

SPEECH**HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH TORKOM MANOUKIAN
LOCUM TENENS CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS
NATIONAL ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLY****APRIL 3, 1995****HOLY ETCHMIADZIN**

**YOUR HOLINESS,
YOUR BEATITUDE,
YOUR EMINENCES,
YOUR GRACES AND VERY REVEREND FATHERS,
HONORABLE DELEGATES**

With the death of His Holiness Vazgen, Catholicos of All Armenians, on August 18, 1994, the patriarchal throne of the Holy See of Holy Etchmiadzin was in mourning.

By the will of God, the Assembly of Bishops, along with the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, elected the Locum Tenens, on August 25. We were charged with the functions of Locum Tenens. We considered that our main obligation was the convocation of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly with the membership of the Supreme Spiritual Council, to elect, within the expected six month period, the heir to the throne of the Patriarch of All Armenians.

At the same time we tried to watch over and supervise the activities of the organizational divisions of the Holy See, its internal and external relations, and to implement indispensable and urgent arrangements.

Concurrently, as Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, we were obliged to maintain our ties with the Holy Order of St. James and the activities of the Patriarchate. This was made possible through two visits to Jerusalem: the first one from October 15 to November 9, 1994, and the second one from January 12 to February 22, 1995. The occasion was the Jerusalem (old calendar) New Year on January 14 and the Armenian Christmas at Bethlehem on January 18. We also carried out, on February 11, the elections of delegates to the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Jerusalem Order, and of the Armenian communities of Israel and Jordan.

NATIONAL ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLY

From August 30, 1994, to March 30, we organized seven sessions of the Supreme Spiritual Council. At the very first session, we formulated the guide to the convocation of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly and established an

individual office that would only take care of the arrangements necessary to convene the National Ecclesiastical Assembly. We appointed His Grace Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian as manager of the office, and he effectively and meticulously accomplished the obligation assigned to him. He and all who helped him deserve the thanks and appreciation of us all.

As a result of all this work and these arrangements, it appeared that many of the more than 35 organized and as yet to be organized dioceses do not have a diocesan structure. They have neither regulations nor charter to explain the duties of officials and organs acting at diocesan and parish levels as well as the relationships between them. The geographical borders of jurisdiction of some dioceses and the total number of Armenians were re-examined to set the appropriate number of delegates to be elected. The number of delegates who may be invited as authorized representatives of organizations to elect the delegates of the diocese was also unclear.

The absence of general clerical regulations and of a Constitution was obvious.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE HOLY SEE

At the first session of the Supreme Spiritual Council (August 30, 1994) we appointed a five-member commission to open the sealed office of the late Catholicos. An inventory was established to make the room usable as an office for the Locum Tenens. The hall next to it was to be a conference and reception room. The Locum Tenens continues to live in the monastery.

On the first floor of the Catholicos' apartments, the bedroom and guest room as well as the art gallery on the south wing of the second floor remain sealed. Only the contents of the bedroom's safe, containing precious objects, are inventoried. Of the two keys that open the inner and outer safe doors, one is with Garegin Archbishop Nersessian and the other is with Mr. Grigor Khanjian. Both are to be given to the Catholicos-elect.

The keys to the storage rooms, the Great Seal, are kept in the office. Each written application carrying the signature of the Locum Tenens, is given to the officials, who seal the door after delivery and return the key and the Great Seal to the office.

The Holy See has the following acting divisions for all internal and external activities and relations. These divisions, however need encouragement and supervision to be able to develop more effective activities.

Central Cathedral and museum
Seminary (Spiritual Academy)
Center for Christian Education and Propaganda

Chancery
Publication: Editing house (Etchmiadzin, Bem Yekeghetsvo)
Printing House
"Vank" affiliated enterprise
Candle factory
Treasury-museum
Churches
Monastery
Accounting office
Supply office
Construction
Agricultural
Electro-thermal plant
Economic affairs
Transportation
Guard and security service
Charity service
Economic-financial commission

Starting in September 1994, we tried to carefully scrutinize the conditions of these divisions and the activities of their employees. Our written reports to the Supreme Spiritual Council give some idea of the most worrying problems and situations. These reports, as well as others, are attached as appendices.

Report presented to the October 3, 1994 session
Report presented to the November 18, 1994 session
The visit of the Locum Tenens to the diocese of Sunik, 1995 March 11-13
Report on the work accomplished and the activities of the diocese of Sunik (Father Abraham Mkrtchian)
Constitution of the Center for Christian Education
Constitution of the Council of the Center for Education and Propagation of the Faith
Charter of "Vank" affiliated enterprise
Commission to place the "Vank" affiliated enterprise in the hands of the Director
Order to re-estimate the funds for the "Vank" affiliated enterprise
Contract with the director of the "Vank" affiliated enterprise
Rules of the economic-financial commission
Regulations of the economic-financial commission
Laws of the economic-financial commission
Regulations of the economic-financial commission: General Theses
1995 Socio-economic development program of the economic-financial commission
Construction
Structure of the economic-financial commission

The Spiritual Academy (Seminary) needs special attention. This is the academy where, we assume, clergymen will be prepared. They will take care of the spiritual needs of the Armenian people, and be the teachers of the instructions of the Armenian Church, specially at the present, when preachers wearing the cloak of charity and religion have free access to Independent Armenia.

To arrange the activities of the Center for Christian Education and Propagation of the Faith that started with the encouragement of the late Catholicos, the Center's constitution was prepared, and the members of the Center's Council and the Office's director were appointed. Its activities will be carried out mainly in three departments. These are: Propagation of the Faith, Preparation of Teachers of Christian Education for public and Sunday schools, and the supply of textbooks. The office of the Center is located in St. Gayane monastery.

Within the Holy See, the Order consists of two archbishops, two bishops, five priests, six married clergymen, and six graduate deacons. The six churches under the care of the Holy See are served by twenty-seven married clergymen.

RELATIONS WITH THE STATE OF ARMENIA

Once more, in the name of the Holy See, we express our thanks and appreciation to the Government of the Independent Republic of Armenia and to its President, Mr. Levon Ter Petrossian. The Government has shown both zeal and interest in making the arrangements both for the funeral of the late Catholicos and the organization of the present National Ecclesiastical Assembly.

On September 17-19, 1994, we participated in the meeting of the Trustees of the Republic of Armenia Fund. It was presided by the vice-president Gagik Haroutyunian. The President, the Prime Minister, the President of Parliament and Trustee members from several countries were present. Allusions were made to the deficiency of fund-raising efforts and the necessity for a more active participation of some clerical circles.

On September 1994, the President of the Republic of Armenia requested that a gift be given to the United Nations by Armenia to be placed in the Headquarters at New York. Accordingly, after deliberations within the Supreme Spiritual Council, one of the stone-crosses that was under the wall of the old apartments of the Catholicos, (the 13th century stone-cross from the convent of Aghdj) was given to the President, who personally offered it to the United Nations Organization.

The Ministry of Culture of Armenia had organized, with the administration of the museum of Bochum (Germany), an exhibition dedicated to Armenia. In November 1994, following a request, seven religious items from the Treasury of

the Holy See were handed over, for the exhibition. Arrangements were made for the safe return of these items.

The State Committee for State Registration and Analysis, by its registration dated June 30, 1994, and its letter of July 27, 1994, transferred the construction factory of Tchopanakar to the Holy See of St. Etchmiadzin, under the name of "Vank" affiliated enterprise. The charter is established and a contract is signed with the director of this enterprise. We are hopeful that, under the supervision of the economic-financial Commission of the Holy See, this plant will render good assistance in the realization of the construction plans of the Holy See.

On February 18, 1995, the Order of the State Committee for the Protection of Monuments, based on the request of the Locum Tenens Prelate of the Diocese of Sunik Father Abraham Mkrtchian, and with the successful collaboration of Mr. Lazar Syutdjian, an official of the Religious Council, the historical church of Noravank and the Saint Pokas Chapel, in Yeghegnadzor, with their surrounding lands, were returned to the Holy See of St. Etchmiadzin.

The renovations of the basilica and the cover of the Noravank Church, the masterpiece of architect Momik are over, and every effort has been made to finish the general renovations of the interior.

The Holy Virgin Church of Norashen, in the Georgian town of Tbilissi had been used, during the previous regime's decades, as a library. In December 1994, while vacating the library, some people ruined the altar of the Armenian Church and adapted it to the Georgian worship service. They also destroyed the frescos by Naghash Hovnatanian. Following protestations by Armenians, and that of the Primate of the Armenians in Georgia, Bishop Gevorg Seraytarian, and on appealing for the assistance of the President of Armenia, we sent telegrams to the leader of the Georgian State, Edward Shevardnadze, as well as to the Catholicos of Georgia, Illia the Second. Three members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, (Archbishop Grigoris Bounyatian, Archbishop Garegine Nersessian and Mr. Raphael Babayan) were sent to examine the situation in situ and ask for the intervention of the Catholicos of Georgia in this situation. The doors of the church are now closed and the church is under the care of the Georgian Catholicos.

ACCOUNTING OF THE HOLY SEE

The financial amounts of the Holy See, that are kept in the Swiss Bank in Geneva, remain inviolate since the decease of the Catholicos and will remain so until the new Catholicos is elected. For current expenses, therefor, we have had at our disposal only those cash amounts in the office of the accountant and in Armenian banks.

Sources of income include personal donations, gifts of worship to the Holy See, amounts received for candles, books and souvenirs as supplied by the Holy See to the Dioceses, and gifts received from the Dioceses as "the Penny of the Illuminator."

A bank account is opened in Paris, under the name of the Patriarchal Delegate His Grace Archbishop Gyut Nakkashian. Statements of this account had periodically been presented to the late Catholicos till June 8, 1994. We have asked for a financial report on two occasions but have received no written reply.

This brief and incomplete information on the general activity of the Holy See, and the responsibility of organizing and taking charge of the world-wide needs of the Armenian Church's Dioceses, emphasizes the need for the Armenian Apostolic Church to be blessed with a Universal Catholicos of All Armenians.

The elected Catholicos will be "the servant of Jesus Christ, by the mercy of God, and with the will of the Nation Catholicos of All Armenians, and Patriarch of the National Senior Araratian Apostolic See of the Holy Church of St. Etchmiadzin."

We express our cordial thanks to the members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, to our spiritual brothers and colleagues in the Holy See, to our Diocesan Leaders and Diocesan Councils, who, to solve some of their problems, were obliged to wait for the elections of the Catholicos of All Armenians.

Our thanks to the Holy Order of St. James and the members of the Directors, who accepted with understanding this spiritual service of being charged with the position of Locum Tenens and of additional obligations, at the end of which, we will return to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and to our holy obligations of the protection of the Promised Land and the Holy Sites in the name of the Armenian Church and the Armenian nation.

We wish that, with the blessing of the Lord and the presence of the Holy Spirit, this historical and venerable National Ecclesiastical meeting, will, with proper and due seriousness of purpose, describe the mission of the Armenian Church, conclude its deliberations and decisions, elect the Catholicos of All Armenians, and the Armenian choirs will sound the Patriarchal oratorio: "Lord, steadfastly hold the Holy See established by Yourself." Amen.

Patriarch Torkom Manoukian
Locum Tenens Catholicos