

THE HOLY TRINITY

HIDDEN HEART OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH



VEMKAR TOPICAL SERIES

Cover Image: Manuscript no. 1: Gladzor Gospels, p. 106. Collection of Armenian Manuscripts (Collection 2089). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

BY THE ORDER OF
BISHOP MESROP PARSAMYAN
PRIMATE



Published by the Bishop Zgon Trust Fund
of the Diocese of the Armenian Church
of America (Eastern), New York



ST.VARTANPRESS2024

Written by Rev. Fr. Hovnan Demerjian

THE HOLY TRINITY

HIDDEN HEART OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

Introduction

As I began the work of gathering materials for this booklet on the Holy Trinity, I crossed myself and prayed almost inaudibly; *‘hanoon hor, yev vortvo yev hogvooyn srpoy, amen...* In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.’ I do this often, as perhaps do you, in times of both trial and thanksgiving; before I approach the hospice bed of a parishioner, and before my daughter’s piano recital. Somehow this shortest of prayers contains great power in connecting the depths of God to the significance of our lives.

The purpose of this booklet is to reveal the hidden and expansive theology behind this trinitarian prayer, which takes just five seconds to say, yet outlines the entire creed of the Armenian Church and reveals the shape of God’s love for you and me. Hidden in plain sight, we will uncover God’s threefold nature in our Sunday Worship, Sacraments and Scripture and highlight their significance.

Most importantly, and contrary to popular depictions of the Trinity as abstract and irrelevant, I

hope to show how the Trinity offers life-long lessons for Armenian Church faithful in learning to love as God does. For in the lavish love of the Father, the harmony of the Son and the intimacy of the Spirit, we recover the lost secret of true love, that fallen humanity may come to know again by participation in the trinitarian grace of God.

The Trinity in Armenian Church Worship

And now I beseech you, let this be to me not for condemnation but for the remission and forgiveness of sins, for health of soul and body and for the performance of all deeds of virtue; so that this may purify my breath and my soul and my body and make me a temple and a habitation of the all-holy Trinity; so that I may be worthy, together with your saints, to glorify you with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

**- Armenian Church Divine Liturgy,
Prayer before Holy Communion**

To begin, I want to uncover the ubiquitous references to the Holy Trinity in our Sunday Worship and our more prominent church sacraments. Uncovering these references to the Trinity will serve two goals. First, like a children's hidden picture puzzle, once we see the references to the Trinity in worship, we can't stop seeing (and praying) them. This will help reestablish their orig-

inal function as reminders and guides in our life of faith. Second, in noting the pervasive nature of the Trinity in our sacramental life, we see that the Trinity was no abstract theological footnote for our forefathers, but points to the very heart of our faith.

Let's begin at the beginning of Badarak. Even if there are no souls present at the beginning of Divine liturgy, we will find the three persons of the Trinity there! In fact, the Trinity is invoked nine times (three times three) before the priest even enters the sanctuary, in donning his ritual vestments and acknowledging the connection between Old and New Covenants. The Badarak begins with the hymn 'Profound Mystery/Khorhoort Khorin', referencing the Trinity as the hidden heart of worship and life with God:

O mystery deep, inscrutable, without beginning, you have decked your supernal realm as a nuptial chamber to the light unapproachable and adorned with splendid glory the ranks of the fiery spirits. ...Through the passion of your holy Only-begotten all creation has been renewed and man has again been made immortal, adorned in an indespilable raiment. Heavenly king, preserve your Church unshaken and keep in peace those who worship your name.

Though obscured by dense theological symbolism, these first words of Divine Liturgy act as a profound 'topic sentence' governing the rest of

our trinitarian worship. God the Father is depicted as lover, and His only begotten Son as beloved. Though fallen away, we are renewed in this love by the Son, and the Church manifests the Spirit of this renewed love. As the hymn powerfully states, the church at heart is a 'nuptial chamber,' the venue for marriage bonds between Father and Son, God and man, Christ and Church.

The rest of our Sunday Divine Liturgy goes on to restate, develop and refine this trinitarian theme, that God the Father created humankind and all things out of love, that the Son returned and redeemed our unrequited love, and that the Spirit of God brings forth this relationship in the here and now for you and me.

We find this threefold nature of God most explicitly stated in the Nicene Creed, which outlines our trinitarian faith in its three main headings, explicating our faith in the Father, then the Son, then the Holy Spirit. This creed was not spontaneous or improvisational, but rather a multi-generational, world-wide project of faithful Christian churches to explain and transmit the essentials of Christian faith to all peoples and future generations.

At the first universal council of the Church, held in Nicaea in 325 AD, these believers committed to parchment the best (and we believe only) explanation of how God revealed himself in different ways in the course of history and Scripture and yet remains one God. After this precise and formulaic description of the Trinity in our Creed, the Armenian Church Rite goes on to glorify the

Trinity in more poetic ways, singing three sequential hymns to each person of the Holy Trinity. These hymns outline how God gives the Son to the world, the Son in his sacrificial love reconciles us back to God, and the Spirit ‘accomplishes through us this mystery.’

The invocations of the Holy Trinity are so many and diverse in the Armenian Church Divine Liturgy that listing them here, out of context, would be less impactful than finding and praying them during Sunday worship. The next time you come to Badarak, seek out these mentions of the Trinity in our worship. Here are a few hints on where to look. We invoke the Trinity over thirty times in Divine Liturgy and that is only in words. We are trinitarian in our movements too; in the number of times we consecrate the chalice and swing the censor. Our iconography is often trinitarian, and Armenian crosses mirror the Trinity in their three-leafed budding branches. And let us not forget the numerous times believers cross themselves in response to the invocation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Manifesting in physical movement Jesus’ first commandment to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,’ (Mk 12:30) we invite God into our minds, our hearts and bear his yoke on our shoulders. Crossing ourselves is like a handshake, but more than welcoming the presence of another person, it welcomes the presence of our Triune God!

The Trinity in Armenian Church Sacraments

If, in addition to Sunday worship, you have occasion to participate in a church sacrament, you will find as many references to the Trinity as in weekly worship. A baptism contains a sacred symphony of threes. Starting in the narthex we sing a hymn to the Holy Trinity, then renounce evil three times before reciting a trinitarian creed. We bless the water three times, baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and then seal the child in the Trinity with nine (three times three) prayers dedicating their senses and labors to discerning the triune love of God.

For their first worship, the child then bows three times—once before the Holy Table, then the Altar, then the baptismal font—and repeats this series three times. The next time you participate in a baptism, pay attention to the many other invocations of the trinity and reflect on how these three aspects of God’s love set a blueprint for the membership and growth of a new faithful member of our church.

Marriage is the second great example of the presence of the Trinity in sacramental life. In addition to the standard doxological repetitions of the Trinity, including recitation of the Nicene Creed, the bride and groom begin the service by repeating their vows three times each. Even the position that the crowned bride and groom assume for the heart of the service is profoundly trinitarian. The couple forms a triangle by bowing forehead

to forehead, joined at the head by the cross. In Christian marriage, love is not based on two—man and woman alone—but is based on three: man and woman united at the head by God. This triangle echoes and partakes of the very shape and nature of divine love.

From this quick survey of trinitarian language in the sacramental life of the Armenian Church, it should be clear that our three-person God was never meant to be an obscure theological footnote, but rather the beating heart which animates the worship and the faithful of our church. The next section of our exploration of the Trinity will flesh out the origins of the Trinity in history as recorded in our Scriptures. Now that we see that the Trinity is an essential aspect of our faith which surrounds us in worship, it is important to trace where it came from and what it means in the context of humanity's ongoing relationship with our God.

The Trinity in Holy Scripture

*Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth:
Set up your kingdom in our midst.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God: Have
mercy on me, a sinner.*

*Holy Spirit, breath of the living God: Renew
me and all the world.*

-N.T. Wright

The Bible is the church's most authoritative written record of God's interaction with humankind over the centuries, from creation, through his covenant with the Hebrew people and culminating in the coming of Jesus and birth of the Christian church. As the authoritative document of our faith, we might expect to find numerous and varied references to the Trinity in our Holy Scriptures. We do indeed find several, and will explore some of these passages in greater depth. Yet because there are not dozens of literal, bite-sized, easily quotable references to the Holy Trinity, some critics of Christianity, and even some Christian denominations, claim that the Trinity is not found in Holy Scriptures.

But these people miss the forest for the trees. Even deeper and more pervasive than the quotable texts, the very structure of the Bible itself and the dramatic arc of its story reveals the Trinity. The Bible not only says things about the Trinity, it is itself trinitarian in its structure and metanarrative. An analogy from the world of literature might be helpful. Though Shakespeare never describes himself explicitly in his plays, in reading them all, we develop a very real sense of Shakespeare's personality, who the author is behind the works. Reading through the Bible, we are left with no other conclusion than that the author of history and Holy Scripture revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is essential to who God is and how he loves.

We can see this in the constituent elements of the Bible itself, by asking ourselves a deceptively

simple question. How many parts does the Bible have? If you answered two, the Old & New Testaments, this is not wrong, but is following a popular modern shorthand. But go back further in Christian history, and ancient churches like ours offer a different answer. The first hint can be seen on the ornate golden book which has pride of place on every Armenian Church altar. This book is not the entire New Testament. It is the Book of Gospels or in Armenian Avetaran. It contains the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It does not contain the rest of the New Testament which is really the Bible's third part, the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters written by early Christian leaders to their burgeoning churches.

This division of the Bible into three distinct parts, not two, is also reflected in the lectionary of the Armenian Church, our ancient rhythm of assigned Scripture readings for church worship. On every Sunday in our church, and all traditional churches, there are three readings from the three parts of Scripture, one from the Old Testament, one from the Gospels portraying the life of Christ, and one from the Epistles outlining the rise of the Church after the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is no coincidence that there are three parts of Scripture, and we worship a three-person God.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

Beginning with the first “third” of Scripture, the Old Testament, a summary view reveals God as Father, the creator of humankind, who also takes great interest in our well-being and development. At once strict and imposing, but also intimately concerned with every detail of his children’s well-being (i.e. what they eat, wear and how they worship), God acted truly as a strict and loving Father to his chosen people. Importantly, and in contrast to the beliefs of neighboring peoples, God the Father was one. There was no pantheon of competing gods with competing claims on truth, goodness and justice; God is one and so too are truth, goodness and justice. In turn, the children of God would grow and prosper by knowing and following the one good will of the Father.

And yet the oldest Scriptures hint that there was more to God the Father than meets the eye. We must look no further than the very first verse of the Bible for the first such hint. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” (Gen 1:1-2) From the very beginning, we find our one God with multiple attributes, namely a ‘Spirit’ that is distinct but of a piece with the Father. Just a few verses later, we see the most explicit reference to a plurality within the one God. ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’ says

God the Father, and goes on to 'create humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:26-27)

In the context of the creation of humankind, God refers to God's own self deliberately as 'us.' The church fathers always saw this as God preparing us for a day when He will reveal not just His "I" but the relational "We" that constitutes the Godhead. From the very beginning, it seems, God is relational in his very nature, and that relationality was passed on to humankind made in his image. We are social animals who only survive in good relation to each other and God, it is in our spiritual DNA.

Yet the leitmotif of the Old Testament is humankind's repeated failures to live in communion with God and fellow man. Adam and Eve's 'personal' fall is echoed and expanded in the subsequent fall of the Tower of Babel. Over and again the Old Testament retells the human tragedy of falling out of communion with God and with each other. The chosen people escape slavery in Egypt, only to enslave themselves in false idols of power, lust and greed. They reach the promised land, but corruption and unfaithfulness lead to their exile. Yet a remnant of God's chosen yearn for salvation and a new start, a coming Messiah who will inaugurate a new relationship between God and his people and reveal a second person of God.

The Trinity in the New Testament

There are dozens of Old Testament prophecies foretelling the coming of Jesus the Messiah into the world and his mission of salvation. In the Armenian Church you will hear twelve of these prophecies read on the highest holy days: Christmas Eve and Easter Eve. The Gospels, in turn, constantly reference Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Yet even if the Gospels said nothing explicitly about God's plan to reveal His only begotten Son, the man they describe, Jesus of Nazareth, begs the question. Reading the Gospels, we have no choice but to join the many who ask in wonder: 'Who is this Man?' One camp believes Him to be delusional or a fraud. The other camp believes Jesus is who he says he was and tries to reconcile what they know of the one true God with this man who seems at one with Him.

Though all four Gospels testify to Jesus' divine nature in his teachings, healings and great signs, John's Gospel constantly captures Jesus' oneness with the Father in his own words. "The Father and I are one,' (Jn 10:30) states Jesus, and later "the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' (Jn 10:38). But lest we think that Jesus is speaking in metaphor, or only describing a passing mystical state, he is even more explicit: 'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.' (Jn 8:58) Here, Jesus is not merely saying he is close to God the Father, but of a piece with him. This is precisely John's

overarching theme for his Gospel, laid out in his explosive prologue, that Jesus' oneness with God was from the very beginning:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:1-3, 14)

John describes Jesus as the 'Word' of God and the Father's Only Son who was present before and during the creation of all things. Jesus then comes into history in order to redeem humanity's lost Divine birthright.

The Gospels' many and diverse revelations of Jesus as the Son of God give rise to trinitarian questions simple enough to occur to a Sunday schooler, but profound enough to perplex the world's greatest theologians. If Jesus was himself God, then who was he praying to? Was Jesus always God or intermittently so? What was the relationship between Jesus' divine and human persons?

Jesus' disciples themselves had to wrestle with such questions about their master in real time, without the benefit of much reflection or hindsight. In fact, Jesus' famous final instructions to the disciples in Matthew's Gospel leaves them with a trinitarian mystery:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt 28:19-20).

With this explicit characterization of the Holy Trinity, Jesus is introducing the coming of a third person of God, the Holy Spirit, who will transition his disciples to a new age. Just as God the Father raised his chosen to reveal a new relationship with his son Jesus, Jesus now leads his followers to a new age led by the Holy Spirit. The character of this third person of God is revealed in the third and final portion of Scripture, the Acts of the Apostles and letters to the early churches.

The Trinity in the Acts of the Apostles and Letters to the Churches

Jesus was keenly aware of his earthly end, preparing his disciples to wait for the arrival of God's Spirit to guide and keep them after his departure.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you (Jn 14:16-17).

This Spirit of God that Jesus promises is alternatively referred to as helper, comforter and advocate, among many other attributes. The Apostles are ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ even from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. But they also were awaiting a broader arrival, a ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit,’ (Act 1:5) foretold in the Old Covenant where ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.’ (Acts 2:17).

This promised descent of the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost, the date the universal church points to as its date of origin. On this day, a mysterious power of the very nature of God comes to dwell within the Apostles and gathers believers who would come to form the early Christian church. On the day of Pentecost, those blocked from access to God the Father and God the Son—whether because of geography, language or tribe—would soon be reached by the indwelling Holy Spirit, transferred from believer to believer through the church. Dozens of passages refer to the Holy Spirit’s manifestation in the early church, one of the most notable being from Paul’s Letter to the Romans:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suf-

fer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rm 8:14-17).

The three-part revelation of God in history recorded in Holy Scripture is now complete. Where God the Father creates and directs his children, God the Son walks alongside and shows us the way, and God the Spirit dwells within and between believers as church. This progression was experienced by the chosen of God in historical time and is recorded in the three parts of Scripture.

But of course, as with all things of God, his interventions in the works of men are not once and done, but once and for always. The love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit was revealed over time to the faithful and has continued, from generation to generation, unto today. In this final section, we will explore in detail the practical implications for those who set their hearts and minds on learning to love like our triune God; as lavish as the Father, as harmonious as the Son and as intimate as the Holy Spirit.

The Practical Implications of the Trinity in a Life of Faith

We thank you, Father almighty, who did prepare for us the holy Church as a haven, a temple of holiness, where the name of the holy Trinity is glorified. Alleluia.

We thank you, Christ the King, who did grant us life through your life-giving and holy Body and Blood, grant us forgiveness and your great mercy. Alleluia.

We thank you, Spirit of Truth, who have renewed the holy Church. Keep her without blemish through the faith in the Trinity from henceforth for evermore. Alleluia.

**-Armenian Church Divine Liturgy,
Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Loving as the Father

Learning to love as the Father is learning to love lavishly. Without God's generous love there would be nothing. Like a fish is unaware of water having known nothing else, we take life for granted, forgetting that the reason there is anything and not nothing is because God the Father loved it all into existence. This was not necessary, but rather a gift. And looking at the gift of the created order, we can intuit many signs of the lavish character of God's heart, seemingly without reserve and without measure. God didn't make one star in the heavens to ornament the Earth, or even one thousand. Instead he made somewhere near one hundred billion. It seems very unlikely that this many stars exist to be functional. The best explanation is that God simply found joy in making them.

Zooming closer down to earth, we see similarly lavish aspects of creation. There are not nine,

nine hundred or nine thousand species of plants and animals, but nearly nine million. Zoom in further on one of those plant species; for example an oak tree. It produces roughly 10,000 acorns a year, far more than needed for reproduction, feeding squirrels, deer and even birds. Where the creations of men are most often efficient, the creation of God is magnificent.

Nowhere is this more clear than in God's creation of man. Like the rest of creation, men and women are lavish masterworks. As the Psalmist says, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. (Ps 139:14). The human brain has more neural connections than there are stars in the Milky Way, processes data at a speed of over 250 miles per hour and receives 11 millions bits of data per second from the body.

Humankind not only reflects its creator in magnificent engineering, but also in a boundless desire for the true, beautiful and good. And so the true geniuses of humankind—Bach, Shakespeare and Mother Teresa—are those who have mirrored the lavish beauty of God's creation, in sound, in word and in deed.

The lavish love of the Father is in full display in the Gospels and in the teachings of Jesus. His great stories and sayings, from the sermon on the mount to the Prodigal Son, manifest the heart of a recklessly loving Father who will let neither sin nor death come between him and his children. Jesus' greatest teachings are neither measured

nor prudent like those of Confucius or Aristotle, but again reflect the boundless love of the Father. “Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.” (Mt 5:44) “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.” (Mt 6:25) “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mt 16:24)

The love of the Father is unbounded and unconditional, a love that does not come naturally to fallen men. Human love nearly always comes with conditions. If this person serves me, then I will serve them. If this person loves me, I will love them. This transactional love is the way of the world, but falls short of the heavenly kingdom, and is the cause of much relational pain. It turns out that we are terribly impartial in judging ourselves on the quality of our love; overestimating the love we give and underestimating the love we receive.

Moreover, because love’s very nature is as gift, love ceases to be love whenever strings are attached. Whether the partnership be marital, corporate or fraternal, whenever partners begin keeping score, enmity follows close behind. This is because God has designed love to be different; not transactional, but transformational. We are to love our enemy, not because they deserve it, but because God sends rain on the just and the unjust and allows the sun to rise on the evil and the good. We are to be free from anxiety, not because life is not worrisome, but because even tiny birds

and little flowers live by God's care alone. We are to love, even in the face of hate, because this is what Jesus did for us on the cross.

This is not how the world loves, but it is how the Father loves, the first person of the Trinity. As we learn to love lavishly and without condition, we grow closer to the love of the Father. No one has captured this first hidden secret of trinitarian love better than St. Augustine who said, 'God you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.' The joyful work of our lifetimes is to learn to love God and others as lavishly as the Father loves the Son, each of us and the entire creation.

Loving as the Son

Learning to love as the Son is learning to love with inner harmony between self and others. In his life, Jesus resolved a tense riddle which has bewildered humankind from the beginning of time. How can we be fully formed individuals and part of a greater fellowship at one and the same time? Like no person before or since, Jesus of Nazareth was at once fully himself and fully in fellowship with his Father in heaven, revealing the harmony within the Trinity and the harmony Christians can find in following Him.

Jesus was such a fully defined, interesting and compelling individual that he remains the most depicted and talked about person of all time,

by far. His personality is so engaging that at first glance, his disciples drop their fishing nets and tax tables—their very livelihoods—to follow him. Jesus' personality is so bright and varied, that like the sun, it resists direct observation, and is best seen by its reflection on others. He gazes angrily at callus-hearted leaders (Mk 3:5), touches a leper (Lk 5:13) and speaks tenderly to a shy woman (Lk 8:48). Jesus weeps, comforts, rebukes, and threatens; he not only thunders but also sobs and sighs.

Time and again, attempts to move Jesus into being something or doing something other than he was, failed. Neither his followers, nor the Pharisees, nor even his family could hold back Jesus from being himself (Mt 12:46-50). In a word, Jesus had so much personality that it overflowed. John ends his Gospel with an exasperated disclaimer: 'But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.' (Jn 21:25)

Yet at the same time, the utterly unique person of Jesus Christ, was totally obedient to the will of his heavenly Father. 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me,' (Jn 6:38) says Jesus in the Gospel of John, just one of many pledges of allegiance to the will of his Father. Jesus' obedience to his Father not only characterizes his life, but seems to become stronger as he approaches death.

Preparing himself for the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane, the intimate marriage of Jesus'

fully realized self and his faithfulness to his Father is most poignantly on display: 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' (Mt 26:39) Jesus' death-defying intimacy with his Father crescendos in his cry from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt 27:46). Spared no agony of the human condition, Jesus does not hide his vulnerability and pain, but instead offers it up with abiding trust in his Father's love. In suffering with and for humanity, Jesus is at once fully himself and fully obedient to the greater fellowship and cause of the Triune God.

Jesus' perfectly harmonic integration of self and other stands in stark contrast to humankind's persistent record of disharmony, which plagues our interpersonal relationships as well as our communal ones. The current nearly fifty-percent divorce rate in modern western countries is just one representative example. Marriage is the ultimate test of being oneself and being part of something greater, and many raised in individualistic cultures seem ill equipped to pass this test. Where society teaches self-gratification and sufficiency, marriage forces us to stretch beyond ourselves. The best marriages have both at the same time: self-assurance and self-giving, leading and following, talking and listening. This dance of self and other does not come easily to most, yet tragically few turn to the master of harmonic integration, Jesus, for support.

If we did turn to the example of harmony be-

tween self and other that Jesus exemplifies within the Trinity and during his earthly life, we would surely become better spouses, family members and citizens; more fully ourselves and stronger in fellowship than we are on our own.

Loving as the Holy Spirit

Learning to love as the Holy Spirit is learning to love intimately and personally. The Holy Spirit does not love in a generalized lump, or by force, but personally and intimately, both within the Trinity, and within the life of the believer to fill and fulfill our greatest ends.

The template for this was demonstrated in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Many misunderstand this event to be a top-down action of God to unify and dissolve people and cultures into a Christian melting pot. Nothing could be further from the truth. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost did not result in cultural unification, of everyone speaking the same language. To the contrary, the Spirit increased the diversity and personalities of the Apostles by empowering them to speak of Christ in the mother tongues of all the tribes and cultures of God's created world.

This Spirit was carried forth to Armenia, where the Apostles and Holy Translators did not force Armenians to learn Greek or Hebrew, but instead let the Holy Scriptures be learned and spoken in Armenian, and then read in the new Armenian

script revealed for this purpose. What resulted, according to the earliest Armenian author Koriun, was not an erasure of culture, but a creation and transformation:

At that time our blessed and pleasant land of Armenia became truly wonderful, where at the hands of two associates, suddenly, Moses the teacher of the Law and Prophets, Paul with the Apostles and the world-sustaining Gospel of Christ, came to be found in the Armenian tongue; they became Armenian-speaking. What heart-warming joy existed there from that time on, and what a pleasant sight for the eyes of the beholder! (Koriun, The Life of Mash-tots, Section 11)

What is true for cultures and communities is also true for individuals. It seems to please God to work with individuals and cultures, as they are, and build them into something greater. This means that fellowship with God comes not by external means; but by his Spirit dwelling within, forming and transforming our unique personalities into suitable temples in which to dwell. This is a very personal experience, more personal than our closest relationships, since after all, God is so much person that he overflows from one to three. The Spirit knows us by name before we are born and even after we die, when, it is written, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us a new name 'which no one knows except him who receives it' (Rev 2:17).

Conclusion

I hope that this short exploration of the Trinity in our worship, sacraments and Scripture has helped uncover a mystery hidden in plain sight in our church tradition. Namely, that our three-person God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—reveals the depths of God’s love for his people over time, including you and me today. Yet even with everything we have said, the Trinity remains a mystery, and this is as it should be. For a mystery in the end is not merely something we can’t understand, but something that we seek endlessly to understand. And though we may never finally get the mystery, we often find that it gets us!

That is why it is of central importance to continue exploring the triune mystery of God’s love in our weekly worship, in our sacramental life and in the relationships forming the fabric of our daily lives. With a bit of courage and self-reflection, we can ‘audit’ these relationships to see how they reflect the love of the Trinity: the lavish love of the Father, the harmony of the Son and the intimacy of the Spirit. We might start with our families and expand out in larger circles to our fellow parishioners, colleagues and friends.

Do we love these people generously as God would, even when they seem unworthy of our love? Are we fully ourselves in these relationships, as well as serving a greater whole? Do we accept ourselves and others as we are, and allow God to form us from within by the Spirit of his

love? May we ask and re-ask these questions of God's mysterious triune love, and let our life be transformed by their answers, hanoon hor, yev vortvo yev hogvooyv srpoy, amen.



ԱՌԱՋՆՈՐԴՈՒԹԻՒՆ ՀԱՅՈՑ ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱՅԻ ԱՐԵՒԵԼԵԱՆ ԹԵՄԻ
DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA (EASTERN)

630 Second Avenue, New York, New York 10016
www.armenianchurch.us

www.vemkar.us