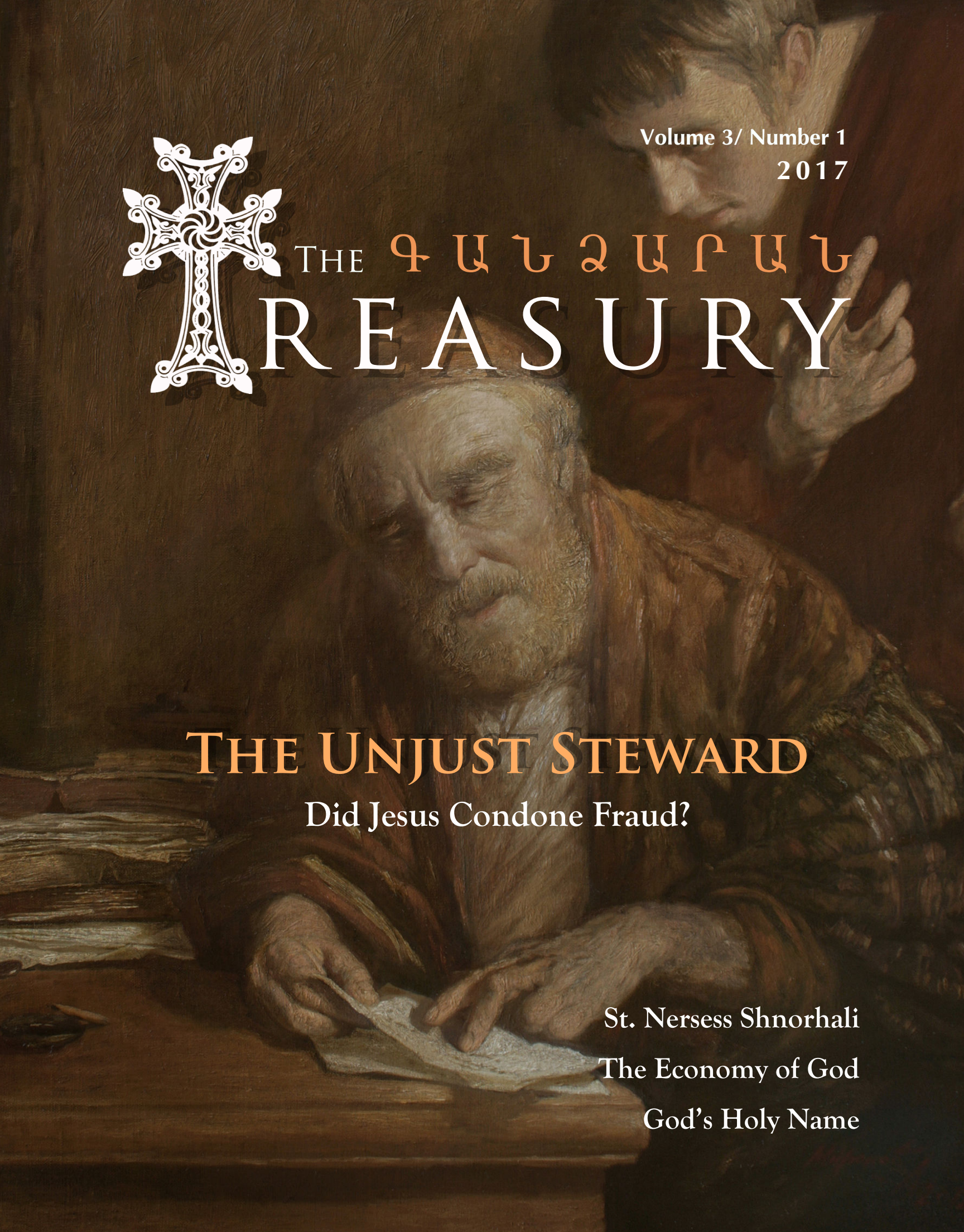




Volume 3/ Number 1

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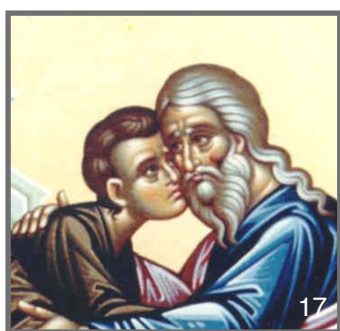


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HOLD THE LEAVEN



The season of Great Lent (*Մեծ Պահպ/*Medz Bahk) in the Armenian Church affords us every year the opportunity to relook at select parables of our Lord Jesus Christ and reflect upon them in new and fresh ways. In this issue of *The Treasury*, we take a closer look at the meaning of The Parable of the Unjust Steward through the eyes of two spiritual giants in the Armenian Orthodox Church: St. Nersess of Lambron, and Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian. We hope that by bringing these two perspectives together in one issue of *The Treasury*, it will allow for a productive and revelatory study of a parable that many have struggled to understand over the ages.

Another item that is often associated with the season of Great Lent is the concept of “leaven.” The term “leaven” (*խմոր/khumor*) nowadays is mostly known to bakers and chefs, and refers to any substance that can be used in doughs and batters (and more importantly for Armenians *chæreg*) to cause gas formation that lightens and softens the food item. There are basically three types of leavening agents: natural (yeast, certain bacteria), chemical (baking soda), and mechanical (beating). The most traditional leavening agent is yeast which is added to bread and cake batters causing them to rise and “fluff” up. Many an Armenian kitchen has agonized over a bad batch of yeast failing to perform its duties during an Eastertide *chæreg* baking session.

The Lenten season’s connection with leaven stems mainly from its association with the Jewish Passover during which the use of leavening for cooking is forbidden for seven days. This restriction of using yeast was meant to remind Jews of their hasty departure from Egypt, which left no time to allow their bread to rise. In the Old Testament, unleavened bread eaten during the Passover celebration was referred to as the “bread of affliction” (see Deuteronomy 16:3), which called attention to the suffering that the Jews endured under the reign of Pharaoh before their liberation. Right after Great Lent during Holy Week (*Աւագ Շաբաթ/*Avak Shapat), the Armenian Church commemorates the Last Supper on Holy Thursday when Jesus broke unleavened bread and distributed it to his disciples during his final Passover meal with them.

During his ministry, Jesus often used the term “leaven” when teaching his disciples, drawing upon the Passover images so familiar to his Jewish audience. In Matthew 13:33, he said: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” In this passage, Jesus emphasized the positive attribute of leaven, its ability to “build up” an otherwise impotent lump of dough. When we are living in the center of God’s will, our leaven can accomplish great things for the family of God. Just as a small packet of yeast causes a lump of flat *chæreg* dough to rise into a mound of delicious sweet bread, the Kingdom of Heaven living and

acting within us can accomplish incredible things and have a great positive influence on others.

That same “puffing up” property of leaven can also have detrimental effects when applied improperly. In Matthew 16:6 Jesus contrasts the leaven of the Kingdom of Heaven to “human” leaven: “Take heed and beware of the *leaven* of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Jesus’ disciples understood that he was not simply referring to bread, but rather to the hypocritical teaching of the Jewish teachers of the time. As an application for us today, we can see that anytime we think, speak or act in sinful ways (pride, anger, gossip, deceit, etc), even in small amounts, this type of “leavening” effect can corrupt us and all those around us. Paul the Apostle commented on this very fact in his letter to the Corinthians: “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little *leaven leavens* the whole lump?” (1 Cor 5:6)

St. Paul made additional use of the multifaceted imagery of leaven when he contrasted it to *unleavened* dough. Recall how unleavened bread is very flat and plain (for example, the “*mas*” bread that you pick up when leaving church). Unleavened bread was seen to also represent simplicity and humility, having no contamination from external impurities (like yeast or fermenting bacteria) that causes one to be inflated with pride, envy or other sins. A person who is “unleavened” has the character described in The Beatitudes - gentle, pure-hearted, peacemaking, merciful and thirsting after righteousness. St. Paul encourages us then to be unleavened followers of Jesus Christ: “Cleanse out the old *leaven* that you may be a new lump, as you really are *unleavened*. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old *leaven*, the *leaven* of malice and evil, but with the *unleavened* bread of sincerity and truth.” (1Cor 5:7-8)

Which brings us to perhaps the most significant image of leaven running throughout Holy Scripture. Recall that after the exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel had to wander in the desert for forty years waiting to enter into the Promised Land (because of their disobedience). After all food supplies had run out and the Israelites were on the brink of starvation, they came into contact with another form of unleavened bread very different from that eaten during the Passover. God then provided the people with a food that fell from Heaven, an unleavened bread called “manna,” which fed them and kept them alive until they could finally enter into the Promised Land (Exodus 16). See how paradoxically the Passover unleavened bread



that was meant to represent affliction and bondage in Egypt, took on new meaning after the Exodus in the unleavened manna which preserved the Jewish nation in the wilderness. This unleavened manna was a shadow of the true, life giving unleavened Bread to come, the Son of God, for the salvation of mankind. It is for this reason that in the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Holy Communion loaf (*ushnshkhar*) is prepared without any leavening, and becomes the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly manna distributed to us during every Badarak celebration for our salvation and continued participation in His divine life.

During this Lenten season and beyond, let us aspire to be God’s unleavened bread in this world. When we live in the center of His will by striving to love and serve others, obeying Him, being diligent in prayer, reading our Bibles, regularly attending church and partaking of the Bread of Life in Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit will produce within us the “good” leaven to bring the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven into our homes, our churches and our communities.



THE MYSTERIOUS PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

Jesus' Parable of the Unjust Steward [Luke 16:1-9], which forms the theme of the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent in the Armenian Church, is surely one of the most troubling passages in the Gospels. A business manager takes liberties with his boss's assets and defrauds him of a fortune. Strangely, rather than firing him, his boss congratulates his manager for his ingenuity! More shocking, Jesus seems to approve of the manager's corruption. Church fathers and saintly teachers of all ages and traditions have grappled with what to make of the story. Here two Armenian Church luminaries of modern and ancient times shed light on this mysterious lesson of our Lord.

"GOOD STEWARDS OF GOD'S GOODS"

Archbishop Malakia Ormanian (1841-1918)

translated by V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

Luke inserts the Parable of the Unjust Steward immediately after the parable of the Prodigal Son, only separating them with the transition, "And he said to the disciples." In the Gospels the word "disciple" sometimes refers only to the twelve, sometimes to the seventy-two disciples. Sometimes it also applies in a general way to all of Jesus' committed followers. If we consider the note placed at the end of the parable, that the Pharisees who were listening became furious [Luke 16:14], then we are obliged to conclude that in this case we must not understand the word "disciple" in the restricted sense, and that Jesus did not address this parable only to his own, but rather to all the people.

There was a wealthy landlord who placed a general manager over his administrative affairs. The manager is referred to as *ununtu/dndes* [steward], in the ancient and positive sense of the Armenian word, and not in the contemporary corrupt and pejorative sense. After the steward had attended to his duties for a number of years, word reached the landlord that his steward was not being faithful in regard to his boss's property, and that the business was hurting and in danger. When the landlord heard this, he called the steward and straight out announced, "I'm not hearing good things about you. Your services are not helping me. Put your books in order and present the results to me. Then leave. I no longer need you."

This comes as a surprise to the steward but he is not flustered. He thinks of a way to secure his future after he has left his job because he realizes that he has neither the ability nor the experience to start a new career, and he is ashamed to open his hand as a beggar.

He decides that he desperately needs a ploy and he finds it. His plan is to adjust his boss's debtors' bills to reduce their debts and so that he himself might benefit. He calls one who owed 100 jugs of olive oil. He orders him to write a new bill of debt for 50 jugs. He erases 100 and replaces it with 50. Deeply grateful, the man departs.

He calls a second man who owes 100 measures of grain. He orders him also to rewrite his bill for 80 measures. He changes 100 to 80 measures. This man also leaves grateful.

The manager does the same with a third man and then a fourth until he is satisfied with the number of discounts he has given to the debtors at the expense of the landlord. One would think that when the shrewd manager rewrote the bills he might have immediately pocketed the difference when he demanded the original amount from the debtors. But the Gospel parable does not say this. On the contrary, it suggests that the manager only intended to earn the gratefulness of the debtors so that when he left his job he would be able to receive housing and food in their homes.

The scheme could not remain a secret. It circulated and eventually came to the ears of the landlord. He was indifferent and instead of becoming enraged with anger, the landlord was surprised by the manager's ingenuity. "He has become an expert," he said. "He understood his work and even his shrewd dealings were astute and clever and more astute than the good and faithful servants."

Up to this point the course of the parable hardly presents a praiseworthy circumstance. The mismanagement of the landlord's possessions is a crime. Defrauding the landlord's possessions is a crime. Fixing the bills is a crime.

Preparing for himself an unearned profit is a crime. The intention to live idly at the expense of another is a crime. So when Jesus says, "The landlord commended the unjust manager," it sounds bizarre to many. It is as if Jesus himself has praised the exploits of the unjust manager. However it is not Jesus who commends the manager. The text says that it was the *landlord* who praised the manager. The reference is to any wealthy person's unusual way of thinking and judging.

On the other hand, others wonder if the landlord in the parable might not represent God the Lord of the world? Then the natural conclusion would be that God has approved of the cheating. But it must be observed that



generally in parables, whenever two things or two persons are compared, they are not intended to be compared in every possible aspect, only in the one point of resemblance that is under consideration. Consequently, in this parable as well, we should not compare every aspect of the landlord and the steward with God and humanity, only the steward's ingenuity and the fact that he makes provisions for himself by means of the landlord's possessions.

This becomes immediately apparent from what Jesus says at the conclusion of the parable: "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon" [Luke 16:9]. "Mammon," from the Syriac or Aramaic root, means "things" or "possessions." Many have assumed that when used here, the word *mamonayeen*/մամոնային would mean "worshipping mammon like a god." However this interpretation has not been conclusively established. In any case, the word "mammon" signifies things or wealth in the material sense. It implies, furthermore, wealth that has been acquired indiscriminately and by any means, illegally or legally. For this reason the words "unrighteous mammon" are frequently

God has surrendered to humanity the world's goods, which are His possession, so that we human beings might manage them, or better, profit from them.

used together. So in the Parable of the Steward, as much as the mammon manipulated by the Steward is not free of the filth of fraud, we are however not absolutely required to interpret the wealth as having been acquired fraudulently. For farther down the word “unrighteous” is used in contrast to “true.” “If you are not faithful to unrighteous mammon, who will entrust you with what is true?” [Luke 16:11]. Here “unrighteous mammon” is used in the sense of wealth that is fleeting, temporary and false.

All interpreters are in agreement that the Parable of the Steward is a passage filled with internal difficulties, and that very careful interpretation is required in order to prevent Jesus' words from endorsing fraudulently acquired profit. Many approaches and solutions have been proposed, but our intention is not to enter into such details. We can accept that Jesus occasionally wished to explain divine principles by means of unappealing examples, for example, when he wished to demonstrate the power of prayer by the example of the widow, comparing the unscrupulous judge with God [Luke 18:1-8]. Let it therefore be sufficient for us to explain the message revealed in the Parable of the Steward.

The Landlord is God and the Steward is humanity. All of the good things of the world are God's possessions. Humanity is not their owner, but their caretaker. God has turned the world's good things over to humanity so that human beings might make good use of them in this world, so as to cultivate fruits and profits for the next world, just as the Landlord's possessions are found in the Steward's hands, and he manages them in order to secure his future.

The world's good things are only temporarily placed into humanity's hands. One day they will no longer be at the disposal of human beings, just as the Steward would one day be deprived of managing the Landlord's property. This is expressed in the parable right after the Landlord dismisses the Steward from his position. He gives the Steward some time to make good use of the possessions that have come into his hands, something which is contrary to the custom of the world. We would have expected that as soon as the Landlord realized the Steward's fraud, he would have immediately fired him rather than giving him the opportunity to continue his fraudulent activity.

So the Landlord of this parable is a person who willingly, and with open heart, gives his Steward free rein to make use of his wealth in any way he wishes. This is how Jesus wants to portray God. God has surrendered to humanity the world's goods, which are His possession, so that we human beings might manage them, or better, *profit from them*. God wants us to make use of those goods in any possible way, for as long as they are in our hands. When we lose them, that is, when we die, we will have profited in our future life from our management of those goods in this world.

It is also worth noting how the Steward derives his profit. When we explained the Steward's procedure for adjusting the bills, we pointed out that he had no intention of profiting from the difference between the original bill and the reduced bill. All the Steward wanted was to do good by his friend and one day to benefit from that good deed. The purpose of the parable is to explain and to teach that we are obliged to care for the well-being of our friend, to help him, to support him, and to have mercy on him using whatever goods of the world come into our hands. There is the great moral lesson of the parable.

In this way, after setting out its main points, those few general principles that the parable raise become clearer. All of them concern the use of the world's goods. The one who is faithful in very little will also be faithful in much. The one who is unfaithful in very little will also be unfaithful in much [Luke 16:10]. The one who is not faithful in temporary things will neither be faithful in permanent things. The one who is not faithful in a stranger's things will be more careless in his own things. It is impossible to be faithful to two opposing masters at the same time. The one who is faithful to one must be unfaithful to the other. God and mammon are mutually opposing masters. God's good things are opposed to the world's good things. The one who goes after the world's good things has gone against God's good things. To remain faithful to God and to mammon at the same time and to serve them faithfully is an impossibility.



Archbishop Malakia Ormanian (1841-1918)

In interpreting this parable we have mainly presented its ethical meaning and the Gospel also leads us in that direction. The Evangelist does not refer to the Gospel message and we will not add anything new because it is the same as that which precedes it.



One of the most learned Armenian clergymen in modern times, Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, 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. In 1879 he was one of 75 Armenian Catholic clergy and nuns to enter into communion with the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. 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 retiring to devote himself to writing. In 1914 he traveled to Jerusalem, where he lived for three years during the First World War and the Genocide. 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.

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“ON THE PARABLE OF THE [UNJUST] STEWARD”

Nersess Lambronatsi (1153-1198 AD)

translated by Roberta Ervine, PhD

And Jesus told His disciples, *There was a certain rich man who had a steward. And there was an accusation against [the steward], alleging that he had wasted his [master's] goods.*

Now, in this parable Christ intends to give hope of repentance to every individual who has been cleansed with His blood and elevated to the status of adoption and made an heir of the Church through the covenant of baptism. Anyone who strays from the faith or does unworthy deeds should not feel cut off from the hope of healing, or be overwhelmed by excessive sadness.

His master called him and said to him, “What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you cannot be steward any longer!” The steward said in his mind, “What shall I do? My master is removing the stewardship from me; I cannot work, and I am ashamed to beg.”

First, the master called him, and only then did he consider the matter. First, one is “called” by death, and then there is an examination of all one’s works. We can profitably read this parable in light of that, as follows.

The steward considered, “I am going to die.” Then he thought, “When I die I am going to be turned over to the tribunal of inquiry into all my doings.” In effect he said, *My master is taking the stewardship of this corporeal life away from me, and the death verdict has been handed down for me as it is for all creatures. When I go from here to there, I will not be able to work, as I will not have a body to act through.* He was also ashamed to beg, knowing that his soul was not worthy of charity. Truly, it is shameful for a person who has resisted learning from the many admonitions of sacred Scripture, to beg for leniency there [at God’s tribunal]!

I know what I shall do, so that when I am put out of my stewardship, they shall receive me into their homes. The meaning of this is not readily obvious. By mentioning *homes* in the plural, I believe he means the “mansions” that are prepared for the saints. (John 14:2) According to the works a person has done in this life, the “mansion” he or she inherits will be greater or smaller. So the steward is saying, “I know that I am not worthy of the biggest and best mansion, but perhaps I can still attain the second best — or at least one of the many smaller ones, appropriate for the small amount of good I have done in the world.”

So calling to him his master's debtors, one by one, he said to the first: 'How much do you owe my master?' And he answered, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down, and quickly write fifty.' Again, he said to another, 'How much do you owe?' And he answered, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down and quickly write eighty.'

What does this mean? One way of understanding this is to consider the two debtors as the soul and the physical body. Both of them work for the same Master, God, under the supervision of the same steward, the will.

Let us now consider the first debtor, the soul, and what it owes. When the will realizes that death is inevitable, it calls the soul to see how the soul's accounts stand with God: *How much do you owe my Master?* The soul responds, *One hundred measures of oil.*

The wealth that is most truly our own as human beings is spiritual and intellectual wealth.

What then is the *oil* that the soul owes to God? By *oil* Jesus depicts the spiritual passions, because when they are ignited and burned away, they produce light. Christ has given us commandments: not to be angry without a reason (Matt 5:22), not to harbor resentment (Matt 6:14-15), not to gaze with lust (Matt 5:28), not to be arrogant (Lk 14:11), not to make our heart a storehouse of evil things (Matt 12:35/Lk 6:45). So the soul is liable for all the ways its mind has transgressed these commands—by anger, lust, resentment, arrogance, and all their sub-species. This is a large debt indeed.

And so, the *steward*, the will, says to the soul, *from the hundred, write fifty.* In other words, "O soul, I know that it is difficult to completely forsake all the evil things that you are accustomed to thinking. If you cannot give them up entirely, at least desist from half of them, so that my debt will be only half as large! If you cannot stop your harmful thoughts totally, at least decrease your resentments, limit your anger, moderate your desires, etc."

What about the second *debtor* in the story — the body? The debt of the body is described as *a hundred measures of wheat*, because wheat is what we feed the body to sustain it. The body, too, owes the Master the full measure of harmful things it has enacted.

And so the will, the *steward*, says to the body, "Sit down quickly and write eighty." In other words, if you cannot all at once change your activities to be completely good, at least give up twenty percent of your bad habits, so that you may be indebted to the Master only for the remaining eighty percent. For example, instead of always eating and drinking until you are ready to burst, be satisfied with eating and drinking a modest amount. Instead of indiscriminately sleeping around, stay with your lawful spouse. If you are unable to love your enemies, at least while you go on hating them, truly love those who love you. (Lk 6:32) Make a start to your repentance and change of life by practicing all kinds of good behavior in this moderate way, until you progress and become stronger in goodness.

As the soul and the body advance in goodness, they will be able to erase their remaining debts also, by moving to higher and higher forms of goodness. Many people in other times have done so.

And the Master praised the steward for his unrighteousness, because he did wisely; the children of this world are wiser than the children of light in their generation. God often praised honest efforts to repent and become a better person. He praised the Ninevites when they repented, and he cancelled their impending destruction. (Jonah 3:10) He did the same when the wicked King Ahab put on sack-cloth and repented. (3 Ki 21:29) He likewise praised other transgressors who regretted the harm they had done and hastened to turn away from it.

I also say to you, make friends by the mammon of unrighteousness, so that when it diminishes, they will receive you into the eternal habitations. As you see, Jesus does not say "Purify yourselves from sin through strict fasting and continual prayer." Initially, people who are accustomed to harmful ways of thinking and behaving may be incapable of taking such strong measures. Instead, Jesus advises people to purify themselves by becoming more and more loving towards others and less hardhearted. As Daniel said to the barbarian Nebuchadnezzar, "You will expiate your sins through charity, and your wickedness by means of gifts to the poor." (Dan 4:24)

What is the charity that Jesus is recommending? Interestingly, He does not say merely, *make friends using mammon that you have gotten by your own labor.* Instead, He says, *make friends using the same mammon that that you have unrighteously accumulated from the deprivation of the poor, and by callously making the impoverished suffer.* Use it to obtain friends for yourself by returning to the poor the profit that you made at the expense of their sweat and suffering. If you cannot return it to them directly, give it to their fellows in poverty, so that when you die you do not take your polluted gains with you into the presence of your Master.

By giving to the poor you *make friends* with God. Truly, this is a wonderful hope. It is a way that anyone can use to get onto the road to heaven. Besides, giving up a part of your gains is also a light burden to bear compared to people who have really given up everything to follow Christ! (Lk 14:33) If loving charity towards others is all that is required to receive a heavenly mansion as your reward, who would not want to claim that reward? It is a very good bargain indeed.

If you are in need of repentance but do not have physical wealth to distribute as proof of your penitence, then distribute the even greater gifts of teaching and instruction. As the Lord said, “A human being shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of God’s mouth.” (Matt 4:4 / Lk 4:4)

Either way, if you prove faithful in little, (Lk 19:17) and you become a friend to the poor through gifts and charity, God will see your benevolence and will entrust to you the treasures of sublime wisdom and the understanding of His mysteries. The more you taste them, the more you will rejoice in His charity, and the more generously you will bestow the same upon others.

If you have not been faithful in unrighteous mammon, who will trust you with true wealth? And if you have not been faithful in what belongs to someone else, who will give you your own? No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will honor the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon. [Matt 6:24 / Lk 16:13]

Here the parable is not speaking of wealth *per se*, but the attitude that the wealthy person displays towards God and others. Abraham was physically wealthy, but he recognized himself as dust and ashes. He possessed wealth, but he loved and honored God more. David was a king but he confessed himself to be no more than a pilgrim and a stranger. He did not love his status and possessions and forgot where they came from. The wealthy Solomon knew that all the things of this world are “vanity of vanities.” (Ecc. 1:2) He had much wealth, but he served and honored the wisdom that came to him from God.

It is obvious that wealthy persons like these weighed and measured themselves rightly, and were not arrogant because of their possessions. By contrast, the wealthy person who is covetous and demands respect from his peers is polluted before God, who opposes the proud. (James 4:6)

If we prove unrighteous in little, stingily scraping together possessions for ourselves, loving and serving them and not sharing them with the poor, we will be exactly the same way in our relationship with God – our knowledge of him will be meager scrapings, because we have not increased it by sharing it with others or by loving our Master first and foremost.

Another way of looking at this is to say that if we are only concerned with physical wealth, who will entrust spiritual wealth to us? The wealth that is most truly *our own* as human beings is spiritual and intellectual wealth. This is what differentiates us from the animals.

Think about it this way: if you accumulate physical wealth, you really accumulate it for someone else. How many years do you expect to enjoy it, before you leave it all, and it becomes the possession of your heirs?

Too, if you gain your wealth at the expense of others, you will have neither the capacity nor the time to take care of *what is truly yours* – the heavenly mysteries, immortal life and bliss that are our proper possessions as human beings.

On the other hand, if we use our physical possessions to *make friends* of the poor, our loving behavior towards others gradually purifies our vision of God. As Jesus said in the Gospel according to Matthew “if the eye of your mind is clean, it lightens all the senses with heavenly light.” (Matt 6:22)

May the *steward* that is within each one of us encourage us to make a good beginning in penitence. May we decrease our debts to the Master by using our resources, *body and soul*, ever more fully for the benefit of our fellow creatures and for the adornment of the eternal home that awaits us, through the charity of God in Christ Jesus.



This translation is excerpted from a much longer homily by the prodigious archbishop and intellectual powerhouse Nersess Lambronatsi (1153-1198). Born into a family of royalty and notoriety (as a descendant of St. Gregory the Illuminator), Nersess quickly ascended through the clerical ranks and was ordained Archbishop of Tarsus in the ancient Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. During his subsequent twenty years of ecclesiastical service, he participated in several ecumenical ventures including the Council of Hromkla, as well as numerous literary projects including his creation of a one-volume Armenian Bible, and the translation, editing and composition of commentaries on various books including the Wisdom of Solomon. The preceding excerpt is not a fully literal translation, but has been abbreviated and slightly altered in form to make it more accessible for modern readers. The Armenian text was printed in Handēs Amsōreay 1939 (Jan-June), cols. 90-102.

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ՏՆՕՐԷՆՈՒԹԻՒՆ DNORENOOTYOON “ECONOMY”

By Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian

There was once a little boy who came home from school with his friend. After they had a snack and finished their homework, they went to the little boy's room to play with his toys. The little boy watched as his friend began to take everything out of drawers, off shelves and from boxes and closets. In a matter of minutes, the entire room was a mess, a complete disaster.

After a while, the little boy's friend went home. As the little boy returned to his room, his father reminded him that he had to clean up his room before dinner. The little boy explained that he hadn't caused the mess, but his father wouldn't hear it. He explained that if the little boy wanted his friend to come over again, he would have to clean up his room. Because he loved his friend so much and wanted to have him return one day, he went about putting everything in order and in its place.

This scenario has been played out time and time again, in virtually every home that has children. But it also teaches us something very theological. When asked, “What did the little boy do after his friend messed up his room?” the natural answer will be: He cleaned his room. However, when we ask, “What did God do after human beings messed up creation?” the answer, in one word, is տնօրէնութիւն/*economia* (economy).



The word “economy”, both in the original Greek (*economia*) and Classical Armenian (*dnorenootyoon*), literally means, “to put the house in order.” Today the word economy is associated with finances, the concept of managing resources in a country, state, region or even in a home. However, in Christianity, economy refers to humankind disobeying God and introducing sin into this world; creation and everything in it was turned upside down. Just as the little boy's friend messed up the little boy's room, we messed up the world through sin. The entire process of putting the world back in order is called the economy of God.

As Christians, we also understand economy to refer to our responsibility of taking care of the world around us. When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them authority over the world and made us stewards of creation (FYI: the word, “steward” literally means, “one who guards the house”). As stewards, we have an active role to play in the economy of creation, which God has laid out. However, we constantly follow the example of Adam and Eve, by disobeying our responsibilities and working against God's economy.

We read about His economy throughout the Old Testament. From the moment mankind fell, God planned out how He was going to save His creation and put His house

back in order. We are given clues of this when we read the Old Testament and see how baptism, Holy Communion, the cross and Jesus Christ himself are all foreshadowed. It took a long time and was a long journey to fix the mistakes of mankind. It involved hundreds and thousands of individuals, kingdoms, races, armies and lands, and took millennia to achieve.

Early Christians realized that God had a plan which had unfolded before them. St. Paul attests to this in his letter to the Ephesians, *"He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."* (1:9-10) God's ultimate goal was to bring everything in heaven and on earth into unity, just as it was before sin entered the world.

The fulfillment, or better yet, the completion of this process, His economy, is Christ Himself. Through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, death and resurrection, God put everything that had been undone by sin back in its proper place. Naturally, we do not live in the Garden of Eden, but God's economy is still being played out through confession, repentance and Holy Communion. When we participate in confession and truly repent of our sins, we help put our life back in order, fixing what we have done. We complete our personal *economia* (putting our home/life in order) with Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Traditionally, the final prayer of the Divine Liturgy took place after receiving Holy Communion, when the priest descended the altar. The prayer says, "You are the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets, O Christ God our Savior, who did fulfill all Your *economies* willed by the Father; fill us also with Your Holy Spirit. Amen." This prayer is a wonderful reminder to the faithful that no matter how much we try to correct our lives or fix our mistakes with self-help books, support groups or personal growth techniques, the ultimate completion is in Christ Jesus.

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Եղիցի, եղիցի եւ
եղիցի: Կատարումն
օրինաց եւ մարգարէից
դու ես, Քրիստոս
Աստուած մեր, որ լցեր
զամենայն հայրակամ
տնօրէնութիւնս քո,
լից եւ զմեզ Հոգւովդ
քով Սրբով:

THE MANY GRACES OF SAINT NERSESS SHNORHALI

by V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

St. Nersess of Gla (1102-1173AD), known as *Շնորհալի/Shnorhalee*, “the Gracious One,” is one of the most beloved saints and prolific catholicoses of the Armenian Church. He must also be counted among the greatest luminaries in the history of Christendom. An exceptional theologian and patriarch, he discussed doctrinal differences with the most distinguished church leaders of his day, East and West. One non-Armenian scholar has referred to him as the first modern ecumenist on account of his innovative approaches toward Christian unity, ideas that would only resurface at the turn of the twentieth century. The “Gracious One” is also renowned for the dozens of sacred hymns and other liturgical works that he composed, exquisite pieces that appreciably enlarged the *Armenian Book of Hours* [*Ժամագիրք/Zhamakeerk*] and the *Book of Hymns* [*Շարակյոց/Sharagnots*].

Among the Catholicos’ lesser-known works is his splendid *Letter of Consolation*, written on the occasion of the sudden death of the young son of an unknown “eastern prince.” In this expansive poem, St. Nersess displays his tender compassion for someone who has experienced what is perhaps the most harrowing and inexplicable pain that one can suffer in this life, the death of a child. With great sensitivity, the Gracious One touches the wounds of the grieving father, as he weaves a tapestry of hopeful images and allusions from Sacred Scripture to bring the healing of Jesus Christ to bear.

Indeed, the poem amounts to a beautiful and persuasive proclamation of the Gospel, an engrossing sermon in which St. Nersess celebrates



the central mystery of our salvation in Jesus Christ and targets that hope to one man's suffering, one man's personal hell. As is typical of the Gracious One's writings, and of Armenian Church literature in general, the poem is fueled by the Bible. The allusions to Sacred Scripture are pervasive, overlapping and often quite subtle.

Also noteworthy is how St. Nersess draws upon aspects of the specifically *Armenian* Christian experience. In particular, the Catholicos refers to the Armenian alphabet. Armenians see God's hand at work in the miraculous creation of their alphabet and they attribute to it almost sacramental power. St. Nersess also alludes to a little-known vision by King Drtad's Queen. The Gracious One reads Armenian history as the story of God at work in the midst of a small nation. He reminds us that the modern inclination to define a "secular" or "nationalistic" Armenian identity apart from Jesus Christ is a modern perversion that has no place in the authentic worldview of the Armenian people.

Consequently St. Nersess' poem is an embodiment of the Gospel. For the Good News of Jesus Christ is not a message to be preached, but a life to be lived. The Gracious One's poem is a profoundly personal gift to a grieving man. St. Nersess responds to one instance of the fallen state of this world by giving of himself; by summoning all of his God-given gifts—theological, intellectual, ethnic, spiritual, moral—and offering something of beauty that only he could create as his contribution to the healing of a fallen world. Is this not exactly what God the Father did? Heartbroken for the forlorn state of humanity, God gave us something beautiful and powerful, something from God's inner being—something profoundly personal, some ONE that only God could give—God's only-begotten son Jesus Christ, to heal the pain and corruption of this world.

So St. Nersess' *Letter of Consolation* is a beautiful poem, an eloquent proclamation of the Gospel, and a compelling illustration of what God has called each of us to do: in communion with Christ's body, the Church, to bring healing to the world, case-by-case, person-by-person, day-by-day, as we encounter the pain and decadence of this gravely ailing world.

The *Letter of Consolation* is the work of a poet of the highest order. To read the poem in the original Armenian is to be enchanted and dazzled by the Gracious One's rhetorical acrobatics. The work is first of all an acrostic, in which the first letter of each successive two-line verse constitutes the successive letters of the alphabet plus the words, "by Nersess Catholicos of the Armenians." In addition, the entire poem is in iambic tetrameter: each verse consists of two lines, each one containing four two-syllable



units or "feet," in which the first syllable is unaccented and the second is accented. As if that were not enough, the entire poem rhymes. The verses comprising the alphabet acrostic are divided into three parts. The lines of the first part end with "-een"; the lines of the second part end with "-ov"; and the lines of the third part end with "-an." The rest of the lines end with "-ar."

It would take a translator much more competent than I to render all of these devices into English. I have been content to give a fairly close translation of the original text while preserving its meter, and employing rhyme within each verse. The resulting translation can do no justice to the magnitude of the Gracious One's artistry and Christian conviction, only offer English readers one more glimpse into the *Treasury* of the Armenian Church.

A LETTER OF CONSOLATION BY ST. NERSESS SHNORHALI TO A CERTAIN EASTERN PRINCE ON THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF HIS SON

Թուղթ Մխիթարութեան
Առման իշխան Արեւելեան
Վասն Որդւոյ Իւրոյ
Տարածամ' Մեռելոյ

Ե God's hope divine no person sees,
Saint Paul's unfailing Word decrees.¹

Բ Yet those who look with their heart's eye,
With faith that same hope they will spy.

Գ The soul will reap rich gems unseen,
No more to crave vain things that sheen.

Դ They'll look to that world up on high,
Where grief and sorrow can't abide.

Ե Just wipe away sin's inky smog,
Your inner spirit's tearful fog.

Զ Your precious boy for whom you yearn,
For him no more your heart will burn.

Է Abode of the beatified—
Your boy will be there by their side.

Ը Among the angels nine in grade,
The first enrolled in Heaven's shade.

Թ Your son now shares the dignity
Of princes, noble sovereignty.

Ժ The legacy of Sion there—
Your son today declared an heir.

Աստեւ է յոյսն աստուածային,
'Ստ Առաքելոյ անսուտ բանին.
Բայց որք բանան զաչրս սրբտին,
Այնք հաւատով ի նա հային:
Գանձեն զաննիւթ գանձն ի հոգին,
Եւ ոչ ցանկան նիւթականին,
Դիտեն զաշխարհն զայն վերին,
Ուր ոչ է սուգ ոչ տրտմութիւն:
Եւ դու թէ զմէզ մեղաց մըթին,
Մաքրես յոգւոյդ յաչաց բըբին.
Զմանուկ տըղայդ ըզբաղձալին
Այլ ոչ ողբաս կըսկըծագին:
Էրանելեացն քաղաքին
Ջնա բնականից նայիս նոցին.
Ընդ հրեշտակացն իննեակ դասին,
Եւ անդրանկաց գրելոց յերկին:
Թագազարմից լուսերամին
Համապայծառ է պանծալին.
Ժառանգ վերինն Սիոնին,
Ժառանգակից որդւոց նորին:
Ի գիրկըս Հօրն է գրգուելին,
Յոյժ գերագոյն անառակին.
Լոյս աշխարհի Հօր Միածնին
Յեղբայրութիւն հրաիրելին:
Խընդա՛ մեծաւ այսու յուսով
Սթափեա՛ ի սգոյդ ըսփոփելով,
Ծանի՛ր զբնութիւնըս մեր մարմնով
Մահկանացու անդարձ վըճռով:
Կա՛ց ի կանգուն օրինակով՝
Զոր մեզ ետուն հարբըն գըրով:
Հայեա՛ց զԱբէլ արեամբ մահով
Հօրն առաջի մեռանելով:
Ձեզ զԱբրահամ տիպ առնելով
Զորդին տուողին նըւիրելով:
Ղամբար մանկանց ողջակիզով
Զմինն ընդ երից ընծայելով:
Ծոխացելոց խորին թըւով
Մանկանց եւթեանց նըմանելով.

Մականբեանց մօրքն Շամունով,
 Զորս Աստուծոյ տայր ցընծալով:
 Յիշեա՛ եւ զկեանքն տապանով
 Ըզմարդկան մահ մեռանելով:
 Նոյն ի յերիւր օր յառնելով
 Եւ մեզ ետ յոյս նըմանելով:
 Շինէ զքակեալս նորոգելով,
 Յանմահ բնութիւն փոփոխելով՝
 Որք հինգ տաղանդ պատուիրանով
 Շահին ըզգործսն հաւատով:
 Չառք որ չարեացն են գործարան,
 Յառնեն ի մահն անմահական,
 Պատին բոցովն անշիջական,
 Ուտին յորդանցն՝ որ անվախճան:
 Զերմ արտասուաց կարօտանան,
 Որ անօգուտ է յետ մահուան.
 Ռամ՝ վարուց հետեւեցան,
 Վասն այնորիկ անդադար լան:
 Սուրբ տըղային ոչ լալոյ ձայն,
 Այլ երգ խընդման վայելչական.
 Վասն որոյ զգոյն ըզտըխրական
 Սեաւ ըզգեստիդ ի յանձէդ հան.
 Տըրտմական կիբքն առցեն վախճան,
 Դառն արտասուք ձեր եւ կական:
 Բոտեա՛ զերկունքս թախծական,
 Զոր մահ մանկանըն ձեզ ծընան.
 Յոյ՛ց զակամայդ կամայական,
 Տալ ստեղծողին յօժարական:
 Իւծեալ մարմնոյն՝ որ ի տապան,
 Ծանի՛ր զհոգին յերկնից խորան.
 Փառօք փայլէ յարքայութեան,
 Ծագէ նըման արեգական:
 Բեզ մըխիթար սակաւ այս բան
 Չափով տառիցըս հայկական:



Ի

The Father clasps his precious one,
 Most excellent Prodigal Son.

Լ

The Father's First, the world's true Light,
 His brother now by God's invite.

Խ

With this great hope, rejoice take heart!
 Cheer up and let your grief depart.

Փ

Recall this body physical,
 Which God declared to be mortal—

Կ

He raised it up and set it straight,
 The fathers' writings do relate.

Ա

Regard good Abel's bloody death.
 He gave the Father his last breath.

Զ

God gave a son to Abraham,
 Who gifted him back with a ram.

Դ

Burnt sacrifice, his precious Son,
 To Daniel's three youths he adds one.

Ճ

Still greater numbers we behold,
 The death of seven brothers told.²

Մ

Shamuna of the Maccabees,
 Her sons she offered God to please.

Յ

Recall as well that Life entombed—
 Christ put to death our human gloom.

Ն

Arising early that third day,
 He gave us hope, showed us the way.

Շ

He mends the broken, makes us new,
 The gift of deathlessness in lieu.



Նայեա՛ց զոր ետ քեզ թաղնաբար
Հայրեն գըթած եւ բարերար:

Եհան զորդին քո յերկրէ չար
Ի հրեշտակաց բիւրոցն պար:

Բենական լուսոյն անձառ,
Հուպ եւ տեսող ըզնա արար:

Սըրբոցն որ անդ համագումար,
Եւ ընտրելոցն հաւասար:

Եթէ յայս յոյս ունիս հանձար,
Լինիս հոգւով դու անմոլար:

Սըրտիդ կըրկն որ կայ ի վառ,
Փոխի ի ցօղ զըւարթարար:

Ի բաց դիր այժմ՝ ըզսգոյդ խաւար,
Որ անյուսիցն է տըրտմարար:

Եւ դու ընկա՛ւ զսոյն անվրթար,
Զյուսացելոցն զուարճարար:

Կենդանին եւ կենարար,
Այն որ ձայնիւ կոչեաց զՂազար,

Առ քեզ գոչէ աստուածաբար,
Լուծցէ ըզսուգ-քոյ եւ զաշխար:

Թագաւորն կամարար,
Որ զՄարեմանսն ուրախ արար,

Ուրախութիւն քեզ անվրճար
Պարգեւեցէ աստուածաբար:

Ղօղիչ զարտօսրն զայն յերկար
Արտասուելովն մարդկաբար,

Ի քէն բարձցէ զսրգոյդ խաւար,
Նովին բանիւ կենդանարար:

Կտաւոց մահուն մարմնապատար,
Վարչամակին այն մահարար,

Որ քոյ յուսոյն անյուսարար,
Եւ հաւատոյդ ծածկոյթ արկար,

Սաստեա՛ նոցին եւ գանիւ հա՛ր,
Զի փախիցեն ծառայաբար:

Ի քէն մերկեա՛ զգեստ տըրտմարար,
Զերդ ըզպատան մահուն Ղազար:

Հայեա՛ց ի կինն Կոռպատար,
Որ վասն որդւոյն անմթիթար,

Աջօքն ետես լուսապայծառ
Թագիւ տըճնեալ արքայաբար:

Որոց Յիսուս ձեզ տիրաբար
Յաւուր մեծին երկնադումար

Յուցցէ զորդին ձեր գերափառ,
Օրհնէ՛ք նովաւ զտէրն անդադար:

Ռ

Like those investing talents five,
Rewarded for their faith they thrive.

Զ

Depraved ones mass-producing lies,
To death unending they will rise.

Պ

Encircled by hellfire's blaze,
Forever food for worms they laze.

Ձ

They yearn for warm tears of remorse,
Which after death are no recourse.

Ռ

Their lives on Earth corrupt, carefree.
So now they weep perpetually.

Ս

Your holy son sheds not a tear,
A song of bliss he sings with cheer!

Վ

So peel away the doleful black,
And strip those dark clothes off your back.

Տ

The grievous pain will cease indeed—
The bitter weeping, tears that bleed.

Բ

Abort the throes of agony,
Born when your dear son passed away.

Յ

Against your will yet willingly,
Give to the Maker happily.

Ի

His woven body in the grave—
See there the Spirit, heaven's nave.

Փ

He shines in splendor with the King,
The rising sun the dawn to bring.

Ք

May these words metered bring relief
Armenian letters soothe your grief.



- Look what he gave you secretly,
The caring Father lovingly.
- From wicked Earth he snatched your boy—
To dance with angels there with joy.
- The holy Light, deep Mystery—
God drew him close and let him see.
- In concert with the holy ones,
God's many cherished, chosen sons.
- If you can grasp this hope's mandate,
Your path the Spirit will keep straight.
- The burning fire that sears your heart
Will change to dew, great joy impart.
- Now cast aside your gloomy grief
That breaks the hearts of unbelief.
- Accept this gift, my offering.
To desp'rate ones great joy it brings.
- The living One who makes alive,
Whose voice dead Laz'rus did revive.
- Almighty God now calls to you
To break your sorrow, lift, renew.
- The King who filled most willingly—
The Marys at the tomb with glee.

Ո Shall surely bring you happiness—
 His free and godly gift of bliss.

Դ Through hidden teardrops falling straight,
 For you he weeps, God incarnate.

Ի He'll oust that wretched, dark despair
 The Savior by his Word with care.

Կ The funeral shrouds that wrap his frame—
 Malignant napkins, death proclaimed.

Ո With them you covered up your hope,
 Concealed your faith for which you groped.

Ս Rebuke those rags and beat them back!
 Defeated vassals post-attack.

Ի Strip off that tragic, doleful suit,
 The death shroud Laz'rus wore is moot.

Հ Take Cleopatra, Dikran's bride,³
 Heart-broken since her son had died.

Ե Her eyes beheld in radiant light,
 Her son crowned regally in sight.

Ո On that great day in heaven's throng,
 In his dominion, Jesus, strong—

Յ Will show your son in glory's blaze.
 Exalt the Lord now and always.



Very Rev. Fr. Michael Daniel Findikyan, PhD, is Director of the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center and Professor of Liturgical Studies at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary

(1) Titus 1:1 (2) The full story is told in 2Maccabees 8. The woman is also referred to numerous times in 4Maccabees 15-18. (3) Cleopatra of Pontus, young wife of King Dikran the Great. One of her three sons, also named Dikran, was taken captive in Rome by Pompei in 66BC. He later escaped, and with his older brother Zariadres, attempted to seize the crown from their father. The latter killed both sons.

The *Letter of Consolation* has been translated from the Constantinople, 1824 edition of St. Nersess' epic, *Յիսուս Որդիս [Hesous Vortee]*, *Jesus the Son*, pp. 305-310.

THE ARMENIAN LETTER THE NAME OF THE LORD

By Barbara Berberian



Have you ever noticed the symbol “Է” which looks like the number five, sitting directly above the altar of most Armenian Orthodox churches? Next to it you may also see the words Աստուած Մէր Է (Asdvadz Ser Eh), which means “God is Love.” One might ask why this symbol should be worthy of such a prominent position over the holy church altar?

The “Է” symbol itself has an interesting history dating back to 3000 BC where evidence of it was found on ancient rock carvings in Metsamor, pre-Christian Armenia. Centuries later in 405 AD, during St. Mesrob Mashdots’ research, creation and development of the Armenian alphabet, the “Է” was incorporated as the seventh letter of the alphabet. In the Armenian language, the “Է” not only serves as a letter of the alphabet, but it is also a word, having the distinct meaning “is” or “am.”

In chapter 3 of the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, we read of an encounter that Moses had with God on Mount Horeb, where God spoke to Moses from the midst of a burning bush. God instructed Moses to go to Pharaoh to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Moses was hesitant. He didn't think the people would listen to him. He asked God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “**I AM who I AM**... Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you’... This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”(v.13-15)

When St. Mesrob Mashdots and his associates translated the Bible for the first time into the Armenian language using the new Armenian alphabet, it was precisely the letter “Է” that was used to translate God’s name “I AM”

or “He who IS.” From that point on, the letter “Է” would represent for the Armenian people and church the name of the holy, mighty and timeless God.

Placing the “Է” as the seventh letter in the Armenian alphabet was also no accident or random choice. St. Mesrob, an erudite teacher (Vartabed) of the Armenian Orthodox Church, knew very well that by locating “Է” as the seventh letter, he was linking the letter to the spiritual significance of the number seven. In ancient times, certain numbers carried metaphysical meaning according to the beliefs of a people. Classically, the number seven signified “completeness” or “divine perfection,” having derived its meaning from the Biblical account of the creation of all things that we read about in Genesis chapter one. God finished His work of creation on the seventh day, and “God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”(v.31)

Throughout the Bible, the number seven is repeatedly attributed to divine acts and principles, and even to God himself. How fitting then for the name and symbol of the great “I AM” to rest in the seventh spot of the Armenian alphabet. [As a side note, the Armenian alphabet was originally composed as one long prayer, beginning with A for Asdvadz (God) and ending with K for Kreesdos (Christ)].

Finally, to denote even further significance, the letter “Է” when pronounced properly (eh), makes the sound of a breath. This reminds us not only of the Breath of God, the traditional Armenian name for the Bible (Աստուածաշունչ/ Asdvadzashoonch), but also of the life that emanates from His essence, as is described in the Book of Genesis, when God breathed into Adam “the breath of life.” (Genesis 2:7)

In conclusion, for the Armenian Church “Է” is not simply a letter in the Armenian alphabet or verb tense, but a

holy Symbol and Word, the name of the One True God, the great I AM himself. “Է” hovers over us in Church and lovingly signifies that God is with us and over us at all times. When we celebrate Badarak every week, the Lord manifests His divine presence to us in a unique and awesome way, which we boldly declare in the hymn *Krisdos Ee Mech Mer Haydnetsav* : “Christ in our midst has been revealed; He **Who Is**, God, is here seated.” And as we prayerfully receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion directly below the “Է”, we are reminded that **God Is**, always was and always will be—Almighty God.

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The Monastery of Tatev, 9th c. Siunik, Armenia

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