



AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA - Left to right: Bishop Karkin Nercissian, Archbishop Nerses Bozabalian, Catholicos Vazken I, Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Vartkes Knouni, AUA President Dr. Mihran Agbabian, and Bishop Mesrob Mutafyan.

Catholicos Vazken I Opens Academic Year at American University of Armenia

YEREVAN - "Praise be to God that the torch of the Statue of Liberty and the United States is now shining in Armenia through the American University of Armenia," said Catholicos Vazken I of Etchmiadzin during opening ceremonies of the second academic year at the Yerevan-based university.

Speaking at the Sept. 21 ceremonies in Yerevan, the Catholicos, who celebrated his 84th birthday that day, recalled his days as a student in his native Bucharest, Rumania.

"It is not self praise if I say that during my years at the University in the years 1932-36, I entered the classroom just as the faithful would enter the church," the Pontiff reminisced. "There was an inner motivation for learning. Although I have had many happy years thereafter, those years have not been equalled due to the fire that was lit within me for learning."

The Catholicos came to the University accompanied by Archbishop Nerses Bozabalian, Bishop Karekin Nercissian of the Ararat Diocese, Bishop Mesrob Mutafyan, the Chairman of the Religious Council of the Istanbul Patriarchate, and Mr. and Mrs. George Kurkjian of London.

Blessing the students, faculty, staff and parents, as well as the Armenian General Benevolent Union for sponsoring the university, Catholicos Vazken I urged the students to never lose sight of the importance of culture and education.

"I urge you, students, to arm yourselves with the technology and the postgraduate education that America is offering you at AUA and take an oath to build your home in Armenia for the welfare of your Fatherland.

"Do not study to please your teachers or to receive a diploma," the pontiff exhorted the students, "but to advance yourselves in order to be true to your mission of helping Armenia."

An audience of more than 500 people in the University's auditorium received the religious leader's message. Three anniversaries were celebrated that morning: The independence of Armenia, the opening of AUA on Sept. 23, 1991, and His Holiness' 84th birthday. A special reception followed the meeting, and a birthday cake honored the Catholicos' anniversary. The Pontiff blew out the candles after "Happy Birthday" was sung to him in both Armenian and English.

AUA has accepted 147 entering students to join the continuing students from last year, University officials said.

AUA President Dr. Mihran Agbabian, Provost Dr. George Gibson, Armenia's Minister of Higher Education Dr. Vartkes Gnouni, and former minister, Dr. Vilik Haroutunian welcomed the students, introduced the faculty and staff, and the second academic year of the university, an affiliate of the University of California, was officially called to session.