

“and S. Paul” (i.e. June 29th): “they then wished to include this in the date of this letter, although their custom is to celebrate the feast of SS. Peter and Paul in the winter.

“As to their Sacraments, their errors are many. As regards baptism my interpreter told me that it was only celebrated twice in the year, once in the summer, the other time in the winter and that their custom was as follows: when an infant is born, they keep it 40 days, at the end of which they carry it to the church, where it is signed with the sign of the holy Cross by the priest. Should it die following this they bury it in consecrated ground, if previously in common” (i.e. unconsecrated) “ground. Afterwards the day for baptism is awaited and then they baptize it: and should it happen to die previously, it will die without being baptized. But I am not sure whether that be the truth; because, when with the greatest delicacy possible I begged the patriarch to abandon an abuse so harmful to souls, saying that every time an infant should be in danger of death it should be baptized immediately, he replied that they did so.

“They do not have Confirmation, unless they confer it together with baptism. They do not have Confession. The interpreter admitted to me that formerly they did have it, but said that on account of one confessor having revealed the confession of a woman there had ensued a very great turmoil, in which four hundred persons were slain, and for that reason they had done away with Confession. When I answered that something instituted by Christ could not for that reason be disliked, nor could baptism be done away with for anything untoward whatever that might follow, it was not hard for him to submit to reason, although they display misgiving and suspicion at women having to tell their most secret affairs into the ear of a priest, and tell of divers untoward happenings and sinful acts which they say have occurred among the Armenians (living) near them on occasions when women have made a confession.

“The Eucharist they receive after the ancient manner—in their hands and they themselves put it into the mouth. They never carry it outside as ‘Viaticum for the Sick’, so that, except that sometimes they carry a sick person on their shoulders into the church to receive it, they die without any sacrament at all, because they do not have Extreme Unction.

“Rarely they celebrate the sacrifice of holy Mass, nor do they recognize any obligation to hear it on Sundays, because they omit it on those days too. During the (Mass) time no one other than the priest and his deacon can enter the small chamber where the altar is, so much so that, were anything at all to enter, even nothing more than a pebble or a drop of water, they say that the sacrament would not be consummated. . . .

“. . . As to the sacrament of Orders . . . they believe that the patriarchate is attributed to one family, so that, if an adult man be lacking in it, they would still have to take as patriarch even a child. He who now rules is about 33 years old, and for more than 20 years has been patriarch, and in that time he has consecrated all the bishops that have been appointed. . . . In their dress and in the matter of shaving the patriarch, bishops and priests are indistinguishable from laymen: and they too (as I have already said, this race is very bellicose) ride on horseback, and go fighting like the laymen. The priests not only live married, but they enter into second marriages too.

“As regards the sacrament of matrimony they do not recognize it to be indissoluble—not on the ground of infidelity, but even because of sterility in the wife they repudiate her and take another. It is not uncommon for marriages between cousins to take place: and they also intermarry with Armenians, having the rule that the wife follows her husband’s religion.

“In the matter of Divine worship, twice daily they pray in public, once in the morning for a very short time, the other time in the evening, but very negligently and stupidly, and without any decorousness or people assisting. Some families of these people (five or six, I think) years ago went to live at Abranar, the place of residence of Mgr the archbishop of Nakhchiwan and the Dominican Fathers and, on seeing the decorousness of the Catholic Offices, they were converted and now live like good Catholics. . . .