

(\*Review Article)

## **The Armenian Cardinal Gregory Peter XV Aghajanian—a Pioneering Figure in the Holy Roman Church (\*\*)**

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### **Abstract**

The presented paper is dedicated to one of the prominent Armenians of the 20th century world, Cardinal Gregory Peter XV Aghajanian (1895–1971), who, with his influential role, stands as a monumental figure in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, at the same time being an outstanding figure of Armenian identity and heritage. Being born in a region marked by political and social upheaval (in the Caucasus), then living in the West and in the East parts of the world and traveling around the globe, he devoted his life to the clerical mission and regulation of inter-ecclesiastical issues, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, aiming to spread Catholicism as well as to bridge divisions between different Christian denominations and promote understanding among diverse Christian communities.

Cardinal Aghajanian, an Armenian Catholic priest, played a significant role as a high-ranking cleric and ‘pastoral diplomat’ within the Vatican. Being the Patriarch-Catholicos of Cilicia from 1937 to 1962, he attained the rank of cardinal in 1946 and subsequently held the position of prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith from 1958/60 to 1970. He played a key role in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), acting for renewal and reforms within the Catholic Church. Appointed as a member of the Roman Curia and serving in different positions, he attempted to promote dialogue between the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox churches. He was also known for his work with the Eastern Catholic Churches and his contributions to their missionary activities and the canon regulation. His contributions are also obvious to the Armenian Catholic presence within the larger Catholic community. Aghajanian's ecclesiastical and missionary legacy is characterized by his commitment to unity and the promotion of peace, making him a pioneering figure in the evolution of the Church during a transformative period of the 20th century. His brilliant knowledge and diplomatic skills, mastering the art of negotiation, and the virtues characteristic of a cleric earned him a position of influence within the Roman Church, where his insights and guidance were sought after in matters of both faith and governance. He was twice nominated and considered as a candidate for Pope (1958 and 1963), possibly due to the above circumstances. Finally, he lived during a unique period of the evolution of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, i.e., during the reign of the 20th century's distinguished popes, among them Pius X (1903-1914), Benedict XV (1914-1922), Pius XI (1922-1939), Pius XII (1939-1958), John XXIII (1958-1963), and Paul VI (1963-1978). So, he was the Armenian who was noticed by some of the mentioned popes, entrusting him with a number of important positions and missions, thus further ensuring his irreplaceable place in the then-operating Roman Curia and the Church atmosphere in general. Essentially, Cardinal Aghajanian was destined to become one of the most famous figures of the Holy See of the Vatican in the middle of the 20th century, to be a part of various world political-diplomatic, spiritual, ecclesiastical, and international affairs, and in consequence to be at the center of those events. His rich lifetime activities

may be divided into a few parts: a priest and a teacher, a bishop and an administrator, the patriarch—a caring father and a pastoral diplomat, a cardinal and a voice for spreading Christianity, a high-ranking cleric, and a diplomatic figure in ecclesiastical-political matters. He always acted for Catholicism, for the propagation of the faith and evangelization.

**Keywords:** Gregory Peter XV Aghajanian, a prominent Armenian, Holy Roman Catholic Church, Holy See of the Vatican, Armenian Catholic Church of Cilicia, Patriarch-Catholicos, pastoral and diplomatic activities.

**\*\**The presented paper is a brief overview of a voluminous research project.***

## **Introduction**

### ***Vatican in the mid-20th century: the inclusion of diverse races and nationalities***

The mid-20th century was a significant period for the Vatican, both in terms of international policy and diplomacy, particularly due to the geopolitical changes in the world. It was the period when Vatican diplomacy faced the post-war environment, so, under these conditions, it had to formulate its policy; in short, a new path in its diplomatic strategy. Papal diplomacy is renowned for being among the oldest in the world and for its numerous accomplishments. Becoming the center of the nations of the Christian West, the papacy always played a significant role. Though papal diplomacy has always acted following unchangeable principles, however it has had to confront various international systems as well, such as *the Res Publica Christiana* of the Middle Ages, *the Westphalia system* in the modern age, and the challenges of secularism and totalitarianism in the last two centuries. Regardless of everything, papal diplomacy played and still plays a significant role in shaping international relations, particularly through the initiatives of the popes. The studies show that the Roman Catholic Church is the only religious confession that has access to diplomatic relations. It owes this, first, to its organizational structure, which is purely universal. It also owes it, therefore, to its head, the Roman Pontiff, who, from the moment of his election in the conclave, gains the status of 'international personality'. Certainly, the Holy See had to weather the storms of history over the centuries, but it has always been actively involved in a wide range of international affairs at various levels, seeking to intervene in various matters. It can be considered a sovereign subject of international law, but of a purely religious nature. (Tauran, 2004) One of its missions, within the framework of its relations with those responsible for society, consists of soliciting and giving voice to the conscience of individuals and peoples. In this regard, the Holy See has adopted a set of principles by which it is guided. Here we can refer to the words of John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*, where he invited authorities to "*recognize, respect, compose, protect, and promote,*" (John XXIII, 1963) these rights, which emanate from human nature itself and, for this reason, are universal, inviolable, and inalienable. And indeed, world affairs cannot be conducted without reference to that set of principles that are the basis of that "universal common good" of which the mentioned encyclical of Pope John XXIII speaks.

So, the Holy See, through the means of its diplomacy, seeks to help those responsible for societies to pursue equitable solutions to the world's problems: that justice be guaranteed to all, without any injustice being inflicted on anyone. In this regard, it is noteworthy the strategies adopted by the Holy See in the context of international relations and diplomacy. This diplomatic posture became more pronounced under Pope John XXIII, who called for an era of dialogue. In fact, the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI were characterized by a new policy of the active presence of the Holy See in the international arena and by international institutions, and, therefore, to build relations and promote collaborations with the churches in different countries, first. Thus, the principles and

policies adopted by the aforementioned popes were certainly not an end in themselves. The significance of the existence of papal diplomacy is also clearly expressed in Pope Paul VI's *Motu Proprio, Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*. (Paul VI, 1969) Thus, at present the Holy See has diplomatic and inter-ecclesiastical relations with diverse countries situated in different continents. Actually, diplomacy is a tool that the Popes have used since the V century; on the one hand, to foster the ties of communication between the local churches and the Bishop of Rome, and on the other hand, by developing their diplomatic perspectives over the centuries, to express the concerns of the head of the Catholic Church toward all the peoples of the world.

Thus, enjoying the international legal personality and therefore presenting itself as a moral authority—sovereign, independent, and, as such, participating in international relations—the Holy See papal diplomacy does not only concern relations with states, and, therefore, one can and must speak of a diplomacy of the Church, which concerns both ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. And as the current Pope, Francis (2013-), rightly points out, *in this disturbing era, interreligious dialogue is indispensable*. (Francis, 2016) Therefore, the present pontificate continues to mediate in interstate disputes for peace, to form world opinion, and to promote interreligious dialogue. The Vatican's actions within the nations, as a moral authority, aim to promote an ethic of relations between the different parties of the international community. (Tauran, 2003)

Coming back to the mid-20th century, we have to refer to Pope John XXIII, who was able to lead the first steps of the ecumenical path among the Christian churches. He perceived the need for a Christian union between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. He used to say, “Catholics and the Orthodox aren't enemies, but they are brothers.” (De Leonardis, 2014) Actually, the Second Vatican Council, which was convened by him, is marked as a pivotal moment in the Church's approach to modernity and engagement with the world. Regarding the announcement of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII referred to the issue of the spiritual impoverishment of modern society, which, according to him, was a result of the deep social and political transformations that had been undergoing over the previous decades and which demanded a new response from the Church. He also referred to the centuries-old divisions in the Christian family. By adjusting Church practices to the new conditions and environment created in the post-war world, he actually sought to offer something fresh to the modern world that could revitalize the Christian faith in the rapidly secularizing world and provide a new impetus to the Catholic Church's mission. (John XXIII, 1959)

Thus, first, the decrees of the Council encouraged greater inclusivity and dialogue with diverse cultures, religions, and social issues. It is remarkable to state that this inclusivity extended beyond theological debates and contexts to include considerations of race and nationality within the leadership of the Church. From this perspective, it should be mentioned that the inclusion of diverse races and nationalities contributed to the Catholic Church becoming universal (Africa, Asia, Latin America, etc.). Actually, the Popes of the mid-20th century began to consider the importance of incorporating voices from these growing communities. Furthermore, the Vatican also decided to appoint bishops with diverse backgrounds in the regions where the Church started to develop. This contributed to the rise of the credibility of the Church in racially and ethnically diverse communities. In those conditions, an environment for ecumenism and interfaith dialogue was established.

In fact, the Second Vatican Council focused attention on ecumenism and interfaith dialogue among various Christian faiths in order to promote a more inclusive approach to religious context. Recognizing that the Church is a universal body, such dialogue found wide echoes and was of high importance at the levels of race, ethnicity, and national identity. Moreover, the Vatican managed to encourage vigorous missionary work, which led to a rise in Church missionary activity in the middle of the 20th century, especially on the Asian and African continents, and elsewhere. These initiatives

required more varied leadership that could interact with different groups and a deeper comprehension of local cultures. Naturally, there were obstacles and challenges, as the Vatican's plan could not avoid them despite these developments. As a result, not unexpectedly, the Vatican faced a number of emerging problems and received criticism.

However, the mid-20th century was a transformative period for the Vatican. Overall, after the Second World War, papal diplomacy was characterized by a blend of moral leadership, humanitarian concerns, and a shift toward greater openness in international relations. According to studies, in the twentieth century, papal diplomacy evolved significantly, with key events and relationships reflecting broader geopolitical changes and inter-ecclesiastical transformations, including different races and nations. From this perspective, the evolution of Vatican diplomacy and the involvement of diverse national representation within the Roman Catholic Church saw significant developments. The policy of the Vatican was also marked with the inclusion of representatives from diverse races and nationalities in high-ranking clerical positions, which continues to this day. The Vatican gradually came to the idea that the universality of the Church could be best represented through a diverse leadership that reflects its universal essence. Actually, the appointment of bishops and cardinals from different nationalities gave the Church a wider perspective on various social, political, and spiritual challenges that the Church faced around the world. Thus, due to the circumstances prevailing at the time, such inclusivity was seen as an incentive to promote more effective perspectives.

Thus, based on the aforementioned, one can suppose that the rise of Aghajanian within the Roman Catholic Church may exemplify just this very shift towards inclusiveness. And his Armenian heritage, combined with his spiritual obligations, clerical duties and activities, demonstrated the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to incorporate and represent the input of historically and traditionally marginalized voices. On the other hand, as one of the most prominent clerical figures of the mid-20th century, his activity reflects the acknowledgment of the Vatican of the importance of diverse leadership. Furthermore, the opportunities afforded him can be seen as a direct consequence or result of the Vatican policy, which has focused attention on universal representation. The activities of Aghajanian not only served to inspire confidence in the Armenian and other Eastern Catholic communities but also signified the desire and policy of the Vatican to engage more deeply with different cultures, admitting their unique contributions to the universal Church. Moreover, his presence in the Vatican highlighted the possibility of a dialogue that could include multiple perspectives. This was evident not only in the context of the problems of Eastern Catholic Christians but also in the broader context of international relations from a religious perspective.

Since the Catholic Church currently continues to orient and position itself in the progressively developing world, it seems the importance of inclusive representation still remains paramount. At least the legacy of Vatican policy since the mid-20th century expresses this approach. It proves that the involvement of diverse national representatives is essential for the Roman Catholic Church to fulfill its mission in the contemporary world. And by keeping this approach up to date, the Church affirms its commitment to universality.

Thus, it may be assumed that the rise of Aghajanian within the Catholic Church represents a change of the Church's approach to inclusivity. Therefore, his elevation within the Holy Roman Church can be considered no coincidence; it also testifies the recognition by the Roman Catholic Church of his own contributions and activities at various levels. In parallel, his work as one of the most well-known clerical individuals of the 20th century demonstrates the appreciation of the Vatican for the value of diverse national authorities. Actually, the opportunities provided to him can be seen as a direct result of the Vatican policy that valued and prioritized global representation. Finally, his elevation demonstrates the intention of the Vatican to interact more fully with other cultures and

to recognize their distinctive contribution to the Universal Church. Especially since the importance of inclusive representation remains of prime importance as the Roman Catholic Church continues to communicate and face the challenges of the currently developing world. Acting in this way, since the mid-20th century, the Church continued to demonstrate the importance of including diverse voices in its leadership and operations, seeking to prove that the involvement of various national and racial representatives contributes to the full and widespread fulfillment of its mission in the contemporary world. In other words, by pursuing this strategy, the Church reaffirms its commitment to universality.

Thus, based on the above-mentioned circumstances, it may be assumed that his elevation in the Holy Roman Catholic Church was most likely purposeful. Most notably, the numerous preserved and accessible documents in various Vatican archival vaults at least attest to the extent to which the Church valued his activities and contributions. As seen in the trajectory of spiritual leaders like him, currently the Catholic Church is better positioned to promote unity and understanding among its followers.

*Aghajanian could achieve the titles, positions, and awards also due to his obvious talents combined with his overall image. His character embodies the priest, the great believer, the teacher, the negotiator, and finally the diplomat. In this respect, he was able to manage to achieve the combination of “the faith” and “diplomacy,” “ecclesiastical affairs,” and “the political affairs.” From first glance, it seems to require different attitudes, and, firstly, intransigence and flexibility, and yet, it can be said that in this context, he really succeeded.*

#### **Formation of the Cleric: Fr. Francis Aghajanian**

In 1894-1896, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were subjected to the crushing policy of Abdul Hamid (1876-1909). Although the then Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) tried to save the Armenians through his apostolic delegates, the diplomatic efforts of the Holy See failed due to Hamid's cunning policy and the lack of official diplomatic relations of the Vatican with the Ottoman Empire. (Hesemann, 2015) As a result, many Armenian families left the Ottoman Empire and found refuge in other countries of the region, and among them was the Aghajanian family. Thus, the future Cardinal (Ghazaros Aghajanian) was born into a Catholic family of exiled Armenians from Erzurum on September 18, 1895, in present-day Georgia (in the city of Akhaltsikhe, in the Armenian region of Javakhk). The horrors of the Armenian Genocide were probably the background that not only shaped his spiritual identity but also propelled him toward a life dedicated to serving the Church and advocating for his people.

Yet a small boy, he dreamed of becoming a priest, and with the approval of his parents, he began attending the Tbilisi Theological Seminary belonging to the Georgian Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church. Being a talented student, he was soon noticed for his abilities by the local clergy, and at the age of 11, he was given the high honor of studying in Rome (1906-1919). This decision was of fatal significance not only for the young boy but also for both Armenians and the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Gradually, the future head of the Armenian Catholic Church was able to overcome many barriers and difficulties, becoming a connecting bridge between East and West.

Indeed, the Roman environment played its beneficial role. In fact, most of his later life remained connected with Rome. The brilliant education he received, first in the educational system of the Pontifical Urban University (Latin: *Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana "De Propaganda Fide"*), gave the young seminarist the opportunity to delve into the fields of theology, philosophy, politics, and canon law, simultaneously mastering more than ten languages. The accumulated knowledge and experience in the Roman environment shaped his further course of becoming a clergyman.

In 1917, having been ordained as a celibate priest in Rome, he took the name Francis and entered the service of the diocese of the Armenian Catholic Church in his birthplace, Georgia (a priest in the Armenian Catholic St. Gregory Illuminator church, 1919-1921, in Tbilisi). The young priest had big goals and desires to educate and encourage young people, including establishing a preschool and a college. Unfortunately, many of his plans did not come to life due to the historical circumstances of the time and the policies adopted by the ruling Soviet regime (1920-1990), particularly regarding religion and the church.

*During the years of his studies in Rome, his abilities, educational, spiritual, and other important personal qualities were already noticed by the high-ranking Armenian Catholic clergy of the time, who soon called him back to Rome for the purpose of assigning responsible work. This was the fateful path that became the cornerstone of the entire life and activity of the young Armenian. Thus, becoming one of the most well-known and fascinating characters in the 20-th century Catholic Church history and being at the center of communal spiritual, political, and diplomatic processes, he never forgot his origin and identity.*

Indeed, as a priest, he was distinct for his deep knowledge and natural abilities, standing out among the young clergymen with his bright personality. Due to this circumstance, in 1921 he was appointed to the position of vice rector and in 1932 as rector of the *Pontifical Levonian Armenian College of Rome* (ACO, 2408/1928, 4; ACO, 618/1932, 2-3) (an academic institution for the formation of the Armenian Catholic clergy, which was constituted in Rome by Pope Leo XIII in 1883 and operates up to date), at the same time a faculty member of the *Pontifical Urbanian Athenaeum "De Propaganda Fide"* (1922-1932). He was also an Apostolic Visitor to the Patriarchal Institute of Bzommar in Beirut (Lebanon, 1932; by the decision of the Pope). (ACO, 618/1932, 15)

*Possibly, this decision of the Pope was conditioned also on the administrative and management skills of Aghajanian that have already been demonstrated during his tenure at Pontifical Levonian College. Skillfully organizing the work of education, he gathered Armenian youths from different parts of the world in the college. In that cozy corner of Rome, within the walls of the college, he gave a boost to Armenology, to the propaganda of the preservation of Armenian cultural and historical heritage in general. He put the work of Christian education and upbringing of Armenian youths, future clergymen, on a high level, with the aim of training truly learned and dedicated priests. Most probably, all this couldn't remain unnoticed in the Vatican circles. In fact, within a few years, he had already gained authority and trust within the Holy See; therefore, in 1928, he was appointed as a councilor for Eastern Catholic Churches and, further, as a member of the commission for canonical codification. This was a truly responsible appointment, which significantly influenced the future path of Cardinal's further activity.*

### **Aghajanian's Path to the Holy Roman Catholic Church**

As the Church's history states, Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) was the first pope to directly address the Christian ecumenical movement, as he was interested in achieving reunion with the Eastern Orthodox atmosphere (like Pope Benedict XV), but unfortunately failing that, he determined to give special attention to the Eastern Catholic Churches. (Batteli, 1996, p. 735-761) In his encyclical on religious unity (January 6, 1928)—*Mortalium animos*—the pope referred to the 'subject of religious unity, condemning some of the assumptions of the early ecumenical movement and affirming that the only church founded by Jesus Christ is the Catholic Church'. (Pius XI, 1928) "The union of Christians can only be promoted by promoting the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it, for in the past they have unfortunately left it." (Pius XI, 2012) In these conditions, Pope Pius XI established a council for the Eastern Catholic Churches in Rome to pro-

mote unity and meet the spiritual and administrative needs and requirements of these diverse communities, thus promoting dialogue between Eastern and Western Catholic traditions. This policy attempted to increase collaboration and understanding within the Church, resulting in improved pastoral care for Eastern Catholics.

Most probably, being aware of Father Francis's abilities and his high authority in the Eastern Catholic Church environments, the choice of Pope Pius XI stood on the candidacy of Aghajanian. It seems he wasn't wrong, taking into account that his contributions during this period might be a part of a larger movement within the Latin Church to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the Eastern traditions, reflecting Pope Pius XI's vision of promoting unity and care among the diverse branches of Catholicism. Through his work, Father Francis really played a key role in bridging and promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and more collaboration that would have lasting implications for better interrelations within the Church. Therefore, in 1928, Father Francis Aghajanian's appointment as a councilor for the Eastern Churches of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches by Pope Pius XI was a major step forward. This important position entailed managing issues and overseeing matters pertaining to the Eastern Catholic Churches and encouraging communication and harmony, as well as formatting dialogue and unity, among various rites and traditions within the Catholic faith. In actuality, this esteemed position placed him at the forefront of discussions and cultural exchanges between the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches that reflected the increasing awareness of the diverse traditions within Catholicism. In addition to his duties as a councilor, Father Francis was named to serve on the commission for canonical codification. This commission was tasked with an important work of developing and refining the legal framework governing the marriages, sacraments, and ecclesiastical governance of Eastern Catholic Churches. So, his participation and involvement in this commission played a crucial role in guaranteeing that the distinctive traditions and practices of Eastern Catholicism were honored and integrated into the Catholic Church's larger canon law.

Thus, his developing prominence in the foremost ecclesiastical matters not only revealed his abilities as a theologian and administrator but also indicated a path that might lead to his advancement within the Holy Roman Catholic Church hierarchy. Taking into account his efforts, contributions, convictions, successful attainments, and the strategic relevance of his positions, most likely played a fatal influence that Father Francis might one day be elevated to the cardinalate. Later, it became clear that such an appointment not only acknowledged his commitment and service but also allowed him to exert a great impact on the mission and governance of the Church, particularly in promoting unity and collaboration among the Catholic Churches in the East and West. Later, most probably, Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) considered exactly those circumstances, while assembling a new cardinal consistory in 1946.

*As already mentioned above, a study of the policies pursued by the Vatican makes it clear that the Holy Roman Catholic Church, starting in the second half of the 20th century, began to more prominently include representatives of different races and nations in the ranks of the church's high-ranking clergy, which continues to this day. And perhaps it is also as a result of that policy that Aghajanian was provided with ample opportunities in the Catholic Church to serve the church and the faith during those years.*

#### **On the Way to the Patriarchal Throne: Titular Bishop of Comana Armeniae (1935–1937)**

On July 11, 1935, Aghajanian was ordained as a bishop (St. Nicola da Tolentino Church; Rome). (ACO, 278/1935, 24; 29; 31) In this period, he was already well-known for his activities

both in Beirut and Rome. It seems that, in the eyes of the Vatican, he had already become the individual on whom they could rely and entrust with responsible assignments. This is evidenced by the fact that, next to other patriarchal candidates, Pope Pius XI gave his preference to Bishop Aghajanian, deeply convinced that he could be the best candidate for the Armenian Catholic See. (Romkila, 1967-1968) In the established conditions, he was soon destined to become the Patriarch-Catholicos of the Armenian Catholic Church (succeeding the patriarch Avedis Peter XIV Arpiarian, 1933–1937), who more than dignifiedly assumed the pontificate of the church and its flock entrusted to him (1937–1962).

Thus, in 1937 he was elected a Patriarch-Catholicos of the Armenian Catholic Church of Cilicia by the Synod of Bishops of the Armenian Catholic Church and confirmed by Pope Pius XI on December 13, 1937, accepting the name of Gregory Peter XV [Krikor-Bedros XV, in Armenian].

Accepting the name Gregory, perhaps he took it in memory of the founder of the Armenian church, Gregory the Illuminator (IV c.). Probably, in this way, he was eager to strengthen his position and underline his national origination. Especially when subsequent history revealed that he always acted as a devoted Armenian, appearing at the center of fatal moments and memorable events for the Armenians. In fact, becoming the fifteenth patriarch of the Armenian Catholic Church, he added the name Peter to his name as well (this tradition began with Abraham Peter I Artsivian, 1740-1749), which is an expression of the devotion and allegiance of the Armenian Catholic Church Patriarchs to the Church founded by St. Peter.

Patriarch Aghajanian performed the patriarchal management of his community for about 25 years. During those years, he made the greatest contribution to the prosperity of the Armenian Catholic Church and Armenians in general. Obviously, his Armenian background uniquely positioned him to address Armenian issues, and, as a spiritual leader with caring and diplomatic skills, he worked tirelessly to form an Armenian diaspora with the survivors in the Middle East (namely, in Lebanon) and promote recognition of the Armenian Genocide, seeking to raise awareness within the Church and the international community. It was the historical period when genocide-surviving Armenians were gathered around the church and the clergy to create their new native land far from their historical homeland.

And it was in these conditions that the church took on all administrative, organizational, educational, and cultural activities. The vivid event was in April 1939, when, due to patriarch Aghajanian, the first monument was built in Beirut, strengthening the institutional idea of commemorating the Armenian Genocide among the Armenians of the Middle East, the newly formed diaspora. Besides, he is considered the builder of a number of churches, orphanages, schools, and colleges in Lebanon and generally in the countries having Armenian Catholic communities (Syria, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Egypt, etc.). He was the patriarch who coordinated a number of deacons, priests, and bishops, as well as caring institutions for the Armenian Catholic nuns (in the Eastern countries, in Italy, in the USA, and elsewhere). As a patriarch, he also ordained a few dozen deacons, priests, and bishops. He was always on his way to visiting all the countries where the Armenian Catholic Church had communities and missions.

Obviously, his efforts were primarily directed at the Armenian community, as evidenced by his pastoral trips and the facts detailed in his pastoral papers. During these visits (in the Middle East, Europe, Canada, Brazil, and the USA), he not only dealt with the settlement of various issues of his communities but also dealt with the development of colleges, schools, churches, and monasteries of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, founded in different Armenian-populated places. During those visits, he participated in and presided over sacred liturgies, directed his patriarchal sermon and exhortations to the Armenian believers, and met with different layers of Armenians, as well as with

representatives of local high-ranking clergy and political authorities (among them ministers, kings, presidents, high-ranking political officials, various ambassadors, etc.) of different cities and countries. By visiting the Armenian dioceses and colonies in different countries, he has also supported and promoted the publishing work of Armenian Catholics, thus developing scientific and cultural fields among Armenians. It is worth noting that later, within the framework of the Catholic mission, he also visited countries in Asia, Africa, as well as in Australia and elsewhere. It is important to say that he is considered to be the most traveled Catholic priest of his time.

*He was a faithful shepherd of his flock while being the leader of the Armenian Catholic Church and a humble servant of the Universal Church, dedicated to spreading the truth and grace of Jesus Christ. It was due to his great faith and pastoral diplomatic skills that he carried within him. Regarding his mission, he served God and, he served Armenians with his simple lifestyle and the deepest theological knowledge and convictions, humanitarian and just attitude. This is reflected in his own motto, "Lustitia et Pax" (i.e., Justice and Peace), which he used to keep till the end of his earthly life.*

Thus, his patriarchal years demonstrated his ability as a powerful leader and were defined by unwavering devotion to his people. This is also evidenced by the pastoral papers he created, which constitute his written heritage, shedding light on the depths and details of his patriarchal activities. Today, his pastoral papers are historically significant, particularly from the perspective of the factual data and extensive analysis of the political realities of the time, historical events, ecclesiastical concerns, and, lastly, his pastoral visits. In the depths of these pastoral papers, it is not difficult to discern his thoughts and concerns, the diplomatic substrata of his pastoral visits and their goals and results, seasoned with a spiritual veil, but, deep down, firstly, directed regarding Armenians, and then to the regulation of the most diverse spheres and issues of church affairs.

It should be stated that these pastoral papers could serve as a unique background for any researcher to build that time atmosphere in both historical-political issues and ecclesiastical matters. Although the vaults of the Vatican's archival heritage attributed to this period are still mostly closed, certain judgments can still be drawn from what is available. In particular, the analysis of the patriarchal activity years of Gregory Peter XV Aghajanian shows that they were marked by his trips and numerous meetings with the leaders and other officials of a number of states (from the American and European continents to the Arab and Islamic world, etc.), including the meetings with various spiritual leaders, and that, first, they were of diplomatic essence. Through those meetings he resolved a number of issues, gained tangible results, and finally, he built a great background for further relationships at diverse levels. All of this was presumably consistent with the logic of that time, which embraced the ideals and adopted principles of the Vatican, i.e., in the framework of foreign affairs and diplomacy from the perspective of ecclesiastical matters. All those events have indeed been documented and are preserved in the archival vaults of the Vatican (AAV, ACO, SS, etc.), as well as in the Patriarchate *Diwan* (i.e., archival vault) of the Armenian Catholic Church. In fact, all the above-mentioned visits and activities of Aghajanian found their echoes not only on those time-press pages, but at the same time, according to the prescribed manner, in the form of documented reports, they reached the Vatican as well.

Studies of the documents that can be accessed right now all show that he had the qualities of a good leader, the behavior of an important religious figure, and exceptional diplomatic skills. These were made easier by the fact that he spoke many languages and knew a lot about geopolitics and history, including the unique traits of each country and region. Hopefully, the currently available archival documents and those to be opened in the future will perhaps provide an opportunity to com-

pare and understand in a broader spectrum the circumstances of the advancement of the Aghajanian individuum and cleric in the ranks of the Holy Roman Church.

### **On the Way to Cardinalate (Cardinal-Priest of San Bartolomeo all'Isola; 1946–1970): Internationalization of the College of Cardinals**

The Second World War had just ended when, in August 1945, Patriarch Aghajanian arrived in Rome, where he had not had the opportunity to visit for a few years due to the war. Here he found Italy in ruins and the Armenian Institutions here, in trouble. He soon launched visits to all Armenian institutions in Italy, and, he dealt with managing with a lot of issues quickly over the next few months.

Just after the Second World War (1939-1945), the Vatican was attempting to help shape post-war Europe, advocating for peace and the reconstruction of devastated nations. It also sought to strengthen its influence by reinforcing ties and trying to restore its position in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

This was the period when Pope Pius XII decided to transform the geographic composition of the College of Cardinals by including non-European cardinals in it, thus growing the consistory. (Padellaro, 1956) As the Pope himself stated: “We have been anxious that the greatest number of races and peoples should be represented so that this creation may portray in a living manner the universality of the church.” (Pius XII, 1945)

As history confirms, being one of the longest-standing institutions of government in the world, the reforming of the Roman Curia has always been a long process. Since the 16th century there have been only two major reforms of the Roman Curia: the first was undertaken in 1908 by Pius X, and the second took place in 1967 by Paul VI. The latter actually attempted to create a Curia that reflected the new ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, whilst he actually came up with something closer to an adapted version of the Curia that has been formatted still in the pre-Second Vatican Council Church under Pius XII. Thus, it is impressive to study the inner activities of the Vatican and the changes Pope Pius XII made to the centuries-old procedures from the perspective of the internationalization of the College of Cardinals, including the powers of Cardinals (Tobin, 2003). During his ruling period, Pope Pius XII spoke out about having more cardinals, also mentioning that the existing cadre did not control his appointments. Finally, he overtook the addition of the number of cardinals twice (in 1946 and then in 1953).

Thus, on February 18, 1946, the Pope elected 32 new cardinals in a closed conclave, including patriarch Aghajanian: “*Feria Ila die XVIII a mensis Februarii MCMXLVI. SS.mus Dominus Noster, Creavit et publicavit S. R. E. Presbyterum Cardinalem Gregorium-Petrum XV. Agagianian-Patriarcham Ciliciae Armenorum (...)*.” (Bazmavep, 1946) Indeed, Aghajanian attracted the attention of the papal throne with his education and exemplary clerical behavior, and as a result, he earned his red cardinal cap, becoming a titular cardinal. This occasion was finalized with the glorious Holy Mass in the Sistine Chapel with the Armenian rite (dedicated to the seventh anniversary of the accession of Pius XII) (Aghajanian, 1967), which received a large resonance everywhere, finding its way into the pages of the most prestigious newspapers and being discussed in the most diverse circles.

Noteworthy is that in the same year, Aghajanian was appointed Cardinal-Dean of St. Bartholomew's Church in Rome, in accordance with an ancient tradition: when the Pope grants the title of Cardinal, he also grants the title of one of the ancient churches of Rome along with the cardinal's ring. Thus, it can be assumed that Pope Pius XII, appointing Gregory Peter XV Patriarch-Catholicos as a cardinal, at the same time recognized his extensive contributions to the Catholic Church as well.

Perhaps, the Pope was sure that this Armenian was able to play a crucial role in bridging cultural and religious gaps, especially during a time when the Catholic Church was seeking to engage more with the contemporary world.

*It should be mentioned that in the content of his speech while receiving the title of cardinal, he emphasized his Armenian identity. He proudly accepted the title of cardinal, considering it as respect for the Armenian people. And his celebration of the liturgy according to the Armenian rite in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, which received a wide response everywhere, can be qualified as an important contribution of Armenians to Christian culture.*

Perhaps a number of factors also contributed to his elevation to the cardinalate, including his important position and high regard in the Eastern Catholic Churches and among various country authorities, his most valuable spiritual background and human qualities as a priest. Finally, it was also due to his knowledge, multilingual skills, and experience gained in the Roman atmosphere since his teenage years, which was manifested particularly at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was seeking to achieve unity. Among the next factors were his leadership qualities and diplomatic skills as a Patriarch, which are seen in the contents of the preserved archival documents of the Vatican and in the pastoral papers created by himself. Those, indeed, revealing his exhibited strong leadership skills and a commitment to the mission of the Catholic Church. These abilities sculpt him as a respected figure both in Armenian frames and in the broader Catholic community. His diplomatic talent and natural skills in terms of building relationships at both the political and ecclesiastical levels could not remain unnoticed by the Vatican. Therefore, it may be considered that all this led him to his cardinalate, at the same time highlighting the Holy See's evaluation of his contributions and the importance of including diverse voices within the Roman Curia. And finally, he was elected a cardinal of the Roman Curia, also due to his skillful administrative, clerical ventures and spiritual characteristics created during his early years of service in Rome and then in the Middle East, through pastoral activities, and as a result of a number of dialogues and negotiations among diverse groups in promotion of intercultural and inter-ecclesiastical affairs.

In short, his elevation to the cardinalate met the desire of Pope Pius XII to include different nations in the Roman Curia. Because when Aghajanian was appointed as a cardinal, it was a really fatal time for the Holy Roman Catholic Church, from the perspective of the era's key issues and reforms. Moreover, the same Pope Pius XII, who conferred on him the dignity of a cardinal, then appointed him president of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Oriental Canon Law (in July 1955). Aghajanian served in this position with high responsibility, focusing on the pastoral needs of Eastern Catholic communities and facilitating their integration while respecting their traditions. It should be noted that to combine all these appointments with patriarchal leadership, one must have discipline, time management, and serious and inexhaustible intellectual and administrative abilities. As it was obvious later, through his work and leadership, this Cardinal-priest (1946-1970; later Cardinal-bishop 1970-71) contributed significantly to the mission and outreach of the Latin Church, aligning with the goals of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) to renew and engage the Church in the modern world. Furthermore, his later involvement and role in the Second Vatican Council made obvious his willingness, potential, and influence in shaping the approach to dialogue and modernization of the Church. He invested his efforts in paving the way for significant reforms in the Holy Roman Catholic Church's practices and attitudes towards other Christian denominations as well.

*Aghajanian's elevation can also be viewed in a different light: on the one hand, it expressed acceptance of the Armenian Catholic Church's importance within the larger context of Catholicism. And on the other hand, his appointment was historically significant because it demonstrated an ad-*

*mission of both the Armenian Catholic Church's and his role within Catholicism, highlighting the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to inclusivity. Noteworthy is that he was the Armenian to be appointed a cardinal—an honor that no other Armenian has received to date. Being a cardinal and a part of the Holy Roman Curia, he nevertheless continued to serve his people as the Patriarch-Catholicos of the Armenian Catholic Church for a long time. Though, in fairness, it should be noted that it was most probably difficult for him to combine his pastoral and administrative service between the Roman Catholic environment and the Armenian East. Whilst, according to our studies, he has really served the Armenian Catholic Church and the Roman Curia with great responsibility at the same time.*

### **Resignation of the Patriarchate (August 25, 1962) and Full Involvement in the Roman Curia: Holy See Environment**

Undoubtedly, combining all the positions entrusted to him by the Holy See of the Vatican with the patriarchate was very difficult. At the same time, his health was gradually deteriorating, also due to overloading. Therefore, in 1962, he was forced to resign the position of patriarch, which was soon occupied by his desired successor (Ignatius Peter XVI Batanian: 1962-1976), who came to the throne. Although he had to focus on his duties at the Vatican, whereas, the Middle East remained the center of his care and attention. And this was logical, because it was due to patriarch Aghajanian that the Armenian Catholic Church regained its stature in the Armenian diaspora, namely, under his "astute management" following the sizable losses in the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. From this perspective, as a leader of the church, his deeds are immortal. In his resignation message, he stated that although he was resigning from his position, although he was no longer directly responsible for the patriarchy, he would continue to be concerned about his beloved and honorable Armenian society, and this attitude would remain unchanged. Indeed, he kept his promise by investing his utmost support in different spheres of Armenians' lives.

The assessment of his figure, both as Aghajanian patriarch and Aghajanian cardinal, combined with a wide range of activity, certainly should not be unnoticed. This testifies not only to his versatile leadership, missionary, and pastoral talents, but also to those subtle and flexible diplomatic skills that are very rarely found in church figures living an enclosed life, and certainly, this was a huge advantage that raised his reputation and value... and, of course, his personal qualities of compassion, empathy, negotiation, compromise, etc. It is extremely remarkable to study the path he has taken, in a way that also symbolizes the recognition of the Armenian presence within the broader Christian community.

### **De Propaganda Fide years: From “Propaganda” to “Evangelization”**

It is known that during the period under investigation, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, historically the famous *De Propaganda Fide*, was one of the bodies that made up the Roman Curia. The main aim of this Congregation (currently, dicastery) is to assist the Pope in fulfilling his supreme pastoral responsibilities for the benefit and service of both the Universal Church and the particular Churches. In fact, the role of the leader or a prefect of this Congregation is of high importance in managing the field. Thus, in the mid-20th century, this position was occupied by Cardinal Aghajanian. Studies show that he took over the post of pro-prefect of *the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* in June 1958, until July 1960, and then the position of prefect from July 1960, until October 1970. Actually, during a decade being in this important position, he aimed at managing the promotion of the mission of the Church to all ends of the globe. As a result, the visits during his years as Patriarch were later supplemented by his new official visits dur-

ing his presidency of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in the Catholic Church, which brought great recognition and love to the Armenian cleric.

It should be stated that Aghajanian courageously began his missionary work, becoming the first prefect to personally visit the missions of Africa, Asia, and Oceania. On multiple visits, he visited Pakistan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Burma, Taiwan, Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Japan, India, and other countries in an effort to make direct contact with the believers in those regions. His mission as a spiritual missionary and the voice of faith was to earn so many nations for Christ. Therefore, being responsible for the Middle Eastern, African, and Asian countries, he was able to manage, arrange, and conduct the missionary works with the help of thousands of priests, deacons, brothers, and nuns in missionary areas of such a huge territory.

In light of the preserved and present-day reachable documents of the Propaganda Fide archival vaults, it is revealed that Prefect Aghajanian, in this position, acted very professionally, closely followed the formation of Catholic missionaries throughout the world, and was largely responsible for the liberalization of the Church's policies in developing nations. In general, the documents kept in various archives attest to his successful dialogues and interventions, both with spiritual and secular authorities. These also bring to light that he was a strong advocate for the spread of the faith and that his pastoral mission and diplomacy were in perfect harmony. And finally, these documents attest to and uncover his diligence and dedication to his spiritual and administrative service, revealing the abilities through which he was able to manage things and combine everything despite the overwhelming conditions and his deteriorating health. In 1970, just the latter circumstance forced him to resign this position. However, for nearly a decade, he gave his maximum efforts in this position—to spread the faith.

Since the large parts of the archives related the mid-20th century are still closed, it is difficult to understand the depths of a number of circumstances. Hopefully, in the near future, the researchers will study and assess the broader scope of the activities of Aghajanian, as well as understand why he was the best for this most important position, and finally reveal his activity depths in various dimensions and levels.

### **The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965): Aghajanian's Participation and Contribution**

It is known that the Second Council of the Vatican aimed to address relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world. In essence, up to date, it is considered one of the most significant events in the history of Catholicism. And as we have already mentioned above, Pope John XXIII, who headed the 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, aimed to transform papal diplomacy in relation to the means of spiritual renewal for the church and to be an occasion for Christians separated from Rome to join in a search for Christian unity (announced in January 1959). And in this context, his attempts are obvious in bringing a more open and conciliatory approach to papal diplomacy. Therefore, his convocation of the Second Vatican Council marked a significant shift towards engagement with the modern world and interfaith dialogue. Since John XXIII emphasized universal peace, justice, and social development as critical aspects of the Church's mission in global affairs, he promoted a vision of diplomacy that sought cooperation over confrontation and reflected the commitment of the Church to global issues. His successor, Pope Paul VI, in his turn, contributed to the continued spread of ecumenism by promoting inter-Christian dialogue, highlighting human rights, and emphasizing the importance of interfaith dialogue. Overall, this historical period was defined by the attempts of the Vatican to influence global issues through moral authority, humanitarian efforts, and political engagement while adapting to the quickly changing international environment of the 20th century.

Thus, Cardinal Aghajanian attended the Second Vatican Council and was on the coordinating committee, and also a member of the Board of Presidency. In fact, he was one of the four famous moderators of that assembly, together with the cardinals, the Belgian Leo Joseph Suenens, the German Julius Döpfner, and the Italian Giacomo Lercaro. In this Council, in fact, one of Aghajanian's most significant missions was his direct involvement in it, where he acted for increased ecumenical dialogue and understanding among Christian denominations, particularly in the context of promoting relationships between the Catholic Church and Eastern Churches in general. The leading circles of the Second Vatican Council, and the pope himself, were eager for a pastoral council and one of renovation so that the Catholic teachings could be better understood and accepted in 20th-century society; in short, they wanted to make the best effort to offer to the modern world, at the same time preserving the integrity of its doctrine.

It is known that the Second Vatican Council produced sixteen documents that enacted many modernizing changes in the church. One of Aghajanian's notable achievements at this ecumenical council was his indirect influence and significant role in the final drafting of *Ad gentes* (i.e., *Decree on the missionary activity of the Church*) and *Gaudium et spes* (i.e., *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*) that called on the Church to engage in dialogue with contemporary society and its problems, bringing church teaching and moral values to bear on a world too often torn by hatred, war, and injustice. (Paul VI, Decree, Nov. 18, 1965; Constitution, Dec. 7, 1965)

In fact, Aghajanian's presence was critical to the Second Vatican Council's framework. During the long-lasting period of the council sessions, he worked tirelessly to promote ecumenism, advocating for mutual understanding and cooperation among different Christian denominations, thus playing a significant role during that crucial historical time. He stood apart for his invested efforts, leadership and management abilities, and dedication to the Church's purpose by serving as one of the Council's four moderators. Currently known studies show that the substantial contribution to the Church's outreach and mission made by him was really in line with the Second Vatican Council's objectives to renew and include the Church in that time's contemporary world.

*Summarizing his career, we can note that he was a prominent figure in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, particularly known for his work in the Eastern Catholic Churches, in the field of propagation of the faith, and his contributions to the Second Vatican Council. His biography provides evidence that he was constantly present, always and everywhere. Between 1960 and 1970, he also participated in the First Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (Vatican City, September 29 to October 29, 1967); then the First Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (Vatican City, October 11 to 28, 1969); he was a Camerlengo of the Sacred College of Cardinals (April 28, 1969 - May 18, 1970); as well as a Cardinal bishop of the title of the suburbicarian see of Albano (October 22, 1970).*

### **One of the Most Likely Candidates for Pope of Rome in the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Cardinal Aghajanian was twice (1958, 1963) considered one of the possible candidates for the Pope of Rome, as one of the most central figures in various important events in the Vatican. Despite the fact that information regarding papal conclaves is currently kept secret and still remains closed, however various sources indicate that he was twice considered a *papable* for the papal throne.

After the death of Pius XII, in the conclave, Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) won. Various contemporaries allude to the close, friendly relations between Pope John XXIII and Cardinal Aghajanian. Perhaps this could explain the fact why he remained one of the busiest figures in the Vatican palace during his rule. After the death of John XXIII in 1963, the name of Aghajanian again ap-

peared on the list of papal candidates. But in the conclave of 1963, Paul VI (1963-1978) was elected.

Various theories circulate as to why the cardinal, who enjoyed high fame both in the Roman Curia and in various Italian circles, was not elected Pope. It is difficult to say what actually happened during the elections, especially when the archives of the two elected popes are still closed. Therefore, to draw conclusions based on inaccurate facts is not fair. Yet, researchers are still waiting for the publicity of Vatican documents relating to the period to observe the events and circumstances of that time more deeply. Still-closed documents will surely uncover the most important and headline-making events in modern history, including the elections of the two Popes and every rule and circumstance of this secretive process, as well as the rich history behind the conclaves of 1958 and 1963, and the key issues that have shaped that time's Catholic Church. Probably, there may appear historical and political factors, internal and external circumstances, and finally, inter-church or personal issues. So, nobody knows the exact essence of the circumstances. Therefore, bypassing the presentation of many assumptions and ignoring their examination, one thing can be guessed: the push out of Armenian Cardinal Aghajanian was most likely handled in the ecclesiastical and political backstage, the comprehensive disclosure of which is still to come.

*The only truth that remains undeniable is that only one priest of Armenian descent has ever reached the final round of papal elections, widely regarded as one of the most likely candidates for the papacy. Therefore, if a priest of Armenian descent were to become head of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, the twentieth century could become not only epochal in the history of the Universal Church but also momentous in the lives of all Armenians.*

### **The Road to Sainthood: Beatification**

A few years ago, the Armenian Catholic synod decided to initiate the canonization cause of Cardinal Aghajanian, and in 2022 (October 28, in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran) applied to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for the official beginning of the canonization process. Thus, the cause of the beatification and canonization of the 'Servant of God' Gregory Peter XV Aghajanian, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Catholic Armenians and Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, who died in Rome in 1971, is currently in the process. It is under the control of His Beatitude Raphael Peter XXI Minassian, the Patriarch-Catholicos of the Armenian Catholic Church of Cilicia.

It is important to state that even today, with his heavenly presence, the Armenian cardinal continues his pro-Armenian contribution and support within the walls of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, with his image and name, whose authority is of high importance and instructive in various dimensions. His activities are invaluable in terms of pastoral, diplomatic, cultural, charitable, and national preservation of Armenian identity in general. He possessed and had the levers, knowledge, and practical skills through which he acted, the contribution of which is undeniable.

We believe the beatification of Cardinal Aghajanian will become a moment of profound spiritual and historical significance. Apart from its commemorative value, it will serve as a valuable occasion to promote a wide collaboration among the various Christian churches. By honoring his remarkable pastoral path and his tireless dedication to promoting ecumenical dialogue, the sainthood road could act as a key catalyst for increasing involvement and cooperation among faith communities, especially with those with whom he has had shared deep and valuable connections, serving in his above-mentioned positions within the Vatican. Such a significant event will contribute to a more powerful and genuine Christian testimony in the present-day global context.

The process of beatification and canonization is underway...with the expectation of miracles.

### Conclusion

Thus, according to the studies, there have been notable advancements in the modern diplomacy of the Vatican from the perspective of the acceptance of varied national and racial representation within the Roman Catholic Church, particularly from the mid-20th century onwards. And the representation of Cardinal Aghajanian may be considered one of such accomplishments.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which placed a strong emphasis on ecumenism and communication with the modern world while going beyond Eurocentrism, was crucial and necessary in the Church's history given the circumstances of the mid-20th century. An Armenian Cardinal played a significant role in this context with his involvement and participation. Having held several positions in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, he has invested his utmost abilities, all of which came with a lot of responsibility. His most famous career has included holding some of the most prominent positions in the Holy Roman Catholic Church (within the Curia of the Holy See). Both his pastoral mission and pastoral diplomacy were most effective between 1937 and 1970, as indicated by the following positions, in addition to those already listed above. He served as a papal legate to the Marian Congress, Saigon, South Vietnam (January 31, 1959), then to the Patrician Congress, Dublin, Ireland (June 15 to 23, 1961), to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of the death of St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, and then to the 38th International Eucharistic Congress, Bombay, India (November 11, 1964). His efforts were not limited to internal and external church relations; in essence, he also engaged with various geopolitical issues, particularly in the Middle East, where he has sought to address the concerns of Armenian and Christian communities in general of that historical period. Since he served his people first as a priest and patriarch, his ecclesiastical and pastoral legacy had a long-lasting impact in the Middle Eastern Armenian communities, which is still felt today.

Regarding his image, it should be stated that there are a few important features in his: the first is that this talented Armenian emphasized his Armenian identity, his belonging, and his unflinching dedication to the idea of Armenian identity in all episodes and stages of his activity. As was mentioned above, as an Armenian cleric, he communicated with various political and spiritual figures of the world at the time, and he always emphasized his Armenian identity everywhere, and everybody perceived him just that way. In particular, the geography of his contacts was large: Europe, the Middle East, Asia, American coasts, etc., and he enjoyed great respect everywhere. His pastoral papers bring to light the details of his pastoral visits to the diaspora and talks in Armenian-populated areas, where he consistently advocated for Armenian-centricity, urging people to preserve the language, culture, history, and Christianity, and, most importantly, protecting the interests of Armenians.

The next feature of his activity is that, in addition to preserving the Armenian profile, he became a witness and participant in the most serious processes in the world's spiritual, ecclesiastical, and political spheres of the mid-20th century, sometimes also being within a small group of decision-makers. As his contemporaries attest, he was really a high authority in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, whose advice was of high importance to the popes of the time and the clergy of his rank.

Basically, in his global activities, he not only tried to maintain his Armenian origin, but also, by all possible and impossible methods, to bring it to the forefront and to position himself within the walls of the Holy Roman Catholic Church as an Armenian and a representative of a people that, in both Christianity and world civilization, had and will have its most important role. As a high-ranking cleric of the Armenian Catholic Church, he dedicated his life to bridging cultural, educational, and religious-missional issues among the Armenian-populated regions and communities in the Middle East, thus contributing to national preservation. Appointed as a cardinal, he continued to

be a crucial Armenian voice, investing his utmost efforts in the recognition of its unique heritage within the Universal Church. Finally, the heritage of Cardinal Aghajanian had a lasting impact on the approach of the Holy Roman Catholic Church to inter-ecclesiastical relations, and ecumenism to this day. It is obvious that his influence extended beyond ecclesiastical boundaries, as he actively engaged in interfaith dialogue that is current to this day. His clerical missions and virtues are characterized by a deep respect for cultural identity and a commitment to peace, making him a prominent figure in mid-20th-century Church history, although his individuum is not fully revealed and studied on a large scale yet. Thus, the distinctive characteristics of his biography focus on the numerous links that combine and complete the image of the Armenian priest on the global horizon of Christ's mission entrusted to His Church. All these make him a memorable figure in the Universal Church of the mid-20th century and, undoubtedly, one of the pioneering figures in the Vatican.

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