

To take first the attempted foundation in Julfa, where the policy of the Carmelites, hitherto based on conciliation and negotiation for union, entered on a radical change of method. The increased traffic to, and temporary residence of Armenian traders in Italy and other European countries, including Poland—a feature which had sprung up in the previous twenty years or so and was unknown before that—had its detrimental side: Fr. Paul Piromalli, O.P., afterwards Archbishop of Nakhchiwan and widely famed as Bishop of Bisignano and of Città di Castello, then one of the Dominican missionaries in Nakhchiwan, wrote from Isfahan to the Sacra Congregation, 5.4.1644:<sup>1</sup>

“The Armenians of Isfahan, and in particular those who return from Europe, are the most opposed to union and the most mordant in turning the people from the devotion they have for Rome . . .”

and almost on the same date, 3.4.1644, an Augustinian, Fr. Joseph de Rosario, from Isfahan was notifying the Sacra Congregation:<sup>2</sup>

“We constantly suffer persecution from the Armenians, on account of which the removal of all missionaries from these parts is to be foreseen. If against those who dwell without hindrance in the lands of Catholic sovereigns it were threatened, and by some demonstration made clear to them, that the Catholic sovereigns would take ill any molestation caused us, perhaps we should be freed (from it). . . .”

The Garmelite Fr. Dionysius of the Crown of Thorns had already proposed, 7.11.1643,<sup>3</sup> to the Secretary of the Sacra Congregation action in Europe as one way to stay this malice—here were the Armenian traders enjoying many advantages in Catholic countries of Europe, and enriching themselves and returning to Julfa to bite the hands which had fed them:

“Many of the principal men there (Julfa) desire us to go there, and they recognize readily every truth of the Catholic Faith: and they are discontented with their schismatic bishop and priests. Now the difficulty is . . . these poor Armenians are subjected to the power of Persians and, were any one of them opposed to it to go and accuse the others to the Shah’s officials, saying that they wanted to bring ‘Franks’ into this place—Julfa—those officials would spoil and upset everything,<sup>4</sup> and the Armenians in question would besides be condemned to pay large fines and penalties, so that the richer men are the most timorous.

“I proposed in my last letter to you, as one way out of this, that as these Armenians trade largely in Venice, Leghorn, Marseilles—were the Sacra Congregation to choose a good representative, and were he to arrange with the Duke of Florence, the Signory at Venice (or, if the king of France would be so graciously pleased) to appoint someone as their resident Agent in Julfa and write to the king of Persia to assign a place there for the Agent, and also write to Khwajeh Paulus, the richest and most influential man in the Armenian community, in favour of the missionary in question (who best might have the name of ‘Agent’), it seems to me that in this way a place could be obtained in Julfa without any other difficulty: from such (procedure) the Armenians promise us much benefit and profit to souls. . . . I also tell your Lordship that the church of the Jacobites is now vacant by the death of Rabban Elias: if there were any missionary here knowing the Arabic language, this church could easily be taken over by the Catholics. . . .”

Almost identical language occurs in yet a third letter, addressed to the Praepositus General of the Order, 8.5.1645.<sup>5</sup> It will be seen in the sequel of a whole hundred years and more how

<sup>1</sup> *S.R.*, vol. 62, p. 257 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*, p. 214; *idem.*, p. 204, 20.6.1644.

<sup>4</sup> There is in almost similar terms a letter dated 20.6.1644 (*S.R.*, vol. 62, p. 204) where he used the expression, “To become a Catholic is here called by no other name than to become a ‘Frank’ (*Farangi*)”, which reveals much of the bias confronting any missionary in that part of the world.

<sup>5</sup> O.C.D. 237 c.