

## LATIN RITE ROMAN CATHOLICS OF ARMENIAN DESCENT IN SYRIA

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The article discusses the Latin Catholic proselytism that took place starting the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in northwestern regions of Syria with dense Armenian population, the conditions and methods of spreading the Latin rite Roman Catholic faith, the composition of Latin communities of Armenian descent, as well as the existence of numerous Armenian families that comprise separate churches or are scattered among the non-Armenian Latin rite Roman Catholic communities. The essence of Latin Church and its approach to the national values are touched upon; thereafter efforts to bring the Latin rite Roman Catholics back to the Armenian Church, as well as the current situation of the remaining Latins are presented.

An attempt is made to present in this article all of the above-mentioned topics against the backdrop of the general situation related to foreign religious movements and the Armenian Church.

### *The Background of Foreign Proselytism*

Although in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Armenian Church was properly represented in the region with three Hierarchical Sees (Sis Catholicosate, Constantinople and Jerusalem Patriarchates), yet none of the diocese authorities operated normally. Church wardens and candle-store managers were representatives of local landowner families. The supervisors of the Church-owned lands, archi-

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mandrites or bishops, would visit the area just once a year to collect the tithe on the harvest, like an ordinary estate inspector or *mutawalli*. After adoption of the Armenian National Constitution (in the Ottoman Empire) both the Sis Catholicosate and Jerusalem Patriarchate staged silent opposition to the Constantinople Patriarchate, but avoided assuming responsibilities for the urgent needs of the people, whereas the Constantinople Patriarchate waited the Constitutional authorities to come forward first and only then would tend to intervene and provide assistance. The region suffered from a confusion of triple diocesan power, where each faction pursued their own interests. Articles and complaints frequently appearing in the press actually remained unanswered. This inauspicious spiritual, educational, social, economic and national situation of the Armenians in Cilicia and Antioch region did not change.

The inability, indifference and internal strife of the Armenian Church were major spurs pushing the Armenian people towards foreign creeds.

Being aware of the troubled state of affairs in the Cilicia and Antioch dioceses, absence of supreme religious authority and disorderly situation in the parishes, the Catholicos of All Armenians Khrimian Hayrik wrote in his encyclical dated February 11, 1899 to Maghakia Ormanian, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople: “More and more lamenting and sorrowful letters from the land of Cilicia are reaching me. Reading these letters makes me sad, letters that not only roar – it’s famine, famine – but also tell about the conditions of the abandoned and pastor-less people for whom there is no shepherd and leader, no overseer and visitor.” Khrimian was very much concerned about the wave of faith conversions that had been gradually increasing: “Woe unto me and woe unto you; I am now horrified and so should be you, as the historical chronicles will record that ‘in the times of pontificate of Mkrtych Catholicos and patriarchate of Archbishop Ormanian, vast parishes of Cilicia and Vaspurakan converted to Catholicism.’ The historians will not limit it to this short sentence, but will lay down many accusations in the pages of their

historical accounts. We shall work and do our best to erase with God's help this shameful and disgraceful future book of history.”<sup>1</sup>

In these circumstances the Protestant preaching has made great advances in the region in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Protestantism has penetrated in almost all settlements, and in some places it took the whole population under its umbrella. Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners, and later also the Anglican and Irish churches sponsored this movement, often clashing with each other. The Catholic movement penetrated the region with the same strength, although the Andonian-Hassunian controversy arisen in 1870s weakened its vigor. Later the Latin rite Roman Catholic missions came to the assistance of the Catholic clerics, thus setting grounds for establishment of a church with a different Catholic rite, the Latin Church.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Forming Patterns of the Neophyte Communities*

The fathers of the Latin Church employed the same methods as the Protestant and Catholic preachers did previously to proselytize among Armenians and establish their communities. For example:

- Under some favorable circumstances arisen in the Ottoman Empire, a social class had emerged in large villages, towns and cities that had an upper hand in market relations; in 1840-50s they tried to take over the spiritual and educational affairs, and met opposition from the old authorities. The foreign missionaries came to their assistance and that is how the Protestant, Catholic and Latin communities were created and recognized as separate “*millet*”, independent from the “*Ermeni millet*” that were people adhering to the Armenian Church.

<sup>1</sup>Վաւերագրեր Հայ Եկեղեցու Պատմութեան, Գիրք Դ., կազմեց՝ Սանտրո Բեհբուղեան, Երևան, 1997, pp. 18-19, վաւերագիր թիւ 6:

<sup>2</sup>In order to avoid complicating the article with too many references, it is suggested to see the following works by the author: «Քեսապ», Ա. հատոր, Հալէպ, 1995, sections «Քեսապը 19րդ դարու առաջին կիսուն», «Համայնքներ», «Մայր համայնքին վիճակը», «Կրթական տեսութիւն», pp. 55-80. «Քեսապ», Գ. հատոր, Հալէպ, 2004, section «Ազգայնական շարժումը Հայ Աւետ. համայնքէն ներս», pp. 411-458. «Անտիոքի Մերձակայ Ռուճի Հովիտի Հայերը», Անթիլիաս, 2006, chapters «Լատին քարոզչութիւնը եւ Գնիէի լատինացումը եւ Ռուճի Հովիտը Մեծ Եղեռնէն ետք», pp. 122-205:

- These converted persons put the peasantry in a market-based dependence and exerted influence over them, gradually converting whole settlements.
- In the Antioch district the foreign creeds were forced upon people first of all through conversion of the priests and sometimes the managers of the church candle-stores. The priests and candle-store managers did not want to be accountable and seized the church revenues and lands under the powerful protection of foreign missionaries in courts of law.
- The fight for ownership of church buildings often ended in their destruction. The newly formed community usually received a permission to build a new church, whereas the mother community was unable to win the right to restore its church or even to claim the ownership of the ruins. Court cases took decades and the mother community would never win anything. An interesting fact to mention is that litigation continues up to date over the ruins of the Holy Mother of God Church in Karaduran village of Kessab district that had been razed in 1860.
- The converted communities saw quick changes in their spiritual, educational, economic, social and everyday life aspects. They would have official lyceums, adult schools, nicely constructed church school buildings, doctors and sanatoriums, job/business opportunities, and new phenomena entered in their everyday lives and relations. The Armenian community remained impoverished, uneducated and derided; for many people the only way out of this situation was to convert to the foreign creed.
- Almost everywhere the relations soured between the neophytes and adherents of the Mother Church. Intermarriages were forbidden, the Armenian estates were destructed or taken over, and even the cemeteries became subject of disputes.
- The adherents of foreign creeds always felt protected before high authorities of the Ottoman Empire, and hence, before the local officials and ad-

ministrators. In addition to being protected by the foreign missionaries who considered the converts their own flock, the neophytes also enjoyed protection of the Italian, UK, German, French and American consulates in Latakia, Antioch, Aleppo, Alexandretta, which did anything that the missionaries told them to do. In exchange for conversion, the foreign missionaries protected the people from malevolence of Ottoman officials and even from arbitrary actions of some Armenian leaders.

### *Emergence of Latin Rite Roman Catholic Communities*

The Latin rite Roman Catholicism made its first appearance in the region in 1878, in the Arab-speaking Ghneye village. Members of Jobie family were indignant with the village head Hanneh and incited some of the co-villagers who they were to some extent dependent on them against Hanneh. The Prelate of Aleppo confirmed Hanneh's position and did not allow the Jobies to interfere with the church and educational affairs. The village priest Rev. Mesrob Nazlian from Karin was obviously against Hanneh's monarchy and joined the Jobies faction. He claimed ownership of the village's olive gardens that belonged to the Jerusalem and Cilicia Sees and refused to report to Hanneh. Hhhh The Jobies sought protection with Armenian Catholic and Protestant notables in Aleppo. However, due to the Andonian-Hassunian controversy, the Catholics were not able to satisfy the people, and so were not the Protestants, again due to internal strife. At some point the oppositionists sided with the Greek Orthodox, but realizing that an Eastern church would have not been able to protect their autonomy, they appealed to the Latin rite Roman Catholic missionaries in Aleppo. These missionaries penetrated the village and added tension to the relations. They created their own community. Along with the Jobies, 30-40 families converted to Latin rite Roman Catholicism, including Rev. Mesrob. Hanneh locked the doors of the church and did not let in even the convert priest. The Armenian Church sent a new priest to

the village and tried to boost the school activities, but failed to restore the community. Hassle and court cases lasted for about thirty years. The Latin Catholics somehow managed to record with state authorities that all villagers, including the new priest, are Latin rite Roman Catholics, and harassed any opposition. Efforts to save the church and lands were useless, because the courts would not recognize existence of Apostolic Armenian families in the village. The St. Cyprian Armenian church was dismantled by the Latins. By 1906 the village was fully Latin rite Roman Catholic and ceased to be a parish of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Latins turned Ghneye village into their stronghold and launched their preaching and proselytizing activities from there. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Arab-speaking village Yakoubiye had also been partly Latinized. In these two villages the Latin rite Roman Catholics had monasteries with church, school and benevolent departments. It was a different rite church and Armenian language was not taught at the school.

During the next decades the Latin Catholics had certain success among the population of Armenian and Arab Christian villages and cities of the region. The Latinized Armenians of Latakia and Antioch made bonds with the local Latin Catholic churches, whereas those in the Armenian populated villages Aramo, Ghnemiye and Arpali created relations with the Latin Catholic communities of nearby Arab villages and severed ties with the Armenian rite churches and Armenian life.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the Armenian Catholic communities, the Latin Catholic missions penetrated in a number of regions to implement educational and benevolent activities. Armenian Catholic communities handed their educational affairs over to them, who soon established monasteries, attached school buildings and succeeded in creating small communities (Beilan, Hadji Habibli), thus producing two Catholic communities – Armenian rite and Latin rite.

Excellent conditions for Latin Catholic preaching appeared in 1890s, after the surrender of Hunchakians in Kessab and Musa Ler districts, when contrary to the government promises many were persecuted, arrested and jailed. Turkish *aghas* of nearby districts multiplied their tyranny. All of a sudden Latin “protection” appeared in Kessab. In a short period of time two Latin rite Roman Catholic monasteries were founded in Kessab district and Latin communities were established in several villages. Lower Baghjaghaz village was totally Latinized. In Kessab, Latin rite Roman Catholicism found some acceptance because of the perspective that the Latin fathers would be able to protect them and their property from the terror of Turkish *aghas* and government officials. It was the same reason for the families in Beilan area to convert to the Latin rite.

The Latin fathers skillfully used for proselytism the circumstances of those who survived the 1909 calamity, claiming credit for transportation of Armenians of Kessab and surroundings to Latakia by Italian and French vessels, as well as for averting imminent invasion of Yakoubiye and Ghneye villages. Such preaching resulted in attracting more neophytes and expanded the Latin community of Yakoubiye.

For some reasons still unknown to date, populations of Ghneye and Yakoubiye villages were not deported in 1915. All of Ghneye and part of Yakoubiye were Latin Catholics. The Armenian Apostolic priest of Yakoubiye had passed away. A Latin leader dared to claim that both villages were spared deportation and saved from atrocities of bands spread throughout the region only thanks to the Latin Church, and that only the will and capability of the Latin Church can help these two villages stay afloat and survive. Even the most traditionalist villagers had to remain silent and put up with this. They knew well that the Latin Church and priests were unable to save Armenians of Latin rite Roman Catholic faith in Kessab, Musa Ler, Antioch, Beilan, Zeitun and Marash from deportation. Whether or not avoiding deportation here

had to do anything with intervention of the Latin priests, the latter could any time put their lives in danger.

In 1923, when the French mandate over Syria had already been established, Archimandrite Nerses Dolabjian, the supervisor of the Latakia monastery of Jerusalem Patriarchate and Antioch Vicar General visited Yakoubiye and reported about the situation to Catholicos Sahak. The village was in fact fully Latin. All spiritual needs, without exception, were taken care of by Latin Catholic fathers; the people went to a Latin church and marked Latin feast days, children attended a Latin school. Armenian language was not taught, and there was neither national life nor external national relations.

Some of the families in Yakoubiye wanted to restore their religious/educational activities, but did not dare to act on their own. The superintendent of village lands that belonged to Jerusalem and Cilicia Sees, Ibrahim Musa, had not reported to anybody since pre-war times, because actually, neither Sis Catholicosate, nor Aleppo Armenian Prelacy existed anymore.

In summer 1923 Catholicos Sahak II Khabayan paid a visit to Kessab area. A group of nationally oriented Yakoubiye villagers managed to get 90 families sign a letter and went with it to Kessab, presented the situation of their village to the Catholicos and requested help from him. After having thoroughly investigated the situation and the moods of the villagers, the venerable patriarch personally visited Yakoubiye village. The visit of Catholicos inspired courage to the desperate and helpless villagers. On the spot, in St. Anna Church he ordained Serop Ayanian to priesthood as Rev. Husik. The Catholicos ordered that the income from olive gardens of the village belonging to the Cilicia Catholicosate and Jerusalem Patriarchate should be allocated to the priest to provide for his living. As for the school, the Catholicos promised to make appeals to the Benevolent Union and “free the young children from the clutches of the fanatical Latin clerics”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> «Հայաստանի Կոչնակ», Նիւ Եոքք, 1923, թիւ 46, p. 1459ա:



It appeared the Armenian community of the village finally found peace. However, the Franciscan archimandrite residing in Ghneye could not take it easy at all. He utilized the ugliest methods of proselytism against those Yakoubiye villagers who returned back to the Mother Church, including promises of food and money, pressures and tortures. The local and provincial French authorities supported the Franciscan Order. They tortured and expelled the newly ordained Rev. Husik from the village, closed the church and the school, seized the national estates and forcibly converted the whole village, 120 families to the Latin faith.<sup>1</sup> The Latins harmed the traditionalist villagers every way they could, such as breaking their windows, cutting their trees, closing the church, seizing the church-owned lands, threatening with weapons and terrorizing. Almost all families of Yakoubiye were divided, especially the Mstarih and Kassis-Yeretsian families. The responsible person for the church-owned olive gardens that were to provide for living of the priest, Ibrahim Musa, did not give any of the income to the priest and seized the land.

Having played such an important positive role in the village community during the pre-war period, Ibrahim Musa now actually played into the Latin hands because of this personal issue, and he eventually converted to the Latin faith.

Although the litigation with Catholicosate delayed the issue of the Armenian rite church and Armenian school, but a number of villagers could not forgo the need for these institutions. They would even agree to accept patronage of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate in order to escape from the Latin community. This could also contribute to reconciliation of the two segments of the village. For Yakoubiye it was no longer an issue of choice between Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic communities, but rather an issue of having an Armenian rite church through which the need to be connected

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<sup>1</sup> Աբրահամ Երեցեան, Եագուպիէ- Հայկական Հին Գաղթօճախ Մը, «Գեղարդ Սուրիահայ Տարեգիրք», Հալէպ, Բ. տարի, 1976-1978, p. 368:

with the Armenianness could be satisfied. Both Latin and Armenian Apostolic residents of Yakoubiye jointly appealed to the Armenian Catholic Prelacy of Aleppo, but the latter could not do anything either. The Latin fathers did not want to give up the community status they have created themselves. For them the only way the villagers could go was conversion to the Latin rite Roman Catholicism.

After the lawsuit issues were in some way resolved with Ibrahim Musa, in 1928 by the order of Catholicos Sahak, the Primate of Aleppo Diocese the Most Reverend Artavazd sent a priest to Yakoubiye, Rev. Papgen Adjemian, who was a native of Sassoun and a fluent speaker of Arabic language. He was able to consolidate the scattered flock, inspire courage and faith in them. The villagers felt safe in the caring hands of the Mother Church. In 1929 Archbishop Artavazd Surmeyan, Primate of Aleppo Diocese and members of the national authority visited Yakoubiye and the villagers greeted them as liberators. The already mentioned Rev. Papgen Adjemian was appointed the village priest. He courageously and competently organized the community, successfully dealt with the process of returning people to the mother community, reinstated peace amongst the villagers. In 1930 the Community Council was established. Part of the village community was saved from being finally lost and began living in the Armenian way.

After Cilicia was emptied from Armenian population in 1922 and the new Syrian Armenian community was formed, new Latin rite Roman Catholics of Armenian descent came to add to the number of Latins that had taken roots in the old community in Syria. For example, Latinized Armenians from Marash, Zeitun, Aintab and other regions fleeing to Syria found refuge with old and new Latin churches or Latin missions in Syria, which had been attracting all the refugees who had economic, educational, medical and employment needs. In every place where the Latins had centers, the process of Latinization continued in exchange for taking care of these needs. The Arme-

nian national and religious circles often expressed concern about the dangers and damages caused by conversion to the foreign creed, and this was reflected in the press. Latin churches and schools were multiethnic entities. Many Latinized Armenian families became part of the Latin Church parishes in Aleppo, Latakia, Damascus and Deir ez-Zor.

### ***The Peculiarities of the Latin Church***

The Latin rite Roman Catholic Church did not attribute any national image to itself. Unlike the “Armenian Evangelical” or “Armenian Catholic”, there was no notion of “Latin Armenian”, as the Latin fathers by no means allowed that. Latin Catholicism was against the national idea, and hence, also it was against the national Church Saints, Armenian traditions and history of Armenia. Instead of those, it spread the Latin faith, and filled the everyday life of the faithful with Latin saints and holidays. It was more flexible in the area of education though: among the Armenian speakers, as necessary, teaching Armenian language at the schools was allowed. In the schools of Ghneye and Yakoubiye Armenian was not in the curricula simply because the faithful in these villages were Arabic-speaking. In such cases the Latin clerics were very tough about any relation and ties of the neophytes with the national roots and values. Any national aspiration was despised on the grounds that Latin rite Roman Catholicism is an international power, encompassing all continents, colors and local languages.

In their activities the Latin fathers aimed at creating their community among the Eastern Christians and having a separate community status from the perspective of the government. This would make a solid ground for their activities. For this reason they had an objective of constant expansion and acquisition of more neophytes. Their first thing to do was getting the neophyte family with all its members recorded as Latin Catholics in the government registers. That is why Armenians were always very careful with each other,

because any misunderstanding or intolerance in the local branch of the Benevolent Union, or church's community council, or school board or even in relations between the parents and the school could lead to Latinization. Some people even tended to use the threat of conversion to Latin faith in order to force their will or whim.

During the Ottoman rule the Latin community's feeling of superiority was widespread. As the Latin rite Roman Catholic Church was a Western church, the Latins of East considered their communities an open door to Europe, and they had the self-conceit of presenting themselves as envoys of the European civilization. All of this naturally prompted the Latins to look down on the Eastern Christians, especially their fellow Armenians. The Latin Church had managed to convince their faithful that the Latin rite Roman Catholicism means internationalism and cannot be confined in the national shells. For the Latins, the Armenian Church and the Armenianness that existed thanks to that Church were regressive and anachronistic phenomena. The Protestants, Armenian Catholics and Latin rite Catholics of the Antioch region used to ridicule Apostolic Armenians calling them "Armenian the red slipper." Red slipper was a sign of backwardness there. In those days confessional affiliation was generally perceived as equal to ethnic affiliation.

Once the French took over Syria after 1920, the Latin rite Catholics gained a special status. In practice, the adherents of the Latin Church had many privileges compared to the others, since they enjoyed the patronage and special attitude of the government operating under the Mandate. The Latin rite Roman Catholics comprised the largest portion in the state, regional and village governments. During the French rule all sorts of office tenures were more accessible to them. Latins of Armenian descent dissociated themselves from their kinfolk adhering to another rite and looked down upon them, thus stirring up more inter-confessional intolerance.

### ***Return to the Mother Church***

In 1890s, during the first decade of the national liberation movement, especially when the Hunchakian Party penetrated the Antioch region, some settlements of the area, such as Beilan, Musa Ler and Kessab experienced a national and patriotic urge. The previously accepted “protestant” and “catholic” identifications were then replaced with “Armenian Evangelical” and “Armenian Catholic” identities. This was a period of rapprochement between the communities.

In the period subsequent to the Ottoman Constitution, especially after the 1909 Calamity, all communities of the region made great efforts to recover, especially the Armenian Apostolic community that wished to surpass the other communities in the fields of schools construction and education, despite lacking the vast financial capabilities of the others. This was a new period of national/patriotic movement which inspired the Armenian Evangelical and Catholic youth as well. In this period the need for nationally-oriented upbringing was felt in a number of areas, such as Kessab and Musa Ler. For the sake of this goal there was a serious aspiration to take the schools away from the confessional authorities and make them independent. Even a return to the national roots was observed. For many people this meant return to the Mother Church. The mentioned goal was the underlying rationale for establishment of the Kessab Educational Association in 1910, in which the majority of members were young Dashnaks from the Evangelical community.

In any case the confessional division hindered the overarching goal of national unity. This was particularly evident in 1915, when the Turkish authorities played the confessional game to sow discord among the population of Kessab, which had all the readiness and means for resistance. The defense forces were weakened by the Turkish promise made to the Protestants that only Apostolic Armenians were going to be deported. Eventually, the Protestants were deported too.

On the other hand, the opposite thing happened as well. After returning from exile, when there was no external support, responding to the Catholicos Sahak's call, the Protestants supported the idea of joint schools, at least for some time.

In 1930s the youth of the Protestant community wanted to reorganize the Evangelical Church on national basis. This sent some powerful shockwaves in the community. Due to this formidable movement mass returns to the Mother Church were observed in many places, especially in the Kessab district. This movement still continues to exist.

This movement found its way to the Catholic community as well, where the educational affairs were handled by foreign priests of the Latin rite community. Incidentally, after the return from exile, teaching of the Armenian language had gained more prominence in the joint Armenian Catholic-Latin Catholic schools. However, even this no longer satisfied the parents and students. The Armenian Catholic community demanded more attention to the national education, so that History of Armenia is taught in addition to the Armenian language at the community schools managed the Latin fathers. The movement was headed by Archimandrite Thomas Katchaznoui, a minister of the Armenian Catholic community. The demand of the Catholic community was turned down. Fr. Katchaznoui founded a new school together with a group of his students and a number of assisting teachers. So the Latins conceded; History of Armenia was included in the curriculum and the school was united back. However, the wave against the Latin rite Roman Catholic Church did not come to an end. The nationally minded people felt that the existence of the Latin rite Roman Catholic community is needless and pointless when the Armenian Catholic community already existed. In the Armenian circles the Latin Church with its differing rite was seen as something unnecessary. The issue was finally brought to the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate and Papal Nunciature in Beirut. Ultimately, through mediation of Car-

dinal Agagianian and by the Papal Decree, on July 30, 1946 the Latin communities of the Kessab district were dissolved, their members, churches and monastic estates were transferred to the Armenian Catholic community, and the Latin fathers left the region.<sup>1</sup>

***The Remaining Parishes of the  
Latin Rite Roman Catholics of Armenian Descent***

With Turkish annexation of Sanjak of Alexandretta in 1939, and then dissolution of Latin communities in the Kessab district only the following Latin communities of Armenian descent were left in entire Syria:

- All of the Ghneye village;
- Part of the Yakoubiye village;
- A dispersed mass of Arab-speaking or Armenian-speaking people that are part of the Latin Church parishes in various places.

Among the Armenian-speaking people of the above-mentioned mass many tend to have an urge to return to the Armenian rite. This is manifested especially on occasions of baptism or wedding, when people wish the ceremony to be held in the Armenian rite. The Latin Church prohibited this, because if a ceremony happened in an Armenian rite church then its subjects would have to be registered as Armenian Catholics or Apostolic Armenians. However, today this is doable to some extent, particularly in Aleppo.

In the mentioned mass, especially for the Arabic-speaking part, the cultural and social isolation leads to alienation, which always highlights and elevates the value that has caused such alienation. In this case it is the Latin rite Roman Catholicism. The same is true for the Greek Orthodox Armenians, as well as those Protestants who are part of the local Arab Evangelical Church parishes. The parishes of the Presbyterian Church in Latakia are comprised mostly of Arabic-speaking protestant Armenians from Ghnemiye and Aramo.

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<sup>1</sup> Յակոբ Զոլարեան, Քեսապ, Ա. հատոր, ք. 145, 252-255:

After Syria gained independence in 1946, Arab nationalism became the state ideology, traces of the colonial government were eliminated and activities of the foreign missionaries were banned. The Arabic-speaking Latin communities of Ghneye and Yakoubiye faced a difficult situation with their identity choice: are they Armenians or Arabs?

It is worth mentioning the important role that ethnic Armenian Latin clerics played in maintaining the national affiliation of both Armenian-speaking and Arabic-speaking populations. Indeed, since 1920s there were several ethnic Armenian priests and even some Europeans among the Latin missionaries who played a considerable role in this direction. Some of them had interest and writings in the field of Armenian studies, for example Fr. Haroutiun Msrlian, Fr. Talon, Fr. Mstirih and others. Some of them implemented pastoral care duties. Among those, Fr. Haroutiun Chamichian after serving a liturgy used to lead the Armenians of his Aleppo parish to an Armenian church, so that they could also familiarize themselves with the Armenian Church and *sharakans*. He even organized summer schools of Armenian language for children in Ghneye village.

The Latin rite Roman Catholic population of these two Arabic-speaking villages may return to the Armenian identity, perhaps may even become Armenian-speakers, if thoroughly developed policies are implemented. It is important to know, that many of them are still conscious about their origins, their interest toward Armenian values gradually awakens, they seek to marry women who can speak Armenian, to bring back the spoken Armenian language to their homes. However, they blame the Armenian circles for not considering them as Armenians. For instance, they always question: why their Apostolic co-villagers can go and study in Armenia as Armenians, while they are not accepted as such. The Diaspora does not have a legal means to make connections with such people; can the national state have it?

Except for the religious differences, in the aforementioned villages there are no differences between the Apostolic and Latin communities in everyday



live, forms of economic activities and customs. The household culture is no less important than the religion. Despite having high importance and influence, the language and confession (even the religion) are not always the decisive criteria in determining a group's ethnic affiliation. This can be surely stated for the language, with regards to Armenian community of Yakoubiye, people of Aramo and Ghnemiye, as well as a significant part of the faithful in the Armenian Catholic Church of Aleppo. Being Armenian Apostolic or Armenian Catholic, they have always been linked with the Armenian collectivity and keen to preserve its values.

If the Armenian Catholic clergy exerts proper persistence, the Latin rite Roman Catholics of Ghneye and Yakoubiye villages could be re-connected to Armeniacy without any serious shocks, by transferring them under the auspices of the Armenian Catholic Church with permission of Vatican, as it happened in Kessab district back in 1946. There is a legal issue here as well: the Armenian language cannot be taught at the Latin school merely because for the government Armenian is a liturgical language, and hence, teaching it can be authorized only in the schools of the Armenian rite communities.

On the other hand, the formula "Armenian = member of the Armenian Apostolic Church" is a profoundly wrong one to use. Today, both Armenian Catholic and Armenian Evangelical confessions bear the Armenian traits and adhere to the Armenian traditions. Utmost vigilance should be exercised with regard to these individuals and masses, as not to push them further away instead of returning them to the fold of the nation. After all, nation is a different concept than language, confession, church and religion. There are multi-confessional and multi-religious nations, and there are multiethnic confessions and religions. The same can be stated about the language-to-nation relationship. It is well known that confession and language are the most powerful factors for assimilation, but even under conversion and language change certain political circumstances may prompt a reverse shift.

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