



WELCOME TO THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

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ESSENTIALS ABOUT THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
FAITH, RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND
TRADITIONS FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO PRESENT

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SECOND EDITION

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PRIMATE'S MESSAGE

The Armenian Apostolic Church has been present in the religious landscape of the United States for more than a century and although it is comparably small, it plays a special role in the cultural and religious life of Americans.

This book is produced by our distinguished clergy and top scholars to present the Armenian Church to those who are interested in our Church, its history, mission and unique character.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is more than 1700 years old, and its age provides the Church with experience and strength. These are necessary features that help it to continue its mission, which is the preservation of genuine Christian spirit and its extension. The Armenian Apostolic church is also the source and safeguard of the Armenian identity and culture which exist not only in Armenia, but in almost every corner of the world, especially the United States.

We have one of the most diverse societies here and every single community has its own image and role in the creation of a free and strong social space. The true image of the Armenian Community is the Armenian Apostolic Church, which provides the community with tradition, moral principles and creative spirit that leave their mark on the American experience.

We appreciate the initiative of His Eminence Archbishop Khajhag Barsamian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church (Eastern), in creation of this book. It will help the reader to learn what the foundations of the Church are, where they come from, and how they have developed in United States. We will explore how they continue their existence and what the visions of Armenian Church are in the world generally and in US specifically.

In the edition republished by the Western Diocese, we added a short passage about the history of the Armenian Church in the Western region of the United States.

I pray that you will gain the knowledge which you were seeking from this book and that it will further you on the path in exploration of our ancient tradition, vast culture and rich history.

With Prayers,

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate
Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America

EDITOR'S NOTE

The founding idea of this book, as articulated by His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), is to provide an informal narrative about the Armenian Church designed for those who want an introduction to its history and culture.

We have endeavored to offer the reader a broad overview of the creation and the development of a church dating back to the time of Christ and the apostles in a factual yet interesting manner, avoiding details that may not be so essential to the audience we are trying to reach. Those who may want more in-depth scholastic studies will find numerous publications in specific subject areas.

Today, more than any other time, there is an increasing demand for an easy reference about the Armenian Church. The constant flow of immigration, interfaith marriages, the growing number of non-Armenians desiring to learn about one of the world's oldest institutions, have created the need for a handbook that outlines the many facets of a Church that has sheltered and nurtured her faithful for more than 2000 years.

Members of the Armenian Church are a homogeneous group firmly united through baptism in the Armenian Church. They share the same faith and sacraments, spiritual discipline and authority, and are dedicated to the mission of bringing people to God. The Armenian Church is united to the family of Christian churches, and interrelated to one of a group of five churches known as Oriental Orthodox or the Lesser Orthodox (being the smallest and the easternmost group of the Orthodox family). The larger group is known as Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek). The Armenian Church has two patriarchs, one in Jerusalem, the other in Constantinople (Istanbul) and a Catholicos in Antelias, Lebanon. The spiritual head of the Armenian Church is the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians based in Etchmiadzin, Armenia. You

will find a detailed presentation of the hierarchical structure of the Armenian Church starting page 47.

So many aspects of the Armenian Church deserve an exacting clarification. But the entire faith of the Church is embraced in what is called Holy Tradition, that which is passed on from the time of Christ's apostles to present day. This is not limited to just what is written, but the total life and experience of the entire Church.

First and foremost in the structure of the Holy Tradition is the Bible, God's revelation in two testaments, Old and New. The role of the Bible as interpreted in the Armenian Church is described starting page 69.

Contributing to the spiritual strength of the Armenian Church are the dedicated theologians and teachers who not only gave meaning to the doctrines of Christian faith but also protected it for the generations to come. Some of the luminaries of the Church known for their patristic teachings, were Yeznik of Kolb, who wrote against the pagan sects in the fifth century and St. Gregory of Narek, who wrote a remarkable collection of mystical prayers in the 10th century, "The Book of Lamentations," popularly known as Narek, a 95-chapter treatise contrasting the mercy of god with the sinfulness of man. The Silver Age of Armenian literature in 12th century Cilicia brought forth St. Nerses Shnorhali, a prominent Catholicos, a poet, historian, composer, and spiritual leader.

A geographically small nation with a history marked by many tragedies, Armenia has a significant number of notable personalities in literature. The beginnings of Armenian literature can be traced to Armenian's oral tradition – sophisticated and well developed – that goes back at least 4000 years. Judged by the use of such stylistic devices as similes, metaphors, alliterations, assonance, and repetition, the following verses about the birth of the mythical figure Vahagn reveal early sophistication:

*Earth and heaven
Were in labor,
The purple sea itself
Was in labor.
The red reed
Came forth from the sea
And from this reed
Came forth smoke
And from this smoke, fire
And from this fire
A child sprang forth –
A boy whose hair
Was in flames
And his eyes
Were like suns...*

However, it was the invention of the Armenian alphabet in A.D. 405 and the translation of the Bible into classic Armenian that triggered the Golden Age of Armenian literature. The spirit generated by the translators (*Soorp Tarkmanitchk*) inspired many new writers to produce original religious, historical, poetic and polemic works. During Armenia's countless invasions and conquests many of these scripts were destroyed. The Golden Age of the fifth century produced the powerful figures of Yeznik Goghpati (polemics), Goriun (a biography of Mashdots), Hovnan Mantaguni (moral discourses), Yeghishe (religious treatises), and Movses Khorenatzi, whose monumental work of pre-Christian era has been translated into many languages. Greek scholar, philosopher and historian Agathangelos, known for his eyewitness account of St. Gregory the Illuminator's conversion of Armenia, also rose to prominence during this era. Historian Sebeos and Catholicos Hovhannes Otznetsi were important figures in the seventh century for their religious treatises.

Here it should parenthetically be mentioned that in the beginning there was only one form of Armenian, the *Krapar*. Thereafter all books were writ-

ten in classical Armenian comprehensible mostly to scholars. In 1850's a relatively unknown author and teacher of peasant stock from a village near Yerevan, Khatchadour Abovian, had the daring idea of writing a novel that could be read and enjoyed by anyone familiar with the Armenian alphabet. Spending many sleepless nights studying the language of *ashughs* (minstrels) along with the most technical innovations in the art of fiction, Abovian wrote his first novel in *ashkharhapar*, the popular lingo. His book *The Wounds of Armenia*, probably the most widely discussed and admired of his works, won him the recognition as the father of modern Armenian literature. The Armenian alphabet, consisting of 36 letters, writes Antoine Meillet, a French philologist and comparative linguist, "is a masterpiece...it is so well founded that it has provided the Armenian nation with a definitive system of phonetics which has been maintained to this day without undergoing any alteration, or needing to receive any improvement, for it was perfect from the beginning."

The Armenian language has a unique, independent character with a rich, versatile vocabulary. The translations of Greek and Latin classics are so accurate that it is said if the original versions were lost, one could translate them back without losing the accuracy of the originals.

The Armenian Church comes to life in the stories of its saints, who witness the authenticity of the Christian gospel. A unique source of inspiration to the members of the church is the readings (*Haysmavoork*) on certain occasions about the courage and sacrifice of these holy men and women (See page 79).

A variety of rites, or sacraments, are administered in the Armenian Church which symbolize grace, or are intended to bring about grace to the children of God so that they can fulfill their mission in life. Each sacrament (*khorhoort* or mystery) has an interior and exterior expression. In baptism, for example, the exterior aspect is the water, whereas symbolizing the rebirth and cleansing of the soul is the interior component (See page 90).

The Divine Liturgy (*Badarak*) of the Christian Church means the co-operative effort of the people in performing the work of God. The Armenian Church has always given special importance to this worship service as an expression of their joy in the resurrection of Christ. It appeals to the whole person through all the senses: visual beauty of vestments, the music, incense, etc. (See page 108).

The cross is the central symbol for Christians not only as the instrument of the world's salvation by the crucified Christ but also as the constant witness to the fact that we cannot be Christians unless we live with the cross as the very content of our lives. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Christians see the cross everywhere in the church building, cross themselves before and after prayers, and when receiving a blessing from the priest during liturgy. It's a sign that our hearts, minds and strength are given to the love of God and humanity.

Prayer is another significant tradition in Christian life. It is a dialogue with God, spoken or done silently, acknowledging His existence, name, power and love.

We have not included special chapters on Armenian Church music or architecture, both of which have contributed remarkably to its cultural tradition. The Armenian Church music traces its beginnings to the 5th century, when the religious chants called *sharagans* began to evolve. Nersess Shnorhali is credited for writing some of the most moving liturgical music. Gomidas Vartabed (Soghomon Soghomonian), another prominent religious figure who lived in 19th century, created a wide interest in religious and secular music throughout Europe. As a student of composer Magar Egmalian, whose Divine Liturgy is sung in many churches today, Gomidas contemporized sections of Egmalian's Eucharistic rite.

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The earliest examples of Armenian Church architecture are found in the late fifth century, marking the beginning of the Golden Age that extends to the 13th century. The Arab invasions in the 7th century interrupted the building of churches but it resumed during the 10th century when many of Ani's 1001 churches were erected. The art of building churches has always been a special skill of the Armenians who knew the secret of mixing egg with mortar to increase strength, which attests to the longevity of church structures. They were also talented in the art of refining proportions and working with stone, the most abundant natural resource in Armenia. Cross-stones or "khachkars" carved on church faces or free-standing are found all over Armenia.

The Armenian Church has played a major role in awakening the Armenian national consciousness and inspired generations to uphold their identity, religion and a wealth of traditions. We trust these pages will tell a portion of that story.

– *Michael Kermian*

WELCOME TO
THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

THE BEGINNINGS ...



St. Gregory's Vision, Y. Tadevosian, 1901

*“... The Armenians are perhaps the oldest established of the civilized races
in Western Asia”*

– Arnold J. Toynbee

CHRISTIANITY IN ARMENIA

One of the twelve Apostles of Christ, St. Thaddeus, was the first to preach Christianity in Armenia. He is said to have converted many Armenians, including members of the Armenian royal family.

Foremost among his early converts was Princess Santookhd, the daughter of King Sanadroog of Armenia. His missionary work, focused mostly in southeastern Armenia (now northwestern Iran), received an enthusiastic response which helped him establish firm roots of Christianity in Armenia. His success, however, incurred the anger of the Armenian king as it was all happening in his backyard, in the vicinity of his summer residence. He promptly ordered his men to persecute the Christians and tried in vain to dissuade his daughter. Ultimately, Princess Santookhd was convicted and executed along with St. Thaddeus and their followers.

Their martyrdom did not stop the new faith from spreading throughout Armenia, mainly because of the constant influx of Christian missionaries into Armenia. St. Bartholomew, one of the twelve Apostles, was preaching in Armenia prior to St. Thaddeus' martyrdom. An old legend holds that the two men met at Khor Veerab at the foot of Mt. Ararat, where three centuries later St. Gregory the Illuminator was to spend thirteen years in a dungeon. St. Bartholomew shared the fate of St. Thaddeus and was martyred in Armenia. His grave remains in a ruined church in southeastern Turkey. The grave of St. Thaddeus, located in a monastic complex in northwestern Iran, is still a popular pilgrimage site.



St. Thaddeus

There are various other sacred sites and monasteries in Armenia where the Apostles and disciples of the Lord preached. For example, St. Thomas is said to have converted many in the region of Koghtun (modern Nakhichevan), where a monastery as well as other churches in the region bear his name. Also, St. Elisha, a disciple of Christ, is said to have preached in the area of Artsakh (Karabagh), where a monastery still bears his name.

Though some of these traditions are of a legendary nature, they indicate the relentless penetration of Christian missionaries into Armenia. At this time, there were also large Jewish communities in northern Mesopotamia and northern Syria from where the earliest Christians came.

A medieval list contains names of bishops who are said to have been the successors of Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew; modern day scholars believe some of the names in this list are authentic and that the church established by the Holy Apostles burgeoned in Armenia for two-and-a-half centuries, albeit under cover. Ancient Armenian and Western traditions, which have traced information about saints martyred during the first and the second centuries, attest the existence of such communities in Armenia before the conversion of the Armenian people in A.D. 301. Also, the recorded activities of early Christian sects in and around Armenia is yet further proof that the country had pockets of Christian population that attracted missionaries and preachers. One such very famous early Christian personality was a heretic known as Bardesanes (A.D. 154-222) whose origin is still a matter of dispute, though his Armenian origin has not been ruled out.



St. Bartholomew

Fifth century records also provide information about two major first and second century groups of martyrs known collectively as the Vosgians and the Sookiasians, who became important saints of the Armenian Church. The Vosgians were Roman emissaries sent to the court of the Armenian King Sanadroog for diplomatic purposes. On their way, they met the Holy Apostle Thaddeus who converted them. (*Vosgee* is the Armenian translation of the Greek *Chrysos*, meaning gold).

After the martyrdom of St. Thaddeus, the five comrades withdrew to the remote regions of the country situated at the sources of the Euphrates River in Western Armenia and lived there as anchorites for 40 years. Ultimately they made their way to the court of the Armenian King Ardashes where they converted the relatives of Sateneeg, queen of Armenia, and gave their leader the Christian name Sookias (*Hesychius*, meaning 'solitary' in Greek). The new converts had hardly begun proselytizing at the beginning of the second century when the crown Prince Ardavazt ordered their death. After their burial, Sookias and his comrades withdrew to the remote area where the Vosgians had lived.

The Sookiasians were, like their relative Queen Sateneeg, of Alan (modern Ossetian) origin and of noble birth. The eighteen men lived in the wilderness until an emissary from the king of the Alans came to take them back to their land. Realizing they would be forced to become apostates, they refused to oblige and the emissary put sixteen of them to death, sparing only the two youngest who escaped and continued to live in the mountains as anchorites until the ends of their lives.

Medieval Armenian and Syriac writings also speak about the disciples of St. Thaddeus who preached Christianity in southern and eastern Armenia. One of them, named Dadiu, who preached in the region of Artsakh, has a large monastic complex known as Dadivank in the district of Martakert, Karabagh, dedicated to him. A second disciple named Khat also preached in the same region and the monastery of Khatavank is named after him. The Datev

Monastery, still extant in the Siunik region, a district in southeastern Armenia, is dedicated to a third disciple, Eusthadeus.

There are other sources that proffer interesting details about additional Armenian martyrs. They mention an army of 10,000 Christians in the service of the Roman Empire martyred in 118 in the vicinity of Mt. Ararat, appropriately remembered as the Araratian Martyrs. There is evidence that Christian churches existed in Armenia Minor and in the Melitene (modern Malatia) regions since the second century, inhabited mostly by people of Armenian extraction.

By the middle of the third century, the well-organized Christian community in Armenia attracted the attention of Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria, a towering figure of the early Christian Church, as recorded by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. Eusebius, the first historian of the Christian Church, states in his *Church History* (written in Greek and available in Armenian in the fifth century) that Bishop Dionysius (prelate from A.D. 248-264) “wrote (a letter) to those in Armenia, likewise on Repentance, whose bishop was Meruzanes.” The letter presumably dealt with the issue of accepting as penitent people who had been forced to become apostates. Meruzanes [*Mehroozhan* in its correct Armenian form] was a well-known Armenian name commonly used in the Ardzroonee clan, which was predominant in southwestern Armenia in the third century. This valuable historical statement reveals that the Christians in Armenia in the middle of the third century were an organized community with a bishop who communicated with the



*St. Gregory baptizes King Drtad,
by Salpi Mavian*



*Armenian alphabet in gold and diamonds,
Etchmiadzin, Armenia.*

Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, a considerable distance in those days.

While Christianity spread its roots deeper and wider into the Armenian homeland, a new wave arrived from Cappadocia (the region of Caesaria/Kayseri, where Christianity had old roots) at the end of the third century, encouraging St. Gregory the Illuminator, a Christian of Parthian origin raised in Caesarea (now Kaiseri, Turkey) to convert Armenia's King Drtad, the royal family, the nobility and the royal army. As the newly ordained bishop of Armenia, St. Gregory chose a site near the royal residence in Vagharshabad as the center of his jurisdiction. This place happened to be the very site where Christ, according to a vision that had appeared to St. Gregory, descended from heaven and

struck the Armenian soil with a golden hammer. St. Gregory built an altar at that site and surrounded it with walls. Shortly thereafter, he and King Drtad built the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, which after 1700 years still serves as the headquarters of the Armenian Church.

During the fourth century, the administrative structure of the Armenian Church, and especially its episcopal hierarchy, developed independently from the church in the West, since at that time Armenia was not a part of the Roman Empire. Christianity in Armenia gradually adapted itself to the local social structure and was completely feudalized. The office of Bishop of Armenia was occupied by clerics who were related either to St. Gregory the Illuminator or to Bishop Aghpianos, a bishop from the South.

The fifth century sources already distinguish between celibate and married priests as an accepted order in the church. All priests belonged to the *azad* (noble) social order. The office of bishop was reserved for celibate priests only. This does not contradict the practice of assigning the throne of Chief Bishop of Armenia to the members of St. Gregory's family who were already married. In the fourth century and even later it was not unusual for married men and women to leave their families and join a monastic order after taking the vow of celibacy.

While married priests served as pastors tending to the spiritual needs of the people, celibate priests lived in monasteries or in seclusion, some preferring to spend their lives in uninhabited areas, either in total isolation or within the company of a few pupils and followers. Occasionally they visited villages and towns to preach and do missionary work. Such priests excelled in the teachings of the church and the Scriptures and were referred to as *var-tabeds*, or teachers. St. Nersess the Great, the grandson of St. Gregory the Illuminator's grandson, is credited with founding the earliest monasteries.

In a land with no division between church and state, the adoption of Christianity as the state religion introduced Armenian society to various Christian practices and principles. The royal and feudal houses as well as the common people, though retaining pre-Christian traditions, symbols and blood rights, employed Christian practices such as supporting churches and monastic institutions, educating young cadets and children in the new faith and adopting Christian values in their family lifestyle.

The early liturgy, ritual and rites of the Armenian Church, as in all ancient churches, consisted of psalmody – scriptural readings and prayers that were recited either in Greek or Syriac. Consequently, the language of the church remained incomprehensible to the faithful. In the fourth century this problem was resolved by appointing priests well versed in both Armenian and either Syriac, Greek, or both, so that they could translate the recited texts into Armenian. Such extemporaneous translations could not have been

precise. The priests who translated biblical texts presented paraphrases or interpretations in order to explain to the faithful the meaning of the unfamiliar idiom. This is why the word *tarkmaneech*, a derivative of Syriac origin, has a wider connotation than simply “translator.” It can also mean commentator.

After A.D. 387, with most of Greater Armenia under the control of Persia, the state religion of the Sasanian Empire – Zoroastrianism – posed a serious threat to the Armenian Church. Unless people could understand the liturgy, the Scriptures as well as the teachings of the Church, they could easily convert to Zoroastrianism, since Armenia had a close cultural affinity with Persia. The invention of the Armenian alphabet, the translation of the Bible, and the subsequent emergence of a distinct literary tradition pulled the Armenians away from assimilation and crystallized the Armenian identity.

Soon after the invention of the Armenian alphabet in A.D. 405, Mesrob Mashdots translated the Bible with the help of his students, presumably from an old Syriac version. St. Sahag, the Chief Bishop of Armenia, revised and edited the first draft in A.D. 434, using the Greek Septuagint version.

The Armenian version of the Bible had a tremendous impact on the development of Armenian literature as well as the Armenian intellect. Unlike the Romans and the Greeks, the Armenians had no literary tradition prior to the translation of the Bible. The translators, engaged in the task of rendering the Holy Scriptures into Armenian, created a literary idiom drawn directly from the language of the epics, sagas, folk tales and other forms of oral literature popular in the central regions of Armenia. The language of the Bible served as the foundation of an Armenian literary style.

While the colossal undertaking of translation of the Bible into Armenian was under way in the 420s, the Persian court terminated the rule of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty in 428 and deposed St. Sahag, St. Mesrob’s collaborator, as Bishop of Armenia. This left the Church of Armenia in a politically precarious state until the 480s. Nevertheless, the cultural work and mission-

ary activities of St. Mesrob Mashdots and his pupils unified the Armenians living in the Persian and Roman empires, and defined the identity of the Armenian people in terms of their Christian faith and language.

I FLOUNDER

I flounder.
Like a ship, I founder,
Endangered in the vastness of sins.
God of Peace, I need your help.
I am tossed by the rough seas
Of non-righteousness.
King of Peace, be my help.
Over depths of a sea of sin
I float blindly,
Good Captain, preserve me

– *Mesrob Mashdots (350-439)*

(translated by Diana Der Hovanesian and Marzbed Margossian, Anthology of Armenian Poetry)

In the mid 430s, Armenian translators, dispatched to Constantinople to acquire religious texts, returned with the canons of the Councils of Nicaea (A.D. 431). Based on these canons and a letter from Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople, the fathers of the Armenian Church rejected the teachings of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, which had been denounced at the Council of Ephesus. The controversy turned on a fine theological point: Nestorius had held that in the incarnate Christ, the divine and human persons remained separate. In the ensuing decades the Nestorian Christians gained a strong foothold in the Persian Empire but their doctrine was denounced again and again in the Councils of the sixth and seventh centuries. The disdain for

Nestorian teachings led to the rejection of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), which was considered by eastern Christian churches as a Nestorian victory over orthodoxy. An official anathema against Chalcedon, however, was not pronounced until the beginning of the seventh century. The anti-Chalcedonian position of the Armenian Church alienated the Armenians from the Byzantines.

In the mid-fifth century, the Sasanian court became gradually intolerant of Christianity in Armenia and tried to impose Zoroastrianism as the state religion. The Armenians were not prepared to forsake their own ancestral religion and organized a massive rebellion in 449 that lasted two years, ending in the martyrdom of Vartan Mamigonian, commander-in-chief of the Armenian forces, several Armenian princes and over one thousand soldiers. In 482, a second major rebellion erupted under the leadership of Vahan Mamigonian, the nephew of Vartan. This time the Sasanian court was forced to give in to the Armenians and granted them the political freedom to worship Christ. These rebellions served as a source of inspiration for later generations and greatly strengthened the position of the Church as the major champion and symbol of the Armenian national identity. Despite continual persecutions, the Church carried out its mission and fostered cultural activities such as architecture, music, and translation of historical, theological, liturgical and poetical works.

At the beginning of the sixth century, the Armenian Church entered the international arena of theological controversies. The non-Nestorian Christians living in the Sasanian Empire, including the Armenians, had so far considered themselves of one faith with the Greeks. However, the policy of Emperor Justin I (A.D. 518-527) to reinstate the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures in Christ alienated the Armenians. The attempts of the Emperor Justinian I (A.D. 527-565) to appease the Armenians during the sessions of the 5th Ecumenical Council were of no avail. The Armenians continued to suspect the orthodoxy of the Byzantines, accusing them of Nestorian leanings. These controversies led the Armenians to develop a theology based on the early fathers of the church.

The seventh century was one of the most productive periods in the history of Christian Armenia, notwithstanding the Arab raids and the Byzantine invasions. Under native feudal lords – known as “Princes of Armenia” – who ruled as nominal Byzantine, Sasanian and Arab governors, the Armenians engaged in developing religious art, architecture, theology, literature and science. The catholicoi as well as the major princes built magnificent cathedrals, among which are the churches of Zvartnotz, Taleen, Gayeeané, and Arooj.

This period of political stability ended in the 690s as the Arab caliphate gradually tightened its control over Transcaucasia and imposed heavy taxes. Pressed by this, the Armenian feudal families, the traditional patrons of the Church, rebelled several times during the eighth century. The retaliatory purges organized by the caliphate led to the extinction of the feudal families and the feudal bishoprics (the administrative area under the administration of a bishop). This was catastrophic for the Church as the major monastic centers waned and religious as well as cultural life disappeared.

Although the circumstances were not conducive to the continuity of religious activity in Armenia, a generation of able churchmen, educated in the final two decades of the seventh century, tried to maintain the integrity of the Church.

The period from 750 to 860 was culturally barren until the emergence of the Bagratid royal dynasty in 862 when the monastic movement regrouped under Bishop Mesrob Mashdots and revitalized the Armenian Church. Almost a century and half later, St. Gregory, a monk at the monastery of Nareg, wrote the *Book of Lamentations* comprising ninety-five poetic conversations with God. It's a unique document reflecting the inner thoughts of the medieval Armenian mind, and eleven centuries after its composition, it still retains its sublime beauty and mystical power.

The annexation of the Bagratid kingdom to the Byzantine Empire in 1045 terminated the Armenian catholicate and forced the bishops to recognize the supremacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople. It was only after the fall of

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

The Pagan philosophers labeled death
Evil if it were mindless, purposeless
And I agree because we are dying
Like irrational animals and we are not afraid.
We are lost, and not terrified.
We are forgiven and do not accept it humbly.
We are buried and do not struggle.
We are deported and do not panic.
We are falsified and do not protest.
We are worn out and do not try to understand.
We are diminished and do not replenish.
We walk and do not look where we go.
We are enslaved and do not feel put upon.

– *Krikor Naregatsi (951-1003)*

(excerpt from *Book of Nareg*, translated by Diana Der Hovanesian and Marzbed Margossian)

central Armenia to the Seljuk Turks in 1066 that the Byzantine court allowed the Armenians to elect a new catholicos. The peregrination of the catholicos was due to the Seljuk occupation of Armenia and the migration of the majority of the feudal families, as well as their clients and subjects, to Cappadocia, the Melitene region, northern Syria and Cilicia.

Westward migration brought the Armenians into closer contact with the Byzantine Empire, the Byzantine church and the Greek population in general. A dialogue between the Emperor Manuel Comnenus and Nerses the Graceful opened the door for negotiations to achieve union between the Byzantine and the Armenian churches, which would have been ratified if the Byzantines had not lost Asia Minor to the Seljuks of Rum in the Battle of Myriokephalon in 1176.

The 12th century marked the beginning of relations with the Church of Rome. The presence of Crusaders in the Levant encouraged the princes of the Rupenid house to turn to Rome and to the Holy Roman Empire. Political expectations from the West – and particularly the promise of kingship from the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire – required union with Rome. Under pressure from the Rupenid prince Leo, the leading Armenian ruler in Cilicia, the bishops of the Armenian Church were forced to sign an official statement of union with Rome in 1197, and the Armenian Church came into *de jure* (in theory) communion with Rome. In the ensuing two centuries, this forced union led to bitter controversies between the ruling element and the common people as well as the majority of the bishops. Leo, who was crowned in 1198, became a vassal of the papacy and the Holy Roman emperor, and established the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia as a Crusader state.

During the 13th century, the structure of the Church did not undergo any major changes. The monastic tradition both in Cilicia and northeastern Armenia flourished under the patronage of kings and princes. The Cilician institutions in particular excelled in miniature art, calligraphy, music and biblical exegesis.

The ascent of the Mamluks as a major power in the Levant and their continuous attacks on the Armenian kingdom in the mid-13th century critically affected the Church throughout the 14th century. The status of the Church in eastern Armenia deteriorated after the collapse of political and economic stability in the Iranian world, of which Armenia was a part throughout the 14th century. The Church was also affected by internal strife among the more nationalist elements – the common people and the majority of the bishops in Cilicia and Armenia proper – and a pro-Latin faction, which included the nobility, the royal house and most of the kings who thought political salvation depended only on a new crusade sponsored by the papacy. The monasteries, most of them in territories occupied by the Mamluks and other Muslim dynasties, either ceased to exist or gradually waned. Religious and cultural activities survived briefly and only in small, remote regions not directly affected by the political situation, such as the district of Vayots Tsor in eastern Armenia

which contained a school named Klatsor, renowned for its scriptorium and its expertise in biblical exegesis, the Aristotelian tradition and other branches of learning. The teachers and pupils of Klatsor defended the doctrines of the Armenian Church against Latin missionaries in eastern Armenia and their Armenian followers, who were known as the *Unitores*.

Klatsor became the torch-bearer of the Armenian tradition. From the 14th to the beginning of the 17th century, Armenian vartabeds preached in various parts of Armenia, established monastic schools for short periods of time and kept the faith as well as learning alive. Thanks to the tireless efforts of these men and their associates, intellectual and artistic endeavors flourished in eastern Armenia and the region around Lake Van despite the unstable political situation under Turkic nomads.



Armenian Bible Illumination: Entry to Jerusalem

The vartabeds of Klatsor, their associates and followers also engaged in restoring order in the Church. This dream finally became a reality in 1441, when it was resolved to transfer the Holy See to its original site in Vagharshabad, intending to liberate the Armenian Church from corruption, disintegration and the influence of Rome.

The political adversities in 14th century Armenia and Cilicia forced many Armenians to seek refuge not only in nearby Anatolia, Georgia and the Balkans, but in distant communities in Russia, the Ukraine, the Crimean peninsula and eastern Europe. The Church and religious life flourished in most of these colonies. As sanctuaries were built, Episcopal jurisdictions were created and a number of important monastic complexes were established in Crimea and Anatolia.

From the mid-15th to the end of the 16th century, the great tradition continued in the monasteries of Bitlis (the birthplace of William Saroyan's parents) by vartabeds, the spiritual descendants of the Klatsor school.

As a result of political stability in the Middle East in the early decades of the 17th century, the Church re-emerged as the preeminent unifying force for Armenians. Responding to the revival of faith, priests went as pilgrims to Jerusalem to acquaint themselves with various monastic traditions. Some returned to eastern Armenia well prepared to revive the ancient Armenian monastic tradition. They examined the extant literature, set rules and founded several hermitages. Movses of Siunik, one of the founders of the new movement, ultimately rose to the patriarchal throne (1629-1632). He and his successors, Philippos of Aghpag (1633-1655) and Hagop of Julfa (1655-1680) exerted much effort in establishing their authority over the bishops and in restoring order in the Church. These figures were largely responsible for the religious and cultural revival of the period, which found patrons among a newly emerging social class, namely the Armenian merchants whose transactions covered a wide range of territories including Europe.

The administrative structure of the Church changed as the majority of the feudal bishops were gradually replaced by prelates of common origin, although in some districts feudal bishops – with nephews succeeding uncles – continued to preside into the 19th century. The Armenian bishops of Jerusalem and Constantinople were officially recognized as “patriarchs” by the Ottoman government, even though they were actually archbishops under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos of All Armenians. In the eyes of the Ottoman government the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople was the official head of the Armenian religious minority [*millet* in Turkish] that was dispersed throughout the empire, and the Armenian patriarch of Jerusalem was one of the three prelates – the others being the Greek and the Latin patriarchs – who served as a custodian of the Christian holy sites in Palestine. To the Armenians the patriarch of Constantinople was the head of the Armenian Church in the Ottoman Empire, elected by the leaders (later the representatives) of the people and given an official recognition by the Ottoman government. The patriarch of Jerusalem was the head of the Armenian Church in the Holy Land, officially recognized by the Ottoman government.

The prelates presided over Episcopal jurisdictions that were directly under their authority. The seat of the Catholicos of All Armenians continued to exercise authority over the See of Albania – whose jurisdiction extended over the Armenians of Karabagh and the regions to the east and north, including Russia. The other local sees, namely the catholicates of Aghtamar in the southern region of Lake Van and Cilicia, were self-governing but with limited authority.

The efforts of the great 17th century churchmen bore fruit in the early decades of the 18th century, especially after the ascent of two priests – Hovhannes Golod and Krikor the Chainbearer, both from the monastery of St. John in Bitlis – to the patriarchal thrones of Constantinople and Jerusalem. During their tenure, the administration of the Armenian Church was fully organized in the Ottoman Empire; schools were founded, and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople was able to extend its authority over the ma-

jority of the Episcopal jurisdictions in the Ottoman Empire. In the meantime, contacts with the West exposed the Armenians to the Enlightenment, and later to the ideas of the French Revolution and secularism.

Since the Middle Ages, the Church had not remained apathetic to the general socio-political condition of the Armenian people. As seen above, contacts with the Church of Rome during the Cilician period had political motivation. Following the same tradition, the 16th, 17th and 18th century Armenian churchmen involved themselves in the liberation movements, trying to stir the interest of the papacy, the western powers and Russia so that they might alleviate the oppressed condition of Armenian Christians under Muslim rule. At the forefront of such movements were some of the 17th century Catholicoi of All Armenians, and especially the prelates and political leaders of Karabagh, some of whom were the descendents of medieval feudal families. These movements enhanced the position of the laity in the affairs of the nation as well as the Church, despite the attempts of Muslim authorities both in the West and in the East to keep the Armenians as a passive religious minority.

Already by the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, the Armenians felt the need to limit the absolute power of high-ranking clergymen in community affairs. Minor mob scenes organized by craftsmen in the Armenian quarters of Constantinople and elsewhere ultimately led to the participation of the people in ecclesiastical and national affairs. After the Russian occupation of eastern Armenia in 1829, the need had emerged to define the relationship between the Russian government and the Armenian Church. A constitution based on the current practices and traditions of the Church was drawn to define the relations between church and state. The constitution called *Polozhenie* in Russian, was approved by the Tsar and remained in force until 1917. In 1863, the Ottoman government also approved a constitution for the Armenians under its rule to conduct their internal affairs according to their own traditions. Both of these documents, which limited the power of the catholicos, the patriarchs and the bishops, gave rights to the people to elect their prelates, councils and administrative bodies.

The constitutions and the relative stability of the Ottoman and Russian empires provided the Armenian Church with the opportunity to exert an unparalleled effort to recognize itself and educate the faithful. Several seminaries and hundreds of schools were established, and the majority of the graduates of the renowned Kevorkian Seminary of the Holy See were sent to Germany and other western countries to do graduate work under the direction of renowned western scholars. The majority returned to Armenia and put their expertise to good use. The seminaries of Armash (a village near Constantinople) and Jerusalem in the West played an equally important role in the Ottoman Empire.

The deteriorating economic conditions in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire brought hundreds of Armenians to the New World in the 1880s. A large proportion of the immigrants settled in the industrial towns of eastern Massachusetts, while others sought work in and around New York City; Philadelphia; Fresno, CA; and other places.

As the Armenian immigration to the United States started to increase, the Armenians in America decided to establish a Diocese in the United States. His Holiness Mgrdich Khrimian, better known as Khrimian Hayrig, Catholicos of All Armenians, in response to the request of the Armenians in America, elevated Fr. Hovsep to the rank of Bishop and with his Encyclical dated July 2, 1898, formed and established the Diocese of the Armenian Church in America in Worcester, Massachusetts.

The city of Fresno was the nucleus of the growing Armenian presence in the West, with communities being established in ever-growing numbers in various parts of California. The first residents arrived in Fresno in 1871, and the Armenian community soon felt the necessity and urge to hold religious services. In 1895 Fr. Aharon Melkonian started Armenian Apostolic Church services and in 1899 when the church membership was about 150, the need to have their own place of worship was essential. On April 1, 1900, the foundation of Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church was blessed. The construction was immediately undertaken. The consecration took place on Sunday, October 14, 1900 officiated by Bishop Hovsep Sarajian, the Primate having traveled from Worcester for the occasion.



First Armenian Church in Fresno, California, 1900

Bishop Hovsep designated a permanent pastor, Very Rev. Fr. Sahag Vartabed Nazarian, who arrived in June 1902 and served as pastor until 1906. Rev. Theodorus Isahakian (Isaacs) was next to serve as pastor.

With the resignation of Fr. Theodorus in 1907, Bishop Hovsep Sarajian had resigned as Primate of the Armenian Diocese and in starting from 1908 served as the Pastor to the great joy of the parish until 1911.

The year 1928 marked the start of a new era. The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America was established by an Encyclical from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, dated November 28, 1927.

In 1928, the newly-created Western Diocese (at that time being called a Prelacy) consisted of five parishes, each with its own church edifice.

During the past quarter of a century the Western Diocese has come a long way, and now, the Western Diocese is the proud owner of a multi-purpose complex, located in Burbank, California, which is our present Diocesan Headquarters and site for the ongoing construction of Mother Cathedral.

I NEVER FOUND A JUST MAN

I never found a just man in this wide world I traveled
until I taught my arm the law. I found a lot of brothers then.
As long as my arm is strong: a lot of loves, a lot of friends.
And when it fails, I'll be alone again.

– *Hovhannes Erzenqatsi Blouze (1230-1293)*

(translated by Diana Der Hovanesian and Marzbed Margossian, Anthology of Armenian Poetry
(Columbia University Press, New York, 1978, p. 92).)

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH IN THE WORLD TODAY...

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH
AND OTHER MAJOR CHRISTIAN FAITHS



"...Make them pure and holy through teaching them your words of truth... My prayer for all of them is that they will be of one heart and mind... so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me."

– John 17:17, 21

THE ROLE OF ECUMENISM

WHAT IS ECUMENISM?

The word “ecumenical” is derived from the Greek language and means “those living in the inhabited world.” More precisely for Christians, the word ecumenical describes people(s) of one and the same household who may be found living in many places in the inhabited world. Actually, the Greek word for house *eekos* is part of the ecumenical.

In the Armenian there are two words which are used for ecumenical; [*deeyehzeragan*] or [*unthanragan*] both meaning ‘universal.’

WHAT ARE THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS?

Councils of the Universal Church were convened as early as A.D. 49. The very first one took place in Jerusalem. Since then, meetings were conducted to discuss grave questions of faith, church order or erroneous doctrinal teachings that threatened the unity of the Church and the Christian world. By the fourth century it became the initiative of the emperor of the imperial city of Byzantium (later called Constantinople) to call such meetings of church leaders from different regions of the then ‘inhabited world’. These councils were comprised of all the bishops of the Church who shared a common faith, no matter where they may have come from. This is the exact origin of the adjective ecumenical, meaning “of universal character.”

What characterized councils to be ecumenical was the general consensus reached by its participating bishops. They believed that the power of the Holy Spirit brought forth the wisdom that led their discussions and deliberations; and their final decisions remained faithful to the Apostolic and Holy Tradition and the understanding of the Scriptures. This principle fundamentally characterized a council as ecumenical.

There were other councils of churches throughout the inhabited world that are called local councils. They dealt with the Church in the particular cultural context where it existed. The Armenian Church has taken part in both types of Councils but accepts only three as truly ecumenical in character and content. They are the Councils of Nicea [A.D. 325], Constantinople [A.D. 381] and Ephesus [A.D. 431].

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH IN RELATION TO OTHER MAJOR CHRISTIAN FAITHS

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

There are two ‘families’ of Orthodox, the Eastern (adhering to the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon) and the Oriental (rejecting this particular council). This Council’s acceptance as ecumenical is what fundamentally divides them. The theology, church government, hierarchy, understanding of scripture, and Holy Tradition are identical. From the day of Pentecost until today, these churches of various nations proclaim the same faith of the Apostles.

The Lesser of Oriental Orthodox – the Churches of Armenia, Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia and the Syrian Church in India – though quite different in their outward forms of rite, ritual, worship styles, cultural tradition and language, share a total organic unity. These Churches



*His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme
Patriarch and Catholicos of All
Armenians and His Holiness Alexy II,
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia,
head of the Russian Orthodox Church*

accept only the first three councils as ecumenical in nature. Any member from either Oriental Orthodox Church is privileged to receive all sacramental blessings in any sister church of Oriental Orthodoxy.

The Greater or Eastern Orthodox – the Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Antiochian (Arab Greek Orthodox) Romanian, Bulgarian, American, Japanese, Mexican, Polish, etc – are the sister Eastern churches to the Oriental Orthodox whose confession of faith is without question consonant, save the Chalcedonian interpretation of Christ's natures. Unlike the Oriental Orthodox, the Eastern Orthodox accept seven councils to be Ecumenical. Their church government, hierarchy, theology, understanding of scripture and Holy Tradition are no different from the Oriental Orthodox. They are of the Byzantine or Slavic (and even today Western) rites, meaning that the same Divine Liturgy, according to Saint John Chrysostem, is celebrated in various languages. Unlike the Oriental Orthodox Churches, all their rituals are more unified regardless of the ethnic diversity. The Eucharistic unity with the Oriental Orthodox – broken since the year A.D. 451, as a result of the Council of Chalcedon – in more recent times, with more serious study and with the official meetings of hierarchs, clergy and theologians – has fostered a rapprochement between these two families of Orthodoxy and has sparked a movement toward restored communion between and among all Orthodox Christians.

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

DOCTRINE

- The faith, doctrine and dogma of the Armenian Church are based upon the Apostolic teachings, Holy Tradition and the written Word of God.
- The prime doctrinal dogma of the Holy Trinity defines God as One in three persons.

- The Nicene Creed is the main statement of faith.
- Only three church councils are accepted as ecumenical.

WORSHIP

- There are seven sacraments administered and celebrated by the clergy.
- Baptism by immersion into water constitutes one's entry into the Church.
- The Holy Eucharist or the service known as the Divine Liturgy is the central sacrament and is offered to the faithful in the form of unleavened bread and wine which becomes truly the Body and Blood of Christ.
- The Virgin Mary is venerated as the Mother of God and her icon/holy image is required to be placed above each altar.
- The Holy Cross and other holy images and icons are venerated and honored with great respect as vehicles through which God reveals himself.
- Salvation is achieved through faith and works and is a life-long process.

GOVERNMENT

- The Foundation, Head and High Priest of the Church is Jesus Christ.
- The Armenian Church is one of Apostolic Succession and was established by the Apostles, Thaddeus and Bartholomew.
- Holy Orders – Bishop, Priest and Deacon – are reserved for males.
- The successor of the Apostles is the head of the Church called the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians who resides in Armenia.
- Bishops, priests and teachers are appointed by him to govern the church.

- Bishops govern parishes and these parishes form a unit called a diocese.
- There are two classes of priests: married and celibate.
- The laity and clergy together constitute the leadership of the church and participate in decisions that affect the faith and life of the church.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

DOCTRINE

The Roman Catholic Church is similar to the Armenian Church but with more precision toward definitions and rationalism rather than mysticism which is a dynamic of all Orthodox Churches.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that the Pope alone is the head of the churches in the world, whereas the Orthodox churches, including the Armenian Church, believe in shared authority invested in all bishops.

- Councils are held to define the faith and establish church teaching. There are more than 28 Councils of the Catholic Church accepted as Ecumenical.
- The doctrines of Purgatory, Limbo are understood as stages toward one's salvation. This is not an Armenian Church teaching.

WORSHIP

The sacraments are the same. Baptism is administered more often by sprinkling or pouring water on the head of the infant or adult and not by full immersion.

- The Mass is the celebration of the Eucharist, and the understanding of the mystery of our Lord's presence is identical with the Armenian Church.

- Laymen may distribute Holy Communion, whereas only priests are permitted to do so in the Armenian Church.

- The Virgin Mary is held in high regard as the first of all saints and, unlike Armenian Church teaching, is considered to have been conceived immaculately, without sin.

- Both painted images and carved statues are used in worship whereas statues are not the tradition of the Armenian Church.



His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate,
greets His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

GOVERNMENT

- The Church is of Apostolic origin and was established by Saint Peter.

- The Holy See in Rome is the seat of the Pope who governs all Roman Catholic churches throughout the world.

- The Pope is perceived as infallible and is understood to be the vicar of Christ and of greater authority than patriarchs of Orthodox Churches.

- The priesthood is reserved only for unmarried men. Celibacy is required.

- The clergy alone, in councils and meetings, ultimately decide all matters of faith and church life.

THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

EPISCOPALIAN

The Episcopalian Church is a daughter of the Church of England which is also known as the Anglo-Catholic Church. The Anglo-Catholic church came into existence after breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church over a dispute between King Henry VIII and the Roman Pope. From the establishment of the Anglo-Catholic Church in England, other forms of Protestantism evolved. They were the Presbyterian, Calvinist and Baptist traditions, established during and after the period of Protestant Reformation.

The Episcopalian Church, which essentially shares the same teachings with the Church of England, was established in the United States of America in 1789 after the American Colonies gained independence from England. There are three traditional divisions: High Church (appearing much like the Roman Catholic Church), Low Church (more reformed and Protestant) and Broad Church (without hierarchy, standard doctrines, sacraments and apostolic character, such as Protestant Congregationalism). Often, pastors in charge of Episcopalian Churches choose which particular tradition they prefer to follow.

DOCTRINE

Some doctrines are similar but not exactly the same as the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

- The need for a binding statement of faith, such as the Nicene Creed, is not always necessary.
- Free thought and diversity of opinion can alter faith and its practice, and personal interpretation not based on any given standard is encouraged.

WORSHIP

- The celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Sundays as the community's central act of worship is not always obligatory.
- Though Holy Communion is offered under both the forms of bread and wine as Christ's Body and Blood – like the Armenian Church – the believer is free to interpret its significance either as the real presence of our Lord or merely a memorial of the Last Supper.
- The sacraments lived by the Universal Church are not always seven. In some traditions they are reduced to essentially two, namely Baptism and Holy Eucharist.
- Holy Orders – bishop, priest, deacon – are granted to men and women.
- Veneration of saints, honor to the Virgin Mary and prayers for departed souls are not always part of the faith-heritage of the Episcopal Church.

GOVERNMENT

- The Foundation of the Episcopal Church is not of direct Apostolic succession like the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.
- The head of the Church is the monarch of England with collaboration of the Bishop of Canterbury.
- The decision to consecrate bishops is through election by the congregation and they are invested to govern dioceses. Bishops and priests may be married or celibate.
- Unlike the Orthodox tradition, priests may marry after ordination.

- Like the Armenian Church and all Orthodox Churches, the laity and clergy together constitute the leadership of the church and participate in decisions that affect the faith and life of the church.

THE METHODIST CHURCH

The Methodist Church was founded in 1784 by John Wesley who was a member of the Church of England. His intention was to reform the Church of England from its Anglo-Catholic tradition that was closely attached to the Roman Catholic traditions.

Doctrine

There are no doctrines essential to the faith, unlike the Armenian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Experience of the faith is primarily essential to one's salvation.

- The Bible is the sole authority of the church and the standard rule of faith.

WORSHIP

- The celebration of Holy Communion as a memorial of the Last Supper is essential.

- Wine is not used for the Eucharistic service, rather grape juice, because consumption of alcoholic beverages is forbidden.

- There are only two sacraments essential for one's salvation: Baptism and Holy Communion.

GOVERNMENT

- There is no priesthood, only pastors.

- Women and men can lead congregations in worship and set policy for the community.
- There are bishops elected and appointed for the leadership in dioceses or judicatories, but are not sacramentally ordained and anointed for office.
- Boards of deacons function primarily as administrators for the parishes rather than functionaries at worship.

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

This church originated in Germany. The Lutheran confession of Faith and Church, initially a reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church, was established as a result of reaction against the Roman Catholic Church and came into being in 1517. This was the first Protestant Church of the West.

Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk of the Roman Catholic Church, opposed certain practices and abuses of the papacy and challenged the pope's authority as sole vicar of Christ on earth. He believed that the Bible was the sole authority of the church. He presented his protest to the pope by issuing a statement called the 'Lutheran Theses,' which presented 95 points by which he considered the papacy and Catholic Church to be in error. This was nailed to the Cathedral doors in Wittenberg, Germany, October 31, 1517. Pope Leo X considered 41 of the objections to be heretical and demanded Luther to recant. But Luther did not and was excommunicated from the church in 1521. The Lutheran Church spread to the Baltic nations, Denmark, Finland and Norway, as well as to Bavaria and even as far as Poland. The Baltic, Scandinavian and Bavarian Churches eventually became Lutheran.

Today in the United States there are three Synod of Lutheranism: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), the largest; the Missouri Synod; and the Wisconsin Synod. The latter two groups are not connected

to the ELCA or each other because of some matters of belief and administration.

DOCTRINE

- The priestly status is for all who are baptized into the faith. This doctrinal teaching is referred to as the Priesthood of Believers.
- The Holy Scripture alone is the sole authority of the church.
- Justification by faith alone is the basic tenet of Lutheran Doctrine. The Nicene Creed in proclaiming the unity of the Apostolic Faith is used as a standard but not necessarily as binding as the Oriental, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.
- Luther taught that though good works are helpful signs of faith, they were not necessarily essential for one's salvation.

WORSHIP

- There are only three sacraments: Baptism, Penance and Eucharist, because they were instituted by Jesus Christ.
- Holy Communion, like the Armenian Orthodox teaching, is considered to be truly the Body and Blood of Christ.

GOVERNMENT

- Bishops are elected to serve for a certain time frame and then are expected to return to pastoral ministry.
- The clergymen of congregations are ministers, not ordained priests.
- The term "priesthood" is considered to be for all according to Lutheran theology and not just one individual called to a particular 'ministry' in the

church. Actually the work “priesthood” is understood as minister. One can be a minister in music, Christian education, Outreach and Preaching. All are considered equal.

- Both men and women are given authority to pastor and preach.

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

This church was established as a result of a movement within the Church of England and began in the 17th century. The intention was to ‘purify’ the church from what Baptists considered unnecessary and meaningless innovations and practices. They advocated a separation of Church and State. Some among this movement believed that infant baptism was contrary to scripture. Two leaders, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, left England in 1607 for Amsterdam where freedom of religion was flourishing. In 1611 Helwys returned to London and established the first Baptist Church in England. Other groups which grew out of the movement were Anabaptists (those who re-baptized already baptized infants) and Mennonites. Today there are 35 million Baptists in 145 countries, making the Baptists one of the largest Protestant groups in the world.

DOCTRINE

- This tradition upholds the ‘Baptist of Believers.’
- They profess the faith as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed (although Baptists have many confessions of faith, they hesitate to sign or write any standard creed).
- Unlike the Armenian Orthodox Church, their beliefs express the importance of the freedom of the individual more than the whole Body of the Church. Religious freedom is the basic way of life. There are no canons, rules or binding dogmas.

- Baptists advocated a separation of Church and State.

WORSHIP

- Baptism is reserved for believers; adults, not children.
- Salvation is through Baptism.
- Only the Bible is the rule of faith.
- Baptism and eucharist are not sacraments but are merely signs of the Christian faith.
- Communion is only a memorial celebrated with grape juice, open to anyone.
- The central focus of worship is the sermon or homily, not communion.

GOVERNMENT

The Congregations are individually in charge of their administration on a local level. It is the Baptist belief that the local congregation is the Body of Christ and need not be connected to another Baptist parish.

The individual Baptist churches form themselves into district associations and take part in annual meetings with other Baptist parishes. This meeting is referred to as the Baptist Convention, meaning a coalition of Baptist Churches.

- There is no hierarchy. Parishes are led by ministers.
- Church membership – once essential through Baptism (performed by total immersion into a tub of water) – today is allowed by merely subscribing to the Baptist Church.

– *Fr. Garabed Kochakian*

(excerpted from *The Armenian Church in the World Today*, by Fr. Garabed Kochakian)

ARMENIAN CHURCH HIERARCHY



*His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos and Supreme
Patriarch of All Armenians*

The Armenian Church, like the other ancient churches, has a hierarchical structure consisting of three ranks: deacon, presbyter and bishop or overseer. This simple hierarchy is essentially unchanged even now, as deacons, priests and bishops constitute the three basic ranks. The catholicos is the chief bishop and the patriarchs and archbishops are essentially bishops with titles; the different kinds of celibate priests and married priests are of the same priestly order; and the division between deacons and sub-deacons is for monastic purposes.

PRESENT-DAY HIERARCHY

Catholicos

Catholicos of All Armenians (Holy See of Etchmiadzin)

Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia (Holy See of Cilicia)

Bishops

Patriarchs

Patriarch of Jerusalem (Holy See of Jerusalem)

Patriarch of Constantinople (Holy See of Constantinople)

Archbishops

Bishops

Priests

Dzayrakooyñ Vartabeds

Vartabeds

Celibate Priests

Married Priests

Deacons and Sub-deacons

Clerks within the four minor orders

CATHOLICOS [*Gatoghigos*]

The hierarchy of the Armenian Church is headed by the catholicos, who originally was known as chief bishop of Armenia/Greater Armenia. The title

Catholicos of All Armenians was first used around the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century.

Since the time of its official recognition by the state, the office of catholicos was never absolute. The catholicoi of the fourth century as a rule were elected by the king, the chief feudal lords and bishops, while the populace gave its consent or disapproval.

In the fourth century, the catholicos served as: the spiritual head of the nation; the bishop of the royal court; the chief justice of the land; the guardian of the poor and the sick. He ordained all the bishops for the episcopal jurisdiction or dioceses in Armenia and that is the reason why the bishops were called “the ones who are attached to the throne [*atorageets*].” These developments, some of which are unique to Armenian Christianity, were gradually institutionalized.

For a brief period under the Tsars of Russia (1838-1917), a constitution [*polozhenie*, translated literally as ‘regulation’] was imposed on the Armenian Church, restricting the powers of the catholicos, however after the takeover of Communists in 1920-1921, this constitution was eliminated and the church returned to its traditional mode of operation.

Today, the Catholicos of All Armenians is the supreme head of the Armenian Church and the catholicate located at Holy Etchmiadzin is the pre-eminent see among the four sees listed above. The catholicos is not only the religious but also the national head of the Armenian people, since he is the only official who is elected by representatives of the entire Armenian people. He also bears the title Supreme Patriarch to distinguish him from the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, who are subject to him in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters.

PATRIARCH [*Badreark*]

The patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople (Istanbul) are also archbishops, although in the past bishops and even vartabeds have occupied those positions. Since the mid-1900s, only archbishops have presided as patriarchs of both sees. Jerusalem as the center of the dominical sites and with an ancient Armenian presence, and Constantinople as the center of the Armenian Church in the Ottoman Empire, were important metropolitan sees and had to have archbishops at their head. Constantinople was in charge of several diocesan jurisdictions headed by bishops and Jerusalem had bishops serving on various posts in the dominical sites.



Catholicos Mgrditch Khrymian (1820-1907), known affectionately as "Khrymian Hayrig."

In the case of both sees, a special recognition, similar to that given to the heads of other major churches, was given to them by Muslim governments. The Armenian archbishop of Jerusalem began to use the title patriarch in the 14th century.

As for the head of the Armenian Church in the Ottoman Empire, he is said to have been given official recognition in the middle of the 15th century. The Ottoman sultans officially recognized the patriarch as the head of the Armenian *millet* (religious community) throughout the empire, and this was not an honorary title but an official position within the Ottoman administration.

Today, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, despite its limitations as a result of separation of church and state in Turkey since 1923, is the spiritual head of the largest Christian community in the country. As for the patriarch

of Jerusalem, he continues to preside as the guardian of the Armenian holdings in the Holy Land and as such occupies a very important position in Christendom as one of the three Christian patriarchs guarding the most sacred sites of the Christian Church.

ARCHBISHOP [*Arkebeesgobos*]

Originally this title was used only for the prelates of major metropolitan sees and later the patriarchs of the ancient churches and the catholicos of Georgia and Caucasian Albania. In the 10th and 11th centuries and thereafter it became fashionable to bestow the title on the bishops of larger jurisdictions such as major towns and dioceses. During the Cilician period [12th and 14th centuries] the practice became widespread and the bishops of Jerusalem were also given the title.

In the present-day church the title is used as an honorific and is bestowed on bishops in recognition of long service.

BISHOP [*Yebeesgobos*]

In the early period of the Armenian Church fourth to eighth centuries, the rank below that of catholicos or chief bishop of Armenia was bishop, and all the prelates of the Armenian Church were bishops. According to the ancient canon of the universal church, a priest is raised to the episcopal rank by three bishops who lay their hands on the head of the candidate. In the Armenian tradition, one of the three ordaining bishops must be the catholicos. For the past five hundred years it has become customary to receive episcopal ordination only in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, unless the ordination is done within the jurisdiction of a local catholicate.

The function of a bishop is administrative. He is the one who oversees the work of parish priests and ordains new priests in his jurisdiction. He also ordains deacons and sub-deacons, and bestows the minor orders.

In ancient times the bishops of Armenia were members of feudal families and were princes in their own right. They presided over territories held by their own family or clan and were identified by the name of their clan, such as Nershabooh Bishop of the Mamigonians. While this tradition gradually changed as the feudal structure began to wane and disappear, in certain areas it lingered and nephews continued to succeed uncles as bishops and prelates until the 19th century. In our days a bishop is usually ordained at the request of a diocese that has elected a celibate priest as its primate. The Supreme Spiritual Council, the highest executive committee working under the immediate presidency of the Catholicos of All Armenians, may also recommend candidates to the catholicos, or the catholicos himself may present the candidacy to the Supreme Spiritual council to fulfill various non-elective posts. Also the patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople may recommend members of their brotherhoods to be elevated.



His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

PRIEST [*Kahana*]

The clergy of all ranks are priests and must be ordained. Christ himself was the first priest and through his ministry established the priesthood. In the Armenian Church there are presently two different kinds of priests: the married priests and the unmarried or celibate priests. The married priests traditionally serve as pastors in parishes. To this day, in Turkey and some Middle Eastern countries, the pastors tending to the spiritual needs of parishioners in parishes are all married priests. In their situation, a person must be married prior to his ordination.

The married clergy in the Armenian Church are not allowed to rise to higher ecclesiastical ranks. For meritorious service they are honored with the right to wear a pectoral cross, a black phelonion with floral motifs, and finally the title of archpriest [*avak kahana*], which gives them a precedence over the other married priests in their church. The only time a married priest can rise in rank is if his wife passes away and he decides to join the celibate priests.

CELIBATE PRIEST [*Goosagron kahana* or *Apegha*]

Celibate priests are, in our tradition, primarily monks who live in monasteries. They receive the same sacerdotal ordination as a married priest. Married and celibate candidates to the priesthood are frequently ordained together by the same bishop. In the present reality, the unmarried priests either work on administrative, liturgical and academic levels or serve as parish priests as a result of a shortage of married priests. The bishops, archbishops, patriarchs and the catholicos ascend from their ranks.

Vartabed

Vartabeds are celibate priests who have the right to preach on doctrinal issues. The outward sign of their authority is the doctrinal staff [*vartabedagan kavazan*] headed by two serpents facing one another. In order to achieve this rank, a young celibate priest must spend time studying and writing. Each brotherhood has its rules concerning the requirements for a vartabed's rank, and these requirements are essentially academic in nature. The rank, consisting of four degrees, is bestowed in church by a bishop who is himself a holder of the four degrees. In today's church most celibate priests are ultimately raised to the rank of vartabed in recognition of intellectual service to the church, and other achievements during the first few years after their ordination.

Dzayrakooyñ Vartabed

Dzayrakooyñ vartabed is a *vartabed* with a higher rank consisting of ten degrees. In order to attain that rank one must dedicate himself to study and writing and present a dissertation on a church-related topic. The rank is bestowed in church by a bishop who is himself a holder of the same degree. This degree or rank corresponds to the western ‘doctor of theology.’ There are relatively few *dzayrakooyñ vartabeds* in the Armenian Church. For example, only seven of the eighty-three members of the brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin are *dzayrakooyñ vartabeds*.

DEACON [*Sargavak*]

The English word Deacon derives from the Greek *diakonos*, which means a ‘servant’ or ‘attendant.’ Deacons are known from the New Testament, where they appear as attendants helping the presbyters and bishops. There are two separate ranks within the order: that of a full deacon, which we call proto-deacon; and that of a sub-deacon.

Sub-deacon has practically vanished at the parish level as a separate rank, and the title sub-deacon is erroneously applied to stole-bearers. Today it is simultaneously bestowed on those who are being ordained to the diaconate.

MINOR ORDERS [*T'bir*]

The minor orders in the Armenian Church were originally two: psalmodist [*saghmoserkoo*] and lector [*verdzanogh* or *untertsogh*]. In the Middle Ages, under Crusader influence, the Armenian Church introduced the four minor ranks, taking them from the ritual of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. These, namely the ranks of porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte, have been abandoned by the Western Church but are still retained in our tradition and bestowed on young children and youth. They permit them to serve as clerks

and tend to the physical and liturgical needs of the church and services. The holders of the minor ranks can serve inside the chancel but not on the altar. Only the acolytes accompany the priest and the deacons on the altar.

– *Fr. Krikor Maksoudian*

THE HIERARCHICAL SEES

A REVIEW OF THE FOUR MAJOR BASES OF OPERATION OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

- The See of Holy Etchmiadzin
- The Great House of Cilicia
- Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Patriarchate of Constantinople

THE SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN

The Catholicate of All Armenians is located in the monastic complex of Holy Etchmiadzin, which is now in the town of Etchmiadzin, thirteen miles to the west of Yerevan, the capital of the Republic of Armenia. The catholicate includes the permanent headquarters and residence of the Catholicos of All Armenians and is the spiritual center of the Armenian Church.

The name Etchmiadzin is a compound word in Armenian consisting of two elements: *etch*, meaning ‘descent’ and *Miadzin*, meaning ‘the Only Begotten.’ According to Armenian records from the fifth century, St. Gregory the Illuminator, the enlightener of the Armenian nation and the founder of



Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, 303 A.D.

the catholicate as an institution, saw a vision of Christ descending from heaven and striking the ground with a golden hammer. The site, according to St. Gregory, was next to the court of King Drtad in the capital Vagharshabad, the present-day Etchmiadzin. St. Gregory built an altar on the site of the descent and surrounded it with a wall. The structure, soon thereafter converted to a church, represented the earliest phase of the present-day cathedral and served as the seat of the chief bishops of Armenia until the 470s, when for political reasons the Holy See was transferred to the nearby town of Tovin (Dvin), then the capital of Persian Armenia.

After almost one thousand years of peregrination as a result of political upheavals and dispersion of Armenians, the Holy See was located in Holy Etchmiadzin in 1441. The ancient site was once again chosen as the seat of the catholicate for two reasons: a) it had been the original seat of the catholicoi of Armenia; b) it was the holiest site in Armenia, namely the place where Christ had descended and touched the Armenian soil. Even during the ten centuries of peregrination of the catholicate, Holy Etchmiadzin had always been a most important shrine and a popular center of pilgrimage.

The Catholicate of All Armenians is also the administrative center of the Armenian Church. It extends its jurisdiction over the patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople (Istanbul) and all the dioceses throughout the

world, save those that are subject to the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia. The two patriarchs and all the primates as well as bishops at large, save for the ones under the Cilician catholicate, are ipso facto members of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin, since they have received their episcopal ordination in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin from the hand of the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Once every seven years, the Catholicos of All Armenians blesses the Holy *Muron* ('Chrism,' the symbol of the Holy Spirit pronounced *myooron*), which is then distributed to all the dioceses throughout the world. The bishops use the Holy *Muron* to anoint new churches, altars, crosses and holy pictures as well as the foreheads and hands of those who are being ordained priests. Our priests use it in order to anoint the newly baptized. They also pour it into the water in the font during Baptism.

The Catholicos of All Armenians, as the supreme patriarch and the administrative head of the Armenian Church, is elected to that position by the National-Ecclesiastical Assembly, the highest body in the church, consisting of clerical as well as lay representatives from all the jurisdictions of the Armenian Church. The assembly convenes in Holy Etchmiadzin not only to elect a new catholicos, but also to make decisions about administrative, liturgical, ecclesiological and even doctrinal issues. The Catholicos of All Armenians is accountable to the National-Ecclesiastical Assembly, to which he presents his reports.

The Catholicos of All Armenians is assisted in administering his responsibilities by the Supreme Spiritual Council, which is elected by the National-Ecclesiastical Assembly. If members resign or die, the Catholicos of All Armenians makes the appointments until the next assembly. The Supreme Spiritual Council presently consists of thirteen archbishops and bishops and five lay members. The patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, who are also members, serve as co-chairmen of the council. The Catholicos of All Armenians presides over the meetings of the council.

The Catholicos of All Armenians also convenes all of his patriarchs, archbishops and bishops for consultation. Unlike some of the other ancient Christian churches, the Armenian Church does not have, and has never had, an official synod or conclave of bishops. The bishops' meetings, as stated, are mere consultations.

The Holy See operates from a monastic setting and reaches out to the faithful who attend the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin and other monasteries under its jurisdiction. The catholicate is surrounded by monastic buildings that house the members of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin, who participate in the actual operation of the administrative work of the catholicate. Archbishops, bishops, young clergy and even deacons are in charge of various departments and programs in the monastery, which houses: a large seminary, the renowned Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, the chancellery of the Holy See, several museums, a printing press and a publishing house, an audio-visual studio, an ecumenical relations department, a baptistery and several other divisions. The Holy See also runs operations that are outside the monastic complex. Among these are two seminaries in Armenia, one in Sevan and the other in Shirak, active centers for youth at various sites in Armenia, the Center for Christian Education and a number of monastic complexes throughout Armenia.

Besides ordaining bishops and sending Holy *Muron* for and to all the diocesan jurisdictions, the Holy See reaches out to those of us who live in far-away countries by providing priests for our parishes. Two of our past primates and several of our present clergy are graduates of the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. The Catholicoi of All Armenians have also taken full advantage of modern technological advances and since the time of His Holiness Vasken I of Blessed Memory, they have made regular and frequent pastoral visits to our shores, thus creating a great deal of interest and activity. In addition to these the Catholicos of All Armenians oversees the operation of the entire church and gives frequent directives to the primates concerning doctrinal, administrative, ecumenical and Armenian issues of an international scale.

THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA

The headquarters of the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia is located in Antelias, a coastal suburb of Beirut, Lebanon. The original home of the seat of the catholicate prior to the 1915-1923 Armenian Genocide had been Sis (modern town of Kozan in Cilicia, south central Turkey), the once capital of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. As a result of the evacuation of Cilicia in 1921, the majority of the Armenians living in that province migrated to Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus, which were at that time, with the exception of Aleppo and northern Syria, under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In the 1920s, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem agreed to let the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia tend to the spiritual needs of the Cilician Armenians now residing in lands under its jurisdiction. The agreement was officially sanctioned by the Catholicos of All Armenians and the Supreme Spiritual Council in 1929. The one-time American orphanage complex in Antelias was taken over by the catholicate and converted into a monastery.

The existence of two catholicates in the Armenian Church requires an explanation. In her formative years (fourth and fifth centuries) the Church of Armenia, or Greater Armenia to be more exact, was under one chief bishop, who was later given the title catholicos, an adjective in Greek meaning ‘universal (bishop).’ This adjective stressed the fact that the catholicos’ authority was universally accepted throughout Greater Armenia of that time. In the second half of the fourth century the northern, eastern and southeastern provinces of the country in particular, despite their overwhelming Armenian population, had been seized by the Persians and appended to other lands. The Armenians in these areas accepted the jurisdiction of the churches of Georgia and Caucasian Albania, which were in union with the Armenian Church and considered the see or office of the chief bishop of Armenia as their metropolitan see. At the beginning of the seventh century, the Georgian Church rebelled and severed its ties with the Armenian Church, while the

Church of Caucasian Albania continued to maintain her ties. In the sixth century, the Catholicate of Albania was transferred to the city of Bartav in the Uti province of historic Armenia and the Armenian population became more predominant in the Church of Caucasian Albania. During the high Middle Ages under the Bagratid princes and kings, the Catholicate of Albania continued to remain faithful to the Armenian catholicate. The catholicoi of Albania were at that time and thereafter ordained by the catholicoi of Armenia. This tradition continued until the end of the Albanian catholicate in the early decades of the 19th century.

In the eighth and ninth centuries and thereafter, the Armenian fathers, in theological and doctrinal as well as ecclesiological discussions with the Byzantines, classified the Catholicate of Albania as an independent local jurisdiction headed by an archbishop bearing the title of catholicos. Theologically, doctrinally, liturgically and linguistically the Church of Albania was identical with the Armenian Church. It tended to the spiritual needs of Armenians in the eastern provinces but it had a separate hierarchy. Thus, historical precedent and geo-political divisions had laid the groundwork for the institution of the local catholicate. During the ensuing centuries other local catholicates were established at different places as a result of the dispersion of the Armenian people particularly after the Seljuk invasions in the middle half of the 11th century. In the 18th century, there were beside the Catholicate of All Armenians three other legitimate local jurisdictions, namely the Catholicate of Albania, the Catholicate of Aghtamar and the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia. At various times during the same period these sees also had illegitimate contenders who also claimed the pontifical title. The Russian occupation of the Caucasus put an end to the Catholicate of Albania and its last locum tenens agreed to accept the jurisdiction of Holy Etchmiadzin. The Catholicate of Aghtamar, which had come into being at the beginning of the 12th century, ended as a result of the Armenian Genocide. The only one that remained was the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia.

The Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia emerged in 1441 when the Catholicate of All Armenians was transferred to Holy Etchmiadzin. The incumbent catholicos decided to remain in Cilicia for reasons unknown to us today. After a short lapse of time after his demise, a new catholicos emerged and the see was restored. For a while some of the western dioceses in Asia Minor wavered in their allegiance between the two catholicates, but after occasional frictions, the borders of the two jurisdictions were resolved in an official meeting between the Catholicos of All Armenians and the catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. The event took place in Jerusalem in 1652.

The monastery of the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia is the administrative center of the Armenian prelaties in Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus. Since 1956, the Catholicate of Cilicia has been in dispute for taking over the dioceses in Iran and Greece, for establishing prelaties in the United States and Canada, and pastorates in a number of other places.

The Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia has a totally different administrative structure that is derived from the Armenian Constitution of the Ottoman Empire. The hierarchical and ecclesiastical structures, however, are identical with that of the See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

The Catholicos of the Greate House of Cilicia ordains his bishops in the cathedral of St. Kreekor Loosavoreech and blesses Holy *Muron* once every seven years. Beside the cathedral, there is a small chapel dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide, where one can see the bones of slaughtered Armenians, which were gathered from the deserts of Syria, exhibited behind glass casings. The monastic buildings include the residence of the brotherhood, the library, the mausoleum for the deceased members of the brotherhood, the residence of the catholicos, a printing press renowned for its publications, an impressive museum and other structures. The seminary, which was originally in the monastery, is now in a nearby village on the slope of the mountain at whose foot is the village of Antelias.

The Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia also tends to the spiritual, educational, cultural and social needs of its flock. Its seminary trains priests for its parishes and its educational department. The catholicate is also actively involved in ecumenical relations and participates in a number of inter-denominational and inter-religious Middle Eastern organizations.

PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is located in the Old City of Jerusalem (Israel), in the Armenian Quarter which comprises one-sixth of the old city and occupies the entire southwest corner of the town. The Armenian Patriarch and the Brotherhood of St. James, together with the Greek and Roman Catholic patriarchs, are the sole guardians of the Dominical Sites, the holiest shrines of Christendom.

The Armenian presence in Jerusalem dates back to early Christian times. From as early as the fourth century we have records about Armenian monks in the Holy Land. Over the ensuing centuries Armenian monks and pilgrims built several monasteries, with as many as seventy institutions mentioned by a seventh century Armenian writer. Armenian mosaics with Armenian inscriptions from the fifth and sixth centuries indicate a very early Armenian presence in the city.

Originally, the city of Jerusalem had one bishop and chronologically first in the line of bishops had been St. James, the Brother of the Lord. Armenian bishops from Greater Armenia visited the Holy Land and some may have lived there for extended periods of time. These pilgrim bishops, priests and laymen probably suffered persecution under Byzantine rule as a result of the schism in the church after the Council of Chalcedon in 451, since the bishops of Jerusalem adhered to the faith of the Byzantine Empire, whereas the Armenians remained true to the doctrines of the early church. When the Arabs seized Jerusalem in 637, the Armenians took the opportunity to set

up their own bishop, a cleric named Abraham, to head the followers of the Armenian faith. It became traditional for the Armenian patriarchs to consider this Abraham as the first of the 91 succeeding bishops.

The original title of the Armenian patriarchs of Jerusalem was Bishop/ Archbishop of Jerusalem. In the later Middle Ages the archbishops of Jerusalem assumed the title of patriarch and received recognition as such from the Mamluk rulers of Egypt, who were at that time in possession of the Holy Land.

Today the patriarchate of Jerusalem occupies the third place in the hierarchy of the Armenian Church after the Catholicate of All Armenians and that of the Great House of Cilicia. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is subject to the jurisdiction of the Catholicate of All Armenians and its bishops as a rule are ordained in Holy Etchmiadzin by the Catholicos of All Armenians. Thus, the bishops are members of both the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Brotherhood of St. James. There are also primates of dioceses under the direct jurisdiction of Holy Etchmiadzin who are members of the Brotherhood of St. James but are presently not resident members of the St. James Monastery.

The patriarchate of Jerusalem extends its jurisdiction over all of Israel and Jordan where there are a number of Armenian communities with churches and schools. The main preoccupation of the patriarchate, however, is to tend to the holiest sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In the dominical sites in Jerusalem, the patriarchate occupies the monastery of St. James located in the Armenian quarter. Attached to it is the monastery of the Holy Archangels and close to these but outside the walls of the Old City is the monastery of Holy Savior where the Armenian cemetery is located. Near the garden of Gethsemane is the monastery of Dormition of the Holy Virgin, which was the residence of Mary Mother-of-God and subsequently her grave. The ancient subterranean church at that site is owned by the Armenians and the Greeks.

Outside Jerusalem, the most important site is the church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem, which the Armenians share with the Greeks and the Roman Catholics. On the west side of the church and attached to it with a small vestibule is the Armenian monastery. In the vicinity of Bethlehem is the Armenian retreat of Baron Der. The olive orchards on this land surround a large three-storied structure, namely the local headquarters of the patriarchate, and several caves and hermits' cells.

The patriarchate also possesses a medieval monastery, named after St. Nicholas, on the Mediterranean in the town of Jaffa. Another monastery named after St. George is located in Ramleh. The town of Haifa has a small church that serves the Armenians in that area. The monasteries and the churches are headed by monks appointed by the patriarchate. They serve as abbots and deans and cater to the spiritual needs of the Armenians. Amman, the capital of Jordan, is the seat of a bishop whose office is referred to as that of patriarchal vicar. He presides over the Armenian parishes and communities in Jordan.

St. James Monastery is the headquarters of the patriarchate. The monastery houses an ancient cathedral and several chapels. It is surrounded with tall walls with gates that are closed in the evening and opened in the morning. Inside the complex there are monks who live in their quarters and scores of Armenian families. These are the progeny of survivors of the Genocide of 1915 or of refugees who sought shelter during the Arab-Israeli War in the late 1940s and early 1950s. the residence of the patriarch as well as the divan are all within the same complex, which also includes a large library, a museum, manuscript library, the old printing press (the oldest in the city) an Armenian day school and other institutions. Across the street that runs in front of the complex is a large building that is presently the seminary of the patriarchate and near it is the new printing press.

The seminary of the patriarchate has been the source of young clergy for several decades. A large number of primates and parish priests pres-



Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

ently serving in various parishes throughout the world are graduates of the seminary. At various times St. James Monastery has emerged as an important liturgical and intellectual center. It was also known for its artists and craftsmen, both religious and secular.

St. James Monastery is also known as one of the most prolific publishing houses outside of Armenia. Since the mid- 19th century, it emerged as the main publisher of liturgical texts, especially those

used in parishes all over the world. The press also published many valuable studies and reference works and is still in the process of publishing new works that are useful for both scholars and laymen.

The patriarch of Jerusalem is elected by the members of the General Assembly of the Brotherhood, which is the highest body that has a final say. The patriarch presides over the assembly, which consists of all the members of the brotherhood throughout the world. The assembly elects the Executive Council that conducts the business of the patriarchate under the immediate supervision of the patriarch. All the heads of divisions, the deans and people in administrative and managerial position are accountable to the Executive Council, which is also the body that appoints these people to their posts. The only exception to this is the Grand Sacristan, who like the patriarch, is elected by the assembly and is de facto in charge of liturgical matters and general monastic discipline.

The patriarch of Jerusalem is also the host of all the Armenians who visit the dominical sites as pilgrims. In that respect it has always been a home

away from home for our people, and the truth of that became apparent in 1915 and 1947, when the Brotherhood hosted Armenian refugees by providing shelter and feeding them for several years.

PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople was traditionally established in 1461, when Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror ordered Armenians and Turks to settle inside the city of Constantinople, newly conquered by the Ottomans, and had Archbishop Hovageem (Joachim), the prelate of Bursa, move to his capital and preside as the spiritual head of the Armenians in his realm. The same tradition maintains that Sultan Mehmed issued an edict that specified all the rights he had granted to Archbishop Hovageem. The edict was unfortunately destroyed during one of the fires that occurred frequently in the Constantinople churches, thus depriving us of a very important document and a source of information. Whatever the extent and nature of their jurisdiction and their exact title may have been, later Armenian patriarchs of Constantinople traced back their line to Hovageem, considering him the first patriarch. Yet historical evidence indicates that there were Armenian bishops in and around Constantinople presumably tending to the spiritual needs of Armenians in the region prior to the Ottoman occupation.

Modern scholars are now of the opinion that the application of the title patriarch is from the early decades of the 16th century and seems to be somehow synchronic with the grant of certain property rights to the Armenian Church by the renowned Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent. The Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople, from the perspective of the Armenian Church tradition, was initially an episcopal see. The fact that it was located at the Ottoman capital and recognized by the Ottoman government as the official head of the Armenians played an important role in its development as an important hierarchical see. What was initially a distant diocese gradually emerged, especially in the course of the 18th and 19th

centuries, as the sole authority that the Ottomans officially recognized as the head of the Armenian minority. The patriarchate ultimately extended its jurisdiction over the patriarchate of Jerusalem and the catholicates of Aghtamar and the Great House of Cilicia, while it recognized the jurisdiction of the see of the Catholicos of All Armenians only in spiritual, doctrinal and liturgical matters, received from it Holy Chrism [*Muron*] and sent candidates of its choice to Holy Etchmiadzin for episcopal ordination.

The Armenian patriarchs of Constantinople, like all bishops, traditionally had a great deal of authority over their jurisdiction, but since the beginning, local lay leaders, many in the service of the Ottoman court, had a say in the affairs of the patriarchate. In time, this developed into an institution and during the 18th and early 19th centuries a number of councils were formally established for administrative purposes. Ultimately these were all institutionalized by the Armenian Constitution that was approved by the Ottoman Court in 1863. This document allowed the Armenians to conduct the administration of their internal religious, educational, social and community affairs through an assembly of representatives elected by popular vote. The assembly elected the patriarch who presided over its sessions and was responsible for its enforcing its resolutions.

In the eyes of the Ottoman government, the Armenian patriarch was the head of the Armenian millet, which included the Armenians and a number of other peoples and religious minorities such as the Copts, the Assyrians, the Yazedis and the Nestorian Christians. Since the Ottoman state recognized no division between church and state, the patriarchate, which in its eyes was like a ministry, was in charge of the social welfare and the educational needs of the community. This situation ceased with the fall of the Ottoman Empire soon after World War I and the former status of the Armenian patriarchate changed as a result of the emergence of new countries on the territories of the empire and the depletion of the Armenian population of eastern Anatolia and western Armenia during and after the genocide.

Today the Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople extends its jurisdiction mainly over Istanbul and its suburbs where Armenians still live and constitute the largest Christian minority in Turkey. Outside of Istanbul the patriarchate has only a small number of churches in Turkey and one parish in Crete.

The patriarchate is physically located in Istanbul, at Kumkapi. It consists of a three-storied structure in the immediate vicinity of the cathedral and two churches. In the 1950s, the Soorp Khatch Seminary was established for the preparation of clergy, but for various reasons it was converted to a regular school. At present candidates for the priesthood receive tutorial education on the premises of the patriarchate.

In our days the patriarchs of Istanbul are looked upon by the Turkish government as merely spiritual leaders. Like the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Patriarch of Constantinople is under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos of All Armenians. All the candidates of the episcopal rank coming from the patriarchate are ordained in Holy Etchmiadzin by the hand of the Catholicos of All Armenians. In ecclesiastical and liturgical context the Patriarch of Constantinople is ranked after the patriarch of Jerusalem, out of respect for the Holy City. The two patriarchs are ex-officio co-chairmen of the Supreme Spiritual Council of Holy Etchmiadzin.

– Fr. Krikor Maksoudian

THE HOLY BIBLE

[*Asdvadzashoonch*]

*Its interpretation and influence in shaping early Armenian
Christian life, teachings, worship and customs*



First Armenian Bible, printed in Amsterdam, 1666.

Armenians use several words to refer to the Bible. One of these words is *Asdvadzashoonch*, meaning “breathed by God” which reinforces a theological principle in the Armenian Church that the Bible is a collection of books breathed upon, or inspired by God.

Another word is *Soorp Keerk*, “Holy Book.” For Armenians, the Bible is “the Holy Book” because it contains revelations about God. It invites the readers to a life of holiness.

As part of the Orthodox branch of the Universal Church of Christ, the Armenian Church believes that the books of the Bible were written, edited, compiled and preserved by divine inspiration. God is the source and origin of the biblical message. As such, God is the author of the Bible. Therefore, another common title for the Bible among the Armenians is “the Word of God.” Obviously, this does not mean that every word in the Bible was written or dictated by God. Words, by definition, are human. As such, the biblical text is comprised of human words of several languages, such as Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and it contains all the markings of the authors, as well as the culture and time during which the words were written.

THE ARMENIAN BIBLE

The Bible was heard in Armenia through the preaching of Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew. In the year A.D. 301, when St. Gregory the Parthian succeeded in converting the King of Armenia, Drtad the Third, Christianity became the official religion of Armenia and the first to accept Christianity as state religion. Immediately groups of missionaries were sent all over Armenia to teach and baptize the Armenians. One major obstacle was the absence of an Armenian version of the Bible, because Armenians did not have their own alphabet. The Greek and Syriac versions of the Bible that the evangelizers brought with them were used and local priests translated the specific texts into Armenian orally.

After the invention of the Armenian alphabet, St. Mesrob Mashdots and his team of monks spearheaded an aggressive evangelical movement to translate not only the books of the Bible, but also the commentaries about them. Within a few decades a library of Armenian literature was created.

The earliest accounts of the Armenian translation of the Bible are recorded in the writings of the fifth century historians Goriun, Movses Khorenatsi and Ghazar Parbetsi, who confirm that the translation of the Bible into Armenian went through two phases. The first was initiated by St. Mashdots immediately after the invention of the Armenian alphabet (A.D. 405). The translation process from Syriac began with the Book of Proverbs and was concluded in the capital city of Vagharshabad in Armenia, with the support of the reigning Catholicos Sahag the First.

The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) marks the beginning of the second phase of the translation, which continued for several years. Catholicos Sahag and St. Mashdots had already sent several of their disciples to participate in the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) who returned to Armenia with “reliable copies” of the books of the Bible.

The fifth century translation started a wave of copying the Bible. Monasteries, dioceses and royal palaces had their own scriptoriums. Hundreds of thousands of copies were made in the various towns and villages of Armenia. In one city alone, Siunik, for example, there were more than 10,000 copies in the 12th century, when the city was ransacked by the invading armies and all the manuscripts were burnt.

The Armenian translation of the Bible, in addition to being one of the earliest into a non-biblical language, was also one of the most accurate. Many non-Armenian scholars admiring its beauty and accuracy have considered it the “Queen of Translations.” The Armenian Church observes officially the translation of the Bible every year in October.

INTERPRETATION

To understand and interpret the Bible correctly it is essential to consider the background of its writers. Equally important is to identify to whom these documents were addressed and what the problems and conditions of that specific community were at the time. Another important factor is to keep the Bible in its context and consider all its interrelated conditions. Misinterpretation of the Bible has and continues to cause divisiveness in the universal church, allowing heretical movements to spread.

The books of the Bible relate to historical, geographical, scientific, cultural, and many other factors, however, it's most essential purpose is to make God's revelation eternal and accessible to all generations. Interpretations begin with the process of peeling off the various layers of available data, and revealing the divine messages contained within and their relevance to our daily lives.

THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

The word "canon" means a measuring rod or a standard of guidance. The canon of the Bible, thus, is the list containing the names of the book that make up the Bible, which took several centuries to gestate.

The earliest reference to biblical books can be found at the time of Moses. In Deuteronomy 31:25-26, we read about Moses commanding his followers to keep the book of law, i.e, the Torah, in the Ark of the Covenant. We know that these books, together with that of Joshua, were kept in the ark and carried with it during the wilderness experience of the Israelites. Solomon is accredited for finding a library and collecting the sacred books "about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings" (2 Maccabees 2:13).

Around year 300 B.C., the Jews of Alexandria and in the Diaspora had lost their Hebrew language and were using the Greek language. This situation necessitated the translation of their Bible, i.e. our Old Testament, into the Greek language known as the Septuagint, a Latin word meaning “seventy.” According to a Jewish tradition, seventy translators, independent of each other, translated the Bible into Greek and ended up with seventy identical translations. The Jewish religious authorities, before Christ, accepted the Septuagint as the official version of the Bible. From the New Testament and other contemporary writings, it is evident that the disciples knew of the Septuagint version of the Bible. Most of the quotations of Christ in the New Testament are from the Septuagint version.

Martin Luther, reacting to the Roman Catholic tradition, rejected the Latin as the base text for the translation of the Bible and followed the example of Jerome in separating all the books, which were in the Septuagint and not in the earlier Hebrew manuscripts. He called these books that were missing in the Hebrew manuscripts “Apocrypha,” a Greek word for “hidden.” The term has been accepted by the Armenian Church, all the Orthodox and Catholic churches as part of the Canon of the Bible, but the Protestants reject it.

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

The books of the Bible are classified into two major groups: Old Testament and New Testament. “Testament” means “treaty,” “contract,” or “covenant.” The Armenian word for it is *Gdagaran*. The Bible refers to the agreements that God established with His people. In the first two chapters of Genesis, for example, God’s first “testament” was with Adam and Eve. He gave them the authority over all the beasts and creatures and in return commanded them they do not eat from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Adam and Eve chose to ignore God’s commandment, which was not an exception. As we continue reading the book of Genesis and the rest of

the Bible, we realize that the people have always ignored God's commandments and violated the rules of their agreements with Him.

The books of the Bible beginning with Genesis until the end of Malachi reveal how God manifests His commandments and how people live by these covenants or ignore them. These books, called "Old Testament" by Christians, also contain narration of God's wrath on those who constantly forgot their responsibilities and ignored God's commandments. He told them that the time is approaching when he will reject them as they rejected Him, and invite those who believe in His new covenant to inherit His kingdom (Jeremiah 31: 31-37).

When God realized that the time had come to establish the last and eternal "testament," He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to establish the new covenant, sealed with His blood. The commandments of the New Testament were taught by Jesus Christ, as witnessed and handed down by His apostles.

Thus, the "Old Testament" includes the books recalling the history, revelation and prophecies concerning the old covenants of God, and "New Testament," is comprised of the books, letters and prophetic oracles written concerning God's new covenant through His son Jesus Christ.

OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament can be classified into four groups:

1. **Pentateuch:** this term means "five containers," referring to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Together these books constitute the Law for which the Hebrew word Torah is commonly used. They offer a review of the history of God's dealing with His people, from creation of the world to the death and burial of Moses and his

succession by Joshua. These books record the establishment of Israel as the people of God as well as His commandments.

2. **Historical Books:** this category includes – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and books of Maccabees. They narrate the history of the people of God, as well as Israel’s relationship with God and with her neighboring nations.

3. **Books of Wisdom:** this category includes – the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles (Song of Songs), Wisdom, and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus). They examine issues related to the lives of the people of God and their salvation.

4. **Prophetic books:** this category includes – the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Called prophetic books, they contain oracles delivered and written by prophets to whom God had revealed Himself, and who prophesied about future events. These prophetic oracles are about Israel, most of them written hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth. They prophesied about His birth, miracles, suffering, crucifixion and resurrection, which were fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as confirmed by the books of the New Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament can also be classified into four groups:

1. **Gospels:** this category includes the first four books of the New Testament – the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The term Gospel comes from the archaic English compound word, “God-Spell” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Armenian word for “Gospel” is *Avedaran*, meaning “bearer of

good news.” Gospels are the depositories of the good news of our salvation through the events of Jesus’ birth, ministry, miracles, passion, crucifixion, death and resurrection.

2. **The Book of Acts:** this book discusses the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles in the early church. It contains certain historical information that is not recorded anywhere else in the Bible, such as the ascension of our Lord, the descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), and the ordination of the early church ministers, deacons and priests.

3. **Epistles:** this category includes, St. Paul’s letters to the Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the First and Second Epistles of Peter, the First, Second and Third Epistles of St. John, and the Epistle of Jude. These are actual letters written by the apostles or their disciples. These letters discuss the faith, liturgical practices, moral responsibilities and problems of the early Christian communities.

4. **The Book of Revelation:** this book is also called the Apocalypse, a term which comes from a Greek word meaning “the disclosure of that which is hidden or unknown.” The Greek word “apocalypse” is used in the title verse of the book, “the apocalypse of Jesus Christ” to emphasize that this book unveils facts about heaven and earth, past and present and future. The Book of Revelation combines letters and prophetic oracles using a very rich symbolic language. The main theme of the book is the prophecy about the coming Day of Judgment, and the establishment of the eternal and universal rule of God, once and for all.

ARMENIANS AND THE BIBLE

The fifth century historian, St. Yeghishe, sums up the role that the Bible plays in the life of the Armenian people by stating that, “We recognize the gospel as our father and the apostolic universal church as our mother. Let no one separate us from them.”¹ In other words, the Armenian people cannot exist without the Holy Bible and the church.

The role of the daily reading of the Bible in the Armenian spirituality is likened to the function of water or rain in the life of the trees. St. Gregory of Nareg states, “Indeed, what kind of water nourishes a tree and makes it fruitful and filled with leaves, the way the readings of the divine books does to the mind? Or, what kind of rain nourishes plants the way the Holy Scriptures does the souls of those who love God?”²

Unceasing reading of the scriptures, which some may find repetitious, is the only way to explore their deeper meaning. The eighth century father of the Church, Krikor of Arsharoonik, teaches his disciples saying, “In order that my repetition of the same words of salvation does not bore you, remind yourself of the feather of a peacock. The more you explore it the more its gorgeous beauty makes you forget what you saw earlier. Likewise the mystery of the scriptures, the more you repeat it the more it clarifies the mystery of our salvation.”³

The fundamental role that the Holy Bible continues to play in the ethos of the Armenian people was translated into liturgical expressions and public celebrations. The Book of Psalms, for example, remains throughout the centuries the main hymnal and book of prayer of the Armenian Church. Almost all of the Armenian prayers and hymns are either anthologies of biblical verses, or commentaries and reflections concerning biblical events.

Scripture readings are incorporated into the daily services of the Armenian Church as well as the Divine Liturgy. The biblical text has been

divided into passages that are assigned for daily readings, according to the feast or theme of the day. The collection of these biblical passages based on their sequence of reading during the liturgical calendar is called “Lectionary.” One of the important didactic parts of the Divine Liturgy in the Armenian Church is the audible reading and proclamation of the word of God from the Bible. This is traditionally followed by the sermon, which serves as a commentary on the biblical readings of the day.

– *Fr. Vahan Hovhanessian*

¹Eghishe, Matenagrutiwnk (Venice, 1859), p. 51.

²Grigor Narekatsi, Meknutiwnk Erg Ergoc Solomoni (Beirut, 1963), p. 276.

³Grigor Arsharuni, Meknutiwn Araradsots (Venice, 1964), p. 96.

THE SAINTS AND SACRAMENTS OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH



St. Gregory the Illuminator, by unknown
Armenian painter,
18th Century

“...Nations have produced heroes, outstanding men and women who have glorified their nation throughout history. Subsequent generations commemorate these people and their achievements both from gratitude for what they have done and, more importantly, in order to pass along the spirit that emanates from the lives of such exemplary individuals.”

– Patriarch Torkom Koushagian

THE SAINTS

During the course of the liturgical year, the Armenian Church commemorates hundreds of saints of both Armenian and non-Armenian origin, saints of non-Armenian origin comprising a majority. It is almost impossible to give a precise number, since many saints are associated with groups and some of these are in the thousands. All saints are remembered usually on the day of their execution and/or burial. Of these, only a few hundred are commemorated. While the remembrance day is set by month and date, the commemoration-day is not, since the liturgical year is based on Easter Sunday, which has no set date and moves between March 22 and April 25.

On the commemoration-day of a saint the deacon and the priest seek his/her intercession in some of the biddings and ascriptions. In churches named after a saint, the Divine Liturgy may be celebrated on the particular saint's day.

The saints of the Armenian Church can be categorized into three major groups: Old Testament saints, New Testament saints and post-Biblical saints. The Armenian Church shares with the other ancient churches of the East and the West the Old Testament, the New Testament and many of the post-Biblical saints which include those who flourished until 451, the year when a major split on theological grounds occurred among the Christian Church of the East.

Among the post-Biblical saints there are some that are of Armenian origin. A few of these, particularly the ones from Armenia Minor and Cappadocia to the west of Greater Armenia, are well known to Westerners and are accepted as major saints. One of the best known is St. Blaise or Blasius, who is still very popular in the Latin (Roman Catholic) West and is considered to be the patron of the sick. As for the saints of Greater Armenia, many of them are of Armenian origin, but there are some who are not. St. Gregory the Illuminator – the only saint of the Church of Armenia who is well known throughout the Orthodox, Latin and Anglican worlds – is a good example,

since according to tradition he was of Parthian ancestry and according to modern studies, a Greek-speaking missionary of Cappadocian origin.

In the early period of the Christian Church, saints' commemorations were not universally observed. The earliest saints of the church were the martyrs for the faith. The early Christians gathered once a year at the burial site of the martyr and remembered him/her by singing psalms. The gathering usually took place on the day of the execution and/or burial. This tradition was also observed in Armenia. Universal commemorations of martyrs and saints were established at a later period and given their present form of observance in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The Church of Armenia as well as the other Eastern churches operated in a geographical area that became the eastern frontier of Christendom throughout the Middle Ages. Conflicts of a religious nature frequently flared up with neighbors and oppressive regimes that ruled. Under her own kings and princes Armenia began to fight religious wars soon after her conversion to Christianity in 301. The nobility and the people, deprived of their independence already in 428, continued to defend their faith against Zoroastrian Persia, the Muslim caliphates and emirates, the Seljuks, the Mongols, the Mamluks of Egypt, the petty Islamic dynasties of the 14th and 15th centuries, the Iranians, the Ottomans, and even Christian powers such as the Byzantines and later the Latin Crusader states. Despite the execution of thousands during massacres over the course of sixteen centuries, the Armenian Church was careful in her selection of saints, since not every one killed qualified as a saint of the church. The church required clear evidence about the circumstances of martyrdom and sought eyewitness testimony.

Besides martyrs, the Armenian Church also recognized as saints people who had suffered in the name of Christ and remained firm in their faith. Such people were called confessors, and St. Gregory the Illuminator is an illustrious example of that category. The majority of the Armenian saints are either martyrs or confessors.

The Armenian Church also recognizes as saints still a third category of saintly people who have dedicated their lives to God and to the service of his church and people, and have made great contributions to the church either with their accomplishments or with their exemplary lives, or both. A good example of this category is St. Mesrob Mashtots who invented the Armenian Alphabet and initiated the colossal task of translating the Holy Scriptures into Armenian.

The saints of the Armenian Church prior to the conversion of the Armenian people in 301 comprise chronologically and categorically a distinct group since the church was an underground institution and was frequently persecuted by the state. The foremost and the first in this category of saints are the Holy Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, who brought Christianity to Armenia.

The Armenian Church also venerates the first Christian King Abgar of Edessa, who was converted by St. Thaddeus and the latter's successor Addai, who became the overseer of the Christians in Abgar's realm. Among the followers of the Holy Apostle Thaddeus in Armenia proper was a group of noblemen that survived the persecutions and lived in seclusion in remote mountain areas. These were known as Vosgians and Sookiasyans, as mentioned in "Christianity in Armenia."

There are certain martyrs of Armenian origin but outside of the jurisdictions of Greater Armenia who are venerated by other ancient churches but their names are not known. Still other saints of Armenian origin who lived in neighboring regions of Armenia in the period prior to the conversion of Armenia are officially recognized as saints of other churches, and are venerated by the Armenian Church.

A number of martyrs of the Church of Armenia who were contemporaries of St. Gregory the Illuminator were executed prior to or right at the time of the Christianization of Armenia. Among these are: St. Theodore Salahuni

from Western Armenia; forty nuns and their followers identified by the name of their leader Gayeeané and their most distinguished member Huripseemé. These ladies were executed at the order of King Drtad III of Armenia in about 300. St. Gregory's first job was to bury the bodies of these saints in the capital city of Vagharshabad. There he erected chapels over their burial sites. Churches were later built to replace these chapels and are presently popular sites of pilgrimage in the immediate vicinity of Holy Etchmiadzin.

The other saints connected with the conversion were the immediate associates of St. Gregory, including his two sons, Arisdagés and Vurtanés, who succeeded him as chief bishops of Armenia, his grandchildren (Kreekorees, chief bishop of Caucasian Albania) and Huseeg (who succeeded his father Vurtanés as chief bishop of Armenia), the latter's grandson Nersés the Great (chief bishop of Armenia), and St. Gregory's and his successors' close associate Bishop Daniel (who was of Syrian extraction). Among other associates of St. Gregory were the monks and hermits who lived in the vicinity of the present-day town of Mush in Western Armenia, where they founded the Monastery of St. Garabed (St. John the Precursor). As for the generals and soldiers who perished during a religious war against the Persians during the pontificate of St. Gregory's son Vurtanés, they are now commemorated together with the martyrs of the Vartanantz War of 451.

From the early and middle decades of the fourth century there is St. James, Bishop of Nisibis, in northern Syria, one of the fathers of the Holy Council of Nicea who is said to be related to St. Gregory. He traveled extensively in Armenia in quest of Noah's Ark. Though not an Armenian by birth, he is a very popular saint among the Armenians. Another countryman of James was Marutha, the bishop of Martyropolis (Mia Farkin) in northern Mesopotamia. Marutha was Armenian on his mother's side. He was one of the fathers who participated in the Holy Council of Constantinople in 391. Two other esteemed saints of the church of Caesarea whose family tracked back part of its ancestry to Armenian roots are St. Basil and his brother St. Gregory of Nyssa. Their writings were translated into Armenian almost at the begin-

ning of Armenian literature. Together with their third Cappadocian colleague St. Gregory Nazianzus, they are also the founders of Christian theology. Totally unrelated to the above saints but still a fourth century figure is St. Stephan of Oolnia, the son of immigrants from Greater Armenia, who was executed during the period of the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate near the present city of Marash, Turkey.

The middle of the fifth century was occupied with a bitter struggle against the king of kings of Iran and his government who tried to impose Zoroastrianism on the Armenians. In a decisive battle on May 25, 451, the Armenian armies were defeated and the commander-in-chief Vartan Mamigonian as well as a number of renowned noblemen and 1036 warriors were killed in battle.

During the ensuing years, the Persian government arrested, tried and exiled the heads of the noble families and the important clergymen of the land. The clergymen were mostly martyred in a remote province of Persia. Two clerics who survived suffered greatly and were later recognized as confessors. The church recognized as saints the executed clergymen, namely Catholicos Hovsép, the priest Ghevont, Bishop Sahag and a number of other priests and deacons.

St. Shushaneeg, the daughter of St. Vartan was executed three decades later at the order of her husband Vazken. He had converted to Zoroastrianism and tried to force his religion on her and their children. Shushaneeg was greatly venerated in northern Armenia not only by the Armenians but also by the Georgians, who still consider the Georgian version of her life as the first original literary work in their language.

The intolerance of the Zoroastrian Persian state especially towards people who had converted from the state religion to Christianity was the cause for the martyrdom of a number of hermits and laymen. Martyrs from the Arab period appear from the late seventh century. One of the first is a person of mixed Persian and Armenian origin, who had probably converted

to Islam and then came into the fold of the Armenian Church, receiving the name David. Since apostasy is punishable by death in the Islamic faith, David was martyred. The fate of Vahan of Koghtun was in many ways similar to that of David. Vahan was the son of the Lord of the district of Koghtun (now in Nakhichevan). After killing his father in battle, the Arab raiders took the young child and thousands of captives to Syria. He grew up among the natives and became very proficient in Arabic. Ultimately he entered the service of the caliph as a court secretary. Taking advantage of an amnesty concerning the captive Christians, he decided to return to his ancestral homeland. Upon his return, he was reaccepted in the church and married an Armenian woman. When the Arab authorities found out about his conversion they pursued him. After his capture they offered him the choice of conversion or death. Vahan preferred to remain firm in his faith and suffered martyrdom in 737 in northern Syria, where the chapel on his grave is still a pilgrimage site for Armenians and Syrian Christians.

Other victims of the Arab period include two princes of the Ardzrooni family, namely the brothers Sahag and Hamazasb, who were executed in prison soon after their participation in the rebellion of 775. The authorities gave the choice of conversion or death. The two brothers chose death, while a third brother succumbed to the weakness of the flesh and converted.

A quarter of a century later, two other brothers, Sahag and Hovsep, who lived in Karin (Erzurum), were martyred in 808. They were the children of an Arab prince and an Armenian woman who had raised them as Christians with their father's consent. When the Muslim authorities discovered that the sons of an Arab father dared to practice the Christian faith, they tried to persuade them to convert. A third brother, the youngest, succeeded in escaping to Byzantine territory, while the older two were ultimately apprehended. They were given the choice of conversion or death, and when they made their choice of remaining firm in their faith, they were beheaded.



The Battle of Avarayr (1482), from Vasbouragan, by Garabed of Bergri, MS. 1620, pp. 295b-296a, Collection of the Repository of Ancient Manuscripts (Madenataran) Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.

Four other brothers, Kohareenos, Radeegos, Dzameedes and Dookigos, from Sebaste in Armenia Minor suffered a similar fate in 1156. Their father, an Armenian Christian, had converted to Islam while in captivity, but his wife had remained a Christian and had raised her children as Christians. Like their predecessors, they were given the choice of conversion to Islam or death. They chose to die as Christians.

From the 12th until the 19th centuries there were several Armenians who were executed by the order of various Muslim potentates in Asia Minor, Armenia, the Crimea, which was under Muslim rule, and northwestern Iran. The church has recognized them as martyrs. They are remembered annually

on the day of their execution and their lives are read in church. Some of these neomartyrs stand out as representatives of their contemporaries who were massacred by the thousands.

The Armenian Church has only a very small number of clergymen saints who are neither martyrs nor confessors. As mentioned earlier, St. Gregory of Nareg and St. Nerses Shnorhali were classified among the ranks of the Holy Translators. Catholicos St. Hovhannes of Otsoon [719-728], a scholar who edited the Armenian Book of Hours and compiled the Book of Canons, lived a saintly life as a solitary. The vartabeds Hovhan of Vorodun [14th century] and his pupil Krikor of Datev [14th-15th centuries] were renowned theologians who spent their lives in educating priests in very adverse political conditions.

Catholicos St. Movses of Datev [1628-31] is neither a commemorated nor a remembered saint, but his name is mentioned during the Divine Liturgy, since he is responsible for the restoration of the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, the establishment of the seminary of the Holy See and, most important, the religious and cultural revival of the early 17th century. The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem has two saints of a similar category that are remembered locally. The name of the meritorious Krikor Baronder became well-known recently as a result of the Israeli army's occupation of the Baron Der land near Bethlehem. Krikor Baronder was patriarch in the first half of the 17th century and exerted much energy in order to save the Armenian holdings in the Holy Land. Almost a century later, his namesake Patriarch Krikor the Chain-bearer did the same thing. In order to impress the Armenian public with the seriousness of the situation, he carried a heavy chain around his neck and promised to take it off only when the tremendous debts of the patriarchate had been paid. The chain is presently kept in the vestry of St. James Cathedral in Jerusalem.

Like the other older churches, the Armenians venerate the relics of the saints, ask for their intercession and go on pilgrimage to sites associated with

them. They venerate equally the non-Armenian and the Armenian saints, and pilgrimage is not restricted only to Armenian sites.

– *Fr. Krikor Maksoudian*

SAINTS AND DATE OF MARTYRDOM OR DEATH

Santookht, Virgin Princess	First century
Atteh	A.D. 36
Apkar, King	First century
Vosgeyan Priests	A.D. 107
Sookiasians	A.D. 130
Hripsimeh, Kayaneh and their Companions	c.A.D. 265
Nooneh and Maneh, Nuns	c.A.D. 320
Krikor Loosavorich (Gregory the Illuminator)	A.D. 326
King Drtad/Queen Ashkhen and Princess Khosrovitookht	c.A.D. 330
Andon and Gronites	c.A.D. 330
Aristages, Catholicos	A.D. 333
Vertanes, Catholicos	A.D. 341
Krikoris, Bishop	c.A.D. 345
Hoosig, Catholicos	A.D. 347
Daniel, Bishop	A.D. 348
Nerses the Great, Catholicos	A.D. 373
Sahag Bartev, Catholicos	A.D. 437
Mesrob the Vartabed (known as Mashdots)	A.D. 438
Stepanos Oolnetzi and his Companions	c.A.D. 450
Adovmyan Generals and their Armies	c. A.D. 451 & 853
Vartanank: St. Vartan the Brave and 1036 Martyrs	A.D. 451

Levontian Fathers	A.D. 454
Yeghisheh, Movses and Tavit	Fifth century
Tatool, Varos, Toomas	Fifth century
Shooshan	A.D. 470
Krikoris Rajig	A.D. 549
Asdvadzadoor Makhoj	A.D. 553
Seven Witnesses called Vegetarians	A.D. 604
Tavit Tvinetzi	A.D. 701
Hovhan Otznetzi (John of Otzoon)	c.A.D. 728
Vahan Koghtnatzi	A.D. 737
Sahag and Hamazasp Ardzroonik	A.D. 786
Sahag and Hovsep Garnetzi	A.D. 808
Krikor Naregatzi (Gregory of Nareg)	A.D. 1010
Koharinyank	A.D. 1156
Nerses Shnorhali (Nerses the Graceful)	A.D. 1173
Hovhannes Vorodnetzi (John of Vorodn)	A.D. 1388
Krikor Datevatzi (Gregory of Datev)	A.D. 1410

The preceding partial list of the most well-known saints of the Armenian Church is excerpted from Patriarch Torkom Koushagian's *Saints & Feasts*, as edited and paraphrased by Very Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian.

THE SACRAMENTS *[Khorhoort]*

The sacraments are the signs of God's love for all humanity, expressed symbolically in a language that relates to Christians all over the world. They are the sacred symbols of a divine plan we must follow to attain salvation in the heavenly kingdom.

There are seven rituals that are defined as sacraments and are basically the reenactment of what took place during the life of Jesus.

The following is a summary of those sacraments as related to each cornerstone of our lives. In the Armenian Church, the first three sacraments are given at the time of Baptism:

BAPTISM

Mgrdootiun

It is the responsibility of a Christian parent to baptize the child by the eighth day or up to 40th day after birth. The sacrament should be administered in a church, unless special health reasons require it to be done at home.

The Godfather *[Gnkahayr]* at the baptism must himself be someone who is baptized and confirmed in the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and, preferably, not a blood relative. The reason is to create a new and unique spiritual relationship. There is no provision for a Godmother. However, if it is desired to have a female represent the motherhood side of this association, it will be permissible to have a female participate during the ceremony.

CHRISMATION [CONFIRMATION]

Soorp Gnoonk

The newly baptized receives the Holy Spirit by the act of affirming the faith and promising to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

EUCCHARIST [HOLY COMMUNION]

Haghortootyoon

The child is administered the Holy Body and Holy Blood of Jesus Christ which binds us all to God and to each other. By receiving Christ the grand design of God's plan commences and the life of a Christian begins.

CONFESSION [RECONCILIATION]

Khosdovanootiun

The wayward life of sin and guilt is forgiven through repentance and the individual is re-instated in the Christian community.

MARRIAGE [HOLY CROWNING]

Soorp B'sag

Despite the fact that Jesus himself was not married, he held marriage as a sacred union. There were no specific religious ceremonies in those days. A decisive step to regulate the holy crowning service did not exist until the beginning of the 10th century.

The rite of crowning is the climax of the wedding service. The crowns are the signs of the glory and honor with which God crowns them during the sacrament. The groom and the bride are crowned as the king and queen of their own little kingdom, the home, which they expect to rule with wisdom, justice, and integrity. The rite of crowning is followed by the blessing of the common cup when a goblet of wine is blessed in remembrance of the marriage at Cana of Galilee in the presence of Christ. The drinking of the wine serves to impress the couple that from that moment on they will share everything in life – joy as well as sorrow.

No marriage can be solemnized in the Armenian Church if both parties have not received the sacraments of Christian baptism and confirmation. The major sacramental witness, also known as the Best Man [*Khach Yeghpayr*], should be a member of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church.

HOLY ORDERS [HOLY CROWNING]

Tsernatrootiun Yev Odzoom

It takes years of study and training to become a priest or deacon. Even before the formal education, there must be a special calling, without which one can never truly become a servant of God.

There is a three-fold ministry or rank of clergymen – deacon, priest, and bishop – who receive the Holy Orders. There are lesser orders that lead a young man to aspire to the major Holy Orders. The four minor ranks of clerk [*Tbir*] are: Door Keeper (porter), Reader (Lector), Exorcist, Acolyte and Sub-diaconate [*Gisasargavak*].

ANOINTING OF THE SICK AND DEPARTED

Verchin Odzoom

Anointing the sick has not been part of the Armenian Church's custom. Neither St. Gregory the Illuminator, nor the catholicoi have included the unction with the oil in our rituals. Christ himself did not anoint any sick person with such oil.

In the Armenian Church's tradition, whenever the priest visited a sick person, he prayed for his health and speedy recovery. At times he also put his hand over the sick' person's head.

– Fr. Daniel Findikyan

DO YOU WANT TO BE ADMIRER?

Do you want to be admired and loved as a saint?

Stay humble like the soil that stays underfoot.

Iron is strong, but it melts in the fire.

Stay pliant like water, that makes fire again.

– *Hovhannes Erzenqatsi Blouze (1230-1293)*

(translated by Diana Der Hovanessian and Marzbed Margossian, *Anthology of Armenian Poetry* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1978, p. 91).)

WELCOME TO
THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

WORSHIP, RITUAL AND HOLIDAYS



His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, presides over the Blessing of the Muron, held every seven years at Holy Etchmiadzin.

NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

THE NEW YEAR'S DAY [*Navasart*]

This was an occasion to celebrate the renewal of life cycle and economic prosperity. Animositities, anger and grudges between each other, if any, were set aside and friendships were renewed by visiting and offering holiday wishes. The men traditionally visited friends, while women and prospective grooms called on households where there were girls of marrying age, bringing apples, walnuts, hazelnuts and dried fruits. These presentations symbolize fecundity as well as the fertility of the orchards. Other rituals included decorating the door with crosses and red ribbons, spreading red garments outside to signal the coming of a prosperous year. Also, ritualistic bread was kneaded to ensure fertility and health for the animals. Today, New Year's Day continues to be one of fellowship and renewed friendships.

CHRISTMAS, JANUARY 6 [*Soorp Dznount*]

Armenians are the only Christians today who celebrate Christmas on January 6 instead of December 25. Why? The exact birthday of Christ has not been definitely established. Historically, the celebration of Christ's birth on January 6 by all Christian churches goes further back than that of December 25. As early as A.D. 386, January 6 was observed in Bethlehem as the date of Christ's birth and baptism, recognized as Theophany, a Greek work meaning Manifestation or Revelation of God.

In the Roman Empire December 25 was a day of high jinks, relating to the "Birth of the Sun," known as "Saturnalia." Just after the winter solstice the days begin to get longer. With the promise of longer days ahead, December 25 provided a logical reason for festive merrymaking. To prevent the faithful from participating in these "abominable" pagan celebrations, the Church

created a special day of its own. Thus began Christmas in the West, and it spread quickly to the East and all over the Roman Empire. Armenia had no reason to accept this date since it was neither part of the Roman Empire, nor did Armenians associate any pagan festivity with the date to divert their attention.

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD AT THE TEMPLE [*Diarnuntaratch*]

On the 40th day of the nativity of Jesus Christ – February 14 – the Armenian Church celebrates the presentation of Baby Jesus, Son of God, to the temple in Jerusalem.

The hymns chanted on this occasion contain references to the Son of God as “light” (“today Christ God dawned as light unto nations”). The faithful used candles or lanterns lit from the fire built in the narthex or nave, to carry light to their homes for the unlit lamps in the house.

Such practices have led generations of Armenian to observe the eve of *Diarnuntaratch* with a traditional bonfire in the church courtyard and kindled by the priest or a newly wed bridegroom. Evidently, this practice has survived from the time people worshipped fire or the sun. Such a feast in winter was also intended to give warmth and help speed the arrival of spring season. At the same time, it ensured agricultural productivity, human and animal fecundity. Childless women charred a part of their undergarment hoping to become fertile. Pregnant women drank water mixed with ash to ease the birth process; a prospective bride jumped over the fire three times to show that she was able to bear children. From the movement of the bonfire smoke and ashes thrown in the air, assumptions were made about the next harvest, the future of brides or grooms.

LENT [*Medz Bahk*]

Lent, which begins the Monday following the Sunday of “Poon Paregentan” and lasts forty days to the evening of the Friday before Palm Sunday, commemorates the forty days of fasting of our Lord (Matthew 4:2).

The Lenten period, including Holy Week, is intended to be one of self-discipline. It is a time for self-examination and self-appraisal toward renewal of lifestyle and improvement of moral and spiritual values. The practice of abstinence may include control over food intake, giving up meat, fish and all other animal foods, such as dairy products and eggs. Lenten sacrifice may also include abstaining from certain pleasure, amusements and festivities, allowing more time for prayers, introspection and church services.

Each Sunday of Lent has a specific name characterizing a basic Christian truth to meditate about. The Sunday preceding Lent, for example, is called Poon Paregentan, which means “good” or “happy living.” It is carnival-like time of indulgence in feasting and merrymaking. Also, it is a reminder of the Christian teaching that man was originally created in happiness, but marred by sin. The rest of the Sundays during Lent mark the Expulsion, the Prodigal Son, the Steward, the Unjust Judge, Advent, Palm Sunday and finally Easter Sunday. The last week of Lent is called *Avak Shapat* (Holy Week).

EASTER [*Zadig*]

Easter is a feast commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He died upon the cross and rose on the third day, reviving the spirit of his disciples, who were overwhelmed by His sufferings and crucifixion.

In A.D. 325, the Ecumenical Council of Nicea decided to celebrate Easter on the first Sunday of the next full moon after the Spring Equinox. This is why Easter is a movable date and falls on one of the Sundays between March 22 and April 25.

ST. VARTAN'S DAY [*Vartanank*]

The Armenians embraced Christianity in the year 301. It was the first time in history that Christianity was adopted as a national religion. Three years later one of the oldest churches was erected in Etchmiadzin, Armenia.

In the middle of the fifth century, the neighboring Persians commanded the Armenians to return to Zoroastrianism, their pagan faith of fire worship, and renounce Christianity. The Persians were bluntly refused and a war started between the Persians and Armenians, the first in defense of Christianity.

The war, which took place in 451 on the banks of river Dghmoud and on the plains of Avarayr in Armenia, is remembered as Vartanantz, after the name of the commander Vartan Mamigonian. Although Armenians were outnumbered and defeated, the Persians were so surprised by the show of resistance that the Armenians were able to continue in their faith and pray freely in their own churches, and in their own language.

General Vartan became a saint of the Armenian Church, and his spirit is memorialized each year on the anniversary of the fateful battle.

ASCENSION [*Hampartsoom*]

At the close of the Great Forty Days after Easter, Jesus took the apostles to Mount Olive, and told them to return to Jerusalem and wait to receive the power of Holy Spirit. He told them to go out into the world and tell about His doings while on earth, and teach everyone what He had taught them. Soon after his directives "a cloud received him out of their sight" and then angels appeared and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." At this point the apostles returned to Jerusalem with great rejoicing.

TRANSFIGURATION [*Vartavar*]

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ happened on a mountain where he had gone to pray with Peter, James, and John. During the prayer, his composure suddenly changed, his white garment started to glisten, and Moses and Elijah appeared by his side.

The feast of Transfiguration is celebrated on a Sunday between June 28 and August according to the date of Easter.

Armenians observed Vartavar even before Christianity. It was a pagan feast when they decorated the temple of goddess Asdghig with roses, hence its name which means “adorned with roses.” On this occasion, they also sprinkled water on each other and released pigeons. St. Gregory, unhappy with these heathen activities, abolished the pagan feast and combined it with the Feast of Transfiguration.

MARTYRS’ DAY

Every year on April 24 Armenians around the world pay tribute to the victims of heinous massacres that began on this date in 1915, and led to the killing of almost 1.5 million Armenians, over one-half of the entire population, by the Ottoman Turks. This premeditated destruction forced Armenians to leave their historic homeland and disperse throughout the world.

SAINT SARKIS

Initially this was the “Feast of Catechumens” but the ordinary citizens changed it to “The Feast of St. Sarkis.” Though it is a religious commemoration in appearance, it was based on a popular holiday signifying the sexual desires of youth. In observance of this feast, youth ate salted bread and went to bed thirsty so that their future brides or grooms would express their sacred

love by providing water in their dreams. Also, they prepared water and bread for birds so that their course of flight would indicate the whereabouts of their prospective brides and grooms.

POON PAREGENTAN

Paregentan is a holiday for feasting, singing, dancing, playing games, and traditional rituals. It precedes *Medz Bahk*, and lasts for two weeks. The final week is called *Poon Paregentan*. The term signifies a day of good living and was not limited to the general public. Seminarians, deacons, monks and even bishops participated.

On this occasion relatives and neighbors gathered at the homes of wealthy families where lambs and cattle are slaughtered. Joining the celebration were instrumentalists, minstrels, and narrators of tales. Parties were organized in such a way that they would move from house to house. In the last days of Paregentan, the dining tables were not even cleared, large barns were converted into dance halls for continuous celebration. This was also a time for match making, engagements and marriages.

ASSUMPTION

This is the most eminent feast exalting the Holy Virgin Mary, observed on a Sunday between August 12-18. It is also one of the five major feast days of "Daghavars," comparable to Christmas and Easter. Historically, St. Mary lived in Jerusalem for about fifteen years after the Resurrection, and when she died an elaborate funeral took place. All the Apostles, except St. Bartholomew, buried her with reverence in the Garden of Gethsemane. For three days and nights singing and prayers were heard over her tomb.

When Bartholomew arrived, he asked to have a last look at Mary, but to the amazement of all, the tomb was empty. The apostles were convinced

the Lord had taken her body to heaven, a belief that was sanctioned later, sometime during the ninth and 12th centuries, by the Church.

The Armenian Church observes Assumption for nine days as ordered by St. Nersess Shnorhali, who is credited for the composition of the most poetical *sharagans* (hymns) dedicated to St. Mary. On the day this feast is observed, the blessing of grapes service takes place following the Divine Liturgy.

The church where St. Mary is entombed is still in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem. It is under the protection of the Armenian and Greek churches.

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated September 15, is one of the five major feast days of the Armenian Church, along with Nativity and Theophany (January 6), Easter (earliest on March 22, latest on April 25), Transfiguration (Sunday June 28-August 1), and Assumption (Sunday, August 12-18).

The events that gave rise to the feast of Exaltation of the Holy Cross go back to A.D. 610-628, when the Zoroastrian Persians, after defeating the Byzantine army and capturing the holy city of Jerusalem, took the true cross of Jesus. Emperor Heraclius of Byzantine, a native of Cappadocia, a province of Armenia, invaded Persia in A.D. 628 defeating King Chosres. The terms of the armistice included the return of the captive cross to the rightful custodian, the Christian Church.

In the afternoon of this feast day, an elaborate processional takes place during which the cross, covered with basil leaves and flowers under a white veil, is carried high on a silver tray. After the benediction of the presiding clergyman, the faithful kiss the cross and take home the decorative basil stems.

BREAD IN THE ARMENIAN RITUAL

The ancient tribes of the Armenian mountains of Aratta (Ararat) considered bread an object of worship, a heavenly gift. They even had a good harvest named Kaghots, one of the sons of Hayk, the chief god of ancient Armenians. The fifth month of the Armenian calendar was called Kaghots.

Armenians have a number of terms for wheat grain associated with the name of Ashnan, the Summerian goddess of the wheat grain. Ashara in Armenian means wheat that has just turned green. Ashora is a cereal grain with a stem longer than that of wheat used for producing dark bread called *awdar*.

Hittite inscriptions testify that the “sacred bread” was brought from the Pala land as sacrifice to Tsiplanda, the god of wind in the city of Nerik. The Pala inhabitants called the bread *lashine* or *lashina*, derived from the name of Summarian goddess Ashnan. This word was borrowed by the Armenians and transliterated as *losh* or *lavash*. The Persians called *lavash* “nune ermeni,” meaning Armenian bread. Long after the disappearance of Hittites, Pala and others from the arena of history, “sacred bread” – *lavash* – continued to exist in Armenian, initially as “ritual bread” and later as regular bread.

Lavash is the oldest “sacred bread” among the Armenians. It had curative features because of the way the dough was prepared. It was kneaded to last for a few months, whereas other types could not be eaten after a few days. Armenians at the time considered apathy toward bread a “sin.” In the village of Adana, for example, when bread is dropped on the ground they say, “I sinned before bread.” When they notice a piece of bread on the road they pick it up and put it aside as it is a “sin” to step on bread. The veneration of bread among Armenians has never grown out of fashion.

HOLY *MURON*

Muron is Holy Oil used in the Armenian Church for consecrating churches, priests, baptismal fonts, holy pictures and chalices. It is also used in the baptismal water and to anoint during confirmation. It is usually contained in a dove-shaped container, thus emphasizing that the *muron* symbolizes the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The word *muron* comes from the Greek, “*myooron*,” meaning sweet anointing oil.

The use of oil to anoint things and people is not indigenous to the Armenian Church. In the Old testament the Jews used oil to anoint kings, prophets, temples, altars, and so on. The custom began when God directed Moses to prepare sacred oil to be used on the tent of meeting and the Ark of the Covenant, on the utensils, table and lamp stand in the tent. Also, He directed Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons so that they carry out their priestly duties (Exodus 30:22-38). Oil was used in the Christian Church for healing of the possessed and sick (Mark 6:13).

According to popular tradition, the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew brought oil blessed by Christ with them to use in Armenia. In the fourth century St. Gregory began the Blessing of the Holy *Muron*. The *muron* used is made up of primarily of olive oil and about forty types of flowers as well as fragrant seeds, roots and grains. Also, according to popular tradition, mixed with the *muron* is some of the oil that Thaddeus and Bartholomew brought.

Since the eighth century the Blessing of *Muron* has been the privilege of only the Catholicos. Since the time of St., Gregory, Catholicoi have blessed *muron* periodically...every seven years. It is prepared in Holy Etchmiadzin. For forty days a cauldron of olive oil is placed upon the altar. On the fortieth day the Divine Liturgy is offered by the Catholicos. There are Bible readings and numerous prayers asking that the Holy Spirit come upon the oil. Finally the cover is lifted and the Catholicos, while singing “Arakelo Aghavno” (the Dove was sent), pours in the liquid of the forty flowers and seeds, roots and

grains. The new *muron* is poured in one or two litres of the old *muron*, and blessed with a relic of the Cross, a relic of the lance that pierced Christ's side, and a relic of St. Gregory's right hand.

HOME BLESSINGS AND SACRED SPACES

THE HOME

From the earliest times, the home was a sacred place, the hearth the center of family and ritual life. It is the most basic of all social structures, where we are born and live many years, a place where great family events transpire. Here we break bread, share joys and sorrows, pray, celebrate, worship. Here God is present in the loving relationships that transcend fragile human existence. Family love is all-accepting, all-forgiving and lasts a lifetime, reflecting – however partially – the abundant love of God.

Until recently, the Christian home was genuinely the “domestic church,” where the elders presided, the family meals were blessed, prayers were said, holy icons were mounted, and candles were lit; living rituals reflected a real, living faith.

THE THRESHOLD

The threshold itself has a fascinating place in the history of sacred spaces. Among many examples from ancient peoples, the Old Testament Israelites (in a tradition continued to this day) would affix on their door posts a “mezuzah” or tiny box containing parchment with verses from Deuteronomy. Muslims leave their shoes behind when they cross over the threshold of a mosque. For early Christians, passing over the threshold into church, at that time surrounded by a pagan world, was a journey from the profane to the

sacred. In our own time, a vestige of the powerful line the threshold draws in the imagination between “the chaos out there” and “our holy place” is the tradition of the groom carrying the bride over the threshold. We have been consecrated for life together. This is our place.

HOME BLESSING

The home is not blessed to make it holy since all that God created is good and holy. It is rather for the purpose of dedication or rededication, a reminder that the home reflects the Kingdom.

Decades ago in Armenian villages, the *dzookh* – which has come to be the word for “parish” but which literally means “smoke” – was defined by groups of chimneys or homes. Two or three priests would divide the care of the flock in a town and bless the homes of families in their jurisdiction.

Traditional times of the year for Armenian homes to be blessed are Eastertide (the fifty days following Easter), Christmastide (until February 14, the Feast of the Presentation), and after having moved into a new home. A rich and evocative blessing, the *Dnorhnek* has practically fallen into disuse along with many other blessing rituals, chiefly because the world is no longer popularly perceived as sacred and in need of repeated prayer and anointing. This perception is indeed perplexing considering that there has arguably never been a time when God’s blessings were more needed.

At a home blessing, every member of the dwelling assembles with the priest to sanctify together for life-giving gifts.

BREAD

Bread is blessed as a potent symbol of God’s greatest gift offered back to Him in the form of a humble loaf. The staff of life, it is the vital spiritual food

of Holy Communion, where it represents the ultimate convergence of the sacred and the profane.

“This is the bread which came down from heaven... whoever eats this bread shall live forever.” (John 6:58)

WATER

Water, the symbol of chaos out of which God created the world is also essential to life. God drew forth life from the formless water (Genesis 1); we ourselves float in a liquid womb; without water we quickly perish; and in the water of baptism we are “washed clean,” die to sin, and are reborn in Christ.

SALT

Salt is an important, universal household staple. Salt seasons and purifies. “You shall present (rams) before the Lord, and the priests shall sprinkle salt upon them and offer them up to the Lord as a burnt offering.” (Ezekiel 43:24) A newborn baby in Biblical times would be rubbed with salt. Christ called His disciples the “salt of the earth.”

INCENSE

Incense is an ancient symbol of prayers rising to God and the individual soul burning with the love of God. “May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.” (Psalm 141:2)

NUSHKHAR

It is a custom in some communities for the priest to bring with him a *nushkhar*, the round flat wafer of blessed bread stamped with a crucifix or plain cross and designs of grapes and wheat. Traditionally, this is placed in a container where salt, rice, wheat or flour (or other household staple) are stored as a symbol of the presence of God's blessing.



The Armenian home blessing service gathers these gifts and all who live in the home to be cleansed, blessed, and bestowed the protection of the Cross, of the Word (Scripture) and of the Holy Trinity. In this beautiful ritual, “old things pass away; behold all things become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17)

THE DIVINE LITURGY [*Badarak*]

The Divine Liturgy or *badarak* is the main worship service of the Armenian Church. Actually, however, it is much more than that. It provides the most intimate encounter we can have with God in this life. In the Divine Liturgy Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes to his people in two forms: first, by his Word in the reading of the Holy Gospel; and second, by His Holy Body and Blood in Holy Communion. These two actions – the reading of the Word of God, and receiving Holy Communion – are the two pillars or building blocks of the Divine Liturgy in all ancient, apostolic churches.

Supported by these two pillars is a magnificent structure of words, music, symbols, and rituals. For those unfamiliar with it, the Divine Liturgy can seem like a bewildering array of disjointed movements and rituals, and arcane theological terminology. The complex interplay of the celebrant priest, the deacons, the other altar servers, the choir and the people might lead one to overlook the logic and purpose of the Divine Liturgy, and to miss its very real benefits.

Back in the 10th century, the great Armenian theologian Khosrov Antsevatsi eloquently described the importance of the Divine Liturgy when he wrote: “Since those who confess and show repentance receive atonement by means of the Holy Mystery [the *badarak*], and are re-united to Christ in order to become for Him body and members, we should be eager for the great medicine.” The Divine Liturgy is the great medicine that provides true meaning and direction for our lives. It offers the peace and solace that only God can give – a free gift no less – in an age when so many people are searching, and spending millions of dollars in vain to find personal stability and security.

Preparation for the Divine Liturgy is done both physically and spiritually. The custom of the Armenian Church is to fast from all food and drink after waking up Sunday morning, until Holy Communion is received. Fasting will help the mind and the heart focus on the spiritual nourishment.

Spiritual preparation for the *badarak* is by means of prayer. To participate, it is essential to devote at least fifteen minutes of quiet time with God either on Saturday night or Sunday morning. This may include reading and meditating on relevant passages from the Bible, or prayer and reflection.

The *badarak* is a procedure with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Therefore, it is important to arrive in church at least five minutes before the Divine Liturgy begins, and to remain attentive until the end.

The service has four parts: 1) Preparation, allowing the priest to ready himself and the elements (bread and wine) for consecration; 2) Synaxis, the teaching service, consisting of Bible readings, the creed and prayers; 3) Holy Sacrifice, the true representation of our Lord’s life with bread and wine being sanctified through the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, asking forgiveness for our sins through communion; 4) Dismissal, the congregation is requested to go forth in peace and bear witness to the Kingdom of God.

– Fr. Daniel Findikyan

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF VESTMENTS

The vestments worn by the priest have evolved through centuries. Most of them derive from the garments worn by the temple priests of the Old Testament as itemized and described in Exodus.

“Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor. These are the garments they are to make: a breast piece, an ephod (an apron-like garment), a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for Aaron and his sons so that they may serve me as priests. Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.” Exodus 28:2-5.



His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian
presiding over ordination services

In fact, you can read about the temple vessels and the consecration of priests, as well as about vestments, in Exodus 28:30.

Some, like the bishop’s mitre (the distinctive headdress resembling the Roman Catholic pope’s, which wasn’t used in the Armenian Church until the 15th century), entered Armenian tradition in later years under Roman influence. There were influences, as well, from the clothing of the royal court and the splendor of royal processional garb.

The vestments (and vessels, for that matter) developed from scriptural, traditional, practical – and in some cases – obscure foundations. Spiritual symbolism for them evolved later.

The priest wears this special clothing as a sort of “armor,” sheathing himself for the Christian victory over evil as evidenced by the triumphant chalice of bread and wine, or Christ himself shared among us: “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:11-17)

The priest is assisted during the vesting by the deacon. As each piece is put on, the priest says a prayer, the most important words of which are excerpted below. But before the vesting is begun, the priest recites a long prayer that includes such significant lines as:

“O Jesus Christ our Lord, clothed with light as with a garment, you appeared upon earth...make me...also worthy...that I may divest myself of all ungodliness, which is a vile garment, that I may be adorned with your light.”

PRIEST’S VESTMENTS IN VESTING ORDER

Saghavart (Helmet or Crown)

This bulbous, kingly headgear resembles the crown of a fairy tale king. Indeed it echoes the royalty of Christ the King as well as symbolizing the victorious liberation of the soul from bondage to evil. Traditionally, twelve arched pieces are joined to form a peak which is topped by a cross. This

made its appearance after the 13th century and may have been inspired by Persian helmets.

Lord, put the helmet of salvation on my head to fight against the powers of the enemy.

The helmet is put on first, then removed until the priest is fully vested.

Shabig (Alb or Tunic)

The tunic is a long white shirt that reaches the ankles. It is often embroidered at the hem, sleeves and neckline. Its white color is a symbol of purity of heart, just like the white that is worn by the newly-baptized. Records show that in the third century, white was a preferred color for priestly vestments.

Clothe me Lord, with the garment of salvation and with a robe of gladness, and gird me with this vestment of salvation.

Poroorar (Stole)

This long stole has a hole for the neck and is, in actuality, the deacon's stole that has been draped around the neck and sewn up in the center. It symbolizes righteousness.

Clothe my neck, O Lord, with righteousness and cleanse my heart from all filthiness of sin.

Kodi (Belt)

A fabric belt matching the cape is worn over the *poroorar* as a symbol of the strength of faith and the priestly authority of binding and loosing.

May the girdle of faith encircle me round about my heart and my mind and quench vile thoughts out of them.

Pazban (Cuffs)

These wide cuffs, worn over the shabig on the forearms, are the same material as the cape and belt. They symbolize strength and moral cleanliness as well as the hard work and penitence required in the Lord's service.

Give me strength, O Lord, to my right (left) hand and wash all my filthiness of sin, that I may be able to serve you in health of soul and body.

Vagas (Collar)

The wide collar matches the cape in fabric. A long linen piece and ribbons allow the collar to be worn by crossing the ribbons to the front and then tying them in back. This has come to symbolize obedience and the yoke of Christ. From Matthew 11:29-30: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Clothe my neck, Lord with righteousness and cleanse my heart from all filthiness of sin.

Shourchar (Cape)

Made of a beautifully textured and ornamented fabric, the cape is a symbol of the glory of the new spiritual life and a shield-like defense against evil.

In your mercy, Lord, clothe me with a radiant garment and fortify me against the influence of the evil one.

My soul will rejoice in the Lord, for he has clothed me with a raiment of salvation and with a robe of gladness. He has put upon me a crown as upon a bridegroom and has adorned me like a bride with jewels.

Tashginag (Towel)

The towel, an oblong piece of linen hung on the left side of the belt, is used by the priest at certain moments of the liturgy, for example, to dry his hands after rinsing them ritually in water or to dry the chalice after distributing communion. The towel indicates spiritual cleanliness.

Hoghatap (Slippers)

Since regular street shoes would be inappropriate for the altar of God, richly ornamented fabric slippers, like bedroom slippers, are worn. They symbolize the fact that Christ tramples evil underfoot. There are many decorative designs possible but traditionally snakes and scorpions are featured as in Psalm 91:13: *You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

I Love You So Much, Armenia

I love your stony roads,
your ancient songs,
your poplar trees
and swallows above the fields
that loop like eagles
swooping down.

I love those fragrant fields
promising recurrent springs...

I love the village people
early in the morning,
reaping

in sight of mountains that I love.

I love the jagged mountains
fragmented like old monuments...

I love the night they rest against.

And though I cannot deny,

I love life
and its daily living.

Should anyone take what is left of you

I will embrace death gladly
in the name of life, Armenia.

– *Kevork Emin*
(translated by Diana Der Hovanessian)

WELCOME TO
THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

**ARMENIA
AND THE
ARMENIAN DIASPORA TODAY**



THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

DESTRUCTION AND DISPERSION OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE

The Armenian Genocide, one of the first genocides in the 20th century, was the culmination of continued oppression of the Armenian people by the Ottoman Turks. As natives of Asia Minor for several thousand years, Armenians were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire between the 16th and 17th centuries, but they were ethnically and religiously different from Ottoman Turks. They were not treated as equals, but rather as inferior, second-class citizens. As such, they were required to pay additional taxes, forbidden to carry arms, prohibited from wearing distinctive clothes, and restricted from building new churches or using church bells.

As the Ottoman Empire began to lose its territory, the eastern provinces populated by Armenians became important for the survival of the empire. Moreover, the Armenians were gaining a stronger national identity. Culturally and religiously they felt more at home with the Christian states of Europe. The European powers exploited these ties to press for their own political and economic interests in the Ottoman Empire, which engendered Ottoman resentment. The Armenians advocated reforms in the empire based on European models. Although primarily an agricultural people, they were also involved in trade, which some perceived as European capitalism penetrating distant Ottoman provinces and disrupting Muslim customs and traditions.

From 1894-1896 several hundred thousand Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were massacred, sending a clear message to the Armenians that any political action inviting the attention of the European states would not be tolerated. In 1909, another massacre of over 20,000 Armenians in Cilicia took place.

The attempt by the Young Turk regime prior to World War I to introduce constitutional reform failed to stem the disintegration of the empire, and the Ottomans feared that the Armenians, like other Christian peoples in the

empire, would eventually gain independence. The Ottomans resented the efforts of Europeans who urged them to implement reforms on behalf of the Armenians as a pretext to interfere in their internal affairs with the objective of dismembering the Ottoman territories.

Young Turk reforms centered on implementing European concepts of the nation-state to establish a Muslim middle class, replacing the existing middle class groups composed primarily of Armenians, Greeks, Jews and other non-Muslim, non-Turkic peoples. Attempts to accomplish this through boycott of non-Muslim merchants and special Muslim cooperative organizations in various parts of the empire had failed. Furthermore, some Young Turk leaders decided that the future of their empire lay in Pan-Turkism. Their goal was to unite Turkic peoples in Central Asia to the Turks of the Ottoman Empire via the Caucasus. The Armenians were an obstacle once again for Young Turks' plans because the Armenian ancestral homeland lay on the path to Central Asia. The prevailing wartime atmosphere was used as a cover for an attempt to physically annihilate the Armenians by employing the full resources of the Ottoman bureaucratic state, including the available technology of the time, such as telegraph communications and railroads.

As a prelude, killings on a small scale took place in the fall of 1914 and Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire were subjected to greater requisitions and forced labor than their Muslim neighbors. In the spring and summer of 1915 the Ottoman army massacred entire village populations near the Russian front. The majority of the Armenians however, were eliminated in a more calculated process. Strong adult males were first killed so that resistance would be diminished. The young Armenians drafted into the Ottoman army at the onset of World War I were disarmed by January 1915 and added to the Armenians already in labor battalions. These men were then either worked to death or killed. In the spring of 1915 notables and dignitaries of local communities were arrested under various pretexts and killed shortly thereafter. This attempt to eliminate any possible Armenian leadership is symbolized by the arrest of the Armenian intellectuals of Constantinople. The date

of these initial arrests, April 24, reminds Armenians around the world of their pent-up sorrow and frustration, as they commemorate the tragic destruction of their ancestors.

As for the rest of the Armenian population in villages or towns, they were instructed on short notice to prepare to leave their homes. All but the adult males, who were promptly killed, were grouped into caravans and sent on a tortuous journey without shelter, proper food or water until they reached the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts. Along the way bands of released convicts, Kurdish, Circassian and Turkic tribesmen, and local Muslims attacked the defenseless people, usually with the encouragement and participation of gendarmes supposedly appointed by the state to protect the deportees. Rape, torture, murder and enslavement were daily occurrences, and human tragedy attained indescribable proportions.

Those who survived the initial deportation process were placed in concentration camps, and faced another set of brutal massacres at the end of 1915 and 1916 when the Young Turk leaders realized that too many had survived. Meanwhile, massacres of civilian Armenians on the Caucasian front by the Turkish army intensified in 1918. Only the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I saved the Armenians from total annihilation.

The Turkish Nationalist movement that created the Republic of Turkey in 1923 under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk continued on a lesser scale the elimination of the Armenians perpetuated by the Young Turks. The destruction of Smyrna/Izmir, the massacres of Marash and elsewhere in Cilicia, the killing of thousands in territory taken from the Republic of Armenia in 1920, and isolated killings throughout Anatolia of Armenian captives and repatriates after World War I, made the desonation of Ottoman Armenia final. At least one-and-a-half million Armenians, that is over half of the Ottoman Armenian population, vanished.

As with most crimes, denial of culpability or even of the existence of the crime itself, continues to this day. The government of the Republic of Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, continues to disavow the Armenian Genocide and preceding massacres. Genocide, as defined by the United Nations, is any act committed with intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. While the most widely known example of genocide in recent history is the Jewish Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide is the first major case in the 20th century.

– *Aram Arkun*

REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

The Republic of Armenia is a landlocked country situated between the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean seas, in an area now referred to as Transcaucasia. According to epical-biblical traditions, Noah's Ark was said to have rested on Mount Ararat, the highest peak of Armenia's historic highlands. Ancestors of the Armenian people, however, probably lived in the area for a long time before the nation emerged in the sixth century B.C.

As a small state comprised roughly of 11,500 square miles of mountainous territory, present Armenia is only a fragment of historic Armenia. Its population, estimated at about three million, may actually be considerably less because of emigration due to economic and political adversities. Included in the overwhelmingly Armenian population are a small number of other nationalities, such as Russians, Kurds, Jews and Assyrians. The official language is Armenian, which is of the Indo-European stem, with a distinctive alphabet invented in the early fifth century A.D. As Christians, most Armenians belong, at least nominally, to the Church of Armenia.

In the early 20th century, after the destruction of the short-lived first Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), the territory of present Armenia became a republic of the Soviet Union. It offered shelter to hundreds of thousands of survivors from the massacres perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia took the initiative to proclaim itself an independent republic on September 23, 1991, with Levon Ter-Petrosyan as its first president. After presiding for seven years, in 1998 he was succeeded by Robert Kocharian.

The Armenian constitution, passed by a referendum in July 1995, helped the government to establish its executive, legislative and judicial branches, giving supreme power to the president. The capital of Armenia is the ancient city of Yerevan, home to the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, which translates as “the spot where the only begotten Son descended.”

Privatization somewhat improved the productivity of state-owned resources, such as minerals, metals, grains, livestock and chemicals. Armenia developed an ongoing trade with countries like the United States, Russia, Iran, Germany and Belgium, among others. Armenia relies heavily on imported oil and gas, but also has facilities for producing hydroelectric and nuclear energy (the Metsamor nuclear plant). Environmental concerns about the nuclear plant and the chemical industry have only been partially dealt with, while deforestation and the sinking water levels of Lake Sevan continue to be of concern. Armenia’s national currency is called the dram. Armenia is a member of several world economic bodies such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, and it participates in various programs of the European Council, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and NATO.

In 1988, Armenia had to cope with a major catastrophe. A severe earthquake killed tens of thousands of lives and destroyed the area of Gyumri (Leninakan), Armenia’s second largest city, leaving almost 300,000 people homeless. Moreover, in the same year Armenia faced another turmoil

that threatened its peaceful existence. An undeclared war developed with Azerbaijan over the adjacent mountainous region of Karabagh, an enclave the size of Maryland substantially populated by Armenians. Karabagh is a few miles of countryside from Armenia, a land of ancient Christians, while Azeris are Muslims of Turkic origin. An armistice in 1994 still holds today, but one result of the conflict has been the economic blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Several hundred thousand Armenian refugees from various parts of Azerbaijan and Karabagh took refuge in Armenia, straining its resources. The Republic of Armenia continues to participate in negotiations on the ultimate status of the Karabagh territory but little progress was made in the years since the armistice and the threat of renewed violence still exists.

International aid from various governments and philanthropic organizations as well as Armenians from the United States, France, Russia, the Middle East, South America, and Australia helped the fledgling republic deal with these catastrophes. Still, the level of poverty in Armenia by World Bank and other international standards is high, with the majority of the population in a poor state. A very rich and powerful small upper class controls much of the economy and positions of power in the administration, while the middle class is relatively small. Thus, Armenian society remains very stratified.

Despite all the problems that Armenia faces today, it remains firmly anchored in the hearts and souls of all Armenians. Its existence and prosperity can provide the needed assurance for the perpetuation of the Armenian culture and heritage.

– *Aram Arkun*

KARABAGH

THE CONFLICT WITH THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

This mountainous region, the size of Maryland and only a few miles of countryside from Armenia, was decreed to be an autonomous enclave within the neighboring republic of Azerbaijan partially due to the influence of the Soviet ruler Stalin, in pursuit of his strategy to divide nationalities.

Armenia has always been caught on the dividing line between Christian and Muslim worlds. This time Karabagh, substantially populated by Armenians, was mandated to be governed by Azerbaijanis, who are Muslims.

When Gorbachev's era of *Perestroika* recognized the right for self-determination, Karabagh's legislative body sought unification with Armenia. The ensuing conflict resulted in a bitter battle against Azerbaijan nationalists, at times backed by Soviet military force. Armenians eventually succeeded in taking control of their ancestral territory, but the hostility continues and even international attempts in shaping a more enduring compromise have been less than successful.

A good part of Karabagh is in the ancient Armenian province of Artsakh, on the eastern edge of the Armenian plateau. Its population converted to Christianity as did the rest of Armenia at the beginning of the fourth century, when numerous churches and monasteries were established. During the following centuries, Artsakh, along with the rest of Armenia, confronted foreign invasions and occupations, except in the mountainous terrain that allowed considerable autonomy even at the worst of times. Only in the second half of the 18th century did a Muslim feudal principality emerge in Karabagh, leading to an influx of Turkic and Kurdish tribesmen. In the 19th century, the Russian Empire took control of the region, and in the 20th century it fell under Soviet rule and became part of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani leaders were allowed a free hand in dominating the Armenians politically, economically and culturally, despite continuous protests. The immediate result was the decline of the Armenian demographic dominance. In the 1980s, as the disintegration of the Soviet Union was taking place, local Armenians appealed for bringing Karabagh under Armenian rule. They did not succeed. Demonstrations led to violent reprisals in various parts of Azerbaijan and finally an out-and-out war began in 1991. After Azerbaijan revoked the autonomous status of the Region of Mountainous Karabagh, the local Armenians in turn held a referendum for independence, which in January 1992 was formally ratified by a newly-elected Karabagh parliament. The Armenians of Karabagh took control of most of the territory of the former autonomous region. The territory surrounding Karabagh was also occupied by Armenians, both a buffer zone against future attacks, and displacing hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis. Together, both sides suffered several tens of thousands in casualties during the height of the conflict. A ceasefire agreement was signed in May 1994, which still remains in force.

Many international organizations have provided assistance to Karabagh, and refugees in Armenia, Azerbaijan and elsewhere. In the Karabagh republic, the U.S. Agency for International Development worked with several non-governmental organizations to provide humanitarian aid such as housing projects, hospitals reconstruction, water distribution systems, and rehabilitation of schools. Organizations such as the British "Halo Trust" are involved in de-mining programs. The International Committee of the Red Cross has educated both Armenian and Azerbaijani populations about the dangers of landmines and implemented water and sanitation efforts in Azerbaijan. Baroness Carline Cox, Christian Solidarity International, and Christian solidarity Worldwide have brought a variety of aid to Karabagh.

Much work remains to implement a lasting peace in the region. Humanitarian needs of refugees and others are still overwhelming in Karabagh and the neighboring states.

– *Aram Arkun*

THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA

RENEWAL OF ARMENIANS AWAY FROM THEIR HOMELAND

Today there are sizeable Armenian communities outside of the Republic of Armenia, spread in all corners of the world. Some are tightly organized self-contained entities; others are comfortably melded to varying extents with the local lifestyles.

Dispersion for Armenians is not a new phenomenon. It has come about every so often either under coercion or by voluntary emigration. In the sixth century tens of thousands of Armenians were forcibly displaced from their historic homeland to places like Cyprus and the Balkans by the Byzantine Empire. Others migrated on their own to countries that were relatively more stable economically and politically. In the 11th century, for example, as the Armenian medieval Bagratuni and Artsruni kingdoms fell, a wave of emigration began to places as far as Western Europe. The collapse of the Kingdom of Cilicia in the 14th century opened the doors for another exodus, as did the wars between the Ottomans and Persians in the 16th-17th centuries. The Diaspora, as we know it today, is largely the outcome of the massacres perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire. A large number of displaced Armenians first settled in the various countries of the Middle East, while others emigrated to Europe and the United States. In the 1960s the trend reversed, when several waves of emigration from the Diaspora to Armenia (repatriation or *nerkaght*) took place at a time when the country was under Soviet rule. But it was short-lived. Within a decade, Armenians began to leave their country, and continued to do so even after the collapse of the Soviet rule and the establishment of an independent republic. The reason for this restlessness was mostly due to a combination of economic and political motivations. The flight from instability and insecurity has reinforced and fostered Armenian communities in various parts of the world, such as in Russia, the United States and France. The Armenian population in these countries is not readily

available, since the census does not always provide details of specific ethnic groups. The estimated population numbers would be two million in Russia, one million in the United States, and 400,000 in France.

The traditional Middle Eastern strongholds of Armenian communal life have been depleted through massive emigration, so that there may only remain in the range of 100,000 Armenians each in the formerly teeming centers of Iran and Lebanon, and even fewer in Syria. The Balkan countries, Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Australia, and the countries of Central Asia all have Armenian communities, as do a number of other European states. Small numbers of Armenian communities are scattered throughout the world in places as far-flung as India, Indonesia, Senegal and Finland. Armenia's neighbor Georgia still contains several hundred thousand Armenians, though emigration is significant there too. On the other hand, countries formerly alien to Armenians, like Spain and the Czech Republic, are developing new Armenian communities.

The Armenian Church has been an important force in maintaining contact between Armenians throughout the world and the "motherland." Dioceses have been created with primates, churches, clergy, and lay participation, and in some places with special local bylaws. In addition, Armenian political parties, philanthropic organizations, and regional cultural associations have been formed. Armenians have been successful in many professions in the Diaspora, and after some fifty years had passed after the heavy blow of the Armenian Genocide, they again began to play a leading role in many aspects of society in their new homes. Some of the well-known contemporary names are: author William Saroyan, singer Charles Aznavour, painters Arshile Gorky and Jean Carzou (Karnig Zouloumian), businessmen Kirk Krikorian and Alex Manoogian, composers Alan Hovhannes and Aram Khachaturian, tennis star Andre Agassi, chess champion Garry Kasparov, film directors Atom Egoyan and Rouben Mamoulian.

– *Aram Arkun*

ODAR AND WHAT IT MEANS

The present-day usage of the word *odar* for a non-Armenian is characteristic of the modern language, meaning not only “foreigner” but also “not a member of the family or the household.” In both the classical and the modern idioms, it has a neutral, or even a positive meaning, as evidenced in the compound *odaraser*, based on the Greek *philoxenos* “one who loves guests.”

To clarify the meaning of *odar* and understand the background of its present usage, it might be helpful to remember that the ancient, medieval and early modern Armenians did not consider non-Armenian Christians as foreigners or strangers, since they were a part and parcel of Christ’s people. The line of separation for the Armenians of old was not between Armenian and non-Armenian but between Christian and non-Christian, heretics being reckoned among the non-Christians. The national or ethnic identity of an Armenian was defined by language – *hayakhos* or *hayaparpar*, literally ‘one who speaks Armenian.’ In areas with a mixed population, such as the borderlands where non-Armenians spoke Armenian and Armenians in turn spoke other local languages, the Christian identity was the basic factor that set people apart from their non-Christian neighbors. Despite a keen awareness of the existence of heterodox (not in agreement with Armenian Church beliefs, doctrines or dogma) Christians, including Armenians of other denominations, and despite restrictions imposed by the Armenian Church on relations with such Christians, the common people and even high-ranking clergymen did not refrain from associating with them. Intermarriage in areas with a mixed Christian population was very common. In the early 10th century, a catholicos of the Armenian Church did not hesitate to refer to the heterodox Georgians, who were the adherents of the Byzantine Church, as “sheep of our meadow.” Intermarriage and interrelationship, however, was very rare with people of the Muslim faith, despite the fact that the Armenians lived under Muslim domination for more than 1300 years. In modern colloquial Armenian *aylazk*,

‘of a different kind or race’ – originally not a word with a pejorative connotation – instead of *odar* is applied to Muslims.

The ancient, medieval and early modern Armenian welcomed in his home non-Armenian, particularly Christian, guests and acted as an *odaras*, by showing them respect and hospitality and giving them honor. Ancient, medieval and early modern travelers that passed through Armenia were hosted by Armenian families or stayed at Armenian monasteries.

A thorough search in the dictionaries of Classical and Modern Armenian yield only a few very late (19th century) examples of the pejorative use for the word *odar* in both the Eastern and the Western literary idioms of the current language. The pejorative use of the word appears for the most part in compounds and in adverbial phrases. Notwithstanding this, the origin and the early usage of the word *odar* point to the fact that it was an appropriate term for a guest or an outsider. The word is not native to Armenian; it derives from the Middle Persian (Pahlevi) *awtar*, which means ‘non-native, outsider.’ The above data indicates that the word *odar* in modern Armenian is a proper term in reference to a non-Armenian and that it should not be considered as having a pejorative connotation at all.

About the Diocese of the Armenian Church (Western)

With the creation of the Western Diocese in 1928, there were five churches in California; namely, Holy Trinity in Fresno; St. Gregory in Fowler; St. Mary in Yettlem; Holy Cross in Los Angeles and Sts. Sahag-Mesrob in Reedley. The Diocesan Headquarters was in Fresno, with the Holy Trinity Church serving as the Diocesan Cathedral.

WELCOME TO THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

In 1971 Archbishop Vatché Hovsepian, who was a Bishop at that time, was elected by the Diocesan Assembly as Primate. He was elevated to the rank of 'Archbishop' by His Holiness Vazken I in 1976. Sensing the needs of the church and community, he started to look for potential sites for a Cathedral in order to establish a parish in the Hollywood Area and interim Cathedral. Soon, a property at 1201 N. Vine Street in Hollywood was purchased, and the Diocesan Offices were moved from a modest house on Crenshaw Boulevard to a large two-story building and Cathedral in Hollywood. Moreover, a twelve-unit apartment, next to the Cathedral was also purchased, thus insuring the Diocese of a substantial income monthly. The Diocesan Headquarters remained at the Vine Street address in Hollywood until the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, which drastically shook the Diocesan Building.



St. Ghévond Mother Cathedral in Burbank, California

In 1994, the Diocesan Assembly, in a Special Session on September 24, decided to purchase a new Diocesan Headquarters. On May 16, 1997, through the initiative of the Primate, Diocesan Council and kind donations of the faithful, the Western Diocese was able to officially move into the newly-purchased multi-purpose complex, located at 3325 N. Glenoaks Blvd., in Burbank, California, which is the new and present Diocesan Headquarters and the future site of the Mother Cathedral. The same Diocesan Assembly of 1994, also decided to repair the property damages of the Vine Street property, incurred from the earthquake, and transfer the sanctuary to the St. John-Garabed Parish.

Major centers of Armenian population in the United States include the greater New York area; Boston and its suburbs; Worcester, Massachusetts; Detroit, Michigan; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Los Angeles and Fresno, California. Communities are expanding in Wisconsin, the Southeast and Texas.

DIOCESAN GOVERNANCE

The Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Western) is governed through its bylaws, which clearly define the overall sphere of its jurisdiction and organization.

The Diocese is an indivisible part of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church under the Supreme Ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Catholicos of All Armenians headquartered at Holy Etchmiadzin. All religious communities or parishes throughout the United States, with the exception of those in the Western Diocese, constitute the Eastern Diocese.

The Diocese is comprised of the following administrative bodies headed and presided over by the Archbishop, the Primate of the Diocese:

- Parish Assembly
- Parish Council
- Diocesan Assembly
- Diocesan Council
- Diocesan Board of Trustees

The activities of all these bodies are guided by the approximately 100 articles in the bylaws.



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