CHAPTER 1

Armenian liturgy: 
A source of spirituality

1. LITURGY

Liturgy\(^1\) is a corporate public act of the Christian community assem-
bled in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to
render thanks for the abundant gifts granted to it by the Holy Trinity
(Rev 22.9).

Liturgy is the faith–response of Christians to the magnificent revela-
tion and awe-inspiring omnipresence of transcendent God, who fas-
cinates the assembly with the holiness and immanence of his very
being interacted in our daily lives on personal and collective levels.

This liturgical encounter of God and his people is not optional and
peripheral but necessary and fundamental. It is an expression of

\(^1\) In this paper liturgy, worship and public worship are used interchangeably in accordance to
the genuine meaning of leitourgia.

“Another word that all of the ancient churches use for “worship” is liturgy (bashda-
moonk), a word that in Armenian and Greek implies effort. (The same Greek root is found
in the word “energy”). Worship in the Armenian Church is liturgical; it involves effort and
energy by the faithful.” (Findikyan, xvii).
acknowledgement and gratitude to the very fact that God reveals himself to us through his creation, by his inspired word of the Holy Bible, in the person of his Only-Begotten Son Jesus Christ and in the dynamic and graceful presence of the Holy Spirit.

In private prayer and public worship creatures meet their Creator and Savior through an authentic and natural longing of communication, as expressed in Psalm 42:1: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." Therefore, this response becomes the manifestation of personal and collective attraction to and attachment of God in the exposition of ritualistic richness.

Leitourgia derives from Greek ('people' and 'work'), and originally "was used of a public work of any kind, not only religious." (Cross, 830)

"[It is a] form of public worship, particularly the form of rite or service prescribed by the various Christian churches." (Columbia enc)

"Liturgy, or worship (and the form it takes), is the public, common action of a Christian community in which the church is both manifested and realized." (Lossky et al, 949)

Although I am not a liturgist, I believe that, by above-mentioned definitions, clergy are liturgists by vocation, because they do the work of God for and with the people of God, as servants of God supervising the public worship rendered to him.

Leitourgia indicates very clearly that Christian public worship and public service are essentially one. Through them expectation, encounter and response overflow to infiltrate all aspects of the community's life, and devotion to God extends into commitment to serve. Therefore, worshipping and serving community become one body (1Cor 12.12ff) as branches of a living tree (Jhn 15.1ff).

In worship the faithful primarily respond to God's grace, and thus liturgy becomes apprehended in the context of the saving intervention of Jesus Christ, not only as a commemorative reality but as a liv-
2. Liturgical theology

ing and transforming presence, (Jones et al, Liturgy, 17) of which celebration of the Holy Eucharist is a concrete indication.

Our knowledge of God is manifested through various festive and aesthetic liturgical activities and gestures, e.g. adoration, devotion, gratitude, honor, joining hands, kneeling, ornaments, piety, praise, prayer, prostration, raising hands, reverence, service, singing, symbols, thanksgiving.

In liturgy we confess the greatness of God and adhere to the instruction of worshipping and serving him only (Exd 20.1-3; Jsh 24.14-15) with our whole being (Dtr 6.5; Luc 10.27; Rom 12.1) and guided by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.26; Phi13.3). Thus, through worship we meet God and enter into union with Him (Jhn 12.26).

This paper will reflect on the corporate acts of ritual reflecting the social, public, common and organic character of worship and enabling the Christian Church to realize itself as a community in communion with God “in spirit and truth” (Jhn 4.23).

2. Liturgical theology

Liturgical theology cannot have a clear-cut definition, because everything related to liturgy is part of our theology. John Meyendorff generalizes this point of inter-relatedness for the entire theological discipline, by asserting: “...the Orthodox doctrines of man and of the Church cannot be compartmentalized in neatly separate sections of theological science—“theology,” “anthropology,” “ecclesiology”—but are simply meaningless if approached separately. Only together do they reflect the true “mind of Christ” of which St. Paul wrote, the “true gnosis” defended by St Irenaeus, and the authentic experience of God, called for by the Fathers of later centuries.” (Zizioulas, 11)

In the understanding of the Armenian Church, lex orandi, lex credendi (the rule of prayer as the rule of faith) is the key for elaboration on liturgical theology. Prayer and faith go hand in hand, they comple-
ment each other and they make the Church into the gathering
together of the faithful, the fellowship, the communion, the koino-
nia, the missionary entity.\footnote{2}

Our faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ is expressed in our lit-
urgy, which is the very expression of our theology \textit{in doing}, in com-
municating with God and interacting with human beings. In
Orthodox theology, dogma and communion are in total agreement
and mutually enrich each other by the indispensable and active
presence of the Holy Spirit in shaping the Church as the body of
Christ.

Our Church teaches that \textit{orthodoxy} (right teaching, right doctrine)
and \textit{orthopraxis} (right actions, right practice) are interwoven. In the
ordination of a priest in the Armenian Church this is highlighted by
the following instruction, right after the candidate proclaims the
orthodoxy of his faith through the creed:

\begin{quote}
This is the profession of our orthodox faith, which all Christians
should have in their minds and preserve on their lips, because
“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in
your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”
(Rom 10.9, NIV). This is the foundation on which we should build
our good deeds, because this staircase of faith leads us step by step
—by mind, by soul and by body—to heaven, to God. Which means
that as long as we are alive we descend to God by mind and by
faith; after our death we ascend to God by soul and good deeds,
and after our resurrection we ascend to God by body and soul.
The bishop is obliged to demand this profession of faith from the
candidate he is about to ordain, because the Holy Spirit God,
bestower of graces, rests on those holy tables, those anointed-ones
and those who profess orthodoxy and who can select the good from
the bad.
Then, the bishop makes the sign of the cross on the head of the can-
didate, praying:

“Lord God, who is able to strengthen and confirm you in this
faith, let him keep and reinforce [you] by his blessings. Let him
beautify your mind and senses, heart and thoughts, words and
deeds, entrance and exit with the radiance of his graces, under

\end{quote}

\footnote{2 For the incorporation of the \textit{lex orandi}, the \textit{lex credendi} and the \textit{lex agendi}, see Lathrop, 7.}
3. The calendar of the Armenian Church

The liturgical life of the Armenian Church evolves around the religious calendar, which facilitates the understanding of the ordo of worship in various ceremonies and rituals referred below.

The Armenian Church has developed a calendar-system based on the weekly cycle, which includes three types of days:

- Dominical feasts;
- Saints' feasts;
- Fast days.

All these days are movable except for six:

- Theophany and Nativity (January 6);
- The Presentation of the Lord to the Temple (February 14);
- The Annunciation (April 7);
- The Birth of the Theotokos (September 8);
- The Presentation of Theotokos (November 21);
- The Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary by St Anne (December 9).

The liturgical year of the Armenian Orthodox Church is divided into eight great periods or seasons, namely:
Armenian liturgy: A source of spirituality

• Theophany and Nativity;
• Lent;
• Easter;
• Pentecost;
• Transfiguration;
• Assumption;
• Exaltation of the Holy Cross
• Advent

3.1 Ceremonies and rituals

In the Armenian Church the faithful worship and serve God through the following ceremonies and rituals:

Daily divine office

The Armenian Church has seven daily prayer hours as a reflection of the exhortation of Pss 119.164: “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances.”

The seven daily prayer hours are:

1) Night hour (vigils, nocturns), addressed to God the Father;
2) Morning hour (matins), addressed to the Son of God who appeared to the women at the Tomb;
3) Sunrise hour (prime), addressed to the Holy Spirit and in commemoration of the appearance of the risen Christ to the Disciples;
4) Midday hour (sext), addressed to God the Father and in commemoration of the passion and crucifixion of the Son of God;
5) Evening hour (vespers), addressed to the Son of God who descended from the Cross, was wrapped in linens and placed in the tomb;
3. The calendar of the Armenian Church

6) Peace hour, addressed to the Holy Spirit and also to the Logos who was put in the tomb, descended to the hell and granted peace to the souls;

7) Rest hour (compline), addressed to God the Father to keep us under the protection of the right hand of his Only-Begotten in this gloomy night.

These daily Divine Offices were originally designed for monastic settings and presently are held alternatively in the Armenian monasteries and some parishes, and are offered in the nave of the Church.

3.2 Ecclesiastical feasts

All Sundays are dedicated to our Lord Jesus Christ and are called dominical days. On the Lord’s Day we affirm our identity as the people of God, belonging to him and worshipping him, because he is our God and has been gracious toward us.

Every Sunday, during the Morning hour, resurrection Gospel narratives are read and all the hymns are dedicated to the resurrection of our Savior. Celebrations of saints’ days are prohibited on Sundays.

Ecclesiastical feasts are of two types:

A) Dominical days:

These are days on which events of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ are celebrated. In addition days appointed in honor of the Holy Cross, the Church, Theotokos and Pentecost are considered Dominical.

There are about 140 Dominical days in the Church year celebrated either on Sunday or other days of the week except on Wednesdays and Fridays, e.g. Theophany and Nativity is celebrated on January 6; Ascension is celebrated on a Thursday, forty days following Easter.

B) Saints feasts.
These days are designated for the commemoration of saints, who have been recognized by the universal Church and Armenian Church as being pre-eminent for their holy life in piety and virtue or have given their life in martyrdom as witness to their Christian faith and God’s Kingdom.

Some 128 days in the year are dedicated to the commemoration of saints. These are not fixed dates, because saints may be commemorated only on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. If a Dominical day falls on any of these days, then the commemoration of the saint will be shifted to some other day. Saints may not be commemorated on any of the five days, Monday to Friday, of a week of liturgical fasting.

Wednesdays and Fridays are fast days. The spirit of the office during these two days of a week is penitential. Wednesdays are dedicated to the Annunciation and Incarnation, Fridays to the Crucifixion.

In addition, there are six dietetic fasting weeks and the period of forty days of fasting of the Great Lent. Great Lent is a season of intense prayer, fasting, penance, meditation and self-examination.

There are about 150 days in a year put aside for fasting.

### 3.3 Sacraments

The sacramental reality of the Church is expressed in the encounter of elements and words, mystery and grace, and sign, significance and faith as stated by Luther. (Lathrop, 165) Thus, sacraments point beyond their literal meanings while not being able to expose and interpret them entirely. (Schmemann, 109)

The Armenian Orthodox Church has seven sacraments:
3. The calendar of the Armenian Church

1) Baptism;
2) Confirmation;
3) Penance;
4) Holy Eucharist and Communion;
5) Holy Matrimony;
6) Ordination;
7) Order of the Sick and Last Anointing.

According to St. Krikor Datevatsi:

- Baptism is the sacrament of faith, because we believe and get baptized.
- Confirmation is the sacrament of hope, because we place our hope in the Holy Spirit in order to be able to resist Satan, our enemy.
- Penance is the sacrament of justice, because we are justified of our sins through confession and repentance.
- Holy Eucharist and Communion is the sacrament of love, because in love we get united with our head, Christ, as a member of his body.
- Ordination is the sacrament of wisdom and knowledge, because the ordained person is called to administer the sacraments and to admonish the faithful wisely and knowledgeably.
- The order of the sick and last anointing is the fulfillment of our earthly victory with justice, because we cleanse ourselves from the destruction of the sin in this world and get ready to inherit the eternal life.

3.4 The Holy Eucharist

Every Sunday and on other designated Dominical days, the Armenian faithful gather in churches to offer the Holy Eucharist. On very special occasions it is permitted to celebrate the Holy Eucharist outdoors, where an altar is erected and a consecrated rock-stone (vem-kar) is placed, on which the chalice rests during the consecration of the hosts.
The Holy Eucharist is the liturgical high point in the Armenian Church, underlining the Christological character of worship. It is directly related to the events of the salvation history, because Christ gives his life for human beings and brings them to partake of that life by his sacrificial death and offering of his body and blood. This event does not pertain to the past only but becomes a life-generating experience in the present as the foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven (Heb 12.28). William R. Crockett (231) defines this reality by the following statement:

The eucharist is neither a repetition of the sacrifice of the cross, nor simply a mental recollection of an event that took place 2,000 years ago. Through the eucharistic memorial, the sacrifice of the cross is made sacramentally present in order that we may participate in its redemptive reality in the present.

This eschatological hope directs the faithful to have unconditional faith and full trust in Christ and to offer their gifts as a symbolic response and sacrifice to the self-offering of God. The Armenian literally translation of Holy Eucharist is Holy Sacrifice (Sourp Badarak). Through grace—the transforming power of the Holy Spirit—we enjoy the heavenly reality in our earthly surroundings and limitations, take part in the communal worship and become part of the community of faith. Hence, in the presence of Christ Holy Eucharist embraces the whole creation and becomes the sacrament of love, thanksgiving, communion, unity and service.

Henry Hill (20) assesses the Armenian Holy Eucharist with these words:

Armenian beliefs are richly embodied in the Holy Liturgy which opens with the words, "O mystery deep, inscrutable, without beginning ... through the passion of thine holy only-begotten all creation hath been made immortal." Armenian worship takes place within its distinctive conical-topped churches, with the square altar mounted on a high stage or bema. The celebrant, wearing impressive and colourful vestments, is assisted by deacons with censers, acolytes, and singers. The congregation participate in the liturgy fully, sometimes lifting their hands, sometimes bowing low in reverence.
3.5 Occasional Liturgical Pious Customs

In the Book of Rituals of the Armenian Church there are liturgical services devised for special occasions and reflect the piety of the faithful. Here is a partial list of these services:

- The blessing of the newborn before baptism;
- The canon of burial;
- The requiem service at the gravesite;
- The service of blessing a home;
- The service of tonsure of adolescents;
- Prayer for the sick;
- The order of confession;
- The blessing of the harvest.

3.6 Other devotions

Devotions include personal and family prayers, Sunday school and Christian education courses, morning prayers in the Armenian schools, home prayer groups and many other expressions of liturgy that are not direct part of the ritual of the Armenian Church and do not take place in the churches but are in line with the Church’s teachings.

4. Characteristics of the Armenian liturgy

The liturgy of the Armenian Church has ingredients common to all Christians in general and the Orthodox Churches in particular⁴, of which some basic elements are at the heart of the Church’s life and need a brief elaboration:

⁴ “In the history of the Armenian liturgy one can distinguish five significant influences, coming from Syria, Cappadocia, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and the Latin West.” (Barsamian, 1).
4.1 Liturgy, theology and doctrine

Theological statements and doctrinal positions of the Armenian Church are based on the teachings of the three Ecumenical Councils of the Universal Church (Nicaea, 325; Constantinople, 381; Ephesus, 431) and were elaborated on the common ground of those initial definitions.

The liturgical variety and richness of the Armenian Church is founded on its theological and doctrinal clarity. This interconnection of liturgy and dogma is reflected in the creeds and confessions of faith recited during Church services, orienting the faithful toward God. It is interesting to note that the celebrant proclaims his Orthodox faith at the beginning of the morning service, after denouncing Satan and before publicly confessing his sins. In the context of worship, theological reflection becomes a constant reminder of the dynamic participation and the moving experience of being enriched by the Orthodox faith. Paul Meyendorff (Zizioulas, 696) rightly notes: “But Eastern worship, just as Western, expresses the faith, culture and spirituality of a given ecclesial body, its understanding of orders, its approach to tradition.”

In his first encyclical, Catholicos St Nerses Shnorhali (c.1102-1173) addresses the Armenian nation underlining faith as the prerequisite for Christian worship and service, by saying:

Now the head is primary and most honored among members of the body because of its elevated position and the existence of the senses in it, and it is succeeded by the other members one by one. In the same way among the faculties of the soul the greatest and primary is the truth of faith which brings forth great and small works of righteousness according to God’s commandments. For this reason, first of all, we emphatically place faith before you as the primary good. We are not writing anything new but are making a summary based on the writings of the apostles, prophets and holy fathers. We do this that you may not stray from the truth into the ignorance of the unlearned by listening to words which are not in keeping with the confession of the orthodox church, but which are outside the Holy Scriptures and lead to the destruction of the hearer. You should know in whom you believed on the day of baptism, as Paul
4. Characteristics of the Armenian liturgy

says, ‘I know in whom I have believed’ (II Tim 1.12). It is indeed worthy to hold the confession of faith of the orthodox Christian, in which we begin in simple and plain words to show the truth of our faith. (18–19)

Furthermore, he says:

The confession of the true faith is the foundation of the divine temple which is in us. (10)

and elaborates practical instructions, such as this one on ‘Faith and Works’:

The expression of faith is one, but it has two forces. The first is the faith of confession of the Holy Trinity that each person received from the baptismal font. The second is the faith, which is the word that the Holy Spirit spoke through the mouths of the prophets, the apostles and the doctors of the church, who wrote the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures should not be considered fables or falsehoods, but should be believed as the true and correct account of all that was, will be, and is, as if one saw with one’s own eyes. (22-23)

Here, I would like to underline the Trinitarian aspect of liturgy. We believe in God as united Holy Trinity and three persons at the same time, as we sing in the hymn of Sunrise hour: “Holy Trinity, three persons and one nature, confessed forever.” (Book of hours, 373) 5

The very substance of God as communal love is manifested in the Holy Trinity and makes our liturgy a communal reality. This does not only gather worshippers as the community but also bestows on them the grace of coming closer to God, the Father, through the communal interaction of the Holy Trinity where Christology and pneumatology become essential.6 7

5 Zizioulas (chapter I, ‘Personhood and Being.’) deals with the whole issue of Trinity, specifically in relation to the ongoing Christological deliberations on nature, person, substance, hypostasis, ousia.

6 “But patristic theology insisted from its origins on something very significant: man can approach God only through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.” (Zizioulas, 19, 40-41).
In this context, the Christocentric and pneumatological character of the liturgy needs to be highlighted:

Christ is the center of our liturgy, being the one who invites us all to genuine worship, thus creating the inclusive fellowship of the church based on the divine love generated in the assembly. This divine love is inter-connected also with the communal aspect of the Holy Trinity.

Christ, the Lord of our lives, wills our redemption from sins and our enjoyment of the eternal life in the fullness of his Kingdom. Christ is the Savior who through his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection brings us to this incarnational reality on earth and eschatological reality in heaven. Only from this perspective we can grasp the full meaning of the centrality of the resurrection of Christ in the teachings and liturgy of our Church.

The dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit leads us in worship and brings our worshipping experience out of the “church” sustaining our witness and mission beyond our enclosed inner-circles of Christian community.

Pneumatology is inseparably connected with Christology and ecclesiology because the Holy Spirit becomes an active presence in all stages of the Christ-event (e.g. (Mat 1.18-20; 4.1), and maintains the church—the mystical body of Christ, the community of the believers in Christ—by its gracious presence. Thus, in the power of the Holy Spirit the communion of the Holy Trinity becomes the model of the communion of the believers in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, transforming the church into a covenantal, relational and ethical reality.

7 “God as Father, that is, as he who “begets” the Son and “brings forth” the Spirit.”
“...Trinity not because the divine nature is ecstatic but because the Father as a person freely wills this communion.” (Zizioulas, 44).
4. Characteristics of the Armenian liturgy

4.2 Liturgy and ecclesiology

The liturgical theology of the early church reverberated in the assembly of the believers, where “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (AAp 2.42, NIV).

This ecclesiological reality as a communal reality is inter-connected with Christology, Pneumatology and eschatology, where the church is identified with Christ's messianic ministry of preaching, dying and rising, the pentecostal experience of the upper room, and the second coming of the Messiah.8

Pneumatological aspect of ecclesiology can be summed up by the words of Zizioulas (132), that

The Spirit is not something that “animates” a Church which already somehow exists. The Spirit makes the Church be. Pneumatology does not refer to the wellbeing but to the very being of the Church. It is not about a dynamism which is added to the essence of the Church. It is the very essence of the Church. The Church is constituted in and through eschatology and communion. Pneumatology is an ontological category in ecclesiology.

Therefore, authentic calling and active witness of the church is conditioned by the charismatic presence of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the institutional and constitutional qualities of the church are brought together in Christ and in the Spirit. (Zizioulas, 140)

In an Armenian context, ecclesiology acquires a martyrlogical dimension as well. In the 5th century, when Armenians were defending their Christian faith against the Persians in the Battle of

8. “‘Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.’ The center of the Christian kerygma is this, that the Messiah has come. …Judaistic time is eschatological in the sense that it is still directed toward the coming of the Messiah and the messianic Kingdom. In Christian time the Messiah has already come, is already revealed, the Kingdom of Yahweh is at hand.” (Schmemann, 71.)
Avarayr, the chronicler poignantly described the martyrdom of the Christian soldiers by saying, “Each soldier who gave his life for the faith was a church in the very essence.”

4.3 Liturgy and Christian spirituality

Words, music, symbols, and movements of the worship are tools for Christian formation and discipleship. For Armenians liturgical services and spiritual formation begins in the family and extends to the church where we are incorporated into a caring and nurturing community of faith, where prayer occupies central place. Its exemplary developments of Christian life and witness molded a unique Christian–Armenian identity with particular religio-national characteristics.

The Dictionary of the ecumenical movement (Lossky et al, 949), defines Christian spirituality as the: “integrated and integrative dimension of the life and faith.” William A. Barry (8) develops this integration and characterizes Christian spirituality as:

help by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.

The relational dimension of Christian life and the communicative character of Christian spirituality address the question of God’s presence in our personal and collective lives; that is in liturgy.

Through spirituality we come to excellent and exceptional ways of experiencing God’s penetration in our lives. We respond to these by expressing our feelings in prayer as we define God and our needs. When we incorporate these experiences with corresponding biblical teachings, we receive the image and likeness of God, the Father (Gen 1.26), grow into becoming new creatures in Christ (2Cor 5.17) and

* All biblical quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.
walk according to the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.1, KJV). This is what could be called our ‘new birth’ experience, which makes us spiritual beings (Jhn 3.3–8), longing for the ever–presence of God (Pss 62.1) and finding our comfort in him (Mat 11.28-30).

We embark on this spiritual journey by our faith in God and by the reception of the abundant grace of the Creator (Eph 1.7), by redemption from sins through the sacrificial death of our Savior (Rom 3.22-26) and by the sustenance in the Pentecostal constant renewal of the Holy Spirit (AAp 1.7-8). The Trinitarian (with Theos), Christological (through the Logos) and Pneumatological (in the Holy Spirit) aspects of Christian spirituality put us in permanent and growing contact with the Holy Trinity and adorn us for witness and mission. Thus, spirituality acquires a communal dimension and is fulfilled in the fellowship (koinonia, communio sanctorum) of the church, expressed in the regular gathering of the believers. Only in this context may a human person become a unique and particular being, affirm his/her identity as a relational entity in communion with believers and in co-existence with the society at large. The dynamic interaction of the Trinitarian and communal realities is manifested in the faith we have in God and in the love we demonstrate to our neighbors (1 Jhn 4.7) and in the way we treat the natural environment.

The reward of this Christian spiritual pilgrimage is our ultimate union with Christ, which links incarnation and salvation to theosis (2Pet 1.4) as we sing in the Armenian Church, “[God], your mercy and truth, and the brightness of your face will lead us to justice.” (Sarakam, 213–214)

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10. “The fellowship or communion that characterizes the Christian church is created by “sharing” in Christ and His benefits. It means “sharing” in God’s grace (Phil 1:7), the gospel (1 Cor 9:23), the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1), and the Eucharistic body and blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17).” (Tyson, 31).

11. Self-identification of a Christian is matured in the I–you dialogical relation, which we experience in the genuine milieu of fellowship in the church.
4.4 Liturgy and diakonia

In liturgy the Armenian faithful are called to serve, to spread out the Gospel and to reach out to the needs of their community. Henry Hill (22) sums up this aspect of worship by stating:

At the heart of every Armenian community is the parish church and centre: the focus not only for rites of passage and spiritual sustenance but of social life as well. The Armenian people, whether in the homeland or in the diaspora, are held together as a family by their participation in the activities of the local Church.

Faith and love expressed in prayer and diakonia are translated into a participatory reality of liturgy and social service in the church. The Orthodox Church teaches that sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are clear manifestations of our becoming an ecclesial and eucharistic community, not only by meeting God and gathering together, but also being cleansed of sins, and sharing whatever we possess in an authentic spirit of Christian solidarity.

Geoffrey Wainwright (Jones, Spirituality, 592) draws a parallel between prayer, diakonia and spiritual formation when he refers to “the combination of praying and living.”

By praying and accepting Christ’s call of discipleship (Mat 9.9), we become his followers. We obey his will to accomplish his mission (Rom 8.28) and to live a life of service for the glory of his name (1Pet 4.19) and the edification of his church (1Cor 14.12).

According to the Church fathers, prayer is beneficial for our spiritual formation, Christian maturity and fellowship with believers. By prayer we dispel Satan, our common enemy (Ephrem the Syrian), we draw God’s attention to us (Hovhan Mantagouni), we live in proper conduct (Augustine), and we offer ourselves as holy and living eucharist to God (Yeznig Goghpatsi).

Prayer draws us to the cross of Jesus Christ, the supreme manifestation of Christian love, where we see the embodiment of the vertical beam of love for God and the horizontal beam of love for one’s
neighbor, joined together in the exhortation of our Savior to love God and to love our neighbor (Mat 22.37-40). Here, love of God and love of neighbor have come together to assure that our prayer and our diakonia go hand in hand and complement each other, as expressed in the saying ‘laborare est orare’ (to work is to pray).

Diakonia is accentuated by the self–giving love of the believer in following Jesus (Jhn 12.26) and in becoming the servant of all (Mar 9.35). Only this kind of genuine diakonia can make the church a missionary reality in creating a healthy and caring inclusive community as a committed response to the commission of preaching the Good News to all nations (Mat 28.19). And only this sacrificial service can be extended to the point of martyria, where the witness testifies for Christ with the baptism of his/her blood.

Prayer makes diakonia possible, because through it we create an intimate room in our hearts by living out our belonging to God and to one another, and drawing to the center, to our Creator. Christian love generates the intuitive relationship between God, human beings and our natural environment, enabling us to respond to the needs of each other and of the universe in a genuine spirit of diakonia and to re–offer the creation to God in prayer.12

4.5 Liturgy and eschatology: Fulfillment of the Kingdom

In the church, time is conceived in the urgency of the coming of the reign of God as a “present” and “not yet” reality. Alexander Schmemann rightfully elaborates this point, when he writes (180-181),

The early Christian theology of the eschaton did not destroy, did not empty time, or abolish its significance, but transformed it into the “time of the Church,” into the time of salvation. Within the Church time becomes a progressive movement toward the fullness of the Kingdom of Christ, toward his cosmic and historical triumph.

12 One of the high points in the Holy Eucharist of the Armenian Church is the offering of the gifts of bread and wine to God with the following prayer: “And we offer to you yours of your own from all and for all.”
Only this understanding can give specific significance to the celebration of Easter as the endowment of church’s time focused on the theology of resurrection of Christ and the granting of eternal and abundant life of timeless time to us. (Schmemann, 218)  

Zizioulas (180) links Pneumatology with eschatology and the whole notion of historicity.

4.6 Royal priesthood: Ordained and lay

The Priest of the assembly is Christ himself who as the good shepherd (Jhn 10.14-18) cares for the souls brought up to God in the worship of the church.

In liturgy the church becomes an inclusive community, a *koinonia*, with no artificial separation of ordained and lay classifications for the service of the one ministry of Christ. When Christ is the head of the church then all of us are the members of his body endowed with diverse gifts and entrusted with specific functions to exercise various forms of ministry (I Cor 12.27).

Therefore, it is the distribution of various gifts by the Holy Spirit that counts and not the authority or ordination (Eph 4.7). This statement becomes relevant in the competent awareness of the royal priesthood of all believers (Zizioulas, 153), where leadership roles need to be structured by specified communal co–responsibilities and charisma for the fulfillment of the ministries of the assembly through the service of graceful individuals.

13. See especially chapters two and four.
14. “The word “laos” derives from the name given to the men who built roads in ancient Greece. Early Christians adapted it to signify those who create a new way. Christians are the people of God who prepare the way for God’s reign.” (Yohn, 16–18).
15. Recently, during a Beirut-Rome-Beirut flight, I read the following in the Middle East Airlines in-flight magazine, “Good teams become great ones when the members trust each other enough to surrender the ‘me’ for the ‘we’” (Phil Jackson). How much more this could be true for the faith community anchored on Christ!
How this royal priesthood is actualized in the church?

a. Through teaching. The education of the faithful is a life-long ministry in the church. In the Armenian Church we are in dire need of appropriate teaching programs for young adults and adults, because a general assumption is that a well-grounded family education and Sunday School formation is sufficient for a lifetime commitment to Christ. A revision of the teaching ministry of the church is necessary for the continuous maturity of all believers.

b. Through the sacraments. The sacraments of the church not only are symbolic, mystic and metaphorical realities, but they are also excellent tools for Christian education. Teaching is embodied in the ordo of the liturgy.\footnote{Gordon W. Lathrop (60), for example, reserves a whole section on ‘The Ordo of Teaching and Bath,’ where he confirms, “The bath, which may be metaphorically called ‘new birth’ or ‘dying and rising with Christ’ or ‘crossing the Red Sea’, can never be earned nor given as a kind of graduation. It stands in tension with learning, is greater than the teaching; the bath itself teaches.”}.

c. Through liturgical formation. By liturgical formation I mean the actual development of the faithful in doing liturgy (Talley, 8). Here Lathrop (119-127) helps us to indicate that the catechumenal ministry of the church must be reinstated, because all of us are continually in need of liturgical formation.

Wendy Fletcher-Marsh (16) highlights the incarnational aspect of this developmental experience referring to our ongoing discipleship and the incarnational nature of the Christian story.

Liturgy is not a spectacle but a corporate act to be accomplished in a particular community whose members are in active process of formation, and where intellectual and spiritual barriers are demolished and bridges of participation are built by and for all worshippers. This kind of liturgical formation creates an ideal atmosphere of communal prayer in the guiding presence of God. This very reality is
expressed by the hymn of the Armenian Church, when we chant at
the kiss of peace during the Eucharist (Findikyan, 27):

Christ in our midst has been revealed;
He Who Is, God, is here seated.
The voice of peace has resounded;
Holy greeting is commanded.
This church has now become one soul,
The kiss is given for a full bond.”

Eschatologically expressed royal priesthood as total ministry indi-
cates that the church is

not a system as the word is traditionally used. It is the acceptance of
an inspiration, and Jesus Christ is the Good News at its center.
Around that center a community orbits and moves further into
God’s outer space—God’s future, where Christ is all and in all, that
dimension of life and ministry into which God’s Spirit would lead
us. For as many theologians have noted, God is the God of the
future far more than of the past.” (Zabriskie, 2)

The established ordo of liturgy—Scriptural passages, prayers, music,
symbols, vestments, movements, fellowship and many other ele-
ments—creates the perfect atmosphere for the worshipping Church,
which gathers under the leadership of the clergy. As consecrated
ministers of the Church, the clergy administer the sacraments. God
is the source of grace, and priests are only his servants and channels
of communication between him and human beings.

Liturgy acquires pastoral implications in the sense that it becomes
the reflection of our theology in bonding the entire church to pro-
claim its belief. In worship the edification of the church is realized by
the calling of the laity and clergy to perform their roles and to com-
mit their dependence on God and on each other as a relational real-
ity. Thus, worship acquires Trinitarian and missionary character, and
becomes a service to God and to the world linking liturgy and life,
witness and mission, relied upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit
for authentic communal prayer.
4.7 The missionary dimension of the liturgy

The church has a missionary calling to reach out to the end of the world manifested in its liturgical life, where ordained and lay worshippers acknowledge the demands of the mission of the church as their missionary requisites for the society at large. The church is a relational reality also in the sense that it has to serve the sustainability of all creation. The stewardship of the creation is conditioned by this missionary vocation, when the Holy Spirit empowers these men and women to live out the will of God and engage in the faithful protection of the cosmos (Zizioulas, 164). Following Jas 2.1–5, Zizioulas (220-221) adds baptismal, eucharistic and eschatological dimensions to this relational nature of the church.

In Greek the word liturgy means service in the authentic sense of Jesus’ testimony, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mat 20.28). The missionary dimension of the liturgy goes beyond the liturgical texts and gestures, and resonates as God-relatedness in the compassionate solidarity of the church with the needy, the marginalized, “the outsiders, the uninvited, the godless.”(Lathrop, 119, 108) It is fully grasped in the inviting words of God (cf. Mat 25.34f) after fulfilling the commandments of loving God and loving one’s neighbor (cf. Mat 22.37-40).

4.8 The ecumenical dimension of the liturgy

Liturgy should facilitate the ongoing progress towards the ecclesial unity of the Church in “one Lord, one faith and one baptism” (Eph 4.5). This could be achieved if we acknowledge the interdependence of various churches in their service to the same God and their commissioning in the field of missio Dei. Then, ecumenism becomes an indispensable dialogue of mutual love, understanding, respect and confidence expressed in common witness and service, where the identity of the churches is preserved, the common good of all is promoted, and confessional pluralism is eliminated. Genuine ecumen-
Armenian liturgy: A source of spirituality

ism is expressed when churches cross out denominational lines and learn to enter into the lives of each other.

Lathrop (9) writes, “Liturgical theology asserts that the assembly itself is the concrete form of the communion between Christian voices,” and Zizioulas (117, 154) adds the truth perspective to ecumenism by asserting that the unity of the Church is achieved in dogmatic orthodoxy and eucharistic communion.

Here, the whole issue of “one” and “many” enters the scene and becomes summed up in the words of Apostle Paul,

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (1Cor 10.16–17).18

The ecumenical movement enables the churches to come closer to each other and pursue the visible unity of the one, catholic, apostolic and holy Church. According to Patriarch Malachia Ormanian (223-224) worship plays a pivotal role in this respect, because:

The purpose of ritual is to cultivate the hearts [of the faithful] in an orderly and effectual manner to praise God, ignite their emotions and intensify their services.

And he goes on (142), in spite of some exaggeration:

From the perspective of worship, Church unity lies in the fundamental and basic tenets that the Church inherited from the apostolic times. It is understandable that changes occur due to local requirements, but the basics should remain unchanged. Among all the churches, the Armenian Church is the most loyal follower of the oldest [order of worship] and rejecter of modernism. In this respect the Armenian Church is incomparable to other churches. Therefore,

17. “There is no ministry which does not need the other ministries; no ministry possesses the fullness, the plentitude of grace and power without a relationship with the other ministries” (Zizioulas, 139).

18. Also Zizioulas, 149; 144-145; 159.
4. Characteristics of the Armenian liturgy

the rituals, ceremonies and moral laws of the Armenian Church have rightfully been considered models for original orders.

4.9 Worshipper as witness

The Greek word for ‘witness’ is martyros. Martyrs are saints who have sacrificed their lives to bear witness to their Christian faith. The Armenian worshipper is not a spectator but a witness to and participator in the salvation history as well as an active participant in offering himself or herself to God, always remembering that the witness/martyr par excellence remains Jesus Christ. In the words of Aidan Kavanagh (15):

By grace, faith, and sacrament, the Church is the fullness of him who is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. If the incarnation of the Logos was God enhumaned, the Church is God in Christ enworlded.

4.10 Liturgical inculturation

To a considerable extent the Armenian Church has been and continues to be the generator and promoter of the Armenian culture. The Armenian Church and Armenian nation are identified as a single united entity through Armenian culture. It is very hard to draw a line of demarcation between the sacred and secular culture, history, art etc. Being Armenian—Armenianess as a Christian and national identity—is intertwined with Armenian culture. The national character of the Armenian Church is the concrete manifestation of the incarnation of the nation and national values in the church.

A lucid example of inculturation could be cited from the beginning of the 5th century, when St. Mesrob Mashdots invented the Armenian Alphabet with a peculiar longing to translate the Bible into Armenian in order to inculturate the divine message in the life of the Armenian faithful. The contemporary historian, Goriun, witnessed the penetration of Armenian Christianity in the lives of the believers and recorded, “God spoke in Armenian!” This is not a sentimental exaggeration but a testimony of an impressive inculturation.
This process of inculturation makes the Armenian Church a living reality, because Armenian history is a source of progressive motivation in conformity with Armenian Christian values, and adaptation, acculturation and inculturation are integrated in the annals of Armenian history and contemporary challenges faced by Armenians worldwide.

On a larger scope, all believers live in a cultural milieu and are under the influence of dynamic multi-cultural interactions. The whole issue of church and culture, Bible and cultural identity has occupied the social sciences for a long time, and this debate is still relevant and has a diological dimension. One reality is crystal clear: Inculturation is not a choice but a must for the church, and it is vividly expressed in the liturgy of the church, which is also the creative cultural act of the assembly. Thus, inculturation has an incarnational dimension in the sense that God has become the "Immanuel" (Mat 1.23).

The Christian faith is manifested in a particular cultural context and is called to promote the spiritual values of that society, embodying the witness to the Gospel in the culture. Inculturation is called to synthesize the Good News and the human culture especially in this age of secularism when the sense and presence of the holy and divine are eluded.

In tackling the issues of language and culture we should be reminded that we are addressing not only the language of spoken words but also the revision of the whole ritual of the church-music, vestments, gestures, arts, etc. Finally, we should note that the imperative lies not in understanding all these ritualistic richness but in contemplating on their profound meaning.

How do we face the challenges of contemporary times by making the Armenian Church more relevant to those faithful who find themselves alienated from it?
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