STATE-CHURCH QUANDARY

Posted on December 17, 2025 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

By Serop Stepanian, Ontario, 16 December 2025

The below conversation was elicited as a result of the recent recommendation by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian that Armenia and Echmiadzin emulate the Lateran Pacts (1929), which resolved the centuries-old rivalry-conflict between Italy and the Vatican.

Arshag: I agree with Archbishop Barsamian. Since they signed the Lateran Pacts almost a century ago, there has been no serious clash between Italian state and the Vatican.

Varouj: There are too many differences between the current Armenia-Echmiadzin conflict and the centuries-old Italy-Vatican rivalry. For example, the Vatican had to give up large amount of real estate. That's not the case in Armenia unless Pashinyan demands Church property.

As well, the Vatican is an international organization whose members belong to various races and have different cultures and politics. The Vatican has to consider these differences which is not the case for Echmiadzin: while Armenians live in all four corners of the world, they are intrinsically Armenian and share the same history, religion, and traditional culture.

Arshag: O.K., I agree that the Lateran Pacts can't be the prototype for solving the State vs Church conflict in Armenia. For centuries the Armenian Church has helped navigate the nation's destiny through turbulent waters. Thus, it has earned the trust and respect of the nation.

Varouj: The Church was bestowed the leadership of Armenians in Russia and the Ottoman Empire—where the majority of Armenians lived. Empires are gone and there's now a Republic of Armenia. In other words, the Church should recognize that its role has severely diminished. It should focus on its natural spiritual mandates. Besides, some of the main leaders of the Church, such as Catholicos Karekin II and Patriarch Nourhan Manougian of Jerusalem, have been severe disappointments.

Arshag: Three quarters of Armenians live outside Armenia. Thus, the prime minister of Armenia is not their political leader. These Armenians are closer to the Church than to the government of Armenia. As well, many are hostile towards Pashinyan and condemn his foreign and domestic policies.

Varouj: Are you saying diaspora Armenians should have no say in Armenia's governance?

Arshag: Exactly. However, the diasporans can't be indifferent to Armenia's governance, especially when that government's strategy and political decisions jeopardize Armenia and its future. How long will the diaspora survive if Azerbaijan-Turkey decide to implement their long-ago planned decision to take over Armenia?

Varouj: We are drifting from our core topic: I think we started by asking how can we improve State-Church relations in Armenia.

Arshag: The surest way peace can be established is for Echmiadzin to leave the political stage and

stop taking part in anti-Pashinyan demonstrations.

Varouj: How can you expect the Church to stay silent when the country's leader behaves like a criminally insane hoodlum, rules with a heavy hand, and jeopardizes the existence of the country?

Arshag: The Church has the right to raise its voices in Armenia and abroad. However to do that, the Church has to have a spotless reputation.

Varouj: Sometimes I think the issue is not Catholicos Karekin II's alleged corruption. The undercurrent of the conflict is the Church establishment's disapproval of Pashinyan's drift from the Russian sphere to the West. As well, Pashinyan is trying to sabotage the Armenian Church by courting non-Armenian religious groups, from far away United States. He co-engineered the U.S.-rooted Prayer-Breakfast in Yerevan in November when Protestant clergy from the U.S. versed in smooth talk and marketing deigned to teach members of the oldest Church how to be good Christians. Yes, the great-grandchildren of 19th century Bible-thumping *biradars* of Western Armenia and Cilicia have invaded Armenia.

Arshag: Being the oldest Church doesn't mean its contemporary clergy is of higher quality than the clergy of other Churches. We take too much pride in being the first state to adopt Christianity.

Varouj: I know, but it's still enervating to witness the gumption of American clergy fly 6,000 miles to transmit to us the Good Word.

Arshag: I am still confused and am saddened we couldn't come up with a seamless solution to the problem. It's obvious to me that the conflict between the Church and the State has nothing to do with immorality or Pashinyan's glaring shortcomings. Russia and the United States have made Armenia their latest hegemonic arena.

Varouj: Are you saying the answer to our State-Church conflict is to be found in the Kremlin and the under repair White House?

Arshag: If Pashinyan and Karekin continue to drag down the country, it means outside interference would be necessary to restore peace.

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Comments

Manoug – 2025-12-22 18:47:09
The State-Church confrontation in Armenia is reminiscent of decisive and consequential events of the 1950s in the Middle East, at the peak of the Cold War and the rise of Arab nationalism. During that period, the Armenian Apostolic Church was also impacted. Today, the geopolitical struggle between the West and Russia (and allies) is unleashed for the domination of the Caucasus. The “conflict” between the Pashinyan regime and Etchmiadzin should be interpreted within this context. What "Arshag" presents at the end of this dialogue as an epilogue may not be that far off. “If Pashinyan and Karekin continue to drag down the country, it means outside interference would be necessary to restore peace.”

Hrach – 2025-12-19 04:35:02
Պարզապես կույր, խելագար պետք է լինել կամ հակա-ազգային և անձնական շահերի հետևորդներ որպեսզի չնկատել ու հասկանալ որ մեր Հայրենիքի թիւ ՄԵԿ թշնամին Ռուսաստանն է սկսեալ ստալինի տարիներից մինչ այս օրերը: Ուստի Ռուսին հետևողները չեն կարող համարվել հայրենասերներ և կեղծ քարոզներ մղեն Հայաստանի Պետութեան դէմ: Մեր Սուրբ Առաքելական եկեղեզին պիտի պատկանի իր ժողովուրդին, պէտք չէ խառնվի քաղաքաքանությամբ և պիղծ այս օրերի կլանը հավաքված պարոն կտրիճի շուրջ պէտք է հեռանայ մեր Ս. Եկեղեցուց քանզի բոլոր հայերը այդ անձնավորութեանը չեն ճանաչում որպես վեհափառ:

David Boyajian – 2025-12-18 21:27:30
Pashinyan - unmarried but with mistress Anna and offspring - heretofore reportedly rarely attended church. He cares absolutely nothing about the church, religion, or theology, It was so phony of him to read Bible verses to some Western theologians. Indeed, it was an embarrassment. No, Pashinyan is simply upset that much of the church (and many others) dislike his: - Constant denigration of the Genocide, Diaspora, National Church, Armenian Symbols such as Ararat, and Armenian history. I consider him to be agnostic at best, and probably an atheist who is also an anti-national liberal, a very common thing in America. Pashinyan is so strange that a couple of years back he pronounced himself, at one time, as "too patriotic" for (supposedly caring about the Genocide and Armenian territory.) Who says something like that except someone off-kilter? Not too long ago, no one anywhere could ever have imagined tolerating such an anti-nationalist fool as Pashinyan. A united opposition with an honest figurehead with a program is needed. New outrages from Pashinyan are in the works. Time grows short to act.

hovanes boyadjian – 2025-12-18 13:13:35
Arshag: The surest way peace can be established is for Echmiadzin to leave the political stage and stop taking part in anti-Pashinyan demonstrations. My thoughts exactly!

Setrag – 2025-12-17 23:18:47
Why are any criticisms about Pashinyan automatically interpreted as Dashnak-oriented or Russian propaganda? Setrag

A – 2025-12-17 21:27:05
Mr. Stepanian, in your article you have tried to keep a balance between the Catholicos and the varchabed by citing the good and the bad. No matter how the conversation between Arshag and Varouj goes, the Armenian nation needs Echmiadzin and the Catholicos of all Armenians. After losing Artsakh to Moslem Turks, losing lives and devastation of 5-6000 able bodied men and women soldiers, seeing the imprisonment of all who criticize the current regime, imprisonment of bishops criticizing the autocratic system in Yerevan, creating schism within the church, importing foreign religious groups, harassing Echmiadzin and the Catholicos is unforgivable. Any improvements needed should be acknowledged and addressed by Echmiadzin and the Catholicos himself. No other body.

Narine Harutyunyan – 2025-12-17 20:00:09

These two people are discussing Armenian state and church matters without having accurate information about the situation, statements were made based on fake news. Or they knowingly push dashnak's propaganda against Pashinyan, which is surprisingly similar to Russian propaganda. Just ridiculous!