



Data or Dogma? A Critical Review of Khachkar Studios' 'U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem'

By Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian

In recent months, Khachkar Studios — a media outlet affiliated with billionaire Paul B. Kazarian's Charles & Agnes Kazarian Foundation — has flooded Armenian news cycles with claims of a “historically unprecedented” \$100 million investment to revitalize the “The Failing U.S. Armenian Christian Ecosystem.” Armed with corporate terminology like “Social Return on Investment (SROI),” “Benchmarking,” and “12 Body Parts,” the studio presents itself as a data-driven savior of “failing” churches.

However, a closer look at their published materials, methodology, and the actual nature of their “investment” reveals a project that is heavy on corporate jargon but strikingly light on academic rigor, transparency, and human expertise.

The \$100 Million Question: Cash or “In-Kind”?

The headline-grabbing \$100 million figure is the cornerstone of Khachkar's PR campaign. Yet, their own press releases clarify that this investment is “shepherded by 5,000 pro bono senior management hours.”

In the world of professional consulting, 5,000 hours of “senior management” time — particularly if billed at the rates of a billionaire financier — can be valued at millions of dollars on paper without a single cent of liquid capital ever changing hands. If Khachkar Studios is counting the “professional time” of its own founder as a primary component of this \$100 million, the figure is less a philanthropic gift and more an internal accounting exercise.

In the 2023 IRS filing, the “book value”

of the Foundation's “total assets” is shown as \$209 million. The Foundation's “core competency is to improve Government Financial Performance (GFP) and Government Total Balance Sheet (GTBS) literacy.” From this perspective, “\$100 million” is almost half of the Foundations assets ostensibly being “invested” in Khachkar Studios.

Methodological “Black Box”

Khachkar Studios claims to have conducted an “18-month research” project including “69 years of Armenian Church related materials and world-class benchmarking data.” They frequently cite a “3% faithfulness rate” among U.S. Armenians, ranking the community in the “bottom decile” of 23 Orthodox groups.

There is no publicly available white paper detailing the methodology behind these numbers. Where did the “verified attendance counts” for 106 parishes come from? Were they self-reported, observed, or estimated? They define “faithful” strictly as those attending non-holiday Sunday services. This narrow KPI ignores the complex ways Armenian identity and faith intersect through community service, cultural education, and private devotion. The “data” provided on the Khachkar website often consists of one-page PDF summaries and “Briefing Packets” that repeat the same conclusions without showing the raw data or the statistical models used to calculate, for example, the 6.1x SROI.

The AI-Generated Authority

For a project supposedly dedicated to “revitalizing human faith,” the output of Khachkar Studios is remarkably devoid of human presence. Their extensive library of

podcasts and “Good News” videos (Workstream #2) consists almost entirely of AI-generated voices and avatars.

This creates a bizarre paradox: a studio claiming to “empower role models” and “build discipleship” is doing so through synthetic media. The reliance on AI suggests a lack of actual scholars, theologians, or community leaders willing to put their names and faces behind these “studies.”

Who Are the Experts?

There is no “About” information on Khachkar Studios' website, other than the statement that it “is an affiliate of the Kazarian Foundation — created by Paul B. Kazarian in 1993. The Foundation's filings reveal that beyond Paul Kazarian and the institutional names of his firms (Japonica Partners, JI-Analytics), there are no listed advisory board members of Khachkar Studios, for instance, professionals, sociologists, theologians, or other academic experts.

Research into a centuries-old religious institution requires more than just “management excellence”; it requires an understanding of ecclesiology and ethnic sociology. Without a transparent list of qualified professionals running these “studies,” the conclusions feel less like social science and more like a top-down corporate audit.

The “Ecosystem” Fallacy

Khachkar's “12 Body Parts” systems map attempts to consolidate the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical churches into a single “ecosystem.” While these groups share an ethnic heritage, they possess vastly different ecclesiological structures, governance models, and historical trajectories.

By flattening these distinctions into a single “underperforming” metric, Khachkar ignores the unique strengths and challenges of each denomination. The “Framework” assumes that a “one-size-fits-all” corporate management strategy — designed for “global large caps” (as per Kazarian's Japonica Partners profile) — can be seamlessly applied to the nuanced life of a parish.

Data or Dogma?

Transparency is the bedrock of credible research. If Khachkar Studios wishes to be taken seriously by the community it seeks to “save,” it must move beyond slick PDFs and AI-generated podcasts. It must publish its full methodology, name its experts, and clarify exactly how much of the \$100 million is actual liquidity versus “in-kind” consulting fees.

Until then, the “Armenian Christian Ecosystem” study remains less a scientific discovery and more a private “pet project” dressed in the borrowed robe of data science.

For sure, “Armenian Christianity” today undoubtedly faces major institutional problems and serious challenges, but the central question is how to address these complex issues and develop effective, sustainable solutions. This requires not only sound methodology but also open communal dialogue — one that involves the clergy, lay leaders, and the faithful in a collective discernment process. Top-down directives alone have rarely proven sufficient; lasting change depends on conversations that reflect the lived experiences and concerns of the wider community.

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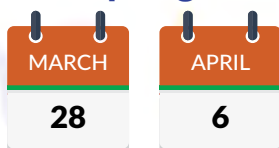


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