

ՀԱՊԱՐԱԿՈՒՄՆԵՐ

A STUDY ON THE NUMBER OF ARMENIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS IN SYRIA AND LEBANON IN 1946

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Editorial Note

Rev. Hovhannes Aharonian (1909-1986) was a key Middle Eastern ecumenical leader who later became a professor of Christian Education at the Near East School of Theology and its president from 1959 to 1978.

In his unpublished Master's thesis¹ Rev. Aharonian presents a religious curricular plan for the weekday schools of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. As education has been considered a prime expression and mission of the Armenian Evangelical Church since its founding in 1846, his MA thesis is seen as a foundational attempt to organize the educational ministry of the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches of the Near East. Rev. Aharonian became chair of the Union's Central Committee and President for long and fruitful years, and his thesis sheds light on the statistics of the 1940s.

Because of its importance, the editorial board of the *Haigazian Armenological Review* has decided to publish excerpts from this MA thesis titled "A Suggested Religious Curriculum for Week Day Schools of the Armenian Evangelical Union in the Near East". The thesis was presented by Hovhannes P. Aharonian to the Presbyterian College of Christian Education, which later merged with McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, in 1946.

A. HISTORICAL BEGINNINGS

....In the beginning of the 19th century an intellectual and spiritual awakening took place among Armenians in Istanbul. People felt hungry for spiritual illumination and they turned to the Bible. Under the auspices of the Patriarchate and with the leadership of Krikor Psehdimaljian, a school was opened in 1829, to prepare worthy clergy for the church. as a result of this movement a society was founded under the name "Parebashdagan Miutune," Union of Pietists. The study of the Bible opened their eyes. The National Church saw the danger and began to persecute them. Consequently they founded a secret society, which eventually marked the beginnings of Armenian Protestantism. Patriarch Matthew, on January 25, 1846, anathematized the "modern sectaries", called their leader Vertanes, "a child of the devil, a murderer and traitor of Christ." All properties of the new sectaries, were placed under ban, and social contact or business with them was forbidden the believers. The evangelicals were called to the Patriarchate and required under anathema to accept nine points of doctrines. Some evangelicals refused allegiance, therefore, were excommunicated perpetually on June

21, 1846. This provided the occasion for the foundation of the first Protestant Church on July 1, 1846. The Evangelicals formulated their nine counter-Opoints which were submitted to candidates for membership. These nine points were as follows:

- 1) The Triune God alone is to be worshipped;
- 2) Relics, crosses and public prayers for the dead are contrary to Scriptures;
- 3) Man is naturally depraved and needs the regenerating power of God, and the preaching of the Word is the chief medium of conversion;
- 4) The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice;
- 5) Christ is the sole head of the Church, Saviour and Intercessor, and the one only atonement for sin;
- 6) Salvation is by faith alone, and not by meritorious works of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, or penance;
- 7) A holy life is the true mark of a saved soul;
- 8) Any organized group of true Christians is a Church of Jesus Christ, and
- 9) There are but two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.²

The similarity of these nine points to the beliefs of Tondrakians is too evident to be indicated. Soon other churches began to organize in other towns of the Turkish Empire.

A strong factor in the progress of this movement should not be overlooked. The missionaries of the American Board were in Turkey at this time and were the supporters of this Movement. The missionary enterprise has a parallel growth with this Movement. In 1850 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had seven stations in Turkey, with eight missionaries, native pastors, and preachers in eight churches. The missionaries joined hands with this Movement and it became difficult to choke it. The outpouring funds by missionaries enlivened the churches. Due to the influence of the missionaries, eventually Armenian Protestantism was recognized by the Turkish Government as a separate "millet," or community. Soon the churches were equipped with buildings and schools. Orphans were fed and educated, hospitals were opened for the sick.

B. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Armenian Evangelical Movement was spreading from town to town. Churches were blooming one after another in thirty five main towns of Turkey. On the eve of the First World War there were, in Turkey, 137 Protestant churches, with 179 pastors and preachers, 13891 communicant members and 50,000 adherents, according to Arpee.³ Others estimate the Protestant Community as numbering between 60,000 and 65,000. There were five territorial organizations or stations, as they were called, in Turkey: The Bithanya Union (founded in 1864), the Aintab Presbyterial Assembly (1864), the Harput Evangelical Union (1865), The Central Evangelical Union (1863), and the Cilicia Union (1872). Under the auspices of the missionaries there were four theological seminaries: Bebek (Istanbul), Marsovan, Marash, and Harput; six colleges: In Istanbul, Aintab, Harput, Marsovan, Smyrna and Tarsus; six high schools for girls: in Bitlis, Marsovan, Istanbul, Adabazar, Marash and Smyrna. Each church had its own week day school, Sunday school, and brotherhoods. In 1842 the Bible was translated into Turkish and in 1853 into modern Armenian by the Rev. Elias Riggs. The Bible had been translated into Ancient Armenian in 404 AD, which is one of the oldest and best translations. In Istanbul

a powerful publishing house was supplying ample religious literature. There was immense progress in every respect.

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS MOVEMENT

Many characteristics of the Armenian Evangelical Movement can be cited, but for our purpose it will be justifiable to mention only a few of the most dominant ones.

Evangelism and Revivals. From the start the Armenian Evangelical Movement was Evangelistic. It began with the intention of preaching the Gospel and living according to the principles of the Gospel. This was the central impetus and the result was a succession of revivals. During the period between 1866 and 1914 some eight widespread revivals flooded the churches. In a revival the marked emphases are on sin, repentance, redemption and salvation. Sometimes prayer meetings lasted all night. Often so many were anxious to pray that the leaders could not find time to speak. As a result some very zealous religious groups came forth. Some of them ran to extremes, claiming to have the gift of prophesy and to see visions. Soon a common conversion theology grew up. New birth and an emotional type of conversion were asserted to be the sole criteria and necessary condition of being a Christian. In such a theology, religious education was considered to be secondary; it was thought to be a preparation for conversion, and after conversion a sustainer of the new experience.

The Bible and Schools. The Bible was the only authority in this Movement. Therefore the primary responsibility of the Church was to teach the Bible to the old as well as to the new generation. The prime purpose of all education was to teach the Bible. The week day schools, the Sunday schools and other organizations used to function to his end. On Sunday mornings all the congregation was divided into classes according to age and occupational interests. Students from other denominations used to fill the rolls in Protestant schools, even the non-Christians used to come to receive education and be helped to become real men. The teaching of the Bible was rather factual but students were led to examine their lives in the light of truth which they found in the Bible. Many persons would repent of their sins and give themselves to Christ. They had no conception of religious education in the modern sense, but Bible teaching, combined with the experience of conversion, could show the fruits of a Christian life.

The outcome in terms of Christian living was immense. The family played a central role. Family prayers, grace at tables, Sabbath keeping, church going were the most important part of the life of a Protestant. Parents were very strict with their children in matters of Christian conduct. A Protestant was known by his puritan life. He was respected by al, Christian and non-Christian. He was looked upon as honest, truthful and trustworthy. A Protestant would not open his shop on Sundays. He had a high ethical standard in the form of obstinence from intoxicating liquors and smoking. No one indulging in such vices could become a member of the church. A Protestant in a Turkish court was not expected to take the oath, because it was known that he cannot but tell the truth. He was looked upon as reliable in every respect.

D. THE GREAT TRIAL

During the First World War the Armenians were subjected to unprecedented cruelties by the Turks. Thousands of them were deported into the deserts of Syria and Arabia. They were driven out of their homes and churches. About a million of them

perished in the deserts through massacres, hunger and thirst and through exposure to the violence of nature and desert tribes. After the War some returned with the Allied Armies to their home towns. Churches, hospitals, schools had been burned down, closed and turned into mosques, with the sole exception of those in Istanbul. In 1918, after the war, there were not more than fifteen organized Armenian Protestant Churches. Soon the Kemalists came in and refugees again began to pour out of Turkey into Persia, Syria, Greece, Bulgaria, and Iraq. Refugee churches were founded in Jaffa and Jerusalem, Cairo and Alexandria, Athens and Piraeus and Salonika, Sofia and Varna. Some of the Harput Union Church people passed into Soviet Armenia. Other Protestant groups settled in Paris, Marseilles, Lyons, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Sa Paulo. In these lands they found themselves altogether in strange environments. Life was so different. They had to face many difficulties.

E. THE ARMENIAN EVANGELICAL UNION IN THE NEAR EAST

About 200,000 Armenians found refuge in the hospitable lands of Syria and Lebanon. Most of the Cilician Protestants fled in 1921-23 to Syria and Lebanon where they organized in 1924 the Armenian Evangelical Union of Syria and Lebanon. The name in 1938 was changed to "the Armenian Evangelical Union in the Near East."

Refugee Armenians could bring very little with them. Each family came with a carload or an animal load of property. There were no homes for them. They settled in tents and huts. Huts were made of small pieces of tin or wood. On a square mile more than 5000 families had their huts of three or five square meters each. The rain and heat of summer used freely to enter these huts. Privacy of any kind was difficult. Sanitary conditions were deplorable, and it was the same with moral conditions. Poverty was the master of the situation. For many years they had to live under such conditions. Quite a few still are in these same circumstances. Out of this religious, moral and economic chaos new churches and schools had to be built and religious education be made available to the new generation. It was a painful road to walk, but every difficulty had to be faced without discouragement.

Out of these situations grew some churches and schools. During the past 25 years immense progress was made, some twenty church and school buildings were erected. People began to improve their economic situation and settle in the land as loyal citizens. They began to build their own houses and run their own businesses. But still some 8000 Armenians live in these deplorable huts. The Protestant community in comparison with other communities is well off. On a percentage basis they are better educated and self-supporting. Nearly 90% are literate in a country where illiteracy is more than 70%. Nearly 10% of the community can be labeled as intellectuals, i.e. teachers, doctors, publishers, and the like; 25% artisans; nearly 20% traders and merchants, and about 40% workers of every category. Only about 5% can be called dependent persons.

The Union has 22 churches, with a communicant membership of about 2500 and a constituency of about 10,000. Approximate numbers are given because after the last statistics, migrations took place and the numbers were reduced. Four churches are self-supporting. All the churches have their pastors and schools, Sunday Schools and Christian Endeavor Societies. There are five High schools, 24 Elementary schools and 21 Kindergartens, with a total of 2400 students. There are 27 Sunday Schools with a

total of 2500 children, and 21 Christian Endeavor Societies with 1000 adherents. Church going people constitute nearly 30% of the community.⁴

WEEK DAY SCHOOL STATISTICS⁵

This is part of the statistical report taken in 1946 from a questionnaire sent to weekday schools. Due to migrations, changes in numbers have occurred since – as it is evident in comparison to Appendix I.

Schools in Syria and Lebanon

5 high schools, one of 5 grades, one of 4 grades, one of 3 grades, and one of 1 grade.

24 Elementary schools, 13 of six grades, three of 5 grades, seven of 4 grades, and one of 3 grades.

Pupils: Total constituency: 2810.

Sexes: 49 per cent boys, 51 per cent girls.

Denominations: 50.5% Evangelicals, 46% boys, 54% girls.

Schools: Kindergarten children 30.5% (boys 50.5%, girls 49.5%). Elementary school children 62 % (52% boys, 48% girls). High school students 7.5% (50% boys, 50% girls). Usually at the age of 7 children enter the Elementary school which is of six grades, then the high school of five grades.

Teachers: Total: 152 teachers, 36 men, 116 women. Evangelicals 116, 45 communicant members. Gregorians 17, others 19.

Weekly class instruction per teacher: maximum 60 periods, minimum 25.

Educational standing: Elementary school graduates 55, High school graduates 65, College graduates 20, University graduates 12.

Payment (yearly): Minimum 140 II (Q. 2II. One dollar). Maximum 2800LL. Average 700LL.

Budget: Grand total: 133, 481 TL.; Tuition: 85.095; other sources: 48.386; Expense per student 47.5/year; Income per student 30/year.

Table 1: Armenian Evangelical Churches, Schools, Sunday Schools and Christian Education Societies ⁶				
Churches	Constituency	Schools & Students	Sunday Schools & children	Christian Education Members
Lebanon				
Beirut, 1st Church	1300	High school 100	Int. 90	Young people 50
		Elem. 250	2 Jrs. 225	3 Int. 70
Beirut, Eshrefieh	1600	High school 80	Int. 80	Young people 80
		3 Elem. 400	3 Jrs. 375	Int. 50
Beirut, Nor Marash	800	Elem. 150	Jrs. 150	Young Men 40
				Int. 50
Beirut, Trad	50	Elem. 120	Jrs. 120	Int. 60
Tripoli	150	---	Jrs. 50	Int. 30

Ainjar	500	Elem. 120	3 Int. 120	Int. 50
Zahle	200	High school 20	Jrs. 60	Int. 40
		Elem. 40		
Chtaura	200	Elem. 30	9 Jrs. 30	Int. 30
Subtotal	4800	3 High schools 200	5 Int. 290	2 Young people 130
				1 Young Men 40
		9 Elem. schools	Jrs.	10 Int. 380
Syria				
Homs	70	---	Jrs. 30	Int. 15
Damascus	150	---	Jrs. 20	---
Emanuel	1800	Elem. 250	Int. 300	Young Men 80
Bethel	1500	High School 120	2 Jrs. 100	Int. 70
		2 Elem. 400		Int. 80
Nahadagats	500	-----	Jrs. 125	Int. 60
Assyrian	100	Elem. 30	Jrs. 50	--
Daoudie	80	Elem. 50	Jrs. 60	Int. 40
Azez	50	Elem. 40	Jrs. 45	Int. 20
Djarablus	40	---	---	---
Kessab	400	High School 20	Jrs. 100	Int. 40
		Elem. 60		
Ekizoluk	200	Elem. 40	Jrs. 40	----
Keurkune	150	Elem. 25	Jrs. 25	Jes. 20
Kaladouran	60	Elem. 25	Jrs. 40	Jrs. 20
Baghjaghaz	40	Elem. 20	Jrs. 20	---
Subtotal	5140	11 Elem.	13 Jrs.	
		2 High schools	1 Int.	7 Int. Young Men 80
				2 Jrs. 40
Total	9940	5 High Schools		
		20 Elem Schools		

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL STATISTICS⁷

This is part of the statistical report obtained as an answer of a questionnaire sent to the Sunday schools in 1946.

Sunday Schools: In Syria and Lebanon there are 29 Sunday Schools. 15 in Lebanon and 14 in Syria. There are 2800 Sunday school children with 170 teachers. Distribution of children: a) Sexes: 45% boys, 55% girls; b) School children: 95%, non-school children 5%; c) Age groups: beginners 16%, primaries 23%, juniors 32%, Intermediates 25%, seniors 4%. D) Denominations: Protestants 54%, Gregorians 41%, others 5%. E) Teachers: of the 170 teachers men are 25%, women constitute 75%. Communicant members: 35%, C. E. members 60%.

Table 2.- Religious Education Agencies and the Age Groups they serve ⁸				
Ages served	Week day school grades	Sunday school grades	Christian Endeavor societies	Daily vacation Bible schools
0-3	---	---	---	---
4-5	Kindergarten	Beginners	---	---
6-8	I, II, III	Primaries	---	Mixed groups
9-11	IV, V, VI	Juniors	Intermediate	
10-14	VII, VIII, IX	Junior High		
15-17	X, XI	Seniors	Young People	---
18-25	---	---		---
25-	---	---		---

Table 3.- Percentage distribution of 2500 children in weekday and Sunday schools⁹		
Percentage		
Pupils	Boys	47
	Girls	53
Religious professions	Evangelicals	52
	Armenian Apostolic	45
	Catholic and non-Christians	3
Age groups	4-5	16
	6-8	23
	9-11	32
	12-14	25
	15-17	3
	18	1

ENDNOTES

¹ A bound copy of this important thesis was donated by Dr. Hrair Aharonian in November 2019 and is preserved in the Haigazian University Derian Armenological Library.

² Leon Arpee, *A History of Armenian Christianity*, New York, the Armenian Missionary Association, 1946, p. 269.

³ Arpee, p. 277.

⁴ MA thesis, pp. 12-20.

⁵ MA thesis, pp. 144-46.

⁶ In Elementary schools Kindergarten is included. Jrs. denotes up to that department, including smaller departments.

⁷ MA thesis, pp. 147-48. It should be noted that after the taking of these statistics migrations took place and numbers were reduced as it is obvious in comparison to Appendix I.

⁸ MA thesis, page 24.

⁹ MA thesis, page 26.

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ԿԻՐԱԿՆՕՐԵԱՅ ԴՊՐՈՑՆԵՐԸ ՍՈՒՐԻԱ-ԼԻԲԱՆԱՆԻ ՄԷՋ, 1946ԻՆ
(Ամփոփում)

ՎԵՐ. ՅՈՎՀԱՆՆԷՍ ԱՀԱՐՈՆԵԱՆ

Հայ Առետարանական Եկեղեցիին համայնքային, հոգեւոր եւ կրթական գործունեութեան 1940ականներու փաստագրումը կը ներկայացուի այստեղ: Մանաանդ լուսարծակի տակ կ'առնուի անոր կրթական գործունեութիւնը՝ ամենօրեայ եւ կիրակնօրեայ դպրոցներու առումով: Փաստագրական շահեկան այս նիւթը քաղուած է Վեր. Յովհաննէս Ահարոնեանի մագիստրական թեզէն զոր ան պաշտպանած է 1946ին, Շիքակոյի Presbyterian College of Christian Educationի մէջ: