THE BEN AND GIL MEETING

Posted on January 12, 2009 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

By Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia PA, 9 January 2009

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As everyone knows, the American government has a vast surveillance network around the world, utilizing satellites, electronic eavesdropping, and on-the-ground agents.

What most people don't know is that this surveillance includes a listening device in the private office of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

A contact at the CIA has sent me a transcript of the recent meeting between His Holiness and Aram of Giligia. He explained that a team of experts had listened intently to the recording and another team of experts had read and re-read the transcript and they have decided that there is nothing dangerous or sinister about the meeting. Thus, my contact felt comfortable about sending me the copy.

In his note, he explains that the device is sound-activated. The transcript reads as follows:

Yes?

Your Holiness, there is someone out here who claims that he is the Head of the Armenian Church and would like to see you.

The head of the Armenian Church?

Yes, Your Holiness.

But he was here just a few months ago. Well, all right, show him in. He must have forgotten something.

Hello, again, Karekin. . . . Wait, you aren't Karekin.

No, I'm Aram.

But, you told my secretary that you were head of the Armenian Church.

Well, actually, I am one of the heads.

One of the heads? Karekin didn't say anything about another head.

Yes, I expected as much. That is just like him. Wherever he goes, he never mentions me, as if I don't exist. That's why I follow him around.

Why follow him around? Why not just talk to him?

Impossible. We don't meet very often.

Why not? Etchmiadzin isn't that big, is it?

Oh, well, you see, I am not in Etchmiadzin.

I don't understand. Please explain.

You see, I am the Catholicos of the See of Giligia.

Giligia? That's in Turkey. I didn't know there were any Armenians left in that part of Turkey. What are you doing there?

Actually, I am not there. I am in Lebanon.

You are head of the Giligia See, you are in Lebanon, and you claim to be the head of the entire Church which is based in Etchmiadzin, in Armenia. It's all so confusing. After all, everyone accepts Karekin as the head of the Armenian Church. Isn't it confusing to try to convince people that there can be two heads of one church?

Yes, it is, which is why I insist the Armenian Church is unique and there are two heads and that I am one of the two heads. For the present, that is. What I am trying to do is promote myself as an equal to Karekin. And then, maybe down the road, who knows? You see, the Armenian Church was once in Giligia, as the Armenians kept getting kicked around and as it kept moving its government the Mother See kept moving with it and, so, Giligia was created when the kingdom was there. And Giligia was where the last Kings of Armenia reigned. So, when the kingdom died, the See of Giligia more or less died.

I see. And, you brought it back to life.

Well, not exactly.

Please explain.

Actually, Ben. May I call you "Ben."

Yes, please do.

You may call me "Gil." Well, you see, Ben, actually, it is too complicated for non-Armenians.

Try me. I like to play with complicated things. It keeps my mind alert.

Well, until the Kingdom was set up in Giligia, there was no See there. So the Giligian See was set up. After the kingdom died, the Mother Church moved back to Etchmiadzin and Giligia returned with it. That was in 1441. Then, in the 1930s it moved to Lebanon, but kept its name. Then, an archbishop of the Etchmiadzin Brotherhood was elected Catholicos there, and it came back to life, so to speak.

And, one thing led to another and for political reasons, during the Cold War, the Giligia See sort of, kind of, declared itself independent of Etchmiadzin.

Let me play with this, Gil. For a thousand years, there was no See in Giligia. Then for a couple-hundred years, there was a See in Giligia. Then for about five-hundred years, there was no See of Giligia. Now, there is a See, and you are its head, and you want to be considered one of the heads of the entire Church. Do I have that pretty much right? And besides, isn't the Cold War over?

There you are. I told you that non-Armenians couldn't understand it. And, Yes, the Cold War is over, but we sort of like the idea of my being a head.

But you can't be.

Well, we say we are.

You win, Gil. I really don't understand.

So, why don't we forget all about it. It really gets complicated after that. Let's leave it that I am now the head of Giligia, and I and my followers think I should be the legitimate head of the Church since I inherited the See of the last kingdom. And, besides, Lebanon is bigger than Armenia and everyone knows where it is. Hardly anyone knows where Etchmiadzin is.

I still say that none of this makes sense, and I am not going to try to understand.

You are wise. Don't bother.

All right. Now that you are here, Gil, what did you come to see me about? What can I do for you?

Well, Ben, what I would like is to have some photos taken of the two of us. I always travel with a photographer wherever I go, and have photos taken. This helps with my image--especially with Armenians. The Armenian newspapers really eat up these photos, and they make me appear more important than I am. First, they see Karekin's photos then they see mine with the same people.

That's it? You came just to have photos taken?

Yes. I hope you don't mind.

No, not really. I suppose there are some people who wonder what a Pope does all day. But, I still think all of this must get confusing and cause problems--even for Armenians--with you following in Karekin's footsteps, so to speak?

Not really. I have been doing it so often, ever since I took office, so people expect to see me go where Karekin goes. It's all very simple. Whenever I get Karekin's travel plans, I give them to my travel agent and he makes the arrangements, we set a schedule, and my Press Office does the rest.

Where will you be going next?

I am not sure, but I have heard rumors that Karekin is going to East Fignewton Falls in Idaho.

Never heard of the place.

Neither have I.

Are there any Armenians there? Maybe he is going there for a vacation.

I don't know, but if Karekin is going there, I will be going there. But, to get the matter at hand, is it possible to get some photos?

Yes, I suppose so.

Good. By the way, I will be giving you a few trinkets. They make for great props in photos.

Oh. Well, in that case, I will try to find something laying around which we aren't using, and which I can give you. When we get outside, I will ask my secretary to find something while the photographer sets up his equipment.

Good. Oh, by the way. Where is a good restaurant? I just love Italian food, but I can't get anything really good in Lebanon.

I can recommend Luigi's, in the center of Rome. Best Italian food anywhere. You must try the linguine with marinara sauce. Out of this world. And order a bottle of "Est! Est! Est!" to go with it. Great combination.

Thanks, What's the address?

I don't know. My driver takes me there. We'll ask my secretary, when we go out. By the way, if you ever go to Bavaria, I can recommend a great place for pork-sausages and sauerkraut.

No, I have no plans for Bavaria. At least, Karekin has no plans for Bavaria, so I won't be going there. And, if you are ever in Beirut, Ben, I can recommend a good shish-kebab restaurant. Oh, is it all right if I mention your name at Luigi's? I think it will help me get a good table and better service.

Yes, of course, Gil. Shall we go out and get the photo session over with? I was working on my gift list for Santa Claus, and I want to get it out before it's too late. The Italian postal service gets rushed at this time of the year.

Yes, Your Holiness.

Have they gone?

Yes, Your Holiness.

Good. Now, listen carefully. If anyone else comes here saying that he is the head of the Armenian Church, tell him I am not in.

Yes, Your Holiness.

The transcript ends there, but my contact has appended a note saying that, to be safe, two agents were sent to Luigi's to determine if it is a meeting-place for spies and foreign agents. The report says that it appears to be what it is, a restaurant. They also report that the linguine with marinara sauce is, indeed, out of this world. And the suggested bottle of "Est! Est! Est!" made the meal fantastic.

It would appear that, after all, there is really some good in all the efforts of the American surveillance networks.

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