

## THE HOLY TRANSLATORS (celebrated October 14)

Mesrob, Yeghishe, Moses, David, Gregory, Nersess



This year, take the opportunity to go beyond the popular "culture month" image of the Holy Translators, the frenzy of pride over these men who are chiefly remembered in the mass imagination as cultural champions and see them for the deeper values in their stories. A more careful scrutiny will be rewarding!

A great theologian once remarked that we would do better to follow the spirit and goal of our Church Fathers than to blindly exalt their memory and accomplishments. In the case of the Holy Translators, celebrated every October in what has come to be known as Culture Month in the Armenian community, this is especially evident. Perhaps this year, we can remember them such that their hopes and dreams are truly honored.

Who are the "Holy Translators?" More can be read about them on pages 13, 16, and 26 in *Saints and Feasts of the Armenian Church* (an abridged and edited translation of Patriarch Koushagian's original work by Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian) or in *Living the Armenian Church Year*. You might want to go over all or a few of their lives in class using these resources. For each translator, articulate (or simply present to students) an important contribution. Then decide what we could do today to imitate their lifework.

- Mesrob Mashtotz. Founded an Armenian alphabet to help evangelize the Armenian people. Their faith and worship could now be shared in their own letters. The first work translated was the Bible, the linguistic fountainhead for centuries of Armenian literature.
- Yeghishe Vartabed. The author of many books and Scripture commentaries, his most famous work was an account of the Battle of Avarayr (he was purported to be St. Vartan's secretary), which is filled with Biblical allusions and Christian witness.
- Moses of Khoren (Movses Khorenatzi). He wrote poetry, hymns, orations and histories and was a great church leader. He is best known as the father of Armenian history because of the important *History of Armenia* he wrote.
- David the Philosopher (Tavit Anhakht). He was a celebrated philosopher, translating works of Plato and Aristotle as well as writing on the Bible and the Church.
- Gregory of Narek. A mystic poet on a par with the greatest Christian poets and a writer of celebrated commentaries, letters, and hymns. St. Gregory is best known as the author of his *Book of Lamentations*. This prayer book has been an inspiration to faithful for centuries.
- Nersess the Grace-filled. Perhaps the greatest of Armenian churchmen, St. Nersess was a brilliant writer, musician, thinker, and spiritual leader. He is remembered as an inspiring ecumenist as well.

To imitate these men's minds and desires for the faithful, have students:

1. Present a display of posters on the Holy Translators under a banner entitled "Beloved Laborers in the Vineyard" or "Good and Faithful Servants of the Lord."
2. Write (upper grades) a brief explanation of a Bible story, one of the sacraments, or other aspect of church life. Reprint the essays in your church newsletter as "Today's Translators."
3. Write a poem on their faith, Jesus, the Holy Spirit or any other subject they would like to describe.

Reprint as in #2 above.

4. Translate (those who know Armenian well, of course) a short paragraph from the late Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian's works such as on Holy Week, Biblical saints, etc.
5. Participate in an English-language liturgy.
6. Write a history of the Sunday School or the parish (year-long class project for an upper grade).
7. Visit other Christian places of worship. Discuss similarities and differences. Try to learn more.
8. (Upper grade) explain the meaning of a badarak hymn to a lower grade class.
9. Use the letters of their name to begin each line of a prayer.
10. Plan ways to teach the rest of the community more about their faith.