

Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies
Vol. 40 (1999) Nos. 1-4, pp. 89-105

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Latin America: Situation, Analysis and Perspectives for the Future

Bishop Vartan Boghossian

Abstract

(Українське резюме на ст. 105)

In a wide-ranging analysis of the situation of the various Eastern Catholic Churches in Latin America, the Armenian Eparch of Buenos Aires offers statistics for the Maronite, Melkite, Ukrainian and Armenian Catholic Churches in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela. An analysis follows, along with the author's vision for the future. He speaks of the lack of clergy, of the dispersion of the faithful, of Eastern Catholics serving Roman Catholics instead of their own flocks, of problems arising from a lack of knowledge of Eastern Catholic Churches on the part of Roman Catholics.

The author sees hope in various aspects of the new evangelization proposed by Pope John Paul II, complains of the sometimes unresponsive attitude of the Mother Church towards its daughter in the new world, and concludes with two paragraphs from the Pope's *Ecclesia in America* which speak respectfully of the Eastern Churches, which the author hopes will not be reduced to liturgical museums, but will rather be revived through systematic catechesis, coordinated training of clergy and an increased understanding of their riches by a re-educated Roman Catholic clergy. The intervention was offered in Spanish and is presented here in English translation.



This providential conference of members from the Eastern Catholic Churches offers us the opportunity to reflect on the presence of the Eastern Churches *sui iuris* in the vast territory of immigration which the continent of Latin American constitutes.

It is our intention to deal with the reality of the situation during these days and, afterwards, do an analysis and, finally, seek out perspectives for the future and articulate new conclusions.

A. Situation

Since the end of the last century, numerous groups of Eastern Christians established themselves in Latin America (see **Table 1**).

| CHURCHES | ARGENTINA | BRAZIL | CHILE | MEXICO | URUGUAY | VENEZUELA | No. of Families | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|--------|---------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| | MARONITE | 50000 | millions | - | 30 | - | - | E |
| | 6000 | thousands | - | 7 | - | - | R | Recorded |
| MELKITE | - | ? | - | ? | - | ? | E | Estimated |
| | - | 600 | - | ? | - | ? | R | Recorded |
| UKRAINIAN | 50000 | 42300 | - | - | - | - | E | Estimated |
| | 15000 | 27550 | - | - | - | - | R | Recorded |
| ARMENIAN | 4000 | 1.5 | 600 | 400 | 1 | 900 | E | Estimated |
| | 893 | 605 | 131 | 172 | 235 | 175 | R | Recorded |
| | 104000 | ? | 600 | ? | 1 | ? | E | Estimated |
| | 21893 | ? | 131 | ? | 235 | ? | R | Recorded |

Table 1

The countries, from north to south, that were especially chosen were: Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. Four out of the twenty-one Eastern Churches *sui iuris* are represented in these countries, with their own Ordinary (see **Table 2**).

| | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------------|--|------|
| MARONITE | ARGENTINA | Eparch | His Excellency Mons. Charbel Merhi | CML |
| | BRAZIL | Eparch | His Excellency Mons. Joseph Mahfouz | OLM |
| | MEXICO | Eparch | His Excellency Mons. Wadih Boutros Tayah | – |
| MELKITE | BRAZIL | Apost. Adm. | His Excellency Mons. Pierre Mouhalen | MPS |
| | MEXICO | Apost. Adm. | Archpriest Antoine Mouhanna | – |
| | VENEZUELA | Apost. Exarch | His Excellency Georges Kahhale Zouhairaty | BA |
| UKRAINIAN | ARGENTINA | Eparch | His Excellency Mons. Miguel Mykycej | FDP |
| | BRAZIL | Eparch | His Excellency Mons. Efraim Krevey | OSBM |
| ARMENIAN | ARGENTINA | Eparch | His Excellency Vartan W. Boghossian | SDB |
| | BRAZIL | Apostolic Exarch | | |
| | CHILE | | | |
| | MEXICO | | | |
| | URUGUAY | | | |
| | VENEZUELA | | | |

Table 2

All the Ordinaries are members with full deliberation and voting rights in the Episcopal Conferences of their respective countries. About 99% of them participate in the conferences.

The Episcopal Conference of Argentina (CEA) includes an “Episcopal Commission of Eastern Catholic Churches,” with its own president, secretary and membership. The commission also has a set of statutes.

In the Latin American continent there exist more than 91 Eastern parishes. Their distribution is indicated in **Table 3**.

| CHURCHES | COUNTRIES | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| | | PARISHES | EPARCHIAL PRIESTS | RELIGIOUS PRIESTS | PERMANENT DEACONS | RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS | EASTERN EPARCHIAL PRIESTS OF THE DIASPORA RELIGIONS | EASTERN RELIGIOUS PRIESTS OF THE DIASPORA RELIGIONS | EASTERN BI-RITUAL PRIESTS | LATIN BI-RITUAL PRIESTS | EASTERN PERMANENT DEACONS | LATIN PERMANENT DEACONS | | |
| | | | | | | MALE | FEMALE | | | | | | | |
| MARONITE | ARGENTINA | 4 | - | 6 | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | - | 8 | - | 1 | - | |
| | BRAZIL | 6 | 1 | 5 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | - | - | |
| | MEXICO | 3 | - | 3 | 1 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 1 | |
| MELKITE | BRAZIL | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 | - | - | 3 | 2 | - | 1 | 1 | 3 | |
| | MEXICO | ? | ? | - | - | - | - | - | - | ? | - | - | - | |
| | VENEZUELA | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | |
| UKRAINIAN | ARGENTINA | 47 | 5 | 12 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 12 | 2 | 5 | 1 | - | |
| | BRAZIL | 23 | 14 | 52 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 14 | 51 | 2 | - | 2 | - | |
| | ARGENTINA | 1 | 3 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | - | |
| | BRAZIL | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | |
| ARMENIAN | CHILE | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| | MEXICO | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| | URUGUAY | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | |
| | VENEZUELA | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| | | 91 | 28 | 83 | 9 | 11 | 8 | 28 | 67 | 17 | 8 | 5 | 4 | |

Table 3

B. Analysis*a) There are no new immigrations*

Approximately 90% of the faithful are second and third generation. Few families today are emigrating from the East to Latin America. Obviously, this decline has its consequences. Over the course of time, their connection with the traditions of their ancestors continues to weaken, and so does their support for their Church.

It is not uncommon to say, at least for some of the Churches, that the first generation of people arrived in Latin America with hardly any economic resources. They organized themselves with much enthusiasm, and they built beautiful temples that are now empty. The physical space for liturgical celebration exists, but the enthusiasm of previous years is lacking.

b) The growth of the Eastern Churches does not coincide with the growth of the populations

The majority of the Eastern communities in Latin America do not have proportionate growth to the natural growth of families. Even though some speak of thousands of faithful, or even millions, this is a fictitious count because the reality is much lower.

Every family that leaves the community, every family that no longer lives its faith or has an awareness of its belonging to an Eastern Church, signifies a loss that increases geometrically with every generation. The sects have made many conquests even within our communities.

The families that continue to stay, because of their natural growth, are able to maintain stability with regard to the number of families.