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The Armenian Immigrant Community of California:

1880–1935

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requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

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To patience is added sacrifice, both emotional and material, by those closest to me. This work is about my father and mother and their friends. It was their fervent desire to see it to its completion. George Barouyr Kooshian was born in Hadjin, Turkey, in 1895 and received his education from the American missionaries. He accepted the crown of martyrdom in 1915 but was spared to emigrate to the United States and establish himself in Pasadena, California. The immense love and respect that he received from those who

knew him proceeded from his rectitude and Christian honor. Suzanne Annik Kooshian was born in Adana, Turkey, in 1903 and at the age of 6 was orphaned, along with many other Armenian children. In 1922 she was exiled to Greece and after marrying my father in Cuba in 1930 she came to Pasadena. Despite physical infirmity, she raised four sons with fierce determination and will. The third of those sons, Roy Malcom Kooshian, recently passed away. He was a pastor in Billings, Montana.

My wife Clary has been my constant loving support in all ways. Without her I long ago would have lost heart. The three fine sons she has given me will continue this story.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This study recounts aspects of the history of the Armenian immigrants to California up to the early 1930s, concentrating on settlement and economy, religion, and political and organizational life. It has relied mainly on printed materials in English and Armenian, making heavy use of contemporary newspaper and periodical reports.

Armenians began to come to the United States in appreciable numbers after 1875, having been influenced by contact with American missionaries and by worsening economic and political conditions in the Ottoman Empire. They first settled in New England and New York. In 1881 two Armenians moved to Fresno. After generalized massacres of Armenians in Turkey in 1894–1896, many more emigrated, some of whom found their way to California. The growing community spread south into the fertile

farmland of the San Joaquin Valley, where many Armenians engaged in grape cultivation. Another center sprang up in Los Angeles. Some Armenians also came from the Russian Transcaucasus, primarily to southern California. The lack of an established manufacturing industry precluded the formation of an urban working class and the immigrants found opportunities in small business and trades which could be entered with little capital. Gradually, they began to climb the economic ladder to material success. Like other immigrants, they attempted to reestablish their familiar religious and political organizations. Many had already adopted Protestantism, but most still held to the traditional Armenian Apostolic Church. Philanthropic and political organizations were founded, which raised money and volunteers for relief and for the hoped-for liberation of the homeland. But the genocide of the Armenians of Turkey, together with the failure of Armenian political aspirations, poisoned the climate. The community permanently split into two camps with the assassination of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian in 1933. These factions led entirely separate organizational lives, even as the people continued with their normal economic, social, and religious activities. This situation lasted as long as the immigrant generation remained and only ameliorated with the rise of the second generation, to whom the old quarrels seemed distant and unfathomable.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Land of Armenia

The ancient land of Armenia was located on the mountainous plateau north of Mesopotamia. Today it is divided between the modern states of Turkey and Iran, with portions also in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Only a tiny sliver still (or rather, again) belongs to Armenia. From a low of 2,500 feet on the Araxes River, it soars to the summit of Mt. Ararat, almost 17,000 feet above sea level. It is a rugged, hard land, rimmed with mountains and slashed with gorges, where winter snows lie deep and people and animals huddle together for warmth and where the summer sun scorches a treeless landscape.

The mountains of Armenia make communications difficult within the plateau itself, especially from north to south. But the rivers and their valleys are easy routes into the interior. Centuries before Christ, the “Royal Highway” connecting Susa in Persia with Sardis in Asia Minor entered Armenia through the Tigris Valley, following the river as it made a sharp westerly turn southwest of Lake Van, and then continuing to the Euphrates and beyond. The Euphrates has two tributaries that, with their great valleys cutting Armenia from east to west, formed the natural route for both trade and invading armies.¹

¹ On the question of trade routes, see Hakob A. Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. Nina G. Garsoian (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1965).

From the north, bands of Medes, Scythians, Cimmerians, and Mongols at various times skirted the Caucasus along the Black Sea, entering Armenia through the Araxes Valley on the way west to Asia Minor or south to Persia. This recurrent traffic had a profound effect on the fate of the Armenians.

The Armenian People

Over two millennia, the Armenian people were dispersed and then in the first quarter of the twentieth century nearly made extinct on the portion of their native lands that fell within the control of the present entity of Turkey. This was the result of Armenia's geographical position on the marches between east and west. From the Medes and the Persians, to the successors of Alexander, to the Romans and the Parthians, to the Sassanids and the Byzantines, to the Arabs, to Crusaders, to Turks, Mongols, and Tatars, to the Ottomans, Persians, and Russians, and finally to the Kemalist Turks and the Soviets, successive powers sought control of the Armenian Plateau. The policy of all of these, without exception, was conquest or at the least domination, and the policy of some of these was the removal or extermination of the native population. That is the basic reason for Armenian emigration, and it begins in earnest not decades but centuries ago.

Beginning in the first century B.C., Armenia was caught in the middle of the rivalry between expanding Rome on the west and Parthia on the east. After more than a century of warfare, a settlement was reached in A.D. 66 by which Rome acquiesced in Parthian predominance in Armenia, but with Roman confirmation of the Parthian

candidate. This lasted until Trajan's eastern campaign (114–117), when Armenia was briefly made a Roman province. Sporadic wars weakened the reigning Parthian Arsacid dynasty until it was overthrown by the Sassanids of the southern province of Persis in 224–226.

The Sassanids presented a grave danger to the Romans, for they were driven on both by their lust to recapture the glories of the great Persian Empire of the Achamenids and by their fanatical Zoroastrianism. The Armenians found a new enemy, too, for their ruling family was a branch of the old Parthian Arsacid/Arshakuni house, whom the Sassanids were sworn to extirpate. Into this context was injected a rising new force—Christianity.

According to tradition, Armenia was evangelized in the first century by the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew. With the conversion of King Trdat by St. Gregory the Illuminator in 301, Christianity was established as the state religion, making Armenia the first officially Christian nation. This momentous event wrenched it once and for all away from the Iranian east. Henceforth, for all that it would entail, Armenia would look to the West.

The struggle between Rome and Iran, which continued after the conversion of the empire to Christianity in 312, had serious repercussions for Armenia. The defeat and death of the Emperor Julian the Apostate (361–363) by the Sassanid King Shapur II in 363 led to a treaty in which Armenia was abandoned to the Persians, and political life deteriorated through the rivalries of the great Armenian nobles with each other. In 387, Armenia was divided into two kingdoms, the smaller part under Roman suzerainty, and

the larger under Persian. After the death in 390 of Arshak III, king of Roman Armenia, the Arsacid dynasty was abolished in the west and thereafter the country was ruled by the Armenian feudal nobles under an appointed Roman governor with the title *comes Armeniae*. In Persian Armenia, the monarchy lasted until 428, when the nobles asked the Great King (shah) to abolish it altogether, so that they could rule themselves without interference. Henceforth the shah appointed a viceroy.

In the next hundred years, the Armenians resisted the attempts of both Persia and Rome (which by now should be referred to as Byzantium) to gain control through religion. In 449 the Persian King Yezdegird II decreed that henceforth all his subjects should embrace Zoroastrianism. Christianity had become firmly entrenched in Armenia, however, and despite the defeat of an Armenian army led by Vartan Mamigonian at Avarayr in 451 the Persians had to abandon the effort.

A theological issue with Byzantium masked the political rivalry between the patriarchates of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, and resulted in the separation of the Armenian Church, along with some others of the eastern fringe of Christendom, from the Western Church. This dispute was over the formulation of the natures of Christ by the Council of Chalcedon (451), called the Fourth Ecumenical Council in the West. The final break took place in 552. The result of this was the fierce

independence that the Armenian Church preserved from then on, the major factor in preserving the Armenian national identity.²

The identity of nation with church was further buttressed by the invention of the Armenian alphabet and the development of the Armenian literary language. This remarkable story was the work of three men, Vramshapuh the King, Sahak the Catholicos, and Mesrop Mashtots the Monk. Sometime between 403 and 406 the letters of an Armenian alphabet were ready, and a team of scholars began with the translation of the Bible, followed by religious and liturgical works. These all remain in use today and form the cultural patrimony of the Armenian people.

It was well for the Armenians that they had religion and culture to hold them together, for the following centuries were a time of political disintegration and dispersal. By the sixth and seventh centuries, the unending wars between the Graeco-Roman west and the Iranian east took on an unusually fierce character. Armenia was in the path of the invading armies, and over the course of many centuries was repeatedly pillaged, burned, and devastated, and her inhabitants driven into captivity, killed, and raped. The cities of Armenia were frequently left in ruins, and entire provinces were emptied of inhabitants.³ In addition to the flight of refugees from the devastated areas, there was also at times a conscious policy on the part of Byzantine and Iranian emperors to depopulate

² Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia* (London: A R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., second English edition, 1955), pp. 27–28. Partly quoted in David M. Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 171.

³ Manandian, *Trade*, pp. 68–69.

the area of Armenians. Deportations are recorded by Justinian I (527–565), Tiberius (578–582), and Maurice (582–602).⁴

These wars, particularly those of the reign of Heracles I (610–641), exhausted both sides to such a degree that neither could oppose a wholly unexpected military and political force rising out of Arabia, that of Islam. Within the decade of the 630s Syria and Egypt were taken from Byzantium, and Persia was conquered. By 640 the Arab armies were in Armenia, which for the next five hundred years became the object of struggle between the Byzantines and various factions of Muslims.

The land groaned under Muslim tax-gatherers, and the best parts passed to the hands of Muslim landlords and nomadic herdsmen. A portent of the future came in 705 when the viceroy Muhammad ibn Marwan decided to carry out the caliph's plan to exterminate the troublesome Armenian high nobility. Several hundred Armenian lords and their families and retainers were summoned to Nakhichevan for a “meeting” and were locked into two churches, which were then burned to the ground.⁵

This and other catastrophes sent many, both nobles and peasants, fleeing the country. But the Armenians recovered, and the remaining noble houses filled the vacuum. In 885 a new Armenian kingdom was established under the rule of the Bagratids. But Byzantine military and diplomatic pressure continued. Mass transplantations had the result of

⁴ Peter Charants, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire* (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1963), p. 13–14.

⁵ Cyril Toumanoff, “Armenia and Georgia,” in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4, pt. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 607.

dispersing the Armenian people further and weakening the eastern flank of Christendom against Islam. In the meantime, Turkic raiders poured in from Central Asia, fighting the Christians and quarreling with each other. By 1018 bands of Seljuk Turks were making raids into Armenia. In the face of mortal danger, the Christian empire continued to dismember Christian Armenia, swallowing the last morsels in 1045. Preferring taxes in cash to required military service, the emperor disarmed the native population. This left the Byzantine Empire with no effective force to withstand the Turks. The catastrophe came in 1071. At Manazkert (Manzikert) in the heart of Armenia, the Seljuk chieftain Alp Arslan defeated and captured Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes. The road to Asia Minor was open.

The Byzantine campaigns of 965 had depopulated the area of Cilicia and northern Syria of Arabs, and into this vacuum great numbers of Armenians migrated. More came south after the conquest of Cappadocia by the Turks, and a new Armenian barony developed, finding allies in the Crusaders who had come from Europe to reclaim the Holy Land from the Infidel. This new "Little Armenia" officially became a kingdom in 1186, playing a four-cornered game between Byzantium, the Crusaders, the Muslims, and her own internal factions. But in the end, when the Europeans were driven out of the Eastern Mediterranean and her traditionalist Armenian clergy prevented her from finding aid in the Catholic West, Cilician Armenia drowned in the Muslim sea (April 13, 1375). The people nonetheless remained, until the dark events of 1915.

The ensuing years were bitter, as warring dynasties, usurping nomads, marauding Turkomen, and pillaging Mongols in turn inflicted woe and tribulation upon the Armenians. These events were witnessed by scribes and monks in monasteries, who left accounts in the margins of the holy books they were copying.⁶ Through this despoliation Christian Asia Minor was changed into Turkey. Many Armenians were killed or Islamicized, and many others fled. Those who remained sank into abjection and submission, aliens in their own land.

Armenians And Turks

Many Armenians, having left their subjugated homeland, established colonies in Europe and Africa and east in India and the Orient. Some of the emigrants kept their identity and religion, while others, perhaps because of adverse political conditions, became absorbed into foreign populations.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Armenia was divided between Turkey and Persia. But in the first quarter of that century the expansionist Russian Empire reached south over the Caucasus Mountains. By 1829 it had conquered Georgia and northeastern Armenia from Persia and Turkey. Henceforth Armenia was divided into three parts, which came to be known as Turkish Armenia, Russian Armenia, and Persian Armenia.

⁶ Avedis K. Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301–1480: A Source for Middle Eastern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

The conflict between Russia and her southern neighbors was a part of the great international struggle between the powers of Europe for influence and advantage in the world, and because of the strategic geographical position that they occupied, the Armenians were again caught in the middle. Of all the peoples of the earth during this period, they were called to the greatest suffering, and the result was their total extermination on the land of their forefathers. The emigration of Armenians to the United States and elsewhere was a direct result of these events, the focus of which was in Turkey.⁷

Aside from a small, wealthy, and influential class of Armenians residing in Constantinople and a few coastal cities, the masses of Armenians dwelt mainly in the interior. The cardinal factor of their existence was the distinction between Muslim ruler and Christian subject, which was reflected in everything from the formal organization of government to the day-to-day intercourse of common people of the same class and lot in life. Turkey was, above all, a Muslim theocracy in which non-Muslims were tolerated only on certain conditions and with the performance of certain extra obligations.

The disabilities suffered by the tolerated non-Muslims included the payment of special discriminatory taxes, the capitation tax and the land tax, and the imposition of certain

⁷ For the Armenians in Turkey, see A. O. Sarkissian, *History of the Armenian Question to 1885* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1938); Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963); Avedis K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Dominion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 2 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

restrictions to mark out their inferiority. In court, the evidence of a non-Muslim against a Muslim was not admissible, and a Muslim who murdered a non-Muslim would not be put to death. Any Muslim could marry a non-Muslim woman, but no non-Muslim man could marry a Muslim woman. Anyone could convert to Islam, but the Muslim who dared to convert to Christianity would be killed. Churches could be made into mosques, but new churches could rarely be built. Nor could the cross be displayed or church bells rung, though the muezzin wailed in the ear of believer and infidel alike. Non-Muslims were forbidden to ride horses, nor could they bear arms, and in some places and at some times they had to wear distinctive clothing, so they could be identified, lest they trespass against any of the prerogatives of the Muslims.⁸

There was an ancient system in the Near East, used by the Romans and Sassanid Persians, to govern subject peoples by their own laws and through the agency of some authority responsible to the ruling power.⁹ This system, which also entered Islam, was adopted by the Ottoman Turks to deal with the Greeks following the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and was soon after applied to the Armenians and the Jews as well. Each of these communities, or, in the Turkish terminology, *millets*, was defined on religious lines and was governed by an ecclesiastical authority responsible to the sultan. The temporal head of the Armenians in the empire was the Patriarch of Constantinople. That office

⁸ H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 208.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

itself was a creation of the sultan, for, according to tradition, in 1461 Mehmet II invited Hovakim of Brusa to be its first incumbent. Although in the eyes of the Church the office of patriarch was, in spiritual matters, inferior to that of catholicos, the Patriarch of Constantinople had civil jurisdiction over all the Armenians of the empire.

There were several factors that over time depressed the status of the Christians. According to Muslim theory, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians could receive some measure of toleration because they had received scriptures of their own, which gave them an excuse, however weak, for rejecting the Koran. This leniency did not extend to polytheists, however, who had been Mohammed's most immediate antagonists in Arabia and who were offered the choice of Islam or the sword.¹⁰ Once these had been eliminated, the Christians fell to the bottom and there came to be a twofold division between Muslim and infidel.¹¹ Furthermore, internal conflicts within Muslim society caused the Ottoman sultans to adopt a rigid, intolerant Sunnism in opposition to the Persian Shiism, especially after the conquest of the orthodox Muslim heartlands of Arabia and North Africa. This latter conquest made the Muslims for the first time a majority over the Christians in the Ottoman Empire.¹²

¹⁰ India was an exception because the sheer number of polytheists made such a policy impossible. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 207–208

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 210, 224, 232.

But even more dangerous to the Christians was the dread that had always haunted the Muslims that the Christians whom they had subjugated would ally themselves with the hostile Christian powers of Europe and rise up and destroy Islam.¹³ This fear became so magnified in the eyes of the Turks that they eventually resorted to the most desperate methods to suppress the Armenians. The actual application of the disabilities that were imposed upon the Christians became more significant than the legalistic rationalizations for them. Their administration became more unfeeling, and the discriminations became more burdensome. Their use had always been intended to reinforce humility on the subject peoples; indeed, the Law enjoined the tax-gatherer to seize the non-Muslim by the throat and adjure him to “pay, O enemy of God!”¹⁴ But even more ominous for the Armenians was a policy that Selim I enforced after his war with the Persians in 1514. The Kurds, wild nomadic Muslim tribesmen, had given the sultan valuable help in the war, and to reward them, he settled them in Armenia.¹⁵ There they were a constant threat to the unarmed, sedentary Armenians. As long as there was some kind of control over the Kurds by the government, there could be order; when there was no such control, or when it was actually government policy to incite the Kurds against the Armenians, there was terrible suffering.

¹³ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

It came to be, therefore, that the Turks, down to the meanest porter in the streets, systematically regarded Christians, whether natives or Europeans, as inferior to themselves, and made it almost an article of their religion never to show them respect.¹⁶ The American missionaries Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight, who toured Armenia in 1831, relate how, even after being defeated on the field of battle in the war of 1828, one of the Turkish pashas refused to rise in the presence of the Russian general who had defeated and captured him, until absolutely ordered to do so. The lot of the miserable Armenian peasant can be imagined.¹⁷

¹⁶ Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia; including a Journey through Asia Minor, and into Georgia and Persia, with a Visit to the Nestorian and Chaldean Christians of Oormiah and Salmas* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833). Pagination is from the British edition (London: George Wightman, 1834), p. 39.

¹⁷ A story by Smith and Dwight illustrates this (*Researches*, pp. 436–437). On the journey from Bayazid to Erzerum they were accompanied by a Tartar guide, a Kurdish muleteer, and an Armenian servant. The party encountered a blizzard on a mountain pass, and the muleteer abandoned them to seek shelter in the village below. The Americans made it down from the mountain top with great difficulty and were grudgingly lodged in the house of a Kurd. Their Armenian servant straggled in later half-frozen: “The servant, an Armenian who had hardly been out of Tebriz in his life, before he entered our employ, being thoroughly drenched with the rain, completely exhausted by fatigue, stiffened with cold, fell helpless upon the ground as he entered. To our repeated inquiry, what he would have, his only reply was, ‘Sahib oldum! Oldum sahib! Master, I am dead! I am dead, master!’ Our unfeeling host, as if interpreting his wishes, tauntingly cried, ‘He wants a priest’ (meaning, to give him the Viaticum before he should die.) No one would raise a finger to his aid, and we begged in vain for the least article of dry clothing, for food, and even for a fire, to revive him. The old Kurd only laughed at our solicitude, as if the life of a Christian dog was not worth saving; and at the same moment took off his own shalwar for the muleteer, a Kurd as hardy as the beasts he drove, saying complacently to the Tartar, that for the act God would reckon him worthy of a reward!”

Missionaries

It was in religion that the Armenian identity rested. As far as they were concerned, God Himself might have spoken to Adam in Armenian, or at least He should have, for according to tradition the Garden of Eden was located in Armenia at the head of the four biblical rivers. On the nearby mountain top the Ark rested, and on the slopes of Ararat Noah planted a vineyard. His children went down to the plain, and then back up again to seize their mountain stronghold. To this stronghold Jesus sent His Apostles, and the Church was founded and grew until St. Gregory the Illuminator converted the king and the whole country to Christianity early in the fourth century. But not much later the Armenians went their own way and found themselves isolated. With one hand they fought off the Zoroastrian Persians, and with the other they cut themselves off from the rest of Christendom. Then the Arabs came with the sword of the Prophet and the Koran, and after them all manner of raider and conqueror. Many fell by, but the unassimilable and indigestible core remained Armenian by virtue of their religion and their Church.

In spite of rejecting the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the Armenian Church is still Trinitarian and orthodox and accepts all the sacraments and essential doctrines of the Universal Church, in her own usage: the Apostolic Succession, the intermediation and magisterium of the Church, and the Holy Undying Sacrifice of the Mass. The Roman Catholic Church tried to bring the Armenians into communion with Rome, but the only result was the establishment of an Armenian Catholic rite for that small number of Armenians who submitted to the Pope. Although these could be encountered in almost

every village, the vast majority of the Armenians remained faithful to the national Church, and relations between the two groups were decidedly cool. Today the distinctions that separate do not seem as important as the beliefs that unify, and efforts have been made to bury the ancient doctrinal controversies.¹⁸

Through the many centuries of subjection to foreign rule, the Church was the only expression of Armenian nationality, and the masses clung to her as their only rock of stability in a treacherous and hostile world. The conservatism and inwardness of the Church reflected the conservatism and inwardness of the Armenian villagers. The ancient observances were kept as they had been for centuries, and the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the same classical language, which grew incomprehensible to the people. To this land came foreign missionaries.

After the religious revival that is called the Great Awakening, the call to be “witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth” was heard by Christians in Europe and America. In Boston, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was organized and in 1819 sent the Reverends Pliny Fiske and Levi Parsons to Palestine. This work of evangelization had originally been intended for the Jews, but the missionaries had been instructed to see what good could be done for the pagans, Muslims, and Christians as well. As it turned out, only the Armenians listened.

¹⁸ An agreement was signed in 1995 by Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I ending the dispute over the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Some Armenian bishops are objecting.

The Gospel as the missionaries understood it (and still understand it) had momentous consequences on the Armenians. The Protestants have no need of priests or bishops, for they preach salvation by faith alone, not through any sacrament save the sacrament of God's Grace. God speaks directly to man's heart through His Word, with the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and not through Tradition, Councils, or the Fathers of the Church. Most especially the Protestants deny the recurring Sacrifice of the Mass. There is no mediator but the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen once for all.¹⁹

This belief is the basis of Western individualism. By spreading their religion, the missionaries spread also their own cultural values. The most basic of these was education. Since each believer is responsible for his own soul before God, he must be able to understand God's message to him. He must have in his hands the Scriptures, which he must be taught to read in his own tongue, not in some ancient and unintelligible ecclesiastical language. Studying for himself, and being responsible for his own soul, he is a free man, and independent. Such ideas are the antithesis of authoritarianism.

In the eyes of the missionaries, the Christians of the East were hardly Christian at all, and therefore needful of the true religion that was being brought to them.²⁰ The

¹⁹ For the activities of the ABCFM in its first hundred years, see William Ellsworth Strong, *The Story of the American Board* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1910; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969). See also Joseph Tracy, *History of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, second edition (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1842); Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches*, 2 vols. (Boston: The Congregational Publishing Society, 1872).

²⁰ Indeed, the ABCFM sent missionaries to the "nominally Christian," i.e., Roman Catholic, lands of Austria, Bohemia, Italy, Spain, and Latin America. Strong, *American Board*, chs. 14, 15.

regeneration of the Armenians was needful first for their own sake, and then so that, seeing their example, the Muslims would also be converted.²¹ Smith and Dwight reported this evaluation of the Armenians back to the Board:

In what do they exemplify any of the genuine characteristics of true religion, if we know at all what true religion is? Both in their views and in their conduct we search for them in vain. Look at the nature and manner of their religious worship, their unscriptural perversion of the gospel, their substituting a system of salvation by external ceremonies for faith in the atoning blood of Christ and all the evangelical doctrines which hinge upon it, and their attempts at posthumous salvation. And add to this the hireling character and debasement of the clergy, the excessive ignorance and degradation of the great mass of the laity, and the want of moral principle universally manifested in conduct immoral or vicious....

They are sincere in believing that their superstitious rites and ceremonies will cancel their sins. But can such sincerity save them? It is the very thing that encourages them to indulge in sin. It makes them feel secure in courses which they know to be wicked. It leads them blindfold to perdition.

But, though they are in a perishing state, their rescue is not to be despaired of. For, another consideration we would suggest respecting them is, *that their reformation is practicable.* It is so because the truth can be brought to bear upon their minds. Christians in Mohammedan countries are accessible to missionaries.²²

The work among the Armenians went forward rapidly. In the decade of the 1830s, following the journey of Smith and Dwight, mission stations were opened at Urmia (for the Nestorians), Trebizond, and Erzerum. In the 1840s and 1850s, stations were established at Aintab, Sivas, Marsovan, Adana, Diarbekir, Cesarea, Marash, Urfa, and

²¹ This actually happened, although in minuscule fashion. It is reported that in 1919 in Marash twelve Turks converted to Christianity and started the Fourth Evangelical Church of Marash, which was accepted into the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches. Of course, after the triumph of the Kemalist Turkish revolution, all these persons met horrible deaths. Pastor Abraham Hartunian believed that, without the success of the Kemalists, Christianity might have made progress among the Turks. Abraham H. Hartunian, *Neither To Laugh nor To Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, trans. Vartan Hartunian (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), pp. 123, 127.

²² Smith and Dwight, *Researches*, pp. 461–462. Original italics.

Harput. The Protestants began to make converts and the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church became nervous. It became apparent that the crucial doctrines and the authority of the Church were being challenged. By 1846 the Armenian Evangelicals had been excommunicated and anathematized by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1850 the Turkish government gave them their own civil organization. As the movement spread, churches were founded and organized into Unions.²³ Gradually native leaders and preachers were trained. The more promising of these found their way to the United States and studied in such places as Yale Divinity School and Andover Theological Seminary.

This was made possible by the educational and philanthropic institutions that the missionaries founded. Some of the many new schools grew into colleges. By 1910 there were in Asiatic Turkey alone, under the aegis of the American Board, 4 seminaries, 6 colleges, 39 high schools, 395 common schools, and 10 hospitals. There were 164 missionaries in the field. One hundred and twenty-two Evangelical churches had been organized, with 13,325 communicants and 46,131 adherents, plus a membership of 42,594 in Sabbath schools.²⁴

²³ For the beginnings of the Armenian Evangelical movement, see Leon Arpee, *A Century of Armenian Protestantism 1846–1946* (New York: The Armenian Missionary Association of America, 1946); Giragos H. Chopourian, *The Armenian Evangelical Reformation: Causes and Effects* (New York: The Armenian Missionary Association of America, Inc., 1972); Vahan H. Tootikian, *The Armenian Evangelical Church* (Detroit: Armenian Heritage Committee, 1982).

²⁴ Strong, *American Board*, pp. 496–497.

All this activity, with its strong emphasis on education, had a great liberalizing influence on the Armenians. First of all, an educated native elite began to form. From this followed an increased national consciousness, which widened the gulf between the subject Armenians and the ruling Turks. Secondly, the missionaries themselves set an example of an entirely new way of life that the Armenians had never seen before. Here were foreigners who came specifically to help the Armenians, rather than to extort their livelihoods. And how different and regal was the manner in which they lived! With money from abroad, with American canned goods, with luxurious quarters, horses, servants—all this, to the eyes of those who slept on dirt floors and baked their bread over dried cow dung—all this appeared incredible and rich beyond measure. Where was this land called America, where everyone was so eager to help the Armenians, and where everyone lived in such wealth and luxury? Over the next ridge, perhaps? Or a little beyond Constantinople? Oh, to escape there from this poverty and oppression!²⁵

Emigration

With the exception of two or three individuals in the eighteenth century, the first Armenian to come to the United States was Khatchadour Vosganian, who had been a student at the missionary school at Bebek in Constantinople. He came to New York as a

²⁵ George B. Kooshian, personal communication. This accurately reflected the views of the author's father and his friends, who were raised in a missionary orphanage.

student in 1834, and afterwards pursued a colorful career as a newspaper man, lecturer writer, and advocate of Armenian emigration to the United States.²⁶

In 1863, according to one observer, there were ten in Armenians in New York.²⁷ By 1867 there were perhaps fifty in the whole country.²⁸ By 1870, according to the estimate of an immigrant, Melkon Markarian (born April 30, 1844), there were still only 69 Armenians in all the United States.²⁹ Some came as students, in almost every case returning home after completing their studies; very few settled or married in the United States. Others came to establish themselves in a trade or business. Of these, too, many returned home; one or two set out for the American west.³⁰

As the influence of the missionaries spread out from Constantinople, emigrants began to come from other areas of Turkey as well. There soon were enough to be noticeable, and at this time the first assistance society was formed by the Armenians of New York for the new immigrants. Markarian had risen to be the owner of a carpet factory and was in a

²⁶ Bishop Mushegh Seropian [Seropian], ed., *Amerikahay Taretsuytse* [American Armenian Almanac], vol. 1, 1912 (Boston: Kilikia Tparan, 1913), pp. 16–22 (henceforth *Taretsuyts 1912*). See also Robert Mirak, “The Armenians in the United States 1890–1915” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1965), pp. 50–51; Edward Minasian, “They Came from Ararat: The Exodus of the Armenian People to the United States” (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1961).

²⁷ Mikael Tophanelian, who arrived in New York that same year. *Taretsuyts 1912*, p. 29.

²⁸ Estimate of Bishop Seropian.

²⁹ *Taretsuyts 1912*, p. 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

position to provide temporary lodgings for new arrivals. His establishment became known as “The Armenian Patriarchate.”

More Armenians emigrated after 1875, and for the first time they began to spread out from New York City and to establish themselves in the industrial cities of the Northeast. This increase came about because more Armenians became aware of America through the expanding activities of the missionaries, and after 1875 their situation in Turkey became worse.

One factor inducing the Armenians to leave Turkey was economic.³¹ As the effects of the industrial age came to be felt in the poorer areas of the world in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, the old methods of production and agriculture were no longer competitive. This caused the emptying of the peasantry of southern and eastern Europe into the United States. These conditions existed in Turkey as well, and many young Armenian males left their villages to find work and send money back to their families. They already had the habit, born of necessity, of leaving home and hearth and wandering far afield in search of work, perhaps to Constantinople, perhaps among the towns of their own region, perhaps to return briefly before setting out again, perhaps never to come back.³² It was not much different to migrate to the United States for work once modern

³¹ Robert Mirak, “Outside the Homeland: Writing the History of the Armenian Diaspora,” in *Recent Studies in Modern Armenian History* (Cambridge, Mass.: National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, Inc., 1972).

³² George B. Kooshian, personal information. This was the lot of the author’s grandfather, who fell sick on the road between Adana and Hadjin sometime around 1900 and died there.

transport made that feasible, so the Armenians joined the flood of the millions of European and Asian workers crossing the oceans.

The second factor spurring on Armenian emigration came to be by far the most important. This was the revenge taken on the Armenian people by Turkey for the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the old imperial order of Europe was careening toward its destruction, with Turkey in the van. Its demise had been expected already for the better part of the century. It was being dismantled piece by piece. On every side, the European powers were poised ready to carve it up, being restrained from doing so only by their fear of each other. The infectious virus of nationalism had spread among her subject peoples, particularly among the inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula, who one by one strove for and gained their freedom. And in every case, where it was to their advantage, the powers caused the virus to spread, and where it was not, they suppressed it. For those with a vested interest in the old order, for the rulers of Turkey, and even for the meanest classes, who imagined it their right to lord it over the subject peoples, or to have the land for themselves, for those, it was a desperate time, and a time to resort to violence.

Massacre was not an unfamiliar practice in Turkey, particularly when inflicted upon unruly subjects. It was not very selective: a provocation, real or imagined, was answered by visiting destruction upon everyone in the way, whether guilty or innocent. The Greek revolution of 1821–1829 was marked by atrocities on both sides, but what gained the

Greeks the sympathy of the civilized world was the destruction by the Turks of the island of Chios, which was wholly innocent of rebellion. Of a population of 113,000 Christians, 23,000 were slain and 47,000 sold into slavery, and virtually all the rest reduced to penniless exiles.³³

The Turks' ancient fear of their Christian subjects was magnified by the accession of a suspicious-minded sultan in a time when the old order faced definite threats both from within and without. In the reign of Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909), the great massacres began that emptied Turkey of Armenians. Abdul Hamid lived in an increasingly isolated world in fear of any kind of opposition. His spies and censors were continually active, and he even let the Turkish navy rot at anchor in Constantinople throughout his entire reign, out of fear that it would be used against him. When he was finally overthrown, it was by Turks, not Christians.³⁴

There were movements in certain advanced circles of the Armenians, as there were among most of the peoples of the Ottoman Empire, including the Turks, toward nationalism and political organization.³⁵ This reflected a worldwide phenomenon that was the prelude to the passing of the age of imperialism. These movements arose later

³³ William A. Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors, 1801–1927* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), pp. 79–80.

³⁴ Hovannisian, *Road*, p. 27; Sanjian, *Communities*, p. 278; Miller, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 429; Nalbandian, *Revolutionary Movement*, pp. 120–122.

³⁵ These will be discussed more fully in chapter 5 below in relation to political movements among the Armenians.

among the Armenians than they did among the other peoples of the empire, and they followed the failure of the European powers to effect any betterment of conditions for the Armenians of Turkey. The actual number of activists among the Armenians always remained very small, however, and they never posed any real threat to Turkish control. The existence of activists was a source of aggravation to the Turks, as was the intermittent meddling of the European powers into the question of the treatment of the Armenians, when it suited them. In response the sultan set the Kurds upon the unarmed Armenian civilian population. In 1891 he organized the Hamidiye Corps, bearing his name. This corps was hardly any army at all, but consisted merely of the undisciplined Kurdish tribesmen, who were given uniforms and arms. They had always been accustomed to make extortions from their sedentary neighbors; now they did so under color of law. In 1894 the Armenian mountaineers of Sassun—one of the few mountain districts where, as at Zeitun, the inhabitants had not been entirely subdued and cowed—refused to submit to any more extortions, and were besieged by the Kurds. The Armenians could not be subdued and the Kurds had to call in Turkish regulars. After a siege of some weeks, the Armenians were induced to cease fire on the promise of amnesty. Instead, the Kurds and Turkish troops under the command of Zekki Pasha embarked on a terrible slaughter, after the Armenians had laid down their arms, destroying twenty-four villages and putting to the sword twenty thousand. Zekki was decorated for his services by His

Imperial Majesty. The European powers demanded an investigation, which, having been carried out, an American consul on the scene labeled a farce.³⁶

Members of an Armenian political party staged a demonstration in the streets of Constantinople on September 18, 1895, to seek reforms. The demonstration served as the pretext for a massacre of Armenians in the capital. This was followed the next week by a massacre at Trebizond, far away on the shores of the Black Sea.³⁷ This developed into a general carnival of destruction, which spread out over the entire Armenian Plateau. The rabble was egged on not only by hysteria, but by the prospect of loot and pillage, and women and children were generally spared death only in order to be debauched or carried off into Turkish harems. Whole villages were Islamicized at sword point, and churches were transformed into mosques by the hundreds.³⁸ The carnage culminated where it had started, in Constantinople, on August 28 and 29, 1896, with the slaughter of 6,000 Armenians. The pretext for the final act was the seizure of the Ottoman Bank by a small band of armed revolutionists. The revolutionists were given safe conduct out of the country, while their countrymen were meted out retribution in an operation directed by

³⁶ *Despatches from United States Consuls in Sivas*, 1894, no. 46. United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 59 [General Records of the Department of State], Microcopy T-681.

³⁷ For the demonstration at Constantinople, see Nalbandian, *Revolutionary Movement*, pp. 122–146. For an eyewitness account of the massacres at Trebizond, see *Despatches from United States Consuls in Erzerum, Letters of October 9–24, 1895*, United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 59 [General Records of the Department of State], Microcopy T-568.

³⁸ Johannes Lepsius, *Armenia and Europe: An Indictment* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), pp. 330–331. Quoted in Hovannisian, *Road*, pp. 266–267, note 15.

the soldiers and police, by a mob supplied with bludgeons of the same design prepared in advance. For these two years, the number of persons slain, of dwellings destroyed and inhabitants left homeless, of businesses looted and livelihoods ruined, of women violated or forced into harems, of children orphaned or Islamicized, will never be known. The estimates just of the dead alone range from 100,000 to 200,000.³⁹

This blow was merely a portent of the future. Hysteria and massacre spirit continued to lie just under the surface, waiting for some pretext or provocation to break out anew. Small bands of revolutionists infiltrating over the Russian and Persian borders provided both, and the Turks and Kurds took revenge on the innocent villagers, since they were unable or unwilling to mount any effective operations against the guerrillas. In one incident in Sassun in 1900 two revolutionists were alleged to be hiding in a village, but had “escaped” by the time the troops arrived.⁴⁰ The terrified villagers took refuge in their church, which the Turks burned down around them. The Turks then went on to level three villages, killing from 250 to 500 men, women, and children. Their commander,

³⁹ Hovannisian, *Road*, p. 28.

⁴⁰ When a British vice-consul was attacked, the government swiftly and effectively took action against the perpetrators, though at the same time they allowed the Armenian guerrillas to conduct their operations freely. (*Despatches from United States Consuls in Erzerum*, 1900, no. 147). Contrast this with an incident in the district of Bitlis in 1899: “A force of between five hundred and one thousand Hamidiye and regular troops reported fifty to eighty regulars plus an undetermined number of Kurds killed in an engagement with thirty or forty revolutionists whom they had surrounded in a sheep enclosure. The surrounded revolutionists all escaped, leaving only two dead. Afterwards the troops plundered three villages. The question is, who was supplying the pretext?” (*Despatches from United States Consuls in Erzerum*, 1899, no. 114.)

Ali Pasha, was heard to boast that the order to exterminate the three Armenian villages had been sent to him directly from the sultan's palace.⁴¹

This sort of operation became the rule in the eastern provinces. In the plain of Mush, pillage and rapine was a regular occurrence in the years 1900, 1901, 1902, and 1903. In 1904, there was a general massacre throughout the area of Mush, Bitlis, and Van. The government acted as if every Armenian was in sympathy with the revolutionists, leaving the population in terror. The number of armed revolutionists was hardly more than one hundred, which was small enough considering what the Armenians had suffered since 1893. Yet the government continued a policy that seemed bent on extermination rather than any justifiable military objective. In the district of Sassun alone, 5,000 of the inhabitants were killed, and all the livestock, to the very last head, was carried off. The surviving population of 10,000 was left to face a hard winter destitute, naked, without roofs, blankets, or food. The United States consul who viewed it said that no better method could have been devised to insure their extermination.⁴²

It is hardly a matter of wonder, then, that the Armenians emigrated. After the massacres of 1895–1896, some 50,000 to 60,000 fled to Russia. They fled west, as well. Of the 180,000 Armenians in Constantinople at the turn of the century, 80,000 were recent

⁴¹ *Despatches from United States Consuls in Erzerum*, 1900, nos. 144, 145.

⁴² *Despatches from United States Consuls in Harput*, 1904, no. 136, encl. 3. United States, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 59 [General Records of the Department of State], Microcopy T-579.

emigrants from the interior.⁴³ But the preferred destination was America, for by this time the Armenians had become aware, due in greatest measure to the schools that the missionaries had established, of the freedom that existed in Occidental countries.⁴⁴ Many of those who had emigrated to other lands had returned, bringing with them the leaven of discontent with existing conditions. Letters and remittances from abroad also encouraged others to leave. The *vilayet* (province) of Harput (Kharpert), in particular, seemed to be emptying. In 1901, the American consul reported that 1,000 Armenians were waiting to go because they could stand conditions no longer.⁴⁵ Emigration to America from the vilayets of Van and Bitlis rapidly increased after the massacres of 1904. This stream had hitherto been directed toward Russia, but that avenue was cut off by the stringent anti-Armenian policies adopted by the tsar's government in 1903.⁴⁶ America was the last, best hope.

⁴³ H. F. B. Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies* (London, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), vol. 2, p. 412.

⁴⁴ *Despatches from United States Consuls in Harput*, 1904, no. 136, encl. 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1901, no. 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1904, no. 136.

CHAPTER 2

THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES OF CALIFORNIA TO 1920

Origins of Armenian Settlement on The Pacific Coast

The Great Valley

Seaward of the Sierra Nevada lies the great Central Valley of California. Stretching 400 miles from north to south and from 20 to 70 miles from east to west, the valley extends over more than 20,000 square miles. It is drained in its northern half by the Sacramento River and in the middle by the San Joaquin River. The southern end of the valley consists of the Tulare Basin, whose drainage is entirely internal. The rainfall declines north to south from an annual average of 33.30 inches at Redding to 17.52 inches at Sacramento, 10.60 inches at Fresno, and 5.72 inches at Bakersfield. Most of the precipitation falls between November and April and evaporates before it can replenish the aquifers that lie beneath the surface. The natural vegetation consists of early ripening annual grasses and drought-resistant deep-rooted trees along the intermittent stream beds. The meager pre-Columbian native populations, who lacked knowledge of irrigation, subsisted on acorns from the oaks in the foothills. Because of the dryness, the familiar garden crops of the Midwest and East—corn, potatoes, vegetables, and fruits—cannot grow unaided by man.

Shielded for most of its length from the tempering influences of the sea by a low coastal range, the valley remains bathed in sunshine during the course of a long, hot summer. For days on end the midday temperature exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Nevertheless, the winters are mild, snow rarely falling on the valley floor. In the vicinity of Fresno the temperature never drops below 17 degrees. The first killing frost comes about December 1, and the last frost of spring about February 9, leaving an average growing season of 295 days. At least one crop is under cultivation at all times.¹

Under the hand of man, the bleak, flat, hot desert around Fresno has become one of the world's great gardens. The chill of winter forces the deciduous vines and trees into dormancy, ensuring a good crop set in the spring, and the intense summer heat ripens the fruit to delectable sweetness. The late summer is normally dry, permitting the production of raisins and sun-dried fruit. But the farmer always labors under the threat of a ruinous early rain. Citrus and other frost-tender subtropical winter crops are grown in the thermal belt of the lower foothills, down which the frigid winter air drains into the valley bottom to settle. In the winter, storms blanket the heights with snow, and the spring melt replenishes the ground water and feeds the streams, which can be subjugated for irrigation. The produce of the rich earth, of the baking sun and the dust and the back-breaking labor, make the land a paradise.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture, *Climate and Man*, 1941 Yearbook of Agriculture (Washington, D.C., 1941), p. 783. See also United States Geological Service, "Ground Water Atlas of the United States," at <<http://capp.water.usgs.gov/gwa/index.html>> (accessed November 27, 2000).

Agriculture was introduced into California by the Franciscan missionaries from Spain, who arrived at San Diego in 1769. They brought with them livestock and grain, and those ancient Mediterranean fruits, the olive, the fig, and the grape. After Mexico attained independence from Spain in 1821, agriculture declined, and immense herds of cattle, sheep, and horses were grazed on vast haciendas. The principal export commodity of this era was hides.

Development proceeded rapidly after the American conquest in 1848. Different agricultural products were emphasized in succession, reflecting an interest in the speculative use of land. Thus the last four decades of the nineteenth century have been characterized as follows: 1860–70, decade of wheat; 1870–80, decade of wool; 1880–90, decade of fruit; 1890–1900, decade of dairy awakening. Production of one crop after another, each promising large returns, was expanded until the market was glutted and prices came tumbling down. Speculation in that crop then ceased to be profitable and the producers and vendors of land turned to new crops. The sale of land to immigrants, both from the Midwest and East of the United States and from foreign countries, served to divide the large land-holdings into one-family tracts.²

As heavy immigration into the valley continued, more and more of the land was devoted to fruits and vegetables intended for eastern and foreign markets. Two prerequisites made this possible: easy communications, provided by the transcontinental railroad

² E. V. Wickson, quoted in John Leighly, "Settlement and Cultivation of the Summer-Dry Climates," in *Climate and Man*, p. 202.

completed in 1869, and water, which had to be brought to the fields by artificial means from the abundant snow-fed supply in the mountains.³

To this land Armenians came.

The First Armenian Settlers

The first Armenian arrived in Fresno in 1876. He expected a “paradise,” as it had been represented to him, but he thought the hot, bleak desert was more like Hell. He went back to Philadelphia two years later. Nevertheless, he was the first Armenian to set foot in California. His real name was Mardiros Yanikian, but supposedly he told the inspector at Ellis Island in Armenian, “*Nor mart em!*” That is, “I am a new man!” So he became Frank Normart.⁴

The first permanent settlers came a few years later from the East Coast of the United States, in a pattern that was to become typical. They were the brothers Hagop and Garabed Seropian, sons of the first Evangelical convert in Marsovan, a town in Sivas vilayet (province) in Turkey. Together with a younger brother, Simon, they had left Turkey in the early 1870s with some returning missionaries and had established themselves in Worcester, Massachusetts. There they opened a shop where they sold fruit, stationery, and notions. When their father died a little later, Garabed and Simon returned to Turkey,

³ Ibid. Cf. Frank Norris, *The Octopus* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1901), celebrated novel of California in the clutches of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

⁴ Nectar Davidian, *The Seropians* (Berkeley:[n.p.], 1965). p. iii; Bishop Mushegh Seropian [Serobian], ed., *Amerikahay Taretsuytse 1912* [American Armenian Almanac], vol. 1 (Boston: Kilikia Tparan, 1913), p. 56.

leaving Hagop behind to mind the store. The climate and overwork did not agree with Hagop, and he contracted tuberculosis.

The pilgrims returned in 1880 with two younger half-brothers in tow, Kevork and Hovhannes. The doctor advised Hagop to get out of Massachusetts for his health's sake. He might go to Egypt or California to heal in the sun. The brothers had no one in Egypt, but in Fresno were two former Congregationalist missionaries, Miss Lucy Hatch and Miss Minnie F. Austin. There they would be welcome. Simon went on ahead with Hagop, leaving Garabed and the young boys in Worcester. They arrived in Fresno in the autumn of 1881.⁵

It was good. Hagop wrote back to his brothers in Worcester and to his friends and relatives in Marsovan to come. The brothers arrived in 1882, and Hagop bought forty acres of land with the money he had saved in Worcester.⁶

Two more Armenians passed through in the fall. They were Haji Bedros Seferian and S. Minasian. Not much later Stepan Shamirian of Marsovan and his three children came to stay. In February there were two more families, Melkon Markarian of Mush with his wife and four children, and Mahdesi Bedros Bedrosian of Garin (Erzerum), known in America as Hadji Agha Peters, and his family. There were now four Armenian families in Fresno.

⁵ Nectar Davidian, *Seropians*, pp. 1–2; *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 56.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Melkon Markarian, the New York rug merchant, had become an American citizen and returned to Turkey. Somehow he offended the government and had to be extricated through the intervention of the United States Navy.⁷ After he got back to New York, Markarian heard about the clean air and beautiful valleys of California that in his mind he compared to his beloved flower-bedecked homeland of Taron.⁸ Leaving the east with his family, he found his way to San Francisco. There he worked as a tailor, saved up 30 dollars, and took his family to Fresno. He built a cottage on O Street, probably the first house built by an Armenian in the United States. Markarian endured illness and difficult times, but he got back on his feet and tried his hand at everything. His children all became landowners, and his eldest son Hrant owned a great fig orchard, which in its time was the largest one in California. The elder Markarian was active in local Armenian affairs, and the Markarian name became well-known and respected.⁹

Haji Bedros Agha Bedrosian (known in the United States as Peters)¹⁰, was born in the village of Khokh in Kharpert in 1816. Orphaned, he found his way to Garin at the age of fifteen and eventually became a wealthy landowner in the village of Komatzor. He made

⁷ The Turkish government at that time did not recognize the citizenship rights of Turkish subjects who had emigrated, been naturalized as United States citizens, and returned to Turkey.

⁸ Mush in Turkey.

⁹ T. B. Khungian, [T. P. Khunkian]“Patmutiun Kalifornio Hayots” [History of the Armenians of California], in *Asparez [Asbarez] Tasnameaki Zhoghovatsu* [Asbarez Decennial Anthology], (Fresno: Asbarez Press, 1918), p. 300 (henceforth ATZ).

¹⁰ *Haji* is a title meaning one who has taken a pilgrimage; *agha* is a landowner. Bedros or Petros is Armenian for “Peter.”

enemies after a trip to Constantinople to secure the release of two Armenian prisoners, and when he heard about the massacre of the Armenians at Bayazid in 1877, he beat a hasty nighttime retreat out of town, escaped Turkey, and made it to Philadelphia. His son, Krikor (John Peters), had come ten years before. A few months later they all went to California. Haji Bedros Agha bought forty acres in Fresno. The town grew, the land became valuable, and it was subdivided and known as “Peters’ addition.” He was widowed, remarried at the age of 84, and died in 1904.¹¹

The other one of the first four families to come to Fresno met with tragedy. On the night of June 5, 1896, the bodies of Stepan Shahmirian and his son and daughter Benjamin and Takouhi were found in a vineyard outside town. The Armenian community believed that they had been massacred by German-Russians because of some private quarrel, perhaps over water, chickens, or a question of honor. The Armenians thought the investigation had been inadequate, but they were criticized in turn for alleged lack of cooperation. They replied that fear prevented them from speaking up.¹²

Now the letters to the old country started to have an effect. Stories of watermelons as big as boats, eggplants that weighed ten pounds, grapes the size of eggs—that was enough to bring a party of forty Marsovantsis (natives of Marsovan) to Fresno on September 10, 1883. In November another caravan of twenty came from Yozgat. Some thought that so many Armenians would come that they would establish an Armenian colony, complete

¹¹ Khungian, “Patmutiun,” p. 300.

¹² Ibid.

with Armenian schools, language, and government. The Southern Pacific agent even showed the immigrants a site, present Kingsburg-Selma, but the matter died.¹³

These few pioneers, bravely setting out for a new land thousands of miles from home on the strength of the letters of others, found themselves set down in a hot, dusty desert in a foreign land, in the midst of strangers. The hidden richness and potential of the land was not immediately apparent to these bewildered people, who, ignorant of the language or customs of the country and still clad in outlandish dress, could neither speak to others on the streets nor find work. The earlier arrivals were not yet in any position to help the newcomers. So, often the immigrants would gather together to bemoan their fate and rain down curses upon the heads of those whom they held responsible for their predicament.

Some of them decided to go to the East Coast to work in the factories, and others wanted to go all the way back to Turkey, so they started arguing with the “accursed Southern Pacific, which took and threw us here” for passage. The arrangements were almost complete when Dr. Chester Rowell and some other sympathetic Americans heard about it and started looking for ways to find work for them so that they would not go. Perhaps they feared a setback for the development of the land if it were seen that immigrants had been dissatisfied and left. Contributions were collected, and Moses J. Church donated a plot at Belmont and Hughes Avenues for an Armenian cemetery.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 300, 302; *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 57.

Because the troubles of the colony were known among the Armenians on the east coast and in the old country, for some time no new large groups of Armenians came Fresno. However, there seems to have been a sympathetic attitude toward the Armenians on the part of at least some Americans at this time, and the Armenians were able to enter various jobs and enterprises, and to become cultivators of land and planters of vineyards.¹⁴

Despite such manifestations of sympathy toward them by Rowell and others, the Armenians were still a foreign element in a land where foreigners were kept separate by society. Everyone in the community—Americans, Chinese, Japanese, German-Russians, Italians, Portuguese, Mexicans, Armenians—lived according to their own customs and knowledge. The Armenians occupied themselves with their work. The women, after finishing their own chores, went to help their husbands. Families were isolated, not only from foreigners, but even from their own people. They lived far away from each other and had only rare opportunities to come together. This isolation and the overriding obligation to work, together with disagreements that soon appeared among the members of the colony, precluded any organizational life until a number of years had passed.¹⁵

After a few years, this first group of immigrants achieved some greater or lesser measure of success, exaggerated rumors of which reached the Armenians on the East Coast and abroad. This encouraged a new stream of immigrants, not this time poor

¹⁴ Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 302.

¹⁵ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 214.

peasants completely ignorant of language, as many of the earlier immigrants had been, but persons of substance and knowledge of English. Among the first of these were Hovagim Vartanian of Baghesh (Bitlis) in 1885 and a little later his brother the Reverend Avedis Vartanian. The latter helped to establish the Armenian Library and Hall in Yettem and became the owner of a large vineyard. In 1886, among others, Garabed Nishigian arrived, having escaped from the Turkish police. A few years later more members of his family came, and they prospered as owners of many acres of land and of property in the city.

The first immigrants from Arabkir came in 1887. They were Sarkis Jihanshahian and his brothers. They also prospered as vineyardists and tailors. Others to come from their city were the Azadian brothers, four of whom owned vineyards and the other a jewelry establishment.

In 1888 the first Armenian from Dikranagerd (Diarbekir) came, the Reverend Giragos Hovhannesian. He became active in community religious and political affairs. His countrymen followed him in large numbers both from the silk factories of New Jersey and from the old country. They settled and prospered in their own neighborhood in Del Rey and Sanger.¹⁶

The first of many to arrive from Kharpert was Mahdesi Hagop Rustigian. Other members of his family arrived later and they went into grape-growing, controlling hundreds of acres. The Karpertsis increased in numbers in the following years and soon

¹⁶ Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 303.

formed a majority of the Armenians of Fresno. With few exceptions they went into grape-growing, many of them becoming rich.¹⁷

TABLE I

EARLIEST ARMENIAN IMMIGRANTS TO FRESNO COUNTY		
NAME	DATE OF ARRIVAL	COMMENT
Mardiros Yanikian (Frank Normart)	1876	Returned to Philadelphia in 1878
Hagop & Garabed Seropian	1881	First permanent settlers
Simon, Kevork, & Hovhannes Seropian	1882	Brothers of above
Bedros Seferian	1882	Visitor
S. Minasian	1882	Visitor
Stepan Shamirian & three children	1882	Became extinct; see text
Melkon Markarian, wife, & four children	1883	Family became prominent fig raisers
Haji Bedros Agha Bedrosian & family (Peters)	1883	Subdivided "Peters' addition"
First immigrant party, to wit:	1883	Came directly from Marsovan because of booster letters
Haji Hovhannes Arakelian, wife, & children Harutiun, Krikor, Hovsep, Repecca, Esther		
Hagop Azhderian, wife, & five children		
Harutiun Azhderian, wife, & three children		
Takouhi Kazanjian & four children		
Hovhaness Babasinian & wife		
two Aristakesian brothers		

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 303–304.

S. Yorghanjian		
S. Saralian		
H. Magarian		
N. Soojian		
H. Sahagian of Marash		
Kh. Avakian of Cilicia (Mr. Cross)		
Mesrop Sinanian & wife, of Garmir village of Cesaraea		Their son Jonathan was the first Armenian child to be born in California (Dec. 28, 1883)
Apraham Sarkisian, mother, & sister		
Second immigrant party, to wit:	1883	Came directly from Yozgat
Garabed Yusufian, wife, & four children		
Hagop Papazian, wife, mother, & four children		
Avedis Kahrimian, wife, & two children		
Tateosian & wife		
Tovmas Aivazian of Chakmak village of Yozgat	1883?	Came separately

Adapted from Khungian and *Taretsuys* 1912.

Organizational Life in The Early Colony

The large groups that arrived in September of 1883 consisted mostly or entirely of Protestants, who began immediately to worship with the Americans at the First Congregational Church. The story of this, and the subsequent establishment of Armenian Evangelical churches, is given in the next chapter. A few other Armenian organizations were started in this period, the first of which was the Armenian Immigrants' Union of Fresno (*Fresnoi Hay Gaghtakanats Miutium*), established on February 20, 1889. It received a charter in

1892. The stated purpose was to build patriotism and good citizenship by advancing intellectual, moral, and social life. Later the name was changed to the “Armenian Library Union of Fresno” (*Fresnoi Hayots Gradarani Miutiun*) because it was thought that “Immigrants” sounded too harsh to American ears.¹⁸

Three Armenian organizations were founded in the next decade: the Armenian Ladies’ Patriotic Association of Fresno in 1893, the Armenian First Presbyterian Church in 1897, and the Quiver-Bearers of Zeitun (*Kaparchakirk Zeytuni*) in 1898.¹⁹ The latter was probably named for the successful rebellion in Zeitun in the mountains of Cilicia in 1896. It may have had as its purpose the aid of the Armenian revolutionists by propaganda and fund-raising, in so far as it was able, being a tiny organization in a distant colony. Politics was to become a major preoccupation of the Armenians of America in coming years, however.

By 1890 there were in Fresno County only 165 Armenians, among whom were several Protestant ministers, but no Apostolic priest. A strong organizational life did not develop in this period for the reasons that have been suggested above, namely, the smallness of the community, the isolation of individual families on farms, the overwhelming necessity to work, and disunity. Large-scale efforts at community life had to await a time when there was a sufficiently large community to support them.

¹⁸ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 60.

¹⁹ Khungian, “Patmutiun,” p. 306.

Expansion of The Colony After The Hamidian Massacres

It was at the time of the massacres of 1894–1896 that Armenians started to emigrate from Turkey in great numbers. Many of these people reached the West Coast and Fresno, and the colony quickly began to grow larger. By the count of Hagop Nishigian, there were 329 Armenians in Fresno in 1897. Among these were 51 married couples, 7 men with families in the old country, 5 widowers, 15 widows, 88 single young people, 18 young ladies, 94 children under 15 years of age, 3 men married to foreigners, and 1 woman married to a foreigner.²⁰ This gives a total of 66 adult males. The 88 “single young people” apparently were unmarried young men since there are separate categories for “young women” and “children under 15.” These young men were probably immigrant workers, spillover from the eastern factories, and younger brothers and adult children of emigrating families. Thus they may be counted in the (male) work force, which numbered about 154 less any aged or unable to work. Because of the social system of the Armenians all women belonged to families and stayed at home or were sent out to work as adjuncts of their families. Some of the young men and older children would also have worked in such a capacity. Nishigian says that 54 persons were engaged in urban occupations and “the rest” in farming. “The rest” should then mean something like 50 to 100 farmers. As the years passed, the Armenians were more able to buy property and many entered farming as owners.

²⁰ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 61.

The older Armenian immigrant communities of the Northeast at this time were still composed mainly of single men who worked in factories. In California, however, industry was undeveloped and the means of living lay in the land or in small business. If there was a demand for labor, it was for seasonal work in the fields or packing houses. This was not conducive to the emigration of large masses of workers. The community was therefore made up mostly of settled families. Of the 329 Armenians, 54 were engaged in town occupations, and the rest of those who worked were involved with agriculture. Most of these grew grapes. The Armenians operated 1,800 acres of vineyards, much of it rented. The net worth of the community was estimated at between \$150,000 and \$200,000.²¹

The subsequent rise in population of the colony may be adduced from a number of sources. The Dillingham Commission estimated that in 1900 there were 500 Armenians in Fresno County out of a total population of 37,862, or 1.33 percent. Twenty-five percent of the entire population was foreign-born (9,134); of these about 5.5 percent were Armenian. The population of the city itself was 12,470.²²

²¹ Ibid.

²² United States Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 24 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911) (henceforth "Dillingham 24"), p. 565. The so-called Dillingham Commission had been set up by the Senate in 1907 to investigate the problem of immigration, which was troublesome to nativist elements in the United States. It submitted a 41-volume report, which, whether or not it supported the prejudged conclusions of the Commission, is a mine of information for the historian of immigration. For an introductory discussion of the Commission's work, see Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 177–183; for a rebuttal of its methods, Oscar Handlin, "Old Immigrants and New," in his *Race and Nationality in American Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957).

T. B. Khungian (T. P. Khunkian), presenting figures compiled in 1906, shows 2,326 Armenian individuals of 445 families from 76 old-country towns and villages, owning 12,816 acres of farmland and 232 buildings in town.²³

The Dillingham Commission estimated that in 1908 there were 3,000 Armenians in Fresno, a six-fold increase since 1900. The population of the city and county had doubled in that time to 23,333 and 70,000 respectively, and the total foreign-born population had slightly more than doubled to 20,100. The Armenians comprised more than four percent of the total population of the county and nearly 15 percent of the foreign-born.²⁴

Thus after 1896 there was a very large and rapid increase in the Armenian population of Fresno. Some came directly from the old country, and others after working for a while on the East Coast. *Gotchnag's* correspondent in Fresno wrote in 1913, "Every day our community is growing larger. They come from the old country, they come from the eastern states, they come from everywhere!" Economic advancement was a great motivation: "While the newcomers are looking for jobs and housing, those who came before are looking to double what they already have! The natives, receding before the flood of Armenians, are hurrying to sell their houses and move farther away. The Armenian merchants have begun to take an important position. Most of the tailors are Armenians. The Armenian properties in the business district are not few. About a

²³ Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 306.

²⁴ Dillingham 24, p. 565.

quarter of the raisin business is in Armenian hands. The Armenians have also seized the first rank in the production of melons and vegetables.”²⁵

By mid-1914 the Armenian colony of California, which by now included 2,000 in Los Angeles and a smaller settlement in San Francisco, had reached 10,000.²⁶ An analysis of the 1915 Fresno Directory showed 6,334 Armenians in Fresno County.²⁷

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TABLE II

POPULATION OF FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY, 1900 & 1906				
	TOTAL POPULATION		FOREIGN-BORN	
	1900 CENSUS	END OF 1908 (EST.)	1900 CENSUS	END OF 1908 (EST.)
Fresno County	37,862	70,000	9,134	20,000
City of Fresno	12,470	23,333		

Dillingham Commission, v. 24, p. 565

²⁵ *Gotchnag* [Kotchnak] XIII.46 (November 15, 1913), p. 1,111.

²⁶ *Gotchnag* XIV.23 (June 6, 1914), p. 544.

²⁷ Richard Tracy La Piere, “The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California: A Study in Social Psychology” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1930), p. 158.

²⁸ *Gotchnag* XIV.23 (June 6, 1914), p. 544.

²⁹ Richard Tracy La Piere, “The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California: A Study in Social Psychology” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1930), p. 158.

TABLE III

FOREIGN-BORN PERSONS IN FRESNO COUNTY IN 1900 & 1908, BY RACE OR RACE GROUP		
RACE OR RACE GROUP	1900 CENSUS	1908 (EST.)
Armenian	500 (est.)	3,000
Chinese	1,634	1,000
German	785	1,000
German-Russian ³⁰	734	3,000
Italian	430	1,000
Japanese	601	3,000
Portugese	309	600
Scandinavian	1,418	4,000
Austrian (race not specified) ³¹	112	500
Miscellaneous	2,611	3,000
TOTAL	9,134	20,100

Dillingham Commission, v. 24, p.565

During the years 1915–1920 traffic across the Atlantic was cut off by the war, and only 718 Armenians entered the United States from abroad. Yet the Armenian population of Fresno County increased by nearly 2,500 during this period,³² indicating that the migration was coming from the eastern states.

³⁰ Ethnic Germans from the Russian Empire.

³¹ The Austrian Empire was multi-racial, or, in modern terms, multi-ethnic.

³² Ibid.

TABLE IV

ARMENIANS IN FRESNO IN 1906 SHOWING ORIGINS, FAMILIES, AND PROPERTY					
ORIGINS	VILLAGES	FAMILIES	PERSONS	BUILDINGS	ACRES
Aintab	-	1	8	-	120
Antioch	1	3	14	2	73
Adana & villages	2	8	52	3	440
Arabkir & villages	3	21	87	14	310
Bitlis & villages	2	61	326	37	380
Yozgat & villages	2	10	51	16	206
Smyrna & vicinity	3	6	24	1	20
Erzinjan & vicinity	2	5	45	1	180
Kharpert & villages	24	132	674	28	4596
Erzerum & villages	3	42	205	46	85
Cesaraea & villages	5	13	56	81	1430
Malatia & one village	1	3	17	1	120
Marash & villages	2	6	32	-	520
Marzovan & villages	2	31	137	20	1226
Mush & villages	6	32	147	22	215
Charasanjak & villages	4	9	45	3	320
Chunkush & vicinity	2	11	51	-	370
Constantinople & vicinity	2	14	66	11	200
Van & villages	3	7	43	6	440
Dikranagerd & villages	2	32	158	5	680
Ordu & vicinity	2	8	37	3	30
TOTAL	76	445	2326	232	12,816

Adapted from Khungian. Order reflects Armenian alphabetization.

The Establishment of Outlying Colonies

New arrivals began to settle farther away from Fresno in the farming communities of Fresno and Tulare counties or in the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. But until

the agricultural depression of the 1920s, about three-quarters of the Armenian population of California still lived in the San Joaquin Valley.

Fowler. From Fresno the Armenians spread south and southeast. More lived outside the city limits: 43 percent by 1915, and 55 percent by 1920. The oldest of these settlements was Fowler, 10 miles southeast of the city on the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. According to Sarkis M. Aharonian, the first Armenians to arrive in Fowler were Krikor Agha Soghigian, Dikran Kalustian, A. Taiian, K. Mkhjian, B. Yenovkian, and A. Gagosian, among others.³³ Another source gives the following names of four Armenians who rented vineyards there in 1900: Mugurdich Mkhjian, Dikran Kaloustian, Peter Thompson, and Harutiun Yanikian.³⁴ Aharonian reports that at first the Armenians were very poor, even to the point of going barefoot to the only grocery market in town and returning without bread for lack of money. Wages were seventy-five cents for eleven hours of work, but that was the price of an acre of land.³⁵ By the next year there had been rapid economic progress: eight Armenians owned their own vineyards and one rented. Altogether they had 300 acres of land. By 1912 there were 500 Armenian residents,³⁶

³³ Sarkis M. Aharonian, "Faoulerahay Gaghute" [Fowler Armenian-American Community], in *ATZ*, p. 315–317.

³⁴ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 70

³⁵ Aharonian, "Faoulerahay Gaghute," p. 315. The land must have been considered worthless desert, but not for long. Aharonian reports the value of an acre as \$700 to \$800 in 1918. Elsewhere in this chapter the inflation in land prices is described, with its important effects.

³⁶ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 70

and by 1918 there were over 1,000.³⁷ Aharonian estimated the net worth of the Armenians in the following way: they owned ten thousand acres, conservatively valued at \$400 per acre, totaling \$4 million. Half of that was debt, therefore, they were worth \$2 million free and clear. The community supported three churches and several other organizations, and it was described as well-to-do and containing no poor.³⁸ The churches were St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church, 75 dues-paying members, with an annual budget of \$1,800, and paying the priest a salary of \$800 per annum; First Congregational Church, founded in 1905, 50 members, with an annual budget of \$1,800, paying \$1,000 to the pastor; and the Presbyterian Church, 75 members, with an annual budget of \$1,500.

An Athletic Club had been founded by a group of young Armenian men a few years earlier. After it had gone into debt in the amount of \$800, the founders turned it over to the community. The financial situation was stabilized in the prosperity of the war years, and by 1918 the club owned a hall valued at \$4,000.³⁹

An Armenian school was started in 1913 in a small building adjacent to the Apostolic Church. It was run by a committee appointed by the church. By 1918 there were 116 pupils. The building was also used for community meetings and housed a library of 300

³⁷ Aharonian, "Faoulerahay Gaghute," p. 315.

³⁸ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 70; Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 310.

³⁹ Aharonian, "Faoulerahay Gaghute," p. 315.

volumes, but the people were too busy with their own pursuits to spend much time reading.⁴⁰

It was reported in 1918 that all four political parties had organizations: Dashnak-tsutiun (Tashnagdzutiun), Social Democrat Hnchakian (Hunchagian), Reformed Hnchakian, and Sahmanadrakan Ramkavar (Ramgavar). At that time there was a short-lived union of the parties. With the end of the war and the defeat of Turkey, there was hope for a favorable solution to the Armenian Question, and the improved morale was evidenced by an increased interest in public meetings and lectures. There were two orphans' aid organizations, one run by the Apostolic Church and the other by the Protestants, but the latter had dissolved and turned over \$200 to the Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. The other was continuing with 80 members and had a balance of \$800. It had made two contributions to the Armenian National Union in the amount of \$100 and \$200. There was also a chapter of the Armenian Red Cross with 17 members.⁴¹

Selma and Kingsburg. Selma, 15 miles south of Fresno on the Southern Pacific tracks, and Kingsburg, 20 miles to the south, were at first insignificant in size and wealth, most settlers choosing to live as close to Fresno as possible. But as the population of Fresno increased and land prices went up, and as communications improved, the newcomers moved farther afield. After 1900 the little towns along the railroad tracks to the south of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. This was a Dashnaktsakan organization. See below, pp. 143–144.

the city began to grow and soon were encircled by vineyards operated by Armenians. By 1918, Selma had become both populous and prosperous, but there was only one Armenian organization, a chapter of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). Although Kingsburg was a predominantly Swedish community, it had a significant Armenian population. Most of the Armenians were from Van. By 1918 the community had an Armenian Presbyterian Church, an Armenian school, an Armenian Red Cross branch, and a Ladies' Aid Society.⁴²

Parlier. East of Kingsburg 20 miles south of Fresno on the Santa Fe tracks was Parlier, another community that by 1918 had prospered, having an Armenian Congregational Church, an Armenian Saturday school, an Armenian library, an AGBU chapter, an Armenian National Union chapter, and several Armenian political organizations. There were some Armenian merchants in town, but most of the Armenians were grape farmers.⁴³

Reedley and Wahtoke. On the same Santa Fe tracks 5 miles east of Parlier was Reedley, another large and prosperous farming community. The only Armenian organization to be found there in 1918 was an AGBU branch. Five miles north of Reedley was Wahtoke, an entirely Armenian community about the size of Reedley, with a flourishing Armenian Saturday school, the "Izmirlian Library," a meeting-hall, and several active Armenian

⁴² *Gotchnag* XVI. 34 (August 19, 1916), p. 888; Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 310. The population is still approximately one-third of Swedish descent and tourists can find Swedish-themed businesses and architecture in the town (*California Heartland* television broadcast, KCET, August 17, 1999).

⁴³ Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 310.

political organizations. The founders of the community were the Aslanian brothers of Alashgerd. The school had been started by Aslan Aslanian, and his wife Makrouhi was the teacher.⁴⁴

Tulare. The first Armenian to settle in Tulare was Mgrdich Garabedian in 1902, followed by his brothers Avak and Israel in 1903. They were from Pazmashen (Buzmushen) in the province of Kharpert. The next year the following came: Bedros Asadourian, Movses Hovnanian, and Apraham and Dadig Khazarian. The first Armenian child to be born in Tulare was Asdghig H. Stepanian, in 1904. By 1912 the community numbered 70, of whom 62 were from Pazmashen. The Armenian farmers raised grapes, vegetables, onions, and watermelons. They owned 1,075 acres of land. The “Lusavorchagan Educational Society of Pazmashen” was established in 1903, and a branch of the Armenian General Benevolent Union was organized on June 18, 1911.⁴⁵

Other Farming Communities. Other farming communities with sizable Armenian populations were Del Rey and Sanger, but these had no Armenian organizations. The Armenians there were owners of vineyards and orchards. Armenians could also be found in Visalia, Turlock, Dinuba, and other places, often prospering, but with no Armenian organizations.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 70–71.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Yettem. The small agricultural community of Yettem lies 40 miles southeast of Fresno in Tulare County at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. It is here that an attempt was made to plant a purely Armenian colony.

The idea for such a settlement in the San Joaquin Valley was broached at a meeting in Turkey between the Reverend Harutiun Jenanian of Adana, Nazaret Spenjian, and Kapriel Baghdoyan in the aftermath of the massacres of 1894–1896. In 1901 Spenjian, Baghdoyan, and a Jenanian (probably Movses, a brother of Harutiun) were in Fresno and set out to look for land. They found a suitable site in Tulare County north of Visalia, near the tiny community of Churchill, a few miles from the railroad stop called Lovell. They were unable to reach any further agreement and the cooperative venture ended. As individuals, however, they made their own efforts. Baghdoyan bought a plot of land, either forty or eighty acres, and built a small house for his family.⁴⁷ There were only five other families in the place, all of them non-Armenian. Soon more Armenians came, including Spenjian, Movses Jenanian, and Zenop Joghefian of Yozgat. Two or three years later Harutiun Jenanian came to Fresno, and Spenjian immediately took him to see the colony. The original settlers were hard-pressed to meet their payments and Jenanian bought 110 acres from them on the spot. The next day he contracted to buy more. Jenanian still had the idea of establishing an Armenian colony, which he envisioned as

⁴⁷ According to *Taretsuys 1912*, the first Armenian to buy land in Yettem was Kapriel Bedrosian (p. 59).

providing money for a college he had founded in Konia, Turkey. He sold some land to new arrivals from the east, but he died in 1907 before his plan could be realized.⁴⁸

The early arrivals to Yettem found vast hay fields and virgin land, the only sign of civilization being the railroad tracks, sagging telegraph wires, and a 12-by-12 shack with a sign reading “Lovell,” and in smaller letters, “Wells Fargo and Co.” A small one-room schoolhouse served as the Churchill District Grammar School. The land was considered to be a worthless desert and there was no irrigation water except from wells. A few miles off the railroad line the land sold for only \$10 to \$15 per acre, and this is where the Armenians bought. The heavy adobe soil reminded them of the rich, dark loam of the homeland, they said, but at the first rain it became a sticky morass, and in the summer heat it baked as hard as concrete. Such land demanded the “sweat of Moses’ rock,” in a phrase understood by readers of the Bible, to bring forth fruit. The American frontier, as it were, made everybody, regardless of education or background, more or less socially equal.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Charles Davidian, *A Warm Wind Through Yettem: an Eighty-Year Anthology* ([n.p.]: Davidian House Publishing, c. 1993), at <<http://www.putnampit.com/yettem.html>> (accessed December 22, 1999), unpaginated electronic copy, chapter 1; *Taretsuyts* 1912, p. 70; *History of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church 1911–1976, Yettem, California* (Yettem, 1971), p. 43; H[agop H.] Khashmanian, *Amerikahay Hanragitak Taregirk 1925* [American-Armenian Encyclopaedic Almanac], (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1926), p. 446; *Gotchnag* X.37 (September 10, 1910), p. 884. According to Charles Davidian, who came to Yettem in 1905 as a boy, the Jenanians were from Marash. For the biography of Harutiun Jenanian, see Krikor H. Kaloustian, *Marash kam Germanik ev Heros Zeitun* [Marash or Kermanig and Heroic Zeitun] (New York: Marashi Hayrenaktsakan Miutiun, 1934), pp. 528–529.

⁴⁹ Khungian, “Patmutiun,” p. 310; Charles Davidian, *Yettem*, chapter 2.

The Armenians were scattered on farms half a mile or so apart separated by virgin land. A small village sprouted around Hagop Hamalian's general store near the schoolhouse. Hamalian supplied food, clothing, kerosene, and harnesses. He became the postmaster as well, earning himself the Turkish title of "*Effendi*," while the rest of the mature males were called either "*Baron*" or "*Agha*." He extended the farmers credit until harvest time, when the accounts were settled.⁵⁰

From the beginning the Armenian founders of the colony wanted to have an Armenian name for the place. Hamalian, along with Ezekiel Kendigian and Devlat *Agha* Moor-salian, submitted three names to the Post Office Department in Washington: "Ararat," "Cilicia," and "Yettem" ("Eden"), from which "Yettem" was chosen. Consequently the Churchill District Grammar School became the Yettem School. It was the only place in the United States with an Armenian name and an Armenian postmaster. It is still on the map today, although few Armenians remain.⁵¹

Through ceaseless labor the Armenian immigrants made the land bloom. Irrigation ditches were dug and fields planted. There were 200 Armenians there by 1910 and 300 by 1912, farming on 2,574 acres, or one-fifth of the land in the settlement.⁵² By 1917 the Armenian population was 800. The immigrants were both Armenian- and Turkish-

⁵⁰ Charles Davidian, *Yettem*, chapter 1.

⁵¹ *Gotchnag* X.37 (September 10, 1910), p. 884; *Taretsuyts* 1912, p. 70; Khashmanian, *Taregirk* 1925, p. 446; Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 310; Charles Davidian, *Yettem*, chapter 2. Davidian says "Armenia" instead of "Cilicia."

⁵² *Taretsuyts* 1912, p. 70.

speaking Armenians from Adana, Marash, Zeitun, Everek, Urfa, Chomakhlu, Chunkush, Kharpert, and elsewhere.⁵³ Organizations flourished. By 1917 there were Armenian- and Turkish-language Protestant services, an Apostolic church, an Armenian school, and a thriving AGBU chapter. Substantial sums were collected for Armenian charities and it was said that the debilitating political quarrels so prevalent elsewhere were absent.⁵⁴

All told, by 1912 there were in Fresno and Tulare counties between 5,500 and 6,000 Armenians. They controlled between 18,000 and 19,000 acres of land. In the town of Fresno there were about 100 Armenian merchants and tradesmen, who competed on favorable terms with those of other nationalities. The combined wealth of the Armenians was estimated at \$4 million.⁵⁵

Los Angeles And The Surrounding Area

Los Angeles, 200 miles south of Fresno across the Tehachapi Mountains, began a period of phenomenal growth around 1870. This was stimulated first by the Southern Pacific Railroad and was fed by successive land booms. Here the adventurous classes of the

⁵³ Khashmanian, *Taregirk* 1925, p. 446. The first immigrants were Turkish-speaking Armenians from Marash and Adana, joined later by the others. Charles Davidian, *Yetterem*.

⁵⁴ *Gotchnag* XVI.22 (May 27, 1916), p. 575, XIII.30 (July 26, 1913), p. 729; Khashmanian, *Taregirk* 1925, p. 446. For the history of Yetterem, see also Archpriest Garabed Kalfayan, *Edeme: Patmakan Hbantsik Aknark* [Yetterem: A Brief Historical Overview] (Yetterem : [n.p.], 1947) and *Edemakan Hushardzan ev Echmiatsnakan Husher* [Memorial of Yetterem and Remembrances of Echmiadzin] (Yetterem: [n.p.], 1950).

⁵⁵ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 71.

world gathered.⁵⁶ Among them were the first Armenians to arrive in Southern California, the brothers David, Kasbar, and Movses Tashjian , originally from Kharpert. They had learned stone cutting in Vermont and started selling tombstones in San Bernardino in 1890. As competition appeared, they expanded their business into the surrounding towns and also began dealing in real estate.⁵⁷

In the 1890s some Armenians may have passed through Los Angeles selling oriental rugs, but they did not leave any trace. The first Armenian known to stay was Parnag Serope Yezdikardashian of Cesaraea. He was a university student who had come to California in 1900 to recuperate from an illness. After he had regained his strength, he entered the field of forestry and eventually obtained a federal job as a supervisor. Some of those who followed him entered the rug business: Avedis Enfiajian and Hovhannes Pashgian of Kharpert, both in 1900; the Reverend Haigag Khazoyan, 1901; Hovhannes Arakelian, 1902; Mrs. Elmas Dinjian and her son, 1902; Dikran Avakian and his wife, 1903; M. Jamgochian and sons, 1903. By the end of 1905 there were about 100 Armenians in the area. In 1905 a Russian Armenian named Yenovk Ter Stepanian arrived and began preaching in the Protestant Armenian church. He was a graduate of Euphrates College in Harput (Kharpert) and of Union Theological Seminary in New York. In the same year a group of seven Russian Armenian families arrived from the

⁵⁶ A classic history, or rather, commentary is Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1973 [originally published in 1946]).

⁵⁷ *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 71–74.

village of Karakala near Kars: Shekerian, Mooshagian, Perumean, Gatanian (Katanian), Nalian, and Gevorg Ter Stepanian, brother of Yenovk Ter Stepanian. Some of this group came by way of Winnipeg, Canada.⁵⁸

From 1906 to 1908 there was a larger movement of Armenians to Los Angeles. These were both Russian Armenians from Kars and the plain of Shirak and Turkish Armenians who had wearied of the farmer's life in Fresno. They were joined by Armenians from the eastern states as well. Most came in whole families, and by 1911 the Armenian population had reached 1,000. Of these 520 were Russian Armenians, a few of whom were Molokans.⁵⁹

The 400 Russian Armenians from Shirak were almost all laborers in the cement and steel works of the San Bernardino area. The rest of the Armenians were occupied in small business, farming, trades, or small pursuits. About 100 were estimated to be produce sellers, rug repairers, junk peddlers, clothing pressers, and ice cream sellers. By 1911 there were five Armenian rug dealers in the area: Pashgian Brothers, Khazoyan, Enfiajian, M. Koroyan, and H. Minasian. The Armenian immigrants of Southern California clearly demonstrated an independent mentality, wishing to be the master of something, anything, no matter how small or insignificant.⁶⁰ Many of them prospered over the years and generations. Garbage collectors became wealthy rubbish dealers. Fruit sellers became

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. The Molokans will be discussed in chapter 4.

⁶⁰ *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 73–75.

owners of established markets. Tailors and pressers stood by their machines in hundred-degree heat and paid off their properties and sent their sons to college. Of the rug establishments founded in Pasadena around 1900, Pashgian Brothers and Khazoyan Brothers are still in business a hundred years later. They have been joined since by others.⁶¹

By 1905 cultural life began. A “Literary Union” was founded, which became the “Armenian Library” the next year. Lectures and programs were presented, and aid was given to the orphanage in Hadjin.⁶²

San Francisco Bay Area

From the time of the gold rush of 1849 San Francisco was the leading city of California. The Armenians there were few in number and counted for only a minuscule proportion of the population. The first Armenian to pass through was Melkon Markarian in 1883, who went on to Fresno after a few months and raised figs. The first permanent Armenian resident was Manoug Manougian of Constantinople. In 1885 the Koroyan brothers opened a rug business, which was still in operation in 1911. By 1911 the number of Armenians had increased to 150. They were spread out in different parts of the city and were not in contact with each other. A few Armenians lived in Oakland. They were engaged in tailoring, jewelry, produce selling, and newspaper selling. One Armenian

⁶¹ Personal observation of the author.

⁶² A large Hadjintsi community grew in Pasadena.

owned a pool room. There were also one doctor, two dentists, a photographer, a portrait painter, and a famous sculptor, Haig Patigian.⁶³

Institutions of Higher Learning

In this era there was a total of ten Armenian students at the following institutions of higher learning: the University of California, Stanford, Occidental College, and Pomona College. One person, Moushegh Vaiguni, had graduated from Berkeley with a doctor's degree in chemistry.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 74–75.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3

ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, 1900–1920

The Raisin Industry

Until 1920 most of the Armenian settlers of California lived in the San Joaquin Valley. There were no great urban centers or the promise of industry. What towns there were served as marketing centers for the vast hinterland. The economic avenues open to the Armenian immigrants were therefore limited to agriculture or small-town commerce and trades. To this they brought their own training, ambition, and predilections.

The production of raisins, begun around Fresno in 1876, increased rapidly as the land was subdivided and new water projects built. By 1892 California produced more raisins than Spain. Acreage devoted to raisins increased steadily until 1921, by when 186,331 acres were planted in vines.¹ During this period, the raisin market was subjected to extreme cyclical variations of tight supplies and high prices followed by overplanting, glut, and disastrously falling prices. This situation was exacerbated by the collusion of middle-men who united to depress prices for their own advantage.

¹ Edith C. Meyer, "The Development of the Raisin Industry in Fresno County, California" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of California, 1931), pp. 15–19, also chapter 11. See also Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 111.

The earliest growers sold their crops directly to the trade, but soon brokers in San Francisco handled the bulk of the crop, filling orders from the east. These brokers were succeeded by local merchant-packers, who bought the fruit on the vine or in the vineyard sweat boxes to sell under their own brands. Throughout the 1880s the growers realized large profits, but by 1889 supply outstripped demand and the packers were able to impose a commission system, packing the raisins for a fixed cost, charging five percent on the sale, and returning the net to the grower. This system worked well for a short while but soon degenerated into selling on consignment, which demoralized the market and caused prices to fluctuate. Until 1897 the growers were at the mercy of irresponsible packers and commission men.

A number of attempts were made between 1891 and 1897 at cooperation between merchant, packer, and grower, but these all failed. In 1898 the California Raisin Growers' Association was formed under the leadership of Theodore M. Kearney. The Association enforced a grading system and signed contracts with the packers for selling the crop at a set commission. Ninety percent of the vineyards joined the cooperative. This system was successful until 1903, when prices fell and much of the crop remained unsold. By 1904 only 30 percent of the vineyards were signed up with the cooperative, which failed and was taken over by a packer organization. Another attempt was made to form a cooperative in 1905, but this collapsed within a year. For the next several years prices remained low or underwent rapid fluctuations. Several more pooling arrangements were attempted in 1906, 1907, and 1909, but all came to naught as either growers held out in hope of

higher profits or packers bid high to unsigned farmers in order to fragment the market. Another effort was made in 1911, this time with the idea of doing market research as a basis for sound business decisions. Finally, in the fall of 1912, a new tack was taken with the establishment of the California Associated Raisin Company (CARC) by a group of prominent growers, lawyers, and bankers led by William R. Nutting and Wylie M. Giffen. The intention was to break the stranglehold of the packers by competing directly on the market. While stock would be available for anyone to buy, a voting trust arrangement was established by which the raisin producers would maintain control of the organization. This effort succeeded, helped by rising wartime prices, and CARC was to have a lasting influence on the raisin industry.² There followed a speculative frenzy, and new vineyards were planted and old ones sold at unheard-of prices. The market collapsed under the glut in 1922, during the general postwar depression that was the harbinger of the Great Depression of the 1930s.³

It was during this period, the era of the raisin boom, that Armenians arrived in the valley in large numbers. The expanding and contracting raisin industry, with the speculative fever that infected it and the inexorable seasonal demands that it made, was for a quarter of a century the strongest influence in the life of the Armenians of Fresno,

² Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 111–113.

³ This survey is based on Meyer, "Raisin Industry," pp. 19–87. For the agricultural depression, see Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier, Agriculture, 1860–1897* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, [1989]).

affecting not only their economic well-being, but also their settlement patterns, organizational life, and social attitudes.

Farm Laborer to Farm Owner

The development of intensive fruit-growing in the valley created an ever-increasing demand for seasonal hand labor. The calendar dictated operations to be performed in the vineyards and orchards. Deciduous fruits were picked by work gangs from June to August, and canneries operating full tilt required hundreds of men, women, and children to put up the crop as fast as it was gathered. In late July the table grape harvest began, followed a month later by wine grapes, and both harvests extended into November. A force of 2,000 to 3,000 men was required. The huge raisin grape crop was cut during a period of three to six weeks beginning September 1, during which the number of pickers rose to 10,000 or more. The grapes were laid on paper or wooden trays between the rows of vines to dry in the sun. Many women and girls were employed packing green (that is, fresh) table grapes for shipment. Following the harvest, the vines had to be pruned. After most of the fruit had been picked, the raisin, fig, and dried fruit packing houses began operation, requiring several thousand men, women, and children from October into December.

This work fell to Fresno's large foreign-born population. The first large group of immigrants to be used as farm laborers were the Chinese. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, they became less numerous as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, and they were

supplanted by German-Russians and Armenians, who were employed extensively in the vineyards. The predominant race of hand workers came to be the Japanese, however, who were present in large numbers, were not burdened by family ties or much property, and exhibited skill at organizing themselves into highly competitive work gangs. It was possible, in fact, to categorize each race in terms of its work habits and economic tendencies.⁴

The Armenians, along with a few other races, were notable for the speed with which they rose from the status of farm laborers to that of farm owners.⁵ The Dillingham Report showed that by 1900 there was already a considerable number of Armenian farm-owners in the county. These farmers also leased much land, often in anticipation of purchase. With the passage of time these lands were bought and the proportion of leased land declined.⁶ By 1909 the Armenians had the tenure of as much as 25,000 acres of land, owning three-fifths of it.⁷ Most of the land they acquired had already been planted to vines or fruit trees. Of this, between 16,000 and 20,000 acres were in raisin grapes, comprising one-sixth of the total acreage of that crop. In addition, they grew some fruit

⁴ United States Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 24 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), *passim* (henceforth "Dillingham 24").

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 634.

⁷ T. B. Khungian, [T. P. Khunkian] "Patmutiun Kalifornio Hayots" [History of the Armenians of California], in *Asparez [Asbarez] Tasnameaki Zhoghovatsu* [Asbarez Decennial Anthology], (Fresno: Asbarez Press, 1918), p. 302 (henceforth ATZ).

and controlled from 5 to 10 percent of the watermelons shipped out of the county.⁸ The class of Armenian farm laborers was even by 1900 already considerably reduced, most of them having gotten their own farms or having gone into business in the city. What farm laborers remained were now occupying the best positions on the ranches of their countrymen.⁹

Surveys of Armenian property ownership and contemporary observations all point up the basic fact that the Armenians moved rapidly into farm ownership although there may be some slight discrepancies in actual figures. La Piere, surveying private land-ownership records in 1930, shows slightly lower estimates than the Dillingham Report of land actually owned by Armenians. In 1913 the Armenians owned 373 plots totaling 13,760 acres. Of these, 320 plots were in holdings of 40 acres or less, totaling 8,560 acres. Thus 86 percent of the holdings accounted for 62 percent of the acreage.¹⁰

A contemporary observer in 1920 reported that the greater part of the Armenian colony consisted of grape-growers who owned their own farms, with a minority living in town and engaging in small business.¹¹ La Piere reports that by 1921 Armenians owned

⁸ Dillingham 24, pp. 296, 626.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁰ Richard Tracy La Piere, "The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California: A Study in Social Psychology" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1930), pt. 2, p. 50. The discrepancy between the two surveys (Dillingham and LaPiere) may be because the estimate of the Dillingham commission included leased land and was given in round figures, and there could also have been inaccuracies or omissions in either survey, possibly by not taking into account Armenians who had changed their names.

¹¹ M. H. Ananikian, "California and the Armenians" [in Armenian], pt. 1, *Gotchnag* XX.48 (November 27, 1920), p. 1,426; pt. 2, *Gotchnag* XX.51 (December 18, 1920), p. 1,525; pt. 3, *Gotchnag* XXI.7 (February

1,151 plots totaling 47,840 acres, of which 939 totaling 24,820 acres were in holdings of forty acres or less.¹² Thus 80 percent of the holdings accounted for 52 percent of the acreage. Not only had the total number of holdings increased in eight years by 309 percent and the total acreage by 340 percent but the average holding had gotten larger.

Both background and ambition enabled the Armenians to progress rapidly. Among the earliest Armenian immigrants there had been a number who had brought with them capital, sometimes in the form of money, but also in the form of education and exposure to western ideas obtained at the hands of the missionaries. Indeed, the immigrants who found their way to Fresno were not at all typical of the population of the interior of Armenia. In the first place, common laborers or peasants were not so likely to emigrate as those with more means or education, and furthermore, most emigrants were apt to stay on the east coast where there were jobs in the factories. The most numerous class to be found in California was the petty bourgeoisie of the old country—the merchant, artisan, shopkeeper, shoemaker, silk-weaver, dyer, and coppersmith. With whatever capital they had they started themselves in business or farming. But most of those in Fresno had come to the United States with little or nothing, having pushed on to California after a sojourn in the mills and factories of the east.¹³

12, 1921), pp. 245–246.

¹² La Piere, “Armenian Colony,” pt. 2, p. 50.

¹³ Dillingham 24, p. 633.

The desire—bordering on compulsion—to own land was supported by industriousness, shrewdness, and thrift. The Armenians boldly and even recklessly plunged into the market, undertaking heavy mortgages that most Americans would be unlikely to consider. These were paid off only at the cost of maintaining a lower standard of living. If all the immigrants had a greater tendency to save and work harder than the Americans, the Dillingham Commission concluded, then the Armenians worked even harder and saved even more. They lived in smaller, older, less comfortable houses than all but the German-Russians, and they wasted neither the time nor the money necessary to keep them in good repair. No matter, for “No house can produce a farm, but a good farm can produce a house.” The town-dwelling Armenians sent their women and youth to work in the raisin-packing houses, where they constituted a large percentage of the workers, but the farmers’ wives and children had plenty to do on the farm and precious little need to seek employment elsewhere. And despite their onerous, time-consuming chores, the women insisted on keeping their unassuming habitations clean, neat, and presentable, just as they maintained their own traditions of modesty and personal morality in the face of the looser standards of the other races about them.¹⁴

Their primary concern was the money-making potential of the land. What they wanted were prime agricultural tracts, preferably already planted to vines. Such land did not come cheap, and inflationary pressures were at work, too. The Armenians bid high

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 296, 626, 644–645.

prices up even higher. In this they were matched only by the Japanese. Although it was commonly supposed that the Armenians and Japanese “ruined property values” the truth was exactly the opposite. “White” farmers, given offers they could not refuse, pocketed their profits and retired to the city or bought new lands elsewhere. The value of the surrounding lands increased to the new levels.¹⁵

The Fortunes of Life for the Armenian Farmer, 1908–1920

1908–1909: *Falling Prices*. Throughout this period the fortunes of the Armenian farmer, despite his ambition and hard work, were tied to the prevailing economic conditions and particularly to the price of raisins. Realizing the importance of this in their lives, in 1908 the Armenians of Fresno favored William Howard Taft, who promised to keep up the protective duty on imported raisins.¹⁶ In the spring of 1909, the situation was grim as prices were low and there were 10,000 unsold tons left over from the previous year. The growers attempted to organize to fight the throat-cutting tactics of the packers, and April 30 was designated as “Raisin Day” as a propaganda tactic to promote the consumption of raisins throughout the country. But the situation went from bad to worse, and by fall the price had fallen to 1.75 cents per pound from 4 cents the previous year, below the cost of production, and bankruptcies threatened among Armenian farmers. With barley at 1.75 cents, and chicken feed at 4 cents, grapes were being fed to livestock. A surplus of

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 643.

¹⁶ *Gotchnag* IX.1 (January 2, 1909), p. 8.

40,000 tons was forecast. The situation in other crops was no better. Dried peaches had sold for 10 cents per pound the previous year, but the packers started out by offering 5 or 6 cents, and progressively dropped their offer until the growers were forced to sell at 3 to 4 cents. The cost of production was 4 to 4.5 cents. After the growers had sold, the packers raised their offering price to 5 cents and higher.¹⁷ The growers countered by forming the Central California Raisin Company, with fifteen directors, one of whom was an Armenian, Hagop M. Nishigian. A committee was named to take measures to keep the price above 2.5 cents, and the packers, conspiring to break the market, offered 2 cents if 20,000 tons would be contracted for by November 1, and 1.5 cents after November 15.¹⁸

1910: Rebound. In 1910, general prosperity and inflation after the previous year's depression kept up prices.¹⁹ The following spring, a heavy crop was anticipated and the packers were finally compelled to sign a contract to buy the next three years' crop at 3.5 cents. But a record frost on the night of April 13, 1911, wiped out from 50 to 70 percent of the crop and the price on the remainder jumped to 4.5 cents. Twenty percent of the affected fields were owned by Armenians.²⁰

1912: California Associated Raisin Company. A subscription campaign was undertaken to obligate growers to deliver their produce to the newly-established

¹⁷ Ibid., IX.43 (October 23, 1909), p. 1,017.

¹⁸ Ibid., IX.45 (November 6, 1909), p. 1,066.

¹⁹ Ibid., X.31 (July 30, 1910), p. 726.

²⁰ Ibid., XI.19 (March 13, 1911), p. 471.

California Associated Raisin Company. Marketing activities would not begin until seventy-five percent of the industry was under contract.²¹

1913: *Better Times*. The price of raisins had fallen to 2.5 cents early in 1913, and efforts were made to expand CARC. An Armenian, Karekin Izmirian, was on the board of directors. Lobbyists were sent to Washington to argue against a proposal to remove the tariff on imported raisins.²² In the fall the cooperative, controlling ninety percent of the crop, was able to hold the price up at 3.5 cents for muscats and 4.5 cents for Thompson seedless, even though 15,000 to 20,000 tons remained unsold from the previous year. The independent fruit packers were forced to sign contracts on CARC's terms, and the remaining "outside" packers had to scramble for raisins at the cooperative's price. Their grumbling compelled the federal government to investigate whether a "raisin trust" was monopolizing the market.²³ Melon prices were down and Armenians were heavily into that crop, but all in all it ended up as a good year. Some Armenians had even gotten rich over the years through raisin-growing, despite all the pitfalls of packers' cartels and weather.²⁴

A flood of Armenian immigrants was coming into Fresno looking for jobs and housing. The natives were selling out in the older sections and moving to new neighborhoods. The

²¹ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 115.

²² *Gotchnag* XIII.5 (February 1, 1913), pp. 129–130.

²³ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, pp. 118–120.

²⁴ *Gotchnag* XIII.43 (October 25, 1913), pp. 1,042–1,043.

earlier arrivals, encouraged by good times, were looking to double their holdings. More and more Armenians were appearing in business in Fresno, which some recommended as a more stable field of endeavor than raisin farming.²⁵ Armenian merchants were taking an important position in the city. Armenians were most of the city's tailors, controlled a quarter of the raisin business, and held first rank in melons and vegetables.²⁶ But although many development projects were in full swing and land prices had skyrocketed, it was not anticipated that a multitude of unskilled immigrants would be able to find work. Readers of *Gotchnag* were advised not to emigrate to California unless they had at least \$5,000 capital to start in business.²⁷

Real estate prices began to escalate sharply. But a threat came from another quarter, as a bill was introduced in the state legislature to prohibit aliens from owning land. This would have had a calamitous effect on the Armenians, a great many of whom were not citizens.²⁸ Even though the law as it was drawn up affected only the Japanese, many Armenians were led by their better judgment to apply for citizenship. More pertinent, discrimination against Armenians in land sales became worse. For several years real estate agents had been refusing to sell in certain "restricted" areas to Asians, Negroes, and other "undesirables," including Armenians. One Armenian who had changed his name

²⁵ Ibid., XIII.5 (February 1, 1913), pp. 129–130.

²⁶ Ibid., XIII.46 (November 15, 1913), p. 1,111.

²⁷ S. V. Yeramian, "The Future of California" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XIV.2 (January 10, 1914), p. 35.

²⁸ *Gotchnag* XIII.5 (February 1, 1913), pp. 129–130.

managed to buy a parcel north of town despite the collusion, but when it was discovered that he was an Armenian, he was boycotted, refused water, and prevented from building. *Gotchnag* wryly recommended that he change back his name.²⁹ In another incident, a real estate agent named Stockton advertised that he would not sell to Armenians. This caused the Armenian wrestler Aram Hovsepian to take offense, and he went to Stockton's office to demand that he stop publishing such insulting notices. The agent told him to "Get out, you god-damned Armenian!" This started a fight in the office. The two fell to blows again on the street a few hours later and were arrested for disturbing the peace.³⁰ Later the case was thrown out of court, Stockton's insults having been judged to have provoked the fight.

1914–1915. A depression in the winter of 1914 resulted in gangs of unemployed going from town to town throughout the valley in search of work, but no Armenians were seen among them.³¹ Tobacco, which had been introduced into the valley by Armenians, fell from 40 to 50 cents per pound the previous year to 18 to 35 cents.³² Many Armenian tobacco farmers then turned to melons, but were hurt again as overplanting resulted in a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII.26 (June 28, 1913), p. 628.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII.48 (November 29, 1913), p. 1,159.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XIV.4 (January 14, 1914), p. 75.

³² *Ibid.*, XIV.7 (February 14, 1914), p. 160.

glut and some of the crop had to be fed to the pigs. Dairy farming became profitable and many Armenians entered it, but there was the fear that milk prices would drop.³³

Raisin prices held steady because of the cooperative; muscat farmers, who had stayed out, received 4 cents per pound, and Thompson seedless farmers, who had joined up, received 4.5 cents.³⁴ Only one Armenian, T. B. Khungian, worked in the office of the cooperative, and Armenians seemed reluctant to join, reinforcing the hostility of the non-Armenian elements, who viewed them as uncooperative. Khungian spent his time going from farm to farm urging the Armenians to sign up as a matter of Armenian honor as well as public spirit. The coming of war in Europe in 1914 had two consequences, the end of immigration across the Atlantic and general inflation caused by increased demand and labor shortage. At first there was a drop-off in prices of both dried and fresh fruits as exports fell and the local market was flooded. But the combination of war and a small harvest sent prices up, and muscat raisins went for 4 to 4.5 cents per pound and Kishmish for 5 to 5.5 cents from non-coop packers.³⁵ The cooperative promised 3.25 to 3.5 cents immediately with a bonus of 1 cent after one year. Raisins affected politics, and most of

³³ Ibid., XIV.39 (September 26, 1914), p. 926.

³⁴ Ibid., XIV.21 (May 23, 1914), p. 498.

³⁵ "William Thompson, an English settler, first planted a popular Eastern Mediterranean grape known as the Oval Kishmish near Yuba City north of Sacramento in the 1860s. This popular green variety is now known as the Thompson Seedless." California Table Grape Commission, "Vitis Vinifera: The History of Grapes," at <<http://tablegrape.com/allabout/history2.htm>> (accessed February 28, 2002).

the Armenians who were citizens supported the Progressive Party over the tariff issue. The central committee of the party had six Armenian members.³⁶

Land prices continued to rise throughout the year, undeveloped land within 25 miles of the city selling for \$100 to \$300 per acre, and orchards and vineyards for \$300 to \$1,000 per acre. Commercial land in the city was up and was being sold by the frontage foot. Residential lots sold for \$300 to \$3,000 and more. Places where Armenians owned land were increasing in value even faster.³⁷ The face of the city had changed, too, as automobiles were coming into common use. The police had to direct traffic and neighborhoods were disrupted by paving projects.³⁸ On July 22 the last wooden buildings downtown, which contained Armenian shops, burned down.³⁹

The year 1914 ended on a good note, with the raisin crop sold, debts paid off, and new construction and lack of store vacancies downtown.⁴⁰ Development affected the whole area, and the outlying Armenian colonies at Wahtoke, Yetteem, and Kingsburg took on a prosperous look. Land prices were up due to general trends and, at Wahtokee, also

³⁶ *Gotchnag* XIV.10 (March 7, 1914), p. 232.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, XIV.12 (March 21, 1914), p. 280.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XIV.27 (July 4, 1914), p. 639.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV.34 (August 22, 1914), p. 808.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XV.3 (January 16, 1915), p. 64.

to the introduction of orange growing. Capital was being gathered, roads, water, and electricity put in and a new rail spur built to the orange groves.⁴¹

It was on Raisin Day in 1914 that the famous “Sun-Maid” raisin brand was born, as fifteen-year-old Loraine Collett posed in her bonnet and apron for the portrait that has adorned raisin boxes ever since.⁴²

1916. Prosperity continued into 1916 as good weather, good crops, and strong demand kept prices up for every crop except peaches. Farmers paid off their old debts and began to think about expansion. The banks, which a few months previously had been reluctant to loan \$75 on the acre were now loaning \$100 and even \$150.⁴³ A wet spring promised good crops, and vacant land was planted to orchards. Money poured in from the east, interest rates dropped, and demand for land surged. Many purchasers of land were Armenians, and the natives were surprised at their boldness and their willingness to undertake heavy debts on insufficient capital, figuring to make up the difference through hard work. They often succeeded contrary to all odds, though there was no shortage of failures. Those who failed once got up to try again.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., XV.8 (February 20, 1915), p. 182; XV.10 (March 6, 1915); XVI.22 (May 27, 1916), p. 575; XVI.34 (August 19, 1916), p. 888.

⁴² Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 120

⁴³ *Gotchnag* XVI.4 (January 22, 1916), p. 89.

⁴⁴ Ibid., XVI.15 (April 8, 1916), p. 378.

The peach growers formed an organization on the lines of the successful raisin cooperative, to which some Armenians belonged. But success itself was a threat to the raisin cooperative, and the packers kept trying to break it up by offering higher prices to those who would abandon it. A drive was undertaken to renew the expiring contracts to CARC. In February, the cooperative still needed to sign contracts for 15,000 more acres to insure its survival.⁴⁵ Some farmers, including a few Armenians, were finding ways to renege on their commitments and profiteer from the higher prices the packers were offering. Strong pressure was brought to bear upon the recalcitrants to sign, both through the newspapers and through actual coercion. Local merchants and banks denied credit or boycotted any grower not under contract. Roving gangs of “night riders” paid visits to farms and in one case the child of an outside grower was beaten at school while the teacher looked on. In another incident, a farmer was “dunked” in an irrigation ditch until he agreed to sign.⁴⁶ There may have been a racial element in the intimidation causing it to be directed more strongly at Japanese and Armenian farmers. These abuses were, however, generally supported by public opinion.⁴⁷ But in the end, Armenian community leaders drew the praise of Wylie Giffen, the president of CARC, for their efforts to

⁴⁵ Ibid., XVI.7 (February 12, 1916), p. 171.

⁴⁶ The race of these individuals is not given by Woeste.

⁴⁷ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, pp. 126–130.

persuade their countrymen to join the cooperative and to act “responsibly.”⁴⁸ Most Armenians signed, and the cooperative was assured of success for two more years.⁴⁹

But disaster struck in the fall as unseasonable heavy rains caught two-thirds of the raisin crop out to dry. Even grapes on the vine were damaged. Twelve days of rain had ruined 25,000 tons of raisins worth \$2 million, amounting to one-quarter of the crop. The previous year’s crop had all been sold, and the cooperative could fill only 75 percent of its orders. Compounding matters, the harvest had been late because of the labor shortage and the raisins were on the ground when they should have been in the packing houses. There was no labor available to salvage the crop, even at \$1.00 per hour. The rich were not so bad off, because their wooden trays could be stacked on each other and some of the crop salvaged; as usual, the poor suffered most and faced bankruptcy, for their trays were made of paper. The loss rippled through the entire economy, totally dependent on the prosperity of the farmers.⁵⁰

In spite of the disaster, land prices continued to rise, not just because of the general inflation, but also because of the Armenians, who seemed crazy for land at any price. Over the winter Armenians bought thousands of acres, even resorting to going to the doors of American farmers to badger them into selling.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Gotchnag* XVI.8 (February 19, 1916), p. 186.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI.13 (March 25, 1916), p. 314; XVI.15 (April 8, 1916), p. 378.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XVI.44 (October 28, 1916), pp. 1,148–1,149.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XVI.50 (December 9, 1916), p. 1,303.

1917. By early 1917 the general prosperity—despite the disaster of the previous year—had become evident, shown by the abundance of automobiles in the community. Still, the Armenians maintained their thrifty if not niggardly existence, balancing their accounts ten times before spending five dollars, and seemed in no danger of becoming ostentatious. In fact, *Gotchnag's* correspondent sniped, if there were some law to force them to build houses, buy automobiles, and enter society to liberate their families from isolation, he would support it.⁵² The cost of living continued to rise and there was an unprecedented demand for potatoes, rice, and wheat. All available land was being put under cultivation. Cold spring weather forebode tight fruit supplies.⁵³

1918: *Bonanza*. The following year high prices precipitated a renewal of widespread profiteering and the cooperative seemed again to be on the verge of failure. The Armenians were accused of torpedoing the cooperative, but this calumny was just as true of farmers of all races. Nevertheless, a public eager to believe anything bad about the Armenians pointed to their alleged lack of help in the recent fund drive for the cooperative, and said that they didn't care if Fresno went down.⁵⁴ While many Armenian community leaders preached cooperation, this was something to which the Armenians had never been accustomed, and their ingrained reluctance to become entangled was viewed by the Americans as selfishness and worse, though most white Fresnoans could hardly be

⁵² *Ibid.*, XVII.6 (February 10, 1917), pp. 194–195.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XVII.13 (March 31, 1917), p. 397.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XVIII.4 (January 26, 1918), p. 1,660.

called objective on the subject of foreigners in any case. The Armenian was, despite the westernization of some of them in missionary schools, an Asiatic, used to eastern methods and psychology and suspicious of outsiders. Fear and insecurity bred of generations of Turkish rule, where the wise man was the one who handed down his father's inheritance intact to his children, was not eradicated simply by the act of landing in America.⁵⁵

Social cooperation had to be learned gradually, over generations. Thus the boldness of the Armenians in Fresno and their participation in the cooperative to the extent that they did was all the more remarkable.

Land prices continued to rise through the year as many Armenians emigrated from the East Coast in whole families, buying expensive vineyards. Experienced voices were beginning to be heard to say, sell, don't buy, for after the war prices will drop.⁵⁶ No one paid any attention. The material progress in the vineyards and in the whole community was striking, and former owners of twenty acres now had forty, sixty, eighty, or even one hundred. The already-high vineyard prices of four years earlier had doubled, and the government had contracted to buy the whole raisin crop at 5.5 cents per pound. The raisin cooperative was reestablished on a firm foundation after the scare earlier in the season, and thousands of acres were being converted to vineyards every year in anticipation of further price rises. No one stopped to think that they were being held up by the

⁵⁵ Bedros A. Veoljiukian, "Conditions for Success in American Business" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XVII.36 (September 8, 1917), pp. 1,070–1,073.

⁵⁶ *Gotchnag* XVIII.28 (July 13, 1918), pp. 2,315–2,316.

war. Some Armenians paid as high as \$800 per acre, and the best vineyards went for \$1,150 per acre, more than even the Armenians were willing to pay. Armenians wanted bigger and bigger farms, not twenty or forty acres, but 160, 200, and more.⁵⁷

Unseasonable September rains struck in again in 1918 as they had in 1916, destroying 30 percent of the raisin crop. Because Prohibition had shut down the wineries, the damaged fruit could only be fed to the hogs.⁵⁸ In spite of the precarious situation, raisin fever continued to affect the Armenians, and the Armenian community of Los Angeles began to shrink noticeably as families moved to Fresno at the rate of one or more per week. The Armenian Congregational Church in Los Angeles began to decline in membership. Following the example of others, parishioners abandoned their occupations and undertook heavy debts in the expectation of reaping a bonanza in farming.⁵⁹

1919–1920. With the end of the war in 1918, a flow of Armenian survivors sought refuge in the United States. Hearing the success of those who had gone to the West Coast, many went straight on to California, joining those who had been abandoning the cold, damp, smoky factory towns of the east for the sunny and fertile fields of Pacific. By 1919 raisin prices rose to 11 cents per pound, and in the fall of 1920, to 15 cents. The price of an acre of average-quality vineyard reached \$1,250, and the very best went for \$2,000 to \$2,500. Those who had bought in 1918 had gotten rich; the cautious had been

⁵⁷ Ibid., XVIII.32 (August 103, 1918), pp. 2,334

⁵⁸ Ibid., XVIII.51 (December 21, 1918), p. 1,350; XIX.4 (January 25, 1919), p. 118.

⁵⁹ Ibid., XIX.32 (August 12, 1919), p. 1,029; XIX.44 (November 1, 1919), p. 1,414.

shut out. Everyone said that he who would profit had to throw himself in with his eyes closed.

Yet there were danger signals, if anyone chose to look for them. A vineyard had to return its cost in four or five years to be considered cheap. Hopes of paying off heavy mortgages on new or expanded farms depended on the price of raisins. The heady war-time boom was grinding to a halt. Imported raisins from Spain and Smyrna were keeping prices from rising further, now that transatlantic shipping had been resumed. The effects of Prohibition on viticulture were unclear. The wine grape industry had been destroyed, but now there was a mad rush on raisins by home vintners, keeping up the price. The situation was most uncertain, and the incoming Republican administration had given no indication of its enforcement policy. What if the government stopped allowing home wine making? The price of figs, which no one had yet thought to use to make wine, had already dropped because of competition from imports. The 15 cent price for raisins seemed unattainable for the next year, though the situation might take some time to shake itself out. The overheated land speculation was cooling down; prices of vineyards did not jump in the fall as before; transfers of property were down. Caution was the byword.⁶⁰ Any event could trigger a collapse.

On June 20–22 a heat wave caused some farmers to lose a quarter to a half of their crops.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ananikian, “California and the Armenians,” pts. 1–2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pt. 2.

Town Occupations

There were no factories in Fresno to provide employment to workers. Therefore non-agricultural pursuits were limited to those petty urban trades and services that could be entered on little capital. In 1897 [Table V], when the Armenian population of Fresno was only 329, according to a contemporary count, 54 persons were engaged in such occupations. The rest were farmers.⁶² Of these 54, 49 were shopkeepers or peddlers, 4 were professionals, and 1 was a packing house owner.⁶³

TABLE V

URBAN OCCUPATIONS OF ARMENIANS IN FRESNO, 1897		
TRADES & SERVICE	LARGE ENTERPRISE	PROFESSIONAL
Tailors 14	Packing house owner 1	Dentist 1
Watchmakers 8		Doctor-pharmacist 1
Peddlers 7		Pediatrician 1
Fruit sellers 5		Singer 1
Shoemakers 4		
Carpenters 3		
Barbers 2		
Butchers 2		
Grocer 1		
Animal seller 1		
Bicycle seller 1		
Printer 1		
TOTAL 49	1	4

Adapted from Khungian.

⁶² See above, p. 43.

⁶³ Bishop Mushegh Seropian [Serobian], ed., *Amerikahay Taretsuytse 1912* [American Armenian Almanac], vol. 1 (Boston: Kilikia Tparan, 1913), p. 61.

In little more than a decade, Armenian businessmen had assumed an important role in the community and were more numerous than those of any other immigrant race except for the Japanese. While Armenian farming interests were much the larger, Armenian business interests were nonetheless extensive. Armenians had not entered the packing or wine-making industries to any great extent but they dominated the melon trade. In the city they operated numerous stores for the sale of clothing, new and second-hand furniture, groceries, and the like, quickly developing small establishments into profitable businesses.⁶⁴ Their stores compared favorably with those of the natives but were smaller. Although they were patronized by all races, most of their customers were Armenians. But there was also hostility against the Armenian businessmen and criticism of “sharp” practices, which cut into their patronage. The more Americanized Armenians traded extensively at non-Armenian stores, although their patronage, along with that of the Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians, was discouraged. The Armenians were most conspicuous as tailors and had the largest and best shops, which were patronized by all races. Armenians kept out completely from saloon- and brothel-keeping, which was foreign to their tradition and sense of morality, and which in any case was dominated by the Chinese.⁶⁵

Another contemporary survey made in 1917 or 1918 [Table VI] showed a continuation of the earlier trends, with 137 establishments dealing in petty trades and

⁶⁴ Cf. *Gotchnag*, XIII.5 (February 1, 1913), pp. 129–130; XIII.46 (November 15, 1913), p. 1,111.

⁶⁵ *Dillingham* 24, pp. 651–652.

services, 3 packing houses, and 21 professional persons.⁶⁶ While most Armenian businesses were small family affairs, a few grew into large enterprises. But these were mainly marketing aspects of agricultural ventures. The Seropians were successful in packing until 1904, when their firm was taken over by wealthy San Francisco interests.⁶⁷ The Markarians parlayed their fig ranch into a large concern that packed and shipped the figs as well, and Krikor Arakelian had such success in growing and marketing melons that he expanded into the Imperial Valley in Southern California.

There were a few attempts also at other enterprises. During the oil boom around Coalinga in 1910, some Armenians formed a company to stake claims and search for oil, but they came with too little too late.⁶⁸ The next year shares were being sold to Armenians at \$20 each for a planing mill to be capitalized at \$25,000, with each major subscriber contributing \$1,000.⁶⁹ This also never materialized. In 1913 some Armenians in Wahtoke thought they were sitting on top of a huge pool of oil, which they weren't.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Khungian, "Patmutiun," p. 309.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 299; Nectar Davidian, *Seropians*, pp. 5–9.

⁶⁸ *Gotchnag* X.27 (July 2, 1910), p. 641; XI.12 (March 25, 1911), p. 294.

⁶⁹ Ibid., XI.12 (March 25, 1911), p. 294.

⁷⁰ Ibid., XIII.44 (November 1, 1913), p. 1,066.

TABLE VI

URBAN OCCUPATIONS OF ARMENIANS IN FRESNO, 1918		
TRADES & SERVICES	LARGE ENTERPRISES	PROFESSIONAL
Tailors 30	Packing house & bulghur factory owners 3	Lawyers 7
Fruit sellers 20		Dentists 6
Grocers 16		Physicians, including no longer practicing 6
Shoemakers 15		Pharmacists 2
New & used furniture sellers 15		
Barbers 14		
Real estate & insurance salesmen 8		
Restaurant & coffee shop operators 7		
Watchmakers 5		
Clothing stores 5		
Photographers 3		
TOTAL 137	3	21

Adapted from Khungian.

Almost all of the Armenians who entered urban occupations were, therefore, engaged in small-scale shopkeeping or services, preferring—or forced by economic circumstances—to operate independent businesses, which they built up, if they were fortunate, through their own hard work, aided by their families. In this they were handicapped by lack of capital and unfamiliarity with western practices, as well as the hostility of the other races. Their success would depend on their willingness to work long, hard hours, maintain a thrifty and modest standard of living, and adapt themselves sufficiently to their environment. In all of these areas they were well equipped by their own background and culture.

CHAPTER 4

RELIGION: THE CHURCHES BEFORE 1920

Naturally, the Armenians cast in far-off America lacked the comfort and solace of their familiar surroundings. They desired the companionship of their old friends and neighbors, the sound of their maternal tongue, and the aroma of their customary food. They longed for the forms and usages of their childhood, and most of all for the sweet and gentle arms of their mother, the Church.

First there were Evangelical gatherings, led by the young men who had come to America for education. These started as prayer meetings in private homes and then developed into formal congregations: Worcester, Massachusetts, prayer meetings in 1881, congregation organized on New Year's Day 1892; New York, prayer meetings in 1881, worship services begun on November 14, 1896; Belmont, Massachusetts, first meetings in rented facilities in 1891, church organized in 1908; Providence, Rhode Island, prayer meetings in 1892, incorporated in 1912; Fresno, California, first worship with Americans in September 1883, church organized on July 25, 1897, split in 1901; Watertown, Massachusetts, prayer meetings in 1897, church organized in 1905; Chicago, Illinois, first monthly meetings in 1901, church organized on February 20, 1916.¹

¹ Robert Megerdichian, *The Armenian Churches in North America: Apostolic, Protestant, and Catholic. A Geographical and Historical Survey*. Society for Armenian Studies Occasional Paper Number 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Society for Armenian Studies, 1983).

The Armenian Apostolic Church was a little later on the scene. The first spiritual pastor of the Armenians of America was Hovsep Vartabed Sarajian, who celebrated the Divine Liturgy in a hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1889.² This notable churchman was born in Constantinople in 1849. He received his education in Jerusalem and was ordained there as a celibate priest. He was sent to Van, where he became the Father Superior of Surp Arakelots monastery. At the time of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 the young priest remained at his post during the Russian invasion and appealed to the Turkish governor to release grain from his hoarded stores to relieve the severe famine among the local Armenians. When his entreaties were ignored, Father

² The best survey of the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church in America is Father Oshagan Minassian, “A History of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church in the United States (1888–1944),” (Boston, Massachusetts: Boston University School of Theology Th.D. Dissertation, 1974). Father Minassian has explored the subject thoroughly using Armenian- and English-language sources, presenting all the pertinent facts in great detail and with objectivity and a generous spirit of interpretation. The history of the Armenian Apostolic Church in America is intertwined with the history of the Armenian political parties, which will be considered below in due course.

The nomenclature of the ranks of Armenian clergy is confused in the popular usage. The titles of these may be transliterated into Eastern or Western Armenian; I have given both in this note but in the text the western transliteration will be used since this was the usual pronunciation by Armenian immigrants in the United States during the era under consideration. According to Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, ordained clergy include only the orders of deacon (*sarkavag* or *sargavak*), priest (*kahana*; *erets*), and bishop (*ebiskobos* or *episkopos*). Catholicos (*katolikos*) is a special case of bishop. Additional terms, not necessarily referring to ordained clergy, are *abegha* or *apegha* (monk) and *vardapet* or *vartabed* (doctor, i.e., one who has received formal and ceremonial permission to teach the Faith). Other dignities are granted for merit or service but do not imply a separate ecclesiastical degree: *awag* or *avak*, combined with *sargavak*, *kahana*, or *erets*, meaning arch- or senior; *tsayraguin vardapet* or *dzairakuin vartabed*, meaning plenary or full doctor (usually translated “extreme vartabed”); *arkepiskopos* or *arkebiskobos*, archbishop; and *patriark* or *badriark*, patriarch. In the popular usage, however, *sargavak* or deacon is used for altar servers whether they are actually ordained or not, *kahana* refers to married parish priests, *apegha* to celibate priests who do not have the degree of doctor, and *vartabed* to celibate priests with the degree of doctor. This is the usage that is followed invariably in this work. In Armenian these titles are placed after the personal name and if the family name is used it follows the title, such as Hovsep Vartabed Sarajian or Matteos Catholicos Izmirlian. Terms that are commonly used in English, such as bishop, patriarch, and catholicos, will be given according to customary style: Archbishop Hovsep Sarajian, Catholicos Matteos Izmirlian. See Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, *Armenian Church Historical Studies: Matters of Doctrine and Administration*, ed. and introd. Nerses Vrej Nersessian (New York City: St. Vartan Press, 1996), pp. 272–274.

Sarajian organized the peasants and seized the grain by force. This put him in danger and the patriarch recalled him to Constantinople for his own safety.³ After another decade, Father Sarajian was sent to minister to the Armenian immigrants of America. He organized the first parish, Holy Redeemer (*Surp Purgich*), in Worcester, where a church building was erected and consecrated in January, 1891. At that time there was no Armenian bishop in America and the Church was directly responsible to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Father Sarajian was a straightforward man who had little sympathy for the Armenian revolutionary movement and his tenure was marked by conflict with local political activists. He left America in 1893 and returned to Constantinople. There followed a period of turmoil and confusion, during which political factions clashed and individual priests took up positions in the communities of the eastern states without proper authorization. The patriarch elevated Father Sarajian to the rank of bishop and sent him back to Worcester to be the first primate of the new Diocese of North America. He arrived in late 1899. In June 1901 a church assembly was convoked at which the decree of the patriarch was promulgated.⁴

The Armenian Apostolic Church had to make a difficult adjustment to conditions in America. Individualism, Protestantism, and the separation of church and state, the

³ Dikran Spear [Tigran Mkund, Dikran Mgoont], *Hay Kghern Amerikayi Mej* [Armenian Clergy in America] ([Weehawken, N.J. : s.n.], 1945), pp. 21–23. This information is based on the obituary by M. Portugalian in Armenia, October 29, 1913, quoted by Spear.

⁴ P. A. Atamian, “American-Armenian Church and Churchmen, 1888–1911” [in Armenian], in Bishop Mushegh Seropian [Serobian], ed., *Amerikahay Taretsuytse 1912* [American Armenian Almanac], vol. 1 (Boston: Kilikia Tparan, 1913), pp. 112–113.

principles upon which the nation was founded, profoundly affected the institutions of every immigrant group. The established churches of the old world were disestablished in the new. They had to confront the prevailing attitude of Americanism, secularism, and growing indifference. Those churches that had exercised civil power, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, found that power usurped by the state and were left to minister only to the spiritual and emotional needs of their people. Its Church lost its control over taxation, community discipline, and marriage. Her authority now existed only to the extent that its children would grant it. No passport identified the individual, as it had in Turkey, as an Armenian by reason of his baptism into the Church. No one was compelled to obey priest or bishop by civil sanction; he chose to do so or not only of his own accord. Nor had the clergy any power over him save spiritual. The Church in America stood naked to the searing winds of individual freedom and democracy.

The Armenian Evangelicals were better adapted to the new climate, and indeed, were half-aculturated before they came. They had been torn off, as it were, from the Mother Church and grafted onto New England Congregationalism, which had its roots in the Great Awakening of America. So they could claim an American heritage, if they had a mind to. Their church organization was as American as any other. Their doctrine, renouncing all authority but Holy Writ and Conscience, emanated from the Protestant Reformation. Their style of worship was identical with that of their American brethren. Their songs had been translated for them from the songbooks of the missionaries. Their sermons, whether in Turkish or Armenian, could be just as easily delivered in English

when the need arose. And they could follow the fine old American tradition of spinning off new sects, of multiplying, of evangelizing. For them, being Armenian was a matter of nationality and identity, not religion or ideology.

The Apostolic Church had a harder time of it. To begin with, there was the problem of sheer distance. A hierarchy in Constantinople and Echmiadzin had to govern a church halfway around the world, in an age when the fastest means of communication was the steamship. By church law, the people could not take independent action to start a parish or call a priest; all had to be done through proper channels. The unscrupulous or self-serving could exploit such a situation to carve out their own personal fiefdoms with the aid of their partisans. By 1899 the Church in America was in chaos, and the Catholicos remarked, "It is most difficult to find a worthy, willing, and dedicated pastor who can take charge of the mission in that land."⁵ Those who were sent were invariably unfamiliar with American conditions, customs, and language.

A further strain on the Church stemmed from her position as the only Armenian institution of unchallenged legitimacy. If the Evangelicals formed a fairly cohesive, like-minded group in social and political matters, the overwhelming majority that professed allegiance to the Apostolic Church reflected every view and attitude. This spelled trouble. Every stripe and opinion could claim that the Church should conform to the will of the "people." The political controversies that began in Turkey over the use of the

⁵ Ibid.

Church as a platform for the propaganda of the new revolutionary parties spilled over into America. In the free American climate, the arguments could be stated in terms of “democracy” or “representation” Most of the clergy stuck to a conservative line, infuriating the rebels, although a few took the other side. In 1893 Hovsep Vartabed Sarajian tried to throw the works of Raffi and the newspapers *Mushag* and *Hunchag* out of the National Library, which was housed in the church. A riot ensued and heads were cracked.⁶ Not an auspicious beginning for the Church in America.

Beginnings: The Evangelicals

Fresno

Worship with the Americans. The first group of Armenian immigrants to Fresno arrived on September 10, 1883. They were all Evangelicals with certificates of church membership obtained in Turkey.⁷ On September 17, they began to worship at the First Congregational Church together with the Americans. According to *Taretsuys 1912*, a Mr. Freeman, who probably was the minister, saw that there were forty Armenians with certificates of church membership. Freeman wrote to the American Board that a church was needed. A new church was built on K Street.⁸ But soon thereafter, the Armenians

⁶ *Taretsuys 1912*, pp. 109–111; Manuk G. Chizmechian [Manug G. Jizmejian], *Patmutiun Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890–1925* [History of the American-Armenian Political Parties, 1890–1925] (Fresno, *Nor Or Press*, 1930), pp. 19–20.

⁷ With one exception. *Taretsuys 1912*, p. 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

complained of racial persecution. In a petition submitted to the General Association of Congregational Churches of Central and Northern California in 1884, they charged that they were being ostracized and were being discriminated against in the seating in the church and that the ushers had been ordered not to distribute the customary Bibles and hymn books to them. On Sunday, January 7, 1894, Mr. Mesrop Sinanian had been accosted by an usher while attempting to take his seat. He broke away, sat down, and was forcibly removed. It was further charged that Pastor J.H. Collins, who had recently arrived from Arizona, had refused to admit adult Armenian members and had declared that if any more were admitted he would resign.⁹ The Armenians believed that some members were trying to drive them out of the church and that they were instigating others to join them. All of the successive pastors except one joined against the Armenians, they charged. In 1895 the church voted to expel the Armenians.¹⁰

Fresno First Armenian Evangelical Presbyterian Church. After they had been expelled from the church, the Armenians appealed to the Home Mission Society (Congregationalist) for help in starting an independent church, but they were turned down. They kept looking for some religious organization to help them, and three years later, the Presbyterians came to their aid. Thus First Armenian Evangelical Presbyterian Church was

⁹ Richard Tracy La Piere, "The Armenian Colony in Fresno County, California: A Study in Social Psychology" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1930), pp. 366–367; Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 196. Mesrop Sinanian arrived in Fresno in 1882. See above, p. 40.

¹⁰ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 63.

established on July 25, 1897.¹¹ Their first minister was the former missionary to Bitlis, the Reverend L. T. Burbank. He preached in fluent Armenian. In 1900 he was succeeded by the Reverend George Harootune Filian,¹² during whose pastorate a building was erected on the corner of Santa Clara and Fulton Streets. He was followed by the Reverend H. M. Haiguni (1905–1912) and the Reverend Mihran H. Knajian (1913–1920).¹³

Fresno Armenian Evangelical Pilgrim Congregational Church. Another group of the Armenians who had been expelled by the Americans founded the Armenian Evangelical Pilgrim Congregational Church on January 26, 1901. Their first preacher was Dr. Nazaret Agheksantrian, who remained for one and one-half years. He was followed by the Reverend Hovhannes K. Santigian until 1909 and then by the Reverend Arpiar Vartanian for four years. During the latter's pastorate a building was erected at the corner of Van Ness and Inyo Streets, which was sold ten years later. On July 31, 1914, the church welcomed a most notable and able pastor, the Reverend Manasseh G. Papazian. This eloquent preacher was born in Aintab in 1865. Following his graduation from Aintab College in 1881, he had taught at Agn until 1884 and then at Aintab College until 1886. He then came to America to study, graduating from Yale Divinity School in 1889. His first

¹¹ Ibid., p. 63; *Gotchnag*, XIV.34 (August 22, 1914), p. 808.

¹² This was the way he spelled his name in English. The Reverend Filian was born in 1853. He was the author of *Armenia and Her People* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1896).

¹³ Krikor Sarafian, *Gordsapatum H. B. E. Miutian Kalifornio Shrchanaki 1910–1953* [History of the Activities of the California District of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1910–1953] (Fresno, 1954), p. 32. Krikor Sarafian was a native of Aintab, the brother of Professor Kevork Sarafian, the uncle of Dr. Armen Sarafian, and the granduncle of Dr. Winston Sarafian, all educators.

pastorate was at an American Congregational Church in Rowley, Massachusetts, from 1889 to 1892. He was called to the pulpit of Hayik Church in Aintab in 1892. In 1908 he returned to America for good, serving as the pastor of the New York Armenian Evangelical Church from 1908 to 1914. He served at Pilgrim Congregational Church until 1940, except for an interruption of less than two years, when he filled the pulpit in Pasadena.¹⁴ He died at Fresno in 1943. The Reverend Papazian took an active role in community life for many years.¹⁵ Not shying from controversy, he boldly expressed his conservative views and drew the bitter hostility of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.¹⁶

Fundamentalist Meetings. The Armenian Full Gospel Church of God was established in 1912 by the Reverend Vartan Moomjian. This was a fundamentalist meeting whose members were entirely preoccupied with religious matters. It remained very small and had little if any influence on community life. The Reverend Moomjian remained in the pulpit until 1925. He was succeeded by the Reverend Harutiun Karajian (1925–1928).

¹⁴ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 32.

¹⁵ Kevork A. Sarafian, *A Briefer History of Aintab* ([n.p.]: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1957), p. 61.

¹⁶ Papazian was incessantly criticized in the pages of the Dashnaktsakan paper *Asbarez*, the more so because he was the boldest and ablest Evangelical spokesman.

Outlying Communities

Fowler. Evangelical churches were also established in the outlying Armenian communities. The oldest of these was the First Armenian Congregational Church of Fowler. It was founded on Sunday, April 16, 1903, by the Reverend Hovhannes K. Santigian, who was on a visit from Boston to hold meetings. He later returned to California to stay. By 1910 the church had 42 members and 100 Sunday worshipers. It continued to grow over the next decade. In 1911 the building burned down. New improved facilities were bought from an American church and dedicated on March 16, 1913. Visitors came from as far away as San Francisco and Los Angeles.¹⁷

Yettem. The Armenian settlement of Yettem was established in 1901 by a group of Evangelicals, as related above. Their first Sunday services were held in private houses or in the local school building and if no trained clergy were available, were led by laymen. Midweek prayer services were held rain or shine. If the roads were impassable to horse-drawn vehicles because of foul weather, the people would walk to meeting along the raised banks of the irrigation ditches.¹⁸ Later, a mission was started by the First Armenian Presbyterian Church of Fresno, which first sent the Reverend H. M. Haiguni and afterward underwrote the salary of the Reverend Movses Jenanian. The mission became

¹⁷ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 67; *Gotchnag* XI.14 (April 8, 1911), p. 330; XIII.14 (April 5, 1913), p. 335; XIII.21 (May 24, 1913), pp. 537–538; XV.7 (February 13, 1915), p. 156; XVII.20 (May 19, 1917), p. 622.

¹⁸ Charles Davidian, *A Warm Wind Through Yettem: an Eighty-Year Anthology* ([n.p.]: Davidian House Publishing, c. 1993), at <<http://www.putnampit.com/yettem.html>> (accessed December 22, 1999). Unpaginated electronic copy, chapter 2

independent on April 2, 1911 as the First Armenian Presbyterian Church of Yetteem. A building was erected in 1913. The Reverend Jenanian preached in Turkish because at the time most of the people of the church were from the Turkish-speaking areas of Adana, Marash, and Zeitun.¹⁹

Parlier. In Parlier, mission work was begun in 1910 under the auspices of the Fowler church. About fifteen to twenty were present for services each Sunday. Meetings were sometimes held under a tree for lack of a building. The church was formally organized as Mt. Olivet Armenian Congregational Church on May 28, 1911. By 1914 attendance was between fifty and sixty for services, with many transient young male workers in the congregation. The church had twenty members and still was dependent on outside aid.

Kingsburg. Although Kingsburg was predominantly Swedish, there was also a large Armenian community. Through the support of the Armenian Presbyterian Church of Fresno and the efforts of the Reverend Rushduni, they were able to organize the Armenian Martyrs Presbyterian Church on July 30, 1916. A building was bought in 1917.²⁰

Reedley and Wahtoke. In the neighboring communities of Reedley and Wahtoke, mission work was begun in 1910. For some time the Reverend Kartoizian of Parlier came on Sundays to hold services.

¹⁹ According to Professor Richard G. Hovannisian, Yetteem also had many people from Kaiseri (Caesarea) province, especially the villages of Chomakhlu, most of whom spoke an Armenian dialect. These came later. This led to a controversy over language, described below.

²⁰ *Gotchnag* XVII.20 (May 19, 1917); H[agop H.] Khashmanian, *Amerikahay Hanragitak Taregirk 1925* [American-Armenian Encyclopaedic Almanac], (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1925), p. 199; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 88–89.

Turlock; Lone Star. Meetings were also held in some other communities with small Armenian populations, but churches were not established. In Turlock, the Reverend Arpiar Vartanian began holding meetings in homes in 1914 and continued for over a decade without remuneration.²¹ In Lone Star, near Fresno, the Reverend H. Ghazarian was conducting mission work in 1914.²²

Los Angeles

Gethsemane Armenian Congregational Church. In Los Angeles, the first religious meeting was conducted by the Reverend Haigag H. Khazoyan in 1905 in a small room of the First Congregational Church. For a while, the meetings were led by Mr. Yenovk Der Stepanian. In 1908, a congregation was organized under the name “Los Angeles Armenian Gethsemane Congregational Church,” with the Reverend S. H. Babasinian as pastor. In 1910 Mr. Aram S. Yeretjian was called. He was ordained in 1913. In 1916 a building was bought for \$5,600 from Salem Congregational Church, which had been built only ten years earlier at a cost of \$25,000. On Christmas Day, January 6, 1917, the church held a special service and became completely independent of First Congregational Church.²³

Gethsemane Church was active in the community, conducting mission work among the Caucasian Armenians of Los Angeles and dispensing aid to the needy both locally and in

²¹ *Gotchnag* XV.7 (February 13, 1915), p. 158; Khashmanian, *Taregirk* 1925, p. 199.

²² *Gotchnag* XV.7 (February 13, 1915), p. 158.

²³ *Asbarex* 442 (January 26, 1917).

the homeland. Worshipers came from as far away as San Diego and Santa Barbara as well as suburban towns.

Molokans. In Los Angeles there were also a number of small independent gatherings of “spiritual” or fundamentalist Christians.²⁴ Among these were the Armenian Molokans, who were from the village of Karakala in the Kars Oblast (province).²⁵ The Molokans were a sect that had emerged in central Russia in the middle of the eighteenth century, although it is possible that antecedents had already been in existence a hundred years earlier. Like the Mennonites, the Quakers, and the Dukhobors, with whom they shared a historical similarity, they rejected the essential orthodox doctrines of the Church: its magisterium, or authority to teach, the Apostolic Succession, and the sacraments. Their worship consisted mainly of “jumping” or ecstatic dancing, communal singing, and the recitation of Bible verses. A strict reading of the scriptures led them to embrace pacifism and the Mosaic dietary laws. From their refusal to fast during Lent, they were called *molokane* or “milk drinkers,” but they turned this insult on its head by declaring that they

²⁴ These gatherings governed themselves on a congregational basis and did not belong to any organized denomination or church, although they could join in voluntary associations. They usually held that the only true Christians were those who believed the Bible as they interpreted it and who had experienced a spiritual conversion or rebirth. This attitude is typical of many Protestant sectarians. The name “spirituals” was also used in the author’s youth to refer to fundamentalist Armenians usually associated with the Brethren faction, but they were called so in Turkish, “rookhjis.” See any text on Protestant church history and organization or “Religious Organization,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 13, pp. 428–437 (New York: Crowell Collier and MacMillan, 1968).

²⁵ Siragan Kaloian, *The Immigration of the Armenians of Shirag to America* (Los Angeles, 1950), p. 10; Aram S. Yeretian, “A History of Armenian Immigration to America with Special Reference to Los Angeles” (M. A. Thesis at the University of Southern California, n.d.), pp. 56–57; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 49, John K. Berokoff, *Molokans in America* (Whittier and Stockton, Calif.: Doty Trade Press, 1969). This book has been placed on the Internet at <<http://gecko.gc.maricopa.edu/clubs/russian/molokan/berekoff/>> (accessed August 27, 2001). The Internet copy, which is incompletely paginated, was used for this research.

drank the “spiritual milk of God.”²⁶ After 1828 the tsarist government sent many of them to the Transcaucasus because of their intransigence. However, the clean, industrious, and thrifty habits of the Molokans caused them to prosper and even to make converts, among whom were the Armenians of Karakala. These also adopted “jumping.”²⁷

In the Transcaucasus, Molokan leaders made prophetic utterances assertedly inspired by the Holy Ghost. One such prophecy foretold the division of the community into two groups, Zion, which would be led to a place of refuge, and Jerusalem, which would remain and endure tribulation. However, the time of this event was not specified. Signs pointing to the imminent fulfillment of the prophecy were seen in 1900 by Efin Gerasimitch Klubnikin. This man, young by Molokan standards, was born on December 17, 1842 near Erevan and began having revelations at the age of 9. Klubnikin went from village to village throughout the districts of Erevan and Kars with his warning. He told his Armenian co-religionists of Karakala that if they did not flee, they would suffer a fate far more severe than that of their Russian brethren.²⁸ Following a debate in the Molokan communities at which the leader of the Armenian community of Karakala, Ardzuman

²⁶ I Peter 2:2.

²⁷ Andy J. Conovaloff, “Molokan Home Page,” at <<http://staff.gc.maricopa.edu/~jstory/molokan/>> (accessed July 24, 1999) contains a description of a Molokan service. See also Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), pp. 919, 1017–1018, 1221, 1222. A recent study of the settlement of Russian religious dissenters in Transcaucasia is Nicholas Brenton Breyfogle, “Heretics and Colonizers: Religious dissent and Russian colonization of Transcaucasia, 1830-1890 (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia)” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1998).

²⁸ Whether one accepts that Klubnikin was inspired by the Holy Ghost or not, it is undeniable that his prophecies came true to the letter. For this warning Berokoff states that he is revered to this day by the Armenian Molokans.

Ivanitch Ohanessian, was present, the first group of emigrants left Kars for Los Angeles on May 1, 1904. The migration of Molokans continued until the outbreak of war in 1914.²⁹ The emigrants settled on the east side of the Los Angeles River down from Boyle Avenue between First and Sixth Streets, an area called the “Flats.” This became a “Russian town” and here the Molokans built a church. William Klubnikin, Sr., the grandson of E.G. Klubnikin, states that the Armenians settled south of Fourth Street and had their own church on Clarence Street off Fourth Street.³⁰ It seems probable that these meetings were conducted in Armenian. According to Joyce Bivin, the descendent of Armenian Molokan immigrants, the Armenian Molokans adopted some Pentecostalist beliefs under the influence of revival meetings that were going on at the time at the Apostolic Faith Mission at 312 Azusa Street. These meetings were conducted in English and the Armenians did not fully understand the language, but they believed that they were receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost and “spoke in tongues.” The first Armenian Molokan meetings were on Boston Street, then in a large room at 431 South Pecan Terrace, and then on Gless Street, all in the “Flats.”³¹ The Armenians gradually moved

²⁹ Berokoff, op. cit., chapter 1.

³⁰ The author’s associate at Belmont Community Adult School, Steven Makshanoff, provided the name of William Klubnikin, Sr., who very kindly consented to be interviewed over the telephone in September, 1999. Mr. Klubnikin, aged 77 years, delivered bread to the Armenians from his father’s bakery when he was a child. Regarding persecution in Russia, Mr. Klubnikin stated that his great-grandfather was whipped for not bowing to the priest. This story, together with the prophecies of Efin Klubnikin, is given in Berokoff, “Heretics and Colonizers,” chapter 1.

³¹ Joyce Bivin, from comments quoted on “Were Molokans the first to ‘Speak in Tongues’ in Los Angeles?” at <http://gecko.gc.maricopa.edu/clubs/russian/molokan/NEWS/Azusa_Street.html> (accessed August 27, 2001).

east past Atlantic Boulevard toward Montebello. The Armenian Molokans kept to themselves rather than participating in general organized Armenian community life and were led by their own “brethren.”³² Mr. Klubnikin told the author in 1999 that formerly he would sometimes see Armenians at the Russian church, but that he had not seen them for many years.³³ The present gathering, according to Joyce Bivin, is in Hacienda Heights. She writes: “They’ve removed ‘Armenian’ from the name of the church to make it more neighborhood-friendly. They sing a couple of the old songs [Psalms, verses] right in the beginning of the service before continuing with the American choruses and hymns. They still observe all the Feasts [of the Maksimisti/Jumpers]. Mrgditch Perumean’s grandson, Stanley is the leader.”³⁴

The Armenian Evangelical Association

Except for the Presbyterians, all of the Armenian Evangelical churches were completely independent and self-governing. Therefore, they had no central organization. But such local churches could and did join together with other like-minded believers in voluntary associations for the purpose of fellowship and the furthering of mutual aims. In Turkey,

³² Kaloian, *Shirag*, p. 10.

³³ William Klubnikin, Sr., personal information.

³⁴ Bivin, *op. cit.* Interpolations in the original. According to Mr. Klubnikin, the Russian Molokans still have nine churches near the original area of settlement but not down in the “Flats.” The largest is about a mile to the east near Whittier Boulevard and Lorena Street, south of Evergreen Cemetery. The singing is “lined,” that is, sung out by a leader and then repeated by the group. It is still in Russian, and at weddings some Russian folkways persist.

the Evangelical churches were organized into territorial unions: the Bithynia Union and the Aintab Evangelical Union, 1864; the Harput Evangelical Union, 1865; the Central Evangelical Union, 1868; and the Cilicia Union, 1872.³⁵ Following the same model, two unions were established in America. In 1901 the Armenian Evangelical Association of America was established in Worcester, Massachusetts, for the churches in the east. In 1908 the Armenian Congregationalist Association of California was founded, comprising Fresno Pilgrim Congregational Church, Fowler Armenian Congregational Church, and Los Angeles Gethsemane Armenian Congregational Church. The other congregational churches joined each association as they were organized. In 1912 the name of the Armenian Congregationalist Association of California was changed to “The Armenian Evangelical Association of California” and the Armenian Presbyterians were invited to join. They were present for the 1913 meeting. The Association conducted (and still conducts) annual meetings, where reports were given on church activities, mutual encouragement was extended and aid pledged, and the religious advancement of the community was promoted. The Association elected officers and trustees, who only executed the activities of the Association and had no authority over any of the member congregations.³⁶

³⁵ Leon Arpee, *A Century of Armenian Protestantism 1846–1946* (New York: The Armenian Missionary Association of America, 1946), p. 67.

³⁶ The Reverend G. M. Manavian, “American-Armenian Protestantism and its Religious and Churchly Life” [in Armenian], in *Taretsuyts 1912*, pp. 94–104; Antranig A. Benigian, “Armenian Evangelical Churches of America” [in Armenian], in Khashmanian, *Taregirk 1925*, pp. 173–199. *Gotchnag* regularly published reports on the annual meetings of both the Armenian Evangelical Association of America and the Armenian Evangelical Association of California. For the invitation to the Presbyterians, see XII.II (March

Beginnings: the Armenian Apostolic Church

If the course of the Armenian Evangelical churches went fairly smoothly, with allowances for occasional anomalies based on personality or language, or in the experience of the first Armenian settlers, on prejudice, the course of the Apostolic Church at times became chaotic. Through all this, however, the people retained a strong devotion to their ancient forms and usages.

Fresno

The first Apostolic priest in Fresno was Aharon Vartabed Melkonian, who came in 1894 with his brother, B. Srabion (P. Srapion). Father Melkonian was born in Bitlis in 1826 and was ordained a married priest in 1853. He assumed the monastic cassock in 1871 in Lim, after the death of his wife. From 1876 to 1878 he was the superior (*vanahair*) of the monastery of Garin (Erzerum), remaining there alone during the Russian invasion after all had fled. He served the Armenian community of Fresno without remuneration until his death on March 7, 1911.

Father Melkonian celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Armenian Library Association hall, in the German Presbyterian Church, and sometimes on the banks of the river or in tents in the mountains. In October 1899 a fund drive for a church building was begun and on February 25, 1900 a board of trustees was elected. On March 2 the details of

15, 1913), p. 267; XIV.II (March 14, 1914), p. 249.

construction were approved and the parish was named “Holy Trinity.” On April 1 the foundation was laid. The church was located at the corner of F and Monterey Streets.³⁷ On June 26, with the building partially finished, a letter was sent to Primate Bishop Sarajian in Worcester inviting him to come to Fresno to consecrate the new church. The finished building resembled a typical American wooden church building of the period, with pointed Gothic windows and entry porch, except for the steeple, which had an Armenian-style conical pinnacle set on eight columns. It was consecrated on October 14, 1900. The primate reviewed the charter, which had been prepared and signed by thirty-five members. He remained in California for several months and attended to the organization of the church. A new board of trustees was elected on December 14, 1900, and on December 22 the church was incorporated according to the laws of the state of California.³⁸ The charter was given final approval by Bishop Sarajian on January 1, 1901.³⁹

The Armenian Presbyterians had given a sizable contribution and were present at the consecration in October.⁴⁰ The following February they requested the use of the building in the afternoon while they were building their own church. On October 26 the trustees of Holy Trinity replied that it was beyond their authority to allow Protestant services in

³⁷ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 180–181.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 63–64.

⁴⁰ *Gotchnag* XIII.31 (August 2, 1913), p. 753.

the building and referred the matter to the primate. The refusal caused some ill feeling, but the primate praised the action of the trustees.⁴¹

Since his arrival in Fresno in 1894, Aharon Vartabed Melkonian had been attending to the religious needs of the community without remuneration. By 1901 it was apparent that the priest, now aged 75, would not be able to continue his volunteer service. At a meeting on June 2, the church members decided to ask the primate to appoint a regular pastor. On June 7 the church expressed its appreciation to Aharon Vartabed for his many years of service. On August 11 a letter was written to Bishop Sarajian suggesting the names of Mushegh Vartabed and Papken Vartabed, but no reply had been received by the time the board of trustees' term expired on December 29. In February the church decided to call Sahag Vartabed Nazaretian, who was a convert from the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist Brotherhood of San Lazzaro. Sahag Vartabed was installed on November 29, 1902. His work was fruitful, but on May 1905 he resigned. The church asked him to withdraw his resignation. In a letter of June 11, Bishop Sarajian offered the names of Arsen Vartabed Vehouni, Toros Kahana Jughaetsi, and Sarkis Kahana Tashjian. But the community was thrown into an uproar on August 5, 1906 when Sahag Vartabed was accused in a public meeting of a serious indiscretion involving an eighteen-year-old girl.⁴² Amid severe outrage in the community, Bishop Sarajian appointed

⁴¹ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 64.

⁴² Spear says in *Hay Kghern* that Sahag Vartabed was confronted at the railroad station by the father of the girl he was just about to leave town with.

Aharon Vartabed, now aged eighty, his personal representative. The church then called Toros Kahana Jughaetsi, who arrived in Fresno on Christmas Eve, 1907 (i.e., January 18).⁴³ The clergy tried to dispose of the matter of Sahag Vartabed quietly, but there was still strong feeling against him in the community. Jughaetsi did not get along with the board of trustees and he tendered his resignation in December. In the following April Archbishop Sarajian retired from his post and came to Fresno. He served as pastor until May, 1911.⁴⁴ Then despite his age and infirmity he answered the call of the Armenians of Van to be their locum tenens and spent the last three years of his life in service to his people and his church.⁴⁵ Archbishop Sarajian was succeeded by Vartan Vartabed Kasparian (later Archbishop), who served until 1934.

As the community grew larger, the small wooden church with its attached and library became too small and it was apparent that a new building was needed. The trustees were in the process of buying land when, on July 10, 1913, a fire destroyed the church, together

⁴³ The Armenian Church celebrates Christmas on January 6, not December 25. At that time the Church was still using the old Julian calendar, which was 13 days out of synchronization with the civil (Gregorian) calendar.

⁴⁴ *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 64–70. Minassian states that Teodoros Kahana Isahagian was the pastor during this period.

⁴⁵ Spear, *Hay Kgern*, pp. 21–23. Archbishop Sarajian was a dedicated, selfless churchman who placed no value his own personal comfort and who brooked no nonsense from others. When some Hnchakians threatened his life in 1905, he replied that ever since he had taken the vows of priesthood his physical life was of no importance. He was criticized for dressing poorly and for eating boiled eggs, but he made no demands on his people for luxurious food or accommodations. He was not a silver-tongued speaker, but a father to his sometimes wayward children. The revolutionaries fought him and even pulled his beard, but he was the one who built churches and put the diocese on a firm footing. Twice exasperated he left the diocese, but he went on to serve as a simple priest. At the age of 62 he returned to Turkey to serve the people to whom he had been sent as a young vartabed and there he died on October 15, 1913. If he had lived to see the war and genocide he would have suffered the fate of his flock together with them.

with the Armenian school, the hall, the library, seven houses, and five stables. Total damage amounted to \$20,000 of which \$6,000 was sustained by the church and hall. All was substantially insured. The cause of the fire was found out to be a small boy playing with matches.⁴⁶ The Armenian Presbyterian Church offered the use of its facilities, but the trustees declined and held services in the Episcopal Church instead. The plans to build, already in progress, were speeded up. On August 3, the church held a meeting in the Princess Theater and voted to push ahead.⁴⁷ The twelve cornerstones were blessed on January 4, 1914. According to custom, the privilege of being godfather of the church was auctioned off and eight hundred dollars was raised. Three of the godfathers were Evangelicals.⁴⁸

On November 13, 1914 the new church was consecrated by Archbishop Mushegh Seropian, who came from Worcester. An overflow crowd filled the church and spilled out into the yard, as farmers drove in from the countryside with their whole families. The building, designed by Boghos Koundrajian of Garin (Erzerum), was a brilliant success. It was executed in red brick and echoed the traditional Armenian style while meeting modern requirements. The interior was bathed in colored light from the large stained

⁴⁶ *Gotchnag* XIII.31 (August 2, 1913), p. 753.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII.34 (August 23, 1913), p. 825.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XIV.6 (February 7, 1914), p. 137.

glass windows and a great electric chandelier hung from the dome. The community was in a state of euphoria. *Gotchnag* reported,

Old women, who had lived under the sun of Armenia, could be seen here moving their lips to the words of the *sharagans*, while the choir sang and the bells rang. White-haired old men stood by the hour with unmixed joy beaming from their faces. These were the sons of the race that had built the church, who, not knowing how to get tired, have defeated the enemy. The hand of the destroyer could not stop them from building. That day the newspaper reported, "The Turks have destroyed the Armenian church of Erzerum," and here, by the hand of a native of Garin, a new church was being consecrated.⁴⁹

Holy Trinity Church supported a school, library, and various societies and became the center of Armenian cultural life in the community.

Outlying Communities

Fowler. In *Fowler*, services were held by visiting priests from Fresno in St. Michael's Episcopal Church beginning in the pastorate of Sahag Vartabed Nazaretian.⁵⁰ In 1910, St. Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church was built. It was consecrated on April 17, 1910 by Archbishop Sarajian. Five hundred Armenians were present from the surrounding area, Fresno, and Los Angeles, the largest crowd of Armenians ever to assemble in *Fowler*.⁵¹ The first pastor was Teodoros Kahana Isahagian, an able and intellectual man. But the church went through a turbulent period in 1914 over the activities of a defrocked

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XV.1 (January 2, 1915), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 67–68.

⁵¹ *Gotchnag* X.20 (May 14, 1910), p. 473.

priest, Ghevont Martoogesian. The trustees of the church had agreed to allow Martoogesian to preach in the church after regular morning services. Martoogesian tried to get himself appointed pastor with the aid of some partisans, and even donned the vestments of a priest and conducted services.⁵² The matter reached the courts when the trustees called the police to have Martoogesian thrown out of the church.⁵³ Primate Arsen Dzairakuin Vartabed Vehouni traveled from Worcester at the direction of the Catholicos to restore order, arriving on May 14.⁵⁴ A court hearing was held on May 27, to which the primate was subpoenaed. He was unable to produce documents verifying that Martoogesian had been defrocked because the papers were in the possession of the former locum tenens, Boghos Kaftanian, who refused to relinquish any of the records of the diocese. Martoogesian's partisans argued in court that the Fowler church was independent of the Diocese of North America. The primate was, however, allowed to introduce evidence that the church was under the jurisdiction of the diocese and of the Holy See of Echmiadzin. But before the court had reached a decision, Martoogesian agreed to step down and announced his intention to go to Echmiadzin.⁵⁵

Excursus: Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian. Because the actions of Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian had an extremely important effect on the life of the entire Armenian

⁵² Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 243–245.

⁵³ *Gotchnag* XIV.16 (April 18, 1914), p. 377. The matter was reported in detail in the *Fresno Morning Republican*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV.23 (June 6, 1914).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XIV.32 (August 8, 1914), p. 760; Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 243–244.

community later in his career and will be referred to at length below, it would be well to review his earlier history at this point. Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian was born Garabed Martoogesian some time around 1871. In the late 1890s at the age of 28 he was employed as a preacher at the (Protestant) City Mission in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. The source does not say when he emigrated to the United States, where he was educated, or whether he was ordained as a Protestant minister of the Gospel or not. In Worcester, 20 miles to the north, there was an Armenian library that had been a subject of controversy because of revolutionary materials it contained. Martoogesian, who was an active member of the Reformed Hnchakian Party, started a branch of this library in Whitinsville, to which he carried books from Worcester.⁵⁶ This offended his superiors at the City Mission, who dismissed him from his position. He then moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where he continued to preach to some Armenians. In 1899 the pastorate of Holy Redeemer Armenian Apostolic Church in Worcester fell vacant due to the departure of Mashdots Vartabed Papazian, who had abandoned the priesthood. Martoogesian expressed a desire to return to the Apostolic church (or possibly a desire for the job). Whether he should be accepted as an Armenian priest was argued back and forth in the Armenian press, the Hnchakian paper *Tsain Haireniats* being in favor and the Dashnaktsakan paper *Hairenik* opposed. To avoid the necessity of appealing overseas for a pastor, Primate Archbishop Hovsep Sarajian ordained Martoogesian into the Diaconate on October 8 and into the Priesthood on October 15. Martoogesian was therefore the

⁵⁶ The Armenian political parties will be discussed in chapter 5 below.

first Armenian priest to be ordained in America. Archbishop Sarajian was to repent of this later. Martoogesian continued his revolutionary activities while he was a priest, proclaiming from the pulpit, "I am a Hnchakian!" He became a celebrated speaker at Hnchakian activities and was very effective at raising money. At one such meeting he raised the then astronomical sum of \$3,000. But soon the Hnchakians turned to extortion, threatening prominent Armenian businessmen with death if they did not contribute to the "national cause." Archbishop Sarajian urged the businessmen not to give in, and his own life was threatened in turn. In 1905 the wealthy rug dealer Hovhannes Tavshanian was shot dead in front of his shop in Union City, New Jersey, by a 24-year-old Armenian from the interior province of Kharpert. The primate immediately suspected that Martoogesian was the mastermind behind the murder and defrocked him. Martoogesian was convicted as an accomplice and was sentenced to two years hard labor. Martoogesian was further convicted of conspiracy to murder Mihran Karageuzian in 1905. While he was in jail, he continued writing articles for *Tsain Haireniats*. On August 3, 1907, Catholicos Khrimian responded to the appeal of Archbishop Sarajian by telegram: "D'après votre demande, nous avons dégradé Martoogesian."⁵⁷ In 1914 Martoogesian, still defrocked, appeared in Fowler in the incident related above. *Gotchnag* reported that the primate received a decree from the Catholicos dated January 25, 1914, stating that Martoogesian had been defrocked and ordering that he not be given any position in the

⁵⁷ Spear, *Hay Kgerm*, p. 35.

Church.⁵⁸ In 1916, Catholicos Khrimian now deceased,⁵⁹ Martoogesian went to Echmiadzin to petition the Holy Synod for reinstatement. This was granted after one year of penitence. The Reformed Hnchakian Party was now moribund and Martoogesian occupied himself with priestly duties until he re-emerged as a Dashnaktsakan in 1933.⁶⁰

Yettem. The first religious meetings in Yettem were held without denominational discrimination. Later, the local school was used by the Evangelicals in the mornings and the Apostolics in the afternoons. St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church was founded on “Green Sunday” 1909 by Primate Archbishop Hovsep Sarajian.⁶¹ A building committee was formed under the chairmanship of Krikor Arslanian, who himself was the architect. The master builder was Boghos Simonian. The Armenian folk of Yettem, men and women, donned their working clothes and aprons and built a good-sized wooden edifice with a steeple in the style of an honest American prairie church. The cost of the building was \$2,379. It was consecrated between July 4 and July 17, 1911 by Bishop Mushegh Seropian.⁶² However, no pastor was available for many years and the Divine Liturgy was

⁵⁸ *Gotchnag* XIV.15 (April 11, 1914), p. 354; XIV.16 (April 18, 1914), p. 377.

⁵⁹ Catholicos Khrimian died in 1907.

⁶⁰ See biography in Spear, *Hay Kghern*, pp. 31–36; Minassian, “Armenian Church,” 150–151, 189–190, 544; Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 192, 231, 240, 245.

⁶¹ Green Sunday is the second Sunday following Easter.

⁶² Garabed Avak Kahana Kalfayian, *Yettem* [Commemorative album in Armenian] ([n.p.]: 1947).

celebrated only occasionally by visiting priests. Until the arrival of Vartan Kahana Guldalian in 1922, the people mostly had to be satisfied with the prayers of the clerks.⁶³

Reedley and Wahtoke. In 1909 the Armenian vineyardists around Reedley and Wahtoke established the “Matteos Izmirlian Library” in Wahtoke. Books acquired through donations and purchases were loaned out to readers. Educational lectures, gatherings, and debates were also held in the library. Sometime before 1912 the brothers Kaspar and Dikran Aslanian bought a large hall near their house and started an Armenian language school with about twenty-five children. The first teacher was Mrs. Makrouhi Aslanian. On Easter Sunday, April 12, 1912, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Vartan Vartabed Kasparian in the school. A board of trustees was elected later that year. In 1916 the Wahtoke community built a hall and called it “St. Mesrob.” The library and the school were transferred to the hall. Occasionally the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by visiting priests. The building was also used by the Evangelicals.⁶⁴

Los Angeles. An emotional reaction to the death of Catholicos Khrimian Hayrig in 1907 motivated the incipient Armenian community of Los Angeles to organize itself into

⁶³ Vahan Kahana Guldalian was born in Aintab in 1877, where he received his primary education in Armenian and American schools. Then he went to Jerusalem for religious training. On returning to Aintab, he established a school. He was ordained in Aintab in 1904, where he held his first pastorate. He was then sent to Kessab and to Antioch. In both places he established schools. After returning from exile in 1920, he was sent to Egypt as vicar-general. In 1922 he came to America and served as the pastor of St. Mary parish in Yetteem. He then served in Chicago and in Troy, New York. Vahan Kahana Guldalian died on March 5, 1945. *History of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church 1911–1976 Yetteem, California* (Yetteem, 1971), p. 34.

⁶⁴ *Sts. Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Church and Community of Reedley: Celebrating Sixty years 1924–1984* (Reedley: Sts. Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Church, 1985), p. 23. See also Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 384–385.

a parish. A committee of four men was formed with the goal of building a church.⁶⁵ Sahag Vartabed Nazaretian, who had been driven out of Fresno, began to conduct services on holidays without remuneration before 1912.⁶⁶ Teodoros Kahana Isahagian was also present in the town, and a rivalry developed between the supporters of the two priests.⁶⁷ The situation was resolved through the efforts of the primate, Arsen Vartabed Vehouni, and Father Nazaretian left the city in 1914. After this the people had to depend on visiting priests from Fresno or elsewhere.⁶⁸

In late December 1915 a board of trustees was elected consisting of A. Arakelian, A. Arsenian, S. Manoushian, Kh. Papazian, and M. Sterian, to which were added Messrs. Vartanian, Hairabedian, and Hovhannesian from the Caucasian-Armenian community.⁶⁹ On Easter, services were held before a large congregation but consisted only of chants by the clerks and sermons by Mr. Pashgian and Mr. A. Arakelian. A collection of \$1,000 was taken to pay for a “worthy clergyman.”⁷⁰ A candidate was found in Fresno. “For a long time the Fresno people have been thinking of ordaining a priest in order to further the work, but it keeps getting put off,” reported *Asbarex*. “There is one person in the

⁶⁵ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 377

⁶⁶ *Taretsuys* 1912, p. 73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 46; Kaloian, *Shirag*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ *Nor Giank* 11.70 (July 1, 1916); *Asbarex* 387 (January 7, 1916).

⁷⁰ *Asbarex* 404 (May 5, 1916).

church who is an excellent candidate for the priesthood, and that is Deacon Melikian.... If the Fresno people don't keep their eyes open, Los Angeles will snatch him out from under their noses."⁷¹ The deacon was indeed snatched by Los Angeles, and he was ordained Adom Kahana by Bishop Papken Giuleserian on March 8, 1917 and celebrated his first Divine Liturgy in the Episcopal church on Palm Sunday, April 8, 1917.⁷²

Father Adom's pastorate was adversely affected by a struggle for control of the church between the Armenian political factions. Within less than two years the enthusiasm with which he had been welcomed had faded and he was increasingly subjected to attacks and innuendos.⁷³ In late 1918 or early 1919, a scheduled church meeting was held at which a board of trustees was to be elected. That there was a coordinated plan to take over the meeting is evident from the statement of Hagop Zakarian in *Asbarex*. Zakarian was a member of the Los Angeles Committee of Dashnaktsutium and a chairman of the state convention in 1919. According to his account, the chairman of the meeting was absent and Father Adom tried to seat the chairman's brother as chairman. "The people" objected and made Zakarian chairman over the latter's "protests" that he was not a member of the church. The assemblage then "insisted" that the membership fee be lowered from \$5.00 to \$2.00. At this point a number of members of the church walked

⁷¹ Ibid., 441 (January 19, 1917).

⁷² *Gotchnag* XVII.13 (March 17, 1917), p. 397; *Nor Giank* 102 (February 17, 1917); 103 (February 24, 1917); *Asbarex* 451 (March 30, 1917); Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 47.

⁷³ See *Asbarex* 485 (November 23, 1917); 486 (November 30, 1917); 487 (December 7, 1917).

out of the meeting. Eighty new members were then registered at the lower fee, and the newly-constituted parish assembly proceeded to elect by overwhelming votes a board of seven Dashnaktsakans. Zakarian professed outrage at the suggestion that this constituted a takeover, claiming that Dashnaktsakans too had a right to go to church, which the national constitution did not prevent them from doing. Father Adom was reportedly of a mind to resign. Zakarian asked, “If *Der Hair* (Reverend Father) was willing to serve when there was a Ramkavar board, why won’t he serve with a Dashnaktsakan board? But if he has such an intention, then we can’t stop him.”⁷⁴

The Dashnaktsakan board remained in power for the following year. In February 1920, they attempted to separate the church from the Diocese. Objecting to a circular from Primate Shahe Kasparian in support of the Salvation Fund Drive of General Antranig, they said that they did not want to recognize efforts in support of “crooked aims.” They continued:

Your Grace: last year also you abandoned your religious duties when you meddled in the completely-political National Union. You sinned against your apostleship when you worked in every legal and illegal way for a certain political element in the election of the delegates to Paris. And now you are sinning against your apostleship when you join in this latest campaign. This shows that you have completely left your position and have turned into an agent of a political faction. We call you “Father” as a cleric, but you have favored one over the other, trampling noble fatherly principles, and the result is very sad, as you have seen. As heavy-hearted Armenians seeing this course of yours which is harmful to the nation, we protest with all our strength, and from now on we do not recognize you as the religious leader in America.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “Letter from the Hinterland” by Hagop Zakarian [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.549 (February 14, 1919).

⁷⁵ “Protest against Worcester Primate” [in Armenian], in *Asbarez* XII.622 (February 27, 1920).

As a result of this letter, Father Adom at first threatened to resign, then decided to stand and fight. A meeting after church services on March 23, 1920, was packed by the opposing factions, one supporting the Worcester Diocese and the other Vehouni's pro-Dashnakstakan Providence Diocese. In the struggle over who would chair the meeting, Zakarian called the priest a "beggar" and a fight broke out. The police were called in to restore order.⁷⁶ The board of trustees "gladly accepted" Father Adom's resignation and purported to have called another priest in his place.⁷⁷ But Father Adom and the Diocesan authorities responded with a legal charter for the church to prevent the manipulation of the membership rolls. For some time policemen were stationed inside the church to prevent disturbances.⁷⁸ Father Adom remained pastor of the church until his early death in 1935, having been weakened and sickened by his continual troubles.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Asbarez* XII.631 (March 30, 1920).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XII.642 (May 7, 1920).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ George B. Kooshian, personal communication.

CHAPTER 5

POLITICS AND THE PRESS: THE FIRST PHASE

Nationalism and the Beginnings of the Armenian Political Movement

On November 23, 1793, in the Republic of Virtue, the Commune of Paris replaced the worship of the Christian God with the worship of the state.

Nationalism, Socialism, And Revolution

The French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution which immediately followed it, greatly accelerated the breakdown of the Christian consensus of Europe that had begun with the Protestant Reformation. Along with liberty, equality, and fraternity, the republican armies spread the idea of nationalism wherever they marched. Once the Napoleonic wars ended in 1815, the rapid development of industry pushed the peasants of Europe off the land and into towns. As capital was accumulated and factories were constructed, the condition of life of the laboring classes was greatly degraded. Observers such as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were moved to declare that the scientific study of history showed that inevitably the means of production would fall into the hands of the workers, leading to a golden age of plenty and eternal peace and harmony. The ideas of nationalism and socialism were taken by intellectuals and revolutionary thinkers and intertwined into a

myriad of different combinations in what has been called the “Age of Ideology.” Each of these ideologies claimed to be an all-encompassing world view, competing not only with the Christian monarchical ideal, but with all the others.

These new conditions led to the ferment of peoples in the great multi-national empires of central and eastern Europe and western Asia. The Christians of the Balkan peninsula were the first to rebel against their Turkish Muslim overlords, beginning with the Serbs in 1804. Next were the Greeks, who revolted during the period 1821–1829. After the Russo-Turkish war of 1828–1829, Greece became independent and Moldavia, Wallachia, Serbia, and Montenegro received autonomy.

Inspired by the Greeks, the Bulgars underwent a religious and cultural revival that passed to guerilla warfare and revolution. A rising of the Christian peasants of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1875 spread to Bulgaria the following year. This was suppressed with such cruelty that the sensibilities of Europe were outraged and on June 30, 1876, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on Turkey. By fall Serbia was about to be defeated and Russia forced an armistice by presenting Turkey with a 48-hour ultimatum backed by 200,000 troops. In December a conference of the European powers was convened in Constantinople to compel reforms. Four months later Russia, not satisfied with developments in Turkey, declared war. The Tsar’s armies swept from the north to the gates of Constantinople and in the east occupied much of historic Armenia. The Treaty of San Stefano, signed by Russia and Turkey on March 3, 1878, created a large independent Bulgaria that would be under Russian influence, wresting effective control of the Balkans from the

Ottoman Empire. In the east, Russia gained territory including Kars and Batum. Russian troops were to remain in the six Armenian vilayets to guarantee the security of the Armenians, who had been brutally treated by the Turks during the war. The European powers, however, were frightened by the Russian successes and scaled back the settlement at the Congress of Berlin (June 13–July 13, 1878). This still left the Balkan Christians in a much improved position, and Britain received a payoff in the form of the island of Cyprus. But the occupying Russian troops were compelled to abandon Armenia, which had to be satisfied by certain “reforms” that all the powers would guarantee together, guaranteeing only that none of them would guarantee any reforms at all.

Khirmian, Portukalian, and the Armenian Political Awakening

Archbishop Mkrtych Khirmian, attending the Congress as an observer, understood what the effect of this would be upon the Armenians. In a celebrated sermon delivered in the Armenian cathedral at Constantinople upon his return, he compared the fate of the Armenians to a feast of barley stew the powers had served up to the Balkan rebels. One by one the Bulgars, the Serbs, and the Montenegrans strode to the pot to take their ample portions with their ladles made of iron, that is, with the tips of their swords. The Armenians had nothing to scoop with but their paper guarantees, which melted, leaving them hungry. The clear implication was that the Armenians had to help themselves.

There had already been the beginnings of Armenian restlessness, in Constantinople in 1848, at Zeitun in 1862, and at Van and Erzerum in 1863, and a few small and ephemeral

secret societies had been formed. But it was after the Congress of Berlin had made it clear that the promises of reform would be neglected that some Armenians moved toward real revolutionary activity.¹ The father of this movement was Mkrtych Portukalian (1848–1921), the scion of a wealthy Armenian family in Constantinople. Gaining a concern for the condition of the less fortunate Armenians of Asiatic Turkey, he went to the interior as a teacher. There his activities drew the opposition of the government and in 1885 he was forced into exile in Marseilles. In France he published a newspaper, *Armenia*. This found its way back into Turkey and inspired some of his former students to found a secret political organization, which they called the “Armenakan Party.” Their program was to win self rule for the Armenians through revolution. This party, although it participated in some revolutionary actions, most significantly the defense of Van against the Turkish assault in 1896, soon was superceded by other organizations.

Russian Influences

The founders of the new Armenian political societies were influenced by intellectual trends originating in Russia. These were based on the ideas of Alexander Herzen (April 6, 1812–January 21, 1870) glorifying the virtues of the suffering peasant masses. Herzen spent a good deal of his life in internal and external exile, where he wrote many literary

¹ This summary is based primarily on Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), and Anaide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Zorian Institute, 1984). The former is a pioneering historical survey and the latter considers ideological factors.

works.² In London he published the political journal *Kolokol* (“The Bell”), which he intended to be smuggled into Russia. An article by Nicholas Ogarev appearing in 1862 inspired a group of student revolutionaries in St. Petersburg to form *Zemlya i Volya* (“Land and Freedom”). These students expected to foment a vast uprising of the peasantry the following year, but this failed and their organization was put down by the government. Nevertheless, Land and Freedom reappeared 14 years later. In 1878 the conspirators attempted their first political assassination of a political figure but failed. The following year they made an unsuccessful attack on Tsar Alexander II. This provoked a harsh government crackdown and the party split into terrorist and anti-terrorist factions, the terrorists forming *Narodnaya Volya* (“People’s Will”). Alexander was assassinated by bomb on March 13 (March 1, Old Style), 1881. Again, the government took harsh retribution and by 1883 People’s Will had been smashed. Nevertheless, scattered remnants of revolutionary populists continued working among the peasants. These were augmented after 1899–1901 by students who had been expelled from the universities. The Social Revolutionary (SR) Party was formalized from these elements, taking a name that had first been used in 1878. The practice of political assassination was revived both by SR agents and others.³

² See Philip Pomper, *The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), and Adam B. Ulam, *Ideologies and Illusions: Revolutionary Thought from Herzen to Solzhenitsyn* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1976). Professor Ulam treats a forbidding topic with wit and grace.

³ The Socialist Revolutionary Party was the largest Russian party before the 1917 revolution. Some Socialist Revolutionaries cooperated with the Bolsheviks. After the October (Bolshevik) revolution most were liquidated by Lenin along with all other non-Communists. Any residue of populist sentiment among the peasantry was eradicated by Stalin. Massimo Salvadori, *The Rise of Modern Communism*, Third Edition (Hinsdale, Illinois: The Dryden Press, 1975), pp. 25–26, 53–54. See also V. I. Lenin, “‘Left-Wing’ Com-

The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party

The Russian influence was strongly felt by a small group of exiled Armenian students in Geneva, led by Avedis Nazarbekian and his fiancée Mariam Varandian (Maro). These individuals had been born and raised in Russia and had been involved in the conspiratorial movement. In August, 1887, they started a revolutionary cell patterned after People's Will, which in 1890 they named the Hnchakian⁴ Revolutionary Party (in 1905, the name was changed to Hnchakian Social Democrat Party; since 1909, Social Democrat Hnchakian Party). Their journal, *Hnchak* ("The Bell"), was a conscious imitation of *Kolokol*, even taking the same name in Armenian translation. The Hnchakians were inspired by Portukalian's writings but impatient with his lack of concrete action. They proposed a frankly Marxist program, emphasizing propaganda, agitation, and terror leading to revolution, an independent and united Armenian Republic, and world socialism.

The Hnchakians thought at first that they could gain the sympathy of the Turkish masses with socialist propaganda in the Turkish language. This effort was foredoomed to failure because of the vast gulf between the Muslims and the Christian subjects. The Hnchakians also failed to gain the sympathy of the Armenian bourgeois class, who were repelled by Marxism. But hundreds of Armenian youth were drawn to the Hnchakian

munism, an Infantile Disorder," *Collected Works*, vol. 31, pp. 17–118 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964). First published as a pamphlet on April 27, 1920.

⁴ Various spelled Hunchagian, Hunchakian, Henschakian.

banner by the prospect of winning the freedom of Turkish Armenia. Many of these recruits had no interest in socialism, leading to a split in the party in 1896. Moreover, the Turkish government reacted in the most draconian way to the Hnchakian provocations, weakening the party enough for another group to rise to dominate the Armenian revolutionary movement.

The Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries

Among the many small conspiratorial organizations that had emerged in Russia, mostly among students expelled from university, were some made up of Armenians.⁵ These were brought together in the summer of 1890 by Kristapor Mikaelian (1859–1905), Stepan Zorian (1867–1919), and Simon Zavarian (1866–1913) and called the *Hai Heghapokhakaneri Dashnaktsutiun* (Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries), later the *Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun* (Tashnagtsutiun; better known in English as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation or ARF). Dashnaktsutiun and the Hnchakian Revolutionary Party both stemmed from the same current of Russian populist revolutionary thought and personal connections that had come from Herzen through Land and Freedom, People's Will, and the Russian Social Revolutionary Party.⁶ Dashnaktsutiun advocated a socialistic program for the administrative and economic freedom of Armenia

⁵ See Nalbandian, *Revolutionary Movement*, chapter 6.

⁶ Ibid., p. 17. The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party was Marxist but Dashnaktsutiun and the Russian Social Revolutionary Party were not.

through the use of armed rebellion, propaganda, and terrorism.⁷ Its theoreticians believed that, because individuals could and did shape the course of history, the elimination of evil influential persons was a service to humanity. Thus, assassination became a vital tactic.⁸ The Dashnaksakan and Hnchakian programs were similar, and for a brief time before 1892 the two parties effected an official affiliation. This broke up because of petty jealousies and personal feuds rather than ideology or methods, and the parties soon became bitter enemies.⁹ Dashnaksutiun was to wield power and influence, with great repercussions both in Armenia and in America.

⁷ Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 17.

⁸ Hovannisian, *Road*, p. 262, n. 46. This rather romantic idea of political terrorism failed totally wherever it was practiced, serving only to egg on the regime, whatever regime it was, to more repression. Lenin rejected it as “infantile”: “[Socialist Revolutionary Party] considered itself to be particularly ‘revolutionary,’ or ‘Left,’ on account of its recognition of individual terrorism, assassination—which we Marxists emphatically rejected. Of course, we rejected individual terrorism only on the grounds of expediency . . .” (Lenin, “‘Left-wing’ Communism”). Effective terrorism, practiced by those unburdened with conventional morality, is the annihilation of whole groups or classes of people, so that there will be an enforced uniformity of interest. The Turks, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao all used it to great effect. This can be done only by governments or quasi-governments, not rebels. For Communist class terrorism, see Salvadori, *Communism*, pp. 25–27, 54–56, 137–139. For the Communist “operational code,” or what passes in place of moral principles, see Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism* (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1962), pp. 78–91. If anyone still needs to be convinced, the Library of Congress has published evidence of Communist brutality. See Lenin’s “Hanging Order” of November 8, 1918 at <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/ad2kulak.html>> (accessed February 11, 2001), ordering ruthless suppression of the “Kulaks” or well-to-do peasants. Proof of Stalin’s intentional murder of millions of Ukrainians by starvation can be seen in the “Addendum to the minutes of Politburo [meeting] No. 93, ‘Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine on Blacklisting Villages That Maliciously Sabotage the Collection of Grain,’ 6 December 1932,” at <<http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/k2grain.html>> (accessed February 11, 2001).

⁹ Nalbandian, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 172

Forms of Political Expression

The repression, despotism, and complete lack of democratic institutions in Turkey and in Russia meant that political expression could only take the form of revolution. The sultan's government bitterly opposed and suppressed the Armenian parties. But in the United States, where there was freedom of speech and organization, the parties could form chapters, publish newspapers, hold rallies, collect money, and even raise volunteers. Nevertheless, the activities of the parties were controversial and stirred up much dissension among the American Armenians.

Much of the discord stemmed from the Russian Armenian background of most of the revolutionary leaders. Russian revolutionism, conditioned by the particular conditions of that country, was foreign to the experience of the Turkish Armenian immigrants.¹⁰ The ideas of Herzen and his followers were meaningless to them. Both the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the western-educated Evangelical leadership abhorred the atheistic and materialistic words, thoughts, and deeds of the revolutionaries. This resulted in a bitter running feud between the revolutionaries and the clergy. The political parties attacked not only the conservatives, but each other, even squabbling within their own organizations. Armenian political life was racked with dispute, factionalism, and violence. Only in the most extreme crises did the warring groups come together. Too

¹⁰ Robert Mirak, "The Armenians in the United States 1890–1915" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard, 1965), pp. 256–257. Chapter 13 of Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), gives a history and analysis of the Armenian political parties and their activities in America.

often they dissipated their energies on ruinous and vindictive attacks on their own countrymen. Liberalism was irrelevant to conditions in the homeland, and very few Armenians understood what it meant. So revolution and dogmatism became equated with patriotism, and the voice of reason was drowned out with shrillness.

The Armenian Political Parties in the United States: The First Phase

The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party

The Visit of Mkrtych Portukalian and Its Results. The national feeling of the immigrant community was awakened by a visit of Mkrtych Portukalian to America in 1888. Portukalian was scheduled to give a lecture in the hall of an American Protestant church in Worcester, Massachusetts, on September 3. However, a conservative Armenian preacher named Asadour Antreasian bitterly opposed the appearance of Portukalian in the church, convincing the pastor to cancel the event. Portukalian delivered his speech elsewhere, using the opportunity to point out to his listeners that they needed institutions and facilities of their own, so as not to be at the mercy of foreigners.¹¹

¹¹ Father Oshagan Minassian, "A History of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church in the United States (1888–1944)" (Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1974), p. 89. Minassian's sources are Bishop Mushegh Seropian [Serobian], ed., *Amerikahay Taretsuytse 1912* [American Armenian Almanac], vol. 1 (Boston: Kilikia Tparan, 1913), p. 106; Manuk G. Chizmechian [Manug K. Jizmejian], *Patmutiun Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890–1925* [History of the American-Armenian Political Parties, 1890–1925] (Fresno, Nor Or Press, 1930); Dikran Spear [Tigran Mkund, Dikran Mgoont], *Hay Kghern Amerikayi Mej* [Armenian Clergy in America] ([Weehawken, N.J.: [s.n.], 1945), p. 6; and an article in *Armenia* [Paris], May 23, 1906.

Thereupon the audience immediately formed themselves into a club, which they called the *Kachar Haykakan*, or “Armenian Academy.”¹² On September 16 the group held its first meeting, electing Mikael Tophanelian chairman. The latter was bitter enemies with Antreasian, and insisted that Protestants should not be allowed to join. This policy was confirmed by a unanimous vote of the membership on October 7, 1888. Antreasian responded by starting a Protestant organization of his own.

The climate of religious intolerance, exacerbated by both sides, led to increasing hostility within the community. Finally, the Antreasian faction filed a petition with the Ottoman Embassy in Washington alleging that the Armenian Academy had been engaging in “revolutionary activities” and “anti-sultan propaganda.” Tophanelian traveled to Washington to see the ambassador in an effort to repair the damage. In the meantime (November 3), his group sent a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople asking him to intercede with the Sublime Porte on their behalf. The patriarch replied on December 13 that he could not represent the American Armenian community unless it had a clergyman of its own. In January the Armenian Academy asked the patriarch to send a celibate priest to minister not only to the Armenians of Worcester, where they resided, but to all the Armenians of the United States.¹³ This request was opposed by the

¹² Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 89; Mirak, *Torn*, p. 182.

¹³ Minassian gives two different dates on pages 93 and 95 of January 27 and January 8.

Protestants and by another group in New York called the Armenian Union.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the patriarch sent Hovsep Vartabed Sarajian, who arrived in New York in June, 1890. The character of Father Sarajian and the hostility which he encountered from the Hnchakians have been referred to above.¹⁵

Organization of the Hnchakian Revolutionary Party in America. Political activity began to increase in the decade of the 1890s. The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party was the first to form an organization in America, holding a convention in Worcester in July, 1894.¹⁶ Their public meetings were well attended, but the party was bitterly opposed by the clergy and by the American missionaries, who warned that the Hnchakian policy of confrontation would only provoke further outrages against the Armenians in Turkey.¹⁷

News of the massacres of Armenians at Sassun in 1894 and the subsequent massacres throughout Turkish Armenia and in Constantinople in 1895 and 1896 galvanized the American Armenian community and for a time served to suppress partisan differences. Mass meetings of protest were held and money was collected for relief and guns. American public opinion strongly favored the Armenians against their Turkish oppressors

¹⁴ Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 92–95. The Armenian Union was founded in New York on February 13, 1886, and "tried to establish a bond among Armenians in America. It fostered functions for the benefit of the Armenian Community and cultivated national sentiment."

¹⁵ Also see Mirak, *Torn*, p. 184.

¹⁶ Mirak, "Armenians in the United States," pp. 259–260.

¹⁷ Mirak, *Torn*, pp. 209–210. For circular letters by missionaries denouncing revolutionary tactics, see Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusakstutants*, pp. 7–9, 13–18, 39–42, 45–47.

and sympathy committees were formed by prominent persons.¹⁸ The Hnchakians could not benefit in the long run from this temporary unity, and their influence declined as the failure of their policy of armed risings became apparent.¹⁹ They fell to quarreling among themselves over personalities and the issue of socialism. The party split in 1896, reunited briefly, and split again permanently in 1906 in a wash of attacks and fratricidal murders both in the United States and abroad.²⁰

The dissidents formed the Reformed Hnchakian Party, renouncing socialism and advocating slow preparation, secrecy, and propaganda.²¹ In 1907 they brought out their organ, *Azg* [*Azk*] (“Nation”), with an appeal to pragmatism:

This generation of Armenians has work to do far beyond its capacities. We are far behind the civilized nations. Our immediate duty is to fight against the political restrictions and ignorance that are chaining the Armenian people, waiting for the nations much more advanced than us to solve the tangled and difficult questions of capital and labor.²²

¹⁸ Mirak, *Torn*, pp. 212–217, 219–223.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 228–233.

²⁰ For differing views, see Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, pp. 25–128, 503–505, 513–516; *Taretsuys 1912*, pp. 133–137; A[rsen] Kitur [Gidoor], ed., *Patmutium S. D. Hnchakian Kusaktsutian 1887–1962* [History of the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party, 1887–1962] (Beirut: Shirak, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 98–99.

²¹ Mirak, *Torn*, p. 229

²² Suren Barteveian, editor of *Azg*, quoted in *Taretsuys 1912*, p. 136.

The Rise of The Armenian Revolutionary Federation

The debilitation of the old-line Hnchakians yielded the field to Dashnaktsutun, which now attempted to establish its leadership over the revolutionary struggle. Dashnaktsutun entered the United States in the 1890s, when some committees were organized in the eastern mill towns of Lawrence, Haverhill, Providence, Worcester, and Whitinsville. The party paper *Droshak* (“Banner”) was imported from Geneva. Activities were stepped up in 1899 when the organizer Arshak Vramian was sent to America to edit the new Dashnaktsakan organ, *Hairenik* (“Fatherland”).²³ Vramian immediately began a ceaseless attack on the non-Dashnaktsakans, vituperating the Hnchakians, the churches, and all bourgeois and conservative elements alike. Dashnaktsutun attempted to mobilize American opinion by forming the “Armenian Committee for Self Defense” under the chairmanship of a pro-Dashnaktsakan priest, Mashdots Vartabed Papazian. They held rallies and fund drives, and for a while seemed to have gained the sympathy of some prominent Americans. But soon the latter became disillusioned with the constant Armenian internal warfare and the committee collapsed.²⁴ Nevertheless, Dashnaktsutun tirelessly continued its rallies, propaganda, and organizing efforts, and, with the Hnchakians again

²³ Sarkis Atamian, *The Armenian Community: the Historical Development of a Social and Ideological Conflict* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955); Mirak, *Torn*, p. 249.

²⁴ Mirak, “Armenians in the United States,” pp. 278–280; *Taretsuyts 1912*, pp. 137–138; Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, pp. 100–105, 510–512.

fighting among themselves in 1906, it was able to gain the leadership of the revolutionary movement.²⁵

Liberals

The Reformed Hnchakians, in the meantime, split still further. The restoration of the long-suspended Ottoman Constitution in 1908 emboldened many Turkish Armenians to hope that liberalism had triumphed and that reform would now become a reality. They supposed that the dark days of repression and massacre would be in the past. In this climate, some Reformed Hnchakian elements met in Alexandria, Egypt with the representatives of the *Armenakan* and the *Gaghaparaksakan*²⁶ parties. The resulting union was called the *Sahmanadrakan Ramkavar Kusaktsutiun* [*Sahmanatragan Ramgavar Gusagtsutiun*] (Constitutional Democratic Party). Representing mainly middle-class, liberal elements, it was “a party dedicated to the liberation of Armenia, by organizing the work of self defense in the interior provinces with the proper caution.”²⁷ The Ramkavars denounced the Hnchakian and Dashnaktsakan propaganda as dangerous braggadocio which was gravely harmful to the Armenian people. Revolution might become necessary again, but if it did, it should be pursued with proper preparation and secrecy, not openly so as to provoke reprisals. If the Ottoman government were to abandon the Constitution and resume the

²⁵ Atamian, *Armenian Community*, p. 355.

²⁶ “Those of the same mind.”

²⁷ Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, p. 214.

former oppression, the party would assume a secret conspiratorial posture. In the meantime, it would refrain from political entanglements and remain true to Armenian interests. Both the Dashnaktsakans and the Hunchakians had foolishly tied themselves to Turkish political parties, the former to the Young Turks and the latter to the opposition.²⁸

Optimism was short-lived. Only the following year, ferocious massacres in Cilicia left 30,000 Armenians dead. The Young Turk government tried to throw the blame on partisans of the deposed Sultan Abdul Hamid II, but the Ramkavars showed proof of the complicity of elements of the ruling party.²⁹ The Ramkavars claimed that the Dashnaktsakans had participated in a coverup of the role of their Young Turk allies.³⁰ The Ramkavars decided to arm the Armenians of Van immediately for their self defense and raised money in the United States through their American chapters. The weapons were dispatched through agents in the Caucasus. But in Van and the surrounding district of Vaspurakan, the Ramkavar efforts were opposed by Dashnaksutiun.³¹ Bitter hostility continued between the Armenian factions, having a respite only during the darkest days of World War I. The aims of the two parties were incompatible. The Ramkavars were liberal and oriented toward the west, while the Dashnasakans strove for socialism and

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 140–141, 144, 215, 217, 513–516.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 218–219.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 221–222.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 212–340.

denigrated bourgeois values. The Dashnaktsakan papers constantly derided the Ramkavars as fat, rich “aghas,” while the Ramkavars accused the Dashnaktsakans of cynicism, lack of principles, and dangerous provocativeness that many times had given the Turks the pretext to massacre innocent Armenian civilians.

The Reformed Hnchakian Party had abandoned its former violent methods and had grown closer to the Ramkavars in outlook. Nevertheless, the two organizations remained separate during the critical years of World War I. This worked to the disadvantage of liberalism, for they split their efforts in opposing what both viewed as the ruinous policies of Dashnaktsutium.³² But in 1918, a movement for unification began in the United States, with nonpartisan liberals forming “people’s committees” in New York, Boston, Providence, Worcester, Lowell, Lawrence, Philadelphia, Fresno, and other Armenian centers. The Ramkavar Party had already appointed a committee to approach the Reformed Hnchakians. The people’s committees sent letters to both parties suggesting consultations. Talks were held in Boston with the result that the people’s committees merged with the Ramkavars under the new name “National Democratic Party” (*Azgayin Ramkavar Kusaktsutium*) in June, 1919.³³ The Reformed Hnchakians (now styling

³² For failure to cooperate in the election of delegates to the Armenian National Congress of 1919, see “Why We Lost the Election (If We Indeed Lost It),” editorial in *Nor Giank* 205 (February 8, 1919); 206 (February 15, 1919); 208 (March 1, 1919). Personal and political disputes between Hratch Yervant, editor of *Bahak* [*Pahak*], and Professor Michael Minasian, editor of *Sisvan*, ended up in a public “Court of Honor” in Fresno on June 10, 1919. The two aired their differences before a panel of judges and an audience of 2,500, over a third of whom stayed until the end at 3:30 AM the following morning. *Gotchnag* XIX.31 (August 2, 1919); *Asbarez* XI.566 (June 13, 1919); XI.567 (June 20, 1919). A running feud was carried on in the pages of *Azk*, *Bahak*, and *Sisvan* of the same period [all in Armenian].

³³ Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, pp. 378–379; *Gotchnag* XIX.26 (June 28, 1919), p. 829.

themselves the Liberal or *Azatakan* Party) joined the others in the fall of 1921, in the realization that the division between the ideologically similar parties had weakened the voice of liberalism in Armenian politics. Agreement was reached simultaneously by representatives in Boston and Constantinople, and the party organizations and papers were merged. The new party took the name “Democratic Liberal Party” (*Ramkavar Azatakan Kusaktsutiun; Ramgavar Azadagan Gusagtsutiun*).³⁴

The Armenian Political Parties in California

Organization

The Armenian political parties all extended their organizations to California. They held propaganda meetings, raised funds, and imported or published newspapers. There was also a large non-partisan or “*chezok*” element in the community whose attitudes were generally conservative. The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party was first, forming a committee in Fresno in 1891. In 1893 an agent brought a charter from party headquarters in Massachusetts. But the chapter remained small and did not have much influence in the community. No Hnchakian paper was published in California and *Eritasard Hayastan* (“Young Armenia”) had to be imported from New York. The members complained that the materialism of California diverted the interest of the workingman from politics. The party picked up slightly after 1915, when more Hnchakians came to Fresno and when

³⁴ Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, pp. 489–492; *Gotchnag* XIX.45 (November 5, 1921), p. 1,318.

volunteers were being raised to fight against the Turks. In 1928 Stepan Sabah-Gulian, editor of *Eritasard Hayastan*, visited California and breathed some fire into the local Hnchakians with his speeches. Chapters were also formed in Los Angeles in 1907, San Francisco in 1918, and Selma-Dinuba in 1922. The Selma-Dinuba chapter conducted its activities with the Fresno chapter and the San Francisco chapter folded in 1920, but the Los Angeles chapter continued.³⁵

In 1901, the Reformed Hnchakians and Dashnaktsakans both organized committees in Fresno.³⁶ Haigag Eginian, a pioneer newspaper publisher, moved to Fresno in 1899 and began publishing *Kaghakatsi* (“Citizen”) irregularly beginning on October 16, 1902.³⁷ Eginian favored the Reformed Hnchakian Party, but the newspaper was not a party organ. In 1908 a group of Dashnaktsakans consisting of Aslan Aslanian, Avedis Tufenkjian, Arpaksad Setrakian, Bedros Hagopian, Levon Hagopian, Apraham G. Seklemian, and

³⁵ Kitur, *Hnchakian Kusaktsutian*, vol. 2, pp. 25–27.

³⁶ T. B. Khungian, [T. P. Khunkian] “Patmutiun Kalifornio Hayots” [History of the Armenians of California], in *Asparez [Asbarez] Tasnameaki Zhoghovatsu* [Asbarez Decennial Anthology], (Fresno: Asbarez Press, 1918) (henceforth ATZ), p. 306; A[vedis] Tufenkjian, “Who Is Responsible, Church People or Revolutionaries?” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VIII.401 (April 11, 1916).

³⁷ Eginian was born in Tigranakert [Dikranagerd] in 1865 and came to New York in 1883. In 1887 he published the first Armenian newspaper in the New World, *Aregak [Arekag]* (“Sun”), as a monthly. In 1890 it became a weekly and its name was changed to *Surhadak [Surhantag]* (“Courier”). Later in the same year the name was changed again to *Azatutiun [Azadutiun]* (“Freedom”). In 1897 Eginian and a group of nine or ten others started *Tigris [Dikris]* (“Tigris”). Eginian bought out the interests of the others in the following year and transferred it to the Reformed Hnchakian agent Karekin Chitjian. It then became the party paper *Tsavn Hayreniats* (Voice of the Fatherland). In California Eginian published *Kaghakatsi* and *Nor Giank*. He died at his printing press on March 25, 1919. *Asbarez*, the Dashnaktsakan paper, gave him a respectful obituary although he was a political opponent. See *Taretsuyts 1912*, pp. 127–129, 132–133, 144; *Asbarez* XI.555 (March 28, 1919); Charles Mahakian, “History of the Armenians in California” (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), pp. 70–71.

Hovhannes Kabadayan brought out *Asbarez* as a weekly. After an initial period of relative moderation, *Asbarez* became intensely partisan.³⁸ The *Asbarez* offices became the center of local Dashnaktsakan activities. Dashnaktsakan chapters were started in nearly every Armenian settlement.³⁹ In Los Angeles, the party was particularly strong among the large Russian Armenian population. A chapter was started in 1911 and reorganized in 1915.⁴⁰

Eginian's last paper was the weekly *Nor Kiank* [*Nor Giank*] ("New Life") which he began publishing as a non-profit personal effort in 1914.⁴¹ *Nor Giank* opposed Dashnaktsakan policies and was subjected to a constant barrage of deprecation from *Asbarez*.⁴² It was impossible for Eginian's papers to compete with subsidized party organs, and after his death *Nor Giank* was taken over by the Ramkavars, with Kevork Sarafian as editor.⁴³

Another private paper, *Sisvan*, was started by conservative and religious elements in 1918. From the point of view of *Asbarez* it was even more obnoxious than *Nor Giank*.⁴⁴

³⁸ A[praham] G. Seklemian, "The Birth of *Asbarez*" [in Armenian], in *ATZ* pp. 9–10; *Taretsuyts* 1912, p. 144.

³⁹ Mahakian, "Armenians in California," p. 72.

⁴⁰ Siragan Kaloian, *The Immigration of the Armenians of Shirag to America* (Los Angeles, 1950), pp. 27–28.

⁴¹ *Gotchnag* XV.14 (April 3, 1915), p. 326.

⁴² For typical attacks on *Nor Giank*, see *Asbarez* VII.375 (October 15, 1915); VIII.401 (April 14, 1915); VIII.409 (June 9, 1915); IX.421 (September 1, 1916); IX.422 (September 8, 1916); IX.436 (December 15, 1916); IX.437 (December 22, 1916); IX.438 (December 29, 1916); X.510 (May 17, 1918); and almost every issue after 1919 [all in Armenian].

⁴³ *Nor Giank* 220 (August 6, 1919).

⁴⁴ For attacks on *Sisvan* see *Asbarez* XI.520 (July 26, 1918); XI.523 (August 16, 1918); XI.526 (September 6, 1918); XI.532 (October 18, 1918); XII.585 (October 21, 1919); XII.590 (November 7, 1919).

In 1919, a Reformed Hinchakian paper called *Aror* (“Plough”) was started. *Sisvan* was merged into *Nor Giank* in 1920, resulting in *Nor Giank-Sisvan*. This was shortened to *Nor Giank* shortly thereafter. When the Ramkavar and Azatakan parties were merged in 1921, the papers were merged to form *Nor Giank-Aror*, shortened in 1923 to *Nor Or* (“New Day”),⁴⁵ still being published, currently in Altadena.

Political Life in The Colony

The political parties in America were parts of overseas organizations whose discussions, activities, and efforts were primarily concerned with the Armenian Question, that is, with the condition and aspirations of the Armenians of the Ottoman and Russian empires. These issues were the preoccupation of Armenians all over the world. The party positions were debated in the local press and from local platforms, and in newspapers imported both from the East Coast and abroad. The California newspapers also carried news of regional interest. *Gotchnag*, which was distributed nationwide, also ran columns of news from the various Armenian colonies throughout the United States and the world. The Armenians of the United States, living in a free country, could speak and preach and debate as much as they wished without fear of reprisal. And, because of their much better economic situation, even the poorest of them felt it was his duty to contribute to the cause. So together with their American friends they raised great amounts of money for the relief of the

⁴⁵ Mahakian, “Armenians in California,” p. 71.

Armenian victims of massacre and war, to support schools and good works, and to supply arms for the revolutionary struggle.

Raising money and making political protests went hand-in-hand. When word reached Fresno of the Cilician massacres of 1909, the mayor of the city organized a great mass meeting, at which prominent local Americans and Armenians were heard, a petition was sent to President Taft, and a fund-raising committee was organized.⁴⁶

The relief effort became continuous. Up and down California, in each Armenian center, societies were formed to aid victims. Churches, Sunday school classes, youth organizations, and individuals subscribed to the care of orphans.⁴⁷ Soon a chapter of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was started in Fresno. This organization had been founded only four years earlier in Egypt by Boghos Nubar Pasha and other prominent and wealthy Western Armenians, and quickly became the preeminent Armenian charitable organization in the world.⁴⁸ The Fresno chapter was started by Hagop Neshigian, Dr. Stephen Long (Ouzunian), the Reverend H. Haiguni, and Haigag Eginian. The following year the AGBU in California received a great push forward with the visit of Archbishop Mushegh Seropian. Seropian traveled to Los Angeles, San Francisco,

⁴⁶ *Gotchnag* IX.20 (May 15, 1909), p. 488.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, X.10 (March 5, 1910), p. 233; X.20 (May 14, 1910), p. 473; X.38 (September 17, 1910), p. 908; XI.14 (April 8, 1910), pp. 330–333; XI.15 (April 15, 1910), p. 367.

⁴⁸ The AGBU met its first major challenge in the massacres of 1909, and provided tents, food, clothing, and medicine for the victims. It grew from 3 chapters in 1909 to 64 worldwide by the end of 1910. Bedros Norehad, *The Armenian General Benevolent Union* ([No City]: Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1966), pp. 13–14.

Yetter, Tulare, and Fowler, meeting with community leaders and giving impassioned speeches on the necessity of organizing AGBU chapters and sending aid to the destitute Armenians of Turkey. Other California chapters were founded on the initiative of local residents: Reedley in 1912, Selma in 1916, Parlier in 1917, and Kingsburg in 1918. By 1953 there were 40 chapters and ladies' auxiliaries in 22 California cities, as well as in Portland and Seattle.⁴⁹ The AGBU received its support from liberal, religious, and non-partisan elements, including Eginian's *Kaghakatsi* and *Nor Giank*, prominent Apostolic clergymen, almost all of the Protestant churches, and the Ramkavar Party. But the Dashnaktsakans and *Asbarex* were cool because of its connection to the conservative, aristocratic Boghos Nubar and its stress on charity rather than revolutionary politics.⁵⁰

In America, Dashnaktsutiun started its own relief organization. Beginning in 1905, Dashnaktsakan women were organized in cities where there were ARF committees. In 1910, the ARF Central Committee of America founded the Armenian Red Cross, for the announced purposes of conducting benevolent work in peacetime, aiding victims in time

⁴⁹ Krikor Sarafian, *Gordsapatum H. B. E. Miutian Kalifornio Shrchanaki 1910–1953* [History of the Activities of the California District of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1910–1953] (Fresno, 1954), pp. 7, 33, 49, 60, 65, 68, 72, 77, 80, 85.

⁵⁰ An examination of the pages of these respective newspapers will show that AGBU meetings and activities were advertised and supported editorially in *Kaghakatsi* and *Nor Giank* while being downplayed or reported critically in *Asbarex*. For support by the Ramkavars, see Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, pp. 84–87. For support by the Protestants, see Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 49, 89; *Nor Giank* II.90 (November 18, 1916), II.92 (December 2, 1916), and reports on AGBU activities, *passim*. For opposition by the Dashnaktsakans, see “Letter from Los Angeles,” *Nor Giank* II.92 (December 2, 1916) and an untitled article in III.105 (March 10, 1917); *Asbarex* VII.381 (November 26, 1915), VIII.395 (March 3, 1916) [all in Armenian].

of epidemic, war, and disaster, and helping needy families of Dashnaktsakan comrades and martyrs.⁵¹ Chapters were formed in Los Angeles in 1913⁵² and Fresno in 1915.⁵³

Disunity in the Armenian communities of California was already well evident even before 1910. As in Worcester, open conflict first appeared between conservative churchmen and young radicals over control of the local Armenian library. Around 1902 or 1903, the priest in Fresno, Sahag Vartabed Nazaretian, accused the revolutionaries of being “unbelievers” and “destroyers of the church.” Rival library associations were formed, pistols were drawn, and policemen were posted inside the library. Sahag Vartabed’s tenure in Fresno ended when moral accusations were made against him in 1906. The community split into pro- and anti-Sahag factions, which suggests that there might have been some question at the time as to the validity of the accusations. It is not impossible that the priest was done in by his political enemies, but the accusations were of a type that is hard to make up.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “H. H. D. K. *Khache Amerikayi Mej*” [The ARF Red Cross in America], in *Albom Hay K. Khache, Ir Ksanamiakin Artiv 1910–1930* [Armenian Red Cross Album, On the Occasion of Its Twentieth Anniversary 1910–1930], (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1930), p. 7.

⁵² *Hay Sirt* [*Hay Sird*], April 1960, p. 25.

⁵³ “ARF Red Cross in Fresno” [in Armenian], in *ATZ*, p. 283.

⁵⁴ See above, p. 108. A[vedis] Tufenkjian, “Who is Responsible, Churchmen or Revolutionaries?” in two parts, *Asbarez* VIII.401 (April 11, 1916), VIII.402 (April 21, 1916) [in Armenian]; Khungian, “Patmutiun Kalifornio Hayots,” *AZT* p. 307.

Claimants to Power

The increasingly bitter disunity among the Armenians was the result of a power struggle for leadership of the community. This struggle had its basis in differing and incompatible assumptions about the world, about history, and about morality. The most vocal contestants in Fresno were the leaders of the Apostolic Church, the Protestant ministers, and the Dashnaktsakans. Each group had its own claim.

The leaders of the Apostolic Church. Most of the Armenian Apostolic clergy were traditionalist and conservative, although there were a few who were pro-Dashnaktsakan. The clergy laid their claim on their ancient status as the leaders of the people. Especially in the absence of an Armenian state, the church had the legitimacy of authority and establishment, and all other claimants could be considered usurpers. The conflict between church and state and the question of religious freedom, resolved in Europe centuries earlier, was still being played out among the Armenians. The Protestant challenge of the 1840s had been met very early with excommunication. As for the revolutionaries, the church regarded their anticlericalism and atheism and their desire to make the church subservient to the state as a direct assault on Holy Truth. As leaders of the nation by right, the clergy believed, they should guide the legitimate activities of the community.

The Protestant ministers. The claim of the Protestant ministers lay both in ideology and in western education. Their denial of the ancient doctrine of Apostolic Succession attacked the very basis of the supremacy of the Apostolic Church. They believed that

nothing was of lasting importance but advancing the Kingdom of God, for which each individual would be personally answerable at the Last Judgment, without regard for bishops or priests. The struggle was a moral and religious one, in which the means were as important as the end. Therefore, they promoted relief work and benevolence, not guns and revolution. They were under divine injunction not to be “unequally yoked with unbelievers,” so they kept their distance from the “antireligious” and “atheistic” revolutionaries but were intimate instead with their spiritual brethren, the American missionaries. Most if not all of the ministers were the products of missionary colleges in Turkey and often of seminaries in the United States, and so they knew English well and were imbued with Western ideas. Some of them, such as the Reverend Manasseh G. Papazian, were exceptionally able and moved with ease in American circles. The Dashnaksakans disliked and feared the Protestant ministers more than any of their other enemies, and spilled much ink in *Asbarez* in a continual effort to discredit them. The Dashnaksakans were particularly irked by the perceived superior attitude of the Protestants and their dismissal of the political parties as associations of unbelievers who taught the young people immoral teachings. The believers were in turn accused of unpatriotism.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Reverend Knajian, sermon, quoted in Tufenkjian, “Who Is Responsible.” A debate was held in Los Angeles in June, 1919 between the Reverend Haigag Khazoyan and M. K. Ferrahian over the proposition that the Dashnaksakans were really Bolsheviks, reported from different viewpoints in *Asbarez* XII.573 (August 1919); *Gotchnag* XIX.25 (June 21, 1919); *Nor Giank* V.215 (June 25, 1919); V.223 (August 27, 1919) [all items are in Armenian]. Of course they actually weren’t, but the point was made that their behavior was similar. The contrast between Protestant and Communist attitudes was even greater, since Bolshevism advocated that the ends justified the means and Protestantism that the means *were* the ends. Lenin practiced total expediency in the service of the Bolshevik revolution. Anything could and in fact was done that would promote socialism, in total rejection of traditional (“bourgeois”) morality. This extended as far as the destruction of the family in the name of the “liberation” of woman from the kitchen. See Leon

The Dashnaktsakans. The Dashnaktsakans laid their claim to leadership on the modern ideologies of nationalism and socialism, which in their eyes were universal and unchallengeable doctrines. The good of the nation was above all, and the good of the nation required liberation from Turkish oppression, destruction of archaic forms of authority, and the establishment of popular rule through the leadership of a nationalist and socialist party. This ideology was not to be questioned, and those who opposed it were enemies of the people and traitors. The political existence of the state came first. Whatever did not serve the revolution deserved to be destroyed. The worst enemies of the revolution were the Protestants and the capitalists. They were apostates from the nation, and their coziness with the missionaries and their efforts to divert money from guns to relief undermined political progress. Thus, as fund collections in the community increased dramatically during the war years, the greatest dispute was over who would control the money.

Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), pp. 144–159, for a criticism of Stalin for not going far enough in this regard.

CHAPTER 6

POLITICS AND THE PRESS: WORLD WAR I

Relief And Dissension

The great crisis that burst upon the Armenians of Turkey and the Caucasus with the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey in November 1914 sent shock waves through the Armenian communities of America. All the Armenian papers trumpeted the urgent need for massive new aid. *Gotchnag* reported under a banner headline:

Appeal to All The Armenians of America

Dear Countrymen:

The great storm has finally broken out over the land of the Armenians also. Our brothers and sisters in the homeland, who already had been in the most extreme economic straits, now, since Turkey went to war with Russia and her allies, have been subjected to the most strenuous tribulations. On one hand, the supporters of families have been sent off to the army, and on the other hand, commercial life has ceased, because of the seizure of goods by the government, the disappearance of money, and the terror of the probability of horrible disasters. The reality of conditions that have been established is so bitter as to defy description.¹

The AGBU set up a Central Relief Committee in New York, and the Apostolic and Evangelical churches started their own fund drives. Voices throughout the community called for one unified effort, but unity was easier preached than reached.²

¹ *Gotchnag* XIV.48 (November 28, 1914), p. 1,131.

² *Ibid.*, XIV.48 (November 28, 1914), pp. 1,131–1,132.

On November 12, 1914, Bishop Mushegh invited representatives of the four parties to a meeting at which it was agreed to form the All-Party Committee consisting of two delegates from each party, with the following purposes:

1. To aid the volunteer regiments currently fighting.
2. To promote armed insurrection when the Allied Powers would supply aid.
3. To actuate diplomatic efforts in behalf of the Armenians.³

Soon after, two delegates from the Armenian Church joined and the name was changed to the *Amerikayi Azgayin Pashpanutian Komite* (National Defense Committee of America).⁴ Disagreement immediately surfaced over the question of the disposition of the money the committee would collect. The Dashnaktsakans demanded that half of the money be sent to the Armenian National Bureau in Tiflis for use by the Armenian volunteer regiments operating with the Russians.⁵ The Bureau was a Dashnaktsakan-dominated organization of Russian Armenians that had been formed in October 1912 with the support of the Russian Viceroy, Count I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov. Its initial program for Turkish Armenia had consisted of assistance to the Catholicos in his efforts to mitigate the distress of the Turkish Armenians, establishment of contact with

³ Manuk G. Chizmechian [Manug K. Jizmejian], *Patmutiun Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890–1925* [History of the American-Armenian Political Parties, 1890–1925] (Fresno, Nor Or Press, 1930), pp. 198–203; M[anuk] Hambardzumian, “The American-Armenian Community: The Last Decade” [in Armenian], in *Hairenik Amsakir* I.8 (June 1923), p. 65. The four parties were Social Democrat Hnchakian, Dashnaktsakan, Reformed Hnchakian, and Constitutional Democrat (Ramkavar).

⁴ Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” p. 65.

⁵ Ibid.

Armenian communities abroad, and propaganda among the Russian public and officials.⁶ With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Vorontsov-Dashokv encouraged the organization of volunteers to fight the Turks. Some Armenians warned that this would give the Turks a pretext for violence against the Turkish Armenian population, but a corps was organized nonetheless under the supervision of the National Bureau.⁷ The non-Dashnaksakan groups regarded the National Bureau simply as an arm of Dashnaksutun and so they organized their own independent volunteer regiment, which consisted mainly of Hnchakians and enlistees from America and the Balkans.⁸

In view of the Dashnaksakan demands, the majority of the National Defense Committee agreed to send 25 percent of receipts to the National Bureau on a provisional basis, with the promise of more later if the volunteer movement showed results. The majority, maintaining that it did not know whether the Bureau was truly a national organization or if it was only partisan, that is, Dashnaksakan, decided to seek proof. They sent a telegram to Tiflis addressed to Bishop Mesrop, Primate of Tiflis, requesting him to confer with Alexandre Khatisian and Hambardzum Arakelian, respectively the mayor of the city and editor of the liberal newspaper, *Mshak*, and answer whether there was a body in charge of

⁶ Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47. See also “Letter from Tiflis” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* I.39 (November 23, 1915).

military affairs, and, if so, what it was.⁹ Bishop Mesrop replied that the National Bureau worked with the agreement of the Catholicos, that every group belonged to it, that he was the honorary chairman and Khatisian was the vice chairman, that the Bureau had organized five regiments which had met with “brilliant success,” and that money should be sent.¹⁰ But Arakelian’s signature was lacking, although he had been one of the original members of the Bureau in 1912.¹¹ The committee took this to mean that the National Bureau was partisan, and refused the Dashnaktsakan demands. The Dashnaktsakans then proposed (on January 8, 1915) that a fund drive be started immediately. One-half of the money raised would be sent to the National Bureau, which had units already operating in the Caucasus. The rest would be kept to be used to promote revolution in other parts of the country (i.e., Turkey), and if by March 1915 it was not possible to bring about such a movement, this money too would be sent to the National Bureau.¹² This proposal was rejected. Dashnaktsutiun then withdrew and the two organizations each opened separate fund drives.¹³

On January 8 Bishop Mushegh Seropian, secretary of the National Defense Committee, wrote to the Catholicos in Echmiadzin asking if His Holiness had granted the

⁹ Arakelian was murdered in Tiflis on June 11, 1918, assertedly by Dashnaktsakan agents. Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, p. 213.

¹⁰ Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” p. 65.

¹¹ Hovannisian, *Road*, p. 269, n. 38.

¹² Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” p. 66.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67; Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, pp. 202–203.

National Bureau his Apostolic patronage. The Catholicos replied that he had patronized only the Organizing Committee of Brotherly Aid of Echmiadzin, which was solely a relief organization. All other organizations received his patriarchal blessing equally insofar as they were true nonpolitical aid organizations, and that the National Bureau had not been singled out for any special blessing. Therefore, the Catholicos instructed, all monetary and other aid should be sent to him, the only head of the Armenian people, who was worthy to be the representative of all and who must be regarded as such, particularly in the present circumstances.¹⁴

In the meantime, in Paris, Boghos Nubar Pasha established the *Azgayin Himmadram* (National Capital Fund) in the name of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Echmiadzin. To raise money, he organized the *Azgayin Shaheru Pashtpanutian Miutium* (Society for the Defense of National Interest).¹⁵ This group invited the four political parties, the two churches, and the AGBU to send representatives. On May 8, 1915, an invitation was sent to the Dashnaktsakan Central Committee. Dashnaktsutium refused to join, questioning Nubar's plans and saying that he did not need large sums of money because the work of the National Delegation was entirely diplomatic. Furthermore, there were pressing needs for the money in arming troops and aiding refugees. The Evangelicals also did not join at that time. But by the end of summer, with the addition of Evangelical representatives, the National Defense Committee merged with the Society for the Benefit

¹⁴ *Nor Giank* II.68 (June 17, 1916).

¹⁵ *Gotchnag* XV.40 (October 2, 1915), pp. 872–875).

of the Nation to form the *Azgayin Pashtpanutian Miutium* (National Defense Union). Arsen Dzairakuin Vartabed Vehouni, who had succeeded Archbishop Mushegh as Primate, became President by virtue of his office.

The Americans also organized relief efforts, having been made aware by the missionaries of the Armenian persecutions. They were motivated by humanitarianism rather than politics and directed their efforts toward feeding and caring for the stricken populations. In 1915 three committees were organized under the auspices of the missionaries and their friends: the Persian War Relief Fund by the Presbyterian Board of Missions, the Syria-Palestine Committee by Presbyterians and Jews, and the Committee on Armenian Atrocities by representatives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the independent (missionary) colleges of Turkey. In 1915 these were merged into a single organization, the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR). It was headed by Dr. James L. Barton, Senior Secretary of ABCFM and one-time president of Euphrates College in Kharpert. Collections of money and goods from the American population at large were aided by extensive propaganda and presidential proclamations of Near East Relief Days. Increasingly large sums of money were collected: \$176,000 in 1915, \$2,000,000 in each of the years 1916 and 1917, \$7,000,000 in 1918, and more than \$19,000,000 in 1919. Relief was distributed by missionaries and educators in the field. Yet, even these vast sums were insufficient in the face of the overwhelming need and the changing fortunes of war.

The Question of Volunteers

The factions were deeply divided over the proper military role of the Armenians living abroad. The United States never declared war on the Ottoman Empire, so anyone who wanted to fight had to enlist in a foreign unit. The Dashnaktsakans urged the patriotic young men to serve, and in the first few months alone they enlisted more than 800 volunteers and shipped them out to the National Bureau in the Caucasus.¹⁶ The Social Democrat Hinchakians also recruited volunteers, sending three groups to the Caucasus in 1915 and one to Cilicia in 1920. These were mainly recruited in the party strongholds in the Eastern and Midwestern United States.¹⁷ The Ramkavars also sent some volunteers to Russia in 1915. In May 1915, the *Boston Herald* ran a proposal by an Armenian businessman to raise 1,000 men and to ask the British army to send them to Turkey to fight against “their age-old enemy,” but the government declined. Most Hinchakian and Ramkavar volunteers would not fight under the command of the National Bureau, and a bitter war of words developed in the American-Armenian newspapers. The Dashnaktsakans defended the National Bureau as the embodiment of the nation itself and attacked as traitors any who dared criticize it.¹⁸ The non-Dashnaktsakans in turn accused the Dashnaktsakan leaders of rampant corruption and political opportunism. A letter

¹⁶ Hambarzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” p. 66.

¹⁷ A[rsen] Kitur [Gidoor], ed., *Patmutiun S.D. Hinchakian Kusaktsutian 1887–1962* [History of the Social Democrat Hinchakian Party, 1887–1962] (Beirut: Shirak, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 92–93.

¹⁸ “Notice to American-Armenians,” *Asbarez* IX.425 (September 29, 1916) and many other references in *Asbarez* and *Hairenik* [all in Armenian].

from a volunteer in Tiflis appearing in *Nor Giank* in 1915, for example, accused the National Bureau of diverting relief funds into the pockets of the Dashnaktsakan leadership and of being preoccupied with looting the province of Vaspurakan.¹⁹

The more conservative Armenians, who had always been against the notion of armed insurrection, rejected the idea of sending volunteers altogether. *Gotchnag* condemned the enlistment of volunteers in the United States to fight in the Caucasus and Turkey as unnatural and dangerous and only serving to egg on the Turks to more massacres. Instead, *Gotchnag* wrote, the Armenians should serve in the armies of their own countries. What good would it accomplish to add new victims to the legions of Armenians already sacrificing willingly and unwillingly in the Russian and Turkish armies? They would be needed after the war for reconstruction. As the horrible terrors of the genocide of the Armenians of Turkey became known over the next few months, *Gotchnag* was in the forefront of the relief movement but never deviated from its opposition to the volunteer movement.²⁰

¹⁹ *Nor Giank* I.39 (November 23, 1915); Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, p. 208.

²⁰ Among the many references in *Gotchnag*, see “The Question of Volunteers,” XV.22 (May 29, 1915); “Can We Remain Indifferent?” XV.31 (July 31, 1915), p. 633; “For the Needy in Armenia,” XV.32 (August 7, 1915), p. 668; “Volunteers,” XV.38 (September 18, 1915), p. 801; “About the Volunteer Movement,” XVI.5 (January 29, 1916), p. 105 [all in Armenian].

Fund Drives in California

The leaders of the community responded to Turkey's entry into the war by educating their people and appealing to them for funds. The war and the plight of the Armenian people became the subject of church sermons. Reverend Knajian of the Armenian Presbyterian church brought forth proofs from the Scriptures that the end of the world was not at hand, and Reverend Papazian, the newly-arrived pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church, laid the blame for the troubles of the Armenians on England, France, Russia, and Germany. In the meantime the Ladies' Aid Society of his church held a program in which \$125 was gathered for relief in one night, and collection efforts were continuing.²¹ Los Angeles Gethsemane Congregational Church scheduled a prayer meeting and fund drive on November 22 and wrote to all of the American churches in the area to join them.²² Among all the Evangelicals efforts to raise money for relief were begun, and the California Armenian Evangelical Union called on the faithful to give to the aid of the needy and to pray for the peace of the whole world and in particular for their unfortunate fatherland.²³

In every place fund drives multiplied. By March 1915, close to \$9,000 had been raised among the Armenians of California. In October, the *Fresno Morning Republican* ran a strong editorial protesting the massacres and demanding that President Wilson call

²¹ Ibid., XIV.51 (December 19, 1914), pp. 1,214–1,215.

²² Ibid., XV.7 (February 13, 1915), p. 157.

²³ Ibid., XV.8 (February 20, 1915), p. 181.

Turkey to task, and the Mayor of Fresno called a meeting to elect a committee to work with the relief committee in New York.²⁴ Yet there was uneasiness. Some thought that Fresno, where there were many Armenians with money, should be giving more. Others were provoked by the diversion of money to the Caucasus, to the detriment of the Armenians in the interior of Turkey. Political and personal disagreements erupted in the “unified” fund drive meetings, hampering efforts and ruining morale.²⁵ *Asbarez* blamed the two Evangelical churches for holding a prayer meeting instead of going out to slay the foe; only one of the faithful had prayed, “O God, exterminate our enemies!”²⁶ *Asbarez* expressed disappointment in the organizing meeting called by the mayor, which was attended by only thirteen persons, just five of them Armenians. It was asked what the Armenians were doing to help themselves. Reverend Papazian was quoted as saying that his church had given \$400, while Hovhannes Kabadayan, editor of *Asbarez*, claimed that the community had given nearly \$10,000 in the previous eight months.²⁷ A committee of Americans was formed, and the following week an organizing meeting was held at Holy

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XV.44 (October 30, 1915), p. 970.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XV.13 (March 27, 1915), p. 203, XV.44 (October 30, 1915), p. 970. The totals to date for California were: Fresno, \$3,500; Los Angeles, \$3,000; Fowler, \$1,600; smaller. Reedley, \$500; Turlock, \$100; amounts from the outlying communities.

²⁶ Hovhannes Kabadayan, “Faith Without Works Is Dead” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VII.374 (October 8, 1915).

²⁷ “Meeting of Last Tuesday Evening” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VII.374 (October 8, 1915).

Trinity Church.²⁸ The Dashnaktsakans complained that they had not been invited and vowed to exceed by themselves the efforts of the “bitter enemies of Dashnakstutiu who let no opportunity escape to vent their vituperations.”²⁹ But shortly thereafter a second meeting was held and Dashnaktsakans were added to the committee, prompting the resignation of Reverend Papazian, who was chairman.³⁰ A mass meeting was set for November 4 at which money would be collected both for relief and for the volunteers. Papazian’s church refused to participate if money would be collected for the volunteers, but Reverend Knajian and Armenian First Presbyterian Church continued to take part. Pro-Ramkavar *Nor Giank*, while owning that both relief and guns were important, maintained that the first order of business was to keep alive the starving and dying, not to cut the air with flatulent talk.³¹ But the Dashnaktsakans likened the sentiment that “the money spent on one volunteer will support many needy” to the words of Judas.³²

On November 4, all Armenian establishments in the city shut down and Armenian workers did not report to work. Some 2,000 crowded into Rowell Auditorium, which had been donated for the occasion. Fervent prayers were recited and speeches delivered on

²⁸ The members of the committee were Mayor Alva E. Snow and Messrs. Wylie Giffin, Frank K. Prescott, and Albert Munger.

²⁹ *Asbarez* VIII.375 (October 15, 1915).

³⁰ *Nor Giank* 1.35 (October 26, 1915); “The Americans and Us” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VIII. 377 (October 29, 1915). The four new members were Paul Movsesian, Harutiun Rustigian, Avedis Tufenkjian, and Hovhannes Arakelian.

³¹ “To Whom Shall We Give?” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* I.36 (November 2, 1915).

³² “Lies in the Local Newsletter” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VIII.375 (October 15, 1915).

the plight of the refugees and the need to arm the volunteers for revenge. Three colors of pledge cards were handed out: red for the volunteers, green for the refugees in the Caucasus, and white for the needy Armenians in Turkey. *Asbarez* reported in a burst of over-enthusiasm that even though a “dirty circular from *Nor Giank*” was being circulated inside and outside the hall “defaming the National Bureau in the most shameless language,” the majority of the people still supported and contributed to the National Bureau, the stack of red cards being “larger than either of the other two stacks—showing the people’s belief in guns.”³³ Pilgrim Congregational Church had not participated at all, *Asbarez* said, contributing only the paltry sum of \$400 for the Turkish Armenian refugees. The report was inaccurate. In another place in the same issue, *Asbarez* showed the contributions to be \$9,800 for the needy in Turkey, to be sent through Ambassador Morgenthau; \$8,637 for the refugees in the Caucasus, to be sent through Nubar Pasha and the Catholicos; and a total of \$7,302 for all the volunteers combined, \$4,179 of that to the National Bureau and \$3,123 to the non-Dashnaktsakan volunteers. Pilgrim Church had actually collected \$2,500 on its own for the relief of the Turkish-Armenian refugees.³⁴ Many in the community shared the sentiments of a writer to the *New York Herald*: “The great disaster and the plight of our remnants weigh so heavily on our minds that is not only simply laughable to

³³ “Big Fund-Raising Meeting in Fresno” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VIII.379 (November 12, 1915). Other accounts of the meeting may be found in *Nor Giank* I.37 (November 9, 1915) and *Gotchnag* XV.47 (November 20, 1915), p. 1,042.

³⁴ Two-line item in *Asbarez* VIII.380 (November 19, 1915); also refuted in *Nor Giank* I.39 (November 23, 1915).

think in terms of a militaristic movement but also completely removed from the realm of possibility.”³⁵ The fund-raising efforts continued in the following days. They were given a push by sympathetic Americans, who were motivated by the suffering of the Christian Armenians. The *Morning Republican* said that the Armenians were martyrs to the same ideals as those upon which western civilization was founded, and that “we have to help those noble victims, especially since they are the kinsmen of our neighbors.”³⁶ This cooperation and interest from the Americans was eventually to be repudiated by the Dashnaktsakans. But for the immediate present, the Armenian Red Cross worked with the support of Mayor Snow and his committee on “Tag Day,” and the *Morning Republican* urged the Americans to give generously. The event was heavily promoted in *Asbarez*. On November 6 Armenian women canvassed the town, pinning tags on contributors. Receipts ran far ahead of expectations; the supply of 600 tags ran out in midday and 2,000 more had to be printed immediately; these also ran out. Twelve hundred dollars was raised to send to the Catholicos for the care of the wounded and sick. Aside from one or two Germans who reportedly said that they would rather see the Armenian race die out than contribute, there was no unpleasantness.³⁷

³⁵ The writer was Yervant Ardzruni. Quoted in *Asbarez* VIII.379 (November 12, 1915).

³⁶ Quoted in *Gotchnag* XV.48 (November 27, 1915).

³⁷ *Asbarez* VIII.379 (November 12, 1915).

Fund collection was pursued simultaneously in other Armenian centers. In San Francisco, where there was a community of some 1,500 Armenians,³⁸ a number of organizations made efforts, including the Dashnaktsakan Committee, the Ordu Patriotic Association, the Armenian Association, the Masis Drama Club.³⁹ The Armenian Association sponsored the first drive on December 20, 1914, collecting \$436.10 to be sent to the Catholicos. The second was held by the Masis Drama Club on September 13, 1915, collecting \$179 for the Catholicos. The third was a united effort of the Armenian Association and Dashnaktsutiun in November.⁴⁰ The twenty-first of the month was proclaimed “Armenian Sunday,” and all the ministers of the city were asked to preach about Armenia and collect money. On Tuesday, November 23, there was a great protest meeting against the Armenian massacres at the Scottish Rite Temple at Van Ness and Sutter Streets, at which some \$2,000 was collected.⁴¹ The various groups continued to hold meetings through 1916, with money collected and sent abroad.⁴² On Saturday,

³⁸ “Big Bazaar in California” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* II.101 (February 10, 1917).

³⁹ *Asbarex* VIII.377 (October 29, 1915).

⁴⁰ “Great Successful Public meeting in San Francisco” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* VIII. 378 (November 4, 1915).

⁴¹ “To San Francisco Armenians” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* VIII. 380 (November 19, 1915); *Asbarex* VIII.381 (November 26, 1915).

⁴² Dashnaktsutiun held propaganda meetings but it is unclear whether money was collected, and if so, where it was sent. But seems likely that some collections should have been sent to the National Bureau since this was an overriding concern of the Dashnaktsakans. See “San Francisco Public Meeting,” *Asbarex* VII.412 (June 30, 1916). The Armenian Association held eight meetings of various types and collected \$2,000, which was sent to the Catholicos in two checks. The “natives” (i.e., the Americans) collected \$2,300, which was sent to the Catholicos through the Red Cross. “Program in San Francisco,” *Asbarex*

February 24, 1917, five to six hundred people gathered at the Scottish Rite Temple for a program and bazaar sponsored by the Armenian Association. All elements of the community were present as well as many Americans. The Armenian ladies sold sweets and appeals were made by Dr. Dutton of the ACASR Committee of San Francisco and by Mr. Donald Grant, a British diplomat. That day \$1,3000 was raised. But *Asbarez* complained that a spirit of partisanship had entered San Francisco, some having objected at the adjective “Dashnaktsakan” and wanting their money back.⁴³

In Fowler, an attempt was made to form a united committee with Hnchakian, Ramkavar, and religious elements, but this foundered on divisions and antagonisms that seem to have been personal as well as political.⁴⁴ In Reedley, a chapter of the National Defense Union was formed and a memorial service and fund drive was held on December 12, 1915. The meeting was chaired by a Ramkavar, Arsen Diran, and two Armenian Protestant ministers gave speeches. A disturbance was created when one Hovsep Amirian got up to leave, protesting that he had been given no opportunity to contribute his \$10 to the volunteers; insults and blows were traded outside the hall.⁴⁵

IX.431 (November 10, 1916); IX.436 (December 15, 1916) [all in Armenian].

⁴³ “San Francisco Bazaar” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* IX.448 (March 9, 1917).

⁴⁴ “Fowler,” *Asbarez* VIII.380 (November 19, 1915); “Fowler Fund Drive and the False Cooperators,” *Asbarez* VIII.383 (December 10, 1915); news item in *Nor Giank* I.36 (November 2, 1915); “Fowler,” *Nor Giank* I.38 (November 16, 1915) [all in Armenian].

⁴⁵ “Memorial Service and Fight in Reedley” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VII.386 (December 31, 1915).

In Los Angeles, a branch of the *Azgayin Shaheru Pashtpanutian Handznakhumb* (Committee for the Defense of National Interests) was organized in June 1915, and in the course of five months collected some \$1,300, conducting a fund drive in Riverside as well as in Los Angeles. When the former organization was replaced by the National Defense Union, the local committee affiliated itself with it and continued to operate under the new name. Letters were sent to the religious and political organizations. The Ramkavar Party, Gethsemane Congregational Church, and the AGBU chapter each sent two representatives. The Apostolic Church, which had a board of trustees but no permanent location, sent no representative. The committee added four more members in order to provide a working number and the Reverend Sarkis Yeretian, pastor of Gethsemane Church, was elected chairman. A meeting to collect funds for relief was held in an American church, at which \$1,000 was collected.⁴⁶ By mid-February the committee, now supplemented by a ladies' auxiliary, had collected \$2,300, all earmarked for relief.⁴⁷

But the typical dreary political arguments and opportunism began to appear in Los Angeles also. An anonymous letter appeared in *Asbarez* denigrating the fund drive conducted in Riverside by the NDU as a personal visit by Reverend Yeretian and "some members of his church."⁴⁸ In June 1916, Matteos K. Ferrahian, the most prominent

⁴⁶ *Nor Giank* I.39 (November 23, 1915); "National Life in Los Angeles," *Nor Giank* I.37 (November 9, 1915); *Gotchnag* XV.50 (December 11, 1915) [all in Armenian].

⁴⁷ *Gotchnag* XVI.5 (January 19, 1916), p. 117; XVI.12 (March 18, 1916), p. 302.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Dashnaktsakan in the city, attacked the committee in the press, claiming that it was discriminatory and anti-Dashnaktsakan and was sowing partisan struggle and hatred, although he had been invited to join the committee and had refused. Ferrahian threw all the blame on the Protestants and predicted ominously that “the bitter partisan struggle of the east will be transferred to the west.” Again, the issue was who would be in control and where the money would be sent. Because the local people had joined the NDU, Ferrahian wrote, they were verifying “the truth and legality of those splendid jewels, the epithets that that grace-worthy ‘Mushegh,’ the marrow and brains of NDC, uses publicly and in print: for Dashnaktsakans, ‘rascal,’ for Red Cross, ‘red crescent,’ for its work, ‘womanish insolence’... Now it is the time to give life to knocking down Dashnaktsutun, pulling up the revolutionary movement by the roots, starving the volunteers to death, choking the volunteer movement, and to the deadly and immobile doctrine of ‘one church, one flock, one shepherd.’”⁴⁹ But the Dashnaktsakan efforts to discredit the NDU did not prevent the Armenian Apostolic Church of Los Angeles, which had recently reorganized and elected a new board of trustees, from joining the local chapter and sending two representatives to the committee.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ferrahian, “National Defense Association, Los Angeles Chapter” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* VIII.410 (June 16, 1916.).

⁵⁰ “Letter from S. Manoushian” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* II.70 (July 1, 1916).

The following biographical sketch of Matteos K. Ferrahian is from the “Holy Martyrs Ferrahian Armenian High School’s History,” at <<http://www.ferrahian.org/HISTORY.HTM>> (accessed on July 26, 1999):

“Matthew Ferrahian was born in Ankara, Turkey. In 1870 he was sent to Jerusalem to study at the Armenian Seminary, and since he did not want to be ordained as a Priest, he found his way to the United States. As a promising community leader in Los Angeles, he organized a couple of important gatherings

The Armenian National Union

In Cairo, Egypt, representatives of all the political parties, the church, and the AGBU established the Egyptian-Armenian National Union in early 1917. This was prompted by the agreement between the French government and Boghos Nubar's Armenian National Delegation, which had been representing the Turkish Armenians in Paris since before the war, to form an "Eastern Legion" under the French flag. The Armenians hoped this would liberate Cilicia, while the French intended to use it to secure their sphere of influence in a dismembered Ottoman Empire.⁵¹ An interparty delegation consisting of Mihran Damadian (Ramkavar), Artavazd Hanemian (Dashnaksakan), and Stepan Sabah-Gulian (Hnchakian) traveled from Egypt to Paris for consultations and then on to America, where the idea of liberating Cilicia met with wild enthusiasm. In seven meetings from March 16 to 26 representatives of the four parties in America reached an

within the Armenian community in 1907. In 1912, he opened a clothing store in downtown Los Angeles, on Spring Street. It did not last long. He enrolled at [the] U[niversity of]S[outhern]C[alifornia] and graduated with a law degree in 1915. In 1913 he founded the Los Angeles Armenian Youth Organization with forty members. After Ferrahian married Miss Yevgineh Shishmanian, they settled in their two-story luxury home on the corner of Adams and San Pedro. There, the majority of the Armenian community leaders would gather to discuss Armenian issues, among them the hot issue of an Armenian daily school. Mr. Ferrahian had mastered the Armenian language through his own efforts, and being a literary man, he produced many publications and translations. His dream was to open an Armenian daily school in Los Angeles. It was a dream he never gave up, but alas, his life came to an end in 1955 and so did that of his wife in 1960. Their bodies were cremated, and their ashes are resting at Rosedale Cemetery at the corner of Washington and Normandy, in a box on the window of which we read, "Live to learn, love, and serve."

Ferrahian belonged to the Hnchakian Party from about 1890 until 1893, when he joined Dashnaksutiun. He was member of the Los Angeles Committee of Dashkantsutiun. M[at]teos K. Ferrahian, *Havakatsoy* [Collected Works], (Los Angeles: Horizon Press, 1952), p. 5; Asbarez XI.567 (June 20, 1919).

⁵¹ See Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971–1996), vol. 1, pp. 257–260.

agreement. On April 2, plenipotentiaries from the Apostolic and Evangelical Churches were invited and with the unanimous consent of the eighteen delegates, a central body was formed for the Armenian National Union of America. ANU adopted the following principles:

1. The liberation of Cilicia through the use of volunteer fighters.
2. Reconstruction of the fatherland and immediate aid to the needy.
3. Diplomatic efforts and pro-Armenian propaganda.

Two days later, the Union accepted the program of the National Delegation and constituted itself into its agent in America. The central committee issued a statement decrying the disunion and schism among the Armenians that hitherto had aided their enemies and resolving

1. To work together for the advancement of the Armenian Case without the thought of particular religious or political gain.
2. To postpone divisive economic disagreements until better times.
3. To keep the leadership of the National Delegation informed of their activities and to work together with it in agreement.

With all the political elements working together for the first time, 187 chapters were formed nationwide, a fund drive was started, netting \$931,982 in three months, and 1,172 volunteers were enlisted. The Armenians felt that they would have raised a larger force had not the French government, secretly changing its policies, duplicitously placed

obstacles in the way and hampered efforts by denying transport. The troops were sent first to France and thence to Egypt, where they were joined by escapees from Turkey, and then to Cyprus for training. They saw action at the critical battle of Arara in Palestine on September 19, 1918, and were commended by General Allenby for their heroism.⁵²

In order to enforce cooperation between the formerly antagonistic elements, ANU promulgated regulations prohibiting separate efforts by the member organizations to collect or disburse funds. If a group wished to make a separate undertaking, it would have to publish the reason for it and obtain prior permission from the local ANU chapter. All the receipts, together with an accounting, would have to be turned over. ANU would engage in propaganda by sending existing materials on Armenian subjects to politicians and the press, by publishing new works, by presenting speeches and lectures, and by other appropriate means.⁵³

Accord meant that the elements that previously had been trading bitter accusations would now have to work together. In the weeks before the union was consummated, the intemperate speeches and articles had continued unabated. Both Reformed Hnchakians and Dashnaktsakans had attacked those who said that the volunteer movement was responsible for the massacres. The Reformed Hnchakian agent Hrach Yervant, speaking

⁵² Hovannisian, *Road*, p. 66; Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutants*, pp. 341–357; Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” pp. 69–70.

⁵³ “Announcement from the Armenian National Union,” in *Gotchnag* XVII.32 (October 11, 1917), pp. 975–976; *Asbarez* IX.456 (May 4, 1917); *Nor Giank* III.114 (May 5, 1917) [all in Armenian].

in Fresno, lamented that there were still those in the community who were spreading such an opinion, being in the position of one who, having lost his case, submits harmful and inappropriate proofs against his opponent. *Nor Giank* responded that no one was saying such a thing; one would have to be mad or a fool to contend that the massacres were simply the result of the volunteer movement. But many believed that the manner in which it was being conducted, using military units directly under the Armenian flag, and especially the inappropriate boasting of some elements, had been harmful and had only served to enrage the German and Turkish barbarians who had planned the exile.⁵⁴

The Dashnaksakan agents were even stronger in their rhetoric. Matteos K. Ferrahian took the position that Dashnaksutiun was being cruelly persecuted by low types in Armenian life “who blame the revolutionaries for the massacres, who curse at the Red Cross, always being an obstacle to working elements and aiding the Turko-German and anti-Armenian policies.”⁵⁵ At one public meeting, Avedis Tufenkjian was reported to have used such “unspeakably condemnable language and insults against the churches, various national organizations, other parties, and the AGBU” that the father of the girls who were to have sung a duet left with his daughters after hearing the speech.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁴ “Reformed Hnchakian Meeting” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* II.97 (January 6, 1917).

⁵⁵ Report of the ARF meeting in Los Angeles on February 25, 1917 *Asbarex* IX.449 (March 13, 1917); see also Ferrahian, “Shall We Adopt the Noble Struggle,” *Asbarex* IX.442 (January 26, 1917) and “The Responsible Ones,” *Asbarex* IX.448 (March 9, 1917); “Attacks on Asbarex,” *Asbarex* IX.442 (January 26, 1917); A[vedis] Tufenkjian, “Who Is Guilty?” *Asbarex* IX.443 (February 2, 1917); “ARF Meeting,” *Nor Giank* II.102 (February 17, 1917) [all in Armenian].

⁵⁶ “ARF Meeting in Parlier” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* II.109 (March 31, 1917).

Dashnaktsakans also circulated a petition in Fresno in February calling for each political party, the Apostolic and Protestant churches, and the AGBU to join together to form a fund-raising committee which would immediately send its proceeds to the Catholicos.⁵⁷ *Nor Giank* saw more than irony in the fact that such an organization already existed and included every element except Dashnaktsutium, namely the National Defense Union, and charged that the petition was a thinly-masked attempt to destroy it and rebuild it on lines more acceptable to Dashnaktsutium.⁵⁸

But once the parties had agreed to unite, chapters of ANU were formed rapidly. A chapter was organized in Fresno by the end of April, followed by Fowler, Reedley,⁵⁹ and San Francisco.⁶⁰ There was initially a spirit of cooperation, and all elements, including the Evangelicals and Dashnaktsakans, took part, holding joint public meetings.⁶¹ But there were also indications of unrest. A Dashnaktsakan correspondent from Reedley complained because by mid-June no fund drive had been held, the committee having postponed it until after the harvest.⁶² A letter appeared in *Asbarez* on June 22 charging

⁵⁷ *Asbarez* IX.446 (February 23, 1917).

⁵⁸ "Don't Sign!" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* II.102 (February 17, 1917).

⁵⁹ *Asbarez* IX.455 (April 27, 1917), IX.457 (May 11, 1917); editorials in *Asbarez* IX.458 (May 18, 1917); *Asbarez* IX.549 (May 25, 1917); *Nor Giank* III.111 (April 14, 1917), III.112 (April 21, 1917), III.114 (May 5, 1917).

⁶⁰ *Nor Giank* III.119 (June 7, 1917).

⁶¹ *Asbarez* IX.458 (May 18, 1917); IX.460 (June 1, 1917); IX.461 (June 8, 1917).

⁶² *Ibid.*, IX.462 (June 15, 1917).

that the San Francisco committee had not taken part directly in a recent fund-raising bazaar but had left it to ACASR, with the result that the money collected would be divided between Armenians, Syrians, Greeks, and Jews rather than going entirely to the Armenians. The 38 signers threatened to call a public meeting in three weeks to elect a new committee if the existing committee did not do so itself.⁶³ When the committee ignored the letter, the protesters set a meeting for July 15 to elect a new board, inviting the current one to submit its final account for the bazaar of February 24.⁶⁴ At their meeting, the dissidents elected a delegation of five to approach the committee and to report back in two weeks.⁶⁵ On July 29, a report was made in a public meeting at which the loss of 108 tickets out of 3,800 was disclosed, attributable to an error, and the former committee was reelected.

Fund raising in all the valley communities was put off during the summer months, when all hands were busy with the crops, until November. The drives were set to coincide with “Armenian and Syrian Relief Day” proclaimed by President Wilson for November 10. In Fresno, a meeting on November 5 was attended by 1,500. But despite one donation of \$5,000, only \$11,000 was collected, far below expectations. The Evangelicals refused to take part because money would be collected for the volunteers,

⁶³ Ibid., IX.463 (June 22, 1917).

⁶⁴ Ibid., IX.466 (July 13, 1917).

⁶⁵ Ibid., IX.467 (July 20, 1917).

and they conducted their own fund drive.⁶⁶ In Fowler, receipts were \$3,000, twice what had been expected.⁶⁷ In San Francisco, the committee had been reduced to impotence because of the dissension in the community and by the end of the year still had not held a public meeting.⁶⁸ Los Angeles raised \$1,500 in an ANU meeting on December 2, and drives were held in the smaller valley communities of Tulare, Selma, and Parlier. In many places, teas, bazaars, and plays were given on behalf of ANU.⁶⁹

The first blow to ANU came in early 1918 when the Evangelicals in Fresno pulled out. The Reverend Papazian, who was seated on the local committee as the AGBU representative, resigned in January and his church ceased cooperation.⁷⁰ They were followed by First Armenian Presbyterian Church.⁷¹ Papazian explained why he had resigned for the second time from a local committee in a series of articles in the newspapers. The Armenian National Union was not a union, he said, but an attempt to kill the church and AGBU and unite them under the conditions of the revolutionaries.

⁶⁶ Ibid., X.486 (November 30, 1917).

⁶⁷ *Asbarez* X.483 (November 9, 1917); X.484 (November 16, 1917). See also Sarkis Aharonian, "Fowler Armenian-American Community" [in Armenian], in *ATZ*, p.316.

⁶⁸ "San Francisco Armenian Life," *Asbarez* X.486 (November 30, 1917); "Forgotten Armenian Community," *Asbarez* X.492 (January 11, 1918) [all in Armenian].

⁶⁹ Ibid., X.487 (December 7, 1917); X.488 (December 14, 1917); X.489 (December 21, 1917); X.490 (December 28, 1917); X.491 (January 4, 1918).

⁷⁰ Ibid., X.492 (January 11, 1918)

⁷¹ Ibid., X.494 (January 25, 1918); X.496 (February 8, 1918).

Because each group, the four political parties, the Apostolic and Protestant churches, and the AGBU had an equal number of members in the central committee in Boston, the churches and AGBU would be dominated by the politicians and forced to sacrifice their historic principles in order to support the revolutionary program. The local chapters were organized in the same way as the central committee, giving dominance to the revolutionaries, who were a small minority in every community. Even at that, the only purpose of the local chapters was to funnel money on to the Central Committee and obey its directives. Of the stated objectives of the Union, everyone agreed that relief had to be sent to the Armenian remnants, and after that reconstruction was necessary, that diplomatic efforts had to be conducted, and the Armenian cause propagandized among the non-Armenians. But the plan to liberate the Armenians through the use of a volunteer force was a crazy and merciless dream, which would condemn the Turkish Armenians to extermination. The \$57,000 spent for that purpose out of net receipts of \$178,000 in 1917 had gone in vain to save the rocks and trees of Armenia, while it all should have been used for relief. Since ANU was openly political, the churches and AGBU had no business in it.⁷²

⁷² Papazian's articles were printed in *Asbarez* X.497 (February 15, 1918); X.498 (February 22, 1918); X.499 (March 1, 1918); X.500 (March 8, 1918) and in *Nor Giank* of the same period. Vigorous refutations appeared in *Asbarez* X.502 (March 22, 1918); X.505 (April 12, 1918); X.506 (April 19, 1918); X.507 (April 26, 1918); X.508 (May 3, 1918); X.509 (May 10, 1918); X.510 (May 17, 1918).

CHAPTER 7

POLITICS AND THE PRESS: POSTWAR

Armenian Attitudes Toward the American Committee

for Armenian and Syrian Relief

Papazian and those who shared his opinions directed their efforts toward ACASR, which being entirely humanitarian, relieved them of having to support the volunteer movement. ACASR was active in California and Nevada, with chapters in San Francisco, Berkeley, Fresno, and Los Angeles, and Papazian campaigned vigorously in its behalf.¹ On one trip in 1918, he traveled 5,000 miles and made 60 speeches in 47 days.

While the Dashnaksakans at first avoided undermining ACASR, there were indications of building friction. M. K. Ferrahian was committed to revolution and impatient with the constant prayers of the believers, which he believed tired the ears of God to no effect, and he looked for both external and internal enemies.² He rankled at the domination of pro-Armenian propaganda in the United States by the Evangelicals their

¹ *Asbarez* IX.427 (October 13, 1916); IX.428 (October 27, 1916); IX.429 (October 27, 1916); IX.430 (November 3, 1916), IX.464 (June 29, 1917); IX. 475 (September 14, 1917); X.481 (September 21, 1917); X.482 (November 2, 1917); X.483 (November 9, 1917); X.485 (November 23, 1917); X.486 (November 30, 1917); X.489 (December 21, 1917); X.490 (December 28, 1917); X.492 (January 11, 1918); X.493 (January 18, 1918); X.500 (March 18, 1918); XI.544 (January 10, 1919); *Gotchnag* XVIII.1 (January 16, 1918); XVIII.4 (January 26, 1918), pp. 1,658–9; XVIII.51 (December 21, 1918), p. 1,351; *Nor Giank* IV.193 (November 16, 1918).

² Ferrahian's words. M. K. Ferrahian, "Organizations" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* IX.425 (September 29, 1916)

American friends. The missionaries had presented the Armenians only as a Christian nation that was being martyred and massacred for the faith. They then went on to raise money to help cure the Armenian problem, knowing that while money could temporarily feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and support the orphan, it could not cure the causes of hunger, nakedness, and orphanhood. The missionaries had come to Turkey only to spread the “Light of the Gospel” as they saw it, and to avoid endangering their work by offending the Turks they said nothing about the Armenian question. They taught that the Christian must be docile, meek, and obedient, and if he was punished from time to time with savagery and massacre, it was because he was sinful and worthy of punishment. The *badvelis* (Armenian Protestant ministers), like their fathers the missionaries, believed in prayer rather than work and completely ignored their moral responsibility to propagandize in behalf of the Armenian Question.³

Anonymous rumors were circulated that ACASR was spending money to relieve Kurds and Turks and that the American missionaries and relief organizations had agreed that Turkish rule should continue over the Armenians. James L. Barton was forced to make a defense of ACASR in the “debate with one segment of the Armenian press.” He sent letters and telegrams to the editor of *Asbarez* and to Ferrahian stressing that the committee was only a charitable organization and that politics did not enter into its discussions. The committee had in no way changed its policy and was not spending

³ M. K. Ferrahian, “Armenian Propaganda in the United States” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* IX.456 (May 14, 1917).

money collected in the name of the Armenians on the Kurds and Turks. No missionary or member of a relief organization had ever advocated for even one minute such an outlandish idea as returning the Armenians to Turkish rule. Barton lamented that in the face of such great need he had to waste time answering such absurd and baseless charges. He added a personal note:

I wish, however, to add that my patience has reached the limit because of these mindless, harmful, and wicked complaints, which come to me from unknown sources and with which it appears that they are succeeding in harming those efforts of the Americans, whose purpose is to save the remnants of the Armenian race and to save the whole nation from Turkish rule by securing for them absolute independence. Therefore my soul is so sorely tried that I cannot bear it. I do not understand why these things are happening.⁴

In April 1919, Ferrahian charged in *Asbarez* that the missionaries in Bulgaria and southern Persia were pro-German and had “used relief monies to advance the Bulgarian cause, therefore indirectly helping Germany and Austria-Hungary.”⁵ The missionaries were the reason that the United States had not declared war on Bulgaria. He lambasted those prejudiced Armenians who “have strongly defended the present course of the missionaries, and, going even further, have pled that we should turn over to them the vital questions of our nation, whether political or educational, that we should look to them for leadership, and even that we turn over our money that we have collected for relief to

⁴ James L. Barton, “Armenian-Syrian Committee and the Debate with One Segment of the Armenian Press” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.544 (January 10, 1919).

⁵ M. K. Ferrahian, “Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.559 (April 25, 1919).

them.”⁶ The Protestants deplored the attacks on ACASR. The people of the Armenian Martyrs’ Presbyterian Church in Kingsburg expressed it typically. There were among the Armenians as among every people those who were not in harmony with the historical or modern spirit of the nation, they said. The Armenians had always been receptive to good foreign ideas, and alone among the peoples of the Ottoman Empire had welcomed the missionaries because they recognized the worth of their message. The people of Armenian Martyrs’ Church went on to bear witness that they were grateful for the services that ACASR and the missionaries had performed and were performing in the name of Christianity, and they would pass that feeling on to the next generation. “We want to give them our heartfelt thanks,” they said. “Although we are poor, we have always done as much as we could to help Armenian-Syrian Relief.”⁷

Demise of The Armenian National Union: National Issues

Thus there was hardly any middle ground of common purpose between the Protestants and the Dashnaktsakans. Throughout 1918 and into 1919, tensions increased between all the other members of ANU as well. Following the emergence of an independent Armenian Republic in a portion of former Russian Armenia in late May 1918, the interests of the various Armenian parties began to diverge more sharply. Both the Social Democrat Hinchakian Party and Dashnaktsutiun had serious disagreements with ANU

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Gotchnag* XIX.17 (April 26, 1919), pp. 536–537.

that eventually led them to leave the Union in 1919. Ramkavar and Dashnaktsakan sources charge the Hnchakian central committee with having issued a directive to local chapters to devote more energy to partisan interests than to ANU. The Hnchakian Party held fund drives for its own treasury in violation of ANU rules in the spring of 1918. The ANU Central Committee demanded that the money be turned over but the Hnchakians refused.⁸

Troubles with Dashnaktsutium proceeded along similar lines. Before it joined ANU, Dashnaktsutium had conducted fund drives for the volunteers and refugees in the Caucasus. The ANU Central Committee maintained that the agreement required that this money be turned over to it, which Dashnaktsutium refused.⁹ Even more serious problems emerged after the establishment of the Armenian Republic with its government dominated by Dashnaktsutium. This success of Dashnaktsakan policy gave the Dashnaktsakans of America little incentive to consider ANU or to look anywhere else but Erevan. In July, the twenty-fifth American Convention of Dashnaktsutium sent a telegram of congratulations to the new government, and went on to urge that in the coming peace negotiations the representatives of the Republic not forget to settle the matter of Turkish

⁸ Manuk G. Chizmechian [Manug K. Jizmejian], *Patmutiun Amerikahay Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians, 1890–1925* [History of the American-Armenian Political Parties, 1890–1925] (Fresno, Nor Or Press, 1930), p. 362; M[anuk] Hambarzumian, “The American-Armenian Community: The Last Decade” [in Armenian], in *Hairenik Amsakir* I.8 (June 1923), p. 71.

⁹ Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, p. 363.

Armenia also.¹⁰ Since the representatives of Turkish Armenia were already in Paris as the National Delegation headed by Boghos Nubar, and since ANU of America was a branch of the National Delegation and all parties had consented to support its policies, the Dashnaksakan telegram was a fundamental breach of the agreement.

During the summer and fall of 1918, the tiny Armenian Republic had lain surrounded by Turkish divisions. The country was teeming with refugees from Turkish Armenia along with the Caucasian Armenian population, all of whom lacked food, shelter, and medical supplies. Disease and starvation were rampant, and the people were dying at an alarming rate. The Armenians, hard pressed by the Turks, made a heroic last stand at Sardarabad and, to everyone's surprise, defeated the enemy and began to advance. But this was abruptly ended when on June 4 the government concluded an armistice with Turkey at Batum. The treaty was bitterly denounced by many Armenians, and the commander of the volunteer army, General Antranig [Andranik], refused to lay down his arms and continued operations in the mountains of eastern Armenia.¹¹ The representatives of the new government went to Constantinople to treat with the Ottoman government.¹²

¹⁰ "ARF 25th American Convention" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* X.520 (July 26, 1918); Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, p. 363.

¹¹ Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 193–201.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 229–238.

In the ANU Central Committee in Boston, the Treaty of Batum and the negotiations in Constantinople were hotly debated. The non-Dashnaktsakans condemned the Dashnaktsakan actions. Both sides presented draft resolutions. The Dashnaktsakan draft found the terms of the treaty unsatisfactory and unacceptable, but dictated out of necessity to save the Armenian race from extinction in light of the unequal war that the Caucasian Armenians and the Turkish Armenian refugees had been waging against the Turks for the previous six or seven months. Communications with the outside were lacking; there was famine and shortage of matériel; and timely aid from the Allies had not arrived. Their draft expressed “faith and respect to our national-political bodies and fighting forces for their efforts expended to this time in the cause of independence, believing that with the victory of the Allies the historic desires of the Armenian people will be realized.”¹³

The non-Dashnaktsakan majority rejected the Dashnaktsakan draft and adopted a resolution that praised the Armenians in the western Caucasus for their heroic fight. Not having received the expected aid from the Allies, betrayed by internal and external enemies, enduring famine and lack of military supplies, and under the necessity of saving the last remnants of the Armenians from annihilation, they had been compelled to make a forced and unwilling peace with the Turks. A delegation from the Armenian National Council in Tiflis had gone to Constantinople and signed a treaty that established an

¹³ “Official ARF Announcement to the Armenian Community” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.532 (October 18, 1918).

Araratian Republic within the limits of the district of Erevan.¹⁴ But in reality, after burying the Armenian cause, which had been sanctified by the blood of millions of Armenian victims, this treaty strangled and helped to exterminate the Armenians once again within the boundaries of a microscopic republic that was independent in name only, remaining firmly under the Turkish yoke. On the other hand, the majority draft continued, the Armenians of the eastern part of the Caucasus were continuing to fight, aided by their favorable position.¹⁵ General Antranig and his troops were outraged at the forced peace, and had expressed their determination to press on to victory in the expectation of aid from the Allies. ANU took note that the Armenian Delegation in Paris had already protested to French Premier Georges Clemenceau that the treaty was in fact an extension of the infamous Treaty of Brest-Litovsk¹⁶ and thus should be regarded as null and void. ANU resolved in the name of the Armenian community of America to unite its voice with the protest of the National Delegation in favor of the continuation of the war and in rejection of the forced treaty of Constantinople [sic], whose signers did

¹⁴ The Armenian National Council was an outgrowth of the Russian Armenian National Congress, which met in Tiflis in October, 1917. It was this body that became the government of the Armenian Republic. Although an attempt was made at interparty representation, it was dominated by Dashnaktsutun. The treaty was signed in Batum, not Constantinople. Hovannisian, *Road*, pp. 86–93, 194.

¹⁵ They were in Zangezur and Karabagh.

¹⁶ The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was concluded between the Central Powers on defeated Russia on March 3, 1918. Russia ceded huge territories in the west, as well as Kars, Ardahan, and Batum in the Caucasus. It was annulled by the armistice of November 11, 1918.

not represent the voice and will of the Armenian nation at all, and who had no right to speak for the Armenian Case and to make political arrangements.¹⁷

Such a resolution, placing the National Delegation of Boghos Nubar higher than the representatives of the government, could never be acceptable to Dashnaktsutiun. They protested that the resolution was illegal and outside the competence of ANU. The Dashnaktsakan papers refused to publish the ANU resolution until their own Central Committee had composed a response. They vehemently maintained that the *only* body which had the right to speak and make arrangements on the Armenian Case and to embody the will of the Armenian Nation was the National Council, which represented the two million Armenians of the Caucasus and the 300,000 Turkish-Armenians under their brotherly protection.¹⁸ In other words, the Caucasian Armenians were to dispose of Turkish Armenia, and the National Delegation was relegated to limbo.

The Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church also became involved in the fight over control of ANU.¹⁹ Bishop Mushegh Seropian, who had arrived in the United States from Adana in 1910, was elected Primate on February 26, 1911. He was a Hunchakian and a strong opponent of Dashnaktsutiun.²⁰ In an effort to remove him from office, it was

¹⁷ Ibid. The ANU declaration was quoted in the *Asbarez* article.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Mirak, "Armenians in the United States," pp. 229–244; *Taretsuys* 1912, pp. 237–238.

²⁰ Seropian was one of the earliest members of the Hunchagian Revolutionary Party. See his memoir, *Mer Paikare Hai Azatagrutian Ughiov* [Our Struggle in the Path of Armenian Liberation] (Cairo, 1948), referenced in Nalbandian, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 208, n. 15.

charged that his election had been illegal. He was removed by the Catholicos of All Armenians on the grounds that as Bishop of Adana, he was under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos of Cilicia and so he had no standing to assume any position outside his diocese.²¹ Following the arrival of an Emissary Plenipotentiary from the Holy See in 1913, a new election was held. On September 21, Arsen Dzairakuin Vartabed Vehouni, the pastor of Holy Redeemer Church in Worcester, was elected Primate.²² But during his tenure he was accused of being a Dashnaktsakan partisan and of having prevented union between Dashnaktsutiun and the National Defense Union, of which he was the president by virtue of his office. Charges were brought against him by the chairman of NDU, Mihran Sivasly, forcing him to resign on February 18, 1917.²³ It was variously reported that he had resigned, that he had been removed, and that in a meeting he chaired in May his resignation was “rejected.”²⁴ He was succeeded by a locum tenens, Bishop Papken Guleserian. A little more than a year later, Vehouni convened an assembly in Providence, Rhode Island, supposedly to discuss his accounts. He charged that he had been treacherously opposed and betrayed by Sivasly, Bishop Papken, and Shahe Vartabed Kasparian, who had withheld communications, set snares, and filled the head of the

²¹ Mirak, *Torn*, pp.188–189 (hostile account); *Gotchnag* XI.30 (July 29, 1911). According to Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 200–216, the reason was the rivalry between the sees of Echmiadzin and Cilicia, aggravated by hostility from the Dashnaktsakan press.

²² *Gotchnag* XIII.40 (October 4, 1913), p. 970.

²³ *Nor Giank* II.104 (March 3, 1917); Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, p. 364; *Asbarex* IX.448 (March 9, 1917).

²⁴ *Asbarex* IX.463 (June 22, 1917).

Catholicos with lies. One delegate, unable to get a satisfactory answer as to whether the assembly was legally constituted, walked out. The editor of *Hairenik*, Sahag Chitjian, remained in the chamber although all non-delegates had been asked to leave until a decision had been reached whether to exclude them or not. The assembly voted without debate to move the Prelacy from Worcester to Providence. They then elected new delegates to the ANU Central Committee and instructed them to insist that it be changed to “a body elected by the people in a secret and equal ballot in order to discuss the weighty questions of the nation.” This was the line that Dashnaksutiun was now advocating in the hopes of breaking the institutional majority in ANU.²⁵ The Assembly elected a central committee, constituting itself into an anti-diocese in opposition to the legal diocese in Worcester. But ANU rejected the three representatives that it sent.²⁶ The energies of ANU were dissipated in a long drawn-out argument over the issue of the Providence delegates and Dashnaksutiun’s demand that members of the central committee be elected at large. Dashnaksutiun then boycotted the ANU meetings.²⁷

The final blow to ANU came over the issue of the election of delegates to the Armenian National Congress to be held in Paris in February, 1919. This had been called for in October by Boghos Nubar for the purpose of reorganizing the National Delegation

²⁵ H. Kh. Bedikian, “Infamy in Providence: About Arsen Vartabed’s Conspiratorial Assembly,” *Nor Giank* IV.193 (November 16, 1918). For Dashnaksakan view, see “The Question of the Prelacy,” *Asbarez* XI.536 (November 15, 1918) [all in Armenian].

²⁶ *Ibid.*; see also Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, p. 365

²⁷ Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutiants*, p. 365

and defining the Armenian plans for the future that would be pressed in the Paris Peace Conference. Delegates were sent from all the Turkish Armenian population centers around the world. These were mostly appointed by existing national bodies because of the generally chaotic conditions that in most places precluded any thought of elections.²⁸

ANU was directed by Nubar to send immediately two alternate delegates to Paris.

Because the delegates had to be sent at once, the central committee decided to appoint them itself. A list of candidates was drawn up, debated, and voted on in the November 15 meeting. Vahan Kurkjian, an AGBU representative, and Manuk Hambardzumian, Dashnakstakan, were agreed upon. A few days later the Hnchakian representative, Zakigian, objected and demanded a new election because no Hnchakian had been chosen. When this was denied, the Hnchakian members withdrew saying that they would not recognize the election unless their candidate, Sabah-Gulian, was elected.²⁹

The central committee then reversed itself and ordered an all-national election to be held on January 25, 1919, for the four positions that had been allotted to America. The election was then postponed for one week, after which the procedures were published in the Armenian press. All Armenians of both sexes over the age of twenty-one would be eligible to vote. All voters would be required to register by January 29. A registration list would be posted in each locality. The registration and elections would be conducted by

²⁸ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971–1996), vol. 1, pp. 454–459.

²⁹ “Official Announcements from ANU,” *Asbarez* XI.549 (February 14, 1919); Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, p. 352; Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” p. 71 [all in Armenian].

local ANU chapters or ad hoc electoral committees. The election would be held from 1 P.M. Saturday, February 1, until 4 P.M. Sunday, February 2. Each elector would be given a ballot upon presentation of his registration card and would be enabled to vote for four names. The ballots would be counted by a quorum of the local electoral committees immediately upon closure of the polls and the results would be sent by registered mail to ANU headquarters.³⁰

The Dashnaktsakans had insisted on a popular election for the same reasons that they had pressed for the direct election of the ANU central committee. Some conservative elements, however, were opposed to the idea. *Gotchnag* advocated appointing the delegates, pointing out that the National Congress would convene on February 1, leaving the American-Armenian delegates little time to obtain passports and make the crossing by steamship. The central committee, where all parties were represented, should select them from lists submitted by the parties of persons already in Europe. Furthermore, no other community was conducting an election, and having one here would have the danger of destroying the fragile union.³¹

Six slates of candidates were submitted. According to the regulations, each party would submit two official candidates but the electors would be free to vote for whomever they wished, whether on the official lists or not. The following were proclaimed:

³⁰ *Gotchnag* XIX.4 (January 25, 1919), pp. 116–7; *Asbarez* XI.546 (January 24, 1919)

³¹ “The Matter of the Four Representatives”(editorial), in *Gotchnag* XIX.1 (January 4, 1919), p. 3; “The Day’s Matter” (editorial), XIX.3 (January 18, 1919), pp.67–68 [all in Armenian].

Armenian Apostolic Church

Hovhannes Khan Massehian

Harutiun Mosdichian

Armenian Evangelical Church

Dr. Sempad M. Kaprielian

Professor Harutiun Dadurian

Dashnaktsutiun

Manuk Hambardzumian

Zatik Matikian

Reformed Hnchakian Party

Dr. Hovhannes Dzovigian

Hrach Yervant

Ramkavar Party

Professor Michael Minasian

Mihran Damadian

AGBU

Ervand Bey Aghaton

Hagop Neshigian³²

³² *Asbarez* XI.547 (January 31, 1919); *Gotchnag* XIX.5 (February 1, 1919), pp. 144–145.

The Hinchakian Party had boycotted ANU and did not participate in the election. To prevent the election from being delivered to Dashnaktsutun, the two churches, the AGBU, and the Ramkavar Party joined forces to form the “United Electoral Committee” or “Bloc.” But agreement could not be made with the Reformed Hinchakians and they conducted a separate campaign. Thus the election became a three-sided affair. The Bloc noted that time, money, and distance precluded sending delegates from America and that an electoral campaign would turn into a bitter personal fight that would discredit the Armenians in the eyes of the foreigners. The Armenian demands for an independent and united Armenia extending from the Caucasus to Cilicia did not have to be presented by delegates traveling all the way from America. Furthermore, the money saved by selecting persons already in Europe could support five hundred orphans for a whole year. The Bloc proposed Hovhannes Khan Masehian (Apostolic Church candidate), the former Persian Ambassador to Berlin who had been removed on the demand of the Turks because of his pro-Armenian activities; Professor G. Tumaian (Evangelical candidate), formerly of Marsovan College, condemned to death by Sultan Abdul Hamid II but released on British intervention; Ervand Aghaton, one of the founders of AGBU; and Mihran Damadian, a highly respected Ramkavar. The Bloc delegates would demand the following:

[GENERAL]

1. United Independent Armenia in her historical boundaries.

ARMENIANS OF TURKEY

2. The six Armenian provinces, Cilicia, and Trebizond all to belong to Armenia.

3. Punishment of the perpetrators of the Armenian exile and massacres, great and small.
4. Reparations for all property destroyed or looted by the Turkish government and population.
5. Liberation of all captive Armenian women and children from Turkish harems and provision for their maintenance.
6. Reversion of the property of intestate deceased Armenians to the Armenian state.
7. Protection of Armenian rights in Jerusalem and the holy places.
8. Firm rejection of any Turkish rule or influence over Armenia.

CAUCASIAN ARMENIANS

9. Recognition of the independence of all Russian Armenia as an inseparable part of United Armenia.
10. The treaty made under duress with Turkey and Germany and all arrangements made thereunder to be void.
11. End of all disorder in the Caucasus and the establishment of a suitable local government conforming to democratic principles and national interest.
12. Recognition of the religious rights of the Catholicos of All Armenians and the freedom of religion.

EXECUTIVE BODY

13. An Executive Committee to be formed of the following:

Boghos Nubar

Gabriel Noradounghian

Hovhannes Khan Masehian

Four persons to be elected, including two Caucasian-Armenians and two Turkish-Armenians.

14. Recognition of the Executive Committee as the National Provisional Government.

15. An end to all partisan quarrels so that reconstruction could commence.³³

Dashnaktsutiun offered as its four candidates Hambardzumian, Matikian, Dr. Nishan Tashjian, and Arsen Mikaelian, maintaining that the delegates had to be residents of America and that there was no reason why they could not cross the ocean.³⁴ The Dashnaktsakan platform gave the priority to the “Araratian Republic:”

1. Recognition of the Araratian Republic as the legitimate Armenian government in fact and by right and the nucleus of United Independent Armenia.

³³ “Armenian-American Electors of Both Sexes” [announcement from the United Electoral Committee in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XIX.5 (February 1, 1919), pp. 135–137.

³⁴ “Our Candidates for the Congress in Paris,” *Asbarez* XI.547 (January 31, 1919).

2. Independence without external control. Armenia to have its own governmental organization, with its national legislature and army guaranteed by the League of Nations.
3. A worker-democratic form of government so that class conflict will not appear and disrupt natural development.
4. Reparations from the Central Powers and the Allied Powers for physical and material losses.
5. Immediate liberation of Armenian women and orphans from Turkish harems and orphanages and their deliverance to the care of national institutions.
6. Punishment of the criminals responsible for the Armenian terrors, in the name of the principles of human justice.³⁵

The electoral campaign that followed was very bitter. The Dashnaktsakans charged that the Bloc was an illegitimate conspiracy directed against their party. *Hairenik* maintained that the Protestants had no right to join in the election, because for seventy years they had been split off from the nation. The Apostolic Church had no right to participate because the matter was political. The AGBU had no right to participate because it was a charitable organization.³⁶ In other words, only the politicians had any right to a voice in the future of Armenia.

³⁵ “Official Appeal to the Armenian-American Community” [announcement from the ARF Central Committee in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.547 (January 31, 1919).

³⁶ As quoted in *Gotchnag* XIX.8 (February 22, 1918), pp. 229–230.

Public meetings abounded, and pamphlets and circulars were freely circulated by all sides, even being dropped from airplanes onto polling sites.³⁷ According to the Dashnaktsakan press, the bishops, ministers, and Ramkavars had joined together on platforms to condemn the Dashnaktsakans as conspirators, traitors to the nation, wreckers of the church, dishonorers of the family, extremists, Bolsheviks, and murderers, accusations that were freely returned in kind if not particulars.³⁸ The United Electoral Committee had been hastily put together to oppose Dashnaktsutiu, and suffered because in the negotiations between the liberal-conservative elements to select four candidates, first one name and then another was put forth, leaving the people confused in the short election campaign. The Protestants, who had virtually left ANU, confounded everyone by joining the Bloc. But the absence of the Reformed Hnchakians, who felt slighted because they had not been given a candidate, cost the Bloc dearly in the election, since the anti-Dashnaktsakan vote was split. The Bloc aimed all its fire at Dashnaktsutiu, but the Reformed Hnchakian Party backed its own candidates against the field and campaigned only against the United Electoral Committee.

As *Gotchnag* had predicted, the electoral campaign was the final blow to what was left of Armenian unity. Relations between Dashnaktsutiu and the non-Dashnaktsakans both to the left and right worsened, and the Armenian community was split into two

³⁷ "The Election Campaign" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* V.295 (February 8, 1919).

³⁸ M. Ozanian, "The Struggle That Was Waged" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.548 (February 7, 1919).

increasingly hostile camps that seemed to hate each other more than they hated their external enemies. The search for scapegoats for the calamities that were still crashing down about the ears of the Armenians was beginning in earnest.

There was great confusion over the results of the election. Conflicting and incomplete reports were published in the newspapers. The Fresno results showed the Dashnaktsakan candidates trailing badly, with 1,579 votes as opposed to 4,402 for the Bloc candidates, with 653 to others, out of a total vote of 6,634. Nevertheless, Dashnaktsutium claimed to have swept to victory with such totals as 2,289 to 200 in Detroit and 80 percent of the vote in Los Angeles.³⁹ Hambardzumian, Matigian, and Mikaelian departed for Paris with certificates from ANU, and Tashjian got ready to go.⁴⁰ But the Bloc charged the Dashnaktsakans with fraud, and the ANU Electoral Committee discovered irregularities in a number of places. The following corrected figures were published, omitting allegedly illegal votes:⁴¹

Hambardzumian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	10,212
Matigian	<i>Dashmaktsakan</i>	9,705
Masehian	<i>Apostolic-Bloc</i>	8,715
Damadian	<i>Ramkavar-Bloc</i>	8,629

³⁹ Ibid., XI.548 (February 7, 1919).

⁴⁰ Ibid., XI.551 (February 28, 1919).

⁴¹ *Gotchnag* XIX.10 (March 8, 1919).

Aghaton	<i>AGBU-Bloc</i>	8,518
Mikaelian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	8,332
Tashjian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	7,905
Tumaian	<i>Evangelical-Bloc</i>	6,565

In light of the complaints, an investigating commission consisting of a Ramkavar, a Reformed Hnchakian, and a Dashnaktsakan was appointed. The Ramkavars charged that the fraud was rampant. But it was possible to investigate only one locality, Braddock, Pennsylvania, in depth. The majority found a Dashnaktsakan vote of 450 out of 218 votes cast, but the Dashnaktsakan member refused to concur and walked out of the meetings.⁴² The entire vote from Los Angeles was also thrown out on allegations of intimidation and underage voting.⁴³ The final totals as certified by the Examining Commission did not change the order of finish:

Hambardzumian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	11,436
Matigian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	10,842
Masehian	<i>Apostolic-Bloc</i>	9,662
Damadian	<i>Ramkavar-Bloc</i>	9,414
Aghaton	<i>AGBU-Bloc</i>	9,380
Mikaelian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	9,290

⁴² Chizmechian, *Kaghakakan Kusaktsutians*, pp. 367–369.

⁴³ *Asbarex* XI.557 (April 11, 1919).

Tashjian	<i>Dashnaktsakan</i>	8,800
Toumaian	<i>Evangelical-Bloc</i>	7,010

Thus two Dashnaktsakan and two Bloc candidates were elected.⁴⁴ ANU sent a telegram to Paris revoking the credentials that had already been granted to Mikaelian, and refused to certify Tashjian. The Dashnaktsakans were incensed. They claimed that their four candidates had been fairly elected and that the Bloc had conspired to steal the election.⁴⁵ The Dashnaktsakan Central Committee immediately withdrew from the Armenian National Union and ordered all Dashnaktsakan representatives to local committees to break off relations.⁴⁶ The recriminations began. Dashnaktsakan spokesmen blamed the Bloc for forcing them out of ANU after a year of peaceful cooperation. First, there had been the matter of the selection of the primate, in which the “pharisaical elements” had tried to delude the people into believing that Dashnaktsutiun was trying to use the church for political purposes. Then all the American-Armenian papers had set upon each other in a bitter debate over the Araratian Republic. Instead of showing respect for the 2,000,000 Caucasian-Armenians who had raised the banner of independence over Masis, the lying agents of the Bloc had called the sacrificing heroes “traitors,” Aharonian “Enver’s brother,” Khatisian “a Turkified Armenian,” and

⁴⁴ *Gotchnag* XIX.15 (April 12, 1919), p. 469; *Asbarez* XI.558 (April 18, 1919).

⁴⁵ “Dashnakstakan Candidates Elected” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.549 (February 14, 1919).

⁴⁶ *Asbarez* XI.557 (March 28, 1919); Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” pp. 73–74.

Dashnaktsutiun “a nest of traitors.” They had blamed the Caucasian Armenians for the fall of Baku, and then, after trying every trick to prevent the election, had robbed the victorious Dashnaktsakan candidates of their due. The gentlemen of the Bloc were invited to rub their beards in their offices in the Old South Building in Boston, for they wouldn’t last long.⁴⁷ The whole total in Fresno was based on trickery, the Bloc had stolen sixteen votes in Bakersfield, and the vote in Los Angeles was as clean as the driven snow.⁴⁸

Party Positions

As far as the Dashnaktsakans were concerned, the National Union had been dead from the day it was born. It had not been an expression of the popular will, but only a temporary truce between some parties and a few badvelis dictated by the circumstances. So in any one city, a few individuals, be they Ramkavars, AGBU, or church people, controlled the majority of votes in the councils, even though they all represented the same political tendency. The “neutrals” had protested in vain that they were not

⁴⁷ “Why We Left the Union: Inescapable Explanations” [editorial in Armenian], *Asbarez* XI.556 (April 4, 1919). The Old South Building was the headquarters of ANU.

⁴⁸ Many articles in *Asbarez* expressed this viewpoint: “To the Attention of the Four-Sided Union” (editorial), M. K. Ferrahian, “Open Letter to ANU Plenipotentiary for California, Mr. K. Giragosian,” Alex Pilibosian, “Los Angeles Voters,” all in *Asbarez* XI.557 (April 11, 1919); M. Balian, “About the Election in Fresno,” *Asbarez* XI.559 (April 25, 1919); Hambardzumian, “American-Armenian Community,” pp. 73–74 [all in Armenian].

represented, so the Union died. The solution that the Dashnaktsakans advanced was popular election without regard to party.⁴⁹

The Hnchakians were of the same mind. At a public meeting in Fresno on December 7, 1919, Stepan Sabah-Gulian blamed the National Union for strangling the volunteer movement. This was done, he maintained, by the collusion of the badvelis and the Ramkavars with their preponderance of representatives.⁵⁰

The Ramkavars on their part accused the Dashnaktsakans of following Bolshevik principles. The Dashnaktsakan program as published in *Asbarez* called for “all power to the workers.” This was the equivalent of class war and was anti-national. If Dashnaktsutiu were to come to power in Armenia, it would set off a fratricidal struggle in the nation. They, like Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, would subordinate national welfare to class welfare. The workers would end up worse off, just as they had in Russia. Arts and trade would be destroyed, intellectuals would be suppressed or exiled, land would cease to be cultivated, and the people would live in anarchy. Eventually, the Dashnaktsakans would prefer the Turkish working class over the Armenian propertied class. Why didn't Dashnaktsutiu show its true colors instead of hiding them? But they, the Ramkavars, rejected internationalism and the Russian example. The Armenians were one people.

⁴⁹ Smpad [pseudonym], “The Question of the National Union” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.599 (December 12, 1919).

⁵⁰ “Social Democratic Hnchakian Meeting in Fresno” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.603 (December 23, 1919).

There was no question of the advantage of any one class over another. The workers and the propertied, the educated and ignorant, were all equally valuable. The welfare of the whole nation was spiritual as well as material. The Armenian nation had always found its salvation in its nationalism, not in the destructive materialism of the class war.⁵¹

The Missions From Armenia

In the fall of 1919 two delegations arrived in America from the Republic of Armenia to lobby the American government and to rally the Armenian-American community to its side.⁵² The first of these was a civil mission consisting of political and economic officials, which arrived to a tumultuous welcome in New York on October 9, 1919. All the Armenian political parties pledged fidelity to the tricolor flag of the Republic, and in the euphoria it seemed that unity had finally come to the Armenians.⁵³

Six weeks later a military mission arrived, consisting of General Hakob Bagratuni from the Republic and General Antranig to represent the interest of the Western Armenians.⁵⁴ Earlier, Antranig, after nearly thirty years in the field, had quit in disgust at the policies of the Dashnaksakan government of Armenia and the meddling of the British in the

⁵¹ Vahan Mesrob [pseudonym of Kevork Sarafian], "What Program Will Dashnaksutium Follow in the Armenian National Council?" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank* V.220 (August 6, 1919).

⁵² Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 2, p. 383.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

Caucasus.⁵⁵ Having now reconciled himself somewhat to the new realities, he had been added to the Armenian military mission on the insistence of Boghos Nubar Pasha.⁵⁶ The Armenian National Union stressed in its official announcement that the envoys had come solely to concern themselves with Armenian national life. The local chapters were instructed to form mixed committees to welcome them into their communities and to receive them as countrymen and not as the representatives of any political parties. Any such entanglements would signify the failure of the mission.⁵⁷

The arrival of the two military heroes stirred up the community with new enthusiasm.⁵⁸ It was announced that Antranig and his companion, Dr. Haig Bonapartian, would visit California.⁵⁹ But the unity was short-lived.

On December 16, 1919, Antranig issued an appeal to the entire community for a “salvation fund drive.” This was undertaken in his capacity as a representative of the National Delegation in Paris, and the money was to be distributed to various organizations primarily for relief of the Armenian needy.⁶⁰ Included in this figure was 10

⁵⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 190–191.

⁵⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 385–386.

⁵⁷ “Official Announcement from the Armenian National Union” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.590 (November 7, 1919).

⁵⁸ “Long Live the Armenian Military Mission” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.598 (December 5, 1919).

⁵⁹ *Asbarez* XII.603 (December 23, 1919). Bonapartian was Antranig’s bodyguard and comrade-in-arms. He was a medical doctor. Antranig Chalabian, *General Andranik and the Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (USA, 1988), p. 526.

⁶⁰ Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol 2, pp. 390–391.

percent of the receipts to the AGBU. The interest from the collections was earmarked for the Armenian Patriarchate and the people of Cilicia, to be controlled by the National Delegation. This was not to the liking of the Central Committee of Dashnaksutiun because the Armenian government had not been given control of the money. On December 23 the committee wrote to Antranig telling him that they had the matter under advisement and asking him not to take any action until they had issued their opinion, which they said would be forthcoming on December 30. In the meantime they were informed through semi-official contacts that the general did not intend to enter into discussions with Dashnaksutiun about his plan, that the interest would not go to the Republic of Armenia but to a committee made up of representatives from the office of Allied Commissioner in Armenia, Colonel William N. Haskel, the Western Armenians, and himself from the Armenian government, and that this was final and not negotiable. On December 31 the Central Committee of Dashnaksutiun wrote its regrets to Antranig, agreeing that the refugees should be aided, but stating that a fund drive was an internal matter for the community to organize on its own. An organizing committee should be selected by popular election, which would decide how to apportion the money. Furthermore, without local control the people would not give any money and nothing would be accomplished. The Central Committee forbade the Dashnaksakan ranks to cooperate and expressed amazement and hurt that someone with such a pro-unity record as Antranig would take an "irresponsible anti-government and anti-army step." The

Dashnaktsakans would conduct their own fund drive for the Armenian army, in which they expected the cooperation of the Hinchakians.⁶¹

The Dashnaktsakans then proceeded to blame Antranig for the resumption of the turbulence and personal and partisan attacks that had temporarily been put into abeyance with the arrival of the diplomatic and military missions. According to *Asbarez*, the true author of these contrary and oblique activities was the National Delegation, abetted by the former hero General Antranig. Because of his dissatisfaction with the government of the Republic of Armenia, he had gone off on his own supposedly as a means for the “pashas” to help the refugees.⁶²

In April, Antranig and Bonapartian arrived in California. Public meetings were held and money was collected in Los Angeles and Fresno and the neighboring towns.⁶³ They were acclaimed in the non-Dashnaktsakan press but attacked in *Asbarez*. M. K. Ferrahian wrote an “open letter” calling the thirty-year veteran to task for consorting with badvelis. Why was he thousands of miles away from the hero-people on a grubby mammon-serving tour? Ferrahian had no confidence in the circles into which Antranig had fallen. Had Antranig changed or had the badvelis changed? Did he still believe in

⁶¹ “In Order to Inform the American-Armenian People: From ARF Central Committee” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.615 (February 3, 1920).

⁶² “Contradictory Activities in American-Armenian Life” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.610 (January 16, 1920). “Pashas” is used derogatorily to refer to Boghos Nubar Pasha and the National Delegation.

⁶³ *Asbarez* XII.633 (April 6, 1920); XII.634 (April 9, 1920).

arms? Did he think the role he was playing in America was more important than the role he had played before? It was the intention of the local Dashnaktsakans to hold celebrations on May 28, the second anniversary of the Republic, when they would raise money for the Armenian army. Would he turn his back on his old comrades and give preference to the “badveliagan” Salvation Army?⁶⁴ Did he not know that “salvation” was a religious word, and that Armenia needed political liberation and independence instead?⁶⁵

Asbarez clearly stated the Dashnaktsakan position in a series of editorials.⁶⁶ Dashnaktsutium was a revolutionary organization which had been striving for Armenian liberation and separation. Now that Armenia was independent, everything had to be seen from the perspective of the state, and nothing had any value unless it strengthened the position of the Republic and its army. Because of the sympathy which it commanded in the country, Dashnaktsutium had magnanimously and bravely taken charge of the government, allowing all political currents to take part, even in greater roles than dictated by their strength. This was only for the good of the state. Dashnaktsutium had stopped conducting its policy simply as a political party and was now conducting it as state policy. It would continue to do so until some other organizations had gained greater power and

⁶⁴ *-agan* or *-akan* is an Armenian suffix roughly corresponding to English *-ish*, hence, “belonging to the badvelis, preacherish.”

⁶⁵ M. K. Ferrahian, “Open Letter to General Antranig” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.636 (April 16, 1920).

⁶⁶ “The ‘Salvation’ and Army Fund Drives and the Dashnaktsakan Position” in three parts [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.638 (April 23, 1920); XII.639 (April 27, 1920); XII.640 (April 30, 1920).

position or until it had no more strength. The person who stood at the head of the “Salvation Fund Drive” [Antranig] had abandoned the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian army. Before leaving for America with the military delegation he had met in Paris with Avetis Aharonian, the chief of the Delegation of the Republic, on the understanding that he would subject himself to the military mission and collectively work on behalf of the army of the Republic. But instead he had planned in Paris with Boghos Nubar to collect money without permission, ignoring Dashnaksutiun and the needs of the Armenian army. The name “salvation” and the connection with Nubar raised serious doubts in the central committee. “Salvation” was a misleading word because nothing that ignored the army could call itself “salvation.” Since the campaign was started in America without bothering to answer to the central committee of the Dashnaksutiun, that raised the suspicion that the campaign had a political rather than a material purpose. Dashnaksutiun had not participated because the leaders of the campaign had allocated 10 percent to the AGBU and 40 percent to the Republic. And without explaining why 10 percent was being given to the AGBU, they went further and said that the 40 percent for the Republic would not be given to the government or to its foreign representatives, but through separate bodies—that is, through the Near East Relief—to be used for their own purposes. Such a fund drive was based on distrust of the Republic. The Near East Relief was trying to sell out the Republic, and the fund drive had brought out the “crowing roosters” who had been trying to bring down the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian

army for the last two years.⁶⁷ So the people rejected the Salvation Fund Drive, because they were impatiently waiting for the Army Campaign of Dashnaksutiun.

As for the Army Campaign, talks were held with the Social Democratic Hnchakians and the Reformed Hnchakians. They both wanted 30 percent of the receipts to go to Cilicia. But Dashnaksutiun wanted most of the money to go to the army, because only the army could solve all the problems, including the situation of Cilicia. Dashnaksutiun proposed to send only \$50,000 to \$75,000 to Cilicia. The other parties also wanted the campaign to be in the name of self defense, rather than in the name of the Armenian army. Dashnaksutiun took the position that these proposals ignored the Armenian government and the Armenian army, so the parties could not agree.

So Dashnaksutiun opened its own fund drive in competition with the Salvation Fund Drive of General Antranig. In the end each side collected about half a million dollars, but the brief period of unity had ended.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ That is, the badvelis and the Ramkavars.

⁶⁸ Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 2, p. 391.

CHAPTER 8

ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY AFTER 1920

1920: Boom Times

By 1920 Armenians were firmly established in and around Fresno. But the decade, begun in the bright hope of prosperity in the vineyards, was to see the end of the wartime boom and the long slide into the Great Depression.

The boom had brought new immigrants to the valley, and this was reflected in the growth reported from Yetem. The population increased from 400 to 600 during 1920, many having come during the summer. Among them were sojourners from the east and survivors from Armenia, including young families and girls who had come from abroad to be married in the near future. The intention of most of the new arrivals, it was said, was to buy vineyards and to establish themselves in the community. Yetem was a desirable destination, for it had two Armenian churches, Apostolic and Protestant, a public school, and an Armenian Saturday school. There was the hope that in the near future it would be possible to show moving pictures in the meeting hall of the Ramkavar organization. But the land near Yetem was occupied, so the newcomers were compelled to disperse around the vicinity.¹

¹ Mihran Terzian, "Yettem" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.315 (October 1, 1920).

The high price of raisins, so profitable to the farmer, had already brought the unwelcome attention of the federal government. On September 30, 1919, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer had requested the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the charges of exorbitant prices in the raisin industry. The independent packing firms, shut out from the bonanza by the California Associated Raisin Company, retained their own lawyers and presented briefs at the hearings in Washington in October. They argued that CARC was not merely a growers' cooperative, but an illegal monopoly that had set unreasonably high prices in 1919. If it were not dissolved, it would do so again.²

The Government Files Suit

Raisins were never again to be so profitable. In 1920 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) ruled that CARC's price for the 1919 crop was excessive. Furthermore, the cooperative's practice of writing contracts specifying a firm-at-opening price was in restraint of trade. Its preferential contract with the California Packing Company violated the antitrust laws. And some grower contracts had been obtained through coercion.³

Palmer threatened to file suit if CARC did not cut its prices and reduce its control to less than 60 percent of the crop. Wylie Giffin offered some concessions, but on September 5, 1920, Palmer ordered the United States Attorney in Los Angeles to

² Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 146-149.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

proceed. This of course caused great consternation in Fresno, because the certain collapse in prices that would follow a government victory would ruin not only CARC, but also the packers who had paid high prices to the growers in the spring.⁴

The community was relieved on September 20 when CARC signed a consent decree and Federal Judge Benjamin F. Bledsoe in Los Angeles refused to issue an injunction.⁵ An Armenian member of the board of trustees of CARC wrote in the newspaper praising the Armenian farmers for their support. They had renewed their contracts freely and willingly, and many Armenians who had been outside had joined, too. The court had seen that the suit had obviously been brought to benefit the five independent packers of the city. But the danger was not entirely over. There was still another trial to come, which would decide the fate of the Raisin Association. The Armenian farmers had to stand behind the Association and defend it. No Armenian farmer should try to leave the Association or attempt, either openly or secretly, to sell his produce outside. Violating his contract would be against his own long-term interests. The Association had to be strengthened, become unchallengeable, and rule the raisin market. No Armenian farmer, considering his own heavy mortgages, should be stupid enough to be the cause of its destruction. So at all costs they had to stand behind the Association as one man.⁶

⁴ Ibid., p. 152–154.

⁵ “Raisin Contracts Signed. Raisin Stipulations Rejected” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.314 (September 28, 1920).

⁶ An Armenian Member of the Trustees of the Raisin Association, “Raisin Crisis Over” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.316 (October 5, 1920).

But still, the writer admitted, there were some valid points in the government's charges. The Armenian farmers had to insist vigorously on the reform of the Association. Now was the time; the Association had to correct those anomalies that had been pointed out by the government and the growers. They would be doing a wise and useful thing if they formed a committee that, while defending and strengthening the Association, would at the same time consult with the directors and work for those reforms in its by-laws and contract that would ensure the real and lasting welfare of the Armenian farmers.⁷

1921: A New Campaign

Judge Bledsoe had taken the wind out of the government's and packers' sails. Instead, he had ruled that CARC would be allowed to offer the growers a new fifteen-year contract approved by the court. The sign-up campaign would commence on February 1, 1921.⁸ Again, the survival of the Association depended on convincing the growers to join.

The Armenian newspapers joined the battle. The Association should not die, wrote *Nor Giank-Sisvan*. Its enemies were still trying to destroy it after its twenty years of service. This could not be allowed to happen. One hundred percent had to sign, not 60 percent or 90 percent.⁹ *Asbarež* published the consent decree on two full pages, and reported that Attorney General Palmer had decided not to press forward on the suit but

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 155; *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.343 (January 7, 1921).

⁹ *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.343 (January 7, 1921).

to leave it to the incoming Republican administration. It would be at least fall before the question would come up, if ever.¹⁰

The campaign began slowly. Everyone could remember the bad old days before the Association. The farmers had been at the mercy of the independent packers, *Asbarex* reminded them. But then everything changed because of the successful cooperative, the war, and prohibition. The price of raisins went up, land values rose, and everyone had a higher standard of living. Schools and hospitals were built, amusements provided, and the cultural standard improved. During the last year the association had fallen on hard times and the packers had instigated a suit to destroy it. The Armenian farmers, against whom there was unfounded prejudice, had to get behind the association. The new contract would bring improvements, notably the increase in the guaranteed rate by one-half cent.¹¹

By the beginning of March still not enough farmers had signed. Those who were going around to the Armenian farms pictured the situation in very bad terms. The Association was in danger of folding. Some of the farmers, according to those who had talked with them, exhibited an indifferent “Turkish” attitude. Others were waiting to see what their friends and neighbors were going to do, and others apparently were bent on committing economic suicide, thinking that if they stayed out they would get a better

¹⁰ *Asbarex* XIII.721 (February 8, 1921).

¹¹ “The Raisin Association and the Armenian Farmer. Look to Your Welfare” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIII.723 (February 15, 1921).

price from the independent packers. One should not think that the independent packers were stupid, *Asbarex* said. They were just waiting for the association to collapse. Reliable sources had revealed that 40,000 tons of the previous year's crop were still unsold, as the buyers were waiting for the price to fall with the collapse of the association. Only madmen committed suicide, *Asbarex* continued. And "foreign" eyes were looking on the Armenians. It would be extremely bad if they were to be blamed for the failure of the association.¹²

On Saturday, March 5, 1921, there was a meeting of the Armenian Committee of the raisin association in the mayor's office. Giffin remarked that at the same point in the last campaign three years earlier, more farmers had already signed contracts. The Reverend Santigian was elected chairman of the committee, and five captains were selected to go from farmer to farmer with their assistants to encourage them to sign.¹³ So far, less than half of the Armenians had complied, 834 having signed and 864 still remaining out. Figuring by acreage also the majority was still unsigned.¹⁴

In the meantime, the packers made an appeal to buy raisins, which the Reverend Santigian translated into Armenian. The intention of this was to prevent CARC from controlling the crop and therefore the price, by enticing the growers to sell now at a good

¹² *Asbarex* XIII.728 (March 7, 1921).

¹³ Mr. Tiutelian for Dinuba and Yettem district; Mr. A. Gostanian for Lone Star; Mr. S. Ejhdeherian for Selma and Parlier; Mr. H. Yeremian for Clovis; Mr. H. Jorjorian for Bakersfield. "Discussion-Meeting of California Farmers" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.362 (March 15, 1921).

¹⁴ *Asbarex* XIII.730 (March 11, 1921); XIII.732 (March 18, 1921); XIII.733 (March 22, 1921).

price. The American Seedless Raisin Company put forth several different plans. Before August 15, 1921, they would pay whatever price the buyer and seller would agree on, making payment two days after delivery to the packing house. After August 15 they would beat the cooperative's price by \$10 per ton. Half would be paid in the first payment, and the remainder whenever the cooperative made its own payment. A third plan for raisins in sweat boxes promised payment two days after delivery to the packing house. The price would be the opening price of the company for sixteen pound cartons less 5.5 cents. The opening price would be published on October 1 or before. If the wages of day laborers or the price of packing materials fell in the meantime, the growers would receive that much more money. The buyer agreed to meet or exceed CARC's average price for the same merchandise. He agreed to buy at the best opening price for seedless raisins, and furthermore to set the highest opening price, because it had the greatest amount of Thompson Seedless raisins. Disagreements would be settled by arbitration. "Have you understood, are you ready to fall into the pit?" Santigian asked. "LET THOSE WHO HAVE REMAINED OUTSIDE READ AND UNDERSTAND WELL."¹⁵ For the next issue he would translate the proposal of the Rosenberg Co.¹⁶

William A. Sutherland, the president and chairman of the Fidelity Trust and Savings Bank, composed a letter to send to the holdouts. He was very surprised to learn that the recalcitrant, who, owning so much land, had not yet signed his raisin contract. His

¹⁵ Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Ibid., XIII.733 (March 22, 1921).

inaction had affected his neighbor, too, who was waiting to see what he would do.

People did not realize that the Association would be wrecked if it could not control the raisin crop. Didn't anyone care if the price fell to 2 cents and the farmers all failed? Just a few months before there had been an attempt to wreck the Association in the courts, instigated by the independent packers. Ten thousand farmers had stood behind CARC, certifying that they had not signed their contracts under compulsion, but of their own free will. This feat was accomplished in one short week, because it was apparent that the other course would have meant the ruin of the Association and the end of their own success and well-being. The time was crucial; it was difficult to sell raisins and there was the possibility of a carryover to the next year. How surprising it was that the same farmers who had rushed to the aid of the Association in September were now showing a great indifference to whether it lived or died. If the farmers did not act quickly, the raisin price would collapse. Every day that any one farmer did not act, he increased the expectation on the market that the price would fall, that next year there would be a great surplus, and that the year after that the price would collapse also. Sadly, the farmers themselves would have been responsible.

There had never been a time when an association of farmers was more necessary, Sutherland continued. Vineyards had been bought for four or five times what they had sold for in 1912, and new vineyards were about to come into production that had been bought at unimaginable prices. Their crops had to be sold also, either by the farmers' association at a price that would mean success for all the farmers and for all the raisin

crop, or it would be used in the old way, which meant to sell it for less than what it was worth, at a price too low to pay for the mortgages on the farms, and at the ruin of prices throughout the whole San Joaquin Valley.¹⁷

Now the farmers began to sign up. Giffin announced that the campaign would be closed on April 2, and the contracts began to come in at the rate of 100 per day. Of the 12,200 raisin growers in the state, 10,700 had signed the old contracts. But by March 12 there were still 3,500 farmers out, with only 18 days left. Now it seemed that the numbers would slow down, because the unsigned contracts belonged to those who had been hostile from the beginning.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the campaign concluded successfully and the Association increased its control from 88 percent to 92 percent of the crop.¹⁹

Don't Come to Fresno

It was estimated that in 1921 the production of raisins from both old and newly-maturing vineyards would be 250,000 tons, and that by 1930 it would reach 400,000 tons. The Association was looking for places to build new packing houses, and great efforts had been

¹⁷ "Sutherland Writes, The Unwillingness of the Vineyardists Presents a Great Threat" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.360 (March 8, 1921).

¹⁸ "Raisin Results" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.364 (March 22, 1921).

¹⁹ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 156.

made to advertise raisins in all parts of the world. “Have you taken your iron today?” The consumption of raisins would have to double within the next ten years.²⁰

But the second night after the successful conclusion of the campaign there was a frost, destroying the young vines in the valley bottom in Kings County and around Sanger and Clovis. The loss would be 40,000 tons, mostly Thompson Seedless, valued at \$8,000,000 and amounting to 20 percent of the crop.²¹ Now the novices who had optimistically bought farms with great expectations would face disappointment and hopelessness.²² And because of the closure of factories in the east and rising unemployment, many more Armenians had started to migrate to Fresno with hopes of buying vineyards. They were warned to stay away. There would be no quick riches. One had to have enough money in his pocket if he wanted to buy land. There were no factories in Fresno as there were in the east, only field work, very strenuous and requiring knowledge of farming. Land prices had quadrupled over half a decade, and it was impossible to make the crops pay for the farm. See what had happened in one night of frost! Better to stay where you were, save up some money by practicing thrift, and wait for prices to go down.²³

²⁰ “Raisin Results” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.364 (March 22, 1921).

²¹ *Asbarex* XIII.738 (April 8, 1921).

²² “Bad Effect of Frost” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.368 (April 5, 1921).

²³ “Stop Immigrating into Fresno” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIII.746 (May 6, 1921). One could argue that the frost of the night of April 4, 1921, actually marked the beginning of the Great Depression, at least as far as Fresno was concerned.

Some Armenians recently arrived from the eastern states could not find work and were wandering the streets of Fresno. Many were in dire straits and in need of immediate help. A few went to non-Armenian vineyardists. They were told that the big Armenian landowners were employing Japanese; go ask them for a job.²⁴

The 8,917 farms and vineyards of Fresno County were worth \$279,861,191, outranking five states of the Union. In the previous ten years they had gone up in value more than the farms in the eastern states had in the last 100 years.²⁵ But even though a load of fresh figs, probably grown by an Armenian, had reached Chicago for the first time, prices started to go down, and not only for raisins.²⁶ Onions worth \$60,000 had been thrown into the sea at San Francisco because nobody wanted them. Two years earlier a sack had sold for \$7.00 or \$8.00; now it was worth 25 cents.²⁷ Peaches were down to 9 cents a pound from 15 cents the year before, and figs were down to 9 cents for Calmyras and 7 cents for Adriatics.²⁸ Wylie Giffin, no fool, sold off his 400 acres at Parlier for \$1,400 an acre. No one had seen that price for a long time, and Giffin put his money into a huge tract of vacant land.²⁹

²⁴ "Armenians Again Unemployed" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIII.749 (May 17, 1921).

²⁵ "Riches of Fresno County" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIII.763 (July 5, 1921).

²⁶ *Asbarez* XIII.762 (July 1, 1921). At \$1.81 a box the load netted \$400.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII.763 (July 5, 1921).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII.768 (July 22, 1921).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII.765 (July 12, 1921); *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VII.396 (July 12, 1921).

By August the distress was evident, and an editorial in an Armenian newspaper identified the causes. For the last few years, the people of California had lived well off of the agricultural production. The vineyardists had received ample payment for their labor, and as the price of raisins and the value of land had gone up during the war. It seemed as if everybody was rolling in money. To a greater and greater degree speculation appeared, and the people became drunk with success. This was founded upon dry paper. They added field upon field, bought cars, built splendid homes, and undertook heavy expenses. The public expectations became extreme. Finally, the Federal Reserve Bank constricted the supply of money. This was followed by a frost in the vineyards, and then the failure of the raisin association to meet its third payment. How long the present uncertainty would last no one could know, but it was sure to be for a long time. Every Armenian had to understand the reigning conditions and cut down expenses.³⁰

Foreclosure was not pleasant. Lawyer Yeretjian sold a vineyard in Clovis to Minasian, who couldn't pay, so the aforesaid went out to reclaim his property, got into a fistfight with the latter, and was stuck two inches deep with a pocket knife by old Reverend Minasian, defending his son.³¹

By August 1 there was still a large surplus of raisins left over from 1920 amounting to 50,000 tons or 30 percent of the entire production. It would have to be sold at one-third

³⁰ "Economic Crisis in California" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VII.407 (August 19, 1921).

³¹ *Asbarex* XIII.770 (July 29, 1921).

discount.³² The cooperative announced a price of 9 to 10 cents per pound for Thompson raisins, but the independent packers would not pay more than 8 cents. Nevertheless, there was encouragement in good demand and prices for fresh grapes, apricots, peaches, and figs, and a strong effort was made to market raisins abroad.³³ There still seemed to be some cause for optimism, as the Raisin Association announced that the previous year's surplus would all be cleared out before the new crop came in. Even though the independent packers were unwilling to pay the cooperative's price, they were secretly trying to buy up their share. It was reported that experienced farmers expected the price of raisins to firm up.³⁴ The vineyardists were given advice on how to get the most for their crops. The raisins had to be kept clean and free from insects, because housewives wanted clean raisins and in any case the contract specified that clean raisins would receive a half-cent premium per pound. The grapes should be inspected before harvesting them and the sugar content had to be above 24 percent. The trays had to be kept clean and sterilized in boiling water. The pickers had to be careful; if the grapes were bruised the juice in the trays would cause them to rot. Wet and dry produce should not be mixed together. Trays should not be overfilled or wet trays piled on top of each other.³⁵

³² "Price of Raisins" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIV.772 (August 5, 1921).

³³ *Asbarez* XIV.773 (August 8, 1921).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV.774 (August 12, 1921).

³⁵ "How Should the Farmers Prepare Their Crops?" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VII.396 (July 12, 1921).

Before the middle of September the surplus was exhausted. Demand was rising, the crop was 60,000 tons less than the previous year, and the price went up to 11.5 cents for Muscat, 12.5 cents for Sultana, and 14.5 cents for Thompson Seedless raisins.³⁶ At harvest time the unemployed stirred themselves to get a little seasonal work, so many coming from San Francisco and Los Angeles that the city government sent out telegrams to other cities warning workers not to come to Fresno.³⁷ Many Armenians were depending on the crop to pay for their fields or houses and others had used the crops as security for various transactions. But in the valley bottom communities of Sanger, Del Rey, Clovis, and Fowler the vines had been damaged by the spring frost and the farmers were facing losses, particularly those who had bought vineyards at high prices. Around Parlier and Reedley there was less damage, and on the upslope of Cutler and Yettlem there had been no frost at all.³⁸

1922: The Collapse

On January 18, 1922, the anti-trust suit was settled by a consent decree. The 1921 contract was voided and CARC was permanently enjoined from engaging in the following practices prohibited by the Sherman Act: obtaining crop contracts through coercion;

³⁶ *Asbarex* XIV.778 (August 26, 1921); XIV.784 (September 16, 1921).

³⁷ "Army of Unemployed Descending on Fresno" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIV.773 (August 8, 1921).

³⁸ *Gotchnag* XXI.37 (September 10, 1921).

contracting for prices contingent on future market conditions; purchasing the plants and businesses of competing packing firms; dealing exclusively with or discriminating among purchasers of raisins; using the packers as CARC's selling agents; buying raisins for the purpose of fixing prices; or restricting production in any way.³⁹

CARC now changed its name to the Sun-Maid Raisin Growers of California. Despite a carryover from the previous year, the 1922 raisin price remained relatively high and farmers continued to mortgage themselves heavily to plant new vineyards even into the fall of 1922. But the market was saturated, causing a sharp drop in wholesale prices. Sun-Maid took a loss of \$4.5 million on the 1921 crop. It could not secure bank financing for the 1923 crop and was forced to issue demand notes to the growers. The Fresno banks refused to honor the notes, and in an effort to avoid bankruptcy the board of directors reorganized the management. Ralph P. Merritt was named to the new position of managing director with full executive authority. Wylie Giffin remained president. In two years, that title accrued to Merritt also.⁴⁰

The collapse of grape prices in 1922 and the general unemployment that ensued shook the economic life of the Armenians of California to the foundations. Many lost

³⁹ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 161. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890. Its intention was to outlaw restraint of trade and monopoly practices by large corporations. It has since been modified and expanded by other acts of Congress and by court decisions. The question of the economic and political power of large monied interests was an important issue at the time, as it continues to be to this day.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

their property and were forced to move to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and other cities to seek work in trades and crafts or as laborers.⁴¹ The “evil winds” blowing over the Armenians of Fresno caused many to lose hope and to feel that they would never stand up again. Such were exhorted by the newspapers and the community leaders to keep heart, to remember that the great characteristic of the Armenians was endurance in the face of adversity. On coming to this bountiful and lovely land they had brought with them empty pockets but the great capital of the will to work, to endure, to conquer hardships. Undeniably they were passing through difficult times, their economic life had not improved, their crops were not worth the labor spent on them. But it was also true that hopelessness had never gained them anything; on the contrary it was debilitating and destructive. Undoubtedly the economic conditions of Fresno would change; it was necessary only to show courage and perseverance, to put one’s affairs in order, to be ready for the opportunities that would surely come.⁴²

Those opportunities would surely come, but not for a long time.

⁴¹ Krikor Sarafian, *Gordsapatum H. B. E. Miutian Kalifornio Shrchanaki 1910–1953* [History of the Activities of the California District of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1910–1953] (Fresno, 1954), pp. 4–5.

⁴² “Evil Winds,” *Nor Or* II.72 (August 3, 1923), “For the Salvation of the Vineyardists,” *Nor Or* II.97 (October 30, 1923) [all in Armenian].

1923: Another Campaign Produces Violence

In January 1923, Sun-Maid was reorganized and split into two companies due to the losses that had been incurred on the sale of the crops of 1921 and 1922. One of these, Sun-Maid Growers of California, was a cooperative marketing association of farmers. The other was a processing company called the Sun-Maid Growers' Association, a Delaware corporation. In order to increase the amount of capital of the Delaware corporation, a stock subscription campaign was initiated. The banks had some objections to the old contracts of the previous Sun-Maid, and so new contracts were sought from the growers. The new contracts shifted much of the market risk onto the growers, but there was a withdrawal period every two years. The board of directors announced that 85 percent of the acreage had to come under contract for Sun-Maid to continue in business.⁴³

On Raisin Day, April 26, Merritt announced that the stock subscription drive had met its goal. But many growers were dissatisfied with the new contract, and by Raisin Day only 60 percent of them had signed. Merritt gave a deadline of May 5 to bring in the rest.⁴⁴

The next night a mob numbering about one hundred went to the rented farm of Nazaret and Ashken Der Torosian to compel them to sign a contract. As the rioters began to break windows and doors, shots were fired, one of which hit a Sun-Maid

⁴³ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, pp. 167–169.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

employee, William L. Osteraudt. He lost his foot. Later one witness claimed that Mrs. Kiulekjian had run out of the house saying, “My brother’s son fired the gun.” Others accused Der Torosian of the shooting. Der Torosian’s wife told the grand jury that she had fired the shot in defense of their lives and to drive off the mob in the dark. The night riders claimed that no one in their party was armed and that they had only come to the farm at midnight because no one had been home during the day. Nevertheless, the police investigators found a revolver bullet at the scene as well as the 30-30 bullet fired from the Der Torosians’ rifle.⁴⁵

The case was defended in February 1924 by Aram Saroyan, an Armenian lawyer of Fresno, before Judge Stratton. Saroyan asked for a change of venue based on the following arguments:

1. There was anti-Armenian prejudice in the San Joaquin Valley.
2. On the day of the incident ropes were found hanging from trees in Fowler and behind the Fowler bank and threats were made to hang Der Torosian.
3. Some farmers were filled with hatred against all those who would not sign new contracts with the Raisin Association.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 173; “About a Lawsuit” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1,043 (February 6, 1924); XVI.1,048 (February 16, 1924).

4. An impartial jury would be difficult to find because those who would be impaneled might be those same individuals who had been working to get the new contracts signed.
5. The local press had been publishing untrue articles that were filling the minds of the people with hatred toward the victim.

The representative of the District Attorney, Mr. Hogden, answered that there was no hatred of the Armenians, but at the same time he said that the Armenians had always been found in despicable conduct. Saroyan protested that compared with other foreign races the Armenians had been involved in a negligible number of convictions for crimes. Hogden called three witnesses in an attempt to prove that there was no prejudice against Armenians and they were cross-examined by Saroyan. The court ruled that if the case had been brought four or five months earlier, it would have moved the case outside the valley, but in the meantime the disposition of the people toward the Raisin Association had completely changed, and that it would surely be possible to find twelve impartial men to examine the evidence in good conscience and render judgment. But if during the trial the court saw any prejudice on the part of the jury, it would immediately transfer the case to another city.⁴⁶

The case came to trial on February 13, 1924, and Der Torosian was acquitted.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "About a Lawsuit" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1043 (February 6, 1924).

⁴⁷ *Asbarez* XVI.1,049 (February 19, 1924). Other incidences of violence in the raisin campaigns, some of them against Armenians, are given in Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, pp. 129–130, 133–134, 177–180,

Into Depression

The 1923 crop did not look promising. A tour of the agricultural areas by an official of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce showed mildew damage to one quarter of the grape crop. All fruits, and especially peaches, had set a heavy crop, resulting in smaller fruit. This caused a 25 percent drop in the price of peaches remaining in cold storage from the previous year.⁴⁸ The glut of raisins resulted in a carryover of 85,000 tons from 1922. Sun-Maid was compelled to allow the independent packers to buy raisins from the cooperative and market them under their own labels. It was hoped that in this way a market would be found for the surplus.⁴⁹

In addition to the mildew and low sugar content of the grapes caused by a cool summer, rains starting on September 1 damaged the unharvested grapes and rotted the raisins left out to dry.⁵⁰ Forty Armenian farmers refused to honor their contracts and were sued by Sun-Maid. The crops were placed under guard to prevent their being sold. The Visalia National Bank also seized the crops of some farmers in their district, so that there was confusion as to whom to turn over the crop.⁵¹ In Fresno County, the Board of

182, 184.

⁴⁸ *Asbarez* XV.974 (July 13, 1923); "California Agricultural Production" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1,002 (October 19, 1923).

⁴⁹ "Raisin Association Deals with Independent Packers" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XV.977 (July 24, 1923).

⁵⁰ "California Agricultural Production," [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1,002 (October 19, 1923).

⁵¹ "Sun Maid Places Guard over Raisins in Yettem" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1,002 (October 19, 1923).

Supervisors approved an emergency ordinance to prevent farmers from sneaking off in the dead of night to sell their crops to outside packers in violation of their contracts.

Truckers would have to notify the sheriff if they were working after 6 P.M. and divulge for whom they were working, whose raisins they were transporting, and where they were going, under penalty of 180 days in jail or \$300 fine.⁵²

As the economic crisis got worse, it appeared to have a demoralizing effect. *Nor Or* complained that instead of causing the community to gird up its will, it was producing laxness, hopelessness, and indifference, which was becoming widespread. In the coffee houses and on the streets groups of Armenian men could be seen playing cards and backgammon, gambling, and idling away their time when they should have been going out as honorable men at least to find some work pounding rocks together.⁵³

But 1923 was the worst year of crisis the 10,000 Armenians of Fresno had ever seen, *Asbarez* wrote. Never before had there been days as bitter as those. Families were falling apart before their eyes, and many more were expected to follow them. Everybody was in a panic. Those who thought Fresno had no future were trying to sell their land for whatever they could get and shake the dust of the place from their feet. Even storekeepers, artisans, and merchants were being drowned in the current and were quitting their work and fleeing with their families. A few years earlier they had bought high and now that

⁵² "Timely Law to Prohibit Stealing Raisins" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1,004 (October 26, 1923).

⁵³ "Sloth Threatens This Community" [in Armenian], *Nor Or* III.100 (November 9, 1923).

they were in a crisis land had become something frightening and suspicious for them, something that tricked them out of their wealth, and something to escape from as soon as possible. They were told not to lose heart, there would soon be an end to it; by the next year the situation would begin to improve.⁵⁴

1924: A New Sun-Maid

In January 1924, the old Sun-Maid Raisin Growers of California was declared bankrupt by a federal judge in Los Angeles.⁵⁵ The public was assured that the new association would not be burdened with the debts of the old one nor have its organizational flaws and weaknesses. All the creditors, including the Armenians, would receive fair and equal treatment, whether they were rich or poor.⁵⁶

One of the nine directors elected for the new company one was an Armenian farmer and merchant, K. M. Kaprielian. *Asbarex* saw this as a recognition of the role the Armenians had played in making the 1923 campaign a success; in fact, an admission that without the Armenians the Association would not have been organized at all. Previously, the Armenians had been ignored and although sacrifices had been demanded from them, they had not been given the right to have their voice heard in the governing circles of the

⁵⁴ *Asbarex* XVI.1,026 (December 27, 1923).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI.1,031 (January 8, 1924).

⁵⁶ "Bankruptcy of the Old Raisin Association," [in Armenian], *Nor Or* III.4 (January 1, 1924).

Association. Considering that the Armenians were not liked in California, their entry into such positions served as a vital bridge to the Americans and an avenue of friendship. It remained for the representatives of the Armenians to make themselves worthy of their positions, and for the community to support them in every way.⁵⁷

By selling raisins overseas it was hoped that the market would revive. Raisins were sent as far away as China, South Africa, Peru, Java, New Zealand, and Denmark.⁵⁸ By January 1, 1924, 125,000 tons had been sold and there was optimism that by spring the previous year's sales would be doubled. Sun-Maid's debt had also been reduced from 18 million to 4 million dollars.⁵⁹ This, however, was an indication of the chronic oversupply that could not be absorbed except by expanding the market.⁶⁰ Prices had already peaked, and nothing could reverse the downward trend. The condition was permanent; the Great Depression had already started in the farmlands of America.

Out of Luck, Off the Land

The exodus from the valley continued. Some rumors had embittered, foreclosed farmers cutting down trees and destroying machinery as they left; whether the rumors were true

⁵⁷ "Election of an Armenian," *Asbarez* XVI.1,039 (January 26, 1924); K. M. Kaprielian, "Letter to the Editor," *Nor Or* III.15 (February 19, 1924) [both in Armenian].

⁵⁸ *Asbarez* XVI.1,027 (December 29, 1923, 1923).

⁵⁹ "Comforting News for the Vineyardists" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1,028 (January 1, 1924); *Nor Or* III.2 (January 4, 1924).

⁶⁰ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 175.

or not, they did not make the troubles of the Armenians any easier.⁶¹ Just about all of the farmers of Yetttem, Armenians mainly, were in danger of being run off the land. They would lose the labor of years, the labor of taming a wild and uninhabited place, the labor of planting the Garden of Eden. Now what they needed was a cure, some good intentions, some understanding from the banks.⁶² According to the bankers, economic conditions had begun to improve and loans were being made at low rates.⁶³ But in the past year alone, 3,000 Armenians had already left the valley.⁶⁴ It was apparent that the crisis was being caused by overproduction and foreign competition, and the vineyardists of Fresno were not suffering just from local conditions.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Sheriff Nishan Tashjian and Dr. Jenanian of Yetttem went off to San Francisco in April to try to talk the chiefs of the Bank of Italy out of the mass of foreclosures being perpetrated by their Visalia branch. Supposedly the bank agreed to cancel existing mortgages and allow ten years of payments of principal and taxes only, but this was either a misunderstanding or a cruel hoax, for the repossessions continued. The

⁶¹ *Asbarex* XVI.1,044 (February 7, 1924).

⁶² *Nor Or* III.25 (March 25, 1924).

⁶³ "Economic Conditions" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XVI.1,065 (March 27, 1924).

⁶⁴ *Asbarex* XVI.1,066 (March 29, 1924).

⁶⁵ "Farmers of America in Grave Crisis," *Nor Or* III.30 (April 11, 1924); "The Distant Saint Is Not Strong," *Nor Or* III.34 (April 25, 1924) [both in Armenian].

greatest number of the victims was Armenian. Bank profits had to be protected, the spokesman said.⁶⁶

As if California had not suffered enough, now hoof-and-mouth disease struck, starting in Stockton and spreading south to Madera, Kings, Kern, and Los Angeles counties. Nearly 100,000 beasts fell victim. If one bull or cow in a herd was found to be infected, all the others in the pasture had to be shot and buried in the same deep pit. Other states closed their borders to California, and her produce could not be sent to distant markets. The economic crisis, growing worse, bent down the shoulders of the stricken farmers, dimmed their eyes, drove some insane. Yet others slogged on, kept their spirits and wills, and faced down the crisis.⁶⁷

On December 19, the Armenians of Yetteem held a fund-raiser. The chairman of the AGBU chapter had moved to Los Angeles, so a new man presided. The quota for the community was \$300, which was exceeded by \$50. This was all the more remarkable because the population was down to a third of what it had been.⁶⁸ As the valley communities shrank, the Armenian population of Los Angeles and San Francisco grew.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "Matter of Foreclosures in Yetteem" [in Armenian], *Nor Or* III.34 (April 25, 1924); *Asbarex* XVI.1,093–1,094 [sic] (June 3, 1924).

⁶⁷ *Asbarex* XVI.1,086 (May 15, 1924).

⁶⁸ "AGBU Bazaar in Yetteem" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XVIII.1,178 (January 1, 192[6]).

⁶⁹ "Life of the Armenian Community of San Francisco," *Asbarex* XVI.1,032 (January 10, 1924); *Asbarex* XVI.1,051 (February 23, 1924); "Matter of Foreclosures in Yetteem," *Nor Or* III.34 (April 25, 1924) [both in Armenian].

1925: Withdrawal From Sun-Maid

According to the terms of the contract, growers were allowed to withdraw from the Association after two years. Just as coercion had been applied to farmers in order to “convince” them to sign up in the first place, now an investigation by the Department of Justice revealed allegations of coercion to stay in. Of the 37 alleged instances discovered by the department, thirteen were against Armenians. The investigation was compromised when news of it was leaked by the *Fresno Morning Republican*. The information was turned over to the local authorities and there it rested.⁷⁰

Because of the number of canceled contracts, Sun-Maid’s share of the crop decreased to 60 percent. Some growers reneged on their contracts and delivered their crops to outside packers. In such a situation, Sun-Maid would sue. Of the 32 suits, 23 were against Armenians. Most of these were settled out of court, and in one instance the grower won. Two well-known Armenians, Krikor Arakelian and Paul Mosesian, challenged the legality of their contracts made with the old Sun-Maid and assigned to the new company and were upheld by the State Court of Appeals in 1928.⁷¹

The chronic oversupply brought on by the heavy new planting during the boom times, together with the defections from Sun-Maid, made it impossible to maintain high prices.⁷²

⁷⁰ Woeste, *Farmer’s Benevolent Trust*, pp. 183–186.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187–188.

⁷² *Ibid.*

In 1925 prices fell and the Association blamed competition from the independent packers.⁷³ But rising costs ate up growers' profits and more farmers fell into foreclosure.⁷⁴ By January 1, 1926, the packer Folley had gone bankrupt for the third time in the last two years, causing consternation to the vineyardists.⁷⁵

1926–1928: Grapes, No Buyers

At harvest time in August, 1926, there were 100,000 carloads of highly sugared grapes on the vines, but no buyers for them. Eastern prices barely covered shipping costs. Before World War I, the growers had been able to sell their surplus to the wineries at \$8 to \$15 per ton and make money because both the price and their costs of production were low. During the war the price of fresh grapes went up to \$200 per ton, quintupling the value of the land. Thousands of virgin acres were planted to vines. Presently there were 653,236 acres in production and 27,559 acres soon to be. The farmers insisted that if the eastern buyers thought that they could just walk on down to the railroad station and buy up raisins at a price that barely covered shipping, then they were mistaken, because the farmers would not sell at a loss as they had done the year before. The buyers replied that they would not pay a premium, because the crop was very big. The farmers countered

⁷³ *Asbarex* XVII.1,154 (July 17, 1925).

⁷⁴ One estimate was that nearly 80,000 acres reverted to the banks. Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 188.

⁷⁵ *Asbarex* XVIII.1,178 (January 1, 192[6]).

that if they did not sell FOB Fresno, then they would go out of business, citing the situation of the melon, fig, and apricot markets. Even so, there was a shortage of railroad cars. The grapes had come in fifteen days early because of the weather, and were starting to wither on the vines. The only thing left to do was to make raisins out of them.⁷⁶ The crop looked to be between 250,000 and 300,000 tons when dried. Because of the low prices for table grapes, Malagas and Muscats both would be used. The independent packers dallied, apparently waiting to determine the size of the crop.⁷⁷

As an indication of the general state of agriculture, the peach market had collapsed and farmers were letting the fruit rot on the trees in order to reduce the supply and thus raise the price. This was ascribed to the abnormally large crop.⁷⁸

Raisin prices, which had slumped in 1927, crashed in 1928. With wholesalers selling at 5 cents per pound or less, farmers received only 2 to 2.5 cents.⁷⁹ This marked the beginning of the end for Sun-Maid. Its processing was taken over by creditors, and six months later the cooperative filed for bankruptcy. Only 32 percent of the state's raisin growers were still members. After some years the cooperative was eventually returned to the growers.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., XIX.1,211 (August 20, 1926).

⁷⁷ Ibid., XIX.1,215 (September 17, 1926).

⁷⁸ Ibid., XIX.1,259 (July 22, 1927).

⁷⁹ "Raisin Price" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,308 (June 29, 1928).

⁸⁰ Woeste, *Farmer's Benevolent Trust*, p. 189.

In the summer of 1928 it was proposed after talks between bankers, merchants, and Sun-Maid, to start a new cooperative for those farmers who had remained outside. This organization, called the California Vineyardists' Association (CVA), would control the grape market without regard to the form in which the fruit was sold, whether as fresh fruit, juice, or raisins. Farmers would join in an agricultural cooperative, merchants in the Clearing House Division, and processors in the Grape Products Division. The objective would be keep the market from being flooded. A minimum price would be fixed.⁸¹ Meetings of farmers were held in Reedley and in Fresno, at which the new company was presented to the farmers. By the end of July the following participation was reported: farmers, more than 12,000 or 83 percent; merchants, 310 or 85 percent; and processors, 32 or 94 percent.⁸² It was seen that the basic problem was oversupply, as evidenced in the carryover of raisins from one year to the next. There was also an excess of inferior raisins and of low-producing vineyards. It was proposed that standards of quality be maintained, inferior vineyards be ripped out, the tonnage of grapes pressed for juice greatly increased, and an effort made to develop the market for fresh grapes.⁸³

⁸¹ *Asbarex*. XIX.1,307 (June 22, 1928).

⁸² *Ibid.*, XIX.1,308 (June 29, 1928).

⁸³ "Declaration Number 1," *Asbarex* XIX.1,312 (July 27, 1928); "The Raisin Pool," *Asbarex* XIX.1,308 (June 29, 1928) [both in Armenian].

1929: Federal Intervention

CVA started its efforts on behalf of the farmer. One possibility was the sale of grape juice for home use; that is, for fermentation. The farmers could put it up themselves in one-gallon tins for a dollar, undercutting the five dollars the bootleggers charged. The natives didn't like to squeeze the grapes themselves, considering it dirty work. As long as the grape juice was not fermented past 1.5 percent alcohol, it was still legal to sell. CVA also thought to centralize the market in order to equalize supply and demand. It was proposed to make merchants who paid down payments for grapes post bond, to eliminate fly-by-night operators. The last means to improve the market was to pool production.⁸⁴

In May a price stabilization scheme was presented before an audience of 2,000 in the Fresno Civic Auditorium. A "Federal Stabilization Corporation," requiring the approval of the Congress, would set the price of raisins for the next three years at prices ranging from 3.5 cents per pound to 4.5 cents per pound. The company, which would not be a governmental agency but a private one, would receive aid from the government and the banks, depending on proposed changes in Federal law. It would buy grapes from the farmer in the sweat box and sell them to Sun-Maid and to other companies, which would in turn sell them to customers on their own account. In addition to federal approval, the plan would depend on pledges of crops from 90 percent of the raisin growers. Sun-Maid

⁸⁴ *Asbarez* XIX.1,340 (February 8, 1929).

would have to join as an individual and divide the receipts from its crops among its members.⁸⁵

As soon as Herbert Hoover assumed the presidency in March 1929, he called on the Congress to find a permanent solution to the agricultural crisis. On June 15 the Congress passed the Agricultural Marketing Act, establishing the Federal Farm Board, with an appropriation of 500 million dollars. This agency was intended to stabilize commodity prices and to promote the sale of agricultural products, in part by encouraging cooperative marketing associations.⁸⁶ In addition to the main Federal Farm Loan Board, Stabilization Corporations were set up throughout the country for various crops. These would act as local agricultural cooperatives. The intention was to raise prices by buying and storing crops and then releasing them on the market as conditions warranted. The flaw in this program was that it did not limit production and thus supply. On the contrary, it might even lead to further overplanting as farmers tried to take advantage of the higher prices.⁸⁷

Muscat farmers suffered from the imbalance in the market. Before Prohibition, Muscat grapes had been used primarily to make raisins. But in the previous two years,

⁸⁵ “Plan of CVA to Save Profitability of Grapes” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,353 (May 10, 1929).

⁸⁶ *Asbarez* XIX.1,360 (June 28, 1929); “HUSBANDRY End & Beginning,” *Time*, June 24, 1929, at <<http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/analysis/back.time/9605/06/index.shtml>> (accessed November 14, 2000); National Archives and Records Administration: Records of the Farm Credit Administration, at <<http://www.nara.gov/guide/rg103.html>> (accessed November 13, 2000).

⁸⁷ “The Farm Relief Board and Its Work,” *Asbarez* XIX.1,378 (November 1, 1929); “Farm Board Will Quickly Examine the Aid Plan for California Farmers in Order to Rectify It,” *Asbarez* XIX.1,378 (November 1, 1929) [both in Armenian].

because of the collapse of raisin prices, 12,000 to 15,000 carloads of grapes had been sent from California to all parts of the country to be sold for juice. This, however, flooded the market with fresh grapes, depressing the price further. To correct this, the Federal Fruit Stabilization Corporation (FFSC), an arm of the Farm Board, proposed to buy the farmer's entire crop at a base price of 4 cents per pound for raisins and \$20 per ton for fresh Muscat grapes until September 24, raising the price to \$22.50 afterward. With control over the entire crop, the FFSC would then release only as much as the market could support without depressing prices. Profits would be distributed back to the farmers in proportion to their production. By October 15, the FFSC would declare the amount of Muscats to be sold fresh or to be dried into raisins. The Armenian farmers were urged to sign up and benefit from the expected higher prices.⁸⁸

Nature had her own way to limit the Muscat crop. Unusually cool weather during the first three weeks of June was followed by an unexpected rainfall, and then by a heat wave. The fruit was not set yet and the vines had been dusted with sulphur as a preventive against mildew. The hot wind shriveled up the leaves, and irrigation was in vain. Muscats suffered most of all; the other grape varieties less so. Stone fruits were damaged too, up to 80 percent of the plum crop in Tulare County.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Asbarex* XIX.1,360 (June 28, 1929).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, XIX.1,362 (July 12, 1929).

The 1929 grape crop was the smallest since 1924. Production was down from 480,000 tons in 1928 to 420,000 tons in 1929, even though acreage had increased from 176,187 acres to 180,891 acres. Raisin grapes were down for the second consecutive year, from 1,443,000 tons in 1927 to 1,408,000 tons in 1928 to 1,020,000 tons in 1929.⁹⁰

In August, the Farm Board loaned 9 million dollars to Sun-Maid and to the FFSC to stabilize raisin production. This would enable the FFSC to buy fresh grapes from the farmers. Sun-Maid would buy raisins at a pre-payment price of 3 cents per pound. All farmers would be free to sell to Sun-Maid, whether members or not.⁹¹

The temporary constriction of supply caused the prices to rise slightly in the fall of 1929. The farmers in turn held their crops off the market in the hopes of selling higher.⁹² Charles C. Teague, a prominent valley grower and Farm Board member, optimistically suggested that perhaps the 9 million dollar loan would not be needed after all. The sale of grape juice, packaged with sly warnings that if improperly treated it would turn into wine, continued without obstruction from the government.⁹³ In response to the demands from

⁹⁰ Ibid., XIX.1,377 (August 16, 1929).

⁹¹ "Washington Gives \$9,000,000 for Work of Stabilizing Grapes" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIX.1,368 (August 23, 1929).

⁹² "Raisin Price Up" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIX.1,369 (August 30, 1929).

⁹³ "Raisins Don't Need Aid" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIX.1,369 (August 30, 1929).

the farmers for an increase, the FFSC added 1 cent to the prepayment price for Muscats in addition to the 3 cents being paid by Sun-Maid.⁹⁴

Despite scheme after scheme, despite pooling arrangements and monopolies, despite government intervention, the agricultural crisis had continued to worsen for the whole decade. The value of farm properties in the United States had fallen from 79 trillion to 58 trillion dollars. The costs to farmers for taxes and the wages of hired workers had doubled in this time, but the returns on agricultural products had declined from prewar levels. During that time, 3,200,000 persons had left the farms of America to seek other work.

On October 25, 1929, *Asbarez* reported to the Armenians of the valley an event that had transpired the previous day three thousand miles away in New York. They termed it “the unprecedented fall of the speculators.”⁹⁵ It is now generally called “Black Thursday.”

1930: The Farm Board Tries to Raise Prices

Now was the time for more plans to restore profitability to the grape industry. Teague expressed his views to a mass meeting in the Fresno Civic Auditorium on March 12, 1930. The cause of the distress of the vineyardists was overproduction, he maintained. During the war, encouraged by favorable prices, acreage planted to vines had more than

⁹⁴ “Appeal Made to Raise Price of Muscats” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,369 (August 30, 1929).

⁹⁵ “Unprecedented Fall of the Speculators” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,377 (October 25, 1929).

tripled, for which the farmers were now suffering. The average grape crop was 2 million tons, 300,000 tons of which had no market. It was this surplus that had caused the fall in price. There were two ways to handle this overproduction. Either 15 percent of the vineyards had to be pulled up, or the excess had to be put under control. Because the first was impractical, it remained to consider the second. He proposed the following plan on behalf of the Farm Board: A new general company had to be organized, whose directors would be representatives from Sun-Maid Raisin, the Fruit Exchange Company, the CVA, and the Farm Board. Sun-Maid would market the raisin crop, and the Fruit Exchange and the CVA would market the fresh grapes. For the plan to be put into effect, 85 percent of the farmers would have to join. Each would be assessed \$1.50 per ton by the company, giving it an estimated annual income of 1 million dollars. The company would use this money to buy up surplus crops to pull them off the market. The Farm Board would also give attention to the juice market. In his opinion, these actions would use up all of the 300,000 excess tons of grapes and thus solve the problem of surpluses. Eventually the vineyardists would take control of the company and turn it into an agricultural cooperative. But all depended on getting 85 percent of the farmers to sign up. At the meeting a campaign committee of fifty members was immediately elected.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ "Organization of Farm Board and Raisin Producers," *Asbarez* XX.1,396 (March 7, 1930); "Teague Presents Farm Board Plan to Help California Vineyardists," *Asbarez* XX.1,397 (March 14, 1930) [both in Armenian].

According to the new contracts, the vineyardists undertook the following:

1. They would submit their raisins to the raisin pool before December 1. Sun-Maid members would submit their raisins to Sun-Maid, but to the credit of the raisin pool.
2. Those wishing to sell fresh grapes would do so either through CVA or the California Fruit Exchange.
3. Every farmer would pay an assessment of \$1.50 per ton of fresh grapes and \$5.25 per ton of raisins to the Control Board.
4. The minimum term of membership would be three years, after which farmers would be free to withdraw.
5. The signers would be assuming the outstanding 10 million dollar debt that Sun-Maid owed to the banks and to the government.

The chief responsibilities of the company were the following:

1. The Control Board would undertake to place grape productivity on a firm, permanent, and profitable foundation. With that in mind, it would bring only enough grapes and raisins to market each year to ensure that goal. It would try to find other uses for the excess. The Farm Board would provide \$1,500,000 for this purpose.

2. The raisin pool promised to pay, no later than six days after receiving the crop, as large an advance payment as conditions allowed. The remainder would be paid out as soon after December 31 as possible.
3. Farmers would get a share in any profits of the Control Board.
4. Farmers were not to have any responsibility for debts of the Control Board.
5. There would be no liens on farmers as a result of the contract.
6. Eighty-five percent of the acreage would be necessary to put the plan into effect.
7. The Control Board of Directors would have seventeen members: eight from the Raisin Pool, three from the CVA, three from California Fruit Exchange, and one from the Farm Board.⁹⁷

The initial payment was set in August at 2 cents, to the surprise and consternation of the farmers. A surplus of 770,000 tons was foreseen, which the Control Board would buy on the vine. No larger payment could be made in the face of the dying market for exports because of cheap raisins from Australia, Greece, and Smyrna, and the contraction of the domestic market due to the prevailing economic crisis. Inspectors would go to the vineyards and make payments of \$2.00 per ton, with the remainder being paid after the season when they could see that the grapes they had bought were still actually on the vine.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ “New Organization of Vineyardists” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XX.1,405 (May 9, 1930).

⁹⁸ “Raisin Price 2¢. Control Board Will Buy 770,000 Tons of Grapes on the Vine” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,419 (August 15, 1930).

On August 16 the despairing farmers gathered at the Fresno Civic Auditorium again. Two cents was totally inadequate, not enough to live on. Wylie Giffin, Arpaksat Setrakian, and Aram Saroyan all expressed their disappointment. A resolution was adopted and sent to the Farm Board demanding 2.5 cents. The next day another meeting was held for the Armenian farmers only; the same speakers were heard and the same resolution passed. No matter; the Farm Board maintained that market conditions did not permit a payment higher than 2 cents.⁹⁹

Asbarez pointed out the difficulty of the situation. After a long campaign, the membership campaign had been successful. But the 2-cent price had poured cold water on everybody's enthusiasm. The farmer, already up to his neck in debt, could not maintain even the most modest standard of living, much less keep his farm. Meetings had been held, protests sent to the Farm Board, but to no avail. It was impossible. But now things were getting out of hand, as groups of farmers were gathering here and there, giving speeches, arguing, wondering, becoming incensed and then voting resolutions, by which they demanded either 2.5 cents down or to be let out of their contracts. But this was all completely pointless, extraneous, and dangerous. The Farm Board had given its final judgment and there was no chance that it would change its decision under pressure. There was no legal basis to get out of the contracts. And the whole idea that the Board had promised 3 cents was a misunderstanding. No such representations had been made.

⁹⁹ "Protest of Vineyardists" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,420 (August 22, 1930).

The Armenian farmers, of whom barely 40 percent were members of the pool, were making a big mistake and damaging their reputation. No one was satisfied with 2 cents, but the grape market was dead. Mr. Rothschild, an official of the Rosenberg Company, had said that if it had not been for the pool, they would never have paid more than 1 to 1.5 cents per pound for grapes. So it was necessary to give the new arrangement a chance to revive the market, if it could.¹⁰⁰

A month later the Farm Board found it could raise the advance payment to 2.5 cents per pound after all. The crop was smaller than predicted because of damaging late rains. Sun-Maid and the independent packers were given permission to buy for 3 cents. The purchase of 400,000 tons of grapes on the vine had limited supply, and the slight rise in price on the part of the Farm Board was seen as encouraging them to go up further.¹⁰¹

1931: In The Depths

This was neither the first economic crisis nor the last. The *Literary Digest* had listed previous booms and busts; the crash of 1895 had reversed itself the following year. The year 1931 had started out well. We have reached the depths and we are beginning to

¹⁰⁰ “Pointless and Worthless Movements;” “Vineyardists’ Meeting,” *Asbarez* XXI.1,422 (September 5, 1930) [both in Armenian].

¹⁰¹ “Raisin Prepayment Will Be 2½ ¢” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,427 (October 10, 1930).

climb out, or so *Asbarez* encouraged its readers.¹⁰² Now the question was how to handle the grape surplus. An *ad hoc* committee stated that the overproduction of raisins amounted to 90,000 tons, and the best means of reducing it was to rip up vineyards. The farmers would be paid \$5 to \$10 per ton for each acre that would be plowed under, on the condition that it would not be replanted for six years. The 3.5 cents per pound that the committee felt was the minimum that the farmer would get would only be possible to meet if the acreage was taken out of production.¹⁰³

However, the Farm Board did not want to put up the money for the scheme. It was furthermore vexed at the shippers, who were reluctant to pay \$600,000 that they owed. The latter had collected the money from the farmers, but since the farmers owed the shippers money, this amount had been used to reduce the indebtedness. The shippers also did not want to subject themselves to the control of the Farm Board. Circles within the Farm Board, in return, wanted to withdraw from the fresh grape market altogether. They would take a hand only in the raisin market, working through Sun-Maid.¹⁰⁴

Wylie Giffin, President of the California Raisin Pool and a member of the Executive Advisory Committee, announced another plan and Ralph K. Merritt, representing the

¹⁰² K. M. Hazarabedian, "Don't Give Up Hope; We Have Reached the Depths and Are Climbing Up" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,441 (January 16, 1931).

¹⁰³ "Proposal to Pull Up the Vineyards" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,446 (February 20, 1931).

¹⁰⁴ "Raisin and Grape Association Not Satisfying. New Changes Probable" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,450 (March 20, 1931).

California Grape Control Board, went off to Washington to discuss it with the Farm Board. Giffin's proposal would create two pools within the existing raisin pool, one to take care of the sales, and one to control the surplus. The price of raisins would be 2.75 cents per pound for extra-standard and 1.5 cents for sub-standard. The price for Surplus Pool grapes had not been set, but 1 cent per pound was anticipated. It would be necessary for the Farm Board to agree to remove 30,000 tons of grapes from the market, which was the surplus to October, 1930. Dues in the amount of \$3,600,000 would be used in the fruit industries, including the purchase of 100,000 tons of table and juice grapes. A final decision would be made in December and January about the issue of ripping up 50,000 to 60,000 acres of vineyards, considered to be the cause of the "permanent surplus."¹⁰⁵

In the summer of 1931 a drought struck the valley, with which the state government did not have the means to cope.¹⁰⁶ During the second week of July the Grape Control Board made an extensive tour of the vineyards to assess the damage done by drought, heat, and insects. The results were telegraphed to Merritt in Washington to call to the attention of the Farm Board. The crop was short by 650,000 tons from the previous year, but still showed a surplus of 480,000 tons. This was expected to keep prices low.¹⁰⁷ High-

¹⁰⁵ "1931 Grape and Raisin Control Plan" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,458 (May 15, 1931).

¹⁰⁶ *Asbarez* XXI.1,466 (July 10, 1931).

¹⁰⁷ "Raisin Crop Out of Danger" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXI.1,468 (July 24, 1931).

quality raisins were drawing good prices, but poorer raisins were depressing the price. It was suggested that they should be kept off the market. But unfortunately, the hot weather continued to the point that the leaves of the vines wilted and the grapes were damaged. This also weakened the vines, affecting the next year's crop.¹⁰⁸

In August Giffin stated that there were still 40,000 tons of raisins left over from the 1930 crop. As soon as they were exhausted, the farmers would receive an additional payment.¹⁰⁹ The price was settled at 2.5 cents per pound.¹¹⁰ On Monday, September 7, the 32 reception stations of the Raisin Pool opened to take in the crop. Farmers had to make appointments to deliver their grapes, and could not change stations without permission.¹¹¹ For a while, eastern prices for table grapes and for juice appeared to hold up well, then declined.¹¹²

1932: No Improvement

By 1932 the distress, continuing for so long in the vineyards, had reached alarming proportions. *Asbarex* urged an immediate remedy. Each state or county was left to fend

¹⁰⁸ "Condition of Raisin Market" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXI.1,469 (July 31, 1931).

¹⁰⁹ "Farm Board Will Probably Ratify 1931 Raisin Production Plan" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXI.1,470 (August 7, 1931).

¹¹⁰ *Asbarex* XXI.1,471 (August 14, 1931).

¹¹¹ "Transfer of 1931 Grape Crop Begins" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXII.1,474 (September 4, 1931).

¹¹² "Grape Shipments Much Lower" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXII.1,478 (October 2, 1931); *Asbarex* XXII.1,481 (October 23, 1931).

for itself, a very ineffective solution. The not-so-clever would not get very much help that way. But it was the moral responsibility of men to help each other, particularly men of the same race. In Boston an effort had been started, the Armenian Relief Organization. But in California, except for the meager efforts of the churches, no outstretched hand was evident. Some methodical and systematic means was necessary. In other words, in every town the organizations in the Armenian churches had to come out of their isolation and start a united body to organize the relief work in an authoritative manner. This could not be done by occasional contributions but had to be put on a system of dues, whose details could be settled in a general meeting. Perhaps this could be led by the *Arachnortaran*.¹¹³

In Washington, talks continued between the Farm Board and representatives of the grape industry over supply and demand. Giffin reported the new arrangements, which required that the raisin growers void their contracts with the Grape Control Board and sign up with the Raisin Pool. These contracts would be for ten years, with the possibility to leave after five years. Again, 85 percent of the acreage was necessary for the plan to go into effect. The campaign continued in the summer.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ “For Aid to the Needy” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXII.1,481 (October 23, 1931).

¹¹⁴ *Asbarez* XXII.1,515 (June 17, 1932); “Pool Campaign” [in Armenian], XXII.1,529 (July 29, 1932).

1933: Continued Low Prices

Raisin prices continued to be low in 1933. The farmers held another meeting in the Fresno Civic Auditorium in July to try to remedy the raisin problem through a production code for the whole state.¹¹⁵ When the 1933 crop came in, the farmers protested that the price was too low and sent a delegation to Washington to protest, but in the end were forced to accept the government's price of \$52.50 per ton for Thompson Seedless raisins, less than the \$65 per ton they said they needed.¹¹⁶

1934

The 1934 crop was 40 percent smaller than the previous year, making it the smallest in ten years. This would not promise the vineyardist enough to pay his bills. Complicating matters, according to the plan that had been made previously, 15 percent of the crop would come under the control of the Control Board and not be subject to sale by the farmers. The amount on the market under those circumstances would amount to half of the previous year's total. It therefore was irrelevant to withhold 15 percent of the crop in order to hold up prices, because they would rise anyway. The farmers wanted to share in

¹¹⁵ *Asbarez* XXIII.1,573 (July 28, 1933).

¹¹⁶ "Raisin Arrangements. Vineyardists Accept Government Proposals" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,595 (October 20, 1933).

the higher price, and to sell their entire crops. So they were ready to withhold their entire crops from the market until their demands were met.¹¹⁷

In this manner the Armenians of the San Joaquin Valley endured with their American brethren until the coming of war brought the Great Depression to an end. Many Armenians abandoned the farms for the city, particularly Los Angeles and its environs. But the Armenian community remained, having left a lasting impression to this day.

¹¹⁷ "Faced With a Short Raisin Crop" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,632 (September 14, 1934).

CHAPTER 9

THE CHURCHES AFTER 1920

The Armenian Apostolic Church

The disaster of World War I and its aftermath fell harshly upon the Armenian Apostolic Church, which nevertheless had to provide spiritual sustenance while at the same time dealing with both the adjustment to American life and the increasing political divisions in the community.¹ The repercussions of these cataclysmic events were the following:

1. The physical destruction and scattering of the Armenians of Turkey.
2. The decimation of the Armenian Apostolic Church, with 63 dioceses, 2,152 parishes, and 2,043 churches extinguished, and the Catholicos of Sis driven into exile in Syria.²
3. A loss of religious faith and the near-death of the spirit of religion, due to the apparent abandonment of the Armenians by God.³
4. A resultant increase in the immigration of Armenians into the United States.

¹ Portions of this chapter dealing with the diocesan assembly of 1923 are based on a paper the author presented at the Conference on Identity and Assimilation: The Armenian Experience in America entitled "Church Reform in America: The Diocesan Assembly of 1923," published in *Journal of Armenian Studies* 3, nos. 1 and 2, 1986–1987.

² Compare the tables of statistics of Armenian dioceses before and after World War I, in Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*. (London: A R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., second English edition, 1955), pp. 205–212.

³ George B. Kooshian, Sr., who survived the desert in 1915, spoke of hearing the victims bitterly reproach God many times for having abandoned them. This sentiment was by no means universal, however.

5. The sovietization of the Republic of Armenia, as a consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.
6. The demoralization of the Armenian people due to the complete failure of their aspirations.
7. The intensification of political division among the Armenians, especially in the United States, because of the frustration engendered by the calamity.
2. A change in the character of the American-Armenian immigrant community from migrant (*bantukht*), at least in part, to permanent.
3. The ageing of the immigrants and their Americanization because of the immigration restriction laws enacted by the United States Congress in 1921 and 1924, cutting off immigration for more than forty years.
4. The rise under these circumstances of a new generation of Americanized offspring.

These factors together created a crisis in the Armenian Apostolic Church. An attempt was made to meet it in October 1923, when the clerical and lay representatives of the parishes throughout the United States gathered in Worcester, Massachusetts, for their annual diocesan assembly.

Reform Movements within the Church

There had been efforts at modernization of the Church before. As far back as 1863 the unrestricted power of the Patriarch of Constantinople had been limited by a constitution

for the Armenians of Turkey. This provided for an elected General Assembly of clerical and lay members. A period of progress in education and ecclesiastical life began, together with the discussion of church reforms. Some elements opposed any kind of reforms at all, either from an attitude that regarded the Church as some kind of national museum, valuable insofar as she remained uncontaminated by innovations, or from a hide-bound conservative adherence to all the received teachings as one indivisible mass, none of which could be chipped off without wrecking the whole. But still, there were others who proposed radical changes, and the debate over reform was carried on both in the Armenian press of Constantinople and within the Church. From the question of governance and the election and confirmation of high officials, the reformers pressed on to consider the celibacy of priests, marriage and divorce, church music, the abbreviation or elimination of "superfluous and meaningless rituals," and the liturgical use of modern Armenian instead of the ancient church Armenian, which had become unintelligible to the masses. Some went so far as to propose union with the Church of England. All these proposals for reform presupposed a more fundamental question, namely, the mission of the Church itself. The Christian Church has always proclaimed its mission to be the salvation of mankind. To accomplish this, from ancient times it sought superiority over the temporal power, even bending kings and emperors to its will. Gradually in Europe the temporal power won out. But for the Armenians, who were always under foreign domination or the threat of it, whether from the Greeks, the Persians, the Latins, or the Muslims, the Church became a national institution, and the idea of the salvation of the

Armenian people from Satan and the idea of the salvation of the Armenian people as a nation became inextricably mixed, and when they were tardily exposed to the Western influences that sprang from the Reformation, in conflict. For the Armenian Church, the question of reform, particularly reform of language, impinged on the national values of the Church, which many Armenians put higher than its spiritual values. Was the Armenian Church the Christian Church for the Armenians, or was it the national expression of the Armenians?⁴

The Church in America and the Diocesan Assembly of 1923

After a century of cataclysmic events, defections, attacks, and conflict with modern secular and anti-religious ideologies, the Church was transplanted to America. Personified as a loving mother, established in religious and civil rule, it was now only one of many competing churches, a foreign church facing the hot flames of the melting pot. But this only strengthened its Armenian identity. Nothing had stripped it of its Armenianness; while it

⁴ See Leon Arpee, *A Century of Armenian Protestantism 1846–1946* (New York: The Armenian Missionary Association of America, 1946), chapter 9; Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*. (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., second English edition, 1955), chapter 19; Piuzant Ketchian, “Church Reform” [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXIII.20 (May 19, 1923), p. 615. In 1912 Primate Papken of Ankara, later Catholicos, made the following proposals in a synod of bishops convened by Catholicos Izmirlian: 1. Beware of length and repetition in the services. 2. Change the language of the Church to the vernacular, except for the Divine Liturgy and selected hymns. 3. Reform fundamentally church music, following the arrangement of Gomidas, and admitting the organ for use in the church. 4. Reform rituals, including Baptism, Holy Matrimony, Burial and Ordination, eliminating Extreme Unction altogether. 5. Open all the higher ranks of the Church to the married clergy, and consign the celibates to monasteries, if anyone wants to go. 6. Reform administration and revise the number of bishoprics in order to eliminate unnecessary officials. 7. Reform marriage laws on more humane lines, for example, eliminating the prohibitions against marriage based on spiritual or legal kinship and not on degrees of blood relationship and reexamining divorce laws. Catholicos Papken, “Church Reform” [in Armenian], reprinted in *Gotchnag* XXXII.36 (September 3, 1932), pp. 905–906, from *Nor Lur* (Constantinople, no date).

no longer encompassed the entire Armenian nation, it remained the only connection to the Armenian past. Its legitimacy could not be denied. Even Protestants acknowledged its primacy of honor, and revolutionaries and conservatives alike struggled to claim it for their own. Trial by fire and sword had only added new national commemorations to its calendar. After the fate of the Western Armenians had been sealed by the post-World War I settlement, the survival of the Armenians as an identifiable group once again was synonymous with the Church's own survival. Furthermore, after the United States Congress enacted immigration restriction in 1922, the renewing influx of Armenians from the Middle East stopped. The present and future depended on the Armenians who already lived in America, and on their children.

All these facts were recognized by many American-Armenians, and a new debate began on church reform. Since the Armenian colonies of the United States had become permanent, some reorganization was needed to meet specifically American conditions. How could the Armenians, children of the same race and Mother Church as they were, living in such different environments as the Soviet Union, Muslim lands, and the colonies of Europe and the Americas, live under the same institutions? If the Armenians of the United States were to enjoy the full rights of the country, they had to conform themselves to its way of life and social practices. The Church would have to foster the peaceful and law-abiding life of its children. Its clergy would have to be able to take part in the life of the country, to understand the civil authority of the government, to take part in social and public issues. The Church not only would have to keep the traditions of the past, but

to provide the moral leadership for the future, and this without depending on the commands of a distant catholicos. The priest in Boston or New York needed a far different preparation than the priest of some rural village in Turkey.⁵

The debate over church reform was fanned to a white heat by an incident that was reported by all the Armenian papers in 1923. It was revealed that the celibate priest of the Armenian parish of London, the only one in England, had become intimate friends with a wealthy Armenian merchant of his flock, to whose home he was frequently admitted as a guest of the family and as a teacher of Armenian to the children. One day, this man abducted the merchant's wife and spirited her off to Paris and Berlin.⁶ This outrage recalled the attempted abduction of a young girl in Fresno in 1909,⁷ and for weeks afterward incensed articles appeared in the Armenian papers blaming most of the Church's troubles on the institution of celibacy.⁸ Besides this, the Armenians of

⁵ The foregoing was pointed out by Dr. H. S. Jelalian in "Our Religious Position in the United States" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXI.34 (October 20, 1921), pp. 1,004–1,005.

⁶ "Exploitation by a Disgraceful Vartabed" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXIII.12 (March 24, 1923), pp. 56–357.

⁷ For the Fresno episode, see Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 191. The accused was Sahag Vartabed Nazaretian; see above, p. 108.

⁸ For attacks on celibacy, see "We Must Eliminate Celibacy," *Gotchnag* XXIII.15 (April 14, 1923); Faustus of Byzantium (pseud.), "The Armenian Church," *Gotchnag* XXIII.19 (May 12, 1923); Vahan Kahana Giuldarian, "The Question of the Marriage of Celibate Priests," *Gotchnag* XXIII.25 (June 23, 1923). For more debate on reform proposals, see "The Position of Our Church in the United States," *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VII.411 (September 2, 1921); untitled article by H. M. Nshigian, *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VII.418 (September 27, 1921); A. Khan-Amir, "About the Armenian Apostolic Church," *Nor Giank-Sisvan*, VII.422 (October 11, 1921); H. M. Nshigian, "About the Armenian Apostolic Church," *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VII.424 (October 18, 1921); Dajad (pseudonym of Mardiros. H. Ananikian), "The Question of Reform of the Church," *Gotchnag* XXIII.50 (December 15, 1923), reprinted in XXXII.41 (October 8, 1932), pp. 1,028–1,030; Karekin

California had been agitating for some time to have their own separate diocese and primate because of the great distance to the Prelacy in Worcester. This idea had already been approved by the Catholicos, but not implemented. In June or July, 1923, a few months after the London incident, the clergy of California sent a letter to Worcester asking the primate to convene a church assembly in Chicago, where all the clergy could meet together with lay representatives. It was generally acknowledged that, considering the desperate state of the Armenians abroad and of the Church in general, measures had to be taken quickly. The questions of the preparation of clergy, the regulation of preaching and singing, the opening of Sunday schools, the question of celibacy, and the reform of the calendar all needed resolution.⁹

The extraordinary convention requested by the clergy of California was not called, but the reform proposals were put on the agenda of the regular meeting of the diocesan assembly. This was set to convene at Holy Redeemer Church in Worcester on October 7, 1923. The assembly, a body consisting of all the clergy of America and lay representatives from the parishes, had the power to act only on administrative matters pertaining to the diocese. It could not make any reforms on its own that would affect canon law. Any such matters would have to be referred to Holy Echmiadzin for the action of the Catholicos

Vartabed, Bishop of Trebizond, "The Question of Church Reform," *Gotchnag* XXIII.28 (July 14, 1923); M. H. Knajian, "Clerical Celibacy," in two parts, *Gotchnag* XXIII, Nos. 40–41 (October 6, 13, 1923); Vartan Vartabed Kasparian, "Church Reform," *Gotchnag* XXIII.45 (November 10, 1923); Nersioian, "About Church Reform," in two parts, *Gotchnag* XXIII, Nos. 47–48 (November 24, December 1, 1923) [all in Armenian].

⁹ "Proposal of the Armenian Churches of California" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXIII.28 (July 14, 1923), p. 869.

and the Supreme Spiritual Council. Yet great hopes were put on this meeting. The American-Armenians felt that the duty and honor of leading the reform movement had fallen to them, and many waited to see if the assembly would emerge as the one body that could unite all the Armenian factions.¹⁰

Before the assembly itself convened, the primate called a meeting of the clergy to discuss the proposed reforms. Fifteen pastors were present. Following this meeting, the assembly met. It consisted of 32 clerical and lay representatives. The report of the clergy was heard, and the assembly held its debate and passed twenty resolutions. These were as follows.¹¹

1. *Reform of the Calendar.* The Armenian Church was still using the old Julian calendar, which by 1923 had fallen thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar in use in the West. Furthermore, the Armenian Church had always observed the Feast of the Theophany on January 6, combining the Nativity, Epiphany, and Baptism of Jesus Christ into one celebration. This meant that according to the civil calendar, the Armenians would observe Christmas on January 19. The real desire of the assembly was to adopt the Gregorian calendar and to celebrate the Nativity on December 25 and the Epiphany on

¹⁰ "Diocesan Assembly of America" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXIII.37 (September 15, 1923), p. 1,155.

¹¹ Reports of the meeting from which this account is constructed are the following: "Diocesan Assembly of the Armenians of America," *Gotchnag* XXIII.42 (October 20, 1923); Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian, "Resolutions of the American-Armenian Church Assembly, October 2–10, 1923," *Nor Or* 111.2 (November 16, 1923) and *Asbarež* XVI.1,010 (November 17, 1923); Teotoros Kahana Isahagian, "The American-Armenian Church Convention and Its Resolutions," in five parts, *Asbarež* XVI.1,019 (December 11, 1923); XVI.1,020 (December 14, 1923); XVI.1,021 (December 16, 1923); XVI.1,023 (December 18, 1923); XVI.1,029 (January 3, 1924) [all in Armenian].

January 6, in keeping with the Western world. This matter was out of its jurisdiction, so it resolved to celebrate the Theophany on the Sunday following January 6 rather than on the day itself and to ask the Catholicos to make the other changes. On November 9 the Catholicos issued an encyclical establishing the Gregorian calendar in response to the Western appeals, which came from Europe as well as America. Because of delays in transmission, this decree did not arrive in the United States until early 1924, when it was put into effect. The date of the Nativity, however, was not changed from January 6.¹²

2. *Sunday Worship*; 3. *Spiritual Administration*; 4. *Confession and Holy Communion*; and 17. *Regulation of Church Singing*. Four resolutions dealt with the reform of services in the church, which were criticized as too long, repetitious, and tedious. There were also complaints about the music and about lack of discipline during services. On Sundays, the Divine Office or *Zhamergutiun* was sung before the Divine Liturgy. It was entirely appropriate and in keeping with tradition to follow this vestige of ancient practice, for these prayers were appointed to be sung at various times throughout the day. But the assembly noted that in America people did not have the time or patience to spend so many long hours in church and were arriving late for Sunday services. So it was resolved that the local parishes could hold the *Zhamergutiun* and Divine Liturgy on separate days if they wished to do so, with the idea that this would increase attendance at both services and also free the pastor to visit the Sunday school.

¹² “New Calendar for the Armenians” [in Armenian], *Nor Or* 111.5 (March 14, 1924).

The assembly also voted to instruct a special committee to shorten and make uniform the rites of Baptism, Holy Matrimony, and Burial. Likewise the long Confession, with its many “*meghas*” (I have sinned) was to be abbreviated. No changes were made in the Divine Liturgy as this was a much more delicate matter, but many had expressed the feeling that some parts, such as the iteration of half forgotten saints and hermits, could be omitted. The matter was called to the attention of the Catholicos. No changes were made in the manner of administering Holy Communion, and pastors were exhorted to encourage the faithful to fulfill this obligation.

5. *Membership in the Church.* The Armenian laity had, from the middle of the nineteenth century, a voice in the administration of the Church.¹³ This was formalized for the Church in America with the adoption of a constitution in 1902. Upon the payment of dues and inscription on the rolls of the parish, a communicant became a “member” and had the right to vote in church meetings on administrative matters. This process was open to considerable abuse, because in the highly charged political atmosphere of the time, the members of Armenian political parties would try to have their own sympathizers elected to the parish councils and diocesan assemblies. Indeed, political dissension had been an aspect of church life since the first parish was established in the United States in 1889.¹⁴ One particularly bitter episode had taken place in Holy Cross Church in Los Angeles in 1919, when a mob took over the annual business meeting and installed their

¹³ See Ormanian, *Church of Armenia*, chapter 32.

¹⁴ Mirak, *Torn*, pp. 183–190. The polemics on this subject in the Armenian press are endless.

own chairman over the objections of the priest. They then lowered the annual dues from \$5.00 to \$2.00, at which point many of the old members walked out. Eighty new members were immediately enrolled, who promptly turned out the old Ramkavar-dominated board and elected seven Dashnaksakans.¹⁵ The following year, objecting to a circular from the primate in Worcester in support of a charitable fund drive being conducted by General Antranig, who had broken with Dashnaksutiu, the new council wrote the primate a letter accusing him of political meddling and informing him that they no longer recognized his jurisdiction.¹⁶ This resulted in a free-for-all at the next church business meeting, to which the police had to be called to restore order.¹⁷ In order to prevent this kind of thing, it was proposed to make stricter membership rules and to require a test of “spiritual worthiness” as a condition for church membership. This was attacked by the Dashnaksakan press as a reactionary scheme to deprive the people of their rights. Nevertheless, the assembly resolved to insert an article into the constitution that “spiritual worthiness is to be given proper consideration.” Unfortunately, the struggle for political control of the Church could not be stopped, with results that became well known to all Armenians.

¹⁵ Hagop Zakarian, “Letter from the Hinterland” [in Armenian], *Asbarež* XI.549 (February 14, 1919). Zakarian took over the chairmanship of the meeting and was elected chairman of the parish council. This account is from his own description of the events.

¹⁶ “Protest Against Worcester Primate” [in Armenian], *Asbarež* XII.622 (February 27, 1920). Zakarian signed the letter.

¹⁷ See reports in *Asbarež* XII.631 (March 30, 1920); XII.632 (April 2, 1920); XII.642 (May 7, 1920).

6. *Clerical Celibacy.* One of the most inflammatory issues of the time was the celibacy of priests, due in large measure to the crime that had been committed in London. It was recalled that the ancient patriarchs of the Armenian Church, such as Saints Gregory the Illuminator, Nerses the Great, and Sahag Bartevis, had all been family men, and that the practice of celibacy was a medieval and foreign intrusion into Armenian discipline. The chief bishop of the Anglicans was married, and all the ranks of the clergy, from the lowest to the highest, were open to married men with no harmful effects on the Church. Why then, it was argued, should the Armenian Church cling to a medieval practice that, besides leading to occasional scandals, had caused many priests and even bishops to renounce their vows in order to marry? And by preventing the married priests from progressing beyond the low rank of kahana into the episcopate, the Church was deprived of worthy talent and the priests themselves became demoralized and discouraged. The assembly accepted these arguments and voted that henceforth any person, either before or after reaching a clerical position, should be free to marry and raise a family. Since it was out of the power of the assembly to legislate on such a matter, the resolution could only be forwarded to Echmiadzin for consideration.¹⁸

¹⁸ This would in fact have been a tremendous innovation. See the discussion of the topic in Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, *Armenian Church Historical Studies: Matters of Doctrine and Administration*, ed. and intro. Nerses Vrej Nersessian (New York City: St. Vartan Press, 1996), "Notes on the Marriage and Celibacy of Priests," pp. 272–300. No evidence has been adduced that any bishops entered marriage after they had become bishops. The rule is against marriage *after ordination*, which is increasingly bent due to the exigencies of our times, but by dispensation.

7. *Preparation of Clergy*; 14. *Fund for the Relief of Needy Clergymen*; and 16.

Examination of Candidates for Ordination. Three other resolutions also dealt with the clergy. Although many clergymen had recently arrived from the Middle East, few of these were equipped by education or temperament to assume pastorates in America. They would have to be maintained. On the other hand, there soon would be, if there was not already, a shortage of suitable priests. The central committee of the diocese was directed to prepare a plan specifying where and in what way clergymen should be prepared, and how it should be paid for. Until other arrangements could be made, the Seminary of St. James in Jerusalem was considered the most appropriate place. The central committee was further directed to set an examination for all candidates for ordination. But the resolution did not mention any test of spiritual worthiness. It was pointed out that the notorious vartabed of London (called in the press “the non-vartabed”) had been a university man. As Father Teotoros Kahana Isahagian of California remarked, as yet there was no institution to train priests in the United States, and furthermore, the most important part of their education was not to be found in books. That was to be obtained by leading a Godly life of forgiveness, prayer, and meditation, sustained by frequent worthy partaking of the Blessed Sacrament.

8. *Days of Weddings*; 9. *Civil Weddings*; and 10. *Illicit Weddings*. Three resolutions dealt with the regulation of marriage. The assembly voted to permit weddings on any day of the year except during Holy Week and midday Sunday. This was directed against festivities, eating, and drinking on days when the minds of all Christians should be

directed toward repentance and dominical thoughts. The other two resolutions reaffirmed the long-standing doctrine that the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony was the exclusive domain of the Church. The possibility of marriage outside the Church, which was recognized by the civil law, presented a direct challenge to this authority. There could be no question of the assembly accepting civil marriage; to do so would mean a denial of the sacrament, and whosoever entered into such a purported union committed a grave sin and had excommunicated himself until such time as he had submitted himself to the Church and had received the blessing of Holy Matrimony. Similarly, the assembly declared that for a communicant to contract a marriage contrary to the rites and canons of the Armenian Church was illicit. This was of course in no way an innovation or contrary to the laws of any of the other Apostolic Churches. A Catholic could always find a Catholic church in which to get married, but an Armenian, because of the dispersion of his people throughout the world, might find himself nowhere near an Armenian church. Such persons, Father Teotoros explained, would incur no impediment when forced by circumstances to marry under another Christian rite. A related question that was not presented but that Father Teotoros believed the assembly should have considered was divorce. Again the liberal secular American environment presented a real danger to the authority of the Church over the institution of marriage. In this matter again the teaching of the Church was very explicit, and to this day lifelong fidelity is demanded in the wedding rite through triple vows before God, the Church, all the Heavenly Hosts, the Ministers, and the people. The reaffirmation of the position of the

Church on marriage would have been more complete with a statement on divorce.

Another issue that was not addressed, or was addressed only obliquely, was intermarriage. That would ultimately have a far greater effect on the Church than civil marriage, if the non-Armenian party was not brought into communion with the Armenian Church along with his or her spouse.

11. *Burial of Unbaptized Infants.* The assembly, by stating that unbaptized infants were not to be permitted Christian burial, was again reaffirming the laws of the Church. While this seemingly callous declaration categorized the unfortunate innocents with divorced persons, adulterers, unconfessed sinners, and suicides as outside the fellowship of the Church, it was perfectly consistent with the ancient doctrines concerning baptism. Similar difficulties have confronted other Christian denominations. The remedy, it was stated, was for parents to present their newborn promptly for baptism. The neglect of this, the first and most fundamental Christian act, would not only deny the children salvation, but would ultimately kill the Church.

12. *A Prelacy for California*; 13. *Status of the "California Church Convention"*; 19. *Relations with Foreign Churches*; and 20. *Annual Conventions and District Meetings.* In April 1918, the churches of California had demanded their own separate diocese because of the great distance from the prelacy in Worcester. This had already been approved by the Catholicos and was awaiting implementation. But the matter had dragged on for four or five years, while the diocesan assembly did nothing. In their exasperation, the California clergy tried what appeared to be a back-door approach by holding a convention in 1922

and passing resolutions. At the present session, this question was brought up again, but somehow it got changed into a discussion of a vicarate or vice prelacy. Again it was put off, the explanation being offered that because of the current difficult economic conditions and the mounting debts of the Prelacy the time was not right, and furthermore, the assembly said that the California resolutions of 1922 had to be submitted to Worcester for ratification. Needless to say, this pleased the California clergy not at all.

The assembly also resolved to have a committee prepare a plan for reciprocal relations with the Episcopal Church. This recalled the efforts that had been made at union of the two churches in the 1880s, during the reign of Catholicos Mkrtich.¹⁹ Each had always felt some sympathy for the other, perhaps because both laid claim to an Apostolic tradition and neither would accept domination by Rome.²⁰ This sympathy was shown by the fact that wherever the Armenians had no church building of their own, they would hold their services in an Episcopal church. It was still being proposed by some Armenians in America that the Armenian Church formally unite with the Episcopal Church, but as to what were the “reciprocal relations” called for in the resolution, it is not specified.

15. *Reading of the Holy Bible in Modern Armenian.* In all of its ceremonies and rites, in all of its hymns and prayers, in all of its lections and readings, the Church used Classical Armenian, the graceful and beautiful language of St. Mesrob Mashdots and St. Nerses

¹⁹ Harutiun Kahana Yesaian, “Open Letter to The Very Reverend Vartan Vartabed Kasparian” [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXIV.9 (March 1, 1924).

²⁰ Jelalian, “Our Religious Position.”

Shnorhali, hoary with tradition and use. For the deacons, for the scholars, for the educated, nothing could ever compare to the sublimity of the ancient tongue or the incomparable expressions of devotion of the hymns of the Church. But to the common people, even to those who knew long sections of the Mass or Prayer Book by memory, or who placed the Lamentations of St. Gregory of Nareg across their thresholds to ward off the Devil, it had become unintelligible. Even the reading of lessons from the Prophets, Apostles, and the Holy Gospel, whose purpose in the early Church had been the instruction of the people, was done in the same incomprehensible language.

The Evangelicals, who were more interested in saving souls than in saving traditions, cut the Gordian knot by discarding Classical Armenian altogether. In all their services they used the vernacular, whether it was modern Armenian, Turkish, or English. So the missionaries translated the Bible for the first time into the modern tongue and into Turkish with Armenian letters, and provided books of Protestant songs with Armenian and Turkish and English words set to the western music. These could be and were (and still are) sung in two or three languages simultaneously. The Evangelicals had no objection to the vernacular, no matter what it was.

But for the Apostolics, the question of language was vital. In any liturgical religion, words assume an immense importance. By their repetition the holy celebration is accomplished. There can be no deviation from the prescribed ritual, for deviation can bring forth error. So the words themselves come to be regarded as holy, and to tamper with them in any way is close to a sacrilegious act. Thus the language of the liturgy, originally

intelligible to all, will be perpetuated long after people have ceased to speak or understand it. And the people themselves will meet any attempt to change or modernize it with dogged opposition. If the Roman Catholic Church, so great and secure, had to wait two thousand years to abandon Latin for the vernacular, then what could be expected of the Armenians, who had just barely survived an attempt to obliterate them and their memory from the face of the Earth? Was not the language of their ancient rites and rituals the surety of their existence as a people? And if the Holy Mysteries were to be celebrated in another language, then what should that language be? Should it be the modern Western Armenian of the Turkish-Armenian refugees? Should it be the modern Eastern Armenian of the Armenians of Persia and the Caucasus, or even the ill-begotten “Workers’ Armenian” that was being foisted off by the Soviet government? Should it not be Armenian at all, but English in America, Spanish in Argentina, and French in France? Either it had to be the same old Classical tongue, or else it had to be all the languages that the Armenians spoke. As for the young, the English-speaking children of the immigrants, perhaps they could learn enough Armenian in the Saturday schools to continue the tradition.

The only resolution the assembly made on the subject of language was to “accept in principle” the reading of Scripture lessons in modern Armenian during the Divine Liturgy. But this was nothing new at all. In Cilicia in the preceding century, where many Armenians understood no Armenian, the missionaries had made many converts by preaching to them in Turkish. Seeing this, the Apostolic Church began to allow Turkish

translations of the Gospel reading, and Catholicos Mkrtych Keyfshian would even preach in Turkish himself.²¹

If the assembly avoided the question of language, then what could be done? The problem did not end with the reading of the Gospel in modern Armenian or English, or the delivering of bilingual sermons. Through constant repetition, most of the people, excluding the American-born generation, of course, understood at least some parts of the Mass itself, or had some idea of what was going on, if they did not understand every word. But what of all the other services of the Church? There were many variable hymns and prayers, the *Zhamergutiun*, baptismal, marriage, and burial rituals, and special services throughout the year, such as Lenten devotions. Unless they were to recede out of daily life, they had to be understood. In America, this was a problem of enormous proportions, which could only get worse. For the children, despite the high hopes of their elders whenever another Saturday Armenian school was started in some church basement, had not a prayer of learning even a minimal standard of modern Armenian, much less the Classical Armenian of the Church. So they would inevitably be drawn to English-speaking American churches. If nothing were done, the Armenian Church in America would die.

The minimum that was necessary, as Father Teodoros pointed out, was to put bilingual prayer books in the hands of the people, particularly the young. The Roman Catholic Church still celebrated its ceremonies in Latin, from China to South America.

²¹ V. K. G. [sic], "Church and Language" [in Armenian], *Nor Or* 111.102 (November 16, 1923). The author states that he heard preaching in Turkish many times with his own ears as a clerk in Aintab.

How many of these multitudes knew Latin? But their Church provided them with missals and instructional books in their own languages, and made a tremendous effort to educate the young. There were already precedents for this in the Armenian Church. A bilingual Classical and modern Armenian prayer book was in use in Constantinople, a bilingual Armenian-English missal had been published in London, and in India a priest had translated the entire Office into English,²² besides which there was Catechism of Christian Instruction. All of the liturgical books—everything—had to be translated and disseminated if the young were to learn. As for Father Teotoros, the marvelous Armenian-English missal that he published in Fresno in 1932, complete with the text of the Mass, hymns and occasional services, and the melodies of the Holy Eucharist, was an example of precisely what was necessary. What else was necessary the assembly considered in the next resolution.

18. *Sunday Schools*. The assembly recognized the critical need to provide for the religious education of the young and so instructed a committee to draw up a suitable plan for Sunday Schools and to present it to the Central Committee for ratification and implementation. This matter assumed immense importance in America. In the old country, all education had been religious education. Children were instructed on a daily basis in village or parish schools. But in America, with the separation of church and state and the complete exclusion of religious instruction from the public schools, all the

²² Isahagian, "Church Convention," pt. 5.

responsibility fell on the Church and the family. So the Church had to adopt the Western institution of the Sunday School. What textbooks there were had to be disseminated and new materials prepared. The *Zhamakirk*, so necessary for personal devotions, had to be taught along with the Bible. Competent teachers had to be found, and the doctrines and practices of the Church had to be taught. In short, the children had to be made into Christians.

This was already a big enough task for any church, but again it was compounded by language. It offended some that any English at all was used in the church. The official language of the Armenian Church was Armenian, they said, so even the instruction in the Sunday Schools had to be in Armenian. How could a child who was taught the Bible in English ever hope to have a warm relationship with his Mother Church?²³ On the other hand, it was pointed out that the American-born generation, which constituted the future of the Church, was growing up with English. The old arguments over whether to use Classical or modern Armenian were meaningless, because the day was swiftly approaching when no one would know either. The young people had already cooled off, objecting to the language.²⁴

So the older generation put their hopes in the language schools that operated at the churches on weekdays after school and on Saturdays. But it was not fully appreciated

²³ Sisag Kulujiian, "The Past Year: 1924–1925" [in Armenian], *Mshak* I.17 (March 5, 1926); Spear, *Hay Kgem*, pp. 69–72.

²⁴ V. K.G., "Church and Language," p. 194

what an effective school involved. They were underhanded, understaffed, and under-attended, and professional methods and materials were unknown, despite the dedicated and even heroic efforts of the ladies who operated and sustained them.²⁵ One Fresno mother wrote to the paper in 1926:

I wish to say that our children are denied the means of receiving religious and moral education in the spirit of our church and are gradually being lost. The American-Armenian Church is sleeping and its officials do not feel the gravity of the present danger. And we mothers see the daily foreignization of our lambs and the bastardization of our national language and traditions, and we remain indifferent. We say, "We can't help it." But talk has it that in the Fresno Armenian community alone we spend nearly \$30,000 for religious purposes, but barely \$300 for Armenian language and national education. We also send \$30,000 to orphans and refugees in Armenia and other countries, but we don't think of our children right here before our eyes. Through our own acquiescence and indifference they are becoming orphaned, which for us will be an accursed remembrance.²⁶

Evaluation of the Diocesan Assembly of 1923

The greatest issue facing the Church in 1923 was survival in America. Did the diocesan assembly understand that, and did it take effective measures to confront it?

The fathers and lay representatives who attended the assembly showed by the resolutions that they adopted that they were aware that the Church was in a period of crisis and that action had to be taken. This they did by proposing reforms of the calendar, rituals, and music, in order to make the church services more appropriate for life in America.

²⁵ See Mirak, *Torn*, p. 194.

²⁶ Mrs. T. Isahagian, "Letter to the Editor" [in Armenian], *Mshak* 1.29 (April 20, 1926). The author was the wife of the priest Teotoros Isahagian.

They addressed the question of celibacy and encouraged the preparation of priests. They attempted to strengthen spiritual life by reaffirming the teachings of the Church on Baptism, Matrimony, and Holy Communion. They recognized that there was a language problem, and they tried to do something about the religious education of the young. Such discussions were essential, and the delegates had a right to feel satisfaction and enthusiasm at having held them. This satisfaction and enthusiasm was felt by the whole community, by conservatives and revolutionaries alike, as reflected in the comments and editorials that appeared in the press. But a reform movement, or a movement for renewal, cannot stop with one meeting. After the assembly, the delegates went home and the committees made their reports. If the reform movement was to have had a lasting effect, it would have had to have continued and grown. It would have had its evidence in the increase of church attendance, in vocations, and in popular piety. This did not happen. Instead, the political divisions among the Armenians grew and involved the Church more and more, until they exploded into violence in 1933 and tore the Church and the community asunder. The Church was not able to calm the passions of partisanship and was herself rent by partisanship. The Church also had to embrace its American-born children. That meant that it had to become self-sustaining. It could not depend on transfusions of new blood from abroad. America had closed the door to new immigrants, and a new generation would have reached maturity before it was opened again. American-born Armenians themselves had to have vocations and become priests.

The essential precondition for this was an increase in the level of religious devotion. This depended on the education of the young, independent of any consideration of language.

The conditions of the American environment also conspired against the Church. The government and popular opinion of the United States fostered a ferocious doctrine of Americanization that had as its purpose the absorption and elimination of all the immigrant groups into the great American culture. This message was well understood by every public school child. It is no wonder then that the Armenian language never gained a foothold among the American-born children of the Armenian immigrants. Besides this, the economic conditions precluded the kind of effort that was necessary. It was not realistic to expect that the little church language schools could turn out functioning Armenian speakers. That would take a complete system of elementary and high schools offering Armenian as well as American education. Even if it were politically feasible, which it was not before the 1960s, where would the money have come from? Even by 1923 some parts of the country, notably Fresno with its great Armenian community, were already experiencing the first economic contractions leading to the Great Depression, and the prelacy was complaining that it did not have the money to conduct its own operations. If the Armenian Church and the Armenians as an identifiable group were to survive the long years of immigration restriction, Americanization, depression, and war, it would not be because of the Armenian school, but because of what Armenian parents taught their children in the home.

The *Vem Kar*

While the diocesan assembly was promoting reform, the Primate of America, Archbishop Dirayr Der Hovhannesian, was following a more conservative course. This came forth in the issue of the *vem kar* or altar stone. The altar stone is a solid piece of natural stone, consecrated by a bishop, large enough to hold the Sacred Host and chalice. It is inserted into or placed on the surface of a structure that answers the purpose of an altar, when the whole altar is not consecrated.²⁷ This “portable altar” was being used by priests in Reedley and Los Angeles to celebrate the Divine Liturgy because there were no regular consecrated church buildings in these places. In 1924 Archbishop Der Hovhannesian ordered the two communities to cease this practice and to wait until he had the opportunity to travel from the east to California to perform the prescribed ritual. This caused a bitter reaction from the parishioners in Reedley and Los Angeles. They argued that this ultra-traditionalism of the primate was depriving them of spiritual consolation and did not take into account the economic conditions, which made it difficult for them to bear such an expense.²⁸ The consecration of the Reedley church was accomplished by the local California clergy later the same year, as noted below. The Los Angeles Church was also

²⁷ “Altar Stone.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. Online Edition Copyright © 1999 by Kevin Knight).

²⁸ Reedley Armenian Apostolic Church Trustees, “To the Attention of the Sons of the Armenian Apostolic Church,” *Asbarez* XVII.1102 (July 18, 1924); “Give an Arachnort to the Arachnort of the Armenians” (editorial), *Nor Or* III.39 (May 13, 1924); K. H. Altounian, Secretary of Los Angeles Armenian Apostolic Church, “An Explanation,” *Nor Or* III.48 (June 13, 1924); “Letter to the Editor,” *Nor Or* III.47 (June 10, 1924) [all items are in Armenian].

eventually consecrated, apparently by Archbishop Der Hovhannesian, but the date is unclear. The issue of the altar stone persisted, however, and became a subject of controversy in the press and in the diocesan assembly held in Boston on September 7, 1925.²⁹ The obduracy of Archbishop Der Hovhannesian in this and in other matters turned many of the Armenians against him, and in 1928 he resigned.³⁰

Individual Parishes after 1920

Reedley. The Wahtoke community hall burned down in 1922, forcing the people to conduct their religious exercises in the facilities of others or outdoors in the field. During an Armenian requiem service in the Reedley Episcopalian church, some sort of unpleasantness erupted that convinced the Armenians of the need to build a new church of their own.

A building committee was chosen on January 18, 1923, at a meeting in the home of Nazaret Noroyan. More members were added later, and Kaspar Aslanian was elected chairman. The next year the Armenians bought the Reedley Methodist Church for

²⁹ The controversy over the altar stone is discussed in Father Oshagan Minassian, "A History of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church in the United States (1888– 1944)," (Boston, Massachusetts: Boston University School of Theology Th.D. Dissertation, 1974), pp. 349–352. Minassian expresses the opinion that Archbishop Der Hovhannesian may have been opposed to the use of altar stones because he wanted to discourage the use of rented facilities by the Armenians, which contributed to impermanence.

³⁰ Archbishop Der Hovhannesian was a renowned scholar and philologist. Politically he was sympathetic to Dashnaksutiun. He was considered to be an uncompromising, extreme traditionalist. His Eastern Armenian background—he was born in Artsakh (also known as Karabagh)—was not familiar to the majority of the American Armenian immigrants, who were from Turkey. All of this caused opposition to rise against him. See the discussion of his tenure in Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 330–375.

\$3,500 and renovated it to meet Armenian liturgical requirements. An insurance payment of \$700, kept since the fire destroyed St. Mesrob Hall, was donated by the Wahtoke community. The books saved from the fire were transferred to the church, and the Armenians of the neighboring communities gave material and moral help. During this time, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the unconsecrated building on an altar stone. It was this which prompted the intervention of Archbishop Der Hovhannesian. In a meeting on November 16, 1924 it was decided to name the parish Saints Vartan and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church. It was consecrated with great enthusiasm on November 23, 1924 by Vartan Vartabed Kasparian with the assistance of other clergy. This laid to rest the issue of the altar stone as far as Reedley was concerned. The first pastor was Khachig Kahana Krouzian, who served until 1927. He was succeeded by Arsen Kahana Torosian for two years. But by then the general agricultural crisis had caused the community to decline considerably from its heyday during World War I and a pastor could no longer be maintained. The building was closed in 1931 and visiting priests were brought in on holidays. In 1954 the church was renovated and reconsecrated, with Bsg Kahana Sarkisian assuming the pastorate.³¹

³¹ *Sts. Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Church and Community of Reedley: Celebrating Sixty years 1924–1984* (Reedley: Sts. Sahag-Mesrob Armenian Church, 1985), pp. 24–25; Krikor Sarafian, *Gordsapatum H. B. E. Miutian Kalifornio Shrchanaki 1910–1953* [History of the Activities of the California District of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1910–1953] (Fresno, 1954), p. 72; *Paros* (“The Lighthouse”) I.6 (June 1927), p. 142; Charles Mahakian, “History of the Armenians in California” (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1935), p. 46.

Yettem. After Vahan Kahana Giuldalian left for Chicago in 1925, St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church of Yettem was left without a permanent pastor. The general agricultural crisis and the foreclosures of farms in the area had caused the Armenian population to decline. Nevertheless, the church tried to maintain its existence. For a while Teotoros Kahana Isahagian came on Sundays to hold services.³² On July 22, 1930 the parish decided to invite Vartan Kahana Tavitian (1862–1940) of Racine, Wisconsin, to serve as the parish priest. He served until 1934, when he returned to Racine. Still lacking a priest in 1936, the parish extended an invitation to the Reverend Father Ghevont Hovsepian of Beirut, Lebanon. But Father Hovsepian and his family were turned back from Ellis Island because of an eye infection. However, the people of the community, many of whom were natives of Chomakhlu, were fortunate to find residing in Greece a countryman willing to serve as their priest. He was Deacon Aris Kalfayan, who was ordained as Garabed Kahana on October 2, 1938, and arrived in Yettem with his family on December 2, 1939. The Reverend Father Kalfayan enjoyed a long and successful pastorate, attaining the dignity of Avak Kahana (Archpriest). He retired on account of ill health in 1962 and died on June 18, 1967.³³

On Tuesday, June 12, 1945, a fire starting in an adjacent home destroyed the old wooden church. Father Kalfayan was in Armenia for the election of a Catholicos, and the

³² *Paros* I.3 (March 1927), p. 68; *Asbarez* XIX.1308 (June 29, 1928).

³³ *History of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church 1911–1976 Yettem, California* (Yettem: St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church, 1977), p. 46.

news was immediately telegraphed to him. He replied with equanimity that it was God's will that His house should be rebuilt. The new church was a fine brick building in traditional Armenian style reminiscent of the famous church of St. Hripsime in Echmiadzin. The foundation was laid with great ceremony on September 29, 1946, the Feast of the Cross of Varak. This specifically Armenian feast is in honor of the Hripsimian Virgins. Noting that the next Saturday was the Name Day of the Catholicos, Gevorg V, a telegram of congratulation was sent to His Holiness in Armenia. Five hundred persons were present for the blessing by Locum Tenens Bishop Vartan Kasparian, including American and Armenian Protestant clergy and guests. The church was consecrated on November 16, 1947 by Archbishop Mampre Kalfayan and Bishop Vartan Kasparian.³⁴ In the interim the parishioners went to the neighboring town of Reedley to worship with the people there, combining the clerks of the two churches.³⁵

San Francisco, Oakland, Tulare, Sacramento. In San Francisco, where the Armenian community was small and dispersed, the first Divine Liturgy was celebrated in St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church by Primate Dirayr Der Hovhannesian on Sunday, May 14, 1922. Beginning on November 16, 1924, visiting priests were invited from the San Joaquin Valley. The same year the San Francisco Armenian Apostolic Church was organized. Some time in the early 1930s the parish was renamed "St. Nerses Shnorhali." In

³⁴ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 59–60. The *Yettem* album has historic photographs.

³⁵ This small community gave six of her sons for their country during World War II. They were Private Archie Ekizian, Second Lieutenant Jack Cherkezian, Private Leo J. Markarian, Corporal Haig A. Michaelian, Haig Kendigian, and Charlie Tavitian.

December 1927 Khachig Kahana Krouzian came from Reedley. He served as pastor until his resignation on June 30, 1929 over a dispute with the board of trustees. Father Krouzian then rebelled against the bishop and was defrocked.³⁶ He later repented and was reinstated, devoting his last days to gathering money for the new church building. After Father Krouzian, the pastors of this church were Bedros Kahana Hagopian (1930–1939, 1945–1947, 1951–1954), Khachig Kahana Krouzian again (September 1939–March 9, 1941), the Reverend Levont Parunak (1941–1943), the Reverend Karekin Hagopian (July 1944–January 1945), the Very Reverend Zkon Der Hagopian (July 1947–November 1950), Archbishop Vartan Kasparian (December 1954– May 1955), and the Reverend Artoon Sempadjian (June 1955– September 1968).³⁷

An existing Methodist church building was bought with money from donations and the sale of a plot of land donated by Samuel Galstaun, who reserved the right to name the church. He named it St. John the Evangelist in memory of his father. The consecration of the church was to have been held on Sunday, December 7, 1941, but was canceled because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and held over until January 4, 1942.³⁸

³⁶ An admonition to Khachig Kahana Krouzian from the Supreme Spiritual Council in Echmiadzin was published in *Asbarex* XX.1407 (May 23, 1930). He was defrocked a week later by the Primate of California, Bishop Karekin Khachadourian. Krouzian first was a Protestant pastor and then was ordained a priest. Although he was a man of good character, the issues seemed to revolve on personality and adjustment to clerical discipline. Father Krouzian did a great deal to redeem his reputation with his devoted service after his reinstatement. See *Asbarex* XX.1,409 (June 6, 1930); XX.1,410 (June 13, 1930). Some of this information is from George B. Kooshian, Sr., who as a refugee in Aleppo was helped by the future priest.

³⁷ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 99; Mahakian, "Armenians in California," p. 46; *30th Anniversary of the St. John's Armenian Church of San Francisco* (commemorative booklet, May 21, 1972).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

A second church, St. Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church, was organized in 1952 by pro-Dashnaktsakan elements.³⁹ It had no ties with the Western Diocese and reflected the political split in the church. In Oakland, St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church was organized in 1926. At first, services were irregular and conducted by visiting priests. In 1932 a building was bought and consecrated. Parishes were also organized in Tulare in 1927 and Sacramento in 1928. Services were held on special occasions whenever a priest could be obtained. In 1951 the Sacramento group bought a building and consecrated it St. James Armenian Apostolic Church on May 10, 1953.⁴⁰

Los Angeles. The lack of suitable facilities caused the growing community of Los Angeles to seek to build a church. In January, 1921, a building committee was elected consisting of Krikor Altounian, Antranig Kaprielian, and Khachadour Izmirlian. Five thousand dollars was collected the same night. A plot of land at East 20th Street and Maple Avenue was bought. The foundations were ceremoniously laid on March 26, 1922, under the presidency of Vartan Vartabed Kasparian.⁴¹ In Los Angeles, as in Reedley, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the unconsecrated building on an altar stone. Archbishop Dirayr Hovhannesian was originally scheduled to consecrate the church on June 22, 1924, but the local board of trustees rescinded the invitation. Minassian states that the church was consecrated by Archbishop Hovhannesian in 1923, but this is

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Mahakian, "Armenians in California," p. 47; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 128–129.

⁴¹ Minassian, "Armenian Church," p. 379.

clearly the wrong date.⁴² The total cost of the building was \$30,000.⁴³ Father Adom died on March 6, 1935.

The Evangelicals

The Armenian Evangelical churches continued to grow and new congregations were added as the number of Armenian immigrants in the United States increased after the war. Many Armenian Protestants found their way into American churches, where the path into general American society was broader and more direct.

Fresno

First Armenian Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Armenian Evangelical Church. The Reverend M. H. Knajian resigned from the First Armenian Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 1920, after which the Reverend Vahram Tahmisian filled the pulpit for four months. His tenure caused a division in the church and on April 24, 1921, he left with his followers to start the Armenian Evangelical Church (non-denominational). A building was built on N Street near Ventura in 1922. This church stuck to a strict fundamentalist line. Tahmisian tried to wield influence among the Armenian Brethren

⁴² K. H. Altounian, Secretary of Los Angeles Armenian Apostolic Church, "A Clarification," *Nor Or* III.48 (June 13, 1924); "Letter to the Editor," *Nor Or* III.47 (June 10, 1924) [both in Armenian].

⁴³ H[agop H.] Khashmanian, *Amerikahay Hanragitak Taregirk 1925* [American-Armenian Encyclopaedic Almanac], vol. 1, 1925 (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1925), p. 451.

faction through his religious monthly *Prgutum* (Salvation), printed in Armenian and Turkish. He remained there until his death forty years later.⁴⁴

The First Armenian Presbyterian Church, in the meanwhile, called the Reverend Missak Aijian to keep order until the Reverend Garabed Missirian arrived in January 1922.⁴⁵ The Reverend Missirian was well loved by the people for his youthful vigor and humility and helped the church to recover quickly from its previous split.⁴⁶ But to the distress of everyone he died the following year. He was followed by the Reverend Vartan Amirkhanian (1923–1941), during whose pastorate a building was built at First Street and Huntington Boulevard. After him came the Reverend Arsham Yeramian (1942–1954) and the Reverend Arshag Hiusian.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Gotchnag* XXI.26 (June 25, 1921), pp. 845–847; Krikor Sarafian, *Gordsapatum H. B. E. Miutian Kalifornio Shrchanaki 1910–1953* [History of the Activities of the California District of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1910–1953] (Fresno, 1954), pp. 32–33; George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal communication.

⁴⁵ The Reverend Missak Aijian was born in Hadjin and received his primary education at the Hadjin Academy. After graduating from Aintab College he emigrated to America. He graduated from the Mister White Bible Institute in New York in 1914. He was pastor of Armenian Protestant churches in Chicago, Pasadena, and Parlier. He also had been a teacher in Kayseri. H. P. Poghosian, Ph. D. [H. B. Boghosian], *Hajeni Endhanur Patmutiune* [General History of Hadjin], p. 404.

The Reverend Missirian was from Aintab. The following biographical sketch is from Kevork A. Sarafian, *A Briefer History of Aintab* ([n.p.]: Union of the Armenians of Aintab, 1957), p. 62: “Rev. Garabed Missirian 1889–1924. Graduate of Aintab College, 1909; teacher, 1909–1910; Graduate Andover Theological Seminary, Boston, Mass. 1914. Pastor American churches New England, 1914–1921; Armenian Presbyterian Church, Fresno, Calif., 1921–1924 [sic], when he died of appendicitis at Fresno. His untimely death at thirty-five years of age was a shock and grievous loss to his church and the evangelical community, as he was a popular, likeable and handsome person and parson.”

⁴⁶ *Gotchnag* XXII.14 (April 8, 1922), p. 465.

⁴⁷ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 32.

Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church. Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church continued as an important and influential Evangelical institution. In 1921 the church bought a building at the corner of M and Merced Streets from an American Presbyterian church. The eloquent and forceful Reverend M. G. Papazian remained in the pulpit until 1940, when he was succeeded by the Reverend Haig Asadourian (1940–1941) and the Reverend Hagop Chakmajian (1941–1951).⁴⁸

Full Gospel Church of God. The Reverend Vartan Moomjian continued at the Full Gospel Church of God until 1925, when he was succeeded by the Reverend Harutiun Karajian (1925–1928). The following pastors were the Reverend Garabed Ouzunian (1928–1930); three years of guest preachers; the Reverend Davit Pakhchorian (1933–1935); two more years of guest preachers; and the Reverend Garabed Kalemkarian (1937–1950s). The church was at N and Mono Streets.

Armenian Evangelical Brethren Church. In 1938 the Armenian Evangelical Brethren Church was founded by the Reverend Garabed Boyajian, who remained pastor until his death in 1951. He was followed by the Reverend Balikian for one year and then by the Reverend Sanadroug Shanlian. The church was on Alta Avenue and Hazelwood Boulevard near Longfellow school.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid. The Reverend Dr. Hagop Chakmakjian was born in 1900 and passed away in Fresno on January 17, 1996.

⁴⁹ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 32–33.

Outlying Communities

Yettem: First Presbyterian Church. In Yettem, the Reverend Melkon Jenanian preached in Turkish because the original settlers of the town were Turkish-speaking Armenians from Marash and Adana. But in time, new Armenian-speaking immigrants predominated. This caused discontent, which was expressed with strong feeling. A brief attempt was made at bilingual services, which did not please anybody. After a tempestuous meeting, it was decided that the Armenian speakers would use the sanctuary, while the Turkish speakers, who were in the minority, would use the basement hall. This also was not satisfactory,⁵⁰ and Golgotha Presbyterian Church was established in 1923. This church seems to have been short-lived.⁵¹ The fortunes of the First Presbyterian Church rose and fell with the community, but it continued in existence despite the economic difficulties of the times. The Armenian population of the town, having reached 600 by 1920, fell drastically during the agricultural depression that followed World War I, and by 1952 was barely two hundred.⁵²

⁵⁰ Charles Davidian, *A Warm Wind Through Yettem: An Eighty-Year Anthology* ([n.p.]: Davidian House Publishing, c. 1993), at <<http://www.putnampit.com/yettem.html>> (accessed December 22, 1999). Unpaginated electronic copy, chapter 2

⁵¹ H[akob H.] Khashmanian, *Amerikahay Hanragitak Taregirk* [American-Armenian Encyclopedic Almanac], vol. 2, 1926 (Boston, 1926), p. 199; *Asbarex* XII.622 (February 27, 1920); 627 (March 16, 1920); *Paros* I.8 (August, 1927), p. 171.

⁵² *Gotchnag* XI.14 (April 8, 1911), p. 33; XI.21 (May 27, 1911), p. 503; XI.22 (June 3, 1911), p. 542; XIII.30 (July 26, 1913), p. 729; *Paros* I.3 (March, 1927), p. 68; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 59. For a first-hand description, see Charles Davidian, *Yettem*.

Parlier: Mt. Olivet Armenian Congregational Church. By 1925 Parlier Mt. Olivet Armenian Congregational Church had 44 members and had built a wooden building on donated land at a total cost of \$460.⁵³

Reedley: Armenian Evangelical Church. An Armenian Evangelical Church was established in Reedley on May 9, 1920. There were 26 members and the Reverend Vahan Yesaian was the pastor. This church closed its doors during the post-World War I depression, when many people left the area.⁵⁴

San Francisco And Oakland

In San Francisco, the Reverend Minas Salatian preached without remuneration from 1923 to 1924. Then in 1926 the Reverend H. A. Kartoizian organized the Armenian Evangelical Golgotha Congregational Church. There were 32 members. At the same time the Reverend Kartoizian also filled the pulpit at the Armenian Evangelical Bethany Congregational Church in Oakland, established in the same year.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Gotchnag* XI.14 (April 8, 1911), p. 33; XI.24 (June 17, 1911), p. 589; XV.7 (February 13, 1915), p. 157; XVII.20 (May 19, 1917), p. 622; Khashmanian, *Taregirk* 1926, p. 197; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 80.

⁵⁴ *Gotchnag* XI.14 (April 8, 1911), p. 330; XV.7 (February 13, 1915), p. 157; XVI.34 (August 19, 1916), p. 888; XX.23 (June 5, 1920), p. 730; Khashmanian, *Taregirk* 1926, p. 199; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 72.

⁵⁵ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, pp. 99, 116.

Los Angeles

Armenian Gethsemane Congregational Church and Masis Congregational Church. By 1923, average attendance at Sunday worship at Los Angeles Armenian Gethsemane Congregational Church was 250. Local Armenians who were members of American congregations also visited on occasion.⁵⁶

The language issue caused a split in Gethsemane Church when about fifty Turkish-speaking members left the church and started Masis Congregational Church on February 25, 1925. Most of these people were from Aintab, a Turkish-speaking area of Cilicia.⁵⁷ Sermons were given in Turkish until the rise of a new generation born in America required that they also be given in English.⁵⁸

Immanuel Congregational Church. In 1930 the Reverend Yeretjian left Gethsemane Church to found Immanuel Congregational Church.⁵⁹ They met in an American church

⁵⁶ *Gotchnag* XI.14 (April 8, 1911), p. 333; XIII.10 (March 8, 1913), p. 242; XIII.51 (December 20, 1913), pp. 1,232–1,233; XIV.12 (March 21, 1914), p. 269; XV.7 (February 13, 1915), pp. 157–158; Aram S. Yeretjian, “A History of Armenian Immigration to America with Special Reference to Los Angeles” (M. A. Thesis, University of Southern California, n.d.), pp. 53–54; Mahakian, “Armenians in California,” p. 49; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 48.

⁵⁷ George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal communication.

⁵⁸ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 48–49, Mahakian, “Armenians in California,” pp. 49–50. In 1963 Gethsemane Congregational Church and Masis Congregational Church reunited, together with the First Armenian Church of San Fernando (founded in 1958) to form the United Congregational Church, located at 3480 Cahuenga Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. See also Robert Megerdichian, *The Armenian Churches in North America: Apostolic, Protestant, and Catholic. A Geographical and Historical Survey*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Society for Armenian Studies Occasional Paper Number 2, 1983). Although this work attempts to list all the Armenian Churches in North America and provides much basic information in tabular form, there are a few errors and omissions, which the author acknowledges.

⁵⁹ For Ferrahian’s version of this, see below, p. 419. Apparently there were some disagreements within the church leading to the Reverend Yeretjian’s departure.

building until they purchased their own facilities in 1934. By 1935 the church had one hundred and thirty members and the full panoply of subordinate organizations.

Fundamentalist meetings. In 1929 the Armenian Gospel Mission of Los Angeles was founded, which seems to have lasted for a number of years and then disappeared.⁶⁰

Around the same time an Armenian Pentecostal Church was started in the Caucasian Armenian neighborhood by Brother Vartan Moomjian. This church continued under Brother Panos Ghazarian, and Moomjian started another church, the Community House of God, in 1940. He preached in Armenian for two years and then switched to English. His son, Melvin Moomjian, succeeded him in the pulpit, preaching in English.⁶¹ There was also a group of Armenian Russellites or Jehovah's Witnesses, who met for study and published literature in Armenian. They worked to proselytize the Armenians, but had no impact on community life.

Pasadena

Armenian Cilicia Congregational Church. In Pasadena, the Armenian community consisted mostly of Protestants from Hadjin and the neighboring Cilician towns. On June 3, 1922 some of these families met under the leadership of Stephen Salisian and Setrak Timourian and organized the Armenian Congregational Mission of Pasadena. The Reverend Sanadrouk Shamlian, formerly a minister in Hadjin and then a resident in Pasadena, was

⁶⁰ Mahakian, "Armenians in California," p. 52.

⁶¹ Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 49.

invited to be the pastor. He served for one year, and then in 1923 the Reverend Misak Aijian assumed the pastorate for two years. After that, the Reverend Sarkis Devirian and the Reverend Haigag H. Khazoyan briefly shared Sunday pulpit service and weekday prayer meetings until the Reverend Haig Adoorian was appointed. He served from January 1925 to April 1926. The Reverend Hampartsum H. Ashjian served for the remainder of the year.⁶² On January 1, 1927, the Reverend Samuel Rejebian arrived⁶³. The Armenian Congregational Mission changed its name to Armenian Cilicia Congregational Church on April 7, 1927. A church constitution and by-laws were adopted, with

⁶²The Reverend Hampartsum H. Ashjian. Born on November 30, 1862 in Marash. Graduated first in his class from Aintab College on June 26, 1884. Taught at the Marash Academy and Marash Girls'College; part-time preacher and secretary of the Evangelical Union of Cilicia until his departure for America in 1894. Student at Yale Divinity School in 1895 when the news of the massacres of the Armenians of Turkey reached America. Lost his brother in Marash in the massacres. Gave speeches in churches and mass meetings for Armenian aid. Returned to Aintab in 1899. Pastor at Aintab, Marash, and Konia; teacher at St. Paul Institute. Courageous role during Cilician massacres of 1909. Saved many Armenians during deportations of 1915 by giving them identification papers. Imprisoned twice and court-martialed. Remained in Konia until November 16, 1922, when he went to Beirut with 800 orphans in the care of Near East Relief. Pastor and preacher in the refugee camps. Called to Masis Congregational Church in Los Angeles on January 26, 1926. Called to the Armenian Evangelical Church of Chicago on January 5, 1929. At the age of seventy he was still serving as the pastor. Retired to Los Angeles. Died in 1938. Highly respected throughout his life for his courage, intellect, and service. *Hishatakaran Eotanasameaki Tonagatarutian* [Seventieth Anniversary Memorial Album], prepared and arranged by the Reverend H[ampartsum] H. Ashjian (Los Angeles, Bozart Press, 1936).

⁶³The Reverend Samuel Rejebian. Born on April 11, 1883, in Hadjin. Received his early education at the Hadjin Academy. Graduated from St. Paul College in Tarsus in 1904. Taught in Hadjin and Adana for four years. Entered Marash Theological Seminary in 1908 and graduated. [The source gives 1914 as the year of graduation, but this must be a mistake as it also has him at Konia for two years until 1914.] Served for one year in the Third Evangelical Church of Marash. Attended Jenanian College in Konia for two years while serving at the Armenian Evangelical Church [at the time a classmate of the author's father]. Came to America in 1914 with his young family and entered Yale Divinity School. After receiving his B.D. degree, served in Binghamton, New York. Returning to Yale, received an M.A. degree in theology, philosophy, and education in 1920. Served in the United Armenian Church in Troy, New York and was ordained there on October 20, 1920. Accepted the pastorate of Pasadena Armenian Congregational Mission in 1927 and preached there for ten years. Then went to Philadelphia where he was a pastor. Poghosian, *Hajeni Undhanur Patmutiune*, pp. 406–407

52 charter signatories. On November 10, 1927, the church was admitted to the Southern California Congregational Conference.⁶⁴

At the beginning, services were conducted in private homes and then for two years in the YMCA building. In 1924 the First Methodist Church allowed the use of its chapel. For eleven years the Psychic Science building at 495 East Villa Street was used. In 1935, Mr. Stephen Philibosian of St. Louis, Missouri, visited the community. He bought a lot at the corner of El Molino Avenue and Mountain Street at a cost of \$1,000.00 and donated it to the church. Ground breaking took place on March 31, 1936, and the cornerstone was laid on July 12, 1936. The project was guided by Mihran Salisian, president of the trustees, Samuel Mardian, builder, and Luther Eskijian, architect. With great devotion and sacrifice the parishioners contributed many hours of physical labor and services, and despite the straitened economic circumstances, they finished the building. The dedication took place on June 13, 1937, with 400 persons present.⁶⁵

The Reverend Rejebian resigned in August, 1940, and the Reverend Aijian again filled the pulpit until February, 1942. The Reverend Manasseh G. Papazian, who had served as the distinguished pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Fresno for many years, took the ministry on an interim basis until the Reverend Senekerim K. Sulahian

⁶⁴ *Armenian Cilicia Congregational Church: 1992 Seventieth Anniversary Church Directory* (Pasadena, Calif., 1992).

⁶⁵ *Thirtieth Anniversary of Armenian Cilicia Congregational Church: Directory* (Pasadena, Calif., [1952]), pp. 3-4; James Evkhanian, personal communication.

arrived in July, 1942.⁶⁶ The latter served until October 1953. The Reverend Siragan Agbabian of Aleppo, Syria, then served for an interim of one year. Mr. Avedis C. Hassessian of Beirut, Lebanon, preached his first sermon as pastor on December 25, 1955. He was ordained on June 1, 1956, and served until his resignation on December 31, 1958. There followed a period during which there were guest preachers until the Reverend Puzant Levonian became interim minister in April 1959.⁶⁷ On May 1, 1960, the Reverend Norair Melidonian accepted the church's invitation to the pastorate and served for 25 years until his resignation in 1986.⁶⁸

As the name of the church reflects, almost all of the parishioners were from Cilicia. This was a Turkish-speaking area, and many of these people spoke only Turkish and their local Armenian dialect, far removed from the standard Western Armenian of Constantinople. Those who could speak standard Armenian, usually by virtue of some formal schooling, were also fluent in Turkish. So in the early years, services were held exclusively in Turkish. But the resentment of the Armenian-speakers against the language of the

⁶⁶ The Reverend Sulahian was from Aintab. The following biographical sketch is from Sarafian, *Aintab*, p. 63: "Rev. Senekerim Sulahian Born 1910. Graduate Aleppo College 1930. Near East Theological School, Athens, 1935. Pastor Evangelical Church, Kesab, 1935–1937. Graduate Hartford Theological Seminary, 1939. Pastor, Armenian Evangelical Church, Providence, R.I., 1939–1942; Cilicia Armenian Evangelical Church, Pasadena, Calif., 1942–1953; Masis Congregational Church, 1953, Los Angeles."

⁶⁷ The Reverend Levonian was from Aintab. The following biographical sketch is from Sarafian, *Aintab*, p. 63: "Born 1890. Graduate of Aintab college, 1910; Hartford Theological Seminary, 1914. Pastor American Churches, 1914–1916; Armenian evangelical churches, 1916–1930; Los Angeles, Calif., 1930–1952; Chicago, 1953. A hard working, conscientious pastor and effective preacher. Son of Prof. Sarkis Levonian."

⁶⁸ *Cilicia Seventieth Anniversary*.

hated oppressor smouldered, fanned by annual Martyrs Day commemorations. Their protests resulted in the introduction of some Armenian into the service, but still the primary language remained Turkish. Gradually, however, Turkish was eliminated. The conflict was in part generational, because the Turkish-speakers tended to be the older members of the congregation. A new conflict emerged with the rise of a new generation of American-born English speakers, and English was introduced in an effort to hold the young people.⁶⁹

For many years Cilicia Armenian Congregational Church was the only Armenian church in Pasadena (except for a tiny Brethren gathering) and its large basement hall was the scene of many community activities. But changing demographic and social factors after World War II caused the dispersal of the American-born generation and the slow decline of the church, resulting in the sale of the property in August, 1974. But soon a new influx of Armenian immigrants arrested the trend and gave new life to the oldest Armenian church in Pasadena.⁷⁰ After the property was sold, services were held at the Seventh-Day Adventist Church at 1280 East Washington Boulevard and then at the Altadena Congregational Church, 943 East Altadena Drive. On June 2, 1991, the congregation again moved into its own building at 339 South Santa Anita Avenue, Pasadena.

⁶⁹ George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal communication.

⁷⁰ Personal observation of the author.

Evangelical Brethren Church. A small Brethren gathering started in Pasadena in 1925, which was the predecessor of the Armenian Evangelical Brethren Church. They met in various locations under the leadership of Brothers Asadour Yeghoian, B. Agiulian, Eflatoon Elmajian, and Luther Kalustian. They also conducted mission meetings in Los Angeles. They were invited to join Cilicia Church in 1939 by the Reverend Manasseh G. Papazian, but preferred to remain separate for doctrinal reasons, not accepting the “liberalism” of the Congregationalists. They built a small church on East Washington Boulevard in the 1970s under the Reverend Vahram Tourian.⁷¹

The Armenian Evangelical Association of California

It was reported in *Paros* (“The Lighthouse”) that in 1927 there were twelve Armenian Protestant churches in California: three in Fresno, two in Los Angeles, two in Yettum, one in Parlier, and one in San Francisco.⁷² All of those reported were Congregationalist or Presbyterian, with the exception of one “non-denominational” (i.e., fundamentalist) church in Fresno. But according to other sources at this time there were four churches in Fresno and four in Los Angeles. The extra church in Fresno and the two extra churches in Los Angeles were probably fundamentalist gatherings. The Los Angeles churches included one among Armenians from Turkey and the other among the Caucasian [Molokan?] Armenians. We can take their omission from the list as an indication that

⁷¹ George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal communication; Sarafian, *Gordsapatum*, p. 49.

⁷² *Paros* I.8 (August, 1927), p. 171.

they were very small or had little or no influence on community life, and so were unknown to the editors.

CHAPTER 10

POLITICAL LIFE AFTER 1920

The Mandate

While the Armenians of America were debating the proper conduct of Armenian affairs, world events were rushing on to their own conclusions. There were great hopes after the war ended that an Armenian state would incorporate the whole area from the border of Georgia on the north to the Mediterranean Sea on the south. Armenia would be under British or American protection through a mandate of the League of Nations. But as revolutionary movements gained strength in Russia and Turkey through 1920, prospects dimmed for a settlement favorable to the Armenians. Still, President Woodrow Wilson was in favor of a mandate, and in May 1920 he sent the request to the Congress for action. Wilson, however, had waited too long and the moment had passed.

By then the Dashnaktsakan press had cooled to the idea, and while the proposal was before the Congress, it was reported in the press that Garegin Pasdermajian, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia, in the company of Vahan Cardashian and the Primate of Erevan, Bishop Khoren Muratbekian, had visited Henry Cabot Lodge to

announce in the name of the entire Armenian people that they declined to be subject to the United States.¹

This aroused the bitter indignation of the non-Dashnaktsakan elements, who refused to give up their hopes for Western aid, even in the face of the dimming prospects. They charged that this was a fatal blow struck against United and Greater Armenia by Armenian hands, since the whole world and especially the Erevan government knew that without a mandate, barely a little slice of the unliberated Armenian lands would be joined to the Republic, and the greater part of the national patrimony would be surrendered to the hands of the bloody [Turkish] executioner, along with at least half a million Armenians.² The lie was further compounded by the presumption of the Erevan government to speak both for the Armenians who were still bearing the Turkish yoke and for the populous foreign colonies, this at a time when the majority of the Caucasian Armenians in their dire condition were desperately looking outside for saving help. Moreover, they said, it was an unbelievable crime against the heroes of the Cilician uprising, who were desperately waiting for aid from the West.³ In protest, the Armenian National Union and

¹ “Official: To the American Armenian People” [in Armenian], Nor Giank-Sisvan V.271 (June 3, 1920). See Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971–1996), vol. 3, pp. 378–379 for an explanation of the reasons behind this incident. Bishop Muratbekian later became Catholicos. For his tragic fate, see p. 417, note 23.

² In fact, this estimate was over-optimistic by half. In the final settlement, the area pertaining to Armenia (by then Soviet) was reduced, not enlarged.

³ This refers to the Armenian remnants in Cilicia who had been fighting against the Turkish Nationalist forces since February, 1920. For the effect on the Armenians, a good introduction is Stanley E. Kerr, *The Lions of Marash* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973); also Abraham H. Hartunian, *Neither To Laugh nor To Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, trans. Vartan Hartunian (Boston: Beacon Press,

the National Ramkavar Party resolved to withdraw from the joint celebrations of the second anniversary of the Republic of Armenia planned for May 28.

The visit to Senator Lodge scandalized Boghos Nubar and Avetis Aharonian in Paris. They sent the following telegram to the National Union, which was received on May 29:

We are amazed to read in the New York Herald an article according to which an Armenian bishop has declared that the Armenians do not want an American mandate. The Delegation of All Armenia has not given to anyone the right to make any such declaration, which goes against the unanimous will of our people, who in confidence are waiting for the American Congress to give a favorable answer to the mandate proposed by the Peace Conference or to the question of aid to Armenia. Please forward this to the Armenian press.

Boghos Nubar
A. Aharonian⁴

Despite the denials in the Dashnaktsakan press that the representatives of the Republic had not expressed themselves against the mandate and that the reports were misunderstood, the rift in the American-Armenian community widened.⁵

The Lines Harden

The sides were divided over two basic issues. One was the conflict between revolutionism and liberalism, and the other was the emphasis on Eastern Armenia or Western Armenia. The Dashnaktsakans were nationalist and socialist revolutionaries whose orientation was

1976), which is a first-hand account by an Armenian Evangelical pastor.

⁴ Nor Giank-Sisvan V.273 (June 10, 1920).

⁵ *Asbarez* XII.653 (June 15, 1920); Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 3, p. 379.

toward Eastern Armenia. The Western Armenians tended toward liberalism and had been more exposed to European and American influences. The tragedy for each side was that the revolutionists did not have the strength, experience, or good judgment to win through the force of arms, and that liberalism was irrelevant in a revolutionary situation.⁶ This conflict continued to be carried out in the American-Armenian community long after Armenia ceased to be an independent country and soon turned into an exercise in frustration.

The Dashnaktsakan government of the Republic and its defenders wrapped themselves in the flag and equated patriotism with loyalty to the regime. Thus *Asbarez* proclaimed that it was impossible to determine where the Republic ended and where the regime began. Until another organization was strong and popular enough to take the state firmly in control, to write and speak against the Armenian regime was to write and speak against the Republic of Armenia. Whoever desired to overthrow the regime was working to overthrow the Republic, and whoever was hostile toward the Republic of Armenia was an enemy of the Armenian people.⁷

⁶ For a discussion of this topic see Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1952), chapters 5 and 6.

⁷ *Asbarez* XII.633 (April 6, 1920).

The Ramkavars strongly rejected this idea. In their conception, the Republic of Armenia was separate from the Armenian regime, and a patriot could still criticize the regime without being an enemy of the Republic.⁸

The Dashnaktsakans maintained that once the Republic of Armenia had been proclaimed, it was the only legitimate voice of all the Armenian people. Thus on the first anniversary of independence, the regime unilaterally declared the union of Eastern Armenia with Western Armenia, the latter still under Turkish control and supposedly represented at Paris by the National Delegation of Boghos Nubar. According to the Boston Dashnaktsakan organ *Hairenik*, Aharonian should not have had any more dealings with “the Egyptian *bashi-bazouk*”⁹ because since the day the Armenian state was born, or at least since it “declared the union of the two divisions of Armenia,” everyone else should have withdrawn from public life.¹⁰

The non-Dashnaktsakan camp condemned the government action as an illegal and absurd “annexation.” It was, they said, nothing more than an attempt to undermine and vitiate the National Delegation and take over its work for itself. But the National Delegation represented the entire Western Armenian will, and with the sole exception of Dash-

⁸ M. Minasian, “The Republic of Armenia and Its Government” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* V.271 (June 3, 1920).

⁹ Boghos Nubar. These were the lawless Muslim Turkish irregulars who fought for the Ottoman Empire. They were largely responsible for the massacres during the Balkan risings of 1875 known as the “Bulgarian Horrors.”

¹⁰ “Who Is Responsible?” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* V.275 (June 15, 1920).

naktsutiun, all the nation, that is, every organization, political, religious, or humanitarian, looked to it for support. If Dashnaktsutiun would recognize the authority of the National Delegation in this manner, it would be easy to form a mixed directorate and put the government of the Republic on a firmer footing. This would put an end to the division, the responsibility for which Dashnaktsutiun had the greater part.¹¹ But instead, Dashnaktsutiun had undertaken a course of oblique and personal persecution of the National Delegation and its leader, Boghos Nubar.¹² And of course, the Republic had not the least strength or means at its disposal to enforce the “annexation” with arms. The only hope for Armenia, and the unanimous desire of the Armenians of Turkey, was the protection afforded by a mandate, and the intervention of Pasdermajian, Cardashian, and Bishop Khoren to the contrary was nothing short of treason. Thus Senator Lodge was able to proclaim in the course of his bitter battle with President Wilson, “The Armenian people themselves do not want a mandate.”¹³

In fact, the Republic of Armenia was caught between the Russian hammer and the Turkish anvil. In June the United States Senate rejected the Armenian mandate, and the reconquest of Armenia was assured. The Red Army had already crossed the Caucasus and at the end of April had sovietized Azerbaijan. This emboldened the few Bolsheviks in Armenia to rise against the government. In reaction, an open Dashnaktsakan dictator-

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “A Clarification” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* V.278 (June 22, 1920).

¹³ “The Care of Armenia and the Doers of Evil” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* V.273 (June 10, 1920).

ship took power and the Parliament was suspended.¹⁴ Within two months the rebellion had been crushed, but the respite was only temporary. In the west, the Turkish Nationalist forces of Mustafa Kemal were waiting for the propitious time.¹⁵

Asbarez blamed the “anti-government elements—badvelis and questionable professors [with their] bourgeois-democratic ideas”—for lecturing them about “freedom” while wallowing in self-deception and ignorance of the actual conditions. Before anything else, the Armenian government had to put down anti-government movements. The rightist Armenians thought that if they overthrew the Dashnaktsakan government, then they themselves would come to power. They could not lead the Armenian people, because they were unknown to the masses, who viewed them with suspicion, and their organization had not been put to any test. Only Dashnaktsutium and the present government, firmly for Armenian independence, stood in the way of anarchy and the Mongol barbarians who were trying to wipe the Armenians from the face of the earth. Even though all elements had been invited to stand behind the government, instead they began a fierce anti-government movement that culminated in the Bolshevik rising of May.¹⁶

¹⁴ The so called “May Rebellion” was staged by the Alexandropol Military Revolutionary Committee or Revkom. The instigators who survived or were not shot were forced to flee the country. Among the prominent members was Avis Nurijanian, a twenty-one-year-old fanatic who was to wreak his vengeance six months later. See Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 3, pp. 229–253.

¹⁵ For the defeat of the mandate and the sovietization of Armenia, see Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 4.

¹⁶ A. Bar, “Bolshevik Instigation at Rebellion” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XII.665 (July 27, 1920). This allegation was completely untrue. All the Armenian parties, organizations, and groups joined in denouncing the Bolshevik rebellion. See Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 3, p. 225, and all of chapter 6.

Each side accused the other of being the cause of the Armenian divisiveness. The Dashnaktsakans blamed the National Delegation. But the non-Dashnaktsakans pointed to the ruination of the Armenian National Union, the division of the Armenian Apostolic Church by Arsen Vartabed Vehuni, the undermining of the National Delegation, and the establishment of the dictatorship in Armenia.¹⁷ The Dashnaktsakans were so jealous of their party rule and so attached to former Russian Armenia, *Nor Giank-Sisvan* charged, that they were willing to sacrifice Cilicia. Even after the National Delegation had stressed upon the Erevan government that the government had neither the military force to occupy the most important part of Armenia nor the support of the Western Armenians and the Armenian emigrants behind them, the Dashnaktsakans continued to show bad faith, never admitting that the issue was not one of socialism or political parties but of Eastern and Western Armenians. Still, the National Delegation helped the representatives of the Republic honestly in the pursuit of their aims, which were the official recognition of the Republic, the aid of the suffering in the country, and a loan for the government. But the Republic repaid them with a devious and disastrous policy. By seeking a center for Armenian independence in the Caucasus, they strengthened the idea among the foreigners that there were the Turkish Armenians to be saved but no Turkish-Armenian question. Such was the effect of Mr. Cardashian's criminal declaration. The

¹⁷ "Who Is Responsible?" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* V.277 (June 19, 1920).

result was a disastrous betrayal of Armenian rights and of the long revolutionary struggle. Thus was Greater Armenia sacrificed on the altar of partisan political gain.¹⁸

M. K. Ferrahian gave a reply from the Dashnaksakan viewpoint.¹⁹ To him, “patriotism” (*azgasirutium*) meant the love of nation (*azg*). A nation was a nation only if it was independent; otherwise it was only a people (*zhoghovurd*). A patriot therefore had to devote himself to independence, and whatever did not serve independence was not patriotism. There were three tendencies among the Armenians: the conformists, who had no organization and gave no thought to future generations or the liberation of the fatherland, thinking that wherever they lived was the fatherland; those who trusted in diplomacy, waiting for favors from the great powers; and the only true patriots, those who trusted in guns (meaning of course Dashnaktutium). He condemned the other factions, whose antiwar attitude had worsened the sufferings of the nation, had strengthened and emboldened the enemy, had multiplied the number of victims, and had crushed and abandoned the arms of the Armenian fighters. A minority consisting of the Armenian Bolsheviks, the Professional Religious (*tiradzuner*), and the badvelis had fervently worked to upset the steps taken in the name of independence. The Bolsheviks, being internationalists, made no pretensions to patriotism and were completely dedicated to the class struggle. They did not care in the least if the ancient and irreconcilable enemies of the

¹⁸ “A Clarification” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* V.277 (June 22, 1920).

¹⁹ M. K. Ferrahian, “Patriotism” in three parts [in Armenian]. *Asbarez* XII.673 (August 24, 1920); XIII.675 (August 31, 1920); XIII.676 (September 3, 1920).

Armenians, namely, the Turks, the Kurds, and the Tatars, enslaved the Armenian land in the name of the “proletariat.” The Professional Religious used religion as a trade, cajoling, deceiving, and fawning to keep their positions. The badvelis were foreign-apers and missionary-lovers who thought that the Armenians had nothing of value, neither education nor organizations nor able individuals nor leaders. They wanted to hand the government of Armenian over to the missionaries. But only Dashnaksutiun had stood firmly against the Bolsheviks, who had recently tried to overthrow the Republic of Armenia, casting 500 of them into jail.²⁰

The Fall

On August 10, 1920, the Allies signed the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire at Sèvres and washed their hands of Armenia. On the same day the Armenian government signed a preliminary agreement with the Red Army, which it had been fighting for the last month in the south. In the west the Turkish Nationalist forces of General Kiazim Karabekir were poised to invade Armenia. Far to the south, the Armenian remnants in Cilicia had been abandoned to their fate by the French and were making a desperate last stand against the Kemalist insurgents. On August 5 Mihran Damadian, the representative of the National Delegation in Adana, attempted a *coup d'etat* that lasted for a day. The curtain was falling.

²⁰ A number were shot. Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 3, p. 252. When the Bolsheviks returned six months later, they took revenge.

The Turkish attack began on September 10 with an artillery bombardment and skirmishing in the northwestern region around Olti. On September 28 the Turks launched a full-scale offensive. The Armenians were pushed back, having underestimated Mustafa Kemal and having believed their own propaganda. Martial law was declared on September 30, and all elements of the population united to resist the invasion. Appeals—unanswered—were directed to the civilized world. On October 30 the Turks entered undefended Kars and sacked the city, massacring those Armenians who had not fled. On November 17 the Armenians accepted the Turkish terms.²¹ On November 29 the Red Army invaded Armenia and the country was partitioned.

Realism and Delusion

Now in bitter frustration the Ramkavars raked the Dashnaktsakans over the coals for their policies of the past three decades. Addicted to illusions, they had led the people into disaster. First they thought that with small demonstrations they would get the great powers to intervene in the Armenian question. The result was disappointment, failure, and ruin. Then they allied themselves with the Young Turks, and for the sake of Dashnaktsakan-Ittihadist friendship, they broke up the authority of the Armenian Patriarchate. What was the result of this blind fusion? Nothing but blood and terror. Yesterday's allies, the Talaats and Envers, turned on their gullible, self-deluded

²¹ Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 3, chapters 5–6.

“comrades.” The Dashnaktsakan response was, “Whoever opposes Dashnaktsutiun is a traitor, a betrayer, a reactionary.” The same errors, the same epithets, always crooked, always contemptuous of the will of the people, always wrecking the authority of the leaders of the nation.²² But the Ramkavar Party was born of Armenian realities. The greater part of the Armenian people was imbued with patriotic ideas and confessed democratic principles. In the National Assembly and in every other meeting the non-partisans had always sided with the Ramkavars, because the Ramkavars were nothing if not the realization of the majority of the Armenian people.²³

Asbarez reported on October 29 in the most effusive—and mistaken—language that the Armenian army had launched a counter-attack against Turkey along the whole front. With Greek and English victories, the Kemalists would be crushed forever together with Azerbaijan. Nor would the Bolsheviks succeed in subduing the Armenians. The planned retreat would be followed by a complete victory. Now the army was strong enough to take revenge. Allied warships had already left for the Black Sea. Preparations were being made to land American troops at Batum to keep the lines open to Erevan. France and Italy, who for their imperialist designs had kept Greek troops from landing at Trebizond, would be forced to give in because Britain was on the side of the Armenians. The Armenian people had taken up arms to do what unwilling European arms could not do.

²² “Realism” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.314 (September 28, 1920).

²³ “Letter from A. Terzibashian” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.329 (November 19, 1920).

Those arms would win!²⁴ In the same issue *Asbarez* reported that France was to take over all of Cilicia, and that Belgium had recognized the Armenian government.

On November 5 *Asbarez* reported that the Turks had captured Hadjin, killing 10,000 Armenians. Contradictory reports of Armenian victories were published for the next few weeks. It was variously reported that the Bolsheviks had been driven out of Zangezur, that thousands of Turks had been killed, that Kars was being defended, that the news from Kars was false and that the enemy had overwhelming strength. Erevan had been evacuated, Sovietism had been declared in Ankara, Armenia had rejected a Turkish ultimatum, fighting had resumed and the Armenians had retaken Alexandropol.²⁵ The Armenian government had resigned, the League of Nations would aid Armenia. The most pathetic of all was the banner headline, KARS RECAPTURED. Steel had spoken; Armenia had won the war.²⁶ The latter was published, unknowingly, the next day after the government of the Republic of Armenia had capitulated to the Bolsheviks.

On December 10, 1920, *Asbarez* reported that Armenia had been Sovietized.²⁷

²⁴ "Toward Victory" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIII.692 (October 29, 1920).

²⁵ As late as January, more than seven weeks after the fall of the Dashnaksakan regime, *Asbarez* was still declaring that Mustafa Kemal "will receive such a blow that not only will he withdraw from our present borders, but he will clear out of Turkish Armenia as well." According to *Asbarez*, all of the enemies of Dashnaksutiun from Paris to Boston to Fresno to New York were attacking them in the most extreme and insulting manner, ignoring the fact that Dashnaksutiun had saved Armenia and had effected her absolute independence. Thus Armenia would have been able to govern over her entire and historic borders and the starving refugees would have been saved. *Asbarez* XIII.717 (January 25, 1921)

²⁶ *Asbarez* XIII.701 (November 30, 1920).

²⁷ *Asbarez* XIII.704 (December 10, 1920). The event occurred on November 29 or December 2, depending on whether one counts respectively from the proclamation of the assumption of power by the Military Revolutionary Committee (Revkom) of Armenia or the formal yielding of power by the

The Aftermath

In far-away Fresno, there were protests. The local committees of the four Armenian political parties—Social Democratic Hnchakian, Reformed Hnchakian, Ramkavar, and Dashnaktsakan—temporarily forgot their differences and drafted petitions for the populace to sign. One was sent to President Wilson, urging prompt and effective aid to the Armenian army, government, and people. Lord Robert Cecil at the League of Nations was begged to inform that body that the 20,000 Armenians of California expected big results from them in defending Armenia. The French, English, and Italian parliaments were urged to abide by the portions of the Treaty of Sèvres relating to Armenia. A mass meeting was held, attended by 4,000. All four parties were represented on the platform. Arpaksat Setrakian (Dashnaktsakan) was the chairman. Alexander Shirvanzadeh, the noted writer, expressed the wish that the four parties work together to support Armenia and put an end to their bickering in the press and on the platform. Representatives of each of the parties made appropriate speeches. When the Dashnaktsakan speaker, Comrade Snar, said that the only hope for civilized humanity in the East was the Armenian army, which was holding up the free Tricolor by fighting on four fronts, having decided either to secure freedom or die an honorable death, many in the audience wept aloud, including some on the platform.²⁸

Dashnaktsakan government. See Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 4, pp. 375–398.

²⁸ “Agitation and Great Protest Meeting in Fresno” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIII.700 (November 26, 1920).

Briefly—very briefly—*Asbarez* saw the only hope for Armenia in Russia. Hopeless, betrayed, and ignored, Armenia had the right to turn her back on her European “friends” and change her orientation. Russia would not be unjust to Armenia. Lenin and Trotsky would give to Armenia what the Allies could or would not give. They would expel the Turks from Kars and Alexandropol and give Armenia at least the areas granted by the Treaty of Sèvres. Armenia had entered into a Russian orientation in this expectation, since the European imperialists could not help. “Armenia is Soviet,” *Asbarez* declared. “Yesterday we stood at the side of the Armenian state. Today we are at the side of the Armenian government. It doesn’t matter if that government is Soviet or non-Soviet. And with the appearance of Soviet Armenia we have the hope that our nation’s desires will be attained more than we were able to achieve attached to European imperialism.”²⁹

This was not Lenin’s idea at all, and it took *Asbarez* only four days to understand it. The country was in fact partitioned. Not only was “united” Western Armenia not reoccupied, but Kars and Ardahan were lost and Armenia was compelled to renounce the Treaty of Sèvres. Amid multitudinous condemnations, *Asbarez* reported that Armenia had been betrayed by Turko-Bolshevik imperialism and had been disarmed.³⁰ There would be many years to rehash this and to cast blame, but the fact did not change.

²⁹ “Soviet Armenia and Our Position” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIII.704 (December 10, 1920).

³⁰ “Turko-Bolshevik Imperialism and Outraged Armenia” [in Armenian], *Asbarez*. XIII.705 (December 14, 1920).

The Recriminations: Dashnaktsakan

The Dashnaktsakan writers condemned their opponents as “reactionary” elements who had never participated in Armenian political life but had always unmercifully persecuted their movement. Even now they were at work blaming the Republic of Armenia and its able leaders for all the disasters that had befallen the Armenians. It was the Dashnaktsakans, according to them, who had become the tools of the European imperialists and had brought forth hostility between the Armenians and the simple Turkish people. But these critics had never lifted one finger to help the cause of Armenian independence. While the enemy was knocking at the door they never came to Armenia’s aid, but only obstructed genuine efforts with their fanatical anti-Dashnaktsakanism. As for the leftists, it was they, not the Armenian government, who were responsible for the Armenian collapse at Kars and Alexandropol. They had dissolved the Armenian resistance and allowed Kemal to enter the country. Now they thought that with condemnations and trials they could fool the Armenian people.³¹

As for the Nubar-Noradoungian-Papajanov clique in Paris, they had revived the artificial division between Turkish Armenian and Russian Armenian that the revolutionary movement had been trying to bury for the last thirty years. They were repeating that the Armenian cause was the Turkish Armenian cause in reality, that a temporary administration had to be formed for the Western Armenian provinces, and that the Russian

³¹ “The Armenian Crisis and the Eternal Prosecutors” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XIII.716 (January 21, 1921).

Armenians not be allowed under any circumstances to meddle in Turkish Armenian affairs. They were actually glad at the success of Kemal because it removed Russian Armenia from the problem and turned it back to its Russian orientation, leaving the question of the liberation of Turkish Armenia separate and distinct.

Now was sounded what would be the Dashnaktsakan theme for the next for the next seventy years: “United, Free, and Independent Armenia.” Had not the Treaty of Sèvres called for United Armenia? Was not the government of the Republic of Armenia the one and only legal representative of the Armenian people? By divorcing Turkish Armenia from Russian Armenia, now the Nubarists showed they were against United Armenia. They were the representatives of factionalism and discrimination, the spreaders of the poison of hatred and schism. But the patriotic children of Armeniandom felt contempt toward those who tried to separate the Western Armenians from the united fatherland, with the traitorous motivation that to make an enemy of the Russian Armenians is to make an enemy of Dashnaktsutiun.³²

The Recriminations: Ramkavar

The Ramkavars blasted the Dashnaktsakans for adventurism and incompetence. They had stubbornly held to power even though they could not govern, could not organize an army, could not conduct successful diplomacy with foreign countries, and did not at least have the good grace to keep quiet. Why did Dashnaktsutiun insanely lead the nation

³² “The Enemies of United Armenia” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIII.725 (February 22, 1921).

over the precipice? The reason was as clear as the blue sky. Their history was spending other people's money, spilling other people's blood, and living off of other people's suffering. When had they ever desisted from bringing some terrible disaster on the head of the people? Whenever the chance came to save the Armenian nation, Dashnaktsutiun drove it away with its dictatorial and loud-mouthed bragging. In the last two years, with the best chance to give a satisfactory conclusion to the Armenian Question, Dashnaktsutiun toiled to move the focus to Russian Armenia. So Independent Armenia was castrated, hemmed in, and made dependent on the pleasure of Lenin, Trotsky, and Mustafa Kemal.³³

But in this disaster, breaking the heart of all the Armenians in the world, rising to anger at the culprits who were responsible, how did Dashnaktsutiun answer? "Some changes have been made in Armenia, but there is independence and it will remain." Nor would they take responsibility. What proof? "The spirit of independence has taken root in the Armenian people." It was no good; "reasons" and "circumstances" would not do. The emptiness was self-evident. The Dashnaktsakans had signed an agreement with the Bolsheviks and they had to live with it. They had always claimed to be in complete control; they had rejected a mixed cabinet; they had set up a dictatorship. So why were they trying to evade the responsibility now?³⁴

³³ Dítak ["Observer"], "Dashnaktsakan Responsibility for the Armenian Failure" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.342 (January 4, 1921).

³⁴ "Whose Is the Responsibility?" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.342 (January 4, 1921).

The Ramkavar theme for the next seventy years was sounded: It is better for the Armenians to be under the Russian Bolshevik yoke for a time than to be under the threat of Turkish annihilation. “We do not condemn the Republic of Armenia for taking a Soviet form if that was because of unbearable necessity rather than internal agitation.”³⁵

The Recriminations: General Antranig

General Antranig blamed the government, which lacked authority among the people, and the military staff, which was incompetent. They had depended on the Greeks on the Smyrna front, thinking that the Turks were not strong enough to attack Armenia. They had neglected espionage, while the Turks were well informed about the Armenian movements. They did not even dig trenches in advance for an orderly retreat. The Armenians needed 70,000 men under arms, which was the number the munitions and clothing received from the British would supply. The Armenian army held the Kars-Sarkiamish-Olti line, but was drawn into the collapsing Turkish center without noticing that the enemy was secretly outflanking them. Still, the Armenians should have won. The Armenian soldier had never turned his back on the enemy; he only had to know *how* to fight.

The role of Dashnaktsutiun had been very mischievous. They had undermined discipline by protecting party members who had deserted from the army. The ones responsible for the disaster were the Cabinet, which was made up only of Dashnaktsakans. They

³⁵ “What Is It That We Are Condemning?” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.350 (February 1, 1921).

had known that they had no authority among the people, but still they had not had the wisdom to form a coalition government in advance. This would have averted the present disaster. The last word on Armenia was Russia's, whether Menshevik or Bolshevik. But the Armenian leaders had not been able to come to an agreement with the Bolsheviks. Just as three years previously they had fought against them in Baku, now they had made threats against them in the Parliament, until they received their punishment. Being squeezed by the ancient enemy, now they had to look to the Bolsheviks for the defense of their existence.³⁶

Rebellion

There remained one tremor before Bolshevism hung itself permanently on the neck of Armenia. The behavior of the Bolsheviks after their takeover, and the reaction of the Dashnaktsakans to it, allowed the latter to be cast forevermore as the bugbear of Soviet Armenia. Ignoring their promises not to molest members of Dashnaktsutun and other socialist parties on account of their party membership, the new government took vengeance for the humiliation of May. Within days the political police (Cheka) was organized and prominent Dashnaktsakans were sent into internal exile in Russia. On December 28 all the banks, forests, lands, and waters of Armenia were nationalized. This provoked a rebellion among the people, and the Dashnaktsakans captured Erevan on February 18,

³⁶ "General Antranig Explains Final Defeat of Armenia" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* VI.350 (February 1, 1921).

1921.³⁷ *Asbarez* reported the February rebellion with enthusiasm. A telegram was received from Simon Vratzian that the Soviet regime had been overthrown by the united action of the army, the people, and all the political parties. A second telegram reported that the Communists had executed hostages. Vratzian had formed a “National Salvation Government” and the Revkom had fled. But a contradictory note in *Asbarez* quoted the Associated Press as reporting that as of February 27 the anti-Bolshevik government had been overthrown and the Bolsheviks were back in power. This was premature. On March 18 *Asbarez* reported that Armenia had been cleared of Bolsheviks.

The Fresno Committee of Dashnaktsutiun held a public meeting on Sunday, March 27 in the Civic Auditorium, at which they explained their positions. There were the usual musical selections and patriotic recitations. The first speaker, Mr. M. Tashjian, spoke about the events of the past four to five months. Soviet Russia had not entered Armenia to change the social system, because there were no grounds to do that and no support for it in the country. Plainly, it was for political reasons, to threaten the Allies with the Russo-Turkish alliance. This was ruinous for the Armenians, because the country was subjected to new Kemalist outrages and despotism from the Armenian and Russian Communists. Finally the exasperated population rose and expelled the self-

³⁷ The policy of “War Communism,” which entailed forced requisitions on the population, provoked open rebellion throughout Russia. In February 1921 the Kronstadt naval base near Petrograd mutinied. This was put down with military force and the surviving sailors were executed or sent to concentration camps. Lenin was forced to back off some of his more controversial policies, but political repression was actually increased. “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: The Communist Regime in Crisis: 1920-21.” Britannica CD, Version 99 © 1994-1999. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

proclaimed government leaders, and formed a National Salvation Council (*Azgayin Pashpanutian Khorhurd*), which still remained in power. The speaker then condemned the block-headed attacks of the enemies of Dashnaktsutium, proclaiming that the party still stood on orthodox foundations and that the charges by its opponents were all politically motivated fabrications.

After another recitation, Khoren Kaloustian spoke. He said that the enemies of Dashnaktsutium had no right to their opinions, which not only would strengthen the arguments of the age-old enemy, but would break up the already-weakened united Armenian power and subject the people to new depredations. As long as there was no other party with a powerful and effective machine, to ruin Dashnaktsutium would be worse for the Armenian people, not better. In these critical times, the good of the Fatherland and political necessity demanded an end to internal division and a united front to the outside.³⁸

On April 1, 1921, *Asbarez* reported that Turkish forces had retired from Armenia, and that Armenia, now freed from the Bolshevik yoke, would fight to the last man and the last bullet. But soon the news was grim. On April 8 it was reported that Russia had ceded Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin to Turkey.³⁹ On April 19, the Armenians of Fresno learned that the Bolsheviks had recaptured Erevan.⁴⁰ Subsequent issues told of the

³⁸ *Asbarez* XIII.737 (April 5, 1921).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII.738 (April 8, 1921).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *Asbarez* XIII.741 (April 19, 1921). This occurred on April 2.

Bolshevik revenge and the gradual elimination of the resistance in Zangezur. By the end of summer Armenia was cleared of Dashnaktsakan forces. A great number of refugees managed to reach Tabriz, Persia. On October 21 Armenia officially recognized the boundary with Turkey that was imposed by the Russians and the Turks. This is the boundary that exists to this day.⁴¹ Despite their pleas for military aid, none came. It was left to the Dashnaktsakans to fight, whether against Turks or Russians or Armenians, only with words.⁴²

The Defecting Dashnaktsakans

There were protests and defections by members of Dashnaktsutun. A letter appeared in the Ramkavar paper from some dissenting Dashnaktsakan comrades in Los Angeles, Torrance, Pasadena, and Bakersfield.

After decades of sacrifice under the banner of the revolutionary party, they had joyfully greeted the freedom of the fatherland. But unhappily the Kemalist attack destroyed their hopes and brought new ruins upon the head of the unfortunate fatherland. Armenia was again suppressed by the Treaty of Alexandropol, but with the help of

⁴¹ Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 4, pp. 403–406; Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), pp. 28–30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XIII.752 (May 27, 1921). For the February uprising, see Hovannisian, *Republic*, vol. 4, pp. 403–406. After the return of the Soviets to Armenia Lenin ordered a softer policy under Alexander Miasnikian. Lenin also had trouble with overzealous Communist commissars in Georgia, but he died before he could resolve the problem. The beneficiary of this was Stalin. See Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 266–293.

Great Russia, Soviet Armenia was able to void the treaty and make the Turks leave Armenia.

From the first day the Dashnaktsakan press, especially in the United States, instead of standing by the new government and encouraging the work of the reorganization of Armenia, had begun an infamous campaign of calumny. For the last ten months, the Central Committee of America and the Dashnaktsakan press had stained the thirty-year-old revolutionary history of the party, defamed the memory of countless martyrs, killed the idea of independence in the souls of the Armenian workers, and dragged Dashnaktsutun through the mud of dishonor.

They the dissenters had strongly protested to the California Regional Committee and the Central Committee, and called for a special Regional Convention and an end to the anti-revolutionary, anti-social, anti-Dashnaktsakan, and anti-national course of the Dashnaktsakan bodies. But instead they were ignored and crucified as anti-Dashnaktsakans. They were therefore declaring their position publicly:

1. They did not recognize the authority of the party conventions that had been held recently in Bucharest and in America.
2. They strongly condemned the “anti-Dashnaktsakan” and “anti-national” course of the foreign Dashnaktsakans and their press over the last ten months.
3. They stood by the “Workers’ Left Wing” of Dashnaktsutun of Armenia and would give their moral and material aid to the government of Soviet Armenia in support of the welfare of the people and the freedom of the fatherland.

4. They declared that the fate of the Armenian people could be entrusted only to the government of Soviet Armenia and to no other, because without the will of workers' Russia the physical existence of the Armenian people was in danger.
5. They strongly condemned Vratzian and the "front-line pashas" for organizing the rebellion against Soviet Armenia and were ashamed to call him a comrade of theirs.
6. They would wait for the next Dashnaktsakan convention, which they thought would be convened in Armenia, and not by the rebels from outside. Thus they declared that they were separated from the overseas Dashnaktsakan organization.

The Social Democratic Hinchakians Support Soviet Armenia

The Hinchakian paper *Eridasart Hayastan*, mouthpiece of Stepan Sabah-Gulian, ridiculed the idea that the Armenian Question would be solved by Dashnaktsakan guns or by the mental efforts of the diplomats. Only the torch-bearer of the World Revolution, Soviet Russia, had solved it. To follow capitalist Europe or to accept a Turkish orientation would mean willing suicide and would bury the revolutionary battle. The Armenian Case was the Social Case, and the indefatigable leader of the social case was revolutionary Russia. As long as there was a soviet Russia, the Armenians could not have an individual and independent foreign policy and it would be wrong to have one.⁴³

⁴³ Quoted in Armenag Malikian, "Survey of the Press" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIV.781 (September 6, 1921).

Thus was sounded what would be the Hnchakian policy for the next seventy years: the party would support Soviet Armenian wholeheartedly.

Is There an Armenia?

On June 23, 1922, a dinner was given in New York in honor of Artashes Karinian, the economic representative of the Soviet Republic of Armenia. He gave some information that his hearers considered encouraging. Armenia existed as a self-governing country and everyone was going about the business of reconstruction. The famine of the preceding year was over, although multitudes still were in need. Individual rights were being observed and wealthy Armenians were moving from Tiflis to Erevan. The people were content with the government and wanted it to continue. There was not one political prisoner in the country. No one would want to pursue a foreign policy separate from or contrary to Soviet Russia. Of course, not everything was rosy, but trade and railroad traffic had resumed. American-Armenians had to help in the reconstruction of the country and capital had to be formed and factories rebuilt. This was a great opportunity to help the Armenian people. They would not cease to demand their National Home in the Armenian portion of Turkey, but at the same time they would not forget Araratian Armenia, which was already free, and within whose borders lived more than a million Armenians.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Gotchnag* XXII.26 (July 1, 1922), p. 839. The Communist policy under Lenin entered a relatively liberal phase after the end of the Civil War, called the New Economic Policy. During this period, which came to an emphatic end with Stalin's consolidation of power in 1928, a certain amount of private enterprise and

Lausanne

During 1920 and 1921 the Turkish Nationalists drove the French and the Armenians out of Cilicia and turned back the Greek invasion, which had advanced to within 50 miles of Ankara. On September 9, 1922, the Kemalists entered Smyrna (Izmir), which was destroyed by fire as the Christians were massacred or fled in terror. On October 11 the Allies restored Constantinople to Turkish control. On November 1 Mustafa Kemal abolished the sultanate and Sultan Mehmet VI was evacuated by the British. In the face of the new facts on the ground, a conference was convened at Lausanne to work out a settlement. On July 24, 1923, after nine months of tortuous negotiations, a treaty was signed between the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Rumania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, on one hand, and the government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on the other. That dead letter, the Treaty of Sèvres, was abrogated. All of the Turkish demands, except for the boundary with Iraq, were satisfied by the Allies. The partition of the Republic of Armenia between Turkey and Soviet Russia was confirmed, without mention of the names "Armenia" or "Armenian." Provisions were made for members of minority populations to transfer their nationality to one of the successor states that were mentioned in the treaty, but this did not apply to any Armenians who may have been left over in Turkey. They were gotten rid of later in new deportations to Syria. No more Armenians remained in Turkish Armenia or Cilicia. Indeed, the very

individual freedom was tolerated in order to protect the revolution. It was then possible for foreign observers to attribute a more benign face to Bolshevism. Many foreign Armenians (but only non-Dashnak-tsakans) would consider Armenia to be "free" if she were free of Turks.

name “Armenia” was proscribed. The Armenian Question ceased to exist except in the minds of the Armenians, who were left revisionist, revanchist, and irredentist.

Last Gasp

The Treaty of Lausanne scandalized the Armenians and their friends. But the politicians had long since washed their hands of the Christians of the east. If they could not hang on to their lands, then all the worse for them. There would be no intervention and no aid, only protests for conscience’s sake by some sentimental persons with no hope or intention of fulfilling them. These protests filled books and numbered in the thousands; gradually they died away. James L. Barton’s letter dated November 21, 1918 to the Reverend Dikran H. Rejebian was carefully tucked away by the recipient in a volume titled *The Lausanne Treaty Turkey and Armenia*.⁴⁵ It reads as follows:

My dear Mr. Rejy:-

I thank you for your letter of November 18 and assure you that a large number of American friends are working eagerly to secure for Armenia absolute freedom from Turkish rule. Documents have been presented to the State Department in Washington by a competent committee of Americans urging such an outcome and at the same time asking for the autonomy of Armenia under American protection. I certainly hope this will be the outcome of the Peace Conference, and remain

Sincerely yours,
[signed] James L Barton

⁴⁵ The American Committee Opposed to the Lausanne Treaty, *The Lausanne Treaty Turkey and Armenia* ([n.p.]: 1926). The book and the original letter in it were given to George B. Kooshian, Sr., many years ago and are now in the author’s possession. The Reverend Doctor Dikran H. Rejebian was from Hadjin. He died in Pasadena in the 1960s in old age.

The book in which the letter was found seven decades later ends the story, with the pathetic plea to the United States Senate not to ratify the treaty without two important reservations:⁴⁶

(a.) Restitution of academic and religious freedom to American educational and missionary institutions.⁴⁷

(b.) Fulfillment of the Wilson arbitral award to Armenia.⁴⁸

Even if the Senate would ratify the treaty with the latter provision, or if it would not ratify the treaty at all, it would not make one whit of difference. The United States had the chance to play in Asia Minor, she chose not to, and now no one would listen to any more platitudes. The Treaty of Lausanne also meant the end of the National Delegation in Paris. After the resignation of Boghos Nubar, it had been headed by Gabriel Noradounghian. For a while the delegation occupied itself with providing for the Armenian refugees and orphans. These matters also became more regularized. In 1921 Fridtjof Nansen of Norway was appointed high commissioner for refugees by the League of Nations. The international identification card called the “Nansen Passport” that he

⁴⁶ *Lausanne Treaty*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ The Turks had begun to intimidate and expel any foreign missionaries or teachers who made statements that could be construed as critical of Turkey, forcing them to walk a very tight rope. The Dashnaktsakans in particular criticized the missionaries severely for alleged kowtowing to the Turks.

⁴⁸ President Woodrow Wilson had been given the responsibility of setting the boundaries of Armenia for the Treaty of Sèvres, which he did in November, 1920. Most of this land was occupied by the Kemalist Turks, as has been related above.

devised was used mainly by Russian and Armenian displaced persons.⁴⁹ Then in February, 1924, the Soviet government was recognized by Britain and France, and later by most of the other European states. The authority for the National Delegation no longer existing, Noradounghian announced its dissolution in early 1925.⁵⁰ Boghos Nubar himself died on June 25, 1930.

⁴⁹ Later it was used for Jews from Nazi Germany.

⁵⁰ *Gotchnag* XXV.3 (January 17, 1925).

CHAPTER 11

POLITICAL LIFE AFTER THE SETTLEMENT

The Ramkavar Azatakans

The program of the Ramkavar Azatakan (Democratic Liberal) Party, published in *Nor Giank-Sisvan*, was in stark contrast to the Dashnaktsakan position. It proclaimed National Self-Culture, Fatherland, and Independence as the imperishable and incorruptible rights of the Armenian people and of all peoples. Nevertheless, certain truths had to be recognized. Armenia first had to have restoration, increase of population, and economic strengthening. This could come only with internal tranquility and external peace. If the Armenians were to think that to show their love toward the idea of their absolute independence they had to unsheathe the sword against whomever, then they were a thousand times, a million times stupid. That could be left to Dashnaktsutiun.

The Ramkavar Azatakan Party would help and encourage Armenia without conditions or reservations. Hungry, naked, destitute people could not make progress. The Ramkavar Azatakans cherished personal and collective freedoms as much as anyone and their economic ideas had nothing whatsoever in common with Bolshevism. Nevertheless, they recognized that the man who would fight well, whether with ideas or with weapons, would come out of a people who were healthy, numerous, and strong.¹

¹ Hratch Yervant, "Our Position and Political Platform" [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* II.71 (267) July 31, 1923.

The Treaty of Lausanne through its silence had denied the scattered Armenians their right to live in their own fatherland and their right to self-determination, rights that had been granted to others. Therefore the Ramkavar Azatakan Party would direct its aid toward the people of Armenia in order to help them stand up again economically, culturally, and physically. It would work to encourage gradual immigration both as a partial solution to the serious question of depopulation and as a motivation for the economic advancement of the country.

The natural consequences of Armenia's geographical situation and political exigencies were ties with the Soviet world; therefore the party would reconcile itself to the regime. This was the only guarantee that the Armenian people would enjoy peaceful development and continued physical existence. With this understanding every possible assistance would be given to the Armenian government, in order to make it easier to fulfil its responsibilities.

Those Armenians now scattered all over the world should have on one hand good relationships with the governments of the countries where they lived, and on the other, self-preservation and cultural development of the [Armenian] nation. And always they should be good guests. The very righteous feelings of the injustice done to them through the Treaty of Lausanne must not cause them to forget the very modest condition of their strength and those hard circumstances that they had been compelled to face in life. Their dealings with various governments should be completely responsible.

It had to be remembered that although the political avenue was cut off, there was still the question of the refugees.

It was regrettable that the representatives of the former government of the Republic of Armenia were pursuing an unhelpful negative course.²

Do We Need Political Parties Anymore?

The calamities that had befallen them, and their repudiation by the world, had led many Armenians into demoralization and hopelessness. One way this was expressed was by the sentiment, “We don’t need political parties anymore.” This attitude, *Nor Giank-Sisvan* said, was especially prevalent in the American-Armenian community. According to this view, political activity could take place only in Armenia, where the political organizations had to exist and government had to be conducted by parliamentary means. The benevolent institutions, of course, had an interest in what was going on there. But there were many reasons to maintain political activity outside Armenia as well. The foreign communities had been kept alive by politics. Their only thought had been the salvation and reconstruction of Armenia. If political activity were halted, the cord connecting the foreign colonies with the fatherland would be cut. And one would have to be wilfully

² “Second Convention of the Ramkavar Azatakan Party” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* III.21 (March 11, 1924).

blind not to see that no political opposition of any sort was permitted inside Armenia. All the more reason to carry it on overseas.³

The Dashnaktsakans, of course, agreed thoroughly that Armenian politics had to continue outside Armenia and have maintained that policy consistently to this day.

What Political Parties?

As far as the Dashnaktsakans were concerned, the Ramkavar-Azatakan Party was no party at all. They had no program for the pressing matters of the day. Instead of immediately taking up the liberation of Turkish Armenia, they had withdrawn completely from the Turkish Armenian question.⁴ They had become the foreign agents of Bolshevism to persecute Dashnaktsutiun. Their thinking was perverse. Now they criticized the Dashnaktsakans for wanting to “direct” the government of Armenia, but just a few years ago, when Dashnaktsutiun was in power, they kept repeating that the overseas Armenians, meaning the Dashnaktsakans, should not meddle in the work of the homeland. The Dashnaktsakans had allowed other parties to operate freely in Armenia.⁵ Yes, they had criticized the Ramkavars for trying to run the country from America or Paris or Egypt. But no Ramkavar who returned to Armenia had found the doors of the

³ “Sickest Appearances” in three parts [in Armenian]. *Nor Giank-Sisvan* III.22 (March 14, 1924); III.23 (March 17, 1924); III.25 (March 25, 1924).

⁴ “The Turkish Armenian Cause and the ADL” [in Armenian], *Nor Giank-Sisvan* III.23 (March 13, 1924).

⁵ After the Bolshevik uprising of May, 1920, the Dashnaktsakans imposed a party dictatorship.

government house closed to him. Neutrals, Social Democrats, Populists, Muslims, and yes, even Bolsheviks sat in the National Parliament.⁶

But now, under Bolshevik rule? How was it possible to imagine that the doors of Armenia were not closed to Dashnaktsutiun? Was there any freedom of speech or press there? Even with their slavish faithfulness to the Red tyranny, the Hnchakians and Ramkavars had been broken into a thousand pieces. They had neither been able to secure freedom of speech for themselves nor to keep their own party organs, indeed, even the right to their own existence! To compare the conditions of yesterday with the Bolshevik state of today meant to shut out the light of the sun with one finger, to extinguish the truth, and to put the public in the place of real dummies, hoping that they would swallow that black is white. This turned the tenets of democracy into a joke.⁷

The Dashnaktsakans did have information about what was really going on in Armenia, and they were not reluctant to spread it. As true and as obnoxious as it probably was, it did not change the basic thrust of the Ramkavar argument: Armenia and the Armenians were weak and needed the protection of Russia, or they would be exterminated by the Turks. Whatever the Dashnaktsakans may have done or may not have done, however the Bolsheviks and the Kemalists may have colluded to partition Armenia,

⁶ The actual composition of the first elected Parliament in 1919 was 73 Dashnaktsakans, 4 Social Revolutionaries, 2 Muslims, and 1 Independent. The Armenian Populists were liberals associated with the Russian Constitutional Democrat organization. See Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971–1996), vol. 4, pp. 16–17, n. 34.

⁷ “How They Defend Themselves” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVI.1064 (March 25, 1924).

whatever might be written in the Armenian periodicals, the result was apparent and overwhelming: the complete destruction of Turkish Armenia even to the extent of the loss of the greater part of the former Republic. If the Dashnaktsakans wanted to take the credit for the success of the Armenian Revolution, then they had to take the blame for its failure, too. This they refused to do. They made themselves the true repository of nationalism and patriotism.

Dashnaktsutiun therefore found new life in anti-Communism.

Give the Communists a Chance

There were some Armenians who believed that the Communists were doing good works. In Fresno this opinion was expressed for a time by *Nor Aror*, edited by Levon Lulejian. The year 1925 was good and fruitful for the reconstruction for Armenia, he wrote. Aided by internal and external peace, education had advanced and the economy had developed. The foundations for a number of enterprises had been laid: mines, textiles, mills, cotton culture, cheese, leather, among others. This had to enthuse every Armenian, for it was the economy that would raise and support the country. Housing was being built. The people were enjoying their own language and customs. Not one dissatisfaction, not one upset had appeared either inside or outside Armenia's borders. The only deep wound was

the unfortunate death of the unforgettable and praiseworthy⁸ founder of the Armenian state, Alexander Miasnikian.⁹

On December 17, 1925, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Turkey signed a treaty of friendship, which was motivated by the diplomatic isolation of the USSR and the pique of Turkey over the Mosul question.¹⁰ This caused chagrin among the Western allies. Lulejian made the point, with apparent smugness, that the machinations of England and France to isolate Russia so that she would fall into their hands like a ripe plum had been thwarted. It is the clever diplomats who win, and Chicherin was the cleverest.¹¹ Russia had sent a storm through Asia by first winning over China, and now Turkey. The diplomatic war would always continue, even without the smell of gunpowder. Europe would not know peace, as long as Soviet Russia did not take its worthy place and rank among the nations.¹²

Lulejian had words to say about the Communist internal policy also. From 1921 to 1925 the Communist authorities, although opposed to religion, had to tread carefully out

⁸ The Armenian word used is “khnkeli,” which means “worthy to be censed,” i.e., with incense.

⁹ “1925: The Year Past” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.3 (January 15, 1926). After the collapse of War Communism and the reconquest of Armenia in the spring and summer of 1921, the Revkom was replaced by the Council of People’s Commissars. Miasnikian was sent to Armenia by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party to be the chairman. He was killed in an airplane crash. Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), p. 38.

¹⁰ This was the disputed area between British-mandated Iraq and Turkey. By the Treaty of Lausanne it had been awarded to Iraq.

¹¹ Gregory V. Chicherin, Foreign Commissar of the USSR.

¹² “Russo-Turkish Agreement” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.6 (January 26, 1926).

of fear of the sentiments of the people. Various methods had been tried to reduce the influence of the Church.¹³ One of the first acts of the Bolsheviki had been to confiscate the monastic properties at Echmiadzin. It was still possible, in late 1925, for the bishops to protest this policy and to demand the return of the lands. *Nor Aror* expressed the opinion that the 150 acres that the monks still possessed was enough for them. The rest, uncultivated land, had been turned over to the orphans and refugees, who needed it more. It was the people's land anyway.¹⁴ In regard to some recent arrests and shootings in Armenia, Lulejian held, one should not get too upset. They were just criminals and bribers.¹⁵

¹³ The greatest danger to totalitarian systems is the personal belief in an authority higher than the state, which is a fundamental teaching of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Governments and political movements have often tried to subvert this by establishing rival churches. Soon after the Bolsheviki took over, they used a group of renegade clergymen led by Benik Vartabed Melian to start the Armenian "Free Church." Benik had written a number of tracts before sovietization attacking clerical celibacy and the study of the afterlife as well as some popular superstitions. He was punished for this by the church authorities, but when the Soviets took power they published his works and encouraged his movement in an effort to undermine the legitimate church. In 1922 the government recognized the Free Church, but the Catholicos excommunicated Benik's group and the Free Church collapsed. Benik then took a government post. See Matossian, *Soviet Policies in Armenia*, pp. 92–93. Other historical examples of this phenomenon occurred in revolutionary France, Nazi Germany, Communist China, and Sandinist Nicaragua. The attempts to control the Armenian Church, both by the Soviet government and the political parties in the overseas colonies, must be considered in this context.

¹⁴ "Supreme Council of Echmiadzin and the Governors of Armenia" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.7 (January 29, 1926).

¹⁵ "Money-Fraud and Shootings" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.42 (June 8, 1926). It should hardly be necessary to note that, whether these particular individuals were criminals or bribers or not, the Communists did not limit themselves to shooting only such persons.

The Language Reform

One of the methods used by dictatorial reformers to reshape the ideas of a population is the alteration of language.¹⁶ This was done by the Communists over the whole Soviet Union in all the languages that existed within their boundaries. It involved modifying vocabulary and orthography to produce a “workers’ language” that everybody could learn and that would express the political ideas of the system. In some tribal areas in Central Asia where writing was unknown, the Cyrillic alphabet was provided. In Soviet Armenia, the Eastern Armenian literary language was made official. This was based on the dialect of Erevan and had some differences of phonology, vocabulary, and syntax from the standard Western Armenian of Turkish Armenia. In 1922 radical reforms were introduced. Two letters of the alphabet were dropped, spellings were modified, and non-Armenian “international” words were introduced. These innovations were not immediately accepted with equanimity by the Armenians of Armenia and stuck in the craw of the non-Soviet Armenians outside. Sahag Chitjian, writing in *Nor Aror*, defended the Soviet reforms. All the overseas colonies had to follow suit, and the Erevan dialect had to be the one and only Armenian language.¹⁷ The editor (Lulejian) in a note expressed lack of complete agreement on all points.

¹⁶ One of the more spectacular examples was the alteration of Turkish by Mustafa Kemal.

¹⁷ Sahag Chitjian, “Bolshevik Orthography and the Use of Latin Words” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.48 (June 29, 1926).

The reforms in fact appeared insufferable, and this time Lulejian could not swallow the Red medicine. Four years after the new alphabet had been made obligatory, *Nor Aror* reported, the number of readers in Armenia had actually decreased, because writers did not want to write and readers did not want to read in that style. Neither the people of Armenia nor of the overseas colonies would ever be able to get used to it. It was so obscure, so piled up with foreign words, that it was practically unintelligible even to the more or less educated. It was much easier to read and understand English or French than Armenian in Armenian letters. Many eagerly awaited the newspapers from Armenia, but had not been able to read them. The effect was that the colonies would gradually become foreignized and lose interest in the fatherland whose freedom had been the dream of their nights and the thoughts of their days. The European languages had been developed and improved over the centuries, but the Armenians had added foreign terms and forgotten the beautiful modes of expression of their golden age. If the authorities had changed the letters of the alphabet, that signified that the Armenians did not know the beauty, richness, descriptiveness, and elegance of their own language. To compound the evil, the government was trying to do away with *grabar*, the classical literary language. They did not know that the source of the beauty and elegance of the Armenian language was *grabar*. That meant to dry up and kill the Armenian language.¹⁸

¹⁸ "Armenian Orthography" in 2 parts [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.81 (October 22, 1926). Of course the Communists knew that *grabar* was the source of the beauty and elegance of the Armenian language. It was exactly beauty and elegance in the commonly understood meanings of the terms that they did not value.

While Lulejian found the language reform to be insufferable, *Asbarez* found it to be insane. If one would pick up a newspaper published in the Soviet Union, for example, *Khorhurdaiin Hayastan* (Soviet Armenia) or *Proletar* (Proletarian) of Tiflis, he would immediately get the impression that he was in an antique hardware store. Had some madman gotten into the print shop? Grammar, orthography, Russian, German, Turkish, Communist, all were broken up and mixed without any order. But one did see some system to it all—yes, the system of lunatics! They had dedicated themselves to the simplification of the language, observing that the working man often had to take ten or fifteen minutes to understand the news. How modest! If they would have tried just a little bit harder, they could have made it completely unintelligible!¹⁹

The overseas colonies kept on using their traditional Western Armenian.

HOG And The Workers' Paradise

The *Hayastani Ognutian Komite* or Committee to Aid Armenia, known by its initials as HOK, or to the Western Armenians, HOG, was formed in 1921 to send aid to Armenia. This was a great concern of the American-Armenian community, considering the devastation of the country during the war years and the overwhelming need for reconstruction. Chapters were formed in the Soviet countries and in Syria, Egypt, Greece, France, and America. HOG was advertized as “non-political,” that is, whoever regarded himself as a

¹⁹ “The Question of Simplifying the Armenian Language in Armenia” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XX.1371 (September 13, 1929). The language reform was intended to shape the “*aktif massaner*” (the active masses).

friend of the governmental organization of Soviet Armenia was invited to join.²⁰ Of course, the Dashnaktsakans could not be regarded as “friends of the governmental organization of Soviet Armenia,” and they complained that the Bolsheviks, in collaboration with their fellow-traveling bourgeois foreign elements, were using it to neutralize and isolate Dashnaktsutun.²¹

In 1926 the government of Armenia sent a committee to Europe, Egypt, France, and America to form new chapters and to see to it that they were all tied in to HOG of Armenia. The committee was to transform the foreign organizations into “propaganda” bodies in order to disseminate favorable information about Armenia. By keeping clear of political activities, they hoped to appeal to a broad public. All Armenians, regardless of political opinion, wanted to see the progress of Armenia in order to prove to the Turk that he could not extinguish Armenia or the Armenians.

There was an effort to start chapters in California before the arrival of the visitors. A meeting was called at Holy Trinity Church in Fresno for February 1, 1926. It was expected that only the “enemies of the reconstruction of Armenia” would be absent.²² Thirty persons were present. Sahag Chitjian, former Dashnaktsakan and now a supporter of Soviet Armenia, explained the purpose of the organization. A committee of five members was elected: Karekin Manugian, Ashot Yeretjian, Sahag Chitjian, Max Balian, and

²⁰ “HOG” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.54 (July 20, 1926).

²¹ “HOG and Its Activities” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XVI.1044 (February 7, 1924).

²² “HOG in Fresno” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.7 (January 29, 1926).

Hagop Melkon. They were instructed to communicate with the New York chapter and with Erevan. All undertook to sign up new members and to hold another meeting a few weeks later.²³ The next month Chitjian went to San Francisco and organized a committee there.²⁴ In April one was also organized in Los Angeles.²⁵

The emissaries arrived in California in July. Public meetings were held in Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, which were given glowing reports in the pro-Soviet press. A moving picture was shown, not at all the picture of naked and starving children, dying women, massacres, ruins, tribulations, and begging, but rather a resurrection from the dead, a picture of the Armenian people at work in the Republic, of happy peasants, what would made people weep for joy.²⁶

On July 23 a grand public meeting was held in the Fresno Civic Auditorium. A large crowd was present despite the summer heat and the press of farm work. The chairman, Professor Levon Ardruni, introduced the guests from Armenia to great applause on behalf of the local HOG organizing committee. Present on the platform were local clergy Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian, Dirayr Dzairakuin Vartabed Markarian, Khachig Kahana Krouzian, the Reverend Manasseh G. Papazian, the Reverend G. M. Manavian and the president of the HOG Fresno chapter, Karekin Manougian. Professor Ardruni

²³ "HOG Chapter in Fresno" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.8 (February 2, 1926).

²⁴ "HOG in San Francisco" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.21 (March 19, 1926).

²⁵ "Los Angeles HOG Meeting" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.35 (May 11, 1926).

²⁶ "HOG Los Angeles Chapter" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.53 (July 13, 1926).

described the history of the previous ten years as three periods: the period of the massacres, pillage, and exile; the period of the struggle over new ideas; and the period of reconstruction. After a musical selection, Mr. Karen Mikaelian spoke for one hour about what had been taking place in Soviet Armenia. At the base of Ararat was a small but independent Armenia, which was free and independent, where Armenian was the official and obligatory language for the courts, schools, and for every other official purpose. Because of the efforts of her leaders, Armenia was enjoying a peaceful period and the people had undertaken the great work of reconstruction and were building a new paradise on the ruins that had been dedicated and sanctified by the blood of the Armenians. There was great applause. The remaining speakers, Dr. S. Kamsarakan and Grigor Vartanian, described the terrible conditions that had prevailed and how with tremendous effort medical facilities had been established all through the country. Armenia had found life in the ruins and had been able to gather to herself the desperate refugees of her race.²⁷

The following day a dinner was given for the guests at the Hughes Hotel. Dr. Kamsarakan and Mr. Vartanian again spoke. The latter said that in Soviet Armenia there had never been any persecution of the clergy. They were all free and comfortable. The churches were open and everyone was at liberty to frequent them and to pray.²⁸ The comrades also went there and received their spiritual enjoyment and satisfaction. If there was any fault in this, it was that they had separated the church from the state, as France,

²⁷ "Public Meeting of HOG and State Red Cross in Fresno" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.56 (July 27, 1926).

²⁸ This was, of course, untrue.

England, and the United States had done hundreds of years ago. They had only taken a part of the uncultivated lands of Echmiadzin and given it to the refugees to live on.

Wheat, tobacco, cotton, and honey were being produced and factories and canals were being built.

The final speaker, Mr. Karen Mikaelian, spoke about the beautiful efforts that were being made in Armenia. The overseas colonies were obligated to help their brethren and encourage them to work. All the three peoples of the Caucasus, the Georgians, the Azerbaijanis, and the Armenians, were engaged in a great race for reconstruction.

Armenia had to be rebuilt if the nation was to survive.

Dr. Tufenkjian proposed from the floor and it was unanimously accepted that the people of the San Joaquin Valley subscribe \$10,000 to construct a building in Armenia in the name of the valley. A committee of six members was elected to start fund-raising in the fall.

On Sunday, July 25, a crowd of over 3,000 gathered in the Fresno Civic Auditorium in the sweltering heat. After a brief introduction by the guests from Armenia, the celebrated film was shown. When Armenian letters appeared on the screen, the people went wild with clapping and shouting. Mr. Mikaelian narrated. Here is Erevan, here are the streets of the city, the university, the library, the statues of Freedom and of Kamar Katiba, and the President of Armenia, Mr. Hambardzumian. Happy people, smiling, working! The audience wept for joy. On to Leninakan, to Vagharshapat, to the medieval

ruins of Zvartnotz, see Khachig Vartabed, see the pitiable former condition of our orphans, see the opening of the Shirak Canal, see the happy dances!²⁹

The moving picture went back for a second showing in Los Angeles on August 1, where the fund drive was continuing. Even the Caucasian Molokans participated. General Antranig came down from Fresno to see his friends, the emissaries, and to be present at a dinner in their honor. The hero delivered a moving speech at the public meeting. Then, to thunderous applause, he presented his diamond-studded sword to Citizen Grigor Vartanian to be taken to Armenia, where it would be enshrined in the museum.³⁰

It was undeniable that material progress had been made in Armenia, and considering the low state from which the country had started immediately after the war, it should have been inevitable, given peace and a strong government. The foreign overseas yellow press had turned into a tool of the capitalists, *Nor Aror* editorialized, continually feeding the common people baseless ideas against the Bolsheviks. If anyone was a rascal, a scoundrel, a criminal, or a bully, he was a Bolshevik. They had seen the Bolsheviks a few days ago, and there was nothing strange about them. They were just as patriotic, just as revenge-seeking, and just as cultivated as the Armenians of California.³¹ As for the

²⁹ “Public Meeting of HOG and State Red Cross in Fresno” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.56 (July 27, 1926).

³⁰ “Hog and Red Cross of Armenia in Los Angeles. General Antranig Presents His Very Valuable Sword to Museum of Armenia” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.61 (August 13, 1926).

³¹ “It Is Bolshevik” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.62 (August 17, 1926).

liberals in the Ramkavar Party and the AGBU, they were dwindling into insignificance. Why did their organ, *Miutium*, honor unworthy traitors in its Twentieth Anniversary issue?³² Less than two weeks after the smashing HOG presentation in Los Angeles, a miserable crowd of barely 100 had showed up to hear the Reverend Khazoyan and Mr. Hovsep Pushman speak. Why this cold indifference? Surely the AGBU was in its winter and would be replaced by HOG.³³ And what silliness from the Ramkavars! Arshag Chobanian, quoted in *Baikar*, had said, “The only country that has had a helpful attitude toward the Armenian Question is America. After having lived in this free country, you know what freedom is, so you have to do your best to transfer that attitude toward your fatherland.”³⁴ What need was there for American-style capitalist “freedoms” in Armenia? Obviously the Ramkavars had not abandoned their old, home-wrecking attitude of help from the capitalist powers for a “solution” to the “Armenian Case.” It was solved already, and the Bolsheviks had solved it. Everybody celebrated the sixth anniversary of Soviet Armenia on November 29, but the Ramkavars still refused to use the word “Soviet.”³⁵

Demands were also made that money that had been collected previously should be turned over to Soviet Armenia. The Dashnaktsakan Red Cross had collected over

³² “*Baregortsakan* and Honorary Members” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.67 (September 3, 1928).

³³ Khachig Kahana Krouzian, “Winter of the *Baregortsakan*” [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.68–69 (September 10, 1926).

³⁴ Quoted in *Mshak* II.105 (January 18, 1927).

³⁵ Y. Chubar, “The Ramkavars and Soviet Armenia” [in Armenian], *Mshak* II.105 (January 18, 1927). The writer was a Soviet Armenian writing in Erevan.

\$23,000 in 1919 and 1920 for a maternity hospital in Erevan; this money should be turned over to the State Red Cross, according to a writer in *Nor Aror*.³⁶ The AGBU was holding a sum in banks in London and New York that should also be turned over. This was the Melkonian bequest of \$3 million that had been left by the wealthy Egyptian-Armenian brothers Krikor and Garabed Melkonian.³⁷ The interest on the deposited funds was distributed by the AGBU according to the terms of the bequest to various charitable institutions, including the State University of Armenia.³⁸

Dashnaktsutian and the Workers' Paradise

The Dashnaktsakan press was not so enthusiastic about HOG. It had supposedly been born as an independent body and it had received help from abroad and given to the needy, but surely it could have done more things if it had not been weighted down by the Bolshevik government. It had neither the right to speak independently nor to work on its own plan. A delegation had been sent abroad to seek aid for the economic and cultural reconstruction of the fatherland. But HOG had turned the question of aid into a new means of the anti-Dashnaktsakan struggle by making an alliance with the bourgeois elements. In spite of the hatred stirred up against them, the Dashnaktsakans had already

³⁶ "Open Letter" [in Armenian], *Nor Aror* I.62 (August 17, 1926).

³⁷ Bedros Norehad, *The Armenian General Benevolent Union: Its History and Purpose* (Armenian General Benevolent Union: [n.p.], 1966), p. 70. The brothers had started a school in Nicosia, Cyprus, which was given to the AGBU in 1926 together with a large endowment.

³⁸ "AGBU Testimonial in Los Angeles" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XX.1,379 (November 8, 1929).

sent aid and were ready to do more. Until HOG secured their cooperation, it could never be a useful organization.³⁹

M. K. Ferrahian, writing in *Asbarez*, pointed out that HOG had lost its independent, nonpolitical character and had become a branch of the Bolshevik political organization. After the Armenian Bolsheviks had wrapped their dictatorship around the necks of the people of Armenia and established their rule through terror, they had turned their eyes on the overseas Armenians. Since their Chekist⁴⁰ methods were not effective outside the country, they had to use peaceful and innocent methods, that is, to spread the HOG organization overseas and to use it as a method to spread their rule. For this purpose they had sent the three emissaries overseas to establish new chapters. They had arrived in Paris, where they had held some discussions with representatives of Dashnaktsutiun. The Dashnaktsakan representatives proposed that they would help HOG and further its aims in every place if it would not serve political interests and be solely dedicated to the reconstruction of the fatherland. The HOG emissaries were favorably disposed, but they had to forward the proposals to Erevan.

The answer, Ferrahian continued, appeared in *Korhurdaiin Hayastan* on March 28, 1926. Persons who were “hostile to Soviet Armenia” were prohibited from participating in HOG. This of course meant Dashnaktsutiun. The same extended to those who were “indefinite” or “ambiguous” toward the transfer of money or property “belonging to”

³⁹ *Asbarez* XVI.1044 (February 7, 1924).

⁴⁰ That is, terroristic. The Cheka was the first Bolshevik secret police.

Soviet Armenia. This referred in part to the so-called Melkonian bequest, which had been “misappropriated” from its rightful owner, Soviet Armenia. Thus the Ramkavars were shut out as “ambiguous” and the AGBU as embezzlers. Any chapters of HOG that did not stand firm on these issues would be expelled. Since the Bolsheviks could not establish party chapters abroad, HOG would serve instead. In the local chapter in Los Angeles, there was a struggle going on between three elements: individuals who were completely familiar with the mentality and ruling purposes of HOG; individuals who might have known about the HOG program and were not completely agreed, counting the reconstruction of the fatherland more important than the political struggle; and those who were neither familiar with nor in agreement with HOG’s mentality or political program but sincerely wanted to help the people of Armenia. The first group was trying to use the chapter for Bolshevik purposes. The second was trying to keep it independent of the central committee. This faction was reluctant to send large sums of money collected under the name of HOG to the insatiable “proletariat” in New York and was working to turn HOG into a real machinery of reconstruction. The third group was ignorant or indifferent to all these comings and goings. It might have been worthwhile encouraging the second group in their struggle, but they had made a big mistake by taking the name “HOG.” Once they did that, they had to accept the general directorship and rules of the organization. The only other way was to quit using the name of HOG and to dedicate themselves to the reconstruction of the homeland under another name, keeping the welfare of the people out of the political labyrinth. If they did not do this, they would

make HOG useless and noisy up the peaceful public life and push the cooperative spirit to opposition and schism. The only ones who would suffer would be the people of Armenia, whose aid was near to their hearts.⁴¹

The account of the reception of the emissaries by *Asbarez* differed markedly from the report of wildly cheering, weeping crowds. Mikaelian, Vartanian, and Kamsarakan had arrived in Fresno and were greeted by a few Bolshevnik sympathizers. They were ensconced in the California Hotel, where they remained for a few days before returning to Los Angeles. On Friday night they held a meeting in the Civic Auditorium. It was barely half full. At 8:00 they were escorted into the hall by the organizing committee. One Bolshevnik signaled for everybody to get up and here and there one or two people stood up. After a few half-baked words of introduction from Mr. Ardzruni, Karen Mikaelian went to the podium and delivered a long speech. He asserted that the Armenian people were living free and secure under the Bolshevnik regime and were making supreme efforts to reconstruct their ruins and to establish their economy. In a few areas—foreign relations, war and peace, the questions of business, foreign trade, and so on—they might not be free, but they were free in their internal cultural life. The peasants were the masters of the soil, and the Armenian language was mandatory inside the boundaries of the country for everyone. They had their own university and museum. Instead of thinking about external subjugation, the Armenians should be thinking about subjugating the mountains,

⁴¹ M. K. Ferrahian, "Organization of the Los Angeles HOG Chapter" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXVIII. 1,203 (June 25, 1926). Since the Bolshevniks were in total control of everything, it was not possible to help Armenia independently of the ruling regime.

marshes, and deserts of Armenia. Armenia had every economic advantage, and in time through the various skills of her people she could reach a high level of civilization. The copper mines and hydroelectric potential of Armenia were great sources of wealth. Regarding the security of the frontiers, any aggressor would be confronted with the 13 million-man strong army of the Soviet Union.⁴²

The motion picture shown the following Sunday did make a better impression, *Asbarez* admitted, even though it was not of the best technical quality. A large crowd of homesick Armenians was present to see at least the pictures of Armenia. In spite of Mr. Mikaelian's explanations, many scenes were undecipherable. But still everyone was filled with pride at the efforts toward reconstruction, and \$1,000 was collected.⁴³

So the emissaries had come to Fresno, held public meetings, and shown their movie. But their statements were irresponsible propaganda, *Asbarez* complained. Mikaelian had said that after centuries of slavery, the Armenians had begun to live a state-life only in 1921, that is, since Armenia was sovietized! Then he must have been either a total ignoramus or one who turns black into white. Since he was not the former he had to be the latter. He was so cynical as to confuse the date of the *independence* of Armenia with the date of the *loss* of the independence of Armenia!⁴⁴ To prove that the Armenian

⁴² This was in fact the deciding point for those bourgeois elements who went along with the Soviet regime.

⁴³ "HOG Representatives in Fresno" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVIII.1,203 (June 25, 1926).

⁴⁴ November 29, 1920. One has to see things from a Communist perspective in order to understand the Communist use of language. To the Communists, such a statement actually made sense.

people were truly living a free and independent life under the Soviet regime, he offered that the Armenian language was compulsory and that there was a university. Behold all of it. Even granting that, forgetting the indignities to which the Armenian language had been subjected and the twisting of young minds in the so-called “state university,” was that enough to declare a people free and independent? Free in a country where the people could not set foot outside without permission from Moscow,⁴⁵ where people were thrown into jail for singing “Mer Hairenik”⁴⁶ or for reading the Dashnaktsakan press? Free where there was not the most elementary freedom of thought, speech, press, assembly, or protest? Mr. Mikalelian had said that even if Soviet Armenia was not independent in her foreign policy, finance, or defense, she was still an equal member of the Soviet Union with her own weight to wield. If you believed *that*, you were eating *dolma*.⁴⁷

Once the emissaries had gotten back home, they reported on their trip to the press. *Asbarez* compared it to the accounts of the conquests of the emperors of Babylon and Assyria. “We went, we measured the world, we returned!” Among other things, they had announced that the membership of HOG and of the State Red Cross (there was a rival Dashnaktsakan Red Cross organization in the United States) consisted of those elements that were sympathetic to and worked for Soviet Armenia. These were made up for the

⁴⁵ Freedom of movement was restricted.

⁴⁶ “Our Fatherland,” national anthem of the Republic of Armenia.

⁴⁷ “Irresponsible Announcements of HOG Delegation” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XVIII.1,203 (June 25, 1926). *Dolma* is stuffed vegetables. The “independence” of the Union Republics was in fact a fiction.

most part of members of the working class, so the Red Cross and HOG had become the most popular organizations. What working class, *Asbarez* sniped. In Fresno they could be counted on one hand. And in France and Greece many workers had left HOG, complaining that they had been fooled. All distortions. They had drawn a Great Wall of China around the truth.⁴⁸

They Are All Persecuting Dashnaktsutiun

The Dashnaktsakan press reported the oppressive conditions in Soviet Armenia to the world and deplored them. The persecution of religion, contrary to the cheery lies of the HOG agents, had been a cardinal feature of the regime since the beginning. Churches were turned into theaters and clubs. Monasteries were made into military barracks and storerooms for fruit. Church bells were silenced. Priests were dishonored, disenfranchised, and murdered. Public “anti-baptisms” were performed. The Bolsheviks tried to get control of the church organization through intimidation and subornation. The old Catholicos, Gevorg V, was unpliant and an attempt was made to marginalize him by setting up a mixed body of clergy and workers to oversee the church, using a pro-government bishop. They tried to neutralize the Primate of (Persian) Azerbaijan, Archbishop Nerses Melik-Tangian, but the plot was realized in time and foiled for the time being. The Bolshevik government’s churlishness or incompetence had even

⁴⁸ “What News They Disseminate” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,241 (March 18, 1927).

extended so far as to stop scientific projects that had been begun under the Republic and to lose Professor Nicholas Marr's priceless collection of antiquities.⁴⁹

When a devastating earthquake struck the Shirak region of Armenia in October 1926, appeals were made to the Armenians of America to gather and send aid. The Bolsheviks accepted gifts from all the Armenian factions except the Dashnaktsakans, which were "tainted." "It injures us when through the hands and means of our bitter enemy we receive aid for Leninakan," wrote a Soviet newspaper.⁵⁰ *Asbarez* was incensed. The regime took money from Boghos Nubar as sympathy toward the "socialist" regime. The money of the extremely conservative AGBU was counted as an expression of brotherly love for the leaders of the proletarian "revolution," and the dollars of *Baikar*, that organ of the ruined clerico-bourgeois class, came as respect and encouragement for the international reds and Communists. This was obviously a conspiracy by all the anti-Dashnaktsakan elements, a godsend for them to fall all over themselves to present a united front against Dashnaktsutiun. If the Dashnaktsakans were enemies of the Soviet regime, that did not mean that they were enemies of the Armenian people!⁵¹

⁴⁹ "Fanatical Struggle against the Armenian Church," *Asbarez* XVI.1,053 (February 28, 1924); "Attempt to Extinguish the Catholicate," *Asbarez* XVI.1,062 (March 20, 1924); "In the Mother Country," *Asbarez* XVI.1,095 (June 5, 1924) [all in Armenian]. For a description of the persecution of the Church in the early and middle 1920s, see Kilbourne Matossian, *Soviet Policies in Armenia*, pp. 90–95.

⁵⁰ *Martkoch* ("Battle Cry").

⁵¹ "All Anti-Dashnaktsakan Corners, Unite..." [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,230 (December 31, 1926).

Herein was exactly the Dashnaktsakan error. They were reasoning on a bourgeois basis. This is not what the Communists meant at all. If the Dashnaktsakans were enemies of the Soviet regime, then according to Lenin's logic, they were *ipso facto* enemies of the people, for the regime was the expression of the working people, or the "toiling masses," as they put it. Dashnaktsakan aid to the "Armenian people" was only a trick to promote nationalism and subversion. Then why did the Bolsheviks accept aid from the bourgeois foreign Armenian elements? That was entirely tactical and had no principled basis. It was in the interests of the Revolution to do so. Who decided? The Party decided. Then what about the will of the people? The Party expressed the will of the people.

"If we criticize the Bolshevik regime's anti-Armenian and anti-nationalistic course," *Asbarez* protested, "that does not mean that we do not differentiate the people from the government. There is no proof that the homeless and hungry orphans of Shirak reject our brotherly sacrifices."

"Of course they do," the Communist could answer. "The people of Shirak are one with the proletariat. They are not nationalistic Armenian deviants as you are. That is a pathology the Revolution has wiped out. They are not your 'brothers;' you are the exploiting bourgeois class! Don't try to apply your oppressor's logic to this case."

Asbarez recognized the truth of the situation. Principle had nothing to do with it. The Reds were happily chasing the money of the anti-Bolshevik countries and the bourgeois elements that were conducting an active struggle against the Soviet government.

Moreover, *Asbarez* said, the Dashnaktsakan organization had shown its strength, its sacrifice, and its intimate ties with the Armenian working people by collecting more money than its opponents. The campaign had shown that Dashnaktsutiun refused to be buried.⁵²

Dashnaktsutiun Refuses to Be Buried

The local Dashnaktsakan committee declared March 5–13, 1927, to be “Dashnaktsutiun Week” in Los Angeles. The report appeared in *Asbarez*.⁵³

The week was very successful, *Asbarez* said, in spite of the local Bolsheviks, who boycotted it. The “people” had a chance to teach them a good lesson. The first public meeting was held on Sunday, March 6, in front of a large crowd. The chairman, Dr. Haig, said that this was proof that Dashnaktsutiun still “had something to do.”⁵⁴ The Armenian public still had something to expect from this large organization. After musical and poetic selections, the next speaker, Avedis Tufenkjian, compared the late struggle

⁵² *Ibid.*; also “Who Is Dead and Who Is Alive?” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,235 (February 4, 1927). The conversation in quotation marks preceding is not intended to be literal but a personification of the true views of the parties in question.

⁵³ “Dashnaktsutiun Week in Los Angeles. Big Public Meeting. Receipts of \$700 in Dinner Program. Ten Members Join Committee” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIX.1,241 (March 18, 1927).

⁵⁴ This was a reference to a pamphlet written by the former premier of the Republic of Armenia, Hovhannes Kachaznuni, titled, “Dashnaktsutiun Has Nothing More To Do” [in Armenian]. By virtue of this recantation, Kachaznuni was allowed to remain and work in Armenia. He died during the Great Purges. Matossian, *Soviet Policies in Armenia*, p. 127.

for independence with the Vartanantz wars of the fifth century.⁵⁵ The second speaker, Arsen Mikaelian, refuted the positions of the opponents one by one. Dashnaktsutium was born of the Armenian reality; Bolshevism, of the Russian bayonets. On March 10 there was a members' meeting at which the Dashnaktsakan program was explained, and 10 members joined the committee. On Sunday, March 13, there was a dinner and program, which lasted until midnight. The reporter declared that the \$700 in contributions that were collected was proof that the sympathies of the community were with Dashnaktsutium, and that childish boycotts could not wreck their work.

What was the Dashnaktsakan program?

Dashnaktsutium held as enemies all peoples and states obstructed the ideal of "United and Independent Armenia." This referred to both Turkey and the Soviet Union, which together had "strangled our young Republic in their claws and today are the ones who oppose the reestablishment of our Republic."⁵⁶

The relationship with Turkey was seen as completely hostile. "It is Turkey itself forces such a policy on us. Even if we were to forget our recent gory history, even if we were to plug our ears against the cries of the millions of our martyrs for revenge, we would find no tongues with which to speak to Turkey, because Kemalist Turkey after all this is

⁵⁵ This was the defining act of Armenian heroism against the Persian aggressor, taking place in 451. The Armenians were annihilated but preserved Christianity in Armenia. The soldiers of this army together with their general, Vardan Mamikonian, are considered saints by the Armenian Church.

⁵⁶ "What We Must Do," in two parts, *Asbarez* XX.1,379 (November 8, 1929) and XX.1,380 (November 16, 1929) [in Armenian].

not reconciled to our existence. This is the bare truth. The present state of Turkey, driven out of Europe, has put its eyes on the Transcaucasian countries and dreams of pan-Turanism. The Armenian people are one of the chief obstacles in the way. See where present Turkey's enmity comes from and why we cannot cultivate friendly relations with her."⁵⁷ With this point all the Armenian factions could agree wholeheartedly. Dashnaktsutun particularly endorsed the rebellion of the Kurds against Turkey in order to destabilize the regime.

The methods used against Soviet Russia could not be the same as those used against Turkey. Any weapons and means could be used against Turkey. But the struggle against Russia was on a purely ideological basis. The political, economic, and intellectual freedom of the Armenian people depended on the removal of the Soviet regime in Russia. This had to be done by the Russian people. The Armenian people were not strong enough to accomplish it themselves, so Dashnaktsutun must not take part in Russia's internal quarrels. There should not be any aid by outside powers to prop up the regime. First of all, the ancient enemy (Turkey) was camped on the banks of the Arax River and in front of the gates of Alexandropol. Secondly, the struggle was not against the great people of Russia, but against the destructive policies of the government both against the Russian people and against the Armenian people. Except for this, Dashnaktsutun would retain its previous pro-Russian policy and would regard Armeno-Russian friendship as

⁵⁷ Ibid.

essential and desirable. For that reason they were friends to all the liberal elements of the great Russian people who were friends of self-determination and liberation of the small nations. Dashnaktsutiun would continue to be an intellectual opponent, in order to keep alive the political consciousness of the Armenian masses.⁵⁸

However, Soviet Russia had surpassed even the imperial government in tyranny by detaching Armenian-populated areas and attaching them to other republics. The districts of Akhalkalak, Armenian Borchalu, Mountainous Karabagh and Sharur-Nachichevan should be returned to Armenia. They had ethnographically, geographically, and historically belonged to Armenia, the majority of the population was Armenian, and moreover wanted to be joined to Armenia.⁵⁹

Dashnaktsutiun would continue to support the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia, which carried on a shadow government in Boston, considering it to be the depository of Independent Armenia and expecting it to play an important role in the Armenian life in the future.

All members were to protect the existing national (i.e., ethnic Armenian) institutions and to establish new national organizations in those places where they did not exist. They

⁵⁸ Ibid. The Armenian Republican regime had sided with the White armies during the Civil War.

⁵⁹ In fact, Bolshevik Russia had only reannexed former Russian Armenia minus the districts won in the Russo-Turkish War of 1878. The Armenian territory had been minimized as a result of the failure of the final war with Turkey in 1920. It was the loss of Turkish Armenia and the fixation on Communism that vexed the non-Dashnaktsakan Armenians, as has been noted above.

were to support all efforts to keep the Armenians in the colonies Armenian. The new generation would have to carry on the struggle.⁶⁰

Reaction to Stalinism

Lenin died in January 1924. His eventual successor was Josef Stalin, who grasped the supreme power by playing his rivals off against each other until he had eliminated each one of them. Stalin then embarked on the total transformation of Soviet society and the ruthless elimination of any opposition, real, potential, or imagined. In 1928 he introduced the first Five Year Plan, which led to the forced collectivization of peasants throughout the entire Soviet Union. In Armenia as elsewhere this gave rise to fierce resistance, and Dashnaktsakans reappeared on Soviet territory.⁶¹ The persecution of religion and of the Armenian Church became more severe.⁶² Increasingly, the Dashnaktsakans viewed Soviet Russia as the enemy rather than the savior of the Armenians from Turkey. In November 1929 Asbarez made the following demands on the Soviet Armenian government:

1. Open up Armenia to the Armenian refugees.

⁶⁰ "Declaration from XI General Meeting of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation" [in Armenian], *Asbarez*. XX.1,361 (July 5, 1929).

⁶¹ Rebel bands held out in the mountains of Zangezur until as late as 1934. Matossian, *Soviet Policies in Armenia*, pp. 47–52; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 55–56.

⁶² Matossian, *Soviet Policies in Armenia*, pp. 147–152.

2. Put an end to the mindless anti-Armenian persecutions in Armenia.
3. Stop the crazy disarming of the Armenian peasants. The Turks around them were armed to the teeth.
4. Restore freedom of thought and of speech.⁶³

This program would have of course meant the reversal of the Bolshevik Revolution, which was not in the least likely to happen.

The following was demanded from the overseas colonies:

1. Maintain a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere among the Armenians of the colonies, where it would be possible to undertake constructive collective work without wrecking and neutralizing each other.
2. Arm the colonial Armenians with the idea of United and Independent Armenia and gather all those who believe in that idea under one flag.⁶⁴
3. Strengthen the ties between the colonies and the fatherland, which have been weakened by the senseless and repulsive policies of the Bolshevik government.
4. Cultivate patriotic work among the Armenians of the colonies; it is not a concern that thus unorthodoxly we would be helping to strengthen the Bolshevik regime.⁶⁵

⁶³ "What We Must Do, Part 1" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XX.1,379 (November 8, 1929).

⁶⁴ By this is meant the tricolor of the defunct republican regime. This point was to gain enormous significance, but not in the intended way.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

By “peaceful and harmonious atmosphere” was meant the acceptance of the Dashnak-tsakan program by all elements of the community. The converse was just as true of similar statements from the other side. The remaining points were nationalistic, therefore fundamentally opposed to Soviet interests.

The end of any hope for a “peaceful and harmonious atmosphere” was to come at a church service.

CHAPTER 12

THE SCHISM

Archbishop Ghevont Tourian

The Armenian Apostolic Church now became the focal point of the political conflict. Dashnaktsutiu became convinced that all the other elements in the community were combining to persecute it and that the Bolshevik government was sending agents in the guise of clergymen to subvert the church and thereby the whole community. Some of those who were particularly disliked were Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian (later archbishop), who held various positions but from 1911 to 1934 was the pastor of Holy Trinity Church of Fresno, and Adom Kahana Melikian, who from 1917 to 1935 was the pastor of Holy Cross Church of Los Angeles. Higher clergy included Bishop Mushegh Seropian and Archbishop Ghevont Tourian. All of these were accused in the Dashnaktsakan press as being in the pocket of the Ramkavars or Bolsheviks or both.¹

The most serious situation developed after the election of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian (July 1, 1881–December 24, 1933) as Primate of America in 1931.² Although

¹ One incident occurred in Alexandria, Egypt, on July 31, 1921, when Bishop Mushegh Seropian was prevented by the “nationalists” from celebrating a requiem for the benefactor Krikor Melkonian. According to *Asbarez*, a fight was provoked by “some adventurers hired by the national council and the Ramkavars,” to the chagrin of the “Ramkavar Asbeds.” “Eruption of the People’s Anger. Mushegh Thrown Out of Church” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XIV.782 (September 9, 1921).

² Father Oshagan Minassian, “A History of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church in the United States (1888–1944)” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1974), chapter 9, to which this section is indebted.

the jurisdiction of Archbishop Tourian did not extend to California, the repercussions of his assassination, for which nine Dashnaktsakans were convicted by a court in New York, were strongly felt worldwide. The future archbishop was educated at the Seminary of Armash in Turkey and ordained a celibate priest in 1901. His entire career was spent in Church administration. He served as the personal secretary to Patriarch Malachia Ormanian and as vicar-general under four Armenian patriarchs of Constantinople. At the same time he preached at the Christ the King Armenian Church in Kadikeuy (ancient Chalcedon), in Asiatic Constantinople. In 1913 he was elevated to bishop and henceforth served as primate of various dioceses: Adrianople in 1913, Bulgaria from 1914 to 1919, and Smyrna to the sack of the city in September 1922 by the Kemalist Turks. Bishop Tourian escaped to Athens, Greece, where he was called to Manchester to be primate of the Diocese of England. While he was in Manchester, he was elected primate of America.³

Now an Archbishop, Tourian arrived in New York on May 28, 1931. The primate was immediately handicapped by the long-standing hostility that Dashnaktsutian bore toward him,⁴ and now the Ramkavars rallied to his support. However, an incident toward the end of the first year of his reign marked the beginning of unparalleled personal attacks upon him. In view of the sensitive position of the Church under the Stalinist regime,

³ Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 430–432.

⁴ The criticisms of Archbishop Tourian's previous activities are given in Partizian [Bardizian], A., *Hay Ekeghetsvoy Tagnape Ev Anor Pataskhanatumere* [The Crisis of the Armenian Church and Those Who Are Responsible for It] (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1936), pp. 315–357.

Catholicos Gevorg V had issued a directive on June 26, 1929, strongly urging the Armenian clergy not to become involved in anti-Soviet propaganda. According to custom, Martyrs' Day programs were held in the community every year on April 24. Because the Dashnaktsakans had turned such occasions into anti-Soviet and anti-Turkish political mass meetings, Archbishop Tourian instructed the clergy that they should organize Martyrs' Day observances at the local parishes only and not to attend or preside over any held outside the church.⁵

The primate himself was invited to preside at one such observance planned for April 24, 1932, by a group in New York City called the "Friends of Martyred Writers." He declined, citing a previous engagement in Canada. The group then extended the same invitation to the former primate, Archbishop Dirayr Der Hovhannesian. While he was in Canada, Tourian heard about the matter and sent Der Hovhannesian a telegram forbidding him to preside at the meeting. Der Hovhannesian attended although he did not preside. However, he read the primate's telegram aloud to those assembled in the hall.⁶

The incident motivated *Hairenik* to charge that the primate was "a staunch friend of the Bolsheviks" who "serves the Bolsheviks with fanatic admiration." *Asbarez* continued by repeating the old charges and proclaiming that the "honorable American-Armenian

⁵ Ibid., p. 440.

⁶ Ibid.

public [would] refuse to recognize the prelacy of Bishop Ghevont.”⁷ An inflammatory article published under a pseudonym in *Hairenik* on July 2, 1932, accused Archbishop Tourian of cowardice and abandonment of the Armenians of Smyrna in 1922.⁸ The non-Dashnaktsakans were outraged by these attempts to discredit the primate.⁹

During the next twelve months the attacks against Archbishop Tourian increased in frequency and in stridency, both in the diocesan assembly convened on January 21, 1933, and in the pages of *Hairenik* and *Asbarez*.¹⁰ The primate was sorely vexed and wrote to *Asbarez* asking them to stop sending their newspaper to the diocesan offices. This elicited an editorial reply that the primate didn’t like criticism, no matter how just it was or from what pure a motive it was written.¹¹ According to Minassian’s interpretation, the intensification of the attacks against the archbishop, evidently with the intention of undermining his position and forcing him to resign, only served to increase his resoluteness and the support he enjoyed from the non-Dashnaktsakan sector of the community.¹²

⁷ “Primate Archbishop Ghevont Tourian’s Manifestation” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXII.1,510 (May 13, 1932).

⁸ This incident is discussed in Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 442–447. See also Marjorie Housepian, *The Smyrna Affair* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1966).

⁹ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 446.

¹⁰ For example, see *Asbarez* XXIII.1,545 (January 13, 1933).

¹¹ “That Is Not the Right Path” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIII.1,547 (January 27, 1933).

¹² Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 449–450.

All this, however, was but a prelude to the events of the last six months of the year. On July 1, 1933, there was to be an “Armenian Day” at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. The local organizing committee, an ad hoc body consisting mostly of Protestants, invited Archbishop Tourian to preside. The Tricolor flag of the defunct Republic of Armenia now became the center of a dispute. Since the fall of the republic, the flag had come to be identified solely with Dashnaktsutiun. Not wishing to insult the Soviet government by implying that the former regime was still the legitimate government of Armenia, the archbishop would not consent to appear at the exhibition until he was assured that the Tricolor would not be displayed. Upon the archbishop’s insistence, the organizing committee agreed that the event would take place under the American flag only and that no Armenian flag would be flown, neither Tricolor nor Soviet. This was similar to the solution adopted by the German Americans, whose homeland had been taken over by the Nazis three months earlier. The Dashnaktsakans complicated matters, however, by insisting that either the Tricolor had to be flown or the strong anti-Soviet and pro-Dashnaktsakan Senator William H. King of Utah had to give a radio address from the event. The organizing committee refused to accede to the Dashnaktsakan demands.¹³

Minassian gives a detailed account of what happened next. On the day of the program, contrary to the previous arrangements and before the appointed time for the

¹³ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 451–453.

beginning of the program, a woman bearing the Tricolor flag, accompanied by twenty children bearing smaller flags, mounted the platform and placed the flag there. This caused general pandemonium and the police were called. Archbishop Tourian explained to the police that he could not continue with the program unless the flag was removed, because if he were to proceed, he would appear to be endorsing a particular political viewpoint, which would cause dissension in the Armenian communities all over the world and bring reprisals from the Soviet government.

The American official who was responsible for the event, Major Felix J. Streyckmans, then requested those responsible for placing the flag on the platform to remove it. They refused to do so. Passions became inflamed, and a Dashnaktsakan adherent picked up a chair and struck the chief of police. This caused a riot which was eventually put down and the program proceeded.¹⁴

Hairenik and *Asbarez* then mounted a sustained, daily attack on the primate, accusing him of treason and unpatriotism. In their reasoning, “treason” or “unpatriotism” meant rejection of the Dashnaktsakan claims that they constituted the only true and legitimate government of Armenia.

According to *Asbarez*, the non-Dashnaktsakan press bore “unbridled enmity” to the Armenian Tricolor. A dishonorable campaign to wreck Dashnaktsutun was being waged by a dark and sinister conspiracy made up of the foreign stooges and free provocateurs of

¹⁴ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 454–457.

Soviet Armenia, led on by their lust to serve their red masters, in collusion with the conservatives, reactionaries, and even the assimilated, all having a bitter passion against Dashnaktsutiun. *Baikar*, the Ramkavar organ, owned that the Tricolor was the symbol of Armenian independence, but now that the government had changed, the Tricolor had to be relegated to the museum. *Gotchnag* accepted that the Tricolor was the symbol of the Armenian rebirth, but under the present realities the flag did not represent a government. And especially because of the “hostile attitude” of the Dashnaktsakan party, the Tricolor was an “anti-government symbol.” Therefore, the Armenians, with the exception of the Dashnaktsakan elements, preferred to remain without a flag.¹⁵

All of this was false, *Asbarez* said. The red Soviet flag of Armenia was completely political and Communist. It represented a party that was not only un-Armenian, but totally foreign. Except for a few Communists, there could not be found in Armenia any Armenians who did not hate the bastard flag, just as they had hated the tsarist and sultanist flags before it. It had been created by the Russian Bolshevik Party as a symbol of the “world revolution,” which had been imposed on all the nations within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, as a proof of the “proletarian dictatorship!”¹⁶

But, *Asbarez* continued, the Tricolor flag of the Republic of Armenia had been created in the blood of the fight for liberation and had led the Armenian warriors through unbelievable gallantry. And even now it remained the symbol of political rebirth for the

¹⁵ “The Tricolor Flag” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIII.1,570 (July 7, 1933).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Armenian freedom-loving elements. To insist that the “Armenian people, with the exception of the Dashnaktsakan element, prefer[ed] to remain without a flag” was an out-and-out trick. The *Gotchnags* and the *Baikars* of this world would not hesitate to spit poison against the red Soviet flag too, if it happened that Dashnaktsutiu were not against it! The Tricolor would be folded up only when the Armenian people freely and independently chose another flag for themselves different from the present Tricolor. Until that time, it would wave over their heads as a symbol of their liberation struggle.¹⁷

Asbarez gave its version of the events in Chicago two weeks later, in order “to avoid mistakes.” The main reason for the unpleasantness was Archbishop Ghevont Tourian, who without reason counted himself “Primate of North and South America.” The Armenian and American flags were flying over the platform, the program had begun, and the people were calmly listening. But Primate Tourian of the “Eastern District,” who innumerable times had bowed before the bloody Turkish flag, refused to come to the platform in the presence of the Armenian Tricolor. In order to satisfy his demand, Major Streyckmans, the president of the Committee of Nations, ordered the flag to be removed. That caused a fight to break out, which the unworthy apostle of Christ witnessed with

¹⁷ Ibid. Armenia reverted to the Tricolor on August 23, 1990, when she declared independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In that sense the Dashnaktsakan position may be considered to have been vindicated. But at the time in question, the Tricolor was regarded by the non-Dashnaktsakans as a Dashnaktsakan symbol only.

satisfaction. This cowl-wearer¹⁸ could tolerate any kind of flag but the Armenian. Groveling before imposed flags, he was ready to dishonor his own national flag.¹⁹

The attacks on the archbishop were answered in kind in the non-Dashnaktsakan press as the situation deteriorated. After Tourian had explained his actions to the central committee of the diocese, the latter issued a “Declaration” that the primate had always proved his respect for the national Tricolor. Three days later, however, *Banvor* (“Laborer”), the Bolshevik organ in the United States, published a facsimile of a private letter over Archbishop Tourian’s signature in which he allegedly had said that he had prevented the use of the Tricolor at the Chicago Exhibition because he considered it a manifestation of revolt and disdain against the state organization of Armenia.²⁰ This caused a new storm. *Asbarez* saw in the situation a Communist plot to disrupt the foreign Armenian communities. The sinister group behind Archbishop Tourian was making two contentions: first, that the primates in foreign lands, being subject to Echmiadzin, were obligated to fulfil its orders, that is, to be friendly to the Soviet government of Armenia and to prohibit political demonstrations within the church against that same government, and second, that the use of the Tricolor flag as a demonstration against the Soviet government (in the vocabulary of the regime, the state) could agitate it to take revenge against the Armenian people.

¹⁸ This refers to the monastic hood worn by the upper clergy.

¹⁹ “Primate Tourian’s New Gaffe” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIII.1,571 (July 14, 1933).

²⁰ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 458.

Both of these contentions were absolutely false, *Asbarez* said. The evidence was without doubt that the threats of the Cheka were what instigated the orders of Echmiadzin.²¹ But even if Echmiadzin had willingly given the orders, they could only relate to church circles, where any anti-Soviet activities were prohibited. But it had never been ordered that a primate, stepping out of bounds on his own, should become a political hero in lay circles, as happened at the Chicago International Exposition. So Archbishop Ghevont's defense became a plain deceit. The second contention was obviously the same as it was during the time of the tsar and of the sultan, that their governments must not be agitated to take revenge on the Armenians living within their borders. If the Soviet government would actually take revenge on the Armenians of Armenia, then it was even more wicked than those previous governments. Naturally, it could not be called the "government of Armenia." Furthermore, since it had voluntarily declined to recognize the Armenian citizenship of Armenians residing in foreign lands, the latter had no obligation whatsoever toward the Soviet government.²²

²¹ The Cheka, or VeCheKa, from the initials in Russian, *Vserossyskaya Chrezvychainaya Komissiya* (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Struggle against Counterrevolution and Sabotage) was the first Bolshevik secret police organization, established in December, 1917. It was responsible for the Red Terror during the initial period of the revolution. This often entailed shooting suspected "counterrevolutionaries" on sight. The Cheka was replaced by the GPU (State Political Administration, January 23, 1922), later renamed the OGPU (Unified State Political Administration, January 31, 1924). The powers of the secret police were somewhat limited and regularized, but the organization gradually came under the influence of Stalin. After 1928 it was used to put down the Nepmen (private entrepreneurs who had flourished under the New Economic Policy) and as an instrument of the Great Purges. All of these organizations were feared and loathed. They served as the model for Hitler's Gestapo. "Cheka" as used in the Dashnaksakan papers at this time is an anachronism; the term should be "OGPU."

²² "The Deceit Will Be Thrown Down" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,574 (August 4, 1933).

Escalation to Violence

The constant derision of Archbishop Tourian in the press and from the platform provoked some young “toughs” to take physical action. On August 13, the primate was invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at Holy Savior Church in Worcester, Massachusetts and then attend the church’s annual picnic at a farm in Westboro. On the same day there was a picnic also being held by the Dashnaktsakan Party at Grafton. Seven young men at this latter event, incited by the derogatory remarks of the speakers against the primate, traveled from Grafton to Westboro in a truck. Just as the 52 year-old cleric was about to pronounce the benediction, they attacked him from behind and began beating him. According to Minassian:

Fists, clubs, and stones flew in all directions as supporters of the primate and their opponents engaged in physical combat. It is believed that more serious casualties would have resulted had it not been for the intervention of the police. Five of the attackers escaped, but two were arrested. The reason the Tashnag Party offered for the attack was that the archbishop had insulted the Armenian flag in July at the World’s Fair in Chicago.²³

The interpretation of the incident in the Dashnaktsakan and the non-Dashnaktsakan press showed the extent of the division in the community. While *Hairenik* tried to place the blame on the archbishop, *Baikar* placed the violence in the context of what it called the twenty-five-year history of Dashnaktsakan disruption of the community. The Dash-

²³ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 460; *New York Times* (December 25, 1933), p. 1.

naktsakans should put an end to acts of violence and stop corrupting the minds of the youth.²⁴ Tragically, passions became inflamed even further.

The “Removal” of Primate Tourian

The event that was to happen next, and the murder of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian that followed it, poisoned and divided the Armenian immigrant community evermore. The community had been divided into two camps: those loyal to Echmiadzin and the hierarchy of the Church, and the Dashnaktsakans, who strove to dismiss the primate and break relations with Echmiadzin. This came to a head at the diocesan assembly of September 2–3, 1933. While this has been interpreted from a partisan viewpoint in nearly every report, again Minassian gives a detailed factual account.²⁵ The meeting was convened at Holy Illuminator Church in New York under the most tense conditions. The selection of delegates from the various parishes had been accomplished in an environment of agitation and violence that had made it necessary to call in the police “many times.” There were reports of persons coming to the convention armed.

Archbishop Tourian did not appear at the meeting but instead sent a letter with Bishop Hovsep Garabedian pleading ill health. In the ensuing tumult, the convention split, the delegates loyal to the primate resuming the meeting in the Grand Suite of the Martinique Hotel in New York City and the pro-Dashnaktsakan delegates continuing at

²⁴ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 461.

²⁵ The following is based on Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 463–467.

Holy Illuminator Church. Bishop Garabedian, apparently reneging on a commitment to Primate Tourian, continued to preside at the original meeting. Thereupon the primate appointed Father Mampre Kalfaian to preside at the convention at the Hotel Martinique. The question of which convention was “legitimate” persists to this day.²⁶

Asbarez published its version from its own correspondent on the scene.²⁷ The room was very crowded. Primate Archbishop Tourian had insisted on guarantees of his personal safety before he would come to the meeting. The necessary guarantees were given to him through Father Martoogesian.²⁸ The archbishop also asked for police protection. It was replied that no police were needed in an Armenian meeting. It was agreed, after a long discussion, to hold the meeting behind closed doors. Nevertheless, the primate claimed some illness and did not come. Instead, he sent his opening speech to Bishop Hovsep Garabedian. The attendees considered that Archbishop Tourian did not have the courage to be present at the diocesan assembly.

According to the *Asbarez* report, a provisional central committee and an examining committee opposed to the primate were elected, giving the meeting over to confusion. The first session was recessed to reconvene the next day at 2:00 P.M. The examining

²⁶ For the Dashnaksakan viewpoint forcefully expressed, see *Crisis in the Armenian Church: Text of a Memorandum to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America on the Dissident Armenian Church in America / Prepared by the Central Diocesan Board, Armenian National Apostolic Church of America* (Boston: The Board, 1958).

²⁷ The following account is from “Ghevont Archbishop Tourian Removed from Office” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,579 (September 8, 1933).

²⁸ For Martoogesian’s version of this, see below, pp. 374–375.

committee, after a fruitless interview with the executive committee of the diocese, went to the primate's room and demanded the records of the elections for delegates and the protests that had occurred in various places. These were not forthcoming from the archbishop, who finally dismissed the committee from his room.

The next day, according to the *Asbarež* report, there was a delay of three hours because of the absence of the delegates who were opposed to the majority, after which the convention proceeded under the chairmanship of Bishop Garabedian. The examining committee reported that there were 55 accredited clerical and lay delegates present, many of them having come from long distances. The members then listened to the "long" and "tasteless" reading of the primate's written address. Because of "foreign trouble-makers" allegedly hired by the primate and his followers, the convention voted to conduct the remainder of the session behind closed doors. After hearing "evidence" from delegates Kh. Babaian and Zadig Matigian²⁹ about the primate's improprieties, the convention voted to remove him from office and to direct the executive committee to designate a locum tenens. All of the delegates except two voted for his impeachment.³⁰ This occurred at 2:00 A.M. on September 4. The convention then revoked two orders of the primate, reinstating the defrocked priest, Father Mesrob Der Hovannesian of New

²⁹ A prominent Dashnaktsakan; he had been elected to the Armenian National Congress that was held in Paris in February, 1919.

³⁰ *Asbarež* first gave the figure of 54 votes to remove out of 55 cast.

Britain, Connecticut, to the priesthood and ratifying Nishan Kahana Papazian as pastor of the Patterson parish.³¹

A puzzling question was the ambiguous behavior of Bishop Garabedian. He later explained to Archbishop Tourian that he had not announced the change of location to the convention “because of the seriousness of the prevailing situation.” This, and his cooperation with the dissident convention, caused him to be accused of opportunism on one hand while it was rumored that he had feared for his life on the other.³²

According to Minassian’s investigations, the loyalist delegates at the Martinique Hotel continued their proceedings and endorsed the policies of the primate. The minutes of the two conventions lacked objectivity, making it difficult to determine what actually happened. Both sides elected central committees. The Martinique group commended Archbishop Tourian for his courage and sent the Catholicos a telegram reaffirming their loyalty to the primate. The dissident faction notified the archbishop of his “dismissal” and sent a telegram to the Catholicos to that effect.³³

³¹ “American Armenian Diocesan Assembly” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933). Much more was to be heard later of Father Papazian.

³² Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 468. Both factions claimed to be the legitimate convention. Since the decree of the Catholicos of September 11, 1933 confirmed Archbishop Tourian in office, I have used the terms “loyalist” for the pro-Tourian faction and “dissident” for the anti-Tourian faction, in keeping with Minassian’s usage. See below, pp. 371–373.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 466–467.

The dissident group published the resolutions of their council in the Dashnaksakan press, not neglecting to instruct the parishes to send them their dues.³⁴ Their “National Central Committee” expressed themselves ready to listen to any reasonable suggestion and advice, within the limits of legality, that could be useful in improving the situation, a situation that in its gravity was unparalleled in the history of the community and that threatened to deepen the fighting that had begun in the life of the people and the church. They added the following statement:

The National Central Committee on this occasion again expresses its deep assurances of respect and dedication to the Mother See, Holy Echmiadzin, and to its Vicar, His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians, to whom we hasten to send our account, the minutes of the Diocesan Assembly and pertinent documents, according to our responsibility.³⁵

Echmiadzin Responds

Each side waited for an answer from the Catholicos. The reply was a telegram dated September 11 and addressed to Archbishop Tourian. In it the primate was vindicated by His Holiness, who announced his satisfaction and blessings to the members of the diocesan convention and for the confidence expressed in the primate by the community.

³⁴ “Declaration of the National Representative Assembly,” *Asbarež* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933); “Declaration of the National Central Council,” *Asbarež* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933) [both in Armenian].

³⁵ “Appeal” [in Armenian], *Asbarež* XXIV.1,582 (September 29, 1933).

The Catholicos expressed his blessings and confidence in Archbishop Tourian's "helpful work and ... righteous course of action."³⁶

On the basis of this telegram, the central committee issued a "Declaration" on September 20. This reaffirmed that Archbishop Tourian was still the primate and that his "deposition" had been illegal. This was founded on three articles of the church constitution that delineated the duties of the diocesan convention and required that complaints against the prelate of a diocese be submitted to the Catholicos for decision.³⁷ This was followed by another declaration by Archbishop Tourian on October 21, with the intention of countering the activities and announcements of the dissident central committee.³⁸

The final arrangements of Echmiadzin, dated October 25, 1933, were as follows:

Holy Echmiadzin. Primate of Armenians of America. Most Reverend Ghevont Archbishop:

As a result of Your letters of August 28 and September 22, which relate to the display of the tricolor flag at the Chicago Fair, and the legality of the assemblies convened on September 2-3, the Supreme Spiritual Council, taking note of the letters and telegrams and the explanations on both sides about this matter in the press, declares to You:

1. That the course that You have taken is generally considered right and helpful.
2. The minority meeting that was held in the 27th Street Church in New York is held to be illegal and the resolution that it passed to remove the primate is unconstitutional and illegal (Article 2 Sections 6 and 10).
3. Also taking into account some deficiencies of the meeting held in the Martinique Hotel, it is proposed to you at a time that is convenient in Your judgment to reconvene the same Assembly with the same agenda

³⁶ Minassian, "Armenian Church," p. 469.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 470.

³⁸ Ibid.

under Your presidency, and above all to try to keep the Assembly united, welding the divided community together, in order to keep the diocese united without any division.³⁹

None of this was what the Dashnaksakans wanted to hear, and instead of retreating, they went on the attack. Their most spectacular weapon was Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian.

Martoogesian had been defrocked by Catholicos Khrimian “*Hairig*” in 1907 because of his convictions for extortion and conspiracy to commit murder while he was a member of the Reformed Hnchakian Party. In 1916, the old Catholicos now having passed away, Martoogesian traveled to Echmiadzin to petition the Holy Synod for reinstatement. This was granted after one year of penitence.⁴⁰ He took various pastorates in New England, wrote some articles and made some speeches, and was present at the opening session of the diocesan convention on September 2, 1933. He remained with the dissident group and now he became their chief spokesman against Archbishop Tourian. For the next three months at public meetings in various cities Martoogesian worked up crowds against Archbishop Tourian to a fever pitch, making a display of striding across the platform to kiss the Tricolor flag.⁴¹

³⁹ “Final Arrangements by Echmiadzin” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,596 (January 5, 1934). Capitalizations in original.

⁴⁰ See biography in Dikran Spear [Tigran Mkund, Dikran Mgoont], *Hay Kghern Amerikayi Mej* [Armenian Clergy in America] ([Weehawken, N.J. : s.n.], 1945), pp. 31–36.

⁴¹ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 471.

One such speech was delivered at a “neutral” meeting in New York. It was reported in an article in *Asbarez* entitled “The Real Truth: Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian Speaks.”

Before the Diocesan Assembly, I wanted to see the primate personally to understand truly why he had done what he did in Chicago. I thought he had made a mistake, a bad mistake, but before everything we spiritual ones have to think to remedy that mistake intelligently and to save the primate of a community.

My interview with Archbishop Tourian was very friendly. We two Ghevonts, one an archbishop, the other a village vartabed sitting opposite each other, spoke for a long time.

“*Srpazan*, why did you go to Chicago? Why did you participate in the fair, and especially why did you do that in respect to the flag?” I asked him.

“I don’t know what to say,” the primate answered, visibly shaken. “The Trustees of the Chicago church invited me. I didn’t decline the invitation; I went there, and I celebrated the Mass. They also asked me to appear at the fair and to speak. I didn’t decline that request, either.”

“You made a mistake, *Srpazan*. You interfered in other affairs outside your spiritual responsibilities. It is important to be present at a foreign religious meeting, to speak, and to present our church, but what need is there to go to an international fair where no nation was represented by its clergymen? *Srpazan*, you are fond of going out to some city and doing your work there, first seeing the mayor or the governor of the state. Do you think that is your immediate responsibility and any good will come of it? I don’t think so. But let us say that you went to Chicago and had to appear at the fair. But did you have to take such an inflammatory attitude toward the flag, even declaring that until the flag was removed from the room you didn’t want to enter?”

“Oh, Father Ghevont, those are excesses, I have always respected the flag, I have celebrated the Mass with the flag in my hands. If it is necessary, even now I will kiss the flag.”

“*Srpazan*, if you have such great respect for the flag, then how can that letter be explained, which you sent to the Central Committee of HOG, immediately after the events in Chicago?”

“What did I know, Vartabed, that my letter would be published?” [general laughter]

[Martoogesian Vartabed, obviously touched, begged the people not to laugh.] “Don’t laugh, countrymen,” he said. “The picture is very lamentable of an archbishop, who makes so many errors and makes himself worthy of such ridicule. I am telling you all this unwillingly, but I am telling only the truth in order to expose and describe men as they are. I love Tourian, but I love my church more, and even

more the flag, against which those who take a hostile attitude must be exposed.”
[extended applause]

Continuing my discussion with Archbishop Tourian, I added:

“*Srpazan*, those things shouldn’t have been done, but what is done is done. I feel that you have been made the victim of the wrong calculations and suggestions of others, and I think that hands working in the dark became the reason for your sins. Now I declare to you, that I want to do what I can in the Diocesan Assembly to ameliorate your position. Only you tell me whether the meeting will take place in St. Gregory Church on 27th Street, or if it will take place in the Hotel Martinique, because such rumors are reaching my ears.”

“No, those rumors are false, the meeting will take place in Illuminator Mother Church. I can never permit a change of location. By changing the location I will have split the community in two with my own hands.”

“But will you be present at the meeting?”

“Of course I will be present.”

“That is very good, *Srpazan*. You have to be present at the meeting. Come face to face with your sons and sincerely tell them what your motivations were in Chicago and declare that you will be subject to the will of the people. If you do that, I, and I am sure others also, will work for you to escape from this grave situation.”

“Father Ghevont, if I can get out of this grave situation,” Archbishop Tourian said, “you will see what attitude I will maintain toward the flag after that. But I want you to know one thing. If I appear at the meeting, won’t something untoward happen, won’t there be demonstrations?”

And leaving the Martinique Hotel, I went to the ARF Armen Garo Club, where I saw many prominent Dashnaksakan delegates, to whom I told the whole discussion I had with the primate. They assured me that there would not be even one demonstration against the primate; they were even working to keep the people calm. But being Dashnaksakans they were more adept at smelling things out. They told me plainly that the primate was tricking me, he wouldn’t keep one of the promises he made to me.

A little later I also saw a former Reformed Hnchak, who told me that a meeting was taking place at the Martinique Hotel. I didn’t want to believe any of this. I went to the primate again. I told him what I had learned from the Dashnaksakans, and I added,

“*Srpazan*, we will accept you in the proper way for a primate. A little later we clergy will also have a meeting. We are thirty clergymen. We will all accompany you to the meeting hall. If after their promises, the Dashnaksakans conduct any demonstration against you, be sure that you will win and they will lose.”

Archbishop Tourian drew a deep breath...⁴²

⁴² “The Real Truth: Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian Speaks” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,585 (October 20, 1933).

Martoogesian was repeatedly warned to desist from these activities, and he eventually received severe censure from the Catholicos.⁴³

Garegin Nzhdeh

Feelings were inflamed further by the visit to the United States of the Dashnaktsakan field worker Garegin Nzhdeh (Ter-Harutunian). Nzhdeh was a charismatic former partisan commander and career soldier who had fought the Turks and the Bolsheviks to the bitter end. After the February 1921 revolt against the Revkom he had declared the independence of Lernahayastan or Mountainous Armenia in Zangezur. He passed into exile after the final Bolshevik victory on July 16, 1921.⁴⁴ He was a fiery and brilliant orator and a passionate hater of Bolshevism.

Immediately upon his arrival Nzhdeh prepared to organize the youth, with the full backing of Dashnaktsutium.⁴⁵ He embarked on a speaking tour of all the Armenian settlements in behalf of his new movement, *Tseghakronutiun*. This was “race-worship” or “glorification of racial values,” a neologism coined from *tsegh* (race) and *kron* (religion). The word was chosen precisely for its roughness and force, even though there was an existing word in the language that meant the same thing (*tseghapashtutiun*). With the

⁴³ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 471.

⁴⁴ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971–1996), vol. 4, pp. 405–406.

⁴⁵ Sarkis Atamian, *The Armenian Community: the Historical Development of a Social and Ideological Conflict* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), p. 389.

feeling of alienation and danger prevalent in the overseas colonies, the message found an audience. In the course of a few weeks, oath-taking societies had been formed in the towns of the northeast and the movement spread also to the midwest.⁴⁶ Nzhdeh preached that the Bolsheviks were out to conquer the world and that every nation under Soviet domination would lose its national identity and cultural values. Even in America, those Armenians who identified with the Soviets were bound to change their national values.⁴⁷ *Tseghakronutium*, with the expressed purpose of promoting love of nation among the youth, had the effect of increasing anti-Bolshevik and anti-Ramkavar hatred and greatly exacerbated the tense situation.⁴⁸ Finally, his extremism was too much for the Dashnaktsakan leadership to stomach and he was expelled from the party.⁴⁹

The Litvinov Affair

On November 16, 1933, there was an exchange of letters between President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States of America and Maxim Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The two governments agreed to establish normal diplomatic relations and to exchange ambassadors, ending the long diplomatic boycott of the USSR by the United States. They expressed the hope that the

⁴⁶ Dr. A. Parseghian, "The *Tseghakron* Movement" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,588 (November 10, 1933).

⁴⁷ Atamian, *Armenian Community*, p. 389.

⁴⁸ Minassian, "Armenian Church," p. 475.

⁴⁹ Atamian, *Armenian Community*, p. 389.

relations thus established between the two peoples might forever remain normal and friendly, and that the two nations henceforth might cooperate for their mutual benefit and for the preservation of the peace of the world. The governments mutually established the fixed policy each to respect scrupulously the right of the other to order its own life within its own jurisdiction in its own way and to refrain from interfering in any manner in the internal affairs of the other. They furthermore engaged to refrain from any governmental act liable to injure the tranquillity, prosperity, order, or security of the other. Neither would permit the formation, residence, or activity on its territory of any organization or group that made claim to be the government of or made attempt upon the territorial integrity of the other, nor would either form, subsidize, support or permit on its territory military organizations or groups having the aim of armed struggle against the other, and both would prevent any recruiting on behalf of such organizations and groups.⁵⁰

Along with many others, Archbishop Tourian sent a letter of congratulations for which Litvinov returned his thanks. The Dashnaksakan press severely criticized the primate for his words of encouragement “on behalf of the Armenians of the United States of America” to the Soviet regime and its “noble cause.” Archbishop Tourian was also present at a banquet in Litvinov’s honor held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York

⁵⁰ “Exchange of Communications between President Franklin Roosevelt and Maxim Litvinov of the USSR” (November 16, 1933). The National Security Archive, The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. <<http://www.hfni.gsehd.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/>> (accessed July 4, 2000).

on November 24, accompanied by thirty other prominent Armenians. The Dashnaktsakans again used this event to pile abuse on the archbishop and the “pro-Soviet Armenians” for the alleged indecency of supporting the atheistic Communist regime.⁵¹

Struggle for the Churches

The struggle for control of the local parishes, which from time to time had waxed and waned, became more intense. In Philadelphia, Archbishop Tourian dissolved the board of trustees of St. Gregory the Illuminator Church because, in the words of *Asbarez*, “they would not be co-sinners with him” and ordered them to turn over the property to the building committee. Both sides went to the police, and Archbishop Tourian is said to have written a letter stating that the church had to be closed the following Sunday “in the face of a faction that was causing trouble and was seeking bloodshed.” The matter was turned over to the courts.⁵² Eventually the church was awarded to the Dashnaktsakans.⁵³ This conflict was to be repeated, one way or another, in every parish, extending to California.

⁵¹ This event is detailed in Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 476–478; and from the Dashnaktsakan point of view, *Crisis in the Armenian Church*, p. 53. Atamian does not mention it.

⁵² “Conspiratorial Disruptions of Archbishop Ghevont. A Fitting Answer Is Given” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,591 (December 1, 1933).

⁵³ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 518.

Nadir

Events now reached their nadir. Father Oshagan Minassian has collected the relevant information from both Armenian- and English-language sources, including the private scrapbook and diary of Bishop Hovsep Garabedian, and has given a complete description.

On Sunday, December 24, 1933, Archbishop Ghevont Tourian had been invited to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Cross Church at 587 West 187th Street in New York City. The service began with a solemn procession, led by the deacon with a censer. Immediately following the deacon were fourteen clerks with lighted candles. Behind them walked Bishop Hovsep Garabedian, rector of the church. Following Bishop Garabedian was Archbishop Tourian vested in ceremonial robes, carrying a golden crozier in his left hand and a crucifix in his right, with which he blessed the worshipers. At 10:28 A.M. the procession reached the seventh pew from the rear and a parishioner leaned out from the right side of the aisle to kiss the crucifix. Suddenly the primate was surrounded by figures from the pews and center aisle, who pinioned his arms as someone thrust a dagger twice into his heart. The primate staggered in an apparent effort to rest his body on the crozier he carried. It either smashed or broke from under him and he lurched forward, then fell onto the floor, his face tilted toward a picture of the Crucifixion that hung on the wall of the Church. In the ensuing pandemonium, some members from the band of assassins were viciously beaten by the infuriated parishioners while others fled to the exit. In the confusion it was reported that a mysterious figure had fled. Khosrov Gorgodian, the bodyguard of the primate, helped the archbishop to his feet and assisted him to the vestry. Several policemen rushed into the church. A choir girl noticed a

blood-stained knife on the floor. It was a large butcher knife with an oak handle and eight inch blade. She lifted it carefully and carried it to the altar. Inside the vestry the fallen Archbishop was surrounded by police, detectives, doctors, and a few members of the congregation. There the archbishop expired, feebly uttering his last words, “Okne indzi Deres” (“Help me, My Lord”). The primate’s body was placed in a police car and taken away. Two prisoners were apprehended: Madteos Leylegian, the alleged knife-wielder, and Nshan Sarkisian, who pinioned the archbishop’s arms. Later, seven coassassins were also arrested. In the milling mass a mysterious figure had escaped from the scene. On the records of the District Attorney this unknown person became “Mr. X.” To the parishioners, there was no doubt that the primate had been assassinated by Dashnaktsakans.⁵⁴

Denials

Asbarez published the sad news in their next issue, dated December 29. A brief factual account repeated the New York newspaper story. There was an announcement of a Requiem for “the Primate of the Armenians of the Eastern and Midwestern States of America” at Holy Trinity Church in Fresno, to be celebrated by Bishop Karekin Khachadourian. An editorial, obviously prepared before the assassination, cast a backward glance at the previous year’s Armenian national and political events. Of all the years since the

⁵⁴ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 479–482. See also the *New York Times* of December 25, 1933, which led with the news of the assassination on page 1.

end of the war, the previous one had been the most disturbing, particularly in the lives of the overseas Armenians. The editor found the “true cause” of the sickness of the public body in the “nest of conspiracies” of the Bolsheviks of Armenia. They had used the Church as a tool to split the Armenian communities and organizations, first, by setting up a phony “Free Church” in Armenia with the collusion of a few opportunistic clergy, and then through a rigged “free” election of the Catholicos. Echmiadzin and the Ramkavars had completely given themselves over to their Bolshevik masters and only Dashnak-tsutium stood firm.⁵⁵

In the same issue *Asbarez* printed its editorial comments on the assassination. Dashnak-tsutium was being slandered by evil-minded people, aided by the fact that it had shown enmity toward the victim ever since the well-known events in Chicago. This had caused confusion among the Armenian public of California, also. But the party could not have performed such a deed, because it was completely to be rejected in the course of a struggle of principles and ideas. *Asbarez* had hope and firm faith that the governments of New York City and State were able to do justice and punish the perpetrators. There could be no beneficial result from prematurely advanced quarrels and excited passions.⁵⁶

Hairenik carried the argument a step further in an article republished in *Asbarez*. The deed was most lamentable, to be sure. But the disruption of the community was the doing of the Soviet government, which had decided to turn the Armenian Church in foreign

⁵⁵ “On the Threshold of a New Year” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,595 (December 29, 1933).

⁵⁶ “About a Sad Deed” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,595 (December 29, 1933).

lands into its tool in order to destroy the freedom-loving Armenians and put an end to the Armenian Question. The Cheka had spread its malicious shadow and poisonous breath even into the most distant community. They were responsible for the bitter struggle against the Armenian Tricolor and all national values which that flag stood for.⁵⁷ All those who knowingly or unknowingly had tried to use the Armenian Church as a weapon to make propaganda in favor of the Soviet government had a great moral responsibility for the terrible deed of the previous Sunday. Even more responsible were those who had continued to support Archbishop Tourian after the public dishonor shown to the Armenian national flag in Chicago on July 1, at the same time seducing the Catholicos of All Armenians.⁵⁸

The Central Committee of Dashnaktsutium of America officially announced that certain elements were spreading lies that tended to hold Dashnaktsutium responsible before the eyes of the American government and complicated the work of justice. It was taking whatever legal steps were necessary and invited everyone to remain under control, calm, and peaceful.⁵⁹

The editor of *Asbarez* added the advice to his readers not to pay too much attention to everything the American papers said, because much of it was entirely baseless and

⁵⁷ This point of view is expressed at length in Partizian, op. cit.

⁵⁸ "About the Assassination in New York" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,596 (January 5, 1934).

⁵⁹ "Official Announcement. ARF Central Committee of America. To ARF Bodies and Comrades" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,596 (January 5, 1934).

untrue. There had been no such examination of the Dashnaktsakan headquarters in Boston, as had been reported. There was good information that in California also there were evil-minded agitators, among whom there were also pastors of churches, who were spreading lies among the simple populace.⁶⁰

Any hope that Dashnaktsutiun would retreat from the course that had been set in motion was dashed by another announcement two weeks later. The Central Committee was pained that its expression of deep regret and its rejection of the slanders against it had not been heeded, and blamed its enemies for continuing to stir up passions and to create a poisonous atmosphere around Dashnaktsutiun. This could have exceedingly grave and terrible consequences for the Armenians.⁶¹

It was the sinister forces inspired by Soviet agents, the Dashnaktsakan committee maintained, who had performed their sad anti-national treason in Chicago the previous July 1. The division of the community and the systematic agitation of the “United Front” had ended in the assassination in New York. By trying to tie the guilt around the neck of the nationalistic Armenians and their representative, Dashnaktsutiun, they were making every effort to exploit the disaster that they themselves had brought about.⁶²

⁶⁰ “Don’t Pay Attention” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,596 (January 5, 1934).

⁶¹ “Official Announcement of ARF Central Committee of America” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,597 (January 19, 1934).

⁶² *Ibid.*

Now Dashnaktsutiun put itself forward as the protector of the Church: The only remedy to escape from the internal disunion of the American-Armenian colony, and all the colonies, had to be to shutter that weapon that the Bolshevik Cheka used. *Gotchnag* had insincerely declared, “The Armenian Church has become a field for the political parties.” What this showed, according to *Asbarez*, was the distortion of truth. Really, it was the Cheka that had politicized the church, especially after the election of the Catholicos. An objective and honest man would discern that truth quite easily. The Cheka was behind it all and the Supreme Spiritual Council and the Catholicos were doing its bidding. It was plain, therefore, that the decisions and encyclicals of Echmiadzin had become the exportable goods of the Cheka. And those goods were exported, which suited its views and benefit, but those goods were prevented from being exported that did not suit its welfare.⁶³

What were those internal goods? One could find them in the internal Soviet publications such as *Khorurdayin Hayastan*: “The Soviet Union, by undertaking the eradication of classes, is giving final and destructive blows to religion. In the war against that hashish, the accomplishments of the Soviet Union and of Armenia are great.” But the same paper took *Ateist* to task for publishing an anti-religious answer to a letter from a writer in Detroit. “To disseminate such anti-religious propaganda abroad among our comrades means to pull out eyes instead of eyebrows.”⁶⁴

⁶³ “Conspiracies and Remedies” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,600 (February 9, 1934).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

So, in the opinion of *Asbarez*, this “amazing warfare” between two Soviet publications explained the whole thing: the existence of the spiritual government of Echmiadzin was important only for the colonies, but not for Armenia. And the work of this body would be to export such goods (encyclicals, orders, etc.) that directly suited the disruptive purposes of Cheka. Internally, Satan; outside, an angel.⁶⁵

Exportable Goods

Catholicos Khoren I, himself fated to be the victim of a murder, but by the Communists, issued an encyclical on March 16, 1934.

With this, our Pontifical encyclical, we express our deep sorrow due to the senseless and tragic crime perpetrated against our beloved son, the Most Reverend Archbishop Leon Tourian. We condemn the murderers and the murder as a product of a deluded mentality and we exhort you to be vigilant and to drop this purposeless controversy and feud, and especially to stay away from impulsive actions, which are detrimental and unbecoming to a cultured nation and people.⁶⁶

Condemnations

Non-Dashnaktsakans throughout the world condemned the crime that had been committed in New York. Many of these condemnations were collected and published by

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Minassian, “Armenian Church,” p. 484.

the Tourian Committee in *The Martyrdom of Archbishop Tourian: The Treasonous Crime and Its Condemnation*.⁶⁷

Nor Or answered the charge that the primate was an agent of the Cheka: This was an absolute calumny. Archbishop Tourian was a man of his calling, a man of duty. Like every obedient clergyman, he recognized the higher authority of the Catholicos of All Armenians and followed his commands. As a daily eye witness of Soviet Armenia's saving and constructive role,⁶⁸ the Catholicos of All Armenians naturally would advise and order his subordinate clerical officials to speak and preach in favor of Soviet Armenia and never to permit anti-Soviet elements to exploit the church and the clergy for the benefit of their defeated and harmful cause. This was because of the true patriotism of the Catholicos and not the result of the influence of the Cheka as the anti-Soviet elements would have one believe. After having been expelled from the country, the anti-Soviet element tried for a long time to use the Armenian clergy as a weapon against Soviet Armenia. But fortunately courageous and right-minded persons were found among the clergy as also in other political currents and organizations, men such as Archbishop Tsusig Zohrabian, the

⁶⁷ Tourian Committee, *Nahatakutiune Durian Srbazani: Azgadav Egherne ev Datapartutiune* [The Martyrdom of Archbishop Tourian: The Treasonous Crime and its Condemnation] (New York: Gotchnag Press, 1935).

⁶⁸ Despite the revolutionary excesses of the Bolsheviks, the lack of political and religious freedom, and even the Stalinist terrors, a strong case can be made that Armenia advanced in a physical and economic sense under Communist rule. See Matossian, *Soviet Policies in Armenia*, especially pp. 52–58. It is generally agreed by scholars that the result of the Stalinist five-year plans and industrialization was the basis for a modern industrial society and the defeat of the Nazi aggression (whether Stalin was prescient or not), despite the terrible wastefulness of lives and resources that seems to have sprung from Stalin's aberrant personality itself. Certainly, there was no further danger of Turkish invasion or genocide.

Primate of Rumania; Bishop Rupen Minassian, Primate of Iraq; Bishop Mazlounian, Primate of Greece; Archbishop Torkom Kooshagian when he was primate of Egypt; and Archbishop Ghevont Tourian.⁶⁹

The flag issue was addressed by *Hay Sirt* (“Armenian Heart”), a newspaper in Marseilles: When the inexcusable tragedy happened in New York, not a small number asked, “Why did Tourian *Srpazan* have to get mixed up in that flag business?” This was a false issue, blaming the victim, not the malefactor. Of what could Archbishop Tourian have been guilty? Of doing his duty? Ghevont *Srpazan* followed the orders of the Mother See. Those were to keep the Armenian people away from manifestations against the Armenian government. But that was exactly why the Tricolor was there! Obviously there would be some partisans who would not like Tourian’s behavior. But to condemn Tourian’s deed meant to encourage the desires of a minority and to defy the majority, and to offend against the truth.⁷⁰

More Agitation

Public meeting followed upon public meeting as the outraged community poured out in protest. These were held in all the settlements by the United Front. The name “Tashnag” became familiar in the American newspapers as a secret conspiratorial organi-

⁶⁹ “We Say it Again” [in Armenian], *Nor Or* (January 26, 1934). Quoted in Tourian Committee, *Martyrdom of Archbishop Tourian*, pp. 63–66.

⁷⁰ “About the Murder of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian” [in Armenian] *Hay Sirt* (January 11, 1934). Quoted in Tourian Committee, *Martyrdom of Archbishop Tourian*, pp. 59–60.

zation that was compared to the Mafia.⁷¹ In Los Angeles an “All-Community Worship Meeting” was held on January 21, including all the non-Dashnaktsakan community.⁷² In Fowler a meeting of 500 voted to send a telegram of protest to the President of the United States condemning the criminals and the Dashnaktsutiun. A Fresno meeting was addressed by a local American judge. Prominent were the non-Dashnaktsakan leaders such as Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian and the Reverend M. G. Papazian. The Dashnaktsakans calumniated the protestors,⁷³ calling them “slanderers,” “heroes of *kufteh*⁷⁴ and pinocle,” “agitators,” “exploiters of the corpse,” “pink and yellow knights,” “rabble,” and minimizing the attendance at their rallies. Particularly abusive was the editor of *Asbarez*, M. B. Kabadayan.⁷⁵

The Tseghakron Movement Advances

Nzhdeh continued his tour, visiting the towns on the West Coast. On Sunday, February 18, 1934, he held a meeting in Fresno. Before a crowd estimated by its organizers to number 2,000, he expounded his racial and political views for two hours.

⁷¹ “Those Who Are Sowing Trouble” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,601 (February 9, 1934).

⁷² “Los Angeles Community Life” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,601 (February 9, 1934).

⁷³ With at least one significant exception; see below, pp. 394–396.

⁷⁴ Stuffed meat balls, a favorite delicacy.

⁷⁵ M. B. K[abadayan], “Crazy Attempts” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,602 (February 16, 1934). See every issue of *Asbarez* or *Hairenik* of this period for similar material.

Dashnaktsutiun was the Armenian racial bastion, flowing out from the history of the Armenian people. They were the fighting part, who believed in the success of their struggle. The anti-Dashnaktsakan current stemmed from the negative and guilty parts of Armenian history. Bereft of self-confidence, they did not believe in the independence of the Armenian people. The anti-Dashnaktsakan faction rose up against the fighting faction, joining itself with the Persians, the Arabs, the Byzantines, the Turks, and the Bolsheviks. They thought that the Armenian people had never produced great ideas or great men. The Bolshevik Cheka exploited this, arming them against the fighting part. This was the battle that was taking place in the overseas colonies. The Bolsheviks were trying to destroy the warlike and nationalistic spirit of the Armenian people. But this would not be destroyed because it was tied to the values and principles of centuries. Through their veins coursed the blood of their virtuous race. The Bolsheviks had no fatherland, nor history, nor holiness, nor ideals, only materialism.⁷⁶ Afterwards a Dashnaktsakan members' meeting was held at which Nzhdeh spoke for two more hours and 53 new comrades joined the party.⁷⁷

A week later the hero was in Los Angeles for an invitation-only dinner on Saturday night. The next day there was a huge rally for the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Armenian Red Cross with 1,700 present.⁷⁸ Inside the auditorium, according to *Asbarez*,

⁷⁶ "Big Public Meeting" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,603 (February 23, 1934).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ That is, the Dashnaktsakan auxiliary organization.

everyone felt as if they were in free and independent Armenia. There were the usual songs, recitations, and speeches. When the big crowd glimpsed Comrade Nzhdeh they jumped to their feet as one man and greeted him with wild applause. He spoke for nearly two hours about the ideals of the Armenian Red Cross, the Armenian cause, and the Armenian nation. Enough, the correspondent wrote, to melt a heart of stone. Forty-one new members were added to the Red Cross and 39 to the Dashnaktsakan committee. There were actually hundreds of applicants, but the comrades were occupied with sorting and purging them according to the “iron rule of order.”⁷⁹

Coinciding with this “holy meeting,” *Asbarex* said, the rabble called the “Front” held a vulgar and noisy “protest and demonstration” at just about the same time. Being tired of the curses of the “Asbeds,” the people came to breathe the clean air—to listen to Nzhdeh’s constructive and patriotic speech.⁸⁰

Nzhdeh continued on to San Francisco. His presence in the city, according to *Asbarex*, “brought forth an unparalleled enthusiasm and spread light in minds. He bound everyone, even sceptics, to our party. His lively words both melted and forged chains.” It was reported that 49 old and new comrades joined the Dashnaktsakan committee and 45 joined the Red Cross. A “*Tseghakron Ukhd*”⁸¹ was formed with 39 members. According

⁷⁹“Great Emotional Meeting in Los Angeles. Comrade Nzhdeh Speaks. 41 New Comrades Join Armenian Red Cross and 39 New Comrades Added to ARF Committee” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXIV.1,603 (February 23, 1934).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *I.e.*, *Tseghakron* chapter.

to the Dashnaktsakans, all the people were with them. Similar results were reported from Oakland and Sacramento.⁸² A week later Nzhdeh was back in Los Angeles, receiving the same adulation from his admirers.⁸³

The State of New York Speaks

The violent murder of Archbishop Tourian threw the Armenian community into confusion and disarray. Amid all the charges and countercharges, meetings, protests, and cries for vengeance, the state of New York was charged with the responsibility of determining the facts of the case according to the law and bringing the perpetrators to justice. The report of the trial is given in Armenian translation in *The Martyrdom of Archbishop Tourian: The Treasonous Crime and Its Condemnation* and in English by Minassian.⁸⁴

Nine persons were charged with the crime, all of them Dashnaktsakans. All except one had attended a large Dashnaktsakan gathering two days before the murder. The pre-trial investigation and the trial itself were hampered by the strong passions stirred up by

⁸² “Dashnaktsakan Week in Central California. Comrade Nzhdeh Illuminates Everybody’s Minds. Hundreds Join ARF Armenian Red Cross New Chapter and Join Tseghakron Vow. During the Oath-Taking the People Mix with Each Other Smiling and Happy” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,606 (March 16, 1934).

⁸³ “Great Crowd at Dashnaktsakan Meeting, etc,” *Asbarez* XXIV.1,607 (March 23, 1934); “Comrade Nzhdeh in Los Angeles for Second Time,” *Asbarez* XXIV.1,608 (March 30, 1934) [both in Armenian].

⁸⁴ The trial was reported extensively in all the Armenian and American periodicals. Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 519–539, on which this account is based, made use of all the available materials and some from private collections. The main journalistic reports were made in *Real Detective* and *The Master Detective* magazines by Avedis Derounian. Unfortunately I have not been able to locate copies of these magazines.

the incident. As the non-Dashnaktsakans became more outraged, the Dashnaktsakans refused to accept any responsibility and struck back with ever harsher rhetoric. Demonstrations and counterdemonstrations were the rule in every city and community. It seemed to the investigators that an Oriental wall of silence surrounded the event, because whereas the assault had been seen by a large crowd of people, witnesses melted away, feigning illness or lack of English in order not to testify. According to Avedis Derounian, at the time a correspondent attending the trial, the reason for this reluctance was the dread of retaliation from the hands that had struck down the archbishop. At the same time, *Banvor*, the Armenian Bolshevik newspaper, deliberately inflamed the antagonisms within the community.⁸⁵

The trial was convened before Judge Joseph E. Corrigan in the Court of General Sessions in New York on June 7, 1934, and lasted until July 14, 1934. The jury of twelve non-Armenians returned a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree for the defendants Madteos Leyelegian and Nshan Sarkisian and guilty of manslaughter in the first degree for the other seven defendants. Leyelegian was the knife-wielder and Sarkisian had pinned the archbishop's arms. Ten days later Judge Corrigan condemned Leyelegian and Sarkisian to death and the others to prison terms ranging from ten to twenty years. In his comments, the judge said, "Dashnaktsutiun nurtured hatred toward the archbishop."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Minassian, "Armenian Church," p. 525.

⁸⁶ "New York Trial Ends. Nine Accused Found Guilty" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,624 (July 20, 1934).

That evening the Attorney General of New York made a radio address to the public on the subject of the trial. He concluded that Dashnaksutiun was opposed to the Soviet Union and therefore antagonistic to Archbishop Tourian, who was friendly to Soviet Armenia. This fact triggered the defendants to kill the victim in the church. Archbishop Ghevont Tourian had been a victim of political revenge. The foreign-born communities should not bring their old-country feuds to these shores. While freedom of thought was tolerated in America, a crime committed in the name of an ideology was punishable.⁸⁷

An Outraged Dashnaksakan Writes

M. K. Ferrahian, a man of principle and a trained lawyer, went to the heart of the matter. The trial had been held before a judge and jury of non-Armenians who were not interested in the Armenian political parties and their demands. After weeks of listening to testimony, they had condemned two of the accused Dashnaksakans to the gallows and seven to prison. Dashnaksutiun had announced that they would appeal the verdict.

Dashnaksutiun had taken over the case and paid for a lawyer because the name of the party had been associated with the crime. This had been disastrous. The party was condemned along with the accused men. Official Dashnaksutiun was responsible for the vicious crime that had been perpetrated in New York. But that was not all. On the day of the crime twenty-five or thirty Dashnaksakans had been present at the church, a

⁸⁷ Minassian, "Armenian Church," p. 535.

church that they did not frequent and where a bishop whom they hated and persecuted was celebrating Mass.

The lawyers had bungled the defense. If the one who had actually stabbed the bishop had confessed, he could have given as an excuse the dishonor the bishop had done to the flag in Chicago. Then the remaining eight might have gone free, or their punishment might have been lighter. This would have weakened the prosecution's conspiracy theory, and exculpatory evidence could have been presented.⁸⁸

But instead, all the defendants denied any guilt in the crime and brought out into the open the partisan hatred and quarreling between Dashnaktsutiun and the bishop and his supporters. Since the crime itself was proven and no ameliorating factors were shown, naturally it was assumed as proven that all of the defendants had engaged in a conspiracy.

Ferrahian found all of this a cause for mourning. First of all, mourning for Dashnaktsutiun, whose present impotent, incorrigible, chancellory-playing leaders had led the party from one collapse another. Abandoning their original purpose, they had sunk into the filth of fratricide and wasted their material, physical, and moral strength. Salvation for the party would be found in a return to its original principles of patriotism and pure spirit of sacrifice. Secondly, mourning for the nine condemned Dashnaktsakan young men. Instead of using their spirit of helping their country in a beneficial way, instead of using their readiness to sacrifice for the benefit of the Armenian Case, instead of thrusting

⁸⁸ According to the verdict, all the defendants had physically attacked the archbishop in some way.

the knife of revenge into the heart of the enemy, they had, thanks to those cruel and heartless leaders who had showed them the wrong way, struck the very race that they defended, betrayed the cause that they believed in, and spilt the blood of their brother. Now they were condemned as common criminals.⁸⁹

The Dashnaktsakan Convention Declares

The Forty-First Annual Convention of the American Region of Dashnaktsutium made its declaration of the reasons, as it saw them, for the “unprecedented split in the Armenian community of America for the last thirteen months.” It was all the result of a premeditated conspiracy by the Turks and the Bolsheviks against Dashnaktsutium. This included the dishonor to the Armenian Tricolor, the schism of the Armenian Church, and the unprecedented crucifixion of Dashnaktsutium that began after “the assassination that took place in Holy Cross Church in New York on December 24, 1933, by unknown hands,” including all efforts of the enemies of the nationalist Armenians to condemn the nine Dashnaktsakan comrades.⁹⁰

The convention declared its contempt for the enemies of the Armenian Tricolor. Dashnaktsutium would resist all attempts to turn the Armenian Church into a weapon in the hands of foreign rulers over the Armenians. The party had absolutely no connection

⁸⁹ Ferrahian, “A Real Dashnaktsakan Condemns, Too” [in Armenian], *Amrots*, Paris (August 15, 1934). Quoted in Tourian Committee, *Martyrdom of Archbishop Tourian*, pp. 74–77.

⁹⁰ “Declaration by the 41st Convention of the American Region of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation to the Armenian People” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXV.1,630 (August 17, 1934).

with the assassination, the nine convicted comrades were not guilty, and Dashnaktsutiun would use every legal means to prove their innocence.⁹¹

The editorials in the Dashnaktsakan papers carried his attitude further. *Asbarez* charged that a few members of the Armenian clergy, including some on the Supreme Spiritual Council, were Cheka agents.⁹² The Dashnaktsakans began to use the term “hooded Cheka” to describe these alleged Soviet agents in monastic garb, apparently including the hierarchy of Echmiadzin in this category. This greatly offended the non-Dashnaktsakan press, but *Asbarez* retorted that the Cheka had infiltrated Echmiadzin after the fall of the “Free Church” and blamed *Gotchnag* for having the “wicked intention of stirring up fanaticism.” By the logic of *Asbarez*, the foreign dioceses had every right to disrupt the “execrable wickedness of the conspiracies of Cheka” hiding in Echmiadzin. This would be done by taking control of the executive machinery of the Diocese of California, consisting of the diocesan assembly, the primate, the central committee, the parish assemblies, the pastors, and the local boards of trustees.⁹³ In other words, the Dashnaktsakans would try to take over the Church. This is exactly what they tried to do, and they were resisted by their opponents.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “Position of the Armenian Clergy” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,632 (September 14, 1934).

⁹³ “Against the Conspiracies of the Hooded Cheka” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,635 (October 5, 1934).

The Central Committee of the American Region of Dashnaktsutiun appealed to “nationalist Armeniandom” to stand by the party for the defense of their nine “innocent convicted comrades.”⁹⁴ For weeks afterward there were fund drive meetings from one end of the United States to the other organized by Dashnaktsakan committees to aid the “honorable young men.” It was protested that the trial was full of contradictions from the beginning. Witnesses would say one thing; others, motivated by wickedness, would say something else. No witness was produced who saw the murder weapon in the hand of the accused. Not one spot of blood was found on the knife. No weapon was found on the accused. Many persons testified that none of the accused, particularly Leylegian, had ever left his seat during the uproar. It had been proven during the trial that one or two men escaped through a side door which was usually kept closed but which that day had been secretly left open, certainly through the oversight of those who were in charge of the church. And finally, the blind and stupid enemies of Dashnaktsutiun pursued their despicable conspiracy to wrap the murder around the neck of Dashnaktsutiun.⁹⁵

Martoogesian Redux

Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian now bound himself together with Nishan Kahana Papazian and seven other like-minded clergymen to form the “Clergy Union of

⁹⁴ “Appeal to Nationalist Armeniandom” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,635 (October 5, 1934).

⁹⁵ M. Hampartzumian, “In the Name of Justice” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,638 (October 26, 1934). The jury rejected all of these contentions in reaching its verdict.

America.”⁹⁶ This group formed the nucleus of the future Dashnaktsakan church. One more priest joined later. On May 23, 1934, they issued a manifesto to the Catholicos rejecting the control of the locum tenens, Father Mampre Kalfayan, and the central executive committee of the diocese. The Holy Synod of Echmiadzin responded by defrocking Martoogesian and Papazian, the former for the second time,⁹⁷ and suspending the other six. This made no difference to the affected clergymen, however, who continued on in Dashnaktsakan churches.⁹⁸ Ghevont Martoogesian was shot on March 17, 1935 in Cranston, Rhode Island by George Nazarian and died on March 22. Nazarian believed him to be the mastermind behind the murder of Archbishop Tourian.⁹⁹ Evaluation Martoogesian’s career has been extreme. Mgoont calls him “born of the devil” and compares his reincarnation as a Dashnaktsakan (in his earlier days he had been a Reformed Hnchak) to a frozen snake that is defrosted by the sun. The Dashnaktsakan side portrayed him as a simple, holy churchman who was the innocent victim of a dastardly and foul attack as he was leaving a prayer meeting. Martoogesian’s only known vice, as such, was an excessive devotion to backgammon. In a volume by Archbishop

⁹⁶ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 473–474.

⁹⁷ The first was following his conviction for extortion; see above, p. 114.

⁹⁸ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 517–518.

⁹⁹ Nazarian was eventually found not guilty by reason of insanity of Assault with Intent to Commit Murder by direction of the court. Ledger No. 17,753, Judicial Records Center, Rhode Island Supreme Court (June 24, 1935).

Mesrob Ashjian titled *The Armenian Church in America*¹⁰⁰ there appears a dedication to his memory, together with two other dissident priests of the period. It is impossible at this time to determine if Martoogesian actually was involved in a conspiracy to murder the archbishop, but he did a great deal to aggravate the situation beforehand. He was not alone in this, however.¹⁰¹

Dashnaktsutiu and the Murder of Archbishop Tourian

Dashnaktsutiu never, at least in the period under discussion, accepted that members of their party had committed the crime. Indeed, Dashnaktsakan opinion came to regard Leylegian and Sarkisian as heroes. The deed was pinned on the mysterious tenth man who had escaped, but who was never identified or apprehended, and whom the Dashnaktsakans maintained was the real assassin, who was involved in a Soviet plot to defame Dashnaktsutiu.¹⁰² It certainly was completely in character for Stalin to have had people assassinated in foreign countries, but no evidence has ever been put forward to support this theory or to contradict the finding of fact by the jury. Even Ferrahian, a convinced Dashnaktsakan, accepted that the convicted men were guilty, and furthermore held that

¹⁰⁰ Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, *The Armenian Church in America* (New York: Armenian Prelacy, 1995).

¹⁰¹ Spear, *Hay Kghern*, pp. 31–36; Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 150–151, 189–190, 544; Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 192, 231, 240, 245.

¹⁰² Atamian, *Armenian Community*, p. 371; Reuben Tarpinian, “In Retrospect: A Glance at the Past Thirty Years,” *Armenian Review* VI.3 [23], (Autumn, 1953), p. 52.

the very nature of the defense presented in behalf of the accused men by the party inexorably led the jury to the conclusion that there had been a conspiracy. Another tack taken by Dashnaktsakan writers is to treat the assassination only as a consequence of the flag incident, but this view is inconsistent with the first. As for the Communists, whether or not they had anything to do with the assassination, they certainly exploited it to the hilt.

The assassination of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian had an extremely depressing and calamitous effect. If its purpose was, as the Dashnaktsakans maintained, to split the Armenian community, it succeeded brilliantly. If there were any legitimate aims to the assassination, they failed. Communism was not overthrown, church life was not advanced, lost Turkish Armenia was not redeemed. The non-Dashnaktsakan segment was horrified and revolted, and there were retaliatory attacks on various Dashnaktsakans. Their outrage was compounded by the nature of the deed: it followed a concerted campaign of vilification; it was premeditated; it was perpetrated in the holy confines of a church, during the Mass, and on the Western Christmas Eve, against a man armed only with a crucifix; it was the recompense for a blessing; on the person of a bishop by presumably baptized individuals, hence parricide; and with a butcher knife in front of women and children.

One must ask why this murder was committed and what sort of mentality could have produced it. This is only understandable, at least to people with common values, in the context of the times. This was the general demoralization that followed World War I,

which the Armenians had reason to feel more than any other people. Unfortunately, the archbishop became the scapegoat for all the tragedies that had befallen the Armenians.

CHAPTER 13

A DIOCESE FOR CALIFORNIA

Proposals for a Diocese of California

The growth of the Armenian colony on the West Coast made it apparent that the administration of church affairs would be easier if there were an authority closer than Worcester, Massachusetts. Soon after Bishop Hovsep Sarajian founded the Diocese of North America in 1899, parishes of the Armenian Apostolic Church were started in California with formal boards of trustees: Fresno in 1900, Los Angeles in 1907, Yetttem in 1909, and Fowler in 1910. The vast distances across the North American continent made it difficult for the primate to exercise supervision over all of the parishes. For example, in 1901 the board of trustees of Holy Trinity Church wrote to Bishop Sarajian asking him to appoint a pastor, but by the time their term had expired six months later, no reply had been received. Occasionally there were also disciplinary matters that needed attention. In 1912 two rival priests were holding services in Los Angeles, one of whom had been run out of Fresno for alleged inappropriate conduct. In 1914 the troublesome Ghevont Vartabed Martoogesian had tried to seize St. Gregory Church in Fowler although defrocked, and Primate Arsen Dzairakuin Vartabed Vehouni had to come from

Worcester by train to testify in court. Thus a movement started to establish a prelacy in California.¹

The proposal was put before the diocesan assembly of 1916 by the delegates from California and approved. It was submitted to the Catholicos in Echmiadzin for the required consent, and in anticipation the Californians convened a convention of eleven delegates under the presidency of Vartan Vartabed Kasparian at Holy Trinity Church on January 28, 1917. After discussing the proposed jurisdiction of a western diocese, they sent their reports to Worcester and to Echmiadzin. A reply was received from the Holy See asking the Worcester assembly to review the matter in consultation with the representatives from California. A report was submitted to the diocesan assembly of April 7 and 8, 1918, by the special representative from Fresno, Vahan Kurkjian. He explained that the new diocese was needed solely because of the distance from Worcester and that there was no intention to establish a rival or an anti-diocese, but a full canonical equal of the Diocese of North America. This was approved by the assembly, with the stipulation that until such time as patriarchal consent was obtained, the west would remain under the existing jurisdiction.² But there the matter stood and nothing was done for the time being.

The long-delayed issue came up again six years later. Exasperation at Primate Dirayr Der Hovhannesian had increased because of his intransigence over the use of the altar

¹ *Paros* ("The Lighthouse") I.8 (August 1927), pp. 171–172.

² Father Oshagan Minassian, "A History of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church in the United States (1888–1944)" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1974), pp. 363–365.

stone and other issues.³ Finally a meeting was held in Reedley in June, 1924. It was felt, *Nor Or* expressed, that the benefits of a regional diocese would be both moral and material. There were many pressing matters needing attention, and the only response of the primate had been a shower of contrary, impractical, and destructive orders. He could not give California the personal attention it needed, because it was very inconvenient and expensive for him to travel all the way from New York. For the same amount of money, a primate could be maintained in Fresno full time, and the work of the church would be done in a timely and suitable manner.⁴

Things did not seem to improve. *Gotchnag* complained that the diocese still continued in a state of disorganization and inactivity. Of all the Armenian organizations, only the church was condemned to begging and immobility. No steps were being undertaken to reform. Many Armenian communities did not see the face of a priest even once in a year, and the state of the church was unsatisfying. Worst of all, no preparations were being made for the near future, when the new generation would demand English-speaking preachers, like it or not. The old oriental methods did not work any more.⁵

³ Reedley Armenian Apostolic Church Trustees, "To the Attention of the Sons of the Armenian Apostolic Church," *Asbarež* XVII.1102 (July 18, 1924); Editorial: "Give an *Arachnort* to the *Arachnort* of the Armenians," *Nor Or* III.39 (May 13, 1924); K. H. Altounian, Secretary of Los Angeles Armenian Apostolic Church, "A Clarification," *Nor Or* III.48 (June 13, 1924); "Letter to the Editor," *Nor Or* III.47 (June 10, 1924) [all in Armenian].

⁴ Editorial: "A Practical and Useful Step" [in Armenian], *Nor Or* III.48 (June 13, 1924).

⁵ Editorial: "What Is the Armenian *Arachnortaran* Doing?" [in Armenian], *Gotchnag* XXV.8 (February 21, 1925).

The diocesan assembly met again in Boston on September 6 and 7, 1925. The proposed California diocese was brought up again, but no new information was available. This should not have been surprising. The Church was reeling everywhere. In Soviet Armenia it was under relentless persecution: religion was mocked, and the Catholicos and the clergy were being stripped of their ancient rights. In Turkey, the centuries-old privileges of the patriarch were gradually being extinguished, and the properties of the church were being shut down. But still, even considering all this, in America the Armenian Church still had a surpassing opportunity to fulfill her own role, and at the same time to protect the Armenian colony, or at least to extend her life—if only the needed remedies were effected.⁶

A Diocese is Organized

The Californians finally took matters into their own hands. On May 5, 1927, five pastors and boards of trustees met at Holy Trinity Church in Fresno and decided to act. As the editors of *Paros* pointed out, there were only eighteen churches for the 16,000 Armenians of California, thirteen Protestant and five Apostolic. For the estimated 12,000 Apostolic Armenians, that worked out to one church for every 2,400 persons. At least five new churches were needed, and the three communities that had already organized boards of trustees had to be helped to buy or build facilities. A circuit pastor had to visit each of

⁶ Ibid.

the five parishes until priests were brought over from abroad or trained in America. The Diocese of North America (then headquartered in New York) could not be expected to follow this up. There was immediate need for leadership, both pastoral and organizational. The Armenian cultural schools and the Sunday schools had to be strengthened, and the Catholicos had already agreed that the Californians could have their own diocese.⁷

At a second meeting on September 6, the representatives elected Karekin Khachadourian, Bishop of Trebizond, as their primate and informed the Holy See of their decision.⁸ Ratification came in the form of a decree from the Catholicos on November 28, 1927. This distinguished scholar arrived in New York in April, 1928.⁹ He celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church on November 23 and on the following Sunday conducted the funeral of the Hinchakian leader, Stepan Sabah-Giulian. After a dinner in his honor on May 4, Bishop Khachadourian went to Boston. On May 8 he presented his credentials and on May 13 he celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Proceeding westward, he made stops in Detroit and Chicago on his way to his destination, and arrived in Fresno on Saturday, May 26, 1928. He was greeted by a crowd of hundreds at

⁷ Editorial: "The Armenian Churches of California" [in Armenian], *Paros* I.8 (August 1927), p. 171.

⁸ Minassian, "Armenian Church", p. 365.

⁹ Minassian lists some of the attainments of Bishop Khachadourian. Educated at the famous seminary of Armash, destroyed by the Turks in 1915, he was proficient in Classical Greek, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, and Armenian. He was the author of many religious works in Armenian, including a new translation of the Gospels. As Patriarch of Constantinople, he later founded the Holy Cross Theological Seminary, which was closed by the Turkish authorities in 1972.

the Santa Fe Railroad depot. Immediately he was taken to Holy Trinity Church, whose facade was decorated with the American flag. The bishop was escorted into the church by a procession of children. After the singing of *Hrashapar Astvads*¹⁰ by Archdeacon Roupen Dikranian, a suitable lesson from the Scriptures was read by Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian. With a brief address His Eminence greeted his new flock. At the celebration of the Divine Liturgy the next day there was a large crowd. The Primate-Elect called upon the people not to confuse the ends with the means and to make the means the end. There had to be a spirit of love for God and love for the nation (Armenian nationality). The spirit of independence had to be maintained and the independence of the fatherland strengthened, while at the same time the freedom and independence of other nations had to be respected. Without a spirit of forgiveness and concord, it would not be possible to accomplish any task. No primate on such distant shores could wave a magic wand. He needed moral and material help and faith that with sacrifice together they could finish the work. He would do his duty, and demand that the people do their duty.¹¹

¹⁰ This chant is sung whenever a bishop enters the church. "Glorious and ever-protecting God, who didst by foreknowledge ordain the salvation of the Armenian nation, and didst grant unto us an illuminator from the sinful Parthian race, therefore, through his intercession, O Saviour, preserve us now and at thine awful second coming." Translated by Archpriest Theodorus Isaac (Teotoros Kahana Isahagian), *The Missal or The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Church of Armenia* (Fresno: [n.p.], 1932), p. 119.

¹¹ *Asbarez* XIX.1,302 (May 18, 1928); XIX.1,304 (May 31, 1928).

Primate Khachadourian was invested at a solemn ceremony in Holy Trinity Church on June 24, 1928.¹² On July 5 the diocesan assembly held its first meeting. Heartfelt thanks were rendered to His Holiness the Catholicos for granting permission for the diocese to be organized and for appointing Bishop Karekin as its first shepherd. All the clergy were admonished not to organize church picnics for Sundays; not even the Americans did such a thing. New parish organizations were needed in Tulare and Sacramento, and a committee of Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian and Teotoros Kahana Isahagian was assigned to readjust parish boundaries. Father Teotoros was designated as a circuit pastor to visit Reedley, Yetttem, Visalia, Tulare, Oakland, and Sacramento in turn to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.¹³ Thus the work began with optimism.

Primate Khachadourian gave his vision for the diocese in a speech to the diocesan assembly in October. First, in the face of inevitable assimilation, was the matter of the Armenian language. It had to be preserved for at least two or three generations with superhuman efforts. The diocese would keep good relations with the Mother See and its incumbent, and would cultivate brotherly relations with the eastern diocese in all matters of universal significance. There was no reason not to continue the praiseworthy relationship on a purely evangelical basis that the Mother Church of the Armenians had always had with the Armenian Protestant denomination, and there should be no difficulty in meeting together with them over purely national and cultural matters. The diocese

¹² Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 365–368.

¹³ Presumably he was to take with him an altar stone.

would agree in the course of the brotherly relations shown by the Episcopalian Church. But as a religious and cultural organization, the Church was absolutely apart from any matters of political significance, and therefore could not cultivate relations with any political organization. Nevertheless, the Church could not be lax in giving its brotherly encouragement to all those organizations that promoted a supremely benevolent purpose and that were dedicated to the general and immediate aid of the Armenian people. However, the primate found that the diocese could succeed only under one condition. There had to be an end to the beggarly economic situation of the diocese and the parishes through a “national tax.” Every member of the Armenian Apostolic Church had to give his specific dues and to participate according to his ability in the support of the church. These dues should be uniform and annual, and payable in a lump sum or in payments.¹⁴

By next May *Asbarex* was convinced that the primate was wasting his breath. He had submitted a 31-page report that contained many fundamental criticisms, and the diocesan assembly had accepted it without discussion, as if to ignore it altogether. Most of the criticisms were about the financial security of the diocese and the state of indifference toward education. It ended with four important proposals:

1. The diocese should be reorganized in the manner of the Episcopal Church as a sole corporation, in order to gain the moral authority of recognition by the government.

¹⁴ *Asbarex* XX.1,325 (October 26, 1928).

2. All the official bodies and organizations should use the diocese right-mindedly and make its programs easier for the people.
3. The people should be ready to make whatever appropriate material sacrifice the diocese asked of them for purposes of the church or nation, thus freeing the diocese from material worries, by securing a regular and stable income for the maintenance of its modest expenditures.
4. All should give complete trust to the diocese and the primate.¹⁵

It was on the third point that the reign of Primate Khachadourian was to founder, for the United States was soon to enter the Great Depression, and money would be very scarce.

Trip to the East

The aged Catholicos Gevorg V died on May 8, 1930. It was announced by Primate Khachadourian that an election was to be held in Echmiadzin by the permission of the Soviet government. The Diocese of California would be represented by three persons, the primate and two laymen, Hagop Nshigian and Soghomon Bastajian. The latter had been elected by the diocesan assembly on August 24. The amount of \$3,000 had to be raised for travel expenses.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., XX.1,355 (May 24, 1929).

¹⁶ *Asbarež* XXI.1,421 (August 29, 1930).

Asbarez was ambivalent. On one hand, the orders from the Catholicate seemed to indicate that the Soviet government had the wisdom to permit the election of a Catholicos according to the arrangements of the late Gevorg V. But it was also obvious that this freedom was conditional, as long as the government would not promise to admit those delegates from abroad against whom it might object. This, in *Asbarez's* view, to a great degree invalidated the convocation's value and meaning and contradicted the spirit of the aforementioned arrangements. It was obvious that the new Catholicos would be selected from a list designated or approved by the government. Therefore there was not so much laudable or praiseworthy to be seen in the "gracious" permission that the Soviets had given. But perhaps even that much was something, at least, for the children of the Armenian Church would have, in the newly elected Catholicos, one who if not actually at least in form would both represent them and be the symbol of the rule of the Armenian Church. However, *Asbarez* continued, the two delegates who had been chosen were unsuitable representatives of the diocese and, considering the difficult economic times, the primate should travel alone with the votes of California.¹⁷

Primate Khachadourian left for Armenia and arrived in New York in late September.¹⁸ At that time the throne of the Diocese of America was vacant, and the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The information in this paragraph is from Minassian, "Armenian Church," pp. 408–419. It is not clear whether Primate Khachadourian went with the elected lay delegates or alone. The proposed election in Echmiadzin was postponed. It was finally held in 1932.

office of primate had been filled by a locum tenens.¹⁹ While he was in the east, Primate Khachadourian was asked by the Central Executive Committee of the eastern diocese to visit various communities there, which he did. Thus he had the opportunity to meet with the faithful and to officiate at various religious services. On January 31 and February 1, 1931, a diocesan assembly was convened in New York. It was proposed, because of the financial difficulties caused by the deepening depression, that the two American dioceses together should retain Bishop Khachadourian as a dual primate, while each diocese preserved its own independent administration. This proposal received very little support and the assembly elected Archbishop Ghevont Tourian of Manchester, England as the primate of the Diocese of America.²⁰

Tensions

The depression and the increasing political tensions now had their effect on the tenure of Bishop Khachadourian. In November 1931 the diocesan assembly heard the primate's Annual Report. He explained the national, religious, and educational questions of the colony and concluded that the present economic crisis had unfortunately tied their hands.

¹⁹ Archbishop Dirayr Der Hovhannesian had resigned on August 15, 1928. Father Serovpe Nershabouh served from 1928 until his death on July 26, 1930. Father Harutiun Sarkisian then assumed the office of locum tenens and served until the election of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian in 1931.

²⁰ According to Arra Avakian, who had access to documents at the Western Diocese, after the resignation of Primate Der Hovhannesian the eastern diocesan council proposed to the Western Diocese that the two dioceses should reunite as one diocese under Bishop Khachadourian as primate, but this was rejected by a specially convened diocesan assembly in the West on July 2, 1930, and again at the following regular diocesan assembly. Arra Avakian, with inserts by Anne R. Movsesian, "The Diocese in the West," at <http://www.armenianchurchwd.com/church_index.htm> (accessed April 9, 2000).

“We are deeply sorry that we have not been able to do more, contrary to our deep desire,” he said. The annual budget was read with the details of income and expenditures of the diocese. The primate added, “It is essential to rescue the prelacy from this unfortunate material condition.” An agitated debate followed for the next three hours, after which the budget of the diocesan office was lowered from \$3,500 to \$2,666. The meeting recessed at midnight and reconvened at 3:00 the following afternoon. After another rancorous debate, fifteen percent was added back. *Asbarex* pointed out that there had to be other motivations for all this than simply economic, for the Los Angeles parish, whose delegates fervently had argued for the reduction of the budget, had just given a raise of \$500 to its pastor. The Fresno parish too had been generous with its pastor. Instead, certain elements were trying to secure the control of the church for their partisans. There was now an effort to change the constitution of the diocese so that it would not be enough just to be a dues-paying member of the church to vote in the parish assemblies; one would actually have to attend services as well. *Asbarex* contended that this was fundamentally against the spirit of the Armenian Church, and it would never be ratified by the Catholicos in any case. Why not find out the real reason why many of the dues-paying members and the majority of the Armenian people did not go to church instead?²¹

The reference to the salaries of the pastors of Holy Cross Church and Holy Trinity Church was in fact an oblique attack on Adom Kahana Melikian and Vartan Dzairakuin

²¹ *Asbarex* XXII.1,485 (November 20, 1931).

Vartabed Kasparian, who from time to time had been the targets of vituperation in the Dashnaktsakan press. According to one letter that now appeared in *Asbarez*, there was such dissatisfaction against the pastor and trustees of Holy Trinity Church that many parishioners and others who had withdrawn from attending church were even thinking of organizing a new parish.²²

Effort to Remove the Primate

On September 25, 1932 a new session of the diocesan assembly was convened. The four-year term of the primate had expired a new primate would have to be elected, or the assembly would have to take some other action in the face of the continuing economic difficulties. A new central committee would also have to be elected. First, it was reported that the Supreme Spiritual Council in Echmiadzin had issued an invitation for delegates to come to Armenia for the election of a new Catholicos, which had been postponed from 1930. Then Bishop Khachadourian briefly summarized his printed report. The budget of the central committee was also read. Both were unsigned and unverified, which caused a bitter argument, after which the central committee was obligated to produce verified reports for the next meeting. The next item on the agenda was the election of a primate.

Bishop Khachadourian left the room because he was a candidate for reelection and Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian took the chair. But a list of three candidates had

²² “Open Letter to the *Sr̄pazan* Primate of California” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXII.1,494 (January 22, 1932).

not been prepared in advance. Before the election could proceed, the delegates from Los Angeles made a protest over a pamphlet that the bishop had written, apparently feeling that it had cast aspersions on their community. Passions began to become inflamed, and the Los Angeles representatives demanded that all of the postponed questions on the agenda be brought under consideration. Immediately they passed to the examination of the primate's report. During the debate they read a letter written and sealed by their church, by which they proposed to have the district governed by a locum tenens for two years. At 11:30 P.M. the meeting was recessed without having come to any conclusion. It was reconvened the next day (Sunday) at 3:00 P.M. with the primate in the chair.

The subject of the debate again turned to the protest of the delegates from Los Angeles over the primate's pamphlet, which they claimed was unconstitutional because it had been published without the approval of the central committee and the assembly. After hearing the primate's objections, the assembly passed the following resolution: "The assembly, taking note of the Father Primate's published booklet and the protest of Los Angeles, has decided that hence forth the diocese is obligated to subject any report about the diocese or the parishes first to the central committee and to the assembly before publication."

The matter of the election of the primate was next on the agenda, and Bishop Khachadourian left the room. The delegates selected Dirayr Dzairakuin Vartabed Markarian to the chair, although some of those present protested that this was contrary to accepted practice. But now the chairman, in view of the petition from Los Angeles,

agreed to change the question to whether the diocese should dispense with a primate altogether. Therefore the presence of Bishop Khachadourian again became necessary, because the question was fundamental and not about the Father Primate's person. Nevertheless, the meeting continued without his presence. A debate of half an hour followed, during which it seemed to the observers that the sentiment was not only in favor of retaining a primate, but keeping the present one. But a secret ballot gave the opposite result; twelve to ten against having a primate. This caused pandemonium, and it was some time before order was restored.

The matter of sending delegates to Echmiadzin was quickly resolved in the negative, because of the distance and the unfavorable economic conditions.²³ With the election of a new central committee, in which *Asbarex* professed to see the hand of Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian, the meeting came to a close.²⁴

The response of Primate Khachadourian was to the point. He noted the following:

1. The diocesan assembly had changed the purely formal question of the election of a primate into a fundamental one.
2. First viewing the question from its formal aspect he had relinquished the chair to his deputy.

²³ Catholicos Khoren I Muratbekian was elected on November 12, 1932 and consecrated the following day. He had once been sympathetic to Dashnaksutiun, but the government permitted his election because he recognized the prevailing political exigencies and could work with the Soviet regime. He was murdered by Stalin's henchmen on April 6, 1938 and the Holy See was vacant for seven years thereafter.

²⁴ This account of the diocesan assembly of September 25–26, 1932 is from *Asbarex* XXIII.1,530 (September 30, 1932).

3. Once the question had assumed a fundamental nature the presence of the president of the meeting became absolutely essential.
4. This necessity had been disregarded by the assembly.
5. The issues under discussion were resolved without the presence and knowledge of the incumbent.
6. There were also other legal deficiencies, among other things, ignoring the will of the diocese and the people, and the provision that for important constitutional matters a quorum of two-thirds of the dues-paying members had to be present.

Therefore he declared the resolution of the question of the primate and the following question illegal, hence null and void. He would remain the primate until new leadership was legally elected. Furthermore, the whole matter had been referred to Echmiadzin to the attention of His Holiness the Catholicos of All Armenians.²⁵

Primate Khachadourian was now criticized in *Nor Or* and defended in *Asbarex*.²⁶ *Nor Or* maintained that the diocesan assembly had acted legally and the bishop was continuing to occupy the office of primate in disregard of the diocesan constitution. There had been discontent from the beginning, and the people were divided into pro-Khachadourian and anti-Khachadourian factions. The primate's term had ended, and the economic

²⁵ *Asbarex* XXIII.1,531 (October 7, 1932).

²⁶ G. H. Kellerian, report in *Nor Or* of October 7, 1932, quoted in *Asbarex* XXIII.1,532 (October 14, 1932).

situation did not warrant the expense of supporting a primate.²⁷ But *Asbarez* saw the influence of pro-Soviet clergymen who were trying to tag the primate with a partisan label. If one was absolutely patriotic and a defender of the values of Armenian culture, if he declared himself firmly against assimilation, and if he did not glorify the Soviet regime, then obviously he must be condemned on constitutional grounds and torn down. M. K. Ferrahian blamed the whole episode on the Knights of Vartan, a fraternal organization of conservative, well-to-do Armenians and a favorite bug-a-boo of the Dashnaktsakans. The *Asbeds* (Knights) had persecuted the pastor of a local Armenian Protestant church and driven him out, according to Ferrahian, replacing him with an *Asbed*.²⁸ Now they wanted to drive out the primate too and replace him with an *Asbedagan* primate or locum tenens. According to A. Partzian, all but one of the twelve delegates who had voted in the assembly of September 26 to remove the primate were members of the Knights of Vartan, as well as Vartan Vartabed Kasparian and Adom Kahana Melikian.²⁹

Another writer in *Asbarez* noted with vexation the lack of appreciation for Bishop Khachadourian. Here was a man, the first incumbent of the diocesan throne, who was

²⁷ Snar Samuel, "The Matter of the Diocese of California" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIII.1,534 (October 28, 1932).

²⁸ This refers to the departure of the Reverend Aram S. Yeretian.

²⁹ Partzian [Bardizian], A., *Hay Ekeghetsvoy Tagnape Ev Anor Pataskhanatunere* [The Crisis of the Armenian Church and Those Who Are Responsible for It] (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1936), p. 279. The author is aware by personal knowledge that members of the Knights of Vartan have had prominent positions at Cilicia Congregational Church and St. Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church in Pasadena as well as in the Western Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church at least for the last 30 years. These individuals have included pastors, high clergymen, and board members. It is conceivable that they have felt a mission to "protect" the church according to their view.

one of that exceptional minority of living bishops: educated, experienced, aware of the majesty of his office, at the highest level of religious advancement, and fervent in the desire to be helpful to his flock. The newly-established Diocese of California had to count itself lucky to have such a clergyman for its first primate. He had wanted to keep politics out of the church and school and had tried to put some order and rule into church life. But this had not suited some *aghas* and lower-class clergy. So they had started to throw various impediments in his way. One priest had gone so far as to rebel against the primate and to split his church.³⁰ Others had undertaken a systematic boycott of the efforts of the prelacy. And as a result of this, the late diocesan assembly had tried to put soap underneath the primate's feet. The fundamental question of whether or not to have a primate had not been on the agenda. There was only the matter of the election of a primate for the new term. The primate, who was the chairman of the meeting, had absented himself so that the assembly could feel free to consider all candidates. But during the absence of the primate, the crafty leaders of the meeting had cleverly changed the question to whether or not there should be a primate, which was an altogether different question. By a show of hands it was obvious that an overwhelming majority was in favor of retaining the prelacy with the incumbent primate. When the minority bent at all costs on removing the primate saw that their plan was not succeeding, they objected to the method of the vote and demanded a secret ballot according to the constitution.

³⁰ Khachig Kahana Krouzian.

Before the vote there was a recess. The minority who were opposed to the primate used the time to round up new votes and emerged victorious from a secret ballot. This was done in spite of knowing that the overwhelming majority of the churches and delegates wanted to keep the prelacy.³¹

The assembly published an official notice in the press defending its actions in view of the completion of the four-year term of the primate and the straitened economic circumstances.³² Nevertheless, there was turmoil in the parishes. The conflict was especially sharp in Holy Cross Church in Los Angeles and in Holy Trinity Church in Fresno. In both places there had been division between conservative and Dashnaksakan elements.³³ One faction in Los Angeles published a petition supporting the primate and blaming the trustees for opposing the will not only of the community but of all the parishes of the diocese.³⁴ In Fresno a special parish meeting was held on Sunday, November 20, 1932. The pastor, Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian, who had been under constant attack by the Dashnaksakan element, submitted his resignation. There was a passionate and noisy argument over the vote of the delegates of the church in the diocesan assembly and a group of 96 women submitted a letter of protest in favor of Bishop Khachadourian. The

³¹ "The Question of the Diocese of California" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXII.1,537 (November 18, 1932).

³² *Asbarez*. XXII.1,535 (November 4, 1932).

³³ The conflict between the pastor of Holy Cross Church and the Dashnaksakan-dominated board of trustees a decade earlier had by no means been forgotten, and was dredged up again in the present circumstances. For one example, see M. H. Zartarian, "Trustees or a Bunch of Puppets?" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXII.1,538 (November 23, 1932).

³⁴ *Asbarez* XXII.1,543 (December 30, 1932).

central committee was ordered to prepare a draft stating that it was the will of the parish to keep the diocese with the present primate. Protests also were made by the parish assemblies of St. Mary Church in Yetem, St. Nerses Shnorhali Church in San Francisco, and St. Vartan Church in Oakland.³⁵

Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian's resignation was effective January 1, 1933, and Holy Trinity Church invited Bishop Khachadourian to assume the pastorate on an interim basis, which he did until June 10.³⁶ Thus he presided at the extraordinary parish assembly of Sunday, February 12, 1933. The meeting was again acrimonious, and someone called a policeman to be present, but he was sent off as soon as he arrived. First, there was a long debate over whether the meeting would be open or closed, the conservatives wanting it to be closed to prevent disruption by non-dues-paying members; finally it was decided to keep it open. There was another debate over whether the old central committee should conduct the meeting or a new one should be elected immediately; it was decided to elect a new one after the ratification of the minutes of the previous parish assembly. The ratification of the minutes caused another argument but with the addition of the words "with regret" to the acceptance of Father Vartan's resignation and a few other changes, the minutes were adopted. After three hours and

³⁵ Ibid., XXII.1,539 (December 2, 1932).

³⁶ *Avakian*, "Diocese in The West."

twenty minutes and without attending to any of the other items on the agenda, the meeting was adjourned.³⁷

Exactly one week later, on February 19, 1933, the diocesan assembly reconvened at Holy Trinity Church in a special session.³⁸ Bishop Karekin presided and Mr. Kh. Dzovigian was in the chair. Immediately there was the question of credentials and of a quorum. The assembly should have comprised twenty-two delegates. However, only eleven were present and certified. Two members, one from Tulare and one from San Francisco, had been decertified. The remaining nine absent members had demanded that the bishop should not preside, contending that the previous assembly had not elected him. When this position was rejected, they chose not to participate. The delegates present voted to proceed with the meeting, noting the following:

1. Eight of the nine parish assemblies had sent written notices signed by their central committees demanding that the diocese continue with the current primate.
2. Nine delegates had absented themselves for the previously stated reason.
3. The San Francisco church had stripped their representatives of authority with a vote of no-confidence.
4. Eleven delegates constituted a majority.

³⁷ *Asbarez* XXIII.1,550 (February 17, 1933).

³⁸ Avakian, "Diocese in The West," gives the date as February 1, but the news report in *Asbarez* gives it as February 19. If the Holy Trinity parish assembly was held on February 12, then the diocesan meeting had to be afterward and Avakian is incorrect. Furthermore, *Asbarez* would not have reported a meeting held on February 1 in their February 24 issue. Other references also are to February 19. *Asbarez*. XXIII.1,551 (February 24, 1933); *Asbarez* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933).

It was then announced that the first chairman, Mr. Vahan Chituni of Holy Trinity Church, would not participate. The president then invited the second chairman to preside. The matter of credentials was dealt with and the letters from the eight churches supporting Bishop Khachadourian were read. Then it was the bishop's turn to speak.

His Eminence read the circular he had sent earlier dealing with the diocesan assembly of September 25–26, 1932. Turning to the election of Catholicos Khoren I, he stressed the beneficial aspects of his election and proposed to sing the chant “Echmiadzin.” He recalled the good works of the late Dirayr Dzairakuin Vartabed Markarian and asked the people to bless his memory. Then he came to his own defense.

He regretted, he said, that men were to be found who ascribed unfamiliar motives to him. Never had he wished to conduct his office through tyranny, and if those rumors were in the least true, long ago the people would have constrained him to leave. Even now, when practically all the Armenians of California wanted him to stay, if he received a letter from his spiritual superiors expressing the least doubt he would be gone tomorrow.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read, and only those resolutions that had been carried in the presence of the primate were ratified. Those carried in his absence were to be ratified only after an investigation.

The critical issue was the election of a primate. As was customary, Bishop Karekin absented himself and his place Parsegh Kahana, the pastor of Yetem, presided.³⁹ A

³⁹ This account of the diocesan assembly of February 19, 1933, is from *Asbarez* XXIII.1,551 (February 24, 1933). According to *History of St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church 1911–1976 Yetem, California* (Yetem: St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church, 1977), p. 46, the pastor of St. Mary Church in Yetem at the time

three-man list had not been prepared in advance, with the observation that the assembly could prepare its own list. Bedros Kahana Hagopian observed that if the whole community wanted the present primate, the exercise would be a waste of time, but the assembly appointed an electoral committee anyway, and five minutes later they presented their list: Bishop Karekin Khachadourian, Archbishop Dirayr Hovhannesian, and Bishop Hovsep Garabedian.

The eleven delegates present voted unanimously to reelect Bishop Karekin Khachadourian. The president and the chairman of the meeting went out to inform the primate of the vote and escorted him into the chamber to applause. After the election of the central committee and the religious assembly of the diocese, a modest budget of \$2,500 was adopted. All then repaired to the church to receive the blessing of the newly-elected primate.⁴⁰

For the next six months Bishop Karekin continued to function as primate. He was supported by *Asbarex*, which took the position that the parish assemblies were authoritative over their diocesan representatives, and then declared the matter closed.⁴¹ On May 8 he visited Holy Cross Church in Los Angeles, whose representatives had opposed him most strongly in the diocesan assembly. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy and gave a

was Vartan Kahana Tavitian. In the same *Asbarex* article there is a reference to "P. Kahana Tavitian." Apparently these are one and the same person.

⁴⁰ *Asbarex* XXIII.1,551 (February 24, 1933).

⁴¹ "Our Position" [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXIII.1,552 (March 3, 1933).

Mothers' Day sermon, and afterward there was a dinner and a program in honor of the newly-elected Catholicos Khoren I and the visiting primate. He heard speeches depicting the loving course of the great majority of the Armenians of the community toward their leadership, one of them from the prominent Dashnaktsakan M. K. Ferrahian. After some musical numbers and recitations, the primate gave an address. The chairman, Mr. H.S. Levonian, made some oblique comments about those officials with a contrary attitude, and the meeting came to an end.⁴² In June 1933 Bishop Karekin was relieved from the temporary pastorate of Holy Trinity Church when a new priest arrived from Jerusalem. His name was Kegham Vartabed Kasimian.⁴³

But all about events were rushing headlong to a crisis.

The Nullification of the Assemblies

The Supreme Spiritual Council of Echmiadzin, under the presidency of His Holiness the Catholicos, reviewed the two controversial sessions of the diocesan assembly that had been held on September 24–25, 1932, and February 19, 1933, and reached the conclusion that they had departed from the Constitution of the Armenian Church. It ordered the following in consideration of the internal peace of the community:

1. The *acta* of the aforesaid two sessions were declared null and void.

⁴² *Asbarez*. XXIII.1,563 (May 19, 1933).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XXIII.1,567 (June 9, 1933).

2. A special session with the former membership was to be held no later than August 15, 1933, after which the presidency of the diocesan assembly was to be passed to the senior member of the clergy present.
3. The assembly should then decide by vote whether to elect a locum tenens or a primate. According to that decision, they should either elect a central executive committee with instructions to elect a locum tenens and to send his name to His Holiness the Catholicos for confirmation, or the assembly should elect a primate and likewise to send his name to the Catholicos for confirmation.
4. The assembly should also elect an examining committee.

The Supreme Spiritual Council gave the following explanations:

1. Since the assembly had not agreed to extend the four-year term of the primate, his term had expired.
2. While parish assemblies had the right to make declarations to their representatives, the latter had the right, guided by their consciences, to exercise their own independent judgment.

The communication from the Supreme Spiritual Council stated that the resolutions had been ratified by His Holiness and was signed by a member of the council, Archbishop Karekin,⁴⁴ and by the Secretary, G. Kocharian.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Not Khachadourian.

⁴⁵ "The Supreme Spiritual Council, under the Presidency of His Holiness Catholicos of All Armenians and Supreme Patriarch. Number 929. 4 July 1933. To the diocesan assembly of the Diocese of California" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933).

Upon receipt of the directive from Echmiadzin, Bishop Karekin Khachadourian immediately stepped down from office and published that fact in the Armenian newspapers to his beloved people of California. In the spirit of keeping order in the church, and without entering into any legalistic examinations, he called on everyone to remain calm. He would continue to exercise his purely spiritual obligations and while waiting for the legal, just, and peaceful path to resolve the question of the prelacy, he asked the pastors of parishes to cease mentioning his name during the Divine Liturgy. He announced that according to the instructions sent separately, a new session of the diocesan assembly would have to deal with those questions. In bestowing his blessings on his spiritual children, he advised and expected them always to remain law-abiding and orderly.⁴⁶

Archbishop Gevorg Cheorekjian, a member of the Supreme Spiritual Council and a future Catholicos, tried to put matters in perspective for Vahan Chituni, who had declined to participate in the diocesan assembly of February 19. These matters had been a subject of concern for the Supreme Spiritual Council for some time. They had been studying the goings-on of that place since September 24 and had carefully examined the documents that they had received in spite of the difficulties of distance. The practical matter was the most important. Nothing was permanent in life, neither the primate of a

⁴⁶ “Announcement and Admonition to all the Children of the Armenian Apostolic Church” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933).

diocese nor the will of a diocesan assembly. But the split between the primate and the diocesan assembly was significant, and everybody should calm down.⁴⁷

Reactions

In some of the parishes, there was anger at the delegates who had not followed the wishes of the local meetings. The trustees of Holy Trinity Church in Fresno published a condemnation of their delegates in the newspapers.⁴⁸ The parish assembly of St. Nerses Shnorahali Church in San Francisco, which had instructed its two delegates to vote to retain Bishop Karekin Khachadourian in the diocesan assembly, revoked their credentials for violating their instructions.⁴⁹ The trustees of St. Gregory Church in Fowler also felt compelled to express in the newspapers that it was the will of the members' assembly that their representatives reelect Bishop Karekin to the primal throne.⁵⁰

M. B. Kabadayan, writing in *Asbarez*, ascribed it all to a plot by a clique that was trying to take control of everything. Why were they dredging this matter up again? Since February the churches had been at peace, there were many new members in Fresno and

⁴⁷ "Hon. Mr. V. G. Chituni" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933). According to the interpretation of Partizian, the enemies of Primate Khachadourian had convinced Echmiadzin that he was sympathetic to Dashnaktsutiun. Partizian, op. cit., p. 280.

⁴⁸ "Protest from Fresno Holy Trinity Trustees against Their Own Delegates to the Diocesan Assembly" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,579 (September 8, 1933). Vahan Chituni had walked out of the meeting, as mentioned above.

⁴⁹ *Asbarez* XXIV.1,579 (September 8, 1933).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Los Angeles, and services were continuing. The struggle over the question of the prelacy of the diocese was pointless and harmful. The communities had already expressed their highest will officially through their members' assemblies and in the press. The peace of the past several months was the proof that the decision of the diocesan assembly convened in February had been in accordance with the will of all the parishes. And in a practical way they were helpful to the Armenian Apostolic Church. The elected representatives of the parishes were obligated to do the will of the people and not to tyrannize them. Echmiadzin, which was completely cut off from the colonies, could not know better than the local people what the best solution to local problems was. While respecting the authority of the highest leadership of the church, one could not be blind to reality. The orders received from Echmiadzin presented the opportunity once more for the protesting delegates to arrange the question of the prelacy in an honorable way, according to the unanimous will of the people, as expressed in their members' meetings. Would they benefit from this opportunity? The unanimous will of the people should be determinative.⁵¹

A subsequent editorial elaborated on the developing Dashnaktsakan theme. According to this theory of church governance, the Supreme Spiritual Council should not interfere with the local churches. Contrary to historic church teaching, it was held that "in national-religious organizations the most authoritative power IS THE PEOPLE. All other bodies are born from it. They rule constitutionally and the rights of each body has

⁵¹ M. B. K[abadayan], "A Current Matter" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,579 (September 8, 1933).

its own boundaries. The Supreme Spiritual Council of Echmiadzin is one of those bodies, which cannot deviate from constitutional canons.”⁵² The upshot of this argument was that the local church organization should pay only formal allegiance to the hierarchical authority in Echmiadzin but in every other aspect should govern itself independently.

Events Coalesce

These matters were being discussed in the local press at the same time as the tumultuous events of 1933 were transpiring in the east. *Asbarez* announced with apparent satisfaction that Archbishop Ghevont Tourian, Primate of America, had been “removed” by the diocesan assembly sitting at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in New York.⁵³ By October the repercussions had spilled over into California. Demonstrations were made by both sides. An anti-Dashnaktsakan rally was held in Los Angeles on October 8, 1933, provoked by the “flag incident.”⁵⁴ On their part, the Dashnaktsakans expressed their anger at the Supreme Spiritual Council and its directives. A group calling itself the “real majority of the Los Angeles Armenian Apostolic Holy Cross Church” demanded the election of new parish representatives to the diocesan assembly and the reelection of Archbishop Khachadourian rather than the solution stipulated by Echmiadzin. According to the protesters, the delegates had not been elected legally and the term of some of them had

⁵² “The Question of the Diocese of California” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,580 (September 15, 1933). Capitalization in original.

⁵³ “Ghevont Archbishop Tourian Removed from Office,” *Asbarez* XXIV.1,579 (September 8, 1933).

⁵⁴ *Asbarez* XXIV.1,585 (October 20, 1933).

expired. Their actions, furthermore, had been contrary to the wishes of the majority of the parishioners.⁵⁵

The Special Session Is Held

The special session was held at Holy Trinity Church on Sunday, November 26, 1933, in accordance with the orders from Echmiadzin. The church was full with a multitude of observers. Twenty-three delegates from nine churches were present, of whom four were clergymen. At exactly 2:45 P.M. Bishop Karekin Khachadourian entered the room to open the session with the Lord's Prayer. The secretary read the official letter from the Supreme Spiritual Council with its declarations and instructions. His Grace read a short speech exhorting everyone to be calm and orderly. Then, in obedience to his orders, he handed over the chair to the senior clergyman present, Vartan Kahana Tavitian, the pastor of Yetteem. The first item of business was the examination of the credentials of the delegates. An extended debate took place over the names of the two delegates from Tulare, one of whom had been elected but not certified, and the other both elected and certified. In order to calm passions, both were excluded by a large majority. Challenges against the representative from Sacramento, Arshag Sarkisian, and the newly-chosen pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Fresno, Kegham Vartabed Kasimian, were rejected. The meeting then proceeded to the agenda, which had been set by the Supreme Spiritual Council. The

⁵⁵ Ibid., XXIV.1,587 (November 3, 1933).

delegates elected a central committee of five lay and four clerical members who in turn would appoint a locum tenens. Within four months the parishes would replace their old delegates with new ones and a new session of the diocesan assembly would convene to elect a primate and adopt a budget. At 11:00 P.M. the session concluded with the prayers of the clergy. It had been calm, despite fears in some quarters of disruption.⁵⁶

Increasing Tension

The on-going tension at Holy Cross Church in Los Angeles was evident in the members' meeting of December 3, 1933, which was set to elect an executive committee and a board of trustees. A large crowd of members and non-members was present. Some policemen appeared at 10:30 A.M., apparently called by some non-Dashnaktsakan trustees as a precautionary measure against trouble. The meeting opened on time at 11:20 with routine agenda items and the report of the pastor. The names of the 217 members were read. One member questioned the legality of a number of recent additions to the membership rolls, which caused a general commotion and shouting, bringing an admonition from the pastor. M. K. Ferrahian then explained the situation apparently to everyone's satisfaction. Another argument was caused by some remarks by Khoren Papazian, which were rebuked sharply by the chairman. Finally the news was revealed by someone that

⁵⁶ "Special Session of the Diocesan Assembly of California" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,591 (December 1, 1933).

Kegham Vartabed Kasimian, the favorite of the Dashnaktsakans, had been appointed locum tenens. This came as a bombshell, and the meeting was adjourned.⁵⁷

In Fresno, the Dashnaktsakan element had a majority in the parish meeting of December 17. During the previous year, 75 new members had been enrolled, bringing the total to 208. This was an increase of 56 percent. The trustees' report showed a modest budget surplus. Officers were elected and the pastor was given a four-year appointment. Various congratulatory resolutions were passed.⁵⁸ All of this apparent harmony, however, was soon to come to an abrupt end.

The Diocese of California Splits

On Saturday, May 5, 1934, an extraordinary session of the diocesan assembly of California was held at Holy Trinity Church in Fresno, with Locum Tenens Kegham Vartabed Kasimian presiding. A requiem was celebrated for the murdered Archbishop Ghevont Tourian and for the Primate of Bulgaria, Archbishop Stepanos Hovagimian, as well as for all the recent dead of the diocese. A proclamation from the Catholicos was read confirming the election of the locum tenens and of the executive committee. His Holiness exhorted his children the Armenians of the Diaspora and their spiritual and secular

⁵⁷ "Church Members' Meeting, Los Angeles" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,592 (December 8, 1933).

⁵⁸ "Victory of the Popular Will in Elections at Fresno Holy Trinity Church" [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,594 (December 22, 1933).

leaders to pull up nation-destroying factionalism by the roots and to cultivate the love of the ancient Holy Church and of Holy Echmiadzin in the hearts of all.

The certification of delegates reflected the struggle going on for the control of the parishes. Delegates were accepted from Fresno and Oakland, but rejected from Los Angeles, Tulare, and Fowler because of alleged irregularities in their selection. In Los Angeles, the anti-pastor faction (i.e., the Dashnaktsakans), now calling itself the *parezart-akanner* or “reformers,” numbering according to *Asbarex* 105 members, sent their own delegates to the diocesan assembly while the candidates of the trustees also claimed to have been elected. The assembly rejected the delegates from both factions, denying the Los Angeles Church any representation at all.

But a more serious situation developed after the forty-five-minute dinner break when six delegates did not return. After a few minutes one of the absentees walked in and handed the chairman a letter and then walked out without saying a word. According to the letter, the absent delegates had retired to the Hughes Hotel in protest of the rejection of the delegates.⁵⁹ This caused some consternation, but the chairman, Vahan Chituni, and the president, Locum Tenens Kegham Vartabed Kasimian, went on with the meeting and elected an executive committee. The question of the election of a primate was postponed. It was suggested by G. Alchian, the Secretary of the Executive Committee, to

⁵⁹ Khachig Hampartzoumian, “An Unwilling Answer” [in Armenian], *Asbarex* XXIV.1,622 (July 6, 1934).

expel those churches from the diocese that had not paid their dues.⁶⁰ This meant, of course, Los Angeles. According to *Asbarez*, drawing a parallel with the Hotel Martinique situation,⁶¹ the problem in the diocese was the result of the effort of a minority to impose its will on the majority of the members and the solution was new election of delegates to the diocesan assembly.⁶² This approach, which had been proposed before in other situations, was intended to give the Dashnaktsakans the chance to take control through the organization and mobilization of their partisans to vote. This in fact did happen later in a number of parishes.

In July, an official message was received from the Catholicos ordering the following:

1. The diocesan assembly of California was dissolved for an indefinite period.
2. The extraordinary session was declared invalid, according to the Seventh Article of the Constitution (that is, the meeting lacked a quorum).
3. The locum tenens was to remain in his office and the previous executive council was invited to work with him.
4. The locum tenens and the council were to lead the diocese for two years, after which the Catholicos was to issue new instructions.

⁶⁰ “Extraordinary Session of California District Diocesan Assembly” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,610 (April 13, 1934).

⁶¹ This refers to the schism of the eastern diocese in the meeting of September 2–3, 1933, as discussed above.

⁶² “Inappropriate Obstructionism” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,610 (April 13, 1934).

The directive was attributed by *Asbarez* to an evil desire to split the overseas colonies, by which the hierarchy was acting as the tool of the Communist government.⁶³ The order had been issued under duress by the “hooded CHEKA,” who were acting “in the name of the Catholicos.” This was all to no avail, *Asbarez* maintained, because “the tyranny of CHEKA [was] powerless to compel the people of this district to submit.”⁶⁴

The Struggle For Control of Holy Trinity Church

Holy Trinity Church, which was the cathedral church of the diocese and the most important parish both in terms of history and influence, continued to be the center of the struggle for control. The Dashnaktsakans had organized their followers and elected a sympathetic board of trustees in December, 1932. This had resulted in the resignation of the pastor, Vartan Vartabed Kasparian, and the call to Kegham Vartabed Kasimian. The anti-Dashnaktsakans now tried to enroll members for the December, 1934, parish assembly, which, if they took control again, would have resulted in the reverse situation and the possible return of Father Kasparian.⁶⁵

The meeting took place on December 23, 1934, ironically one year less one day after the assassination of Archbishop Tourian. The meeting was presided over by the pastor of the church and still locum tenens, Kegham Vartabed Kasimian. The police had to be called in to maintain order. At the end of the day, the Dashnaktsakans were in the

⁶³ “The Patriarch Commands...” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,625 (July 27, 1934).

⁶⁴ “The Law Against Illegality” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXIV.1,632 (August 31, 1934).

⁶⁵ “Rights of the People” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,632 (September 14, 1934).

majority, and the church was in *de facto* opposition to the hierarchy in Echmiadzin. The situation continued to be unstable and uncertain, awaiting the arrival of an emissary from Echmiadzin who was to be sent to reestablish order. When the patriarchal legate, Archbishop Garegin Hovsepien, arrived in 1937, he was denied admission to the church and had to be received at St. Gregory Church in Fowler.⁶⁶ The non-Dashnaktsakan element withdrew from the parish on July 2, 1939. Holy Trinity Church formally broke its ties to the Western Diocese in September, 1951, and subsequently was accepted into the new Dashnaktsakan-oriented prelacy that exists to this day.

The non-Dashnaktsakans organized a parish which was accepted into membership in the Western Diocese on March 31, 1940. This church became known as St. Paul Armenian Parish of Fresno. The first temporary pastor was Father Arsen Tourian. The facilities of a local Episcopal church were used until July, 1943, when the parish bought the First Armenian Presbyterian Church on Fulton and Santa Clara Streets. Father Nerses Odian of Detroit assumed the pastorate on November 29, 1947. The next year it was realized that the facilities were inadequate and a building committee was formed. The First Baptist Church property was purchased in 1952 for \$75,000. The sale was finalized on August 30, 1953. After renovation to meet Armenian liturgical requirements, the

⁶⁶ Archbishop Hovsepien failed to bring peace to the American church, receiving criticism from the irreconcilables on both sides. He later became Catholicos Karekin I of the Great House of Cilicia, which he served with the highest distinction. He is universally considered one of the great churchmen of modern times. See Minassian, "Armenian Church," ch. 12.

church was consecrated on January 23–24, 1954, by Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Primate of the Western Diocese.⁶⁷

In Los Angeles, the schismatic movement received the blessing of then-Locum Tenens Kegham Vartabed Kasimian. On July 26, 1934, the Dashnaktsakans gathered in the Sons of Herman Hall to form “St. John Church” and elected a board of trustees.⁶⁸ This movement was apparently not carried to fruition. The internal divisions in Holy Cross Church continued, with the Dashnaktsakans gaining the upper hand. The non-Dashnaktsakans, under the leadership of Locum Tenens Vartan Dzairakuin Vartabed Kasparian, withdrew and organized St. James Church on April 18, 1942.⁶⁹ They bought a house with a large yard at 3200 West Adams Boulevard, which they converted to liturgical use. It was consecrated on December 27, 1942 by Primate of California Bishop Mampre Kalfayan.⁷⁰ Holy Cross Church left the Western Diocese in 1953.⁷¹ The church moved to Montebello along with the Armenian population on the Eastside. It is now the cathedral church of the Western Prelacy.

⁶⁷ Minassian, “Armenian Church,” pp. 182–184.

⁶⁸ “Official Announcement of Los Angeles Armenian Apostolic St. John Church” [in Armenian], *Asbarez* XXV.1,630 (August 17, 1934).

⁶⁹ Krikor Sarafian, *Gordsapatum H. B. E. Miutian Kalifornio Shrchanaki 1910–1953* [History of the Activities of the California District of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1910–1953] (Fresno, 1954), p. 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Avakian, “Diocese in The West.”

Archbishop Khachadourian, caught in the economic and political conflict of the 1930s and rejected, subsequently was sent to Buenos Aires as patriarchal legate (1938). From 1950 to his death on June 27, 1961, he filled the office of patriarch of Constantinople with distinction.⁷² The disrespect shown to him, as well as to another rejected but eminent clergyman, Archbishop Garegin Hovsepian, not to say the unspeakable treatment meted out to Archbishop Ghevont Tourian, cannot be a matter of pride to the Armenian community of America and to the political leaders who brought it on.

⁷² Minassian, "Armenian Church," p. 368.

CHAPTER 14

CONCLUSIONS

This study has recounted aspects of the history of the Armenian immigrants to California up to the early 1930s, concentrating on settlement and economy, religion, and political and organizational life. It has relied mainly on printed materials in English and Armenian, making heavy use of contemporary newspaper and periodical reports.¹ The use of these sources, which usually were published by organizations with a particular viewpoint to put forth, may have made the political and religious differences in the community to appear more prominent than they actually were in daily life. The area of literature and the arts has not been approached because that may be done better by specialists in that field. A pioneering work in the effects of Americanization on the second generation has been done by a sociologist.² It is to be hoped that a future investigator will use the large collection of oral history interviews which have been gathered by Richard Hovannisian at UCLA.

¹ Newspapers, being ephemeral materials, are in danger of disappearing even if they are housed in library collections. Some of the periodicals which the author had heard or read about could not be found and must be presumed to be lost. Even some materials which the author began to use in the UCLA library some years ago had been unexplainedly lost when he tried to find them later. The author hopes that he has performed a service by making the contents of some of them available in English translation for the first time.

² Anny Bakalian, *Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, c. 1993).

The first Armenians to come to America were students of the Protestant missionaries to the Ottoman Empire. They intended to study in the colleges and theological seminaries of the northeast in the expectation of returning to Turkey as pastors of Evangelical congregations. These pioneers were followed by workers during the general movement of populations that occurred in the late nineteenth century. Many more Armenians left the Ottoman Empire following the massacres of 1894–1896. In 1881 the first permanent Armenian settlers arrived in Fresno. New arrivals swelled the community. Soon they spread south into the fertile farmland of the San Joaquin Valley, where many engaged in grape cultivation. Urban communities emerged in Fresno and Los Angeles. Some Armenians also came from the Russian Transcaucasus, primarily to southern California. Because there was no established manufacturing industry, the immigrants did not form an urban working class but found opportunities in small business and trades which could be entered with little capital. Gradually, they began to climb the economic ladder to material success. Like other immigrants, they attempted to reestablish their familiar religious and political organizations. Many had already adopted Protestantism, but most still held to the traditional Armenian Apostolic Church. Philanthropic and political organizations were founded, which raised money and volunteers for relief and to liberate the homeland. But the genocide of the Armenians of Turkey, together with the failure of Armenian political aspirations, poisoned the climate. The community permanently split into two camps with the assassination of Archbishop Ghevont Tourian in 1933. These factions led entirely separate organizational lives, even as the people continued with their

normal economic, social, and religious activities. This situation lasted as long as the immigrant generation remained and only ameliorated with the rise of the second generation, to whom the old quarrels seemed distant and unfathomable. Now the second generation is giving way to a third and a fourth, and a new wave of immigration has created entirely new conditions.

Some Common Concerns

The process of transplantation and adjustment produced some emotional conflicts in individuals, alluded to above. The passing of the old culture troubled many of the first generation. This situation was hastened by intermarriage and the furnace of the American melting pot. Another problem was the religious and political split in the community, although similar situations existed in other immigrant groups as well.³ A humorous insight into some of these quirks may be found in *The Confessions of Kitchoonie* by the American-Armenian author, Jack Antreassian.⁴ Antreassian was the editor of the English-language newspaper *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, published in Watertown, Massachusetts by the Ramkavar Party, and the literary journal *Ararat*, also in English, published in New York by the Armenian General Benevolent Union. He also translated a number of books from Armenian into English. The loss of the use of the Armenian language by the second generation was generally met with a sense of resigned helplessness.

³ See Ralph Lord Roy, *Communism and the Churches* (New York: Harcourt, c. 1960).

⁴ Jack A. Antreassian, *The Confessions of Kitchoonie* (New York: Ashod Press, 1979).

The small Saturday schools which had been founded out of desperation to keep the language alive were generally ineffective, and the members of the older generation were reduced to demanding or begging the young people to learn Armenian. Of course, it was impossible beyond the very basic domestic usage. Kitchoonie, the hero of Antreassian's satire, confronts someone who is derelict in speaking Armenian, and exposes his "ridiculous rationalizations":

"But I don't know the language well at all."
"Then learn it."
"And if I do learn it, what will I do with it?"
"Read it, write it, speak it."
"Read what, write and speak to whom?"
"Everybody."
"But nobody will understand what I say."
I have to restrain myself from exploding.⁵

Old Vartan comes in for particular abuse from Kitchoonie's brother:

"What kind of Armenian are you, anyway?"
"What do you mean?" The sniveling wretch quivered while others tried to appease my brother with irrelevant talk about the old man's patriotism, his love of the church, his service to the community, and other similarly ridiculous recommendations.
"What do I mean? I will tell you what I mean. Does your grandchild speak Armenian?" It was a master thrust.
"No, but what could I do about that?" the idiot replied barely above a whisper.
My brother pounced on him. "If you can't see to it that even your own grandchild learns to speak Armenian, what good are you to your people?"
The old man began crying and stuttering at the same time, a signal to all his friends to rally around him and pour their filthy abuse on my brother who waved aside all their stupid protestations.
"What could Vartan do?" one of them expostulated. "He doesn't even see his grandson more than three or four times a year. His son lives hundreds of miles away

⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

where there are no other Armenian families. And his daughter-in-law is not even Armenian.”

The poor fool didn't seem to realize that he was giving my brother another club with which to batter the miserable Vartan. And he didn't waste a minute. He began immediately to expound his theories on the sin of intermarriage, calling it the white massacre, in its way more dangerous to the future of the Armenian nation than the bloody variety the Armenians had experienced in Turkey, where in spite of everything Armenians had at least still married other Armenians.⁶

The plight of poor old Vartan was a normal condition, at least insofar as the author has ever seen. Prior to World War II, Armenians were considered “foreigners” along with Italians, Greeks, and other non-Anglo-Saxons. The war caused this attitude to change, and everyone became “American.” The children of the Armenian immigrants wanted to integrate completely with the other Americans, and their parents had abetted this by giving them all non-Armenian first names. In Pasadena, the Armenian families made no effort to establish a ghetto but lived in widely separated residences. Although the families had very close social relationships, the youths desired to associate with non-Armenians. Any appearance of being “foreign” was to be avoided.⁷ The author can remember being embarrassed at school by other children for bringing Armenian food in his lunch bag. The Armenian language itself was perceived to be the language of old people, and for a

⁶ Ibid., pp. 16–17.

⁷ One case of a child changing his Armenian name was Aram Rejebian, son of the Reverend Doctor Dikran H. Rejebian. The following is excerpted from *The Occidental Magazine*, Fall 2000: “ROBERT REGAN (formerly ARAM REJEBIAN) explains his change of name. After Oxy he got into radio and TV journalism in San Luis Obispo. On returning from Iwo Jima after the war, he settled in San Diego with his wife and two children and became the night news editor and anchor for TV8. When he changed his name to Robert Regan, his income went up \$6,000 a year!” Rejebian/Regan was an alumnus of Occidental College, class of 1936. <http://departments.oxy.edu/alumni/records/f2000/class_notes_30.html> (accessed April 25, 2002).

young person to speak it would have appeared ridiculous. Whatever Armenian they learned depended on what their parents taught them, or rather, what they understood while answering in English.⁸ It was simply not feasible before approximately 1965 for anyone to learn how to speak, much less read or write Armenian, without great effort and dedication.⁹

Kichoonie turns his attention to the division in the community:

Who could have been responsible for so awful a predicament? All the political parties pointed passionately to each other, and everybody else pointed unhesitatingly to the political parties. With the scapegoats thus dutifully selected people felt free to go casually about their business, their consciences clear that they had done their duty. The guilty had been identified, had they not? What else was there to do but rail at them periodically if for no other reason than to reaffirm the virtue of their own position? Armenians have been quarreling here for more than fifty years. Waves of new generations have washed over all the old disputes, obliterating their shape and origin, until nobody can be really sure what the quarrels are all about. This has never prevented them from insisting that they had to be for a good cause. Good enough for their fathers, could they be otherwise for the children?¹⁰

As the years passed and the reasons for the division got lost in a murky past, it perpetuated itself in odd ways. Nevertheless, Kichoonie maintained, it was all in the spirit of good American competition to find in a three-block area (of New York City) the head-

⁸ Some of this information is from the author's personal recollection, augmented by interviews with Richard Bedrosian on April 23, 1998 and January 17, 2002. Mr. Bedrosian, the author's cousin, was born in Pasadena in 1931.

⁹ I think this is still true except for the existence of some Armenian day schools. But even this requires a great financial and emotional commitment from both parents and children. One also has to accept an "old-country" way of doing things. Most of the children in such schools are from Armenian-speaking families.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

quarters of two dioceses of the very same church governing the affairs of the very same jurisdiction. He saw vast possibilities:

But what if we had two (or more?) Governments in Washington, set up two or three blocks apart from each other, operating at the same time, each one with its own policies and programs? Every citizen could decide which government suited him best and enroll in that one, much as he does for political parties today. The possibilities stagger the imagination. One government could arrange a detente with China, one with the Soviet Union, and if we have a third government it could quite appropriately cozy up to the Third World. No more confusion or convulsion. We can be on every side of every issue: nuclear power, conservation, taxes, gun control, energy, civil rights. And if a citizen doesn't like what his government is doing, he merely switches registration and pays his taxes somewhere else.

We would all remain Americans, celebrate the Fourth of July, revere the Constitution (after we changed it of course), and above all take our mothers out to dinner on Mother's Day...¹¹

So, too, Armenians today remain Armenian, celebrate most of the same holidays, and show up at the Armenian church on Easter or Christmas, but usually don't associate with anyone from the other group, or at least have not until fairly recently. In an emergency, it is possible to cross over.

Collective Memory

The social characteristics of the immigrant generation remain in the collective memory of the descendants. As the author observed them, they included the following: patriotism, willingness to work hard, law-abiding nature, love of family, a strong sense of patriarchal-

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

ism and gender differentiation, emphasis on traditional foods, and sociability. These aspects form the transition from Armenian history to American history and sociology.

Patriotism. It was a great relief for the immigrants to be in America after the harrowing experiences of oppression, warfare, and genocide. For those who had seen the Syrian desert, whatever hardships or prejudice or discrimination they may or may not have encountered in California seemed trivial in comparison.¹² No one worried much or labored himself with self-pity. They set about to work in the expectation, fulfilled, that whatever a man earned he kept. Person and family were secure. There was complete freedom of religion and expression within the limits of common decency. So to the last individual they wholeheartedly and enthusiastically embraced the United States and in due course received citizenship and voted in elections.¹³ Patriotism was demanded by the greater American society and unstintingly given in return. They taught their children the same values, and when the time came sent their sons off to war with their blessings. The author's mother, who had been an orphan and a refugee, declared on many occasions that her greatest glory in life was to have given four sons to be soldiers for her country.

¹² Taking to task a foolish man [not an Armenian] who was denigrating the United States and praising Stalinism, all the time living and taking advantage of American freedoms, the author's father said, "I have been oppressed and I want nothing more to do with it." On Thanksgiving Day he would say, "Once I was in Turkey and I was sad. Now turkey is in me and I am glad!" George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal information.

¹³ Proved by the exception. Mr. Butcher, the author's father's friend and a man of exemplary honesty, claimed exemption from the draft during World War I on the grounds of being an Ottoman subject. He was forever ineligible for citizenship and regretted it to his dying day. George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal information.

Willingness to work hard and law-abiding nature. The immigrant generation, with its strong sense of duty and propriety, and out of necessity, set about to work and make a living. There was really no other choice, and they would have made no other choice anyway. They worked, most often at trades and at farming as has been mentioned at length above, despite the economic hardships of the times. At the same time, they were law-abiding honest citizens, in so far as the author has experienced and ever heard. No anomalous stories or reports were ever handed down or told and no one gave any cause for defamation, and if anyone did, it was kept quiet.

Love of family. The best parts of patriarchalism carried over from the old country to the new, sometimes exercised with excessive strictness, but always in the interest of the family.¹⁴ The family was protected as the basic social unit. The author never heard of any divorce in the immigrant generation, and doubts if there was any at all. Marriages stayed together for extraordinary times. One couple known to the author were promised *before birth*, survived the tumultuous events of the first part of the twentieth century, and lived in old age in Pasadena. Love of family was expressed in domesticity. Children, at least any ever known to the author, were nurtured and cherished. A generation of survivors held dear the chance to settle down to a normal family life.

Gender differentiation and preparation of food. There was and remains today in a new immigrant generation a strong sense of gender differentiation. Mothers filled their primal

¹⁴ It should be obvious that the basis of patriarchalism is the family, and without the family there can be no patriarch.

urge to feed. And what food! As long as there was money to buy it, and in the depression money was short, it was prepared and cooked according to elaborate old-country recipes.¹⁵ A chicken might appear on Sunday, but lamb breast was cheap and could be ground up for *sarma* and *dolma*, and tasted better than ground beef.¹⁶ The leanest meat was used to prepare *kufte*, which found its way onto festive tables. These stuffed meat balls could also be served in *madzoon* [yoghurt] soup, a real treat for a sick child. Meals were accompanied by rice or *bulghur* [cracked wheat] *pilav*. Summertime meant *jajukh*, or sliced cucumbers in madzoon seasoned with garlic and mint. A really festive meal, perhaps at one of the large picnics put on by the various organizations, would feature barbecued lamb. Another type of *kufte* was made from the leanest beef or lamb, triple-ground to paste-like consistency and kneaded in ice water with bulghur and served raw with paprika and a garnish of finely-chopped tomatoes and onions. This popular summertime meal did not require that the stove be turned on.¹⁷ Stews could be prepared of lamb with eggplants, squashes, or okra. The remains of a fowl, or, if one was lavish, some lamb, could be cooked with wheat or barley into *harisa*, topped with butter and paprika, good any time but especially tasty in the wintertime. Special breads could be bought at the bakery, similar to other old-country hearth-baked loaves. But one bread, which in Asia Minor had

¹⁵ The foods and recipes listed here are what the author saw his mother prepare.

¹⁶ *Sarma* is stuffed vine leaves, and *dolma* is stuffed vegetables, usually squash, eggplant, peppers, or tomatoes. It does not matter whether these are called by Turkish names or not; they still tasted the same.

¹⁷ In the old country it also gave everybody tapeworm. Dr. Norman Gertmenian, personal information.

been baked on a hot griddle, was the cracker bread, in fact a large, flat, dry circular loaf which could be stored indefinitely (if the children didn't get to it first) and either softened with water or eaten as it was. A visit to the store brought home *basturma* or *yershkig*, the former dried beef tenderloin marinated in special spices reeking with fenugreek, and the latter a distinctive sausage.¹⁸ These could be eaten by the adults as appetizers, but more likely would be finished off by the children with bread and cheese. Either could also end up with scrambled eggs in the morning, especially tasty with cheese and parsley. The work of a whole day was to make *lahmajoun*. A bread dough was let rise. In the meantime, lamb was ground and mixed with onions, tomato, parsley, and spices. When the dough had risen, it was separated into little balls, which were rolled out into circles and placed on a baking sheet. These were covered with the meat mixture and baked. It was most delectable straight out of the oven, while still hot and juicy, but enough was made to put away in the freezer for future use. The author's uncle actually built a gas-fired brick oven in his backyard for this purpose. The commercial imitation which exists today from some bakers is meager—not enough meat, thin, dry.

Old-world vegetables included leek and eggplant. Either was delicious cooked with lamb, but the most delicious of all was *imam bayeldi*, the Turkish name for this eggplant dish referring to the Muslim holy man who, overcome with emotion, fainted when his

¹⁸ The spice mixture is called *chaman*. Some time during World War I Gary Gertmenian lay dying (it was supposed) of typhus and begged for a last meal of *chaman*. "Oh, give it to him. The boy is going to die anyway." He survived and died of old age in Pasadena in 1985, always having credited *chaman* with saving his life. Personal knowledge and George B. Kooshian, Sr., personal information.

bride made it for him. Another version of the tale has him fainting when he realized how much the olive oil to make it had cost. The strips of eggplant, already having been sauteed in oil, are studded with whole garlic cloves, covered in tomatoes, and baked, then served cold. Artichoke hearts, cooked in olive oil and onions, were also served cold.

The trip to the Armenian grocery might also have resulted in a container of olives, the salty wrinkled kind, *halvah*, string cheese, *bastegh*, *rup*, and *lokhum*. Halvah, now known to the general American public, is a confection made from sesame seeds. Bastegh is a thin dry sheet made from fruit juice, usually apricot, good with nutmeats. Rup is a heavy grape molasses, abundant in Fresno, which can be also used to coat strings of nutmeats and dried to make *rojig*, another dessert. Lokhum is made of fruit juice flavored with rose water, thickened, and cut into squares. An Armenian in the state of Washington has made an excellent commercial version of this using a variety of different fruit juices, which has gained a wide distribution.

Baked goods were spectacular. A sweet butter dough was shaped into crescents, baked, and sprinkled with powdered sugar to make *khourabia*, served to the adults with strong Oriental coffee but eaten with gusto by the children. The Armenian version of festive sweet rolls, called *cheoreg*, was served at Easter and Christmas and any other time in between. A soft butter dough, seasoned with *mahleb* and black nigella seeds, was rolled out and sprinkled with a filling of flour and sugar sauteed in butter along with walnuts and raisins. Cinnamon was sprinkled over it and all was rolled up, then cut diagonally, glazed with egg, sprinkled with sesame seeds, and baked. A larger version could be made

into a round shape and called *katah*. For really festive occasions, *pakhlavah* was necessary. The homemade variety from the hands of an expert bears little resemblance to the commercial products offered today. First, a woman had to learn how to make the paper-thin dough, which had to be treated with corn starch and kept moist to keep it from breaking up.¹⁹ This was layered into a baking sheet with abundant butter, spread with walnuts, and covered with more layers. Then all was cut into diamonds, baked, and doused with syrup made up for the occasion. Many things could go wrong in this elaborate procedure, but if there were children around, they were always ready to eat up the evidence. A simpler version could be made by wrapping the dough around a broomstick to get a cylindrical shape, an equally delicious product.

Fruits were highly prized, especially the pomegranate, quince, and apricot, which have been cultivated in Asia Minor since antiquity. But of all fruits, the grape received the greatest reverence. This was not because the Armenian farmers of Fresno grew grapes, but because the grape itself was a native of Armenia and the surrounding region. The vineyard which the book of Genesis recounts that Noah planted at the foot of Mt. Ararat, and the patriarch's effort at wine-making, reflect the historical fact of the origin of the grape. The leaves were as coveted as the fruit. They were wrapped around a filling of rice

¹⁹ The author's mother somehow got baker Melekian's wife in her debt, and to relieve the obligation the latter reluctantly taught her how to make sheet dough. It took some practice to get it right, but the eventual result was a continuing supply of *pakhlavah* and *beureg* [sheet dough stuffed with cheese filling and baked]. It was also the source of a modest income from orders by friends and neighbors. Later, immigrants arrived from Lebanon and competed in the sheet-dough business. Eventually, commercial bakeries started providing it, although the quality of the factory-made product can never be the same.

and meat and cooked for a main dish or around rice with herbs and olive oil for a delicious appetizer. Fresno produced leaves put up in quart jars, which were available in the local Armenian grocery stores. Many suburban Armenians planted vines in their yards to have a ready supply. Olives were equally cherished, and would be gleaned from the trees in the foothills above Pasadena and cured at home. Olive oil was the kitchen oil of choice, and butter was used for baking. What was never seen was pork or wine, at least among the western Armenians.²⁰

Sociability. A strong sense of community carried over from the old country. Sociable people visited each other, joined in organizations, and attended picnics and programs. Distance would mean little and anyone could drop in at any time. The trip from Los Angeles to Fresno could be made in a weekend with a stay at an old friend's house. Children often had to sit patiently or not while the adults visited. Refreshments had to be provided, but courtesy demanded that they be refused several times first. The author remembers a time, not at all untypical, when visitors from Fresno unexpectedly arrived in front of the house. No, they would not get out of the car, they were just dropping by for a moment to say hello. "Oh no, you must, come upstairs for just a minute, no, I will not prepare any food, no, nothing at all!" As soon as the visitors grudgingly opened the car door, Mother grabbed the children, said "Come with me NOW," and started giving orders. The table was set, kufteh, lahmajoun, and beureg materialized from the freezer,

²⁰ Perhaps because of Muslim influence? Bread, wine, and olive oil are holy to the Christian tradition as the Body and Blood of the Lord and as the oil of chrismation.

and in fifteen minutes there was a complete meal on the table. The “grudging” visitors suddenly seemed not grudging at all, and the unplanned visit stretched into several hours. Another time old Reverend Rejebian and his wife, the author’s father’s first teacher in the old country, were supposed to come for a holiday dinner. A son was dispatched with the car to fetch them, but he returned a little later without the guests. “Where are *Badveli Hairig* and *Varzhouhi Mairig*!?” exclaimed Father.²¹ The chagrined son said, “They said they didn’t want to come.” At the same time the telephone rang. “George? Why didn’t your son bring us?” “He says you didn’t want to come,” was the reply. “He was supposed to insist!” A fast return trip brought the old people on the double.²²

Postscript 2002

With the passing of the old generation and the fall of the Communist system in the former Soviet Union, many of the issues that had troubled the Armenian community became moot, to be replaced with new concerns. The intense partisan passions subsided, but the organizational split in the Armenian Apostolic Church remained, having been institutionalized in 1957. Turmoil first in the Middle East and then in the Caucasus induced large numbers of Armenians to take advantage of liberalized immigration laws and depart for America, particularly Southern California. Many of those arriving from

²¹ Literally, insofar as they can be rendered, “Reverend Daddy” and “Teacher Mommy.” Varzhouhi Mairig’s actual name was Altoon. We all thought that her name was “Varzhouhi.”

²² The author is not making this up; he was there. The culprit was brother Percy.

the former Soviet Armenia had been influenced by the deliberately atheistic policies of Communism, but some still found their way into the churches, which were revitalized and transformed. New facilities were bought or built and often filled. This applied to Armenian Protestant, Apostolic, and Catholic churches. The small Saturday language schools of an earlier, more fiercely Americanizing era, grew into or were replaced by private primary and secondary schools which provided instruction in Armenian language, history, and culture while giving valid state diplomas. In higher education, degree programs in Armenian studies and related fields were developed most notably at the University of California, Los Angeles, at California State University, Fresno, and at other institutions outside California. Classes were also offered at community colleges in areas with a large Armenian population. Cultural, political, and youth organizations flourished, sponsored by one or another faction or tendency.

If there were conflicts or strains, they were more to be found in the adjustment of newcomers to an unfamiliar social and economic system and in the differing attitudes of American- and foreign-born Armenians. This sometimes became evident in the churches as disharmony over language or customs. The existence of two hierarchies, however, and the growth of Protestant sects, made it possible for one who was dissatisfied in one church to find refuge in another. In Pasadena, for example, by the 1990s there were two Armenian Apostolic Church parishes, one affiliated with the See of Echmiadzin and the other with the See of Cilicia, and a number of Protestant churches ranging from the old Cilicia Congregational Church, now in new quarters, to several small but very active and grow-

ing fundamentalist meetings on Washington Boulevard. The difference may be socioeconomic or cultural, an older church such as St. Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church in Pasadena being dominated by the children and grandchildren of immigrants, often materially successful individuals, and the newer Armenian Apostolic Church of Pasadena strongly catering to Armenian-speakers and immigrants while keeping many old traditions. And the Evangelicals are always happy to accept converts. Many persons, of course, have simply melted away into the larger American population by intermarriage and assimilation.

The old problem of language still exists. At St. Gregory Church, for example, under an American-born priest there has been a strong shift toward the use of English and Modern Armenian in place of the classical Grabar. The Armenian Apostolic Church of Pasadena, however, continues to use Armenian in all of its activities. The dissemination of liturgical books in English, a concern of the scholarly Teotoros Kahana Isahagian, has to this date extended only to the Missal, which is available now with Armenian text, transliteration into Latin letters, and English translation on the facing page. The Lenten *Arevagal* service is available in the same format. The Baptismal and Wedding services are available but one has to ask for them. The Requiem Service is in the back of the Missal because it is used frequently. The Bible in English containing the correct Armenian canon is hard to find. It goes in and out of print and is not available in a premium binding. As for the complete Bible in Classical Armenian, it hardly exists outside the church. Nobody would be able to read it except for priests, deacons, and graduates in

Armenian studies. There are Sunday school materials in English specific to the Armenian Church. These observations apply to both churches.

It should be noted that historically all immigrant churches in the United States have eventually shifted over to English, some sooner, some later. This is not to say that everyone likes it or acquiesces in it. We are all human beings and we are emotional and stubborn, as much as we might imagine ourselves to be rational and objective. H. Richard Niebuhr wrote in 1929, and it remains true today,

One of the most important elements in culture is language and every European church in America, save those whose native tongue was English, has been required to make its accommodation to this factor. The language question has been one of the most difficult problems with which the immigrant churches have had to deal, for it involved the problem of rebirth in a new civilization. Conservatives in these churches have always maintained that the abandonment of the old, European tongue and the adoption of English as the language of worship and instruction involved the abandonment of all the ways of the fathers and the introduction of a new 'English or American religion.' Their intuitions have usually been correct, for the adoption of the native tongue is only the most obvious symptom of the assimilation of the native culture as a whole.²³

Niebuhr continues that the process of assimilation, which continues in other ways as well, eventually transforms the immigrant churches into American denominations perform. The other choice is eventual extinction.

²³ Is it? Quoted and paraphrased from H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1957. Originally published by Henry Holt and Company, 1929), pp. 211–212. The whole of chapter 8 is relevant.

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