



from the office of the
Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

630 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016, tel: (212) 686-0710

news:

CONTACT: Public Relations
(212) 686-0710

A RECENT DISRUPTION OF ORDER IN THE CHURCH

In the November 10, 1988 issue of *The Armenian Reporter*, the Prelacy Executive Council of the Separated Brethren under the jurisdiction of the Catholicate of Antelias has published a statement about the Armenian community of Atlanta, Georgia. The statement contains obvious errors and falsifications. We propose to present in chronological order the facts concerning the Armenian community of Atlanta.

The Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America was first concerned with the spiritual needs of Armenians living in Atlanta in the early part of 1968. At the suggestion of His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Diocese, a list containing the names and addresses of Armenians living in the region was compiled and sent to the Diocesan Headquarters.

As a result of continuous correspondence between the Diocese and the community in Atlanta, a more detailed list of names and addresses of as many as 90 families was compiled through the efforts of Mrs. Elizabeth Manoogian and Mr. John Hachigian. All of these families were invited to meet Archbishop Torkom Manoogian during his first visit to Atlanta on March 1, 1976.

On that occasion, His Eminence celebrated the Divine Liturgy and offered Holy Communion to all the faithful who were present. At that time a Church Committee was organized under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, with Seth Dorian acting as chairman.

- more -

The following were members of the above Committee: Mr. and Mrs. John Hachigian, Mr. and Mrs. Artin Megerian, Dr. Ara Dostourian, Simon Diboyan, and Keefer Lousararian. It was also suggested that Mrs. Siran Megerian, Varaztad Sarimian and Grace Hohn also help the Committee.

The Committee was responsible for organizing various community functions and making the necessary arrangements with the Diocese so that visiting clergymen would come to Atlanta to hold religious services. The Primate complied with the requests of the Church Committee and appointed various clergymen to visit Atlanta, celebrate the Divine Liturgy, deliver sermons and administer the sacraments.

In 1980 the Armenian Cultural Association of Atlanta was founded. The Rev. Fr. Mesrob Moutafian was present at the inaugural meeting. In 1981 the group changed its name to Armenian Independent Cultural Association of Atlanta. Archbishop Torkom Manoogian greeted with joy the formation of the new Association and even assisted its members in drawing plans and programs for future activities. Some of the members of the Church Committee were also members of the Armenian Independent Cultural Association.

In 1984 the following were members of the Church Committee: Dr. Ara Dostourian, Chairman; Mrs. Mary Apelian Dillon, Vice-Chairman; Talin Keoseian-Major, Secretary; Peter Darian, Treasurer; Edward Der Avakian, Levon Meserlian, Manuel Housepian and Bedros Nersesian, Advisors.

In his letter of May 24, 1984, Dr. Ara Dostourian, Chairman, presented the above names and informed the Primate that the Church Committee was connected with the Diocese of the Armenian Church, which is headed by Archbishop Torkom Manoogian and is under the jurisdiction of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. In the same letter, Dr. Dostourian requested that the Church Committee of Atlanta would be officially accepted into the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

In his letter of June 5, 1984, the Primate confirmed the appointment of the Church Committee and officially accepted the Armenian community of Atlanta as a newly organized parish under

the jurisdiction of the Diocese of the Armenian Church.

At the decision of the Diocesan Council, the Church Committee of Atlanta, along with a number of other newly established communities, was invited to send a representative to the Annual Diocesan Assemblies of the past few years.

Peace and order in the life of the Atlanta Armenian community was disrupted when the Armenian Independent Cultural Association began to meddle in religious matters and undertake the responsibility of inviting clergymen, disregarding the presence of an existing Church Council. No Cultural Association could invest itself with the right to represent a religious community and invite clergymen at its own will nor reject the visitation of clergymen invited by a Church Council.

From the same statement published in *The Armenian Reporter*, we learn that in 1986 Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian went to Atlanta at the invitation of the Executive Committee of the Armenian Independent Cultural Association, and in his homily he expressed the wish that the community in Atlanta would serve as a model of unity and cooperation for other communities in the United States.

Was Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian unaware -- or did no one tell him -- that there was already an official body that tended to the spiritual needs of the community? What he did could cause a new division instead of achieving unity. And in fact, a new schismatic Church Council was appointed by a Prelacy Executive Council operating under the jurisdiction of Antelias.

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian was certainly aware of the existence in the small Armenian community of Atlanta of an official church body, a Church Council, tending to the religious needs of the community and operating under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church. The appointment of another Church Council by a Prelacy Executive Council operating under the jurisdiction of Antelias is a divisive act.

In the same statement there is a citation attributed to the Rev. Fr. Vertanes Kalayjian, whom the

Primate had appointed visiting pastor. The words attributed to Fr. Kalayjian -- "We are not in the business of selling mixed vegetables" -- were not said by him and serve only to confuse the reader. The truth is that when it was proposed that the Armenian Cultural Independent Association undertake the responsibility of inviting clergymen, thus disregarding the already existing Church Council, Fr. Kalayjian replied, "It is canonically impossible to do that."

In a pastoral letter attached to an announcement sent to the community of Atlanta on Sept. 26, 1988, Fr. Kalayjian says: "It is a welcome sign that there is an Armenian Independent Cultural Association which is functioning in the community to tend to social and cultural needs. Both the Church Council and I will extend all necessary help and cooperation as required."

The situation in the Armenian community of Atlanta is now tense. The formation of a new Church Council in that city is an improper act that disrupts the work of an established ecclesiastical jurisdiction and sows seeds of confusion and anarchy.

Behold! This is another act, enveloped in the thick mist of "unity and cooperation" and executed by the Separated Brethren, that disrupts church order.

11 / 23 / 88

Chancellery of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

###