

THE WINTER OF THE PATRIARCH

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By Hagop Hagopian, Toronto, 20 January 2022

After six months of controversy, exposes, accusations and counter-accusations, a misleading calm has descended upon Jerusalem's Goveroun Bardez scandal. The core of the conflict remains Patriarch Nourhan Manougian's illegal signing of a 99-year contract leasing the strategic Goveroun Bardez tract of land to Dany Rubenstein of Australia. According to unconfirmed reports, the Australian millionaire has close ties to Jewish fundamentalists who are aggressive proponents of Judaizing East Jerusalem where the Armenian Quarter is located.

A testimony to the brewing storm is Manougian's decision not to participate in any of the major feasts preceding Christmas. As well, rather than celebrate Christmas with the Sts. James Brotherhood, Manougian had dinner at the home of one of Armenian Convent's gatekeepers.

Manougian also canceled the traditional midnight prayers at the main square of the convent during New Year celebrations. As well, contrary to tradition, Sts. James Cathedral's bells didn't ring the following day. The patriarch also refused to host the community at the patriarchate's reception hall. At the traditional gathering, the patriarch gives oranges to attendants.



Archbishop Sevan Gharibian leading the Armenian procession to the Church of Nativity in

Bethlehem

However, the strongest indication that Manougian's and that of his right-hand man Rev. Baret Yeretsian's reign has become shaky was Manougian's absence from Christmas ceremonies at the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank. He attended the ceremony last year despite the covid-19 pandemic lockdown. The consensus among Armenian Jerusalemites is that the patriarch played truant from one of the major ceremonies of the Jerusalem Armenian Church because of his concern in negative reaction from the Palestinians of Bethlehem who, like other Palestinians, feel betrayed by Manougian's signing of the unconstitutional Goveroun Bardez lease.

The patriarch's trepidation about attending Christmas ceremonies was justified. While in the past Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh have attended the midnight ceremony, this year the Palestinian government was represented by Bethlehem Mayor Tony Salman and Dr. Ramzi Khouri, president of the Higher Presidential Committee of Church Affairs in Palestine.

"Patriarch" derives from the word "pater"—Latin for father. It's obvious Manougian is neither the father of the Sts. James Brotherhood nor of the community. He is described by a person who closely follows the affairs of the patriarchate as uncommunicative, capricious, undiplomatic, petulant, and food obsessed. Manougian is obese and can hardly walk. He doesn't interact with the Brotherhood, the civilians, or other Jerusalem church leaders. He has become a cipher, a dictatorial hermit, and an irrelevance with a knack for ostracizing people. His only support is eminence grey Yeretsian and the half-dozen clergy whose salaries he pays.

Since 1936, Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People" has sold 30 million copies and taught unknown millions of readers "people skills". Manougian's behavior suggests he is qualified to write "How to Lose Friends and Ostracize People."

Manougian's and Yeretsian's strategy in the past six months can be described in one word: stonewalling. The best example of the strategy is their refusal to show the lease contract to anyone. Any reasonable person would wonder why the pair refuse to let anyone see the patently illegal contract. Any reasonable person would also wonder whether the pair have made financial gains by signing the treacherous lease. According to a source close to the patriarchate, Manougian is planning not only to lease but also sell Armenian Church properties in Jerusalem's Old City.

If the Goveroun Bardez lease is legitimized and Manougian doesn't back down or withdraw his signature, the Australian businessman's building project at Goveroun Bardez will change the features of the Armenian Quarter and advance Israeli occupational process of East Jerusalem and particularly the Old City.



Archbishop Sevan Gharibian greeted by Palestinian officials in Bethlehem.

Since the declaration of the 17 members of the Sts. James Brotherhood condemning the Governour Bardez lease, communication between the patriarch and the Sts. James Brotherhood has ceased and the patriarch is no longer considered a faithful custodian of the Armenian properties.

The rupture of the relations between the patriarch and the two-thirds of the Sts. James Brotherhood has severely compromised the daily operations/functioning of the affairs of the patriarchate. The Armenian Church in Jerusalem is not a parish or a prelacy. It is an important institution in an international city. Patriarch Manougian must be aware of the dire current situation. If he is honest with himself and his high office, he should step down. In view of the continuing paralysis of the Armenian Patriarchate, the Sts. James Brotherhood and the community expect a speedy solution so as to salvage the image of Armenians among the public in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

Comments



H - 2022-02-04 19:27:33

Hayorti, You are correct. Just focusing on nourhan/baret evil souls, who continue bullying good Armenian residents for speaking up, are corrupt, sell properties belonging to st James and the Armenian nation, are true criminals. They deserve to be banished not just from the patriarchate but from the Armenian nation. Where are Armenian heroes from within the monastery and outside to throw them out. We repeat our support of the priests from the brotherhood who continue to demand the signature, of "Goveroun Bardez sale document" , by baret and nourhan to a Jew, null and void. In addition, worthy of mention, is the fact that for centuries, no government before the 1967 occupation of Jerusalem has used encroachment and dispossession tactics on the Armenian properties as since 1967. Nourhan and Baret should be punished for this sale/lease, and the sale of shop near Sourp Prgich cemetery.



Hayorti - 2022-01-29 15:50:15

It's not helpful to dredge up the scandalous history of Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian. Citing his misdeeds misleads people into thinking what Patriarch Nourhan is doing is not particularly bad and that the patriarchate has a history of criminal management. There have been 97 Jerusalem patriarchs. They didn't sell Armenian lands.



H - 2022-01-27 12:55:36

Thank you, Sylvie, sad reminder of an earlier scandalous period in the Armenian patriarchate. Worse now. These two low level duo khachig/nourhan should "exit the stage"? or be banished!



Hayorti - 2022-01-27 08:43:19

Re H's above comment about the "womanizing" Rev. Baret Yeretsian: In its references to Yeretsian, Keghart.org has been circumspect about the questionable U.S. career of the deplorable priest who remains vartabed fifty-five years after ordination. There are good reasons why he has been denied promotion. His behavior in various U.S. parishes where he "served" made him an undesirable spiritual leader. He was finally given refuge in Jerusalem where Patriarch Nourhan made his right-hand man and enforcer. But increasingly it looks like Yeretsian has come to dominate the relationship. (Several years ago, when Nourhan wanted to see Yeretsian become a bishop, a number of priests in North America wrote to Catholicos Karekin II and exposed Yeretsian's outrageous exploits in the United States. They asked that he be not made bishop. The catholicos canceled Yeretsian's promotion.) It's high time the Armenian media investigated the U.S. career of Yeretsian in addition to looking into the litany of his misdeeds in Jerusalem before his arrival in America and after his return to Jerusalem. The reject has been recycled into the power behind the Jerusalem Patriarchate throne. The head office of the Eastern Prelacy (?) in New York is the place to start such an investigation. That office must have the files on Yeretsian's questionable North American career.



H - 2022-01-27 02:10:45

We assumed Nourhan had good experiences that could/would enhance the glory of St. James if he became the Jerusalem Patriarch. Wrong. His first fatal mistake was to allow Baret (khachig) to return to Jerusalem. That, because all parishes where Bared had served in the US had expelled him. Baret was/is a womanizer, a bully, and a divisive man who caused a major rift between the Holy See and the Patriarchate. He now bides his time to see the Patriarch pass away. Since this uneducated clergyman, believes he deserves to be the next Patriarch. All these character flaws aside, with the help of Nourhan, secretary selling/leasing/giving away the centuries old St. James properties is an unforgivable crime. Wrapping up. Power has corrupted these two, to no end. Therefore, it will be naive to believe they will resign voluntarily. Besides, they don't deserve to resign. They should be forced to declare their signature, on the illegal sale documents of the nation's precious "Goveroun Bardez", NULL AND VOID. Return the proceeds of the sale. Then and only be forced out of the Church properties, and the Armenian nation. The only way to reverse the course of their scandalous actions. Dear loyal St James clergy, community and residents of the St. James Monastery, with the support of all Armenians, you have moral responsibility to safeguard the properties of St. James and the Armenian nation.



sylvie aharonian tertziakian - 2022-01-27 01:05:57

The Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate is a gem for the Armenian nation, its history and location bear a major significance to our nation and others. However, as an Armenian Jerusalemite, I have never felt comfortable with the "reigning" patriarchs nor their hierarchies. Going back to the 1950s, when I was a little girl, I remember the division in the community - supporters of Diran and of Yeghishe. The latter won the patriarchal campaign. Like Jesus, triumphantly, he entered Jerusalem, without the olive branch. He ruled for many years, with no concern for the community's needs. He and his partners did away with properties and treasures of the patriarchate, at their whim and for their own profit. Enters the present gang of Nourhan and Baret, the continuation of the earlier regime, minus the sophistication and oratories. It has become the Patriarchate of fear for the community. The sooner these two partners in crime exit the stage, the easier will the community breathe.



Vahakn - 2022-01-26 17:08:14

As the above letters make it clear, the Armenians of Jerusalem need the support of the diaspora to fight the criminal misrule of Patriarch Nourhan. But with few exceptions, the Armenian diaspora's media and the AGBU have played deaf and dumb to the tragedy unraveling in Jerusalem. Since the majority of the diasporan media are mouthpieces of the three political parties, I wonder why the latter has chosen not to condemn the two culprits--Patriarch Nourhan and his henchman Rev. Baret Yeretsian who are responsible for the downward spiral of the Armenian Patriarchate. What motivates the three parties and the AGBU in their rare unanimity? Don't they care about what happens to Armenian Jerusalem? Their silence makes them almost collaborators of the despicable pair.



Hagop K. - 2022-01-26 07:08:48

Keghart is the only Armenian newspaper which continues to write and demand what is right in this scandal. I encourage and support the writers of Keghart especially Hagop Hagopian who is giving us hope here in Jerusalem to protect our heritage and fight for our rights. Jerusalem is the oldest Armenian Community in the Armenian diaspora since the 4th century. It is the duty of the entire Armenian nation to stand with us, the Jerusalemite Armenians, in this fight for our history. We can't lose Jerusalem. The Armenian Patriarchate is the treasure of our nation as well as the Armenian Quarter. What's happening now in Jerusalem by Nourhan and Baret isn't acceptable, both of them should resign because if they continue to stay here we can lose other properties in the Holy Land especially inside the Old City as Hagopian mentioned in his article. Keep up the good work!

Շնորհակալութիւն

**sira** – 2022-01-26 03:50:33

Very true what you have written . We are ashamed to have such a patriarch here in Jerusalem. This Patriarch is a humiliation to our community.The best thing for him to do is to RESIGN and go away for good. Unfortunately he is controlled by this person called BARED and we still do not understand what is his gain with all the problems that he is creating here in our community .

**Armenag Derderian** – 2022-01-26 00:39:34

Very good Mr. Bakerjian! We are all together in this battle and we will do our best to protect our rights, lands and heritage in Jerusalem.

**Serop Sahagian** – 2022-01-25 17:01:17

Ջիւլանին ըսածն է, թէ ձախորդ օրերն ճմռան սման կու գան ու կ'երթան: Երուսաղէմը յանձինս նոյն նուրհանի թէ Պարետի դատապարտուած է մնալու այդ ճմեռին յաւիտեան: Ու կասկած չունիմ թէ ճմեռն է մնալու ու աթոռն գնալու եթէ սա մարդիկն սա աթոռի վրայ մնան:

**Dikran Bakerjian** – 2022-01-25 16:58:59

Super well written and it is the truth. I am a prime opposer in Jerusalem and wanted such a down to earth article that exposes Nourhan's and Baret's guilt. Because of their ill behaviour towards our church which our ancestors have protected and restored, Armenians here are suffering so much. I raise my voice to all Armenians of the world to support us and push them out of here; we live in shame as our most valuable assets fall in these dirty hands. I have translated [the article] into Arabic to share our deep wound with our Arab brothers.

**Vanig Boghossian** – 2022-01-25 16:36:03

Շատ ճիշտ խօսքեր են: Վարձքը կատար Յակոբ Յակոբեանին: Եթէ սաղիմահայութիւնը եւ ես որպէս սաղիմահայ չեմ կրնար ազատ արտայայտուիլ Յակոբ Յակոբեան մեր սրտի խօսքերը կ'ըսէ այս տողերուն մէջ:

**Vartoug Kevorkian** – 2022-01-25 15:50:19

Սաղիմահայութիւնը դժուար օրեր կ'ապրի. այսպիսի յօդուածներ պէտք են որպէսզի համայն հայութեան ներկայացուի թէ ինչ տեղի կ'ունենայ այստեղ: Երուսաղէմը վտանգի մէջ է Նուրհանին պատճառով, անկարելի է այս վիճակը շարունակուի: Նուրհանը եւ իր աջը՝ Պարետ ըսուածը 4-րդ դարէն ի վեր մեզի կտակուած ու վստահուած հարստութիւնները ծախու դրած են. կարծես իրենց պապուն մալն են: Շնորհակալութիւն «Գեղարդ»ին որ արդէն 6 ամիս է իր աջակցութիւնը կը ցուցաբերէ Սաղիմահայութեան:



Hovsep Gureghian - 2022-01-25 15:40:01

Very well written! As a Jerusalemite Armenian I'm proud that there are people abroad who are interested in what's happening here. Nourhan should leave his role as a Patriarch, he doesn't deserve this role. Abris Hagop Hagopian krichet talar.



Armenag Derderian - 2022-01-24 20:00:42

Ughhh Nourhan, do us a favor and resign! You are a big and a Hoghadu. A person who loves Sourp Hagop never acts this way. Take with you grey Yeretsian and the half-dozen clergy who continue to support you just because you pay them their salaries and get out of our lives.