

THE IMAGE OF MAN AND LEADER
IN NERSES SHNORHALI'S "ENCYCLICAL EPISTLE"
(Dedicated to the 850th anniversary of "Encyclical epistle")

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Nerses Shnorhali

The theological, literary, religious and musical rich heritage of the great Armenian thinker, poet, musician-composer, historian, political and ecclesiastical figure Nerses Shnorhali (1100-1173) was highly appreciated by literary critics, musicologists and prominent representatives of other spheres of intellectual culture.¹ Incidentally, his poetical works, Armenian liturgical chants (շարական-sharakan), riddles were more often studied and evaluated than his prose works, including "Encyclical Epistle"². Meanwhile, it is one of Nerses Shnorhali's exclusively valuable prose works which has theological, historical, public, social and political importance. According to M. Abeghyan: "This great writing of Catholicos Nerses is a very important historical document by its content, as well as a valuable literary work"³. Referring to the purpose of the work, M. Abeghyan notes: "...he writes not only for the purpose of admonition, but also of teaching"⁴. This remark is very essential for the right interpretation of its content and directivity. In 1995, Matenadaran named after M. Mashtots published the original of "Encyclical Epistle" with an extensive Introduction by E. M. Baghdasaryan who analyses and evaluates Nerses Shnorhali's admonitions and exhortations as divine commandments addressed to spiritual and secular figures, and all the other classes of

¹ Particularly, see Աբեղյան Մ., Հայոց հին գրականության պատմություն, հ. 4, Երևան, 1970, էջ 96-170: Հակոբյան Գ., Ներսես Շնորհալի, Երևան, 1964, էջ 300: Ներսես Շնորհալի (հոգևածների ժողովածու), Երևան, 1977: Բաղդասարյան Է. Մ., Ներածություն: Տես՝ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, աշխատասիրությամբ Է. Մ. Բաղդասարյանի, Երևան, 1995, էջ 8-50: The Heritage of Armenian Literature. Volume II: From the Sixth to the Eighteenth Century. A. J. Hacikyan (Coordinating editor), G. Basmajian, E. S. Franchuk, N. Ouzounian, Detroit, 2002, p. 201, n. 32.

² Ս. Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, «Գանձասար» հանդես, 1991, էջ 124:

³ Աբեղյան Մ., op. cit., p. 153.

⁴ Ibid, p. 154.

society, emphasizes their significance for his time and later in the context of social, religious and political developments. According to E. M. Baghdasaryan it has had moral and educational significance for many generations and at the same time it is “an extremely important historical source for the coverage of numerous complex problems of that time, a highly appreciated linguistic monument in Armenology”⁵.



The Armenian fortress-monastery of Hromkla on the Euphrates, the seat of the Catholicos of All Armenians from 1149 to 1292

It should be noted that in some cases the literary source under study was mostly evaluated as a work reflecting the historical situation and social and religious developments of the 12th century, in which “the faults and defects and shortcomings relating to the life, state and occupation” of different social groups (religious figures, princes, merchants, artisans, peasants) “...were strongly

criticized, thus, in “Encyclical Epistle” were exposed, in fact, the defective sides of the feudal society”⁶. Meanwhile, the provisions characteristic of the modern theory of public administration - the dominance of law containing universal and lasting value, justice, right choice of managerial personnel, mostly are singled out in this valuable work⁷. It was written in 1166⁸ when the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1198-1375) had not been founded yet, thus in his work the role of the church in the field of regulation of the Armenian social and political and cultural life is also highlighted in conditions of absence of Armenian centralized power (Kingdom). At the same time, we believe that in the light of essential truths of the Christian faith “Encyclical Epistle” expresses criteria which inherently are universal for the behaviour of man and leader.

In this regard it is noteworthy that in the collection of articles (dedicated to the 800th anniversary of Nerses Shnorhali’s death) by famous researchers of the Institute of Literature named after M. Abeghyan, Matenadaran named after M. Mashtots and Yerevan State University, academician Victor Hambardzumyan emphasized: “by the force of artistic reproduction of actual events of life Nerses Shnorhali achieved such

⁵ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 7:

⁶ Cf. Հակոբյան Գ., op. cit., p. 74.

⁷ For details see Սովարյան Յու. Մ., Հանրային կառավարման տեսության ու պատմության ուրվագծերը, Երևան, 2004, էջ 24-25: Suvaryan Y., Mirzoyan V., Hayrapetyan R., Public Administration: Theory and History, Yerevan, 2014, pp. 113-114.

⁸ In the period of the Armenian Principedom of Cilicia (1080-1197).

great universal generalizations as the new understanding of the concept of human being and the development of new behaviour towards the nature....”⁹. In the same collection outstanding philologist V. S. Nalbandyan noted: “The problems of intellectual and moral education of the society and human being also occupied thoughts of the personality and poet who was deeply concerned with the political fate of the nation”¹⁰.

Of course, in “Encyclical Epistle” the possible negative phenomena in the sphere of religious and secular activities are also pointed out, which always accompany people in almost all historical times in various forms. Nerses Shnorhali admonishes to refrain from them. Let’s pay attention to one of his admonitions: “I beg you to be cautious and keep your hands clean from diseases which are harmful and bring a curse upon you person”¹¹. Thus, he presented his vision of man and leader (without the above-mentioned deficiencies), according to different layers of society and religious and secular officials, which dominates in the content of “Encyclical Epistle” (or “General Epistle”). Perhaps, besides the historical and theological value this is another reason that since the day of its creation it had numerous publications - in Saint Petersburg (1788), Constantinople (1825), Venice (1830 and 1873), Ejmiatsin (1865), Jerusalem (1871), Antelias (1977)¹², Yerevan (1991 - journal “Գանձասար”; 1995 «Գիտություն» հրատ), New York¹³.

In this article we attempt to discuss the peculiarities of man and leader created in “Encyclical epistle” especially that the role of man, as a creative being and leader (ruler) is huge in the socio-economic, religious, scientific and technical and political development of every country.

An image in fiction is usually created through the use of the methods and resources of psychological analysis, dialogues, actions of the literary hero, depiction of his behaviour and appearance, etc. The hero is often viewed as a collective image, to some extent as an abstract and idealized personality in the vision of the author of the literary work. In his first message addressed to the Armenian people Nerses Shonorhali specifically draws both the religious and secular image of man first of all as a social being, and a believer, worker, subject, and then, as a leader. Unlike the traditional

⁹ Ներսես Շնորհալի (հոգևածների ժողովածու), էջ 7:

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

¹¹ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 91:

¹² Ibid, pp. 6-7.

¹³ St. Nersēs Šnorhali, General Epistle, translation and introduction by Fr. Arakel Aljalian, New York, 1996.

methodology and toolset of image creation, the image of man and leader is formed with two fundamental peculiarities in Nerses Shnorhali's work:

- first of all it is real, corresponding to certain principles and requirements, devoid of defects incompatible with social and religious life: as such, the image is not so much a record of the fact, but an expression of a desirable, thus a potential personality;
- secondly, the method of constructing the image is a preaching with fundamental religious and philosophical provisions, which is more substantial and influential than the sensory description of a literary image.

By the way, before proceeding to the critical analysis of man and leader created by N. Shnorhali, its lasting significance should be emphasized not only in the fields of devotion to the Christian faith, right construction of human relations, but also those of effective management of spiritual and secular life, establishment and strengthening of statehood. In that respect today and in the future as well, the image of man and leader created and in fact anticipated by Nerses Shnorhali may be actual and demanded. As such one he considers everybody: hermits and holy fathers of monasteries, bishops, priests, princes, warriors, citizens, farmers and women. Among them he distinguishes leaders since man may be a subject or a leader, as Nerses Shnorhali says: "... priors and those they lead..."¹⁴.

MAN IN NERSES SHNORHALI'S VIEWS

On the whole, according to Nerses Shnorhali's religious and philosophical interpretation the following should be typical for man as divine commandments:

- infinite fidelity to the Christian faith, thus also to the true idea given from above,
- justice, fair treatment in various and complicated situations during all his activity,
- decency and honesty in human and labour relations,
- morality in the way of living and working activity,
- kindness towards the surrounding world and people,
- patriotism and commitment to the entrusted work,
- high responsibility for the performance of his duties.

¹⁴ Ներսէս Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 101: "General Epistle", p. 44.

It should also be added that as researchers of his poetical works testify: “To the greatest human virtues Shnorhali attributes power, courage and bravery, praising them in works written in various genres and content”¹⁵.

Nerses IV Shnorhali believes in high responsibility for the duties and commitment to the Christian faith by his own example; being ordained Armenian Catholicos (1166-1173) in a time when our nation, according to his words, “not only refuses to submit itself to and obey the judgement of divine laws, but also sits in unjust judgement upon the judges of the church... with logs in its eyes, with malicious slander and unbridled mouth, always sees the mote of transgression”¹⁶ in their behaviour, “because in this time of evil and diverse multiple authorities it is impossible to walk everywhere, to all parts of the world and preach the word of God like the holy apostles”¹⁷, “does not presently have a royal capital and assembly”¹⁸.

Nerses Shnorhali objectively felt all the obstacles that could hinder the realization of his mission. But because of the complicated reality in his words: “To deny the flocks their chief shepherd, to deprive them of his care, and to neglect them even while the sheep are being ravished by wolves is a sign of unfaithfulness”. And such was his judgement: “So that we shall not be completely fruitless before you, we, along with our bishops and vardapets, are determined to remind you in writing of that which was commanded by in the Old and New Testaments. Thus we resemble the great apostle Paul who not only proclaimed the Gospel in his travels through foreign lands..., but even while in bonds strengthened his disciples”¹⁹.

It is noteworthy that Nerses Shnorhali's admonitions for human behaviour, according to social classes, thus differentiating and concretizing for them the content of the admonitions. The city dwellers, merchants and ns were admonished to live “with rectitude and with pure civility,” not to sell their “goods deceitfully”, but “with justice and rectitude sell the work” of their hands...²⁰. Do not despise the peasants as ignorant ones”²¹.

Nerses Shnorhali admonished the farmers and the people in general not “to corrupt the divine temple of your souls”, “not get drunk on wine brings debauchery and

¹⁵ Ներսես Շնորհալի (հոգվածների ժողովածու), էջ 17:

¹⁶ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 59: “General Epistle,” p. 16.

¹⁷ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 60:

¹⁸ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 61, “General Epistle,” p. 17.

¹⁹ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 62, “General Epistle,” p. 18.

²⁰ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 156, “General Epistle,” p. 78.

²¹ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 157:

foolishness and causes... iniquity, strife, vile words of disrespect and murders..."²². In relation to religious figures - monastic clergy, holy fathers of monasteries, bishops, priests, it is especially emphasized that they should "be modest and pious", differ from secular people by their behaviour and way of speaking, moreover, be an instructive example for them, be trusty to the Christian faith ("do not extinguish the light in the lamps of your faith..."²³ do not for the sake of the love of material things separate your souls from the warmth of the fire of Christ's love"²⁴). The following observation of Nerses Shnorhali has the strength of an aphorism: "...now no one is ignorant in choosing between the bad and the good; people can nevertheless become ignorant by their own will"²⁵. Addressing the priests, N. Shnorhali warns them: "None of you should prefer the blindness of ignorance to priestly study because of indolence or worldly preoccupations"²⁶.

Giving importance to kindness and the desire to overcome ignorance through hard work, Nerses Shnorhali emphasizes the need of being righteous: "... Do not love some with special favors and cut off and ignore others, providing to some in excess of their needs and not satisfying the basic needs of others... and the distribution of food should be according to the amount of each one's work, in greater or lesser degree. Do not abandon, as no longer necessary, the elderly and the disabled who expanded the time of their youth and the strength of their bodies in service to the church"²⁷.

These provisions have already developed into modern social philosophy, which are extremely essential for modern public administration. Particularly, importance is rightly given to the fair remuneration for work, its connection to the quantitative results of the work. Besides, not only the need for social protection for the old and disabled is emphasized, but also that of the continual evaluation of their earnings. This issue is still topical today; different generations should not be contradistinguished, especially for opening vacancy, but instead, an effective policy of combining experience and youth should be followed.

²² Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 158: "General Epistle," p. 81.

²³ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 75: "General Epistle," p. 27.

²⁴ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 75:

²⁵ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 61: "General Epistle," pp. 17-18.

²⁶ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 129:

²⁷ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 99, "General Epistle," p. 43.

For the class of bishops the pure image, modesty, hospitality, kind and fair behavior, self-restraint, temperance, not being a lover of money, disinterestedness should be special²⁸.

Human virtues and rules of behaviour emphasized by Nerses Shnorhali should indisputably be characteristic of civilized people of all classes regardless of their nationality, place in society, quality of life, so let us once again emphasize their universal nature – as the most important criteria of the human image.

A LEADER ACCORDING TO NERSES SHNORHALI

According to the modern theory of management the leader is a person who is able to influence the behaviour of people and their groups by his potential abilities. Official is different from leader: with the authority delegated to him with force of law he has an opportunity to influence the behaviour of people and their groups. Certainly, lucky is the organization or group the head of which is also leader. Below we will discuss the perception of a leader who combines the features of official and leader in one personality.

Nerses Shnorhali refers to insatiable careerists of all times when he considers it as a sin against "the laws of God" to become a leader by dishonest means: "Let no one, motivated by the sin of wilfulness, seize, by bribing the elders, the priory of the monastery without the timely examination and permission of the prior"²⁹.

Nerses Shnorhali's following admonition is directed to the realization of the position held and a high degree of responsibility by leaders and officials of different levels: "I beg you to remember and recognize in wisdom the rank which you bear, its dignity and obligations, where it began and why it was established, and what who commanded to be done by those who established it"³⁰ (he refers as to those who appoint to a position and as well as the problems assigned). Thus, a manager, taking the role of a leader by honest means, should commit himself to the performance of his duties with high responsibility since his actions can be decisive for the fate of the organization, individuals and even the country. Extensive powers - high responsibility; in modern terminology this is the first criterion for the behaviour of the leader, according to Shnorhali.

²⁸ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 105-111, "General Epistle," pp. 47-49.

²⁹ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 100-101, "General Epistle," p. 43.

³⁰ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 102, "General Epistle," p. 45.

The next criterion refers to the selection of personnel, according to the chapter entitled "To the worldly princes": "Do not appoint evil and iniquitous officials and governors over your country, lest you be judged by God together with them because of the injustice they commit. Rather select righteous and judicious men to govern the people who will not abandon the many prescribed royal rights of the meritorious for small bribes or themselves steal or interfere or take more than what is commended, for both are unjust before God"³¹. Thus, for human resource policy importance should be given to the following features of the appointed people - kindness, honesty and justice, behaviour free of corruption risks. Indisputably, these principles of Nerses Shnorhali for personnel selection are true for all times.

The following profound admonition of Nerses Shnorhali suggests a complete system for organizing the work and material stimulation: "Do not enslave people who are under your rule, as though they were animals which are by nature servants to man, to harsh, unremitting labor... not even giving them food. Instead, with a sweet forgiveness and with sweetness and without delay, fill them with abundant food during their work and pay them enough so that they can support their humble homes and children and pay the royal taxes"³².

Nerses Shnorhali's commandment referring to tax collection is noteworthy: "... do not act unjustly toward the obedient, applying heavy and burdensome taxes that they cannot bear, but judge each one by the law and according to the measure of his strength..."³³. The last two commandments also emphasize the importance of the leader's kindness, justice and knowledge of work during the performance of his duties.

Nerses Shnorhali's next commandment contains essential components for assessing the work of the subjects and if need be, for fairly punishing them: "Do not judge anyone unrighteously, but make honest judgments, that you may be judged by God mercifully and not with severity. Do not judge for bribes or with bias for one side or, on account of hatred and vengeance, or show partiality toward one out of pride and vindicate the unjust in court or pervert the rights of the just, lest you make yourselves responsible for the curse of the laws of God because of these things"³⁴.

According to modern understanding, social responsibility towards the human settlement and surrounding society was also highlighted in "Encyclical Epistle". The

³¹ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 143, "General Epistle," p. 69.

³² Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 144, "General Epistle," p. 70.

³³ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 142, "General Epistle," p. 69.

³⁴ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 143, "General Epistle," p. 70.

following admonitions of Nerses Shnorhali addressed to princes are directed to that: "Do not deprive any human being and do not torment the poor and homeless...", "Do not ignore the rights of widows and the poor when they cry before you because of those who exploit them. Rather do justice for the orphan and give rights to the widows"³⁵. He considered appropriate to follow the example of righteous people, who "for they deprived no one and they hurt no one, nor did they steal anyone's belongings, and they were neither unjust nor deceitful to anyone. From their honestly acquired estate they fed the hungry, they clothed the naked, they received guests, they filled the needs of those in need"³⁶.

It should be emphasized that especially for the behaviour of leader N. Shnorhali repeatedly gives great importance to the need for justice and honesty: "Again we say this concerning the falsehood and deceit about which Christ taught, that whatever is evil is from the devil, and although it is harmful to all men, it is more so for the great and powerful. The little ones are powerless... and the great have in their hands the ability to do what they want imperiously, while despising the law"³⁷.

Probably as in the 12th century, as well as now people often complain that it is difficult to rule justly, without shady actions, according to Shnorhali's definition: "To rule without depriving". His answer to such viewpoints is topical today and will stay such in the future as well: "It is not impossible to rule without iniquity, but within reach, even pleasant, for those who have love and wish to pursue it, this we testify before God as bondsmen for all. For if anyone cleans his house of oppression and collects only rightful tribute, it will seem less burdensome and more profitable as well, than many unjust acquisitions... for any unjust acquisition, however small, burns like fire and corrupts the many that are lawful; acquiring things unlawfully will bring cursing and bitterness from the oppressed and the poor and the curse of God shall enter into the house of the oppressors. On the other hand, into the house of the just-free of extortion and with concern for the hungry - both the blessing of the poor and the blessing of God enters secretly, and multiplies the little he might have"³⁸.

One of Nerses Shnorhali's profound admonitions and exhortations concerns the development of a friendly and healthy social and psychological environment in the team: "...If you approve of our counsel, establish this as a rule for everyone who serves you. For

³⁵ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 143-144, "General Epistle," pp. 69-70.

³⁶ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 145-146, "General Epistle," p. 71.

³⁷ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 145-146, "General Epistle," p. 71.

³⁸ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 148, "General Epistle," p. 72.

if a man desires to stay in your service, he will serve you with loyalty and without deceit. However, let whoever wants to quit your service, ask openly and without fear for permission from you, do not forbid it with scolding and violence, but respond persuasively to him whom you would prefer to say; and to others give permission with kindness and pay whatever is due to them. And when they see these considerations coming from you, they will change their minds stay, or if they go, will quickly return to you”³⁹.

The last admonition of the Catholicos addressed to the worldly princes is also very didactic: “We also give you another command: do not be vengeful or vindictive... but be tolerant and patient according to the commandment of Christ toward all who sin against you”⁴⁰.



Niccolo Machiavelli

The renowned diplomat and writer of the Renaissance Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) wrote the genius book titled “The Prince” covering the state management basics⁴¹. In that famous work the types of states and governments are discussed and recommendations are given on the government of state, conquest of new countries and cities, establishing relations with the subjects, leading military affairs, etc.

More than three centuries before the great Italian, Nerses Shnorhali with his admonitions and exhortations, suggested provisions of management for different levels that are most complete, humanistic and universal. In different theories of leadership developed in the 20th century⁴² the same criteria are highlighted in the behaviour of the leaders that have been preached for generations as divine commandments by Nerses Shnorhali.

***Translated from Armenian by
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³⁹ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 150, “General Epistle,” pp. 73-74.

⁴⁰ Ներսես Շնորհալի, Թուղթ ընդհանրական, էջ 152, “General Epistle,” p. 75.

⁴¹ See Макиавелли Н., Государь. История Флоренции, М., ЭКСМО, 2010, с. 7-87.

⁴² See Մենեջմենթ, Յու. Մ. Սուվարյանի ընդ. խմբ., Երևան, Տնտեսագետ, 2009, էջ 350-366.