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The Unusual Spectacle of Bishop Horatio Southgate and his Missiologies
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The unusual spectacle of Bishop Horatio Southgate and his missiologies

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Abstract:
This article relates the story of Horatio Southgate, a missionary of the Episcopal Church (USA) and the only ever Missionary Bishop of the Dependencies and Dominions of the Sultan of Turkey. The author traces the differing views of Southgate in relation to his own missionary endeavor (missiology) and how that led to a clash with other Protestant American missionaries in Constantinople.

Resumen:
Este artículo relata la historia de Horatio Southgate, misionero de la Iglesia Episcopal (EE. UU.) y el único Obispo Misionero de las Dependencias y Dominios del Sultán de Turquía. El autor rastrea los diferentes puntos de vista de Southgate sobre su propio esfuerzo misionero (misionología) y cómo eso llevó a un choque con otros misioneros protestantes estadounidenses en Constantinopla.
Background
Horatio Southgate was born in Portland, Maine on July 5th, 1812 to a Congregationalist family. While studying at Andover Theological Seminary something happened that occasioned his movement from Congregationalism to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA. On conclusion of his seminary studies he was ordained to the diaconate on July 12 of 1835. The Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA) was late to enter into the worldwide Protestant missionary movement. The Church of England already had the Church Mission Society, founded in 1799; the London Jews Society, formed in 1809; and the mother of all missionary boards in the USA was chartered in the very year of Southgate’s birth when the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions came into being—that last body being mostly Presbyterian and Congregationalist. (The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was often referred to simply as ‘the American Board’ in older literature, and as the ABCFM in more recent literature.) In 1821 the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society was formed as a corporation under New York law, and technically speaking, every Episcopalian was a member of said society, and that remains the case today.

The First Mission and Missiology: Direct Evangelism of Muslims
The first period of Southgate’s missionary career, like many other contemporary missionary endeavors, was one devoted to exploration. It lasted from 1836 through 1839, during which time he was a deacon. Upon the completion of his exploratory mission he wrote his two-volume work, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia, and Mesopotamia*. That same year a reviewer for The Christian Examiner found the book to be “replete with both new and useful information”. At the time large swaths

1. Presently the American Episcopal Church prefers to go by TEC (The Episcopal Church). The Acronym is, in my view as an Anglican with deep connections to the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East and the Scottish Episcopal Church, unacceptable. I prefer to use the older, more accurate, and less imperialist acronym, ECUSA.
2. Known today as the CMJ or the Church’s Ministry among Jewish People.
of Asia, and the Ottoman Empire in particular, were a mystery to Europeans and Americans. So before establishing permanent missions it was necessary to send teams to explore. Southgate’s Narrative is one of many such exploratory records. The most famous and influential one was the fruit of ABCFM missionaries, Smith and Dwight, and is generally called Missionary Researches in Armenia, though its complete title is significantly longer. This volume influenced a generation of missionaries and missionary strategists. The Rev Joseph Wolff, a Hebrew Christian and Lutheran affiliated with the London Jews Society (LJS) and who voyaged throughout Armenia, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Kurdistan searching out the lost tribes of Israel also composed multiple volumes documenting his sometimes rather fantastic experiences.

Before departing for his first, exploratory mission in 1836, Southgate gave a homily at the Church of the Ascension in New York on April 3rd, the evening of Easter Sunday that year. The title of the sermon is ‘Encouragement to Missionary Efforts among Mohammedans.’ This homily is of particular interest because it presents to us in a concise and clear manner one of the various missiologies, or strategies of mission, of Southgate, namely direct evangelism of Muslims. In this homily Southgate dismisses the common approach to mission in the Muslim world (that of the ABCFM, incidentally). That strategy has been given the tidy and accurate title of the Great Experiment by Bob Blincoe, who has done extensive research on the history of Christian missions in Kurdistan. The Great Experiment aimed at the eventual evangelization of the large Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire and Persia, but in an indirect manner. Evangelizing Muslims was illegal (and remains so today in many Muslim countries). Converting from Islam to Christianity (or any other religion) was generally considered a capital crime. As Bernard Lewis explains, ‘The excommunicated unbeliever is not only damned in the world beyond; he is outlawed in this world. He is deprived of all legal rights and barred from all religious offices; his very life and property are forfeit. If he is born a Muslim, his position is that of an apostate, a dead limb that must be ruthlessly excised.’ Furthermore, all the schools of Shari’a

5. Missionary Researches in Armenia: including a Journey through Asia Minor, and into Georgia and Persia, with a Visit to the Nestorian and Chaldean Christians of Oormiah and Salmas (London: George Whitman, 1834) is the complete title of the earliest version, though it has been printed in many editions since.
6. Wolff met with Southgate during a visit of his to Constantinople (Wolff, p. 529).
agree that the male apostate must be slain. Nor is this the opinion of some obscure jurist which can be debated but comes directly from a verified saying of the Prophet himself: ‘Whosoever changes his religion, slay him.’

Given these dangers and difficulties, the Western missionaries soon became convinced that engaging in direct evangelism of Muslims was not viable. But they often found pockets of Christians—Nestorians, Orthodox, Armenians, Copts—throughout the lands they were exploring. Thus, the missionary strategy of the Great Experiment came into being: after reforming these ancient churches, often described as ‘decayed’ or ‘superstitious’ or even ‘idolatrous’, these indigenous Christians, with their knowledge of the local languages and customs, would be ready, willing, and able to evangelize their Muslim neighbors and lords. To what extent, if any, the Great Experiment failed or succeeded is not the topic of this writing though. The churches to which the Western missionaries directed their efforts have been largely exterminated or exiled in our day. There was a general consensus that the Great Experiment was the best missionary strategy for the Ottoman Empire and Persia, though there were further questions: should one start by reforming the common layperson through bible study and catechesis? Or should one try to reform the bishops and priests, with the expectation that they would then teach the ‘reformed’ and ‘pure’ gospel to their flocks?

Southgate’s sermon is noteworthy because he takes issue with the missiological strategy of the Great Experiment. In doing so he shows an amount of originality and a willingness to challenge the existing consensus. He outlines his reasons for advocating direct evangelism of Muslims, arguing that Persians, rather than Arabs or Turks, should be targeted. Some of his key points are as follows: that if the Muslims convert then it will be a small thing to complete the evangelization of the rest of the world (5). Persians Muslims have a long tradition of inquiry and religious curiosity (9). Persians

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9. The convenient and accurate label of ‘Great Experiment’ to refer to the dominant missiological strategy of the 19th Century Protestants was coined by Robert Blincoe in his 1998 History and analysis of Christians mission in Kurdistan, Ethnic Realities and the Church: a history of mission work, 1668-1990 (Pasadena, California: Presbyterian Center for Mission Studies, 1998). Blincoe, though writing from an explicitly confessional point of view, is one of the most astute scholars of mission to write on this topic.
10. Both Blincoe and Pikkert argue that it was in fact a great failure in the end. Their volumes on mission history contain their respective arguments.
The Second Mission and Missiology: “The Unusual Spectacle”

Southgate was ordained to the priesthood on October 3rd of 1839 and in May of 1840 he departed for Constantinople—this was the commencement of his second, and lengthier mission, which lasted through 1849. During a visit back to the USA, on October 6, 1844 he was consecrated to the missionary episcopate of the Dependencies and Dominions of the Sultan of Turkey; Southgate was the first person to hold the office and would be the last.

During his second mission, his vision for Muslim evangelization was apparently gone; what then took its place? It appears that he never subscribed to the Great Experiment, as did the missionaries of the American Board. Rather, his correspondence indicates that he was concerned with the protection, rejuvenation and revivification of the indigenous, ancient churches for its own sake, and not with the view that they would then evangelize Muslims. Two quotes are instructive:

The Romanist has no scruple in invading the Eastern Churches, drawing off their members, preaching schism, inculcating error. The Latitudinarian has as little in breaking up the foundations of these ancient communions, violating their integrity, preaching schism also in another direction, and teaching a neglect of everything that we hold most sacred in the Church’s institutions.15...the position which we [the Episcopal mission], as a Church, have assumed here, is the only one which can save the Eastern Churches from rationalism and infidelity on the one hand, or a degrading superstition on the other.16

Southgate felt that the ancient churches—Armenian, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox—were threatened by enemies on all sides: The Roman Church; a non-episcopal, non-sacramental evangelicalism; and the

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14. This was the first time that ECUSA had chosen to consecrate missionary bishops. A bishop was also consecrated for work in China, William Jones Boone (1811-1864)
irreligious rationalism of modernity.\textsuperscript{17} He devoted his work to helping to fortify the ancient churches, and a key strategy was the education of clergy. He opened a small seminary and his goal, never completely brought to fruition, was to train clergy for the ancient churches. He was adamant that he did not want to establish a separate, Protestant millet, nor had those been his instructions from the DFMS. When he did accept converts, they were only from the uniate churches, like Peter Hazzar, formerly a Chaldean Catholic.\textsuperscript{18} This new strategy, which was neither one of direct Muslim evangelism, nor the Great Experiment, but something unique, was carried out by him during his second mission.

It was during this second mission, this one not exploratory, but specifically designed to support the ancient churches (or at least the ones not in communion with Rome), that he ran into trouble with some missionaries from the ABCFM. Those missionaries wrote to the American Board complaining about what they considered to be Southgate’s change of behavior—for instance during his first mission as a deacon he had taken communion from one of their non-Episcopal ministers, but upon his return he would no longer do so. Southgate attempted to vindicate himself in two short publications, \textit{The Vindication of the Rev H. Southgate}\textsuperscript{19} and \textit{A Letter to a Friend}.\textsuperscript{20}

Additional details are difficult to discern with precision,\textsuperscript{21} but it appears that at a time of particular tension among the Armenians he sided with the ancient Armenian Apostolic Church (which is non-Chalcedonian) over the Armenians who had left or were thinking of leaving to form a new Congregationalist-style community. Multiple other charges were made in addition to this.

But this sort of tension was inevitable—it was a fundamental question of identity. Southgate had been given directions by his board and by the presiding

\textsuperscript{17} In retrospect it was ethnocentric Islamic nationalism that was primarily responsible for the extermination of most of the communities which Southgate so cherished.

\textsuperscript{18} The Chaldean Catholic Church originated when numerous clergy and laity aligned with Rome and departed from the Assyrian Church of the East, or the Nestorians as they are normally called in the missionary literature of the 19th Century. It was Anglican missionaries who decided to call them Assyrians rather than Nestorians, given that the later term had connotations of the heresy condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Vindication of the Rev. Horatio Southgate: a letter to the members of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States} (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1844).

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{A letter to a friend: in reply to a recent pamphlet}, from the missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions at Constantinople. (New York: D. Appleton, 1845).

\textsuperscript{21} The most detailed telling that I can find is ‘Bishop Southgate and Episcopal Missions’. The unnamed author is decidedly antagonistic towards Southgate.
bishop, quoted at length in Bridgeman’s article on ‘Mediterranean Missions of the Episcopal Church’, not to proselytize and to ‘keep steadily in view the unity of the Church’. But he was faced with a baffling conundrum: as an Episcopalian, with whom did he belong? On the one hand the Americans were, like the Anglicans, born of the Protestant Reformation, inherently suspicious of all things ‘Romish’, and emphasized personal piety. Moreover, they upheld the Christological doctrines promulgated at Ephesus and Chalcedon. On the other hand, Southgate had the ancient churches which were sacramental, episcopal, and held tradition in high regard, and very importantly, they were not Papists. Southgate was, as a Christian who had repudiated a congregational ecclesiology, perhaps more sensitive to some of these issues than others would have been. But in addition to that he had clear instructions to liaise with and edify the ancient Churches. In the end he aligned himself with the Eastern churches, only accepting converts from the Papists, and then, as in the case of Michael Jamala, using that priest as a missionary to Mosul to strengthen the non-Papist faction. But there are still additional complications, namely ‘That the Episcopal church wished scrupulously to avoid trespassing upon a sister Society’s field is clear from the official statements made about this time’. The American Board missionaries were already working with Armenians in the Constantinople, and they were indeed open to the formation of a new Protestant millet, which Southgate as noted was not.

If we wish to explore the Anglican identity of such indigenous agents, we run into a problem though: both Southgate’s ecclesiology and his mandate from the board in the USA precluded making of these indigenous Christian Anglicans.

During his episcopacy he engaged in several activities to strengthen the indigenous churches: he founded the (embryonic) seminary, had multiple works translated into local languages, especially Armenian, and supported the distribution of missionary literature and the Book of Common

Prayer in various local languages. While other missions finally decided that the culture and hierarchical nature of the indigenous churches could not be reformed (according to their model of reformation, of course), Southgate never gave up. He had left one revolutionary theory of mission behind—direct evangelism of Muslims—for another wherein he understood himself to be the defender of the ancient churches against the onslaught of Rome, congregationalism, and secularism. Southgate never denied the integrity and validity of the ancient Churches, even though, he said, they clearly needed reform in certain areas. In the end they were, in his opinion, more authentic expressions of catholic Christianity than the ecclesiologies espoused by the ABCFM missionaries. All in all though, the missionary board of the DFMS was not impressed, ‘for there was little to report each year besides discussions of differences between East and West, the selling of books and tracts, the encouraging of Syrian [that is, Syriac Orthodox] churches to resist papal encroachments, interviews with Oriental patriarchs and other ecclesiastics, and, on the other hand, violent disputes with the Protestant missionaries from America’.  

This loss of popularity and funding caused the mission to suffer. After a fellow missionary, the Rev Samuel Penny, was sent home due to health concerns, ‘The last two years of the mission presented the unusual spectacle of a bishop without any presbyters...’.  

His mission ended prematurely—not something uncommon in those days. After the tension in the US occasioned by the complaints of the ABCFM missionaries and the dysfunctional and impractical funding system of the foreign missions’ board of the DFMS, he decided to discontinue his work and resign as bishop, which took place in 1849. In 1850 the DFMS officially closed Constantinople as a mission field. Southgate went on to function as a pastor in various churches. He was elected as bishop of Haiti and California but turned down both sees. He passed away in 1894.  

His first missiology—direct Muslim evangelism—has become a staple of evangelical missionary activity today. But he seemed quick to abandon it, and it was replaced by what appears to be an almost impossible missiological vision. First, he had abandoned the bold idea of missionizing the Muslims themselves. Second, he had been commanded not to make converts of the ancient churches. Third, he was not to encroach on the existing work of the American Board missionaries among the Armenians and Greeks. The missiology or mission

25. Shaw, p. 44.  
strategy that emerged from this awkward and difficult web of instructions was itself an odd one to behold: the Protestant bishop distancing himself from his fellow Protestant countrymen, thus causing a scandal that reached back to the USA, thus causing his funding to dry up and the ‘unusual spectacle’ (as Shaw put it) of a bishop all alone in his enormous diocese.

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