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**THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX  
AND THE ARMENIAN CHURCH  
(12 century)**

**A. Historical Background (1045-1165 AD)**

Since the second century BC, when Rome became world power and reached Asia Minor, the Armenians were in contact with them. For many centuries, Armenia was the apple of discord between Rome, and later Constantinople, and Persia. This struggle led to the division of Armenia between them in 387. In the seventh century (640), Armenia was conquered by the Arabs. With the help of Byzantine army and the assistance of the Iberian king, Ashot II “The Iron” reestablished the rule of the Bagradites in Armenia<sup>1</sup>. Political, economic and military cooperation continued until the end of the tenth century. The policies of Basil II (976-1025) were the expansion of the Byzantine Empire on the East and West. In the East, after the death of the Armenian king Gagik I (990-1020), Basil saw the chance to intervene: the region of Vaspurakan, together with a part of Iberia, was annexed to Byzantium, while the Armenian kingdom of Ani (capital of Armenia) was to remain under King John Smpat (son and successor of Gagik, 1020-1042), during his lifetime, but thereafter to fall to the Byzantine Emperor<sup>2</sup>. Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-1055) was able to continue Basil II’s policy toward Armenia, and to bring his work to its conclusion by annexing the kingdom of Ani<sup>3</sup>. The Byzantine Empire, however, was unable to maintain its power in Armenia because the people were greatly dissatisfied with the administrative as well as the religious policy of the central government.<sup>4</sup>

After the fall of the Bagradite kingdom, in 1045, the population immigrated to the Western parts of the Byzantine Empire. Armenia and the eastern parts and frontiers of the Empire were under consistent attacks from the new invaders, the Seljuq Turks.<sup>5</sup> Their arrival “not only affected the general position of the Empire, but its whole foreign policy had to be changed to meet the altered circumstances.”<sup>6</sup> Armenian princes, who served in the imperial army, were settled around the southern borders of the Empire, to protect it against the invading Seljuqs. In 1064 the Seljuqs, under their leader Alp Arslan (1063-1072) conquered and sacked Ani.<sup>7</sup> Between

<sup>1</sup> Vasiliev A.A., History of the Byzantine Empire, vol. One, (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1980), pp.313-314.

<sup>2</sup> Ostrogosky George, History of the Byzantine State, (Rutgers University Press: New Jersey, 1969), pp. 313-314. Vasiliev, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> Ostrogosky, p. 333; Vasiliev, p. 315, 355.

<sup>4</sup> Vasiliev, p. 315.

<sup>5</sup> “The Byzantine Empire had known the Turks for a long time. A project of a Turko-Byzantine alliance existed in the second half of the sixth century. The Turks also served in Byzantium as mercenaries as well as imperial bodyguards. They were numerous in the ranks of the Arabian army on the eastern borders of the Empire, and they took an active part in taking as well as the plundering of Amorion in 838. But these relations and conflicts with the Turks were of little or no consequence to the Empire until the eleventh century. With the appearance of the Seljuq Turks on the eastern border in the first half of the eleventh century conditions changed” (Vasiliev, p. 354).

<sup>6</sup> Ostrogosky, p. 333.

<sup>7</sup> Vasiliev, p. 355.

1020-1070, the Seljuqs conquered Persia, drove through Mesopotamia and captured Baghdad, the capital of the Caliph. They soon gained possession of the whole of the Near East up to the borders of the Byzantine Empire and the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> On August 19, 1071, they defeated the Byzantines and captured Emperor Romanus Diogenes (1068-1072) in Manzikert. While in captivity, the emperor reached an agreement with the Seljuq leader.<sup>9</sup> He was deposed in Constantinople by his own court.<sup>10</sup> “It was this appalling epilogue which turned the defeat at Manzikert into a disastrous tragedy, for now the treaty which Alp Arslan had made with the Emperor Romanus fell to the ground and the Turks made this the excuse for the invasion and conquest of Byzantium.”<sup>11</sup> Byzantium, for the next several centuries tried to push them back, but failed. According to Vasiliev’s conclusions “Although according to the treaty the Byzantine Empire probably ceded no territory to Alp Arslan, its losses were very great, for the army which defended the borders of Asia Minor was so completely destroyed that the Empire was unable to resist the later advance of the Turks there. The defeat at Manzikert was a death blow to Byzantine domination in Asia Minor, that most essential part of the Byzantine Empire.”<sup>12</sup>

During the eleventh century, the greatest of religious events happened: the schism between the East and the West, whose consequences were far more political than religious.<sup>13</sup> After this schism, the Greek Orthodox Church returned to the policies of Justinian and Heraclius and of Constantine the Great, to have religious unity in the Empire. This was one of the reasons for prince Alexis’ visit to the East and Cilicia.

Cilicia was an important imperial land from the times of the Roman Empire. Historical documents from the first century BC, show that Armenians lived there. Therefore, during the first half of the eleventh century, when Armenian princes traded their ancestral lands with new imperial lands, they came and settled in and around Cilicia. Later, when the Armenian kingdom fell, most of the people immigrated to Cilicia. The Armenian princes in Cilicia, after initial internal conflict, began to unite under the leadership of the Roubinides, who established their principality in Cilicia, in 1080.<sup>14</sup> The defeat of Byzantium at Manzikert contributed greatly to this. Alexius Comnenus (1081-1118), under extreme pressures and difficulties, managed to improve “the international position of the Empire, extended its limits, and for a time stopped the progress of the numerous enemies who on all sides pressed against the Empire.”<sup>15</sup> After half a century of fight against Byzantium, they were subjected to the Byzantine rule again, by John II Comnenus (1118-1143). Emperor John is known as the greatest Comneni of all. “As a ruler he combined clever prudence with purposeful energy, while at the same time he was a man of upright, steadfast character and high principled far beyond his day. Moderate, yet firm and forceful in pursuing his goal, he carried his father’s policy with iron determination, never losing sight of the bounds of possibility.”<sup>16</sup> After establishing imperial authority in the Balkans, the main objective of his foreign policy was the re-establishment of Byzantine authority over the Norman

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<sup>8</sup> Ostrogosky, p. 343; Vasiliev, pp. 354-355

<sup>9</sup> The treaty consisted of three points: “1) Romanus Diogenes obtained his freedom by the payment of a definite sum of money; 2) Byzantium was to pay a large annual tribute to Alp Arslan; 3) Byzantium was to return all Turkish captives” (Vasiliev, p. 356).

<sup>10</sup> Vasiliev, p. 353..

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 356ff.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>14</sup> Ostrogosky, pp. 378-379

<sup>15</sup> Vasiliev, vol. II, pp. 380-412.

<sup>16</sup> Ostrogosky, p. 377.

principality of Antioch. On his was stood the Armenian principality of Cilicia. John was ready to march to the East in 1130. After defeating the emirate of Danishmend in 1135, he turned toward Cilicia and Antioch. After capturing the former Byzantine cities and ports from the Armenians, he managed to capture prince Levon I and his sons and sent them to Constantinople.<sup>17</sup> One of the sons, Thoros II (1147-1169), escaped Constantinople in 1147 and began to rebuild the authorities of his fathers in Cilicia. John's successor, Manuel I Comneni, was "a true Byzantine, convinced of the validity of the conception of universal imperial sovereignty and possessed of the characteristic Byzantine passion for theological discussions."<sup>18</sup> While engaged in difficult diplomacy and military campaigns in the first 15 years of the reign, Manuel, nevertheless, came to the East in 1158. The agreement between the Emperor and the Armenian prince Thoros, was an agreement of alliance rather than an overthrow.<sup>19</sup> Following his father's policy, Manuel established the Byzantine sovereignty in the East. His short lived victory over the Normans of Sicily revived in his mind the establishment of *romanum imperium*.<sup>20</sup> It was within this dream that the Emperor pursued the restoration of communion between the Orthodox and the Armenian Church.

In Cilicia, two strong families emerged in the twelfth century, the Rupinides and the Lambronides. The first was strong advocates for the independence of Cilicia, while the latter accepted the suzerainty of Byzantium. Thoros, who was the chief ruler of Cilicia, wanted to unite Cilicia under his rule. To achieve this goal, he captured Til Hamdoun and Mamistra. In 1152, Andronicus Comneni, the future Emperor, led the Byzantine forces against Thoros. He was joined by Oshin II, head of the Lambronides and their allies, but they were defeated. Thoros took as captive Oshin and arranged a marriage between his daughter and Oshin's son Hetoom. For the moment, everything seemed in place. But differences and hostilities continued between the two families. In 1163/4, Thoros learned that Oshin was keeping an active correspondence with Byzantium. Fighting soon broke out between the two. This struggle left Catholicos Krikor III (1113-1166) deeply distressed. He sent his brother Nerses to end the enmity existing between the two and, in 1165, Nerses<sup>21</sup> succeeded in facilitating the reconciliation at the castle of Vahga

Because of political conditions, the Catholicate was transferred to Hromgla<sup>22</sup>. In Armenian proper, the Catholicos established four honorary sees (Ani, Sanahin, Pchnee and Sunik). The

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 378-379.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 380-386.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 384-385.

<sup>21</sup> One of the most important Catholicoi and theologian of the Armenian Church. Born in 1101, he was the son of Apirat Pahlavuni. He received his education in *Garmir Vank* (Red Monastery: located on the "black mountain" in Cilicia. The mountain is well known for its many monasteries and hermitages, including Armenian, Greek and Syrian Orthodox monasteries) in Cilicia from the priest Stepanos Manuk (Stephen the Child). At the age of eighteen, after completing his studies, he was ordained a priest by his brother Catholicos Krikor III and in 1135, he was elevated to the rank of bishop. His brother resigned, in 1166 at the age of 70, and a few months before his death, with the unanimous consent of the Armenian bishops, he consecrated as Catholicos his beloved brother Nerses. The consecration and anointing ceremony took place on Palm Sunday – April 17, 1166. Nerses was sixty-six years old on the day of his ascension to the throne of the catholicate and served for the next seven years, during which time he continued to lead a life of intense literary, public, pastoral and ecclesiastical activity. The quest for church unity became one of Shnorhali's chief interests during the seven years of his pontificate. Nerses died on August 13, 1173, at the age of seventy-two.

<sup>22</sup> St. Gregory the Illuminator established the Holy See in 303, in Echmiadzin. Throughout the following centuries, it became traditional have the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities located in the same city. Therefore, in 484, the Holy See was transferred to Dvin, in 927 to the island Aghthamar, in Lake Van and in 970 to Ani. From 1045-1113 to several places. In 1113 to Dzovk and finally in 1149 to Hromgla. Catholicos Krikor III (1113-1166) bought the fortress and transferred the Holy See there.

role of these sees was to take care of the faithful on behalf of the Holy See and give their approval for the election of the Catholicos.

## B. The Ecumenical Dialogue (1165-1185)

In 1165, Archbishop Nerses was on a peace mission between two quarreling Armenian princes, Thoros and Oshin. He was sent by his brother and Catholicos of the Church Krikor III. On his way back to the Catholicosate See, he stopped at Mamestia (Missis), where the imperial ambassador prince Alexis was stationed. Prince Alexis was the son-of-law of Emperor Manuel Comnenus (1143-1180). Alexis was very curious about the faith of the Monophysite Armenians and he was very happy to meet the Archbishop. He asked him to fulfill his curiosity and explain the reason of schism in the Orthodox family. He argued with Nerses for days about dogmatic and ritual issues<sup>23</sup>. He was very satisfied and asked Nerses to write them in a document, known as “Confession of Faith of the Armenian Church.”<sup>24</sup> After the prologue, Nerses writes the confession (pp. 88-93), where the Incarnation and the union of the natures occupy the biggest part. He avoids to mention Chalcedon and rejecting “two natures” and defends the “*the union from two perfect natures.*” He defends the confession of the Armenian Church without condemning the position of the Orthodox Church. Defends the celebration of Christmas of January 6, based on the account of Zechariah in the gospel of Luke (pp. 93-94) and mentions the veneration given to the Mother of God (pp. 94 - 95). Returning to the natures’ issue he declares that when “*we say there’s one nature in Christ, not as Eutyches but as Cyril understands it, and if “two natures” are said in order not to fall into confusion, then we won’t oppose it*” (pp. 96-97)”. Speaks about the use of another kind of oil (“*Shooshma*”) instead of olive oil for the blessing of the Holy Muron, because *we didn’t have olive trees in Armenia* (p. 97). Speaking about the icons he states that “*we accept and worship*” the divine icons, and the icons of the saints “*we venerate.*” Says that the *Trisagion* is sung with *who was crucified for us* in front of Christ (p. 99). On eating oil and dairy products on the Saturdays and Sundays of Big Lent, he says that “*in the old days the Armenian princes ate fish and oil during the Lent and drank wine, like the Greeks and the Franks. Moreover, the leaders of the time suggested to abstain from them for five days and eat oil and milk, as well as fish for two days. Later this usage was forgotten. Nowadays, princes and soldiers of their free will and sometimes with our permission eat these products, while the clergy and the population keep the strict rule of Lent, and those who don’t keep it are subject to the heavy burden of repentance*” (pp. 99-100). Acknowledges and defends not mixing water to the wine during the Divine Liturgy as a tradition from St. Gregory the Illuminator (p. 100). Likewise, defends the blessing of the crosses for once and rejects the custom of repeating it every year (p. 101). Returning to the issue of Incarnation rejects the notion of appearance and accepts that Christ had an *earthly, concrete body*, subject to *torture and death* but free from anything that is *out of sin*. Once again, he stresses that when Armenians say *one nature* they don’t understand that *His humanity was dissolved* (p. 102-104). Overall, this confession of faith was written according to the faith of the Armenian Church and the mixing in issues was due to the questions that the Byzantine prince presented. Arch. Nerses concludes his writing stating that he “*wrote what was necessary and nothing more than what was required.*”

Prince Alexis was very happy with this meeting. After he finished his diplomatic assignment and returned to Constantinople in the beginning of 1166. This confession of faith and the information that the prince gave had profound impression on the emperor and the

<sup>23</sup> Ormanian, Arch. Malachia, “History of the Armenian Church”, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Beirut: 1959), pp. 1384-1385.

<sup>24</sup> “General Letters of St. Nerses the Gracious”, (Jerusalem, 1871), pp. 87-107.



Patriarch Lukas Chrysoberges (1156-1169). Based on the simplicity and the strength of the writing, the idea of agreement between the Churches seemed a strong possibility. The main reason, though, behind this initiative was political. Byzantium was losing her influence in Levant and Manuel, like his father, John II (1118-1143), was determined to achieve that goal, by any means necessary. Unfortunately, he couldn't attend to this issue until September of 1167. He wrote a letter to Catholicos Gregory III, without knowing that he had died a year earlier. In his letter<sup>25</sup>, the emperor stresses the importance of Church unity, so that Christians may become "one shepherd and one flock." He suggests that the Catholicos send his brother Nerses so that they can talk about Church unity, in a Holy Synod. He sent the letter with an Armenian, working at the palace, named Smbat.

The political and other "traps" in Manuel's letter did not escape Nerses' attention. In his response, he declined the invitation to attend the proposed meeting, underlining his pontifical duties and humors him by saying, *"how can a drop of knowledge be courageous enough to approach a sea of wisdom"* (p. 111). In his turn, he suggests that the Emperor must come to the East, if he can, so that they can conclude their talks. Stresses that the union shouldn't be *"with royal might, but with humility"* (p. 113), because *"it's been almost seven hundred years since the division, because of the ancient 'two nature' tradition."* He mentions the difficulties that the Armenians endured inflicted by the Greeks during those seven centuries, which caused *"us to distance ourselves from you"* (p. 114-115). He mentions that the Church of Rome had sent delegates to Constantinople for unity of faith, as well as the Patriarch of the Syrians: he considers these movements as the will of God to achieve the Christian unity by a Council. This council, however, shouldn't be conducted as between *"masters and servants, but rather to accept the writings of the apostles and the prophets and the Orthodox Fathers of the Church as supreme judge and if either side made a mistake in dogmatic issues, that side must abandon those wrong doings. We are ready to correct ourselves if you show us our mistake. But you too must correct yourselves if there is a mistake in you"* (pp. 116-119). Catholicos Nerses added another confession of faith to his letter. This second writing was not a new one but rather a repetition of his former confession. He wanted to give his pontifical authority to his confession, since the former one was written by a bishop.

In this second writing<sup>26</sup>, he puts the dogmatic issues together and then *"for the unity of the Church"* he mentions the ritual issues<sup>27</sup>. In the first section, he reflects on the union of the natures, rejecting Nestorius and Eutyches as well as Pope Leo, stressing *"from two natures"* formula (p. 126), according to the faith of the Armenian Church, which defends the union of the natures. In traditional and ritual section, he defends the usage of unleavened bread during the Liturgy, but does not condemn the Greeks for using leavened bread. Defends the usage of unwatered wine without condemning the usage of water. Explains the ancient and true celebration of Christmas and Epiphany of Christ together. Speaks about the trisagion, with *"who was crucified with us"*, the veneration of icons and the blessing of crosses always defending the traditions and customs of the Armenian Church, without imposing the positions of the Armenian Church. Smbat, who brought the letter of Manuel, had to wait until the spring of 1168 to return to Constantinople.

The Emperor, Patriarch Michael III (1169-1177) and his counselors were exited by the response and Nerses' proposal to visit the East was not at all unpractical. The Emperor could combine his political and ecclesiastical agendas and settle both issues. In the East, Armenian

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-109.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-130.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-143.

prince Thoros was uniting Cilicia under his authority. In Syria, Sultan Nuradin had already united Syria and was preparing an invasion of Egypt. In Anatolia, the Seljuq Sultanate was attacking Byzantine holdings. In the West, due to unsettled political situation in the Balkans, the emperor could not concentrate on the unity issue. Only in 1170, when the political situation was calmer that the Emperor wrote a letter to Catholicos Nerses. He send it with two delegates a Greek, named Theorian and Armenian, named Hovannes Oudman, abbot of the Armenian monastery in Philippoupolis (Bulgaria). They started their journey on May 15, reached Hromgla, and started negotiations about unity and two natures. Theorian, who was philosopher, did not want to yield or accept the Cyrilian formula “One nature to the Incarnate Logos.” While Nerses tried to explain and defend the unity against the division of Nestorius and the confusion of Eutyches. Finally, Nerses agreed to say that when the Greeks say *two* they can be considered away from the division of Nestorius and when the Armenians say *one* they can be considered away from the confusion of Eutyches. However, he declined to change the official formula accepted by the Armenian Church, because a change like this requires the authority of the Holy Synod of the Armenian Church. “*Our See, being away from our historical homeland, cannot make a decision like this, without the participation of all bishop*” (pp. 145-147). He prepared another *true confession* only about the natures (pp. 145-153), in October of 1170 and handed it over to Theorian and Hovannes to take it to the Emperor.

Theorian, who wrote his encounter with Nerses, presented the situation to the imperial court<sup>28</sup>. His report created great enthusiasm in the Emperor and the Patriarch, but again two years<sup>29</sup> passed before any practical steps could have been made. Between 1170-1172, Catholicos Nerses wrote a letter<sup>30</sup> to the bishops in the eastern provinces mentioning the emperor’s proposal and assuring them that without the Holy Synod, he does not intend to reach an agreement with the Orthodox Church. During these years, Cilicia was in political unrest. In 1169, prince Thoros died and his Frank father-in-law, prince Thomas, invited the prince of Antioch to take over the reign. Thoros’ brother, Mleh, with the help of his friend Sultan Nuredin, ruler of Aleppo and Damascus, seized the throne and drove the Franks out of Cilicia. Based on the testimony of Theorian, the Emperor and the Patriarch thought that if Catholicos Nerses and his bishops are convinced about the Chalcedonian profession in this way and they are condemning and anathematizing the anti-chalcedonians, then unity is simply a matter of time. Therefore, they wrote another letter to Catholicos Nerses with nine points<sup>31</sup>.

It was in December 1172, that the same delegates brought two letters to the Catholicos, with its nine points. One was from the Emperor and the second from the Patriarch. In his letter, the Emperor finds it unacceptable the “one nature” formula and suggests that the Armenians accept the nine points, in their Holy Synod and add other points, if necessary<sup>32</sup>. While the Patriarch, praises the necessity of unity and suggests that the Armenians return from their wrong ways<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, we don’t have Theorian’s testimony. A copy exists in the accounts of Clement Calanos (Romae De Propaganda fide. 1690, vol. II, pp. 242-322). Calanos presents that in this report, catholicos Nerses is presented as an illiterate, who doesn’t know the Scripture, the Fathers or the philosophical methods. “*He [Theorian] explains that Nerses agrees that “one nature” is heresy, condemns and anathematizes those, who rejected Chalcedon and with tears in his eyes asks the Patriarch of Constantinople to bless the Armenian people, who for so long lived in anathema. He gives a paper to Theorian stating tat he (Nerses) accepts the great and honorable Council of Chalcedon*” (pp. 282-322).

<sup>29</sup> Byzantium and Venice were having problems at this time.

<sup>30</sup> “General Letters of St. Nerses the Gracious”, pp. 209-210.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p 136.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-155.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-159.

The nine points, presented in the imperial letter, were<sup>34</sup>:

1. To anathematize those who say “*one nature*”, namely Eutyches, Diosgorus, Severianus and Timothy.
2. To confess in Christ two natures, two wills and two energies.
3. To remove from the *Trisagion* the “who was crucified for us” line.
4. To celebrate Annunciation on March 25, Christmas on December 25, Circumcision on January 1, Baptism on January 6 and Presentation on February 2 with the Greek Church.
5. To prepare the Holy Muron with olive oil.
6. To use leavened bread and water during the Liturgy.
7. *To keep everyone in the Church, except for catechumens, during the Liturgy and other services.*
8. To accept the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh council (Chalcedon, Second and Third Constantinople and Second Nicaea).
9. To subject the election of the Catholicos to the Emperor’s approval.

Catholicos Nerses, full with Grace, explained to the delegates that without the Holy Synod, he couldn’t agree to those nine points. Since it was winter, he explained that he cannot call the Holy Synod until summer time and that he will do everything he can to achieve the desired unity. He answered to both letters separately. In his letter to the Emperor, he states that “*the tradition of our Church is based on the witness of the Bible.*” He suggests that Armenians are ready to make some concessions, but not as turning from heresy to orthodoxy. On the one hand, he says, “*whatever cannot be changed, we must keep and wait for the appropriate time.*” On the other hand, he proposes that the Armenians must discuss with the Greeks what seems to them as heresy and that the Greeks must open the door of dialogue, if they are interested in unity. He promises to discuss these issues with his Holy Synod and inform them about the results<sup>35</sup>. In his letter to Patriarch Michael III, he praises the efforts of unity and the importance of Christian unity and suggests that the Greeks have a meeting and respond to the Armenian proposal<sup>36</sup>. The delegates returned to Constantinople in January or February of 1173.

Catholicos Nerses, though, had no intention of conveying a meeting. He was careful enough to wait and see how things were going to develop. He sent a certain priest, named Stepannos, to inform the bishops and the honorary sees about the development of the unity efforts and the suggested nine points<sup>37</sup>. However, before he can hear his report, he died, in August 1173. The efforts of unity, however, did not stop. Catholicos Nerses was succeeded by his nephew Catholicos Krikor IV (1173-1193). Emperor Manuel as soon as he heard about the death, he wrote a letter to the new Catholicos and sent it with Theorian. In his letter, he encouraged and advised the Catholicos not to abandon “*the efforts, that begun with your predecessor and may conclude in your lifetime*”<sup>38</sup>. Theorian, however, could not travel to Hromgla, because of the war between Byzantium and the Seljuq Sultanate. So he sent the letter with a courier and he returned to Constantinople. The Catholicos was very pleased to see the readiness of the Emperor

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-157.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 160-161.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 163-165.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 323.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

to pursue the union. During this time, in 1174, Stepannos returned from Armenia with the letter of the bishops, who agreed on the unity process, proposed by Catholicos Nerses, but rejected the nine points<sup>39</sup>. Catholicos Krikor, in his turn, wrote to the Emperor informing that he and his bishops are ready to pursue the unity only if the Emperor and the Patriarch reduce those nine points. He wishes him success in his war against the Turks and invites him to come to Hromgla to conclude the unity dialogue<sup>40</sup>. He gave his letter to a Greek priest named Constantine. Constantine couldn't meet the Emperor, who sent him to Constantinople and wait for him.

Manuel was in war all through 1175 until April 11, 1176 against the Turks<sup>41</sup>. The sun eclipse on September 11, 1176 they had bad influence on the imperial army and they suffered a big defeat. The Emperor had to conclude this defeat with peace treaty, managing to get back the venerable relic of the Cross, the icon of the Holy Mother of God and returned to Constantinople. During this time, Constantine was explaining to the Patriarchs Michael and to Cyril of Antioch about the Armenian position, stating that *“the Armenians have the true faith”*<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, when Manuel returned, he found the atmosphere ready to discuss unity and by the end of the year, the emperor and the Holy Synod met and, in order to achieve this unity, agreed to some concessions. In January 1177, Manuel and the Patriarchs prepared their letters and sent it to Catholicos Krikor with Constantine. In his letter<sup>43</sup>, the emperor praises and elevates the efforts of unity and taking the opportunity, says that *“we are happy to know that the Armenians don't think about the Greek as nestorians, because they accepted the ‘two natures’ formula”* and denies the wrong idea that the Greeks had about the Armenians, because of *“we thought you were heretics.”* He expresses his agreement to the Catholicos' proposal to reduce those nine points. He stresses, though, on the issue of two natures, two wills and two energies to see if the Armenians mean confusion or mixture or the decline of the human nature or the lose of it when they say union. If they don't understand the union as such, then they are in agreement with the Orthodox Church (p. 174). Therefore, they must accept the ‘two natures’ formula and the Council of Chancedon. He concludes by asking the Catholicos to summon his archbishops and bishops, priests and deacons and theologians and agree on his proposal *“without conflict and doubt but with unity and sympathy and present the confession of faith”* (p. 195). In his return, he invites the Catholicos to come to Constantinople to conclude the dialogue. The Patriarch's letter had much more weight than the emperor's because it was written by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, with 20 signatures, headed with Patriarchs Michael and Cyril of Antioch, along with the archbishops of Ceasarea and Iraklios and 16 metropolitan (p. 180). The synodical letter confirms the contents of the emperor's letter, accepting the orthodoxy of the Armenian faith and stating the confession of faith of the Orthodox Church. Finally, the letter asks the Armenians to do the same in their *“divine and Holy Synod”*<sup>44</sup>.

The letters, brought by the same priest Constantine<sup>45</sup>, reached the Catholicos before Easter, 1177. Based upon the assumption that instead on nine points the Greeks now suggest only one point, that they accept that the accepted Armenian formula of ‘one nature’ was used in the orthodox sense and not as to indicate confusion or mixture and, finally, that the Armenian

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 166-168.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-175.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> Constantine was ordained bishop by Cyril of Antioch and was appointed metropolitan of Herapolis, in 1177 (Ormanian, “History of the Armenian Church”, p. 1456).



Church was not heretical gave the Catholicos and his counselors good reason to summon the bishops from Armenia and Cilicia to discuss the proposals.

From the account of Nerses of Lampron, we get the impression that the meeting took place immediately. However, the meeting took place two years later, in 1179 and the reason for this delay was the internal difficulties rather than political difficulties. During these two years, fierce correspondence<sup>46</sup> took place between the Catholicos and the eastern bishops<sup>47</sup>. In their letter, signed by the abbots of several important and influential monasteries, cautioned the Catholicos to be very careful in his dealings with the Greeks, underlining that “*if they accept our orthodoxy, why then they sent us the second formula* [meaning the ‘two natures’].” They explain how the Armenian Church understands the “One nature to the Incarnate Logos” formula. They implore the Catholicos to reject the proposal, not because they suspect their orthodoxy, but to show that the Armenian Church is not divided<sup>48</sup>. Catholicos Krikor was very disturbed by the letter. In Cilicia, the Church unity was accompanied with the expectation of political and military assistance from Byzantium. The eastern fathers, living in Armenia and having the support of the Georgian kingdom, were not interested to make concessions for the sake of that assistance. In his reply<sup>49</sup>, in 1178, he expresses the importance of Christian love not only toward each other, but toward other Christians too (Matthew 6.43-48). He points out that “*this unity efforts did not start with us, but we inherited it from our fathers*” (p. 314). Moreover, in order to convince them, he mentions that the Greeks made “concessions” by reducing their demand of nine points to just one point. Therefore, it is important and appropriate to make that concession (p. 315) on ‘one nature’ issue. After long pages of quotations from the Church history, he asks them to the Holy Synod, on Easter, in 1179, in Hromgla.

The Holy Synod took place on April 1, 1179, in Hromgla. Thirty-three of the participants signed the subsequent letter, but we don’t know about the exact number of participants. Representatives came from the eastern provinces along side with the catholicos of Caucasian Albanian Stepannos. Unfortunately, we don’t have the documents of this important Synod. The Synod took a long time, almost 18 months. The Synod prepared two letters, one for the Emperor and one for the Holy Synod. In the letter to the emperor (p. 181-190), the Synod recognizes and accepts the first three ecumenical councils, condemn and anathematize Arius, Marcion, Nestorius and Eutyches. It explains the confession of the Armenian Church. The letter does not use the terms ‘two natures’. Defends the orthodoxy of the Cyrilian formula of ‘one nature’. The letter ends with the wish of establishing peace in the Church. The letter to the Holy Synod does not mention Patriarch Michael III, who died in 1177. He was succeeded by Chariton Eugeneitos (1177-1178) and Theodosios Boradiotes (1178-1183). The letter declares that from the letter of the Synod, “*we are convinced that you are not Nestorians*”. Then they explain their faith about Christ and the natures: “*The Armenian Church always avoids to use the term ‘two nature’, because the term ‘two’ implies two separate natures. By saying ‘one’, we don’t imply the natures to be confused or dissolved in each other, rather the divine and human natures, wills and energies are united in perfect union. This has been the intention of Catholicos Nerese of blessed memory. With this in mind, when we say ‘one nature’ we don’t confess the Eutychean monophycism, nor when you say ‘two natures’ we believe that you don’t confess the division of Nestorius.*” The Council of Hromgla accepted in principle the proposal of Emperor Manuel, but it rejected the

<sup>46</sup> “General Letters of St. Nerses the Gracious”, pp. 307-329.

<sup>47</sup> The monasteries, the honorary sees, the bishops and the theologians living in Armenia were called ‘the eastern priests and bishops’, because they lived on the eastern lands of Cilicia.

<sup>48</sup> “General Letters of St. Nerses the Gracious”, pp. 309-311.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 312-329.

“two natures” formula, the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo.

The couriers, unfortunately, did not go beyond Caesarea, because of political unrest in Anatolia. They returned to Hromgla. Catholicos Krikor IV was still trying to find a way to send those letters when the news of Emperor Manuel’s death, in September 1180<sup>50</sup>, arrived at Hromgla. Emperor Isaac was not interested in these talks. Instead he started to persecute the Armenians within his Empire and tried to force them to accept the Council of Chalcedon. The whole dialogue, which began almost 20 years ago, collapsed and was over. With the end of this dialogue, the political expectations of the Armenian Church and the Armenian princes turned toward Rome and Europe. The capture of Jerusalem in 1187 by Saladin, Sultan of Egypt and Syria, forced Europe and the papacy to prepare for the third crusade. “In the light of the current, widely-hailed ecumenical movement, the principles that guided Catholicos Nerses Shnorhali eight centuries ago are truly inspirational and visionary within the movement today.”<sup>51</sup>

## CONFESSION OF FAITH OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

By St. Nerses the Gracious

(1165)

We confess the All Holy Trinity, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. Three persons in one nature and divinity. The Father is uncreated and without beginning all before eternity. The Son is born from the essence of the Father without blemish and without body before time. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

And there was no time when the Father was without the Son or the Spirit, but as the Father was always the Father, the Son also was always the Son with His Father eternally. In the same way, the Holy Spirit was always the Spirit of God, indivisible from the Father and the Son. One essence, one authority, one will and one creative power in the three persons. There is neither seniority nor juniority, neither high nor low, neither more nor less, but one order, one duty and one worship to the Holy Trinity, by which everything was created from nothing; the heaven and the heavenly orders and the earth and the earthly creatures, visible and invisible were created in the first creation.

In the second creation, one of the Trinity, the Word of the Father, the Only Begotten Son, by the will of the Father and the Spirit and the annunciation of archangel Gabriel descended into the womb of the virgin Mary, without decreasing from the bosom of the Father according to the unlimited divine nature and taking upon himself from the most pure blood of the virgin the flesh of Adam. United it with his divinity with inexamable and unspeakable mixture and became in two perfect nature, from the divine and the human, one perfect person, without confusion and division.

The unbodily Word, united with the body, unites the human nature with his, divining it through the union. In this union no change or transformation occurred, but he united our nature with his nature in inconceivable manner. And by taking the nature of Adam, not the nature of paradise before the fall, but the nature after sin and corruption, so that the virgin Mary, from

<sup>50</sup> Emperor Manuel was succeeded by his son, Alexis II Comnenus (1180-1183), who was 12 years old and from his second wife. John was declared Caesar and his mother, Mary of Antioch, regent. However, Manuel’s cousin, Andronicus Comnenus ordered Alexis to be drowned and Mary deposed and declared himself Caesar. However, he himself was killed by Isaac II Angelus (1185-1195).

<sup>51</sup> Aljalian, Fr. Arakel, “St. Nerses Shnorhali, General Epistle”, (St. Nerses Armenian Seminary: New York, 1996) p. 5.

whom Christ took body, who was from the sinful nature of Adam, but with union with the nature of God, the sinful nature became without sin and the corruptible clean.

He was born as man, God Incarnate, keeping the virginity of his parent. He was circumcised on the eighth day, in order to fulfill the promise of the fathers and to teach us the circumcision of the heart. He came to the temple of the fortieth day, according to the laws of dedication, so that He might offer the human nature to the Father. He escaped to Egypt, so that He may turn the capital of idol worshippers to the worship of God. He walked on the face of the earth for thirty years in poverty and He kept His divinity secret in humility, so that He might elevate us when we become followers of His path. He came to Jordan when He was thirty years old, revealing the glory of His divinity with the testimony of the Father, that “This is my beloved Son” and the descendent of the Holy Spirit as a dove.<sup>52</sup>

This is why we confess Christ as God and man. We don’t say this to acknowledge a division that he was suffered and he did not suffer. This means that with divine nature, he was unchangeable and insufferable and with his body he suffered and died. Because some say that someone else suffered and someone else did not suffer. But it was no one else but the Word of God that suffered and died, for the same Word of God, without body and far from suffering, took upon Himself the suffering human body to save men with suffering. Because the Word being God, is beyond suffering in His nature, but to the suffering body the unbody nature was united without separation. Athanasius<sup>53</sup> said these. With him, we confess His divinity was not separated from His body and spirit after His death. And when He was on the cross and in the tomb with His body, He was at the right hand of the Father and the heavens and earth were filled with His glory. Therefore, descending into the tomb with His lifeless body and living divinity, He took control of hell and rising on the third day, He gave resurrection with Himself to the souls of the faithful and gave hope and resurrection of the body accordingly, on His Second Coming. And after forty days He ascended to heaven with the same body and sat at the right hand of the power of the Father. He will come with the same body, with which He ascended, to judge with righteousness the living and the dead.<sup>54</sup>

Again in your paper is written about us that we confess only one nature in the Word, of which Apollinarius<sup>55</sup> is accused. We say there is one nature in Christ, not according to Eutyches,<sup>56</sup> but according to the teachings of Cyril of Alexandria<sup>57</sup>, who in his letter against Nestorius<sup>58</sup> says

<sup>52</sup> Nerses Shnorhali recounts the life story of Christ, always attaching a lesson to the events of His life.

<sup>53</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296-373), defender of faith at Nicaea, in 325 AD.

<sup>54</sup> In the following pages, Catholicos Nerses speaks about the ritual and practical differences of the churches, which we will not include.

<sup>55</sup> Apollinarius (‘the Younger’ c.310-c.390). He shared with St. Athanasius the conviction that only the unchangeable Divine Logos could be the saviour of man with his inherently changeable and fallible mind or soul. This led him to deny explicitly (in a way that St. Athanasius did not) the presence of a human mind or soul in Christ. While this enabled him to stress the unity of Godhead and flesh in the person of Christ and to repudiate any conception of moral development in Christ’s life, it carried the implication that Christ’s manhood was not complete. It is that fact which is distinctive of Apollinarianism. The fundamental objection raised from the outset of catholic orthodoxy is that if there is no complete manhood in Christ, He is not perfect example for us, nor did He redeem the whole of human nature, but only its physical elements.

<sup>56</sup> Eutyches (c.378-454) affirmed that there was only one ‘nature’ (fusiV) in Christ ‘after the union’, and denied that His manhood was consubstantial with ours, a view which was held to be incompatible with our redemption through Him.

<sup>57</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria (d.444) was the most brilliant representative of the Alexandrian theological tradition. He appears to have used the Greek word fusiV as almost if not quite the equivalent of upostasiV (‘person’), and not in its later sense of ‘nature’.

<sup>58</sup> Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (428-431) confessed that there were two separate persons in the Incarnate

“one nature to the Incarnate Word, as our fathers confessed.” He calls fathers Athanasius and those before him. And we say this according to the traditions of saints and by not following heretics, who confessed confusion or change or division in the unity of Christ. Rather, instead as when you say one person, which is right and confessed by us, we also say one nature. And when you say two natures, not according to the teachings of Nestorius but to show the heresies of Eutyches and Apollinarius, we do not condemn it. To give another example the spirit and the body of man are of different nature. One of them is heavenly, while the other is earthly. One is visible and the other is invisible. One is eternal and the other is mortal, but after the union, one nature is said about man and not two. And when it is said one nature, there is no confusion in man, or only spirit or only body. In this way also, although it is said one nature in Christ, it’s not said to confuse, but because of His unspeakable union from two natures. Because if this is not the case, then we shouldn’t say two, but three natures in Christ: two human natures and one divine nature. However, after the union, the duality of division disappeared, according to the teachings of the Holy Teachers. Therefore, if one nature is said for the indissoluble and unseparable union and not to have confusion and if two natures are said for being unconfused and unchanged and not to have a division, then both of them are within the boundaries of orthodoxy.

For the “Trisagion” it is written that we say, “who was crucified for us.” And that we sing this holy song in front of the Holy Trinity as you do, is evil and heretical to say “was crucified.” However, because it is addressed only to the Person of the Son, therefore it is to express our gratitude that we put “God and Powerful and Eternal, who was crucified with body for us, have mercy upon us.” Along with this, we have as intercessor the Mother of the Word of God to her Only Begotten and we sing “offer our implorations to your son and our God.” For this reason, if someone says this in front of the Trinity, as you do, and if in front of the Son of God it is said, as we do, both are acceptable to God, when they are said without contradiction.

It is written about us that we say one nature in Christ as if the human nature was completely dissolved in His divine nature, as one drop of vinegar and honey, fallen into the ocean, are disappeared. We have already written about this earlier that in the union the concrete human nature did not change and lost its characteristics nor did the unbodily nature of God, mixing with the human nature, was changed or altered. Because the vinegar and the honey do change and are corrupted when they are dropped into the sea, as the water and the wine do. It is not the case with the union of divine and human natures. For when the two are united they are not confused with each other nor change their nature.

Therefore, according to your request, most honorable head and having the wisdom of the elders since your youth, we have put in front of you the true confession of the Armenian Church. And if someone, after reading these, is still suspicious of us, he will answer to Christ on judgment day as someone, who divides the members of His body. And whoever reads and believes and does not judge, with the true faithful will be rewarded by Christ, our God, to whom is befitting glory and power forever and ever, amen.

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Christ, the one Divine and the other Human (as opposed to the orthodox teaching that the Incarnate Christ was a single Person, at once God and man). He preferred to speak of conjunction (*sunafeia*) rather than of union (*enwsiV*). His fear of the Monophysite tendencies led him to reject Cyril’s conception of a hypostatic union (*enwsiV kaq’ upostotin*), substituting for it a union of the will (*kaq’ eudokian*).