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THE RECENT CRISIS IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

By

Dickran Karnick Kouymjian

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the
requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Arab Studies of the
American University of Beirut

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PREFACE.....	iv
I	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II	THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CILICIA AND ETCHMIADZIN, 1441-1956.....	15
III	THE ELECTION OF THE CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA, February 1956.....	34
IV	FROM THE ELECTION TO THE CONSECRATION, February - September 1956.....	61
V	ANALYSIS.....	90
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	108

PREFACE

On February 20, 1956, His Grace Bishop Zareh Payasl-ian, Prelate of the Diocese of Aleppo, was elected Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia at Antelias, Lebanon. The election was contested and declared illegal by a minority of the Electoral Assembly, who, supported by a group of the Cilician Religious Brotherhood and a sizeable group of the Armenian faithful under the jurisdiction of the Cilician See, refused to recognize His Holiness Zareh I as the duly elected Catholicos. Further, the affair was complicated and brought out of its local context, effecting a crisis within the whole Armenian Church, by the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin who refused to accept the election of His Holiness Zareh I. The situation today remains with some modifications about the same with a portion of the Armenian Community of the See of Cilicia, which includes those faithful to the Armenian Apostolic Church in Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus,¹ and the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin still refusing recognition. It must be pointed out at the beginning that the disagreement does not concern religious matters; there is no doctrinal divergence nor the prospect of one in the future.

1. Since 1956 the jurisdiction of the See of Cilicia has been extended to The Armenian National Apostolic Church of North America, 1957; The Armenian Church of Iran and India (the Dioceses of Tabriz, Teheran, Ispahan-India), 1958; and the Diocese of Greece, 1958.

The dispute is the highest manifestation of jurisdictional differences within the Armenian Church and of political divisions within the Armenian Community of the diaspora. The crisis quickly aroused wide-spread interest among non-Armenian ecclesiastical and political groups in the Middle East. It received extensive coverage by the Lebanese and foreign press. For many it remains a confusing, incomprehensible problem. Thus far there has been no factual or objective study of the events in question; this work hopes to provide one.

The main body of the thesis will deal with a presentation of the events immediately prior, during and after the elections, roughly from February to September of 1956. However, in presenting a study accessible to the non-Armenian reader having scant knowledge of the Armenian Church or the modern Armenian Community, the events of 1956 will have no contextual meaning without an introduction. The introduction does not intend to give a concise historical, social or political outline of the Armenian Church or Community. It will present as brief a statement as possible concerning those particulars fundamental for comprehending the Armenian Church Crisis.

Finally, the position the Armenian Church occupies in the "Armenian Nation" must be kept in mind, especially by the non-Armenian reader, for a proper understanding of the Church Crisis. In 1910 prior to the great massacres and dispersion

of the Armenians a Frenchman, Bertrand Bareilles, said,

I have often had a very clear impression that even when he loses his faith, the Armenian never ceases to continue loyal to his Church. He instinctively feels that if she becomes undermined, all will crumble.²

In 1955, forty years after the great exodus from Armenia, Sarkis Atamian underlined the continuing importance of the Armenian Church in the diaspora:

The Armenian Church is not only a religious institution, it is even more eminently... a national institution which throughout its history, has been the progenitor of those cultural and social values that make the Armenian the entity he is.³

.....

In the final analysis the church remains the most sacred institution around which the current ideological battle is raging and the political segment which controls it will succeed in exerting a strong influence on the national sentiments of the Armenians throughout the world.⁴

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2. Malachia Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, p. xvi.
 3. Sarkis Atamian, The Armenian Community, p. 439.
 4. Ibid., p. 424.

I INTRODUCTION⁵

The Armenian Church⁶ is the world's first national Christian church. Through the work of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the King of Armenia, Tiridates III of the Arsacid Dynasty, who had received a pagan, Roman education, was converted to Christianity. In the year 301 A.D.⁷ he decreed that the Armenian nation accept Christianity as its state religion. This was more than a decade before the celebrated

5. Unless otherwise indicated most of the material relating to church history can be found in the standard reference, Malachia Ormanian (formerly Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople), L'Eglise Armenienne, the English translation by G. Marcar Gregory, The Church of Armenia, revised edition by Terenig Poladian, London, 1955.
6. Other names have been used to signify the Armenian Church, e.g. The Armenian Apostolic Church, The Armenian Orthodox Church, The Gregorian Church. I prefer simply the Armenian Church. However, this is not to be confused with the Armenian Catholic Church which gives allegiance to the Pope, nor the Armenians who follow the Protestant faith. The latter two groups are estimated to comprise only about 5% of the total Armenian population.
7. Other dates such as 278, 287, 313, have been suggested. Ormanian himself refers to 285 as possible, but prefers 301. See Ormanian, op.cit., p.8. See also Vardapet Karekin Sarkissian, Armenian Christian Literature, n.5, p.13.

Edict of Milan, 313 A.D., through which Emperor Constantine proclaimed that Christianity enjoy equal privileges with paganism in the Roman Empire.

In 302 A.D. with the help of Leontius, the Greek Bishop of Caesaria in Cappodocia, St. Gregory was made the first Catholicos⁸ of the Armenian Church. Tradition has it that shortly after the conversion of the Armenian nation, Christ appeared to St. Gregory and bade him erect a cathedral near the Armenian city of Vagharashapat (near the present Erivan) at the foot of snow-capped Mt. Ararat. This the saint proceeded to do, calling the Christian installation "Etchmiadzin", the place of the "Descent of the Only Begotten". A more practical explanation for the site is that the Armenian Royal Court of Tiridates was at the time located at Vagharashapat. The aid, protection and immediate prestige of the civil authority gave the church the security and stability it needed to flourish.

8. The Catholicos is the supreme head of the Armenian Church. He holds the highest rank in the hierarchical system of the church and enjoys the power and privilege of ordaining bishops and blessing the Holy Chrism. He is at times forced to be the national leader. "...Political figures as well as religious, the Catholicoi... on many occasions have been forced by the interests of the nation to act as the real rulers of the Armenian people. Foreign subjugation of Armenia has long deprived Armenians of self-rule and political rights and has at the same time invested the office with very great moral and political authority." Vahe Sarafian, "The Soviet and the Armenian Church", The Armenian Review, VIII, No.2, (summer, 1955), p.83.

In the next century and a half, spurred on by the zeal of Christian conversion, Armenia underwent its Golden Age of Letters. With the creation of an Armenian alphabet in 404/6 A.D. by St. Mesrop, there was a great flow of religious literature dominated by the translation of the Holy Bible by St. Mesrop and St. Sahag, and their disciples known as the "Holy Translators".

During these years, both the Catholicos of the Armenian Church and the Armenian Royal Court reigned at Vagharashapat. However,

The Armenian patriarchate (Catholicossate) has never derived its designation from any fixed place of residence; it has always been called, The Patriarchate of All Armenians.... On the strength of this title it has always been able to set itself up in that central spot in the nation where happened at the time to be the political pivot of authority in the land. Etchmiadzin, the original residence, contemporaneous with the proclamation of Christianity as the official religion, remained identical with the capital Vagharashapat, only till the beginning of the fourth century.⁹

In 452 the Catholicos after the pagan Persian invasion of the Vagharashapat region moved his residence to the Armenian city of Dovin, where the Armenian royalty had already taken refuge. Later in 485 Catholicos Havhan Mandakouni officially transferred the seat of the Armenian Catholicossate to Dovin; it moved to the island of Aghthamar in the district of Vasbourakan (Van) in 927. There it remained until the Seljuk Turk invasion

9. Ormanian, op.cit., p.37.

of Armenia forced the Catholicos to move his throne to the village of Argina near Ani in 947, once again following the civil authority of the nation, the Armenian royalty. Further invasions caused a series of rapid changes for the Catholicos-
sate: 992 to Ani, 1062 to Tavplour, 1072 to Dzamentav, 1116 to Dzovk, 1149 to Romkla, and finally in 1293 to the capital of the Kingdom of Lesser Armenia (Cilicia), the city of Sis.¹⁰

But the peace and security were again short-lived. The Kingdom of Lesser Armenia finally succumbed to the forces of the Egyptian Mamelukes in 1375, bringing to an end the last remnant of an independent Armenian nation until the Republic of 1918-21. The Catholicos was once again not only in danger, but now isolated and deprived of any civil authority and protection it had under the tutelage of the Christian Armenian nobility. The Kingdom of Cilicia was occupied by Moslem Mamelukes and Armenia Major in the northeast by the Moslem Persians. There was no longer an Armenian city, neither Etchmiadzin, Sis, nor any other, which could provide safe refuge for Church and Catholicos.

In the mean time there was a resurgence of religious activity in Armenia Major. A reawakened interest in the Church, fear of the Church's position in Mameluke controlled

10. Instead of Ormanian, op.cit., I used as a more accurate source for the dates of the peregrinations of the Catholicoi of this period, Babgen Gulesserian, The History of the Catholicoi of Cilicia, p.6.

Cilicia, and especially an intensified Roman Catholic interference, precipitated a movement which favored the transfer of the Catholicossate back to Etchmiadzin, because of the relatively better security this town enjoyed under Persian domination. In May 1441 a National Assembly of seven hundred members, composed of bishops, archimandrites, doctors of divinity, arch-priests, princes and dignitaries was called at Etchmiadzin. The Assembly approved a decision to move the Catholicossate back to the place of its origin. However, Catholicos Grigor IX Musabekiantz, who did not personally attend the National Assembly, remained at Sis.¹¹

In view of this situation the National Assembly proceeded to elect another Catholicos. There was great rivalry among the various candidates who aspired to the throne and to put a stop to possible future conflict, Kirakos Virapetzi, an ecclesiastic of a saintly character and one who had not taken part in the agitation preceding the election, was voted Catholicos. His Holiness Kirakos immediately communicated his best wishes to Catholicos Musabekiantz at Sis, never questioning his authority and considering him his spiritual equal. Strangely enough the National Assembly was apparently not bothered by the existence of another Catholicos, for it neither demanded nor requested Musabekiantz to give up his title as Catholicos. Furthermore, the aged Catholicos did not contest

11. Cf. infra chap. II, p.15.

the new election on his part. There were, therefore, two Armenian Catholicos.¹² However, in 1443 Catholicos Kirakos resigned, fed up with the intrigues going on around him. Again the machinations of rival candidates caused a very fluid and unstable situation at Etchmiadzin. There followed in rapid succession a series of Catholicos too numerous to enumerate, in which violent usurpation was the common manner of succession.

While turmoil was prevailing at Etchmiadzin, Catholicos Musabekiantz died at Sis. In 1446 the Congregation at Sis, viewing the occurrences at Etchmiadzin with anxiety and perhaps suspicion, chose a successor, Karapet of Tokat, to continue as the Catholicos of Cilicia. A pattern was initiated, and as Catholicos followed Catholicos both at Etchmiadzin and Sis administrative and jurisdictional independence resulted, while a firm religious and spiritual unity was preserved. Relations between the two Sees in the 500 years interim have been, except for two minor occasions,¹³ marked by

12. This was not an unprecedented event. In Aghthamar a rival Catholicossate had been established in 1104. An extraordinary National Assembly censured it in 1114, but in 1409 a rapprochement was effected with the Mother See, which was then at Sis. Its jurisdiction covered the dioceses of Aghthamar, Van and Bitlis. In 1915-18 the Turks eliminated the problem of the Catholicos of Aghthamar by simply eliminating all Armenians in the area. See Ormanian, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-38, 43, 76.

13. Cf. *infra*, chap. II, pp. 16-20.

friendly Christian brotherhood and cooperation.

Under the Persian Empire Etchmiadzin maintained itself at times precariously as the Mother See. The situation remained thus until 1827 when Russia successfully defeated the Persian forces in the Caucasus, taking control of that portion of Armenia which contained Etchmiadzin. In 1836 the Tsarist government issued a statute, Polojenia, which regulated the administrative functions of the See, including the mode of the election of the Catholicos. Later in 1843 a synod at Etchmiadzin elaborated the rules and regulations of the Polojenia.¹⁴ This statute remained operative for the Armenians of Russia until its abolition after the Revolution of 1917.

On the other hand the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Sis continued to administer the Armenian churches within the jurisdiction of its own dioceses.

Today in addition to the two Catholicosal Sees there are the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople. Both are under the jurisdiction of Etchmiadzin. The former, established early in the Christian Era, is mainly concerned with the preservation of Armenian rights and possessions in the Holy Land, especially the Cathedral of St. James. The

14. For a brief summary of some of the essential provisions of the Polojenia, see L'Eglise Arménienne, an official publication of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, 1936, p. 38.

Patriarch is elected by a general council of the religious brotherhood. Prior to the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Patriarch of Constantinople had to approve the election. After the occupation of Palestine the British made the Patriarch of Jerusalem independent of Constantinople; approval by the King of England was substituted.¹⁵ Today approval of the Patriarchal election has become the right of the Jordanian Government. The Patriarchate has along with Antelias and Etchmiadzin one of the three remaining Armenian seminaries,¹⁶ as well as a priceless collection of Armenian religious relics and one of the best existing Armenian libraries. Archbishop Elishe Derderian has just recently (1960) been recognized Patriarch by the Jordanian Government after a long and bitter struggle with Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan. The Jerusalem Throne had been vacant since the death of Patriarch Cyril II in 1949.

The Patriarch of Constantinople, though technically under the jurisdiction of Etchmiadzin, has been the autonomous head of the Armenian Community of the Ottoman Empire and now the Republic of Turkey. Since the majority of Armenians lived under the Sultan during the 19th century and up

15. During the British Mandate two patriarchs, Elishe Tourian, 1921-30, and his successor Torgom Koushagian, 1931-39, actually received approval from the King, *ibid.*, p.42.

16. Recently a new seminary was established in Istanbul under the auspices of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

to the collapse of the Empire in 1918, he was de facto the most powerful Armenian cleric in the world. As one of the conquered nations which made up the vast Ottoman Empire and in lieu of their Christianity, the Armenians became part of the Christian Millet established by Mahomet II in 1453 and headed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch. The millet system provided minority communities (mostly non-Moslem which were tolerated, but considered inferior) within the Empire with a degree of autonomy in the regulation of domestic, religious and civic affairs. In 1461 Bishop Hovakim of Bursa was called to Constantinople by Mahomet II, who declared him Patriarch of the Armenians and head of the newly formed Armenian Millet, Ermeni Millet, assuring him the same jurisdiction and honors as the Greek Patriarch.

In 1860 the Armenian National Constitution was drawn up and in 1863 officially recognized by a firman of the Sultan as the legal instrument of the Ermeni Millet. The Constitution confirmed the Patriarch of Constantinople as the head of all Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The Patriarch was to be elected by the Armenian National Assembly, which was a nationally elected body composed of clerical and lay representatives, and confirmed by a firman of the Sultan. In addition the Constitution prescribed the rules and

regulations for the administration of the Armenian millet.¹⁷ However, all this came to an end with World War I and the collapse of the Empire. The near successful Turkish attempt at genocide, resulting in the slaughter of 1,500,000 Armenians, and the work of the Kemalist government after the war, reduced the Patriarchate of Constantinople to an ineffectual religious center, feebly trying to accommodate the spiritual needs of the 80,000 Armenians left in Turkey.¹⁸ The National Constitution was reduced; the church was stripped of its properties; secular privileges were abrogated; and all schools were secularized. Technically the National Assembly and its councils still administer the affairs of the community.¹⁹ The present Patriarch, His Beatitude Archbishop Karekin Khachadourian, is the eldest high ranking Armenian clergyman

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17. The Constitution in part is still used to administer the Armenian Communities of the Middle East. The next chapter will elaborate this point. The complete text of the Armenian National Constitution of 1863 appears in H.F.B. Lynch, Armenia, Travels and Study, Vol. II, Appendix I, pp. 445-467.
18. Before World War I the Patriarch of Constantinople had 51 dioceses under his jurisdiction including the Armenian Communities of Egypt, Bulgaria, Roumania, and Greece; today it administers the few churches left in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul. For a complete list of the dioceses with the number of churches, clergy, and followers for each, both prior to 1910 and today, see in Ormanian, op.cit., appendices II and III, pp. 205-212.
19. Catholicossate of Cilicia, op.cit., p.43.

in the world.

Turning away from the church for a moment, in the political domain the 19th century saw the Armenians, as so many other national groups under the Ottoman and Russian Empires, experience a national awakening. Though initially limited to cultural endeavors, it led in the 1880's and 90's to the formation of Armenian revolutionary organizations; first in Russia, where the various anti-Tsarist secret revolutionary societies set a strong precedent, offering Armenian intellectuals and students studying in Moscow and St. Petersburg first hand experience, but then quickly spreading to the Armenian provinces in eastern Turkey, where the conditions of the Armenian peasant unlike his rich counterpart in Constantinople were becoming intolerable.²⁰

The activities of these revolutionary organizations finally bore fruit with the help of the international fluidity caused by the Great War. Two epoch making events, the Russian Revolution and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, allowed the Armenian Revolutionary Armies to consolidate their gains and drive the Turkish Army out of a good part of the traditional homeland. On May 28, 1918, following the lead of Georgia and Azerbaijan a few days prior, Armenia declared herself an independent republic. After almost 600 years of

20. For further information on the development of Armenian revolutionary societies see Atamian, op.cit., pp.92-130.

foreign subjugation the dream of an independent Armenian nation was realized. The Mother See of Etchmiadzin was once again united with the seat of Armenian civil authority at the capital of the Armenian Republic, Erivan.

With the virtual destruction of the Armenians of Turkey, and the scattering of the survivors to the far lands of the world, Etchmiadzin became an increasingly important source of authority and national consciousness. Armenians looked to Etchmiadzin, and to the Armenian Independent Republic established around it by the efforts of the A.R.F. (The Armenian Revolutionary Federation), for a national life.²¹

For two and a half years despite the desperate economic situation, and an uncertain future vis-a-vis her neighbors, Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia, there was a passionate, austere joy in Armenia and among all Armenians scattered throughout the world.

However, the utopian dream was soon to give way to the realities of a war-weary world. The policies of the Great Powers were guided by power politics and personal interests, any relation to living ideas of self-determination or previously made promises being purely coincidental. Though recognizing the Republic of Armenia and pledging their support, when the time came for action the Great Powers soon forgot their "Little Ally". Faced by a severe depression and in desperate need of revenue; deprived of half the world's Armenian population, victims of the brutal Turkish massacres; threatened

21. Sarafian, op.cit., p.89.

from the south and east by the advancing Kemalist army, and from the north and west by the advancing Bolshevik forces; the Independent Republic of Armenia came to an end as poignant and full of sorrow for Armenians as the cold-blooded massacre of their relatives and friends just five short years before. Turkey took the western provinces of Kars, and Ardahan, while the Soviet Union split the rest of the homeland between the newly created Republic of Soviet Socialist Armenia and Ezerbaijan.²²

With the sovietization of that portion of Armenia containing Etchmiadzin, the anti-religious policies of the Communist followers of Marx and Lenin found a new church to persecute. As with the Orthodox Church in Russia proper, the Armenian Church became the "enemy of the state", therefore, of the people, since the two were equated. All churches were closed, many being destroyed or used as state storage houses; the clergy were killed, beaten or exiled; all church properties were seized by the state and precious relics sold; the faithful were discouraged, by force when necessary, from worshipping or participating in religious services; schools were seized and secularized; and the theological seminary of

22. For a full account of the vicissitudes of the Independent Republic of Armenia see Atamian, op.cit., pp. 204-257, and Simon Vratzian (former Prime Minister of the Republic), The Republic of Armenia, chaps. 14-17, pp. 145-204.

Etchmiadzin was closed.²³ It was only in the hearts of the Armenians of the diaspora that Etchmiadzin remained the Mother See, the Catholicosate of All Armenians.

Thus, with both the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and the Patriarch of Constantinople virtually paralysed, the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia became indispensable to the Armenian Nation.

23. Sarafian, op.cit., p. 91.

II THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CILICIA AND ETCHMIADZIN, 1441-1956.

The relationship between the See of Cilicia and the Mother See of Etchmiadzin, though at times hostile, has generally been congenial during the past five hundred years. In this chapter a very general historical record of the relationship will be investigated.

It is with the reestablishment of the Holy See at Etchmiadzin in 1441 that the Cilician See as an independent Catholicosate begins. The fact that Catholicos Grigor Musabekiantz did not leave Sis and go to Etchmiadzin, and the subsequent election of Kirakos Virapetzi as the new Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, resulted in the creation of two Catholicosates. The situation itself was not unique since the Catholicosate of Aghthamar had existed independently from the 11th century.¹ However, what is unusual is the total lack of any record left by the National Assembly of 1441 (if indeed there was any action taken) regarding the future state of Catholicos Grigor in Sis. Catholicos Babgen Gulesserian in his The History of Catholicoi of Cilicia gave an undocumented, personal interpretation of what might have happened. He felt it would be natural to expect that the Assembly would have forced its decision upon Musabekiantz, and if he still persisted in his obduracy, excommunicate him. Thus, Babgen speculated the

1. Cf. chap. I, n. 12, p. 6.

Assembly tacitly accepted the existence of the Cilician Catholicossate as a special throne, much the same as Aghthamar had functioned for centuries.²

There are no known documents concerning Catholicos Musabekiantz's reaction to the Assembly's action. Babgen again speculated he did not protest the election of Virapetzi. However, Virapetzi acknowledged the separate existence of Sis in an encyclical letter from which we have a quotation.

Let the Catholicoi, bishops, vardapets, priests, deacons, monks and all the faithful of Sis be blessed, and those who are bound be loosed, and those who are anathematised be delivered from the chains of sin.³

It has been conjectured that the clergy both at Sis and Etchmiadzin awaited the death of Musabekiantz as a solution to the problem of two Catholicoi.⁴ Events were to move quickly, however, for Virapetzi apparently unable to endure the power politics among the high ranking clergy surrounding him withdrew in 1443, leaving the throne of Etchmiadzin vacant. A struggle for power ensued, which ended in the election of Bishop Grigor Djalalbekian as Catholicos of Etchmiadzin.⁵

2. B. Gulesserian, *op.cit.*, col. 1212.
3. The text uses the words of the Gospel of St. Matthew 18:18, *ibid.*, col. 1212, n. 2.
4. Mihran Herardian, "Interrelations of the Etchmiadzin and Cilician Patriarchal Sees", *Armenian Review*, IX, no. 2 (summer, 1956), p. 22.
5. For further details see Malachia Ormanian, *Azgapatoum*, Vol. II, p. 2130.

While Djalalbekian was Catholicos at Etchmiadzin, the aged Musabekiantz of Sis died. The year of his death is not definitely fixed; the generally accepted date is 1443. In 1446 Bishop Karapet of Eudocia was elected the new Catholicos of Cilicia. There have been many guesses by scholars as to what happened during the five years between 1441-46. The most popular opinion is conditions at Etchmiadzin became unstable enough that the clergy at Sis finally decided to elect a successor and keep the See of Cilicia going. However, in a recently published collection of Armenian colophons of the 15th century two manuscripts written in 1444 still mention Musabekiantz as the Catholicos of Cilicia.⁶ This perhaps indicates there was never any intention on the part of the Cilician clergy to discontinue the Catholicossate, but that in fact Catholicos Musabekiantz died later than previously assumed. In any case the election of Catholicos Karapet in 1446 firmly established the existence of two Catholicossates.

Relations between the Sees remained cordial until the early 17th century. In 1633 Catholicos Philippos of Etchmiadzin challenged the jurisdictional rights of Catholicos Simeon of Sis. After the death of Simeon, the fight was continued into the reign of Nerses Sebastatzi who was elected Catholicos of Cilicia in 1647. However, within five years a successful

6. Levon Khachikian, Colophons of 15th Century Manuscripts, Vol. I, pp. 575, 576.

reconciliation was affected. In 1652 at Easter-time there was an historic meeting of the two Catholicoi, accompanied by a group of their respective clergy, held at Jerusalem. A written agreement was drafted and agreed to by each which delineated the jurisdiction of the respective Sees.

They (Philippos and Nerses) set canons, thirteen in number, which we will state in brief. The first of them is that there should be love and concord between the two Catholicoi of Etchmiadzin and Sis; each should ordain the bishops of his own jurisdiction and not from the other. If he ordains a candidate from the other jurisdiction he should place him in his own jurisdiction. If the incumbent moves from the jurisdiction of the Catholicos who consecrated him to the jurisdiction of the other Catholicos he should not be accepted.⁷

The Catholicoi left each other with brotherly feelings of peace and goodwill.

Once again a long period of normal and cordial relations followed. It is not until the end of the 19th century that the next clash between the Sees occurs. The Mother See of Etchmiadzin was occupied by Gevorg IV, former Patriarch of Constantinople, a thoroughly pious churchman, intellectual, educator and an authoritative and ambitious personality. Occupying the throne of Cilicia was the clever and aspiring Catholicos Muguerdich Kefsizian. Both men were guilty of excessive pride. Catholicos Kefsizian could not stand a

7. Anakel Tavrijetzi, a 17th century Armenian chronicler, p. 331-3, as cited by Guleserian, op.cit., p. 343-50.

position of inferiority to the Patriarch of Constantinople, a mere bishop.⁸

Kefsizian, after his election in 1871, was considered a possible threat to both the spiritual and political powers of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Catholicos Gevorg IV, likewise, could not bear the existence of the former as an independent Catholicos. On December 15, 1871, Gevorg issued an encyclical (no. 275) inviting Kefsizian to resign. In case of the latter's refusal he threatened to condemn him as a rebel and opponent. Kefsizian refused in an encyclical dated February 27, 1872. Catholicos Gevorg, therefore, declared the See of Cilicia schismatic and oppositional. He further rejected the legitimacy of the bishops ordained by the Cilician See, and went so far as to incorporate a provision in the Armenian Mashtots (Ordination Book) forbidding Cilician ordained bishops to officiate within the jurisdiction of Etchmiadzin unless they first knelt down at the

8. Though religiously the Patriarch of Constantinople and all the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (with the exception of the Cilician Dioceses) were under the authority of the Catholicos at Etchmiadzin, secularly and administratively they were under the Patriarch's control. The Armenian Constitution of 1863 gives him legal jurisdiction over the Armenian Millet. This power was much greater than any power, religious or secular, which the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin enjoyed, let alone the Cilician Catholicos.

altar of the Holy Cathedral, renewed their allegiance to Etchmiadzin and repented their error.⁹

The unilateral action of Gevorg remained in effect after his death in 1882 and throughout the reign of his successor Makar of Taghout. A reconciliation occurred during the illustrious reign of Catholicos Muguerdich Khrimian of Etchmiadzin. In 1895 three years after Khrimian's election, Catholicos Kefsizian died, bringing to a natural end the conflict between the Sees. In 1902 Bishop Sahag Khapayan was elected Catholicos of Cilicia. He had been director of the Armenian Monastery of St. James in Jerusalem during Khrimian's exile there by Sultan Abdul Hamid. The two had become close personal friends. Now finding themselves Catholicos of previously quarreling Sees, they were quick to eliminate any differences between Etchmiadzin and Sis for the good of the Armenian Church and Nation.

Khrimian's first move was to delegate two bishops from Constantinople to attend the consecration of Sahag on his behalf; however, neither bishop was able to go. But on April 10, 1902, he sent a personal telegram of congratulations.¹⁰ Then in 1903 Khrimian sent an encyclical (no. 634) of congratulations in which he declared the cancellation of

9. Ormanian, Azgapatoum, Vol. III, pars. 2819-2821, cols. 4273-4281, and pars. 2881, cols. 4444-4447.

10. Ibid., Vol. III, par. 3022, cols. 5142-5146.

the passage added by Gevorg IV in the Mashtots.¹¹ In a letter of July 7, 1903, he asks Catholicos Sahag on the occasion of his visit to the Sultan of Constantinople to consecrate as bishops those vardapets who had got their certificates from that city.¹² "Furthermore, in the ensuing years in all of his letters Catholicos Khrimian addressed the Catholicos of Cilicia as "his brother", "his co-equal", and similar cordial superlatives."¹³

Upon Khrimian's death, Catholicos Gevorg V Sureniantz continued the wise policy of his predecessor, maintaining a very friendly relationship with Cilicia. As an indication of Gevorg's attitude, when he completed the draft for proposed reforms in the Armenian church, he submitted the said draft to the prelates of the Cilician See as well as his own for study.¹⁴

The First World War not only ended all formal relations between the two Sees, but initiated a period in which the great centers of Armenian religious life - Etchmiadzin, Sis and Constantinople - struggled for their very existence. The once powerful Patriarchate of Constantinople was virtually destroyed by the extremely secular Kemalist regime in post-war Turkey. Etchmiadzin suffered a worse fate after

11. Gulesserian, op.cit., cols. 896-897.

12. Ibid., col. 897.

13. Herardian, op.cit., p. 27-8.

14. Ibid., p. 28.

the sovietization of the Independent Republic of Armenia in 1920-21.¹⁵ Cilicia also suffered greatly; the Catholicosate at Sis was destroyed and the Armenians killed or driven into the deserts of Syria. Catholicos Sahag followed his people and accepted all their adversities with them. The Armenians who survived found their way to the important cities of Syria and Lebanon - Aleppo, Beirut, Latakia, and Damascus.

Armenians throughout the world considered the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Gevorg V, a captive Catholicos, completely paralyzed by the Communists. All hope for the Armenian Church seemed to lay with Catholicos Sahag. From Sis he found his way to Aleppo and thanks to the help of General Weygand, French High Commissioner of Syria and Lebanon, was allowed to minister to the needs of his desperate followers, unmolested. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, who legally had jurisdiction over the Armenians of Beirut and Damascus, put Armenian church properties in these cities at Sahag's disposal.¹⁶

In 1929 Catholicos Sahag and Patriarch Elishe Tourian of Jerusalem had a conference in which the latter ceded not

15. Cf. *supra*, chap. I, pp. 13-14.

16. Besides churches there were large refuges for Armenian pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem in Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, and Latakia which were no longer being used; these helped to accommodate thousands of refugees.

only these properties, but his jurisdiction over the Dioceses of Damascus, Beirut, and Latakia.¹⁷ In the next year Catholicos Sahag moved to Lebanon, choosing the small coastal village of Antelias north of Beirut as the new site of the Cilician See. At Antelias the Near East Relief had operated an orphanage for Armenian children. After some negotiation they graciously gave the structure to the Cilician Catholicos. The orphanage was converted for use as the Catholicossate and a cathedral was soon built. Within the first year a new seminary was in operation; the official monthly publication, "Hask", was started in 1932. In 1931, because of his age, Sahag invited Archbishop Babgen Gulesserian, director of the seminary at Jerusalem and a great teacher and scholar, to assist him as coadjutor. An assembly was called which approved the invitation and on April 25, 1931, Babgen was consecrated Catholicos.

In 1932 Khoren I Mouradpekian was elected as Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, filling the throne left vacant by Gevorg V's death in 1930. Normal relations between the Sees were resumed, even though Khoren's activities were greatly restricted by the Soviet Government. On November 17, 1932 the coadjutors of Cilicia, Sahag and Babgen, sent a telegram of congratulations

17. French High Commissioner, Henri Ponset, was advised of the affair in April of 1929 and officially approved of the transfer on May 16, 1929. See Catholicossate of Cilicia, op.cit., p. 46.

to Khoren, who in turn sent a reply warmly thanking them.¹⁸ Later Catholicos Khoren sent a long letter to Sahag and Babgen stressing the close ties between the Sees, "Our soul is delighted and strengthened by seeing the Sees of the Armenian Church united in the bonds of love".¹⁹ In an encyclical of the same year there were several lines addressed again to the Catholicoi of Cilicia. "I am much delighted by the work you do and the successes you have made, which I regard as my own work".²⁰

As the 30's wore on Catholicos Khoren's work was ever more restricted. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 exemplifies Soviet sophistry. Article 124 states: "In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the USSR is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of an anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens."²¹ Khoren's tenacious resistance to the government's anti-religious policy finally resulted in his death in 1938.²² The authorities at

18. Hask, December 1932, p. 51.

19. Ibid., February 1933, p. 9.

20. Ibid., September - October 1933, p. 49.

21. It should be noted, though anti-religious propaganda is legalized, there is no reference to religious propaganda, which has in fact never been allowed. Constitution of the USSR, Art. 124.

22. Though the evidence is not absolutely reliable, many church authorities accept that Catholicos Khoren I was murdered by Soviet political agents. See Rouben Darbinian, "The Armenian Church Break", Armenian Review, X, no. 4 (winter 1957), p. 11.

Etchmiadzin did not seem anxious to elect a successor, leaving Cilicia with an even heavier burden. In 1935 Catholicos Babgen died and the aged Sahag appointed Archbishop Bedros Sarajian as locum tenens. In 1939 Sahag II died, and was succeeded by Archbishop Sarajian, who in turn died in September of 1940.

The locum tenens, Archbishop Garoyan, called together an Electoral Assembly in January 1941. The Assembly did not elect a Catholicos, but among other things approved a new constitution for the See of Cilicia. Article 8 increased the ratio of clergy to lay delegates from 1/7 to 1/3. More important, however, was Article 11 which provided for the participation of two delegates, one lay and one clergy, from Etchmiadzin in the future Cilician Catholicosal elections, while reciprocally allowing two delegates from Cilicia to take part in elections at Etchmiadzin.²³

In the fall of 1941 locum tenens Garoyan called for another Electoral Assembly to be held in December. He informed Etchmiadzin of its right to send one lay and one clerical delegate to participate as voting members in the Assembly. Etchmiadzin replied:

We received with pleasure the telegram sent to us for our delegation in the election of the Catholicos of Cilicia. Soon we will let you know the names of our ecclesiastical and lay delegates for obtaining visas.

Archbishop Choerekjian, locum tenens.²⁴

23. For the full text of the 1941 Constitution see Hask, March-April, 1941, pp. 48-50.

24. Hask, September - October, 1941, p. 149.

The delegates from Etchmiadzin, Archbishop Arsen Gheldjian and Mr. Hamparsum Arakelian, not only attended, but were extremely active. On the night of December 6 they sent a letter to locum tenens Garoyan which was read to the Electoral Assembly the next day. In the letter they accused the leading candidate Archbishop Karekin Khachadourian of not being an able administrator and of holding views inconsistent with the traditions of the Armenian Church. The religious brotherhood of Cilicia with only one exception,²⁵ supported the Etchmiadzin delegates and the election was postponed.²⁶

In 1943 another Electoral Assembly finally elected Archbishop Karekin Hovsepian, Prelate of North America, as Catholicos of Cilicia.²⁷ Due presumably to war conditions, neither the two delegates from Etchmiadzin, nor three delegates from various Cilician Dioceses were present.

In 1942, but not clearly noticeable until after World War II,

...The Soviet Government adopted a new religious policy: the (religious) persecutions stopped and the Kremlin instituted a modus vivendi with all denominations, on condition however that they would be loyal to the regime. The policy had been equally applied

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25. The single exception was Catholicos Zareh I at the time a young vardapet.
 26. For details on the Assembly see Hask, November-December, 1941, pp. 169-172.
 27. Due to wartime conditions Catholicos Karekin did not journey to Antelias until 1945; he was only consecrated then.

to the Armenian Church.²⁸

Despite this general change toward a more lenient religious policy, the See of Etchmiadzin was left vacant from 1938 to 1945. In the latter year an Electoral Assembly was held at Etchmiadzin, presided over by Catholicos Karekin of Cilicia. Cilicia had two representatives in accordance with the provisions of the 1941 Constitution. Locum tenens Choerekjian was the favorite candidate of the Etchmiadzin faction and was unanimously elected Catholicos Gevorg VI.

Relations in the next seven years until the death of Karekin of Cilicia in 1952 were cordial. Because the seminary at Etchmiadzin had been closed since 1921, the Antelias seminary often provided new priests for Dioceses of Etchmiadzin outside of the Soviet Union. There were no important disputes between the Sees during this period.

On June 21, 1952, Karekin Hovsepianz, Catholicos of Cilicia, passed away. According to the Cilician Constitution of 1941, an election for a new Catholicos should take place in not less than forty days and not more than six months. The locum tenens Archbishop Khat Atchabahian, set December 17 as the election date, but that date was postponed. It is in just this period that the present crisis has its beginnings. The October 1953 issue of Etchmiadzin (the official publication

28. La Documentation Française, La Situation de L'Eglise Armenienne, p. 6.

of the Catholicossate of Etchmiadzin) carried an editorial which expressed some very strong views on the Cilician See. Its main point was that the coming election transcended the jurisdiction of the Cilician See and was a problem of particular importance to all Armenians.

The question of the election of the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia today no longer represents a problem of purely local interest to the Dioceses of Cilicia; it interests all of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and is related to an ecclesiastical and national question of great importance: the question of unity. As a nation, we live in a politically complicated and difficult situation....The position of our Armenian people of the diaspora is very delicate, particularly the situation of the Cilician dioceses and of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is no longer a secret that one at present finds in the diaspora, mainly in Syria and Lebanon, the declared or secret enemies of the unity of the Armenian Apostolic Church, politically bribed, morally degenerated, and poor believers, who, in the midst of the least faithful, have wanted to destroy the solid unity of the Armenian people and the cohesion surrounding the church.²⁹

The editorial continues by stressing the recent cordiality between the Sees.

...In the course of the past fifty years, cordial relations have been established between the Mother See and the Catholicossate of Cilicia. This collaboration, beginning during the epoch of the pontificate of Khrimian and Khapayan, transformed itself into a tender friendship during the epoch of the pontificate of Gevorg VI and of

29. Etchmiadzin, October 1953, pp.3-4. Cf. La Documentation Française, op.cit., p. 8.

Karekin I,³⁰ whose successor will shortly be elected. This understanding is proved by the participation of the Catholicos of Cilicia at the 1945 Council at Etchmiadzin, which consecrated and regulated the cordial relations between the two Sees.³¹

It ends by proposing as candidate for the Catholicos of Cilicia locum tenens, Archbishop Khat,

...who enjoys not only the sympathy and the confidence of Etchmiadzin, but more the love and the sympathies, without reservation of the faithful...Armenian people of Cilicia... because he endeavored to tighten the lines which unite his church and the Mother Church.³²

The editorial drew a great reaction and attack from Armenian newspapers, mostly of the Tashnag party, throughout the world.³³

On May 9, 1954, Gevorg VI Catholicos of Etchmiadzin died leaving both Sees without spiritual leadership. His death was used as an occasion for a gathering of important Armenians in Etchmiadzin; Armenian lay and clergymen from around the world were invited to attend the funeral. From the Cilician See locum tenens Khat, the Prelates of Beirut, Aleppo, Damascus, and Cyprus, and various religious and lay figures were personally invited. A delegation led by Archbishop Khat

30. Ibid., p. 5.

31. The last part of this quotation from n.30 does not appear in ibid., but only in La Documentation Francaise, op.cit., p. 8.

32. Etchmiadzin, ibid., p. 6.

33. A sampling can be found in La Documentation Francaise, op.cit., pp. 9-11.

journeyed to Armenia, but the Prelates of Beirut (Bishop Khoren Paroyan) and Aleppo (Bishop Zareh Payaslian) refused to attend. Their position was unequivocally stated by Bishop Paroyan in an interview with the Beirut daily Aztag.

Etchmiadzin does not have the right to address directly the bishops, priests and laymen of our Catholicossate. A single telegram should have been addressed to the Catholicossate of the Great House of Cilicia, to the person of the locum tenens. It is up to him to decide which personalities he will call to form the delegation of the Catholicossate. Only the Catholicos of Cilicia has the right to enter into relations with the dioceses of his jurisdiction.³⁴

He further denounced Etchmiadzin's action as "...efforts of Etchmiadzin for imposing its control on the Holy See of Cilicia in the name of the preeminence and pan-Armenian character of the Supreme Catholicossate."³⁵ Adding

We consider that the two Catholicossates have the same competence and the same rights...We wish that our independence be respected and that Etchmiadzin renounces the addressing of our dioceses except through its hierarchy.³⁶

As in any time of crisis latent antipathies, resentments, and political machinations are brought to the fore. Relations between the vacant Sees were once again tense. December 17, 1954, was the next date for the Catholicosal Election, but again, because of friction in the Cilician See, postponed.

34. Aztag, September 28, 1954, as cited in ibid.,
p. 12.
35. Ibid.,
36. Ibid.

On June 17, 1955, at a meeting of the Cilician Brotherhood, presided over by locum tenens Khat, it was decided to set October 14 as the election date. The decision was unanimous and declared by Khat as definitive and irremissible. Etchmiadzin was notified of the date, but after a long delay sent a reply announcing its own elections, scheduled for the end of September, to fill the vacant throne of the Mother See. It further proposed that the Cilician election be postponed to a later date. Etchmiadzin had been delinquent in electing a new Catholicos, since its provisional constitution of 1945 states that a new election must take place not later than six months after the death of the reigning Catholicos; more than a year had passed without an announcement to that effect. Its sudden appearance, in view of the growing tension between the Sees, and as a reply to the Cilician election date, added to the agitation already present in the Cilician Dioceses and the diaspora in general.

Archbishop Khat replied that he had already warned Etchmiadzin of the October 14 date and asked on his See's behalf that Etchmiadzin postpone its election. Etchmiadzin responded with two telegrams again asking postponement of the Cilician election.³⁷ On September 6 it sent a third telegram to locum tenens Khat saying that for the good of the church and the Armenian Nation "his presence at the Electoral Assembly

37. Ibid., p. 15.

is indispensable".³⁸ Two new telegrams from the Supreme Council of Etchmiadzin arrived. The first on September 15 said besides the election of the Catholicos the Electoral Assembly would discuss "important questions" and therefore "...the presence of the locum tenens is indispensable for the good of the church and the Armenian nation." ³⁹

It will be regrettable...if the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia will not play the role which belongs to it in the National Assembly, we beseech you once again to take part in the council, you, your bishops and lay delegates.⁴⁰

The last telegram of September 23 again urged adjournment of the Cilician election and participation in the Etchmiadzin election. Archbishop Khat finally relented; his reply to this telegram was the announcement that the Cilician See would be represented at Etchmiadzin by Bishop Terenig Poladian and Mr. Hrant Grigorian. The Electoral Assembly met between September 25-30 in Etchmiadzin, electing on the last day Bishop Vasgen Baljian, Prelate of Roumania, Vasgen I, Catholicos of All Armenians.⁴¹

At Antelias on October 11 Archbishop Khat once again postponed the Cilician election, declaring that "...contrary

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. For full details on the election and the proceedings of the Electoral Assembly, see ibid., pp. 15-23.

to assurances given, the solidarity wished by us has not been realized and in these conditions the election of the Catholicos will be disastrous for our See and our people."⁴²

On October 23 Khat submitted his resignation as locum tenens at a meeting of the Religious Brotherhood of Cilicia held at Antelias. He declared his decision irrevocable, "because the state of my health does not permit me to fulfil such a responsible and difficult office."⁴³ The Brotherhood then elected the Bishop of Beirut, Khoren Paroyan, as the new locum tenens. It also set February 14, 1956 as the new date for the election of the Cilician Catholicos. Five days later locum tenens Paroyan with the Bishop of Aleppo, Zareh, and the Armenian deputies in the Lebanese Parliament were officially received by the President of the Lebanese Republic; shortly afterward Bishop Khoren was received by Choukri Kouwatly, President of Syria, who issued a favorable, friendly statement on the meeting.⁴⁴ The locum tenens then began final preparations for the long delayed Catholicosal election.

42. Ibid., p. 23.

43. Ibid., pp. 23 - 24.

44. For details, see ibid., p. 24.

III THE ELECTION OF THE CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA, February 1956.

On January 31, 1956 two weeks prior to the date fixed for the election of the Cilician Catholicos, Vasgen I Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, sent the following cable to locum tenens Bishop Khoren Paroyan.

Guided by the consciousness of the love and unity of our Holy Church and the defense and consolidation of its supreme interests, We have decided to participate in person at the election and consecration of the Catholicos of Cilicia. We petition (you and ask) that in case of necessity you order postponement until Our arrival at Antelias. We leave for Moscow and await Lebanese visas for Us and party. We are applying to the honorable Prime Minister His Excellency R. Karami by cable.¹

Announcement of Vasgen's telegram created a sensational stir among Armenians in the diaspora, especially the faithful of the Cilician See. The decision of the Catholicos was unprecedented; never in the 500 year history of the Cilician See had the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin participated in an election. Furthermore, the last time a Catholicos of Etchmiadzin left Armenia was in the second half of the 17th century, 300 years previously.

Though Vasgen's unilateral announcement was a surprise, locum tenens Paroyan sent an immediate, favorable reply.

It is with joy that we have received the

1. Hask, January 1958, p. 11, cf. The Travels of His Holiness Vasgen I, Catholicos of All Armenians, p. 19.

telegram of your Holiness and it is with pleasure that we await your arrival for the election and consecration of the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia.²

Afterwards Bishop Paroyan declared,

It is the first time in the history of the Armenian Church that the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin will assist in the election of the Catholicos of Cilicia. I am sure that his presence will be a benefit and that the election of the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia will unfold itself peacefully.³

It should be noted that in applying for Lebanese visas the Catholicos based his request on the 1941 Constitution of the Cilician See.

...This year on February 14 the election of the Catholicos of the House of Cilicia will take place in which the Mother See of Etchmiadzin will participate with two votes according to the Electoral Constitution of the Catholicossate of Cilicia. We received invitation (to send delegates) in December from Bishop Khoren....We have decided to participate personally in the election....⁴

The official delegates were Bishop Vardan Der Sahakian, and Professor Arakel Arakelian. Also to accompany the Catholicos were his cross bearer, Barkev Apegha Kevorkian, and his personal secretary, Haig Arakelian. The purpose, then, of Vasgen's visit was to preside over the election and consecration of the

2. Travels, p. 21.

3. Ayk, February 8-12, 1956, as quoted in La Documentation Francaise, op.cit., p. 25.

4. Taken from a long telegram to Prime Minister Rashid Karami, Hask, ibid., pp. 11-12, cf. Travels, pp. 19-20.

new Catholicos of Cilicia. The Lebanese press (Western, Arabic and Armenian) in view of the long delay and numerous postponements in the election and the general tension in the Armenian community, interpreted the expected visit in political terms.⁵ Catholicos Vasgen later gave additional reasons for his journey.⁶

On Sunday morning February 12, His Holiness Vasgen I Baljian with a party of four arrived from Moscow via Prague and Paris at Khaldeh Airport, Beirut. He was officially received by locum tenens Paroyan, the bishops of the Cilician See, as well as various other Armenian archbishops and bishops from the diaspora. The Christian communities of Lebanon and Syria also sent official representatives. Mr. George Haimari greeted the Catholicos on behalf of the President of the Lebanese Republic, Camille Chamoun. Mr. Kazem el-Khalil, representing the Lebanese Government, deputies Emil Bustani, Sami Solh, Moses DerKaloustian, and Dicran Tosbath, the Armenian deputy of the Syrian Parliament, T. Tehratchian, the Ambassador of the Soviet Union, Serge Kiktiev (the Catholicos is of course a Soviet citizen), were present. There was an estimated crowd of 20,000 Armenians on hand, with an equal number lining the streets on route to Antelias. The Catholicos was received with military honors and after a short speech of welcome by Bishop Paroyan was driven to the Cilician Catholicossate in President

5. See the Daily Star, L'Orient, Al Hayat, as well as the Armenian papers of February 11, 1956.

6. Travels, pp. 14-16, 60.

Chamoun's personal automobile; the official car was followed by a procession of some 2,000 vehicles.

At Antelias Bishop Khoren pronounced a new address of welcome, touching on the very delicate problem of the relationship between the Sees of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia.

The visit of your Holiness fills our hearts with joy. It is a symbol of the inseparable unity of the two Holy Sees....The Armenian people in our mother country or in the diaspora are spiritually attached to Holy Apostolic Etchmiadzin....The Holy See of Cilicia, its bishops, Brotherhood and faithful, desire to underline once again on this occasion, the absolute unity of the Armenian Church and the two Holy Sees which are faithful and sincere allies and collaborators.⁷

While recognizing Etchmiadzin as the spiritual center most respected in the Armenian nation, the address underlined the administrative independence of the Cilician See. In response to the welcome, Catholicos Vasgen avoided reference to the question of relationships between the Sees. He said he had come in the first instance to reinforce the lines of friendship and unity with the See of Cilicia and then with the patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople.⁸

That evening immediately after supper Bishop Khoren had a private interview with Catholicos Vasgen, after which the locum tenens announced His Holiness "will willingly preside at

7. See the full text of the address in Hask, January-April 1956, p. 125.

8. La Documentation Francaise, op.cit., p. 25.

the Electoral Assembly on February 14."⁹ Vasgen's later account of the same meeting partially conflicts with the bishop's statement.¹⁰

On the next day February 13, the Catholicos accompanied by the locum tenens, high ranking Armenian clergy and the Armenian deputies, visited the President of the Republic to thank him for his welcome. During the visit he told the President "tomorrow the election will take place and we have the joy of participating in it."¹¹ Afterward His Holiness paid an official visit to the Soviet Ambassador Serge Kikhtiev. Later a delegation of fourteen laymen headed by Dr. Yervant Jidejian presented itself to Vasgen at Antelias. They protested on behalf of a segment of the Armenian faithful against the legality of a number of delegates participating in the Electoral Assembly. They contested the proxies of the Aleppo delegates, which they claimed put under suspicion the legality of the Electoral Assembly itself.¹²

During the course of the day the Catholicos called for a consultative meeting of bishops at eight o'clock the same evening. This so-called "Bishops' Consultative Synod" was to examine the problems of the coming election collectively and find a common solution. The participants were to consist of

9. Hask, March 1958, p. 90.

10. Travels, p. 53.

11. Ibid., p. 58 and Hask, March 1958, p. 90.

12. Travels, p. 59.

the bishops of the Cilician Brotherhood and all bishops who were guests at Antelias.

That evening before the Bishops' Synod met, Mr. Selim Lahoud, the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, came to Antelias; on the steps of the chancellery he told Shahe Vardapet, the Secretary of the Catholicosate who was accompanying him, that "he had some information to convey to the locum tenens."¹³ Shahe instead of taking the minister to Bishop Khoren, escorted him to Vasgen's office, where Mr. Lahoud made the following statement of information.

I have received a phone call from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which asks that if possible, by the intervention of the Lebanese Government, the election of the Catholicos be postponed for a certain time. But in such a delicate problem, a conversation by telephone cannot serve as a basis for a decision. So I asked that we should receive in writing what they expected from us. However, the Lebanese Government will not interfere in these electoral problems and leaves entire freedom of action with the responsible persons.¹⁴

At the Episcopal Synod which began at 9:00 P.M., the Catholicos first stated the reasons for his visit to Antelias and made some general remarks on the role of the Church in Soviet Armenia. He then turned to the question of the Cilician election.

...It is our fervent desire to solve this problem in an atmosphere of peace. We have

13. Hask, March 1958, p. 91.

14. Ibid.

received letters from Patriarch Karekin, and Hmayag and Babagen Vardapets who state that the situation is very serious.¹⁵

Referring to Mr. Lahoud's visit he quotes the minister as saying to him,

The Syrian Government had officially said to the Lebanese Foreign Ministry that the delegates from Aleppo do not legally represent the Diocese of Aleppo and possess no proxies. We do not interfere in the affairs of the Armenian Church, but deem it essential to transmit to you that, that which concerns Aleppo, is the same also for Lebanon. We are glad that your Holiness is present for the purpose of creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding in order to elect the Catholicos in a harmonious atmosphere. We await your answer concerning tomorrow's election.¹⁶

Locum tenens Bishop Khoren and Bishop Zareh, Prelate of Aleppo, then explained the problem of the Aleppo delegates. The Armenian Community of Aleppo as the other cities of Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus have a degree of administrative autonomy as a carry over from the Ottoman Empire millet system. There is a Communal Council which is periodically elected by the Armenian Community at large. According to the 1863 National Constitution 1/5 of the members are to be reelected every two years. Theoretically, then, the Council is renewed every decade. In the recent past only three such elections had taken place, in 1945, 1949 and 1953. All were swept by the Tashnag

15. Travels, p. 64.

16. Ibid., p. 66.

Party. Other elections scheduled were postponed, some by the Syrian Government itself fearing a political clash in the Armenian Community. Late in 1955 anti-Tashnag political parties petitioned the Syrian Government on the illegality of Communal Council. On the basis of this petition the Syrian Ministry of Interior Affairs sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister of Syria.¹⁷ It is dated October 9, 1955, and states that the petitioners consider the Council illegal because less than a majority of members have been renewed since 1945. Therefore, the delegates chosen by it to the Catholicosal Electoral Assembly are also illegal. The petition asks the Syrian Government to take steps to postpone the election scheduled for October 14, 1955. The memo further states that upon the Ministry's investigation the Council's existence appears illegal. It concludes by asking the Prime Minister for his point of view in the matter. The next day, October 11, the Prime Minister's office sent the following note to the Internal Affairs Ministry. "We agree to your point of view (presumably) on legality) and beg you to do the necessary."¹⁸

This administrative action on the part of the Syrian Government was taken without consulting Bishop Zareh, the legal head of the Armenian Community of Aleppo. When informed of the matter he personally, and with great indignation,

17. The full text appears in Zartouk, February 21, 1956, pp. 3-4.

18. Ibid.

protested the whole affair. The Syrian Government on its part, though never rescinding the above memoranda, refused to take any legal action. There was no attempt to call for new elections, and permission for the Council's chosen delegates to attend the election in Lebanon in February of 1956 was not withheld.

The matter, however, was not closed. Acting on a new petition presented to it in early 1956 by the same anti-Tashnag group, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter dated February 12, 1956,¹⁹ to the Lebanese Foreign Ministry. It informed the latter body of a further request to have the elections postponed for the same reasons stated above. This letter was merely one of information and did not request any formal action of the Lebanese Government. Once again no action was taken to prevent the election, nor to contest the legality of the Aleppo delegates.

Despite the explanation of this long and somewhat complicated affair, and the personal assurances of the legality of the Aleppo delegates given to the Episcopal Synod by Bishops Khoren and Zareh, the majority of bishops present voted that the following morning His Holiness Vasgen I request the Electoral Assembly to postpone the election for one week.²⁰

19. For full text see Ararad, February 18, 1956, and Zartonk, February 19, 1956.

20. Travels, p. 64.

The next morning before the Electoral Assembly had convened Minister Lahoud again appeared at Antelias. In the presence of Catholicos Vasgen, locum tenens Khoren, Bishop Zareh, and deputies Tosbath and DerKaloustian he said he had a telephone conversation with Premier Ghazzi of Syria that morning. The minister then made the following statement.

Yesterday's visit having raised an unfortunate misunderstanding, I have come to make an important clarification by reiterating that the Syrian Government has not taken any decision of illegitimacy (and) that the delegates elected by it can participate in the election of the Catholicos, but that certain members of the Armenian Community, having protested against that Council, it (the Syrian Government) leaves the consideration and best solution of the nature of that protest to my wisdom.²¹

At 10:00 A.M. the electoral delegates assembled in the chancellory of the Catholicosate at Antelias. In accordance with the 1941 Constitution the lay delegates held a 2/3 majority over the representatives of the clergy. There was a recommended list of five candidates chosen by the Cilician Brotherhood in 1952, but not constitutionally binding. Any bishop of the Armenian Church was eligible for election. It was generally known that the favored candidate was the Bishop of Aleppo, Zareh Payaslian. He appeared to have the backing

21. Hask, March 1958, p. 93. Also see the Official Communique of the Permanent Executive Committee of the Electoral Assembly in Le Jour, February 17, 1956, p.3.

of the Tashnag Party and that section of the Armenian Community which supported the traditional independence of the Cilician See. Together they held a clear majority of the electoral delegates.²² The composition of the Electoral Assembly was as follows:

<u>Representing</u>	<u>Ecclesiastical Delegates</u>	<u>Lay</u>	<u>Total</u>
Brotherhood of the Cilician See	5	-	5
The See of Etchmiadzin	1	1	2
Prelates of Cilician Dioceses	4	-	4
The Diocese of Aleppo	3	14	17
The Diocese of Damascus	-	2	2
The Diocese of Cyprus	-	1	1
The Diocese of Lebanon	3	15	18
Locum tenens of Cilician See	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	17	33	50 23

Before opening the session locum tenens Khoren announced that His Holiness Vasgen I wished to address the Assembly. The Catholicos' long address first recalled the past decades in which "the Armenian Church has been afflicted by various spiritual, administrative and economic factors,"²⁴ but passed on to the crucial problem of the election.

In the course of the past two days, I have been able to ascertain that the crisis (which will be) provoked by this election will not be favorable to the peace and well being of our Holy Church unless we intervene in order to put a stop to the unpleasant acts for the peace of our people. It

22. See Le Jour, February 14, 1956, or other papers of the time.

23. Hask, January - April, 1956.

24. Travels, p. 70.

is because of this that I, Catholicos of Armenians, address Our last counsels to you.²⁵

Compling to the decision taken by the Episcopal Synod the previous evening, the Catholicos presented the following proposal.

I advise and beseech you to postpone the Assembly which takes place today until next week. I would like to try to find with you, calmly and objectively, in the exclusive interest of the Church, grounds of understanding in order that this election unfold itself in a climate of peace, union and charity.

In case of the contrary situation, our religious life will be imperfect and without meaning. We will plunge into common troubles, disputes and quarrels; we will cease to be the honored servants of the Church. Our actions are being closely watched not only by all Armenians, but also by other peoples and states, both friendly and unfriendly. I pray you to follow my counsel, but do not consider it an obligatory injunction. You are at liberty to choose the two solutions. The first is that which I propose to you, on the other hand if you refuse to listen to my utterance and decide to open the Assembly, the Catholicos of All Armenians will refuse to take part and must, grieved to death, leave this country.²⁶

After his delivery the Catholicos left the hall and the locum tenens proposed a discussion of His Holiness' suggestion. There ensued a very heated debate. Professor Arakelian, the lay delegate from Armenia, was one of the most vociferous proponents of adopting, without reservation or discussion, the proposition put forth by the Catholicos. He

25. Ibid., p. 73.

26. Ibid.

suggested that the meeting adjourn until the following Monday. The opposing elements wished.

To respect the arrangements of the rules of the Cilician Catholicossate, establish the legality of the Assembly by electing its Provisional Committee, to carry out the verification of credentials, to elect afterwards its Permanent Committee, and only then take the decision to adjourn the election, for according to the regulations, only the Assembly officially assembled has the right to take such a decision (of postponement).²⁷

Though a majority of the delegates favored the latter proposal, the Assembly could come to no agreement. There was then a proposal to which the Assembly agreed, that Bishop Khoren see if the Catholicos would consent to the election of the Permanent Committee. After fifteen minutes the locum tenens returned declaring that His Holiness was unyielding.

After further debate locum tenens Bishop Khoren took the following decision.

In spite of my desire to yield, deemed by my ecclesiastical rank before the insistence of His Holiness,
 But considering the legal will of the overwhelming majority of the delegates,
 Considering likewise the danger which menaces the existence of the See of The Catholicossate of Antelias, in case the delegates themselves should disperse,
 I take upon myself all responsibilities and leave to the delegates' care the decisions it imposes by inviting the eldest in age to be President of the Provisional Committee and the youngest his secretary.²⁸

27. Official Communique of Permanent Committee, op.cit.

28. Ibid.

By a vote of 38 to 10 the delegates²⁹ formed the Provisional Committee as follows: Hagop DerMelkonian, president, and Haroutioun Kouyoumdjian, secretary. At this point the ten delegates, lay and clergy, who had voted against the action left the hall in protest.³⁰ Two of the lay delegates handed a written statement to the locum tenens before leaving which declared their inability to accept a decision contrary to the wishes of the Catholicos, but "reserve to use our rights as delegates only when we find in this Council a spirit of peace and real cooperation."³¹ The ten delegates later signed a protest addressed to Foreign Minister Lahoud against the Electoral Assembly claiming that the Aleppo delegates held their positions illegally.³²

The Provisional Committee verified the credentials of the remaining delegates, and elected the Permanent Executive Committee of the Assembly with DerMelkonian, first president, Vahé Setian, second president, Stepan Kabaradjian, first secretary, and Kouyoumdjian, second secretary. The legally

29. Two delegates were absent from the Assembly.
30. They were the two delegates from Etchmiadzin, Bishop Shavarsh, Prelate of Damascus, Bishop Terenig, two lay delegates from the Diocese of Damascus, two lay delegates from the Aleppo Diocese, and two lay delegates from the Beirut Diocese.
31. Hask, March 1958, pp. 97-98.
32. L'Orient, February 15, 1956.

constituted Assembly then adopted the proposal of Catholicos Vasgen and adjourned the Electoral Assembly until Monday, February 20 at 10:00 A.M.

The Executive Committee then presented itself to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, told him of its decision of adjournment and proposed his collaboration, as he had suggested, toward an understanding. But His Holiness declared "that all the possibilities of arriving at an understanding have been exhausted, that he has nothing more to do, and will prepare to leave Antelias in two days."³³ Vasgen's plans were to journey to Jerusalem where he would hold a General Episcopal Synod of all Armenian bishops. He designated Bishop Yeghishe Derderian, locum tenens of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as his representatives at Antelias for any further negotiations. In an interview the Catholicos stated his position thus, "I am very sorry that my first attempt to supervise the elections hasn't been successful. Most candidates would not listen to our advise, but tried to initiate the election without permission."³⁴

The short week between the 14th and 20th of February were occasioned by attempts at reconciliation, strong protests by the supporters of the delegates who walked out of the Assembly, and editorial wrangling in the Armenian press. On the

33. Official Communique, op.cit.

34. Daily Star, February 15, 1956, p.1.

16th Catholicos Vasgen called for the world wide meeting of bishops, to discuss Armenian Church affairs, mentioned above. On the same day Hrach Papazian, Dr. Ardour Kabakian, Kaspar Kasparian, and deputy DerKaloustian, leaders of the Tashnag majority in the Electoral Assembly presented themselves to the Catholicos. They discussed the forthcoming election, asking the Catholicos not to depart, but remain for the election and subsequent consecration. "They expressed their and their associates' loyalty towards Holy Etchmiadzin and its duly elected Catholicos."³⁵ The Catholicos expressed displeasure with comments of the Tashnag press of Beirut, deprecating what he referred to as the

...totally baseless and politically tendentious allegations directed to the person of the Catholicos of All Armenians, and the purpose of his visit to the diaspora....(the) journalists were willfully presenting a distorted picture to their readers, to the extent of even disregarding the limits of propriety.³⁶

Mr. Papazian expressed his and organization's regret. He promised an official retraction (which appeared as promised³⁷) in the papers of the next day and gave assurances that items of similar nature would not appear. The Catholicos pledged that if they did as they promised, he would do his best toward implementing a rapprochement.³⁸

35. Travels, p. 81.

36. Ibid.

37. Aztag, February 17, 1956.

38. Travels, p. 84.

In the meantime Vasgen's representative Archbishop Derderian held conferences with the disputing groups. He proposed various compromise candidates which had no part in the internal dissensions of the Cilician See. However, the majority group in the Assembly was just as inclined toward Bishop Zareh as their favored candidate as the oppositional group was adamantly against the candidacy of the bishop. No compromise was effected.

On February 17 Prime Minister Said Ghazzi of Syria came to Beirut to confer with the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rashid Karami. The Premiers held a meeting with Bishop Zareh and Deputy DerKaloustian to try to resolve the differences in the Electoral Assembly, especially regarding the Aleppo delegates. Seeing that a common solution could not be reached, Premier Ghazzi suggested that the Catholicosal election be postponed until a settlement was reached. His suggestion was unacceptable and the negotiations bore no fruit.³⁹

Simultaneously, meetings were held in Beirut by those supporting the oppositional minority of the Assembly. They demanded postponement of the election and sent various delegations to the Lebanese civil authorities, protesting the Electoral Assembly and demanding a deferrment. On February 18 a group of five bishops saw the President of the Lebanese Republic to inform him of the Catholicos' decision to leave Beirut.

39. Daily Star, February 18, 1956, p. 4.

They prayed for his intervention in delaying the election.⁴⁰ Later in the day Premier Karami accompanied by Deputy Tosbath paid a visit to His Holiness in the name of the Lebanese Government and bade him farewell. On that same crowded Friday Archbishop Derderian regretfully reported his inability to reconcile the opposing sides.⁴¹

The succeeding day, Saturday, February 18, was highlighted by the arrival of His Eminence Archbishop Karekin, Patriarch of Constantinople, the eldest high ranking clergyman in the Armenian Church. He had been personally invited by Catholicos Vasgen to further pursue attempts at agreement. That evening he had an intimate conversation with Bishop Zareh on the crisis which had developed. Zareh asserted that he was in a position similar to Archbishop Karekin's in the Cilician election of 1941.⁴² In the course of the talks the Archbishop spoke of one Armenian Church, one spiritual head, and regarded Cilicia as subordinate in spiritual affairs to Etchmiadzin. Archbishop Karekin then proposed himself as a suitable compromise candidate. "Don't you think that my election will save

40. Jean Paul Hornus, "La Crise du Catholicosat de Cilicie," Proche-Orient Chretien, no.3, 1956, p. 6.

41. Travels, p. 86.

42. In the Cilician election of 1943 Archbishop Karekin Khachadourian was the favored candidate. However, the delegates from Etchmiadzin were so strongly against his candidacy that he was finally by-passed in favor of Bishop Karekin Hovsepian. See supra chap. II, p. 26.

the situation."⁴³ Zareh said it was too late for such a proposal now with the Electoral Assembly meeting the next day. It was up to that body to decide who would be elected. "If you had the intention to become Catholicos you should have come a week earlier, so that we could carry on the appropriate work for your candidacy."⁴⁴

An important meeting of bishops was then called by His Holiness. He

expressed deep sorrow that, not even the presence of the Catholicos of All Armenians, his patriarchal exhortation and paternal appeal had been able to reconcile the two sides; consequently he was obliged to depart the very next day, even though he had come to Antelias with lively optimism to take part in the election and the ceremonies of consecration of the Catholicos.⁴⁵

The meeting continued in a very tense and unhappy atmosphere. Strong pressure was once again imposed on Bishops Khoren and Zareh to withdraw their candidacy from the election. They refused and stood firmly on the constitutional basis of the election and the legality of the present Electoral Assembly. They said they had taken a vow to serve the Cilician Catholicossate and its people; any other sentiments or allegiances were subordinate to the appeals of the people they had vowed to serve.⁴⁶ The Catholicos expressed his disappointment but added, "We

43. Hask, January - February, 1959, p. 9.

44. Ibid.

45. Travels, p. 101.

46. Hask, Ibid., p. 10.

are confident that we shall not be parting spiritually from one another, and are hopeful that the Lord will indicate to us new avenues of love and unity by the light of His divine providence."⁴⁷ He bade them all a final farewell and adjourned the meeting. The tired and forlorn clergymen retired to what could only have been a restless night's sleep.

Early the following morning Catholicos Vasgen was accompanied to the airport by locum tenens Paroyan. His original plans were to journey to Jerusalem, but being denied a visa by the Jordanian Government, which had not established diplomatic relations with the USSR, he decided to convene the aforementioned Bishops' Synod in Cairo. The timing of his departure made it as dramatic and conspicuous as his arrival. In no stronger way could he have expressed his displeasure with the course of events. He may have hoped that this symbolic hand-cleansing of the whole affair might precipitate a last minute reconciliation or postponement.

After the Catholicos' departure, some of his followers attacked locum tenens Khoren and his party, throwing stones and bundgeoning sticks. They tried to sieze the Bishop who was able to break away securing safety in the airport building.⁴⁸ Bishop Khoren holds that it was an attempt to kidnap him,⁴⁹ whereby the Electoral Assembly would have to be postponed,

47. Travels, p. 101.

48. Daily Star, February 21, 1956, p.1.

49. Interview with Bishop Khoren Paroyan, March 1961.

until his appearance. He was escorted back to Antelias by two wagon-loads of police.

Meanwhile, at Antelias the situation was tense and tenuous. The Assembly which was to convene at 10:00 A.M. was awaiting the return of the locum tenens. A large contingent of Lebanese police were situated around the Catholicosate; only official personnel were allowed on the grounds. At 10:30 Bishop Khoren finally arrived.

He was presented with a statement signed by nine members of the Cilician Brotherhood in sympathy with Archbishop Khat who had left with Catholicos Vagen for Cairo. They demanded the locum tenens to stop this illegal electoral procedure and recognize the right of the Brotherhood to meet in council to study the situation. Otherwise they would refuse to recognize the election of a Catholicos forced against public opinion, union and unity, and all legality, leaving all responsibility to you.⁵⁰

Traditionally the election of a Catholicos takes place in the church proper. However, the Cathedral of Antelias had been occupied early in the morning by a group of about 60 women, supporters of the minority opposition in the Assembly. This seizure of the church was a further attempt to postpone the election. Emissaries on behalf of Bishop Khoren were not able to convince them to evacuate. The bishop then demanded that a delegation of four come to see him. The spokesmen remained intransigent, demanding the postponement of the election

50. See full text in Zartok, March 5, 1956.

of the Catholicos, or the withdrawal of Bishops¹ (Khoren and Zareh) candidacy.

In the Catholicossate the question of turning the women out by force was considered ill-advised. Finally, a copy of the regulations of the Electoral Assembly was closely studied. It did not specify that the Assembly had to take place in the church. The delegates were then invited to assemble in the reception hall of the Catholicossate.

The Assembly was opened with an address by Bishop Khoren,

The See of Cilicia is not ignorant of the ties which unite it to the other Holy Sees of the Armenian Church and the first tie to the preeminent See of Holy Etchmiadzin. Faithful to the unbreakable unity of the Armenian Church, the Holy See of Cilicia proceeds with its policy of collaboration which will best guarantee the unity of the Armenian Church.⁵¹

The Assembly began voting at about 12:30 P.M. First the names of all Armenian bishops were read. It was announced that three bishops Khat, Tiran, and Paren had formally withdrawn their names the night before. The oppositional delegates who had walked out of the first meeting, continued their boycott. On the first ballot each delegate was to vote for its three favorite candidates. The results were

Bishop Zareh	35 votes
Bishop Khoren	33 votes
Bishop Ghevond	28 votes

51. Hask, January-April, 1956, p.20.

Archbishop Khat	4 votes	
Bishop Tiran	2 "	
Bishop Shnork	2 "	
Archbishop Karekin	1 vote	52

On the second ballot votes were to be cast for only one of the first three. Of thirty-six votes cast, Bishop Zareh received thirty-two and became the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. There were two abstentions, and Bishop Khoren and Bishop Karekin each received one vote.⁵³ As is the custom the Cathedral bells began peeling to announce the election of a new Catholicos.

Immediately after his election the new Catholicos made an important impromptu address, stressing that all was far from perfect, but reaffirming confidence in the future, and stressing the close ties between the Sees of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia.

We have had difficulties; we still have them; we will continue to have them. They are known to everyone. Their source and origin are also known. We ask this Electoral Assembly, the representatives of the press who are present, and friends, to do one thing. That is to act consciously and conscientiously toward this historical event. You must neither think of victor nor vanquished. You must believe and pray that the only victor is the Armenian Church, the Holy Gospel, and our Christian faith....We have had no rancor toward anyone and there has not been, nor is there now, hatred in our hearts. All our sons of the Armenian Church, baptized and confirmed with the Holy Chrism, must be confident that they will have a place in this Catholicossate.⁵⁴

52. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., pp. 23-26.

After stressing the mission of the Cilician Catholicosate to the Armenians in the diaspora and after expressing his firm belief that it would be carried out in an efficient way, he asked the members of the Electoral Assembly, and through them the congregations they represented, to do their share in the fulfilment of the mission, and above all to pray for him. The Catholicos then added,

I address my heart-felt words of greeting to the honorable Mother See of Etchmiadzin, to His justly elected Catholicos Vasgen I, with the firm conviction and belief that the honorable Mother See and this Cilician See are co-servants and share in the same work for our people and the Gospel. The link between our See will remain unbreakable with Etchmiadzin, as in the days of the previous Catholicoi. It will remain unbreakable in spite of people who would like to weaken that link. We will keep it unshaken and steadfast, because it will keep us unchanged in our national, ecclesiastical and religious physiognomy.⁵⁵

Catholicos Zareh then sent his greetings to the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople, after which he thanked the governments of Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus, expressing once again the faithfulness of the Armenian people to them. With his words of blessing and prayer the new Catholicos ended his message.

On the same day Bishop Khoren personally announced the results of the election to the President of the Lebanese Republic. They were also officially communicated to the Council

55. Ibid.

of Ministers and the Parliament of Lebanon, the Governments of Syria and Cyprus, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, all Armenian Dioceses of Cilicia and Etchmiadzin, the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, all the heads of the Christian communities and foreign embassies in Lebanon.

On the following day, February 21, Catholicos-elect Zareh was officially received by the President of the Republic. All the Christian communities of Lebanon without exception quickly and officially recognized Zareh as the new Catholicos. Various political leaders, including the President of the Syrian Republic and Rashid Karami, the Lebanese Prime Minister, as well as all the major foreign ambassadors accredited to Beirut, rendered their official congratulations. The notable, but expected, exception was the Soviet Ambassador who remained silent.

However, all was far from peaceful and perfect. The minority opposition delegates declared the election illegal, still maintaining that the credentials of the Aleppo delegates were not in order. This group was supported in the Armenian Community at large by the Ramgavar, Hunchak and Communist political parties along with their affiliate youth and charitable organizations. The three parties were represented by their respective organs, Zartonk, Ararad and Souria (of Aleppo). Supporting the electing majority of the Electoral Assembly and Catholicos Zareh was the Tashnag Party and its affiliate organizations. The party organs Aztag and Arevelk (of Aleppo)

as well as Ayk (owned by deputy Tosbath) stood firmly by the legality of the election. Politically neutral independents of the Armenian community were to be found on both sides. The relationship between the oppositional group and Etchmiadzin was close; their positions and arguments were essentially identical. The spiritual and moral respect which all Armenians have for the Mother See was continually exploited to give popular support to their arguments.

The Brotherhood of the Catholicossate of Cilicia also took sides after the election of Zareh as predicted in the letter given to locum tenens Khoren prior to the election.⁵⁶ The opposition clergy, which in fact represented a majority of the Brotherhood, was lead by former locum tenens Archbishop Khat and supported by Bishops Terenig (the Dean of the Seminary of Antelias) and Paren. The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, as expected, refused to recognize the legality of the election; Prelates of All Armenian Dioceses under Etchmiadzin conformed to the Catholicos' action by also refusing to accept Zareh as Catholicos of Cilicia.

In the week after the election the opposition groups held protest meetings, issued anti-election declarations, and petitioned the President and various governmental officials of Lebanon and Syria. These attempts met with no success.

56. Supra, p. 54.

The governments and the majority of the Electoral Assembly unwaveringly upheld the election of Catholicos Zareh as legal and binding.

On February 23 L'Orient of Beirut carried an interesting interview with Catholicos Zareh.

Q - What are the differences between Etchmiadzin and Antelias? Your Grace Zareh do you foresee the improvement of relation with Etchmiadzin?

A - We do not have any differences with Etchmiadzin, the center of the Armenian Church. On the contrary our relations have been and remain brotherly in religious affairs and questions of ritual.

* * * *

Q - What is the magnitude of differences which have manifested themselves on the occasion of your election? Do you think you can alleviate them?

A - There always exist differences and misunderstandings at the time of an election. But once this is finished, misunderstandings disappear and everything returns to normal. The normal life of the community continues. I will exert myself in the best way to accomplish the weighty task of a spiritual father. This Catholicossate will continue to be the spiritual center of our three dioceses and of their flock without discrimination.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, during the months between the election and the consecration, February - September 1956, the opposition elements showed a resolute antipodality to the sentiments expressed by Catholicos Zareh. This unpleasant and confused period will be carefully examined in the next chapter.

57. L'Orient, February 23, 1956.

IV FROM THE ELECTION TO THE CONSECRATION, February-September
1956.

The scene shifts to Cairo where Catholicos Vasgen called an assembly of all Armenian Bishops to be held from March 5 to 8. Sixteen bishops from around the world assembled to discuss a prepared agenda. The Cilician See was represented by four bishops: locum tenens Bishop Paroyan, Archbishop Khat, Bishop Terenig, Bishop Ghevond, as well as Bishop Shavarsh, the Prelate of Damascus, who is not a member of the Cilician Brotherhood. Bishops Khoren and Ghevond both supporters of Catholicos-elect Zareh, set these conditions for their attendance at the Episcopal Synod: first, Catholicos Vasgen congratulate the election of Zareh since it was an accomplished fact, and secondly, the convention not discuss the Antelias question. Catholicos Vasgen replied by saying he could not congratulate Zareh as Catholicos because he was not consecrated as such. To the second point, he could not promise there would be no discussion on the Cilician election, since the Catholicossate of Cilicia is an integral part of the Armenian Church; he could not accept Cilicia as a separate entity above the domain of the Bishops Assembly. He concluded, "It is our desire to take a definite position toward these events which took place at Antelias."¹

1. Travels, op.cit., p. 188.

During the second session on the afternoon of March 5, the Antelias question was brought up for discussion. A debate immediately ensued as to whether the Bishops' Synod had the right to deal with this matter. The majority of bishops felt that the Synod had the right. Their opinion was summed up by Archbishop Karekin of Constantinople. His argument was that since the Catholicosate of Cilicia is an integral part of the Armenian Church any 'irregularities' or 'misconduct' which takes place in that Catholicosate can not be over-looked by the rest of the church. Therefore the Bishops' Assembly has the right and the duty to take up the Cilician election as an irregularity.²

Bishops Khoren and Ghevond refused to take part in any such discussion. Upon their refusal and at the suggestion of Archbishop Karekin, the other bishops of the Cilician See, Khat, Shavarsh and Terenig also did not take part. The Synod under the chairmanship of Archbishop Yeghishe of Jerusalem after debate and discussion issued a statement declaring the Cilician election "defective and unacceptable."

Whereas, the Armenian Church is but one indivisible body, having as its sole head and leader the Catholicos of All Armenians, and its sole center, the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, founded by Gregory the Illuminator.

Whereas, the See of Cilicia is but a

2. Ibid., p. 189.

particular Catholicossate³ within the present confines of Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus, and is subject to the Catholicossate of All Armenians in spiritual matters, but independent in administrative and management activities.

Whereas, the election which took place on February 20, 1956, in the hall of the Catholicossate of Antelias had a purely one-sided and factional nature, causing the division and separation of the faithful people, and being contrary to Christian principles in general, and to the spirit of love and concord of the Armenian Church in particular. Therefore, the Synod of Bishops, unanimously and regretfully considers the aforementioned election defective and unacceptable.⁴

After passing this resolution of censure the Synod appointed a committee composed of Archbishops Karekin and Yegishe and Bishop Shnork to draft a set of conditions which would be in keeping with the above statement, and would make acceptable the election which was regarded defective and unacceptable. The committee presented its proposals to the Synod at the fourth session on the afternoon of March 6. Again there was a discussion resulting in a final "Writ of Agreement".

In view of the fact that the election of Bishop Zareh Payaslian to the Catholicossate of the Great House of Cilicia has been defective, therefore, unacceptable, the Episcopal

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3. In all the statements issued by the Cairo Episcopal Synod neither the Armenian word for Catholicossate or Patriarchate is used when referring to the Catholicossate of Cilicia. The word Hairabedutioun is used, presumably to indicate that its rank is higher than a Patriarchate, but lower than a Catholicossate.
 4. Ibid.

Assembly convened at the Armenian Prelacy of Egypt at Cairo from March 5 to 6, under the presidency of His Holiness Vasgen I, Gracious Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians, proposes to remedy that defect by the following conditions:

A. Bishop Zareh will sign a pledge wherein will be defined the position of the Catholicos of Cilicia toward, the Catholicossate of All Armenians and his Catholicosal duties and rights.

B. The Catholicos of Cilicia will accept the supremacy of the Catholicossate of All Armenians at Etchmiadzin and his submission to the supreme Catholicosal See in Spiritual matters - dogmatic, doctrinal and liturgical problems - retaining his independence in administrative and executive affairs.

C. The Catholicossate of Cilicia will have its own constitution consistent with the spirit, principles and canons of the Armenian Church based on the "Constitution of the Armenian Church", ratified by the Catholicossate of All Armenians, but adapted to local conditions, assuring the Catholicossate of Cilicia the position and authority it deserves. Pending the preparation and ratification of such a constitution, the Constitution of 1941 will be suspended and will cease to operate. Instead, however, there will be constituted a Spiritual Council as an executive body composed of four clergymen and four laymen, elected by the General Assembly of the Religious Brotherhood of the Catholicossate of Cilicia. It will be presided over by the Catholicos.

D. The Catholicos of Cilicia will have his vicar general elected by the General Assembly of the Brotherhood.

E. The Mother See will participate in the election of the Catholicos of Cilicia with two votes, one clergyman, and one layman, this latter to be a member of the Supreme Spiritual Council (of Etchmiadzin), and the consecration of the elected Catholicos will be performed by the Catholicos of All Armenians or by His representative, and with the participation of six bishops.

F. According to the ecclesiastical-canonical rules the Catholicos of Cilicia will not be able to ordain, or to permit the diocesan bishops of his See to perform any ordination, or to send

ordained clergy outside the jurisdiction of the Cilician Catholicosate, without the recommendation and approval of the Catholicos of All Armenians, and, in the case of the ordination and sending of married priests, upon the request in writing of the Primates established by the Holy See.

In cases to the contrary the ordainer and ordained will be dealt with by canonical procedure.

G. The name of the Catholicos of All Armenians be mentioned during the Holy Liturgy in all the diocesan Armenian Churches irrespectively and Special Prayer made for the Catholicos in the name of Etchmiadzin and the Supreme Catholicos. Likewise, in all those dioceses immediately after the mention of the name of the Catholicos of All Armenians, the name of the Catholicos of Cilicia will be mentioned.⁵

The Writ was signed by the executive board of the Episcopal Assembly.

The 'Pledge' mentioned under the first article which required the signature of Zareh stated,

In this church of Saint Lousavoritch in Cairo, before God the Almighty Father...I vow to remain during my lifetime a faithful servant and preserver of the traditions of the One and Holy Armenian Apostolic Church and obedient in all spiritual matters to the preferred Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and its Occupant the Gracious Vasgen I, Catholicos of All Armenians and to all His successors.

In consequence of which, therefore, I, elected Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia within the boundaries of Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus, with the testimony of my conscience sign this irrevocable pledge.⁶

The Resolution, the Writ of Agreement and the Pledge

5. Ibid., pp. 192-3.

6. Hask, June 1959, pp. 221-2.

were handed to Bishop Khoren at 11:30 A.M. the next morning, March 7, with the suggestion that the Cilician bishops should assemble and give their answer by 5:00 P.M. the same day. Bishop Khoren, however, flew back to Antelias to consult with Catholicos-elect Zareh, promising Vasgen a reply Sunday, March 11. A refusal in the form of a letter dated March 10 was personally brought back by the locum tenens to Cairo; it was addressed to Vasgen.

Your Majesty:

In the presence of the Bishops of the Brotherhoods of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia at the Prelacy in Cairo Your Majesty handed to us...the draft of a Writ of Agreement with two attached papers signed by the Executive Committee of an Assembly composed only of bishops of the Brotherhood of Etchmiadzin convened under Your presidency.

Although Your Majesty recommended that we give a written reply by five o'clock the following day, but considering the serious content of the Writ of Agreement, we had to return to the Holy See of Antelias, as we informed Your Majesty that same afternoon to consult with the elected Catholicos of Cilicia, His Grace, Bishop Zareh, promising to present our reply to Your Holiness by Sunday, March 11, 1956.

Having submitted the Writ of Agreement to a most serious examination, we hereby wish to declare to Your Majesty that:

1. The above mentioned Episcopal Assembly has no canonical, historical or traditional right to deal with problems concerning the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia.

2. We declare also, that on February 20, 1956, the Assembly of delegates of the Cilician Dioceses, based on the traditions of the Armenian Church and of this Holy See and according to the Special Constitution (1941), formed in the spirit of the Constitution (1863) and validated by usage, performed the election of the new occupant of the Great

House of Cilicia legally and without defect. Allow us also to remind Your Majesty that the Catholicos of Cilicia in the past have been elected on the same basis.

3. We feel it is our duty to remind Your Holiness of a most important fact that the Cilician Dioceses as well as the Holy See are governed by the National Constitution and Regulations which are confirmed and accepted by governments and their application revered over decades, hence, if these (regulations) are shaken (violated) dire consequences will follow for our people, and (further their violability) is impossible for practical reasons.

4. On this occasion we come to declare to Your Majesty, once more, that the brotherly, affectionate and intimate relations existing between the Mother See of Etchmiadzin and our Cilician See will be maintained as heretofore, remaining faithful to the spirit of unity of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church.

Your Majesty, allow me to add that the autonomous existence of the Sees of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church is the basis for the preservation of the Armenian people in the conditions, past and present, in which they live.

Hence, in reply to the Writ of Agreement which Your Majesty handed to us, we present to Your Holiness this document exposing the fundamental principles of the Catholicossate of the Great House of Cilicia.

We remain, with the deepest of filial respect, and kissing the Holy hand of Your Majesty,
 Humble co-prayer
 Bishop Khoren
 Locum tenens of the
 House of Cilicia⁷

Though Catholicos Vasgen accepted this as a refusal of the Synod's proposal, he said that he did not consider it as the final reply, suggesting that further attempts at reconciliation be made.⁸ Archbishop Yeghishe, who had previously been appointed the Catholicos' personal representative,

7. Travels, pp. 209-11, and Hask, ibid., pp. 225-6.

8. Travels, p. 211.

was instructed to carry on negotiations toward a rapproachement with the bishops of the Cilician See. The Catholicos then left Cairo and continued his travels visiting Armenian centers in Europe. At a banquet in Paris on April 5 he reiterated the purpose of his visit to Antelias and the failure of his attempts to supervise a peaceful election. In reference to the decisions of the Bishops' Synod and Cilicia's refusal to its proposals, he re-emphasised that he does not accept Antelias' answer as a final decision, but again suggested they reconsider the matter for the good of the Church. He added that if the proposals of the Episcopal Assembly were unreasonable, Cilicia could make its own.⁹

At Antelias Archbishop Yeghishe held several conferences with Bishops Zareh and Khoren. The meetings bore fruit in the form of a Writ of Agreement between the Catholicosal Sees of the Holy Armenian Apostolic Church. The "Writ" was dated March 26, 1956 and officially signed by locum tenens Khoren.

A. Whereas, the Armenian Holy Church is one and indivisible in her dogmatic, doctrinal and liturgical conception, the two Sees hereby declare that they will faithfully keep them with the spiritual and honorary priority of the Catholicossate of All Armenians.

9. Dicran Simsarian, "Catholicos Comments on Beirut Situation; Pleads for Unity," Armenian Mirror-Spectator, May 5, 1956, p. 1.

B. The two Catholicosial Sees respectively participate in each others elections with two votes in order to preserve the spirit of unity of the Armenian Church.

C. The two Sees take it upon themselves to ordain clergymen for the dioceses under their jurisdiction. The sending of clergymen from the dioceses of one See to those of the other takes place with mutual consent.

D. In the churches under the jurisdiction of the two Sees, the names of the two Catholicoi be mentioned respectively during the Holy Liturgy.

E. The Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Vasgen I, after this agreement as a sign of unity of the Armenian Holy Church will congratulate the newly elected Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, His Grace Bishop Zareh.¹⁰

The Writ of Agreement was sent to Catholicos Vasgen I in Paris by Archbishop Yeghishe, but the answer came from Archbishop Sahag, Chairman of the Supreme Council in Etchmiadzin, and stated that "His Holiness Vasgen is not satisfied with the concessions of the Writ of Agreement".¹¹

Arbitration among the opposing bishops in the Cilician Brotherhood continued. In May with the mediation of various important Armenian lay notables from within and outside of the Cilician Dioceses, the bishops of the See once again started serious and hopeful consultation with each other. A mutually satisfactory agreement was drafted and signed by Bishops Khoren, Ghevond, Zareh and Archbishop Khat. It was essentially the same as the Writ of Agreement signed by Khoren above,

10. Hask, July 1959, pp. 264-5.

11. Ibid., p. 265.

but with the addition of a further clause similar in content to clause C of the 'Writ' of the Cairo Synod. It asserted that the Central Council of the Catholicossate of Cilicia should be formed by five clergy and five lay members and that the Central Committee of the Council appoint a commission of lawyers to revise the 1941 Constitution.¹²

On the basis of this internal agreement within the Cilician Brotherhood, Archbishop Yeghishe sent the following cable on June 4 to Catholicos Vasgen.

Bishop Zareh, the Catholicos-elect, has accepted in their general spirit the five points of the Writ of Agreement of the Episcopal Assembly. As to the third and fourth articles he is ready to appoint a body composed of five clergymen and five laymen for a period of two years. This body in its turn will appoint another one composed of lawyers for revising the 1941 Constitution. We would like to ask your benevolent favorable point of view for the benefit of our Church and people. I ask you to cable your reply to Bishop Zareh.¹³

On June 9 Catholicos Vasgen sent the following reply to locum tenens Bishop Khoren from Etchmiadzin.

We received with gratification Archbishop Yeghishe's cable at the request of Bishop Zareh. To consummate the proposed concord we invite the bishops of your See and the lay representatives of the two sides without discrimination to Holy Etchmiadzin. We find it desirable to perform the ceremony of consecration in the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin in an atmosphere of general national reconciliation and rejoicing, without setting a

12. Full text in ibid., p. 267.

13. Ibid., p. 272.

precedent for the future. We call upon you all, the members of the Brotherhood of Your Holy See and the people to be led by a spirit of love and unity in the interest of our Holy Church and Armenian Nation.¹⁴

On June 17 the Armenian daily Aztag carried a copy of this cable, accompanied by an interview with Bishop Khoren. The locum tenens expressed his surprise at Vasgen referring to a "cable at the request of Bishop Zareh". The bishop said, "There had never been a request on the part of Catholicos Zareh to have such a telegram sent by Archbishop Yeghishe."¹⁵ However, he added he had wired the following rejection on the 15th, two days earlier.

We are in receipt of Your Majesty's telegram of June 9. We deeply regret that your proposals are unacceptable to us. The consecration will take place in the Cathedral of Antelias. In token and preservation of the unity of the Armenian Church we request you to instruct your Bishops to participate in the ceremony of consecration.¹⁶

A further cable from Catholicos Vasgen dated June 22 was sent to Bishop Paren Melkonian of the Cilician Brotherhood. It was similar to the earlier cable of June 9, but with the following concession

"...and later to perform the consecration

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14. The cable first appeared in Marmara (Istanbul), June 13, 1956, but see Hask, ibid., p. 273.
 15. Aztag, June 17, 1956.
 16. Ibid., also Hask, July 1959, p. 273.

at Etchmiadzin or Antelias."17 (emphasis mine)

Earlier locum tenens Khoren had called a meeting of the National General Assembly of the Cilician See to discuss among other Catholicosal affairs the consecration of Catholicos-elect Zareh. However, the meeting scheduled for June 21 was postponed due to continuing disagreement within the Cilician Brotherhood and the strong protests of lay oppositional elements.18 During this period all the Bishops of the Cilician See continued discussions at the summer residence of the Catholicossate in Bikfaya with the aim of eliminating differences between themselves and effecting an internal solution to the crisis. Again assisted by important Armenian laymen they reached an agreement. This new Writ of Agreement, signed on June 22 by Archbishop Khat, Bishops Zareh, Khoren, Ghevond, and Terenig, incorporates the essentials of the Writ of the Cairo Episcopal Assembly and further sets the date of the forthcoming consecration at July 22.

Whereas, on February 20, 1956 disagreements and disputes arose about the Catholicosal election in Antelias and consultations

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17. The cable was addressed to "Bishop Khoren (sic) Melkonian", which led to some confusion. However, Catholicos Vaghen later refers to the cable as having been sent to Bishop Khoren, cf. infra p.76. Hask, ibid., p. 274.
18. See the "Official Communique" of Assembly for the Defense of the Cilician See, Ara-rad, June 20, 1956, p. 1.

and negotiations took place in Cairo by the Episcopal Body under the presidency of the Catholicos of All Armenians His Holiness Vasgen I and afterwards by his representative the locum tenens of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Archbishop Yeghishe, and finally by the group of Cilician Bishops in view of smoothing out the issues.

We, the Bishops of the Cilician Catholicossate, after long deliberations, and for the sake of the maintenance of the solidarity of the Armenian Church, and the harmonious cooperation of the hierarchal Sees declare:

A. We drafted the following Writ of Agreement concerning the mutual relationships of Holy Etchmiadzin and Cilician Catholicossate, taking into consideration the spirit of the proposals of the Episcopal Assembly held March 5-8 in Cairo under the Presidency of the Catholicos of All Armenians H.H. Vasgen I.

The first point corresponds to point B in the Cairo 'Writ'; the second point corresponds to point E in the Cairo 'Writ'.

3. The Catholicos of Cilicia in accordance with the ecclesiastical canons ordains clergymen only for the dioceses under his jurisdiction; outside his dioceses, for the dioceses of Etchmiadzin, he sends clergymen with the consent of the Catholicos of All Armenians or of the diocesan bishop under his (Etchmiadzin's) jurisdiction, and vice versa.

4. The Catholicos of Cilicia will not permit any diocese or section outside his own dioceses to join the Cilician See.

Point 5 is essentially as G in Cairo 'Writ', but with no reference as to the order of the names.

B. The Locum Tenens of the Catholicossate of Cilicia in consultation with the Cilician Episcopal Body forms unanimously for a period of two years and by appointment a Central National Committee composed of five ecclesiastical and five lay persons; in the case of resignation of a single member or of all members of this appointed committee the Episcopal Body will again reconstitute the committee by appointment.

The duties of this appointed Central National Committee are:

1. The management of the national ecclesiastical and administrative affairs of the Cilician Dioceses.

2. Revision and redrafting of the Constitution of the Cilician Catholicossate of 1941 by a commission composed of competent persons and lawyers appointed by this aforementioned Central Committee.

C. Upon completion of the period of this National Central Committee, the revised and redrafted 1941 Constitution of the Cilician Catholicossate prepared according to the spirit, principles and canons of the Armenian Church and adapted to the local conditions of the Cilician Dioceses is presented to the National General Assembly constituted by the partial election which takes place according to the disposition of the redrafted constitution, which Assembly after examination sends it to the Catholicos of Cilicia for ratification.

D. The administration of all the monastic affairs of the Cilician Catholicossate is implemented according to the prescribed canons of the General and Executive Councils (of the Brotherhood). The revision and redrafting of the internal regulations of the Brotherhood are enacted by a commission elected by the General Assembly of the Brotherhood, which commission after examination presents it to the General Assembly. The revised be sent to His Holiness the Catholicos of Cilicia for ratification.

E. The Episcopal Body of Cilicia having taken upon itself the complete application of the aforementioned articles - formation of the General Committee and the convening of the General Assembly of the Brotherhood - and having established the mutual relationship between Holy Etchmiadzin and the Cilician See, according to the proposals of the Cairo Episcopal Assembly, decides to perform the Catholicosal Consecration of Most Reverend Bishop Zareh on the coming July 22 in the Cathedral of Antelias.

F. This Writ of Agreement of the Cilician Episcopal body is sent to the Catholicos of All Armenians asking him to send his representative to the consecration of the Catholicos of Cilicia.

At the same time we publish this Writ of Agreement to inform the other hierarchal and diocesan Sees of the Armenian Church, the members of the

Brotherhood of Cilicia, the members of the Cilician Diocesan Councils and the faithful Armenian people, praying for the peace of the world and the unshakeable unity of the Armenian people and the Holy Armenian Church.¹⁹

There was general rejoicing among the five bishops who signed the Writ as well as the Cilician Brotherhood and faithful. However the joy was short lived. After a long meeting with various lay notables of neutral and oppositional leanings in Beirut on the evening of June 26, Archbishop Khat and Bishop Terenig withdrew signatures, and once again the crisis was resumed.²⁰

At the Cathedral of Mother See in Etchmiadzin, Catholicos Vasgen gave an important sermon on July 9, 1956, the fifth anniversary of his consecration as bishop. The sermon was broadcast over radio Erivan on July 22 and appeared in Beirut papers that same week. The major portion of the sermon dealt with the rebirth of the Armenian Church in Soviet Armenia, but the Catholicos also commented on the Cilician crisis.

Our aim had never been and is not now to intervene in the internal controversies of the Cilician See. Our aim was and is to help, if it is possible, Antelias find once again its independence, internal peace and

19. Bishop Paren was the only Cilician Bishop who refused to sign the agreement, apparently on the grounds that it gave too much power to the Cilician Catholicos. Full text appears in Hask, August-September 1956, pp. 304-6.

20. Ibid., p. 304.

the road toward a constructive life in our Holy Church.²¹

Referring to the last offer of consecration he made by cable on June 22,²² he continued,

...Until today, July 9, we have not received an answer....Why is not even a simple answer given? Where goest thou, Antelias?

...Unfortunately, it gradually appears that powers and forces which have no relation to ecclesiastical life and benefit of the church are causing Antelias to separate itself from the Mother See, despite the will of its Brotherhood and faithful people.

There has recently been published a long series of articles by political leaders. Certain aspects of these clearly show that some people are committing a tragic mistake by trying to make the Cilician See a tool of their political struggle. We advise them to abandon such plans and leave Antelias free and in the hands of Bishop Zareh....

Our sons, the sons of our people, all of them without distinction, must unite and must secure by all means:

1. The unity and indivisibility of the Armenian Church.
2. The independence of the Catholicosate of the House of Cilicia from political influences of all kinds and entrust to it all its traditional rights.
3. The maintenance of love and the spirit of religious cooperation and the delineation of rights between the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the See of Antelias.

This demands a period of religious rebuilding and reorganization of our Church, especially in the ways outlined by the (Cairo) Episcopal Assembly in its proposal to Antelias.²³

21. Etchmiadzin, July 1956, p. 16. The full text appears in ibid., pp. 13-18, and Ayk, July 24, 1956.

22. Cf. supra, p. 71.

23. Etchmiadzin, ibid., pp. 16-17.

The sermon ended with a prayer to God for the maintenance of the Armenian Church for now and evermore.

On the same Sunday at Antelias, the National General Assembly of the Cilician See met and by secret ballot elected the members of the Central Clerical Council and the Central Lay Council. Afterward the Assembly Chairman and locum tenens Khoren ushered in His Holiness Catholicos-elect Zareh. The Catholicos then took the traditional oath of fidelity to the Armenian Church and Nation before the Assembly.

Before God, and before the Central National Assembly, I publicly vow to remain faithful to the Lord, () to my Nation, and to administer righteously the full letter and the law of the National Constitution.²⁴

He then made the following statement:

Today I want one thing to be clear. Indeed, there was a danger for this See and there were men who wished to see their centuries old dream²⁵ realized by this election. We as the feeble guardians of this See have decided to hold firm to the basic principle of the protection of its independence and rights.

At the end of this Assembly I wish to make a public call inviting all strata of our people to consciously embrace this See and consider it as belonging to everyone who wishes to live as an Armenian and a Christian. By way of law this See will serve all and will remain the See of the Cilician Armenian people.²⁶

On July 21 Archbishop Khat sent a letter to Catholicos-

24. Hairenik Weekly, July 19, 1956.

25. The 'centuries old dream' was the subjugation of the Catholicosate of Cilicia to Etchmiadzin.

26. Hask, August-October, 1956, p. 379.

elect Zareh inviting him to a meeting of the Cilician Brotherhood to be convened at the summer residence of the Catholicos-sate in Bikfaya on the evening of July 23.²⁷ Zareh answered saying he had no right to convene such a meeting.²⁸ Khat replied he had the right since a majority of the members requested the meeting.²⁹ Locum tenens Bishop Khoren had earlier received a number of written requests from members of the Brotherhood to convene the General Assembly of the Brotherhood. Khoren said he would only call such a meeting when the members of the Brotherhood fulfilled their religious duties, the most important of which was the congratulating and accepting of Zareh as the Catholicos and spiritual head of the Brotherhood.³⁰

In view of Archbishop Khat's adamant position, Catholicos Zareh and locum tenens Khoren issued the following "Decision" on July 22.

Whereas, the three Bishops of the Cilician See, Archbishop Khat Atchabahian, Bishop Paren Melkonian, and Bishop Terenig Poladian, from the time of the election of the Catholicos on February 20, 1956, until the present date tend to disintegrate the Cilician See by their conduct and behaviour and have refused to perform their episcopal obligations toward the See, and, whereas, they condition the fulfillment of their duties by the complete submission of Cilicia to the See of Etchmiadzin, a condition which endangers the centuries old independence of the Cilician See, as the Catholicos-elect, having

27. Hask, July 1960, p. 119.

28. Hask, ibid., p. 120.

29. Ibid.

30. Interview with Bishop Khoren Paroyan, March 1961.

the duty and the responsibility for maintaining the centuries old rights and independence of the Cilician See, We decide to suspend them from their rights as members of the Cilician See until further arrangement.³¹

The following reply was sent to Catholicos Zareh from the three bishops.

There is no canonical nor legal basis for this ridiculous and extraordinary decision of yours. We have always protected and do now protect the independence of the Cilician See. We have never wished it to be subjugated to the See of Etchmiadzin. You absolutely misunderstand; and we regret to say you always try to raise irrelevant problems to the detriment of the Cilician See.³²

On the evening of July 23 eleven of the nineteen members, all of whom opposed the election of Zareh, met, discussed a prepared agenda and issued an "Official Declaration". It states in part

Whereas, the Assembly confirms with sorrow the accusations given by the majority of the Brotherhood against His Grace Bishop Khoren, that the locum tenens had not followed the Constitution of the Congregation and has misused his authority,

Whereas, the majority of the Brotherhood for four months has spared no effort to invite the locum tenens to apply the Constitution (by holding a meeting),

Whereas, the locum tenens disregarded the rights of the Brotherhood,

The General Assembly of the Brotherhood condemned the illegal behaviour of the locum tenens by a vote of non-confidence and declared him deposed of his functions.

The General Assembly... (then) asked His

31. Hask, ibid.

32. Ibid.

Grace Archbishop Khat to run the affairs of the Brotherhood with all the rights of a locum tenens until the election of a new locum tenens.³³

The meeting also elected a new Executive Committee with Bishop Paren as chairman and Zaven Apegha as secretary.

The following day Catholicos Zareh issued a declaration stating that the above meeting of some members of the Cilician Brotherhood was illegal and damaging to the authority and interests of the Cilician See. The Catholicos-elect took additional disciplinary measures against three of the clergymen participating in this unauthorized meeting.

May it be known that for their insubordinate actions We declare the following (members of the Cilician Brotherhood) relieved of their functions starting July 24: Dean of the Seminary, Bishop Terenig Poladian, Chief of the Secretariat of the Catholicosate, Vardapet Shahe Adjemian and Dean of the Printery, Apegha Mesrob Yumuztagian.³⁴

The Khat faction of the Brotherhood in turn issued its own statement in the form of a "Correction".

...We inform our faithful people that the appointment of monastery functions and changes thereto are made only by the arrangement of the Executive Council of the General Assembly of the Brotherhood of this Holy See. Consequently the above mentioned depositions by Bishop Zareh of three members is altogether illegal and to be condemned. Therefore, His Grace Bishop Terenig, Very Reverend Vardapet Shahe, and Very Reverend Apegha Mesrob retain their functions unchanged.³⁵

33. Ararad, July 25, 1956.

34. See "Correction", Zartok, July 28, 1956.

35. Ibid.

The correction was dated July 27 and signed by Bishop Paren, chairman, and Apegha Zaven, secretary. There was a further "Communique from the Catholicossate" which reexpressed the legality of the July 23 meeting and the illegality of Catholicos-elect Zareh's disciplinary actions. It was dated Antelias July 28 and once again signed by Bishop Paren and Apegha Zaven.³⁶

At this point in the summer of 1956 the confusion in the See of Cilicia, with a group of the Armenian faithful still opposing the election of Bishop Zareh and the Religious Brotherhood split into two groups with two locum tenens, was bewildering to Armenian and non-Armenian alike. Though Catholicos Zareh was legally elected and officially congratulated by the President of Lebanon, he had not yet been consecrated. The reasons for the delay were, first, the Catholicos wanted all difficulties settled and a unanimous consecration; and secondly, he did not want to deviate from the usual procedure in which all bishops of the See would participate in the consecration. Only Bishops Khoren and Ghevond of Cyprus were willing to participate. The others, Archbishop Khat, and Bishops Paren, Terenig, and Shavarsh of Damascus³⁷ were still

36. *Ibid.*, July 31, 1956.

37. Bishop Shavarsh, though Prelate of Damascus, is not a member of the Cilician Brotherhood, but graduated and ordained from the Brotherhood of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He, therefore, never had a voice in the affairs of the Brotherhood.

in opposition to Zareh.

However, the Lebanese Ministry of Justice on July 26 issued the following certificate confirming Bishop Zareh as the legally elected Catholicos and the highest religious authority in the Armenian Apostolic Church in Lebanon.

The Ministry of Justice confirms that His Holiness Zareh Payaslian after his canonical election and recognition by the head of the State became the highest religious authority of the Armenian Apostolic Community of Lebanon under the title of His Holiness Catholicos Zareh I. This certificate is given as confirmation.³⁸

The same day Catholicos-elect Zareh summoned by cable Shahe Vardapet from Bikfaya; the Catholicos wanted to secure the keys to the secretariat office which were in the possession of the oppositional group of the Brotherhood. Shahe with a few of the other younger oppositional clergy appeared, but refused to turn the keys over. A scuffle was provoked, which was fortunately stopped before any serious injury was incurred. However, the keys were not secured and the doors to the secretariat office were later forced open.

Subsequent to these events the oppositional Brotherhood again petitioned the government of Syria and Lebanon, protesting the election of Catholicos Zareh. The governments took no action, but referred these petitions to Zareh and the incumbent Brotherhood. An "Official Communique" from the

38. Ibid., August 9, 1956.

Central Executive of the Brotherhood referred to the matter as follows,

At a meeting of the Central Executive held Friday, August 3, this body considered the matter of these members of the Cilician Congregation who rendered a petition to the governments of Syria and Lebanon. This petition, which protested the election of Catholicos Zareh, has been turned over to us by the Syrian and Lebanese governments, along with a covering message which stated that as far as those two governments were concerned, Catholicos Zareh was the spiritual head of the Armenians....³⁹

On the morning of August 7, Archbishop Khat headed a delegation of Cilician clergy and oppositional laymen to see President Chamoun. They called to the President's attention the events which had been taking place at Antelias. In a specially prepared memorandum they explained how the election of Zareh supposedly violated the canons of the Armenian Church and asked "that the certificate issued by the Ministry of Justice by which Bishop Zareh was proclaimed Catholicos be withdrawn."⁴⁰ On the same day an "Official Communique" was issued by the oppositional Brotherhood on the meeting with the president. It reads in part,

His Excellency revealed his astonishment when he found out that in the certificate Bishop Zareh was recognized by the State as Catholicos, and said that such a certificate does not give legal status to Bishop Zareh.

Then, the discussion turned to the Catholicos crisis and His Excellency said his

39. From a news dispatch datelined Beirut, August 7 in Hairenik Weekly, August 30, 1956.

40. Zartonk, May 8, 1956.

wish is that the unity of the Armenian Church be kept and by a mutual understanding the existing unhealthy situation be brought to an end.⁴¹

The next day Armenian Deputies Tosbath and DerKaloustian called on President Chamoun inquiring about his alleged statement. The President officially denied he had said anything against the legal status of Zareh as Catholicos.

A week later on August 13 a sensational 600 word telegram in French was sent by Catholicos Vasgen from Etchmiadzin to President Chamoun. The cable after commenting on Vasgen's frustrated mission in visiting Lebanon earlier in the year and referring to the recent events at Antelias, stated the following points:

First, we recognize Archbishop Khat as the locum tenens elect of the Catholicossate of Cilicia.

Second, Bishop Zareh is neither Catholicos nor Locum Tenens, and so is devoid of all religious and administrative authority. Catholicosal grace and authority derive from the mercy of God and the influence of the Holy Ghost, by canonical consecration and application of the Holy Chrism. The election - even if it is done legally - is nothing more than a presentation of a proposition for candidacy by the authority of the Church's hierarchy.

Meanwhile, We appeal to your high consciousness as a state leader to use your high authority, and just and beneficial assistance to help the Armenian Church and the faithful Armenian people, and to, as soon as possible, reestablish in the Catholicossate of Antelias Locum Tenens Archbishop Khat Atchabahian and

41. Ibid.

the Brotherhood's lawful authority....⁴²

However, once again the Government of Lebanon took no action in the matter.

Our narrative has brought us to the week before the consecration of Catholicos-elect Zareh scheduled for Sunday, September 2 at the Cathedral at Antelias. Announcement to that effect was sent to Catholicos Vasgen and other interested parties. The bishops of the Cilician See, who still refused to recognize Zareh as Catholicos, as well as other Armenian bishops, respecting the request of Catholicos Vasgen, were unwilling to participate. On August 30 Catholicos Vasgen sent the following cable to Bishops Zareh, Khoren and Ghevond.

Our only wish is that the consecration of the Catholicos of the House of Cilicia be performed according to canon and in an atmosphere of National peace....If these two conditions are not met, we advise you to postpone the ceremony of September 2, which will bring forth incurable difficulties and a final schism, subjecting you to the blasphemy of the Church and Nation. Let us try once again by a united effort in love of our Holy Faith and unity of our Nation to create the desired conditions. We do not see any unconquerable obstacle. In the event of a positive answer from you We have new proposals to present for the benefit of you and your See. For Holy constructive work one should not feel hopeless and discouraged. We are responsible before God and our History.⁴³

The following reply was immediately cabled by locum tenens

42. Ibid., August 28, 1956.

43. Ayk, September 2, 1956.

Khoren and Chairman of the Central Religious Council, Bishop Ghevond; it is dated Antelias, August 31.

We received your Holiness' cable of August 30 in the name of Catholicos Elect Zareh I and ourselves. We heartfully wish for the peacefulness of our two Sees in the benefit of Church and Nation. It was due to our wish that we postponed the consecration until now, so our conscience is clear in front of God and Church and Nation.

At present a new postponement is impossible for many reasons. We beseech you to allow your bishops to participate in the consecration of September 2 as a positive proof of good relations and a Christian spirit. After the consecration the Cilician See is ready, as always to examine any new propositions good-heartedly.⁴⁴

On the morning of the consecration, September 2, Ararad printed an "Official Declaration" by the oppositional group in the Cilician Brotherhood, again asserting the election of Zareh to be illegal and therefore warning that the consecration would be illegal and unacceptable.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, between the hours of 10 and 11:30 A.M., Bishop Zareh Payaslian was consecrated Zareh I Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. Bishops Khoren, Ghevond and Severios Yacoub, Prelate of the Syrian Church of Antioch, assisted by various lesser clergy, performed the consecration. Present in the Cathedral of Antelias were the heads, or the chosen representatives, of all Christian Churches and

44. Ibid.

45. Ararad, September 2, 1956.

denominations of Lebanon. Also present in official capacities were: the representative of His Excellency, President Camille Chamoun, Prime Minister A. Yaffi; the representative of the President and Prime Minister of Syria, Hanna Malek, Secretary of the Syrian Ministry; Adel Osseyran, President of the Lebanese Parliament; Selim Lahoud, the Foreign Minister of Lebanon; Abdul Nizameddin, Syrian Minister of Health; and other members of the parliaments of both countries. The crowd in the Cathedral and the adjacent grounds was estimated at 30,000. The entire consecration was broadcast over Radio Lebanon. The rites ended with a short sermon by Catholicos Zareh in which he thanked the governments of Syria and Lebanon and the Arab people for their help and understanding toward the Armenians. He called on the Armenian people for assistance, and prayed to God for guidance, so that he might be able to perform the heavy duties placed on his shoulders.⁴⁶

The expected reaction of the opposition was not slow in coming. Various cables and petitions were sent to the Governments of Syria and Lebanon by members of the Brotherhood and oppositional lay elements. Catholicos Vasgen was immediately informed of the consecration and sent the following cable to Archbishop Khat on September 8.

⁴⁶ A full account of the consecration can be found in Hask, August-October 1956, pp. 354-372.

We were shocked reading your telegram about the ceremony performed upon Bishop Zareh in the Cathedral of Antelias on Sept. 2. We deplore the prevailing situation within your See and We participate in the sorrow and spiritual agitation of your order.

For six months we made every effort to inspire all with the spirit of our holy faith and the unity of the nation. Now we are pained to know that after the deficient and unacceptable election of February 20, Bishop Zareh had undergone a ceremony which cannot be considered as ordination and consecration, because what has taken place is against the Holy canons and tradition of our Church, and altogether alien to the character and spirit of the Armenian Church.

The Armenian Church and the Armenian people will never tolerate to see an Armenian clergyman accept his jurisdiction through an ordination by non-Armenian clergy, for that would be a fatally dangerous precedent for the future of our Church.

We are confident that there will not be a true servant of our Church, there will not be an Armenian believer, who will be reconciled to the event that took place on September 2.

The Holy See of Etchmiadzin considers the ceremony of September 2 as an irreparable lawlessness, whereby the Bishops Khoren, Zareh and Ghevont (sic) have failed to their vow to keep safe and to defend the sacred legacy entrusted to them.

We wish you and your loyal priests wisdom, patience, strength, and devotion, so that with the help of God we may be able to restore within your See lawful authority, spiritual prestige, guided by the constructive and wholesome spirit of national unity.

Let the Holy Spirit give you health and strength.⁴⁷

Once again the contesting groups were unsuccessful in their attempts to invalidate the consecration. The government of Syria in fact sent the following circular directive to all

47. Mirror-Spectator, September 22, 1956.

district governors announcing the consecration of Catholicos Zareh and asserting his rights in Syria.

In accordance with the information received by this government from the Armenian Apostolic Community and the Cilician Catholicossate, on September 2, 1956, there took place the consecration of Zareh I, who had been elected on February 20, 1956, as Catholicos.

Due to this fact, Catholicos Zareh I, as the highest leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church government in Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus is entitled to the privileges and authority of that office.

We request that the contents of this directive be noted by you and made known to all officials under your jurisdiction.⁴⁸

In the five years that have lapsed since 1956 Catholicos Zareh has strengthened, spiritually and administratively, the See of Cilicia. There have been continued and numerous attempts at reconciliation with the Mother See of Etchmiadzin and the oppositional Cilician clergy, but all to no avail. Today most of the oppositional clergy, deprived of their rights and duties in the Cilician See, have found religious life outside the jurisdiction of the See. Attempts are still being made at a rapprochement with Etchmiadzin; all parties involved are hopeful that a reconciliation may be effected soon.

48. See "Syrian Government Bids All Officials Honor Sis Catholicos", datelined Damascus, September 13 in Hairenik Weekly, September 27, 1956.

V ANALYSIS

The preceding chapters have presented in so far as possible an objective narrative of the events surrounding the election and consecration of Catholicos Zareh I of Cilicia. This election gave birth to the recent crisis in the Armenian Church. In the following analysis the salient factors which caused the crisis will be examined. The independence of the Sees of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia since the 15th century is a well established fact. At least on two occasions in the 17th and again in the 19th century, the See of Etchmiadzin had tried to bring Cilicia under its administrative as well as spiritual authority. Thanks to the wisdom of Catholicoi such as Khrimian and Sahag in the 19th and 20th centuries this was not accomplished.¹

Was the recent crisis in part precipitated by a further attempt by Etchmiadzin to bring Cilicia under its control? In the 20th century with its sophisticated propaganda techniques, it is more difficult to reach a clear conclusion. A fair historian must concede that only in the future will such a question be resolved. Among other things the problem today is complicated by the relationship of Church and State in Soviet Armenia. The Soviet policy toward religion immediately

1. Supra, chap. II, p. 20.

after the Revolution was one of destruction and annihilation; since the 1942 softening of its violent anti-religious program the present Soviet attitude is much less clear. The contemporary literature on the status of the Church in Soviet Armenia is scanty, unscholarly, and passionately biased. The thesis has made slight reference to Soviet religious policy because it will further confuse the issues at hand. The Sees have been treated as religious bodies independent of governmental control, possessing, with some reservations, freedom to act as they wish. This may be giving the benefit of doubt to the Church in Soviet Armenia, but this benefit needs to be given for an understandable analysis of the purely Armenian factors involved.

If suspicion must be cast on Etchmiadzin's intentions toward the last Cilician Catholicos election, it must begin with its surprising reply to the announcement from Antelias that October 14, 1955, would be the definitive date for the election of a new Catholicos. The reply was an announcement of its own election scheduled for September and a request to once again postpone the Cilician election. The See of Cilicia had been vacant since 1952, the See of Etchmiadzin since 1954. The former had already postponed previously scheduled elections twice. Etchmiadzin after a year and a half had given no indication when it would elect a successor. To the tense and politically divided Armenian Community of the diaspora the sudden scheduling of an election by Etchmiadzin in reply to

Antelias' announcement seemed more than a coincidence.

Yet Cilicia gave Etchmiadzin the spiritual respect it has traditionally had by postponing its election a third time. In September 1955 a comparatively young clergyman, Vasgen Baljian of Rumania, who had only been ordained bishop in 1951, was elected Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. The Catholicossate of Cilicia took part in the election with its two authorized votes. It immediately congratulated Catholicos Vasgen and devoted the editorial of its official publication, Hask, to the election, expressing sincere joy and genuine hope for future cooperation.²

At Antelias a new election date, the fourth, was set for February 12, 1956. Armenians of the Middle East and the rest of the diaspora were expectantly waiting to see what position the new Catholicos would take toward the coming event. When on January 30, 1956, two weeks prior to the scheduled date, Catholicos Vasgen announced he would personally attend the election of the Cilician Catholicos, Armenians in the diaspora were overwhelmed, but also suspicious.

Why? What was so unusual about this announcement? First, it was an unprecedented event in Armenian history; never had a Catholicos of Etchmiadzin personally participated in an election of the Catholicossate of Cilicia in its 500

2. Hask, October, 1955.

year history. Secondly, a Catholicos of Etchmiadzin had not left Armenia for any purpose since the second half of the 17th century. Yet these unusual circumstances in themselves would not have caused such a sensation. A third factor was involved. What business had the newly elected Catholicos of the Mother See, which had been vacant for a year and a half, within less than six months of his election to visit dioceses and participate in an election outside his jurisdiction?

Catholicos Vasgen had neither visited the dioceses within Soviet Armenia nor those of Etchmiadzin in the diaspora.³ Did the upsetting situation in the See of Cilicia merit the immediate attention of the Catholicos more than his own dioceses? No. Since the sovietization of Armenia in 1921 the Catholicoi of Etchmiadzin have not been allowed to properly accomodate the spiritual needs of their faithful. In the diaspora Etchmiadzin has not even been able to provide priests for its dioceses. The theological seminary of Etchmiadzin has been closed from 1921 to 1945; only in 1954 did it graduate its first class of priests, some four in number. During these years clergymen were provided by the Seminaries of Antelias and Jerusalem. The number of churches open for religious use was dismally small. That there was a reawakening of religious life, in the early 1950's, no matter how meager, can not be

3. Never once have the dioceses of the diaspora received the benefits of a Catholicosal visit.

denied. Catholicos Vasgen referred to the above conditions more than once on his journey to Antelias. Why then, just when his services were sorely needed in his own dioceses, did the Catholicos decide to attend an election beyond the pale of his authority? Elements suspicious of Etchmiadzin's intentions ascribe the journey to still another attempt to subvert the independence of Cilicia. An opposing view holds that the Catholicos was merely showing his concern with the alarming condition in one part of an integral Armenian Church, and wished to use his highly respected position in supervising a peaceful election.

From the moment of his arrival in Lebanon, Catholicos Vasgen assumed authority in the election proceedings. Legally and canonically he had no such authority. The highest authority in the Cilician See was held by the locum tenens until the election of a new Catholicos. This was a source of untold confusion; many people, Armenian and non-Armenian alike, unquestioningly assumed the Catholicos had not only spiritual, but administrative authority. This was particularly true of the average Armenian believer, who did not clearly understand the issues or procedure involved; for them the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin was "the Catholicos".

Historically what has been the position of the Armenian community in the Middle East? As a carry over of the Ottoman millet system the Arab governments regard the Armenians

as forming an independent community governed by their own national constitution. This creates the unfortunate situation of a non-Armenian civil authority enforcing the regulations governing the Armenian Community. Thus, internal legal disputes must ultimately be judged by at best a disinterested and at worst an alien governmental body.

Politically the Armenian Community of the diaspora has been far from monolithic. The sovietization of the Independent Republic of Armenia became one of the immediate causes for political disagreement. In 1920 the Armenian Parliament was firmly controlled by the Tashnag Party. Though socialist, they wanted Armenia to remain autonomous. When the Republic fell the Tashnags were persecuted and denied political freedom. With the formation of Soviet Armenia only the Communist Party was allowed to operate. The Tashnags, as well as the Hunchaks (a socialist party to the left of the Tashnags) and the Ramgavars (representing the wealthy capitalist class), had to carry on national political activities outside their country. In the diaspora the minority Hunchak and Ramgavar parties saw the sovietization as beneficial to Armenia. Their argument was that Russian suzerainty would finally assure Christian Armenia protection from the centuries old persecution of the Moslem Turk. The Tashnags contended that atheistic communist rule would be as oppressive as Ottoman Turkish rule.

In the decades between the two World Wars, Armenians

in the diaspora were more concerned with the problems of settlement in their new homes than the wranglings of these disfranchised political parties. With the inception of the Cold War Armenian politics received a fresh impetus. Because of their bitter resentment toward Soviet Armenia the Tashnags adopted a consistent anti-Communist, pro-Western policy. On the other hand, despite their conflicting political and economic ideologies, the Ramgavars and Hunchaks, who displayed more sympathy toward the conditions in Soviet Armenia and still remembering their minority position during the short lived Republic, formed a coalition against the Tashnags.

All parties followed an essentially non-religious policy at least until the latest post war period. In the See of Cilicia the church indiscriminately administered to the spiritual needs of all Armenians who wished Christian guidance. In the political affairs of the Armenian Communities of Syria and Lebanon, the Tashnag Party was most powerful. Armenian deputies elected to the Syrian and Lebanese parliaments, more often than not, were Tashnags or Tashnag sympathizers. So too, the members elected to the diocesan councils, though not divided politically, were predominantly of Tashnag sympathies. Therefore, if the Tashnags wished to act as a united force in any Church election, or wished to support as a party a particular candidate for Catholicos, they would almost surely be successful.

The office of Catholicos of Cilicia as that of Etchmiadzin is an elected one. But unlike the Pope who is elected by the College of Cardinals, the Catholicos is chosen by the whole of the Armenian Community. In reality election of the Catholicos is in the hands of laymen and not the clergy; according to the 1941 Constitution of the Cilician See, lay members have a two-thirds majority over the clergy. In every sense of the word the Catholicos is a servant of his people.

Catholicos Karekin of Cilicia died in 1952; December 17, 1952, was the date set to choose a successor. The Tashnags had a majority in the various communal councils of Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus and would therefore have a majority of delegates in Electoral Assembly. The election, however, was postponed. Why? First, locum tenens Khat Atchabahian had ambitions of becoming the next Catholicos, but at the time did not have the unanimous support of the Tashnags and would probably not be elected. Secondly, if the Tashnags as a party favored any candidate it was either the Bishop of Aleppo, Zareh Payaslian, or the Bishop of Beirut, Khoren Paroyan. But a bishop of the Armenian Church must be at least forty years of age to be eligible for election; both were disqualified, the former being 37 and the latter 38. Thirdly, the Tashnags wanted to have the ecclesiastico-national machinery reestablished in its normal pattern. Catholicos Karekin had never convened

the National General Assembly, disregarding the rights of the laity in ecclesiastical affairs. The Tashnags proposed that the Assembly be convened by locum tenens Khat before the election of a Catholicos; he refused and no agreement was reached. The next election date, December 17, 1954, was again postponed, this time more by the wish of Khat than the Tashnags.

By October 14, 1955, the third scheduled date, it was clear the Tashnag Party had decided to wholeheartedly support either Bishop Khoren or Zareh. The Ramgavars and Hum haks, who were in a politically inferior position, tried to change the Tashnag majority in the diocesan communal councils. At this point the Communal Council of Aleppo becomes the center of controversy. According to the provisions of the 1863 Constitution there is supposed to be an election of 1/5 of the members of the Council every two years. After World War II there had only been three such elections, one in 1945, a second in 1949 and the third one in 1953; all three were swept by the Tashnags. The anti-Tashnag elements took the position that the Communal Council, and therefore, the delegates chosen by it for the Electoral Assembly, was not legally constituted because of this failure of electoral renewal.

Given the instability and the political realities of the Middle East, the above argument loses validity. There had been other elections scheduled, but they were postponed, often by the Syrian Government itself, which feared provocations among the Armenians of Aleppo. Yet, even assuming that

such elections regularly took place, there is no reason to believe the Tashnags would not have maintained a majority; everything points to the contrary. In September 1956 after the consecration of Catholicos Zareh there were communal elections held in Aleppo; the Tashnag supported candidates swept all positions.⁴ The oppositional elements boycotted the election. Generally a political party only boycotts an election it feels it will lose. If the Ramgavar-Hunchak coalition thought they could win in 1956 there can be no valid explanation for boycotting an election held under the auspices of the same Syrian Government ^{to which} they earlier made so many and often successful appeals.⁵

The October 14, 1955 date was also postponed. Anti-Tashnag pressure on a Syrian Government, at the time flirting with the Soviet Union, did bear fruit by way of the October 9, 1955 declaration of the Syrian Ministry of Interior Affairs on the Aleppo elections.⁵ This document, which was never enforced, as well as the persistent pressure of Etchmiadzin to postpone the Cilician election in favor of its own lately announced election, resulted in a situation so tense and confused that Archbishop Khat was forced to accompany his announcement of postponement with his resignation as locum tenens. The new locum tenens elected by the General Assembly of the Cilician

4. Hairenik Weekly, September 26, 1956, p.1.

5. Supra, chap. III, p. 41.

Brotherhood was the Tashnag supported Bishop of Beirut, Khoren Paroyan. He set the new Catholicosal election date for February 14, 1956.

On the above date the Electoral Assembly met at Antelias with all delegates present. They included the previously contested Aleppo delegates. If the Government of Syria believed their position to be anything but legal, positive steps could have been taken in the form of visa restrictions to keep them from attending. No such action was invoked. The claim that the Syrian Government was ignorant of the conditions involved is unsupportable in view of the declarations, petitions, interviews given the oppositional elements by it. The final appeal in a democratic process must be made to the law and those responsible for its enforcement. As discussed above it is unfortunate that the enforcing of the internal Armenian legal system is by a non-Armenian body, but this is an unsurmountable difficulty.

The Electoral Assembly met in a very tense atmosphere, but all parties concerned treated it as a legally constituted body. Before the opening of the first session Catholicos Vasgen addressed the Assembly. By the nature of his moral and spiritual authority he asked the delegates to postpone the election for one week so that he could attempt a reconciliation among the opposing elements in the community. This was, and could only be, a suggestion, or, at most an appeal from

the Catholicos, but not a legally binding demand. It was up to the Assembly to decide. The Assembly was composed of a pro-Tashnag majority; working as a bloc they could do as they pleased.

A legal postponement could only be inacted in one of two ways, officially by the locum tenens, or, by the Assembly formally constituted as an Assembly. Bishop Khoren did not take it upon himself to postpone again a thrice-postponed election. The opening debate found a minority of the delegates endorsing postponement without discussion. The majority held that the Assembly could not make such a decision until it was legally constituted, which meant the formal examination and approval of credentials and the choosing of an executive committee. A motion to that effect was put forward and passed. At this point a minority of delegates, ten out of the forty-eight present, walked out in protest;⁶ it was only then that the Assembly was declared illegal by the opposition.

The remaining majority had to make a choice: either, continue with the election of the Catholicos, or, adjourn. Wisely it respected the moral exhortations of the Catholicos of All Armenians and adjourned until February 20.

Catholicos Vasgen was displeased with the action of the Assembly and the same day announced his forthcoming departure.

6. Supra, chap. III, p. 47.

What alternative was there to the Assembly's procedure? If it had adjourned without legally constituting itself, what consequences would have resulted? There was little chance of changing the political alignment of the Assembly in this one week of grace. Did the Catholicos or the opposition expect new elections of the delegates? That would mean a further postponement. Did they expect the governments of Syria and Lebanon to be pressured or intimidated into acting against the Assembly? This, too, would result in a long term postponement. Most likely both Catholicos Vasgen and the anti-Tashnag elements wanted to see the Tashnag favored Bishops, Khoren and Zareh, withdraw their candidacy. This decision was purely a personal matter and the Bishops had already stated that their first loyalty was to the desires of the people they had vowed to serve.⁷ Even if they had withdrawn their names the Assembly could, and probably would, have elected one of them. How then, would they have shirked their responsibility?

But they did not withdraw, and the governments of Syria and Lebanon did nothing. On February 20 the Electoral Assembly met under rather unhappy circumstances,⁸ but elected Bishop Zareh Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia by an overwhelming majority. It was a legal fait accompli; what could

7. Supra, chap. III, p. 52.

8. Supra, chap. III, pp. 54-55.

the loosing minority opposition do? Legally, nothing. Extralegally, they could protest and make a great clamor; they did. Catholicos Vasgen refused to recognize Bishop Zareh as Catholicos-elect; that was his prerogative. However, his action had no bearing on the legal position of Zareh. The Catholicos of Cilicia is internally elected; his position is not affected by Etchmiadzin's recognition or lack of recognition. Just as the election of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin is not contingent on the sentiments of the Cilician Catholicos.

Within a week Catholicos Vasgen had journeyed to Cairo, where he called a world wide Armenian Episcopal Assembly to consider what it termed a 'defective and unacceptable' election. The decisions⁹ taken by this body can in no way be considered binding. First, the bishops who discussed and passed the resolutions were all under the jurisdiction of the See of Etchmiadzin. As such there is neither canon nor tradition which sanctions such action towards Cilicia. At most these decisions were recommendations or proposals to be examined by the new Catholicos. However, even if this Cairo Synod were a truly representative body of bishops from both Sees, there is again no canon nor precedent for it to take action against the purely internal administrative matters of either See. Many observers, lay and clergy alike, interpreted the actions of this body as another unilateral attempt by Etchmiadzin to bring

9. Supra, chap. IV, pp. 61-65.

Cilicia under its control.

The Religious Brotherhood of the See of Cilicia had, according to the Constitution of 1941, five votes in the Electoral Assembly. The General Assembly of the Brotherhood had elected its five representatives in 1952; these same five participated in the February 1956 election. Constitutionally, even if all five delegates voted against the elected Catholicos, the Brotherhood was bound to accept him as Catholicos, and, as such, the spiritual and administrative head of their order. They are vowed to be obedient to him; it is their spiritual, legal and moral duty to acknowledge and accept him as their superior. If they do not, the decision of the people they have vowed to serve is violated; their rights in the Brotherhood can be forfeited. Each member of the Brotherhood was confronted with two courses: either, recognize the elected Catholicos as Catholicos, or, withdraw from the order. There is no way, canonically or traditionally, that the Brotherhood can by itself elect, dismiss or withhold recognition from an elected Catholicos. This must have been a genuinely frustrating position for members of the Cilician Order who were against the election of Bishop Zareh. They had either to accept him, or resign; there was no third alternative. Some tried to create one; they failed and were dismissed from the Brotherhood.¹⁰

10. Supra, chap. IV, pp. 78, 80.

Not so clear was the position of the Catholicos-elect in the interim between election and consecration. In the Armenian Church as in other early Christian Churches there are three major degrees in the hierarchy: deacon, priest and bishop. Other ranks as archbishop, patriarch, vardapet, and Catholicos are merely variations of these levels. They entail no new religious or spiritual authority, though they may carry additional administrative functions and power. The Catholicos still has the ecclesiastical rank of bishop, as a Patriarch in the Orthodox Church, and the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church, who is the Bishop of Rome. Ordination as bishop confers the rights to bless the Holy Chrism and ordain priests. When a bishop is consecrated Catholicos he receives no additional religious prerogatives. As Catholicos he is merely first among equals and recognized as such by the other bishops.

The important point here, is that the additional administrative authority an Armenian Catholicos obtains is bestowed by his election and not by his consecration. The ceremony of consecration confers a religious sanction to his duly elected position. Upon being elected Catholicos he is endowed with a triple function: religiously, the rights of a bishop; administratively, the highest ranking clergyman of his See; internally, the spiritual and administrative head of the religious brotherhood. In this last capacity he has the authority to assign duties to the members of the order as he sees fit. If

members refuse to adhere to his commands, he may dismiss them, or, suspend their rights. Further, he is above the decisions of the General Assembly of the Brotherhood and may convene or dismiss that body at will. His only allegiance is to God and the people who have elected him. Therefore, by the virtue of his election Catholicos Zareh had the right to suspend or dismiss clergymen who, either, did not fulfil their prescribed duties as members of the Cilician Brotherhood, or, refused to obey his decisions.

During the summer of 1956 Catholicos-elect Zareh was reluctant to use his full powers. He desired to make the way for reconciliation with oppositional members of the Brotherhood as easy as possible. When it was clear that certain clergymen did not appreciate his patience and remained adamant in their refusal to recognize him as Catholicos and to obey his orders, he acted firmly by dismissing them.¹¹

The final question, which was the most misunderstood problem of the crisis, was the consecration of Catholicos Zareh. The opposition held that according to canon at least three Armenian Bishops were necessary to perform the ceremony. For a long time this was almost axiomatically accepted by Catholicos-elect Zareh and locum tenens Khoren. At least there were various attempts made to find in addition to Bishops Ghevond

11. Ibid.

of Cyprus and Khoren, a third. Upon close examination of all known canons it was found no such canon existed. Then the opposition hedged by stating that three bishops was minimal by the time honored tradition of the Armenian Church. Again, after close scrutiny of church history, there was no record of a single consecration in which just three bishops participated. The three-bishop-consecration appeared to be a myth. Catholicos Zareh, who was very cautious and sensitive about the possible violation of correct procedure and also still partially intimidated by the magical number three, asked Bishop Yacoub, Prelate of the Syrian Church of Antioch which is in communion with the Armenian Church, to assist Bishops Ghevond and Khoren with the consecration.

The courage and patience which Catholicos Zareh displayed throughout the unpleasant ordeal must be admired. In every way he tried to meet the demands of both the oppositional members of the Cilician See and the Catholicossate of Etchmiadzin. His single desire was to preserve a Christian unity in the Armenian Church at any cost short of subversion of the independence of the Cilician See.

Today, there is no longer any question about the position of Catholicos Zareh, but the dispute between Etchmiadzin and Cilicia continues. Catholicos Vasgen has not yet recognized Zareh as Catholicos of Cilicia. However, both Catholicoi still express their sincere desire for a rapproachment. One can only hope and pray that the inevitable reconciliation will not be long in coming, and the unity of the Armenian Church restored.

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