

***Saints and Sacraments of the  
Armenian Church***

**By: Bishop S. Kaloustian**

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## PREFACE

The following pages contain what the title of the booklet implies: simple talks on certain Saints and Sacraments of the Armenian Church, as well as talks on Holy Days and various religious and ecclesiastical subjects, such as Holy Etchmiadzin, Religion, Death and the like.

These titles present neither elaborate studies nor pious generalities. They contain plain facts and easy explanations on certain matters of interest to Church people. Most of them have been given as sermons from church pulpits. A few of them were lectures, read at Ladies' Aid meetings, Youth Assemblies, or Sunday School Teachers' conferences. Some of them were articles published in the official paper of the Armenian Church Youth Organization of California. Others were added while revising these articles. As they were written on various occasions and in different periods of time, there is no uniformity of method, nor unity of treatment in presenting these articles.

I had no intention of publishing such a book. I yielded, however, to the pressure of some close friends who, after reading some of the articles, insisted that they should be published in booklet form. If anybody benefits from the reading of this booklet, the credit goes to these friends. Its shortcomings, of course, are mine alone.

While preparing some of these articles years ago, I have benefited from the books of my library which is left in California. Unfortunately, I had not put down references in the first draft of these articles. I have revised and edited the draft in Jerusalem and I have no means of finding out how much and where I have benefited from various sources.

The transliteration of the Armenian words into English is a thorny question. Although we have a regular system of transliteration, yet the application of that system does not give the actual sound values of the words transliterated. For example, the Armenian form of the word for Lucas when transliterated according to this classical rule, is pronounced as *Llougas* or *Ghoogas*. Therefore, I have not followed any specific rule in transliteration; I have tried to give the nearest possible sound of the Armenian words in English letters.

My sincere thanks to His Beatitude the Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Patriarch Elect of Jerusalem, Very Rev. James M. Malloch, D.D., Dean Emeritus of St. James' Episcopal Cathedral, Fresno, California, and Dr. Arra S. Avakian of Weston, Massachusetts for reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions. My special thanks goes to Dr. Malloch for writing the foreword of this booklet.

My blessings and thanks to Deacon Richard Sarafian of Alameda, California, Miss E. Koojoolian of Fresno, California, Miss Y. Manougian of Jerusalem, for typing, sometimes retyping, the manuscript. Last but not

least, my thanks to Brother Hagop Semerjian of Jerusalem, who made most of the pictures used in the book. May God reward them all abundantly.

Bishop S. Kaloustian

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## Foreword

This book by Bishop Kaloustian is a notable achievement in ecclesiastical literature. It is both interesting and important. In it the Bishop has outlined in fascinating fashion the essential tenets and practices of historic Armenian Christianity. His book is colorful, practical, and inspiring.

The book gives one a sense of the grandeur of belonging to Christ's Church, the oldest institution in the history of the world. It will tell Armenians what they need to know for sure about their ancient branch of that Church. It will also tell members of other Churches what they should know about it. Further and importantly, it will introduce Protestants to Historic Christianity and its priestly lineage in a clear, simple, and winsome way.

The book is very practical too. It shows how to be a good Churchman, and how to live a Christian life in the social order of our time. It is strictly up-to-date, a fact shown by its treatment of such subjects as Mother's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Youth Organizations. It deals soundly and effectively with such baffling questions as evil and death. The chapter on the Holy Cross, for instance, is a masterpiece of religious writing.

Even theologians will find this book significant. The chapter on the Church, Tradition, and the Bible is a "must" for an understanding of the badly misunderstood subject of recorded Revelation.

Best of all, the book introduces its readers to Christian sanctity, the summit of Christian living. In reading its beautiful accounts of the saints of the Armenian calendar, I was reminded of the great words of Emily Dickinson:

"No matter where the Saints abide,  
They make their circuit fair;  
Behold how great a Firmament  
Accompanies a star!"

May God bless the reading of this book to His glory and the advancement of His Kingdom of peace on earth.

Very Rev. James M. Malloch, D.D.  
Dean Emeritus, St. James Episcopal  
Cathedral, Fresno, California and Member,  
Fresno City Board of Education

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# **Saints**

## ST. MARY

One of the main differences between the Protestant churches on the one hand, and the ancient Apostolic churches, including the Armenian Church, on the other hand is that the latter have canonized saints, while the former have not.

The first thing we must know about saints is that we do not adore them; we adore God alone. We simply venerate the saints as the true and closer followers of Jesus Christ. Just as the state honors and respects its great men and women, so the Church honors its saints. By honoring the saints, the Church values their love of God and their devotion to His cause on earth.



Saints are to us as models to be imitated, because they were better and closer imitators of Christ. St. Paul says: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (I Cor. 11: 1). The veneration of the saints is really an incentive to a better Christian living.

Saints were made of the same flesh and blood as we are, meeting the same difficulties and temptations as we do here on earth. They were subject to the same infirmities as we are. Yet they became imitators of Jesus Christ by conquering those infirmities and temptations. That is why they are honored.

The list of saints is headed by the Holy Virgin Mary, as she is the first and greatest saint of the Christian Church.

She is a great saint for two reasons. a) She has the most and the highest qualifications which make a saint. B) She has played the most important role in the life of Christ, our Saviour. Therefore the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary is due to the recognition of her divine motherhood, and of the unique sanctity which was hers as the mother of the incarnate Son of God. Our veneration is shown by the fact that her picture with the Child Jesus in her arms is placed on all our church altars.

The veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been spontaneous and gradual, almost without stimulation of Church authorities. Speaking of the gradual manner in which the veneration of the Holy Virgin has been established in the Church, someone has said: "As she increased day by day in God's grace in Nazareth, her home town, while the world knew nothing of her, so the Holy Spirit, working in the Church, has raised her silently and by a natural process to the place which she occupies in our churches."

Her image is found in catacombs, the earliest places of Christian worship. This proves that from the earliest times the Church has shown great veneration to the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first

and the most venerated shrine in the Armenian Church, Holy Etchmiadzin, is dedicated to her. Our Prayer Books, as well as our Hymn Books, are full of songs in her honor. The honorable position which she enjoys in the Church is nothing else but fulfillment of her own prophecy about herself, as preserved in the Gospel: "From now on all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me" (Luke 1: 48-49).

Scripture and Tradition agree in ascribing to Mary the greatest personal sanctity. She has shown the greatest humility and patience in her daily life. Humility and patience are the key virtues in a holy life. She has exhibited a heroic patience under the most trying circumstances, on Calvary for example at the Crucifixion of her beloved Son.

Mary was truly the mother of Jesus; and as Jesus was truly God from the first moment of His conception, therefore Mary is truly the *Mother of God*, "*Astvadz-a-Mayr*," as we call her affectionately in our language.

As Mary is the mother of Christ, so she is mother of all those in whom Christ live. Therefore, we have the right to claim Mary as our mother, in so far as we identify ourselves with Jesus by the life of grace, i.e., by a true Christian life.

Eve is our natural mother, because she is the origin of our natural life. Mary is our spiritual mother, because she gave birth to One who became the origin and source of our spiritual life.

We must realize and declare that nothing has exercised a more profound and a more salutary influence upon Armenian womanhood than devotion to and veneration of the Holy Virgin. If Armenian women had higher moral attributes in the East than their sisters in other neighboring nations, it was mostly due to the high esteem that our Church has about this Holy woman, the mother of Christ.

May she continue to be always an inspiration to all of us, particularly to our mothers and sisters, for a higher, purer and better life.

\* \* \* \*

The Armenian Church observes five main holy days in honor of the Virgin Mary: a) *Annunciation* on April 7; b) Her *Conception* from Anna, her mother, on December 9; c) her *Birthday* on September 8; d) her *Presentation* to the Temple when she was, according to tradition, three years old, on November 21; and e) her greatest holiday, however, is the Feast of *Assumption*, which is celebrated in our Church on the Sunday nearest to August 15, and lasts nine days.

Assumption means "taking up" (to heaven). The Armenian word for the feast, "*VERAPOKHOU*," has the same meaning. This great feast of the Church honors the Holy Virgin for the sanctity of her life and purity of her heart with which God has endowed her, our blessed Mother. The story behind this great feast, in a nutshell, is this: because of her extreme

holiness and purity, St. Mary was preserved from corruption after her death and was raised and taken in heaven. The Assumption differs from the Ascension of our Lord in the fact that Christ went up to heaven by His own divine power, whereas St. Mary was taken up by the power of God, and by the ministry of angels.

## THE TWELVE APOSTLES



The word *Apostle* is a Greek word, and it means one "who is sent forth," having been entrusted with a special mission.

It is related in the Gospels that from the beginning of His ministry our Lord called some twelve men and gave them intensive training for a specific office, in which authority and duty were joined. He named them Apostles.

The Apostles were to be with Jesus while He was on earth, to aid Him in the preaching and in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The mission of the Apostles is summarized in the following words of instruction, which our Lord gave them before His Ascension into heaven: "All power is given to me, in heaven and on earth. As the Father has sent me, I also *send* you. Go ye therefore, and *make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28: 18-20).

The Apostles' lives were a constant exercise of this last instruction. Wherever they went they preached the Gospel with authority, being the authentic witnesses of the life and teachings of our Lord; they established churches wherever they went. Since the authority, with which the Lord empowered the Apostles, was given them not for personal use but for the entire Church, it is natural to assume that this authority should last, and that it should remain in the Church after the death of the Apostles. Therefore,

like their Master, the Apostles also selected some people as their successors and transmitted their authority to them. These successors of the Apostles were later called *bishops*. The power of a bishop, in governing and teaching the Church, is essentially the same as the general authority of an Apostle.

The Church has been called "Apostolic," because the mission of the Church is identical with the mission of the Apostles. When we say that our Church is "Apostolic," we mean that the Church of today is identical with the Church which was founded by Jesus Christ and of which the government and the continuation was entrusted to the Apostles. The Apostolicity of a Church is of great importance, because it is the surest sign of the true Church of Christ. *Apostolicity* is one of the four marks of the Church. It contains in itself the other three marks of the Church which are *Unity*, *Sanctity*, and *Catholicity*; an Apostolic Church can be only One, Holy and Universal.

The term "*Apostolic Church*" also signifies, in its narrower meaning, those particular ancient Churches which were directly founded, or at least for a while governed, by an Apostle, and which on that account, enjoyed a special dignity. Our Church is "Apostolic" in this sense too. By the term *Apostolic Succession* is meant that the mission conferred by Jesus Christ upon the Apostles passed from them to their legitimate successors, in an unbroken line, until the end of the world. Apostolic Succession ensures the continued identity of the Church.

Let us say a few brief words about each of the twelve Apostles of Christ.

(1) *St. Peter* was the most active figure among the Twelve. His former name was Simon, which Jesus changed into Peter, which is a Greek word meaning "rock." He made the memorable confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" thus he became the first official member of the Church, because the Church was going to be composed of those who would accept our Lord as "Christ" (which means One "whom the Lord has anointed,") and as "Son of God." Although St. Peter had the weakness to deny his Lord when Jesus was arrested, nevertheless he repented, and was later pardoned and was restored to his office as Apostle by Christ. It was he who gave the first Christian sermon on the day of Pentecost. He first preached in Jerusalem; he was imprisoned but miraculously escaped from the prison. He was finally crucified in Rome, head downwards in 67 A.D.

(2) *St. Andrew* was Peter's brother. He was one of the first to follow our Lord as a disciple. He preached in Northern Greece, Epirus and Scythia, and suffered martyrdom in about 70 A.D. on a X-shaped cross, which for that reason is called St. Andrew's Cross.

(3) *St. John* has been called "the beloved Disciple" in the Gospel. He was the one among the Apostles who had the courage to follow Christ to the place of His Crucifixion. He was the only faithful disciple standing at the foot of the Cross on Calvary. St. John became the adopted son of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, and took good care of her until her death.

He went to preach in Asia Minor, and was later banished to an island called Patmos, where he experienced those marvelous visions or revelations which are recorded in the last book of the New Testament, called *the Apocalypse*, or the Book of Revelation. He also wrote the last Gospel, the Gospel of St. John, and three Epistles. He died at the age of one hundred years by a natural death.

(4) *St. James the Major* was the elder brother of St. John. He was a daring and brave person. For that reason he was the first among the Apostles to be martyred, being beheaded in Jerusalem in the year 44 by King Herod Agrippas (Acts 12: 2). The famous St. James' Armenian Monastery of Jerusalem is dedicated to his name. The Sanctuary where his head is buried and where a beautiful church is built, is visited and venerated not only by Armenians but by all Christians who go to Jerusalem as pilgrims or visitors. It is now one of the most important holy places in the Holy City.

(5) *St. Matthew* was probably the only one among the Apostles who was not a fisherman. He was a government official, a tax collector, and perhaps the one Apostle who had a better knowledge of reading and writing. He wrote the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel according to St. Matthew. He preached among the Persians and Parthians, and was martyred in Parthia (present Iran).

(6) *St. Thomas* was famous for his doubts and for his realism. He would not believe in the Resurrection of Christ until he saw, on the hands and feet of Jesus the marks of the Crucifixion. He went as far as India, where he was martyred, pierced with a lance, on a hill which is now called "Mount of St. Thomas" near Madras. He founded the Church of the Christians of St. Thomas in Malabar, South India.

(7) *St. Philip* is the only one among the Apostles who had a Greek name which means "horse lover." Probably he spoke Greek, as it was to him that "certain Greeks came" with the request to be admitted to the presence of Jesus (John 12: 20-22). He preached in Asia Minor and was crucified in Hierapolis.

(8) *St. Thaddeus* was the first Apostle to visit Armenia. He preached first in Syria and the upper parts of present day Iraq; he then entered Armenia in 44 A.D., made many converts and was martyred there in 66 A.D.

(9) *St. Bartholomew* was the same as Nathanael, "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (John 1: 47). He was the second Apostle of Armenia. He preached first in Arabia and Persia, and was later martyred in Armenia in 68 A.D. His tomb was venerated by Armenians until 1915 when Armenians were deported by Turks from their homeland. The shrine now is in ruins.

(10) *St. Simon* "The Zealot" preached in North Africa and was martyred in Persia.

(11) *St. James the Lesser* was the son of Alphæus. He preached in Palestine and Egypt and was finally crucified in Lower Egypt.

(12) *St. Matthias* was chosen to take the place of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Lord. He preached in Ethiopia and was martyred there.

(13) *St. Paul* was not one of the Twelve, but was converted miraculously one year after the Resurrection of the Lord. Paul was first a persecutor of Christians. His conversion took place as a result of a vision in which he saw Christ bidding him not "to kick against the goads" (Acts 26: 14), but follow His instructions (Acts 9). Though not of the Twelve, yet among all the Apostles St. Paul was the most ardent and diligent laborer. He wrote many Epistles, which we still read in the Church. He is called the Apostle of the Gentiles, because he carried the Gospel to the pagan world. He traveled extensively, and was finally martyred in Rome in 67 A.D.

"Remember your leaders who preached to you the word of God, consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith . . . do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings" (Heb. 13: 7-9). These memorable words have always echoed in the hearts of early Christians as referring to the Apostles, their teaching and life. The members of the early Church had a profound respect for the Apostles when they were living on earth. We must have the same respect; and that is what we show by remembering them on Apostles' Day. The Armenian Church commemorates each Apostle twice in the year; first on the feast of the Twelve Apostles, secondly they are celebrated two by two on various Saturdays of the year. Our veneration of their memory should find expression in the devotional reading of the Apostolic writings, that is, the Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles, in following their instructions, and in imitating their virtues and their devotion to Christ, for the salvation of our souls, for the revival of our Church and for the greater glory of God the Almighty, whose devoted servants they were.

## ST. GREGORY THE ENLIGHTENER

St. Gregory is the Patron Saint of the Armenian Church. He is usually referred to as "Our Holy Father St. Gregory the Enlightener," because he has converted the Armenian people to Christianity.

Christianity began to be preached in Armenia in the middle of the first century by the Apostles St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew, who for that reason, are called the "The First Enlighteners of Armenia." The Church they founded in Armenia was small and scattered. Nevertheless, it survived all vicissitudes and persecutions of the first three centuries. Missionaries from the South, Syria, and the



West, Cappadocia, constantly strengthened the flickering light of the Gospel. However, it was St. Gregory who established Christianity as the official religion of Armenia and thus made Armenia the first Christian State in world history.

The early life story of St. Gregory and the account of the conversion of Armenia have been preserved in the book of the historian Agathangelos, who is traditionally known to be as King Tiridat's secretary. This story is one of the most interesting in the annals of Christianity. As part of a planned plot, the Persian King Ardashir Sassanian, in the year 238, sent a trusted friend to Armenia to kill King Khosrov. The newcomer, named Anack, happened to be of the same Parthian royal family, which had been reigning for two centuries in Armenia. King Khosrov was the ruling monarch in 238. Therefore it was very easy for Anack to win the confidence of his royal cousin, King Khosrov. One day, as they were out for hunting, Anack killed the King and ran away. The loyal men of the King pursued Anack and killed him on a bridge and threw his body into the river. The dying King gave orders to exterminate Anack's family. Only one infant escaped from this slaughter, and was rushed by his nurse to the city of Cæsarea in Cappadocia. This nurse happened to be a converted Christian. Therefore she brought up her princely charge in the Christian faith and gave him a Greek name, Gregory. The boy became a devout and zealous Christian, married a Christian lady named Mariam, whose brother was a well known missionary bishop, confessor and martyr. Gregory had two children, Aristakes and Verthanes.

When the Persian King heard that the King of Armenia was killed, he overran the country with a huge army and established Persian rule in Armenia. Two of the children of King Khosrov were saved by loyal satraps. The Princess Khosrovidought was taken to one of the inaccessible castles of that country, while the boy-prince Tiridat was taken to Rome. Tiridat received a thorough Roman training. He was a famous athlete in the Roman arena and an able general in the Roman army. When he became a mature young man, able to rule a kingdom, the Roman Emperor Diocletian gave him a Roman legion and sent him to occupy Armenia to recover the throne of his fathers, and become a Roman ally.

As Tiridat was passing through Armenia Minor, which was under Roman control, most of the Armenian feudal lords, who had remained loyal to the throne and who had escaped the country accompanied Tiridat. Gregory also decided to go along with him. Nobody had any knowledge of his background or of his religious convictions. He probably had some far-reaching ideas in his mind. Tiridat found out that he was a well educated and dependable and conscientious young man. Therefore he appointed him as his secretary. One cannot help seeing the hand of Providence in this strange association. Two young men, whose fathers had killed one another,

were returning to their native country with the idea of saving their homeland from alien yoke, the one physically, the other spiritually.

After winning victory over his enemies, Tiridat gave orders for a great and solemn celebration. During the festival the young ruler ordered his secretary Gregory to lay wreaths of flowers and laurel leaves, the symbols of victory, before the statue of the goddess Mother Anahit, who was the most popular deity of the country. Gregory, after some hesitation, confessed that he was a Christian and he could not perform such an idolatrous act. He began preaching about the foolishness of idolatry and the wisdom of worshipping the One God, Who created heaven and earth. One of the king's ministers, who had found out who Gregory was, thought this was a good opportunity to reveal the secret. He therefore told the King that Gregory was the son of Anack, the killer of his father King Khosrov. Gregory did not deny the stunning revelation. So Tiridat gave orders to torture Gregory in order to induce him to apostasy. The story enumerates twelve terrible tortures. When Gregory stood fast, then the King ordered him to be put to death by throwing him into the prison-pit or dungeon where major criminals were usually thrown to be starved to slow death. The pit was full of human bones and filth. St. Gregory survived this terrible ordeal for thirteen years. Someone in the Court, who was secretly Christian, had found the way to feed the Saint in the dungeon. This was done, most probably, with the knowledge and assistance of Khosrovidought, Tiridat's sister, who seems to have been sympathetic to Christians. Perhaps she was even a Christian herself.

Then Tiridat ordered the persecution of Christians in his realm. This persecution revealed the presence of a group of Christian women, who were peacefully and secretly living in the neighborhood of his capital city of Valarshapat. The superior of these pious women was called Gaiane. There was also among them a beautiful maiden called Ripsimeh. Tiridat wanted to have her as his concubine. Ripsimeh refused and resisted the King's advances and finally fled from the Palace. This was too much for Tiridat, the mighty and victorious king. He then mercilessly ordered to have all these women killed. They were 37 in number. This slaughter of innocent women and his frustration at being "repulsed by a young lady," as the sacred song says, threw the King into melancholy and finally made him insane. When out hunting he often behaved like a beast, hence the legend that he was transformed into a boar. He could not attend the affairs of the state.

People began to worry about him, because he was a King loved by his people. Most of all his sister, Khosrovidought, did everything to bring back her beloved brother to his senses. Then one day she suddenly remembered Gregory! In her dream she saw Gregory coming out of the dungeon and healing her brother! She told the people at the Court of her dream, and revealed that Gregory was living and was the only man in the world who could cure the King. As the condition of the King was getting worse, they

sent men to the dungeon; and to the great surprise of everybody they heard a feeble "yes" to the question: "Gregory, are you still alive?" As they lowered the rope, out came a man with a long beard, dirty clothes and darkened face. But his face was shining with a strange and strong light. After dressing him properly, they took him to the presence of Tiridat. Moved by a strange force which he could not control, Tiridat kneeled down before his prisoner, Gregory, putting his hands on the King's head, prayed for him. Thereupon Tiridat was cured and became a new man. He said to Gregory: "Your God is my God, your religion is my religion." Gregory lifted him up and embraced him. From that moment until their death they remained faithful friends and worked together, each in his own way for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in Armenia, beginning in the year 301 A.D.

Gregory first converted the people in the capital city and in its neighborhood. There were no bishops or clergymen left in the country, because of the severe persecutions by Tiridat. So Gregory could not find people in holy orders to baptize the neophytes. Gregory himself was still a layman. Therefore the Royal Council decided to send Gregory back to Cæsarea to be ordained as the bishop of Armenia. His fame as a wonder-working confessor and a great missionary had already reached Cæsarea. He was received with great honors. The Metropolitan of the city, Leontius, ordained him a priest and then consecrated him a bishop. Gregory took many priests from Cæsarea and from Sebastia, where his bishop brother-in-law Athanakenes was martyred. He took with him his two sons also, who were well educated young men. His elder son, Verthanes, was already married. His younger son was a monk. Gregory's wife was already dead by this time.

So with a group of clergymen Gregory came to Armenia. The King, the ruling feudal lords and the army came to meet him at the banks of the river Euphrates. He ordered a week of abstinence for everybody, including the King, the Queen and courtiers. The Armenian Church to this day observes this week of abstinence, established by St. Gregory, as the week of "Arachavorats" i.e., "the week of Catechumens." He preached and prepared the people for baptism. The clergymen whom he had brought with him assisted him in baptizing the people. He personally baptized the first Christian King of Armenia in the year 302, together with the Queen and the King's sister and the royal household and the feudal lords of the country. Tiridat formally proclaimed his country a Christian State, in the year 302 A.D. So Armenia became the "First country of any size to become officially Christian." The Roman Empire became Christian twenty years later in 323.

Then the mass conversion of the whole country began. Gregory preached the Gospel from one end of the country to the other. Occasionally he met resistance from pagan priests. But such resistance was easily subdued. Pagan places of worship were transformed to Christian temples.

Together with many other churches, Gregory built two famous sanctuaries: The shrine of "St. Garabed," "The Forerunner," near the city of Moosh, dedicated to the name of St. John the Baptist, whose relics he had brought with him from Cæsarea and had put them in this church. This monastery became one of the most important religious centers of Armenia. It was almost the greatest Holy place where our people used to go on pilgrimage for many centuries. It is now in ruins under Turkish rule, after the cruel deportations of 1915.

The other shrine which Gregory and Tiridat built was Holy Etchmiadzin (see the article), still functioning as the headquarters of the Armenian Church near the present capital of Armenia.

Although there were bishops in Armenia long before St. Gregory, looking after their flock in the persecuted Church in Armenia, yet it was St. Gregory who became the first "Catholicos of All Armenians."

He governed the Armenian Church for about 25 years. He diligently worked for the internal organization of the Church. Gregory died in 325, shortly after the First Ecumenical Council of the Universal Church was convened in the city of Nicaea.

His son Aristakes, who was ordained a bishop by him, attended this famous Church Council as the representative of the Armenian Church, because his father was too old to attend. It was in this Council that the Creed of the Christian Church was formulated.

St. Gregory was also instrumental in spreading the seeds of the Gospel in the neighboring Caucasian countries of Georgia and Caspian Albany (present day Azerbaijan). Gregory sent to these countries especially his youthful grandson Grigoris, who was cruelly martyred by Caucasian barbarians.

St. Gregory is one of the great missionaries of the Christian Church. He is commemorated as a canonized Saint by all the ancient churches of the East and of the West, including the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches.

The Armenian Church has set aside three holy days in honor of St. Gregory, commemorating three of the main events of his life: first his Sufferings and Entrance into the dungeon, second, His Coming out of the dungeon and Converting Armenian to Christianity, third Discovery of his relics. St. Gregory died in solitude, like Moses.

## ST. GEORGE



St. George has been classed from the beginning among the greatest saints and martyrs of the Christian Church. In spite of his popularity both in the East and in the West, we do not know much about his life, except that he was a high ranking military officer in the Roman Army towards the end of the third century. He was a brave soldier, as well as a virtuous Christian. He openly protested against the persecutions of Christians ordered by the Emperor Diocletian. He was bold enough to tear down the imperial order of persecution which was posted in the streets of Antioch. He was summoned before the imperial court for this crime. He bravely defended his religion and showed the falsehood of paganism, as well as the injustice of the order of persecutions. For his outspoken courage, he was beheaded after terrible tortures in the year 303.

St. George is always represented in pictures as a horseman killing a monster or dragon. This is symbolic, representing St. George fighting against the powers of evil, against injustice, and for the liberty of human conscience. However, Christian imagination has invented stories about St. George fighting with a real dragon. According to one of the most widely spread stories, a terrible monster had overrun the countryside around a certain city. The monster inhabited a cave nearby. Its breath alone caused pestilence whenever the monster approached the town. The inhabitants finding themselves helpless against this monster had no other means to keep it away from their town except by giving two lambs every day to satisfy its hunger and to keep it in its cave. But eventually there was no lamb or sheep or goat left in the town or in the vicinity and they were obliged to offer human beings to the dragon. Lots were cast to determine the victim.

On one occasion when the lot was cast, as usual, it fell on a daughter of the Governor of the city. The Governor offered all his wealth to purchase a substitute, but the people had pledged themselves that no substitutes should be allowed. Therefore, the poor maiden dressed as a bride, was led to the cave of the monster. It happened that as they were taking the daughter of the governor out of town, St. George was passing by and seeing the poor girl crying so helplessly, ask the reason. Learning the cause, he decided to fight and kill the dragon. So he alone followed the maiden to the entrance of the cave. The maiden earnestly request him to leave, lest he also might perish. St. George, however, prepared himself to meet the monster. When the dragon appeared, St. George making the sign of the cross, attacked the monster and nailed it to the ground with his lance, then dragged it to the city like a wooden log. When the townsfolk saw the dragon, they were so terrified that everybody ran away. But St. George ordered them to have no fear, but believe in the true God, and in Jesus Christ, "through whose power," he said, "I have killed this dragon." Then he cut off the head of the dragon to make everybody realize that it was no longer a dangerous monster. The townsfolk, seeing the supernatural power of St. George, were converted to Christianity and were baptized.

The Governor and his wife were so happy at the miraculous rescue of their daughter, that they offered half of their possessions and wealth to St. George. But the saint, thanking them for the offer, replied that his mission was to go from place to place and to save helpless people like their daughter. "Only I would ask of you," he said, "to protect all Christians under your rule, honor their clergy, and have pity on and take good care of all poor people." He then went off to carry on his God-given mission.

Commonly when we think about Saints, we are apt to think of pale, quiet persons, who think about nothing else but their salvation and heavenly bliss. This is not always a true picture of a saint. A true saint is a person of strong convictions. He is a man of action, a real fighter. St. George is the best example of this kind of active saintliness. His example and courage should inspire us to become better fighting member of the Church, fighting against falsehood and evil.

## ST. SAHAG AND ST. MESROB

St. Sahag and St. Mesrob are two great saintly figures, who conceived the idea of translating the Bible into Armenian. Their names are always remembered together. They are the "matchless associates" who laid the foundation of Armenian secular and religious education.

From the point of view of age, family background, religious rank, and profound learning, St. Sahag is the greater of the two. It was, however, the eternal glory of St. Mesrob to have started the movement and to have found the tool—the Alphabet—for the translation of the "Greatest Book ever written."



Until the beginning of the fifth century, Armenian was not a written language for the simple reason that it did not have its own alphabet. State documents were written either in Persian or in Greek. Church services were conducted either in Greek or in Syriac. It was St. Mesrob who made Armenian a written language in the year 404 A.D.

St. Sahag was the last male descendant of St. Gregory, the Enlightener of Armenia. He was born in 354 and educated like his forefathers in Cæsarea of Cappadocia and then in Constantinople. He was married and had one daughter, who became the mother of the famous Armenian national hero, St. Vartan Mamigonian. St. Sahag was ordained Catholicos in 387 and became one of the longest reigning heads of the Armenian Church, remaining in the office for fifty years. He was a great scholar and could use fluently the international languages of the time, Greek, Persian and Syriac. He died in 436.

We do not know much about the background and education of St. Mesrob. The main thing we know about him is that he was the chief secretary of the royal court of Armenia during the last quarter of the fourth century. This high office implied higher education and a noble family background. It also implied knowledge of foreign languages and state affairs. In fact, St. Mesrob had all of these. After serving many years efficiently in this office, he felt the calling to serve the Eternal King and His Kingdom on earth. From the palace he went to a monastery and prepared himself for missionary work. He gathered some disciples around him and

went to preach in remote parts of Armenia where Christianity had not yet sufficiently penetrated. However, not having the Bible in Armenian was a great handicap for him to make his mission successful. Conducting the Church services in foreign languages, of which the public could hardly understand anything, was troubling his mind and soul. He finally made up his mind to find a proper Alphabet for his people to translate the Bible and the entire Church Ritual into Armenian.

He came to the headquarters of the Church in Valarshapat and met St. Sahag, who was the Catholicos of the time. They had known one another before and were close and intimate friends. They discussed together the matter and went to see King Vramshabouh, the temporal head of the nation.

The King, himself a wise and progressive minded person, knew St. Sahag as his spiritual guide, and St. Mesrob as his respected and capable former secretary. He was wholeheartedly in agreement with them. The King put at their disposal his treasury and his authority for the successful undertaking of this sacred task. It was inspiring to see the close and harmonious cooperation between the religious, intellectual, and temporal authorities in a most noble cause, which was eventually crowned with amazing success.

St. Mesrob was sent to consult some well-known Greek scholars. He traveled widely and extensively. However, these scholars were not of great help to him. They suggested that he use the Greek letters after modifying them, and after adding new signs for those sounds which were proper to the Armenian language alone. St. Mesrob put his trust in God and in himself. In a moment of inspiration, he "created" the Armenian Alphabet, and then presented his work to St. Sahag. The Catholicos who had talents also in music and in the arts, re-shaped and re-arranged the letters and they together gave the final touch to one of the most perfect of alphabets. It contained thirty six characters. Two more letters were added to the alphabet in the late Middle Ages.

St. Sahag and St. Mesrob immediately trained their disciples in the new Alphabet. These disciples opened schools all over the country to teach Armenian boys and girls to read and write in their native language.

St. Sahag and St. Mesrob, with the collaboration of their disciples, began the great work of translating the Bible and the Church Ritual.

It took them many years to complete this colossal work of translation. They later revised their first and hasty translation according to a more "accurate" text, especially brought from Constantinople. The translation and the revision of the whole Bible (about 75 books according to our text) took thirty years. It was begun in 405 A.D. and completed about 435 A.D. For the perfection of style and accuracy of meaning, the Armenian Version is called by some scholars, "The Queen of the Translations."

Armenian was the fifth language into which the Bible was translated, the first translation being in Greek, the second Egyptian, the third Syriac,

the fourth Latin, which was finished in the year 405, almost at the time when the Armenian translation was begun. The first English translation was completed in the year 1380, more than 900 years later than ours. By the year 1928 the Bible had been translated into 856 languages and dialects. At the present time, the number of translations has already passed the limit of one thousand.

After their great achievement, St. Sahag and St. Mesrob and their disciples translated many other literary and religious works from Greek and Syriac languages into Armenian. They produced also their own original writings on many subjects. These literary works were written in such perfection and beauty that the first period of the Armenian classical literature is considered the Golden Age of Armenian Literature.

## THE VARTANIANS

Every year, on the Thursday preceding Lent, Armenians throughout the world celebrate the anniversary of an important event in their history. This is the religious war waged between pagan Persia and Christian Armenia in the year 451 A.D.

The hero of this war was St. Vartan the Brave. All those who gave their lives in this war are called collectively the Vartanians.

The cause of the battle was religious. Armenia, the first country in the world to proclaim Christianity as its state religion (301 A.D.), lived peacefully, first under its own kings, and then under Persian rule. She developed her culture with great zeal during the first half of the fifth century. During this period the Bible was translated into Armenian and Christianity flourished in the country.

Armenians, who formerly had almost the same religion as the Persians, showed signs of alienation from the Persians after becoming Christians. In order to force the Armenians to revert back to the Persian religion, the king of Persia decreed that all Christians under his rule should abandon their new religion and accept Mazdeism, the distinctive feature of which was the worship of the sun and fire. The Armenians, in a mass meeting of the clergy and the ruling princes, gave a bold answer to this royal decree, insisting that they had not the slightest intention of altering their Christian beliefs. They wrote a letter to the Persian King in which they said: "Our religion is not like a garment that we might change according to the circumstances; it is part and parcel of our bones and blood and personality .



. . We serve you loyally in your army and pay you taxes faithfully if you leave us alone in the matter of religion. If you try to force your will upon us we are ready to suffer, and to be tortured and even to die. However, you should know in advance that there is no power on earth which can force us to change our religion because our covenant (pledge to be faithful) is not with man but with the Almighty God." That was the conclusion of the letter.

The Persians countered this boldness with a heavy hand. They sent to Armenia a huge army of some 220,000 strong, to crush the resistance and to convert the country to Paganism by force.

In 451 A.D. on the field of Avarayr (rhymes with fire), near Mount Ararat, a band of 66,000 semi-trained and poorly equipped Armenian fighters, under the leadership of Vartan Mamigonian, their Commander in Chief, stood waiting for the invading army of Persians.

Vartan Mamigonian was the descendant of a noble Armenian family. From his mother's side he was the grandson of Sahag the Catholicos, the chief translator of the Bible from the Greek into Armenian. Vartan was, at that time the head of the Mamigonian House, a very influential and renowned ruling family in Armenia. Vartan knew full well that the Persians outnumbered his men, that they were well equipped and that they were going to use their hordes of elephants against him, but he put his trust in God and preferred honorable death to servility.

The day before the battle, the Armenian soldiers spent the night in prayer and devotion. The entire army prayed and took Holy Communion. The head of the Church, Catholicos Hovsep, was there together with his clergy. Priest Ghevont (Leontius), the most zealous among the clergy, together with Vartan Mamigonian, encouraged the soldiers with inspiring words.

Towards the morning of a Saturday they heard, and dimly saw, the approaching Persian army. The clash of the two armies was fierce, with swords glittering and blood running profusely. The Armenians inflicted great losses on the enemy. In this battle which lasted only one day, and in the subsequent guerilla wars, 1036 Armenians fell, against the Persian loss of 3544 soldiers. The battle of Avarayr came to an end with the fall of Vartan the Brave. The Armenians, seeing that they were left without a commander, withdrew to their castles and inaccessible mountains to carry on a guerilla war.

In this battle Vartan and his comrades suffered a military defeat but in reality the victory was theirs. They lost the battle but in the end they won the war and attained their aim for which they were fighting. The Persians eventually stopped their scheme of converting the country to their religion, when they realized how steadfast the Armenians were in their faith and convictions. Their defeat became a moral victory.

Some thirty years later, a nephew of Vartan, Vahan Mamigonian, brought this religious resistance to a successful end, even from the military

standpoint; he dictated his simple terms to the Persians: a) full religious freedom, b) home rule for the country, and c) replacement of corrupt officers with men of dependable character.

The Armenians still hold what the Vartanians were fighting for: their Christian faith and heritage. The Persians lost what they were trying to impose upon Armenians, their own religion, because they were themselves converted later to Islam.

Vartan has become the most outstanding hero of the Armenian nation. He, with his comrades in arms, together with millions of others following their example throughout Armenian history, laid down their lives so that the coming generations of Armenians might worship their Lord and God freely.

The war of St. Vartan was fought exclusively on the issue of freedom of conscience, and as such, it constitutes a glorious event in the struggle of humanity for freedom of religion. Vartan and his valiant men were the pioneers of freedom of conscience in the middle of the fifth century.

As a result of such battles in our history and the fine spirit which the Vartanians displayed, the Christian religion has survived in Armenia throughout the centuries and under most trying circumstances. We are proud inheritors of this unconquerable spirit, so conspicuously manifested on the Field of Avarayr. May God make us worthy of this glorious legacy.

## ST. GREGORY OF NAREG (KRIKOR NAREGATSY)

St. Gregory of Nareg is one of the most popular saints of the Armenian Church. Had he been known outside of his Church, he would have been considered as one of the greatest representatives of Christian mysticism, which is defined as: "the contemplation and love through which is revealed to man an immediate consciousness of God as the real and absolute principle of all truth."

St. Gregory of Nareg was born in the year 951 of a good family, whose known members were all well educated. After the death of Gregory's mother, his father took Holy Orders and soon became the bishop of his province. Gregory's two brothers also received the holy orders and gave a unique example of the dedication of an entire family to the service of God.

Gregory's great uncle, Anania, was a man of great learning and had established a monastery in the village of Nareg. Gregory and his older brothers were educated in this monastery, which soon became a famous center of higher education. His eldest brother John later became the abbot of the monastery. Gregory remained a teacher at the monastery until his death about the year 1005.



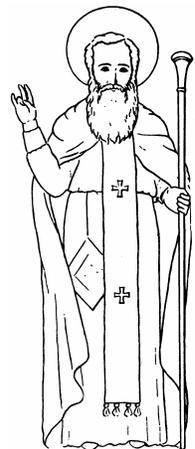
St. Gregory was a "Vartabed" in the true sense of the word; a highly educated celibate priest with the ability to teach and preach. From all over Armenia students were attracted to the monastery of Nareg because of Gregory's fame as a scholar in all branches of Christian learning. Gregory was also a poet with mystical temperament and has written some religious hymns which are considered to be of a fine literary form and which are used in the Church to this day. He is the Angelic Doctor of the Armenian Church.

Gregory's fame as a popular saint and an author of eminence rests mainly on his "Prayer-Book," popularly known as "Nareg;" which actually bears the title: "The Book of Tragedies," an original work almost unique in its kind. This book contains ninety five chapters, uniformly entitled "Conversations with God from the depths of the heart." It is written in a lofty style but in a most humble spirit. The contents of the book reveal the cry of a fallen soul, who accuses himself before God for all imaginable sins, which mortal beings commit. St. Gregory has written these "confessions and accusations" not only for his own behalf but on behalf of men of every age and of every class. While expressing the greatest anguish for the sins of men, which St. Gregory imputes to himself, he never loses sight of the great compassion and unbounded mercy of God for all sinners. Although it is written in a universal spirit, it is difficult to translate these prayers into European languages or even into modern Armenian, without losing a considerable degree the beauty of its thought and its dignity. The artistic qualities and religious suggestiveness of Gregory's style are bound in the classical Armenian language and its idioms.

"The Book of Tragedies," despite its highly literary tone and profound spirituality, has acquired great popularity and has become an object of piety. Its prayers are considered to be "powerful prayers," and the recitation of its prayers is taken as having especially strong effectiveness. In popular esteem "The Book of Tragedies" has a place second only to the Bible. For centuries it was the most respected and the most read book among Armenians. It is still loved and kept, if not always read, by many of the faithful of the Armenian Church. A miraculous power is attributed to this Prayer Book, and often it is read over sick people.

## ST. NERSES THE GRACEFUL ("SHNORHALY")

One of the most noble and saintly leaders of the Armenian Church, and a great literary figure in Armenian Ecclesiastical Literature is Nerses, surnamed Shnorhaly, "The Graceful," born in 1100 A.D. of a princely family. Through a female lineage he was a descendant of St. Gregory the Enlightener. Nerses and his elder brother, Gregory (Krikor), were put under the guardianship of their uncle, who was the Catholicos of the time, when their father, who was an army



general, was killed in a battle at the time Nerses was only ten years old. Nerses and his brother received a good education under the tutelage of a certain Stepanos Vartabed who was renowned for his wisdom, scholarship and eloquence. Nerses became a celibate priest when he was twenty years old.

In the year 1113 Nerses' elder brother Gregory was elected Catholicos of the Church. Nerses was his brother's principal assistant. He administered most of the affairs of the Holy See with wisdom and skill, while at the same time he devoted himself to music, poetry and literature. He composed the music and words of hymns and chants which are still in use in the services of the Armenian Church. He was consecrated a bishop when he was thirty five years old.

Upon the death of his brother in 1165, Nerses was elevated to the high office of Catholicos, and he remained in office until his death in 1173. One of the most popular of his works is a prayer, consisting of twenty-four verses, beginning with "I confess with Faith."

When Nerses became Catholicos, he wrote his first Gontag (encyclical) longer than usual addressed to his flock, which was scattered from the Caucasian to the Taurus Mountains in Cilicia, like sheep without a shepherd. Copies of this encyclical were distributed among Armenians everywhere. This pontifical letter is used even today, as a valuable document on pastoral theology.

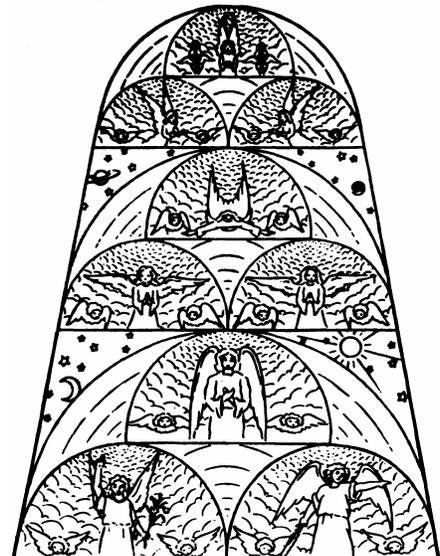
He made a permanent contribution to Armenian Church literature by enriching or Book of the Hours (Zhamagirk), with many liturgical songs which he wrote and popularized. Among these are the songs "Aravot Louso" and "Aysor Anjar". Most of his songs are written acrostically, that is, in the order of the Armenian alphabet, consisting of thirty six verses. Others bear upon them his signature permanently, as the first letter of each verse starts with a letter of his name spelling the word "Nerses."

He worked hard to bring about reconciliation and intercommunion between the Greek and the Armenian Churches, but forces beyond his power prevented the realization of his noble ideals.

## ANGELS

The Church venerates not only saints but also the angels. The Armenian Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Archangels, St. Gabriel and St. Michael, and of all the Heavenly Hosts.

The Christian Church believes in the existence of spiritual beings, called angels. This belief is biblical, and is confirmed by both the Old Testament and the New Testament.



There are many passages in the Bible about angels. For example, some angels visited Abraham in connection with the destruction of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was the angel of God who guided the people of Israel into the promised land. The angels conversed with prophets. They served as guides to the servants of God. It was an angel who announced the birth of St. John the Baptist. Angels gave the good news of the Birth of the Saviour to the shepherds. They sang the first Christian hymn, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2: 14). Our Lord often spoke about angels. They were the first and joyous witnesses of His glorious Resurrection. Thus angels appear every now and then in the course of the biblical history from the beginning to the end.

The existence and appearance of angels being a matter of historical record, we must now learn something about their nature.

Angels are spiritual beings created by God at the beginning of the creation of the world. They are gifted, like men, with intelligence and free will, but they are distinctly different from men in the fact that they do not possess physical bodies.

They are by nature invisible to men, but they can manifest themselves, if God so wills, in assumed or apparent bodies.

The word *Angel* is a Greek word meaning "messenger." The Armenian word for Angel, "hreshdag," has the same meaning. This gives a clue to the nature of their function: angels attend God and execute His commands on earth and in the universe as a whole. St. Paul said, "They are ministering spirits sent to minister to them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation" (Heb. 1: 14). In other words, they are God's servants who carry out His orders.

Angels are represented throughout the Bible as a class of spiritual beings, intermediate between God and men. It is commonly accepted that there are nine orders or classes of Angels. The degree of their closeness to God and the character of their function, serve as the basis for their classification into different orders.

It is an established belief that all Christians, at least all children, have their Guardian Angels. "See that you despise not one of these little ones," said Christ, "for I say to you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18: 10).

The function of these guardian Angels is to lead us, if we so wish, to the Kingdom of Heaven. I said, "If we so wish," because our guardian Angels can act upon our senses and upon our imagination, but never against our will; it is up to us to put our will into action.

There are two or three angels who are mentioned by name in the Bible; *Gabriel* is one of them. His name means "fortitude of God." Gabriel is first mentioned in the book of Daniel, where he gives the explanations of certain visions which the prophet Daniel had seen (Dan. 8: 16). Gabriel appears under his own name twice in the New Testament, first to Zachary,

father of St. John the Baptist, announcing the birth of a child to him (Luke 1: 19), and second to Mary, mother of Jesus, announcing the birth of Christ (Luke 1: 26).

"I am Gabriel who stands before God," said he about himself. From this reference some have been led to believe that this Angel belongs to the highest rank.

The next Archangel mention by name is *Michael*, which means "who is like God?" According to a tradition, "who is like God?" was the war-cry of the good angels who fought against those angels who had rebelled against the authority of God. As the leader of rebellious angels boastfully identified himself with God the Almighty, the loyal angels used to cry, "who is like God?" This war-cry was given as a proper name to the leader of the good angels, St. Michael. He also is mentioned in the Book of Daniel as the assistant and colleague of Gabriel, as "one of the chief princes" in heaven (Dan. 10: 13). He is also mentioned in the Epistle of St. Jude (1: 19) and in the Book of Revelation of St. John, as the champion of the Church against the powers of evil (Rev. 12: 7).

In Christian art St. Michael is represented as an angelic warrior fully armed with helmet, sword, and shield, standing over a dragon with his lance pierced through the monster. On other occasions he holds a pair of scales in which he weighs the souls of the departed, showing that he has a function in the last judgment of souls.

Besides the two individual Archangels, the names of two groups of angels are also mentioned in the Bible. The first are *Seraphim*; these are a special class of attendants of God's heavenly court. These angelic beings are distinctly mentioned only in the book of the Prophet Isaiah. While he, Isaiah, stood in the Temple, he saw the presence of God on the Throne of His Glory. On each side of the Throne stood mysterious guardians, each supplied with six wings: two of these wings were for holding them up, two for veiling their faces, and two for covering their feet in the majestic presence of the Almighty. They are the closest servants of God, standing near His Throne and ministering to Him and proclaiming His Glory, each calling to the other, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His Glory" (Isaiah 6: 3). One of these Seraphim flew towards the Prophet, having in his hand a burning coal with which he touched and purified the Prophet's lips, so that henceforth those lips might be consecrated to the utterances of divine inspiration. The number of Seraphim is thousands and thousands. They appear around the heavenly Throne in a double choir and the volume of chorus is such that the sound of their song shakes the world (Isaiah Ch. 6).

The other class of heavenly beings that are frequently mentioned in the Bible is *Cherubim*. They are supposed to be the heavenly throne bearers of God. That is why we see this sentence frequently used for God, "who sittest upon Cherubim."

Angels, like Saints, were held in the greatest veneration in the Christian Church. Churches have been dedicated to the names of angels. Their protective power is clearly recognized by the Church and it is asked in prayers by the faithful. God is asked to sustain those who are laboring in this world by the protecting power of His heavenly hosts. God is praised and thanked for the favor of this angelic protection.

Belief in Angels is in full keeping with our deepest and holiest feelings. We naturally long for spiritual and heavenly connections beyond this world. In our calm and thoughtful moments we feel the impression that we have direct and unbroken fellowship with intelligent beings higher and better than we are. This peculiar impression attains a greater depth and richer sweetness when a spirit feels itself alone, or when it has freed itself from the bondage of perishable things. Let all those who think otherwise remember that there is sometimes more truth in the vague impressions of feelings of the heart than in the dry conclusions of the head. For love, which is the heart's activity, is more penetrating than thinking, which is the activity of the mind. The things that live forever and are loveliest are mostly born in the heart. This belief in angels had its origin in the human heart. The biblical stories about angels did but intensify and strengthen it.

Angels Day, therefore, is a day when we remember our better and higher friends, who are willing to assist us in our fight against the temptations of our common adversary, the Devil. It is a day in which we must cultivate in ourselves the angelic virtues of faithfulness to God, holiness of heart and purity of mind and soul. It is a day to invoke angelic assistance in carrying our prayers before the Throne of the Almighty. Finally it is a day in which we praise the most Holy Name of God, saying in unison with the angels: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts: Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Blessing in the Highest. Amen."

# **Sacraments**

## BAPTISM

Baptism is the first of the seven sacraments of the Christian Church, the others being: Confirmation (Chrismation), Marriage (Holy Matrimony), Holy Communion (Eucharist), Penance (Confession), Holy Orders (Ordination of Clergy), and Extreme Unction (last blessing given to a dying person).

Sacraments are outward or visible signs and ceremonies to give us God's invisible graces. They are channels by which the Christian graces enter into our souls to feed, to nourish and to strengthen our spiritual life.

Baptism is the first sacrament which a Christian receives. Unless we are baptized, we are forbidden to receive any other sacrament. Any other sacrament received before receiving Baptism, will be invalid. That is why Baptism is called "the door of the Church."

By Baptism we are made Christians, and are incorporated into the Church. Baptism gives new life to our souls. Through Baptism we become children of God, and co-heirs of Christ.

This sacrament, as well as each one of the others, was instituted by our Lord Himself. He gave us the first example by being Himself baptized by John the Baptist. On leaving this world the last order which He gave His disciples was: "Go and make disciples of all nations. *Baptize* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

How was Baptism administered in ancient times?

In the early ages of Christianity Baptism was administered without special baptismal fonts. It was administered in rivers and pools. Jesus Himself was baptized in the River Jordan. St. Gregory, the Enlightener of Armenia, baptized King Tiridat, the first Christian King of Armenia, and thousands of others in the River Euphrates.

Indoor baptisms were, however, not uncommon even in the Apostolic age. St. Paul, for example, was baptized indoors. For the sake of privacy and solemnity indoor baptism came to be the rule.

Reverence for the rite itself, and for the water, which came in time to receive a special consecration, gave rise to the use of a special font for the sacrament of Baptism. This font became one of the most important parts of the Christian Church everywhere. The ancient practice was to have it hewn out of a solid piece of rock.

In the Armenian Church, according to ancient custom, the first part of the ceremony was performed outside the door of the church. This symbolic



practice, however, is no longer kept. At present, the infant is brought to the church. While the godfather is holding the infant in his arms, the priest recites, in the name of the infant, some penitential psalms, makes a triple renunciation of Satan, and then recites the Creed.

Then the priest, together with the godfather and those attending, goes to the baptismal font. Water is poured into the font. The priest says a blessing over the water. In the meantime the child is taken to be undressed and brought back. The priest then asks the godfather, "What does this child request?" The godfather replies, "Faith, hope, and love; to be baptized and to be justified, to be cleansed from sins, to be delivered from evil, and to serve God."

The priest then asks the name of the infant, holds him up, and then immersing him in the water says: "(name), Servant of God, has come as a catechumen to be baptized; he is now baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; being saved by the blood of Christ from the servitude of sin, receives the sonship of the heavenly Father, to be co-heir with Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit." While saying this the priest immerses the infant three times in the water. In this act of immersion in consecrated water consists the essence of Baptism.

Baptism by "dipping" or "immersion" was the universally accepted custom in the Church from the beginning. This is testified even by the Fathers of the Western Church, where at present it is a general practice to baptize by "sprinkling" or "pouring." Immersion means dipping the whole body of the baptized in the water.

Since the grace of Baptism is absolutely necessary *for all men*, therefore this Sacrament must be denied to none, not even to infants. On this principle Infant Baptism became normal in the Church as soon as circumstances allowed. One of the aims of the Baptism is the forgiveness of all sins, including the original sin, in which we are born to this world. As original sin is universal, and the *need* for release from it is universal, therefore the Church wisely and justly allows infants to receive the Grace which cleanses them from the stains of the original sin and gives them, in their innocence, the equipment to fight victoriously against sin. Whole households, which included infants, were baptized by the Apostles (Cf. 1 Cor. 1: 16, Acts 10: 47, 16: 33).

"Just as parents provide the necessary physical cleansings of the child, supply it with food, guide it and educate it without regard to the *will* of the child, so, having in view the spiritual progress and wellbeing of their child, they provide for its spiritual regeneration and oversee its spiritual needs."

From the earliest times a new name was given to the catechumen at Baptism, even if the receiver of this sacrament already had a name. Unusual and pagan names should be avoided when giving a new name to a child. It is always recommended that the name of a saint should be given because the name given at Baptism is the child's "Christian" name.

At the Baptism someone should assist at the ceremony to make the profession of the faith on behalf of the child. Such a person is called *godfather* (in Armenian, "Gunka-hayr" which rhymes with hire). The duty of the godfather is to see that the child is brought up as a good Christian, if this is not done by the parents. In the Armenian Church there is only one godfather, of the male sex. The wife of a godfather may be considered as godmother but she never assists at the ceremony in any formal capacity. The godfather should be over 12 years old. He *must* be a member of the Armenian Church. One who is not a member of the Armenian Church cannot be a godfather at an Armenian Baptism. Also, those who neither know nor practice their faith should not be chosen as godfathers. Too many people choose godfathers for their children for reasons other than spiritual.

Children should be baptized as soon as possible, preferably eight days after birth. Our baptismal fonts are not made to hold grown-ups. Besides, it is always easier and quieter to baptize a little baby than a grown up child. Another important reason is that children are entitled to receive the benefits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as early as possible.

Baptism is necessary for salvation. The parents must not take the risk of depriving their children of the benefits of this sacrament. Parents who put off Baptism for a long time, or entirely neglect it, are endangering the eternal salvation of their children. Responsible people always should remember the warning of the Gospel, "Unless a man be born again of water and spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." This is what our Lord said.

The priest is the usual minister of Baptism; therefore, administration of the Sacrament, under all normal conditions, must be at the hands of the priest. If there is a danger to the life of an unbaptized baby, any one else may and *should* christen the baby. In such emergency cases it is sufficient to sprinkle or apply some water on the forehead or any part of the body, giving a name and using the proper formula: "(name) is now baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Should the person so baptized recover, he must be brought to the church and his baptism must be normalized and validated by receiving the remaining parts of the ritual, at the hands of a regular priest. Such extraordinary Baptism is lawful only in the event of absolute and dire necessity.

After Baptism and Confirmation a certificate is given. It should be very carefully kept. Parents should tell their children when and where they were baptized, so that even if the certificate is lost the registration may be traced.

## CONFIRMATION

The Sacrament of Confirmation is actually the completion and perfection of the Sacrament of Baptism, and that is why Confirmation immediately follows Baptism in the Armenian Church. In the Roman Catholic Church it comes much later. Someone has this to say about Confirmation: "A royal seal validating, as well as confirming Holy Baptism, just as *Amen* validates and confirms the Creed." By Baptism a new principle of spiritual life is given to the neophyte; by Confirmation he is endowed by all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are necessary for the growth and progress of that life. By Baptism a new road is opened for the Christian; by Confirmation he is strengthened for this long course of spiritual conflicts in the Christian warfare as a soldier in the army of Christ.



The biblical expression for Confirmation is "laying on of hands," as it is described in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (Chapters 8 and 19). It is always accompanied by the receiving of the Holy Spirit. "When they (Samaritans) believed . . . they were baptized" by Philip the deacon. "When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that (people at) Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they *laid their hands on them* and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8: 12-17). "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had *laid his hands upon them*, they Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 19: 5-6). Therefore it is the sacrament through which we receive the Holy Spirit.

In the Armenian language the name of the sacrament of Confirmation is "GUNOUNK" which means "Sealing," referring to the spiritual fact that by Confirmation we are sealed as possessions of God. "He (God) has put His seal upon us and given us His spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Cor. 1: 22). A Christian character is given to us by this sealing.

The chief sacramental act at the Confirmation is the *anointing* of the various members of the body of the baptized with the sanctified oil called

*Chrism*, hence the name of "Chrismation" given to this sacrament. This oil is called "Sweet Oil" in Armenian or "Miuron." Holy Miuron is blessed only by the Catholicos, the head of the Armenian Church, and distributed freely to all churches. Holy Miuron is made of olive oil and of the essence of some forty kinds of flowers and other sweet smelling herbs as ingredients.

Confirmation being the completion and fulfillment of the Baptism, there is a close connection and similarity of natures between these two sacraments; therefore separate administration of the sacraments, which is the common practice in the West, is not justifiable. The practice of the early Church was to administer them together.

Like Baptism, Confirmation also is not repeatable. All those who desire to become members of the Armenian Church, and who are not confirmed in their former church, must be anointed before their formal admittance into the membership of our Church.

After the unction the child is dressed. As the last and crowning act of the sacrament the priest ties around the neck of the child a cord made of white and red colored strings. It is symbolic of the blood and water which came out from the side of Christ on the cross, and signifies purity and courage. That string combines the meanings of Baptism and Confirmation. By Baptism, as we have said, the baptized is purified, and through Confirmation he is given the grace of spiritual fortitude, making him a Christian soldier to fight against the powers of the Evil which beset the Christian in the course of his life.

Then the child is taken to the altar to worship God. There Holy Communion is given to him by touching his lips with a particle of reserved sacrament. Thus, almost all the necessary Sacraments for salvation, Penance, Baptism, Confirmation and Communion are administered in one continuous act of making a person a member of the Christian Church.

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Penance is the sacrament by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven through absolution by the priest.

We must receive the sacrament of Penance:

- (a) Because our Lord Jesus Christ commanded it when He said: "Repent, and believe in the *Gospel*" (Mark 1: 15). "Unless you repent you will all perish" (Luke 13: 3).
- (b) Because we need it. It is true that by the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation we are saved. However, it is well known that after Baptism we do not always stay in the state of grace; in other words, we



commit sins. As a remedy for these sins after Baptism, the sacrament of Penance has been established.

- (c) Because it increases the grace of the Holy Spirit which we already possess. The greater our knowledge about our sinfulness, the stronger become our desire and willingness to be sanctified and to be saved.

In order to receive this sacrament properly, we must:

- (a) Examine our conscience. We must make a sincere effort to recall to mind all the bad things we have done in thought, in word, or in deed. We can make a good examination of our conscience by reviewing the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, in order to see whether we have omitted to practice any of God's commandments or committed any acts against any one of them. In our self-examination we must recall the particular duties of our state of life as citizens, as church members, as sons and daughters, as mothers or fathers, wife or husband, and to ask ourselves how we have conducted ourselves with regard to our duties in these capacities.

- (b) We must be sorry for our sins, expressing to God our grief at having been disloyal to Him. This act of being sorry for one's sins is called *Contrition*. Contrition is a very important act of penance. God will not forgive us our sins unless we make a true and sincere contrition.

Indeed, if we knew the nature and effect of the thing called *Sin* we would surely feel a sincere sorrow, because sin is the greatest of all evils with dreadful results. Ill health, poverty, and other material evils last for only a certain time; at death these evils will all come to an end. But evils arising from sin will follow and persecute us into eternity, in addition to the troubles they bring upon us in this life. We can have contrition not only by recalling our misdeeds and feeling sorry for them, but also by praying: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; according to Thy abundant compassion blot out my transgression" (Psalm 51: 1).

- (c) We must have a firm purpose not to sin again. Our day of good resolutions is not necessarily the New Year's day. On every occasion when doing penance, we must sincerely promise God not to fall again into the same sins. After this sincere resolution, we must honestly avoid sin and everything which causes us to sin.

- (d) The last act of Penance is Confession. Confession is an important part of the sacrament of Penance. There is private confession not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but in all the Ancient Eastern Churches, including the Greek, Russian, and Armenian Churches. The unfortunate fact however, is that in many places it is not practiced. But in Jerusalem it is still practiced. There is a small chapel in the Cathedral of St. James, where an elderly priest sits all during the services. Anyone desiring to go for confession sees the priest at this chapel. The priest draws the curtain and hears the confession.

If we do not feel well physically, we go to a doctor, or if we do not feel good mentally, we would perhaps consult a psychiatrist. Likewise, when we do not feel peaceful in our souls, we should go to a priest to regain our inner peace and spiritual health. That is the aim of confession. Doctors cannot give you the right form of medicine unless they know your trouble. Likewise the priest should know your spiritual troubles in order that he may give his advice or guidance in accordance with your need. Therefore, private confession is based on the teachings of the Gospels and of the Church, as well as on common sense and to the need of our soul.

It is obligatory to go to confession before Holy Communion. That is the rule of the Church. It is true that many Christians do not commit serious sins, or mortal sins, which is the technical word for heavy sins. Nevertheless, we must confess our little sins, too. If, however, somebody says I have no sins, he is lying, as the Scripture says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1: 18).

Penance, therefore, is the Sacrament through which we receive that sanctifying grace for the soul which we have lost through sin. No matter how grave our sins may have been, they are forgiven if we make a sincere contrition and a good confession.

"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity" (I John 1: 9).

The sacrament of Penance gives the penitent, in addition, a special strength by which he will overcome temptations and lead a good life.

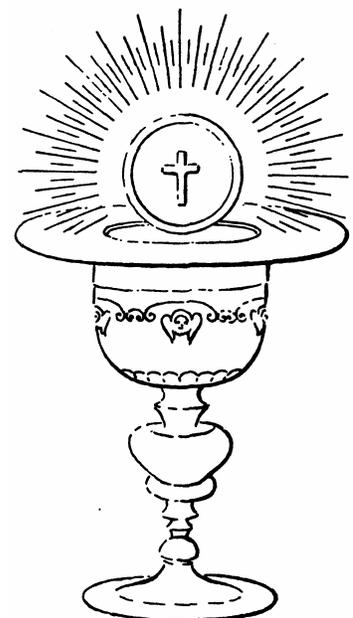
The works of Penance act like a medicine; not only do they cure sins but also weaken the power of evil tendencies, and give new strength to the soul.

## HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Communion is THE Sacrament of the Christian Church. It is the most essential means for our salvation, and for our progress in the way of Christian perfection. It is the Sacrament through which we receive the Body and the Blood of Christ, under the forms of consecrated Bread and Wine, for the remission of sins and for the reception of eternal life.

### I. NAMES GIVEN TO HOLY COMMUNION:

It has several names according to its various aspects and meanings. It is called: a) *Eucharist*, which means Blessing or Thanksgiving, and describes its Sacramental aspect. b) The *Lord's Supper*, referring to the occasion on which it was



established. c) *Communion*, because of the action and its results, inasmuch as we communicate with our Lord Himself in this sacrament. d) *Sacrifice*, which refers to the immolation of our Lord on the Cross, where He shed His Blood, as a victim, for the salvation of mankind. The last two terms are the most common nomenclature used in Armenian. "Holy Sacrifice" or "Sourp Badarak" is the term we use to describe the ritual of Holy Communion.

## II. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOLY COMMUNION:

As the central Sacrament of the New Testament, the Holy Communion was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The archetypes of the Holy Communion are: a) the *Passover*, the commemoration of the passing-over of the angel of God, sparing from killing the children of Israel who had the sign of blood on the lintel of their houses, in which they were eating the Paschal Lamb. b) The *Manna*, the heavenly food, which was, as Moses said, "the bread which the Lord has given to eat" (Ex. 16: 15). Manna was a type of Christ who gives Himself in the Holy Communion as the true food of the soul. "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven . . . I am the bread of life" said Jesus (John 6: 31). c) The *Sacrifices* of the Old Testament are regarded as foreshadowing the true Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

The Divine Institution was revealed and promised by our Lord in His preachings, before it was actually established at the Last Supper. The verses 32-50 of the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John are considered as "a discourse about the food of the soul, the divine teaching made available through faith." The latter part of the same chapter, verses 51-59, is "a discourse about the Holy Eucharist, as the Body and Blood of Christ."

The account of the establishment of the Holy Communion is explicitly recounted in the first three Gospels (Matt. 26: 26-28, Mark 14: 22-24, Luke 22: 19-20). It is also clearly referred to in the Epistles of the Apostles. For our purpose we consider it worthwhile to bring forth verbatim the account of the foundation of this Sacred Institution, as it is given by St. Paul, which is chronologically the first written account about Holy Communion. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'" (I Cor. 11: 23-24).

## III. THE MEANING OF THE HOLY COMMUNION:

"This *is* my body . . . This *is* my blood"; these words are not taken metaphorically. The verb IS does not mean "shows" or "represents". Some one has said in this connection: "In the institution of the greatest Sacrament of the New Testament . . . our Lord would have taken care that the terms He used in the founding and establishing this Sacrament should be clear and

free of possible misinterpretation." Therefore the words of the Lord must be taken in their obvious and usual sense, and not metaphorically.

It is plainly said in the New Testament, and it is clearly taught by the Church from the earliest times, that "The Bread and the Wine" should not be considered as ordinary elements, "but the very Body and Blood of the Lord." This belief is shown in the great reverence paid to the Holy Communion by historic Christianity. The earliest Fathers of the Church are quite clear in teaching that the Consecrated Elements of the Holy Communion are the very Body and Blood of the Saviour. One of them, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, living in the first part of the fourth century, has said, "That which seems bread is not bread, even if it is so perceived by the taste, but is the Body of Christ."

#### IV. THE EXCELLENCE OF THE HOLY COMMUNION:

The Holy Communion is distinguished from the other sacraments first by reason of its unique character; that is to say, by the fact that our Lord is given us in this Sacrament not in the way of "superabounding grace," as in the other sacraments; but "truly and really." He gives *Himself* "as spiritual food for the faithful, quickening the soul and leading man into immediate fellowship with Him." Second, the Holy Communion is distinguished from other sacraments by reason of its being both Sacrament and Sacrifice. As a Sacrament the Holy Communion possesses all the constituent features of sacraments in general, i.e., the outward signs, or the "matter," the minister, and the grace bestowed. The outward sign and matter of this Sacrament is the bread and wine and the proper prayers. The ministers are the bishops and priests only. Deacons assist at the Divine Liturgy and even in emergency cases can communicate the faithful from the presanctified Holy Communion, but they can never consecrate it. The Grace bestowed through this Sacrament is remission of sins and reception and strengthening of eternal life, and union with our Lord.

Holy Communion is not only a Sacrament but also a Sacrifice. "As Sacrifice, it is the continuation of the sacrifice of Golgotha." The very words used by our Lord clearly show this: "My Body *given* . . ., or *broken* for you," "My Blood shed . . . for many for the remission of sins." "These expressions indicate that this Institution is itself a propitiatory sacrifice." It is not simply a representation of the death of our Lord, but actual and real sacrifice, in which "The Offerer and the Victim are one and the same, our Lord, even if the sacrifice be offered by the priest." It is not simply a reminder or commemoration of the historical fact of Golgotha, but an actual and objective sacrifice. The purpose of the sacrifice on the Cross was the reconciliation of man with God, the atonement for the sins of man and their expiation, in general. Whereas the Sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered for specific people, it is the application of the general benefits of the sacrifice of the Cross, to those for whom the Eucharist is celebrated, both for the living and the dead.

It is also a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving, Worship, and Praise, which we offer to God, for His goodness and loving kindness. In this Sacrifice of Thanksgiving the congregation joins with the priest, taking part in the singing or following it in spirit.

All those who would take Holy Communion must prepare themselves by repentance and obtain absolution by confession. Willful indifference to the Holy Communion or carelessness in regard to it deprives us of its benefits.

## V. THE DIVINE LITURGY:

The celebration of this unbloody Sacrifice is called the "Divine Liturgy." The Armenian Divine Liturgy is composed of four main parts. These are: The *Preparation*; The *Instruction*; The *Oblation*; and The *Benediction*. The third part, the Oblation or the Sacrifice, is the most essential act of the Divine Liturgy.

<sup>1</sup>a) "The Preparation consists of certain acts and prayers for the ritual and consequently the moral purification of the celebrant priest as well as of the participating faithful in preparation for the performance of the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice.

"The first theme of the Preparation is the assumption by the priest of his sacerdotal function by the Vesting.

"The second and third themes of the Preparation consist of acts and prayers of repentance and for divine forgiveness, which make the priest and the believer bold to enter into the presence of God in a mystical way.

"The fourth theme is the preparation of the elements of the Holy Sacrifice, i.e., the bread and the wine, symbolizing the preparation of Christ for his redemptive work before His Baptism.

"b) The Second Part of the Divine Liturgy is also called Synaxis, which is a Greek word, means meeting, and it refers to a general prayer meeting, which used to be held prior to the Eucharist, or the Holy Sacrifice proper, in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Synaxis was held for the purpose of Christian edification.

"The first theme of the Synaxis is the proclamation of God's Kingdom in the Church, the citizenship of the faithful in it and the affinity of the Kingdom on earth with that of heaven.

"The second theme of the Synaxis (Lectons, Creed, and Prayers) refers to the enlightenment of the mind of men called to enter into God's kingdom, and to the understanding of divine truths and of the will of God. This is followed by the proclamation of and witness to the Christian faith by the enlightened believer. In this part of the Synaxis the teaching ministry of the Church is symbolized and the reception of the Gospel or the good news by mankind is sacramentalized.

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<sup>1</sup> This last part is taken from Divine Liturgy of Bishop Tiran Nersoyan, page 293.

"c) After moral purification and mental illumination, the third and main part of the Liturgy, the Holy Sacrifice proper, effects the spiritual and mystical union of the Christian with his Lord and God, Jesus Christ.

"This essential union of the Christian with the Lord constitutes the core of the Sacrament or Mystery of the Eucharist and is the ultimate purpose of Christian life as a whole.

"It is this third part of the Divine Liturgy which constitutes the sacrament which was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself at His last supper with the Apostles, and which was performed by the Lord in person on Calvary.

"d) The fourth part of the Divine Liturgy, i.e., the Last Blessing and Dismissal, is only an appendage and an elaborate send-off after the termination of the Sacrament."

## RECEIVING THE HOLY COMMUNION

Along with church attendance every Sunday, the periodical receiving of Holy Communion is the most important religious obligation of every practicing Christian. One can hardly be called by the holy name of "Christian" without having the regular habit of going to church, and without receiving the Holy Communion at least once or twice during the year. The Armenian Church requires from regular practicing members the reception of Holy Communion on the following holy days of the year: Easter Sunday (Spring), Transfiguration and/or St. Mary's Day (Summer), Holy Cross Day (Autumn), and Christmas (Winter). There is no limitation as to how often one may approach the holy altar. There is, however, strict ruling about delinquency in receiving the Holy Sacrament.



Any member of the Church desiring to take communion must previously make preparation. The first step in this preparation consists of examination of conscience, the reading of the Bible, refraining from certain pleasures, and reconciliation with your fellowman. This last is the most important requirement.

The next step is to go to the church and make confession to the priest and receive absolution a week or a few days before taking communion.

It is necessary to fast during the morning of the day when Communion is to be taken. The fast should be observed from twelve o'clock midnight

until the time of Communion, which would be the first thing taken in the mouth on that day. According to common practice prevailing in America, the service of Divine Liturgy is not over before eleven o'clock A.M. Therefore, persons who are sick or unable to fast, for health reasons, can obtain a dispensation from the priest, by explaining the circumstances to him at the time of confession; or they can ask the priest to give them Holy Communion early in the morning with the presanctified and reserved Sacrament.

The prospective communicant must attend the Divine Liturgy early and devoutly on the day in which he desires to communicate. Toward the end of the service he should come into the chancel, when the curtain is being withdrawn, and the deacon calls: "With fear and with faith draw near and communicate in holiness" (Yergughiv yev havadov harach madik yev surpoutiamp haghortetsarouk). When the priest turns and comes to the edge of the bema (altar stage), the communicant should approach him, and make the sign of the cross, say "Megha Astoudzo,"<sup>2</sup> and standing should open his mouth, slightly protruding his tongue, and on which the priest lays a small particle of the Host (Sacred Body) dipped in the Cup (Precious Blood).

It is customary for men to precede women in approaching the altar to take Communion. The communicants should come in line from the right, and after receiving the Holy Communion, should pass to the left and remain in the chancel, or when there is no more space in the chancel, in the forepart of the nave (middle part of the church), until the partaking is ended and the priest stands and blesses the people saying: "Save thy people, O Lord, and bless thine inheritance, feed them, and lift them up from henceforth for evermore."

The communicant should then go back, take his seat and say his private prayers.

Women should refrain from using lipstick before receiving Holy Communion.

There is no doubt that all of us love the "Sourp-Badarak," the Divine Liturgy sung in the Armenian sacred music. But that is not enough. A practicing Christian should also partake of the Holy Communion, approaching the altar, as often as he can; because the Holy Communion is our means of receiving eternal life, and the true sign of the unity of the Church. By no other act of the Church is the unity of the people of God in the church more proven than by the Holy Communion. By Communion not only are we united with God, but also with our fellowmen. Holy Communion deepens man's communion with other men.

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<sup>2</sup> Literally it means: "I have sinned against God." Here, however, it almost means: "God have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner."

The real progress and strength of a church does not consist merely in its financial success, but in its spiritual oneness and love. A church cannot make any real progress unless and until Holy Communion occupies its rightful position in it. Holy Communion is of primary importance in the Church.

May God give us His grace and wisdom to know this vital truth about Holy Communion. May He create in us an ardent desire to approach His altar for Holy Communion and may He make us worthy of this greatest privilege given to men.

## MARRIAGE

Marriage is a contract to form a family, and the family is the foundation of human society. The stronger the foundation, the stronger will be the structure over it. God Himself is the author of marriage. He instituted it in the Garden of Eden saying, "Increase and multiply and fill the earth." Adam, receiving his inseparable companion from the hands of God, pronounced these important words: "Increase and multiply and fill the earth." Adam, receiving his inseparable companion from the hands of God, pronounced these important words: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, wherefore a man shall leave father and mother; and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh."

The purpose of the sacrament of the Holy Matrimony is to sanctify the union of man and wife for the preservation of the human race, for the increase of the members of the Church, for the promotion of mutual helpfulness and for the upbringing of the children as Christians.

The establishment of this sacrament by Christ is not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. However, our Lord by His Presence at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, showed His readiness to sanctify marriage. He also gave laws concerning marriage (Matt. 19: 3-12). But the significant passage "upon which both in early times and today the doctrine of the sacrament of marriage is based" is Eph. 5: 22-33, which is read at our service of the Holy Matrimony as the main lesson. Here the Apostle Paul speaks of the relation of husband and wife as being similar to that of Christ and His Church, and uses the words "This is a great mystery." Sacraments in the Eastern Churches, including the Armenian Church, are called "Mysteries." Therefore, both the Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Church regard marriage as a sacrament, established by our Lord.

As a sacrament, matrimony is the act by which the Church blesses the mutual agreement of the two parties, and binds the new couple with a spiritual bond to each other and to the Church. The free consent of each of the two persons is required by the priest, and this consent is an integral part of the Sacrament. According to the doctrine of the Eastern Churches the

minister of the Holy Matrimony is the priest, or, on solemn occasions, a bishop.

To receive the sacrament of Matrimony worthily, it is necessary to be a practicing church member, to know the duties of married life, and to obey the marriage laws of the Church. The couple must be of proper age, physically capable of being married. There must be no close blood relationship. Both Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition emphasize the indissoluble character of the marriage, recognizing only one cause for the dissolution of the marriage tie—marital unfaithfulness; the Scriptural word is “fornication” (Matt. 5: 32, 19: 9). Second and third marriages are not looked upon with favor by the Church.

The purpose of marriage is very sacred. In Matrimony, a man and his wife are called to take part in the work of the Creator. If married people think about this fact, they surely will not neglect their duties toward their children, the chief of which is to “rear them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6: 4).

Besides the aim of bringing children into the world, Marriage is also instituted for the mutual support of man and woman. “It is not good for man to be alone,” said God after creating Adam, “Let us make him a helper like unto himself” (Gen. 2: 18).

What are some of the duties of husband and wife in the married state of life? The first duty of husband and wife is to be faithful to each other. They vow fidelity to one another at the marriage. With the disappearance of faithfulness the conjugal happiness ends. The married parties should bear with each other’s faults and infirmities.

Husband and wife must comfort and support each other in their common life.

The wife can influence her husband for good more by meekness and devotion, than by nagging and arguing. The husband can win the heart of his wife more by companionship and consideration, than by wealth and force. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church” (Eph. 5: 25) says St. Paul. “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5: 22), adds the same Apostle. The wife should obey her husband as the head of the family (Eph. 5: 23).

The man is the breadwinner and the head of the family. The wife is the queen and mother. In a true Christian marriage there is no question of first or second. There is no competition or superiority between wife and husband; for, as the Bible states, “They are no longer two, but one flesh” (Matt. 19: 6).

Through marriage the couple enters into the society formally and effectively. It is the beginning of all permanent relations among men. The character of a nation depends more on family discipline than on the civil constitutions or even the school system.

As mothers are mainly responsible for the social training of the children, mothers of a generation are of more importance than the government of the state itself. The family is the unit which makes up the nation and humanity. If the family influence is evil, no code of laws can rectify the resulting evil in society. On the contrary, if the family influence is good, any external evil influence will have little effect upon the social good order.

## THE RITUAL OF THE HOLY MATRIMONY

The sacrament of the Holy Matrimony or marriage is the most important even in one's lifetime. The interests of society and of nature meet at this moment. Therefore, every society, recognizing the importance of marriage, has clothed not only the bride and the groom in beautiful garments but has also made the ceremony itself beautiful and impressive. We can say that, properly performed, the marriage ceremony of the Armenian Church is one of the most beautiful of rituals. The following are a few notes as to how the marriage ritual is performed in the Armenian Church:



After the bridal procession, the bridegroom and the bride stand together at the entrance of the chancel (that part of the church where choir members stand while singing at the service of the Divine Liturgy).

They face the altar; the bride stands to the left of the bridegroom.

The godfather or best man stands behind the bridegroom to the right, holding the plate with the rings on it with his left hand, and the cross in his right hand. The ushers and the bridesmaids stand to the right and left of the bridegroom and the bride respectively, outside the chancel.

The bride gives her bouquet of flowers, if she is carrying one, to her maid-of-honor, who stands behind and to the left of the bride.

The priest, coming out of the vestry, stands in the chancel near the edge, facing the congregation. The congregation stands when the priest begins the service.

First takes place the blessing and putting on of the wedding rings by the priest. Rings are symbols of attachment and perpetual faithfulness. Usually the priest himself puts the ring on the left ring fingers of the bride and the bridegroom.

Then the priest joins the right hands of the couple and makes them face each other, giving them instructions to be faithful to one another to the end of their lives.

Then the priest asks each one of the couple three times whether they will be united to one another until death. After receiving a positive answer, the priest and the deacon go up to the altar and the couple step forward to the front of the bema (stage) and face the altar. Here the couple kisses the Book of the Gospels offered to them by the deacon or the priest.

After the lessons are read, the priest blesses and places the crowns on the heads of the couple. The godfather holds the cross with his right hand over their heads. Then the prayer of crowning is recited and the couple sits on chairs facing the altar, as newly crowned king and queen. Then the priest, while reading another prayer, removes the crowns from their heads. He blesses a cup of wine and offers it to the bride and the groom to drink. With the final exhortation and the benediction by the priest, the ceremony comes to a close.

## HOLY ORDERS

The church is an organized society. It is composed of all the baptized persons who are united in the same *Faith*, the same *Holy Communion*, the same *Sacraments*, and under the same *Ecclesiastical authority*. Those who exercise this ecclesiastical authority form the *ministers* or *officers* of the Church who serve God, teach and sanctify the faithful, and govern the Church. This authority *to serve, to teach, to sanctify, and to govern* is not given by elections or appointment, but by a sacred ritual which is called *ordination*.

Ordination or Holy Orders is one of the important sacraments of the Church. Through ordination men receive the power and grace to perform the sacred duties of a minister of the Church.

It is true that by Baptism all Christians are endowed with the "priesthood" of laymen, who have thus the obligation to offer up to God the spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving, prayers and acts of faith, hope, and charity. But only those men who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are ministers of God in the full sense of the word.

The sacrament of Ordination is administered always by a bishop. There are various orders in the Church, and consequently, there are various



forms of ceremonies by which each one of these orders is conferred. However, the one act that is common to all of these various orders is the *imposition of hands* by the bishop. That is why Ordination is also called "the Laying on of Hands," "Tzernatroutiun" in Armenian.

For the ordination of any cleric, except a bishop, one bishop is sufficient to administer the Sacrament. The consecration of a bishop, according to the rules of the Armenian Church, is performed by His Holiness the Catholicos, having at least two other bishops assisting him at the Ordination. The consent of the laity is expressed formally at the service of Ordination by the choristers when they sing: "he is worthy."

In the beginning the Apostles were the sole ministers in the Church. They were teachers, sanctifiers and rulers in the Church. They even used to administer the material needs of the faithful. However, as the membership of the Church increased, the Apostles created other officers to assist them. The first order thus established was that of *deacons*. The first deacons were elected by the faithful and were appointed and ordained by the Apostles to distribute alms, as well as to serve the public dinner tables at which Holy Communion was administered (Acts. ch. 6).

The Apostles also chose, appointed and ordained other assistants to help them in baptizing the converts, in administering the Holy Communion and for other functions in the Church. These men were called *Elders*. They were the predecessors of our present day priests. (The Greek word for elder is *Presbyter* from which the English word *priest* is derived).

The Apostles did not stay permanently in a town or country. There were ordered by our Lord to go to all parts of the world to preach the Gospel. Therefore, before leaving a town or country, where they had already established a flourishing church, they used to appoint an able and dependable person to supervise the Christian communities of the area and to act with full authority in the name of the Apostles. These men were the successors to the Apostles in their own locality, such as a large town, a province, or even a state. They were called *Bishops, Episcopos*, which is a Greek word meaning "overseer."

There are, therefore, basically three main orders in the Church: Those of *Deacons, Priests, and Bishops*. These three orders have been instituted in the Church since the time of the Apostles.

At present *Deacons* assist the bishop and priest in the church during the divine offices, by singing, censuring, and bringing the gifts to the holy altar during the Divine Liturgy.

The *Priests* administer all the sacraments except the Holy Orders and are the shepherds and the leaders of local churches under the bishop.

*Bishops*, with the full power of the Apostles, are the governors of various Dioceses of the Church. They alone administer the Holy Orders. According to the canons of the Armenian Church, Bishops alone are authorized to consecrate churches, altars and baptismal fonts.

In addition to these three basic orders, there are in the Church, many other ranks and offices: some of them are higher, others lower.

The higher ranks are those of *Archbishop*, *Patriarch* and *Catholicos*. They have higher authority and jurisdiction in administrative matters.

In its proper and ancient meaning, the *Archbishop* was a prelate who had other suffragan bishops to assist him in governing his diocese. Greeks use the word Metropolitan instead of Archbishop. At present in the Armenian Church "Archbishop" is only an honorary title given by His Holiness the Catholicos to those bishops who are distinguished by their position or good record of activity.

The office of *Patriarch* is the highest in the Greek Church. In our Church, however, the Patriarch is an archbishop, who occupies one of the historical patriarchal Sees of Jerusalem or Constantinople. Patriarchs are independent in all administrative matters within the area of their own jurisdiction.

The office of *Catholicos* is the highest office in the Armenian Church. The Catholicos is the head of the whole Armenian Church. It is a Greek word meaning General. The full title of the head of the Armenian Church is "Supreme Patriarch Catholicos of All Armenians."

The *Primate* or the Ordinary of a Diocese (Arachnort) is a high ranking clergyman who holds the highest position and authority in a given diocese. He may have a lower order than that of a bishop, and even if there are retired bishops or even archbishops in his diocese, they come under his jurisdiction in matters of administration.

*Vartabed* is an academic church title given to a celibate priest who has the necessary education.

*Dzayrakoun Vartabed* is an honorary title given to those Vartabeds who have been elected primate, or who have distinguished themselves by their learning in the fields of theology, religious teaching, and Holy Scripture, etc. It corresponds to Doctor of Divinity in the Western Church.

*Apegha* is a celibate priest, attached to a monastery.

*Archpriest* is also an honorary title given to those priests who have fruitfully served their church for long years or who have distinguished themselves in outstanding service to the Church.

*Minor orders* of which there are as many as six, are given to those who take care of the material building of the church and assist in the Divine Office, by singing, reading the lessons, etc. They are Doorkeepers, Psalmists, Readers, Acolytes or candle bearers, and Exorcists, whose function is to read prayers over sick people. Subdeacons have the highest rank among the holders of minor orders. For each one of these minor orders the proper symbols of the office are given to the candidate at his ordination.

These differences of rank and office are necessary for the proper government of the Church. Without them the Church would be a society without organization.

"I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying of my hands," writes St. Paul to his disciple Timothy (2 Tim. 1: 6). The "Gift" or the Grace which is given to a minister at Ordination is the spiritual authority to fulfill all his duties worthily and in a manner pleasing to God, and to live a virtuous life in conformity with his calling.

A candidate for Holy Orders must be a person fit for his task, having good moral character, knowledge of the Bible and Church laws. He should be well trained in the ritual of the Church. He must be a man of faith, piety, and wisdom. He must be healthy in body, without physical impairment, which would prevent the performance of his duties in the ministry of the Church.

All members of the Church, whether clerical or lay, constitute together the *Faithful*; faith being the basic virtue of a Christian.

A good Christian has before him a wide scope of activity in the community, if he or she wishes to participate in the work of the Church. It is a great service to the Church if a family encourages one of its young members to consecrate his life to the service of God and His Church by becoming a priest. If this is impossible, a family should try to defray the expenses of a candidate for priesthood in one of the seminaries of the Church.

People may devote themselves to the service of the Church not only by entering Holy Orders, but also in the lay state. The latter service is, sometimes, as valuable and meritorious before God as the service rendered by entering the Holy Orders.

# Holidays

## FEAST OF THE THEOPHANY OR EPIPHANY (Christmas in the Armenian Church)

It is misleading to use the word "Christmas" for the feast which the Armenian Church celebrates on the sixth of January all over the world, and which for reasons of convenience, is celebrated in America on the Sunday following the sixth of January. It is misleading to call this feast Christmas, because it is more than Christmas. It is the celebration of the two important events in the life of Christ, namely, *His Nativity*, and *His Baptism* in the River Jordan.

This combined celebration of Nativity and Baptism we call with a long compound Armenian word, "Astvadz-a-haytnoutiun," which means, "appearance of God" (among men), Theophany or Epiphany in English. The Baptism of Christ is as important as His Nativity as far as his "appearance" among men, as the Son of God, is concerned. As Christ's Birth is the starting point of His public life, so also His Baptism is the starting point of His public life, and ministry. Besides, it was at His Baptism that the divine voice from heaven revealed, "*He is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3: 17). Therefore, the first thing we have to know about the so called "Armenian Christmas," is that it is celebrated on the sixth of January, secondly that it is the celebration of all events connected with the Birth of Christ, up to His public ministry; the *Birth* and *Baptism* holding the chief place among these various events. In the Armenian Church, on this holy day, a popular ceremony is performed. It is called "Jur-orhnek," "blessing of waters." It is performed in commemoration of Christ's Baptism.

The question which I am sure will be asked by almost everybody in this connection will be: Even granting this united celebration of the Nativity and Baptism of Christ, why is it that Armenians are the only Christians celebrating this feast on the sixth of January and not on December twenty-fifth, as all the other Christians do? The answer briefly is this:

The exact day and year of Christ's birth have never been satisfactorily established, because nothing definite is said about the date in the Gospels.



*But it is a historical fact that the celebration of Christ's Birth on January sixth in all the Christian Churches goes further back than that of December twenty-five.*

A Catholic book, defending the Catholic form of Christianity, while giving the approximate dates of the institution of various church festivals, mentions Christmas in these words: "Christmas celebrated first on January sixth, kept on December twenty-fifth in Rome about 340." The reason for changing is given as follows, again by another Catholic author: "The Lord was born in the month of January on the same day on which we celebrate Epiphany, (i.e., on the sixth of January), for, of old, the feast of the Nativity and Epiphany were kept on one and the same day. The reason why our Fathers changed the solemnity celebrated on the sixth of January, and transferred it to the 25<sup>th</sup> of December is as follows: It was the custom of pagans to celebrate the birthday of the Sun on this very day, December 25<sup>th</sup>. In these solemnities and festivals the Christians too were tempted to participate. The leaders of the Church, therefore, decided that the Birth of Christ be kept on this date (i.e., 25<sup>th</sup> of December) to overshadow the pagan festival, and on January sixth, the feast of Epiphany. (Catholic Encyclopedia: Articles, "Christmas" and "Epiphany").

This change, having begun in Rome, spread very quickly to the East and all over the Roman Empire. The change did not penetrate into Armenia, because the Armenians, having no such pagan festival on December 25<sup>th</sup> to suppress, did not see any reason for following the new practice; besides, as they were living almost isolated in their own mountains, no practical inconvenience was arising from their not following the general change. Most of all, however, the Armenians wanted to remain faithful to the ancient custom; so they have kept the old date through the centuries to the present day.

Therefore, the Armenians have a good historical reason for celebrating this festival on the sixth of January. They may have a practical reason, too, in America.

Christmas, as people celebrate it in America, although a most joyous occasion, is nevertheless, so full of excitement and commotion, that they are in danger of losing the real meaning of the day. We have always to keep in mind that Christmas is a religious and spiritual festival, and social festivities connected with it are incidental. To give more prominence to these worldly aspects of the feast than to the real thing is like, cultivating cotton for its seeds rather than for that white precious stuff, the cotton itself. After everything has calmed down and even the New Year has gone by with all its distracting attractions, we can in true spirit, settle down to celebrate the feast which in Armenian is "Asvadza-haytnoutiun," the appearance of God among men; always remembering that it is the "appearing" of a God on earth which has brought to this world that wonderful spirit with which almost everybody feels himself filled.

The briefest and maybe the most complete message of Theophany would be this: The Son of God has appeared on earth, becoming a son of man, in order that sons of men may someday appear in heaven as sons of God. May the Good Lord make us worthy of this glorious destiny.

## CHRISTMASTIDE IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH (A retrospective description of Christmas preparations)

Like other Christians, the Armenians at all times have taken great pains to celebrate Christmas in a manner suitable to the dignity and spirit of the occasion. However, it is well to know that we have no such tradition as "Santa Claus" or a "Christmas Tree." These are entirely of Western origin.



Similarly, we have no "Crèche" (The French word for "crib"), an essential factor of the Christmas celebrations in the Roman Catholic Church, the origin of which is ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi. These traditions, although not formally accepted by the Armenian Church, being in themselves innocent and merely an occasion of good cheer, have in certain countries penetrated into the family and school celebrations of our people.

The Christmas preparations in the Armenian Church have mostly had a religious character. In keeping with the significance and spirit of this Feast, the beginning of the Christmas season is marked by a week of fasting, which begins about *fifty days*, before the actual day of Christmas. This week of fasting, as well as the whole period of fifty days, is considered as a reminder of St. John the Baptist's proclamations about the coming of Christ, and therefore, constitutes an earnest invitation to repentance.

The week preceding Christmas fast is dedicated to some of the famous saints of the Church. These commemorations are called, in our church, "Avak Doner" (Greater Festivals). The services are performed in such splendor and dignity as to give us a foretaste of the greater celebrations ahead of us; this is true particularly in Jerusalem, with which each of these Saints has some personal association. The churches are adorned with special decorations and take on a festive appearance, with brighter lights

than on the days of ordinary services. The faithful come to church in greater numbers. The "Sharagans" or hymns are sung with greater solemnity. All persons bearing the name of the day's Saint receive congratulations.

Almost every one of these Saints is related, in some way or another, to Jesus, and therefore, they, taken together, are known as "The witnesses of Theophany." They are:

*King David*, the most illustrious of the ancestors of Jesus according to the flesh. It was to David that God promised that Christ would be born of his family.

*St. James*, "the Brother of the Lord," is the closest relative of Jesus, being one of His cousins, who afterwards became the first Bishop of Jerusalem. It is on the site of his house that the present splendid Armenian Cathedral of St. James' in Jerusalem is built.

*St. Stephen*, the first among the followers of Jesus to shed his blood for his Master and thus entitled to lead that galaxy of martyrs who constitute the very glory of the Christian Church. His title is "Protomartyr," the First Martyr.

*St. Paul and St. Peter*, the central pillars of the Universal Church. They have played the greatest role in spreading Christianity.

The two brothers, *St. James* (the Elder or the Major) and *St. John*, the Evangelist, were called "Sons of Thunder," because of their great zeal, devotion and love for Christ. They were the "Apostles whom Christ loved."

These church solemnities are followed again by a week of fasting, which is a time of devotion and preparations. These preparations take two different forms; the internal and the external.

The internal or inner preparations consist mainly of prayers, fasting, confessions, penance, and regular daily church attendance. The external are of a physical nature, although symbolically significant in their resemblance, such as cleaning of the house and everything in it. Last minute touches are given to every detail of the preparations, such as final checking of the Christmas shopping to see that everybody gets a new dress and other presents, and making sure of all the ingredients to be used in the different Christmas dishes. In short, no effort is spared so as fully to enjoy the happiness and cheer so characteristic of this most popular of all religious festivals. In spite of the fact that this last week is a period of fasting, and, therefore, of physical deprivation, one cannot fail to sense a feeling of contentment and joy in everybody. For example, fathers feel happy because they have had the joy of buying something new for every member of the family, in addition to the surprises they hold for the actual day of Christmas. Children are happy speculating on the toys and other presents they know they will receive. They try hard to be good, for on their behavior depends whether or not they will receive the presents promised to them. Housewives hustle about the house grumbling about small trifles so as to hide their inner joy and satisfaction—for after all is not this a week of fasting and are they

not expected to observe it strictly? And what glowing joy when the numerous Christmas preparations move on to completion without a hitch! But above all wives are happy because they can get from their husbands almost everything they ask for, since during this season mankind feels kindly toward its own, and husbands hardly ever refuse a pleasure to their wives or children. This is a time when men seem to forget their hardships, for a smile flickers on every face.

On Christmas Eve everybody hurries to Church. Many have been fasting the whole day, neither eating nor drinking, in order to be able to take Holy Communion after the Divine Liturgy, celebrated in the evening. The long readings from the Old Testament—bearing on the coming of Christ—do not seem too long, for it is not the clergy, but the ordinary members of the Church who read these lessons and who bring out their best selves on this occasion. Even the mistakes they make, and their often wavering voices, add a charm to the occasion. Then follows the Evening Liturgy, which is sung with special enthusiasm. After the Divine Liturgy, everybody hurries home, because there is not much time before the long awaited Christmas dinner. The Eve of a spiritual feast within the Church now becomes an occasion for family rejoicings round a table decked with all the delicacies of the season. This is a great day for family reunions; the family table is almost sacred.

In the small hours of the next morning, when most people have had only a short nap or no sleep at all, the bells of the churches toll in the night, ringing out the good news of Christ's Birth. The "Jamgotches" (those who "call" people to church) sing in the streets, "Aysor Don e Sourp Dzununtian, Avedis . . ." (Today is the feast of Holy Birth, glad tidings), "Ov pari Christoniayk, egayk I Sourp Egeghetsi" (O ye pious Christians, come to church). Everybody is up and ready for church. Those coming from afar carry lanterns. The churches are full. Sometimes, people cannot find room in their own church, so they try other churches. All the churches, however humble they may be, are tonight at their best. In the darkness of the night the flickering lights of the candles and lanterns create an atmosphere of heavenly rejoicing in God's house. The air rings with the glorious notes of the Christmas carols, sung with great fervor and solemnity: "Khorhourt Meds yev Skanchely" (Mystery grand and wonderful) and others. Children's thin but merry voices send back echoes. "Christos Dsunav yev Haytnetsav" (Christ is born and manifested). Then the whole congregation sings in unison the "Park i Partzoun" (Gloria in Excelsis).

Towards the end of the Divine Liturgy, practically the whole congregation approaches the Holy Altar to take Holy Communion. It is at this supreme moment that unity is manifested inside the church through the giving of the kiss and greeting of reconciliation and brotherly love. Every Christian leaves the church, carrying with him this same spirit of love into the world. Outside the church, in the faint light of approaching dawn, he

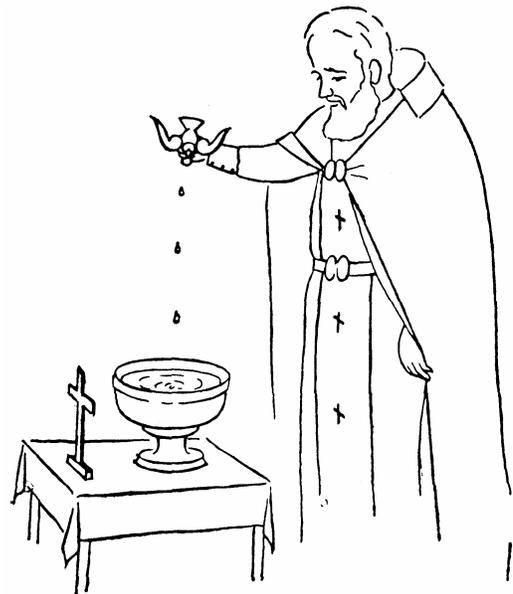
expresses his joy in more informal ways. The day's greeting is "Christos dzunav yev Haytnetsav," or, "Shnorhavor sourp Dzunount" (I wish you a Christmas full of grace). Thus is achieved the ultimate aim of Christmas—the fraternization of all, for, on this day, all those who have been on bad terms with others, are brought together, disputes are settled, wrongs are forgiven, ill feelings are forgotten. Even the sinners feel a certain purification. Almost miraculously, if only for a short time, the angelic wish "Good will amongst men" becomes a reality. It is, therefore, all the sadder, that many of these beautiful traditions and the spirit embodied in them, are daily becoming a thing of the past and their memory growing dimmer and dimmer.

### DESCRIPTION OF A HISTORIC "JUR-ORHNEK" (The Blessing of the Waters)

The celebrations of Christmas in the Armenian church culminate in what is called in Armenian "Jur-orphnek" which means "the blessing of waters". It is a symbolic commemoration of Christ's Baptism. This ceremony was celebrated in ancient times by the riverside or by the seashore. But, because of the difficulties caused by Moslem neighbors and for other reasons, it was later confined to the interior of the churches. This religious ceremony was accompanied by popular joyful festivities.

The following is a description of "Jur-orphnek" in the thirteenth century Sis, the Capital of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, during the reign of the Armenian king Levon the Great (1190-1220), the most glorious figure of this kingdom. We are indebted for this description to a European monk by the name of Canon Willebrand. In 1211 a group of European princes, going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, passed through Cilicia. They stayed there for four months, enjoying the hospitality of the King. Canon Willebrand was one of them. On the Armenian Christmas the King invited his noble guests to the celebration service of "Jur-orphnek". This is how the Canon describes it.

"During the feast of Theophany we came to Sis, where we were invited by King Levon to attend their celebrations. Sis is one of the principal cities and has a great number of rich inhabitants. The feast of Theophany was celebrated thus: At first, for twelve days they did penance, fasted and abstained from fish, wine and oil. On the day of "Jrakalouyts" (i.e., Christmas Eve) they fasted the whole day. In the evening Mass was



celebrated, and this was followed by a divine service and vigil the whole night.

"The next morning they all came to the riverside near the city. King Levon rode on a magnificent horse. His suite rode ahead of him, splendidly dressed and carrying flags, and a thousand men surrounded the King. Roupen, the Heir to the throne, rode behind the King with all the nobles of the land. Then came a host of soldiers, all in splendid garments suitable to the occasion. The soldiers shouted in unison, 'Holy King!' Then the trumpet sounded and the musical instruments struck their notes. Upon this, the King alighted from his horse and entered the tent which had been pitched for him on the bank of the river. Then came the Greek Metropolitan with his suite, and the Armenian clergy, headed by their Catholicos, in great pomp.

"They began to bless the water of the river. The Gospels were read in Armenian and Greek, the cross was lowered into the water, and at the same time, on the right, a pigeon was flown. One person entered the water and when he got to the middle of the river, he called out in a loud voice, 'Long live our King!' Then he called out again saying, 'Let all Christendom never cease to be strong and loft', and all in unison replied, 'Amen'. Then the King and others sprinkled this blessed water on their persons, and the Assyrians, who were present, bathed in the water. After the blessing of the waters, the clergy went back, but the king and those with him went to the races, for a course was laid out near the city of Sis. The refined amusement afforded by these entertainments, I must confess, I am not able to describe. The sons of the nobility took part in fencing and arrow throwing tournaments.

"When the days of Theophany were over, the Great King saw us off with royal honors. We visited other cities over which King Levon ruled".

## LENT

Lent is intended to commemorate the forty days of fasting of Our Lord (Matt. 4:2). In our Church, as well as in all Eastern Churches, the great fast of Lent begins with the Monday following the Sunday of "Poun Parekentan", and not on Ash Wednesday, as is the practice in the Roman Catholic Church. Lent is a period of forty days counting from the above-mentioned Monday to the evening of the Friday before Palm Sunday.

The whole Lenten period, including the Holy Week, is intended to be one of self discipline. In this period, particularly, we should consider our shortcomings, and make efforts to rectify them. It is a time set aside



by the Church for self-examination and self-appraisal, to strengthen our character and to renew our purpose in life. None of us is so perfect that no room is left for further moral and spiritual improvement. We all have faults, weaknesses and sins, and Lent is the most appropriate time in which to make penance and to correct them. To achieve this goal, examination of conscience is the first necessary step, followed by a resolution to be more humble, and more gentle, and to exercise self control over our appetites, which is the main principle behind the practice of Lent.

The practice of abstinence is stricter in the Eastern Churches than in the Western. The Western abstinence consists simply in refraining from the use of meat. In the Eastern Churches it consists in abstaining from all kinds of flesh meat, including fish, and all other animals foods, i.e., dairy products and eggs. We know that today not everyone can observe Lent in its strictest form, but everyone can and should observe at least some part of the Lenten obligation according to his individual requirements. We can abstain from certain pleasures, amusements, shows, festive occasions, etc. We can at least devote more time to private prayer, church attendance, and the reading of edifying good books.

In the Armenian Church all Sundays of Lent have meaningful names, which remind us of various Christian basic truths to meditate upon during that Sunday and the whole week following.

The Sunday preceding the first day of Lent is called in Armenian "Poun Parekentan". "Parekentan" is an Armenian word used for all Sundays preceding a week of abstinence and means "good or happy living". "Poun Parekentan" is the Armenian *Carnival Day*. People who are intending to observe Lent are permitted to give themselves, on this day, to all kinds of feasting and merry making.

According to the Armenian Church calendar this Sunday of "Poun Parekentan" is dedicated to the commemoration of the happy, healthy and care-free life which our first parents, Adam and Eve, enjoyed in the earthly Paradise. This commemoration reminds us of the Christian teaching that man was originally created in a happy state of life, and is destined to eternal and endless happiness by his Creator. The ugly thing which comes between man and his happiness is *sin*, which is disobedience to God's laws, and which is the greatest evil on earth. Sin or disobedience to God's commandments did deprive our first parents, according to the Bible, of their natural happiness. Sin is the only thing which deprives us from our supernatural or spiritual happiness which we shall enjoy in heavenly Paradise.

The second Sunday of Lent is called "*The Sunday of Expulsion*" and commemorates the exclusion or banishment of Adam and Eve from Paradise as a result of their sin of disobedience. It reminds us of the sad consequences of sin. (Read Gen. 3: 1-24).

The remaining Sundays of Lent are named after the Parable of the main Lesson of the day, read during the Divine Liturgy.

The lesson of the third Sunday contains the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), and therefore is called "*The Sunday of Prodigal Son*". It teaches us how to regain the lost paradise.

The fourth Sunday is known as "*The Steward's Sunday*" (Luke 16: 1-13). It instructs us to use our intelligence to gain and preserve our spiritual life, to use our wealth to relieve the poor and needy, and to help our churches, so that one day we may be received "into the everlasting dwellings".

The fifth Sunday is called "*The Sunday of the Judge*" (Luke 18: 1-8). It reminds us of the importance of prayer in gaining and keeping our eternal happiness.

The last Sunday is called "*The Sunday of Advent*" (Mark, Chapter 13). It reminds us of the last happenings of human history in this world: a) The end of present order of the world; b) The second coming of Christ; c) The resurrection of the dead; d) The Last Judgment; and e) The Inauguration of a new order in the world, "A new earth and a new heaven".

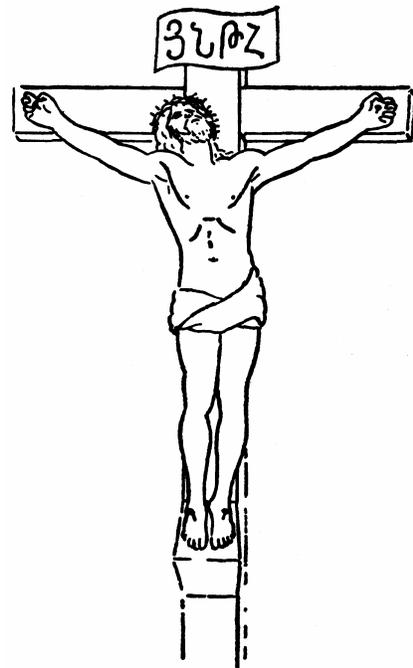
In accordance with the penitential spirit of the Lenten Season, the altars of the Church are closed and Divine Liturgy is said behind closed curtain, in a low voice and in penitential tunes. Besides the regular daily morning service, the Armenian Church has another morning service called "Arevakal" which is generally sung during the Lenten season. This service has beautiful prayers and the hymns which are mostly in supplicative tunes.

In keeping with the spirit of Lent the faithful are expected to abstain from worldly amusements, such as shows and parties. They should devote more time to churchgoing, prayer, penance and other religious exercises.

## HOLY WEEK

Although Holy Week is a very short period, it is the most eventful and important church period for all Christians. During this brief but very important and solemn period, the Church follows closely the last scenes of our Lord's life. On the last three days of the Holy Week, the Church even reproduces, in a kind of sacred drama, the last acts of the Passion of our Lord.

The Holy Week begins with *Palm Sunday*, which commemorates the last and solemn entry of our Lord into the city of Jerusalem, five days prior to His death. It was a triumphant occasion for Jesus and His disciples. The multitude came out of town to welcome Him, waving palms and olive branches – symbols of victory and peace –



and with cries of "Hosanna," which is an exclamation of praise reserved for Almighty God alone. Children also took part in this popular procession, singing psalms of victory. In memory of this event our churches are decorated with palms and olive branches on this Sunday.

There is a very impressive service in the evening of Palm Sunday, called "Opening of the Doors" (Turnpatsek), which is symbolic of our entrance into the Heavenly Jerusalem. This dramatic ceremony is, unfortunately, falling out of use in American Armenian Churches.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the Holy Week are comparatively quiet days.

*Great Thursday*<sup>3</sup> is indeed a great day for all of Christendom. It is the anniversary of the *institution of the Holy Communion*. On this day, at the Last Supper, our Lord instituted the lifegiving Sacrament of the Holy Communion. Divine Liturgy is celebrated in commemoration of our Lord's Last Supper and the first Holy Communion. In the evening takes place the dramatic ceremony of the WASHING OF FEET, in memory of Our Lord's washing of the feet of His disciples, giving a sublime lesson of humility. During the night of Great Thursday, an *all-night vigil* is kept, in memory of the last sleepless night of our Lord on earth. This nocturnal service is called in Armenian "KHAVAROOM," i.e., Darkness. During the service a time comes when all the lights of the church are put out, commemorating the awful darkness which fell upon the earth on the betrayal of the One Who said, "I am the Light of the World". On this night the last words of Christ are read, long and mournful church songs are sung, which aim specifically to portray the last sad hours of our Lord at Gethsemane and before the human law-courts.

*Good Friday*<sup>3</sup> is the most solemn and sad day for Christians. It commemorates the unspeakable SUFFERINGS, CRUCIFIXION, DEATH, and ENTOMBMENT of our Lord. Every good Christian should make a special effort to break the routine of his business at least for a time between 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. and go to some church to meditate about these heart-breaking events. Most unfortunately sometimes the commemorative service of Crucifixion is not practiced in our churches in America. At any rate, the Burial or Entombment service invariably takes place in all our churches in the evening of this great day.

*Great Saturday*, being Easter Eve, the celebrations of a joyous character begin in the evening of this day. In the beginning the lights of the church are put out, then with reading of Isaiah Chapter sixty, they are suddenly put on. It is already the joyous Easter Eve. From the sudden and dramatic lighting of candles in the church, the ceremony of Easter Eve takes

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<sup>3</sup> For all the days of the Holy Week, invariable, the adjective "great" (Avak) is used in the Armenian Church. There is no equivalent for the adjectives "Maundy" (used for Thursday) and "Good" (used for Friday) in the Eastern Churches. However, the expression "Good Friday" is kept here, because it is in so common usage in English speaking circles.

its name in Armenian, "Jrak-a-louyts," i.e., Lighting of Candles. The famous lesson from the Prophet Daniel is read (Ch. 3: 1-90 Armenian or Catholic version), by a chorus leader, who is followed by three other readers who represent the three young men who were thrown in the fire but were not burned, symbolizing the entombment of Jesus who, although buried, "did not see corruption". With the Evening Divine Liturgy the Saturday church celebrations come to a conclusion.

*Easter* is the most solemn feast of the Church. It commemorates the glorious Resurrection of our Lord. The joyous character of Easter is shown by the drastic change in the atmosphere and tone of the worship in the church. The long and heavy services of Lent and Holy Week give way to more gay and triumphant hymns in which the words, "Christos Hariav e merelots," Christ is risen from the dead, are constantly repeated.

Easter Sunday is followed by a period of forty days, during which time there are no saints or fasting days. The period is entirely dedication to the glorification of the Resurrection of our Lord, and, in commemoration of the forty days which Christ spent on earth after His Resurrection. The last day is the ASCENSION DAY, commemorating our Lord's entry into Heaven. Then comes PENTECOST, which is the fiftieth day after Easter, and commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and the Birth of the Christian Church.

## EASTER

With the blossoming of trees and flowers, with the songs of the birds, which are signs that a new cycle of life is beginning in nature, Easter comes to refresh in our minds the memory of the greatest regeneration in history—the glorious Resurrection of our Lord. It is most wonderful that this happy news of new life came from a tomb in a graveyard. Christ's crucifixion, death and burial in a sepulchre were witnessed by a great multitude. But on the third day after His Burial His tomb was found empty.

No one has summarized the facts about the Resurrection better than St. Paul. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, he writes (Verses 1-8 inclusive):

"Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the Gospel, which you receive, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that



that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that

he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”

This is the earliest written record of Christ’s Resurrection, having been written about twenty years after the event took place. Thus our Lord’s Resurrection was attested by more than five hundred eyewitnesses, whose experience, simplicity, uprightness and integrity make their testimony unquestionable. The moral courage which the Apostles exhibited in their preaching and spreading of the Gospel of Christ, can be explained only by their message; and the core of their message was the Resurrection of Christ. The fact that thousands and millions believed the testimony of the Apostles, in spite of all the hardships incurred by their belief, and the triumphant march and spread of the Christian Church, can only be explained by the reality of Christ’s Resurrection.

The Resurrection completed the work of our salvation. By his death Christ freed us from sin, and by His Resurrection He restored to us the most precious gift of God—our new life of grace.

Easter is THE day of joy and happiness for all Christians, because it is the celebration of the greatest victory ever won on earth, the victory over the most unconquerable enemies of mankind, the powers of evil and death. Through His victory over evil and death, Christ gave us the hope and assurance that all His faithful followers will eventually share in this victory.

1) The best known of these traditions is the use of eggs. This custom has its practical origin and symbolic meaning. We must know that almost all the popular customs of the Church had their origin in some practical use; their symbolic meaning usually coming later. Under natural conditions, chickens start laying eggs just about the Easter season. Therefore, people had a good supply of this commodity during this period of the year. And as Easter was a great occasion of joy and happiness, people started to put color on the eggs. They used to color them red to symbolize the joy occasioned by the victory of Christ.

This custom of egg coloring is found all over the Christian world, both in the East and in the West. Little by little the use of eggs assumed a symbolic meaning as well. The egg being a symbol of life, became a symbol of Christ’s coming to life. As life comes out of an egg, in a similar way, Christ came to life out of His sepulchre.

2) The Easter Rabbit or Easter Bunny is entirely a Western custom and is unknown in the East. The rabbit is also a symbol of fertility and represents Spring rather than Easter.

3) Easter was celebrated for three days in the old country. The Monday and Tuesday following Easter Sunday were also days of rest and

time for families to visit each other. Easter Monday, although it is a memorial day according to the Armenian Church calendar, was one of the most joyous days of the year. On this day the cemeteries were places of popular sports and picnics. The people used to eat their dinner near the tombs of their loved ones and invite all the poor people of the neighborhood to come and take part in their food and rejoicing. This was a kind of attempt to bring even to the departed souls the joyous spirit of Easter. It was also a popular way of expressing and celebrating the victory gained over death.

4) The Blessing of the House is another custom of Easter time. The parish priest visits the houses of the members of his parish and blesses them. Easter is the day for visiting one another and sharing and conveying the joy of the day. The priest is a spiritual member of each and every family of his parish. He must visit all his parishioners on Easter Sunday, as a member of the family.

The priests in those good old days did not receive any set salary. They depended entirely on the free gifts of their parishioners. It was very natural for the parishioners to offer, on such a joyful occasion, a little gift to their priest to express their thanks and appreciation for the spiritual services that this humble servant of God used to give to the whole congregation without monetary recompense. It is most deplorable that in this material world of ours the spirit of things disappear faster and easier than the shell or body of them. But it is the spirit that gives life and significance to any custom. Once the spirit is lost, then the visible part also, little by little, loses its beauty and meaning and dies out. This is what is happening to this most meaningful custom of house blessing.

5) Another important custom or practice of Easter is the taking of Holy Communion without fail. Together with right faith and good works, Holy Communion is a most important factor in making us worthy Christians. Easter will have little value, or no value at all, if we do not take Holy Communion. It is the duty and privilege of every Christian to partake at the Lord's Table at least on Easter Day. Christ will rise in our hearts on Easter Morning if we ourselves approach Him at the Altar with a clean heart and humility.

6) The traditional greeting of the Day is: "Christ is risen". The answer is: "Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ".

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It is worthwhile to know that Easter occupies a central position among the days of the year, not only from the point of religious importance but also from the point of church-calendar making. When preparing a church calendar, the first thing a calendarist does is to find the date of Easter. With the exception of a few "immovable" holy days, all the other "movable" days

take their place in the year according to the position which Easter occupies in the year.<sup>4</sup>

The day of Easter is determined in accordance to the following rule: Easter is celebrated on THE FIRST SUNDAY following the FIRST FULL MOON following SPRING DAY, i.e., March 21. According to this rule Easter may occur on any Sunday between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup>. This rule was set at the famous Church Council of Nicea, in 325, which also formulated the Christian Creed, which is known as the "Nicene Creed".

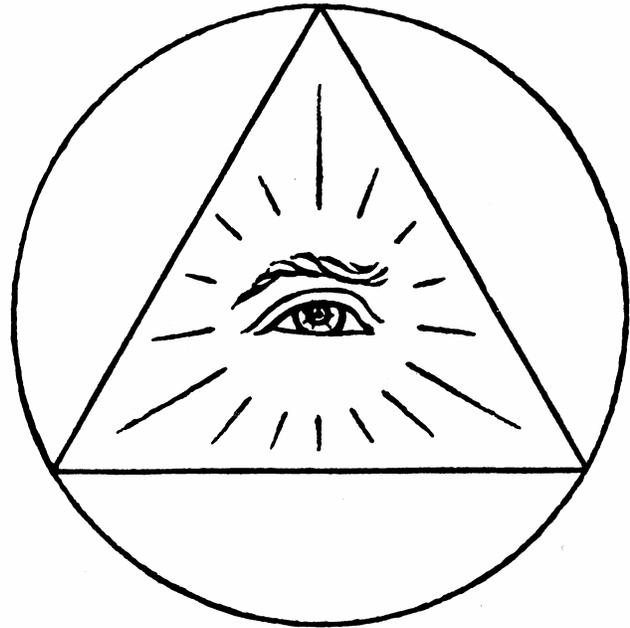
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<sup>4</sup> By "immovable" holy days, we mean those feast days which have a set date which does not change. For instance, Western Christmas falls always on December twenty-five; the Eastern Theophany invariably comes on January sixth; the Feast of Annunciation falls always on April seventh. There are also some "semi-movable" Holy days which fall on the nearest Sunday of a set date. For instance, Astvadzadzin (St. Mary's Day) is always celebrated on the Sunday nearest to August fifteenth; Holy Cross is celebrated on Sunday nearest September fourteen. There are very few of these "immovable" or "semi-movable" holy days in the Armenian calendar. Most of the other feasts are "movable," which means that they do not occur on the same date each year. Easter is the leader and controller of these movable days. All the movable feasts come early or late in the year according to the early or late occurrence of Easter.

# **Fundamental Tenets**

## RELIGION

To be a happy and normal human being man needs not only food, clothing, shelter and social enjoyments, but also religion. If religion is lacking in human life, then something very vital is missing, and man will not be a happy creature. Religion is as vital for us as eating and drinking, and all those who are not practicing it, cannot be happy people, in the true sense of the word. What is more important, without religion man can not achieve his ultimate destiny, for which he is created.



Religion is the basis of a good life, the foundation of morality for the individual and for Society. An individual without religion is like a ship without a rudder.

Religion puts man in contact with God, who is the fountain of life, love and inspiration. Take away religion from man, and you make him simply a walking machine who knows not where he is going.

No force in human history has exercised so great an influence upon the life, thought and civilization of mankind, as has religion. It has put its imprint upon man's law, has colored his art, and has created the atmosphere for his literature.

It supplies the answers to man's deepest questionings: Whence have I come? Whither am I going? What is the meaning and purpose of human life? How can I achieve my ultimate destiny? In one word, religion concerns itself with the deepest desires and aspirations of man.

Religion, in its simplest definition, is the relation of man to God. This relationship consists, in the first place, in voluntary subjection of the creature to his Creator. This sense of dependence upon God constitutes the very essence of religion. In the Christian religion, God, whose sovereignty we acknowledge by acts of prayer and praise, adoration and thanksgiving, is a *personal God*, with power to hear and answer. He is not a vague, supreme being without intelligence. Where God is identified with a blind force or power, there true religion ceases to exist. What would be the sense of talking to or adoring the all powerful air or the universal force of gravitation? The belief in a personal God, Who possesses wisdom and will, constitutes the core of our concept of God.

Is there a duty falling upon all mankind to render homage and to worship God? Some people would say, "No, that is a privilege which may or may not be exercised, according to the whim or option of the individual". It is true that man is free to worship or not to worship God. That is why no state legislature enforces or forbids the exercise of religion upon its citizens. Nevertheless, there exists a compelling MORAL obligation upon every human being to render homage and adoration to God. We are physically free to commit theft or murder, but we are under a moral obligation not to do so. Thus, it is with the worshipping of God; while we are free not to attend a church, yet we are under the most serious obligation to render God the homage of gratitude and worship and love due Him. Why? Simply because man owes his very existence to his Creator and is dependent upon Him both for body and soul. Without the sustaining power of God, we would cease to exist. Out of His infinite goodness God has lifted us from the valley of nothingness to the mountain of existence. It follows from this that man should acknowledge his dependence upon God and proclaim his gratitude to Him. This is a law of nature. This is a dictation of reason. This is a command of God. The failure to make such an acknowledgement constitutes a serious violation of the whole moral order. Thus, the rendering of homage to God is not a matter of option or caprice, it is a matter of strict obligation. It binds every creature born into this world, whether he be white or colored, rich or poor, old or young, king or beggar, scientist or farmer. It is man's first obligation.

Man naturally pays homage to real greatness, wherever found; he is naturally attracted by goodness and love. God has all these things in perfection, because God is Perfection, Life, Love, Wisdom and Power. When, therefore, man reads His greatness in the marvels of creation, His love and goodness in the order of nature, His providence in the ordering of human life, then if a man is in full possession of his senses, stretches his hands upwards exclaiming, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts". The sin of irreligion, therefore, is one of the most grievous which a creature can commit.

Seeing the vast number of people who rarely or never enter through the door of a church, we can say that there is no call which needs to be sounded more loudly or more persistently in the ears of our people, than that of the duty of rendering homage and worship to God, the Creator. It is man's first and supreme duty. This duty is absolute, universal and indispensable.

Religion, faith and Christian idealism have been the most precious heritage of the Armenian people. Signs are not wanting, however, that this religious faith, which was once so strong in their national life, is fading away through the failure of many to practice it. Religion, like all living things, grows through use, and decays through disuse.

We have to put first things first. It is time to put God on the throne of our lives, to thank Him for the blessings which He has poured out upon us, to obey His commands and to render Him the homage of adoration and love which are His due. We have to remember that we can kill faith by failing to practice it.

The greatest enemy of religion is indifference. This is the first stage of the spiritual sickness that leads to spiritual death. "Nothing," said a religious leader, "is so fatal to religion as indifferentism which is at least half infidelity".

Our fathers had a better understanding of their religion and had a deeper appreciation of its power; so much so that they were ready to give even their lives to preserve it. It their offspring, who are flourishing now in this glorious country of the United States, also recognize the power of religion, they may be sure that it will help them to live richer, nobler and more Godlike lives. That is the ultimate aim of our Christian religion.

May God gives us at least enough common sense to see the importance of religion in our daily lives, and to practice it by all means which God provides for us through the Church. May God grant us the power to be normal and perfect human beings, in order that we may achieve our ultimate destiny of inheriting the heavenly life, and there also, in eternal happiness, with Angels and the Saints, we may glorify the name of the most Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST

The main teaching of the Christian Church is *Jesus Christ* Himself.

In Armenian Church circles, sometimes, people put so much emphasis upon the importance of the Armenian Church as such, and her cultural and national values, that they often forget the central reality in their religion. In fact, without Jesus Christ, there is no Christian Church nor Christian culture. Christ is the soul and center of Christian religion. The first instruction in our religion is to love and adore our Lord Jesus Christ and to follow His teachings.

It is true that Christ was a man like us; a man who could cry on seeing the tears of the helpless sisters at the death of their brother, Lazarus. He could weep over Jerusalem, the glorious capital city of His nation, foreseeing its inevitable doom. He could feel the fatigue of long journeys and ask for water to quench His thirst. However, He was also and at the same time God. *He was God in human flesh.* In Him mankind witnessed the incarnation of God's love, wisdom, and power.

The life and teaching of Christ has been transmitted to mankind chiefly through the Gospels. We Christians believe that the Gospels are divinely inspired. Apart from this, the Gospels are historical documents, the

genuineness and the reliability of which have withstood the acid test of scientific investigation.

No matter what people say or believe about Christianity, today no book is as much in demand as the Gospels. The New Testament is the greatest book in the world and the best seller of all times. To be unfamiliar with this masterpiece is to be spiritually illiterate.

The greatest fact, which men of this materialistic era are inclined to forget, is that Christ is the fullness of Divine revelation. It is not His teaching which makes Christ the greatest figure in history. It is *His Divine Person* which differentiates Him from other religious leaders. The whole structure of His teaching stands upon His Person.

If Christ is not God, but a mere man, even though the greatest of men, then His teaching has no divine authority behind it, no mark of uniqueness which would differentiate it essentially from any other religion.

We see in the Gospels that when Jesus speaks, He speaks not as an ordinary teacher, but with divine authority. For example, after that long and magnificent sermon which is known as the "Sermon on the Mount", this was the impression of his hearers as recorded in the Gospels; "When Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His teaching for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes". The latter were the teachers of religion of His time.

On one occasion Christ asked His disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter said, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16: 16). If Peter were mistaken, or carried away by his enthusiasm, it would have been the duty not only of Christ, whom we know from the Gospels, but of any other honest man, to correct Peter and remove a false impression. On the contrary, Jesus confirmed the truth of what Peter said, by assuring him that his answer was divinely revealed to him. It is obvious that this expression, "the Son of the living God", is not used for Christ in the vague sense in which all good Christians are children of God. We are sons by grace and adoption; Christ is Son by nature.

No less dramatic is the even which occurred before the supreme court of the Hebrews, that judge Christ. Christ was charged with the crime of claiming divine honors. According to Jewish religious law, this offence was punishable by death. The high priest addressed Christ in these solemn words: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us if thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26: 63). Jesus knew full well that, if He answered in the affirmative, He would be signing His own death sentence. If He was not the Son of God, He would simply say "No" and be free. But without a moment's hesitation, or the slightest equivocation, He answered clearly, "Thou hast said it" (Matt. 26: 64), which means: "I am indeed Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus not only said, "I and the Father are one; whosoever has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14: 9), but He confirmed His divinity with

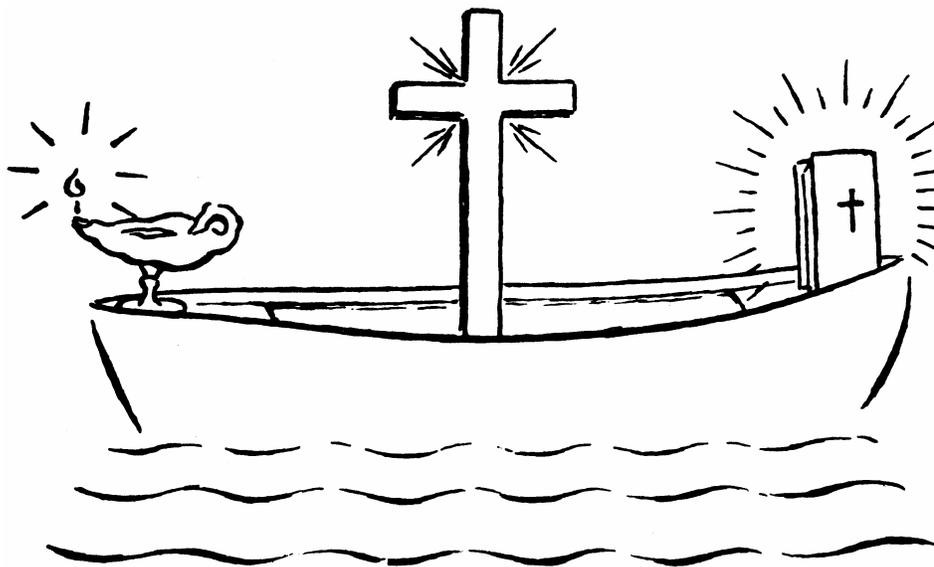
signs and miracles, and on more than one occasion appealed to His audience to believe His works if they did not believe in His words.

Even the Roman centurion, who supervised the crucifixion of Jesus, seeing the signs and wonders occurring at the time of the Saviour's death, was forced to cry out his belief: "Indeed this man was the Son of God" (Mk. 15: 39).

So universal was the belief in the Divine Sonship of Jesus in the early Church, that they looked upon this as the distinguishing mark of true Christians. All those who denied this simple but basic truth were branded as heretics.

The evidence of the divinity of Jesus would be incomplete, if we did not consider also the testimony of our fathers. They speak and testify concerning this truth, not merely with words, but with the far greater eloquence of their sufferings and death. Their life blood, which they gave for the sake of their Savior, has placed upon their faith the seal of conviction which neither time nor eternity can break.

## THE CHURCH, THE TRADITION AND THE BIBLE



This subject is very extensive. It almost covers the whole field of Christian teaching. Therefore without entering into details my aim will be mainly: a) to show the relationship of Church, Tradition and Bible to each other, b) then I shall give a general idea about each one of them, and c) finally I shall conclude that one is as important as the other.

The first thing we must know is that the Church, the Tradition and the Bible are inseparable from one another, as light and heat are inseparable from the sun. The Church must have a Tradition and a Bible. The Bible and Tradition can only exist in a living Church.

Among the three, the Church definitely comes first, both from the point of time and from the point of importance. Generally speaking the Church is the living congregation in which God's Spirit works, where God's will prevails, and which can produce people who can receive the revelation of God, and transmit it with powerful words to their fellow men. Such people are called prophets.

In this sense the Church was from the beginning. It was created with the first man who had the vision and intimate knowledge of God. The Church of God had a new beginning with Noah. It acquired a new character with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was organized with Moses, preserved and defended by the Prophets. This is the Church of the Old Testament.

Before Moses and long after him there was no such thing as a Bible. But there was the Chosen People of God, the Church, and its Tradition. In the families of God's Chosen People, from one generation to another, had passed on the traditions of the Garden of Eden, of the Deluge, the saving of the few from the Flood, the bird with the green olive branch in its bill, the rainbow on the skies of Mt. Ararat, the sacrifice of Isaac, the lentil soup of Jacob, the sale of Joseph, his promotion in Egypt as the chief executor of the pharaoh, the Commandments and all the rest of Bible stories and instructions.

Therefore *most of the Bible was tradition before it was put into written form*. The contents of the Old Testament were gradually written down within the nine centuries preceding our era.

The Church of God had a new beginning, a new content, and a new covenant with Christ. The aim of the Ancient or the Old Testament Church was to prepare the ground for the coming of Christ. Almost everything in the Old Testament, the law of Moses, the priesthood, and the writings of prophets, all were pointers and preparation for the *new order, the new Church of God*, which was to be established with the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

Christ came and established the real Church, the Christian Church. His teachings about the Church may be briefly summarized as follows:

a) It is an organized society, with leaders and ministers with special powers. "Truly, I say to you [to Apostles], whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (Matt. 18: 18).

b) It is a visible society, a new Church to replace the Jewish Church which rejected Jesus. "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21: 43).

c) In this Church, or "The Kingdom of God," bad is mingled with good, and it will be so until the day of last judgment (The parable of the weeds: Matt. 13: 24-43).

d) Its extent is universal (The parable of the net thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind: Matt. 13: 47-50).

e) No power on earth will be able to demolish it. "On the rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18).

f) The New Testament teaches that the Church is a hierarchical organization, which means that certain people of this society will be given certain powers from the Holy Spirit of God, enabling the recipients to fulfill special functions in the Church. "God has appointed in the church first Apostles, then prophets, then teachers" (I Cor. 12:28). The ministers of the Church are entrusted with threefold powers of *governing* the Church, *sanctifying* the people and *preaching* the Gospel (I Tim. 3: 2, Titus 1: 9).

g) The appointment to these offices is made by a solemn *laying on of hands* (I Tim. 5: 22). This laying on of hands is not a mere formality without practical import. A special gift is conferred by this laying on of hands as the following words of St. Paul indicate: "I admonish thee that thou stir up the *grace of God* which is in thee by the *laying on of my hands*" (I Tim. 7: 6).

Summing up the above-mentioned points, it follows that Christ established His Church as a visible and organized society under accredited leaders. Her members are united by the profession of a *common faith*, by the partaking in *Sacraments*, by participation in a *common worship*, and by being loyal to a *common authority*. *The Church is a divine society, established to be the means of salvation for all mankind.*

Incorporation into the Church alone can unite us to the family of God. Moreover it is to the Church that Christ has committed those means of grace through which the gifts He earned for men are communicated to them.

The Church alone dispenses the sacraments which are the means and channels of God's graces (Matt. 18: 17).

Outside the Church these gifts cannot be obtained.

From all this there is but one conclusion: Union with the Church is not merely one out of various means by which salvation may be obtained; *it is the only means.*

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As for the Tradition, it is the *sum total of the Deposit of our Faith* which is transmitted from generation to generation.

The earliest source of Christian Tradition is the Mother of Christ, the Holy Virgin Mary, particularly the Tradition about the childhood and the early life of Jesus. Then come the Apostles, who were the eye witnesses of Christ's miracles and public life. They were, so to speak, ear witnesses to His preachings and sermons. *All the contents of our present Gospels were told by the word of mouth before they were written.* Christ preached orally.

He did not write a book. He sent His Apostles to preach, not to write books. There were many acts and words of Christ which were never written down, as the last words of the Last Gospel implies: "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21: 25).

Therefore the New Testament also was a part of Christian oral or unwritten Tradition before it was crystallized in the present four books of the Gospels. There were many revealed truths which were not written in the Gospels but were carried from generation to generation by oral tradition until they were incorporated into the early writings of the Church Fathers or into the collection of Church canons and practices which is called the "Constitution of the Apostles".

St. Paul, who wrote most of the Epistles in the New Testament, never intended writing down everything he knew about Christian revelation, nor replacing his oral teaching by writing.

The Church is the official and authentic organ to transmit the Traditions in their purity and integrity.

\* \* \* \*

Coming to the Bible. The Holy Scripture is included in the Holy Tradition, not only because its contents were part of oral tradition before they were written into books, but also because the Bible itself, as a book, is preserved, multiplied, and transmitted to the coming generations, as the most important part of the general deposit of the Christian Faith.

The Bible is the collection of sacred writings which the Church of God has solemnly recognized as inspired. It was handed down to the Christian Church as the written record of God's revelation to mankind.

The Bible contains many books which differ widely from one another in subject, style, origin, and scope. However the Bible is distinctly made up of two collections, which correspond to the two distinct periods of time in the history of man, B.C. and A.D. The bigger and the older part, originally written mainly in Hebrew, is the Old Testament. The more recent and smaller collection, written originally in Greek, is the New Testament. Yet these two sets of writings are most closely connected with each other in regard to doctrines, events, customs, and even ways of expression. Above all both collections have the one and the same religious purpose, the one and the same inspired character. They form the two parts of a great organic whole, *the center of which is the person and mission of Christ.*

The Bible, therefore, is the inspired record of God's revelation; it contains those revealed truths which the Holy Spirit of God wishes to be transmitted in writing. Yet we must keep in mind that all revealed truths are not contained in the Bible. Neither is every truth in the Bible revealed truth,

if by revelation is meant the manifestation of hidden truths which could not otherwise be known. Many of the writers of the Scriptures received their information through the channels of ordinary knowledge. But the human authors wrote the Bible under the influence of Divine inspiration. It is the Church which says what books belong to the Bible.

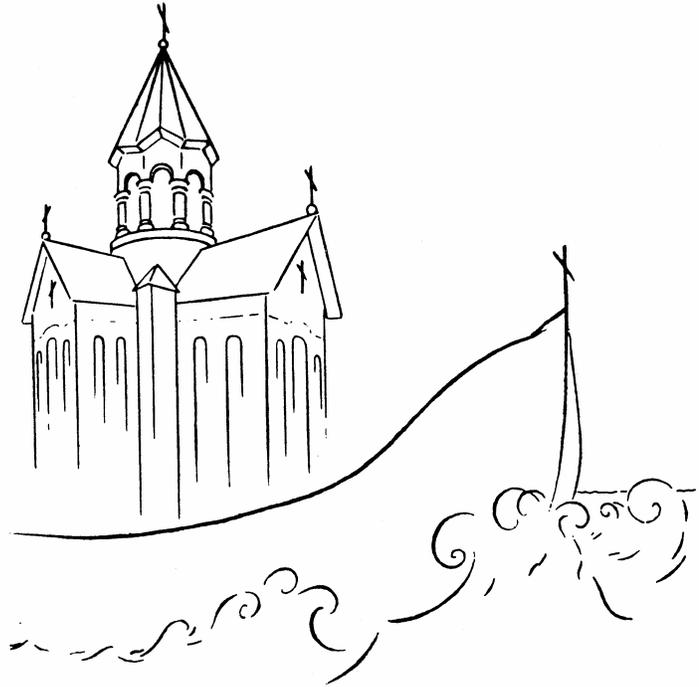
In the Bible we can find all the literary forms known to us, most of them with Eastern content and quality. The greatest writers, orators, and intellectual leaders of all centuries have turned to the Holy Bible as containing books worthy of admiration, constant study and imitation. The Bible has been the best seller of all centuries. It has the widest and deepest influence upon the minds and hearts of men. The secret of this influence lies in the fact, that while other literatures are but man's productions, *the Bible is indeed God's production*. We can conclude and summarize our talk about the Bible with the words of St. Paul: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3: 14-17).

Holy Scripture is therefore *not the only* source of Divine revelation made by God to His Church. The Protestant principle that Bible and nothing but the Bible is the source of Christian truth is not acceptable to our Church or to the Roman and Greek Churches.

Side by side with the Scripture there is Tradition. In other words, side by side with the written revelation there is the oral revelation. It is impossible to be satisfied with the Bible alone for the solution of all religious questions. Nowhere is it indicated in the Bible that the Bible is the sole deposit of faith. There are in fact Divine traditions not contained in the Bible. Therefore we must not confine ourselves, while teaching in Sunday schools, to the Holy Scriptures alone. The Traditions of the Church is as inspiring as the stories of the Old Testament. Along with the teachings of the Bible the instructions based on the Tradition are also important for our salvation.

## THE CHURCH

While speaking about the Church, the first thing one should know is that the Church which Christ established is an *organized* religious body, and not a loose fellowship of those who just profess Christianity as their religion. It is the brotherhood of *baptized* people who are firmly united in the same *faith* and are spiritually nourished by the same *Sacraments*, and are under the same *spiritual discipline* and authority. The term "Kingdom", by which Our Lord used to call His Church, implies organized society.



The next thing we have to know or remember about the Church is that as far as it is revealed to us, the Church is the *only* means of salvation. By salvation we mean attainment of eternal life for which man is created. Man can acquire his eternal salvation in the Church only, which means that there is no salvation outside the Church. This, of course, does not mean that membership alone in the Church assures our salvation. Not *every* member of the Church is saved, but *true* members alone. "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved", said our Lord, "but he who does not believe shall be condemned". He would not have given this warning of condemnation to unbelievers unless He had furnished the *means* whereby they could believe. The Church is the means through which men can have saving faith. All men must join the Church, if they do not want to be condemned.

It is true that the Church should be composed only of saints, i.e., of good Christians. But the greatest part of the activities of the Church is for sinners only. We may say, without erring against the truth, that all the members of the Church are more or less sinners. We all fall away from our Christian ideals at some time or other. One of the most important aims of the Church is to call and to bring us back to the fold of God's people and to righteousness.

Until we attain heavenly life, there will always be in this world the darkness of sin, the pain of evil. Christ Himself spoke of bad fish mixed with good ones; of cockle, that useless weed, which grows with the wheat.

The next important thing that we should know is that the true Church has certain marks or qualifications which must be kept faithfully. The Church is *One, Apostolic, Catholic, and Holy*.

*Unity of the Church:* By ascribing *unity* to the Church we mean that she is one in *origin*, one in *aim* and one in the *means* that she uses to attain her aims. This oneness is expressed in the Churches' *doctrine, worship, and government*. All the members of the Church profess one Faith and are animated by one Holy Spirit, adore one and the same Holy Trinity, and obey one discipline and order of administration. Applying the above-mentioned statements to our particular Church, we can say that no matter where the Armenian churches are located, no matter under what conditions they exist, all of the Armenian local or individual Churches confess the one and the same faith, and practice one and the same form of worship and perform the same Sacraments, and obey the same Canons.

However, for a Church it is not enough to be one in doctrine, in sacrament and in worship. It is all important the Church should also have one and the same *government*. According to the canon laws of the Armenian Church, every local church must be a part of a lawfully established Diocese and all dioceses should be under the supreme head of the Church. Therefore, any Armenian Diocese, or a local church, which is not in the administrative framework of our Church has, knowingly or unknowingly, thrown itself outside the pale of the Armenian Church.

*Apostolicity of the Church:* The second mark of the Church is its Apostolicity. It means that the Church of today is identical with the Church which was started by the Apostles, who were the first members and the first preachers and propagators of it. The Church is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles . . . Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ep. 2: 20). The Church is Apostolic because its rulers, the Bishops, derive their office and authority by lawful succession from the Apostles. That is why we call our Bishops "Surpazan," which means "of Holy Lineage" that is to say, direct successors of Apostles. Churches that have no connection with a Diocesan Bishop or have severed their ties from their lawful bishops, have lost their apostolic qualification. The Church is Apostolic because it holds intact the doctrine, the teachings and the traditions of the Apostles.

*The Church is Catholic:* the word Catholic means *universal*; which means that the teachings, the faith, the sacraments of the Church are not limited for certain groups of men or for certain nations or races. The teachings of the Church should be preached to all without distinction of race, color or class. The redemptive and saving acts of the Church are essential for everybody. The Church must be for all people of every nation and for all times, and must be preached everywhere.

*Holiness of the Church:* The last, but most important mark of the Church is *Holiness*. The Church is Holy because its Founder is Holy and it is sanctified by Him. Its function is to make her members holy. The Church

provides the means for its members to lead a Holy life. The Church is Holy because it is separated from the profane world outside. Furthermore it teaches a Holy doctrine in faith and in morals.

The fact that there are sinners, hypocrites, false members in the Church does not militate against her character as Holy, for her task is always to inspire and stimulate all her children toward greater holiness.

The Church that has all these four essential Marks in their true sense is called *Orthodox*. One must not confuse the word "Orthodox" with the Greek Church, nor the word "*Catholic*" with the Roman Church. These terms, *Orthodox* and *Catholic*, are attributes of the Church. If one church uses either of them permanently as a qualifying adjective for herself, it is no reason for other churches to forgo using it in the fear that they will be confused with the church that uses them as her proper name. When people used the word "Apostolic" for the Armenian Church in U.S.A., it is no cause for the other churches, which are Apostolic in every sense of the word, to refrain from using it as an attribute of their church.

Since the days when Armenians first adopted Christianity as their state religion, they have made great sacrifices and have endured unbelievable hardships to preserve their faith intact. It has grown in the hearts of our forefathers and has strengthened their souls, so much so, that they could say with the courage of a hero and with the determination of a martyr, "From this faith no one can sever us." This was true in the land of our fathers, and should remain true today and for centuries to come in any land, including the United States of America.

## HOLY ETCHMIADZIN



The Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin is one of the first known Christian churches ever built above ground.

Christianity was a persecuted religion in the first three centuries of our era. Therefore Christians were not permitted to build their own church buildings and were forced to pray in catacombs, or in private houses. It was in the fourth century that Christianity became a free religion, first in Armenia in 301 A.D. and then in the Roman Empire in 323 A.D. After these dates Christians started to build their own houses of worship above ground; Etchmiadzin was the first Armenian Church of this kind. It is now the oldest Armenian house of prayer in existence. It was built in the year 303 A.D. by St. Gregory the Enlightener or the Illuminator, the great Apostle of the Armenian people, through whose efforts our country accepted Christianity as its national religion.

The Holy Etchmiadzin is the Seat or headquarters of the supreme head of the Armenian Church. In other words as the Vatican is the center of the Roman Catholic Church, so Holy Etchmiadzin is the center of the Armenian Church.

The word Etchmiadzin literally means "The only begotten (Son of God) descended". It is so called in commemoration of a beautiful vision which St. Gregory saw in connection with this holy place.

According to a very old story<sup>5</sup>, St. Gregory, after converting the king of Armenia and with him the whole country to Christianity, was thinking one night about the place and the shape of the church which he was contemplating to build as the first house of worship in the capital city of the Kingdom of Armenia. As he was deep in his meditations he suddenly saw a beautiful vision: The heaven was opened, and a blazing flood of light poured upon the earth. Through that light a parade of angels started coming down to earth; at the head of this heavenly procession there was a tall and glorious figure. He was Our Lord Himself, the Only Begotten Son of God. He had a golden hammer in his hand. Descending from heaven down to the spot, where the present Church of Etchmiadzin is standing, he struck the ground three times with the hammer. Instantly a mighty golden column rose on the spot and then it was transformed into a magnificent church. Before the vision was faded away the form and the lines of this church were indelibly impressed in the mind of St. Gregory.

From that day on, in 303 A.D., a splendid church has always stood on the same place for over 1600 years. Around this Cathedral centered the national and religious life of Armenians.

Etchmiadzin has been one of the important Christian centers in the East. It has been one of the important bastions of Christian faith in the Near East. The faith has been maintained and preserved in Etchmiadzin in spite of all persecutions and insults to which Eastern Christianity has been

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<sup>5</sup> Told by historian Agathangelus, who was, according to a written tradition, the secretary for foreign affairs of King Diritad, and therefore, a contemporary of St. Gregory. It is assumed that Agathangelus' Book of History was originally written in Greek, and it was translated into Armenian in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. This book is the main source about the life of St. Gregory and the conversion of Armenia to Christianity.

subjected by non-Christian neighbors. It has been under all sorts of regimes and rules, barbarian, pagan, and Moslem, but it has survived all of them. They have all gone into history. Etchmiadzin is still standing and functioning. Here seed of Christianity have thrived when they might have been choked off by weeds of idolatry or by other religions. Here it was preserved by a devotion of heart and sacrifice of blood surpassed by no other church.

Etchmiadzin, as the headquarters of the Armenian Church, has played a very important part in Armenian history. It has helped in shaping the Christian character of the nation and in creating and guarding the spiritual heritage of the Armenian people. When the Armenians lost their political power they looked upon Etchmiadzin as the unifying center for all Armenians. In those disastrous periods of their national life, when invading barbarians crushed every human effort for freedom and higher aspirations, it was in the Church and its center, Etchmiadzin, that the Armenian people found their collective will for survival.

With the dispersal of an important part of the Armenians to the four corners of the world, Etchmiadzin became the magnetic pole which held together the different communities of Armenians all over the world.

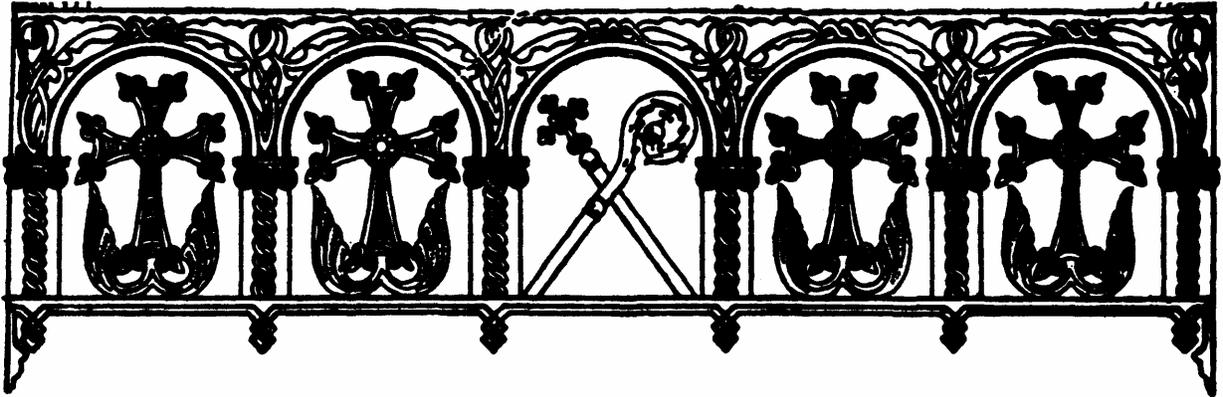
Etchmiadzin has efficiently preserved the love of and the initiative for national education. Before the first world war all the educational establishments in the Russian zone of Armenia were administered by the Church authorities under the supervision of Etchmiadzin. With the creation of an Armenian State in 1918, and its subsequent incorporation into Soviet Union, Etchmiadzin was stripped of all its non-religious privileges and responsibilities and kept only its physical existence. There is a sort of renaissance since the World War II, intensified with the election of His Holiness Vazken I to the See of Etchmiadzin as the 130<sup>th</sup> Catholicos in line of succession to St. Gregory the Enlightener.

Now Etchmiadzin is a religious center from which radiates spiritual guidance with fatherly love and the ecclesiastical authority to the members of the Armenian Church all over the world.

Let us be thankful to God for preserving this Holy place through so many centuries and under as many trying conditions. Let us renew and rekindle our filial attachment and loyalty to this venerable Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

May God grant peace and stability to the whole world. May our Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin stand steady and strong through the centuries to come, for the greater glory of Almighty God now, always, and evermore. Amen.

## THE HOLY CROSS



Symbols occupy a very important place in the Christian religion. They express to us in a visible way some invisible truth which words are unable to convey clearly. A piece of yardage of material, for example, does not have much value or special significance in itself, but once a nation accepts that piece of material for its own flag, that material immediately assumes almost a sacred meaning, because it is the symbol of that particular nation and country.

The Cross is the most sacred symbol of Christianity. It is the sign of the Christian religion. It was the first sign used by Christians, and it will be the last sign to appear in the history of the Church. It is related in the Gospel; once the disciples asked Jesus: "Tell us what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world"? (Matt. 24: 3). He gave a long answer to this question and among many other things said, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (Matt. 24: 30), referring to the sign of the Cross. Christians, especially the Apostolic, Catholic and Orthodox Christians, render great reverence to the Holy Cross.

Every Christian should know why we render so much veneration to this holy sign of the Cross. The answer is that Christ gave His life for our salvation on a cross; from that day on it became a reminder of the great sacrifice that the Son of God made for mankind. That is the reason why the Church from the early days has given so much importance to this sign; that is the reason why the Armenian Church has established so many feasts in honor of the Holy Cross. We have four such holy days.

As this sign reminds us of the greatest sacrifice ever made on earth, the cross has assumed, in Christian vocabulary, the meaning of a life of endurance, courage, and sacrifice. Our Lord once said, "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10: 38); meaning that those who cannot endure moral hardships, those who cannot sacrifice their own selfish and bodily interests for the sake of a higher life of sanctity and honesty, cannot worthily be called Christians.

Sometimes we lament that the Armenian people and Church have had to live in the past in most trying conditions, persecutions and tribulations. We must, however, give thanks to Almighty God, for He has given to this people and Church the strength and the courage to live a life worthy of their faith in such trying conditions. Our Lord's first formal utterings were a praise of those people who experienced similar difficult conditions: "Blessed are the poor . . . "Blessed are they that mourn . . . "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness . . . "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad . . . for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5: 3-12).

The meaning of the Christian Cross, however, will never be understood by the generation of this century of pleasure and materialism. St. Paul already declared this fact long ago: "The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1: 18).

From a Christian standpoint a life without a cross is almost worthless and meaningless. Although most of us are living a most comfortable, even a luxurious life, we are not however entirely free from crosses. The present society in which we live, of which we are a part, unfortunately is made up of individuals who are imperfect, as each and everyone of us is imperfect. Therefore, as a consequence of this human imperfection, which reveals itself in human ignorance, petty jealousies, pride, etc., willingly or unwillingly we will have inevitable troubles in this world. No matter how often we ask God to "deliver us from evil," there always will remain evil on earth. Such is the unfortunate order of this imperfect and wicked world. If we grumble and complain over the hardships that we encounter in this world, then we are not true Christians. We must fight against evil with courage and endurance and at the same time with gentleness and charity; this is the moral significance of the Cross. We must first try to eliminate the evil that is in our soul and then the evil which is in our community. If however, we are unable to do away with these evils, we must bear them patiently, without malice and without complaint. Such is the kind of life which is worthy of Christ, who himself gave the greatest example of forgiveness, forbearance and sacrifice.

We must not ask God to take away our crosses. They are opportunities and channels for us to gain more merit before God and gain more blessedness in heaven. We must ask God to give us wisdom and strength and to increase our courage and patience to bear them bravely. Only then will the blessedness, which our Lord promised to those who show patience to the end, be ours. May God make us worthy of this blessedness.

## ABOUT DEATH

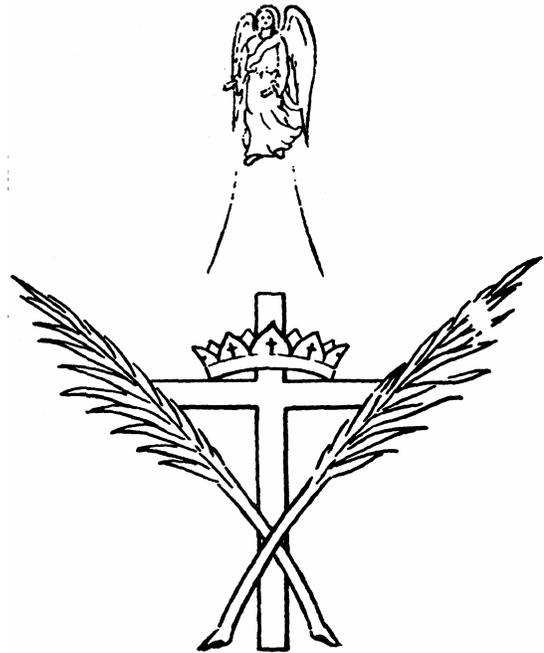
Usually we think and we talk about death as something abstract, something unreal. But on occasions when the casket of a beloved one is laid before our eyes, death becomes for all of us something more than real, something almost tangible.

To us death is the most terrible thing we know. However, the most horrible thing about it is that it lacks timeliness. Everything in our world has its time. The leaves of the trees have their time to fall, flowers to wither, and even stars their time to set. Only death has no regular time of its own. It can strike everywhere, anytime; babies and daddies, young and old, kings and beggars are its victims.

The strangest fact about death is that it seems to strike the innocent and the young, more than the sinner and the old. Wars are grim evidences to this fact. It is the young who die in wars by hundreds and thousands. According to the Bible, death did not first strike Adam, the first man and the first sinner, nor Cain, the first offspring of man and the first killer, but Abel, the innocent, the young and the righteous one. That is why we hear so much about the saying: "whom God loves best, dies first". It looks that heaven needs not only mature men of ripe old age, but children and young people as well, for the formation of eternal humanity. We cannot imagine a perfect society without children and the younger set. The reward of dying young will be that of remaining young and with youthful charm for eternity.

It matters not at what age or at what hour we die. Death cannot come untimely to him or her who is fit to die. One of the Church Fathers has said: "There is but this difference between the death of old men and the young: The old men go to death; but death comes to the young. Let it come when it will, it can do the Christian no harm, for it will be but a passage out of a prison into a palace; out of a sea of troubles into a haven of rest".

Our fear of death is like the terror of children in the night, the night with its darkness, with its uncertainty, and with its feverish dreams. However, when the night passes away and when we awake, it will be the sunlight of eternity. After the darkness of the night will appear God's great morning, lighting up the sky. Someone has this to say about death: "Death to a good man is but a passing through a dark entry, out of one little dusky



room of his father's house, into another that is fair and large, lightsome and glorious".

We picture death as one coming to destroy; let us rather picture it as coming to save.

We think of death, as ending; let us rather think of it as beginning.

We think of it as losing; let us think of it as gaining.

We think of it as parting; let us think of it as meeting.

As the voice of death whispers, "you must go from the earth", let us hear the voice of Christ saying, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest". (Matt. 10: 29).

May the good Lord give this rest and heavenly happiness to all our beloved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ. May God give courage to all of us, who will one day face death.

## **Civic Subjects**

## MOTHER'S DAY

One of the finest customs in the United States of America is the setting aside of one day in the year in honor of the mothers of this land. It is a day in which we want Mother to know that we think of her constantly and that we love her deeply. It is also a day to meditate upon the virtues of motherhood, to appreciate Mother more and even to be inspired by her.

There is nothing in the world that can rival mother's love either in intensity of feeling or sincerity. Love, which is the essence of motherhood, is the greatest thing in this world and in the world to come. One day everything material will pass away, including this world itself, but love shall abide forever.

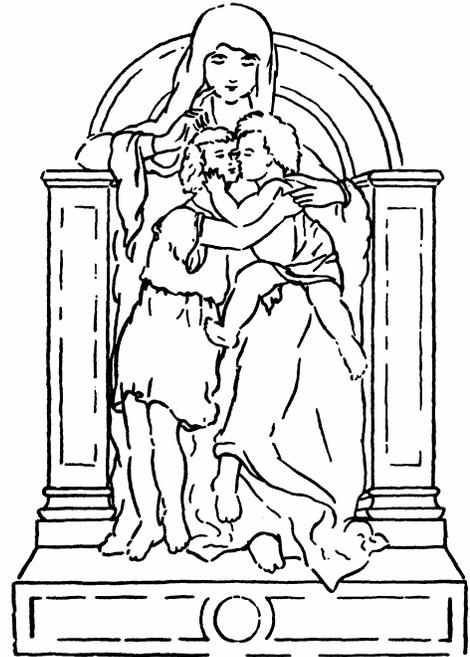
Let us mention briefly, on this occasion, some of the characteristics of the Armenian Mother for which she has been noted.

Her first noble quality has been her whole-hearted devotion to her family. She sacrifices herself, her pleasure and her time for the sake of her children and husband.

The Armenian woman has kept her home life sacred through the centuries. This fact has gained the admiration of well known travelers and historians. No honor can be greater to a real Armenian mother than to see her offspring following this code of purity and family loyalty. Divorce was something practically unknown in Armenia for centuries. Only through our contact with other so-called "civilized nations" has this social curse, divorce, been introduced into Armenian families.

Purity inspires courage and self-confidence. The Armenian woman had this virtue of heroism as well. To protect her honor she fought fiercely. She faced death as a relief rather than be captured to live in slavery. There are many stories, especially during the massacres and deportations of 1915, of many Armenian women who threw themselves from cliffs or jumped into the fires of their burning homes, or into rivers, in order to escape slavery and apostasy. They preferred to die with courage when they saw that it was impossible for them to live with dignity and in their Christian faith.

Another characteristic of the Armenian woman is her great working capacity. She is a tireless housewife. No amount of poverty and difficulty is too great for her to cope with. When she has to toil for the bread and



maintenance of her family, no work is too menial for her, as long as she is earning honorably the daily bread of her family.

The most outstanding characteristic of the Armenian mother has been her piety, her Godliness, and her devotion to her Church and to charitable institutions. She went to church daily, as there were morning and evening church services every day. At her work, she turned her inner eyes to heaven and entreated God to help her in her daily life, to protect her children and to give good health to all sick people. She believed in the power of prayer. She received Holy Communion as frequently as she could and without fail at Easter and Christmas. With great reverence and with a clean heart she approached the Holy Communion, first forgiving others and then seeking forgiveness of others.

Here in America, she works for the building of churches and for their upkeep, giving to these God-pleasing endeavors part of her time. She contributes generously to church and charitable institutions; she gives to work of charity her time and energy, which sometimes are more important and valuable than money itself.

These are some of the characteristics of the Armenian mother. We give thanks to God, on this Mother's Day that there are still wonderful mothers living among us. My prayers shall be to ask God to help us to preserve these good mothers in these United States, because this country needs nothing so much as good mothers. They will be one of the greatest and best contributions to this great country.

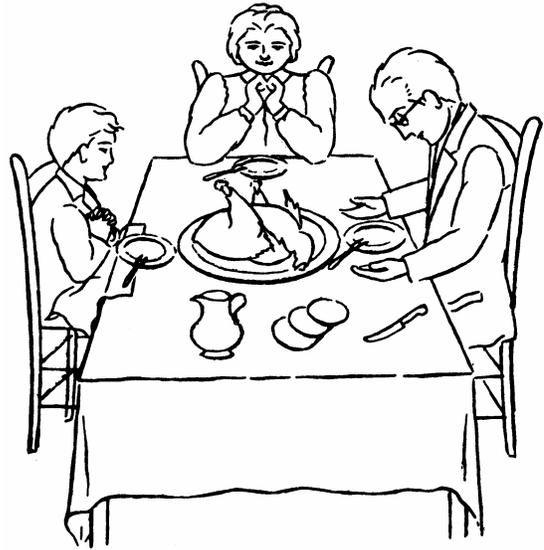
On Mother's Day we openly and lavishly express our deep love and respect for our mothers, with gifts and sweet surprises. However, we can render no greater honor to our mother, deceased or living, than to follow in her footsteps, to carry on in our own family life her devotion, her loyalty, her courage and hard working spirit, and last, but not least, her intense devotion to God, to the Church and community. Such an honor extends far beyond the second Sunday in May into the whole year and into even everlasting life.

Nothing on this earth could be more precious than good mothers. Mothers are the ambassadors of God's love and providence on earth. We all love Mothers.

May God bless all Mothers, giving them patience and wisdom to keep on living their devoted lives on earth as an inspiration for their children and for the greater glory of God.

## THANKSGIVING DAY

Although Thanksgiving Day does not appear on the calendar of the Armenian Church, and although it is a civil holiday, nevertheless, there are good reasons which make it necessary that we should observe it even in our churches. One of the main reasons for this is that the origin and aim of Thanksgiving Day is religious. Another reason is that it is an American holiday, and we, as American citizens, have to observe it, not only by taking the day off but also by attending a church service.



The story of the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth does not need telling as I assume it is familiar to all of us. But mention must be made of the aims and purpose for which this holiday was established. George Washington has put it like this: "As a day of public Thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God."

This proclamation urged the people "to beseech God to pardon our national and other transgressions, to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best".

The expression of gratitude to God for His bounty, when He has supplied the necessary means and resources to satisfy the most primary human needs, is an idea which is by no means exclusively Christian; it belongs almost to all faiths. Nevertheless, in the Christian religion, following the personal example of our Saviour, the obligation of thanksgiving has been emphasized from the very beginning.

The Epistles of St. Paul almost invariably start with expressions of thanksgiving like this: "I give thanks to my God always, Who has blessed us with every blessing in Christ".

Our Prayer Book is full of prayers and hymns of thanksgiving. Our fathers found reasons for gratitude not only for the higher gifts of God, but for the most ordinary things in life. They thanked God, for example, for the light which we enjoy every day: "We give Thee thanks, O Lord our God, Who by Thy visible light hast given joy to all Thy creatures. We give Thee thanks, O Lord our God, Who by the divine light of Thy commandments has enlightened all who believe in Thee." Our fathers gave thanks to God even for that common nightly rest, which we hardly think of as something worthy

to be thankful for. "Let us give thanks unto the Lord, Who by His own mercy has guided us in our daily labor and granted us to come to rest this night."

Indeed, thankfulness to God is the heart of religion. It is nothing else but acknowledging God's Providence and expressing the dependence of mankind on His bounty. It is also the mother of all other virtues. Thankfulness is the act of a noble heart. In hearts that are full of meanness and pride, virtues never grow. Without a sense of thankfulness it is hard, even impossible, to be sociable or religious. It is evident that all of us have our troubles and afflictions. The affliction of each person seems to him to be the greatest in the whole world. Sometimes our troubles blind us to such an extent that we cannot see all the beautiful things which surround us.

The Pilgrim Fathers considered it sufficient to give thanks to God because they had crude dwellings to shelter them, a few wild turkeys to feed them, and an abundant crop which would insure their food supply for the year. As far as our present material needs are concerned, we are a hundred times better off than the Pilgrim Fathers, but we, in our indifference, no longer consider that today to be sufficient grounds for giving thanks to God. In fact, many people do not even consider it necessary to express their thanks to God at all. Today we take many things for granted, and complain when we fail to obtain luxuries that we feel we should have. On Thanksgiving Day we may give half-hearted thanks, while inwardly we are bitter and complain about our bad luck on the other days of the year.

Plato, the famous Greek philosopher, gave thanks to God for three things: first, that God has created him a man and not a beast; second, that he was born a Greek, and not a barbarian; and third, that he was born a philosopher and not a common man. This way of thinking, however well-motivated, is evidently a selfish one. The Christians, that are better taught, turn the streams of their thanks into another channel. They give thanks to God: first, because God has created them after His own image; second, because they have been born and brought up as Christians; and third, and most especially, because God has given them grace to be faithful members of the Church. If this is true, if we really are faithful members of the Church, it is the greatest cause of thankfulness indeed, because it is the greatest grace given by God, and maintained by us. For God has two dwellings, one in heaven, and the other in a faithful and thankful heart.

"If one should give me a dish of sand", says a famous thinker, "and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes, and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and how would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction. The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find in every hour some heavenly blessings, to be thankful for" (H. W. Beecher).

In fact the private and social blessings we enjoy in this country of God, the blessings of immunity, safety, liberty, and abundance of almost everything, are causes for the thanksgiving of a whole life.

Therefore let us express our sentiments not only by filling ourselves with well-cooked food, but also by some actual demonstration of thanks to the Almighty God who is the "Giver of all good and perfect Gifts."

On this Day of Thanksgiving let us give hearty thanks to God for all visible and invisible gifts through which He has blessed us as a church and community. Most of all, however, let us praise God and give thanks for those good people, who have shown particular interest for their church, and those who have given not only from their material goods, but from their precious time and talent, doing big or small deeds voluntarily in their parish. The presence of such people should give the greatest joy and we should give special thanks to God for them, and extend the community's thanks to these wonderful people. We should pray that God may accept their work and their toil for the benefit and prosperity of their parish. Their efforts for the church and community are in fact thanksgivings in action, speaking louder before God than our words. May God bless them and increase their number for the further benefit and progress of the Church and for the greater glory of His Holy name, which is blessed now, for ever and ever, Amen.

## INITIATION OF ST. JAMES ACYO L.A.

We are here tonight for a special purpose—the initiation of this group of young people into the Armenian Church Youth Organization of California. In other words, to start things in the right way.

Our whole life is dedicated to Christian ideals through various sacred rituals which are called Sacraments. For example, we become Christians and children of God and members of the Church through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. The ministers of the Church are dedicated to the service of God through the rite of Ordination. Two loving hearts and lives are united together through the sacred ceremony of the Wedding.

Being a member of Armenian Church Youth Organization of California entails certain dignity and responsibility. Therefore, it is always proper to mark the entrance into the Organization by a brief ritual or ceremony of initiation. We are here tonight to perform this ceremony and formally to accept you in this Church Organization.

On this happy occasion, I would like to bring to your attention that the main purpose of ACYOC is to bring together into one fraternal group the young people of the Armenian Church.



I believe that in every normal human being there is a desire to be incorporated, to be part of the community in which he lives. You are all part and parcel of this great country of the United States of America. Apart from our civil affiliations, we should also be part of a religious group. You are already members of this Church by Baptism. We now want you to take certain responsibilities upon yourselves through membership in the ACYOC.

The ACYOC, if properly managed, provides a healthy fellowship through friendly gatherings that present excellent opportunities for learning more about your Church and contributing something to its welfare and progress.

In this Organization you will find lots of fun and entertainment. But this Organization is not intended to be a means for merry-making. Christian action should be the main purpose of this group. So much so, that it might be called Armenian Christian Action.

The chief aims of ACYOC are:

To promote among its members the study and appreciation of Armenian culture and heritage.

To establish mutual helpfulness, solidarity and fellowship.

To contribute towards the development of healthy communal life among the Armenians.

Last, but most important, to rally our youth around our Divine Leader, Jesus Christ, and to keep our youth in the bosom of our Mother Church, in order to warm them through her redeeming love.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of the Armenian Church in America will be in the hands of this Organization. The Church is the noblest institution of our people. Whatever is good among the Armenian people can be found in their Church.

This Organization was established so that you might understand your Church and heritage, and safeguard its continuation in this country. I feel that by taking an active part in this Organization and in your church affairs, first you render a service to your community; second, you enrich your own lives with the spiritual wealth of your common ancestors; and third, you render a service to this great country of ours, the United States of America.

Almost every nation has brought something from its country of origin and has grafted it upon American life, thus making it richer and better. You, too, must add your own small share in this common pool. You can do this by keeping and cultivating whatever is valuable in our heritage, culture, and character. The Armenian Mother Church is the custodian and guardian of the best among the Armenian people.

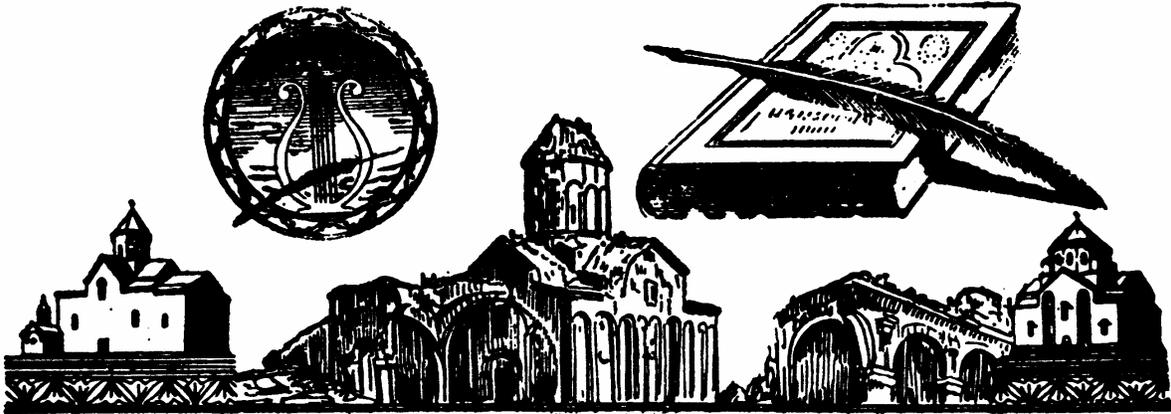
Let this initiation ceremony bind your hearts together in a sincere fellowship. May God give grace to all of you and make you honest, devoted, and active members of ACYOC.

I pray that once you are initiated you may remain strong and steady. May the ACYO of St. James' of Los Angeles be an effective factor in the life

of this community. May God keep all of you under His Divine guidance and protection. Amen.

## THE ARMENIAN HERITAGE

(Talk given on the occasion of the new St. James Church building banquet in Los Angeles)



We are here tonight, not only to enjoy the company of each other at this grand Banquet, but also to put into practice an act of faith. The decision to build a church is indeed an act of faith; and coming together to contribute something material for its realization is indeed putting faith into practice. Faith in spiritual and moral values gives greater assurance and greater sense of security to mankind than anything else in the world.

Despite all the disappointing and gloomy features of our times, we Christians still believe that there is an everlasting source of strength and hope in this divine institution which we call CHURCH.

For more than nineteen hundred years, this divine institution has served as shelter of security and a castle of calmness for millions of human souls. The teachings of the Church have shaped some of the best characters in history, who in turn have given a new meaning and value to human life.

As a matter of historic fact, Armenia was the first country to see this sustaining and civilizing power of Christianity, and to adopt Christianity as her state religion in the year 301 A.D., more than sixteen hundred and fifty years ago. Since then we have given almost everything, our homes and country, and even our very lives, just to preserve this Faith of our Fathers.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we Armenians owe our survival through those ages of darkness and desolation to our unwavering faith. Despite all the destructive forces, working from within and from without, the Mother Church has been the most potent factor in unifying, comforting, and inspiring our people. This was true in the land of our fathers and it remains true in this land of ours, the United States of America.

Even the unspeakable tragedies of World War I did not deter our Church from doing its work. All those who survived the tragic massacres and deportations of 1915 migrated to friendly countries. Though they were shattered in body and in mind, their faith remained unshaken. Wherever Armenians went, while building their new homes and mastering their new jobs, they also began to come together to find spiritual comfort in the worship of the God of their fathers in accordance with their ancient rite, no matter how modest the buildings were in which they prayed.

Some of those deportees came to this land of freedom and opportunity. There are now about two hundred and fifty thousand American citizens of Armenian extraction in the United States, scattered all over the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. About fifty thousand of them had the good fortune of settling in this Golden State of California. Many of them, starting from almost nothing, have already risen to honorable positions in business, agriculture and social and cultural professions in the life of this state. All these financial and other successes come to us from that unconquerable strength which our faith has created in our souls.

We have to admit that at present our faith is not as strong as it used to be; yet, we give thanks to God, that despite all the faith-killing factors of our times, the Faith of our Fathers is still alive in the hearts of most of our people. This banquet is a tangible proof of that fact.

We are now an established community in these United States of America, along with other immigrants of many nationality backgrounds. We are proud of having contributed in proportion to our size, fully and wholeheartedly to the progress and prosperity of this strongest nation in the world. We have given, along with other immigrants, some successful farmers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, businessmen, authors, musicians, and most of all devoted citizens. There were thousands of boys and girls of Armenian descent in the armed forces of our country during the second World War, who served with distinction and devotion; some of whom never came back. God bless their sacred memory.

Nevertheless, no matter how worthy these achievements might be, we will not consider them sufficient until we contribute our own small share, in our own way, to the spiritual treasury of this country.

We believe that our Armenian spiritual heritage is not only dear to us, as Armenians, but also is of human and universal value. It has values which have enriched the world civilization. It is our sacred duty to preserve them.

We are proud of our architectural achievements. The scholars admit that Armenia has been a creative center of Christian architecture and has influenced other countries. The world famous Austrian Scholar, Strzygowski says, "Greek genius at St. Sophia [Constantinople] and Italian genius at St. Peter's [Rome], only realized more fully what the Armenians had originated in their country".

The Armenian Divine Liturgy is rich in symbolism and music. It may be performed with great solemnity. Armenians have developed a distinct form of church music, with oriental quality and western setting. Egmalian, a pupil of Tchaikowski and Rubinstein, has put our Sacred Liturgy in musical setting which is beautiful and inspiring. The Egmalian music is the one commonly used in our churches at present. Another outstanding figure in Armenian music is Gomidas Vartabed, who set in music our Liturgy in polyphonic form which if properly executed is considered to be one of the most inspiring and uplifting pieces of church music in the world.

These are some of the values of our culture which we would like to perpetuate in this country, as our own contribution to its spiritual and artistic achievements. In addition, we desire to worship our God in a more decent and magnificent house of prayer, as our fathers always did in the old country.

With these considerations in mind, the authorities of St. James Armenian Church of Los Angeles, with our approval and encouragement, have decided to replace their present house of worship with an Armenian church in authentic form. This banquet is the first practical step in that direction.

The new church, with its adjoining parish house and the present community hall, will serve as the headquarters of spiritual life and cultural activities for our Southern communities, and as a center where our up-and-coming younger generation can develop a more genuine and stronger attachment to their religious heritage.

This church will serve as a worthy medium through which the symbolic beauty of our ritual will be effectively expressed and where we shall pray together as members of one great family.

Finally, the erection of such a building, I am sure, will serve to enrich in its own way, the artistic appearance of this world famous metropolis of Southern California. With this new and beautiful Armenian church our other fellow citizens can see and know better this less known Eastern ancient Church of ours.

This initial support given to this project by our community and friends gives assurance to all concerned that the worthy enterprise ahead of us is going to be a sure success. We are however far from our goal. This banquet is only the first step towards the realization of our dreams. The key to the success of this project, as to all other worthy projects, is first of all, in the hands of God, from Whom come all good things and all perfect gifts, and in Whom we trust. Secondly, this key of success lies in the hearts of our people, upon whom we rely. The investment of our money in a church building will be rewarded abundantly in countless spiritual dividends for many generations to come.

Let us then firmly and faithfully stand behind this worthy project and support it in our traditionally generous way.

May God bless all our endeavors, and may He accept our material offerings as tokens of our devotion and love for His sacred cause and for the greater glory of His Holy Name.