here is, that this is the concrete content of ethical action. This is what we should do, and how we should act in dealing with our fellow men, if our behavior is to have a universal and absolute moral value and to be truly good. Kant suggest how a person ought to be treated by other people, not how he ought to treat himself. For if a person thinks that he is an end to himself, then he will use others as means. Moreover, if the idea of man as an end is to be taken as a true estimate of his worth, he cannot be expected to sacrifice his life or his interests for the good of someone else or even of a nation. He must treat himself the way he expects others to treat him. And Jesus remarkably summarized the whole Old Testament righteousness in one verse which we commonly call "The Golden Rule." "Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12). Why should a group or a whole nation be worth the sacrifice of one's life? To a person who regards himself as an absolute end a thousand lives will not be worth more than his own life.

Sophisticated thinking may enable man to feign his being sufficient to himself. Yet the way to insanity is paved with illusions. The feeling of futility, of absurdity that comes with the sense of being useless, of not being needed in the world, is the most common cause of psychoneurosis. The only way to avoid despair is to be a need rather than an end.

There is not a soul on this earth which, however vaguely or rarely, has not realized that life is dismal unless mirrored in something which is lasting. We are all in search of convic-

²⁸B.A.G. Fuller, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1955), p. 247.

tion, of realization that there is something that is worth the toil of living and the peacefulness of death. There is not a soul which has not felt a craving to know of something that outlasts life, strife, and suffering.

The secret of being human is care not only for mere existence but for meaningful existence. To us Assyrians the urgent question is not mere being but living. Because to live means to be at crossroads. There are many forces and drives from within and from without ourselves. What direction to take? is a question we face again and again. Whether we insist and prove that the question is meaningless, we can never cease to raise it. The question affirms its own validity. Science cannot permanently suppress it. Existence implies living, living implies meaning, and meaning implies direction. All four crossroads are intertwined, and we are at them.

Ultimate meaning as an idea is no answer to our plight, to our meaningless existence, to our anxiety. Assyria is more than an intellectual structure or theoretical information; it is a personal reality. Our cry for meaning is a cry for ultimate relationship, for ultimate belonging. It is a cry in which all pretensions are abandoned. Are we alone in the wilderness of time, alone in the frightfully marvelous universe of which we are a part and where we feel forever like strangers? Is there a meaning to live by? Is there a worth living for? Is there a direction worth dying for? Is there a way of living beyond absurdity? Is there manna in our wilderness? I put these permanent basic questions before all Assyrians.

The sense of requiredness, of demand, and expectation is as essential to a nation as its capacity for reasoning. A nation, a people is that of whom demands can be made, that has the ability to respond to what is required, not only to satisfy its own needs and desires, but to be responsible for the needs and

desires of other nations as well. Responsibility is not something a nation imputes to itself; it is hers by virtue of its capacity for responsibility, and it would cease to be a nation if it were to be deprived of responsibility. Real meaning, authentic meaning, meaningful existence is found in responding to the demand, is found in sensing the demand. In other words, a nation must be responsive as well as responsible. It means having a task, being called to act. It experiences living as receiving, not only as taking. Failure to attain this necessary aspect, or failure to understand it is the source of anxiety and frustration.

Many authorities tell us that frustration is the basic factor in many human tragedies from personal incompatibilities to international major wars. Infant misbehavior, school failures, juvenile delinquency, unhappy marriages, business difficulties, and group protest activities, racial unrest, individual wars, are related to frustration.

We feel frustrated for we do not sense a measure of responsibility in the full sense. We are drastically disappointed because we do not feel having a measure of demand, we do not sense having a task to perform nor called upon to act. We desire, we ask, we demand to play our role in the realm of duty, obligation, allegiance, responsibility, sacrifice.

It is the glory of Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, to have realized that the true being of man cannot be adequately apprehended at all, if he is considered in isolation from his fellows; it is only in society that man can both be and express that which he is.²⁹

What Plato means is that man cannot possibly mature in isolation. As a matter of fact, one of the founders of American

²⁹Stephen Neill, *A Genuinely Human Existence*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959), p. 22.

sociology made a remark that has since caused much consternation. He said, "A human being is not born social; he is not born with complete human nature; but he becomes social and fully human through association."³⁰ The remark obviously makes sense in that it focuses our attention on the necessity of social experience. A man, a group, a nation, all mature only when they meet the challenge of life, by coming into contact with other men, groups, and nations. Man is not oriented solely by his own nature, toward maturity in every area of life. Other people contribute to his own growth emotionally, socially, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

The essence of a nation, of a group, of an individual is found in freedom. This is what Paul Tillich, the German philosopher means when he emphasizes "Man is man because he is free," or what Tolstoy, the Russian writer implies when he says, "I cannot conceive of a man not being free unless he is dead." Cicero, the Roman philosopher and orator in the first century B.C. wrote, "Freedom is participation in power." We Assyrians do not want all power or every kind of power, because then we may be tempted to deprive others of their freedom. Freedom does not mean to do what we please or the right to live as we please. It means the power to live, to rise to a higher level of existence. On the other hand, we can never be content without participation in power. We agree with Lord Acton that power tends to corrupt or absolute power corrupts absolutely. The words of Alfred the Great are still timely and true: "Power is never good unless he who has it is good." There is nothing wrong with power, but there is everything wrong with it when it is unequally distributed or wrongly used.

³⁰John J. Evoy, and Van F. Chrisloph, *Maturity in the Religious Life*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), p. 5.

What is freedom? First, it is the ability to deliberate or to weigh alternatives. Shall I be a physician or an attorney? Shall I be a minister or a teacher? Shall I be a Republican or a Democrat? Day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment we go through life engaged in this strange conversation with ourselves. Second, freedom expresses itself in decision. The word "decision" like the word "incision" denotes the meaning of cutting. Both words are defined by Mr. Webster, "to cut, to cut off." Incision means to cut in, decisions mean to cut off. When I make a decision, I cut off alternatives and make choices. The philosophers of existentialism tell us that we must choose, that we are choosing animals, and that if we do not choose we sink into oblivion. We will be led against our will. The third ground of freedom is responsibility. It is my obligation to respond if I am questioned about my decisions. No one else can respond for me. I alone must respond, for my acts are determined by the totality of my being. And no nation is great unless or until it realizes how great a responsibility it carries on its shoulders.

Those who think most about individualism and the worth of it preach freedom. Those who think most about unity, whether it be unity of a nation or of the entire world, declare the sacred obligation of duty. The bill of freedom and the bill of duties are as vital as the Bill of Rights.

The absence of freedom imposes restraints on my deliberations, on my decisions, on my actions, as to what I shall do, where I shall live or what kind of career I shall pursue. In the absence of freedom, I am personally defrauded, deprived of the basic quality of personality. When I cannot choose what I shall do or where I shall live or what I shall be, it means in fact that someone or some system has already made these decisions for me, and hence I am reduced to a thing or at best

to an animal. In this case, the only resemblance I have to a man is in my motor responses and functions. I cannot adequately assume responsibility as a person because I have been made a victim of a decision in which I played no part.

An outstanding demand in ethical thinking today devotes itself for the union of freedom and responsibility. If a moral agent has no freedom, there is no use to talking about his responsibility.

Man is free to be free: he is not free in choosing to be a slave; he is free in doing good; he is not free in doing evil. To choose evil is to forfeit freedom. A major root of freedom lies in the belief that every man is too good to be the slave of another man.

Since 612 B.C., we Assyrians have not made our own decisions. Someone else, other people have done that for us. Other groups, parties have been our representatives and spokesmen. Since the passing away of our empire, we have not been free. We have chosen no evil; we have done good; we have shown malice toward none, yet we have been denied the preciousness of freedom, the rights of existence on equal footing with other people, in a day when freedom is a pressing and urgent issue all over the world—for the East and especially for the West, for men and especially for women.

Let it be noted that I am not implying that there are no limits to freedom. Freedom constantly operates within the bounds of an already determined structure. For instance, the mathematician is free to draw a circle but he is not free to make a circle square. I am free to walk through an open door, but I am not free to walk through a stone wall. I am free to go to New York or to Los Angeles, but I am not free to go to both cities at one and the same time. Freedom is always within destiny. It is the chosen accomplishment, desired fulfillment of our destined

nature. We are always free and destined.

Yet freedom, with all its preciousness, is not given, it is won. Furthermore, freedom is not easily won by a passive acceptance of suffering. It is won by a strenuous struggle against suffering. When malicious men are oppressing other men, good men must unite and abolish that oppression. When evil are bombing, good men must unite and build. It is not enough to stop and defeat Hitler and bring about his downfall. We must do something about the spirit that produces men like Hitler, the spirit of Nazism. We must understand the origin and activity of that spirit and do something to counteract it if we sincerely desire to bring permanent peace. We must always distinguish between the historical man and the principle or philosophy which has been modernized and named after him. Hitler is dead, but is Hitlerism dead? Many people believe that Hitler is their leader in the spirit if not in the flesh. Hitler dead may be almost as dangerous as Hitler alive.

We all share a supreme appreciation and devotion to the hard-won freedoms of the American people. However, to be worthy of sustaining, upholding, and cherishing our freedom in blessed America, we must not lose our understanding of the fundamental nature of freedom. Freedom means more than sheer emancipation. It is more than cutting off the shackles of a slave. Freedom consists primarily of conscience attached to inward honesty, inner allegiance, devoted conscience. To-day the absence of freedom is largely due to the failure of conscience than to the failure of power. Freedom is the liberation from the tyranny of the self-centered ego, from all prejudices. Freedom is a challenge as well as a burden against which men often rebel, because it entails responsibility. It is here that man fails when he fails to realize the ultimate sense of freedom. This is the climax of absurdity. Freedom is the possibility of

development, an enhancement of one's life, of self-realization. Freedom is participation in essential human affairs. Someone has stated: "There is solid reason, therefore, for concluding that freedom is essential to human dignity... Human dignity is based upon freedom and freedom upon human dignity. The one presupposes the other."³¹ And as to its progress, development, freedom can ripen only in the light of the spirit. Without freedom, there is no spirit, and without spirit, no freedom, and without freedom no self. Martin Buber, a modern philosopher, made a strong statement when he said, "Freedom and destiny are solemnly promised to one another and linked together in meaning."³²

Unfortunately, we Assyrians, to a great extent, have lost our spirit, our self in this barren world, because we have been denied our political, social, and religious freedoms. We have not been allowed to decide and act in agreement with the spirit that goes with these essential values. But we do believe that if we measure up to the little responsibility which Providence has placed upon us, we shall be called on for help by many people who want to help. When we respond to this cry for assistance, we shall be not only manifesting spirit of cooperation, but also obeying fundamental laws of life—that God helps those who help themselves, that life is giving and receiving at the same time, and that what a man sows that he shall also reap.

Too many world leaders, governments, politicians, and statesmen have not yet absorbed the basic truth enunciated a hundred years ago by Carl Schurz when he said: "If you want to be free, there is but one way; it is to guarantee an equally

³¹Rollo May, *Freedom and Destiny*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), p. 9.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 83.

full measure of freedom to all your neighbors. There is no other.’’

Yet in regard to us Assyrians, this is precisely what has not been achieved. We can never call a day in our national life to call it free since the glory of the Assyrian empire was gone. Every situation, in relation to us, has been twisted and manipulated, and every civil law has been substantially more dishonored than honored. The environment has never been particularly favorable to any attempt we have made to serve our cause. Winston Churchill once said, ‘‘Laws, just or unjust, may govern men’s actions. Tyrannies may restrain or regulate their words. The machinery of propaganda may pack their minds with falsehoods. But the soul of man thus held in trance or frozen in a long night can be awakened by a spark coming from God knows where. People in bondage need not despair.’’³³

But the soul of man can be awakened, and people in bondage need not despair. This is a positive truth, positive mode of thought that we must absorb into our fabric. It is psychologically sound and historically plausible that making a habit of negative thinking, negative attitude, and negative emotions destroy our self-respect, our power, our incentive. These disfiguring emotions isolate us from reality.

We must resort to the courage and self-respect within us and use them at this present needy hour to prevent ourselves from displacing ourselves from the goal we seek. Courage that demands that we faithfully stand up for our rights and the rights of others, the sort of glorious courage that may build our nation, courage to live with compassion not aggression, courage

³³Churchill: *His Life, His Death, His Wit and Wisdom*. Written and edited by the Staff of the New York Times, 1965, p. 154.

to live in belief not doubt, courage to live in hope not despair, courage to surmount crises instead of being crushed by them, and courage to build self-reliance. We must not permit the unhappy present circumstances to crush us if we are to live creatively. When we rise above failure—there is inevitably a definite sign of success. Let us remember the words of John Dryden:

“Of all the tyrannies of human kind,
The worst is that which persecutes the mind.”

In this century, and in present situation, we Assyrians are the most challenged people under the sky. Our existence is either superfluous or indispensable; it is either tragic or proud to be an Assyrian. Unfortunately to many it is tragic and shame. Many Assyrians are ashamed to be known as Assyrians. How can nationality survive on this sort of triviality. On the other hand, it is a pride to be known as such. We are always in danger of forfeiting our national identity. But we must learn to survive and maintain our identity, customs, culture, and existence—in spite of and because of diverse and mordant international, political, and social conditions. It would be suicidal to live by the maxim that unless the climate favors our principles, they will have to be discarded. That climate may never arrive. That day may never come. We must not wait for the right and proper time, we must create that proper and right time. A people is born to face temptations, make decisions, and implement actions. It is a challenge as well as a charge to live in the midst of such circumstances.

Edmund Burke once said, “Never despair, but if you do, work on in despair.” Mr. Burke knew very well as all of us know that despair does not comprise a day or a week of unhappiness, but that it is one dreary journey dragging on endlessly

to another as if there were no hope in sight. And probably that is why he said, "Work on in despair," because at a time of crisis like ours we can call upon our inner resources, our courage, summon our wits together and move steadily toward the goal we crave so much and cherish so dearly.

Each day is a new lifetime, and we cannot give up a day that has not come as yet, we cannot give up a new day without even trying to find the promise of peace, the sense of fulfillment, the sentiment of a meaningful existence that can come at the least expected moment.

We move from weakness to strength whenever we find something to live for. We do not have to be giants, either in mind or in body, to live for something great or good. All we need is a great heart. Every man and every woman can have a cause and live for it. We ought to have and love our cause. A man ought to be able to point to his days with some satisfaction and say, "I do this better than I did yesterday. I understand more easily; I live more genuinely."

Presently, Assyrians are faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the passionate urgency of *now*. We still have a choice, a chance for identity, dignity, and freedom.

We must realize that there is no going back to the day when a nation could live by itself. That day has gone forever. The world has become too small for that. There are no walls than can shut-out air approach. Today the airplane has made this whole wide world a small neighborhood.

We know that despair is a kind of suffering. But we shall not give up either to despair or to suffering. Life, urgency, necessity, earnestness, will not allow us to give up. It is far easier and far better to give the best that is in us in a time of crisis than to give up. Remember the words of George Herbert,

“He begins to die, who quits his desires.” Despair, frustration, should stimulate us, help us solve our problems and dilemmas, not yield to them. If we yield to them, if we are crushed under them, the whole existence becomes a chronic type of negative feeling that does not raise one brick in the construction of our national building.

In one of his plays, *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare has Malvolio say, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” This expresses a universal experience. What Shakespeare said of greatness, any of us can say of human suffering. It seems to us that some have suffering thrust upon them; some achieve it by their own folly; and some are born to suffer.

All of us Assyrians have suffering thrust upon us. We have not invited it. On the contrary, it has swept over us like a tidal wave with relentless force. But it shall not have the last word upon us.

The last word belongs to faith. Faith is an adventure; it is the courage of the soul to face the unknown. But that courage springs from the hope and confidence of the soul that its adventure will eventually succeed. Beyond the unknown, beyond the uncertainties, perils, and responsibilities of the earthly failure, it sees the certain, the secure, and the imperishable.

Thomas Carlyle, the British philosopher once said, “Belief is great, like giving. The history of a nation become fruitful, soul-elevating, great, as soon as it believes. A man lives by believing something, not by debating and arguing about many things.”

Faith is power. It makes men sturdy, ardent, persistent, and heroic. Nothing truly great has ever been done in any department of the world's work without faith. Think of the faith of the explorers of this land, and the Pilgrim Fathers who planted

it with life. Think of the faith of men of science, Galilio, Kepler, Newton. Think of the faith of all the martyrs down the centuries. These are the potent, the enduring, the inspiring men of history, men like Washington and Lincoln. They may fall, they may be defeated, they may perish; but onward marches their cause, for they are part of it, they have believed in it.

CHAPTER V

Where To From Here?

We can go further if we go deeper.

A. TO A SENSE OF DIRECTION

A sense of direction to where and from where? Many of us have no answer to the question. All that we know is that in the midst of confusion we are ourselves confused.

On the other hand, when a direction, a landscape is dotted with obstacles, it is an indication that the hour has come for sober reflection, for serious evaluation, for determination, for assessment of our goals and methods. Stumbling and groping aimlessly in the barren wilderness of no-man's-land finally must be replaced by a planned, cautiously organized, and orderly march toward a desired destination.

Some years ago a blackout affected the large city of New York. Some people seized this opportunity and began to rob stores in the midst of darkness. Others of good will and intention were directing the traffic by means of flashlights and helping those who could not help themselves.

Emotional blackouts crush millions of people everyday and often for a lifetime. But a blackout we can control if we remember that we came into this world to succeed not to fail, to help not only to seek help, to direct people in the midst of darkness and not to rob them, to serve not only to be served. We must resist the emotional blackouts of negative feelings that prevent us from living creatively. Any determined people

can move out of its emotional darkness into light and hope.

Naturalists inform us with certainty that in every single drop of water in the ocean there is electricity enough to generate two thunderstorms. The power is there latent, nevertheless ready at any moment to leap forth and do terrible execution. So within the soul of every nation there is enough moral and spiritual force lying hidden to leap forth and shatter all darkness and produce eternal destinies. Montaigne once made this statement: "Man is capable of all things." And Thomas Fuller three hundred years ago (1608-1681), stated a truth, "It is always darkest just before the day dawneth."

A sense of direction implies a goal, a planned path, and end. We must have a goal within our capabilities. In fact, a sense of direction determines our growth and maturity, energizes our efforts and courage, and it instills within us a sense of esteem and self-realization.

It is imperative to have a sense of direction, especially to us, a people who has no sense of direction and perhaps there is no one to give it to us. Without it we may survive, but it is impossible to arrive at our destination.

There is a sense of psychological security when we secure a sense of direction. On the other hand, the absence of a sense of direction is a result of uncertainty and fear.

From my observation in our different gatherings, political or social, or religious, I have to say with regret that I have not detected a sense of direction or realization of a goal either in the speakers or in the listeners or in the questions and answers presented. I have not found it in our journals, lectures, articles and books. I have not found it in our common talks, in our common people or among the intelligentsia. We have lost our sense of direction, hence we have lost our direction. That is why we have been idle bystanders in the drama of life and death

instead of creative individuals.

Goals, directions, destinations, and even cultures do not decay and pass into oblivion because they become old and die, but because men and women in them fail to give their hearts, minds, and souls to the task of sustaining them. A goal, a sense of direction cannot be maintained merely by rich resources or by physical power. A sense of direction will not be achieved without a generally shared set of convictions that are comprehensive, coherent, and positive. These convictions are concerned with what is both right and possible for us Assyrians, here or anywhere else, at this point in time and history. It is not enough to have a dream of some impractical utopia; what is more practical and more required is a conception, a way of how to make the dream to come true. Although it is true that only a handful of dreams in all history do really fit reality. We have such a conception, if we have such immovable convictions, and if we give them our full and undivided commitment, a dream can be accomplished. No decision is final except your decision to reach your goal, your destination.

A sense of direction for us Assyrians is not a choice but a must, a national demand, a categorical imperative, because ours is a history of disorganization. This is no fault of ours that we are disorganized. For centuries we have had no government, no country, no army, no navy, no air force. Moreover, modern Assyrians have always lived in small towns and villages, and are not fully acquainted with big cities, their problems, computers, huge industries. A sense of direction implies coping with all these complicated avenues, if perchance one day we are going to have a homeland in which we are going to determine our own destiny.

A sense of direction requires directors, who at least have common sense to direct the affairs of a community. Obvious-

ly, we do not desire for one moment to put the reins on a nation in the hands of inexperienced individuals. Hence this call for providing men of vision, insight, and leadership. Common sense, experience, history past and present indicate in obvious fashion that it does make all the difference who happens to lead a nation at a particular moment especially at a crucial moment like ours. Capable individuals do have a compelling share in determining goals, directions, and aspirations, and if one wishes to understand in full depth the meaning of a nation's actions at a specific time of history, it will be profitable to understand the personality and aims of its major leaders.

A goal, a direction, demands a unique personality, a man or a group of men of fearless energy and reckless initiative, skilled in governing the affairs of a nation; men whose decisions can determine the issues of life and death, who can transform us from the vale of anxiety to the Garden of Eden. There is no doubt that an individual with a sense of direction will have an influence in shaping the nation's aims, plans, goals, and directions. We shall have to create these leading men who embody virtue, leadership, and power we can respect; men who have moral, ethical, and spiritual principles that we can applaud with an enthusiasm that enables us to rally support for them based on confidence and trust. We will have to demand high standards and give consistent, loyal support to those who merit it, and who will prove themselves to be committed spokesmen and warriors on our behalf.

Therefore, it is the highest mission of our community to find, to train, to raise people who can lead; people who can trust and be trusted, and to aid them in their gigantic task of leading us in the right direction. It is the sublime task of the family, school, church, club, to carry the burdens of this national sacred mission. This is a fundamental requirement. We cannot ex-

pect the fruit before the root first.

Whatever be the causes (and perhaps there are many) of our present disorganization, many of us agree that a sense of direction is an essential ingredient for our reformation, stabilization, and self-realization in our present existence.

A sense of direction is the one power that can constantly direct man's emotions, capabilities and dictate them to noble and estimable aims such as are capable of achieving permanent national structure. This important aspect was never so much needed in our life; desperately needed in order to enable us to act with sincere consecration to reach new ideals.

There is no force, no system, no ideal, than can restore, reform, direct, and stabilize us but the awakening, the resurgence of men and women to an essential vision of the future of a home, of a nation. I am sure this gospel has been repeatedly preached to young and old, near and far, but it needs to be preached and emphasized again and again today. And if we seriously put our minds to it, seek it diligently, maybe this dream one day will turn into reality.

We must get rid of the false notion that there is some miraculous quality, some supernatural formula, some appealing magic in the stream of time that miraculously will heal all our wounds and cure all the evil in the world. There is one thing certain about time and that is that it waits for no one. If it is not used constructively, it will pass us by.

Another mode of our direction is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power so that others cannot elude us when we offer our demands. We must develop from strength a position in which other people find it reasonable and prudent to collaborate with us. It would be the height of naivete to wait passively until other governments and nations had somehow been infused with divine blessings of good will to direct

our programs and activities, and decide for us. To follow such a course of existence is childish fantasy.

B. TO A SENSE OF UNDERSTANDING

A sense of understanding implies an understanding of needs—our needs and the needs of others. We may be an island within ourselves but at the same time we belong on the mainland of mankind. Anatole France remarked, “It is better to understand a little than to misunderstand a lot.”

A sense of understanding requires an understanding, an evaluation of ourselves as well as of others. Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher said, “Know thyself.” And Shakespeare, the English writer announced, “To thine own self be true.”

The first thing to remember is that no person—absolutely no one—has final authority over our destiny but we. Hence it is absolutely imperative to understand ourselves.

We have a cluster of needs, and we are the only agents to fulfill those needs. Throughout the past decades we have expected others, particularly the Western missionaries and diplomats to show us the way and to supply all our needs. That is one reason why we have fallen behind in our national enterprise. It is one thing to be *for* a cause and another thing to be *in* a cause. A spectator may sympathize with you when you are fighting ravening beasts in an arena, but he will not get into the arena itself and fight by your side. Only your brother or your father or some close relatives will venture to do so.

We Assyrians have not yet learned the essential lesson of self-determination. When we have achieved that necessary step, we will be capable to deal adequately with our needs and our problems by ourselves. Mercenaries and hired agents will not fill the gap. We have to fight our own battles by ourselves.

We ought to understand one another. In this field too we have been weighed and found wanting. We have not yet mastered the art of discussion, the etiquette of conversation, dialogue, and the propriety of conducting certain assemblies. In a discussion when someone does not agree with someone else, it is taken as a direct personal criticism, insult, and displeasure. Therefore, some uneasiness always ensues. We do not know yet that to disagree with someone's point of view does not mean dislike or hatred. I may not agree with your viewpoint but I am still your friend, and we shall work together where we can agree for common good and interest. We may disagree, but we must not quarrel or fight over our disagreement.

And what is more important than understanding our culture, heritage, history, customs, language, and tradition? It is pathetic as well as tragic that most of the books, textbooks, and articles about our history, language, grammar, and theology are written by foreigners. These are fundamental groundwork for our national, social, political, and religious life. They explain our desire to reveal our identity. These qualities are a part of our mental, social and spiritual equipment which distinguish us from other people. We thank those brothers and sisters of American and European stock who have taken time, toil and trouble to teach us our own language, culture and history.

But this sort of cultural dependence cannot go on forever. We must produce our own men and women who could transmit their own culture and heritage. A culture cannot be sustained from outside, by outsiders. Rather it is kept alive by the pen, power, and sweat of its own people.

This is one reason why the world has forgotten us. And we wonder why the world has forgotten us. Few people have heard of us. The reason is obvious. We do not publicize ourselves;

and a further reason for that is more obvious: We have no publisizers, no writers, no adequate publications. Hence, there are no books written by us, about us to be handed to other people in order to know us. We are forgotten, neglected by our own fate and literally handicapped.

Our forefathers, unlike us, did not leave their literature, culture, and heritage for others to transmit it to their children and children's children. They wrote their own religion, grammar, history, and conquests. They not only kept what they wrote, but spread it from Arabia in the west to India in the east. It is reported of Patriarch Timothy I to have said, "Take care of the schools, with all your heart. Remember that the school is the mother and nurse of the church."³⁴ About A.D. 1000, the Assyrian church had twenty five metropolitans, and fifty four bishops, with theological centers at Nisibis, Edessa, in modern Turkey and elsewhere. This is the only proper way to sustain a language and culture, and keep a nation alive. A modern writer writing about our ancestors states, "And the Assyrian thirst for it (learning) is keener than even his thirst for money."³⁵ They wrote on the skins of animals, on papyrus, on clay with a feather, or stylus, and at the light of a wick. Yet they have enriched this world and its museums with their feather-pen far more than what we have done for the last nine hundred years. Will there be a day when the modern Assyrians be able to restore the glory of the ancient Assyrians? We hope so. Will there be a time when we will enrich the generations to come? We hope so.

Another important step in our national life is to understand the means and methods of other ethnic groups. In a con-

³⁴Fortescue, *Lesser Eastern Churches*, p. 19. Quoted by Aubrey Vine, p. 109.

³⁵John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 6.

glomerate community, in a multiracial society like ours, no group can make it alone. Usually many people refer to the Irish, to the Jews, to the Germans, and Italians, the ethnic groups they cite as justification for their views. These people did not rise to power and influence through separatism. It is a myth to believe that these people made it through isolation. No group can. We can achieve neither political power in isolation nor gain economic influence in separation.

Certainly these ethnic groups stuck together, but their group unity, their ethnic solidarity, their togetherness was always strengthened and enlarged by joining in alliances with other minority groups receiving all the help and support they could in all the vicissitudes of life. To succeed in a pluralistic society, to make it in a teeming welter of nations, with all its hustling and bustling, we Assyrians need all the organized strength that we can obtain. But that organized strength will not be delivered to us in neat, wrapped packages, and will not be effective unless consolidated through constructive alliance, with the other groups.

Indubitably, there are some elements that we cannot trust, we cannot use half-hearted associates or those with no genuine concern for our cause and needs. But there exists a substantial majority of good will that undeniably will offer a helping hand and will sympathize with our plight once they understand our dilemmas. I do not imply that we should gather crumbs from other people's tables. That we should refuse to do. But we must steadfastly demand a fair share of the loaf. What we should do is that we ought to have to master the art of political alliance. We must be prepared to act in unity and throw our needs and support on those major sections that are as prepared to take our demands seriously and fight for them vigorously. This should not be interpreted as a catalog of defeats or a sign of

weaknesses. This is rather a sign of wisdom and political maturity, expressing our enthusiastic spirit and determination to be treated equal in all areas of life. I stated earlier that we should fight our own battles, but even in battles it is very necessary as well as wise to get all the help that one can get.

This spirit of cooperation with others is very essential and we must know it and master it as well. Do not dream that .005 percent of the population alone can by tension, toil, and sweat, force 99.95 percent to change a way of life or compromise or conform to your viewpoint.

The most plausible method and one that is rewarding is to work with those who cannot help themselves. This is a program of progress. Let us realize it and utilize it as well. Let us get all the help we can from all the people who can give it. An understanding of all this is imperative. If we cannot live with other people, we can at least work with them.

C. TO A SENSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

A sense of self-confidence is needed by all but especially by those who have less confidence in themselves and cannot confide in anyone because they have no way to do so.

Regretably, I am writing at a crucial moment of national dormancy. I am writing to a quiescent, indifferent, listless, minority that only exists but hardly energetically leads an active meaningful existence either socially, politically, educationally, religiously, either individually or collectively, due to no choice of its own. The entirety of our personal and national existence is at stake at this very moment, everywhere, in the east as well as in the west. Hence the topic under discussion.

Without a sense of self-confidence, the Assyrian community throughout the world will not find, cannot achieve mass

coherence nor can it mount mass actions. The tragic experiences of past centuries have torn us apart and held us in paralyzed solitude. Nevertheless, the failures of the past must not impede the successes of the present and the hopes of the future. With confidence we must concentrate on success, with confident ability, on winning like professional athletes competing in athletic arenas. They forget the failures of the past events and the times lost in them. They are out to win at all costs. We must use the techniques, the methods of champions in the art of living. We can only rise above our past failures if we practice confidence in ourselves every day. This is our choice and we must select it and practice it prudently. Self-confidence is a sort of philosophy based on a positive, optimistic view of life. It seems to be a fact of life that no nation can be reliable without showing forth some realization to clothe her acts and words in the garment of self-confidence and self-dependency. When we initiate a national project, it ought to be boosted by a high sense of self-confidence that eventually will come to completion. Many of our objectives, projects, decisions, were a total failure because we were not sure, we were not confident whether or not they would be consummated.

I am introducing this item in this volume because I think it is mandatory, and I hope my readers will take it seriously, since we need it desperately. Unfortunately, it has not been included in our books, in our journals, and in our agenda. We need someone to admonish us, to instill in us a sense of self-confidence, a sense of self-acceptance, of self-respect, of capability. What is material in this aspect of life is the presence of an ability to believe that important events can happen and make them happen. When Hannibal, the great Carthaginian general was told that there was not way to cross the Alps, he responded with the spirit of a hero, "I will find a way or make

one." And he did. Napoleon believed that he could reach Moscow and he did. Winston Churchill believed with self-confidence that the Allies would win the war and they did.

One of the fundamental methods to achieve a national goal, to pursue a desired end is that of effectiveness. What is the most effective method to consummate the desired goal? If a method is not effective no matter how much energy and steam it releases, it is an expression of weakness and not of strength. Perhaps one reason to explain its failure is that it is born out of timidity and not of confidence, out of hesitation and not of courage.

I believe it is time to stop criticizing ourselves, although I myself have been guilty of doing this. I think it is time to quit concentrating on our past failures and gloomy days. Rather we should see ourselves at our best in spite of our worst. Our past experiences, good and bad, and perhaps we have had more bad experiences than good, are our best teachers. We are our most dangerous enemy when we torture ourselves with feelings of frustration every day. We are at our best when we daily practice the secret of self-confidence every day. We have a choice, let us choose wisely. Let us forget our failures of unhappy yesterdays and let us press forward with sound thinking, hard working, toward a brighter future with all its possibilities. The more we think of reaching our goal, the less time we will have for the worries, heartaches, and sufferings of yesterdays.

Every generation speaks about uncertain times and events. Born in uncertainty, living in uncertainty, we pass on in uncertainty. But by living confidently and creatively, we bend uncertainty and doubt to our will so that we can achieve a sense of fulfillment. We live successfully by rising above our tensions. We can do this effectively if we absorb the technique

of self-confidence.

Once when Ole Bull, the Norwegian violinist, was giving a concert in Paris before a huge audience, his A string snapped. Instead of stopping, Ole Bull transposed the composition and finished the concert on three strings. This is exactly what confronts every Assyrian man and woman, old and young. Throughout all these unhappy and unmerited suffering, our A strings of self-confidence, self-respect, and opportunity had snapped. But the performance of our existence must go on without self-pity or excuse or surrender. We must transpose the composition of our existence and go on performing our daily national tasks on three strings if we have to.

This is the challenge facing us today. It is this determination to keep striving, marching, in spite of the world's severe blows, that will transpose darkness into light, despair into hope, and unmerited suffering into saving moments of the present and the future. There is no chance, no destiny, no power, no fate, that can circumvent or hinder or control the firm resolve of a determined soul.

What, then, are the challenges that Assyrians face as a result of their dilemmas? There are always some explanatory methods, to seek negative avenues, self-destructive means, and unjustifiable solutions. Some seek a passive way out by yielding to the sense of inferiority; or by allowing the floodgates of defeat to sweep over them in despair; or by dropping out of the picture of life altogether silently; or turning to the escape mechanisms of diverse means. Others seek a defiant way out. They trust no one and do not expect anyone to trust them. All these approaches are cynical and nihilistic because they are based on a loss of faith in the present and a loss of hope in the future.

We have followed none of the above-mentioned means and

methods. Generally, we have rejected them in toto. However, our scattered dreams and withered hopes have provided us with the psychological and sociological explanation for the choice of negative paths. A world that has treated a people as float-sam and jetsam in the stream of life cannot expect us all to grow up healthy and well balanced overnight. Nevertheless, in spite of these explanations, the Assyrian people cannot constructively deal with their problems through negative strategies. We all know this. And no one resorts to the negative avenues unless all positive channels have been totally blocked. In spite of the political, social, and religious upheavals of the moment, and the negative vicissitudes of life, we can develop the self-confidence, courage, and determination to confront the odd circumstances with positive inner assurance.

One positive response to such a course is to develop a sense of somebodyness, a sense of self-esteem, a sense of personal worthiness. We must no longer allow the outer chains of a negligent and indifferent world to shackle our minds, hearts, and souls. With courage and fearlessness we must set out daringly to stabilize ourselves. This no doubt will give us a sense of confidence of our roots and an assertion of our worth and self-determination.

This sense of worthiness, of confidence, of determination, means the refusal to be ashamed of being what we are. Our children of now and of coming generations must be taught to stand tall, physically, morally, and spiritually with their proudly lifted heads. Through self-acceptance, self-appreciation, and self-determination, the Assyrian people may one day, in their proper time and place, be able to show the nations of this world that they are no longer a footnote in the almanac of this world, but an important chapter therein. And why not? In the best possible world, everything is possible.

Here is a thought to live by: Be ashamed to die until you have achieved some goal for yourself and for your nation.

D. TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH AND POLITICS

The first confrontation between church and politics, or between religion and state or church and state, occurred centuries ago between two unequal leaders in the ancient world. It happened between Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and Moses, the rugged prophet and shepherd. The king invested with unparalleled royal authority met this desert shepherd and leader, apparently with no authority at all, in the royal palace of Egypt.

But Moses, clothed in divine authority declared: "Thus says the Lord, let my people go that they may serve me" (Exodus 5:1-2). Pharaoh retorted: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go."

The outcome of that ancient summit meeting between those two participants has not come to an end even in our so-called civilized world. It occurred between prophet Elijah and king Ahab of Samaria (II Kings 17-18), it happened between prophet Nathan and king David (II Samuel 12), between Jesus Christ and king Herod, between Jesus and Pontius Pilate, probably between St. Paul and Emperor Nero in Rome, and in our time and memory it took place between Agha Petros and Lady Surma in Iraq. It happens all the times and in all places.

The contemporary church has offered very little to the contemporary man. It is not ready to offer comfort because it is not equipped spiritually to do so. It has no courage to challenge the corrupting wordly systems because it has no dynamic con-

viction to do so. It is not ready to offer edification because it has not enough educational experience. The church of today has no strength to break the idols and to shatter ignorance because it is not armed with proper tools.

Furthermore, the church of today has hardened into cold formulas; the dead hand of tradition reaches out of the past and holds everything in the present. The leaders of the church have ceased to be prophets of a new age and have become priests of yesterday.

The church declines not because it is refuted, denied, opposed or abandoned, but because it became irrelevant, and dull. When faith is entirely replaced by creed, worship by ritual, and love by custom, then that is the doom of the church. Someone has adequately said, "When faith is lost, when honor dies, the man is dead." When the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor and pomp of the past; when faith, hope, love and doctrine become tradition rather than a living fountain of salvation; when the church speaks only in the name of authority rather than in the name of love and compassion, then the message of the church becomes insipid, meaningless, and absurd, no matter how strong the ritual, how deep the tradition, or how high the authority.

The church is not for the church's sake nor for minister's sake, but for God's sake. But how often the church forsakes its essential task. It often has diverted its efforts into other directions whether consciously or unconsciously. Nevertheless, it is without excuse. The church tends to become an end in itself, self-indulgent, self-seeking. The task of the church is not to enhance the power and beauty of its institutions but to ennoble the human nature, to purify, to sanctify. The task of the church is to be a challenge to the stabilization of values, ethics, and doctrines.

Many fallacies arise in many institutions including the church itself because people arrogate to themselves areas of authority, of leadership that do not fall under their competence.

Four hundred years before Christ, Plato, the great ancient Greek philosopher wrote a matchless book for all times, and he entitled it, *The Republic*. The thesis, the argument advanced in the book is, What is it that constitute a just society? How can a just society function? And Plato suggests that if every man in the society does his own work to the best of his ability without interfering in someone else's work, we will have a just and stable society. For instance, if a shoemaker does his work properly without interfering in a teacher's work, and if a doctor performs his work adequately without mingling in a businessman's work, and if a priest does his duties satisfactorily without interfering in a judge's work, etc., we will have a just and true society.

Church and politics should go together but they should not mix together. The church is not a place of diplomatic machinery. And politics is not a confessional booth. In the Middle Ages the church and the Pope decided for everyone and controlled everything in the church and outside the church. People disliked it and became tired of it. Later, finally, the state restricted the Pope to one-mile area called, Vatican.

On the other hand, Hitler made a grave mistake by interfering absolutely in church affairs when he ordered all parents in Munich to send their children to nationalist schools in Germany whether they liked it or not. The Church protested and rightly so.

Civil authority, politics belong to the state, religious authority belongs to the church, and the two should be kept apart and not mix. Each belongs to different domain, and each must fulfill its duty and obligations toward the other. Even Jesus had to

pay tax and be tried by civil authority.

The church should not have absolute authority over politics, it should not demand supreme authority in civil affairs. Only when the state, the civil authority comes in conflict with God's authority, then the church must take a stand as did the early church. "We must obey God more than man." Both the church and the state must make their choice between Jesus is Lord and Caesar is lord. The state must necessarily acknowledge the law of God, the truth of God, and the justice of God. It must not use the church as its instrument.

The New Testament teaches that there must be political authority and that the church should take a positive attitude toward it, for it is a divine instrument through which the providence of God is incessantly at work to preserve essential conditions and situations for human life. At the same time, the political authority should know its territories and not be allowed to usurp the authority of God. This is a way of saying that God is the Lord of political authority and that the rulers are responsible to Him whether they know it or not. The righteousness of God is above the interest of the state.

The words of Jesus, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's," clearly summarize the church's view toward the state. They allow for the positive role of political authority, but they make clear that there are things which belong not to the state but to God. In fact, in one sense even the state belongs to God. The Bible says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

We do not want, we do not expect a politician, a statesman to run the affairs of the church, nor do we want or expect a churchman to administer the affairs of the state. The church must assist the state by its moral support and spiritual boost. The church must pray for the prosperity of the state and en-

courage it in making the right decisions and taking the right actions. The state, on the other hand, must protect the church, and seek its guidance.

Church and politics must not be considered antithetical but synthetical. Both, a minister and a politician, church and politics are concerned about pollution, inflation, abortion, nuclear confrontation, arms race, economy, and various social phenomena. But the roles should not be mixed.

There are some who contend that although the church is in secular society, it should not be identified with it. Others argue that the church is in the society and it should not detach itself from it so that it loses all contact with it. However, the true church sees the need for balance, and insists that while the church is not part of society and secular culture surrounding it, it has its message and mission to that society and culture. Its work is to bring the supernatural love of God straight into the midst of relative justice. Among the changes and chances of this mortal life, men and women are literally without hope if in this world only they have hope. It is the work of the church to awaken in them the beauty of the eternal world. In this way the work of the church is irreplaceable.

Any attempt to amalgamate religion and politics will end in a system like that of Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. And who wants to live under such a regime? Religion and politics, in a sense, seem to be remote from each other as is Cape Canaveral from the moon. In another sense, they seem closely related if only we had enough sense to distinguish between them.

With us Assyrians, the old sense of mixing church and politics ought to be abandoned forever. Much mischief has resulted out of this mixture. I think it is now time that we should abandon it. To expect the church to meddle completely in political affairs, or to run our political system is to expect such a pro-

found change in its inner structure as would alter it completely. It will lose its objectives, it will miss its mission, it will not maintain its loyalty, it will cease to be the church. The same thing will be true with politics. The idea that the church should dominate all avenues of our national life must be given up. Because of this mixture, for centuries we have not been able to produce either competent religious leaders or capable national leaders. For many years our ecclesiastical head has been the temporal head as well. We have believed that he could do a splendid job in both fields, a task too big for any man. We have taken it for granted that he could sit with both parties, religious and political and solve all our problems involved in these fields. No wonder our problems are so enormous in both areas.

It is the job of the church to feed the flock; it is the task of the state to protect the flock. It is the priest's task to teach the law of God; it is the politician's job to pass the law of the land. Each has his own role and task to perform for the good of all. But let the minister stick to his ministry and the politician to his politics.

Both religion and politics should not dominate the affairs of man. They both should be his servants and must protect him in his free individual expansion and be worthy of him. When church and politics seek to substitute their interests to the pursuit of individual development, then they really threaten human dignity, and progress is inconceivable.

The positive worth of the church is that it values the qualities of life so highly, perhaps more than any other institution on the face of this earth. The church must not compromise with a type of state which would attempt to make loyalty to it superior to loyalty to God. Moreover, the church cannot tolerate any glorification of the state, or the community, which fails to

recognize and respect the worth and dignity of the individual man.

The church must not be an impersonal affair, an institutional loyalty, but a citadel of morality, a bulwark of faith, not a system of fanaticism, but an organ of salvation. The church is not merely a location of social affiliation but a channel of personal conviction, a means of redemption. The church without a message is as viable as a man without a heart, or a house with dead bodies. The church's role is to stir the hearts and minds of its adherents with divine enthusiasm here on earth. Its message should not be confined only to the next life. The church, true sanctuary knows no walls.

Unfortunately the church of twentieth century has been reduced to outward institution, to rituals, and symbols. It has lost its salt; it does not affect the inner condition of man; it does not touch the depths of his existence; it does not satisfy his deep yearnings. The church of today does not stress personal faith, inwardness, the direction of the heart. How often we miss this inner component! That is the reason why the human soul is silent and the heart of man is dry instead of being aflame.

It seems to be an appropriate idea, a needful thought to improve, to reform, to democratize the church in order to meet the demands, the needs, and the challenges of the twentieth century society. This requires first and foremost the education of the clergy. I regret to say that Assyrian clergy are the least educated of all. You cannot expect a farmer to run the affairs of a huge and complicated firm, or a carpenter diagnose a cancer-stricken individual. Why should it be different in church offices, or perhaps in high church offices? A poor carpenter working with poor tools will eventually produce poor work. A poorly educated minister will ultimately produce a poor if not a dead church.

The church can exert its influence in a host of movements by its educational endeavor. Deep, permanent, and constructive changes in attitude, spirit, form, and essence can only be wrought through the channels of a good education. The church must undertake this enterprise at once, cost what it may. The whole church must mobilize itself in this direction. We hope that one day someone will do something about this thorny problem.

A major task of philosophy of religion is to rediscover the consciousness of man, the truth of religion by delving into the teaching and doctrines of the church. Religion does not shine in a vacuum. Man can belong to any church as well as clubs without being shaken, moved, challenged, and confronted. False confessors simulate true faith. The wheat and the tares cannot always be easily separated.

Church officials are the servants of the church not their rulers and masters. The Bible tells us that ministers are not to be "lords over God's heritage but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3). Ministers of the church are admonished not to be greedy of filthy lucre, contentious, crafty, pleasers of men, not entangled by cares, nor given to wine (I Timothy 3:3). They are enjoined, on the contrary, to preach the gospel, feed the sheep, build God's church, teach, exhort, strengthen the weak, warn the doubters, comfort the broken-hearted, watch over souls, endure hardship, and war a good warfare of faith like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. This is a task big enough to any minister and to any church.

Now an admonition is in order. Every Christian should be convinced that the visible church is God's own creation for the benefit of believers and for the extension of God's kingdom and the Gospel. He should identify himself with some visible church, engage in its activities, and lead his influence to, and

throw his support behind its work praying, always that every member of the visible church here on earth might be in very truth a member of the church invisible.

E. TO A COMPELLING SENSE OF UNITY

Another necessary step that Assyrians must necessarily secure is to work passionately for group unity and group identity. This does not imply group isolation or group separation or group exclusiveness, although we Assyrians are prone to be exclusive. It rather means the kind of group consciousness that modern Assyrians, in different quarters of the world need in order to participate more effectively and meaningfully at all stages of the life of our nation.

Unfortunately, not much has been accomplished in this field. There are various attitudes taken toward the question today. Some ignore the problem altogether by taking no attitude at all, perhaps not recognizing the seriousness of the problem. Others, presumably intelligent persons, do not appear even to have given the subject a passing thought. Only a few seriously-minded individuals believe that we have to face the problem and do something about it if we are to get anywhere in fashioning a national unity.

Obviously, group unity involves group trust and recognition. One of the most serious effects of the Assyrian's damaged ego has been his frequent loss of respect for himself, the minimizing of his talents and of other Assyrians. Therefore, he ends up with a prejudice, with an ambivalence toward his own group. To overcome this tragic attitude, this unhappy conflict, it will be necessary for us to find a new self-image, a healthy positive attitude toward oneself and toward others. By being reconciled, to ourselves and to others, we will be able to build upon the

resources we already have at our disposal. Too many Assyrians are jealous of other Assyrians' success and progress, a disease, a vice, that can be remedied only by reconciliation and unity. And if I am not mistaken at all, there are many Assyrian organizations warring against each other with a claim to absolute truth. This warring spirit, this attitude of jealousy ought to be destroyed before it destroys us, and a loving and reconciling attitude must indispensably rise on its ruins.

This plea for unity is not a call for uniformity or compromise. There must always be healthy debates. Most assuredly there will be inevitable differences of opinion. The problems the Assyrians confront are so complex and monumental that their solution will of necessity involve a diversified approach. But Assyrians, like all other groups, can differ in opinions and still unite around common national objectives.

There are already some forces in the Assyrian community that can serve as the basis for building a powerful united front, provided these forces find a sound, capable and united leadership. For instance, there are Assyrian churches. They can, if they will, initiate a step toward unity. There are Assyrian publications, Assyrian clubs, and a number of other organizations. We must admit, with regret, that so far these forces have not given their entire support and resources to the cause of the Assyrian unity. We believe now it is time they should do so. When they do, it will be a proof that we have outgrown our stupidity, timidity, and have attained some level of maturity.

There is a tremendous chance for liberty, equality, dignity, and maturity, when solidarity, unity, is felt, and this solidarity or unity emerges from a real sense that all individuals and groups are ready to rally around a common goal or even risk their lives for a national cause.

Very few of us realize that the magic word which will make

us to perform miracles is unity. What a powerful force it is! Yet most of us do not realize it and few of us, indeed, make the most effective use of it.

Without this power of some kind, for something, somewhere, sometime, I doubt that if we could continue to exist. Certainly, we would not progress.

Through this form of group unity we can begin a constructive program which will efficiently seek to improve our status quo in many important respects. It will enable us to be better acquainted with one another. It will teach us how to deal with our doubts, confusions, and distortions. All prejudices will be dismantled. It means deep self-examination, both of the incidents that unite us and unfortunate events that divide us, silly trivialities that separate us and make us almost enemies to one another. We can be able to give and receive criticism in the spirit of love and good will in spite of evil circumstances. Criticism is not an enemy nor are the critics. In fact, they are our unpaid teachers. If the criticism is surrounded by elements of mutual national concern and personal love, it need not be destructive but can actually be creative. When we have attained this point of maturity in our relationships with one another, we have actually taken a significant step toward our national unity. Moreover, when such acquaintance or discourse or relationship deepens, it will be more possible and plausible to discuss differences as well as similarities, and to do so without antagonism and hatred. Common sense tells us that the more united we are, the more free and unrestrained and unprejudiced are our conversations, the more honesty develops, good will prevails, and awesome barriers that stand in our way can be substantially reduced.

Many years ago, the Chinese Christians were in their matter-of-fact-way, discussing some kind of unity among themselves.

They came to the conclusion and issued this significant statement, "Agreed to differ, but resolved to love and unite to serve."

Another necessary step toward a united national front is to engage around a powerful active program, not merely annual conventions for the sake of conventions only, annual gatherings for the sake of dancing, drinking, hand-clapping, finger-snapping, and passing fun. Something constructive and far more profitable ought to be done by those concerned, and I am sure there are some who are concerned. Involvement is mandatory, especially by those who are equipped to play significant roles. We will be greatly deceived if we naively believe that this problem will work itself out. Problems are not solved and the citadels of evil do not crumble by passive waiting. If history teaches anything, it is that evil forces do not relinquish their mighty grip and that time does not wait for anyone. If time is not used constructively by good men, it will be used destructively by evil men.

It is amazing to note that even in this generation the children of darkness are still shrewder and more influential than the children of light. Perhaps that reason for this fact is because the former are more zealous, more determined, more equipped, and certainly more committed to their cause than the latter. If they want to advance their cause, they do not wait for time to do it for them, nor wait for other people to approve of what they do; they make time their ally, and exploit and manipulate people to serve their cause. But good men patiently and cautiously wait and pray and timidly act. Hence, we are faced with a double destruction: the destruction of the evil people from without and the destruction of the silent, passive people from within.

Connected with this thesis and one that is perhaps even more

difficult is the attempt to engage in a process of purification. External influences must be eliminated, paid agents and disloyal individuals and groups ought to be converted, won, trusted, taught, and trained. Obviously, this requires discretion and technique. Our task is to work to remove the faults so secretly present in the system in which the individual or groups are operating. The process must be through persuasion, not coercion. It demands a dynamic magnitude of redeeming power, in which every effort is justified morally and legally, Our task is not to satisfy dishonesty, but to shatter it. Our duty is courageous confrontation rather than evasion.

Before we can take any efficient steps toward a national unity, we must be quite clear about the nature of the unity we are talking about—the words, phrases, intentions, methods, and terminologies we are using. Nothing but frustration and fantasy will come of a naive hope that unity can be achieved by just a little more talking, and a few more meetings. The differences that remain when all the talking has been done may still be astronomical differences. However, this is one possible method that still divides the children of the same household against one another.

We come to the final step. A national unity will not come if each group or party passively and reluctantly waits for the other to move toward it. Unity will come only as all groups move out toward one another with peaceful stretched hands; neither will be quite the same as it was before the confrontation took place. The process involves some rules. They are:

1. Each group, each party must wholeheartedly believe that the other group is speaking in good faith, with sincere convictions, and well-meant intentions. Individual groups working secretly behind each other not only cannot contribute to the national unity but they are a hindrance thereto.

We all know very well that there is a great power in unity. And the secret of this power is no secret at all. It simply is a uniting power—joining together with a singleness of thought, feeling and purpose. The more people who can unite, the more groups which can be joined together, the more nations which can collaborate—the greater will be their combined power.

2. Each group must have a clear understanding of its programs, plans, intentions, goals, means, and methods. Half-knowledge of important issues will leave the job half done. Dr. Herbert Hawkes of Columbia University used to advise, “Half the worry in the world is caused by people trying to make decisions before they have sufficient knowledge on which to base a decision. Get the facts. And be sure that the facts are exact, clear, and objective.”

3. Each party must accept responsibility in humility, good faith, and serving spirit for what its group has done and is doing to foster and perpetuate unity.

4. Each party must forthrightly face the issues that cause separation, as well as those which create unity, and sincerely discuss them with other groups.

5. Each party must recognize that all that can be done with the discussions and dialogues is to offer them to God in sincere prayers who willingly and gladly consummates every well-intended unity.

I acknowledge with gratitude the sincere desire and firm belief of all those who strive to accomplish a lasting unity among our disunited people. When in God's good time that great work is accomplished, it will be a gift and a fruit of many tearful prayers and many hard efforts of many people. But at the same time it is an urgent and an essential goal toward which must be directed all our endeavor and will, cleansed of egotism, and illuminated by the discoveries of intellectual minds subject to

the demands of faith. And finally, it would be well for us Assyrians to remember that our first and last hopes in our inventory must be the hope that unity is going to have the last word. If that hope is lost, we are lost indeed.

Many years ago, before improvements were made in mental hospitals, a visitor was escorted through a mental hospital by the superintendent. He finally was taken to a balcony overlooking a ward where the most dangerous "lunatics" were kept. One hundred violently dangerous lunatics, watched over by only three guards. The visitor was astonished. He turned to the superintendent and asked, "Aren't you afraid those dangerous lunatics will kill the guards?" The superintendent calmly replied, "No, lunatics never unite."

There is a lesson in the statement of this superintendent for all persons, groups, and nations. Evidently many of us have not been sufficiently impressed by the wisdom which has come ringing down through the ages: "United we stand; divided we fall." Perhaps we will be more impressed by these dramatic words: "LUNATICS NEVER UNITE."

CHAPTER VI

Concluding Remarks

We have come to the end of our survey in dealing with the Assyrian nation in the modern world. The problems, dilemmas, and destiny of that nation is our chief concern.

In this small work, we have attempted to portray a few things of great significance as far as that nation is concerned. We have earnestly made an effort to search for a national identity so important to a nation that has lost its own identity for many centuries. It is a universal mode of thought to consider ourselves as important elements of humanity as a whole. But during all these centuries, nothing important has happened to change the attitude of humanity toward this minority. During the course of the discussion, many attempts were made to arouse some consciousness, both in ourselves and in other groups. We have shown, throughout the first pages how we lost our identity from the very beginning of our decline in the seventh century B.C., through successive centuries under different rulers in different climes.

In connection with our search for identity, it became necessary to assure ourselves of our continuing existence by a more powerful Scriptural argument—an echo of eternity. The purpose of this assertion was to give assurance that this nation blessed and promised to play a necessary role with other na-

tions of the world cannot possibly evaporate into nothingness. God will not retreat, He will not pass us by. He will fulfill His prophetic words in us in His own appropriate time. Assyria is the work of His hands. And one day the descendants of this nation will play their part in building a highway of friendship with other nations, although it is the conviction of the present writer and many others that we do not have a guide for an understanding of this conception. Yet we believe that it will come to pass somehow, sometime.

Furthermore, since this nation cannot perish, since we are involved in God's providence and His program, and since we are an echo of eternity, then we are entitled to a better existence than the one we are leading now.

To accomplish certain national ideals, it is important to achieve certain ends or remove certain obstacles. A sense of understanding among many of our groups is mandatory, and any sense of misunderstanding ought to be removed. A sense of direction is imperative to any nation. It is a compass by which a nation proceeds in the right path. A nation must never lose its sense of direction, otherwise it will lose itself in the process. By the same token a sense of self-confidence is as important as any. I have included this item in our discussion because I want it to be absorbed in our psychological fabric. Today the world suffers mainly from distrust, and it seems that nobody worries about it at all.

In another discussion under Church and Politics, I have attempted to keep them separated but not isolated. I have made my effort to show that they have different domains, that each has its own sphere, and that the two should not mix together. Both are necessary to a society and both must support each other.

However, all these above suggestions and recommendations

can only be achieved and implemented as a result of a national galvanized unity. This is the first and foremost requirement to our dilemmas and destiny.

These are some of the problems which some of our thoughtful men and women are asking and for which they are trying to find a solution. These problems are more urgent in a crisis such as the one that the Assyrian nation is passing through at the present time.

To conclude the whole treaties, I have throughout the foregoing pages, shown that perhaps the time has come to this nation to know what it needs. If it needs an identity or a better existence, then we must understand that the problem must be approached basically. Superficial foundations, meaningless conventions, and silly discussions will falter on every side. National freedom, security and destiny of a nation cannot be consolidated by makeshifts, by bits of strings, by old patches, by pots of glue. They can be established by transforming ourselves from the interior and not by erecting exterior structures. Only on such bases can we arise to a kind of breathless expectation of tomorrow's miracle.

Many important things in the world of ours have to be done by people who are convinced that they can work together, or they will not, and cannot, be done at all.

New men of vision, of insight, of good will are needed for a new society. Without these new men, the plans, the efforts of a new society are paper toys only—perhaps, beautiful toys, models, well built, but they will remain toys, unreal, illusions if we stay indifferent, inadequate to the new social and national obligations of our future. These men and women are a mighty force and a bright hope to lead us. We have to follow them.

Throughout human history every large nation has been given an opportunity to help itself by helping the other nations of

the world. If such an opportunity is seized and implemented with a broad and generous spirit, an infinite of practical possibilities may open up. Our great need today is to have these possibilities brought under control as will make them a blessing to a few rather than a curse to many.

Many people among the Assyrian community entertain optimistic notions that we are on the verge of our greatest trial. The little forces that we possess, social, moral, and spiritual, and the deepest motivations and strongest convictions of life are tested for success or failure. Is this really important? Yes. Very important. Successful counselors tell us that it is not what happens that matters, but how you feel about what happens. Mental capacities are not merely so beneficial as mental attitudes. You become what you think you are.

But first be motivated by zeal, with strong conviction that we can and will succeed. This is the ignition that ignites the fuel in the rocket to propel our guided missile to success. No ignition—and you stay on the ground. There are thousands of people among us who are always grounded because nobody provided the ignition of inspiration.

Next we must be motivated to find out what we need to know and do in order to assure our success. Motivation transforms inspiration into activity.

Whatever we want in this life or from this world has a price tag. Not necessarily in money. This price tag is more important than money. It includes personal sacrifice in time, effort, study, toil, planning, and doing. Are we willing to pay the price? The door to the future awaits us. Let us not linger behind, looking at a door from the past which has been closed for many centuries. It is a law of life that when one door closes, another opens. We spend too much time looking with regret at the closed doors when we should seek the open doors of opportunity and

move on with confidence that they will lead to a better tomorrow.

There is much inner strength and hope in realizing that the darkest hour will surely pass. There is, power too, in knowing that we never are given a burden which we are unable to bear. It is only when we cling to old burdens, so that we still carry the weight of the past when we add the burdens of each new day, that we falter and break. Dorothy Dix once wrote: "I stood yesterday; I can stand today; I will not permit myself to think about what might happen tomorrow." Another has said, "Do the thing and you have the power." This statement can make you do two things, namely, to make you try to do things, and second, it will make you actually accomplish things. Henry Ford, who must have made some sort of record for doing things, put it simply, "Whatever you believe you can do a thing or not—you are right."

Perhaps that is an oversimplification of a very profound fact of life. Nevertheless, there is a great resource of power ready to be used by anyone who begins to do something. Do the thing and you will have the power to accomplish it. Start now—with the sure knowledge that whatever man can conceive and believe, man can achieve. Start now without hesitation or fear.

Thank you my patient reader.