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THE ԳՆԱԶԱՐԱՆ REASURY

**What's So Special about Mary,
the Mother of God?**

Hamabadoom: Harmonizing the Four Gospels

Papken Catholicos Guleserian

Remember Me Too Before the
Immortal Lamb of God

The Sign of the Cross

and more...



Volume 2

Number 3

THE TREASURY

FEATURES

3 THE MYSTERY OF MARY IS THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

What is it about Mary, the Mother of God, that attracts so much attention to the Church? See how the mystery of Mary draws us deeper into the mystery of her Son, Jesus Christ.

by Eric Vozzy

10 Ի ՍՐԻՈՒԹԻՒՆՆ ԵՐՐՈՅ: COADJUTOR CATHOLICOS PAPKEN GULESERIAN

Explore the life and work of this clear-eyed yet practical 20th century visionary and faithful servant of the Armenian Church.

by Roberta Ervine

15 GULESERIAN THOUGHTS ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAITH

Catholicos Papken Guleserian preaches on the importance of understanding our Church's Creed and Her confession of faith.

by Catholicos Papken Guleserian

DEPARTMENTS

2 FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Being Like Nicodemus

8 BADARAK BYTES

Remember Me Too Before the Immortal Lamb of God

19 WORDS AND *THE WAY* Լ, Ի * Lee * Full

20 GOOD READS

Hamabadoom: The Gospels and the Gospel

24 KHORHOORT KHOREEN

The Sign of the Cross

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE FELLOWSHIP OF ST. VOSKI

Volume 2 Number 3

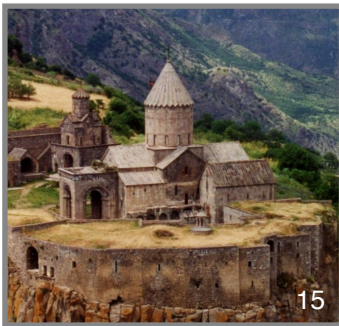


PHOTO CREDITS

Front Cover

Adoration of the Magi (fragment): Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 251, Gospel of Hromkla, 1260, artist Toros Roslin

Front Inside Cover

Tapestry - unidentified source

Page 3: The oldest-known image of Mary located in the Santa Priscilla Catacombs of Rome, dated ca. 150

Page 6: Nativity: Handcrafted Ceramic plate - www.mskh.am

Page 8: Incenser - www.eyeofthetiber.com

Page 9: Remember me, too... - photo by Ridvan Yumlu-Schiessl, source: www.flickr.com

Page 10: Armenians - unidentified source

Page 11: Turkish soldier - unidentified source

Page 13: Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I Guleserian - unidentified source

Page 15: Monastery of Tatev - www.tourismarmenia.net

Page 19: Depiction of the Holy Spirit as a Dove by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the apse of Saint Peter's Basilica - www.en.wikipedia.org

Page 20: Maghakia Ormanian - Maghakia Ormanian - milwaukeearmenians.com

Page 21: The Gospel of John - www.commonswikimedia.org

Page 24: Lake Sevan - www.eastbook.eu

Back Inside Cover

Making the sign of the cross - www.allposters.com

Back Cover

Young Soldier (fragment of a fresco) Replicated by an Armenian artist Vahan Qochcar - property of Vahan Qochcar

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Nor Voskiank/Նոր Ոսկեանք is a fellowship of men and women working toward the revival and restoration of Armenian Orthodox theology and life within the Armenian Church at large. The fellowship is named after St. Voski and his companions (the Voskians) who were a group of Christian martyrs and monastics from the first century, many of whom were students of St. Thaddeus. According to tradition, St. Thaddeus ordained as their leader a priest called Chrysos (Greek for “gold,” Armenian “voski”), and thereafter the group came to be known as the Voskians.

In the spirit of the Voskians, Nor Voskiank seeks to support the cultivation of a thriving, united, worldwide Armenian Christian community through prayer, fellowship, and the publication of practical educational resources covering the entire breadth of Christian life as lived, interpreted and testified to by the Armenian Church since ancient times. The Treasury/Գանձարան is published quarterly and subscriptions are available by request. To contact us or donate, please visit us at

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BEING LIKE NICODEMUS

Welcome to the third release of this year's **The Treasury!** Inside is an exciting collection of articles on practical Christian living, the lives and works of two very influential Armenian Church leaders from the last century, and an in-depth look at the Armenian Church's reverence for St. Mary, the Mother of God.

Having celebrated the Easter holiday not that long ago, the biblical figure of Nicodemus recently caught my attention. There really is not much that we know about Nicodemus, as he is only briefly mentioned in the Gospel of John. The first time we meet Nicodemus is in chapter 3 where he is identified as a Pharisee, one of the Jewish religious leaders. Nicodemus appears on the scene during an almost mysterious nighttime encounter with Jesus, where his intended purpose seems to be to find out more about who Jesus is and what his mission was. Nicodemus' introductory remark to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him," seems to suggest that Nicodemus is a closet admirer of Jesus. This admiration apparently stemmed from the fact that Nicodemus had, at least in part, realized that no average person could say or do the things that Jesus had been doing without some special anointing from God. Clearly, Jesus read between the lines of Nicodemus' somewhat weak acknowledgement of his power, and recognized that Nicodemus still had serious doubts about who Jesus was. We read further in chapter 3 that Jesus used this opportunity to explain to Nicodemus that only through a spiritual rebirth can one truly see and experience the Kingdom of God.

Later on in St. John's Gospel (chapter 7), Nicodemus reappears during a discussion among the Jewish chief priests and Pharisees who desire to have Jesus arrested. Nicodemus arises to seemingly defend Jesus, again with another bland statement of support: "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" This comment was quickly met with a few remarks of mockery and scorn after which Nicodemus remained silent.

Our final encounter with Nicodemus occurs at the base of the Cross of Christ, after Jesus' death in chapter 19. Nicodemus apparently provided a substantial donation of burial spices prior to placing Jesus into the tomb. This time, John the Apostle offers no words from the mouth of Nicodemus, just noting his presence at Jesus' crucifixion and positioning him alongside Joseph of Arimathea, whom John clearly identifies as "a disciple of Jesus."

So why bother drawing attention to this relatively obscure figure of the Bible who at least as far as the biblical record is concerned, never clearly becomes a Christian? The value of studying a character like Nicodemus is that he reminds us of a very risky attitude that we can have towards Jesus Christ. Nicodemus admired Jesus for his exceptional teaching and service, he asked good questions, he defended Jesus to a degree amidst his detractors, and he even offered generous ceremonial gifts. Yet, where Nicodemus desperately fails is that he never seems to make a true, heartfelt commitment to Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of his life. He apparently was content to merely dabble with faith in Jesus, superficially paying homage to the man Jesus but never falling on his knees before Jesus Christ as God. Nicodemus would have done well to heed the admonition of 20th century British apologist C.S. Lewis in his famous book *Mere Christianity*:

"I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him (Jesus) - 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God' - that is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.....You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Therefore, let us guard against an attitude like Nicodemus' and reject living the Christian life on the fringe. Our God wants from us a total commitment of heart, mind, soul and strength: all our belief, all our loyalty, all our resources, all our love. Undergirding our regular church participation, monetary stewardship and service activities must be an unwavering worship posture of *yergbakootyoon* / *հրկրպագութիւն* - translated literally as "kissing the ground" - which is the only disposition fitting a true believer and servant of Jesus Christ.



THE MYSTERY OF MARY IS THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

by Eric Vozzy

Once a year, families recognize mothers for who they are and what they do. They brought us into this world, raised us, and continue to love us through all of our ups and downs, flaws and virtues, triumphs and setbacks. A mother cheers us on, encourages us, supports us, and waits for us to call home, or better yet, to visit in person. In ideal circumstances, it is easy for us to love our mother, even natural. It begins from infancy. Fresh from the womb there was no need to think about it, calculate the situation, or weigh the pros or cons in order to decide to love our mother. The love we had as a child for our mother, and the reciprocal love our mother has for her child are innate. They deepen and mature in a manner that can only be called a mystery. Yes, at times our devotion to our mother can be challenged, but given a healthy environment, this love is natural and unquestioned.

Besides our earthly mother, we have been blessed with another mother, Mary, the Mother of God. Yet for many Christians, Mary is little more than a secondary character in the Bible, not a mother to be honored and cherished. In these skeptical times, even those who worship in the ancient churches where Mary has always been held in the highest regard, wonder what connection Mary has to their faith and their very salvation.

MARY IS EVERYWHERE

The presence of Mary in the Armenian Church, as well as in other ancient church traditions, is anything but subtle. Her name and status as Ever-Virgin, Immaculate, and All-Holy are mentioned in all of our services and her intercession is sought in most of our prayers. Listen carefully to any Armenian Church service for no more than a couple of minutes and you will hear Mary's name heralded lovingly in the prayers and hymns. Of all the saints she is the first whose intercession we bid, and we often seal our prayers with her name before praising the Holy Trinity. In fact, Mary is the first person audibly mentioned in the Divine Liturgy. The opening prayer of the priest following his entrance into the church asks, "By the intercession of the holy Mother of God, O Lord, receive our supplications and



The oldest-known image of Mary located in the Santa Priscilla Catacombs of Rome, dated ca. 150

save us." Notice that we invoke Mary even before we invoke God!

Additionally, the main altar of every Armenian Church is adorned with a portrait of Mary and the Christ child. Images of Mary embellish sacred objects, paintings, frescoes, manuscript illuminations and reliefs. Monasteries, cathedrals, and parishes are named in her honor. Her presence also abounds in the Armenian Church year. There are seven feasts during the Armenian Church year dedicated to Mary – her Annunciation, Birth, Presentation to the Temple, Conception, Assumption, the Discovery of her Belt, and the Discovery of her Box, each with their respective hymns glorifying who Mary is. It's not easy to miss Mary in the Armenian Church.

FODDER FOR SKEPTICS

Mary's prominence in the life of the Armenian Church comes as a surprise to some and is a stumbling block for others. Some claim that Mary does not deserve all of the attention she is given, that she is a distraction from Jesus Christ, and that she is magnified to the point of idolatry. Historically, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches have had to fend off accusations that they were worshipping Mary, or elevating her to the status of a goddess. After all, when the Bible mentions Mary by name it amounts to just a few verses, seemingly contradicting the exalted status we give her. Indeed, some of those references (Luke 11:27-28, Luke 8:19-21) seem to downplay her, almost as a warning for us

to curb our devotion to her. As for the Marian church feasts, several of them are based on later traditions and sources such as the *Protoevangelium of James*. Some people are suspicious of such extra-biblical sources. Finally, by calling Mary “Mother” are we implying that God the Father is somehow deficient?

Yet the church’s devotion to Mary has survived all the critics and naysayers, all of whom have been fully refuted in sources outside of this article. The simple fact is that Mary, the Mother of God, serves as an icon of faith and discipleship. Her mystery is the mystery of her Son, and so she is absolutely worthy of our honor and devotion.

THIS IS NOTHING NEW

Devotion to Mary goes back to the earliest Christians. It was a natural instinct that emerged from their experience of the Gospel as it was lived out in daily life and liturgy, blossoming from the fruit of love and prayer to God. By the third century many Christians, including prominent teachers such as Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Athanasius, referred to Mary in Greek as *Theotokos*, meaning “Birth-Giver of God.” This is exactly what the Armenian word **Լսմուծաճիկ**/*Asdvadzadzeen* means. When Christianity was brought to Armenia long before the official national conversion in 301, the practice of venerating Mary came with it. The cathedral of Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Church, initially built between 301 and 303, was even originally named after the Virgin Mary. In fact, the naming of churches after Mary was a common practice in the Early Church, since, like Mary, the Church begets children of God through the baptismal font. In this way, both the Church and Mary are truly dwellings or shrines of God. Interestingly, even in monastic settings where the monastery had its own name, the church was often named after Mary.

Ancient images of the Virgin Mary also testify to the very early devotion of the Mother of God. The oldest-known image of Mary, where she appears to be nursing the infant Jesus on her lap, is dated around 150 AD, and is located in the Santa Priscilla Catacombs of Rome. This is one of the oldest surviving Christian images anywhere. Ancient Christians held Mary in such high regard that they surrounded themselves and their sacred places with her image, much as we surround ourselves with framed photographs of the ones we love.

The early church’s affection for Mary also found expression in music. Mary was the object of some of the earliest Christian hymns, which today we could very

accurately characterize as love songs. The most ancient surviving Marian hymn, which dates at least to the third century, spread throughout Christendom including Armenia. In the Armenian Church, we sing it *twice* every day. Once during the Morning Service (**Առաւօտեան ծաւ**/*Aravodyan Zham*) and then again in the Evening Service (**Երեկոյեան ծաւ**/*Yeregoyan Zham*) immediately following the Trisagion (**Սուրբ Լսմուծ**/*Soorp Asdvadz*):

Glorified and blessed ever holy Virgin, Birth-Giver of God; Mary, Mother of Christ, offer our supplications to your Son and our God, that He may be pleased to deliver us from temptation and from all our perils.

Referred to by its opening words in Latin, *Sub tuum praesidium* (*Beneath Thy Protection*), like many Christian hymns, it is simultaneously a song of praise and a prayer. Why did the Armenians attach this prayer, asking for Mary’s supplication, to *Soorp Asdvadz*? Because the latter is a powerful profession of the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity. In the Armenian Church every acknowledgment of Mary is an expression of the incarnation of her Son, by which salvation comes to us.

MARY AS MOTHER OF GOD

Besides the Divine Liturgy and festal hymns, some of the more evocative expressions of devotion to the Mother of God are found in the prayers composed and addressed to her by various church fathers. For example, St. Gregory of Narek (945-1003), an Armenian monk, poet, mystical philosopher and theologian, composed a prayer book containing ninety-five prayers, one of which is dedicated to Mary. It is a confession of praise and affection for her. Gregory closes the prayer with the following words:

*Mother of our exalted Lord Jesus,
creator of heaven and earth,
Whom you bore complete in humanity
and total in divinity,
Who is glorified with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
Uniting his essence and our nature
in a manner beyond human understanding.
He is all and in all, one of the Holy Trinity.*

Our understanding of who Jesus Christ is begins with the affirmation that the child born of the Virgin is the eternal Word of God who became flesh of Mary in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Mary, as Mother of God, is not only a definitive part of the Creed, our statement of faith, but also the Eucharist, where God comes to us in his Body and Blood.

The Creed

In the first part of the Divine Liturgy, following the chanting of the Gospel, everyone assembled recites or sings with one united voice what for centuries has been affirmed as our official declaration of faith, the Nicene Creed, which reads;

[Jesus] took body, became man, was born perfectly of the holy virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. By whom he took body, soul and mind and everything that is man, truly and not in semblance.

The reference to Mary is not a minor historical detail, but affirms the unaltered divinity of Christ in his incarnation, and it is *through Mary* that Christ's body was truly human.

Although the Nicene Creed was more or less finalized (different versions emerged), the question of who Mary was and how to think of her was not over. In 428, Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (428-431), asserted that it was incorrect to refer to Mary as *Theotokos* (Birth-Giver of God) because God is eternal. He has no beginning therefore he can have no mother. Nestorius instead gave Mary the title *Christotokos* (Birth-Giver of Christ). But Nestorius' reductionist option cast doubt on whether he actually accepted Christ's full and complete divinity. If Mary is not the Mother of God, it implies that her Son is not God. In 431, the Third Ecumenical Council was convened in Ephesus to address the issue. Cyril of Alexandria led the denunciation of Nestorius. The Council affirmed that the title Mother of God, paradoxical as it surely is, is not optional. It is Mary's most correct designation, since it irrefutably conveys the fact that the fruit of her womb is the Son of God. To misrepresent Mary, in other words, is to compromise the fundamental truth that through the incarnation the Son of God became truly human, without in any way compromising the full divinity he shares with God the Father.

Well-known theologian Jaroslav Pelikan summarizes the Orthodox Christian teaching on Mary: "She was the mother of the man Christ Jesus, the mother of the Savior; but to be the Savior, he had to be God as well, and as his mother she had to be Mother of God." Mary's

status as Mother of God proclaims to the Church what the evangelist St. John wrote in his Gospel, that Mary's Son is none other than the eternal Word of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." As a result, the two titles accorded to Mary are "Mother of God" (*Asdvadzamayr/Մայր Աստուածամայր*) and "Birth-Giver of God" (*Asdvadzadzeen/Մայր Աստուածաճին*). To call her anything less is to deny that Jesus is God and to diminish the mystery of Christ.

Holy Communion

During the Divine Liturgy, Jesus Christ is present, is revealed, and comes to his people in the reading of the Holy Gospel, and also in the Holy Communion of his Body and Blood. To this extent, the Divine Liturgy is interpreted

In the Armenian Church
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in terms of the mystery of Christ's incarnation which, again, is the mystery of God with us in the person of Jesus Christ who came to us in the flesh of the Virgin Mary. Consequently, the mystery of Mary is present in the very act of Holy Communion.

Consider the ancient custom in Armenian Churches of placing an image of Mary and the Christ Child over the altar table where Holy Communion is celebrated. As we face eastward to pray, this image is the focus of our attention, the one thing that is consistently facing toward us. Why do we prefer this image and not something else, such as an image of the Cross, the crucifixion of Christ, or his resurrection? Because the image of the Virgin with her infant Son celebrates the incarnation of Christ, when the Virgin Mary became the living temple of the incarnate Lord. Mary is the source of Christ's humanity and the portal by which God himself entered the world as a human being. It is *through Mary* that salvation was brought into the world in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. What better

image to place above the table upon which the chalice containing the gifts of the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ? Hence, the image of the Mother of God and the Christ Child is an image of the Incarnation, the mystery of God-With-Us in Body and Blood.

That mystery is revealed from the very start of the Divine Liturgy, during the preparation of the gifts. Behind the closed curtain, the celebrant prays over the Eucharistic bread and wine. Three times the priest makes the sign of the cross over the gifts and repeats, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” These, of course are the words of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would become the Mother of God. The connection to Holy Communion could not be clearer. The bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ in the chalice the same way that the Son of God was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. That is, just as God came into the world through Mary, God comes among his people in the Church through the living Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Once more, the mystery of Mary is the mystery of Christ.

MARY IS MORE THAN A DOCTRINE

So, honoring Mary as Mother of God safeguards the doctrine of the person of Christ, and this is indeed important. But Mary herself is esteemed, venerated, and loved by the Church as a *person*, not as a dogma. Titling her “Mother of God” is not just a theological statement for the sake of drawing doctrinal and creedal boundaries. When we sing praises to God are we merely reciting doctrine for the sake of tenets and explanatory purposes? Absolutely not! Neither do we merely recite abstract concepts when we address prayer to Mary and sing about her.

What we sing causes us to ponder the *person* of Mary and the intimate role she plays in our salvation. Read, for example, this verse from the Introit sung in the Armenian Church on the Feast of the Theophany of Jesus Christ, which is the Church’s ultimate celebration of his incarnation and baptism:

O Mother of God, confessing, the
Orthodox Church adores you; for while the
many-eyed Cherubim and the fiery thrones
and the six-winged Seraphim could not dare



to look at the the Incorruptible Lord, you bore him in your womb without seed like a handmaiden. And you gave birth to the God of all as a man—the one who took body from you, the ineffable Word—for the salvation of the world and life for our souls.

The Incarnation is more than a theology. It involves humanity, and in the above quotation Mary is presented as a human being, one of us, but special in that she conceived and held in her arms the eternal God without beginning. And so we rightfully venerate her and love her for who she is and what she has done. That poignant image of Mary, human like us, holding in her arms the One who cannot be embraced, is depicted in the Introit sung on the Feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God:

O unwed Mother of God, you conceived
the Word who has no beginning, and
incomprehensibly you gave birth to God.
You held in your arms the One who cannot
be embraced. Intercede with Him unceasingly
for our souls.

These hymns reveal the paradox of the Mother of God. They are not syllogisms to be proven, or riddles to be solved. They are expressions of faith inviting prayerful engagement into the joint mystery of Christ and the Mother of God. In these verses, Mary is not a theological device, but the object of praise and adoration. If anything is “clear” from these enigmatic statements of praise, it is that although we

We love Mary because she points us to Jesus Christ, and the more we admire her, the more we are drawn to her Son.

cannot grasp the reality of God becoming man in the flesh of Mary, we cannot love God without loving his Mother. Furthermore, just as the love children have for their mother cannot be explained rationally, likewise, our love for Mary is intuited.

We also love Mary because God loves Mary. He chose her to be the origin of our Savior, and therefore the origin of our salvation. Mary's example of faith, her openness to receive God's Word at the Annunciation, and her assent to say "let it be" on behalf of humanity evokes awe and joy. In a song addressed to the Blessed Virgin, Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi (1763-1780) reveals that after God, Mary is the expectation of his creatures. In that same prayer, Simeon beautifully expresses the love each person of the Holy Trinity has toward the Blessed Virgin, thus bidding us, the faithful of the Church, to bless her with that same love:

Now, O Holy Mary, Bearer of God, what would God the Father withhold from you, He who loved you so much that He granted you His Only-begotten Son through whom He created all creatures? What would God the Son withhold from you that you would ask of Him, He who loved you so much that He dwelt in your womb and sat in your lap, who feeds all but was fed from your breasts, who was your God and Lord but became your son and called you mother? God the Spirit, too, loved you so much that He entrusted His co-equal in essence to you and He who adorns everything rested in you and made you the lodging place for His unending gifts.

Like the love notes that a child writes to his or her mother, or the Mother's Day card that we select to express our love, so too are the prayers and hymns that the Church addresses and devotes to Mary the Church's expression of affection for the Mother of God. We love Mary because she points us to Jesus Christ, and the more we admire her, the more we are drawn to her Son.

EMBRACING THE MYSTERY

In Armenian, we also refer to Mary as **Ամենաթոգի**/*Amenasrpoohee* (Most-holy Woman). But this does not mean that Mary is *merely* the saintliest saint, which of course she is. Mary is the Mother of God, which is a much higher calling. An essential part of experiencing and understanding Jesus Christ directly involves the person of Mary, and so she cannot be discarded as a footnote or a mere historical detail in the Incarnation narrative. Diminishing the Virgin Mary in any way, or not referring to her as the Mother of God raises questions regarding the true meaning and significance of the Incarnation, and to minimize the Virgin Mary in any way is to minimize Jesus Christ.

Eastern Orthodox theologian John McGuckin writes, "When the church confesses her, it confesses, therefore, the essence of the mystery of redemption in Christ. The praise and confession of Mary is, to that extent, entirely a celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation – that God himself came in our midst as Emmanuel – God with us." This is exactly why dominical days of the Armenian Church year, which are Sundays and feasts of the Lord, *include* feasts of the Mother of God.

It is only by faith that we can experience Mary as the Mother of God, and the Church's veneration of her is not born out of a desire to be doctrinally accurate, but naturally, out of an experience of the Gospel. Like our earthly mother, the Mother of God loves us and cares for her Church as she lives in intercession, putting in a good word to her Son on our behalf.

When we know and love Mary, we know and love God, because we know and love Jesus Christ. In one of his Nativity hymns, St. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373) reflects on the mystery of Mary leading us to the mystery of Christ (translated by Kathleen McVey):

"But if Your mother is incomprehensible,
who is capable of comprehending You?"

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REMEMBER ME, TOO, BEFORE THE IMMORTAL LAMB OF GOD

by Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan



One of the more imposing moments of the Divine Liturgy comes shortly after the service begins. The curtain opens and the celebrant, holding the censer in his right hand, and the Cross in his left hand, comes down from the bema and processes around the church accompanied by all the altar servers. As the choir sings the *Hymn for the Incense Offering*, *Բարեխոսոոյամք / Parekhosootyamp*, the celebrant censes the altars, the baptismal font, the icons and all of the people, before ascending the altar steps and proclaiming, “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Our liturgy books provide various allegorical interpretations of this Procession. Originally this procession marked the beginning of the *Badarak*. It is a remnant of what was once the entrance procession of the clergy into the church. Most of what precedes the Procession in today’s *Badarak* developed later.

Traditionally as the priest rounds the church, the people approach him, kiss the holy Cross in his hand and say, “Remember me, too, before the immortal Lamb of God.” This short phrase, just seven Armenian words, tells us a great deal about the meaning of the Divine Liturgy.

“Remember me” is a typically Armenian way of saying, “Pray for me.” We ask the priest to fulfill his primary and preeminent duty, which is to pray for his people. That is the priest’s highest calling and his chief responsibility. Prayer is also the sum and substance of the *Badarak*. Prayer is much more than asking God for what we need. The point of prayer is not *what* we ask for, but *Whom* we are asking it from. In the *Badarak* God’s people turn and return to God not only with our needs and wishes, but with our pain and anger, our joys and hopes; in short, with all our lives. So the *Badarak* is the great prayer of the Armenian Church, in which our people gather together to “Love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart, and with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind, and with all [our] strength” [Mark 12:30]. When I say, *Heeshescheer yev zeēs* to the priest, I am saying, “Pray for me and count me in as a member of this community of God’s people.”

The prayer that we request during the Divine Liturgy is unlike any other prayer. Although it is offered largely from the lips of the priest, the *Badarak* flows from the heart of the Church. What is more, our prayer is offered not to a distant God, but to the

Heeshescheer yev zees arachee anmah kareenun Asdoodzo

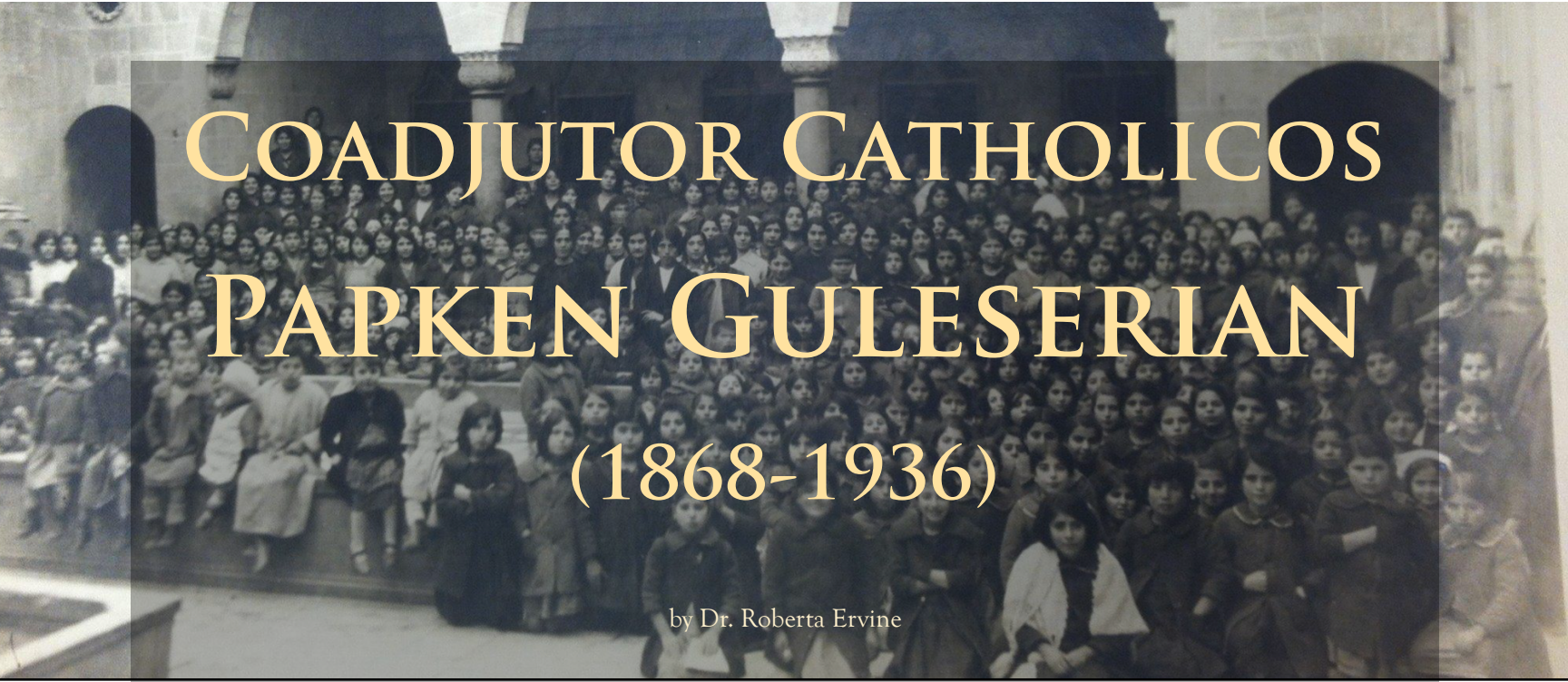
Յիշեսցիր եւ զիս առաջի անմահ դառինն Աստուծոյ

“immortal Lamb of God” who is with us in our midst. He is praying with us and from within us. When we call on the “Lamb of God,” we are adopting St. John the Baptist’s name for Jesus when he called out, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29, 36]. By designating Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” the Baptizer tapped into the most poignant episode of Jewish sacred history, the Passover, to reveal Jesus’ identity and mission. The blood of the Passover lamb was sealed on the doorposts of faithful Jewish families to protect them against the cataclysm to come. Ours is the “Lamb of God,” God’s only-begotten Son, who shed his blood to save his people from death. In the *Badarak* we celebrate the sacrifice of God’s very own beloved Lamb, given “for the life of the world” [John 6:51]. Our Lamb is immortal. Yet paradoxically, mysteriously, our Lamb dies willingly out of his love for us. When we receive Holy Communion, we are sealing the doorposts of our lives with the life-giving blood of the living Lamb of God.

- Remember me, too, before the immortal Lamb of God -

“Pray for me, *Der Hayr*, when you stand at the holy altar in the presence of the Lamb of God, the mysterious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the holy chalice. With joy, thanksgiving, great hope and all the faith I can muster, I take my place in the Body of Christ, in this church, in this Holy *Badarak*. I pledge to do my level best to live up to this great privilege and to encourage my brothers and sisters to do the same.”





COADJUTOR CATHOLICOS PAPKEN GULESERIAN (1868-1936)

by Dr. Roberta Ervine

*“In our life, our Church is for us our Mount of Transfiguration: we ascend it to feel
God’s presence among and within us.”*

When in 1889 the venerable, 13th century monastery of Armash was chosen as the site for the new Armenian seminary of the Istanbul patriarchate, no one could have foreseen how short its life would be. By the same token, when Armash was closed by the Turkish government in 1914, no one could have known how crucial its brief life span had been for the survival of Armenian faith and learning following the Genocide.

Led by the most renowned clerics of the day, Maghakia Ormanian and Eghishe Tourian, Armash provided its students with seven years of rigorous, wide-ranging and in-depth education. Although it was criticized by many contemporaries as having “a far too liberal curriculum” that included not only Biblical studies, liturgics and theology but also French and Turkish, Greek and Latin, biology, chemistry, philosophy, mathematics and other topics that some deemed unbecoming to the minds of future clergy, Armash gave its students a sound basis on which to encounter the harsh world that was coming. It was a world that they would lead. At least, those who survived

the Genocide would find themselves leaders in that new and difficult reality.

The first group of Armash graduates was ordained to the priesthood in 1895. They numbered seven souls. Two of them died within a decade after their ordination, martyred in the Genocide, and a third died in 1918. Two more left the priesthood. The sole survivors of the class were Zaven Der Yeghiaian, future patriarch of Istanbul, and Papken Guleserian. It was a meager harvest, but a significant one.

Best known to history as the visionary coadjutor Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, where he was the right-hand man of the aged and long-suffering Catholicos Sahak Khabayan from 1931 to 1936, Papken Guleserian was also many other things. He began his life as Haroutiun Guleserian, son of a linen-merchant in Aintab. The middle child in a blended family, a born administrator and a true people-person, he was raised in Aintab’s prosperous Armenian community, under the shadow of Holy Asdvadzadzin Church.

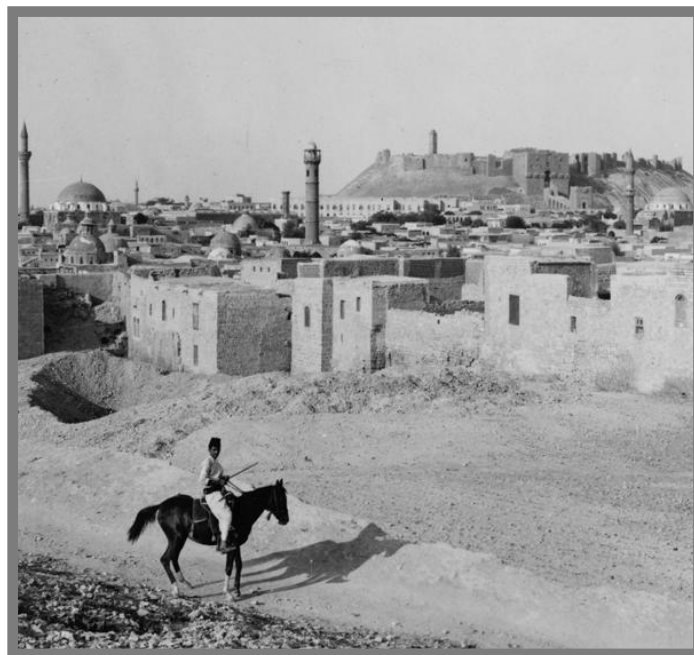
Young Haroutiun was one of those people who knew very early what he wanted to do. Shortly after his ordination at 27, he was hand-picked by Maghakia Ormanian to be groomed for administrative leadership. A pragmatist whose great gift was seeing to the heart of people and their problems, Father Papken, soon Bishop Papken, was the right man for any difficult job: when he was assigned to create the new diocese of Samsun, he learned the Hamshen dialect of Armenian so that he could gain the ears and hearts of the region's Islamized Armenians. In addition to his administrative responsibilities, he published newspapers, wrote articles and pursued research, started schools, briefly returned to Armash to serve as dean at his alma mater, and became administrator of Daron (and was imprisoned there). Later he ran the Armenian community of Ankara. Having done all that, he was still only in his forties.

In the thick of things as he always was, there was no way Bp. Papken would have survived the genocide that filled his home town with refugee tents—but survive he did. His survival must have seemed very random to him, and perhaps unjustified. In fact, he said as much in 1920:

I do not know why God protected the life of this servant from the harassment of the Turks and the jaws of a fierce disease, ... especially when so many of my brothers in rank ordained with me have been martyred in service. This is a mystery to me, and I do not know the reason for it.

Bishop Papken survived the genocide because of the ill health that had dogged his steps since childhood. Although he never let it prevent him from serving, he always had been frail. In addition, imprisonment in Daron and an unfortunate accident on horseback compromised his body further. The pace and stress of his life caught up with him in 1914, while he was serving as primate of Ankara. So it was that on the eve of the Genocide he found himself forced to seek medical care in the United States for gastric problems and chronic kidney disease.

As is turned out, Bp. Papken spent eight long years in America recuperating. While in the US, he stayed with another Armenian from Aintab, Armenak Nazar, who emigrated to the United States in 1910 and became editor of *Azg* (later called *Baikar*), organ of the Armenian



Democratic League. To pass the time of his recovery, Guleserian joined Nazar in editing the weekly Armenian paper *Davros* (1917-1918).

Ever the clear-eyed visionary pragmatist, Bp. Papken used his time in the US not just to regain his health and pursue literary work, but also to size up the needs of the American Armenians and the challenge they presented for the Church. Serving as locum tenens of the American Diocese in 1920-1921, he had the perfect opportunity to view the nascent American Armenian diaspora not only as an outsider uninvolved in any of the community's many partisan divisions, but as an experienced administrator and pastor.

His assessment of the American Armenian future was clear-eyed and practical. "Armenian life will slowly diminish in this community, unless a new fury, a new enthusiasm lifts its spirit." (April 4, 1920 diary entry) In his view, five things were necessary to support "the perpetuation of the Armenian identity within the parameters offered by this country": 1) the establishment of churches, with buildings and staff, in *all* Armenian communities without exception; 2) preparation of Armenian clergy in American schools, so that the clergy would be able to teach and preach to American Armenians in English and with full understanding of both their own ancient culture and the Armenian Church's rightful place in the pantheon of American

Christian groups; 3) officially sanctioned and carefully overseen adaptation of the Armenian services to the pace of life in America; 4) a new system of diocesan administration suitable to American needs and requirements; 5) unambiguous recognition of and respect for the dedication and commitment of American Armenians to their faith and culture, within their own emerging social paradigm.

The Armenian Church would have to change in America, Bp. Papken told Catholicos Kevork V in a 1920 memorandum. In fact, he said, change was inevitable; the only real question was whether the Church hierarchy would lead the changes or follow them. His memorandum to the Catholicos in Ejmiadzin and his writings on the nature of Armenian reform in America are still well worth reading; his views on language, celibacy and hierarchy, and the role of women remain ahead of their time. At the Diocesan Assembly of 1918, two years before women gained the right to vote in the United States, Bp. Papken was one of those who granted voting rights to Armenian women, and confirmed their eligibility to hold elected office within the Church.

The prospect of meaningful Church reform thoughtfully undertaken on the basis of deep study of the past and detailed awareness of the present was something Bp. Papken found exciting. He also saw it as essential:

Today we find ourselves at an historic crossroad. If we do not carefully restore our house of prayer, or put it in order, it means that we will have removed the Armenian Church from the flow of time. We will turn it into just another stone building, when we should be reinforcing its spiritual structure.

Armenians in America, he felt, were ideally situated to lead the way, with their intellectual and monetary wealth, their vigor and enthusiasm, and their need to reinvent Armenian life in a completely new society.

When Bp. Papken left America for the last time, it was for Jerusalem, where his former teacher Eghishe Tourian had been chosen as Patriarch. There Bp. Papken revived and ran the printing press, resurrected the long-defunct monastery publication *Sion* as an intellectual powerhouse, taught most of the seminary curriculum, and cultivated students like Yeghishe Derderian, Shnork Kaloustian, Sion Manoogian and Tiran Nersoyan – grooming them for their future roles as custodians of the Armenian spirit in the Middle East and America.

Although he taught many subjects, Bp. Papken's concern, as he saw it, was not primarily with conveying religious and cultural information to his students, priceless though that information was. Rather, in the time-honored tradition of Armenian pedagogy, his concern was with shaping his students' way of being in the world:

The issue of shaping character is the cornerstone of education. Filling the brain of the student with diverse knowledge, no matter how brilliant, does not shape character; that is a matter of [educating] the whole psyche.

Not surprisingly, when the octogenarian Catholicos Sahak Khabayan of Cilicia's Great House needed a coadjutor Catholicos to help the dispossessed Catholicosate find and grow a new headquarters and reorganize the dioceses of the Middle East around it, Papken's was the only name on his list.

“If we do not carefully restore our house of prayer, or put it in order, it means that we will have removed the Armenian Church from the flow of time.”

After completing a final two years in Jerusalem, which he had requested in order to set his projects there on a secure foundation, Bp. Papken moved to Antelias. He described sitting on the roof of the desolate building leased to the Catholicosate by Near East Relief, watching the moon rise and contemplating the difficulties that lay ahead.

We find ourselves under unfamiliar stars; the distance between Antelias and [historic] Cilicia is immense. [Yet] the desolation of these buildings will breathe tomorrow with the dreams and visions of its students. The school is the nerve of the Catholicosate; the church is its soul. Both will become realities tomorrow in this new and strange place, where the most tangible realities are the mountains of Lebanon that line the eastern horizon.... (Diary entry, August, 1930)

Bp. Papken's closest collaborator in Cilicia was Fr. Shahe Kasparian, who had served as primate locum tenens of America from 1917-1920. Together the two men set about transforming the unsuitable Near East Relief structures into a Catholicosal residence, seminary, printing press, school, museum and library and setting all of those institutions on a workable footing. The final five years of Bp. Papken's life were spent fund-raising, planning, wheedling, wangling and cajoling to insure lasting financial support for the Catholicosate and the growing number of institutions and programs that grew up around it under his careful cultivation.

On April 26, 1931 Bp. Papken – by then, Abp. Papken – was consecrated as Coadjutor Catholicos. On that occasion, he made a verbal promise to lead the Armenians of the Middle East in a way reminiscent of the values he had admired in America:

Now, I will work in accordance with two guiding principles. First, according to the commandment of the Savior to love one another; I love our Church and the Armenian people. Second, in accordance with the principle of Abraham Lincoln – [government] of the people, by the people, and for the people.



When Catholicos Papken stated his love for the Armenian Church and people, he meant all the Armenian people:

All of you, without political or other prejudice, are the sons of the Armenian Church. You are all equal, and it is my duty to love all of you. I have never been a member of any political party, nor am I currently. I belong only to the Mother of us all – the Armenian Church....

As Catholicos, Abp. Papken convened frequent councils of bishops to discuss matters of all kinds; if it was an issue of the people, the solution must be forthcoming by the people and for the people, even if decisions were officially made through the bishops they had elected to represent their interests.

Over and above building a strong relationship with his bishops, the Catholicos followed a relentless schedule of diocesan visitations, meeting not only with community representatives but also with the local authorities and religious leaders of other denominations whose work affected the lives of the Armenian faithful.

It was during one of his many diocesan visitations that Coadjutor Catholicos Papken contracted malaria. His physical system was overwhelmed by this new insult to his body, combined with recurrences of his old maladies and the stress of having to mount a major fundraising campaign to save the buildings of the Catholicosate, when the Fund for Near East Relief departed from the region and was unable to extend the Catholicosate's lease. He died in Antelias on July 9, 1936, three years before Catholicos Sahag Khabayan, whom he had been chosen to succeed. The aged Khabayan was devastated at the loss, the greatest in the long litany of tragedies he had endured across his difficult career. "God has once again stricken our newly established nest," he said in his announcement of Guleserian's passing. Despite Khabayan's great faith, the untimely death of his Coadjutor Catholicos felt to him like a final divine abandonment.

Three years prior to Catholicos Papken's death, before the doctors treating him had realized the seriousness of his state, he had a premonition that his time was coming to an end. The fact of his death did not concern him. As he said,

"Death is inevitable; it is worthless to talk and philosophize about it." However, the prospect of leaving his work unfinished troubled his heart: "It seemed to me that there is something in me that is propelling me towards my death, and that I will die without fulfilling my duty...."

And yet, as he had mused during those final years,

It is not death alone that disturbs the valuable expression of life, but also the deadly realities of sloth in work, indifference towards duties, unfaithfulness in commitments. All these are moral deaths more catastrophic than the death of the body.

On that understanding alone, Catholicos Papken was and will remain deathless, ever the sincere servant. Having climbed the Church's Mt. Tabor time and time again, he died as he had lived, practicing what he had often preached to others:

If you are a brave fighter, be also a virtuous one.

If you are a brave lover of your nation, be also a lover of the Spirit.

If you are rich, be also generous.

If you are a person of pure ideals, be also a person of pure deeds.

If you are a person of abundant knowledge, open yourself also to the lessons of the Gospel.

For further reading:

1. Ghazarian, Vatche. *The Life and Work of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken Guleserian*. Waltham, MA: Mayreni Publishing, 2000.
2. Papken Catholicos Guleserian, *The Armenian Church*, translation by Bishop Terenig Poladian, 2nd printing. New York: AMS, 1970.

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THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

Catholikos Papken Guleserian

THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION OF FAITH, AND THE LITURGY

The most sensitive point in Church reform is the *confession of faith*, which has an intimate connection with *liturgical worship*. Although when people discuss “Church reform” they do not touch on the topic of the *confession of faith*, it isn’t because there’s nothing to say on the subject; instead, it is because people consider that the question of our creedal understanding has already been settled. In other words, for some people the understanding of faith is a matter for theologians and clergy; it is not something that the congregation understands.

Besides this, from the people’s point of view, understanding the faith is not a vital religious issue. For some, questions regarding the creed have no practical contemporary relevance and thus [creedal affirmations] can continue to be preserved in the Church just as they always have been.

For others, such issues simply have no importance at all; they feel that it is impossible to square these matters with today’s scientific and critical spirit.

The above are, in my opinion, the reasons why questions of *what we believe* have not been prominent in the writings and discussions of reform within the Armenian Church.

However, we should lay aside any secretiveness and, with a boldness hallowed by piety, step up to this question

and inquire whether indeed our modern-day Armenian Church and our people have remained faithful to the confession of the One Universal Christian Church and Her Apostolic understanding. Have we “kept the faith?” (2 Co 13:5)

The Church is a “school of faith.” Neither hypocrisy nor a double standard have any business there.

When Luther and his predecessors took inventory of their Church’s (Rome’s) ways and activities, in which the unlimited authority ascribed to the Pope figured largely, they found themselves inescapably enmeshed in matters of faith confession and in the inevitable consequences of their own involvement.

The ensuing theological debates quite naturally issued in new confessional conclusions, yet the Church of Rome was not willing to reform itself according to Luther’s ideas. An unbridgeable gap was opened between the would-be reformers and their Church. Radicalism reached new heights; Rome stood firm in Her traditional positions, and carried them to new extremes. By permanently shaking off Rome’s dogmatic authority, the Lutheran movement found itself confronting an endless vista of new emancipations, as it

gave birth to a multitude of movements similar to itself.

We have already discussed, at the outset of this study, the rise and character of Protestantism as the result of unbridled “reform.” But it is worth stressing again that once Luther set out on his path, with the principle of reform as his guide, he set in motion a process whose results he could never have foreseen. Had he been able to see where his undertaking would lead, he might have been horrified—for he was a faithful servant of his Church—and thought better of the whole attempt. But once he had set out, the tide of consequences, foreseen and unforeseen, proved so strong that to try to stem that tide would have been a fruitless endeavor. He himself was carried away on the flood, and if he managed not to drown, it was as much as he could do. Sometimes it was indeed possible for him to change the direction of events, but just as often he was forced to acquiesce in the direction they were taking. At the end of his life, he saw with his own eyes the gaping wound in the side of his Mother Church—a wound whose pain Rome still feels acutely today.

If these historical precedents hold a lesson for future generations, the Armenian Church should benefit from that lesson. All of us desire that the Armenian Church reform itself; none of us wants to open wounds in its tender sides, in the name of that reform. Thankfully, we do not have a Luther among us—nor (just as thankfully) do we confront the same egregious grounds for reform in our desire to enact change.

So what is the question of our *understanding of the faith* in the context of desirable reform? First of all, it is a vital question. Today a majority of Armenian intellectuals and Armenian young people, under the influence of their 20th-century education and upbringing, have an outlook on life quite different [from that of the older generations]. Not only do they not concern themselves with questions of theological confession, but people in general do not concern themselves with the Christian religion at all; to use a slang expression, they say “Whatever!”

On the other hand, the [Armenian] community, which looks upon itself as the guardian of its forefathers’ faith, seems unable or unwilling to face questions of faith, because their psychological makeup finds the prayers, the liturgy, and good works sufficient. The clergy, for their part, with some precious exceptions, have not been prepared for a studious examination of faith issues.

I believe that the above is an accurate, unbiased and unexaggerated depiction of the situation. And yet, from the point of view of real reform, it is not possible to simply pass over in silence matters that concern our understanding of the faith.

You cannot wave away
the Church’s centuries of
amazing intellectual and
spiritual achievement,
monuments of mind and
pen, devotion, dedication
and willingness to
sacrifice its own blood.

“What is the *confession of faith*, and what is its importance for the Church?” interested persons are sure to ask. Let us respond to these questions first.

One of the most far-reaching consequences of Luther’s reform movement was that in its hostility to the Roman Church’s official teachings it championed the individual Christian’s freedom of opinion. The confession of faith, better known as the Creed, is the Roman Church’s official, verbal formula of its teachings on certain faith issues that must be accepted without scrutiny and without debate. Either you accept them, believe them, and remain in the Church, or you don’t accept them, don’t believe them, and leave the Church.

[The Creed] is a “scholastic” explanation; that is, it is not subject to re-examination but is the formulation of a School [of theologians], although the School may review its own decisions and improve upon them. In other words, the statements of the Creed are not subject to the individual opinions of individual believers [in the Roman Church].

Although the Armenian Church is also “scholastic” in its formulation of the Creed, it is more open-minded than other Churches.

St. Nersés Shnorhali is a shining and authoritative example of the Armenian Church’s “conservative openness” towards other forms of Christianity. Nonetheless, even Shnorhali’s attitude towards the faithful is strict in that he demands that the Armenian Church’s members understand their Church’s creed. It is for this reason that he includes an

interpretation of the Church's creed at the beginning of the first official document of his catholicosial reign, his *General Epistle*, before setting out his own guidelines and directives.

Can such a requirement be reconciled with today's mentality? Is it any longer possible to believe in the straightforward Gospel story of Jesus Christ's incarnation, as well as the official formulas that condense the Church's belief in His Person—that is, the Creed? Haven't we Armenians raised our children using this century's enlightened educational methods? Haven't they thoroughly absorbed the dictum that one must always seek out the "whys and wherefores" behind any statement? Isn't it true that they are no longer willing to swallow things "because the priest said so?" They argue, they demand an explanation, and if the explanation suits their thinking they accept the decision, but if it does not, they feel free to reject it.

Actually, this has historically always been the case, and today's human society is no different than societies of the past, although people may be more open about their acceptance or non-acceptance of propositions.

A little earlier we said that the Church is a "school of faith;" hypocrisy and a double standard have no place there. Today, in this "enlightened generation," the Church of Jesus Christ presents itself to us as a combination of, on the one hand, ancient and stalwart Apostolic teachings and powerful logic and, on the other hand, simple-mindedness and traditional conventions.

You may be ready to cast aside the Creed and its careful formulations in favor of individual freedom of interpretation, but you cannot be so cavalier with the Gospel and the writings of the Apostles. You cannot wave away the Church's centuries of amazing intellectual and spiritual achievement, monuments of mind and pen, devotion, dedication and willingness to sacrifice its own blood. You cannot pretend that a Church whose traditions and teachings have lived through two thousand years of history and counting, has nothing to offer.

We must humble ourselves a little, climb down off the high horse of our intellectual pretentiousness, put on the *pazbans*, and stand respectfully and reverently before the Mysteries of faith, submitting ourselves to them like lambs.

Even the physical universe is filled with mysteries and things beyond our understanding. It is certainly true that the human intellect has been able to penetrate secrets that did not even cross the minds of earlier people, or that they looked upon as miraculous. And yet the revelations of science are relatively few, in comparison to the things that remain unknown. Nature is the wondrous revelation of unprovable truths, and religion is the realm of the most profound truths among them; in theological language, these are mysteries like the existence of God, the Trinity, the

Incarnation, and so on.

True knowledge and true enlightenment will maintain their prominent status by bowing before the fact of Mystery and unprovable truth — upon which Nature is based, and by which heaven and earth are filled — and religion, which mystically expresses those Truths through its sacraments. Persons who want to "simplify" religion by disrobing it of Mystery will quite naturally not succeed in doing so. The intentions of those who advocate a "rational religion" are good in principle, but they will not succeed in de-Mysterifying faith. Take away the Secret and the Mystery, and there is no religion left. Turn religion into an individual pursuit or, as they say, make it "a matter of individual conscience," and you will see that that religion becomes a matter of individual self-deceptions. The human being is religious by virtue of his or her very creation; to put it another way, the human being is "incurably religious."

Knowledge, as the word is now understood, is not in opposition to pure religion. We accept that prejudices and factors stemming from human weakness have crept into "pure religion," and that these cannot stand up to the light of knowledge; on the contrary, they melt away, they dissipate. Pure religion, however, as it was preached to humanity by Jesus Christ, stands and remains inalterable, just as the Savior Himself does: in the words of the Apostle, it is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:7-9) and has no need of strange teachings and opinions proffered in the name of knowledge.

Pure religion, however,
as it was preached to
humanity by Jesus
Christ, stands and
remains inalterable,
just as the Savior
Himself does.

It neither was nor is our intention to make this into a theological discourse, but with regard to the reform of the Church it was worth touching on this question at least briefly. Because of the strong link there is between *confession of faith* and *worship*, the former issue is one of great importance.

True “open-mindedness” ... is free from intellectual prejudice and intellectual narrowness; it can accommodate the incomprehensible and the mysterious.

At the outset of this study we spoke about a book entitled, “A Portrait of the Armenian Apostolic Church.” Returning to that subject for a moment, we should point out that in its pages worship has been “corrected” in the name of Reform: for example, the reformers have removed from the hymns any wording that refers to “the intercession of the saints,” as well as all the hymns having to do with the Virgin Mary. They have excised these things, as we mentioned earlier, with an eye to pleasing the Protestants, and in so doing they have created a contradiction. The notion of the “intercession of the saints” originates in our teaching concerning the immortality of the soul – a concept that the authors of the book include in their version of the Creed, as given at the beginning of the volume. To contradict themselves in this manner is truly inexcusable.

The question, to put it in the simplest way possible, is this: is the human spirit immortal, or is it not? The Church believes that it is. So how is it possible to toss aside a teaching that emanates directly from that belief? We accept that the idea of the intercession of the saints has been belabored at times and painted in dark colors; but inept application does not invalidate the idea itself. It is with the spirit, the Mystery, that we are concerned. . . .

In our Church’s “reform” the *confession of faith* remains unshaken; open-minded though we are, we accept that. What we believe are not artificial concepts, nor are they the fantasies of ignorant or delusional people. True “open-mindedness” does not consist in the rejection of things, but in their considered acceptance. In other words, it is free from intellectual prejudice and intellectual narrowness; it can accommodate the incomprehensible and the mysterious.

Without dwelling on this too long, we can say that in the Church the Creed and the confession of faith are something like the by-laws of institutions. Just as no institution can exist for long without statutes specific to itself, neither can the Church go on for long without a Creed and a confession of faith. The members of an organization subscribe to its by-laws and are not free to simply ignore any regulations that they do not understand or do not agree with, or to countermand them or to “correct” them in whatever manner they see fit; if they do so, the organization is destroyed. By the same token, the Church is harmed when the members of its Society treat the Creed and the confession of faith in those ways. . . .

In our humble opinion it is essential, in the context of Armenian Church reform, to educate the people at all levels; in so far as possible they should understand the Church’s Creed and Her confession of faith, and where understanding is not possible, they should respect what is not understood. An end should be put to the deadly indifference of our intellectuals and scholars, the ignorance of a large portion of the laity and the unpreparedness of the clergy. If we have accepted the Gospel, we should also be prepared to accept its consequences. None but specious objections can be raised against this.

The above excerpt, translated by Dr. Roberta Ervine, was taken from a chapter entitled “*The Church’s Confession of Faith, and the Liturgy*”, *The Armenian Church* [Հայ Եկեղեցի], Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1930, 52-85.

For further reading: *General Epistle*, St. Nersess Shnorhali, translation and introduction by Fr. Arakel Aljalian. St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 1996.



Լի = “LEE” = FULL, FILLED, PLENTY, ABUNDANT

By Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian

The concept of something being filled is a constant part of our everyday lives, especially when it comes to packing a suitcase, eating a meal or purchasing gas. Yet, we do not think of being filled very often when it comes to our spiritual lives. Yet, this is a principle central to our faith as Christians. It is a word that is found hundreds of times throughout the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles and is especially used when referring to feelings of compassion Christ has when interacting with people. The word “*լի*” and the English words “*full*,” “*fill*” and “*plenty*” all have the same root.

On the day of Pentecost, we hear that “they [the apostles] were *լի*/filled with the Holy Spirit” [Acts 2:4]. This means that only the Holy Spirit resided in the apostles and nothing else occupied their thoughts or hearts. They emptied themselves of the cares of the world, thus making room and allowing for the Holy Spirit to dwell within and completely fill them.

This is how we, as Christians, must live our lives. So often we permit other, worldly things to fill our lives and our schedules, which ultimately leave no room for God. We must let go of grudges and hatred, gossip and lies, pride and jealousy, which fill our thoughts and lives with unnecessary

worries and stress, preventing the Holy Spirit from filling our lives with His gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control [Galatians 5:22-23]. We make filling our stomachs, closets and bank accounts our priorities, but Christ tells us to first seek the Kingdom of Heaven, and all these things will be given to us [Matthew 6:33].

As we see with the holy apostles on the feast of Pentecost, when we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit and allow only Him to dwell within us, nothing else can take His place. The Holy Spirit fills us completely and there is no room for temptation, sin, or evil, or anything else that distracts us from undivided devotion to the Lord.

If you have been baptized, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and you also belong to the Church, the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Let’s live in such a way that fulfills what we are – *filled* with the Holy Spirit. And “if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” [Galatians 5:25].

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Perhaps the most learned Armenian clergyman of modern times, Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian was born in 1841 in Constantinople, where he was raised in an Armenian Catholic family. While still a teenager he joined the Armenian Catholic monastic brotherhood of St. Anthony in Rome. There he earned three successive doctoral degrees: in philosophy, in theology and in canon law, before settling in Constantinople. Beginning with the controversial declaration of the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope at the First Vatican Council in 1869, Ormanian became increasingly troubled by various aspects of the Catholic Church's teachings. In 1879 he was one of 75 Armenian Catholic clergy and nuns to leave the Catholic Church and to enter into communion with the Armenian Orthodox Church. While still a *vartabed*, Ormanian was appointed preacher at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Galata, a neighborhood on the northern shore of the Golden Horn in Constantinople. Later he served as primate of Garin, where he was instrumental in opening the Sanasarian School. Summoned to Holy Etchmiadzin, he was consecrated bishop and appointed instructor in the Gevorkyan Seminary. In a time of increasing Russian influence in Armenia's affairs, Ormanian was forced to leave the country due to his Ottoman citizenship. In 1889 Ormanian was appointed the founding Dean of the newly established seminary adjoining the old Monastery of the Holy Mother of God in Armash near Constantinople. In 1896 he was elected Patriarch of Constantinople and served for 12 years before resigning under pressure from Armenian political forces, which opposed his restrained approach toward the regime of Sultan Hamid. In 1914 he traveled to Jerusalem, where he lived for three years during the First World War and the Genocide. He died in Constantinople in 1918. Among his voluminous writings are his massive history of the Armenian Church entitled *Azkabadoom* (History of a People), and his comprehensive study of the Gospels, *Hamabadoom* (Gospel Harmony), from which this excerpt is translated.

PATRIARCH MAGHAKIA ORMANIAN'S GOSPEL HARMONY HAMABADOOM

By V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

One of the great blessings of the Church is that she has preserved and handed the heart of the Christian message down to her children in four distinct accounts known as the "Gospels." Of course there is really only *one* Gospel. Mathew, Mark, Luke and John each provide a unique perspective on that "Good News," the one life-giving ministry of Jesus the Christ. While the four Gospels relate essentially the same story of humanity's salvation, there are many differences between them in content, sequence of events and interpretation. Some of these differences are significant. So it is not surprising that as early as the second century, there were efforts to "harmonize" the four Gospels into one, unified narrative.

The first such effort of the twentieth century was actually produced in Armenian by an Armenian, the illustrious churchman and scholar, Maghakia Ormanian. Published in 1911 in Constantinople and spanning more than 1100 pages, his book is entitled *Hamabadoom*/*Համաբաժանում*, which literally means, "narrated together" or "common

story." Works of this type are often referred to as "Gospel Harmonies" or "Gospel Synopses." Reading the four Gospels as unique views of one fundamental history, Ormanian draws them together in a single, very readable account of the "Good News" of Jesus Christ. But the great scholar achieves much more. Ormanian not only reconstitutes and retells the Gospels, but he explains them. With great erudition, faith, and sensitivity, *Hamabadoom* throws light on the great parables, miracles and sermons of Jesus, as well as the events of the Passion of the Christ. As he tells the stories, Ormanian interprets their vital importance for his Armenian flock. At the same time, the author tackles problems and inconsistencies that have plagued Christians from the very beginning. Ormanian's careful analysis of the text reveals his mastery of the best biblical scholarship of his times. Known for his meticulous eye, Ormanian includes numerous maps and illustrations, and concludes his work with eight appendices including indexes of persons, topics, places, and various comparative and synoptic tables.

In this way, *Hamabadoom* becomes a precious textbook and resource for understanding and teaching the Gospel within the Armenian Church. It must be considered one of the great literary achievements of the Armenian Church in modern times, a *must-read* for every Armenian clergyman, seminarian, church-school teacher, and for all who seek to deepen their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Look for English translations of select chapters of *Hamabadoom* in upcoming issues of *The Treasury*.



THE PREFACE TO MAGHAKIA ORMANIAN'S *HAMABADOOM*

Translated by V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

No other book in the world has inspired more high-level scholarly writing than the Gospel. I can make such a bold assertion not only as a true Christian who sees in the Gospel a work that is the result of God's inspiration; but also as an objective observer, one who has examined and scrutinized the fruits and irrepressible life that have emanated from it.

The greatest revolution in humanity is connected with the name of Jesus Christ. The world owes to Christianity realities that have come to be known as human self-consciousness, liberation, dignity, fraternity, and cumulative progress. The world has made these the marks of its splendor and joy. And Christianity has acquired its basic principles from the Gospel. Its norms have been compiled from the Gospel. Its path was paved from the Gospel and its strength has come from the Gospel.

The Gospel became a bright sun, which has cast its light in every corner, having shaken and uplifted all by its rays—not only those who have lovingly embraced its messages as their own, but also those who think that they have kept their distance from it but who, by their own actions and deeds, have actually set out on a similar path, and only in so doing have succeeded in improving their lot.

The irrepressible life of the Gospel is as evident as are its undeniable effects. The Gospel has had, and continues to have its rabid antagonists. Yet whatever critics are writing today was already written long ago by critics of antiquity, and has been parroted from age to age. And that incessant

campaign has been unable to diminish the Gospel's esteem. It has not impeded its popularity. It has not weakened its power, nor eroded its solid foundation. Today the Gospel is what it was at the time of its birth, a work coveted by all and loved by all.

The secret to the Gospel's unrivaled staying power becomes even more remarkable when we observe that its power lies neither in its philosophical nuances nor in its rhetorical structures; neither in its learned deductions nor in its aesthetic fineries, but rather in a new and phenomenal quality that enriches the mind and captures the heart, soothing the spirit and strengthening the will. And even from its inelegant composition—forgive me for this brash description—the Gospel gives off a ray of light, a beam that stuns, a breath that animates, a power that propels.

The Gospel has also had its opponents. Some have subjected it to their own philosophical, not to say pedantic biases, and in this way have claimed to find points to condemn. Others have drawn phony conclusions from the Gospel, twisting it into saying things that the text does not say.

When we read the Gospel simply, as it is, without polemics or preconceived notions, its supernatural wisdom is an inerrant guide for the person of faith. The moral advocate is attracted by its straightforward guidance. The politician is attracted by its unambiguous principles. In times of prosperity the Gospel offers thoughtful counsel. In times of defeat, it provides heartfelt consolation.

It is that deep-rooted conviction that has made the reading and study of the Gospel so precious to all of us, both practically, because we have witnessed its proven benefits, and intuitively because we have sensed those same benefits. From a general, moral perspective, is it perhaps even possible to observe that those nations that are known for their high moral compass are those in which it has become customary to read the Gospels? Does not our own Armenian history itself also witness to this? Gospel in hand, our valiant martyrs and benevolent women, our robust young people and God-fearing populace were strengthened in their battles. They were enlivened against persecution and they were exhorted to action in times of deprivation.

I too am led by that conviction, both as a preacher and *vartabed*, and as teacher of religion. I have loved to walk by the light of the Gospel, both in my counseling, and in my lectures, as my audiences in Constantinople and in the provinces, as well as my students in the academy, in the seminary and in the Central School will remember. I am therefore also inclined to make that same great wish permanent in print, to instill in our people a love for the Gospel and its contents. Back in my very busy days I had already planned that work in the issues of the religious journal *Looy*s [Light], which was carried on for a while in the daily paper *Arevelk* [East]. Yet these were short-lived efforts, and it was necessary to present the planned book in a handy and permanent volume. To accomplish this I wanted to make use of the freedom that I received from my official duties, reviewing what I had published in periodicals and filling in what was still lacking from the complete work, which was more than half.

This is the purpose of my *Hamabadoom*, and so began its preparatory steps.

Those who set out to study the Gospel have adopted many and various approaches and objectives. Since there have been those who have attempted to refute the Gospels in pedantic ways, searching for technical and scholarly defects and even theories that are contrary to logic, it became necessary for others to take on the role of advocate and to write in defense of the Gospels.

There have also been critics who, by focusing their research on the Gospels' origin, their composition, transmission, dating, authorship and other such points, have even raised doubts about their authenticity. For this reason, it became necessary to produce and publish critical studies in order to dispel such objections.

On the other hand, those who are interested in dogmatic issues engage themselves in analyzing the Gospels' words and constituent units, extracting from within them arbitrary principles, constructing points of faith, and making the Gospel itself the cause of dissension

within the church of Christ. Against people like this too, it became necessary to study the contents of the Gospels impartially, without complicating and without reducing, to uncover the doctrine contained in them. This is a branch of study entrusted to knowledgeable theologians.

The role of my *Hamabadoom* is neither apologetic, nor text-critical, nor doctrinal because this volume is intended neither to counter those who attack Christianity, nor those who deny the value of the Gospels. This study is meant for the faithful people of the Armenian Orthodox Church who are the descendants of a nation that loves the Gospel, followers of the robust principles of the Gospel. At the same time, however, when they take the Gospels into their hands, they encounter points sparking genuine questions. Each one of the four Gospels follows a procedure that is independent of the others. Consequently, comparing them, our people wish to acquire a sense of completeness. The last of the four Gospels contains many more perceptible differences when compared with the first three. Therefore our people wish to be enlightened in that regard. From time to time in the Gospels our people encounter words and explanations that seem to contradict one another. They would like to hear the solution to those difficulties.

The Gospel-writers never intended to be merely chroniclers of history or stenographers. They shift events back and forth and they make no effort to reconcile their respective approaches. Readers of the Gospel are interested in seeing the events arranged in historical sequence.

In the sermons of the Gospel, many points are described without perfect clarity, and in places problems surface that remain obscure and which lack a solution. Their clarification is not only satisfying, but, in a way, becomes an absolute requirement for maintaining a reverent attitude.

Gospel in hand, our valiant martyrs and benevolent women, our robust young people and God-fearing populace were strengthened in their battles.

The purpose of *Hamabadoom* is to satisfy those reasonable expectations in a modest way. The heading or newly-composed title for this book shows the preference for a narrative approach. I have chosen to group together various points, for I wish to recount the contents of the four Gospels by arranging and harmonizing and explaining them. Even the sermons and teachings are presented in a narrative style.

For that reason, an effort has been made to summarize all of the important information. In this way, the reader will find not only historical, doctrinal, dogmatic and moral theories, but also chronological, topological, etymological, textual and linguistic information, to the extent that the sequence of issues demands, without, however, inordinately protracting the book.

The primary and principal intent has been to *popularize* the Gospels, if one might put it this way. It is intended, in other words, to accommodate the Gospels to the capacity and ability of people of faith so that, having understood the Gospels, they might feel satisfaction and receive inner fulfillment, and so that the Gospel will become their spiritual food, their moral guide, and the means for strengthening their faith.

Hamabadoom will also be a very useful manual for servants of the church, perhaps with the exception of the highly educated class. Yet I believe that no one will be offended when I say that the overwhelming majority of priests needs a handbook that summarizes and elucidates the Gospels, where they can find what they need without hunting and foraging here and there.

In the provincial and outlying regions, *Hamabadoom* could even be read from the altar, if not in its entirety, at least in part, as a meritorious, Christian, moral exhortation to the people, more edifying and helpful than aimless, bland sermons.

I will be happy if religion teachers would also use it in their lessons on the Gospel. *Hamabadoom* could serve as a teacher's guide to make more enjoyable the lessons that students consider boring.

I have no doubt that everyone will find these ideas appealing and engaging. The only issue is, have I been able to do justice to the matter at hand? To make such a claim would be neither realistic nor perhaps even true. I have only attempted to make the best use of whatever I have explored as a student, teacher, *vartabed*, and pastor both from books

and from practical experience. I have not had a particular advisor nor relied on a certain author, but have made use of every kind of study of the Gospels, even polemical denunciations. I have sought to appropriate and condense the best theories and to apply what others have said to our Armenian Church and to our people.

Only one thing is missing. Had I personally visited the holy places of Palestine I would have described them more vividly and precisely. Unfortunately the unending constraint of my responsibilities made it impossible to fulfill this wish.

I have one other wish in my heart. As in this volume I have presented our blessed people with the four Gospels in an easily understood format, I would like to do the same for the other parts of the New Testament, namely the Acts of the Apostles and the Apostolic Letters, similarly arranging, collating and properly elucidating them in order to make them more easily accessible to our people. To this first *Hamabadoom* volume, which could be subtitled *Jesus*, I would add a second, subtitled, *The Apostles*. But I am afraid that my wish will remain unfulfilled because my life has reached its twilight and I only hope that I will be able to complete the projects that are currently in hand.

Ormanian's *Hamabadoom*, while long out of print, can be found in most Armenian libraries. Used copies are occasionally available for sale on eBay. A pdf version can be accessed and downloaded at http://greenstone.flib.sci.am/gsd/collect/hajgirqn/book/hamapatum_1911.pdf

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THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

By André Markarian

If you were brought up in the Armenian Church it is very likely that you are familiar with a frequently used hand gesture called *խաչակնքել*/*khachagnkel* (to make the sign of the Cross), *խաչ հանել*/*khach hanel* (to cross oneself) or *տեսանագրել*/*dyarnakrel* (to inscribe the Lord). Whether it is performed ceremonially upon entering a church, before receiving Holy Communion, after a blessing or prayer, or to recognize a divine action, making the sign of the Cross is an almost ubiquitous liturgical and personal devotional practice. Unfortunately, as with any instinctive action that is so often repeated, crossing oneself runs the risk of becoming a mindlessly reflexive and misinterpreted movement. If not properly understood and utilized judiciously and devoutly, making the sign of the Cross risks losing its very deep and powerful spiritual meaning and value.

We know that making the sign of the Cross is a very ancient practice in the history of the Church. Although we do not know precisely when the sign of the Cross was introduced into the daily lives and worship practices of Christians – the gesture is not distinctly mentioned in the Bible – some of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament attest to its use. Christian writers like Tertullian,

St. Basil and St. Cyril of Jerusalem confirm that some form of the sign of the Cross was already common practice by the third century AD (especially at baptisms), well before Armenia was fully evangelized.

Soon after, a more formalized technique of making the sign of the Cross developed: joining the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger of the right hand and tracing oneself, first from the forehead to the breast, then from one shoulder to the other. Often the gesture was accompanied by a prayer or invocation of the Holy Trinity. There were (and still are) minor variations from community to community in the details of the hand position and movements, none of which have theological or dogmatic significance. For example, in the Armenian Church (and other Oriental Orthodox and Catholic rites) the hand moves from the left to the right shoulder, while in the Eastern Orthodox ritual, the right hand moves from right to left. Another example of these variations from the early years of Christianity was tracing the sign of the cross on the forehead rather than across the head and chest. Despite any of these differences, there was an unquestionable mindfulness of why this gesture was being made and its multifaceted significance.



At the most elementary level, the sign of the Cross is a concrete visual reminder of the Cross on which Jesus Christ was executed, and consequently of his voluntary death and resurrection out of love for us. More broadly understood, the Cross serves as a powerful symbol of God's sacrificial love for humanity personified in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Having become truly human, the Savior set out to heal a broken world through his words and miracles. He took upon himself the sins of the world by suffering and dying on the Cross, and he rose again to life so that we too may have eternal life with him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Originally the Cross was a Roman device for torture and execution (the word "excruciating" is derived from the Latin word "crux" meaning cross). Yet, Christ transformed it into the means of eternal life, the ultimate sign of God's extreme love and compassion for humanity. The Cross became a sign of our salvation, not because the symbol itself had any power to save, but because of the One who died on it to save us. The Cross became a visual image of God's promise to the world that "whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" [Gospel of John 11:25].

As you can see then, the ritual of crossing oneself is basically a mini-prayer and confession of faith without words. Every time we make this hand gesture, we proclaim an abridged version of the Nicene Creed, the very same declaration we make every Sunday morning during the *Badarak* (Divine Liturgy). This silent profession of faith in the form of a hand gesture, whether it is upon oneself or someone/thing else, is an attestation of belief in the One who hung from the very Cross that we trace over ourselves

and the work that He accomplished by dying on that cross. By imprinting upon ourselves the Cross that Jesus died on, we publicly (or privately) and solemnly pledge our faith in all that the Cross stands for; that with God all things are possible through Jesus Christ, that joy can emerge from sorrow, hope can arise out of despair, light can dispel the darkness and life can emerge from death.

Not only does this "physical" prayer serve as an affirmation of one's Christian beliefs and discipleship, it can be a deliberate way to acknowledge God's presence and to accept His will. At times when one is keenly aware of God's activities in our lives (for example, when we receive good news or maybe when dealing with an illness), making the sign of the Cross can be a marvelous way of recognizing and endorsing His daily blessings, guidance and discipline without having to say a word. Finally, when we make in faith the sign of the Cross during a moment of joy or despair where words simply don't suffice, this gesture carries the non-verbal power of even the most sincere of prayers, for it is at times like these that the Holy Spirit speaks to God on our behalf [Romans 8:26].

Whether we utilize this simple and beautiful gesture of making the sign of the Cross as a silent confession of faith, a personal testimonial of God's power and rule over our lives, a proclamation of Christian commitment and discipleship, an attestation to the victory of good over evil, or a petition for protection and deliverance, this sacred gesture has enormous sacramental power. There can be no more visible and solemn declaration to mark ourselves as belonging to Christ. Crossing ourselves can be one of the purest expressions of the soul and the simplest way of saying "Amen" to Jesus's lordship and activity in our lives. The mark of the Cross reminds us of God's undying love for us in all circumstances, and by inscribing it upon ourselves we seal our commitment to the crucified and risen Christ. So make the sign of the Cross deliberately and boldly. Unabashedly declare your allegiance to Jesus Christ and your faith and trust in Him through this sacred inscription, for just as St. Paul has testified, "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" [Galatians 6:14]

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