

THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MATTHEOS MAMURYAN'S POLITICAL CONCEPTION

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Abstract

19th century Armenian prudence is valued as a result of self-awareness and self-reflection of national existence. Evidence of this is the philosophical-political problem of the thinkers of the time, the goal of which is the preservation of the nation's living foundations as a guarantee of national sovereignty. Historically, libertarianism has become an important factor in the political self-organization, statehood and culture formation of Armenians. Mattheos Mamuryan (1830-1901), a Western Armenian liberal-conservative figure, publicist, political scientist, is distinguished by his original interpretation of these problems. His conception is built on the basis of considerations about the national life (being) and the identity of the nation ("inherent essence").

Keywords: *Mattheos Mamuryan, national identity, sovereignty, foundations of nation's existence, family, church, language*

From the organistic point of view, Mamuryan sees the nation as a physical-spiritual integrity, whose members are united by natural rights and responsibilities, national interests, moral, political and state-legal relations. However, as a result of political division, the nation has lost its integrity in its current existence: "Since a nation like us is in a circle of civilization and has relations with other nations, it cannot be considered as a separate body, but subject to surrounding influences".¹ In this case, he considers the primary task of the Armenian intellectual to be the argumentation of the foundations of nation's existence, the characteristics of Armenianness, the "signs of the nation's essence", without which the nation as an ethnic entity cannot be perceived, moreover, its existence is endangered.

Valuing sovereignty as the supreme characteristic of nation and statehood, Mamuryan explains: "It is different from the national self-segregated entity, which is strong by itself, is the master of its own destiny, but it is different from a passive existence that lives with the permission of others and is dependent on them".² In the absence of state sovereignty, national sovereignty is understood as the basis and

¹ Mamuryan 1899d: 130.

² Mamuryan 1874a: 11.

guarantee of the restoration of the nation's political independence. The conditions of existence and durability of a nation are determined by the standards of national life.

National life (entity) is a methodological starting point in the author's conception. According to him, national life is nothing more than "...a collective body of the same gender, same language, the same family and urban education, the same manners and customs, the same basic principle and right, the same way of life, the same protection from the public interest, the same moral, literary, legislative, historical anticipations, the struggle, the movement, with all the means that our past, our different living conditions, material and intellectual abilities, the enlightenment and knowledge of our age can give us".³

In order to reveal the fundamentals of national life, Mamuryan studies the tribal origin, national spirit, moral, political maturity, administration systems and legislative principles of different peoples using the historical-comparative method. According to his belief, the existing differences between the nations prove that each of them, "...like an individual in the crowd, has his own shape and signs among people and deserves to be called a certain nation".⁴ Thus, he does not emphasize human commonalities, the similarities of peoples, but the peculiarity of the national Self as an identity characteristic only of a specific nation. And he describes "primary nation" as an ethnic collective that is faithful to the family, religious and moral traditions that determine its national identity, is governed by fair laws, and protects its freedom and national interests.

Unlike other peoples, who in the case of foreign invasion lose their national characteristics, ceasing to exist as a separate ethnic group, according to Mamuryan, "Only Armenians in their exceptional situation will present an exceptional image of the protection of their existence".⁵ In other words, the power to preserve the national identity is the will of the nation, the internal endurance characteristic of Armenians, the political zeal to self-organize and protect everything that is national and patriotic. And if the Armenian "...does not cultivate the moral circumstances that are the essential characteristics of identity, does not strengthen the ties that are the pledges of the preservation of his nationality... his most noble institutions will become refuges of xenomania".⁶ Regardless of the political situation, preventing all this is the main duty of every generation of Armenians, which begins with the awareness of the national Self.

According to Mamuryan, national self-recognition begins with a natural question: "Who am I, where will I be and where will I go?".⁷ He considers the prudence of the Greek philosopher Socrates as an example for all humanity, who with the message "Know thyself" not only marked a methodological basis for epistemology, but also with a

³ Mamuryan 1875: 5.

⁴ Mamuryan 1966a: 68.

⁵ Mamuryan 1891: 367.

⁶ Mamuryan 1891: 366.

⁷ Mamuryan 1966a: 108.

mental vehemence, inspired civic virtues and national spirit to the Greek people, who began to "...understand their essence, to examine one's self".⁸

According to Mamuryan, just as the individual Self improves its spiritual inner world through moral education, so "the Self of the nation, which is the composition of many selves, when it reaches self-recognition... it will baptize itself with the muron of its obligations and rights, will show the signs of its essence... in its thinking production".⁹ Thus, the problem of the nation's existence ("essence") is solved in the thinker's concept from the starting point of perception of identity, self-recognition and spiritual self-improvement.

According to Mamuryan, the main component of the national nature of Armenians is the perception of freedom as the supreme right: "Liberalism became a natural feature of the Armenian nation." He interprets freedom as a value granted by nature, which Patriarch Hayk "... found in his soul... saw in his human rights. He felt his birthright".¹⁰ In other words, the source of national identity is in human nature itself, and due to this, freedom has become the basis of Armenian political self-organization and the creation of statehood.

With the same logic, Mamuryan affirms that the ways of governance, the forms of the state structure reflect the political nature and national character of the peoples who choose them. In this sense, he emphasizes that "the nature of a people will be seen in its institutions".¹¹ According to him, in order to judge any nation, one should examine not only its external existence, but also its internal national-spiritual characteristics, the fundamental conditions of existence, which, changing over time, can weaken ... and lose their conservative properties, leading to non-existence".¹² Therefore, the preservation of the nation's existence, identity and vitality is the main strategic problem of national policy, in order to solve this it is first necessary to argue the historical foundations of nation's existence. According to Mamuryan, they are:

A. FAMILY, which the thinker appreciates as an ancient traditional institution of the nation, "a miniature of the people",¹³ "a small motherland", where the initial principles of kinship, piety, philanthropy and patriotism and self-government are cultivated. The family is also a model of the state, "it is the first link in the friendship chain",¹⁴ and it is no coincidence that the virtues formed in the family are manifested in various spheres of society. Accepting the family as a condition for the vital power and durability of the society, the ideology of German philosopher and lawyer H. Ahrens, Mamuryan especially emphasizes his following statement: "The family is the center that will spread

⁸ Mamuryan 1966a: 756.

⁹ Mamuryan 1966a: 756.

¹⁰ Mamuryan 1966a: 116.

¹¹ Mamuryan 1966a: 151.

¹² Mamuryan 1966a: 208.

¹³ Mamuryan 1897: 257.

¹⁴ Mamuryan 1890: 536.

good habits on the society, whose morality will rise or fall with the moral spirit of the family".¹⁵

Emphasizing family's well-being, Mamuryan points out that the basis of the stability of family relations and family welfare is the family spirit, which implies a union based on love, marital fidelity, devotion, equality, dignity, duty, etc. He also emphasizes that "the gorgeous heroes Armenian nation is proud of, were the birth of the family spirit..¹⁶ In other words, family educates Armenian soldiers dedicated to the motherland, national figures, who ensure the nation's security with their struggle and activities.

In order to preserve the national identity, Mamuryan rejects the introduction of foreign customs and laws into the sphere of family relations, and says that their regulation should be carried out only by national traditional regulations based on the ancient Armenian hereditary and family law. He draws the attention of spiritual and secular legislators and moralists to this vital issue. According to the thinker, no matter how faithful the people are to their native customs, it is not possible to prevent various influences, especially in the status of subjection. "Friendly foreigner's manners, political law, the lie of civilization... the invaders will directly or indirectly attack our family and destroy its basis".¹⁷

Therefore, Mamuryan considers the constitutional protection of family rights and the responsibility of the National Department to take care of the well-being of Armenian families' mandatory. He states that "creating true families is building and shaping of a nation",¹⁸ and assures that the interest of the Armenian nation requires protection against foreign influences with national education, legislation, serious moral principles, because "... just like the national church, the family institution remaining pure is an essential condition for the preservation of nationality".¹⁹ In this context, Mamuryan rejects the strict liberalization of civil marriage laws, especially the divorce law. According to him, divorce can be implemented only in extreme cases, when it is no longer possible to save the marriage union by any means.

According to the principle of radical liberalism, some consider the traditional model of the family backwardness, prejudice, and the reason for this, according to Mamuryan, is that they subordinate the Divine Council to civil laws as a "contractual action". Meanwhile, the Divine Council, which was sanctified by the canonical law of the Armenian Church, cannot be violated by secular legislation. It is necessary to reform the marriage law in such a way that "...it corresponds to modern enlightenment, rhetorical and psychological requirements, but giving a freer arena to the fanatics is not an improvement at all".²⁰

¹⁵ Mamuryan 1873: 260.

¹⁶ Mamuryan 1890b: 536.

¹⁷ Mamuryan 1883: 8.

¹⁸ Mamuryan 1890c: 582.

¹⁹ Mamuryan 1883: 9-10.

²⁰ Mamuryan 1890a: 491-492.

Therefore, if the European nations allow the separation of church and secular laws regulating family legal relations, this is unacceptable in the current situation of Armenians, because "we cannot go beyond our national religious autonomy".²¹ In Armenian reality, the decisions of Ashtishat (354 AD) and Shahapivan (444 AD) councils, which were reflected in the Armenian Codes of Laws, Statutes and Constitutional Bills, were adopted as the basis for the regulation of marriage and family. This regulation was used for centuries. Of course, some rules of family law were considered to be revised, but "... we are obliged to do so only for cases, which can only refer to secondary points".²²

B. CHURCH - According to Mamuryan, in the East, nations are distinguished by religion, and "among Armenians, a church would also mean nationality".²³ This reality has its reasons. If Europeans accept the importance of religion and church in their social and political life, then Armenians, who have no statehood, have no right to ignore the role of this national-historical institution, especially since the Armenian Church was valued with its importance even during the reign of the Armenian sovereign state as a national collectivity.

Proclaiming the slogan "An independent people needs an independent church and religion", Mamuryan defends the administrative sovereignty of the Armenian Church, the independence of the Patriarchal See from other churches and states, as well as the powers of the Armenian Patriarchate over all layers of the Armenian people. He justifies this defense by the fact that "Holy See ... will be considered not only as the center of Armenian Church, but also as the center of nationality... Etchmiadzin is not only a spiritual, but also a political and glorious symbol".²⁴ Therefore, the thinker sees religion as the second essential characteristic of nation's existence after the family, as "a special mark and condition of Armenia".²⁵ Moreover, the church gets its moral power from the family, and the latter "...would get his faith and hope from the Church".²⁶

By the way, some Soviet-Armenian historians considered Mamuryan an atheistic thinker²⁷ and considered his assessments of the Armenian Church and religion as contradictory to his own "atheistic" ideas. This opinion is denied in Mamuryan's literary works, as well as in many historical-philosophical, legal-political and publicist articles. According to him, "The most free-minded person must admit that in the present situation the essential power of national protection is the Church".²⁸

²¹ Mamuryan 1874b: 51.

²² Mamuryan 1874b: 51.

²³ Mamuryan 1966a: 151.

²⁴ Mamuryan 1966a: 208.

²⁵ Mamuryan 1899d: 130.

²⁶ Mamuryan 1899b: 177.

²⁷ Mamuryan 1966b: 20.

²⁸ Mamuryan 1885: 64.

Analyzing the vital elements that preserve the national identity - family life, history, religion, literature, language, ancient legislation, etc., according to the principle of historicity, Mamuryan comes to the conclusion that the Armenian nation "...has no stronger ties than the national church, which is connected with its essence and that it has strong reasons to keep this organization safe".²⁹ Again comparing the Armenian and European peoples, he clarifies the following reality: the political freedom of Europeans allows for the separation of state and church by legislation. However, in contrast to materialist and positivist theories, religion and the church have such a significant influence in their lives that the slogan "free church in a free state" was seriously tested in many states. Moreover, it is not acceptable for the Armenian people.

The thinker generally considers that "irreligious" society is impossible. Religion is "the foundation and basis of society, which will be formed and moved for better or for worse...".³⁰ Of course, the peoples definitely do not understand and confess the Divine Councils, religious teachings, as a result of which their socio-political life and culture are significantly different: "Legislation, institutions, morals, customs, crafts and literature would not remain free from the influence of religion".³¹ Muslims, pagans, and Christians imagine the fundamental principles of governance, the extent of freedom, and the limits of rights and responsibilities in different ways. According to Mamuryan, there have been as many political revolutions in the world as there have been religious ones. He explains the types of state structure by denominational differences and church affiliation, noting: "Everywhere, together with the church, states have gradually become theocratic, monarchical, constitutional, and authoritarian, supporting each other." Armenians are not an exception in this matter either.³²

According to Mamuryan, the source of vitality of the Armenian Church is its apostolic origin and constitutionality. According to his testimony, even European theologians claim that "the Armenian Church is based on true apostolic boundaries, free from monarchical and theocratic tendencies, free in its electoral and pastoral actions".³³ It should be noted that this reality significantly influenced the nature of the self-organization of the Armenian nation, the formation of the principles of self-government. In the conditions of subjugation, through the church and culture, a spiritual-moral commonality is created between Armenians, the basis of which, according to Mamuryan, is not the political coexistence of the nation, but "...only the national religion and the Constitution that is established to preserve it. We have the constitutional law of the Armenian Church as our leader".³⁴

²⁹ Mamuryan 1888a: 74.

³⁰ Mamuryan 1872a: 505.

³¹ Mamuryan 1872a: 505.

³² Mamuryan 1872a: 507.

³³ Mamuryan 1899d: 135.

³⁴ Mamuryan 1872b: 545.

Appreciating the unifying nature of the Armenian religion, the Armenian thinker rightly rejects the division of the nation based on religious differences. On the one hand, he does not accept religiosity, declaring that Catholic and Protestant Armenians should also be considered members of the nation, if they do not deny their nationality. On the other hand, he affirms that many gentile Armenians have no sufficient spirit of tolerance, and they refer to the Armenians with bigotry. Therefore, it is important to guide Armenians towards real values through national-religious education.

Mamuryan's conception discusses the influence of religious factors on political processes. He attributes many trends in politics to religious systems and principles, believing that "in the current enlightened age, even a legislator and a political scientist, no matter how liberal he may be... could not decide his program without taking into consideration the religious sentiments... which are powerful factors in social welfare".³⁵ And if politics is based on the principle of freedom, it will contribute to social progress and the enlightenment of the people. In this sense, the role of the Armenian Church in the formation of national libertarian governments is appreciable. According to Mamuryan, theocratic authorities are more prone to tyranny, and the Armenian Church is free from that accusation, because "...its legal structure will bear the stamp of the simplicity and independence of the original church", and the spiritual authority "will have its administrative authority towards the nation".³⁶ This reality proves an essential manifestation of Armenian national identity.

Mamuryan also argues the problem of the relationship between secular and spiritual authorities, emphasizing their interaction in national processes. According to his conviction, the clergy should not only engage in spiritual activities, but should also "...be a soul mate and advisor with the secular, whether in national life or in meetings",³⁷ support the legal decisions of the government, participate in solving political problems for the sake of protecting national rights. Without these conditions, "the Armenian religious figure... will always be a morally and nationally separate body, a damaging, dissolving element in the Armenian society and will prohibit all freedom... enthusiasm and development, will lead to the destruction of nation's existence".³⁸

Thus, in Mamuryan's conception, the Armenian cleric with their moral and political description is seen as a guarantor of the national identity, the integrity of the nation's spiritual and moral essence. He criticizes those figures who "...according to the European theory, noting that nationality and religion are different things" want to "shape" the Armenian society according to the European model and "...the door of the church will be open for every sect, every belief, every religion".³⁹ But the important thing is that

³⁵ Mamuryan 1888a: 75.

³⁶ Mamuryan 1888a: 77-78.

³⁷ Mamuryan 1872b: 545.

³⁸ Mamuryan 1872b: 545.

³⁹ Mamuryan 1888a: 76.

the majority of Armenians unconditionally accept the creed, authority and rights of the Armenian Church.

It should be noted that Mamuryan is liberal when it comes to cultural communication between different peoples, he even emphasizes the need to borrow universal values. As for religious issues, he takes a conservative position, considering Armenians to be a closed society. At the same time, he dreams of such a civilization where the standards of the vitality of nations will be their morality, wisdom and "steps taken in freedom".

C. LANGUAGE - Among the vital elements of national identity, Mamuryan particularly appreciates the role of language, noting: "In general, language will take a dominant place in the various conditions of nation's existence".⁴⁰ It has always been important as a unique means of communication, nationwide education and upbringing, culture development, and identity preservation.

The peoples differ not only in their locality, customs, religion, legal and political systems, but also in their linguistic features. Mamuryan especially emphasizes the function of language to preserve the nation's wellborn-tribal peculiarity and way of thinking. According to him, languages "...are a pursuit of purely preserving their native features, as inherited treasures of national intellectual activity".⁴¹ Although Armenian language has changed over the centuries, the original linguistic nuances in the dialects have been preserved. With this reality, Mamuryan confirms the immutability of the essence of national language thinking. He excludes the possibility of linguistic unification of different peoples, even if some figures in the context of European civilizational reforms try to realize the religious or political union of nations.

Mamuryan, like many Armenian thinkers of the 19th century, poses the problem of improving the Armenian language and developing the literary language. The use of a common language will make it easier for Armenians from different provinces to communicate. However, he does not ignore the peculiarities of Eastern Armenian and Western Armenian, considering their compatibility as possible. The thinker emphasizes the role of national dialects - "linguistic jewels" in terms of enriching Armenian vocabulary and phrases. At the same time, he rejects the artificial introduction of foreign words and concepts into the national language, explaining: "We are not purists, but we do not want to be the followers of the foreign, especially when our rich, pleasant and flexible language will give us inexhaustible means to fill the lack of new words with complexity".⁴² The purity of the language prevents the alienation of all national, national school, literature and the entire culture in general.

Thus, Mamuryan interprets the Armenian language as: a) a vital power for the preservation of the nation's identity, b) a way of expressing national thinking, c) a means of preserving and transmitting historical memory and national intellectual values,

⁴⁰ Mamuryan 1899c: 257.

⁴¹ Mamuryan 1899c: 258.

⁴² Mamuryan 1899c: 263.

d) a factor that unites different parts of Armenians and spiritual-mental ties, e) basis of national agreement and solidarity, etc.

Valuing the fundamentals of the vitality of the national identity as elements intertwining the Armenian integrity of the nation, Mamuryan also confirms their interdependence, because if any condition of the nation's existence is disturbed, the others will also be endangered. The family, the school, the church are the institutions with which "... the foundations of the nation should be strengthened, the favorable environment will be found, the wise law will be written, by which it will enjoy the freedom of conscience, religion and education, the constitutional and administrative organization will work, which will conduct domestic and national affairs".⁴³ In addition, with unique national elements and features, Armenians can progress and show themselves in the world civilizational arena as well, as a cultural and active nation, making its contribution to the universal treasury.

Summary

According to M. Mamuryan, the discovery of national identity is possible through the nation's self-knowledge. It allows us to confirm that the main component of the nation's spiritual existence and essence is the perception of freedom as the supreme right. Historically, libertarianism has become the basis of Armenian political self-organization, statehood and culture. The vital elements that preserve national identity are argued in the thinker's concept as the foundations of nationhood. These are: family, history, religion and national church, language, literature, ancient Armenian legislation, etc. Mamuryan also confirms the interdependence of these foundations, because the loss or distortion of one of them by foreign customs will endanger the existence of the others as well.

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