THE PRODIGAL SON

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2002

FOREWORD

In the course of the eleven years when we worshipped together Albert was always supportive-a fact which I very much appreciated then-and still do! But it was not his support only in the life of the Church that helped me so much but also the words of support, the warm clasp of his hand on my arm, and the assuring smile on his face.

I knew that he was a writer and I have appreciated reading some of the material that he had written. I commend his writings, not because I have read them (for "no" I have not read them all) but because I know the writer and I appreciate the sincerity with which he writes.

My prayer is, that you who read his words in this Booklet, will not only be blessed by what you read but that you will say in prayer a " Thank you " to the One whom Albert seeks to share with you.

From a friend whose life has been enriched by knowing you, I say " Thank you Albert, and may God Bless " .

Rev. W. Stanford
Sutton, Ontario
June 16, 2002

THE PRODIGAL SON
THE SUBLIME LOVE OF GOD, THE FATHER

Humans are privileged to see, comprehend and touch so many beautiful things in this natural world, such as marvelous sunrises and awe-inspiring sunsets. We were made to delight and savor the numerous and multicoloured flowers and to savor their fragrance, to hear the songs of birds and to observe the flight of butterflies. It is the gift from God to be able to enjoy the friendship of fellow men and women. In all this immediate splendour, there is an undeniable presence or awareness of God, our Maker. Although we cannot see or touch God because of our natural limitations, we can perceive and spiritually apprehend His presence, His guidance, His safekeeping and most of all, His sublime fatherly love.

In order to comprehend this divine revelation and Presence, we do not need to submerge ourselves in the depth and darkness of the ocean, nor do we need to fly to atmospheric heights. In order to see the reality of God's revelation, a person urgently needs and requires meditation and divine grace. Perceptive enlightenment comes to us when we direct our thoughts and meditations from the material to the spiritual realm.

I invite each reader to approach the modest thoughts in this publication with thoughtful prayer, to knock on the door of eternal life and find the God of Jesus Christ Whose love is unsurpassable. This God created the cosmos, not to show His power, but to reveal His tenderness to His highest creation.

I do not pretend that I know all there is to know about God, but I have had a glimpse of this knowledge and love which I want to share with all my neighbours and friends. I present these humble tiny candlelit thoughts to all those who love and believe in God, the Father of humankind.

Albert J. Noradunkian

Written and published in Armenian, January 13, 1998
Translated into English, June-- 2002

THE PARABLE OF
THE PRODIGAL SON
THE EXALTED REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

The parables resemble mirrors where a person can see his or her reflection. Speaking in parables is a very efficient way of teaching and this technique was often used by Jesus to illustrate and convey the true love of God to the masses. The difference between the parables of Jesus and world renowned fables is that Jesus never used vegetables or animals in His parables. He only used the human world and its spirituality. The central characters in the parables of the Gospels are always *human beings*. The parable of the Prodigal Son is the apex of all the parables and truly shows the close relationship between God and humanity. It is impossible to find another Teacher who has cast such a marvelous image into the hearts of men and women. The parable of the Prodigal Son is an unparalleled memorial of love.

A parable is a first-rate genre of *international* literature. It belongs to all times and speaks to all people. It is the vehicle through which the truth can be known in the

strongest and quickest way. Some of the most famous parables of the Gospels are the Prodigal Son, The Good Samaritan, The Sower, The Lost Sheep and The Ten Talents. Jesus stood in the market place and looked attentively at the poor the rich , the Jews and the gentiles who passed by Him walking on the streets of Judea. It is strange that not a single disciple in the biblical record copied the Master and told a parable.

The parable of the "Prodigal Son" is the crown of all the parables. This parable unmistakably and uniquely portrays a God Who even loves sinners. The washing of the feet of the disciples is a performed or acted parable and the fulfillment of Jesus' ministry. The parables of Jesus reveal His authentic being, which is His divinity within.

1. "There was a man who had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate'. So the father divided his property between them".--Luke 15:12.

Freedom and *wealth* are circumstances which can either be a privilege or a misfortune. In human life there is a disturbing confusion of values which can be learned and apprehended only by giving, sacrificing and serving in the Christian faith. In spite of knowing that his younger son will waste his possessions, the father went ahead and divided his property. Why? From the father's perspective, his younger son was already a lost soul. Consequently, material wealth did not mean very much. The wise father mixed his material possessions *with his love,* and handed them over to his son, believing that he would eventually win back his son's faithfulness and loyalty as a true and loving son. Only parental love has that *unparalleled* commanding *force* that returns the lost child to the parent. It is unfortunate that very few Christians make use of this *self-denying* love. The younger son was not *prodigal* until he received his inheritance. Then he lived prodiga-lly.

It is not possible for animals and beasts to be prodigal because they have no will, privilege or prerogative to rise higher in moral issues. Domesticated animals are tame and ferocious ones are wild. Humans are the only creatures in all this world who have the *free will* of either becoming spiritual from material dust of the ground or of turning their spiritual potential into dust or ashes through free choice.

There are diverse ways in which humans are called to turn or repent and go home. That difference is seen in the approach of Jesus when He communicated with individual sinners. Jesus Christ approached Zacch- aeus the paralyzed man, Mary Magdalene the Samaritan woman, the disciple Peter who denied him and Thomas the sceptic in different and varied ways. Though the ways and the means seem different and many, all are clothed in Jesus' loving spirit and all point to Jesus Christ.

2. The younger son converts all his father's lands to money and goes to a far distant world--Luke 15:13.

To convert parental love and a father's estate into money is pure *materialism*. In religious terms it constitutes idolatry. In spite of human idealism, we still live in a world where the dominant instinct is materialism and love of money. Although there are hundreds of thousands of church-goers and innumerable churches, western men and women still think that religion is pure emotion or palpations of the heart.

The figurative parable about the younger son is not only a picture of disobedience, but also a picture of an attempt by a child to reach maturity of faith and love. The twelve disciples of Jesus became apostles without apparent effort or "pangs of childbirth", but Paul, the enemy and persecutor of the Church, went through many afflictions and much spiritual pain and misery before he found the desire of his heart.

It would be impossible to imagine Christianity without Paul. Yet, unlike the other Apostles, Paul never knew Jesus during his life in Palestine. His conversion from a leading persecutor of the early followers of Jesus Christ to an essential architect of Jesus' Church is one of the most remarkable facts in the history of Christianity.

The change that came over Paul was profound and absolute. His immediate reaction, however, was to spend a long period of time in isolation in Arabia (Gal. 1:16-18). He then felt able to evangelize on his own account in Damascus.

How many of us today, can comprehend the spiritual crisis and the painful strug-

gles that our saints and martyrs went through before they reached the footstool of the Crucified Lord? How many of us have studied the spiritual journey of St. Augustine and his path toward Jesus Christ? Did all faithful Christians struggle on a similar uphill climb with embarrassment, setbacks and entanglement, before they reached sanctification?

In this parable the word "prodigal" is used not as "disobedient" but as "sensual", or delighting in immorality and vain glory. This happens only with free behaviour and having *free will.*

Each person develops faith and knowledge of God only through experimental living and through his or her own errors and mistakes. Humanity has to go through the furnace of pain and grief. The tribulations and afflictions which humans create for themselves become the way and the divine means or revelations through which each individual will apprehend the holy Crucifixion on Golgotha. Golgotha was not an accidental or random occurrence. God's love was shown to humans in a tangible and concrete way, through which men and women will turn to Him for reconciliation and communion as Father and child. This unimaginable and indescribable goal was accomplished through God's almighty charm and love which draws each sinner into communion with Him.

3. "And there he squandered his property in dissolute living"--Luke 15:13.

What is property? What does a person really own? What does he or she possess? The only thing that a person possesses, is his or her existence as a human being. However, a person can exist only through the Maker or with-*in* God. A person's being, essence and existence is not brought about spontaneously or independently. It is a grace and a gift that we do not exist as beasts but as human beings, simply because the divine Potter wanted it so. The Prodigal Son did not squander *his own* personally gained property, but his father's estate which he had inherited. Any person who does not know how to use hereditary wealth advantageously will become a victim of his or her wealth.

A human being's relationship with the Infinite and the immense universe should be very intimate and friendly. Our very existence should urge us to accept that a human being is made and created for a purposeful achievement. One should not live only for oneself and for personal delights. Before he came to his senses, the Prodigal son thought that life consisted of only spending and dissipation. Only after he had wasted away his fortune did he come to him-*self* and realize that life was more than transitory amusement and waste, but rather, life should be *productive* and *inspired by God* for meaningful achievement.

4. "When he had spent everything"--Luke 15:14.

There are only a few who return to God without having wasted their livelihood. We thank God that His grace is inexhaustible. Not all objects bounce back when they fall. There are also objects that shatter or get lost when they fall to the ground. Luckily, among souls which fall, there are a few who come to themselves and repent and receive pardon. Our prodigal son belongs to this repentant group. He came to himself instead of being lost. That small word *"himself"* also included the atomic particle of his father's personality. Within that particle the son could see his father's love and the father's longing to hug his lost son. This small vanishing point was the turning point through which he trusted his father's love.

5. "A severe famine took place throughout that country --Luke 15:14.

To be exposed to famine is like a slow death, but to be left penniless in a strange land is an unspeakable death. Some people think that the famine and poverty was sent by God to the prodigal for punishment. However, God loves even those who hate Him. Jesus commanded His disciples to love their enemies. God, Who is our Heavenly Father loves the whole world. God teaches and educates humankind, not by famine, punishment and violence, but through persuasion and love. He wants to win us over to His side. Those who err do not deserve our hatred and punishment, but rather our *compassion,* because they have already experienced the consequences of their wrong doing. The sting of conscience is the first punishment.

Heathen priests who preach belief in revengeful gods want to demonstrate that great punishments will follow great sins. The Old Testament preaches revenge by advocating the slogan "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, burning for burning, wound for wound and stripe for stripe". --Exodus 21:24. Jesus, however, overturned the Mosaic code. For example, He cleared the flea-market traders out of the temple and He said to a paralyzed man,

"Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven"--Matt. 9:5.

Sometimes we think that God is unable to prevent evil and affliction. Only faith and trust will comprehend God's amazing mystery and power. Nothing is impossible for God. He permits and allows evil because He can turn even our evil actions to good use.

1. God used Joseph, whom his brothers sold to slave traders, to save the Patriarch Jacob and his descendants from starvation.
2. Moses was put into the river by his mother. God transformed the evil thoughts and murderous actions of Pharaoh. Moses became the Pharaoh's grandson.
3. The trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus became the door through which men and women can believe and love God and receive pardon for their sins.

Armenian national ingenuity often has glittered and shone in painful times and under blows from enemy hatred. Affliction, grief and rough conditions of life have given an impetus to Armenian national productivity, art, literature and architecture. Persecution and suffering sometimes cause an upward surge of culture. For example, when Stephen the deacon was persecuted and stoned to death, Christians fled from Judea and went to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the gentiles. Onlyin the darkness of night can we behold and enjoy the beautiful starry heavens. These speculative ideas are foreign to historic idealism and egoistic philosophy.

6."Who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs"--Luke 15:15.

For a Jew, to feed pigs was the most insulting and debasing servitude imaginable. A Jew would prefer to die rather than be a herder of pigs. However, to hunger was to embrace the door of death. All those who, like the younger son, aspire only to the joys of this world and the glory of ostentation and fame in their society, will eventually drink the bitter cup of misery and remain naked, lonely and rejected.

7. "He would gladly have filled himself with the pods,... but no one gave him anything"--Luke 15:16.

With an abundance of physical bread, a human being does not feel the famine of spiritual bread. Hunger is a physical requirement of the body which urges a person to think and to find a solution to the misery. Thinking represents the real person, the "inner being", which belongs only to humans. The process of thinking is an encounter between God and man. A Christian who thinks, begins a dialogue with the invisible, but comprehensible, spiritual Presence. The light of the mind, illuminated with the light of the sun can perceive an invisible universe, which is called the world of Divine Revelation or Divine Inspiration. Scripture is an additional source of Divine Revelation.

"Indeed, the word of God is living and active,... piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"--Heb. 4:12.

8. "When he came to himself he said..."--Luke 15:17.

How can a human being 'come to himself '? Does a person ever go outside of himself or herself, that he or she needs to return within? A person's self-consciousness is a tiny particle of his reality, truth or essence. Christians believe it is a gift from God to

humankind. Looking from a personal perspective, I regard it as "the invisible **personality** of each of us". A positive self-consciousness is embodied in service to others, self-sacrifice and toleration. There cannot be negative "self-consciousness". However, physical lust or material gluttony can blind the eye and benumb the consciousness.

Self-consciousness reveals that a person is maturing spiritually when he or she begins to examine not only the outside world, but also the world that is within. Human consciousness reveals that we are limited creatures and not self-created persons. The hidden forces of nature push and oppress from all around to shatter and break our hopes to pieces. Then they threaten us with death, reminding us that we are only an atom within innumerable selfless atoms. Suddenly, within all this oppression and hopelessness, our soul becomes a forceful will which awakens and lights the candles of faith in our hearts and fills us with hope.

The human mind can understand and know God, more than it can know itself. Our identity will be definable when we perceive our duty and role which we shall play throughout our lives. God is the First Cause and the Author of all human consciousness. It is a great satisfaction and contentment for each human to receive his or her individual divine consciousness. Each human being has a unique personality. In the parable of the "Prodigal Son", we see the highest consciousness of God Who helps us to see the truth of our own real situation. Parental reality pictures in us love, forgiveness and mercy.

For the above reason, when Paul met the celestial Jesus at the entrance to Damascus, he regretted his actions, repented and was baptized. He then went to the Arabian desert and for two years meditated and prayed to God to receive the calling and discipleship of the resurrected Jesus Christ. This action of St. Paul is called *'coming to himself'*.

Therefore, a person's 'coming to himself ' means regret and repentance spiritually and mentally. It is a total moving around of the person toward the good, the right and the holy. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again". In other words, you must be made a new thinker-physically and spiritually. You must become a new personality. However much a human being may sink into sin, his or her memory book will show the whole truth. In that memory book there will be recollections as though seen dimly in a mirror. Those dimly seen realities and facts, such as parental endearment, self-sacrifice and **love,** will come alive to the repentant sinner.

Though he was surrounded by dirty pigs, the thoughtful prodigal son began to see, as if on a moving screen, his previous life in the house which he had willingly left because of his arrogant and sickly ambitions. In his memory rang the melodious words which his father had spoken with tears running down on his cheeks, "Look, my dear son, this is your home. I will keep it open for your return. I love you. God be with you until my eyes will see you again." The memory of those keen and penetrating words of his loving father shook the prodigal son's whole being. A desire began to stir within him to return home, toward salvation.

9. "I will get up and go to my father"--Luke 15:18.

The concept of *'father'* has no equivalent. To dispel fear, Jesus, the Son of God, represented God as a **"Heavenly Father"**. Until we change our Old Testament prejudices, we will think of God as a despot and a tyrant towards His creation. In the reality which Jesus revealed, God is a merciful heavenly Father and His love of humankind is unlimited.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son,
so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish
but have eternal life."--John 3:16.

10. "And I will say to him...". Luke 15:18

When we study the parable of "the Prodigal Son", we see that the son spoke with his father only twice. The first time he *demanded* his *inheritance* and the second time he revealed *his regrets and his repentance.*

In the first conversation, the son was arrogant, demanding and self- centered, as if the father owed him the inheritance even before the father was dead. There the younger

son thought he was omniscient and clever while the rest of the family was stupid.

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
--I Peter 5:5.

During the second conversation between the younger son and his father, we see the son totally changed. He is a new person. The father does not see the stinking rags hanging from his shoulders. The only visible things that are important to the father are his son's shining and sparkling eyes as he kneels in front of him in a prayerful attitude. Prayer becomes worthy when the person prays in the spirit of penitence. When a sinner comes to himself or herself, a pearl of hope forms over the sand of anxiety which puts him or her on the road to salvation. God's love for each sinner is the golden key to the Kingdom of God and penitence is the lock of salvation.

Salvation from sin does not come from reciting a *mechanical* mantra as some people like to portray themselves saying, "I am a *born again* Christian". There is no real salvation without turning away from and denying the old life. The salvation which Jesus taught is always tied to penance and sorrow for wrong doing. St. Paul, speaking in front of King Agrippa, said,

"That they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance"--Acts 26:20.

Through repentance and a transformed life, a person has the possibility to be liberated from God's Judgement.

What is repentance?

To repent is to reorient our lives and to turn our backs on sin and sinful living.

a. The person who repents transforms and elevates his or her life into a lasting desire towards the Creator of Light, the Spring of Life and the Absolute Goodness.

b. He or she does not stray from this direction. This person does not **forget** the virtues of faith, hope and love toward God.

In Jesus, and precisely in Him, the Love of God breaks through all historical and psychological analysis, and in directness and in mediation transcends both, for God's love is bound neither to this or that thing nor to this or that place. Because God is eternal and omnipotent, He is unique and once-for-all. To this, Jesus, the eternal Christ, bears witness. Love can be given to us, but we **have** to **accept** and **receive** it. Let us read together the repentant son's confession.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."--Luke 15:19.

The season of Lent consists of forty-eight days of meditation, repentance, self denial, contemplation and prayer.

"In the early Church, the main purpose of Lent was to prepare the 'catechumen', that is to say, the newly converted Christian, for baptism which at that time was performed during the paschal liturgy. But even when the Church no longer baptized adults and the institution of the catechumenate disappeared, the basic meaning of Lent remained the same. For even though we are baptized, what we constantly lose or betray is precisely that which we received at baptism. Therefore, Easter is our return every year to our own baptism, whereas Lent is our preparation for that return--the slow and sustained effort to perform, at the end, our own "passage" or "pascha" into the new life in Christ. Each year Lent and Easter are, once again, the rediscovery and the recovery by us of what we were made through our own baptismal death and resurrection."--Fr. Alexander Schememann Orthodox theologian 1921-1983.

To go to church is sometimes difficult today because of distance or language. But it is worth it to make an effort, at least once a year, by turning to the springs of our faith and drinking its pure and healing spiritual waters. This act symbolizes a death to the old

life under the law and a rising to newness of life "in Christ" or "in the Spirit."

What is penitence?

Jesus Christ came into the world (the Word was made flesh) to grant pardon and forgiveness to sinners, instead of condemnation. He said to the woman who was caught in the act of prostitution, "I also do not condemn you. Go and sin no more". There is no *pun - ishment* in the Gospel revelation of Jesus Christ. A person suffers and loses eternal life because of his or her own rejection of God's grace. It is a *consequence* and result of sin. Individuals reject God, and yet, God accepts us, fallen as we are. We are still His children and objects of His mercy, His favour, and His love.

a. To forgive and to justify a sinful person through confession and penitence, is the central gospel of Jesus' mission and revelation to humanity.
b. Though forgiveness is a free gift of God to a sinner, yet God wants to see a sincere confession and true regret from each sinner.
c. God's forgiveness is that bridge where God and humans join and embrace one another.
d. On that bridge, God shows His love, mercy and forgiveness, and each man or woman presents his or her repentance through confession and sometimes by reimbursement or restitution.
e. Penitence and confession embody another action, which is sometimes disregarded. The Prodigal son "*got up and went...*", Zacchaeus, on the other hand, *"compensated"* for his wrong doing by giving half of his wealth to the poor.

There are some sinful actions which demand that restitution should be paid to the victims. It is not enough just to say "I am sorry". The sinner should feel the pain of his past wrong. This pain of conscience is a form of penance. The act of compensation is the concrete expression of the confession. The gift of Divine mercy and grace is also found within the Old Testament and Islamic faiths, but without the tangible and visible expression of--***the crucifixion.*** "The cross is the ladder that leads from visible realities to invisible realities; through the cross, one's mind soars above the tangible world and touches the heavenly, divine realm."--St. Athanasius of Alexandria (293-373).

In the religions which demand punishment there cannot be forgiveness for sins. Consider the last words of Jesus on the cross. The first three were for forgiveness and love, "***Father, forgive them***, *for they know not what they do".* The second two words were for His personal crisis and torment, and the last two were for thanks and victory.

11. "So he set off and went to his father"--Luke 15:20.

First, the younger son (the prodigal), *came to himself* and he recognized his vain and useless living. Second, he felt regret and Third, he prepared his confession with real humility and free will. However, these were only considerations and reflections... not executed performances. The Prodigal son's greatest response was when *he got up and went to his father*. This **action** demonstrated his ***repentance.***

12. "But while he was still far off, he ran and put his arms around him"--Luke 15:20.

In the parable of the "Prodigal Son" we can observe a human parent's God-like behaviour. The parable of the "Prodigal Son", according to my humble understanding, should be called,

"Our Heavenly Father's unsurpassable Love".

God, the Father, is the ideal of love, pardon, and grace for human-kind. If the prodigal son belonged to the father, the father also belonged to the son. The father had given birth to the son. They were made of the same body! There is nothing that can stop a father's love for his son. The longing of love has no measure and neither time nor space can intervene. The prodigal son's return home represents the victory of fatherly love. Jesus, with His great skill and artistic technique, presents to human understanding, not only a painting but a living episode, where it says, "the father saw and recognized his son."

The father believed and hoped that one day the son would return home. The mysterious and unparalleled fatherly love has that exquisite force which is difficult to explain, but is real and active and shows its power in the universe.

13. "His father saw him and was filled with compassion"
--Luke 15:20.

The father did not deal with legislative law towards his son. Instead, the father, through his love and grace, used the forgiving formula--**compassion--**to welcome his son. It was the father who ran forward to meet his son. It was the father who wrapped his arms around his stinking son and it was the father who kissed the son first. Jesus is the sweet Legislator, not the Judge of Punishment. He taught,

"The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him... . God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."
--John 4:23.

Jesus Christ, throughout His life on Earth, showed humility, compassion and self-sacrifice. The requirements of God proceed from the legal to the moral and from the moral to the spiritual. The Pharisee went into the temple to pray, but instead of praying to God, he began to boast about his obedience to the Law.

St. Nerses Shnorhali, by counting himself a disciple of Jesus and His Gospel, wrote saying,

"Lord, do not judge me through Your justice, but through Your compassion forgive me."

Indomitable greatness is not to be found in the ingenious scientist, the erudite intellectual, the gracious artist, the crowned poet, or the rich millionaire. Real and lasting greatness in this world is to be found in a mortal earthling whose heart has been activated by Divine compassion. Nietzsche portrayed the Christian virtues of compassion, humility, nobleness, gentleness and unselfishness, as sheepish moralities which must be abolished. Nietzsche continually hated, cursed and condemned Chris-tianity. He became insane in his later years and ironically, received the sympathy and solicitude of Christians. He died in the home of a compas-sionate sister.

What is compassion?

True compassion requires the determination and strength of a warrior. Compassion and mercy towards an enemy leads to Godlikeness. Christian love makes the loved one transparent. By loving an enemy, we cleanse and amend our conscious and soul. By pardoning, we are pardoned. A human being is really humane when compassion is born within. In the Gospel of Jesus, pity and sympathy are represented as compassion and mercy.

14. "And kissed him"--Luke 15:20.

People will forgive a defective or guilty person. They will reconcile with an opponent or an enemy. However, you need additional motivation to kiss and love those people. By the act of kissing his son, the father cemented his own love to the love of his son. The father kissed his son so often it was as if he wanted to make sure with his lips that he was not day- dreaming but that the person in his arms was actually his own son, the younger son who had denied him for a father and went away for good.

If the father had originally scolded the son for his unreasonable demands and not distributed his estate, the younger son would still have gone away. The son would then have lived as a slave or criminal and never returned home. Love is the true hook for catching souls. The father, with far-sighted wisdom, chose to sacrifice his wealth and deny himself in order to eventually win back his son for good.

15. "Then the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son"--Luke 15:21.

That son who first had approached his elderly father as a creditor, now kneels at

the feet of the same father with tears running down his cheeks and wails out his confession in sorrow and regret. Our human approach to God should also be profoundly reverent and humble.

The younger brother returned home, not just because of hunger, being homeless , penniless or because he had lost everything including his friends. The swine-herder returned home because he had witnessed his father's inexhaustible love and mournful weeping at the very moment when he rejected the father and departed from the home. The faith of the father was unbreakable; his hope was luminous and the love incomparable. Eventually the father would recover his son when that son became grown-up, self-conscious, faithful and appreciative of the father's sacrificial love.

The kneeling and weeping swine-herder had just started to confess saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" when the father interrupted him and gave orders to the servants saying,

"Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! And they began to celebrate."--Luke 15:22-24.

The father stopped his younger son from continuing his confession, because he did not want to hear the last words which were going to be,

"Treat me like one of your hired hands"--Luke 15:19.

This descriptive portrait of forgiveness and pardon by the father, surpasses normal human behaviour and reveals the depth and grandeur of the Divine. For the sake of human vision, Jesus opened the heavenly curtain, so that we would be able to see the extent of God's majestic love. Within love, words are not important. Words vanish. Only ***silence*** speaks.

The greatest sacrifices often are done silently without speech. The supreme form of prayer is to humble oneself in the presence of God in silence. When the body is silent, the soul prays to its Maker. Only in the darkness of the night will the light become visible and only in silence can you hear the tender voice of your heavenly Father. Humans are obliged to search for God, but He is not to be found in tumult and uproar. God is friendly with silence. Look at nature--trees, flowers and grass. They grow in silence. Look the stars, the moon and the sun. They move silently. Silence is the musical Presence of God.

In such expressive silence, saved from sin, emancipated and reconciled the lost soul hears its authentic ratification, not as a slave, but rather as the rightful son in his father's home. The father authenticates this sonship by issuing the following commands:

1. Quick, bring out a robe--the best one.
2. put a ring on his finger.
3. and sandals on his feet.
4. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

Jesus called such unexpected, unforeseen and unlooked-for happiness, *angelic enthusiasm. "Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*--Luke 15:7.

16. "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"--Luke 15:21.

The Gospel of Jesus calls a sinner's repentance and return to God a rise from the dead or the resurrection of the dead.

If someone asks, "What does God do with the world after He has created it?" The reply should be, "God is bringing the world to its completion-to perfection.

17. "Now his elder son was in the field."--Luke 15:25.

The elder son was hard working and productive. Instead of wasting the inheritance

that he received from the father, he was augmenting it. At sunset, when he was nearing the house, he heard the sounds of music and dance and singing voices. He couldn't understand what had happened in his absence. He called one of the slaves and questioned him saying, "What's going on in the house?"

His servant, a neutral person, replied to the elder son, *"Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound."*--Luke 15:26-27. The elder brother was thunder-struck by this unthinkable news. He hated his brother! The elder brother became so indignant and angry that he did not want to go in or even see his brother.

On the other hand, we see the fatherly love which loved both sons equally. A father should love all his children with the same unselfish and sacrificial devotion because all of them belong to him. His body is their body and they all share the same blood. Just as the father went out to welcome his younger son, so he went out to welcome the elder son and include him in the dance and rejoicing.

18. "His father came out and began to plead with him."
-- Luke 15:28.

The pleading and beseeching demonstrated the father's love towards both children because to plead is proof of compassion and mercy. The father understood his son's weaknesses. Not that the elder son was cruel and pitiless, but he had deadened divine emotions and feelings by his evil avarice which is the worship of money and indifference to others. It is precisely in Jesus that the Love of God breaks through all historical and psychological analysis. Through in directness and in mediation, transcends both, for the love of God is bound neither to this or to that thing, nor to this or that place because a father sympathizes with all of his children.

The younger son was carnal, selfish and pleasure-loving, but never apathetic and unfeeling. But the heart of the elder son, like the hearts of the Pharisees, was harder than a rock. It was as if it was made of insensitive breathless and inanimate stone, .

In contrast to the father's compassion, the elder son replied,

> ***"Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"***--Luke 15:28.

Envy had blinded the elder son. From the beginning the father had divided his property between both sons. The elder son already had received twice as much as the younger son because he was the firstborn in the family--Deut. 21:15-17.

People who are surrounded by wealth usually pass over gifts of God and become more and more greedy and materialistic. Knowledge of God is the force of faith against prejudice and materialism, whereas materialism is idolatry and the worship of money.

19. "For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command."
--Luke 15:27.

The elder son's words remind me of believers in the Old Testament. Paul, the apostle, in his letter to the Corinthian church sings a different hymn of love and faith saying:

> ***"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love I gain nothing."***-- I Corin. 13:1-3.

It is not the *"What*" in Christianity which will save a person from death, but it's the

"How". This "How?" is believing, trusting and following Jesus without discrimination against race, gender or language. To believe, is to have faith in the Unbelievable, warmly and enthusiastically. For some persons Christianity can be reduced to religious rhetoric, or a declaration of faith. However, the Christianity which Jesus expects from all His followers is to demonstrate love of our neighbor in our daily lives. Jesus said,

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."--John 13:35.

St. Paul has said, "To me, living is Christ and dying is gain."--Phil. 1:21

Christianity is built upon the real mystery of the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ. This is not only doctrine, but concrete objectivity and fact. Even the stones of Golgotha are witnesses and they will cry one day, saying,

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God."--I Corin. 1:22."

The real Christian is the person who effaces or cancels his or her mortal self, with all of its selfishness, glory, fame and achievements for the good of his or her neighbor and for the glory of God.

The conditions or terms of discipleship are, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it." --Luke 9:23.

20. "But when this son of yours came back..."--Luke 15:30

Contrary to all humane and benevolent idealism, we live in such a country where materialism, consumerism and the craving and desire to have more and more has reached the top of the ladder. When new conditions and terms develop and an individual has become self-centered, arrogant and conceited, like the elder brother, the person becomes insensitive and finds other people repulsive. Instead of saying, "When my **brother** came", he says, "When **your son** came."

The elder son has denied, not only his brother, but also his legitimate father. Covetousness and an insatiable thirst for riches becomes so destructive, that it destroys stony temples and human reality alike and converts the Godlike aspects of humanity into nothingness. Because of the Venetians' blind covetousness and greed, the fourth Crusaders (1201-1204) failed to destroy the force of the Byzantine empire. A century later, the Ottoman Turks occupied Constantinople. No family, nation, or even the love of God, can exist in greed and decadence. The boundary of this world's greatness and riches ends at the cemetery. Jesus said,

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."--Matt. 6:19-21.

21. "Who has devoured your property with prostitutes" --Luke 15:30.

It was the younger son who had wasted his father's inheritance. It was not the elder brother's business to judge what the younger brother had done. The younger brother had not touched his older brother's inheritance. It is unfortunate that religious critics tend to

humiliate and denigrate themselves, instead of waiting in their chairs for their turn. Avarice is the blindness of the soul.

"Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall." "Only the Lord Himself knows who is standing in faith, or is fallen?"--Rom. 14:10, 4.

"Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God."--I Cor. 4:5.

22. Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours."--Luke 15:31.

These loving words expose the summit of fatherly generosity and magnanimity. The father, who after distributing his own heritage to his two sons, is disappointed with the elder son because the father always thought him to be faithful and loyal. Instead of reproaching the son, he says with extreme generosity and patience,

"All that is mine is yours."

Jesus Christ was able to display His Heavenly Father's incomparable, inexplicable love and inconceivable compassion and mercy in the parable of the "Prodigal Son", because he had witnessed the real sensation in heaven. The fatherly words "All that is mine is yours," constitute the profoundly intuitive invitation to each believer. Through a parable picture, Jesus, the Artist, displays the human character's most rebellious and wicked nature juxtaposed against God's radiant nature with skillful brush lines. Likewise, Jesus requires heroical effort to achieve His glory from each one of us, even if we are living in affliction or pain.

23. "This brother of yours was dead and has come to life."

At first, the elder son in his anger had scorned his brother by calling him '*your* son'. The father tactfully and gently tried to **re-educate** him. Before ending his conversation with the elder son, the father reminded him that the despised person was also his brother. He said to him,

"This ***brother of yours*** was dead and has come to life".

God loves us inexhaustibly but He does not spoil us. He instructs and moulds his handiwork until his human creatures become godlike, with a small 'g'.

Epilogue: How to reconcile the parable of the "Prodigal Son" with the narrative of the "Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden."

Some readers may be offended by my unorthodox ideas. The following comments are not intended for show-off purposes, but to help many who are stranded between Old and New Testament concepts. To begin with, I like to quote two verses from the Gospels:

1. ***"While the Law was given through Moses, Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ."***--John 1:17.
2. **"When His disciples James and John observed this, they said, Lord, do you wish us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, *even as Elijah did*?"**
   Let us see what Jesus (the Truth and Grace) replied to His disciples.

"But Jesus turned and rebuked and severely censured them. He said, *You do not know of what sort of spirit you are, For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*"--Luke 9:64

Those two quotations should be enough for any sincere believer to do his or her own research to understand my comments: Whatever was written and taught as the Law of Moses is not necessarily the whole **truth** and **grace**. These concepts only pertain to Mosaic Law or legislation. Moses was a great law-giver, a prophet and a national hero, but he did not come down from heaven. Elijah, can also be considered a great prophet, miracle-maker, fire-bringer from heaven and killer of 450 heathen priests. But the New Testament says through the mouth of St. Paul,

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and faith so that I can remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing. Even if I dole out all that I have and if I surrender my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."--I Cor. 13:1-3.

Christians will listen to Jesus Christ and apprehend His revelation of God because Jesus is the only One who came down from heaven, from the Father of us all, to the world. The God of Moses was a **jealous** God.--Exo.20:5. The God of later prophets was a **revengeful** God.--Nahum 1:2. (*Please read those passages yourselves.*)

Jesus Christ 'was made flesh' and became a human physical person because the prophets of Israel failed to faithfully or honestly **comprehend** and understand the true nature of God the Creator. Therefore, God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world, that He even gave up His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in, trusts, clings to, and relies on Him may not perish--become lost or destroyed--but have eternal and everlasting life.

After reading the parable of the "Prodigal Son", how can a follower of Jesus Christ believe that such a loving God would expel His highest and most godlike creatures from the Garden of Eden, from paradise, for one mistaken act? Moses says,

"So God drove out man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life"--Gen.3:24.

In the Gospels of Jesus Christ, Jesus depicts God as a loving merciful Father. Let us reread the quotation, "*While the son was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; He ran and put His arms around him and kissed him."* In the O.T. narrative of Moses, God put out a flaming sword so that man could not return to the Garden of Eden. However, in the teaching of Jesus, the father (God) runs to hug and kiss the returning sinner and the transgressor.

In the O.T. narrative of Moses, God is a harsh, insensitive and jealous God who keeps the sinner away from the tree of life. In the Gospels, God sends His Son (the Tree of Life) that whosoever believes in Him (partakes of His Body and Blood) shall have eternal life!

Let each reader of this simple booklet make up his or her own mind, through the guiding Spirit of the Eternal, until he or she finds the **Truth** and the **Grace.**

The parable of the prodigal son is a condensed revelation of God's magnanimous love. Human words are woefully inadequate and can never fully explain God's incomparable love. Its gravity cannot be weighed; its number or dimension cannot be measured and its feelings cannot be translated. The grandeur of God's love has no comparison. This unique and unparalleled love from God, the Creator, should become the source of a believer's devotion and dedication to God.

Written and published in Armenian, January 13, 1998
Translated into English June--2002
Toronto, Canada