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PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES PERSPECTIVES ON THE ARAB ORTHODOX AND ORTHODOXY AT THE TURN OF THE 20th CENTURY

IMAD RUBEIZ

Abstract

Some centuries after the onset of European missionaries to the East and their competition over winning converts, Protestants started their missionary work at the turn of the nineteenth century in an East which was then under the Ottoman Rule. From Aleppo to Palestine, they eventually promulgated across the entire Near and Middle East, with the purpose of instilling in the population there — both Muslim and Christian — what they believed to be the “true” Christian faith. In fact, their claim revolved around their firm conviction that both Catholics and Orthodox have gone astray in their basic elements of faith, which in turn have always dissuaded the Moslems to accept Christianity as the true religion. From primary protestant sources, this paper will focus on their perspective regarding the “degrading” Orthodox faith, and their “shallow” clerics and “obsolete” established traditions.

The advent of Western missionaries during the 18th and 19th centuries

Since the time of Chateaubriand and Nerval, the Orient has been considered as “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1978: 9). For the French, Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss, “(t)he Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West)” (Said op. cit.). Scholars

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may diverge in defining what Orientalism stands for; the one adopted here incorporates a cultural, even ideological, “mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (Said 1978: 10). Orientalists therefore came since early times to this area of the world — i.e. the Middle and Near East — by means, among others, of colonialism, thereby impacting, among other areas, the religious doctrines and practices of the colonized inhabitants, including those at the periphery of the Ottoman Empire:

“With the advent of direct Ottoman rule in the 1860’s, Transjordan witnessed a major expansion in the activities of European missionaries directed at the sizeable Orthodox Christian minority. Protestant agents of the British Church Missionary Society, and Catholic priests from the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem entered an escalating competition, seeking to win converts with the promise of churches and schools. Local Muslims were pleased to take advantage of the social services, and Orthodox converts to the Western Churches came to claim European protection. The Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Ottoman government were forced to respond in kind, providing schools and other social services” (Chatelard & Tarawneh 2013: 37).

The interest of foreign missionaries in the East dates back to 1728, when the Court of France stipulated three main objectives\(^2\) to its new Ambassador to the Astana, the Marquis de Villeneuve, who subsequently wrote a report in 1740 of his actual achievements. He described how the Catholic missionaries were sent first to Aleppo, and then to other main cities of the East, preaching and celebrating masses and conducting other prayers, and teaching catechism. In the report, de Villeneuve also reported the opposition that these missionaries faced from the Roum\(^3\) of the region

\(^2\) In their own words, these three objectives are: Christianizing Moslems, converting the “dissidents” there, and uprooting “the seeds of heresy”. Hence, right from the beginning, they regarded the Christians of the region (i.e. the non-Catholics) as heretics.

\(^3\) Using this term instead of “Greek” is historically and practically correct, as it symbolizes the belonging of this population and its belief to the historical Roman Empire, and not to the rather small Greek territory as the West and its church(es) insinuated by using the term Greek in reference to the Orthodox population, in an attempt to limit its universality. Research on the correctness of using “Roum Orthodox” instead of “Greek Orthodox” has been initiated and conducted by John Romanides, (n.d.). *Introduction to Romanity, Romania, Roumeli*. A number of authors have adopted this explanation, e.g. George Atiyeh.
and how these Roum had already succeeded in obtaining from the Sublime Porte in 1725 two legal documents to restrict the jurisdiction of these missionaries’ work, and to confine it only to the geographical areas where the French subjects resided (Rustum n.d. vol. 3: 160-162).

The actions of the Catholic missionaries could not but raise the suspicion, and later the interest, of the Protestants:

“February 7, 1856- Malta, Smyrna, Cicilia, Seleucia, Beirut! Names associated with the voyages and labours of Paul the Apostle, and not less connected with modern missionary work in the Levant” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 20).

Since the early nineteenth century, the Near and Middle East witnessed the arrival and residence of Protestant missionaries, first in Palestine, then in Beirut. Through their work of preaching and conversion, they ultimately altered the demography and geography of Christianity in the region. Hence, missionaries and Brothers, all alike, were almost instantly interested in Palestine: they sent Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons to Jerusalem in 1819 to work and preach among the Jews (Thompson 1902: 176). As they stated, both were commissioned to study what could exactly be done to help the Moslems and Christians and the inhabitants of Egypt, Syria, Persia, and Armenia. Specifically, the concern was how these two

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4 Asad Rustum recounts us how the British colonies in North America obtained their independence under the name of The United States of America (1776-1783) with a growing number of Protestant immigrants until these became the majority of the population. As most of the settlers believed in colonial Protestantism, they soon felt the obligation to preach and to broadcast their beliefs more than the Lutherans or the Anglicans. This is how a body was formed in 1806 in Williamston in New England, consecrated to work “in the field of the Lord”. This body founded two years later “The Brotherhood Society”; they went to Andover College to study theology, and were able to advertise themselves in William’s College. As they succeeded, Samuel Mills founded in 1810 “the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions”, later abbreviated to “American Board”, a board that became officially recognized two years later, in 1812, by the State of Massachusetts. Cf.: Rustum n.d.: 162 and above. This is the board that ultimately sent the first Protestant missionaries to the East.

5 This is the label Protestants used to name the members of “The Brotherhood Society”. See preceding note.

missionaries would be able to “commend Christianity to Moslems who regarded Christianity as a picture-worshipping, saint-worshipping and idolatrous system full of Mariolatry and immortality, little better than themselves” (Jessup 2002: 29). Hence, Protestant missionaries, much as the earlier Catholic ones, came to the East with a pre-conceived stereotype of the existing Christian inhabitants, irrespective of their denomination and religious affiliation. Although the Protestant missionaries had not come to the East to convert Christians per se, as claimed Henry Jessup, and whatever their official claim was, Protestants ended up proselytizing a large number of Orthodox and Catholics.

Illiteracy, ignorance, superficial spiritual religiosity of a large number of the Easterners could have arguably been at the essence of the success of the Catholic and later Protestant missionary work. Why else, in addition to commerce and exchange of goods that has always existed between the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and the rest of the world, would the churches of the West be interested in the East and trying to convert as many Christians as possible to their own faith? In coming to the East, these western churches saw a population ready to listen to their message or were at least ready to accept the alms and material help that these westerners brought. By money, goods, and/or services, possibly including some personal religiosity as well, a good number of believers left their own churches and joined either the Catholic or the Protestant ones.

Shedding the light on the work of these first Protestant missionaries in the East, specifically on how they looked at the Orthodox Church, its clerics and believers, and how they related with them is the core of this article. One such specific view is Henry Jessup’s, as expressed in his two-volume “Fifty Three Years in Syria”— a recollection of the work of these first few Protestant missionaries. These volumes seem very important for Protestantism and its achievements in the East as evidenced by the fact that they were reprinted in 2002⁷. Jessup notes many of his own views and memoirs of his own coming as well as his missionary and academic work among the inhabitants. His name is not one easy to miss: indeed, among other achievements is that of being one of the co-founders of the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut and one of its first faculty members. He is representative of how all the

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⁷ I chose to purposefully mention that the main Protestant source used in this paper is a second edition (a reprint in 2002) of an original work of 1918.
Protestants initially looked at the Orthodox and at Orthodoxy of our East at the turn of the last century.

The Protestant opinion on Orthodox faith and the Orthodox Church

In describing what the six classes of Oriental Churches believe in common, Jessup indicated that these churches agree “in the common truth and the common error which they hold to be classed as one…They hold the doctrines of transubstantiation, of baptismal regeneration, priestly absolution, Mariolatry and saint worship, image and picture worship, auricular confession and prayers for the dead… Instruction in the Scriptures is virtually unknown…” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 81).

After reporting the total number of these Christians of different sects — a total amounting to about a little more than nine and a half million in all — Jessup accuses the heads of the Oriental Churches of their failure to reform their churches from within despite the fact that several Western missionaries visited the local patriarchs, bishops, abbots, and priests, even in their own houses, to accomplish such internal reform. But they ultimately failed, and several missionaries were rebuked and even excommunicated by highly-placed clerics. It was only because of the insistence of these missionaries that “the light had begun to shine. The leaven was working in many minds. One after another joined themselves to the missionaries openly or secretly…” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 82-83).

In one attack on the Orthodox faith, Jessup bases his claim on a particular “Article of Faith of the Church of England” that, in turn, also condemns Orthodox and Catholic practices as erroneous, even in matters of faith. In it (the Article), Orthodoxy is accused that through catechism and from different texts that appear in the Synnaxar, salvation is merited

8 The very first four missionary delegations to the East being Fisk, Parsons, King and Bird; cf. same source.
9 Jessup reports that even “the Maronite patriarch compelled emirs, begs and sheikhs to persecute these Bible men... The Jesuits obtained, through political intrigue, a firman from the Sultan, forbidding the import or sale of the Scriptures and all other books and ordering all existing copies to be destroyed” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 82).
10 A book describing the lives of the Saints of every day according to the Orthodox Christian calendar.
by good works, and that baptism, the holy chrism and communion, are indispensable to salvation, beliefs that the Protestants believe to be unscriptural (Jessup 2002, vol.1: 186).

**About The Orthodox Church and its Clergy**

“Uneducated”, “simple”, “illiterate”, “oppressors”, “keeping people in ignorance”, are Jessup’s words, and generally early Protestant missionaries, which they used to describe what and how they considered the Orthodox clergy. In describing the fourteen sects of Oriental Churches that pertain to the “six great classes”\(^\text{11}\), Jessup described the Orthodox Greek Church as “Rome Decapitated, a priestly system without a pontifex”; their patriarchs during Ottoman rule were always unfamiliar with the customs of the East, with the exception of the Syrians who had only recently obtained bishops of Arab descent. “The parish clergy are married and generally most illiterate”, states Jessup; he continues on quoting the Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, Dr. Blyth, who stated that “no one but those who lived in the East could be aware of the gross ignorance and immorality of the Greek priests… It seems that Jeroboam, the Orthodox Patriarch “made priests of the lowest of people” as Jessup concludes this note (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 80).

Early Protestants also claim that “tens of thousands” of faithful had adhered to Protestantism from “the Old Churches”; and that this has thus led to “weaken the tyrannical power of priesthood” and freeing those converts “from extortion and oppression” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 84). He later noted that “the patriarchs and bishops of the East are, as a class, wealthy, avaricious, masters of political intrigue, unscrupulous, and trained to tyranny over the conscience of men… High offices are bought and sold…” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 91).

Among the consequences of the 1860 massacres in Lebanon and Syria, Jessup and thus all Protestants in general considered that “the political power of the native hierarchy was broken”. Concerning the clerics of the Orient, he adds:

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\(^{11}\) In the order that Jessup presents them, first are the Monophysite, Eutychian, or anti-Chalcedonian sects; second are the anti-Ephesian; third the Orthodox Greek, fourth the Maronites; fifth the six Oriental Papal Sects (the Papal Greeks, Papal Armenian, Papal Nestorian, Papal Coptic, Papal Syrian, and Papal Abyssinian); and sixth, the Latins. (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 79-80).
“The patriarchs and bishops, priests and monks, had interfered in the courts, set up and put down officials, and made Lebanon on a small scale what the papal states were before Garibaldi entered into Rome. They even had the power of life and death as in the case of Asaad es Shidiak. They kept the people in ignorance, and allowed of no schools, excepting those for training up for priesthood. They had been for ages appropriating the best lands of Lebanon, by intimidation of men on their death-beds, and by seizing the property of widows and orphans, so it is true even to-day, that the most fertile land, the finest water rights and the wooded hills of Lebanon belong to the bishops and the monks, and the fellahin\textsuperscript{12} are chiefly their tenants.

But the upheaval of 1860 deprived the priesthood of political power. The collapse of the patriarch’s crusade to exterminate the Druses lessened greatly his prestige. When Rustem Pasha was in office (from 1871 to 1881) he exiled the Maronite Bishop Butrus el Bistany of B’teddin to Jerusalem, for political intrigue and banished a Papal Greek priest from Zahleh for beating a Protestant in the street” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 217-218).

In countless places, Jessup would also rejoice in any clergy that would look down upon, or away from, the Roum clergy. For instance, Jessup comments on one priest, a certain \textit{Jeraijiry}, stating that he was later made bishop, then patriarch, and as such was “very open-minded and liberal of the Romish clergy, the friend of education and most courteous and friendly to Americans” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 218).

\textit{About Mariolatry, idolatry, picture worship (iconolatry), and relic worship}

Protestants in general are unable to comprehend or to accept the Holy Tradition as depicted by the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church; they claim to rely solely on the Holy Scriptures\textsuperscript{13} and as such refuse the “Holy Tradition” of the Orthodox Church.

\textsuperscript{12} Plural of “Fellah”, i.e. plowman.

\textsuperscript{13} “Sola Scriptura” is the term they would use in this instance.
Jessup and all Protestants typically acknowledged that the veneration that the Orthodox Church for the Holy Virgin as being a form of worshipping; hence he labelled this belief as sheer “Mariolatry”. While the Catholic church holds the belief that the Virgin is Co-Redemptive, this element of faith is entirely rejected by the Orthodox Church. Jessup hence also accuses the “Greek Church” — as he would call the Orthodox Church — of Mariolatry and considered this belief to be “a grievous error and a stumbling-block in the way of the Mohammedans”. To reach this conclusion he based his analysis on several liturgical prayers that address the Virgin, which, if taken at face value, show and address her as equal to Christ. To exemplify the case, Jessup quotes in p. 678 of his first volume an Orthodox prayer book — the Horologion: “We are lost through our many sins, turn us not away disappointed, for thou alone art the hope of Christians”, and “Save us from future punishment those who put their trust in thee. Alleluia”. He continues by stating that such is “a plain deification of the Virgin Mary, and led the Mohammedans to charge, as they do to this day, that the Trinity is a blasphemous elevation of a woman to a place in the Godhead… Space will not allow our giving details as to the worship of relics, the prayers offered to the reputed wood of the cross…” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 90).

This same position was taken up much later when, in 1870, he attempted to counter the Anglican clergy who seemed to have been fraternizing with the ecclesiastics of the Orthodox Church. Jessup was apparently infuriated by this act that confirmed in his eyes that the Anglicans were closing a blind eye to the Orthodox Church’s anti-scriptural teachings. In Jessup’s words, a “reformation of the Greek Church is possible, but not very probable. With education and the Bible, the people some day will demand the abolition of Mariolatry and ikon worship” (Jessup 2002, vol. 2: 406).

Concerning iconolatry, or picture (ikon) “worship”, Jessup attacked the “Oriental type of Christianity” stating that “Moslems despise its immorality and idolatry and protest against the worship of creatures and images of both the Greek and Latin Churches. Images and pictures are the abomination of the Mohammedan world.”

14 “The Book of Hours” an Orthodox prayer book used in praying services celebrated at specific hours of each day.
The pagans of the second century objected to Christianity that it had neither altars nor images: the Moslem of the twentieth century objects to Christianity that it has only images and altars. The Christian missionary today urges a Mohammedan to accept Christianity. He is met with a derisive reply, “Thank God we are not idol-worshippers as are you Christians, and, God willing, we will never be. We have lived among Christians twelve hundred years, and we want none of your creature worship. There is no God but God” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 85).

Jessup also mocks the Russian “iconolatry” by indicating that after such a recent exhibition, icons were sent with their army to war against Japan. Jessup mockingly and rhetorically comments whether such “painted boards are going to conquer the armies of Japan?” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 92). His position on Russian pilgrims is furthered when addressing his personal pilgrimage experience to Jerusalem by Austrian steamer. On the way, he describes Russian pilgrims as

“The most abject and filthy creatures to be seen in the East. They must be chiefly of the lowest of the serfs. They are herded together like cattle and seem lost to all senses of decency. They lay up money for many years to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Bethany, and the Jordan, and go back fleeced and plundered by the priests and monks to spend the rest of their lives in poverty. They carry back the clothes in which they bathe in the Jordan and keep them to be buried in… Their ignorance and infatuated superstitious devotion to saints’ pictures, and holy places, make one ashamed of Christianity. No wonder the Mohammedans scoff and ridicule Christianity when thus identified with the grossest idolatry” (Jessup 2002, vol. 2: 421).

To defend further his position, Jessup brings up the twenty-second “Article of Faith” of the Church of England that condemns certain specific Catholic doctrines and practices, some of which are common to the Orthodox Church, such as “Worshipping and Adoration as well of Images as of Reliques and also Invocation of Saints…”, considering such a doctrine to be “repugnant to the Word of God” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 86).
In the fourth point among the seven ones that Jessup brings up against the “Greek Church”, he accusatively states that the Orthodox Church “teaches and requires the worship of “ikons” or holy pictures. They repudiate carved images, but devoutly pray to pictures, light candles and burn incense before them” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 89). He even apologetically refers to the Synaxar of the first Sunday in Lent and the Horologion where statements that refute non-Orthodox faith and practices are iterated and even considered anathema. He again brings up the “burning of incense, light tapers, bow before the filthy painted boards and devoutly kiss them!” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 89-90).

Jessup speaks of a third missionary plan in the East: to preach the Gospel and give Bibles to the people. He claims that the intention was not to proselytize them “in the hope of reforming the Church from within” as this (initial) plan had been tried and failed in many countries of the East. So with the efforts of the Protestants and their teachings, and as soon as people read the Bible, people will “become enlightened”, and as such will hurry to “come out and be separate. Enlightened New Testament students will not pray to a creature or worship a painted board” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 91). He even takes a step further in claiming that it is the people themselves that demanded to eventually establish an Oriental new Evangelical church. According to Jessup, it is only in the teaching and practices of these very newly-founded churches that Moslems could realize what the Bible truly talks about. (Jessup op. cit.).

Very later in his book, Jessup recounts the story of Antonius Yanni, the grandson of a Greek sea-captain whose ship was wrecked in Tripoli, Lebanon. Incidents seem to have lead Antonius to eventually be in contact with two missionaries, reading the Bible with them “until the truth took lodgment in his heart”… Jessup reports that the city was in commotion, for young Yanni “was the pride of his family, the hope of the church, the joy of the priests, the friend of the poor”, and now had become a “Bible man”. A Greek bishop from Athens and many priests came to convince the young “heretic” to revert from his decision, but without success. Yanni’s position was that how could he “worship the Virgin and the saints and kneel down and pray to pictures and kiss them when the Bible forbids it?” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 388). Next, Jessup reminds the readers that “more intelligent” Moslems have more sympathy with Protestantism, abhorring “the Greek and Roman creature worship, and regard all Christians as
idolaters, until they see Christianity in all its original simplicity as preached and exemplified by Protestant missionaries and their converts. They thus respect Protestant Christianity while unwilling to admit that Christ is the divine savior” (Jessup op. cit.).

Jessup seems confused as to what the Catholic or Orthodox churches believe in. It is clear for a versed Orthodox believer that Jessup clearly does not comprehend what the Holy Fathers would say as “the Orthodox Way”. He seems to ignore that Orthodoxy reveres the Theotokos as being the Mother of God, and venerates all saints and their relics, along with holy objects, including the Holy Cross, and that such veneration is far from being adoration which in fact is due to the Holy Trinity, and to It alone.

About differences within the Orthodox Church in various liturgical practices

Another perspective that Protestants held against Orthodoxy is the latter’s liturgical practices. Jessup brings up Parson’s journal and quotes from it how the latter “was shocked that his friends among the Greek clergy should take part in the disgraceful farce of the Holy Fire.” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 33). He later extends his description of this event, which takes place each year at Easter as “the brutal deception of the Holy Fire”. Jessup repugnantly mocks the practice of millions of Christians, Orthodox and otherwise, around the globe, who believe that this fire is a light that descends directly from God. Parsons, and hence Jessup and all Protestants in general, claimed that the whole ceremony is a flagrant deception in which some ecclesiastic (a cleric) lights

a torch with a Lucifer match and then thrust it through a hole in the wall of the Holy Sepulcher, telling the surging thousands of ignorant pilgrims that this is a miraculous flame lighted from heaven; while Mohammedan military officers and guards, placed there to keep the mob of crazed fanatics from trampling each other to death, look on disgust and contempt at such a fraud enacted in the name of Jesus Christ!” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 90).
Jessup also accuses the Orthodox clergy of non-coherency in many of their liturgical practices. To support this claim, he reports different incidents in which some Orthodox priests baptize by full immersion while others perform it by pouring. He repeats this same type of accusations against the other “Old Churches” and their practices (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 86-89).

He continues by attacking the Orthodox belief of the transubstantiation of bread, water, and wine into Christ’s true flesh and blood. He recounts the spiritual journey of a certain “Soleyman Effendi” — a former mystic in the Nusairi faith — to Christianity. In this journey to his final conversion to Protestantism, he became, among other religions, a Druze for a time, a Moslem at another, only to become repulsed by “three hundred lies and seventy great lies” found in the Koran (Jessup idem, vol. 1: 258). It is then, says Jessup, that Soleyman joined the Greek Orthodox Church after studying their books, and was eventually baptized by them. He continues:

“Entering on this new faith, he frequented the church and was horrified to find that though professing to worship the true God, the Greeks actually worshiped pictures, the holy “ikons”. Attending the mass, it was explained to him that the priest blessed the water or bread, whereupon it was transformed into the perfect humanity and divinity of Christ. “What,” said he, “does it become God?” “Yes, certainly.” “And then what do you do with it?” “We eat it.” “Does the priest eat it?” “Yes.” “What! Make a god and then eat their god?” This was too much. He said he had read in an Arabic old version of Robinson Crusoe about men eating one another, but here were people eating their god!” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 258)

About proselytization; the Organization of the first native Evangelical church

Eventually, an Evangelical church was founded and officially recognized in Lebanon, then in Greece, and eventually spread to several countries of the East. Their attractiveness was primarily that of purveyors of schools, hospitals and education, and of course distributing and reading the Bible.
Jessup defensively states that early missionaries made it clear to the converts that it was not their (the missionaries’) intention to draw people from their original sect nor to refuse any member of a given sect from joining them when “giving satisfactory evidence of piety”, irrespective of how much “it may interfere with his previous ecclesiastical relations” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 83). Jessup even maintained that the main intention was originally “an honest attempt to reform Oriental Churches”, and that this attempt “was made and failed” (p. 84).

On another occasion, Jessup wrote about a third missionary plan in the East: to preach the Gospel and give Bibles to the people, claiming that the intention was not to proselytize them per se “in the hope of reforming the Church from within.” However, as early missionaries had attempted to convince the clergy of the need of this internal reformation, Jessup bluntly stated that to him and to the Anglicans, the twelve tasks of Hercules would have been easier to accomplish than to “reform” Orthodoxy and to have a union between it and Protestantism, for, in addition to all the previous attacks, “the patriarchs and bishops of the East are, as a class, wealthy, avaricious, masters of political intrigue, unscrupulous, and trained to tyranny over the conscience of men… High offices are bought and sold…” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 91).

Since reformation from within has failed and new converts joined the Protestant faith, Jessup claimed that because of their teachings — especially of the Bible and having people reading it, people ultimately “become enlightened”, and “they make haste to “come out and be separate”, and as such join Protestantism. So it is these people (i.e. the new converts) themselves that demanded to eventually establish an Oriental new Evangelical church, claimed Jessup. These new converts came from a number of religions and denominations, including Islam and Druze. By joining their Protestant faith, Jessup described the new converts and their role:

“a powerful, intelligent, well-educated and a living rebuke to ignorance, superstition, and ecclesiastical assumption. It has weakened the tyrannical power of priesthood, and in fact shields tens of thousands of adherent of the Old Churches from extortion and oppression, through fear lest they break away entirely and join the Protestant ranks” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 84).
In doing so, Jessup raised the issue of proselytism in the East, denounced even by the Anglicans as “a mistake”, and that one should not “build up one Christian Church at the expense of another” (idem). Jessup’s answer was that the same was also taking place in England and America, but these churches did not feel that “they have committed the heinous sin of proselytism”. He tried to justify missionary work in Western Asia as an attempt at converting the two hundred million Mohammedans to Christianity by preaching to them the Gospel, using their primordial faith in divine origin of both the Old and the New Testament, although these Moslems considered the Scriptures as corrupted and denied Christ’s divinity. Jessup hinted to the basic elements of faith that these *Old Churches* had in common, and which Moslems and they — the Protestants — refute wholeheartedly.

In addition, Jessup recounted different incidents that ultimately led to forming the first Protestant Church in Greece: In 1828, King went to Greece to distribute food and clothing to those sufferers who had fled the Turks. This opened the way for him to “preach” Christ, soon to have his work favored by the country’s President. He married an influential Greek lady in 1829 who helped him in his work. By spreading Protestantism, Jessup described King’s life during that period as

“a life of strenuous toil, persecuted, misrepresented, imprisoned, through the jealousy of the Greek hierarchy... In 1847, the king advised him to leave as his life was in danger. In March 1851, he was appointed United States consular agent. He was, even after that, imprisoned, threatened and persecuted.” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 40-41)

The Holy Synod in Athens eventually anathematized King in 1863. However, aided by his pupil Dr. Kalopothakes, he laid down a plan for the organization of a distinctively Protestant Greek Church, which was eventually founded in Athens in 1874.

*About the avariciousness of non-Protestants; supremacy of Protestants over all others*

Protestants are good, Protestants are the best. In time of dire need, they are the only ones to provide and help. In time of natural disasters, they are the only ones to offer substantial help when other existing
denominations and religions refused to offer this help or charged heavily for it. With these descriptors, Jessup affirmed the social and eventually religious supremacy of Protestants. By converting to this specific faith, one becomes a better person, free from the chains of the “Old Churches”, free from the “oppression” of their clergy.

Jessup recounts the incidents that took place just after the great earthquake that struck Syria and Palestine in 1837 and which resulted in the death of thousands; the hundreds of survivors fled to Beirut for relief and hospitalization offered by the Protestants. According to this recount, Jews, Moslems and Greeks refused help unless they were paid enormously. Jessup reports also other incidents, battles and wars, in which it was always the Protestants who ended up helping, aiding, and relieving the struck and the sufferers (cf. Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 58 onwards).

As for faith and intelligence, Jessup describes a substantial change that took place in the position of the new converts to Protestantism. They became “a powerful, intelligent, well-educated and a living rebuke to ignorance, superstition, and ecclesiastical assumption…” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 84). According to Jessup, it is only in the teachings and practices of these very newly-founded churches (i.e. the Evangelical ones) that Moslems could comprehend the Bible. (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 91). Moslems were finally able to see more truth in Protestantism rather than in the Greek Church:

“Oriental Churches have lost the spirit which might enable them to evangelize Islam. They care not to do it. They cannot do it. They will not do it. This “kingdom” of privilege and service “shall be taken from them and given to another”, even to the Churches of the Reformation.” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 93).

Jessup recounts another incident that took place in 1859 in Zahleh, Lebanon, whereby Orthodox priests ended up chasing away a minister and his family who apparently came to the town as guests. Jessup believes that at the time,

“Zahleh was not yet open (to their mission). It needed the discipline of God’s hand in war and disaster and humbling defeat by their merciless Druze foes, to teach them their weakness and open the way for messengers of peace” (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 154-155).
Again, Jessup addresses the aftermath of the 1860 massacres. Concerning the input of Protestantism in education and schools, Protestants claim once again their superiority. He claimed that “after the events of 1860 and largely as a result of Protestant Missions, there was an intellectual and educational awakening throughout the whole Turkish Empire…” (cf. Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 221 onwards).

Response of Orthodox clerics to the Protestant missionaries

Since the start of their mission in the East, the Protestant claim was to improve the social welfare of its inhabitants, and eventually their health, and education. However, when it became clear to Eastern clerical officials that their target went well beyond their claimed objectives and ultimately targeting the belief of the inhabitants and their traditions, it became a different matter altogether, and radical measured had to be taken.

In 1823, Patriarch Neofitos learnt that American missionaries, once reaching Jerusalem, had immediately settled in the Armenian quarter and had started distributing Bibles. They showed sympathy for the Greeks, lent money to the Monks of the Holy Sepulcher who were badly in need, rented several rooms in the monastery of the Archangels and used it as a residence, and even distributed bread to the needy students on a daily basis. These missionaries earned the blessings of the monks; however, once these missionaries started teaching the children to show disrespect for holy icons and to the Holy Cross, and to stop their fasting and praying to the Theotokos, the monks were appalled. They immediately borrowed money from the Jews and returned all the money they owned to the missionaries. They also immediately expelled them from the monastery and from all their schools (Papadopoulos 1984: 458).

Similarly, Asad Rustum states that in 1824, as a result of Bird and Goodell’s missionary work, 13 schools opened and registered a total of 600 students. This infuriated both the Maronites and Catholics in Beirut, and eventually Bird was imprisoned, while Goodell managed to escape. Three years later, in 1827, Patriarch Methodius wrote to the missionaries and asked them to refrain from “spreading the seeds of dispersion among the sheep”. As a result, Metropolitan Gerasimos of Tyr and Sidon ordered the closure of their schools in Marjeyoun and Hasbaya. Zakariah, the Metropolitan of Akkadia (Akkar) had a more tolerant attitude.
Protestant Positive contributions and a resultant conversion in faith

There are basically six main ideological or dogmatic differences that separate Orthodoxy and its teachings from Protestantism. Protestants considered Orthodoxy as well as other Christians as in need of “saviors”, preachers to Christians as well as to non-Christians, of “true” and “pure” Christianity. Although the American Board’s main intention behind sending the first missionaries to the East was to help the inhabitants in their needs, both social and spiritual, when the Board’s Secretary Rev. Clark visited the missions in Beirut in 1871, he was impressed by the many buildings Protestants had erected. Jessup quotes one of his statements: “Brethren, you are right. These buildings are a credit to your taste and judgment. Protestantism looks as if it had come to Syria to stay and not merely to pitch a tent and then decamp” (Jessup 2002, vol. 2: 411). In addition to the Arabic translation of the Bible as well as distributing and selling it in very large numbers and eventually have also been a multitude of people reading it in their own language, Protestants have also been at the origin of a countless number of innovations introduced to Syria: Rev. Bird brought potatoes in 1827 to Ehden in Northern Lebanon; a certain Mr. Hurter introduced into Syria kerosene oil and lamps which, by 1870, made the East use them instead of the traditional olive oil for lighting. Jessup also lists a number of Americans — all being Protestants — who introduced parlor organs, mimeographs, typewriters, and dentistry; in 1856, the photographic camera; in 1867, the first steam printing press; and in 1871, steel beams. The Morse telegraph machine was introduced later by a certain Dr. Hamlin (Jessup 2002, vol. 1: 360-361).

In terms of religious impact, a large number of persons were converted to the various Protestant denominations, with the claim that this conversion was the result of people seeing “the true light” along with the simplicity of faith that the Orient lacked and which these “saviors” had brought with them. Reading Jessup’s memoirs, the picture of the missionaries’ twofold aims becomes clearer—spreading Protestantism in the East by firstly “reforming” Oriental Christians so they end up at least accepting Protestant teachings and actually becoming Protestants inasmuch as they could convert people into their churches, and by secondly showing “Mohammedans” — the name Jessup uses most to refer to Moslems — that the teachings of this Oriental Christianity were essentially wrong as
these churches had forsaken the simplicity and the truth as expressed in the Bible. On more than one occasion, Jessup was clear in stating that Moslems revered Protestants and their elements of faith while they never could accept any of the beliefs of the “Old” churches. Indeed, most of what Jessup had written addressed the beliefs and Holy Tradition (and practices) of the Oriental churches as to the question of the intercession of saints and of the Holy Virgin, or to the veneration of icons and holy relics. To Protestants, these were the primordial reasons for having a large number of persons converting, for as Jessup expressed, these oriental beliefs and practices “are contrary to the Old and New Testaments and against the law of God and His Son Jesus Christ” (Jessup 2002, vol. 2: 421). Hence these veneration are “the gods of mere nominal Christians who have forsaken God’s Word and followed the traditions of men” (idem). These practices, as claimed by the Protestants, are what appalled the Moslems right from the beginning and made them “scoff and ridicule Christianity when thus identified with the grossest idolatry” (idem). Orientals have terribly failed in relating to Moslems or addressing with them issues of faith, accuses Jessup. In a letter that Jessup addresses to Sir William Muir in 1891, one reads

“They who talk about the Greek clergy laboring for the salvation of the Moslems do not know what they are talking about. I wonder whether there are a dozen Greek priests in Syria and Palestine who can read correctly a chapter in the Koran, or carry on an argument with a Moslem sheikh,… Or… Or… And if they did speak, the Moslems would reply by charging them with idolatry and creature worship.” (Jessup 2002, vol. 2: 569)

Conclusion

All Protestants firmly believed that it was they who brought this true and pure faith, i.e., this correct message and teachings, to the East… “in peace”; this is what made Moslems respect them and accept their religion, of course except the fact that Lord Jesus Christ is one and true God.

Jessup did not cease throughout his two volumes to purposefully mock the beliefs of the three main Oriental churches — Orthodox, Maronite
and Catholic — in particular with an incessant emphasis on the beliefs and practices of the Orthodox Church, which he was determined to keep referring to as the “Greeks”. In all the memoirs, Jessup never raised the issue of the roots of these practices nor debated them from a theological or at least Biblical perspective as an attempt to defend his position. In addition, it is noteworthy that Jessup kept reporting throughout the two volumes a good number of singular acts of certain “Greek” clerics and lay people — patriarchs, bishops, and priests — who happened to have committed acts that were in contradiction with the Orthodox Holy Tradition, such as coveting money or property, not fasting, etc. and then take these individual acts at face value just to denounce the whole Church’s faith and beliefs, with the aim of proving the supremacy of Protestantism.

In a conference in 2004 that brought together Orthodox and Evangelicals, Archbishop Basilios Nassour specifically questioned Smith’s real intentions behind his will to awaken Antioch by destroying and disrespecting the Tradition of its inhabitants. In his opinion, the true awakening should have been a scientific one, about tools and technological advancement, much as what happened in the West, but definitely not about the roots of Orthodoxy and its Holy Tradition. A theological debate should have been in order, rather than just Western, orientalist, arrogance¹⁵.

In conclusion, research should extend to understanding the Western (Protestant) early perspective of the other local inhabitants of the Near and Middle East, namely the Sunnis, Shias, Druze, as well as the other different Christian denominations. This may lead to uncover, or confirm, the reality of Western imperialistic and supremacy thought with which they look down on the inhabitants of the East to this day, even in religious matters.

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REFERENCES


