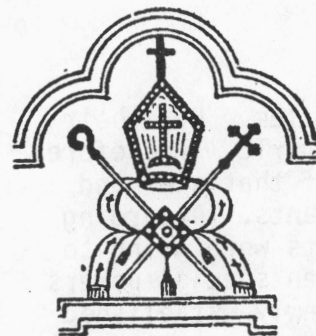


THE SUPREME
PATRIARCH-CATHOLICOS
OF ALL ARMENIANS



THE SUPREME
PATRIARCH-CATHOLICOS
OF ALL ARMENIANS

THE CHURCH AND ITS AUTHORITY

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded the Church as a visible spiritual organization. He always referred to it as the Kingdom of God. By the use of the word *Kingdom*, He implied that there must be in the Church an organized authority.

The purpose of the Church is to continue the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this work cannot be carried out without an organization in which some functionaries have special authorities. In fact, these authorities were vested in the Apostles from the very beginning by our Lord Himself.

While He was on earth, our Lord chose twelve Apostles to whom He gave three special powers: *to preach, to sanctify and to rule* the Church. References to these powers are to be found in the New Testament: Matthew 28:19; John 20:23 and Matthew 18:18.

Wherever the Apostles went, they not only preached the new religion of Christ and baptized converts, but they also became the supervisors of the churches they had founded and gave decisions in all sorts of matters as judges.

Now it was the intention of Christ that His Apostles have successors. He said that the Church would last until the end of the world and it goes without saying that this intention could not be fulfilled without people who would continue the work of the Apostles, having the same powers.

WHAT IS APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION?

The Apostles preached first in Jerusalem. But their commission was to convert the whole world. Therefore, they went all over the known world of that time and wherever they went, they chose assistants. According to the positions that these assistants were going to hold in the community, they were given special powers by the Apostles. Before leaving a newly established church, an Apostle would designate someone to take his place and would transfer to him all his powers. This transference of special powers was not done merely by declaration, but by a ceremony, the main feature of which was the *laying on of hands*. The Apostles *ordained* their assistants and successors.

Those who received only a limited authority were called *Deacons* (Armenian = *Sargavak i.e. servers*). Those who were given more extensive authority were called *Priests* (Armenian = *Kahana i.e. elders*). Those who succeeded the Apostles themselves with equal authority were called *Bishops* (Armenian = *Yebisgobos i.e. Supervisors*).

Thus, all Bishops *ordained* their successors, the first Bishops being the Apostles themselves. To this uninterrupted series of ordinations we refer by the phrase *APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION*. Some churches do not have the Apostolic Succession. The Armenian Church has had continued, unbroken Apostolic Succession throughout its existence.

DOES THE CHURCH NEED A VISIBLE HEAD ?

It is essential for the Church to have a visible head. A chief executive is needed by all organized societies. In this respect, the Church is no exception.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal *invisible* head of the Church. The Church also needs a *visible* spiritual head and chief executive so that it may work as an organized society. The Armenian Church has its visible head. He is called *Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians*.

WHO IS THE PATRIARCH-CATHOLICOS ?

As elsewhere, so also in Armenia, the Apostles ordained

Deacons and Priests. They also ordained their own successors, before they themselves were martyred. These successors were to supervise the Christian flock of Armenia. They were the first Bishops of the Armenian Church.

Beginning with the year 301 A.D., when the entire Armenian people were converted to Christianity, the head of the Armenian Church assumed a new title: *CATHOLICOS*. This term comes from a Greek word meaning *universal*. He is also called *Patriarch* which means "Chief among the Fathers. The Armenian word for Patriarch is *Hayrabad*.

WHAT IS THE OFFICE OF PATRIARCH-CATHOLICOS ?

1.) The Catholicos is the sole and universal head and ruler of the Armenian Church all over the world. As such, he has precedence of jurisdiction and honor over all the other dignitaries of the Armenian Church, including the Armenian Catholicos of Cilicia, now residing in Antelias, Lebanon; and the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople. His spiritual jurisdiction extends over all the Armenian churches of the world, no matter where they are. He is the center and symbol of unity of the Armenian churches and communities throughout the world.

2.) He enjoys the exclusive titles of *Chief Bishop, Catholicos of All Armenians, and Supreme Patriarch of the Mother See of Etchmiadzin*. He calls himself the *Servant of Jesus Christ*.

3.) He alone can ordain Bishops for the Armenian Church with the assistance of at least two other Bishops. Therefore, all candidates for the office of Bishop, must go to the headquarters of the Armenian Church to be ordained directly by the hands of His Holiness the Catholicos.

4.) He alone can confer the honorary titles of *Archbishop* and *Archpriest* by a formal encyclical.

5.) The Catholicos alone can bless and consecrate the Holy Myron (Chrism). With this oil all Armenian Christians are chrismated (confirmed) following their baptism. This oil is used to anoint all the Priests and Bishops of the Armenian Church, as well as the Catholicos himself, at the time of their ordination.

6.) He bestows the *ORDER OF ST. GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR* upon those who have distinguished themselves in furthering the welfare of the Armenian Church and people.

7.) He summons the National-Ecclesiastical Assembly for important occasions.

8.) He writes encyclicals through which he conveys his fatherly exhortations and pastoral orders to the entire Armenian Church or to a portion of it. Through them, he also expresses his satisfaction and sends his paternal benediction to such organizations or individuals who have served the Church and nations through outstanding deeds or donations.

HOW IS THE CATHOLICOS ADDRESSED ?

The Catholicos is addressed as *HIS HOLINESS* or *MOST HOLY FATHER*. Some will refer to him as *HIS MAJESTY*, because as Armenian Christians, he is our spiritual king.

The Throne or See which the Catholicos occupies is called *The Mother See, the Supreme See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the See of St. Thaddeus the Apostle, or the See of Our Holy Father St. Gregory the Illuminator.*

WHAT ARE HIS DISTINCTIVE MARKS ?

The vestments of the Catholicos, both in church and outside the church, are similar to those of any Bishop, except that he wears a diamond cross on his hood. Along with his vestments, at the Divine Liturgy he carries a *gonkair*, symbol of his office as the supreme Shepherd of the flock of Christ. His crosier or staff is mounted by a cross and he wears his ring, the sign of authority, on his ring finger and not on his small finger as all other Bishops do.

HOW IS THE CATHOLICOS ELECTED ?

The Catholicos is elected for life by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly. This Assembly is composed of a.) all the Primates of the Dioceses of the Armenian Church; b.) all the Bishops of the Armenian Church; c.) lay delegates from each Diocese. Lay delegates form

a majority in this Assembly because each Diocese should send one such delegate for each 25,000 people or fraction thereof.

The Assembly convenes at the Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. Each member is free to give his vote to the candidate of his choice. After the election, the newly elected Catholicos is anointed in a most moving and imposing service. It should be noted that the candidate becomes Catholicos only with the anointing, not simply by means of the election.

OUR PRESENT CATHOLICOS

The present Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of the Armenian Church is His Holiness Vazken I. He was elected and consecrated in 1955. His Holiness Vazken I is the 130th successor to St. Gregory the Illuminator as the Chief Bishop of the Armenian Church and the 140th successor to the Apostles Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew who were the first Chief Bishops of the Armenian Church.

The first Chief Bishops of the Armenian Church are

St. Thaddeus - 43-66 A.D.
St. Bartholomew - 60-68 A.D.
Zacharia - 68-72 A.D.
Zementus - 72-76 A.D.
Atrnerseh - 77-92 A.D.
Mooshe - 93-123 A.D.
Shahen - 124-150 A.D.
Shavarsh - 151-171 A.D.
Ghevondius - 172-190 A.D.
Mehroojan - 240-270 A.D.

* * * * *

*This pamphlet is a publication of the
Department of Youth Activities & Christian Education
of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church
of North America - 1980*