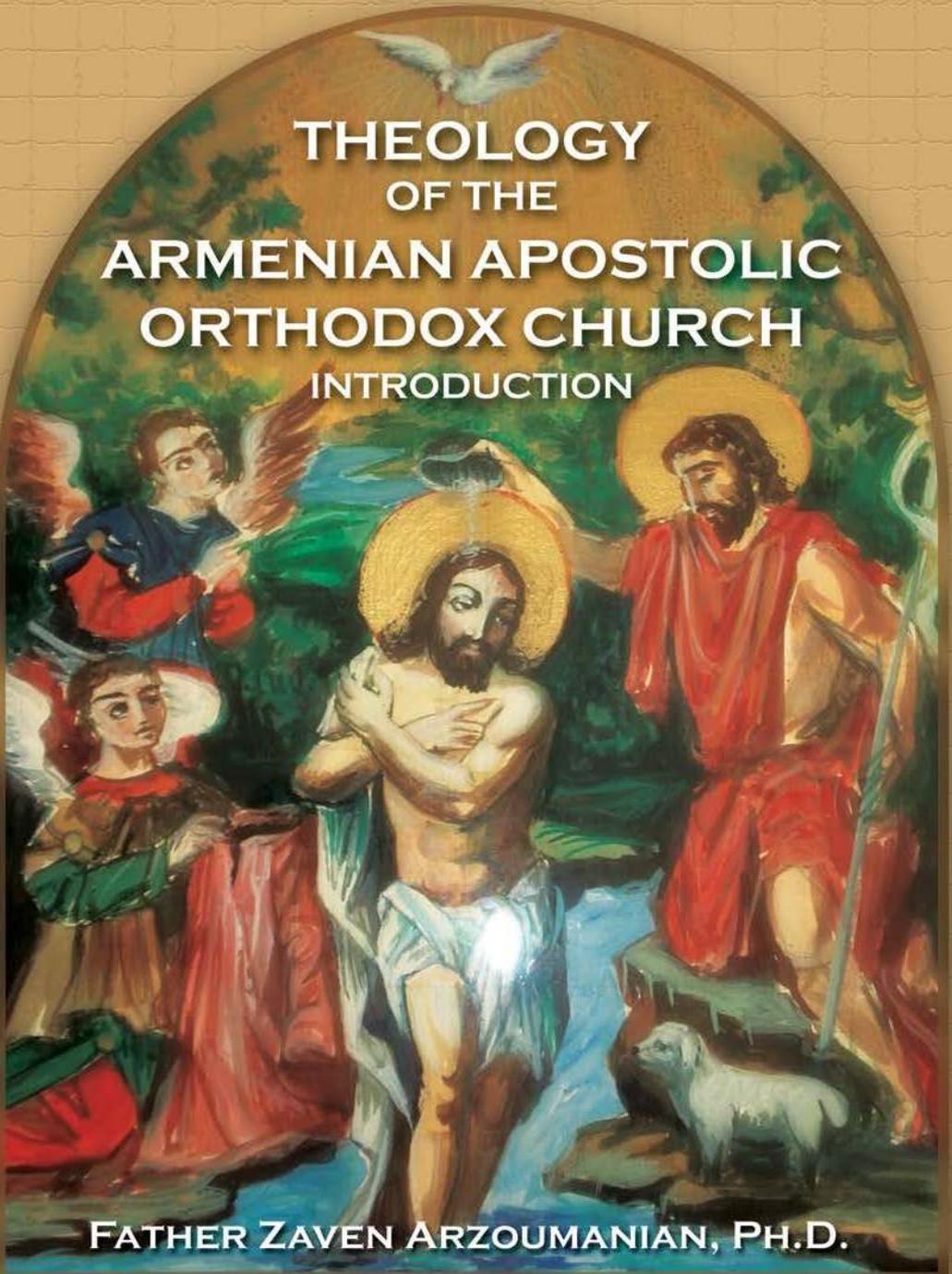


THEOLOGY OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

**THEOLOGY
OF THE
ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC
ORTHODOX CHURCH
INTRODUCTION**



FATHER ZAVEN ARZOUMANIAN, PH.D.

PUBLICATION OF THE WESTERN DIOCESE
OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
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FIRST EDITION

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HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II
SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS
OF ALL ARMENIANS**

BY THE ORDER OF

**HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP
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**PRIMATE OF THE WESTERN DIOCESE OF THE
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To
YERETSGIN JOYCE ARZUMANIAN
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FOREWORD

The following *Introduction to the Armenian Church Theology* is an easy-to-read summary of the basic doctrines and dogma of the Armenian Apostolic Church, written for the people at large. This is why it is labeled as Popular Edition. Theological writings and standard publications, such as Patriarch Malachia Ormanian's *The Church of Armenia*, and more recently, *The Theology of the Armenian Church* by Karekin I Catholicos of All Armenians, have been published in the past, all of them however in the Armenian language.

The present book is probably among the first comprehensive exposition in English with brief chapters, primarily for the leaders of our Sister Churches, and for those who have no access to the Armenian language. Unlike papers read at symposiums, it is meant to be read free of complications and technical terminologies, simplified, rather than argumentative, so that the reader may feel comfortable and unbiased in understanding the central beliefs of the Universal Church, as well as the characteristic aspects of the Armenian Church, which is genuinely one of its most original branches of early Christianity.

We have treated each subject primarily in the context of the Holy Scriptures and the Canons of the first Three Ecumenical Councils of the Universal Church. Armenian ancient sources are also used as references, including Commentaries and the Hymnal. Armenian Church theologians are quoted sporadically who have stood firm on the theological foundations of the fundamental issues regarding the Christology, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the "Salvation History" of Christianity, and the Holy Sacraments of the Church.

Biblical citations are invoked to support the theological issues, to make sure that theology can only begin from the Holy Scriptures and proceed with gradual development of the pertinent issues, finding its conclusion in the same Divine Book, where God in His revelation through the Son and the Holy Spirit reigns over His Kingdom on earth. Sacraments in the Armenian Church are authentic and central in permeating and expressing its theology, including the rites and the colorful ceremonial wealth which formed the characteristics of this ancient church.

Fr. Zaven

Theology of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church An Introduction

Background

Theology is the search for deity in an attempt to defining and finding God in our lives. To define theology requires the central quest of God's existence, which in the case of Christianity, is His revelation through the human history. To take this first step we are called to acknowledge the first and the foremost source which is the Divine Scriptures, the Holy Bible, where God's revelation is manifested in history, and not in fantasy, in the real life of nations and lands, and not in speculative search for a supreme being. The Holy Bible, unlike writing another book, admittedly was written by human mind and exposure to the Supreme Being over the periods of centuries, and finally was collated as the Canonical Book of Christianity. It is the conclusion of God's breath speaking to those who approached Him as they were called and were able to recognize Him as the One who is above all, the Supreme Being, who created the world and the human being with all its components, celestial and earthly, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the plantation and the animal life. Heaven and earth were created by Him, including the huge bodies of waters upon the face of the earth, as we read in the Book of Genesis.

The platform on which one should stand is the premise and the precondition of God's existence and His revelation through the Scriptures. To deny such platform and try to stand on another pedestal and speak with an attitude of objecting and questioning whether or not the Bible comes as the mandatory first, is simply to "justify" such attitude in futility. If as Christians we are willing to explore theology in its positive direction, and

that is the only way to pursue our search for God, then the abovementioned platform is the only lofty place for us to stand, to focus and to search. The Holy Bible revealed the Creation of the universe, the creation of the human being according to God's image, and finally commissioned the Patriarchs and the Prophets, the Kings and the Judges, to follow up with His creation in terms of covenants and promises, to serve peoples and nations, no matter how much those nations opposed to the will of God and remained disobedient towards His commandments.

As well known, the Bible contains the Old and the New Covenants, the Creation and the New Creation. The ultimate goal of God's Creation was revealed by His love for the world He created. "He loved the world so much, that He sent His Son," the final expression of Divine Providence, as John the Apostle states in the Fourth Gospel. For centuries the Old Testament spread God's message repeatedly to alert nations to hear Him and to cling to His commandments. Not always people followed God's ways; they stood mostly further away from Him, as nations were formed, lands were mapped, political strategies were enforced. God gradually was personified in the idea of His final emissary, His anointed, the Messiah, who at the time of "fulfillment" became incarnate, was born like a man, to turn the history of nations into a new history. God sent His Son, who was with Him from the beginning, as the true and final expression of His domination.

Theology therefore is the exploration of a long-term cycle of events in which God as we know Him in the Bible remained involved until the fulfillment of His promise by Jesus who became the Christ, God's Anointed, the ancient Messiah, who came in history, was born of Mary and was confirmed by his Father as His only-begotten Son. The Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, completed each other and, in modern theological terminology created the "History of Salvation" once and for all. The basics of the Bible were gradually further explored by saintly men who explained or commented on the various issues in the Scriptures regarding the salvation of mankind from servitude of the secular world, without underestimating the reality of the same world in which Jesus lived, taught, and actualized the Kingdom of God as the only tangible and comprehensible haven for mankind while living on earth. After all, the Kingdom was and is destined

“to belong” to men living on earth, purposeful and resourceful, rather than stand as a speculative entity up there in heaven.

That was exactly the case when Jesus culminated God’s ordinances in his Prayer which he taught to his disciples, known as the Lord’s Prayer, where he asked the Father in heaven to bring down His Kingdom: “Thy Kingdom come,” he asked, with the immediately following commitment of “Thy will be done.” The first was impossible to acquire without the second, since nations finally knew that “God’s will” must be done through the agency of His Kingdom, now inaugurated with the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. God’s plan has been to convert each nation to His Church, which in turn became the actual presence of His Kingdom. God called “all nations,” as specified by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, to gradually be conformed to the central and common ground of being integral parts of His Church by a mandate of doing His will on earth as it is in heaven. God’s Kingdom was and is two-way communication, from above and from below. His Kingdom came down for those who followed Him and bore full responsibility to keep that Kingdom alive and active.

The first coming of Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom which was handed to those who followed Christ as their Lord and Savior. The Kingdom of Heaven, now the Kingdom of God on earth, was entrusted to the chosen races, which in turn cherished it with responsibility and commitment. The Kingdom of God became a reality with the participation of the followers of Christ after his Ascension and with the advent of the Holy Spirit. Such Kingdom, enriched with stewards and "citizens of heaven," and yet living on earth and preserving the “holiness” of the earth, carried the Church through centuries and is carrying it until the Second Coming of Christ despite the many odds and obstacles of this unfaithful world. Christ’s Second Coming is conditioned with one single commandment: “*To be prepared for it,*” without questioning as to how and when his coming would occur. The more Christians are prepared for it, the closer the Second Coming will be.

Sources

Stemming from the Holy Bible, subsequent Commentaries on each of the Books therein constituted the body of sources written by earliest divines, who understood the above pre-conditions of God's plans for mankind, and accordingly explained and justified all the elements comprising the Theology of Christianity. Christianity penetrated into the lands where the Apostles preached Christ following the Pentecost, including Armenia, a cradle of ancient civilization, where tradition places the missionary works of the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew with their subsequent martyrdom in Armenia.

Whereas the Old and the New Testaments were originally written in Hebrew and Greek respectively, the next original sources of biblical commentaries, with certain input of philosophy and history, were extant in Greek, Latin and Syrian languages by the leaders of early Christianity, such as Tertullian, Origen, Irenaeus, Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia (d.325), and later by the three Cappadocian Fathers, Basil Bishop of Caesarea (330-379), Gregory Bishop of Nyssa (330-395), Gregory Bishop of Nazianzus (329-389), and also by John Chrysostom (347-407), whose biblical, theological, philosophical and liturgical works penetrated by way of original translations into Armenia soon after the invention of the Armenian alphabet and the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Armenian during the first half of the 5th century. The Cappadocian Fathers were the leaders who defeated the Arian heresy at the Council of Constantinople of 381.

Theology was developed along with the times, especially when the First Ecumenical Councils were convened in Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431), to finalize the doctrines by formulating the creeds of the Christian faith, namely, the Holy Trinity, the Person of Jesus Christ, the status of Mary as the *Theotokos* (Mother-of-God), the salvation, and the unity of Christ's Church. The resolutions of Church Councils comprised a major part of sources for the study of theology through the Middle Ages, despite various controversies, heresies and anathemas. Historically Armenia was the first among nations to embrace Christianity and establish churches in our land step by step as early as 301 AD, through the preaching of Gregory the Illuminator, and by the verdict of the newly baptized King Trdat III

and the royal court of Armenia. This however did not at once qualify the Armenian Christianity theologically sound and self-supporting, due to the lack of Armenian scripts and the Armenian Bible. For that reason Armenians needed immediate input from the biblical commentaries and the already formulated liturgical texts by the Greek and the Syrian churches.

The Holy Translators were the heroes of the task of awakening Christianity in Armenia. Headed by St. Mesrob Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, and St. Sahak, a great scholar and the Catholicos of Armenia, they translated the Holy Bible during the 5th century, calling it *Asdvadzashoonch* (Breath of God), the essential books for commentary and liturgy, and set the way for the Church of Armenia to follow their steps. Armenian divines, qualified and educated members of the newly opened religious schools of translation, began their task in making the newly born church in their land an authentic and somehow original institution with its own language, music and culture. This evolution was most essential in the development of the theology borrowed from the Greek theologians, such as Athanasius and Patriarch Cyril, both of Alexandria, whose distant contemporaries in Armenia proved to be theologians of the same caliber, as some of them held the highest office as pontiffs of the Armenian Church, including Sahak Barthev, Mesrob Mashtots, Movses Khorenatsi, Eznik the Philosopher, John Mandakuni, John of Otzun, David the Philosopher (the Invincible) and their followers, historians and theologians alike, who kept faithfully the doctrines of the first Three Church Councils and firmly established the theology of the Armenian Church.

It sounds like a conflict, but it should be noted that in the past, history and theology, better yet, politics and theology were seldom detached from each other. Politics blocked the way for religion and Christology to go forward as designed by God, and as prescribed by Christ and the Apostles. Often Christian nations gave priority not to Christ and his Church, but to political gains and losses. The Church was used for unwarranted and unworthy causes, but in spite of that, she survived miraculously because her foundations were theologically superior. The Holy Bible overcame the world with its millions of publications, translations, commentaries and liturgical exegeses, because the theology of the Word of God, the Son of God, and of the Holy Spirit eventually stood

unchallenged by any outside force, always protected by the “fear of God” and by the salvation brought by the Son of God. For Christians the name of Jesus Christ remained higher than any other name, and all knees bent before him, calling him Lord of all (Philippians 2: 9-11). The natural course took its toll however, and churches were divided unnecessarily into various groups, some on bases of Christology and others for reasons of political interests. At a later time divisions among churches were further created for reasons of Reformation.

St. Paul’s Theology

The first and foremost theologian of all times was undoubtedly St. Paul the Apostle, whose Letters in the New Testament comprise a first-hand and an indispensable source of exposition of Christ’s person and his teachings. In the most minute and clear manner Paul was able to present “Christ in action,” as if the Lord Jesus was commenting on his own mission. Paul, who never saw Jesus but was converted miraculously on his way to Damascus, in his much preferred and repeated expression, proved to be constantly “in Christ” and the closest follower to the Lord Jesus, in terms of his knowledge of him, analyzing the doctrines of Jesus, weighing the sinful status of men as against Jesus’ total sacrifice, bringing into focus the relationship of the Law of the Old Testament and the Grace of the New, underlining the “justification by faith,” not without work for sure, since, according to St. James, faith without action is destined to death.

As an example, Paul’s sermon on the Cross in his First Letter to the Corinthians is remarkable (1: 17-31), where the Cross of Christ stands high as the “wisdom and the power” of God the Father for those “who are saved”, despite its mockery and rejection by “those who are lost.” No matter what others say, Paul said, we preach “*Christ and him crucified,*” using the present participle “Christ **being** crucified,” as it appears in the Greek original. Theologically the point is well taken, because Paul and his followers not only acknowledged the past event of the Crucifixion historically, but more so, they lived the Crucifixion as a daily experience: **Christ is on the Cross today and tomorrow, inviting us to be crucified with him, in order to inherit the fruits of his Resurrection, even every single day.**

Again, for St. Paul the experience of being "in Christ" was truly the basis of the Church as an organism, which extends and perpetuates the Incarnation of Christ. In his Epistles the Church has always been focused on the Body of Christ, where Christ is present, and reciprocally, the Church becomes the means which Christ uses for his purposes of redemption. In his Letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians this idea is clearly exemplified: *"And he has put all things under his feet and has made the head over all things for the Church, which is his Body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* (Eph. 2: 22).

The Church as the "fullness (*pleroma* in Greek) of Christ" implies in Paul's theology the concept of God's ultimate plan and purpose in its universal and eternal content, namely, finding the consummation of all history, past, present and future, in Christ through the Church, whose head he is. Being "the head of the Church," Paul asserts the great purpose of the Kingdom of God on earth, including primarily the process of reconciliation. That same process in Paul's thinking has begun in the life of the Church and is being continued without interruption, as long as the "bridge", the Kingdom of God that is, reigns between the First and the Second comings of the Lord.

Theology in the Armenian Hymns

The Armenian Church is enriched with another source used for worship and devotion which contains ample and indispensable data for Theology, Christology, Mariology, Panegyrics, and Biblical History. That genre is the large body of the Hymns, known as *sharagans* of the Armenian Church, written over a period of ten centuries, from the 5th to the 15th. The authors mostly identified have offered a most precious vehicle to transmit not only the authentic songs and music of the Armenian Church for daily services and feast celebrations, but more importantly, the theology of Christ's Church in its minute, careful, and conducive ways, purely according to the Biblical narratives, step by step, abiding on the Life and Mission of Jesus on earth, from his Birth to his Resurrection and Ascension. Among the most illustrious theologians behind the hymnology of the Armenian Church are St. Sahak Catholicos (5th century), St. Mesrob Mashtots (5th century),

Catholicos Komitas (7th century), St. Nesses the Graceful (12th century), St. Nersess of Lambron (12th century), and many others.

Nersess the Graceful, the most articulate poet, theologian, and talented Catholicos of the Armenian Church, wrote hymns abundantly giving them the proper music also, whose virtuosity remains unsurpassed. He was able to “put on stage” the entire Creation of the World, and then the last week of Jesus’ life, from his last entry into Jerusalem, to his arrest, passion and crucifixion, with deep emotion and sound theology with lengthy and illustrated contents. He wrote also a hymn dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ, to be sung every Sunday. He is known as the author of Armenian religious hymns within the national sphere of our people in which the defense of Christianity in Armenia and the flourishing of cultural strides proved to be fundamental to the development of Armenian Christianity as a nation theologically and ecclesiastically.

The Hymnbook of the Armenian Church contains specific exposition of the status of St. Mary, with diversity of illustrations, giving her abundant attributes and roles in the emergence of Christianity as the “Gate of heaven”, the “Luminous cloud”, the “Ever flowing fountain”, the “Blossomed flower”, the “Tree of life”, the “Sweet dew”, the “Foundation of church”, the “Mother of the Light”, the “Garden of Eden planted by God”, the “Bearer of God of all”, and numerous more, eloquently put together in honor of the Mother-of-God, dedicated to her entire life, from the Annunciation to the Assumption. Theologically the role of St. Mary lies in her sainthood for being considered as the first “intercessor” before her son Jesus Christ. Intercession is a central point in the Armenian Church theology, granted to those who have reached the height of sainthood, following St. Mary and St. John the Baptist, both of whom took essential part in the life and mission of Jesus while living on earth. The Church does not “worship” the saints, since worship belongs to God alone; the Church only honors them, asking their intercession before Christ, having received favor from him. Christ-like life that they lived has been the primary condition for their sainthood.

The Armenian Church hymns are loaded with praises and intercessory supplications addressed not only to St. Mary, but also to those numerous Saints, Armenian, Catholic and Orthodox, who have enriched the life of the church, thus addressing to the

universality of Christ's Church within the Armenian Church. Each one of them, according to their feast days, is elaborately observed by their own *sharagans* (hymns), following the yearly church calendar, depicting their status in the church and describing their devotion to Christ even to the extreme point of their martyrdom. All saints have given their lives as witnesses to Christ, and have earned the crown of sainthood. Their status is conditioned and guaranteed one way, by Christ only, and not in return for what they have done, including St. Mary the Mother-of-God. They were the chosen ones who have received Christ's favor for their exemplary life on earth.

The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity

Christian theology is fundamentally defined by the three Persons of Deity, the **Father**, the **Son**, and the **Holy Spirit**. This is evidenced by the Holy Bible where we repeatedly read the existence of those Three Persons and their Unity in One. God is one, but His expression is the true revelation of Himself (Father), His Word (Son), and His Breath (Spirit). Each have shown their expression by revelation: the Father by the Creation of the World, the Son by being Born in time and space for the salvation of mankind, the Holy Spirit, the Breath of the Father through whom the Creation was realized, prophets proclaimed the message of God, and the apostles spread the mission of their Master. The three revealed themselves in many instances as we read certain passages in the Bible. The true appearance of the Trinity was actualized in history and was witnessed by John the Baptist, according to the Gospels, at the time of Jesus' Baptism in the River Jordan, where all Three came in unison. The Son was in the water, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove, and the Father whose voice was heard from behind the clouds approving Jesus as "His beloved Son."

No Christian Church is truly and genuinely identified as such without the faith in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which is the rock foundation of all churches. Ancient churches have remained faithful to this fundamental doctrine which is clearly specified in the Nicene Creed of 325 AD, based always on the teachings of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is the source of illumination and sanctification in such a way that the Father

bestows all graces through the Son with the Holy Spirit. Theologically the Holy Spirit is fully divine and consubstantial with the Father and the Son, as explained by Athanasius of Alexandria. The same is applied by the carefully specified hymns of the Armenian Church dedicated to the Holy Spirit. In addition, those hymns emphasize the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and the word used is *Harasharzj*, meaning “moved by the Father,” a case which became a doctrinal point of controversy among ancient churches, whether or not the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only, based on what St. John’s Gospel tells us, or from the Father and the Son simultaneously, known in the church history as the *filioque*, meaning “and from the Son.”

The orthodox belief, as correctly interpreted what the Fourth Gospel says about the matter of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, is “from the Father only,” as the Son is “begotten,” from the Father, so also the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. Prolonged controversies between the West and the East, the Latins and the Greeks that is, caused the Great Schism between them in 1054 on account of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, Latins stating the procession “from the Father and from the Son” (*filioque*), and the Greeks “from the Father only.” The Oriental Orthodox Churches, including the Armenian Church, adhered to the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit “from God the Father only,” as implied in the Nicene Creed and professed in the Armenian Church Creed later formulated by St. Gregory of Tadev. Thus, the Greeks declared themselves “*Orthodox*”, and the Latins declared themselves “*Catholic*” (Universal), causing the historic schism of the Church in 1054, even to the point of pronouncing anathemas against each other. The Armenian Church, which remained against the revision of the Council of Chalcedon since 451 regarding the natures of Jesus Christ, and for that matter was in disagreement with the Greek Orthodox Church all along, this time was in accord with the Greeks regarding the doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit “from the Father only.”

God the Father

The Father is known by His own acts of creation and guidance through history, according to the Holy Bible. He is further acknowledged by His Son Jesus Christ who displayed very

intimate and special relationship between himself and the Father, offering many similes through his parables, particularly recorded in John's Gospel. Unity of the Father with the Son is understood by the Birth of Jesus in time and space, and by the mission entrusted to him as the Son of God. Jesus always called on the Father because it was His will that the Messiah should come and reveal himself from the descendants of David, who entered history by actually being born from Mary, by the choice of the Father and by the conception of the Holy Spirit. His Birth was the Father's plan, who called Mary to be conceived by the Holy Spirit, so that the Word "who was with the Father from the beginning" would assume flesh, like man in all aspects except for sin, in order for the revelation of God the Father to be complete and fulfilled.

In the Armenian Church theology, God the Father is expressed in the hymns and in the earliest interpretations of the Church Fathers, following the first Three Church Councils, all of them based exclusively on Biblical material, such as His guidance in the Old Testament through the prophets, and the numerous expressions of Jesus in the New, where Jesus has shown his followers his unique relationship with the same God of the Old Testament who is now known as his Father in heaven. Many instances also demonstrate Jesus' full dependence on the Father, whose "will is to be done," no matter what happened to him. Such dependence created a final and consummate unity between the two, underlining the theological basis of being "one" God as one deity, and yet with two Persons, in order to make God's revelation to men comprehensible, tangible, and complete in time and space. Thus Jesus became the Birth of the Father, as the Father was the source of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from Him, and sent by the Son.

The essential source for the theology of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the Nicene Creed where the above relationship among the Three Persons of divinity is quite simply and comprehensibly formulated. An Armenian Creed, written later in the 14th century by Gregory of Tadev, has elaborated the same with additional emphasis on the "Birth of the Son before the times," and the "birth of Jesus from Mary" in the time and space we know. Most consistently our church has preserved all Biblical and conciliar formulae and development up to the Council of Ephesus in 431 which sealed all issues essential to Christology,

including the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and Redemption. To the Armenian Church above and beyond the Council of Ephesus additional formulations and decisions of further church councils meant unnecessary, burdensome, and more than sufficient. “The less the complications, the clearer the doctrinal dogmas,” was decreed by the early Church Fathers. Additional doctrines did not justify any more the dogma of the church than they proved themselves unnecessary in respect to their completeness and sufficiency.

The Son of God

The Nicene Creed finalized the doctrine of Jesus as the Son of God, based purely on the premises of the New Testament. Although Jesus kept his status as the Son of God unannounced but at some point Peter made the confession boldly, and Jesus acknowledged silently, charging Peter not to repeat it until the time came. The doctrine of the Person of Christ remained to be the main doctrinal issue of the early church. Preliminary notions found in the New Testament about Jesus were not readily understood by the leaders of the early church; they required Biblical and philosophical treatment before they were formulated into confirmed dogma. Such treatments naturally sometimes yielded wrong interpretations, known as heresies, along with lengthy and much complicated controversies regarding the true Person of Jesus Christ, and further creating the problem of dual natures of the One Person that he assumed, the divine and the human.

The first three Church Councils of the early church resolved such complications once and for all, and before it went out of control, the schools of Alexandria and Antioch led the Councils and offered specific definitions on the two natures of Christ. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, came forward with the orthodox view in his interpretation of the **“One person of the Incarnate Word,”** meaning that the two natures of Jesus Christ, being totally complete in themselves individually, were united without confusion in the One Person of the Son of God after the Incarnation, thus condemning all heresies regarding the separation of the natures, and/or giving priority to the one nature over the other.

This became the final Christological stand of the Armenian Church ever since. As said earlier, Armenian Church Fathers adhered to the doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria, who had died in the year 444, despite the many interferences in the faith of the Armenian Church by the Byzantine Empire or the Greek Patriarch during the 1000 years of Byzantine reign, who pressured constantly for Armenia to adhere to the Fourth Council resolution, known as the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, where a deviation was formulated from the Council of Ephesus, distinguishing the two natures and their separate functions in the One Person of Jesus Christ. This revised doctrine of the two natures of Christ was adopted by Constantinople and Rome, thus creating the earliest division of the ancient churches. The Armenian Church remained faithful to the essential dogma regarding the Person of Christ, to the unity of his two natures, to the status of Mary as the Mother of God, and to the Holy Spirit sent by the Father through the Son. Anything above and beyond those doctrines the Armenian Church regarded as unnecessary and confusing.

The Monophysite Doctrine

The Armenian Church belongs to a small group of the ancient churches known as “Monophysite churches.” It is important for us to determine the exact orthodox meaning of this awkward term before the Armenians are labeled as “heretics,” who supposedly because of it, have “separated” themselves from the universal church, having rejected the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. The term “*monophysite*” refers to the “One Person” of Christ after the Incarnation, in the exact way St. Cyril of Alexandria had taught at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The two natures of Our Lord, the divine and the human, were confessed at Ephesus as united natures in One Person. This was final and was accepted as the orthodox dogma concerning Christ and his Person within the unity of his double natures.

The Council of Chalcedon, which followed the Council of Ephesus, changed the situation, confessing in Christ each nature keeping its own characteristics and operating accordingly. Chalcedon pursued the belief, and in fact made it a dogmatic issue, that each nature remained individual “persons,” as against the One Person with united natures, distancing itself from ascribing “all

activities” of Jesus Christ to his “united Person.” In accepting the Ephesian orthodoxy of Cyril, and in rejecting Chalcedon for the unnecessary complications regarding the Person of Christ, the Armenian Church confessed the original orthodox teaching reached at Ephesus, namely, the doctrine of the *“One Person after the Incarnation of the Word,”* and remained faithful to it up to this day.

What happened at Chalcedon? The Fourth Council of 451 advocated the operation of double natures individually, as if the divine was expressed only when Jesus performed miracles and delivered his sermons, while the human nature experienced fatigue at times, and went through hunger, thirst, and finally sufferings before the Crucifixion. This was a deviation from the orthodox monophysite view that taught the Unity of the Person of Christ, who performed divine acts, and the self same experienced all human requirements, not as fitting to one or to the other nature, but in unison, to the Person of Jesus Christ. The Armenian Church interpreted Monophysitism this way: **Christ did not act according to his one nature first, and then the other nature; he did not act “divinely” at one point, and “humanly” at another.** He lived, preached, ate, and felt all things as One Person (*mia physis*), and never separately and individually.

God the Holy Spirit

Jesus clearly told his disciples that he was going and the Comforter Holy Spirit was coming to replace him. The Spirit was the Biblical breath of God the Father at the Creation, and later when he, the Spirit, gave wisdom and courage to the prophets. The Holy Spirit entered in real human life by giving birth to Jesus from Mary, since she was conceived by the Holy Spirit as commanded by God the Father at the Annunciation. Therefore, the breath of God became the true presence of God as from the beginning so also in history of mankind. The third Person of the Holy Trinity was the final manifestation of God the Father, even after the departure of the Son. He was and is the source of illumination and sanctification, which became the foundation of the new creation, the agent of the Kingdom of God on earth, through whom the church was founded as the mystical Body of Christ. This new creation was not anything symbolic; on the contrary, it was a

historic event, occurred on the 50th day of the Resurrection of Christ.

It was on that day, while Pentecost was being celebrated, when the Spirit came down in the midst of thunder and lightning, in the form of individual tongues and in the form of flames, while the disciples were gathered together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem as instructed by Christ (Acts 2: 1-13). Many visitors from colonies outside Palestine witnessed the most unusual event, among them Jews from all parts of Arabia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and Armenia. Geographically the countries involved are listed carefully and correctly, among them, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles one country is mistakenly identified as “Judaea between Mesopotamia and Cappadocia.”(Acts 2: 9). There was only one Judaea in Palestine, and Church Fathers way back from the second century have noticed the inconsistency and have replaced Judaea with Armenia, *Hreastan* with *Hayastan*, meaning that people from Armenia also had come to Jerusalem for the feast. The connection is significant, as it was interpreted by Tertullian, Latin Church Father, followed by St. Augustine, who both agreed on the corrected location of the colony between Mesopotamia and Cappadocia. Recently this point was brought to our attention by our church historian and theologian Malachia Patriarch Ormanian.

The theology of the Holy Spirit was formulated during the Ecumenical Councils of the 4th and 5th centuries. It was first Athanasius of Alexandria who resisted against the persisting heterodox teaching that the Holy Spirit was not fully divine. He declared instead, as we confess today, that the Holy Spirit is consubstantial both with the Father and with the Son. This was expressed with colorful clarity at a later time in the Armenian hymns, written specifically for the Advent of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius further implied that the Holy Spirit came from God and bestowed sanctification and life. He dwelt on the intimate relation between the Spirit and the Son, deducting from it that the Holy Spirit belonged to the Son exactly as the Son belonged to the Father. This was inherited from St. Paul who had inferred that the divinity of the Holy Spirit was based on the fact that the Holy Spirit makes us all “partakers of God” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Christ's Mission: Redemption of Mankind

Christ's mission had a single purpose for which he was sent by the Father as His Son. That purpose was and is the Redemption of the sinful world from the original sin by way of reconciliation of the fallen mankind with the Heavenly Father. Christ on his Cross accomplished that task by shedding his innocent blood for the freedom of men from their sins. The New Testament entirely represents Jesus Christ as the Savior who asked the Father to bring His Kingdom on earth for that same purpose of salvation. The Four Evangelists and St. Paul have recognized Christ's salvation in terms of **redemption** and **propitiation**, the first by "the price of his blood," and the second through "justification by faith," described also by the "free graces" (gifts) given by Jesus Christ through his Resurrection. Pertinent passages are the following: Acts 4: 12; Eph. 1: 13 and 7; Col. 1:14; Hebrews 9: 12; Romans 2: 24-25; 2 Cor.5: 18. In Romans 5: 11. There is a third term reflecting the theology of the Old Testament, namely **atonement**, which literally meant uniting men "at-one" with God.

St. Paul's Biblical citations just mentioned contain the terms of Christ's Redemptive work. Here are some of them. *"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, being **justified** freely by his grace through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus."* (Rom. 3: 23-24). *"That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."*(1 Cor.15: 3). *"Christ has **redeemed** us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us."* (Gal. 3: 13). *"In him we have **redemption through his blood**, the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of his grace."* (Eph.1: 7). *"That he might **reconcile** them to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting the enemy to death."* (Eph.2: 16). *"For this (sacrifice) he did once and for all when he offered up himself."* (Hebrews 7: 27). *"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, **cleanse your conscience** from dead works to serve the living God?"* (Hebrews 9: 14).

Given the above analysis, Redemption was realized by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The Cross and the Sacrifice could not stop there, but should conclude its purposeful achievements to

save the world. Christ's sacrifice was "to pay" the eternal debt of mankind due to the Father in heaven because of their fall. The Church on earth continued the task of **salvation** on behalf of the perpetual sinful generations. There was no greater sacrifice than the one offered by Christ, and no one else was capable of undertaking such sacrifice, especially knowing well that Christ did it voluntarily for the sake of our debts, a sacrifice which he was not obligated to go through personally.

At a later stage the term "salvation" that we just used, came to elucidate the process of Christ's mission, which primarily meant to be saved from danger or from evil. Inwardly salvation is exactly what Christ came to offer, that is, the process of freeing oneself from corruption, guilt, and selfishness. This was seen in the Old Covenant. Prophet Jeremiah transmitted God's message, saying that salvation is an inner spiritual experience, a change in the person's nature: *"Let those who boast, boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight."* (9: 23). The same was also proclaimed in the Psalms, following which Jesus, reflecting always on the ancient Scriptures and sometimes even quoting from them, exerting his effectiveness as the one who dealt with his people as the Son of God the Father caring for his brethren: *"The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want."* (The entire Psalm 23). In a series of three consecutive stages Christ's salvation was made manifest as follows.

1. **Salvation as freedom from sin and danger**, which carried with it the meaning of victory, since those who were victorious in its ordinary sense were called saviors. We know from the Gospels that Jesus rejected that kind of worldly salvation which was not in God's plan in the Old Testament to begin with. His kingdom was not "of this world", he often said. He looked with sympathy on the mishaps and the painful life of his people, and healed the sick, comforted the mourners, and promoted love among men.

2. The concept of **Salvation as freedom from this world**, took shape when Israel recognized the Messiah and his supernatural function replacing the worldly kingdom. Jesus was sent from the bosom of the Father as a descendant of David, to lead the people

from this world to the world where God lived and guided the lives of the nations.

3. Salvation as a means to penetrate the divine into the life of the human nature. To this end God was incarnate in Christ, assuming human nature with all its limitations except for sin, so that the human nature could be transformed into the likeness of God. The Incarnation, now activated by the Holy Sacraments of the church, was the only way to make such transition with the pouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit on human nature, primarily through the Sacrament of Baptism, declared also in the Gospels, as *“being born again from the water and from the Holy Spirit.”*

In St. Paul’s Epistles the central concept of becoming a *“New Creature”* stands out with elegance and much effectiveness, which is equivalent for him to attain unity with the Resurrection, ideally a true salvation. The cycle is thus unchallenged, complete and conclusive if we bring the Resurrection of Christ to be the center of the Redemptive work of God. The “new creature,” as seen in Pauline Christology, is a radical transformation of the believer, whose whole life is now subject to the control of a totally new principle, dictating consciousness of spiritual realities as against those belonging to “this world.” Redemption, humanly comprehended, becomes historical and effective through the Church on earth, where the real “Body” of Jesus Christ lives, breathes by the Holy Spirit, like that same body which was carried by Jesus while living on earth.

The Theology of Christ’s Mission: Prophet, High Priest, King

The Salvation brought by Jesus Christ reflected his ministry in his three divine offices: He was the **Prophet**, the **High Priest**, and the **King**. Through these offices Christ established a new covenant between God and men, taking his mission from his calling as the Messiah, the One Anointed by God. As Prophet, he revealed God to mankind once and for all; as High Priest he removed the distance between them; as King he brought down to earth the Kingdom of God. All three comprised the unified mission of Christ’s salvation; they did not establish three indi-

vidual actions from three different positions. All three were inherited from the Old Testament where they stood firm as mandatory offices of the people of Israel in so far as they were kept in touch with God through the Patriarchs, Prophets, Kings, and Judges. Christ actually fulfilled the prophecy, the priesthood, and the kingship as the One who was chosen, invested, and sent for the purpose of accomplishing what was left undone by the corresponding ancient offices.

Christ the Prophet preached eternal truths victoriously, revealing the ordinances of God, as we read in Matthew's Gospel, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*" (5: 17). In addition to the Prophets, who spoke the word of God through the Holy Spirit, Jesus preached the Word of God with authority. He revealed God to men, and also made man self-conscious as to who he was and what life he had inherited from the Creator God. Herein lay the fact that the weak and the base among men could have the chance to evaluate themselves by the graceful presence of Christ, who came to seek primarily the fallen and the lost. His prophecy, by way of teaching, declared the Kingdom of Love, the principles of servitude and meekness, and not selfish attitudes depriving others from equal benefits of God's blessings. The society was to benefit from what Jesus brought down to earth whatever God had promised to the ancient Prophets, now through His own Only-Begotten Son, whose sacrifice was the standard of all truths now incarnated in his Person and mission.

Christ the High Priest removed the animal sacrifices and offerings of the Old Covenant which were mandatory for the people to offer for their sins, through the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrificed animal. The Book of Leviticus gives many examples regarding the ancient tradition which was believed to be established by God. Christ followed God's ordinance and went along with His plans for redemption, this time not by the killing of the animals, but by presenting himself as the One Anointed to be the Sacrificial Lamb on behalf of many. Christ as High Priest is eloquently represented by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (7: 11-25), where Christ through his Sacrifice on the Cross rendered the unrestricted approach of men to God possible, against, or in fulfillment of, the Law of the ancient priesthood, underlining Christ's redemptive and eternal priesthood, saying:

“But he, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore he is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (7: 24-25).

Christ is the “Eternal High Priest, holy, innocent, immaculate,” who for the first time offered to God the perfect Sacrifice “obediently and as the Suffering Servant” of Isaiah. He did this not in order to lessen the wrath of God as it was the case in the ancient relationship, but in order to show us God’s truthful nature and purpose for mankind, himself being the fulfillment of the true High Priest. Christ’s final ministry through his Priesthood comprised the eternal relationship of men with God.

With his office **Christ as King** displayed his authority and power in the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth with the natural conclusion of his victory. Christ the King was the triumphant Lord, since he possessed not only divine authority and power to heal the sick and return to life the dead, but also was trusted by the Father to bring the Kingdom down to earth where his followers needed to be its citizens and its promoters. “Thy Kingdom come” was clearly the necessary request for that Kingdom not to remain in heaven where it is originated, but to come and be part of those who were the “chosen race, and the royal nation.” After all the Kingdom was needed by the followers of Christ, who had to share in its spiritual wealth, rather than leave it up there to speculate on passively. Christ was and is the King in that lasting sense, that his Church on earth embodies the Gospel as the true Kingdom “in action” until Christ’s second coming, which is conditioned by the “active” presence of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Christ the King was victorious over Satan while he went through the temptation in the wilderness. He was triumphant during his passion on the way to Golgotha with enduring patience and obedience. He was triumphant King while keeping his convictions independent, without subjecting himself to any pressure from the outside world. Christ the King preached love and the fear of God, charging his followers to practice both as their duties toward each other. He was victorious as a king should act, self-confidently and with vital initiatives. He displayed his kingship with great enthusiasm and with unending patience. Christ

the King finally showed all signs of perfection, which is reserved only to God, bringing men closer to God's perfection.

The Legacy Left by Christ **The Theology of His Names**

His deep and lasting influence with its multiple ways on his disciples and his followers comprised Christ's legacy, which is the Church on earth embodied in the Kingdom of God. The Twelve Disciples for sure acknowledged his teaching and his divine performance in its entirety. So did also Paul the Apostle in a much more efficient and resourceful manner. This had its immediate and permanent seal on each one of them, who remained faithful to his words, until the Holy Spirit "moved" them with a similar authority practiced by Jesus while living on earth. Their final meeting with the Risen Lord in Galilee, on the day of the Ascension of Christ into heaven, transferred his divine authority and mission to them to continue the work of baptizing and converting "all nations." Christ's legacy then has become an urgent action to be taken by today's society. He is the Lord of All, and the world needs Christ's effective presence among nations and in societies, in families and churches in so many ways, a presence which is never withdrawn by him, despite the unending destructive indifference and denial of God's Creation.

Personal names are indicatives for identifications and missions. This has proved universally truthful in history and in the Person of Jesus Christ. His names stand to confirm the completion of his mission on earth as the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, and subsequently reflect the bases of theology by way of Christology. Seven names were ascribed to Jesus Christ. All, except for one, were "given" to Jesus at his Birth and during his ministry, and the remaining one name, the most unassuming and the humblest one, was addressed vaguely by himself to himself which was the **Son of Man**. He once raised the most characteristic question whether or not on his Second Coming the Son of Man would find faith left on earth.

The first names were heavenly proclamations by the Archangel even before his Birth in Bethlehem. Prophet Isaiah had prophesied that the child born of the Virgin should be called **Immanuel**, "*which meant God with us.*" (Isaiah 7:14). This name

was recalled verbatim by Matthew and ascribed to the yet unborn Child (2:23). In addition, the name **Jesus** was announced by the Archangel both to Mary and Joseph at different times, which "*meant the one who would save his people from their sins.*" In the story of Jesus' Birth other names were also revealed. We read in St. Luke's Gospel that the Child of Bethlehem "*shall be called the **Son of God***" (Luke 1:35), and the "**Savior who is the Anointed (Christ) Lord**" (Luke 2:11). The seventh name **LORD** was the "name above all names" as proclaimed by St. Paul in the second chapter of the Letter to the Philippians (2:11).

It is important to learn about these names individually and reflect on the theological implications behind them, bearing in mind always that all of them belonged to the One Person Jesus Christ, who lived and acted as the sole responsible Person on behalf of each of his names regarding his mission on earth according to the significance of each name "given" by God the Father. If his given name was Jesus, the rest were equally bestowed on him "from above." No man on earth gave Jesus any further name, including himself, except for the Son of Man which he referred to incidentally. We shall attempt to examine each name chronologically and reveal God's purpose and His divine salvation of His people through the Sacrifice of His Son on the cross, and by the establishment of the Church on earth.

Immanuel: A Hebrew word meaning "God with us." The ending of the word is from *Elohim*, meaning God. It reflected way back from Prophet Isaiah, as cited above, that God was reaching the world in the person of the Messiah who was coming for a specific purpose, albeit expressed with uncertainty, and yet the belief of his coming was "expected." Such belief made the Messiah, literally the "One Anointed by God," who was with God the Father from the beginning, and thereby led to the actual Birth of the Son of God in the fullness of times. Theological implication is made manifest by the meaning given to Immanuel: "*God with us,*" a relationship of a most unique kind between man and his Creator God. The Birth of Jesus is clearly implied with its further implication of God revealing Himself on earth and "abiding with us." Naturally, God's "being with us" was suggestive as to how "WE can be with God" in return. This was a great task indeed full of serious commitments. The coming of God as a man was not

meant to be "one way gift"; it required the "return of men to be with God," according to their commitments and actions taken.

Jesus: This Hebrew name from *Joshua* was repeatedly announced by the Archangel which meant "*the one who will save his people from their sins.*" It contained the function of the Savior in it, who is the one who delivers men from their dangerous status like the person who is unable to pull himself out of the ocean while swimming. He is taken out at once and saved from the danger of drowning. Jesus was given this name for being the One who came to help mankind recover from their sinfulness and unrighteousness. This was the salvation Jesus came to accomplish.

Christ: The Greek word for the Messiah or the One Anointed. The name separated Jesus from the rest of mankind by virtue of the choice of God the Father who cleansed and anointed the One whom He sent through Mary who in turn was conceived by the Holy Spirit. "Christ" remained as the associate name of Jesus, giving him divine nature as proclaimed in the Gospels at his Birth in Bethlehem. Both names, Jesus Christ, comprised the unique manifestation of the Lord in the liturgical life of the church.

Son of God: Was bestowed upon Jesus only and naturally by the Father who unambiguously and repeatedly announced the status of Jesus being "His Son." The Son of God became the foundation of Mary's divine motherhood, as she was soon proclaimed to be the *Theotokos*, meaning the "Mother of God", and not the mother of Jesus alone. Invariably the name "Jesus" reflected his human nature, as "Christ" manifested his divine nature.

Savior: This name was also given by the Archangel, combined with the other appellation, Lord. The Child of Bethlehem was "the Savior, Christ the Lord", all three given emphatically to the Child whose divinity was also revealed at the same time: "*He shall be called the Son of the Most High.*" The name "Savior" later on formed the fundamental terminology of the Church's Doctrine of Redemption, and also of the "History of Salvation," as modern theologians have exposed. The whole New Testament is concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the "power of God for salvation," as explained by St. Paul (Rom.

1:16). The Savior Jesus came *"to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10). In his own words *"I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners"* (Mark 2:17). Those five names carried with them divine ordinance and purposeful providence.

Son of Man: The Evangelists always understood this name as a self-designation of Jesus indicating the human nature that he assumed at his birth. Elsewhere, the Son of Man is found only in the Acts of the Apostles, where St. Stephen, who was stoned to death, exclaimed that he saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man stood at the right hand of God. Theologically it meant very conducive because it complemented to his divine nature, making him *"God revealed in history, in time and in action."* The Son of Man proved the intimacy of men with God, believing that God's purpose was to enter history physically and be a part of the orders of this world. The heavenly God became the earthly Christ directly and unequivocally. This is why no other person gave Jesus this peculiar name. He alone identified himself to be God in human flesh as the consummation of God's final purpose for his creation. Consider the following citations which reveal some theological implications derived from this peculiar title of Jesus.

The Son of man *"has authority on earth to forgive sins."* (Mark 2:28; Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5).

The Son of Man *"is lord even of the Sabbath,"* referring to one who is more than human.

At Christ's second coming *"the Son of Man will be ashamed if a man is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation"* (Matt. 16:27; Luke 9:26).

The Son of Man *"must suffer, be subjected, must die and rise again."*

The Son of Man *"came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28).

In Gethsemane *"the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners"* (Mark 14:41).

Lord: Obviously this latest name was given to Jesus Christ "posthumously", so to speak. It was the name borrowed from the Old Testament but totally revised and renewed by St. Paul who used it on behalf of the entire faithful of Christ's religion and mission who came to worship him as the Risen Lord. It is

specifically pronounced in the Letter to the Philippians (2:11), for the exclusive use of the worshippers. It served as the basic name for liturgical purposes encompassing the lordship of Jesus Christ compared with the subjection of all Christians in all matters.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

In actuality the event of the Transfiguration was an anticipation of Christ's Resurrection as clearly indicated by him before he and the three disciples came down from mount Tabor where the miraculous revelation had taken place. This point indeed is the theological phase of the Transfiguration. Jesus told them "*To tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.*" (Matthew 17: 9). It is further important to link with this event the "confession" regarding Jesus' identity by Peter, "six days" before the Transfiguration at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus had asked his disciples as to what people knew about his identity. But specifically he prompted them to express their own views about him: "*But who do you say that I am?*"

Peter's confession came promptly that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt.16: 16). He at once received the blessings of Jesus, thus tacitly confirming his identity, upon which he further favored Peter upon whose confession the church would be built, and not necessarily upon Peter himself. Peter's confession regarding the identity of Jesus was the foundation of his Church, as implied by Jesus, rather than the person himself. The Transfiguration, then, was the conclusive vision, or better yet the miracle performed by Jesus on himself to receive the confirmation of God the Father, whose voice came out of the cloud, saying "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him.*" (17:5).

The spectacular event "high on the mountain," as recalled by the Evangelist, and the eyewitness Peter (2 Peter 1: 17-18), not only changed the appearance of Jesus, his face being brightened and his clothes becoming as white as snow, but also two of the old Prophets, Moses and Elijah, who appeared on his sides "**talking with him.**" What does this mean? They were the leading Prophets of the Old Covenant, the most prestigious emissaries of God, who appeared to witness and confirm Jesus' identity and to talk with him. No matter how visionary the story seems to be, based purely

on divine premises, the entire picture was panoramic as an anticipation of the final victory of Christ on Easter Sunday. It came to help us understand that the Risen Christ was confirmed as the Victorious Lord by the Old Testament, and by the Father's voice who once more approved Jesus to be His beloved Son.

The Resurrection of Christ

The story of Christ's Resurrection is considered by many as a "fixed" reflection on past events rather than on actual happenings, even despite Jesus' own words, that "*The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up.*" (Matthew 17: 22-23; 20: 19; Mark 8: 31; Luke 9: 22). Still others took even Christ's own words about his Resurrection simply as devotional reflections supposedly written later in time for purposes of worshipping the Lord. It is argued that because the anticipated coming of Christ the Messiah, even with some specific indications, was referred to in some of the old writings and prayers, such as in passages in Isaiah, in Micah, and in the Book of Psalms, the Resurrection had "to happen" in order "to fulfill the writings." Such views we consider unorthodox because we prefer to read the Scriptures faithfully and interpret them while standing on the right pedestal, built by the authors of the Scriptures, on the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth, and on the first interpreters of the early Church.

What we read in the Gospels we should read and accept them indiscriminately, not by choosing one section that we like, and overlooking others because we do not agree with them. The Holy Bible is a united Book. All events and messages are coherent, beginning with the Creation and ending in the Resurrection, the New Creation. This is the orthodox stand of true churches, established by the Apostles of Christ who witnessed and firmly believed in the Resurrection and in the triumphal establishment of the Church on the day of Pentecost. St. Paul wraps up the completion of the Resurrection as he declares: "*If Christ is not risen then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.*" (1 Corinthians 15: 14).

The belief in the Resurrection is founded in the reality of the "empty tomb," where the buried body of Jesus was not found. Questions were first asked as to where the body was taken. The

answer “from above” was that “he had risen from the dead.” The large stone in front of the tomb was rolled aside by the angel as the first witnesses approached the tomb: “*The angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.*” (Matt. 28: 2). The other three Evangelists repeat the same, (Mark 16: 4; Luke 24: 3; John 20: 1).

The immediate appearance of the Risen Lord to the women and to the disciples made it all clear that Jesus was still on earth for 40 days with the same body while living, but this time it was a glorified body, not the one tortured and bruised on the Cross, but a body endowed with spiritual strength, assuring his immortality (1 Corinthians Chapter 15) and his pre-existence. His body, now fully assumed divine nature, had turned to be the source of divine gifts. His Resurrection made Christ “bypass” death, by overcoming it, as it is explained in Romans 6: 9-10: “*Christ having been raised from the dead dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him.*” The “same body” of the Risen Lord which the disciples saw and even touched, was confessed also in the Nicene Creed in connection with his Second Coming; thus it should not be taken as the body Christ had before his crucifixion. This is evidenced by the Risen Christ entering the Upper Room twice as the doors were closed, and as departing from their sight without giving any sign; he disappeared, as we read, after he stayed with the two disciples in Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-32). He ascended into heaven after giving his last commands to his eleven disciples. By the same token, Christ’s Second Coming, we believe, will be with that same glorified body as proclaimed in the Nicene Creed.

Finally, there should be a purposeful and resourceful relationship between Christ’s Redemption and Resurrection. One was the manifestation of the other, Salvation being the act of his sacrifice for the sake of our sins, and Resurrection being the assurance of a new life given to mankind, a life which proved itself as victorious over death, divine and eternal life, guaranteed by his Resurrection. Both, Redemption and Resurrection, were left as Christ’s legacy in the establishment of his Church, his Mystical Body on earth. The Church, well defined by the Apostles, became the purgatory between the Resurrection and the Second Coming of the Risen Lord.

The Church Established on Earth

On Pentecost Sunday, fifty days after the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit came as promised by the Risen Lord to continue his mission on earth. (Acts 2: 10). The Church of Christ was established and gathered together the newly “ordained” apostles and their followers, who went and spread the Word of God, in the exact manner as Jesus Christ had taught them while they were his disciples. The Church therefore was not meant to be the “place”, but primarily it meant those who came together to continue the work of Christ. The Greek term for the church is most significant, *Ekklesia*, which is transliterated to read *Yegeghetsi* in Armenian. The Upper Room in Jerusalem was the original “place,” and only the place of the real Church, the real Church being the faithful who came together with one mind and purpose. What the Apostles did was exactly that; they went to different parts of the world and preached Christ before moving a stone to build the location of the Church. Among all, St. Paul was the most efficient, courageous, and totally dedicated to the cause, who traveled untiringly and with great zeal to establish widespread communities. Read the Acts of the Apostles on his missionary journeys to see how St. Paul established the communities and followed up closely and continuously with his Letters addressed to each one of them.

The Church was obviously inherited from the Jewish *Synagogue*, a Greek word meaning in this case “coming together” for a specific purpose in this case. The Israelites were the “chosen people” in the Old Testament, which in the New Testament, by the advent of Jesus, became the “saved and the new Israel.” Followers of Christ considered themselves the true Israel who carried the oath made with God by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Noah. The “transition” from the Old to the New is eloquently expressed by Peter in his First Letter: “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*” (2: 9-10). Herein lay the big difference between the “chosen people” and the nations of the world, a transition from the particular to the universal.

Christ's Church is founded on the truth of the Gospels, and as such, faith stands as the only driving force behind that truth. As stated in the Canons of St. Sahak Catholicos of Armenia as early as the 5th century, "The church is the true faith that gathers to teach the knowledge of the Son of God," meaning that the church is not the building, not even the altar, but only the "faithful people," who comprise "the living and active faith that unites all souls in one, and builds first the spiritual temple, and then the visible structure." In the same Canons, St. Sahak indicates that *"The church does not teach us the commandments of God coming from the wooden and stone structure of the sanctuary, but only represents peoples and races built on true faith and on its firm foundations."* It is only through faith that people can unite themselves with Christ, as the Holy Spirit abides in them at the same time.

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ

The Greek word *soma* means "body" and is applied to the Church as "Christ's Body." St. Paul gave the church a superior role by elevating the Greek *soma* to its spiritual heights, turning the church into a "Community of Love," that is, the divine love exemplified by the Person of that Body, Christ himself. St. Paul resembled the "members" of the church to the "members" of the human organs, united in one "body," where those members cannot live and operate individually and independently. The unity of the human body depends exclusively on the healthy functioning of the vital organs; so does the unity of the church, alive and healthy, through the power of the Holy Spirit. For St. Paul, the church is the Body of the Risen Christ, permeated with divine life and endowed with the graces (gifts) of the Holy Spirit. Theologically the foundation of the Church is closely linked with the Incarnation of Jesus. By him assuming human body, Jesus Christ united his divine life with the life of men, and the result of his Incarnation made the formation of the Church on earth possible. There is a miraculously mutual interaction between the Church and the Incarnation: in the Living Church God assumes humanity, and man assumes divinity.

The Attributes of Christ's Church

The Church has its special signs or attributes, which are its characteristics and by which it stands out high and superior above all other institutions, as long as those attributes define exclusively and solely the Church of Christ. Not only those signs are attached to the Church, but they also designate its True nature, distinguishing it from false and self-proclaimed deviations. The latter groups have been recognized in early Christian history as the heretics and the sectarians, which deviated from the true preaching of the original Church. The following are the attributes of the Church, established by Christ himself, organized by his Apostles, and finally formulated by the first Three Church Ecumenical Councils: **One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.**

The Church is One

The Church is One, because first of all its head is Christ, the only Lord and Savior, and then is permeated by the Holy Spirit. The Church is One by its Origin, its Faith, its Sacraments, its Purpose, and by its Essence. The Oneness of the Church makes it unique, similar or second to none, as explained by St. Paul: *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”* (Ephesians 4: 4-5). The oneness of the Church unites all nations of different races and colors, since the Holy Spirit, the force behind the Church, is also one: *“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as he wills.”* (1 Corinthians 12: 11).

St. Nersess Archbishop of Lambron, a 12th century Armenian scholar, has made pertinent remarks in his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* that *“Christ is not divided between Paul and Apollos, and neither his church belongs to the Armenians, or to the Romans, or the Franks separately, even though, some due to their ignorance, insist that the church was divided, and that each hoped for another God. But those who consider themselves Christians, and still believe that the language barrier has caused divisions in the church, it becomes obvious that such people sever themselves from the head, Christ himself, and also from the members of the One Church.”*

Love is the only power that can create and sustain unity in the church; nothing else can substitute for real unity, especially when it is a “holy unity.” The Roman Catholic Church in the past has not seen this central point of unity, and instead has advocated “unity in administration,” where secular power and authority have jeopardized the true and lasting unity of the Church, under the sole jurisdiction of the Pope whom the Romans consider the Chief Pastor of the Universal (Catholic) Church. Such “unity” has led Rome to the extreme “religious monarchy,” instead of leading to ways searching real unity. The modern term “Clericalism” is used to describe that “religious monarchy,” rather loosely and with less certainty. Its equivalent term in Armenian is *Kgherapetutyun*; it explains more clearly the role of the Papacy and the Roman Curia. In recent times the Roman Catholic Church entered in dialogues with the non-Catholic churches to better understand and evaluate the Unity of the Church since the Council of Vatican II in the sixties of the 20th century. All such efforts since then were welcomed by the Apostolic and Orthodox churches.

The Church is Holy

The essence of the church is Holiness, like the founder and the head Christ himself is holy, who shed his blood on the cross and sent the Holy Spirit to guide his church. As said by St. Paul, “*Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*” (Ephesians 5:26-27). The Church is Holy because all dogmas, canons, worship services, and Sacraments are inspired by the Holy Spirit. By the same token, the Holy church alone can sanctify its membership, which is called and privileged to form Christ’s Church. This, in turn, sets the standard for the followers of Christianity to live in cleanliness, and away from immoral and ungodly behavior. This quality of the church, “holiness in action,” is the purpose to bring people into a life pleasing God in heaven by actually “doing His will on earth as it is in heaven.” The attribute of holiness has prompted the church to offer Saints from her bosom, those champions of faith, who have witnessed in the past, even as martyrs, and will continue to witness Christ as the Savior. They are recognized by the church as intercessors before Christ, on behalf of the worshippers. It is also

by the holiness of the church that those sinners and ungodly people, staying away from the church and living in communities, will receive mercy; they will also benefit from the holiness of the church to rectify their lifestyle and keep themselves checked by the church. Speaking of “holiness,” one should cautiously distinguish the Absolute Holiness from the one that people try to achieve. The first belongs to God alone, and the second is simply the image or the mirror of that Holiness, in which men can recognize their own selves and shortcomings.

The Church is Catholic (Universal)

Christ’s Church is Universal or Catholic in its original sense: It belongs to everybody who believes in Jesus Christ and is canonically baptized and confirmed, following the Baptism of Jesus in Jordan. Jesus has commanded: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.*” (Matthew 28: 20). In its correct context there is no discrimination, which means Universal and not merely local. The Good News of salvation was given to all, as we read, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” The church has one calling: to preach the Gospel and establish God’s Kingdom on earth. This is the true meaning of the universality (or the catholicity) of the church.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 formulated the Creed of the Universal Church and specified those four attributes, **One**, **Catholic**, **Apostolic**, and **Holy**, believing and proclaiming that all four qualified one specific church, the Church of Christ, which is the Universal (Catholic) Church. It was only centuries later, in 1054, at the time of the Great Schism taken place between the East and the West, Rome and Constantinople, when the Roman Church monopolized the attribute “Catholic,” borrowing it way back from Nicaea. The same year the Greeks, in disagreement with Rome on the matter of the “Procession of the Holy Spirit,” as discussed earlier in this study, called themselves “Orthodox,” a term which is not included in the Nicene Creed, meaning “the holder of the true doctrine.”

The Church of Armenia remained faithful to the original Creed of the Universal Church, and did not in any way participate in the controversies raised after the Council of Ephesus in 431, thus not separating itself from the Universal Church. Those who

claim that Armenians deviated and separated themselves from the Universal Church because of their rejection of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, are historically in error, since any and all divisions in the Universal Church took place **after** the Council of Chalcedon, while the Armenian Church had remained as the integral part of the Universal Church, undivided and truly universal then until 431, **before** the Council of Chalcedon, abiding by the resolutions of the Third Church Council of Ephesus as sufficiently complete and final, allowing no additional dogma and doctrines beyond 431 AD.

The Church is Apostolic

The Church of Christ, whose head is Christ himself, is founded by the Apostles of Christ as indicated by St. Paul: “[*The church*] having been built upon the foundations of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2: 20). The first churches were personally founded by the Apostles who went to their respective countries and preached Christ to the local communities. Those churches are truly and historically apostolic for having Apostles by name and location who established those churches directly, not by the hands of their disciples or their descendants. Tradition associates names such as Peter, Mark, Thomas, Thaddeus, and Bartholomew and the rest with countries where they personally went right after the Pentecost, where the First Church was founded by them and the Holy Spirit they had just received. Armenia was one of them where St. Thaddeus and Bartholomew went, and Rome was another where St. Peter went, or St. Thomas who went to India, or St. Mark who personally preached Christ in Alexandria. St. Paul, for sure, who came later on, without having seen Jesus and without experiencing the Pentecost, stands out as the one special Apostle whose lifelong deep faith and devotion to Christ made him the Apostle of the Gentiles, who established more than fifteen churches across Asia Minor and Greece. The Acts of the Apostles and his fourteen Epistles are the documents of his missionary work. This historical phase is the basic evidence of the Apostolicity of the Universal Church.

Next, theologically the Church is Apostolic because the message and the continuous preaching of the Good News comprise an apostolic mission in themselves. The source of such

an apostolic mission is Christ, who transferred his apostolic authority to his disciples personally, while the Eleven had met him in Galilee before his Ascension: “*All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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.*” (Matthew 28: 18-19). The word “apostolic” implies “delegating”, since the word *apostolos* in the Greek original means “the one who is sent” for certain purpose.

Taking this basic meaning and applying it to the Church elucidates two further dimensions: First, the Apostolic Succession of the church, by which the order of the hierarchy of ordained bishops and priests, originated by the Apostles themselves, continued and still continues to carry the true teachings of Christ through his Apostles. For traditional churches the “apostolic succession” is essential in so far as it safeguards the lineage and the continuity of the ordained clergy directly from the Apostles. Secondly, the apostolic attribute of the church is acknowledged in the preservation of the true doctrines of the church which the Apostles and their loyal followers preached, including the administration of the holy Sacraments.

Finally, the validity of the church is based on its Apostolic nature which was specified by Jesus when he transferred his authority to all of the disciples equally, giving them the power to bind and to loose, saying: “*Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*” (Matthew 18: 19). The holy Sacraments are valid in so far as they are performed linked with the “apostolic succession.” The Apostles received equal authority, despite the Roman Catholic doctrine which advocates the priority of Peter as the Chief of the Twelve, and whose direct successor, the Romans believe, is the Pope of Rome with the additional title of the Vicar of Christ. We already mentioned earlier that the **confession of Peter** at Caesarea Philippi, and not his person, **was the rock** on which Christ wished to build his Church. In many instances the equal authority of the Twelve Disciples has been repeated by Jesus, especially at the very end, when he charged all of them to preach to the entire nations equally.

The Armenian Apostolic Church

It was stated above that the Armenian Church is recognized as the church belonging to a nation with its own language and culture, both of which have been the true and lasting expressions of this holy institution. I mean to say that even if the Armenians had their spoken language earlier than Jesus Christ, which they actually did, they had to invent the Armenian letters and flourish literature because of Christianity which penetrated into Armenia and which required the Armenian authentic alphabet and the urgency of the translation of the Holy Bible into Armenian. The theological trend of the Armenian Church is in genuine line with the Universal Church, as explained already. The four attributes specified above are also expressed in the Armenian Church in their full sense.

The Armenian Church is one within itself in the unity of the Universal Church. The authenticity of the Church of Armenia is recognized by its oneness of the Sanctuary, Hierarchy, Clergy, and Sacramental life. All Armenian churches ever since have kept the unity in this very essential centric system, following very carefully the Apostolic Succession of Christ's church way down from the First Illuminators of Armenia, Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew, and from St. Gregory, the Second Illuminator of Armenia. The successor of St. Gregory is the Catholicos of All Armenians who resides as of today for 1700 years in the original seat of the Great Saint, in the Holy City of Etchmiadzin. The internal unity, based on religious and national integrity, is manifested in the unity with the Universal Church, keeping all four qualities intact and in harmony with that Church. The original doctrines and dogma of the Universal Church have formed the foundations of the Armenian Church and guaranteed its existence, and as such, they have kept the Armenian Church within the realm of the Universal Church, confessing Christ as the Head and the Holy Spirit as the Power and the wisdom of the church. The Armenian Church has expressed in words and in deed the unity of the Church, declaring by the words of Catholicos St. Nersess the Graceful of Armenia, "Unity in the essential beliefs; Liberty in the doubtful matters; Love among all."

The Armenian Church is Holy, because Christ the head of the church is holy, so are the doctrines, the orders of the hierarchy,

the rites, and the worship services. It is with holiness that the Armenian Church tries to lead its membership to live under the grace of the Holy Spirit, teaching them the saintly activities of those witnesses and martyrs who gave their lives to uphold the sanctity of the Church. Like the other authentic churches, the Armenian Church has also administered the Holy Sacraments to bring sanctity, purity, and loyalty among its members, who comprise the actual existence of the church, instructing them to stay away from all kinds of divisive and alien ways, political and worldly that would mislead them to an ungodly life.

The Armenian Church is Catholic in its proper and original sense, as explained above, being part of the Universal Church, acknowledging the fact that Catholic means Universal, and not necessarily Roman Catholic. It has kept the rites and the doctrines of the united church without any addition to or severance from the Nicene Creed, which was endorsed by all churches within the universality of the Christian Holy Church. The Church of Armenia, although serving exclusively the Armenian people and nation, has been also in touch with other people in so far as spreading the Good News to those neighboring countries. Such countries were Georgia and Caucasian Albania.

Historically then the Armenian Church is Apostolic, being founded directly by the two Apostles of Christ, and has transferred without interruption the line of the apostolic preaching to their successors by the ordination of Bishops. It is Apostolic by way of its doctrines and the dissemination of those doctrines, thus building its own mission whose historic field has been the land of Armenia and its people, in the motherland and in the Diaspora. As said, the term "Orthodox" was not originally used as an attribute canonically given to the Church; it meant in Greek "the church that holds the correct faith." During the religious conflict of 1054 between Rome and Constantinople, the term was monopolized by the Greeks. The Armenian Church maintained always the "Apostolic" designation, found in the Nicene Creed, but at the same time defended the "Orthodoxy" of the church at all costs, solely in its theological sense and application, and not in its historical development since the latter could possibly tend to identify the Armenian Church as a member of the family of the Greek Orthodox churches. Bear in mind always that the term "Orthodox"

was not included in the Nicene Creed. It was adopted at a later time.

The Armenian Church has always been an autocephalous church, independent from its inception, having no subjection to any church at any time. Therefore, to say that the Church of Armenia has separated itself from the Catholic or the Orthodox churches, remains simply unfounded and historically incorrect, since it has its allegiance to the First Three Church Councils only, where the doctrines and the dogma of the Universal Church were formulated in unison with the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

The Theology of the Sacraments

Following the tradition of the early church, the Armenian Church has administered the Seven Sacraments as vehicles to distribute the “sevenfold gifts” of God through His Holy Spirit. They are the visible “moving forces” and the “life-giving” sustainers of the members of the church, since they were established by Christ himself. They are not just rites and ceremonies prescribed by the leaders of the church; they are the “actions” of Christ, humbly performed by authorized members of the clergy, who through canonical ordination have assumed responsibility to perform those Sacraments, as representatives of Christ and as successors of the Apostles. The number of the Church Sacraments is seven. This is neither an accident nor a fixed number taken from the Bible. It has simply developed with the growth of the Church, and it was only in the beginning of the 12th century that first the West and later the East determined them to be no more than seven, as the essential Sacraments for the life and vitality of the church. There are other lesser rites, as important in fact, which have been the integral parts of the sacramental life of the church. They are not Sacraments, but are essential rites, such as, the Consecration of church edifices, of religious icons and crosses by the Holy Oil, and the blessing of the water, commemorating the Baptism of Jesus on Holy Epiphany.

The Church without the Sacraments is not considered as “functional,” even though the same church, viewed from other faiths, firmly believes in the Holy Scriptures and rightfully performs the preaching of God’s Word as a priority. For that matter, the Sacraments are certainly the offspring of the Word of

God, directly mandated by the Savior Jesus Christ, being the Body and the Mind of Christ, as they ceremoniously continue the mission of the Incarnate Son of God always based on the Holy Scriptures. The church would have suffered serious setback without the “nourishment” of the Holy Sacraments.

The Church is replenished by its faithful who have received individually the corresponding gifts and power of the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments, especially through Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Absolution and Ordination, to maintain the truthful and canonical existence of the Church and the Preaching of the Word of God. Originally rites and ceremonies are parts of the covenant between God and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and not simply created by men of faith who have only embellished them eventually, based on the New Covenant, where Jesus had actually ordained those forms to be “fulfilled” by a drastic revision.

Whereas the Baptism of Jesus was essential for his ministry, Repentance was announced forcefully by John the Baptist, Marriage was controlled and elevated to its highest moral understanding, and Ordination was actually administered by Christ to his disciples before his Ascension as the sign of the “authority” he had received from the Father, and now “transferring” it to his Disciples. The Sacrament of the Holy Communion stands by itself as the most sacred “act” of Christ, who during his Last Supper, offered his own body and blood symbolically, by breaking the bread and by drinking from the cup, to conclude the ephemeral and to establish the eternal once and for all. The seventh Sacrament is known as the Last Unction, or the Last Rite and is reserved for the sick prior to their death.

The Requirements of the Sacraments

The performance of the Sacraments in the Armenian Church has its peculiar requirements in order to be canonical, effective, and acceptable by the Church. The original texts and the formulae to be recited during each ceremony, primarily in the classical Armenian, are mandatory as it is the person himself who is about to perform those Sacraments. The latter must be an ordained priest in the Armenian Church who is authorized to celebrate the following six Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation,

Penance, Communion, Marriage, and the Last Unction. The one remaining Sacrament of Ordination is reserved for the bishop, who alone has the apostolic power to ordain deacons and priests, and to transfer priestly authority to the worthy deacons who must have previously received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, and Communion.

The Armenian Church gives divine quality to the Holy Oil, calling it *Serpalooy's Miuron*, meaning "sacredly lit," which is prepared and consecrated by the Supreme Head of the Armenian Church every seven years in the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin and distributed worldwide. It is venerated by each church and kept in the Baptistry, holy and untouchable by the laity, in a dove-shaped container. The Holy Oil is symbolically the means for transferring the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church members, clergy, and to certain articles for the use of the church. It is considered as Holy, touched only by the ordained clergy, excluding the deacons. The sacredness is transmitted to the Oil from the power of Holy Scriptures, the ancient miraculous relics, from the real Spear of Christ, from the "Arm of St. Gregory the Illuminator," arm-shaped silver "right hand," containing the relic of the Saint, and from the relics of Church Saints. All and every member of the clergy, beginning from priesthood up, receives the unction of the Holy *Miuron* by actually being anointed by it during the elaborate services of ordinations of each rank. The bishop anoints the priests, the Catholicos-Patriarch anoints the bishops, and the College of Bishops anoints the Catholicos. The faithful kiss the right hand of the clergy, because it is anointed; further, clergy and faithful kiss any item which is anointed with the Holy Oil. Anointment actually separates the spiritual from the worldly, and the clean from the unclean.

It should be noted that the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is not limited exclusively in the performance of the Sacraments and/or in the anointment. The Holy Spirit works in many other limitless ways, as said in the Scriptures: "*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*" (John 3: 8). The Holy Spirit, apart from the Sacraments and from the Holy Oil, distributes manifold gifts when a believer is praying personally, or when the Holy Bible is being studied, or missionaries are helping the poor and the destitute in

far away countries, providing them with food and social care. Sometimes those outreaches are more acceptable to God than the performance of a Sacrament, at which time the Holy Spirit gives abundant hope and courage, both to the missionaries and to the needy.

Having said all this, one thing however must be adjusted. Sacraments are valid and acceptable by the church only when they are performed in the presence and with the participation of the faithful. The priest cannot perform any Sacrament alone, when people, having received the Sacraments of the Church and being gracefully filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are not witnessing his performance. This is very true when the Divine Liturgy is performed and the Holy Communion is administered. The bread and the wine are NOT consecrated and changed into the Body and the Blood of Christ, when privately performed by the “action” of the priest itself, known as *ex opere operato* in the Latin tradition, BUT in the communion of the church where the faithful are in participation, and where the Holy Spirit has descended upon them collectively. The same is true when baptisms and ordinations are performed, when godfathers and witnesses are primarily and necessarily needed.

The Sacrament and the Receiver Subjectivity versus Objectivity

Here comes the basic question as to how effective a Sacrament can be to the receiver. Is it by way of performance only, or by the intent and faith of the receiver? It should be noted that neither the required objects (water, bread, wine, holy oil), nor the proper ceremonies by proper clerics (bishops and priests), can guarantee the effectiveness of a given Sacrament by themselves. This implies that the mere action objectively done does not accomplish the purpose, without the effective presence of the Holy Spirit subjectively. Sacraments are not complete by simple action, as just mentioned, *ex opere operato*, that is, “by the means of the action performed only,” without the intent and the conscientious participation of the receiver, because the divine ordinance of the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit cannot operate “automatically” so to speak leaving the impression of a magic action, empty of divine power, just because the ceremony is done

properly. This is not accepted by the Armenian Church, which requires subjectivity rather than the objective performance alone.

The most illustrious example in this case is in the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. Only when believers have attended the *Soorp Badarak* (the Holy Eucharist) and participated in it, have confessed their sins willingly, sincerely, and collectively, thus proving themselves personally and spiritually ready, in clear conscious, only then they become worthy to receive the Holy Communion. St. Paul's admonition is striking: "*Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in any unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*"(1 Cor.11: 27-28). For the Sacrament to be a vehicle of salvation, it is mandatory that the receiver experience spiritual renewal, mentally and physically ready, displaying a joyful and a determined willingness to go through it.

Baptism

Baptism or Christening is the initial Sacrament of the Church, following Jesus' Baptism in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. Infants, and rarely adults, are baptized in the Armenian Church and Confirmed immediately after the Baptism. The newly baptized and confirmed also receives the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, thus completing the infant's initial requirements to enter the church at once and live in full communion with the Christian faith according to the Armenian Church Canons. No further Sacraments can be administered on any person who has not been baptized and confirmed in the first place. Water is the first requirement for Baptism which is consecrated by the priest, who pours drops of Holy Oil (*Miuron*) in it, using the silver dove-shaped container, symbolizing the descent of the Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus in the form of a dove when he was in the water. A Godfather is necessary to sponsor the child and to follow up with his upbringing in the church, for which reason he himself must be a baptized and confirmed member of the Armenian Church, knowledgeable of the doctrine and the teaching of the Orthodox faith. Godmother, as it seems important in the Western churches, is not a necessity in the Armenian tradition, (it may still be an honorary presence), because "*the Church is the Godmother*

of the newly-born” as stated in the Armenian theology in the *Girk Hartsnants*, (*Book of Questions*) by Grigor Tadevatsi.

Baptism is performed by immersion of the infant in the consecrated water by the hands of the priest or the bishop, who receives the child from the arms of the godfather. Giving his/her name for the first time, he bathes the child three times and uses the passive verb in the third person, saying: *This (name) child is being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*, each time immersing the infant in the water completely. The passive verb is significant and suggestive, telling us that the priest is not the one who is actually baptizing the child. He does not say, for example, “I baptize you,” but only, he says, the child **“is being baptized,”** in the name of the Holy Trinity. This also means that each Sacrament is performed directly by the founder, Christ himself.

The thrice immersion of the child in the water symbolizes the death of Jesus, his burial, and his Resurrection, making the child *“co-heir of Christ, an adopted child of the Father, and temple of the Holy Spirit,”* as recited clearly by the priest, following St. Paul’s theology of the Sacrament, saying: *“Therefore we were buried with Christ through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (Rom. 6: 4). Further, *“Buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”* (Col. 2: 12). The child now is born anew has become a member of the Armenian Church in its Biblical sense. It is a second birth from the bosom of Christ’s Church. Baptism is not repeated under any circumstances, provided it is performed as required by the church; otherwise it is considered invalid, and it must be performed again. It is a spiritual birth once and for all, as stated by St. Paul: *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”* (Eph. 4: 5).

Confirmation with the Holy Oil

This Sacrament brings a new “Pentecost” to each individual, since it makes the newly baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. In the Armenian Church it is performed immediately after the Baptism with the ointment of the Holy *Miuron*. It symbolizes the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove upon Jesus while

receiving baptism by John the Baptist. Its practice is originated from the Apostles who placed their hands on the newly baptized for them to receive the Holy Spirit, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles: *“They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit”* (8: 16-17); *“And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”* (19: 6).

Whereas Baptism cleanses the person from his original sin, Confirmation empowers him with the gifts of the Holy Spirit throughout his life; it enlightens the person’s spiritual abilities, taking him out of darkness and leading him to a life of hope and godliness. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which later in the 13th century, deviating from the original tradition, postponed the Confirmation of the child up to a certain age, keeping the Baptism as it was, the Armenian Church believes that the child should receive the life-giving gifts of the Holy Spirit in life as soon as possible, before something happens to the child. It is obviously contradictory to baptize the infant while the infant is a baby, and to postpone his/her confirmation to the age of 12 to 14, arguing that the grown up will understand the Sacrament of Confirmation. The same is not being applied however to the Sacrament of Baptism. In my opinion I still think there is some wisdom in the Catholic tradition.

The Holy Oil is the means by which several parts of the child’s body are anointed by the priest, by dipping his thumb in the Oil and making the sign of the cross each time with the proper formula on each part of the body. He in fact **“seals in the name of Jesus Christ”** the forehead, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the lips, the heart, the hands, the back and the feet. For each a specific power is asked for a life-time defense and guidance, such as, for the forehead “immaculate gifts,” for the eyes “light of immortality,” for the ears “hearing divine commandments,” for the nose “smelling the sweetness of life,” for the lips “controlling the words coming out of the mouth,” for the hands “accomplishing good deed and conduct,” for the heart “remaining firm in holiness where the Holy Spirit can be renewed,” for the back “being helmet of resistance against the evil,” for the feet “enabling to walk in life firmly to attain eternal life.”

In the Roman and the Anglican churches Confirmation is reserved for the bishops only, whose privilege it is to pronounce in the first person, saying: "I confirm thee," leaving the impression as if the source of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the bishop himself. In the Armenian Church, as mentioned above, all Sacraments and blessings are done in the third person and in the passive tense, ascribing the privilege to the Lord Jesus Christ alone. In the case of Confirmation, for example, says the priest: "*This divine seal in the name of Jesus Christ may enlighten your eyes,*" and so forth. The third Sacrament of Holy Communion follows, as the child is carried up on the Holy Altar where he/she worships with the priest for the first time before receiving the Communion.

There is one final note regarding the 40th day of the birth of the child. It is customary and very common that parents bring their children on the 40th day to present them to the Church, following the Presentation of Jesus to the Temple when he was 40 days old. The *Book of Sacraments* of the Armenian Church has a special canon for this, with the instruction that it is done **after** the Baptism and Confirmation, and not before, since those Sacraments are meant to be performed within the first 8 days, or at least before the 40th day of the birth, so that on the 40th day the baptized and confirmed child is readily presented to the church. This, as we see almost every week, is done in reverse, thinking that it would be too early to baptize the child at the early age of a few weeks.

Repentance

Confession and contrition are required for a believer to be freed from his/her sins committed following the days and years after being a full-fledged member of the church. The priest hears the confession, gives the absolution in the name of the Holy Trinity, and re-instates the faithful in the Sacraments of the Church. This Sacrament is the strongest and the most personal, if the believer takes it seriously rather than as a mere formality. Sins are committed by all, every day in life. The Church allows this "limited" opportunity to have the faithful cleanse themselves individually, from within, with the resolution not to sin again. But life has proven otherwise, there is neither "limited opportunity" nor the guarantee of "not sinning again", therefore the church has made the allowance of repentance before the priest a life-long

opportunity, who has the “authority” to bind and loose, an authority given by Christ before his Ascension and renewed by his ordination.

Sin is the leading evil before God in its manifold ways, rooted in wrong-doings, from telling lies to killing, from cursing to committing adultery. It is even the cause of illness, as seen in the case of the paralytic. Jesus healed him saying, “*Your sins are forgiven*” (Matthew 9: 2), meaning that one has to be cleansed from within first, and then be restored in his health. Christ accomplished his mission for one major and eternal purpose, that is, the salvation of mankind from its daily sins. The fruit of Repentance is **forgiveness**, which appeared in the words of Jesus constantly, beginning from the Lord’s Prayer, where one has to be willing to forgive the other’s wrong, so that God may forgive one’s own misdeeds. Jesus said: “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*” (John 20: 23). We also read in the Old Testament where Prophet Jeremiah comforts his people on behalf of God, saying: “*I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins.*” (43: 25).

Conditions are set for proper absolution from sins, and one of them is to feel sorry and pain for what the believer has done, and then confess them willingly and never as a habit, asking God’s forgiveness, having the church as shelter and haven for his hopes and for possible righteousness through Christ, who wiped the sins of mankind by giving his life on the Cross. As the clean water washes filthiness, so does the sincere confession which wipes away the sins of men. Prophet Ezekiel has made it all clear, when saying: “*But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all my statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die; none of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.*” (18: 21-22).

Being a Sacrament, Repentance is effective only in the church and before the priest, and in extreme cases at homes for the aged or private homes, where the priest visits the infirm. The Armenian Church has set a list of most probable sins, usually committed daily by all, which are read by the confessors themselves, fully understanding the significance and the weight of

those sins. In his concluding prayer, the priest absolves all the sins, the ones read and heard and those which were forgotten, giving each one, personally or collectively, forgiveness in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The theology of this Sacrament is imbedded in the Incarnation of the Word of God. His coming had the special purpose from God the Father, not to lose any of his creatures, but have them return to Him, through His Son who left his legacy on earth, his true Body, the Church as the custodian of his eternal mission, until his Second Coming.

Finally, the Armenian Church does not understand “repentance achieved under pressure, under certain conditions and in return for some punishment,” as the Roman Catholic Church maintained for centuries, which the believer must go through, as if God “claims the price” before He grants forgiveness. The Eastern churches, among them the Armenian Church, reject such condition and instead consider repentance or penance powerful enough as means for edification and guidance. Punishment of the Old Testament was replaced by love and tolerance in the New Testament, for which the leading example is the well known parable of the Prodigal Son, who experienced pain and poverty, repented, and returned willingly to his father’s home, where he was received by his father lovingly, with no punishment in sight, on the contrary with a lavish reception: “*He was dead and now he is alive, he was lost and now he is found.*” There is neither sign nor a message of punishment in this illustrious parable told so eloquently by Jesus Christ, making it a “gospel in the Gospels” in the New Testament.

After all, “*If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” (1 John 1: 7). If the blood of Jesus Christ is the ultimate healer of our sins, then any other requirement remains futile.

Eucharist and Holy Communion

The Holy Eucharist (a Greek word meaning Thanksgiving) and the administration of the Holy Communion are central in Christian worship. The word “communion” itself applies to the relationship between man and God through Jesus Christ, who instituted the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, revealing the

symbolic transition of the bread to his Body, and the wine to his Blood. The words of the Institution of the *Soorp Badarak*, as we call it in Armenian, meaning Holy Sacrifice, liturgically realized the transition of the Last Supper from the Upper Room to the Holy Altar of the church, where the bread and wine are consecrated by the celebrant priest in the presence and with the participation of the faithful, who, after confessing their sins and going through the Sacrament of Repentance, receive the Body and the Blood of Christ worthily. This in essence is the Sacrament of the Holy Communion which gives the believer a new and an unending life, as said by Christ himself: *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”* (John 6: 54-55).

The Body and the Blood of Christ referred to at the Last Supper by Jesus himself, prompted Christ’s Great Sacrifice on the Cross without which neither communion, nor salvation would be possible. His Sacrifice was eternally purposeful; it was offered for men’s salvation, as stated by Jesus and addressed to his disciples, saying: *“This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”* (Luke 22: 19). Also, *“This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.”* (Mark 14: 24). As often as the Divine Liturgy is performed on the altars of the churches Christ is being sacrificed, this time away from Golgotha and “in remembrance of him,” through the mysterious change of the bread and the wine into the Body and the Blood of Christ.

The celebration of the Divine Liturgy is therefore the Sacrament for the preparation of the “Last Supper” in its new format, for which a special canonical service is composed by the early church Fathers, based entirely on the Biblical events, on the instructions of Jesus, and following the first meals that the Apostles shared “in remembrance” of the Lord. The entire performance is most elaborate and solemn among the ancient churches, by readings from the Testaments of the Bible, and by reciting specific prayers, some of them silently, along with the singing of the selected hymns and songs dedicated to the Persons of the Holy Trinity individually and in unison. The four parts of the Divine Liturgy make the entire service complete and meaningful, the central part being the actual Sacrifice itself, at which time the elements of the Eucharist, the bread and the wine, are

consecrated through the invocation of the Holy Spirit (*Epiclesis*). The chalice, with the consecrated elements, is now elevated and presented to the Father in Heaven. The four parts of the Divine Liturgy are the following:

**The Preparation,
The Synaxis,
The Sacrifice,
The Last Blessing.**

All four comprise a magnificent unity complementing each other. The Preparation is first for the celebrant priest, who is properly and humbly vested with prayers for each part of the vestment, and is led into the congregation for his confession, after washing his hands for purification. Second, the preparation of the hosts takes place, as the wafer and the wine, which are blessed through prayers behind the closed altar, symbolizing the Incarnation of Jesus, are placed in the chalice, covered, and taken to the side altar. Between the first two parts, the celebrant descends from the Altar with procession and walks around the congregation signifying Christ's mission, his preaching and his healings, the cross in one hand and the incense in the other, blessing them individually as they ask "to be remembered before the Immortal Lamb of God," to which the priest answers, saying, "May you be remembered before the Immortal Lamb of God," while incensing each.

The *Synaxis* begins with the declaration of the Blessing of the Kingdom of God. This is the time to hear the Word of God, particularly from the Gospels, to confess the Creed of the Universal Church, and to hear the homily after prescribed passages from the Old and the New Testaments are read and the Nicene Creed recited in unison. It is for the congregation to learn about the Word of God. This part leads the Liturgy into the Great Entrance, the procession for carrying the Chalice from the side altar to the celebrant. This is done ceremoniously and with high devotion. It marks the beginning of the actual Sacrifice, the third part of the Liturgy. At first greetings are received from the Celebrant who has just touched the Chalice, known as the Kiss of Peace, and then distributed to the entire congregation individually, confessing "The Revelation of Christ in our midst."

The climax is the *Epiclesis* which makes the change of the elements happen through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. The natural bread and wine remain as physical objects with their taste and shape, but they are now transformed into the Body and the Blood of Christ mysteriously, by the power of the Words of the Institution at the Last Supper and by the Holy Spirit abiding in them. St. Gregory of Tadev, the Armenian theologian says: *"The bread is the same as we see it, but now it is a new substance, namely the Body of Christ; we see the appearance from the outside as the same, but its nature is united with the Word of God."* This further means that whereas from the outside the elements remain the same, both bread and wine receive a new power, whereby the essence of Christ's body and Blood find abode in them by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, similar to the Incarnation of the Word at the Birth of Jesus from Mary, whose conception took place as mysteriously by the Holy Spirit.

St. Nersess Bishop of Lambron views the Eucharist this way: *"Until the invocation (epiclesis), both elements are offered as the earthly body and blood of Christ, but at the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the invisible offering and the spiritual offering by the faithful are made one by God the Father."* Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, a theologian of the Armenian Church in recent times, has made it rather simple, saying: *"The material elements remain the same in every respect, except that they receive a new power, and are thereby raised to a level or role in the order of things, by virtue of their being consecrated to be a vehicle of the Spirit."*

The change is not seen nor felt to the naked eye, but it is felt by the soul through faith in Christ and his purpose for giving himself to become part of the believer's life on earth. St. John Mandakuni, theologian and Catholicos of Armenia, has elucidated the point further, saying, *"You should not look at it as simply bread, because you cannot see the greatness of the Sacrament on the Altar, unless you feel the power of the Sacrament. You should see Christ on the Altar with truthful faith, and approach him, see him, touch him, kiss him, and receive him inside you, thus becoming body and members and sons of God."*

In the Armenian Church the wafer (*nushkarh*) which is consecrated on the Altar for Holy Communion, must be unleavened bread, unlike the Greek and the Orthodox churches; as for the wine in the cup, must be pure wine, no water added to it,

unlike the Catholic and the Orthodox churches who actually add water to the wine. The mixture, they believe, is in commemoration of the blood and water sprung from the side of Jesus, while on the Cross, when the spear pierced his side. But it is of prime importance to remember that at the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist, broke the **unleavened bread** and blessed the **pure wine** before giving them to his disciples. At the end of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the Armenian Church administers the Holy Communion after the celebrant dips the Wafer, now changed into the Body of Christ, in the Wine, now changed into the Blood of Christ, thus making the unity of Christ's Person a real and effective unity, and places portions on the tongues of the believers, after the Confession is heard and the absolution given by the priest.

The last part of the Divine Liturgy is the "Blessing", which begins with solemn biddings by the priest, after he descends from the Holy Altar, addressed to the Father in Heaven, for the prosperity of the church, the faithful, the Christian states and their leaders, kings and authorities, stating the fact that the church is thankful to God for all His gifts that come down to the earth. Following the Thanksgiving Prayer, the last passage of the Gospel from St. John's (chapter one) is read, as the faithful approach in awe to kiss the Gospel Book and receive individual blessings before departing.

Matrimony – Crowning

This Holy Sacrament is typically called in the Armenian Church tradition as the **Sacrament of the Crowning**, rather than Marriage or Matrimony, referring to the union of the bride and the groom who will from now on establish their own little kingdom within the larger Kingdom of God, making them the "king" and the "queen" of the day, with actually crowning them during the ceremony. A special hymn is sung during the coronation bringing back blessings from the first Christian King Trdat and Queen Ashkhen who embraced Christianity by the hands of St. Gregory the Illuminator and proclaimed it nationwide. The theology of this Sacrament is reflected in the following Biblical elements:

- (a) Its initiation by God’s Creation of Adam and Eve,**
- (b) Its sanctification by Christ to keep the union holy and inseparable,**
- (c) The sanctity of its unity as seen between Christ the Groom and his bride the Church,**
- (d) Its blessing by the “presence” of Jesus, his Blessed Mother, and the Disciples.**

It is only the Church that unites the couple by the hands of an ordained priest and on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. No outside institution or authority shall perform it, since the sanctity of the union between husband and wife is sealed by the hands of Christ, who established the Sacrament of Matrimony, strictly refusing any and all moral deviations resulting in the separation of the two. It is further the Holy Spirit which acts in each Sacrament, and there is no place other than the church where the Spirit of God, the source of divine gifts in each Sacrament, is present and active. This unity in Jesus’ mind is not only a physical unity, but also a unity of mutual love and support for the principal purpose of procreation of children to replenish the family and, in extension, the Kingdom of God, which is Christ’s Church on earth. Let us explain each of the above briefly.

(a) As God created man and woman, He told them about the purpose of his first creatures: *To be fruitful and multiply the earth and subdue it*” (Genesis 1: 28), which Jesus repeated and clarified, saying: *“But from the beginning of the Creation God made them male and female.”* Jesus sanctified the Father’s initiative by confirming the forceful and purposeful unity between the two, saying: *“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”* (Mark 10: 6). To be fruitful is the goal of this Sacrament, for which the Armenian Church reads lengthy prayers to safeguard the sanctity and the lasting unity between the husband and his wife, so that children are born and brought up properly, families are formed, the earth is replenished, and the Church of God is enriched. For all these to be within the standards of God’s Creation, they require life commitment, with the unfailing support of the Church. This is why St. Paul has taken the marriage of the husband and wife most seriously, indicating two major levels of

comparison: First, *“For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church.”* (Ephesians 5: 23).

Here the newly formed family is elevated into the status of a component of the Church. If the Church is the most important institution of Christianity, so is the family whose head, the husband, must do what Christ has done for the Church. The highest responsibilities in both cases coincide in the mind of the Apostles in the next verse which is the second level of comparison: *“Just as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in everything.”* (5: 24). Subjection in terms of moral and religious obedience suggests for sure the kind of relationship between the two as the subjection of the church to Christ. Do not forget that when comparing these statements Christ is the highest model, and the Church is the holiest institution. Perfection is being compared with imperfection, so that as the family grows, the church further reaps the harvest and keeps its mission going.

(b) In his time Moses encountered the problems which emerged from marriage. He was forced to allow his people in extreme cases to divorce their wives. Being aware of that, Jesus argued that from the beginning it was not so. Therefore, he said: *“Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except for sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”* (Matthew 5: 32; Luke 16: 18). The Church categorically rejects any and all excuses for divorce, given the fact that after marriage the two are one body, symbolizing the inseparable unity between Christ and the Church. The Armenian Church believes firmly that divorce may be given in cases of immoral relationship, as approved by Jesus. I just cited the verse from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19 verse 9, where he has made that “exception.”

Of course times have changed and today divorce has become a common process, totally within the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, hastily done, to a degree where God's blessings and the Church's privileges are sacrilegiously ignored. Until World War II the Armenian Church was still honored for its juridical authority, and divorce was permitted in extreme cases, such as mental disorder, physical incompetence, and of course unfaithful relationship of one of the spouses. But still, such final

decisions were made after serious investigation by diocesan courts, upon whose recommendation, only the head of the Armenian Church gave the certificate of divorce, thus defending the church's spiritual guidance and integrity.

(c) The everlasting unity of Christ as the Groom and the Church as the Bride is most significant. Jesus alluded himself to the Groom when telling the parable of the Ten Virgins. He united himself with his Church in such a way that without him no church would exist. In the same manner, on a much lower level, the unity of the newly married couple reflects the mystery of the Church and its founder Jesus Christ as inseparable entities. Families are institutions following the example of the Holy Institution, and the founders are responsible for their stability. This also means that as long as the Church exists with Christ as the head, so also Christian families shall exist, so long as the head of the household, the husband with his wife, remain faithful to each other, morally and spiritually, in order to promote families to join the Kingdom of God, the Church of Christ on earth. This is why St. Paul specifically says: "*[The marriage] is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*" (Ephesians 5: 32).

(d) Jesus did not despise marriage, but blessed it with his personal presence with his Blessed Mother and the Disciples at the wedding taken place in Cana of Galilee, where he performed his first and the most unusual miracle in the midst of a large crowd of wedding guests, by changing the water into wine, since they had run out of wine. This event comes in the Crowning service of this Sacrament for two reasons: First, personal blessing and endorsement, and then the happy ending of the party and merriment. The Armenian Church blesses a cup of wine by actually repeating what was just said. The prayer itself recalls the miracle, and by the grace of that miracle the priest blesses the cup and gives it to the groom and the bride to drink from that one cup. The wisdom of such conclusion in the Armenian Church performance of this Sacrament expresses remotely the theology of Christ's presence to this particular matrimony. Christ, his Blessed Mother, and the twelve Disciples are actually the honorary "witnesses" of the Sacrament, which makes the unity between the groom and the bride more honorable and even miraculous.

Ordination

Ordination is the Sacrament for providing the Church with its ministers, the spiritual shepherds, known to the ancient churches with their proper Biblical ranks as *Episkopos* (Bishop), *Presbyteros* (Priest), and *Diakonos* (Deacon). Through this Sacrament the church authorities invite those who have the calling to serve God and the People of God as the successors of the Apostles who laid their hands on their immediate successors, making them presbyters and deacons, who came to assist them in their missionary work on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first ordination in Christianity is described in its primitive form in the *Acts of the Apostles* where it says about the first “seven men of good reputation”: “*Therefore, brethren seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. And when they had prayed they laid hands on them.*” (Acts 6: 3, 6; 13: 3). St. Paul’s favorite disciple Timothy was charged even more directly: “*Do not neglect the gift that is in you which was given to you by prophecy by the laying on of the hands of the eldership.*” (1Timothy 4: 14). The early Church Councils followed the Apostles arrangements, and established those ranks as the three basic hierarchic orders of the Church. The leader of those three offices assumed the Greek term of *Episkopos*, literally meaning “overseer,” or *veratesooch* in Armenian. Thus, the Sacrament of the Ordination kept the Apostolic Succession unbroken in the ancient churches.

Candidates for any of the three ranks are usually chosen by the congregation in local or national levels. The Bishop is the authorized officer, most of the time the Primate of a diocese, who can ordain priests and deacons, given his apostolic authority. In turn, by the decision reached at the Council of Nicaea, the Bishop is ordained by at least three bishops who lay their hands on the candidate and transfer to him the apostolic power. In the Armenian Church, as in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the basic hierarchic ranks are no more than three as mentioned. There is, however, the highest rank representing the head of the Armenian Church, who has his origin in the person of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia since 301 AD, whose successors have assumed the highest office of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Armenians with an unbroken line up to the present time. It

corresponded to the position of the Roman Catholic Pope and the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch. The present Catholicos of All Armenians is Karekin II, the 132nd from St. Gregory. His administrative position as the Chief of the Bishops, *Episkoposapet* in Armenian, surpasses those of the local diocesan bishops as he exercises his authority nationwide, residing in the original site of St. Gregory the Illuminator, having his seat in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia.

Theologically ordinations in the Armenian Church are genuine and colorful. The laying on of hands is essential for all ranks with one authentic addition. Following the ordination of the priests, bishops, and the Catholicos-Patriarch by the laying on of hands, **anointing** with the Holy Oil for all of them is necessary, symbolizing the source of divine gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each time a priest is ordained by the hands of a bishop, he is given the authority to wear proper liturgical vestments, along with the authority and the dominical power entrusted to him, to hear confessions and give the absolution. He receives ointment by the bishop on his forehead and the two palms, at which time he is also given a new name. His given name is now changed signifying the new man called to serve God and His flock, names mostly selected from the Holy Scriptures or from the Saints of the Church. Finally he is given the privilege to perform humbly the Divine Liturgy, *Soorp Badarak* in Armenian, which is the actual service of the Holy Communion.

The anointing is repeated when a given priest is elevated to the rank of a bishop by the hands of the Catholicos, the head of the Armenian Church, who ordains him first, along with two other bishops as required by the Canons of the Nicene Council, and then anoints his forehead and the thumb of his right hand. Now consecrated, the bishop's thumb is dipped in the Holy Oil every time he in turn consecrates a priest, a new church edifice, and the vessels of the church by the "sign of the Holy Cross and by the Word of the Gospel." Ultimately when one of the bishops is elected to succeed the Catholicos as the head of the Armenian Church, after his proper election by the Assembly of the bishops and the lay delegates of the Armenian Church nationwide, is ordained and anointed for the third time; this time the Holy Oil is poured on the top of his head corresponding to his office as the Chief Bishop, the Supreme Patriarch and the Catholicos of All

Armenians. Election alone does not conclude his office; he must be ordained and consecrated canonically by up to 12 and no less than three bishops, who in unison spread the Holy Oil on his head with the sign of the cross, in the presence of the bishops, clergy, and the lay officials of the Armenian Church from Armenia and the Diaspora. Following his consecration by the Holy *Miuron*, the Catholicos is enthroned as the successor of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the First Catholicos of Armenia. His office is for life.

Qualifications and Conditions

The Apostle Paul draws the basic difference between the lay person and the one who is about to be ordained: “*For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.*” (2 Corinthians 10: 18). This introduces the importance of the candidate’s personal virtues, prepared spiritually and mentally, feeling the calling to serve God seriously, in good conduct and in full dedication, displaying the impact of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within his daily life. The candidate is qualified if and when he has successfully gone through the required training, education, and the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, as declared by Prophet Malachi: “*For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge.*” (2: 7). The intent of the candidate must be clearly announced to the bishop before the ordination. During the ordination his intent and willingness are publicly investigated through the questions raised by the bishop and answered by the sponsoring priest. The final judgment is left to the people, who approve his candidacy three times by saying in unison, “he is worthy to the rank to which he is called.”

A new priest must follow the doctrines and the traditions of the Church. During the Calling Service the day before, and during the Ordination the next day, he is called to refute the Arian and the Nestorian heresies, the heresy of Macedon, and the rest heterodox teachings concerning the Person of Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is now ready to confess publicly the orthodox teachings of the First Three Church Councils. He therefore must remain firm in his confessions and teach accordingly. This is why training in theological principles are essential to the one who is about to receive the rank of priesthood. In case during his ministry he is found unfaithful to the Armenian Church doctrines, teaching or following the refuted dogma of the church

willingly, thus denying his orthodox beliefs, he can be defrocked by the Catholicos. The candidate's moral behavior is essential, especially when he has been ordained a priest and has proved himself worthy of his God-given privileges.

A candidate for priesthood must absolutely be certain that his career is "non-profit." He will only serve, and not abuse his position. Temptations are numerous for anyone. A priest must exercise utmost caution to keep himself clear of any temptation, thinking always that he represents a role model in life. He confesses his sins every time before entering the Holy Altar for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. He should raise his own family as an example for his flock, and the flock in turn will care about his livelihood and comfort, seeing the dedication and the pastoral duties accomplished decently, diligently, and faithfully. The same applies of course to the members of higher ranking clergy, celibate priests and bishops, who have higher responsibilities in educating or administering the affairs of monasteries and/or dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Doctorate in the Armenian Church

Unlike initially established, today celibacy is the only way a cleric in the Armenian Church can be elevated to higher ranks. Today priests in the Armenian Church, married or celibate, have equally the opportunity to pursue higher education, but higher ranks and the traditional academic degrees are denied to those who are married, despite the fact that previously all priests from both orders when qualified were eligible to receive those degrees. The Armenian Church, especially in the past, had famous monasteries which offered religious, Biblical and philosophical education, and upon graduation, gave them the academic degrees. Initially, as just said, the same academic degrees were also granted to the married priests upon qualification, which meant that conferring those degrees had little to do with the state of celibacy. Such religious centers of higher education were the Monasteries of Etchmiadzin, Tadev, Haghbat, Sanahin, Noravank, Gladzor, Kecharis, Hovhannavank, Sevan, Haghartzin, Saghmosavank, Harij, and a few others in Cilicia where the seat of the Catholicos temporarily moved until 1441, most of them recognized in their respective times as universities of higher education.

The degrees those centers awarded were known as *Vardapetutiun* (Masters Degree) and *Dzayragooyin Vardapetutiun* (Doctorate), which to this day are conferred to educated celibate priests with canonical church services by bishops who must have already received them. Those academic degrees, however, were introduced in the Armenian Church during later centuries, beginning from the 14th century, when the above mentioned religious institutions were established and prominent teachers, such as Anania Mokatsi, Nersess Mshetsi and Yesayi Nechetsi, Nersess Shnorhali and Nersess Lambronatsi, Hovhannes Erznkatsi and Gevorg Skevratsi, were heading the schools and teaching theology, Biblical commentary, homiletics, philosophy, music, hagiography and mathematics to hundreds of students of whom we read today in certain manuscripts written by the hands of those same students.

The first rank awarded four “partial” or “limited” degrees which granted authority to preach the Gospel, teach the doctrine and the liturgy of the Armenian Church. The Doctorate awarded the remaining 10 degrees conferred on those who had already received the four degrees. They must have completed the required education, and were known as authorities in matters of dogma and orthodox teaching in order to receive the additional ten degrees. In recent times both degrees had lost their academic caliber and significance, since they were conferred at random considering the good services rendered by all celibate clergy as sufficient, rather than considering their academic achievements. It was during the pontificate of Gevorg IV, Mkrtich I, and especially Vasken I, Karekin I, and Karekin II, the present Pontiff of the Armenian Church, that academia was reinforced, and serious authorship of written theses was and still is required of the candidates before becoming *Vardapets* or *Dzayrakooyin Vardapets*. Vasken I, made the arrangement and established a tradition to have an academic commission read the theses and examine the knowledge of the candidate before conferring both degrees in the Church of St. Mesrob Mashtots in the village of Oshagan, where the Saint who invented the Armenian Alphabet is buried in the chapel of that church and whose tomb is venerated by the Armenian people.

The Extreme Unction

The seventh Sacrament is called the Extreme Unction, better known as the Last Rites, administered by the priest to the sick in their last days in life, not necessarily because they may die, but rather to give them hope, strength, and the healing protection of Christ through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The priest reads a passage from the Gospels, says prayers for recovery, lays his hands on him, blesses the person with his hand cross, and administers both the Confession and the Holy Communion. This Sacrament asks for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the patient, giving him courage and hope. It should not be taken as if the patient is definitely going to die; on the contrary, it might happen that he survives and lives longer than expected. The Sacrament, like the previous ones, is mandated by Christ, who gave authority to his disciples *“over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease,”* (Matthew 10: 1) or *“to cast out many demons, and anoint with oil many who were sick, and heal them.”* (Mark 6: 13). We read also in the Acts of the Apostles that they were praying, laying hands on the sick and healing them (5: 16). Even the sick and their diseases were identified before they were healed by the Apostle Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles: *“And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery, Paul went into him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.”*(28: 8).

When healing the infirm, Jesus held the hand, laid his hand on the head, and in some cases used his commanding speech, saying: *“I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”* (Mark 2: 11). This practice is seen throughout Jesus’ ministry as we read the following passages: (Mark 5: 23; 6: 5 and 8; Mark 1: 30 and 5: 41; John 9: 6-7). Not only the healings of Jesus were remarkable, but also his divine power in bringing the dead back to life was amazing, as were in the cases of the raising of Lazarus from his grave (John 11: 38-44), and the dead child in Nain: *“Then he came and touched the open coffin and those who carried him stood still. And he said, young man, I say to you ‘arise’. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And he presented him to his mother.”* (Luke 7: 14-15). The healings of Jesus have definitely established this last Sacrament of the Church, and the many instances as cited above gave the Church the

assurance to continue healings as we see the Apostles doing it faithfully.

St. James in his Epistle instructs that when someone is ill, they should reach the presbyters of the church to come and pray over him, and to anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. Such prayers will save the sick from their illness: *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven”* (James 5: 14-15). He further adds that only the prayer of the just is most powerful in helping those in need, like Prophet Elijah’s prayers, as St. James recalls. Jesus had always related illness with sinfulness, the latter being the cause of illness. We know that sometimes vices, unwise and immoral behavior knowingly committed, lead to unnecessary and unexpected illness, while natural causes do the same independently from sinful acts. Jesus emphatically healed the sick telling them “not to sin any more,” meaning that illness can stay with those who continue their ungodly behavior. (Mark 2: 2-12; John 5: 5-15).

This is evident also in real life, when people sin “in thought, in word, and in deed,” making themselves blind mentally and spiritually, keeping a distance between them and God, a condition in which they feel feeble and spiritually unsafe. The Last Rite has significance only if the sick realize that they are strong enough spiritually, with prayers and with Christ abiding within them, to meet the physical ailment, even if they should die; they will know that the Risen Christ is with them, and the Holy Spirit is “working” in the church for them through the collective prayers of the faithful. In the past the Armenian Church kept the tradition to anoint the forehead of the sick during the Last Rites, but later the church dismissed the unction and deemed sufficient the laying on of hands and the administration of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion. The tradition is still in force, and there is no objection if the sick are anointed, believing that the Holy *Miuron* will always transfer the gifts of the Holy Spirit as long as they are alive and conscious of their Christian faith. On a related note, let me mention that the anointing is reserved to the clergy after they die, and this raises the question as to why not anoint the still alive lay person in the first place when he is sick. Furthermore, the

anointing of the dead clergy has nothing to do with the Sacrament of the Last Unction, given the fact that Sacraments are for the living people and not for the dead. The clergy are anointed simply because they were anointed at their ordination, having distinguished themselves from the lay faithful.

The Kingdom of God

Thy Kingdom come, asked Jesus in the Lord's Prayer to his Father in heaven making the coming of the Kingdom all central and lasting. The Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus' mind had to be transferred into this world as the Kingdom of God, the same way he was born in time and space as the son of Mary and as the Son of God. His Birth brought that Kingdom down, because his followers needed to participate in it as citizens of that heavenly Kingdom, established in heaven and now activated on earth, through him, through the activities of the Holy Spirit, and through the preaching the Gospel of Christ on earth, his Church. Christ, as the King of that Kingdom, made the world realize the powerful presence of God on earth from the east to the west, and from the north to the south. Jesus gave so much importance to the Kingdom on earth that he explained its emergence by telling so many parables which involved the daily lives of the people and their labors.

He told the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13: 24-30); the Parable of the Sower of the Seed (13:3-23); the Parable of the Mustard Seed (13: 31-32); the Parable of the Leaven (13: 33—35); the Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13: 44); the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (13: 45-46); the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14: 15-24), and others. Jesus' intention was to bring the Kingdom of God as close to the people's daily life and labor as possible. As they toiled the earth, as they worked in their farms, and as they handled all the necessary tools and earthly products, they realized that the Kingdom of God was at hand; it was not up in heaven where they were fixing their aspirations constantly without living their lives under the reign of the Kingdom of God in the first place, here on earth, becoming true and productive "members" of that Kingdom.

Theologically the Kingdom of God has close affinities with the Second Coming of Christ as promised by him. Christ

ascended to heaven as the Risen Lord, with a Glorified Body, and not with the body nailed on the Cross. This is also confirmed in the Nicene Creed where it is said that “*on the third day he resurrected and sat on the right side of the Father.*” The body Christ carried during the 40 days of his appearances after his Resurrection was the body of the “Risen Lord” with which he appeared to the disciples, entering the Upper Room while “the doors were closed.” His appearance and disappearance on various occasions, until the day of his Ascension, was possible with that same Glorified Body, revived and strengthened by divine power and by the Father’s providence.

There is no question that Christ will come at his Second Coming the way he came the first time, assuming human physical body, but with the “same body” he assumed as the Risen Lord, “with the glory of the Father,” as stated in the Nicene Creed. The quest which interests us most should not be about the nature of the Body of Christ that he has since his Resurrection and the “sitting at the right hand side of the Father,” nor the time or the way he is coming. Jesus told his disciples that “no one knows about those things,” including himself, but only the Father. What we must know is the fact that “how well are we prepared for his Coming.” “Be ready and prepared,” Jesus repeatedly said in so many words and parables. This to me means that the more we are prepared the more the Lord’s Second Coming gets nearer. Persistent and unconditional “preparation,” faithfully and actively pursued as citizens of the Kingdom of God, will be the only way to comprehend it and long for it.

Immediately following the request “Thy Kingdom come,” the Lord’s Prayer makes it all clear that “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Here lies the above mentioned persistent and unconditional preparation in real action. Followers of Christ, as commanded by him, must fulfill the Father’s Will on earth, so that His Kingdom may prove effective and lasting in the lives of Christians to whom that Kingdom is entrusted. The farther men stand apart from seeing and doing the works of God, the farther the Second Coming will be. The key is therefore to keep active the Church, which is the only means to achieve the distance between the First and the Second Comings of the Lord. Jesus remained ever obedient to his Father’s ordinances, sacrificing himself willingly, which was also the will of the Father, as Jesus said, “*Father, if it*

is your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless not my will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22: 42), setting the prime example to his followers to remain faithful and take part in his Sacrifice, in the *Soorp Badarak* (the Divine Liturgy), as often as we remember His Sacrifice on the Cross, in order to be partakers of His Glorious Resurrection, the greatest sign of the Second Coming of the Lord.

Between these two polar Comings the Gospel and the Church and only these two will establish the Kingdom of God on earth. To preach the Gospel of Jesus and to activate the Church by the Holy Spirit can make us understand the Second Coming of the Lord better, as proclaimed during Jesus’ Ascension, by the *“Two men standing by the disciples in white apparel, who said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up with you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven’*” (Acts 1: 10-11). “Gazing” obviously is not the answer to Christ’s Coming; rather, doing the will of God and replenishing His Kingdom on earth is its purposeful end.

Atheism: Rejection of God

All said, however, there always persisted the antithesis of God’s existence in history by those who cannot see, or do not want to see, the Supreme Being expressed in the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate limit of human apprehension and dependence. Those are the atheists, from *atheos* in Greek, meaning “without God” who argue that the world existed as a result of the convergence of the following elements: time and space and their cyclic movements, evolutions and natural courses. For them all the rest are meant to be simply speculations and frames of mind. They argue rather superficially that from the most primitive “existences” the world and the human being were formed during the ages on their own and will continue taking their course independently and haphazardly. Ancient philosophers were divided, and the ones closer to our age were also partly inconsistent and puzzled as to how to address the cause of the beginning of things, ascribing it either to an intelligent Creator or to mere accidents and catastrophic evolutions, in which the human being has no place, except for being the victim and not at all the victor of that hazardous convergence.

Even before the Birth of Jesus, on the other hand, serious and well balanced thinkers came forward as classic philosophers of their time and recognized “a better way” in pursuing the Creation of the world, in which the thinking human being was evaluated “as the crown” of the Creation: “Know yourself,” has said Socrates the great philosopher very typically. Such famous philosophers were also Plato and Aristotle, who with their deep intelligence and penetrating mind, even though unknowingly, placed their theses at the service of sound religion, and sub-consciously at the service of Christianity. The human intelligence naturally geared toward a Supreme Being, whom Aristotle called the “Unmoved Mover,” who created the ideas and the concepts before they were formed into realities, as explored by Plato, and the physical material was given the immaterial content as its antitype, the basis of all things seen. Such philosophies, headed by Aristotle, put forward the human mind and elevated it higher than what the naked eye could see. Whereas the Platonic 'Forms' were regularly interpreted as the creative thoughts of God, Aristotle asserted that an idea exists only as expressed in the individual object, by postulating a 'First Cause', or the 'Unmoved Mover' of all things.

The soul and its immortality in the human body was emphatically acknowledged by Aristotle, whose philosophy of the human being went parallel with the Biblical format concerning the immortality of the soul, later taught by Jesus as the most essential element in his religion. This meant that atheists were standing far from the intelligent genius of the past, preferring for example, Darwin's "Theory of Evolution," "The Survival of the Fittest," and those of his followers, as the easy way out, where neither dependence nor responsibility or commitment were guiding men in their search for true happiness and purposeful accomplishments. Christ gave the last word on behalf of the Creator God, who was very close to Aristotle's “Mover” of all things that existed. Plato and Aristotle served Christianity, providing the “unseen” in the world and in the human being, namely, the soul or the spirit which remained imperishable while the material body was destined to perish. In between, sound philosophy and Christianity met and complimented each other with the Ultimate Power, or the “Unmoved Mover” at the helm of human history and destiny on earth. The physical and spiritual entities were identifiable by those

great thinkers, culminating in Christ's "Spiritual Kingdom," free from the bondage of the one which is "of this world."

Atheism can not walk in parallel lines with any religion, having nothing common, real, stable, and purposeful on its agenda, except for what atheists see, touch, and feel physically. They could not see beyond the material, having no interest in spiritual achievements. Christianity, on the other hand, is based on true relationship with God and fellow men, the result of which has been plenty: charity, benevolence, love, forgiveness, hope, trust, virtuous life, respect, service, self-control, patience, righteousness, and their fruits, all of which can be achieved through the guidance of God, who is Spirit; only through spiritual qualities can a man communicate with Him. The breath of God gave men soul and spirit, the source of which is the heart, the mind, the conscience, with a free will behind them. Many of the Parables of Jesus teach "the continuity of life in its fullness," rather than the short cuts. Spiritual activities involve the mind and the heart "in communion with" the mind and heart of the others, thus creating an extended "communion" with God, whose true expression is the Son and the Church permeated with the Holy Spirit.

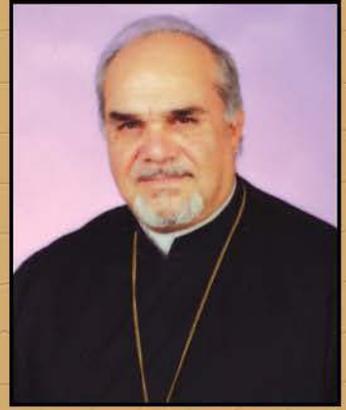
Faith and trust in the Supreme are the highways, and outside them self-serving short cuts lead to dead-ends only. The existence of God and the dependence of the human beings on divinity through Jesus Christ have spread unparalleled experiences, unending hope, fruitful and lasting accomplishments, and therefore a distinguished society. Ancient people, like the Armenian nation, are among those distinguished people, having a single choice: Jesus Christ as our Savior through His Word and through the Church of Armenia founded by His own Descent in our historic land as early as 301 AD.

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