

# THE TWO-FACED PATRIARCH

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**By Hagop Hagopian**, Toronto, 25 April 2023

In an interview with the *AGBU* magazine in 2018, Patriarch Nourhan Manougian described the Armenian presence in Jerusalem as "one of the most miraculous sagas of the Armenian people." He went on to describe the Armenian Quarter as a "miraculous possession...a spiritual fortress." In the same interview, he promised: "We plan to build a housing project for young Armenian couples on a plot belonging to the Armenian Patriarchate..." The plot of land is *Goveroun Bardez* ("Cows' Garden").

But last year he and his right-hand man (75-year-old but still a Vartabed Baret Yeretsian) signed a secret and illegal 99-year lease with Australian businessman Danny Rubinstein who would build a 7-star hotel in *Goveroun Bardez*, in the shadow of the Patriarch's residence.

What happened between 2018 and last year? Why did the housing project for young couples go the way of gone with the wind to be replaced by a hotel? Since the lease included the parking lot at *Goveroun Bardez* Rubinstein has taken over the parking lot and replaced the two guards appointed by the Patriarchate with guards hired by him. Some Armenians worry Rubinstein will ban Armenians from parking at the *Goveroun Bardez* lot. That would pose more than an inconvenience to Armenians since parking space in Jerusalem is as hard to find as locating an Israeli settler who doesn't hate Palestinians. If denied parking space, some Armenian workers would be deprived of their livelihood. As in the past, it could result in immigration and in further shrinking of the tiny community.

In the same *AGBU* magazine the so-called shepherd of the community, boasted: "We invest heavily to strengthen the infrastructure of the community... We need Armenia's and Diaspora's moral and political support. We need heightened consciousness and vigilance on the part of the Diaspora to help keep our presence in the Holy Land inviolable." How can a person spout the above words when soon after he sells his nation and Church? How can a man who gave away so much of the Armenian lands have the nerve to ask for the Armenian nation's help? How can an Armenian consider making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when the so-called Patriarch is shrinking--square-meter-by-square meter Armenian lands?



Since the so-called Patriarch began to give away Armenian lands to Israeli interests, Armenians and non-Armenians have wondered about the motivation for his treacherous acts.

Is it to enrich himself? Why would he need more money at his age (septuagenarian) when he is already wealthy and lives in palatial accommodations?

Is he a self-hating Armenian? Not likely: he has been a clergyman most of his life.

Is it because of imbecility? His acts speak loudly on that question.

Is it because of lack of character? Very likely. He is a coward and a defeatist with a yellow streak down his chunky back. Not long ago, when a Palestinian Arab with close ties to the Armenian community, asked him why didn't he "build the promised *Goveroun Bardez* housing complex for Armenian couples" the 'Patriarch' said: "What's the point when everything would be gone in twenty-five years?" Nourhan the Prophet expressed similar views on another occasion when he promised a young activist that the Patriarchate would grant him scholarship at an Austrian university. He advised the young man not to return to Jerusalem following his graduation because soon "there would be nothing left to return to." We don't know whether the coward meant the Armenian Quarter or the Armenian community. The transparent bribe was obviously intended to remove the "troublesome" activist from the scene.

Some leader. Some father of the community. Some patriarch.

Nourhan can hardly walk (he didn't officiate at the recent Easter ceremonies at the Holy Sepulcher). His phlegmatic demeanor can mislead some into thinking he is a serious person. How this disaster

became head of the Jerusalem Church is a mystery. What we have in Nourhan is a slow-witted coward who is fueled daily by countless Ferrero chocolate balls. The man who mismanages the most important Armenian real estate in the Diaspora is a calamity.

Although timorous, he has surprised people by his obstinacy not to withdraw his signature from the treacherous forever leases he has granted to people who are no friend of Armenians. Has he been obdurate because he has secret and powerful non-Armenian backers who want to swallow the Armenian Quarter as part of their "Judaization" of Jerusalem? There is no proof of a blackmail but through a process of elimination, one can wonder whether the cowardly Patriarch has dared to betray his nation and Church because he is protected by shadowy big brothers who although active behind the scenes, have remained cunningly silent throughout "Patriarch" Nourhan's real estate scandals.

But the tide seems to be turning against Nourhan. The community has become vociferous in its opposition to the Patriarch's misdeeds. Sending a message to several targets, including Nourhan, at the Easter procession through the heart of the city, the scouts of the *Hoyetchmen Club* (one of the major Armenian clubs), carried trilingual placards (Armenian, Arabic, and English) which said: "Armenian Lands Are Not For Sale". Young men have challenged Vartabed Baret at the entrance to the Armenian Convent to confess his misdeeds. The Patriarch's former co-conspirator replied the hard-to-believe claim that he was following Nourhan's orders. Representatives of the Palestinian Authority and Jordan demanded, during their recent meeting with Nourhan, that he withdraw his signature from the illegal leases. According to Jerusalemites, people who have been close to Nourhan for a long time, have begun to criticize him. Nourhan and Baret didn't attend any of the events dedicated to the 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

The above are positive signs. But to make the opposition to Nourhan effective, the members of the Sts. James Brotherhood should rise in unison and present Nourhan two choices: withdraw the illegal real estate signatures or resign.



## Comments



**Kegham Papazian** – 2023-05-14 11:31:28

My understanding is that both His Holiness Karekin Catholicos of all Armenians and His Holiness Aram I of the Holy See of Cilicia do not have any legal authority or jurisdiction on the Jerusalem Patriarchate, according to some kind of law governing the relations between them, same as with the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. That's why they cannot interfere or remove Nourhan and his assistant. The other option perhaps is for the Jerusalem Armenians to cast a general vote of no confidence for Nourhan and demand his removal. Also take legal action arguing that his state of mind has deteriorated and should be replaced by another patriarch.



**Nora Der-Bedrossian** – 2023-05-10 22:39:34

Margaret Kevorkian, what evidence do you have that Goveroun Bardeze belonged to the Assali family ? Can you name your source? And suppose it was sold to the Armenian Patriarchate, what right does the Holy father and his real estate broker partner to sell it or lease it for 100 years.



**ANGELA** – 2023-05-08 21:46:01

At the end of the day, the question remains, what can the Armenians, the rightful owners, do about this? Any legal advice? Is anyone interested to pursue a reversal of this treachery?



**Hovhannes Harutiunian** – 2023-05-08 05:33:01

Armenians living outside of Armenia can't manage their own diasporan affairs. Any notion of them engaging in Armenia's development is fantastic. Pathetic.



**Nora Der-Bedrossian** – 2023-05-07 22:59:59

Mike, we are not talking about the motherland. We are talking about Jerusalem, the religious capital of all Armenians around the world since the fourth century. And by the way my character and morals are perfect. Your English is bad.



**JERRY PAPIKIAN** – 2023-05-07 07:05:51

It is disturbing to see a clergyman breaking his spiritual oath of office. If he is not punished in this world he will definitely pay the price when he meets his creator GOD!



**LUSA DIASUNI** – 2023-05-07 05:12:47

Those lands belong to all Armenians of this world. A lawsuit (Armenian people vs the Armenian church), through the legal process of discovery, will confirm this and reveal any and all detailed information necessary to take further action(+).



**Hovan** – 2023-05-07 04:20:32

It seems to me that the wolf has become the shepherd. The sheep will pay the price.



**Nicolai Romashuk** – 2023-05-06 20:34:25

Baret is punished. In the past few months, I have suggested the formation of a delegation from the three Armenian political parties to sit down with Patriarch Nurhan to learn the truth about the real estate allegations. For example, to determine to whom does the land belong? Has it been leased or sold? Was the leasing or selling legal? If the leasing of properties is illegal, it means the Sts. James Brotherhood needs a good lawyer to straighten the matter. It's important to understand and accept that the Sts. James Brotherhood's properties belong to the Sts. James Brotherhood and not to Armenian civilians. There is no country that will accept Armenian civilians as legal owners of Church properties. Besides, it's wrong to condemn the Patriarch for wrongdoing and only afterwards meet him. That is not the correct sequence of an interchange.



**Vahrij** – 2023-05-05 21:03:00

According to reliable sources, Jerusalem Patriarch Nourhan and his cohort Vartabed Baret have sold the Alex Manoogian Seminary adjacent to the Patriarch's residence. As expected, not a peep from NYC's AGBU head office crowd although the seminary was built with the donation of AGBU's Life President. These days the AGBU's paper honchos have their hands full shuttering schools and organizing panel discussions about movies and music appreciation in a misconceived attempt to elevate the artistic standards of its members while one of the most important spiritual centers of Armenians is ignored. There are also unconfirmed reports Nourhan has sold the Patriarchate's own 9-10 parking spaces.

**Vrej H. S.** – 2023-04-26 22:04:19

The Patriarch and Baret Vartabed have stated Armenian Quarter belongs to the Armenian Church. The facts contradict their assertion. The Armenian Quarter was built and enlarged through the initiative of Armenians from all walks of life—from Armenian kings and queens to humble pilgrims. During the past millennium Armenians have donated untold millions to establish and expand the Armenian Quarter. In the 17th and 18th centuries, when the Patriarchate faced bankruptcy because of usurious Ottoman Turk taxes and had to pawn everything from chalices to vestments, it was Armenian laymen who raised the money to save the Armenian Quarter. They raised so much money that the Patriarch, in one instance, was able to expand the Quarter. At the main entrance of the Armenian Convent, carved on the marble above the iron gate, is the following legend in three languages: "Վասնք Հայոց Սրբոց Հակոբեանց - Couvent Arménien St Jacques - دير الأرمن مار يعقوب". In other words, the convent belongs to Armenians. At no time has the convent been identified as Armenian Patriarchate Convent. But Patriarch Nourhan and Baret Vartabed prefer to forget the facts if it's to their advantage to do so. What a pair! Vrej H. S.

**Mesrob** – 2023-04-26 05:40:12

Margaret Kevorkian is not a credible source regarding the ownership of Goveroun Bardez. The long-time Hadassah hospital nurse's son was an Israeli policeman while her grandson is in the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces). In other words, by questioning the legitimacy of the Armenian ownership of Goveroun Bardez, she is trying to facilitate the grabbing of Armenian lands by the Israelis. Elsewhere in this column, a commenter provided chapter-and-verse information which verifies centuries-old Armenian ownership.

**Vartan Simonian** – 2023-04-26 04:29:39

Margaret Kevorkian, interesting information about "Goverun Bardez" belonging to the "Al Assali" family and selling it to the Patriarchate. Why have'nt we ever heard/read about it? The property was leased and not sold to the Israelis. Who is Patrick?

**mike** – 2023-04-26 03:45:16

There is a proper way to criticize ones actions, the language you are using here to describe the Patriarch of Jerusalem speaks volumes about your character and morals. Instead of writing so much about a 200 meter parking lot in Jerusalem, you should actually be writing about the thousand of kilometers of our motherland Armenia which is being sold to the Turks by nikol and his supporters...





**Nora Bedrossian** - 2023-04-25 23:03:43

Thank you H for a short and firm suggestion. Thank you also for the youth who had the courage to express their concerns in the most appropriate fashion. THROW THEM OUT both Nourhan the traitor/realtor and Baret his agent. All Armenians and ALL clergy must go to his office and get them out by force. The fact that he did not show up to the recent ceremonies is a good sign that he is fearful. You elected him and now you can get him out of that office. Rumours circled that he cheated to be elected. These similar acts were done previously by Yegishe Derderian and Shahe Ajemian when they sold the monastery's entire antiquities until they got caught when they were selling the Holy Bible which is part of 24 volumes. Notice that the Catholicos of Echmiasin is silent on this matter.



**H** - 2023-04-25 17:40:04

Both nourhan and khachig yeretsian (baret) should be thrown out of the convent.



**Margaret Kevorkian** - 2023-04-25 17:39:04

Freddy, This property , the western side of the goverun bardez belongs to the "Al Assali " family, and not the Armenian Patriarchate. I believe the owners suggested to the Patriarch to buy it because they had the intention to immigrate to Canada, and also to avoid being listed as selling their land to the Israelis. What happened next is still an enigma...The property was sold by the name of the Armenian Patriarchate. The Assaly family left the country for good. Were the Armenians a mediator?? Regards to Patrick!!



**Freddy Lama** - 2023-04-25 15:05:49

Oh my God!!! I am shocked after reading Hagopian's article. Let us do something: Get 100 000 signatures from Armenians , Arab Palestinians (Christians and Moslems) exposing the Patriarch and asking for his immediate expulsion from the Armenian Orthodox Church! This situation has to be rectified immediately and a detailed summary of all other crimes similarly committed be made public!



**Hayorti** – 2023-04-25 13:40:31

Garabed's questions are to the point. However, it is difficult to answer them because the Patriarch refuses to divulge information, especially regarding financial and real estate matters. I've come to this conclusion after reading Hagopian's articles of the past year. Since the Patriarchate is autocephalous, no Church authority (including the Catholicos in Armenia) can tell him what to do. I agree with the article that the Sts. James Brotherhood should demand Nourhan's resignation. The speculation that there might be Israeli coercion in the affair is reasonable. It's no secret that Israel is fully fledged to Judaize Jerusalem. The churches and a handful of clergymen can remain because they are necessary for tourism/pilgrimage: they bring countless dollars to the government coffers.



**Minas H Tanielian** – 2023-04-25 13:32:12

He has obviously bowed to pressure from people who seek their own interests and don't have any sort of sympathy towards Armenians. He should be replaced. We need to install a patriot in this post. Otherwise, his pronouncement will become a self-fulfilling prophesy.



**vatche** – 2023-04-25 09:19:22

Thank you for this well written exposé. The Armenian diaspora desperately needs to know more facts about all things Armenian. These so called "leaders" seem to think they can decide the fate of our nation/lands/belongings yet they fail to realize they are there as the protectors. Feckless, selfish parasites.



**Garabed** – 2023-04-25 08:55:39

Why has the patriarchate resorted to selling property it owns? Was the patriarchate coerced by the Israeli government to sell property it owns to a Jewish businessman? Is the patriarchate experiencing budgetary issues? Is it a matter to have budget to cushion against expected cost of living increases and dwindling income? I remain at loss to have an informed stand.



**Vahakn** – 2023-04-25 08:16:10

If I were a member of Jerusalem's Sts. James Brotherhood, I would sit with my brother clergy and draft Nourhan's letter of resignation. At the same time, I would start looking for candidates to succeed the so-called Patriarch.



**Hagop** – 2023-04-25 05:32:10

He lied to everyone. The Jerusalem Armenian community is going through the most difficult times; the Armenian nation and all friends should raise their voice, and help us save the Armenian presence and the Armenian quarter in Jerusalem. Patriarch Nourhan is the only person responsible for the current situation, he should cancel the scandalous deal or resign.



**Sossy Neredian** – 2023-04-25 02:42:34

Very sad to hear about what is and has been going on concerning the centuries old Armenian properties in Jerusalem. It is time for the clergymen to stop meddling in worldly matters and start praying not for the people's salvation but for their own salvation. On the other hand, there is an upper level party that is definitely benefiting from this transaction without whose approval not even a pew could be sold. The fish smells from the head, as wise men say. The time of lamenting has long passed, quick solutions have to be found.



**Alin** – 2023-04-25 02:35:05

He must resign. No one would trust him any more. The land is NOT his . Shame on everyone who takes advantage of his position.



**Tatiana Arakelian Mardirosian** – 2023-04-25 02:21:23

This is so unfortunate. "Goveroun Bardez" should have become the housing project for Armenians. What a defeatist posture the Patriarch's action and the belief that in 25 yrs there won't be an Armenian quarter. Had that been a housing project it would have encouraged some of the new generation to stay. What is going to become of us Armenians when our clergy above all are traitors to our existence.