

*The Relationship
of the
Armenian Church
with
Other Christian Churches*

Hagop Nersoyan

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By Hagop Nersoyan

I am using the word 'relationship' in our title partly to mean the attitude of the Armenian Church toward non-Armenian Churches. This attitude is both fashioned by, and expresses itself through, events that make up the history and determine the tradition of our Church. It also testifies to the light that God has given us to discern truth from error.

It goes without saying that relationship also implies similarities and differences. Of the similarities between the Armenian Church and other Churches, as well as of its difference from them we shall speak shortly.

Why

Having defined an important word in the formulation of our subject, we can ask quite pertinently the following: Why should the study of such a question be of interest at all?

Different people may have different reasons for wanting to know about the differences and similarities of the Armenian Church from and with other Churches. Some may have pride in their Church and may want to substantiate this pride with facts. Others may feel uneasy either in our Church or simply in a plurality of Churches and may be looking for one that would suit them better or best. Still others may want to know about our relationship with other Churches out of plain scientific curiosity.

All of these reasons are legitimate. There is, however, a fourth reason — a psychological one — that makes people ask frequently about the place of our Church in the multitude of Churches that exist in this country. It makes no difference, they are led to think, whether you belong to this Church or that.

These men and women ask the question because they do not really **belong** to their own Church in the first place. They are indifferent spectators of all Churches including their own. And the question, 'What are the differences?' is merely a substitute in their minds for the interjection, 'What's the difference!' And it is worthy of note, in this connection, that whereas clergymen are asked again and again, in this country, to clarify points of differences to 'interested' audiences, it occurs to relatively fewer people to ask such a question in more compact Armenian communities elsewhere.

The Basic Difference

I will say in a moment what some of the things are that distinguish our Church from other Churches. But these will be only the expressions of the basic identity of our Church, that comes to the fore when it is considered in contrast to other Churches. Its basic difference, therefore, is its being this particular Church. As far as we, you and I, are concerned, it is 'different' because it is our Church, whereas the others are not. An example may clarify this obscure saying: suppose someone asks you all of a sudden, 'What are your differences from other persons?' At first you would be baffled. Then you would begin to compare yourself with people you know. You would eventually be able to point out a great many differences, but always with a sense of not having exhausted the list of the things that make you a different person. And it is this difference that at the same time relates you to other people. There are people with whom you are friendly, others with whom you are not so friendly. Still others whose existence does not affect your life in any visible fashion.

There are Churches that hold with us the same truths, Churches that refuse to do so, and other organized communities that have not heard, or do not care to listen to our message. It is these circumstances that determine our attitude toward, or relationship with them.

I am asked to give you this afternoon a panoramic view of the Christian Churches and to place the Armenian Church in this general picture. There was a time when I myself was satisfied with knowing that my Church was mine, and that it was the true Church. This opinion is however, not satisfactory to the extent to which national consciousness loses its grip on our minds. Be that as it may, the fact remains that in spite of its being that of a now small people, the Armenian Church tradition is sound and solid enough to stand proudly, shining with truths, even when it is taken apart for purposes of comparative study.

The Church and Many Churches

What is the church? There have been to this question as many answers as there were schools of Christian thought. I propose the following definition:

The church is the entire world throughout its history from the perspective of its reconciliation with God.

The world was (is) estranged from God on account of Adam's sin. Jesus Christ's being made man, and His death on the Cross, healed this estrangement or, to say basically the same thing, made the healing of this estrangement possible. Many circumstances have made it impossible for this — let us say ideally one church — to be actually one, i.e., one, administratively and in doctrine.

We sometimes say the church will be one 'in the future.' Now 'future' is a name given to that which is not, but which is expected, hoped for, or yearned after. In this sense it is unreservedly correct and legitimate to say that the church will actually be one in the future.

It follows that although we speak and presumably will speak for a long time to come of Churches, the plural form of this word should not lead us to believe that the oneness of the Christian church according to Christian theology is impaired in any serious sense. Although the form of the word is plural, its meaning is singular inasmuch as it refers to a reconciled one world. The word *churches* may perhaps be likened to the word *series*, for example, which is also plural in form but singular in meaning.

Ecumenical Councils

An ecumenical council is a meeting of the whole church represented by its bishops. The most significant part of an ecumenical council is its implicit rejection of the authority of one man in matters of faith.

An ecumenical council is ideally different from ordinary councils or meetings in this that while in ordinary meetings decisions are made, in ecumenical councils they are quite literally arrived at. At ecumenical meetings there are invocations to the Holy Spirit in which He is asked to enlighten the minds of those present. Truth is not fabricated in these meetings. It is discovered. No one decides anything. As a result of their receptive attitude and humble search the participants see, as it were, what God wanted man to see from all eternity. And those who refuse to see the truth as formulated by the vast majority are anathematized. They are not accepted in the congregation of the faithful. At the Council of Nicea, for example, the two bishops, who unlike the overwhelming majority did not give their assent to the formula defining the Godhead of the Son, were excommunicated and subjected to exile.

The adjective *ecumenical* comes from the Greek word *oikoumene* which means the inhabited world. Acceptance of the authority of an ecumenical council is based on the saying of our Lord, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them.'

The earliest councils of the Christian Church are reported in the Book of Acts. Other early Ecumenical Councils have been held at Carthage, for instance, and elsewhere, but the first great ecumenical council that the church recognizes is that of Nicea. This Council begins what some historians refer to as the Age of Councils during which the bases of the Christian faith were laid down. The Age of Councils follows the Age of Persecutions.

The Edict of Milan

Many people are familiar with the incident at the Milanese Bridge where the Emperor Constantine saw a flaming cross in the sky with the Greek inscrip-

tion *En toutau nika* ("By this conquer.") Though the story of this vision may not be true, Constantine won the battle in 312 and then he issued the famous Edict of Milan which granted religious toleration to all the citizens of the Roman Empire. In 323 he gave his standard a Christian form, and in 325 he himself signed the letter of convocation of the Council of Nicea.

As long as the church was being persecuted as a whole differences of opinion inside the church did not come to the fore. Resistance to the common enemy kept important divergences of views in abeyance. But now that problems of Christian belief could be freely discussed, questions as to the formulation of the basic convictions of the church were raised. And the dogmas to be established should above all conform to the requirements of logic. Yet there was no satisfactory way of logically formulating the fact that Jesus Christ was God, and God the Father was God, and they were both, and the Holy Spirit, the same and one God. Tertullian, one of the earliest church fathers, writes as follows: 'The simple (I will not call them unwise and unlearned) who always constitute the majority of believers are startled at the economy on the ground that their very rule of faith withdraws them from the world's plurality of gods to the one and only true God... They are constantly throwing out against us that we are preachers of two gods and three gods.'

Arius and His Teachings

The man who tried to satisfy such concerns as were raised in the minds of 'the simple' is Arius. In the controversy about the Godhead of Christ he is one of the main figures. He was a man well-trained in logic and wanted to achieve the impossible. He wanted to place within the framework of the human mind the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In his endeavor to do this he removed from the Holy Trinity its mysterious nature. This is roughly what he said: God is one and supreme. Outside of God the Creator and Father of all, everything is created. So therefore is the Son.

Now all Orthodox fathers had taught from the beginning that the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is not created, but is Creator. Arius, in order to make the issue simply understandable, said that the Son was creator in a special sense, namely, he was the only agent of God through whom the work of creation could be effected. The Son, though creature, was unique. God created him for the specific purpose of creating through him the world. Thus, the Son's specific mission was to make the world, for which he received the 'material' and 'orders or instructions' from God the Father. Those who have some familiarity with Plato realize that this idea is an adaptation from the *Timaeus*, one of the Dialogues of that justly famous Greek thinker.

Arius, well-versed in Greek philosophy, proceeded with therefores and

ifs. If, he further said, the Son is a true Son, then the Father must have existed before the Son. Therefore, there was a time when the Son was not (did not exist,) he is created or made. This question seems to many today, and seemed to many at the time, an unimportant verbiage. The Emperor himself wrote a letter to Arius in which there is the celebrated phrase, 'Having made a careful inquiry into the origin and foundation of these differences, I find the cause to be of a truly insignificant character.' The truth is that had the Arians won, there would be no Christian church today, because mankind would have been tired of worshipping an extraordinary man. Arius thought of Christ simply as an extraordinary man. There are many people who do this even today.

The Council of Nicea

At Nicea in the year 325, a large number of bishops from all parts of the Christian world met to consider this matter of the Holy Trinity. The formulation of the Creed was the result. The Nicene Creed is, with some additions, what we say or sing during the Synaxis in our Armenian Church every Sunday. We declare that we believe 'in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, of one substance with the Father... by whom all things both in heaven and on earth are made.' The most controversial phrase in this passage is 'that is, of one substance with the Father.' A very large part of the time of the Council of Nicea was devoted to the Greek word that corresponds to this phrase. The word is '*homoousion*.' Those who were more or less in favor of Arius' teachings wanted to use the word '*homoiousion*.' The difference is the letter *i* which makes the word mean not 'of *one* substance (or essence),' but 'of *like* substance.' Had not the orthodox been meticulous, and if for the sake of harmony they had given in, the inclusion of this little letter 'i,' a mere iota, would have destroyed the Christian church. Incidentally, this detail of church history has a moral: unity is important, but more important is truth.

We traditionally maintain that St. Aristakes represented the Armenian Church at the Council. During the Armenian Divine Liturgy, immediately after the recitation of the Creed, the Deacon says: "As for those who say there was a time when the Son was not or there was a time when the Holy Spirit was not or that they came into being out of nothing or who say that the Son of God or the Holy Spirit is of different substance and that they are changeable or alterable, such doth the catholic and apostolic church anathematize." Then the celebrant priest quotes the doxology first said by St. Gregory the Enlightener: "But we glorify Him who was before the ages, worshipping the Holy Trinity and the one Godhead, the Father and the Son and the Holy Sprit, now and always and unto the ages. Amen." As anyone can readily see these two statements constitute a compact summary of the Nicene Creed, and testify to the earliest adoption by the Armenian Church of the faith of Nicea.

The struggle between the orthodox and the Arians lasted some 50 years. The champions of the orthodox faith in this controversy were Sts. Athanasius; Basil, Bishop of Caesaria in Cappadocia; Gregory of Nyssa, and somewhat later, Gregory Nazianzus. All these theologians have had a deep influence on the faith of the Armenian Church.

The Council of Constantinople

It is said that truth rides on the back of error. The error of Arius had helped the church establish the truth about the divinity of Christ the Lord. Although the Council of Nicea had mentioned the divinity also of the Holy Spirit it had not placed on it sufficient emphasis.

The Arian controversy had come to some sort of an end with the death of the Arian Emperor Valens in 378. Now a man by the name of Macedonius began to go about and say that the Spirit was a minister and a servant and not truly God. Macedonius placed the Holy Spirit on the same level as that of the angels. The new emperor Theodosius summoned another Council at Constantinople in 381. This Council established the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. This is the second of the three Councils the Armenian Church accepts along with the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

The Council of Ephesus

The third Ecumenical Council recognized by the Armenian Church is that of Ephesus held in 431. This Council dealt with the implications of the issues with which Nicea had concerned itself. On the surface the Council of Ephesus was concerned with the word *Theotokos* meaning '(She who) bore God.' The corresponding Armenian word is *Astvadzadzin*. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople (428-431) was opposed to the use of that word because he feared that it might minimize and eventually destroy the humanity of our Lord. Nestorius is the classical example of a man who falls into one error while he is busy avoiding another. He was rather ruthless in the persecution of heretics. Said he to the Emperor, 'Give me, O Prince, the earth purged of heretics and I will give you heaven as recompense.' Nevertheless his teachings, carried to their logical conclusion, would destroy the divinity of Christ altogether. Although he was condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431) his followers spread their brand of Christianity into countries as far as China. He himself died in exile in 451. This is the year of the Battle of the Vardanians and of the celebrated Council of Chalcedon that the Armenian Church does not accept.

The Council of Chalcedon

Because the theme of the deliberations of this Council revolves around the nature(s) of Christ and we reject its formulation, some Churches accuse us

of holding the belief that Christ is not man, but God with perhaps only a touch of humanity. This is a false accusation. It is true that unlike the Western Church, and inasmuch as we are an Eastern people imbued with mysticism, we stand in awe before the eternal miracle of God's becoming man, and our attention is concentrated, as witnessed by our hymns and the general spirit of our Divine Liturgy, on the divine nature of Christ. But we never refused to recognize that Jesus Christ was God and perfect man.

Chalcedon decided that Jesus Christ was one Person with one human nature and one divine nature, that is, two natures. This decision was in keeping with, or a concession to the famous 'Letter,' 'Tome,' or 'Dissertation' of Pope Leo I. We do not agree with this statement. Our position is that Jesus Christ is one person with one nature, human and divine. Our formulation is, *mi pnouthyoun panin marmnatseho* ('one nature of the Word incarnate'). It was proposed in the original Greek, of course, by Cyril of Alexandria whom we hold in great esteem as a theologian.

The implications of the pronouncements of the Council of Chalcedon were not as clear in the 5th century as they are now, or rather as they were in the following centuries. I may mention that only two years before Chalcedon a council was held at Ephesus. At this council the views of Eutyches received the sanction of the church. Eutyches is an interesting theologian. By the same token, just what it is that he believed about Christ is not always clear. Some of his views seem to agree with the official position of the Armenian Church, but due to some of his exaggerations we formally repudiate the totality of his doctrine.

The situation was thus terribly confused, and without a leisurely and detailed study it was impossible to know exactly the feeling, then, of the whole church. This study was exactly what our clergymen of the time could not indulge in, involved as they were in their war against the Persians. It is possible that our monophysitism was not an avowed teaching but an implication of our delay in considering Chalcedon. The fact is that our uncertainties gave way to positive anti-Chalcedonian statements in the year 506 at a Council in which the Georgians and the Caspian Albanians (Azerbaijanis) also participated and which was presided over by the Armenian Catholicos, Papken I. The Armenians felt that the formulation of Chalcedon was not in keeping with the spirit of Nicea. The serious theological and other reasons that justify our stance cannot be reviewed here. They are complex and ramified. It is at this point that our relationship with other Churches becomes articulate.

Four Groups of Christian Churches

The Armenian Church distinguishes itself within the Christian church in that it has come into existence in a particular country, to serve a particular people. In "Armenian Church" the Armenian word for *Armenian* is

Hayasdanyayts which means "(church of) the people living in Armenia". It originally referred therefore not to a nation but to people living in a particular region of the world, to all the people who happened to be living in that region. Until (and after) the Council of Chalcedon the Armenian Church was of course distinguished by its use of the Armenian language. But this difference in language did not create any friction between our Church and the other large sections of Christendom. Our language was a perfectly adequate instrument to render any Greek text in all its details and niceties of form and content, and our writers and theologians spoke Greek quite as perfectly as the Greeks themselves.

After 451, the Armenian Church belonged among the Churches that rejected the formula of Chalcedon on the ground, as already suggested, that it was not in line with the previous orthodox pronouncements of the first three Ecumenical Councils. Together with the other Churches of this conviction we are sometimes referred to as Monophysites. (This word comes from the Greek *monos*, single, and *physis*, nature.) We are usually referred to as the Lesser Eastern Orthodox Churches. I will say a word about these Churches toward the end of this talk. A Monophysite is someone who professes one nature in Christ. This makes better philosophical sense, and it is crucial to realize that that *one* nature is both *human and divine*.

There are, from one point of view, four different groups of Christian Churches. These are, in the order of their 'closeness' to us, the Lesser Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church (together with those of different rites that recognize nevertheless the unique authority of the Pope), and the various and sundry Protestant Churches and communities. I will speak of our relationship with these sections of Christendom beginning with the last.

The Armenian Church and Protestantism

In the eleventh century the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches parted company. Then in the sixteenth century from the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church came out Protestantism. Protestantism itself gave birth to a number of other forms of Christianity. These have not come into contact with the Armenian Church in the past, nor are they likely to influence to any considerable degree the life and work of the Armenian Church in a foreseeable future.

The outstanding proof or sign that we have been, at least physically, in close relationship with main line Protestantism is the existence of our Protestant brothers. There are two main reasons why Protestantism could develop among Armenians to the extent to which it did.

One circumstance that accounted for the appeal of Protestantism to some of our people at one time was economic advantage. Such advantage accompanied their 'acceptance' of Protestant teachings presented to them by na-

tionals of states of great wealth and prestige. Protestant missionaries coming to the different cities of Turkey in the first half of the 19th century would assist Armenian individuals in their professional objectives. Instances where the stoppage of financial help meant the end of the 'converted Armenians' going to Protestant prayer meetings indicate the considerable role of such help in the success of the endeavors of the missionaries.

The second, perhaps more important, reason for which Protestantism could have access to some elements in the Armenian population of Turkey is more general. It is the fact that there was a crying need for regeneration, education, and reform within the Armenian Church itself. The necessary participation of our Church in our national struggle for survival tended to make it seem more nationalistic in character than religious-spiritual. I must say in passing that it was both natural and sensible that our Church should concentrate, in times of crisis, on the survival of the nation first. That meant, for the Church, concern for its flock. This was in a profound sense a religious endeavor, since the nation is the 'material' of which our Church is built. Tending the nation, the Church was doing its work. Its purely spiritual character was nevertheless fading, and there were movements within the Church for its restoration. Yet Armenian clergy and laymen alike were careful to point out that reform should not be confused with change of faith. A priest, Der Vertaness Krikorian, who left his own church under some duress for having adopted Protestant procedures of preaching the Gospel, was sorry for having done so and wrote a book in 1868 entitled, 'Apostasy (change of faith) is No Reform.'

This is precisely what some people did not understand and with, at times, good will and conviction followed Protestant teachers. The origin of an organized Armenian Protestant group goes back to 1822. Levy Parsons and Pliny Fisk were the first missionaries that came into contact with the Armenian people in the Near East.

For a long time, the Protestant Armenians neglected quite consciously and deliberately the study of Armenian history and of the Armenian language. This was a direct result of their otherwise understandable antinationalistic tendencies and their psychological inclination to break with a good deal of the past. They have contributed little to genuine and distinctively Armenian literature.

Protestants have been useful to our nation with the schools and care centers that they established. They caused us indirectly to work for the better fulfillment of the Christian mission. But for Protestantism as such there was no appreciable room. In fact, some of the dogmatic changes that the Armenian Protestants sought to introduce were simply outrageous in the eyes of the Mother Church.

Practically every aspect of Protestantism can be explained merely by looking at it from the point of view of rejection of authority. Luther said that

faith was enough for justification or salvation. No authority was needed to interpret the Bible — no authority (Church) had to intervene between the individual and God. We cannot subscribe to this religious philosophy. We know that without the Armenian Church we cannot be saved, not only as individuals but also as a nation. And this is not merely a theological saying. We know that our Church saves us both in time and in eternity.

Now it does not behoove a Church to be inimical toward anyone or any institution. Our feelings toward the Protestants are far from bitter. In spite of our profound differences in religious beliefs and outlook we understand their presence in the midst of us as well as their religious opinions and collective feelings. Circumstances beyond the control of the Mother Church made their coming into existence inevitable. We hope and pray that as the Mother Church grows stronger and meets her appointed mission more adequately, mistakes of omission and of commission by all parties will be corrected.

The Armenian Church and Roman Catholicism

The formation of an Armenian Roman Catholic community goes back to the 18th century. The first Armenian (Roman) Catholic Church services were held in Beria (Aleppo, Syria) on December 30, 1738. But we had come into contact with the Roman Catholics much before that date, when political circumstances compelled large Armenian groups to move to Cilicia where we later established a kingdom. Everybody knows that the Armenians were of great help to the Crusaders who tried to liberate, under the orders of the Pope, the Holy Land from Moslem domination. Ever since, Jesuit missionaries have worked among Armenians and have spared none of their methods to make their work as effective as possible.

Today the head of the Armenian (Roman) Catholics says that he is a successor of Abraham Ardzivian. This gentleman was consecrated bishop in 1710 by a rival catholicos named Bidzag (the literal meaning of this word is 'wasp') and his consecration has never been accepted as valid. We cannot deny, of course, that Armenian (Roman) Catholic religious orders and congregations with headquarters in Venice and Vienna have made considerable contributions to Armenian literature, mainly with their critical studies in history. But their views on our Church and its history have been accused of bias in favor of their acceptance of the Pope's unique authority. In more recent times they have put out publications in which history is perhaps again distorted a bit in their favor.

Our relationship with the Armenian Catholic and with the Roman Catholic Church has not always been warm, though hopefully it is improving. There is, of course, the issue of Chalcedon, which is a historic cause of separation. There is the so-called *filioque* controversy: they maintain that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son; We say he 'proceeds from the

Father'. There is the fact that we do not use statues in our churches and they do. In the Eucharist we use only wine. They mix water with the wine. (The Greek Orthodox warm the water prior to its use). They usually receive only the transubstantiated bread. They believe in Purgatory, in the Immaculate Conception and they have made a dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin. There are also differences in our rites. There are other such differences and above all there is their dogma of the Infallibility of the Pope.

This last Roman dogma is of considerable importance, which importance is not due however to its theological connotations. The infallibility of the Pope is the Roman way of maintaining that the church is infallible. We also believe that the church is infallible, that it does not err, but we cannot place this infallibility in the judgment and/or inspiration of one person. We have no evidence to believe, as they claim, that the Pope is the successor of Saint Peter. Even if he were his successor, he, as an individual bishop, could not be 'God's representative' on earth. The church was not built on Saint Peter alone, but on all the Apostles as a group of disciples inspired by the Holy Spirit and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Christianity was preached in Armenia by two Apostles; it was established by St. Gregory the Enlightener; it was developed by the Armenian people and adapted, as it should be, to their specific characteristics and ethos. These circumstances legitimately require that they have their own liturgical language and supreme pontiff, while sharing the essentials of their faith with other Christian orthodox bodies. This is according to the truism that truth is one, although it manifests itself in different shades in the case of different communities. The Armenian Catholicos-Patriarch, elected by an assembly representing all the faithful, is first among equals (that is, among the bishops of the Armenian Church.) He is more like a chief executive officer who abides by the decisions of the college of bishops, and exercises his authority within that framework.

We are, of course, as anxious as anyone else to see actually one holy, apostolic, and catholic (universal) church, and we believe that the highest authority on earth of this church is the assembly or council or college of the bishops of the different Churches, from the different parts of the world, each having a different background and tradition and each seeing the truth from a particular angle. Only in such a council can eternal and universal truth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, be formulated for the benefit of all generations to come.

The question of the infallibility of the Pope is, therefore, a methodological issue without, for this reason, being unimportant. Yet in spite of this and the other divergences which I have mentioned there are no unreconcilable differences in our respective creeds. We accept the validity of the Roman Catholic orders, although we are not in communion with the Roman Church. It must be noted however that neither our Catholicos nor the Pope

have any objection to worshipping together within the walls of the same church.

The Armenian Church and the Orthodox Churches

It was in 1054 that the Latin and Greek provinces of the Christian world finally separated. There were of course many immediate reasons for this separation, but the main reason that englobes them all is perhaps very simple. It is one of ethos.

The mystically inclined Eastern peoples were concerned mainly with God or the Absolute beyond understanding. They still emphasize the Resurrection and the eternal Lord as a giver of life and light. The theologians and the artists of the West emphasize — always relatively speaking — the Crucifixion and the legal constraints on the propensity to sin. Also, Greek theology is somewhat less definite, less clear-cut. Roman theology has a well-defined answer to every question. Where the Greek Church has an attitude, a broad 'position' to offer as an answer to some of the individual questions of the faithful, the Roman Catholic Church leaves little such latitude in its answers. As a consequence the Eastern Churches rely less on details of dogmatic formulations than on the spiritual insight of the Church for the practice of their God-given religion. Let me repeat that these are broad generalizations. Actually all the characteristics of the ancient churches are shared by all, to a greater or lesser degree.

The Armenian Church belongs to the group of Eastern Churches. In spite of interminable quarrels (until the 12th century) it is difficult, I believe, to point out any well-defined and important differences between the Armenian and Greek theologies, the matter of accepting or not three or more Ecumenical Councils notwithstanding. Thus the definitions of Chalcedon are the main divergence, but this, at least in my modest opinion only complicate an unfortunate historical development. What I mean to say is this: had the Greek Church remained with the Platonic philosophical insights instead of moving to Aristotle's side of the fence under Latin pressure, we would have had no doctrinal differences.

Yet our close similarity with the Greeks has not always been a reason for very friendly relations. Two tenants of the same apartment house can be much more disrespectful of each other than two total strangers. Since we were so close both temperamentally and geographically and since we were of the same religious tradition, our differences were magnified beyond measure, while political considerations and personal rivalries added fuel to the fire.

Only in recent times was there a happy tendency in the Orthodox Churches to come closer together and discover grounds of mutual support and cooperation. Ever since the fifth century we have not been in communion with the larger body of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, although we

recognize the validity of their orders. There are no impassable barriers to our being in communion, as seen by the Armenian bishops officially convened in Council during the pontificate of Gregory IV, in 1179, at Romclia.

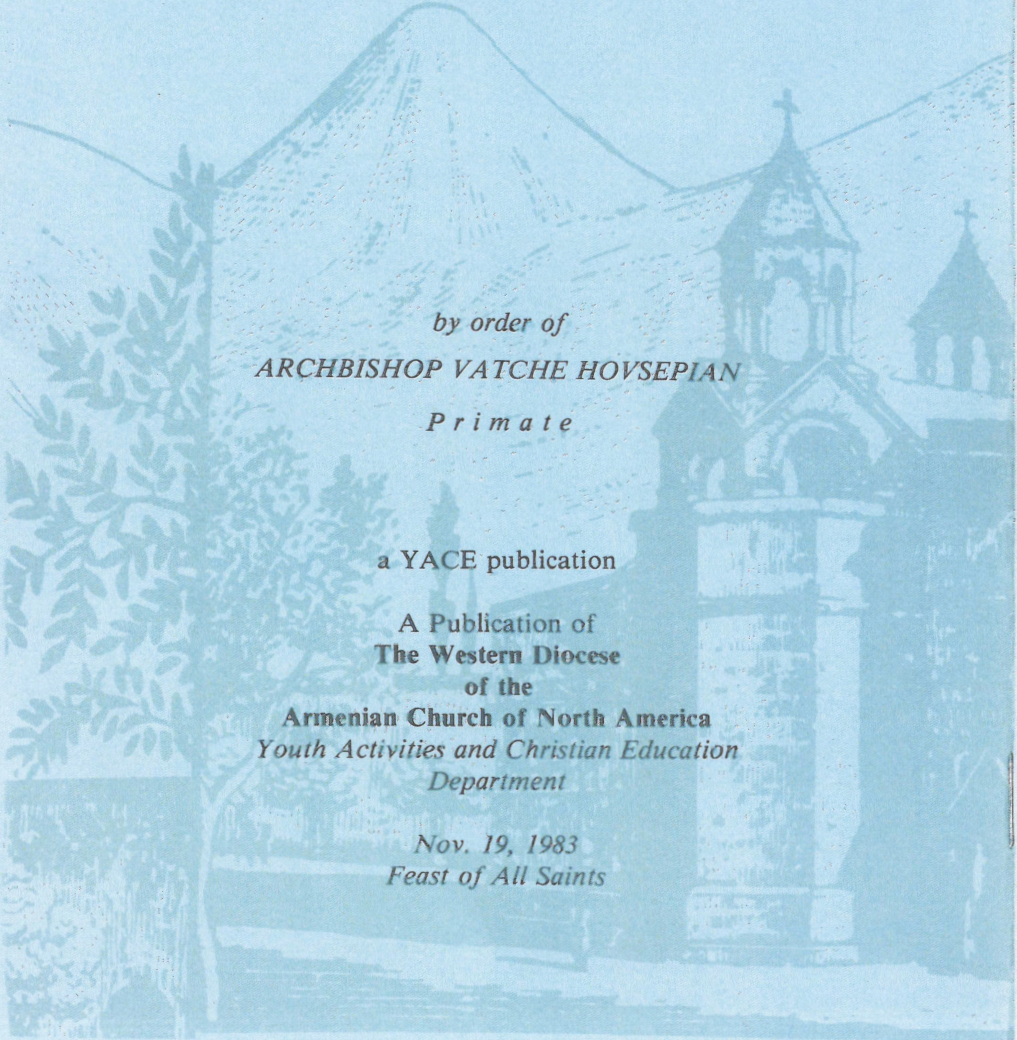
The Lesser Eastern Churches

In spite of rather profound social and ethnic differences, we are in communion with the Lesser Eastern Orthodox Churches. To be 'in communion' means to be allowed to receive the holy communion at each other's Divine Liturgy (which is the center of Christian life), on account of oneness in faith. We recognize, of course, the validity of each other's orders.

There are five Lesser Eastern Churches: (1) The Armenian Church, (2) The Coptic Church (ancient Egyptian, main See: Alexandria), (3) The Ethiopian Church, (4) The Syrian or Assyrian Church (with its main See historically at Antioch, now at Homs, Syria), and (5) the Syrian Church of Malabar (a province of India).

The Coptic and Ethiopian Churches on one hand, and the Syrian Church of Antioch and that of Malabar on the other, are more closely related between themselves. Together we are about 15 million. In this group of five Churches the Armenian Church occupies a very important place and much is expected of her.

I will not take your time much longer telling you about these churches individually. Let me just add that these five Churches, all of which can trace their origin to the Apostles and were at one time very influential and prosperous, are not, today, at the height of their glory. This is a challenge. We want to be better organized and we want to progress in the service of our peoples and of God. We can do so if all of us are conscious of our moral and religious obligations and are enthused with the great objectives that these Churches have pursued through the ages and are still called upon to pursue.



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