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**ԴԻՏՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐ ՄԵԾ ՊԱՀՔԻ
ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿ ՀԱՅՈՑ ԵԿԵՂԵՑՈՒՄ ԿԻՐԱՌՎՈՂ
ՓԱԿ ՎԱՐԱԳՈՒՅՐԻ ՎԵՐԱԲԵՐՅԱԼ**

Լկածություն. Ավանդական եկեղեցական ծիսակարգերում այսօր կիրառվող ծիսական բազմաթիվ սովորույթներ կարիք ունեն վերանայման եւ վերարժեւորման: Այս իմաստով որոշ ծիսակարգեր, աղոթքներ, շարականներ, ծիսական զգեստներ կարող են նաեւ ոչ ավանդական կամ նույնիսկ կեղծ (cripto.) ծագում ունենալ: Այսպիսի մի երեւույթ է Հայոց եկեղեցում Մեծ Պահքի ժամանակ կիրառվող վարագույրը, որը բաժանում է Ս. Խորանը հավատացյալներից: Սույն հոդվածն առանձնապես անդրադառնում է փակ վարագույրի պատմական եւ աստվածաբանական ծագմանը՝ որոշ դեպքերում ներկայացնելով ընդհանրապես վարագույրի կիրառման սովորույթը Հայոց եկեղեցում:

Հոդվածում քննվում են նաեւ փակ վարագույրի ծիսական կիրառության հետ կապված բազմաթիվ հիմնախնդիրներ՝ պատմական, գործառույթային, հովվական ու մեկնողական:

1. Փակ վարագույրի կիրառությունը Հայաստանում. Իբրեւ ծիսական առանձին պարագա՝ վարագույրները Հայոց եկեղեցում իրենց նշանակութամբ այդքան էլ ուսումնասիրված չեն: Ձեռքի տակ առկա մեկ-երկու վատ պահպանված հնագույն վարագույրները թվագրվում են 1619 թ. (պահվում են Կ. Պոլսի Հայոց պատրիարքությունում), եւ անցյալում գործածվել են Կ. Պոլսի Ս. Նիկողայոս եկեղեցում:

Խորանի վարագույրի կիրառության հնագույն վկայությունն առկա է Ս. Սահակ Պարթևին վերագրվող կանոնախմբի ԻԱ. կանոնում, որտեղ քահանաներին արգելվում է եկեղեցում օգտագործվող վարագույրը կիրառել իբրեւ հարսանեկան առաջաստ: Մեկ այլ՝ քիչ ավելի ուշ շրջանի

վկայությունն էլ պահպանվել է Հովհան Մայրապետեցու «Վերլուծութիւն կաթողիկէ եկեղեցւոյ» ճառում: Այստեղ է. դարի հայ վարդապետը երկու վարագույր է մատնանշում՝ համապատասխանաբար երկու խորանների համար: Առաջին վարագույրը, ըստ այսմ, ծածկում է Սուրբ Երրորդությունը մարմնական աչքերից, իսկ երկրորդը՝ առանձնացնում է անմարմին էակներին մարմնավորներից՝ այդպիսով խորհրդանշելով երկնայինի ու երկրավորի այլաբանական բաժանումը: Մի քանի վկայություններ կարելի է գտնել նաեւ Ս. Հովհան Օձնեցու մատենագրության մեջ զետեղված անանուն հեղինակի «Բարեբանեցէ՛ք զԱստուած» խորագրով քարոզում: Ճարտարապետական առանձնահատկություններին անդրադառնալիս անանուն հեղինակը մեկնում է նաեւ Ս. Խորանի նշանակությունը: Ըստ այսմ՝ խորանի վրա կանգնած քահանաները, իբրեւ աներեւույթ աստվածային լույսի փառաբանիչներ, ծածկվում են վարագույրով:

Վարագույրի եւ խորանի մասին վերջին՝ քիչ թե շատ ամբողջական տեղեկությունները հասնում են մինչեւ ԺԲ. դար՝ Ներսես Լամբրոնացի, որի՝ Ս. Պատարագի մեկնության մեջ արդեն նկատելի է ավելի զարգացած ծիսակարգային ընկալում:

Անդրադառնանք այժմ «Տօնացոյց»-ում առկա ցուցումներին, որոնք ծիսական կյանքում որոշիչ նշանակություն ունեն վարագույրի կիրառության պարագայում: Ըստ «Տօնացոյց»-ի՝ Մեծ Պահքի ընթացքում փակ վարագույրի կիրառությունն սկսվում է Բուն Բարեկենդանին նախորդող Շաբաթ օրը՝ Կ. Պոլսի տիեզերական ժողովի 150 հայրապետների հիշատակությամբ: «Տօնացոյց»-ի համաձայն՝ վարագույրը փակ է մնում նաեւ հաջորդ՝ Բուն Բարեկենդանի օրը, որը խորհրդանշում է, իբրեւ Մեծ Պահքի Ա. Կիրակի, Ադամի ու Եվայի արտաքսումը դրախտից: Այս փաստը, սակայն, ուղղակի հակասում է Բարեկենդանի տոնական ոգուն եւ նշանակությանը, երբ հավատացյալները կարող են ուտել միս ու կենդանական կերակուրներ: Մեկ այլ հակասական իրողություն է այն, որ ըստ Օրացույցի՝ Մեծ Պահքի Ա. օր համարվում է Բուն Բարեկենդանին հաջորդող երկուշաբթին, որով հարց է առաջանում՝ եթե Բուն Բարեկենդանը Մեծ Պահքի Ա. Կիրակին է, ապա ե՞րբ է Հայ եկեղեցում սկսվում Մեծ Պահքը՝ հաշվի առնելով, որ Մեծ Պահոց Ա. օր դրված է երկուշաբթին:

Ավելին՝ Բուն Բարեկենդանին նախորդող շաբաթ օրվա եւ Բուն Բարեկենդանի Կիրակի օրվա ծիսակարգի ո՛չ ընթերցումների, ո՛չ շարականների եւ ո՛չ էլ ծիսական որեւէ այլ միավորի մեջ արտացոլված չէ դրախտից Ադամի արտաքսման խորհրդաբանությունը՝ չնայած «Տօնացոյց»-ի

Հստակ հրահանգին: Կարելի է նշել, որ Ադամի՝ դրախտից արտաքսման աստվածաբանական ընկալումն ընկած է ավելի շուտ Մեծ Պաշտի Բ. Կիրակիի (Հայտնի՝ «Արտաքսման կիրակի» անունով) հիմքում, որի ծիսական գրեթե բոլոր միավորներում առկա են աստվածաշնչյան այս դրվագին վերաբերող պատկերներ ու մեկնություններ:

2. Բաց վարագույր. Վարագույրի կիրառություն հետ կապված հիմնահարցեր առկա են նաեւ Մեծ Պաշտի ավարտին դրա բացման արարողություն ծիսակարգում: Ըստ «Տօնացոյց»-ի՝ վարագույրը բացվում է Ծաղկազարդի կիրակիին նախորդող Շաբաթ օրը՝ Ղազարոսի հարություն հիշատակության երեկոյան ժամերգության ընթացքում՝ նախատոնակի ձեսին բնորոշ արարողությամբ: Այստեղ նույնպես Շաբաթ երեկոյան երգվող եւ նախատոնակի շարականի դերն ստանձնած «Որ վերօրհնիս»-ում մեկնողական կամ աստվածաբանական որեւէ ակնարկ չկա վարագույրի բացման վերաբերյալ:

3. Ավելի ուշ շրջանի վկայություններ. Ուշ միջնադարի միակ ակնարկվկայությունը Մեծ Պաշտի ընթացքում կիրառվող փակ կամ բաց վարագույրի վերաբերյալ առկա է Կիլիկիայի կաթողիկոս Սիմեոն Բ. Սեբաստացու (1633-1648 թթ.)՝ Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոս Փիլիպպոս Աղբակեցուն (1632-1655 թթ.) գրած Ջատագովական թղթում, որտեղ Սիմեոնը մեղադրում է Փիլիպպոս կաթողիկոսին՝ նվիրակին Մեծ Պաշտի ժամանակ բաց վարագույրով պատարագելու համար, մինչդեռ, ըստ Սիմեոն Սեբաստացու, Եկեղեցու հայրերի կանոններն արգելում են այս ծիսական նորամուծությունը: Հայտնի է, թե Սիմեոնը որ կանոններին է հղում: Երկրորդ վկայությունն ավելի նոր ժամանակների է եւ առկա է Գեւորգ Դ. Քերեստեճյան (1866-1882 թթ.) կաթողիկոսի կանոններում: Թ. կանոնը հստակ հրամայում է քահանաներին ու երեցներին՝ Մեծ Պաշտի փակ վարագույրի ժամանակ Ս. Հաղորդություն չտալ հավատացյալներին: Հաղորդության համար Մեծ Պաշտի ընթացքում նախատեսված օրեր են, ըստ այս կանոնի, Ավետման օրը, Ս. Գրիգոր Լուսավորչի մուտն ի Վիրապն, Ծաղկազարդի եւ Ավագ Հինգշաբթի, ինչպես նաեւ Ճրագալույցի ու Զատիկի օրերը: Գեւորգ Դ. կաթողիկոսի այս կանոնը հայ իրականություն մեջ միակ հավաստի վկայությունն է, որով Մեծ Պաշտի ժամանակ արգելվում է հաղորդել հավատացյալներին:

4. Եզրակացություն. Եզրակացնելով՝ կարելի է ստորեւ մի քանի դիտարկումներ ու նշումներ անել.

ա. Մեծ Պաշարի ընթացքում կիրառվող բաց կամ փակ վարագույրի մասին ծիսական ցուցումները հակասական են:

բ. Աղամի ու Եվայի՝ դրախտից արտաքսման խորհրդաբանությունն առկա է ոչ թե Բուն Բարեկենդանի, այլ դրան հաջորդող Արտաքսման կիրակիի խորհրդաբանության եւ ծիսակարգի մեջ:

գ. Ծաղկազարդին նախորդող՝ Ղազարոսի հարություն Շաբաթ օրվա երեկոյան վարագույրի բացումը եւս չի համապատասխանում օրվա խորհրդաբանությանը:

դ. «Տօնացոյց»-ում բացակայում են անհրաժեշտ ցուցումները՝ կապված փակ կամ դոց պատարագի ժամանակ մի քանի հիմնահարցերի հետ, ինչպիսիք են ողջուն տալը, Հաղորդություն առնելը, մաս բաժանելը եւ այլն:

ե. Բացի «Տօնացոյց»-ից՝ հայ եկեղեցական մատենագրության մեջ, ընդհուպ մինչեւ ԺԷ. դարը, չկա փակ վարագույրի ու դոց պատարագի վերաբերյալ հիշատակություն:

HANGING BY A THREAD: THE CLOSED CURTAIN DURING GREAT LENT IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

I. Introduction

I suspect that many good people who worship faithfully in ancient and liturgically opulent traditions like the Armenian Rite - who have little or no idea of (or interest in) the rarified world of historical liturgiology - would be surprised to learn how much of the liturgy so familiar and dear to them actually has very dubious origins. Many elements comprising the very fabric of what we consider to be the sacred tradition - rituals, prayers, hymns, gestures, liturgical accoutrements - are cryptogenic. We do not know how or when they came about, where they came from, what their original purpose was in the liturgy. Consequently, and perhaps most troubling of all, we cannot be sure what their true meaning and function should be today. This disconcerting reality is the force that motivates those who study the historical evolution of the liturgy, and it naturally raises questions regarding the very nature of the "holy tradition" that theologians and church authorities so confidently invoke.

One such distinctive feature of the Armenian Church is the unusual custom of closing the curtain that separates the elevated *bema* or altar space¹ from the chancel or choir area² at the beginning of Great Lent, and keeping it closed throughout this most solemn season. In effect, the Eucharistic celebrant and altar servers are concealed from the view of the faithful for the duration of Great Lent. For worshipers in the Armenian Rite the closed curtain practically defines Lent. Strange as it may seem, nothing is more natural to an Armenian than coming to church on a Lenten Sunday to worship in complete visual isolation from the Eucharist, which is celebrated entirely behind the closed curtain, a custom

¹ Known as *xoran* [tabernacle], this apsidal area is reserved for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and certain rituals from the rites of baptism, matrimony, and ordination, as well as the reading of the Resurrection Gospel during the Sunday Morning Office (*Iwtaberik' karg*, the so-called Cathedral Vigil or Office of the Oil-bearing Women). On the latter see M. D. Findikyan, *The Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office by Bishop Stepanos Siwnec'i* (* 735): Critical Edition and Translation with Textual and Liturgical Analysis, OCA 270, Rome, 2004, p. 404.

² A liturgical precinct known as the *das* [choir] or *atean* [court], which lies between the elevated altar area and the nave. It is a middle ground, normally one step above the level of the nave and separated from it by a low parapet with openings in the center and at both sides. The Liturgy of the Hours takes place almost entirely in this space. The *das* is three or four feet lower than the elevated *bema*.

known as *Goc' Putarag* [closed Divine Liturgy]. Yet even if it is the accepted tradition of the church, the custom poses a number of knotty problems, historical, functional, pastoral and hermeneutic. Most notably, the closed altar curtain cannot but be connected to the even more peculiar tradition of suppressing Holy Communion entirely during Great Lent, thereby effectively and universally withholding the sacrament from the Armenian faithful, a practice unknown to any other church in Christendom. But first things first. Before investigating the historical origins and theological consequences of suppressing Communion during Great Lent, a topic I look forward to returning to, the current article examines the rather shaky historical dossier supporting the Armenians' Lenten tradition of closing the sanctuary curtain.

Altar and/or sanctuary curtains are not, of course, unique to the Armenians³. The notion of hanging a curtain either from the ciborium or between the altar space/sanctuary and the choir/nave of the church, widespread in eastern and medieval western rites, is inevitably associated with the Mosaic tabernacle [Ex 26:1-12; 36:9-17; 40:21] and later with the Temple of Jerusalem, where a curtain or curtains separated the inner sanctum of the Temple, the so-called "Holy of Holies" from the rest of the interior sanctuary. The synoptic Gospels insist that at the moment of Christ's death, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" [Mt 27:51, Mk 15:38; cf. Lk 23:45]. Recent scholarship, however, has challenged the conventional fixation on the Herodian Temple as the primary,

³ The bibliography on the liturgical use of curtains is scanty at best. The standard theological encyclopedias in French, German and English offer little in the way of synthesis or bibliography. Even the usually reliable *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* has only a brief entry limited to the veil hanging over the main entry to the church edifice. H. Leclercq, "Rideau," *DACL*, 30 vols., Paris, 1907-1953, 14:2422-2423. B. Kranemann, M. Restle, "Liturgische Tücher," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 10 vols, Stuttgart [1977]-1999, 5: 2036-2037. C. Schneider, "Studien zum Ursprung liturgischer Einzelheiten östlicher Liturgien I. Katapetasma," *Kyrios* 1, Königsberg-Berlin, 1936, S. 57-73 remains probably the best overall survey, though the author's evaluation of patristic evidence needs to be reconsidered in light of more recent scholarship. In this regard, see the recent collection of essays in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, S. J. Gerstel, ed., Washington, DC, 2006. T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*, London, 1971, p. 162-171. M. Dudley, "Altar Hangings," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, P. F. Bradshaw, ed., Westminster, 2002, p. 8-9. Brief but specific references to church draperies of various kinds are found in A. Kempeneers, *Le type des églises bâties par et depuis l'empereur Constantin ou analogies des anciennes basiliques chrétiennes avec le temple de Salomon et leurs différences avec les basiliques profanes*, Liège, 1881, esp. p. 122-174 *passim*. Other early studies include: A. Raes, S.J., *Introductio in liturgiam orientalem*, Rome, 1947, p. 35-39. D. G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London 1945, p. 480-485. C.E. Pocknee, *The Christian Altar*, London, 1963, p. 59-63.

if not the exclusive paradigm for the delineation of liturgical space in Christian worship places by means of a curtain, among other kinds of partitions. Scholars are increasingly aware of ancient Roman and other pre-Christian influences, as well as uniquely Christian insights governing the delineation of spatial order in early Christian sacred architecture⁴. “Veils for the chancel were coeval with the earliest ages of the Christian religion,” asserted Henry John Peasey confidently in his nineteenth-century study of English Holy Week ceremonial⁵. Yet scholars of his era who make claims for the antiquity and ubiquity of altar curtains adduce absolutely no literary or archaeological evidence⁶. Instead, concomitant with scholarly assumptions of the time and buttressed by the reference to the Temple curtain in the Gospels, they assume that the Jewish use of an altar curtain was necessarily carried over into Christian liturgy. Similarly, citing the Byzantine iconostasis, they assume first, that it is an early adaptation of the altar curtain, and, second, that such eastern evidence is of relevance *ipso facto* for the West. Neither of these assumptions can be demonstrated⁷.

A more promising trajectory toward uncovering the remote Christian origins of the sanctuary curtain is the premise that early representations of curtains in Christian art and architecture could be based upon actual usage of sanctuary drapery⁸. It has been suggested, for example, that the gilded drapery adorning

⁴ For the spatial precincts of the Jerusalem Temple, with ample bibliographic references, see the thorough and fascinating study of J. R. Branham, “Penetrating the Sacred: Breaches and Barriers in the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, p. 7-24. The author discusses the numerous “sanctuary membranes” on p. 20-22. More than simply to delineate space, Branham argues that curtains and various other types of “screening paraphernalia” served in the Herodian Temple also “to signal the presence of certain charged substances – most notably blood – that, in turn, conferred spatial and ritual meaning.” Branham, p. 9.

⁵ H. J. Peasey, *Ancient English Holy Week Ceremonial*, 2nd edn., London, 1897, p. 13.

⁶ For a similar approach see P. Bond, “The Lenten Veil” in *The Chancel of English Churches*, London/New York 1916, p. 101-105.

⁷ For a thorough refutation of these flawed methodologies see in particular R. F. Taft, “Eastern Presuppositions and Western Liturgical Renewal”, *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* 5, 2000, p. 10-22. P. F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed., Oxford/New York, 2002, p. 21-46.

⁸ Manuals and encyclopedias of Christian art tend toward brevity in their treatment of drapery. Their liturgical function is given even less attention. See, however, R. Milburn, *Early Christian Art and Architecture*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1988, p. 283-290. Art historical examinations of altar curtains, particularly surviving medieval European “Lenten veils” (see below) are numerous. See, for example, A. Huber, *400 Jahre Millstätter Fastentuch (Drappo di Millstattein): Tagungsbericht sowie Bildtexte zu jeder Szene des Millstätter Fastentuches in italienischer Sprache*, Seeboden, 1993. J. Müller, “Das Zehdenicker Fastentuch,” *Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 13, 1944, S. 103-110. M. Ranacher, “Painted Lenten Veils and Wallcoverings in Austria: Technique and Conservation” in *Conservation Within Historic Buildings: Preprints of the Contributions to*

the baldacchinos of Santa Maria Maggiore and St. Peter's in Rome represents vestiges of the ancient altar curtain⁹. Similarly, "a multitude of monuments" from the 4th-9th centuries contain depictions of drapery drawn back to frame various sacred scenes. Though clearly used to give the impression of a holy place, it is not clear whether the depiction of curtains is realistic or metaphorical¹⁰. From Egypt survive numerous examples of illusory painted curtains in niches and on walls, as well as inside and at the entrance to sanctuaries. Elizabeth S. Bolman writes, "The choice to include a painted curtain or veil in these locations underscores the actual use and perhaps also conceptual significance of such textiles"¹¹.

The earliest depiction of a sanctuary curtain in Armenia is probably the full-page manuscript illumination of the Annunciation to Zachariah, the first in a series of four full-page biblical scenes in the so-called *Ejmiacin Gospel* (Erevan MS 2374 fol. 228^r). The scholarly consensus holds that these images date before 640AD¹². The angel Gabriel is depicted in front of a curtain that is pulled open from the bottom partially to reveal a stone altar with pillars supporting a monumental, arched canopy. Of course this particular scene depicts the "altar of incense" within the temple of Jerusalem, where, according to Luke 1:8-11, the priest Zachariah was serving when the angel announced the impending birth of John the Baptist. It is likely, however, that it is modelled after the Armenian altar and furnishings known to the artist¹³.

the Vienna Congress, 7-13 September 1980, London 1980, p. 142-148; 525 Jahre Grosses Zittauer Fastentuch und wie weiter? Internationales wissenschaftliches Symposium, Althörnitz, 3. und 4. Mai 1997, Görlitz, 2000. O. Stary, *Das Fastentuch im Dom zu Gurk: Bilder aus der Geschichte Gottes mit dem Menschen*, Othmar Stary and Wilhelm van der Kallen, eds., Klagenfurt, 1994. Zittauer Fastentuch: Biblische Betrachtungen, Friedhelm Menckes and Edeltrud Meistermann, eds., Stuttgart, 1998. On the textile industry in medieval Armenia see H. A. Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, tr. Nina Garsoïan, Lisbon, 1965, p. 155ff.

⁹ F. Bond, "The Lenten Veil," p. 101.

¹⁰ H. Leclercq, "Rideau," p. 2422.

¹¹ E. Bolman, "Veiling Sanctity in Christian Egypt: Visual and Spatial Solutions," in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, p. 88.

¹² For an interpretation and references, see T. Thomas, F. Mathews, "The Early Armenian Iconographic Program of the Ejmiacin Gospel, Erevan, Matenadaran MS 2374, olim 229," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews and Robert W. Thomson, eds., Washington, DC, 1982, p. 199-215, here 201-205 and Plate I. I am grateful to Prof. Christina Maranci, Arthur H. Dadian and Ara Oztemel Associate Professor of Armenian Art and Architecture at Tufts University, for bringing this particular painting to my attention.

¹³ For an art historical survey of Armenian textiles see: M. R. Breu and R. T. Marchese, "Armenian Religious Textiles in Istanbul," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 13/1-2, 2001, p. 175-197;

Apart from Eusebius of Caesarea's (d. 339AD) vague reference to "embroidered curtains"¹⁴ installed by Empress St. Helena in her Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem¹⁵, the earliest sustained literary reference to a Christian sanctuary curtain seems to come, however, from the same region. It is in the *Letter to the Armenians* of Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem in 335AD [228:3-10]¹⁶:

And how shall the table of the sacrament be positioned, and (what about) the partitions also?

The table of expiation is behind the veil [խիւ վարագորիս], where the Holy Spirit descends; and the font is next to it in the same compartment, and out of honor, set up on the right hand. And the clergy in their several ranks shall worship (there), and the congregation outside the veil [արարարի վարագորիս], and the catechumens at the door, listening. Lest these partitions be effaced by encroachments, let each remain in his own station, irreproachable.

By the mid-fourth century, the number and geographical sweep of surviving hagiographic and patristic references¹⁷, as well as several archaeological finds, leave little doubt that altar or sanctuary curtains were a widespread feature almost throughout the Christian East, from Cappadocia¹⁸, Antioch and Palestine¹⁹

and especially their recent, *Splendor and Pageantry: Textile Treasures From the Armenian Orthodox Churches of Istanbul*, Istanbul, 2011) passim. See also R. H. Kévorkian, B. Achdjian, *Tapis et textiles arméniens*, Marseille, 1991, p. 116-121. For early Byzantine curtains, see F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople*, 163ff. R. F. Taft, "The Decline of Communion in Byzantium and the Distancing of the Congregation from the Liturgical Action: Cause, Effect, Or Neither?" in *Thresholds of the Sacred*, p. 48.

¹⁴ Thus the translation of *παρπετάσμασι τε ποικίλοις* in Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Introduction, translation and commentary by A. Cameron, S. G. Hall, Clarendon Ancient History Series, Oxford, 1999, p. 137. Note the variant (erroneous?) text in Eusèbe de Césarée, *Vie de Constantin*, F. Winkelmann, L. Pietri, M.-J. Rondeau, eds., *Sources chrétiennes* 559, Paris, 2013, p. 405: *περπετάσμασι τε ποικίλοις*, translated, "tentures brodées."

¹⁵ Eusebius, *Vita Const.* iii. 43, PG 20:1104.

¹⁶ The traditional attribution of this important work, which survives only in an ancient Armenian rendering of the original Greek, has now been resoundingly confirmed by Abraham Terian. Macarius of Jerusalem: *Letter to the Armenians AD335*, Abraham Terian, ed., *AVANT: Treasures of the Armenian Christian Tradition* 4, Crestwood, NY, 2008, p. 90-91.

¹⁷ An exhaustive assessment of the literary evidence is given by R. F. Taft S. J., "The Decline of Communion," p. 40-49.

¹⁸ R. F. Taft, "The Decline," p. 44.

¹⁹ Read in the light of the Letter of Bishop Macarius, Egeria's memorandum regarding the lavish veils and sumptuous curtains that adorned the churches on Golgotha and Bethlehem can be interpreted safely as allusions to sanctuary curtains: "And on this day [Epiphany] in this church [the Great Church on Golgotha], and at the Anastasis and the Cross and Bethlehem, the decorations really are too marvelous for words. All you can see is gold and jewels and silk; the hangings [vela] are entirely silk with gold stripes, the curtains [cortinas] the same, and everything they use for services at the festival is made of gold and jewels." Egeria, *Itinerarium*

to Alexandria²⁰, the Wadi-Natrun²¹ and the Pentapolis in Libya²². Less certain was their intended function. Of all of the early sources, “only [John] Chrysostom in Antioch gives any solid information on how these curtains were used liturgically”²³.

Evidence for ciborium and sanctuary curtains in the West is, characteristically, somewhat later than what we find in the East. Canon 13 of the Council of Narbonne (589AD) stipulates that the task of “raising the curtains to the doors in front of the senior [clergy]” [senioribus vela ad ostia sublevant] falls to the sub-deacons and door-keepers²⁴. While the canon attests to the use of curtains in the churches of sixth-century southern France, it is hardly clear that these were altar or sanctuary curtains. The earliest evidence for drapery surrounding the altars of three of the great Roman basilicas is found in the lives of Popes Sergius (687-701) and John VI (701-705) in the *Liber Pontificalis*²⁵. These early Roman draperies, referred to as *tetravela*, may have served merely a decorative, not a liturgical purpose²⁶. It should also be observed that this period was one of significant eastern influence on the Church of Rome.

Constantinopolitan churches were apparently entirely devoid of sanctuary curtains, at least during the first millennium. While references to ciborium cur-

25:8. Égérie, *Journal de voyage (Itinéraire): Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et cartes*, P. Maraval, SC 296, Paris, 2002, p. 252-253. English translation from Egeria's Travels, J. Wilkinson, tr., 3rd ed., Warminster, 2002, p. 146. Cf. R. F. Taft, “The Decline,” p. 43. For other literary references to curtains in Palestinian churches of the early Byzantine period, see J. Patrich, “Early Christian Churches in the Holy Land,” in O. Limor, G. G. Stroumsa, eds., *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 5, Turnhout, 2006, p. 381.

²⁰ Athanasius briefly mentions “the veils [βήλα] of the church” among other booty pillaged by Arian looters from a church in Alexandria. Elizabeth Bolman theorizes that, “as he mentioned only particularly important furnishings, the use of the term ‘veil’ here suggests either altar veils or some sort of curtain from the sanctuary area.” E. Bolman, “Veiling Sanctity,” p. 90, citing Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum ad monachos* 56 (PG 25:760D).

²¹ Coptic sanctuary curtains from the fifth or sixth century are preserved in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Louvre. See the references in E. Bolman, “Veiling Sanctity,” 88. C. Schneider, “Studien,” p. 61-62.

²² Cf. R. F. Taft, “The Decline,” p. 43.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 40, 42-43. “Churches in the region of Antioch had chancel curtains that were opened and closed at certain times of the liturgy, though when cannot always be determined with any certainty.” *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁴ Cited in Kempeneers, *Le type des églises*, p. 163.

²⁵ *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, ed. L. Duchesne, 2 vols., Paris, 1886-1892, I, p. 373, 383. Cf. *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber pontificalis)*, tr. R. Davis, Liverpool, 1989, p. 86, 88.

²⁶ C. E. Pocknee, “Christian Altar,” p. 61.

tains are found in some later literary works and artistic representations, there is scant evidence for chancel curtains²⁷. Thomas Mathews writes, "References to veils enclosing the sanctuary are numerous for Egypt, Syria, and Pontus from an early date, but in Constantinople, not a single mention has been found"²⁸.

Thus some form of drapery concealing the altar and/or the entire sanctuary from the view of the faithful - at least at certain moments during the Divine Liturgy - exists or existed in all of the rites of the non-Byzantine Christian East²⁹: Armenian, Coptic³⁰, Ethiopian³¹, West Syrian³², East Syrian/Chaldean³³, and Maronite³⁴.

II. Altar Curtains in Armenia

Perishable textiles that they are, the oldest surviving Armenian altar curtains do not reach back very far in history. The oldest altar curtain that I have uncovered is an exquisitely embroidered curtain depicting the Last Supper, dated 1619, from the collection of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was used in the former Armenian Church of St. Nicholas³⁵.

²⁷ "There is very little evidence for curtains in the liturgical usage of the patriarchate of Constantinople, and what there is gives no indication as to how the curtains were used. But they do not seem to have been closed during the liturgy until much later, beginning with the late eleventh-century monastic usage." R. F. Taft, "The Decline," p. 49.

²⁸ T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches*, p. 169, cited by R. F. Taft, "The Decline" p. 48.

²⁹ On altar and sanctuary curtains in the East see Raes, *Introductio*, p. 35-39.

³⁰ See E. Bolman, "Veiling Sanctity," and Archbishop Basilios, "Eucharistic Veils" in A.S. Atiya, ed., *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, New York and Toronto, 1991, 4:1063. Also to be consulted are the classic surveys on the Coptic Rite of O. H. E. Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church: A Detailed Description of her Liturgical Services and the Rites and Ceremonies Observed in the Administration of Her Sacraments*, Cairo, 1967, p. 19, 21, 23, 27. A. J. Butler, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, vol. 2, Oxford, 1894, p. 28-35, which also contains comparative notes from other eastern and western rites. C. Schneider, "Studien," p. 63.

³¹ A. Raes, *Introductio*, p. 36-37. C. Schneider, "Studien," S. 63.

³² G. Khouri-Sarkis, "Notes sur l'anaphore syriaque: Prière du voile." *L'Orient Syrien* 7, 1962, p. 277-296. S. J. Alphons Raes, *Introductio in liturgiam orientalem*, Rome, 1947, p. 35, 36. On Syrian enclosures see also C. Schneider, "Studien," S. 57-73. F. Van de Paverd, *Zur Geschichte der Messliturgie in Antiochia und Konstantinopel gegen Ende des vierten Jahrhunderts. Analyse der Quellen bei Johannes Chrysostomos*, OCA 187, Rome, 1970, S. 42-47. C. Schneider, "Studien," S. 62-63.

³³ G. Khouri-Sarkis, "Notes," p. 281. A. Raes, *Introductio*, p. 35. C. Schneider, "Studien," S. 63-64.

³⁴ A black curtain "with the symbols of the passion" hides the altar during Passiontide. Likewise, images and crosses are veiled, likely in imitation of western practice. A. King, "The Rites of Eastern Christendom," London, 1950, p. 254.

³⁵ R. H. Kévorkian, B. Achdjian, *Tapis Et Textiles Arméniens*, Marseille, 1991, p. 121.

In his concise description of the interior architecture and furnishings of an Armenian Church, the ever scrupulous scholar Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan offers this description of the sanctuary curtain:

A veil 10 to 15 feet high is drawn across the front of the bema, usually sliding on a rod, fixed on the north and south walls of the apse so as to shut the altar and the bema from the view of the congregation at certain times during the Liturgy³⁶.

Apart from the sanctuary curtain that completely shields the apsidal altar space, some Armenian churches also feature a smaller altar curtain that “is used sometimes to cover the altar and its ornaments after the service”³⁷. The altar curtain seems to be a relatively recent innovation, according to Ormanian, who describes it this way:

The main altars in our churches now possess a second, small curtain. These cover the front of the altar and have a height of two meters. They are closed at the time of the [celebrant’s] communion instead of the large curtain. But this little curtain does not exist in the ancient ritual and was not accepted in the eastern regions³⁸.

The Armenian Catholic Synod of 1911 prescribed “two curtains, one of which is dense and colorful, and the other delicate and white” [վարազոյրք երկու՝ որոց մին ստուար և գունաւոր, միւսն նուրբ և սպիտակ]³⁹. Vardan Hacıuni wrote that this was precisely the custom known to him in the Armenian Catholic Churches in Turkey. “The Russian Armenians” [ռուսահայք], he notes, only use the larger curtain, which, he adds, is the tradition of the oldest Armenian churches⁴⁰. He concludes, “The Synod affirms that the old curtain should be ‘delicate and white’. If only [the Synod had given some direction concerning] its shape and function, for the use of double curtains during the Badarak serves

³⁶ Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church with Variables, Complete Rubrics and Commentary, T. A. Nersoyan, tr., rev. 5th ed., London, 1984, p. 196-197, here 196. Hereafter, Divine Liturgy.

³⁷ J. Issaverdents, *The Sacred Rites and Ceremonies of the Armenian Church*, Venice, 1876, p. 9-10. Archdale King also mentions the Armenian altar curtain as if it were normative: *Idem*, *The Rites of Eastern Christendom*, 2 vols., Rome, 1948 II, p. 568-569.

³⁸ M. Ōrmancan, *Cisakan bararan* [Liturgical Dictionary], Antelias, 1979, p. 186. This is my translation of the original Armenian. The published English translation of this work must be used with caution due to many inaccurate renderings of technical terms. M. Ormanian, *A Dictionary of the Armenian Church*, B. Norehad, tr., New York, 1984.

³⁹ Cited in V. Hacıuni, Հայ ծէքը 1911 տարւոյ ազգային սինոդոսի գործոց մէջ [The Armenian Rite in the Works of the 1911 National Synod], Venice, 1919, p. 109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

no purpose and is inappropriate”⁴¹. Hacıuni theorizes that this “little curtain” [փոքր վարագոյր] derived from yet another altar furnishing known to the Armenians as the *tetrasket* (from τετρασκελής). This dome-shaped canopy, rising up from the altar table on four pillars crowned with a cross, and “covered with a fine linen cloth” is mentioned in the famous vision of St. Sahak⁴². Found in only some early churches, the four faces of the *tetrasket* were covered by a fine, white cloth, whose purpose was to conceal the altar at all times except during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy⁴³.

The oldest written reference to the altar curtain in Armenia is found in Canon 21 of the so-called *Canons of St. Sahak the Patriarch* († 439), which Aram Mardirossian has recently attributed to the erudite yet controversial seventh-century radical Julianist theologian, Yovhannes Mayragomec'i († c. 652)⁴⁴. The canon prohibits priests, under threat of harsh punishment, from using church vessels for any secular use. The canon states:

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴² “The Vision of Saint Sahak the Parthian, which he saw in the city of Vataršapat when he was sitting in the holy church on the bema near to the altar of God in the holy cathedral” contains, among other details, a vivid description of architectural features and furnishings from the interior of a celestial church. See Łazar P'arbec'i, *History of the Armenians and the Letter to Vahan Mamikonian*, a photographic reproduction of the 1904 Tiflis edition with a new introduction and critical bibliography by D. Kouymjian, Delmar, NY, 1985, x, p. 29-38, here 29. English translation in *The History of Łazar P'arbec'i*, tr. R. W. Thomson, Columbia University Program in Armenian Studies, Suren D. Fesjian Academic Publications 4, Atlanta, GA, 1991, p. 65-74, here 65, cf. 67. N. Akinean, Տեսիլ Ս. Սահակայ [The Vision of St. Sahak], Vienna, 1948 has argued that the vision is a later interpolation into the mid-fifth century text.

⁴³ V. Hacıuni, *The Armenian Rite*, p. 109-110, where the author provides several historical descriptions of Armenian altar curtains with insightful commentary.

⁴⁴ Confirming the earlier hypothetical attribution of G. Garitte, *La 'Narratio de Rebus Armeniac', CSCO 132*, Louvain, 1952, p. 273-276. A. Mardirossian, *Le livre des canons arméniens (Kanonagirk' Hayoc') de Yovhannes Awjnee'i: Église, droit et société en Arménie du IV^e au VIII^e siècle*, CSCO 606 Subsidia 1116, Louvain, 2004, p. 582-588, where Mardirossian also summarizes the previous scholarship on the corpus of canons attributed to Sahak. Whether or not these canons truly came from the pen of the great fifth-century patriarch and patron of Armenian letters or, as tradition recounts, that they were handed down from St. Gregory the Illuminator, Conybeare could conclude, “It is very probable that much of the matter in the first four chapters belongs to the first half of the fourth century, and the Armenian is almost certainly translated from a Greek original now lost.” F. C. Conybeare, “The Armenian Canons of St. Sahak Catholicos of Armenia (390-439AD),” *The American Journal of Theology* 2/4, 1898, p. 828-48. Cf. P. N. Akinian, Գնումքին Ս. Սահակի վերագրուած կանոններն ե հայոց եկեղեցական տարին Է. դարոյ սկիզբը [Examination of the Canons Attributed to St. Sahak and the Armenians' Ecclesiastical Year At the Beginning of the Seventh Century], Ազգային մատենադարան [Nationalbibliothek] 163, Vienna, 1950, p. 21. Cf. G. Garitte, *La 'Narratio de Rebus Armeniac', CSCO 132*, Louvain, 1952, p. 273-276.

And I hear that at wedding celebrations they give church vessels, especially the curtain, as a nuptial veil [unwquwun] for the groom and bride; and the chalice to soldiers to use as vessels for drinking wine. Wherefore it is proper to remove that priest from his order by reason of such obscene and evil deeds, which, henceforth no one should dare to commit. But if one is found having done so, he shall be deposed of his priesthood, bereft of forgiveness⁴⁵.

Contrary to what one might first assume, the unwquwun is not a wedding veil placed over the head of the bride or over the heads of the bride and groom, as we find in Coptic and Ethiopian marriage rites but not in the Armenian Rite⁴⁶. It refers here, rather, to the drapery hanging down the sides of the marital bed to afford privacy⁴⁷. Implied, therefore, is none other than the large sanctuary curtain that some unscrupulous, if enterprising clergy were co-opting for domestic use. There is no reason to suggest that the curtain referred to was significantly different from that found in Armenian Churches today.

In a work unambiguously attributed to the same Mayragomce'i entitled, "Analyses of the Catholic Church" [Վերլուծութիւն կաթողիկէ եկեղեցոյ] the author gives a highly allegorical explanation for the presence of *two* curtains covering two sanctuaries⁴⁸:

[Why] are there two sanctuaries [junraw]⁴⁹, which are called "heaven"? In the one is the actual Holy Trinity, and in the second are the bodiless choirs of the angels and those higher than they. Two partitions of the curtains means [this]: By means of the one, the Holy Trinity is concealed from the bodiless ones by means of the fiery one. And the second, the bodiless powers, [are concealed] from the bodily ones by means of water... But the curtain secluding heaven

⁴⁵ Kanonagirk' hayoc', 2 vols., V. Hakobyan, ed., Erevan, 1964, 1971, I: 379. Cf. Y. Gat'ricean, Y. Tašean, p. 733. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. See also the complete English translation of the corpus: E. C. Conybeare, "The Armenian Canons of St. Sahak," p. 828-848.

⁴⁶ O. II. E. Burmester, "The Sacrament of Matrimony," in idem, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, p. 128-142.

⁴⁷ The authoritative *Nor Bargirk'* gives the Greek equivalents *παστός, νόμφων; θάλαμος*. *Nor bargirk' haykazean lezui*, 2nd printing, Erevan, 1979, I:282-283, hereafter NBHL. The same word is used for "sail" (*ιστίον, ὀπρέμεον*) again, implying a sizeable textile. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁴⁸ [Չտրքսնի հայ եկեղեցական մասննազրոյթսն] [Selected works from the medieval Armenian literature], eds. P. Khachatryan, H. Kyoseyan, Holy See of St. Eghmiadzin, 2003, p. 189. I am grateful to my colleague and monastic brother, V. Rev. Fr. Shahe Ananyan of the Holy See of Eghmiadzin, for bringing this reference to my attention.

⁴⁹ See n. 1.

shows the Holy Spirit's selecting the worthy ones, whom only he knows, for his own dwelling.

It is difficult indeed to decipher this passage. It would appear that Yovhannes is describing the double curtains mentioned by Ormanian above. Yet Yovhannes' allegory would be a strikingly early reference to a usage that, according to Ormanian and my best knowledge, indeed, "does not exist in the earliest ritual"⁵⁰.

Three references to the altar curtain are found in an anonymous early homily for the Feast of the Dedication of the Churches (Encaenia)⁵¹ bearing the incipit, Բարևաանցկը զԱստուած [Extol God]⁵². In an interpretation of the architectural features and furnishing of the church that functions as part of the homily's encomium on the church, the author writes⁵³:

And just as [the Father's Word] enveloped the heavenly ones in a fiery tabernacle, those nearby who glorify the unapproachable light of the Divinity, likewise in this tabernacle the ranks of priests are enclosed by a curtain, those who stand in the ministry of the tremendous and awesome mystery of the Body and Blood of the Lord, which is conducted for the salvation of the world.

Somewhat later the author refers again to the altar curtain, this time transmitting the very same allegory as Yovhannes Mayrakomeci, applied here to a single curtain⁵⁴:

And the partition of the curtain shows first the separation of heaven, where the one Trinity is said to reside in the heaven of heavens. It is as well a partition that stands between us and the bodiless beings⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ See the quote above.

⁵¹ The ancient feast commemorates the dedication of the Constantinian shrines on Golgotha on September 13, 335. The Armenian Church celebrates the feast on the Saturday before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. See M. D. Findikyan, "Armenian Hymns of the Holy Cross and the Jerusalem Encaenia," *REArm* 31, 2008-2009, p. 151-184.

⁵² Յովհաննու Իմաստասիրի Աւանգույ մատնագրութիւնը [Works of Yovhannes the Philosopher of Awjun], 2nd ed., Venice, 1953, p. 151-167. Hereafter, Yovhannes.

⁵³ Եւ որպէս զերկնայինսն հրեղինաւ պարածածկեաց խորանաւ զմերձակայսն փառաւորիչս անմատոյց լուսոյ աստուածութեան, նոյնպէս եւ յայսմ խորանի պարածածկին վարագորաւ դասք բահանայից, որոյ կան ի սպասաւորութիւն սոսկայի եւ ահաւոր խորհրդոյ մարմնոյ եւ արեան տեառն, որ կատարի ի փրկութիւն աշխարհի: Ibid., p. 154.

⁵⁴ Իսկ վարագորին անջրպետութիւն զառաջին երկնից ցուցան, որոշումն, որ միայնակ երրորդութիւնն ասի բնակիլ յերկինս երկնից. եւ այն եւս անջրպետ, որ ընդ մէջ մեր եւ անմարմին Լուրեանցն կայ. Ibid., p. 162.

⁵⁵ Եւ սեղանոյն քաջումն՝ զյայտնապէս երևումն աստուածութեանն ամենայն արարածոց քաջաբարոզէ, յորժամ ցուցան, զինքն արժանատւոյց իրոց. ըստ այնմ, թէ, «Տեսանկոց եմք զնա՝ որպէս եւ էն»: Ibid., p. 164.

And a few lines further down, at the beginning of an interpretation of the liturgical elements of the Liturgy of the Word, the text reads: “And exposing the altar declares the manifest appearance of God to all creatures when He shows Himself to his worthy ones, as it says, ‘We shall see him as he is’ [1Jn 3:2].” “Exposing the altar” obviously refers to opening the sanctuary curtain and thereby revealing the altar. Situated, as it is, at the very beginning of the homilist’s interpretation of the Divine Liturgy, this passage can only refer to opening the altar curtain at the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy. The implication is that the preparation of the Eucharistic gifts had taken place behind the closed curtain at some time prior to the start of the Liturgy, whereupon the curtain opened and the “public” portion of the Divine Liturgy began⁵⁶. The sanctuary curtain closes only two other times during presbyteral Divine Liturgies⁵⁷. Other than these

⁵⁶ The preparation of the gifts now belongs to the public portion of the Divine Liturgy, albeit obscured from the view of the congregants by the closed curtain. This shift came about during the Cilician period as a consequence of the appropriation of new entrance rites adapted from the old Dominican Missal. These introductory rites, comprising the entrance of the priest and ministers, the confession and absolution of the celebrant using Armenian renderings of the Confiteor and the Misereatur, and the celebrant’s ascent to the altar accompanied by Ps 42(43), were simply prefixed onto the existing Armenian ordo, resulting in a new beginning for the Divine Liturgy. This new beginning effectively co-opted the prothesis rites, which had formerly been conducted before the start of the Liturgy, behind the closed curtain. A solemn, ritual ascent from the chancel to the altar space, on the other hand, naturally required the sanctuary curtain to be open at the start of the liturgy. The solution arrived at by the Armenians was to close the curtain following the officiants’ ascent to the altar, and to conduct the preparation at that point. Thereupon, the curtain is reopened for the procession of the celebrant and ministers around the church and among the people. Cf. **M. D. Findikyan**, “Ancient Introit Prayers from Jerusalem in the Armenian Divine Liturgy,” in **M. D. Findikyan, D. Galadza, A. Lossky**, eds., *Sion mere des églises. Mélanges liturgiques offerts au P. Ch. A. Renoux*, Münster, 2016, S. 91-107. **R. F. Taft S. J.**, “The Armenian ‘Holy Sacrifice (Surb Patarag)’ as a Mirror of Armenian Liturgical History” in *idem*, ed. *The Armenian Christian Tradition, Scholarly Symposium in Honor of the Visit to the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, of His Holiness Karekin I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians*, December 12, 1996, OCA 254, Rome, 1997, p. 178-179. **M. D. Findikyan**, “L’Influence latine sur la liturgie arménienne,” in **C. Mutafian**, ed. *Roma-Armenia*, Rome, 1999, p. 341-342. **G. Winkler**, “Armenia and the Gradual Decline of its Traditional Liturgical Practices as a Result of the Expanding Influence of the Holy See from the 11th to the 14th Century,” in *Liturgie de l’église particulière, liturgie de l’église universelle*, *Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae Subsidia* 7, Rome, 1976, p. 329-368. **Y. Gat’rčean (Catergian), Y. Tašcan (Dashian)**, *Սրբազան սրբապատարագի հայոց [The Sacred Book of the Divine Liturgy of the Armenians]*, Vienna, 1987, p. 477.

⁵⁷ During the pre-Communion manual acts and the communion of the celebrant; and after the Communion of the faithful, when the vessels for Holy Communion are cleaned and put away. The former corresponds to the fourth-century evidence for Antioch in the homilies of J. Chrysostom. **R. F. Taft**, “The Decline,” p. 42. Taft adds, a propos of the early Antiochian Eucharist: “Van de Paverd has subjected these Chrysostom texts to minute exegesis and concludes that

Indeed, a closer examination of the liturgical elements mentioned in the author's interpretation of the Divine Liturgy reveals a somewhat more developed ordo than that evinced by the Catholicos' contemporary, Bishop Step'anos Siwnec'i around the turn of the eighth century, thus suggesting a *terminus post quem* of the early eighth century⁶¹. The *terminus ante quem* would be the death of Nerses Lambronac'i († 1198), whose commentary shows a significantly more developed shape for the Divine Liturgy⁶².

Consequently, our earliest literary reference to the Armenian sanctuary curtain depends upon the date of the Canons of St. Sahak, from as early as the fourth to as late as the mid-seventh century when, in any case, we have the problematic reference of Yovhannes Mayrakomec'i to a curtain or curtains. The next surviving witness is at least a century thereafter⁶³. Naturally this in no way precludes the likelihood that, concomitant with evidence from neighboring eastern rites, the Armenians already used a sanctuary curtain at a much earlier era.

III. Closing the Curtain

Having reviewed the early literary evidence for the existence of the sanctuary curtain, let us turn to the Armenian custom of closing the curtain during

⁶¹ No descriptions of the ordo of the Liturgy of the Word survive in the authentic writings of Yovhannes Ojnc'i. See M. D. Findikyan, Commentary, p. 219-279. In general, however, the description of the Liturgy of the Word in Barchanec'ek' zAstuac is more developed than that found in the commentary of Step'anos Siwnec'i († 735), which is contemporary with the writings of Yovhannes Ojnc'i. In particular, the Monogenys (Miacin ordi) is the first element of the Liturgy of the Word following the entrance procession. Yovhannēs, p. 164. In Step'anos' work there is no mention of the Monogenys. M. D. Findikyan, Commentary, 442ff. Barchanec'ek' zAstuac also refers to the litany following the Gospel as "the so-called universal proclamation" [բարոզն համաշխարհական կոչմամբ], (likely in reference to the first petition, "For peace in the whole world...") [Կանն խաղաղութան ամենայն աշխարհի], a term that is unknown in the earlier work. Yovhannēs, p. 165. M. D. Findikyan, Commentary, p. 101, 145, 459-460.

⁶² N. Lambronac'i, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy [խորհրդածորինք ի կարգս եկեղեցւոյ և Մեկնութիւն խորհրդոյ պատարազին], Venice, 1847. I. Kéchichian, tr. Nersès de Lambron (1153-1192): Explication de la Divine Liturgy, Recherches 9, Beirut, 2000.

⁶³ In the tenth century History of Yovhannes Draxanakertc'i 24.3 we find mention of a sumptuous sanctuary curtain in a church in Baguan, north of the eastern shore of Lake Van, which was coveted and plundered by an Arab governor: "It was then that he noticed the beautiful and very splendid gold and silver vessels of the divinely made altar, as well as the multicoloured curtain of the sanctuary [զգոննակ գոննակ կրանգս ամազաստին սրբութեան], the vestments and robes..." Y. Draxanakertc'i, History of Armenia, K. H. Maksoudian, tr. and ed., Atlanta, 1987, p. 114. Յովհաննէս Կաթողիկոսի Դրասխանակերտեցւոյ Պատմութիւն հայոց [The History of the Armenians by Catholicos Yovhannes Draxanakertc'i], ed. M. Emin, Moscow, 1853, p. 61. Cf. P. Boisson-Chenorhokian, Y. Draxanakertc'i histoire d'arménie: Introduction, traduction et notes. CSCO Vol. 605 Subs. T. 115, Louvain, 2004, p. 172.

Great Lent. If we open the *Tonac'oyc'* to the Saturday before Great Lent, which, according to the Armenian calendar, is always the commemoration of the 150 Fathers of the Council of Constantinople, we find the following notice⁶⁴: And in the evening, [they shall sing the Hymn of Psalm 120(121)] Tone 8, "The Word [who is consubstantial] with the Father." And drawing the curtain, they shall conceal the altar after the example of Adam's exile from Paradise. And henceforth they shall not kiss the Gospel, nor shall they elevate it in view of the people during the Creed, nor at "Save us." They shall also recite "Joyous Light" at the place of the acclamation until Palm Sunday.

These are the closing lines of the roughly page-long instructions for conducting the services of the commemoration of the 150 Fathers of the Council of Constantinople. It would seem that to abide by this rubric would require one to close the sanctuary curtain and to keep it closed from that moment within Saturday Vespers "until Palm Sunday." In fact, we find a variety of practices in Armenian churches and dioceses throughout the world, and this is based on ambiguity in the *Tonac'oyc'* instruction.

First of all, if, according to the instruction just cited, the curtain is closed on Saturday evening, then obviously it remains closed the next day, the Sunday known as Բոնս բաբնկնդան [Great Carnival], which the *Tonac'oyc'* counts as the first Sunday of Great Lent⁶⁵. Yet closing the curtain "after the example of Adam's exile from Paradise," as the *Tonac'oyc'* states, patently contradicts the festive spirit and function of the Carnival, when people are expected to consume any meat and dairy products remaining in their homes in preparation for the fast. The Armenian word *Barekendan*, a cognate from the words for "good" [բարի] and "life/living" [կենդան / կենդանի]⁶⁶, would seem to accentuate further the

⁶⁴ «Եւ բարձրալ գվարագորն՝ ծածկեացն գտղանն, յօրինակ արտաբանն Ադամայ ի դրախտն, եւ ոչ համբուրեացն այսուիտն զանտարանն. նստա ոչ բարձրացուցն ի Հառատամբին եւ ի կեցոին ի տես ժողովրդեանն. զԼոյս զուարթն եւս թիւ ասացն ի տեղի մաղթանքին մինչեւ ի Ծաղկազարդն»: *Tonac'oyc'*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ By clear implication, since the *Tonac'oyc'* clearly labels the following Sunday as "the second Sunday of Great Lent" [երկրորդ կիրակի Մեծի Պահոց]. *Tonac'oyc'*, p. 43. This numeration goes back to the second-generation Armenian lectionaries (post-eighth century), the first to adapt the lectionary of Jerusalem to local customs. Ch. Renoux, *Le lectionnaire de Jérusalem en Arménie: Le Čaşoc' II. Édition synoptique des plus anciens témoins*, PO 48/2, Turnhout, 1999, p. 123-125, 160-182. Hereafter, Ch. Renoux, *Le Čaşoc' II*.

⁶⁶ Ačaryan compares the word with the Persian word *pergantan*/*barqandan*, which refers to the day before the first day of the Ramadan fast, concluding that "the Persian word has been borrowed from Armenian." H. Ačaryan, *Hayeren armatakan bararan* [Armenian Etymological Dictionary], 5 vols., Erevan, 1971, I., p. 422. Cf. Ch. Renoux, "Un programme de conversion," p. 283 n. 2.

idea that among the Armenian people too, the Great Carnival was considered a day suitable for festivity and fun. To my knowledge, Armenian monasteries do indeed follow the rubric literally, though I do not know how they reconcile the penitential spirit expressed by the closing of the curtain with the festive intent of the Great Carnival. In many parish churches, Saturday Vespers are not routinely conducted anyway, so the curtain remains open until after the Eucharist of Great Carnival Sunday. Many parish priests close the sanctuary curtain after Holy Communion, as usual, but leave it closed for the conclusion of the Liturgy, when it would normally be reopened⁶⁷. This solution is more faithful to the spirit of the Great Carnival⁶⁸, but defies the instruction in the *Tonac'oyc'*⁶⁹.

More troubling is another contradiction: Like the *Tonac'oyc'*, another liturgical book, the *Orac'oyc'* [Daily Directory], considers the Great Carnival to be the first Sunday of Lent⁷⁰. However, the latter additionally designates the very

⁶⁷ Divine Liturgy, p. 104-105.

⁶⁸ Though not completely faithful, since the festivity of the carnival could only commence following the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

⁶⁹ Renoux seeks to resolve the contradiction by proposing that the Armenians' carnival is not a day, but a two-week affair commencing after the five-day pre-Lenten fast known as *Unuwpung uuhp*. The Great Carnival would thus be the crowning day of this two-week period of festivity. Ch. Renoux, "Un programme de conversion: la liturgie du 1er dimanche de carême dans le rite arménien," in *Liturgie, conversion et vie monastique*, Conférences Saint-Serge XXXV Semaine d'Études Liturgiques Bibliotheca "Ephemerides Liturgicae" Subsidia 40, Rome, 1988, p. 283. Some second-generation Armenian manuscript lectionaries reflecting the first adaptation of the Lectionary of Jerusalem to local Armenian usages designate the Saturday before the Great Carnival as "the Saturday of Bun Barekentan" [Բմն քարկենտանի շաբաթ արթ]. Ch. Renoux, *Čaşoc' II*, p. 610. Ormanian similarly proposed that Bun Barekentan was the last day of a carnival period lasting one week, which "is spent entirely in the joy of foods and festivity." Idem, *Cisakan bararan*, 20. These theories of an extended carnival period are mitigated by the absence of any note to this effect in the *Tonac'oyc'* or other liturgical books. Furthermore, judging by their propers, the two Wednesdays and Fridays preceding Bun Barekentan are clearly penitential days of abstinence as usual. Moreover, if the hypothetical one or two-week carnival period ends on Sunday, why would the sanctuary curtain be closed on the Saturday prior, the Commemoration of the 150 Fathers of the Council of Constantinople, which would still fall squarely within the purported festive period?

⁷⁰ Like the evidence in the *Tonac'oyc'*, this is by clear implication since the entry for Bun Barekentan includes no sequential designation. Yet the following Sunday is labeled, "Second Sunday of the forty-day Fast" [2. Kirjaki K'arasnordakan Pahoc']. *Orac'oyc'* 2009 [Daily Directory], Holy Ełmiacin, 2009, p. 42. The *Orac'oyc'* is an indispensable booklet published annually by each of the Armenian hierarchical sees for the churches under its jurisdiction. It defines the date of Easter and of all of the other feasts and commemorations of the Armenian Church calendar for a given year. (The *Tonac'oyc'* is a "generic" directory of the church year containing no calendar dates). All of the various *Orac'oyc'* booklets regularly refer to the Monday following Bun Barekentan as "the first day of Great Lent." Each day of Lent is thus numbered in such

next day (Monday) as “the first day of Lent” [Լոյ Մեծի պահոց]⁷¹. The same can be said for the *Book of Hymns* [Տարակ]⁷². So when does Lent actually begin in the Armenian Church? The answer is hardly clear from the conflicting information in the Armenian liturgical books.

A further inconsistency lies in the symbolism associated with the closed curtain as indicated in the *Tonac'oyc'*. Surprisingly none of the lections, hymnography or other liturgical propers for either Saturday or *Bun Berekendan* make any allusion to Adam's exile from Paradise, which is otherwise ubiquitous in Armenian theology, hymnology and exegesis. The Canon of *Տարակս* [hymns] for that day, which, according to the direction in the *Tonac'oyc'*, is chanted while the curtain is being drawn on Saturday evening, excludes any reference to Adam and Eve's expulsion⁷³, much less to the closed sanctuary curtain. To the contrary, the hymns amount to a *celebration* of the protoparents' joyful *pre-lapsarian* existence in Paradise with - quite uncharacteristically for the Armenians - only the most muted hint of their impending fate⁷⁴. Consider, for example, the first verses from the hymn⁷⁵:

The Word, who is consubstantial with the Father and coexistent with the Holy Spirit, combined his own image with earthen nature. Adorning it with glory, he placed him in the Paradise of delight.

There, exultant, [Adam] rejoiced in a gladness incapable of sorrow, for he always saw God humbled in Paradise, from whom a ray of His Light was imprinted upon him.

a way that the Friday preceding the Commemoration of the Raising of Lazarus (Saturday) and Palm Sunday is the fortieth and final day of Great Lent.

⁷¹ *Orac'oyc'*, p. 39.

⁷² *Jaynk'at Sarakan* [Hymnal Arranged by Tone], Jerusalem, 1914, p. 103, where the canon of hymns is labeled, “of the second Sunday of fasting” [երկրորդ կիւրակեւ աւստիւ]. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 84. Hereafter, *Տարակ*.

⁷³ Renoux analyzes the most important liturgical propers for *Bun Berekendan* in idem, “Un programme de conversion.” Cf. G. Haroutiounian-Thomas, “Les lectures eucharistiques des dimanches du grande carême d'après le rite arménien,” in A. M. Triacca, A. Pistoia, eds., *La liturgie: interprète de l'écriture I: Les lectures bibliques pour les dimanches et fêtes*, Conférences Saint-Serge XLVIII^e Semaine d'Études Liturgiques, Paris, 25-28 June 2001, Rome, 2002, p. 173-182.

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the centrality of Adam and Eve as the inevitable topos and point of departure for Armenian depictions of salvation history in medieval liturgical hermeneutics, see M. D. Findikyan, “Christology in Early Armenian Liturgical Commentaries,” in *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Trinity, Christology and Liturgical Theology*, ed. B. D. Spinks, Collegeville, MN, 2008, p. 200-203.

⁷⁵ *Տարակ*, p. 84. For a complete French translation of the canon of hymns for *Bun Berekendan* see Ch. Renoux, “Un programme de conversion,” p. 288-289.

Therefore pray, O Mother of God, Mary, to your only-begotten Son, that he may grant us, like the thief, to inherit again the garden of majesty.

Today after the example of Adam, the first-created, who rejoiced with the angels in Paradise, let us too delight in spiritual praise.

Today in the mystery of the forefather created by God, who rejoiced in tasting the fruit of Eden, let us too taste the commandments of God.

The other hymns of the Canon make absolutely no reference to the expulsion of the first couple from Paradise. Why has such a conspicuous ritual as the closing of the sanctuary curtain left no mark whatsoever on the liturgical propers of the day or indeed the very hymn that accompanies it? A three-line note in the *Tonac'oyc'* is the only trace of the ritual and its hermeneutic.

The theme of Adam's exile from Paradise is hardly absent, however, from the Armenians' theological conception of Great Lent. The theme is connected not with the Great Carnival, but with the following Sunday, "the second Sunday of Great Lent," which has become known as "the Sunday of the Expulsion" [Արսուսութան կիրակի]⁷⁶. It is here that we find a preponderance of explicit references to, and meditations on the Fall of the proto-parents and its cataclysmic consequences for humanity. The opening verses of the Canon of *Šarakan* are representative of the rest of the Canon⁷⁷:

You first transmitted the law of the holiness of the fast in Paradise. Not observing them and tasting the fruit, the first creatures tasted the bitterness of sin and death. Therefore, Lord, grant us to taste of the kindness of your commandments.

We were stricken in our souls through various wounds of sin by the enemy. And in our multiple ailments we longed for you, O lover of mankind, to take away our pains. Therefore, heal us, O Christ, as one who loves mankind.

For you came for the salvation of humanity through birth of the Virgin Mary. And by your life-giving resurrection you invited us mortal ones to the res-

⁷⁶ *Orac'oyc'*, p. 42. Malachi Ormanian (Małak'ea Ormanean) writes that "The second Sunday [of Lent] has no functional title. However, in some places we find it labeled Artak'sman, which is also attested from the meaning of the hymn composed by [Catholicos Nerses] Šnorhali. Already we know that the life of the first people in Paradise is commemorated on Bun Barekandan, that is, the first Sunday of Great Lent. Accordingly, on the second Sunday, their expulsion from Paradise is commemorated." Ormanian does not appear to recognize or to acknowledge the apparent contradiction with regard to the closing of the curtain. M. Ormanean, *Cisikan bararan*, p. 16.

⁷⁷ *Šarakan*, p. 103.

urrection of immortality. Therefore, through the prayers of your mother, grant us life, O Savior.

We are faced, therefore, with a patent contradiction in the church's interpretation of the closed sanctuary curtain and the spirituality of *Bun Barekendan*. Even the eminent Armenian hierarch and intellectual Ormanian did not seem to recognize the inherent inconsistency in the Armenian Church's prevailing understanding of *Bun Barekendan*⁷⁸:

After conducting the penitential church hymns of Great Lent and closing the curtain on Saturday evening, on Sunday morning, with ecclesial sorrow, consecrating ourselves to the joy of foods, according to our teachers, "follows the example of the delight and the good life of Paradise." For the meaning of *Bun Barekendan* Sunday contains the commemoration of the happy life of the forefathers in Paradise.

IV. Opening the Curtain

If the Armenian liturgical books present an ambiguous ritual context for the closing of the sanctuary curtain near the beginning of Great Lent, more questions arise regarding the circumstances surrounding its reopening at the end of Lent. To begin with, "until Palm Sunday" in the *Tonac'oyc'* rubric has to be interpreted in an exclusive sense, since there is no instruction in it to reopen the curtain on Palm Sunday. That rubric is found at the end of the lengthy entry for Lazarus Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday: "when they begin [the Vespereal hymn of Psalm 120(121)], they shall expose the altar space." In Armenian this amounts to all of four words: ի սկսիլն քացցնն զխորանն⁷⁹. This stark note hardly corresponds with the instruction to close the curtain at the beginning of Lent with its brief, but telling theological justification for closing the curtain.

At first glance, the ritual of reopening the sanctuary curtain appears to be contextualized within the typical structure of the pre-festal rite known as *Naxatonak*, although uncharacteristically, the *Tonac'oyc'* does not refer to it as such⁸⁰:

And together, the priests shall vest and go to the center of the chancel [խորանն] with cross and Gospel, incense and candles. Hymn [of Psalm

⁷⁸ M. Ōrmancan, *Cisakan bararan*, p. 20-21. I do not know what "penitential church hymns of Great Lent" Ormanian is referring to. No such hymns are appointed on the Saturday before Bun Barekendan.

⁷⁹ *Tonac'oyc'*, 56.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

120(121)] in Tone 1, ‘Praised on high.’ And when they begin, they shall expose the altar space. Proclamation: ‘Let us beseech’; Prayer: ‘King of peace’.

Any Armenian cleric instantly recognizes this cryptic memorandum as the conventional directive to conduct a *Naxatonak* ceremony. This short office takes place at the end of the Evening Hour on the eve of dominical feasts and the commemoration of certain important saints. The office normally begins after the prayer, “Compassionate Father” [Հայր զթաժ] a fixed Vespertal prayer⁸¹. The clergy, vested in chasubles [շոթթաւ], gather in the center of the chancel. The choirs chant the Canon of hymns designated for the next day’s feast while the presiding cleric processes around the church offering incense. If the next day’s feast is a saints’ commemoration, a litany of the saints is chanted. The office concludes with a diaconal proclamation and dismissal prayer⁸².

Obviously the function of a *Naxatonak* is to inaugurate the next day’s festivity by introducing its primary themes, which are most deftly encapsulated in the hymnology of the feast. So implanting the ritual of opening the curtain into the Saturday evening *Naxatonak* for Palm Sunday is tantamount to defining the meaning of the ritual in terms of Palm Sunday. In other words, the text of the Palm Sunday hymn should in some way elucidate the meaning of the opening of the curtain. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The Palm Sunday hymn, ‘Praised on high’ [Որ վերօրհնի], neither alludes in any way to opening the curtain, nor does it contain any obvious hermeneutic link with it. Consider the first few verses⁸³:

⁸¹ *Žamagirk’ hayastancaye’ surb ekelec’woy* [Book of Hours of the Holy Armenian Church], Jerusalem, 1955, p. 567, hereafter, *Žamagirk’*. English translation in *The Book of Hours or the Order of Common Prayers of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church: Matins, Prime, Vespers and Occasional Offices*, Evanston, IL, 1964, p. 93, hereafter, *Book of Hours*. Like the Pre-Festal on the eve of Palm Sunday, on the eves of Transfiguration, the feasts of the Church, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the next day’s Hymns are sung in place of the day’s Hymn of Psalm 120 [Հաւթարթի], not in addition to them. See Kh. Balyan (Palyan), *Ժամակարգություն [Order of the Hours]*, Ečmiadzin, 1984, p. 65. Note that Balyan omits Palm Sunday.

⁸² See, for example, the order of the *Naxatonak* conducted every evening of the Theophany octave: “And after [the prayer] Compassionate Father [Հայր զթաժ], together, they shall go to the center of the chancel with cross and Gospel, incense and candles; and singing first the Hymn for the Canticle of Azarias, [Daniel 3; Հարց] in its entirety, they shall conduct *Naxatonak* on these eight days. Proclamation: ‘The Holy Mother of God’ [Սուրբ զԱստուածածին]. Prayer: ‘Receive our supplications, Lord [Բնիկս տէր զաղաչանս].” *Tonac’bye*, 12.

⁸³ Renoux has argued, based on thematic and verbal similarities with the Georgian hymns of Palm Sunday, that the remote origins of this hymn lie in Jerusalem. *Idem*, “Le Iadgari géorgien et le Šaraknoc’ arménien,” *REArm* 24, 1993, p. 89-112.

Praised on high among the cherubic thrones, you were pleased to be seated upon an ass. Praised are you, who came to save [us].

Therefore, with the youths, we, too, offer a triumphant shout of praise to you, O King of glory, singing, "Praised are you, who came to save [us]."

"Hosanna in the highest. Alleluia! Praised [are you, who] have come in the name of the Lord. Alleluia! And praise to you, who will come in the name of the Lord. Alleluia!"

Today we have seen revealed on Earth the eternal Word, who is enthroned in glory with the Father. With the voice of the cherubim we praise Him. Blessed is He that has come in the name of the Lord.

Today in Bethany, by your almighty command, you called to Lazarus, and death shuddered. Hell was defeated. Corruption was dissolved. Life-giving Christ, give us life. Blessed is He that has come in the name of the Lord.

Today in Bethany, you called incorruptibly from the tomb the one who had been dead for four days, thus prognosticating your holy resurrection that saves the world. Blessed is He that has come in the name of the Lord.

Today in Bethany, the children of the Hebrews, amazed, said, "The Son of Mary has raised the brother of Mary from the tomb." Blessed is He that has come in the name of the Lord.

As the verses above show, the Armenian Palm Sunday canon integrates themes from the story of the Raising of Lazarus with the conventional Palm Sunday story, juxtaposing Bethany and Jerusalem, as it were. One could imagine a liturgical scene in which a hymn extolling Lazarus' dramatic emergence from the tomb accompanies the opening of the sanctuary curtain. Just as the hymn recalls Jesus' command, "Come out, Lazarus!" the sanctuary curtain would open solemnly, unveiling the resplendent altar. Alas, we have no such drama here. The Palm Sunday canon of hymns emphasizes not the dramatic appearance of Lazarus, but rather that of Jesus, the heavenly giver of life. Furthermore, even if the epiphany of the Savior were the intended backdrop for the opening of the curtain, which is not inconceivable, this motive only awkwardly rejoins the previously designated symbolism of the closed curtain: the expulsion of Adam from Paradise. While it may be possible to contrive various hermeneutic links between the Palm Sunday hymn and the ritual of opening the curtain, another explanation stubbornly persists: that the hymn and the ritual have no inherent affiliation; the ritual of opening the curtain has been carelessly superimposed upon the pre-existing structure of the Lazarus Saturday evening office with

its hymnology. The abrupt four-word instruction to open the curtain indeed smacks of an afterthought.

More ambiguities arise from the *Tonac'oyc'* instruction to reopen the curtain. We assumed that the curtain should remain closed throughout Great Lent, even if there is some uncertainty regarding exactly when that period begins. Yet this assumption is hardly indisputable based on a careful reading of the rubrics in the *Tonac'oyc'*. In fact, on the commemoration of the Imprisonment of St. Gregory the Illuminator [Սիւնի ի վիքսայ], which falls on the Saturday preceding the sixth Sunday of Great Lent, the *Tonac'oyc'* includes this note:

Only expose the sanctuary [յնքան] in which you will be offering the *Patarug*. And after the *Patarug*, close it again⁸⁴.

So on this feast, the Divine Liturgy should be celebrated with the curtain open. But what about the other days during Lent when the *Tonac'oyc'* directs us to celebrate the Eucharist – this means every Sunday, as well as the Lenten Saturday saints' commemorations, among the oldest in the Armenian calendar⁸⁵: St. Theodore the General⁸⁶; St. Cyril of Jerusalem⁸⁷; St. John of Jerusalem and two Armenian Saint Johns: Yovhannes Ojnee'i and Yovhannes Orotnee'i, together with the latter's disciple, Grigor Tat'ewac'i⁸⁸; and the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia⁸⁹. Moreover, the dominical feasts of the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple (Տևաոնընդաւաթ) on February 14⁹⁰, and the Annunciation to the Mother of God, on April 7⁹¹ often fall within the Forty Days. The *Tonac'oyc'*

⁸⁴ «Եւ յորում խորանի մատուցանելոց եւ զպատարազն, զայն խորանն միայն բացցես. Իսկ զկնի պատարազն դարձեալ լիակես»: *Tonac'oyc'*, 52.

⁸⁵ There is an entire tradition in eastern canon law, most explicitly and possibly originally articulated in Canons 46, 47 and 48 of the Council of Laodicea (end 4th ante 5th c.), that directs the Eucharist to be celebrated only on Saturdays and Sundays of Great Lent, Saturdays specifically for the commemoration of the martyrs. The canons cited above correspond to canons 49, 50 and 51 of the Greek version. A. Mardirossian, *Le Livre des Canons*, p. 556. *Kanonagirk' hayoc'*, I, p. 591-593. *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, 7 vols., R. Naz, ed., Paris, 1957, VI, p. 338-343.

⁸⁶ Saturday of the first week of Lent. *Tonac'oyc'*, p. 42-43.

⁸⁷ Saturday of the second week of Lent. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸⁸ All on Saturday of the third week of Lent. *Ibid.*, p. 47-48.

⁸⁹ Saturday of the fourth week of Lent. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁰ In the nearly four pages of the *Tonac'oyc'* devoted to the rubrics for this feast, no mention is made of the curtain, even though other provisions for the liturgy are made for those years when the feast falls during Great Lent. *Ibid.*, p. 25-29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102-105. While making provisions for the celebration of the liturgy in those years when the feast falls during Holy Week, on Easter Sunday, or on the Sunday following Easter, none are made if the feast falls during Great Lent. Nowhere, in any case, is there reference to the curtain. Archdale King notes erroneously, and without reference, that the sanctuary curtain

makes no reference to the sanctuary curtain in any of the entries for these days. Ormanian writes that “even if [the Feast of the Annunciation] falls within Great Lent, the church’s mourning and penitential forms are interrupted.” From this one could infer that the curtain should be opened for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on this day, although Ormanian nowhere specifies what he intends by the “penitential forms” to which he refers⁹².

The omission is not merely a technicality of interest to liturgical pedants. It presents a real dilemma for the Armenian clergy who strive to abide by the letter and spirit of their sacred tradition. There are essentially two solutions to the problem based on how one interprets the silence of the *Tonac’oyc’*. Strict literalists assume (consciously or implicitly) that the absence of any direction with regard to the curtain is intentional and therefore prescriptive. They celebrate these festal Lenten Eucharists with the curtain closed, thus giving full weight to the exclusionary function of the curtain, and thereby promoting a radically penitential understanding of Great Lent.

Others rightly struggle to understand what it is about the Imprisonment of St. Gregory that warrants the extraordinary opening of the sanctuary curtain?⁹³ What elevates St. Gregory’s commemoration above the other great saints and indeed above the two feasts of the Lord?⁹⁴ Lacking a credible answer, they infer

“is drawn during Lent, except on Palm Sunday and the Annunciation, to symbolize the expulsion of our first parents from the Garden of Eden.” Idem, *The Rites of Eastern Christendom*, II, p. 569.

⁹² M. Ormanian, *Cisakan pararan*, p. 18.

⁹³ Paradoxically, Gregory’s thirteen-year confinement in a pit would seem most deftly to echo sinful humanity’s alienation from God so poignantly symbolized by the closed curtain. The story is recounted in the History of Agat’ankelos. Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, R. W. Thomson, tr. and ed., Albany, 1976, esp. §122-124, p. 132-137.

⁹⁴ The instruction to open the curtain and celebrate the Divine Liturgy in view of the people on the commemoration of the Enlightener’s Entrance into the Pit dates to the mid-18th century liturgical reforms of Catholicos Simeon Erewanc’i, who was at pains to give added prominence to saints of Armenian ethnicity in his reorganization of the church’s sanctoral. Vexed by the presence of a feast of the holy Enlightener during the Church’s great fasting period, yet unwilling to transplant a well-established and popular holy day, Simeon prescribed that the curtain be opened on this feast: “But let them expose only that sanctuary [խորան] in which they will offer the Patarag on that day. On Friday evening, having conducted a pre-festal ceremony [ռաձաթոնակ] with great solemnity, let them, on Saturday morning, offer the Patarag in view of the people.” M. Ormanian (Ormanian), *Azgapatum [History of a People: Passages of the Armenian Orthodox Church from the Beginning to Our Times, Narrated in the Context of National Circumstances]*, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1960, III, p. 3067, citing G. Aftaneg’, *Դիւան հայոց պատմութեան [Archive of the History of the Armenians]*, 10 vols., Tiflis, 1782-1802, III, p. 427. Ormanian refers to this innovation as “devoid of propriety” [անարարութիւն, գրգռելի]. Un-

that the direction to open the curtain on the Feast of St. Gregory is, or should be normative for other saints' commemorations as well, and certainly for the dominical feasts that fall during Lent. They therefore open the sanctuary curtain for the celebration of these Lenten Eucharists, implicitly accentuating the primacy of God's redemptive grace in the Eucharist over any element of the church's penitential discipline. This approach, while meritorious, is not supported by the letter of the *Tonac'oyc'*.

There is a third, tacit solution: The overwhelming majority of parish churches in the diaspora do not celebrate these festal or Saturday liturgies during Lent. As such, there is no question of opening the curtain at all during Great Lent. Over time, this approach can only ossify the *status quo*, which supports the strict literal interpretation. Today one encounters advocates of both of the above interpretations, and thus a variety of practices regarding the celebration of the Eucharist during Lenten feasts. As should be evident, however, neither solution is without fault, or, for that matter, entirely satisfying. One is left searching for a better explanation.

V. Problems Associated with the Ritual of *Goc' Patarag*

Celebrating the Divine Liturgy with the curtain closed raises a whole range of practical problems, which the curt rubric in the *Tonac'oyc'* entirely overlooks. This results in confusion and disparity in practice from place to place. Diocesan bishops are largely left to their own devices in regulating and interpreting these ritual ambiguities. The only text to my knowledge that details specific ritual prescriptions for the *Goc' Patarag* is a short section of Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan's Divine Liturgy book entitled, "On Celebrating 'Veiled' Liturgy"⁹⁵. Nersoyan's rubrics in this page-long section seem to be based, like the work as a whole, on "the practice prevalent in the Armenian Monastery in Jerusalem"⁹⁶.

The first question is how to begin the Lenten Divine Liturgy? Normally the celebrant and altar servers process from the vestry into the chancel, where, around a lattice of Psalms, introit proclamations and prayers, the priest washes his hands, recites a formula of confession and then ascends the altar for the preparation of the gifts. How, if at all, should the clergy maneuver around the closed curtain? The *Tonac'oyc'* is of no help here. In current practice, this part

resolved remains the fundamental contradiction inherent in celebrating a feast when the sanctuary curtain is closed.

⁹⁵ Divine Liturgy, p. 233-234.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

of the Lenten Divine Liturgy is omitted entirely. The Lenten *Patarag* begins after the preparation of the gifts. This practice, while universal, is not prescribed in any liturgical book apart from Nersoyan's modern instructions⁹⁷.

More egregious is another practice that I have witnessed personally on more than one occasion: the priest celebrates the Liturgy without donning the proper liturgical vestments, remaining, instead, in the simple black cassock and *phelonion* that are worn for the Liturgy of the Hours. One can imagine the priest's reasoning: Why bother to put on sacramental vestments if the entire Liturgy is veiled from the people?

Should the Kiss of Peace be conducted? In the Armenian Rite, as in other rites, the Kiss of Peace functions simultaneously as a greeting and a blessing⁹⁸. The Kiss is initiated by the celebrant, who offers the greeting of peace ("Peace unto all") from the altar area as he turns toward the faithful and blesses them with the sign of the cross; this, just as the deacon, who previously kissed the altar table and the celebrant priest's hands, has come down from the elevated altar area and shared the Kiss of Peace with clergy and/or representatives of the congregation who are standing in the chancel for this purpose. They, in turn, return to the nave, where they share the Kiss of Peace with the rest of the congregation. There is thus a quasi-hierarchical quality to the Kiss of Peace, which comes into question when the sanctuary curtain is closed. No uniform practice exists with regard to the sharing of the Kiss of Peace during Lenten liturgies. In most jurisdictions the Kiss of Peace is omitted entirely during Great Lent, but not by reason of any prohibition in the liturgical books. It remains, in any case, a matter of discussion among Armenian clergy and faithful⁹⁹.

How, if at all, should the celebrant give the blessing of peace? As in all eastern rites, from time to time during the Divine Liturgy the celebrant turns his back to the altar and traces the sign of the cross over the people, saying, "Peace unto all" [Խաղաղութիւն ամենեւորն]. During Lent, this gesture is occluded by the closed curtain. Recalling the stated symbolism of the closed curtain, it

⁹⁷ "When the Morning Office ends, the Liturgy should begin with the Eucharist." Ibid., p. 234. I am not aware of any prescriptions for *Goc' Patarag* in Armenian printed or manuscript liturgical books.

⁹⁸ On the kiss of peace see L. E. Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 36, Cambridge, 1996. R. F. Taft, *The Great Entrance*, p. 35-52; and more recently, M. Ph. Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*, Philadelphia, 2005.

⁹⁹ "The deacon should not give the greeting to the people. He should remain behind the veil," writes Nersoyan in his instructions. *Divine Liturgy*, p. 234.

is reasonable to ask whether the priest should offer the peace at all? In current practice, most priests do conduct the ritual as usual during Lent even if the whole affair gives the impression of being somewhat contrived¹⁰⁰.

How and from where should the deacon chant the Gospel? In current and universal usage, the deacon comes out from behind the closed curtain and, still standing on the elevated *bema*, chants the Gospel as usual. Nersoyan describes this ritual exactly, but not the *Tonac'oye'*, which stipulates none of this, only that the Gospel book should not be elevated at the conclusion of the Gospel reading and during the recitation of the Creed, which follows immediately¹⁰¹.

Further ambiguities surround the post-Communion rites. Are the thanksgiving hymns following Holy Communion called for if only the celebrant is receiving Communion? Nersoyan directs that while the celebrant and deacons conduct their parts as usual, the choir should omit all of the hymns normally sung during and after Communion¹⁰². This is not the general practice however: the above hymns are sung by the choir in uninterrupted succession. It is certainly illogical to sing "We have been filled with thy good things, O Lord, by tasting of thy Body and Blood..." [Լցաք ի բաքութեանց քոց սուր ճաշակելով զմարմին քո և զարիւն] when no one but the priest has in fact received the "Good Things."

Should the *antidoron* [*mas*] be distributed to the people at the conclusion of the *Patarag*? Nersoyan clearly states that it should¹⁰³. Yet in many places it is withheld, probably because some consider it to be among the divine benefits that are forsaken by those who, like the proto-parents, have become alienated from God.

Perhaps the most bewildering anomaly arising out of the practice of *Goc' Patarag* is the now universal and unquestioned practice of erecting a new and often ornate "Lenten altar" on the elevated *bema*, directly *in front of* the closed curtain - the curtain that is presumably intended to conceal the altar in the first place! In many churches the "Lenten altar," inevitably shrouded in black, is fully outfitted with three, four or more gradines, luxuriant linens, candles, a prominent gilded altar cross, flowers and other adornments. The *Book of Hours*

¹⁰⁰ Nersoyan makes no mention of the blessing of peace.

¹⁰¹ "At the proper time the deacon should read the Gospel and recite the Creed outside the veil. While reciting the Creed he should hold the Gospel book against his chest, instead of raising it. At the end of the Creed he should return behind the veil." Ibid., p. 234. Cf. *Tonac'oye'*, p. 37.

¹⁰² Divine Liturgy, p. 233, 96-105.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 234.

[*Žamagirk*]¹⁰⁴ is propped up in the center for easy reference by the clerics. The “Lenten altar” is also inevitably embellished with a large painted image of the crucified Christ, suspended from the curtain rod, in such a way that it simulates a reredos or retable. The “Lenten altar” is not prescribed by any liturgical source known to me. It serves no functional purpose, amounting to little more than a monumental bookstand. Furthermore, according to conventional practice¹⁰⁴, on Thursday of Holy Week, the unwieldy structure has to be dismantled for the Eucharist and Washing of the Feet (during which the curtain is open), and then reassembled for the Great Vigil, a process that wearies parish priests and deacons every year.

VI. A Vain Search for Precedent and Meaning

Goc’ Patarag also poses problems on the other side of the curtain. As much as they accept it as a traditional part of the Armenian Church’s Lenten commemoration, most Armenians and their families struggle with the concept. Notwithstanding the stated symbolism of the Fall of Adam and Eve and its attendant penitential lesson, there remains something counter-intuitive about the closed curtain, the blackened church, and the unusual liturgical modifications, not to mention the “Lenten altar.” Most parish priests, if pressed, will confess how challenging it is to convey the meaning and relevance of the closed curtain to their faithful, and, moreover, to convince them to come to church at all on Lenten Sundays, when there is no Holy Communion and the people are isolated from the vibrant rituals. Indeed, church attendance invariably declines during Great Lent in many parish churches in the West.

Neither do Armenian priests and teachers have any guidance in elucidating the theology of the closed curtain because in the vast corpus of Armenian patristic and exegetical literature there exists not a single treatise, homily or other exposition that mentions, much less interprets the Lenten closed curtain. The great Armenian homilists, hierarchs, teachers, liturgical exegetes and canonists, who can be counted on to expatiate on much less prominent or peculiar ritual niceties, are totally silent with regard to closing the curtain during Lent. It is as if the custom were unknown to them.

The earliest reference that I have found to the Lenten closed curtain is incidental and quite late: a mid-17th century polemical letter written by Simeon II of Sebastia, Catholicos of Cilicia (in office 1633-1648), to P’ilippos, Catholicos of All

¹⁰⁴ Yet again, without mention in the liturgical books.

Armenians in Etchmiadzin (in office 1632-1655). Simeon derisively admonishes the Catholicos in Etchmiadzin because the latter's unnamed emissary, on a mission to western Anatolia, "celebrated open *Patarug* when, according to the canon of the holy fathers, it should be closed"¹⁰⁵. The implication is that the Eucharist was celebrated with the curtain open during Great Lent, though I do not know what "canon of the holy fathers" Simeon could possibly be referring to since - it bears repeating yet again - I have never encountered a prior reference to the Lenten closed curtain in any Armenian canonical, liturgical or patristic writing. The divergence in practice between the two Catholicoses could be a sign of a greater diversity in practice throughout Armenia with regard to the sanctuary curtain.

Somewhat more substantive is a later reference to the closed curtain in an encyclical by Catholicos Georg IV K'eresst'ecan of Etchmiadzin (in office 1866-1882) dated 1868. The "Encyclical of the Most Noble Patriarch on the Office and Obligations of Senior Priests" [Վեհափառ հայրապետի կոնդակ ասագ քահանայից պաշտօնի և պարտոց համար] deals with a panoply of disciplinary and ritual matters. Article 9 reads as follows¹⁰⁶:

The senior priest is obliged to teach the people that in general, men and women should confess to their own father confessor at least two weeks, or at the very least eight days before [receiving] Communion; and on the day of Communion they should receive absolution from their father confessor and only then

¹⁰⁵ *Babgēn Catholicos* (Giwleserian), *Patmut'iwn Kat'olikosac' Kilikioy 1441-en minč'ew mer orerā* [History of the Catholicosate of Cilicia 1441 to Our Times], Antelias, 1939, cols. 334-335.

¹⁰⁶ Ասագ քահանայն պարտի ուսուցանել ժողովրդանս՝ զի առ հասարակ արք եւ կանայք յառաջ քան զերկուս եօթանկա կամ զէթ զուրն օր յառաջագոյն քան զհաղորդութիւնն խոստովանեցին սեպեակսն խոստովանաւոր իրեանց եւ յառիւ հաղորդութեան ընկալցին զարձակումն ի խոստովանաւորն եւ ապա հաղորդեցին սուրբ խորհրդոյն, բոլորովին հեռի կաշով յօտարամուտ սովորութենէ, որ մոռնալ է յեկեղեցի մեր ի տեղիս տեղիս (հարիւր ամաւ կամ դոյզն ինչ տեղի ժամանակաւ յարաջ) ի մի եւ նոյն ատոր խոստովանել եւ հաղորդել: Եւ ի մէջ մեծի պահոց մինչ ծածկեալ է սուրբ սեղանն պատարագի, չէ օրէն հաղորդել զժողովուրդն սուրբ խորհրդոյն, այլ զկնի չորրորդ շաբաթու աղոսիացից, եթէ պատահեցի տօն Անտման, կարելի է, նոյնպէս եւ ի տօնի մոխն ի վիրապն արդոյն Գրիգորի Լուսարոյցի, յորում լինի բաց պատարագ, հաղորդեցեն, նոյնպէս ի Շաղկազարդի եւ յաւազ Հինգշաբաթու, եւ ի Ճրագալոյցի երեկոյեան, նոյնպէս եւ Զատիկ ատորն հաղորդեցեն, իսկ մինչ ծածկեալ է սեղանն Ս. պատարագի հաղորդելն սուրբ խորհրդոյն օտարաց է ներմոռնալ յեկեղեցի մեր, եւ միայն իրանդաց եւ ընդ երկար ճանապարհ գնացողաց է ներկի: *Nersēs Ark'episkopos Melik'-T'angean*, *Հայոց եկեղեցական իրաւունքք*, Ա. Գիրք Ներածութիւն եւ սղիւրներ [Armenian Ecclesiastical Law, Book 1: Introduction and Sources], 2nd. ed., Ijmiacin, 2009, p. 522-533, here 521. I am grateful to V. Rev. Dr. Shahē Ananyan of Holy Etchmiadzin for bringing this reference to my attention.

commune of the holy Mystery; thus entirely rejecting a foreign custom that was introduced into our church in some places (one hundred years ago or more) to confess and to commune on one and the same day. And during Great Lent, when the altar of the *Patarag* is closed, it is not lawful to commune the people of the holy Mystery. However, if the Feast of the Annunciation falls after the fourth week of the Fast, it is permitted [to commune the people]. Likewise on the Feast of St. Gregory the Illuminator's Entry into the Pit, when there is open *Patarag*, they should offer Communion. Likewise they should offer Communion on Palm Sunday and on Holy Thursday, and on the evening of the Paschal Vigil [Ճրուարայն], as well as on the day of Pascha. But offering Communion of the holy Mystery when the altar of the holy *Patarag* is concealed was introduced into our church by foreigners and is only permitted for the sick and for those who are going on a long journey.

The casual remark about "Great Lent, when the altar of the *Patarag* is closed" suggests that this was for the Catholicos a routine and established custom. His larger concern is the distribution of Holy Communion during Great Lent, which he prohibits, thus providing our first, and to my knowledge *only* explicit interdiction of Holy Communion during most *Patarags* of Great Lent. The exception on the Feast of St. Gregory is, as we have seen, taken right out of the *Tonac'oyc'*. The instruction to offer Holy Communion on Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, the Paschal Vigil and on Pascha itself is remarkable because it suggests, incredibly, that some Armenian priests were withholding the Sacrament on these important feasts, including Pascha itself! The note about offering Holy Communion only if it falls after the fourth week of Lent, that is, the mid-week of Lent is new and unattested anywhere to my knowledge. What should happen if the Annunciation falls earlier than the middle of Lent is unclear. Nor does the Catholicos provide any guidance in the case of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple. Equally ambiguous is the Catholicos' indictment of unnamed "foreigners" for having introduced the practice of offering Holy Communion during Great Lent from behind the closed curtain. Whether factual or merely rhetorical, the remark is hardly newsworthy since the custom of withholding Communion during Great Lent is utterly unique to the Armenians. Yet the very fact that the Catholicos addressed the matter at all indicates that in the mid-nineteenth century, there was divergence in practice among Armenian priests regarding the Lenten *Patarag*, vis-à-vis the curtain and the distribution of Holy Communion. This disparity is also reflected in early editions of the

Tonac'oyc'. Most 18th-century editions of the *Tonac'oyc'* include the instruction to close the altar curtain on the Saturday before the Great Carnival. Yet at least one, the 1703 Hymiacin edition, has no mention of the curtain¹⁰⁷.

VII. The *Velum Quadragesimale*

Before concluding, it will be worthwhile to mention the *Velum Quadragesimale*, the Lenten veil that was hung before the altar, the sanctuary crucifix ("the great rood"), sacred paintings and statues in medieval western churches during all or part of Lent¹⁰⁸. First testified shortly before the turn of the ninth century¹⁰⁹, Lenten veils were hung either on Ash Wednesday, the First Sunday of Lent, or on Passion Sunday (the Fifth Sunday of Lent), depending upon local custom. The veils were removed either on the eve of Maundy Thursday, at the conclusion of Good Friday service, or before the Easter Vigil¹¹⁰. The eleventh-century monastic reformer William of Hirschau († 1091) wrote that during Lent none of the priests may pass the curtain stretched between the chancel and the nave, just as Aaron alone was permitted to enter the room of the Holy of Holies¹¹¹. Book One of William Durandus' († 1296) *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* devotes a chapter to the use and symbolism of various draperies, including an

¹⁰⁷ Soluwnjg (Hichmiadzin, 1703), p. 40.

¹⁰⁸ For a good survey of the Lenten Veil in medieval England, including an inventory of veils recorded in historical documents, see H. J. Feasey, p. 13-31. See also C. E. Pocknee, "Christian Altar," p. 62-63. F. Bond, p. 102-105.

¹⁰⁹ Article 40.2 of the Code of Ecclesiastical Laws of Alfred the Great levies a fine on anyone who would tear down the Lenten veil: "Si quis in Quadragesima sanctum velum in populo sine recto deponat, emendet C. viginti sol." Besides bespeaking the people's antipathy toward this custom, the law also suggests that it was an innovation. Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen, ed. F. Liebermann, 3 vols., Halle, 1903, I, S. 75. Pocknee writes, "The custom of veiling crucifixes, statues and pictures during the whole of Lent, that is during the forty days, can probably be traced back to the tenth century. At that time Christ was depicted on the Cross as alive and triumphant rather than in the anguish of death, while statues of the Saints were intended to reflect their heavenly glory. To veil these things during the penitential season of Lent seemed fitting and appropriate. The custom of veiling the crucifix only from the fifth Sunday in Lent, commonly called Passion Sunday, appears to have developed in the seventeenth century." Idem, "The Christian Altar," p. 62-63.

¹¹⁰ Concomitant with developing penitential practice in this period, as well as the increasing emphasis on visualizing the Eucharistic gifts, the medieval Lenten veils eventually became reduced to small relics of their original form. The Lenten veil was briefly suppressed in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, only to be rehabilitated as an option in the 1975 edition of the Sacramentary. The Sacramentary of the Roman Missal, Collegeville, MN, 1985, p. 185.

¹¹¹ William of Hirschau, Constitutiones Hirsaugiensis seu Gengenbacenses, PL 150:1092, cited in B. Baert, A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image, tr. Lee Preedy, Brill, 2004, p. 120.

extensive section on the Lenten veil. Durandus writes that “in some places” two curtains are hung: one “around the choir,” and the other, “hung between the altar and the choir: lest those things which are in the Holy of Holies be seen”¹¹². For several pages in the English edition, Durandus gives a variety of typologies for the curtain between the altar and the choir - the one that would be analogous to the Armenian sanctuary curtain. Invariably in these expositions, Durandus returns to the curtain of the Temple, which was “torn asunder in the Passion of the Lord”¹¹³. Durandus is preoccupied to use the veil to explain the Lord’s Passion, when¹¹⁴ - the Divinity was hidden or veiled in Christ; for He handed Himself over to be seized and flogged as man, as if He no longer had the power of Divinity in Himself, and so in the Gospel of this day it says, ‘Jesus therefore hid Himself and went out of the Temple’ [Jn 8:59].

Surprisingly, only once - and that tentatively and strictly in the context of the Passion - does Durandus carry the typology back to Adam and Eve. The veil, he writes, signifies¹¹⁵ - that weapon placed before the door of Paradise, and since the carnal observance of this sort and the obscure law and the and the sword have been mitigated by the Passion of Christ, therefore the curtains and veils of this sort are removed on Good Friday.

Needless to say, this thematic orientation contrasts with the general thrust of the one and only Armenian interpretation of the closed curtain as found in the *Tonac’oyc’*, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

VIII. Conclusion

As we have shown, the custom of closing the curtain for the duration of Great Lent is plagued by a series of enigmas:

1. The rubric in the *Tonac’oyc’* to close the curtain at the beginning of Great Lent is contradictory, and has led to divergence in monastic and parish use today.
2. The closing of the curtain during Lent and its stated symbolism - the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise - patently contradict the liturgical context of the closing of the curtain on Lazarus Saturday evening. Moreover, in

¹¹² *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* I, 3:34. English translation from *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durandus of Mende: A New Translation of the Prologue and Book One*, tr. Timothy M. Thibodeau, New York, 2007, p. 42.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the Armenian Church the Fall of the Protoplasts is the theme not of Carnival Sunday, but of the following Sunday.

3. Neither is the ritual of reopening the curtain compatible with its liturgical context on Lazarus Saturday.

4. The terse instruction to reopen the curtain only for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Commemoration of the Imprisonment of St. Gregory the Illuminator on the Saturday preceding the sixth Sunday of Great Lent is inexplicable given the absence of any similar provision for the other saints' commemorations and dominical feasts that fall during Great Lent, on which the Eucharist is to be celebrated.

5. The brief rubric in the *Tōnac'oyc'* overlooks many necessary details concerning how to conduct the Divine Liturgy with the curtain closed throughout.

6. The gross lack of uniformity in the order of *Goc' Patarag* as it is conducted from place to place today suggests that the Divine Liturgy is not easily or intuitively adapted for celebration with the curtain closed throughout.

7. The universal, though undocumented, practice of erecting a "Lenten altar" in front of the closed curtain controverts the purpose of the latter as conveyed by its stated symbolism.

8. There is no evidence of the custom in Armenian literature until the mid-seventeenth century, and no theological or exegetical treatment of it apart from the *Tōnac'oyc'* rubric.

All of these factors leave the unmistakable impression of an ill-conceived innovation; a ritual that has been unsatisfactorily imposed upon the tradition, without as yet having become adequately rooted in it. Did the Armenians' adoption of a custom of closing their sanctuary curtain during Lent develop under the influence of the western *Velum Quadragesimale*? Or is the Lenten closed curtain somehow associated with the aberrant, but well documented medieval Armenian monastic custom of closing the main doors of the church sanctuary and prohibiting anyone but the presiding priest from entering? To these questions we shall have to return.

