

# CHRISTIANITY & GOVERNANCE ©

## PROGRESS OF A FAITH FROM A STREET SEMINAR TO A STATE STRUCTURE



In 301, Armenia, an independent kingdom, acknowledged Christianity as the official state religion. The country's monarch, Tiridates III had been converted to Christianity by St. Gregory the Illuminator. Related harrowing developments leading up to that historic date were considerable. Nevertheless, all forms of paganism were promptly and decisively eliminated, a significant achievement, thus establishing a broad and progressive set of values and traditions. Unfortunately, its western neighbour, the Roman Empire was to suffer significant Christian persecutions even after Armenia acknowledged the new faith. Indeed, persecutions initiated during the reformist Emperor Diocletian's rule were the worst in Roman history – Saints were martyred.



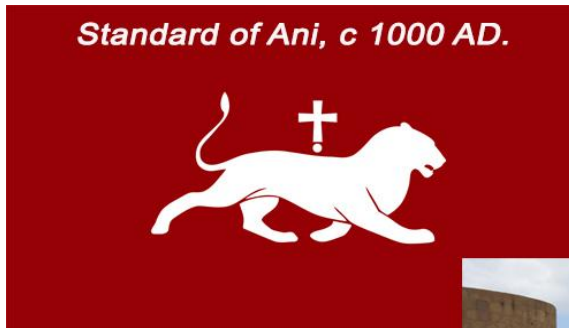
The Ark comes to rest. Noah descends from the Sacred Mountain and plants a vineyard in the Ararat Valley. The illustration is a detail from Aivazovsky's 19th Century painting, *Noah Descending Mount Ararat*.

The rise of Constantine the Great, however, altered the situation significantly. In 313, the edict of Milan, proclaimed in the Western half of the divided Empire, permanently established religious tolerance for Christians. By incrementally defeating his adversaries, Constantine united the Western and Eastern sectors of the Roman Empire in 324. A year later he presided over the Church's first Ecumenical Council at Nicea in north western Anatolia. Shortly after, the Greek city of Byzantium was extended and in 330 declared the capital of the Roman Empire. It is also referred to as Constantinople. The city of Rome remained a regional capital. By the Emperor's death in 337, Christianity was decisively on the ascent. Nevertheless, in a broad geographic setting, it had to compete with former pagan gods and traditions.

In 380, the Edict of Thessalonica, declared by Emperor Theodosius I, established Christianity as the official state religion of the Roman World. It prohibited Roman polytheism effectively. As a result, it advanced to the level attained by Armenia decades earlier. Theodosius I was the last emperor to rule over the Western and Eastern sectors of the Empire. A most progressive aspect of a Civilisation was confidently in motion, it was to become Global.



[Cartography of Armenia](#)

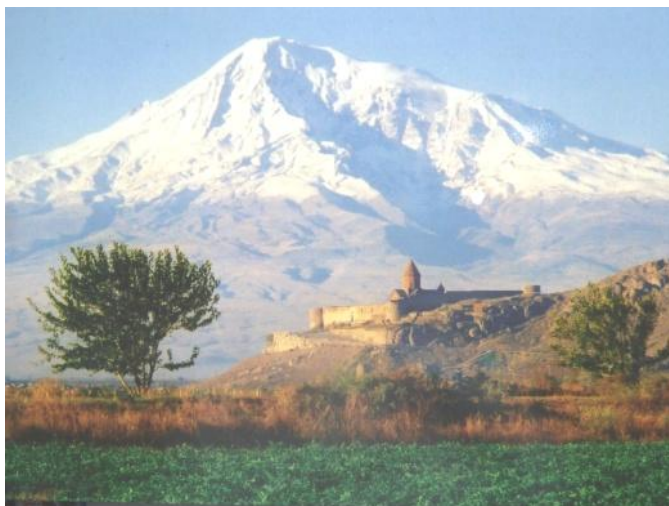


The Vatican and the World Council of Churches have given significant importance to Armenia's pioneering embrace of Christianity. In 2001 Pope John Paul visited Armenia on the occasion of the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its adoption of Christianity and declared: ' God Bless Armenia'.

Stepping back in time, it is prudent to highlight that the First Century Apostles, Bartholomew and Thaddeus, initiated the spread of Christianity in Armenia.



Later-day Saints – among a convention of thirty-five elect abbesses with leaders initiating from Rome – were to follow, during the late 280s. The country's medieval capital Ani is depicted as the City of 1001 Churches. Nonetheless, martyrdom was to encircle The Bible's Sacred Highland predominantly. Saving it from its perennial enemies can be looked upon as a Holy Vocation. Indeed, it is imperative to decisively eliminate all dangers aimed at the European Civilisation.



Originally, of course, the Roman educated Armenian King Tiridates III was inimical towards Christianity. Consequently, he imprisoned St. Gregory (c 257 – c 331) in a deep pit situated in the Ararat Valley, for alleged intrigues and proselytizing the new faith prominently. However, after 12 years and some tribulations Tiridates rescinded his order and permitted St. Gregory the Illuminator to step out of the pit. It is Christianity's first Global step into a broad array of multifarious state

structures progressively. In 2001 Pope John Paul descended into St. Gregory's pit. In 2015, due to the Genocide's centennial commemorative events, the Vatican held a Globally televised Papal Mass in St. Paul's Basilica. A year later, Pope Francis followed that enlightenment by visiting Armenia and conducting Mass together with the Armenian National Catholicos at the revered site. As illustrated, the pilgrimage site – with its first church built in 642 – is now encompassed within the Church of Armenia's Khor Virap monastery complex, majestically overlooked by Mount Ararat, as Providence decrees.

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