

## THE ARMENIAN CHURCH LITURGY AND A PROPOSED PEW BOOK

Dear Fr. Daniel:

Thank you for your memo of last October. After we came back from New Zealand, there was hardly any time for the proper arrangements for a trip to New York. This means that the cost of my presence at the Pew Book project meeting (requiring two nights at the hotel) will be prohibitive — over a thousand dollars. I am sure any contribution I might make to the deliberations will not be worth that amount, in view particularly of the fact that the members of the committee are much better qualified for the task at hand. I decided therefore not to come to this meeting. I do nevertheless have certain comments:

1. The proposed English text is not exactly a translation. It is an adaptation of some sort, although just what it is that our krapar text is being adapted to, is not clear to me. The idea seems to be to make the Badarak “user friendly,” which is OK, but such endeavors have limits. It is thus a mistake to think that the English of the translation of the Badarak must, or even can, be *ordinary* English, the English that people speak in the street or around a dinner table, and that therefore polysyllabic words must be avoided. According to this mistaken view, even if a given Armenian word means transgression, for example, we must translate it as “sin,” because “sin” is a familiar word while “transgression” is not. A corollary of this misconception is that we must reduce the language of the Badarak to the linguistic competence of ordinary folk, say, high school graduates, rather than get the people to understand the more or less unordinary language of the Badarak.

Now it may be that in the initial stages of the Eucharist everyday language was used. But the terms of that once ordinary language have, in the course of time, acquired meanings (or nuances of meanings) that cannot be disregarded just for the sake of simplicity. We now therefore stand under the necessity of using a somewhat more elaborate, more precise, less ordinary terminology. And the fact is that in an increasingly science-driven world *all* religious language is headed toward unfamiliarity. When was the last time you heard the word “sin” in the course of an ordinary conversation?

It is at any rate a mistake to believe that simplicity of language is the same as simplicity of meaning, and that familiarity with a word implies the understanding of that word. Thus everyone is familiar with the word “sin,” but what percentage of the population knows precisely what “sin” truly means? Nor is language enough by itself to make the Eucharist more “attractive.” Education is always necessary, as indicated by the “glossary” that you have appended to the material you sent. If some of the words the church has to work with are foreign, unfamiliar or polysyllabic, the job is to see to it that people come to understand them.

The “translation” in question, based on the false premises mentioned above, has innumerable imperfections, including some serious departures from the meaning of the krapar text. A very simple example is the translation of *khaghaghouthyouan amenetsoun* as “peace be with you.” The difference in meaning between the two phrases is important, and there are serious reasons why the Greek we follow should not be replaced by the Latin way of thinking. This is not

the place to go into these reasons. The bare fact is that had the early celebrants of the Badarak *meant* "peace be with you" they would have *said* "peace be with you." There must be a reason why they said "peace unto all," and our responsibility is not to change the text, but to find and teach that reason. Besides, "peace unto all" is no more difficult, no more complex than "peace be with you." There is even here the moral obligation not to deceive. If the text is presented as a translation, any one congregant has the right to hear in English what the priest or deacon or the congregation is saying in Armenian.

Another simple example of falsification is the translation of *i dzadzoug*, which evidently does not mean "inaudibly." It means what it means, namely "in secret," or perhaps "privately." I suspect the translation of "*i dzadzoug*" as "inaudibly" hides a certain uneasiness or reservation about the celebrant priest praying in secret. But if that is the case, it is up to the College of Bishops to get together and do something about it. The translation of the Badarak is not and should not be an occasion of structural reform or textual modification. [Speaking of textual modification, I inwardly chuckle whenever I see and hear the celebrant priest turn to a congregation composed 51% of women, and say, "... *yev arachi tzer hark yev yeghparrk* ... ,," when a correction of sorts would simply be to cut out the words *hark yev yeghparrk*.]

The point is that the submitted draft of the translation does not quite respect the sacredness of the krapar text and takes unwarranted liberties. This is why I applaud the Primate's decision to use the Abp. Nersoyan translation, with only stylistic modifications. Nearly all that need be done, as said before, is change the thees and the thous, the hasts and the wass. Once in a while more substantial changes may be advisable, as when Abp Tiran translates the *hanabazori* of the Lord's Prayer as "perpetual." This is no doubt accurate, but is jarring enough to have to give way to the generally accepted "daily."

The translation of the Badarak is not a matter of mere scholarly competence. It is also a thing of episcopal authority and authorization. Abp. Tiran's translation of it in his capacity both as a scholar and as a bishop is an additional reason, I should think, why it should serve as a standard, and I am glad Abp. Khajag is likewise determined to keep close to our text and thus prevent any tempering with its theological undertones.

2. I am personally of the opinion that explanatory notes should not appear alongside the text of the Badarak. My reason for thinking this is as follows:

There is a difference between participating in the Divine Liturgy, and being informed about it. As a participant, a congregant is "in" the Liturgy; as one who is being informed about it, he or she is "outside," observing it. These two states of mind may clash. Information about the liturgy may or may not reinforce the congregant's religious commitment. It is at any rate distracting. A piece of information to the effect, for example, that a certain vestment is borrowed from, or is at any rate traceable to, ancient Jewish ceremonial attire may distract from its inherent symbolic significance. An information to the effect that a certain segment of the Liturgy is a later addition may throw doubt on its "authenticity." And so on. It is therefore advisable that all information about the Liturgy be given in a longer introduction, or even in a separate pamphlet to be made largely and freely available.

3. Your Introduction is of course a fine essay. It may need a little editing as all writing does. I do have some suggestions, but they are not indispensable, and I will be glad to present them to you if you wish. There is for example the use of the adverb "somehow" in the 'explanation' of how it is that the bread and wine of the Eucharist turn into the Body and Blood of Christ. This seems

unadvisable, inasmuch as 'somehow' has a pejorative connotation in some contexts, as in "he somehow got through." It is probably better to state clearly and boldly the belief of the church without (hurried) attempts at explanations that are not real explanations. The answer to the question, But how is that possible? requires complex metaphysical premises, while remarks like "it is a mystery," or "it is beyond our comprehension" have the effect in our times of "shut up and believe!" which is counterproductive. [Incidentally, if you or Professor Terian know of any scholarly, reasoned essay on the Armenian (monophysite) position on transubstantiation or real presence, please let me know.]

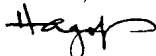
4. The word "please" in the instructions on posture (sit, stand, kneel) is probably out of place. I am also under the impression that being seated during any one segment of the Liturgy is never quite as imperative as standing up during other segments. One may, in other words, choose to stand up during the entire Liturgy, and kneel on occasion. Many people do this in churches where there are no pews (which are a Western, modern, in some ways unwelcome innovation.) One way of avoiding regimentation in the matter of sitting down or standing up would be to explain in the Introduction the reasons why we are supposed to sit down when we sit down, to stand up when we stand up, and kneel down when we do; specify the situations when one or the other of these postures is obligatory (except when one is physically incapacitated;) assign a small symbol to each position; and show those symbols in the margins of the pew book. [As I speak of regimentation I remember the old Armenian church of Worcester. I used to go there every Sunday from New Haven in order to preach the sermon in English. There were two switches on the altar, by the chalice. When the celebrant priest switched on the red light (clearly visible on the front wall to the right of the arch,) everyone stood up; he switched on the green light, everyone sat down. Once I jokingly suggested an amber light for standing up and a red light for kneeling, and to my horror some members of the parish council thought it was a good idea!]

5. I hope the illustrations, as shown, are very, very preliminary drafts. In their finished form the illustrations could be simple line drawings, enabling the congregant to make connections between the picture and what is going on around him or her. These drawings should exhibit seriousness and reverence. The drafts of the pictures as they now stand, seem, to me, to have been made for some sort of a comic book.

6. A final question that occurs to me now is this: Will the projected book, as we now have it, serve the purpose we have in mind? May it be too elaborate? What will the congregant be doing at any one time? Read the transliteration? The translation? The private prayers of the celebrant? The instructions of the deacon? What the choir is singing? How easily will a typical, unsophisticated congregant be able to follow what is being said and done, even if an indicator on the wall tells him what page the congregation is at? Is the projected book too loaded for the average American Armenian to be of practical use, to be a "pew book?"

Having read the above, maybe you are glad I am not coming to the meeting, after all!

Peace,



Hagop

CC: H.E. Archbishop Khajag  
Fr Krikor Maksoudian  
Fr Vahan Hovhannessian  
Ms Elise Antreassian-Bayizian  
(I do not have G Kassiss' address.  
You may want to send him a copy.)

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March 6, 1999

Dear Father Daniel,

This letter has to do with the pew book, but because it is rather theoretical in nature, I will address it to you personally rather than to the committee, with copies only to Archbishop Khajag (I assume the book will be published by his order,) and to Fr. Krikor. My problem (if that's what it is) is with the publication in the pew book of the portions of the Divine Liturgy that are said or done "in secret." You translate *i dzadzoug* as "inaudibly." It seems to me that that is an interpretation, rather than a translation.

In my view the interpretation of *i dzadzoug* as "inaudibly" indicates a significant deviation from the canon (*orenk*) of the ministration of the church. I am myself not entirely certain that I am unhappy with that deviation, but there it is. It seems to me that the unmistakable implication of some prayers having to be said *i dzadzoug* is this: The framers of the Divine Liturgy of the Church of Armenia do not intend that the congregation pray with the celebrant priest, during the celebration, the prayers that he says "in secret." The inclusion of these prayers in the pew book fails to abide by that stipulation. This is the theoretical side of the problem, which also has a practical side: What is the worshiper to do with such prayers while participating in the Liturgy? Is he (or she) to pray *them* and ignore the choir? Does he, for example, sing the Our Father—or does he turn his attention to the *celebrant's* (concurrent) prayer? And what about the obligation of being attentive to the deacon's biddings? As I had mentioned in my previous letter, it looks like the pew book is creating for the worshiper a two-ring mental circus, and the distraction is surely not less severe when we paint one ring blue, the other black. Is it advisable to turn a pew book into a *textbook* on the Divine Liturgy?

Let me repeat before I go on, that the deviation I mention above may not necessarily be in the wrong direction. But it is good to be fully aware of what it is that we are doing. More often than not, as in this case, tradition is changed unwittingly and it changes in invisibly small increments. This is an obscure thing to say and it needs fleshing out, but let me first make two important remarks:

1. Abp Tiran's book is not a pew book. I do not know whether he would authorize its use as such. It is a visually helpful book for the study of the Divine Liturgy. Let me add that Tiran Srpazan was fully aware, as anyone who knew him might expect, that *i dzadzoug* can sometimes be rendered as "inaudibly." He so translates it when the occasion demands—which means that when he translated it as "in secret" in the case of the prayers in question, he considered "inaudibly" and deliberately rejected it.

2. The classic Armenian "pew book" may be said to be the *Khorhourt Sourp Badaraki* printed in our *Zhamagirk* as its last item. Perhaps it is not altogether an accident that there is no reference there to anything said or done "in secret."

Back to the problem of "inaudibly," and to some of its deeper implications. Needless to say, "in secret" and "inaudibly" cannot be used interchangeably. Of the two, "in secret" is the more comprehensive concept. Thus it makes sense to say, "she is saying it in secret, which is why she is saying it inaudibly," but it makes no sense to say, "she is saying it inaudibly, which is why she is saying it in secret." "In secret" includes "inaudibly," but not vice versa. So why do we incline nevertheless to translate *i dzadzoug* as "inaudibly" when it means "in secret?" Because, I think, we tend to assume that a thing *done* in secret is *itself* necessarily a secret. The thinking then is this: There is nothing really secret about the portions of the Liturgy that the celebrant is instructed to say or do in secret. So why not print and describe them in a pew book for the information and edification of the congregant? But it is a mistake to think that all things done in secret are themselves secrets. Since I want to make this letter as

brief as possible, let me, rather than engage in theoretical elaborations, give a simple example. Consider a married couple. There is nothing secret about what they do in the privacy of their bedroom, but they are required to do it in secret all the same, and there are good reasons to support that requirement. Now this may not be a suitable example under the circumstances, but it forcefully serves our purpose. The point is that, by parity of logic, although there is nothing secret about the prayers of the celebrant, they must be said in secret nevertheless. It follows that a pew book must not advertise them to the congregation *during* the service. They are prayed not just inaudibly, but in secret, which is required I think by the logic of the rite.

That is what the informed, saintly framers of our Divine Liturgy are telling us to do. Not to do as they say may well be described as an act of disobedience. Maybe the best that could legitimately be done is print, in blue, a brief (a sentence or two) paraphrase or description of each in-secret portion, at the place of the Divine Liturgy where it occurs.

The question that must now be answered is this: Why are these prayers said in secret? Without an answer to *this* question, the comments made earlier remain hanging in midair.

There are no doubt historical circumstances that "explain" the phenomenon of prayers in secret. When did they begin? Were they said overtly in apostolic times, and *then* in secret? Are there extra religious influences at work here? Does the practice have anything to do, albeit remotely, with the Hebrew Holy of Holies or the Greek iconostasis? I personally do not know the answers to these questions, and have no way of finding out. But at least two comments can safely I think be made, whatever the historical circumstances.

1. We do not have to know the reasons why some instructions are issued by the church in order to be under obligation to follow them, although informed awareness is helpful and good. It also allows healthy criticism and progress.

2. The Armenian (like the Greek or Roman) celebrant priest is obviously not just another participant in the Banquet that is the Eucharist, which is why he is not there in his street clothes or academic gown. He represents Jesus the Christ in a very special way. Some of the confidences the celebrant priest does or ought to share, as it were, with God, cannot even be spoken by an ordinary congregant (e.g. "...enable me, who have been endowed with the grace of this priesthood.") Perhaps a more felicitous translation of *dzadzoug* is "mystically," which would, if I am not mistaken, be a reversion back to the original source of the phrase, leading to the conclusion that in his "mystical" prayers the celebrant priest is continuously seeking to bring himself ever closer to the very heart of his holy vocation.

Perhaps secrecy, meaning "in-secretness," *is* of the essence of prayer. Consider Gethsemane. "And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me. And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed."

Jesus' going forward a little is a telling detail. I am under the impression that the celebrant priest's saying his prayers in secret is the equivalent of those one or two steps that our Lord took before he began to pray. He took those steps by way of being away even from Peter and the sons of Zebedee. He prayed in secret. It is interesting to note from our perspective that although *he* prayed *in secret*, we *know* what he prayed.

A general conclusion suggests itself. If we print in the pew book the "in secret" portions of the Badarak in toto, we may be disregarding a theologico/liturgical requirement. Such a disregard could arguably be described as the unintended beginning of a new trend. It could be signaling an unexpressed desire, the desire to open the Badarak up to the worshiping congregation, and make of it a "Supper," true to the Original, *around*, not *behind* "the Table." It is as if we were beginning to require the celebrant priest that he tell and show the congregation what he is doing and saying, turning to the congregation not his back, but his face. We seem to wish that he be not the star performer in a spectacle, but the presiding

co-participant at a love feast. And what is wrong with that? Perhaps nothing. This trend may even be positively good. Yet I must point out one more thing, namely the sheer dramatic effect of some of the segments of the Badarak as we have it. For example, the celebrant's reading (remembering) *on his own* the story of the Last Supper, and only *then* inviting the faithful, in a loud voice, to "Take, eat ...." What is happening here? What is happening is that the congregant is not hearing the saving invitation *as part of a story*, as in a Western Mass. Taken out of its "story" context, the "Take, eat....," intoned all by itself, is heard as if being said by Jesus himself, coming out of the silent depths of reality, personally present, extending to the world the Invitation that will save it.

I have probably said more than enough about this matter.

The illustration of the cover of the book could be something more imaginative than just a cross—maybe a cross enwrapped in husks of wheat, i e bread (sustenance in the dimension of time) and bunches of grapes, i e wine (joy in the dimension of eternity.) An innovative cover illustration should suggest that the Cross is the means to the end of the Resurrection.

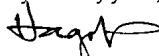
I hope the instructions to stand and/or sit will be given through symbols in the margins. Maybe kneeling during the Prayer of Inclination should be emphasized, inasmuch as the priest in his prayer actually refers to the "body language" of the people: "the form signified by their bodily posture..."

As to the more or less jingoistic custom of standing up during the diptychs when the celebrant priest mentions the name of the reigning catholicos, it began I think no earlier than Vazken I. He used to stand up when his own name was about to be mentioned, and sit down immediately thereafter. Innocent (sheepish?) congregations eventually followed the leader. In the diaspora the procedure came to be used to show fervent allegiance to Etchmiadzin against Antelias, and vice versa. I hope the new pew book will not make a point of inviting the congregation to stand at that juncture.

Finally, I hope something is done to put an end to the subhumanization of the women in the congregation when the priest turns to it and confesses the sins he has committed before only his "fathers and brethren."

Dear Father Daniel, I am sending this letter on to you after our telephone conversation, only as a continuation of our exchange of ideas. If the pew book is published with the in-secret and inaudible prayers in it, the earth will not crack open, nobody will be aware of the doctrinal underpinnings, and I myself will not lose my sleep. Regular churchgoers may be baffled by the complexity of the book the first few times, but they will eventually realize what's what and learn to use it without confusion. But the question persists: What about the good Fathers of our glorious Church? Would they be happy? I wish there were foolproof ways of knowing.

Very cordially yours,



Hagop Nersoyan

cc (for information):  
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Fr Krikor Maksoudian

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April 28, 1999

Dear Fr Daniel,

Thank you for the last draft that you were kind enough to send to me for my information. I had written to you in my last letter about certain problems connected with the inclusion in the pew book of the in-secret (but not secret) prayers of the celebrant. Your disregard of that letter does not indicate, I hope, that my remarks were below the level of your more urgent or more serious concerns.

Be that as it may, the problem remains: your (or the committee's) inclusion in the pew book of the in-secret prayers of the celebrant seems to me to run counter to the traditional requirement that they be said in secret. This invites the question, What else should the framers of our *badarak* do to get through the thickness of our skulls, to get us to get the point that they do not intend that the congregation pray with the celebrant in certain instances? We, the spiritual dwarfs of this generation, must make an effort to understand their reasons for instructing us as they do, before "correcting" them by way of edifying our congregations as we see fit.

The committee's reasoning seems to be that there is nothing secret about any of the celebrant's prayers, so why not open them to the congregation, during the *badarak*, for the congregation's enlightenment? But as I said in my last letter, a prayer does not have to be a secret, in order to be said in secret. I do not have to tell you that there are serious reasons for the "in-secretness," as distinct from the secrecy, of a prayer. Hence the formal placement by an Armenian church on its church pews of a pew book, with the in-secret prayers printed in it in extenso, is anticanonical.

The issue is not one of scholarship. It is a matter of mental muddle: You cannot hand Armenouhi a text, ask her to read it now, and tell her simultaneously that Armen is also reading the same text now—in secret! If Armenouhi is reading the text "with" Armen, and they both know that they are reading it at the same time, then obviously Armen is not reading it in secret. That is why the publication in a *pew book* of the in-secret prayers of the celebrant amounts to a disregard of the intent of the framers of our *badarak*. It is a wilful disobedience and an infraction of the law. The fact that no one, or nearly no one of the people who attend the *badarak* will be aware of what is happening is no reason to hoodwink them into paths that our Forefathers did not want to tread. There surely are important reasons, as I say, why our Fathers instruct us as they do.

The translation of *i dzadzoug* as "inaudibly" (or as "mystically" but without obeying the instruction that the prayers in question be *said* mystically!) is not a matter of language. It is a matter of theology, including the theory of priesthood. I pointed out enough reasons in my last letter why we should be cautious about the inclusion of the in-secret prayers in the pew book. There is also the *aesthetics* of the co-occurrence in our *badarak* of the in-secret prayers of the celebrant and the loud proclamations and songs of the congregation. The covert and overt parts of our Liturgy are indeed beautifully wedded, and anything that threatens to interfere with that exquisite correlation is equivalent to letting a bull gallivant in a china shop. More importantly perhaps, the publication of the in-secret prayers in the pew book *yanks*, or *threatens to yank*, our *badarak* off its neoplatonistic moorings and places it on an Aristotelian track, which is a pity. Those of us who know what I am talking about should realize that such a move is a major turn away from the spirit that defines the Oriental churches, including our own. Even the physical shape of our *badarak* within a properly designed Armenian church building shows our ancient metaphysical preferences. This point may need elaboration, but I will not turn this letter into an essay. We know what happens to letters when they are too long.

A pew book is not an *instruction* book. It is, or must be, designed to help the congregant *worship*, with body, mind and soul, in the course of the Divine Liturgy. Instruction *prepares for* worship. It is not worship. There is a time for instruction and a time for worship. If done simultaneously, these activities will interfere with each other to the detriment of both. We may, for example, ask ourselves, Just what is the usefulness of telling a worshipping man or woman, *during the worship*, just before the Creed, that "this confession of faith was agreed upon by all the churches at the first ecumenical council..." a piece of information which is, incidentally, slightly misleading and not altogether accurate. Come to think of it, I am not aware of any committee asking itself and answering the questions, Do we have a precise profile of the person the pew book is for? Just what is a pew book supposed to achieve? What is the best way of achieving it? Has anyone bothered to ask the people who *use* pew books whether they are satisfied with what they use, and why? This is the age of electronics. Why not use earphones and simultaneous translations, for example? Is *this* a crazy notion? Why?

I am under the impression that the pew book you have been working on has now taken on a life of its own. We are producing it because we have the scholars that can produce it. We are determined to make it the pew book to end all pew books, and we are producing in the process something that is cumbersome, confusing to the typical worshiper, and hence counterproductive. The Canadian diocese recently put out a pew book which, with a few modest adjustments would serve just fine.

There are a number of errors in the text you sent me, most, though perhaps not all, of which are easily detectable by a good proofreader (E.g. *Hayr* spelled with a *hee*, instead of a *ho*; 'was' instead of 'were' in the trisagion.) One error is rather sad: the compromise (if that is what it is) of placing in parentheses the words "fathers and brothers" in the celebrant's confession. What the parentheses are supposed to suggest is perhaps that the phrase "fathers and brothers" is in the original text, but let's not get hung up on it. But parentheses are usually for elucidation. When you say "you," then place "fathers and brothers" in parentheses immediately after it ["and before you (fathers and brothers)..."] you are adding insult to injury by seeming to insist that when the celebrant says "you" he means fathers and brothers and *not* mothers and sisters.

One may, I suppose, conjecture that "*hark yev yeghpar*" comes from times and places where the celebrant addressed among the congregation bishops or abbots, or priests or monks, and had *them* in mind as he was confessing. But that of course is no longer the case, if it ever was, and a proper adjustment is necessary. [We are all creatures of habit. I myself did not wake up to this problem of "fathers and brothers" until a year or two ago, and then I was saddened that no one, no man and no woman, had been bothered by it before.] Whatever its history, the practice strikes one as sexist and it should not be tolerated at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must either simply delete "*hark yev yeghpar*," or expand it to "*hark yev mark, yeghpar yev kork*," which would be the nicer alternative. I don't have to tell you in this connection that for many parish priests the problem does not even arise. They often dispense with the confession altogether, as if that were something peripheral to the rite, a liturgical relic of no present-day value.

Let me repeat, if I may, what I said last time. Not all legal violation is bad. There would be no cultural and moral progress without the breach from time to time of well-established laws, or departure from tradition. The publication of the in-secret portions of the *badarak* in the pew book will not strike many people as a thing of revolutionary dimensions. In fact, it will hardly be noticed, if at all (which is why it may look like I am myself making a mountain out of a molehill.) But if we are proposing to violate a clearly imparted instruction of the framers of our *badarak*, if we are taking a tentative first step toward the westernization of our Divine Liturgy for a westernized Armenian-American community, then we must do it boldly, as the result of mature deliberation. Assuming Archbishop Khajag, in his capacity as the Bishop of the Diocese, has the right to order such a deviation from the norm, and is prepared to exercise that right, he must have pondered the issue, must have been properly advised and ready to face all possible objections. I assume you are an advisor to His Eminence, which is one reason why I am



writing to you.

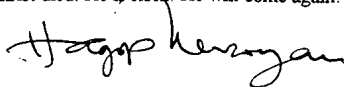
Nor does any of the above mean that our Liturgy, as now celebrated (even in Armenia,) needs no improvement. There is no doubt that it has got away from the people, and the need to have the congregants involved is urgent. But a complex pew book is probably not a good starting point. We should see to it at any rate that any measures taken do no damage to the specific character and authenticity of our Divine Liturgy.

Withal, the pew book as now almost completed (as I assume it is) is far from useless. We do need a book that updates Tiran Srpazan's translation, explanations and commentaries. But such a book would be for purposes of study, not worship. Khajag Srpazan may want to make it mandatory that all parishes organize groups for the in-depth study of the Badarak, and use for that purpose the book the committee has prepared. As mere pew books, we may have abridged editions, i.e. two separate volumes, one in spoken Armenian, the other in English with transliteration. The worshiper in church will use the one he or she is more comfortable with. The pew book may refer to the in-secret portions of the Badarak, without complete reproduction.

Finally, an answer to this letter need not be the most important item on your agenda. I suppose the committee has completed its work, and as a former member thereof I have nothing more to say or do about this matter. I may even have talked too much and out of turn, but I am under the (possibly naive or uninformed) impression that the things I have said are relevant. Deliberate disobedience to our Fathers, or departure from tradition is sometimes good, but to those who have the required awareness it is always a serious matter.

Be of good cheer.

Christ died. He is ~~risen~~ risen. He will come again!



Cc: Archbishop Khajag  
Rev Dr K. Maksoudian



## ST. NERSESS ARMENIAN SEMINARY

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May 7, 1999

Dr. Hagop Nersoyan  
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Kettering, OH 45429

Dear Dr. Nersoyan,

Just a moment ago I received your letter dated April 28, 1999. Only yesterday I finally got around to responding to your earlier letter of March 6, 1999. Most of what follows answers that earlier letter. Of course, now I am obliged (and delighted) to respond to the additional concerns you raise in the April letter.

But first and foremost I must apologize most sincerely for the delay in responding to the original letter. My dreadful delay in responding is no reflection on the importance of your letter. I am simply overburdened with responsibilities. Personal correspondence, tragically, tends to fall to the wayside. The fault is my own. As a new priest with brand new responsibilities, I have not yet learned how to pace myself. But that is not your problem. I only hope you will not be offended by my transgression, or worse, assume that I am disregarding or ignoring you. On the contrary, I sincerely relish our every meeting and exchange. Do forgive me for my negligence.

Before I present the reasons for my conviction that the new pew book include the "secret" prayers offered by the priest, let me tackle some of the issues you raise in your letter of April 28.

It may be helpful, first of all, to share with you briefly the circumstances surrounding my involvement in this project. I heard, about four years ago while studying in Rome, that the DRE had found a benefactor to produce a new pew book. I wrote a letter to Elise Antreassian literally begging her to let me get involved. As a result of my liturgical studies, I had a number of concrete suggestions to make regarding a new pew book. For various reasons, some of them frankly appalling, the project passed from department to department within the Diocese, and from editorial committee to editorial committee. When I returned to New York in 1997, having spent dozens of hours preparing an introduction, explanatory notes, a glossary of terms, and a new translation of the Eucharistic Prayer, I resigned myself to the fact that this project had crashed and burned.

In November, 1998, during a meeting with the Primate on an entirely different matter, I asked him, quite in passing, if there were any hope for the pew book. He informed me that for now Tiran Spazan's book simply was going to be republished with a slightly retouched English translation, until such time that a more thorough revision could be produced, in line with the benefactor's wishes, and the needs of our faithful as gauged by the DRE (which no longer had any role in the project). I strenuously objected that to republish Tiran Spazan's book now, and then, say, five years later to issue an entirely new book, was imprudent financially and pedagogically. Following a passionate discussion with the Primate and Diocesan administrators, I was essentially dared to assemble a competent committee to produce a more satisfactory book by March 1, 1999.

Because I feel so strongly that the pew books presently in use are totally unsatisfactory, I took up the challenge. The Primate instructed the committee not to engage in any kind of liturgical "reform," necessary as this may be. This explains why we have not changed the petitions for "pious Christian kings," or any number of other aspects of the Badarak which could/should be reconsidered. This is also why we did not take up the issue of the "fathers and brothers" in the priest's confession, except to add parentheses around the phrase (I believe the Primate established

The 17th Centenary of the Christianization of Armenia by St. Gregory the Illuminator

«Զորդաւատ բանիւ հոգեւոր ծննդեամբ լուսաւորեցեր զՀայաստան աշխարհս»  
"With overflowing words and spiritual birth you enlightened the land of Armenia"

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such a principle in order not to open a Pandora's box of liturgical demons in need of examination and possibly reform).

I see your point that the parentheses around "fathers and brothers" could conceivably give the impression that this phrase elucidates the antecedent "you." Personally, I agree fully that the phrase can safely be dropped or amended to "fathers and brothers, mothers and sisters," though I think the former solution is a bit lighter on the tongue. This entire section of the *Badarak* was taken over by the Armenians *tout d'un coup* from the French Dominican Missal, without amending its manifestly monastic orientation. Nevertheless, in keeping with the Primate's instruction, I proposed the parentheses. I am by no means willing to fight for this attempt at a compromise solution. When the proofs come back from the graphic artist, the Primate will make a final decision on how to handle this. Rest assured that your suggestions will be taken into full consideration. You have some pull with me and others!

You also insist that a *pew book* must not be confused with an *instruction book*. Frankly, both one and the other (if indeed they are distinct entities) are novelties in the Armenian Church. Until modern times (and we may argue whether or not the Armenian Church as a whole has arrived in "modern times") no one except a cleric would have dreamed of following the written text of the *Badarak* during worship or outside of worship. Most others couldn't read anyway. So I am not certain that it is necessarily helpful to insist on a clear distinction between praying and reading, or praying and learning. Whether we like it or not (and personally I rather like it), in our literate society, if you place a text in front of the people in church they are going to read it, and they are going to think about it, and they are going to learn something. There are limits of course. I would not be happy if one of my parishioners were busy reading Thomas Aquinas, or even the Bible during the celebration of the *Badarak*.

We must also be realistic about our effectiveness today in this Diocese in educating our adults in the faith. Since my priestly ordination 21 months ago, I have been invited to address dozens of parish groups on the Divine Liturgy. I have a standard all-day workshop where I try to help our people better to understand the Divine Liturgy, its Biblical foundation, structure, history, and relevance in our lives. The workshop has been very well received, and I will continue to do whatever I can to help our sheep meet their Shepherd in the Eucharist. The reality is that under the best circumstances, I reach only the tiniest fraction of only the most devoted members of a given community when I lecture. God willing, our educational programs will blossom in time and reach ever more faithful. For now, however, I am convinced that one of the most effective ways to bring our people to a fuller appreciation of the Great Mystery is to put the full text at their disposal, along with an introduction and a few explanatory notes to serve as guideposts to the experience. Yes, someone out there may become lost cogitating over the note about the date of the Council of Nicea and the Armenian Church's participation in it, thus missing the essence of the worship experience. But I personally, inasmuch as I have been asked to contribute to this project, am willing to take that risk because I am sure that some other soul will suddenly realize, as she never has before, that when the deacon has finished reading the holy Gospel, he elevates it over his head, turns to God and confesses the basics of our faith. You know better than I do that our sheep <sup>are</sup> not only lost, they are bleeding. I hope that many people will purchase a copy of this book for themselves, and read the texts (and yes, the priest's prayers!) at home, and then on Sunday morning bring it to Church. I am a pragmatist. The only religious book many, many of our people will ever open — ցաւօք տրտի! — will be our pew book. We have an obligation to use this tool to its fullest potential to reach our people.

We may bicker over how much information should be included in these explanatory notes, or "annotations," as I call them. They have already been substantially reduced from what I had prepared long ago. Once again, I will not lose sleep if they are further reduced, or if some are eliminated altogether. But I believe the principle of including them is sound.

Now, then, let me move on to the issue of the "secret" prayers. The decision to include the celebrant's "secret" prayers was the Primate's with my enthusiastic endorsement. I read with the greatest care all of your thoughts about this. I do believe that much of what you write is belied by

fairly recent historical studies of the early liturgy. We know, for example, that the "framers" of the Divine Liturgy intended the Eucharistic Prayer to be recited (or chanted) aloud, in the plain hearing of the assembly. There can be no doubt that the Eucharist/Prayer was considered, from the very beginning, the prayer of the Church, i.e., the prayer of the assembled faithful, offered by the bishop (and later the presbyter) according to his proper ministry. If the celebrant offered the prayer aloud, the people obviously knew it. The reduction of the Eucharistic Prayer to a silent reflection of the celebrant is an innovation (albeit an ancient one) that arose as a result of purely non-theological, non-ecclesiastical factors. With the passing of time a theology emerged to justify a circumstance that originally had no theological significance. Liturgies east and west, including our own, are littered with developments that came about as a result of factors that had (and have) nothing to do with theology. Part of the task of comparative-historical liturgiology is to trace these developments in order to better understand the liturgy as it was originally intended, and how that meaning has changed (for better or worse) over the centuries.

There can be little doubt that originally the Eucharistic Prayer was offered in the full hearing of the people:

1. In antiquity reading meant speaking. The Ethiopian eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles, for example, was riding in his chariot reading the Prophet Isaiah when Philip "*heard him reading* Isaiah the prophet, and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'" [Acts 8:38]. In this earliest period, the notion that the priest should read the prayers of the Eucharist silently would have been considered innovative indeed. Yet we find no word in the historical record to suggest any such novelty.
2. There are many ancient legends, including hagiographies, where saintly young boys begin to recite the Eucharistic Prayer, only to be zapped by the Holy Spirit at the height of their ecstasy. As with all literature of this genre, the historical significance is not in the narrative itself, but in its implications. How else would a young boy be able to recite the Eucharistic Prayer if not by having heard it on a regular basis during the celebration of the Eucharist?
3. In antiquity the celebrant was expected to offer the prayer of the Eucharist spontaneously. According to Justin the Martyr (c.165), the bishop "sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and the [elements over which] thanks have been given are distributed and everyone partakes..." [First Apology 67.1]. The author of the Apostolic Tradition (Hippolytus of Rome?) likewise states that the celebrant bishop may use his own words or a fixed form. Why did these authors bother to point out such a detail if what the celebrant was praying was not audible to the people? Moreover, how can the people give their "assent" if they have not heard what the bishop was praying?
4. In the sixth century, *Novella 137* (Chapter 6) of Emperor Justinian orders that the Eucharistic Prayer must be recited aloud. This demonstrates, of course, that by this time some priests had begun to pray inaudibly what was originally intended to be heard by all. Justinian points out that hearing the words of the prayers is spiritually edifying and necessary for the faithful.
5. As for us Armenians, we have the precious fragment of the Eucharistic Prayer of St. Basil (which is traditionally attributed to St. Gregory the Illuminator) preserved in the *Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'* V.28. Agathangelos also quotes liberally from this prayer. If the words of the Eucharistic Prayer were considered within the privileged domain of the clergy, then why would the clergy divulge them in these historical/theological writings? Unless we are convinced that the authors of these works intended them to be read/heard only by other clergy, we must conclude that the words of the Eucharistic Prayer were not secret, but were well-known to the people.

Justinian's *novella*, mentioned above, is just one sign that the reduction of the Eucharistic Prayer to an inaudible reflection of the celebrant began at a very early date. The reasons for this decline from the original, evidently universal practice of the Church had very little to do with theology and faith. The decline was due to several inter-related factors:

1. Laziness and ignorance of the clergy. There is a universally recognized tendency toward reduction in liturgical evolution. What is essential in the liturgy tends to be marginalized and what is marginal tends to be magnified. This principle is evident throughout history in all realms of liturgy, throughout the liturgical families. In the Daily Office, to give just one example, what was formerly the heart of daily prayer, the psalms, was gradually replaced by hymnography. The psalms were originally chanted alone. Gradually extra-biblical refrains were composed which elaborated the themes of the individual psalms. As these compositions developed and multiplied, they eventually supplanted the very psalms they were meant to interpret and accompany. An obvious manifestation of this reduction in the Armenian Church Night Office is that today we sing the *Օրհնութեան շարականն*, which is but a compilation of refrains composed to accompany Moses' Song of Victory in Exodus 15. But where is the scriptural song? It has been supplanted by the refrains.

In the case of the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharistic Prayer, which is in every way the prayer of the Eucharist, has been reduced to a personal inaudible reflection of the celebrant. The prayer which encapsulates the meaning of the Eucharist, indeed, the faith of the Church, is no longer heard by the faithful. Instead, the very late hymns *Հայր Երկնաւոր, Որդի Աստուծոյ*, and *Հոգի Աստուծոյ*, whose thematic connection to the Eucharistic Prayer is superficial, have become primary.

2. The Christianization of the Empire after Constantine necessitated the building of new, massive churches. Liturgy was no longer the occupation of a small, profoundly devout, intimate fraternity. Massive basilicas were now increasingly filled with crowds of new converts. Simply maintaining order became a significant task during liturgical assemblies, as the not infrequent exasperated asides in St. John Chrysostom's homilies, as well as the frequent calls for attention in the liturgy [Broskhoomeh] testify. In such an environment, it is easy to see how priests eventually gave up trying to make themselves heard, and gradually began to recite their prayers *sotto voce*.
3. The massive influx of proselytes during this time led to a new "mystical" spirituality. This in turn led to clericalism as the clergy struggled to protect the sanctity and exclusiveness of the Christian faith and Church life. For the first time the Body and Blood become something to approach with awe, with fear and trembling. While the number of Eucharistic celebrations increases, the number of communicants plunges as the faithful become increasingly sensitive as to their "unworthiness" to receive the holy mystery. (Once again, St. John Chrysostom frequently chastises his listeners for not coming forward to receive the Sacrament). This spiritual climate fosters a new theology justifying the muting of the Eucharistic Prayer: the lay are no longer considered "worthy" to hear its words, which become the "secret" domain of the clergy. The Eucharistic Prayer became part of the *disciplina arcana*.

These are the historical reasons usually proffered to explain why the Eucharistic Prayer, in all liturgical traditions, was reduced to inaudibility. I cannot, therefore agree with you when you suggest that "the 'in-secreteness' is of the essence of prayer." For sure, our Lord commanded us to "Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." But this is not the prayer of the Church, it is the outpouring of my soul to my Lord. As you point out, Jesus, too, "went forward a little," apart from Peter, James and John, and prayed by himself. In the Upper Room, however, he drew near to his disciples and joined himself to them mystically in holy communion.

I believe there are manifold reasons not only to make the text of this prayer readily available to the faithful, but also perhaps to consider retrieving the ancient custom of the universal church, that the celebrant offer the Eucharistic Prayer in the full hearing of the people.

1. Prayer is not said for God. Our Father knows our thoughts "more than we ask or comprehend" (Mt 6:8). Prayer is addressed to God for the sake of the people. Liturgical prayer is a confession of faith in the God we are addressing. The literary structure of Armenian liturgical prayer (as well as the liturgical prayer of all ancient churches) confirms this. The first part of our conventional bi-partite prayers is always a rehearsal of the Scriptural foundation and grounds upon which we dare to make a request of God in the second part of the prayer. The Lord does not need us to remind him of what he has said and promised. He knows that very well. But WE need to proclaim this solemnly, publicly, officially, in prayer as a confession of our faith, both personal and corporate. How much more important this is in the case of the Eucharistic Prayer, which articulates the *historia*, and the justification in Scripture of the Church's most important Christian obligation and privilege, mandated by Christ himself, by which the Church ever becomes the Body of Christ. It is this magisterial prayer that the faithful must seal with their conscious, convinced "Amen," as Justin emphasizes (see above).
2. We are today, for better or worse, products of the Enlightenment. Our faithful in America, especially the youth, no doubt under Protestant influence, increasingly approach the Armenian Church with a desire for "understanding." Of course our search for the knowledge of God in his Son Jesus Christ cannot be a purely intellectual endeavor, as I have recently argued (in the last issue of *The Armenian Church*). One of the great challenges facing our Church and other traditional churches in America, is the prevailing absolutization and idolization of science and the scientific method.

And yet this is no reason for us to perpetuate ignorance. The liturgy of the Church must be returned to those to whom it belongs, the "members" of the Church, to use St. Paul's terminology. If our goal is to bring our people back to the Church, this necessarily means drawing them back into the worshipping life of the Church, whose crystallization is the Divine Liturgy. It is there, in the Eucharistic Prayer of St. Athanasius that we find crystallized, subtle though it may be, the uniquely Armenian witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am convinced that we must not stifle this witness, but expose it and teach it to our people. It can only be enlightening and magnetic.

So much for the Eucharistic Prayer. I realize that there are three other silent prayers of the celebrant that, as you point out, concern the celebrant himself. Even here I have no problem making these prayers available to our people in the pew book. Let us assume that Mr. Pilafian reads this prayer while the choir is singing the *megheti*. Yes, I would prefer that Mr. Pilafian offer his own prayer to God at this moment. But if he feels disposed to do that he will do it no matter what is written in the pew book. Let him "read along" with the celebrant and see that the priest is no magician, after all. He is as sinful as anyone else, and what he presumes to do during the Divine Liturgy is by the Lord's authority and will and power and no one else's. Let Mr. Pilafian contemplate his pastor, whom he presumes to know so well. Let him appreciate more clearly this "other side" of his pastor, a side otherwise obscured by bickering over the treasurer's report, or over what color to paint the newly-remodeled kitchen. Let Mr. Pilafian reflect on the rubric which instructs the celebrant, before he receives the holy Sacrament, to pray for all those who hate him. Let Mr. Pilafian see a facet of the Divine Liturgy he has never seen before, and did not even know existed. Next Sunday, when the curtain closes, Mr. Pilafian's attention may again be drawn to the text of this prayer of the celebrant. But a few Sundays hence, Mr. Pilafian will have read that prayer a number of times, and will have no reason to be distracted by a prayer which does not concern him directly. Maybe then he will offer a few humble words to God in prayer, perhaps prayer for the celebrant's worthiness and his own.

Allow me to address some other concerns you raise in your letter.

1. The practical question of what the worshiper should do with the Eucharistic Prayer while participating in the Liturgy. You express concern that by adding the full text of the

Eucharistic Prayer we will be creating for the worshiper a "two-ring mental circus." I would argue that the Divine Liturgy is already by its nature a many-ringed circus, with many simultaneous levels of — for lack of a better word — activity. In the Divine Liturgy the worshiper is drawn into an experience of gestures, rituals, movements by the priest, deacons and altar servers, chanting, hymnody, processions, sacred art, etc. In such a situation, I believe that the worshiper's attention should be focused on the heart of the Eucharist, which is the Eucharistic Prayer. They should follow it attentively, even prayerfully. This is, I repeat, *the* quintessential prayer of the Church.

2. I do believe that it behooves us to "open the Badarak up to the worshipping congregation," the Church, to whom it belongs, for whom it was instituted as communion with Christ, her Head. I do not believe that this will or should inaugurate more questionable innovations such as making the priest face the congregation. I agree totally with your every criticism of this novelty of the Second Vatican Council. It has no part in our Church. I do not believe that exposing the faithful to the inaudible prayers of the *Badarak* will reduce, malign, or in anyway threaten the priest's ministry. On the contrary, our people will better understand his key role in the liturgy, and in the Church.
3. While it may be dramatically effective, the words of institution, "Take, eat..." must not be taken out of the context of the narrative in which they are found. The fact is that the narrative *is* a story, just like the first part of every liturgical prayer of our Church. As I mentioned above, the words of institution present the Scriptural foundation justifying the claim of the Church that the bread and wine we offer are much more than that. Furthermore, as I tried to show above, the prayer was composed to be read aloud and understood by the people. Hearing the isolated words of our Lord may be stirring to some, but this was not the effect intended by those who composed and first offered the prayer.

Well now I have really done it. I have composed a veritable tome. Worse, by my ranting and preaching I may well have offended an esteemed friend, from whom I have much to learn. Forgive me if I have overstepped my bounds. I offer all of the above as a way to continue this conversation, with the sincere hope that our pew book will be better as a result. I look forward to hearing from you again. Let all we do be for the glory of Christ our God.

As always, please give my warmest regards to Mrs. Nersoyan. As I write this I have fond memories of my visit with you a few years ago. I look forward to seeing you again sometime soon.

For all of us great news: Christ is risen from the dead!

Yours in Christ,



Fr. Daniel Findikyan

cc:

His Eminence, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian  
Rev. Dr. Krikor Maksoudian

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 May 22, 1999

Dear Fr Daniel.

Thank you for your letter of May 7. Needless to say, it displays thoughtful scholarship, and is obviously rooted in serious concern. It therefore made me forget my previous intention of not saying or doing anything more about the pew book. I have in fact jotted down a number of comments in the margins of your letter, which is something I do when I read worthwhile articles in journals. Some of these comments are addressed to myself and say, "I should have thought of this!" Others are critical. I will share them with you in a moment. But before I do so let me say that all disagreement is based on some agreement. No disagreement is even possible without a common ground on which the parties stand together. The common ground on which we stand is, I believe, our common desire to remain critically loyal to the faith that is both a gift of God and an inheritance from our Fathers of blessed memory.

If I understand you correctly, you are arguing that the publication in the pew book of the *in-secret* (as distinct from *secret*) portions of the Liturgy may indeed be contrary to the canon or norm now in effect. Such publication is nevertheless justified, you say, because:

(a) the Eucharistic prayer was originally said aloud. The in-secretness at issue is a departure from that practice. This departure is ill-advised and unfortunate. It is in fact a degeneration due to non-theological reasons, including human weakness. There is nothing unadvisable about a possible return to the robust intonation by the celebrant of the Eucharistic prayer. Its publication in the pew book is tantamount to that openness or audibility, and recommendable for that reason.

(b) it is to the spiritual advantage of the faithful to know the Eucharistic prayer. Seeing it printed in the pew book in its entirety, the faithful will eventually familiarize themselves with it and that will enhance their understanding of the Liturgy.

That then is your thesis. Now there is no doubt that it is beneficial for any Christian, including therefore an Armenian Christian, to know the Eucharistic prayer. But that is not the issue. The issue is whether the faithful should pray the Eucharistic prayer with the celebrant priest during the Liturgy. The averment that they did so at one time, so there is no reason why they should not do it now, is not satisfactory. The fact is that the Eucharistic prayer has not been said aloud for centuries, and the abandonment of the original practice is not due to some sort of an attrition or negligence. On the contrary, it is clear from the unmistakable instructions we have to that effect, that that practice was abandoned *knowingly*.

The questions that may need ampler treatment then are, Were there theological reasons behind the abandonment of the celebrant's saying the Eucharistic and other prayers aloud? If there were, are they still valid? And who has the authority to override them, should that be the wiser thing to do?

Keeping in mind the prudence of being critically faithful to our Fathers, and with as much caution as I can muster, I shall now amplify on some of the notations I made in the margins of your letter.

You say in defense of your thesis that in antiquity "reading meant speaking." Actually reading always meant reading and speaking always meant speaking. What is the case is that perhaps as late as Gutenberg people read privately as if for someone else, the obvious reason being that books were very rare, and readers *did* read with and for others more often than not. There is the celebrated case of St Augustine, if I remember correctly, who reports that he once saw St Jerome read the Scripture noiselessly, without even moving his lips! Augustine reports this as something altogether unusual. It



follows that the case you point out of the Ethiopian who read Isaiah, pronouncing the words to himself, does not entail the conclusion, for any given period, that the celebrant priest always prayed aloud. The possibility remains open that he murmured the words to himself, without being heard by the people.

You also present the case of the boy of the legend who was zapped by the Holy Spirit as he recited the Eucharistic prayer. "How else would a young boy be able to recite the Eucharistic prayer," you ask, "if not by having heard it on a regular basis during the celebration of the Eucharist?" The answer is. In a dozen different ways. Perhaps the boy was an altar boy and thus strategically placed to hear things that the celebrant was saying in a low voice. Perhaps his mother's first cousin was a priest and taught the prayer to him, for we must remember that there was nothing secret about the prayer itself.

In-secret prayers could of course be turned by some priests into "secrets" and then turned into abracadabra in order to exploit the credulous piety of the people. "Watch me. I say the words, and - poof! - ordinary wine turns into the blood of Jesus Christ!" But that only shows that men who have gone through the ceremonial motions of ordination can be as depraved as anyone else. [Incidentally, the change of one substance into another, a theory we do not countenance, is magic. Armenian theologians who have a clear grasp of their monophysitism should not fall into that lamentable quagmire.]

As one reason for the Eucharistic prayer turning into "an inaudible reflection" of the celebrant you mention the "laziness and ignorance of the clergy." But the long tradition of the in-secret prayers cannot be accounted for in that summary fashion. Remarkably alert, knowledgeable and powerful leaders dot the length of that tradition, and such men would surely have seen to it that an attitude adopted by lazy and ignorant priests does not prevail. As to the case of the *ornhouthyan sharakan*, it is regrettable depending only on the metaphor that one has in mind. Why should one think of a song in Exodus as a diamond, and of a fine hymn as debris? Why couldn't the *sharakan* be in this case an improvement over the original source of its inspiration?

You go on to say that the first large cathedrals and their unruly crowds were another cause of the disappearance of the practice of saying the Eucharistic hymn aloud. "In such an environment ...priests eventually gave up trying to make themselves heard, and gradually began to recite their prayers sotto voce." That is an intriguing conjecture. If the priests gave up trying, why didn't the deacons? If the deacons could raise their voices above the din, so surely could the priests! The conjecture is also quite malleable in that it works both ways. If, instead of "in secret," the celebrant were bidden to *raise* his voice in certain instances, we would be arguing no doubt that the practice began at a time when, in vast edifices, the priest had to make himself heard by the people standing just inside the distant door!

We may further observe in this connection that Justinian was one emperor who built one of those huge cathedrals (the Santa Sophia.) I had some awareness of his *Novellae*, but I did not know that he had ordered that the Eucharistic prayer be said aloud. But why was an imperial edict necessary to solve the simple problem of having priests speak louder? Couldn't some sacristan tell them to raise their voices? An imperial order suggests rather a theological opposition to the Emperor's pleasure. As I recall, Justinian dabbled in theology, but he was not exactly a great theologian.

I have probably not covered all of the points you make in your letter, but I am not trying to *avoid* any. My intent is not to write another essay. Generally speaking, to go after the original purity of an age-old practice is like chasing the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. The purity is elusive and the search does not come to an end. Luther tried it and he ended up establishing another church within the cultural parameters of his own time. As to the explanation in secular terms of a religious practice, it is like saying that the original purpose of incense was to kill bad odors, therefore we should now quit using it. More to the point, the argument "it was not so originally," if applied widely enough, would put an end to, for example, the institution of celibacy in the church.

In the absence of incontrovertible documentary evidence as to why and how the practice came about of having the Eucharistic and other prayers said in secret, the wiser course may be to look at that practice within the traits of the culture where it developed. Nothing comes to be what it is in complete isolation. We should also avoid what is sometimes referred to as the genetic fallacy, which is the mistake

of thinking that the specific *history* ("genesis") of a thing *explains* that thing.

Come to think of it, we do not need *any* evidence, circumstantial or documentary, in order to realize that there were no prayers said in secret during the earlier "remembrances" of the Last Supper. One cannot even imagine an apostle saying prayers in secret at the first Eucharist after the Ascension. And oh, what wouldn't I give, including whatever is left of my life, for a transcript (better still, a video transcript) of what went on at that first service! Was Mary the Mother of God there? Was it Peter or James who began: "You remember, my friends and co-missionaries, our meal with Him before He ... ." But let's get back to what we can say with a measure of certainty.

To me, one of the more significant details of our *badarak* is the psalm the celebrant recites responsively with the deacon as he walks up to the altar. I have in mind particularly the verse *Arakya Der zlouys ko...* In that verse the psalmist comes close to the neoplatonism of Eastern Fathers. There is in some ways a continental divide between Plato and Aristotle. We are on Plato's side. Plotinus, a man inspired by Plato, and the master of neoplatonists, was trained in Alexandria. Our own theological predilection for that city's orientation is a matter of common knowledge. There are traces of Origen and Clement in our *badarak*, and it is no accident that many of the major translators of Greek philosophy to Arabic were Jacobites, who were therefore instrumental in the emergence of such gifted neoplatonists as al-Farabi.

What is neoplatonism? Simply put (i.e. within the narrow limits of my capacity to understand these things) neoplatonism is the view that all of reality derives from the One, down to the vast plurality of things material. Human beings who belong partly in the material world, do nevertheless have the vision of, and yearn for the One. Salvation is thus the process of ascending from plurality back to the One. As I say, this is a very simple, even simplistic, way of putting it, but it's all I can do. But it is enough to show the affinities between neoplatonism and the orthodox faith, namely God's coming down from heaven and becoming man, so that man may become God, as Athanasius and others, including Gregory of Narek, teach.

A connection between Christian neoplatonism and the psalm I just spoke of now comes into view. The celebrant's ascent to the holy mountain and to God's dwelling enacts or typifies the souls's ascent to the One. In our theology, while God is God, the Object and "Receiver" of worship, and man is man, the worshiper, there is no ontological vacuum between God and man (cf. "O you who sit with the Father and are sacrificed here;" "He Whom heaven and earth cannot contain was wrapped in swaddling clothes," etc.) God who is eternal is nevertheless in history, which is the point of bi-partite prayers, as you suggest from a somewhat different perspective. We know God through His acts of mercy, and we ask Him Whom we thus know, to have mercy upon us. From within history we reach out to His eternity.

The Armenian Orthodox celebrant priest does not turn his back *on* the congregation. The congregation is behind the celebrant priest because he is the one leading the congregation. A good leader turns his back *to* those whom he leads, even as he is keenly, lovingly and responsibly aware of their presence. He knows the itinerary and silently decides to follow it landmark by landmark, while his followers actually decide joyfully with him, for they trust him and his leadership. In somewhat the same way, as the celebrant priest walks up to the altar of Sacrifice, an attentive audience does so with and through him. The shape of our *badarak* does not entirely duplicate the "circle" of Jesus and His Disciples because whereas Christ was "leading" His disciples to Himself by distributing Himself to them, the celebrant priest directs the congregation *to* the Christ.

The in-secret prayer of the celebrant priest thus constitutes the silent "moment" or phase in the experience of the congregation in the course of its ascent to the One. During our Liturgy our congregation is not composed of a plurality of people each addressing God on his or her own, and synchronizing, so to speak, through the simultaneity of their states of mind. The people at our Liturgy are not like clocks that happen to be showing the same time. This is, I believe, our basic difference from the Latins, particularly the post-Vatican II Latins, and even more importantly from the Lutherans and Calvinists. The people worshipping at an Armenian (generally Eastern or Oriental) Liturgy is a single

corporate entity, a body in the Body of Christ. Westerners tend to worship, so to speak, *side by side*. We worship *together*. [I am painfully aware, as I write these lines that I am looking at the situation from an "ideal" standpoint. Things *are not* as I describe them. They ought, or we expect them, to be so. But then I am not describing here a secular situation in the manner of a psychologist or sociologist.]

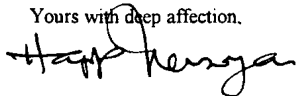
The celebrant prays silently, he articulates what is on the worshipful mind of the single corporate entity that is the congregation. When *he* prays the *congregation* prays. At the same time, the congregation responds to its own prayer. An exquisite example of this is the in-secret *prayer* by the celebrant priest of the trisagion, as the choir (i.e. the congregation) *sings* it. The congregation is a person writ large. The congregation, that is, this collective person, feels and thinks for herself through the priest, and the self-same collective person sings through the choir, much as a person feels exuberant (in the mind and spirit) and bursts into audible song—responding perhaps to the "presence" of someone absent ("invisible.") And the deacon is there to direct and coordinate the actions of the "incorporated" faithful.

I do not know when and where the celebrant's prayers began to be said in secret. As I recall, the earliest structured Divine Liturgies have prayers in secret. What I am saying is that the in-secretness of these prayers fit the rest of the life of our church, which is why they have been adopted and *kept*.

And now, what about the education of Mr Pilafian? [Part (b) of your argument as stated above.] There *is*, as you say, a sense in which study and worship blend. All of life is after all a worship, or should be for a Christian. Still, within that larger context study is one thing, worship another. Synaxis is one thing, Divine Liturgy another. Going to school is not going to church, and there seems to be something slightly sneaky about subjecting a captive audience to instruction, when it is there for ... well, worship. Will Mr Pilafian turn into a believer, or even a better believer, by busying himself during the Liturgy and trying to satisfy his curiosity as to what the priest is saying at any given moment — without therefore participating in the jubilation of the choir, without paying heed to what the deacon is telling him to do? Maybe not. Let us assume however that Mr Pilafian will come to church Sunday after Sunday, that he will eventually know to his satisfaction what the priest is saying, and will then start paying a better informed attention to his own part in the Liturgy as a real participant therein. But if Mr Pilafian is such a man, he would willingly come to a course of instruction. And a knowledgeable and pious instructor would make of him an even better participant in the mystery of the Divine Liturgy.

Dear Father Daniel, my whole point is this: The inclusion of the in-secret portions of the Divine Liturgy in the pew book is important *if not in itself* (perhaps nobody will notice the difference,) *then in its implications*. That is why it must be done after a serious debate, so we know what we are doing. With these three letters to you I said what I have to say and I am out of the debate for good. I hope Khajag Srpazan followed our discussion as a part of the debate, and will make his decision accordingly. In the end he alone will be responsible as the bishop of the diocese.

Yours with deep affection,



Cc: Archbishop Khajag  
Fr Krikor Maksoudian

PS. Something unexpected happened as I was writing to you. I received a call from H.B. Archbishop Torkom in Jerusalem about an unrelated matter. As I told him what I was doing, he expressed a keen interest in seeing a copy of our correspondence. I see no reason why I should not send it to him. Do you have an objection?



# ST. NERSESS ARMENIAN SEMINARY

## Ս. ՆԵՐՏԵՍ ԸՆԾԱՆՑԱՐԱՆ

150 STRATTON ROAD NEW ROCHELLE NY 10804 (914) 636-2003 FAX (914) 636-3564

June 3, 1999

Dr. Hagop Nersoyan  
149 South Pelham Drive  
Kettering, OH 45429

Dear Dr. Nersoyan,

Many thanks for your letter, the most recent installment of our wonderfully edifying literary discussion about the Eucharistic Prayer. You write that with your last letter you are "out of the debate for good." I hope we will have a chance to continue our discussion face-to-face. For now, allow me to respond briefly to just a couple of the points you make in this most recent letter.

You are right when you state that our difference rests on a substantial common ground. I agree whole-heartedly with almost everything you write, at least on a conceptual level. I believe we differ on the level of interpretation and application. At least part of the disagreement, it seems to me, is that I am approaching this issue as an historian (that, along with theology, is my training), and you, as a philosopher (and theologian, though I suspect you will reject that title). By that oversimplification I do not in any way intend to imply that your arguments ignore or misuse historical arguments. But I think the distinction is instructive. My approach is to examine the historical record in an effort to understand (yes, "genetically") what has been handed down to us and why. You may be right to caution that one or another of my historical arguments could be interpreted in other ways: Yes, that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts read aloud from the Prophet Isaiah does not prove that the early Armenian priest read the prayers of the *Badarak* aloud. Yes, the little boy zapped by the Holy Spirit *may have had* an uncle who was a priest. Yes, it is *conceivable* that priests murmured the prayers in a low voice. Yes, Justinian's *Novella* *may have been* in response to some discrete theological argument for offering the Eucharistic Prayer in-secret. The fact of the matter is—and here I am unabashedly arguing as an historian—there is absolutely no evidence to support these conjectures. I feel very secure resting on the weight of the cumulative historical evidence I presented in favor of the theory that the drafters of the Eucharist (in all traditions) intended its prayers to be heard and comprehended by the people, and affirmed by their corporate "Amen." (This is the "Amen" following the last words of the Eucharistic Prayer: «Եւ եղիցի ողորմութիւն մեծիս Աստուծոյ եւ փրկչիս մերոյ Յիսուսի Քրիստոսի ընդ ձեզ, ընդ ամենեսեան».) By the way, this is not *my* theory. It is universally accepted by liturgical theologians and historians.

This leads to another point you make, with which I entirely agree: that the search for "original purity of an age-old practice" is ill-advised, if at all possible. Among other reasons, there is no such thing as "original purity." Who is going to decide which century and which venue provides this alleged "original purity" for us. Here we are in total agreement. My interest in the early liturgical practice of the churches is not in order to return there (which is impossible), nor to imitate it (which is silly), but in order to understand what we have today. Critical comparative-historical study of the liturgy provides a yardstick—the *only* yardstick I maintain—for interpreting our liturgy today. My argument, in other words, is not "It behooves us to publish the Eucharistic Prayer in its entirety in our new Pew Book because that is how it was *originally*." Rather, my argument is: "The early Christians placed great emphasis on the Eucharistic Prayer. It was known and heard by all because it was universally considered to be *the consummate* prayer of the Church. Early on the Eucharistic Prayer came to be offered inaudibly by the priest, for reasons that have

The 17th Centenary of the Christianization of Armenia by St. Gregory the Illuminator

«Յորդառատ բանիս հողերոյ ծննդեամբ լուսաւորեցեր զՀայաստան աշխարհս»  
"With overflowing words and spiritual birth you enlightened the land of Armenia"

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nothing to do with theology. Since this prayer is so important for the Church's self-understanding and for her worship of God, and since there is no identifiable theological reason not to do so, I concur with the bishop's decision to provide the full texts of these prayers in the Pew Book. It is, after all, the bishop who must decide how best to care for his flock.

Now, is it theoretically possible that there was indeed some theological justification which led the churches to abandon the audible offering of the Eucharistic Prayer? I suppose so. Almost anything is conceivable, if not possible. The problem is that there is no trace of this justification in any liturgical/historical/theological sources, and in the judgment of many of our sister churches that have studied this issue and who now offer the Eucharistic Prayer aloud. This scenario would be curious indeed: a theology of the Eucharist which is so momentous that it justified opposing the original practice of the Early Church, which itself "framed" the Eucharist, and presumably knew what it was doing; a theology of which, however, no trace remains. If this is indeed the case, then the Church of Christ is in serious trouble.

Perhaps instead of using the phrase, "laziness and ignorance of the clergy" as one of the reasons for the reduction of the Eucharistic Prayer, I should have referred to the universally recognized principle of liturgical evolution, whereby essentials are seen to fall into desuetude, while secondary elements of the liturgy tend to become magnified. I offered the example of the *sharagans*, which supplanted the original psalmody and Biblical odes which they were intended to accompany and illuminate. I could have given countless other examples of the phenomenon. Your conjecture that "remarkably alert, knowledgeable and powerful leaders... would surely have seen to it that an attitude adopted by lazy and ignorant priests does not prevail." Unfortunately, history belies this hypothesis, not only in our own tradition, but universally. I could offer dozens of examples. Let me point out two patent textual errors in our own Divine Liturgy, which, knowingly or unknowingly, have prevailed despite the presence of enlightened leaders in the Church. The last line of the Cherubic Hymn, which Archbishop Tiran saw fit to include in his Divine Liturgy Book even though it has, to my knowledge, fallen out of use, is non-sensical as it stands. Scholars have shown it to be a mistranslation of the original Greek. Yet it continues to be copied (if not chanted) in modern editions of the Divine Liturgy, and translators like Archbishop Tiran struggle to render it into modern languages. The "Prayer of Elevation" («Նախեաց Տէր մեր Յիսուս Քրիստոս, յերկնից ի սրբութենէ քուսմէ...») is a slavish Armenian translation of a defective Greek original. The phrase: «Արժանի արա տալ մեզ յանարատ Մարմնոյ...» is problematic, and Abp. Tiran had no choice but to use a degree of latitude to arrive at his translation, "Do thou deign to give unto us of thine undefiled Body...". I am sure he was not the first to struggle with this phrase. Yet it has been faithfully reproduced and recited for centuries. The point is that hard, textual and comparative-liturgical analysis has proven time and again that in liturgical evolution the tendency to *preserve* what has been handed down, even if it is incomprehensible or patently wrong, generally triumphs over efforts to reform. So the fact that the allegedly spurious custom of reciting the Eucharistic Prayer inaudibly continued for centuries does not at all imply that there was a sound theological reason for it.

I cannot resist giving one more example, this time from Baptism. I wonder how many Armenian priests during the last 1200 years or so have offered the beautiful prayer over the oil, «Օրհնեալ ես Տէր Աստուած ամենակալ, որ ընտրեցեր քեզ նոր ժողովուրդ...», especially the lines, «...եւ այժմ աղայեմք զքեզ, Տէր բարերար, առաքեալ զչնորհս ամենասուրբ Հոգւոյդ ընդ իւղոյս. զի որ օծցի՝ եղիցի նմա ի սրբութիւն անգետոր իմաստութեան...». The problem is: *what oil*? The pre-baptismal anointing with consecrated oil dropped out of Armenian initiation rites no later than 1200 years ago. But the consecratory prayer for this oil remains to this day. I shutter to think how many well-intentioned Armenian priests believe they are (re-)blessing the sacred myron at this point. Now, I ask: Is there a *theological* reason why we preserve the prayer but not the oil or the anointing?

These examples should be sufficient to demonstrate that the liturgy, *by its very nature*, must be subject to continuous critical review (actually "reform", but that word is easily misunderstood in Armenian circles). This must be done in order that, through changing times, the liturgy continue

always to reflect authentically "the faith that is both a gift of God and an inheritance from our Fathers of blessed memory," as you so eloquently put it in your letter. In my opinion, the historical study of the liturgy (which is actually a theological undertaking in the true sense of "theology") provides the only reliable criterion on which to evaluate that tradition. (St. John of Otsoun, to name just one Armenian liturgical reformer, was keenly aware of the *history* of the rites he sought to reform at the Council of Duin in 719 AD). Of course when this principle is carried to extremes, the liturgy can become our little arts and crafts project; altering it here, adjusting it there, it becomes nothing but a reflection of our own vanity, a golden calf. However, I believe there is a trend in our Church which is dangerously close to the other extreme: our *Badarak* is no longer the sublime "experience of the congregation in the course of its ascent to the One." It has become a sacred relic from antiquity, a beautiful artifact which the clergy dust off each Sunday, exhibit for two hours to the few connoisseurs who appreciate such things, and then carefully put away again until next week's exhibit. There are many reasons for this decay in the *effective* role of the Divine Liturgy in the life of the Armenian Church. I believe that one way to respond is by providing the faithful with the full text of the Divine Liturgy, so that they can follow it and appreciate it once again for what it is and always has been: the pre-eminent prayer of Christ's Body. Yes, this is a departure from what has been done for several hundred years. But as I have shown, it is not an innovation. It more closely corresponds to the spirit of the "framers" of the Divine Liturgy.

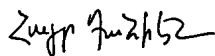
You write that the priest "articulates what is on the worshipful mind of the single corporate entity that is the congregation." Ideally, of course, this is true. In reality, I hesitate to think what is on the worshipful mind of my humble mission parish in Charlotte, North Carolina as I go about my priestly functions during the *Badarak*. Who can blame these poor souls? All they have in their present pew books is a succession of disjointed fragments such as, "With whom visit us also, O beneficent God, we beseech thee." What in the world does this mean? I count the days until they have a pew book which will assist them in truly "Lift[ing] up [their] minds in all wisdom..." As for the elusive, alleged theological justification for praying in-secret, I (inasmuch as the Primate has consulted me on this matter) am willing to sacrifice this phantom for the greater good of truly uniting the faithful in meaningful prayer and worship of our Lord.

Yet again, we are in full agreement regarding corporate prayer and worship. Unlike some denominations, Armenians do not merely pray simultaneously, we pray with one word [Միաբան] and one voice [Ի հաճախ]. By putting the words of our prayer at the disposal of the people, we will only enhance our common, corporate, meaningful worship. I am in no way advocating a diminution in the role of the celebrant priest!

There are other issues to discuss, of course, and I do hope we will have the chance to continue when we next meet. Your letters have challenged me to organize, to sharpen, and in some ways to adjust my thoughts on this issue. For this I am grateful. May our Lord have mercy on us and lead us to the Truth.

As always, my warmest regards to Mrs. Nersoyan. We will be in touch again concerning the "Day of Remembrance" on the tenth anniversary of the death of Archbishop Tiran.

Yours in Christ our God,



Fr. Daniel Findikyan

cc: Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate  
Fr. Krikor Maksoudian

PS: I have no objection to your forwarding copies of our correspondence to Patriarch Torkom or anyone else who may be interested.

149 S Pelham Dr  
Kettering, OH 45429  
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June 14, 1999

Dear Fr. Daniel,

I really wanted to conclude this matter of the pew book, but your last letter gave a new, noteworthy turn to the discussion. Your argument now is as follows:

- a. We have reasons to believe that the practice of in-secret prayers by the celebrant during the Divine Liturgy is due to historical vicissitudes, none of which constitutes a canonically binding precedent;
- b. Furthermore, there is nothing in the relevant literature to show that there is a theological reason that supports that practice;
- c. The abandonment of that practice will, moreover, recover or enhance the spiritual life of our community;
- d. We must therefore abandon the time-honored practice under consideration. [Note: I am assuming, by logical necessity, that once the in-secret prayers of the Divine Liturgy are printed in extenso in the pew book, it will be rather odd for the celebrant priest himself *not* to say them aloud, except of course that the priest praying out loud, the choir singing, the deacon making his biddings all at the same time would be counterproductive, to say the least. But then aim-specific (*nbadagaharmar*) arrangements could be made to avoid raucous overlaps. Actually, if we see no objection to having the in-secret prayers printed in extenso in the pew book, then common sense requires that such arrangements be made. And if the bishop of the diocese orders the printing of the pew book as presently planned, he would have to allow the priests of his diocese to say aloud, during their celebrations of the Divine Liturgy, the prayers or narratives that they are now under obligation to say in secret.]

Let me comment on a, b, c, and d in that order.

a'. We may reconsider very briefly one of the historical developments we already talked about. The building of large cathedrals and the noisiness of large, unruly congregations caused the celebrant priest to give up trying to be heard by everyone as he spoke his prayers. That is presumed to be the origin of the canonical requirement that the celebrant say his prayers in secret. One problem with this surmise is that it does not address the central issue: If the celebrant priest despaired of being heard, why did he continue to say *some* of his utterances aloud? Why is it that only *some*, and not *all* of what the priest says are now required to be in secret? Was there a consideration that prescribed the distinction between what must be said aloud, and what not? The chances are that there was. Which is probably why you and I are in agreement that, as you put it, "Yes, Justinian's *Novella* may have been in response to some discrete theological argument for offering the Eucharistic prayer in secret."

But, you will say, there is the "cumulative" strength of the historical argument. If you add up the large cathedrals, the Ethiopian eunuch, and so on, you will come to see that the practice of the in-secret prayers actually stands on loose sand. The trouble with this view is that when you add lukewarm water to your lukewarm water your water does not get hot. Or, to change the metaphor, a chain is as weak as its weakest link. Conjectures, all of which are not reliable, do not yield a reliable conclusion. A listing of vague probabilities must not be confused with the premises of inductive logic.

But then all that is academic. No one in his right mind can claim, as I said in my last letter, that there were in-secret prayers in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy from the very beginning.

[I'll come in a moment to the inconsonance of shouting Amen to something that we do not, and are not supposed, to hear.] I myself do not know when the in-secret prayers began. All I know is that the practice is old enough to deserve respectful attention.

b'. My knowledge of our classical literature being tangential at best, I shall assume with you that not only do we not know of any classical text that explains or justifies the in-secret prayers, but that such a text does not exist.

We must admit that it would have been nice to have such a text, but does its absence prevent us from placing the practice of in-secret prayers on theological terra firma? I had observed in my last letter that the liturgical requirement of in-secret prayers is in keeping with our known neoplatonistic orientation and with the rest of our theology. I had also mentioned some circumstances that hold that remark up. There is no need to repeat them here. It seems to me that these facts or correspondences are enough of a theological basis on which to justify the practice of in-secret prayers. You seem to disagree for reasons that do not address this phase of the matter directly. The practice under discussion still is in your view an old habit that has lost its relevance. You compare the practice of in-secret prayers to, for example, the use of a prayer in the sacrament of baptism where the priest prays over an oil ... that isn't there. But I am not sure this is a sound comparison, in the sense that we seem to be mixing apples and oranges.

Let me give you yet another example of something the Armenian Church keeps on doing, which is more than a relic. It is incongruous enough to be almost hilariously funny. Imagine Archbishop Vatche in Los Angeles presiding over an *antasdan*. At one point in the service he and his *shourchar*ed entourage solemnly turn west to pray for the Christian kingdoms on that side of the world, when all they are facing is the Pacific Ocean, and Japan at the other end of it. And this in a world where there is no real Christian kingdom left!

Now there is no question that such fossils belong in a liturgical museum, or else they must be modified and brought up to date. We do desperately need a new John of Otzoun. The question is, Is the practice of in-secret prayers in the Liturgy the same sort of thing as fossilized items in the liturgical corpus of the Armenian Church? It is true of course that practices too, as objects or tools, become obsolete, but it is also true sometimes objects get obsolete while their use does not. Typewriters are now obsolete, but we type on the keyboard of a computer exactly as we did on that of a typewriter. Different sorts of proofs may be needed to show the obsolescence of practices and of objects. In the case of the oil of the sacrament of baptism, as in the case of the *antasdan*, there is discrepancy between what is being said and what is the case; in the case of the Amen you mention there is the oddity of a detail that may need adjustment. These observations fail to apply to the practice of in-secret prayers during the Liturgy, — a practice that pervades the entire celebration.

c'. Yet your (and my) concern remains. I cannot but wholeheartedly agree with you that the *badarak* "has become a sacred relic from antiquity," and one may remark, most sadly, that to many it is not even sacred. It is, as you put it so well, "a beautiful artifact which the clergy dust off each Sunday [for those] who appreciate such things, and then carefully put away until next week's exhibit." I have known clergymen who have told me that they themselves no longer believe any of it, and that, "frankly," they do it for the money and for those whom they do not want to disabuse. The problem is vast enough to exceed the limits of the Armenian Church. A vast percentage of Americans will tell you that they believe in God and in Jesus Christ, but their religion is not written in the text of life. It is something for its margins. Were it not for Mt iii:9, "For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham," one would have to concede that the postchristian era is upon us.

Will the printing of the celebrants' in-secret prayers in the pew book improve the spiritual lethargy of the nation? There is nothing, absolutely nothing I would hope more. Yet I have my doubts. We agree that, as you say, "Yes, this is a departure from what has been done for several hundred years," that is, from tradition. The question is, Are we departing from tradition for reasons that are weighty



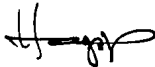
enough? Perhaps there is a way of meeting our concern *without* departing from tradition. It should be possible, as already suggested, to throw light on a song, response or proclamation by the choir with a short paragraph about what the priest is saying in secret. This would be printed in smaller type, in a different color, where appropriate in the text. A general notation would tell the congregant where to find the full text of the prayers for purposes of study. .

d'. If a', b', and c' have any validity to them, then d above must be reconsidered.

\* \* \*

Have I changed your mind? Of course not. (How people make up their minds about things and how they change their convictions is a matter of the deepest mystery.) Yet one thing has, I believe, become abundantly clear. The matter of printing the in-secret prayers of the celebrant in toto in the pew book is a deliberate departure from tradition. Its logical implication is that an Armenian celebrant will be at liberty to say openly, aloud, during the celebration, what he had to say in secret up to now, for all these centuries. Will that be a good thing? If there is a way of answering this question, I do not know it. In the meantime I so deeply sympathize with your concern, that I will personally accept a decision either way. The burden of the decision is not on your shoulders and it is not, mercifully, on mine. Archbishop Khajag will have to make the decision, assuming of course that a diocesan bishop has that authority.

Yours in Jesus Christ our Lord,



Cc: H.E. Abp. Khajag  
Rev. Dr. K. Maksoudian

P.S. I am glad you have no objection to my forwarding copies of our correspondence to Patriarch Torkom or anyone else who may be interested. After my last letter to you I waited for more than 10 days, and assuming after that interval (in this age of the e-mail) that you indeed had no objection, I sent a copy of this correspondence to H.B. Archbishop Torkom. Patriarch Mesrob of Constantinople, himself in the process of preparing a pew book for the churches under his jurisdiction, also expressed interest in our exchange of views on the subject. He also has a copy. As I mail this letter to you, I will be mailing Their Beatitudes copies of your last letter and of this reply.