

## Favoritism has no Place in the Church of God

What do members of any congregation expect from their church leaders? Perhaps fairness, honesty, humbleness, righteousness and acting unbiased towards all will surely make the list of all polled people.

On September 17, 2024, Assyrian singer Evin Agassi succumbed to his cancer and passed away peacefully with his family by his side. He was 78.

Immediately after the news spread on social media, many Assyrians began to issue overwhelming statements of sorrow for the passing of the Assyrian singer. This was natural since Agassi has been performing for almost 50 years. However, few went too far with their statements or the description of what Agassi meant to the Assyrian people. One, for example, stated that Agassi represented a national and educational school (thought). Another suggested that the Assyrian institutions and organizations should declare a 3-day national mourning.

We must be careful with our descriptions, definitions and give each person what he/she deserves. To say that a person represents a national and educational school (thought), that person should be involved in extensive nationalistic thoughts and activities evoking various ideas about nationalism that involve building, advancing or sustaining a nation. Singing about the return to the homeland and about Assyrian villages, for example, are noble ideas and beautiful thoughts. Songs are one way of conveying a national message to the people; it is in fact a powerful tool. But, Assyrians must give many thanks to Evin's brother, poet Givargis, who wrote almost all of Agassi's songs. Furthermore, to travel to Arbil (northern Iraq) and support the enemy of the Assyrian people (the Kurds and their puppets) is against that Assyrian nationalist school of thought that those few talked about. This author wrote about all those Assyrian singers who rushed to [Sarkis Aghajan](#) after Ishtar TV was launched in 2005/06 in Ankawa, and were paid handsomely by the Kurdish leaders for their support. There was a reason for that special status of Mr. Aghajan. In 2006, the late [Patriarch Mar Dinkha awarded Aghajan with two medals](#), one of them was created especially for him. [The church glorified him and many people followed](#). The patriarch hypnotized the people and led them to accept Aghajan. Many patriarchs awarded Aghajan with medals.



My family did not escape/immigrate to the United States so that I praise the Barzani regime that describe the Assyrians as Christian Kurds, fabricate Kurdish history by claiming that Assyrian archeological sites and remains are Kurdish or to allow the Islamic and tribal Kurds to harass the Assyrians in their historic villages in an attempt to force them to vacate their lands. My family did not escape in the middle of the night in the early days of the Iraq-Iran war so that I become a hypocrite and remain silent in the face of Barzani's oppressive actions because the church leaders are on good terms with the Barzani regime.

The Assyrian Church of the East and the synod made an official statement and worldwide monumental arrangements for Agassi's passing.

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لكنيسة المشرق الآشورية



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❖ *The Holy Synod of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East* ❖

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARIAT

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN

*"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." John 11: 25*

In the name of His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, and all the Hierarchs, Members of the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East, we extend our sincere condolences to the wife, children and extended family and friends of the late Assyrian legendary singer Evin Agassi. We were profoundly saddened to learn of his passing. However, as Christians, we enjoy a great hope in the Resurrection from the dead and the promise of new life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The late Evin was a nationalistic educational institution. Through his nationalistic music, he revitalized the Assyrian cause within the hearts and minds of our people, providing encouragement to the succeeding Assyrian generations. His lyrical compositions inspired hope for the eventual return to our ancestral homeland of Assyria and the pursuit of our rights as a nation, especially in a period and under suppressive political conditions where the Assyrian name was utterly banned from being pronounced.

His Holiness the Patriarch and the Hierarchs request that prayers be offered in all the Assyrian Church of the East parishes globally for the repose of the soul of the late Evin Agassi.

May we beseech God Almighty to grant him eternal rest in His Kingdom among all the righteous and just ones, who have been well-pleasing before Him.

+ Mar Benyamin Elya | Bishop

Diocese of Victoria & New Zealand and Secretary to the Holy Synod

20<sup>th</sup> of September 2024

Agassi traveled to northern Iraq a few times. On September 21, 2021, for example, he traveled to Arbil to pay a visit of honor to Patriarch Mar Awa on the occasion of his consecration. In another visit, he met with Aghajan and addressed him by stating: *there are many tall mountains in northern Iraq, but you are the tallest*. Seriously? I wonder if Agassi thought about that description of the tallest mountain disappeared all for a sudden? But I was always curious to know why would an Assyrian singer praise the oppressive Barzani or any of his puppets.



Let us consider the examples of the following exceptional Assyrian artists, singers, poets, nationalists, thinkers and notables:

- Ammo Baba passed away on May 27, 2009. He introduced Assyrians to all of Iraq, the whole of Asia and the world. He suffered, died poor and basically alone.
- Prof. Donny George passed away on July 11, 2011. Many argue that he was murdered. He spread the Assyrian name and cause throughout the scholarly and political world.
- Ninos Aho passed away on July 15, 2013. His passionate poetry and speeches for Assyria moved thousands of Assyrians, including this author.
- Paul (Essa) Joseph passed away in January 2015. He was a great painter, poet and sculpture since his early days of involvement with art in Kirkuk. He painted several ancient Assyrian pieces inside the large Bungalow of the Assyrian Athletic Club during the era of the Baath regime and continued his activities later in Chicago.
- Hannibal Alkhas passed away on September 14, 2010. His works have been exhibited in Iran, Europe, Canada, Australia, Israel, Dubai, and the US. He created book illustrations, His translations include modern Persian poetry into English, Carl Sandburg's poetry into Farsi, and

an illustrated volume of Hafez's poetry into Assyrian. He also established Gilgamesh Gallery, the first modern art gallery in Iran.

- George Homeh passed away on November 16, 2010. His amazing songs motivated many young Assyrians.
- Robert Bet Sayad passed away May 26, 2024. He sang many great Assyrian songs such as Betan, Qala d' Yimma, Urmi Urmi, Nani Nani, Jhari Yimman Atour, and many other patriotic songs.
- Sargon Rasho passed away in October 3, 2024. He sang and wrote beautiful traditional folklore and nationalistic songs such as Atourayeh Qoomon, shara, Gubare and many more.

Was Agassi more nationalistic than the above Assyrians to be given this unusual treatment? Agassi was a wonderful Assyrian singer who had too many songs, some of which were amazing, and he and especially his brother Givargis, a poet, deserve all the praise and recognition for their work.

The question to ask is, since when do church synods issue official statements about the passing of artists?

What did the synods of the Assyrian (Syriac) speaking churches do for the above Assyrian icons when they passed away? Is there an official protocol that the synods follow? Who decides which artist deserves a synod statement and which icon does not?

Also, did the church supporters call for a 3-day national mourning for the above passing Assyrian icons?



Having said all that, the question that begs an answer, why the special burial and memorial services for the late Evin Agassi?

Most Assyrians refuse to consider the fact that Agassi's daughter is married to Patriarch Mar Awa's brother and that explains this amazing arrangement for Agassi's funeral and for the worldwide memorial. Why not accept this reality?

This leads to the most critical question. Is it morally acceptable that the leaders of the Assyrian (Syriac) speaking churches treat one artist or icon different than the other Assyrian singers, academics, scholars, writers, poets, painters, etc. The favoritism of church leaders and their bias in dealing with living or deceased community members goes against all Christian values. We must speak the truth and reject such unchristian behavior.

I have no problem with the church. I have a problem with the church leaders who have been running the churches of the Assyrian people in the last 50 years. The church of my fathers did not praise the Kurdish leaders for reason or no reason, the same Kurdish leaders whose families massacred the Assyrian people and never bothered to make a public apology. All members of my family have served the church as priests and deacons for generations dating back to at least the 17<sup>th</sup> Century as our family tree indicates.

I know I will be tormented for telling the truth that the overwhelming majority don't want to hear or talk about. But 35 years ago, I realized that my purpose in life was to educate. Yes, I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death. However, I have acquired encouragement and strength from the golden words, *when you are honest and tell the truth, you lose people who do not deserve you*. There rests my comfort.

I know there are many out there who understand and agree, but unfortunately they prefer to remain silent in the face of unfairness, which is their way of self-preservation from possible backlash. Unfortunately, they become part of the Assyrian society problems since it is our moral obligation to speak out against injustice, unfairness, corruption, hypocrisy, etc. that plague our society.

Fred Aprim  
October 27, 2024