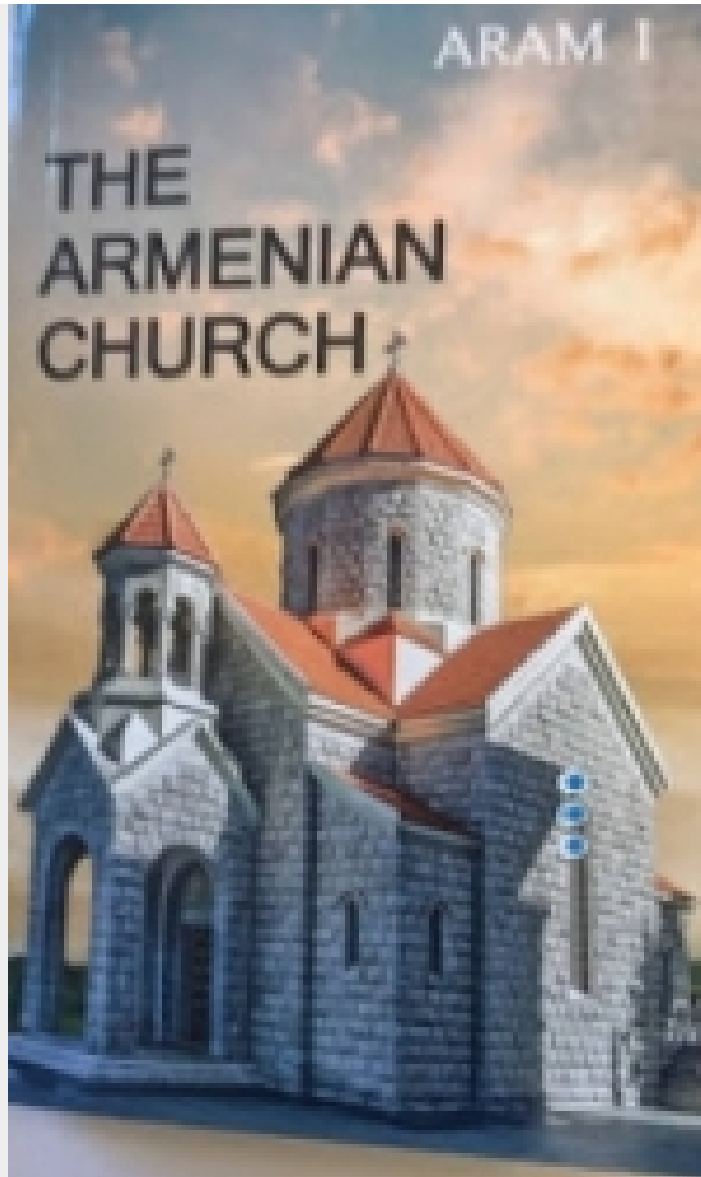


# ARAM I: THE ARMENIAN CHURCH, A BOOK REVIEW


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**Vahe H. Apelian**, Massachusetts, December 2018

In a superb narration Aram I presents to his readers, in his book titled "The Armenian Church", "*The Christianization of Armenia and the Armenianization of the Christianity*" because "*The Armenian* 

*Church is the birthplace of Armenian culture and since the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century it has been its epicenter, not only creating the wonder of the Armenian Alphabet, but also playing a pivotal part in promoting, enriching, and protecting all manifestations of Armenian culture.'*

Aram I, early on in the book, presents the different names by which the Armenian Church is known: Church of Armenia, Holy, Apostolic, Catholic, Orthodox Armenian Church; Armenian Gregorian Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Armenian Church or Church of Armenia. He then explains why he chose "Armenian Church" as the title of his book, when it was known as Church of Armenia during its early founding years. The one time church confined in Armenia now extends its jurisdiction from America to Australia and in all continents of the world in between where Armenians have now scattered.

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Along with the customary Preface and Introduction of a book, Aram I presents the Armenian Church in 10 chapters in each of which he presents the essence of the inferred topic in a clear, easily understood, and captivating manner even though it may entail theological discussion as to why the Armenian Church rejected the Council of Chalcedon while it upheld the teachings of the first three ecumenical councils and explains the Armenian Church's understanding of the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To give a breath and the scope of this superbly narrated book that encompasses all aspects of the

church for the interested lay reader, I will have to enumerate the chapters and the topics under each chapter Aram I presents in a simplified manner. Only those who have full command and grasp, resort to such simplified and pleasant narration to transmit their knowledge in a simple manner to the interested not to bore them but retain their attention and help them understand the working of the Armenian Church.

The chapters and their subtitles are as follows:

LONG HISTORY IN BRIEF(pages 21-53), comprises:

The major periods of the history of the Armenian church, The Origin of the Armenian Church, Christianity as the state religion, The Golden Age, The Rejection of the Council of Chalcedon, The Arabs in Armenia, The Formation of Armenian Cilicia, A Period of uncertainty and stagnation, The Armenian Genocide, Soviet Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora, New hopes and promises.

HIERARCHY AND DECISION-MAKING (pages 54-76), comprises:

Hierarchy, Catholicos, Patriarch, Archbishop, Bishop, Vartabed and Supreme Vartabed, Celibate Priest, Married Priest, Deacon, Decision-Making Structures, Hierarchical Sees, Two Catholicosates within One Church.

ESSENTIALS OF FAITH (pages 76-95) comprises:

The Bible, Ecumenical Councils, Local Councils, Liturgy, Exegetical Literature, Hagiographic Writings, Treatises and Homilies, Encyclical, pastoral letters, exchange of letters, and Confessions of Faith; Historiography.

RICH SPIRITUALITY (pages 96-140) comprises:

Liturgy, Daily Services, Feasts, Liturgical Books, Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, Repentance, Holy Lucharist, Holy Orders, Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, The Holy Muron, Images, Cross-Stone, Music, Liturgical Vestments, Liturgical Vessels, Relics of Saints, Architecture, Armenian Calendar.

CULTURAL ACTIVITY (pages 141-156) comprises:

The Translation of the Bible and Church Fathers, Major Figures of Armenian Original Literature, Contribution to painting, printing and music.

SOCIAL ACTION (pages 157-167) comprises:

Characteristic features of the Church's diakonia, Armenian Diaspora: the focus of the Church's diakonia, Social action: a continuing concern.

EDUCATIONAL ROLE (pages168-174) comprises:

The first Armenian school, Monasteries: centers of education, Community schools, Authors in

ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT (pages 175-196) comprises:

Relations with the Oriental Orthodox churches, Relations with Eastern Orthodox churches, Relations with Catholic churches, Relations with the Anglican Communion, Relations with Protestant churches, Participation in ecumenical councils and bilateral theological dialogues, Collaboration with the Armenian Catholic and Armenian Evangelical churches.

PEOPLE'S CHURCH (pages 197-205) comprises

Indigenization of Christianity, The Church as a unifying factor, The leadership role of the Church, Church-state relations.

CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES (pages 206-217) comprises:

A dynamic pastoral engagement, An active spiritual ministry, Redefining of the national identity of the Church, Renewal of the Armenian Church and urgent imperative.

The rest of the book comprises Notes, Appendices, and a listing for Further Reading.

At the end Aram I lists his prodigal output in Armenian, English and in French, totaling 28 titles!

Those who have followed Aram I have come to know that the basic tenets of his ministry can be summed up paraphrasing President Abraham Lincoln's famous quote from his Gettysburg Address, "Of the People, by the People, and for the People". Catholicos Aram I writes that "The Armenian Church should not become a museum of spiritual heritage; nor should it remain imprisoned in a petrified institutionalism. It is called to respond, in faithfulness to the core value of the Gospel, to the expectations of its people and to the challenges of the present-day world".

It is not hard to envision that Aram I is burdened with the administrative responsibilities of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia whose jurisdiction extends globally. He also is a revered spiritual leader and an ecumenical figure. He has served as two terms moderator of the World Council of Churches and as two terms president of the Middle East Council of Churches. God has bestowed upon Catholicos Aram I a powerful intellect and a tireless stamina, which he has put in service towards to the Armenian People through the Armenian Church.

The book was first published in 2016 by the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon. The book I read was its second edition in 2017. The book measures 5 inches x 7.5 inches making it handy to carry for reading in leisure. Each chapter is an entity in itself and thus can be prioritized per the reader's interest. Reading the book in its entirety will give a reader a vital knowledge for his or her better appreciation of and understanding the Armenian Church that has withstood the test of time but continues to face new challenges.

