

ԲԱՆԲԵՐ ՀԱՅԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ
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ՀԱՅԱԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՆԴԵՍ

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ՀՀ ԳԱԱ «ԳԻՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ» ՀՐԱՏԱՐԱԿՉՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

The Efforts of Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan Aimed...

On January 1, 1936, the activity of the Spirit and the Presiding Dean was terminated by the Independent Synods No. 1 and 2 of the Catholicos of All Armenians, and the Supreme Spiritual Council¹ was established instead. It was to be provided by the Catholicos, with the membership of six experienced high-ranking clergymen: Archbishop Mesrop, Hagop, Khoren and Hovhsep Garago, Zaven and Simeon. In the absence of the Catholicos, the meetings of the Council should have been chaired by Archbishop Khoren, who on March 6, 1935, was appointed Deputy Catholicos² by the synodical of the Catholicos of All Armenians.

With the establishment of the Supreme Spiritual Council on January 1, 1936, a new period in the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church began, when the Mother See, in the carrying of the authority³ and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, transferred from the patriarchal rule of the Catholicos to a collegial rule.

Now it is appropriate to quote the words of Archbishop Mesrop, the Mesropist⁴: "... In these conditions, thanks to the Supreme Spiritual Council, the Armenian Church is governed better than by the unilateral will of the Catholicos or by the Spirit enlightening the soul. This is the reality".

After the formation of the Supreme Spiritual Council, the Deputy Spirit of Khoren Khoren Muradbekyan should have focused more on the protection of the rights of the church and on settling the distressed church – such relations rather than on more domestic issues. That is why, as before a devout clergymen, on February 1, 1936, Archbishop Khoren submits his resignation⁵ from the post of Deputy Spirit of Khoren to Catholicos George V. On May 27, 1936, the Synod accepted Archbishop Khoren's resignation, ordering him to remain in the Mother See as the Rector of the Mother Cathedral and the presiding member of the Supreme Spiritual Council.

Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan held the position of Deputy Catholicos of All Armenians and the presiding member of the Supreme Spiritual Council until 1932 when he was elected Catholicos of All Armenians. During that period, the violence perpetrated by the Soviet authorities against the Armenian Apostolic

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2. The Supreme Spiritual Council of the Armenian Apostolic Church, established on January 1, 1936, was composed of six members: Archbishop Mesrop, Hagop, Khoren and Hovhsep Garago, Zaven and Simeon. The Council was presided over by Archbishop Khoren, who was appointed Deputy Catholicos on March 6, 1935.
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Church and its ministers increased. Church seizures and repression of the clergy were becoming more and more widespread.

Due to the desperate situation, Archbishop Khoren regularly addressed appeals to the Chairman of the People's Council of the Armenian SSR and the People's Committee of Internal Affairs, asking them to end the violence against the clergy and return the confiscated churches to the Mother See and the Catholic community.

Despite the exerted best efforts and zeal, very few churches reopened, most remained closed, and the policy of repression against priests continued.

New Restrictions by the Soviet Authorities

From February 1955, the Soviet authorities created more unfavorable conditions to put pressure on the Armenian Apostolic Church and restrict its activities. The logical continuation of these actions was to tax the clergy by demanding income tax from them.¹ Concerned Archbishop Khoren went again to the Chairman of the People's Council of the Armenian SSR, the People's Committee of Internal Affairs, asking them to cancel the decision to tax the Catholics of the Armenian SSR and monks of the monastery, i.e. according to the decree requirements, their income being only 100 roubles, did not exceed 400 roubles declared, consequently, as representatives of the religious community, they had no other source of income. Therefore, according to the decree, they should not be taxed and pay income tax.²

During the years of 1955-1956 Archbishop Khoren Merabishyan, in the capacity of the Catholicos representative and deputy, actively continued to negotiate with high-ranking officials of the Soviet government, trying to solve the issues of primary importance for the Armenian Apostolic Church: normalization of church-state relations, reopening of the monastery,³ completion and publication of a new calendar,⁴ convening a national church assembly,⁵ clarifying the legal status of the Mother See,⁶ etc. However, the course of the negotiations and the process in the applications showed that the final agreement with the authorities

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Armenian nation and the authorities of the Catholicos. On this occasion, during the meeting of the State Council of Soviet Armenia on May 25, 1925, a decision was made to take advantage of all controversies within the Supreme Spiritual Council and to use it, to include Soviet-oriented members, to identify negatively with Soviet authorities, and thus, to reject the religious issues from Church administration, as well as the nation³².

In future, the authorities did not allow the Catholicos Deputy Archbishop Khoren, referring to administrative arguments, to visit a cathedral, denouncing Soviet State ideology, or an expression of the hostile attitude against the Mother See, aimed at decimating the state³³.

Armenian Media in Diaspora and Armenian Spiritual Church

Adhering to his title of a clergyman, Archbishop Khoren continued to fight by all possible means to find a way beyond the existing barrier between the church and the state. It should be noted that in those years the church and its ministers were humiliated not only by the authorities, but also by the press in the Diaspora and Soviet Armenia, which further alienated the state from the Armenian Apostolic Church, provided that the latter had already become a "thorn in the flesh for the state". Thus, for example, in 1926, Atrpet³² published an article in the Tbilissi newspaper "Martakoch" with the headline "Intolerable", in which he accused the Catholicos of All Armenians and the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council of looting and illegally selling national antiquities³³. In particular, it referred to the gold coins of Tigran the Great, the eastern tapestry-curtain and the Catholicos' pearl crown, which were allegedly taken out of the treasury of the Mother See and sold to foreigners.

In response to the defamatory article, the Catholicos Deputy Archbishop Khoren, referring to administrative arguments, issued a statement, denouncing Atrpet's false allegations as an expression of the hostile attitude against the Mother See, aimed at decimating the state³⁴.

³² *Armenian Media in Diaspora and Armenian Spiritual Church*, p. 100.
³³ *Armenian Media in Diaspora and Armenian Spiritual Church*, p. 100.
³⁴ *Armenian Media in Diaspora and Armenian Spiritual Church*, p. 100.
³⁵ *Armenian Media in Diaspora and Armenian Spiritual Church*, p. 100.
³⁶ *Armenian Media in Diaspora and Armenian Spiritual Church*, p. 100.

called "Supreme Council" of Armenians. The White Council came to some agreement with the Supreme Council and created a coalition front against the working class of Soviet Armenia.³⁸

The clergymen of the Armenian Apostolic Church found themselves in a hopeless situation. On the one hand, the persecution and repression by the authorities, on the other hand, the disturbing articles of the Armenian press in the Diaspora seemed to once again give reason to believe that the church, by overestimating its importance in the fate of the Armenian people, was trying to undermine the reputation of the Soviet authorities in the Diaspora.

Based on the demand of the created situation and through the mediation of Archbishop Khoren, Catholicos of All Armenians George V, on the eve of the October Revolution on November 17, 1927, addressed all Armenians with an encyclical to call for solidarity, unity and assistance to Soviet Armenia³⁹.

Notes of Bishop

The authorities of Soviet Armenia were well aware of the responsibility of maintaining the faith of the people through the contribution of church property, the closure of churches, arrest of the clergy, the creation of "new churches" and the discrediting of the press.

In 1925, the authorities formed the Union of Atheists (renamed into the Union of Fighting Atheists (UFA) in 1929)⁴⁰. The main goal of the union was to engage in atheistic education of the people, which intensified the policy of intolerance towards the church and religion.

The official newspaper "Atheist", published since 1928, was filled with anti-religious, anti-church propaganda and cartoons of the clergy. The culmination of the atheists' actions was the mass closure of churches and turning them into clubs

and warehouses. Concerned about the reality, the Catholicos in the hope of finding a way for relations with many letters and petitions to the Supreme Spiritual Council one of which reads as follows: "The strongest struggle is against religion and the clergy. They have intimidated terribly all the poor people, the church goes, the church council members and the members by depriving them of the opportunity of their work. From that point of view I am left with my arms

³⁸ *Հայաստանի հայրենակցական ժողով*, 1927, հ. 1, Է. 1.
³⁹ *Հայաստանի հայրենակցական ժողով*, 1927, հ. 1, Է. 1.
⁴⁰ *Հայաստանի հայրենակցական ժողով*, 1927, հ. 1, Է. 1.

