

NEW RESEARCH ON ANCIENT ARMENIA
University of Geneva, 8-9 June 2018

Arpi Aleksanyan
Research Master
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
KU Leuven, Belgium
email: arpi.alexanyan0@gmail.com

THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH UNITY IN “ATENABANUTYUN,” BY NERSES OF
LAMBRON (1153-1198)

Abstract

My research work is devoted to the famous Armenian medieval theologian Nerses of Lambron's (1153-1198) “Atenabanutyun.” Though the ecclesiastical and historical sources report us opposite opinions and information about this person, Nerses of Lambron remains one of the gifted and illustrious scholars in the ecclesiology of the Armenian Church.

Nerses of Lambron fulfilled his spiritual activity in Cilician Armenia in the 2nd half of the 12th century. He is considered one of the significant ecumenical thinkers in the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The aim of Nerses of Lambron to write “Atenabanutyun” is to establish brotherly relationship among the Christian churches.

In the Armenian language the word ‘atenabanutyun’ means a speech for an audience or for a group of people. In his work Nerses of Lambron refers to some of the ecclesiastical issues which were discussed in the context of Church Unity in the 2nd half of the 12th century. *My research question is according to ‘Atenabanutyun’ which questions prevent the Armenian Church to find ecumenical dialogue with other Christian churches?*

My research work is a historical and theological examination of “Atenabanutyun.” It is necessary to examine the work in its historical context. The historical critical method helps to illustrate the historical and political conditions which motivated Nerses of Lambron to write ‘Atenabanutyun.’ It is relevant to provide a hermeneutical critical approach to the text as well. A hermeneutical critical approach to the text illuminates the theological questions which were discussed during Movement of Unity.

I provide a general description of the historical situation of the Armenian Church in Cilician Armenia in the 11th-12th centuries in the first chapter of my research. Since the end of the 11th century the religious center of the Armenians was in Cilicia. However, one group of the Armenian clergy continued their spiritual activity in the native land. According to the medieval historical sources, Movement of Unity (arm. *միաբարակյան կամ ունիթորակյան շարժում*) set in within the Cilician branch and caused inner-division in the Armenian Church. The non-fundamental group (the Cilician monks) had a positive attitude towards the movement. Contrary to them, the fundamentalists (the Eastern monks) were against the unity. Nerses of Lambron was one of the

faithful and enthusiastic supporters of the notion of unity. It is possible that during Movement of Unity there were also ecclesial, theological and ritual changes in the Armenian Orthodox Church.

Traditionally, Movement of Unity is connected with the Latins but the examination proves that in the 12th century there were serious debates and discussions concerning the union with the Byzantine Church as well.

One of the aims of my research work is to examine the Armenian church relationships with the Latin and Byzantine churches in the 2nd half of the 12th century. During the activity of Nerses of Lambron the Armenian Church had relationships with both the Byzantine and Latin churches simultaneously. The Armenian-Latin church relationship began later in the end of the 11th century. There was a mutual epistolary relation between the Armenian Catholicos Gregory II Martyrophile (1066-1105) (arm. *Գրիգոր Բ Մկրտիչ*) and Pope Gregory VII (1015-1085). Contrary to the Latin Church, the Armenian and Byzantine ecclesiastical relationship has a long history and began before the Armenian population transferred to Cilicia.

My first chapter describes the ecumenical activity of Nerses of Lambron as well. The position of the author regarding Church Unity is combined with the aim of writing his “Atenabanutyun.” The historical examination makes evident that Nerses of Lambron had a centre role in the ecclesiastical relationships. Nerses negotiated with both the Byzantine and Latin sides about the question of Church Unity. The author accepted the liturgical and doctrinal differences and attempted to prevent the subordination among the churches. Nerses of Lambron tried to overcome the political and ecclesiastical obstacles and to establish ecumenical relationship with the Latin and Byzantine churches. According to Nerses of Lambron, the dogmatic and ritual features of the churches should not forbid ecumenical dialogue among them.

The Greek and Latin translations constitute a part of the ecumenical activity of Nerses of Lambron. The exploration of the theological heritage of Nerses of Lambron illustrates that Nerses translated mostly biblical interpretations from Greek and ecclesiastical documents concerning the canons of the Latin Church. N. Akinyan, the biographer of Nerses of Lambron, introduces the list of the translations of Nerses (See, Akinyan, H. V. Nerses. *Nerses of Lambron the Archbishop of Tarsus: The Life, Literary Merit with the Genealogy of the Pahlavunis and Hethumids of Lambron*. Vienna, Mkhitarian Publication, 1956).

It is necessary to mention that the question of Church Unity was discussed in the political context as well. Using the ecclesiastical conditions of the time the Armenian principal Levon attempted to receive the crown from the Pope and the Byzantine emperor and to declare the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia. For the papacy Cilician Armenia was a Christian ally against the Muslims during the Crusades. The Byzantine emperors tried to expand their influence on the Armenian Church and kept the alliance with the Armenians against the Sultanates of Iconium and Egypt.

“Atenabanutyun” has not been examined in the Armenian academic context in the proper way and there are many open questions concerning the work. The scholars have, mostly, focused on the biblical commentaries and liturgical writings of Nerses of Lambron. In my second chapter I

am going to illustrate the year of the writing of “Atenabanutyun’ which will help to solve the questions of the opponent and the genre as well.

And finally, the third chapter is a theological interpretation of ‘Atenabanutyun.’ I analyse the liturgical and dogmatic questions which are discussed by Nerses in “Atenabanutyun.” The theologian refers to the Christology of the Armenian Church, the differences of the celebrations of the Eucharist and Christmas in the Armenian Orthodox tradition. The content of the text makes obvious that these points were main obstacles in the Church Unity.

My current examination lets me conclude that

- In the 2nd half of the 12th century movement of Unity in the Armenian Orthodox Church developed in two directions western (with the Latin Church) and eastern (with the Byzantine Church).
- The question of Church Unity had not only ecclesiastical but also political motivations and purposes.
- In addition, in his ecumenical activity Nerses attempted to prevent the subordination among the Christian churches.

“Atenabanutyun” exists in several versions and also in Italian and German translations. I prefer to work on the oldest one. It is published in Constantinople (Turkey) in 1749. Probably, it is the printed copy of the original manuscript because only this version contains the introduction of the author. The book is written in old Armenian: Grabar.

The research is valuable not only for the Armenian Apostolic Church but also for all Christian churches to develop the notion of the one ecumenical Church of Christ. In addition, my research provides the proper information about the liturgical and dogmatic features of the Armenian Orthodox Church which are actual topics in the current academic context. And finally, it is also one step in development of the Armenian Studies.

WORK PLAN AND STRUCTURE

Period	Work focus	Work units	Bibliographic references with sample specific references
October /November 2017	Preparatory work and preliminary reading		
December-May 2018	CHAPTER 1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LATIN AND THE BYZANTINE CHURCHES IN THE 2 ND HALF OF THE 12 TH CENTURY.	1.1 THE CONDITION OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN CILICIAN ARMENIA IN THE 11 TH -12 TH CENTURIES. 1.2 THE BEGINNING OF THE ARMENIAN-LATIN ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONSHIP. 1.3 THE ECUMENICAL ACTIVITY OF NERSES OF LAMBRON IN THE ARMENIAN-LATIN CHURCH RELATIONSHIP IN THE 2 ND HALF OF 12 TH CENTURY. 1.4 THE PARTICIPATION OF NERSES OF LAMBRON IN THE DISCUSSIONS OF THE ARMENIAN-BYZANTINE CHURCH UNITY AND THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL OF HROMKLA. 1.5 THE GREEK TRANSLATIONS IN THE THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF NERSES OF LAMBRON. 1.6 CONCLUSION.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selected books describe the initiation of Cilician Armenian as a new period in the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Armenian and foreign historical sources concerning the letters of Pope Gregory VII and the activity of the Armenian Catholicos Gregory II. Selected books and sources which introduce the position and initiatives of Nerses of Lambron in ecumenical negotiations with the Latin Church. The letters of Nerses of Lambron written to the authorities of the Byzantine Church. The sources related to the Council of Hromkla. The Greek translations of The Book of Revelation and the biblical commentaries by Nerses of Lambron.

July- November 2018	CHAPTER 2 HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF “ATENABANUTYUN” by NERSES OF LAMBRON	2.1 THE CHRONOLOGICAL OBSERVATION OF “ATENABANUTYUN.” 2.2 THE GENRE OF THE WORK 2.3 THE QUESTION OF THE OPPONENT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The books and sources which examine the theological heritage of Nerses of Lambron including ‘Atenabanutyun.’ Akinyan, H. V., Nerses. <i>Nerses of Lambron the Archbishop of Tarsus: The Life, Literary Merit with the Genealogy of the Pahlavunis and Hethumids of Lambron</i>. Vienna: Mkhitarian Publication, 1956. Hakobyan G., <i>Nerses of Lambron</i>. Yerevan: YSU, 1971, Ormanyan, M., <i>Azgapatum</i>, vol. 1, Beirut: Sevan, 1959.
December 2018 - March 2019	CHAPTER 3 THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF “ATENABANUTYUN” BY NERSES OF LAMBRON	3.1 THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH. 3.2 THE EUCHARIST IN THE LITURGY OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH. 3.3 THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS IN THE ARMENIAN ORTHODOX TRADITION.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theological and ecclesial sources related to the doctrines and liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The original manuscript of ‘Atnebaanutyun’ by Nerses of Lambron in Matenadaran (Yerevan, Armenia). Sarkissian, Karekin. <i>The Council of Chalcedon and Armenian Church</i>. New York: Armenian Church Prelacy, 1975. Christine Chaillot (ed.), <i>The Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches</i>. Volos: Volos Academy Publications, 2016. Krikorian, K. Mesrop, <i>Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Christology in the Tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church</i>. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010. Ormanyan, M., <i>The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature and Existing Condition</i>. trans. Margar Gregory. London: A. R. Mowbray and CO, 1912:
April 2019	GENERAL CONCLUSION and GENERAL INTRODUCTION		