

**A PATH TO THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH  
IN RECENT TIMES  
1955 - 1995**

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TO THE  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**Pontificate of Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians**

**Reverend Father Zaven Arzoumanian, PhD**

**Burbank, California  
2009**

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**PONTIFICATE OF VASKEN I  
CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS**

**REV. FR. ZAVEN ARZOUMANIAN, PHD.**

**BURBANK, CALIFORNIA  
2010**



His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians  
1908-1994

**DURING THE PONTIFICATE OF**

**HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II**

**SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS  
OF ALL ARMENIANS**

**BY THE ORDER OF**

**HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP  
HOVNAN DERDERIAN**

**PRIMATE OF THE WESTERN DIOCESE OF THE  
ARMENIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA**

**THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH  
IN RECENT TIMES (1955 - 1995)**

**FIRST EDITION**

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**IN MEMORY OF HER LATE HUSBAND**

**BENEFACTOR EDWARD MARDIGIAN**

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## PRIMATE'S MESSAGE

The last century has offered our nation distinguished representatives of letters and literature, religious and civic leaders, in the galaxy of a luminous constellation. Each of those scholars and churchmen has contributed substantially to the promotion of the Armenian Church and Nation one way or another. The Reverend Dr. Zaven Arzoumanian, the author of this book, has introduced among them one of our brightest and most illustrious giants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians of Blessed Memory, the first recipient of the “National Hero” Award of the Republic of Armenia, whose life and legacy as the chief shepherd of the Armenian Church have shaped dramatically the modern history of the Armenian people.

Indeed, the Reverend Father has successfully compiled the many and various phases of the accomplishments of the Venerable Catholicos. In his descriptions of the events in and around the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Diaspora, the author has made it all clear the highly effective and exclusively successful role of Catholicos Vasken I in the face of the anti-religious policy of his time, virtually by-passing the cold war with his brilliant diplomacy and enduring patience and optimism.

This book portrays His Holiness Vasken I, our outstanding Pontiff, as a history making religious leader as well as an inspiring personality for the succeeding generations. Acknowledging the tedious efforts of Father Arzoumanian in this respect, we extend our gratitude to him for his professional undertaking, realizing at once that this book will serve the English-speaking communicants of the Armenian Church and the Western readership at large, to know better and become acquainted with the life and the accomplishments of the Venerable Catholicos.

Prayerfully,

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian  
Primate

## FOREWORD

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian Apostolic Church and Nation experienced true revival and modern approach under the efficient leadership of Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. During the four decades of his Pontificate, the 1700 years of Armenian Christianity confirmed its persistence remarkably and justified its continuity and mission in Armenia and abroad miraculously. His Holiness proved excellence in leadership personally, being a Builder and Ecumenist, a great patriot and a Holy Father to all whom he met in person through his extensive pastoral visits across the ocean.

The present volume is a concise edition of the last part of the three volumes of *Azgapatum* published in Armenian by this author in 2003 on the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Holy Etchmiadzin Cathedral. It includes in a condensed format the events related to the Mother Church of Armenia and Nation, in terms of internal consolidation and dignified exposure to the world Christian and civic centers. Those events included Catholicos Vasken's personal relationship with the Vatican, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Lambeth Palace, Centers of the WCC and the NCC, the Catholicosates of the Coptic, Ethiopian, and Indian Malabar Churches.

Almost all achievements were truly unprecedented, fruitful, and lasting. Numerous bishops were ordained, new dioceses were initiated, hundreds of priests graduated and ordained, ancient monasteries were returned from Soviet confiscation to the Mother See, a series of Centennial Jubilees celebrated, and corresponding high quality publications appeared.

The reader will find this book a comprehensive source for many events related to our recent history as an update to the authentic versions of the past. The publication of this book, this time in English, was the wish of many who were willing to read their contemporary history in this widely read language.

F.Z.A.



National-Ecclesiastical Assembly in Holy Etchmiadzin  
Election of His Holiness VASKEN I Catholicos of All Armenians  
September 30, 1955

*(First Row from Left)* Bp. Serovbe Manookian, Bp. Haigazoon Abrahamian, Bp. Terenig Poladian, Achbp. Sion Manoogian, Achbp. Vartan Kasparian, Achbp. Mampre Kalfayan, HIS HOLINESS VASKEN I, Achbp. Mampre Sirounian, Poet Avedik Issahakian, Bp. Souren Torossin, Bp. Sahag Der Hovhannissian, Bp. Hairig Aslanian, Bp. Shnork Kaloustian, Bp. Vartan Der Sahakian, Bp. Yeznig Aznavourian

## HIS HOLINESS VASKEN I CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS

### Early Life

Vasken I was born **Levon Garabed Baljian** on September 20, 1908 in Bucharest, Romania, to Abraham Baljian and Siranoosh Markarian both of Adrianople (Tekirdagh). The only child of the Baljian couple, Levon received his early education in the Armenian School and upon graduation entered the University of Bucharest where he studied literature and philosophy, majoring in pedagogy. He taught at the Missakian-Kessimian Armenian School until age 35 when he decided to enter into the priesthood of the Armenian Church. Until 1943 as an educator and an active member, Levon was involved in youth organizations, in scouting, and in publishing important books. They included a review on Frans Werfel's *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, a monograph on Catholicos *Khrimian Hairig* as a great pedagogue, *The Liturgy of the Armenian Church*, and the periodical *Herg*, which he edited for a short time.

Next to the Armenian language, Baljian knew well the native Romanian and was fluent in French. He taught the local language to the Armenian students and at the same time was a lecturer, speaker and a writer. As a young educator and teacher, Levon Garabed Baljian was exposed to Romanian history and culture working with **Prof. Nicola Yorga** and **Prof. Hagop Sirouni**. Mr. Baljian's numerous students have admired his command of the subjects he taught at the school and have felt privileged and proud to see him elevated on the Throne of St. Gregory the Illuminator at age 47, as the 130<sup>th</sup> Catholicos.

Mr. Baljian received the order of priesthood in Athens, Greece, in September of 1943, where the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Greece, **Archbishop Garabed Mazlumian**, ordained him a deacon and a celibate priest in two consecutive days, giving him Vasken as his new name. At the

same time, the Archbishop conferred on him the four degrees of *Vartabed*, giving him the authority to teach and preach. Upon his return to Bucharest, after a most dangerous trip to and from Athens during the turmoil of World War II, Vasken *Vartabed* Baljian assumed the leadership of the Romanian Armenian Diocese. He was elected Primate in 1948, and in 1951 was ordained a bishop by **Kevork VI, Catholicos of All Armenians**.

Bishop Baljian's candidacy for the election as the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians was conspicuously endorsed by the Soviet government. In 1954, after the death of Catholicos Kevork VI Chorekjian, Bishop Vasken Baljian was invited by the Supreme Spiritual Council of the Mother See to visit the Holy See to attend the Council's session in December, where he was assigned for an extensive tour around Armenia, Georgia and Russia, during the months of December to March 1955. He visited all Armenian churches and parishes and celebrated Holy Mass during the Holidays of the Holy Nativity. The purpose was to introduce him silently to the Armenian faithful as a young Bishop who was the preferred candidate for the highest position in the Armenian Church. Looking back from a distance of a half a century, against high and unmatched accomplishments in recent history as witness, the Armenian people were ever grateful to the introduction of otherwise the best candidate at the time.

### **Election in 1955**

During September 25-30, 1955, the **National-Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Armenian Church** convened in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, presided over by **Archbishop Vahan Gosdanian**, Chairman of the Supreme Spiritual Council. At the session of September 30, 1955, 137 delegates were present from all over Armenia and the Diaspora to cast their votes for the election of the new Catholicos of All Armenians. A

majority of 125 votes cast in favor of Bishop Vasken Baljian, Primate of the Armenian Dioceses of Romania and Bulgaria, declared him Catholicos. The newly elected Bishop assumed the name of **Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians**. His election was followed by his ordination and consecration as required by the canons of the Armenian Church. The solemn ordination and anointing of the Catholicos took place in the Mother Cathedral on October 2, 1955 with eight Archbishops participating. They were **Archbishop Mampre Sirounian** of Egypt, **Archbishop Mampre Calfayan** of the USA, **Archbishop Vahan Gostanian** of the Supreme Spiritual Council, **Archbishop Vartan Kasparian** of California, **Archbishop Sion Manoogian** of South America, **Bishop Terenig Poladian** of the See of Cilicia, **Bishop Sahag Der Hovhannissian**, and **Bishop Souren Torosian** both of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

### **First Encyclical**

Catholicos Vasken I signed his first Encyclical on December 1, 1955, and addressed to the entire Armenian Churches with the following text: *"My love in Jesus Christ I extend to you all."* With ample advice and immediate prospects regarding his high office, the Catholicos specified the essential reforms ahead of him, such as renovating the Cathedral and the existing residence, especially the *Veharan*, the Palace of the Catholicos, which was confiscated for decades by the Soviets. He also addressed the need of safeguarding the numerous ancient monasteries across Armenia that needed immediate care and restoration through special dispensation from the government for which the Catholicos needed significant funds from abroad. The Encyclical gave an important signal for the preparation of a new generation of clergy, well educated, for which he committed himself to strengthen the Seminary with a fundamental agenda and discipline, both for the prospective students and for the members of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin.



In his Encyclical, the Catholicos acknowledged the successful achievements of the hierarchic Sees of the House of Cilicia, the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople, as well as the dioceses outside Armenia, such as France and Europe, North and South Americas, Egypt and France, Iraq and Iran, England and Greece. The scattered Armenians had flourished as a united and productive Diaspora under the guidance of Primates in each diocese.

### **Twelve Bishops Ordained in 1955 and 1957**

During his Pontificate, His Holiness Vasken I ordained 65 bishops to lead the various dioceses of the Armenian Church worldwide. This was a historic and unprecedented number of ordinations by one single Pontiff in the past hundreds of years. To begin with, following his enthronement in 1955 as the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, Vasken I ordained 12 bishops within the first two years as follows.

In 1955, nine bishops were the first ordained: **Archbishop Haigazoon Abrahamian** from the Brotherhood of St. James in Jerusalem, was born in Van in 1906, and ordained a priest in Jerusalem in 1930. He served in the Armenian Patriarchate and after being a bishop, he served in Holy Etchmiadzin as Pontifical Legate to the Far East, and later as Grand Sacristan and Chairman of the Supreme Spiritual Council. **Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian** from the Brotherhood of Jerusalem was born in Van in 1908 and ordained a priest in 1930. He served as Patriarchal Legate of Jerusalem, Dean of the Seminary and the Tarkmanchats High School, and was ordained a bishop as the Primate of Paris, France, and as the Pontifical Legate of Western Europe. **Archbishop Hairig Aslanian**, a member of the Jerusalem brotherhood, was born in Van in 1909. He was ordained a priest in 1932 and served in the Jerusalem Patriarchate as Chancellor and Grand Sacristan. **Bishop Barkev Vertanessian**, a member of the Jerusalem brotherhood,

was born in 1905 in Balikessir, Turkey. He was ordained a priest in 1930 and assigned as a member of the editorial staff of the monthly official *Sion* of the Patriarchate where he signed significant articles. He died in Jerusalem only one year after his ordination following a heart attack. **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian**, was born in Yozgat, Turkey in 1913 and ordained a priest in Jerusalem in 1935. He served as Dean of the Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon. He was pastor of the Armenian Church in London and later in the Eastern Diocese of the United States. Upon his election as the Primate of the California Diocese, he was ordained a bishop, and soon after, as Grand Sacristan of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. **Bishop Yeznik Aznavorian** from the Brotherhood of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin was born in Alashkert, Armenia in 1880. A 1902 graduate of the Kevorkian Seminary of the Mother See, he worked as a teacher and as an accountant until 1944, and was admitted by the *locum tenens* of the Mother See Archbishop Kevork Chorekjian and ordained a priest the same year. He was assigned as primate of Baku, Azerbaijan, upon which he was ordained a bishop by Vasken I. **Bishop Vartan Der Sahakian**, was born in 1878 in Nagorny Karabagh, and studied at Shushi's Diocesan Academy until 1901, and was ordained a married priest in 1904 to serve in the Armenian Church of Grozni, Northern Caucasus. In 1945, he was the parish priest of the St. Gregory church in Baku, and later in 1951, joined the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin by the orders of Catholicos Kevork VI.

Two weeks later, on October 23, Vasken I ordained two more bishops. **Bishop Shavarsh Kouyoumjian**, a member of the Jerusalem brotherhood, was born in Hajin in 1908, and as a survivor of the Armenian Genocide had escaped to Damascus on the way to Der Zor where all the rest were massacred. He was admitted by the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1924 and upon graduation from the seminary was ordained a priest in 1930. He studied in King's College, London, and

returned to further his studies in law. Kouyoumjian was holding a degree in law when he was assigned to the primacy of the diocese of Damascus by Karekin I, Catholicos of Cilicia in 1949. **Archbishop Bessak Toumayan**, a member of the Jerusalem brotherhood was born in Bardizag, Turkey, in 1912. He was orphaned during the massacres, and in 1926 was admitted by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Upon graduation from the seminary, he was ordained a priest in 1934. Toumayan was a talented musician with a special vocal quality who furthered his education in music, assumed the vicariate of the Diocese of Alexandria in Egypt, and in 1949 was appointed pontifical legate in Great Britain by Kevork VI Catholicos of All Armenians.

In 1957, the following three new bishops were ordained by Vasken I. **Archbishop Asoghig Ghazarian** was born near Malatya, Turkey in 1909. He was orphaned in Bakuba, Iraq, and later in 1926 was admitted by the Jerusalem Patriarchate as a seminarian. After completing his education, he was ordained a celibate priest by Patriarch Torkom Koushagian in 1932. At his youthful age, he was sent to Kharbin, China to administer pastoral work in the Armenian community for 12 years, where Armenian Churches existed, including the one in Singapore. It was in the middle of World War II and Father Asoghig, the first Armenian clergy ever sent to China, was imprisoned in concentration camps as a foreigner until 1950. Returning to Jerusalem, he was assigned as pastor of St. James parish in Los Angeles, and later was ordained a bishop for the Diocese of Iraq, where he served until his death in 1978. **Archbishop Papken Varjabedian** was born in Hama, Syria in 1918, studied in the Seminary of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, and upon graduation was ordained a priest in Antelias, Lebanon and joined the Brotherhood of the House of Cilicia. He served in the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, graduated from Berkley University in theology, and in 1957 was elected Primate of the Western Diocese in California. **Archbishop**

**Gomidas Der Stepanian** was born in Damascus in 1925, and studied in the Seminary of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He migrated to Armenia and entered the Seminary of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, where he was ordained a priest. First he served as the Primate of the Diocese of Georgia.

### **Blessing of the Holy *Muron* (Holy Oil) in 1955**

During his pontificate (1955-1994), Catholicos Vasken I conducted **six Blessings of Holy *Muron***, once every seven years, the first soon after his election on October 16, 1955, with the participation of 15 bishops, among them seven just ordained the week before. The last Blessing of the *Muron* had taken place three decades before in 1926 by **Catholicos Kevork V of All Armenians** (1912-1930). During the pontificate of the two succeeding Pontiffs, **Khoren I Muradbekian** (1932-1938), and **Kevork VI Chorekjian** (1945-1954), blessings of Holy *Muron* were not permitted by the Soviet authorities. Considering the gap there was an urgent need for the distribution of the Holy Oil all over the churches in Armenia and abroad. The 1955 celebration was welcomed with great enthusiasm and anxiety, notwithstanding the still obvious harsh and suspicious measures of the government. Diocesan bishops carried jars of the new *Muron* to their respective countries to be used solely for Baptisms and Confirmation, and in special cases for ordaining new priests and for consecrating of churches.

The next five Blessings of the Holy *Muron* by the hands of **Vasken I** took place in **1962, 1969, 1976, 1983, and 1991** under more relaxed and tolerant conditions. The following is a brief description of this special sacred ceremony, which applies to each one of them identically, except for the invited and present high ranking clergy of each time. Variably, Catholicoi, Patriarchs, and Archbishops of the Armenian Church as well as of the sister churches, such as the Orthodox Patriarch of Russia, the Orthodox Patriarch of Georgia, the Catholicos of the Indian

Malabar Church, the Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Bishops of the Anglican Church have been present to the rare ceremony.

### **How is the Blessing of the Holy *Muron* Performed?**

Following Sunday's Liturgy in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians, is escorted by a procession of 12 archbishops fully vested, by the members of the Brotherhood, and the chief clergy invited from various denominations to the site where a stage is prepared for the ceremony to accommodate the unusual crowd. In recent years, the stage was permanently replaced by a spacious Open Altar built by His Holiness **Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians**, elected in 1999, to allow ample room for thousands of faithful to witness the ceremony. Each of the attending archbishops holds a relic, a cross, a Gospel book, a vessel containing some of the previously blessed *Muron*, the Spear which pierced the side of Jesus, and the relics of Saints. The Catholicos holds the **"Right Arm" of St. Gregory the Illuminator** containing a relic of our Patron Saint. It is significant that the old *Muron*, containing samples from the centuries-old *Muron*, going back into the depth of the past centuries, is symbolically mixed in the newly blessed one carrying the succession of the sacred tradition into the present time, along the line of the "apostolic succession."

In the midst of the singing of the proper hymns, the readings from the Scriptures, and the lengthy prayers by the presiding Catholicos, by the archbishops and the choir, the large silver cauldron, sculptured with saints' figures and covered with a dome-shaped top filled with the new oil, is now placed on the stage where the ceremony would take place. It contains a mixture of olive oil with 40 different kinds of juices drained from the roots of the plants and flowers, prepared forty days earlier and placed in front of the main Altar of the Cathedral for 40 days, while daily and Sunday services took place.

After reciting prayers, the Godfather opens the cauldron and the previously blessed Holy Oil is poured, following which the Catholicos blesses it three times by actually immersing in the oil the Spear, the Cross, and finally the “Arm of the Saint.” The oil has become Holy and all of the clergy and the faithful, beginning from the Catholicos, approach the cauldron and kiss it reverently. The Holy *Muron* never runs out; it is always ready and available to keep the life of the Armenian people holy and united.

### **Renovations and Excavations of Ancient Monasteries**

Vasken I is regarded in the modern history of the Armenian Church as the “Builder Catholicos” (*Shinarar Catholicos*). He was determined to seize all possible opportunities within reason and take proper measures with great caution, patiently and systematically, to renovate the buildings of the Mother See and the neglected monasteries across Armenia despite the Soviet regime, especially during the first decade of his pontificate. Vasken I, in his unusual optimism was successful indeed. Thanks to his vision, faith, great diplomacy, and unending energy, by which he was able to secure the immediate and permanent help of a group of highly qualified architects who formed a standing **Architectural Committee** of the Mother See for 35 years, under his presidency and chaired by a distinguished architect **Varaztad Harutyunian**.

The initial restoration began with the **Palace of His Holiness**, the *Veharan*, which included his residence, his reception hall, the pontifical office, and the offices of the Chancellery, a two-floor ancient building, built in 1914 during the pontificate of Catholicos Kevork V Sourenian (1912-1930), donated by the famous benefactor Alexander Mantashian. Soon the impressive building was confiscated by the Soviets and was brutally abused by various groups and for various purposes, other than religious. After the acquisition of the building by

Vasken I in 1957, the *Veharan* was completely renovated by the funds of Calouste Gulbenkian, and was ready for the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of 1962. This was a bold achievement by His Holiness in years of uncertainty, and for sure remains the pride of the nation and the Armenian Church. At my first visit to Etchmiadzin in 1958, I saw the *Veharan* completely neglected and in ruins in the interior, and no one was permitted to approach the building, but when I was there again in 1969, I witnessed the miraculous change from the inside and from the outside of this elegant building.

### **Monastic Structures and Excavations**

Within the first decade, from 1955 to 1965, the following renovations were successfully completed. In the **Mother Cathedral** of Holy Etchmiadzin a marble Altar was designed and built, along with the new marble flooring of the church. While construction was in progress, ancient pagan fire worshipping remnants were found directly under the main Altar that now has access to the visitors. It designated the initial site of worship replaced by St. Gregory with the first Altar of the original church that was named after St. Mary the Mother-of-God before it was known as the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. Marble railings separating the chancel from the nave were newly built, as also the roof that was completely redone. Within the complex of the Mother See a wall fence was built anew all around, with an arched main entrance with pink *toufa* stones, and the old **Printing House** was renovated by Yervant Aghajanian, a donor from the United States. A Tower with a clock was erected, and the old *Veharan* was converted into a museum dedicated to the memory of Catholicos Khrimian Hairig.

Not too far from the Mother Cathedral, the **Church of St. Hripsimeh** in Vagharshapat needed some repair and especially a new Altar was in the plan of the general architecture of that

most original church of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, built by Catholicos Gomidas. This was underwritten by benefactors from Milan, Italy. Nearby the **Church of Shoghagat** was also renovated, and the holy shrine of **St. Mesrob Mashtots** (361-440) in the district of Ashtarak in Oshagan was completely redecorated with murals and outdoor landscaping. This particular shrine contains the tomb of St. Mesrob, the inventor of the Armenian Alphabet, where pilgrims always visit to kiss the marble cover of the tomb in the chapel beneath the Altar. On my second visit to Oshagan in 1969, I noticed a significant change in the interior design of this holy sanctuary. A huge window on the western wall installed with an artistic design of the **Armenian Alphabet**, flanked by St. Sahag, St. Mesrob, King Vramshapuh, Prince Vahan Amatuni and the Holy Translators, whose intellectual light was shining through with the sunshine penetrating in from the skies of Armenia. Additional murals such as historian Movses Khorenatsi and the Child with St. Mary were gracing the church with a special touch of Christianity in Armenia. In 1965 within the walls of Holy Etchmiadzin a **Memorial Khachkar** was designed highly artistically with multiple crosses and eagles, and was built on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in memory of the Armenian Martyrs of 1915.

### **Excavations of the Graves of Saints Hripsimiank**

During the pontificate of Catholicos Vasken I, tedious excavations took place around the foundations of the Church of St. Hripsimeh and in the graveyard next to it where, it was believed, those 32 virgins who were killed by King Trdat III of Armenia, were buried by St. Gregory the Illuminator. First, directly under the sanctuary ancient structures revealed, and more importantly, scientific excavations were conducted in the gravesite next to the church. The Armenian archeologists were able to reveal vaults of the remains of the martyred Virgins, sealed by Catholicos Komitas (615-628) and dated 618 AD,



which is the actual date of the construction of the church by Komitas Catholicos.

In 1959, and later in 1978, architect Alexander Sahinian and archeologist Babken Arakelian conducted further excavations with the approval of the State of Armenia and Catholicos Vasken I, to find around the foundations of the church remains of the ancient city of Vagharshapat. One year later, on April 12, 1979, Vasken I released an unprecedented and history making communiqué informing the State of Armenia and the entire Christian world that under the walls of St. Hripsimeh Church an ancient chapel was revealed with a series of graves with beheaded burials. The Catholicos considered the incredible findings "*as a new physical evidence for the authenticity of the original faith of Armenian Christianity.*"

The same communiqué provided ample details concerning the outcome of the excavations and their findings, verifying that around the courtyard of the church, there existed a vast gravesite from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the bodies of all 32 companions of the Virgins were interred side by side. An independent source, the Armenian historian Agathangelos of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, *confirms the findings telling that the martyred Virgins were buried side by side in one mausoleum exactly the way the excavations revealed.* Pontifical seals of confirmation regarding the graves are also reported by early historians beginning from St. Gregory the Illuminator who, and I quote, "*taking each of the saints one by one, and after placing them in individual coffins, properly vested, sealed each with his seal bearing the sign of Christ*". A century later, Catholicos Sahak Barthev did the same following the reconstruction of the mausoleum. Later, Catholicos Komitas in 615 wished to build the mausoleum anew, because it was "*too low and gloomy*" as reported by historian Sebeos. He in turn sealed the tomb and later built the glorious church of St. Hripsimeh in 618.



Blessing of Holy Muron in Holy Etchmiadzin, 1969



Vaskenian Seminary in Sevan, 2005

St. Hripsimeh Church was renewed from the interior during Catholicos Vasken's pontificate in 1978. He in turn "sealed" it by placing a magnificent tombstone bearing the colorful mosaic of St. Hripsimeh below the northern chapel of the church.

### **Goshavank Monastery Renovated**

**Goshavank Monastery**, known also as the Monastery of *Nor Gedik*, was built in 1196, a monastic complex with four churches. A gallery, library, refectory, and a bell tower were added later in 1213. The main church of the complex was named after St. Mary the Mother-of-God. The monastery was named after the famous author of Canon Law of Armenia **Mkhitar Vardapet (doctor) Gosh** whose work *Datastanakirk* (Book of Codes) remains the only ancient Armenian unit of Canon Law written by one individual. Vasken I was able to secure help from the state of Armenia to renovate the complex in 1959, which lasted three years. The architects having the full support of the government were able to repair the St. Kevork church in 1957, adjacent to the tomb of Mkhitar Gosh. This way the tomb of this famous *Vardapet* was preserved as a shrine for posterity.

## **PONTIFICAL VISITS OF HIS HOLINESS VASKEN I CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS**

### **Unprecedented Visits**

His Holiness Catholicos Vasken I was the first Pontiff in the entire history of the Armenian Church to visit extensively the Armenian Dioceses within Armenia proper and particularly those in the Diaspora. His ten Pontifical visits abroad during his 39 years of tenure from 1955 to 1994, marked an unprecedented achievement in terms of national and international exposure of this ancient Armenian Church and nation. The first among them began in February 1956, only a few months after his enthronement, when he embarked on a three months long visit from Armenia to France, to Lebanon, Egypt, Italy, and Great Britain, back to Moscow, before returning to Holy Etchmiadzin. Subsequent Pontifical Visits are described briefly in parallel with the accounts of the events as we go along.

### **Antelias, Lebanon (February 12-20, 1956)**

His main purpose as a newly elected Pontiff of the Armenian Church was to familiarize himself with the hierarchical centers of the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias and the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, where he had intended to convene the First Bishops Conference in the Holy Land and discuss urgent matters relative to the reorganization of the Armenian Church worldwide. It was his intention also to report on the immediate financial needs for renovations of the shrines in the Mother See, among the neglected historic monasteries in Armenia during the Soviet regime. As known, the Soviet regime was against religion and churches, and for that matter was still in full force during the first decade of his pontificate despite the death of J. Stalin in 1953.

Vasken I had also in mind two major tasks ahead, one for the See of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon, where a new Catholicos was to be elected after three years of vacancy, following the death of **Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian** in June 1952. The next task was for the Armenian Apostolic See of Jerusalem where the election of a successor to **Patriarch Guregh II**, who died in October 1949, was still in jeopardy. The Catholicos of All Armenians felt obligated to offer his paternal blessings to both events as the Supreme Patriarch and the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

By way of Paris, where Vasken I visited for the first time, he arrived in Beirut with his entourage of bishops on February 12, 1956, and was welcomed with great enthusiasm of outpouring love and respect. His visit was the first ever to this Middle Eastern haven of the largest Armenian community outside Armenia. Greeting the Catholicos of All Armenians at the airport was **Bishop Khoren Paroyan**, the *locum tenens*, along with the entire bishops, clergy, and executives of the See of the Great House of Cilicia. State representatives were also there to welcome the Pontiff. The youngest priest of the Brotherhood, the writer of these words, presented His Holiness the traditional bread and salt for blessing. Vasken I stayed in Antelias for one week, and on February 20 departed for Cairo, Egypt, where the previously planned Bishops Conference scheduled for Jerusalem took place instead, due to the political conflict in Palestine.

His Holiness' entourage comprised of 13 bishops including the local bishops of the Cilician See as follows: Archbishops Karekin Patriarch Khachadourian of Constantinople, Yeghishe Derderian of Jerusalem, Tiran Nersoyan, Mampre Kalfayan, and bishops Serovbe Manoukian, Vartan Der Sahakian, Shnork Kaloustian, Zareh Payaslian, Khoren Paroyan, *locum tenens*, Terenig Poladian, Paren Melkonian, Ghevond Chebeyan, and Shavarsh Kouyoumjian.

In the midst of high tension and confusion among the Brotherhood and the laity on the eve of the forthcoming election of the Catholicos of Cilicia, those 13 high-ranking clergy held two Bishops' Conclaves in Antelias presided over by Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians, first on February 13 and later, on the 19.

Upon his arrival, the Catholicos addressed the following three major problems in order to find proper and possible solutions for them. a) The evenly divided Brotherhood of the Cilician See on the eve of the election, b) serious reservations among the political parties that were actively disturbing any foreseeable peaceful election of the Catholicos, c) suspicion concerning the legitimacy of the election of the delegates of the Diocese of Aleppo. The last problem was personally brought to the attention of the Catholicos by representatives of the Syrian and Lebanese authorities.

The already delayed election of the new Catholicos for the See of Cilicia on the one hand, and the involvement of the Armenian political parties in the process of the election on the other, did not promise very much for Vasken I to create an amicable and peaceful atmosphere. His lengthy negotiations in five brief working days with the local bishops and those who had come from abroad, headed by **Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian** of Constantinople and **Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian** *locum tenens* of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, tried to interfere for a solution.

Following the recommendations of the College of the Bishops, Vasken I agreed to address the Assembly of the Delegates on February 14 as scheduled before its opening. Only two days after his arrival, he offered his pontifical advice not to hasten in opening the apparently divided Assembly that day, but try to resolve the conflict among the delegates first. His advice was to postpone the election for one more week, since he needed more time to understand the situation better and,

without interfering any further in the internal affairs, have the election of the Catholicos take place on February 20, in his presence and under his presidency if that was agreeable. However, the pontifical advice was overlooked, and after he had left the hall, the Assembly was opened and was called to order against the wishes of His Holiness and then decided to officially postpone the election as recommended. The Assembly and the Election of the Catholicos on February 20 took place in the Assembly Hall of the Veharan.

Having given his good advice, Vasken I now disappointed and in a dilemma, waited a few more days. He delivered his pontifical sermon during the Holy Mass on Sunday, February 19, but seeing no sign of peace within the community, left Antelias on February 20, the day the Assembly convened later in the day to elect the Catholicos of the House of Cilicia. Bishop Zareh Payaslian of the Diocese of Aleppo was elected as **Catholicos Zareh I of Cilicia**.

### **Cairo, Egypt (February 20-March 18, 1956)** **Bishops Conference**

From March 5 to 8, 1956, the already planned Bishops Conference was called by **Catholicos Vasken I** as scheduled. It took place in the Diocesan headquarters of the Armenian Diocese of Egypt in Cairo with 16 archbishops and bishops attending the meeting and discussing many and diverse matters pertaining to the reorganization of the affairs of the Armenian Church at large as figured by the Catholicos before leaving the Mother See. There appeared on the agenda also the most recent development of the election of the Catholicos of Cilicia in Antelias. Although the election was conducted by a duly convened Assembly, the Bishop's Conference deemed it "unacceptable" for reasons beyond its jurisdiction, with the presumption that the Assembly "was not attended by a number of delegates in protest," and for willingly changing the

nomination list of the candidates previously prepared by the Brotherhood of the See which was the prerogative of the Brotherhood. Those “many delegates”, along with 11 members of the Brotherhood of the See of Cilicia, had rejected to take part in the electoral Assembly honoring the advice of the Catholicos of All Armenians.

The Cairo Conference of the Armenian Bishops discussed a number of matters relative to the preparation of a draft of the Constitution of the Armenian Church. The agenda included the strengthening of the mutual educational interrelations among the three Seminaries in the Mother See, in Antelias, and in Jerusalem, the translation of the Holy Bible into modern Armenian, the proper distribution of the bishops and pastors in various dioceses in the dispersion. These required a revised Constitution yet to be written and ratified. Various subjects relative to the enhancement of the spiritual, cultural, and administrative affairs of the Mother Church of Armenia were also discussed, focusing on her genuine and functional unity. For all the above separate and distinct committees were formed to follow up within a span of one year and report back to the Mother See for review. This turned out to be unrealistic and no follow up of any sort was realized. Matters discussed were left for the future and thereby were mostly forgotten. Not until 1969 was the next Bishops Conference held in the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, after a long gap of 13 years, when a new agenda was adopted having no bearing with the initial Conference of 1956.

While in the Diocese of Egypt the Catholicos celebrated Holy Mass in Cairo and Alexandria, and visited the schools and centers of culture, in both cities, creating great enthusiasm among three generations who had not seen any Catholicos face to face who was coming from Holy Etchmiadzin. His Holiness paid an official visit to **Gamal Abd-el Nasser, President of the Republic of Egypt**, who welcomed him with high honors.



### **Italy, Milan and Venice (March 18-29)**

On his way to Great Britain, the Catholicos arrived in Milan on March 18 and met with community leaders Yervant Husisian and Onnig Manoogian, who together upon the request of the Catholicos undertook the renovation costs of the historic shrine of St. Hripsimeh, originally built in 618 by Catholicos Gomidas. On March 26 His Holiness paid one-day official visit to the Island of St. Lazar in Venice where the **Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation** have established their Monastery by the famous Monk Mkhitar of Sebastia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His was the second visit to Venice as an Armenian Pontiff. It was in 1550 that Stepanos Catholicos of Salmast had visited Venice. Catholicos Vasken I was respectfully received by the Abbot and the members of the Congregation giving them his pontifical blessings. Vasken I returned from Italy to Paris and celebrated Easter Sunday on April 1, at the St. John the Baptist Armenian Cathedral.

### **Great Britain (April 12-25)**

The Catholicos arrived in London on April 12 upon the invitation of **Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury**. He was welcomed by the Armenian Pontifical Legate Bishop Bessak Toumayan and the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury Bishop Mc Inness and was escorted to the Lambeth Palace of the Church of England. On April 13, an official reception was tendered at the Palace in honor of the Catholicos of All Armenians by Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, where the head of the Church of England considered the Armenian Pontiff's visit to Canterbury "*a unique one.*" He stated further, "*for hundreds of years not a single Catholicos had left his country to come out for the search of his flock.*" Dr. Fisher found the ancient Armenian Church to be a unique church "*for her antiquity, being established by the Apostles of*

*Christ, thus marking it as the first church to adopt Christianity as a National Church.”*

During his First Visit on April 15, Vasken I celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the St. Sarkis Armenian Church of London in attendance of the Archbishop of Canterbury who offered the homily upon the request of His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians.

### **France (April 25-May 5)**

His Holiness arrived in Paris and met with **President Rene Coty** of France on May 2. The 40-minute visit with the President offered an opportunity of mutual acquaintance and gratitude for having France sheltered Armenians as good citizens. The French President acclaimed the cultural input of the Armenian community as the most ancient church and the hard working people who have established loyal residence in the country. Vasken I departed for Moscow on May 5, on his way back to Etchmiadzin.

### **Moscow (May 5-19)**

On May 12, His Holiness Catholicos Vasken I paid an official visit to the Kremlin and met with the **Prime Minister of the Soviet Union Nikolai Bulganin**. Prior to his visit with Bulganin, on May 6 the Catholicos visited the Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection and performed solemn Mass on Easter Sunday, according to the Julian Calendar. Archbishop Sahag Der Hovhannisian and the local parish Priest Father Khachadoor welcomed His Holiness. In attendance were some “2000 faithful” which were anxiously waiting to meet with their chief shepherd following his lengthy journey abroad.

The meeting with the Soviet leader on May 12 proved most favorable. Present were also both the Soviet and Armenian Ministers of Religious Affairs V. Boliansky and H. Grigorian.

Vasken I briefed Bulganin on his current pontifical visit to Europe, England, and the Middle East, and in conclusion he presented seven urgent requests regarding the immediate needs of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Upon his return to Holy Etchmiadzin, and during the celebration of the Holy Mass on the following Sunday, Vasken I reported on the outcome of his visit, including his last stop at the Kremlin, at which time Bulganin had read the items requested by the Catholicos regarding the immediate needs of the various buildings and institutions of the Mother See. They were confiscated by the Soviets in the past decades. Prime Minister Bulganin had read the petition “from the beginning to the end, examining each of the seven problems, giving them his official approval to each.”

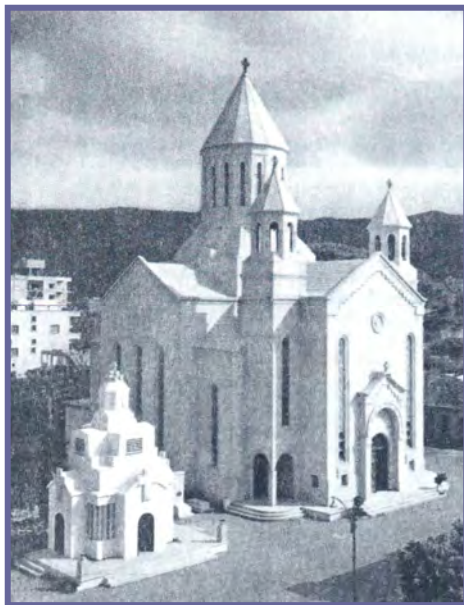
Even though we were unable to verify those seven items on the Catholicos’ list anywhere in writing, one of them, the most important indeed, soon became very conspicuous, namely, the return of the Pontifical Palace to His Holiness as his residence and administrative quarters only a year later in 1957. The confiscated and abused Palace (*Veharan*) was totally renovated, ready for the National Ecclesiastical Assembly in 1962.

## THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA Antelias, Lebanon

### Disappearance of the Holy Relics from Antelias A Year of Agony (March 1956 - March 1957)

On March 13, 1956, three weeks after the election of **Catholicos Zareh I** of the House of Cilicia, the heavy silver tabernacle containing the “**Arm of St. Gregory the Illuminator**” and other relics of ancient Saints disappeared from the Holy See of Cilicia. They were the sacred and the most precious possessions of the See for centuries brought from Sis during WWI. They disappeared suddenly from the room of **Archbishop Khat Achabahian**, the former *locum tenens*, who was living in the *Veharan* of the Catholicosate. The Archbishop was away from Antelias to attend the Bishops’ Conference in Cairo, Egypt. It was a bizarre blackmail, or even an act of terrorism in view of the outcome of the election presumably by those who had opposed the election of the new Catholicos. Achabahian returned to Antelias at once to follow up with the incident first hand. No matter what the case might have been, the sacrilegious and unlawful theft was rightfully considered an act of condemnation by the entire church. The disappearance of the Relics lasted one whole year, coinciding with the date of the already delayed ordination of Zareh I. His ordination took place on September 2, 1956, creating agony, anxiety and vacuum, considering the fact that the “presence” of the Relics in the See of Cilicia was essential for the pontificate and for the annual Pilgrims’ Day that takes place in the last week of Lent every year on the feast day of St. Gregory the Illuminator.

One year after the extensive search, a letter was received by Catholicos Zareh I from Amman, Jordan dated March 23, 1957, signed by Bishop Yeghishe Derderian, informing him that the precious Relics were kept with him in the capital of Jordan. He asked that the Catholicos send Archbishop Khoren Paroyan,



St. GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR  
CATHEDRAL  
Catholicate of Cilicia, Antelias



His Holiness ZAREH I  
Catholicos of the House of Cilicia  
1956-1963



His Holiness KHOREN I  
Catholicos of the House of Cilicia  
1963-1983



His Holiness KAREKIN II  
Catholicos of the House of Cilicia  
1977-1995

Primate of Lebanon, to return them safely to Antelias, the seat of the Catholicos of Cilicia. At the time, Bishop Derderian, living in Amman, was deposed from his office as the *locum tenens* of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Derderian was also suspended by Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians for his neglectful behavior regarding the Patriarchate, and in his place Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, his opponent, was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem on March 20, 1957 by the Brotherhood, three days before the date of the letter of the Relics was signed by Bishop Derderian.

Bishop Derderian is blamed for keeping the sacred treasures for one whole year as implied in the letter, instead of alerting the owners in Antelias at once and to return the Relics immediately. More to be blamed of course was the person, allegedly a member of the Brotherhood of the Cilician See, who had the audacity to open the room of Archbishop Achabahian in his absence and take the sacred tabernacle out of the Catholicosate. The Relics wandered at high risk from one place to another as said in the letter, kept in peoples' homes at first, and then handed over to Bishop Yeghishe Derderian, who was at the time desperate, exhausted, disappointed and punished. All told, the most important case was neither the theft, nor the unclean hands that carried the Sacred Relics from one place to another. The most important of all was for sure their safe return to the rightful owner Catholicos Zareh I on March 31, 1957.

## **Ordination and Consecration of Catholicos Zareh I**

Six months had elapsed between the election and the ordination of **Zareh I**. This was an unusually long time for an elected Pontiff to wait for his ordination and enthronement. In the Armenian Church, an elected Catholicos does not hold office until after his ordination and consecration by a set of Bishops as required by the Canons of the Council of Nicaea of

325 AD. The anointing follows the ordination collectively by the attending bishops as a canonical rite of the Armenian Church. The awkward delay was primarily because of the lack of participation of one or more additional bishops to the two who were Catholicos Zareh's supporters. Practically, all Armenian Bishops within the three hierarchical Sees of Holy Etchmiadzin, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, abode by the policy and the stand of the Bishops' Conference of Cairo held in March of 1956, and remained uncommitted withholding their participation in the ordination and the consecration of Catholicos Zareh I.

The three Bishops were left alone namely, **Zareh Payaslian** the Catholicos-elect, **Khoren Paroyan**, and **Ghevond Chebeyan**, leaving only the last two to ordain the Catholicos-elect. To comply with the least requirement, the See of Cilicia invited a Bishop from the Syrian Orthodox church, despite the many attempts on the part of Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians to find an amicable and acceptable solution to melt the existing tension and the hard stand.

They therefore went ahead and ordained Catholicos Zareh I on September 2, 1956 by the attending two Armenian and one Syrian Bishops, and consecrated him with the Holy *Muron* by the two Armenian Bishops. The Mother See and the entire College of the Bishops of the Armenian Church worldwide remained neutral, and regretfully recognition was not accorded to Catholicos Zareh I until his sudden and untimely death on February 20, 1963, seven years later on the anniversary of his election.

### **Encroachments of the Dioceses under the Mother See**

Zareh I began his first activities in reaction to the stand taken by the Mother See and the bishops of the Armenian Church. Such stand, nonetheless, pursued feasible avenues for reconciliation of the past events with lawful agreements and

commitments, without hurting the jurisdictional authority of the Cilician See in any way, nor rejecting the election of the Catholicos who was waiting for his ordination by the required number of bishops from the hierarchical sees. Antagonism gradually and rapidly showed its irregular course, and encroachments on the part of the Cilician See affected some of the dioceses traditionally and legally under the jurisdiction of the Mother See for centuries, separating them secretly and hastily without the knowledge and against the will of the Catholicos of All Armenians. Those dioceses in question were the three dioceses in Iran (Tehran, Tavriz, and New Julfa), the diocese of Greece, and the separated churches in the United States from the Eastern and Western Dioceses of the Armenian Church.

Subsequently, Catholicos Zareh I, soon after his enthronement, ordained four bishops within the first two years to satisfy the newly acquired dioceses that had switched their allegiance from the Mother See almost overnight. **Bishops Dajad Ourfalian** and **Ardag Manookian** were first ordained in 1956, the first to be assigned later as the prelate of Lebanon, a legitimate diocese of the See of Cilicia, but the second was reserved for the diocese of Tehran, Iran, against the knowledge and the wishes of the Catholicos of All Armenians. Later in 1958, Zareh I ordained two more bishops, **Hrant Khachadourian** and **Sahag Aivazian**, who were likewise sent to the United States and to Greece respectively, creating a dangerous and contagious situation in the Armenian Church, to which Vasken I reacted forcefully, rejecting categorically the occupation of the five dioceses.

We should remember that the dioceses in question always had each a *locum tenens* in charge. In fact, Vasken I, immediately after his enthronement in 1955, had delegated high-ranking clergy, all of them members of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, to Iran and to Greece, to organize proper elections



of primates, way before the See of Cilicia had entered into the picture. Two of those were not even permitted to enter Iran, namely Bishops Haigazoun Abrahamian and Hairig Aslanian, while the other two, Reverend Hmayak Intoyan for Iran, and Reverend Isahag Ghazarian for Greece, after arriving in their respective countries, were told to leave because they were considered as *persona non grata*. This meant that because they were sent on behalf of the See of Holy Etchmiadzin, then under the Soviet regime, were treacherously labeled as “agents” of the Soviets, ignoring the fact that they were actually coming from Jerusalem, Jordan in the first place.

As for the Diocese of the United States of America, two sister dioceses existed initially, the first since 1898 in New York, and the second since 1927 in California. A segment of the Armenian Church members were waiting since 1933 to separate themselves from the existing dioceses. The time was ripe, when Zareh I, under pressure from the political party governing the See of Cilicia, sent the newly ordained bishop, declaring a prelacy in the United States next to the Diocese of America against the rules of the Armenian Church. Thus, a permanent schism emerged from the action taken and, as of today, fifty years later, there seems to be little hope to remedy the division. Subsequently, two Armenian Church authorities, the Diocese under Holy Etchmiadzin and the Prelacy under the See of Cilicia, co-exist in the same geographic area in six dioceses, three in Iran, one in Greece, in the United States and lately in Canada. For the last fifty years, numerous negotiations were held to come to an understanding, the main condition being on the part of the Mother See the return of the occupied dioceses amicably and restore the administrative unity of one diocese in each given country, but to no avail. As of today, "Cooperation and not Unity" is advocated by the Cilician See, a claim that is insufficient in view of a real and functional unity of the Armenian Church. Obviously, cooperation is not unity.

## The Position of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

Vasken I issued an Encyclical regarding the violations dated April 24, 1957, protesting against the encroachments saying, *“no one is authorized to separate the Armenian Church faithful from Holy Etchmiadzin,”* reiterating the historic status of each of the dioceses that *“they are and shall remain under the jurisdiction of the Mother See.”* At the same time the Supreme Spiritual Council of Holy Etchmiadzin sent a communique dated June 12, 1957, informing the Armenian Church worldwide *“with deep grief,”* that Catholicos Zareh I had taken such steps. Despite the fact that up to the present the Mother See rejects the occupation of the dioceses in question, considering leadership in those areas by the See of Cilicia only *“temporary,”* acknowledges at the same time that those dioceses flourished and organized, despite their separation from the Mother See.

We learn differently from the immediate past history of the Armenian Church. It has proven just the opposite. It was in the 1930's when the Mother See was under heavy persecutions by the Soviet rule, and even then none of the church hierarchies in Jerusalem, Antelias, or Constantinople, thought of usurping any of the churches from Holy Etchmiadzin. Instead, those wise leaders in the Diaspora, all graduates of the famous **Seminary of Armash**, exerted every effort to support the Mother See at all costs in her desperate moments. Now that neither Soviet power nor political pressures exist, and independent Armenia is up front since 1991, the See of Cilicia, if free from internal political powers, can comfortably and amicably still help those occupied dioceses by sending their clergy to serve. This, however, can be accomplished with the agreement and the blessings of the Catholicos of All Armenians, bringing those churches back under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Mother See where they always belonged. This will be the only way to

safeguard and guarantee the unity of the Mother Church, rather than utter rhetoric and unrelated wishes.

Even after Catholicos Zareh I was ordained, Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians issued another Encyclical dated April 25, 1960, known as an **“Invitation of Love and Unity”**, addressing it to the Armenian Church at large, specifically to Catholicos Zareh I and the See of Cilicia, with paternal message of preserving the unity of the Armenian Church. He was inviting the representatives of all sides to Holy Etchmiadzin, including Catholicos Zareh himself, to come to an agreement *“for the benefit of the fullness of the Armenian Church.”* Regretfully, the invitation remained unanswered.

### **Passing of Catholicos Zareh I (1963)** **Catholicos Khoren I of Cilicia (1963-1983)**

Seven years went by and **Catholicos Zareh I** achieved as much as possible given the difficult and pressing circumstances created by the opposition party of the community. The Mother See had tried endlessly to bring matters to normal but to no avail. Zareh I was obviously under pressure as he advanced in his pontificate, and at the conclusion of his seven years, succumbed to death after suffering a massive heart attack, exactly on the seventh anniversary of his election on February 20, 1963 at age 49. Election took place for a successor, and Archbishop Khoren Paroyan, Primate of the Diocese of Lebanon was elected Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia and was enthroned as **Catholicos Khoren I**. The Mother See did not participate in the election, given the illegally occupied dioceses of Holy Etchmiadzin, and the delegates thereof, who had taken part in his election. The consecration took place on May 12, 1963 at the Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Antelias. It was in October of the same year when Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians, while visiting the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, invited Khoren I to meet with him.

Catholicos Khoren I accepted the cordial invitation and on October 26 the two leaders of the Armenian Church greeted each other, and **Vasken I** congratulated **Khoren Catholicos'** election, trusting in constructive relationships to remedy in the near future the actions taken by the See of Cilicia. A few months went by, but no sign of any kind was in sight for feasible understanding and reconciliation. On the contrary, **Khoren I** preferred to keep his distance with disregard, attempting to bring the Diocese of Marseilles under his jurisdiction unsuccessfully. He also added two articles to the Constitution of the Cilician Catholicosate to read, (a) Article 32: *"Five new dioceses are permanently switched to the See of Cilicia from the jurisdiction of the Mother See,"* and (b) Article 33: *"Other dioceses may apply to come under the Cilician jurisdiction."* Such steps sharply contradicted the understanding reached at the meeting in Jerusalem, thus making matters worse.

Catholicos Khoren I of Cilicia, on the other hand, renovated the complex of the See, adding new buildings and acquiring new churches in the Diocese of Lebanon. The *Veharan* was rebuilt anew and the printing house worked and produced books of value to the Armenian Church and history. Khoren I ordained five new bishops for the dioceses as follows: **Bishop Nersess Pahtigian**, **Bishop Smpad Lapajian**, **Bishop Karekin Sarkissian**, **Bishop Ardavazt Terterian**, and **Bishop Datev Sarkissian**. Due to his poor health, Khoren I decided in 1977 to have an election for Catholicos-coadjutor to help the administration of the See and eventually be his successor. The Assembly of the delegates from the dioceses of the See of Cilicia convened in Antelias on **May 5, 1977**, and elected **Archbishop Karekin Sarkissian**, who assumed the name of **Karekin II Catholicos-coadjutor** of the Great House of Cilicia. The Mother See was invited to the election and to the ordination. Vasken I sent his two representatives **Archbishop**

**Serovbe Manoukian** and **Bishop Nersess Bozabalian** on condition of removing the above two Articles from the bylaws.

### **Political Turmoil in Lebanon (1975-1980)**

Years in the 70's and beyond were politically unsafe and Lebanon was in turmoil with internal conflicts. The condition in the country affected deeply on the Armenian community. War broke out, and for four years, Lebanon went through devastation and deportation of its population. Especially the week of October 1-7, 1978, the outskirts of Beirut bombarded and Armenian schools and churches destroyed. Churches and communities suffered, and the See of Cilicia was even unsafe for a while. In 1978 alone at least 80 Armenians were killed and 300 others were injured. At the same time, 30 Armenian schools bombarded and 16 Armenian churches suffered serious structural damages. Overall, 31,000 Armenians had left their homes, and an estimated 230 Armenians had lost their lives during those three years of devastation.

Both **Khoren I** and **Karekin II** exerted great efforts to keep the Armenians in Lebanon united and called emergency meetings with the Armenian Catholic and Protestant leaders and the leaders of the Armenian political parties, advising them not to interfere in the political strife, but stay neutral until the situation was improved. They felt the urgency to communicate officially with **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** for support. They dispatched a delegation to Holy Etchmiadzin where Vasken I took immediate measures to send funds for the relief of the stricken Armenians in Lebanon. Two years earlier, the Mother See had already sent a sum of \$101,200 on December 31, 1976, contributed by 18 European and American institutions, including \$20,000 from the treasury of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. In addition, Vasken I, in response to his appeals, had received funds of \$210,000 from Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian, Pontifical Legate of Western Europe.

Thus, the total amount allocated by the efforts of the Mother See had reached \$307,770 to be used for the relief of the Armenians in Lebanon.

### **New Bishops of the See of Cilicia**

During the first decade of Catholicos Khoren's Pontificate, from 1963-1972, 12 priests were ordained: Fathers Yeprem Tabakian, Yeghishe Manjikian, Gomidas Ohanian, Dirair Panossian, Zareh Aznavorian, Oshagan Cholyan, Vahan Berberian, Varujan Hergelian, Aram Keshishian, Khajag Hagopian, Sebu Sarkissian, Anoushavan Tanielian. Except for Manjikian and Berberian, **Goriun, Yeprem, Zareh, Aram, Gomidas, Oshagan, Dirair, Varujan, Khajag, Sebu**, were ordained bishops, most of them by Catholicos Karekin II, and some by Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia.

In 1977 and 1980 Catholicos Karekin II ordained **Bishop Vartan Demirjian**, born in 1939 and ordained in 1957, **Bishop Mesrob Ashjian**, born in 1941 and ordained in 1961, **Bishop Souren Kataroyan**, born in 1939 and ordained in 1959. The next group included **Bishop Yeprem Tabakian**, born in 1941 and ordained in 1965, **Bishop Goriun Babian**, born in 1941 and ordained in 1961, **Bishop Zareh Aznavourian**, born in 1947 and ordained in 1966, **Bishop Aram Keshishian**, born in 1947 and ordained in 1968. Bishop Aram was elected to the throne of the See of Cilicia as **Catholicos Aram I** in 1995. Subsequently, the number of the Brotherhood grew as the following members were ordained celibate priests: Papken Charian, born in 1965, Khoren Doghramajian, born in 1965, Shahan Sarkissian, born in 1963, Neshan Topouzian, born in 1966, and Meghrig Parikian, born in 1968. At the end of 1988 the total number reached 37, fifteen of them bishops. From the above **Papken, Khoren, Shahan**, and **Neshan** were later ordained bishops by Catholicos Aram I. Further, during the decade of 1983-1993, six priests were ordained, including

Fathers Moushegh Mardirossian, Norair Ashekian, Muron Aznikian, Shahe Panossian, Nareg Alyemezian, and Kegham Khacherian. Four from the six, **Moushegh, Shahe, Nareg, and Kegham** became bishops by Catholicos Aram I.

Catholicos Khoren I passed away on February 23, 1983 at age 68, following a severe heart condition. **Catholicos Karekin II** succeeded him and took the helm of the Holy See until 1995, when elected Catholicos of All Armenians, succeeding Catholicos Vasken I. Vasken I had passed away the year before in 1994 following a prolonged illness.



Archbishop YEGHISHE DERDERIAN  
Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem  
1960-1990



Archbishop TORKOM MANOOGIAN  
Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem  
1990-



Archbishop SHNORK KALOUSTIAN  
Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople  
1961-1990



Archbishop KAREKIN KAZANJIAN  
Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople  
1990-1998



## THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

### Vacancy from 1949 to 1960

Following the death of **Patriarch Guregh II Israelian** (1944-1949) of Jerusalem in October 1949, the Armenian Apostolic See of St. James in Jerusalem remained vacant for a long time first under the leadership of **Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian**, the Grand Sacristan and the *locum tenens*, and later under **Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan**. There the political conflict existed between the Israelis and the Arabs since 1948 that dragged on indefinitely, even to this very day, providing no peace and stability in the region. In that political situation, Christian leaders of the Holy Land, the Catholics, the Armenians, and the Greeks, who equally hold the rights and the privileges to oversee the ancient Christian shrines on a daily basis with carefully scheduled church services and traditional ceremonies, promoted and kept the system working under continuing economic stress and social hardship.

There was in general the anxiety that during the decade of vacancy (1949-1960) no election of a new Armenian Patriarch was held due to the political conflict on the one hand, and the lax and indifference of the Brotherhood to expedite the election as mandated by the Constitution of the Patriarchate on the other. Unnecessary procrastination prompted repeated protests from the hierarchic heads and the dioceses of the Armenian Church, thus creating a real crisis. Distinguished members of the Brotherhood, especially those from the United States where they were serving as primates and parish priests, had returned to Jerusalem to undertake preliminary measures to replace the *locum tenens* Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian who was away from the St. James Patriarchate for unspecified reasons.

The Brotherhood led by Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, the former Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the United States, and

Bishop Shnork Kaloustian, Primate of the Western Diocese in California, both American citizens, based on the Constitution of the Holy See, in October of 1956 elected **Archbishop Souren Kemhajian**, a senior member of the Brotherhood, as interim *locum tenens*. This election was at first confirmed by the civic authorities of Jerusalem, and later revoked, following the instigation of Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian. This prompted the Brotherhood to depose him from his double offices, the *locum tenens* and Grand Sacristan, and to elect **Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan** on October 13, 1956 in his place, and also **Bishop Shnork Kaloustian** as Grand Sacristan on March 25, 1957. Such radical developments in the internal affairs of the St. James Patriarchate made matters worse. Archbishop Derderian who was sitting in Amman, Jordan, convinced the Prime Minister and the authorities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan of which he was a citizen unlike his opponents in Jerusalem, to annul all actions taken against his legitimate status as the *locum tenens* of the Patriarchate since 1949.

The interference of the government of Jordan turned everything upside down, especially after the election of **Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan** as Patriarch on March 20, 1957, who had already received the approval from Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians. However, the next year on August 3, 1958 the newly-elected Patriarch Nersoyan, who had not received the Royal Decree of approval from the Hashemite Kingdom as it was required, was treacherously expelled from the Holy Land by the state authorities. It was not too long after, on January 2, 1960, when Bishop Shnork Kaloustian was also expelled from the country, thus opening the way for Archbishop Derderian to return to Jerusalem on March 26, 1960.

### **Important Achievements**

Despite the political and internal conflicts, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem accomplished some worthy deeds during 1956-1960,

especially in view of the neglected and isolated life of the Seminary and the Brotherhood in previous years. The Patriarchate had within its jurisdiction 11 bishops, the majority outside Jerusalem, 28 celibate priests, and 14 deacons.

Indeed, the interim administration of **Patriarch-elect Tiran Nersoyan** revived the educational system of the Seminary, the Tarkmanchats High School, and the Yuzbashian-Gulbenkian school in Amman. Financial assistance arrived from the AGBU and the Gulbenkian Foundation. Besides, the publication of *Sion*, the official monthly of the Armenian Patriarchate, was published with a new editorial staff and printed religious and philological articles, similar to the ones decades before. Under Grand Sacristan Bishop Shnork Kaloustian the historic shrines were given closer and more careful protection with regular daily services as was the privileged tradition in Jerusalem among the three responsible denominations. The social life also was maintained for hundreds of Armenian refugees who were sheltered within the confines of the Patriarchate. Proper action was taken for each of the needy families on a daily basis.

The more important achievement was the ordination of 10 new celibate priests just graduated from the Seminary. On June 23, 1957, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Patriarch-elect, ordained four deacons into the rank of priesthood and named them Father Aris (Shirvanian), Father Tavit (Sahagian), Father Levon (Apelian), and Father Ohan (Kabakian). Three years later, on February 7, 1960, **Archbishop Souren Kemhajian** ordained a group of six deacons into the priesthood as follows: Father Arshag (Khachadoorian), Father Kegham (Zakarian), Father Yeznig (Chavdarian), Father Jirair (Tashjian), Father Paren (Avedikian), and Father Vertanes (Kalayjian). Weeks later the deposed *locum tenens* Bishop Yeghishe Derderian had already entered the monastery of St. James and all newly ordained priests took part in his election as Patriarch, taken place hastily on June 23, 1960. From the above, Apelian,

Kabakian, and Chavdarian renounced their ranks after years of service to the Armenian Church.

### **Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan Exiled**

On August 3, 1958, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Patriarch-elect, was exiled by the Jordanian authorities. He went to Beirut, then to London, New York, and Istanbul, always waiting for his possible return to Jerusalem. This however never happened. He returned to New York for good where he had the vision of founding a Seminary for the American-born Armenian youth to study theology for the priesthood. The Seminary, first in Evanston, Illinois, and later in New Rochelle, New York, was called **St. Nersess Armenian Theological Seminary**, after the name of Catholicos St. Nersess the Graceful. As of this day, the Seminary functions as an institution honoring the Archbishop's good wishes. The Seminary is under the auspices of the Eastern and Western USA, and Canadian Dioceses of the Armenian Church.

In retrospect Archbishop Nersoyan was a leading theologian of the Armenian Church who served as pastor and primate in London and in the Eastern Diocese of the United States. A highly learned cleric who has done much for the American Diocese of the Armenian Church for a decade (1944-1954), establishing the infrastructure of the Diocese, gracing the Church with a set of Bylaws, founding the Armenian Church Youth Organization, and promoting the construction of the St. Vartan Cathedral in New York. He was regarded as a leading ecumenist by sister Orthodox and Catholic churches by reading theological papers on various occasions in Europe and the United States. He lived long and reaped the fruits of his labor rightfully. Archbishop Tiran passed away in 1989 at age 85 in New York where he resided at the Holy Cross Armenian Church. His legacy includes an excellent edition of the Divine Liturgy with the original text and its translation into English.

## **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian (1960-1990)**

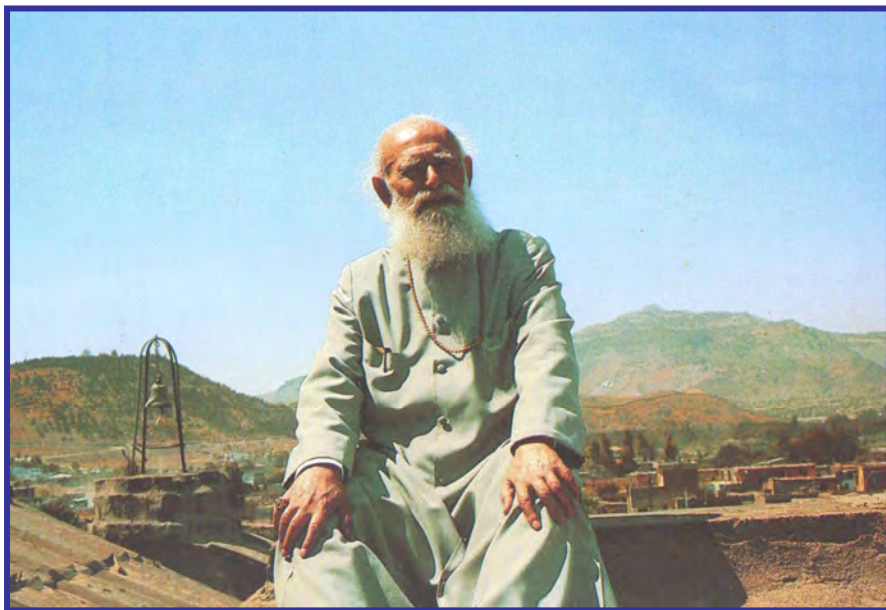
The internal conflict ended by the forceful interference of the Jordanian government, when the leaders of the interim administration were expelled from the country and their opponent Archbishop Derderian, albeit deposed by the Brotherhood and suspended by the Catholicos of All Armenians for his conduct, was installed in his position as the *locum tenens*. He was suspended and his honorary title of Archbishop temporarily revoked by His Holiness. Upon his return to Jerusalem Bishop Derderian was able to secure 15 votes of the Brotherhood out of a total of 25, requesting from the Jordanian authorities in Jerusalem his restoration as *locum tenens*. This was granted by the governor of Jerusalem who came in person on June 2, 1960 and met with the request of the Brotherhood.

The next day, on June 3, Bishop Derderian summoned a General Assembly of the Brotherhood to elect members of the Executive Board of the Patriarchate with Bishop Hairig Aslanian presiding, since Derderian himself was still suspended by the Catholicos. On June 7, the General Assembly convened again by Bishop Derderian to elect five members as candidates for the forthcoming election of the Patriarch. On June 8, the Assembly with 23 members attending elected **Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian** from among the five as the next Patriarch of the Apostolic See of St. James with 18 votes in favor, 4 blank votes, and 1 for Shahe vartabed Ajemian. The outcome of this most hectic, and obviously hasty and even suspicious election was submitted to the Jordanian authorities in Amman and to Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians for approval. At the time, His Holiness was on his lengthy Pontifical Visit to the North and South Americas, having no chance to determine the real outcome of such hastily taken actions in Jerusalem.

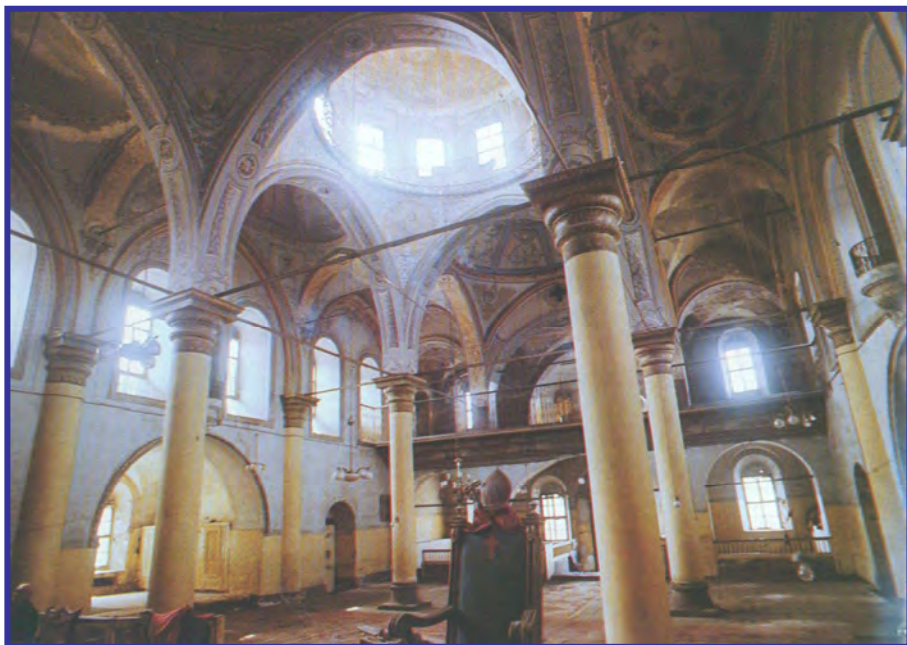
The enthronement of Patriarch Yeghishe took place in the Cathedral of St. James on August 21, 1960, following the approval of the election by the Mother See and Catholicos

Vasken I. A proclamation by King Hussein II of Jordan was read, following a brief canonical prayer service with the participation of six Archbishops. The Patriarch, now restored in his position as an Archbishop by Catholicos Vasken I, recited his oath and the attending bishops placed their right hands on his head and conveyed the divine blessing. **Archbishop Haigazoon Abrahamian**, Chairman of the Supreme Spiritual Council of the Mother See, represented the Catholicos of All Armenians and addressed the officials on behalf of the Pontiff.

Patriarch Derderian was 50 years old when he ascended to the Apostolic Throne of St. James in Jerusalem. Born in historic Van (Vaspurakan) in 1910, was orphaned in Bakuba, Iraq, and in 1924 was admitted to the Seminary of the Patriarchate by the then Patriarch Yeghishe Tourian. He was ordained a celibate priest in 1932 by Patriarch Torkom Koushagian, and later was elected Great Sacristan in 1944 and *locum tenens* in 1949. Later, in 1951, **Catholicos Kevork VI of All Armenians** ordained him a bishop in Holy Etchmiadzin, granting him at the same time the honorary title of an Archbishop. Derderian was a prolific writer, poet, editor, and instructor, known as *Yeghivart* by his penname. Despite all conflicts of the immediate past, he restored his relationship with the Mother See, remaining loyal to His Holiness Vasken I.



His Beatitude Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian of Constantinople  
Visiting Central Anatolia



Interior of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church  
in Kayseri Built in 1859

## THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

### Vacancy

At the end of World War I, the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey in Constantinople was vacant, when **Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiaian** was forced to resign in 1922. A successor was not elected during the Kemalist regime (1923-1938) of the newly founded Turkish Republic until 1927, when **Patriarch Mesrob Naroyan** was elected as the head of the Armenians in Turkey. Following Patriarch Naroyan's death in 1944, the Turkish government delayed the next election, causing again a long vacancy until 1950, at which time Naroyan's classmate at the famous Seminary of Armash, near Istanbul, **Archbishop Karekin Khachadourian**, was elected Patriarch and installed. With the creation of the Turkish Republic, the capital of Turkey had moved from Istanbul to Ankara.

### Political Crises

Following his death in 1938, the President of Turkey **Mustafa Kemal**, was succeeded by Ismet Inonu whose harsh measures against the Christian minorities and the Jews culminated in the imposition of heavy taxation known as *varlik vergisi* (taxation of possessions). In 1941, Inonu drafted all non-Muslim males between ages 25-45, some 40,000 men, and forced them to work in the construction of roads throughout the country for 14 months. The intent was to push the minorities out of Istanbul and replace them with native Turks. The following year heavy taxation in Istanbul forced merchants and all those who had established businesses to pay unspecified and unbearable taxes which if not met, confiscations and exile would be their destiny.

The imposition of taxes was primarily for the foreigners, namely, the three minorities: the non-Muslims, the foreigners,



and those Jews converted to Islam. Such distribution, obviously intentional, in no way reflected the financial checks and balances, aimed at racial and religious discrimination of the population with false and unjustified calculations. Those three minorities formed 84% of the population in Istanbul, and 15% in the provinces. The bottom line was such that they ended up paying almost half the entire taxes of the whole country. This taxation policy remained in force until 1944, causing immeasurable hardship and great damage in terms of irreparable economy and forced migrations.

Ten years later, in September 1955, sudden and destructive demonstrations and riots by the Turks created great turmoil in Istanbul with the tacit approval of the authorities thus renewing hatred against the minorities, especially against the Greeks. Overnight, cemeteries vandalized, stores were broken in, leaders were tortured, and the safety of the inhabitants of Istanbul was at stake. No interference by the security forces was in sight. The weeklong disturbance was clearly an internal unrest against Christians, whose stores and homes, wherever the mob could reach, were totally destroyed. According to historian Alexandris, the 1955 riots caused an estimated \$60 million damage including looting and destruction of 4348 shops, 1004 homes, 27 pharmacies, 21 factories, and 10 restaurants. The Greek Orthodox community suffered the most by heavy attacks on 73 churches, 26 schools, and 2 cemeteries.

### **Demolition of an Ancient Armenian Church Building of a New Church**

At his advanced age of 80, the 81<sup>st</sup> Patriarch of Constantinople **Karekin Archbishop Khachadourian** was still at the helm of the Patriarchate. One tragic event overshadowed his achievements two years before his death, when the Turkish authorities ordered the demolition of one of the most ancient Armenian churches, that of St. Gregory the Illuminator of

Galata, downtown Istanbul, for reasons of expanding roads according to a developed planning for the city. The historic church was built in 1436, during the Byzantine reign and before the Ottomans had occupied Constantinople. At a later date in 1732, the church was renovated by the famous **Patriarch Hovhannes Golod**, whose tomb was enshrined in the lower chapel of the church. The decree of the demolition was enforced in 1958, despite the repeated appeals of Patriarch Karekin and the Synod of the Patriarchate to save the historic monument. The Patriarch regretfully reported the news to the community by a communiqué on March 15, 1958 saying, *“that the shrine of Galata was to be evacuated for demolition in May, with its central church and the two side chapels, and that the last Badarak (Liturgy) was to be celebrated on May 8.”*

There was at least a consolation in the fatal demolition. The one-half of the land would be available for the Patriarchate to build a new church on the same site, since the city needed only the remaining half for the expansion. Now Patriarch Karekin and the entire Armenian community of Istanbul had to embark on the difficult task of raising funds for the new edifice to be renamed after St. Gregory the Illuminator which would still enshrine the tomb of Patriarch Hovhannes Golod for pilgrimage. Initial steps were taken and, after lengthy efforts to design an authentic Armenian Church, the first to be built in the city after the traditional style, was prepared by architect Bedros Zobian and approved by the Patriarch. Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian died suddenly on June 22, 1961, while attending church service, and did not see even the blessing of the foundations of the church, a task honorably accomplished by his successor **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** on April 8, 1962, who later consecrated the edifice on August 25, 1965. The official inauguration of the new church took place in May 1966, with the **Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras** of the Greek Orthodox Church attending along with officials of the city. This church was the last to be built as a new church in

Istanbul considering the more elaborate and ancient some 30 churches already in existence for many years.

## **The Passing of a Great Patriarch**

**Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian** of Constantinople was a distinguished leader and a graduate of the famous Seminary of Armash, near Constantinople. He was also a prolific and talented writer, poet, and translator. He passed away on June 22, 1961 suddenly following heart failure while attending church service on the feast of the Holy Translators. He was a distinguished author of many religious books, including *The Descent of the Light of the World in Armenia*, two successful translations of the *Book of Narek* by St. Gregory of Narek (10<sup>th</sup> c.) into modern Armenian from the classical original, and the periodical *Shoghagat* of the newly-established Holy Cross Seminary in Istanbul.

The late Patriarch was ordained a priest in 1901 in **Armash** with nine other graduates and sent to Arapkir, and later to Trabizon as primate. He was elected the first primate of the state of California in the United States when Kevork V Catholicos of All Armenians separated the Western Diocese from the Eastern Diocese in 1927. Bishop Karekin, ordained by Kevork V, was later sent to Marseilles, France, and from there on to Argentina as the Pontifical Legate of the Catholicos. Karekin was elected Patriarch in December of 1949, assuming the leadership of the Armenian Patriarchate in January of the following year.

His passion was to establish a Seminary in Istanbul to educate Armenian clergy similar to Armash, his *alma mater*. He was successful in establishing the **Soorp Khach Seminary** (Holy Cross Seminary) in Iskutari, where an appropriate school for seminarians was built. The Seminary sheltered hundreds of students and functioned as long as he lived, until 1960. Afterwards, Patriarch Shnork was privileged to ordain the first

three graduates in honor of the late Patriarch. Gradually, however, the Seminary changed its image and turned into a Lyceum (High School), of which many graduates served the Armenian communities for decades wherever needed, especially as teachers and administrators.

### **Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians in Istanbul**

Upon hearing the sudden death of the distinguished Patriarch, **Vasken I** decided to arrive in Istanbul from Holy Etchmiadzin to preside over the funeral and pay a brief visit to the Armenian community at the time of the national bereavement. The funeral of **Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian** took place in the Cathedral of the Patriarchate in Kum Kapi on July 7, 1961 with Catholicos Vasken presiding who anointed the remains of the late leader of the Armenian Church in the presence of religious and civic leaders of sister churches and of the government of Turkey. Many archbishops from different dioceses attended the funeral. Karekin Patriarch was eulogized by His Holiness as one of the last survivors of the famous **Seminary of Armash** who revived the good traditions of his teachers, Patriarchs Ormanian and Tourian. He carried them all the way into his ministry as a highly learned and prolific writer of the Armenian Church from the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century down to the end of the fifth decade. **The Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras** also eulogized the late Patriarch as an alert, determined, and dedicated “brother in Christ” as he stood firm in his high calling despite the many obstacles of the time.

His Holiness’ visit to Istanbul had, on the other hand, a happy ending for the thousands of Armenians in Istanbul who had never seen the head of the Armenian Church visit them for centuries. **Vasken I** celebrated Holy Mass on one occasion and visited the various religious and educational institutions, including the **Soorp Pirgich Armenian Hospital** in Yedikuleh. This was the only visit of the Catholicos to Turkey through his

entire pontificate. Before World War I, Catholicos Vasken's parents had taken him to Istanbul as a toddler where he attended the Armenian School for a couple of years in Gedik Pasha section of the city before migrating to Romania.

### **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian (1962-1990)**

The successor of the late Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian was Bishop Shnork Kaloustian, the former Grand Sacristan of the St. James Patriarchate of Jerusalem who was temporarily living in the Patriarchate of Istanbul and helping the Patriarch unofficially, since he was a citizen of the United States and not allowed to assume any office. Following Karekin Patriarch's sudden death, **Bishop Shnork Kaloustian**, was unanimously elected to the historic see of Constantinople at age 48 by the General Assembly of delegates on October 11, 1961. His election was confirmed by the Turkish government with a special decree dated December 25, 1961, based on the status of his birthplace, Yozgat, Turkey, and on the outcome of the election by the Assembly. The election was also greeted and approved by **His Holiness Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians**, who bestowed on the newly elected Patriarch the rank of Archbishop. The enthronement of Patriarch Shnork took place on January 3, 1962 with three Armenian archbishops conducting the ceremony in the Cathedral of the Patriarchate, including Archbishop Khat Achabahian from Lebanon, Archbishop Souren Kemhajian from Jerusalem, and Archbishop Bessak Toumayan from London.

The new Patriarch was born Arshag Kaloustian in 1913 in Yozgat, Turkey, this being a prerequisite for his candidacy. He was orphaned during the Armenian Genocide in 1915, and entered different orphanages, and lastly was admitted by the Armenian Seminary of Jerusalem in 1927, where he received his religious education under Patriarchs Yeghishe Tourian and Torkom Koushagian, as well as under Bishop Papken

Guleserian, later the Catholicos coadjutor of the House of Cilicia. He was ordained a celibate priest in 1935 and named Father Shnork by Patriarch Torkom Koushagian. After serving as an instructor and dean of the Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon, he assumed the pastorate of London, England, and later of parishes in the Eastern Diocese of the United States. He was elected Primate of the Western Diocese in California, and in 1955 was ordained bishop by His Holiness Vasken I in Holy Etchmiadzin. The next year Bishop Kaloustian became the Grand Sacristan of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Upon confirmation by the Turkish Minister of Interior, the Patriarch paid his first official visit to Ankara and met with **President Jemal Gursel** in March 1962. He presented the President certain petitions pertaining to the church communities of Istanbul, such as the completion of the construction of the demolished church of St. Gregory, the urgency of securing gradual freedom and progress in the life of the community after 1960 political unrest in Cyprus. The petition included permission for real estates to be donated to churches that definitely needed financial help from such donations. It was also forbidden for the Armenian churches to expand with additional buildings as needed, next to the existing churches, or even to renovate them. The Patriarch's repeated visits to Ankara in the future reiterated those requests in good faith, and made possible to secure limited permission to renovate the churches, the two orphanages, namely, the **Kalfayan** and the **Karageuzian**, and particularly the ancient church of the Holy Cross in Skutari.

Besides, the Patriarch was successful in a very short period of time to put in order all the filings, letters and documents of the Patriarchate, which were left untouched since World War I. Most of those were sent to Jerusalem Patriarchate after the War. By the end of 1968 he had accomplished a most thankful

task in sorting out and bringing together some 2533 files and classifying them in 46 large boxes in alphabetic order. In addition, he edited the existing official periodical of the Patriarchate called *Shoghagat*, and dedicated the first issues to the late Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian and to the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1461 by Fatih Sultan Mehmet II of the Ottoman Empire.

During the following three years, Patriarch Shnork increased the number of the Armenian clergy serving in many vacant churches, both in Istanbul and in the provinces of the country. He first ordained the three graduates of the Seminary into the priesthood, in addition to the 18 non-seminarians that he ordained by the end of 1966, having around him 50 active priests in total. Two high-ranking members of the clergy received Episcopal ordination by His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians, Bishop Shahan Sevajian and Bishop Khosrov Emirzeyan, in view of the increasing number of the total Armenian population that numbered 75,000. Emirzeyan renounced his ranks a few years later.

The most challenging task was always in the mind of the Patriarch. That was to bring gradually the needy and the destitute remnants of the Armenians from the scattered provinces of Turkey to Istanbul for a better life and for educating their children to keep their identity in the larger Armenian community. In February of 1966, the Patriarch was successful in opening a summer camp for the students on the island of Kinali, where 250 children from various schools of Istanbul spent their vacation. Most significantly, on July 25, 1967, **Pope Paul VI of the Roman Catholic Church**, while in Istanbul, paid an official visit to the Armenian Patriarchate, where Patriarch Shnork, the bishops and the clergy of the Armenian Church welcomed him with due dignity and honor.



His Holiness VASKEN I on his Third Anniversary 1958  
Archbishop Kude Naccashian (L), Archbishop Papken Abadian (R)



## CATHOLICOS VASKEN I IN AMERICA

### First Pontifical Visit to the USA 1960

#### New York

It was the first time in the history of the Armenian Church that a Catholicos of All Armenians would pay a pontifical visit to the Western Hemisphere, to North and South Americas. **His Holiness Vasken I** arrived in New York on May 20, 1960 and welcomed by the Archbishops and the Primates of the Armenian Church, headed by **Archbishop Sion Manoogian** of the Eastern Diocese, and **Bishop Papken Varjabedian** of the Western Diocese. Heads of sister churches as well as civic authorities of the City of New York, along with an unprecedented group of thousands of Armenian faithful applauded as the *Vehapar Hairabed* Vasken I stepped on the American soil for the first time. He was escorted to the Armenian Church of the Holy Martyrs in Bayside, NY, where he was traditionally welcomed with the proper ceremony fitting the Pontiff of the Church.

On May 21 and the following days the Catholicos received various groups one by one. The clergy met with him first, and then the intellectuals, the media, the editors of the papers, and the fraternal groups. Gradually heads of the Catholic and Orthodox, Episcopalian and Evangelical churches, representatives of the World Council and National Council of Churches paid their respects personally in the Diocesan Headquarters of the Eastern Diocese. On May 29, Vasken I presided over the celebration of the Holy Mass at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church of the Diocese on 35<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue. In the evening, a welcoming Banquet was tendered in his honor at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, where he addressed an audience of 850 faithful, headed by the Primate of the Eastern Diocese Archbishop Sion Manoogian, who acted as the Master of Ceremonies. The Catholicos said, “*We are coming from one*

*of the ancient centers of the world to bring our blessings to you and to the New World.”* His address reinforced the urgency of unity among our people and the divided Armenian Church in the outside world “under the eternal Holy Etchmiadzin.”

On June 1, the Catholicos was the guest of the National Council of Churches, and the following day he visited the Holy Cross Armenian Church, uptown New York, where he said a requiem prayer over the tomb of the martyred Primate Ghevond Tourian. On June 3, he was the guest of the AGBU Central Board at the Empire State Building with both Presidents of the Armenian General Benevolent Union **Arshag Karageuzian** and **Alex Manoogian**.

Sunday, June 5, was the date for the first Pontifical celebration of the Holy Mass in the United States. It took place at the **St. John the Divine Episcopal Cathedral**, assisted by Archbishops Sion Manoogian, Mampre Kalfayan, Tiran Nersoyan and Gomidas Der Stepanian. Present was also **Bishop Horas Dunegun** of the Episcopal Church whom His Holiness honored with a gift of an Episcopal *panagia*. His pontifical sermon was translated into English by Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan. Before leaving the Eastern Diocese, His Holiness visited the State of Michigan and blessed the foundations of the Southfield (Detroit) Armenian Church property on June 19, where the glorious St. John the Baptist church edifice and the Alex Manoogian Day School were built ever since.

## **California**

His Holiness Vasken I flew to Los Angeles on June 30 for a two-week visit to the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church. He met with the Primate **Bishop Papken Varjabedian** and the clergy of the diocese, including **Archbishop Vartan Kasparian**, the Very Rev. Dirayr Dervishian and ten parish priests. He celebrated Holy Mass on July 3 at St. James Armenian Church on Adams Avenue with an attendance of

6000 faithful. He was assisted by Bishop Papken Varjabedian, Primate, and the accompanying archbishops Vartan Kasparian, Tiran Nersoyan, Mampre Kalfayan, and Gomidas Der Stepanian. A welcoming Banquet was given to honor the Catholicos of All Armenians who visited also Armenian communities in the San Francisco area and Fresno on July 4, and before leaving the region, he led a prayer service at the Grace Episcopal Cathedral of Fresno.

## Argentina

Following his itinerary, **Vasken I** arrived in Buenos Aires on July 29, 1960 and was welcomed by the Pontifical Legate of South America **Bishop Papken Abadian**, the Aslanian Armenian School superintendent the Very Rev. Haroutiun Moushian, Church Council Chairman Armen Bergamali, and **Deputy Governor Arturo Grosseti**. With the official hymn “*Hrashapar*” on August 14, the Catholicos was escorted to the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Cathedral where he celebrated the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Assumption of St. Mary the Mother-of-God. His sermon was focused on St. Mary and the Motherhood of the Armenian mothers. The same evening Mothers Day was observed at the Armenian Center, where the mother of Catholicos Vasken, **Diramyre Siranoosh Baljian** was honored, who was living with her son in the *Veharan* of Holy Etchmiadzin, and whose painted portrait was presented to His Holiness as a gift to his mother.

On August 17, the Catholicos was invited to lecture at the Grand Rex State Museum Hall on “Culture and Ethnicity,” in attendance of 1500 people. An interpreter translated the speech into Spanish while the delivery was in Armenian. His Holiness underlined the creation of cultural values through the history of nations and the impact they have left behind. On August 18, he paid his official visit to the President of Argentina, **Dr. Arturo Frontisi** in his Presidential Palace on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

the country's independence. Vasken I presented to the President of Argentina a specially engraved silver tray with the design of the national hero San Martini at the center, framed with these words in Spanish: "*Presented to the people of Argentina by Vasken I Catholicos, 1960, Holy Etchmiadzin.*"

In the evening of August 18, the Diocese of South America tendered an official Banquet in gratitude to His Holiness for his first Pontifical Visit in the presence of 800 faithful. The following week His Holiness visited the parishes of **Brazil** and **Uruguay**, where he celebrated Divine Liturgy in Sao Paulo and Montevideo. He left for Lisbon, Portugal on September 8.

## **Lisbon**

### **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation**

The Catholicos' itinerary included an official visit to Lisbon, where the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** was established since the 1950's by the great philanthropist Calouste Gulbenkian. On September 9, 1960, His Holiness arrived in Lisbon and was welcomed by the President of the Foundation **Jose de Azeredo Perdigan**, and members of the Central Board Kevork Yessayan and Robert Gulbenkian. The next day the Catholicos paid a visit to the **President of Portugal Americos Tomash**, and later to the **Catholic Patriarch of Portugal**. That evening these officials, including **Prime Minister Antonio Oliveira Salazar**, were greeted at the Pontifical Banquet honoring His Holiness.

A great philanthropist, **Calouste Gulbenkian**, the second President of the AGBU, established the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** in Lisbon. Gulbenkian was born in Constantinople in 1869 and died in Lisbon in 1955. Following his Last Testament, a **Permanent Foundation** was established in 1956, where Calouste was living since 1942 and had amassed large wealth in the petroleum industry. The Foundation came directly under the management of the government of Portugal, and the

President of the country ratified its establishment by a decree dated July 18, 1956 as a **State Foundation** with a common goal of Benevolent Affairs towards achieving educational, religious, and publishing endeavors related mostly to non-Armenian centers. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation nevertheless included a small provision for the benefit of the "**Armenian Affairs**" which provided help to the Hierarchic Sees of the Armenian Church, for scholarships, and other benevolent projects.

This illustrious Foundation built a **Center in Lisbon** in 1969 with several offices and a remarkable museum where more than 3000 artifacts owned by Mr. Gulbenkian are treasured. The Foundation has allocated in general approximately \$135 million during 1956-1969. **From 1956 to 1971, a grand total of \$18,500,000 was allocated to the Armenian Affairs.** As an example, the amount included \$2,045,695 for 1959 and \$752,730 for the year 1960, distributed for the construction and renovation of different Armenian school buildings in various parts of the world, particularly for 56 Armenian schools in Lebanon, and for others in Iraq, and Alexandria. Grants, scholarships, and financial help to students and teachers were also included in the contributions. These are but samples for our readers to have an idea what the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation had done fifty years ago.

**FIRST VISIT OF CATHOLICOS VASKEN I  
TO THE HOLY LAND  
Renovation of the Holy Sepulcher Cathedral  
In Jerusalem**

**Cost Estimate**

The **Holy Sepulcher Cathedral** in Jerusalem was dedicated originally during the reign of Emperor Constantine I in 335. In 626 a new church was built. The present Cathedral of the Holy Sepulcher dates from 1810, followed by periodic renovations during the subsequent centuries. In recent years, urgent and major renovations needed from the exterior and the interior. The huge task began in 1962 and partially ended six years later. Three custodian Patriarchates, **Latin, Greek and Armenian**, agreed in the lengthy and costly process, and on April 18, 1962 signed a contract with a French construction company that began the work on June 1. The total estimated cost for the renovations was 900,000 British Pounds, shared evenly by the three Patriarchates, each of which had to raise the minimum funds of 300,000 British Pounds to complete the reconstruction.

An Encyclical from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin was issued by **His Holiness Vasken I** on April 30 for a national fund raising, and an editorial in *Sion*, the monthly of the Armenian Patriarchate, appealed to the Armenians worldwide for the “unprecedented and yet not impossible accomplishment of this holy task.” One third of the Armenian share was readily donated by the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** of Lisbon in the amount of 100,000 Pounds.

**Catholicos Vasken I in Jerusalem (1963)**

His Holiness Vasken I was personally involved in the project of the Holy Sepulcher Cathedral. He was invited for the needed fund-raising by **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian** to convene a **National Central Committee**. The Catholicos arrived in

Jerusalem for the first time in the fall of 1963 and called a National Committee to oversee the whole project of the renovation of the Cathedral in all its phases, primarily the fund-raising. The Committee presided over by His Holiness met on October 15 and 16 and included the following members: Archbishops Sion Manoogian (USA), Serovbe Manoukian (France), Papken Abadian (South America), Torkom Manoogian (California), Haigazoun Abrahamian (Holy Etchmiadzin), benefactors Alex Manoogian (AGBU), Sarkis Zartarian (Boston), John Kurkjian (Los Angeles), Yervant Husisian (Milan), architect Edward Utujian (Paris), and Mikael Mazmanian (Armenia).

Chaired by Archbishop Sion Manoogian, the Committee decided that all donations made previously in addition to the sums to be raised in the immediate future should be deposited in New York under the supervision of Charles Karaguezian who was authorized to make payments periodically upon invoices confirmed by the united representatives of the three responsible Patriarchates. Soon fund raising activities were organized in North and South Americas by their respective primates Archbishops Sion, Torkom, and Papken. By the end of 1965, a total amount of \$383,000 was raised by the various dioceses where members of the Jerusalem Brotherhood, Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian, Guregh vardapet Kapigian, and Shahe vardapet Ajemian visited on behalf of Patriarch Derderian of Jerusalem and accomplished their tasks successfully. Their efforts provided more funds on the previous contributions, totaling the amount to \$500,000 by the end of 1967.

### **The Renovations of the Cathedral**

During the decade of 1964-1974 a series of chapels and shrines were renovated completely, including 20 chapels belonging variably to one or the other of the three Patriarchates, each of them being responsible for the chapels belonging to him.

Prior to the interior constructions, the exterior basic renovations were completed by the end of 1966 and paid for equally by the three Patriarchates. The Armenians had completely renovated the Armenian chancellery within the Holy Sepulcher and the chapel of Golgotha where they held traditional privileges. The Greeks and the Catholics likewise repaired their chapels and shrines.

### **Ordination of Priests in Jerusalem**

During the thirty years of his patriarchate, **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian** (1960-1990) ordained **thirty celibate priests** who rendered their services both in the Patriarchate and in the dioceses of different countries. Two major events came to place the Seminary of the Patriarchate on a higher pedestal, namely, the second Pontifical visit of His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians in 1975, and the inauguration of the New Seminary building built and donated by a great philanthropist Alex Manoogian, President of the AGBU. Three Deans succeeded each other to head the Seminary, the first two briefly, Reverend Father **Nerseh Baboujian** and **Bishop Hagop Vartanian**. While **Archbishop Shahe Ajemian** held the position beginning 1967, a good number of students graduated and ordained priest by the hands of the Patriarch.

In 1961, two celibate priests were ordained, Fr. Vatche Ignadiossian and Vagharsh Khachadoorian, followed by three others in 1963, Fr. Samuel Aghoyan, Fr. Vahan Topalian, and Fr. Datev Gharibian. From the above, Fr. Vagharsh, Fr. Vahan, and Fr. Datev, were ordained bishop by Catholicos Vasken I in Holy Etchmiadzin. In the successive two years, 1965-1966, three others were ordained. They were, Fr. Arshen Aivazian, Fr. Ghevond Samoorian, and Fr. Bared Yeretsian. Succeeding ordinations offered the Armenian Church noted clergy as the learning level improved. In 1968, Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian ordained a group of three deacons into the priesthood,



Fr. Aghan Baliozian, Fr. Sipan Mekhsian, and Fr. Sevan Gharibian. Whereas Fr. Aghan and Fr. Sevan were ordained bishops by the Catholicos of All Armenians, Fr. Sipan has been serving the Western Diocese in USA with distinction.

A new trend created a special situation in the educational system of the Seminary by the influx of a large number of students who were brought to Jerusalem from Turkey, a total of 72 youngsters of different ages, most of which however were placed in the **Tarkmanchats Elementary and High School**, since they barely spoke and read the Armenian language. They were called “**Dadourian students**” after the name of a New York philanthropist Dadour Dadourian who sponsored the entire three years scholarship. Only a few graduates from the Tarkmanchats School entered the Seminary.

The year 1971 marked the year for the next ordinations by Patriarch Derderian, as he embarked on the second decade as the head of the Apostolic See. The five graduates, including two from those who came from Turkey were, Fr. Nourhan Manougian, Fr. Kissag Mouradian, Fr. Vicken Aykazian, Fr. Khajag Barsamian, and Fr. Moushegh Tashjian. The first four were later ordained bishop by His Holiness Catholicos Vasken I in Holy Etchmiadzin. Father Moushegh Tashjian has been serving the Western Diocese with distinction.

During the next remaining two decades of his patriarchate, from 1973 to 1989, Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian ordained 14 additional priests, most of whom remained in Jerusalem and served in various capacities as Deans of the monasteries and of the Seminary, and few others were called to serve in the Armenian Churches in North and South America, Europe, and Australia. They were Fr. Roupen Hovagimian in 1973, Fr. Asbed Balian in 1974, Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian in 1976, Father Aram Ateshian and Fr. Manuel Yergatian, both ordained in Istanbul by Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian in 1976. Three additional celibate priests were ordained by the Patriarch of

Jerusalem, Fr. Gomidas Sherbetjian, Fr. Parsegh Kalemderian, and Fr. Voski Vortikian.

In 1978, Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian of Paris ordained in Jerusalem Fr. Papken Anoushian and Fr. Vanig Mangasar-ian. The same year Fr. Hairig Kalayjian was ordained by the Patriarch in Jerusalem. In 1979, Archbishop Dirair Mardikian of Romania ordained in Jerusalem Fr. Hampartsoom Keshishian. During his tenure three more celibate priests were ordained, Fr. Vazken Karayan in 1982, Fr. Kousan Aljanian in 1983, and Fr. Razmig Boghossian in 1989.

The total number of the ordained celibate priests in 30 years offered to the Armenian Apostolic Church an equal number of 30 priests at the time of the passing of the Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian on February 1, 1990.

### **The Alex and Marie Manoogian Seminary**

The year 1971 marked a milestone in the life of the Patriarchate in Jerusalem. In April the foundations were laid of the new building of the Seminary which was built soon after by a generous donation of **\$450,000 by Alex Manoogian**, who was present with his wife Marie Manoogian at the ceremonies conducted by **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian**. The new Seminary was designed to accommodate larger numbers of students, with modern facilities and accommodations. Accordingly, the architecture included a two-storey building with a dozen large classrooms, a cultural hall, a kitchen and a library.

### **The Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum**

As the Seminary building transferred to its new location, the Patriarch decided to renovate the original building of the Seminary and convert it into a Museum of ancient church and ethnic artifacts. **Mr. and Mrs. Edward and Helen Mardigian** of Detroit, Michigan, volunteered to sponsor the cost of

the renovation. The Mardigians visited Jerusalem personally upon the invitation of Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian to dedicate the Museum. As of this writing the Museum is well preserved to honor the Armenian Church and culture, next to the Library of the ancient 4000 Manuscripts that are treasured in the nearby chapel.

## **Second Pontifical Visit of H.H. Vasken I**

His Holiness **Vasken I** was invited by **Patriarch Yeghishe** of Jerusalem to visit the Holy Land for the second time to officially inaugurate the new Seminary building that was completed in June of 1975. Vasken I arrived in Jerusalem with his entourage on June 22, and was welcomed by **Patriarch Yeghishe of Jerusalem, Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian of Constantinople**, Mr. and Mrs. Alex Manoogian and the official guests who had come for the occasion. On June 23, His Holiness opened the doors of the new building bearing the inscription of "**Alex and Marie Manoogian Theological Seminary**," as the benefactors cut the ribbon at the entrance. Official addresses were delivered by the Catholicos, the two Patriarchs, and Alex Manoogian who noted that "*he had come as a pilgrim to place a stone and to raise a lighthouse in the Holy Land.*" He also made his "confession", saying: "*If God has made me fortunate financially, He has at the same time given me even a greater fortune, the joy of sharing.*"

In conclusion, Catholicos Vasken I addressed the audience selecting the Biblical advice of "Wisdom and Education" which have always prompted the perpetuation of the Armenian faith, culture, and mission. He stated that "*From now on this new house of learning would shed more light on the ancient and new development of our religious thought, reconciling the ancient with the new, so that our mission of education may breathe in health and in keeping with the modern needs of our*

*people. The younger generation will always look for higher educated spiritual leaders as time goes on."*

## **Theft and Sale Prevented**

### **23 Ancient Manuscripts of Jerusalem Patriarchate Saved**

In February 1967, news spread all over that 23 Armenian ancient manuscripts disappeared from the vaults of the St. James Cathedral in Jerusalem. Actually, those manuscripts were stolen from the shelves and taken to London, England to be sold at the Sotheby's auction center. All 23 were primarily Gospel Books, hand-written and illustrated during the centuries between 1260 and 1700, mostly on parchment. Some of the stolen Manuscripts were copied in Cilicia, others in Jerusalem, and the rest in Iran where ancient Armenian monasteries still exist. News of the theft reached the world-wide Armenian community through a colorful pamphlet published in 1967 by the Sotheby's, entitled, "*Catalogue of twenty-three important Armenian illustrated manuscripts*", announcing the sale.

Ordinarily the books in question were supposed to be under the custody of a three-member committee, headed by the Grand Sacristan, elected by the General Assembly of the Brotherhood. The books are annually taken out of their vaults selectively, on festive occasions, with the full knowledge of those three clerics who possess different keys to the one box that contained the final key to the vault. Therefore, three keys needed at the same time in order to open the box, meaning that not one of the three members is held responsible for the removal of any of the rare books, but all three together. The tragedy, however, was that **no such committee existed in 1967**, a high risk responsibility indeed that fell on Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian, Grand Sacristan Archbishop Hairig Aslanian, and Chancellor Bishop Shahe Ajemian.

Taken all related factors inside the Patriarchate into consideration, it became evident that the removal of the Manuscripts

was carried out only by the knowledge of those high-ranking leaders of the Patriarchate. The total estimated sale price then for all 23 books was 500,000 British Pounds. All urgent action was immediately taken by the Catholicos of All Armenians, the state of Armenia, scholars and benefactors to stop the sale at once, and save the Manuscripts from an apparent loss. Thus, under heavy pressure from all sides, Patriarch Derderian had no choice but to dispatch Bishop Ajemian to London and meet with the *ad hoc* committee designated by Catholicos Vasken I to remedy the penalty imposed in case the sale had to stop. The committee, headed by **Alex Manoogian**, President of the AGBU, provided the 50,000 Pounds ransom, personally from his own funds, and the stolen 23 Manuscripts returned safely to Jerusalem on March 11, 1967.

This could have been the end of the ignorant deal had the Patriarch of Jerusalem and his cohorts kept silent and bore responsibility quietly as the guilty part of the whole event, without further investigation. Confused, they chose to accuse two other high-ranking clerics, **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** of Turkey, and **Archbishop Souren Kemhajian** of Jerusalem, blaming them for the removal of the books way back in 1958 when they held office.

This was obviously a deplorable and outright lie, and the people simply resented the fraudulent accusation finding neither sense nor decency in accusing the archbishops whom they knew well, as they knew the responsible Patriarch Derderian and his chancellor Bishop Ajemian. Future conflicts between the last two revealed the truth as they accused each other for the theft, thus justifying the Lord's words, "there is nothing secret that will not be revealed." The mishap was a great scandal for the Patriarchate and for the Armenian Church, attempted in a most shameful and deplorable way. At the end, the authority of **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** honorably came to the rescue.

## **Jerusalem Alumni Convocation (1980)**

Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian of Jerusalem called a unique Convocation of all graduate clergy from the Seminary of the Apostolic See who had been serving the Armenian Church all over the world in different capacities. The occasion was the **Bi-centennial of the birth of Patriarch Zakaria Kopetsi of Jerusalem** (1780-1846), the founder of the Seminary and the Printing House, and the **Fiftieth year of the passing of Patriarch Yeghishe Tourian of Jerusalem** (1860-1930). The Patriarch had informed the **Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I**, who had sent an Encyclical dated July 28, 1980, "*Marking the significant Convocation called by the Patriarch aiming at future reformation of the Armenian Church*," endorsing and encouraging the steps taken wisely and purposefully. In response to the Patriarch's invitation **46 alumni bishops and priests** attended the Convocation. The Catholicos had sent his personal representatives, Archbishop Sion Manoogian, Chairman of the Supreme Spiritual Council and Archbishop Gomidas Der Stepanian, both alumni of the Jerusalem Seminary, who presented the Encyclical at the opening session of the Convocation.

The carefully organized meeting was presided over by **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian** and **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** of Constantinople, and attended by Archbishops Sion Manoogian, Serovbe Manoukian, Torkom Manoogian, Bessak Toumayan, Hairig Aslanian, Dirair Mardigian, Shahe Ajemian, Zaven Chinchinian, Guregh Kapigian, Karekin Kazanjian, Hagop Vartanian, and all the graduate priests, celibate and married, local and from abroad. They all took part in the one week-long deliberations chaired in turn by each archbishop. Patriarchs **Yeghishe** and **Shnork**, and each archbishop read academic papers and/or chaired the sessions addressing issues of different sorts, such as liturgical, pastoral, canon law, church discipline, church's mission, and preparation of clergy. They

discussed the subjects in-depth looking ahead for the improvement of the Armenian Church's stability and progress. Two prominent and senior members of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, Archbishops Tiran Nersoyan and Norair Bogharian, both classmates and ordained together by the venerable Patriarch Yeghishe Tourian in 1928, were absent.

Workshops for four themes took place with evenly grouped clergymen each presided over by an archbishop as follows:

**I. Canon Law and Church Discipline:** In his presentation, Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian of Constantinople underlined the importance of Canon Law and Church discipline as the prime obligation on the part of the clergy during the session chaired by Archbishop Dirair Mardigian. Addressing the audience, Patriarch Shnork spoke on "*Canon Law and Church Discipline*," considering them the foundation of a stable church with proper dignity and authority, looking forward for future progress, especially in light of preparing eventually a Constitution of the Armenian Church.

**II. Religious Education:** A careful study on "*The Armenian Religious education in past and present*" was read by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian of the United States. He emphasized "*our church has always had the calling within the families of the churches to lead our nation, our families and society, bearing in mind the ultimate purpose of her perpetuity and vital importance.*"

**III. Liturgy and Ceremonies:** Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian of France read his paper on "*The liturgy and the ceremonies of the Armenian Church.*" Considering the liturgy as colorful and yet most significant expression of our national identity he pointed out that "*those liturgical and ceremonial natures or characteristics have proven high and lofty to serve as only the means to an end. They have attracted talents from our ancient literature, history and music of the past and blended them with*

*tangible arts of our people, the arts of architecture and painting."* He separated and distinguished the liturgy as a category in itself, sprung out of the treasury of the past. The Archbishop advised, *"not to conduct ceremonies mechanically, devoid of spiritual content, in which case we certainly deny our faithful the true religious education."*

**IV. National Role of the Church:** The study presented by Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian was specified as *"The National role of the Armenian Church,"* indicating first *"that the Armenian Church is truly a national church with certain qualifications."* He founded his thesis on *"the origins and the milestones of the church's centuries-old existence."* The Armenian Church in the past *"safeguarded the politically endangered existence of our nation within the frame of moral and spiritual awakening."* The Patriarch in his elaborate and well-presented speech underlined the balance between the two, church and nation, cautioning his colleagues that our church alone is not primarily a factor of "nationalism" in its narrow sense, but above all she is a *"spiritual institution that has yielded many talents that have formed our nation's character."*

**V. Closing Remarks:** The presiding Patriarchs expressed their closing remarks. **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** concluded that the Armenians became *"a church as part of God's economy, since God's purpose was to convert each nation into individual churches."* One of the "role model" of such "national churches" is the one initiated in Armenia. He reminded his fellow clergy *"to feel humbled and proud to understand that God's universal purpose of the conversion of nations into churches has been thoroughly realized in the establishment of the Armenian Church, the first among the nations of the world."* His conclusion was the unique encounter of the "universal" and the "national" entities of the Armenian Church, complementing each other.



**Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian** was appreciative of the Convocation as an accomplishment of continuing study. He thanked the participants, especially Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian for his presence. He stated that the 1980 Convocation of Jerusalem would conclude with observance of tribute in memory of both, **Patriarchs Zakaria and Tourian**. The observance took place in reverence and with special speeches addressed and a cultural program performed by the alumni priests in an impressive manner. The special issue of *Sion*, the official monthly of the Patriarchate edited by Archbishop Shahe Ajemian, reflected the actions taken by the Convocation with respective photos. In retrospect, the general content included a historical review of the Founding of the Seminary since 1843, and the lives and the legacies of the venerable Patriarchs Zakaria Kopetsi and Yeghishe Tourian. It was impressive to see all the papers published in the monthly, headed by the Encyclical of Catholicos Vasken I, as well as the names and short biographies of the entire ancient and current clergy by name and profession who comprised past and present alumni of the Seminary as a permanent record. Regretfully, follow-up since then never appeared on the agenda of the Patriarchate in successive meetings to justify the work and the intentions of the Convocation.

## MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN

### Ordination of Bishops and Jubilee Celebrations

#### **Eighteen Bishops Ordained During 1958-1967**

Previously Vasken I had ordained 12 bishops and assigned them to various dioceses. During the decade of 1958-1967 he ordained an additional 18 bishops for his immediate needs. In 1958 Vasken I ordained **Bishop Zgon Der Hagopian** for the Diocese of Iraq, and **Bishop Knel Jerejian** for the Armenian churches in Lebanon under the jurisdiction of the Mother See. In 1959, he ordained **Bishop Papken Abadian** as Pontifical Legate of Argentina and South America. His next ordination was in 1962 which coincided with the **National Ecclesiastical Assembly of 1962**. Those ordained were **Bishop Torkom Manoogian**, Primate of the Western Diocese USA, **Bishop Housig Santourian**, Grand Sacristan of the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin, **Bishop Mashtots Tajirian**, Primate of the Shirak Diocese, **Bishop Barkev Gevorgian**, Pastor of the Armenian Church in Moscow. In 1964 the Catholicos ordained a pair of new bishops, **Bishop Dirair Mardigian**, Primate of the Dioceses of Romania and Bulgaria, and **Bishop Vahan Derian**, Vicar of the Ararat Diocese in Erevan. In 1965, four candidates were presented to the Catholicos for ordination as follows. **Bishop Yeghishe Simonian**, Vicar of the Eastern Diocese of the USA, **Bishop Hagop Vartanian**, Vicar of the Diocese of Marseilles, France, **Bishop Shahe Ajemian**, Chancellor of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and **Bishop Zaven Chinchinian**, Vicar of the Diocese of Egypt in Alexandria. In 1966, for the first time since World War I, three candidates were presented by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Catholicos of All Armenians for Episcopal ordination. They were **Bishop Karekin Kazanjian** who was ordained as Pontifical Legate of the Diocese of Australia and the Far East, **Bishop Shahan Sevajian** and Bishop **Khosrov Emirzeyan**, both as assistant to the Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian of Constantinople. In 1967,

two more bishops were ordained upon the recommendation of Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese USA, they were **Bishop Vatche Hovsepian**, Vicar of the Diocese of Canada, and **Bishop Vazken Kebreslian**, Vicar of the Eastern Diocese USA. From above four left their ranks and subsequently were defrocked by the Catholicos: Barkev Gevorgian, Vahan Derian, Khosrov Emirzeyan, and Vazken Kebreslian. By the end of 1967 a total of thirty bishops were ordained by His Holiness Vasken I.

### **Ordination of Nine Bishops (1973-1976)**

In 1973, His Holiness ordained a set of four bishops as follows: **Bishop Kude Naccashian** of France. Bishop Kude was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1933, and was the only graduate of the Seminary of Antelias in 1955. He was ordained a priest the same year. Since 1960, he was serving in the Diocese of France under Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian, who had assigned him as his vicar. **Bishop Arsen Berberian** of the Mother See was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1937 and admitted to the Seminary in Holy Etchmiadzin in 1955. He was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin in 1965. Bishop Arsen was the pastor of St. Sarkis Armenian Church in London where he served until 1971, and at the same time studied at King's College and earned his doctorate. Upon ordination, he became the Vicar of the Catholicos in the Ararat Diocese. **Bishop Nareg Shakarian**, Primate of the Diocese of Shirak, was born in Damascus, Syria in 1932. He was ordained a priest in the Mother See in 1962, and later served as the abbot of the Monastery of Geghart until his election as primate. **Bishop Kevork Seraydarian**, primate of the Diocese of Georgia, was born in Bucharest, Romania in 1938. He was ordained a priest in 1962 and first was an instructor at the Seminary and the curator of the Museum. He prepared the annual calendar of the Mother See according to the feasts and celebrations of the Armenian Church.

In 1974, His Holiness ordained a set of three bishops: **Bishop Hmayak Intoyan** from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Bishop Intoyan was born in Kghi, Turkey, in 1908, and as an orphan was taken to Jerusalem, where he studied at the Seminary of the Patriarchate. He was ordained a priest in 1936, served in the Patriarchate, and later in the Eastern Diocese of the United States. **Bishop Aris Shirvanian** of the Eastern Diocese of the United States was born in 1934 in Haifa, Palestine, and was ordained a priest in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1957. He studied at Durham University in England, and served as parish priest in the Eastern Diocese of the United States. He was ordained bishop as the Vicar of the future Diocese of Canada. **Bishop Nersess Bozabalian** of the Mother See was born in Kirik Khan, Turkey, in 1937. He Entered the Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon, and soon migrated to Armenia where he continued his religious education at the Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin. He was ordained a priest in 1961, studied in London, and returning to Etchmiadzin was assigned Dean of the Seminary. Bishop Nersess was ordained as Pontifical Legate of Great Britain representing His Holiness Vasken I.

In 1976, Catholicos Vasken ordained two bishops, both members of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, **Bishop Giuregh Kapigian** and **Bishop Tavit Sahakian**. Bishop Kapigian was born in Jerusalem in 1921 and lived in the Patriarchate. He worked for the printing press and later was ordained a priest in 1951, serving in the Armenian Patriarchate all his life especially as the Dean of the Tarkmanchats High School in the Patriarchate. Bishop Kapigian passed away in December 2003. Bishop Sahakian was born in Jerusalem in 1935, and was ordained a priest in 1957. He served in Lyon, France as the vicar of the Armenian community under Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian, Primate of Paris. In 1990, Archbishop Sahakian was elected Grand Sacristan of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. He held his responsible position for a few years and then resigned

as a member of the Brotherhood of the Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate and since then he resides in Lyon, France. Those nine additional bishops brought the number of the ordinations to 39 from 1955 to 1976.

### **Ordination of 26 Bishops (1982-1992)**

Catholicos Vasken I performed additional ordinations of bishops in the last decade of his life, consecrating 26 more candidates. The total number of the bishops ordained by His Holiness reached 65.

In 1982, five bishops were ordained: **Bishop Yeghishe Gizirian** of Great Britain, was born in 1926 and ordained a priest in 1947 in Antelias. His service in the Eastern Diocese of the United States has been long and productive. The Catholicos assigned Bishop Gizirian as his Pontifical Legate of England in 1982 and ordained him bishop. **Bishop Aghan Baliozian** of Australia and the Far East was born in 1946 and ordained a priest in Jerusalem in 1968. He was the vicar of the Diocese of Australia until the Primate Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian assumed the task of Grand Sacristan of the Patriarchate in Jerusalem. **Bishop Vosgan Kalpakian** of the Diocese of Greece was born in 1941 and ordained a priest in 1965 in Holy Etchmiadzin. Prior to his ordination Bishop Vosgan was the Primate of the Diocese of Damascus, Syria. **Bishop Norvan Zakarian** of Lyon, France, was born in 1941 and ordained a priest in 1968. He was the vicar of Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian, Primate of Paris. Later Bishop Zakarian became the Primate of the Diocese of France. **Bishop Avak Assadourian** of Iraq was born in 1942 and ordained a priest in 1977. He studied in the United States, served in the Eastern Diocese, and was later elected Primate of the Diocese of Iraq. All five have been elevated to the rank of Archbishop.

In 1983 Catholicos Vasken I ordained a set of three bishops, all of them members of the Mother See: **Bishop Grigoris**

**Bouniatian** of South America, was born in 1946 and ordained a priest in 1969. Previously having served in Paris and later in the Mother See, he was appointed as Pontifical Legate of South America by Catholicos Vasken I. **Bishop Karekin Nersissian** of the Araratian Pontifical Diocese, was born in 1951 and ordained a priest in 1972. He studied in Vienna and served in Germany. Upon his return, Bishop Karekin became Vicar of the Pontifical Diocese of Ararat in Erevan, Armenia. Since 1999, Archbishop Karekin Nersissian is **Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians**. The third candidate was **Bishop Anania Arabajian**, born in 1951 and ordained a priest in 1973. He was ordained as the *locum tenens* of the Diocese of Azerbaijan. Later, he resigned from his ranks and was defrocked by Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians.

In 1984, two bishops were ordained in Holy Etchmiadzin: **Bishop Vazken Keshishian**, Primate of Canada, born in 1935 and ordained a priest in 1959. He served in the Armenian churches of Ethiopia, Marseilles, and the United States, and became the first Primate of the newly established Diocese of Canada in 1984. **Bishop Datev Karibian**, Primate of Brazil, was born in 1937 and ordained a priest in 1963. He served in the Armenian churches in South America, and was ordained a bishop for the newly established Diocese of Brazil in 1982.

In 1986 Catholicos Vasken I ordained two more bishops: **Bishop Mesrob Krikorian** of Central Europe, was born in 1932 and ordained a priest in 1953. He entered the Durham University, England and earned his doctorate. Bishop Krikorian assumed the pastorate of the Armenian community in Vienna, Austria for three decades and later in 1980 was assigned as Pontifical Legate of Catholicos Vasken I for Central Europe. **Bishop Mesrob Mutafyan** of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople was born in 1956 and ordained in 1979. He studied in the United States and returned to Istanbul to assume duties under Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian. At the present,

Archbishop Mesrob Mutafyan is the **Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople** since 1997.

In 1988, Catholicos Vasken I ordained six additional bishops, three from the Mother See, and three from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Those from Jerusalem were **Bishop Vagharsh Khachadourian**, born in 1941 and ordained in 1961; **Bishop Vahan Topalian**, born in 1941 and ordained in 1963; **Bishop Sevan Gharibian**, born in 1940 and ordained in 1966. From the Mother See the newly ordained were, **Bishop Barkev Mardirossian**, Primate of Artsakh, born in 1954 and ordained a priest in 1985; **Bishop Diran Giureghian**, Pastor of the Armenian community in Moscow, born in 1948 and ordained in 1972; **Bishop Asoghig Aristakessian**, born in 1959 and ordained in 1983. Of the above six Diran and Asoghik resigned from their clerical ranks and were thus defrocked.

In 1990, Catholicos Vasken I ordained four bishops for the North and South American Dioceses. They were: **Bishop Kissag Mouradian**, born in 1951 and ordained in 1971, Primate of Argentina; **Bishop Khajag Barsamian**, born in 1951 and ordained in 1971, Primate of the Eastern Diocese, USA; **Bishop Hagop Klenjian**, born in 1955 and ordained in 1976, Primate of Uruguay; **Bishop Hovnan Derderian**, born in 1957 and ordained in 1980, Primate of the Diocese of Canada.

In 1992, Vasken I ordained four more bishops, all from abroad. It was the last performed by the late Catholicos. They were: **Bishop Houssig Bagdassian**, born in 1934 and ordained in 1959, Chancellor of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. **Bishop Daron Djerejian**, born in 1937 and ordained in 1963, Vicar of the Diocese of Marseilles, France. **Bishop Karekin Bekjian**, born in 1942 and ordained in 1965, Primate of the Diocese of Germany. **Bishop Vicken Aykazian**, born in 1950 and ordained in 1971, Primate of the Diocese of Switzerland. During his 39 years of Pontificate His Holiness Vasken I consecrated a total of 65 bishops for the Armenian Churches in

Armenia and the Diaspora, truly a record number that generated much vitality and exposure of the Armenian Church all over the world. The large number of bishops during Catholicos Vasken's pontificate demonstrated the addition of many new dioceses. The new bishops held their respective offices, but at the same time they assisted the Primates in larger dioceses and communities.

### **Centennial Jubilees Marked By Encyclicals of Catholicos Vasken I**

A set of four Centennial Jubilees of different occasions were proclaimed by **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** during his pontificate, inviting the hierarchical Sees, the Armenian dioceses, and the entire faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church to observe them worldwide. He issued an official Encyclical for each Jubilee with orders of honoring them properly and ceremoniously. Chronologically they were the following.

### **The 2750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Foundation of Erevan-Erebuni**

The year 1968 marked the 2750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of one of the oldest cities in the world, **Erevan**, the modern capital of the Republic of Armenia. History goes back to the Kingdom of Urartu, on the shores of Lake Van, whose King Argishti I built the fortress of Erebuni in the year 782 BC, on the hills of Arin Bert, on the eastern frontiers of his kingdom. Archeologists discovered the ancient stele on which they were able to decipher the cuneiform inscription saying that *"I, Argishti of Menua, built this impressive fortress and named it Erebuni for the glory of the lands of Biaina and as a threat and horror to the enemy countries."* The stele, still clearly legible is now displayed at the entrance of the Erebuni Museum as an amazing testimony to the founding of the city of



Erevan, dated 782 BC. To calculate the anniversary add 782 BC to 1968 AD to confirm the 2750<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The earliest mention of the City of Erevan in ancient Armenian literature occurs in the minutes of a Church Council. Catholicos Abraham of Aghbatank (607-615) who had called the Council of Dvin in 607, a certain "Bishop Tavit of Erevan" is included in those who attended the council. However, it was not until 1950 when the Armenian archeologists discovered the historic stele and the remnants of some royal artifacts. The Centennial celebrations which began in 1968, headed by **Anton Kochinian, President of the Republic of Armenia**, state officials and religious leaders of the Mother See, attended a concert which consisted of a choral group of 2750 members with an orchestra, performing the especially composed "Erevan-Erebuni" the famous song by Edgar Hovanesian.

At the Spendiarian State Opera House, on October 19, 1968, the 2750<sup>th</sup> Centenary Jubilee was officially inaugurated as a national observance with **President Kochinian** of Armenia presiding, and **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** attending, who had arrived from Holy Etchmiadzin with Archbishops Haigazoun Abrahamian and Gomidas Der Stepanian. Badal Mouradian, president of the Council of Ministers, opened the celebration declaring that Erevan in its antiquity is *"truly classified with Babylon and Persepolis which, however, are now extinct under ruins"*. The main address was delivered by President Anton Kochinian of the Republic who stated that *"actually Erevan was one of the youngest cities in the world"*, despite its longevity, and is now shining under the sun with its state buildings, palaces, squares, and parks.

The same evening a Jubilee Concert was presented in the Opera House with "the Republic's best performing artists" to celebrate the unique Centennial. Music and songs by **Gomidas Vartabed** and arias from "David Beg" opera were performed.

A Museum designed by architects Baghdasar Arzoumanian and Shmavon Azadian was inaugurated in the presence of 40,000 people with a concert by the same choral group of 2750 members, and by 150 young men surrounding the fortress wearing duplicates of the original uniforms of the infantry and mounted soldiers of the Urartian era. The ancient site is now an attraction to worldwide visitors who are able to see the remnants of one of the oldest cities in history, the capital of Armenia.

### **The 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople**

The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, established in 1461 by the verdict of Sultan Fatih Mehmet II of the Ottoman Empire, marked the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historic event in 1961, but the celebration took place in 1962, due to the sudden death of Patriarch Karekin Khachadourian the same year. **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** issued an Encyclical dated August 22, 1962 stating that "*one millennium after the rise of ancient Byzantium an Armenian Patriarchate was initiated in 1461 with Bishop Hovagim of Broussa as its first Patriarch.*" The Encyclical was addressed to **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian**, just installed in January 1962, who was at the helm of all arrangements for the celebration as the new Patriarch.

To mark the Fifth Centennial, Patriarch Kaloustian edited a special issue of the official periodical *Shoghagat* of the Patriarchate's Holy Cross Seminary. He compiled the entire history of the Patriarchate entitled "*The historic role of the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey and the achievements realized thereof,*" subdivided into 16 headings, beginning from the Western Armenian cultural achievements and ending with the founding of the **Seminary of Armash**, near Istanbul, and its illustrious graduates. In September of 1962 the Patriarch called

a meeting with clergy and lay representatives to announce the month of December as the commemorative month. Dignitaries, such as **Archbishops Khat Achabahian**, from Lebanon, and **Souren Kemhajian**, from Jerusalem, arrived in Istanbul to celebrate the event on December 2, with Patriarch Shnork presiding. Present were church and state officials representing the **Greek Ecumenical Patriarch**, the **Government of Turkey**, and the **City of Istanbul**.

While performing the patriarchal Holy Mass, Patriarch Shnork recited individually the names of the 81 Patriarchs of Constantinople who preceded him on the throne since 1461. The Encyclical of Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians was read and a Commemorative Concert was given in the patriarchal reception hall on December 22. The closing of the Fifth Centennial of the Patriarchate took place with the celebration of Divine Liturgy by the Patriarch at St. Kevork Armenian Church in Samatia on Sunday December 30. The Patriarch hailed three legacies left from the past: the **Legacy of Patriarch Hovagim**, the **Legacy of Patriarch Hovhannes Golod**, and the **Legacy of Harutium Amira Bezjian**.

Twenty-five years later in 1986, the Armenian Patriarchate celebrated the 525<sup>th</sup> anniversary by **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** whose 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of enthronement coincided with the event. Both anniversaries were observed following the Encyclicals of **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians**, dated October 22, 1985, and March 6, 1986. It was a special honor for Patriarch Shnork as he celebrated Holy Mass in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin on September 28, 1986, upon the invitation of His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians, marking both the **25<sup>th</sup> year of his office** as well as the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination** as priest. The Pontiff graced the Patriarch with patriarchal *Epigonation*, a 12 by 12 inches square part of liturgical diamond-shaped vestment suspended by the belt on the left side, with cherubim and seraphim

embroidered on it, known as *Gonkerr* in Armenian. In the Armenian Church, this part of the vestment is exclusive for the Catholicos only. Patriarch Shnork was honored personally as a one-time privilege to wear it privately as a personal reward and not necessarily for his successors to inherit. It should be noted that the Patriarch held his office in difficult times, the longest among his predecessors from 1962 to 1990, and distinguished himself as a true leader in the Armenian Church and particularly in the Armenian community of Turkey. He also accomplished a great task in rescuing hundreds of Armenians who were still living in the interior of Turkey, who were assimilated and had lost all contacts with religion and language. **Archbishop Shnork Kaloustian** rendered historically a heroic task in his 28 years in office as the Patriarch of Turkey, personally visiting those remote areas at least three times.

### **Patriarch Visits to Anatolia**

**Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** of Turkey paid a special pastoral visit to the Armenian remnants in the provinces of Turkey. In addition to his 1969 and 1977 visitations, the Patriarch gave his last visit in 1985 from August 26 to September 7. With an entourage of three priests and an executive of the Patriarchate, he started his journey passing through Nicomedia (Adapazar), Bolu, and Ankara, arriving in Kaiseri he was welcomed by the local pastor, priest Varak Beylerian. The Patriarch performed the Holy Mass on August 27 in the elegant and famous Armenian church of St. Gregory the Illuminator. In attendance were only "ten Armenians". Today the church is a landmark with an authentic architecture, built in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The next day the Patriarch visited Kharpert and performed the Holy Mass in the local Assyrian church. In attendance were 100 pilgrims.

The Patriarch's next stop was in Malatia where there was no church. Those Armenian churches prior to 1915 were either

confiscated or demolished. Instead, the Patriarch said a Requiem prayer in the cemetery, and went onto Diarbekir on August 30 to visit the Armenian Church of St. Giragos, neglected and in need of renovation. Following a short prayer, Patriarch Shnork left for Derik where priest Muron Aivazian, a member of his entourage, performed Holy Mass at St. Kevork Armenian church. The visit to the interiors of Turkey was very close to the Patriarch's heart considering the condition of the Armenians who mostly had not seen any church or clergy for decades. The Patriarch courageously made every effort to save them by bringing them to Istanbul, where he provided them lodging, education, and jobs.

### **300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Printed Armenian Bible**

The year 1966 marked the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **first printed Holy Bible** in Amsterdam, a huge task indeed, accomplished by **Voskan Vartabed of Erevan**, a member of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin. **His Holiness Vasken I** issued a special Encyclical dated March 11, 1966, addressed to the Holy Sees of Cilicia, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, to the Dioceses of the Armenian Church and the faithful worldwide, to celebrate the event that had taken place 300 years earlier "*by the orders of Catholicos Hagop IV Jughayetsi under most difficult and pressing conditions.*" Vasken I was comparing the task of this first printing of the Bible with the 5<sup>th</sup> century translation of the Holy Bible, at which time Catholicos St. Sahag Barthev and Vartabed St. Mesrob Mashtots were the pioneers then, as Catholicos Hagop IV and Vartabed Vosgan of Erevan were similar pioneers later in 1666.

In the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin on October 8, 1966 a solemn Liturgy was conducted by the Catholicos, following which the Encyclical was read and a symposium was held in the main hall of the *Veharan*, presided over by His Holiness.

Scholars and high ranking clergy took part in the symposium. The keynote speaker was **Prof. Rafael Ishkhanian** on the topic of "The printing of the Vosgian Bible," underlining the "*huge role that the Holy Bible has rendered to our nation by way of an ancient literary legacy*," being the most essential Book for our religion for a nation surrounded by non-Christians, safeguarding the identity of that nation. Vosgan Vartabed had also printed the *Hymnbook* of the Armenian Church at the same time. Remarks were made by other historians and intellectuals including **Professors Ararat Gharibian** and **Hagop Sirouni**. In his closing remarks Catholicos Vasken I honored the memory of the two pioneers of 1666, **Catholicos Hagop Jughayetsi** and **Voskan Vartabed of Erevan**, granting the St. Gregory pontifical medal of honor to **Hagop J. Sirouni** of Romania, who represented his colleagues of the past famous poets Siamanto and Daniel Varujan, his contemporaries.

A special issue of the *Etchmiadzin* monthly of the Mother See featured most valuable studies by various scholars, all of them touching on the anniversary of the printing of the Armenian Bible of 1666 one way or another. The content included the *Pontifical Encyclical* and a series of leading studies as follows: "*The Armenian Text of the Holy Bible*", by **Hagop Anasian**, "*The Bible of Erznka of 1269*", by **Sirarpi Der Nersessian**, "*The newly discovered pages of the oldest translation from the Book of Sirach*", by **Kevork Abgarian**, "*The history of the Syriac and Armenian versions of the Bible*" by **Haig Melkonian**, "*The Manuscript text of Hetum II and the Vosgian publication*", by **Souren Kolanchian**, and others.

It is worth mentioning Kolanchian's study where the author has identified the text which has been used by Vosgan Vartabed for his first publication of the Bible. According to him Vosgan had taken with him from Etchmiadzin a **manuscript copy** of the Bible, known as the **Bible of King Hetum II of Cilicia** (1289-1301), written in 1295 and presently kept in the



Consecration of St. Vartan Cathedral in New York  
By His Holiness Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians  
1968



St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral  
Eastern Diocese, New York City  
1968

Matenadaran of Yerevan as the number 180 Manuscript. Kolanchian assumes without doubt that this manuscript text was the basis of the 1666 publication in Amsterdam. The hierarchy of the Armenian Church and the dioceses in Armenia and abroad observed the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary locally and nationally with various conferences and symposiums deserving this great achievement of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **First Armenian Cathedral in the USA St. Vartan Cathedral, Eastern Diocese**

During his 1968 Pontifical visit abroad, Catholicos Vasken I was invited to consecrate the first Cathedral built in the USA, the **Cathedral of St. Vartan in New York City**. The unprecedented and elaborate service of dedication and consecration according to the canons of the Armenian Church took place on April 28, 1968, with seven bishops attending, headed by **Cardinal Terrence Cook** of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop of St. Patrick's Cathedral of New York. Present was also **Mayor Lindsey** of New York. The Catholicos had arrived two days earlier with his entourage of five members of the Mother See, and was welcomed by the Primate of the Eastern Diocese **Archbishop Torkom Manoogian**, and **Bishop Yeghishe Simonian**, Primate of the Western Diocese, guest Bishops and lay representatives. On the eve of the consecration His Holiness conducted the Opening of Doors Service of the Cathedral.

His Holiness consecrated the Main Altar, and the assisting Primate consecrated the pillars of the new cathedral, following which Catholicos Vasken I pronounced the official name of the **Cathedral as St. Vartan**, then he delivered his message on a text from Prophet Isaiah: *"Lord keep this vineyard safe that you planted with your own hands."* The project of the building had started long time before. But, when the headquarters were finally established on 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue, the



Diocesan offices were built in the late fifties, and architectural studies were then pursued for the Cathedral between the architects of New York and Armenia, and the final design was approved both by the Diocesan Council and the Catholicos of All Armenians. A large Hall was also built next to the Cathedral, the **Haik and Alice Kavookjian Auditorium**, named after the main Godfather of the Cathedral **Haik Kavookjian**, a ninety years old executive member of the Diocesan Council and the Diocesan Assembly since 1940's.

As we write these words the Eastern Diocese celebrates in 2008 the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Consecration of St. Vartan Cathedral that has been serving the Diocese honorably ever since. Four Primates were involved in the planning and the building of the Cathedral beginning in 1942. The project was initially presented to the Diocesan Assembly by **Archbishop Karekin Hovsepian**. Later, **Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan**, **Archbishop Mampre Kalfayan**, and **Archbishop Sion Manoogian** carried the project of the construction of the Cathedral to its completion. It was in the second year of the primacy of **Archbishop Torkom Manoogian** in 1968 when the Cathedral was consecrated.

Gradual steps were taken to achieve the goal of the construction of the Cathedral. In 1949, the present site on 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue was purchased under the primacy of Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, and soon adjacent buildings were also acquired totaling the acreage to 25,478 sq. ft. at a cost of \$616,600. In 1959, during Archbishop Sion Manoogian's primacy the Diocesan Building began to rise, and in 1963 the architectural plans of the Cathedral were prepared and the groundbreaking took place in May 1965 by Archbishop Sion. The Foundation Stones were consecrated in October 1966, and the Cathedral was completed early in 1968, ready for consecration by the Catholicos of All Armenians in April of the same year. The St. Vartan Cathedral followed the architecture

of the 7<sup>th</sup> century **St. Hripsimeh Church** in Vagharshapat, a most original model church architecture in our history. It stands 120 ft high, spacious with a large dome in the center, stained glass windows featuring figures of historic events and Saints. It dominates the corner of the intersection both on 34th Street and the Second Avenue, with an open plaza in front of the edifice and the adjoining diocesan building, where outdoor activities are held to promote Armenian history and culture, including the commemoration of the 1700 years of Christian faith since St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia. The following year an addition to the headquarters was built and named the **Gullabi Gulbenkian Cultural Center**. The celebrations of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cathedral were presided over by **Archbishop Khajag Barsamian**, Primate, who was elected in 1990, and is still the head of the Eastern Diocese as of this writing.

## **THE PONTIFICAL DIOCESE OF ARARAT IN EREVAN AND NEW DIOCESES IN ARMENIA**

### **Catholicos the Head of the Diocese**

The first Diocese in the Armenian Church is the one established by St. Gregory the Illuminator, originally known as the **Araratian Diocese in Erevan**, the capital of Armenia. The Primate of the Diocese has always been the Pontiff of the Armenian Church, who appoints a **Vicar** whose title remains as such. The headquarters of the Araratian Diocese has been the central church of the city presently named **St. Sarkis** Church. When Vasken I ascended to the throne of St. Gregory in Holy Etchmiadzin as Catholicos of All Armenians in 1955, his first attention was directed to his Diocese which was left unattended, due to the passing of his predecessor Catholicos Kevork VI. Vasken I appointed first **Bishop Vahan Derian** who held his office for several years, and then transferred to Baku, Azerbaijan, as the Primate of the local Diocese. On June 1, 1972, Vasken I paid his Pontifical Visit to St. Sarkis and appointed **Archbishop Gomidas Der Stepanian** as the new Vicar of the Ararat Diocese, who was previously heading the Armenian Diocese of Georgia in Tiflis as Primate for 15 years.

When the new Vicar took office, he embarked on his duties diligently and organized the affairs of the Diocese, paying special attention to the renovation of the old church of St. Sarkis, which needed complete reconstruction from the exterior and the interior. The plans prepared by the Catholicos were implemented by his Vicar Archbishop Gomidas. On July 31, 1972, the Archbishop ordained four priests to serve the Diocese and the surrounding Monasteries which came under his jurisdiction. One of them is the ancient Monastery of Geghart. In 2001, a new **Cathedral** was built and dedicated in downtown **Erevan** by **Catholicos Karekin II**. It was named

after St. Gregory the Illuminator on the **17<sup>th</sup> Centennial** of the conversion of Armenia into Christianity in 301 AD.

### **St. Sarkis Church in Erevan**

The last renovation of this ancient church had taken place way back during the pontificate of Catholicos Hovhannes Garpetsi during 1835-1842. **Catholicos Vasken I**, under the supervision of his Vicar **Archbishop Gomidas Der Stepanian**, undertook a major renovation project, long overdue, to make the Diocesan Church of the capital city a presentable edifice for the local faithful as well as for the visitors. The architectural drawings were rendered by architects Raphael Israelian and Ardzroun Galikian. The overall reconstruction of the church was completed in 1976, and the consecration took place on October 3 by the hands of Catholicos Vasken I and Archbishop Gomidas in the presence of the benefactors of the entire project, **George** and **John Kurkjian** brothers, sons of benefactors Sarkis and Asdghig Kurkjian of London, England. Present was also the writer of this book, an eyewitness of the dedication, who was visiting the Holy See upon the invitation of the Catholicos on behalf of the Eastern Diocese.

With the renovation completed, the exterior of the church created an elegant arch to the entrance, and in the interior an upper room was added for the faithful, since the church has originally been small, in spite of the overflow of the attendance who always considered **St. Sarkis** as the diocesan center of their country. Twin bell towers stood on the western side of the edifice, with some attractive sculptures carved by Aram Sahakian on the exterior walls, depicting Biblical scenes after the pattern of the ones on the Holy Cross Church of Aghtamar, in Lake Van. **Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians**, delivered the sermon and appreciated the significant gift and the work performed by distinguished architects and sculptors. He also thanked the government of Armenia saying: "*We definitely*

*enjoyed the greatly appreciative support of the city officials of Erevan who helped expedite the project whenever needed."* During the reception Banquet in the hall of Hotel Ani in Erevan, the Catholicos decorated George and John Kurkjian brothers with St. Gregory the Illuminator Pontifical Medal in appreciation for their generosity.

## **The Following Decades**

The Araratian Diocese flourished under subsequent Vicars appointed by the Catholicos, following the sudden death of Archbishop Gomidas Der Stepanian in December 1980, at age 55. The most recent Vicars of the Diocese were **Archbishop Arsen Berberian**, and at the passing of Vasken I in 1994, **Archbishop Karekin Nersissian**, presently Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. Archbishop Karekin distinguished himself during his 15 years of dedicated service to Erevan and surroundings, adding to his priorities the establishment of the **Vaskenian Seminary** on the shores of Lake Sevan, the building of the new **Diocesan Building** next to St. Sarkis church, and the building of the impressive complex of the Vaskenian Seminary at the turn of the century.

## **New Diocesan Building**

In 1987, the new Diocesan Center was built in place of the ancient building through the generous funds of **Jean and Sona Abajians** of Belgium. The dedication of the new building took place in September when diocesan bishops from abroad were visiting the Mother See with a large number of pilgrims from America, England, Egypt, and Greece. **Catholicos Vasken I** presided and the benefactors cut the ribbon at the entrance of the *arachnortaran*. In his greeting the *Vehapar Hyrabed* gave his words of gratitude to the guests invoking the words from the Psalms: "*Lord, if you open my lips, my mouth shall utter blessings*". Because, he stated, "*your rewards are abundant on*

*earth, for you have come to transfer the love and gratitude of the Armenians in Belgium right in this city of Erevan."* The Vicar, Archbishop Karekin Nersissian, spoke next and said, *"This building rises on rocks, under the skies of Armenia, and no one shall be able to endanger its presence under the blessings of Holy Etchmiadzin."* Benefactor Jean Abajian was emotional when saying, *"We both, my wife and I, were here in 1981 to visit our motherland for the first time when I felt that we should also do something for our country's restoration regardless of our Evangelical status. As Christians, it has been our desire as faithful Christians to serve our national Church founded by St. Gregory the Illuminator."* The same day in appreciation, the Catholicos decorated the Abajians with the **St. Gregory the Illuminator Pontifical Medal**.

### **Vaskenian Seminary**

The old and neglected monastic buildings on the shores of Lake Sevan were replaced by an elegant and modern complex through the efforts of **Archbishop Karekin Nersissian**, Vicar of the Araratian Diocese. In 1990 the idea began to be implemented, 50 students were gathered, 21 professors were invited to teach, and the name of the Seminary was given in honor of **Catholicos Vasken I**, who was present at the inauguration of the Seminary. The Catholicos passed away in 1994, but his memory perpetuated even more promisingly, when the benefactors pledged to donate large amounts for the building of the Vaskenian Seminary.

The benefactors were **Mr. and Mrs. Karnig and Anahid Yacoubian** of Damascus, Syria, who visited Armenia and devoted their prayers and their funds for the accomplishment of such a huge project. The buildings included a dormitory, classrooms, studies, a lecture room, auditorium, a large kitchen, and a separate chapel on the side for daily worship services dedicated to the name of St. Hagop of Nisibis (*Soorp Hagop*

*Mdžbnatsi Hyrabed.*) The chapel was consecrated by **Bishop Arakel Karamian**, Primate of the Diocese of Kotayk, and a full size statue of Catholicos Vasken I was erected in the courtyard after whose name and in memory the Seminary stands.

The curriculum of the Seminary included the same subjects as the Kevorkian Seminary in Etchmiadzin, with an emphasis on preliminary studies. It included six languages, classic and modern, dogmatic and pastoral theology, interpretation of the Holy Bible, history of ancient literature, church history, liturgy and other related subjects, 36 in total. Graduates from the Vaskenian Seminary are obligated to complete the last two years of their theological and philosophical studies at the Kevorkian Seminary in Etchmiadzin, before they are admitted in the graduate program and start working on their theses. This is the established prerequisite before any ordination. Recently, the **Kevorkian Seminary became an accredited university** recognized by the State of Armenia.

On September 14, 2002, **Catholicos Karekin II** inaugurated the dormitory wing of the Seminary in the presence of the benefactors Karnig and Anahid Yacoubian. A marble plaque above the entrance indicates the date and the names of the Catholicos and the benefactors. On October 15, 2002, students entered the dormitory, and additional 30 students were admitted to Sevan to join the students. As of today, over 100 students are learning in this institution for priesthood.

### ***Hyortyats Project for the Youth***

Another of **Catholicos Karekin Nersissian's** projects proved very beneficial when in 1993 he was the Vicar of the Erevan Diocese. He was concerned about the youth from ages 10 to 18, some of them orphans, left without proper education and care. He established "homes" in different districts of the capital city where instructors, a chaplain, visiting clergy, and

elders taught trades, arts, the painting of miniatures as reproductions from ancient Armenian manuscripts, religion, culture, language, and social studies to thousands of them. An estimated number of 2390 children, with a considerable number of teachers and staff of about 230 were reported in the previous years. Within a few years the project gave quality results in the training and preparation of children and youth ready to perform on stages, pray and worship in their churches, sing in choirs, produce art works, sing and play instruments on stages, and eventually become promising artists in various fields in the future, including servants of the Armenian Church.

*Hyortyats Homes (Homes for the Armenian Children)* were established in Etchmiadzin, in the Nork district of Erevan, and in suburban Arapkir and Malatya. In Kanaker there was one, established primarily for the art of miniature reproduction. By the orders of **Catholicos Karekin II**, groups of the students in the "Homes" traveled to perform across Armenia and abroad. One group visited California in 2007 and performed admirably to the surprise of all those who were astonished seeing youth, between ages 12 and 14, perform repeatedly on different stages and before different audiences.

## **New Dioceses in Armenia**

Soon after the independence of Armenia, **Vasken I** established the historic dioceses of our homeland. His successor, **Karekin I**, continued renovating ancient monasteries and consecrating new churches in each diocese. The re-established dioceses are the following:

**Diocese of Gugark** in Vanadzor. The Diocese comprises seven regions including the ancient monasteries of Haghbat, Sanahin, Odzoon, Khoranashat, Makaravank, Goshavank, and Haghartzin. Among the churches are, the church of St. Nersess Shnorhali, consecrated by Primate **Bishop Sebouh Chooljian**, St. Sarkis church, and St. Gregory of Narek, the most recently



built in Vanadzor. The benefactors of St. Gregory of Narek church are **Sarkis and Ruth Bedevian** from New Jersey.

**Diocese of Artsakh** in Shushi. The Diocese comprises the most ancient monastery of Amaras, the monastery of Gandzasar, and the Cathedral of Shushi, recently renovated and consecrated in 1997 on the Feast of the Assumption of St. Mary by **Archbishop Barkev Mardirosian**, Primate. Next to them, several new churches were built and dozens of priests were consecrated by the primate. He also established a prestigious center of religious publications.

**Diocese of Siunik** in Goris. The diocese comprises the famous monasteries of Datev, Noravank (renovated by Catholicos Karekin I and consecrated in 1999), and St. John the Baptist church in Sisian (7<sup>th</sup> c.). The new churches built during the primacy of **Bishop Abraham Mkrtchian** were St. Dertad church in Vayk, St. Sarkis in Malishka, St. Gregory the Illuminator church in Goris, confiscated in 1930's, and later consecrated by Catholicos Karekin I in 1997.

**Diocese of Aragatzotn** in Oshagan. The diocese comprises the monasteries of Hovhannavank, Saghmosavank, Eghivard, St. Kevork of Mughni, St. Asdvadzadzin of Tegher, St. Marineh of Ashtarak, St. Gregory the Illuminator of Aruj, St. Asdvadzadzin of Talin, Holy Cross of Aparan, St. Mesrob of Oshagan, where the tomb of the Great Saint who invented the Armenian Alphabet **Mesrob Mashtots** is enshrined.

**Diocese of Armavir** in Armavir. Among previously built churches are St. Asdvadzadzin in Artamet, reconsecrated after 70 years of confiscation, and the church of All Saints in the city of Armavir. **Bishop Sion Adamian** is the Primate.

**Diocese of Gegharkunik** in Gavar (Kamo). The Diocese comprises the ancient twin monasteries of the Island Sevan, the

famous monastery of Geghart, and recently built churches. The Primate is **Bishop Markos Hovhannisian**.

**Diocese of Kotayk** in Hrazdan. The diocese comprises the monasteries of Kecharis, St. Asdvadzadzin of Garni, newly built All Saints Church in Charentsavan, Church of Tugh Manoog in Hrazdan, and five churches in different villages, including the Holy Martyrs Armenian Church in Teghenik, by the funds of the late **Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian** of the Mother See. The late Archbishop laid to rest in the courtyard of the church in 2009. The Primate of the diocese is **Bishop Arakel Karamian**.

Catholicos **Karekin I** further re-established the **Diocese of Ukraine** in Lvov, with **Archbishop Grigoris Pounyatian**, Primate, and the **Diocese of South Russia** in Krasnotar, **Bishop Movses Movsissian**, Primate. In South Russia Catholicos Karekin I consecrated the Armenian churches of St. Vartan, St. Nigoghayos, and St. John the Evangelist.

## **NEW DIOCESES OUTSIDE ARMENIA**

### **Established By the Encyclicals of Catholicos Vasken I**

During almost four decades of his pontificate, **Vasken I** formally established the following seven Armenian Church dioceses outside Armenia: the Dioceses of **Australia and the Far East, Brazil, Uruguay, Germany, Canada, Central Europe**, and **Switzerland**. The Diocese of **France** was established recently by **Catholicos Karekin II** in 2007.

#### **Australia and the Far East**

##### **Initial Visit to India**

It was the first time in our history that a Catholicos of the Armenian Church paid a visit to India in 1963. His pontifical visit initiated the formation of a new diocese in the Far East, centered in Sidney, Australia. **Vasken I** arrived in New Delhi in November, 1963 for the main purpose to respond to the invitation of the ailing **Catholicos Basilios II** of the Indian Malabar Church. Catholicos Basilios II was in Holy Etchmiadzin in September 1958 at the invitation of Catholicos Vasken I, on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his pontificate. This church is in full communion with the Armenian Apostolic Church among the five Oriental Orthodox Churches, Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Indian Malabar, and Ethiopian. **Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian**, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Bishop Gomidas Der Stepanian of the Diocese of Georgia, and several other members of the Brotherhood of the Mother See and of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, joined the entourage of Vasken I whose first official visit was to meet with **President Radha Krishna** of India in Calcutta.

After praying at the Anglican Church on November 17, Vasken I visited the St. James Malabar Orthodox Church and was greeted by the faithful. The same day he paid another official visit to **Jawaharlal Nehru**, the Prime Minister of India,

coinciding with his 74<sup>th</sup> birthday. The next day the Catholicos went to Madras to visit the ancient Armenian Church of St. Asdvadzadzin (St. Mary) built in 1772, prior to the founding of the first Armenian printing press by **Priest Harutiun Shma-vonian** in 1789. It was in this press that the first Armenian periodical *Azdarar* and a few books were originally printed.

The Catholicos and his entourage went to visit the See of the Malabar Orthodox Church on November 19 in **Kotayam** in the province of Kelara, responding to the invitation of Catholicos Baslios II. The origins of the See of the Indian Malabar Church traditionally went back to the preaching of the **Apostle Thomas**, whose successor is the Catholicos of the Malabar Church. At the time of the Armenian Pontiff's visit, the Malabar Church numbered one and one half million faithful, spread over 10 dioceses with 800 priests and 1000 churches. The Armenian Church entourage was greeted by thousands of people who escorted the Catholicos to the Catholicosate of the Malabar Church, where Vasken I met the 93 year-old ailing Catholicos Basilios II and offered his prayers for his recovery. Later, in the evening he addressed some crowd of 30,000 church communicants, headed by their respective bishops, under the leadership of Metropolitan Dionysius, the Vicar of Catholicos Basilios II. On November 20, **Catholicos Vasken** visited the Malabar Theological Seminary in **Kotayam** on its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and presided over the laying of the foundations of the new seminary building.

On November 23, Vasken I visited **Niranam** where St. Thomas the Apostle had established the first church in India. There were gathered "more than 120,000 Christians" to greet the Armenian Catholicos. The next day the Pontiff celebrated the Holy Mass outside in the park of the Seminary in the presence of all Malabar bishops, priests and faithful, and delivered a historic sermon on the communion of both Malabar and Armenian Churches in the past and at present. The same

evening Catholicos Basilios II gave a farewell reception in honor of the Armenian Catholicos with his bishops attending. The remaining week Vasken I visited the Armenian churches in India and the Armenian College in Calcutta. From the 20,000 Armenians between the two World Wars, only 500 individuals had remained in the country at the time of the Catholicos' pontifical visit, including the native **Armenian Martasiragan College** built in 1821, and the **Davidian Girls' School** in 1924. The Catholicos performed his farewell Divine Liturgy in the Armenian Church of St. Nazareth on Sunday October 8.

### **Diocese of the Far East Initiated**

Catholicos Vasken I dispatched **Archbishop Haigazoun Abrahamian**, Dean of the Theological Seminary of the Mother See to India as his Pontifical Legate with an Encyclical dated April 11, 1964. Arriving in India on April 27, the Archbishop visited certain cities and communities and on May 20 he arrived in Kotayam to pay the respects of the Catholicos to the Malabar Church, where Basilios II had died and his successor **Basilios Ugen I** was to be enthroned as the Catholicos of the Malabar Orthodox Church. The Archbishop fully vested took part in the installation service and informed the new Catholicos that he was to stay in India and later visit Australia at least for a period of two years to organize the Armenian Diocese of the Far East having its center the larger Armenian community in Sidney. His intention was to draft a set of bylaws according to the local rules and requirements to place the new Diocese under the jurisdiction of the **Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin**, himself being the first **Pontifical Legate**, until the election of a Primate according to the bylaws ratified by the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Having accomplished his task on a vast and meticulous manner, visiting each city in India and then in Australia, Archbishop Abrahamian returned to Holy Etchmiadzin after his

long sojourn and presented a detailed report about his temporary office as the acting Primate of the Diocese of the Far East. Upon his recommendation, **His Holiness Vasken I** invited **Karekin Dz. Vartabed Kazanjian** of Washington DC, to come to Holy Etchmiadzin as a candidate for the new post in the Far East. In 1966, Vasken I ordained Kazanjian a bishop and sent him to the Far East to succeed **Archbishop Haigazoun Abrahamian** as Pontifical Vicar. Bishop Kazanjian was elected Primate of the Far East having his headquarters in Sidney, Australia. The Diocese covered the Armenian churches in Australia, Singapore and India.

**Bombay** was the first city where there was the St. Peter Armenian Church. Archbishop Abrahamian met with the parish at an assembly for the first time in which the church bylaws were reviewed and the parish was placed formally under the jurisdiction of Holy Etchmiadzin. In **Calcutta** he was greeted by the Very Rev. Kegham Zakarian, a member of the Jerusalem Brotherhood, who escorted the Pontifical Legate on June 7 to the ancient Armenian Church of St. Nazareth, built in 1707. At the time, the Armenians in Calcutta numbered 500 who maintained several social and religious activities, including the two educational institutes mentioned earlier. There existed in Calcutta two churches in addition to St. Nazareth, the Holy Trinity (1867) and St. Gregory the Illuminator (1906). Archbishop Haigazoun Abrahamian then went to visit the two Armenian churches in **Chinsura**, St. John the Baptist (1695) and St. Asdvadzadzin (1758). On July 16, the Archbishop traveled to **Australia**, via Singapore where he stayed one day to see the first Armenian Church in the Far East with 35 faithful still living there.

The Archbishop spent most of his time in **Sidney**, the future diocesan center, where most of the Armenians lived. As of 1964, at least 2700 out of the estimated 4000 Armenians were living with their church already in operation. On July 17, the

Archbishop was welcomed by the Reverend Father Aramais Mirzayan and the Church Council members, and was led to the Holy Trinity Armenian Church. Due to anticipated crowd, the Archbishop celebrated his first Holy Mass on July 26 in a larger Hall of the Italian community. A large crowd attended to hear the Pontifical Encyclical regarding the establishment of the Diocese of the Far East. During the following few days the Archbishop paid official visits to civic authorities and went to Melbourne where a sizable Armenian community lived.

The Legate spent two months in **Melbourne** where an Armenian Church of St. Asdvadzadzin existed, a large and a beautiful church on a large acreage of property, with a parsonage next to it with 6 rooms built for the residing priest. Mostly the Armenians in Melbourne had migrated from Egypt and the Middle East. **Archbishop Haigazoun Abrahamian** celebrated the Holy Mass on Sunday August 16, the day the Armenian Church observes the Assumption of St. Mary. On his return to Sidney he had already completed the revision of the diocesan bylaws which he presented to the government of Australia for ratification before leaving the country. His main efforts lay in placing the entire community of Australia legally under the permanent jurisdiction of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Archbishop Haigazoun performed his last Liturgy at Holy Trinity Armenian Church on November 29, before returning to Singapore, Calcutta, and back to Armenia. On December 6, he attended the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Anglican Church in Calcutta, India. He paid a farewell visit to the President of India, observed the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on April 25, 1965 in the Armenian Church of St. Nazareth, and on February 16 he ordained a new priest for St. Peter Armenian Church of Bombay, naming him Rev. Father Vasken. In June 1966, Archbishop Abrahamian left New Delhi for Moscow, and the next day he returned to Holy Etchmiadzin. A complete

report on the Far East Armenian churches and community was now ready for the Catholicos of All Armenians to finalize the election of the Primate. Upon his return Archbishop Abrahamian assumed his new position as the Chairman of the Supreme Spiritual Council of the Mother See.

### **Diocese of Brazil**

Armenians lived in Brazil since 1879, and fifty years later, in 1929 they built their first Armenian Church in San Paulo and named it **St. Kevork**. The St. Kevork Church functions as of this day as the Diocesan headquarters. A second church named **St. John the Baptist**, was built in Ozasko in 1935. The approximate number of the Armenians by that time was 17,000, which warranted a permanent bishop as Primate. **Vasken I** paid two pontifical visits to Brazil, and upon his return to the Holy See, he wrote an Encyclical announcing the formation of the Brazilian Diocese of the Armenian Church as a separate and independent Diocese in South America. Reverend Father Datev Vartabed Garibian, a member of the Brotherhood of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, was the first Primate to serve in Brazil as pastor since 1966; he was called by the Catholicos to Etchmiadzin in 1984 to be ordained a bishop. The Encyclical issued in 1984 formally established the Armenian Diocese of Brazil. **Archbishop Datev Garibian** is the Primate of the Diocese of Brazil as of this day.

### **Diocese of Uruguay**

Catholicos Vasken I established the Diocese of Uruguay in Montevideo in 1990. Earlier, in 1984, **Archbishop Hagop Kelenjian**, a member of the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin, was the acting primate, who was directed by the Catholicos to organize the infrastructure of the future Diocese. In 1990 Father Kelenjian was elected Primate, and soon received Episcopal rank in Holy Etchmiadzn by Vasken I the same year.



Since 1922, following the evacuation of the Armenians from Cilicia, the number of Armenians in the capital city of Montevideo had reached 13,000 where two streets were named after "Armenia" and "Erevan". The first Armenian Church in the city was built by the newcomers and was consecrated in the name of **St. Nersess Shnorhali**. Next to the church an Armenian school was built in 1965 by benefactor Missak Kouyoumjian. Both, the church and the school were dedicated by **Archbishop Papken Abadian**, Pontifical Legate of South America. The students at the school numbered 429 back in 1985.

### **Diocese of Germany**

The Diocese of the Armenian Church in **Germany** was under the jurisdiction of the Central European Diocese since 1980. **Catholicos Vasken I**, considering the demography of Central Europe, addressed his April 2, 1991 official directive to Karekin Vartabed Bekjian, formerly of Marseilles, France, *"to organize church communities in Germany, primarily the cities where Armenians lived most."* In his Encyclical, dated January 21, 1992, the Catholicos decided the city of Koln to be the center of the future Diocese of the Armenian Church in Germany. The same time he instructed Reverend Father Karekin Bekjian, a graduate of the Holy Cross Armenian Seminary of Istanbul, *"to draft a set of diocesan bylaws with 65 articles and to form a Diocesan Council to oversee the newly formed parishes under the jurisdiction of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin."*

**Archbishop Karekin Bekjian** was consecrated a bishop in 1992, and the Diocese of Germany was established by the Pontifical Encyclical dated March 10, 1994. At the initial state of the Armenian Diocese there were in Germany 13 Armenian communities functioning with their 46 Diocesan Delegates.

Next to the Primate, the Diocese included two young priests from Holy Etchmiadzin to serve in the Armenian churches.

## **Diocese of Canada**

**Catholicos Vasken I** established the **Armenian Diocese of Canada** in 1984 with his March 15, 1984 Encyclical, thus separating the churches in Canada from the Eastern Diocese of the USA, under whose jurisdiction they operated for several decades. The oldest church in Canada has been **St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church** in St. Catharine's, Ontario since 1932. Later the **Holy Trinity Armenian Church** was built in Toronto, Ontario in 1953, which was replaced by an elegant church edifice in suburban Scarborough and was consecrated by **His Holiness Vasken I** in 1987.

The new Diocese was formed after a set of Diocesan Bylaws was drafted by the Primate of the Eastern Diocese **Archbishop Torkom Manoogian**, who carefully followed up with the internal structure of the future Diocese in Canada before presenting the case to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and Catholicos Vasken I of All Armenians. It was in 1970 that the larger parish in Montreal purchased a church in Outremont through the efforts of **Bishop Vatche Hovsepian**, Vicar. After extensive remodeling, it was consecrated in 1972 by **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian of Constantinople**, assisted by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian and Bishop Vatche Hovsepian. This church in the suburban section of Montreal soon after became the **Cathedral of the Canadian Diocese** with diocesan offices added on the second floor of the premises at the time the first Primate was elected in 1984.

The Diocese of Canada elected its first Primate in 1984. **Archbishop Vazken Keshishian**, an archimandrite at the time, was the acting Primate until 1984, when His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians ordained him a bishop and installed him in the headquarters of the Diocese. By his efforts two

additional churches were built, the **St. Vartan Armenian Church** in Vancouver, BC, and **St. Mary Armenian Church** in Hamilton, Ontario. Archbishop Keshishian died suddenly in 1990 at age 55, and Hovnan Vartabed Derderian, pastor of Holy Trinity parish of Toronto succeeded him. The same year Derderian was ordained a bishop by Catholicos Vasken I in Holy Etchmiadzin and was elevated to the rank of an Archbishop. He held his office until 2003, when he was elected Primate of the Western Diocese of the USA.

During Archbishop Hovnan's tenure additional mission parishes were formed in Ottawa, Mississauga, Chomedey Laval, Winnipeg, and other remote parts of the country. The Armenian Church was further expanded and exposed to sister churches, as ecumenical relationship grew among the denominations. **Archbishop Hovnan Derderian** extended help with consistent visits to the motherland Armenia and the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, where he had received his religious education and upon graduation from the Seminary was ordained in 1980 by Vasken I and became a member of the Brotherhood. Upon his election to the Western Diocese of the USA, another young member of the Brotherhood of the Mother See, **Bishop Bagrat Galstanian**, was consecrated by Catholicos Karekin II in 2003 and was installed as the third Primate of the Canadian Diocese as of this day.

### **Pontifical Legate of Central Europe**

**Vienna**, Austria included a limited number of Armenians since the end of WWI, and a small chapel on a higher floor in a building in the center city was functioning until the new church of **St. Hripsimeh** was built in a new location. Catholicos Vasken I consecrated the church in April 1968. By that time, the Armenian population grew substantially in Vienna, where Pastor Rev. Mesrob Krikorian served the parish for decades and in 1986 was appointed by the Catholicos as his Pontifical

Legate of Central Europe. Reverend Krikorian was ordained a bishop the same year by Catholicos Vasken I, who elevated him to the rank of Archbishop a few years later. At the same time, he continued his pastoral duties in Vienna. **Archbishop Mesrob Krikorian's** jurisdiction covered the Armenian communities of Central Europe, next to the Dioceses of Germany and Switzerland which were given individual diocesan status by the Catholicos. Continuing his pastoral visitation, His Holiness traveled from Vienna to New York City to consecrate the first **Armenian Cathedral in the USA** in the name of **St. Vartan the General** who defended Christianity in Armenia during the Battle of Avarair in 451 AD. The ceremonious dedication of the Cathedral took place on April 28, 1968.

### **Diocese of Switzerland**

The Catholicos of All Armenians established this Diocese in Geneva where a new **St. Hagop Armenian Church** was built. He appointed **Bishop Vicken Aykazian**, a member of the Brotherhood of Jerusalem Patriarchate as the Primate of the diocese. For some reason the status of the diocese reverted back to that of a pastorate, and a permanent priest was assigned instead. Archbishop Aykazian assumed other responsibilities and eventually became the Diocesan Legate in Washington, DC, representing the Eastern Diocese of the USA. He was involved in the interchurch relations as an active member of the **National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA**, and eventually the President of the Council upon which he was elevated to the rank of Archbishop by Catholicos Karekin II.

### **Diocese of France**

The Western European Armenian communities have always been under the leadership of the Legate of the Catholicos of All Armenians centered in Paris. During the 30 years of **Vasken I**, the Legate of Western Europe and the Primate of Paris was

**Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian**, from 1955 to 1984 when he passed away suddenly. Archbishop Serovbe was a graduate of the Seminary in Jerusalem and was ordained a bishop by Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians in 1955. As the Pontifical Legate, his jurisdiction spread from France to Switzerland, from Italy to Holland and Belgium. He was very instrumental in representing the Catholicos in various capacities as his emissary before the French and European parliaments. Occasionally, the Catholicos commissioned Archbishop Manoukian to report on the affairs of Jerusalem and the Catholicosate of Cilicia whenever needed. While his successor, Archbishop Kude Naccashian, held his position, European communities gradually formed independent dioceses under the jurisdiction of other bishops as designated by the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Most recently, in 2007, under the pontificate of **Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians**, the status changed to that of a separate **Diocese of France**. Although **Archbishop Kude Naccashian** kept his title as the Legate of the Western Europe for a while, France became a separate Diocese by the Encyclical of the Catholicos of All Armenians in 2007, based on the newly drafted Bylaws of the Diocese, ratified by the French government and by the head of the Armenian Church. **Archbishop Norvan Zakarian** of Lyon was elected as the first Primate of France, and was elevated to the rank of Archbishop before moving to Paris. The Diocese of France comprises two vicarages, in Lyon, and in Marseilles, where acting regional bishops govern the Armenian churches and the communities, under the jurisdiction of the Primate of France.

## **Two Churches in Holland**

There was an ancient Armenian Church in **Amsterdam** since 1713, named the **Armenian Church of the Holy Spirit**. According to a documentary book published in 1926, the first

Armenian priest to visit Holland was Priest Markos Abrahamian in 1715, who submitted a petition to **Catholicos Asdvadzadour Hamadantsi of All Armenians**, dated September 20, 1715, asking a permanent priest for the community. Another priest succeeded Abrahamian by the name of Hovakim Vartabed. The Armenian Church of the Holy Spirit served the Armenians in Holland for 160 years. In 1874, the church was sold to the nuns of the Roman Catholic Church for reasons of a dramatic decrease in the number of the Armenian population.

In 1986, **Archbishop Kude Naccashian**, the Legate of the Western Europe of the Catholicos of All Armenians and the Primate of Paris, renewed enthusiasm in the growing Armenian community in Amsterdam and encouraged them to organize a church community of their own. Armenians from Turkey and the Middle East had migrated to Holland, and more from Eastern Europe, thus making their home in **Amsterdam** and in **Almelo**, a town 90 miles to the East. The Armenians in Almelo were mostly from Turkey who established their homes since 1976, and they numbered 300 families in 1980, when they built their own church edifice in the city.

Archbishop Naccashian was able to re-acquire the ancient original **Armenian church of the Holy Spirit** in Amsterdam. With the blessings of His Holiness Vasken I, the Archbishop was able to negotiate with the Catholic Church and purchase the edifice with one-third of the funds raised by the Armenian community, in addition to the donation of the second third of the cost by the Catholicos of All Armenians in Holy Etchmiadzin. The remaining one third was donated by the Armenian General Benevolent Union based in New York. The community bought the church on September 14, 1986, and, after basic renovations it was consecrated by Archbishop Naccashian on November 26, 1989. A few years later, Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians, planned to establish a separate diocese for the Netherlands, including Holland and Belgium.

## **New Church in Belgium**

The Armenians in Brussels have always been under the jurisdiction of the Diocese in Paris, and the Archbishop is their spiritual head who periodically sends pastors for services and for the administration of the Holy Sacraments. During the latter part of Catholicos Vasken's pontificate, a new church was built in Brussels. The laying of the foundations had taken place in 1987, and three years later, the new church was completed. **Catholicos Vasken I** consecrated the church on May 6, 1990, along with **Catholicos Karekin II** of the House of Cilicia, Archbishop Kude Naccashian of Paris, and Bishop Norvan Zakarian of Lyon. The Catholicos of All Armenians named the church **St. Mary Magdalene Armenian Church**, designed by architect Haig Mardigian after the Armenian Church architecture. Present were Archbishop Morret, Papal Nuncio, the Cardinal of Brussels, the representative of the Greek Orthodox Church, and General Behri, representing **His Majesty King Baudouin I** of Belgium.

Catholicos Vasken I greeted the King's representative presenting him with an Encyclical in French translation, where he had expressed his and the Armenian community's gratitude "*for the generous support and the allowance of the Royal Government that made the consecration of the new church possible.*" In honor of Catholicos Vasken I and Catholicos Karekin II of Cilicia and the high-ranking clergy, a Banquet was given the same evening, following which on May 9 the Catholicos of All Armenians and the entourage returned to Paris.

## HISTORIC VISIT TO THE VATICAN

### May 1970

#### In the Vatican

At the invitation of His Holiness **Pope Paul VI** Catholicos **Vasken I** of All Armenians paid his first official visit to the Vatican from May 8 to 10, 1970. He was accompanied by the two Armenian Patriarchs, **Yeghishe Derderian of Jerusalem**, and **Shnork Kaloustian of Constantinople**, and a group of Archbishops from the Mother See, Great Britain, Europe, North and South Americas, as well as a large lay delegation from different dioceses. The Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the United States, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, was accompanied by Reverend Father Mampre Kouzouian who had an active role in the arrangement of the Pontifical visit. On May 8, the Catholicos and his entourage arrived in Rome and was escorted to the Vatican's St. Peter Cathedral. Cardinals, headed by the Vatican Secretary of State, along with **Patriarch Ignatius Peter Batanian** of the Armenian Catholic Church, led the Armenian Pontiff to the Altar by the singing of the traditional hymn "*Hrashapar*". The next day, Vasken I met with Pope Paul VI in the presence of the Roman Catholic and Armenian Orthodox church representatives.

Both heads of the two ancient churches were escorted to the Sistine Chapel where they sat on their thrones. All high-ranking clergy from both sides flanked the Pope and the Catholicos in the presence of a large audience. Vasken I delivered his message of greetings addressed to the Pope of Rome, praying for world peace and for cooperation among Christian nations. In return, Pope Paul VI called the meeting "historical and reflecting a unique significance." In the evening of May 9 an official reception was tendered in honor of Catholicos Vasken I of All Armenians, at which time he gave his pontifical message to the 150 attending guests.



On May 10, His Holiness Pope Paul VI performed the Holy Mass at St. Peter's Cathedral in the presence of His Holiness Vasken I. The Catholicos was invited by the Pope to the Holy Altar for the Kiss of Peace that they exchanged "as a sign of brotherly love", at which time the Pope placed his pontifical ring on the finger of the Catholicos "as a token of his personal love and appreciation". The same afternoon **Cardinal Gregory Peter Agajanian**, the Armenian Catholic Patriarch honored the Catholicos at a dinner in the Levonian Seminary of Rome.

### **St. Bartholomew's Relics Gift to Etchmiadzin**

While in the Vatican **Pope Paul VI**, during a private meeting with **Catholicos Vasken I** on May 12, 1970, gave Vasken I the Relics of St. Bartholomew, one of the two Apostles of Christ who arrived in Armenia to preach Christianity in the middle of the first century. The presentation was a historic gift given to Holy Etchmiadzin and was given in the presence of two Cardinals, the two Armenian Patriarchs, and the Armenian Church delegations. The Relics of St. Bartholomew were placed in the center of a golden Radiant Cross. Following the presentation both Pontiffs signed a statement reflecting on *"Thanksgiving dedicated to the Holy Spirit on that very Day of Pentecost for being able to pursue the Will of God on earth, based on acknowledging Pastor and Flock relationship as true and genuine relationship through the gifts of the Holy Spirit."*

Upon his return to Holy Etchmiadzin Catholicos Vasken I issued an Encyclical regarding the Relics of St. Bartholomew, and on June 28, 1970, during the celebration of the Holy Mass, the Catholicos elevated the Relics as the procession entered the Cathedral. On the Holy Altar, following a brief offertory of prayer and incensing, the Catholicos handed the Gift of Pope Paul VI to **Archbishop Haigazoon Abrahamian**, Grand Sacristan of the Cathedral, who in turn placed the Radiant

Cross containing the Relics on the Holy Altar for 40 days in reverence and in thanksgiving.

It was 24 years later, on April 22, 1994, when a delegation from Rome visited Holy Etchmiadzin on behalf of **Pope John Paul II**. Cardinal Sylvester greeted the ailing Catholicos Vasken I, saying: *"I have the great honor to present to Your Holiness the gift of Pope John Paul II through which his expression of love, respect and appreciation for the Armenian Apostolic Church are embodied."* The Gift represented the **Relics of Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew** who came to Armenia, and introduced Christianity there and met with their martyrdom. The Relics this time were imbedded individually on the top of chalices, and were protected in two identical glass containers.

For **Vasken I**, who passed away a few months later on August 18, 1994, this was the last official visit of the Roman Catholic Church delegation from the Vatican to Holy Etchmiadzin.

## 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

### Observance

Catholicos Vasken I declared the year 1965 as a national observance of the **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915**, perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish government against the Armenians who were living in Turkey as their homeland from ancient times where they lived for centuries. The persecutions took place in Western Armenian provinces, beginning from Constantinople, where Armenians were living until the beginning of World War I. The Genocide was carried out by the Turkish authorities and an estimated one million and one half were deported and killed between 1915 and 1922, including the burning of Smyrna and the deportation of Armenians and Greeks.

The Soviet Armenian Republic and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin took special measures to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and open the way in exploring and pursuing the Armenian Case in order to present it to the European nations, rather than simply repeat the observance on April 24 of each year as they always did.

### The Mother See

The Catholicos of All Armenians issued an Encyclical dated August 17, 1964, directing the Armenian Church to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary officially and nationally. **Vasken I** had also appealed to **Pope Paul VI**, to **Patriarch Alexy of All Russia**, to **Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Michael Ramsey**, and to the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches **W. Visser't Hooft**, inviting them to call on all churches to participate in the observance of the Armenian Genocide. In his Encyclical, the Catholicos reiterated the fact that "*an entire nation was martyred by harsh measures taken by the Turkish*

*government as an organized murder to annihilate the Armenian people."* He also stated that the bulk of the Armenian people lived in Soviet Armenia where they built their homes and lived prosperously "*under the shadow of our own statehood, side by side with the other brother Republics, building their happy future.*"

In his Encyclical Vasken I stated that "*Although an entire nation was martyred, but the Armenians were not annihilated since they held their faith high and firm, believing that Christ is life and to die for him is a gain.*" He further proclaimed the entire year of 1965 as a year of mourning and prayer, as he performed his Pontifical Mass on April 24 in memory of the one million and one half Armenians. Three Memorial Monuments were built in Holy Etchmiadzin, in the capital of Erevan, and in Sartarabad.

### ***Khachkar Memorial in Holy Etchmiadzin***

On April 24, 1965, a Pontifical Mass and Requiem were performed by the Catholicos of All Armenians, following which the newly built Monument of the *Khachkars* (stone-crosses) was dedicated near the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin as "*the symbol of our grief and prayer.*" The next day a symposium was conducted in the *Veharan*, the Pontifical Residence, presided over by **Catholicos Vasken I**, and pertinent studies were presented by academicians. Armenian Church dignitaries visited Holy Etchmiadzin later in the year for the dedication of the ***Khachkar Monument***. The dedication took place on October 31, 1965, with the Holy Mass offered by **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian of Jerusalem**. In attendance were His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians, **Patriarch Ephrem II of Georgia**, a delegation representing the Patriarch of All Russia, **Patriarch Ignatius Peter Batanian** of the Armenian Catholics, and representatives of the Ethiopian

Orthodox **Patriarch Basilios II**, and the head of the Armenian Evangelical churches.

The *Khachkar* Monument stands as an artistic and unique composition of carved stone-crosses over an eagle holding on its wide spread wings the grief of the nation, namely, a number of *Khachkars* of different size and style, symbolizing the renaissance of the Armenian nation. The architect of the Monument is **Raphael Israelian**, who has inscribed on the pedestal of the statue the following words of Catholicos Vasken: "*Khachkars of prayer and pledge in memory of the martyrs of 1915 Genocide of the Armenians, built in this 1965 year.*" On the reverse side of the Monument are inscribed the names of the "hero cities of Armenia" as follows: "Van, Musa Dagh, Shabin Karahisar, Hajin, Marash, Edessa, Zeytoon, Sassoun, and Sartarabad." Following the dedication, presided over by the Catholicos of All Armenians, a tribute was given in the reception hall of the Patriarchal Palace where leading artists and dignitaries, including Karen Dallakian, Mardiros Sarian, Garo Melik-Ohanjanian, Gostan Zarian, and high-ranking clergy of the Mother See addressed the audience.

### **Dzidzernagaberd National Monument**

In Erevan an impressive Monument marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Genocide of 1915 was built by the Republic of Armenia on the hills of **Dzidzernagaberd** and was dedicated on November 29, 1967. The complex rises on 5000 sq. meters of land designed by architects **A. Tarkhanian** and **S. Kalashian**. It is comprised of a rotunda with 30 meters of diameter, symbolizing a large mausoleum surrounded by 12 half-bent and half-size tall heavy walls with the perpetual flame in the center, representing the 12 provinces of Turkish Armenia. A few yards apart a twin pillar with double-edged picks, one higher than the other, penetrates into the skies, symbolizing the twin renaissance of the Armenian nation, both in Armenia and abroad.

At the dedication, **Anton Kochinian, President** of the Republic of Armenia, stated: *"This Monument represents protest not only against the past events, but also condemns all and any future genocides."* **His Holiness Vasken I** paid his first pontifical visit to Dzidzernagaperd on January 8, 1968, accompanied with diocesan Bishops, members of the Brotherhood of the Mother See, and of the Supreme Spiritual Council. He conducted a Requiem Service and placed a wreath with a ribbon, saying: *"May the Lord accept these sacrifices offered by our country of Armenia, and may the memory of our martyrs be blessed forever."* Later, next to the Monument a Museum was built to house documents, murals, and pictures, books and files for the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit Armenia from all over the world.

### **The Monument of Sartarabad**

On May 25, 1968, another impressive complex was built near the Turkish frontier village of Sartarabad, on the site where the Turkish-Armenian battle was waged during **May 22-26, 1918**. It was on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Battle of Sartarabad** that the complex was dedicated by **President Anton Kochinian** on May 25, 1968. On a widespread acreage, the complex features an entrance of steps between two bulls under an arch with nine bells hanging, symbolizing the nine churches that existed before the Battle and tolled at the time of the crisis. A long way leads the visitor to the sculptured wall of Sartarabad, depicting scenes of the Battle. Along the way statues of eagles "watch" in a seated position, and behind on the horizon Mounts Ararat and Massis are seen to "defend" the true victory of Sartarabad. Further, down the road a Museum and a Restaurant are added for visitors. The entire complex is constructed with native *toufa* stones in pink color to blend the artistic architecture with historical content. The monument stands as an extraordinary expression of national aspiration designed by talented architects and sculptors of the sons of the Armenian survivors.

## Battle of Sartarabad

The Turkish government was now ready to invade Eastern Armenia in 1918, after committing the greatest crime against the same people in the Western territories of ancient Armenia. Their troops had resolved to advance as close to Erevan, capital of Armenia, as possible, endangering even the center of the Armenian Church, which was on their way between the city of Alexandrapol (Leninakan) and the capital Erevan. The political power was not conducive either among the three nations in the Caucasus, since all three opposition parties of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, namely, the **Dashnaks**, the **Mensheviks**, and the **Mousavats**, were rightfully against the invading Bolsheviks. They, instead, had formed a coalition named the *Seim*. This internal confrontation naturally caused the Turks to invade even more confidently and forcefully on February 10, 1918, after capturing Erzinka, Erzeroum, Sarighamish, Kars, Alexandrapol, and Pash Aparan.

The Turkish army, under Yaghub Shefket Pasha, was on its way to the city of Alexandrapol, when the Armenian battalion under General Silikian, confronted them with active defense, until the Turks violated the 1914 truce and invaded the city, thus penetrating into the Ararat Valley. They spread their raids, passed through Alexandrapol, causing some 100,000 Armenian population in the vicinity to flee. On May 22, the war of Sartarabad became fatal. It was providential as help arrived from the Armenian people at large to join the regular army, forcing the enemy to withdraw to the Turkish borders. It was at that crucial moment when General Silikian rushed to Holy Etchmiadzin to alert **Catholicos Kevork V Sourenian** to give up hope and leave his headquarters to save his life, advising him to go and find temporary refuge in the monastery of Sevan. At that point, the Catholicos, more courageous than the General, responded crucially that he would never leave the Holy See, but will remain there to defend his country.

The next two days proved very critical. Three clergy from the Mother See went to encourage the Armenian troops on the battlefield, including **Archbishop Karekin Hovsepian**, Bishop Zaven Babaian, and Vartabeds Eznik, Taniel, and Tateos. The Archbishop with his fiery speeches, and the rest of the clergy with their actual participation in the fighting, helped the Battle of Sartarabad to end in victory through the bravery of the Armenian troops and the middle class population at large. The enemy fled, the 10,000 Turkish troops called "*Gelibolu*" were destroyed and Sartarabad was rescued. The Turks fled the battlefield leaving behind 3500 casualties in the 5-day fighting. Armenians, citizens and peasants alike from Erevan, hastened to the village of Sartarabad to cheer up their valiant compatriots, carrying with them fresh water, food, and clothing. The train station was captured, as was the city of Alexandropol.

Unfortunately, however, the Turkish regular army returned on May 24 and 25 and invaded Gharakilisa (the modern Vanatsor), Pash Abaran, and directed their raids towards Sartarabad for the second time, headed by lieutenants Shevki, Vahib, and Karabekir. Bavel Piroumian was leading the Armenian army of 1300 troops, to which 2000 more came to join, in addition to the 300 cavalry and the 1000 soldiers from the *bourgeoisie* (middle class) people from our country. The fighting on May 25 was fierce, and the Armenian front suffered casualties, leaving on the battlefield heroes, such as Vartan Chaghinian, Arsen Sarkissian, Shahen of Ikdir, and others. However, on May 27, Col. Garo Kasabashian gathered new troops from Erznka and Maku, and 700 additional soldiers came to attack the enemy from the back. Thus, Turks were forced to withdraw the same day back to Alexandropol, leaving behind heavy casualties. Sartarabad was rescued forever, so was the advance of the enemy to Etchmiadzin and Erevan. The defense remains in the annals of the recent Armenian history as the most crucial and fatal resistance of the Armenian people, who were able to inaugurate their **First Independence** even the



next day, on **May 28 of 1918**. Had the Armenians lost the war at Sartarabad, the Turks would have wiped out the entire Eastern Armenia as they did in Western Armenia.



St. Gregory Armenian Cathedral in Baghdad, Iraq  
Archbishop Avak Asadourian, Primate



St. Gregory Armenian Cathedral in Baghdad, Iraq  
Archbishop Avak Asadourian, Primate

## PONTIFICAL VISIT TO THE ARMENIAN DIOCESES OF IRAQ AND EGYPT

### The Diocese of Iraq

On the eve of the pontificate of **Catholicos Vasken I**, the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Iraq was **Archbishop Roupen Manasian** of Holy Etchmiadzin, who held his office from 1928 to 1944. For the following ten years, the Diocese had *locum tenens*. In 1958 Reverend Zgon Vartabed Der Hagopian of the Jerusalem Patriarchate was ordained a bishop by Vasken I and went to Iraq. The Diocesan Assembly of Iraq elected him Primate of the Diocese. **Bishop Zgon Der Hagopian**, however, left Iraq shortly after and the Catholicos sent as a candidate **Bishop Asoghik Ghazarian** in 1966 also a member of the Jerusalem Patriarchate who had assumed the duties of Grand Sacristan of the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. He was elevated to the rank of archbishop for his many years of dedicated service to the Iraqi Diocese until his death in 1978.

Through Archbishop Ghazarian's efforts the 350 year-old Cathedral of St. Mary (*Asdvadzadzin*) in Baghdad was entirely renovated and Armenian school buildings were built in Basra, Mosul, and Kirkuk. In 1968, two additional Armenian schools with a total of 1600 students were in operation within a total of 18,000 Armenian population in the country as of 1968. During Archbishop Asoghik's tenure another church was built near the Armenian Old Age Home by the generous funds of Meline Daniel Iskandar, the benefactor of the Home. The chapel was dedicated to the name of St. Garabed and was consecrated by Archbishop Ghazarian in 1973.

### Vasken I in Iraq

It was his first pontifical visit to Iraq when **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** traveled to Baghdad in 1978 to

visit his flock from January 28 to February 9. Since the 1630's Armenians are believed to have arrived in Iraq and eventually have established a significant community among the native population and the existing Christian communities. On his arrival the Catholicos was greeted by the leaders of the Armenian, Chaldean, and Roman Catholic church leaders, including Patriarch Boulos II Sheikho, Archbishop Jean Rupe of the Vatican, and Archbishop Hovhannes Kasparian of the Armenian Catholic church. The Primate of the Armenian Diocese, **Archbishop Asoghik Ghazarian** was gravely ill and was being hospitalized at the time, and therefore was unable to be with the Catholicos while visiting his diocese. Unfortunately, Archbishop Asoghik passed away in March of the same year. On behalf of the Iraqi government, Usama Khalil of the Ministry of the Exterior was also present at the airport.

The visiting Pontiff was escorted to St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Cathedral where on behalf of the ailing Primate, **Archbishop Bessak Toumayan** of London, England, greeted His Holiness. While in Baghdad, Vasken I was the official guest of the government and stayed at Al Mansur Palace on the Tigris. On Sunday January 29 he presided over the Liturgy at the Cathedral which was built during 1954-1958. The same day he paid a visit to the hospital to say a prayer over Archbishop Asoghik Ghazarian, Primate of the Diocese of Iraq. The same evening he visited the newly-built St. Garabed Armenian church and the adjoining Home for the Armenian Aged, expressing his admiration to the Armenian community for being able to build a modern complex where elderly members of the community had been caring for, despite comparatively the smaller size of the Iraqi Armenian community.

On February 2, was the Feast of Vartanank. St. Vartan and his followers fell in defense of Armenian Christianity in 451 AD. The same day Divine Liturgy was performed by Archbishop Bessak Toumayan who also delivered the sermon. The

same evening a Banquet was tendered to honor the visiting Pontiff "in attendance of 300 faithful, including church and civic dignitaries". Vasken I addressed the guests expressing "his joy and gratitude for the respect and honor given him by the government of Iraq."

A Pontifical Mass was performed by the Catholicos on Friday, February 3, whose sermon was on the Holy Spirit which should never be extinguished as taught by St. Paul. He also prayed for the health of the Primate of Iraq Archbishop Asoghik Ghazarian. The next day the Catholicos of All Armenians visited the most ancient St. Asdvadzadzin church of Meydan, built in 1640, known as "the first Christian church built in Iraq." On February 5, in honor of the *Vehapar Hyrabet*, the Armenian youth presented a cultural program in the presence of more than 500 people, directed by Parooyr Hakobian. His holiness, after paying two more visits to Archbishop Asoghik in the hospital, gave his last paternal blessings to 120 community members at a reception given by the Diocesan Council of Iraq. On February 9, 1978, the Catholicos left Iraq for Paris on his way to Holy Etchmiadzin.

### **The New Primate of Iraq**

Upon the death of Archbishop Asoghik Ghazarian, who was taken to Armenia on his last days of life and died in Erevan in March, 1978, Catholicos Vasken had already designated candidate Avak vartabed Assadourian, a young priest born and raised in Baghdad as his successor. Assadourian who was ordained a priest in Holy Etchmiadzin in 1977, was soon elected *locum tenens* by the Diocesan Assembly and later Primate of the Diocese of Iraq. He was ordained bishop in 1982 and, as of this day, is serving his native Diocese faithfully and effectively despite the unending political conflict in Iraq.

Bishop Avak was elevated to the rank of Archbishop by Catholicos Vasken I for his devotion to his calling, for his

persistence, and his constructive activities in the Armenian community of Iraq. **Archbishop Avak Assadourian**, a well-educated cleric and a graduate of Tulane University in the United States, raised the standard of his diocesan priests by founding special training program in the Diocese that gave good candidates for priesthood. They were ordained in Iraq by his hands, as several new churches were built and consecrated during his three decades of service. Even though many Armenians fled the country during the war, the Cathedral in the capital and the churches in the main cities are functioning to serve the community. Being a native son, Archbishop Avak Assadourian, fluent in the local Arabic language and well acquainted with the chief leaders of the country, has been able to develop a good relationship with the government as well as the Christian denominations still functioning in Iraq.

### **Diocese of Egypt**

**Catholicos Vasken I** had paid his initial visit to Cairo, as said above during his first Pontifical Visit where the Bishops' Synod was held under his presidency in March 1956. His Holiness repeated his visitations to Egypt several times during the tenure of Primates **Archbishop Mampre Sirounian** (1932-1966), and **Zaven Chinchinian** (1976-2004). The Reverend Nerseh Dz. Vartabed Baboujian held the office in the interim ten years as the *locum tenens*. The ancient church of St. Asdvadzadzin was the center of the diocese since 1836, built and consecrated by Bishop Gabriel of Marash, as was the **Kaloustian National School** from mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The school was the largest and long-standing school of the community, sponsored and built by Kaloust Kaloustian. Later, the new **Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator** was built by philanthropist **Krikor Yeghiayan** and consecrated in 1928 by the then Primate **Archbishop Torkom Koushagian**. Both churches served the community simultaneously until the original edifice of **St. Asdvadzadzin** in Bein-el-Sourein was

demolished in the late 50's for improvements by the city. Koushagian held his office from 1914 to 1931, implementing great projects and accomplishing the construction of the new buildings of the cathedral, the diocesan complex, and the new **Noubarian School** named after the benefactor Boghos Noubar in Cairo, as well the St. Paul and St. Peter church, and the **Boghosian School** in Alexandria. Archbishop Torkom was also successful in securing funds and building the **Holy Cross Armenian Church** in Zagazig, a town between Cairo and Alexandria.

The Diocese continued its progress under Archbp. Mampre Sirounian. The Armenians, both in Cairo and Alexandria, were living a prosperous life with various national, religious and cultural activities. Four daily and weekly newspapers appeared continuously in Cairo and in Alexandria, "*Arev*", "*Houssaper*", "*Jahakir*", and "*Arax*", the first three still appearing as of today. Religious and cultural life in Cairo and Alexandria enjoyed separate centers complimenting each other, which offered lasting impact on the successive generations, next to the well organized, and progressive Armenian schools. Famous teachers from the past and later generations, well educated in Constantinople and in Europe were at the helm of those institutions. In later decades, due to political changes and oppressions, most of the Armenian population migrated to Europe, the United States, and Australia, reducing the 40,000 to less than 4,000 combined in both cities.

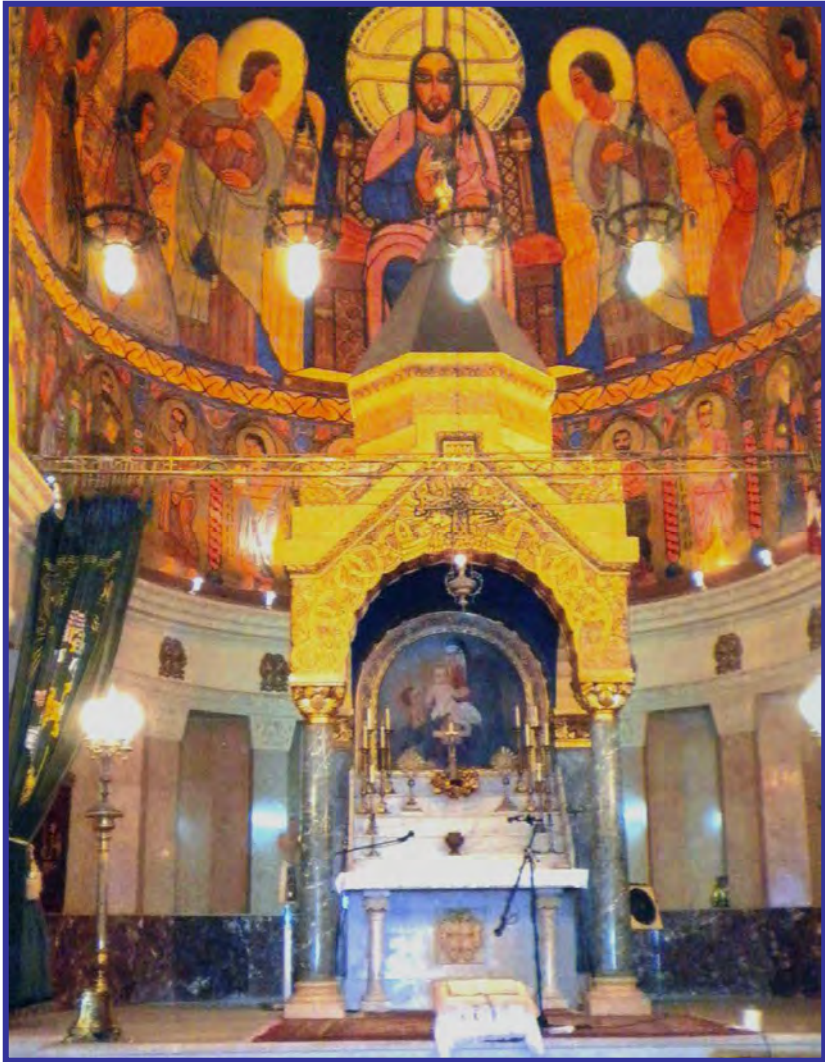
Catholicos Vasken witnessed healthy progress in the Diocese of Egypt during his repeated visitations. Considerable number of wealthy Armenians lived in the community from the days of **Noubar Pasha Noubarian**, once the Prime Minister of Egypt. Being out of danger from WWI and the Armenian persecutions by the Ottoman Turks, safe under the sultans and the kings of Egypt, the Armenians perpetually reached out to help compatriots in the Middle East. The schools offered many

educated individuals who eventually mastered the Arabic language and entered Egyptian, English or American universities to pursue professional careers, thus strengthening the Armenian presence as faithful citizens of the country, until such time when the political scene drastically changed and migration to foreign countries became necessary.

While visiting Cairo in 1963, Catholicos Vasken I marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **Archbishop Mampre Sirounian's** long-time and dedicated service as the Primate of the Diocese. In 1966, on his next Pontifical Visit to Cairo, the Catholicos celebrated this time the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Archbishop Sirounian's ordination to the priesthood. Sirounian, was the last clergyman among the illustrious graduates of the **Seminary of Armash** near Constantinople who was ordained a celibate priest in Constantinople in 1916 by Bishop Mesrob Naroyan. The Seminary had just marked its 25<sup>th</sup> year when the last graduates, who were ordained deacon, were forcefully exiled with the Dean and the staff by the Turkish authorities. Priest Mampre Sirounian, only weeks after his ordination, was deported from Constantinople for good, to join the Armenians who were destined to perish in the hinterlands of Anatolia. Sirounian, saved from exile and the massacres, found his way to Jerusalem after a torturous and unsafe journey. It was immediately after 1918 when he went to serve in the Diocese of Egypt where he spent his entire life with dignity and service. Soon after the celebration of his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Archbishop Sirounian passed away on October 13, 1966, at age 76.

His successor, **Archbishop Zaven Chinchinian** from the Brotherhood of Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate, had joined the Egyptian Diocese since 1958 as the Vicar of Alexandria, who in 1965 was ordained bishop by Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians. In 1977, he was elected Primate of the Diocese. Archbishop Chinchinian served close to three decades as Primate until his sudden death in 2004 at age 75. During his





St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral  
Cairo, Egypt

tenure the ancient church in Alexandria built in 1885 observed its centennial jubilee, at which time Catholicos Vasken sent his pontifical greetings personally through **Bishop Nareg Shakarian**, Primate of the Diocese of Shirak, Armenia. The pontiff had sent a special Encyclical dated September 10, 1984, marking the "*Golden Jubilee as a victory in the hospitable land of Egypt and the Arab nation.*" Bishop Shakarian celebrated Holy Mass on January 6, the day Armenians observe the Holy Nativity and Epiphany, and gave a lecture on "*the Diocese of Shirak and the Cathedral of the Seven Wounds*". He delivered his speech both in the cultural centers of "Harachtimaser" and "Dikran Yergat" before returning to Cairo. He visited the Coptic shrine of St. Makarios and witnessed ancient Armenian letters inscribed beneath the excavated plaster of the ancient walls by the 12<sup>th</sup> century Armenian **Catholicos Krikor Vkeyaser**, who had visited Egypt and initiated the Armenian Church diocese.

The writer of this book, a native of Egypt, visited Cairo in December 1982 and was welcomed by his namesake primate Archbishop Zaven Chinchinian. Father Zaven Dz. Vartabed Arzoumanian celebrated Liturgy on Sunday at St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral where he had served as a youth, and following his ordination in Antelias, had performed his first Badarak in the summer of 1954.

During his stay, he visited Kaloustian Armenian High School where he studied fifty years earlier, the centers of the editorial offices of the local Armenian newspapers, and the cultural halls. Sadly, he witnessed a drastic change. The school buildings demolished and students reduced to a minimum. However, the cultural halls were still vibrant. The change understandably was due to the lack of Armenians who had departed over the years to establish new communities in Australia, Canada, the United States, and in some countries in central Europe.

Presently, the Diocese of Egypt, even though weakened and less effective, is still vital under its young **Primate, Bishop Ashot Mnatsakanian** from the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, with ample resources, but limited schools with limited students still functioning on the shores of the Nile.

**NEW BUILDINGS IN HOLY ETCHMIADZIN**  
**Haikashen, Vanadoon, and**  
**Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum**

**Haikashen**

In 1972, the **Pontifical Residence** (*Veharan*), in Biurakan, was built as the summer residence of the Catholicos. It was named after the benefactor of the building **Mr. and Mrs. Haik Kavoukjian** of New York City. The opening ceremony of the new *Veharan* was performed on October 6, 1972, by the Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I and in the presence of Haik and Alice Kavoukjian. Present were also a host of archbishops and bishops from abroad and from Armenia. Earlier, on June 14, 1969, the laying of the foundations in Biurakan located at the foot of Mt. Aragadz, was blessed by the Catholicos. The land of the property was the gift of the State of Armenia to His Holiness in 1958 on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The architect of the new Residence was **Raphael Israelian** who had presented the drawings to the Catholicos in 1968 when the actual building began through the generous donation of the Kavoukjian. The Catholicos named the Veharan **Haikashen**, after the name of the donor Haik. He acknowledged the gift as *"the most precious gift on the 17<sup>th</sup> year of our pontificate by a devout son of the Armenian Church at his advanced age of 97."*

As a witness, the writer of this book is in a position to describe the New *Veharan* in Biurakan as a structure endowed with all modern facilities. The two-storey building has a dome at the entrance, a large hall on the first floor with five living quarters on the left side. There is also the kitchen and the dining room well equipped and furnished. The upper level consists of five additional bedrooms with private facilities. On the East of the building, there is a chapel a reception room, and a conference room. The new building serves for daylong conferences of various commissions of the Holy See.

Mr. Haik Kavoukjian, a veteran member of the Eastern Diocese of America, has been since the 1940's an active member of the Armenian Church. As a Diocesan Delegate, he has attended the **National-Ecclesiastical Assemblies** in Holy Etchmiadzin, as well as at the annual Diocesan Assemblies in America. Mr. Kavoukjian was born in 1875 in Constantinople and lived to be 102 years old. He died suddenly on April 26, 1977 while at his desk in the Diocese in New York.

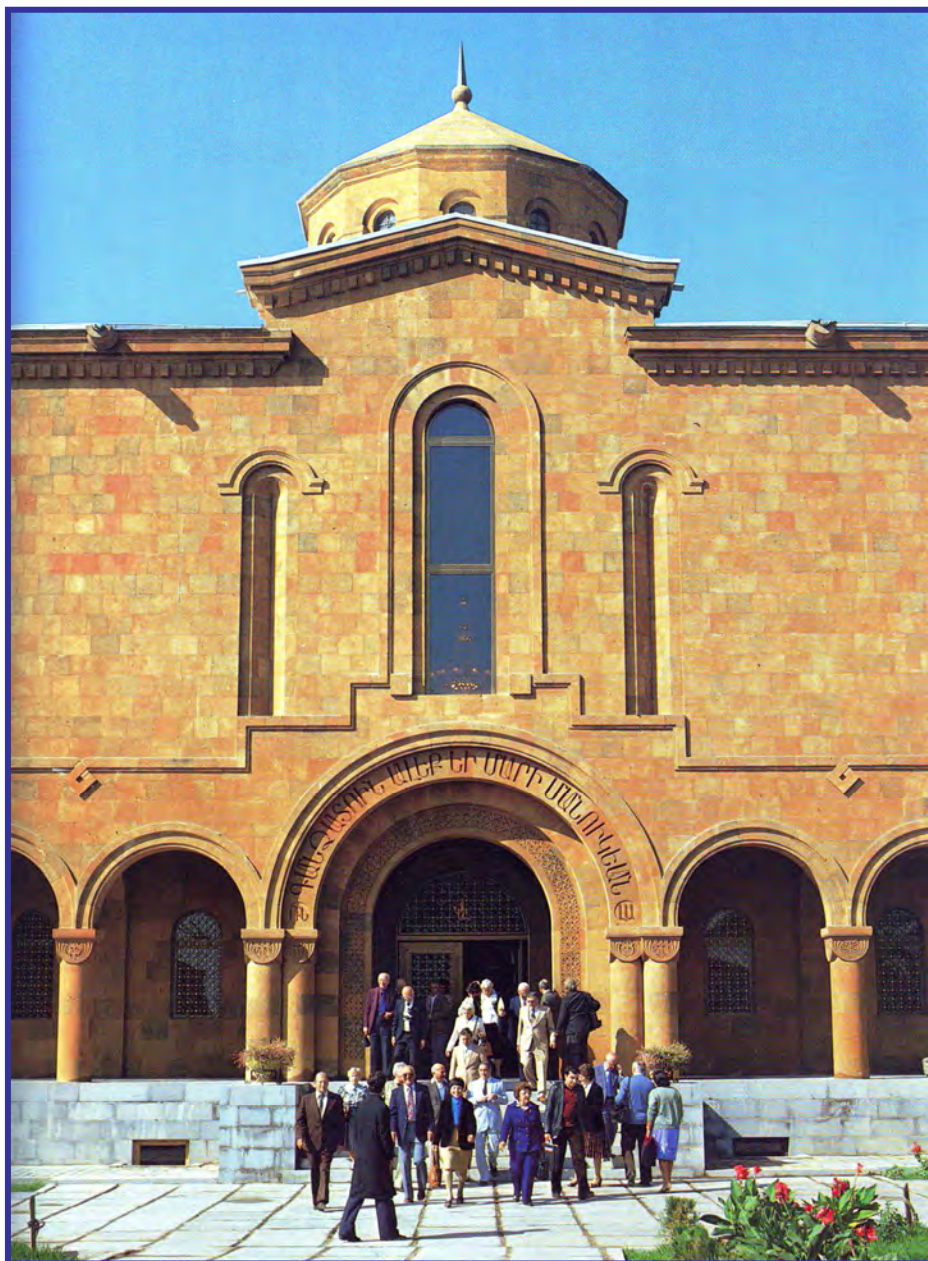
## **Vanadoon**

Catholicos **Vasken I** always felt the need for a **Guest House** (*Vanadoon*) for visiting clergy and lay guests. The building, three stories high, was designed by architect Ardzroon Galikian, comprising 22 bedrooms and three apartments with five bedrooms each. The benefactor was the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** of Lisbon. The structure, situated in between the Mother Cathedral and the Ghazarapat building, is located on the southeast of the grounds of Holy Etchmiadzin. The construction was completed in 1978 and ready for dedication on October 2.

The same day His Holiness and **Robert Gulbenkian** representing the Foundation, were heading the procession of the local and visiting primates and members of the Brotherhood for the ribbon cutting ceremony of the new *Vanadoon*. The same Foundation had sponsored earlier in 1974 the rebuilding of **Ghazarapat** initially built in 1750 by **Catholicos Ghazar Jahketsi**. After the renovation, the building included a chapel for Baptisms with two marble baptismal fonts, and a large refectory for the members of the Brotherhood.

## **Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum**

In 1982, an impressive **Museum** on the premises of Holy Etchmiadzin was ready for dedication next to the *Veharan*. The Museum building was entirely the gift of **Alex Manoogian**,



Dedication of Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum  
Holy Etchmiadzin

**President of the AGBU**, where ancient relics, crosses, church vestments, embroidered drapes, manuscripts, and various artifacts from the earliest centuries of Christianity in Armenia, would be treasured. The architect, **Baghdasar Arzoumanian**, headed the group of architects to design the two-storey high elegant building with a front colonnade and portico with 15 arches. The entrance to the Museum is under the fourth arch on the north side of the building.

The marble steps and columns lead the visitor to the second floor where the artifacts are displayed in specially designed glass cabinets. The inauguration took place on October 11, 1982 by **His Holiness Vasken I** in the presence of the benefactors Mr. and Mrs. Alex and Marie Manoogian from Detroit, USA, who cut the ribbon at the entrance of the Museum. Inside in the large hall the Catholicos performed a special ceremony and gave his message, saying: *"In this place treasures from our past turbulent history shall find their rest, including manuscripts, rare books, paintings, church artifacts and samples of embroidered covers and church drapes as living witness of the Armenian talent and spirituality."* Among the treasures are included the **spear (Geghart)** of the Crucified Lord, and the **Cross of Khotakerats** Monastery in 1300 AD, commissioned by Prince Eatchi Proshian. The Cross is significant for its age and artistic engravings. Reliquaries in the Museum are studded with gems, created in centers of Armenian handcraft, in Sis, Adana, Vaspurakan, Smyrna and Kesaria.

Alex Manoogian addressed the people and humbly admitted the wish that led him and his wife to Etchmiadzin, saying: *"Our forefathers have knelt on this holy soil and have conversed with heaven, uniting their pains and morsels of prayers to the incense and to the light of the candles, asking God's mercy."* He added that, *"following the example of his ancestors, he was glad to see his dreams come true by adding another stone on the building of the homeland of our religion."*

## VASKEN I AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND MILLENNIAL OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE

### Pontifical Visits to Great Britain

It was in 1956 when **Catholicos Vasken I** had met **Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury**, during his first Pontifical Visit outside Armenia. On subsequent visits Vasken I had visited the Lambeth Palace of the Church of England on three other occasions, but it was not until 1977 when an Archbishop of Canterbury, **Archbishop Frederick Cogan**, in return and for the first time in history, visited Armenia and Holy Etchmiadzin. The Catholicos' second visit to England was on June 11, 1975, and the third was during June 9 and 11 of 1978. On his 1978 visitation, Vasken I was welcomed by Archbishop Frederick Cogan, who had visited Holy Etchmiadzin the year before. Vasken I paid a fourth visit to Great Britain in 1983, from May 6 to June 1, to meet with the Armenian community as well as to personally greet the newly elected **Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Robert Runcie**. At his last visit to Lambeth Palace, the Catholicos was accompanied by **Archbishop Yeghishe Gizirian**, Primate of the Armenian Diocese of England, Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian of the Mother See, Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian of France, and Archbishop Zaven Chinchinian of Egypt.

### Historic Visit

It was the first time in history that the head of the Church of England paid an official visit to Holy Etchmiadzin. From September 29 to October 3, 1977, **His Eminence Frederick Donald Cogan**, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the Eminent Guest of Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians. The Archbishop arrived in Armenia with his entourage including Dr. Robert Runcie, Bishop of Albans, Canon John Arnold,



Secretary of the Anglican Synod, Dean David Painter of Canterbury, Canon Michael Moore, Director of Communications of Lambeth Palace, and Canon Eric Staples, spiritual pastor of the Anglican Church of Helsinki.

The Catholicos had invited **Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem**, and Archbishops Serovbe Manookian of Paris, Bessak Toumayan of London, Torkom Manoogian of the United States, Vatche Hovsepien of the Western Diocese USA, Shahe Ajemian of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, and Karekin Kazanjian of Australia. Present were also Bishops residing in Armenia, both primates and members of the Brotherhood of the Holy See. **Vasken I**, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the Archbishops of the Armenian Church greeted the **Archbishop of Canterbury** at the Erevan airport.

The head of the Church of England proceeded with his entourage of Anglican and Armenian clergy to the Cathedral of the Mother See, where the Catholicos of All Armenians greeted his guest, saying: *"Such visits among church dignitaries surely strengthen us in our respective missions."* Responding to the welcoming words, the Archbishop of Canterbury said he was *"extremely grateful because his predecessors longed for a visit to this Holy City to meet with you until this day,"* recalling his own ordination to the priesthood 42 years earlier, thanking God for His abundant gifts to enable him to serve in His Great Kingdom. The Archbishop conveyed the *"greetings of the worldwide Anglican churches to His Holiness and to the entire communities of this ancient Armenian Church"*, while he was being honored in the *Veharan*, the Residence of the Catholicos, where he resided next door to his host.

On September 30, a Conference convened among the Anglican and the Armenian delegations for religious, theological, and ecumenical matters, reflecting on the traditional missions of both churches, past and present. Vasken I wished to remind

the Anglican delegation that the Armenian Church was one and united under the supremacy of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. The unfortunate split by the actions taken in the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Lebanon, since 1956, he said, *"was out of order, so long as an internal animosity had gone so far as to spread jurisdictions outside the historic borders of the See of Cilicia, thus putting the rules and the canons of the Armenian Church in jeopardy."* The Catholicos, on the other hand, underlined the fact that the Armenian churches in Armenia, mainly in Erevan, had been enjoying legitimate coordination with the State of Armenia "in normal status with each faithful enjoying the right of free conscience and freedom in his/her belief."

The Archbishop of Canterbury spent the next few days visiting the important historic sites in the country, such as the Mesrob Mashtots Library of ancient Manuscripts and rare Books, the Genocide Monument of Dzidzernagabert, the monasteries of Geghart, Khor Virap, and Oshagan. On October 2, a solemn Liturgy was performed in the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin, at which time **Dr. Frederick Cogan, the Archbishop of Canterbury**, was invited to the Holy Altar to deliver his message. In his sermon, he recalled the genocide of 1915, saying, *"We cannot forget the Genocide of the Armenians; instead, we bring closer the aspirations of the two peoples, as they went through the horrors of the two World Wars."* He reminded the faithful of the Armenian Church *"horrors should not be returned with hatred; otherwise, it turns out to be a permanent wound with no cure in sight. We should put our pains and grievances in the hands of God to let Him turn them into peace and comfort. Let Him determine to treat them the way He wills, as St. Paul has said that God will bring out something good out of your tortures, because in the hands of God those horrors can be transferred into strength, and the strength into renewal of character yielding its most glorious fruit, the love of God towards His children."*

At the reception the same afternoon, **Vasken I** decorated the Archbishop of Canterbury with the great **Medal of St. Gregory the Illuminator**, to which the Archbishop responded humbly, *"with great joy I do receive the great honor bestowed on me in the name of your Holy Church and the Great Saint. I shall wear this Medal with pride as a token of unity and firm bond between our two churches."* Following the signing on October 3 of an official "Bilateral Statement" on behalf of the two, Anglican and Armenian churches, the Archbishop of Canterbury bid farewell to His Holiness and departed for London the same day.

### **Millennial Anniversary of the Russian Patriarchate**

The year 1988 marked the 1000 years of the **Russian Orthodox Patriarchate** by the orders of **Patriarch Pimen of All Russia**. From June 4 to 13, 1988, church dignitaries arrived in Moscow, among them those from the Armenian Apostolic Church, headed by **Vasken I**, Catholicos of All Armenians. The Armenian delegation included **Catholicos Karekin II** of Cilicia, the two Armenian **Patriarchs Yeghishe Derderian** of Jerusalem and **Shnork Kaloustian** of Constantinople, and a dozen of archbishops.

In 988, Russian Prince Vladimir entered the Dnieper River in Kiev with thousands of followers to receive baptism and adopt Christianity as a nation. Vladimir's grandmother **Princess Olga** was already a convert to Christianity and an ardent defender of the new religion. On the tenth centennial, **President Mikhail Gorbachev** of the Soviet Union took part in the celebrations inviting all religious heads of Christian denominations, including officials from the United Nations.

On June 5, an impressive and historical procession headed by Patriarch Pimen of All Russia proceeded to the Monastery of St. Daniel where the members of the Russian Synod were conducting the Liturgy. Patriarch Pimen officially announced

the **Millennial Anniversary** as a significant milestone in the Russian Patriarchate. The Greek Orthodox **Patriarch Diodoros** of Jerusalem and **Patriarch Shenouda III** of the Coptic Orthodox Church expressed greetings, and while the Liturgy was on, the Metropolitan Bishop of Rostov delivered the sermon, following which the procession entered the St. Sergius Chapel. Then they all entered the Mother Cathedral where 270 clergy and lay representatives celebrated for three days, presided over by **Patriarch Pimen**. Such assemblies convened only twice during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1945 and 1971, for electing Russian Patriarchs.

In his report on the Russian Orthodox Church's status, Metropolitan Galitsa of Kiev acknowledged the approval of the opening of more than 90 new Russian churches, a monastery, and the building of churches in Russia, due to the good policies of *glasnost* (Russian human rights) and *perestroika* (economic reforms), introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev. On behalf of the Armenian Church, **Karekin II** of Cilicia read his greetings in English, expressing his "unlimited joy that the Armenian Church was present to celebrate the great event headed by the Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I and the two Patriarchs. **Patriarch Pimen** proclaimed the **canonization of nine Saints** for the Russian Orthodox Church, including Prince Dmitri Donskoi (14<sup>th</sup> c.), and iconographer Andre Roupliov (15<sup>th</sup> c.).

The following two days new Bylaws were approved as final for the Russian Church, and on June 10 a solemn convocation was held in the Moscow theatre, presided over by Patriarch Pimen. In his address the **Catholicos of All Armenians** said, "*Rejoice ye all and be glad, you who are just before God. Boast ye all who are right in spirit.*" He invoked the date 988 as a "*historical act*" that overwhelmed the life of the Russian people. The Russian Orthodox Church, Catholicos Vasken I said, "*stood firm for 1000 years as the lighthouse of Christian belief and education with authority and high knowledge.*"

**THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
AND THE MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN  
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA**

**The Armenian Church Member of the WCC, 1962**

In 1959 a delegation from the **World Council of Churches** (WCC) arrived in Holy Etchmiadzin, headed by the General Secretary **Dr. W. Visser't Hooft**. The initial meeting of the WCC and the Armenian Orthodox Church gave its good fruits. Catholicos Vasken I submitted an official application on April 26, 1962, on behalf of the Armenian Church to become a member of the WCC, believing that *"from the beginning, as early as 1927, the Armenian Church was involved in the Ecumenical Affairs of the churches."* The Central Executive Council of WCC in Paris received the application on August 11, 1962, and unanimously accepted the **Armenian Church** as a member church. Present at the meeting in Paris were Bishops Serovbe Manoukian, Gomidas Der Stepanian, and Barkev Gevorgian. The same meeting accepted a second application from the See of the **Catholicosate of Cilicia** in Antelias, and was admitted, rather awkwardly, as a "different" church from the Mother See of the Armenian Church. This of course caused disappointment to Catholicos Vasken I and the Supreme Spiritual Council, thus further damaging the administrative unity of the Armenian Church before the eyes of the Western Churches.

Subsequently, **Vasken I** issued an official Encyclical on this historic milestone, dated June 4, 1965, advocating "unity in diversity" among the churches of the sublime World Council of Churches. At the Council many representatives of various denominations and races had come together to carry on the message of Jesus Christ in active participation and to promote *"brotherhood and respect toward each other against the many odds and challenges that the Christian world encountered."*

In March, 1967, the Catholicos welcomed the official visit to Holy Etchmiadzin of **Dr. Eugene Carson Blake**, General Secretary of the WCC in order to extend a cordial invitation to the head of the Armenian Church to pay his first official visit to Geneva. **Vasken I** arrived in Geneva on July 6, 1967, accompanied by Archbishops Haigazoon Abrahamian, Serovbe Manoukian, and Torkom Manoogian. In Geneva the Catholicos was welcomed by **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** of Turkey, and met with the past and the current Secretaries. He briefed them on the *"oneness of the Armenian Church, a unity conditioned and guaranteed by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as a centralized, historical, and canonical institution."* He further related the efforts of the membership of the churches to the *"essential issues of the time, regarding justice, peace, and freedom of nations."* On July 12, the Catholicos paid an official visit to the President of the State Council **Andre Chavanne**, who called the visit "a visit of precious divine gifts."

On July 13, Armenian Holy Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the WCC Center by one of the Armenian bishops in the presence of **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** of Constantinople. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the visiting Catholicos celebrated Mass in St. Peter Cathedral of Geneva, and gave his paternal blessings to "over 400 Armenians, including 150 young students from the summer camp." A year after the Catholicos had returned to the Holy See, an Armenian Church was built in Geneva and was consecrated by Archbishop Serovbe Manookian as **Soorp Hagop Armenian Church**, donated by philanthropist Hagop Topalian, formerly of Alexandria, Egypt.

### **The National Council of Churches of Christ in USA**

The counterpart of the WCC in the United States of America is the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) formally established in 1950, soon after the WCC. The following data are provided by the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of

America that joined the Council in 1957 under **Archbishop Mampre Kalfayan**, Primate of the Eastern Diocese. Presently the President of the NCC is **Archbishop Viken Aikazian**, the Diocesan Legate of the Eastern Diocese residing in Washington, DC. The Archbishop is the first Armenian high-ranking clergy to hold the highest office in the NCC, elected in 2008. He is a member of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and ordained bishop by the late Catholicos Vasken I in 1992. He was elevated to the rank of Archbishop by Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians. In *The Torch Was Passed*, published in 1998 by the Eastern Diocese on the Centennial of the establishment of the Armenian Diocese in America, we read the following.

*"1957 was the year that the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America was accepted for membership in the country's premier ecumenical organization, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. The previous year, Catholicos Vasken I had granted his approval to the idea of submitting an application. Fr. Vatrطان Megherian, the diocesan Vicar General, and Fr. Arnak Kasparian were both appointed to represent the diocese at the NCC's triennial General Assembly in St. Louis, Missouri. The situation was complicated somewhat when the NCC's membership committee received hostile communications from the Church's dissident faction, but after considering additional information provided by the diocese's own representatives, the committee affirmed its original favorable recommendation. Consequently, on December 5, 1957 the various Protestant and Orthodox denominations, which comprised the NCC, voted to accept the Armenian Church of America into membership.*

*"On behalf of the Primate, and at the invitation of the Reverend Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, the organization's president, Fr. Megherian delivered a statement of appreciation to the 1500 delegates of the General Assembly. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful association with the ecumenical organization, which brought the Armenian Church into a vastly wider circle of contacts within the American society. Indeed, shortly after the diocese became a member, its representatives were privileged to make acquaintance*

*with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, during the dedication ceremony of the NCC's new Manhattan headquarters, the Inter-church Center."*

As stated above the Armenian Church Diocese in America is the only representative member church in the NCC with the rest of the Orthodox Churches. The Diocese has played a central role in the affairs of the NCC by subsequent Primates personally, especially by **Archbishop Torkom Manoogian** (1966-1990), chairing the Central Council meetings ever since. As the permanent Legate of the Primate, **Archbishop Papken Varjabedian** was assigned in Washington, DC, who held the position for three decades and represented the Eastern Diocese and the Armenian Church before the White House and the Congress through the NCC. The position of the Diocesan Legate proved important in the capital of the nation. Archbishop Varjabedian performed his duties diligently, keeping an active relationship between the Armenian Church and the Nation's Capital.

### **History of WCC (1910)**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity was known as the **Ecumenical Century** by the eventual formation of the **World Council of Churches** in 1948. The initial intent of the ensuing conferences since 1910 among the various Christian denominations, as it remains to be up to this date, was not and could not have been "a unity in uniformity" among them. It has rather been, as always, not to create a "unity" as such, but only to respectfully learn from each other, to know each other closely, and work together for the welfare of the world affairs and the needs of the times. The intention and the purpose have been to make the presence of the Church in the world effective and permanent. It was a century ago, in 1910, that a first such conference among the Christian churches worldwide met in **Edinburgh** with 1200 representatives from interested churches to respond to the challenge and to the specific invitation. This initial meeting



opened the doors of the "closed" churches for the immediate future, and a few preparatory conferences were held until decades later, on August 23, 1948, at which time the World Council of Churches (WCC) was inaugurated in Amsterdam.

Both the Roman Catholic and the Russian Orthodox churches did not participate in the Edinburgh Conference for theological and canonical reasons, fearing that the Conference could jeopardize the traditional principles of doctrines confessed by the canonical and ancient churches while mingling with the Reformed Churches and their missionary works.

### **The Lausanne Conference (1927)**

Seventeen years later, from August 3-21, 1927, the first Conference of the churches convened in **Lausanne, Switzerland**, where the nature of the new movement among the churches was labeled as "**Ecumenical**", a word from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning, "*the whole inhabited world.*" The Conference explored and discussed the issues under the general heading of "**Faith and Order**," concentrating on a common ground in terms of Theology, Doctrine, and Canon Law, which naturally proved to be impossible to handle at that very primitive stage. The initiative of the agenda came from Robert Gardner, the Episcopal Bishop of New York, who had died three years earlier. It included five specific issues: (1) the Message of the Church to the World; (2) the Nature of the Church; (3) the Episcopal Order; (4) the Lesser Orders; (5) the Apostolic Succession and the Sacraments.

Concerning the Lausanne Conference, on behalf of the Armenian Church the Supreme Spiritual Council of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin had drafted a Guideline regarding "the spirit of the participation," "the conditions," and "the delegation." **Kevork V, Catholicos of All Armenians** (1912-1930), designated a delegation in response to the invitation

dated May 19, 1926, which included Archbishop Tirair Der Hovhannisian of New York, Bishop Ghevond Tourian of Manchester, and Bishop Krikoris Balakian of Marseilles. The delegates were instructed "to represent the Armenian Church on behalf of Catholicos Kevork V, and the ancient Church of Armenia", underlining basic principles as follows: *"Final decisions are reached only after the convening of the National-Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Armenian Church, presided over by the Catholicos of All Armenians. Further, the delegation shall not have the right to participate in, nor adhere to, any resolution adopted by the "Conference of faith and Order."* 102 churches were represented at the Lausanne Conference with 500 delegates, presided over by the U.S. Bishop of the Episcopal Church in New York. The Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church declined and did not participate, while the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Greek Orthodox Church sent a representative in the person of Archbishop Germanos who expressed the feelings of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which were "fortunate to have joined the Western young churches." Germanos' stand was twofold, (a) There should be no integration among churches for the sake of "unity", (b) There is no such thing as "to achieve unity overnight"; rather, to work on a long-term schedule to reach agreement on fundamental matters.

Subsequent speakers touched on the following subjects. (a) The Lord's wish, that ***you should be one***, (b) The preaching of the church, which is the Gospel itself, (c) The Gospel as the only source to change the world and mankind, (d) The wish *"to make the Gospel a holy bond to join us together in order we may achieve individual and social reform. Otherwise, if we cling to our old directions, it would mean that God has not yet spoken his best to mankind."* Other speeches were delivered on "Christ the head of the Church and the life", on "the Holy Spirit as the source of all gifts". From the Armenian Church Bishop Ghevond Tourian gave an introduction on the history of the

Armenian Church and her apostolic origin, and, in conclusion, he said: "The Armenian Church follows St. Augustine's principles in doctrinal matters, namely, *Unity in the essentials, Freedom in diversity, and Love among all.*" At that early stage of the Ecumenical Movement, an important remark was made by the Greek Orthodox Bishop Evangelitas of Nubia, who expressed his feelings this way: *"I believe, he said, that unity among churches cannot be realized if the 325 Nicene Creed of the ancient churches is not honored and protected. We should place it as the rock foundation of our future unity."*

The Conference in Lausanne took care of the remaining doctrinal issues on their initial stages, as delegates expressed *pro* and *con* views. They included the "*Apostolic Succession, the Sacrament of Ordination, the other Sacraments, abiding on the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist which came to us directly from Christ for us to promote them as our prime legacy.*" On behalf of the Armenian Church Bishop Krikoris Balakian spoke and reflected on the atrocities of World War I, saying: *"Let this Conference in Lausanne be a New Pentecost, and let us carry the message of peace across the world and our respective churches."* The Conference elected a Central Executive Council of 35 members, including the two Armenian bishops, Tourian and Balakian, to carry on the resolutions of Lausanne in the near future.

### **The Edinburgh Conference (1937)**

Ten years after the Lausanne Conference of the Christian churches, during August 3-18, 1937, the **Second Edinburgh Conference** succeeded, having a specific agenda on **Faith and Order**. On behalf of the Armenian Church **Catholicos Khoren I Mouradbekian of All Armenians** sent a delegation to participate. The agenda had the following subdivisions. a) The doctrine of the Grace of God, b) The Word of God and the membership of a given church, c) The intercession of Saints, d)

The administration of the Sacraments, e) Unity of Church seen from within the life and worship of the faithful. Briefly, the above issues reflected the following comments.

a) **Grace** was viewed as the revelation of God's love at the Creation of the world. It is distributed to men through the church by the actions taken from the Word of God and by the administration of the Sacraments.

b) **Church Membership** was viewed from the doctrinal diversity of, and disagreement among the churches.

c) **Intercession of Saints** was the topic of discussion in two different and contradictory dimensions. Saints can take part in the lives of the faithful if the faithful are "living under the Grace and not under the Law." According to the orthodox teaching Saints are glorified equally with the angels, living in the heavenly abodes.

d) **Sacraments** surfaced diversity of opinions among the Orthodox and Protestant churches regarding the number, whether seven or less, and their effectiveness. While the Protestants rejected the apostolic succession and the Episcopal rank, the Orthodox members advocated both of them and deemed essential by the administration of the Sacrament of Ordination.

e) **Unity of the Church** was definitely the most complicated issue, as it was also premature for the Conference to handle. The Conference reduced it to "cooperation based on the unity of the faith, shunning from any kind of uniformity or administrative subordination of one church to another. Two major and contradicting definitions were at stake: 1) that the church is the only institution that can exercise "authority", and 2) that the church is a communion of "personal entities" that can reflect each faithful individual's behavior, rather than on the administrative and systematic structure. The Conference at

Edinburgh resolved that the future conferences should be identified as **The World Council of Churches (WCC)**. This was unanimously adopted and was put to effect with regularly convened intervals with their respective agendas.

On behalf of the Armenian Apostolic Church **Catholicos Khoren I Mouradbekian of All Armenians** had designated Archbishop Houssig Zohrabian of Romania, and Archbishop Matthew Injeian of Manchester who addressed the Conference and took part in the deliberations of the sessions. The Conference further resolved to convene the newly formed WCC every seven years in an attempt of keeping alive the Christian faith and teaching, in order to be able to resist the problems that can hinder the spread of Christianity in the world.

### **The World Council of Churches (WCC) (1948)**

Based on the 1937 resolution, the WCC convened initially at a General Assembly of church representatives held in Amsterdam on August 23, 1948. The fundamental principle of the WCC was and still is "a convocation of churches that accepts Jesus Christ as God and Savior."

Its Constitution was drafted earlier in 1938 in Utrecht, upon which more than 150 denominations, except the Roman Catholic and the Russian Orthodox Churches, were represented. The three-fold name of the WCC stands self-explanatory. The WCC is formed of **churches** as individual institutions and not as individual members of any given church. It is **worldwide** and not simply national or Western. It is a **council**, a volunteer fellowship, rather than a "superior" church with jurisdictional authority. The WCC proved to be exactly that for which reason different churches felt comfortable to join as members. Administrative unity is not and cannot be the *raison d'etre* of the WCC. Fellowship and communion in good

faith, respect for each other and learning from each other as independent churches are the sole objectives.

### **Evanston (1954)**

The second WCC General Assembly convened in Evanston, Illinois in 1954, where a statement was adopted that the unity talks may not simply constitute a theoretical principle, devoid of practical achievements. This included primarily outreach to the needy churches and help to the refugees that existed all over. Mutual concerns and actions thereof would be the common goal of all churches under the umbrella of the WCC. During the following ten years, up to 1958, numerous philanthropic activities were exploited in three directions: a) to reach and help the politically unsafe and depressed refugees; b) to help the minority churches, especially those newly formed; c) to try to communicate with the Christian denominations under the Soviet Socialist rule as much as possible.

The WCC actually did relocate 12,500 deported people from Eastern European countries to the United States, Canada, and Australia in 1955 alone. Plans were set to build Aged Homes for the needy and help the older clergy of all denominations to be admitted in nursing homes or hospitals. In 1953, the WCC helped the victims of the devastating earthquake in Greece, and a year later, helped the homeless and the needy in Korea with an allocation of \$2,800,000 worth of food and medicine. It reached the same way to help India, Pakistan, and Laos where flooding had caused great damage to the citizens. The riot of September 6, 1955 in Istanbul had destroyed many churches, homes, and stores, in which Greeks were the main target. To meet the emergency there, the WCC sent delegations to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and reached out providing immediate help, both diplomatic and economic. Overall, the assistance in 1955 was an estimated \$33 Million,

including scholarship grants to more than 1300 students. Another way to help churches and communities was "The Ecumenical Loan Firm" through which many houses of worship were either built or renovated, thus "bearing the other's burden and practicing the Law of Christ."

Inter-church relations remained active on the initial agenda of the WCC relative to the cooperation between the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches. The first step in this direction was taken with an official visitation of the Council's executive committee to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul in November 1955. Relations also developed with the Christians in the Soviet Union, mainly in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, on the one hand, and in Asia and Africa on the other, finding ways not to isolate them from the main stream of the Christian world, but to bring them in touch with the Western churches.

In Evanston, the WCC exercised efforts to defend the Christian faith taking three specific steps: a) The role of the church in the society, b) The missionary work of the church across nations, c) Attempt to unify the church in the interest of the common ground of economy and civilization, especially among the underdeveloped churches. A most modern and urgent issue even was part of the agenda, namely, Christianity in the face of abolishing atomic power. It surely required theological and moral approach, under the guidance of scientists, historians, and the military. It also required an immediate need to enter into contact with the non-Christian religions that comprised millions of population of various races.

### **New Delhi (1961)**

The Third General Assembly of the WCC convened in New Delhi, India from November 19 to December 6, 1961. The chosen theme was "*Christ the Light of the World.*" It was a year

later that the Armenian Church was admitted to the WCC as a member church of which we have written earlier in this study. By the invitation of His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians, **Bishop Terenig Poladian**, Dean of the Theological Seminary of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa and formerly the Dean of the Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon, attended the Assembly and later presented his report to the head of the Armenian Church in Holy Etchmiadzin. The General Assembly was attended by 577 delegates, representing 198 churches, and at its first session the delegates voted to admit the Russian Orthodox Church as a member of the WCC, bringing the total church membership in 1961 to 198. The entire participants in New Delhi, including counselors, reporters, youth, and observers, totaled some 15,000.

The agenda included the importance of the exposure of all nations to the Word of God. At first Holy Mass was performed on November 26 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Holy Communion was administered to the 1500 attendants; later, Liturgy was conducted by the clergy of the Indian Malabar Orthodox Church. The basic agenda, as said above, was around "Christ the Light of the World" which is spread all over the world, Christian and non-Christian alike, without boundaries or intervals of periods in history. Papers were read reaching the conclusion of the Way to the Light, Jesus Christ, in **witnessing, serving, and unifying**. The papers acknowledged those three steps as essential to perpetuate the Gospel of Christ as the Good News everywhere. The follow-up of all these was to concentrate on the service of the church in reaching out to social, economic, and racial needs, with an effort to eliminate integration of races which in the early 60's had placed important burden on the leaders of the church. All told, justice among nations and races was imperative and discrimination among races reduced to equal opportunities. The church was to make the difference, and for that to happen the General



Assembly at New Delhi stressed unity among churches first before they could reach outside to help the world.

Three sub-committees conducted the above agenda separately, and at the final session, the Assembly delegates voted to invite other denominations for WCC membership. Executive members were elected, among them six presidents (4 clergy and 2 lay members) for a term of 7 years until the Fourth General Assembly. Those four clergy were: Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury, Archbishop Yakovos of the Greek Orthodox Church of America, Dr. David Moses of India, and Dr. Newmeller, President of the German Lutheran Church.

### **Uppsala (1968)**

The Fourth General Assembly of the WCC convened in Uppsala, Sweden, from July 4 to 19, 1968. In attendance were 702 delegates representing 230 churches and 80 nationalities. Altogether 2800 participants were present including reporters, observers, youth, and alternates. The Armenian Church, as reported earlier in this study, was admitted the year before in 1962 as a member of the WCC. The Armenian Church was represented in Uppsala with a delegation on behalf of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, headed by Archbishop Serovbe Manoukian of France, including Bishop Barkev Gevorgian of Holy Etchmiadzin, Mesrob Vartabed Krikorian of Vienna, Nersess Vartabed Bozabalian, and Arsen Vartabed Berberian, both from the Mother See. A separate delegation from the See of the Catholicosate of Cilicia was also present. The theme of the Uppsala Assembly was "**I renew all things.**"

From July 5 to 8, six papers were presented following the report of the General Secretary of the WCC Dr. Eugene Carson Blake. The presentations were as follows:

- 1) "*Here I renew all things*" by Archbishop Ignatius Hazim

- 2) "*The imperative of the Ecumenical Movement*" by Dr. William Visser't Hooft
- 3) "*Jesus Christ the ultimate purpose*" by Dr. H. Berkoff
- 4) "*Our common Christian witness*" by three Fathers from the Roman Catholic Church
- 5) "*Wealthy and poor nations*" by the President of Zambia
- 6) "*White Genocide or World Community?*" by James Baldwin and Lord Garaton.

The newly admitted churches in the family of the WCC were all from Africa. On July 8, the General Assembly elected six different committees to present world issues in the following order. a) The Holy Spirit and the universality of the church, b) Renewal in our Christian mission, c) Economic and social progress worldwide, d) Toward justice and peace in international affairs, e) To worship God in the midst of today's world, f) Towards a new life and a new style. On July 11, a conclusive workshop gave a synopsis of the works done among 32 sub-committees in which the delegation from the Armenian Church had an active part. The Fourth General Assembly concluded its agenda on July 19, 1968, with a united worship service in the Cathedral of Uppsala. The next day the Central Committee re-elected **Dr. Eugene Carson Blake** as Secretary General along with an Executive Board of 16 members.

### **Central Committee at Canterbury (1969)**

The following year during August 13-22, 1969, the Central Committee of the WCC met for its annual meeting in the Canterbury Cathedral with 120 members. The Armenian Church was represented by **Nersess Vartabed Bozabalian**, and **Barkev Shahbazian** from Holy Etchmiadzin. The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Michael Ramsey gave the welcoming address, followed by the Secretary of the Foreign Affairs of Great Britain Lord Chalfont's address, representing Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Secretary Blake alerted the

Council regarding the unending war among nations in Vietnam, the Middle East, and Africa.

### **Nairobi (1975)**

The Fifth General Assembly of the WCC convened during November 23 through December 10, 1975 in Nairobi, Kenya, with delegates representing 270 churches. Total participants were some 2500, including counselors, reporters, and guests. On behalf of the Armenian Church the delegation was headed by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian (USA), including Archbishop Shahe Ajemian (Jerusalem), Bishop Nersess Bozabalian (Great Britain), Bishop Arsen Berberian (Mother See), and Barkev Shahbazian (Mother See). The Catholicosate of Cilicia was represented by Archbishop Karekin Sarkissian, Aram Vartabed Keshishian, and Tammy Simonian. The theme of the Fifth General Assembly was **"Christ Jesus emancipates and unites."** The first to address the Assembly was the President of the WCC who asked the Lord Jesus to shed His Light on the Assembly.

Following his welcoming address, Dr. M. Thomas, President of the Central Committee, read his report covering the 7 years activities of the WCC, centering on the evangelization and the mission of Christ's Gospel outside the church. He advised Christ-centered steps to be taken in order the WCC could "invite the world to grasp the concept of theology in its midst as a living factor at the crossroads of the church and the world." He underlined further the wish that the ecumenical movement would mark progress among nations and bring them together through their church membership.

### **Vancouver (1983)**

The Sixth General Assembly of the WCC convened in Vancouver, Canada, from July 24 to August 10, 1983. 3000 delegates from 300 member churches attended, including

delegates from the Mother See of the Armenian Church, headed by Archbishops Torkom Manoogian (USA), Shahe Ajemian (Jerusalem), Vatche Hovsepian (USA), Bishop Nersess Bozabalian and Father Yeznig Bedrossian (Holy Etchmiadzin). The theme of the Assembly was chosen as "**Jesus Christ, the Life of the World**", announced by Archbishop Edward Scott, President of the WCC. The first keynote speaker was Prof. Theodore Stilianopoulos from the Greek Orthodox Church, who touched on the Incarnation of God as the ultimate expression of His love, Christ being the Life of all nations. The next speaker was Rev. Alan Pusak, representing the African Third World countries, where millions of children die from hunger, simply because justice and protection were totally lacking. He stressed that Jesus Christ, the Life of the World, is hardly affecting the church, let alone the world which has neglected Christ altogether.

The same day Dr. Philip Potter, Secretary General, presented his report reflecting on Christ as the "Living Stone", according to St. Peter's First Epistle, being the foundation of the "Spiritual Temple", alive, active, and effective. He further stressed the fact that the ultimate purpose of the "united churches" should be the achievement of "communion of those who confess, and those who follow, along with those who share each other's needs with unreserved sacrifice."

The Sixth Assembly formed groups to consider the following steps: a) Witnessing the many divisions among churches, and trying to reinforce the inner strength in unifying the worship service as the central element in our community lives. b) Pursuing unity with actions rather than with preaching the Word of God alone, whose backbone comprises the three Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and the Ordination of priests. c) Theology is not sufficient; rather, attempt should be made to enter into communion with each other, tasting Christ from the same Table, based on official stands taken by

each, acknowledging each other's Sacraments as valid and necessary. d) To live together and heal the world community based on the Cross, and the ultimate sacrifice on it. This prompted to share practical goals, such as the distribution of churches' wealth to the poor and to those churches in need. e) To meet the challenge of the world, especially those calamities which threaten peace on earth, respecting the rights and privileges of peoples and nations through the United Nations. f) To struggle for justice in terms of human dignity by opposing and resisting the tyranny of those nations which try to violate peace among nations. g) To educate families through membership of churches and their respective worship services.

The Armenian Church delegation raised once again the issue of the Genocide of 1915 perpetrated against the Armenians living in Turkey. They proposed that the WCC should pursue and issue proclamation through the Committee of the Human Rights. To that end, the same delegation drafted a special resolution in four parts, dated August 1, 1983, and presented to the Assembly for consideration. The Assembly voted for the resolution, which included in the second section *"the massacres of the 1.5 million Armenians following the mass deportations from all parts of the country."* The third section of the resolution confirmed that the WCC had expressed concerns regarding the proposal of the Armenian Genocide to the United Nations, to take steps *"to punish the crime and put an end to future genocides among nations."* In closing, the Assembly in Vancouver discussed the conflicts in the *"Middle East and Cyprus, abiding also on the political unrest in Jerusalem, on the danger of the nuclear weapons, calling on the churches to pursue the urgent cause of securing peaceful world, standing as true witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ."*

### **Canberra (1991)**

The Seventh General Assembly of the WCC convened in Canberra, capital of Australia, from February 7-20, 1991.

Delegates from 950 member churches attended in addition to hundreds of observers, counselors, and reporters, totaling some 4000 people. On behalf of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiazdin, the Armenian Church represented a delegation of 12, headed by **Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian**. The general theme of the Assembly was "**Come, Holy Spirit and renew the entire creation.**" The Prime Minister of Australia gave the welcoming remarks, followed by a 7-years activities report by Emilio Castro, the Secretary General of the WCC.

The next day Hans Johakim Helt, Chairman of the WCC, delivered his address. The agenda included four main issues as follows:

- a) *Holy Spirit source of life, protect your creation*
- b) *Spirit of truth liberate us*
- c) *Spirit of unity reconcile your people!*
- d) *Holy Spirit change and sanctify us*

Twelve sub-committees touched on all four issues on the bases of theology, society, and politics. The Middle East crisis was closely reviewed, especially the War of the Persian Gulf, and the Apartheid of South Africa. The Chairman made a brief statement regarding the ecumenical nature of the Assembly of Churches, whereby bringing forth the needs and desires of all churches, making them no longer "*alien entities with each other; on the contrary, seeking their participation ultimately at the service of the world problems in unity and more effectively.*"

Secretary of the WCC Dr. Philip Potter spoke next and further identified the problems the world facing presently indicating a more sensitive approach to the greater demands in view of the wars in Vietnam and the Middle East. He underlined the "global nature" of the crises that needed equally "global reaction" through the help of the churches for the recovery of the world. Dr. Potter's views were hailed as a

calling *"to join God's providential work with a new order where truth and justice would stand triumphant."* Six papers were read in the light of the foregoing concerns as follows:

- a) Confessing Christ anew
- b) What does unity require?
- c) Search for brotherhood
- d) To educate people for the search of liberation
- e) Struggle for the sake of liberation
- f) Need for present-day education to be compatible with the world's progress.

All papers contained religious, social, evangelical and liturgical issues, in addition to the rights of women. Eighty workshops of 15-20 delegates each, convened during eight sessions to review the general theme of the General Assembly and the actions taken during the period from Uppsala to Nairobi. Four administrative offices were formed as follows:

- a) General Secretary's offices with subdivisions
- b) Activities pertaining the Faith and Order aiming at spreading the Gospel for the search of church unity
- c) Activities reflecting justice and service aiming at peace and justice among nations in modern times
- d) Renewal of faith and education

The Armenian Church took active part in the above deliberations emphasizing the traditions upon which the Eastern Churches have placed their belief next to the Holy Bible. The conservative member churches expressed caution not to entertain political issues and become involved in worldly affairs other than the philanthropic realm, compatible with the Gospel of Christ, such as social issues, justice, peace, the needy, and ways to outreach them. The Assembly announced that the WCC should join the UN and the Security Council to help the fate of Jerusalem in achieving more stability among the three religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

## **THE MOTHER SEE**

### **The Hierarchic Sees of Cilicia, Jerusalem and Constantinople**

#### **Catholicos Karekin II of Cilicia and The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin**

**Catholicos Karekin II** of the Great House of Cilicia served the Holy See for 18 years. He was Catholicos Coadjutor of Catholicos Khoren I, and upon the passing of Catholicos Khoren in February 1983, Karekin II succeeded him and assumed full responsibility. He showed intimacy toward the Mother See and Armenia, especially when the earthquake devastated northern Armenia in 1988. He stood beside the **Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I**. He paid several visits to comfort and extend a helping hand to the motherland and the people at large who suffered the tragedy.

Unlike Catholicos Khoren I, and his predecessor Catholicos Zareh I, who never visited Armenia or Holy Etchmiadzin, Karekin II showed more tolerance and respect toward the Mother See, distancing himself from unnecessary ambitions and further encroachments. On the contrary, he displayed more understanding with his urgent visit to Holy Etchmiadzin immediately after the earthquake, and through his subsequent visits and communications with Catholicos Vasken I, alleviating the pressure of silent confrontation for a better relationship. During his tenure, the Seminary in Antelias grew, and more graduates entered into the priesthood, both celibate and married. He ordained a good number of young bishops as mentioned earlier in this book, and sent the graduates to higher educational centers in England, France and the United States, to further their theological and Biblical education.

Catholicos Karekin II of Cilicia visited New York upon the invitation of Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians who had arrived before him in January 1989 to organize a **National**

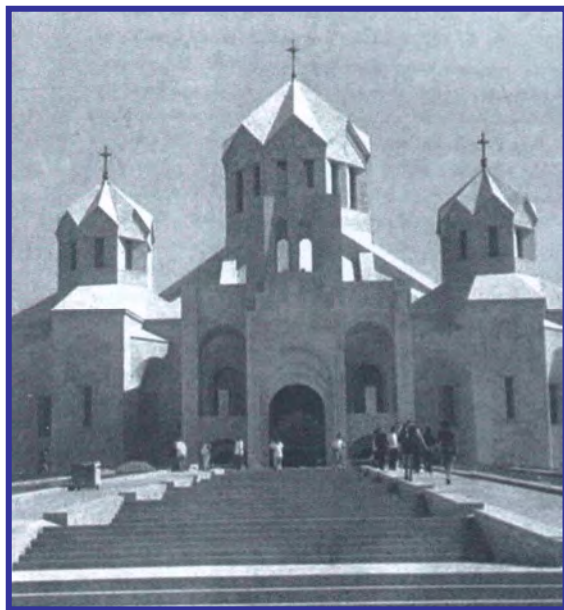




His Holiness POPE JOHN PAUL II  
Visits Holy Etchmiadzin  
With His Holiness Karekin II  
Catholicos of All Armenians



All Holiness BARTHOLOMEW I  
The Ecumenical Patriarch of the  
Greek Orthodox Church in  
Holy Etchmiadzin



St. GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR  
CATHEDRAL  
In Erevan, Armenia  
In Commemoration of  
1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Armenian Christianity



His Holiness KAREKIN I  
The Late Catholicos of All Armenians  
(1995-1999)

**Fund Raising Committee** to meet the urgent need for the families left behind. The joint presence of both Vasken I and Karekin II in **St. Vartan Cathedral** prompted urgent support in helping Armenia and those who suffered great losses. Prominent Armenians from all persuasions from North and South Americas, Europe, and Australia, were in the Cathedral to pledge before the Catholicos of All Armenians to contribute toward the rebuilding of the devastated cities of Giumri, Stepanavan, Spitak, Vanadzor, Nalband, and the numerous surrounding towns and villages.

In 1995, Karekin II of Cilicia became the candidate for the position of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Holy Etchmiadzin upon the passing of Vasken I in August 1994. Catholicos Karekin II, elected in April 1955, was enthroned as **Karekin I Catholicos of All Armenians**. Unfortunately, he lived four brief years and passed away following a prolonged illness in June 1999, at age 67.

### **Crisis in Jerusalem Patriarchate (1982)**

Two years after the Jerusalem Convocation an internal crisis surfaced the tranquil life at the St. James Patriarchate. The crisis originated between the two leaders, **Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian** and **Archbishop Shahe Ajemian**, Chancellor, who collaborated closely for 25 years in the handling of the day-to-day operation of the Monastery. In fact, next to notable accomplishments, they were partly mishandling the affairs of the Patriarchate until such time when disagreement between the two brought about an internal strife on a personal behavioral basis. The General Assembly of the Brotherhood of the Patriarchate met officially to examine the case, which resulted in the ousting of Archbishop Ajemian from his offices and from the membership of the Brotherhood. After 25 years of intimate and selfish cooperation, rather than careful and responsible service, the friendship fell apart causing a serious vacuum in

the leadership of the Patriarchate, the Chancellery and the administration of the Seminary that were entrusted to Archbishop Ajemian. The Patriarch and the Archbishop quarreled and the Executive Council of the Patriarchate reached the decision to replace Archbishop Shahe with another high-ranking clergy for the said offices.

The administration of the Patriarchate stood by the side of the Patriarch giving him full support. Meantime, in 1981, Grand Sacristan **Archbishop Hairig Aslanian** passed away, and **Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian**, Primate of Australia and the Far East, was elected instead. The Archbishop assumed the position of the Dean of the Seminary, besides his responsibility as Grand Sacristan. As for Archbishop Shahe Ajemian, he lived in Jerusalem, outside the Patriarchate for a while, and then departed to Armenia and initiated the **Department of Religion** at the State University of Erevan, acting as its first Dean. He passed away in Armenia in 2005.

### **Passing of Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian**

**Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian** of Jerusalem passed away suddenly on February 1, 1990, at age 80, holding office for the longest time. He served the Apostolic See for 30 years and accomplished noteworthy deeds as already described in this book. Following his death, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of America, headed the members of the Brotherhood serving in different parts of the world, went to Jerusalem to help the situation. The urgent matter was to elect a *locum tenens* as the acting head of the Patriarchate during the vacancy. Archbishop Manoogian assisted **Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian**, the Grand Sacristan, who was in charge of the Patriarchate until the election of a new Patriarch. On February 16, at a General Assembly, the clergy elected **Archbishop Torkom Manoogian** *locum tenens* according to the bylaws of the Patriarchate.

The late Patriarch Derderian was elected to the Apostolic See at St. James in June 1960 under controversial upheavals as reported earlier in this study. His death occurred suddenly following an apparent stroke. Ten years before, the Patriarch underwent a brain surgery. Archbishop Kazanjian informed the passing of the Patriarch to **His Holiness Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** and to the Hierarchic Sees of the Armenian Church, the Vatican, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Lambeth Palace of the Anglican Church, and other centers of Christian missions. The Catholicos dispatched Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian, Chancellor of the Mother See, to present his personal condolences to the members of the Brotherhood who arrived in Jerusalem on February 7. He celebrated the Requiem Mass in the Cathedral of St. James and read the pontifical condolences on behalf of the Catholicos of All Armenians. The funeral of the late Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian took place on February 11, presided over by **Archbishop Torkom Manoogian**, *locum tenens*. During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian administered the Last Unction of the late Patriarch.

### **Patriarch Torkom II Manoogian**

In July 1990, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian was elected Patriarch of the Apostolic See as **Patriarch Torkom II Manoogian**. He met different challenges within the offices of the Patriarchate, where the financial situation and the status of the real estates were in jeopardy. The filing system had to be organized, the Seminary needed immediate attention, and the members of the Brotherhood needed new leadership. The same year, in 1990, **Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian** passed away while visiting Armenia. **Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian** succeeded him as Patriarch of Constantinople leaving vacant the position of Grand Sacristan in Jerusalem. The General Assembly of the Brotherhood elected **Archbishop Tavit Sahakian** as Grand Sacristan who held the office for eight years.

Assisted by Archbishop Tavit Sahakian, Patriarch Torkom first embarked on the urgent problems of the real estates of the Patriarchate and the revenues, which were neglected during the previous years and demanded legal actions and prudent decisions. He was also involved in the building of the new living headquarters of the bishops and the priests, an achievement that he realized successfully. Four years after his election, Patriarch Torkom assumed the most important duties as the Vicar of the Catholicos of All Armenians when Catholicos Vasken I passed away in 1994. He acted as *locum tenens* and held that high position for one year, until the election of the new Catholicos of All Armenians took place in 1995. Patriarch Torkom held his dual offices simultaneously, traveling back and forth from Jerusalem to Etchmiadzin. As of this writing, the Patriarch at his advanced age of 90 is still at the helm of the Patriarchate with the immediate assistance of the Grand Sacristan **Archbishop Nourhan Manoogian** as the Vicar of the Patriarchate.

### **Passing of Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian**

The same year, in March 1990, the Patriarch of Constantinople **Archbishop Shnork Kaloustian** had passed away following an accident while visiting the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Prior to his departure, the Patriarch spent a month vacationing in Florida as the guest of Father Zaven Arzoumanian, Pastor of St. David Armenian Church in Boca Raton. **Patriarch Shnork celebrated his last Liturgy at St. David** before leaving for Holy Etchmiadzin. The next day of his arrival, while descending from the second floor of the *Veharan*, he fell on the marble steps before taking his first step down, apparently caused by dizziness, and fatally injured his head. He died following an urgent surgery at the hospital in Yerevan. The remains of the Patriarch were flown to Istanbul, accompanied by the two priests, who had arrived in Etchmiadzin from Istanbul. **Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian**, Chancellor of the

Mother See, headed the delegation. The funeral of the late Patriarch took place in the Armenian Cathedral of the Patriarchate, in the midst of thousands of mournful faithful who felt the loss deeply of a true father and head of the community. The Catholicos' personal emissary Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian presided over the Requiem on behalf of the Catholicos and read the Pontifical message of condolence. The late Patriarch was eulogized by **Archbishop Shahan Sevajian**, Patriarchal Vicar, who administered the Last Unction. The Patriarch was laid to rest in the Armenian cemetery of Shishli, next to the former Patriarchs.

### **Patriarch Karekin II Kazanjian**

After securing permission from the Turkish government, the General Assembly of the Patriarchate elected the former Grand Sacristan of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in October 1990 **Archbishop Karekin Kazanjian Patriarch of Turkey**, at age 63. The new Patriarch met with the state authorities, made his way pursuing the good work left behind, kept the stability and the safety of the Armenian Patriarchate in difficult times and under sensitive conditions, himself being a native of Istanbul, born and raised in Turkey. He was a graduate of the Seminary of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Dean of the newly founded **Holy Cross Seminary in Istanbul**, and later was ordained a bishop as the Primate of Australia and the Far East.

The newly elected Patriarchs, Torkom of Jerusalem and Patriarch Karekin of Turkey, collaborated very closely and respectfully with **His Holiness Vasken I**, as the Pontiff was nearing his final years in life. They often visited the Mother See whenever the Catholicos called them, especially when the devastating earthquake raised the urgency of immediate help to the survivors, financially, physically, spiritually, and psychologically. Especially from the United States various assistance was dispatched with medicine and medical equipments, such as

physicians, dentists, and other professionals, to alleviate the grief in the motherland and to equip the local hospitals with modern and updated treatments. Both Patriarchs were with Catholicos Vasken I when the rebuilding of the housing projects were initiated. They were in the Mother See when the last Blessing of the Holy *Muron* took place by Catholicos Vasken I in September 1991. Twice they assisted the Catholicos when he ordained bishops in 1990 and 1992. The Catholicos lived two more years and passed away in August 1994 at age 86, following a prolonged illness.

### **Eastern Diocese of the United States**

From 1955, during the pontificate of Vasken I, the Primates of the Eastern Diocese of the United States were **Archbishops Mampre Kalfayan, Sion Manoogian, Torkom Manoogian, and Khajag Barsamian**, since 1990 to the present. Under Archbishop Torkom's lengthy and productive leadership of 24 years, the Diocese marked significant progress in many areas. Churches were built, parish priests were ordained, St. Nersess Seminary offered graduates, and educational achievement flourished in terms of religion, culture, and Armenian language. During his six successive terms in office, Archbishop Torkom established infrastructures in the complex of **St. Vartan Cathedral**, especially following the tragic years of the earthquake of 1988, which destroyed most of northern Armenia. It was due to his efforts that special offices initiated under the name of **Fund for Armenia Relief (FAR)** reaching out for different kinds of assistance to the devastated families. During his tenure, the Armenian Church was exposed to the most vibrant community of New York City, keeping close touch with the Mayor's office, the National Council of Churches, the United Nations, the Catholic and Greek Orthodox, and Eastern Orthodox archdioceses, and visiting dignitaries across the world.



Mother Cathedral of the Western Diocese



Consistency, diplomacy, dignity, and honor were the marks left for the future when Archbishop Torkom Manoogian left New York following his election as the **Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem** in 1990, succeeding Patriarch Yeghishe who had died on February 1, 1990. Archbishop Manoogian spearheaded an important task with pontifical approval of Catholicos Vasken I, trying to bring the separated Diocese of the Armenian Church back under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Holy Etchmiadzin. The separation had taken place in 1958, and a separate Prelacy was operating under the See of Cilicia in Antelias. Special committees from both sides worked hard to achieve the goal for decades, but at the end abandoned by the See of Cilicia. Archbishop Torkom is regarded as the pioneer for trying to establish unity in the Eastern Diocese.

### **Western Diocese of the United States**

Established in 1927 by a special Encyclical of **Catholicos Kevork V of All Armenians** as the Diocese of California, the Western Diocese of the United States celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. For eight decades, Armenians in the state of California and most of the western states where Armenians lived, centralized their religious and educational activities around the Diocese, first in Fresno, and later in Los Angeles. Presently the Diocesan headquarters have their permanent site in Burbank, CA, where a new Cathedral was built in recent years. The Cathedral will be consecrated in September 2010 by **His Holiness Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians**.

Fundamental progress in the Western Diocese was achieved by Primate **Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian** for the longest period of 32 years. He was able to enrich the diocese with new churches, new priests, a camp for the youth, and finally the site of the diocesan complex in Burbank, where diocesan offices were placed in view of the future Cathedral. The building of the

Cathedral started with the efforts of his successor **Archbishop Hovnan Derderian** who assumed the office of the Primate since 2003. The diocese is engaged in organizing various mission parishes across the states of California, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, and elsewhere. Armenians from the Middle East, Turkey, and Armenia have migrated in large numbers since the turn of the century and formed one of the largest communities of the Armenian Apostolic Church outside Armenia. The community includes members of the Catholic, Protestant, and other sister churches.

### **Canadian Diocese**

Formerly a part of the Eastern Diocese, the Diocese of Canada became a separate and independent diocese in 1984 by the Encyclical of **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians**. We have already written earlier about this diocese along with those newly established by the Catholicos. The Armenian **Cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator** in Montreal is the diocesan headquarters that serves as the Primate's office, as well as the large parish of Montreal. Three Primates succeeded each other in the past 25 years, Archbishop Vazken Keshishian, died in 1990, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, who played a central role in the formation of the various parishes and the infrastructure of the diocese, and the current Primate, Bishop Bagrat Galstanian from 2003. The headquarters have always been in Montreal.

The current Primate, **Bishop Bagrat Galstanian**, a member of the Etchmiadzin Brotherhood, has been serving the Canadian Diocese. His efforts have shown stability and progress. He endowed the Cathedral with offices of departments of religious education, social service, Sunday School, and public relations. Today the Diocese includes active churches in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Ottawa, Laval, Quebec City, and some remote mission parishes in other provinces. Six permanent parish priests are currently serving the Diocese of Canada under the leadership of the Primate.

**ARMENIAN HIERARCHS**  
**In Holy Etchmiadzin**  
**INDEPENDENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

**Catholicos Karekin II of Cilicia**

In 1991, **Catholicos Karekin II** of the House of Cilicia arrived in Holy Etchmiadzin on June 8, with Archbishop Souren Kataroyan of Aleppo, Bishop Zareh Aznavorian and Papken vartabed Charian of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. Shortly before his arrival Karekin II had gone as a pilgrim to Der Zor, Syria, where a new church was built in memory of the Armenian Martyrs who were massacred during the Genocide of 1915. It was in that place where tens of thousands of Armenians lost their lives following the mass deportations of the Armenians from Anatolia. The church was designed by architect Sarkis Balmanoukian of Aleppo, Syria and consecrated by Karekin II as the **Holy Martyrs Armenian Church**.

Karekin II celebrated the Holy Mass in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin on June 9, and in his sermon he said: *"Dear Brother Catholicos Vasken Hyrabad, here we are just returned from Der Zor to repeat our pilgrimage here in Holy Etchmiadzin. This visit has a different significance since it does not repeat the mournful April 24 anymore, the day our people revere each year as Martyrs Day, but welcomes the dawn of independence of the Republic of Armenia."* The Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I took Catholicos Karekin II to pay an official visit to President Levon Ter Petrossian of the Republic of Armenia, along with the visiting bishops.

**Patriarch Torkom II of Jerusalem**

**Patriarch Torkom Manoogian** of Jerusalem arrived in Holy Etchmiadzin on March 15, 1991, and was escorted to the Cathedral by the Grand Sacristan. He then proceeded to the Palace of the Catholicos where Vasken I welcomed him whom

the Patriarch called *"the father of all Armenians, our brother in Christ, who is constantly concerned about the future of our people."* The Patriarch witnessed reawakening all over Armenia since its independence. He asked people to pray for Jerusalem in those trying times so that in that war-torn corner of the Middle East *"our home, the Armenian Patriarchate, may continue to live and prosper."* Patriarch Torkom celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Monastery of Khor Virap on March 16, on the feast of the imprisonment and the terrible tortures of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia in the pit of Artashat. The Patriarch joined the entourage of Catholicos Vasken I to pay an official visit to the President of Armenia on March 18. He returned to Jerusalem on March 21.

### **Patriarch Karekin Kazanjian in the Mother See**

On March 16, 1991, **Karekin II Kazanjian**, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople visited the Mother See for the first time since his election. His entourage was comprised of Bishop Mesrob Mutafyan and Priest Bessak Tezenlian. He first prayed at the Cathedral and was welcomed by Archbishop Nersess Bozabalian, Chancellor of the Mother See. The same evening, Catholicos Vasken I honored the Patriarch at a dinner, and on May 17, they paid an official visit to President Levon Ter Petrossian. On Sunday of Pentecost, May 19, Patriarch Karekin performed the Holy Mass in the Cathedral in attendance of a large crowd of pilgrims from abroad. The Catholicos expressed his joy to have the new Patriarch in the Mother See as *"the head of the 530 years old Armenian patriarchate still standing unshaken on its feet in service of the spiritual and ethnic needs of our children in Turkey."*

Patriarch Karekin delivered his sermon reporting on the life and activities of the large community in Istanbul with its 35 Armenian churches, schools, and hospitals. The Patriarch referred to the Holy Spirit as "The Comforter" who came and

encouraged the disciples. He wished the Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I continued health on his 36<sup>th</sup> year of pontificate, *"Who lovingly took the responsibility upon his shoulders, and in return, the Holy Spirit ignited the breath of God and constantly opened doors of hope before him."* The Patriarch returned to Istanbul on May 23, 1991.

## **Independence of the Republic of Armenia**

When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, the component Republics declared their independence one by one and turned into sovereign states. **President Mikhail Gorbachev**, deposed on August 19, had no choice but to submit his resignation on December 15, declaring the "dissolution" of the USSR. Armenia was the first to go ahead, and exactly three months before Gorbachev's resignation had already elected its President. The Parliament announced that the new status of the **Republic of Armenia in 1991** was the re-establishment of the **First Republic in 1918**. Even before the presidential elections, in June 1991, the Parliament of the Armenian Republic had applied to the **United Nations** for membership, signed by Levon Ter Petrossian, Chairman of the Parliament and addressed to General Secretary Perez de Cuellar.

On September 21, 1991, **Levon Ter Petrossian** was elected President of the Republic of Armenia. Two days later the President went to Moscow to meet with the seven former republics for an economic alliance aiming at free enterprise. Those republics were The Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Upon his return to Erevan Ter Petrossian swore-in before the **Parliament** and the **Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I**, in attendance of 210 delegates, diplomats and representatives of the media.

His Holiness gave a historic message including these words: *"Today, as we welcome the new morning of our history by the*

*declaration of the independence of the new-born Republic, let us all remember the founder of our nation **Haik Nahapet** and the enlightener of our faith St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia. All ye Armenians, living in Armenia and abroad, wake up and vow with a solemn promise to remain faithful to our liberator Haik Nahapet and to the All-holy **Gregory the Illuminator** of our souls."*

Soon President Levon Ter Petrossian undertook an official visit to the White House in 1991. He was received by **President George Bush**, asking the President of the United States to grant recognition to the Republic of Armenia, which he did later in December on Christmas Day by greeting some of the republics with proper recognition, including the **Republic of Armenia**.

### **The Republic of Artsakh-Karabagh**

When Gorbachev's era of *Perestroika* recognized the right of self-determination, Karabagh sought unification with Armenia which of course ignited conflict and confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan within which Karabagh was an enclave since the beginning of the Soviet Union. Armenians eventually succeeded in taking control of their ancestral territory. The territory of Karabagh was populated by Christian Armenians since St. Gregory the Illuminator, and numerous churches and monasteries were established. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire took control of the region, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it fell under Soviet rule and became part of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. The conflict began on February 22, 1988, when the first confrontation occurred in the enclave after the Azerbaijanis marched towards the town of Askeran, a town populated mostly by Armenians.

As refugees, the Armenians fled and violence erupted against them in Sumgait and Baku with pogroms and deportations. On November 29, 1989, Azerbaijanis gained control of the region

of Karabagh. This prompted the Karabagh administration to join Armenia. On December 10, 1991, Armenians in Karabagh held a referendum approving the creation of an independent state within Azerbaijan. War broke out between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis in 1991, and Azerbaijan revoked the autonomous status of the region. The local Armenians in turn held a referendum for independence, which in 1992 was ratified by a newly elected Parliament in Karabagh. By the end of 1993, the conflict had caused thousands of casualties and more refugees on both sides. An unofficial ceasefire was reached on May 12, 1994, which lasts as of this day. In the interim, unending negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan since then have not proven any tangible progress.

As of August, 2008, the United States, France, and Russia (the Minsk Group) attempted to negotiate a settlement of the conflict, which culminated in the Moscow Meeting among the three Presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia on November 2, 2008. The three signed an agreement for talks on the Karabagh settlement. Despite all these, the Diocese of Artsakh went ahead with renovation of monasteries and building of new churches across the Republic of Karabagh. The Cathedral of Sushik, the monasteries of Amaras and Gandzasar, the new churches and new priests, have shown strides in terms of Christian mission headed by the Primate, **Archbishop Barkev Mardirossian**. In addition, Christian ancient literature became an important part of the work carried on by the Diocese, along with Christian education and cultural centers.

## PASSING OF AN ERA 1955-1994

### **Vasken I Entered His Eternal Rest**

On August 18, 1994, His Holiness **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** entered his eternal rest at age 86, following a lengthy illness. His Holiness suffered from lymphoma since 1978, but was in remission for the next 15 years, living healthy and active life as usual. He died in his Patriarchal Residence in Erevan after receiving the last rites from the Grand Sacristan of Holy Etchmiadzin. Weeks before his passing **Levon Ter-Petrosian, President of the Republic of Armenia** had visited His Holiness on July 28, and bestowed on him the highest medal of the Republic, the first ever, the Medal of "**National Hero of Armenia.**" The Catholicos passed away after 39 years of productive pontificate with complete dedication and unsurpassed legacy. He was comforted at last witnessing the independence of Armenia in 1991.

In honor of the late Catholicos, the **Republic of Armenia** undertook the arrangement of a State Funeral with the participation of high dignitaries, both religious and civic. The funeral took place on Sunday, **August 28, 1994.** Catholicos Karekin II of the House of Cilicia administered the Last Unction during the celebration of the Holy Mass at the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. He was surrounded by **Patriarch Torkom II Manoogian** of Jerusalem, **Patriarch Karekin II Kazanjian** of Constantinople, and the entire diocesan Primates from Armenia and abroad. **Karekin II** eulogized the late Pontiff selecting the verse from St. John's Gospel: "*I am the Good shepherd,*" referring to Vasken I who proved to be the "builder" in all walks of life, in the Armenian Church and Nation. During his pontificate, "*he built the spiritual life of our people, Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian Church and united our nation.*" Karekin II witnessed that the



entire life of Catholicos Vasken I turned to be a wonderful school in itself for our church and nation. He praised the Catholicos who transfigured our people even in his death, because *"Your death"*, he said, *"did not put an end to the illustrious life of your person, but definitely radiated more of what you were and what you did."*

Next, **Patriarch Torkom Manoogian**, Acting Vicar of the Mother See, gave a eulogy reflecting on the late Catholicos' past as *"an enthusiastic and vibrant servant of his church and nation with complete compassion and full service."* He lamented the *"passing of a great leader whose body will rest next to his predecessors, near Catholicos Khrimian Hairig whom he cherished all his life. He will rest with them under the blissful shades of the Cathedral where Christ descended."* The Patriarch's message emerged from the actual legacy of the life and work of **Vasken I, of Blessed Memory**, a message of unity of our lives with the commitment of a life living with Christ. That way alone each person feels victorious and free from the bonds of physical pains, as mentioned in the Book of Psalms: *"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined to me and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,"* (Psalms 40:1-2). Patriarch Torkom concluded saying: *"The deep sorrow that we experience at this time of farewell, shall leave us in constant prayer that the light of our faith like the Lantern of St. Gregory on the top on Mount Aragadz, may stay lit and unquenched forever in the memory of our beloved Catholicos."*

At the graveside the **President of the Republic Levon Ter-Petrossian** witnessed close to 40 years of legacy of the late Catholicos that began *"from the fall of Stalin and gradually built itself in terms of freedom of human values, through his total dedication to the rebuilding of our religious and national life. The Late Catholicos Vasken I, he said, was able to keep safe the Armenian Church and his flock from all kinds of adventures and most dangerous trials."* The Orthodox Patriarch

of Georgia and other church leaders expressed their condolences before the interment of the venerable Catholicos.

### **The Interim Year (1994-1995)**

Following the passing of Catholicos Vasken I, an emergency meeting convened on August 25, 1994. On behalf of the Supreme Spiritual Council **Archbishop Houssig Santourian** called the Council members, headed by both Patriarchs Torkom of Jerusalem and Karekin of Constantinople, including 35 archbishops and 4 lay members, 39 in total, to meet for electing the *locum tenens* of the Mother See. Both **Patriarch Torkom Manoogian** and **Patriarch Karekin Kazanjian** chaired the meeting and verified the present members as follows: 35 clergy and 4 lay members.

First, the meeting reviewed the late **Catholicos Vasken's** letter dated May 7, 1993, identified as "*Pontifical Order*" and directed to all. This was a little bit of a surprise, since it was in the possession of only five of the Supreme Spiritual Council members. After learning about the content of the letter, which remained so far unpublished, the meeting found it necessary to refer the election to the 1991 bylaws where there was the specific article (**Article 9**) regarding the election of the *locum tenens*. The meeting of August 25, therefore, convened in accordance with that article. It became obvious that the letter of Vasken I did not comply with the meeting and did not allow its convening following his death for reasons unknown to us. It in fact contradicted the proposition of Article 9 of the bylaws ratified by the Catholicos himself back in 1991.

The Council respectfully dismissed the letter, and went along with the bylaws and cast their votes accordingly for a senior archbishop to take care of the vacancy of the Mother See until the election of the next Catholicos of All Armenians. **Patriarch Torkom Manoogian of Jerusalem** was elected by a majority vote who assumed the current responsibilities both of the

Mother See and the Apostolic Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He held the office until April 1995, at which time **Karekin I** was elected **Catholicos of All Armenians**

## **The Armenian Church Today**

The last 50 years the Armenian Church enjoyed progress and renewal under the leadership of **Vasken I Catholicos of All Armenians** (1955-1994). Three years before his passing, in 1991, Armenia proclaimed independence from the disintegrated Soviet Union, and the Armenian Church regained her freedom of the past centuries during the last years of Vasken I, and during the pontificate of the two succeeding Pontiffs, **Catholicos Karekin I Sarkissian** (1995-1999), and **Catholicos Karekin II Nersissian**, from 1999. It is remarkable the renewal of the Armenian Church worldwide under Vasken I, who was diplomatically capable to bring all resources together to expose the Armenian Church to the outside world through his frequent visitations and by inviting the church dignitaries to the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. They all came in person to witness the renaissance of our church.

There was however from the very beginning of his Pontificate the signal of division within the structure of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The divisive signal ignited at the 1956 election of the Catholicos of the House of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon, where political forces penetrated creating a unilateral front among the delegates, and an unfortunate confrontation with the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. The confrontation led to an overnight seizure of some of the dioceses of the Mother See illegally and against the will of the head of the Armenian Church, despite Catholicos Vasken's repeated warnings and fatherly advice to refrain from alienating the Armenians from their Mother See in Armenia. His ardent desire was always to come to terms with negotiations considering the canons and the rules of the Armenian Church.

Despite the situation, the affairs of the Armenian Church within Armenia and abroad proved unprecedented in terms of integrity, church attendance, religious publications, cooperation with the hierarchic sees of Jerusalem and Constantinople, where both Patriarchs stood firm beside the Holy See of Etchmiadzin with total support and periodic visitations. During those fifty years, the Armenian Church at home remained unshaken despite the irreligious regime of the Soviets. Churches and cathedrals were built outside Armenia, and ancient monasteries were renovated in our country, due to the friendly and diplomatic relationship between the Catholicos and the state authorities.

Both the Kevorkian and Vaskenian Seminaries in the Holy See dramatically improved under Vasken I and his successors, and numerous candidates for priesthood received the rank, a considerable number among them reaching the higher rank of a bishop. The hiatus in the Armenian Church's life at the close of the century and at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was the **1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Conversion of Armenia into Christianity** (301-2001). The celebration under the Pontificate of Catholicos Karekin II of All Armenians, culminated in the construction of a new **Cathedral in Erevan**, capital of Armenia. The historic visits of **His Holiness Pope John Paul II** of Rome in September, and **His Beatitude the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I**, of the Greek Orthodox Church in November of 2001, took place in the Cathedral just consecrated the week before. Both the Pope and the Patriarch gladly responded to the cordial invitation extended to them by **His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II**, and by the **State of the Republic of Armenia**. Those two personal visits on that historic milestone, confirmed the brotherly respect of the two ancient and highly distinguished churches toward the Armenian Apostolic Church. His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II consecrated the Cathedral in Erevan and named it after our **Patron Saint, Gregory the Illuminator**.

Today, under the leadership of **Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians**, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin has been transformed dramatically with new buildings and modern facilities to serve as residence for the growing members of the Brotherhood, dormitories for the seminarians, Baptistery for mass Baptisms, Museums, and a new building for the Chancellery. Generous donations in large amounts are constantly offered to the Holy See by benefactors from Armenia, Russia, and abroad. Systematic projects for religious purposes were developed within the past ten years, since the years when the present Catholicos Karekin II of the Armenian Church was the Vicar of the Araratian Diocese in Erevan.

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