

February 26, 1976

Mr. Carl Newton, News Editor
The Atlanta Journal
72 Marietta Street, N.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30302

Dear Mr. Newton:

We would be most appreciative if you would insert in your paper any of the enclosed regarding His Eminence Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Since there is no Armenian Church in Atlanta, we feel certain that, among others, your Armenian readers particularly would be very much interested in his visit to your city.

We thank you for any attention you may be able to give to this matter.

Very sincerely yours,

Ani Der Margosian

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

The Armenian Church is an independent Christian church, also known as Apostolic Orthodox. Its head is the Catholicos, who resides in Etchmiadzin, near Mount Ararat, and is a direct successor of the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew.

It was in the middle of the first century that Thaddeus and Bartholomew introduced Christianity to Armenia. Repeated persecutions failed to stem the rapid growth of the new faith, and Christianity was declared the state religion of Armenia in 287 A.D. Armenia thus became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion.

This was largely due to the efforts of St. Gregory the Illuminator. Born a nobleman, he converted King Tiridates, who had formerly severely persecuted the Christians. The rest of the population soon followed suit. It was St. Gregory who built the mother church at Etchmiadzin in 303 A.D.

Until the fifth century, Christian worship in Armenia was conducted in Greek or Syriac, since there was no Armenian alphabet, hence no written language. In 404, a monk, Mesrob, completed an alphabet of 36 letters. Approximately thirty years later the Bible and other religious works were translated into Armenian and the golden age of classical Armenian literature had begun.

The conversion of Armenia to Christianity was of grave concern to its neighbors, especially Persia. The rulers of this vastly stronger country did everything in their power to uproot the new religion across its borders. They reduced Armenia to vassaldom and in 450 issued a decree ordering all Christians to embrace the Zoroastrian religion.

The Armenians rose in violent revolt, under Vartan Mamigonian, a prince of noble family. This culminated in the battle of Avarair against vastly superior forces. Vartan lost the battle, but his and his followers' determination convinced the Persians that all Armenians would rather die than renounce Christianity. Christianity survived, and St. Vartan's Day, commemorating the battle, is a major Armenian holiday.

Coincidentally, the Council of Chalcedon took place at precisely the time of the Armenian revolt. Naturally, the Armenians were unable to send delegates but sided against the decisions of the Council. Further differences led to the eventual autonomy of the Armenian Church.

In the 12th century, during the Arab occupation of Armenia, the Catholicate took temporary refuge in Cilicia, and eventually returned to Etchmiadzin, which is still the Supreme See. The Catholicate of Cilicia, however, continued as a subordinate see located in Antelias, outside Beirut, Lebanon.

In addition, the Armenian Church has traditionally maintained two Patriarchates, in Jerusalem and Constantinople (Istanbul). In Jerusalem, the Armenian Patriarchate is the guardian of the Holy Places which are in the possession of Armenians. It is also one of the three principal custodians of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other important shrines and sanctuaries in the Holy Land.

In spite of its independence, the Armenian Church is now taking active part in the ecumenical dialogue.

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