



BIOGRAPHY OF ARAM I

Aram I Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia

“Through his vision and commitment, His Holiness Aram I has made the Catholicosate of Cilicia of the Armenian Church a living center of reflection, dialogue and action.”

His Holiness Aram I, the spiritual leader of the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church, was consecrated Catholicos on July 1, 1995, after serving as Primate of the Armenian Orthodox community in Lebanon for 15 years.

He was ordained a celibate priest in 1968 and obtained the title of Vartabed (Doctor of the Armenian Church) in 1970. In 1979, after serving for one year as Locum Tenens, he was elected Primate of the Armenian Orthodox community in Lebanon. The next year he received his Episcopal ordination. His tenure as Primate of the Armenian community in Lebanon coincided with the Lebanese Civil War. During this time and after, His Holiness reorganized parishes and schools, restructured and reactivated church-related institutions, and renewed community leadership.

In June 1995, he was elected Catholicos (the head of the church) by the Electoral Assembly of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, by 35 clergy and 115 lay representatives. He was consecrated and installed one week later, July 1, 1995.

Born in 1947 in Beirut, Lebanon, His Holiness studied at the Armenian Theological Seminary in Antelias, Lebanon, and the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland. He received his M.Div. from the Near East School of Theology, his S.T.M. jointly from the American University of Beirut and Near East School of Theology, and his PhD from Fordham University in New York. He also holds several honorary degrees. His major areas of specialization are philosophy, systematic theology, and Near Eastern church history.

His major achievements as Catholicos include:

- Reorganized and revitalized the work of the Church, particularly in the areas of theological education, Christian education, publications, communications, cultural activities, youth, justice and peace, and human rights.
- Realized several construction projects such as the Cilicia Museum, Center of Archives and Manuscripts, buildings for bishops and monks, a guesthouse and offices, a center for youth and university students, apartments for low-income families.
- Made pontifical visits to all the dioceses of the Catholicosate in the Middle East, Europe, and North and South America, and brought a new dynamism to the relationship between these world-wide dioceses and

the administrative center of the Church, the Catholicosate, in Lebanon.

- Emphasized the Church's outreach through social service (orphanage, old peoples' home, blind peoples' home, and school for the disabled).
- Strengthened ecumenical relations and collaborations, by establishing a special department for this work, developing close personal relations with world church leaders, organizing important ecumenical meetings and events, and chairing and lecturing at international conferences and events in different regions.
- Maintaining relationships on an international level with heads of states, political and religious leaders, and representatives of international organizations.

For many years His Holiness has lectured regularly on armenological, theological, and ecumenical subjects at the Seminary and Haigazian University in Beirut. He has also given numerous public lectures in various universities, academic and cultural centers, and at public events and international gatherings.

In addition to his numerous articles and reviews in Armenian, English and French (some of which have been translated into Arabic, German, Spanish and Swedish), His Holiness Aram I has written the following books:

- Nerses the Gracious: Theologian and Ecumenist, 1974, Beirut (Armenian)
- The True Image of the Armenian Church, 1974, Antelias (Armenian)
- The Witness of the Armenian Church in a Diaspora Situation, 1978, New York (English)
- With the Will of Re-Building, 1983, Beirut (Armenian)
- With the People, 1989, Beirut (Armenian)
- Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal, 1991, Geneva (English)
- Orthodox Perspectives on Mission, 1992, Oxford (English)
- The Incarnation of the Gospel in Cultures: A Missionary Event, 1995, Beirut (English).
- Towards the 1700th Anniversary of the Christianization of Armenia, 1996, Antelias (Armenian)
- The Church and Ethnicity, 1996, Antelias (English)
- The Challenge to be a Church in a Changing World, 1997, New York (English)
- Jesus Christ: the Son of God—the Son of Man, 1999, Antelias (Armenian)
- Church, Nation and Homeland, 1999, Antelias (Armenian)
- In Search of Ecumenical Vision, 2000, Antelias (English)
- L'eglise Face aux Grands d`efis, 2000, Antelias (French)
- The Armenian Church Beyond the 1700th Anniversary, 2002, Antelias (English)
- The Mission of Faith, 2003, Antelias (Armenian)
- Justice, Paix, Reconciliation, 2003, Antelias, (French)
- The Christian Witness at the Crossroads in the Middle East, 2004, Antelias (English)
- Der Zor: A National Sanctuary, 2005, Antelias (Armenian)
- The Dignity of Serving, 2005, Antelias (Armenian)

His Holiness has been active in inter-church dialogue, relations, and collaboration since 1972, when he was appointed as the Catholicosate's representative for ecumenical relations. He served in this position until 1995, and represented the Church at major theological and ecumenical conferences, assemblies, and consultations in different parts of the world. For the past 33 years, His Holiness has played a major role in the worldwide ecumenical movement.

Here are some of the highlights of His Holiness's ecumenical achievements:

- Founding member of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), in 1974. From the beginning he served on the Council's Executive Committee and played a leading role in the major initiatives of the Council.
- Represented the Church at the Nairobi (1975), Vancouver (1983), Canberra (1991) and Harare (1998) Assemblies and international conferences of the World Council of Churches (WCC).
- Elected member of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC in 1975, and member of the Standing Committee in 1983.
- Elected member of the Central Committee of the WCC at the Vancouver Assembly in 1983.
- Elected Moderator of the Central and Executive Committees at the Canberra Assembly in 1991, the highest position of this global fellowship of churches, which comprises more than 350 churches from different confessions, cultures, nations and regions. He is the first Orthodox and the youngest person to be elected to the position of Moderator. After serving as Moderator for seven years, His Holiness was unanimously re-elected at the Harare Assembly in 1998. The re-election of His Holiness, which was based on his "strong leadership, firm commitment, theological knowledge and administrative experience," was unprecedented in the history of the WCC.
- Founding member of the Oriental Orthodox–Eastern Orthodox Theological Dialogue, Oriental Orthodox–Reformed Dialogue, and the Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue. He is an honorary member of Pro Oriente and an honorary president of the Museum of World Religions Foundation.
- Instrumental in creating the Standing Committee of the Three Heads (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian) of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East in 1996.

As a strong supporter of inter-religious relations, dialogue and cooperation, His Holiness has played a significant part in promoting common values, mutual understanding and peace coexistence among religions.

Toward these goals he has:

- Worked tirelessly as Primate to create tolerance and build mutual confidence between Christian and Muslim communities during the most critical times of the Lebanese Civil War.
- Made frequent reference in his writings and public intervention to the vital importance of dialogue and collaboration among the living faiths of the world.
- Initiated a number of inter-religious dialogues and took active part in important inter-religious meetings on regional and international levels.
- Played an instrumental role in re-organizing the Christian-Muslim Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches, and in preparing the International Inter-religious Conference organized by the World Council of Churches, June 2005.
- Lectured at inter-religious meetings, universities, and public events in various parts of the world.

As a result of his strong commitment to peace with justice, and human rights, His Holiness has:

- Been a strong voice for mutual understanding among religions, cultures and civilizations.
- Organized regional and international seminars and conferences at the Catholicosate in Antelias, Lebanon.
- Lectured to university students, visiting academic, religious and NGO groups.