

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE CANONICAL HOURS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

By Archbishop Tiran

There are seven daily offices or hours in the Armenian Church. These hours were appointed in the course of early centuries and it is not our purpose to go into the history of the development of the system. The following are these seven hours.

1. The Night Service which can be compared to the Latin Nocturne, and in Armenian it is called Gisherayin Zham. The Night Service takes place before dawn.
2. The Morning Service which can be compared to the Latin Matins. In Armenian - Kravotian Zham, which is said at dawn.
3. The Sunrise Service which has no equivalent in the Latin Church. Arevagali Zham - it is performed at sunrise.
4. The Midday Service which can be compared to the Greek service called Typica. It is called the Jashou Zham and as the name indicates it is performed at Kiddy.
5. The Evening Service which corresponds to the Latin Vespers - Yerecoyan Zham - and is performed in the afternoon around 3 p.m., or perhaps a little later.
6. The Peace Service which has no equivalent in the Western Church and is called in Armenian - Khaghaghacan Zham. The Peace Service takes place at sundown.
7. The Rest Service which can be compared to the Latin Compline. In Armenian it is called Hangstian Zham and takes place before retiring.

The number seven is a mystical number and symbolizes perfection, completion, wholeness. The psalmist says, "I shall bless thee seven times in the day." So the Christian Church has set seven hours of prayer during the day. At present and also in the past these seven hours have not always strictly been observed in parishes or people's churches. It has been the custom to couple several of these hours and perform them at one stretch. Some of these hours are said during definite periods in the course of the year. Others are said on special occasions.

Thus, for example, it is customary to couple the Night Service and the Morning service. The Sunrise Service is performed during Lent. The Midday Service is coupled with the Divine Liturgy. Peace Service also is usually performed during Lent, and the Rest Service is said on fast days and on special occasions. These seven hours were regularly performed only in monasteries.

Thus various ways have been found in which it has been made possible for lay people to participate in all seven hours at one time or another. During Lent the Peace Service and the Night Service are customarily joined together. Although the Midday Service forms part of the Liturgy, it can also be said separately when no Liturgy is being celebrated and thus the Midday Service, on exceptional occasions, takes the place of the Liturgy.

The different services are directed to the different persons of the Holy Trinity. Night Service is addressed to God the Father. Morning Service is addressed to God the Son. Sunrise Service to God the Holy Spirit. The Midday Service is addressed to the Holy Trinity. The Evening and Peace Services are addressed to the Son, and the Rest Service is again addressed to God the Father, so the first and the last services are addressed to the Father.

The various hours have different themes and the several parts of each service revolve around a central idea. These themes are all indicated in a vague manner in the titles of the services themselves, and in the psalm with which each service opens.

The Night Service is mainly composed of thankgivings and blessings. Morning Service refers to the God of our fathers and reference is made to the continued identity of the Church and its faith with that of the past centuries. The Church is thought of as a corporate body together with all those who have passed away. The theme of the Sunrise Service is the enlightenment of our minds and souls by the appearing of Christ who is the true spiritual Sun. The Midday Service refers to the passion of Our Lord through which we were saved. The Evening Service is a prayer of thankfulness for our deliverance from dangers. The Peace Service marks the end of the day and is a prayer for peace. The Rest Service is a prayer for deliverance from the powers of darkness, from the unseen enemies of our soul.

The original elements in the Christian service are the psalms and prayers. The chants, the hymns, the sharacans are mostly based on the psalms; but because the psalms are pre-Christian the Church has added hymns or chants in its services which are sung immediately after psalms. Usually after the chant a short prayer of praise is said which is called ascription, Maghtank. These ascriptions conclude the songs and constitute a kind of doxology. Then comes a litany said by the deacon which enumerates in detail all the desires and the requests of the faithful which have arisen in their souls while singing the psalm and the sharacan. Then these requests and aspirations are collected by the priest into one and are formed into a prayer. Thus there is a definite pattern in the priest Hours-Book which forms the texture, so to speak, of all the services. The other elements also are woven very often into this texture according to certain general rules. We need not go here into these details. We can discuss them at some other time.

The following is the general pattern or basic structure referred to above.

1. The Lord's Prayer
2. A Psalm
3. A Sharacan
4. An Ascription
5. A Litany
6. A Prayer
7. The Lord's Prayer, again

Thus the Sunrise Service is composed of four such orders or cycles. Each order has a different theme which is recurrent in all its parts.

Apart from the seven hours mentioned above there are also other short services in the Hours-Book which are used as special services for special occasions. Thus there is what is called "the three voghormias" or "the misereres." This service stands apart as a group of penitential prayers. The essential element in this service is the 50th Psalm. Often lessons from the scriptures form part of one or another of the above seven services. These lessons are placed after ascription and before the litany.

Sometimes there are other elements such as the Trisagion or the Angelic Hymn, which have their place in the order of the service together with their accompanying items. Some of the prayers or collects to which we have referred above are divided into two with a peace bidding placed in the middle. Often the first part of these prayers is historical or descriptive or narrational and the second part is composed of petitions. The Divine Liturgy, of course, does not go with the hours. Rather it is the central service around which all the other services revolve.

There are also in the Hours-Book such services as The Order of the Service of the Oil-Bearing Women, Blessing of the Table, or Service of Entry into the Church, Blessing of the Fields - "Andastan," Service for the Repose of Souls, and certain other prayer items or spiritual songs.

Certain items in these orders of service are variables. In other words, certain parts of the services change in accordance with the feast of the day. Thus when it is a Sunday, the sharacan of a particular order of service is a resurrection sharacan. During Lent the same item will be a penitential sharacan. Other items in the order are also variables. All these require more detailed study into which we cannot go in this brief talk. We can take as an example here the analysis of the Morning Service.

Morning Service is said every Sunday and must be said before the Pataraq. It is addressed to the Son. Its main theme is "We are filled on this morning, O Lord, with thy mercy. We have been joyful and glad all the days of our lives." Then the passage called "The blessing of the three children," from the Old Testament is recited. "The three children" refers to Shadrack, Misak, and Abednego, thrown into the furnace. This passage is recited here because there is reference in it to "the God of our Fathers," which shows that we have our faith from the beginning and that we have oneness with ourselves and our ancestors. The Sharacan following this is called Harts (the first orders) - "of the fathers". At the end of each of these Harts sharacans is the phrase, "God of our Fathers".

Magnificat (the second order) is from St. Luke's Gospel (Medzatsoustse). In this order the Virgin Mary is praised. After the Magnificat comes the Sharacan which is called "Medzatsoustse Sharacan". In this sharacan the Virgin is praised and her intercession is asked.

Then comes the litany of the Magnificat and then the prayer of the Magnificat and no ascription. After the end of the second order the Iughaberits is introduced - the oil-bearing women's service. This is part of the morning service and marks the day as Sunday - a resurrection day. It should always be performed because every Sunday is consecrated to the Resurrection of Christ. (We Eastern Orthodox Christians lay greater stress on the Resurrection and the victory of Christ, whereas the Westerners - Latins and Protestants - stress the crucifixion and the humility. This is probably so because we have endured much humility and therefore want to rejoice in the Resurrection.)

The Iughaberits Service has the following sequence: Litany, Ascription, Psalm (sung), Gospel of Resurrection, a song (not a sharacan), Versicle which is a variable (a versicle is a little piece, a short anthem sung elaborately; it comes just before the Litany), Resurrection Litany, Final Ascription - (because there is no special prayer in this order, the Ascription follows the Litany.)

Miserere, Voghormia, (the third order) is the 50th Psalm recited. It is composed of the Sharacan (main theme of this is always supplication for mercy), the Litany, and the Ascription.

Psalm Ter Hecnits (the fourth order) is "The Lord from on high." This is followed by the Angelic Hymn. (This is the shortest "order"; there is only a psalm and sharacan because the other part of the cycle has been put after the Gloria in Excelsis (Part I Bartsomnus), the Ascription, and the Trisagion (this was introduced at the end of the 5th century by Peter the Fuller, Patriarch in Syria).

#### The Modes

In order to introduce variety into the hours, our Church, as well as other Eastern Churches, has introduced the system of modes in the services. These modes should not be confused with the tones. The system of modes regulates the use of certain variables in the course of the service, whereas the tones refer to various and different tunes in which sharacans or other items in the service are sung.

Each day in the calendar year is designated by a mode and under that mode certain items rather than others are said. These items, changeable in accordance with the modes, are called variables, just as other items, changeable in accordance with the different feasts, are also called variables. There are eight modes. Thus, for example, if a day is designated by, say, the first mode a certain psalm or a certain prayer or ascription belonging to the first mode is said. If the day is designated by the second mode, then another psalm, prayer or ascription falling under the second mode is said instead. The

system of modes starts with the first day of Lent which is designated by the eighth mode and the first Monday of Lent is always designated by the first mode.

### Canon

The word canon has a special meaning in the case of church services. Canon, of course, means usually the laws of the Church which apply everywhere in the church. In this sense canons are distinguished from bylaws. The bylaws of one diocese may differ from the bylaws of another diocese. But all dioceses are governed by the same canons. There are canons of the universal church and canons of national churches. Thus the canons established at the Council of Nicea are mandatory for all the churches, Greek, Roman, Armenian, Russian, etc. Whereas the canons of the Armenian Church Councils are observed by the dioceses of the Armenian Church. The canons of the Greek National Church Councils are observed by this or that Greek autocephalous church.

The word canon also means the order of a service. Thus, we have, for example, the canon of the Burial Service, or the canon of the Morning Service. The word also has other uses. A particular pattern of sequence of sharacans is also called a canon. Thus the services referred to above are canons. We can also call the special order of various items grouped together in each service a canon.

There are various kinds of items in the services that are sung. These are seven in number.

1. Psalms, which can be recited, intoned or sung.
2. Anthems, which are versicles of psalms representing the theme of a psalm. They may be sung elaborately or sometimes may be just intoned. All canonical chants are preceded by an anthem which represents the central theme of the psalm which is recited before the chant.
3. Chants, which are spiritual poems which are not metrical. These are called sharacans. The Midday Chant is sung during the Midday Service. The "I have raised" chant (Hambartzi) is sung during the Evening Service. All the chants in the Chants-Book belong to one or the other of the eight categories and all the chants in the same category are composed on similar themes.
4. Hymns, which are metrical and usually are extra-canonical in the sense that they do not have their place in the regular sequence of the items of a canon.
5. Melodies are extended tunes with very few words. The emphasis is on the tunes rather than on the words, and they are sung during the Liturgy in order to fill in time during which the Celebrant performs certain acts behind the veil at the altar.
6. Odes, which are spiritual poems written by various persons. They are poems not much burdened with tunes as melodies are. They do not form part of the canon of services. They can be sung at the beginning or at the end of services or on various occasions out of services, at homes, or during various church gatherings, etc.
7. Gantzes which derive their name from the first word with which some of the Gantzes begin. These are long litanies elaborately composed and are sung only during special services. They are narrative in character and are intended to eulogize either a sacred event or a saint.

Of these only psalms and chants and anthems have their place in the canons of the service. All the others are extra-canonical.

There are eight kinds of chants according to their themes and their place in the canon of services. There is the "Praise Chant" sung during the Night Service; the "Of our Fathers" chant which is the first chant during the Morning Service. Also in the Morning Service are the Magnificat Chant, the Miserere Chant, the "Lord on High" Chant, and the "Children" chant.

All chants have either three or four verses and rarely five verses. The "Of the Fathers" chant has a special form. It has three verses which end with the words, "God of Our Fathers," after which follows the singing of a praise psalm which is then followed by three or four other verses of the chant, ending with the words, "Bless and Praise Him forever." The Praise Chant contains praise and blessings of God. Magnificat Chant is

always in praise of the Virgin. The Miserere Chant is always penitential. The Children Chant is sung only on Saints days or on a fast day during the Morning Service. It is never sung on a dominical day.

#### Tones

Tones represent tunes with a given soale. Each tone has its own key. There are eight tones. Some of these tones also have their variants. The signs or marks for writing down these tones were well known until the 14th century. By now although these signs are still printed in our chant books we do not know their meaning and we have not found the way of deciphering them. While the character and general course and the key of each tone is known, the particular tune of each of the chants is passed on by tradition, and only in modern times have they been written down employing a system which has been borrowed from the western musical notation system. The punctuation of the chants as well as the marks on each syllable gives the cantor a certain indication of its nature, but no precise rendering is possible at present, unless, as we have said, they have been written down in later times with European notation.

There are several books which are necessary in order to conduct the services of the Armenian Church. There is, first, the Liturgy Book or Mystery Book which contains the parts which the priest has to say during the liturgy. Then there is what is called the Odes Book which contains the parts which deacons and clerks sing during the liturgy. The Hours-Book contains the seven hours and certain other special services. There is the Rituals-Book which contains the services performed in connection with the sacraments, baptism, matrimony, etc., as well as other special services and blessings such as the Burial Service, the Service for the Sick, the Blessing of Homes, etc. There is the Chants-Book which contains the chants and the Hymns of the Church. The Lectionary contains all the various passages of the scriptures which are read during the church year. The Lectionary also contains certain prayers and litanies which are said extra-canonically on certain feast days. The lectionary has also the following auxiliary books: a. The Oil-Bearing Women's Service - Lessons Book; b. The Midday Service - Gospel Lessons Book; and c. the Gospels-Book which contains the four Gospels in regular sequence, used whenever occasion arises.

The Calendar-Book gives the sequence of verses indicating the lessons, the chants, and other items which have to be said or sung on feasts or other days. The Psalms Book contains the psalms and is used for psalmody both during the regular services as well as on special occasions.