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HISTORY

KANAKARA HAYRAPETYAN

PhD Student at NAS RA Institute of History

q.hayrapetyan@gsu.am

ABOUT ARCHBISHOP KHOREN MURADBEKYAN'S ELECTION AS CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS

Key words: *Archbishop Khoren, Catholicos of All Armenians Khoren I, National Church Assembly, "Pontifical Electoral Charter", National Church Constitution, Reforms, Supreme Spiritual Council.*

The Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Gevorge V Surenyants¹ passed away on May 8, 1930. In accordance with Article 22 of Pontifical Electoral Charter endorsed by Catholicos Gevorge V Surenyants, after the death of the Catholicos the Head of the Armenian Apostolic Church should be elected within six months at the session convened by the National Church Assembly². Therefore, after the burial ceremony of the Catholicos, the Deputy Catholicos of All Armenians³, the President of the Supreme Spiritual Council⁴, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's main task was to conduct the procedures officially as stipulated by the Charter.

The Archbishop Khoren and the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council embarked on conducting negotiations with ASSR authorities to convene a session of the National Church Assembly. On this occasion, on May 29, the President of the Supreme Spiritual Council, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan

¹ Documents of History of Armenian Church, Book B, Catholicos of All Armenians Khoren I Muradbekyan (ecclesiastic activities during 1901–1938), compiled by **S. Behburdyan**, Yerevan, 1996, № 140, p. 253.

² Ibid., № 142, pp. 254–256.

³ Ibid., № 78, pp. 152–153.

⁴ Ibid., № 85, pp. 166–167.

About Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's Election as Catholicos...

wrote a letter to the President of ASSR Central Executive Committee S. Kasyan and the President of ASSR People's Council S. Ter-Gabrielyan asking to facilitate and allow unimpeded convocation of delegates and members of electoral councils of all Union Republics, free entrance of foreign deputies to Soviet Armenia, and also for a right to publish periodicals⁵ to cover a number of issues concerning the election of the new Catholicos and the National Church Assembly to successfully carry out the election of the Catholicos.

In response to Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's letter, the President of ASSR Central Executive Committee S. Kasyan wrote that the Central Executive Committee had never hindered convocations of religious congregations if they dealt with only religious and church issues and on the same grounds he considered the entry of foreign guests to Soviet Armenia for the election of the Catholicos possible. Stemming from the purpose of the issue, publications in the press would also be permitted for which the relevant bodies would be given preliminary instructions⁶.

After receiving a positive response from the Central Executive Committee, on July 18, 1930, for the purpose of convening a session of the National Church Assembly, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan sent a circular addressed to the Catholicos⁷ of Cilicia, Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople, all diocese leaders and bishops. It was particularly mentioned in the circular that after the death of the Catholicos of All Armenians George V Surenyants, the main task of the Supreme Spiritual Council was not to leave the Patriarchal seat vacant but quickly organize the election of the Catholicos. On this occasion, previously agreed with the authorities of Soviet Armenia, a decision was made to convene the Church Assembly session on October 26 the following questions being included in the agenda:

1. election of the Catholicos of All Armenians,
2. election of the Deputy Catholicos of All Armenians,
3. election of the Supreme Spiritual Council members of St. Etchmiadzin,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., № 145, p. 258:

⁷ In 1928–1936 the Hierarchical See of Cilicia had two Catholicos: Sahak II Khapayan and Archbishop Babken Kyuleseryan. See in "Azdarar", № 31, 2009, pp. 2–3. See in **Hatityan A.**, Brief Overview on the History of Mother See St. Etchmiadzin (1920–1967), "Hierarchical Sees of Khoren I the Catholicos", "Etchmiadzin", 1968, E, p. 50.

Hayrapetyan K.

4. discussion of the National Church Constitution,
5. reporting on the Armenian National Church reforms,
6. validation⁸ of the estimate of St. Etchmiadzin and the adjacent spiritual, educational and cultural institutions.

Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan also attached the “Pontifical Electoral Charter” to the circular according to which, the session of the National Church Assembly should be convened with the participation of the previously elected deputies of all dioceses; besides, according to Articles 5 and 6 of the Charter, the participation of the patriarchs in the National Church Assembly session was emphasized. In the case of the absence of the Catholicos, the session would be headed either by the Catholicos of Cilicia, or the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and in the case of their absence – by the Deputy Catholicos of all Armenians⁹.

While sending the circular, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan expressed his hope that the pious Armenian nation would treat the elections with a sense of responsibility and would elect reputable persons who would give solutions to all the problems in St. Etchmiadzin and also be a commendable Catholicos of All Armenians¹⁰.

The session of the Armenian National Church Assembly seemed to be a reality but on August 17, during a closed session of the Central Committee Bureau of the Armenian Communist Party, a decision was made to postpone the convocation of the session of the National Church Assembly and discuss the question at the session of the Central Committee of All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party¹¹. The decision to postpone the session was not accidental. The authorities were concerned about the activation of the Dashnaks and the connection of the latter with the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council.

On September 11, 1930, the Supreme Spiritual Council sent circulars to all diocese leaders and spiritual institutions on postponing the session of the National Church Assembly on the ground that obtaining permission for the entry of foreign deputies takes long, whereas the Supreme Spiritual Council

⁸ Ibid., № 148, pp. 261–263.

⁹ **Hatityan A.**, Brief overview on the History of Holy See St. Etchmiadzin (1920–1967) Khoren I Muradbekyan, the Catholicos (November 1932 – April 1938), “Etchmiadzin”, 1968, B, p. 22.

¹⁰ Documents of History of the Armenian Church, pp. 261–263:

¹¹ Ibid., № 152, p. 265:

About Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's Election as Catholicos...

considered it desirable to convene the session of the National Church Assembly with its full staff¹².

As for the entry permission, it is worth mentioning that in those years the citizens of Syria, Lebanon and European countries were prohibited to visit the Soviet Union. However, a more defensible reason for postponing the session of the National Church Assembly was the obvious anti-church and anti-religious policy of the Soviet authorities to subdue and finally disorganize Etchmiadzin. We present the following document to prove this fact.

On September 7, 1930, the Deputy President of the Interregional Board L. Beria and the Head of the Secret Department of Interregional Board Mughdusi wrote in their strictly confidential report to Moscow that all the efforts for taking Etchmiadzin under the influence of the ruling regime had so far been in vain. Therefore, the situation created in Etchmiadzin should be used to take it completely under control. It is not a secret that Etchmiadzin played an important role not only in Soviet Armenia but also in the Diaspora. The Catholicosate in Etchmiadzin was the spiritual, political and organizational center of the Armenian Church and a major factor in the development of the social, cultural and political life of the entire Armenian nation. An opportunity should be granted to convene a session in St. Etchmiadzin, otherwise the Catholicos of All Armenians might be elected in the Diaspora¹³ – a fact that would result in the Soviet government losing the last chance¹⁴ of keeping the Armenian Apostolic Church under its control. The same report mentioned the names of all the Catholicos candidates with their political and party orientations. Among the candidates was the leader of Spahan diocese, Archbishop Mesrop Ter-Movsisyan; leader of the Tabriz diocese, Archbshop Melik Tangyan; the Deputy Catholicos, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan, the latter being mentioned as an ardent proponent of the Dashnaks and a person having the anti-Soviet orientation. Finally, Archbishop Gevorg Chorekchyan's name was mentioned who, as stated in the report, was presented as a person with the anti-Dashnak orientation, the least discredited clergyman by the Soviet press and a person

¹² Ibid., № 155, pp. 279–280.

¹³ This issue was addressed by N. Adonts taking into consideration “The Dashnaktsutyun” party's intention of dividing St. Etchmiadzin and creating separate Catholicosate for the Armenian people in Diaspora. See in **Adonts N.**, Narratives F, Yerevan, 2012, pp. 284, 478.

¹⁴ Documents of History of the Armenian Church, Book B, № 154, pp. 268–279.

Hayrapetyan K.

who in the years of leading the Georgian Diocese in Tbilisi had been in touch with the authorities and cooperated with them. In his report Beria proposed to delay the permission for convening the session of the National Church Assembly to save time and thus, allow Gevorg Chorekchyan to win the elections of Catholicos.

After about two years of delays and active negotiations conducted by the Supreme Spiritual Council, on April 1, 1932, the Central Committee Bureau of the Communist Party of Armenia made a secret decision and permitted the convocation¹⁵ of the National Church Assembly session in St. Etchmiadzin.

On April 6, the President of the Supreme Spiritual Council, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan temporarily sent Gevorg Chorekchyan to Georgia and appointed him as leader of the Georgian Diocese being confident that the Soviet authorities had a benevolent attitude towards him¹⁶.

On November 10, 1932, the long awaited session of the Armenian National Church Assembly headed by the Deputy Catholicos, Archbishop Khoren was finally convened in St. Etchmiadzin, with the participation of previously selected 80 deputies from the Diaspora, Soviet Armenia and Union Republics, 72 out of which were clergymen, and 8 were seculars. Because of some problems connected with the entry permission, the Catholicosate of Cilicia and the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Constantinople were not able to attend the session of the Armenian National Church Assembly. The three hierarchical sees appointed their authorized deputies: Archbishop Khoren represented the Catholicosate of Cilicia and Archbishop Bagrat represented the Patriarchate of Jerusalem¹⁷.

From November 10 to November 13, six National Church Assembly sessions were convened during which the following questions of the agenda were set up for discussion and approval:

1. Discussion and Approval of the Election Method of Catholicos,
2. Reports by the Supreme Spiritual Council on a) the Activities and Institution of the Supreme Spiritual Council, b) Material Needs of the Holy Center, c) the Constitution of the Armenian Apostolic Church,
3. Reports on the Reforms of the Armenian Apostolic Church,

¹⁵ Ibid., № 185, p. 317:

¹⁶ Ibid., № 186, pp. 317–318:

¹⁷ **Hatityan A.**, Ibid., “Etchmiadzin”, 1968, B, p. 28:

About Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's Election as Catholicos...

4. Election of the Catholicos of All Armenians,
5. Election of the Members of the Supreme Spiritual Council,
6. Greetings and Gratitude Expressed by the National Church Assembly to the Soviet government¹⁸.

As a result of active discussions and exchange of opinions during the sessions of the National Church Assembly, a decision was made to approve the Patriarchal Encyclical of January 1, 1924, according to which, the Supreme Spiritual Council had been established, and to accept the resignation of the current staff of the Supreme Spiritual Council, asking them to continue their activities until the election of the new staff.

The Supreme Spiritual Council was assigned to form a special Committee to work out the draft of the Constitution of the Armenian National Church taking into consideration the opinions of the Catholicosate of Cilicia and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. It was proposed to recognize the material status of Mother See as totally insecure and explore the problem with the relevant specialists¹⁹.

On November 12, 1932, at 11:30 a.m., Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan announced the opening of the regular session of the National Church Assembly with the participation of 72 deputies and 80 votes. The questions of electing a Patriarch and the Supreme Spiritual Council were set up for discussion.

The Chairperson of the session Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan presented the procedures of Catholicos election according to which, the preliminary list of the Catholicos candidates had been previously drawn up in leaflets and the final election should also be carried out with leaflets as the Presidency had considered the ordered boxes to be useless.

Before the voting, the Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan reported to the meeting that according to their letters, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Torgom Gushakyan and the Patriarch of Constantinople Mesrop Naroyan had withdrawn their candidacies. Archbishop Bagrat also announced the withdrawal of his candidacy.

79 ballots, instead of 80 were distributed (Arshak Chopanyan attended the session after the voting).

¹⁸ Documents of History of the Armenian Church, Book B, № 221, pp. 353–357.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Hayrapetyan K.

The results of the preliminary election were as follows: Archbishop Khoren Muradbakyan received 51 votes, Archbishop Matteos Matteosyan – 12 votes, Archbishop Mesrop – 10 votes, Archbishop Bagrat – 2 votes, and Archbishops Torgom and Garegin – 1 vote each.

Apart from Archbishops Khoren and Matteos, the others refused to run during the next voting. Archbishop Mesrop announced that the only deserving candidate was Archbishop Matteos.

After a break of half an hour, the second round of voting began. Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan received 60 votes and Archbishop Matteos – 19 votes. The Chairperson Archbishop Khoren stated the results of the elections and announced Archbishop T. Khoren as the Catholicos of All Armenians²⁰.

Thus, despite the efforts of Soviet authorities, the throne of the Catholicos was entrusted to Archbishop T. Khoren Muradbekyan who was not welcomed by the authorities. The newly elected Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Khoren Muradbakyan expressed his satisfaction and gratitude to the Armenian National Church Assembly and added, “This session had loaded him with a weighty responsibility; however, only relying on the Cathedral, the help of the Armenian people and actions of his brotherhood monks would he be able to do his sacred duty toward the church and his people”²¹.

On November 12, after the Patriarch elections, the staff of the Supreme Spiritual Council was also approved: 4 clergymen (Archbishop Garegin Hovsepyan, Archbishop Gevorg Chorekchyan, Archbishop Artak Smbatyan and Archbishop Arsen Ghitrchyan) as well as 2 secular representatives²².

The Consecration Ceremony of the Catholicos of All Armenians took place on November 13, in Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin with the participation of 12 bishops, members of the National Church Assembly and the pious people²³.

On the occasion of the election of the Catholicos of All Armenians, publications were issued not only in the Diaspora²⁴ but also in the Soviet press.

²⁰ National Archives of Armenia (hereinafter NAA), f. 409, c. 1, b. 153, pp. 33–34.

²¹ Ibid.

²² NAA, f. 409, c. 1, b. 159, p. 2.

²³ “Etchmiadzin”, C, 1968, **Hatityan A.**, Ibid, p. 29.

²⁴ “Armenia”, December 10, 1932: “Armenian Speaker”, December, 1932: “Hask” p. 43, 1932. “Sion”, December, 1932: “Haraj”, November 15, 1932. “Bazmavep”, volume R, № 12, 1932, p. 563.

About Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's Election as Catholicos...

In that regard, the newspaper "Soviet Armenia" wrote that as a result of the session of the National Church Assembly convened in Etchmiadzin, Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan was elected Catholicos of All Armenians. The Assembly sent greetings to the Government of Soviet Armenia and adopted a relevant declaration²⁵.

All Armenians triumphantly accepted the news of the election of the new Catholicos. Various congratulatory letters and telegrams from different parts of the world addressed to the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Khoren I were sent by the Diocese leaders, priests, national institutions and individuals who expressed their delight and satisfaction with regard to the election of the new Catholicos. On this occasion, the leader of Armenian diocese in America, Archbishop Ghevond Duryan wrote: "May all the monasteries, friaries and temples rejoice in delight and be adorned with feathers; ... May St. Etchmiadzin jubilate and exult as a sacred bride Church.

All of us in one heart and soul wish and say: "King of Heaven, keep Hhy Church firm and Thy worshipers in peace"²⁶.

On November 18, one week after the election of the Catholicos, the first session of the newly elected Supreme Spiritual Council took place, the major task of which was the preparation of the first Patriarchal Encyclical. A decision was made to entrust the artistic design of the Encyclical to Archbishop Garegin as a skilled master in Armenian miniature²⁷. By the proposal of the Catholicos of All Armenians, the Supreme Spiritual Council carried out a division of labor. Archbishop Garegin Hovsepian was appointed Chair of sessions of the Supreme Spiritual Council and was obliged to present himself to the Catholicos and report on the process of the sessions. Archbishop Gevorg Chorekchyan was appointed as a negotiator and representative of the Catholicos in state and governmental circles, Archbishop Artak Smbatsyan was appointed as Treasurer of Mother See and Deputy Diocesan of Yerevan, and Archbishop Arsen Ghltrchyan was appointed Chair of the Audit Committee in Mother See²⁸.

²⁵ "Soviet Armenia", November 16, 1932.

²⁶ NAA, f. 409, c. 1, b. 161, p. 30.

²⁷ "Etchmiadzin", C, 1968, the mentioned article, p. 29.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 29–30.

Hayrapetyan K.

On June 1, 1933, the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Khoren I Muradbekyan wrote his first Patriarchal Encyclical²⁹ in the eighth month of his enthronement with excused delay due to his illness³⁰, all circumstances and difficulties hindering the normal functioning of the church, intolerance and arbitrariness by the authorities, and repression of the clergy. It was printed in 200 copies in Yerevan and sent abroad to Hierarchical Sees, Deputy Diocesans, clergymen, charities, national non-governmental organizations and the Government of the Soviet Union.

In his first Encyclical, the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Khoren Muradbekyan sent his blessings and greetings to all Armenians and mentioned that his election as Catholicos during the session of the National Church Assembly held November 10–13 was an exceptional and important phenomenon given the fact that following the Pontifical Charter³¹ adopted in 1836, for the first time the Catholicos was elected in a national election for which the newly elected Catholicos expressed his gratitude to the government of Soviet Armenia.

With particular grief, the newly elected Catholicos addressed the difficult circumstances existing not only in Soviet Armenia but also in the Diaspora singling out the migration of the Armenian people, the widespread poverty, divisive struggle of the party, and deviations of the Holy Church from faith.

The Catholicos then addressed the decisions made by the National Church Assembly: the necessity of a new constitution for the Armenian Apostolic Church which should be compiled in accordance with the historical and cherished traditions of the Armenian Church; the reforms of the rules of the Armenian Apostolic Church needed refinement in line with the contemporary challenges and requirements, as well as the economic security of Mother See.

Despite the existing difficulties, the Catholicos of All Armenians was hopeful that he was not alone and that the Catholicosate of Cilicia, Patriarchates, diocese leaders of Jerusalem and Constantinople, and all pious Armenians stood by his side.

Afterwards, the Catholicos of All Armenians expressed his gratitude and wishes to all Hierarchical Sees, Deputy Diocesans, priests and the Armenian

²⁹ Documents of History of the Armenian Church, Book B, № 246, pp. 379–380.

³⁰ “Sion”, № 10, October, November, 1933, pp. 293–297.

³¹ Encyclopedia “Christian Armenia”, Publication of Armenian Encyclopedia, Yerevan, 2002, pp. 864–865.

About Archbishop Khoren Muradbekyan's Election as Catholicos...

people urging the clergymen to be exemplary believers, not engage in politics and keep the people away from party divisions. The people, our homeland and church longed for peace which meant labor, wealth, construction and spiritual good from both cultural and patriotic perspectives.

The Encyclical of the Catholicos of All Armenians ends with a patriotic, heartfelt appeal and exhortations: “My spiritual sons, who have crossed the border of far-flung states and nations, I have words of exhortation and blessing to tell you, words of condolence and gospel as even though under adverse circumstances desolation has gripped our country and scattered the surviving people all over the world, many of you being part of them, thanks to the mercy of God we were bestowed with the Land of Ararat with its bordering regions which day by day flourish in prosperity. Hereinafter, my dear sons, to your rejoice and condolence, I exhort you to both morally and materially support the replenishment of our country, development of educational institutions, reconstruction of cities, villages and factories, and cultivation of fertile farmlands as you are twigs of a tree, roots and trunk of revitalization with which our historical homeland Soviet Armenia will stand erect”³².

The Patriarchal Encyclical was completely covered in the “Sion”³³ and “Hask”³⁴ magazines but because of obvious anti-religious disposition of Soviet Armenia it was published after declaring independence, in “Etchmiadzin” magazine³⁵ in 2003.

Owing to the turn of events, the Catholicos of All Armenians Khoren I Muradbekyan took over patriarchy in a period when the intolerance policy, obvious arbitrariness and Stalin repressions by Soviet Armenia authorities towards the church reached their peak. In defense of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the holy faith and unity of the Armenian people, Khoren I Muradbekyan undertook the resolution of the crucial issues of the Church. It was necessary to complete the processes related to the Constitution and reforms. Finally, it was necessary to put an end to the destructive, partisan and divisive policies of the Diaspora.

³² “Sion”, № 10, October 1933, pp. 293–297.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Hask”, 1933, pp. 49–58.

³⁵ “Etchmiadzin”, JB–2003, **Behbudyan S.**, The First Encyclical of the Catholicos of All Armenians Khoren I Muradbekyan, pp. 76–82.

**Տ. ԽՈՐԵՆ ԱՐՔԵՊԻՍԿՈՊՈՍ ՄՈՒՐԱԴԲԵԿՅԱՆԻ՝
ԱՄԵՆԱՅՆ ՀԱՅՈՑ ԿԱԹՈՂԻԿՈՍ ԸՆՏՐՎԵԼՈՒ ՀԱՐՅԻ
ՇՈՒՐՋ**

ՀԱՅՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ Ք.

Ամփոփում

Քանալի բառեր՝ Խորեն արքեպիսկոպոս, Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոս Խորեն Ա, ազգային եկեղեցական ժողով, «Հայրապետական ընտրական կանոնադրություն», ազգային եկեղեցական սահմանադրություն, բարեփոխումներ, Գերագույն հոգևոր խորհուրդ:

1930 թ. մայիսի 8-ին Ամենայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոս Տ.Տ. Գևորգ Ե Սուրենյանցի մահից հետո Գերագույն հոգևոր խորհրդի խնդիրը և նպատակը դարձավ 1925 թ. հոկտեմբերի 22-ի «Հայրապետական ընտրական կանոնադրության» համաձայն ազգային-եկեղեցական ժողով հրավիրել և նոր կաթողիկոս ընտրել: Սակայն խորհրդային իշխանությունների կողմից եկեղեցու նկատմամբ բացահայտ անհանդուրժողականության քաղաքականության հետևանքով այն որոշակի նկատառումներով հետաձգվեց:

Իշխանությունների թույլտվությամբ, 1932 թ. նոյեմբերի 10-13-ին գումարվեց ազգային եկեղեցական ժողով, որի ընթացքում քննարկվում են ինչպես ազգային եկեղեցու սահմանադրության նախագիծը, եկեղեցու կանոնակարգերի բարեփոխումների խնդիրը, Ա. Էջմիածնի նյութական ապահովվածության, այնպես էլ կաթողիկոսի ընտրության հարցը:

К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ИЗБРАНИИ АРХИЕПИСКОПА ХОРЕНА МУРАДБЕКЯНА КАТОЛИКОСОМ ВСЕХ АРМЯН

АЙРАПЕТЯН К.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: архиепископ Хорен, Католикос Хорен I, Национально-церковный собор, «Устав избрания Католикоса», Национально-церковная конституция, реформы, Верховный духовный совет.

После кончины 8-ого мая 1930 г. Его Святейшества Католикоса всех армян Геворга V Суренянца основной целью и задачей Верховного духовного совета стали созыв Национально-церковного собрания и избрание нового Католикоса в соответствии с «Уставом избрания Католикоса», принятым 22-ого октября 1925 г. Однако в результате политики нетерпимости в отношении церкви со стороны властей Советской Армении избрание католикоса в силу известных причин было отложено.

С дозволения властей 10–13 ноября 1932 г. был созван Национально-церковный собор, на котором обсуждались такие вопросы как проект национально-церковной конституции, реформа церковных уставов и предоставление финансовых ресурсов Св. Эчмиадзину, избрание Католикоса.

12-ого ноября на заседании Национально-церковного собора на основе всенародного голосования Католикосом всех армян был избран архиепископ Хорен Мурадбекян.