

ST. GREGORY'S VISION OF ETCHMIADZIN

"So come, we shall tell you, brethren, of the Creator's love shown towards you, which was revealed to me as an awesome vision. The Godhead condescended to his holy martyrs and raised them up to the incomparable, ineffable and inaccessible height of the kingdom of heaven. Now he revealed to me the vivifying providence that he intends to bestow on you, and there appeared to me a divine, wonderful, and ineffable vision, the details of which I grasped in brief.

"Now, in the middle of that night when you were tired and sleeping from the severity of the labor and vigil, I was still awake and was contemplating the unexpected and inscrutable miracles of God's mercy in visiting you and casting you into the furnace of instruction of the wise divine teaching. I also considered the martyrs' love for their beloved creator, and what would be the ineffable rewards prepared for them.

"Suddenly there was a great sound, the thunder of lightning, a fearful noise like the sound of the roaring tumult of the waves of the piling sea. And the cube-shaped vault of the firmament of heaven was opened, and a man descended in the form of light. He called my name and said: 'Gregory!' And I looked up and saw his form, and terrorstruck I fell to the ground. Then he said to me: 'Look up and see the wonders that I shall show you.'

"And I looked up and saw the firmament of heaven opened and the waters above it divided like the firmament, for like valleys and mountain-tops they were divided and their infinite expanses were piled up on either side beyond sight. And the light flowed from above down to the earth, and with the light numberless hosts of shining two-winged creatures in human appearance and with wings like fire. And in the likeness of minute specks of dust which in the sunny spring-time play in their myriads in the rays passing through windows or sky-lights, so too these hosts filled everything below with their light, and as the light streamed forward so did the hosts with it.

"And (there was) an awesome vision of a man, tall and fearful, who governed the front and the rear guards and, descending from above, advanced as leader. And in his hand was a great hammer of gold, and they all followed him. He himself flew swiftly in the likeness of a fleet-winged eagle. And he descended and came down near to the ground of the earth in the middle of the city. And he struck the wide expanse of the solid ground and great and immeasurable rumblings sounded in the depths of hell. And the whole earth as far as the eye could see was struck as level as a plain.

"And I saw in the middle of the city, near the royal palace, a circular base of gold, as great as a hill, and

on it an exceedingly tall column of fire, and on top of that a capital of cloud, and on top of that again a cross of light.

"And I looked up and saw three other bases: one in the place where Saint Gayane was martyred with her two companions, and one in the place where Saint Hripsime was martyred with her thirty-two companions, and one in the place of the wine-press. And these bases were red, the color of blood, and the columns were of cloud and the capitals of fire. And on top of the three columns were crosses of light in the likeness of the Lord's cross. And the crosses of these columns were level with the capital of the column of light, for that one was higher than they. And from the four columns, above the crosses, marvelous vaults fitted into each other. And above this I saw a canopy of cloud, wonderfully and divinely constructed in the form of a dome. Under the canopy but above the vaults I saw these thirty-seven holy martyrs in shining light, with white garments, which I am not capable of describing.

"At the summit of this edifice I saw a wonderful and divine throne of fire with the Lord's cross above it. Around it spread light in every direction, mingled with the rays of the cross and joined to the same. And the column made of light shone out among the bases of the lower columns.

"And there gushed forth an abundant spring, flowing over all the plains and filling them completely as far as the eye could see. There was made a vast bluish sea, and the plains appeared altogether the color of heaven. And I saw a numberless multitude of fiery altars, and a column on each altar, and a cross on each column. And they shone out in infinite number like the stars.

"And I saw numberless herds of goats, black in color, who having passed through the water turned into sheep, and their color became white and their fleeces sparkled like shining wool as rays flashed out from them. While I was still looking, suddenly the flocks gave birth and multiplied and their offspring filled the land. And the lambs that were born were covered in shining wool. Then suddenly still more offspring multiplied, and half of them crossed to the other side of the water. And these lambs became brown wolves and attacked the flocks and began to slaughter them, and there was shedding of blood. While I was looking, I saw that the flocks grew wings and flew up and joined the shining hosts. And there arose a torrent of fire which bore away the wolves."

This is the beautiful account of the founding of Etchmiadzin as it is reported in the 5th century history of Armenia attributed to a certain Agathangelos.

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