

“At once on learning of the deaths of the two Religious I informed the Dominican Fathers at Mausil, three in number, so that they might immediately dispatch one of them. They answered that they would await the instructions of their superiors on the subject. . . .”

Fr. Dominic Lanza, O.P.’s, own explanation,¹ given to the Sac. Congregation, was that he was “unable to send a companion to Julfa for Fr. de Bernardis, because the two in Kurdistan “are already well occupied in separate places. . . .” So for several years that Dominican was to remain alone at Julfa.

Notwithstanding the paucity of numbers of priests and the difficult times, in matters of discipline the Holy See did not relax rules. Even before the coming of the younger Dominicans in 1764 the Bishop of Isfahan had had to notify the Sac. Congregation that at Julfa they had adopted the old Armenian calendar in order to conform with the practice of people there.² In April the Sac. Congregation issued the instruction:

“It is not permissible for the missionary Fathers and the Latin people residing at Julfa to use the old calendar, but they are entirely obliged to observe the new calendar after “the form of the Bull of Gregory XIII . . .”;

and, 10.11.1764,³ Mgr Cornelius informed the Sac. Congregation that he had received

“replies to various letters, and the decree for the prohibition of the old calendar being “adopted, as the Fathers in Julfa had done, and also regarding the obligation Armenian “priests have of celebrating in the vestments of their own rite.”

In regard to this second correction Bishop Emmanuel of Baghdad explained the point in his reply of 5.1.1763 to Rome:⁴

“. . . I shall see your orders executed regarding the Catholic Armenian priests at Basra, “who have hitherto been using our vestments to celebrate Holy Mass, and other functions, “which is expressly contrary to the decree of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XIV.”

But he added—and it was sad irony:

“The Armenian priests were only two, of whom the younger died about 6 months ago, “and the survivor is so aged and infirm that he can say Mass only very rarely. . . .”

On 5.10.1764⁵ Fr. J. B. de Bernardis sent a complete “list of Catholics in Julfa and neighbourhood”, showing a total of 18 persons of the Armenian rite and 13 of the Latin rite.⁶ Fourteen of them were women, nine of them children: one was the wife of Count John Shari-man, who was then living in Venice, another of a refugee trader in Madras. That did not embrace the whole of Persia, but illustrates the havoc to the Christian Faith of those twenty intervening years of rapine and slaughter, anarchy and extortionate oppression, seeing that in his Latin report to the Sac. Congregation of 1740 Bishop Emmanuel had estimated the numbers of Catholics in Julfa at 5,000 or over, and in 1745 the Jesuit superior had testified to Rome that they were many more than formerly. A wider perspective of numbers is given in Bishop Cornelius’ letter of 3.5.1765⁷ to the Cardinal Prefect when, after protesting against

¹ S.N.R., VII, p. 357.

² In a letter of 2.6.1766 Fr. de Bernardis again referred the question because the Latin calendar was 35 days in advance of the Armenian.

³ S.N.R., VII, p. 286.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 292.

⁵ *Idem*, p. 312.

⁶ Later in his letter of 20.10.1765 he gave other figures: “24 souls of the Armenian rite, 5 of the Latin rite”. Writing, 4.11.1763, the Superior of the Lazarist (Vincentian) Fathers of Isfahan estimated *present* numbers of Armenian Catholics to be about 150 at Julfa, 1,000 in all Persia: that the schismatic Armenians would be about 3,500 at Julfa, 20,000 in the province of Isfahan, between 30,000–40,000 for all Persia.

⁷ S.N.R., VII, p. 308.