SOFT-BALL INTERVIEW WITH DEFROCKED PRIEST

Posted on July 29, 2023 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Hagop Hagopian, Toronto, 23 July 2023

About ten days ago, an Armenia TV program, hosted by broadcaster Sako Arian, telecast an interview with Khachig Yeretsian, the defrocked former Rev. Baret Yeretsian who is accused of wrongdoing regarding the forever leases he had co-signed along with Patriarch Nourhan Manoogian. The interview sounded rehearsed and the soft-ball questions were often apologetic and there were no follow-up questions to Yeretsian's version of the truth. It was all like two old friends chatting. Right off the bat, the interviewer showed his hand when he began the exchange by calling Khachig Yeretsian "Rev. Baret Yeretsian" because he said he felt he "owed" it to the disgraced former priest.

Below are twelve of Yeretsian's excuses, denials, and avoidance gimmicks as he tried to clear his tarnished name.

1. Yeretsian started by claiming the accusations against him were "completely lies …and wrong." Apparently, the Armenian community of Jerusalem, Patriarch Nourhan, and the Palestinian Authority, the Jordanian government, and the Armenian and Arab media have all been telling lies about the unjustly persecuted former priest. Only—you guessed it—innocent Baron Khachig Yeretsian is telling the truth as he basks in the California sun.
2. Betraying a bizarre logic, Yeretsian said he was not responsible for the real estate crisis because he had been merely the director of the Patriarchate's real estate office. Let's parse that dunderhead explanation: because he was in charge of the real estate office, he was not responsible for the real estate lease of Goveroun Bardez (*Cows' Garden*). The student was not responsible for handing an 'F' homework because he merely wrote it. The man who was responsible for one of the most precious real estates of the Armenian nation demonstrates a topsy-turvy mind, especially when he prevaricates.
3. Yeretsian said only the Patriarch is responsible for the lease contract. If that is so, why did Yeretsian and Archbishop Sevan Gharibian bother to sign the treacherous deal?
4. He said previous two Patriarchs had also signed 99-year leases. He didn't provide proof of this. So, according to his logic, if previous Patriarchs erred, it was okay to repeat their mistakes.
5. Because Jerusalem Armenians fear a 99-year lease translates into eventual tenant ownership, the defrocked priest said when the 99-year lease of the Armenian-owned Anglican Christ Church lands expired, the Armenians successfully reclaimed the property. However, the Armenians had to go to court to assert their ownership. As well, in Israel a long-time occupant can claim the property when his long lease expires. A ninety-nine year lease would certainly legalize the ownership of a rented space. Reclaiming the *Cows' Garden*, after ninety-nine years from Israelis would not be as easy as reclaiming it from Jerusalem's Anglican Christ Church which is an isolated entity with a negligible congregation.
6. Baron Yeretsian said he always regarded the *Cows' Garden* transaction as a purely "commercial deal" and nothing to do with Arab-Israeli politics. The answer to that is: "Good morning,

Sunshine." Baron Yeretsian is disingenuous to the nth degree. When American-financed Jewish settlers have nabbed the Greek Patriarchate's Hotel Imperial and Hotel Petra (a hundred yards from the Armenian Quarter) and plan to tear them down and build housing for far-right settlers, when settlers have declared their intention to Judaize the Old City by expanding their footprint in the city, when non-Jewish communities have fought for decades against Israeli encroachments, and when the Armenian Quarter has been caught between the Israeli and Palestinian tug-of-war in the final status of the Old City, Pollyanna Yeretsian believed the deal was a purely commercial enterprise and would not impact Arab-Israeli politics.

7. Baron Yeretsian said the deal was signed for the financial security of the Armenian Convent. However, five years ago, his co-conspirator Patriarch Nourhan told a Diaspora journalist the rent the Patriarchate collected from its properties covered all of Armenian Patriarchate's expenses. So, why give the *Cows' Garden* to a foreigner when the Patriarchate didn't need the money and could have built at *Cows' Garden* housing complex for young Armenians in a city where rents are astronomical? Such a subsidy would have discouraged young people from immigrating thus reversing the shrinking of the small community. Incidentally, Yeretsian didn't mention how much Danny Rubinstein/Rothman had paid. But then again, the interviewer studiously avoided messy questions.
8. When asked to react to the fact that Palestinians and Arabs in general had expressed hostility to the signing of the contract, Yeretsian dismissed the concern as a non-issue, unmindful that the land giveaway hurts Armenian-Arab relations not only in Palestine but across the Arab world. He said the Arabs were twisting the truth. Finally, he accused the Arabs of anti-Semitism because, according to Yeretsian, Arabs objected to the deal because the tenant was a Jew.
9. After insisting that he was not guilty, without being prompted Yeretsian said he had never done anything against the Armenian Church, theology, or rites. Armenian Jerusalemites and the North American parishes he served might argue with that bit of self-promotion.
10. Several times Yeretsian referred to his "55-years…" without finishing the sentences. He meant to say the number of years he had been a priest. It didn't occur to him that viewers might wonder why he was still a *vartabed* after 55 years. The reasons are many and revealing.
11. He accused community leaders of being motivated by self-interest. However, a leading activist against the illegal transaction (Setrag Balian) lives some miles from the Armenian Quarter. He has no self-interest in the conflict. But more importantly, it's not just activists who condemn Yeretsian but the whole community as witnessed when Yeretsian tried to move his private papers from his plush apartment at the Holy Archangels' Convent but was manhandled by dozens of young men who shouted "TAVAJAN…TAVAJAN…" as he was escorted by the Israeli police who took him to the airport for his flight to Turkey.
12. But the sentence which tells everything one needs to know about Baron Khachig Yeretsian's relations with the people he has supposedly served is the following. At the end of the interview he said: "Whenever you defend the Armenian Convent's interests you go against the interests of the people."

Over and out.

Comments



Hovhannes Harutiunian – 2023-09-04 12:13:09
Sako Arian's journalistic credentials are more than suspect. He arrived in Yerevan without any media background and, as is the unfortunate case in Armenia, was given the job of interviewing officials and others solely based on his knowledge of western Armenian. The media landscape in Armenia is littered with such non-professionals.