

# *A Missionary Society at the Crossroads: American Missionaries on the eve of the Turkish Republic*

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YÜCEL, İdris, A Missionary Society at the Crossroads: American Missionaries on the eve of the Turkish Republic. CTAD, Year 8, Issue 15 (Spring 2012), 51-68.

During the World War I (WWI), Asia Minor experienced another historic in and out population flow, specifically through the deportation of the Armenian people in 1915 and the mutual exchange of Muslim population in Balkans and Greek population in Asia Minor throughout the 1910s and afterwards. At the end of the WWI, following its century-old missionary activities among the Armenians and Greeks in Asia Minor, The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions came to the point of a vital decision regarding its future work: now the mission was to preach among Muslim population in Asia Minor through all missionary leftovers and its experience from the Ottoman past. In this paper, I aim to shed light on the massive shift of strategy towards the target groups and also the new mission of the American Board in Asia Minor by examining sheer amount of untouched archival documents, especially the Board's correspondences. Moreover, I will analyze the details of the prospective mission strategy of the Board missionaries in order to bring a retrospective understanding on the mission strategies during Ottoman past through the aforementioned archival materials.

*Keywords:* The Ottoman Empire, The American Board, Missionary, Turkey, Protestantism

YÜCEL, İdris, Yolayrımında Bir Misyonerlik Örgütü: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşu sürecinde Amerikan Bord Misyonerleri. CTAD, Yıl 8, Sayı 15 (Bahar 2012),

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is a reviewed form of the paper presented by the author at the World Convention of The Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, New York, 15-17 April 2010.

51-68.

1910'lu yıllar Anadolu sahasında bir diğer tarihi göç hareketine sahne oldu. I. Dünya Savaşı yıllarında gerçekleşen Ermeni Tehciri ile bölgedeki Ermeni nüfusunun önemli bir kısmı ülkenin güney eyaletlerine transfer oldu. Sözü edilen on yıllık süre boyunca benzer şekilde Balkanlar'dan Anadolu'ya kitlesel Müslüman göçleri ve Anadolu'dan Yunanistan'a Rum göçleri yaşandı. Yaklaşık bir asır boyunca Osmanlı topraklarında, yoğun olarak Ermeni ve Rum kökenli gayrimüslim nüfus arasında misyonerlik teşkilatlanması gerçekleştiren Amerikan Bord, bahsi geçen nüfus değişimi karşısında önemli bir misyon değişikliğine gitmek zorunda kaldı. Yeni misyon stratejisi, Osmanlı geçmişinden miras kalan tecrübe ve Anadolu'da halihazırda mevcut bulunan misyon teşkilatı aracılığıyla bölgedeki Müslüman nüfus üzerine yoğunlaşmaktı. Bu çalışma, Amerikan Bord misyonerlerinin Müslüman nüfus arasında gerçekleştirmeyi planladıkları misyonerlik faaliyetlerini, kendi aralarında gerçekleştirdikleri tartışmalar ve konuyla ilgili örgüt merkeziyle yürütülen yazışmalar temelinde ele almaktadır. Çalışma, çoğunlukla örgütün I. Dünya Savaşı yıllarına kadar olan süreç içerisindeki tarihçesine değinen literatürdeki mevcut araştırmalara ek olarak, Amerikan Bord'un bölgedeki faaliyetlerinin savaş yılları ve sonrasında geçirdiği dönüşümü, örgütün Harvard Üniversitesi'nde bulunan merkezi arşivindeki belgeler doğrultusunda aydınlatmayı hedeflemektedir. Diğer taraftan çalışma, Bord misyonerlerinin yeni misyon stratejisini ve gerçekleştirilen tartışmaları eleştirel analiz süzgecinden geçirmek suretiyle, örgütün Osmanlı dönemindeki etnisite temelli misyonerlik stratejisine dair ipuçları aramaktadır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Osmanlı Devleti, Amerikan Bord, Misyonerlik, Protestanlık, Propaganda

## Introduction

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereafter the board) was established early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of religious awakening, especially in the New England district during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> with an objective to evangelize all heathens in different corners of the world. Since their mission was broad and challenging, not surprisingly, the motto of the society was “*the field is the world*”. Following its establishment in

<sup>2</sup> For the organization, by-laws and the legislation of the American Board in Ottoman territories; İdris Yücel, *Kendi Belgeleri Işığında Amerikan Board'ın Osmanlı Ülkesindeki Teşkilatlanması*, Erciyes Univ., Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Unpublished Master Thesis, Kayseri, 2005. For the history of the American Board in the Near East see also: James L. Barton, *Daybreak in Turkey*, Pilgrim Press, Boston 1908, David Brewer Eddy, *What Next In Turkey Glimpses Of The Armenian Board's Work in the Near East*, The American Board Press, Boston 1913, James A. Field, *America and the Mediterranean World 1776-1882*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1969, Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy in The Middle East*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1971, Joseph Greene, *Leavening the Levant*, The Pilgrim Press, New York 1916, Julius Richter, *A History of Protestant Missions in the Near East*, Oliphant, Anderson&Ferrier, Edinburg and London 1910.

1810 and the institutionalization procedures, the first American Board missionaries were sent to Palestine and Asia Minor forming some of the earliest churches of Christianity in Ottoman lands.<sup>3</sup>

Jerusalem and its neighborhood considered as *The Holy Land*<sup>4</sup> have been selected as the beginning point of surveying activities by the Board, as the Holy Land is composed of principal birth places of Christianity. The first attempts by the Board were mainly aimed at discovering the country and its inhabitants. In this respect, two missionaries of the Board were sent to Jerusalem to undertake research on the region for further activities. Levy Parsons and Pliny Fisk, the Board's first two missionaries, arrived to Izmir in 1820<sup>5</sup> and headed to Jerusalem right after spending some weeks there to have a general idea of the city and the Western Asia Minor. American Board missionaries Josiah Brewer, Elnathan Gridley, Jonas King, Eli Smith, Rufus Anderson, and Isaac Bird conducted similar discovery tours in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>6</sup>

### **Organization of the American Board in the Ottoman Territories and Target Groups**

The Board opened its first long-term mission station<sup>7</sup> in İstanbul in 1831, following the failed attempts of opening an office in Beirut as a result of political disturbances.<sup>8</sup> Afterwards, the Board managed to spread across significant centers in Asia Minor such as Bursa, İzmir, Trabzon, Erzurum and Antep, and established new missionary centers within a short period.<sup>9</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup> Asia Minor includes the first seven churches of Christianity in its territories. These churches are located in İzmir, Selçuk, Bergama, Salihli, Alaşehir, Denizli, and Akhisar.

<sup>4</sup> Holy Land is considered sacred not only for Christianity but also for Judaism and Islam. According to Judaism, city of Jerusalem and its surroundings are given to Israelites by God. It also has some sanctified references in Qur'an. However, the term holds a political background since the Crusades as well. There are some other geographical interpretations of the term which is mapping the holy land as the broader Middle East.

<sup>5</sup> William Strong, *The Story of The American Board*, The Pilgrim Press, Boston, 1910. p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Kendi Belgeleriyle Anadolu'daki Amerika (19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Amerikan Misyoner Okulları)*, Arba Yay. İstanbul 1989, pp. 35-36, For the extensive tour of Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight in the Ottoman Empire see. Eli Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia: Including a Journey Through Asia Minor and into Georgia and Persia with a Visit to the Nestorian and Chaldean Christians of Oormiah and Salmas, Vol. I*, Published by Crocker and Brewster, New York 1833.

<sup>7</sup> The term *mission station* is used by missionary societies to describe the base for missionary activities in a limited geographical region within the mission territories. The mission stations generally own a missionary compound in the city which usually includes residences of missionaries and various mission institutions such as educational, medical or industrial.

<sup>8</sup> Charles T. Riggs, "History of Constantinople Station 1831-1931", Centennial of *Constantinople Station-Near East Mission of ABCFM*, The Board, İstanbul 1930, p. 52-53.

<sup>9</sup> Yücel, p. 13.

early efforts resulted in the establishment of the first Protestant Church in the empire on July 1, 1846 by the support of British ambassador Stratford Canning. Following this achievement, the Board succeeded to establish seven Protestant churches and 15 preaching places until 1849.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Protestants were granted as an independent subject in the *millet system* by the Sublime Port in 1850.<sup>11</sup>

During these early years of settlement until the 1850s, the Board strived for determining the target people in the Ottoman land. In this respect, the country is divided into various mission territories based on the target people. All of the missionary activities handled by the Board in the Ottoman Empire were conducted on behalf of the *Turkey Mission* until 1850.<sup>12</sup> The Turkey Mission formed the principal base for the further massive missionary activities of the Board. The Board decided to make a new shift on the mission map and changed the name of Turkey Mission to *Armenian Mission* in 1850. The Armenian Mission was divided into two sections as *the Northern and Southern Armenian Missions* in 1855. The Board made a final regulation in 1860 which divided the missions in the Ottoman Empire into five different zones.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, activities in the Ottoman territories were going to be conducted by the *Syrian, European Turkey, Western Turkey, Central Turkey, and Eastern Turkey* missions. The last rearrangement on the missions in 1860 remained unmodified until the WWI except a slight change only on the Syrian Mission, which was transferred to Presbyterian Board in 1870. Activities mainly among Armenians, Greeks, and Bulgarians through educational, religious, and sanitary institutions were accelerated following the final regulation on the mission fields.

Essentially the Board was interested in almost every single community within the entire empire. In addition to the failing Jewish mission which continued until 1850, it commenced *the Assyrian Mission* in the eastern part of Asia Minor. When it comes to the territories in the Balkans, Bulgarian people were massively targeted when the European Turkey Mission was founded in 1870.<sup>14</sup> Significant number of the Board staff was also appointed for the Greek people living in Asia Minor. However, the Armenians gradually began to be assessed as a “most favored nation” among the people in Asia Minor in the eyes of the Board. In other words, the activities and the institutions of the

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<sup>10</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 522, No: 6, 7, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips C. Jackson, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, Cambridge 1969, p. 161.

<sup>12</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 522, No: 12. The term *mission* describes the territorial division for the missionary activities mainly based on the ethnicity or religious sect of the target population.

<sup>13</sup> Yücel, pp. 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> Strong, p. 213.

Board in Asia Minor broadly focused on the affairs concerning Armenians. According to the missionaries of the Board, Armenians were 'the stars left to fade' in Asia Minor among the Muslim majority under the Turkish rule. Thus, it could be asserted that their main goal was to evangelize and revive the old Apostolical Armenian Church.<sup>15</sup>

Board's educational activities reached its higher standards in the 1880s. Robert College in İstanbul, Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, Euphrates College in Harput, and the Central Turkey College in Antep principally provided education for the non-Muslim subjects of the empire. Later, the early period colleges were followed by new schools such as *International College* in İzmir, *St. Paul Institute* in Tarsus, *Central Turkey College for Girls* in Maraş, and *the American College* in Van and they were all open until the breakout of the WWI. Students at these colleges mainly belonged to Armenian, Greek, and Bulgarian people. For instance, the graduates of *the Anatolia College* in Merzifon between the years 1880-1919 almost entirely consisted of non-Muslim Armenian and Greek students.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, in addition to the non-Muslim students, there were only a very small portion of Muslim students at the colleges.

As seen in the Syrian mission, the Board cooperated with the other missionary organizations and the British Consuls in the entire empire.<sup>17</sup> These cooperative organizations included *the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church (BFMPC)*, *Women's Board of Missions of The Interior*, *Turkish Missions Aid Society*, *Women's Board of Missions*, *Independent Church of Scotland*, *British and Foreign Bible Society*, and some of the various missionary societies from Germany and Netherlands.<sup>18</sup>

### **Missions of the American Board During the World War I and Its Aftermath**

The WWI brought hard times for the missions of the Board in many countries, unquestionably including the Ottoman Empire. The war all through Europe and the Ottoman Empire not only caused great financial problems, but also created political challenges for the missionary activities. Abolition of the capitulations facilitated the empire to use its sovereign power through its territories and the break-off the diplomatic relations between the United States and the Ottoman Empire in 1917 restricted the activities of the missionaries. The hospitals of the Board in Harput, Talas, Antep and Konya were

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Colcord Bartlett, *Historical Sketch of the Missions of the American Board in Turkey* Boston 1889, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Gülbadi Alan, *Merzifon Amerikan Koleji ve Anadolu'daki Etkileri*, TTK, Ankara 2008, p. 268.

<sup>17</sup> Strong, p. 309.

<sup>18</sup> Kocabaşoğlu, p.126.

confiscated by the military officials for the purpose of treating the sick and wounded soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Since it was difficult to have medical care during the years of warfare and the epidemics were severe all across the country, many of the Board missionaries died. These catastrophes forced the Board to limit its work throughout the country widely and even to abandon some of the mission stations. The U.S. ambassador Abram Isaac Elkus urged the citizens and the missionaries of the Board to leave the country together with the diplomatic mission in 1917. However, missionaries refused this call and stayed at their posts, except for the ones who had private reasons to leave.<sup>20</sup>

The Board conducted a big expedition to Asia Minor following the armistice at the end of the war. The Board sent 72 missionaries under the name of *Near East Relief* and maintained the work in Kayseri, Harput, Bursa, Adana, Marař, Antep, Mardin, Merzifon, Sivas, and Trabzon.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, The Anatolia College in Merzifon, the International College and the American Collegiate Institute in İzmir, St. Paul College in Tarsus, and the Central Turkey College for Girls at Marař, were still able to conduct educational activities.

However, despite great efforts of the Board to maintain its activities in Asia Minor, the missionary power became weaker compared to the pre-war years. To illustrate the point, the number of the staff decreased to 120 as opposed to 168 prior to the war. In a similar vein, seven of seventeen stations permanently closed at the end of the war. In addition to these figures, the Board has widely lost its native worker force, which diminished to merely 324 when the war ended while the number of total native workers stood at 1204 in 1914.<sup>22</sup>

### **Population Exchange in Asia Minor and Its effects on the Mission Work**

The deportation of Armenians in 1915 to the provinces in the south of the empire resulted in a huge loss of the target people of the American missionaries, while Armenian population mostly in İstanbul and some of the centers in Asia Minor remained. Similarly, the second biggest target people of the American missionaries were the Greek population in Asia Minor. The migration during the war and the exchange of Greek and Muslim population between Turkey and Greece resulted in a religiously homogeneous population in both countries. This was the second loss community for the missionary activities of the Board. On the other hand, an intense Muslim migration from various provinces of the empire and regions such as the Balkans and Caucasus

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<sup>19</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 714, No: 659, Reel 632, No: 408.

<sup>20</sup> James Barton, *A Survey of the Missions of the American Board for the Past Year 1917-18*, Congregational House, Boston 1918, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> The New York Times, Near East Relief Expedition Leaves, February 17, 1919

<sup>22</sup> ABCFM Papers, Henry Harrison Riggs, ABCFM History in Turkey 1910-1942 p. 42.

into Asia Minor took place during the years of warfare. Now, the heterogeneous structure consisting of different religious and ethnical backgrounds that lived side by side in the heart of the empire for many centuries gave its place to a dense Muslim population.

On the other hand, the Muslim structure of the region and the huge Muslim population attracted the Board. As a matter of fact, the beginning of consideration of the Muslims as a target society by the Board dated back to earlier years. Their goal to arrive in the region was very explicit: to evangelize all the inhabitants of the region. Yet, the environment in the region and reaction of the target people towards missionary activities postponed the evangelization of Muslims.<sup>23</sup> However, under the liberal circumstances that emerged as a consequence of the 1908 Revolution, the Board re-evaluated the evangelization of the Muslims by field research activities and inquiries in the beginning of the 1910s.<sup>24</sup> Until that period, the main reason for their deterrence on the activities concerning the Muslims was the risk of current privilege losses within the Empire.<sup>25</sup> Following early years of the 1910s, the Empire witnessed severe political disturbances caused by the wars against Italy and the Balkan States that unfavourably affected the Muslim work project. However, during these fluctuating years, there was another positive wave on the Muslim work project in 1914. In this year, a committee was secured to do field research on evangelistic work among the Muslim men and women through medical, educational work, and the press.<sup>26</sup>

However, the significance of the Muslim work excessively increased when the war ended in 1918. James Barton, the secretary of the Board, pointed out the importance of the Muslim work and the necessity to employ two missionaries unique to Muslim work subsequent to the war in 1919.<sup>27</sup> At this point, both the Board missionaries in Asia Minor and the prudential committee in Boston were deeply contemplating the new situation to make some vital decisions. According to the secretary James Barton, the war led the Muslim world to lose its unity. The Muslim world which had been in unity since the prophet Muhammad has been disintegrated and the common ideal has been lost. The call for the jihad by the Sultan in the beginning of the war could not get any serious response. Moreover, the Sheriff in Mecca announced his

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<sup>23</sup> E. D. G. Prime, *Forty Years in the Turkish Empire or Memoirs of Rev. William Goodell* New York 1876, p. 427.

<sup>24</sup> Riggs, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 668, No: 498.

<sup>26</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 668, No: 565.

<sup>27</sup> James Barton, *A Survey of the Missions of the American Board for the Past Year 1918-19*, Congregational House, Boston 1919, p. 29.

sovereignty to establish a kingdom on the holy lands of Islam against the Sultan. All of these developments changed the religious perception of the Muslim Turks on Islam according to the secretary Barton.<sup>28</sup> The transformation on the religious perception of the Turks was a historical opportunity for the Board. In other words, for Barton, when the event was reviewed in a broader framework, the situation that the Muslim world faced was a great opportunity for the Christian world. The Board underscored that all Christians had to work together not to waste this historical opportunity.<sup>29</sup>

The Board was carefully observing the struggle between *the Nationalist Forces* and the Allies following the Armistice in 1918. The Board perceived the situation in the entire country as a great opportunity for evangelizing the Muslims.<sup>30</sup> It can be argued that compared to the past, it was the most convenient opportunity for the missionary activities against 15 million Muslims in Asia Minor. Moreover, the missionaries attached special importance to such a circumstance that they even began to make plans for restructuring the entire society. They imagined creating a new system and life by all kinds of educational institutions on the region from Dardanelles to Caspian Sea and Mesopotamia. George White, the president of Anatolia College in Merzifon stressed that the educational institutions of the American missions would solve the problems of those suffering people. According to Mr. White, it is impossible to infuse virtues such as good will, tolerance, justice, and liberty by laws and official authorities, while it is possible to infuse these virtues by education of the students through American schools.<sup>31</sup>

### **Formulating a New Mission toward Future: The Muslim Mission**

Now, it was time to formulate the work among Muslim population under the name of *Muslim Mission*. One of the prominent questions to be settled was to make a decision on possible and suitable methods of approaching the Muslim population. It was obvious that new objective required new methods and a new system to be pursued. A new system meant fundamental changes on the former applications for the Christian minorities within the Empire. Language, literature, schools, social contacts, way of thinking, and the mission scheme had to be renewed and complete missionary machine had to be

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<sup>28</sup> James Barton, *A Survey of the Missions of the American Board for the Past Year 1915-16*, Congregational House, Boston 1916, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> James L. Barton, The Effect of the War on Protestant Missions, *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1. (Jan., 1919), p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> James Barton, *A Survey of the Missions of the American Board for the Past Year 1920-21*, Congregational House, Boston 1920, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p, 7.



rearranged for the new task.<sup>32</sup> This seemed fairly complicated and confusing for the missionaries of the Board in Asia Minor. New relations and the applications had to be cautiously designated. To clarify the uncertainties, countless numbers of questions were asked to the prudential committee in Boston. Equally the Prudential Committee addressed detailed questions to the missionaries in the field on affairs as they were known to become acquainted with the region and its people in depth.<sup>33</sup> Some of the questions that had to be clarified were as follows;

- The stance to be taken for remaining Armenian population in Asia Minor.
- The approaching methods to the Muslim population in the region.
- The methods to be applied for the Kurdish population.
- The operating system of the educational institutions for Muslim people.
- The future of the converted people and the environment to be prepared in the community for them to live in.
- A new missionary force designated for the Muslim mission and their education process.
- The issue of taking over the former hospitals of the Board from the Near East Relief.
- The new mission map and the regulations on the mission stations for the new mission as the border of the country experienced a massive change on its former pre-war order.<sup>34</sup>

The Western Turkey Mission organized a meeting to discuss the details of the Muslim mission in 1921. The meeting was organized by the Muslim Work Committee which consisted of leading missionaries of the Board in the region such as Mrs. Crawford, Mr. Ryan, Dr. White, Mr. Birge, and Mr. Goodsell. Experienced missionaries of the Board in the field participated in the meeting and expressed their opinions. The view of Dr. Marden, who worked in Merzifon for several years as a medical missionary, about the actual situation of Asia Minor was quite interesting. Dr. Marden stressed that long years of warfare caused demoralization among Muslim Turks and their perception of Islam changed in a negative manner.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, fighting in different battlegrounds and becoming prisoners of war in remote places caused the

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<sup>32</sup> Riggs, p, 4.

<sup>33</sup> ABCFM Papers 16.9.1 V. 1, 1920, *Statements and Suggestions Regarding the Future work of the American Board in Turkey*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 716, No: 166, 167.

<sup>35</sup> ABCFM Papers 16.9.1 V. 1, *Report on Work for Moslems 1921*, p. 1.

Turks to become exposed to new liberal ideas and to bring these ideas to the country. He also pointed out that the secular system of the Turkish State would create a great opportunity for the missionary activities.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Marden's views on conversion of the Muslim people had two different aspects. First, approaching the Turks in interior parts of Asia Minor became harder after the deportation of Armenians who lived among the Muslim population. The best way to reach these interior areas could only be possible by the employment of the converted Turks in İstanbul or İzmir.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, one of the most proper ways to reach Muslim people was through medical institutions because these institutions were a tool to break down prejudices of the Muslim people who contact the Americans and/or Protestants very first time by these medical services.<sup>38</sup>

The education of the Muslim students through American Protestant institutions was another subject that should be discussed in depth. First, American missionaries were aware of the prejudices of Muslim people on Christianity and the problems related with the approval of the converted people among the society. However, they had the experience of Muslim students enrolled at the Beirut Protestant College in that period. Accordingly, a small mosque had to be included in the schools and Muslim students had to be permitted to practice Friday praying. In this case, the parents of the Muslim children would be considerably convinced. In reality, the final purpose was to convert the new, upcoming generations rather than expecting a quick response on the current students. In other words, the plans were based on a long term vision. For the missionaries, every single interaction with the Muslim people and the smallest progress in breaking prejudices were the milestone to be accomplished.<sup>39</sup>

Another assessment of the committee on the new mission pointed to the importance of understanding the religious beliefs of Muslims deeply. Education of a Muslim, the books and educational tools used by Muslim teachers and the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 3. American Board facilitated mission hospitals in Antep, Adana, Kayseri, Merzifon, Erzurum, Harput, Van, Diyarbakır, and Konya since the 1870s. These hospitals were soon welcomed by the local people following their establishment. Medical missions of the Board conducted a tremendous amount of work and medical missionaries were able to get in touch with almost every religious and ethnical group in the Ottoman Empire. Number of the total yearly treatments through the medical missions in 1910 was more than 130.000 cases. For the mission hospitals and the story of the medical missions of the American Board in Asia Minor see. İdris Yücel, *Anadolu'daki Amerikan Hastaneleri ve Tıbbi Misyonerlik (1880-1930)*, Hacettepe University, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Ankara, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> ABCFM Papers 16.9.1 V. 1, *Report on Work for Moslems 1921*, pp. 4-5.

Muslim way of thinking had to be profoundly understood in order to make easy contacts on mutual references. Mutual references were crucial to approach Muslims since they were never willing to cooperate with the Christians. They did not want any sort of dialogue and always used to form a wall between themselves and Christians. Therefore, analyzing Islam and learning their way of thinking in depth had a critical importance for breaking down prejudices and creating a dialogue. Eventually, it was stated that a thorough training of the missionaries on Qu'ran and Islamic books was inevitable.<sup>40</sup>

Another argument was on the negative missionary image that was linked with the political accusations towards missionaries on alienating and provoking people against their state.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, the idea proposed to cooperate with the suffering Turks and help them recover from the national disaster that they faced in order to change the unfavorable missionary image. By these means, plans were raised to address nationalist feelings of the Turks for the mission work.<sup>42</sup> During these debates, the fluctuating political atmosphere in the country was also significantly taken into account.<sup>43</sup>

### **The New Strategy**

The new strategy on the Muslim mission was based on the different ethnicities of the society. For instance, aside from the Sunni Turks, the Alawite Turks were considered a sect that had many common rituals with Christianity.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Kurds settled mainly in the south east part of Asia Minor were considered as a main mission goal. The American missionaries had the opportunity to get acquainted with the Kurds through the Eastern Turkey Mission which operated in the east for long years among the Kurdish population. The missionaries took into consideration the importance of some negative thoughts of Kurds towards the Turks and the Turkish state for the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Until the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, missionary activities conducted in the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were mainly considered as an internal affair of the non-Muslim societies by the Ottoman authorities since the main engagement of the aforementioned missionary societies was among Armenians and Greeks. When the outbreaks among Armenians started to spark, the Ottoman governments gave attention to the missionary societies that used to educate and introduce Armenians to nationalistic ideas. For the details on the educational activities of the American Board and other missionary societies among Armenians see. Alan, *Merzifon Amerikan Koleji ve Anadolu'daki Etkileri*, Şamil Mutlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Misyoner Okulları*, Bilim Basın Yay. İstanbul 2005, Seçil Karal Akgün, "Amerikalı Misyonerlerin Ermeni Meselesindeki Rolü", *Atatürk Yolu*, Vol. 1, No: 1, (1988)., Ayten Sezer Arğ, "Osmanlı Döneminde Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri", *Osmanlı Ansiklopedisi*, Vol 2., Ankara 1999.

<sup>42</sup> ABCFM Papers 16.9.1 V. 1, *Report on Work for Moslems 1921*, pp. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

mission work at that time. Accordingly, the plan aimed at gaining the sympathy of the Kurds by teaching them their own language. Besides, there were thoughts about reaching thousands of Kurds who migrated to İstanbul away from the families to have job opportunities. Thus, activities among the Kurdish population were seriously considered within the Muslim mission.<sup>45</sup>

The Christian leaders who had the potential to influence public opinion were going to be raised among adults in the society. Some of the earlier converts were considered to be employed for this purpose. The point for raising Christian leaders among the society and utilizing them for mission goals were determined as a crucial tool with the opinion that it would be useful to address and affect the society through previously converted people living there and foreign missionaries.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to these decisions, it was emphasized that the missionaries would have an excellent command of Turkish and education on the Islamic studies. In addition, they should also do some literary work addressed to the Muslim people.<sup>47</sup> Main tools to manage these activities were chosen as educational and sanitary institutions.

The young generation was the keyword of the mission work because the future was going to be constructed by the youngsters. Therefore, the mission work was planned for the future and the new generation. In this respect, the educational institutions for the children and the Biblical studies in the schools were the principal designations for the Muslim work.<sup>48</sup>

The hospitals and the medical work were the secondary institutions that would be utilized within the Muslim mission. As a matter of fact, the missionaries had the closest contacts with the Muslim population through the medical work in the past. The mission hospitals organized by the Board in various cities across Asia Minor had tremendous influence on the people and were visited by countless numbers of patients and their relatives.<sup>49</sup> The Muslims who had treatment in these institutions had the first contact with Americans or Protestants. Besides, the medical missionaries had the closest contact within the Muslim houses through the medical tours and house visits.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-24

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Grace Higley Knapp Clarence Douglas Ussher, *An American Physician in Turkey a Narrative of Adventures in Peace and War* Boston and New York 1898, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> ABCFM Papers, Reel 667, No: 37-38.

medical work was also thought to be one of the main tools for the future Muslim work by the committee.<sup>51</sup>

It is also stated that attitude of the government had to be critically taken into account while these resolutions were prepared. Their previous experiences from the Ottoman period denoted that the flexibility of the governmental bodies and authorities were seriously required in order to take steps.<sup>52</sup>

On the other side, when the missionaries were busy with the new mission strategies and the regulations on the new mission work during the Armistice period, the Nationalist Forces under the command of Mustafa Kemal could manage to push out the occupying French forces in the south and the Greeks in the west. Following this, İstanbul was taken over from the British forces. The new rulers of the country had a different point of view for the missionaries compared with the past. They did not approve the relationship between the missionaries and various ethnicities within the country. Likewise, most of the missionaries within the sphere of influence in Asia Minor were expelled by the nationalist leaders in 1921.<sup>53</sup> According to the officials and the government, the mission societies could only be associated with the Christian minorities in the country. Thus, the missionaries were perceived totally discarded after the exchange of Muslim and Christian population. Moreover, the uprising and the discomforts among the minorities in the past were generally associated with the missionary activities by the officials.<sup>54</sup>

### **Missions in the Post-war Era**

Following the war, the institutions of the Board around Asia Minor—except İstanbul—were idle facilities. After conducting mission work among the target societies for almost a century, the Board had lost those societies. Moreover, native workers who were Armenians or Greeks were also unavailable. The Eastern Turkey Mission was totally abandoned at the end of the war. The Western and Central Turkey Missions, the other two missions in Asia Minor were also quite weak in comparison to the pre-war period. The Central Turkey Mission covering the southern part of Asia Minor allocated its main missionary forces and financial instruments for the deported Armenians in the northern part of Syria. As a matter of fact, the Presbyterian Board that took charge of Syria since 1870 was principally conducting relief work for the Armenian

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<sup>51</sup> ABCFM Papers, 16.9.1 V. 1, *Report on Work for Moslems 1921*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Riggs, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> ABCFM Papers, Charles Riggs, *History of the ABCFM in the Near East Especially in Turkey, 1819-1934*, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Erdal Açıkşes, *Amerikalıların Harput'taki Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri*, TTK, Ankara 2003, p. 312.

refugees and the Central Turkey Mission of the Board joined them in order to assist them temporarily.<sup>55</sup>

The border between Syria and Turkey was determined following the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 and the establishment of the Turkish Republic at the same year. Therefore, the Central Turkey Mission reached a crucial point to regulate the mission map after operating both sides of the new border in the past for several years. The communication and the transportation between Northern Syria and cities such as Adana and Antep in the south of Turkey became considerably difficult. In addition, another missionary force of the Presbyterian Board used to function in the area. For this reason, while temporary cooperation was being performed with the Presbyterian Board in Northern Syria, cities within the Central Turkey Mission such as Adana, Tarsus, Marař, and Antep were attached to the Western Turkey Mission. Thus, the Central Turkey Mission was abolished and the Western Turkey Mission was renamed as a general Turkey Mission.<sup>56</sup>

The unstable state of the missionaries was continuing during these years. A law adopted by the Turkish government in 1924 furthered the deteriorating situation of the missionaries. The new law prohibited any religious propaganda at schools and medical institutions. This situation, even the prohibition of Biblical studies at schools left the missionaries in despair.<sup>57</sup> However, the Board was not reluctant to give up the mission work easily and forced itself to continue its mission in Turkey despite the existence of stringent conditions. The new strategy was based on establishing contacts with people through the educational and medical institutions and teaching them religious principles outside these institutions.<sup>58</sup>

The secular state and negative attitude of officials towards the missions were the biggest obstacles for tenacious missionary activities in spite of ongoing difficulties. Similarly, educational and medical developments during the early times of the Republic could be seen as negative factors on the mission work. Therefore, trials of reopening of the institutions were mostly unsuccessful. The Anatolia College in Merzifon was transferred to Salonika in Greece and the Central Turkey College in Antep moved to Aleppo in Syria. The International College in İzmir was closed after failing revival attempts and was transferred to Beirut. The work in Harput, Van, Mardin, and Sivas was totally abandoned. Activities were limited to some certain centers such as İstanbul, İzmir, Kayseri,

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<sup>55</sup> ABCFM Papers, Henry Riggs, *Beginning Again in the Turkey Missions, 1923-1942*, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Riggs, p. 72.

<sup>57</sup> James L. Barton, *Status and Outlook of Missionary Work in Turkey*, ABCFM, Boston 1924, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Riggs, p. 16

Adana, and Antep. In addition, economic recession in 1929 forced the Board to reduce its missionary force and even to lay off some of its staff.<sup>59</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Board missionaries had tough times on the face of extraordinary circumstances in the WWI and its aftermath. Considering the post war picture, they had to change the means of strategy to survive in the region radically. Likewise, change within the missions was going to construct an exact frame for the activities in the Republican period. After long term discussions for future of the mission work in Asia Minor, the Board decided to re-structure its work among the Muslim population in the region. Accordingly, this study focused on the discussions within missionary circles for setting forth a new mission during the turmoil in the region. Surveying these discussions provided hints about the details and scope of the Board's new strategy for Muslim mission in Turkey.

In this context, first of all, it is important to note that the perseverance of the Board for sustaining the mission work in the region after losing a century work legacy was remarkable. As seen in the details of discussions for constructing mission work among Muslim population in Turkey, American Board formed a mission strategy based on the ethnic and religious characteristics of the country. The strategy simply focused on the ethnical and religious differences of the populations such as teaching the Kurdish language to Kurds, and introducing a possible analogy between Christianity and the Alawite sect among people who were partisans of the caliph Ali by pointing a tentative similarity between their belief system and Christianity. In fact, the strategy of religious and ethnical indoctrination of the new mission should not be surprising when constant diplomatic complaints of the Ottoman officials to the US Embassy and Washington about disintegrating activities of American missionaries among various groups in the empire were taken into consideration.

The massiveness of the mission plan designed to shape the society was another crucial point that should be taken into account. This great project aimed to restructure the society by educating children at established primary schools and educate leading figures who had prestigious positions in the society. A good deal of the colleges, hospitals, social clubs, and industrial workshops were planned for this project. The civilization and democratization of Turks were aimed through these institutions. First, this great mission project shows us the broad vision of missionaries. On the other hand, it is evident that the new mission project of the Board was mostly inspired by the situation of a country under occupation. Likewise, the anti-mission attitude of Turkish

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

officials following the establishment of the new Turkish Republic proved the complexity of this broad mission project. Turkish government was not as hospitable as the Ottoman governments towards these mission institutions. The Board sustained some of its missions amidst toughened conditions in Turkey, although these activities were diminished to a great degree in comparison to the Ottoman past. We need further comprehensive studies of the Board's activities during the Republican era concerning its project aimed at reshaping the society by producing prestigious leaders.

Thirdly, the skill for adapting new mission strategies of the Board missionaries under changing political circumstances in Turkey is worth of noting. Being active among the local people since the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century enabled the Board missionaries to have an extensive knowledge of the region and its people. This experience gave them an opportunity to adapt to varying conditions and changing time irrespective of the status of the ruling power either as a sultan, monarchy, or a democratic government.

In the final analysis, discussions of the Board missionaries about a new mission strategy denote that in contrast to overt mission activities of the Ottoman Empire, religious propaganda would be directly performed outside the mission premises and mission institutions in the Republican future. As a result of the immoderate attitudes of the Republican governments, mission activities that were explicitly conducted among the non-Muslim societies in the past were to be implicitly carried out through non-institutional means among the Muslim population in the Turkish Republic.

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