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# The Near East Relief and the American Board Commissions for foreign missions. Humanitarian partnership and divorce in the Near East (1918–1929)

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## ABSTRACT

The active involvement of missionaries was an essential element in the history of Near East Relief (NER), the largest private and American humanitarian association in the Middle East from 1915 to 1930. Most of these missionaries were associated with the American Board Commission for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). They often spoke local languages and may have been living in the Ottoman Empire for many years, in regions where some of them had indeed been born. The presence of these missionaries was key to NER's performance as large operational organization. These missionary women and men functioned as NER humanitarians and NER 'experts' alongside agronomists, sanitary engineers and university professors. They were themselves welfare specialists, medical doctors, teachers and administrators. While their presence shaped the practices and vision of the NER, tensions arose between the more secular arm of NER and these missionaries over the place of religion in their common project and relations with local populations.

## Introduction

The first part of this article summarizes how and why NER was created and explains why NER joined forces with ABCFM missionaries in relief work during and in the aftermath of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> As it demonstrates, American secular and religious humanitarian and advocacy networks were intertwined and shared a common ideology, including American Christian exceptionalism and expansionism. That missionaries in the field wished to become NER relief workers was a logical though not inevitable development of a set of

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<sup>1</sup>This article is part of a broader project on international humanitarianism in the Near East in the aftermath of the First World War to be published by Cambridge University Press with the title *Night on Earth. A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East (1918–1930)*. I have worked on Near East Relief sources scattered across locations that include the Rockefeller Archives Centre, Tarrytown (hereafter RAC); the New York Public Library; the United States National Archives, the Library of Congress in Washington DC, and the Hoover Archives at Stanford University. The main source for this article is the ABCFM archives at Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter AABCFM), principally the microfilms, personal papers and the archives of Western, Central, and Eastern Turkey Missions. Further archives of the ABCFM and NER are available at SALT archives online (<https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/43?offset=20>).

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personal, political and conflict-related realities. The second part of the article describes their co-operation on the ground between 1919 and 1923, including its contractual conditions. Growing tensions, as we shall see, would lead to the termination of NER and ABCFM collaboration the mid-1920s. Even when they were working full time for NER, missionaries were not required to resign from the ABCFM and could continue their spiritual work as long as it did not interfere with their relief activities. Historian Inger Marie Okkenhaug has argued that during and after the First World War, 'missionaries were forced to become relief workers among refugees in Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus'.<sup>2</sup> My work suggests that statement be modified, for rather than being left with no option but to become relief workers, many missionaries embraced the opportunities an organization like NER offered, while not necessarily fully supporting either its *modus operandi* or its objectives.

The ABCFM was the oldest, largest and most extensive faith-based American institution in the Near East.<sup>3</sup> Its activities extended from the Balkans to Syria, for following an 1837 agreement that divided the spheres in which missionary organizations operated, Presbyterian missionaries were more active in the Ottoman territories beyond Syria.<sup>4</sup> The ABCFM was not the only American faith-based institution present in the Ottoman Empire. The Protestant Episcopal National Council, the Presbyterian Foreign Board, the Foreign Missions Conference, the YMCA and YWCA, the Federal Council of Churches, the World Alliance, the American Bible Society, the World's Christian Endeavour Union, the World's Sunday School Association, the Mennonites and the Mormons were all present in various Ottoman territories, as were American Catholic organizations. Many other non-missionary European and Christian organizations were also active in the Near East, as were both Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish associations.<sup>5</sup>

The ABCFM was represented in various forms in many Ottoman Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had expanded its educational

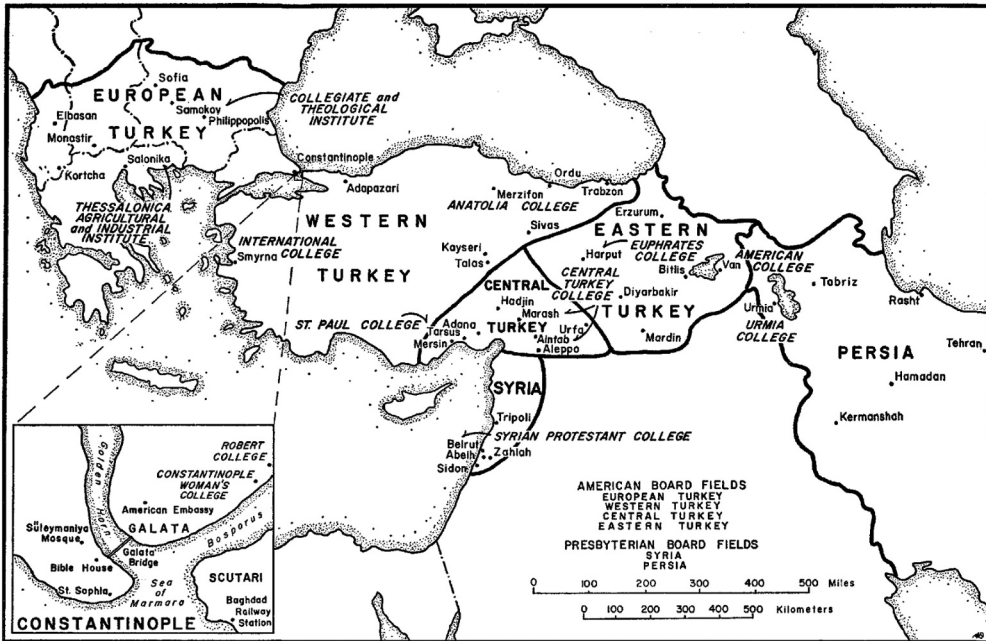
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<sup>2</sup>Inger Marie Okkenhaug, 'Religion, Relief and Humanitarian Work among Armenian Women Refugees in Mandatory Syria, 1927–1934', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 432–54, here 434.

<sup>3</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.5: Near East Mission: miscellaneous papers to 1929 and main series of papers 1929–1961 (government documents), vol. 8, Near East, 1874–1930. Supplementary. Extra size, vol. 3. Microfilm A467: Reel 507, Minutes of the Conference held on 6 April 1920 to Discuss Educational Work in the Near East. In 1920 in all the Near East, the ABCFM had 450 primary and secondary schools whereas the Presbyterian missionaries had 114; the former had a total of 25,911 pupils, the latter 5,418; the former had 96 American teachers, the latter 39; the ABCFM had 897 native teachers, the Presbyterian Board had 182 native teachers. The ABCFM colleges had 2,421 students.

<sup>4</sup>Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather J. Sharkey, eds., *American Missionaries and the Middle East. Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011); Recep Boztemur, 'Religion and Politics in the Making of American Near East Policy, 1918–1922', *JSRI* 11 (2005): 45–60; Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians. American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Robert L. Daniel, *American Philanthropy in the Near East* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1970); Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810–1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971); Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); Suzanne E. Moranian, 'The Armenian Genocide and American Missionary Relief Efforts', in *Americans and the Armenian Genocide*, ed. J. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 185–213; Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon, *World War I. Nationalism, Independence, and the Fate of the Missionary Enterprise, Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion, Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 167–86.

<sup>5</sup>Owen White and J. P. Daughton, eds., *In God's Empire. French Missionaries and the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), in particular, Jennifer M. Dueck, 'Flourishing in Exile: French Missionaries in Syrian and Lebanon under Mandate Rule', 151–72. On the role of Danish missionaries in Syria see Matthias Bjørnlund, 'Karen Jeppe, Aage Meyer Benedictsen and the Ottoman Armenians: National Survival in Imperial and Colonial Settings', *Haigazian Armenological Review* 28 (2008): 9–43.



Geographical extent of ABCFM Missions: European Turkey, Western Turkey, Central Turkey and Eastern Turkey.

activities, with hundreds of village schools as well as high schools and a dozen junior colleges and teacher training institutes. Most of these institutions remained inaccessible to Muslim Ottomans.<sup>6</sup> Before the First World War some 25,000 students had been educated in these institutions.<sup>7</sup> As the historian Nazan Maksudyan has explored, in the 1890s the ABCFM had also become involved in orphan-care in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century there were also some fourteen American missionary hospitals within the Ottoman Empire, which admitted Muslim patients, and by the early twentieth century hospitals were a flagship missionary endeavour.<sup>9</sup> Thus, by 1919 hundreds of ABCFM missionaries in the Ottoman Empire were familiar with health, education, and orphans' care objectives that NER would include in its definition of humanitarianism. The term 'humanitarian' or references to humanitarian activities

<sup>6</sup>Major works on Ottoman education include Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Selçuk Aksin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839–1908: Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) and Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>7</sup>AABCFM, 77.1.25, Box 25, Biographical Collection, folder 22:38, Luther R. Fowle, As it Looks to Me, 1970. On Robert College and U.S.A.-Turkish cultural relations, see Robert L. Daniel, 'The United States and the Turkish Republic before World War II, the Cultural Dimension', *Middle East Journal* 21, no. 1 (1967): 52–63; Ali Erken, 'The Making of Politics and Trained Intelligence in the Near East: Robert College of Istanbul', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 23, no. 3 (2016): 554–71.

<sup>8</sup>Nazan Maskudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), especially chapter 4, 'The Internationalisation of Orphans', 116–58.

<sup>9</sup>İdris Yücel, 'An Overview of Religious Medicine in the Near East: Mission Hospitals of the American Board in Asia Minor (1880–1923)', *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 14, no. 40 (2015): 47–71; Inger Marie Okkenhaug, 'Refugees, Relief and the Restoration of a Nation: Norwegian Mission in the Armenian Republic, 1922–1925', in *Protestant Missions and Local Encounters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. H. Nielssen, I. M. Okkenhaug and K. Hestad Skeie (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 207–33.

appear infrequently in ABCFM records, and, indeed, NER articulated its definition of humanitarianism only in 1923.<sup>1011</sup>

It is not easy to quantify the ABCFM's contribution to specifically humanitarian operations in the Near East during and in the aftermath of the First World War. As noted, ABCFM had been active in the Near East before the war and not all its activities were absorbed by NER.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, ABCFM documents do not enumerate missionaries' relief activities carried out for NER during the war. These records are framed more broadly and interactions, co-operation and exchanges with other institutions, NER included, are not recorded separately. The ABCFM distributed short-term relief following natural disasters and massacres and during periods of famine, but its broader objectives reached beyond such relief. Missionaries understood their work, with its spiritual basis and intent, as different from that of foreign humanitarian institutions active in Ottoman lands such as the American Red Cross, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the YMCA and YWCA, and Save the Children. ABCFM missionaries referred to their involvement as 'charity', a term with spiritual connotations indicative of their sense of mission. But that charity was not simply a form of almsgiving—local populations were to be taught to support themselves.<sup>13</sup>

### **From the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief to the birth of Near East Relief, 1915–1919**

When news of the Armenian genocide reached America at the instigation of Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, in 1915 the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) was created, a product of the merger of the Persian War Relief, the Syrian-Palestine Relief Fund and the Armenian Atrocities Committee.<sup>14</sup> In 1919 ACASR would become Near East Relief (NER). Protestants, both ordained and lay, were amongst ACASR's first members, who included internationalists and experienced public campaigners. Clergy involved with ACASR tended to be church executives and officers of organizations like the YMCA and YWCA. Others were representatives of the American Red Cross, Hampton Institute, General Education Board and National Recreation Association, academics and trustees of colleges and educational institutions in the Near East.

Together the members of ACASR formed a close-knit group of like-minded members of the American cultural, economic, and political elites. Their political connections reached as far as Cleveland Dodge's friendship with President Woodrow Wilson. The Dodge family,

<sup>10</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. Western Turkey Mission (hereafter WTM) 1860–1927, vol. 49, WTM, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [758], ABCFM Western Mission to Barton, July 1921: 'It was felt by all that our relation will be increasingly helpful and that the American Board is deeply indebted to the NER for its magnificent humanitarian and educational work' (emphasis is mine).

<sup>11</sup>Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy*, 17 (Copyright 1971 by the University of Minnesota).

<sup>12</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. Central Turkey Mission (hereafter CTM) 1860–1924, vol. 27, Central Turkey (hereafter CT), 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Report on Medical Work and Need in Aintab, by Lorrin Shepard, M.D., February 1920. On the history of the Shepard's family and of Lorrin Shepard's father, see Rev. Fred Field Goodsell, *Shepard of Aintab. The Beloved Physician*, Envelope Series, 19, 1916, 2, ABCFM publication.

<sup>13</sup>AABCFM, Barton James, Corresponding Secretary, ABCFM 1894–1927, Papers and Correspondence (hereafter Barton Papers), vol. 9, James Barton, American Educational and Philanthropic Interests in the Near East (1930?).

<sup>14</sup>National Library, Washington D.C., Henry Morgenthau Papers, Reel 23, on the work of ACASR. AABCFM, Barton Papers, vol. 8, folder 8:6, Articles, MS, 1918–1920, Statement and Petition from James L. Barton, Chairman, Near East Relief, regarding Armenian Orphan and Refugee Conditions in the Near East, 1919.

with its thriving involvement in trade, railroads, and mining, was strongly Protestant, a religious commitment that drove and shaped its activities within and beyond national frontiers. Internationally, the Dodges supported American missionary activities in the Near East in many ways, especially through contributions to educational institutions and involvement in relief committees.<sup>15</sup> On 21 September 1915, the US Department of State granted ACASR permission to see its dispatches from Turkey. A political privilege that was indicative of the organization's influence in Washington DC.

James Levi Barton (1855–1936), foreign secretary of the ABCFM, was elected ACASR's chairman. Barton's private papers reveal the relentless, multifarious and protean activities of this clergyman, foreign missionary, Foreign Mission Board administrator, Christian statesman and prolific author. In 1885, the year he married, Barton had applied to join the ABCFM and eventually he landed in Harpoot (Kharput). He witnessed the 1892 massacres of Sassoon (Samson), when in Barton's own words, Abdul Hamid II 'horrified the world with the wholesale murder of his subjects'. Increasingly anti-Muslim, Barton was persuaded that Greeks, Assyrians and Armenians were 'intellectually far more eager and alert for modern education than the Turks'.<sup>16</sup> His humanitarianism was political and outspoken and certainly not impartial.

Barton served as Foreign Secretary of the ABCFM for 35 years, from 1892 to 1927. He made good use of *The Missionary Herald*, the official organ of the ABCFM, for information sharing and publicity. He also worked closely with the Associated Press Office, recognizing the American newspaper-reading public's growing interest in affairs abroad. He envisioned the ABCFM, ACASR and, later, NER as modern organizations. Against this background, from ACASR's early days Barton had been eager for co-operation with Charles V. Vickrey, secretary of the Laymen's Missionary Movement since 1909, and previously field secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church. As the historian Jaffa Panken notes, the Laymen's Missionary Movement was an innovative and efficient force behind fundraising campaigns.<sup>17</sup>

ACASR was a fund-raising effort, not an operational humanitarian organization. Its leaders adopted a modus operandi based upon the formation of local committees across the United States that would provide information and collect funds, which were to be handled by the Central Committee in New York. This concept was not particularly original, for it replicated the ways in which charities and relief committees campaigned all over the country and would be taken up by NER in 1919. The Rockefeller Foundation was one of ACASR's most generous supporters and by 1916 had donated 490,000 US dollars.<sup>18</sup> It continued to give to ACASR because it was the only American organization that had—via missionaries and the consular network—a foot in the Ottoman Empire and because its leaders' close political ties with the US government suggested its contribution could be deployed effectively.

<sup>15</sup>Phyllis B. Dodge, *Tales of the Phelps-Dodge Family: A Chronicle of Five Generations* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1987).

<sup>16</sup>AABCFM, 77.1, Biographical Collection, Box 7, folder 6:15, Barton, Mr. and Mrs. James Levi (1), James L. Barton, Autobiographical Notes of James L. Barton.

<sup>17</sup>Jaffa Panken, "Lest They Perish": The Armenian Genocide and the Making of Modern Humanitarian Media in the U.S., 1915–1925' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2014), 43.

<sup>18</sup>RAC, RG 2 OMR, Series Q World Affairs, Box 41, folder 356, Vincent to Vickrey, 25 January 1919, which confirms that the Rockefeller Foundation had by that date contributed the sum of 570,000 dollars to ACASR. J. Panken, 33.



With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, ACASR was able to expand the scope of its activities, and with the change in its function came a change in name. On 6 August, the US Congress incorporated the Committee as 'Near East Relief', putting an official stamp on efforts already under way to organize food, medical supplies and refugee administration in the Near East. Section two of its incorporation stated that the NER's objective was 'to provide relief and to assist in the repatriation, rehabilitation, and re-establishment of suffering and dependent people of the Near East and adjacent areas; to provide for the care of orphans and widows and to promote the social, economic, and industrial welfare of those who have been rendered destitute, or dependent directly or indirectly, by the vicissitudes of war, the cruelties of men, or other causes beyond their control'. President Woodrow Wilson gave his full support to the new organization, as would President Harding subsequently. After incorporation, the majority of ACASR's leaders continued on to work for NER: Vickrey as general secretary, Cleveland H. Dodge as treasurer, and Barton as chairman.<sup>19</sup>

From the outset it was evident that the repatriation of displaced civilian populations depended on a plethora of actors and was certainly not a matter NER could deal with or decide upon alone. Logistics of repatriation, for example, were in the hands of Ottoman, French and British authorities and local relief organizations. NER sources say nothing of important local initiatives by Armenians for Armenian survivors or initiatives by Muslim organizations for Muslim Ottoman civilian populations.<sup>20</sup> Compared to these networks, NER was a foreign, undoubtedly resourceful but inexperienced organization.

In order to become operational, NER was dependent on relationships with other organizations and various authorities. For food supplies, it relied on the US Food Administration, which allocated 5,000 tons of food monthly for civilian populations in Ottoman territories, and on Allied soldiers, who would unload or transport supplies. Unlike the American Relief Administration, NER had no direct access to foodstuffs such as flour—it purchased supplies locally or provided the destitute with money that they might purchase their own sustenance.<sup>21</sup>

NER also needed to recruit relief workers. Experts were available back home, but the newly created institution needed human resources on the ground. ABCFM missionaries had knowledge—even if biased and selective—of local contexts. They were an obvious choice for NER, and they were also willing to collaborate. The missionaries in turn recognized that as NER was the successor of ACASR, joining with it would enable them to stay in Ottoman lands. In 1919, the American Red Cross decided not to undertake any humanitarian operations in the Near East, whereas the American Relief Administration cooperated with NER in Transcaucasia, a reality that might also explain why ABCFM missionaries were willing to offer their services to NER.<sup>22</sup> By 1920 NER overseas staff

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<sup>19</sup>AABCFM, 77.1, Biographical Collection, Box 7, folder 6:15, Barton, Mr. and Mrs. James Levi (1), James L. Barton, Autobiographical Notes of James L. Barton.

<sup>20</sup>Hilmar Kaiser (with Luther and Nancy Eskijian), ed., *At the Crossroads of Der Zor. Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915–1917* (Tampa: Signalman Publishing, 2017), 3; Khatchig Mouradian, 'Genocide and Humanitarian Resistance in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1916', *Etudes Arméniennes Contemporaines* 7 (2016): 87–103.

<sup>21</sup>American Relief Administration (hereafter ARA), *Documents of the ARA. European Operations, 1918–1922*, vol. 12: *The Near East, South Russia, Bulgaria* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1932).

<sup>22</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM, New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 1, January 1920 to July 1924, Memoranda Concerning Proposed Joint Statement of European Relief Council and Near East Relief, signed (though the signature has been erased by pen) by Charles Vickery and dated (in pencil) December 1920 (with a question mark).

included 538 American women and men, many of whom were missionaries, mainly affiliated with the ABCFM.<sup>23</sup>

In 1919, NER operated in the area around the Ottoman capital, the Caucasus, Anatolia, Asia Minor, Syria and Lebanon, Palestine (for Armenian refugees only) and, to a lesser extent, Persia. By law, and according to its incorporation, NER was bound to relieve all suffering and dependent people, but its relief operations were not all-embracing. NER did not seek out and had no access to Muslim sufferers and it prioritized Armenians over other Christian populations. By the time NER was fully operational, relief and repatriation in areas such as Cilicia were already in progress and the organization therefore did not take on leadership in this field. NER could provide only limited relief and only where displaced populations were stationed, so in camps rather than during their transit. From the military occupation of Ottoman territories by the Greek army in mid-1919 to those forces defeat by Turkish nationalist forces in 1922, NER—including the missionaries that worked for it—experienced increasing difficulties in relieving the recipients of their aid, mainly Ottoman Christians, who were often forced to relocate. Neither NER nor the ABCFM was equipped to organize and support masses of people on the move.

During these years NER was responsible for food distribution, for medical aid for adults, and for children in orphanages and clinics connected with refugee camps. In 1921, NER supplied food to 561,970 persons (mostly Armenians) in the Near East<sup>24</sup>; and the organization also recorded that the same year it operated 63 hospitals with 6,522 beds, 128 clinics, 11 rescue homes, and 229 orphanages in a number of Ottoman provinces, referred to in NER publications and documents as ‘the Near East’.<sup>25</sup> In its 1922 report NER claimed that one million people, chiefly Armenians and members of the ‘exiled subject races’, had been saved from perishing from starvation and epidemic diseases, although the rationale for these statistics is unknown. According to its official record, at the close of 1923, NER had in its overseas service 166 American personnel.<sup>26</sup>

These statistics are as remarkable as they are confusing and incomplete. Evidently presented to impress, they leave the historian frustrated. For instance, we do not know how many of those included in these figures were missionaries, and we do know that competent, trained native personnel recruited from amongst the refugees were not included. On one point NER sources are precise: all health work other than work on behalf of orphans was terminated by late 1923 because of lack of money. Food distribution for adults was terminated at the same time, again for lack of funds, so not because the recipients’ living conditions had improved.

At the end of 1923, NER was forced to move almost entirely out of Turkey, to Syria, Greece, and Soviet Armenia.<sup>27</sup> Of the 30,000 children transferred out of Turkey in the second half of 1922, some 18,000 went to Greece, a figure made up of Armenian and Greek children in roughly equal parts. The remaining 12,000 – mostly Armenians—were added to those already concentrated in Syria.<sup>28</sup> The vast majority of these orphans would be placed under the care of national or colonial authorities by the mid-1920s. After

<sup>23</sup> *Near East Relief Hand Book*, published by NER, 1920 (Statistics to 30 June 1920), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Nevzat Uyanık, *America and the Armenian Question* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 115.

<sup>25</sup> *The Medical Work of the Near East Relief. A Review of Its Accomplishment in Asia Minor and the Caucasus during 1919–1920*, ed. Geo. L. Richards, M.D. (NER, 1923).

<sup>26</sup> RAC, Box 129, NER 1923 Annual Report to Congress, 1924, 35.

<sup>27</sup> RAC, NER, box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chap. VI, 8.

<sup>28</sup> RAC, NER, box 129, 1923 NER Annual Report, 1924, 25.



1923, because of the dramatic decrease in the resources at its disposal, NER enforced the so-called ‘outplacing program’, with as many orphans as possible relocated to live with relatives or responsible carers.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, as late as 1923, when most of its relief work was terminated, NER defined itself as ‘humanitarian’, with its members humanitarians. NER General secretary Vickery stated:

Near East Relief is a *humanitarian organization*. It has saved, and we trust, will continue to save many lives. We are not content, however, with the saving of lives, if by so doing we merely prolong the physical existence of a certain number of human beings; we want not only to save life but to make life, bigger life, better life, for a better day of peace and international good will that is to be. It is believed that most of our workers overseas are dominated by this ideal of unselfish service of their fellowmen and the vision of a better world.<sup>30</sup>

### NER and the ABCFM: closely associated, but distinct

Vickery’s definition was certainly not antithetic to how ABCFM missionaries imagined their humanitarian engagement. Reference to ‘bigger life, better life’ must have resonated with missionaries who had been so active in trying to convert local populations.<sup>31</sup> NER made sense to ABCFM missionaries: for example, the two organizations spoke the same administrative language, and missionaries on the ground continued to correspond with decision-makers like Barton, who belonged to their missionary society. ABCFM missionaries who worked with NER were active at all levels of the NER administration; as men and, sometimes, women on the spot; as directors of local branches; as members of the Constantinople Administrative Committee (NER Ottoman headquarters) or in New York City. Missionaries working for NER continued to report to ABCFM decision-makers in Istanbul; some drew full salaries from ABCFM.<sup>32</sup> They could report to William Peet, the ABCFM treasurer in Istanbul, or in Boston to Barton directly, or to the Prudential Committee, ABCFM’s executive.

NER and ABCFM interests and visions converged in the message proclaimed by NER’s fundraising system, which was built upon that established by ACASR. NER proved able to deploy mass media, with a particular focus on visual strategies that included the funding of Hollywood movies such as *Ravished Armenia*.<sup>33</sup> The content, themes and nature of NER communications were expanded versions of ACASR’s message, amplifying its universalist claims and utilization of Christian rhetoric. NER campaigns were interwoven with Christian references, and the tropes of its visual campaigns were not innovative per se: helpless victims, particularly women and

<sup>29</sup>RAC, LSRM Series 3, Box 8, folder 100, NER 1921–23, James Barton, Walter George Smith, and Stanley White, as adopted by the special committee meeting at the Aldine Club, 29 April 1921.

<sup>30</sup>RAC, NER, box 129, Annual Report to Congress, 1923, New York, 1924, p.35, emphasis is mine.

<sup>31</sup>Ussama Makdisi, ‘Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity’, *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (1997): 680–713.

<sup>32</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924. vol. 1, Documents. [762], Fowle to Barton, 8 February 1921.

<sup>33</sup>On the film see Anthony Slide, *Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian* (Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 1997); Flora A. Keshgegian, ‘“Starving Armenians”: The Politics and Ideology of Humanitarian Aid in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century’, in *Humanitarian and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, ed. Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 140–55; Jaffa Panken, ‘“Lest They Perish”’: Leshu Torchin, ‘“Ravished Armenia”: Visual Media, Humanitarian Advocacy, and the Formation of Witnessing Publics’, *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 214–20; Michelle Tusan, ‘Genocide, Famine and Refugees on Film: Humanitarianism and the First World War’, *Past & Present* 237 (2017): 197–235.

children, 'brutal Turks' (i.e. Muslims), and heroic saviours were all stereotypical humanitarian narratives to which ABCFM missionaries were accustomed and which they approved of.<sup>34</sup>

ABCFM's propaganda had a well-established tradition of showcasing missionaries as heroes or heroines.<sup>35</sup> ACASR and later NER learned from missionaries how to use visual materials such as illustrations, posters, photographs and movies. One ABCFM pamphlet, written by the Reverend Fred Field Goodsell, celebrated the work of Dr Fred Shepard, who served in Antep/Aintab (today Gaziantep).<sup>36</sup> *Shepard of Aintab* was a typically Orientalist, condescending and patronizing publication. It described local populations and landscapes ('the obscure mountain village'), the diffident encounter of 'ignorant' and 'superstitious' natives with Western civilization, and a hero who carried out his mission in impossible conditions. Shepard is portrayed as an athlete able to spend countless hours in the saddle. These publications were demonstrations of 'Yankee genius', of a hero who exported 'the best ideals' of American universities and had the missionary's ability to relate to all kinds of people: Muslims, Kurds, Jews and, of course, Christians. The persistent opposition of native medicine to American physicians is part of the modernist/enlightening tale of publications like *Shepard of Aintab*. Such stories of Christian heroism were virtually indistinguishable from later NER stories of humanitarian heroism, which similarly adopted a paternalist and civilizational stance.<sup>37</sup>

The conflict opened up new opportunities for women missionaries, who accounted for about fifty per cent of missionaries in foreign service.<sup>38</sup> As historian Suzanne E. Moranian demonstrates, these women were far from having attained the same status as men, primarily because the ranks of the clergy were closed to them. They were frequently college graduates, representing therefore the minority of American women who attended college at that time.<sup>39</sup> Among ABCFM women missionaries, medical doctors in particular seized the opportunities offered by NER or the American Women's Hospitals, another humanitarian institution operating in the Near East. In her work on women missionaries

<sup>34</sup>Keshgegian, "'Starving Armenians'", 146; See also Nazan Maksudyan, 'Physical Expressions of Winning Hearts and Minds: Body Politics of the American Missionaries in "Asiatic Turkey"', in *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism in the Middle East, 1850–1950. Ideologies, Rhetoric and Practices*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Karène Sanchez Summerer (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 62–89.

<sup>35</sup>The ABCFM did not fail to lift up its heroines, as in the case of Miss Allen, who died of typhus at Sivas in February 1922. *Lone Sentinels in the Near East. War Stories of American Women in Turkey and Serbia*, by Ethel Daniels Hubbard and published by the Woman's Board of Missions in 1920, tells the story of four missionary heroines. AABCFM, ABC 16.9. vol. 2 WBMP—Turkey, General Correspondence, 1917–1923 (in chronological order), W. W. Peet to Rev. Ernest W. Riggs, Constantinople, 9 February 1922.

<sup>36</sup>Goodsell, *Shepard of Aintab*, 2, ABCFM publication. Fred Goodsell was Field Secretary of the Turkey Mission, Near East Mission of the ABCFM, director of the Bible House in Istanbul, and Director of the Language School in Istanbul, and was elected executive vice-president of the ABCFM in 1930.

<sup>37</sup>AABCFM, 77.1.25, Box 25, Biographical Collection, folder 25:49, Haas, Dr. and Mrs. Cyril H. See Bertrand Taithe, 'Humanitarian Masculinity: Desire, Character and Heroics, 1876–2018', in *Gendering Global Humanitarianism in the Twentieth Century. Practice, Politics and the Power of Representation*, ed. Esther Moeller, Johannes Paulmann and Katharina Stornig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 35–59.

<sup>38</sup>Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud, eds., *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East. Two Hundred Years of History* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Barbara Reeves-Ellington, *Domestic Frontiers: Gender, Reform, and American Interventions in the Ottoman Balkans and the Near East* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); Maria Jacobsen, *Diaries of a Danish Missionary: Harpoet, 1907–1919*, ed. A. Sarafian, trans. Kristen Vind (London: Gomidas Institute, 2006); Kathleen Sheldon, 'No More Cookies or Cake Now, "C'est la guerre": An American Nurse in Turkey, 1919 to 1920', *Social Sciences and Missions* 23 (2010): 94–123; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar and Connie A. Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms. Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup>Morianian, 'Armenian Genocide', 189; Maria Småberg, 'On Mission in the Cosmopolitan World', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 405–31.

Caroline Kahlenberg emphasizes that these women positioned themselves as (Western) experts by employing typical Orientalist tropes about the domestic life and physical appearance of Ottoman women, who were deemed unfit, weak, sedentary and lazy.<sup>40</sup> American women viewed Ottoman women's bodies as a physical expression of a lack of self-control and of the laziness that beset their society. The stereotypes the female missionaries employed were no different from those of their male colleagues.

The historian Ussama Makdisi notes that while the American missionaries in the late Ottoman Empire disavowed biological racism, they fully accepted and engaged in its more pervasive cultural variant as they discoursed on the national manners, customs, and traits of the Syrians, Turks, Armenians and Arabs. Sometimes their intent was sympathetic and sometimes not, but their engagement always came with the conviction that theirs was the more righteous civilization and the knowledge that it was the more powerful. Makdisi's point provides another reason, this time ideological, for the convergence of and connection between ABCFM and NER: they both steadfastly avowed the universal nature of Christianity, at the same time condemning Islam as a ritual system based on Oriental ideas and Arab national peculiarities. They believed that the United States most perfectly resembled a Christian nation and were oblivious to, or purposefully silent about, the great dramas, struggles, and injustices under way in late-nineteenth and early twentieth century America.<sup>41</sup>

NER and the ABCFM shared an acceptance of Anglo-Saxon world dominance, the existence of a hierarchy of nations and their own positions within that reality.<sup>42</sup> ABCFM missionaries and secular American humanitarians assumed that the United States constituted an unproblematic land of liberty and an imperial power of manifest destiny and were able to explain away the suffering of millions of slaves and their descendants. Missionaries genuinely believed the Ottoman government's treatment of the Armenians in 1895–96 – when an Armenian uprising was suppressed harshly—was more barbarous than the treatment of autochthonous North American populations and African Americans.<sup>43</sup> NER humanitarians' ideological and moral platform and that of ABCFM missionaries rested upon similar mixes of nationalism, racism and cultural exceptionalism, expansionism and civilizational postures, and a particular kind of internationalism. According to the historian Ian Tyrrel, American imperialism was characterized not just by cultural expansion but also by specific forms of Protestant Christian moral expansionism.<sup>44</sup> By the turn of the century, Social Gospel—the religious expression of progressivism—had mobilized a paternalist discourse of responsibility at home and exported it for the welfare of the world. Building on ideologies that advanced the superiority of Christian civilization, ... Social Gospel ethics merged with Social Darwinist thought and scientific racism that classified races, nations, and peoples on an evolutionary ladder of civilisation and religious belief. Imbricating the superiority of Christian

<sup>40</sup>Caroline Kahlenberg, "The Gospel of Health": American Missionaries and the Transformation of Ottoman/Turkish Women's Bodies, 1890–1932', *Gender & History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 150–76.

<sup>41</sup>Makdisi, 'Reclaiming the Land of the Bible', 177–8.

<sup>42</sup>Idir Ouahes, "Machine Age Humanitarianism": American Humanitarianism in Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Syria and Lebanon', in *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Karène Sanchez Summerer, 183–208.

<sup>43</sup>Makdisi, 'Reclaiming the Land of the Bible', 178–9.

<sup>44</sup>Ian Tyrrel, 'Woman, Mission, and Empire. New Approaches to American Cultural Expansion', in *Competing Kingdoms*, ed. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Sklar and Shemo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 43–69, here 47–8. See also William R. Hutchinson, *Errand to the World. American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

civilisation and imperial ideology authorised an Anglo-Saxon sense of duty, historian Karine V. Walther has argued.<sup>45</sup> In an in-depth survey of NER from 1924, the sociologist R.R. Reeder perfectly illustrated this point:

[T]he *social message of the Gospel* must lead in this new evangelism [...]. To make more successful engineers, professional men, hotel proprietors, business leader, etc., merely in their individual capacities, hardly justifies the expenditure of American money in a foreign country. [...] Unless our humanitarian efforts release and convey the spirit of Christianity, we build without a foundation.<sup>46</sup>

Missionaries working for NER were persuaded that humanitarian actions had to go beyond relief and encompass rehabilitative and more permanent policies. They shared with NER the idealization of the countryside—agricultural life with a dash of modernity—and the idea of the city as a place of perdition where refugees might live idle, apathetic lives (hence the need to ensure refugees could work).<sup>47</sup>

### From cooperation to separation

It was October 1921 before NER and the ABCFM articulated their relationship in a memorandum of understanding. The two organizations had a common purpose in Turkey in ‘serving all the peoples of the land’, and although there were ‘slight differences in approach’, the actual service of each organization tended to the same ends, while past co-operation had redounded to the mutual advantage of both institutions.<sup>48</sup> The document reiterated that ABCFM missionaries served for life. Their connection with the ABCFM would be retained even when they were giving their entire time to relief work (in other words, to NER). The ABCFM and NER agreed that missionaries would receive remuneration for their temporary work with the latter. They were not volunteers. When performing relief duties for NER, they would be under the NER director. One provision from the memorandum would prove problematic, however. NER was supposed to recognize the essentially missionary character of ABCFM workers, in both their influence and their activities, as long as it did not interfere with the fulfilment of their specific tasks with NER.<sup>49</sup> Property issues would also give rise to tensions between the two institutions, with the ABCFM increasingly concerned about the expropriation of its assets by the Turkish state as the victories of Turkish nationalists grew.<sup>50</sup>

In her autobiography, Ruth Parmelee, a missionary and medical doctor who served in Kharput (Harpoot), recounted that in 1919, missionaries like her were ‘seconded’ to NER,

<sup>45</sup>Karine V. Walther, *Sacred Interests. The United States and the Islamic World, 1821–1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 160–168, and 245; see also her article, ‘For God and Country: James Barton, the Ottoman Empire and Missionary Diplomacy during World War I’, *First World War Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016): 63–79.

<sup>46</sup>AABCFM, Barton Paper, box 13, A Survey of Near East Relief. Educational, Social, Religious, by Paul Monroe, R. R. Reeder, and James L. Vance, 1924; in particular R.R. Reeder report entitled Sociological Observations.

<sup>47</sup>Jonas Jauffeldt, ‘Danes, Orientalism and the Modern Middle East. Perspectives from the Nordic Periphery’ (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2006), 135.

<sup>48</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. WTM 1860–1927, vol. 49, WTM, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [758], Charles T. Riggs.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. The final version of the document had some minor modifications.

<sup>50</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9. vol. 2 WBMP—Turkey, General Correspondence, 1917–1923 (in chronological order), 2 May 1922, portions of a letter from Mr. Birge, work in Smyrna, signed by Enrest W. Riggs. See also AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. WTM 1860–1927, vol. 52, WTM, 1920–1924. vol. 4. Peet, Letters 1920–1922. [761], Peet to Barton, 1 February 1923.

as fellow workers, but received a special kind of appointment.<sup>51</sup> In late August 1920, Parmelee enthusiastically praised the good work NER was carrying out on behalf of health conditions for children and the local population. She also asked Barton for more NER workers so that missionaries could focus more on their missionary work, an indication that missionaries and NER workers were not doing the same thing. Exactly twelve months later, Parmelee wrote another letter to Barton complaining about her expulsion (and that of Isabel Harley) from Turkey, which the nationalist government in Ankara had ordered in January 1922. She also recorded, however, that since April 1921 the newly appointed director of NER, Mr Curt, and his new 'business system' had been a disaster. Curt had cut spending on orphans' clothing, food and relief to the needy, leaving relief workers unable to start a soup kitchen for new refugees. Missionaries in the field had to spend their private funds for the relief of those in dire need. The NER director had also cut monthly allowances and the wages paid to native workers. Parmelee argued that it would have been more economical to care for the vulnerable before they got sick rather than wait for them to be sent to hospital; the same applied to orphans, some of whom suffered from malnutrition. She concluded that the 'Harpoot spirit' had gone and co-operation and harmony between NER and the missionaries was dead: Curt's 'one-man regime had spoilt it'. Now, Parmelee wrote, missionaries and NER personnel seemed to be split into two factions and Curt wanted all missionaries out. Parmelee added that the name of the Americans had been 'stained by drinking, etc.' – a reference to Curt's questionable moral character and behaviour, and a possible hint at sexual relations with locals.<sup>52</sup> When the new Turkish government eventually deported both NER staff and missionaries from Kharput, Parmelee recorded that Curt had used NER funds and the organization's car to curry favour with the local authorities.<sup>53</sup>

Tensions also ran high between Clarence Ussher, a physician and ABCFM missionary, and Colonel William Haskell, who was in charge of an Allied mission and the same time represented the American Relief Administration and managed NER funds in the Caucasus.<sup>54</sup> On 21 April 1920 the doctor wrote that since he had joined the NER mission he had not performed medical or surgical work. The administrative demands were so great that he seemed able to do more for the people by organizing hospitals and having native physicians do the bulk of the work than by working in a hospital himself. Moreover, Dr Ussher wrote that Haskell pushed him 'out of everything because he had been a missionary'. Indeed, Haskell seemed to have a strong antipathy to anything connected with missions. According to Ussher, he deprived children of Bible instruction and anything that might have connected them with evangelical Christianity. He had also broken up the orphanage founded by Dr Reynolds and his missionary companions and had scattered the equipment, appropriating the orphanage building for his headquarters. Ussher insisted

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<sup>51</sup> AABCFM, ABCFM 77.1.56, Box 56, BC, folder 46:20, Parmelee, Ruth A., Ruth Parmelee, A Pioneer in the Euphrates Valley, 1967.

<sup>52</sup> AABCFM, ABC 16.9.7. ETM 1853–1919, vol. 26, ETM, 1920–1922, Documents and letters. [765], Parmelee to Barton, 25 and 28 August 1920; and Parmelee to Barton, 21 September 1921, from Mezeren.

<sup>53</sup> AABCFM, ABC 16.9.7. ETM 1853–1919, vol. 26, ETM, 1920–1922, Documents and letters. [765], Ruth Parmelee and Isabelle Harley to Riggs, 20 April 1922. AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. WTM 1860–1927, vol. 49, WTM, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [758], MD Mark H. Ward, 16 May 1922 (Read before the Committee ad Interim and ordered transmitted to the Prudential Committee in Boston). On Parmelee see also AABCFM, ABCFM, 77.1.56, Box 56 BC, folder 46:20, Parmelee, Ruth A.

<sup>54</sup> AABCFM, ABC 16.9.7. ETM 1853–1919, vol. 26, ETM, 1920–1922, Documents and letters. [765], Dr. Clarence Ussher to Barton, 21 April 1921. The outline of Ussher's views that follows here is based on this letter.

he was not bigoted and fully realized that in a work supported by people of all faiths and none, contributions should not be used for propagandistic purposes that could prove hurtful. But children, he continued, had to have an education and instruction in moral principles, and 'the best piece of literature in the world' was indispensable for that purpose.

Tensions between secular and faith-based relief workers increased. Ussher openly criticized what he referred to as military red tape, especially the wasted opportunity to repatriate Armenians. Like Parmelee, Ussher found fault with the moral conduct of some American soldiers working for the American Relief Administration and for the NER-Caucasus Branch, officers included. He wrote of one of them who had forced his way into the refugee camp at night and attempted to take out one of the girls, to whom he had previously given a pair of shoes. The manager of the camp said he would resign if the 'honour of women in his camp was not respected by Americans'. Ussher complained to Colonel Telford, but the man responsible was the Colonel's superior, which created an embarrassing situation. Cases of embezzlement, corruption, inappropriate sexual relations and other behaviour such as drinking or playing cards divided secular and faith-based relief workers.<sup>55</sup> Noting their different moral standards, another missionary wrote:

Many of our social customs which have gradually come to an accepted standard in United States are accepted and practiced by new [comers]. Some of these for instance, dancing and card-playing and smoking, though often passed very slightly at home, here must be taken seriously. We are here for the moral uplift of the country. The flood of evil things from foreign civilization is overwhelming a people who have not had the years of training. Dancing, for instance, may be all right at home in a home parlor among the youth who have grown up together; here it seems in all its vicious forms, and no differentiation is made. The youth is saying 'if such and such American is dancing, it must be all right, I too will dance'. While such temporary organizations as the NER and YMCA and YWCA have done a great deal of good, nevertheless I fear that it will take ten years of hard missionary work to overcome some of the results of questionable social practices.<sup>56</sup>

Men like Colonel Haskell had humiliatingly lowered American prestige, wrote Ussher. It was difficult for him to believe that NER had the welfare of native races at heart given the language and actions of the relief workers, some of whom made no secret of their hatred of the missionaries and indicated in word and deed that the reason they came out was because America 'had gone dry and there was plenty of booz [sic] available here, [otherwise] they would behaved differently'.<sup>57</sup>

Another missionary, Nesbitt Chambers revealed how dysfunctional the association between NER and the ABCFM was in the city of Adana.<sup>58</sup> Chambers also profoundly disagreed with the decision taken by NER director of education Howard McAfee not to teach the Bible in the orphanages. He found it arbitrary and despotic; he had no time for McAfee's explanation that Bible-teaching antagonized NER Catholic and Jewish

<sup>55</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.7. ETM 1853–1919, vol. 26, ETM, 1920–1922, Documents and letters. [765], Dr. Clarence Ussher to Mr. Hemphill, Chairman NER Board of Directors: 13 June 1920.

<sup>56</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Paul Nilson to Barton, 28 February 1921.

<sup>57</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.7. ETM 1853–1919, vol. 26, ETM, 1920–1922, Documents and letters. [765], Dr. Clarence Ussher to Mr. Hemphill, Chairman NER Board of Directors, 13 June 1920.

<sup>58</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], W. Chambers to Barton, Adana, Cilicia, 6 January 1920.



contributors and might be seen as 'sectarian Protestant propaganda'.<sup>59</sup> On 9 March 1922, Chambers commented from Maraş (Marash) on NER's decision to end adult relief and continue only with relief for children.<sup>60</sup> Care for war orphans was among the prime tasks of NER, but what, he asked, would happen to a widow with several small children and no means of support? Did those children come under the heading of 'war orphans'? Was not their welfare of as great importance as that of those whom relief workers looked after in the NER orphanage, or at least were their needs not a close second to those of the full orphans? NER had helped as many or more children of widows in their own homes, at a considerably lower cost per head. Did the new NER policy mean to leave these poor children to starve just because only one parent had been killed and not both? 'Can't we kill the other parent and save the children?' was the biting question that NER's move seemed to pose. Chambers implored NER to help additional children, especially the children of poor widows who if the new policy were implemented, would effectively be left to starve.

Chambers also insisted that the NER claim that the way was now open for all Muslims and Christians who wished to leave Maraş to get out (to Syria, and to Aleppo in particular) was ridiculous. Acquiring a passport for the road meant getting at least twenty-five separate signatures from different local authorities and paying the corresponding fees. All this was necessary before an individual could have his or her picture on the passport. Chambers asked NER to provide funds or facilities for the migration of adults, especially widows and orphans. Finally, he completely disagreed with NER's view that since heavy taxes on imports into Turkey had closed the market, local industries had a chance for development. Local industry, he wrote, was dead. Chambers' analyses might have been accurate but they ignored NER financial constraints. By 1923 NER did not have had sufficient financial resources to keep the adult relief programme going.

Fred MacCallum, a missionary employed by NER, wrote in March 1923 that for the last few weeks NER had been doing some relief work in connection with the refugees and orphans in Maraş. Theoretically, he wrote, NER was looking after the refugees, but as a matter of fact, 'we [ABCFM] saw that either through inexperience or for lack of funds or both' a great deal of work was being left undone. The ABCFM accordingly appointed Miss E. Zbinden to act as its representative to see what could be done to improve conditions, especially for better-off, educated people who were living in refugee camps for the first time. The ABCFM also spent its own money to purchase from American ships in the harbour food for over 500 of the neediest people, especially mothers with babies and sick people and convalescents. The ABCFM, MacCallum wrote, prevented epidemics by discovering the first cases of smallpox and typhus and supplying a considerable quantity of medicine. It secured work, such as sewing, knitting and lace making, for men and women, as far as ABCFM funds allowed. The ABCFM (not NER) also rented rooms for about thirty young women 'who in the camps were in grave moral danger' (i.e. participation in prostitution, a problem very seldom discussed in the NER documents).<sup>61</sup> MacCallum suggested it was time to employ (Protestant) Armenians in relief work to a much greater extent than had hitherto been the case, especially Armenian men and

<sup>59</sup> AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], W. N. Chambers to Barton, 1922 (?).

<sup>60</sup> AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Chambers to McAfee, 9 March 1922. The account of Chambers' views that follows here draws from this letter.

<sup>61</sup> AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. WMT 1860–1927 vol. 51, WTM, 1920–1924, vol. 3, Letters H–Z. [760], Fred MacCallum to Ernest Riggs, 1 March 1923. The account of MacCallum's views that follows here draws from this letter.

women who had lived or had been educated or trained in America and ‘whose heart would be in the work they would undertake out here’. In his view, they would accomplish much more for the refugees and orphans ‘than Americans who do not know any Oriental language and who do not understand conditions here’. The reference to ignorant NER personnel was indirect but it would have been evident to ABCFM decision-makers who read MacCallum’s letter.

From the beginning of their collaboration with NER, missionaries found it difficult to hide their sense of superiority. In 1921 Luther Fowle, ABCFM assistant treasurer, wrote that the ABCFM men were the leaders and the backbone of NER work.<sup>62</sup> Fowle seems to have forgotten that the fund-raising campaigns back in the United States were not in the hands of the missionaries and that other non-ABCFM workers were as engaged and motivated within the NER. Moreover, working for NER while remaining a missionary came with complications. Barton—in his capacity as ABCFM foreign secretary—reminded missionary candidates in the Near East that they would be guests and would have to obey foreign governments. As to their relations to native peoples, he noted, missionaries were not protectors of the populations of the country but teachers or co-workers, and as such they had to be very cautious about attempting to exercise authority over them. Barton spoke of the necessity of missionaries ‘orientalizing’ themselves (i.e. adapting to local customs), of how indispensable it was to learn local languages and to get acquainted to the ‘slowness of the East’ and not to ‘expect too much from the native Christian’ – though ‘[w]e mustn’t lose sight of the fact that what we send men out for is to make Christian leaders’.<sup>63</sup> Yet when Barton wrote those guidelines in 1921, the bulk of missionaries in the Ottoman Empire were working for NER and undertaking relief operations, the local authorities were either the Allies, the Greek forces of occupation or, increasingly, Turkish nationalists who systematically expelled missionaries. The idea they might educate Christian leaders was delusional.

### **The New Turkish Republic: ABCFM missionaries and NER relief workers part ways**

The expulsion of Orthodox Christians and the independence of Turkey in 1923 meant that most Ottoman Christians were now living outside the borders of the new Turkish republic; their chances of returning to Anatolia, the Pontus or Asia Minor were minimal. Ottoman Armenians who had survived the war and genocide were now dispersed across Soviet Armenia, Syria and Lebanon. They relied on Armenian charities and benevolent networks and cherished their own language, institutions, schools and churches; their interlocutors were British and French authorities in the mandated territories or Soviet authorities in the Caucasus. The ABCFM had to consider its future seriously.<sup>64</sup> As for NER, it had to downsize its activities considerably and was forced to concentrate on orphanages. Many orphans were rapidly ‘outplaced’, i.e. arrangements were made for them to live with relatives. NER abandoned its initial plans to support orphans through college or to invest very significantly in educational projects. At best, NER orphanages could provide short and intensive

<sup>62</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Luther Fowle to Barton, 8 February 1921. AABCFM, 77.1.25, Box 25, Biographical Collection, folder 22:38.

<sup>63</sup>AABCFM, Barton Papers, vol. 9, Stenographic notes of Dr. Barton’s Address to the American Board Candidates, 15 June 1921.

<sup>64</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. Turkey Mission (hereafter TM). New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 1, January 1920 to July 1924, CTM, General Report of Aleppo Field, North Syria, 1923, Aleppo, Syria, 26 April 1924, by J.C. Martin.

industrial, trade or agricultural education and aid in self-support.<sup>65</sup> By the end of the 1920s NER had been renamed the Near East Foundation; the new body terminated all extant NER programmes and concentrated instead on small-scale technical assistance.

The ABCFM was equally affected by the end of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>66</sup> Disbarred from evangelical work in Greece, in 1925 the ABCFM wondered whether its establishment of permanent educational institutions in that country was justified.<sup>67</sup> Refugee schools and education in refugee camps were simply strategic interests. As an internal document admitted, had it not been for the refugees, the mission would doubtless have been unable to secure a foothold in Athens.<sup>68</sup> The ABCFM also acknowledged that its work was almost entirely confined to Armenian refugees, and if they were transferred to some other country, the ABCFM would lose its *raison d'être* in Greece.<sup>69</sup> Eventually, the ABCFM accepted that Protestantism was not popular in Greece and would not make much headway.<sup>70</sup> In Syria and Lebanon, ABCFM had accepted by the end of 1923 that Armenians could no longer be reckoned on as an evangelizing agency for Turkey. There was no prospect that Armenians would be able to return to their homes, and Armenians attending missionary schools in Syria were unanimously determined not to use or learn the Turkish language.

The ABCFM did consider the possibility of returning to Turkey and launching educational work for Muslims. The institution's decision-makers, Barton included, were aware that this project would have to be started from scratch, for it entailed command of the language, an appropriate attitude towards local populations, and selecting missionaries who had not acted or spoken in a compromising (i.e. anti-Turkish) manner in the past.<sup>71</sup> This unprecedented interest in Muslims reveals how profound was the crisis in the ABCFM, but it is also indicative of the institution's vitality and awareness of how the political context in formerly Ottoman lands had changed. Luther Fowle's 1923 *Impressions on Central Turkey Stations* suggested that 'experimental work for Turks' could be carried out.<sup>72</sup> He viewed Aleppo as a possible bridge-head for the ABCFM, for eventual access across the Turkish border.<sup>73</sup> In Aleppo the ABCFM continued the tradition of the Marash Girls' College and the Aintab Boys' College. As to Central

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<sup>65</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 1, January 1920 to July 1924, James Barton, Statements and Suggestions Regarding the Future Work of the American Board in Turkey, December 1920.

<sup>66</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 6, 1924–1929, Reports, American Board Mission—Salonica News Letter, n. 4, December 1924, by Dana K. Getchell, Station Chairman.

<sup>67</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 12, 1924–1929, Conference between Cabinet of ABCFM and Council of Woman's Boards re Policies in the Near East, 23 February 1925. See also AABCFM, 77.1.25, Box 27, BC, folder 23:48, Mr. and Mrs. Dana K. Getchell, document received on 23 October 1930, from Athens, signed by Dana Getchell.

<sup>68</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 6, 1924–1929, Reports, Old Phaleron, Greece, 24 December 1924 (document not signed).

<sup>69</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.5: Near East Mission: miscellaneous papers to 1929 and main series of papers 1929–1961 (government documents), vol. 8, Near East, 1874–1930. Supplementary. Extra size, v. 3. Microfilm A467: Reel 507.

<sup>70</sup>AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 6, 1924–1929, Reports, Old Phaleron, Greece, 24 December 1924 (document not signed).

<sup>71</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, Central Turkey, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], James Martin to Ernest Riggs, Alexandretta, Syria, 11 January 1923; see also ABCFM 77.1.3, Collective Biography, 3:16, Adkins, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie J., American Mission, Aleppo, Syria, 1 January 1931.

<sup>72</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, Central Turkey, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Impressions on Central Turkey Stations, Luther Fowle to Ernest Riggs, 11 June 1923. David Shavit, *The United States in the Middle East: A Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

<sup>73</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. Ibid.; The Aintab Central Turkey College re-opened in Aleppo. According to a native Armenian who was a professor at the college, 90% of the students in Aleppo could never hope to go to Beirut. The Aleppo College for Boys had 211 students in 1927.

Turkey Stations like Marash, Fowle thought the right strategy was to approach Kurds and Circassians, and 'the people of those interesting tribes in the mountains to the north'.<sup>74</sup> If Turkish authorities could be persuaded to readmit the ABCFM, Fowle suggested focusing on medical work. He proposed that the ABCFM hospitals should be agile and mobile, ready to operate in remote villages. As to education work, Fowle suggested an emphasis on primary and secondary education and that missionaries could put themselves at the disposal of local Turkish educational leaders.<sup>75</sup> Fowle did not think that toning down ABCFM's Christian message or reinterpreting it for Muslims was the right thing to do. He argued that 'any Oriental respects religious opinion, and by the same sign has not respect for religious or philosophical casuistry'; simple Christian belief and practice and also the influence of the Christian character upon individuals would need to be emphasized, since evangelistic work would not be allowed.<sup>76</sup> Fowle believed publications for Muslims were important, but his economic and political analysis of the future of Turkey was pessimistic, based on established civilizational and racist assumptions. The Turks, he wrote, had 'eliminated in great part the Christian elements in the economic life of the country', and in his view they would be unable to stand alone economically.

ABCFM progressively returned to Turkey in the 1930s with renewed ambitions and innovative projects such as new literature 'especially fitted' for Muslim readers, with new tracts to be published and circulated among 'the Turks' (i.e. the Muslims) of Istanbul. The ABCFM began publishing family magazines in Izmir, with one especially for women and one for children.<sup>77</sup> As early as 1923 Fred Goodsell had underscored the problem of language. He doubted whether there were six ABCFM missionaries who could speak even simple Turkish. In the past, contacts between American missionaries and the Turks had often been mediated through Greeks and Armenians. Goodsell suggested that missionaries did not know how to approach Muslim Turks and that prejudice had to be a concern, since the vast majority of missionaries identified with the Armenian people, and the Turks believed (or, he wrote, were led to believe) that the missionaries were there for the benefit of the Armenians.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, NER had taken over property and personnel to such an extent that mission stations had been given up, property abandoned, and personnel diverted.<sup>79</sup> Missionaries had to wrestle both with Turkish nationalism and with Americans who wanted the ABCFM to terminate its work. In 1924, Barton—in his capacity as ABCFM secretary and aware of NER's difficult financial situation—reiterated the importance of Christian schools in Turkey, useful for those Christian children of Istanbul who had been spared the exchange of

<sup>74</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Impressions on Central Turkey Stations, Luther Fowle to Ernest Riggs, 11 June 1923.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid. For a dissenting view on missionaries being able to speak Turkish adequately see a document by Dr. L. Shepard written in 1934. ABCFM, 77, 1.66, Box 66, BC, Shepard, Dr. And Mrs. Lorrin A., Remarks by Dr. Lorrin A. Shepard of Turkey—Prudential Committee Meeting, 8 May 1934 – Not for publication in any form [underlined twice in thick red pencil].

<sup>76</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CT, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [762], Impressions on Central Turkey Stations, Luther Fowle to Ernest Riggs, 11 June 1923.

<sup>77</sup>The American Board Missions in the Near East, published excerpt from the Annual Report of 1922, 17. AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 1, January 1920 to July 1924, Annual Report—Publication Department, 1 July 1922–1 July 1923 signed by F.W. MacCallum, Chairman of the Publication Committee, F.F. Goodsell, Rev. Peet, H. H. Riggs and J. K. Birge.

<sup>78</sup>AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. WTM 1860–1927, vol. 49, WTM, 1920–1924, vol. 1, Documents. [758], Fred Goodsell to the Committee ad Interim, 6 April 1923.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., and AABCFM, ABC 16.9.3. WTM 1860–1927, vol. 53, WTM, 1920–1924, vol. 5, Peet: Letters 1922–1927. [761a], H. Riggs to Barton, Athens, Greece, 21 December 1922.

populations and who continued attending school alongside with Muslim children.<sup>80</sup> Not only was Barton not prepared to abandon these few remaining Christians, but, he claimed:

The mass of the Turkish people and the best educated of leaders, *beyond any question*, feel the need of American schools and American philanthropic institutions. While some of the more fanatical are suspicious and eager to curtail the work of American institutions, the great mass of the people desire them to continue and are eager to patronise them. This is undoubtedly true also of the mission medical work.<sup>81</sup>

Barton devised a twofold plan. One element would comprise clubs (in effect higher education schools for the few remaining Christians and selected Turks) where ‘the leadership of a foreigner’ was welcomed. While direct religious propaganda was prohibited, the establishments would be opportunities for contact, which would disarm suspicion and ‘demonstrate to the Turks the underlying principles of our Christian faith’.<sup>82</sup> The second element would comprise American schools for Turks that taught ‘modern agriculture’. He proposed that ‘intelligent’ leaders were conscious of the fact that it was through the development of her vast agricultural resources that Turkey was to become a self-supporting country. The International College in Izmir had already started an agricultural department to this end.<sup>83</sup> Barton revealed his ultimate objective: ‘The missionary work of the American Board in the Near East is not by any means ended. This may be but the beginning of a new era. The American Board entered the Near East with the Mohammedan populations as a goal, mentioned ahead of the Armenians and the Greeks. That fundamental purpose has never been changed’.<sup>84</sup>

In 1933 Lee Vrooman, a missionary and dean of the International College of Smyrna (Izmir), criticized ABCFM educational policies in the Near East. What was the point of agricultural schools given that since 1930 the Near East Foundation had been running experimental projects directed at raising the standard of rural life? Would ABCFM efforts in this realm not be redundant and useless?<sup>85</sup> The government of Turkey had brought in John Dewey and Adolphe Ferrière from Geneva;<sup>86</sup> Iraq had done the same with Paul Monroe; Egypt with Professor Édouard Claparède of Geneva and Professor Mann of England. In Vrooman’s view the only added value from ABCFM education was that the latest technical advantages and pedagogical methods would be highlighted while human needs were tackled in light of the gift of Christ, a combination of religion and science.<sup>87</sup> What then would be the purpose of ABCFM schools if religion could not be part of the curriculum?

<sup>80</sup>James Barton, ‘Status and Outlook of Missionary Work in Turkey. A Review of Conditions in the Near East’, ABCFM, 1924. See also Robert L. Daniel, ‘The United States and the Turkish Republic before World War II, the Cultural Dimension’, *Middle East Journal* 21, no. 1 (1967), 52–63, here 54–5.

<sup>81</sup>Barton, ‘Status and Outlook’, 3 (emphasis added). See also AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series 1920–1929, vol. 2, TM, Jan. 1920 to July 1924, Mark Bristol to James Barton, 25 October 1923; AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 1, January 1920 to July 1924, Report on Work for Moslems, August 1921, by Mrs. Crawford, Mr. Ryan, Dr. White, Mr. Birge and Mr. Goodsell.

<sup>82</sup>Barton, ‘Status and Outlook’, 3.

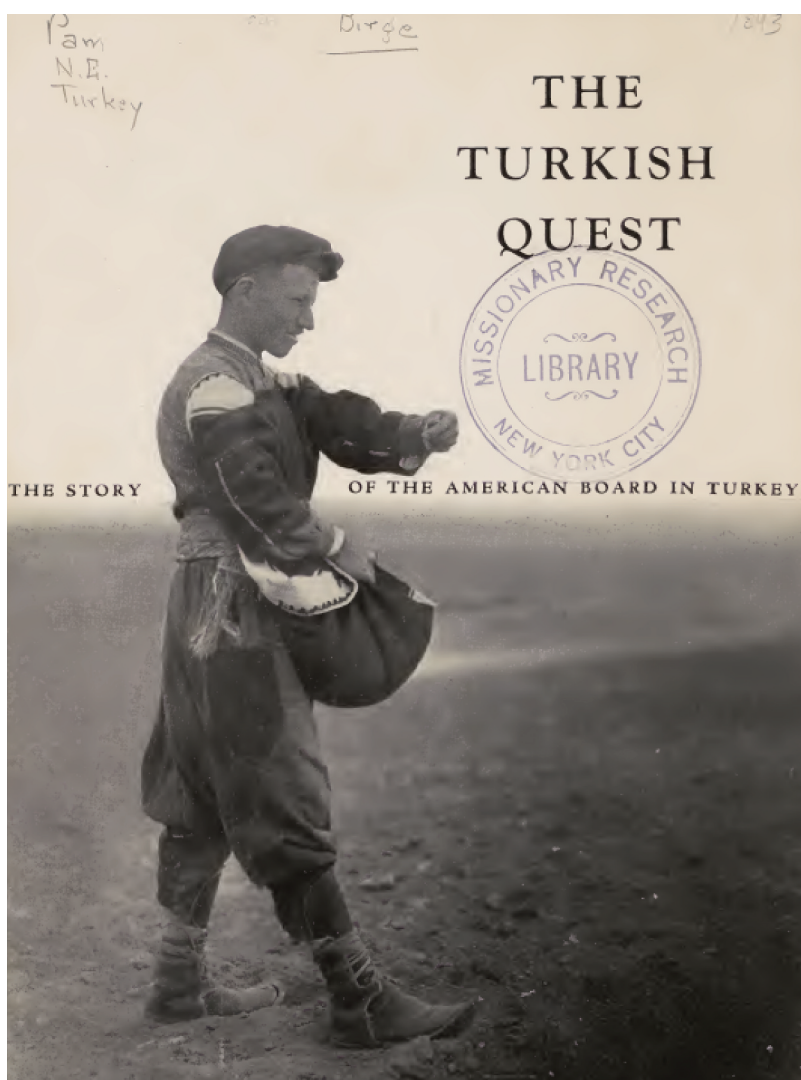
<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 5. AABCFM, 16.9.1. TM. New Series, 1920–1929, vol. 1, January 1920 to July 1924, Report on Work for Moslems, August 1921, by Mrs. Crawford, Mr. Ryan, Dr. White, Mr. Birge and Mr. Goodsell. AABCFM, ABC 16.9.5. CTM 1860–1924, vol. 27, CTM, 1920–1924. vol. 1, Documents. [762], Fowle to Riggs, 11 June 1923.

<sup>85</sup>Lee Vrooman, ‘Issues in Missionary Education in the Near East’, *International Review of Missions* 22, no. 1 (1933): 50–62, here 52; see also Lee Vrooman, ‘The Place of Missions in the New Turkey’, *International Review of Missions*, July 1929. See also David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad. How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 65–6.

<sup>86</sup>Gert J.J. Biesta and Siebren Miedema, ‘Dewey in Europe: A Case Study on the International Dimensions of the Turn-of-the-Century Educational Reform’, *American Journal of Education* 105, no. 1 (1996): 1–26.

<sup>87</sup>Vrooman, ‘Issues in Missionary Education’, 56.



A 1943 pamphlet justifying the educational presence of the ABCFM in Turkey.

The main problem mission schools faced in the 1930s was not that they were Protestant or Christian, but that they were foreign and thought to be denationalizing students (flying American flags for instance) in a highly nationalist context. The only solution was to turn missionary schools, with the help of local government educationists, 'as native as possible'.<sup>88</sup> As Fowle wrote in an article published in the early 1950s, for the ABCFM the depression years had been more difficult than the years of the First World War and Second World War. The continued reduction of resources from America forced the closing of one school after another and the conversion of two out of three hospitals to serve as day clinics, with no in-patients.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 58.



Approximately two-thirds of American personnel had to return to America. The miracle was that anything was saved at all.<sup>89</sup> Historian Hans-Lukas Kieser shows that important institutions such as the Central Turkey College in Antep, the Girls' College in Maraş and the Anatolia College of Merzifon never came back. Robert College and the American College for Girls, both in Istanbul, and the International College in Izmir stayed in close contact with ABCFM; none of these institutions could make any direct reference to the Gospel. Kieser writes that adapting to a nationalist Turkey that prohibited all religious teaching in missionary schools amounted to a failure; the ABCFM and its schools lost much of the fundamental distance from the centre of power that they had possessed.<sup>9091</sup>

For missionary women and men, the NER had been an intermezzo with a bitter end. The missionaries had witnessed the genocide or the mass displacement of their Christian protégés and the end of most of their projects. The rapprochement with nationalism was ambivalent and the offering missionary education for Muslims unpersuasive. In the *longue durée*, the relationship between NER and ABCFM missionaries was only a short, intense and painful parenthesis. Yet while it existed, their interaction was symbiotic. Without NER, the missionaries would have been unable to continue their work; the missionaries were in turn by far the best-qualified relief workers that NER had and the most skilled diplomats in Istanbul, New York and Washington DC.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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<sup>89</sup>AABCFM, 77.1.25, Box 25, BC, folder 22:38, Luther R. Fowle, A Century Among the Turks, from London East of ME Institute, January 1956.

<sup>90</sup>Kieser, *Nearest East*, 105–7.

<sup>91</sup>*The Turkish Quest. The Story of the American Board in Turkey* (Boston: ABCFM, 1943). This 36-page pamphlet justifies the ABCFM presence in Kemal's Turkey.