

# Armenian Apostolic Church

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The Armenian Apostolic Oriental Orthodox Church, is one of the original Oriental Orthodox churches. The Armenian Church recognizes the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431). The decisions and the dogmatic formulations of these councils are the basis of the theological thought of the Armenian Church which help her to protect herself against different sects and religious denominations which threatened her in the past as well as today.

Some councils which were recognized by the Latin and Byzantine Orthodox Churches as Ecumenical were denied according to the councils of the Armenian Church.

The councils which were not recognized by the Armenian Church as Ecumenical are the following: the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the Third Council of Constantinople (681) and the Second Council of Nicaea (787).

In 451 the Council of Chalcedon, the Universal Church realized its first divergence because of the dangerous ideas put forward regarding the problem of the human and divine nature of Christ. Some oriental bishops did not accept the conclusions of the Chalcedonic Council and were thus separated from the West. Among the oriental Orthodox Church family are the Armenian Apostolic, Coptic, Ethiopian, Assyrian, and Indian Malabar. In fact, Armenian Church did not participate in the Council of Chalcedon (451), because in 451 Armenia were having one of the important battles of his history, Battle of Vartanats. The Armenian church has been labeled monophysite because they rejected the decisions of this council, which condemned monophysitism.

The Western Church proceeded with its activities cutting off ties with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. But later on different inner divergences took place in the West. In 1054 the church was divided into the Roman Catholic and Byzantine Orthodox Sees after coming to an insoluble disagreement over the theological problem of the origin of the Holy Spirit.

The head of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church is Jesus Christ. The Supreme Spiritual and Administrative leader of the Armenian Church is His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, who is the worldwide spiritual leader of the Nation, for Armenians both in Armenia and dispersed throughout the world. He is Chief Shepherd and Pontiff to 9,000,000 Armenian faithful, he is the Pope for Armenians. The spiritual and administrative headquarters of the Armenian Church, the Mother See of Holy

Etchmiadzin, located in the city of Vagharshapat, Republic of Armenia, was established in 301 AD and seventeen centuries later continues to guide the devoted nation and people on the luminous paths of fulfilling the primary mission of the Church - leading people to God. "Catholicos" is derived from the Greek word Katholikos, which means Universal. When the structure of the Armenian Church was created, the title was originally used to indicate the highest leader of the church. St. Gregory the Illuminator, the first Catholicos of All Armenians, was still subordinate to the See of Caesarea in Cappadocia and the chief bishops of Georgia and Albania, although dependent on the Catholicos of Armenia. Under King Pap and the Catholicos Hooszik I, Armenia asserted its independence of Caesarea.

On the other hand the Armenian Catholic Church, which is an Eastern Rite church under the authority of the Pope in Rome.

St. Gregory the Illuminator is the Patron Saint of the Armenian Church. He is referred to as "St. Gregory the Illuminator," or "Soorp Krikor Lousavorich" because he spread the light of Christ and converted the Armenian people to Christianity.

While Christianity was practiced in secret by a growing number of people in Armenia during the first and second centuries, it was St. Gregory (302-325) and King Trdat III (287-330) who in 301 A.D. officially proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of Armenia and thus made Armenia the first nation in world history to adopt Christianity as the state religion

The story according to the Holy Tradition is as follows: As part of a planned plot, the Persian King Ardashir I, sent a trusted friend, Anak, to Armenia, to kill King Khosrov. During a hunting trip, Anak killed the King and ran away. The loyal men of the King pursued Anak, who was subsequently killed. The dying King gave orders to exterminate Anak's family. Only one infant escaped this slaughter, and was rushed by his nurse to the city of Caesarea. This nurse happened to be a converted Christian. She brought up her charge in the Christian faith and gave him a Greek name, Gregory. St. Gregory became a devout Christian; married a Christian lady named Mariam, and had two children, Verthanes and Arsitakes.

When the Persian King heard that the King of Armenia was killed, he overran the country and established Persian rule in Armenia. Two of the children of King Khosrov were saved. The Princess Khosrovidought was taken to one of the inaccessible castles of the country, while Prince Trdat was taken to Rome. Trdat received a thorough Roman training. When he became a mature young man, able to rule a kingdom, he was sent by Rome to occupy Armenia, recover the throne of his father, and become a Roman ally.

As Trdat was returning to Armenia, most of the loyal Armenian feudal lords, who were in hiding, accompanied Trdat. St. Gregory also decided to go along with him. Nobody had any knowledge of his background or of his religious convictions. Trdat found out that St. Gregory was a well-educated, dependable and conscientious young man. He appointed him as his secretary.

After winning back Armenia, Trdat gave orders for a great and solemn celebration. During the festival, St. Gregory was ordered to lay wreaths before the statue of the goddess Mother Anahit, who was the most popular deity of the country. St. Gregory refused and confessed that he was a Christian. One of the king's ministers decided to reveal St. Gregory's secret. He told the King that St. Gregory was the son of Anak, the killer of his father King Khosrov. Trdat gave orders to torture St. Gregory. When St. Gregory stood fast, the King ordered him to be put to death by throwing him into a prison-pit (Khor Virab) in the town of Artashat to be starved to slow death.

Through divine intervention and with the assistance of someone in the Court, St. Gregory survived this terrible ordeal for thirteen years. It is thought the Princess Khosrovidought, the King's sister, had found a way to feed St. Gregory in the dungeon.

During that very year the king issued two edicts: the first ordered to arrest all the Christians in Armenia confiscating their property, the second ordered to put to death those who hid Christians. These edicts show how dangerous was Christianity for the State and for heathen religion in the country.

This undertaking of persecution revealed the presence of a group of women, who were peacefully and secretly living in the capital city of Vagharshapat. The Holy Tradition claims that a group of Roman Christian virgins ran away to the East in order to escape the persecutions of the Emperor Diocletianus. After visiting Jerusalem and paying tribute to the holy places, the virgins came to Edessa, then crossed the frontiers of Armenia and settled down in vineyards not far from Vagharshapat. The leader of these pious women was Gayané. There was also among them a beautiful maiden called Hripsimé, who King Trdat wanted to have as his concubine. Hripsimé refused and resisted the King's advances and finally fled from the Palace. This was too much for King Trdat and he mercilessly ordered to have all the women killed. They were 32 in number. Gayaneç, the mentor of the virgins and two others living in the southern part of the town and a sick virgin were tormented in the vineyards. The execution of the Hripsimian virgins took place in 300/301. This slaughter of innocent women and his frustration at being rejected threw the King into melancholy and finally made him insane. He could not attend the affairs of the state. In the 5th century people called this "pig's illness", which is why sculptors portray the king with a pig's head.

His sister, Khosrovidukht, did everything to bring her brother back to his senses. Then one day in a dream, she saw St. Gregory coming out of the dungeon and healing her brother. She told the people at the Court of her dream, and revealed that he was alive. They sent men to the dungeon to bring him out. As he emerged, out came a man with a long beard, dirty clothes and darkened face. But his face was shining with a strange and strong light. He immediately gathered and buried the remains of the virgin-martyrs and thereafter preached the Gospel for a period of time and healed the King. Trdat III proclaimed Christianity as the state religion of Armenia after which the entire royal court was baptized. King Trdat was cured and became a new man. He said to St. Gregory: "Your God is my God, your religion is my religion." From that moment until their death they

remained faithful friends and worked together, each in his own way, for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in Armenia.

Today there are large Armenian Orthodox congregations in many middle-eastern countries outside Armenia. Of particular importance is the Armenian Apostolic Church of Iran (see also Christians in Iran) where Armenians are the largest Christian ethnic minority.

Other large Armenian Orthodox congregations are in the USA and in many Western European countries.

Article based on Wikipedia article.

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## THE FAITH OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

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The Faith of the Armenian Church is transmitted through the church's Holy Tradition, i.e., the ongoing life of the church from the time of Christ to our times. The Bible, liturgy and worship, writings of the church fathers, church councils, saints, canons, religious art and rituals--organically linked together--formulate the Holy Tradition of the Church.

This Faith is articulated in the Creed of the Armenian Church, which in turn defines the church's *raison d'etre* and sets the parameters of its *modus operandi*.

The Armenian Church professes her faith in the context of her worship. Theologically, whatever the church believes, the church prays. Therefore, the Armenian Church's worship and liturgy constitute a prime source for teaching her faith. History, i.e., Tradition, on the other hand, defines and formulates the "articles of faith" and transmits them from generation to generation.

The Armenian Church believes in One God, the Father Almighty who is the Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible & invisible. Humanity (male and female) is created in the image and likeness of God, and as such is a special creature. However, because of the Fall of man, sin entered the world.

The Church believes in Jesus Christ, "the only begotten Son of God...who came down from heaven, was incarnate, was born of the Virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit. He became man, was crucified for us and suffered and was buried. He rose again from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.

The Armenian Church believes in the Holy Spirit - uncreated and perfect, who proceeds from the Father– and together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified. The Holy Spirit spoke to the prophets and apostles and descended into the Jordan, witnessing Christ's Baptism.

The Armenian Church is One, Holy, Apostolic, Catholic, Church.

She believes in one Baptism with repentance for the remission and forgiveness of sins. On judgment day, Christ will call all men and women who have repented to eternal life in His Heavenly Kingdom, which has no end. Christ overcame the power of death with His own and gave salvation to all mankind.

The dogmas of the Armenian Church are based on these "articles of faith."

The Armenian Church belongs to the Orthodox family of churches, known as the Oriental Orthodox, or Non-Chalcedonian, Churches, i.e., the Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian and Indian Malabar churches.

Generally, Christianity is divided mainly between Eastern and Western churches. The relationship between Byzantium (East) and Rome (West) deteriorated gradually. In the ninth century a schism between the Byzantine Church and the Church of Rome started to shape during the time of Patriarch Photius. Then in 1054, anathemas were declared by both sides (Patriarch Michael and Cardinal Humbert), which lasted for centuries. By 1204, when the Crusaders captured Constantinople, the schism had become final. In 1965, following the Vatican II Council, the anathemas were lifted by both sides in a spirit of ecumenism and understanding among the churches.

The main theological differences and disagreements between the Eastern (including the Armenians) and the Church of Rome (Catholics) are in the following issues:

Filioque: according to the teachings of the Church of Rome, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, proceeds from the Father and the Son, while the Orthodox teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father only;

Papal Supremacy: the Roman Catholics consider the Pope the "Vicar of Christ", while the Orthodox churches consider him only as "first in honor" and in pastoral diakonia.

Papal Infallibility: The Catholics follow a "monarchical" model of ecclesial polity, while the Orthodox follow a "conciliar" model, i.e., church councils determine church dogma, canons and policies.

There are also other minor differences among these two branches of churches, such as the rules of fasting; unleavened bread at Eucharist (West); manner of conferring confirmation; celibacy of clergy; divorce (not sanctioned in Roman Catholicism); purgatory (East doesn't teach it); West has "scholastic" approach, East has "mystical" approach to theological issues.

The main difference between the Byzantine tradition, also known as Chalcedonian churches, and the Armenian Church, (together with other non-Chalcedonian churches) has been on the issue of Christology, i.e., the dogma related to Christ's Divine and Human natures.

Abp. A. Keshishian writes, "the Christology of the Armenian Church is fundamentally in line with the Alexandrian Theological School. In fact, the Cyrillian formula of 'One Nature of the Incarnate Word' constitutes the foundation stone of her Christology. [It should be noted that] first, 'One Nature' is never interpreted in the Armenian Christology as a numerical one, but always a united one. This point is of crucial importance [for the Armenian Church] particularly in its anti-Eutychian and anti-Chalcedonian aspects. Second the term 'nature' (ousia, in Armenian bnut'iun) is used in Armenian theological literature in three different senses: (a) as essence, an abstract notion, (b) as substance, a concrete reality, (c) as person. In the context of anti-Chalcedonian Christology 'one nature' is used in a sense of 'one person' composed of two natures."

The Christological controversy continued for centuries, often becoming a matter of political influence and expediency. However, in 1990, the theologians and official representatives of both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches--after years of dialogue and consultations--agreed in a formal statement that their

theological understanding, especially their Christology, is "orthodox." The statement called for unity and communion among the Eastern and Oriental Churches and as such, the document was sent to the respective leaders of the participating churches for formal approval.

While the overwhelming majority of Armenians are members of the Armenian Church (also known as the "Mother Church"), a number of Armenians belong to the [Armenian Catholic Church](#) and [Armenian Protestant Church](#) (Evangelical) churches.