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**EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF AMERICAN  
MISSIONARIES IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE  
(THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY - THE  
BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY) \***

**Key words:** Missionaries, Evangelical Church, Constantinople, Ottoman Empire, Marash, college, Christopher Robert, culture.

**Introduction**

Regardless of the existence of statehood, education has always been emphasized as an important factor in the preservation of Armenia in different historical periods. Even in case of the genocidal policy conducted by the Sultanate and the Young Turk regimes, educational work continued. Moreover, American missionaries and the Armenian Protestant (Evangelical) Community made a certain contribution to this effort since the 19th century. Their financial resources allowed them to engage not only in propaganda but also in active educational activities in order to expand the ranks of their followers.

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The entry of missionaries into the Ottoman Empire, despite encountering many difficulties from the Apostolic Church and the people, nevertheless led to the formation of the Armenian Evangelical community. In 1846, the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, under the leadership of Patriarch Matthew, increased the pressure on the Evangelicals and announced that all Protestant Armenians should be expelled from the Apostolic Church<sup>1</sup>. However, persecuted by the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Evangelicals founded the "Union of Piety" Society, which became the foundation of the Evangelical Church<sup>2</sup>.

### **The formation of the Armenian Evangelical Church**

The Armenian Evangelical Church was founded as a separate Christian religious community in Constantinople on 1 July 1846<sup>3</sup>. The Evangelical Church was more liberal and had sacramental and some ritual differences. Unlike the Apostolic Church, the Evangelicals had a pulpit<sup>4</sup> instead of a tabernacle, their spiritual service consisted of sermons and preachers instead of priests.

Abisoghom (Khachaturyan) Utuchyan was appointed the first pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church. According to V.

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<sup>1</sup> Իսթիմեան. 1914, 65: **Arpee**. 1946, 269. **Arpee**. 1946, 269.

<sup>2</sup> Աւետագիր. 1945, № 9: Յուշարձան Հայ աւետարանականաց եւ աւետարանական եկեղեցւոյ. 1952, 106: Յիշատակարան Եփրատ Գօլէճի 1878-1915. 1942, 43-44:

<sup>3</sup> For details on the establishment of the Evangelical Church and the provisions of the constitution, see **Arpee**. 1946, 42. In 1850, by order of the Sultan, it was made official and called "Protestant/Millet" (see Սեյիմեան, 2020, 159).

<sup>4</sup> Յուշարձան Հայ աւետարանականաց եւ աւետարանական եկեղեցւոյ. 1952, 145:

Tutikyan, the first services were held in the chapels of the German and then the Dutch embassies<sup>5</sup>.

It is noteworthy that in 1850 the Armenian Evangelical Community accepted the offer of the Hamidian government to obtain the official status of "Protestant Millet"<sup>6</sup> (this status was necessary for trade, marriage, etc.)<sup>7</sup>. Stepan Serobyanyan was appointed leader of the "Protestant Community".

We believe that the recognition by the Ottoman government and the granting of state privileges had a hidden long-term goal: to divide and destroy the spiritual-religious integrity and unity of Western Armenians.

### **Activities of protestant educational centers**

In the following years, Armenian Evangelical churches were opened in Constantinople, Erzurum, Ayntap, Sebastia, Kharberd and other places. The pastors of the church also carried out educational work, as it was noted that the missionary was not only "... a spiritual preacher but also a teacher..."<sup>8</sup>. Pre-schools, Sunday schools, seminaries, and colleges began to operate near almost all the churches. During the period under study, there were schools not only near the Evangelical churches but also near the Apostolic churches. Chormisyan rightly mentioned that "... they were mostly maintained and developed in Armenian monasteries, next to Armenian churches..."<sup>9</sup>. In these schools, in addition to religious subjects, they also taught "... so-called "external" subjects of study, that is, semantic and scientific

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<sup>5</sup> Յուշամատեն Հայաստանեայց Ավետարանական եկեղեցւոյ. 2021, 63:

<sup>6</sup> See the letter to the Sultan Հայ Աւետարանական եկեղեցին. 1986, 31:

<sup>7</sup> Ոսկեմատեն. 1950, 14: Ավետար. 1907, № 44:

<sup>8</sup> Ոսկեմատեն. 1950, 17:

<sup>9</sup> **Չորմիսեան.** 1974, 434:

lessons, logic, grammar<sup>10</sup>...", historical subjects. It is noteworthy that among the children, it was not a requirement to become an evangelist; there were children who also attended the liturgies of the Apostolic Church<sup>11</sup>.

The American missionaries took education seriously and had special regard for Armenian youth. They wanted these young people to become "learned translators, teachers, Protestant preachers"<sup>12</sup>. As early as 1869, 185 schools<sup>13</sup> were opened by missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, the number of which gradually doubled, reaching 374 in 1884<sup>14</sup>. In 1878-1915, 7 colleges operated in the territory of the empire, the most famous of which were the Central College of Ayntap, the Euphrates College, the Marzvan Anatolia College<sup>15</sup>, etc.

The Central College was founded in Ayntap in 1876 by Dr. Troprich and Prof. A. Pezchyan<sup>16</sup>. The astronomer and geologist Sargis Levonyan (killed during the massacres at Osmaniye in 1909), Professor Aleksan Pegchyan, Armenak Chamchyan and others taught at the college<sup>17</sup>. A medical college was opened next to the college where doctors were trained for the hospital of Ayntap<sup>18</sup>. The last director of the college was John E. Meril who had repeatedly supported exiled Armenians during the Genocide and sheltered many of them on the college grounds.

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<sup>10</sup> Չորմիսեան. 1974, 434:

<sup>11</sup> Մարտիրոսյան. 2016, 54:

<sup>12</sup> Աշյան. 1995, 89:

<sup>13</sup> Դանիելյան. 1989, 146:

<sup>14</sup> Դանիելյան. 1989, 146:

<sup>15</sup> Անտիկյան. 2011, 61:

<sup>16</sup> Ոսկեմատեան. 1950, 17:

<sup>17</sup> Գասպարյան. 2003, 74:

<sup>18</sup> Հայ Անտարանական եկեղեցին. 1986, 37:

The Marash school <sup>19</sup> was renamed the Central Turkey Girls' College. There were 214 graduates in 1882-1915. The school was located in a district inhabited almost entirely by Armenians. Regular events were organised to raise level of education (lectures, plays, concerts). The school had a "private spacious hall where all the girls practiced gymnastics in winter"<sup>20</sup>. As the newspaper "Avetaber" wrote, the college needed "various facilities and buildings" and the library which had "3000 books" had no place to store them, instead, "half of the hospital was used as a library"<sup>21</sup>. Due to the small size of the college building, "little museums have been created" in every corner<sup>22</sup>. The Central College was fee-paying: for example, the rent for a pre-school was 4 mejits (մեճիթ), and overnight guests had to pay 7 Ottoman gold for "food". Part of the rent was paid in the first month of the academic year, the other part - at the beginning of February<sup>23</sup>.

Among the colleges opened by American missionaries, Robert College had a special place. It was founded by American missionaries Cyrus Hamley (Սայրուս Համլիի) and Christopher Robert in the Bebek district of Constantinople. Chormisian called Christopher Robert "the wealthy philanthropist Christopher Robert" who "... undertook to pay all the expenses

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<sup>19</sup> As early as 1845, the missionaries tried to establish a school in Marash but met with resistance and left. A few years later they tried again, but to no avail (see more in **Դանիելյան**. 1989):

<sup>20</sup> Աւետաբեր. 1913, № 19:

<sup>21</sup> Աւետաբեր. 1913, № 19:

<sup>22</sup> Աւետաբեր. 1913, № 19:

<sup>23</sup> Աւետաբեր. 1913, № 19:

for the establishment of a college in his name in Constantinople"<sup>24</sup>.

Initially, Christopher Robert chose the name "Armenia" College, but according to Dr. Hamlin, the name Armenia had a political connotation and he suggested that the college be called "Robert College" in honour of Christopher Robert<sup>25</sup>. The founders discussed the curriculum of the college for a long time. The college was characterised by the spacious buildings of the time, workshops, stadiums, museum, educational programmes and teaching staff<sup>26</sup>. For a short period, the college experienced difficulties due to the outbreak of an epidemic (cholera).

The study was in English, and the subjects taught were divided into weekly classes. For example, 5 hours a week were dedicated to geology and astronomy, 5-6 hours to history, international law, rhetoric, and philosophy. In accordance with the requirements of the time, young people were trained in trade and finance alongside basic education. Under Robert's leadership, the college forbade students to become involved in political affairs. He tried to keep students away from such questions<sup>27</sup>. In 1879-1880, the college had 209 Bulgarians, 74 Armenians, 27 Greeks and students of other nationalities<sup>28</sup>.

In 1886, the "Marzvan Mancheru College"<sup>29</sup>, or Anatolian College, was established on the basis of Herbingen High School

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<sup>24</sup> **Հորմիսեան**. 1974, 510:

<sup>25</sup> Fifty years in Constantinople and recollections of Robert College. 1909, 15.

<sup>26</sup> **Հորմիսեան**. 1974, 511:

<sup>27</sup> Fifty years in Constantinople and recollections of Robert College. 1909, 100.

<sup>28</sup> Fifty years in Constantinople and recollections of Robert College. 1909, 150.

<sup>29</sup> Fifty years in Constantinople and recollections of Robert College. 1909, 141.

in Marzvan (in the province of Sebastia), where Armenians<sup>30</sup> and Greeks studied. The college was musically oriented and even had an orchestra. During the Genocide, the college transitioned from an educational institution to a hospital and then to an orphanage. In 1924, the college was reopened in Thessaloniki (in Greece).

Through the efforts of Armenak Haykazyan and Harutyun Chenanyan, Chenanyan College started its work in 1893. The college was gradually transformed into a higher institution with the aim of preparing graduates "...for the teaching field"<sup>31</sup>. A boarding school for boys was opened next to the college. In 1905, 400 students studied at the school<sup>32</sup>.

The most prestigious educational center opened by the missionaries in Western Armenia was Euphrates College. In 1878, the Huilliers founded the most prestigious "Armenian (Hayastan) College" on the hill of Kharberd. However, the name was not accepted by the Ottoman government, and in 1888, the educational institution was renamed "Ephrat" College<sup>33</sup>. Despite the name change of the college, "Army, weapon, knife, war and similar words" were also banned, and "... Armenia, Armenians and similar words were put in black lines and deleted" from English textbooks<sup>34</sup>. But the authorities did not limit themselves to "editing" the sections related to Armenians.

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<sup>30</sup> In 1896, Misak Metsarents moved to Anatolia College in Marzvan to continue his studies.

<sup>31</sup> **Էքմէքնեան**. 2016, 36:

<sup>32</sup> **Էքմէքնեան**. 2016, 37:

<sup>33</sup> Յիշատակարան Եփրատ Գօլէճի 1878-1915. 1942, 65-66: **Դեպիս**. 2001, 349:

<sup>34</sup> Յիշատակարան Եփրատ Գօլէճի 1878-1915. 1942, 94:

The junior branch of the college was the kindergarten. From a young age, children were taught humility and cleanliness. At the Euphrates College, not only the Holy Book was taught but also Armenian (Grabar and *Ashxarhabar* language), English, Turkish, Armenian history, church history, intellectual and moral philosophy, natural sciences (arithmetic, geometry, etc.), music (choir, orchestra). Both foreign and Armenian specialists taught at the college, with Armenian specialists being the majority. The college followed the "Armenian calendar, according to which Barekendan, Easter, Vardanank were the festive days"<sup>35</sup>.

It should be noted that there was a Department of Obstetrics with 8 Armenian students next to the college<sup>36</sup>. The Euphrates College "opened a private pharmacy" in 1904 and "provided free medicines<sup>37</sup>" for the college and orphans. As a result, thousands of patients were cured, and epidemics were prevented. The college was heavily damaged during the Abdulhamid massacres<sup>38</sup> but reopened in 1900 and operated until 1915. At its peak, the college had 6 large and 14 small buildings, and in 1902, 1100 students studied in the college<sup>39</sup>.

It is important to note that missionary schools included various educational institutions such as pre-school, college, and also theological seminaries. The Theological Seminary Marzvan stood out among the theological seminaries<sup>40</sup>. Graduates

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.houshamadyan.org/arm/mapottomanempire/vilayetofmamuratul-azizharput/harput-kaza/economy/trades.html>

<sup>36</sup> Հայկ Վ. 1959, 401:

<sup>37</sup> Յիշատակարան Եփրատ Գօլէճի 1878-1915. 1942, 294:

<sup>38</sup> Յիշատակարան Եփրատ Գօլէճի 1878-1915. 1942, 118:

<sup>39</sup> Greene. 1916, 221.

<sup>40</sup> Herrick. 1891, 406.



continued their studies in higher educational institutions: "...They came back with a Ph.D. and taught at the college"<sup>41</sup>.

Among the theological seminaries, it is also worth mentioning the Theological Seminary of Kharberd. "Adult and married people" from different places gradually began to attend the educational center "for theological studies"<sup>42</sup> opened in 1859<sup>43</sup>. The activities of the seminary were greatly affected by the Hamidian pogroms, and then by the emigration to the USA. The seminary was reopened in Kharberd in 1900.

Among the schools organized by the Evangelicals in Constantinople, the Inchir Typi Armenian Evangelical School was of particular importance (1920)<sup>44</sup>. The language of instruction at the school was Armenian, although it operated under the pressure of the Kemalists. However, in 1923, along with other church schools, the activity of the school of Incir Typi was also banned<sup>45</sup>. The school was reopened in 1927 with 80 pupils<sup>46</sup>.

Girls were also given the opportunity to be educated, which was a significant shift from the previous belief that education for them was "...unnecessary and pointless"<sup>47</sup>. In fact, that there were no schools for girls before that "and very few women could hardly read"<sup>48</sup>. In 1856, evangelicals founded the first school for girls. The purpose of the school was "...to educate girls and

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<sup>41</sup> **Էքմէքճեան**. 2016, 41:

<sup>42</sup> **Քասունի**. 1947, 99:

<sup>43</sup> **Քասունի**. 1947, 99:

<sup>44</sup> **Էքմէքճեան**. 2016, 21:

<sup>45</sup> **Էքմէքճեան**. 2016, 22:

<sup>46</sup> Հարիրամեակի Յուշամատենն Կետիկ-Փաշայի Հայ Աւետարանական եկեղեցւոյ. 1950, 41:

<sup>47</sup> **Չորմիսեան**. 1974, 435:

<sup>48</sup> Աւետագիր. 1946, № 3:

especially married ladies..."<sup>49</sup>. Similar schools for girls were opened in Ayntap, Constantinople, Kharberd, Marzvan and other places. Missionary Myra Pracht opened a seminary for girls in Ayntap. Later, the American College of Aleppo continued the work of the seminary<sup>50</sup>. In 1869, there were three schools for girls in which "most of the women could read"<sup>51</sup>. It should also be noted that at the end of the 19th century, the majority of teachers working in Armenian schools were women<sup>52</sup>. Boarding schools for girls were also established in Hachn, Marzvan, Sebastia and other places. Among the colleges, the "Girls' College"<sup>53</sup> operating in Marash during the leadership of the missionary Ellen Blake stood out. Students studied there not only from Marash but also from Adana, Aleppo, Zeytun and other places.

Along with the aforementioned educational institutions, the evangelicals opened schools for the deaf (Marzvan Deaf School) and the blind (Edesia)<sup>54</sup>. Sometimes they also provided financial support to existing structures. One of the issues of "Avetaber" stated that when looking for a school for the deaf in Turkey, they found only one "for Islamic boys", despite there were hundreds deaf and dumb people. With financial support, the School for the Deaf in Marzvan was opened in 1900. Initially, six Armenian girls and boys attended learning to "read the

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<sup>49</sup> Քասունի. 1947, 99:

<sup>50</sup> Քասունի. 1947, 150:

<sup>51</sup> Աւետազիր. 1946, № 3:

<sup>52</sup> Tarihte Türkler ve Ermeniiler. 2014, 131.

<sup>53</sup> Կոչնակ. 1912, № 6:

<sup>54</sup> Յուշարձան. 1952, 474:

teacher's lips and write successfully as well as to solve simple educational questions"<sup>55</sup>.

The educational activities of the American missionaries had significant results: there were 23679 students in 437 elementary schools, 5190 in 54 secondary schools, 2451 in 11 colleges, 24 students in 4 theological colleges. A total of 1369 teachers worked in those schools, with the majority of students being Armenians<sup>56</sup>. After the Genocide, several evangelical schools operated in Constantinople, although the educational activity of the evangelicals took a different course: "...non-Turkish private schools were placed under state control, although Articles 40 and 41 of the Treaty of Lausanne recognized the right of minorities (non-Muslim minorities; the Turks meant only Armenians and Greeks<sup>57</sup>) to maintain their own schools".

## **Conclusion**

The Armenian Evangelical Community, as an ecclesiastical structure, was active in the field of education. In schools opened by missionaries and Armenian evangelists, students were taught not only religious subjects but also the Armenian language, Armenian history, medicine, mathematics and other subjects. Many preschools, colleges, schools and later higher education institutions were opened. In 1900, there were 370 preschools, 44 higher schools, 8 colleges, 5 theological schools within the Ottoman Empire. Graduates of these educational centers successfully continued their studies in prestigious domestic educational centers.

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<sup>55</sup> Ավետաբեր. 1913, № 16:

<sup>56</sup> Tarihte Türkler ve Ermeniiler. 2014, 130:

<sup>57</sup> **Բառու՛**. 2010, 161:

Missionaries also opened educational institutions for girls, where they learned not only to read and write but also to specialize in various professions. With the opening of schools for the deaf and mute, dozens of children also had the opportunity to get an education. As a result of these activities, the entire educational system was revitalized, both in Western Armenia and in other large Armenian settlements in the Ottoman Empire.

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նեությունը Օսմանյան կայսրությունում (XIX դարի երկրորդ  
կես - XX դարի սկիզբ)**

### **Ամփոփում**

XIX դ. առաջին կեսից սկսած ամերիկյան միսիոներների մուտքն Օսմանյան կայսրություն, բազում դժվարությունների հանդիպելով հանդերձ, հանգեցրեց հայ ավետարանական համայնքի ձևավորմանը: Ավետարանականների նկատմամբ Կ. Պոլսի Հայոց պատրիարքարանի ճնշումները չխանգարեցին նրանց, որպես առանձին համայնքի ձևավորման գործընթացին: Հայ ավետարանականները հիմնեցին «Բարեպաշտության միություն» ընկերությունը, որի հիման վրա էլ 1846 թ. հուլիսի 1-ին Կ. Պոլսում ձևավորվեց Հայ ավետարանական եկեղեցին: Եկեղեցու հովիվները, հոգևոր քարոզչությանը զուգահեռ, տանում էին նաև կրթական աշխատանքներ: Նրանք լրջորեն էին վերաբերում կրթությանը՝ նպատակ ունենալով հայ երիտասարդներին դարձնել ուսյալ թարգմանիչներ, հրահանգիչներ, բողոքական քարոզիչներ: Բացվում են մի շարք նախակրթարաններ, քոլեջներ, ապա՝ բարձրագույն հաստատություններ, որոնց առարկայացանկում կարևոր տեղ էր հատկացվում Հայոց լեզվին և Հայոց պատմությանը:

Օսմանյան կայսրության տարածքում 1914 թ. միայն ամերիկյան միսիոներների շնորհիվ գործել է 675 դպրոց՝ 34,317 աշակերտով, որից ավետարանական՝ 370 նախակրթարան,

44 բարձրագույն վարժարան, 8 քոլեջ, 5 աստվածաբանական դպրոց:

**Բանալի բաներ՝** Ավետարանական եկեղեցի, Միսիոներներ, Կ.Պոլիս, Օսմանյան կայսրություն, Մարաշ, քոլեջ, Քրիստոֆեր Ռոբերտ, մշակույթ:

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### Резюме

Начиная с первой половины XIX века, прибытие американских миссионеров в Османскую империю, несмотря на множество трудностей, привело к формированию армянской евангелистской общины. Армянские евангелисты основали общество «Союз благочестия», на основе которого в 1846 году был создан армянский патриархат Константинополя. 1 июля в Константинополе была образована Армянская евангелистская церковь. Они серьезно относились к образованию, стремясь превратить армянскую молодежь в образованных переводчиков, инструкторов, протестантских проповедников. Были открыты несколько начальных школ, колледжей и затем высших учебных заведений, в предметном списке которых важное место отводилось армянскому языку и истории Армении.

На территории Османской империи в 1914 году благодаря американским миссионерам действовало 675 школ с 34 317 учениками, из которых 370 были евангелическими начальными



школами, 44 – высшими учебными заведениями, 8 – колледжами, 5 – богословскими школами.

**Ключевые слова:** Евангелическая церковь, миссионеры, Константинополь, Османская империя, Мараш, колледж, Кристофер Роберт, культура.