



Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I Guleserian

The Life and Work of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken Guleserian

**Translated and Edited by
Vatche Ghazarian**

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INTRODUCTION

The Life and Work of the Coadjutor Catholicos Papken Guleserian is not only a tribute to one of the outstanding spiritual leaders of the Armenian people in the twentieth century, but also a valuable resource for understanding the structure and creed of the Armenian Church. Containing the biography and writings of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I Guleserian of the Great House of Cilicia, this work spans thirty years of twentieth century history of the Armenian people and their church.

The Life and Work of the Coadjutor Catholicos Papken Guleserian presents Catholicos Papken as a clergyman of selfless devotion to his church, his nation, and his vocation. Catholicos Papken is also revealed as a man of bright intellect and progressive thought, with great commitment to his ideals and unquestionable patriotism.

Some of the opinions presented in this work may seem outdated to the contemporary reader, but when considered within the framework of the early twentieth century and compared with other opinions of the time, they testify to the revolutionary nature of Catholicos Papken's ideas.

This publication is the realization of a suggestion made in 1998 by Catholicos Karekin I of All Armenians, of the blessed memory, to the relatives of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I living in the United States, namely, the Walter and Edward Guleserian and Mary Bergoudian families, that their ancestor's life and work be published in English.

The biographical information in this work and the posthumous testimonies herein were gathered from a memorial book¹ dedicated to the Coadjutor Catholicos and compiled in Armenian through the combined efforts of Vahe Guleserian, a nephew of Catholicos Papken I; Archpriest Papken Maksoudian, a student of the Catholicos; Puzant Yeghiayan, a pro-

1. *Hooshamadyan D. D. Papken I Atoragits Gatoghigosin Medzi Dann Giligio* (A Memorial Book on H. H. Papken I Coadjutor Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia), 1968, Beirut, Lebanon. The inner title page reveals that the publication was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Catholicos and enjoyed the auspices of the Central Committee of the Aintabtsis in the United States of America.

fessor at the Seminary established by the Catholicos, and Krikor Bogharian, a compatriot of the Catholicos.

Also included in the book are two letters translated from a book of letters exchanged between Catholicoi Sahag II and Papken I.²

The selected writings of the Catholicos compiled in this book were translated from a variety of different sources, each of which is referred to at the beginning of the selection.

Acknowledgment is due to the Very Reverend Father, Dr. Krikor Maksoudian, and to Barbara Ghazarian for their editorial revisions and comments, as well as to Reverend Father Arten Ashjian for his translation of an essay by Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I.

It is the sincere hope of the sponsors and the translator/editor of this work that it serve as a source of information and inspiration for those who are interested in learning about the Armenian nation, its church, and one of its most industrious and prominent servants of the twentieth century.

Vatche Ghazarian, Ph.D.

2. *Tghtagsootyoon Sahag I yev Papken II Gatoghigosneroo* (Correspondence of Catholicoi Sahag I and Papken II), Archives of the Catholicate of Cilicia, No. 1, 1999, Antelias, Lebanon. There is a mistake in the title. It should read “. . . Sahag II and Papken I.”

GREETINGS

We greet with joy and patriarchal love the reproduction of the “Hooshamadian” which was dedicated, three decades ago, to the living memory of His Holiness Papken I, Coadjutor Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the renowned clergyman.

Indeed, the reproduction of the book is a new and worthy gesture of gratitude toward the Catholicos of blessed memory. It is also a praiseworthy gift to the sons of our people, particularly the new generation, who, with this book, will acquaint themselves with the path this hardworking clergyman, revered intellectual-haranguer, and graceful pedagogue crossed. Readers will be inspired by the model of a man strong in his faith and exemplary in his courage and dedication, so that they may evaluate the role of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church in the life of our nation within the context of the fruitful life and work of this noble Armenian and great patriot.

Brought up under the unparalleled spirit and breath of the holy fathers Malachia Ormanian and Yeghishé Tourian, Papken Guleserian helped his great teachers as a representative of the senior graduates of the Seminary of Armash. He relentlessly added to their heritage as a prominent clergyman who also left an everlasting religious, historical, and literary heritage.

This tireless sower of hope, faith, and love remained strong in his vocation throughout his forty years of spiritual life.

Wherever he was sent for service he awakened the community with his bright and broad-minded character, his administrative abilities, and his reformative tendencies. In these ways he kept the identity alive in the veins, hearts, and souls of Armenians.

It was a blessing that the Armenians, crushed by the Genocide, drained of blood, and deported from their homeland, found in Papken Guleserian an invincible, selfless, and courageous pastor. He was destined to raise the traditional Throne of Cilicia with its rich heritage, simultaneously advocating the unity of the Armenian Church as a law-abiding and faithful son of Holy Etchmiadzin.

We believe that the sublime, proud, and luminous image of Catholicos Papken I, with his eyes focused on the renaissance, the bright future, and the

perpetuity of the Armenian people through his visionary mission, will never fade in the grateful soul of our people.

We extend our blessings to those who have labored to republish the “Hooshamadian” by praying to the Most High, so that He may grant success to their thankful initiative in commemorating the sacred memory of His Holiness Papken I, Coadjutor Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia.

Eternal prayer and a respectful deep bow to the luminous soul of the righteous whom we have as an intercessor before God.

With blessings,

Karekin II
Catholicos of All Armenians

MESSAGE

A man of vision and commitment—this is how I describe the Coadjutor Catholicos Papken Guleserian. His entire life was sustained and guided by a clear vision for the future of the Armenian Church and the Armenian people, and by a firm commitment to all ideals, principles, and aspirations which constitute the identity, the unity, and the enduring existence of our people.

In the first place, His Holiness was a *man of culture* par excellence. He was not an intellectual in the ordinary sense of the word; his deep knowledge of Armenian history, his academic mind, and his scholarly achievements have given to him a unique place among the historians, theologians, and intellectuals of the twentieth century. In fact, he was not just a writer, but a profound thinker; not a simple describer, but a deep analyzer. His books, which touch various spheres and dimensions of the life and witness of the Armenian Church, are eloquent manifestations of his broad knowledge, deep-penetrating mind, and scholarly skills.

Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I was a *great administrator*. As Coadjutor to Sahag II Khabayan Catholicos he played a pivotal role in reorganizing the Armenian Catholicate of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon, and reactivating its missionary engagement in the life of our people. One may imagine the life of our people after the Armenian Genocide: tremendous difficulties, enormous problems, famine, and diseases. In the midst of these uncertainties, which characterized the life of our people in exile, the Armenian Catholicate of Cilicia played a significant role in meeting the needs of our suffering people under the wise and courageous leadership of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I. In fact, the annals of our contemporary history are full of testimonies which point towards the strong leadership of His Holiness.

The scope of my brief statement does not allow me to say more about a person whose intellectual heritage and theological reflections have played an important role in my own theological education and ministerial formation. I would like, however, to single out three major concerns which dominated his life, reflection, and action:

1) The *reformation* of the Armenian Church remained a major item on the agenda of his life. He not only wrote passionately about this crucial issue,

but he also made constant efforts to materialize his convictions and dreams concerning this timely and burning question.

2) The *renewal* of the Armenian Church acquired an important place in the writings and activities of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I. For him the Armenian Church was not only a spiritual institution, a sanctuary of our spiritual values and theological heritage, but also a source of life, hope, and faith, embracing the totality of the life of our people in all its aspects and manifestations. Hence, the renewal of the church was of vital importance in view of the changing times and realities.

3) The *unity* of the Armenian Church and the Armenian people became the driving force of his whole life and pontifical mission. He strongly believed that the strength of our church and people lay in unity—a unity that brings all segments of our people and the church together under one umbrella, in spite of the nature and scope of our differences.

Reformation, renewal, and unity: I consider these challenges the sacred heritage of His Holiness, a heritage that must be taken with responsibility, courage, and commitment today.

I welcome this initiative of bringing to focus some of the perspectives, insights, and challenges of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I. He will undoubtedly remain one of the visionary and great Catholicoi of the Armenian Church.

Aram I
Catholicos of Cilicia

FOREWORD

Father Papken Guleserian of Aintab entered the scene of Armenian history at a time when our people had begun the process of restructuring themselves into a modern nation. As an Armenian priest and a man of the 1890s, he was convinced that the Armenian Church had a very important role to play in the process of bringing the Armenian people into the twentieth century. He devoted the earlier part of his life to this cause, and after the tragedy of the 1915 genocide, he turned his energies to the task of reviving the Armenian Church and the Armenian people. In this respect, Father Papken must be considered as one of the foremost founding fathers of the post-genocide Armenian Church—the most ancient, the most traditional, and the most grass-roots body in Armenian life today.

In trying to assess Catholicos Guleserian's achievements, I find one trait in him that runs like a straight line throughout his life: his selfless dedication to the Armenian Church and the Armenian people.

What makes him worthy of remembrance is the fact that he exerted all of his energies not for his own personal advancement, glory, and gain, but for his people's spiritual, intellectual, and moral welfare. He lived frugally throughout his life and had very little in his possession at the time of his death in 1936. In the early 1930s, when he became Coadjutor Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, there was nothing glamorous about the office of Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. The position of Catholicos entailed serving a deported multitude that had miraculously survived the genocide of 1915.

In our days, particularly in the United States, capitalistic ideology urges people to cherish the importance of self and encourages one to live only for personal gain, advancement, and pleasure. This kind of attitude towards life leads one to entertain a scorn for idealism and virtues such as commitment, dedication, and devotion to the cause of one's people. Catholicos Papken Guleserian and others like him would have found themselves out of place in the contemporary Western world. It is fortunate that humanity is not totally affected by the snares of present Western values, and still holds at high esteem those who are dedicated to idealistic causes. As for a small people, like us, with no professionally trained leadership, we, more than other nations,

needed—and still need—dedicated, far-sighted, and selfless leaders in order to withstand the odds against us and survive. Exemplary leaders of past times must serve as models for our future leaders. Catholicos Papken Guleserian stands out in the annals of our contemporary history as such an exemplary religious and national leader who had, during his lifetime, been an inspiration to those who knew him, worked with him, and studied under his direction. His life and work could serve as a handbook for all those who aspire towards positions of leadership.

From his days as a student at the Armash seminary in the early 1890s, Catholicos Papken Guleserian made a commitment to apply his intelligence, immense drive, and industriousness towards one goal, namely, the service of his people. He excelled in whatever he did, showing a great deal of originality. Throughout his life he was a great pastor and an inspiring preacher, a prolific writer and educator, and the editor of the journal *Looys*, one of the most progressive religious periodicals in Armenian and still considered to be a repository of valuable information on the Armenian Church. His record as a church administrator—as the Primate of a number of dioceses in the Ottoman Empire and later as the Coadjutor Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia—was impeccable.

Until recently, Catholicos Papken Guleserian was best remembered in religious circles as a great teacher. In the mid- and late 1920s he taught in the Seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and in 1930 he founded the Seminary of Antelias. His students remembered him as a very inspiring teacher. Among those who studied under his direction were the majority of the high-ranking clergymen of the Armenian Church of the 1950s and 1960s: Abp. Norayr Bogharian of Jerusalem, a renowned scholar born in Aintab; Catholicoi Zareh and Khoren of the Great House of Cilicia; Patriarch Yeghishé of Jerusalem; Patriarch Shnork of Constantinople; several diocesan primates, priests, many well known intellectuals, teachers, community leaders, editors of newspapers, and so on. Although these men are now in their eternal rest, they are remembered as the ones who shaped the Armenian Diaspora over a period of several decades, from the 1930s onward.

Catholicos Guleserian's activities were not limited to the religious sphere. He was truly a community leader. During his stay in America—where he had come for an operation in 1914 and was consequently spared the sure death that awaited him in his diocese, the present-day Ankara—he briefly served as the locum tenens of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. It was during that period that he and a few other clergymen and intellectuals founded the Knights of Vartan, which since then has stood at

the side of the Armenian Church. In 1918 he began publishing an interesting and popular weekly journal called *Davros*, which he edited with Armenag Nazar, an Aintabtsi intellectual and the editor of the Boston-based newspaper *Azk*.

In 1927 Patriarch Yeghishé Tourian of Jerusalem and the Executive Council of the Brotherhood of St. James asked Bishop Guleserian to undertake the publication of *Sion*, the official monthly journal of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem that had ceased in the 1870s. During his tenure, the journal became an important scholarly and religious publication. A few years later, soon after Bishop Guleserian had settled down in Antelias, he also founded the journal *Hasg*, the official publication of the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia to this day.

This amazing bishop, who never had the opportunity to further his education beyond the six years he spent at the Armash seminary, worked diligently and with unparalleled industriousness. He produced several scholarly tomes and popular works on the Armenian Church and Armenian history, as well as thousands of articles on various topics, scattered in journals and newspapers. Besides several published works, there are still many unpublished manuscripts from his pen. His popular works stand out as an extension of his pastoral mission. Almost all of them are still useful despite the passage of time.

Catholicos Guleserian's scholarly works are indispensable, since they contain original material that is not available from other sources. Among these are two major catalogues of Armenian manuscripts. Many of the manuscripts described in these catalogues were presumably destroyed during the genocide.

In the 1890s Guleserian initiated the first major critical study on Yeghishé, the historian of the Vartanants War. This study had originally been his seminary thesis and is a wonderful example of what Armenian criticism can produce. In listing his other important works, one must mention "The History of the Catholicoi of Cilicia," which was posthumously completed and published by his student Archbishop Norayr Bogharian. One must also count among his serious works a critical essay on how to modernize the Armenian Church, and the recently published correspondence exchanged with the Mekhitarist scholars of Vienna.

Today most of Guleserian's students are already gone. In another decade very few people will be left to remember him from their youth. But scholars will always be grateful to Catholicos Papken for his valuable contributions to Armenian scholarship, and he will always be remembered for his work.

Armenian Church historians will write about him as the clergyman who reestablished the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias and was instrumental in reviving the Armenian Church in the Near East. The Armenian people will cherish his memory, since he devoted his entire life to educating, enlightening, consoling, and helping his people. His was a life spent only for his people. He served God by serving his flock. It is indeed wise for the community to remember Catholicos Papken in connection with the heroic struggle of our people. His life was indeed a heroic struggle against ignorance, against the Turks, and against all the odds facing a deported nation.

We cannot let time fade the memory of a leader of that caliber.

Very Rev. Fr. Krikor Maksoudian, Ph.D.

His  Life

Excerpts from the diary of Coadjutor Catholicos Papken

How sweet it is to talk with God. But we are not worthy of that intimacy. The annoyances of a harsh life pressure us and distort the reality of visions. . . .

December 13, 1919

You are righteous, O Lord, and there is nothing more worthy than serving my people with righteousness and for righteousness . . . If I am to be helpful in the service of this right cause, enlighten my mind and bless my path. If not, take my soul and let me not be inert and useless in any measure or in any way.

January 1, 1920

This afternoon, I go to Dorchester to perform the Liturgy—the covenant that gave us Your Only Begotten Son. Lord, make me worthy, so that I deliver a Liturgy of heart to myself and of comfort to those Armenians of America who have lost their direction.

Armenian life will slowly diminish in this community, unless a new fury, a new enthusiasm lifts its spirit.

April 4, 1920

THE STAGES THAT SHAPED AN OUTSTANDING CLERGYMAN

Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I of the Holy See of Cilicia was born in Aintab, Cilicia, on April 5, 1868, to Avedik Guleserian and Sophig Nazarian. He was named Harutiun by his parents and by his godfather, Fr. Melkon Gemijian.

Avedik Guleserian owned a linen store in Aintab. His first wife died of an epidemic disease, leaving him with their two sons, Hagop and Sarkis. His second wife, Sophig, was a widow with a daughter named Vartouhi. This second marriage resulted in three sons, Nerses, Harutiun (the Catholicos), and Kevork; and one daughter, Mariam.

As a child, Harutiun rarely interacted with his peers. Even at an early age, he preferred the intimacy of his books and the company of the elderly, particularly clergymen, whom he tried to learn from and imitate. One of the first books Harutiun read was a leather-bound manuscript written about the lives of Armenian saints.

One day his father took him to visit Mgrditch Kefsizian Catholicos, who was a friend of the family. The Catholicos asked Harutiun a few questions, then he inquired about his future aspirations.

“I would like to be a Catholicos,” replied the daring teenager.

“Yes, my child, you may be a Catholicos one day, but perhaps not my immediate successor,” said Catholicos Kefsizian.

Although influenced by this visit and his studies, the single most influential factor binding Harutiun to the church and his religion was his mother. Shortly after his mother’s death, he wrote in an article that Sophig was an illiterate woman who could not distinguish *A* from *One*, but that she was a woman who managed the house perfectly, according to her own system of *A* and *One*.

Sophig was a true believer whose basic tenet of faith could be summarized in these familiar words: “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” though she would have misspelled them in Armenian, because Turkish was the language she used in everyday life.

Through her piety, kneeling before God and praying, tears in her eyes, for grace for her children, Sophig taught her sons to cherish the Armenian Church, and to value education.



A photo pertinent to the Gronasirats portraying Harutiun Guleserian (seated, first from left) and his schoolmates of Vartanian College. It is believed that the photograph was taken in 1889, immediately before Harutiun's departure for Armash Seminary.

Sophig's love for her children, however, surpassed her love of the church. It is known that she had voiced her reservations about Harutiun's decision to join the ranks of the clergy.

Harutiun's Early School Life

The first school Harutiun attended was the Upper School located adjacent to the old church in Aintab. Later he went to the Nersessian National School. In addition to the lessons he was taught at school, he learned the crafts of coppersmith, goldsmith, carpenter, and painter in his spare time. However, craftsmanship did not attract him, and later he became a full-time student at Vartanian College, whose principal at the time was Vahan Kurkjian, an intellectual well known for the role he played in educating young Armenian students.

It was Kurkjian who convinced Harutiun's father to make the great sacrifices, despite the financial hardship they required, to send Harutiun to school and allow him to complete his basic education. During those influential years a new energy was stirring in the community in Aintab. The Armenian community was experiencing a revival of interest in education that coincided with the construction of a new cathedral and the establishment of new educational organizations.

It was as a student at Vartanian College that Harutiun first demonstrated considerable ability as a speaker, organizer, and leader.

One of his first achievements was the establishment of the Gronasirats (Religion-Lovers) Association. The goal of the Association was to educate preachers and priests, with the intent of reviving the Armenian Church and, at the same time, resisting the growing influence of Catholicism.

The Association later merged with another organization and together they formed the Yegeghetsasirats (Church-Lovers) Association. In 1912, the Yegeghetsasirats, with the cooperation of Vartanian College, played an instrumental role in establishing the Giligian College of Aintab.

It was at Vartanian College that Harutiun made his literary debut. He wrote a piece entitled "Elbisé" for the school's biweekly newspaper called *Mentor*; and signed it H.A.G.¹

Twenty years later, in 1906, while reminiscing about his school days at Vartanian and his debut in *Mentor*, the Bishop Papken wrote:

Mentor was a Turkish publication with an Armenian alphabet—an accomplishment realized by our beloved school . . . I was a newly-enrolled student when *Mentor* began

publication . . . Aintab, the city of Cilicia most known for cherishing education, and for having, previously, given life to many schools, a museum and lecture halls, now was offering a semimonthly publication to the community. To edit it in Aintab and to publish it in Constantinople was a daring enterprise; however, publication continued for a full year (January through December 1886), ending with the completion of the first year's collection. For a whole year, *Mentor* spoke to the people using the Turkish language, which they understood, without, of course, neglecting the Armenian language. It presented writings on religious, moral, social, economic, and other subjects, and sometimes also included stories, anecdotes, and translations. . . .

The memory of *Mentor* is dear to me. After all, in its pages are my first published article, my first journalistic attempt.

Oh, I'll never forget it. One day, I was at the principal's residence for a task. Upon the principal's instruction, a teacher was preparing a clean copy of the articles for *Mentor*. I watched the labor with pleasure and awe, imagining journalism in its majesty and holiness. I don't know why, but the principal suggested I write an article, and he gave me a theme—a health-related issue about clothes and their cleaning. I remember preparing a lengthy article. I used my textbooks and whatever I had heard on the subject as my sources . . . I wrote it and gave it to the principal. A few weeks later, it was published in the 16th issue of *Mentor* (August 15, 1886) under the title, HEALTH: CLOTHES, signed H.A.G. (Harutiun A. Guleserian). Believe me, in published form, my article had been totally changed. I cannot recall now how disappointed I was because of the alterations; I know, however, that my lengthy article had been edited down into a concise commandment on health.

Hagop Der Melkonian, who attended the same school, recalls his elder schoolmate Harutiun as someone who had more authority over the students than the teachers did. "He could make many internal arrangements with regard to school life," said Der Melkonian.