

Armenian Evangelical Church
of New York

Monthly Bulletin

The Rev. Dr. Haig Kherlopian, Pastor



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Founded in 1896, the AECNY, a Congregational Church affiliated with the United Church of Christ, is dedicated to serving the spiritual needs of the Armenian-American community, friends and neighbors in the metropolitan New York City area and around the world.

We aim to provide a variety of ministries in Christian education, music, outreach and fellowship.

All articles submitted for publication are subject to acceptance, rejection and editing by the Publication Committee with no obligations to return the unpublished articles to their authors.

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With Upraised Hands: Postures of Praise

*“Hear the voice of my supplication,
as I cry to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your most holy sanctuary.”
—Psalm 28:2*

When Jesus says in John 4 that true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth, I believe that He is referring primarily to internal states. The *physical* ways that we glorify God, however, may reflect inner attitudes. What are some of the ways that your body is involved in worship? What do your bodily movements indicate about your convictions? Various postures of praise include kneeling in prayer, lying prostrate on the floor in humility, dancing joyously in celebration, and raising one’s arms and hands. I think that raised hands can symbolize at least four things: surrender, intimacy, intercession, and victory.

Before I address each of these possible meanings of raised hands, I would like to acknowledge that different people are drawn to and comfortable with different worship styles. God, in His graciousness, seems to accept a wide range of expressions of praise, from “high church” liturgy to loud services with strobe lights. Perhaps in some sense content matters more than form—if the Holy Spirit is the one inspiring and inhabiting the praise, it doesn’t matter how “proper” or traditional the meeting is. (The converse holds, too: how important is it if the service is acceptable to a certain group, if the Holy Spirit is *not* the one inspiring and inhabiting the praise?)

Several of the implied meanings of upraised hands are familiar to us from the broader culture. Putting your hands in the air before figures of authority or force, such as the police or an enemy army, conveys surrender. Indeed, after Ferguson, the rallying cry of “Hands up, don’t shoot!” draws attention to the injustice of the murder of unarmed people who pose no threat. Christians who have turned over their lives to God—not under duress, but peacefully and freely—may recall their surrender by raising their arms in song. Here’s a different analogy: picture dogs on their backs, inviting belly rubs. They show more than that they trust the human beings around them. Their vulnerability is tied to their pleasure. Similarly, Christians may demonstrate a kind of happy submission to God in the way they lift their hands. The next time you croon “I surrender all,” consider your posture of praise: does your body convey the state of your heart—your friendly openness to God, your availability to Him, your willingness to yield your ways to His?

Intimacy is related to surrender: “All that I have is yours” turns tenderly into “*I am yours.*” Thus, hands raised in the air might serve as an expression of yearning and need (Psalm 77:1–2, 88:9). You may stretch out your arms toward heaven as a declaration of desperate need or desire: I feel close to you, God, and I want to feel closer. I want my union with you to be deeper. Indeed, Jesus, before ascending into Heaven, “lifted up his hands and blessed” the Eleven (Luke 24:50). “*While* he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven” (v. 51, emphasis mine). Here, the upward movement of intimacy—of drawing close to God—appears directly linked with the outward gesture of benediction.

Like benediction, raised hands often signify intercession. In putting my hand forward, I am saying, I am appealing to heaven for your sake. I want good things to flow from the throne of God, through me, to you. I want to extend my

hand in favor, blessing, and grace. One story in the Bible where this seems to be the case is in Exodus 17, when the Israelites are fending off the Amalekites. “As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they [Aaron and Hur] took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset” (Exodus 17:11–12). Divine intervention in the battle appears as a response to the positioning of Moses’ hands. Godly intercession leads to victory.

Athletes have developed a host of sports dances; before Fortnite-inspired celebratory moves, there was the classic gesture of the pumped fist. Relatedly, in the black power movement, there is the symbol of the single fist in the air. These are expressions of victory, determination, strength, solidarity, and resistance. Sometimes, particularly when singing about Jesus’ resurrection or the awesome qualities of God, a worshipper may be overcome with a sense of the reality of Christ’s victory. You may be caught up in an overwhelming feeling of God’s goodness—its full strength to make things in a bad world right. And you might raise your hand to participate in that sense, to enact it, to celebrate being united with the Christ who wins by love. You may perform what the Psalmist says: “I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands” (Psalm 63:4; cf. Psalm 134:2).

If you are comfortable with these gestures of praise, perhaps you will use them more freely or more consciously after having reflected on the various things they signify. You may even have other “classifications” to offer in thinking about what your raised hands mean. If you want to raise your arms in adoration but are ashamed to do so or if you feel hesitant to break from the custom with which you are familiar,

perhaps you will be moved by focusing on the biblical bases for that style of praise. If you prefer other postures, perhaps this piece has introduced kinder ways of thinking about fellow Christians who worship differently from you.

Because of how intertwined the body and the spirit are, we should be attuned to both aspects. Moreover, raising one's arms in worship may not only serve as a reflection of how one feels about God's worthiness, that physical act may also help one *enter* those worshipful states of surrender, intimacy, intercession, and victory. Sometimes the body follows the spirit, but sometimes the spirit follows the body.

- Heather C. Ohanesson

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In celebration and thanksgiving to God on **Rev. Dr. Haig Kherlopian's** Doctorate in Ministry (D.Min), by Bruce & Christine Momjian.

In loving memory of **Gregory Mikaelian**,
by Richard Mikaelian, DDS.

In loving memory of **Elida Nero Telfeyan**,
by Bruce Telfeyan, Daphne Telfeyan, and family.

FELLOWSHIP HOUR

We wish to express our gratitude to the following for their generous contribution towards Fellowship Hour in the month of June:

*Ruby Kherlopian, Jennifer Telfeyan,
Nancy Kherlopian, and Mesrop Borekjian.*

UPCOMING SERVICES & EVENTS

Join us for:

Sunday Morning Worship at 11:00 AM

Tuesday Night Bible Study - On Summer Break

Thursday Night Zumba Fitness at 7:30 PM

**Join us before Sunday Worship for coffee & bagels, and for a time of prayer in preparation for worship.*

For More Information, Contact The Church Office:

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