

# THE SACRAMENTS IN THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC AND EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

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While both Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Evangelical Churches believe that Christian faith is expressed in certain religious acts that correspond to the different stages of life, they differ in their interpretation of these acts. The Armenian Apostolic Church recognizes seven important rites endowed with saving power called the holy sacraments.

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation or Chrismation
3. Repentance or Penance
4. Holy Communion/Eucharist
5. Ordination or Holy Orders
6. Holy Matrimony
7. Extreme Unction

The Armenian Evangelical Church regards only two of these seven religious acts as "sacraments". The other five are considered to be outward and visible signs of God's grace endowed only with strengthening power. Like most other Protestants, Armenian Evangelicals recognize only those sacraments in which Christ Himself participated--Baptism and Communion.

## **BAPTISM (Mekertootiun)**

Baptism is the first act of initiation that is recognized as a sacrament by both Armenian-Evangelical and Armenian Apostolic Churches. There is a vast difference between the two Churches in the matter of interpretation of this sacrament. The Armenian Apostolic Church, for instance, believes that Baptism washes away the contamination of the Original Sin.<sup>1</sup> The Armenian Apostolic Church believes that along with Baptism, two other sacraments, Confirmation and Communion, are linked closely together. Armenian Apostolic children are not only baptized in infancy, but confirmed

and are given communion in infancy. Thus, they become members of the Church and are admitted at once to the full privileges of such membership. Baptism is regarded as a "gateway to the family of God." The Sacrament of Baptism is administered by the invocation of the name of the Trinity and the threefold immersion of the infant in water. The threefold immersion signifies the three-day entombment of Christ.

Every child who is to be baptized should have a godfather, who is obliged to raise the child in accordance with the faith and tradition of the church and to support him or her in times of need. Although the church requires to have a male believer to be the godfather, of the child, the wife of the godfather, if married, automatically becomes a godmother.

As for Armenian Evangelicals, there is no unanimity in their concept of Baptism. Confessional and Baptist Armenian Evangelicals refuse infant baptism. But the majority of Armenian Evangelicals believe that the Sacrament of Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the mark of the acceptance into the care of Christ's church, and the beginning of their growth into full Christian faith and fellowship.

The parents or sponsors promise with God's help to lead the child by their lives and teaching toward an understanding of the Christian Gospel. The members of the congregation also accept the child as a member of the family of God. They promise to live and practice their Christian faith so that children will grow in the knowledge and love of God. Moreover, they pledge to support the parents in their efforts to guide the children in the way of the Gospel, and to faithful service in the Christian Church. Then the minister baptizes the children in the name of the Triune God.

Armenian Evangelicals unite in rejecting the doctrine of Original Sin, and the belief that if an unbaptized person dies, he/she dies in sin.

The Armenian Apostolic Church, like all ancient Churches, bases belief of Original Sin primarily on the fifth chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans*. According to Armenian Evangelicals, however, if by "Original Sin" we mean that the sin of Adam has been transferred to the human race through the fact of procreation, they believe *Romans 5* does not imply that. *Romans 5*, according to the Evangelicals, implies that all men are connected in the solidarity of sin; that all men do what Adam did. We see the solidarity of the human race in sin, from Adam to our present day. They believe that *Romans 5* does not refer to the transgression of Adam in which all his descendants share. It does not state that man is born with the guilt of Adam upon his soul, but it states that all the descendants of this "Representative Man" -Adam- are involved in death, because they themselves commit sin.<sup>2</sup>

#### **CONFIRMATION (Droshm)**

The Sacrament of Confirmation follows the baptismal ritual in the Armenian

Apostolic Church and is called Drosim (seal). It signifies the descending of the Holy Spirit upon the baptized person (*Mark 1:10-11*).

During the confirmation, the different parts of the child's body are anointed by the Holy *Muron* or chrism, with a special prayer connected to each step of this anointing process. The priest anoints each part of the body, in a cross-wise fashion, in the name of Jesus Christ, while saying:

*The Forehead:* Sweet oil is poured upon you as a seal of incorruptible heavenly reward. *The Eyes:* May this seal illuminate your eyes that you may never sleep unto death. *The Ear:* This holy anointing may open your ears to hear the divine commandments. *The Nostrils:* This seal be to you a sweet fragrance from life to life. *The Mouth:* This seal be a guard to your mouth and a strong door for your lips. *The Hands:* This seal be to you a cause for benevolence in all your virtuous deeds and conduct. *The Heart:* Let this divine seal establish within you a holy heart and an upright spirit. *The Back:* This seal be a shield of strength to you that you may extinguish all the arrows and fumes of the evil one. *The Feet:* May this divine seal direct your path unto everlasting life that you may not be shaken.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately following the Sacrament of Baptism, Confirmation is administered by use of *Muron*, Holy Oil, which is prepared from the fragrance of at least forty flowers and roots, fermented for at least forty days with special prayers and ceremonies. Chrismation is the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." Immediately following Chrismation, the baptized and confirmed child is "at once admitted to labial communion, that is to say, the holy particle is placed in contact with the tongue."<sup>4</sup> Thus, through this sacrament the newly baptized receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is admitted to communicant status.

The Armenian Evangelicals reject the rite of infant confirmation. They believe that confirmation is the renewal of the baptismal covenant. The baptized children, having been instructed in the Christian faith, publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ and are received by the church into active membership.

The Armenian Evangelical Church places great emphasis on Christian education in the life of the family and the church. Laying a strong biblical foundation for the faith of its members has been of concern to the Armenian Evangelicals. The idea of confirmation for Armenian Evangelicals is that the confession of faith made by the parents by proxy should be supplemented by personal confession of faith by baptized infants when they grow old enough to do so. In other words, the baptized babies being too young to make their own promises of loyalty, their parents made those for them. Now, as confirmands, they are old enough to make them for themselves.

### **REPENTANCE or PENANCE (Apashkharootiun)**

*Repentance or Penance* is another religious act through which sins committed

after Baptism are forgiven and the sinner is reconciled to the Church; hence, it is often called a "Second Baptism."

Little is known of the early history of the Sacrament. By the third century, a developed system of public penance had emerged. After the sinner had asked the bishop for penance, he was enrolled in the order of penitents, excluded from Communion, and committed to a course of prayer, fasting and almsgiving; after a period determined by the gravity of the sin, the sinner was reconciled and rejoined the congregation.<sup>5</sup>

A new and different system was developed under the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monk missionaries, when private confession, absolution, and light punishment were introduced.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church it takes place according to a general formula, by a declaration of the chief sins. Repentance is fulfilled with a word of absolution which is followed by Holy Communion.<sup>6</sup>

Armenian Evangelicals refuse to believe in the power of priests to pronounce absolution. They believe, however, in the importance of confession as a means of healing and restoring one's soul. They also believe that "confession takes many forms; sometimes it should be done privately to God, or before a pastor, or in a close circle."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, for Armenian Evangelicalism, repentance is a personal act of commitment with or without the help of the Church. The important thing is one's spiritual regeneration. God looks into the heart and gives His blessings to those who seek Him with faith and penitence. He is accessible to all at all times. He does not trade His favors for ceremonial acts, nor does He barter them for measured amounts of merit by repeated penances and rituals. God is accessible through Jesus Christ, for Christ is the only Mediator between the Creator and the creature. Therefore, there is no need of anyone to intercede with God on behalf of sinful human beings.

### **HOLY COMMUNION (Haghordootiun)**

*Holy Communion, The Lord's Supper, or The Eucharist* is another religious rite and is recognized as a sacrament by both Armenian Evangelical and Armenian Apostolic Churches. For the latter, this sacrament is distinguished from the others in being a sacrifice as well as a sacrament. It is administered by means of pieces of consecrated wafer being soaked in the element of wine. At the words of the priest, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" the bread and the wine are changed into the real body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Catholicos Babken Gulesserian states unequivocally that at the words of the priest the elements of bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

The Armenian Apostolic Church believes the Eucharist to be a re-enactment of Christ's triumphant sacrifice which makes its benefits available to mankind. Perfect participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is the communion of all the faithful. By partaking of the body and blood of Christ, participants become one with Christ and one with one another in a common dedication to the redemption of the world.

In the Armenian Apostolic tradition, the elements of Communion are unleavened bread and pure wine. The Orthodox Church uses leavened bread and wine mixed with water. The Roman Catholic Church uses unleavened bread and wine mixed with water. In the Protestant Churches, the customs vary. Some denominations do not even partake of the element of wine and bread.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church, prior fasting, confession and absolution are essential before taking communion. Fasting can be waived only for medical reasons, as long as they demonstrate the right attitude.<sup>9</sup>

Although Armenian Evangelicals do not hold a uniform interpretation of this sacrament, they refuse to believe in the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, i.e., that the elements of bread and wine are changed into the actual Body and Blood of Christ, their external appearances (accidents) alone remaining. Most Armenian Evangelicals believe in the spiritual presence of Christ in Communion. Others believe that bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ. They believe that the Communion Service is like a memorial service, helping believers remember Christ's sacrifice for humankind. For them, the presence in the Eucharist is not fundamentally different from the presence of Christ in other means of grace, i.e., preaching. With the exception of those who belong to Confessional Churches (i.e., Armenian Evangelical churches in France and those of Armenia), most Armenian Evangelical churches welcome to the Lord's Table any Christian who can conscientiously accept the invitation, while in the Armenian Apostolic church communion is not open to all.

### **ORDINATION or HOLY ORDERS (Karg Dzernadrootian)**

*Ordination or Holy Orders* is another religious act that most mainline Christian Churches recognize. Unlike the Protestant Churches, the ancient churches, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, accept Ordination as the act of conveying special grace to the ordainee.

The ministry of the Christian Church traces its origin to Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve (*Matt 10:1-5*) and of the Seventy (*Luke 10:1*) to the work of God's Kingdom. References to ordination in the early church may be found at a number of places in the *New Testament*, including the appointment of the Seven (*Acts 6:1-6*) and the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul (*Acts 13:1-3*), in both instances by

prayer and the laying-on hands.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that during the Apostle's time, three distinct categories of ministry developed: *Deacon*, *Elder* or *Presbyter*, and *Bishop*. The Greek term *diakonos* literally means "waiter" or "servant", the word for elder, *presbyteros*, means "old man" (used as a title of honor); and the word *episkopos* means "one who oversees" or "overseer."

This system was the nucleus of the traditional three-fold ministry.<sup>10</sup> By the middle of the third century other Orders had appeared, and by the end of the Middle Ages it was the prevalent view that there were seven Orders, a distinction being made between the three Major Orders of bishop, priest, and deacon, and the four Minor Orders of acolytes, exorcists, lectors, and doorkeepers.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church, through the centuries, a hierarchy was developed consisting of several categories or ranks. Following are the ranks or degrees existent in the Armenian Apostolic Church hierarchy: *Janitor*, *Reader*, *Oath Taker*, *Candle Bearer*, *Semi-Deacon*, *Deacon*, *Priest*, *Archpriest*, *Vardapet*, *Tzayragooyin Vardapet*, *Bishop*, *Archbishop*, *Patriarch* and *Catholicos*.<sup>11</sup>

#### 1. JANITOR (Dernapan)

The janitor holds the responsibility of keeping the sanctuary in good condition and opens and closes the doors whenever necessary.

#### 2. READER (Entertsogh)

The duty of the reader is to read certain passages from the Holy Scripture and other church literature to the parishioners during the church service.

#### 3. OATH TAKER (Yerdemnetsootsich)

The duty of the Oath Taker is to read from the *Book of Mashdots* -The Hrajarimk- thus expelling from the minds, spirits and the bodies of the listeners, the evil spirits of Satan.

#### 4. CANDLE BEARER (Djahenkak)

The duty of the Candle Bearer is to light the candles and the lanterns of the church, to have the neshkhar (wafer) and the wine ready on the altar for the Mass and to take care of the other details of the altar and sacristy.

#### 5. SEMI-DEACON (Gisasarkavag)

The duty of the Semi-Deacon is to incense the altars and the sanctuary, to serve

the Priest during the Holy Mass and to read the Lections. The office of the Semi-Deacon is a preparatory step toward becoming a Deacon.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6. DEACON (Sarkavag)

The Deacon is the main helper of the officiating Priest throughout the entire church service. He is authorized to read the *Gospel*. Also, as a privileged member of the church, he performs the Anaphora (Veraberoom) during the Holy Mass and receives his communion on the altar.<sup>13</sup>

#### 7. PRIEST (Kahana)

The parish Priest is the administrator of the divine sacraments and the Pastor of his parish. Before his ordination he is required to be married and have at least one child. The newly ordained celibate priest, who is called Abégha, has the rank of a priest with the same rights, but usually they live in monasteries. The highest degree that a married Priest can achieve is to become an Archpriest (Avak Kahana).

#### 8. THE VARDAPETS AND TZAYRAGOOYN VARDAPETS

The Vardapétootium is not an order in the church, but it is a right and depicts an academic degree. The Vardapétootium has fourteen degrees. The first four are equivalent to a Master's Degree (Vardapet) and the rest to a Doctoral degree in Theology (Tzayragooyñ Vardapet).

#### 9. BISHOP (Yepiskopos)

The office of a bishop is the highest point in the hierarchy of the church. He is the prince of the church and the leader of his diocese. Beyond all the above mentioned priestly duties, he can also perform ordinations, consecrate churches, holy images and other sacred articles used in the church. He cannot consecrate the Holy Muron nor can he perform bishopric ordination which is the sole right of the Catholicos.

#### 10. ARCHBISHOPS, PATRIARCHS, CATHOLICOS

These titles are established due to local requirements and are not included in the hierarchy of the Christian Church. They are accepted as defacto ranks and have their duties and rights according to the church to which they belong, or the offices they hold. They are the first among equals (Aradjinen i havasares). An archbishop is first among bishops, but belongs to the same rank in the church hierarchy.

## 11. THE DUTIES OF THE CATHOLICOS IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

The duties of the Catholicos, though it is not included in the Christian church hierarchy, has a special position in our church. He is the head of the church spiritually and administratively. He may consecrate bishops, the Holy Chrism (Muron), and also establish a new diocese. He can introduce changes in our liturgy, reward the clergy and, also excommunicate church members or grant forgiveness. He also had the right to nullify or grant divorce. He is ordained and consecrated by at least three bishops (some insist on the tradition of twelve bishops). The office is for life, though he may resign or be dethroned under grave moral and criminal charges.<sup>14</sup>

The Armenian Apostolic Church, like other ancient Churches, believes in the *Doctrine of Apostolic Succession*, the historic continuity of the ministry passed on from age to age by the laying on of the hands of bishops who, in turn, received their authority from the Apostles of Jesus. In the Armenian Apostolic tradition, only a bishop has the power to ordain priests and deacons, and the consecration of a new bishop is performed only by a catholicos, the supreme head of the Church. Armenian Apostolic priests are divided into two groups, the celibate or monastic priests and the married clergy. Ordinands must make up their mind before ordination to which group they wish to belong, for there is a strict rule that no one can marry after he has been ordained a celibate priest.

Armenian Evangelicals regard ordination as a formal recognition of one's call and a formal authorization of the ordainee to act in the name and on behalf of that church which he is to represent. They repudiate the concept that in ordination special grace or miraculous power is conveyed by such a delegation of authority.<sup>15</sup> They reject the notion that ordination denotes entry into apostolic ministry; that every individual act of ordination is an expression of the continuing apostolicity and catholicity of the Church. They further reject the view that ordination is a sacramental act whereby the Holy Spirit seals and sanctifies all the ordinands.

A pastor or a minister of the Armenian Evangelical Church is a communicant member, who has been called by God and ordained to preach and teach the Gospel, to administer sacraments and rites of the Church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership. Membership in the Union to which the candidate's own church belongs is a requirement, as well as the acceptance of the constitution of that Union.

There are a few important considerations pertinent to the ordained ministry. The first relates to the calling by God of the one who seeks ordination. The person who desires to be ordained must be convinced of God's choosing for that special ministry. But the church must also recognize and validate the call, because ordination pertains to the entire Christian community. At ordination, the church publicly recog-

nizes the gifts of ministry; not just for the local parish, but for the universal Church. The whole process leading to ordination - involving consultation with one's parish minister, with the Boards of the Church and Department of Ministerial Relations of the Union or Conference - is a process of examination of testing one's inner call. The inner call must find some objective authentication.

Ordination in the Armenian Evangelical Church is not a sacrament; it is a service whereby the Church, through her Unions, in cooperation with the local church, ordains her ministers, confers on the ministerial standing, and authorizes them to perform all the duties and exercise all the prerogatives of the ministry.

#### HOLY MATRIMONY (Pesak, Amoosnootiun)

*Matrimony or Marriage* is another religious act which the Armenian Apostolics regard as a sacrament, whereby a baptized man and a baptized woman are bound as life partners. Marriage is not a state of nature but a state of grace, and therefore requires a particular gift from the Holy Spirit. This gift is conferred in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

In the early centuries, the Armenian Apostolic church recognized only Baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacred rites conferring grace and related directly to salvation. The Armenian Church, following the example of the ancient Churches, included marriage in the list of sacraments in the late Middle Ages. Parenthetically, it was St. Bernard of the Roman Catholic Church in the twelfth century who maintained that there ought to be exactly seven sacraments, since it had already been decided that there were seven deadly sins. In his own list, however, he had only six. Peter Lombard (c. 1150) completed the list of seven sacraments by adding ordination.<sup>16</sup>

In the Armenian Apostolic Church the Marriage ceremony has two parts which are performed in succession: the Office of Betrothal and the Office of Crowning. At the Betrothal service the rings are blessed and exchanged as an outward token that the two partners join in marriage of their own free will and accord. The second part of the service culminates in the ceremony of coronation: on the heads of the bride and groom the priest places crowns signifying the special grace which the couple receive from the Holy Spirit. At the end of the ceremony the newly married are given communion as a seal of their unity as husband and wife.

The marriageable couple are required to be of sound mind, at legal age, express their mutual consent for marriage and must have been baptized according to the tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Non-Christians should convert and be baptized while some Protestants who have not been confirmed, should be confirmed.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church marriage can be dissolved under certain circumstances (*Matt. 5:23, Mark 10:2-12, Luke 16:18*), or by special dispensations

from a religious judicial body, then confirmed and approved by the Catholicos. Marriage is repeatable in case of divorce, annulment or when one of the parties is deceased.<sup>17</sup>

In the Armenian Evangelical Church, however, marriage is not a sacrament whereby the married couple receives special grace from the Holy Spirit. Neither is it a mere civil contract. Armenian Evangelicals, like most Protestants, consider it "an honorable estate, instituted of God and must be entered into advisedly, reverently and in the fear of God."

For the Armenian Evangelical Church marriage is a sacred and joyous covenant, a way of life ordained by God from the beginning of His creation. God has ordered the covenant of marriage that husband and wife may give to each other companionship, help and comfort, both in prosperity and in adversity; that children may be born and nurtured in families and trained in godliness; and that human society may stand on firm foundations.<sup>18</sup>

#### **EXTREME UNCTION (Karg Hivandats/Verdjin Otzoum).**

*Extreme Unction* or *Euchelaion* is the seventh religious act which is offered to the sick and ailing and is administered by the offering of prayer and the anointing of oil.<sup>19</sup> The Greek term *Euchelaion* meaning "the oil of prayer" is described in the *Epistle of James*: "Is any sick among you? Let him send for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him. The prayer offered in faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him from his bed; and he will be forgiven any sins he has committed." (*James* 5: 14-15). The purpose of this sacrament is twofold: bodily healing and forgiveness of sins. Although the Armenian Evangelical Church believes in the power of prayer for the sick and for physical and spiritual health, she neither administers nor does she believe in the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

In the *New Testament*, anointing of the sick is also mentioned in *Mark* 6:13. Moreover, there are various references to it in the Church Fathers. Until the beginning of the ninth century anointing the sick and expecting recovery from illness was a common practice in the church. In the Roman Catholic Church, however, this rite became connected with the penitential system and was commonly postponed until death was approaching.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church the role of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction is vague. Although the Church officially recognizes Extreme Unction as a sacrament, it hardly ever invokes it as a separate rite. It has merged it in the Confirmation Sacrament and recommends to the sick repentance, confession, prayers and communion.

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V.T.

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Հայ Առաքելական Եկեղեցին կ'ընդունի Քրիստոնեական եօթ խորհուրդներ՝ Սյրրտոսին, Դրոշմ, Ապաշխարոսին, Հաղորդոսին, Կարգ ձեռնադրութան, Պսակ, Կարգ հիանդաց/Աբջին օծում:

Մինչ Հայ Անտարանական Եկեղեցին կ'ընդունի միայն երկու խորհուրդ՝ Սյրտոսին եւ Հաղորդոսին:

Դեռ աւելին, երկու եկեղեցիները կը տարբերին ընդունուած կամ չընդունուած խորհուրդներու բացատրութեամբ, մեկնաբանութեամբ եւ գնահատութեամբ:

Առկայ այս տարբերութիւններուն հետեւանքով էս, տարբերութիւններ յառաջացած են նաեւ առընչեալ արարողութիւններուն միջեւ: